

UN, DOUX, SQUA

By Devon Deimler

LIKE LIFE IT CHANGES. IF IT WERE NOT CHANGING
IT WOULD BE DEAD, AND, OF COURSE, FOR SOME OF US SOMETIMES
IT IS DEAD, BUT AT ANY MOMENT IT CHANGES AND IS LIVING AGAIN.

TALKING FOR A MOMENT ABOUT CONTEMPORARY MILK:
AT ROOM TEMPERATURE IT IS CHANGING, GOES SOUR, ETC., AND
THEN A NEW BOTTLE ETC., UNLESS BY SEPARATING IT FROM ITS CHANGING
BY POWDERING IT OR REFRIGERATION (WHICH IS A WAY OF SLOWING
DOWN ITS LIVELINESS) (THAT IS TO SAY MUSEUMS AND ACADEMIES ARE
WAYS OF PRESERVING) WE TEMPORARILY SEPARATE THINGS FROM LIFE
(FROM CHANGING) BUT AT ANY MOMENT DESTRUCTION MAY COME SUDDENLY
AND THEN WHAT HAPPENS IS FRESHER. ""

Squamuglia.

It's really more like a dream than anything, like so many of our constructions are. Forms combine and so worlds collide. The pieces work together with their (w)hole. "The way out is the way in." Just like the garage.

Description is where it's at. "Life is a [poetic] state of mind."

So, dreamer, Tell me what happened in the garage this week.

It was the same but different. Like it's always the same and different.

The garage door is open, glowing up the sidewalk. A pile of broken wood furniture is gathered into a shabby teepee against the back wall. From cracks in the structure two sets of hands fold slices of meat on to circular mirrors. A small androgynous boy lights a dollar bill on fire. He drops it into a river of milky water that streams from the junky teepee. It sizzles and dissolves while the boy giggles with friends. Two young men in camouflage jackets, but no soldiers. Two sets of hands, but no bodies or faces. Nothing cooked, just raw materials. That dollar was the only heat source.

White ceramic mugs, wobbled, like if you cast the inside of a handshake. Fire-glazed on the inside, like by the warmth of that handshake, but dry and cement-like on the outside. A firm and friendly grip. A smooth tenderloin hangs its slug shape from a tall two-top, impeccably lit. Can't tell if it's trying to go up or down. A recurring image of mirrors -- mirrored plates, broken mirrors, mirrored walls with space-foil holes where drinks emerge. Branches and leaves everywhere. Zip-tied prawns. A piece of truly grey cake. Water is poured from a caution-orange plastic jug, and it's really "from Mexico," served by a real surfer. He brings each dish out barefoot, and if you look down from his smile, you'll see that he's dusting your table with sand.

A gangly drunk hobby-Marxist trips on a basketball and breaks through a sheet of plastic. It's covered in the steamy condensation of exhaled laughter and friendly arguments. Another tall man has a seizure mid-walk and smashes into a corner as his eyes roll back, over easy. One of those orange jugs breaks his face from breaking face fully. Diners drop their prawns to discuss medical strategies around the downed men. A saltwater humidifier continues to shoot its atmosphere through fluorescent pink light, like the party must go on. A few diners are more honest about their medical resourcefulness. They stay seated and draw symbols of SoCal folklore into their table sand.

The garage is happening at night, but lots of people experience the garage in the daytime too. One day I walked into the garage to find people steaming out on a set of raw bleachers. The bleachers overlooked two very similar-looking baristas. Both were men, wearing nothing but old beach towels. They took turns pulling shots and pouring water over hot rocks and eucalyptus leaves. One had his arms folded across his chest most of the time and eventually declared that he had to go to work. It was Saturday, but whatever. Then there was one.

Squamuglia -- the name is wobbled. The place, the event, is its name. It's lifted from a great little novel about a cult of silence-keeping and grinning clues, for those turned on, or tuned in, paranoid or hip to its threads. Squamuglia is a place within a play within that book that's set in this general California landscape. Squamuglia is place within place within place, at least.

Squamuglia rides the tongue through a fine arrangement of most of the shapes a mouth can take. It zig-zags, like the same "interesting choice" of wood framing that lines the inner walls of the garage. Like this dream is happening on the inside of Charlie Brown's shirt. With all the caffeine, liquor and this handful of peanuts jostling around his belly, there's always the good chance he'll dance that dance.

Squa is wonky, a little ugly but also cuddly. Its word looks like it describes a place, or is it the Latin name of a rare caterpillar, or a rare STD? It has an affectionate, effective nickname -- Squa -- a relief from otherwise full pronunciation. Squa, squa! -- like the "squawk, squawk" of a crying raven. "Squawk" is a sound of short wheezes, also known as squeaks. A special frequency of pitch and repetition found in hypersensitive birds and a small percentage of pneumatics. Like there's a certain song in the paranoid and the breathless that is the same. "Squa," scrawled in lipstick on the garage and on broken pieces of mirror. Squa, qua? What? An open question. Not like, "What Why?" But like, "What, Can you repeat that? Or turn it up?"

Does this have to be chalked back to Relational Aesthetics? Cut back to Gordon Matta-Clarke? Or further? Dutch still lifes? Sacred objects and ritual spaces of antiquity? Surrealism was

already inherent in Dada. There was a politic within the dream, and vice versa. They served each other.

No solutions (to art food culture? For alt-coffee culture? For the enduring questions of servitude and the element of surprise?) – but suggestions and salutations, surely. Dreams are (like) myths and (like) art; they don't give answers, they make images. Communitas. Gift-exchange, at least in the little thrill of throwing your money on the ground rather than laying it on someone's hand, the clammy conduit to the cash register. Perhaps it's not really some romantic punk gesture at all, but just that money is an uncomfortable idea to negotiate from the beginning, so let's not bother too much and just degrade it to the lowest possible element. Perhaps that trick is fooling itself. But burning that dollar is sometimes the best thing that money can buy. That's what you paid to do with it and it's an option of no recompense at Squa.

The door is open to anyone and many fresh faces have taken the invitation, made themselves vital ingredients of that Squa. But raise the strange drink in the stupidly-shaped glass to the appreciation of origins and time passing, to the future of nostalgia, if not for the sake of Squa's creator, then for the interest of this writer. Squa is an LA thing, but its mythic ancestry is in Baltimore. In Baltimore, Ben Turner first acquired a used espresso machine and began Espresso Discreet in his apartment. Then he collaborated with Matt Papich and Phil Kerrigan to make Sometimes, a semi-often, fully-charmed speakeasy restaurant in his backyard. Papich went on to do a series of hours-long trompleoil dinners, and several other Bmore loyal-royals and ex-pats have since launched spiraled varieties of absurdist, cryptically-advertised dining. But I wonder how many of these things would have come to quite the exact fruition they have if it had not been for Ben Turner's Christmas dinners. The first domino in this particular game of hush-essen wasn't below or above or against capital or etiquette or expectations. It was just a few generous and ambitious Christmas dinners thrown for the Family of Friends. The un-religious don't lack for spirit and soul.

A food scene is much different and not necessarily much different than, say, a music scene (scene implying a destination of significance, a display of some degree of theatricality, and of course, common understanding). Friends are the pillars and strangers are the breeze, but the friends are still often the fragrance, the flavor on that breeze. They are the elder initiates of an expanding language. Through the nourishments of tastes, sounds, colored clamp lights, humor and intellect, Squa is an alternative space for an evolution of aesthetic attitudes that some of us have known for years -- as in an "alter--native" space for all those on this come-and-go wave of lite immigration from the old charm city to the wide spread of L.A.. Despite the beautiful and necessary gift of a relational art project to extend its invitation beyond the tribe, nothing is ever less for its primary audience being a group of familiars. Things always work this way. Squa is also squad.

Yet, familiar or not, when in Squa, everyone is implicated. The pile of broken furniture could sit there all day with not one person hedging the curiosity to approach it with the unlikely idea of requesting it dispense a perfect espresso. It could sit there all night with not one friend

remembering tonight is Squa. And that would be fine. That is that Squa. Next time it could be fifty people, friends and strangers, and that is that Squa. The people animate the project but they are by no means the only animators. Each Squa is loaded with material combinations and tastes, of which the people are included. Squa, like much art, is a setting of provoking arrangements, like life already is, but just arranged for a particular experience, focused on it, living it out. Intuition says the image of the glass marble will go well with the sexualized glaze. The chicken will be served smashed between granite. The flavor profile will be a Camel Crush Menthol. And so on, and so lived out, from image to image-form we duck our heads and go into the dreamtime of this night's garage scene.

The moment of attention does not last; it breaks the flow of time for an instant, but time returns. Continuity seems stronger than eternity. ``

Along with Turner, of course, the only constant in Squa is the old espresso machine. All other things grow themselves around that dusty, leaking endurance object, as it gives a little shudder and moan to release an always lopsided stream of what ends up being the best little espresso Yelp will never review. That machine is Squa in one symbol, the heart-pump of the dream, the central archetype in this particular expanding constellation of further archetypal explosions and magnetized gatherings. The artist, the garage, and the machine are always there. It is always the same and different.

“” John Cage, Silence, “Composition as Process,” p. 44

`` James Hillman, City and Soul, “The Repression of Beauty,” p. 183