

Seduction: a male a/drift by hjboisvert

Introduction:

In the History of Sexuality, Foucault theorizes that the nineteenth century experienced a discursive transhistoric backlash, erupting in codified metaphors and rhetorical allusions to sex—a linguistic costume, similar to Shakespeare’s interweaving of bawdy into the surface detail of Beatrice’s unspoken text/dress. Responding to the ontological effects of both seventeenth century Christian pastoralism, which subjected sexuality on the level of language to the “control [of] its free circulation in speech...extinguish[ing] the words that rendered it visibly present” (Foucault, 17) and eighteenth century surveillance, which drove sexuality out of hiding for the service of policing population and tethering the individual to the dissecting table of the multi-headed hydra, Science, artists/writers of the nineteenth century transferred the “moment of transgression from the act itself to the stirrings—so difficult to perceive and formulate—of desire” (Foucault, 20). For Foucault desire exists purely as a by product, as an effect of cultural ideology and the impact of totalitarian regimes, rather than as a de/vice for self-recreation. Although he exposes the manifold technologies which incite/exploit exegeses of sexuality, he neglects to examine the power of desire as a producer of (un)reality, sub/alternity, and how it manifests and endures pathologically.

This story attempts to examine the psychological mapping of the potential effects a city’s fragmented, sexual imagery has upon human behavior.

Short Story (used as voice over for film I will show):

Stanley Hamburger was a retired insurance salesman. 68, lonely, and eccentric. He spent many hours wandering through Manhattan streets at night. An odd, zombie-like figure, with skittish eyes, he could be found frequenting the most popular clubs, where he would sit quietly, albeit out of place, watching the crowd with his clammy hands in his lap. Always dressed in polyester suits and buttoned-up-to-the-neck sweaters, he never ordered a drink or interacted with people. Some thought he was creepy and voyeuristic, while others were convinced he suffered from Alzheimer’s disease, but in truth, he was simply entranced by the chaos of motion, the comfort of raw rhythms, the warmth of lively conversations, and the smells of young love. He felt there was something authentic here. Something palpable, but he could not touch it.

He grew up in Queens, and lived in the same apartment with his mother for 62 years until she died last July. Except, of course, when he was drafted into Vietnam. Since then only the inaccessible and the unknown moved him. His disposition could be characterized by general lassitude, irritability and slight leaning towards hypochondria.

During lunch, he could be seen browsing in women’s clothing stores, feeling the variety of materials that might brush against the skin of the many images of women lodged in his mind. If the saleswomen ever approached him, he would quickly respond that he was

looking for something for his wife's birthday, and after a controlled beat would continue "say, you look a bit like her, would you mind trying this on." He had a wife once, for about a year, when he first got out of the service. A woman, his mother had been cultivating, like one of her ficus plants, for his arrival, but she turned out to be frigid and over-ingratiating. That was when Stanley began his drifts. To get lost in the vacuous night of the city, to penetrate into the dark womb of human degradation. The abandon and anonymity, he experienced became a substitute for climax. And desire went into hiding, which left him with a mixed state of excitement and depression.

Coming from a working-class family, he never heard the term *flaneur*, but his walking practice certainly possessed an indefinite process of being absent, of lacking place, typical to this French dandy. He never contemplated stalking a woman or requesting the services of one of the many prostitutes he passed each night when he got out of the subway. Instead he preferred the uncomplicated pleasures of gazing at non-threatening billboards. It would seem that he preferred the vicarious desires of others to feel human. Inside the clubs, he would close his eyes from time to time, just to absorb, to smell, to taste the sexuality permeating the atmosphere. Then he would abruptly exit onto the streets, filled with the confidence of an/other's desire, where the billboards would open to him, confide in him. The night was intoxicating with so many languishing, Pre-Raphaelite women staring directly at him, but as soon as he walked back into his mundane apartment, he would despise himself and the fantasy world he created would disappear. He would be reminded how alone he was. That's when he stopped returning home altogether. The city became his dwelling. Instead he would sit for hours outside Sacks, and watch the monitor filled with models walking down a catwalk. He believed that before they each spun around, they signaled him to follow them back towards the dressing room.

As he continued downtown in a state typical to 19th c. neurasthenia, the carnivalesque dis/orientation of the city became a pornographic film with a dizzying frame rate. Filled with so much stimuli and deferred gratification, he could no longer fall in love with one woman, only an entire city. If Manhattan was a woman, the more he walked, the more control he would have upon her. He prostituted his living body to the parasitic needs of the inorganic world. The inorganic had more sex appeal. Ads became the vital nerve that induced his drift. These protracted periods of idleness, in his eyes, were necessary to achieving power.

On the night I first encountered him, he wandered past me, mouth open, as if he was on a pilgrimage to Mecca through the dark passage lined with peep shops, with traces of the 30's fancy arcades filled with oddly juxtaposed boutiques. I sometimes imagine myself back then working as a saleswomen in a quaint, chocolate shop, like the blind woman that Charlie Chaplin falls in love with in *City Lights*. So, he stopped outside one particular display of a giant woman and suddenly swooned to his knees with a violent eruption of emotion. I thought this whimpering was peculiar, so I followed him with my eyes for a bit—worried that he might be a junkie, or worse, one of those confused fags, who identify all women with their rejecting mother. But he looked kind of harmless and a bit mousy, so I thought, what the hell, maybe I could make a few more bucks

comforting an old man. As soon as I cut across the street, my heels grated against the cement triggering a frightened look. He quickly averted his eyes as if to conceal some shameful act. Before he could expose this potentially damaging aspect of himself, he darted back towards civilization.

I guess my shadow made quite an impression, because about a week later, on a balmy August night, Stanley gravitated towards the passage again as if seeking an unknown continent, to hide, shelter and feed him. This time, however, as soon as he was within earshot, he began reciting some sort of poem from a small pocket-sized, leather book (and briefly tossing a side glance at me when he thought I was not aware):

Poetry & Charity--

The holy prostitution of the soul gives itself wholly
To the unexpected that appears, to the unknown that passes.
Against the lamplight, whose shivering is the wind's,
Prostitution spreads its light and life in the streets:
Like an anthill opening its issue it penetrates
Mysteriously everywhere by its own occult route;
Like an enemy mining the foundations of a fort,
Or a worm in an apple, eating what all should eat,
It circulates securely in the city's clogged heart.

I could not decide if his tone was taunting or courting, either way, the approach was unsettling. I asked around on the street to see if other girls had encountered this strange character. Many had witnessed his commodity fetishist prayers and watched him intensely scrawl notes in his little book, but he never spoke to them directly.

Slightly relieved, until about 3 weeks later, when he entered the passage way bearing a gift. A wooden-box with glass. Inside was a scene of women with a grown man in her arms attached to an umbilical cord. The figures seemed to have real human hair and skin. Lots of other particles from the street were categorized with mathematical precision in front of a collage of subliminal messages created with cut newspaper words and magazine ads.

The fragmented, vivid, chiasmal life of the city with its flirtatious, post-modern kisses was a specter that haunted many impotent men's dreams. In Stanley, they produced extreme periods of insomnia, which forced him to painstakingly collect vials and jot down details of every waking moment. In a city where everything appears to be recyclable, transient and inauthentic, Stanley believed that somewhere within these Dream World women was the origin of historical re-awakening. His obsessive gathering would bear witness to this transformation, and preserve the humanity that was being consumed by de/cadence.

His gesture, for some reason, made me shut down and panic. With disdain in my eyes, I rejected the gift. And as I turned on my heel to walk away, I felt shards of glass shatter against my head and as I felt a hand covered my mouth and nose. When I awoke I found

myself peering out a window on 5th Avenue. I couldn't feel my body or face, but I could see, people drifting by, sometimes looking at me, but mostly just coming and going. And Stanley, he passes by now and again.

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Since the Hot Summer of Psychogeography 2002 also outside the British Isle's countless new psychogeographers on the block have rediscovered the walks or rather the Dérives of the French post Freudian avant-garde movements like surrealism & lettrism which culminated in the well know consortium of European groups called the International Situationist who managed quite falsely to secure the term & the practise psychogeography in the eye of the public as their own invention. Psychogeography however is practise as old as human civilization itself. In the 14th century the Italian humanist poet Petrarch climbed the Mont Ventoux for no other reason then to find out how the view from the top would affect him, a strangle exploit for which he had to seek anecdotes from to past to make it look sane to his contemporaries. In ancient Greece there was the peripatetic school of Aristotle who developed their philosophy while walking: for them thinking or rather contemplation & movement where indistinguishable. Psychogeographers, which combines the previous examples have always been interested in history: the city is an artefact, a product, of history itself. But, as the Psy Geo Conflux festival will show it's also very much concerned with exploring new the spaces created by technology, by science: using algorithms, databases, GPS systems, PDA's, Lap-tops, Minidisks, mobile telephones, psychogeographers are now annotating space, rediscovering their own neighbourhood, are mapping invisible spaces like open nodes in Wi-Fi networks, the city is used as a chessboard or as a logic gate. Psychogeography is a strange hybrid between walking & technology, between DIY & high tech, between philosophy & engineering.

I'm still not sure what a definition of psychogeography might look like: nobody can't tell you what psychogeography is & what it's not, therefore you should not trust people who say they know. This is important because psychogeography as it's exist today is a process. Every few weeks I get e-mails from new groups all over the western world, who are all doing their own thing for their own reasons, it's very exiting, & it's relevant in many field. Psychogeography can be practised as artistic practise, as a branch of urban exploration, as a form of social commentary & often it's all these thing at the same time. Psychogeography also has it's own paranoia in the sense that it believe that any environment can induce behaviour. Perhaps you remember the main character in Albert Camus' novel The Stranger who commits a murder for now other reason than the way the

ocean reflects the sun in his eyes. This is a very clear & powerful example of a psychogeographical effect, an effect that can be consciously engineered in the composition of the city.

William Burroughs tried to expose subliminal messages in newspapers by chopping them up, psychogeography as a city space cut-up does the new thing: it tries to find out what's out there, encrypted beneath the surface, by navigating through it in unusual ways.

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