

*O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!*

The Tempest (Act V)

Brave New World

Letter to Jemima Burrill

Hello Jemima,

You will, I hope, forgive me for taking so long before sending you this text. But there you are, it hadn't been on the agenda. Not that I'm someone particularly obsessed by agendas, and since I am my own agenda, I rather like to preserve as much free time and freedom space in my everyday life as the "pleasure principle" can grant me. To seize the fleeting opportunity invented by life, without it turning into base opportunism seems to me essential to feel alive. Enthusiasm is never on the agenda, it is instantaneous. And I had plenty of enthusiasm the day I entered the chaos of your artistic creation, fortunate as I was to be guided by your trustful yet forbearing presence. But the instant becomes diluted – and dilution is not to be indulged in – and thus life constantly reinvents the "principle of reality". Having given my word that I would get involved in your creation through a text, I obviously had to keep it. I had yet to determine its form and matter. After eliminating the scholarly approach, descriptive, didactic, analytical, explanatory of the aesthetic kind, like history of art, psychoanalytical gloss or sociological comment etc. with which, I must confess, I don't really feel at ease, it became clear to me that as far as matter was concerned I had to answer a very simple question: "What do these images tell me, and how do they enrich my mind?". All I had to do was to ride on the emotional and political feeling, with an aquatint and watercolor touch of rage as well as angry protest... To let myself loose supposed an adequate form; the letter was a timely form, intimate and personal, allowing digressions and honesty, like a first draft somewhat disjointed perhaps but throwing a clearer light on the subject.

However nothing is simple and simplicity is exactly like silence: it is difficult to reach... to compose... especially when one is faced with an exhibition like *Hunter and Gatherer*, similar to a train stopped on the track of creation which hides the energy of another passing at high speed through the hole it creates in space. It might as well be said that if this letter remains genuine after proof-reading, it has long lost its primitive spontaneity after a lot of reworking, deletions, erasures and misgivings which strips writing of its much needed healthy look.

It always sounds good to pretend that criticism is easy, but art is difficult. What nonsense! Art and criticism are of a different kind and cannot even complement each other. Whereas the former calls for the absolute, the latter induces relativism. Art convinces and demonstrate, criticism persuades and argues, art is spontaneous and intuitive thinking, criticism is reflection

and discursive thinking... they cannot be compared and may only be remotely associated, in a very remote way indeed... Art is only sustained by the way the world views it. And we are of the world and in the world, playing an active part, and it is through our view – no longer the artist's – that once out of the workshop, it can live its own life. A life which will be more or less rich depending on the density of its thought. No matter how relevant this view is, or its acuteness or the scope of its culture, the discoverer postures as a philosopher curious and naïve about things and facts. Philosophy is absence of power, it does not seek authority and never fits any explanatory system. It feeds on the excesses of the powers, it creates particular tools which it calls “concepts” to clarify, to throw light... to understand the world and thus carry out its radical creation. In Occident, for twenty-five centuries we have all been born philosophers... Like science, religion, politics, art is a power. It strives to change the world and allows itself to do so. Nothing will induce it to quit. In its unchecked race to assert its authority it may sometimes yield to the terrible and terrifying constraints imposed by other powers anxious to confine it within the limits of prestige, but only to bounce back and achieve independence with even more energy and extravagance. A ploy displayed by art as it throws itself into the game of the balance of power which the various powers at work establish between them.

In this pantheon of tyrants, politics is without a doubt the most formidable as its capacity of appropriation seems boundless. Far from worrying about it since “*only what is dead can be appropriated*”¹, art answers back, takes risks, in turn plunders and like Virgil's bee, enriched by this booty, tries to transform it... for itself, for glory, for its eyes only. Art is nobody's servant and what it gives by enriching the minds, it also takes back and incorporates in its greatness fertilized now by this thought which before was foreign to it. Jemima, dear henchman in the service of art, you take the risks required by your master engaging the political questions raised by the status of women in our societies. On the eve of your exhibition in Lyon, you cunningly yet provocatively maintained to me that your “research” remained, to quote you, “modest”... Well, I cannot help but smile... If “modest” means “unpretentious”, then I agree, since pretentiousness is closely related to pride and therefore cannot associate with modesty. In fact, remember what Ulysses had in store for Penelope's suitors eager to steal her company from him. However, paradoxical thinking teaches us that modesty hides ambition and the more or less proclaimed desire to surpass oneself. More precisely, since art is “*a machine that creates affect and percept*”² it cannot be “modest”. It is the reason why we may think that there is no such thing as good or bad art, there are only good or bad emotions.

Your Images speak about the existence of the woman folk, but existence is not life, it is the true life, the life which thinks and in turn submits, rebels, shapes itself into a conscience, and soars. You, British people, have a great expression to translate the force of existence: *To pull yourself together*... There is no complacency then in your statement which is part of a subversive and multifaceted project, from denunciation to protest, even to insurgency and barricades if necessary... which indeed may be the case... Your Images are weapons, and a weapon is never modest, it is appropriate, likely to change the political relations between the individuals. For the time being, I should say that your Images are Rimbaud-like, they want to “change life”. Whether they will do so is another story, but in any case you designed them to such an end. When I refer to images, I mean the Image with a capital “I”, of which the film director Jean-Luc Godard talks about when in 1990 he introduced his film, *Allemagne 90 année neuf zéro*. He thus enlightens us: “What do we call “image” nowadays? Let's see, the Russians have two words for image. They have “izobragenie” and “obraz”; the first means what the Americans call “picture” and we call “image”; the photographs that these ladies and gentlemen here are taking are not “Images”, of

course, they are “pictures”. Then there is this other more mysterious notion which comes from the Bible, Saint John, I think, who said: “The Image will come in the time of the Resurrection”, meaning that on the cross there is no Image. Jesus on the cross is a “picture”. A remarkable thought well worth the digression in this letter which, by the way, has enough of it... but hey, isn't a letter meant to get acquainted?

The title of the exhibition, *Hunter and Gatherer*, in which your Images are shown, ironically suggests a period where matriarchy, literally the governance by women, had all the rights... No one doubts that the hunter gatherer is not only the housewife you stage, but also you yourself, Jemima Burrill, visual artist turning into an archeologist to unearth the attributes of this governance. The series *Myths and Tales*, *3 Stories Up*, *Foul Bite*, and *Another Day Like Yesterday*, show with satire, mockery and derision, then humour and acumen, that we are paradoxically here in a politically incorrect fiction: that is non compliant. The denunciation having reached its limit, the warning lights no longer flash, the signal moves from the purple of rage to the black of revolt, undermining the certainties which used to reassure us in the past, that is yesterday, in carefree imaginary constructs, in the very heart of the “Glorious Thirty”, the era of twist and stiletto heels. The irresponsibility of blessed generations throwing themselves into the lion's den. The irresponsibility of legions of housewives cheerfully filling their baskets, wrapped in the wishy-washy atonal muzak in what would soon become “superstores”. These phoney heroines have been under assaults. At first, a preliminary attack, a sort of formatting and numbing of the brain with the good old “advert”, soon to become obsolete, which made way for “the hidden persuaders”³, another intoxication paving the path for the latest fad, the sacrosanct “communication”, the supreme form of internalization through the image. A new idea drives out the old, and what passes for a “rebirth” is nothing but a recurrent novelty, a fashion which necessarily turns out to be unfashionable. Lest he should be taken for a has-been, no son-of-advertising would allow for a sprightly housewife, well dressed and well heeled, with well-groomed nails, a congenial red lipsticked smile on her face, show her well-kept and tidy home ready to welcome him when he comes back from a hard, inevitably hard, day at work... This image of a woman clinging to the suggested tormenting desire of the male: a peaceful home, is considered as too strongly connoted regarding the hierarchy man / woman by the marketing people. Too much because hierarchy must be present, but with a hint of a bitter-sweet taste, enough to keep people below the point of revolt. If women are fated to be eternally subjected housewives, the image must not show it.

Phase 1: The pure and simple removal of the female presence and a return to the good old catalogue of Debenhams or John Lewis where, page after page, refrigerators, washing machines etc. are listed. All the objects manufactured and obscenely proposed by capitalist engineering will now be classified under headings in a minimal form of staging. Since the consumer society is now taken for granted and worshipped, why try and convince people of its glory and its benefits! Since we already belong to the “Brave New World”, and since the image has other fish to fry, it is now time to move on to phase 2.

In the solarized photograph of the housewife full of energy, saddled with a sad and lifeless companion, the contrast didn't look too good and bordered the ridiculous. Wouldn't it be smarter then to have these objects presented by men, real men, in blouses or even better in overalls, like models, performing monkeys turned into technicians for the occasion? If a man must get involved in the utilitarian domestic world he must do so through technology, a field women naturally do not understand anything about; “Come on guys, put on your overalls!” Quite a big undertaking... you will admit, cooked up by communication. Quite frankly, I'll

grant you, they are treating us like fools (it's an understatement). Having said that, if the Image the woman must disappear, it can only be for a short time, to think about the best possible time and place to reintroduce it. The purpose is to invent a spectacular representation the aim of which is to constantly convey messages to be internalized. Concerned with the remains of a remote age, the world of "*women, women on glossy paper*"⁴ which once offered an appropriate erotico-ideological fantasy, communication will foreground a type of individual as the object of a desire hopelessly focused on credit bulimia. Thus, nowadays and for a long time to come - for the agony of women is proportional to Death which lasts for a long time - a creature is unveiled (both literally and figuratively) with a lingering scent of *Parfum de femme*, shapely, full-bodied, *The New Model* as it were, bottoms-up and giggling on a sofa (or elsewhere, it doesn't matter). At first glance, if the sofa is still a sofa, it is not the object of desire. But the obvious sexual content, however abject it may be, conveyed by these "pictures" is indeed of secondary interest. Before any prospection, "communication" asks this question: "Can anyone in the 20th century desire an object, however stylish it might be, and ready to receive – for such was its function for decades – a huge number of sticky, greasy, ill-smelling, and limp arses sucking on TV and chocolate ice-cream? At any rate something which smells both of Mac Donald and unwashed bed sheets?" Quite a metaphysical question, Jemima... But because there are too many arses which think that watching TV is a combat sport, our marketing specialists' answer is all the more trivial: "Let's flog this bloody sofa to them at any cost!"... in which suddenly appears an unexpected, totally unbiased and dissolute vamp inviting the male or female voyeur to join her there so they may internalize together the fact that with such a magic sofa everything is possible, even the wildest dreams. Such is what this far-fetched staging means with its surfeit of misleading gimmicks, warming up the subliminal messages which settle in our sheep's brains without warning, occupying the maximum space.

Sodding capitalism, shitty magazine paper tiger, you are hard to uproot, but we'll get you in the end... arsewipe!

Dear Jemima, you and I have known for a long time that occidental societies – not to mention others – wallowing in the ideals set by Human rights, dehumanize women, taxing her with infamy harassing her with infamy, scorn and disgrace. Her commodification is an established fact, either as trophy wife acting as a foil to men's good taste, or as skivvy wife evincing the subjection of the slave to the master, or as surrogate wife as the material evidence that "*your body is a battle ground*"⁵. The exhibition *Hunter and Gatherer* does not mean to repeat Simone de Beauvoir's accomplishments nor those of the "suffragettes" or the women's movement of the 70s, or the present day "femen" which have for several generations ennobled the revolt of women in all human societies. We take these achievements for granted. The exhibition *Hunter and Gatherer* complements them as it displaces criticism and brings other premises into play, investigating other perspectives, delving into other points of view buried in the very depth of the human soul, the same which Etienne de la Boétie unveiled in a beautiful text⁶ which can be summed up in one of its sentences: "*They are only great because we are on our knees*". The underlying question in your exhibition concerns internalization. Brainwashing producing a confused jumble, a spell which gets to the core of our being in order to stop us from thinking... like an order. What makes us submit to this despotic capacity of internalization? The coziness provided by the absence of thought no doubt, for thinking is an exhausting process! By urging us to think, *Hunter and Gatherer* invites us to close our ears to the siren song, to resist the inertia of the present which induces us to accept what is there because it is there.

The long perseverance of women to recover some of the nobility and honour of the “second sex” in the days of the hunter-gatherers. By nobility I do not mean that which is granted by the Prince’s letters patent, jealously transmitted like a treasure and which only contains violence, barbarism, plundering, oppression and inequality. I mean the nobility acquired through some action, nontransferable because it is unique. That nobility opens a Promethean future to Mankind. By honour I do not mean that which verges on distinction, reputation or fame, and is shown off to our peers out of a thirst for consideration or even recognition. I mean the honour which urges our hearts and lucid minds to challenge the prevailing ideology. That honour which states that it is not enough to risk losing everything in order to win – for then you only get the withered laurels of heroism – but that honour which considers and transcends its own defeat : “Equality or death!”

In the ancient city of Athens, women did not have the right of vote, but as they represented “half of heaven”⁷, they had more than that: the power to set up direct democracy at home, in the private sphere,. All married citizen present at Heliaia⁸ could do nothing but vote according to their wish or else he would have to face the anger of his untamed shrew at home... Twenty-five centuries later, the sweet citizen shrew that you stage seems lost, overwhelmed by everyday life, the scale of repetitive work, over-excited children, the well-ordered arsenal at hand lonely waiting for her decision. The Image of the young woman with such never-ending hair that one could be hanged with it (Raiponce in *Myths and Tales*) is quite emblematic. The false relaxation on a chair, looking vainly in the mirror for an invigorating portrait of herself watched by a collapsed lover who, we can plainly feel, will shortly start pestering her, such are the signs of weariness and dejection.... Then how can one still be attractive in these conditions?

With *Hunter and Gatherer*, Jemima, you are putting us in the position of the men in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. Your creation presents itself like a reality which in a flash of lightning becomes appearance, thus questioning the very concept of reality. These images call for reflection. Reflection, they say is a repeated flection. It implies bending, twisting, break down the simple opinion, the common thought which constantly pervades our minds. *Hunter and Gatherer* proceeds by dramatic turns meant to maintain our thought process in a wakeful mode and to give warning as to the fact that the worse is yet to come;... For now, your housewife goes to war with her apron and her rubber gloves for armour and gauntlet, armed with her cake slice, her nut cracker, her rolling pin et her ... dildo. A pitiful artillery you will admit, but the Matis-like figure of the body in weightless state, in working choreography, gradually draws a space of freedom, like in the satire on “modern times” manners. The Chaplin-like British humour with its bitter mockery is at work, and the rebellion against what is really shown, alienation, swells behind the spectator’s smirk. Alienation, that monstrous and utterly crazy thing nestling warmly within us and which is the end of us. Don’t be mistaken, these Images are neither funny nor hilarious, nor burlesque, they are “energizing”. You put them on purpose in the four corners of the art gallery like some time bombs. They indicate that we are not attending a gala dinner where celebrities meet and congratulate each other with pats on the back in connivance, with appropriate loud guffaws. These evenings where little turds of both sexes in Sunday best take on fake casual poses through which unbending minds transpire, dummies with the haggard faces of sad killers, red-faced puffy sexagenarians on the verge of having an apoplectic fit. All these cocktail parties where all the flashy objects are crowned as symbols of belonging, here in the salons of “Her Gracious Majesty” or of the “Res Publica” and thus all is said... “It is finished!... By chance, “Man never bathes twice in the same river”⁹ and the nomadism of the hunter-gatherer has been

firmly planted in the mental structures of Man since the beginning of Mankind. We are their heirs. These men have been watching and have set on a silent and determined march for thousands of years, encountering proud and powerful moments of rich autonomy, then adverse set-backs to hideous heteronomy. *They* know that the outcome is never certain... they are seasoned. And the posturing of a handful of individuals thirsting after a power they think they have legitimately acquired will not stop them. They are there, lurking in our collective sub-consciousness... lying in wait.

We are going to see how complex it is to think when faced with suggestive rather than forceful Images, in other words, food for thought rather than propaganda puke. In a sub chapter of your exhibition, entitled *The Children have gone*, you invite the spectator to visit and take stock of a dilapidated library. However, the building is not vacant in the sense that it is deprived of its original function, but in the sense that it is deprived of *affectus*, of feeling, emotion and life. *The Children have gone* and the place is no longer filled with their words, their attitudes, their serious and curious lemur looks which is their trademark. Only a few traces of their passage reveal what must have been its maintenance, their will to maintain it in a perhaps disordered yet permanent functioning state so that it might be pervaded by their children's thoughts. Disheartened, they left and they are missed. What power could have put them under siege and forced them to leave taking with them a chestful of laughter and games, of tears and dreams? Only the gaping hole of their absence remains, and the fear of being abandoned. Dear hostages of this pseudo-democratic society, I like to think that you are not far, but very near with the promise of a salubrious insurrection, not to avenge our failure to prevail – for this you will have to forgive us, dear free children of Maybelone – but to help us build a utopia of equality strong as steel, which is within our reach but we dare not grasp.

More than the simple coverage on the dilapidated state of a town building to denounce wastage on the part of someone, what matters here is to point out what is missing, what has been lost. Following a few scant clues indicating a rushed departure, such as a book, a photograph, a coat hanger, a cave mural reminding us of the celtic origins of the former tenants, the voyeuristic camera lens carries out its investigation and thanks to the artist's desire, because this is how you want it, Jemima, the objects, for the most part functional, are replete with humanity. *The Children have gone* indeed, but can't you smell the aroma of their presence infringing on this dereliction? Of course, the aroma is more tenuous than a memory, but it is there... Low and high relief, it is an engraver's work that you give us here Jemima. First the high relief of reviewing the situation, what is left of it that we can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, followed by the low relief of aesthetics in the etymological and fundamental meaning of what we perceive with our senses. Then we immediately return to the high relief of criticism, the utmost form of anaesthetized aesthetics, deprived of its senses, set in motion by the cortex against opinion, mainstream culture, brainwashing and conformism, of the sixth sense, of the thought process that reaches the core of the unspeakable truth which can neither be described nor painted, that no camera lens can capture, that transcends the clue and opens the art work through a crack in the chaos of the world. Now this appearance, what appeared to be once the children had gone, this dereliction, this desertion, was in fact hiding something else: the political will to come back... for they will come back... and nothing will ever be the same...

Didn't they prepare this come back, Jemima, one spring morning when they left on the worn doormat of your threshold part of this chest they had hastily taken away with them? Magnificent archives, unique present enclosing their fear and their courage. Why did they choose you? Why Rimbaud, that fifteen year-old brat and not me? Why Bacon, that

homosexual Irishman, and a drunkard to boot, thus a weirdo three times over – according to some vile narrow-minded people – and not me? Now, there is a real mystery as secret as a complex polysemic myth... Terrible children of Maybelone who know... everything. Whatever the case may be, it was a godsend to you and a pleasure to meet the little conceptual characters of your future series *Myth and tales*... You can thank them for this. From these treasures, two engravings attract my attention: *Eat or to be eaten* 1 and 2.

I will again indulge in the delights of interpretation since your anthropology gives way to your fertile imagination and thus incites me to it. The presence of the hunter-gatherers is obvious, inscribed in the engravings. Various objects: wicker baskets, iron receptacles, arrows, axes, tomahawks, big earthenware cauldron heated by a primitive fire from which scent and smoke mingle, all this on a legendary cannibalism background joining in the feast. To you, and this goes without saying, it means an age-old cannibalism which has nothing to do with what we would now call “murderous madness” or “frenzied violence inscribed in our genes”. Your cannibalism springs from our primitive men as an imaginary form on which part of the societal is founded; one of their institutions which ensures cohesiveness, as an integral part of their cult and culture. The hunter-gatherer is not a lazy man. He knows that his environment is hostile – “plenty” does not imply “heavenly”. If occasionally he has to eat one of his own or his enemy for nutrition purposes, he does it reluctantly, urged by his survival instinct. He will choose a form of cannibalism – and here I’m trying to be as provocative as you are – measured against the creation of the social link. Having said that, it seems to me that, in those two plates, dream tries to steal the substantial amount of space taken up by reality. With a delicate play on shadows and lights, they appear to be interlocked; reality always on the left-hand side, “underlined” by the white blank edge of the paper, dream on the right-hand side shaded by your skill. In both spaces the characters are either lit or shadowed to foreground the forms which move around, with the ultimate aesthetic aim to make the work easier to read.

What does version 1 tell us? On the side of reality, a naked young woman with a ewe’s head is sitting at a table dressed for four residents of a monogamous family. Four individuals, which is statistically few and deficient for the system. The young woman – we might as well say it – Jemima – will have to make a serious effort to increase the potential exploitation of her family by the system. Indeed she doesn’t seem very happy about it in the light of the colossal problems that having other children will raise as far as her wish for liberation is concerned. In short, the intensity of the class struggle may be stepped up. It had to be said. Finally, the distance between “her” and “him” sitting at that table the perspective of which loses itself into the margin of the engraving, suggests a loose conjugal bond which questions the firmness of the connivance and affection which link “her” to “him”. And what about the two children? They are only separated by the short width of the table, and we can speculate on the kicks and the numerous rows punctuated by shouts and cries. Mealtime is full of promises, all the more so as they are both close enough to be slapped on the cheeks. Two from the north, “slap”! smack”! And two from the south, “smack”! “slap”! It is not even necessary to use the back of the hand, parents, it is well-known, have two hands! Certainly for these two kids, the meal is not going to be fun! So much for the harshly lit reality of the scene-to-come, for happily “she” is still on her own and, not knowing how to answer the question “What can I do?”, she can escape in the liberating dream from her housebound wife condition. Let there be no mistake, her “dream wolf” who is about to knock at her door is neither her lover, nor “he”, her companion disguised as a wolf from the steppes on top of it; “she” knows that “he” does not fear ridicule, but still... although with “him” anything can happen... no, surely, it can’t be “he”! “*She*” is the “dream wolf”... “*She*” has eaten the wolf,

or “she” has been eaten by the wolf, it does not matter since in the tale Red Riding Hood and the wolf share the same blood, the blood of those who do not know fear. A crucial meeting between “her” and “her”, between internalization and liberation.

What does version 2 tell us? On the side of reality, a house, a welcoming home, well heated, jam-packed and chock-a-block with candies, cakes, and all sorts of sweets. But here is the rub for this abundance of goods reveals an “*unsettling strangeness*”¹⁰, some “*disquiet in civilization*”¹¹, or better still “*the future of an illusion*”¹². Paradoxically, this dwelling so filled that it overflows makes us feel the emptiness. This engraving shows the paradox of mystifying consumer societies which far from being “societies of plenty” since they are unable to redistribute wealth, are in fact “societies of scarcity” ruled by the fear of shortage... Fortunately there is the dream... “a good little girl” her hair in a band with what could very well be Indian feather, wonders melancholically, leaning against the huge body of a very young reclining woman. “She”, our heroine, has with difficulty dragged this body out of that space which contains the reality that killed her. Murdered by an overdose of sweets, hence her swollen belly with putrefaction to come, she is lying, absent in the dream space. We know where she comes from, but we do not know who she is; but as you invite us, Jemima, to a cannibal meal, it won’t take long before we discover her identity. Am I hot or cold if I tell you that it is our little Indian’s mother? Good gracious, Jemima, to eat one’s mother... Mummy! Dr. Freud and his Oedipus complex had better watch out, Dr. Burrill is coming... Too simplistic, I thought so, Jemima... Too simplistic for a riddle worthy of Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie... Let’s see... The corpse of a very young woman who still bears the marks of childhood: a round face, pigtails, well-cut coat, small comfortable “moon boots”, of course it’s “she”, our heroine. “Elementary my dear Watson!” “She” is sad to have to eat “her” for better the devil we know than the devil we don’t know; such is the price to pay before any quest for autonomy. Sad yes, but not discouraged by your challenge, Jemima, for really you didn’t make it easy for her when you put on shoes and clothes on this double that “she” was to become... But “she” is listening to you: “when you gotta go, you gotta go!” Once more, a crucial meeting between “her” and “her”.

It is always dream or delirium which penetrates reality forcing it to dream, for reality is never a completely closed system. The system is cracked, and it is through those cracks, which may become real gaps, that the winds of liberty can blow as so many calls of the forest to these hunters-gatherer... the dream world, radical creation.

From the beginning of *Hunter and Gatherer*, Jemima, you have carefully, didactically prepared the spectator to expect the worse. Moving from surprises to surprises, he has got used to this succession of dramatic turns and, reassured, he can now comfortably sit in front of this television set in this quiet place to view your video entitled: *The New Model*. He is ready, the armchair is soft and the place has the pleasant smell of these women’s perfumes which makes you want to follow them in the street... Nothing bad can happen in this room which, for all intent and purposes, looks like home where only a glass of wine, beer or whisky would be missing. Ready to enjoy the last phase of this cultural and entertaining evening, he calmly and trustingly presses the play button of the remote control... Too late. For seven minutes he will be subjected to a series of electroshocks shaking up his mind and forcing him to answer questions as sharp as the point of a scalpel: “Now then, this is what you’re thinking? This is what you want?”. Humour has reached its limits; the sharpness of the content, its sourness are such that everything which had seemed simple easy in the previous works, thus flattering the spectator’s ego – for at last he had found a form of contemporary art to suit him, which he could understand – has changed gears: the die is cast... He had so much

enjoyed the comical positions of these bodies! He had so much relished the hilarious catalogue emblem, in a neat line, standing at attention like little soldiers, masterly carved if you please, in the engraving copper bowl! He has looked so closely at them that he ruined his eyes! And the so clever lovely granny's tales! And the collages! Ah, those so neatly done collages, made of fine cloth elegantly crisscrossed, foregrounding the utensils like coats of arms, signs of belonging to the sacrosanct housewife family! Oh! The magnificent choreographies and signs which compose a skilful and soothing artistic creation! ... Everything that could suggest to the visitor that this exhibition was fun and that well, he was in good company, eventually blows up in his face. In his face, like something ready-made concealing a lightning thought melting the aesthetic discourse and leaving the docile and benevolent spectator with the sour taste of ashes followed by a forced laughter. He dimly hears the small explosions in the other rooms revealing the true nature of these Images now exposed in the video. He has just felt all at once the disorder of creation/destruction, the subtle questioning touch of the increment borer hammer, the destruction prior to any creation/construction. Idols are smashed and scattered at the speed of unsubstantial values... they were mere window-dressing. Here is force of art shattering the arrogance of "Entertainment".

I wouldn't be surprised if you had been foraging around Aldous Huxley's works and came back with a booty which must be defended tooth and nail. *Brave New World*, a philosophical prospective novel has nourished Occidental thought since 1931 and is, to my mind, one of the best inspirations for all those who go through life in the "resisting mode". It has no equal apart from Orwell's *1984* – yet another British author! But whereas the latter deals with the alienation of individuals immersed in a coercive totalitarian society, that is to say constraining and repressive, Huxley speaks about a highly hierarchical society yet a non-coercive one. Its heteronomy has reached a climax as all individuals are subjected to machines, institutions and a fistful of rulers who are no longer elected, but co-opted. In this society, totalitarianism is expressed in the double internalization, on the one hand of the hierarchy as the unique supreme form of organization, and on the other hand of the place and the part played by individuals in this hierarchy, in other words the condition assigned to them. As for those who, from some unlikely divergence, resist this world of clones, they are simply landed on the islands where they can pursue their own activities, however subversive, without being watched and without restriction. They of course, represent an elite. The characters of *New Model* could very well be among the "existing" populations in *Brave New World*, confined as they are to repetitive tasks, robotized, scarcely differentiated, unhealthy and uneventful. The totalitarianism of Huxley's fable is in many ways similar to the one adopted by our "democracies" since the second world war with their mind-boggling control of techno structure, their genetic research for less than acceptable purposes, their encoding of educational institutions, their monitoring of individuals adapted to the socio-political strata they belong to, etc. Certainly, there still exist some remains of the repressive societies; prison, psychiatric hospitals, the severe criminalizing of individuals, the invasion of public and private sphere by the police, but these are only the last stand of a society already on the wane. The future belongs to an internalized order so that it will no longer be necessary to defend it with any kind of repression. About all these issues your video draws up a depressing picture. How can this *New Model* exit this alienating spiral which maintains him in the state of victim whose responsibility has been taken away? However low the odds he may still do it but only if he realizes that he is himself largely responsible for this demeaning condition.

The first image is intriguing. Generally, when the camera focuses on the boot of a car it doesn't bode well. "What corpse is going to jump out of this Pandora box?" Are we following

the convention of a B-thriller or are we in the grim and debatable reality of the Aldo Moro affair? ... Nothing of the sort, since a flesh and blood young woman alive and kicking comes out of it. Suddenly, guided by the very title of the video, we think about a presentational device, of which the fashion world is so good at for clothes by a model. Shot after shot the camera lingers on the red shoes, a floral print dress, a pretty laced apron, a cheap necklace, bright yellow rubber gloves, and outlines what could well be the true identity of this character quickly heading towards a carwash. The stance is lively but the face is tired, full of the weariness of someone in need of a good restorative sleep, or some “relooking”.

The efficiency of the 7th art, to which this video rightly belongs, comes from the fact that it creates Images meant to validate or invalidate a discourse which is political in its immediacy. For seven minutes the spectator is faced with a multitude of perspectives that only the camera can offer. In real life, we never take in more than a limited point of view. However the cinema, thanks to the magic of the camera and editing, offers an up to now unthinkable number thus allowing us a quicker and deeper understanding. Yours, Jemima, are traditional, well-tried methods: wide shots, close ups, travelling, bird's eye views and low-angle shots, etc. their aim being to divide the “instant” and multiply it into “instant moves” coming from all directions to focus on the plane of the screen. As an auteur cinema enthusiast I utterly dislike subtitled original versions because reading the text eats into the Image. When I look at an Antonioni film, I prefer to sacrifice the musical tone of that beautiful Italian language to remain alert to the staging of the Image this gifted film director tenders at such a hectic pace. The Image is the language which conveys conceptual characters, the 300SL Mercedes, the car wash, the *New Model*, the workmen, etc. which will no longer be, as we shall understand later, what they were supposed to represent at first. My focus, to use a videographer's term, was necessary, I think, because I can only analyse the political matter/discourse in relation to its video form/image. Luckily for me, the *New Model* is a story without words, therefore no subtitles!

Let's accelerate the movement of the Images; we are dealing with a “relooking” which implies that it is neither a woman, nor a model, nor a housewife, but a “thing” which for the occasion has taken on the appearance of Jemima Burrill, a conceptual character: an artist's creature. From then on we are going to witness the character's ordeal, go along with it on “the way of the cross” going through the carwash space. It now mechanically puts itself into the hands of other creatures dedicated to their job, not male creatures – for conceptual characters are sexless – but machines performing deeply internalized functions without any qualms. In *The New Model* all the characters are perfectly equal as far as alienation is concerned. Slaves who are deprived of liberty are equals, aren't they? *The New Model* and its companions in misfortune do not think and do not feel anything, thus their vegetative lives make it impossible for them to imagine they might question a condition over which they have no control, and so they are not equipped for any possible rebellion. They are no longer under “influence”, that of “work” which society wields on us all.

It is a fact that in our “liberal” societies one must always be active, moving on, occupied and never tired. It is constantly drummed into our heads that only the weak know exhaustion, only cowards think about ending their lives, and if they do not fear death, well then, let them die! Twice if they commit suicide! Mainstream culture, Jemima, sees suicide as a collateral damage in a society where the “weak” are drained by the “strong”. But since it would be shrewd to salvage some of these suicides, another sanctimonious guilt-laden discourse arises spreading the idea/threat that it is better to live as a slave than to die as a free man. Life being essentially “sacred”, it is every Man's duty to think about those who remain; family, friends,

colleagues, boss and above all bank manager... In short, about all those who think for us... against us. How abject!

Jemima, you seem to be skeptical... Then here is a quadratic equation: “Do you think that *The New Model*, can engage in any struggle, given its beyond-the-nervous-breakdown state? Do you think that becoming aware of its pitiful “existence” through God knows what miracle, it could wish to end it all? In fact, Jemima, I already know your answer; for far from wanting to throw in the towel, you give your *New Model* another chance. You are right for as we saw, the systems we are being locked in are not watertight, “*they leak from all sides*”¹³. Who would have bet on the implosion of the Soviet bloc a few days before it happened, or the amazing cascading uprisings of the Arab World? History can accelerate at great speed in all directions, including the most unexpected... *The New Model* is here, basking in the sun with its arms outstretched, it seems to have a new lease of life, a resurrection. But this Christic vision is short-lived for with an ultimate dramatic turn which you perfectly work out, the reality of the laced apron and the rubber gloves catches up with it... back to square one where the open car boot of the Mercedes is waiting for it.

Thinking is hard, *New Model*, and Man being down here the only being capable of thinking, you have no choice. You no longer have any choice since you creator, your dear Jemima, gave you back – not without some provocation, I grant you – this infinite part of humanity you so much need to make the jump, arm yourself with courage, *New Model*, time has come. You have felt this fleeting happiness to resist, your smile, your sparkling and inquiring eyes, even your dismay are witnesses to this and no one, I repeat no one, saw you go back into the boot/coffin of the car. Henceforth, *New Model*, you are the long patience of the woman folk, the future is yours... You’re going to lit up the screen.

That’s it, Jemima, that’s what I wanted to tell you, thank you for this exhibition which helped me sort out my thoughts and, let’s be honest, to create in my own way. This letter is yours, so is its translation. Use them as you see fit for you and I are united in the pleasure of giving, the pleasure of receiving and the pleasure of giving back... no strings attached. I would like to add that as with everyone, my life sways between conformism: the adherence to a lame prevailing ideology, to what is here and now – proposed by the system as “gourmet coffee” – simply because it is there, and the non-conformism, the supreme form of the critical mind, which will not be deterred. This critical mind which endures and withstands the so-called principle of reality, in short which thinks that thoughts and actions are never realistic but reaching, is similar to a waking state, salutary but in many respects exhausting. So, throughout your exhibition I was hearing a voice which whispered in my ear: “But Michel, in what world do these characters live? In what world *do* they live?” And I had to answer that voice which disturbed my peace and quiet: “But in ours, dear conscience, in ours and in the best possible world”... Incredibly I heard it repeat immediately; “Dear God, but what kind of world are we living in! What kind of world are we living in?”. That’s better... Bloody conscience!

“So long”, as you kindly put it.

La Gimond, 27 Décembre 2013

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- ¹ Cornélius Castoriadis
 - ² Félix Guattari Gilles Deleuze
 - ³ Vance Packard
 - ⁴ Anne-Marie Dardigna
 - ⁵ Barbara Kruger, a libertarian conceptual artist.
 - ⁶ *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*
 - ⁷ Homer, *The Illiad*
 - ⁸ To be brief, the Parliament of that period
 - ⁹ Heraclitus
 - ¹⁰ Sigmund Freud
 - ¹¹ And again
 - ¹² And again
 - ¹³ Félix Guattari Gilles Deleuze