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## Re: what do you think?

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From: **Rindon Johnson**  
Date: Tue, Mar 31, 2020 at 11:32 AM  
Subject: Re: what do you think?  
To: Sohrab Mohebbi

I babble alongside your romantics in red.

On Mon, Mar 30, 2020 at 4:17 PM Sohrab Mohebbi wrote:

So just that i was trying to think about this "bare time" regardless maybe of what delivered it, even though it is not possible to do so.

I said mmmm after reading this because the idea of the bare time being a delivery felt on the nose in the right way.

xs yes xx

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For the first time in contemporary history, everyone is faced with the conditions of being an artist in planetary scale. That is waking up in the morning and having to invent our lives and to make it livable. Or to put it in other words, we are faced with the daily challenge of making our lives into a work of art. **The inventing of a life to make it livable and then the translation of the life into a work of art, is art an invention then to make life livable? I guess it might be as all I can really liken making it to is breathing as I know no other way to live and I know too when I'm choking.** Each day we are faced with the question, how have I been living and how can I live differently, make changes, incrementally, consistently. The hyper accelerated conditions of life that we were used to, the incessant pressure to perform, produce, post, repost, like, had filled life with content and is abruptly paused to a stand still. Suddenly we are faced with empty time, time out of content, time without labor, bare time. **Well sure, i never understood the weekend save for as a tool to relate to other people. It seems to me the only people who are really faced with the empty time are those who can afford it or those who have the foresight to afford it to themselves and those are few I think because it means already an interest in a clarity of mind. I think I might be being pretentious.**

Of course this is a romantic conception of an artist or an artist's life (as Amy said, an artist life might have looked like the quarantine, but life is not always a fucking disaster -- at least not for the most part, or for everybody at all times). But we are, for better or for worse, faced with this bare time instead of time scheduled, calendared time. Romantic or not, now we are faced with the imperative to create a livable life, maintain a life and try to make it less dull and wasted, or more fulfilling . **In a way we suddenly go about this in a more alone way. There are less people to hold us all accountable. I mean the people on the train were holding me accountable, I wore pants in front of them for example, I made sure that my face was clean in front of them.** Art makes something out of nothing, and we have a lot of the latter in our disposal

at the moment. Artists, first and foremost, are people who own their time and claim it their own, fill it up or empty it out. As pleasurable as it sounds, this is not an easy feat, no one asked them to do it, or is going to fill their time for them, no one expects them to succeed or mourns their failure, and yet day after day, they would wake up and propel themselves to engage with an irrational yet logical activity of making and unmaking art. **Yes.**

Arman created “full up,” Klein “the void;” Lozano dropped out and Sturtevant “re”-made and these two approaches could at least metaphorically be instrumentalized to think about what to do with the day and the night. With risk of hyperbolic exaggeration, there are two kinds of artistic approaches in making work. Those who take content out until they are faced with the least possible amount of it, no longer possible to get rid of, and those who accumulate content over content until they reach a point of saturation before everything starts spilling over and out. This is not a question of minimal and maximal, one can be a reductive maximalist and an aggrandizing minimalist. We are faced with the question of how to fill our days, or how to empty them out. **I read this this morning and then used my rowing machine and watched the news. I spoiled myself (as I often do) and almost a year ago I rented a rowing machine that uses real water instead of a fan. I thought about how I had no idea if the whirlpool created in the machine is moving upwards or downwards and as I went back and forth it became obvious that if I'm rowing fast enough it is neither. Then I thought about how the binary mode of thinking is something I cannot help but return to, do I fill things up or do I empty them out. I beat my split time, that's how quickly I can row 500 meters or something like that. Then I thought more about it and wondered do my favorite artists fill things up or do they empty them out? Do the best ones do both at once? Yes I answered myself not beating my split time. I thought of Agnes Denes' wheat field and the ship the Comfort coming to New York and all the New Yorkers not distancing themselves desperate to see the ship, we are so scared and so stupid. We? I thought of myself as a New York and a failed one, one who left. I can hear the field of wheat when I look at those pictures of Agnes standing in her field and I wonder how she must have felt alone in it, touching it with her fingers in several places at one time. Did she fill up that block or did she empty it out? What do you think happens when there is so much or so little content it tips over into nothing or everything? My favorite show of Sydney's right now is Pete the Cat and Pete said to his friend, if everything is special then nothing is.**

Like it or not, right now, in a moment of global catastrophe, with death looming behind every touch, everybody (as it has been proclaimed before for other or similar reasons) is an artist -- “and everyone hates it.” **AND EVERYONE HATES IT! (What did you think of *Females*?)** Artists are best equipped with dealing with solitude, a sequestered life, unscheduled time. But this is art without contemporary art, there is no institutional mandate that propels the quotidian, no critical validation of the everyday, there are no deadlines in place to dustoff the trivial. **Amen.** There is no contemporary art in quarantine yet there are decisions to be made towards an aesthetics of a tolerable life and to make it better, different and less intolerable. **Have you heard about this idea that there is no future anymore, that we are post future and now just in a constant present?** I look out the window and at a similar time each day I see parents walking their small children or running them depending on the size of their children. I also do this most days with my own child and I wonder about how we are all keeping time for each other, staying within the boundary of our registration for fear of being stopped by the police but also happy to be stopped by them to prove that we belong here, that we should be keeping time in this series of blocks, that we can shop at such and such store that we do have a purpose passing our days right here. I wonder why it never bothered me to be doing this alone and by myself but to suddenly all together be doing it feels so different and kind of throws the absurdity of my life into deep relief. The couple who usually have sex on Sundays in the afternoon sun, mostly doggy style who I'm sure I've told you about because I think about them all the time, well anyway, they don't do it that way anymore, they've moved inward and my partner and I talk about how

we kind of miss their tempo, their rhythm, maybe they've stopped fucking or maybe they've stopped needing to have a scheduled date.

We are faced with the question what kind of life is worth living (Foucault)? We are tasked with the dilemma of how to live a beautiful life? To make a life out of nothing. Out of incompetent governance, dreadful ambivalence, sluggish hourglass, banality of groceries, lethargic anxiety of the threat of furloughs and declined sustenance, out of the fear of not making rent and why to pay it. We are all pondering about the reason and value of what we have been doing, and why have we been doing it the way we did, can we do it differently, can we do it better, should we give it up all together, jump ship, do something else. Is it satisfying, is it draining, does it give us any joy whatsoever, are we just wasting our lives away doing something we don't want to do. These are all aesthetic questions. **My brain flipped over at this, at the idea of the wasted life as an aesthetic proposition.** These are all questions that artists face when they get to their studio or post-studio, when they stare at a blank page/canvas, or open the whatever application they design their work in. These questions are fundamental questions, or existential questions, but we usually don't bother asking them, because we have to be at the office or at the bar, on the train or the canteen, in a meeting room here or elsewhere. **The moment that one space becomes every space suddenly there is no where to run from the aesthetic question, well except for social media (maybe? sometimes I disagree with myself...)**

There are people who are out there making our sequestered living possible by sacrificing theirs. We are nevertheless left with a romantic proposition, perhaps even an obsolete romanticism that could propel a semblance of meaning in face of a significant loss of human life. What we can or cannot do is a question that we cannot turn away from as we pace around a shrinking life in a shrinking city, in a vanishing neighborhood and a room that is filled with our being and we cannot quite fill it up. **I was always so bad at calculus, imagine the number acting on another number, but somehow, when Merkel says stay in side you'll save your neighbor, I can see it. It takes so much work to do nothing.**