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Hours and Places

by John Cappetta

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Installation view of Hours and Places. Courtesy Bureau, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

It's hard to feel alone in *Hours and Places*, as Constance DeJong's voice echoes from more than one place in Bureau's two rooms. Wojciech Bakowski's drawings on the walls are nearly vacant, playing with the urban fantasy of having a moment to oneself, while Erica Baum's photos similarly invoke the eerie peace of empty classrooms, evidence of active minds leaving a just-detectable trace of intellectual energy. All three artists are interested in the constant, background search for those synaptic moments—if not with another living person, then with their residue.

But DeJong's voice is a reminder that solitude is unsustainable. Three re-engineered radios play a series of vignettes, weaving short fiction told from the first person with historical research and statistics of recent events, like Wall Street salaries following the 2008 recession. The monologues fall somewhere between news program, essay, and radio horror show. Some of the tracks play on two

radios, and each time the set repeats it does so in a random order. All three radios might pronounce the word “candle” at the same time in a mysterious coming-together of separate chaotic systems—leaving the listener to decide whether or not DeJong intervened or if her interest in candles signifies a higher probability that the topic will appear in multiple places at any given moment.

Wojciech Bakowski, Passing Someone's Evening, 2016. Pencil on board, tinted glass, 19 5/8 × 27 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

Bakowski’s *Passing Someone’s Evening* (2016) renders the impulse to look into a stranger’s lit windows in search of familiar habits. His charcoal drawings are set behind tinted glass, locating the viewers outside of the scene, and forcing them to peer into the work. A kitchen window floats at second-floor height in a roughly-shaded space amid scattered vertical forms. Two heads bow over what might be a table. There are shelves behind them and a lightbulb labeled 100W. Only the kitchen is clearly drawn, as if the viewer is passing quickly, with just enough time to register one thing. It evokes a fleeting, one-sided, urban interaction that makes you wonder what you might have in common with those strangers, and how many unknown people might have wondered the same thing upon seeing you through lit windows.

Baum’s photographs capture the pencil-tip etchings found in Yale classroom desks. The graffiti’s themes range between boredom and lukewarm academic interests. In *Untitled (Lego my Plato)* (1994), for instance, a promotion for Yale Fencing appears alongside a Latin fragment, “non vos relin” [will not leave], in a constellation of dates, noise, and pop-culture-referencing philosophy puns (like the title above). The distance between Baum’s lens and the gouged desks approximates a bowed head studying the traces of students past, or perhaps a student preparing to add their own marks. The desktops in her photos evoke the tradition of college students—a shared, intergenerationally relevant experience of being young, engaged, and distracted all at once. Global conditions may change drastically, but being bored with a hangover in a classroom always feels the same.

DeJong’s vignettes center around a similar strain of nebulous social connection. In *Nightwriters 1* (2018), she builds an imaginary emotional network with the specters of long-dead astronomers, other women who studied stars. She notes that her apartment’s geospatial orientation, which is to say its foundation, limits her ability to see the night sky—the astronomers direct her to bigger swathes of space, making her knowledge more whole, while also offering companionship. One of DeJong’s visitors, Annie Jump Cannon, developed a method of stellar classification which is still in use today. Cannon appears on DeJong’s twenty-third night of

insomnia, aligning the two phenomena. In another vignette, *Bedside* (2018), she roots her insomnia in the anxieties of living cash-strapped to pursue her undervalued work in American capitalism—the beasts of the night aren't the wolf, devil, or witch, but rather the symbolic last hour of Wall Street trading, "the witching hour of high volatility" in which fortunes are made at the expense of broad financial security. Remembering that, we might take note that Harvard, which called Cannon one of "Pickering's computers," takes credit for her classification system. DeJong recognizes an ironic humor in Cannon's choice of *oh be a fine girl, kiss me* for the method's mnemonic device. DeJong's voice uncovers a web of relations between contemporary mental health, patriarchal capitalism, a network of historical figures, and herself.

Importantly, DeJong respects that the oral tradition's primary method of survival was entertainment. Her stories might be intellectually dense, but they are enjoyable and frequently riveting. On the *Candle Cabin* tracks (*Purple General Electric*, 2018) she hooks the listener with the latent violence of a cooled-off relationship: "One long arm of the beast points to the sky. Oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon, the four great agents of living things, bond. And that's what you taught me."

Erica Baum, Untitled (Nietzche is Peachy), 1994. Gelatin silver print, 21 1/8 × 16 3/4 inches. Courtesy Bureau, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni.

Isolation is an often vilified contemporary condition, from eighteenth-century distrust of novels[1] to twenty-first century suspicion of screens. But *Hours and Places* quietly refutes the mutual exclusivity of solitude and human connectedness. Baum and Bakowski assert that by sharing space and time with unseen neighbors the isolated viewer is not actually alone. DeJong goes further, building her network among history's other dispossessed bodies *through* isolation, and in *Bedside* (*Purple General Electric*, 2018) pointing out the true contemporary villain—"248 million dollars, one year of one banker's salary."

[1] The danger thought to be posed by the effects of "fantasies" on young ladies in particular appears regularly in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The chief anxiety, of course, is that young women were accessing information outside of patriarchal surveillance and maternal (read: assimilated) arbitration. This *New York Times* blog lists a few literary examples. See Anna North, "When Novels Were Bad For You?" *New York Times Op-Talk*, September 14, 2014.https://op-talk.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/when-novels-were-bad-for-you/

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