

1 the gap

The text is a production, a put-on, a bit. Paul de Mann tried to tell you. The text is a peacock's display, a con, a surface. The voice of the text, like this voice now, is very much a character, a piece of fucking fiction, lazies and rentalmen.

2 the cast

Some of you have (or rather maybe some of you one day will, but seriously maybe fucking not, and I tweet in the void) have already met the cast, a mangled and spotted crew of disreputable philosophers. Are they not perilously informal? The one named Stumpf seems to play the role of the Thalidomide Kid. He's the stinking, gnarly root. The others are his creations, or so it is suggested, but only (remember kids) within a fiction conceived from the beginning as a prank. So Stumpf the stub or stump is a sham, a psychoanalytically low sham.

3 the interviews

But surely the Mr. Always Being Interviewed is the man behind the curtain? One of the "men" behind the curtain is not a man at all. If you must know, this prank was conceived and implemented by a collective. Is it plausible that none of our own dearly held positions are included? It is not plausible. We have built this fiction using pieces of the truth. The prank itself is an attempt to tell a truth that might not be sayable except indirectly, in the form of a prank.

4 anonymity

We all love Tristan Tzara over here, our female member more than anyone. Some of our early work together involved the creation of fictional DADA theorists. But somehow it didn't work for us. It wasn't bad, but it was just more dada, and belated dada somehow didn't mean as much. We felt like stochastic parrots. So one of us tried to go in the opposite direction. We needed an *underground* Husserl. We needed a Duffenhauer, a caustic asshole assured of his authenticity, and of the absurdity of that authenticity. We ended up getting some of the feel of dada accidentally. Our underground existential ontologist clung to last possible shred of the philosophical ideal. No world-saving. Fatalistic

pessimism even. But still the absurd heroism of a science that gazes on a spectacle without substance.

Why did this character (really set of related characters) amuse us so much? As I said, pieces of the truth were embedded throughout. But, because we created Duffenhauer, Stumpf, and then others together, we could all enjoy a strategic ambiguity, even in the eyes of one another. We laughed at the lines that we expected readers to take especially seriously. The more earnest our protagonist, the more pleasure we took in privately mocking him (and of course, to some degree, our own secret earnestness.)

5 history

Duffenhauer came first, and he was and still is a kind of rude exaggeration of the frustration that all of us more or less felt about intellectual and especially institutional posturing. At first we played with making Duffenhauer a conservative (the crude kind), but we decided that making him an outright cartoon would be wasting the idea, descending into boring political satire (boring because so obviously on this or that side.) We decided that Duffenhauer should exist right on the line, undecidable, maybe not a total creep, but *what wasn't he telling us?*

Duffenhauer was a prank, yes, but it was a prank motivated by increasing paranoia and a “tribe-first” interpretation of anything strange. So we made Duffenhauer both a critic of this xenophobia and its natural target. Duffenhauer challenges this xenophobia from a “masculine” perspective (in his own fictionally masculine eyes.) We could not resist adding his musings on Heidegger’s silence. Frankly this character got away from us. We took down some of our favorite stuff as maybe too spicy. In any case, we rolled with Duffenhauer until the concept was fleshed out.

Then we moved on to Stumpf, who we thought of as a Tiresias figure. We were also inspired by Bloom in *Ulysses* and by Humbert in *Lolita*. From the beginning, Stumpf was never supposed to be a criminal. But we did imagine some kind of crippling sexual impotence having somehow neutralized him. It was important that he had a substantial sexual past that was now only a memory. The key theme was a massive Shakespearean interiority. He was “old” in the sense of deactivated or

removed from the game of life, not completely, but enough to bump a human being into a life of thinking and fantasy. Of course he was supposed to be a pervert in a tactically unspecified sense. We wanted a shaman figure, a target of projection.

Unlike Duffenhauer, Stumpf was incapable of unironic utterance. Stumpf didn't know who he was to begin with. He was a polyphonic roar. So we cast Stumpf as being himself a creator of symbolic characters. This had the added benefit of allowing us to parody ourselves. We symbolized our own ironic indirectness using male sexual impotence. Were we not spineless pranksters ? If we had something to say, why not just say it ? What sort of perversity inspired us to form an anonymous collective ? We still haven't figured it out. In any case, the Stumpf bit will soon be retired. A few of us are toying with the idea of doing it the normal way, earnestly, while of course avoiding any connection to the pranks discussed here.