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Shared space for personal reflections on media art practice

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Homily to Kennedy (given at Eyebeam NYC, July 16, 2009)

Submitted by [patlichty](#) on Wed, 2009-07-22 22:08.
[activism](#)

"We choose to go, ... and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone..."

John F. Kennedy

I'd like to give you a piece of my mind while there's some of it left, even though it may be merely a snack, a 99 cent iTunes song, or a twenty dollar poster. I want to say this, not because it is what I will believe for all time, but because we live in an era in which there is often a profound lack of ideology in culture, or if it is, it is used for convenience of power or cool cynicism. I say this because many colleagues have called me a reverend; a priest to culture, and although I am not a religious man, I'll accept this in spirit. I am also writing in more public, less academic manner, because Vilem Flusser actually convinced me that I can actually say "I" in a text in his essay, "Essays". This, combined with the fact that I have just returned from the edge of the world pursuing my father's ghosts, has all but ruined my academic writing style for now.

This listlessness in culture, this lack of ideology is why I give a homily upon the words of Kennedy on the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the moon landing. I realize I take these words and take them outside their original context of the Cold War as a reminder of its elements of idealism and passion. The amazement in that the United States took less computing power than is in an [iPhone](#) and put people on the moon is not lost on me as I give this in the midst of a center devoted to culture and technology. I would also like to say that tonight there are a number of tactical media artists, for whom ideology and passion are not absent, and this is not an indictment to them.

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[great that you are coming to](#)
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great that you are coming to the /etc & well done for working it out on the train! i would join you except i'll be there a week earlier, pre...

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In response, I'm building a busker organ as an example of interactive media that lives off the grid. So there.

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This is a call to the larger mass culture, in which cool irony often distances us from the flesh, blood, spit and baling wire that holds the street together.

From this, instead of putting forth a cohesive thesis, I would like to put forth a set of propositions that talk about the pragmatics of the "hard" that define our passions.

a: Many of us are activists. Whether one wishes to tactically engage in politics of the corporate or the nation state, or cultural ones in which we want to create worlds beyond white boxes makes little difference to me. To do something as simple as putting a splash of color on a wall where once was none is a beginning.

b: We start conversations. This means we are the ones who set the tone for culture. This is the ongoing engine for progress, and if not progress, dialogue.

c: Collaboration is hard. By working with one another instead of following the singular model, we threaten to find commonality.

d: We speak truth to power. Or at least we try to build platforms that allow us to.

e: Translation has become essential. Whether we are curators, activists or advocates, it is the maven who bridges worlds and breeds understanding. Perhaps breed is a bad word. It might be fun...

f: Who is the public to whom we speak? The public space where we engage?

g: We live in Public. As McLuhan so presciently said, all the walls go out. Everywhere.

h: The avant is still important.

i: The heart of all this is the hack. When something does not work, reconfigure the curvature of the local time-space continuum.

j: We often work without thanks. But this is not the point.

k: Ideology is not fascism. system of ideas and ideals are useful, if one looks at them conversationally. They are toolkits of passion, and are amazing things, but I suggest they should be open.

l: Clarity is essential. The abstraction in language created by focus groups, neoconservatives, and corporations create

further alienation between beings. We must fight to create a culture in which human resources become "person"nel again.

M: Give the "get" wherever you go. Make sure everyone gets something from whatever you do.

n: From this I also believe that what is most important to me is a human/humane point of view. This is why I refuse the discourse of the body. I believe in people who are able to think critically, but are people nonetheless.

This is the year of the fortieth anniversary of the moon landing, and the world is challenged with additionally unprecedented problems, especially the unprecedented use of the word unprecedented. The explosion of connectivity, ubiquitous visibility, and the overthrow of the nation state by corporate globalism calls on humanity to persevere against its own self-interest. To quote NYC-based poet Nicole Blackmore;

"You are more than the sum of what you consume
Desire is not an occupation
Let's stop praying for someone
To save us and start saving ourselves
Let's stop this and start over
Let's go out - Let's keep going"

Amen.

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