



Highlights of 2016

Charlotte Mandell, Dan Fox, Shaun Whiteside and Jen Calleja on their highlights of the year.

As 2016 finally teeters on its last legs, we decided to take a look back over a few of the year's highlights for us. This year we were proud to publish excellent essays by Dan Fox, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Svetlana Alexievich, and Ben Lerner; as well as works of fiction by John Keene, Ed Atkins, Clemens Meyer, and Agustín Fernández Mallo with the second installment of his brilliant *Nocilla* trilogy.

For this blog post we asked a few of our translators, and an author, to reminisce over some of their own cultural highlights of 2016: Charlotte Mandell, Shaun Whiteside, Jen Calleja, and Dan Fox tell us about their most memorable experiences of the year in literature, music, and the arts.

Dan:

At the start of BS Johnson's pitch-black comic novel *Christy Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973), the book's anti-hero, Christy, begins his adventure by taking an accountancy course. Here he learns the principle of double-entry bookkeeping: for every debit, there must be a corresponding credit. Christy is a miserable young man who rationalizes his dreary lot with the belief that the world has conspired against him. Deciding that the metaphysical books need to be balanced, he begins to apply the double-entry system to his life. Christy draws up a two-column ledger: one for 'Aggravations', the other for 'Recompense.' Each time life aggravates or 'debts' him he awards himself recompense, usually an act of minor vandalism. When for instance, he is forced to take a detour on his way to work, his compensation is to scratch the expensive stonework of a nearby building. As his sense of aggravation grows larger, the credit he demands becomes more gruesome.

What, I wonder, would the accounts look like for the calendrical crock of cowshit that called itself 2016?

AGGRAVATIONS

Donald Trump and related misery
Neo-fascism
Aleppo
Brexit
Zika
Post-truth politics
Standing Rock
Climate change

RECOMPENSE

22% of Great Barrier Reef coral dead
Record decline in Arctic sea ice
Pulse nightclub shooting, Orlando
Murder of Jo Cox
Death of David Bowie
Death of Prince
Death of Pauline Oliveros
Death of Sonia Rykiel
Death of Leonard Cohen
Death of Leonard of Mayfair
Death of Malick Sidibe
Death of Alan Vega
Death of Doris Lamar-McLemore (last speaker of the Wichita language)
Death of William Christenberry
Death of Jenny Diski
Death of Victoria Wood
Death of Harper Lee
Death of William Trevor
Death of Sharon Jones
Death of Kenny Baker
Death of David Mancuso
Death of Raoul Coutard
Death of Elaine Lustig Cohen
Death of David Antin
Death of Dario Fo
Death of Prince Buster
Death of Don Buchla
Death of Edward Albee
Death of Elie Wiesel
Death of Caroline Ahearne
Death of Abbas Kiarostami
Death of Billy Name
Death of Tunga
Death of Peter Shaffer
Death of Bernie Worrell
Death of Tony Feher
Death of Alvin Toffler
Death of Carla Lane
Death of Tony Conrad
Death of Ken Adam
Death of Merle Haggard
Death of Umberto Eco
Death of Pierre Boulez
Death of Alan Rickman
Death of Terry Wogan
Death of Jacques Rivette
Death of Zsa Zsa Gabor
Death of Scooter, the oldest cat in the USA

This myopically Western-centric and mostly arts-fixated list could go on. I am stumped for 'Recompense' line items that could truly balance the bereavement, fear, heartbreak and anger that the past year has brought. Nothing on my roll-call of admiration and pleasure is going to stop climate denial or bring down Donald Trump. But these talismans of open-minded thought, empathy and action serve as a reminder for me to keep going.

Exhibitions:

Denzil Forrester, White Columns, New York, and Tramps, London
Mark Leckey, 'Containers and Their Drivers', MoMA PS1, New York
Marc Camille Chaimowicz, The Serpentine Gallery, London
Paulina Olowaska, Metro Pictures, New York
Bruce Conner, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Jessi Reeves, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York
Danny Lyon, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Kerry James Marshall, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
Diane Simpson, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
Nicole Eisenman, New Museum and Anton Kern Gallery, New York
Lukas Duwenhogger, Artists Space, New York

Books:

'The Selfishness of Others: An Essay on the Fear of Narcissim' by Kristin Dombek
'Respectable: The Experience of Class' by Lynsey Hanley
'The Complete Madame Realism and Other Stories' by Lynne Tillman
'Here is Information. Mobilize.' by Ian White

Film:

'Arrival'
'Embrace of the Serpent'
'A Bigger Splash'
'Moonlight'

Television:

'Stranger Things'
'Black Mirror'
'Atlanta'
'Camping'
'Captain Fantastic'

Music:

'Lodestar', Shirley Collins
'Last Signs of Speed', Eli Keszler
'Juarez' and 'Lubbock (on everything)', Terry Allen
'We Got It from Here... Thank You 4 Your Service', A Tribe Called Quest

Borealis Festival, Bergen. (At this small, yet brilliant music festival, I discovered the stunningly strange father and daughter improvised pop duo Yeah You; a blistering footwork set from Jlin, the hypnotic Egyptian Females Experimental Music Session, and the premiere of Object Collection's new opera 'It's All True' – based on the complete archive of recorded gigs by the post-hardcore band Fugazi.)

The two works that made the biggest impression on me bookended the year. In January, it was a song: 'I Can't Give Everything Away', the final cut on David Bowie's final curtain album, *Blackstar*, released days before his death. Opening with warm string synths in respirating refrain, as if struggling for breath, and a plaintive harmonica line that directly echoes Bowie's 1977 track 'A New Career in a New Town' (what better description could there be for an afterlife?), the song begins with an admission with anxiety about the future; 'I know something's very wrong...' Over skittering drums, and an increasingly frenetic saxophone, the words 'I can't give everything away' are a line being drawn between the personal and private, or a defiant assertion of personal sovereignty. I've given you all the love I can, it seems to say, but now I must take care of myself or I will be reduced to nothing.

In December I saw Arthur Jafa's seven-and-a-half minute video 'Love is the Message, The Message is Death' at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York. Cut to Kanye West's song 'Ultralight Beam', Jafa's video pulls together reportage footage, cellphone video, and archival film of police shootings, civil rights marches, block parties, iconic performances by black musicians, and the burning surface of the sun. West's sparse, roboticized gospel track – problematised by the singer's recent support of Donald Trump – wrings pathos from the multiple video textures on screen, from the high-res to the low-grade and pixellated. Jafa's film has the quality of a trailer for a documentary, a tantalising promise of a longer cinematic survey of African American social history, but its compressed expression of the complexities, contradictions, tragedies and triumphs of the black experience in the USA is gut-wrenching. I don't know what could possibly balance the books.

Dan Fox is a writer, musician, and co-editor of frieze magazine, Europe's foremost magazine of art and culture. He is based in New York, and has published Pretentiousness: Why it Matters this year with Fitzcarraldo Editions.