

Introduction: The Pink Tube & The Incorrigible Disturber of the Peace

Myron M. Beasley

Perhaps the primary distinction of the artist is that he must actively cultivate that state which most men, necessarily, must avoid; the state of being alone....The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the work a more human dwelling place.

—James Baldwin, *The Creative Process*

On October 2013, the husband and husband performance art team Stan Shellabarger and Dutes Miller¹ sat on the broad cement stairs of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago knitting. A long pink knitted scarf—their work-in-progress—separated the two men who were located at opposite ends of the grand entry. Each dutifully knit, stitch by stitch as they have done since 2003 in locations around the globe. From Basel, Switzerland to Lewiston, Maine the men have sat for hours knitting, not speaking, as they wrap the pink yarn around the wooden needles, looping slip knots and casting, parroting each other, always in a public space. For hours, too, people gather, some want to ask questions and some do, while others sit and watch, they also enter, just as the Shellabarger and Miller, a trance-like state, a stillness as the men resume again and again the ritualized repetition.

The performance represents the artistic and the matrimonious link between Shellabarger and Miller. The object, the knitted pink tube, is an archive, a momento of shared intimate moments, a timeline of global events and an effectuation of a mundane traditional craft. The public “doing” of the two men fusing pink fibers summons onlookers to pause, and in that discontinuation, and in the

Myron M. Beasley, Ph.D. is Associate Professor in the areas of Cultural Studies, African American Studies, and Women and Gender studies at Bates College. He was awarded the Paschel V. Vacca Distinguished Visiting Professorship at the University of Montevallo, Alabama, 2016. He is also a curator and performance artist.

¹ http://www.westernexhibitions.com/miller_shellabarger/

halting, the onlookers are enticed to mediate on a sundry of topics from the cultural politics of labor, gender performance, domesticity, to queer politics.

This issue of *Liminalities* features performative actions that interrogate the concept of contemplation as an integral component in the creative and intellectual domains of cultural production. Like the DJ mixing layers of tracks; as the music flows, yet before the quick juxtapositions of beats, or the rapidly shared fissures of improvisations, there is a moment, the precipitous pause, a suspension, a hesitation, the moment of anticipation of what's to come. This issue plays with the concept of contemplation. Play here endears the plurality of intersections that streams from and crisscrosses the topic.

Contemplation comes from latin roots, *contemplat-* “to survey “or “to observe”—a place to observe + *Templum-* which shares the root with temple—a place cut out and reserved for the sacred. The verb *contemplate* relates to a moment, a break, a pause. It is also understood as a fissure or a suspension of time in the normalcy of daily life to embrace stillness. Kant locates contemplation as a technique to decipher beauty. Explicitly it is a cognitive moment of achieving equilibrium between purpose and taste. Beauty, as defined by Kant in his theory of aesthetics, is the “faculty of judgment” which enables humans to participate in and experience “an ordered, natural world with purpose.”² Beauty therefore is a sensation and/or emotional response to a thing. The term judgment is allied with subsumption, to be absorbed by or enticed under the spell of an aesthetic aura. Therefore contemplation is a cerebral exercise to engender harmony and negotiate the aesthetic force of a thing. Yet, in this issue, we consider and move from the mere cerebral comprehension of the aesthetic to accentuate the doing, experiential and corporal interpretations of contemplation.

Fanon offers a phenomenological archive that extends the power of stillness and reflection to movement and emancipation. *Black Skin/White Mask*³, considered the foundational theoretical text for postcolonial thought is, in a profound manner, a patchwork of personal narratives with insights, drawn from the hailing, “Hey Negro.” That instance, and that halting, propels Fanon to examine, in ways that a psychiatrist can, the unconscious psychological trauma and lingering hauntings of colonialism on identity formation. In the obfuscation of multifarious veils of the colonial identity, Fanon grasps the complex and often convoluted contested terrain of identity. As Hall insists, as aptly recorded by Fanon, identity is a “production” which is never complete, “always in process.”⁴ The insertion of “production” lends itself to both the constructability and the dialectical nature of

² Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

³ Trans. C. L. Markmann. Grove: New York, 1967.

⁴ Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*. Ed. Patrick Williams and Chrisman. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994. 392-401.

the performative facets of identity. For Fanon, the moments of pause, and reflection are critical moments for identity formation and liberation.

Situating jazz as an example, performance theorist Fred Moten⁵ probes contemplative moments as imaginable intellectual possibility. The improvisational nature of the music genre captures what Moten labels as ‘the break’, which is a precious sliver of the repressed, unearthed, or simply, a recalibration or a reformulation of epistemological and ontological questions and analysis. Such queries and rethinking, though often discomfiting and challenged, unravel radical political possibilities in knowledge production. But it is James Baldwin who beautifully articulates the meaning of stillness in the creative process. For Baldwin the aim of the cultural worker is to seek out aloneness. A stillness, an intimate and genuine journey of self, where one discovers the beautiful and the tragic realities of the world and comes to embrace the mantle of incorrigible disturber of the peace. It is the cultural worker, because of their in-tuneness with the world, who is charged with “make[ing] the world a more human dwelling place.”⁶ The aloneness of which Baldwin speaks is interrogated in this issue.

The moment of ponder was asked by performance artists Faith Wilding⁷ as she sat and rocked and recited the poem “Waiting” asking us, the public, the audience, to pause—to think deeply and ask how long must we wait for the end of patriarchy and the continued oppression against women. And more recently by the Palestinian artist Nidaa Badwan⁸ and her *100 days of Solitude*⁹. Crushed between the chaos of the Gaza and Israeli conflict and gender politics of her everyday life, Badwan refuses to leave her tiny room. In the self-imposed isolation, Badwan produces art that sharply speaks to the mayhem outside the walls of her dwellings. Or when Ernesto Pujol led people to walk for 24 hours repeatedly encircling St. Paul's Chapel in lower Manhattan. Pujol's performance, *Time for Us*¹⁰, like some of his other endeavors around the World, were invitations to both the audience and the co-performers to a moment of deep reflection to enliven memories and undocumented narratives of place. This issue extends a dialogue examining the intrapersonal, interpersonal to the broader community and societal levels giving prominence to the radical transformative and nuanced performative nature of contemplation.

⁵ *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003. 317–317.

⁶ Baldwin, James. “The Creative Process.” In John F. Kennedy, *Creative America*. New York: Ridge Press, 1962. 4.

⁷ <https://vimeo.com/36646228>

⁸ <http://www.nidaabadwan.com>

⁹ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/28/world/middleeast/finding-gaza-unbearable-artist-creates-her-own-world-in-one-room.html?_r=1

¹⁰ <https://vimeo.com/76495011>

Contemplation/Editor's Reflections

The topic of this issue emerged from conversations with graduate students in a seminar I taught in Berlin in 2013 titled Critical Theory/Critical Acts. The purpose was to engage in close readings of critical theorists and discuss contemporary artists as cultural workers. Essentially, we examined how artists are influenced by and currently work through critical thought through performance art. Many of the students were intrigued with audience reception of the performative actions, while others considered the “process” of creating such works. While reading Moten along with Fanon, preoccupation with “process” was debated. But the term “process” for some harkened a reductionist or quantified set of systems or “how to methods” void of the nuanced ebb and flow of the creative process and the fluidity with how audiences receive cultural productions and how cultural workers think about artistic practice as liberatory. We assembled readings and pondered the meaning and role of contemplation.

The same quandary preoccupied the thoughts of many contributors of this issue. The call for papers itself asked for an interrogation of the theme, not just a discussion about the topic itself. Many of the initial submissions wrote around and about the word, thus revealed noticeable interrogative absences in their submissions. The review process inherently asked contributors to probe more deeply. Some were able to engage in the process of reflection and interrogation. Therefore, here in the pages are those who engaged in the breaks, the pauses, the fissures. When I decided to embark on this issue I was unprepared for the level of self-interrogation and reflexivity that would ensue. However to truly engage in this topic in ways that spoke to the call for papers, writing about the topic itself, demanded a level of interrogating and therefore, many embarked on contemplation itself. For example, artist Jean-Ulrick Dessert's sensibly written narrative and modish video recording of his recent installation *Comment Nannite est devenu tante Cilet (How Nannite Became Aunt Cilet)*, is a story of an exile longing for home. The discovery of the images and the assembling of this installation was a process for his own realities of what really happened, as the events occurred when he was young child at the age of five. Reading and viewing his project encouraged me to embark and engage in my own impenetrable longings of home and exile.

Liminalities sets itself apart as one of the earlier online peer reviewed journals of performance studies. As articulated, in the call for papers and the general call for the journal, contributors are encouraged to, “exacerbate the use of technology.” In the debates surrounding digital humanities (for which my most recent work has been situated), the rapid change and use of technology does not signal an end of humanistic inquiry but rather an advancing and creating new ways of thinking, doing, and reading humanistic inquiry as forward thinking figures such as Zora Neale Hurston and Ruth Landes who challenged the primacy of

the printed text for multiple forms of writing and various ways of representing scholarship. The contributors to this issue heeded the call and fully celebrated technology. The reader will visually witness Scott Barton's work on ritual feasts in Brazil and Leah Decters' moving performance as critique of the founding father of Canada. Aural performances such as the installation of Templeton and Adkins creates sonic space and Anastasya Koshkin both recreates and recasts the sonic aura of the visual and plays with chronotopes. But Gina Athena Ulysse reminds us of the power of the spoken word while Laura Dorward reflects on the meaning of a walk to the sound of Janet Cardiff's Central Park performance. Erica Rand questions the look, the queer look; the quick glance to decipher is it queer? The monograph by Jean-Paul Rocchi is a most intimate psalm in a form of a pastiche about the nebulousness of unrequited love, desire and homoeroticism. Yoon Soo Lee responds to the Kantian constructions of the aesthetic and judgment as she ponders pedagogy against design theory. Eda Čufer and Michael McMillan situate the theme as dramaturgical analysis. Čufer, a co-founder of the performance art group NSK, pluck strands of political theory, history and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to critique capitalism and globalism, and McMillan reconsiders the role of contemplation in theatre workshop training.

Stan Shellabarger and Dutes Miller are examples of what Baldwin calls incorrigible disturbers of the peace. The pink tube performance speaks to radical political possibilities as it does their ongoing commitment to each other. The other essential action of the performance is the potential of disappearance. When they become separated by death, the remaining partner must embark on the monumental task to unravel the pink tube. The creating and the dismantling are processes of and an invitation to stillness, pause, reflection, **contemplation**.

We begin here with a sound intervention on the topic of Contemplation¹¹. The performance is comprised of lectures, interviews and the music by the noted philosopher Lewis Gordon¹² and mixed by Harlem based interdisciplinary artist Dianne Smith.¹³



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike International 4.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA

¹¹ to hear the piece, go to <http://liminalities.net/12-3/intro.html>

¹² <http://www.lewisrgordon.com>

¹³ <http://www.diannesmithart.com>