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Camp Genius – On Irving Rosenthal's *Sheeper*

For Douglas Crimp

Thank you for the lovely introduction. And I'd also like to thank Juliane, Marc, and Diedrich for inviting me to speak here. Once, in a particularly difficult phase in my life, Douglas Crimp's encouraging texts were of great help to me. They provided me with a perspective so that I could go on. So I am especially pleased to be here today.

I must admit to being a bit intimidated by the great minds here today from the field of visual studies, which is why I decided to stay within my field of specialization, literary studies. I would like to talk about a text that is, I hope, instructive for at least two of the areas that are also of interest to Douglas Crimp: first, the influence that Jack Smith and his camp aesthetic has exerted on the various arts; and second, queer culture in New York before Stonewall.

Irving Rosenthal was a part of Jack Smith's circle, and even appeared among the “creatures” in two of his films, *No President* and *Flaming Creatures*. He is also one of the figures in the endless fight over Smith's estate, but this is not my topic today. On the other hand, Rosenthal was part of the Bohemian scene around Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Herbert Huncke, and Alexander Trocchi. In his text *Sheeper: 'The Poet,' 'The Crooked,' 'The Extra-Fingered,'* which he had been working on since 1962, all of these characters are portrayed in a thoroughly idiosyncratic way, as are a group of artists from New York's Beat Movement who hardly anyone knows anymore, such as Bill Heine, Elise Cowen, or Ray and Bonnie Bremser. But *Sheeper* is more than “gay wit” or insider gossip about gay New York and the Beat scene. As a poetic text, the book also makes a substantial contribution to the very camp aesthetic that it depicts. It realizes, so to speak, camp in the medium of literature, transferring Smith's visual language into a poetics of permanently transforming, dissolving, and reconfiguring narrative structures. Burroughs calls *Sheeper* a literature of linguistic “transmutations.” Rosenthal translates Smith's flamboyant film language into an anti-narrative poetics, combining short, unconnected sequences in which characters appear in a pose embodying one of their dreams or desires or quirks, then immediately thereafter disappear in the flurry of narrative particles in order finally to turn up once again in another form, another constellation, another age, furnished with other attributes.

The trashy quality of the decoration used by Smith—which is always supplemented by the performer's desire to be *acknowledged*—is replaced in Rosenthal by a decision for the obscene and for words and pathos formulas that have long gone out of fashion: “Here everything

shimmers, shatters, shivers, or gleams falsely, unattainable, like gold.” As “hollow lines,” which are no longer suited to the goals of representation, “burned out by innocence,” they are meant, according to the narrator, as vessels for an inexhaustible desire.

Sheeper reminds us of an intellectual reflection within gay life, now already historical, that is completely opposed to current tendencies toward normalizing, naturalizing, and self-disciplining. We are all anxiously awaiting the publication of Crimp's project “Queer before Gay.” *Sheeper*, which remained Rosenthal's only book, is a spectacular example of the “before gay” position, which has largely become politically marginalized, a position that does not try to fit homosexuality into a logic of catching up on “normal development,” but instead positions it against an always already given presupposition of desiring normality. In *Sheeper* this is put as follows: “The flaming flagrant queenliness that can sometimes save a man so well it makes my forehead yearn to be queened! These black angels keep us unfolded like bat kittens in their fragrant warm wings. We would sell ourselves gladly for those three-hour luncheons with plenty of olives, but the IBM's and CIA's won't have us. They won't even look in our eyes and are already buzzing for bouncers – our mama black angels have scared them off keeping us pure.”

In Germany, *Sheeper* was and remains hardly known at all. In 1966, that is, one year before the book was released, the influential journal *Akzente* pre-published a short section from *Sheeper*, placing it alongside the first translation of Susan Sontag's “Notes on Camp.” (This showed, by the way, that Rosenthal's completely non-ironic text, marked by serious and emphatic devotion to the beloved objects, was quite unsuitable to illustrate Sontag's thesis.) The complete German translation of *Sheeper* appeared in 1969 from März Verlag, which at the time was accomplishing great things in transatlantic cultural transfer, providing access to current political literature as well as poetic texts from the US. Since the publisher at März Verlag, Jörg Schröder, also regularly published pornographic texts, he had no problems with the explicit gay scenes in *Sheeper*. These did, however, significantly hinder any wide reception for the text. The only review in a large German daily newspaper came from Helmut Salzinger, a writer with strong links to the Anglo-American underground. In his discussion, Salzinger above all thematized the dilemma of wanting to praise a book from which he could not possibly print citations, on the direction of the editor of his newspaper, due to the obscenity of the text. Salzinger insists that *Sheeper* is as much pornography as it is a literary artwork, which conceptually breaks with the understandings that regulate which topics and ways of speaking are permissible in an artwork.

Sheeper has been out of print in the German book trade now for many years. It seems the

situation in the US is not much better. It is true that a variety of writers such as Burroughs, Charles Henri Ford, and Harold Norse have enthusiastically praised the book, and Herbert Huncke's memoirs *The Evening Sun Turned Crimson* (1980) also contain a remembrance of the author, who, after leaving New York and moving to San Francisco, where he now lives, participated in the Cockettes and the Diggers commune "Kaliflower." But even as late as 2006, Dennis Cooper referred to *Sheeper* in his blog as a completely unknown work.

The difference between local appreciation as an "inviolable masterwork" (Cooper) and non-existence within the canon and among "academics" seems to add up to a certain significance, for it points to the fact that, after the end of high modernism, "relevance" has become a claim that circulates in subcultures or counterpublics and emerges from their rhetorics – which are restricted in their scope. *Sheeper* is a queer masterwork. It is so not only because of its position, which Cooper also addresses, between the genres. *Sheeper* is not just a Jewish coming-of-age novel, queer historiography, psychedelic montage, caustic literary critique, *ars vivendi* for gays, aesthetic essay, and a collection of enchanting sentences.

Above all, *Sheeper* is a text that interrogates its position between the genres and between art and non-art expressly for its political and ethical implications. The interweaving of the fictional and the documentary, of categories and styles, empirical evidence and the virtual here points to a slightly disturbing effect of being-in-the-moment, which calls on the reader to make basic decisions about their own implication in the text and exposes the reflexive potential of literary experience. The reader is fundamentally involved in a process of judgment that refers to blurry boundaries, to sutures, breaks, and transitions, shifting them into the focus of attention.

Sheeper is a literary reflection on queer creativity, on the forms of transforming and appropriating what is already given, of things, gestures, formats, literary styles, terms, categories. The perspective is thus led away from the objects presented and toward the representative power of forms of presentation. This is the case for all the subjects and objects that Rosenthal treats: be it the staging of gender in relation to "femininity," be it the project of a cinematographic prose, be it the reckless mixture of narrative codes. It is also the case for Rosenthal's interest, obviously influenced by Smith, in the "pose," which has given camp its name, as a specific queer gesture between self-representation and theatrical embodiment. Central chapters of *Sheeper* are dedicated to the pose: "The world of art is made up of poses. The pose is the fact.... The honest pose is part of the truth – not a lie.... Look at the poor aging and now crying queen being beaten. All she wants in life is camp, make-up."

And not least, the production method of bricolage so celebrated by Rosenthal is associated

with the power of representational forms, namely as a procedure taken up by illegitimate subjects whose own powerlessness—which in bricolage is also made to emerge together with what is represented—leaves nothing left but to act in the context of the given. The hegemonic category of “invention” is thus replaced by the categories of “finding” and “modification”: “In short, beauty can be found, revealed, and dramatized, but not invented.” (Interestingly, at the same time as Rosenthal, Levi-Strauss was also acknowledging the value of bricolage as a way of using existing materials that does not follow any previous plan, but examines the potential of the given and works against the original function of things by combining what already exists. In his combinatorics, the bricoleur exposes something of himself without subsuming it to a fixed term or binding it to an identity. There is always *something* there, which can be seen when the work that was pieced together is presented.)

What appears in Rosenthal as a basic organizational element of queer productivity is the seam or the fracture that exhibits the migration of procedures, the coupling of heterogeneous elements, the perspective associated with all bricolage of an improbable, permanent “becoming.” The “seam” – which marks a text being assembled, as montage – has an anti-naturalist effect, which, according to Rosenthal, undermines the illusion, propagated by the “window cleaners” of literature, that reading is like looking through a window and out to reality. Using grammatical, lexical, or compositional idiosyncrasies, it instead seeks to draw attention to the medium, to a writing that appears in the framework of the window: “I want the printed line to intrude constantly, I want the reader’s focus to shift continually, I want each image broken and complemented by a word or sound and fixed by the spike of style.” The seam makes it possible to critique constructions such as “naturalness” and to tackle and disband closed forms. “Seams as a subject. In the seam everything changes, at the interface, all our strengths and weaknesses live in seams, all the world is in seams, not in dreams, do we see anything, all else is ground.”

Sheeper becomes an “inviolable masterwork” because the manneristic text demonstrates to itself the entanglement of pose and shame, self-hate and creativity, citation and originality, glamour and trash, which it makes into the object of representation in its depiction of the lives of the members of the queer New York Bohemia and which it simultaneously propounds as a specific form of queer practices of freedom. It thus achieves for prose what Jack Smith achieved for film as well as for performance art, what Charles Ludlam and John Vaccaro achieved for the theater, namely to transfer the lived queer aesthetics usually treated under the name “camp” into the realm of the arts.

Rosenthal is therefore only being consistent by drawing his examples for an art of bricolage

from the realm of non-art, from the lived world, for instance from the interior of the sixties, which, like everything at the time, was proliferating into the horizontal, into ornament, into formlessness: “Many things looked subjected to more than one transformation, as if the lust to create had been so overpowering as to become cannibalistic, or as if each object of art, once created, became as stupid as a lamp or bookend, and had to be destroyed and built anew. The whole room seemed to belong to another world, to whose inhabitants these uncanny furnishings were the beds and chairs of everyday life.”

What is thematized here is a production principle or a spirit of production that was very prevalent in the sixties, and which turned against the stupidity of the definite form as much as it did against the discourse of closure and completion. In this spirit moves an anti-systematic reflex, a tendency to dissolve constants over and over again in more and more flexible formal events, whose area of use and reference is still undefined. No meanings are suspended, no facts are designated, no closed works are created. It is much more a matter of isolating a method that entails the propensity to separate and classify, to compare and define. With its constantly provisional and open products, this “spirit of tinkering” distances itself from any attempt to force a form of expression onto all possible materials. Form here becomes dynamic and is understood as an impermanent (material) fortune, which can permeate a wide variety of aggregate conditions and demonstrates their changeability in the shape of body image, clothing, sequence, interior, or text in equal measure. Bricolage only knows divergent rhythms of becoming. Even the most tenacious object is exposed to the lapsing of its form, to the passing of its identity, the permanent and the fleeting are equally eventful, and this dynamism points to a dynamism of reality, the forms of which are revealed less by laws and constants than by variables and continuous modulations. Nature and society themselves are presented as realms of constant “becoming,” characterized by mixtures, ramifications, transitions, and entanglements, not by clear and unambiguous forms. This world of “becoming” has nothing to do with existing circumstances, with the “established” or determinable, but with activities, that is, with forces that have a direct effect on the senses.

Historically, reflecting on creativity is inextricably intertwined with the figure of the genius. Marked by the fusion of the ancient terms *genius* and *ingenium*, it forms a point of intersection for debate, particularly about the character of artistic production, about *mimesis* and *poiesis*, about autonomy and heteronomy in art, about the relationship of art to reality, to nature, and to morality. Above all, the category of genius cannot be separated from the controversies, which reach back to antiquity, about the relation between divine inspiration and human production. It is by means of this figure that human self-definition, so to speak, is

treated in the first place. Now the idea of the genius as the image of an exceptional person, of a great individual, who produces from out of himself and thus leaves all boundaries behind, has today been so discredited as ideological that one could get away with simply referring to everything that contemporary art has explicitly introduced into the field against this idea over the past decades: collective and group formats, generic identities, participatory concepts, a gleeful diletantism, process-oriented procedures that continually defer the completion of the “work,” and not least working with reproduction technologies and using citation.

But at the same time, the rejection of a category – even such a corrupted category as the “genius” – always seems to me to reclaim a power position that seeks to assert itself within the rejection. This “masculinist” ambition of wanting to obliterate categories is utterly foreign to camp as I understand it. I find it more instructive to assume that camp encounters categories such as that of the “genius” with a certain passivity as well, treating them as “found objects” that are open to appropriation and idiosyncratic usage. Rosenthal does this. He does not entirely reject the concept of the genius, instead de-emotionalizing and democratizing it to a certain degree while also reflecting on the paradox of a spectacular everyday creativity that happens always and everywhere. Genius shows up, so to speak, behind the critique of genius, but precisely not as the incomparable great white man with the divine hand, but as an “ingenium” that is inherent to every human being, and which enables him or her to piece together, in ever new attempts and with a pattering, insecure hand, a form for life and experience, even where the conditions for self-determination clearly get in the way. Alluding to the Civil Rights Movement, Rosenthal writes in *Sheeper*: “When Ulysses pinned down Proteus, that Old Man wiggled according to his nature. No matter how enchained we are, banned or inhibited, everyone has a tiny margin of freedom to display his nature in. This is no excuse to make men slaves, but good fat black doctors elude enslavement by magic. They take their tiny margin and make a world of it.”

This encodes the queer theme of *Sheeper*: Glamour without power, magic without subjugating materials, without works, without a previous plan. Local slave art with poor materials, not master art. Creativity appears here as a practice of freedom in the middle of bondage. This is deeply marked in Rosenthal by gay experience. Genius for him shows itself by bringing forth a glamour of “moldiness,” to borrow an idiosyncratic term from Jack Smith, which is a reaction to experiences of shaming and oppression. This thesis, that queer aesthetics identifies art as the faculty for an art-like bricolage as the genius of anyone, can also be linked up to Michel de Certeau's theory of the wily strategies of the subaltern, which he explicitly dubs the “arts of doing.”

“Innumerable ways,” writes de Certeau, “of playing and foiling the other's game, that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have.” Rosenthal's writing poetically transfers “the other's game” into the representation of a wealth of aspects and viewpoints. The novel (or whatever it is) teems with subaltern geniuses who are moved by the power of debasing experiences, but who, in their attempts to be heard, have to act within the limits set up by the very circumstances that caused this deprivation. Through a tenacious practice of appropriation and reallocation of cultural realities, they attempt to find a form for their lives. In doing so, they work above all with poor, shabby, seedy materials that seem to offer identification. The latent beauty of these materials is exposed in bricolage: “For anything can be woven into lace.”

Rosenthal calls these practices or the result of these practices “style.” “Style is the grimace or face we make waiting for the painful pimple lance – the strain which drowns out the pain and makes deliverance possible.” The embodiment of this understanding of style are insects, pictures of which illustrate the book as vignettes; innumerable excursions in the text sing their praises, for they seem to be a perfect example of combining a humble position in taxonomy with the beauty of a glamorous surface: “Style belongs to the insects.” By means of the teaching of style, which also obeys a narrative that exhibits the illegitimacy of appropriation by means of summoning a speech pattern that could be assessed according to the standards of presumably good taste as anachronistic, exhausted, pompous, and vulgar, the text treats options of visibility and the performative formation of identity. It thematizes options for queer subjects to act, which explore, after the shaming that provides the basis for their activities, the scope of possibilities of embodying differences, of bringing them into reality, and of experiencing recognition through a “style” developed in the process. The term “style” in *Sheeper* is closely associated with the experience of discrimination. Rosenthal mobilizes all art of representation to illustrate that everyday practices such as bricolage, gossip, or citation can become quite serious strategies against loss and speechlessness. When writing of such seriousness, for instance, he narratively compacts the activities of others to the point of the most external thinghood in order to make them perceptible and to transform them into an occasion for reflection. For example, in the erotic advertising strategies of the character “David,” which get increasingly charged with meaning and beauty in the repetition over various objects, he writes: “The line or routine David uses on little boys to get in their pants

has been polished and perfected by so many years of use on so many different subjects, it is as pure and delicately simple as carved jade or ivory.”

The gossip about David's “style” contributes in a peculiar way to outlining the character, his knowledge, and his strategies for existing. In the anecdote, the ingenuity of others can be experienced and cited. At the same time, the narrator's interest in these strategies finds expression in the narrative of the anecdote about “David.” Genius here is not the index of an unusual power of the individual, at which the forces of the world would find their limits, but is the faculty of any human being, which has become the topic of the narrative, to remain capable of acting and representing within the power-forming social circumstances. Throughout, the difference between art and non-art loses its significance. In the world of queer bricolage the production of works that are solely made with the aim of exhibiting them, that is, artistic works, can be traced back to the same requirements that non-artistic, functional productions also have. Art appears alongside equally creative practices that occur outside the institution of art, but that can be experienced and described like art. In the attempt to achieve forms for one's own life through “the other's game,” disempowerment and empowerment continue to refer to one another.

There are now two different forces that Rosenthal correlates in order to represent the connection between queer experience and bricolage, and both, as citations or allusions, are brought into a narrative relation to the pre-existing category of the “genius,” that is, to the traditional conception of the creative person.

The first force triggers the impulse to be productive. Here he writes: “Surely the images laid down in our childhoods are the *mises en scène* of our lives, and trivial infantile pleasures and shynesses the great windy powers we summon to art. My mother was a tiny chattering woman who could bully no one but an infant. Alas I was her infant and now blast trumpet and tuba against the monstrous regiment of women.”

Rosenthal – who understands the past as a form of energy – declares these “windy powers” on the one hand to be a *pneuma* constantly blowing towards us from the banal individual history of the soul, which compels us to respond to the experience by constantly creating forms. “We become art fiends who deem everything that doesn't leave a residue of beauty sinful. We know David blows boys with heart and soul, and yet we think it may be wrong... We look for justification, however slight. We urge David to write, to turn his transactions for the good use of Art.” Starting from the very first line of the book, gay experience is related as an experience of humiliation, which has its base in “shyness,” and which makes one utterly susceptible to shaming. The first line reads: “My mother used to whip me with a wooden coat-

hanger.” Innumerable stories of grotesque humiliation and violence structure the text. Its characters mutually perceive one other in states of shame to the point that for the reader, who somehow has to relate to this infectious shame, creativity and shaming are eventually connected in a peculiar way, shown in *Sheeper* by the recurring image of an eczematous artist. The connection between shaming and creativity gives rise to the “moldy creatures” that represent queerness, which populate *Sheeper* and at the same time refer to the work of Jack Smith. The story constantly makes use of the “moldy subjects to bring beauty to light, the wartier the better.” And this beauty appears in the destroyed subjects themselves, as soon as the wind pushes them to bring themselves to light in the transformations of bricolage.

A second power then comes to the aid of the energy of the past. This second power, by which “these unfortunates” are empowered to morph themselves into “creatures of gorgon beauty” through self-transformation, is their “genius.” “Genius is the scales and choosing,” as we read in *Sheeper*. In the practices of testing and choosing, genius comes into appearance. Genius “forces the hand to say,” its power thus takes effect by making the decision for one of several possibilities. By transferring this power for decision-making to us, genius inspires us to a “paralyzing, devious art.” Kant's famous definition of the genius reads: “Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind through which nature gives the rule to art.” Whatever Kant's formula might otherwise want to imply, it limits the scope of the definition to the realm of art and defines genius as a figuration of pure and unrestricted activity. Kant's genius is a power of giving. It brings quite new things into art. In the genius of “choosing,” however, the power of genius is not limited to the area of art, instead unfolding to all fields of creativity. What takes effect in it is not nature, but history. And in it, activity and passivity are entangled in a peculiar way. The bricoleur who responds to history is thus dependent on what is on offer. He receives it in order to react to the pre-existing with the activity of combinatory decision-making. The genius of queer bricolage is a figure of active passivity. In *Camp Grounds*, David Bergman even speaks of the “aggressive passivity of camp.” Not invention, but appropriating and choosing from the pre-existing is here the source of beauty and originality. Levi-Strauss says of the bricoleur: “His Universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand.’” One might say that genius and taste – traditionally divided between artists and recipients as the most divergent agents of an artwork – come together in the bricoleur, whose works always pose the question of the criteria of selection. Why is this thing used, but not that one?

Bricolage also becomes a politically relevant practice only in that moment when the system of representation, which authoritatively regulates the attribution of objects and forms, can no

longer be considered valid. Instead, the equivalence of all materials is recognized, from which Jacques Rancière derives the “honour acquired by the commonplace” in modernism. Thierry de Duve has called the “commonplace” the “regulative idea” of contemporary art. In queer culture – which cannot recognize binding forces without abandoning itself – this has always already been the case. Truly everything can find use there. But secondly, it is also the case that, in fact, everything is never chosen. Only the interweaving of these two facts constitutes the significance of bricolage, and also of queer bricolage. Only when everything is capable of art can the act of choosing *something* from the given materials become meaningful in a heightened way and explain the persuasiveness of a bricolage. It becomes a gesture that can be thought and can be interrogated by others. The act of choosing can transport a whole world, a context, within single appropriated sign, justifying the reference that speaks to our faculty of judgment. “The right complications salted in will be *Genius*.” It is thus completely plausible that Rosenthal locates the genius in the act of “choosing,” which in fact represents the riddle of any creative process.

The first power, the “windy power,” which is brought into the world by the discouraged and is celebrated in *Sheeper* as the “incredible impetus” that we introduce in order for an artwork or something like art “to rise from such ugliness,” allows for an identity to emerge as inspiration, an identity that is not defined and has neither form nor fixed assignation, but urges to be realized. The second power, the creative genius of human beings, operates in “the strain which drowns out the pain and makes the deliverance possible.” It allows the shamed subject constantly to try out preliminary forms for this identity in processes of piecing together, to bring a provisional coming-into-appearances into the works, in which the experience of humiliation is simultaneously present and inverted creatively. Rosenthal's name for this form, which corresponds to the improbability of the fact that the identity is undefined, is “pose.” It is the name of a visibility of possibilities gained in visual or linguistic citation, of an overdetermined or underdetermined theatrical presence that does not allow itself to be denied and provides expression to a serious belief in one's own uniqueness.

The pose is constructed in the state of a curiously undirected activity and through spontaneous decisions for or against some available material. “First the high points – an eyeball, an earring – then everything else is suffused with light. The platinum hair. Even when the screen is black you can tell where Dietrich is standing. It is more than a halo effect.” Genius does not proscribe any rules, instead opening up the possibility of playing with the valid categories. The term “creature” accentuated this fact and the indeterminability of what is shown in the pose. Poses are completed by falling apart. They cannot be held permanently. This is why

Rosenthal is practically exalting as he confronts the pathos of working on the pose – “Can we build something greater than ourselves?” – time and again with the reference to the inconclusiveness of bricolage and the instability of every pose.

The interaction of activity and passivity in *Sheeper* corresponds to a whole art of living that invites us to take on an attitude of “outside,” completely focused on appearances. On the one hand it is about being able to relinquish oneself to the random things of a pre-existing world in order to receive them, on the other hand it is about the faculty of suffusing them with that “glamour” that *Webster’s Dictionary* defines as “a charm affecting the eye, making objects appear different from what they really are. Witchcraft; magic; a spell.” Many of *Sheeper’s* chapters are dedicated to the splendor of ordinary things, the dust, the socks lying around, and all kinds of leftovers that work against dissolution, which have been isolated from their contexts in an excess of “choosing” so that they are re-evaluated, assigned a value beyond meaning and function.

This is where the political aspect of the camp term “moldiness” begins to unfold, which involves a splendor of shabbiness, a glamour of transience and the things at the end of the capitalist utility cycle. “Things glow because of the underlay of ownership. An old newspaper clipping about the shortage of high school teachers in Brooklyn is the most valuable object I own.” Once things have left the lack of history in the world of commodities as damaged, they enter into a history of obstinate use, eventually erasing the difference between historical and natural-historical process. This creates a commingling of things and “creatures,” whose beauty and similarity even appears in aging, in downward class mobility, in being used up, in being useless and in decay, in a skill that seems to connect things and beings, because the perspective of a further transformation is always linked to it. If I understand correctly, Juliane’s formulation of “camp materialism” is also aimed at this aspect of solidarity with the inferior, the damaged, the decayed, or the abandoned. Camp means a faithfulness to the fading as a kind of becoming.

The psychedelic passages in *Sheeper* get their function in the context of this sensitive attitude toward appearances, which in turn summons a motif from the history of genius and the teachings on inspiration. Namely, hallucinogenic drugs enter into a body in place of the divine powers that belong to the myth of inspiration, a body which clearly needs an addition coming from outside in order to become creative. It is staged as the power that tears the bricoleur out of the embroilments of the pragma and into an inspired state in which the world begins to present itself to him as an improbable play of appearances. “Pot is THEATER. Everything is bathed in stage lights.... All situations are scenes, all places are sets. All objects are props.

One thing turns into another.” It is in relation to this condition, or at least oriented to the model of this condition, that bricolage gets to work.

The permanent becoming, all the transformations, suturings, and transitions that work against the appalling circumstances, rise up from a base of shame in *Sheeper*, which they eventually fall back into. They tie the knot that keeps the characters in this world. In this melancholy text, however, bricolage is always accompanied by a sentimental hope that events of remaining presence, of uniqueness, of purity, and of success can be won from “becoming.” I will give this hope the last word today: “Because everything I get and love is spoiled. But I am left with something. I can’t say what, something remains, a trace, a taste of vanilla chocolate, honey in the blood, left pure, a memory left pure, an uprush of light, the swell of carnations, a small white skull, perhaps of a child or monkey. A residuum, a line of dry foam on the beach, an infinitesimal profit. And perhaps the only profit is the words themselves, so many.”