

Controlled Environments 1 script

(Seven telephone conversations between two arts bureaucrats, who are rather similar in at least surface appearance. The screen is split-frame, left and right. A and B switch sides with each succeeding phone call.)

I: MEMORY

B's phone rings

B: Hello?

A: B, it's A. Can I ask you a personal question?

B: What kind of personal question?

A: Why did you decide to become an arts bureaucrat?

B: Basically for the same reason as you. I needed to make more money than I had been making as an artist.

A: And you didn't consider teaching?

B: Look, if an offer had dropped into my lap I certainly would've accepted it. But teaching offers don't just fall onto one's lap.

A: Oh, I know a few that have. It depends upon knowing the right people in the right laces. Not like being a fifth level arts bureaucrat.

B: How many video artists make their living through their art?

A: One or two at the most.

B: I can't think of any. Either they switch to film, teach, work as technicians, or else retreat into the bureaucracy. Why did you become a bureaucrat?

A: Why are you asking me that question? You just answered it for me as well as for yourself.

B: But surely you could have infiltrated the academic world, A? After all, you are such a theoretical person.

A: There aren't that many teaching positions for video theoreticians. Film theory, yes. But not video.

B: Yes. I can't disagree with you there.

A: And, for your information B, there are also video artists who teach subjects other than video. They teach ESL. Or go into supply teaching.

B: And their own work moves along at a very slow pace.

A: *Uh huh. And frequently they stop thinking of themselves as artists. Because they have so little time and energy for their own work.*

B: *If you work too long at a support job, that can become your identity.*

A: *Indeed it can... Or... you've reminded me of a woman I know who found lucrative work as a proofreader.*

B: *Uh huh.*

A: *Well... she wore her eyes out during the day and didn't have the energy to do any writing during her off-work hours.*

B: *So? Why did you decide to become an arts bureaucrat, if you are so critical of jobs which wind up impeding writing endeavors?*

A: *That's personal, B.*

B: *And yet you felt personally free to ask that question of me.*

A: *True, B. But you didn't exactly answer the question, either.*

B: *I didn't use the adjective "personal" in order to prevent any further inquiry... The problem with the word "personal," A, is that it implies some deep-seated psychological trauma.*

A: *Oh.... So, you're talking about memory once again.*

B: *Everything you do is determined by memory. Your life is governed by memory.*

A: *So are most people's. Without memory we have no history. And don't tell me that you've become one of those neo-conservatives who gloat over the "death of history".*

B: *Oh, please.*

A: *Without history we have no values except for those of market capitalism.*

B: *Bullshit! Without memory we can eliminate guilt, and without guilt we can be free to enjoy happiness and health.*

A: *Happiness and health hardly exist in a vacuum, B..*

B: *Well, they are certainly dependent upon the elimination of guilt. Why on earth should anybody feel guilty?*

A: *Because people all too frequently commit heinous acts at the expense of others.*

B: *Then those people should get past their guilt and get on with doing whatever they feel is constructive.*

A: *I don't disagree, but...*

B: But what?

A: But memory inspires action! Without memory the motivation would not exist.

B: I disagree, A. Memory impedes action. It allows the past tense to dominate the present tense, and thus prevents the future tense from formulating.

A: Sounds like capitalism to me.

B: Is all enterprise necessarily bad? Just because Big Business is evil doesn't mean that, for example, fundraising is - even though they are both dependent upon hustling and promotion.

A: I still feel that memory provokes motivation.

B: And guilt provokes masochism. Which is probably how you came to be a cultural bureaucrat.

A: You're out to lunch, B. Masochists control narrative. They're not pawns in anybody else's game.

B: Ooooooh. I can tell what you've been reading in your off-hours.

A: Well, at least I don't wear my eyes out proofreading cutbacks.

B: That will do, A.

B hangs up the phone.

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