Preface to Pendulum

I have often dreamed of the perfect decapitation. There is nothing peculiarly macabre about such ruminations. It has nothing of the ghouliness of crushed skulls, eyes dislodged from their sockets, or limbs cruelly cleaved from their moorings by a hatchet blow. Nor is it sadist in impulse. The only head that I am thinking of lopping of in the end is my own. If I am to die, as we all must, then I prefer an elegant, considered demise.

If, however, the mind turns from suicide to murder the matter should proceed with the same refinement. Murders do not fall outside the realm of aesthetic judgment and the rules of good taste. As De Quincy has written, “Murders have their little differences and shades of merit, as well as statues, pictures, oratorios, cameos, intaglios, or what not.” A man who no doubt knew the utility of a handsome blade sheathed in one’s cane.

If I were to kill, it too would have to be artful. I am, after all, no imbecile. Here would be my instrument of choice: a sword made of ice. It could not, of course, be just any sword of ice. As a dilettante of science, its specifications would have to be exact. The precision of the blade would have to be ideally matched to the dexterity of the blow struck. So in this case, the blade would have to be thick enough to handle the requisite force necessary to cut through the neck cleanly and yet thin enough to dissolve precisely on the point of its exit. The variables could no doubt be calculated: the speed which the blade must travel, as well as the thickness, the resistance of the neck’s tissues, and bone, the warmth of the blood, etc. Whether such a weapon is physically possible leaves me utterly indifferent. Just imagine the exasperation of the detective responsible for the case.

It is thus, with a particular pleasure, that I introduce the reader to Evan Calder Williams’ Pendulum, a work hewn on the lathe of the New Pessimism. As a work of art it speaks for itself. It certainly needs no lengthy introduction. Suffice it to say that it is composed for those who know the feeling of having slush in one’s boots. In our derelict age, that it is composed for those who know the feeling of having slush in one’s boots. In our derelict age, it is thus, with a particular pleasure, that I introduce the reader to Evan Calder Williams’ Pendulum, a work hewn on the lathe of the New Pessimism. As a work of art it speaks for itself. It certainly needs no lengthy introduction. Suffice it to say that it is composed for those who know the feeling of having slush in one’s boots. In our derelict age, that it is composed for those who know the feeling of having slush in one’s boots. In our derelict age, it is thus, with a particular pleasure, that I introduce the reader to Evan Calder Williams’ Pendulum, a work hewn on the lathe of the New Pessimism.

Artists: The New Pessimism

Dimensions variable. Height: three inches to one mile in length. Width: one centimeter to three miles, plus spray zone (indeterminate)

Materials: Titanium, linear cold generator, magnetized oxide, lubricant (piviot); water, soot, blood, marrow, plastic, feather, excrement, milk, tobacco, glass, bile, wood, pork, sucrose, urine, brick, rubber, ice (pendulum)

Pendulum is, in essence, a simple work. It was first installed off-site, approximately 18 miles from Head Gallery, thirteen years ago, and it remains off-property. (That is, it cannot be said to belong to the gallery. The gallery legally owns the materials that constitute the work, but the pole, the pivot point, but through the ingenious use of some lesser-known Intellectual Property Statutes introduced with the Geneva Convention, the “concept” of the work is excluded from status as intellectual property. It literally belongs to no one, although in an accompanying audio tape, the artists stated that “it belongs, as it always did, to the flabby futility of binding science to thought.”)

The work is best described as falling between an inconstant object, a process piece, and a performance without subjects involved. Floating one mile above the ground without tether, a single great white lump of ice, the air is the air. Assemblage of small magnets keep it perfectly centered over the installation site. To this pivot is attached a rather crude early version of the linear cold generator, swaying free and pointing its pin-sized beam toward the ground below. A certain quantity of water is gathered around the pivot, where it remains frozen. However, temperature differences in the surrounding air cause the outer surface of this small ice lump to melt slightly. Given the force of gravity, this cannot be prevented by the ultra-cold beam cutting through them, exert pressure on the pendulum, and it begins to swing. The momentum of the swing drives the moisture further toward the tip, where it refreezes. Hence, were every swing, the diameter grows longer and longer. It describes a wider and wider arc, whistling over the heads of the city. It comes closer and closer to the ground, and to the marked zone directly one-mile below the pivot point. One of two outcomes occurs: either the combination of wind pressure and unstable freezing causes the pendulum to break loose during one of its swings, or it grows downward until, with an oddly delicate and splintering crash, the pendulum strikes the earth and shatters into thousands of small shards, droplets, and, given the combined effect of friction and ground temperature, bits of melting slush, all accompanied by a hiss of steam.

Pendulum has remained a controversial work since its inception. It has killed numerous spectators (the current total stands at 241), although such death, common to most works of our period, has little to do with the controversy. Rather, a brief consideration of its history, including some of the deaths incurred, give a useful point of entrance to discuss the accusations made against the piece.

First and foremost, the piece has been attacked as a work of neo-Nazi propaganda. Such an accusation derive from a confusion about the Welteilsehre (“World Ice Doctrine”) of Hans Hörriger, which claimed that the solar system had its origin when a dead wet star smashed into a larger star, its scattered vapors condensing into its present material. During its period of descent (which, indeed, has thoughtlessly cut through scores of bystanders with a bloodythrup and decimated nearby buildings, with the included elements of the “filth” disintegrated, and the impossibility of founding any order of pleasure, reason, or meaning whatsoever.

Second, due in equal part to such incidents of “obscene splattering” and the general shape of the work, Pendulum has been called a “pathetically phallic” piece, a “fantasy of erection unbound by physiological constraints.” The curators would not disagree, except to point out that the “pathetic” inflection is one critically engaged by the work. As we see in how the work pre-engages each of its accusations, nearly posing them itself in order to render them idiotic, it is ultimately a scathing attack on the idea that every idea has its place. Our assertion has to do with not the work itself during its period of descent (which, indeed, has thoughtlessly cut through scores of bystanders with a bloodythrup and decimated nearby buildings, with the included elements of the “filth” disintegrated, and the impossibility of founding any order of pleasure, reason, or meaning whatsoever.

Third, Pendulum is often considered to belong, however loosely, to the Inhuman School. The supposed personal connections of some of the artists gives further credence to this, but we as see in how the work pre-engages each of its accusations, nearly posing them itself in order to render them idiotic, it is ultimately a scathing attack on the idea that every idea has its place. Our assertion has to do with not the work itself during its period of descent (which, indeed, has thoughtlessly cut through scores of bystanders with a bloodythrup and decimated nearby buildings, with the included elements of the “filth” disintegrated, and the impossibility of founding any order of pleasure, reason, or meaning whatsoever.

1. It may be left to its own devices, with the chance prospect that enough moisture will gather near the pivot to recommence: the last instance in which such a decision was