

BURN AFTER READING

Vol. 1. Miniature Manifestos for a Post/medieval Studies

Vol. 2. The Future We Want: A Collaboration

We, the Ornamentalists, anarcho-eco-pacifist amateurs, advocate an aesthetics of historical cosmicity as the ground of an ethics, an avant-garde poetics, and a revolutionary politics of elaborating a varied cosmos as a Public Park. I hate manifestos. They are so yesterday. Blast the manifesto! We need to be critical. Because really, I'm fine, and you're fine, and this is all lovely and fine. But could you stop talking about English literature quite *all* the time? But anyway, who the fuck wants to learn all of those languages? Should we let go of historicism and work to get over it? Rankean history is dead. No one will pretend to tell history as it really was. History's value lies in *not* believing in what you're told. History is what happens when you're making other plans. Can Aquinas (or Foucault) tell me how to think and build surreally, or medievally? The medieval world begins one space at a time. The door is barred, but please come in. I propose a necromantic humanities that "predicts" by creating from speculative imagined pasts desirable futures not required as inevitable reproductions of the present. Manifesto a humanities that will charm and glamour the future pasts and past futures we desire. We value experimental process, risk-taking, transparency, revelation, a blank space, and joy in faltering together. A medieval does not rest. Once it has been identified, it is already lost. A medieval is the polyphony of the angels, music no one hears. Materiality is not the opposite of theory. Don't replace the object with the subject. Style matters. If I'm going into the future, I want the things I've read to come along. Letting go makes room for something, and the whole point is that it's a gamble: you don't know what you're making room for. This is a time to mani-fest, to play, festively, with the hands we are dealt. Let's feel our way around this "we," this pronoun that is already like a party after the lights have gone out. Let's just go with it. Sometimes, for us to see the footprints, we shouldn't just clear the brush. Sometimes, yes, we might just need to set the whole field alight. We need provisional medievalist gems; for example: newly analog Records, flexible and adorned with Wonder.

To be still the same after so much sea! “It am I,” she tells her father. Still Custance after all these years. That’s what the tale tells: some names survive at sea. Does her constancy invert heteronymity? Does she assert a constant *I* as a hedge against the too-much variety flowing all around her, its winds and currents? I don’t think so. She’s looking for passage, like all of us, and finds it, eventually, everywhere.

GUIDO VAN DER WERVE



Figure 2. Guido van der Werve, *Nummer acht, everything is going to be alright* (2007). Courtesy of the artist and Luhning Augustine, New York.

What change do I want from this passing interchange? Why, *peace*. So what about it? I suggest that we pass . . . and trespass. Bushby’s passage also teaches us that even a mistaken divide remains *divisive* nonetheless. Russian authorities ultimately halted his pace, detaining him for entering the country at an unauthorized entry point (the latest update as of April 2012 is that the Russian government has denied him a visa). For them, the “pass” bordered too close to the “trespass” (literally “passing across”). Yet what if we thought of trespassing not as an act of passing across a series of predetermined (and policed)

borders frozen in place, but a process that shows how these contingent borders are constantly being re/defined by beings, like Bushby, who are passing through? We begin to recognize *how* we do it—and thereby imagine new ways of negotiating future interactions. The choice to dip in or dip out of Arctic space (for example) is a false one; we are dipping, we are passing through, *always*. Consider the Dutch artist Guido van der Werve walking slowly in front of an icebreaker that pushes its way through Finland’s Gulf of Bothnia (Fig. 2).¹⁶

Nummer Acht conveys the relationships between humans, technology, and ice that need to be renegotiated; nothing walks alone, unaided by the others. Even more significantly, “Acht” communicates an image of protest. What would it mean to walk in front of the multitude of commercial vessels as they plunge into the open/ing seas of the Northwest Passage, ships that might be the harbingers of cold war? To impede the “progress” of modernity, to trespass in the name of ethics, in the name of peace?

Walk on: the world change I propose here is not easy, and it certainly does not require a world without ice—or any “impediments” (anything which “shackles the feet”) for that matter. We actually need impediments to pace: those things that attach to our feet like ice bridges underfoot, that give us freedom *because of* their bonds, and that direct our pace into new passages, into new maps of knowledge. (Ernest Shackleton was the world’s greatest trespasser.) The future I want starts by rethinking the “trespass” not as the illegal endeavor it has come to be but as a “passage across” that is full of potential—for the humanities-sciences interchange, for the ecocritics who explore these interstices like pacing Bushbys and van der Werves, and for those of us who ponder ways to keep up the *pace*, to keep the *peace*, with a changing world.

SEA CHANGE AND/AS WORLD CHANGE

Can we sing it again, that old anthem? All together? The way we did at Kalamazoo:

Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change

¹⁶ Thanks to Karl Steel for directing us to this image.