Confessions of an Impersonal Spectator

by John Olson

Another way of understanding khaki is in terms of mesmerism. The human brain is divided into competing philosophies which are connected at the center of the cerebral cavity by a tissue of moonlight. When I tell my friends that I have a brain, they tell me that they have one as well. I have no reason to doubt this. These people are engaged in extremely interesting adventures. We all wonder about what the universe is made of, how it works, what we're doing in it and wherever it is it's going, if it's going anywhere at all. Imagine a city made entirely of bricks. If we substitute ‘universe' for ‘city' and ‘particle' for ‘brick,' the narration becomes gelatinous and cork.

Inside an elevator, however, the evaluation of our situation is very different. We have different explanations for the phenomena in the elevator. X calls it a process. Y calls it a ripple in time. Z pockets an ensemble of biases then abandons them many years later. There is no method to prove who is right. What we do know is that light is energy and energy has mass. There is no excuse for seaweed. If the wings are simple and the blood is ardent a smile can be explained by innocent inertia.

There are eight types of mass, which means that there are eight manners of speaking. The first is trash. Rags, cardboard, empty bottles and cans. The second is bathrobes. The third is eucalyptus. The fourth is apple blossom. The fifth is sweat. The sixth is dust. The seventh is concrete and the eighth is hairspray.

Gravitational mass is the raison d'être of a bag of potato chips and inertial mass is a school of soluble fish lit up by lightning.

Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy is a book by Saskia Sassen about populations of people displaced, exiled, and imprisoned by the predatory practices of neo-liberal capitalism.

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This explains little as to why a feather and a cannonball fall with equal velocity within a vacuum and even less to say about the miracle of pancakes, but it does have much to suggest about why poets like Lorine Niedecker live in poverty to do their art, or Bartleby the Scrivener perished in The Tombs.

The point is that objects within the solar system do not move by some mysterious force exerted upon them from a distance but by the nature of the neighborhood through which they are moving. I can carve a fire out of a bar of soap but I cannot make it blink like a waiter at the Café de la Mairie near Saint-Sulpice in Paris. That requires the existential magic of a Jean-Paul Sartre.

This is why I've decided to assign myself a position in life similar to that of Stuart Sutcliffe with the Beatles. A sunglassed Impersonal Spectator, marginal, insignificant, and transcendental, struggling to do what I can on the bass.

Unless I prefer not to.