

A loaded proposition -- in concept, and as an evolutionary articulation.

I first met Lance on an icy November evening in 1998.

Nearing 1207 Main St., he and Flanigan appeared through a frosted street side window as an intrepid - albeit wobbly - pair of novice figure skaters, insistent on choreographing the ice dance 'routine' they had doggedly set upon themselves this particular evening.

I was finishing up a happy hour bartending shift, and after some hailing through the weather and a negotiation with the sidewalk, the 2 of them made it inside for a pop. Introductions were made, a few formalities exchanged, brief conversation and - along with a few more Irish whiskeys - the 3 of us lit out up from the basin to Northside and the Comet...

“What does it matter to us what judgements may later be passed upon our obscure personalities? If we have seen fit to record the political differences that exist between the majority of the Commune and ourselves, this is not in order to apportion blame to the former and praise to the latter. It is simply to ensure that, should the Commune be defeated, people will know that it was not what it has appeared to be up to now.”

Gustave Lefrançais addressing constituents, 20 May, 1871

Around this time - maybe later, sometime in 1999 - I came across the following in an exhibition review, and it has remained an ear worm throughout the intervening years:

“...at the end of the day, the last luxury of the 20th Century is context.”

CONTEXT

At its core this was what *Semantikon.com* provided. Context. Early 21st Century context...

As a premise it was simple enough.

Embrace the 'form' of the storied precedents set forth in the bevy of printed editions of art minded 'Literary Journals' produced by loose, avant-garde collectives throughout history. The surrealists, Letterist International, Fluxus and the like - not to mention zine culture, in all of its glorious DIY manifestations - were touchstones. *Semantikon.com* was conceived to follow suit. Sort of...

A shout in the wilderness, for sure, but one that staked a claim for - and voiced the validity of - a motley, abstract community of (mostly) midwestern artists.

And while we're at it - build **SEMANTIKON.COM** from the ground up -- on the Internet.

Throughout the 1990's, the concept of the Lyotardian "Death of the Grand Narrative" firmly took hold. An overarching sense that by maintaining a linear arc of the importance of work produced mainly in the major culture centers across the globe, a larger number of voices were being excluded.

The emergence of the 'World Wide Web' was poised to combat this - nearly anyone could 'get up,' pushing their work out to an audience heretofore practically unreachable. Now, regional 'micro-narratives' were not only on equal footing with NYC, LA, London and Paris, etc. - they were locations of innovation - and where the truly exciting work was taking place. We always already had to work -- harder.

There's a joke about being a serious 'Artist' in a joint like Cincinnati -
"It's a great place to get a body of work together -- to take somewhere else."

Not anymore.

All at once, "Elsewhere" was at our fingertips - via a click of a mouse - WORLDWIDE.

A distillation of our working praxis - firmly rooted in the 'here and now' of the time - broadcast internationally. Aesthetic positions became concise articulations of the **NOW**, however entrenched. Veteran campaigns engaged through trials by fire: Bolotin, Strange, LaCharity, Flanigan; or nascent, tentative gestures - workshop volleys of the green and embryonic.

Still, all beholden to a firmness of conviction - and belief. And still again, on equal footing.

Semantikon.com was our 'Mechanism for Context.'

As a website - format-wise - **Semantikon.com** exploited the templates laid out by its forebearers.

By pairing a featured Literary Artist with a featured Visual Artist, on a roughly monthly schedule, the site took on an aura of prescience, auto-magically becoming an interrogation of intertextuality. Resonance and disruptions bloomed and withered again, only to reemerge - mutated, viral and more subversive - through the cacophony of voices accumulating within its 1's and 0's.

Not a luxury, by any means, but rather an organically manifest situation of 'CONTEXT.'

Personally, I was fortunate enough to be twice invited - maybe 2 and a half, three times - to have my work, both visual and literary, featured on **Semantikon.com**.

Granted - some forms translated better than others...

First one: 2004.

I work primarily as a Painter, and I make big paintings.

Lance - or Lance and I - hit on the idea of having an online **Semantikon.com** feature for a series of recent paintings I had been working up. The online feature, along with a coinciding 'physical' exhibition, would run simultaneously, with one feeding off of the other. Logistically speaking, we had a task in front of us.

For the online situation, capturing via photography the scale and subtlety of the new paintings, and the presence of a new technique I'd developed - utilizing a ridiculous number of layers of scraped and buffed oil paint and wax - was, frankly, a pain in the ass...

Long story short. After a few trials - and accepting the compromise that even if the individual painting images opened in a new 'window' online, the reproductions were what they were - we cobbled together a handful of images, a couple of facsimile pages of 'Notes' and, in hindsight, a wandering non-sequitur 'statement.' I hung the show in situ at some 'Modernist' high end furniture store I'd been working with, made some posters, and the '**META-NYM Sequence: 5 Paintings**' exhibition was realized. Glitches and all.

Did it work?

YES -- insofar as you'd be hard pressed to find at the time any precedent - or 'model' - of an artist taking on the uncertainty and ambition necessary to even begin to entertain this as an idea, let alone have it succeed as a viable, emerging exhibition platform. This project was, in fact, relatively uncharted territory.

As an experience, the reach was there: great crowds at the opening and after, with a steady stream of online and in person engagement. I met a few collectors - several of whom have become lifelong friends, and received an occasional email of interest from some far-off locale. It also - indirectly - took me to Paris... Context? Absolutely. We MADE the context, and it worked.

Still - some forms translate better than others...

Next one: Part I.

Back to 1999 -- briefly.

I work primarily as a Painter. Primarily.

Adjacent to the visual work, I will on occasion break into a mode of writing - haltingly and belabored, still - *around* whatever it is I'm thinking about 'about' painting. Set off during some existential 'dark night of the soul,' and accompanied by the incessant reading and re-reading of some semi-obscure - albeit in my mind essential - books, 1999 was overrun by these - what? - episodes of malaise? The paint was drying up...

Y2K, the entrenchment of the YBA's in Britain; being just a *little bit* older and - seemingly - none the wiser, I was hounded by an indelible, generalized *Fin de Siècle* ennui. I dove in. Hard.

Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, particularly the essay 'Cartouches;' Isou and Debord, over and over, with a soundtrack of *Call Me Burroughs*, Morphine and the Stooges; Burroughs' *Nova Express* and the cut-ups, running in tandem with an unhealthy obsession focused on the *premise* of Aronofsky's film *Pi*. These works were exposing a METHOD - they also happened to be seeing *through* me, in order to see me through.

At the time, my studio was a 3rd floor tenement walk-up on E. 13th Street, #8. I was 33 years old, and on the evening of 3 May, 1999 - at approximately 10:10pm - I sat down to write...

I stood up at 7:48am the next morning with an 8-page manuscript: **13833 Variants of Apathetic Brilliance.**

*"I am interested in the distribution of physical vehicles
in the form of editions because I am interested in
the dissemination of ideas."*

Joseph Beuys, December 1970

"...physical vehicles in the form of editions..."

Of course.

As a 'physical vehicle' the **13833 V.A.B.** was 8 typewritten pages, collected in a 12" x 9" craft paper envelope. This original text evolved into a self-produced, xeroxed 'edition.' A multiple of 33 first generation iterations - copies made from the original text; with a couple of working copies, and 8 'Artist Proofs.'

As a manuscript, the content of **13833 V.A.B.** lent itself to a *number of possible* interpretations.

Was it a straight, deadly serious artist manifesto? An 'arch-conceptual' Baldessarian parody - with tongue firmly planted in cheek? Concrete poetry, wrapped up in an end-of-the-century post-punk samizdat?

It was, in fact, all this and more.

More or less...

Procedurally, what the text laid out was a proposal for a series of 13,833 individual 11" x 7.5" pieces - artworks - on Arches 140# cold press paper. A number of possible drawings and paintings, material studies and biographical artifacts; miscellaneous notes, novelties - ephemeral odds and ends. 13,833 of them.

*A visual documentation - and archive - of **TIME**...*

Nota bene: *In order to secure 13,833 11" x 7.5" pieces, it was calculated that I would need 1,730 22" x 30" sheets of Arches paper. That's an awful lot of raw material, and it's not - to this day - inexpensive.*

And still again - some forms (of ideas) translate better than others...

Ideally, the concept behind producing an artwork as a 'multiple' is that the piece provides an affordable entry - while maintaining the form of a physical 'artifact' - for a broad segment of "the people" to get into an artist's body of work; and for getting a little bit of cabbage into the artists pocket, while you're at it. (That's beneficial when you set yourself up to *need* 1,730 sheets of fancy French 'art' paper...) While mass produced - within the scope of the edition - multiples are a mechanism for a more extensive *distribution* system, in a manageable, self-contained and portable format; although, by the very nature of a multiples 'limited' production, the *dissemination of the idea* will always already be just that - limited.

Still - and essentially - when considered within the maverick lineage that engendered it, and the motivations of that lineage which it challenged, the 13833 Variants of Apathetic Brilliance as manuscript manifests - fundamentally - as a written record of a number of possible IDEAS. And as such, the 13833 V.A.B. took on a life of its own, as much as a piece of writing as it lives as -- something else, entirely.

A loaded proposition, again -- in concept, and as an evolutionary articulation.

Next one: Part II.

Full disclosure: I have absolutely no recollection as to the how - and vaguely the when, sometime in 2005 - it came to be that Lance approached me to post up again as a 'Feature' on *Semantikon.com*. Not for the paintings this time, though...

The 13833 V.A.B. had stuck its head out in a few instances between 1999 and 2005. A couple of 'straight' readings, parts of which were integrated into a sound collage for a spoken word CD project Flanigan put together; the occasional inclusion in exhibition of some of the individual works on paper, though minimal in number, and somewhat out of context.

*And then, there was a performance - which injected the 13833 straight into the soul of Greil Marcus' Ranters and Crowd Pleasers - at the 5/3 Bank Theater at the Aronoff Center (of all places) for the November 2002 Weston Art Gallery *InterMedia* series.*

Slack translations into French and Chinese of the entire text - read by a couple of aspiring 'actresses' in short skirts, fishnets and high, high heels; megaphone declarations from a shabby old man with a tin whistle; then a sharp suit rattling off the Notes on the V.A.B.: a situationist 'cut-up' of conspiratorial, Burroughsian candor; ruminations and post-modern Beat elegance.

*Just maybe, it was **this** iteration that catapulted the piece into the realm of 'literature' in Lance's mind, and mine as well. Regardless, plans were made for compiling the October 2005 *Semantikon.com* 'Literary Feature' - Joseph Winterhalter: 13833 Variants of Apathetic Brilliance.*

Finally - some forms translate better than others.

At this point *Semantikon.com* had been hummin' along for a while, having smoothed out the majority of bumps and bruises it had gathered in its infancy. Lance - being the wizard - continued to tweak and refine the 'look' of the site and its interactive facets, as well as the platform overall. It was, after all, an evolving cyber-organism - and things were solid.

We set up a time to meet. I gathered up everything I had relating to the project, fortified myself for a couple of days in '*LanceWorld*,' and set out for Columbus - dead set on establishing, once again...

For me - 'analogue' as the day is long, still - this one turned out to be a breeze...

A breeze -- Just like that rush of air that engulfs you preceding the *heat* from a concussive blast.

First step was bog standard, apparently. At least in Lance's world.

As the manuscript was printed on standard issue 8.5" x 11" typing paper, all that was needed to do was to scan each page - and the cover of the outer envelope - into the machine. It was perfectly formatted. Lance worked some of his wizardry and within minutes - or an hour or two, depending on who you talk to - there was a glowing page of thumbnails on his screen; an ordered, tight grid of 9 images: the craft paper envelope and the 8-page 13833 V.A.B. text. A few spells and conjuring's later, a click on any image would open up into a new window - revealing a nearly full-size reproduction of the chosen text page. Perfect. Next, we input a short statement regarding the genesis of the manuscript, messed around with the format a bit. Seamless operation - and done.

The 'Notes...' however, were where the 'juice' was -- or at least where we could squeeze out a mind-boggling context for them -- by indulging in and taking full advantage of the repository of information that was instantly available on the 'Internet' of those days. *Necessary information...*

On stage, the Notes on the V.A.B became a careening, dynamic clarion call. Distorted, megaphoned 'pirate radio' transmissions wrestling with the static din of a repetitive and droning - yet clear, straight - recitation of the 13833 text, tuned as 'temp-morts' translations in French, Chinese and English. A tin whistle bleat in a darkened room...

On paper, the Notes on the V.A.B. was a dog-eared, typewritten and carbon copied sludge... crossed out, margin filled and crossed out again - non-sequitur wanderings, again - aspiring out-takes maybe fallen from a trash bin at 9 rue Gît-le-Cœur; most likely E. 13th Street. As a 'shareable' document - in other words - it needed some help.

We went to work. Cut some lines, clarified others; rewrote a section here and there, assembling a pseudo-respectable - albeit esoteric, still - version of the notes. Whittled down from the original 3 pages of rewrites to a manageable and webpage appropriate 9 or so paragraphs, Lance introduced - once again - a little more '*magic*' -- **HYPERLINKS**.

THIS. WAS. IT.

While not a completely foreign concept to me, the latent potential in the utilization of hyperlinks to convey additional, *Necessary Information* - extant, yet *concealed* within a text - was nothing short of a revelation.

An overloaded filing mechanism - my internal, intertextual 'soul of the machine' - could now, at the very least, be approximated. 'A system of quotation and détournement - embellished and contradictory - in a long, discursive chain...' come to blistering, anarchic life. Via a document. On the internet. Which emboldened 'the dissemination of the idea.'

A line as casual as "*is an accident*" opened to the **Library** at nothingness.org. The term "*situations*" led to **Bureau of Public Secrets** and 'Theses on the Paris Commune' - which in turn made accessible any number of additional, essential texts available at bopsecrets.org. All told, we fit 9 hyperlinks (several of which are no longer live...perhaps '*too dangerous*'?) into 9 paragraphs. These portals offered 100's - maybe 1000's more - ancient **and** modern trails to explore; fleshing out, quite simply -- 'CONTEXT.'

Joseph Winterhalter: 13833 Variants of Apathetic Brilliance went live on Semantikon.com on Sunday, 2 October, 2005. One month and 8 days later I boarded a flight to Paris...

Paris.

90, rue Saint-Martin: 89 steps up a spiral-scratch, opening up to a what amounted to be not much more than a reconfigured rooftop...broom closet.

Still, an ancient, cobbled street below - '*la rue Saint-Martin.*' Narrow, soot-marred and mysterious, alive with '*le revenants*' haunting - this time - an absence of barricades; though still again - an echo of their presence through centuries, scarring this 'artery of resistance' as contested territory.

That we ended up *there* - appropriate as it may be - isn't really important. The *How* most certainly is...

The 'META-NYM Sequence' had, over its physical run, infiltrated a certain sort of consciousness. The online Semantikon.com feature pushed the work even further afield throughout the year. I was able to get a little cash stashed away, proceeds from off-loading a few paintings and peripheral works related - and then not so much - to the exhibition, and was itching to "get outta Dodge."

Not coincidentally, I was turning 40 that November...and there was no way in hell I was going to be in Cincinnati when that happened...

Finding a spot to crash was Priority 1.

I figured I could squeeze out sticking around for close to 18 days - if I played my cards right. This needed to be a lean, streamlined Recon mission; a steady, inexpensive base was crucial to making it work.

Research ensued, and hotels were out - even 0-star joints were too much for my 'hard-scrabble' budget.

Where to turn now? *Craigslist*.

Well before 'Air BnB' turned every sleaze-bag with a shithole into a wanna-be Conrad Hilton, Craigslist was the place to look for Lo-Cal accommodations - anywhere in the world.

Community based - truly - as well as relatively transparent and HUMAN. You were still taking a chance, but it just felt more 'right' - and real - than the other options on tap...

Narrowed down to a dozen or so spots, I fired off a bunch of emails in my best pidgin '*Franglais,*' and then - nothing. Crickets. ZERO. I slowly began to accept that if this was going to happen, I may - perhaps - *have* to do this the 'right' way -- which is, sleeping on and under a pile of cardboard boxes in the *Parc Vert-Galant* on the *Île de la Cité*, or nearby, under the *Pont Neuf*... the oldest 'new' bridge in Paris. In November.

Tearing through a late season house painting gig - just a little more scratch to pad the coffers - I was doing 12 hours a day, 6 days a week to knock it out, and I was fried.

Time was getting tight, and I nearly missed it. The email...

While cordial enough - *French Cordial* - a potential host had, still, a couple of questions.

La Maîtresse de maison, Linda, a French-Senegalese expat, had her vetting process honed as sharp as a piece of Damascus steel. Two questions, elegant and incisive: "Why, exactly, are you wanting to spend 3 weeks in Paris?" and "What, precisely, do you - as an American - intend to do to contribute to *la culture française* while you are here?"

I threw together a paragraph or two: painting/writing research - along with a few other ideas I wanted to investigate - and *my impending turn of age*; and then the '*coup de tête*': the links to *Semantikon.com*.

With *META-NYM Sequence: 5 Paintings* and *13833 Variants of Apathetic Brilliance* added, I hit send.

That was all it took. Sealed it. A couple weeks later, I landed at DeGaulle. Hopped the Métro to Châtelet-Les Halles, and met Linda at *Place Edmond Michelet*. She handed over the keys - and a curiosity. Attached to the key ring was a small bauble, not more than an inch long. A cast aluminum jet, with 'TNT' embossed in bright red paint on each side. It was about 9:30am, Paris time. 11 November, 2005. *Armistice Day*.

An approximation of bohemian homelessness would have to wait - and, there was to be no surrender during this particular campaign...

90, rue Saint-Martin: 89 steps up a spiral-scratch - an ancient, cobbled street below...

The Map:

Passing through the front door to the street, two doors to the right was *Centre Pompidou*. Directly across, *Place Edmond Michelet*, and beyond that *rue Quincampoix*. Walk a bit further and you were back at *Forum des Halles* - a massive, subterranean shopping mall and transit hub - which replaced the teeming arcades and fresh food markets known since Émile Zola as '*La Ventre de Paris*' -- the 'belly of Paris.'

*Completely by chance - maybe - 'basecamp' was just about half a mile -
or 750 meters as the crow flies - from 'Point Zéro des routes de France.'
The pin-drop, precise spot from which every single distance
in and from Paris is measured.
Dead center.*

Bags dropped, we hit the streets... and for the following days, weeks (now a *lifetime?*) each second buzzed and pulsed with - clichés be damned - an *intrinsic* physical and philosophical resonance -- *Electricity*.

Early on, the 'Map' was a necessary - though not 'exactly' an evil - crutch. A formality we needed to indulge if we were going to expedite hitting the hot-spots with the precision this operation called for, as there are certain things one *must experience*, firsthand. Besides, there was - still - a lot of work to do...

In no particular order - of importance or chronology - and, certainly, not an exhaustive itinerary:

Our immediate surroundings, the *4ème arrondissement*, and the *Pompidou*, which had opened a comprehensive **DADA** exhibition in early October; the *Musée National Picasso*, complete with a stenciled assessment on the limestone entrance: '*N'Futur*'; *Place de Vosges*, and on to the Left Bank.

Musée D'Orsay - then over *Passerelle Léopold-Sédar-Senghor* to *le Louvre*... the latter at which I nearly lost my head after standing stone-like and motionless for every bit of an hour or two, soaking in every inch of Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* - while the tourists rush by, reenacting that *Bande à part* bit... Up to Montmartre - *Sacré-Cœur* and *le Bateau-Lavoir*; down the hill and east to *Place de la Bastille*. Back across the Seine to the catacombs - "*C'est Ici L'Empire De La Mort.*"

A Métro trip to visit the Eiffel Tower - jumping off the train at *Trocadéro* - providing a down-step garden jaunt past the husk of *Musée du Cinéma - Henri Langlois*. Another site considered '*contested territory*' -- then, an impulse: enact an impromptu bit of situationist street theater - a 'performance piece' - unscripted. Which - unbeknownst to nearly every passerby - became a clandestine collaboration with Banksy.

*"In no particular order - of importance or chronology -
and, certainly, not an exhaustive itinerary..."*

This statement isn't - completely - 100% true...

It did take us a few days to get our bearings - negotiating the Métro in particular. Still - map in hand - we mostly walked. With purpose. It became apparent that there was an internal logic working on us - intuitive, maybe - but it seemed to be more than just that. A sensibility dragging us along - ancient in origin. Then, I got it. The layout of Parisian *arrondissements* is a spiral; a series of roughly expanding circles, spooling out from 'the center of the universe.' We'd tapped the current, though hadn't - just yet - begun to drift... Still, a spark - "*In Girum Imus Nocte...*"

The Territory:

90, rue Saint-Martin: 89 steps down a spiral-scratch - to a narrow, soot-marred street below...

Passing through the front door to the street, two doors up and to the right was *Centre Pompidou*. Beyond that and heading slightly northeast, staying to the right - **180, rue Saint-Martin**, the second to last Parisian address of Guy Debord.

Early on we'd head out at dawn - backpacks loaded down: books, maps, provisions - deliberate, and with calculated, focused intent. Now, about a week in, we began to run merely on instinct - though I did carry with me an Allan Kaprow-like "flimsily jotted down set of root directions" in the bag, just in case.

*...technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances...
...(a) behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects,
and thus, quite different from the classical notions of a journey or stroll.
In a dérive one or more persons drop their relations, their work and leisure activities,
all their other motivations for movement and action,
and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.
Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a dérive point of view,
cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents,
fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.
But the dérive includes both this letting-go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of
psychogeographical variations by knowledge and calculations of their possibilities.*

Guy Debord - Theory of the Dérive, 1956

Now, carrying only the essentials - water, some '*ideas to disseminate*' - it was on.

17 November:

Gravitational draw, a *psychic fax*: Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Vestigial remains of '*les enfants perdus*?' On and under *rue du Four*. 51, 47, 34 - 26? **24 - Vingt-deux?** A 'mythical' hole in the wall - *Chez Moineau* - suspended in gelatin and silver by Van der Elsen; the dive bar to which all others aspire? No dice. Now a cheap 'clubwear' storefront - all neon leggings and faux - something or other - '*faux*' will suffice. So, we're off - again, and another not quite accidental - drift. Since - still again - there are certain things one *must experience, firsthand...*

Café de Flore.

*It was here that the world turned - briefly, and forever - after a few bottles of wine.
Beneath the critical eyes of 'les fantômes de Sartre et de Beauvoir' -
though thoroughly convinced of their full support - my companion on this odyssey and I agreed -
in no uncertain terms - that we would get married.
Little fanfare, other than a brief 'potlatch' -
et le mépris bohème et langoureux de nos voisins de table...*

A tidy, *Parisienne* dose of "bohemian, languid disdain..." Sure, if that's what you need to keep you going. Not us. Not now -- '*La beauté est dans la rue!*' Going deep, deeper into the *5ème* - we found our way through the *Panthéon* on the way back up from *rue Mouffetard* and environs; and at 51, *rue des Écoles*, *Cinéma Le Champo* found us. On the screen this evening, at **22h** -- Guy Debord's 'last' film, from 1978: *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*.

We turn, indeed - with *'Just A Few More...'*

21 November:

Rue de la Bûcherie - 'Street of the Butchers.'

At number 37, just across the Seine from *Notre Dame* and 'Kilometer Zéro' -- *Shakespeare and Company*.

We had stumbled upon a 'reading' - "*The Paris Review: Its Strange Past and Sublime Future.*"

Hosted by the late Susannah Hunnewell, Paris editor of '*The Paris Review*,' an avalanche of positions fell upon us. From Nelson Aldrich reading from a 1990 piece by George Plimpton to poet Jacques Jouet, a member of the *Oulipo Group* - and with everything in between - sensibilities hit overdrive. *Now's the time.*

As the electricity in the room subsided post-performance, I approached a young woman - furtively occupied behind a teetering pike of books - who appeared, still, to be running the shop. On cue - with the attendant '*je ne sais quoi*' - she introduced herself as Sylvia, as I fumbled into my bag and pulled out - *everything*. Broadsides and chap-books, Flanigan's *VOLK/cspi* spoken word CD; a few posters I'd made, *a manuscript ...* "Would you mind if I left a few of these around? Put some posters up?" An emphatic reply, followed by an animated - while brief - conversation. "Absolutely. Please do..."

Semantikom.com had bluntly - apropos of its name and with the heft of a meat cleaver - landed.

"Since its founding by George Whitman in 1951, Shakespeare and Company has been a meeting place for Anglophone writers and readers, becoming a Left Bank literary institution.

Endeavoring to carry on the spirit of Sylvia Beach's original 'Shakespeare and Company' shop, it quickly became a center for expat literary life in Paris...

Ginsberg, Burroughs; Anais Nin and Henry Miller... William Saroyan and James Baldwin were all early visitors to the shop.

From the first day the store opened, writers, artists, and intellectuals were invited to sleep among the shop's shelves and piles of books -- unknown, mostly, and early on in their careers..."

'Be not inhospitable to strangers lest they be angels in disguise.' - G. Whitman

from "A Brief History..." - shakespeareandcompany.com

Another cascade to follow. Our conquest of Paris carried *us on...*

Rummaging the book stalls and small shops nearby the banks of the Seine, one score was *otherworldly* -- Volumes I, II and V -- *Œuvres Complètes de Paul Verlaine* 1953; Volume III of the *Correspondance de Paul Verlaine*, 1929, and a few others. Each one with their pages 'un-cut,' the collection was wrapped tight, tied together with heavy twine, and pulled from the attic of 'ÉDITIONS MESSEIN - 19 Quai Saint-Michel - PARIS,' by none other than Monsieur Messein's *granddaughter...*

Drawn around a quick corner we landed on *rue Gît-le-Cœur...* at number 9, "*the Beat Hotel.*" Now a 4-star 'boutique' hotel - *Madame Rachou* long gone - the cobblestones retained, nonetheless, an intensity and oscillation worthy of a Gysin '*Dream Machine.*' In homage, some would say, I managed to dislodge a small, loose piece of limestone from where the façade met the street -- and I carry it with me, to this day.

'ONWARD!' to an 'Irish Pub' on the next corner (sometimes you gotta play the chips as they fall...) Hustling inside, *bonhomie...* We found ourselves amongst a crew: a couple, 'defense contractors' from San Francisco; then a Swedish physicist; and, while separate at first, an interesting pair of young French girls - art students at the Sorbonne. Into the night, through liters of wine, the warmth from *Calvados* - *and on, and on...*

As there are - for one last time - *certain things one must experience, firsthand.* Like a *Parisian sunrise...*

I did make one more trip to *Shakespeare and Company*, in order to - *you know* - check things out... One last, misty November afternoon, I dipped in a doorway, huddled up out of the wind. While I finished a hand-rolled *Gauloises* (it really is the best,) a slow, steady snow began to fall - the first since we arrived. In an instant - wind picking up - a more rapid fall, now more ice than snow in the mix...

Out of nowhere a figure materialized.

Small, ahistoric in clothing - my 'shabby old man with a tin whistle' maybe? Another 'fantôme d'une communauté' come to push me along? As he was struggling to clasp the shutters and pull these giant, ancient tarps over the bins -- which held all the books -- I jumped in to help.

Now - these were not the cheap, plastic waffle weave tarps we use today; these pieces were works of art. Massive oil-cloth sheets - watertight - and timeless.

While it took a 'minute,' we were able to get everything secured, as best as it could be.

My 'coworker' had, it seemed, a method. An experienced hand obviously born from years of repeating this particular maneuver, with a precision that demonstrated the utmost care.

Job done, and with an authentic, sincere 'thank you' -- he gestured to head inside the shop.

Shaking off the cold, a barrage of questions followed - *precise* questions - interspersed among several more issuances of 'thanks.' I answered best I could - flummoxed and disoriented to be honest - by the inquisitive line of interrogation thrown my way...

Slightly in a trance - though without hesitation -

*I 'auto-pilot' pulled a last **Semantikon** handbill, CD, and card from my bag.*

I caught a brief flash in his eye, then a shift in his visage, overcome by a knowing sense of - well - calm.

This calm - an openness - had a certain character to it, as if this man had, actually, known my answers to his questions all along.

With a clutch of material in one hand, he extended his other to shake mine as he said

"Yes - Hello!! I took a look at all these the other day --

I'm George Whitman. Do you need a place to sleep for the night?"

27 November:

Our last night passed with one last *dérive*, each step reinforcing in the deepest sense that this was **not** the first time - nor certainly would it be the **last** - that these paths had bestowed upon those who partook in their guidance an essential truth. This '**Truth**' - having been passed down since the 11th century - from '*the Old Man of the Mountain*' to Burroughs, Gysin; through the splintered '*Letterist Internationale*' to countless radicals and punks, was the **lived experience** of an ancient phrase. A contrarian - and oft misunderstood - declaration that stood for nothing less than absolute freedom: '**Nothing is true; Everything is permitted.**'

28 November:

4:30am - with little sleep - we jumped on an **RER** train at Châtelet-Les Halles, back to DeGaulle.

Our departure would not be an easy exercise in '**letting-go.**'

A line of close to 100 passengers clogged the way to security - presently unhostile, probably due to *le café* having not *just yet* fully mobilized their synapses. This calm turned on a dime, though, as *Andie MacDowell* - dragging her daughter behind her - figured it would be a *fantastic* idea to just *stroll* past the backlog. This was not a wise decision on her part. Between bouts and shouts of gorgeous French **mépris** - and trips back and forth to the counter - we made our gate with minutes to go. By now - with the flight overbooked - there was only room for one of us. A tough call - but, *sometimes you gotta play the chips as they fall...* With a crisp grip of 800 new-found euros in my pocket - and through the glass on *her* way to boarding - I bid my newly minted *fiancé* a fond '**Au revoir!**' For a few hours more - at least - *Paris wasn't going to let me go...*

Context. *Semantikon.com* covered more than just a few positions during its 'classic' period of activity. As a website - format-wise - *Semantikon.com* exploited the templates laid out by its forebearers -- the storied precedents set forth in the bevy of printed editions of art minded 'Literary Journals' produced by loose, avant-garde collectives throughout history. By pairing a featured Literary Artist with a featured Visual Artist, on a roughly monthly schedule, this website took on an aura of *prescience*. The *idea* was to not be limited, by any means...

In addition to the monthly features, *Semantikon.com* carried around in its corner a 'ringer' or two. Indulging in, and taking full advantage of the *potential* that information could manifest by being instantly available on the 'Internet' of those days was a loaded proposition. To cover all the bases, Lance had embedded the seeds of a 'physical' publishing arm, *Three Fools Press*; e-books and 'broadside' posters - the work of various contributors, all downloadable, ready to print; a deep library; experiments in sound - occasionally; and a repository of *avant-garde* film and video. It was under this category that my final *Semantikon* contribution would find itself, filed under '*Semantikon CELL LOGIC: Cinema Lost and Found.*'

Third one, in full. 2007:

"No film is more difficult than its era."

*Réfutation de tous les jugements, tant élogieux qu'hostiles,
qui ont été jusqu'ici portés sur le film "La société du spectacle"
Simar Films, Paris, 1975*

*In 1975, two years after the film adaptation of **The Society of the Spectacle** had been released -- this brief statement, lodged neatly as a voice-over in Debord's following film, must have sounded as yet another volley in his contentious 'anti-career' -- as easily dismissed as it is dismissive. Now, in 2007 - 34 years after **The Society of the Spectacle** was first screened - I'm not quite sure of how the game of time has proven Guy Debord prophetic with regard to a film - or any eras - 'Difficulty.'*

*When asked to write a brief introduction to *Semantikon.com*'s November 'Cell-Logic: Cinema Lost and Found' feature **La société du spectacle**, I started to feel like Louis Armstrong's jibe about jazz- -- "Brother, if you don't get it, there ain't no way I can explain it to you..."*

*I thought about staggering down the rue des Écoles in Paris on a chilly mid-November evening a couple years earlier, missing a screening of 'Société...' at the Cinéma le Champo - then 'settling' to settle in to absorb Debord's **In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni** instead...*

*I wanted to remind myself that the **spectacle** is not a collection of images, but rather the social relations between people mediated by images. I had to remember that critical theory must still communicate itself in its own language, and for it to be an all-inclusive critique, it must be grounded in **history**. I needed to remember to forget about living the negation of style, and to - still again - remember how to live a 'Style of Negation...'*

After all -

*"No film is more difficult than its era. For example, there are people who understand, and others who do not understand, that when, according to a very old power strategy, the French were presented with a new ministry called the **Ministère de la Qualité de Vie**, it was quite simply, as Machiavelli put it, 'to allow them to retain at least in name that which they had already lost'."*

“...already lost.”

Nope, considering “*Once I was young...and could talk with nervous intelligence about everything and with clarity and without as much literary preambing as this...*” -- and as I write this piece, which began straight; a ‘retrospective essay’ -- as Lance referred to it -- regarding my involvement with **Semantikon.com** --

*now its tenor taking on a curious vibe -- [shift linguals // tangle word lines] --
as if **something else, entirely**, has overtaken its production --
for it is now the Summer of 2020 -- ‘COVID Time.’*

And not just yet, for in revisiting these projects, activities, **experiences** - I’m struck mostly by how much **we have retained**, to this day - contrary to the ‘conclusion’ arrived at in 2007 - and not just in **name only**.

And still again - in light of the final two paragraphs wrapping up the ‘**Society of the Spectacle**’ piece above, with its *prescience* chillingly accurate - today, each day - as it is necessary for us to not only *recall*, but **fight for**, the promise - the importance - of what **Semantikon.com** put forth into this world, our world. Which is - that undeniable, necessary foundation for - and of - **CONTEXT**.

CONTEXT

Which, by the very definition of the word, ultimately provides a justification for - **everything** -

ALL the deadlines. Miscues and stutter steps; victories - large and small - fires and failures...
ALL the ‘*talking with nervous intelligence*,’ the clarity, the absolute necessity to ‘*just start at the beginning and let the truth seep out...*’ -- each time, and for everyone.

The incessant ‘**Literary Preambling**’ - the **experience** - the **essence of the story...in context**:
The ‘Work’ --

Semantikon.com: A Community Based Arts Journal

This Community: Each one of us; including everyone that has crossed paths with it - **Semantikon.com**.
Each one: an **initiate** into ‘**La Société du Semantikon**’-- *through the work*.
Each one: integral to the ‘**Essence of the Story**’ -- *through the work*.

Still, this is not to say that there haven’t been forces utilizing a certain ‘negation of style’ at odds with these collective - and individual - pursuits. In fact, today’s world perhaps may still prove *our works* ‘**prophetic**’ with regard to any eras ‘**difficulty**.’ Against this formidable - yet fluid, slippery - adversary, these pursuits, their resonances and disruptions...withering again, only to reemerge - **again** - **more** mutated, **even more subversive**, have hardened their roots...

Since, of course:

*“Avant-gardes have only one sole moment;
and the best thing that can happen to them is, in the fullest sense of the term,
for them to have **made their moment**.”*

Guy Debord - In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni, 1978

So, as ‘we turn in a circle in the night, and are consumed by the *fire*’ - **Semantikon.com** made its moment.

And, by having made its moment - one time - **Semantikon.com goes on**, making its moments, *forever* - by striking within an existing, *shifting context*:

*What does it matter to us what judgements may **still** be passed upon our obscure personalities? If we **still see fit** to record the political differences that exist between the majority of the population and ourselves, noting these differences now may **be in order** to apportion the necessary culpability in the future to the former, and to acknowledge the latter for their foresight...*

Which, as an **evolutionary concept**, as an ongoing enterprise -- embodies a loaded proposition. **Still**.

Then *still* - again - by actively pushing to give voice to its *Initiates*: the latest ones - each one - an integral participant in a timeless lineage, **Semantikon.com** has become **more** fortified, as its wells run *deeper*. This storied '**Cadre**': a motley, abstract assortment of '**Artists**' - our actions firm, and steeped in **history** - **will endure**.

Semantikon.com endures.

With the work undertaken - in any form - it carries on.

The **idea** carries on...

In retrospect. In action. In archival form. In our hands. In this world -- and worlds to come.

We **move** - **onward** - doing nothing *other than that which we have always already done* - which is, to '**KEEP ON!**'

As such: **KEEP ON!**

- with **experience**,

- with the **work**,
- with the **soul of the machine**,
- with an **insistence of context...**
- with '**La Société du Semantikon.**'

For:

"It is simply to ensure that, should the Commune be defeated, people will know that it was not what it has appeared to be up to now."

Now.

And still again.

And always...

=====
Joseph Winterhalter
Cincinnati, Ohio
June/July - 2020