

Fischli & Weiss Nutshot – Jeff Kinkle



A week ago a new viral video appeared on various humor sites under different variations of the title [Rube Goldberg Nutshot](#). Probably inspired by the Swiss artist duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss's famous video work [The Way Things Go](#) (1987), the video features a group of kids setting in motion a complex series of chain reactions that lead to a young man being hit in the testicles with a swinging boot attached to a pole. The video has the same DIY aesthetic of the Fischli & Weiss video and the same idea of harnessing the – here in the end violent – energy of collapse. The cameraman intentionally frustrates the viewer by not showing the full extent of their contraption, but we do see a bowling ball falling from a roof, which lands on a shovel, that knocks down a row of folding chairs, which then knocks a burning rag onto a wooden ladder soaked with lighter fluid. The flames rapidly climb the ladder, but we cannot see to what effect as the cameraman turns his attentions to the victim of this deliberately over-engineered apparatus. The young man about to be struck stares at the boot in determined anticipation and he adjusts his stance – one wonders whether to blunt or exacerbate the imminent pain. The boot hangs for what feels like an eternity. The tension is palpable, intensified by the fact that we cannot see the work the fire is doing off screen, or how many steps in this series of chain reactions we're missing. Finally the boot is released, causing the nutshot and the collapse of the sturdy young man.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard claimed that “Boredom is the root of all evil.” Here though, boredom, or perhaps the fight against boredom, is framed as the generator of invention. If boredom is indeed evil, it is to be struggled through and grappled with, not simply sidestepped or repressed. If their passion had been destroyed momentarily and boredom temporarily triumphed, it is here reborn in the passion for destruction.

The creators of *Rube Goldberg Nutshot* attempt to recapture the legacy of Fischli & Weiss' video after its [much-lauded corporate recuperation by Honda](#) a few years back (Fischli & Weiss had [threatened legal action](#)). Moreover, against Honda, it can be read as a neo-luddic critique of the mechanization of labor and everyday life, the lesson being that no matter how creatively one utilizes machinic technology, it always ultimately de-vitalizes its human appendage. The Honda ad ends with a smarmy corporate voice exclaiming, “Isn't it nice when things just work.” The message of *Rube Goldberg Nutshot* is clear: not always.

The dull thud and muted groans of the contraption's victim echo Johnny Rotten's iconoclastic cackle at the beginning of "[Anarchy in the UK](#)" or perhaps more appropriately the laugh of Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) [when beaten into a bloody pulp by the gangster in Fight Club](#). This has nothing to do with laughter *per se* as what is striking about the video is that no one really laughs, there is just awkward coughing and someone advising, "Put [the fire] out." Instead of the machismo of the [testicle thwacking torture scene](#) from *Casino Royale*, the video feels more masochistic and one can imagine all of the participants in the contraption's creation lining up to be struck, one after another.

Ultimately, however, beyond these themes of [subjective destitution](#), for anyone not already hardened by the emptiness of life, *Rube Goldberg Nutshot* is a paean to creativity and innovation – the embodiment of what idle hands can produce.

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