

UNPRESIDENTED

(aka *Corinthians Caught in a Nasty Chora*)*

Melissa Ragona

We begin with our theme for the afternoon, to be unclean. Unclean with joy. In a world that is so-called clean. The world that is on the so-called right side of the law, the right-to-life side, the lifer-side, the birther side, the moral side, the convincing, straight-shooter side, the shooting side, the gunpowder and swagger side, the compulsory, delusionary, missionary position—the supposedly very bright side of the polar moon.

Then violet, violet overtakes the lunar—the violated eyes that suddenly come on stage—that recognize the right side, the wrong side, and the other side. The blur of your deformation —your surveying role, the surveyor, entering the house from all entrances, carrying a basket of deplorables, of implorables of rotting pretexts that allow you to go into someone else's house. The is the zone of the *not yet*, —and we keep saying, *never*. We keep saying, *never*. We will always say, *never*. This is not unprecedented. This is *unpresidented*—The world that is seemingly in order or *of-an-order*. Ordered for you, not by you. The moment you cross that order that down-by-law of speaking or wording, you no longer belong to any world. Your transgression, your transitivity, your *TransAm* bodies are isolated, and marked —flailing as they will—in the company of swans, storks, cavaliers, dithering debutantes, dial-a-thon Corinthians and other C-shaped scallywags that will attempt to reduce and humiliate you. Oh, but don't you let them.

Thriving as we do within the dark, rotting interior of the law, this tiny, heartless, scathing little, teeny, tiny empty center. This law list, this listlessness, of debt—monetary, soul-bound and chained to the inner walls of our folding flesh structures, our soft machines melting in the hallways of petty, penny pushing bureaucracies and bursars, and burden trundlers. A thousand little Mr. Jellybys swinging their purses filled with petty change and pity potty dots of reimbursement and *ressentiment* and the exercise of how much and how much more and why and where and when and for whom? And, for what? For what?

Joy is not unclean! You know this as you try—try so hard to wash your literary hands in the sinks of hell. And what does translation look like in hell? Is it transaction? In order to know, you must climb down, deep, deep, deep into your, as some like to say, *critical hole*. Your glory hole, your stinking *chora*, your unlikely choral safe space where little, evil, purple organs play and play and play.** They are untethered, fearless, and relentless. This is how we must be—

Indeed, descent is much more difficult to achieve than what these institutions call “success” with implications of licking the poles that politicians ride as they circus their way to the top. Giddyap! Giddyap! — cry all the Mr. Guppys toeing their way into the climbing-wall, jerking themselves off on the ivy curtains and the lush shag rugs. But, I order you to jerk off too — to commit small crimes and treacheries in order to avoid the self-denials that build these halls. Choose mud over mortar, jam over jelly. Spam those who attempt to keep you on the surface; who insist upon it; who would violently smile as you skim, or turn into the hideous skin, webbing itself across the glass of milk.

The general trend in life is to accumulate an entire *mélange* of mental, emotional, and biographical clichés. I am asking you, no ordering you to abandon this idle enterprise of surfing and slurping, of CV amplifications, of CVS medications, of STD notifications. Thinking does not happen out there — it is not a *Maker's Mark*, unless you can drink it or bleed into it or write with it. Making is not always thinking. Think of the thinker just sitting (you know how it rhymes, you know). Go down on into it, let your heart's jeans fall around your ankles; let your devil's cake crumble. Just let it crumble.

Before I close, I'd like to share an inspirational poem with you, written by Anonymous:

<i>Don't Fence Me In</i>	hamstring	strip
<i>Tie One On</i>	stigmata	feed
<i>Time Doesn't Wait</i>	Dolores	Bob
<i>Sadder but Wiser</i>	kazoo	cult

<i>You Snooze, You Lose</i>	junkie	freight
<i>Time is Money</i>	bush baby	chew
<i>Safer rather than Sorry</i>	button hole	fee
<i>Haste Makes Waste</i>	Lamaze	crush
<i>Strike While the Iron is Hot</i>	lettuce	bus
<i>Silence is Golden</i>	burrito	fuss
<i>You Can Lead a Horse to Water But You Can't Make Him Drink</i>	pack rat	crust
<i>Curiosity Killed the Cat</i>	pussy	vague
<i>Everything that Goes Around Comes Around</i>	lipochrome	hemp
<i>The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword</i>	dashboard	scum
<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>	speed trap	fem

Somewhere in the depths of my heart, I wanted to say so much more, more than any poem, any rant, any speech can deliver to you. Deeper than any thinking, than any unpresident, than any electoral trick or house of fools can convey. I want you to know that we can fight against ourselves—eject the primitive accumulation shaped by years of experience, and education and the knowledge of generations. But, we are lazy and impatient, sloth-like and *slaughter-pig-like*. We have, as the great Nietzsche has argued, a herd mentality, we plod along, blindly, climbing up and down institutional ladders caked with fat and blood. Like Agamemnon we cannot leave it alone, we cannot abandon the

murder and incest that defines our *Family-of-Man*. We would rather eat our own children, than forsake authority.

I implore you, prod you into places, muddier and less sure. To borrow from Helene Cixous: *Use your own body as a form of transport.****

I stand here with an unidentified inferno inside of me — and it is this disoriented heat that I leave you with.

*The first version of this text was written and performed by Melissa Ragona for Cara Benedetto's *Prelude Her Patron* (2015), MOCA Cleveland, adapted from a script by Benedetto and mash-ups from Helene Cixous's, "Three Steps on the Ladder Of Writing," *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

**"Let us therefore not speak of primacy, but of the instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect—the prohibition placed on the maternal body (a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo). Here, drives hold sway and constitute a strange space that I shall name, after Plato (*Timeus*, 48-53), a *chora*, a receptacle." Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 14.

***Hélène Cixous "So perhaps dreaming and writing do have to do with traversing the forest, journeying through the world, using all the available means of transport, using your own body as a form of transport." "Three Steps on the Ladder Of Writing," *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 202.