

Distributed History

Seth Price
1999 - 2003

Adapted from notebook pages. Published on distributedhistory.com. Quotations and excerpts from this text appear in other works, including the video *Industrial Synth* (2000), the book *Poems* (Onestar Press, 2003/04), poem banner artworks (2004), *Grey Flags* (2005—), *Teen Image* (2009), the insert for the *Army Jacket* LP (2012), *Books of Ice* (2013-14), *Fuck Seth Price* (2015).

Preface

A physician, he wrote in Latin for a learned audience. *Phytognomonica of the Androgyne*. The core of the Wonder tradition was travels, chronicles, encyclopedias---that is to say, surveillance for the sake of knowledge. A Paradoxography? The desired state of affairs is one in which every cultural phenomenon and artifact have a 'fan club'—perhaps on-line. Encyclopedia Popularis. So, The Queensborough Bridge, completed in 1909, was (in a dimly reflected American way) part of the overwrought ornamental style that Loos and others were fighting against across the Atlantic. The architecture of the early man—is it architecture, or thoughts and faith embodied. A serene impenetrability, a flawed science: "It really was like that." The space age, the new age, the radicals and the hippies, antagonistes, both of whom had not cynicism. (SOFT HISTORY---the Sophistorians). Cones and rods, the Situation Room... this is where we came in; "This is where we came in" (stage whisper, shuffling and gathering coats and hat, hunched exit across line of bodies.) Go ahead and sense something of the mesh of fear and suffering and regimentation and bloody sacrifices from which civilization was meant to escape. It's the theory of personality: "You need a sense of control". The shadow fall on wrong side of you. An old friend come to visit; the shadow, animus. The history of house music. "Going underground". The bottomless pit, Baphomet; Astarot, Assaibi, Bacnoe. The sinistrari, the grimoire of the incantata, the tetragrammaton, Uriel, Valerian! The advertisement is composed of layers of coded cultural references and 'in-jokes' in an attempt to trade on multiple narratives, to milk the various registers of the ha-hah, the I'm sade, the 'oh I know this'. The old model of the pyramid, the new model of the pancake. The line of dark trees just at the side of the road and beyond, the open field: Third World. Some day you'll live.

The COMFORT OF LITERATURE:

Unmade trestle beds, swarming with fleas. It was a soft breathless June morning, with a promise of sultriness later. None could gainsay him. At six o'clock I went home, dressed, dined at the Savoy, and turned into a music hall. News flash. Steak, chops, seafood. Their lovemaking was savage at first, and then tender. The musician who listens to the prodigious concerts of the soul, without translating them into notes. The skull beneath the skin. It had begun to snow. One night, while traveling through a dark section of wood, he

seemingly vanished. She picked up two cops on the highway and took them back to her cabin. A liar, a cheat, and a chancer. Cross-hatching.

The History of Art sees 'art' as a science, rather than simply a set of techniques for calculating, measuring, analysing. And paring away the 'art-ness'—leads to what? The way that 'fashion' has become identified with photography and the photographed image—not an image simply of the body, but of anything at all... in some ways, the more mundane the better. *Rendezvous with Fear*, by Norbert Davis: Wittgenstein's favorite detective novel. Remember that most parts of your body live always in utter darkness, and will never see the light of day (if you are lucky). Love is a belief in the future. The depression-era megaliths—the Dolmen, the menhirs. "Yeah, but I could have told it better". "Well, next time..." The commodity form, as the social content of the allegorical form of perception: evoking the corpse from within. Coprolalia. The greatness of lies and lists. Book Burning. Paracelsus, the greatest of communicators (his rooftop message to the future). All the things that have been said about me by people I've never met—who knew me only as a stranger cutting them off in traffic, tipping badly or well, giving them the time, strolling past.... Investigation into imaginary networks, which would fade like a dim star in peripheral vision, if directly transfixed by someone else's eye. Every proposition is its own proof. We cannot compare a process with the 'passage of time'—there is no such thing—only with another process. "The finer things in life". Get home, uncork a nice bottle of wine, put your feet up. Synthesis of pop culture: TV's aim/everything's aim. The endless appetite. A purposeful stride. A heavy tread. A drowned yellow light in the west.

Radio Age:

Shhhhh! Broadcast in Progress. Please close door when on the air. Send away to this address. Enclose SASE. The idea of trying to remember something and getting it wrong, but embarking successfully on a quest based on wrong information. Situating the work on the edge between two things so that they criticize one another. The experience of adjusting to one's face over time, (theatrically): "*In what mirrors one may find...*" Anyway, the men who liar boys, quietly dispatching the dead body or of the dead body, in the line of scrub, trash, and weeds near the train tracks, behind the fast food parking lot and next to the back of a motel, but the late sun here, confused with a metallic smell. The Industrialist—the term having an Old World ring, like the faces of recent Slovak immigrants, looking like New York denizens of 1909—or, ha ha, fuck it, contemporary Eastern European impoverished peasants (the real Old New York). Because 'Punk' or DIY holds the particular position it does, it is both an example and a counter-example, or anti-example. One must use care, and irony or distancing when necessary, when employing the concepts.

--"What? 'Oldies' stations are more interesting to me now than they were ten years ago. They now play songs which were in existence and known to me ten years ago, but were not sufficiently old to be played yet."

--Yes, the stations are sitting on an expanding crap heap and apparently their playlists only grow. When will the Oldies stations have to throw in the towel?

And he became aware of death—obsessed with it. On any forgotten album of genre music... say, house music... it is in the 'filler' songs that he found the blank, thoughtless strivings laid bare---the patterns of a day's hot style. The autopilot verses, no

ornamentation, just the cruise control production value revealing perhaps some gem of the time. A desire for death: "Goodbye, Doctor". (Turn tail and flee). As if all friendships are haunted by the specter of the friend's inevitable death... are all relations similarly haunted? The business of living in a ruined house.

Surveilling the passing landscape below, from the window of a plane: always on the verge of fascinating and boring – or is that the way it is with the sublime in general... is it even sublime. The stars, ocean, horizon, or earth at a distance (maybe anything at a distance) is on that edge. And social phenomena? Same, a sight from the air. The fuselage, dumb brute—some accidents at some point have no doubt sheared off the fins and wings and left it plowing into the ground like a locomotive. Probably happened. As with all the people who, plummeting to their suicide, experienced a flicker of regret (a brief regret). The South American 'tri-border' area (Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina), a totally open border area... piracy, copies, circulation. And the seventeenth century is when music notation came into being, largely for the purpose of ownership of a composition. So, up until that time, ownership and control of music was presumably not a crucial matter. Cathay is ancient China.

America Post War:

The Crucible Of. Electronics Miniaturization Synthetics Plastic Advertising Consumption, the right balance between scraps of ideas and perfect confection.

Tanith:

-Listen, if you're trying to go out into a bad neighborhood at night, you just need to remember to look BAD, you know... Just look like shit, and none bother you.
-Also it helps, (he thought) to look as if you have a plan. A piece of shit with a plan; this is a deadly combination. All words need to be rescued—all words and pictures—although maybe pictures even more. As: the frontispiece is a badly drawn skull: rounded, fleshed out so that it looks more like a human head than a skull, save for the round pits of the eye sockets, the two notches below, and the grin. He no longer remembers the stinging sensation of soap in his eyes, from a time early in the life, when the mother washed his hair... Even in the lovingness of that, there was control and disregard. And back then, I imagine, things were quite different. For instance, the turn of the 20th century – the reform of dress-codes, and dressing in general. Previous to this time, ones dress indicated various distinctions. Or the way wallpaper slowly gives to blank white walls. Abstract state machines. Tolkein saw it primarily as a childrens tale, while the later series he took to be a work aimed at adult mores and minds. He was well in his cups. A pulsing, a regular rhythm – the time-lapse image of decay turning into birth. Rizzo, the tough girl from Grease. The last day of all time, strangely comforting, as one turns over and says: finally, an end to all of this. And what happens to the excess? Like the nostalgia for communism, signified by a word new to the Russian language in 1989. Well, to those who demand a master: you will get it. Love is a debt which cannot be repaid, and more than that, it may be the ultimate belief in the future. And, contrariwise, any doubt of that shining around the next way is seen as a rejection of love. Aesthetic risk: a hieroglyph, a gamble on something which may offend one's sense of taste, in hope that one will in future 'come around' (and, of course, that one will be seen as a visionary): "Don't try too hard... Just do The Bad." If one only rehearses a gesture, one will learn from it... All of this recaptures what is, in fact, instructional, a process of inertia or instruction. All things in

addiction: to speed up, to slow down, to want things, to want not things. If all friendships are haunted by the specter of the friend's inevitable death—are all relations similarly haunted. The business of living in a ruined house. It is 18th century buildings that are missing from the older of the (primarily East) the American: it these styles to mark centers of Europe, themselves cities not nec. older than 18th c.: Paris, London, Geneva. One dramatic flourish of construction which, like the layer of magnesium deposited millions of years ago by a stray meteor, forever demarcated a tear in the fabric of world history. This, of course, was only a hundred years after the introduction of music notation, which came into being as a means of owning the composition and marking ones stake... Earth...Worth. *Moon...* *June.... Spoon.* Why did Nerval die in Madness and hunger, in the Romantic Mode, after the class of bohemians had by and large moved on to an accomodation with the world, leaving him be? Something to do with my father. We have not yet got over the Romantic epoch...“Romanticism is far from dead.” “Ah ha, exactly like fascism!” I miss having confused pain, as a teen. Whoever can run most slowly isn't a loser.

Pain Teens:

—Well, I like how all the tapes just sitting there were at a certain point
—a physical point on the actual tape—
because someone stopped it no matter when, how long ago, they record an act of listening and choosing, and then you just—
—you just start it up again.
—Yeah, and CDs never have that
—it's like 'choose where you want to go.'
—Yeah, and also, with tapes, you sometimes 'rewind to the beginning', because you can't be bothered to look for a particular song—like 'rewind', 'stop', 'play', 'rewind'—so you just go to the first song.
—Yeah, that's *the digital difference*.
There is no criticism of nature—it is taken as it is.
—And there is no 'dirty' there.
Despair has always—and immediately—exceeded its purpose. Jokes resemble art in their treatment of historical material—maybe in their treatment of unconscious material, too. "A return to seventies-style improvisation." It was the Romantics who revived interest in the Greeks.

THE DEBATE OVER:

The early years of a band.
—It was too jangly. We didn't have any sense of smooth production.
—Yeah, but it was raw.
—It's true, they said we sold out.
—That's only because we got better.
—It's true that we're better. But what did we lose.
—Well, it's true that we did used to has a lot more energy.
—That's not true, we just were more loose, but that cause we didn't have the skills.
—We had skills
—Yeah, but different
—Listen to the way that comes in.

—Ooh.

—This is ugly.

—Yeah, but admit it, this is classical.

—Th' energy it takes to summon tears means there is no energy to wring them from the eyes.

I only want to wear white shoes. I want *only*, etc. *Sanction*: You: too old. Me: too old. Always there is a proposal, and an approximation of it, and sometimes they are together, sometimes not; sometimes in one order, sometimes another. The car came to a stop on the dusty shoulder, just out of sight of the town a few miles back. Frank Conroy jogged slightly to reach it—more out of a desire to demonstrate his gratefulness than any real courtesy. He was too exhausted for courtesies. "How far you going?" Thanks – it's too hot. I'm only going to Bascomb Corners, you know where that is? The driver nodded, a series of motions which took a full quarter minute to play itself out. What's that—fifteen seconds? He was heavy-set—thick, a "gin and beef man"—with a tartan plaid work-shirt and a thin-brimmed derby, and an off-white cloth with which he was daubing the inner wrist of his driving hand. They drove in silence for a while. Conroy became aware of the static crackling out of the radio, at low volume. "Hey you mind if I try this?" "Go ahead—I'll buy a pop if you get anything." "Ha, I don't know what we get first—a gas station or a radio station. "Either way, I'm a happy guy." "Mm-hmm, yah, me too" A minute passed. He could hear the wheels turning, then: "Tunes, or—no. Cola.... Cola or rock and rolla." The driver grunted. The needle went all the way down the spectrum and right back up, no signs of life. "No tunes, no boons": the man behind the wheel. Conroy make himself laugh. Instead of something else, he said "yeah, yeah, drop me up there, by those trees." You see, he saw that work primarily as a childrens tale, while the later series he took to be a work for adults, with attendant moral and philosophical sensitivities. The car came to a stop. It was of a dusty shoulder of road. On boarding: "We'd like to employ older (but still young) retired pros to give live commentary on the action. They seem best able to parse the goings-on." When, for instance, I ask you into the car: "It has been absolutely exhausting, a constant barrage of questions, information.... He had done such a good job of mastering the accent that when I turned and saw him I said "Oh my God, There is a certain way of talking about events and ideas as allegory. One would like to be able to curl up & instead go to sleep. Elements of style, stripped of their context. Isolated, they must rely on their 'internal signposts' for communicative action. They are writing a book.

We are also writing a book.

Comfort of last days:

The After Life, the Before Life. The Geyser alright! Hey you guise! Yo, soy bean (Mexican agricultural convention). Janice's face: Oh yeah, we both turned on to the bridge at the same time and started toward one another and then saw each other and started running, like, 'wow what a coincidence meeting here,' then we got close enough to see each faces and we both realized we were mistaken. *Derring-do*: The extreme structural simplicity of products—the immediately, totally recognizable Capitalism Perfectus, the stripping down. Cattle were the first capital. What do you kill this time with? Different matchbooks from various bars and restaurants—I have a large collection. The impulse to/fear of complete annihilation of oneself AND all worldly traces of one's existence, life, passage thru time. 'Weird dreams', actually somewhat banal in and of themselves—this

sense of uncanny arise from inability to reconcile feeling or memory of Weird with difficulty in relating or articulating weirdness---or even recapturing that sense—could I recapture something which was never an experience? A self-expanding archive. An emotion or inner experience which reveals itself through a bodily sensation, for example a *taste* between the tongue and the soft palate.

New York Woman:

1. Asserting the Landscape. The Beauty of the horrid, and vice versa.
2. Flourishing in the cracks.
3. Ennui. Spleen. Languor. Malaise.
4. Spellbound: the morbid stare. Transfixed.
5. Exquisite adoration of suffering.
6. Giving in to love = the ultimate belief in the future.
7. "Sin Chronic; Die a Chronic." (my contribution history of pun).
8. The Lie that Leads to the Truth.
9. Catafalque: the gas lamps maketh a little song: *Quo Vadimus?*
10. Savoy – Miramar –Belvedere; Steaks – Chops – Seafood.
11. The Future, all about Transparency.
12. A Drowned Yellow Light in the West.

The desert : dunes. Abstraction : ahistorical..... Making a virtue of psychic damage.

Totes: The heat death of the sun – what is it like to be a serial killer?

Cargo Cult, After School Program.

UseNet, TymNet, Red Ryder, Vax: VMS (DEC), Unix, Arpanet, Milnet, C, Pascal, Assembler, FORTRAN, Cobol. Lawrence Livermore. White Sands.

"Sack Cloth." Drunken Athlete. "Glee Club." The archaeology of the underground—the 'minor' movements—is practiced, but what about the archaeology of the majors, That Which Should Not Be Dug Up..... Belvedere, Miramar, Savoy: renouncing the epic element in history. Every step is the first step. Transparent in its mechanix. An argument in the guise of experience. It had begun to snow. The violence of everything that is forgotten: the coin of the realm, a currency of loins and coins.

International Jokes:

13. What do you get when you cross French and Spanish? Italian.
 14. "" "" "" "" "" English and German? Dutch.
 15. I go to France because they got *l'attitude* but no longitude. The I Feel tower.
 16. The smell of dogshit always reminds me of Paris
- Mandrax.... A Wide Muddy Track, Bordered By Dense Hedge.

RETURN WITH:

Going back to the show with a friend:

I'll see it again with you, I could come again... I could come with, if you like. I wouldn't mind going again. Yeah, but I'll see it again. Yeah but ill see it again with you. I have, but I wouldn't mind going back if you go. Yeah it's pretty good, if you go I'll go with you. I thought it sucked but if you want I could see it again.

The wiseman:

Listen, what I cannot remember, I try to forget (Madeness = without oeuvre). A group of supposedly hetero workmen. The coziness of literature. A Historian of living memory: Janice's Face. There were few better things than lists. Are there any things else? How to

paint your subjectivity in the codes of culture.... The greatness of lies! Sartorial swearing;
Malleus malefactorum, the witches hammer... the classic text of the inquisition----
coprolalia, involuntary exclamation of obscenity.