

AUDIO

chide/cajole/rant tyranny of the theoretical

Text by Myron Helfgott



The difficulty of not being self-conscious, of letting ourselves go...of letting our bodies make decisions instead of our minds, of walking and eating when we want to walk and eat, laying down when we're tired, touching another being when we need to feel that closeness. Why do we find that so difficult, why do we let our egos get in the way, feel the need to organize, to plan, to develop programs, programs that if not followed will mean disappointment, develop a recipe that lets us know when to eat and when to lay down, why do we need an intellectual construction, a map of time and place, that controls our waking hours and in fact our lives. We want to plan, to design, to figure out what time to eat, to sleep, to walk, to know that twilight is a good time to look at the sky and dawn a time to reclaim our lives, reclaim our lives after the fears we suffer at night. Who am I? and Who are you? Why are you here, why are you here looking at me, imposing the matrix of your values on this work, viewing this object, you pretending to be objective, pretending to view this work with fresh eyes, all the while keeping your prejudices well hidden, it seems to me. Listen to me and speak to me, talk to me, let me know what is in your mind...no, not in your mind, what's in your flesh, in your very being; maybe art is a corporal phenomenon, something that effects your body not your mind, alters your heart rate, cools you down or heats you up, makes you calm or nervous, weak or energetic; please, get as close to me as you can, touch me, caress me, look at my life and my work, my successes and my failures, become a part of this thing you are now only looking at, don't just look at it, examine it, become intimate with it, get down on your hands and knees and rub up against it, smell it, get to know it as well as you know your own children. There are so many things I would like to do but don't know how, so many people who I respect...no, not respect, love and envy, and things, things I so greatly admire, things that are well beyond my ability to achieve. Even if I could achieve them, what would be the sense...having seen these ideas made whole in such powerful and economical ways by people I love and envy, made whole in such a way that I am struck dumb, transfixed by the event, only tells me that that vocabulary, that language foreign to some, is already exhausted and I can only participate as a viewer, not a maker, a maker of these wonderful objects. I salute the maker, I'm envious of the maker; sometimes I attempt to compare my work to these others and am embarrassed by my lack of skill and insight, I'm envious of how the maker has brought together disparate notions, brought together issues and forms rarely seen together, and by the power and intellect of the maker, and by strength of will, force, no not force, finesse these disparate entities together as though they had never been separate. And yet, at other times I look at my work and think that it too may have the same power, that maybe I'm just too close to my work to see it clearly, maybe I have a myopic view of my work, unable to realize how powerful it really is, to realize that it may have as much or maybe even more power than the work of the others I so greatly admire. Maybe I've unknowingly absorbed so much of my culture, the social and political, the visual and auditory, the tactile and the olfactory, the foods and fashions, that maybe without knowing it I've presented a synthesis, an archetype of my culture, a work that speaks for and to everyone around me, a work that contains the basic building blocks, the vocabulary, the very DNA of this culture. But then again, maybe that's not it at all, maybe it's the existential being that resides in my soul that has forced me to develop ideas and schemas that are so unique, so shocking in their newness that they sit there and both threaten and challenge whoever happens upon them, a work that seems to have been born whole, without precedence. Of course this is my vanity speaking, how can I compare this work, the work you are looking at at this very moment, with other works I so admire, and expect you to embrace this work as I do, to love this work as I do, to be as intimate with this work as I am, and to want to make this work yours, to devour it, to digest it, to become so much a part of it that you and it become one. Unfortunately, there are so many things that can come between you and this work you are now looking at. I sometimes look around and get so very upset, so indignant to find so many things that

stand in the way, things that engage the mind but not the body, so much thinking and so little doing, of taking our feelings and emotions and translating them into words, to find so much energy spent putting words together, together in such a way that they are more poetic than meaningful, and as we examine these words we come to discover that they make sense only in as much as they are syntactically correct but whose meaning can only exist in the mind, words that when spoken offer such interesting possibilities, but any attempt to convert these word constructions into practice, to convert them into practical realities, is met with failure, the absurdity of their construction and implication become immediately evident. We see that, "...this era that keeps grinding out nothing but intellectual muck and all this stinking constipating clogging intellectual vomit is constantly being hawked in the most repulsive way as our intellectual products, though it is in fact nothing but intellectual waste products..." We use these same misleading, corrupt words and intellectual waste products to define for us the problems we are attempting to solve, these same words to ask ourselves serious questions, questions that, we think, somehow define our lives. How difficult it is to solve a problem, any problem, especially difficult when one can't quite define the problem, can't quite put the problem into proper words, and even if one could put these problems into proper words how worthless that would be, worthless knowing full well the limitation of the words we're attempting to use to define the problem, knowing the impossibility of solving a problem when possibly there is no problem, and without a problem there cannot be a solution only speculation. Maybe what we now see before us is a series of random thoughts made real, thoughts that in other circumstances would embarrass us, thoughts whose only purpose is to entertain, to lighten the moment, to allow the moment to pass quietly making way for even lighter more asinine thoughts, making way for the next event that will occupy our mind for the briefest bit of time, occupy it such that we don't need to concern ourselves with other, more serious matters. Have these thoughts in any way enriched our lives or have they solely enriched the reputations of the makers? What have we gained by marching through galleries and museums and other cultural edifices? What we've gained, it seems to me, is to appear, yes appear to be productive with our time, the time we invest in cultural activities, yes, we can say that we're cultured and that we've been there, that we've seen that, have read that, we want so much to impress our friends, not impress our friends, just let our friends know that we too are part of their cultural circle, that we are not beneath them, let them know that we too have become conversant with the current body of work, with the names we've read in the art journals and heard on the lips of influential critics, but what we've really done, done in addition to making ourselves acceptable to that subculture with which we associate ourselves, what we've really done, it seems to me, is find an acceptable way of occupying that time between lunch and dinner. Of course we need to read criticism and philosophy, read it but not take it into our studios, not let the criticism and philosophy contaminate our hands and in turn contaminate our work...let the work influence the philosophy, influence the philosophers, let them look and attempt to make sense of what they're seeing, make them attempt to include this new phenomenon in their well organized, well thought out pattern of ideas. Maybe the relationship between influencing and being influenced is somewhat like a finite, enclosed system with no beginning and no end, a social Möbius strip, a snake eating its own tail. The reading influences the maker and the work influences the writer. How wonderful it would be to read these philosophical texts, to absorb these ideas, to make these ideas concrete, to present these new works to you, these works born of philosophical parentage, you who have also read these philosophical texts and find these philosophical speculations fascinating, you who are insightful enough to see the connection between the words and the work, to present these works to you such that now we can share the delight of philosophy made real, of the conversion of words and sentences into events that occupy our space, events that interrupt the normal flow of our lives,

events that delight us, the delight in seeing the conversion of these philosophical speculations into practical realities. Of course I would like to do this for you, to please you, to make you happy, make you want to return time and again, make this image stick in your mind like a tune that you cannot stop humming, make you want to tell your friends, make you want to eat it, make you want to take it home with you, you knowing that people will envy you because you've taken it home, will think you have unique insights, have a knowledge of the most current aesthetic forms, aesthetic forms they know nothing about, you knowing that while you age and are here for such a brief period of time the work will live after you, and after you're gone your name will be on peoples lips as well as noted in respected journals, noted because of the thoughtful, meaningful legacy you so generously left behind. If I could make you happy I would, there is that part of me that wants to grovel, to act the sycophant, to meet your expectations, to see you smile. No, that's not really true, that's not what I'm trying to say, that kind of happiness is such a fleeting phenomena, that's not the kind of happiness I'm interested in, I don't want you to be happy in the way that's here one moment and gone the next. I'm interested in the kind of happiness that grows out of wonder, the kind of happiness one feels when one sees themselves an integral, productive part of the natural system, the system of natural things, a system that we know and don't know, a system that fascinates us because of what we don't know, a system that we are a part of and at the same time are removed from, a system we examine and measure, but how is that possible, how can we pretend to examine from the outside while being on the inside, controlled by that system we are trying to measure. No, not that either, what am I trying to say, what is in my head and impossible to put on my tongue, actually, not in my head, what is in my heart, what is the question that is at the core of this rambling, what do I want to know, what is it I'm looking for, ...maybe what I want to know is what is nature anyway, what is the nature in human nature, is it just an illusion, a convenience, a way of allowing ourselves to live one person on top of another, a synthetic structure that allows people to live in close proximity, to live in "harmony". We speak of man and nature, the implication being that we somehow see ourselves separate from nature...but somehow still a part of nature, how can that be, we speculate that we're different because we think we understand our own mortality, but in reality we don't understand anything, we don't understand how to live peacefully with our families and neighbors, we don't understand the simplest, most basic issue of all, how to properly treat and adequately respect those that are closest to us, we understand nothing, we are so taken with our own egos that we find it impossible to conceive of the idea that will rot just like the parings of the fruit we had for lunch. We're dreamers and planners and controllers, we attempt to plan and control our lives and our environments, control our futures and very often control those around us as well. We're aware of our being, and we're aware of our being next to another being, we're aware of our being aware, aware of whom and what we are. We find it nearly impossible to lose our awareness. If only we could lose ourselves, let our minds go blank, be emptied out, "be" and not be aware of "being," be happy without being aware we're happy. Is that so very difficult, is it not in our nature to lose ourselves in time, not in time, outside of time, become independent of time, and is this not the condition we strive for? Maybe we need to begin with the body and not the mind, relax the body in order to empty the mind, come now, loosen up, start with your neck and let the relaxation flow down your spine, let your arms hang limp, your legs and feet float above the ground, your hands and fingers defy gravity, your head become disconnected from your body, the body disconnected from the mind. Did I say strive? Is not the whole problem one of striving; striving is about ego, the ego wants and strives, strives to get places, get things, are we on the wrong track, moving in a direction opposite of that we seek? The Zen acolyte strives for enlightenment and when enlightened ceases to strive and ceases being self-conscious.