

Ostentatious normality

A photograph of a city street at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. Several people are walking away from the camera on a paved sidewalk. The person on the far left is wearing a dark coat and a patterned backpack. The person next to them is wearing a green shirt and black pants. The person in the center is wearing a black jacket and a light blue skirt. The person on the right is wearing a grey shirt and yellow pants. The background shows city buildings and trees with some autumn-colored leaves. A street sign for "Dorchester" is visible.

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Normality is a nightmare, an oppression that apparently makes us similar. When normality is successful, it takes us even further and makes us identical. This subtle operation is a result of various agents of conformity, those little nothings that are in our genes and in cultural memes, as well as in the leveling mechanisms of the media supported by marketing. And yet, several from this flock of Panurge's sheep want to leave the standard model, live on the fringe, adventure to the heart of ignorance, take the risk of standing out. It means tearing themselves from the identical. Not only artists – but the mad, but young rebels, but the LGBT, but the tattooed, but the pierced – tear themselves from the identical, forming sub-cultures that are delighted and often even delightful.

Norms are invented and are transformed under the relative weight of these sub-cultures. Showing one's tattoos is a new norm in cafés, these small delinquent places, refuges for intellectuals, artists, originals, and the deranged, spaces for the invention of the future.

Under these conditions, the issue of normality and abnormality becomes a zone that is infested with doubts, clichés, and prejudices. Normality is defined as a strange spontaneous consensus, apparently kept in place by *conspirationist* agents who ensure in every case that the norm, no matter what its definition, feeds consumption. Despite the invention of exploded and raging subcultures, there is always this ultimate standard that holds us in its grip, a sort of generalized alienation¹.

In this garbled situation, Folie/Culture wondered what “ostentatious normality” could be. Since normality is by definition drab, how can we render it ostentatious? Everything that is forcefully expressed publically broadens in some way the spectrum of normality.

In an out-of-wack universe, the expression of extremes, attention-grabbing images, hard performances, polymorphous sexuality, even to the questioning of gender and the modification of body morphology — chemical and other surgeries — are objects of ostentatious normality. Nothing is left in the closet. In this situation, can we create an *anti-DSM*, a *DSM* that would be the diagnostic book of reinvented normality? Are there ghettos of normality? Are not gated communities, the perfect example of ostentatious normality?

We are inviting you to try to solve the issue of *ostentatious normality*. It is because this aporia seems to put its finger on the unsolvable mystery of the real. If the real is the “collective hallucination” that Howard Bloom talks about², it is up to us to modify this hallucination according to models that are different, provocative, destabilising, or

¹ Remember that Folie/Culture first dealt with the issue of alienation with the event *Alienated of the World, Unite!*

² Howard Bloom, *Le Principe de Lucifer*, 2003 for the French version

simply of carnival festivity. So what do normal queers or transgendered look like? What about a normal schizophrenic, a normal sex worker or a normal native ? What does a normal artist look like?

Ostentatious normality is seen as opening onto marginal spaces: sexuality, hideous behaviours, cultural fusion, breaks of all kinds. It is a non-extenuating circumstance proposing unheard of forms as banal and usual; in short making ostentatious what is generally closed and lacklustre. We want to contrast the ostentatious joy that comes with going beyond normative limits with the fearful modesty of the shy.

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