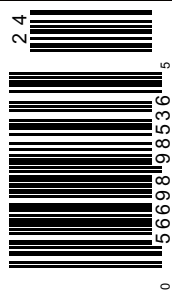


Cabinet

A QUARTERLY OF ART AND CULTURE
ISSUE 44 24 HOURS
US \$12 CANADA \$12 UK £7



INTRODUCTION

Rome was not built in a day, but could a magazine be produced in twenty-four hours? This was the question that the current issue of *Cabinet* was designed to consider. Inspired by literary precedents such as automatic writing, by the resourcefulness of the bricoleur making do with what is at hand, and by the openness toward chance that all artistic production under severe constraint must necessarily incorporate, the themed section of this issue includes contributions by twenty-four artists and writers who were given twenty-four hours—exactly—to complete a project that responded to a prompt sent to them by the editors.

On the one hand, this may seem like an exercise in editorial sadism, further exaggerating the time crunch faced by working artists and writers. Nothing could be further from the mission of a benevolent non-profit whose brief is purportedly to create the conditions for considered reflection. On the other hand, unburdened from some of the usual parameters for both evaluation (and self-evaluation), there is a kind of paradoxical freedom that accompanies such a radical constraint, one that encourages unorthodox forays in both subject matter and style.

Given the mechanical nature of the conceit behind this issue, it was clear that a set of loosely framed questions around daily time would be useful starting points, both for the contributors and for our readers. The staggeringly diverse responses to our prompts (reproduced at right) can be found on the following pages.

Dear “24 Hours” issue contributor,

Choose one of the three prompts below as the starting point for your project. Bear in mind that all kinds of approaches and subject matter are equally welcome, including those that draw on historical, scientific, personal, literary, phenomenological, philosophical, sociological, medical, legal, economic, anthropological, spiritual, zoological, and botanical perspectives and/or artifacts, just to mention a few!

As stated before, contributions that use text, image, or hybrids of the two are all acceptable, as are unorthodox formats, including diaries, charts, graphs, receipts, calendars, advertisements, budgets, menus, correspondence, and lists.

1. Consider different ways in which daily time is kept or administered—from the daily planner to the structure of mealtimes, from the ringing of church bells to our hygiene habits—and how they form and inform our experience of day and night. Specific episodes or incidents are as welcome as broader or more speculative considerations.

2. Depict a day in which dayness itself—its temporal structure, its specific length, form, or limits—was specifically brought to the fore. This can be a day from the past, or the very day on which you are doing this project. Feel free to draw on your personal life or on historical materials.

3. Choose one of the four following divisions of a given 24-hour period—morning, afternoon, evening, night—and create a project that considers or inhabits its particular “being” or “mood.”

We look forward to receiving your projects.

Cabinet

I arrived in the night, dark and warm. I was used to a very different time zone. I had been awake for a number of hours difficult to calculate. I let drop my bags and began to look around. The bookcases were full of treasure. I found framed letters from people dear to me. I spent a long time staring at a drawing of a mysterious person. I took from a shelf a book called *What I Saw and Heard in Rome* by Ingeborg Bachmann. She said in it lots of things that are lovely and true. That the Tiber is not pretty but its water is, that St. Peter's seems smaller than its measurements, and yet is too big.

I dreamed that night of a large painting storming with roses, of a turtle, a frog, and a woman turning slowly, her hair wound high on her head. I dreamed that I levitated—not very high, but high enough. I dreamed of sparrows. In my dream I knew that Venus moved about on the wings of sparrows. I wondered what color her eyes were. Ingeborg Bachmann told me that Athena's were gray—not really gray but *glaukos*, the matte silver shimmering of light on the leaves of an olive tree. She told me that Juno is ox-eyed and so her eyes must have been brown—deep, fixing, and holding. She spoke as though she knew them personally. She said that Venus's could only have been blue. She was of the sea, born of it, emerging from it. I began to ask—

I exploded into consciousness, alarmed. I sat up in bed, the sun streaming in, no Ingeborg, no Venus, no turtles. I felt sure that something momentous had awoken me, a shockwave, that something had rippled through the room, the building. I was perfectly still. I listened, but heard only the rumble of distant cars on cobbles, a voice calling out merrily, sparrows.

As I left the building a short while later, the merry voice I had heard in bed called out to me. She was very old. She welcomed me to her city and asked me how I had slept. I did not tell her of turtle, frog, Venus, or Ingeborg. I told her that I had slept so deeply that I had just woken up, with an extreme start, as though—

She nodded. "The cannon."

How did she know that? Yes, like a cannon. Did she know of the turtles too? "Exactly!" I said. "That's what it felt like. As though—"

"A cannon." She really liked this metaphor. And I did too. And yet something was missing.

"Um, ah—"

"Cannon. Cannon." She mimicked a cannon. Which was strange. "There is always a cannon," she said. "At noon."

I felt a bit dizzy. I thought, "Uh-oh."

"It's a long story," she said. "But there is a cannon that is fired up there—" She turned and pointed toward

the botanical garden and to the hill, the Janiculum, looming over it. "Every day. At noon. BOOM."

The short version of the long story she then told me (and then retold me the next day, my retention not having been what it could have been), is that Rome has countless churches.

"But like roughly how many?" I asked (both days).

"Countless. You know what countless means?"

I did. And the answer is upwards of nine hundred.

Which is really just unbelievable. If you go to one of the hills—preferably the highest, the Janiculum (next to the cannon)—you can see the domes of dozens and dozens of them, each stately. And they all have bells. Many have clocks. Which used to make for a lot of random ringing. And then came the French. A long time ago.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, there was no standard measurement of time in Rome. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French had taken Rome, and Napoleon's troops imposed everything, including "French time." I thought that sounded pleasing, sounded naughty. But it wasn't. At least not directly. When clocks had first appeared in Rome—before the French—they didn't bring standard measurement. Some had a face with twelve hours, some six (to divide the day into canonical hours—times for praying). And the bells rang all sorts of ways. At 4 pm in the summer, for instance, a canonical clock would have pointed to the number three and the bells would have rung nine times. Multiply that times nine hundred, factoring in major variation and you have "Roman time." You'd think that the Romans might have welcomed French time, but that would be to misunderstand the Romans. And so when they kicked out the French in 1814, they went back to Roman time (i.e., chaos). And yet, despite their high tolerance for irregularity, the Romans eventually decided to align their times. On December 1, 1846, Pope Pius IX reinstated French time (though, wisely, he didn't call it that). To mark it, he used a cannon, fired every day at noon. When the French came back in 1849, their first cannonade was taken for noon—but that's another story.

The next morning I rose early, my body on its own Roman time. I walked with my book into the quiet and calm of the botanical gardens. When Ingeborg Bachmann died, there was found among her papers the untitled draft of an essay, or a something, that begins, "Every generation is the dumbest one there ever was." In what follows she divides the world into the guilty (the old) and the dumb (the young), before the flow of the essay breaks down into stenographic notes for what would never be (the completed work).



So much for *pax Romana*. Cannon on the Janiculum, Rome.

One paragraph begins, "Work without the orgiastic. Bureaucracy in place of purgatory. Communism, which never understood its own beginning..." and then some stuff I didn't understand about Marx and Lenin. In short, it was (probably) about work and the dream of a world to come where the dumb and the guilty could live in closer proximity and greater happiness, a world where work would not blunt and crush. Or something. I really didn't know. But I kept reading. And I read, at last, at the end of the unfinished essay, "The world has no accredited holidays, for it itself is a holiday. And time is a slow, secret celebration."

This seemed deeply right. But why? There can be little doubt that a source of much unhappiness is the idea that there is a party. And we are not invited. And that even when we are at one party we tend to dream of another, a better party, fill it up with the most lively of conversations, the most delicious of drinks, the most

magical of glances, the cannon-shots of love at first sight. But if for the world there are no holidays, because every moment of every day is its own slow, secret celebration, if we could realize that, and not wait for the clock to strike this or that hour of joy, then we would have understood. That the party is a book in a garden, the feeling of cold water on warm skin, the smell of wet dog, a warm glance meeting another, and the cannon-shot about to fire, marking the beginning of everything to come.