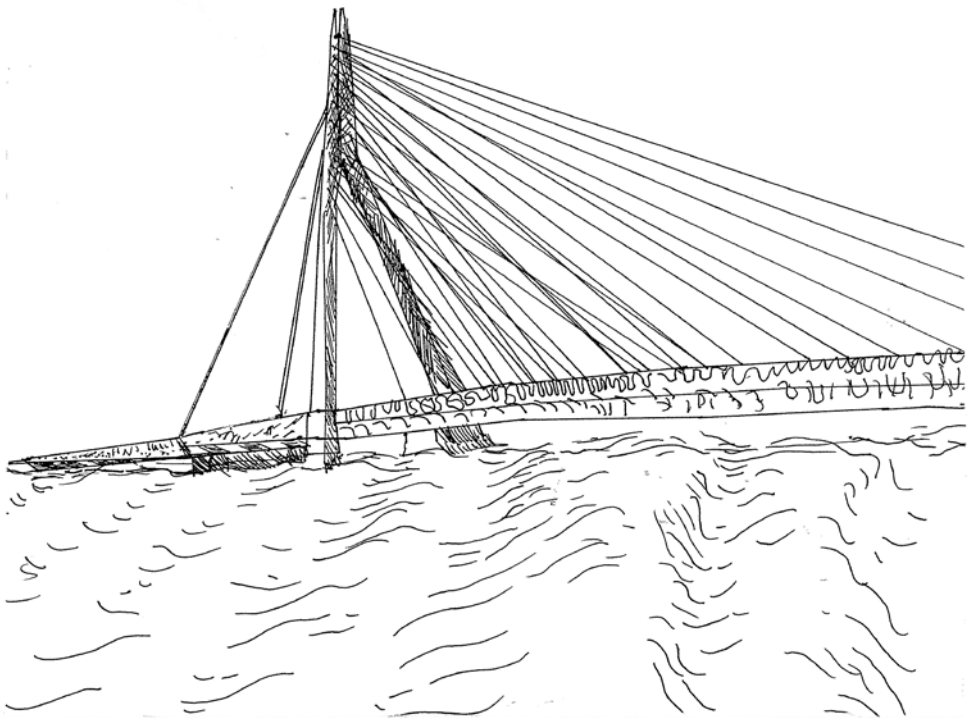


The second and third sentences in the fifth paragraph of this bulletin are borrowed from: Invisible Committee, "I Am What I Am" (2007), *Revolution, A Reader*, ed. Lisa Robertson and Matthew Stadler, (Paris: Paraguay Press & Publication Studio, 2012), p. 868. The Jessica Feldman and Monica Miller references towards the end of the piece are drawn from Monica Miller's *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009) p. 18, p. 221.

Front cover: portrait of the inside of the author's running shoe;
inline illustrations of the Erasmus bridge by the author, too

Sweeping, low-angle aerial view. An industrial city. New buildings, Dutch signage, the Erasmus bridge: Rotterdam. Flags of the world dot one side of the river. Old-style Dutch housing encrusted with intricate gabling like so many wedding cakes lines the other. Traffic flows over the bridge: cars, trams, bicycles, pedestrians, and runners. Slow zoom through fanned tension cables. Tight frame on a herd of runners clad in lycra, fluoro, sweatpants, and hoodies. Close-up on legs in motion, running shoes. Track one runner moving in an even-paced lope, stay focused on shoes. Past the apex, the runner descends, accelerates briefly then slows down, stops to jog in place. Pan upward from shoes to runner's P.◇.V. as the bridge folds to give passage to a waiting ship. Now confronted by a vertical wall of road, the runner turns, runs back the other way. Fixed shot as the runner recedes and soon disappears from view:

The dramatic pylon of the Erasmus Bridge arches into the air like a giant A, marking Rotterdam's otherwise unremarkable horizon with its distinctive asymmetry. From the legs of this A, cables extend along the length of the bridge in a graceful fan. The section of the bridge that folds, on the other hand, hardly creates any silhouette at all, even when vertical. It only impresses those on the bridge, who find themselves,



like the runner, faced with an awesome frustration. Why run over the bridge, then, and chance this obstacle? If you want to stretch your calves in the Netherlands, a land not known for its gradient, your best bet is a bridge. And with every gain in grade comes a gain in perspective. From the bridge, you can survey both sides of the city. You become master of your surroundings. The arc of the bridge is purportedly an image of freedom, to boot, if perhaps a neoliberal freedom—a triumph of civic planning, finance, engineering, and design expressed in a futuristic line that elegantly supports the daily flow of cars, trams, bikes, and runners.

With its ambitious lines, the bridge bears a striking visual resemblance to the leather and nylon side panels of sports shoes, which are typically comprised by abstract symbols of motion. Flashes and zig-zags rush across the shoes like wings. Sweeping curves and elaborate arcs proliferate. Engineering for the feet echoes engineering for a bridge, or vice-versa. Both flag an upward leap: gravity and the past be damned!

Motile means “exhibiting or capable of movement” and *motility*, “mental imagery taking the form of inner feelings of action.” The Erasmus Bridge is motile in both senses of the word. It inspires a mental image of movement—like the curve of a training shoe graphic—and it exhibits movement as it folds.

This swoopy shoe-bridge-future now covers most of the globe, as the sight of Reebok’s “I AM WHAT I AM” enthroned atop a Shanghai skyscraper confirms. Everywhere, it seems, the West rolls out its favorite Trojan horse: the exasperating antimony between self and world, individual and group, attachment and freedom. But what is freedom, really? The word derives from an Indo-European root meaning “beloved, friend, to love.” Modern understanding of the term may have developed from an idea of what a friend would have been to ancient Indo-Europeans—that is, a “free” (i.e. non-slave) member of a clan. Freedom, in this sense, has a ring of friendship, and of love for the commune; freedom isn’t a matter of shedding attachments, but the practical capacity to work on them, to move around in their space, to form or dissolve them, and thus to experience commonality, to be around people who feel the same way you do. (For what else is a contemporary “clan” in our dispersed society but those who gather around mutual interests?)

Perhaps we shouldn't be seduced by the bridge as an image of freedom and movement, in the same way we should resist the lowest-common-denominator tautology of Reebok's marketing. But, supposing we do begin to think of freedom, instead, as the "practical capacity to work on our attachments," what, then, could this mean?

Leaves, trees, greenery. A film crew is preparing to film a scene in a park. Various people with various jobs scurry among cameras, lights, cables, a catering tent. From the right, a figure appears on the periphery of the scene, moving too smoothly and quickly against the rhythm of the crew. It's the runner, clad in lycra. Dodging actors, crew, and equipment, the runner bolts through the set, interrupting the scene briefly, vaguely, before exiting to the left:

The being of the runner is running, that is all. The runner does not contribute content, the runner interrupts the existing content. If there's a desire inherent to running, it's simply the desire to keep running, and to keep running is what it means to be a runner. Seen in this way, running is not an activity that a human does for a reason. Just as the verb "running" becomes a noun when we think "about running" — continuous motion as static mental image — so does this movement crystallize into a form. The metaphysics of the runner: "I run, therefore I am" — or even, "I am, for I run." In either case, we are somehow inferring a displacement: *to be* becomes *to run.* Thus, instead of a living being, we have a living running. Like crystals growing around a rock, running operates from its own non-human intelligence — the practical intelligence of running.

It's difficult to think of an autonomous being outside the human construction, "I AM WHAT I AM." It is difficult to think of something so recognizably human as running-for-sport being somehow independent of human life. Nonetheless, I ask you to try this, to think running as an autonomous being. This means to think of running in its own terms: the runner AS running (as running). Visualize pure motion. Crystallize a moving verb into a static noun. In this mental image, movement develops visible contours — the movement of running becomes the edges of movement. Running becomes an expressive object.

To think about something in its own terms is to think about an object within

its own parameters of criticism. The parameters of criticism for a cup, for example, are marked by terms such as “spillability,” “fragility,” “possibility of being held by a hand,” “transparency,” “volume,” “clean-looking,” “possibility of being touched lightly with a lip,” and many more, especially of an aesthetic nature. (What are the parameters that define a cup’s looking good?) You could draw a figure around an ideal cup, which uses these terms to demarcate the parameters of criticism. Each term is defined by its own limits, and by how it limits other terms. Spillability and volume limit each other, as do fragility and transparency — none of these terms being directly antithetical or causal to the existence of another, but somehow overlapping. Thus, the figure drawn around the ideal cup is an entanglement of qualities, with each quality intricately intertwined, limited, elaborated by others, like so many objects tied together with elastic bands. Pull one, others may move or prevent still others from moving. Transparency affects clean-looking and fragility; volume affects weight, robustness, and spillability; spillability affects pourability and drinkability ... and so on. All the terms that define the value of a cup demarcate the limits of its possible criticism while limiting each other, in turn.

The word “term” derives from the latin *terminus*: “a bound, boundary, limit, end.” A cup understood in its own terms as an intertwinement of values pushing and pulling around the image of an ideal cup, is an image of tension, causality, interdependency. Most importantly, though, it’s an image of limits. The cup must be criticized within its own limits — limits drawn, attenuated, delineated from the cup itself. Yet these terms are not fixed; they are constantly affected by other terms, all moving and changing together. In the moment the cup wobbles, tips over, and spills its contents everywhere, its poise and drinkability are limited by its lightness, spillability, cheapness of materials. The constellation of terms that determine its value shifts constantly, according to the existence — the life — of the cup itself. By this I mean the character of the cup, how it is made, how it sits in a specific space-time frame: where it is now, how old it is now, its current circumstances. Seen in this way, the cup is an expressive object, in that we can derive expressions in line from it: consequences. We can delineate the cup as a figure in motion.

So we can understand running in its own terms by deriving terms (edges,

boundaries) from running. We can think of the terminus, the limitations, of running, as defined by the runner in the moment of running. We can understand the edges of the runner, and of running, which are constantly changing each other from moment to moment, in terms that are not unpredictable or random, but are in constant, interdependent tension.

“Limitations,” especially in context of sport, has an aggressive tone. We imagine an athlete draining all its resources just to achieve a micro-second personal best. Yet if we rethink “limitations” as parameters for criticism—or, even better, as parameters of self-definition—then the value of running is derived by the act itself, which is constantly changing. In this way, to understand something in its own terms is to let the object’s value system grow from the object’s own life. This is in opposition to overlaying a value system from one object to another. It would make no sense to define a runner by its spillability, after all.

To understand something on its own terms is to live with it, to let the object’s edges slowly materialize. And when edges do materialize, we can interpret, we can play, but only in the moment, as they will soon move again. To habitually understand things on their own terms is to cultivate an art of living. It is to be a kind of *dandy*—a person whose life is an art.

Street level. Medium shot frames a busy stretch of city sidewalk in front of contemporary shop windows where passers-by walk briskly alone and in groups, chatting, making phone calls, carrying shopping bags. Someone pauses outside a shop below a large window sign: SNEAKERS. Behind the wide, glass pane, single training shoes, each displayed on an individual shelf, are arranged like jewels. Electric blue, salmon pink, warm grey, cool grey, fluorescent orange, and maroon details float on a tide of white leather. The shopper’s eyes roam over the display. Reflections of the cobbled European street and passers-by shimmer on the glass, melding shoes and scenery. A green park is visible in the far background. Suddenly, the runner appears in the glass, darting among cars and people, then disappears again, absorbed by the street. The window shopper pulls away from the window, moves on:

The shoes in the SNEAKERS window come in many flavors of sport and lifestyle. The lifestyle shoes, studded with brand icons, are the most

jewel-like. The sport shoes are slighter, yet more resilient. Graphic plastic and leather panels comprise the visual, if not the practical, structure of both types. Their lines inscribe motility on shells for the feet. However, as “sport” is filtered through “lifestyle,” so does the function of the shoes gradually leak away, until we are left with sportish images. These lifestyle shoes have a surface that echoes their original function—they express more value than use. Nevertheless, they still require the trace of sport to underwrite their stylization: sport is style is street.

The window-shopper takes in either the sneakers or its own reflection, which partially obscures the sneakers. The shopper’s desire can go one or both ways. To see both self and shoes at once is difficult, just as it is difficult to remember in glassy reverie that you are part of the street, which also includes noise and movement that is separate from you. To window-shop is to consume with your eyes the products you desire (and that are marketed towards an image of you), and to consume your own image by creating and observing your own reflection. In either case, a window-shopper absorbs the surface of the window, and in so doing, becomes the modern-day *flâneur*, that solitary figure who wanders in public, aware of both seeing and being seen.

Like the *flâneur*, the runner focuses two fields at once. The runner must scan the horizon, but also keep an eye on the mid-ground for potential hazards. This linear thinking-motion of the runner—dodging obstacles while maintaining a smooth, long, trajectory—is the experiential interface between running and the material world. An interface is a plane of inter-connection, a thin layer between two different substances. For example, the surface of a river is a water-air interface. The dandy, too, is an interface: it configures a gestalt of transparent and reflected objects on its surface. The reflection of the window-shopper is on the same plane as the objects the shopper desires. The dandy is not the window-shopper, but rather the window—it’s the moment when an object assumes the same status as a life form, and both objects strangely intertwine.

As a transparent figure, the dandy allows us to see our surroundings. It’s not that we’re in public, we ARE public. Through its transparent and reflective qualities, the dandy also enables us to see an emptiness—a lack of desire, a lack of content, a lack of substance, a transformation of

surface into super-surface. We look through the transparent dandy and see the green park. The dandy becomes pure, natural phenomena. And natural phenomena are not substantial, but acts of perceiving outside categories (to paraphrase the poet Lisa Robertson on Gertrude Stein). Therefore, the dandy is an act as much as it is a figure. The dandy is an act of self-determination—the act of creating one's own terms—but it is also the act of complicating those terms. The dandiacal engine generates an ambiguous figure in the periphery of our vision. The dandy allows itself, its subjectivity, its surface, its life, to define its own value system, to become an art, to be understood on its own terms.

Being male, a dandy is a lifestyle shoe, a surface, a queering of accessory, a demand for an expression of surface to be taken absolutely seriously on its own terms. More than a demand—it satisfies its own demand, because a dandy doesn't need the validation of others in order to take himself out for a walk. He's already alone in the park.

Being female, a dandy is similarly a demand that satisfies itself. Yet, however a female dandy may look, she must be understood as the expression of her own object. In other words, we cannot simply overlay the value-system of "male dandy" to "female dandy." A female dandy is not a feminized masculine noun, in the same way one male dandy is not another male dandy. Similarly, black dandification, or queer dandification, is not simply a transfer of meaning from one community to another. It's not as simple to imagine as an interesting cravat worn by a white man, a black woman, a homosexual man, a queer woman ...

In the same way that the runner is an autonomous being with its own system of criteria, which is reanimated every time it takes itself out for a run, so does every dandy draw its own criteria for expression every time it makes an appearance. To be the runner is to run, and to run is to constantly begin. In the same way, to be the dandy—every possible dandy—is to create an independent image that continuously draws and re-draws its own criteria for determination. To reimagine Baudelaire, if every dandy is a sunset, then every runner is a sunrise. Or to quote the dandy theorists Jessica and Monica Miller, "every dandy both images and imagines the body, one startling step beyond contemporary limitations." Anyone pursuing their image as a politics, whether through

grooming, clothing, physique, or markers of sexuality or sexual preference, is enacting some shade of the *dandiacal.*

For the dandy, freedom is not to be a woman wearing a cravat somewhere in a park, but to be actively pursuing the politics of both her outside and the outside. Her outside is her image, and the outside is the street or the movie set or the folded-up bridge she finds herself running towards. And the folded-up bridge is the true image of freedom. It is the image of agency in defiance of norms. It is an image of obstruction. It is the wall of road that forces you to accept that you are not an urban gazelle scaling the slope of a Reebok flash, but a woman trying to exercise in public, among many other men and women trying to do the same thing. After all, if a runner can be an independent being with its own non-human intelligence, then so can a bridge—it can act spontaneously, subverting the desires and expectations of those who bypass it. A folding bridge, like a cup spilling over, or a reflective window, can interrupt a composition. It can divide or break apart the existing composition, creating a space where interpretation has to wait, because something unexpected has happened.

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