

The Politics of Falling

Juli Carson

What if I say to you now: Do you remember going to the Fabulous Forum?

—Daniel Joseph Martinez

Mise-en-scène

Try to remember something: an event, a person or a place. It's a testament to your individual consciousness, your fundamental agency as a subject. Simply, memories are the scaffolding for our intuitive sense of self. And yet, what if this self is really nothing more than a cherished chimera? As Thomas Metzinger, a German philosopher informed by neuroscience, instructs: "Nobody ever was or *had* a self. All that ever existed were conscious self-models that could not be recognized *as* models." From this perspective, the phenomenal self is really a process, not a thing. Moreover, this process—this self-model—is necessarily transparent. "Because you cannot recognize your self-model *as* a self-model . . . you look right through it. You don't see it. But you see *with* it."¹ In reality, consciousness is thus a transparent, invisible process whereby we feel ourselves feeling ourselves, even though the means *through* which we do this can never be seen as such.²

Just the same, Daniel Martinez's *The Report of My Death Is an Exaggeration; Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff* is an attempt to do just that: to make us collectively see our

self-model as a model. Accordingly, a libidinal pulse throbs through *Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff*—the individual self alternately falling apart and falling together—a consequence of Martinez’s journey into the urban sublime when he embarked upon his *Narrenschiff*, his Ship of Fools. But I am getting ahead of myself. First, we must consider Martinez’s imperative cloaked in the question: *Do you remember going to the Fabulous Forum?*

Yes, I do remember.

The year is 1976, and I’m thirteen. Revolution and counterrevolution are everywhere. The trials against the jailed members of the Red Army Faction are beginning in Stuttgart, West Germany. Patty Hearst is found guilty of robbing a San Francisco bank in cahoots with the Symbionese Liberation Army, her own kidnappers. The Soweto uprising in South Africa is brewing, while North and South Vietnam unite to become the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In the States, Jimmy Carter is elected president in the wake of Nixon’s resignation in 1974, making Carter the first presidential candidate from the Deep South to win since the Civil War. And Milton Friedman, the father of the neoliberal Chicago School of Economics, wins the Nobel Prize. All these events, now historical memories, constitute my conscious world model of the moment 1976. But for a thirteen-year-old girl, it was equally impactful—absurdly so—that the success of *Frampton Comes Alive!* the best-selling album of the year, brought Peter Frampton to the Forum in Los Angeles. Hence, the libidinal self-model situated within the political global model. Simply, there is no firewall between the libido and politics, particularly in relation to

memory. Turn the libidinal dial one degree in either direction: you come up right against the political. Moreover, when I recall all of this, I don't see either of these models within myself. I simply relive the world, *as I remember it*, in the here and now, in order to assemble a conscious, situated agent for myself. This is true even if these memories can more aptly be described as screen memories—i.e., those lucid recollections we believe reflect real events but which are, in fact, partial fabrications.³ Either way, my recollection of the Forum—in the context of world events in 1976—constitutes my sense of “being in the world,” and this, in turn, is foundational to the feeling that I have a core self.

Which brings us back to the political terrain beneath *Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff*.

On January 15, 2014, the “Fabulous” Forum—as Angelinos colloquially know it—reopened its doors as a concert hall. Constructed in 1967 by Jack Kent Cooke, then-owner of the Lakers and the Kings, the Forum originally featured such legendary musicians as Led Zeppelin (sixteen times), Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, the Doors and Jimi Hendrix, in addition to being the home base for the Los Angeles Lakers and Kings. But what's equally important is the building itself. In its current \$100 million restoration, the Forum's signature red metal panels—sandwiched between rows of cast concrete columns—return, a flourish that Charles Luckman, the arena's designer, intended to echo California's signature red sunsets. Luckman, a Los Angeles icon in his own right, had been co-principle, with William Pereira, of the architectural firm Pereira and Luckman, and the style of their signature buildings punctuates the Southern California landscape we've come to know from the sixties and seventies: from LACMA

to LAX and, yes, the Fabulous Forum. California's architectural landscape at the time was more human-scale. Think back to Ed Ruscha's photographs of the Sunset Strip. And even if Los Angeles was a sprawling city—something tourists from New York, Chicago and San Francisco endlessly complained about—the individual streets and neighborhoods were populated, and thus alive, whether their residents were rioting, strolling or barbecuing.

Fast-forward to the present. Where in Los Angeles could you even riot today? Certainly not downtown Los Angeles, the site of “L.A. Live,” a mega-entertainment complex built and run by the Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) of the multibillion-dollar Anschutz Corporation. Philip Anschutz, the corporation's owner and current CEO, is the man who brought Los Angeles the Staples Center—a twenty-thousand-seat sports arena where the Lakers and Kings now play—and who plans on bringing a seventy-two-thousand-seat football stadium that will completely redevelop what's left of downtown. A lifelong resident of Denver, Anschutz is an archconservative and devout Christian, which explains his other contribution to California: Proposition 8, the state constitutional amendment, passed in the November 2008 elections (reversed in 2013), banning same-sex marriage.⁴ L.A. Live is thus a living shrine to a brand of neoliberal politics practiced by AEG: the building of homogeneous, supersized megacenters, unfettered by environmental regulations and bolstered by socially conservative legislation. From a neoliberal standpoint, it's *the bigger the better*, to the point of endless distraction. As NBA Commissioner David Stern put it with regard to AEG arenas around the world, “We went from a league playing in beat-up buildings to this model of video boards and sound

systems and restaurants and suites and clubs and, oh yes, there's a basketball game in here somewhere!"⁵ AEG's megacenters are based upon the model presented by Universal Studios and Disneyland, each of which hosts twenty million visitors a year. The AEG logic is as follows: If you can pack people into theme parks, why not pack them into hotels, restaurants and entire neighborhoods? Why not move tens of millions of people like cattle through each corner of Los Angeles reconstructed to fit the AEG model?

Back to the Fabulous Forum. Located on the other side of town in Inglewood, the Forum was restored by the Madison Square Garden Company (MSG) with the intention of making it "once again . . . the premiere music and entertainment destination in Southern California."⁶ The question is whether Inglewood, as a neighborhood, will be reinvigorated or whether MSG, partnered with Caesars Entertainment, will follow the AEG model, injecting neoliberal malls into the Forum's neighboring districts, where they'll spread like a virus. In this context, the inception of a collective memory—the historical *situatedness* of the Fabulous Forum as a neighborhood center—might function as a tactical weapon of urban resistance, a holdout for an older global model. For no doubt about it, this region is a battlefield. Not for the gangster culture made popular by nineties hip-hop. I'm speaking of such hoodlums as Kaiser Permanente—sued by the city of Los Angeles in 2006 for patient dumping on skid row—who just purchased 8.65 acres in Baldwin Hills to construct an outpatient medical office. With no trace of irony, a spokesperson from the seller, Commercial Mortgage Managers, stated: "Kaiser's

commitment to this community and this project is the linchpin that will help us revive the vision for Marlton Square . . . This changes the complexion of the whole area.”⁷

Meanwhile, Leimert Park—an urban landmark designed by the famed Olmstead Brothers in 1928—is right around the corner from the Forum. Adjacent to the Crenshaw District, Leimert Park is the town square of L.A.’s largest historically black neighborhood, one lined with single-story bungalows, low-rise apartment buildings, small shops and industrial warehouses. A light rail/subway station is coming soon, something civic leaders, neighborhood activists, merchants and clergy all fought for. But at the same time, the Crenshaw District is breaking ground on a three-level, three-hundred-thousand-square foot retail center with the standard neoliberal cacophony of soul-crushing corporate shops destined to redefine the *complexion* of this landscape. Think Target, Ross, Marshalls, Starbucks, Subway, Ralphs, etc. Before all this happens, while Crenshaw is still a neighborhood, it’s one of the few places you *could* riot if you wanted to, something the city’s repressive state apparatus fears, as evidenced by the L.A. Police Department’s complete overreaction to a relatively small protest in Leimert Park following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder trial of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin.⁸ And in the background, rising above the corporate war drums, you can hear the chatter getting louder and louder: *Close the street. Bring on the malls . . .*

[LEVEL 1 HEAD]

Ship of Fools

*I believe it is absolutely necessary to maintain a secret agenda, to work within the operation of subterfuge and misdirection . . . What if we could organize around those who were heretics, rebels, dissidents, visionaries, pirates, renegades, schizophrenics, extraterrestrials, atheists, orphans, and nomads? What would that proposal of art look like?*⁹

If you're standing in the path of a neoliberal tsunami, one approaching your neighborhood with the intensity of a freight train, how might your self-model react? When a real tsunami hits, the effect is a world crumbling around you, the ground dissolving beneath your feet into an infinite sinkhole. Offering no sense of figure versus ground nor a secure position within linear time and dimensional space, this is the space of death, if not of pure madness. For just as one's world collapses, so does the self. Analogously, in neighborhoods hit by neoliberal tsunamis, the streets are filled with drifting zombies—those who don't know they're dead—or rambling madmen cursing the gods for everything they've lost. And yet in this case, what if the madman is someone who has lost everything *except* his reason?¹⁰ What if he were actually a seer of the impending corporate wreckage poised to devour a neighborhood with the rage and insidiousness of black mold?

Flash back to the Ship of Fools.

Das Narrenschiff, in German, simultaneously denotes a medieval method of displacing madmen by setting them adrift upon vessels on the Rhineland and Flemish canals; a

fifteenth-century literary composition by Sebastian Brandt; and the fundamental axiom of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. Brandt's book, like Dante's *Inferno* (to which it is compared), is a foray into madness, an allegory for contemporary events that would eventually lead to the Reformation. Its chapters on misers, gluttony, churchgoers, adultery, etc., represented the madman as someone contemptible and loathsome rather than foolish.¹¹ But before it became an allegorical commentary, the *Narrenschiff* was quite real. Recalling the medieval practice, Foucault notes that "madmen then led an easy wandering existence. The towns drove them outside their limits; they were allowed to wander the countryside . . . Frequently they were handed over to boatmen."¹² So why, then, put the insane on boats rather than in prison? According to Foucault, it wasn't only to ensure that they weren't prowling about beneath city walls. Rather, the madman's voyage was staged as a ritual exercise—an absolute Passage—that placed him in the liminal position of simultaneously being cast out of the municipality and contained within the vessel. As such, the madman "is put in the interior of the exterior . . . He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of passage."¹³

Madness and Civilization, where these observations about the *Narrenschiff* were first made, was Foucault's structuralist interrogation of psychiatry's inherent "monologue of reason" vis-à-vis the insane it was designed to study. Simply, psychiatry doesn't *see* the madman in his liminal space. It just *listens* to him. As a consequence, the madman remains confined to his madness, where he is effectively contained and silenced. As such, psychiatry is nothing more than another instance of the *Narrenschiff*, a discourse and practice that has drifted pilotless through the Renaissance, Classical and Modern eras

tenaciously unaffected. Which is to say, while psychiatry alternately conceived the madman as diabolical, irrational or sick within this epochal sequence, the continuum was the transparency of madness itself for writers and clinicians alike, inasmuch as madness is the foundational precept, or self-model, of psychiatry. Reading Metzinger through Foucault, we could thus make the following formulation: Just as we can't see the self-model for our consciousness—we only see through it—psychiatry, in both culture and clinical practice, could never see that madness was psychiatry's *own* self-model—at once definitive and invisible.

How, then, might the madman performatively speak for himself in a contemporary sense? Moreover, how might his language and procedures constitute a modality of cultural critique rather than an object of either literary or structuralist analysis—be it by Brandt or Foucault? Daniel Martinez's *The Report of My Death Is an Exaggeration; Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff* is an attempt to do just that. The site of this experiment was the Los Angeles Metro, a dysfunctional public transportation system used primarily by those displaced by the global neoliberal tsunami—never mind the Metro advertisements boasting of “sustainability” and “green culture.” As such, it is a heterotopic site, a space that is neither here nor there: a modern-day Ship of Fools. Martinez explains it this way:

If we look at the bus line and public modes of transportation as neural pathways that are the links and conduits to the synaptic patterns of thoughts and behavior, we begin to see a very different portrait of the city emerge. My proposition is that the politics and lifeblood of the city play themselves out in the Ship of Fools. The

*participants and actors who ride the buses every day watch a drama unfold that could never have been written or conceived. It's a real-time shape shifting and fluctuation of unpredictability, and the embrace of the abyss and the unknown lived minute by minute. This is the site where all politics emerge: a contested moving vehicle on the fringe of society, the unknown society.*¹⁴

And with that, in February 2010, Martinez set himself adrift for a three-year journey upon his own Ship of Fools. One morning, he simply walked from his house to the corner of Crenshaw and Slauson and boarded the #210 bus on the Crenshaw line, riding the Metro local service for 10 hours straight. A week later, the act was repeated, though perhaps this time he boarded the #108 or the #358 on the Slauson line. Soon after, the activity became a weekly ritual: Martinez would ride the bus in every direction, changing lines for no reason, or for any reason, for 8 to 10 hours a day. He did this once a week for three years. To be clear, that's 1,440 hours riding around on the bus.

Recalling the work of Sophie Calle or Vito Acconci, *Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff* began as a conceptual duration piece and a political act, a means of both observing and partaking in the urban theater laid bare upon this metaphoric Ship of Fools. Perhaps the point was also to construct what Fredric Jameson called a “cognitive map” of the alienated city: a “practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile alternative trajectories.” In which case, Althusser's Lacanian axiom that ideology is the

“representation of the subject’s imaginary relationship to his or her real conditions of existence” becomes highly relevant. For such ideology is what Jameson intends for cognitive mapping: the enabling of “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structure as a whole.”¹⁵ These are, indeed, good critical intentions that accord with Martinez’s aesthetic ethos in this work and the ones that precede it. That said, Jameson’s cognitive mapping requires a Habermasian stance of critical distance, never a Barthesian one of complicit proximity, the latter of which characterizes all of Martinez’s artwork. In this case, dancing too close to the flame, the artist thus falls into the tsunami’s sinkhole. No longer does he observe the madman—he *becomes* the madman. No longer is he *on* the *Narrenschiff*. He himself becomes the Ship of Fools.

But then, again we must ask: what if the madman is someone who has lost everything *except* his reason?

[LEVEL 1 HEAD]

Dreamscape

Repetition is all about trauma. We consciously repeat one thing in order to keep something else, something traumatic, locked in our unconscious. But be warned, repetition has a shelf life. If we don’t switch it up, trauma is clever. It finds a portal and burrows its way back into the home of our consciousness. And then we’re back to black mold. Predictably, well before Martinez had spent 1,440 hours on the bus, his duration

piece descended into something other than what he'd intended, something psychologically liminal:

Endlessly riding day and night, stop after stop, neighborhood after neighborhood, I would view the change of demographics and the shift of class and politics in public space through the bus window. I noticed that I began to internalize the moving frame of cinema—the window—not the external moving image on the other side of the frame. The further I traveled, the deeper and deeper my thoughts and hallucinations became. As I rode and listened, looked and watched, I saw a pageantry of sounds, words and images that spanned thousands of years of history in arm's reach. Delusional, I myself became that which I'd set out to observe. The true nature of political reality was clearer than before. This is where I lived for the three years of travel aboard the Narrenschiff.¹⁶

Setting out to observe the neoliberal wave crashing over the Crenshaw District, the artist is instead crushed by it. Over time, stepping onto that bus was akin to stepping into one's own unconscious, a space where everything is possible yet nothing is defined. The effect was a kind of suspended animation. For if, as Lacan claimed, “the philosophical cogito is at the center of the mirage that renders modern man so sure of being himself in his uncertainties about himself,” then the loss of this mirage—the imaginary self-model in the space of the other—entails a *falling out* of the cogito into complete nondifferentiation.¹⁷ In short, it is to be thrust into what physicists call a fourth dimension—spatialized duration—one endlessly spanning the universe from its

beginning to end. In the fourth dimension endlessly expanded, the past, present and future become simultaneous: *Thousands of years of history in arm's reach*. From the place of the three-dimensional world, we, of course, can't experience the fourth dimension, although we can imagine it as some sort of representation—tesseract being a prime example. But to be caught *within* the fourth dimension is to be infinite in time. Which is to say, it's to fall outside of the time-space continuum as we consciously and logically experience it.

Psychoanalytically, this expanded fourth dimension can also be figured as an infinite dreamscape, one composed of an endless string of dreams, each existing within the other. Christopher Nolan's film *Inception*, in which an industrial spy leads a team of dream snatchers through an involute maze of shared dream states, pictures just that. In the film, dream time runs slower than real time: five minutes of real time equals one hour of dream time. And when a character dreams within a dream, time passes even more slowly: a five-minute dream inside a dream equals one week in the second dream state, and so on and so forth down the spiral of dream states.¹⁸ In this space of infinite regress, entire lifetimes can be experienced continuously, within the space of real hours, minutes or even seconds. Should one drop even further into that ultimate dream state beneath all dream states—into a state of “limbo”—then entire epochs could be experienced ad infinitum. This temporal involution is nowhere more apparent in *Inception* than when the dream snatchers' van—the site of their first-level dream—careens off a bridge. The action within the other two embedded dreams—a series of drawn-out espionage hijinks—occurs in the space of time it takes the van to reach the water below: a matter of seconds. This is

precisely the type of dream space evoked by Martinez's anecdotal recollection of becoming *Narrenschiff* on the Metro, of actually embodying the temporal-spatial paradox described by Foucault: the fool put into the interior of the exterior as a prisoner of passage, drifting into the liminal space of delusion and lucidity, madness and reason.

On this note, there's another convergence between Nolan's *Inception* and Martinez's *Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff*. In *Inception*, the protagonist is running from terrorists defending a multinational conglomerate poised to stage a global economic endgame. The pursuit plunges him deeper and deeper into sequential dream states, eventually landing him in limbo. Nolan's protagonist is what neuroscientists call a lucid dreamer, meaning that he's not a passive victim lost in a sequence of bizarre episodes. Rather, the lucid dreamer experiences the dreamscape in the role of "a full-blown agent capable of selecting from a variety of possible behavioral patterns, by turning them into intended real actions."¹⁹ This is quite different from the way we ordinarily experience the dreamscape, when we're lost in space and time. Ordinary dreaming, therefore, is not *like* delirium, it's *identical* to delirium. In a lucid dream, on the other hand, the dreamer sees himself in the dreamscape and adjusts himself to it. And in the course of the dream, the lucid dreamer's self-model—the fact that he is dreaming—is revealed to him, inasmuch as the model reveals something of the world back to him. Thus, what constitutes delirium in life—seeing one's own self-model, one's own consciousness—is a form of sanity in the lucid dreamer's consciousness. This is precisely the way to understand Martinez's anecdotal account of becoming *Narrenschiff*, of becoming the inside out of one's own consciousness.

What, then, is revealed to the artist? In *Inception*, it's the lack of distinction between reality and phantasy, waking and sleeping. Analogously, if we think of Martinez's delusional state on the *Narrenschiff* as a lucid dream, then the true nature of political reality becomes clearer than before: Guy Debord's model of psychogeography—a model of urban drifting that informed Fredric Jameson's model of cognitive mapping—reveals literally *nothing*, reveals that beyond the foundational (though transparent) screen of our phantasies—be they of distant pasts or dystopic futures—there is in fact no lost “real lived experience.” There is only, as they say, no there there. The artist, *à la recherche du temps perdu*, would find just Debord himself, locked in eternal limbo. Inversely, the artist who willfully abandons this aim while retaining his utopian revolutionary ideals might also live perpetually in limbo. So what's the way back up? What's the “kick” that brings the artist-dreamer back to reality? For there is always a way out. There is always a portal. The trick is, you have to see it first. And when you do, you have to believe it exists. Lacan's theory of the dreamscape guides us here: “If the dream . . . may come so near to the reality that causes it . . . *What is it that wakes the sleeper?* Is it not, *in the dream*, another reality?”²⁰

Yes, what wakes you up is another reality.

So, what if I say to you now: Do you remember the Sorbonne's occupation in 1968?

[LEVEL 1 HEAD]

Dreamwork

Try to remember something: an event, a person or a place. It's a testament to your individual consciousness, your fundamental agency as a subject. But this time, as the Situationists said, *take your dreams for reality*.

To be in Crenshaw on any given Saturday is to experience a holdover from 1960s Angelino culture. The smell of weed—the sweet scent of urban chill *and* resistance—permeates the air. People are walking around everywhere, going about their business or pleasure, never once entering or exiting a California Pizza Kitchen. This is the neighborhood in which Daniel Martinez lives and works, not far from where he was raised. It's literally the terra firma of his self- and global models. But let's not romanticize the neighborhood, given its recent past. Even before the “Rodney King” riot hit Crenshaw on April 29, 1992—the largest riot in the country since the 1960s—it was one of the most violent neighborhoods in Los Angeles owing to the gang-driven crack trade of the eighties. Over recent decades Crenshaw thus became a demarcated space: a contested territory existing somewhere between a CMZ (closed military zone) through the eighties and nineties and a DMZ (demilitarized zone) today. But all of these things—the weed, the chill, the riots and the gangs—define Crenshaw, as does the impending neoliberal tsunami about to strike its shore. As such, the place is a paradox that can only be represented by an artist who intuits—*and who has lived through*—its paradox. Here is Martinez's description of the psychogeography of his daily *dérive* throughout the neighborhood:

This specific area is basically where I live. So as I drive and travel, every day and night, I look and make notes of places, streets, signs, stores, small changes that occur on an everyday basis. The area is a semiotic wet dream. The signs are constantly in flux and are both peremptory and responsive to the world around them. Nothing here is static, nothing is passive, the posture is defensive and predatory while, at the same time, contemplative and organized around the most sincere form of community. It is full of contradictions and exemplary acts of humanity and generosity.²¹

Rife with vicissitudes, Crenshaw is perfect for the kind of *dérive* envisioned by Guy Debord. If we drop our usual movements and actions and instead allow ourselves to be drawn into the attractions of the terrain, we can pursue all sorts of unexpected portals that permeate this cityscape.

Which brings us back to the Situationists and the year 1968.

The memory of the occupation of the Sorbonne and the General Strike of May 1968 is a political, primal scene for Martinez. In his hands it's a tactical weapon of urban resistance. Armed with this memory and the realization that there is never anything but *here*—the situation at hand, real or imagined—the artist hits the streets of Crenshaw to graffiti and photograph its demarcated zone: Manchester to the south, West Adams to the north, La Cienega to the west and Western to the east. Like Atget's stock of photographs that

caught on film a Paris of *common detail* missing from the usual bourgeois image,²² Martinez's photographs of Crenshaw are spectacularly nonspectacular, given the imaginary place the neighborhood holds in our collective memory. However, while Martinez's photographs are devoid of people, they are loaded with signification of another sort. The textual interventions that he made throughout the neighborhood visually and affectively recall the Situationist graffiti scattered throughout the streets of Paris in May of '68. This signification is a ghost haunting the streets of Crenshaw.

A few cases in point. Above a banner reading "Holiness or Hell," the artist has spray-painted "The casualties of a diseased society." Juxtaposed to the sign "Mr. T. Meat Market," another reads, "I am clear in my mind but my soul has gone mad." And beneath the marquee "Sixth Ave School" is the urgent imperative "Commit random acts of kindness." These are the scenes that lie beyond gallery walls—the storefronts for churches, barber and mechanic shops, liquor stores, markets and so forth—all of which are transformed by a single voice, one that simultaneously laments the space that's on the verge of disappearance and interrogates the ideology of that neighborhood's present tense. Tellingly, within the gallery context, the photographs are merely designated "documentation," as if to resist the artworks' author-function vis-à-vis the anonymity that Martinez's graffiti would have had in the real world. For as Foucault noted in 1969, "an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer—but he cannot be an author."²³ Thus, Martinez's textual interventions constitute the attempt to be *everyone* precisely inasmuch as everyone is no *one*. It's a primordial transitivity—the collapse of distinction between self and other—that returns here, the little reality within the dream that Lacan

described. And it's the thing that wakes us all up, or at least lets us know we are still dreaming.

Engaged in this lucid, authorless dreamscape—this interventionist *dérive*—the artist finds his ground, even as the ground continues to dissolve beneath him both psychologically and economically. This state calls for a personal and political act of sovereignty, which the paintings of *Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff* ultimately index. In Seminar XI, when Lacan talked about the “sovereign act” of painting, he was thinking of the “little blues, little whites, little browns” that constitute Cézanne’s work. But his principle applies to Martinez’s paintings as well. “What occurs as these little strokes fall like rain from the painter’s brush is not a choice,” Lacan argued, but something else: it is a terminal gesture, a defensive act that establishes the self, as such, within the confines of the picture. This is the *coming to be* of the artist-subject, one who *falls into* the endless contradictions and excisions of the self within representation, be it of 1960s France—the memory driving Martinez’s work—or of contemporary Los Angeles, the site of his production. As Lacan poetically put it: “If a bird were to paint would it not be by letting fall its feathers, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves? What it amounts to is the first act in the laying down of the gaze. A sovereign act, no doubt.”²⁴ Hence we have all *the little blues, the little pinks, the little greens*—hues of Crenshaw’s handmade signage—that characterize Martinez’s paintings. It’s the color field of the subject’s battleground, a subject who speaks the madman’s reason, either heard or imagined, on the Ship of Fools. But in Martinez’s case, Lacan’s sovereign strokes—and, by poetic extension, the feathers, the scales, the leaves and shit (even)—are not merely

transformed into bits of color in paint, they're transformed into words of madness, love, hope and rage, instancing what Foucault called *parrhesia*, otherwise known as fearless speech.

Greek in origin, *parrhesia* is always spoken from a position of privilege—classically by members of the *ekklesia*, or assembly—hence its fearless nature. When something is revealed that threatens the will of the majority, the speaker could lose everything through its utterance. Consider Martinez's painterly *parrhesia*–cum–mad reason:

*Society appears to be largely composed of extremists and habitual criminals dead
people don't fuck . . . Flee in all directions schizophrenics orphans atheists and
nomads we are so sick of ourselves . . . All waiting for the sky to fall to earth and
when it fell they threw themselves down after it . . . Fills me with feverish emotion
like waiting for a lover I am only an obsession don't talk to me*

This body, this corpus of writing, spills into the gallery from the street. And with it, the artist's proprioceptive awareness of his own body/corpus—the phenomenological “position sense” foundational to his self-model—might seem to have collapsed. I'm speaking both of Martinez's positionality in relation to the kind of art production for which he is known, as well as the political legacy of the sixties to which he is committed. But has this aesthetic/political position sense really collapsed? No. It hasn't. And this is where the reveal—the subversive *parrhesia*—comes into play.

If laying down these words of madness is an act of sovereignty, as I've claimed through recourse to Lacan, we should note that it's not a sovereign act in the symbolic sense established in the ordinary world: the solid nation-state declaring itself vis-à-vis other nation-states ready to do battle. But if we were to think of *Memoirs: Of Becoming Narrenschiff* as a nation-state, it would be one constituted upon madness and populated by those who have lost everything except their reason. For the residents of *Becoming Narrenschiff* still have sense enough to know they've been displaced, pushed into a liminal position between the traumatic failure of 1968's cultural revolution—when twenty-year-olds marched in the street, Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* in one hand and Mao's little red book in the other—and the oncoming neoliberal tsunami bringing us the anaesthetizing reality of a completely corporatized everyday life. Silicon Valleys all the way down. Residents of *Becoming Narrenschiff* are the ones tasked with putting words to this liminal state, precisely when words to describe it fail us. In the end, it's best to stay closer to the madman than to the zombie in this nation-state, for the madman has speech and thus the power to kick us up into consciousness of the fact that our position sense—politically, aesthetically and libidinally—is in crisis. Better to heed the madman's words, lest we end up like the zombie bonsai plants that populate the world of *Becoming Narrenschiff*: ghosts of a past that is neither authentically lived nor convincingly forgotten. In the face of this alternative, the madman's kick demands that we *get up and keep moving*. We better keep listening . . .

This is the politics of falling.

