

## A Final Diversion

For isn't there,  
He says, a final diversion, greater  
Because it can be given, a gift  
Too simple even to be despised?

- John Ashbery, *The Mythological Poet*

This is a very special issue of *focuslessness*, containing exclusive coverage of what has been the occult focal point of our country's collective concern for longer than I can remember, even though, truth be told, there is hardly anything that i can remember these days, and even less that i care to. Yes, the obscure object of our sum desire, the mystical center of our immense mental circle...an apt figure, come to think of it, for the structure in question itself is composed of concentric circles, as those flying civilian reconnaissance drones were able to ascertain. Sure, able to ascertain, because such a Daedelian view still could not discern the structure's interior nature, and therefore was allowed. But you are not happy with what is allowed. When the forbidden is hidden, shrouded in lies - lies you are unsure are lies - you turn to something else; you turn to *focuslessnessness*. For if everyone believes the Authorities deceive in their characterization of the interior nature - the world, that is, of the structure's inhabitants - only *focuslessness* knows. And it is for a truth independent of all official obfuscation that has brought you to us now - this time with *focuslessness* as authority, you still not as authority, and me as the secret-sharer whose word you so crave.

Is this too much? Am i failing already? Yes, a very special issue indeed. Special not only for what it contains - the exclusive insights, the coveted information - but special also for the audience it has drawn. Never have so many focused and durably pensive minds trained their tenacious gazes on *focuslessness*; never has *focuslessness*, you might say, cashed in on so much attention paid. You see, *focuslessness*, my new audience, since its inception, has been nothing more than a rather humdrum monthly "of, by, and for people with A.D.D."...the regular kind, mind you - the garden variety, that is - not the fearful form that has swept our nation bubonically, rendering its victims catatonically distracted, helplessly logorrhetic, and "exiled to a modern day Gulag." No, of course not. For as my fellow journalists from rival publications have succeeded in blindly guessing, in

their million little pieces of speculative trash, which, of course, I haven't really read, or at least finished, those unfortunate victims don't read a thing. Theirs, I can tell you (and I alone), is a civilization of perfect illiteracy, where such a magazine as this one serves no purpose at all.

But wouldn't that be better - to serve no purpose at all - to relinquish any sense of reason - any pretense of worth - instead of struggling to stay afloat, month after month, courting such fickle appetites as our readership's; laboring to sell, sell, sell, when for so long our readership could hardly sustain a thought, let alone a desire; and, what is worse, we could hardly sustain a thought or desire, let alone a method, theme, or point of view, let alone the work-ethic requisite to produce a single issue?

To take this issue in your hands as an example: I can only imagine what droll drama of drops and fumbles culminated in its miraculous completion; what crass comedy of errors; what trite tragedy of human intentions, where *hubris* could hardly be the flaw, since that would require in the hero a constancy of mind and will so foreign to *focuslessness* that the only reason I am able to tell you about it is that the editors themselves stopped paying attention several lines ago; that's right, at "staying afloat"; when they suddenly sat in the crow's nest of a foundering boat, somewhere in the nineteenth century, their eyes surveying the vast horizon (i.e., the lines of text that they are no longer registering), and, seeing nothing there, no, nothing at all, nothing to save them, nothing in the tight but gently rollicking circle of their displaced awarenesses, wait, here they come, shhhhh, here they are. And I don't think my editors would mind - would you, my editors? - if I addressed this unusually large, various, and focused audience directly, privying them as to the nature of *focuslessness*, and perhaps letting leak, like some eager but callow lover in the arms of Calypso (Good-bye, my editors!), a hint of our self-conscious nervousness at such sudden and massive exposure, coupled with a reassurance that we are, so to speak, up to the task. This is all to say, dear audience: allow me, allow us...allow *focuslessness* to introduce itself.

Now I know what you are thinking, and I sense your frustration and disappointment. Believe me, those are emotions I knew all too well, back when I had emotions. You came here, I'm aware, to hear the secret of our culture's enigmatic core, the mysterious institution that has swallowed so many innocents in recent memory, and which has proved impenetrable to all investigative attempts, to all the most ingenious journalists that populate my noble trade...all except one, that is. For as you may or may not have heard, and if not, well I am telling you right now, a certain journalist, a little while ago, disguised him or herself as a victim of that "Black Death of Attention," so that he or she would be swallowed like the rest, into the belly of the beast, entering those impregnable walls as a patient, inmate, camper, call them what you will, and lived among them for a while, participating fully in the "mad chaos of that damned culture," all the while maintaining an ironic detachment, yes, a lucid and critical eye, backed by as much memory as he or she could muster, so that eventually, which is to say, now, or pretty soon, i promise, he or she could deliver, could fructify before your eyes, could give you the proverbial scoop.

You came to hear about Camp Concentration. You came to hear the unadulterated, unexpurgated, unauthorized truth, and perhaps a thing or two about the elaborate misadventure that made it possible. You didn't come to hear about the fucking magazine in which the truth appears!

And yet, dear audience, there is good reason for such an immediate detour; such an originary digression is justified once you realize what kind of injured beast you're dealing with here. As I may or may not have mentioned earlier, *focuslessness* is no ordinary magazine, no *Hollow Harmony* or *Incoherent Currency* or *Proceedings of the Backward Society*. In *focusslessness's* offices, you will find no all-clever and omnipotent staff, no Prosperos of editing and marketing who, having figured out what it is you most desire, what most gets you off, give it to you continually, lacing it, where possible, with the proper ads, so that satisfaction, temptation, titillation, and outrage are woven together, as by the Fates themselves, into a perfectly tailored habit for your holy order of spiritual emptiness, if you

don't mind my saying so. (Unless, of course, they are spirituality magazines.) Yes and no: *focuslessness* is part of that world, no doubt (our offices are right there), and we try to strive for similar control and success, but in the end, it must be admitted, we fail. Nevertheless, precisely because our regular readership can't maintain a clear and distinct idea of what failure would mean - that is, precisely because they can't remember what *focuslessness* promises them, or at least to cancel their subscriptions - *focuslessness* manages to get by, to do okay, to stay, again, afloat.

But here is where you come in: suddenly faced with an audience that bears such a fiercely relentless sense of what it wants and how it should get it - a flame of expectations that my hapless rivals' outsized failures no doubt have flamed - so that your poor minds have, if you don't mind my saying so, and I apologize but I really can't think of a better metaphor, the bluest balls in the history of magazine culture, if not culture itself - *focuslessness* has to be careful to address those expectations first, to quench that false and dangerous flame, to stop and consider why your balls are so blue to begin with, or why you have such balls at all. I'll suck your dick in a sec if you insist, but first look here: *focuslessness* is not used to you, and you are not used to *focuslessness*, and i think it's important that we all just slow down a bit and get to know each other for a while or two.

But your thinking is so predictable, and your frustrations persist. "Okay," you say, "*Focuslessness* (sic), whatever it is, finally has an important story to tell, but doesn't know how to tell it. It is incapable and therefore worthless. I am leaving." But again, such a judgment arises only from the standards and values of your eminently able minds, and not from the values and standards of *focuslessness* itself, or those of our target audience - which standards and values, of course, do not exist at all - in any lasting, steadfast way, at least - but fluctuate forever, yes, in cycles of dissipation and renewal, like...like...like those clouds over there in the sky, or no, the constellation of vultures hovering beneath them...turning and

turning in the tightening gyre...as though I were the falconer's corpse. Maybe that is how they heard me: by becoming vultures....But I refuse to induce such mistaken saliva; to be converged upon merely to be consumed, when I am still unready. Shoo, vultures; away, I say! My desires and ambitions, my dreams and lusts - they, indeed, may be dead. But as long as I have this secret to share - this one-time exclusive - I am alive!

*focusslessness*, you see, will give you what you want, but not how you want it; not because it refuses, but because it can't. You are dealing with a bunch of degenerates here, and this magazine in your hands is our degenerate art. Fair enough, but now I must ask you: Should *focuslessness* be considered degenerate, when there is no other art to speak of? That is, no other possible source of the truth? I would not think so, if I cared. Instead, I would suggest that, for lack of viable alternatives, you might adjust your minds, you might adapt your modes of comprehension, and - like the saint who fell in the septic tank, and found her god in an icon of shit - believe in the power of this your newfound element; believe that the god of Camp Concentration is here - findable, reachable, but right now ungraspable - floating ethereal among the journalistic bric-a-brac that is *focuslessness's* meager, defective, but only endowment. St. Septic, my audience, had no choice, and neither do you; for the secret I have come to share cannot be gotten just anywhere, or in any other way than this.

Then what is the way, I hear you ask, what is the way I must follow? I know where the way will take me - to the heart of the secret, to the truth of the nature - but my arrival will not simply happen; no, not like a toilet-flush prompted by my absence; no, not like death, in my ineluctable pilgrimage toward it. Yes, death the gatherer, death the hole where all the pieces fall. No, now I understand that I am in the hands of an unusual magazine in my hands, and all the training I've gotten in my life thus far, all the education, all the expectations I have accumulated in my life of blind and uncritical habit, all of it will be put to the test - like that time in the gymnasium - yes, I remember - mortified before the class, because I said the words were dad, instead of dead. That kind of test. I am proud

of you, my audience; I am proud to see you talking to yourself like this; to hear you opening your minds to such self-interrogation. I am happy that you haven't simply refused *focuslessness* outright, and tossed it back in the wicker basket, with all those other somber, germy pages; or returned it neatly - though bearing now some wrinkles from your eagerness, which morphed into anxiety, and then into repulsion, and finally abandonment (again, feelings I knew all too well!) - to its place beside the other A.D.D. magazines, presumptuously deeming it unworthy of its temporary berth in World News. Such openness of mind, such willingness to unthread the habit of your order will be essential during the remainder of this article; so essential, indeed, that I would like, as a sort of aside, to ask the editors if they might isolate that last passage and highlight it in big, bold, black letters within the regular text. I forget what that's called, or actually I never knew, but I think you know what I'm talking about:

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because, I assure you, though I realize it is somewhat de-assuring, but don't worry, that any flaw in the thinking I have proffered, any defect in the prose thus far, any tinge of nonsense or taste of inanity, is only the incipience of what will soon be fullblown - the first bubbles of a roiling boil, the meek fledgling of a mad bird, the first lesions on an infected Odysseus...

But a friendly mad bird, I swear. We'll make some tea. Odysseus deserves it.

This brings us to the question of how my prose could be so Odyssean to

begin with - that is, so noble, shrewd, strong, valiant, heroic, eloquent, loyal, and perseverant - a question I will address before, I promise, returning to the question of the way you must follow. And please, by all means, feel free to pose other questions, as well; yes, let them proliferate like milk-bubbles above the thrust-in straw....We at *focuslessness* forget they are questions even as we ask them...but there is the paradox: how can i be so *focuslessness*-aware? how can i take such a critical stance vis-a-vis *focuslessness*, when i claim to be part of it? and again, how can my prose be so strong and purposeful, barnacled with digression, no doubt, but only as a massive, seafaring tanker is (with actual barnacles, that is, not the barnacles of digression), an aircraft-carrier that knows exactly where he or she is going, or, indeed, the boats that brought us to Camp Concentration - what the smart-ass media dubbed the "Ships of Fools." Ah, how I remember those days on the Ship of Fools, sort of: lying for hours in cramped quarters - yes, I see it - breathlessly improvising my inanities, scared the authorities would notice my sea-sickness and suspect my ruse. For such nausea must be rooted in a lingering sense of right, right? an inner spirit level where the little balance-bubble has strayed. While the true victims lack such levels. To be sick meant I had one - a relic orientation; my guise had yet to reach my core. My self-disbelief still stood on the gallows - awaiting its suspension - surveying the crowd of oglers...but no one was there...

Those were strange days on the Ship of Fools, I tell you - even before we sank.

I think this critical thinking needs to end sometime soon. But, since my tale provokes your question, i will address it. Here goes. Now it's extremely important, so, even though I know you already are, I nevertheless beseech you to pay attention. Please. I will not proceed until everyone is looking, and that means everyone. Believe me, I don't mind waiting here all day, even though, granted, day is about to end. For look over there: night sweeps toward me like a wave, pushing against the window of light, pushing up and away, filling with shadows the distance 'tween me and the day. Beauty is

behind a pane of glass, I say, gazing at the deepening blue as through the water of a rising tide. For I am chained here to the ocean floor. And I can hardly see what I am writing anymore. Slowly meaning drains away, like the details of the day, and soon these scrawlings will be nothing but bare marks on a vacant plain; signs of lost presence; proof of present absence; indications not of what I've thought or said, or what you've thought or seen, but merely that we have been there and are not there now. For we are always here, always at the end, the edge, the threshold of darkness and light, the finished and the unrealized. Vague tombstones in a meadow, these scribblings are, under which my dead desires lie; my dead ambitions; dead dreams. But your question, your question - what was it again? Soon we'll be allowed to forget; soon the alloy of oblivion will be a cleansing, a baptism; but not yet, not yet. Is it still the same question, I wonder, now that so much has come between its birth and rebirth? Is it still the same question if you don't want it anymore? Dead questions, dead words. You ask: how is it that I write with such focus when I write for *focuslessness*? Again, editors, please embolden. Well, let me tell you. She ran her salivary finger down his spine, fondling the tip of his tailbone, and then suddenly, but slowly, penetrated him for the first time. Sorry, I just needed to make sure the editors weren't looking, and that's the kind of shit they dig, believe it or not. For what I am about to tell you, they cannot know. They cannot know that, notwithstanding my storied career with *focuslessness*, during which time, I liked to laugh, "my distraction ha(d) found its form" - whether it be in my reviews of A.D.D. medications, *The Pills Talking*, or the lewd chronicles of what I called my *Night Errands*, or even my ill-fated interview with the novelist, poet, and recent suicide Thomas M. Disch, to whose 1968 masterpiece the Authorities unwittingly alluded in naming Camp Concentration Camp Concentration - yes, notwithstanding all of that success - success at failure, you might say - I did not, in fact, and do not (and inducing him to come in a slow but plenteous ooze, she would use his penis as a writing implement, conjuring fantastic scenes) - funny how the very thing that steers them away brings them back for more - have A.D.D. There, I said it. My faculty of concentration is not defective; my bank of attention is bounteous, my fund well-endowed. More and more the air darkens, and meaning is almost

gone: I would not know what they mean if I did not know what they mean. But he did not like the scenes, and refused to be used as a tool. So he began to finger her too, a finger in each hole at first, and then a fist in one (I'll let you decide), as vengefully and longingly he reached to strangle her throat. The defect is in another faculty altogether, the most important one, you might say. She died in an ecstasy of unborn visions. I cannot see.

