Last Year at Betty and Bob's: An Adventure

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Umwelt Ticks

It’s doubtful any pair of eyes saw the tick from 286 to 287 as Red Betty’s statistical moment was calculated.

*The Arcades Project* hosted a real-time line item on the dynamic Umwelt that is the Worldometers homepage. On this stroboscopic seizure-inducing multi-ticker array of faux coordinates and unadulterated portend, TAP held its place as a near static, three-digit antidote to the ruthless advance of advance. Nestled alongside the global update of births and deaths, military expenditure, energy consumed and forests lost, TAP’s digital counter recorded the on-site demise of its patrons. Accumulating at a creep, TAP’s incrementally slow pace was nonetheless chilling, a reminder of desperate conviction clamoring for air in the throes of an anthropocene death spiral.

The mesmerizing Worldometer beat of environmental and demographic data appeals to news junkies with entangled interests: a longing for homeostasis on the one hand and a desire for an exhilarating far from equilibrium rush on the other. TAP ticker watchers are harder to pigeonhole. Catastrophe addicts, conspiracy theorists, rubberneckers, anti-consumerists, rock climbers, rock stars, queers, artists, Betty groupies, greenies, vegans, economists, socialists, stockbrokers, fifth-wave fami-
nists, neo-futurists, eulogy hobbyists, undercommoners, gamblers – the gamut. TAP’s own website hosted “In Memoriam” pages of dropped shoppers, those who risked their lives for an untenable cause, for the transcendental displacement of capitalist hegemony everywhere. Here, martyr videos of the desperate and the doomed were posted alongside photo archives of the accidentally dropped ones, those for whom conviction proved fatal. This digital graveyard proliferated with affirming life images uploaded by family and friends. Many offered eulogistic banalities. “May she rest in peace” was by far the most common and the most “unliked.” Red Betty, when once a living, breathing eulogist herself, preferred more creative adages. Her “RIP & DIFFRACT” gif went viral upon her passing.

She’d been an avid Worldometer observer, hypnotized by the insistence of the counter’s progress. The tockless tick, tick, tick, tick. She had no idea what exactly to do with this barrage of accumulating data. She’d tweeted “Whoa horsey, slow the fuck down. I wanna smell what remains of the roadkill” to hysterical confusion among her followers at #popupworld. As her color boldly announced, her leftwing leanings literally left her a misplaced contemporary on a planet where the horizontal political spectrum no longer held traction, left and right convolving into a meaningless ideological stalemate. The once well-defined, color-coded political spectrum had dissipated, exemplified by the co-opting of Revolutionary Red by neoliberal political parties. Resistance would require encryption.

Once upon a time as a younger activist, RB’s political response to governmental and institutional horrors was straightforward though admittedly ineffective. She collectivized, marched, threw stones (sometimes), resisted arrest (always), spent a day or two in lock-up, then got
bailed. At candlelit rallies she cried together with friends over a slew of injustices: the gross indecency of the distribution of wealth, dominant nation warmongering atrocities, genocide, gender violence, vivisection, and the stubborn persistence of racial hegemony. Micro-political activists cut from the same cloth as Red Betty threw their bodies into the polemic. Resistance was a tactically felt force. Two days before her fall she’d tweeted: “I feel failure in my fingertips every time I click the submit button on Avaaz petitions” #popupworld.