

8. HOW DOES
A WORK WORK
WHERE?

8.1 What is a work?

8.2 What is work?

8.3 What is where?

39 MicroLectures:
In proximity of
performance

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8.1 WHAT IS A WORK?

To answer the question, "How does a work work where?" we must first divide it into three subquestions: 1) What is a work? 2) What is work? and 3) What is where? Once we answer these, we may go on to the how.

Question #1: What is a work?

A work is an object which is infinite and singular. By infinite, I mean that the singularity of the work, which allows us in fact to refer to it as a work, is itself comprised of infinite events. We can divide those events into two kinds of infinities: first the infinity of microevents on a molecular, atomic, and subatomic level, because anything which is noticeable must be made up of parts which are not; and second the infinity of macroevents, that are happening in our present, and that have happened in our past, and that clearly define a work, and temper and shape our perceptions of it, and our responses to it.

Take for example a painting. Let us attempt to view *The Conversion of St Paul* by Caravaggio. First, we must travel to Rome. Once there, we must find the Chiesa Santa Maria del Popolo. Upon entering the unlit cavernous church, we see the painting immediately, and see that we cannot see it. It hangs high on the wall obscured in shadow twenty feet away beyond an uncrossable boundary. We notice a small box to our right, labeled with the word *luce*, below which is a slot the size of a 100 lira coin. One of us volunteers to drop a coin in the slot, and suddenly a miraculous heavenly beam of electric light from the ceiling illuminates *The Conversion of St Paul* by Caravaggio. Before we can begin our contemplation, we realize that tourists from all corners of the church have swarmed to our position, it being the only illuminated area. Jostling to maintain our view of the painting, we focus our concentration on the cramped and colorful composition. We feel momentarily overwhelmed, not just by the startling structures and figures, but also by the textures. We see St Paul on his back on the ground, eyes closed and arms outstretched to an interior heaven, his horse beside him, one front hoof poised above Paul's chest, reined by a frightened steward. Above Paul's head, the horse's head; above the horse's head, the steward's head; above

the steward's head just off the corner of the canvas, in the sky . . . With a click the light has gone out, plunging the painting back into darkness. The tourists hesitate, waiting for somebody to volunteer another coin. When no one does, they wander off again into the interior of the church.

What is *The Conversion of St Paul* by Caravaggio? We expected a painting, but found a series of events. Does the painting we expected exist? There is the painting, but there is also the coin box and the coin, ourselves and the crowd, the church of Santa Maria del Popolo and the city of Rome, the shadows and the light. Of course *The Conversion of St Paul* by Caravaggio exists, but this is not really the question. The question is where does *The Conversion of St Paul* by Caravaggio stop? What is a work? A work is an object overflowing its frame, converging into a series of other objects each overflowing their frames, not becoming one another, but becoming events, each moving in the direction of their own infinite singularity and difference. Somebody pulls another 100 lira coin from a pocket, holds it over the slot, and says, "Get ready."

8.2 WHAT IS WORK?

Question #2: What is work?

A human being is an organism that works; this man is a unit of labor. This is not a quote from Karl Marx, but rather what I thought growing up in Flint, Michigan, before I encountered people who don't work. My grandfather, my father's father, worked in the General Motors auto plant that gave birth, in 1927, to the United Auto Workers Union as a result of the massive sit-down strike that he participated in. At the outset of our performance *How Dear to Me the Hour When Daylight Dies*, when my grandfather was 92, I contributed what for me was a homage to his years on the assembly line – a sequence in which I stood very still, lifted both arms to chest level, rubbed the back of my right hand in a circular motion with the fingers of my left hand, dropped both arms, took three breaths, and repeated the gesture. Under Lin's direction and with the input of the group, the homage took shape. After seven repetitions, I left my right hand raised, and lowered my left only. After nine repetitions of that, I left both hands raised. After twelve repetitions of that, I dropped both arms and began again. The performance of the action required considerable concentration, which I had not expected when I began devising it. As I performed it in front of an audience, in the stillness and the focus which ensued, I imagined the spirit of my grandfather descending on me, even though he was still living, and I imagined my gesture becoming a repetition of his countless gestures at work, my hands becoming his, my face becoming his. My work became the work of becoming my grandfather at work, and when his spirit joined me, it did not descend, but grew from micropoints inside me – in my hands, behind my eyes, in my arms and my

chest, and in my feet. When I articulated my intentions at a work-in-progress discussion in Colorado Springs in the fall of 1995, an elderly woman in the audience volunteered the comment that she had once worked on an assembly line, and the experience was just like that gesture. When I called my mother from Glasgow in the spring of 1996 to tell her we had successfully premiered *How Dear to Me the Hour When Daylight Dies*, she told me my grandfather had died three days earlier. He had died on the day of the first performance.

What is work? Work is life.
A human being is an organism that works;
this man is a unit of labor.
This man is free,
not because he is determined from within,
but because every time
he constitutes the motive of the event that he produces.
What he does, he does entirely,
that being what comprises his liberty.

8.3 WHAT IS WHERE?

Question #3: What is where?

Where is inside. What does inside mean? Inside means inside my car. What is my car doing? It is traveling along its own particular road. What is inside my car? I am inside my car, and since I am inside my car, I cannot perceive anything outside my car until it enters my point of view, which is inside. Thus we can say that not only am I inside my car, but in fact, everything is inside my car – the road is inside my car, *The Conversion of St Paul* by Caravaggio is inside my car, and my grandfather who built my car is inside my car. Does my car have windows? No, it is a windowless car, because how could it have windows when everything is already inside? In fact, there is no outside, there are only more windowless cars. Each one speeds along its own particular road. Each one contains everything else, including its own particular road and all the other windowless cars. But each everything inside has a certain pattern of emphasis, of clarity and obscurity, depending on the car's specific speed, direction, and point of view. In this way there are different everythings. Each car comprises a different everything. We are not speaking of closure, but of infinite convergences. The convergence of all the windowless cars of my body and mind comprise the windowless car of my self, in which everything happens. But not every everything, only my particular everything. So this is not to say that there is nothing outside of myself, but rather that every everything is inside of itself and every other everything, including me.

Question #4: How does a work work where?

A work is an object overflowing its frame. Work is an event in which the human participates; the human is an organism that works. A work works when it becomes an event of work. A work works when it becomes human. This becoming occurs when we realize it. Specifically, it occurs when we realize it where it occurs. It occurs inside. We do not need to find a way into a work, since the work is already inside. Instead we realize a work and its harmony with our point of view. Then it and we begin to work, and the play of work begins.