The Call of the Wild: Terro(i)r Modulations

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This piece, included in the drift special issue of continent, was created as one step in a thread of inquiry. While each of the contributions to drift stand on their own, the project was an attempt to follow a line of theoretical inquiry as it passed through time and the postal service(s) from October 2012 until May 2013.

This issue hosts two threads: between space & place and between intention & attention. The editors recommend that to experience the drifting thought that attention is paid to the contributions as they entered into conversation one after another. This particular piece is from the BETWEEN SPACE & PLACE thread:

April Vannini, Those Between the Common * Laura Dean & Jesse McClelland, Ballard: A Portrait of Placemaking * Amara Hark Weber, Crossroad * Isaac Linder & Berit Soli-Holt, The Call of the Wild: Terro(i)r Modulations * Ashley D. Hairston, Momma taught us to keep a clean house * Sean Smith, The Garage (Take One)
"Instead of beginning with radical doubt, we start from naïveté."

--Graham Harman, The Quadruple Object

"Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest, and on and on, he knew not where or why; nor did he wonder where or why, the call sounding imperiously, deep in the forest."

--Jack London, The Call of the Wild

The figure of the feral remains a perpetual enigma, but the parameters remain relatively consistent.

A person, usually a child, enters civilization after having been raised by wolves or kept in some kind of cruel captivity. The outsider perspective on domestication ensues at the edge of a culture's self-recognition of its clumsier attributes; what has been taken for granted becomes apparent, is brought to the foreground with the stranger and made questionable. Amusement follows naïve questions or observations such as Kaspar Hauser in the Herzog film, The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser, when Kaspar notes that while in his room he is engulfed by it, but when he looks at the tower (with the room inside) he can turn away and it disappears. Ergo, the room is larger than the tower. How entertaining. The aberrant one destabilizes the comforting cultural normative. Places become seen as mere impressions out of space, a patterning, a rut that not everyone lives in like us.

This is one figure of the feral. The naïveté that begs all the questions. As a figure for a certain philosophical disposition, the rapidity of one's saccade scans the environment, intuits its space, not from an initial thaumazein or a Critchlean sense of disappointment, but from
a child-like naiveté bent on survival (itself other than the Socratic naiveté Nietzsche speaks of). To serve the naïve is merely one form of critique, and it is not nearly used enough in lieu of the critique that provides answers. How dull. It is not necessary to be an outsider to entrench a critique with naiveté. After having forced to suffer in the most parched and rocky terro(i)r, itself for so long rooted upwards of fifty feet into the ground upon which it grows, even a grapevine can spontaneously produce a white grape on a red vine. The curious feral can arise from within, and like pinot grigio, it adds variety without admonishing its roots.

There is also the feral dog. Not raised by wolves, but humans. Founded in place the figure of this feral denies this place. The trajectory of this feral roves from the cultivated to uncultivated, or in speaking of plants from controlled to volunteer, finding the necessary nutrients and survival patterns on its own. Finding other places, reaching out into space testing its fertility. And when introduced into a foreign environment, it withers or flourishes.

We would like to attempt a thesis at this juncture and to accept neither feral figure in its entirety, but to argue for the intimate conjunction between a cultivated place and its resonance with the space it procures for its nest and kin.

“I’m not a biter, I’m a writer for myself and others.”
--Jay-Z, What More Can I Say?

“I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it. Everybody is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me. No one of them that I know can want to know it and so I write for myself and strangers.”
--Gertrude Stein, The Making of Americans

There is no subjective disposition outlining an unambiguous individual of the para-academy. There is no para-academic.

We all have day jobs.

'Para-academic' seeped through the cracks as an adjective in the call to frame publishing dedicated to the critical rigor expected by academic publishing, but to deny the limitations of guarded legitimation through capital means. Open-access holds hands with this parasitic descriptor. Para-academic publishing’s refusal to adhere to the valuation of locked access of a site, the site “of a desperate initiation to the empty form of value," seeks to recognize not merely an inclusive interpretation of significance, but the significance of thinking practice.

The practice inside the paywalls of academic 'education' is held in a deathgrip by its infatuation with value and information, both empty without the apprehension of human experience, the barbaric yawp. “I can't breathe in here.”

It is not that a para-academic practice leads one to the childish wonder of Kaspar Hauser who wonders about the spatiality of his room. It is the academic legitimation that distorts that one can hold the understanding of both in a constellation of place and space. Led to believe there is only a place for things, we are led to disillusionment. It is also not that a para-academic practice relinquishes itself to the invasive growth outside of careful
cultivation, an abandonment of pleasantries for the toothy growl of a predator. It is the academy's fear that thought does not require capital to signify value. Some of the most nutritious meals can be foraged.

Defining a para-academic practice is not outlining a place of accreditation of the practice, it is the recognition that any place is subject to modulation by the space it inhabits as well as creates. The para-academic practice keeps an eye of the creation of spaces, follows those paths that eat themselves in the name of academia. This is not unlike Red Peter's report to the academy, only successful if we report in idle idiosyncratic banalities that we have once again become victorious in our acculturation and nullification within the confines of accredited mush and our trajectory of wild rigor is defeated in our desire for recognition as recognizable in this place.

Weeds are integral to the functioning of a large ecosystem. The manicured garden is entirely reliant on its keeper.

The pansy can also go wild once neglected, the daisy definitely does.

...a universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart. The skin of a living organism cuts off an outside from an inside. So does the circumference of a circle in a plane. By tracing the way we represent such a severance, we can begin to reconstruct, with an accuracy and coverage that appear almost uncanny, the basic forms underlying linguistic, mathematical, physical, and biological science, and can begin to see how the familiar laws of our own experience follow from the original act of severance. The act is itself already remembered, even if unconsciously, as our first attempt to distinguish different things in a world where, in the first place, the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please. At this stage the universe cannot be distinguished from how we act upon it, and the world may seem like shifting sand beneath our feet.

--George Spencer-Brown, Laws of Form

"Two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and another edge, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where the death of language is glimpsed. These two edges, the compromise they bring about, are necessary."

--Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text

Between these two epigraphs, interminable questions of where and questions of happening, gesture, and interface. To stay buoyed between a site of visible (read: valued) happening and haptic perspicacity. Bounded by one or the other leads to a desiccation of potential knowledge. The tumbleweed tumbles until met with mud, a bare structure moving but not movement. A tumbleweed tumbleweeds, propagates only at a place. It becomes significant again, continues. Significance, the site where meaning is made known through kinesthetic apprehension. The feral founds (as those feral twins Romulus and Remus found) a gestural horizon; an outsider's scrawl-becoming-law; Deleuze teaching Meno's dog geometry.

Place as marked, outlined, recognized, territorialized. The academies marked by their peculiar disciplines, outlined by their rigid boundaries, recognized as factories of value. This far from ensures complete purchase on the space of thought, but it has made an undeniably elaborate means of making work significant. The academy is a muddy spot, it is fertile, but its gates
are high and its dogs are barking.

The coordinates of concept and experience. Already claimed by a stabilizing suspension, the terms enter specificity of ‘this is this’. Another correlation: activity and the individual. The individual, a placeholder in the crosshairs of juridical identification. Activity, what expands and surrounds this location, but utterly indebted to the node of “one who”. What's happening in this oscillation of nature and nurture is practice. Practice, as Stengers tells us, “is not the activity of an individual or the product of that activity. It is the ingredient without which neither that activity nor this product would exist as such.”

Moving outward from our own honing, we're curious about the ingredient creating the place for holding conceptual and experiential engagements in each hand. And we’d like to argue that this place is not a limiting specification, but a practice undulating daily, by the minute. And we call this practice the para-academic practice.

“I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason.”
---Franz Kafka, *A Report to an Academy*

“In order to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the limit it discovers in itself—a limit where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist.”
---Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

Anyone is a para-academic or practitioner of such means. The academic can, and we argue should, be active para-academically, to escape the bounds, recognizing no site specific place as a place to rest on or the place to grab the Kafka’s top and wonder at its disobedience not to continue. Yet, the para-academic practice must maintain the desire for rigor in scholarship. Indeed desiring past itself to claim a more naïve rigor, one that does not take its form for granted. Without a para-academic practice, the scholar spends half the time merely working on behalf of a hierarchy, to maintain it, and the other measly amounts of time are in the name of thinking, but only in name.

Not to mention the amount of debt it takes to attend the halls of higher education.

Not to mention the snoring tenures.

Not to mention the barely scraping by adjuncts.

Not to mention the materials that shake the very force of producible theory.

Not to mention when swimming in texts becomes slogging through data.

Academia is a barbaric food chain and it is our claim that there is, as always, an imperative for thought to move, with Heidegger, beyond the logics of calculation and planning, to a time (and so a space) of its own. The path, into the panic of the dark wood of this space can be followed by any; any who let the silence and the rigor enter the play. Where the little theater is larger when inhabited (Hauser’s perspective); where the data of the tutor asymptotically refutes; and where, as much as one wouldn’t expect it here, ballet may turn
out to be the most feral of forms…

1“What is significance? It is meaning, insofar as it is sensually produced.” Roland Barthes in The Pleasure of the Text.
