

4 Terminal Gallery / Peripheral Drift by Philip Monk

Criticism is in a state of drift, out of control. Its loss, however, is willed; it drifting, theoretical. Initially, the question is: How is criticism presently adequate to its object? Yet, beyond this question, how is language itself adequate, as language is the role and model of criticism? Criticism as theory frees itself from its traditional object — the work of art; it is responsible — in its theoretical irresponsibility, i.e., in not answering, responding to the work of art — for its excess and loss. But in exceeding or transgressing the object and losing it, is not this excess and loss, for itself, *jouissance*, its own bliss? Desire has no object — it is outside use, want and demand; and theory similarly no longer finds its impulses in the work of art, in an object, formerly its own object. It can still nominate a work of art, and say, “That’s it for me,” as part of the binary “That’s it” / “So what”; but usually it says “What’s in it for me?”, or “How can I use this?”

Theory no longer assumes a subservience to its object (the prerequisite of a science) in a presumed secondariness of non-presence to the full presence of the work of art and the artist, the guarantor of that presence. Theory now, in a sense, is fictive. Nevertheless, as its own object, theory is not a metalanguage, which would return it to the formal, as a formal language. It is drift. This drift is atopic, without a site: theory does not take itself to be central but peripheral (not centered in meaning, in society). Theory’s displacement is the movement of its desire, the loss of its privileged site and meaning. No longer is it prescriptive or normative. It drifts towards the periphery of indifference, as an index of indifference, but positively, as the opening to differences, as plurality, which is the condition of art.

The effectiveness of theory (and art), literally as an *effect* (in its psycho-physical sense) is in the acceptance of *peripherality* as the fluid site of its activity, i.e., the only place it can act as an affect/effect, outside control or acceptance (or acceptance as control), simulation and ideology; and the willingness of a *drift* from use and meaning, i.e., outside communication and signification. This acceptance assumes a willingness to acknowledge a symptomatic condition, to inhabit society and language through its collective and our individual symptoms. It necessitates a revaluation of language, a theft through revaluation (by distortion and disguise, as noise) of what we can use (abuse) in our peripheral drift.

A *network* seems to coalesce as the “site” of the peripheral drift, composed as it is of shifting subjects, subjects created through the inscribed symptoms of recording

techniques. The network is an eccentric and differentiated plurality of indeterminate entries and perverse connections. It cannot be a model, as the model implies a structure and the possibility of representation. It can only find its equivalence in desire and perversion, as desire and perversion.

How is the peripheral a site when it is an atopic shifting non-site, and how is it an effective locale for art to act? More importantly, how is the peripheral a limit? What coalesces at the periphery to make the network a limit-work? It seems to me that the limit and periphery have nothing to do with boundaries as the site of oppositions. The boundary is the metaphorical site and source of the dialectic, identity, symbol, and anything that we face and attempt to understand and use within its terms or those of society, all of which are refused in the drift which is outside intention, detention and contention. There is no origin or end to the drift, only a simple stepping aside, alongside.

Dialectic, identity, signification, communication: all imply use, want, and univocal meaning. The limit is outside use and want: it is invention; non-functional, it is experimental. There is no order at the limit, only the implementation of experimentation, which is not yet a practice. There is no hierarchy, only experimenters. (Can there be theft at the limit? Order and value have not been distributed at the limit so it is a matter of who can use the technology: there is no sense of abuse yet. The thief therefore is free to act as a syphon, where law has not yet set its own limits.)

Advanced technology in its experimental state of implementation is an example of this limit. Technology in war is the ultimate limit. One can see that there is no value or law at this limit, only the residue of ideology that creates the contradictions. There is only pure experimentation, pure machinic experimentation. It seems outside use and want, and appears to be its own desire out of control. This implemented technology is the limit and sum of society’s symptoms, perverse because outside use and want, perverse because it does not seek communication nor meaning. It only desires to proliferate and implement itself with force. This limit is an extreme example, but the network likewise is non-communication — it does not seek to communicate a meaning; and, certainly, non-expressive — it is not an expression of a message: it is performative.

Parallel galleries should take their presumed peripherality (the word “parallel” seems to imply a degree of peripherality) to the level of *meaning* itself: drift from meaning; and not simply reproduce a concept of art within a network that is counter, but has a parallel aesthetic to “high” culture (the art of the centre): both can still fall into “representation”. Parallel is outside, while alongside, open to the peripheral drift. To be parallel is to be open to the possibility of a rupture with structure (instead of reinforcing it in parallel) as soon as that drift effects itself. This peri-

pherality seemingly is against the grain; finding the grain of its voice, it exacerbates. In exacerbating its own language, its position and identity, it exacerbates society which must retain secure identities for their social (capitalist) exchange value. To exacerbate is not to bring something through the work of art to society, a Promethean romantic illusion, but to take on society's symptoms, develop them intensively, obsessively and logically (i.e., perversely) and *re-present* them to society, as society's own desires — whether positive or reactive — freed from their ideological cover.

Eccentricity, allied to anonymity, "colludes" with the centre through these symptoms and desires, but disarticulates the centre's value and stable identity (on the individual level it acts on the notion of the subject). In other words, the peripheral is not an ineffectual or remote site. The art of the centre, itself, is effectively controlled in its "meaning" in the value-conferring precincts of the art gallery/museum; the institution both confers and communicates value — it does all the labour of art. To be central is to retain a structural position: in identity and meaning, protected from the intrusion and confusion of content. One must abandon all privileged sites of meaning, even the privilege of meaning itself. But we cannot escape society (post-industrial urban society); nor should we want to since it gives us both our tools and our content, as its gives us our symptoms.

To be outside society's values by reconstituting those values in the non-site of the peripheral drift is a consequence of inhabitation and theft.

Roland Barthes, writing on the ideological systems of language and literature, admitted that "To keep these spoken systems from disturbing or embarrassing us, there is no other solution than to inhabit one of them." In assuming these systems for ourselves, in inhabiting them through a disguise, we disturb them.

The codes of these sites of inhabitation are complex, but decipherable and syphonable. For example: production inhabits technology as concepts inhabit language. The ideological of production enters the ideological of language through concepts (reproduction). Technology and language, however, are the two fluid currencies that we possess and inhabit, the two that we can use. Theory (as theft) can inhabit language as language inhabits production, the fictional of production. The intelligence of theft is the theoretical inhabitation of production through language. The intelligence of the network is its simulation, for its own perverse purposes, of the technological network, the communications technology network.¹ Our desire is: to be peripheral, and yet inhabit, anonymously.

Communication is the site of this endeavour, however, disguise is the opposite of communication. While appearing to signify, disguise diverts, devalues. Communications is eminently serious: its purpose is to relay a message that has meaning. Communications cannot be conceived outside use and meaning. Yet in any signal

there is a tendency towards noise. Noise then is a drift. Taken as a value by the theorist and thief, it is a drift from meaning and use, a drift towards perversion and desire. (Noise is the intermingling of pluralities, an exacerbation and the grain of technology's voice: its pleasure in the perversion of communication.) Reducing the signal (use and meaning) to noise makes the disguise a decoding (both de-coding and no code). Desire, as disguise, moves through the code (desire is always a movement), distorting the code of its own perverse pleasure, assuming its *content* within the guise of the code. And theft's disguise is also its indeterminacy: it enters at any point and creates its desire in a connecting network — this perverse network.

Our ability to simulate is a matter of desire and intelligence. Simulation is symptomatic; it is both intelligent as a disguise for desire (as in repression), and the companion to desire. Since symptoms are, at once, both collective and individual, it is easy for an individual to anonymously disguise himself within society's symptoms by accepting them as a means and a site. The individual is no more a subject than society: to speak of symptoms is to conceive the subject; to accept symptoms is to deny the subject, to make it a fiction.

The symptom, I could say, is distributed by capitalism, but it is actually configured between the conjecture of desire and the conjecture of repression and ideology. It is more than a compromise (in the psychoanalytical sense); it is devious in creating a network, in "representing" desire in its *own* pleasure, in creating a network through displacement for desire's motion/flow. Desire is atopic, mobile and a shifter; so is the subject. The subject (our multiple subjects, collective and individual) is produced only in the connecting network, as the network, as a symptom of perverse desire in the network. This network is disinvested of structure — both physical and metaphysical. That is, it need not exist physically in the form of an actual space, and it does not exist descriptively as a structure. I do not call it a model as that returns it to the structural. It is outside structure as the force of desire — our desire.²

¹E.g., the "Perverse Telephone Network": "A sub-network sending and receiving interactive pornography using new audio, video, and facsimile transceivers and the existing telephone system. This network, with its open and shut nodes, is impossible to locate; the hardware shifts or falls apart, is easy to build or repair on principles of theft and bricolage, as it is composed of widely-proliferating surveillance tools. The network *per se* is the telephone system. The individual participants are interchangeable" —(Judith Doyle, "Model for a Prose Algorithm", *Only Paper Today*, October 1979.)

²The Theory of Peripheral Drift is further displaced in *Peripheral/Drift: A Vocabulary of Theoretical Criticism*, Toronto, Rumour, 1979.