

Art of Olive Green

Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

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Jaywalking as character study

Posted by *getraer* on *December 27, 2013*

Posted in: Culture crit, In the Field. Tagged: scooter, traffic, urban. Leave a comment

This is the kind of problem-solving that drew me to social psychology long ago:

While navigating my scooter through Manhattan traffic today, I wondered whether pedestrians, and by extension people, fall into three broad categories. I must judge these quickly every day because my life may depend on it.

The crosswalk is possibly the most unpredictable place on a street because of certain crowd dynamics. I've been doing this for over a decade and think I now identify agents in femtoseconds.

The first people into the breach always make their own decisions, even if they're wrong. Type A (as it were) never get out of your way because they've never been hit by anything harder than their sense of self. A couple of these people jaywalking are all it takes to catalyze the motion of the second type.

These would never strike out alone, but are quicker to follow distinct leaders than the third type. They seem more reflective than Type A and are more risk-averse, or perhaps less driven; they seem to watch the actions of As and crossing circumstances equally. In this they may be happy to let someone else blaze the trail, take the largest risk and do the most thinking—but at least the movement of Types B is circumspect once begun.

The carelessness of the third type in groups may be responsible for much of bulk human woe. Galvanized by Types A and B, Type C surges with neither the reflection of B nor the initiative and speed of A. Once a critical mass of Types A & B is reached there is a general outpouring of Cs as if a dam has broken. Dull and herdlike, they are least likely to consider the conditions that informed the decisions of A and B. They usually look only ahead and their response time is inversely proportional to the number of people immediately in front of them. Because of this, if you suddenly find yourself approaching a jaywalker-colonized crosswalk and unable to stop, you should aim for the Type A at front. The risk of impact is least between this person(s) and the flanking Types B. The slowest and most oblivious Cs will be clustered towards the rear, texting with headphones in and only bobbing on the meatrivver to the other side's concrete.

Most hazardous is that each successive type is worse at instantaneous decision than the one preceding. If your timing through an intersection brings you towards the end of a surge, all your bell-ringing and screaming will not save you from collision. On the offchance a Type C sees you, he will likely deer up and let you decide whether to hit him or one of his cohorts immediately adjacent. Of course at that point the population density obviates all choice...not unlike life.