
A M A T E U R

#X/A

There is a terrific wall surrounding the ruling neoliberal elite, as impenetrable as Troy, and with an exclusion that is absolute. Desperation and lack of opportunity characterise the condition of the populace left outside — one that has largely come of age during the Era of Austerity (and who perhaps also remember the Age of Terror that preceded it).

The general idea of the Trojan Horse is that an individual or group presents itself as an entity sympathetic or supportive of some structure, but that in being accepted into that structure it fatally undermines it.

Faced with the very high probability of unemployment, poverty, debt, insecurity and scarcity, one can see why the idea of the Trojan Horse seems attractive: it leaves in tact the moral righteousness of the agent, while allowing them to effectively (and safely) buy into the status quo (or at the very least the lower classes of the elite). Practical applications limited — the dangers of the Trojan Horse strategy are so high that almost no adherents manage to get past the first stage.

In the act of Machiavellian manipulation, of disguise, of simulation the entity loses concentration on their subversive agenda. They become middle-aged, they preen and become proud of their place in the structure (the same one they previously sought to demolish), and with this their political radicality ossifies like their arthritic joints — in short, they become first comfortable and then paralysed.

What I am describing is not the “sell-out”, which is a different category of failure altogether (and which professes no radicality in any case). **The failed Trojan Horse continues to insist on their subversiveness even when it is painfully obvious they represent the established order.**

THE TROJAN HORSE

M O N A S T I C

#X/B

One claim often heard is that the presence of irony is enough to preserve the distinction of truth and simulation. Yes, they say, **I deployed a Trojan Horse for lulz, and now I'm #winning, but ironically.** This is the poorest defence, and the most dangerous conclusion — irony as it exists today is a massive generator of ambiguity about truth. It blends and blurs reality, and it allows the speaker to uphold the status quo while at any moment (if attacked) being able to defend themselves as just joking. It leaves statements in a simultaneous quantum state of both (or n/either) zero and one.

The absence of specificity is uncharacteristic of the actual Trojan Horse. From the moment the idea was conceived, through its careful development, construction and execution, the final victory was written into each moment. There was never a general desire, but only a precise goal. This is how we can discern the Trojan Horse from what will probably become the Sell-Out. Further, the metrics of that goal are vital: **what is the tangible product of your strategy? What do you hope to achieve?** If we follow the logic of late-capitalism (neoliberalism), unless an outcome can be measured it cannot have a value — therefore how is a Trojan Horse designed to unfold? What is its timescale, sphere of influence and audience? How can one tell if it has been successful? The absence of these parameters is a straight path to hell, since **it is worse to betray your beliefs than struggle honestly against an impossible condition.**

THE TROJAN HORSE

A M A T E U R

#X/C

We are used to discussing the “privatisation” of state resources: the rail network, the national grid, the military and the civic realm itself. But we very rarely consider what privatisation might mean for the home. If we shared an apartment, for example, and I “privatised” the kitchen, it would be a unilateral act intended to pursue my own self-investment to the exclusion of your interests. Privatisation means not sharing, which means not thinking beyond your self except **in order to generate a profit.**

The idea of the individual, and its inviolable existence, is unquestionable today, even if for the ancient Greeks and Romans there was no such concept. The effective “invention” of the individual occurs during the Enlightenment, and owes its origins to the rise of the scientific method, a realisation of humanity’s non-privileged position in the universe, and the consequent emergence of an anthropocentric cosmology. The individual was also a precondition for modern democracy; as such, it is largely the product of a reconfiguration of religious ideas about the “soul” into a secular, intellectual and politically autonomous indivisible voting unit.

This concept of the individual, at the end of a complex theological and political struggle, has finally been reconfigured yet again as a purely economic agent: rational, dumb and self-interested.

Under these conditions individualism becomes merely the illusion of diversity: the identity politics of infinite and marginal differences intended to dissimulate the mechanisms transforming us into a homogenised and standardised globalised population. The imperative toward a privatisation of the soul transfers not only agency, but also responsibility, from the collective to the individual. It encourages us to internalise and blame ourselves for our failures.

BEYOND THE SELF

M O N A S T I C

#X/D

The polarised interrelationship between privacy and the public sphere, between the individual and society, is being deconstructed. This is neither a techno-fad nor a temporary condition. **Parliament, airports, the city and its public squares all share the same spatial, architectural and civic qualities — where the profits of the largest transnational companies are aggregated from a billion micro-transactions — where the subject is scrutinised such that anonymity is impossible. The life of the individual already has almost no meaning beyond their own meagre economic activity.**

Accordingly, all the things we associate with individual subjectivity, most importantly “identity”, are illusions. Every category you use to define the limits of your self is an invention. This is not to say that the singular “body” does not exist. I am a unique organism. This condition of incomparability is not in any way related to the concept of individuality.

By insisting on the self, we continue to limit the possibilities of change in the world. **If we recognise that the twin conditions of perpetual crisis and perpetual debt that govern the present and our future are not at all unique to our individual situations, but totally generalised, we approach an understanding of humanity as only social animals engaged in barbaric conflict.**

Under late capitalism, and in the digital era, there are no meaningfully distinct identities. There are only economic metrics of the self. To even consider a collective position similar to that outlined above, we must violently reject individual definition.

Self-obsession is the single largest barrier to any meaningful autonomy.

BEYOND THE SELF

A M A T E U R

#X/E

If once the world around us represented the sublime horror of reality, with all its attendant existential crises, we could always seek refuge in those few cubic inches between our ears. Whenever we found ourselves trapped, forced or disciplined – entwined in the consequences of some bureaucratic or corporate machinism – the private domains of the mind soothed the soul and made our helplessness tolerable.

The imagination left us free to construct our own sense of self, a liberated and righteous superhuman, a floating spirit overcoming the everyday – an everyday that was at once banal and terrifying. The autonomy of the imagination produced a proliferation of interior worlds, each a swirling construction of hopes and aspirations, a blossoming psychedelic synthesis of dreams intersected by fragments of the recognisable.

But now those spaces have been inverted: we have internalised the great metaphysical questions (**Who am I? What should I do with my life? What will happen to me at death?**) thus precipitating a perpetual crisis of identity and purpose. Simultaneously, we have sent out into the world a wildly implausible simulation of ourselves, proliferating this fantasy self through a myriad of heavily-edited social media profiles. The audacity of hope is all around us; the fatalism of desperation pervades our waking hours.

This unnatural orgasm of the self (and selfie), this obscene climax of narcissism and ego, finds its root in a Freudian negation: the fear of one thing surfacing as its opposite. Negation describes why arrogance can mask insecurity, and why total control of our bodies, diets and desires (in the form of ever more elaborate allergies, elitist superfoods and farcical workout regimes) masks **the fear that we may no longer be in control of anything** (politics, the environment, sexuality, death).

NORMCORE IS A TRAP

M O N A S T I C

#X/F

But in this case, **the vain attempt to construct and reconstruct our own image, the insistence on the existence of the ego (“I think, I like, I want!”) masks the dissolution of the individual altogether.** We are no longer free-thinking, autonomous beings, but automatons: bundles of preferences and subjectivities pre-prepared for corporate analysis. We are poor collages of discrete data blocks, split souls (dividuals) ripe for cross-comparison and targeted niche products (presumably designed to drive us forward to the orgiastic utopianism of market saturation). **We cannot bear to be reminded of our genericism, which is also the source of our own self-exploitation.**

A popular evasive strategy to this condition is the pursuit of the hyperordinary. With monastic precision, **the individual eliminates all their identifiable outlying opinions – they conceal themselves in plain sight, at the very apex of the normative bell-curve, through the perpetual liturgy of ultrabanality.** However, invisibility should not be confused with resistance, and it is hardly surprising that **hardcore normativism has begun to morph into the violent logic of remorseless rationality.** Alas now, we cannot reject the inhumane questions the elite are asking of us (more work, personal responsibility and debt / less security, certainty and liberty). **The only available tactic seems to be to answer these unclean demands absurdly and emphatically, with pantomime grins, each of us adopting the mock sincerity and hilarious concern of ten million Diane Sawyers.**

NORMCORE IS A TRAP

A M A T E U R

#X/G

“Kitsch, using for raw material the debased simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates the new urban masses capacity for boredom. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. **Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money — not even their time.**”

In his seminal text *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Clement Greenberg (quoted above) describes the kitsch as ersatz culture — a kind of imitation art founded on the idea of abstracting artistic production into rule sets that can be easily duplicated. This foundation, he says, is inherently capitalist. Or more specifically, it is commercial: the kitsch is not only culture with mass-appeal, it is culture with the capacity to be infinitely mass-produced. By contrast, Greenberg posits the avant-garde as a way of resisting the simplification and reduction of intellectual content in art. While the kitsch is funded by the free market, the avant-garde is funded by the bourgeoisie — an arrangement which positions the avant-garde close to the powerhouse of social norms, and which also allows it to operate without commercial imperative. In other words, bourgeois avant-garde is not the problem it appears, since it is from within this haven that it can be most effective. It is also here that the avant-garde can preserve its aesthetic purity, since it is free from the degradation of standards of popular taste. This should not be a moral reflection on the poverty or ignorance of the masses, which is a facile attack from the position of privilege. However, it may be a moral reflection if framed by what Baudrillard calls the ethics of debt.

THE AVANT GARDE IS KITSCH

M O N A S T I C

#X/H

Consumerism has a critical feedback loop embedded into its modes of production, one which constantly drives **the future to be nothing else than a commercially more successful version of the past.** If one follows the annual catalogues of any company (from Prada to Ikea) one sees at work the iterative cleansing and remarketing of products based on their performance in the previous sales period. The result is **an avant-garde that confuses political reform with mass-media exposure, and social critique with “criticality”** — the dumb fallacy that building awareness of the mechanisms of domination turns the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation...

What I’m describing is the **voluntary collapse of the avant-garde into the kitsch by its total commodification as an asset class.** Today, the avant-garde is kitsch. There is no difference, and therefore there can be no distinction.

The absence of opposition to the mainstream, free-market, Late Capitalist, Neoliberal (or whatever you want to call it) can seem depressing. But if the avant-garde as a form of aesthetic resistance is dead, it simply means that **social change and political reform are today no longer aesthetic projects; and this presents a new possibility, Trojan Horse design.** The separation of form from function permits the operation of the form to distract from its hidden function. **Today, the avant-garde should wear a suit, drive a high-end European car, strategically sell out.**

THE AVANT GARDE IS KITSCH

A M A T E U R

#X/I

Ethics and aesthetics are one.
Wittgenstein, Tractatus 6.421

Brutalism blossomed in Britain at a moment when post-war social order was being radically redefined; as a result of the communal task of total war, the nation had been unified by the saturation of death and ultimate realization of the shared humanity of people. The scale of the devastation was vast, and Brutalism emerged as a tool of state-led reconstruction. Not surprisingly, the style is therefore associated with public housing and governmental buildings. **Formally, Brutalism's modular spaces manifested a social desire for a standardized society—cultural cohesion, shared values, and a fair quality of life for all.** The Brutalist citizen, therefore, has to be understood as an abstract egalitarian ideal, not as an individual lost in a microscopic concrete cave of some gargantuan building.

As Wittgenstein noted, values and formal qualities are similar because neither are inherent properties of the world. A thing can be no more intrinsically “beautiful” than an action can be “good”. **And just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so societal codes of morality are impermanent—imprinted briefly in the historical fabric of our public spaces.**

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS ARE ONE

M O N A S T I C

#X/J

Accordingly, the significance of a style's death, and its inevitable rebirth, very rarely have much to do with its aesthetic as it does the social ethic implicit in its forms. It was the rise of free-market neo-liberalism that spelled the death of Brutalism's form and its philosophical function. Neoliberalism rejected Brutalism, because, in order to operate, it had to visually justify a model of social inequality. Rawls' "difference principal" could never have been written in concrete—it took the hi-tech modernism of Foster's HSBC, or the sleek anonymity of the Bonaventure, to manifest the excitement and false dreams of trickle-down economics in architecture. The occidental rejection of Brutalism was primarily ideological, not stylistic.

Interestingly, Brutalism has made something of a comeback in recent years, attributable to a clichéd predictability that says recessions coincide with solidarity while booms correlate with individualism. The existential crisis of contemporary post-Crash Britain is the struggle to come to terms with the rampant fiscal immorality in previous decades. Part of that struggle is the rejection of its token architectural trope: the icon, witnessed by an army of (ironically) raw concrete stillborns in the deserts beyond Dubai.

Brutalism's renaissance corresponds to a certain social aspiration to recapture an idealized sense of civic solidarity, as it existed before 1979. While this aspiration can be dismissed as anachronistic and nostalgic, the return of Brutalism (as made evident in popular blogs posting and archiving an endless stream of historical images) is highly specific to our age. Passively subliminal, this imagery performs the very serious role of building a formal syntax to express the ethical zeitgeist currently consuming Western society.

A M A T E U R

#X/K

Over the last decade, the popularity of full-body spandex suits has risen substantially. Gradually, the more breathable nylon blends have become normalised, and enjoy almost universal acceptance as legitimate costumes. Known alternatively as “bodysocks” and “morphsuits” this form of clothing first came to prominence in Japan more than a decade ago under the name “zentai.”

Naturally, the anonymity afforded to the wearer has been a source of some controversy. **Like a kind of secular, sexualised burkha, the zentai has been banned from all airports, and anywhere else that individuation is necessary to uphold public order.**

This is precisely what makes them so popular in Japan, a nation famous for its sexual repression and rigid social hierarchy. **The zentai’s power to simultaneously expose the naked form while concealing the wearer’s identity is understood as a double liberation.** Because they cover the eyes and mouth, zentai make it hard to communicate; and all public activity is defined by speech (or the right to speech). **The zentai wearer becomes both a hyper-public and hyper-private figure. They radicalise the category of voluntary political invisibility.**

The possibility of this condition points to a more general situation: the conflation of traditional conceptions of the public and private. **In the era of #prism, of instinctive self-censorship, of heightened autodiscipline — as well as the accelerated deconstruction of the state and its common assets — what does the “public” mean?**

THE END OF THE PUBLIC

M O N A S T I C

#X/L

The general public, Hobbes suggests, is more than simply a population — and diametrically opposed to what is called the **“multitude,”** which describes a group of individuals, each of whom preserves their own self-interests and whose lack of formal organisation prevents them from articulating a specific opinion.

Not to be confused, the public domain is the realm of the commons: where information and property can be, or is, known or owned by anyone. Even if I only have a few Twitter followers, **the transferal of a private thought into a public message means it might be read by anyone, and therefore potentially by everyone.** This risk and indeterminacy constitutes the public domain.

The penetration of the public domain into our personal lives is mirrored by the dissolution of the private realm: **very probably our children will live in a world without privacy as we know it.**

Government now operates without substantial difference from any other “private sector” corporation, in that these too have come to resemble governmental bodies. **An authoritarian state like Russia and a totalitarian company like Apple actually share a lot of similarities — except that Apple is more efficient at world domination than Putin.** There is a serious case to be made for Google replacing Westminster as our principal provider of public amenities. We might have to give up privacy in order to get affordable mass transport, but probably **we will have to give up our privacy anyway and we might as well get something out of it.**

THE END OF THE PUBLIC

AMATEUR MONASTIC

#X/M



In 3D modelling programmes, all form initially appears the colour of ash. Onto this “default grey” any texture, consistency or material is then applied. In virtual space, all difference is an illusion. In real-time space, a new global economic order presents us with just the simulation of diversity: we are all united by an inescapable model lacking a dialectic dimension. And without any otherness, the subject collapses into itself.

AMATEUR MONASTIC

#X/N

We commit no fatal mistakes, just a string of banal ones culminating (coincidentally) in our death. With our finite energies we nonetheless endlessly reiterate, and thus reinforce, bad ideas. Ideology only exists as a performance, not any monolithic abstract objects.



If we can seriously critique the everyday (the commonplace, the cliché, the conventional) we can take some control over our being.

AMATEUR MONASTIC

#X/O



At the palace of Versailles there are no corridors: they weren't invented yet. Every room led to another, and no one had any privacy. The corridor is quite a simple space, just a hall with lots of doors. Yet only by it can every room be a terminus. From the corridor, one must always have a reason to enter a room. This circulation diagram was later extended to the city, such that in order to occupy any space you must now have an excuse: spending money.

AMATEUR MONASTIC

#X/P

The Trojan Horse is a strategy of resistance from within, whereby inconsistencies and weaknesses of a system are turned back onto themselves. All acts, even the smallest (adding a mane to the Horse), contribute to the apparently impossible downfall of a hegemonic order. Without specific metrics of success, the Horse is doomed. Sadly, failed Trojan Horses frequently continue to assert their subversiveness, even when they represent the established order.



AMATEUR MONASTIC

#X/Q

The only task of the architect is material. Today, parliament, airports, the city and its public squares all share the same spatial, architectural and civic qualities, in which the profits of the largest transnational companies are aggregated from a billion micro-transactions. Here, the subject is scrutinised to an extent that anonymity is impossible. The life of the individual already has almost no meaning beyond their own meagre economic activity.



AMATEUR MONASTIC

#X/R



All the things we associate with individual subjectivity (most importantly “identity”) are illusions. Every category we use to define the limits of the self is an invention. Self-obsession, counterintuitively, poses the single largest barrier to any meaningful autonomy. We must learn to reject, with some suspicion, any category of being. In the words of Baudrillard, “The world is basically a wonderful visual reportage. It is the commentary that is unbearable.”
