

*Improper Nouns* Blackbridge Offspace, Beijing  
Sept. 25 - Nov. 6 2015

Sonja Gerdes, Justin Hansch and Jason Starr, John Knuth, James Krone, Alexi Kukuljevic, Lindsay Lawson, Katrin Plavcak

In a letter to his friend Georges Izambard from 1871, a sixteen year old Arthur Rimbaud wrote, “Tant pis pour le bois que se trouve violon.” The literal translation of the phrase from French into English is, “Too bad for the piece of wood that finds itself a violin.” I’ve only just discovered this after sending the sentence through an online translation program. Following up, I see this translation repeated throughout various online course materials for a handful of liberal arts universities I’ve never heard of.

When I first encountered the quote years ago it was in English and had been translated as, “So what if a violin discovers it’s a violin?” I most recently saw this incarnation as an opening epitaph in a Dennis Cooper novel. I would tend to side with Dennis Cooper’s interpretation of Rimbaud’s intentions rather than with a hokey professor who blogs for his class on a tumblr page. But now the validity of this quote, the one I’ve regarded for years as native and true, the time I’ve spent considering it, is threatened by literary comprehension splash pages and the barf well of Bing translator.

I had wished to use the quote and the axis of its introductory usage of *so what* as a reflexive hinge from the speculative *so what (happens then)* to the indifferent *so what (who cares)*. Whether it is a celebratory, horrific or indifferent realization, what if something ceases to identify with that which had been it’s presumed and given order?

*So what (happens then) if a piece of wood discovers it’s a violin* opens a field of existential questions as to what is possible or comprehensible in relation to identity. What can one do if overcome by the influence of an external desire or an alien identity? Are we anything other than a black box theatre for the transmutations of unknown influences, coming from within and without? If so then how can intention ever be claimed or the ego located within the framework of a singular expression? Is this discovery a freedom or a sentencing?

*So what (who cares) if a piece of wood discovers it’s a violin* eliminates all difference rather pessimistically. It makes no difference anyhow. The wood is screwed. Violins and the will to play them exist merely as an aberration of chance in a universe expanding towards its own destruction.

But *Too bad for the piece of wood that finds itself a violin* complicates the matter by potentially offering the half hearted pity of a rubbernecker.

“Too bad!!!” :(

My confidence in what I thought would be a quick probe of a reflexive thought has diminished and been replaced by doubt and now spins out into a seemingly meaningless number of directions.

So what if a piece of wood doesn’t believe in transfiguration?

So what if a piece of wood discovers it’s the handle for a toilet brush?

So what if a toilet brush discovers it’s a piece of wood?

If there is a consistent thread to the logic of all translations of this short phrase, it is the suggestion that a fracture or an entire revolution in self recognition may just occur out of the blue, regardless as to whether this fracture might be of any significance. So it goes.

If one believes this to be a possibility, as I do, then they must look at themselves, at least partially, as a suspicious delegate.

Once a person agrees to recognize the veracity of this social contract (a kind of open door policy between themselves and the other) it becomes very difficult to ascribe a fixed location to the goings on of one's ego as a singular impenetrable entity.

Duchamp's artist of the future was to merely point at things instead of producing them, I will suggest that this time has passed us. Things have been pointed at often and for extended durations with such intense projections of desire and analysis that they seem to have become imbued with something like a pathos of their own to point back with. Perhaps this resemblance of aura is only an effect that comes from the great emptying of human pathos on the behalf of things material. Perhaps more than elevating the object, our human sacrifices to them may have brought us down to the level of employment vessels. It is not outside the realm of possibility to consider them as mutant peers in the sense that these objects and ourselves have a horizontal correspondence and transfer consciousness back and forth between each other like rented organs.

Although I am entirely untrained musically and cannot read musical notation, on occasion my dreams are scored with what seem to be entirely composed, symphonically performed pieces of incidental music that I've never heard elsewhere. They vaguely resemble the emotive hollowness of Hollywood melodramas from the 1980's. They are mediocre, banal and emerge like heat through a vent.

James Krone  
September 2015