

STATUS EFFECT #01

# Status



# Effect

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# On Minions and the Multitude

Minions are idiotic, utterly so. In fact, they are worse than this. Minions are a cancer, a jaundiced plague that infects the culture—metastasizing into every conceivable nook and crevice of the zeitgeist: mummy and daddy minions, baby minions, elderly minions, athletic minions, busy minions, lazy minions, naughty minions, maudlin minions, minions, minions, minions. Always minions. That is to say, always plural. There is never simply a minion, never a lone isolated minion away from its kin. And, of course, the ubiquity and uniformity of the minion—a nondescript yellow sausage with either one or two eyes and little to no individuation—always implies plurality and multiplicity and never uniqueness and singularity—hear me say it again! There is no “minion,” even when this simply appears to be an empirical fact.

*The sleep of the cognitariat produces minions.* How are we, the drones of the knowledge economy expected to dislike minions when they are so like us! Like us they have surely lost count of the number of overlords and villains they have served—and how can we be surprised, “job hopping” is normal under late-capitalism. The minions have existed since the dawn of time itself, serving brutish cavemen, Egyptian Pharaohs, Vampiric Voivodes, and Napoleon himself! But this is simply an incomplete and lacunae riddled list, and one that must be subject to amendment. Ancient hominids, lichen Pharaohs, blood sucking aristocrats, and the *Empereur des Français*; yes, these are who the minions toil for. However, this list would hardly be complete without the likes of Monsanto, Foxcom, James Hardie, or the various merciless governments of the western world thrown in for good measure!

Perhaps it is hasty and misguided to speak of the minions as resembling anything like the multitude that has become internationally famous through the publication of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the minions hold a semblance to the creative chaos of Hardt and Negri’s multitude; the vital “power to”—to build, to tear down, to share, to bring together and to oppose—that is drawn on by “empire.” Hardt and Negri state that,

the power of the proletariat imposes limits on capital and not only determines the crisis but also dictates the terms and nature of the transformation. *The proletariat actually invents the social and productive forms that capital will be forced to adopt in the future.*

What is the empire? The empire is the decentralized network of multinational corporations, nation states, and international organizations such as the United Nations or NATO. All bound by the nebulous field of international law, these various zones of power—that is, “power over,” a power expressed through control, distribution, and especially the holding of other forms of power in reserve—are interlaced through a “smooth space” that is resistant to striation. Such an empire is parasitically attached to the power of the multitude, and this is what Hardt and Negri mean when they argue that the social and productive forms of capital emerge only from the proletariat. However, such a concept of the proletariat is not reducible to the classical definition of the worker but is instead linked to another “smooth space” of powerful desire: the multitude. The multitude is not determined by class, race or gender, but is instead discussed as a multitude of bodies—irreducible to any singular count—that perpetually creates and cooperates.

Just like the multitude, the minions are an irreducible multitude of chaos, creativity, and cooperation. Forces of villainy gather their power from the minion multitude, profiting from the constructive desire of the minion swarm. However, in feeding off the power of the minions this empire of villainy also exposes itself to crisis, insofar as the multitudinous minions—through their sheer creative enthusiasm and by way of their chaotic forms of cooperation—open empire up to decisive transitions that threaten its power over life. In this way the minions present us with an anarchic avant-guard, a de-stratified political vanguard that, through its unpredictable desiring and producing, functions to unconsciously topple one order of empire after another.

And yet the villainous empire remains. The minions, who perhaps need to brush up on their Lacan—or at least their Žižek—have forgotten that the revolutionary spirit of 68, the search for an end to the masters of the old order, simply led to the imposition of new masters. “What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master,” Lacan chided, “You will get one,” he concluded. The empire draws on the minions and thereby draws the multitude into its machinations. While the seemingly inexhaustible exuberance of the minion multitude risks the present ordering of the empire, such a multitude appears to be intractably circumscribed within empire. If this is true, if empire cannot really be escaped through the creative power of the multitude, and if empire is only exposed to the technological and aesthetic modifications of the minion’s desiring production, then is the figuration of the minion and the multitude simply part of late-capitalism’s ideological configuration?

For influential contemporary critics of Hardt and Negri’s theory of the multitude such as Alain Badiou, the answer appears to unequivocally and despairingly, “yes”—a “yes” to minions and the multitude as configurations of ideology. That is to say, minions offer the myth of a creative and chaotic multitude when, perhaps closer to the truth is the unsettling possibility that the multitude are merely minions of empire. While images of minions circulate through our culture, serving to embody the cognitariat’s sense of individuality, irreverence, creativity,

and their irreducibility to the world of work, perhaps the intensity of such memetic cycling only functions to blind the cognitariat of their subservience, banality, and impotence. On this view, the multitude would be much like the minions as franchise, a grand spectacle that gestures towards a radical collective power that has no actuality.

And yet, all of this is said on the minion's behalf. Has no one yet remembered their good manners and asked the minions what it is that they want? What it is that they take themselves to stand-in for or represent? A scene comes to mind. The arch-villain Scarlett Overkill seeks out the creative power of the minions for her latest evil quest. Once her plan is explained she informs the minions that their interests are the same as her own: "respect, power..."; and yet, before she can finish, the minions supplement her list with their own desire: "banana!" What does "banana" signify here? How are we to build a politics, and an emancipatory politics at that, on the desire for, "banana?" Surely we cannot, since, as the radical thinkers of the "Institute of Experimental Freedom," those comrades of the "Invisible Committee" have argued: "politics is not a banana." They declare:

"Politics is not a banana!" You can't get your vital potassium intake from politics. A banana is a fuck toy, a weapon, a charming fruit. Politics is the production of death by another name. Eat death you shit.

They declare:

Politics is not a banana. You can eat a fucking banana. Try eating *the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power* [...]

It is true; one can hardly get politics out of a banana. But, perhaps, the point that needs to be taken away regarding both minions and the multitude is not one concerning their status as the historical subject—as if minion or the multitude are to usurp "the people" or "the human animal" as the figuration of humanity's political movements through history—but rather to see minions and the multitude as an opportunity to look towards the immanent forms of material creativity and "power-to" that sustain "politics," and its associated and perhaps contradictory search for respect and power over others. Are the minions or the multitude a myth? Perhaps. But no more of a myth than the one that argues that the multitude is simply a pernicious and ideological concept, and that minions are simply idiotic cartoons. For, we could remember that the multitude is not an ideal body that is supposed to assume the role attributed to "Man" or "History," but is instead a place holder for an immanent form of creative power that is expressed in immanent desiring—the desire to eat, fuck, create, and share, and to do all of these things differently than we were told they "should" be done. To think the multitude is not to think a mythical force that will save humanity from capital, but

is perhaps to rethink humanity and capital, to rethink the dyad in terms of an immanent creativity that is reducible to neither. And, perhaps more importantly, we could approach thinking minions, not just as another banal prop in a dying spectacle, but instead as an embodiment of the radical strangeness of the desiring imagination. Indeed, and as Jack Halberstam reminds us, Sergei Eisenstein argued that Disney's cartoon works of the 1940s, "are a revolt against partitioning and legislating, against spiritual stagnation and greyness. But the revolt is lyrical. The revolt is a daydream."

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# The Hunchback of South Bermondsey

Perceval, a hunchback  
Lancelot, a knight  
Merlin, a wizard  
Arthur, a king  
Atlantic Ocean, the second largest  
of the world's oceanic divisions

## Act 1

### SCENE ONE

*Merlin is stirring a black cauldron.  
He throws in flower petals, a frog,  
unprocessed gold ore.*

#### MERLIN

Show me the future, I want to see,  
show me the future, I want to see.

*The Atlantic Ocean speaks.*

#### ATLANTIC OCEAN

South Bermondsey  
London SE1  
2555 AD, 1677 AD, 2015 AD

An ashy industrial building with its windows broken. Glass is hard to obtain these days. Burlap sacks and pieces of dirty cardboard cover the windows.

A white cis gay male sits on a stool in the corner, weaving yarn. He is wearing sweat-stained undyed linen. He has nearsighted eyes and a hunchback from leaning in too much, or because a curse has been placed upon him.

He swipes sweat off his brow and casually brushes the screen of an iPhone nailed to the wall. Phones have been off for decades but are considered good luck. A rabbit's foot hangs next to the phone. Outside, a horse carriage is dragging plague ridden bodies to their mass graves. The hunchback hears the click of the horse's slow step on cracked asphalt.

The hunchback extends his neck, looks up. We see that his eyes are a piercing husky blue. We notice his neck tattoo: 'privilege', it reads in a German gothic font. It's a shoddy tat, stick and poke.

Another white cis gay male enters the building. Despite some rotten teeth he is a relative picture of health. His neck tattoo says 'fuckable' in bold Helvetica. He is cradling a kitten. He is wearing black sportswear.



He is humming a little song to himself and stroking a broken MP3 player set deep in the left hand pocket of his sports shorts. For good luck.

*We are informed that the hunchback is called Perceval. The kitten-cradler is called Lancelot.*

*Lancelot enters the room. Perceval stops weaving yarn.*

PERCEVAL

Where have you been?

LANCELOT

I found this kitten in a ditch outside.

PERCEVAL

Does it carry the plague?

LANCELOT

I don't think so. It's cute, right?

*The kitty purrs.*

PERCEVAL

The landlord came by today.

LANCELOT

What did he want?

PERCEVAL

He took one of the chickens and your grandmother's engagement ring.

LANCELOT

Is he gonna fix the windows?

PERCEVAL

Doubt it.

*Sound of thunder followed by rain.*

LANCELOT

I went to teach my seminar today but no one showed.

PERCEVAL

Did your students catch the plague?

LANCELOT

Half of them did. The rest joined ISIS or decided to become real estate agents. Three of them started a vegan cafe in Leeds.

PERCEVAL

So you don't have a job anymore?

LANCELOT

I'm gonna help raise this cat. Maybe I'll start making sculptures again. I feel like I need to originate something.

PERCEVAL

Do you want to have a baby with me?

(pause)

PERCEVAL

I kinda wanna have a baby.

LANCELOT

In a world like this –

PERCEVAL

I wanna have a baby with you.

*The walls collapse in on the worn out building. The horse carrying the dead neighs. London is on fire.*

*London collapses. Our anxious projections about the future fold in on themselves.*

*Smoke clears.*

#### ATLANTIC OCEAN

It's 2015.

Perceval is slouched over his charged up Macbook. He is having a Facebook argument with a queer couple. He is being trolled by them. These queers are white DJs who live in Peckham and smile radiantly on the pages of Vogue UK. Their urban professional parents funded their turn at a high brand value arts university. Now they're bored, frustrated and ready to explode.

Students of humanities used to pride themselves on being open-minded and inquisitive, but the couple have opted for the narrow horizons and pleasures of emotionally abusive moralism. Everyone wants to change the world. They tear their own social context to shreds while proclaiming theoretical solidarity with vaguely sketched out victims displaced in other continents.

It is frictionless to fight for the rights of people who you'll never meet, people who have not been informed of your supposed solidarity with them. People who can't accept of refuse your symbolic helpings.

Perceval cries and penetrates a fleshlight with a picture of Benedict Cumberbatch taped onto to it. This is not queer

enough to be interesting. Loneliness is taboo, but it's not interesting.

#### **SCENETWO**

*Lancelot stands alone on a meadow. He is in the middle of a forest. He is wearing parts of his armour. Knees covered, one arm's length of steel, glistening at an angle to the sun. He is carrying a bow plus arrows.*

*Smoke erupts from below the earth. Lancelot is hunting. He notices the smoke. He notices an attentive audience. He notices that he is here. Lancelot centers himself on stage, faces the audience. He poses himself for the audience. He begins to speak.*

#### LANCELOT

You walk through a white cloud of smoke.

Your nose begins to bleed.

A clump of your hair falls out.

Your posture changes.

Your back draws up into a hunch.

You walk through a white cloud of smoke.

You've been texting.

You've been looking for somebody.

You're in a forest.

There are three witches here:  
Fillet of a fenny snake,  
In the cauldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
An iPod shuffle.  
Your master's degree.  
The keys to your apartment.

You walk through a white cloud of smoke:  
Wizardry,  
Alchemy,  
Allurement,  
Sorcery

Climate scientists conduct their research while unwittingly destabilizing the social order. Climate scientists develop depression and anxiety, plagued by what some describe as pre-traumatic stress disorder. The knowledge of our approaching end can be too much to take on. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

2277 AD, 1667 AD  
London SE1

An ashy industrial building lit by torches, windows covered with cardboard and burlap.  
Glass is hard to come by here.

You are a hunchback, weaving yarn.

You are nearsighted. Sometimes you wonder if a curse has been placed upon you.

A horse carriage outside drags plague victims to their mass graves.

You tap your lifeless iPhone. You rub a rabbit's foot, for good luck.

Dying is easy, it's living that scares you (to death).

Maybe you walk through a white cloud of smoke.

Maybe a good spirit hands you an amulet.

You don't know that the thing you've received is an amulet.

The amulet will protect you where engineering has failed.

Where linear thinking has failed.

You count your blessings.

You walk through a white cloud of smoke.

The smoke makes its audience barren.

You are unable to have children.

Culture can't reproduce itself.

No ideas worth repeating.

As civilization folds, we unravel.

On a piece of parchment, write  
the following words:  
Air cannot freeze me.  
Fire cannot burn me.  
Water cannot drown me.  
Earth cannot bury me.

### **SCENE THREE**

*A video is projected on stage. Perceval's back in sharp focus, close-up. Perceval's hunch is now a massive boil. Plague boils are a latent disorder that has graduated into extreme gestures. A hand outfitted with a steel glove moves in from the left and lightly brushes the boil. The boil explodes into blood, skin and black slime.*

### **SCENE FOUR**

*Merlin is stirring the cauldron. He throws in a hawk's heart.*

#### **MERLIN**

Show me the future, I want to see,  
show me the future, I want to see.

*He looks into the brew and sees.*

#### **MERLIN**

They walk down a gravel road, passing  
burned shells of overground trains.  
Insects are buzzing in dry heat. Their  
shadows brush over wilted blonde hay.  
The sun is high, its rays evenly dispersed.

Perceval is unhunched. He thinks straight.  
A witches' brew has removed the curse.  
Skin glowing in the early bright, he is  
ready to shine upon others sexually.

Perceval and Lancelot are heading  
for the pond. In a forest outside the  
city walls, the pond is for swimming,  
cruising and gossip. Tanned bodies  
lie on the grass, scattered around the  
small pond. The water is cool and goes  
deep. Bodies are burned and scarred,  
mutilated from conflicts. Horses stand  
around and feed on the grass. Sexy  
communality grows from the ashes  
of past wars. Where are the women?  
Hidden in towers, mills, farms, the  
backrooms of candle-lit taverns.

#### **PERCEVAL**

I'm not thinking of having a child today.

#### **LANCELOT**

What child? I've forgotten.

#### **PERCEVAL**

When I feel lonely I feel like I lack a child.

#### **LANCELOT**

The child would love you unconditionally.

#### **PERCEVAL**

Yes, the child is unconditional love.

#### **LANCELOT**

Children are our future.

#### **PERCEVAL**

Yes.

LANCELOT

Thinking about the child is like thinking that there is a future worth going to.

PERCEVAL

This is better though. Hanging out at the pond. The sun shining on all these bodies that are already in the world, fully-formed and in bloom. When I'm really living I'm not thinking about the future.

LANCELOT

Is the future now?

PERCEVAL

Maybe. I'm starting to think that the future doesn't exist.

**Act 2**

**SCENE ONE**

*Perceval and Lancelot are walking back from the pond. In the forest, Lancelot sees a white bird and follows it. Perceval is left behind. Lancelot loses track of the bird and tries to find his way back to Perceval. He can't. They take diverging paths and our story splits in two.*

*Perceval circles around in the forest, calling for Lancelot. He happens upon a meadow. Is it the same meadow where Lancelot stood before?*

*Perceval is tired and decides to rest. There is a stream running through*

*the meadow. He drinks from the stream. He experiences sharp pain in his stomach and folds in half.*

**A)**

*The stage goes dark. We hear Perceval moaning in pain. A video projection begins. A hyperreal visceral CGI animation shows Perceval's hunch expanding. A ripple on the hunch. It is being kicked at from the inside. An opening on the hunch. A small foot emerges, then a hand. There is a baby inside of the hunch. The baby's desire to live translates into force. It tears the hunch open. The baby is screaming. The baby's voice is deep. Perceval squeals.*

**B)**

*Lancelot walks a lush path, green leaves patterned by horizontal sunlight. The sun is setting. He sees something moving behind the leaves. A deer perhaps? He approaches silently. He sees his king. Arthur is shirtless and sweaty. He is hunting for butterflies with a butterfly net. Lancelot genuflects, getting down on one knee.*

LANCELOT

My king!

ARTHUR

What's up?

LANCELOT

I'm lost. I'm looking for Perceval.

ARTHUR

That gnome.

LANCELOT

What are you doing here?

ARTHUR

*(points to net)* It's obvious right?  
Trying to catch a butterfly.

LANCELOT

Any luck?

*Arthur approaches Lancelot, who remains lowered. Arthur grabs Lancelot's hair and pulls his head back.*

*Their gazes meet, Arthur smiles.*

ARTHUR

I've got a feeling my luck just changed.

*The sound of a waterfall drowns out all other sounds. Arthur licks Lancelot's ear.*

**SCENE TWO**

*Perceval is staggering through the forest. He is holding the baby, wrapped up in dirty cloth. The baby screams occasionally, bass heavy screams. A narrow path into the ever-darkening forest. There is light drizzle.*

*Perceval is about to pass out, when he hears the boiling of a cauldron. He hears a spell being recited.*

MERLIN

Fire, element of warmth,  
let me control you.

Water, element of moist,  
let me control you.

Air, element of storms, let  
me control you.

Earth, element of nature,  
let me control you.

PERCEVAL

Merlin!

MERLIN

You're here. Both of you.

PERCEVAL

Did you know about the baby?

MERLIN

I saw her coming. I saw it in the cauldron.

PERCEVAL

What else do you see?

MERLIN

I see the ocean. I see a king  
sitting on his throne, facing the  
ocean, trying to stop the tide.

PERCEVAL

What will the future hold, for us?

MERLIN

Today I cannot see your future. Mercury  
is in retrograde. The sun hides behind  
a veil of ice particles. I get white noise.  
The waves wash ashore, then pull back.

PERCEVAL

I need to go back to South Bermondsey.

**SCENE THREE**

*An ashy industrial building with its windows broken. Glass is hard to obtain these days. Burlap sacks and pieces of dirty cardboard cover the windows.*

*Perceval is lying on the floor, holding the baby. His back is frayed, deep red. Lancelot and Arthur enter.*

LANCELOT

What happened here?

PERCEVAL

My hunch. A baby came out of it.

*The baby cries.*

ARTHUR

You'll have your hands full.

PERCEVAL

*(to the baby)* The king has come to see you.

*Perceval offers the baby up to Lancelot. Lancelot shakes his head.*

LANCELOT

I came back to tell you that I'm going.

PERCEVAL

Going where?

PERCEVAL

The court.

ARTHUR

He is mine now.

PERCEVAL

Do you have to take him from me? Please don't take him.

ARTHUR

Do I have to? I don't have to do anything.

LANCELOT

But he wants to.

ARTHUR

I notice the butterfly, and it occurs to me that I'm holding the net. I capture the butterfly. I pin it down.

LANCELOT

There is a round table where he lives. There is a goblet, a grail. There are foreign diplomats, wall hangings, fast Wi-Fi.

PERCEVAL

What about me?

LANCELOT

You've chosen something else. A choice has burst out of you.

*The baby laughs.*

*Perceval turns around on the floor, faces the wall. Arthur picks Lancelot up and carries him away.*

**SCENE FOUR**

*Merlin, Perceval and the baby are on the beach. A rocky beach in Brighton.*

*There are peasants lying down on  
the rocks, trying to catch some sun.  
It's half-cloudy. A flat grey light.*

PERCEVAL

*(to the baby)* This is the ocean.  
France is on the other side of it.

MERLIN

The future looks bright today. It looks  
a lot like the past, when we crawled  
out of the ocean's depths. We learned  
to walk, climb and build. We invented  
linear progress. The future looks like  
a reversal of that. The sea splashing  
against us, mute and indifferent.

PERCEVAL

Everyone's so stupid and mediocre.  
Deformed, superstitious, xenophobic folk.  
The English look like frost bitten potatoes.  
I hate everyone. But I love my baby. I  
read to the baby. I read about ancient  
Greece. White temples and black olives.  
The sea there is turquoise. Democracy  
was invented last week. They respect  
oracles, sophists, then philosophers, until  
they fall out of love with knowledge. The  
philosopher is offered a cup of poison.  
He takes it. Socrates walks around  
until his legs become heavy. When the  
poison reaches the heart he will be gone.  
Under Roman rule statues become more  
elaborate and expressive. Exaggerated  
drama takes the place of a previously  
cultivated mathematical balance. Season  
one of Big Brother starts. Culture  
studies become a thing. The romans are  
moral relativists living in grey elemental  
architecture, divorcing each other at Ikea.  
They're on Instagram while Nero burns

down speculative real estate markets.  
Soon we are here, crawling in ruins,  
fucking, hoping for a moment's relief,  
single-parenting. Everything is ash and  
dirt. We have magic. We have our rituals  
and our complex identities. We have  
relationship triangles and monophonic  
chants to distract us from ourselves. I  
need distraction because I am at a loss.  
I am completely alone. Yet, I have a  
child, and the future comes with her.

MERLIN

Air cannot freeze me.  
Fire cannot burn me.  
Water cannot drown me.  
Earth cannot bury me.

PERCEVAL

Air cannot freeze me.  
Fire cannot burn me.  
Water cannot drown me.  
Earth cannot bury me.

**End**



**Jaakko Pallasvuo** lives and works in Helsinki and Berlin. His work deals with hierarchies, feelings and social arrangements. Pallasvuo makes videos, ceramics, texts and images. In recent years, Pallasvuo's works have been exhibited at Kunsthalle St. Gallen, New Gallery, CAC Vilnius, 1646, The Goss-Michael Foundation, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, UCCA, Eyebeam and Future Gallery among others.

# The Artist, the Curator and the Caretaker

## VOICE 1 (MALE):

In 1969, American conceptual artist Douglas Huebler stated: “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more.” Referencing this sentiment in 2002, Nicolas Bourriaud elaborated that a new generation of ‘post-production’ artists were working towards ‘strategies of mixing and combining products’ following on from conceptual art’s dematerialisation of the work of art. He proposed that overproduction was no longer considered a problem, but had become a ‘cultural ecosystem’.

Considering the current climate of extreme overproduction perpetuated through globalisation, the internet, and social media, Boris Groys posits that “[t]he traditional relationship between producers and spectators as established by the mass culture of the twentieth century has been inverted. Whereas before, a chosen few produced images and texts for millions of readers and spectators, millions of producers now produce texts and images for a spectator who has little to no time to read or see them.”

In an age of accelerated overproduction, it was inevitable that positions would increasingly be created and appointed (or self-appointed) to manage, prioritise and promote the more important or relevant of products or content created, and to act as cultural gatekeepers of sorts (whether trusted or not) within organisations, communities, and specific interest groups. Such roles include that of the presenter, curator, editor, author and critic, whilst increasingly appearing today in the form of tastemakers such as bloggers, deejays, celebrities, and social media users.

## VOICE 2 (FEMALE):

When I decided to go back to the studio I described it to friends as a soft rebellion against my day job. It had been a number of years since I’d ‘transitioned’ into curatorial work, employed part time at an institution while managing other projects on the side. Sitting alone in a room all day working on an object is a good way to sabotage a career requiring social interaction, networks, and the currency of gossip. But a return to the studio suggested a return to exhib-

iting. If I felt like we'd reached peak curation, subjecting myself to the exhibition process as part of an even more saturated market seemed a counterintuitive means of escape.

He suggested a joke alternative: instead of applying for exhibitions and honing my CV, I could work in secret, building my legacy slowly, trusting in its value. And, after I'd died unrecognised for my contribution, this legacy could be discovered whole and untouched, and therefore transcendent, in a cupboard or under a bed by a janitor or similar. Someone who would confirm the value I had seen in it and take it upon themselves to become the custodian of my estate.

Although we laughed about it, we had concrete examples of this model's success. Ironically, considering his 'outsider' status we had learnt at art school about Henry Darger, janitor by day and author and illustrator of the 15-thousand-page *Story of the Vivian Girls* by night. More recently there had been Vivian Maier's masterful photographs of urban American that she produced around her day job as a nanny, which had been rescued from the backwaters of a thrift auction and plunged into the stream of history.

The real, undeniable lure of the idea made me uncomfortable. Perhaps he framed it as joke because we both knew enacting it sincerely would be impossible. I would be an insider craving the fictitious comfort of 'outsider' status, secure enough in my privilege to consider dropping out a choice. But perhaps the lure was not a pretend safe-zone for visionaries 'outside' the system, but the suggestion of other means by which value could be measured. The value of projects like Darger's and Maier's wasn't necessarily their contemporaneity, but by their function as an archive or the record they provided of an intimate and evolving subjectivity, informed by a similarly evolving sense of nowness but not necessarily judged according to it. It was the lure of value produced by personal satisfaction, growth, intellectual pursuit, by the slow and careful mastering of a craft rather than the public performance of it.

#### VOICE 1:

Likely related to this shift in the producer-audience relationship caused by overproduction, recent times have seen a dramatic increase in the popularity of curatorial practice in the contemporary art world, with new waves of independent curators and artists-as-curators appearing and with new models and theories of practice being developed. Recently, this phenomenon has been echoed in popular culture's appropriation of curatorial practices, or more specifically in its use and misuse of the terms 'curated' and 'curated by', primarily denoting selection or organisation of content and celebrity involvement. Combined, these two trajectories have significantly expanded and diluted the quality of this field, simultaneously highlighting the importance of curatorial quality and integrity whilst also rapidly approaching a point of curatorial saturation or exhaustion.

In competition with quality and integrity, the professional curator must often act as a mediator between artists, institutions, galleries, and the general public whilst implicated in various economic and political structures and restrictions. Such complications can lead to conflicts of interest – or what could be seen as bad curatorial behaviour – whereby something other than the art is placed in the way of the artist's intentions or the art itself, although this could ultimately be seen as a problem of perspective depending upon one's position and personal investment.

In such instances, problematic scenarios could include:

1. The curator as celebrity or brand, placed in a position prioritised over that of the artist or artists.
2. The curator in competition with the artist as author or producer of a work or works.
3. The curation of spectacle or blockbuster exhibitions at the detriment of quality and integrity.
4. Curatorial decisions that compromise the artist's intentions or outcomes, whether through misrepresentation, press and promotion, install decisions, or peripheral activities and programming; and any curatorial decisions otherwise made at the expense of the artist.

Again, the curator is often not responsible for such scenarios alone.

#### VOICE 2:

I found myself trapped between two clichés. Even if I did drop out and work in private, my return to making might be seen as compulsive behaviour – *I just can't help myself, I have to create*. I would be performing still in my absence, the romantic, creative calling of an artist driven by some higher power. I would confirm that what I had long insisted on describing as a profession was, as suspected, a leisure activity for which financial compensation was a bonus and not a necessity. An illustrator friend, not really a friend I suppose but called that, online, had posted a different joke recently. A mock inspirational-text was overlaid on an image of a painter at an easel: *figure out what you love and do it on nights and weekends for the rest of your life*. Or, I could continue to position myself, as an artist or as a curator or worse, as some kind of 'slashie', in an opportunity economy that viewed creativity as a natural resource driving economic prosperity, a kind of neo-liberal community service through which I could also manoeuvre my way towards success. Neither seemed to offer a way forward.

VOICE 2:

As an antithesis to the curator, one could consider the position of the custodian, caretaker, or janitor, which while quite closely linked in terms of language and etymology has departed significantly in role within the hierarchy of galleries and institutions. Originating from the Latin roots 'cura' and 'curare', literally 'care' and 'take care of', the term 'curator' suggests a position of care, concern and responsibility, and includes the roles of ecclesiastical pastors, the guardians of minors, and the keepers of sports grounds and botanical gardens. An update of Apple's Dictionary now includes 'a person who selects acts to perform at a music festival' as an example of a curator, along with 'a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection', echoing the recent addition of 'curated playlists' to iTunes and Apple Music.

As the popular definition of curatorial practice is expanded, curatorial authorship and factors other than artistic intent have also become more immediately visible in the exhibition space. As a result, the sense of custodial responsibility traditionally associated with the curator has diminished. Those responsible for the maintenance of the gallery and the artworks might now be those with the most custodial role, although their presence within the institution is usually invisible to the public. Working behind the scenes, art handlers, installation technicians and conservators protect and handle works, while janitorial staff care for and maintain the gallery environment and its contents, working to maintain the neutrality of the white cube and to provide patrons with the best possible experience of the artworks contained.

VOICE 2:

His joke had a punchline, a name suggestive of a manifesto: Janitorial Practice. This seemed to describe to us the regular and ongoing maintenance of an archive-like practice—tidying, editing, keeping it safe—but also to its end-game, holding out for the janitor's discovery rather than chasing the curator's studio visit. This kind of practice needed a custodial overseer because too many curators had abandoned those aspects of the practice in favour of staking claims on the present and future. Curatorial practice as we knew it seemed to produce disposability. After this project, after these artworks, the next, the next, the next.

In 1969, Mierle Laderman Ukeles did write a manifesto, for something she called Maintenance Art. Ukeles outlined two basic systems: Development—pure individual creation—and Maintenance, keeping the dust off pure individual creation. In an exhibition titled 'CARE', Ukeles would present maintenance as development. She would 'do maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art' in order to highlight discrepancies in value and to yield "clarity of issues." But now there seemed to be a problem with the use of elevation as a strategy. We couldn't trust visibility to confer status on labour, or even to clarify its terms and conditions. As artists and as curators we must now be vis-

ible and productive, competitively authorial, promotional, and new all the time. What else could we do to resist but recede?

In fiction, our professional invisibility would itself be a signifier of our true potential. In the lexicon of TV tropes, the name for a character whose low status grants them the ironic privilege of stealth, total access and the means to quietly triumph against the system is The Almighty Janitor. The metaphor is clear; professional success and personal value are not synonymous. But fiction has other motives and reality is obviously divorced from this ideal. Janitorial labour in the real-life workforce is considered to offer few opportunities for mobility, often performed by immigrant workers at low wages, or in the home by women who aren't paid at all. The salve to our own low and precarious incomes and the staggering debt of our Masters degrees is at least a golden dream. Upward mobility on a global scale, endless opportunity for those who are willing and able to capitalise on their individual potential, an example set by a gold-plated top-tier. But what motives do these fictions conceal?

VOICE 1:

In 2011, Anthony Huberman revised Fischli and Weiss's 1991 artwork *How to Work Better* to suggest a code of behavioural conduct in contemporary curating. Originally a found text appropriated by the artist duo themselves, Huberman titled his version of the ten-point list *How to Behave Better* and included in it new aphorisms such as "remember you don't know," "follow the life of an idea," "speak frankly," and "take your time." In his revision, Huberman outlines curatorial strategies that prioritise exploration, vulnerability, and slowness over explanation, rhetoric, and a febrile media cycle's demand for more. Underpinning each point in his argument is the necessity and ethics of care, and a call for curators and institutions to consider not just what they do, but how they behave and how their behaviour affects others.

In asking us to take care, Huberman recalls the custodial responsibility of the curator, although this duty of care is one that should apply across the entire spectrum of the production and exhibition of contemporary art: from the directors and boards of institutions through to marketing and PR to education officers and to artists. In this instance, custodial behavior could be thought of as anything that creates, maintains or prioritises the optimum conditions for the production and reception of artistic practice. In taking on this shared responsibility, we need to be more generous and selfless in order to maintain the art world's environment and its contents, and to place art practices first again over peripheral activities and potential conflicts.

VOICE 2:

What Janitorial Practice boiled down to, really, was the idea of accepting the role of the custodian or caretaker—for your own work or for the work of others. Being a caretaker requires re-thinking what kinds of labour are considered valuable and worthy of reward, and what

kinds of rewards are in themselves valuable. Art practice can be largely menial, even when transformed by intellectual effort meant to turn that labour into a critique of itself. Instead of indulging in that sleight of hand magic, an artist-caretaker might prioritise what that labour does for those who benefit immediately from it over how it participates in a broader context. This is another kind of sleight of hand but one that might at least have some redemptive effect. Curatorial caretaking might simply involve listening to an artist rather than coming to them with a thesis. Caretaking may, as Anthony Huberman describes, mean accepting smaller audiences and fields of play, as it requires acceptance of a more cyclical, ongoing and accumulative paradigm of work and achievement. But, the rewards of trading the rubric of quantity with quality, and mass broadcast for a more engaged and supportive community are clear. If caretaker roles are in societal terms placed lower on a hierarchy of labour, a system of reciprocal custodianship, where members of a community accept and value the shared responsibilities of care and maintenance, might offer a means by which to address and flatten that construction, itself indicative of biases used to excuse 'bad' economic and social behaviors. Miele Laderman Ukeles, who has been the artist in residence in the New York Sanitation department since 1977, knew this in 1969: The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

**Dan Bourke** is an artist based in Perth, Western Australia. Working between studio, curatorial and publishing practices: he has recently shown at Maxart, Museum of Natural Mystery, Fremantle Arts Centre, and Poetry Club; and currently runs Benchpress (a printing press) and Adult Contemporary (a project space) from his share-house in North Perth.

**Gemma Weston** is Curator of the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art, Australia's only specialist public collection of women's art, at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at the University of Western Australia. She also maintains an independent practice in curating, writing, and in 2015 held her first exhibition of artwork after a hiatus of three years at at Adult Contemporary in North Perth, Western Australia.

# notes from after, during, and before school

Notes starting from 09/29/2015, stretching back at fairly even intervals to before school – early 2014.

1. Small, folding shovels and sharp rusty knives line the “dry-bridge market” in Tbilisi. They are uniform, most likely part of some state-issued military kit. Trying to think of reasons for buying a miniature folding shovel, I imagine a performance where I dig myself a grave and lie in it. Satisfying, because all I want to do is lie down. I’m here for a show. The piece of text you are reading is a couple of days overdue, and I feel horrible for delaying my friends. Last time I checked, there was an ample six days until the deadline. And then, walking down the street, a curator told me that I would have to pay 456 AUD for accommodation that months earlier she told me would be free, and that I could also not expect my 500 AUD artist fee. With accommodation, this leaves me 956 AUD in the red. The curator is well known, in fact the head of a curatorial Ph.D. program in Australia. We have been arguing for days since, and I can’t decide whether to drop out of the exhibition. I’m embarrassed that this is still happening. I have never considered quitting the art world so strongly as I have since being in Tbilisi.

2. Bottle shaped debt. A temper, like rain. Wet pedestrians caught in the liquid stimulus—the desert, flying the flag or, shifting notion of home. A whole season of bad melons, flinching from infections huge air, “how do you like those apples?”

3. The media heaves opens like an exhaust pipe. The hybrids of our various lefts scrap around for a larger share of the tar-and-feather.

4. “USC has the largest University police force in the United States,” we were told at the orientation day, which cost \$80 to attend. During our year in school, police in America committed and were acquitted of numerous atrocities against black men. I’ll never forget walking with Fleurette in the Black Lives Matter protest on Figueroa Street—such an American street. Bodies together walked past USC, the Chevrolet dealership, Carls Jr, Fat-



burger, the Triple A insurance headquarters with its arched doors large enough to drive a tank through, the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall, the 10 Freeway and the Staples Center.

5. Making something conceptual to legitimize one's standing in the market

MAR-KET

MARCH-KETCHUP

KETCHUP MARCH

KETCHUP IN MARCH 2015

Often, I would catch an Uber home around 4am, and ask them to take me to the fast food shops on Figeuroa. This particular time in March I went to Carls Jr in a boozy haze. They closed the front of the shop and I tried to enter drive-thru on foot. They wouldn't serve me and repeatedly threatened to call the police. A nice man in a Pizza delivery van picked me up and decided to give me a lift through. I was very grateful and tipped him and thanked him repeatedly. I managed to eat most of my meal in the first 20 meters of the walk home, and I was left with my chips and coke by the time I reached "frat row," a street exclusively dedicated of fraternities and sororities. The fraternities were very geometric, and painted grey or blood-red and gold. Sororities were surprisingly similar to doll houses. I often made a point of doing something annoying on frat row. All my resentment for having to walk down it daily would charge into this drunken moment. This time, I walked up to TK—whatever it is—and mounted the small wall in front of the window. I recalled a moment earlier that day when I was with Nick Mangan at Greenblatt's, a waiter came and refilled our cokes, and Nick exclaimed "what, they just refill our cokes for free?" I responded, "a donation has been made on your behalf by the Iraq war." On the single line of bricks I fumbled the little ketchup satchels from Carls Jr open and wrote IRAQ on the street-side window of the frat. At the letter R, a security guard started yelling at me from across the street. I quickly finished and when I turned around on my little perch, I was looking down at one guard about 5 feet away and another one across the road behind him. I don't remember what they said but they looked like they meant business. I leapt from the wall, thinking that their authority was not enough to warrant any real fear, and ran down a lane. I heard them on their radios in the background, all of a sudden, as if out of a movie, a huge SUV pulled out of the street ahead and hurtled toward me. I was a rabbit in the headlights. I turned a corner and kept running at a little more than three quarter pace, not wanting to give them the compliment of a sprint. After about 70 meters I saw a carpark in my periphery to the right that I thought I could unexpectedly duck into the parallel street, and lose them. I leant into more of a sprint, did a fakey left, and then side-stepped into a turn right, only to head straight into another SUV coming at me from

the street I sought. Puffed, I stopped and waited for them all to surround me, gratefully accepting the demand that I sit on the curb. Five uni pigs frisked me all over, asking irrelevant details about my personal history and writing it down. I asked them each individually if they had ever applied to be real cops. They all had. At one point they started accusing me of using a permanent marker instead of ketchup, and I thought they might be setting me up. They kept threatening to call the real cops. After a long back and forth asking why I ran, they punished me by driving me back to the fraternity to wipe the ketchup off with napkins. I asked them what would happen if I fell off the wall and injured myself while I was cleaning, on their watch. They didn't say anything. They drove me home and I thanked them.

6. At some point in 2014, I realised I was being rewarded for behaving like the males that I detested.

7. I can engage in two types of shoptalk: one with staff, and one with customers. Shoptalk with staff is peppered with acronyms and oral shorthand, resulting in condensed and barely audible sentences that emerge from expressionless mouths. Shoptalk with customers is built on gratuitous positive body language, purposeful eyes and mouth, and polite turns of phrase, resulting in hundreds of courteous short narratives that also act as a measure of time, beginning with *good morning* and ending with *have a nice day*.

**George Egerton-Warburton** is an Australian artist living in Los Angeles. Egerton-Warburton's work often posits moments of personal potency within a wider political system. His work has been exhibited at institutions including the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (Melbourne), the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Gertrude Contemporary (Melbourne) and Artspace (Auckland).



