At the beginning of the year, the United States withdrew from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and has since persuaded Britain to give notice of its departure at the end of this year. The US has contributed 25 percent of UNESCO’s budget of $187 million. Britain’s share is currently 4.67 percent (Cananda’s is 3.08 percent; these assessments are derived from a population/GNP formula. They apply uniformly throughout the UN system and correspond, in a rough way, to the number of posts a nation may expect within it.) The US withdrawal says something about changes both in recent US foreign policy, and, more generally, in international power relations in the last 20 years—a development that’s usually talked about in terms of the emergence of the third world. In the 1970s, UNESCO came increasingly to identify itself as a place where subject peoples could conquer the speech of colonialism—if at all often still through a liberal intermediacy, in this case the UN.

Western objections to UNESCO should maybe come out of the mouth of the State Department itself: ‘UNESCO has extraordinarily politicized itself and is now a “black hole” for US dollars.’ In the context of the third world, that might mean: ‘UNESCO has been absorbed by the Cold War, and is now a “black hole” for US dollars.’

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The crisis at UNESCO is symptomatic of a general global crisis that can be read in a number of ways. Most obviously, it's part of a challenge to U.S./hegemony by most of the rest of the world. Secondly, it's a function of the contradictory mission of the organization: independent institution and intergovernmental agency. It's also to do, I think, with a struggle around how to interpret post-war history. The balance of power at the UN shifted in the 60s as a result of decolonization. It was the moment, in Sarron's words, when the natives became human beings. A new politics of resistance emerged everywhere in the world, not least in the Third World, which was a result of decolonization. The attack on UNESCO today ought to be read, in part, as a replaying of the 60s, as an attempt to reverse the cultural and political gains made here and elsewhere in those years. To be fair, those liberatory moments were often accompanied by systematic corruption and militarization, as well as by the entrenchment of neo-colonial institutions like the International Monetary Fund. UNESCO by no means stands outside of this ambiguous and paradoxical history. It is a centralized, hierarchical and bureaucratic institution that too often committed to large-scale projects that do little other than reinforce dependence on first world capital and expertise. There's not much attention given to what's sometimes called the fourth world—nations within nations, tribal and indigenous cultures. Neither is there, as far as I can tell, any recognition of the limitations of development and growth in themselves.

But then again, UNESCO is probably not the place to look for the kind of new politics I'm thinking about. I still think it's important to defend the tatters of liberal institutions (and states) that remain, to refuse the language of the marketplace (if only, Reagan must be thinking). UNESCO could be made to turn a profit, like the Los Angeles Olympics. At the same time we have to come to terms with other public sites of political struggle altogether. What I like about the information and communication debates at UNESCO was that it named a terrain of resistance that doesn't recognize national boundaries—just like capital itself.

Alexander Wilson is a Toronto journalist, broadcaster and horticulturalist. He works on the collective at borderlines.

Some Notes on the Occasion of a Performance of Judith Doyle's Rate of Descent

Andrew Payne

I felt not myself—but an example of myself.

Judith Doyle

Given the ephemeral nature of a 'score' which has emerged, if not entirely, then at least somewhat, in the performance, it might seem presumptuous to insist on Doyle's music 'literary' mentorship. Yet it is to the antecedents that the work lends itself, and perhaps even so emphatically as when claiming for itself some 'theatricality'. Nor should we be surprised by this, for this question of the book, of the history and traditionality proper to it, this question has always involved a moment of exemplary dissemblance, a theatrical operation whereby text and event have been made to communicate, but made to communicate across an abyss which forbids any simple resolution of one upon the other. If it will forgo a characterization of Rate of Descent as an event, I do so, not in order to minimize the performative aspects of the work, but rather to insist that the problems of the event, its presence and performance, is never so easily localized. To reduce the question of Doyle's theatricality to productivity of 'performance', as though the question of that performance were somehow decidable in relation to a task defined in, say, angular, a task which would itself writing, this would be to remain blind to theatricality's most profound demand. It would be to forget that mask from behind which silence, in order to give itself to itself, has already spoken.

Of course for the writer, or perhaps more properly, for the writer of 'meditation', for the one whose 'work' is only ever authorized in the absolute co-responsibility of text and cross, this speech must occasion an indulgence. But this exigency which makes the work decline being in the unique moment of rupture—those very moments, certainly, the point in which the work effortlessly flattens out while overcoming the consuming surge of light—we must also comprehend and feel that this gesture produces the work impossible, because it never pursues itself as the work. It is a regime anterior to the beginning where nothing is made of being, and in which nothing is accomplished.

Shumon Bhasin

It was a fleeting slippage, a moment of total identification with a sentence, an idea—since I believed for a few moments explained itself completely. It was like seeing a stranger on a late street and making the leap of contact that requires a second.

These are texts which might properly be called 'misanthropic' and in precisely the sense that the rhetoric employed the term—given to planning, to identification, only reluctantly induced into the labour of the symbolic. Here writing Cannes away from thought, away from its agencies and labour, and towards the figure's response.

My thoughts are not thoughts at all. They are images of thoughts. The old account of false consciousness, of false clarity.

This 'amorous distraction depends upon a notion of readership which is symmetrical to modernity's utopian utopia (though, I will admit, literally one's own). Its point is always, and necessarily, to render desires objects, to make it to other space, established at the destination of the lover's desire. Of course, in order for the lover to reach this freedom there, this other, this object of the lover's desire, must prove an other subject. The legal analogies to this amorous expression is therefore the contract rather than law, the goal, performative rather than enforcement.