

## Similitude Malapropos

by Jacquelyn Davis

If an institution wasn't an institution but something else entirely which one could anatomize with insight, what would it be? If an independent curator is unlike other curators working for institutions, how is this said independent curator to be viewed in comparison to those following constraints which accompany paid, predetermined roles? How does one gauge successes and failures of these curatorial variants—on their own and in relation to each other? Is there a fair system for comparison which functions and applies to all nation states? One that Claire Bishop, Terry Smith or Maria Lind haven't attempted to confront while simultaneously working for the same institutions they critique on the side, still swayed by their quiet, looming influence?

I've been thinking about what pushes people 'over the edge'—what brings out the 'cray-cray' in individuals of contrasting shapes, sizes and designs. In the news, people are flipping the fuck out (e.g., ripping children to shreds with fléchettes in Gaza, bombing tiny sleeping children at wolf hour, misinformed po-po shootings, stomping counter-demonstrators with horse hoofs, and then, there's the woman who stabbed her roommate because he wouldn't stop listening to The Eagles on repeat). Of course, there are periods where all is calm and we are stifled by our self-constructed predictability and malaise, but then Chaos returns with its demands. It is what we can bank on; it returns—always—and we share the weight of what comes next. In a recent essay “In Defense of Looting,”<sup>1</sup> I'm reminded of escalating race and class discord, of oppression vs. anti-oppression tactics used daily. *Play it as it lays.*

'Looting' a.k.a. “sacking, plundering, despoiling, despoliation, and pillaging, is the indiscriminate taking of goods by force as part of a military or political victory, or during a catastrophe, such as war, natural disaster, or rioting. The term is also used in a broader sense to describe egregious instances of theft and embezzlement, such as the 'plundering' of private or public assets by corrupt or greedy authorities.”<sup>2</sup>

What if this concept of 'looter' was not-so-sloppily transferred and recognized as a tool / device in the art world—for what it is now and could be? If independent curators are indeed analogous to the 'looter,' then: is the innocuous corner shop filled to brim with bling on a dimly lit street corner the institution? I feel squeamish yet relieved when playing around with such parallels. Please devise your own theories for this inequitable rainbow. This is an invitation to simplify, though reduction remains dangerous.

If an independent curator is likened to a 'looter,' how does this rogue justify or redeem its presence as either success or failure? How does one 'looter' who was part of an initial protest compare to another who joined after the disaster began, so as to take advantage of an advanced maelstrom? Where is the line drawn between *good protester* and *bad rioter*? When does the term 'looter' align with its lexicon or spontaneously veer off course?

If this curator-as-looter acquires the most expensive flat screen or stealthy iphone in the rumble, is this the mark of success? If the 'looter' in question does not get stabbed in a dark alley by its competing, tooth-and-nail counterparts, is this *true* success? What deems failure? Is it realizing that this 'looter' may be cornered into confronting firmly entrenched forces of patriarchy, privilege and inheritance utilizing the same seemingly counterproductive methods its perceived nemesis used to confirm its own coordinates? Is it when the curator-as-looter makes its way home with its pockets overflowing with secondhand bounty or anything less than the 'real thing'—that cubic zirconia trash (AS SEEN ON TV!)—or fake antiques that don't cut it? Nothing more than a loser's best streak.

If an institution appears to be a brightly lit, well-stocked 7-Eleven, what's for the taking? No, what's *worth* taking? All money aside; let's think past money for now. Candy, cigarettes, Trojans? Do you gravitate towards over-the-counter drugs? Or rescue the panic-stricken cashier? You only have a few minutes before this shit hits the fan. *GO!* When you push through the door side-by-side with blacklisted 'looters' whilst paid curators yelp “take whatever you want ... but spare my life,” what is your quick strategy? And when a loaded Smith & Wesson falls from someone's hands to the floor near your feet? Only so many will make it through one tight entrance. Do you shove through a broken window dodging glass shards? Sometimes, exits do not have exit signs. Do you wait for the hype to subside before taking a leap towards your feral path?

Enough with the Marx and Kropotkin. In short: what kind or type of 'violence' in the art world compliments good fortune, and when does it all take a wrong turn, becoming a pulpy mess, leading the 'looter' to cuffs, sirens or a quick yet priceless last-minute shot to the head or veins? Whose blood matters—when any definition of 'violence' (as it applies to this not-so-what-if-scenario) remains up in the air? In the face of protest, what mask does your art wear?

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1 <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/in-defense-of-looting/>

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looting>