

Melancholy is not enough... But, why is it not? “A sorrowful pleasure,” according to Bulgarian-French theorist Julia Kristeva, the concept is assumed to exclude any action. Besieged by one’s grievous state, one can’t react with or against this all-pervasive affective condition. Conversely, in his famous text ‘Mourning and Melancholia,’ Sigmund Freud warns that, in opposition to mourning, melancholia doesn’t pass with the endurance of grief, and that it can lead to incessant narcissistic self-flagellation. Turning away from deliberately finding pleasure in overpowering sentiments and environments, as the melancholic subject is expected to in most conceptualizations of her state, the artists in this exhibition subvert the looming of melancholia into delight, relentlessly relating the physical places they navigate to the mental states they desire to appropriate. The process through which they engage in these acts can perhaps be related to the writings of Michel de Certeau, more precisely his classic 1984 study ‘The Practice of Everyday Life,’ and the French concept of ‘la perruque’ (‘the wig’), in which the exhibition finds inspiration. ‘La perruque’ is “the worker’s own work disguised as work for h[er] employer.” Within this process, nothing of material value is stolen; what is taken advantage of is time. As de Certeau states, “‘La perruque’ may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room.” Diverting time away from producing profit for her employer, the worker uses it for her own enjoyment, for activities that are free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. Would it be possible, then, that practices analogous to ‘la perruque’ are increasingly proliferating outside the work place, at other significant public sites of production? Which tactical interventions allow the establishing of a private relationship with such sites, escaping its mechanics of subordination while simultaneously situated within the field in which its control is being exercised? And, is there a way to actually find enjoyment and poetic possibilities in such pragmatic subversions of the regularization of everyday life? One might find inspiration in John Cage’s unrealized 1948 proposal ‘Silent Prayer.’ The piece was to become a moment of uninterrupted silence to be played as an intervention during Muzak radio broadcasts. Rather than relying on existing recordings, Muzak produced its own, standardizing a repertoire and styles fitting to different times of the day. Ultimately, its goal was to stimulate the workforce musically, gearing to a system of programming that increased efficiency and productivity and was thus closely entwined with the fordist model of industrial mass production. Muzak provided a pattern of forced listening, and, as music critic Kyle Gann suggests, Cage might have conceived his ‘Silent Prayer’ as a “composition” that should be programmed on Muzak stations to provide listeners with a blessed four-and-a-half-minute respite from required listening. Cage thus, rather than wanting to stage a radically revolting act, quite directly proposes to divert time away from Muzak broadcasts, using his poetic license as an artist to discreetly subvert the all-pervasiveness of its system. The artworks in the exhibition negotiate comparable strategies of subtle subversion. Jo Mitchell’s ‘Silent Prayer (extended version after John Cage),’ directly draws inspiration from Cage’s proposed intervention of uninterrupted silence. Transposed to the context of a heavy metal concert, Mitchell casts the band Rush of Blood to explore the possibilities for a purposeful and active non-playing in a context that usually demands continuous noise and forced conjunction. In her piece ‘Multiple (parking),’ Lotte Van den Audenaeren stages a disobedient action that disrupts commonly accepted sign systems in urban environments. Appropriating all of the individual spots in a parking lot by adding the word “multiple” inside their delineated spaces, she offers challenges to the meaning and interpretation of this quotidian public site. Matthias Wermke and Mischa Leinkauf, in their video installation ‘Zwischenzeit (In-between),’ undermine regulations in a public transportation system. The artists travel on a homemade train wagon through the Berlin subway at night, exploring sites in-between train stops that are normally hidden and inaccessible for daily travelers. As such, they create a poetic ‘in-between’ in which rules and regulations are temporarily suspended. Crafting a composition around the passing of Michael Jackson, Anne-James Chatton’s ‘événement n° 23, vendredi 26 juin 2009’ loops the phrase “the King of Pop is dead.” The piece was created by picking up a newspaper and generating a composition based on that day’s headline. As the rhythm percolates, Chatton’s recitation highlights a disdain for originality, while positioning himself towards the all-pervasiveness of media conglomerates. For ‘Higgs Ocean,’ Andrea Galvani traveled across the Arctic Ocean as part of a scientific research trip, collecting light energy produced by the sun with electric solar panels. Using that energy, and the resources of the scientific institution, he fueled a powerful projector, launching light energy past the perimeter of the planet. The resulting photographs register unrepeatable moments of the transit of energy, suggesting the artist’s conquest of precise moments in time and space. Finally, then, the exhibition, in presenting these works, introduces an ambiguous site of insubordinate gestures, offering potential models to establish a position that merges tactical distrust with poetic action. Propagating ideas of imbalance and disobedience, it is a celebration of practical invention and moral resistance—the conquest of time over subjugation, and of defiance over sorrow—and the vast realization that melancholy is, indeed, not enough...