

Composition as Exposition

a case file



(* i *)

©

2009

Comm-Wild Studio
factoryschool.info

Do not hesitate to open up a case file on a friend.

—Ed Sanders, *Investigative Poetry*, City Lights (1976)

Prologue – *two cities*

In his fifth-century treatise on paganism and urban planning, Aurelius Augustinus (Augustine of Hippo (later canonized as the patron saint of false dichotomies)), proposed two metaphorical cities for the benefit of a newly Christianized Roman intelligentsia in desperate need of good news after the Great Sack of 387 AD. The road from one city to the other, built for all who had fallen but wanted to get up, was paved over by the “twin resources of law and education.” For Augustine, Roman law and Xtian doctrine defined the new imperial curriculum—dual educational technologies designed to remedy the “blight of ignorance and folly” and invigorate an empire sagging in the aftermath of a costly, bloody, failed war.

Law and education, education and law: twin hubs on the two-cities torture wheel.

•

City #1 – *composition as expectation*

*When from afar flamed sudden against the night
The City of Light!*

(from “What Shall We Name It?” by Richard Watson Gilder)

The Pan-American Exposition (Buffalo, New York, May-Nov, 1901) offered in the words of one enthusiast “a great International ‘Information Clearing House’” and celebrated, among other things, the exotic peoples and cultures of the Americas, recent U.S. military victories overseas, the opening of new foreign trade markets, and a suite of promising technological innovations, such as the X-ray machine, touch-free infant incubation, and Nikola Tesla’s three-phase system of alternating current power transmission.

As an information clearing house, the Buffalo Expo came equipped with a lesson plan, a core curriculum. Edward S. Martin explains in his “Short Sermon for Sight-Seers” that visitors possessed of the right mix of mind and attitude would exit the fairgrounds with both fond memories and an “education” worthy of any classroom experience:

If not well devised and managed [he writes]
the fair will not give you what you ought to get.
Take pains to see it wisely; dwell on what appeals
until it takes form in your mind.

Take in its beauty—there is education in it,
and at the same time there is delight.
Don't tire yourself out with overmuch gadding;
a tired body means a tired mind,
and the tired mind is not receptive.
Make it leisurely so what you see you may assimilate.
Rest yourself and be kind to yourself generally.
What counts in the end is not what one sees
but what one is able to think about.

Think about

– *exposition as demonstration*

The Pan-Am Expo featured a multitude of electrical machines and appliances for demonstrating the laws of electricity and magnetism, including:

- apparatus for electrical measurements;
- electro-plating and refining processes, industrial electro-chemical processes and appliances;
- arc and incandescent lighting, regulating and controlling devices;
- telegraphic transmitters, receivers, recording apparatus, synchronous telegraphic apparatus;
- telephone transmitters and receivers, switchboards and safety devices;
- dynamos for producing direct and alternating currents, alternating current transformers and motor-dynamos;
- electric railway apparatus;
- motors, wires, cables, etc., electro-therapeutics;
- electric welding and heating apparatus;
- signals and clocks.

Also on display were a number of machines and appliances of recent invention, such as:

- talking machines;
- machines that automatically reproduce handwriting at distant points;
- machines for reproducing a photograph at a distant place;
- linotype and monotype machines;
- the radiophone, by which articulate speech is transmitted by rays of light;
- and a paper-making machine.

Most magnificent were the ubiquitous (and largely unprecedented) displays of electric light—for example, the Electric Building



with its towers and pavilions embellished with plastic work of ornate character, and which, when outlined by thousands of incandescent lamps, presents a most fantastic and charming appearance;

and the Machine Building, whose towers, pavilions and arcaded façade can be seen reflected in the water of the Grand Basin in front of the Electric Tower, thus forming an effect doubly fantastic and charming; and, of course,

the Electric Tower itself, the most marvelous achievement of the age of its kind, effected by the use of about 40,000 incandescent electric lamps, so arranged both without and within the Tower so that a great variety of effects can be secured.



As one Sight-Seer observed,



when lit, the tower and buildings seemed to pulse with a thrill of life. As if by magic the exposition of beams and staff vanished and became the glorified spirit of the thing and the most marvelous effect of artificial light the world has ever seen.

And since this may be called the Age of Electricity, it was fitting that the focal point of the Exposition should be so designed as to afford an opportunity of accentuating that fact by a lavish display of electric power.

The source of this power is Niagara, as suggested not only by the fountain and the basin at the base of the Electric Tower, but by various groups of statuary in the wings, which have been designed to symbolize the great bodies of water which are tributary to the stupendous cataract.

*

and so in the Age of
great powers, currents, and information
great bodies of water, tributaries, stupendous cataracts,
great symbols and signs, great groups of statuary,
great machines, appliances, devices, and processes
great displays, effects, and magic
we come to

**Look, a tear is on the willow;
List, a sigh is on the breeze,
And the ocean's stormy billow
Bears a wail across the seas.**

Question: *For whom does this bell toll?*

*

– composition as excavation (about the author)

I was born in Detroit nearly twenty-nine years ago. I got my education in the public schools and then went to Cleveland, where I got work. In Cleveland I read books on socialism and met a great many Socialists. After several years I went to Chicago, where I remained seven months, after which I went to Newburg, on the outskirts of Cleveland, and went to work in the Newburg wire mills.

During the last five years I have had as friends Anarchists in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and other Western cities, and I suppose I became more or less bitter. Yes, I know I was bitter.

Eight days ago, while I was in Chicago, I read in a newspaper of President McKinley's visit to the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo. That day I bought a ticket for Buffalo and got there with the determination to do something, but I did not know just what. I thought of shooting the President, but I had not formed a plan.

Not until Tuesday morning did the resolution to shoot the President take a hold of me. It was in my heart; there was no escape for me. I could not have conquered it had my life been at stake. I heard it was President's Day. All these people seemed bowing to the great ruler. I made up my mind to kill that ruler.

I bought a 32-caliber revolver and loaded it.

Yesterday morning I went again to the Exposition grounds. I got to the Temple of Music the first one and waited at the spot where the reception was to be held.



Then he came, the President—the ruler—and I got in line and trembled and trembled until I got right up to him, and then I shot him twice, through my white handkerchief. I would have fired more, but I was stunned by a blow in the face—a frightful blow that knocked me down—and then everybody jumped on me. I thought I would be killed and was surprised the way they treated me.



I deny that I have had an accomplice at any time. I had no confidants; no one to help me. I was alone absolutely.



I would also like the American people to know that I have no use for priests. My family are all Catholics and used to go to church until the hard times of 1893. We had been taught by the priests that if we would pray God would help us along, but it did no good; it didn't help us and we stopped going to church at that time. McKinley was going around the country shouting prosperity when there was no prosperity for the poor man. I am not afraid to die. We all have to die sometime.

Question: *When he shot the President, did he know what he was doing? Did he understand the nature and quality of his act?*

*

– *execution as explanation* (about the reader)

[MacDonald:] As he entered the execution chamber, he appeared calm and self-possessed, his head erect, his face expressing defiant determination. The guards led him to the fatal chair, the binding straps were rapidly adjusted to his arms, legs and body, and the head and leg electrodes were quickly placed *in situ* and connected with the wire which was to transmit the lethal current through his body. Czolgosz offered no resistance whatever, but during the preparations addressed himself to the witnesses in a clear distinct voice in the following significant language:



*I killed the President
because he was the enemy
of the good people—
the good working people.*



*I am not sorry for my crime.
I am sorry I could not see my father.*

At this moment, the Warden signaled the official electrician in charge of the switch, who immediately turned the lever which closed the circuit and shot the deadly current through the criminal's body, which was instantly thrown into a state of tonic spasm involving every fibre of the entire muscular system. At that time, consciousness, sensation and motion were absolutely abolished.



The autopsy occupied about four and a half hours and embraced a most careful, gross examination of all the viscera, attention being especially directed to the brain and its meninges. The following masterly description of the post-mortem findings, and especially of the condition and anatomical structure of the brain, reveals no evidence whatever of disease or deformity of any of the bodily organs, including the brain, which was normal in size, shape, weight and appearance and was well developed in all respects.

[Spitzka:] The body lay upon the table in the dorsal position, the right leg, to which the electrode had been attached, slightly flexed and a trifle abducted. Post-mortem discolorations existed in all the extremities, but not in the trunk, head or neck, where the skin was fairly white. There was post-mortem lividity of the toe- and finger-nails. Pressure of the straps had not produced any discolorations. There was a discharge of small amount from the urethra, probably seminal fluid.

The assassin may be described as a good-looking, youthful, well nourished, mild mannered young man with rather a pleasant facial expression: features, regular; face, smooth shaven and symmetrical; mouth and ears well formed and symmetrical; teeth, none missing, but in poor condition from neglect; tongue, clean; palate, fauces and uvula, normal in appearance. The eyes are blue, the pupils equal and moderately dilated, face is oval and symmetrical. The ears are well-formed and absolutely symmetrical; hair, light brown and slightly curly; stature, medium—five feet seven and a half inches—and weight—estimated—about 140 pounds. The nose is pointed, slightly retrousse and fairly straight, and deviating a little at the point of the injury inflicted at the time of the assassination. The external genitals were normal, excepting two small, flat, unindurated cicatrices on the mucous surface of the prepuce, probably the result of previous chancroids, although he denied having had vene-

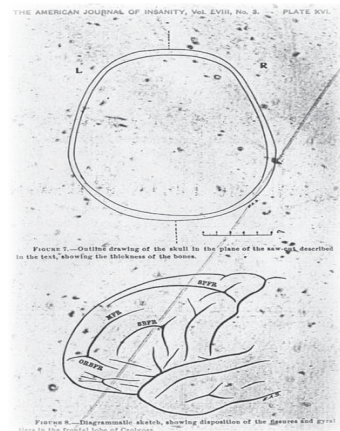
real disease other than gonorrhoea. There were no tremors or twitchings of the facial muscles, tongue or hands.

The figure was of good proportions, his limbs especially so. The arms were not muscular. Evidently he was not a man who had cultivated his muscles by exercise or expanded them by labor. The arms were of a young man of leisure—smooth, round and fair. His hands were not in any way notable. He had high insteps, neat ankles and long toes. The muscles of the legs were better developed than those of his arms, indicating he was swift of foot. He was not noticeably spare in body; his chest was round and symmetrical—not lean—but the ribs quite distinct. With his head thrown back, it seemed to have been well poised in life, more so than is shown in his pictures—all of which having been taken in prison. Nothing in his face or his person gave indication of heavy feeding or drinking, or of evil indulgence. There were none of the inevitable traces of confirmed dissipation.

Finally, a careful inspection of the entire visible body failed to reveal the presence of any of the so-called stigmata of degeneration. The almost perfectly symmetrical development—especially of the head and face—is a noteworthy feature in Czolgosz' case, although had deviations been found the fact would have had little weight as tending to show mental disease or degeneracy, as marked asymmetries, both cranial and facial, are frequently observed in persons who are quite sane and above the average in mental capacity.

[MacDonald:] The assassin had been dead but a few minutes, and was lying at full length on his back, his body white as marble, his face not at all distorted. One might say he was as if sleeping. The head rested on the back part of the table so as to elevate the chin and allow the forehead to slope downward. There was no sign of a great agony; the hair had not been removed for the electrode, but was full of water from the sponge, and in disorder. The lips were slightly parted with more than the curl they had in life....

[Spitzka:] Next the cranium was opened and the brain removed. On incising the scalp a quantity of dark fluid blood escaped. The scalp was of moderate thickness, firm, and well adherent to the skull. The two flaps of the scalp were dissected from the skull and drawn down on either side of the head.



The brain during most of the subsequent examination was kept in a salt-solution. At the time of removal (9.45 A.M.) the brain was still very warm, but of firm texture and normal appearance. The body cooled throughout the examination, and the greatest amount of heat appeared to be retained in the brain.

[MacDonald:] In deference to the relatives, and for reasons of a sentimental nature, the Prison Warden declined to allow any portion of the body to be removed from the prison. Consequently, and regrettably, it was impossible for the examiners to retain any portion of the brain for microscopic examination and study. Accurate measurements, however, of the head and its appendages, of the face and of the exterior of the skull, together with detailed anatomical drawings and descriptions of the brain were made; also plaster moulds of the head from which a cast was subsequently made and photographs of the same—full face and profile—taken. These measurements, together with plates of the drawings and photographs are presented in Mr. Spitzka's report of the autopsy.



*

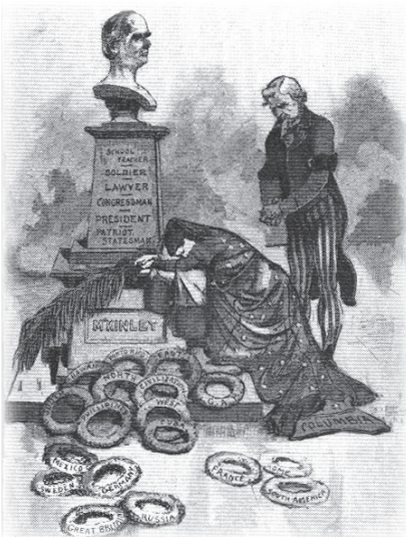
Questions

1. Some argue that Czolgosz's belief, which he expressed as he went to his death, that the President "was an enemy of the good working people," was a delusion; that is, it was a false belief though in no sense an insane delusion due to disease of the brain. Do you agree or disagree? Support your opinion with reasons, evidence, examples.
2. By his own admission, Czolgosz was a devout Anarchist and a firm believer in the principles of "Free Society" as taught by Emma Goldman—of whom he was an ardent admirer—and others. Write a research paper in which you prove or disprove that these were the actual beliefs motivating the murderous deed.
3. Was Czolgosz's act the result of political delusion, a false belief founded on ignorance, faulty education and warped reason and judgment—i.e., the

false belief which dominates the politico-social sect to which he belonged and of which he was a zealot, who in common with his kind believes that all forms of government are wrong and unnecessary—a body of malcontents whose teachings oppose all government and who advocate the use of violence to destroy the existing social and civil order of things? Write an essay in which you respond to this question, particularly as it relates to your own beliefs about education, government, and social order.



4. That Czolgosz was an Anarchist is clearly shown by (1) his declarations after his arrest, namely, that he did not believe in any form of government or law and that all rulers were tyrants who ought to be put down; (2) his admissions to the District Attorney that he was a member of anarchistic societies or circles, had frequently attended their meetings, and had been influenced in his views by the "lectures" of Emma Goldman; (3) the fact that when apprehended "anarchistic literature" was found on his person; and (4) the recognition and commendation which he has received at the hands of Anarchists at their meetings both in this country and abroad since his death, several of these societies having openly recognized him as such and lauded his action. In what respects do you consider this conclusion true, necessary, useful, and compassionate? Write a personal essay in which you compare and contrast yourself to Leon F. Czolgosz, the man born in Detroit and later executed at Auburn Prison for the assassination of William McKinley, 25th president of the United States, Civil War veteran and nationally recognized leader of the



Republican party, whose signature issue was high tariffs on imports as a formula for prosperity, and who, as the Republican candidate in the 1896 presidential election, upheld the gold standard and promoted pluralism among ethnic groups, and whose party captains introduced new advertising-style techniques that revolutionized campaign practices and beat back the crusading of his arch-rival, William Jennings Bryant, and whose 1896 election marked not only the beginning of the Progressive Era but also a return to prosperity after the so-called "Panic of 1893," and who, finally, retains the distinction of having been the first U.S. president to appear on film?

*

Select Responses

When I think of Leon Czolgosz I reproach myself for having indifferently passed by an outraged and deeply-wounded soul. His was a face with childlike eyes, full of eager questioning. It was a face that indicated a singular combination of tenderness and extreme daring.

The act of Czolgosz was the explosion of inner rebellion; it was directed against the savage authority of the money power, and against the government that aids its mammonistic crimes.

Reared under the lash of poverty and the tyranny of the home, he passed a wretched and joyless childhood. This misery soon forced the tender youth upon the block of modern slavery. His vague, indefinite yearnings gradually ripened into the quiet determination to carry out an independent act—an act to bring relief to his own oppressed soul and possibly disturb the lethargy of the masses.

The act of September 6th still affects me like the lifting of a veil designed to hide a dangerous truth.

McKinley personified at once social corruption and political servility. Indeed, he was the ideal President of the secret kings of the republic.

To those who wish to know what the Anarchists have to say, these words are addressed. We have to say that *not Anarchism, but the state of society which creates men of power and greed and the victims of power and greed*, is responsible for the death of both McKinley and Czolgosz.

That among a mass of people who realize fully what a slaughter-house capitalism has made of the world, how even little children are daily and hourly crippled, starved, doomed to the slow death of poisoned air, to ruined eyesight, wasted limbs, and polluted blood; how through the sapping of the present generation's strength the unborn are condemned to a rotten birthright, all so that riches may be heaped where they are not needed; who realize that all this is as unnecessary and stupid as it is wicked and revolting; that among these there should be some who rise up and strike back, whether wisely or unwisely, effectively or ineffectively, is no matter for wonder; the wonder is there are not more. *The hells of capitalism create the desperate; the desperate act—desperately!*

Without doubt he was in private life a good and kindly man. Perhaps he was able to reconcile his Christian belief, "Do good to them that hate you," with the slaughters he ordered; perhaps he murdered the Filipinos "to do them good"; the capitalist mind is capable of such contortions.

Who was Czolgosz? No one knows. A child of the great darkness, a spectre out of the abyss! Was he an Anarchist? We do not know. The police said he was an Anarchist. But the police have lied before. What he really said, if he said anything, remains in the secret papers of the Buffalo Police Department and the Auburn prison.

Leon's large, dreamy eyes must have beheld in the distance the rising dawn, heralding a new and glorious day. His spirit still hovers over me.

•

Conclusion – *composition as exposition*

In October, 1901, just days before Czolgosz's execution, Thomas Edison wired Auburn Prison offering \$2,000 for permission to film the assassin entering the death chamber. When the warden refused, Edison had to settle for a shot of the prison exterior combined with a staged recreation of Czolgosz's final agonizing moments in the chair. The result was a short film entitled "Execution of Czolgosz, With Panorama of Auburn Prison."

Question: *How did audiences respond to this new Edison picture?*

Jonathan Auerbach insists that "however striking a reproduction, the film did not occasion much if any comment in newspapers. Cinema by 1901 was simply too commonplace a medium to warrant any particular mention, so that empirically assessing audience response becomes virtually impossible." However, as film historian Charles Musser points out, "witnessing such an act of morbid disembodiment directly as the reenacted execution of a presidential assassin, we are reminded of the authority of the state as well as the power of the filmmaker to reproduce that authority so effectively and efficiently, albeit in such a ghostly fashion."

Audience response notwithstanding, film exhibitors fared quite well as crowds flocked to see "Execution of Czolgosz" and other new Edison features, including a panoramic shot of the Electric Tower at night and a one-minute slow pan of the angry mob assembled outside the Temple of Music just minutes after the fateful shooting. According to witnesses, the enraged crowd wanted

the head of the alleged assassin. Thomas Edison, whose crew happened to be on hand that day, wanted good footage that would sell, which apparently it did: In the last three months of 1901, at the height of public demand, Edison's Kinetograph Department reported sales figures well above any other three-month period from 1900 to 1904.

The Pan Am mob scene is an excellent study in crowd agitation held in check by the twin resources of law and education. What we see in the ninety-second film is a sea of parasols, Sunday bonnets, bolo hats, and sweating brows—a fidgety river of twitching Sight-Seers seeking to better themselves, and maybe get some education, by catching a glimpse of the villainous traitor. At one point in the film, a little boy perched on his papa's shoulders turns away from the action and stares out over the crowd and straight into the gaping eye of Edison's camera as it pans slowly right. It's a haunting example of new media innocence, and one we should hold steady before us for a minute or two longer. That kid grew up, by the way, to fight and die in WWI having rejected his mother's plea to join the IWW instead. The man to his left lost a fortune in "the hard times of 1893" but soon recovered and died rich and happy on the 31st of June, 1931, the same day my father, now a staunch Republican with patrilinear ties to the late William McKinley, was born.



I end with these fictional asides in order to gesture toward a closing statement. The boy is looking our way, and we don't know what he knows, or what he's learning to know, in that moment. But how silly it all must have seemed to him then, how sweet and scary and strange and wonderful to be poised like that in a crowd of frothy onlookers waiting for a chance to do... something. What powerful lessons he must have learned that hot September day in the City of Light with its Electric Tower powered in the background by a raging Niagara. Behind him, shackled and beaten inside the Temple of Music, is the body of the assassin, a body already primed for jail time, a rushed trial, execution by electrocution, a thorough autopsy, and eventually the kind of sleepy, underground notoriety that only a well-designed visual literacy campaign can offer.

Which leads to my conclusion: Right there in that inter-zone between camera and assassin is the epicenter of today's new education design universe. It is a universe where time travel is possible but beside the point, where data-foraging excursions fuel recovery work in the interest of knowing now what we can't afford to not know tomorrow. It is a universe littered with lenses and mired in

a history of lenses trained to capture, accommodate, correct, order, and render symmetrical everything awkward and crooked. In this new design universe, education designs history for a public in waiting, for an eager generation now balanced on the shoulders of history but soon to be trampled underfoot by a rabid crowd in search of young traitors.

Anticipating recovery, the body un-learning obedience becomes more or less bitter, makes up his mind, forms a plan. As a child of great darkness and extreme daring, he moves forward by looking over his shoulder, noting for the record all that squirms off-camera, unframed, unfiled, uncaptured, and unrecognized. Outraged, deeply wounded, and full of eager questioning, he rejects the lethargy of the masses and soon comes clean of the itchy, faulty stigmata of degeneration. Just in time, a bolt of raw current drives his brain to the brink of significant language.

Law and education unplug, finally, in the excavationist work of exposition (exposing [the real] for what it is). Two cities topple, one collapsing into the other's savage authority. Centuries of Progress, Invention, and Magnificent Achievement come to a deliberate close. After a while, few travel the good road, and fewer still play the game of imminent perfection awaiting them at journey's end. Free of all capital contortions, people strike out for the fair and show up determined to do something. Then, in an explosion of inner rebellion, they learn the rhetoric of advanced treachery, lifting a veil designed to hide a dangerous truth:

Oh, Czolgosz [they declare], yours was a tired mind that took pains to see it wisely. Now rest yourself and be kind to yourself generally. What counts in the end is not what you see, but who throws the switch.