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SUMMER 2014
IMMEDIACY

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On Procrastination

1. In writing about procrastination, I procrastinated heavily. It wasn't deliberate or ironic; I just couldn't make myself begin...

2. I will not make a case for procrastination, which is often a self-destructive—or at least counter-productive—indulgence in behavior. Nor will I make suggestions on how to overcome it, as the Internet is already full of practical solutions (watch out, I'm told that surfing the web is a delaying tactic). Rather, this will be an inquiry into procrastination's relationship with and to productivity and immediacy

3. Procrastination is a condition that suggests something about the nature of action and humans' relationships to work. So many of us put things off, avoiding certain efforts even if they don't actually involve much suffering. Rest assured that yours is not a moral failing but a complex physiological issue fettered to inner feelings, fears, memories, hopes, doubts, and pressures. It's a problem between one's self and one's self; I can't imagine a more intimate relationship.

Carmen Winant

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4. What's the difference between procrastination and perfectionism? On their surface they seem antithetical. But procrastination isn't laziness, and perfectionism hardly gets things done quickly; as a result they have a similar relationship to productivity. Elizabeth Bishop, a noted perfectionist, spent twenty years working on a single poem, *The Moose*. (Bishop had incredibly high standards and as a result her collected poems—her life's work—number under a hundred.) Might the perfectionist be understood, in this sense, as a symptomatic procrastinator? Two sides of the same coin: the fear of starting and the fear of finishing.

5. There is also a matter of having eccentric habits. Franz Kafka, for instance, would not begin writing until 11 PM (he took lunch at 3:30 PM and religiously napped until 7:30 PM). Whether or not this is procrastination, a keen knowledge of one's own productive affinities, or both, I'm not sure. I've been told that Gertrude Stein only worked thirty minutes a day, and she wrote over four-dozen books. These are creative producers who put off their work with due reason. They withheld. They waited for and courted the immediate.

6. What an idea: grooming urgency to strike; taming the muse; opening a window.

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7. Walter Benjamin was in this camp. He believed that procrastination was an active form of thinking (and in this sense, an entirely productive use of time and creative energy). In his text *The Writer's Technique in Thirteen Propositions*, Benjamin stated that the writer should in fact put off setting pen to page for as long as possible, letting his or her idea germinate before fixing it in the tangible world and thereby halting its growth. In this same set of propositions, Benjamin encouraged writers to be choosy with their materials, to read their work aloud to "sharpen the inner ear" (ideally in the "audible silence of night" or amongst "the murmur of voices"), to never consider a work to be finished until it has been sat up all night with, and when unsure about one's ideas, to simply re-write what has already been written.

8. Benjamin never finished *The Arcades Project* (also known as *Passagenwerk*)—a collection of pre-Postmodern writings on nineteenth-century Parisian city life—that he famously worked on for thirteen long years, between 1927 and 1940, the year he died. Though this also might have something to do with the war.

9. I asked two people I respect what they think about procrastination. The first said: it's a problem of fragmented agency. The second said: it's about death.

10. I'm told that men procrastinate getting married because they are afraid of commitment and women procrastinate having children because they want to have careers. Here are the things I procrastinate on, perhaps you can relate: paying (certain) bills, taking showers, calling my mother, contributing to organizations that do good, writing this piece. I eventually force the words.