

SYNTHESIS 3: 'Meditation: *Prodesse quam conspici*'

The history of the margin is one lit, ever, by the dream of triumphant solidarity: the majority, for example, realize their error and then deign to include; the splinter-group deepens in her exclusion; revolution flattens to nil and a refigured future is promised. The lasting result of each of these postulates is static enough to know by heart: the machines of power placate with their 'new equality,' only to reveal that inequality is impressively protean; the deepening splinter-group forgoes her deepening to burst forth to political and public effect, or to haggle the public sphere insidiously—the first becoming an institutional name, the second, a 'terrorist'; the revolution, frankly, never quite materializes, or knows no better than the reformation of her own ghost oppressor. Improvements made in the lives of those without racial, sexual, gendered, and material privilege are always minor.

I wonder: where singular identity is concerned, might the solution to these manifold disappointments (a light word) be the jettison of solidarity-as-telos? Is the posse-dream (and even love is a posse-dream, demanding requital) what truly ails us? Let us foster a *disambiguate* figure instead—one who refuses the balm of consensus, mobilizes her spirit, mind, and her eros, and lastly, bears no bile for fellows.

Let me outline what this meditation (and this figure) is not: *exhaustive, materially empowering, misanthropic, pacifist*. The first case is likely obvious: a study attempting to debunk politics, or to put into precise terms the seemingly 'successes' of political movements is beyond my scope here; neither will any disambiguate be 'exhaustive.' Next, this method is not chic. While the disambiguate need not avoid certain 'excesses,' it is difficult to imagine her as display-based or specially comfortable. Her method is insular, disciplined, rigorous, perhaps mystic; it is cultivation of her interior that leads to revived agency (and this implies that contemporary 'agency' is a farce, strapped to institutional, governmental, and group allowances). Third, the disambiguate need not be misanthropic or solitary: the corridors of the self are not investigated solely in quiet—the key matter is that neither solidarity nor the discovery of love be telos. Finally, this mediation does not call for pacifism, and is in acknowledgment of the peril of 'laying off'—imagining, for example, that one's position of pariah can lead to personal revelation, and that such revelation is enough (while the machines of power crush without reprise). First and finally, all revolts are intimate; my thesis, to this end, is that a cortège of disambiguate thinkers is preferable to a morass of half-invested, zombified protesters.

What I mean by 'zombified' is 'stripped of some deeply personal aspect.' Contemporary politics, social movements, and the history of government nearly always depend, or depended upon, acquiescence. As a passing example, consider a couple choosing a restaurant for lunch: it is exceedingly rare that *both* parties truly 'agree' on a destination. It will be said that this is not a disagreement of 'deeply personal aspect'—yet we have governmental parties with one thousand heads that sing beliefs verbatim, while two cannot agree on salads. We have the NEA with one thousand heads, the NAACP, NOW—and a rather stunning management of

dilution down to three or four tenets. This dilution is not the result of independent thinking. Quite the contrary: it is the result of half-interest, historicism, and power monopoly.

Certainly, such groups can ‘mobilize’ to their benefit—they have, perhaps, a lobbyist or two that can create the requisite headache. More games: a political system that demands signatures in quantity is opposed by quasi-visionaries peddling quantity (and, of course, capital).

What are the relevant values of the disambiguate?: *sacrifice, vigilance, callousness, spirituality, cognizance*. Foremost, small personal preference is dispatched: the disambiguate cannot be ‘all things to all people,’ cannot be the mother who wants her son in Boy Scouts and lives a life of independent reflection otherwise. Not, notably, because her child must be a misanthropic scamp, but because the Boy Scouts organization is an exemplar of nepotism, effacement, and bad ethics. To speak without tenderness: the disambiguate refuses the balm of solidarity-as-telos, of status quo institutionalism (Gramscian hegemony). She seeks to build—through right action—the bounds of the self outward. She bears the old barb of elitism. She is callous to worldly ‘good sense’—a euphemism for obedience. Most poignantly, she internalizes the loss inherent in her rigorous choosing—loss of friends, of previous objects of affection, of general ease—without fancying herself a martyr, and fully sensible that something sensuous is put in abeyance for duty.

This sensual abeyance—if understood as a version of Audre Lorde’s ‘erotic’—is no small wager. ‘Sharing deeply any pursuit with another person,’ ‘the open and fearless underlining of [one’s] capacity for joy,’ ‘the energy to pursue genuine change within our world’—though devoutly to be desired, these modes of the erotic demand not only recognition, but ‘concert with others’ for full blossoming (59)<sup>1</sup>. While it is certainly possible that such concert may exist, it is more likely that the disambiguate will operate in the desert for a time—he certainly cannot wait on the *autre* to begin work. Why, after all, is the spiritual to be a ‘world of flattened effect’ when separated from the erotic? It is a lean understanding of the spiritual and the ascetic (assuming that Lorde is correct in her milieu) that demands ‘abnegation.’ Beyond the bounds of lack are levels of celsius not reachable by eros alone; even per the spiritualist, spirit is deemed separate from eros only in the pornographic contexts Lorde herself disavows. In any event, the disambiguate is queer enough to fathom experience *between* such poles of temperature.

In terms of cognizance, Mel Y. Chen’s “Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections” speaks strongly to the sufficiency of independence as the primary arbiter of experience, while likewise *interrogating* the common sense (solitary) patina of ‘independence.’

[. . .] To a radical degree humans are no longer the primary cursors of my physical inhabitation of space. Inanimate things take on a greater, holistic importance . . . Life sustains even—*especially?*—in this kind of silence, this kind of pause, this disability. The heart pumps blood; the mind, even when it says “I can’t think,” has reflected

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<sup>1</sup> from Lorde’s “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.”

where and how it is. Communion is possible in spite of, or even because of, this fact' (emphasis mine)(Chen 277)<sup>2</sup>.

While Chen is, in this case, iterating her own personal struggles with disability in the public sphere, the lesson is patent: in the silence of the self, life resonates, 'speaks'; the mind approaches the seen mind; the sensorium makes a speaking and unspoken place. In a stunning moment, Chen realizes the comforting apparatus of furniture, and her reflection turns from simple 'fetishism' to cathexis: 'It is only in the recovering of my human-directed sociality that the couch really becomes an unacceptable partner' (278). If this sort of radical cogitation and conclusion-making is not the end of disambiguate space, it is one of several ebullient germs. Relations-in-human are neither conclusive nor, finally, expansive—not without a sense of other sentience, and of disambiguate space.

The luxury of being alive is charged with duty—life would move out of luxury quickly, save for the sense that contact, ('love') is an end. And no one can be blamed for this: loving seems our very right, being the produce of it (well, perhaps). How deeply has one considered, however, what sort of self-knowledge is necessary to produce connectivity? Beyond the aphoristic 'You cannot love another without loving yourself' is a marked veracity: if what permeates is to bind, the notes must have strong *oppositional* charge:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves—goes itself, *myself* it speaks and spells,  
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

(author's emphasis)(G.M. Hopkins)<sup>3</sup>

Politics and other public salves fail because the 'populace' in question has neither the inclination to know itself with intimacy, nor the gall to bristle in its self-defining separatist instant; thus we move about with bobbing heads. *We*—that third-person plural, amorphous, nebulous. The turn inward, and the following turn to a true outward, is the disambiguate turn.

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<sup>2</sup> From Mel Y. Chen's "Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections."

<sup>3</sup> From Gerard Manley Hopkins' "[As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame]."