

*Tripwire Statement*

"Writing as activism." What can be said? Perhaps a few points addressing production primarily, and by default, identity, as the two in practice end up closely intertwined.

For young artists, the act of writing or the making of art is at first not as "political" as it might later become, intended or not (that is to say, regardless of content). For myself, in my twenties I took out \$10,000 in school loans (all paid off now) essentially to educate myself, to gain knowledge I would otherwise never have had access to, to earn two degrees in writing and english. But what I was really doing was buying time to read, write and think, to spend my life doing something other than just surviving economically. And to be fair, given the state of the rest of the world, I (we—in "the first world") should be somewhat grateful that such a pursuit is even an option.

But as the years go on this pursuit takes on a more urgent color. Should one decide to have children, for instance, or if one doesn't come from money, or if one's extended family has no resources (or doesn't exist), the stakes become higher with each passing year. In this sense, writing *is* activism, a battle to define ourselves, how we will spend our time on this earth. There's no way around it: time is (has become) money and writing takes time. It will require sacrifices in all other areas of one's life *because and primarily because* life is defined to us as the *pursuit of the accumulation of capital*. How much simpler can this be stated? What obfuscating "political" discourse should I turn to in order to make this point any more salient?

Within our lifetimes, the San Francisco Giants may (will?) become the Pacific Bell Giants, the Padres the Qualcomm Padres. Are all shoes Nikes? Schubert sells Mazda, Vivaldi for hair-spray. Pianos tinkle for the elderly (vaseline on the camera lens) . . . *family values* to *sell insurance*. What areas of our lives are not subject to this profane encroachment?

I'm referring here not just to the appropriation of art by capital, but to the subjugation and silencing of all cultural production by same. Yet, another critique of capitalism isn't going to save us—(although such critiques should continue, particularly *outside of* as well as within a writing discourse). Something like a critique of human nature might come closer. . . but, from my perspective, many artists and non-artists alike are to some extent at war for the very definition of their being within this system. What does this commitment cost, and *why should* this commitment cost.

## *Disassemble*

materials known to the state  
to cause a suspension of disbelief

tepid requiem  
safety in anonymity

factory / forest / office, alert

for breakfast, a trucker's lunch  
is the highlight (mention collapse and get half off)

trellis of summer and nimrod cups, the curfew's  
been lifted to whenever you can make it

noir or muffle the noir

inexpensively disconcerted easy living, the distribution  
of some kind of beetle or small chocolate

drop the fingerprint records, credit reports  
distinguishing marks or scars on the body

harmonious purchasing, strong language, nudity, violence  
rise to the top, compete

next, a remarkable family visits  
cultural peasantry

now as else

lottery mocking the state's sobriety, odorless and loud

## *Terms of Suppression*

Decor of restraint. Territorial threat of  
the margin pressing a cistern, cavity, maw.

The deliberate exclusion of a desire  
from consciousness, surface to depth. A catered

agreement offered to brace and embroider  
the core against hell and bacteria.  
Scrawl like the others did, get in, out of  
here. Dream men falling into a well

who become our suppliers of lint. Dejected  
beside a formal machine for wrecked  
invisibility, Quixoticism addressing an

underground treasure a rogue become harmless  
submits to. Intently watching the walls  
to it crack. Internalization of tesserae roots.  
I saw the circles under your eyes. Why

aren't there any more shrubs out here yet?  
Random power source. Random lines.  
Claws and honey tones living among  
the angelic choir of the carnivores.

A plea for combustion, the reeds are aglow.  
Their border covenant, thin and in shreds.  
Formal dare of the overused moon  
where beauty seems forced when the name

for it flickers, eyes bright with liquor before  
they go dull, twelve beats of expression in change  
at the moment of composition. Waning loyal  
to give this character (pain?) Idiot carousel

spins in the lights, your money is just like mine  
prompting a target's blatant caricature  
. . . over-run hamlet. . . neon food chains  
some light bled to rejuvenate chronicles  
some light bronzed as a voice in the blaze.

With the thought that with it we would be  
armed. But how it clamps to put it on. Worn

as protection and broken by sense  
on the next episode of fetters and keys.

Increasing the sheer emotion spent  
embellishment a lustrous yoke  
the debt incurred to get to this point  
where no one would notice the debt incurred.

Where often I am not permitted  
since the farms have been mechanized  
at a lower volume of transformation.

"Consistent but not irresponsible desertions."

Dormant leaf. Carafe for Monsieur.

The housing calls for intransigence  
as drugs have ravaged the drugs

leaving a flare on a field of incognizant thriving  
asked to carry on. Where the summoned  
was held as a frame, turned off. Where the critical  
element left the party with nothing  
to eat, and might be withheld.

Disembodied the young shoots look heavenward  
which is a language of promise and vapor.

A trust in rapture and transport.  
What is the desperation under that.

Freelance design and production. It broke.  
Laotians are stealing the weeds.  
With a great mis-trust of intellect, take  
heart where it's not but its red flag is.

How many inches from trailer park pride.

How many scotches in region nine

where bells go in the sauce to give the  
appetite its anonymous service  
anonymous terms. To feed it.

## BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

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### *Notes on Political Poetry*

for Marcus Coelen

*Premise:* Content has no intrinsic role in the definition of poetry, though poetry as such cannot exist without it. Through this initial compromise of pure aestheticism, poetry makes its unavoidable entry into the sphere of the social.

What is most poetic about a poem is only indirectly a matter of content. A poem must say something, but *what* a poem says matters less than *how*. And this is so notwithstanding the fact that our treasuries of poetry are also books of wisdom. In this sense, the scandal of "political poetry" is less its compromise of pure aestheticism, than the fact that this compromise is accepted as more than a mere convention.

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*Premise:* There is no political poetry without content.

This is, I would guess, a tautology: the political poem does not exist as such independent of its extrapoetic concerns. What Charles Bernstein calls "the politics of poetic form" is in effect a reframing of the question of form in terms which privilege content. This is not an original notion. Robert Creeley's well-known dictum, "form is never more than an extension of content," overturns the priority given the aesthetic in all post-symbolist poetics (epitomized in Valéry's notion of *la poésie pure*) by acknowledging that the social determines the manner in which the aesthetic makes itself known.

Bernstein goes beyond this, perhaps to the point of undermining once and for all form's solipsistic claim to provide the very measure of the poetic. When Bernstein insists, for example, that "stylistic innovations be recognized not only as alternative aesthetic conventions but also as alternative social formations," he necessarily redefines formalism as a practice in which