

# Towards a Theory of Institutional Rupture\*

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## *Argument 1.0: We Are All Ravenous, We Are All Voracious*

A hungry child will eat anything put before him. I have seen children eating wood cuttings, plastic wrappings, even grazing on grass. Our poverty as artists makes us ravenous, voracious. But we are all ravenous, we are all voracious.... hunger cannot be an excuse, a justification, an explanation for the sad roles we play: red-handed accomplices to the research, development, and genetic engineering of a single official history, not of our choosing and strictly against our own interests. We must channel that hunger to give shape and form to a powerful, wholly confrontational approach to art, in order to establish a critical purchase on the social order and question ideas of what counts as official history and realism. We must take part in the formation of a new *visceral realism*, and work towards a theory of institutional rupture.

## *Argument 1.1: We Suffer a Tyranny of the Imagination*

It is a long-held understanding that the space between imagination and commodities has grown imperceptible, one necessarily defined by the other, a perfect eclipse of historical meaning. We stand in the long shadow of the Bauhaus worldview, where the old academy lives on in corporatist institutional regimes which mandate definitions of creativity based on perpetual “invention” and relentless “innovation” within a given medium. Obviously, this false equivalence, that innovation necessarily means imagination, enables the corporatist institution’s slavishness to the production modes of late-stage multinational capitalism. The market demands perpetual, relentless innovation (or the illusion of it) in order to sustain perpetual, relentless market expansion. Corporate art institution’s reflect these modes of production and simulation, manufacturing the illusion of innovation in the arts to sustain its perpetual expansion of attendance numbers, status and budget, and corporate donors.

What place for aesthetics to stand against the American tide, its water dark with the exhaust of consumption? Shall we merely wade and splash about in its grey toxic water, waiting to mutate and shape-shift into so many iterations of Madison Avenue’s dream of America?

## *Argument 1.2: History is Full of Last Resorts*

History tells us, of course, that there have been scores of artists that have made revolutionary or utopian gestures, in an attempt to hint at possibilities outside

of this tyrannical paradigm. Its true we are not the first in the endeavor of developing a theory of institutional rupture, but we are entirely unconcerned with being “innovative” in the capitalist sense. We find that most of these noble artists merely nibbled around the edges of the problem, and were ultimately overwhelmed by the age of soundbite and rapid image burn. It is true that the machinery of late-stage multi-national capitalism (and its ability to simulate and finally to become our reality) has been complex, impermeable, and ubiquitous, but our predecessors failed because their efforts were too fragmented, too half-hearted, too unsustainable, and too naïve. The visceral realists will not make that same mistake.

*Argument 1.3: The Way Out Is The Way In.*

In the postmodern age, effective resistance to the art world’s systematic tyranny of the imagination requires a vision of visceral realism which rejects creativity as “innovation” and seeks out *authentic imagination*, a state of unfettered creative energy which can only be achieved through the active engagement of a theory of institutional rupture. Properly harnessed, *authentic imagination* will naturally lead to the activation and execution of systematic, strategic and combative campaigns to undermine the structural underpinnings of corporatist institutional logic in world of culture. We are not speaking about the symbolics or aesthetics of such campaigns, we care even less about the political efficacy of such campaigns to achieve overtly political ends. We deny the transformative potential of utopian “alternative spaces,” which only find legitimacy in their marginal positions in relationship to corporate institutions.

We are, however, deeply and fanatically fixated on the potential for strategies of confrontation and systemic crisis to create cultural spaces deep within the belly of corporatist institutions, where artists can negotiate and further an agenda of *authentic imagination*. Only artists who smuggle disaster and catastrophe into the corporate institutional constructs can exercise truly independent and powerful criticality of the existing social order through institutional rupture. This will not be achieved by innovations in design. This will not be achieved by “new painting.” This will not be achieved by social networking. This will be achieved the moment we realize it is time to *not* be polite. That you can not only touch the art, but tear it down off the wall. This is achieved when we realize that the way out of corporatist institutional logic is to batter our way in through their front door.

*Argument 1.4: Eat Yourself Out of House and Home*

We exhort the visceral realists to cannibalize art and its institutions. You must be insatiable, clenching your teeth, biting down on them and swallowing them whole. Turn the corporatist art institution itself into a site of true conflict and

catastrophe. Instigate an existential crisis. Strip the institution of its life-blood, peel back the veneer of its so-called legitimacy, put the cultural organization in a state of *bare life* until it finally imagines its own demise. Pull back the curtain and expose its messy, dark gastrointestinal workings. Culture is not unlike any other field of battle, it is always contested ground, and for now, the opposition outmatches us because of our reticence for confrontation, and because we choose wood chips and graze on grass. We must be prepared to destroy our reputations, to never work in this town again, to slash and burn our own crops, to eat our own children, to gnaw at our own arm until we achieve a state of *authentic imagination*.

*Argument 1.5: Convening The Dark Heart Seminars and Building a Nation of Visceral Realists*

In order to begin the development of *authentic imagination* in other visceral realists, we begin by convening a series of workshops we shall call **the Dark Heart Seminars**, which include a six-week course of study with the following essential syllabus, including:

the collected writings and poetry of Roberto Bolano (a study in the literary origins of visceral realism); *Guerrilla Warfare* by Che Guevara; an Afghani asymmetrical tactical manuals, circa 1972; Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (especially regarding the artist's role vs. the terrorist's role in cultural criticism and the power of historical thinking ; Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Hacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, especially how crisis creates a vacuum of norms and rules; Saul Lewinsky's *Rules for Radicals*; Samuel Beckett's writings and the Theater of the Absurd (especially how viewers supply their own responsive contexts); Antonin Artaud's writings on the Theater of Cruelty (especially regarding sensory onslaught; theory of invoking catharsis through dramatic hostility); Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (especially the essay on the acceptance of failed arguments as well as proven ones; "A point in space is a place for argument."); *The Anarchists Cookbook*; Jean Paul Baudrillard's *The Conspiracy of Art*; Maurice Blanchot's *Writing Disaster*; Walter Benjamin's *Criticism of Violence*; Tirdad Zohlgadr's *Softcore*; etc.

