

David Antin

From TALKING AT POMONA

it may be that formal concerns applied to things that might be interesting in human space turn out to be obscene on the other hand that's very interesting it raises the issue essentially of what i would call pornography now art has always played with pornography in the west its been significant because it has always been the challenge of the artist that art is informal because one responds pornographically the most cheerful aspect the most heartening aspect about western european art were its possible pornographic concerns because it was always the specter of the human however formal an art work was if it played with pornography as an idea not because pornography was beautiful or cheerful but because it was a reminiscence of human maneuver within the work now it seems one of the problems here that's raised is the kind of conflict that exists between human values and the idea of art making itself as a career that is what art making is about or what it has often been about take the nude say the female nude from the renaissance on it has always offered something of an entrance to the painting through human sexual feeling the consumer the art looker was always assumed to be a man now everyone knows that men dont get excited when they see a painting of a beautiful naked woman not a gentleman or an art lover re-lator not now anyway that we have photographs and movies still who can deny that there is that momentary flicker of interest sure its more complicated than that this feeling is surely diverted or suspended by some conflict of interest in painting say or antiquity nostalgia still its a naked woman youre looking at in a titian or a renoir or a wesselman it isnt a wine bottle or a mountain though the feeling the flicker of sexuality is protected from its consequences by its surrounding attributes its props the case is maybe clearer with suffering than with sexuality the painter has painted a picture of a human being in torment you are filled with an honorable ennobling sympathy for his exquisite torment you look at gruenwalds christ and are filled with pleasure youre masturbating at the crucifixion what is the point of all this self stimulation if you are the viewer or why all this generosity if you are the artist this sexual assistance? what are you masters and johnson? what if you are most especially interested in or in need of masturbation for an artist who gets no frisson from exposing himself or pretending to do so what is there to do? supposing art making is like a kind of knot making if youre a knot maker youve got an idea about what is a knot and what is a mess a legal way of proceeding what is a legal knot and

what is a snarl all knots involve some kind of double reversal you start out going somewhere go back and take some of the past with you to wherever you were going to go and you find a way to mark off some memorial to where you've been a node well there are two kinds at least of knot makers one knot maker knows how to proceed making his knots and watches himself proceeding in the end he arrives at a knot he approves for some reason if he's been watching the way he has been knotting all this time he won't be surprised at the outcome and though he may be satisfied he'll walk away and forget it then he's a process knot maker or he might not walk away but place it in front of you in the hope that you will be bettered thereby in which case he's a therapeutic or didactic knot maker or say he's a forgetful knot maker as soon as he finishes a loop he forgets it because all the time he's only attending to the node he is working on at any given moment at some time when he's tired or interrupted by a phone call he will look up and he'll be surprised by his knot because he'll have no idea how he got there he's a kind of magical knot maker but with all of this and I think we should not underestimate the pleasures and surprises of knot making why in the world should we bother making knots who cares about rope? in a way this is a lot like playing chess and you can say someone has played it well or played poorly but why should you care about this game? it seems ridiculous to spend all this time pushing little pieces of wood about on a board haven't you got better things to do? but it was not always this way with chess chess is a depraved game it represents the world as a struggle for dominance between two sides that have no choice but conflict there is no clear demarcation or boundary that cuts off one side from the others hostilities and there is no bound to human abilities it is an arrogant fantasy of war in which the greater ability will surely win by annihilating his opponent what sort of paradigm is this? no experience on earth corresponds to it so it is a game of no relevance it is a fundamentally trivial representation of reality but it wasn't always like this according to most authorities chess derived from an Indian game called shatrandji which was supposed to represent the state of the world the social classes into which people were arbitrarily divided and it was a game invaded by chance the best player the best plan could as easily be defeated as the worst by luck and this was thought to teach humility to rulers shatrandji was the game of which chess is the trivial example and it doesn't seem that we have to be especially impressed with shatrandji either but as shatrandji was a game built up out of the human experiences of its time arbitrary inequities among people the facts of unavoidable war and the absurd circumstances of luck lying under the feet of ability it is possible to construct make our art out of something more meaningful than the arbitrary rules of knot making out of the character of human experience in our world

A NOTE ON POETRY & PROSE & TALKING AS POSTSCRIPT
TO "TALKING AT POMONA"

some time ago i was sitting in on a doctoral examination in literature where in spite of all efforts to prevent it the conversation came around to what poetry was everybody got depressed the student started in glumly to explain about irony and metaphor and like a drowning man i saw it all before me "imagery" "feeling" "metrical language" "the great recurrences in man and nature" and gasping for air i interrupted "look if someone came up and started talking a poem at you how would you know it was a poem" it may not have helped the student much but we all felt better afterwards and it seemed to help me think about poetry as some kind of talking you might like to say singing and thats all right with me because properly understood singing is some kind of talking though i dont care much for what poets usually call singing because it seems like a boring way of talking anyway i decided to make poems by talking and this piece is part of a poem i made talking at pomona college on april 12 1972 since talking isnt prose prose being a kind of concrete poetry with justified margins this piece has no margins it also isnt verse which is a kind of concrete poetry with lines so it doesnt have lines just pauses all of "talking at pomona" will appear in the september issue of artforum and in my new book talking to be published by the kulchur foundation in october 1972

david antin
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