

Hot Tips For Healthy Living

Author : Chris Campanioni

Categories : Creative Nonfiction / Essay

Date : 25-08-2016

Never work. It should go without saying, but it's worth saying again. Find a way of being in this world and then become it. If you must work for others, make them work for you. Beauty and art have an inimitable kind of power; artifice can be powerful too. Our whole lived experience compels us to create impressions and artifacts for others, something which has no place in economics or the conventions of politics and the pulpit. Money is irrelevant in a culture that has morphed into Monopoly's version of funny money. The best thing you can do with a dollar bill is burn it.

One way to find value in the scenario of work is to inject the company trademark with your own brand of proprietary intellectualism. Stripped of the motive of performing for another's profit margins, your work will find new light in the awareness of its own death.

If you're a copy editor, insert playful double entendre come-ons inside your headlines. Re-arrange photos within the page's specs to re-contextualize the captured action. Break lines in a column to say something subversive. Do it subtly, with some sense of style.

If you're a model, literally go through the motions while privately re-training what movements might actually pervert the apprehended moment. Speak little and listen to everyone talking through you and around you as if you were an actual mannequin. (If you're especially good, you will be.) Wear the dialogue well. Remove the blasé caption attached to the minds and memory of fashion magazine-lovers everywhere and replace it with your own ironic subtext. Destroy the image, or its imagined narrative. Make people remember what it is like to once again feel desire, instead of simply inhabiting an unreachable fantasy.

If you're a writer, use everything around you, and especially the people. They won't know what hit them, because most of us don't actually read.

All of these things are possible; all of these things have already provoked a response. Under the guise of production in an overproduced society, the way out is in reassembling the (re)production. Outside of the host, any viral message becomes sedentary. No longer subject to the laws of supply and demand, we may finally think to demand more. Ask more of yourself; then ask more of others. Pretense and performance are your friends, and will always be. It is far better to pretend to not have than to pretend to have something you clearly do not. (In this scenario, all of us living under the assumption of free choice and liberty are all pretending, but for reasons unbeknownst to us.)

Stage the burglary and steal more than whatever you could have made out with from the real heist: the falsified narrative that keeps the cogs moving in the eternal exchange of consumers and commodities. Like the rare bullfighter who ends the bullfight with only a gesture of his arm, it is far more effective to kill someone without actually murdering them. In the physical scenario, what's done is done or will never be. Remove the symbolism behind any system or subject and the very nature of the system turns inward, reverses, implodes. It is a perspective and a process. It is a way of investigating the world, or an instruction for *feeling*. Holding you in my arms in this book is the closest things to intimacy we'll ever achieve.

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“Can you please pass me a towel?”

Here we are at 2 Tyson Lane, a rented home with a rented pool, a rented stretch of sand and sea. In general, we only ever rent things anyway, in this life. In the next.

Minnie Mouse in Physical Form is wading, waiting, her elbows on the lip of the pool, her blonde hair pulled back, a smell like chlorine dripping from her cheeks to her chin. The automatic wave generator about to kick in, as it does every five minutes, as it did five minutes ago. I’ve been waiting this whole time too.

“Excuse me?”

She was wearing a black T-shirt that said in red, *Maybe, Maybe Not*. And I wondered what was the question. Besides if I could hand her a towel, I mean. What the question was. What’s underneath it all, what’s inside, what’s in the back of it or behind? What’s at the very bottom?

It’s the thirtieth birthday party of a gas magnate’s son. I’m dressed in blue Gap joggers and a black tank top. I’m dripping too, but not with the smell of chlorine. In an hour, maybe an hour and a half, maybe two hours and ten minutes, maybe less, I’ll be wearing khakis and a white collared shirt, a skinny black tie, the unmistakable outfit of a caterer, one who caters for others. I’d mentioned that you should never work. But at least all of this is going somewhere. At some point.

I’d like to keep it inside of me a little longer.

I hand her a towel and she places it on her right shoulder, hoisting herself out of the water, the waves that have been generating for thirty seconds, thirty-one seconds. I hear the swoosh the same moment a waiter swoops in to deliver a white peach Bellini, on a plank. He’s been rented too, but we’re from different rental companies, so I don’t know his name. I don’t ask. I know hers. Everyone knows Taylor Swift.

There’s 135 dinner guests, 200 dancing guests, all of them—I guess—rented, except for maybe the parents of the birthday boy, he of the black gold gild. I look from the sheet of paper in my hand to the bar we’ve just finished assembling, wiping my brow, watching the other swimmers, none of them swimming. *135 dinner guests, 200 dancing guests*. Is that an estimate, I think. Is that accurate? I wondered how anyone could ever tell how many people would actually be dancing, would actually get down on the dance floor. A more accurate headcount would be 135 dinner guests, 193 white guests. But I wouldn’t know that for a few more hours.

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And as we watched the fiction and continued to watch, it became impossible to not look away; servile, static, so much were we entranced by the production that we began to produce our own fictions, capturing and copying and disseminating the moving image of our many-mirrored gaze: the evidence of

our own slow decay.

Fetishizing tabloid taboo, nostalgic of the manufactured past, all that was left for us was a seduction for the ritual desire of no longer being here at all. Having vanished without realizing it, what we want most of all is to vanish again. Reproduce the facts of our own death. And add a hashtag.

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“Sometimes I’m like Sansa, and sometimes I’m like, Sansa, *who are you?”*

Friend of Taylor’s, also blonde, also toweled, sips and twitches, sips and twitches. No one answers her question, if it was a question. Maybe no one else is listening except me.

The others laugh. All of them except Taylor are wearing sunglasses, so there’s no way of telling how false the laughs are, besides the sound itself. Usually, your eyes change shape. Your cheeks crease, your eyebrows might arch, slightly. The pale spot below your eyes fold in. None of this is visible when you are wearing oversized sunglasses in the shade. The sun dipping lower in the sky. It’s almost six o’clock. The camera crews are getting situated, unloading their equipment, connecting apparati. Is that a word? *Apparati*. I like it well enough. I don’t like being filmed, but it’s in the agreement. Everyone is being filmed tonight.

What they’ll do with it is anyone’s guess, or one person’s answer. Probably a Lifetime special. Maybe E! Lifestyles of the Rich & Fortuitous. Or just a promo for *Game of Thrones*. A slow-mo recap of Taylor’s friend seeing-herself-as-Sanza as Taylor smiles, nods, laughs. Cut.

Maybe they rented the cast of *Game of Thrones* too. It’s early. Six-fifteen. The party doesn’t start for another hour. (I glance at my sheet.) *Cocktails & Canapes on the lawn overlooking the beach*. In smaller type: *expect VERY heavy tequila consumption*. If I was this rich, I’d have to get drunk too, I think, every other evening or every evening. Just to look at myself in the mirror, my mirrored image looking back. Something I could never reconcile.

A vanishing point between grass and pool, between pool and the actual ocean. One man-made, the other natural. No longer any separation, or the attempt to remove it completely, which is still ongoing. Today, tomorrow. The next day. The ongoing special project for the systematic extermination of the real.

I listen hard, avoiding the pool-side dialogue to try to catch an actual wave. A non-motorized wave. The pulse, the ebb. It can be so relaxing, when you catch one. It can make you forget, for a moment, that a party starts in forty-five minutes. A party in which everyone knows everyone and nobody talks. Countdown to the end of the world. On camera.

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It had occurred to me from the very outset of the project, it was dangerous to remove my face from the images. Since it revealed the fact that there is nothing behind them.

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At some point during Season 7, Brandon Walsh walks into Casa de Walsh—his words, not mine—to the warm greeting of his family-friend-or-fuck-buddy—Wikipedia calls her, “close to the Walshes, like a cousin.”

“Good to see you,” Valerie says, as she’s spreading peanut butter on toast.

“Good to be seen,” Brandon says. Sometime during Season 7, unless I’m remember this wrong.

In a sense, Brandon’s affirmation is our own, ever since we saw ourselves in a photo and wanted to see *more of them*. Hoarders of the evidence that says we have passed through here, in a world where time no longer passes. Everyone preserved with the same strobe lights they’ve imported in the white vans parked on the gravel somewhere behind me. The long stretch of road and the big black gate that came before it. It’s hard to get here. It’s even harder to leave.

I’ve changed. Not in the emotional sense. I’m still who I am. Or who I think I am. Now I’m wearing khakis, a black belt, a skinny black tie, sweating through my white collared shirt despite the rolled-up sleeves. Despite the three undone buttons below the collar.

One, two. One, two.

The first performer is doing a sound-check in a tent they’ve re-constructed on top of a tennis court. What was a tennis court before they rented it, re-assembled it. Removed the evidence.

Cameras are everywhere, and I don’t mean our cell phones. Everyone at the party—a rented home, rented guests, rented employees—like me—are meant to pretend that the cameras aren’t there. The viewers, watching it later, maybe today, are meant to pretend they *are* there, pretending or forgetting that the party was filmed in advance of its air date, carefully edited, cut, dubbed, scored, then cut again, with voiceover and carefully timed fade-outs for commercial breaks. Pretending or forgetting they’ve probably never been to East Hampton before and have no idea what they’d do if they actually got there. Got here.

It’s never the consummation of a dream that people want. It’s the desire to *keep dreaming*. The belief that we will never wake from this one.

Nothing can be left to chance, except everything, as in a dream, prescribing to rules and laws of our own making: predicated on the promise that anything can happen at any moment because the dreamer wills it. The dreamer, or the one directing. Imposing contrast, lights, shade, angles, cross-cutting, everything already predetermined by the selection of a point of view, all for the right moment or mood or mise-en-scène, the brief winking aside to an audience who is already in on the joke.

It’s bait and switch. All of us pretending. All of us in on the punch line, the whole while disbelieving the fact of its imminent contact. The thrill of deception and its excessive transparency, all at the same time.

The viewers will switch places with us, but who will we switch places with? Who are we meant to replace, or become? Other than characters, literally cast in cathode rays and high-definition anti-freeze, sequestered in this film of a thirtieth birthday party, suffocating on the whole company’s accumulation of oil and gas and energy as though our heads were already halfway in the oven.

Or maybe that's just how I felt, how I feel right now. Shaking a mixer above my head like I learned on TV, thinking to myself, What would have happened if TV hadn't been here?

The joy of the watcher begins and ends in the watching. It is a totality, an end unto itself. Voyeurism, like pornography, has more to do with metempsychosis than the flesh it purports to serve up, consume. Just as with pornography, no one watching is interested in the actual sex act. We watch because we want to place ourselves in the body of the other. What used to be the role of literature has been replaced by our prerecorded realities. No longer do we read to become transported. No longer do we ever have to close our eyes.

"Okay, well my eyes are closed ... right? My eyes look completely closed," a guest asks, answers, points at a screen, as if to confirm it, hands the phone back to me. "Another one, another one, another one. [\[i\]](#) Please."

I oblige, press my index to the oval, rotate the camera length-wise, repeat. Return the mobile to its owner, refill a low-ball with whisky, suck it down. But subtly, with style. Or at least in secret. Come up for air to hear Leslie Odom Jr. from *Hamilton* crooning on stage.

"What a voice!" someone in the long line that's formed in front of me shouts.

And I think about what the voice would sound like once it's been recorded, put through distribution, the channels that will make it live or make it die. Maybe the program won't need music after all. But mostly everything is better with a soundtrack. After all, the origin of cinema is the camera and a piece of music. The only way it's evolved since then is our ability to insert ourselves into the scene, anticipation of the image over all possible realities.

"Oh my god, I'm dead right now. So dead," the guest looks up from her phone, down at her phone. Up again. Seared hanger steaks float past on a butchers block. "So effing dead."

The dream of every stargazer in 2016: to see themselves die live on their own camera.

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*The museum is no longer
A place but place
Less. The museum
Is everywhere. Under
The pretext of saving
The original we have sold
Ourselves as our own
Artifacts. Fossils found
For the purpose of re
Purposing moments into
Meaning or absence
Of meaning. I have no
Words, & I don't
Refer only to
The inexpressible. What's
More or what more*

*Can we become? Better
In death than ever
In life, our faces like faces
In a funeral parlor
Gather round & now
Bow, while kneeling*

*To stagger through
The lower east side's
Google-mapped representation
Of the lower east side
Without a chance
Encounter, or the option
To whistle. Trees
Of concrete with leaves
Printed onto them, retrospectively
A parking lot's solitude
& the stand-still
Silence as all of this
Buffers. Futuristic
Scenario in which
Walt Disney awakes from his cryonic suspension
& understands that no time
Has actually passed
The lead-up to
A sequel in which you & the self
You play on the Internet
Are put in a room & forced
To look at one another
Scenario involves a cross
Walk of mirrors, slabs
Of city that light up when you
Walk over each grave
Pose, every pause
Before a pixel
Reloads, returns
On a cut-in of a coin
Toss, a red bowtie
& moves you never
Knew you had inside or on
The outside, synching
Lips the way it was
In childhood, to voiceover:
It's all designed to make
You feel good
The question is—what kind
Of good do you
Want to feel?*

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In interviews and speaking engagements, televised or transmitted through radio, transcribed and typed out, copy and pasted from a text message or an e-mail, I'd often told people that all of these things had just come to me; I didn't have to do anything but allow myself the opportunity to experience them. Maybe I believed it; maybe I still do. But if this were written down as a script, something set to score and distributed to audiences I'll never know or meet, the general run-down of the major plot points and their sequences would look like this:

Age 18-Current ? insert myself into the media, particularly print newspapers and the literary community at large (The Record, The San Francisco Chronicle, Star-Ledger, The Brooklyn Rail, At Large, PANK, Tupelo Quarterly, et al) as an editor and writer.

Age 22-Current ? insert myself into the fashion industry, become an object of desire for homosexuals (C-IN2, DNA magazine, the general blogosphere) and heterosexuals (Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire, Men's Health, Men's Fitness, Men's Style Guide, Levi's, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, AXE body spray, et al), in North America and abroad (Elle Brasil, Supplémentaire, Twill Magazine), for younger and older generations (One Life to Live, All My Children, various commercials and infomercials), while infiltrating the calendar's big festivals (Cannes, Tribeca Film Festival, National Underwear Day, et al) under the guise of said object of desire.

Age 29-Current ? insert myself into the academic community, teaching and guest lecturing at various institutions in the United States (Baruch College, the College of Staten Island, John Jay, Pace University, Fordham University, Eastern Michigan University, Washington College, the City University of New York's Graduate Center) and the Internet (TEDx, Transatlantic Poetry), forming syllabi and instruction with the intended upshot of forcing interruptions, asking questions.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be ? insert myself en masse into the culture industry (fashion, media, publishing, film and TV) so that I might write about it. Simultaneously consume and produce the fact of my self-commodification. Become object and author. Write into and outside of the culture industry without anonymity or alias. Destroy it, or destroy myself.

To date, I had done well not to achieve the latter. My success with the former endeavor was up for question. But I guess that's the point. To always have something left to question. Of myself and others.

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The greatest crime of Post Internet culture's overseers was to make people culpable for their own demise. No one gets shipped to death camps anymore; we have taken ourselves there, willingly and enthusiastically. Arrested development no longer had to be coercive once its trapping became a sought-after commodity; prisons can be a pleasure, and in fact they've become our one true pleasure in this world. We strive toward the bars in the light of the new day and our backlit screens. Grasping with our head down, the better to bear it.

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When I wrote *Tourist Trap* in 2006, living and working abroad, I was optimistic, passionate, brash, happy, young, or young enough, to not know better. I was twenty-one. On the verge of graduation, the verge of *becoming something else*. Pre-meditated movement. MapQuested directives. What did I have to feel enraged about? Except everything. I never thought this nightmare would ever actually come true. Or inwardly, maybe I did think it would and that's why I wrote it. Facts are problematic. Self-knowledge is a dangerous game.

Whatever the case, I was responding to tourism and its inherent violence, our penchant for a pleasure that consisted in discovering the natural in what was deemed artificial and counterfeit. Destroying ersatz cultural markers to erect what? Something new, something untainted or untarnished, or better still, unrecognized. Unrecognizable. Something invisible. Incapable of being apprehended.

But there isn't any option, any longer. Terrorism, cultural terrorism, the real, the counterfeit, the violence of each gaze. The telescoping of all of them in a single thrust of flesh in the museum of our self-curated newsfeeds. Each of them is the same and none of them exist because of the selfsame markers of their makeup. Everything and all at once. Our only choice is the filter we use to record the memory of our camera eye, and how we choose to play it back.

My parents prefer the living room. A black box that is more like a mirror: the meeting point where everyone comes to witness themselves in the gaze of a future that was taped months ago.

Our pleasure is no longer in discovering the natural; we want to discover new ways to desert it. In fact, our pleasure principle has, in the last decade, turned on its head. We want to discover, not the real, but its opposite, the calm cool gaze of a snapshot duplicate. Our entire existence might collapse if we could not accumulate it, signify it with serialization. In the pursuit of our own canonization we have cannibalized ourselves, simultaneously glutted and emaciated—and still, we swallow graciously.

When I look back at Taylor Swift, she is biting her nails, sucking her cuticles, damp and trembling. A body movement that imitates the pulsating ambiance of a camera on a dolly. A scenario cut before it's presented in the spread-out series, probably to make room for my dialogue, my response to her pressing question. Which was silence.

I don't want to return to 2006. I miss nothing. Hardly any writer does, that's why we write. So we can salvage it: moments, words, sensations of being, or not being. *Play this back*. Dying for having been discovered, or for discovering nothing beyond the mountains except their hallucination.

I am still dreaming of the moment they decide to say *That's a wrap*, and: *Moving on*.

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I know some hot tips for healthy living.

Would you like to know now or later? Or should I have you—

Guess?

I blink, it's a quarter to two. I blink, it's two o'clock. The Late Night Pool Party is supposed to start now, I remember, without glancing at my sheet of paper. The Late Night Pool Party has already started, though, half a dozen guests in my purview stripped without montage or split-screen or fade-out or cut. So

many splashes I can't hear the wave motor kick in.

I blink and shake my head.

She answers anyway.

"Well you can drink a mix of Pepto Bismol and 24-Hour Energy, two at a time," she adds. "You can keep drinking that way. Doing drugs, whichever."

She pauses, as if she's testing me, as if this is a lighting test, maybe. As if this isn't already being filmed? I think, but shrug it off by way of blinking. In between now and then, the past and the persistently-pictured present, there are buffet tables, an ice luge, Summer Watermelon Jell-O shots, a Shake Shack station, cookies from Levain Bakery, a cake presentation, individual birthday cakes from Momofuku, a few speeches, a few more performances from *Surprise Performers*, and a touching father-and-son hip-hop duet.

"What else? What else?"

"You can double up on multivitamins," she interrupts herself, trembling, brushing her brown hair out of her blue eyes. "Wash your hands super well. Order a burger instead of a salad."

"Didn't you—"

"I did," she cuts in, placing her palms together in prayer and rocking her head a little closer in my direction. Closer and then farther, as if she were bobbing for apples. "And so I powdered my nose."

I blink and wonder what's next. I mean after this. *Late Night Pool Party*. It ends on its own ellipsis. The sheet, I remember, read: *2AM ...*

The assembly line doesn't stop in a surplus; the demand isn't the supply itself but the wish to keep supplicating before the altar of production. The assembly line says, *Stay on ...* and I wonder if I'll have to stay on forever, standing in front of strangers and behind a bar, or if I'll be forced to leave the moment the camera crews do. After all, I think, what's the point if there's no one here to film it? Reality was lived so it might be recorded, at least in my case, me who's watched all of it, who's tried to write as much of it down as time and space allowed. I was meant to serve people cocktails. To keep them sated. To keep them smiling. To *keep* them, as plastic keeps, sterilized and halted. Instead I've already been imagining what this moment feels like with the new Rihanna playing over the tepid dialogue (her words in my ears again: *You can ... you can ... you can ... choose to mute this*).

*Been waiting on that sunshine
Boy, I think I need that back*

The constant change of place and camera angles and sound clips and audio cues in the everyday world have saturated me to the point of never-not-hearing-a-soundtrack at the same time that it fragments my line of vision into successive sequences, a rapid-fire schizophrenic perception that has made me who I am or what we all are today. What we will never again be. Spectators no longer, but actors.

*What are you willing to do?
Oh, tell me what you're willing to do?*

If you listen long enough or hard enough, it's easy to imagine Rihanna asking you the question. You, the viewer. You, the actor. It is only ever always you.

“So are you going to come in too?” she asks, already in the process of disrobing, me still and silent for the first time tonight. The rain had already washed away the humidity and the mosquitoes hours ago, between Headliner #1 and Headliner #2. Between hot tips for healthy living. Hers and mine. Between me and her. Me and you. The night was calm and cool. I thought about sliding my body inside my sheets, what that would feel like. When that would be. If I’d ever get there. If I’d ever get here. My brief winking aside.

“Or are you just going to watch?”

[\[1\]](#) As Baudrillard (*Simulations*, 1983) points out: “For opinions as for material goods: production is dead, long live production.”