

Sam Zamrik

Writing to Learn/Blended Learning Class Spring 2018

Bard College Berlin & Kiron

Instructor: Ariane Simard

My Second Epistle

Dearest,

You have asked me in your correspondence of my state as an activist, my state as an artist and as to what has become of my writing. I still do not know how to answer this in the most appropriate fashion, so I will write to you as I have always written you - in *my* voice. You asked me, is it activism if you show up, or don't?

Well, dearest, it depends on the context of your showing up. It depends on the manner of your showing up, and the intent behind it. It depends on your conduct. Though the outcome is not equal in all forms of showing up, I don't find it to lessen the validity of this showing up in retrospect. "Showing up," might not hold much weight in and of itself; it's just another body in the count. There is no substance beyond number in addition to an agreed upon paradigm. Only in the realization of any act as activism is it become activism. In other words, it's whether enough people agree about it, and I think that to be the most fundamental conclusion from the malleability of the concept "activism." If you change a frame in a film so unnoticeably to serve something that you deemed relevant, is it still activism? To you it is, yes. To another it might not be, and therein lies the problem. If you are an activist, be one so that your every action is activism; if you are not, partake but do not hold up any mantle; be silent with your activism and gratefully reap its outcome. If I were to call myself any form of "activist," I will require of myself to fully partake in it. It's "to act" made into a noun. A "verdinglichung" (reification) of the concept of taking stance, being active, *doing*. Activism is an exertion toward a premeditated end - an activist begins with the idea that "action must be taken," either for or against something and in that is its definition. So, activism as practice deals mainly with changing things. In such definitive vacuum, one can argue that a coup d'etat that leads to the installment of a dictatorship regime is also activism, and that is true - to those who committed the coup. Activism, before it is espoused with, and morphed by, the moralities of the individual or collective, is simply about actions in a stance. I think we are far too concerned with our mantels to recognize that we are but a moment in the era of a part of a species' collective mutation history.

Art, even without individual morality or objective, can still be itself; it retains its quality as "art." I find it to be the purest exertion of cognition, of perception. Art is an end in and of itself. It is a great vessel in serving a purpose, voicing opinions, portraying something or giving meaning to things beyond themselves; yet art is not at all reliant on these factors to actualize it.

Are cave paintings from forty-thousand years ago art? Yes, if you ask me. They had no

reason to be deterred or distracted from their own survival as primal humans to dip their fingers in anything that stains a surface and, with admirable verisimilitude, paint so many timeless things, the evidence to their existence.

And this leads me to language. Humans managed to draw sound, to preserve it in shape and construct it accordingly. The first thing they did? Poetry. Poetry first developed as an oral tradition, and apart from helping people memorize their lore and culture, it also allowed them to memorize more things through vocal patterns. Think of short sentences like “The early bird gets the worm.” It’s a short aphorism containing a key piece of wisdom, it’s recognizable because it uses very known characters and the fundamental functions of receiving and “getting.” It’s vocally symmetrical, with the elongation of “e” between “The” and “early,” and the long “worm.” This example is a small one, and only leads me to think of words with a more meticulous eye.

Dearest, write down the word "spices."

Say the word "spices."

Think of the word "spices."

Where does it come from?

I don't know. You might, but I urge you to try and forget this for a minute. Let's look at the qualities of the word. "Spices." you know? It sounds "spicy," it has flavor to it. When you say it, you have to stress one sound in it, and however you do it, it engages your mouth with a wholesome, rhythmic movement. Let's explore that for a while.

Think of the word without its meaning. "Spices spices spices spices spices," like a mantra - you know, when you repeat a word so many times it starts to sound weird. It is just sounds in repetition. Pay close attention to that repetition; really mindfully observe the sound, just the sound. "Spices spices spices spices spices." It sounds like spiders to me, or a half-chewed "despises," and "Spices spices spices spices." The "spi," in spiders and spices rhymes, as well as with the one in "despises" but there preceded by, or are brought to different ends, and hence become wholly different words. But think of what spiders and spices and to despise have in common! That edge factor, that attitude - that whoa! factor. "Spi!"

Let's look at the shape of the word "spices." Just in the sheer aesthetic sense. Look at the letters, zoom out to the word. Look at each as though they were paintings, then to the whole thing as a painting of its own. Look how they fit together or stand out from each other; think of them as they are, quite literally, characters.

The word "spices." It is, more or less, symmetrical. More of its symmetry is however more internal and involved. The letter "s," conveniently for my example that I had you write, is repeated twice - that's an obvious one. But, consider the aesthetic presence of the word in your handwriting, or any type font you use most. In my observation, the "p" is made up of one reversed "c" and one and a half undotted "i's." The i is the uniform average height of the word in small letters, the p is still more complex and needs more strokes to be written. There is more effort in making it. The "S," though a character that slides off the pen and conveniently looks like a slide itself, is a tricky one. It is rarely uniform to the shapes in any of the other letters, or

we can see it as a double “c.” *So, seeing some spiders spices your slice of life.*

Now, this isn't to convey a meaning or tell you something new about language, this is simply to stimulate a mindful instinct toward each word, making a relationship with it, listening to its music. Then, when you open the dictionary for the 'official' meaning and etymology, you hone that instinct you built with the word with what it actually means. It broadens one's capacity to make an interesting use of language.

In another correspondence, I wrote to a dear pen-friend of mine about the state of contemporary writers, saying:

“They say to write when you don't feel like it. They ask you to answer who the ‘They’ in the beginning of these sentences are. You're supposed to explain that They are, in this case:

The faculty members, the literary community, the other writers, the readers, the audience, and the "They" themselves as a collective of thought and peer reviewing and rigorous examination that has reformulated and somehow managed to culminate in your perception by necessities of your lifetime so densely that you couldn't help but care for and write about them.

Keep your sentences concise, though. Maybe not too rich or afforded any embellishment, either, lest you lose Their attention. And not too concise; you need to be descriptive. So They'll ask you about the act of saying. You have to illustrate that saying is the act of relaying bits of information in some language -- the externalization of sound for expression. You cannot be too empiric if you've discovered fiction's ability to tell truths, though. They'll ask you about figures of speech. You have to tell Them, then, that to write is a bloodletting through which we birth worlds. You have to slyly sprinkle a few alliterations around. You have to ingrain your simile in the text like roots in the earth. Pick your battles when it comes to personification, lest They confuse deities with men; hence, carefully select your Gods. Attune your anaphora to not sound needlessly repetitive, despite needs of tonal assertion; it's "uninspired."

You must argue that for a writer to *sound* sophisticated but not "flowery," they have to pick the timing of repeated vocabulary -or references thereto, alterations thereof- in relation to theme and setting, without breaking the flow of syntax. It will then be brought to your attention that your choice of vocabulary is too quaint and your syntax, at any rate, too odd. You will be told that you use words from too many fields and too many time periods. Your use of language is therefore queer by say of the "Fundamentalist Modern English and Rhetoric Illiteracy Termination Elite, (FMERITE)." They will continue to tell you that your style is inconsistent. This is where you prove that you are a foreigner; this is where your words will alienate themselves despite serving their purpose. You, the words you handpicked to describe your flimsy fixation with the experiences of personhood, and your command of language are altogether queer. They will refuse to answer why we allow language to be watered down, or why we allow easily avoidable contradictions in practice and preaching to occur. Where is the replacement for "whence," for "ye," for "Lo"? They will tell you to omit needless words, yet They will opt for the weak, forced "from where," the ambiguous, multipurpose "you," and "you wouldn't believe it!"

When you use "whence" to ask "whence come good?" They will judge you to be too quaint and out of fashion. If you use the often-handy, vernacular "y'all," you'll be mistaken for a "hick," or even accused of appropriation. Use "Lo!" and it's Biblical plagiarism, hence, also, quaint and outdated.

Bottom line: get better influences. Because fuck the Romantics, fuck the Decadents, and fuck fables and otherworldliness and whatever people were talking on and on about during the genesis of industrialization, you know? Once you've gotten these, They'll demand you with time. 'When' is the question. Right now? No.

Time is mutable; centuries can pass with a sentence. You can be on any timeline or on none at all. You can break and twist it and use whatever fragment you please, so long as you observe the

aforementioned commandments.

Then They'll ask you of 'you.' Narrator, character, writer. Which one are you? Who do you assume being?

Understand that the narrator is detached from you, but not really.

Do you know who you are? 'You' are as mutable as time. The more you've lived, the deeper your roots. Or the more dislodged, if you've been to a few places and seen a few things. If you were born of a few seeds or exposed to the various, unrelenting elements long enough to be shaped by them, or had your roots removed and relocated, then you are constantly on the verge of such eloquent, imminently recurrent identity crisis. Furthermore, you are allowed a window to peep into an eclectic thought stream that has become too large to be concluded in one language or one paradigm. You are multiple. Narrator, character, writer, and person. How you mix this palette is where your voice lies slumbering, waiting to be written down - when you don't feel like it.

If you choose to incorporate this, your newfound multiplicity into your writing and have, to an extent, harnessed your voice, you will mostly end up writing hyper-literature. It is the kind of literature, where each sentence, word, and paragraph holds interdisciplinary qualities and roots while still adhering to one or more narratives and the universes therein respectively.

Using that, I managed to construct a poem that uses the reader's mouth, tongue, and throat as instruments, while still carrying a lot of meaning. I call it the Antiode, and it is my activism. I beg you read it aloud, following the syntax.

“We speak the dead.
We are their tongue;
its taillike tip,
the cheek and the teeth
 and the lips.”

We ease their face—
a smile can pull one astray,
away. Platter on a tray!
Profit prophet, parfait!
The day is today—
no deity prefix; My day!
Say, say! Whence tomorrow?
Yesteryear, yesterday?
Non, non, monsieur! *To-day*.
Okay.

How do we weave wonder therewith?
When as the dead, so are we—
as within, so without;
as above, so below!—
The intensely mellow;
the bright blue and blinding yellow;
the flock and chirp of feathery fellows
singing self-same songs, flying to and fro
with a brow-thick fray in their flow!
As they sing, forth we go:

*“Shimmering shimmerree,
Shamms shines, she shines,
shimmering!”*
*“Listen, listen, listen to me!
Listen, listen!
Listen to me!”*
*“I am. Yes, yes!
I am what I am.”*
“Bin ich, bin ich, bin ich!”
*“Yes! I am
who I am.”*
*“Oui, oui; je suis
celui qui est,
mon cherie; oui, oui.”*
“Ego sum, qui sum.”

Death leaned and kissed us
and closed our eyes and whispered.
We were in the midst of its breaths
and they swung the trees and swayed them;
A willful sigh, choked whimper—
Thereof we told tall tales of truths, true to me
and some to you and none to us,
except the dead!

Dead dead upon dead, dismay,
and blood red dread, vice of Wissen
and Christ and I entwined and surmised
when circumcised or otherwise realized.
So had sighed the dead and willed a world
and out its Geist
like a whirlwind pipe piping a merry song
whereby Rintrah roared and night
hung high; where fright
is to sight what light is to the eye!
Dim but to etch a sonorous cry of
help! A stress of heavy-footed tress
to impress depressions on Earth,
an Other, end dull dearth, and plow
every field to sow a screw;
the bed, bread, and brew,
the fuck you! to thy neighbor,
the newling, and the few.

Say,
say, let lovers love in giddy giggles,
and stroll and make and ponder,
here, under the twitches of twigs

and thick bark. We are enshrined
and embroidered in tangled lines
of patterns upon either hand.
My left is passionate
and my right is a wrongdoer.
I am! neither and in-between.
"Be!" I say, and from my hands it is;
You! Your hands are cosmic,
and both in love.
To-day has come to pass,
away, let it die; speak come new day,
now! Now is to-morrow.