

JON CURLEY

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Illuminations in Translation = August Inspirations!

The discrete categorization of artworks causes frustration when carried out to formulate--and defend-- a forceful, enforcing kind of aesthetic sectarianism. Damn the immortal dichotomies and predictably pallid distinctions!-- or so we wish. But those labels are not labile, and separation complexes will always abound in the realm of art and all lived reality for that matter. This is such and such, that is such and such, and mixed media can be tolerated just so long as we keep an eye on all the differently engineered pieces. Such prevailing conservatism is antagonistic to the energies of art which requires space and freedom to adapt in accordance to its whim, using any material as its birthright and breath. Possibility shoves aside prescriptions and neatness of definitions and organizing principles are the requisites of the doctors of the direly mundane.

So now a sequel to yesterday's ruminations:

I caught with a live audience at Montclair's Cinema505 the luminous adaptation of Arthur Rimbaud's collection of prose poems, *Illuminations* by Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno. These filmmakers could have found much simpler, less abstract, less challenging poems to employ in their craft. Poe's "The Raven" comes to mind, so too a dirty limerick or any of the saccharine doggerel of that non-poet Rupi Kaur (whose most recent collection appeared on the shelves of the Montclair Book Center under "Pop Culture"--sometimes the categories must be maintained, aye!)



These four films bristle with the exorbitant antic energy (I shall avoid any overview of the technical or performative mastery but register mightily my profound impressions) of both sensitive and stunted human beings grappling with world events and with each other. They are beleaguered and bold, attempting to establish clarity, understanding, empathy, and a sense of where they stand in the scheme of, well, the kinds of classification, incorporation, and assimilation the world wishes to seize upon and hold us to.

That the Bongiorno chose as their ur-text the restive, ambiguous, *feverish*, and animatedly unstable and non-complacent scripts of Rimbaud demonstrate their commitment to brilliant novelty-- staging new representations and so new possibilities, forcing readers and readers (little coercion is needed in this blissful creative witness and exchange) to consider and reconsider the contents and contexts of both the poems and the films, in relation to one another and apart. The encounters and engulfment of these two arts-- poems and film-- does not so much blur them but orchestrate emergent sensitivities to what they are and what they might be thought to be. My reading of Rimbaud will now always be informed by the camera of the Bongiorno and also his pen now always carries the imaginary ink of their timely intervention in using Rimbaud, the seemingly apolitical poet, in an entirely fresh and adventurous way.

As I mentioned last night to the audience, Rimbaud can be lauded or derided as a poet maudite ("cursed poet") but he has to also be recognized as a historical figure, a

witness, an artist who lived in the world, who witnessed the invasion of the the Prussian army, the Paris Commune, and the massacre of the Communards. There are varied parts of art and there are various forms of artistic and civic participation. Rimbaud participated as person and poet in a crucial index of artistic and social exploration, as do the Bongiornos, participating in and practicing an exploration and intervention into the poet's words, allowing us as an audience to participate in a heightened acknowledgement of the quandaries of our personal and social selves...

Because the Bongiornos choose to resurrect Rimbaud in a wildly, wonderfully, and-- for those tending to the categories-- recklessly rendered adaptation and translation, they are faithful to their poetic forbear's credo: not heeding the pious or perfunctory, making work, making art, because it must be done so as to open minds, doors, conversations, borders, entryways to better approximations to our better selves. Amen, Arthur! Amen, Marylou and Jerome! Salut!



(Here is a Rimbaud mask by David Wojnarowicz, whose retrospective at the Whitney Museum is happening now. I dare you to define what kind of artist he was/is as well....)