



Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, porcelain, 1988.

The very idea of 'History' as looking back on the past and looking forward to the future, the whole investment in development and 'Progress', is structurally informed by the dynamic of the ascendant middle class, the historically bourgeois. This entire perspective is principally concerned with its own current position, which it understands through a firm rejection of its past (its dissociation with and from the lower classes). At the same time, it is marked by progressive values and ambitions, a total identification with its aspirations for the future. In historically 'new' technological and cultural developments, this class pursues fleeting promises of access to better conditions of social life. The middle classes have an imaginary and acquisitive (rather than symbolic and practical relationship) to objects of culture. The fluctuation between these modes of behaviour are manifest in those artists on the threshold, who alternate between struggling to simultaneously see art as valuable in itself and also an effective financial asset or economic means.

But in a historical moment where the economic foundations of belief in social mobility are eroded, this class, which through its combination of means and values, is most responsible for the status quo, is most likely to express a regressive and reactionary political tendency represented in the wider culture. When 'the middle class' is not acknowledged as a static identity, but understood as a dynamic

economic relation, we find in periods of economic stagnation the dissolution of its semblance of identity and the cultural manifestation of a kind of inertia. Once development in general has been so closely interwoven with the narrative of the development of a particular class, we must work toward another concept of development, which can express another economic relation.

If the whole idea of class seems a thoroughly outdated approach to culture in economically 'developed' countries today, it is ironic in that only comparatively recently that culture has become amenable to class analysis at all. The illusion that class is not a useful category may be attributable to both the historical crisis of the ontologisation of the labour movement, as much as a self-preserving investment in arbitrary borders which seek to exclude the truly global character of social relations.

In our present historical moment, an individualistic outlook has dominance over more social forms of analysis. Prevalent accounts of social experience prioritise individual agency and responsibility as if social and political situations were only the complex aggregate effects of individual opinions and actions. By omitting the ways in which the space of individual practice is informed and limited by social conditions, the ideas by which we are given to understand ourselves restrict the extent to which we are able to alter or improve upon our own social environment and mode of life. It is as if we encounter obstacles and approach them again and again in isolation, as if working together was so obviously ineffective and collective approaches did not and could not exist. One of the spaces where this behaviour is exaggerated is the art world, where collective or unseen labour is often blatantly subsumed under the visibility of individual or corporate proper names (and in the case of some established artists, are sometimes one and the same). Time and again, individuals (whether they are artists or curators, critics or interns) encounter shared and similar frustrations and exploitations; but a discourse of professionalism, individuality, and self-sufficiency leads to any collective efforts to address these conditions to be foreclosed. At the same time the increasing availability of information in the absence of methods, leads to diminished expectations, and this can even form frameworks of representation: 'You knew what you were getting into and if you don't like it you can go elsewhere' is met by 'we are here and we are not surprised'.

It is unsurprising that the art world, and cultural production more generally, is the field where strategies of addressing social life in terms of representation and expression or 'voice' is privileged, even if this can obscure the situation of economic opacity even further.

The increasing prevalence of the language of protest and resistance in the sphere of advertising might offer a case in point. We might know that symbolic solutions are partial and short-term substitutions for lasting transformations, even if in practice we are under compulsion to repeat our mistakes in new and different ways. The debate is open as to whether better representation is a signal of social change, or a sanction to a situation that can no longer be ignored. In cultural production it can take the form of a debate over whether representation is descriptive or productive of its object. When the style of Barbara Kruger's critique of advertising is appropriated promotionally to spread a message, the ambiguities of the relationship between advertising and its critique are made dynamic and are only partially stalled by looking at the intent behind them (Supreme). This is a historical outcome, a recuperation that indicates the outmoded and drives the sites of agency elsewhere. Beyond the individualistic 'either/or', an approach which can hold more than one idea at once is required.

To acknowledge that resistance is in the structured absences of the discourse is not to abstractly doom the effort of representation to failure. It is to acknowledge that it is only out of the practice of expression that we are made aware of the limits of our self-understanding, by tracing the particular gaps that restructure the moment of the unexpressed. It is in the moments of convergence between the two failures of individual and collective articulation, between the act of speech and the conditions of language, that we re-cognise the 'Subject and its Others' as the Other that is in Us. Through reference to a moment of racism masquerading as culture, ideology as porcelain, and simultaneously, its facile negation through a contemporary liberal outlook, the work in this exhibition seems to introduce a prohibition on the sensible and affective aspects of the objects presented. Appreciation, but more specifically judgement, of the way the sculptures are produced and the stylistic choices at play are barred by a political and ethical interdiction that opens the possibility for a palpable, yet problematic, sense of historical distance. By reversal, the reference of the sculptures which makes them intelligible, the Royal Doulton ceramics, are at the same time rendered irredeemably 'wrong', in both a moral and aesthetic sense. In this ambiguity between moral and aesthetic judgement the exhibition attempts to represent a movement of anxiety that borders on aggression. And yet this feeling is only seemingly so, we are confronted not by any actual judgements except through representation. In this way the sculptures emphasise the absence of a separation between aesthetic and political choices.

1.

Every time she has a relationship with a white guy she wonders if he's only seeing her for the novelty. In a few years all her exes will have married other white people and every couple of years it comes up in conversation, 'I dated a black girl once'. It comes up in her mind so vivid, it could almost have been a phantasy.

But she has to rid herself of this notion, this time, it's different. She knows this thought has some basis in reality, but right now it just makes her hate him for no reason. She hasn't heard a word he saying and only just comes back to reality.

Yes, mmh, she says, nodding.

How often does this happen to me? She wonders. Look at him, she thinks, so earnestly, imagine if he knew I wasn't listening. She cuts him off abruptly, "sorry I just need to use the bathroom".

When she gets back it has started to rain suddenly; he is moving their things off the terrace. She wants to have a cigarette, alone, this time. "I'm sorry" she says, "I need to go home."

"Why?" he asks.

She hugs him, "let's talk about this another time, okay?"

2.

That's all it takes to be original. You go to a museum or watch a documentary, and they talk about how unique it is, how original he was.

That's novelty, not originality, she says. They're different things.

No, that's not what I'm trying to say, I'm trying to say originality, that's nothing. They say that everyone should want to travel, but the people I meet, they just want to go home.

And how is that related? She says. And who exactly are they? She thinks to herself, concerned. He knows she's getting tired of him now, but he wants to go on. I'll go on.

Travelling, its about differences. Home, it's about keeping things the same. Novelty, familiarity.

She says, then what about fakes?

Fakes?

What about fakes?

It takes him a moment to understand, but she regrets launching him into another monologue. She's hungry and most people have left.

He's overidentifying with his job again, she thinks. If only there was a way to break him out of how self-centred he is. But everyone is like that, she thinks, these days. Everyone. In a few months he'll be in yet another job, talking about it like it's the most important thing.

"Tourist agencies, they are for the fakes. Maybe that's what everyone wants right now, the feeling of change, same old, different background".

"Everyone?" she says, knowingly.

"Shall we get something to eat?"

No, she says. I've got to go back to the library.

3.

They call it "the marriage squeeze".

Wikipedia says *"A term has arisen to describe the social phenomenon of the so-called 'marriage squeeze' for African American females."*

Is America the most racist country on earth? She wonders. I always thought England was worse, or the Netherlands. "Fuck it, all of Europe is bad, and fuck Saudi Arabia too."

The term *"refers to the perception that the most 'eligible' and 'desirable' African American men are marrying non-African American women at a higher rate, leaving African American women who wish to marry African American men with fewer partnering options. According to Newsweek, 43% of African American women between the ages of 30 and 34 have never been married."*

43 percent! she thinks, that is a big fucking deal. "I though poor people got married more often than other people" he says. She doesn't say anything. He knows everything, she thinks. She wants to laugh but it's too fucking sad.

4.

One of her cats sneaks into his room. Every day after its fed, it comes in from the kitchen and into his room. It's a she, but he keeps forgetting. It's hard for him to think of animals having a sex and not a gender. It's in the language, he thinks. One day everything is an it, total objectification.

It rubs against his leg and brushes its head against his laptop. He has watched it do this many times. He cannot tell what this action is directed at. Do cats have self awareness he wonders? Can they think of themselves in the third person? He imagines someone else looking at him, this scene, from across the courtyard. The voices of people in the street below.

He strokes it and it shows such affection. It looks at him, and he reads affection into its gaze. The way it exposes its chest, asking to be stroked. It's good to live with animals, he thinks. When he feels suicidal, he thinks instead about their lives, and finds comfort. They are sharing this moment, this co-presence, right now. Its searching for food he thinks, and watches its eyes scanning across the room. To live only to eat, to sleep and to die. It seems so alien to him, so mysterious, so evidently meaningless, but here.

It is so content, here at his feet on the bed. An urge to disturb the peace comes over him. He wants to throw the duvet over its head, to frighten it. He's almost jealous of its satisfaction. He reads satisfaction into its gaze, scanning across the room. They spend all day sleeping, which makes sense in the wild, saving energy. But here in the city they are just wasting their meaningless time. A life without risks, without danger.

He wants to hurt it. To see its surprise. He puts down the laptop and places both hands on its neck. It is calm, stops moving, doesn't question. He strokes, it presses its head into his palm. Bang! He strikes and lays a hard fist into its ribs. It turns in defence, in shock and surprise. He goes to strike again but before he can it darts out of the room. He remembers the look in its face, the lack of understanding. It can't understand, he thinks, why.

When he enters the living room, the television is on. His flatmate is on the sofa with both cats near her lap. On her laptop the news is playing. On the way to the bathroom he overhears that the suspect is a young Caucasian male who posted a video to youtube some hours earlier.

5.

*Psst! I can mingle with the stars, and throw a party on Mars,*

*I am a prisoner locked up behind Xanax bars*

*I have just boarded a plane without a pilot*

*And violets are blue, roses are red*

*Daisies are yellow, the flowers are dead*

*I wish I could give you this feeling*

6.

We'd only be passing it over in silence if we could remember what it was. That's not silence at all.

That something [familiar guitar riffs slowly, church bells ringing in the distance, slowly]

End of Sequence.