

## Barrett Watten

### PLAN B

Damn the consequences!

Titanic loss drives market up—

Red states rule

Over blue states.

As a consequence of illogic

All can be winners!

In *Casino Royale*.

Do not mention Plan B

On social media.

Never underestimate

The power of data analytics

To fill in blanks.

The people according

To whom? Clock into their

Diurnal routine

5

And normalize.

*Gleichschaltung* freezes

The present moment

In a congealed frame.

Meaning merely the price  
Of witnessing events.

To learn this word

Use it in conversation  
Until it too is normal—

Watching early returns

And reading *Armed Cell*  
Until nothing is normal

All is weird and strange.

Combinatorial demographics—  
Algorithmic decisions. 10

We break ourselves up

To produce more literature  
For the illiterate.

Beyond category's reach

The abstraction of number  
Lays waste,

Turns psychological.

*Gleichschaltung* repeats  
Its deadly meaning.

Is that a thing  
Or an image of one?  
The image detaches

And spins as a segue  
To Plan B as next segment  
Of the narrative. 15

Aggregative informatics—  
Yield qualitative results.  
I use the word *advisedly*

Resulting in a shift  
In the quality of life  
As a cognitive process.

I use the word *terrified*  
In a sentence that states  
Nothing is normal.

License plate reads *BRUTEST*  
A message in a bottle  
Driving in Michigan

Windows rolled up.  
And if he bicycles to work  
He'd be called out 20

For pedaling while black.

All data tends toward

A common center

Of means-end rationality.

*The Shining* screened in reverse

Disappears into itself.

There is no comprehension;

There is only computation.

Autumn leaves

Blasted in virtual space.

The flatline of the political

Result of brute force

A kind of numbness

Men made of cardboard

Paralyzed inertness.

25

Plan B: birth control

Countermeasure to terminate

Unwanted presidency.

The darkest hour

May be just before dawn.

I refuse to normalize

High-low distinction

That makes class politics

A joke for the ages.

They refuse to vote

Their interest because

They do not know it.

*Gleichschaltung* follows

Shame and humiliation

With brute force.

30

In the reception room

All the patients are men

Wearing their class

On their sleeves.

The data are an event

But not our destiny.

50/50 Rule of means/end

Neither one achieved

No matter how many

Voted—the numbers

Refuse to add up

To a predicted measure.

We feel the data

As an inertial weight

Making things strange 35

Out of all proportion.

They cry out for Plan B

To rescue themselves.

My South Asian daughter

Cannot weep out of state

And drives nonstop.

Open fields of meaning

Hemmed in by borders

Increasingly insecure.

After Article 50

They invoke *Gleichschaltung*

As an irreversible force

Of inevitable decline—

Compelled they cannot help

Their own destruction. 40

Domination follows competition

Force guile irony stress—

Even if it is what is

Do not normalize,  
    Seek Plan B if only to  
        Recalculate your life.

Expatriation follows alienation  
    To find an alternative  
        Existence elsewhere.

Nothing follows nothing:  
    The Rights of Woman traduced  
        By Lords of Misrule.

The Rights of Man—  
    A gutted document  
        Of burned parchment      45

*Dokumentationzentrum*  
    A new destination for tourism  
        And skatepunk culture.

I never signed  
    Any nondisclosure agreement  
        Only to act as if we had

The movie rights  
    To *Gleichschaltung* distributed  
        As a general good—

A classroom lecture

In the very courthouse

Where trials took place

Overturning their result.

I refuse to normalize—

And this is my Right. 50

Wake up to a new order

And Plan B as alternative

Ghost assembly line.

“Where the dead walked

And the living were made

of metadata”—

Fact *were* it otherwise

In the subjunctive case

Of mood alteration.

In a windowless building—

You know the one!—

They conduct surveillance

On foreign elements

Floating to the surface

Of dark, polluted streams. 55



New voting machine installed  
As they foil sabotage  
At the name-brand hotel

With no ties to Putin  
Or the Russian state—  
Our results are clean!

As clean as *Gleichschaltung*!  
Cleansing the nation  
Of foreign elements

Unwanted, unneeded, undesired  
Undocumented, unrequited.  
Unrepresented people

Numbering in the millions  
Are affected by decree  
And rumor of affect 60

In organized state of denial  
As new affect akin to  
Boredom and hate.

It is boring in Macomb County—  
We need some excitement  
To flip our pick-up trucks

And the entire state  
Of its unexcited majorities  
Whose quietude is fear.

Seize Bucks County  
By the throat and deliver  
The results on deadline

Like a dog returning  
To its vomit in a Bible Study  
Group of deplorables. 65

“Naaaaw, I don’t see anything  
Racist in this result  
But I got a new Idee—

Let’s call it *class*”—Plan B  
To deny over breakfast  
Normalized to explain

How we tipped the plates  
Pancakes all over the table  
To achieve this result!

Perfidy of mediated state  
Returning to normalize  
Discourse under control.

The New *Gleichschaltung*  
Being barely perceptible  
Everything is normal. 70

The New Detroit unfolds  
Permanently on hold  
With nothing to build.

Nothing, *nichevo, nichts, rien*  
In thirty-seven languages  
None mutually intelligible—

Vietnamese, Croatian, Arabic, Hmong  
Observed at a voting booth  
Next to exit signs.

Plan B is to take a vacation  
Start writing autobiography  
Limit oneself to memoirs

Only to be hacked online  
Their emails purloined  
And publicly humiliated. 75

It's a Mongolian Sausage!  
Return of the repressed  
Of my poetic lineage.

“Put shit in a stocking  
Swing it around your head  
Until everyone goes home.”

*Gleichschaltung* like that—  
When it rains it pours  
Shit or Shinola as *shit*.

These are just words  
And those were just words  
And words have an effect.

No damage no results  
Means no pain no gain  
Means no lumps no vote. 80

Triumph of triumphalism—  
Futurity of crystal gazing  
As medium of nonbeing.

A tip of the old iceberg  
Of coordinated fantasy  
Where the unstable go off

In hysterical bursts,  
Catastrophic incoherence  
Roiling underneath.

Do I want to look at the news?  
Do I need to? “Stalwarts  
Try to Focus on Policy.”

In *Edmund Fitzgerald* weather  
With 18-foot breakers  
Breaking them in half 85

Result of a shallow floor.  
Everything is adverbial—  
That’s how it’s done.

There is no floor or ground—  
Level playing field  
Opens to an abyss

Fair and balanced news—  
With any nonsense analysis  
As good as any other.

*Gleichschaltung* is this:  
I compel content to yield  
And cut out their tongues.

The flip side of Plan B  
Complete normalization  
As if nothing happened. 90

The national anthem  
At sporting events—  
Be seated at your peril.

Beyond the family romance  
Of dysfunction, I'm sorry—  
No extra caring here.

Does poetry make a bubble  
Of like-mined *simpaticos*,  
Foreign elements excluded?

Do we speak to the converted  
Or the statistically lapsed  
When they get over it?

Now use the word *reprobate*:  
An unprincipled person—  
Rogue, rascal, scoundrel 95

Miscreant, good-for-nothing, villain  
Wretch, rake, degenerate  
Libertine, debauchee.

And raise the *Edmund Fitzgerald*!  
A good ship and true—  
From a mill in Wisconsin

Fully loaded for Cleveland.

Waves broke over the railing

Gales of November slashing.

Turbulence is destiny,

Our demography in pieces,

Nothing is decided.

All is projected—

Loaded with materials

Ready to hand for use. 100

Damn the torpedoes!

Down with *Gleichschaltung*

And prepare Plan B!

**Author's note:** "Plan B" is written in an economy of 100 + 1 stanzas, with the keywords "Plan B," "*Gleichschaltung*," and "normal" or "normalize" appearing every ten stanzas. The triadic line, of course, comes from Williams, who first learned it from Mayakovsky; it was not unknown to O'Hara. Numbers are a synecdoche for poetry. *Gleichschaltung* as a concept emerged in March/April 1933 in Germany, combining psychological and institutional processes through which political subjectivity "switched over" and was "coordinated" in the fascist state. It influenced Adorno's notion of

“identity thinking” as a combination of reason and terror. The “normalization” of unreason as a form of political subjectivity was what I feared would happen after November 2016, and which the poem contests. There are also two mentions of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, a marine disaster in the fateful year 1975, well known to the people of Michigan as an allegory of the state, and to those familiar with Gordon Lightfoot’s ballad. The extent to which unreason is a necessary element of political discourse is still an open question. The precise meaning of “Plan B” is thus hermeneutical and still unfolding; we do not yet know what it will be.