



# Niceday

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*Mechanically altered scissors etched with the word 'niceday', electrical cable.*

I almost missed my flight to France. I didn't realise that 'boarding' meant boarding the plane, and that I should already be in line, as opposed to outside the terminal. Then, as I went through security they stopped me because in my bag was a possible weapon – a pair of scissors. I told them to throw them away, hurrying to get to my plane, and they looked at me funnily and told me they couldn't open my bag and that I had to open the bag and throw them away. These had been my faithful scissors since beginning high school (a rare achievement to be sure) and I was thrown into doubt, but between the scissors and a thousand dollar plane ticket there was little choice.

One of the first things I therefore had to do overseas was to buy replacements. The scissors you see before you are this very pair, all the way from Paris, 2013. I spotted them in the office store (I do love stationery) – The store in which I also bought a favourite file that I still use to carry singularly important documents to meetings (Blue, with elastic corner straps). Their initial attraction was that they reminded me of my mother's old sewing scissors that she kept in a drawer in the kitchen in my childhood. Those intimidating scissors were bigger than this pair though, and had flaking black paint on their steel handles, and they were heavy, weighty things – like two knives. The satisfaction of their cool snip is as yet unsurpassed in all the subsequent scissors I have owned or used.

Secondarily, upon the blades of what were soon to be my new scissors, there was the small etched label: 'niceday'. I imagined the company in China who produced these scissors (well, in fact the 'de verpakkingwinkel' [the packaging store] company from the Netherlands) thinking that this would make a wonderful, optimistic brand label, something that would constantly wish people a 'niceday' no matter whether they were having one or not. It also exhibits a kind of grammatical subterfuge that I believe performs a parallel function to that of cuteness in animals: debilitating them. Like dogs that can barely breathe or with stunted legs – features that produce sympathy (or disgust) in us – this cropped sentence cries out for pity. Its inability to articulately wish us to 'have a nice day' causing the item itself to become the apparent manifestation of 'niceday', a sweet and cute short-cutting of the typical intelligent resistance one forms to commodities and their appeals to our search for happiness. Further, this niceday would operate over and over again, and seemed to find the fulfillment of its expression in the meeting and separation and subsequent repetition of the meeting and separation of two shearing blades. This motion also seemed to express the very action of my life.

I am obsessed with mechanical and materialist metaphors for existence, and while the force of industrialisation and the division of labour converts people into machines and automatic functions – that it depresses the spiritual and physical condition of people, and produces alienation – I nonetheless find in the machine the terrible grace of something so rigorous and repetitive that it is its own end. That they are built for purposes makes them merely more mystifying.

The motion of the machine is well known as a sexual metaphor ('When I was a young

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boy I loved a pumping engine, I thought it every bit as beautiful as you' [Auden]) but my favourite of these love poems to the machine is George Bataille's *Solar Anus*:

“And if the origin of things is not like the ground of the planet that seems to be the base, but like the circular movement that the planet describes around a mobile center, then a car, a clock, or a sewing machine could equally be accepted as the generative principle.”

While the idea of Niceday originated long before I read this text, its words describe the principles of this artwork more eloquently than I could ever hope to do so. Or if I did, it would be a reinterpretation, and until such a time as I am proved otherwise, a misinterpretation, of words that already more than adequately express the exact thoughts that I had in conceiving of this non-monument:

“The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive's wheels and pistons. These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other.”

This idea of the non-monument arises from Claes Oldenburg's scissors, that were supposed to replace the Washington Obelisk. They would move in long graceful arcs against the sky, trimming the clouds. I recently watched a documentary about Oldenburg that reminded me I should not watch art documentaries. His sculptures however, demonstrate a great example of a public art, an enlargement of the kind of standardized, simplified, industrially produced objects that proliferate in this age, and are therefore the exemplification of the true protagonists of our lives. Why all these large curvy steel sculptures when the forms that rule our world are the images of consumer objects, aggrandised in our minds from small frail things, into Empire?

“The man who finds himself among others is irritated because he does not know why he is not one of the others. In bed next to a [man] he loves, he forgets that he does not know why he is himself instead of the body he touches.”

These scissors then flew back from France, and I didn't make the same mistake I had made previously and pack them in my carry-on. They became my go-to scissors, have trimmed my hair and cut various packets of muesli open. After I acquired several other pairs of scissors these remained my favourite, until I sacrificed them to this artwork. They are my monument to persistence without success, in the face of unchanging odds ... But perhaps they are hopeful after all, in a manner. The machine, now liberated from the ardour of reproductive consumption into what George Bataille would call 'delirious expenditure', or unproductive consumption. The liberation of a utilitarian machine into this existence of purposeless excess.

*Graham Mathwin*

