

TIM WOODWARD “Z”

“Demography is dead, yet marketers will quietly invent another generation on demand. Clients are desperate to adapt. But to what? Generational linearity is gone. An ageless youth demands emancipation.”¹

Cue *Freedom Furniture*, right in time for Gen Z.² Tempered glass, metal. Temperament.

These are desks made during Generation Z, and imported from a factory in Taiwan to Australia, a country which favours homeowners. Time has passed and these desks move between homes through transactions on gumtree.com.au, and into hard rubbish. Tim Woodward has collected them, separated their parts, and made constellations of “Zs” out of their Z-shaped legs drilled into the gallery wall. Their tempered glass tops and hardware are arranged on the floor. Stripped of their function, I’m wondering whether it’s a stretch to say that these are concrete poems full of melancholy; a mourning note, for a demographic and an era whose god was *work* itself? *Freedom* was the work desk. “Dream catchers”³ for sleeping gallery walls. Dreams manufactured in Taiwan. Feeling flat(-packed). “No sleep ‘til desk...” you get the idea.

Whereas the desk was once the context for work, now it is the subject. Like Francis Ponge’s *Soap*- the subject whose content dissolves at the same rate that it is used⁴- Woodward’s *works* were *desks*, now dispersed into a single syllable: ZZZ... A “Z” is a line in indecision; a line that changes course two times. The Z is that moment, a glitch, when you are distracted.⁵ Dissociation abates and something sets you back on course; a one-man disassembly line.

The volume in this gesture, both spatially and aurally... it’s that of reappraisal. Seized by an “asset stripper,” these forms are the remnants of something that is not quite over. Z is the

¹ K-HOLE. Rep. *YOUTH MODE: A REPORT ON FREEDOM*. New York, 2013.
<http://khole.net/issues/youth-mode/>

² Mid-to-late 1990s as starting birth years and the early 2010s as ending birth years.

³ From a conversation with the artist in May.

⁴ “There is so much to say about soap. Precisely everything that it tells about itself until the complete disappearance, the exhaustion of the subject. This is just the object suited to me. / Soap has much to say. May it say it with volubility, enthusiasm. When it has finished saying it, it no longer is.” Ponge, Francis. “Soap.” *The Paris Review*, March 27, 2015.

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/03/27/soap/>.

⁵ Bruce Hainley compares writing to walking: “I like these quick changes in register, the way I like passing a hot guy on the street. I like being on the street, on the road, or the notion that I might be going somewhere. And sometimes the distraction is enough that you stop going where you’re going and go the other way. But at other times it’s about that meeting; that’s the wonderful thing about being on the street, or walking around, or being on the tube, or whatever... there are these brief things, so I like the quick change. For me it’s a question of velocity or slowing something down... and one of the ways you have is just to completely change register, and taking advantage of that kind of rhetorical device” Hainley, Bruce. “Bruce Hainley.” *21st Century*. Lecture, June 4, 2015.
<https://chisenhale.org.uk/audio-video/bruce-hainley/>. 1:09:00

punchline to the joke.⁶ Whereas Kippenberger's desks represented a mass job interview for a precarious nation,⁷ Woodward's desk is "free" because the *desk* is now subsumed by the body; we are all now the interview, the job, the worker and the client.

The Z in Jannis Kounellis' paintings is ambiguous, and ambiguity socialises with finality or closure; the end of the alphabet road.⁸ In Woodward's concrete poems, the Z stretches out, no rhythm, just a jagged final note.

Notes on furniture & violence:

Freedom Furniture is a battle-cry, and its products are durable weapons.

The Sopranos was made squarely over the time of Gen Z. Rewatching it over lockdown, one wonders whether interior-designers will care to preserve or archive the broad kitchen island, pickled oak cabinets, and the Narnia-wardrobe-esque fridge. I've seen similar Oases in share-houses on month-to-month leases around Melbourne, imminently awaiting their death. A fashion cycle / Nostalgia pendulum is 20-30 years. One can only hope that come 2029 there will be some kind of clause to conserve such spaces, before designfiles.com has swung its savage scythe around the suburbs, and we are all mid-century monotonous panoptipeople.

Tony Soprano: [over the phone] *It's a bad connection, so I'm gonna talk fast! The guy you're looking for is an ex-commando! He killed sixteen Chechen rebels single-handed!*

Paulie 'Walnuts' Gualtieri: *Get the fuck outta here.*

Tony Soprano: *Yeah. Nice, huh? He was with the Interior Ministry. Guy's some kind of Russian green beret. This guy can not come back to tell this story. You understand?*

Paulie 'Walnuts' Gualtieri: *I hear you.*

[the telephone connection is lost - Tony swears, and Paulie hangs up]

⁶ The Howard era?: 11 March 1996 – 3 December 2007

⁷ Martin Kippenberger's *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika'* explores the fictional utopia of universal employment, adapting Kafka's idea of communal job interviews into an artwork. Kippenberger described the situation depicted in his installation as 'a circus in town, looking to employ reliable hands, helpers, doers, self-confident handlers and the like. Outside the circus tent, in my imagination, there would be tables and chairs set up for job interviews'. The installation consists of a diverse assortment of objects and furniture, assembled to suggest a playing field for conducting mass interviews. There are over 40 tables and twice as many chairs..."

⁸"Untitled (Sack with Z)", Jannis Kounellis, 2001." Tate, January 1, 1970.
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kounellis-untitled-sack-with-z-ar00583>.

Paulie 'Walnuts' Gualtieri: [turning to Christopher] *You're not gonna believe this. He killed sixteen Czechoslovakians. The guy was an interior decorator.*

Christopher Moltisanti: *His house looked like shit.*

It's possible to live with *Freedom Furniture* and hate it at the same time. It's probably incredibly common. Blunt, rectangular weapons that clog up corners. They bludgeon the self, ever so subtly, one pragmatic task at a time. That it becomes unnoticeable, means that it also enters one's subconscious. A hegemonic design order, a tetris game of compromise. The livestock pens that we pay to sit at.

Earlier this year, in the middle of the night, Woodward heard his neighbour screaming outside. Instinctually, he grabbed a bar of the *Freedom Furniture* for self-defence. As he tells it, when he ran outside and saw his neighbour naked on top of the car that was being stolen, he felt overdressed. Style can be exposing; that kind of visibility can be a weapon too.

Notes on “single” notes, bachelor pads

In his 1996 review of a Vincent Fecteau exhibition, Bruce Hainley pauses, mid-review, and offers a single paragraph- or rather, three lines resembling notes:

Here are some words: foamcore, laminate, plastic.

Here are some concepts: bachelorhood, Scandinavian design, departure.

Here is the mood: the displaced eroticism of American Gigolo, the ominous unspecifiability of Safe.

These words are “socialising,” bereft of context, ironically they describe a domestic interior. This interior is an ancestor to *Freedom Furniture*. Woodward's “single” notes also socialise without context. As symptoms of a live/work home, Woodward's desks pertain to the bachelor; bachelorhood is a symptom of a social structure where fate is predetermined. Everything that furnishes bachelorhood has a sense of temporality, as if seeing the object, thought or desire age before your eyes is a reminder that there's an expiry date to the symptom itself.

Bachelorhood as a verb; *to bachelor*. Bacheloring an artwork, unrealising it? Regression as mode.

(Bachelorhood is no longer gendered).

Some are reluctantly more familiar with the concept of bachelorhood than others; all that bravado that comes with hiding the deep fear of being alone and unlovable. The somnambulist fortification of the face against the world; a grimace, a glare, a reluctant smile. That Hugh Grant shit. Hainley said that Hugh Grant is aging “in a *very* interesting way” in *A very English Affair*. Hugh Grant coming clean. Hugh Grant owning up to what he did. Hugh Grant going after Murdoch. Hugh Grant the adorable curmudgeon. Divine Brown, the star. “In 1996 she played herself in an X-rated docu-drama based on the incident, *Sunset and Divine: The British Experience*.”⁹ Hugh and Divine met a little less than a year before Hainley wrote *some words, some concepts, the mood*. He was with Liz Hurley at the time, more than a force herself, she was unable to render him un-bachelor. Mumbling, matter of factly, meandering, discombobulated, he failed up.

Tempers and glass.

Woodward’s *tempered* Glass is laid to rest having served its various bachelors. “Stripped,” it lies beneath the single note.

“It is as if we have all been lowered into an atmosphere of glass.

Now and then a remark trails through the glass.

Taxes on the back lot. Not a good melon,”¹⁰

Bachelors aspire to fail-up from the bottom pane of Duchamp’s *Large Glass*. They are hustling and grinding, making fertiliser down there. Interpretations see their quaranting as a reason for their suffering, as if the asymptotic course of desire wasn’t itself indicative of a machine. Desire’s careening line stretches out like a tempestuous market. Do machines suffer?

⁹“Estella Marie Thompson,” February 7, 2021.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estella_Marie_Thompson#:~:text=Estella%20Marie%20Thompson%20\(born%20August,on%20Hollywood's%20Sunset%20Boulevard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estella_Marie_Thompson#:~:text=Estella%20Marie%20Thompson%20(born%20August,on%20Hollywood's%20Sunset%20Boulevard)

¹⁰ Carson, Anne. *Glass, Irony, and God*. New York: New Directions Books, 2005.

In the *Large Glass*, the bottom pane is a bachelors apartment. “Modern” comes to mind. Warehouse/factory conversion. Machine gussied up. Turn anything into a machine. Angle-grinder to the vanity. Cue the monologue from *Fight Club*, or the one from *Trainspotting*.

Readability

Zs around town. Sleepy suburbs. The sound of a suburb wheezing. Oozing. Grazing. Deals (from) under the table; a few obstreperous legs. Bees, mosquitoes. A “Z” like a deadline, stretching out in front of you.

Dissociation is like being Z Z Z while walking around- tempered glass mirroring a sacred disconnection to the landscape, Z Z Z, framing it, an optical rest? They clog up median strips like skericks of fried egg in the sink. Corridors that end with three doors. Frying smells. Meal prep. Efficiency. Bereft of espresso bars and tree-lined boulevards, in Coburg we have a sort of salvage-dandyism. A poetry of interior glut. Gut? Houses burp, belch, convulse these things out of themselves. Our man is there, reading the street: Z Z Z

Michael Fried said modern art reduced sculpture to *gesture*, the basis for *language*. A generation made these Zs. Neurotic symptoms squeezed out of the home. The houses ejaculated, shit, piss them out of their orifices. Chief Executive Orifices digested them. Generational puss, excretion. This is the syntax. *Freedom-speech*.

Concrete poetry

These works explore their own formal and grammatical possibilities and properties. It’s alarming how quickly I wanted to read them as so much else- noises, narratives, and signifiers. Zs that echo. *Echo* always has the last word. Some believe that concrete poetry favours linguistic self-reflexiveness over confession and ideologies of expression.¹¹ This is probably a symptom of one generation's understanding of “expression”: Woodward’s voice in these works is full of volume, the way that his authorship is dispersed amongst the separated parts. Woodward eschews himself by method-acting as a “generation.” A symptom of the economy, the gesture has economy. Like:

¹¹ Dworkin, Craig Douglas, and Kenneth Goldsmith. *Against Expression: an Anthology of Conceptual Writing*. Evanston Ill: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2011.

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