

## **Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A few Clarifications**

**Claire Fontaine**

Thus instead of adding a film to the thousands of films already out there I prefer to expose here the reason why I chose not to do so. This comes down to replacing the futile adventures recounted by the cinema with an important subject: myself.

Guy Debord, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*, 1956

My immolation of myself was a somber dampened rocket. It certainly wasn't modern – yet I had recognized it in others, I had recognized it since the war in a dozen or so honorable active men.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, 1931

I live solely from here to there inside a little word in whose inflexion I lose my useless head.

Franz Kafka, *Diary*, 1911

We're not going to pull the death of the author on you again. No, not that again! No, we're not going to say anything about it, nor speak in favor of therapeutic endeavor, nor on the possibility of cardiac massage or euthanasia. We're going to approach the question from an entirely different perspective, which is that of processes of subjectivization and their relationship to power. The problem at the moment is not so much that of knowing whether the paradigm of the disc jockey may be extended to the situations of all contemporary creators, or whether any spectator/reader, sovereign by means of his or her zapping, short-lived attention, is comparable to any celebrated artist. The crisis, which must be spoken of, is vaster and no doubt older; it reached its height in the twentieth century but its convulsions are shaking us even today. We are speaking of the crisis of singularities.

Foucault explained it clearly: power produces more than it represses, and its most important products are subjectivities. Our bodies are crossed by relations of power and our becomings are orientated by the means through which we either oppose this power or wed ourselves to its flux.

The construction site of the self has always been a collective matter, a matter of interference and resistance, of the distribution of competencies and the division of tasks. Marks of inferiority, sexuality, race, and class are inscribed on the self by a series of focused interventions on the part of the principle relays of power, which act in depth and leave often indelible traces. Black, French, heterosexual, attractive, Bachelors degree, above the poverty line... All of these

parameters and others, which we easily introject, result from a social negotiation to which we were not even invited. The dispossession that we thus feel with regard to our presumed identity is the same as that, which we feel when facing history, now that we no longer know how to somehow take part in it. No doubt this feeling of indignance is intensified due to the fact that we know, as Agamben writes in *The Coming Community*, that the hypocritical fiction of an irreplaceable singularity of being in our culture serves solely to guarantee its universal representability.

Whether one speaks of *whatever singularities* or of men without qualities, it is by now almost unnecessary to enumerate those who have diagnosed an impoverishment of Western subjectivity in literature, sociology, philosophy, psychiatry, and so on. From Joyce to Pessoa, Basaglia to Lang, Musil to Michaux, Valery to Duchamp, and Walser to Agamben via Benjamin, it is evident that the suture that democracy ought to have practiced on those lives mutilated by recent history has actually produced a hitherto-unknown infection. Those injured by modernity, rather than seeing their wounds scar over and regaining the ability to work, actually discovered all sorts of identity disorders, and found their nerves as well as their bodies marked by the crack-up. The more the “I” spawned and multiplied in all the cultural products, the less one might encounter the consistency of the self in real life. In the last fifty years, democratic power, operating under cover of a promise of general equality, has produced equivalence between those previously separated by everything (class, race, culture, age, etc.) This process was not founded on shared ethics, which would have ultimately produced either full equality or conflict, but on the basis of a mall-like universalism. Of course, from the very beginning this universalism was conceived as a short-lived lie, designed to distract us from the fact that the development of Capital was going to debase civil society so profoundly and create such gulfs of inequality that no political tendency could subsequently emerge from this disaster with dignity, let alone propose a possible remedy.

The revolts of the 1970s and in particular the ones that took place in Italy in 1977 aired all sorts of dirty laundry that no political or biological family knew how to clean anymore: colonialism, whose racist heritage was doing rather well, after all, sexism, which only looked healthier after 1968, the “free” spaces of extra-parliamentary cells which had become micro-fascist breeding grounds, the “emancipation” through work that was a postmodern version of Daddy and Grandpa’s slavery, and so on.

What triumphed was the sentiment of having been fooled and having received, in a rural and underdeveloped Europe, an outdated kit for the American way of life of the 1950s, while in the U.S. people were spitting on consumerism and the family and fighting to bring the Vietnam

War home. These movements were unique, insofar as they did not fit into the sociological categories usually employed to mystify uprisings. In Italy a “diffused irrationalism” was spoken of, because young people refused to work and rejected the emerging global petit-bourgeoisie, believing in neither what society said of them nor the future they were offered.

The fact that these years of unheard-of collective creative fertility, both in terms of life forms and intellectual production, passed into the history books as “the years of lead” [a literal translation of the Italian expression “gli anni di piombo,” referencing the material of the bullets; translator’s note] tells us a lot about what we are supposed to forget. The feminist movement triggered this transformation, which dissolved all the old groups that had channeled energies since ’68. “No more mothers, wives and daughters: let’s destroy the families!” was the cry heard in the street. People were no longer demanding rights from the state but making an affirmation of foreignness in regard to the state of the world, an affirmation which made itself heard: nobody wanted to be included to be discriminated on a new basis. These movements were manifestations of the human strike.

Pierre Cabanne: Your best work has been your use of your time.

Marcel Duchamp: That’s right.

Marcel Duchamp, *Conversations avec Pierre Cabanne*, 1966

- How are you doing?
- Fine! It’s been a while! Since Frieze...
- Oh my God! Are you going to Basel?
- Yeah, see you in Basel!

Conversation overheard between two unidentified people in the toilets during the opening of the Scottish pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale.

In art the symptoms manifested themselves violently early on. Dadaism, Duchamp’s urinal and other ready-mades, Pop Art, the détournement, certain presentations of conceptual art, to only cite the most obvious: all of these are luminous oscillations of the classical sovereign position of the artist.

But we are not going to trace a genealogy of transformation in the domain of the production of art objects; what interests us here is what happened in the domain of the production of artists. No doubt, the manner in which the most brilliant amongst them latched onto the flux of a still-Fordist Capital via the principle of “multiples” – in which they started to dematerialize production and exhibition – says something about a new relationship that even today binds us to objects, including art objects. But these initial waves of transformation in the relationship between artists and their practice seemed either harmless (for museums, galleries, and collectors, it was merely a matter of finding new criteria for commodification) or gently dissenting (this time for the critics it was simply a question of proving that there was value beyond the provocation). In fact these stirrings prepared the ground for vast changes. We won’t refer here to the mechanical reproducibility of the artwork but to the reproducibility of artists during the epoch of *whatever singularities*. In an era that has been qualified as post-Fordist, one in which on-demand has replaced stock, the only goods still produced on an assembly line – that of the education system – without knowing for whom, nor why, are workers, including artists.

The extension of the art market, on which there is already a sizeable literature, has in particular generated a mass of people, producer/consumers, who move from gallery opening to gallery opening in the capital cities, from residence to residence, from art fair to biennale. This mass buys more or less the same clothes, knows the same musical, visual, and cinematographic references, and conceives of its productions within the frameworks determined by the market with which it had been initially familiarized through art-schools and magazines. It is not a question here of moralizing about the tastes, attitudes, and aspirations of those who are called “artists.” It is rather a question of understanding the consequences of such an art market on the subjectivities of those who keep it alive.

Yet it is clear that the increasing circulation of works, images of works, and their authors has ended up generating a database of visual and theoretical information, as well as more or less uniform address books, while preserving the same discriminations and inequalities characterizing the rest of society, in line with the protocol of all democratization processes. The self-reproducing fabric called the “art world” has thus reached a stage where interrogating the term “creativity” no longer really makes sense. Nothing “new,” in the most naïve sense of the word, can see the light in this space. The *whatever singularities* who know the public’s judgment and taste and are submitted to analogous processes of in the stimulation of their creativity – in a context with, according to strict norms, will produce similar generic works. And if the novelty of the work is no longer even necessary for the market nor for the consumers, this massive generation of uniformity

will nevertheless generate genuine dysfunction in the social space that surrounds contemporary art.

The reason we insist on this point is not linked to the superstition that artistic work, unlike other types of work, is supposed to emerge from a profound and direct connection with the singularity of the author. It is evident that if one were to pursue Foucault's dream and, for a year or more, identify productions by their titles alone, eliding the names of the authors, nobody would be able to recognize the paternity of a given work. This is a debate that Fluxus and many others should have already closed because, given the relative transparency of the productive protocols adopted by the artists and the accessibility of the technical means employed, a considerable number of people find themselves, without knowing it, doing "the same thing" in workshops thousands of kilometers apart. Anything to the contrary would be astonishing.

When, wining and dining one evening, you discover that you have actually been speaking to an internationally celebrated artist whom you had taken quite sincerely for a truck-driver, you cannot stop yourself from comparing this impression with that made two weeks ago by a brilliant young man, extremely well read – prior, however, to visiting his website and seeing what he calls his artistic work.

The two distinct problems – that of the eternal discord between the qualities of human beings and the qualities of their works, and that of the crisis in the singular quality of artistic productions – have a common base: the social space that shelters them, the ethic of those who people it, the use-value of the life lead within it. Or, in other words, the possibility of living in social relations that are compatible with artistic production. The problem raised here, which might appear scandalously elitist, in fact says something about the policies applied to artistic creation and their relation to politics in general.

The only way of assisting creation is to protect those who create nothing and are not even interested in art. If every social relation extracted from capitalist misery is not necessarily a work of art in itself, it is definitely the only possible condition for the occurrence of the artwork. Contemporary artists have the same demands as everybody else: to live an exciting life in which encounters, the everyday, and subsistence are linked in a way that makes sense. They don't need to be sponsored by the very same multinationals that ruin their life, they don't need to take up residencies all over the world where nobody loves them and they have nothing to do with their days but tourism. All they need is a world liberated from the social relations and objects generated by Capital.

“*Niquez en haut debit*”

(“fuck on broadband”)

Hijacking of the Bouyges Telecom advertising

slogan “*Communiquez en haut debit*”

(“Communicate on broadband”)

Metro Chatelet, November 2005

“...what cannot be commercialized is destined to disappear.”

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, 2001

“Rirkrit Tiravanija organizes a dinner at a collector’s house and leaves him the necessary material for the preparation of a Thai soup. Philippe Parreno invites people to practice their favorite hobbies on the first of May, but on a factory assembly line. Vanessa Beecroft dresses twenty women in a similar manner and gives them a red wig; women that one can only see through the doorjamb. Maurizio Cattelan...” Everyone will have recognized in this interrupted list the beginning of Nicolas Bourriaud’s work *Esthétique relationnelle*. The author’s intention is to present the “revolutionary” practices of a certain number of artists who should help us oppose behavioral standardization through the creation of “utopias of proximity.” We won’t judge here the pertinence of the examples chosen to develop his thesis, which starts out indeed from a shared acknowledgment of the homogenization of our life conditions.

The book has not aged well; both history and critics have shown to what degree this dream was naïve. Above all, experience has demonstrated to visitors/actors that these little utopias accumulate such a quantity of handicaps that they end up becoming grotesque. In addition to carrying the failures already encountered by participative theatre – which at least evolved in the 1970s, in a climate of excess and social generosity unimaginable today – these practices advance with the arrogance of the immaterial and ephemeral work of art, laying claim to the obsolete and suspect principle of the “creation of situations.” If the infantile dream of the Avant-gardes was to transform the entirety of life into a work of art, they just transformed separate moments of our lives into the playgrounds of several artists.

To use another metaphor, if for example we take seriously the traditional reading of modernism, which claimed that abstraction in painting was a return to the primacy of the support, in the case of these artists it is as though we were being asked to fabricate frames and canvases ourselves with an IKEA-style instruction manual.

Relational aesthetics exposes the most basic conditions of production of creativity: sociality, conviviality around a meal or a drink. But given that the authors' singularities are impoverished, these conditions are no longer presented in the auratic distance of the autobiographies of the great. These are mere objects, furniture, totally prosaic, which must be used. If you still don't believe this, recall, among other things, of one of Tiravanija's works in which he exhibited the car that drove him from the airport to the place of the exhibition. A car touched, "miracled" by contact with the artist, but alas any old car, a ready-made justified by the simple history of its use-value, which is the exact opposite of the concept of the ready-made! (As if the bottle-rack or the Brillo boxes were works of art because they had been used by artists!)

The works of relational aesthetics, which have in common the fact of making an inappropriate usage of the gallery or museum space, oddly end up producing an astonishing impression of familiarity. (This is not the place to evaluate, according to a Platonist criterion, the quality of these works as simulacra of life or of the controlled liberation of life, in a semi-closed milieu. Art has always been more experimental than representative and thus has always needed a laboratory, a separate milieu in which this experimentation could be pursued, with the goal of contaminating – or not – the outside world.) The familiarity, which seizes us, is exactly the same as that which we experience with regard to Capital and its everyday operations. Between the zones consecrated to the relational experience of art, and the museum bookshop, or the dinner after the opening, there is no substantial difference; the affects and percepts which emerge are, in sum, similar to those of shops and commercial locales.

Of course, one could ask whether the public who saw Duchamp's urinal reacted in the same manner. After all, what object was more familiar or more trivial? But the operation of the Duchampian ready-made was not designed to be unsettling in what it allowed to be seen; it was this way due to the position in which it placed the spectator, which was the exact opposite of any encouragement towards interactivity. Showing objects from which the use-value had been once and for all subtracted, such that an exhibition value could be assigned to them, tells us that use-value is a concept which concerns life and not art (the joke of the Mona Lisa and the ironing board is only another proof of this).

Today it is the place of the artist that is struck with impropriety, no longer the object that he decontextualizes, nor the installations that he fabricates with ordinary elements. It is the gesture of wanting to produce an "original" work, which transforms authors into multiples of *whatever singularities*. But it is not only the poor "relational" artists whom we are targeting here. Under the conditions of production of artistic subjectivity that we have just described, we are all ready-made artists and our only hope is to understand this as quickly as possible. We are all just

as absurd and displaced as a vulgar object, deprived of its use and decreed an art object: *whatever singularities*, supposed to be artistic. Under the present conditions, we are, like any other proletariat, expropriated from the use of life, because for the most part, the only historically significant use that we can make of it comes down to our artistic work.

But work is only one part of life, and it is far from being the most important.

Ten years of work to pay for a new car and they get two months of prison for burning it.

Pierre, 48, painter in the building trade, *Libération*, 7 November, 2005

Jacques Rancière's concept of an aesthetic regime of the arts clarifies for us the philosophical legitimacy of exhibiting everything today and the impossibility of employing ethical arguments against this. Under the aesthetic regime "everything is equal, and equally representable" the hierarchies and prohibitions that originated in the old world of representations are ruined forever. Our daily experience and its artistic transcription are of the order of "the parataxical linking up of little perceptions"; the promiscuity of everything and anything appears clearly in the syntax of the literature in which "the absolute liberty of art identifies itself with the absolute passivity of sensual matter." In a text entitled "If there Is any Unrepresentability" Rancière places Antelme and Flaubert side by side:

"I went to piss. – this can be read in *L'espèce humaine* – It was still dark. Others beside me also pissed, we didn't speak. Behind the urinal there was the trench for the loos with a little wall on which other guys were sitting, trousers around their ankles. A little roof covered the urinal, the loos. Behind us noises of boots, coughs; it was others arriving. The loos were never deserted. At that hour a vapor floated above the urinals... The night in Buchenwald was calm. The camp was an immense machine asleep. From time to time the projectors shone from the watchtowers. The eye of the SS opened and closed. In the woods, which surrounded the camp patrols did their rounds. Their dogs didn't bark. The guards were tranquil."

"She sat down and took up her work again which was a stocking of white cotton in which she made – we read in *Madame Bovary* – she worked with her head down; she did not speak. Charles neither. The air passing above the door pushed some dust over the

threshold; he watched it dally, and all he heard was the internal pulse of his head, with the distant chicken's squawk who laid eggs in the courtyard.”

If the juxtaposition of these two extracts is orchestrated so as to interpellate the reader, and if the critical and semiotic analysis of this grouping would take up an entire book, we will take it as one effect of parataxic syntax amongst others, even if it is particularly significant. Our intention is to support a hypothesis that Rancière openly rejects in his argument. According to him one must interpret the gesture of Antelme, whom, in the midst of disaster, uses the Flaubertian syntax as an act of resistance and re-humanization of his limit-experience. The silence of the people described in these two extracts and the relation between their resigned lack of words and the hostile surrounding objects raises another question: that of a continuity between the affects of the concentration camps and those of daily life in times of “peace,” and even with those of the “peace” that preceded the existence of the camps. Located in the forced intimacy between human beings and all sorts of vulgar and odious objects, which constitute the daily life of the majority under advanced capitalism, this continuity has produced effects on our subjectivities far more pernicious than those Marx was able to describe. Reification, real subsumption, and alienation say nothing to us of the lack of words afflicting us when faced with our evident familiarity with commodities and their language, as well as our simultaneous incapacity to name the most simple facts of life, such as political events, for a start.

No doubt it is to this talent at making everything coexist in one day, this capacity to call anything and everything “work,” that the extermination machine owed its astonishing efficacy during the Second World War. It was definitely a parataxical banality of evil, which transformed an ordinary employee into Eichmann: all he did, after all, was draw up lists; he was only doing his work.

But beyond the appearance of fragmentation, which characterizes the assemblage of abstract and disparate activities that constitute works in the contemporary world, the task of permanently weaving some continuity to hold life together is offered by each of us, a task that collaborates with the entrenched system, made of tiny gestures and small adjustments. Since the 1930s total mobilization has not stopped; we are still and permanently mobilized within the flux of “active life” (*la “vie active”*). Being *whatever singularities* we are like blank pages on which any history could be written (that of Eichmann, that of a great artist, that of an employee with no vocation); we live surrounded by objects that could become ready-mades, could remain everyday objects, or traverse these two states. However in front of these possibilities, in a light sleep, beneath the surface of the real, a spread of advertising slogans and a host of stupid tasks saturate

time and space. Until an interruption, we will remain foreigners to ourselves and friends with things.

An image is that in which Another time meets the Now in an illumination to form a constellation. In other words, the image is the dialectic frozen. For whilst the relation between the present and the past is purely temporal and continuous, the relation between Another time and the Now is dialectical: it is not something which unfolds but an image.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 1940

Parataxis is thus the very form of our existence under a regime said to be democratic. Class difference remains calm, racism stays hidden, discrimination is practiced amidst a multitude of other facts, all flattened on the same horizontal plane of an amnesiac senile present. The images, impressions, and information we receive are a succession of “stuff” that nothing differentiates or organizes. Collage and channel-surfing are no longer separate activities, they are the metaphor for our perception of life. This is why we believe that it is no longer necessary to go one way or another on the death of the author: for if the author as “convention” seems more necessary than ever in the meaningless struggles to protect copyright and in the interviews with creators that infest the periodicals, we no longer even have to ask whether it was ever anything but a convention to serve the interests of power. We have always thought via assemblages, editing, and juxtapositions, but, as Deleuze argues, the most faithful mirror of thought is the moving image. If one takes this assertion to be a figure of the real rather than a simple metaphor, one is obliged to inquire into the ontological function of the still image amidst total mobilization. In a 1987 article called “The Interruption,” Raymond Bellour remarks that the story of the still image has never been written. In a way we can identify the traces of that absence in Benjamin’s work: the definition he gives of the dialectical image responds in part to our inquiry: “the immobilization of thoughts just as much as their movement is part of the process of thinking. When thought stops in a constellation saturated with tension, the dialectical image appears.” Product of both a cessation and a saturation, the dialectical image is primarily a place where the past encounters the present. But this encounter happens as in a dream, as if the present were purified of any contingency and had given itself over to the pure movement of time and history. The past encounters the present as pure possibility.

The reasons why Benjamin spent so much time analyzing the processes of suspension and cessation in Brechtian theater are inextricably linked to his vision of history and the function that art can assume within it. A large part of his thought appears to be a site for the construction of a knowledge both verbal and visual, which would function as a bridge between the image and life, the fixed image and the moving image. At the center of his research appears always a change in rhythm, whether due to shock, or to other types of interruption.

When, in epic theater, Brecht insists on the processes that produce a strange gaze on both the part of the public and the actors, suspension appears as the technical device employed to release that affect. In 1931 Benjamin described the procedure thus:

a family scene. Suddenly a stranger enters. The woman was just about to roll up a pillow and smother her daughter; the father in the middle of opening the window to call the police. At that very moment a stranger appears in the doorway. A 'tableau' was what one called such a scene in 1900. This means that the stranger finds himself confronted with the situation: bed sheets all ruffled, the window open, furniture turned upside down. Now a type of regard exists before which the most habitual scenes of bourgeois life do not appear to be so different. Strictly speaking, the more the ravages of our social order increase (the more we are affected ourselves, as well as our ability to even notice this), the more the distance of the stranger will be marked.

The prism of the stranger in Benjamin's thought allows us to grasp logical and political links that tend to remain hidden. One becomes strange by means of a halting, for, when the movement picks up again, it is as if the parataxic evidence of the sequence of things appears unbound, as if in that interruption an interstitial space gaped open, sapping both the instituted order and our belonging to it.

In a commentary on Brecht's poems in 1939, Benjamin writes "whoever fights for the exploited class becomes an immigrant in his own country." Becoming stranger, a process that operates via a successive halting of thought images as well as an abandonment of the self, is manifested by an interruption and its following counter-movement.

This process of salvatory defamiliarization, which allows us to gain lucidity, seems to have a close relation to art or, more precisely, to art as source and device of these newfound affects, rather than as a site of their realization. This may be explained by the status of art as a space for the de-functionalization of subjectivities: singularities emerge there emancipated from any utility. As a purely aesthetic space, the world of art harbors a potential critique of the general organization of society, and of the organization of work in particular.

The process of becoming stranger as a revolutionary act appears in Benjamin's work much earlier, in a 1920 text, which has nothing to do with art, entitled "Critique of Violence." Here one can read that "today organized labor is, apart from the state, probably the only subject entitled to exercise violence." But can one term strikes "violence"? Can a simple suspension of activity, "a nonaction, which a strike really is," be categorized as a violent gesture? In all, no, Benjamin responds, since it is equivalent to a simple "severing of relations." He adds, "in the view of the State conception, or the law, the right to strike conceded to labor is certainly a right not to exercise violence but, rather, to escape from a violence indirectly exercised by the employer, strikes conforming to this may undoubtedly occur from time to time and involve only a 'withdrawal' or 'estrangement' from the employer."

What happens in this singular moment of turning away that allows us to lose our familiarity with the misery of ordinary exploitation, suddenly rendering us capable of decreeing that for one day the boss is not the boss? It is an interruption of the normal routine, a mobilization following upon a de-mobilization. This occurs thanks to a halt that transforms us into astonished spectators, nevertheless ready to intervene. Foucault wrote that the implicit demand of any revolution is "we must change ourselves."

The revolutionary process thus becomes both the means of this change and the goal, because this transformation must generate for itself a context of possible persistence. It is in this sense that Benjamin says a genuinely radical strike would be a means without end, a space in which the entirety of hierarchical organization tied to political bureaucracy would fall apart when faced with the power of events. Parataxis would be ruined by the irruption of discontinuity.

But does a means exist today for the practice of such a strike, neither union-based or corporatist, but larger and more ambitious? The question is complex, but perhaps because of our impoverished singularity we are the first citizens of history for whom the metaphysical affirmation of the human being as a being without professional or social destiny has a very concrete sense. Agamben writes; "there is definitely something humans should be, but this something is not an essence, nor is it even a thing: it is the simple fact of their own existence as possibility or power."

Some Italian feminists in the 1970s already envisioned a strike that would be an interruption of all the relations that identify us and subjugate us more than could any professional activity. They knew how to engage in a politics that wasn't considered as politics. During struggles over the penalization of rape, the legalization of abortion, and the application of a quota policy, they simply asked the law to remain silent about their bodies. In 1976 the Bolognian collective for a

domestic salary wrote, “If we strike, we won’t leave unfinished products or untransformed raw materials; by interrupting our work we won’t paralyze production, but rather the reproduction of the working class. And this would be a real strike even for those who normally go on strike without us.”

This type of strike that interrupts the total mobilization to which we are all submitted and that allows us to transform ourselves, might be called a human strike, for it is the most general of general strikes and its goal is the transformation of the informal social relations on which domination is founded. The radical character of this type of revolt lies in its ignorance of any kind of reformist result with which it might have to satisfy itself. By its light, the rationality of the behaviors we adopt in our everyday life would appear to be entirely dictated by the acceptance of the economic relationships that regulate them. Each gesture and each constructive activity in which we invest ourselves has a counterpart within the monetary economy or the libidinal economy. The human strike decrees the bankruptcy of these two principles and installs other affective and material fluxes.

Human strike proposes no brilliant solution to the problems produced by those who govern us if it is not Bartleby’s maxim: I would prefer not to.

Paris, November 2005

Translated by Olivier Feltham and Continuous Project