

Acephale: as ship of the desert

“One might, indeed, believe that the camel is something that is at the most critical point of all life, where futility is at its most distressing”.

(Documents, Critical Dictionary.)

Here we see the way that two artists respond to the space of the city (psychologically, temporally and physically), in a manner that is impossible within the conventional forms of representation. The cognitive mapping of such urban intervention through its conceptual documentation are the means by which the ‘idea’ of the work is communicated.

The initial acephalic *camelus dromedarius* was, we are told, an objet trouvé – an excremental craft-work made by human labour; cast from cow-shit & clay. As a completely chance find amid the urban debris of the landscape – in a city built over a sewer, a certain ambiguity is attached to its being-for-others. As a *punctum*, the absence of the head performs a laceration on consciousness, and (in quasi-arcane terms) represents the destruction of hierarchy; formerly the death of god or the chief, – but by now we are enmeshed in the era of dis-enlightenment – the dark night of the void and the death of the master narratives.

The basic materialism of the original camels’ construction is readily identified with the ‘base’ economy (waste and expenditure), which is the realm of the ‘lower strata’ – where thought loses its head, or if you prefer, where the head loses its thought, as we plunge into the brute existence of a headless animality. The phrase ‘independent arrival’ marks both the door of the possible as well as, the simultaneous destruction of the idea of the limit and the limit of the idea.

The map, as we know, is an authoritarian device which can never be accurate (i.e. the 1:1 map cannot exist, except in fiction: Borges), and there are always hidden immensities that will escape its (grided) measuring rod, in actuality. Cultural domination (i.e. any official culture) is the imposition of a cognitive map – in answer to the need of power to orientate anyone who might wish to break free – it seeks to deny the heterogeneous, under the cosh of homogeneity.

The absurdity of a camel in the desert may be lost on an urbanite. The autonomous response remains anonymous (or, an enigma to the enigmatic) until it moves into the arena of official culture, that is, into the field of cultural production. The self-reflexive strategies of modernism, even more so, of contestatory modernism – weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living. Contestation is only alive when it is chaotic and formless, everything else is assimilated shit, wasted expenditure – living fossils (like the bad old things), in the museum of cultural history. *Ressentiment* walks the tight-rope with praxis, the fall is an ineluctable disaster.

It is only through the exoteric movement of scatology that we can rupture such attempts at assimilation – hence the value of the acephale. The point is to lower thought, to insist that *l'emmerdement et l'ennui de la vie quotidienne* has its own

diabolical laughter that eschews all attempts at discourse (i.e. thoughts attempts at assimilation and confinement), while knowing in advance that thought (or the idea) is incapable of any other tactic. A hard boiled void is unthinkable.

The city has been described as a body without organs, but what are the poor, the mad and the destitute and all who resists the current hierarchy, if not the organs that the social seeks to airbrush out of its system (a hierarchy) – in the way that the pubic hair is removed from nude photographs (in Japan for example).

The upper and the high has always consigned the low and the vulgar out of eyes view, only to be buried behind the hypocrisy of a contorted piety and/or a pitiable charity. It is only when we move through the city, with its people, its functional zoning, and its centres of power – that we begin to experience the absurd existence – which the alliance of paranational capital engenders as *the production of space* – where enlightened reason and rigour versus chaos and the virginal void. With effortless villainy, capital has buried a crucial truth: there are a mass of desires whose realisation is evidently not beyond the capacity of our present means of action on the material world, but only beyond the capacities of the current social organisation. All projects of appropriation, or to shift the emphasis, of functional transformation – have as their incontestable goal a dissimulation of power.

The power of the city is ruptured only by a critical intervention that rediscovers elements of play, chance, the gift, and the sacrifice – all of which have been reduced and de-based to a grotesque parody in the official city: the city as spectacle.

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