

The Rules of the Game

by

Hannah Feldman

*I am a patient boy  
I wait, I wait, I wait, I wait  
My time is water down a drain*

*Everybody's moving  
Everybody's moving  
Everybody's moving,  
Moving, moving, moving  
Please don't leave me to  
remain  
In the waiting room*

*I don't want the news  
(I cannot use it)  
I don't want the news  
(I won't live by it)*

*Sitting outside of town  
Everybody's always down  
(Tell me why)*

*Because they can't get up  
(Come on and get up)  
(Come on and get up)*

*But I won't sit idly by  
I'm planning a big surprise  
I'm gonna fight  
For what I want to be*

*And I won't make the same  
mistakes  
(Because I know)  
Because I know how much time  
that wastes  
(And function)  
Function is the key  
In the waiting room*

*...  
Sitting in the waiting room  
(Ahhh...)  
Sitting in the waiting room  
(Ahhh...)  
Sitting in the waiting room  
(Ahhh...)  
Sitting in the waiting room  
(Ahhh...)  
(Tell me why)  
Because they can't get up*

*All the doves that fly past my eyes  
Have a stickiness to their wings  
In the doorway of my demise I stand  
Encased in the whisper you taught me*

*How does it feel?  
It feels blind  
How does it feel?  
Well, it feels fucking blind  
What have you taught me? Nothing  
Look at what you have taught me  
Your world has taught me nothing*

*...  
As a woman I was taught to always be hungry  
Yeah women are well acquainted with thirst  
Well, I could eat just about anything.  
We might even eat your hate up like love*

*I eat your hate like love  
I eat your hate like love  
I eat your hate like love  
I eat your hate like love  
I eat your hate like love  
I eat your hate like love*

*I'd eat your fucking hate up like love  
How does it feel?  
It feels blind*

\_\_Bikini Kill, 1992

*Seductive Exacting Realism* starts, and *Seductive Exacting Realism* stops. You have to wait for it. *Seductive Exacting Realism* is announced by the chime of a bell and an uncannily familiar woman's voice that you will soon come to re-recognize as one of two protagonists in a conversation to which you are about to be made witness. She instructs you to enter. Her voice is filtered from an institutional broadcast speaker, maybe like one you remember from elementary school, maybe like one in a factory. *Seductive Exacting Realism* clocks-in at the beginning of the work day, or at least the beginning of what we might call the culture industry work day: the gentle hour of 10. It clocks-out at 6. For eight hours in-between it repeats in a cycle, always on the hour: 11 o'clock, 12' o'clock, 13 o'clock, and so on. Like the work day, it administrates your time, the time of waiting, of waiting for the thing that comes next, after work: leisure and the commodity complex that buttresses such leisure. This is not purposive time, although it is true that *Seductive Exacting Realism* is making something, or better, it is making some things equivalent. You wait. For what, you can not know, but you wait.

If you encounter *Seductive Exacting Realism* in Chicago, you sit in a waiting room that is sandwiched in between the gallery and the university-institutional classroom building in which the Museum resides. The waiting room both connects and severs these two spaces, branded with the gleaming form of its own golden logo: SER. You can cross, but only if you wait. The Artist-made decor all but screams: Eastern Europe, circa 1997, which is to say, Eastern Europe at more or less any time since 1961, 1965, 1973. It doesn't matter. The waiting room is also adjacent to the the Renaissance Society's administrative office, also marked as a space out of time by the quasi-trademarked display of an undated, un-editioned, unsigned example of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* that he made for this space: two clocks that would ideally turn in perpetuity, now always out of time and never in synch. At the time of your encounter, the Renaissance Society is celebrating its centenary, 100 years of *its* own time. It was founded in 1915 to help seed and nurture the understanding of "contemporary art," an art that is always also waiting to be "art" in general, and not just "contemporary." It helped art made by artists like Matisse, Moholy-Nagy, Magritte, Orozco, and later, Smithson, Kiefer, Buren, and Hirschhorn, amongst others, realize this aspiration.

If you encountered *Seductive Exacting Realism* in Istanbul, at a Biennial art

1. *It feels wrong to describe the setting, the terms of the encounter, and even the time of the encounter. Especially because at the time I write, I have not yet experienced one and will have missed the other. I have seen neither installation, nor the pieces that comprise each. Perhaps this is appropriate since, from what I know and from what I have been told and from what I have read, this is a work with very few objects. But it presents a challenge for the Art Historian, whose toolbox weighs heavy with one big tool: looking. When I asked the Artist for photos so I could see the Biennial installation—the twin if not the parallax of the Renaissance show—from my home in Chicago, she said no. No photos. This is work you hear, not see. You are blind in front of this work. Not seeing it makes you the imposter you need to be to hear it, to brush against it. In Istanbul, I am told, you feel the work under the soles of your feet, which crunch on 11,000 pebbles, just like that story, told and retold as an allegory, a lesson, a fact. The one about Alexander's army and the soldiers who crossed a forest in the night and who all experienced the regret that it was forecast they would feel. In the light, some realized their regret because, blind in the dark, they they had taken too few of the diamonds beneath their feet, diamonds that they mistook for stones. Others felt regret because they had taken none. Or, at least that's how I was told the story. Not knowing can produce regret, or at least that's one interpretation. Writing, and the writing the Art Historian is taught in the service of what the Artist calls the western definition of art is about enlightening, whereas *Seductive Exacting Realism* is about what it is that happens in the dark, in dark waters The Artist calls*

extravaganza marked by its own cyclical repetition every two years, you waited while lounging comfortably on *chaises longues* that the Artist built and upholstered in fabric of her own design, fabric that draws its patterns from two sources, a floor and a wall. The inspirational floor is that of the Istanbul mansion where Leon Trotsky, the revolutionary Marxist of the first Politburo, the leader of the October Revolution and the founder of the Workers-Peasant's Red Army (amongst many other things), lived from 1929-1933 after his exile from Stalinist Russia. It was here that he wrote both the history of his life and also the epic *History of the Russian Revolution*. The inspirational wall is one of the four Diego Rivera painted for 11 months between April 1932 and March 1933 in the Detroit Institute of Arts. Called *Detroit Industry* in celebration of the city's labor force and the worker's capacity to produce things, actual things, it is perhaps his most revered outside of those extant in Mexico City. In *Detroit Industry*, the force of labor finds its hallmark in the aesthetics of the comintern, the realist rendition of a congregation of clenched fists that crown one of the four walls, and which the Artist has here sampled as motif. It is a fitting merger: two men joined by politics, place, and, if the stories are right, a love for the same woman, the artist Frida Kahlo. At the time you encountered all of this, Trotsky's house, now in ruins, was being sold for 4.4 million dollars. The hope was that it would be sold to a philanthropic organization that wanted to make—what else?—a museum. About the transaction, a British newspaper headline opined, "All property is theft, but this one is a steal."<sup>1</sup> A near steal, the Detroit Institute of Art was almost forced to sell its collections when the city of Detroit filed for bankruptcy in 2012. It was 'saved' in the "Grand Bargain" forged between philanthropic, corporate, state, and cultural entities, a bargain that saved the art from private sale—even if not private ownership —

*it en.dark.ment. Its time and its means are that of the oral, of contact, of a duality and not a finality like that of the printed page and the art historical tool that sees a work all at once, in all its parts. I don't want to end a master on the right side of history, the side that is positioned as such precisely and because it got to write the story. I don't know that I want to be right.*

*2. I have no idea if this is exactly true, or even remotely so. I remember it as what the Artist told me, but that was a long time ago and my notes are terse, opaque even to myself. I always have more faith in my memory than it warrants. I usually remember my forgetting more than what I forgot. Maybe the floor was from another house and maybe the design has nothing to do with Rivera. Would this even matter if my interpretation still corresponds with the meaning of the work regardless of the fact that it might not correspond to the material details as they were either described to me or as they have come to be made? But, I feel now that I want it to be right, to get it right, because I am thinking that some of you might be reading this at the exhibition, although some of you are reading it months from now, in another context, in a context where you will also benefit from the words of the Artist and the critics. In the first case, the rules tell me I have a responsibility to help make the show legible, even though it is really all there (if you listen). In the second case, the rules of art history (and by then this show will have entered history, the history that might be commemorated in the next centenary of the Renaissance, in which case, these words have shaped what is remembered) say I am supposed to describe the work so you can see what is not before you and you can use such knowledge to write other histories, to master other questions. But I can't. I can only imagine that there are actually nods to Trotsky, to Rivera, to the romantic, political, and aesthetic relationship between them. The Artist's history, or, rather, the history of the art she made might come to be built on something imagined, something not real, something never*

---

<sup>1</sup> Marga Zambrana and Emma Graham-Harrison, "All property is theft but this one's a steal: Leon Trotsky's Turkish hideaway for sale," *The Guardian* (online), 8 August 2015.

and “eased” the profundity of the cuts to public workers’ pensions.<sup>2</sup>

*Seductive Exacting Realism* has what feels like a thousand points of entry, all quietly glossed but emphatically referenced. You just sat on, perhaps, depending where you were sitting, references to the 1917 Russian Revolution and the comintern aesthetics it would soon spawn, as well as the political realities to which it would eventually yield: Rivera’s socialist frescoes meld with the Eastern European-ish humdrum post-socialist bureaucracy of the waiting room, replete with 1982 Serbian pop-cum-angry-elevator-complaint music. Soon, you’ll find nods to Greek Mythology: the mannequins and so too the models (also the same things) you are about to see, after all, function like Sirens, they tempt you into the empty space of the gallery, singing you a song, a song that sounds like an exchange between human machines, a conversation you hear in warm waves. Their bodies are luxurious and languid. They are as lifelike as they can be, and they have names: Christy, Rachel... Names that come from the models from which their bodies are literally cast. In Chicago, in the near dark, you might not be able to tell, in fact, if they are living or not, at least not at first. You also won’t be able to tell if those who are with you, listening, but not seeing (much) are living or more mannequin-siren-things. That is one of the advantages of blindness, or so you will learn from the recorded interview between the Artist and the Revolutionary/Consultant, the one that sounds like a song sung between two human-machine women, the one that washes over you in the gallery as if the whole room was the space between two earbuds. Yes, in *Seductive Exacting Realism*, there are allusions to the no-longer new technology and the way it orders our time, delimits our

*realized and unrealizable. Future critics might get it wrong. What if they cite these descriptions as evidence of the artist’s early investment in socialist form? If the details are wrong, does that mean the artist wasn’t interested in socialist form? This is the anxiety of the historian in me, and the pedagogue.*

3. *The Artist’s work is so damn complete. How do I enter? This I remember thinking when we spoke, though maybe I didn’t: there is nothing left to chance. Every detail, every historical fact, every coincidental translation, every symbolic assertion is there in the armature, the apparatus, the conversation-song sung by the Sirens. Listen. What else is there left to say, except to say it all again. I will say what I imagine it encompasses, even if I’m wrong. In The Odyssey, the Sirens taunt, “No lonely seafarer/holds clear of entering/our green mirror.” But how do you enter a mirror? Is it through your twin? The Art Historian who writes in the present about the near future but with an eye to its posterity, its future as history, and the Artist who makes work that points to this very problem of temporal relay, a relay that strands us in a present that repeats and repeats. The work feels like her magnus opus. Even though the Artist is young, it feels like a life’s work, and the Art Historian is tempted to situate it in relationship to the young Artist’s other projects, her even earlier works. The art history rules say she should trace themes, highlight arguments cultivated across time. But why? If I do all these things, I am corrupted by a subservience to the work and the terms it sets out for itself. I stay within. Like the Revolutionary the Artist interviews, and like the Artist herself, I am another consultant, providing knowledge but not ideas that someone could find for themselves. And I am also imbricated in the art web, the institutions, the funders, the fact of art not as money laundering (though that too, sometimes, and also tax evading) but as ideology laundering. I help secure funding, in the present and the very specific, but also in general and in the future.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Randy Kennedy, “‘Grand Bargain’ Save the Detroit Institute of Arts,” *New York Times*, 7 November, 2014. Also, David Walsh, “Detroit Institute of Art on track to become wholly owned corporate subsidiary,” *World Socialist Web Site*, 17 July 2014. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/07/17/diad-j17.html>

space, coordinates our contact with what may or may not still be “real.” You will wonder, for example: isn’t that voice, the one that instructs you to exit the waiting room and enter the gallery, and then repeats as one of the shape-shifting protagonists in the conversation that reverberates around you, isn’t that voice the voice of Apple’s IVR? Is it Siri, maybe with a slight Chinese lilt? Is that a Chinese lilt or is it just the distortion of the transmission?

And then, of course, there are the artish and by now near-obligatory references to multinational capital, transitional capitalism, neoliberal markets, and the revolutions they inspire in those they have ruined and upon which and whom they of course depend: the people and the revolutions both, in cyclical repetition. Here, though, these stalwart contemporary art tropes are pixelated, aurally; they are distorted, leveled through the voices of the women who sound the words of the protagonist we can identify as the Revolutionary-cum-Consultant and the Artist with whom he, here rendered she, speaks. Or are they the same, the same thing? If you listen carefully, you will begin to wonder if the two protagonists don’t in fact switch positions in the conversation. They do, just at the moment when they begin to discuss who and how they are branded, funded. They are rendered equivalent. Both are revealed as equally implicated in and indebted to the methods of marketing and to the dictates of hyper-capitalism and its market economies. So, then, it also makes sense that in *Seductive Exacting Realism*, there are as many clever nods to the fashion, products and pictures of popular culture as there are to the high literature which pretends to distract the Sirens from their work. The Sirens, these models and mannequins made to appear more seductive than the real-life models from whose bodies their plastic figures are cast. But most of all, in all this, there is art, art positioned as the centrifuge in which these things mix, merge, and contort. Art in the space of the Institution that sorts

*The art museum wants a revolutionary artist, one who makes art that will point and indict, do “good,” and it needs the Art Historian to make that pointing arrive on something bright and shiny. The rules of the game mean I demonstrate my erudition, my brand (mine has been “grumpy,” or even “angry” and sometimes even “strident,” and I have worried sometimes it is true that my writing is also too tight, too defended, too clever) and so help confirm the Artist’s. Like the Artist-consultant and the Revolutionary-consultant as they articulate themselves and each other in the recorded conversation, I am influenced, but unlike what they claim, I always know when it happens. The Art Historian is the missing element of the Western idea of art that the Artist wants to reveal as art only in accordance with its own terms, which is not the same as in general. You can’t talk about the complex network of art, politics, and money in the art institution without including her too.*

4. *One of the voices sounds like Siri. In fact, it is Siri, she is Siri, at least in some Asian markets. In others, she is also the voice featured in Citibank ads, Siemens videos, IBM’s e-learning tutorials, Rolex. If you’ve flown Continental airlines, you have heard her voice narrating the emergency instructions in their Mandarin translation. I think the other voice sounds like Rachel, from Blade Runner. The Artist tells me the actress is not, nor has she ever played, “Rachel.” But the voice is named “Rachel,” and I like to imagine that is because she sounds like Sean Young, the genetically engineered thing—one of many manufactured by a super corporation as it was imagined they would be in a future as far away (then) as 2019— who believes herself human because she can remember seeing the things that proliferate in her memories. Roy, another replicant in Blade Runner, boasts, but maybe laments, that he “has seen things you people wouldn’t believe.” His eyes are grown in a lab. Seeing distinguishes human from man-made, from thing, but, in the end seeing is a thing made by the man.*

the world according to its image and the image according to the world.

But still. For all these points of entry, *Seductive Exacting Realism* has only one door, and it is opened to you only after you have spent time waiting. Unless, of course, you are always on time. Otherwise, to enter, or at least to enter properly, according to the rules, you have to spend your time twiddling your thumbs and growing increasingly anxious in the purgatory of being organized by someone else's time. If you are of the art cognoscenti and so used to having the idle time that art demands, you might begin organizing your thoughts and expectations in relation to what you know, in relation to other artworks about waiting. Yes, there's Faith Wilding's *Waiting*, the 1972 *Womanhouse* monologue in which Wilding enumerates the multiply iterative moments at which a woman's life is cast as always one 'in-waiting,' and never in-living. But the waiting room is decidedly not *Womanhouse* and chances are that you are not waiting to be enlightened about the expectations that haunt your gender such as it was lived in 1972. Your thoughts might veer more contemporary, and you might remember Derek Brunen's 2007 *Plot* and how you waited six and a half hours to confirm that he had, in the end, dug his own grave so that you could stop waiting for him to do so and be done with it. You could also turn to David McKenzie's 2007 painted *Proposal*, the deferred rendezvous it pronounces and so too the perpetually contingent art work. Are you waiting for something like that?

But: politics, politics. Someone said *Seductive Exacting Realism* was about politics, revolutions and the like. That it was made by an artist from the Balkans and that it might represent the historical outrage of one born to a place where history might be defined as "on repeat," and always already in the service of someone else. So, ah, yes, you might then think of Paul Chan's 2007 multi-platform staging of *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* in post-Katrina New Orleans (a play in two acts, a project in three parts, and a book to preserve and promote all the project-related ephemera, to protect its authenticity even as it becomes embalmed in shiny paper on someone's coffee table: the space of art.) Yes, you might remember how Chan used Beckett to help point at the plight of a group of people left waiting for service never intended them: "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (Pause. Vehemently). Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say?" Yes, Chan galvanized, or hoped to. His was a political art, or, rather, according to its sponsor, Creative Time, it was "a socially engaged performance at the

5. *I remember complaining recently, complaining often, complaining loudly and incessantly that I have grown terribly tired of, no, worse, bored by art that claims to do politics in the recognized ways that art does politics, art that ushers the topical into the gallery and claims its triumph because it renders banal truths opaque. Opacity is declared a virtue in this art that wants to do good in relation to the people it pictures, or the people it refuses to picture because it says both procedures are equally unethical. But the transparent art is no better. The feel-good participatory art that even more squarely facilitates the neoliberalization and privatization of our everyday life: art that feeds and houses the poor, schools the children, holds block parties, programs TV...for a moment. I wanted an art that I could love and that might love something in return. For whatever that might mean, and however that might manifest. I think now of the Artist's words, written in the essay "Against Biography," an essay that is so tight it makes me all the more uneasy about writing anything here when she has said it all, has tied it up so well. This is an exemplarily feat, but does it allow the point of entry I want or need to feel like less of a tool? o matter, I've done that too. In that essay, she wrote*

heart of a national crisis.” And it did good: it raised money! It had a “shadow fund” generated by the light of its aesthetics. The money in the “shadow fund” made the art work efficacious, and amazingly enough, efficacious in precisely the same idiom of the dark pool and shadow fund economies that spur and thrive on the kinds of oversights and abuse that had made Katrina, never mind the storm. Indeed. But the waiting room is not New Orleans, and, while you sit in expectation that the art *on the other side of the door* will provide you a service, you do not think it will be this. And you do not realize it might be to show you exactly where you already are. This is not political art and it doesn’t give a damn about participation. It is art. It is an art show about art and its image of the world. Therein lie its politics. And they do not sound like outrage, they sound like a beautiful song. Outrage is in the waiting room, where you are bored.

But, if you are not of this art world, you might wonder why you are waiting. You might begin to become anxious. You think you might not understand what comes on the other side of the door, what it is that happens when *Seductive Exacting Realism* starts. You might want to leave. Don’t.

Be patient. That’s the point of the waiting room. To render you without your own power and in the hands of someone else’s time. In the end, when you are released and allowed to enter, you will see nothing, or almost nothing. Hope dashed to the rocks; all is not revealed and it is not within your control. What little there is to see and how easily it arrives at your eyes depends on the time of day, the light it produces, and the weather, at least in Chicago. The light that will come shines not from electrical illumination but from the small crack in the only window shade that is opened, the shade on the eastern wall. The light that comes from the East spawns a split symbol: the illumination of the East, a different model of history making and imaging, but also its inverse, the

*about the image, about an art that values the image for its positioning of history as above, above it all. Fixed. Enduring. It doesn’t stop despite “everything that has happened.” Wars, wars, wars. And the economies and lives they produce: the refugees, the impoverished, the deracinated. Is the text not written above as well?*

6. *I suppose that the waiting room is all too often associated with places where work is done but nothing is made: corporate offices where futures are traded, beauty salons where bodies are buffed and smoothed. But the other day I was in a waiting room at a hospital. It was the waiting room of a chemo infusion center, and the people there felt less-than-administered. They felt scared. To me. I wasn’t sure that waiting for them was being stuck, like it might be for me, or like it might in a grand-historical sense, or like it might be for the people waiting for the fruits of their protest—their undoing one regime in the hopes of another—to yield flavor, although history tells them it will yield only the taste of more dirt. I felt a bit suspicious of my own ready yielding to art and its view of the world. Maybe this was what the Artist is getting at? Or maybe it was the inverse?*

Booth School of Business that looms large on the East end of the University of Chicago's campus, squared opposite the art museum, but separated by the Rockefeller Chapel.

Mirrors. In Istanbul, you would have seen darkness. Giorgio Agamben has told us that the neurophysiology of vision demonstrates that darkness is not a given, an absence of light. In fact, it is a thing made by our retinas *in response to* an absence of light. This means darkness is not privative, but productive. He explains that to live in our time, to be contemporary with it and all its realities, to really see it, we have to look at it with this kind of productive vision in order to perceive "not its light, but rather its darkness." The world, and so too the Art Institution, heralds its light; it draws from an *enlightened* tradition, a progressive march to a better humanity. But to see beyond this image that our world, and the art world, produce of themselves, our eyes must work so that they may be "struck by the beam of darkness that" comes from our time, which is both in and underneath the light. Its shadow and its truth.<sup>3</sup>

Which is to say that when you enter into all this dim space, all this darkness, you should not feel lost at sea, a victim of a seductive, exacting realism that shows you nothing. You will see no labels, no wall texts, no transcripts, no titles, no paintings, and certainly not much light. Unless the day produces it. Your eyes will make darkness and from it, the real. Seductive and certainly exacting, the forms of those beautiful women who hover above you will be barely visible.

They perch above what light there is. Indifferent. They don't need you to see them; they see you, just as they might see everything. They mean only to guide you across the empty expanse of the object-less, art-less gallery and into their time, a time of yet more waiting. Static, stuck. These beautiful women-things, real inanimate animates loll around, perhaps reading, perhaps working, whether at lolling or reading or at something else you can not know. They want to draw you in. They want to seduce you, to trap you, even to devour you if we believe the myths. To some degree, this is what we have always thought art does. It draws you into a space of

*7. When I think of my own waiting, at least in terms of art and the little I know about it, I think of it in terms of the kinds of resolution that might come with greater insight, clearer and more astute thinking. If only the thing on the paper could be as brilliant as the thing in my head, the words as blunt and targeted as the brightly colored sticky-notes that frame my monitor: keywords for a virtuoso delivery. The Hubris. I think that I wish I could write an essay of aphorisms, of lyrics and citations. I think that I wish I could write an essay about my dog, about how she doesn't wait for anything because she forgets she is lacking. I think of another example of an artwork about waiting, this one given me by my close friend, Lane (some of the others were sent my way by Huey). I think of how generous it is of my friends, also art historians and critics, to share their knowledge with me, their time. To help. The work I am thinking of now is called, maybe, No, Future, or at least it relates to a project of the same name. It is a plexi-encased monument to an incapacity to finish, or perhaps even to start: cans of paint, varnish, and what all else I don't know, tools that Ignasi Aballí presents in the air-free cube placed on a pedestal as a completed relic of an incomplete painting.*

---

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "What is Contemporary," from *What is an Apparatus?* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 44, 45.



contemplation. The aesthetic absorbs you, transports you, holds you still in the amber of your gaze, like a bug.

The sirens are reading, or pretending to read. There are books scattered around them, props if not quite texts. The books are eight volumes from a thirteen volume edition of the *Complete Writings of Marcel Proust*, translated into Serbo-Croatian in 1965 by the Croatian Poet, Tin Ujević. Four additional volumes are separated: two appear in Istanbul, carried by the models who would have escorted you to your space in the dark, and two more will crown the heads of models who process around the auditorium during the Artist's opening conversation with the Curator, their posture as perfect as it must be to hold high a fifty year old book. A thirteenth volume is missing. It was lost. The book that will follow the exhibition is to be a surrogate for this lost volume, the 12th in the series, as it happens. It will mark its own return to the past, its own static time: an imposter, a pretense. Like Proust's writing shapes the educated readers who consume it, so too will this volume instruct future readers how to comport themselves around an art work. And how appropriate that the Sirens, whose work it is to lure you in and out of time with their song, should be reading Proust, the author of *Le temps perdu*, a novel about the intrusion of memory into the present, about the longing for an ideal past that pierces through the present to trap you in reverie, in near exquisite pain. Various translations into English, the titles are even better in this regard. They activate the French; they make you boss. The English-reading subject is *In Search of Lost Time* or pursuing a *Remembrance of Things Past*, things from a better time.

*Les temps perdu* was written over nine years, from 1913-1922, right through World War I, but in more or less total reclusivity. Proust's withdrawal, of course, spared him much of the experience of the war— although Paris was not without the threat of the violence actually endured elsewhere— but he worried about it nonetheless, and expressed his misery at the thought that “millions of men are going to be massacred in a *War of the Worlds* comparable with that of Wells, because the Emperor of Austria thinks it advantageous to have an outlet onto the Black Sea.”<sup>4</sup> An outlet, of course, to transport goods and perhaps armies between Europe and Western Asia. For Proust, it was Emperor Franz Joseph who was responsible, as Proust put it, for the “omni-murdering machine” that would destroy “millions of human lives whose sacrifice it was in his

8. *The Art Historian has to do her job. Yes, she is a consultant. She sits at the ready to explain what things mean on the ground, or in the air, as it were. More than telling you what to do, she tells you what it is that is there. And so I do: if there are Proust books, I need to explain the books, but also, to keep my own brand lofty and so keep aloft the brands of my patrons—artist and institution alike—equally buoyant, I need to demonstrate that I know my Proust. (I mean, really, otherwise an attentive viewer could just google Proust.) No, the value of my labor for this whole enterprise, what Hito Steyerl wonderfully names the “art field,” is this, this bit that comes from the pedigrees of my biography. Of course she knows Proust! She went to Harvard, Columbia. And because she went to Harvard and Columbia, she has something to tell us about this art, and this something is important for the Artist, the institution, and the whole ideological edifice it buttresses through a kind of pan-sifting not unlike sifting for gold. The value of the gold that stays in the pan obscures the facts of the shit that falls through the cracks. In the Istanbul Biennial website, I am listed as a participant, along with all the artists. You click on their names, you arrive at bio pages, all earmarked with tiny “logos” derived from each*

---

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Proust to Lionel Hauser, 2 August 1914. See François Proulx, “Proust and the Great War: Selected Letters at the University of Illinois,” May 10, 2014. [nonsolusblog.wordpress.com/2014/05/10/proust-and-the-great-war/](http://nonsolusblog.wordpress.com/2014/05/10/proust-and-the-great-war/)

power to prevent.” The War, history textbooks tell us, was otherwise technically “initiated” by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb and Yugoslav nationalist who, along with others allied under the skull and crossbones logo of the Black Hand militia, longed for a revolution to liberate the South Slavs from the rule of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. An anti-imperialist struggle or an ethno-nationalist campaign? Famously, their aspirations keyed a sequence of events that led to a war fought mostly in the places that the West considered “the world,” the ultimate collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the 1918 establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). Equally famously, the war set the stage for the rise of European fascism in the decades to follow. The fantasy of a unified Yugoslavia came to an end just over half a century later, first by proclamation as various of the six unified Yugoslavian Republics declared their independence, and then by the series of wars across the 1990s now known as the Yugoslav and Kosovo Wars.

*artist's work, perhaps their signature piece if they have such a thing. Most do. The Artists's logo is the slanted lines of the broken triangle with which she has branded SER, the corporation that comes from Seductive Exacting Realism and also with seductive, exacting realism. Click my name and it takes you to a page titled "Speech Acts and Forms of Discourse." That is my brand.*

The set of Proust's works in *SER* was witness to these wars as well. Along with countless other possessions, it was looted from a town in the Northwestern Bosnian war zones around 1995 with the intention that it be sold for profit at the Kalenic market in Belgrade. The Serbian police seized it there. In 2014, the Artist bought it—a thing that testifies to a history beyond its making—from the police at the auction price of one thousand dinars, more or less the equivalent of a bespoke cocktail in Chicago. The missing 13th volume, number 12, was lost along the way. A surrogate, perhaps, that might stand for the tens of thousands dead.

Proust's *Le temps perdu* itself has become almost interchangeable with the celebrated and oft-cited 'episode of the Madeleine,' the moment when the book's protagonist is overtaken by the memory of his childhood days at his aunt's home in Combray. He remembers not through the activity of thinking or willfully recuperating the memory (searching for it, despite the fact that our translation privileges our desire that he do so). He does not look at photos (how terribly we rely on photos to store, protect, and even anticipate our memories). He does not mine archives, or notes. He does not think about what happened. The memories, what critics have announced as “involuntary,” are made to forcefully intrude on his present through sensate experience: the taste of a small, sponge-shaped, orange-scented French tea-cake called a “Madeleine,” dipped in tea. The exquisiteness of the episode, the shudder of pleasure and the release it occasions, reveals for the protagonist the incompleteness of intelligent memories, dutiful excavations, histories codified and ready. It celebrates touch, taste: bodily ways of knowing far removed from the discourse of rational realism. Perhaps this too might be a kind of seductive realism? Something outside of, or before enlightened practice, something ante-enlightenment. Something archaic, so archaic and out of time that it is entirely of the nature of Proust's time, which was to be out of time. Trapped in a pattern of perpetual and escalating war. A time like ours. A dark time, and a time when the seduction of taste has been surpassed by the seduction of things, things of taste.

*Le temps perdu* begins with darkness. The protagonist describes a recurring state: he falls asleep while reading and believes, as he drifts in and out, that the book he had been reading is

about him. When he awakes, he is surprised by the passage of time, its only evidence the fact that his candle has extinguished itself. He recounts, “immediately, I recovered my sight and I was amazed to find a darkness around me soft and restful for my eyes, but perhaps even more so for my mind, to which it appeared a thing without cause, incomprehensible, a thing truly dark. I would ask myself what time it might be; I could hear the whistling of the trains which, remote or nearby, like the singing of a bird in a forest, plotting the distances, described to me the extent of the deserted countryside where the traveler hastens toward the nearest station; and the little road he is following will be engraved on his memory by the excitement he owes to new places, to unaccustomed activities, to the recent conversation and the farewells under the unfamiliar lamp that follow him still through the silence of the night, to imminent sweetness of his return.” He reflects, as he sleeps and wakes, on the lessons learned in the dark his eyes made when he recovered his sight: “Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our mind confronting them. However that may be, when I woke thus, my mind restlessly attempting, without success, to discover where I was, everything revolved around me in the darkness, things, countries, years.”<sup>5</sup> Is the darkness of sleep the same darkness that cloaked the theft of these books? Is the darkness of waking their recovery?

9. *My dog, Roxie, the one who doesn't know she is lacking, is dying, and she sleeps often with her eyes open. As I write, she is at my feet, her body shaking with the erratic beat of her swollen heart, a heart literally too big for this world. She trembles in time with the sweet sensations of her dream. Perhaps a salmon treat is tossed her way, and it stinks exquisitely. Or perhaps she feels rip beneath the weight of her jaw and the stumps of her worn teeth the tendons of the extended and dehydrated bull penis that makes for her favorite snack and her most relished evening's entertainment. These treats smell like pure stank, and I bet she is remembering that even as she longs for it. But, perhaps she is dreaming of past lives, of days before me, on the street, wandering in Houston, free of the comfortable constraints that tie her to me still. And perhaps she too dreams of a different life. The next one, a parallel one? She is waiting to die. And I am waiting for her to die as well. I can't see what she sees as she stares blindly towards the chair in which I sit, writing. Is it the future?*

The logic of the Madeleine and the waiting room are hardly apposite. The waiting room says that things—maybe good things or maybe material things— come to those who wait, who are patient and endure. The thing you have come to wait for will be resolved, addressed, improved, given (or bought). This too might be the conclusion of Srđja Popović, the dashing Serbian Revolutionary, or rather, the dashing Serbian who helped organize the student movements that led to the non-violent ousting of President Slobodan Milošević in 2000 before taking his skills on the road as a not-for-profit consultant associated with over a dozen subsequent attempts at regime-change around the world. The “Guide to Effective Nonviolent Struggle” that he publishes in conjunction with CANVAS (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies), the name of his NFP organization, advocates careful organization, education, information gathering, preparation: things that endure in time. Wait and work and you will be rewarded. Democracy is in your hands.

---

<sup>5</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 3, 6.

The Madeleine, on the other hand, says good things come to those who live, often in darkness where the certainty we have that things are only things is revealed as nothing more than proof that we think we have the authority to make such determinations. The Madeleine is inside historical time, not at the end of it. It moves with time and acknowledges the power conferred by naming things, by the fact that events are otherwise and actually made by the accounts of those who write them, who determine them as events. Or images. The waiting room logic is a principle wedged deep in the heart of the teleological impetus that drives a modern, enlightened humanism or perhaps a humanist modernity from which we have still not escaped, a colonial modernity in which every advance is written on the backs of those whose labor, knowledge, and power as well as whose plunder, dispossession, and displacement have been appropriated by those who have made themselves stronger by the fact that they have given themselves the power to narrate even the catastrophes they have caused, and to tell or picture them their own way. The logic of the waiting room is part and parcel, for example, of the privilege of seeing in its totality what the British socialist thinker Raymond Williams defined in 1961 as “the long revolution” in his book of the same name. For Williams, *The Long Revolution* is the path we follow in historical time. It is a revolution fought and achieved in and through culture. In particular, Williams champions the power of the incorporative arm of the print media as a means to simultaneously locate and understand our own place in relation to an unfolding history, a history of human arrival predicated on assuring that no “class of men” is denied their claims to their essential humanity. But his is a history still written according to the rules that say the history of men should be *written*, the rules of those who write. And so it is written that way. Williams himself was writing in 1961, the year that saw a new zenith in the showmanship of the Cold War as it played out between the capitalist west and the communist east: the CIA-attempted topple of Castro—now historicized (and so reduced) by the pictorial and spatial, but not political, moniker, the ‘Bay of Pigs’—for example, was matched, by defeat, of course, but also by the spectacle of the Soviet’s detonation of ‘Tsar Bomba,’ the most powerful H-bomb

10. *As I write, I remember writing a story about waiting. It began with the memory of once, with my father, waiting on a mountain road as an accident was cleared about a mile ahead. For some reason, I think the event and the mountain were in Brazil, even though we'd never been to Brazil. But now I think that I thought that because it was in Brazil that I'd first thought to write the story. Now I don't even remember if I actually did try to write the story or if I've been waiting to write it all these years. It was about waiting to see what we couldn't see, me and my father: this accident, this woman dead in the car that had careened off the cliff to land about fifteen feet below. I remember thinking or thinking that I remembered that it was good, for me, that the car hadn't fallen all the way into the valley below because it would have meant that I couldn't see it. My history, my personal history, was based on this kind of affirmative knowledge of the world. I could know what I could see, what I could explain. It was real and tangible, and I needed it to be that way in order to feel safe, like I had mastered my own world. It is funny to me that a person who thinks this way is now the Art Historian, here stumbling before an art work that she can't see. Funny not because it's surprising, but funny because it feels so scripted, so ready-made. Even if I have never really liked art. I have, apparently, liked to see and so art suits me. Or maybe just Art History, which is all about seeing. Or maybe it isn't about seeing at all, but rather about looking. Look carefully, look slowly and you will know. Art History reveres its objects, but not because of what they do, but because of what we can do with them, how we can animate them and make them dance to our songs, how we can script the world according to the image we see in their objecthood. We think we are giving them power, authority, even as we are just stealing theirs. But the objects will endure, whether they remain mute or not. We won't.*

ever (then and since) actually set off. A nuclear fist was raised and pumped in the air, and then a wall was erected to make visible the east's superior capacity to demarcate and so too destroy space. Check. And mate.

1961 marked an equally important moment in the still unfolding history of what Walter Mignolo has called decoloniality, a time marked neither by repetition or progression but by the constant becoming of refusal and of rule-breaking, a time that might be traced as an alternative to that of the colonial modernity that privileges itself as dominant.<sup>6</sup> 1961 was the year that Josip Broz Tito, the President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, hosted India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, Egypt's second president and pan-Arabist hero, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkruma at the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, the event that confirmed the Non-Aligned Movement. The Non-Aligned Movement meant to sidestep the dramatic games of the Cold War. Players not invited to the table of the superpowers chose not to fight for their place at the table; instead they chose to change the rules of the game. Rather than resort to might and intimidation, the non-aligned refused adhering to any pre-ordained geopolitical or military structure. They championed many of the same humanist principles of William's ideal culture, mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference, and peaceful co-existence, but they did so in a different tense. In a present understood as something unfolding and beginning, not repeating and enduring. The Sirens, those lovely women-things in *Seductive Exactling Realism*, represent in all their colors of skin not some globalized Benetton fantasy of "all the colors of the world," but rather the color of the non-aligned, all those who wanted to chart a course of history and its future beyond the monolithic reach of the west or the east. In

11. *To perseverate, to repeat or dwell on an action or event long after it has ceased. To be stuck in the past that remains present. It is a good word, one my mother taught me. Lethargic and corrupted by my own arrogance that if I think it through more, if I resolve the ambivalence, there will be a right answer. I sing a Siren's song to myself, seduced by my own power to entice myself and to conquer myself. Again and again. I have started and stopped this essay a thousand times since I began writing it, stressed and indifferent. Stressed about being indifferent. Writing shit. Indifferent about writing shit, but still stressed because somehow it has to stop. And because I was not indifferent. About any of it. I cared, and I was waiting for words, for better words to come. I was waiting for the picture I wanted to show you to materialize itself in my head and spill forth from the fingers that tap on my keyboard. If you look at the history of my browser, you'd think maybe I wanted Google to show me what I wanted to say. I think sometimes Google is one of my senses now, automatic. I try to believe Google will satisfy impatience: you ask, Google answers, you move on. But Google doesn't. Google births patience. Because there is always another answer that Google provides and you must sort through, patiently, waiting for the truth to realize itself in front of you. I was waiting for something I wanted to say about a work that demands nothing more be said about it, that demands we stop waiting. I was waiting to see. I wanted eyes that were smarter, had seen more, could ground themselves in knowledges of things I hadn't seen in order to give my words depth. I was like Rachel, that beautiful machine who wanted to be human, wanted to remember seeing and not the blindness inside her. In my patience, sitting in my chair, a waiting room to the thing promised me by my screen, I realized I had done it backwards. Instead of trying to become deep, I should have let myself be shallow. I should have stayed a thing. If Beckett described the human condition as trying, failing, and so on as one grows only to fail better, I wonder what would happen if I tried only to fail. I wonder what would happen if I actually stopped waiting for time to catch up with me.*

---

<sup>6</sup> See any of Walter Mignolo's recent writings, but especially *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

*Seductive Exacting Realism*, they sit above historical time and the specifics of our waiting. They sit in a nave that lifts them as if divine, beyond human dalliance: things made Gods.

In Williams's story, culture and reform become the backbone of an individual and collective enfranchisement that assures human representation and hence representability in the visible space of a collective public sphere. He sees this as a centuries-long project, but it might be said to be the same story told us about how histories are made by the tactics employed by the insurgents trained by Popović, in the "short" revolutions (to use William's own terminology, even if somewhat against its author) Popović either stages, foments, incurs, or, most frequently, on which he is invited to "consult." Popović is at the core of *Seductive Exacting Realism*, although his version of realism, seductive as it is, might not be terribly exacting. It means to make visible the reality on the street, the power of numbers. With Matthew Miller, Popović is the author of the newly released volume, *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World*, which is for sale to the disgruntled and dispossessed on the famously labor-unfriendly global superstore, Amazon.com. His CANVAS website features news analysis about sites in transition, including for example, Syria, Bahrain, Burma, and Venezuela, as well as a ticker tape scroll of protests taking place in real time. There are also links to Popović's popular YouTube and TED video lectures on such lessons as "How to topple a dictator." Despite Popović's insistence that each regime change is particular, each action and strategy differently *site-specific*, watch these easily digested videos and you'll see the same story, again and again, much like you would in looking at the art that boasts this same claim. It is secreted into your brain like the refrain of a

*But now I am talking about myself.*

*Here, it feels wrong to do that again, to write about myself, and I know the Artist will object, but I don't know how else I can write right now, after everything else. The Artist writes against biography. It is how the art institutions of the formerly west capitalize upon orality: they insert it into the market economy and enjoy feeding off the inert object they have made of the artist. Art historians do this too. The additive logic of our newly globalized art history gentrifies the canon, keeps it acceptable. It makes it easier for us to live in it, because it is less offensive to us. Desirable, even. It now includes artists from traditions and places outside of ours. It recuperates, but it doesn't recuperate those those artists as much as it recuperates us, makes us relevant. Recuperated, we feel content and like we've done our good politics. I don't mean to be snide. Elliot and I talked about this once and about how Tom didn't get it, didn't get that expanding the canon was not the same as decolonizing it, didn't get that expansion is the modus operandi of colonization. Additive logic confirms power. The Artist shifts the rules of the game. Her bio situates her in a space of actions not geography, of "Operating from a place co-inhabited by rationality and bestiality," and suggests her work brings us to "a sunny spot where everyone suffers infinite injustice." The real. The sunny spot that follows the red pill. Or is it the blue one? When I see her work, I think her anthem, the song of this place from where she makes must sound like a song I know: "You could be the King but watch the Queen conquer/OK first things first I'll eat your brains/then I'mma start rocking gold teeth and fangs/cause that's what a motherfucking monster do/hairdresser from Milan, that's the monster do/monster Giuseppe heel that's the monster shoe." She wants to play to lose so she can win. The rules of her game come from the Pink Panthers, an organized unit of Serbian thieves who have made thievery more important than theft. Theirs is not an additive, recuperative logic. She tells us their code: If questioned in a country where you are fluent, provide a fictional biography. If questioned in your native tongue, provide no biography. Here, I give glimpses of my biography, and I sign the work before it is done with my name, and now I pepper it with my erudition as well as my doubt. I footnote things and buttress even these scant notes with the legitimacy conferred by my training, my job, my brand, my*

Taylor Swift song on your radio, like the familiarity of the CANVAS logo: the raised fist that Nenad Petrovic-Duda modeled for the the Otpor! movement in Serbia on the basis of the *Lord of the Ring's* Saruman, and perhaps—at least symbolically and tongue-in-cheek—on his decision to align with the Dark Lord and the dark magig in pursuit of the One Ring.<sup>7</sup> In Canvas's logo, the fist is nestled into a triangular pattern of arrows that suggest CANVAS's tripartite strategy just as it re-orders the Western symbol of recycling and hence planet-saving. The logo and the story it brands follows the same rules and techniques of effective corporate leadership seminars (graphs, flowcharts, bullet points) and, indeed, it has been revealed that CANVAS's funding comes, in part, from intelligence firms like Stratfor that service those same corporations, multinational operations intent on expanding their market reach into precisely those unstable states that CANVAS might have helped advance towards what always turns out to be a position only of perpetual "transition;" those operations that want to turn the people of these places into consumers, fixed in a regime propelled by the desire to possess, the desire to "bring close" that Walter Benjamin long ago described as determining the auratic lure of the visual object. Phantasmagoria.

*logo. I have been fed and now I feed the artist as she feeds the Institution. My words provide safe passage, but sadly only into that same economy we are all supposed to contest even as we depend on it and even as we are seduced by the things it promises us, one after the other until they are all at once. You can't have an art show about art without addressing the critic. We all know that I am the missing component, corrupt and bound by what Christina, a close friend and colleague, once described as a "bourgeois imagination."*

Listen closely to the Sirens's song as it plays in the gallery, this recorded conversation between two hired voices, two women, two women-machines who speak the interview between the Artist and the Revolutionary, and you'll hear them opine—even as they gradually become interchangeable, singular not dual, no longer a them but an it—that this is indeed the same story told us by art, or at least what the Artist elsewhere queries as Revolutionary Art, the art desired by the western art institution, art that points to crises around the world to satisfy the mounting expectation that art achieve social justice, or at least impact us in places where we might learn how to do the same. The association isn't entirely surprising on the one hand. CANVAS's acronym clearly makes reference to an important bit of the artist's toolbox, and its "Model of Multilevel Knowledge Transfer," is actually called "ART" (Act. Recruit. Train. Yes, perhaps this is what art is now expected to do too? Is this not what Chan recruited Becket's words to do in New Orleans?). If CANVAS receives funding for its efforts to destabilize regimes from the very agencies that stand to profit financially from such democratic projects, so too does the art institution. Corruption runs rampant. The museum whitewashes the profiteering of democratic hypercapitalism, even as it tasks its artists with biting the hand that feeds it. But not too hard. Biting the hand of course only makes it stronger. Art that bites like this pretends to show us what we are told we don't see. It claims to slow down the assault of images that we are told have made us numb to world catastrophe, that have ironically rendered such catastrophes as if invisible (just) because we don't look at them. In place of images like these, it give us more images that are now supposed to make us smart, that are supposed to tell us things we haven't yet learned in our own sensate interaction with the world. Art historians love this kind of art, just

---

<sup>7</sup> Emma Williams, "A Velvet Fist," *Intelligent Life Magazine*, May/June 2012.

as they love the mostly pictorial tradition from which it comes. Some art historians are now saying that if we stop ourselves in the protected space of the museum and look, look harder, look closer, we will not only see more, but we will actually refuse the entire temporal order imposed on us by an accelerated capitalism and a corresponding order of consumerism that was yet unimaginable in the years these paintings were first made. Such looking can't refuse anything. It just adds to the story. It follows the rules the image sets out for itself, that it was set out to have. No matter how much looking proclaims its importance and its powerful capacity to interrupt the very image world in which it nestles and by which authority has long been ascribed both commercially and ideologically, politically it only reinscribes that same regime. When Marcel Duchamp said that in the future artists would just point, he already knew that the image world of the commodity would come to be the commodity world of the image.

But that it is the Sirens who sing the songs of *Seductive Exacting Realism*, allows you, perhaps to play against these rules. Make contact with them, don't run away, don't turn your ear. In Homer's epic *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus encounters obstacle upon obstacle on his ten-year journey back to Ithaca after already having fought ten long years of war in Troy. We learn of these obstacles, these hurdles that the hero cleared, one after another, not as they happen, but as he tells them later to the Phaeacians, thereby incorporating them and the listening they do into his story as well. Indeed, moved by his story and his telling of it, the Phaeacians make good on his desire and the narrative that propels it. They deliver him to Ithaca while he sleeps. When he wakes, having reached his destination, he will resume the telling, he will bring the history of Troy home. In other words, Odysseus controls the larger narrative of Homer's poem, not to mention his own destiny, his own capacity to move through the world, precisely through his capacity to tell it. It is, in the end, his stories and his tricks that compel the Phaeacians to act and thereby propel the story towards its foregone conclusion: his arrival home.

Of all the obstacles he surpasses on this self-narrated history, the Sirens are unique. The danger of the Sirens derives from another source than the witchery or violence that clever Odysseus is always able to outdo, out think. The Sirens threaten precisely Odysseus's greatest strength, his control over history through his capacity to tell it, to make it whole, to make it a total picture. *Weltbild*. Their song tempts Odysseus away from his path home not only because it is beautiful (as are they, lolling on their green meadow), but because it offers the truth, a truth that he, a liar who often pretends to be blind, is anxious to know, master, possess. A truth that is, throughout the text, symbolized by seeing, and which they hold up to Odysseus in their "green mirror." Odysseus wishes enlightenment as he travels home to tell the his story: the history of a war and its hero whose travels have brought him full knowledge of the world and so helped him conquer it anew. But, without doing anything, fighting anyone, the Sirens hold their own set of reigns on the making of history. The song-story of the Sirens stops time, delays action, prevents

12. *I think of other stories, stories about things and people, about vision and history. I think about one of my favorite films and the time it presents, time re-written within the plot line of the story by characters not yet born, machines not yet hatched. Past and future are always changing, always contingent, but not unilaterally so. Judgement Day happened in 1997, but interference by resistants and technicians and historians within the film's time-bending narrative means it might not even happen then, it might happen later. But the time of the film and its narrative is also rewritten extra-diegetically, metaleptically. From without the film, blurbs and wikipedia entires, blogs and student papers, as well as ever proliferating media ventures (spin-offs, video games) keep changing the date too. The stories multiply. Judgement Day happens therefore again in 2003, 2004, and 2011.*



men like Odysseus from fulfilling their destinies, wanderers and wayfarers all set on a path determined by war. It prevents these men from telling their stories, and so it tells their own. But it only has this power because you want to see, to know, to be *in* the story, *in* the picture. And to see yourself there. In that mirror. As Margaret Atwood revises it, the Siren's song is one that appropriates history precisely by appropriating the history-making aspirations of those they charm. *Trust me, I'm telling you stories. I can change the story.*

In Atwood's poetry, the Sirens change the story by using the fact that they *are* in effect, *the story*, the one the hero wants to know and tell so he can make it his. In Atwood's poem, the Sirens trick their capture, lulling him not by their beauty or even the beauty of their song, but by appealing to their prey's narcissism, always disguised as empathy. In Atwood's text, the Sirens represent themselves as victims of depravation, isolation, exile. Help me, help me, the Sirens sing. They say they want off their island and that only you can help them because "you are unique." "You" are the hero, the revolutionary, the seer, the artist. When you come, ready to heed their plea for help, to save and uplift them, it is pronounced, "At last, it is a boring song, but it works every time." And so you are stuck. The revolutionary, the hero, is left, stranded in his own endless time, no longer able to control his own story, his own history or the history of those he would recount. Inert, isolated, encapsulated, he is rendered the subject of the same visual regime that attempts to fix history in a master image, a master narrative that rises above all, surpasses all, and outlives all. He becomes Art, but not the art of the Sirens.

*Last we heard, it is set to happen again in 2017 when the machines will take over the hero and help him rebuild them before he was even a character in his own story. But he will again be stopped, probably again by himself, and then the future might finally be an open highway, uncharted territory. If the Sirens have it their way, in 2019, which was Rachel's year, maybe it will happen for real and we might be lead into a future by the army of beautiful women like her, like those that she, the Artist, is making next.*

*13. I was, in the end, wrong about so many details, even if I was right about what they meant. Those of you who read to know what it was that Irena Haiduk made and exhibited in Istanbul and in Chicago should know therefore that this is no record. It is no picture. In the end, there was no Rivera, no Trotsky. The space of the waiting room, the space in which I kept you for so many pages, was comfortable, more like a spa than a second-rank accounting firm. It had sheer white, breezy curtains, not doors, and I really can't say it felt Eastern European at all. There were two benches, but they were not embellished with the ornament of a commintern aesthetic. No, they were covered in a multi-hued, high density foam; their flanks were discretely capped with shiny bits of brass, like that of the logo-title SER that branded the gallery just beyond. The gallery was dark, but it grew lighter and lighter every day as the shades on the eastern wall were slowly raised to let in small blades of light. By the last day, the shade was raised entirely; the shadow box became camera obscure, and, for moments, the image of the campus—all its erudition, all its ideology—washed over the white sculpted walls, inverted, flipped upside down, and shivering. Yes, some of the details are wrong and there were things seen that can not be said here. But does it matter? I have told you the thing art did, not what it was. I have told you what it makes, not how it was made. Transmission is transmutation. How are you to know the truth? Why should you? The future doesn't care about the truth. Its history is not yet written. It is not yet dead. And it doesn't sit in a museum like a roadmap or guidebook, nor does it wait in the pages of a book. So, forget the facts, and just as this essay began with the noise of a doubled epigraph, an "upon," "over," "near," "at," "before," and even "after," drawing or writing, let it end with the silence of an epitaph, an "upon," "over," "near," "at," "before," and even, "after," the funeral or the grave. Kafka said it like a this: "Now, the Sirens have a still more fatal*

*weapon then their song, namely their silence. And, though, admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might have escaped from their singing; but from their silence, never.*<sup>8</sup>

*I see said the blind woman to her deaf dog as she picked up her hammer and saw.*  
\_Popular idiomatic joke

---

<sup>8</sup> Franz Kafka, "The Silence of the Sirens," from *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 430.