

THE EXILE

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A REQUIEM FOR THE ISM

ALL THE ISM WANTS is to do something. It is hardly an onerous demand. The Ism, when we discreetly examine its most intimate bits, is nothing more dangerous than calcified state of action, the state produced when something to be done, generalized, becomes a reflexive idea of itself. Ism is the ambitious issue of the proletarian parents Ize and Ate, the child who went off to philosophy school and became an idealist. Thus we proceed syntactically from the profane one-night-stand of catechize to the universal ideal of the catechism, or from the mechanical act of optimize to the heady feeling of optimism.

Some cognitive scientists argue that if a thought cannot be expressed in words, it does not exist at all; similarly, at one time, if a personal system of beliefs could not be expressed in terms of an Ism, neither did it exist. Under these conditions, the Ism flourished. People and principles from Plato to the atom enjoyed deification in the pantheon of the eponymous Ism. Even Narcissus, despite his unfortunate floral suicide, produced an Ism which, though second-rate, found fashion in the academy.

In the long centuries when ideals were more or less in vogue, then, the Ism enjoyed a profitable reign. The private citizen could feel himself associated with something vast without exiting the secret world of thought. Reading Emerson and finding oneself caught up in Transcendentalism is more than a lonely excitement. To hitch up with an Ism is to depart on an intellectual flight of grand proportion. It is to spread out, without leaving the impenetrable bastion of the cranial wall, a constellation of individuals who have been linked together with you by some unseen astronomer's guide. To found or to fully inhabit an Ism is also an intellectual expedition of the most deeply personal kind. It is to cradle each new thought until it finally finds its rightful station in the Ism's cobwork or occasions a wholesale shift in design.

In postmodern times we collect our ideas into a bricolage of idiosyncratic forms just as rats hoard material for their nests, and we describe with military pride our bravery at having slain the Ism. The latter half of the twentieth century was cruel territory for the hand washboard, the surry, and the paternoster elevator; so too did the Ism find itself a relic. But not a mere outmoded fad: no, the Ism became a hated thing. Ism brought us Fascism, suburbanism, Communism, fundamentalism. The Ism overstretched, and where once it was lauded for its totalities and its concentrations, it became reviled for its totalitarians and its concentration camps.

Worse still, to endorse an Ism was to become Ist: racist, chauvinist, elitist. Abhorrence of Ist called for a purge of Ism and so we registered Independent and announced to the universe: "We must reject Ism lest we become Ist." The universe muffled back a protest, but we were congratulating ourselves too loudly to hear it. Now our opinions are our own according only to their indecipherability. Now we are feminists who do not believe in feminism, socialists who do not believe in socialism, pragmatists who do not believe in pragmatism.

We still form associations, of course, but when they veer in the direction of ideology we pretend against it. We still grasp at totalities, of course, but create fictions of irreducibility to counter them. We still feel the need to believe in something, of course, but our desire for this has largely been sated by a piecemeal assortments of marketable lifestyles and self-help dittos.

In our conquest of the Ism, we have lost the sense that our minds still matter, that they can associate together into the grand designs of master narrative. Restoring the Ism is not rehabilitating an outmoded way of thinking. It is, instead, reaffirming a commitment to a modern project abandoned midway through. It is to insist that our writing, our art, and our politics matter beyond their immediate contexts, that they rightly exist in symbiosis, that they have been deleteriously cleaved asunder.

A faint but still consistent beep can be heard above Ism's bed in the intellectual infirmary. Are we willing to minister to its health?

An Ism catalog for the shopper in a hurry. Environmentalism: In case you haven't noticed, the world is melting. You should probably get on that. Plus you get to wear shirts like that great one in Urban Outfitters with the recycling symbol on the front. So simple. So now, Feminism: Chicks who dig feminists hang out by the Women's Center. Just go pick one, respect her, and check out that giant vagina picture with her. Existentialism: Superfluous, amorphous, vague, and sad. Also, Mom died today. Or maybe yesterday. Etilism: By invitation only. Manifestism: The rare intersection of those who enjoy the finer points of Machiavelli, and the finer points of beef jerky. Bradism: Encompasses guys named Brad, and guys who wish they were named Brad, and some guys named Scott. [continued left]

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GENERAL CONSTRUCTION: The Type F H Harvard Disc Talking Machine is made of the finest materials and is built to last. It is the only machine in the world that reproduces music as it is heard, and it is the only machine that reproduces music as it is heard.

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A condensed history of the ism

- 343 Platonism
- 353 Cynicism
- 355 Zoroastrianism
- 355 Atomism
- 355 Confucianism
- 479 Feudalism
- 850 Humanism
- 1390 Calvinism
- 1643 Absolutism
- 1651 Mechanism
- 1689 Liberalism
- 1770 Neoclassicism
- 1774 Romanticism
- 1776 Capitalism
- 1783 Abolitionism
- 1784 Rationalism
- 1836 Transcendentalism
- 1838 Chartism
- 1838 Antidissemblishmentarianism
- 1844 Marxism
- 1848 Communism
- 1848 Feminism
- 1861 Utilitarianism
- 1874 Impressionism
- 1883 Nihilism
- 1884 Modernism
- 1886 Symbolism
- 1890 Utopianism
- 1908 Cubism
- 1909 Futurism
- 1910 Agrarianism
- 1919 Constructivism
- 1924 Surrealism
- 1932 Fascism
- 1940 Totalitarianism
- 1942 Absurdism
- 1943 Existentialism
- 1969 Structuralism
- 1969 Environmentalism
- 1969 Ba'athism
- 1961 Maoism
- 1961 Bagism
- 1961 Postmodernism
- 1961 Digitalism

WTF, EXACTLY?

DO WE AT HARVARD really need another collection of typeset material, another waste of old-growth forest, outside of the occasional chance that we're stuck in the bathroom without toilet paper and are really in a pinch? Do we need more self-minted Murdochs, more autocrats of opinion, more guarantors of taste?

But of course. And for what? For a set of convictions. We believe in cheerful agglomerations, in the observational spirit, in Garden Street, in the common good, and in pretentious little lists like this one that tread the fine edge between something that makes you smile and something that makes you wince.

Self-indulgent we may be but long-winded we are not. We impose upon you only one page front and back and promise frequently to amuse, occasionally to inform, and hopefully to inspire.

As our progenitors put it—
"And how will you do this?" she wants to know. "A political party? A march? A revolution? A coup?"

"A magazine." ■



Lloyd Winter and E. Percy Pond, 1897. Grave and totem markers for David Andrew.

Some Things which ought to be popular amongst hipsters but inexplicably are not

- "The Neverending Story"
- Moxie
- The word 'rapid'
- Clever bookmarks (for marking graphic novels, Zadie Smith works, &c.)
- Stone Cold Steve Austin 3:16
- Roy Orbison
- Silk shirts with flame or dragon prints
- Eastern Europe ■

Here in THE EXILE's editorial caverns, we welcome your letters, complaints, abstracts, stray paragraphs, dormant poems, accidental photographs, napkin drawings, jungle books, sentences consisting only of adverbs, tales better left untold, mockeries & paeans. SUBMISSIONS@THEEXILE.MATINIC.US

BECAUSE IMITATION is the sincerest form of flattery, you must realize even before obtaining directions to your local Salvation Army store that you are setting out to buy clothes and an assortment of other goods originally belonging to people you have never met. The most important thing for you to know about these people is that they were either nice enough to donate their unwanted possessions to the Salvation Army or they are dead. This is the best of all possible worlds because as we are informed by Psalm 37, the charitable will inherit the good parking spaces, and as we learn from the example of Dionysus, immortal people make terrible role models.

Once you have actually entered a Salvation Army store, this is what you will need to do:

1. Acclimate yourself to the smell. It is distinct to the Salvation Army and is attributable not to the issue of standardized Salvation Army potpourri sachets but to an earned olfactory bouquet of moth balls, dust, and Hefty bag residue. This is hip.

2. Steer clear of clothes that look too recently produced. It is natural to gravitate toward styles currently observable in stores selling clothing not previously worn by other people, but beware. If, for example, a stylish young woman has voluntarily relinquished her hold over a this-season

CONSEQUENTIALISM. It was NOT CONSIDERED anything special that the chimes rang even when there was no wind, but nobody had ever stopped to ask.

"I've heard the Pikes won last evening," one might say, with the chimes ringing lightly as an afterthought.

Or, in a more philosophical frame of mine, a child might remark, "How lovely are the stars to-night!" To this, as to everything, the chimes would return their deliberate refrain.

Even a visiting professor of English once spoke, in that wonderful lifting pit-pat which sets off the knowledgeable choruses of a true Academic, "Belafonte compared the water to a sniveling serpent. Ah. Can we not make such a similar comparison here?" With their typical derision, the chimes pealed—before, during, and after the episode. Though, I must admit, I have only heard of this last instance through hear-say and cannot vouch for its accuracy. ■

designer dress, it is probably because an exorcism was performed on her while she was wearing it.

3. Scrutinize any and all white tops that may strike your fancy. Pit stains can and have happened to the best of us throughout history. Salvation Army clothes, as historical artifacts, will tend to reflect this. Not hip.

4. Don't be afraid to gender bend. Given the world of fashion's current insistence on tight jeans for men and billowing tunics for women, you may do better by foraging across the aisle. In light of the current popularity of the empire waist, ladies pregnant or otherwise should also not shy away from the maternity section. (Note on maternity section: If it is fairly obvious that you're around 19, the store employees will judge. Take this in stride.)

• *Lightning Round of SA-related Information:*

1. If it's not tied to a rack behind the counter, it's not leather.

2. You break the *tchochke*, you bought the *tchochke*. Solution: superglue it back together and give it to your Nana.

3. Red tag means "real cheap." Sometimes it also means "originally purchased at Caldor."

Congratulations! You are now a savvy Salvation Army shopper. Go forth and multiply the net sales of your local branch. ■

Little Orphan Island, from William H. Seward's "Travels Around The World", 1873.

