

**Excerpts from not-knowing as a shared space part 11**  
**Original text by A Constructed World, 2004**  
**Footnotes by ACW, Superflou and Darian Leader, 2008**  
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1. not-knowing as a shared space

a culture is not something that is delivered to you. It builds up from what you didn't-know you were doing. Like everyone talking about something or behaving in a certain way. culture happens first then becomes Culture<sup>1</sup>. Once everyone has been doing or thinking in a way for a while you realise it's culture<sup>2</sup>.

[...]

The audience is in process with and in and through its desire. The audience is always trying to make up their mind and deal with uncomfortable or pleasurable feelings. The subject for the audience is not events but their relation to events, how they think and feel about and around them. The subject can be inchoate. To think a famous artist is the best and indisputably so is an effective way of repressing thinking further. To have an established pantheon of what is good and what is not is a useful way of repressing thinking and feeling<sup>3 4</sup>.

[...]

What-you-want can be called your desire, yet desire is always, to some extent, what someone else told you to want. Desire is always the desire of the other and all that kind of thing<sup>5</sup>. How

<sup>1</sup> I think there is a sort of inner culture, what I mean is that we are born in a type of society where there are already a certain amount of rituals and routines. Until we are old enough to think for ourselves as to what is good and what is bad, we can't really belong to a culture and make it OUR culture.

<sup>2</sup> But it is when a culture becomes official, becomes institutional that it loses all credibility in the eyes of the purists. A too large broadcasting or visibility is the enemy of any said authenticity. How many examples do we have of fans there from the beginning, constant and loyal, who let their favourite group go after the slightest mainstream concession? Often, the attachment or the belief in a cultural product is only valid if we feel we are the sole connoisseur, as if we mature through an autistic admiration of obscure treasures. I like that because it feels good, but if it feels good, it's also mainly because it is I that likes it, and that people like me are rare. Taste is the instrument for individual affirmation; it is as strong as the desire to belong to a group. \*

\* I guess this is why we thought a Kurt Cobain show would be embarrassing and planning it made us cringe so much. LR&RF

<sup>3</sup> We have a nasty habit of trusting quite blindly the critical and dominant speech, it is obviously more reassuring and less tiring to repeat stupidly what it is considered good to say, rather than making up one's own mind about things. We can remark however that is also well thought of to place oneself systematically against the dominating speech, making the output just as sterile.

<sup>4</sup> Most of the time, people have an opinion that is their own, but if it's a well-known artist, well they stick to his fame. They go from the fact that, if it is a well-known artist, then it is a good work, and there is nothing else to say. But the name isn't everything.

Maybe this will for stability and blind belief in some figures is just a legitimate reaction to the traditional figures (political, religious, intellectual) that structure our society. Man needs comforting figures that tell him what he needs, but the breaking of his identity made him go from the immobility and stability of the traditional figures to the more modest, moving and adaptable, like the artist or the sportsperson (the entertainer in general).

<sup>5</sup> Our identity builds itself from the different influences we have. The people around us function as mirrors of ourselves.

can you be authentic about what you really want? How do you know when you are being told or directed what-to-do or when you are thinking and feeling for yourself? Sometimes feverish desire feels authentic at others it seems like its own parody. It's like a pornography of what was unknown seen over and over. It's kind of compelling but not really satisfying.

2.class

It's hard to know what class is at this point in time.

[...]

During elections people often say there's no difference between the left and the right. They're all-the-same. Perhaps it's the feeling neither will give you what-you-want<sup>6 7</sup>. It's hard to believe though Gore would have done what Bush has and most left governments eventually look different in terms of education and health. The left often gets swallowed up in its own good intentions, before the fall of communism in Poland all school children had a cooked lunch. The left has an ambivalent relation with culture because those governments have tended to represent what they think should or should have happened rather than the remainder that can't be described. Governments that want people to feel in-common often don't like thinking about how much we collectively don't-know.

[...]

*Up jumped the swagman and sprang into that billabong  
"You'll never take me alive!", said he  
And his ghost may be heard as you pa-ass by that billabong  
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me<sup>8</sup>*

Culture is the overall knowledge of an individual, that's why culture brings us back directly to a unique personality and to a type of society because it is integrated in an individual. Culture is a baggage that follows us everywhere and that we fill up as we choose.

<sup>6</sup> Anyway, it's obvious nowadays that we can't count on the politicians to do what the people want. This idea of democracy is still completely utopian for me; we've got to stop being so blind... The politicians do what THEY want, full stop.

Politics is the art of consensus. It is very difficult to make everyone content in an individual manner when no one wants the same thing. \*

\* Sometimes politics feels like the art of compromise and contradiction and much more like art than we wish – deconstructed language and emotive effect. LR&RF

<sup>7</sup> It could be apathy but it's also something else. People protest with the slogan 'not in my name', which can sound like denying responsibility, but dis-identifying might be the thing to do when you don't identify. Like Murrumu Walubara Yidindji rescinding his Australian citizenship. Or, like Rancière wrote: 'to take a personal example, for my generation politics in France relied on an impossible identification – an identification with the bodies of the Algerians beaten to death and thrown into the Seine by the French police, in the name of the French people, in October 1961. We could not identify with those Algerians, but we could question our identification with the "French people" in whose name they had been murdered. That is to say, we could act as political subjects in the interval or the gap between two identities, neither of which we could assume.'

(Rancière, 1992) LR&RF

<sup>8</sup> La Marseillaise  
Arise, children of the Homeland,  
The day of glory has arrived!  
Against us, tyranny  
Bloody banner is risen (repeat)

Waltzing Matilda is a song about a suicide. The swagman who finds it impossible to compromise in the social order of farmers and troopers and elects instead to kill himself and his ghost lives on.

There's a lot of other very famous art about suicide<sup>9</sup>.

Hamlet asks whether to be or not to be, like whether he can bear to live, Beethoven 5th Symphony goes da da der dum like it's the end of everything and Kurt Cobain says I wanna kill myself and I wanna die<sup>10</sup>. Culture is a pretty serious place and people often want to express what is unbearable, impossible to resolve other than by escaping<sup>11</sup>. Lacan says something like that it is the only certain act everything else is racked with uncertainty and not-knowing<sup>12</sup>.

[...]

Culture is a collective talking cure that can be undertaken together<sup>13</sup>. We don't-know yet, what we want to say, what will happen and history can only be made later after the shared events have transpired<sup>14</sup>. It can't be given as a pill by those-who-know what is good-for-you.

Do you hear in the countryside  
These ferocious soldiers howling?  
They are coming into our arms  
To cut the throats of our sons, our wives!

<sup>9</sup> It makes me think of Nan Goldin and her will to capture everything, to fix everything, so as not to lose track of her weird and bohemian friends, many whom ended up committing suicide. But she is not the only one to capture traces of life, as it is so fragile. Sophie Calle does it to, Martin Parr as well... All in a different manner, but always with this thought of keeping a trace, of building a memory. \*

\* Our friend is in Japan at the moment, Kyoto specifically. They have a festival called Gozan no Okuribi (Mountain Bon Fire) where they light fires in the shape of large Kunji characters on the five mountains that frame Kyoto. The bonfires are known individually as "Daimonji", "Hidari Daimonji", and "Myo-hou". The other two fires are in the shapes of a boat and a Shinto shrine gate respectively and are called the "Funagata" and "Toriigata" Tied with beliefs surrounding memorial services for departed ancestors, the Okuribi guide the souls of the ancestors who return to this world during the Obon period back to the world beyond. We are somewhat interested in this collective experience of shared grief or acknowledgement of a past. But that this collective is experienced individually. LR&RF

<sup>10</sup> 'When my 6:35, is calling to me, I feel dizzy, Thinking often / To finish it / Bang! Bang!' Serge Gainsbourg

<sup>11</sup> For me, art is the only real escape from all this atrocity. It allows everyone to communicate a bad feeling and to share it, to exorcise the feeling. Art is THE solution.

<sup>12</sup> There is a fantastic scene in Jean Luc Godard's 1965 film Alphaville, where Lemmy Caution hurriedly gets out of a taxi and tells the driver to wait for him. He falters at the sidewalk then goes back and shoots the driver and says ' That's so you don't change your mind!'. ACW 2008

<sup>13</sup> Is it a talking cure? I doubt it.\* Perhaps culture offers us instruments with which we might be able to do a few things psychically. For example, it offers us examples of how creation can take place after loss. Hence the anthropologists' definition of culture as the accumulation of traces of the dead - how things can be made from lost things. Darian Leader

\* So do we. LR&RF

<sup>14</sup> How shared are events? This is never clear. Doesn't culture so often tell us precisely that events are shared in order to gloss over the fact that they cannot be?\* Darian Leader

3.Failure as a shared space

Failure is an important shared space it's something that we have in common. Only a few people experience success yet it is what we identify with the most<sup>15 16 17</sup>. Thinking about success keeps us separate from the person next to us. It's as though one of us may become suddenly successful at any moment<sup>18 19</sup>.

[...]

I wonder what would happen if the 99 per cent of us who fail to reach the ideal spent more time talking to each other. We have a lot in common as failure that's not being used.<sup>20</sup>

\* Sometimes it's a death or loss and time that shows us what we thought we shared was only our own experience. LR&RF

<sup>15</sup> I think that it is good to have role models; people who we can identify with, that make us want to go higher. These people can be close to us (like a friend or a member of the family), but also a personality that appears in the media. The most important thing is to move forward, with a motor, an ambition. Once we get to where we feel good about ourselves, we realise that we did it by ourselves.

<sup>16</sup> What do we consider being success nowadays? Don't we confuse it too often with celebrity? \*\*

\* In art in Melbourne there is an almost formulaic measure and path to 'making it'. How is there so much energy and desire constantly thrown at such predictable and institutionalised notions of success? LR&RF

\* And then did celebrity try to confuse us by failing us? The success of the failure of success. LR&RF

<sup>17</sup> Well, at another level we might identify more powerfully with failure. When things fail they tend to leave traces that we identify with - families rarely repeat successes, but failures certainly. Darian Leader

<sup>18</sup> It is obviously more comforting to take someone who succeeds as an example, than the other way around.

<sup>19</sup> And then you have to start really worrying. So often, depression sets in not when we fail to achieve but when we suddenly get what we think we want - now there is only a void for us. Darian Leader \*

\* Or we might even think – 'shit, I don't deserve this.' LR&RF

<sup>20</sup> Kureishi slams creative writing courses <http://books.guardian.co.uk/story/0,,2282239,00.html>  
Charlotte Higgins, arts correspondent, Monday May 26, 2008 guardian.co.uk

Kureishi - known for his love of music - was asked by an audience member whether he would have liked to have been in a band. "You wouldn't want me in your group," he said. "Or indeed in any group."

The author also said that when he goes to his desk each morning to commence writing, he thinks to himself: "Why am I doing this? Shall I commit suicide." ACW 2008 \*

\* Don't Kurt Cobain. LR&RF