

## **A Day in the Life of Amadeus Gordini, “El Gordini”.**

Amadeus Gordini, the superstar performance and conceptual artist, sat at his desk in his dressing gown, bitterly re-reading his latest reviews in the gloom of the studio, lit up by the seedy glow of the laptop screen. “Ridiculous”, he tutted aloud, as he picked at the residue of a cold macaroni cheese, his back to the window that overlooked the neighbourhood to which the studio belonged.

*In ‘Moments’, Amadeus Gordini attempts a Perecian-inspired record of a single day: to document everything that happens to him in twenty hours. Every passing thought, every fleeting sensation: every tingle and prick, captured in the utmost detail, as and when it occurs.*

Gordini read on.

*Yet we already know the project is doomed to fail - meant to fail - before it can even begin. An infinitude of information collapses the task into a more nebulous one of defining the present moment. In ‘Moments’, Gordini fills the exhibition space with “Object Data”: mounds of bin bags containing the fruits of this endeavour. An endless parade of representational techniques clutter the area with all the charm of a hoarder’s probate auction. Yet, lacking the impetus of a compulsive disorder, there is a somewhat hollow feel to the outcome, as if the artist were performing madness simply for effect.*

Gordini reached for the whisky decanter and poured a small measure into his tumbler and continued reading.

*Indeed, in an age of mass surveillance, we might expect a reimagining of this originally Proustian project, or, at least some comment on its parallel ambitions with big data. Yet, there is an almost Luddite refusal on the part of the artist to engage with these issues. Moreover, with the demand for improved diversity in the arts, it is difficult to see why 'Moments' - the day in the life of a wealthy, white man - has earned a stint in Paris's most important exhibition hall. There is a sense the once venerated poster boy of the post-structuralist brat pack has taken his finger off the pulse with this one, drifting, as all masters must do in time, out into the vacuum of irrelevance.*

Amadeus Gordini stood and fastened his dressing gown. He wandered over to the record player in the corner of the room. Leafing through his massive collection of vinyl records, he picked one out and placed it on the turntable. "Irrelevance", he shook his head as he sank into the bean bag, the Fine Young Cannibals playing in the background as he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

In the aftermath of his failed exhibition, Amadeus Gordini consulted several others within his network of conceptual and performance artist friends. Something more daring is in order, they would tell him. Gordini must go out into the real world, they would say in that tedious habit of talking about him, to him, in the third person. He's spent too long in this bleach-white purgatory of private viewings, this sanatorium of glass-clinking sycophants.

A friend had an idea. "Why not invert the last project? Remove your agency in the recording.

Outset the problem to another: you become the subject".

"Go on," said Gordini, his index finger resting against his cheekbone.

“Have someone record a day in your life. Leave the decision-making with them. The piece will say more about observation than either observer or observed”.

“I’m listening.”

“Have yourself followed for a day. You won’t know they’re following you. Best still, they won’t know they’re following *you*.” The friend was becoming excited.

Within the fortnight, they mulled it over in wine bars. The plan came to be. “I’ve the contact information for a private detective in the city,” said the friend. “They specialise in divorce cases, mostly. Infidelities and the occasional paedophile.” Gotto nodded. The lude was kicking in. “For ten thousand, I could have you followed for a day. They’d get everything you did within twenty-four hours.”

“I want everything.” said Gotto. “When?”

“That’s it,” said the friend with a dumb smile. “You won’t even know. One day in the next year, Gordini will be spied on. Every movement of his logged, every stream of data captured. A complete record of a day in the life of the artist.”

The point of it all was honed in. There would be an emphasis on digital spying techniques that would go some way in providing a comment on the state of the modern era of surveillance: the threat of monolithic corporations centralising data banks for nefarious purposes and so forth. Part of the piece’s ‘spectacle’ would derive from the vast data profile of the artist as rendered by the spy using domestically available monitoring devices. The piece would shatter notions of ‘privacy’ and ‘security’ as plausibly attainable within the technological domain, challenging viewers to rescind some of their online habits in response to this thrust of the artwork. The piece

would focus on who the spy was, too. How the activities of the artist were recorded and interpreted would be an invaluable dimension to the project, rivalling, even, its primary Péricien bent. Indeed, the mismatch between the artist's subjective reality and the spy's objective record - how the latter, in turn, would be modified by the observer's own reality - would be critical to the final piece, ensuring that the notion of 'lived experience' - the plurality of realities in undermining the illusion of one reality - would be made explicit, allowing somewhere for a segue into a rallying cry for more marginalised representation. There would be guest artists. His friend sifted through the notebook. "It's coming together nicely," he said, smacking his lips.

In order to best elucidate the discord between the internal workings of the artist's mind and the interpretation of those events on the part of the spy-observer, a diary would be kept, comprising not just a written record of the day, but also, videographic documentation as well as an impressionistic rendering of experience, e.g. a 'paint diary' (several media were chosen as optimising best overall aesthetic value for the exhibition space), a dream log, and so forth. The diary would testify to any discord and, for that matter, any accord between how the day was experienced and how the day appeared (with the fallible nature of observation the central subject of the study). The question was raised: what is a diary faced with the threat of an all-seeing observer? It was brought up that as a confessional document, a diary was an invaluable trove of information for anyone tasked with such an investigation. To what extent would its function modify if the author knew it would be read? It was proposed that an explicit objective of the project should be for the artist to try and prevent it from being infiltrated by the investigator and, in turn, to observe the effect this tension would have on the private life of the artist and the observations of the spy when considering the actions of the former within this context (i.e., of

pursuit). In short, a secondary theme of the work would be an exploration of the changing relationship between the observer and observed, especially how expectations about the subject distorted observation. “It’s a comment on all artwork since time immemorial”, said the friend after a particularly good lunch.

“Ultimately, it’s a performance,” said Gordini. They were there the following week for drinks. The friend furrowed their eyebrows to convey their attention - that they were listening. “What does it matter that everything’s as we say it is?”

The friend said: “I see where you’re going with this”.

“Isn’t it more important to get cracking the original Percian nub of our endeavour?”.

“It’s no use *worrying*.”

“We can’t afford a public relations fallout”, Gordini pursed his lips.

“You worried it could-”

“Happen?” Gordini nodded and sipped his gimlet. “I need the day you’ve booked with the agency.”

“March fourteenth, it’s the day I have down.”

“We won’t tell anyone. The performance necessitates a degree of trust on the part of the audience.”

“It begs the question, what will Gordini do March 14th?”

They met at the viewing the following evening. “It will be important to strike the right balance between the believable and the remarkable.”

“It is not in Gordini’s nature to be banal.” The challenge was to come up with an agenda for March 14th that would accentuate the artist’s best tendencies.

“Do we pander to your stoic nature? Or make you out as some Sinbad? A Byronic hellion, hellbent on spectacle and exploit.”

Gordini thought for a second. “A bit of both,” he said, swirling a vintage then scooning it in one go. “I shouldn’t want them thinking the money has made the worst out of me. Mind, it would be nice to leverage some of my romantic proclivities.”

The friend stopped (they’d been pacing laps of the gallery). “Here, you have a chance to be caught with your pants down: make them jealous of what they see. Look too good, though, and they’ll see right through it.”

“They shan’t know I’m in on it at all,” said Gordini at the after-drinks the following evening. “I never agreed to be spied on; it was your idea to have me followed. The diary, I keep as a matter of habit. You had me followed for your own reasons. Wait, wait.” Gordini took a cigarette from the box on the table. “After a festering grudge in which I resent you for having me followed - the exact reasons for which can be assimilated into the archetypal narrative of an artistic rivalry referenced in our respective reportage, think, the letters of Vincent and Gauguin - I’ll come to understand why you did it. There will be a cooling off period. One day, in a rare appeal for mutual clemency, I’ll ask to see the reports you had on me. We’ll be particularly interested in this one day, March 14th. It will be noteworthy, first, for it being a pivotal slash climactic episode in the narrative, but also, beyond the events, we’ll notice a fascinating discord between the inferences made by the mole about me based on their comprehensive reportage, modified no doubt by their expectations of a certain motive on my part, inherited from your suspicions that

compelled you to hire them in the first place, and my own feelings about the matter as represented in my record of the incident - the mixed media diary I keep as a matter of habit. These parallel records of the same event will yield fascinating insights only appreciated months afterwards, when all is said and done, and differences have been set aside.”

The friend was open-mouthed. “Gordini gives me an orgasm,” they said. “We should work immediately on feeding the warning signs of our feud into the public domain. Think, Twitter.” The friend, who was also a superstar performance and conceptual artist, thought for a moment. “For the sake of our respective brands, we should ensure the narrative is such that both parties can be considered equal parts protagonist-antagonist in the developments that lead to the falling out. We must tailor the story just right, such that it retains perfect moral symmetry: both of us are motivated by the same ends, realised differently in ways analogising moral systems that are simply different answers to the age-old questions.”

“Agreed”, said Gordini.

“Moreover, degree of warmth must be retained throughout if our subsequent reconciliation is to be believed. For instance, we should cross no lines.” Gordini rubbed his chest.

“It stands to reason you had me followed with my best interests at heart. You assumed some maniacal-seeming quality to my recent behaviour was a cause for concern. You feared I was being self-destructive. I considered your concerns stifling. Your intervention acted as a buffer to more extreme behaviour. The viewer can choose: was I denied a moment of artistic transcendence, or, was the intervention conducive not only to the success of my work but the health of my very being?”

“I’m trying to save you,” said the friend as they neared the punch bowl the following Friday.

“You believe I want you killed. Our two perspectives are polarised: the discord couldn’t be greater.” Gordini licked his lips.

“The mole intercepts the video diary using a key log. Rather than take my word for the reports, they invert everything I say to support their original hypothesis.”

“Embodying the notion big data supposes it knows what’s best?”

“Saying something about how, even opened up in tender earnestness, mankind is doomed by its incapacity for perspective-taking.”

“It will be the artistic spectacle of the century.”

The diary idea was scrapped. The piece would focus on the actions of Gordini and the inferences drawn by a team of spies. The final piece would include every strand of observation-data amalgamated onto a single scroll, one hundred metres long, rolled out across the exhibition floor. Members of the public would be invited to sit, stand or lie on it, to read the scroll at their leisure. The conclusions of the spies would be such that the astute viewer would be able to infer the discords and accords that existed between the observer(s) and observed through the incompleteness of the inferences made by the former. For instance (this was the example used by the friend), imagine you are telling a story about someone to someone who doesn’t know this person, or better still, doesn’t like them. During the telling of the story, you might be tempted to say something like: “Oh X, yeah, they’re just like that, that’s why they did Y”. And whilst the brevity of this explanation might suffice for the benefit of storytelling, a more discerning listener might acknowledge there are many distortions in such a simplified account of X, many concealed truths about X and the context their actions arose within, which will more accurately

explain why they did Y, and that there is something almost spiteful in such a lacking explication of X's actions, whilst at the same time, the listener will appreciate the story exists for the purpose of entertainment: that the concealed truths make up their own narrative in the shape of the missing pieces.

So the final piece would be a hundred or so metre long scroll filled with information describing the activities of a day in the life of Amadeus Gordini, as filtered, collected, interpreted and reproduced by a team of dedicated, highly trained secret agents, using a range of techniques to retrieve and represent information, pertaining to the artist's actions during a particularly public (albeit secretly staged) rivalry between himself and another superstar conceptual and performance artist, the exact narrative for which was yet to be finalised so as to achieve the conditions outlined, namely, that both should see their respective brand images bolstered by the episode.

In practice, it was harder to come up with a narrative that could be arranged to take place in such a way that it would be believable to fulfil the rather quaint-seeming need to hire a team of secret agents. It was also difficult to tinker the story just right such that both parties could be considered equal parts benevolent and malign in their actions. It was easy for the story, manipulated sufficiently to be believable and at the same time retaining the prescribed themes, to portray one party as overly psychotic, say, or controlling or reckless at the expense of the other. Moreover, certain renditions of the narrative, at their most well-weighted, involved certain illegalities that had to be prohibited from the outset, e.g., hiring an assassin would revoke the agencies' vow of non-intervention.

The friend was invited to exhibit in San Francisco; the project had to be postponed until the following year. “El Gordini hasn’t got a year”, Gordini said over the phone. They fell out swiftly and ceased all communication.

“It’s getting messy”, Gordini’s confidante told him one day. “Take it back, bare bones a little. Stick with one theme. Cut some slack.” She rolled her eyes to say: *we both know who I’m talking about*. “You want to say something about identity?”

“I want to say something about life.”

“Keep it simple. Remember *Baubles*?”

“That was ’89.”

“Have you sculpted since Berlin?”

“A little.”

The confidante looked around the room. They were in a restaurant. “Can you smoke here?” she asked. She always asked the same question when she was back in Europe.

The final piece was a 3D porcelain cardioid mounted on a stone plinth, painted mother of pearl acrylic and finished with diamante embellishment. It was a stunning object when mounted in the primary exhibition space of the Hague Theatre, alongside a series of screen-printed curve-functions, displayed in six by two frames, occupying the eastern wing of the building. The show was called *Hearts*. It was explained by the publicity materials:

*The heart, once considered the vehicle for the soul - the essence of life; the connect between the body and divine - has seen a gradual demotion to near banal status: a mere pump, replicated by machinery, transplanted casually; a fallible functionary to the organism's continuity. Hearts demands a reconsideration of the contemporary status of the organ. The beating heart - our earliest notion of time passing, the marker of our own time - is afforded new prominence by the artist. In Hearts, Amadeus Gordini begs us to love ourselves and one another.*

*Hearts* was exhibited for six months then saw a month-long re-exhibition in Copenhagen. The three-dimensional porcelain cardioid, the exhibition's centrepiece, was auctioned for an undisclosed seven-figure sum in Christie's, New York.

