

Preface

If you look at a city, there's no way to see it. One person can never see a city. You can miss it, hate it, or realize that it's taken something from you, but you can't go somewhere and look at it and just see it empirically. It has to be informed, imagined, by many people at a time. It's an everyday group hallucination. This novel is modeled on that phenomenon. 150 writers, professional and amateur, have contributed to it, not using the mutually blind exquisite corpse method, and not using the "may I have this dance" method where writers take turns being the author, but using the old Hollywood screenwriting system whereby a studio boss had at his disposal a "stable" of writers working simultaneously to crank out a single blockbuster, each assigned specific functions within the overall scheme. The result is generic and perfect. And Reena herself benefits from it by being more of a material entity, a being, than a character—her thoughts and actions are not spanned by any author's mind. Who pulls her strings?

Mama! An author is a routine, which makes for good conversation whenever that routine climbs down from the windswept seclusion that walks and breathes centuries of the word. Fourteen meetings with the publisher it took for this author to become convinced that *Reena Spaulings* was fit for print. Thirty-six bleary-eyed howling dinners of beer and cocaine just to prove that Reena was the product of sweat and tears and frustration. All this drilling,

convincing, testing, baiting proves that not only is an author a person who writes, but also a role that is negotiated and trained by those who choose the books one can read today. Becoming an author is a process of subjectivization, and so is becoming a soldier, becoming a cashier, becoming a potted plant.

Like the authors, the New York City depicted herein finds itself constantly exposed to the urges of “communism” – that is, to a chosen indifference to private property, a putting-in-common of the methods and means of urban life and language. Communism, it seems to say, is the only thing we share today, besides our extreme separation. Between the lines is a desire for the not normal situation, a wartime desire not for peace but for a better, fresher war that would produce the not normal situation. In everybody, even an underwear model.

Sometimes, hoping to generate a timely product for young readers today, we couldn’t help but produce something unwanted, unexpected instead. *Reena Spaulings* is not the *On The Road* or *The Great Gatsby* of these times, which is to say that these times do not need or want those kinds of books. If the Novel, today, has lost much of its seductive power and its necessity, perhaps we can fill it with something else. This is a novel that could also have been a magazine. It’s a book written by images, about images, to be read by other images, which is to say it is uninhibited and realist. Its primary content is the desire to do two things at once: to take something back and to get rid of ourselves. It took us less than three years to write. An impossible book we are now letting go of, so that Reena Spaulings can assume her final pose – along with Tristram Shandy, Edgar Huntly, Effi Briest, Silas Marner, Madame Bovary, Daisy Miller, Moby Dick, and all the others – that of literature.