

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan
Wood, Anton Vidokle
Editorial

01/02

e-flux journal #51 — January 2014 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle
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Thanks to everyone who came out to our fifth anniversary party in December. It's 2014 now and we are still hungover. But we want to tell you about a very strange thing that happened to us there. Late in the night we met a young Chinese artist through a friend, and she told us about a recurring nightmare of hers. What happens most nights is this: each time she produces an artwork, a giant barbarian with a long beard appears wielding a sword as long as a person is tall. And with the rounded blade of the sword, he slices her work in two.

According to her description, the barbarian seems to be asleep, waiting for the moment she finishes her piece to wake up and appear. And when he slices through her work, each resulting piece suddenly becomes a different thing: one side shatters instantly, but as it shatters, it melts and shape-shifts – mostly into decorative or useful objects of various kinds. Some become souvenirs meant to decorate a bookshelf or mantle above the fireplace, like a piece of the Berlin Wall or a mug with a cathedral on it. Other bits turn into Biedermeier sofas and lightly-used Ikea shelving units, into clay pots and porcelain vases and discount store pans and blenders and kitchen utensils for scrambling eggs.

While this might seem unusual, what happens next is much stranger. Once the barbarian has sliced through the artist's work, the other part bursts into pure blinding light, like a gigantic paparazzi camera flash turning into a religious epiphany. And then the work is gone forever.

After the brilliant light washes over everything and fades away, some of the useful objects are left scattered around, giving the impression of a destroyed living room full of things bought off Craigslist. And the artist told us that the flash of light also has the effect of erasing her memory, so that she is unable to recall the work that was just destroyed, much less how to go about remaking it.

This dream seemed significant, and so we wanted to know who she thought this barbarian might be. Was the barbarian a critic, framing the work and creating meaning effects to harness its untapped energy? Was he a collector converting the work into mute investment furniture? Was he a right-wing hardliner making a massive budget cut? A curator with an incisive observation? A bearded hipster experimenting with his cool new sword? An impoverished neighbor from the countryside trying to use the work for firewood?

The artist could not say for sure who this barbarian was, and now the dance floor was starting to fill up and we were all being jostled around. Someone spilled a drink. Several conversations started at once. Does anyone have cigarettes? The young artist felt like dancing,

and right before she headed to the dancefloor, she leaned in and screamed to us over the music: "I just remembered! The barbarian says something before he leaves!" By now we could barely hear each other. "He stares straight at me and he says: As You Free People Eat All The Light And Call It Creation We Will Copy Your Clumsy Lies Into Funky Pop and Hire Your Best Spies as Our Own Discount Cinematographers!" At least, it sounded something like that.

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