The Iron Garters and their Many Masks: An Inconclusive History

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Our immediate progenitors, those fellow sorcerers Deleuze and Guattari, said, “The earth needs a new romanticism.” They were perhaps echoing Novalis, the Night poet, who once exclaimed, “The world must be romanticized. This yields again its original meaning. Romanticizing is nothing else than a qualitative potentization... By giving the common a higher meaning, the everyday a mysterious semblance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the appearance of the infinite, I romanticize it....” Then, much later, in a different context, The Cramps’ singer Lux Interior said, “Let’s Tear This Damn Place Up,” wearing nothing but torn lingerie and his own blood.

It would be easy for some to conclude: Idiots, Maniacs, Naïfs. It would be easy to assume the political and the social is nowhere operative.

But first, a Garter would ask: which version of idiocy or mania or naïveté do you refer? Perhaps it’s that fanged invisibility that creaks the meadows and turns the woods to vibrating onyx? Or the lunar frisson that coaxes the tides into spumes of amber, anointing a sex-and-food drenched
afternoon? Or is it that breath of beyond—some remembered passage in a fantasy paperback, or a funereal spice from a vagrant witch—that runs untrammeled through the metropolis to lure the wayfarer down heaths and moors into hinterlands? The world is strewn with real souls, emitting; a world as such is the ever-shifting totality of souls in various frequencies of expression. We aren’t saying we are essentially romantic but we are saying that our perspectives and speculations are very functional: they yield means and results, oblique pathways and open spaces, refreshing vantages and tactical beachheads. Perceptual play declaims new territories in space-time that accommodates more energies and more lives. So again, we are at the very burning heart of the political and the social: spaciousness and how to vivify it, perpetuate it and perfect it, especially when the walls are closing in and the mind and heart are threatened with reduction.

The earth needs new un-knowings that are revelatory and healing and space-making. It’s high time to surrender our credibilities, our neuroses, our identity-fixes when the darkness is most opaque, while also the most voluble; but then in the hot pit of darkness, to reassert our reverential, battle-born enthusiasms when the very conditions for life are threatened. The earth needs new errant dialogues and speculative tangents that wander and spasm across barriers and categories without the fascistic tic to quickly reestablish and reassert the faux-authority of those troubled boundaries. The earth needs new sensualities that derive from the energies released when borders are crossed and unlegislated desires are smuggled, or simply when particularities, like stones and glass shards, are allowed to breathe and blossom inside the Present.

The Garters are saboteurs, smugglers, cultural engineers, phantasy tacticians, living out, in the words of poet
Hart Crane, an “improved infancy.” They materialize wherever art and education realign as one border-crossing provocation. For in the worlds that matter to us and which we strive to recreate, creativity and pedagogy were never sundered, art and politics were never at each other’s throats, but one was forever inextricably in love with the other. So in the dominant prejudices of early twenty-first century America, the Garters by default are called *criminals*—which certainly expands our repertoire, improves our wardrobes and enriches our sex lives. We are called *criminals* because we are ineluctably *judged* and yet we strive *always* to elude judgment. However, Judgment is never wholly eluded but then we are never wholly judged either. All judgment is predicated on economic logic these days; whatever saves us from risk, expenditure, inconvenience, attentiveness is deemed the preferred currency. So it is our vital imperative to create and unleash new predicates that *look* and act like *crimes*, i.e. *invitations to strangeness*. Lastly: performing as criminals, and assuming the personae of the outlaw exacerbates our available energies, feeds our libidinal reservoirs and creates auras of the sublime about us that many people have forgotten that they can experience. And thus we serve the social, even as we un-serve it.

So what are the criminal masks these Garters wear?

In one of their desert mobilizations, the Iron Garters is a syndicate that meets in Las Vegas to discuss and ponder and plot desire, sexuality, taboos, Eros and the body through the medium of writing and propaganda. What flees through sensation we attempt to transcribe in syllables. What distorts the subtleties of its own collisions we awkwardly harvest. Above all we revere the infinity of the sexual in the very midst of our aroused conversing. We share books, visions, tales, jokes, movies, songs and examples that drive, trouble, tantalize and excite us. We have
“conversations” that are entirely unresolvable and thus fecund, not beholden to one form of certainty, opinion or stance. Garters believe that conversations, instead of positions, attitudes, conclusions, and credentials are far more conducive to radical deviations and flowerings of culture.

In another, coastal version the Garters are a theory and politics obsessed art group from the Oakland/San Francisco area who engage in transformative social practices and semi-illegal infiltrations. Writing is also heavily involved, as is gardening, vaudeville, rabblerousing, open schools, wanderings, magic and street lectures. Above all, this mutation of the Iron Garters is overly concerned with how economic monocultures have voided urban spaces of their emancipatory and healing potentials. Where politics has failed, art rushes in with all its reparative powers at full burn. This version of the Garters is going through a catalytic transformation and taking on more pedagogical imperatives.

But then also, in Nether-where, the Garters exist as the semi-fictional, quasi-imaginary protectors and smugglers of a fragile virus-borne ecosystem called Noctula whose transmedial expressions are currently being documented and archived by the current author. This version of the Garters believes sincerely that the Human and the Anthropocene need a bracing dose of the Alien to refine our individual consciousness and to reform and reimagine habitable realities. Herein is where magick, speculative philosophy, magical realism, slime science all dissolve and hybridize into one mad devotional Weltanschauung. Here seethes realms of theory-fiction, philosophy-theater, poetic-supernaturalism, gnostic contagions, Artaudian becomings, and Deleuzian sorceries. This Garter world is organized through a volatile and dynamic eroticism that encompasses much more than just sexual and romantic love.
We believe that a Movement or Force, a Revolutionary Vanguard or Radical Mobilization, for it to persist more dynamically and with sustained furor against overwhelming odds, its own internal contradictions, ceaselessly cruel oppressors, or just the “normal” fluctuations of being, must articulate and sustain itself on multiple yet simultaneously fused levels. In a word: militant versatility. Is it any wonder that poor Guy Debord became so obsessed with military strategizing? Anything remotely called a counter-culture must consider and plan its own defenses and maneuverings against invalidation, consolidation, irrelevancy and destruction. War-machine, D&G called it—and I don’t think we’ve even begun to consider the ramifications of this concept for art and culture, social practice and radical becoming.

So the fictional-poetic-mythic escapades of the Iron Garters in their magical, Atlantean ecosphere of Noctula, as a transmedial venture of the poetic imagination serves as a reservoir for real energy, tactics, inspiration, intensities to be mined and immediately used in “Real Life,” especially when the less-fictional escapades and energies of so-called “real life” Garters becomes spent or frazzled or derailed. This is the Guerrilla ’pataphysical approach to reality: one must always elaborate, populate, nourish and sustain counter-worlds, counter-alibis, counter-selves, counter-myths that are not necessarily “real,” and that can be plugged into, inhabited, invoked, evoked, shared and released in the real world, not only for their reparative, nourishing powers but for the complex and necessary demands they make on your and other’s status quos/reality versions. Always, minute-by-minute, the wear and tear of existence catches up, our fantasies and dreams in perpetual fragmentation, our hopes and loves threatened by invalidation, our anxieties and fears gurgling up from the collective howl, so re-forti-
fying ourselves through the malleable, indestructible ether of the Imaginary is a necessary political tool.

This proposal also releases a question into the normalization of games in daily consumer life. Which counter-worlds are actually benefiting us, helping us to “flourish”—in the term used by social theorist Lauren Berlant.

The Iron Garters have become, by necessity, this simultaneity of forms, alliances, methods, logics and mythologies. What unifies them in their various documented and undocumented forms is the passionate and voracious necessity to trouble and often brashly dissolve the ideological barriers separating crime from community, religion from science, philosophy from spirituality, the occult from the rational, the school from the streets, work from play, the sacred from the profane, the exalted from the banal, the empirical from the speculative, and the ugly from the beautiful. They suggest an invitation to an Outside that also requires novel and more attentive cultivations of the Interior. This is border work, which, by necessity is dangerous and ambiguous, involving taboo-splicing, contraband-disrobing, uncanny-infiltrating among our many indispensable crafts. We are especially interested in how Theory can overflow and outgrow its comfortable habituations/assumptions and reassert its artful, playful influences on various reality modes. The very “otherances” Theory gives such lip service to become rapidly tamed/defanged by the dominant institutions that depend on Theory’s “inoculated” reproducibilities in the first place. We believe in brutal critiques of existing institutions insofar as such critiques provoke the creations of new institutions, articulations, accommodations. But we also need approachable, workable examples and actual contexts to set our rhetoric lose within. We can’t just keep it in expensive books sitting inside imposing buildings. We are here to build in space/time, with flesh and with breath, with labyrinths and with fields.
(What is an institution? A gang is one type, freighted with the panic-driven and libidinal-manias that are usually sanctioned only by “nature.” The police are another institution that garners similar affects as a gang. Both institutions would be served by a deep and irresponsible Erotic makeover.)

Radical change—or, in Deleuze’s words, “a moment of shattering unity”—won’t happen just in schools, knitting circles, community gardens, publishing houses, or largely white, heterosexual anarchist collectives, although those are all provocative sites for Garters to hone their tactics, critiques, experiments and subversions. But Transformations will happen in overlapping, interwoven and infiltrated/infesting milieux of all sorts, especially the surprising and oft-forgotten/overlooked ones. These hybrid sites are where conversations of word and act take place between different entities, and experiments both rational and feral are collectively and singularly undertaken. All the while, participants retain and nourish feelings of excitement and intensity that the more “professional” and “hierarchical” institutions, the ones rigidly hierarchized, traditionally bankrolled and officially named, tend to suppress, mock and sublimate.

So pick a place that has no legible name or clear protocol. Perhaps this place is in your very home or office. These places are often the most neglected or taken-for-granted zones or milieux in our daily blind habitualness. The corner of the white picket fence, the utility walkway, the median strip, the blank field, the vacant lot, the soulless desk. Then momentarily, contextually, define this place by the verbs it induces, the nouns it uncovers, the syntaxes it secretes: politics as art, space as syntax, affect as locus.

END BULLETIN
This is a very early version of the Iron Garters, known as Trespassions Unlimited, or Yes/Tres/Pass/Inc and their first written manifesto distributed in SoMa, San Francisco.