



Synonymous Sculpture,

a play for death in twenty-three acts

The artist is the origin of the work
The work is the origin of the artist.
Neither is without the other.ⁱ

I do not believe for one moment that death has not occurred. I do however believe that somehow the essence or soul of a person is transmittable to an object, or *thing*, transferred like some noxious contagion. A condition of our own creation, a disease of the mind that permits this taking hold, to an end I do not yet know.ⁱⁱ

THE GOD MACHINE I

And there was light...

The camera chamber: the prison cell.

In isolation from the world the receptacle waits in silence for its blinding torture. Silver crystals, gelatin, over one hundred years of research compounded into delicate layers.

We can talk candidly of the shutter release as if it were as nonchalant a task as opening a door, but where this door leads is always a step further from familiarity, a future I will not dare to consider, with every discharge some agent of disbelief is without doubt released.

The shutter itself, a beautifully crafted piece of mechanical symmetry, opens for the world to imprint its violence, the sanctuary of its dark chamber desecrated with every millisecond.

AWFUL GODS

What God would reside in that eerie blackness? What kind of foul creature could that prison hold?

From-the-darkchamber-to-the-darkroom, all is concealed, hidden from us mere mortals, too fragile in its infancy for even the creator to look upon.

With each exposure the silence is broken with glorious praise to Apollo, a paean to that deity of the sun with a hope to appease Thanatos; to pass through death in order to exist. Together they deliver us from the pains and sorrows of life.

THE DAY OF FOREVER

It is always then, the flat light of an overcast spring/autumn sky, that textureless illumination emanating from within our operating theatres, salons, laboratories and mad houses. Here we examine the details, *Neue Sachlichkeit* investigators searching for answers. Minute by minute, hour by hour we work tirelessly repairing the imperfections of our world, desperate attempts to satisfy that chronic craving of what is always beyond. The myopic eye of the camera relentlessly infests our eye, despite the devices endeavors to disguise this via its veracious promise of infinity it champions with every lens. These measurable lengths provide comfort and certainty when faced with this infinite abyss.ⁱⁱⁱ

THE GOD MACHINE II

Through apparitions, likenesses, captured souls, mimesis or simulations you will remain. These remnants, monuments to your being, their presence on this earth will undoubtedly outlast you. Places, people, ideas, existential evidence... Our god machines work industriously, ruthlessly efficient at leaving you behind.

BARBARIA

Recordings are deformities of reality. They are mutations that transgress the laws imposed by originality. Twisting them into something unheard and unseen anywhere before. This is not birth, nor is it re-birth, it is something in between where the soul of the recorder/s interferes with the imprinting process, a somewhat undisclosed brutality visible in the alchemy of inscription. Or may this belief reign if only to convince us of recordings ability to impress this conditional information, instructions within those uncertain marks for that willful suspension of disbelief.

ON DEFINING AURA

That slip in our cognitive processes allowing a moment of disbelief to occur. Archaic instructions received by our slumbering savage, a primitive mind yearning for the wonderment of alchemy. In photographic terms the agency of originality is destroyed outside of this chemical mystification. An alchemic past brutalized by exactitude, our demystified beliefs barely even deceased have been electrified, the carcass striped to the bone; yet validity of being at once both photo-graph and image still holds. The electric array falls by the wayside of auratic perception, its glossiness reflects too little to stave off my immediate lassitude with its world.^{iv} These technical exercises in mechanics do not interest me; I find my uncivilized self investing in more believable fallacies such as the defects of each crystal lattice, and investment after all has always been photography's only genuine commerce.

TITHONUS

Is this my wish? To live out my days, ageing along with the works and ideas I had in life, I had in time. Once I leave the great stream of synchronization, I can no longer defend those things for which I will be remembered. Would I care to? In life, my vain spirit ceaselessly prays to the dawn “please immortalize me in a pleasant light, do not let me fall into decay with my body” but realization soon overwhelms this vanity as I come to recognize that this infinity is just another word for imprisonment.

THE GHOST IN THE CAVE

That first prison prehistoric man subjected themselves to – the cave, the beginning of art and thus the beginning of our love affair with immortality and the eternal suffering born out of that quest.^v

ECHOES

After the body is gone the echo is all that remains. Distortions from the uneven surfaces of the cave walls, distress preservation and the longer it echoes the more distorted it becomes.

FLAT DEATH

Post vulnerability – in that the genuine object is already dead what is left but these ghostly echoes? Hazy documents of a spirit world the present is forever stumbling over. This flat death of the photograph can be located somewhere in its use value between powerful weapon and useless tool when considered in the annihilation and restoration of time.

THE TRIAL OF HISTORY

Like Atget, these photographs are elevated from their refuge within art toward the doctrine of documentation, evidence at the trial of history itself.^{vi}

This body of work is a desert. Photographs deserted not just of human life but also any and all signs of life, they are perfect in their photographicness, their frozenness; timepieces, certificates for the wrecks of an age, debris from the not too distant future. To look upon them is to feel that pain inside, the pain of loss, the pain we all know. The pain of empathy, the pain of memory, that pain only history can inflict.

GAS TANK

Its function being relieved by the camera enhances the aestheticisation of the object captured, which we subjectively elevate to appease our formalistic concerns only to consign it to its former promise of objectivity where they will find their place, to last, to be seen and to be used.^{vii} It isn't a case of one or the other as we become trapped somewhere in between.

ANOTHER TOOL

"The man-made world of things, the human artifice erected by *homo faber*, become a home for mortal men, whose stability will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions, only inasmuch as it transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use."^{viii}

ON THE PRINCIPLE OF HOPE

We are working toward what? We are given the ideals of a utopic future; we are working toward a better place for our children, 'to make a better world', the advancement toward perfection. The ideas of utopia in Benjamin are essential in unpicking that desire for perfection instilled by the cultic value of art. This is epitomized with the ideals of the New Objectivity school of photography, as they rehearsed faultlessness in the exactitude of their execution. Cultic value of the artwork is elevated here through the repetitive nature of the artist's practice; repetition has always been the means of improvement, a convenient word we use to deliver that divine promise.

"BARBARISM OF PERFECTION"

Everything must be perfected in the image, the film and the music when being recorded. We are presented with our desire to experience this perfection, to appreciate, to congratulate this construction, thus congratulating ourselves on the unifying technological achievements we as a species have thus far accomplished. We are contempt. We are dead.

THEATRE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH

Unlike film and music photography abstains from regimented audience duration. We come and go as we please, and with this freedom we achieve first and foremost that wanton sensation of control; save for the self-regulating cultural conventions enforced by institutional law and by which we are all so deeply accustomed to that assimilation has occurred, we are part spectator part invigilator. The role of spectatorship links all mediums together and sometimes slippages do occur but it is only with a total breakage of this standardization that could allow for something *otherworldly* to suggest itself. And only this barbaric show can break the spell of de-concentration, granting for a time some degree of sovereignty over this codified prison.^{ix}

NO ONES HOME

I feel at one not with the work, its singular intention is displacement, but with my viewing comrades; we are there together in the world at that moment, looking. Homeliness created by that opposition of what is familiar to us; homogeneity via heterogeny. Seemingly nostalgic impulses give credence to a possible future, as expressed through our unified gaze; but from this aching comes a comprehension that we conceal within our dispossession.

NON-OBJECT/ OBJECT

The camera is my eye. I have one viewing position of these obsolete constructions. I am looking through the photographer's view. I am distracted, I am not the witness to a reality that no longer exists, I am a witness to a reality that never existed. I am a bystander, forced to observe my own unconscious obedience of optics.^x Removed again with the distraction of display.

Distraction is the atmosphere in which the shock of revelation can occur. Distraction is an essential part of our everyday life, it has always been present and always will be, it is a continuous element of our consciousness, a necessity that has no tangible connection to differing cultures or societal classes, and it becomes an audacious source for unification.

Within the democratized space of the white walled sanctuary, the content of the work is sublimated for the objectness of the art. This gaining of weight both physically and metaphorically adds lucidity to the work, replacing mythological value with monetary value. Sanctuary then is perhaps quite an accurate stage for this type of exchange; and never was there a greater sanctuary than the church. Admittedly the stakes are higher but what remains is the interchangeability of money and belief. I don't know whether it is more prudent to believe in god than art, but perhaps this mimesis would go some way toward explaining why the gallery has become so sacred and drenched in ritualism.

PRAYING TO DEATH

“Art which even in its opposition to society remains a part of it, must close its eyes and ears against it: it cannot escape the shadow of irrationality. But when it appeals to this unreason, making it a *raison d’être*, it converts its own malediction into a theodicy.”^{xi}

THE AGREEMENT

Auratic death is no longer in question with this work, it is a prerequisite; a belief system constructed within the confines of suggested resurrection predisposes a mysterious obligation, the submission of the individual to the suggestion that the Aura must first and foremost pass-through death before it can illuminate. This does not amount to universal law; I dare only apply it here with the expression of my own contemplation of the work at hand. And in these underhanded exchanges of life, death and faith a secret agreement takes shape between our remembered past and desired future.

TO END AT THE BEGINNING AND STILL NOT STUMBLE UPON ETERNITY

At what expense to history, to the depicted, are we brought these reproductions of reality? Can we ever really quantify the cost of a photograph upon society? These documents when entering into the hierarchy at the level of art commodify history, trading in death and misery. I recognize death everywhere I look, its omnipresence reflected in the flat surface of the analog photograph. An awareness of this idea has been present since the first likenesses were performed; and performance it has remained. The power of writing retained throughout photographic history, to mark, trace, to write-with-light, connects us to the divine. Perhaps this bond remained in latency or perhaps so imperiously present that we still spellbound within its shadow. Is the essence of any photograph an attempt to materialize Death, to gain a hold of it, to feel, if only for a moment, in control of it? Deathly significance seems to have been so cunningly concealed within our world of things and through this concealment we have allowed ourselves to distinguish the right to individuality, even extending unto our belief in free will. The greatest illusion of all has been constructed by ourselves for ourselves. Human, animal, plant, star... all will succumb to death but only we have the means or the disillusionment to seek to camouflage it; that we may partake in the most painful of emotions. Or is this willful forgetting actually a reminder to us that sometimes the need to look upon death is the greatest measure of value in all that we are, and the photograph is just another tool dutifully performing the task we have asked of it.

AEGIS

In this work I attempt to examine the apparitions of a life via the works of art we leave in our wake. That through the mapping of an analogue process, here photography, a mark left of our self is somehow embedded within the work. Remembered via our subjective familiarity with the work resulting in the varied confictions this can cause within us, the recollectors.

The sum of our work as artists is remanded within the works themselves that will be eternalized for as long as they form part of our civilized society. So long as the value of that art refrains from drifting into obscurity with other insignificant histories we have so carefully scripted.

To access this remainder is not a simple task that I have tried to unveil within the various acts of the play. The complexity demanded of this kind of revelation is matched within the intricate placement of each word contained rhythmically in these layers of text. A layering I hope the reader to invest in with as much comprehension as they see fit in order to interact with the idea I meditate upon with absolute certainty, that any such comforts of resolution within the confines of any espoused analysis surmount to nothing more than utterly unrefined transcripts of our irresolvable necessity for idealism. Romanticism, and that yearning for a utopic future underlies the very foundation of this writing, existing within the very fabric of my prose, boldly, without concern for ethical or moralistic principles which for me are merely constructed delusions to blind us – that we can no longer put our faith in anything other than the sum of our subjectivity at that time. Only after we acknowledge that any truths we hold are fabrications we have learnt to self subscribe to in order to contain our most monstrous of all creations, the fear of failure, can we begin to remove our shackles. This is the fundament not just of why we work with/in art but why we work or labor at all.

I AM GOD

A man said to me that up is down and down is up, and I replied to him 'you are mistaken.' But what if he believed it with the utmost certainty, with the same conviction that I felt for its polar. How could one of us be wrong? Now that same man took an apple without paying for it so I stopped him believing that he is wrong to do so, but again his level of conviction in the opposite is matched by my own.

We must therefore both be correct.

But a society could not function within this state of lawlessness and there in lies the beginning of our delusions. Our constructs that maintain the same order that enters our world under the guise of order itself. Social order cannot be sustained without these implicit delusions, which physically and psychologically, construct our ever-evolving ideas surrounding utopia.

So, I ask myself, how am I to go on, when it would appear that all contemporary life contains for me are delusions upon delusions? Would it be appropriate, if that word still holds any meaning, to say that the role of the people we deem as great thinkers, the ones who have decently uncovered some of these delusions, have in their revelations constructed but more delusions for us to decipher; a disease mitotically increasing with each resolution? The only logical way out of this eternal dread (that I see appropriate for myself) is to do whatever I want, whenever I want to, which of course means submissively abiding some delusions in order to bring you this. All that is clear to me is that if I am god then so are you, but perhaps this is simply another delusion awaiting an antidote to provide more delusions, a reason for our survival.

END NOTES

ⁱ Heidegger, Martin, *The Origin of the Work of Art, Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p 17-87.

ⁱⁱ It is through the contemplative poetic writing that the very nature of the subject matter we are dealing can begin to be untangled. Any ability to separate and distinguish, compartmentalize and weave a singular linear thread between these indifferent polemics seems to me reckless at best. If we were to continue with our attempts to *straighten matters out* the long narrow line we are constructing will shatter under it's own weight. I choose to embellish and mystify, seeking out monotonous details as the way to interpret these ideologies to bring about new understanding through a form of deconstructive free association.

ⁱⁱⁱ Smithson, Robert, 'Art Through the Camera's Eye', Jack Flam, (ed.), *The Collected Writings*, London: University of California Press, 1996, p. 373.

^{iv} Benjamin's term "auratic perception" denotes the aesthetic faculty by means of which civilization may recover an appreciation of myth.

^v Schopenhauer, Arthur, *On the Suffering of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 37-51

^{vi} Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* London: Penguin, 2008, p.14.

^{vii} Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 173.

^{viii} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 173.

^{ix} Adorno, Theodor, 'Fetish Character in Music and The Regression of Listening' in Andrew Arato, Eike Gebhardt (eds.), *Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Continuum, 1982.

^x Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, p. 10.

^{xi} Adorno, Theodor, 'Commitment', in Ronald Taylor (ed.), *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: Verso, 1977, p. 194.