

If our
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then
let's live
with the
criminal joy
of pirates

Jacob Wren

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Two stories and an essay
by Jacob Wren

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50 YEARS OF ONTARIO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT OF THE ARTS

50 ANS DE SOUTIEN DU GOUVERNEMENT DE L'ONTARIO AUX ARTS

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The Infiltrator

EVERYONE LOVES ME and I love no one. This is a feeling of power. It is what makes the job possible. The job is, in part, to make sure no one ever knows about the job. Like all things in life it might end at any time, but that is not for me to decide. The only evidence of the job is that money is inserted into my account, in wildly differing amounts and at absolutely inexplicable intervals. Otherwise the job is invisible. Every time money is deposited into my account it comes from a different place, a different front. Each of these places, the names of these places, means nothing to me. But I invent a story for each one, in case I am ever asked. Each of these stories must be simple and to the point. If they were complex I would never remember them.

The financial aspects of the job are relatively

straightforward when compared to the rest. When you have money you don't need love. Money makes things happen. But the job requires love or it all goes to hell. Love is connected to power. Or at least that is what I must continue to believe. For much of the time I am alone, reading the exact same books I would read if the job did not exist but I were still placed where I am. There are things I need to know and to know them I must read the books that everyone here reads. I let my mind go blank to enjoy reading these books. The books do not need to be criticized (at least not by me). My fellow activists do not need to be criticized.

When I am doing the job correctly it feels like I don't exist. Something exists but it is not exactly me. Many of the core ideas of the group are based around notions of collectivity and when I feel that I don't exist I also feel that I fit more neatly within this framework. A part of a machine does not go around thinking, Look at me, I am this very specific and important part of the machine. It thinks about the machine, which must function and will function best if all the parts are thinking about the machine. Of course, I am a part of two machines with different goals and different modalities. The machines overlap but the overlap is invisible. And yet at times—in fact, most of the time—I imagine there is only one. One machine pulling in two separate directions, with me as its only common part.

* * * *

The group meets once a month. This is the main gathering, where everyone shares new ideas, talks about what actions we should plan for the future, discusses what was done in the past and how it might have been done better. At these larger gatherings I am always careful to sit as far away as possible from the Irritant. She is the most cynical and also the most suspicious of me. In general, I avoid commenting when she speaks. But when it can't be avoided I take her on earnestly, in as straightforward a manner as possible.

Recently at these meetings it has been suggested there might be an infiltrator among us. This has been the true test of my mettle. How to participate in the conversations about me as if I did not exist? How to participate without giving anything away? I have no tricks or strategy. It is simply a question of speaking genuinely while always leaving out the same key piece of information. I am always careful never to suggest there is no infiltrator, to always leave the possibility open. So far no one has openly suggested it might be me, at least not in my presence, but when they do I must be careful. At that moment it will either end or reach a breaking point past which exposing me will prove impossible.

Along with the main gathering there are also smaller gatherings of two or three members. These

smaller meetings are where most of the concrete decisions are made, and present a difficulty in terms of the job. They are where I can have the greatest influence on the day-to-day reality of the group and its actions. But they also contain an intimacy that greatly increases the chance I will be found out, a proximity within which I am far more likely to slip up. As well, I must not attend too many of these smaller meetings because that in itself would be suspicious. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of smaller meetings I should attend. Attending too few might also raise suspicion, or at least call into question my level of commitment to the group.

Most of the meetings take place in the Girl's apartment. Three weeks ago the Girl and I began sleeping together and now she is completely in love with me. This is another potentially dangerous situation I must monitor carefully. Of course, the Irritant hates the fact that I'm sleeping with the Girl, and I play on this dynamic, hinting at the possibility that what the Irritant has against me is only a kind of non-feminist jealousy toward her much younger rival. Since we both know this is not the case I can only apply this strategy sparingly, just a taste of it in the air.

* * * *

When I am doing the job correctly it is almost as if

I am doing nothing. Just the occasional, well-placed suggestion that sends things off along a slightly different path. What amazes me most is how little is required of me as long as I maintain their trust. When I am trusted, when I am loved, my suggestions are simply taken into consideration. If I time these suggestions effectively it is remarkable how quickly they can become the plan for the entire group. But, then again, it is a question of self-discipline. I must be careful, vigilant with myself, in order not to make suggestions too often. If it appears as though I am trying to control things then the game is lost.

At one of the smaller meetings we start talking about corporations. How when you protest against a government it has, at least in theory, a democratic responsibility to take your protest into consideration. But corporations have no such responsibility. They are accountable only to their shareholders. The other guy, the Odd One, comments that, under current conditions, governments in fact are more accountable to the corporations that paid for their campaigns than they are to the citizens who elected them. And there is a kind of consequent logic to this, since the party that spends the most is also the one most likely to win.

I haven't said anything for a while and am asked what I think. I say there must be some way to get at the shareholders directly, since their opinions had the

potential to impact the actions of the corporation. I don't know why, in particular, I say this. It is one of the comments I make from time to time that, strictly speaking, could not be said to be part of the job, the logic being that if I only said things the job required my position would appear too imbalanced. I mainly have to say other, more normal things that serve to position me as a committed member of the movement.

So I bring up the idea of directly targeting the shareholders and it is an idea that really catches fire. There follows a continuous stream of suggestions as to what the best way to do so might be. A shareholder makes an investment, the Odd One explains. He or she wants a return on that investment. A profit. This desire for profit is completely disconnected from the daily operations and injustices of the corporation. What we need to do is find ways to connect, within the mind of the shareholder, the investment and the crimes of the corporation. The Girl suggests we could set up a group for concerned shareholders and help them organize. Maybe, she says, there are lots of investors out there who would like to help but feel isolated, don't realize there are others like them.

I decide to let the shareholder brainstorming run its course for a few days before trying to influence it one way or another. If I'm lucky I will find precisely the right spin to get everyone behind the idea of kidnapping a few shareholders. But to be effective my

suggestions must come at the right time, and now is definitely not it. It is still only the beginning, when most suggestions will quickly be forgotten, replaced by new suggestions, each idea distorting and confusing the last.

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