

THE VOLCANO
THE TORNADO
&
THE HOURGLASS




ADRIEN CASEY

A NOTE ON THE COST OF THIS E-BOOK

or

EXPLORING OTHER ECONOMIC MODELS IN THE AGE OF

- a) *the internet*
- b) *artists' works existing as digital files*
- c) *the push for solidarity in reducing the wealth gap through nonviolence*



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THE VOLCANO
THE TORNADO
&
THE HOURGLASS

ADRIEN CASEY

IF A BREAST IS THE ARK

6,500,000,000,000

IN LOVING MEMORY OF ZANDER VAUBEL

1984 - 2006



In view of the fact that human consciousness is divided between the desire to serve the deity and the impulse toward disobedience, it is only logical that the God in whose image we are said to be made would be equally paradoxical.

— JANET O. DALLETT

[...] And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things. Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

— WILLIAM BLAKE



Until the kings become philosophers, or else the philosophers kings, civilizations will exist in a state of tumult.

— MARCUS AURELIUS

INTRODUCTION



Right. Waking up and crossing the room & tripping over my shoes in the process, I literally stumbled upon the fact that I was still drunk.

And I can't say it didn't hurt more than a little. I undid the blinds to let in some light to survey the damage: pain for certain—but, luckily, nothing major. A minor scrape and perhaps a bruise to come; the not-yet-fully-dissipated numbness of sleep remained, however, on my side. What boded less well was a stack of books, now no longer stacked: pages of some postmodernist writings and pages of some writings on the Buddha went jammed into each other, playing cards mid-shuffle, like. It also seemed that I damaged my friend's *Contemporary Cultural Studies Reader*, the cover of which opened and bent violently upon *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, which now had a creased one, too. Three foreign (five-dollars' worth of, if I recall) Cézanne postcards tucked into & exceeding the boundaries of a souvenir copy of the Constitution were likely as bent as the little booklet itself. All of this for the love of alcohol. Then I realized I was bleeding. Muttering neologized curse words with a slight smile (the situation's humor had to be admitted, if only by imagining it seen from an outsider's perspective), I looked outside of the window to see if I'd been seen by a neighbor in the apartment across the way.

[*This short interjection is one of the few of its kind in this book. It aims only to ensure that any reading of what's written above has noted: the current "mode" of Western culture; a major*

religion of Eastern origin (that doesn't necessarily require belief, only understanding & practice— and hence, which needn't be accessed as a religion); culture itself & culture's looking at itself; the cultural/ social feminine; art; the United States and politics; & love. There's furthermore the notion of evolution into the five-fold, the idea of quintessence. And yet also at this key moment of incipient narrative onset: another symbol softly lands upon another symbol, looking the protagonist straight in the eyes...]

As suddenly as it was strangely, a small brown dove landed upon the windowsill, and looked me straight in the eyes. Seemingly querying my stupor. The appearance of which was probably doubled due to my only half-opened eyes, which'd yet to be reconciled with the full light of day. Its perfectly round eyes, round, large, and black, were entirely of the fathomless depth that, with persons, is found only in the center.

It was extremely interesting, looking at this bird looking at me, and me just looking at this bird. Rather especially surreal given that it was my first intentional activity of the day, and— I'd almost forgot, until I again felt— the whole time I lightly bled from the hand. And to my dismay: upon my favorite shoes, no less. *Fucking shit*, I noted in thought. As I took note of my situation, the bird moved its head, surveying what I surveyed, and in fact seemed to simultaneously take note of what I was taking note of, too. All very pleasantly curious, to say the least. Communication with animals, and all. By this token, it was also endearing for an unspoken reason: having established a kind of spontaneous, wordless rapport with the dove— though bleeding the whole time and still bleeding— I didn't want to just run off without somehow explaining to the bird *why* I had to be so soon in parting. And yet: with but the very thought of wishing to explain my need of leaving the room in order to tend to my wound: the dove ascended, up from the sill & into the air, having understood perfectly.

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A BOOK OF NONFICTION & FICTION IN 156 PIECES

Like when I used to go up on my roof and look over to Brooklyn, over all of the buildings and a river, at her sleeping.

I'd do this late, after we'd talked on the phone for awhile & said our goodnights and I knew she was sleeping. It felt better going up and looking; alive & with purpose, secure. Somehow in a glance taking in proof of thousands of lives— lit windows, airplane lights, traffic headlights & taillights, etc.— and having the imagined image of her nestled somewhere within it— more made sense, could be loved.

But the broken heart, and how it collapses: I shall liken it to a dead star, the result of which is a vacuum, consuming indiscriminately everything and all without even a superstring-sized shred of logic whatsoever at all. This has me feeling worn and getting told I look worn— weight gained and facial expression lost. How it is that the cost of resignation to life is typically higher than when one stays engaged in the game: the alcohol, the cigarettes, the non-nutritional food: it all adds up, exacts its toll; body & wallet both.

The word *pleasant*. How it floats (as if either on air or upon water). Pleasant is best understood by how what's around it moves, the air or the water— picture a balloon, say. By contrast, *excited* or *depressed* are words the feeling of which comes directly from the subject. An excited or depressed person exudes the mood; a pleasant person is more carried aloft by it. (So, when things are pleasant, two peoples' lives move together because that's simply what they do, no one really having to try.)

Love is the knowing of when to put her photograph into your wallet & the how and when of taking it out. Presently, this is how I opt to define love.

There was very little writing of love while we dated, but now that we don't there's been a fair bit. I think of Goethe and *Werther*, and some other authors and books, and it occurs to me that much of the better writing on love is written in love's absence. (Certainly, such is often the case with songs.) Of course, this also makes sense: if only because it's generally impossible to know the full nature of something when you're living right inside of it— one of life's paradoxes, I suppose.

[As I reread these pages and assemble this book, it dawns on me now, fully in the manner of epiphany, that: as it is with writing & love, so it is with writing & democracy.]

2 | FEBRUARY 15, 2003

On the north sidewalk of 24th Street between 5th & 6th, detained by the police, there are several hundred of us standing together within barricades and against a wall.

A group of traffic police led us down the street, detaching us from the rest of the march to the UN, saying it was a detour. Traffic reasons, I supposed. We obliged with little option. And as we approached the other end of the street: they blocked it off. It was all very unexpected, and then other police suddenly came out from around the corner. Before we knew what was going on, they then barricaded the end whence we came, as well. There were officers on horses, motorcycles. On foot and inside of vehicles. They forced us all to the sidewalk— largely under some scaffolding— pushing us close together as they erected a third and final barricade. It didn't take us long to understand, however with surprise: that they'd corralled us, that we were corralled. Several hundred of us, now cut off from the thousands of others en route to the UN.

But our detention was only the first surprise, and perhaps not as shocking as the second: a police officer with a camera stepped from & climbed atop a special operations van. Then there appeared other officers with cameras. Still cameras and video cameras: they had confined us so as to better photograph us, to have a more precise inventory of our images for the purpose of keeping police records.

We, against the war— and therefore: to be photographed by the police. Basically, to be assured: that when you have a dissenting opinion, we'll be watching, documenting.

And they were clever: they waited twenty or thirty minutes before taking their pictures and video: thereby allowing the protest leaders & the most vociferous to filter to the corral's edges. For a time, they even released (in single-file lines of five or six) the front-most & loudest of the protesters: so as to videotape & photograph them singly as they walked away.

For most of the hour of our detainment in which our right to peaceful protest was unabashedly violated, I simply stood stunned by my new understanding of things. The most disturbing part is what I best remember: my friend Andy being released from the corral in one of the single-file lines: just the image of him walking about 100 feet to 6th Ave, during which time several officers with still & video cameras recorded his image.

I imagine those headshot images — and my own in a crowd photograph — lying in manila folders somewhere in some NYPD filing cabinet. Yet it was the police who broke the law that day — against their own beliefs, some of them probably — not us. There's no reason for those photos to exist.

3

Some problems appear only with proximity, like those little clouds of tiny insects in summer air. Also the smell in one's nose that is the smell of sickness. The scent of absence, vacuity; the absence of one's own health, the space thereby left, perhaps; it's a sort of

pallid translucency that marks the onset of sickness. Into a folded Kleenex doth lands the Rorschach blotch of my sneeze.

And that the water of the first shower of the day in the building is heard from behind its walls. There're no roosters in cities, just alarm clocks, traffic, and building water's sound. I don't need something to wake me. Really, I just need something to mark the time, preferably smoothly. I like the sound of the water, prefer it to other sounds.

4

Yet the city can take on terrifying proportions, especially Saturday and Sunday mornings when couples walk hand in hand or arm in arm, their bed sheets still dragging at their ankles for people the likes of me to trip upon. It's not simply accepting that she's off, but also (or, more) accepting that, on any given morning, she and some he have bed sheets which trail behind.

Turning off your cellphone to ensure the silence is just a method of taking control of silence, rather than being its victim.

There's a sort of unsteady descent, the full nature of which is beyond my understanding, but the weight of which is certainly felt daily. And a view outside won't always tell anything— one's stared-at reflection upon an elevator's mirrored walls, the unchanging & seamless cloudwhite beyond an airplane window— yet the sense of falling is an internal one.

5

That chance should play such a large role in human life should be of no surprise at all, insofar as it's the nature of Earth itself. To be sure, it is only by chance that our Earth happens to be the perfect, conducive-to-life distance from the sun, and that the entire sequence of events having resulted in our having water, soil, & an atmosphere was ever able to occur in the first place.

Chance is pretty much how and why we were born, and is oftentimes how we grow & get by. This isn't to snub the value of intention; it's just to say that chance & intention are two sides of the same coin. The very fact of Earth is a record of the conception, survival, ascendancy, and continuity of the mathematically

almost-impossibly-unlikely. (In essence, causality is the (obsessive-compulsive) desire to see what came before what *is*. It is the need to know *why*— and as such, is restless. *It assumes that the world is like humans; however, humans are like the world*— which remains an incredibly unknown place.)

§

I am the outcome of the coming together of variables beyond my control. My parents' conception & birth of me, my earliest influences & education: I had no control over. Quite plainly I am, in effect, chance incarnate. With this being the case, it's somewhat illogical to disregard chance, insofar as it's illogical to disregard one's own history.

And while as an adult I now make most all choices about my life, I cannot fully control the things that happen to me, things I witness and am introduced to.

6

Perspicacity comes in waves, and so has its undertow.

Aspects of the intellectual life sometimes remind me of those specialized, rounded tops (invented by someone who must know a fair bit of math): the ones that spin & spin until turning themselves upside down, and then continue to spin upside down upon their stems for awhile longer yet, until at last collapsing upon their sides.

The Thinker was concealing a boner.

7

Earlier, I was thinking of how a human lifetime is a substantial period of time, as it means (if we assume a lifetime to be 70 years) that a lifetime is 1/29th of all AD years that have passed into existence in the past 2008 years ($2008 \div 70 = 28.685714$).

The thought brought the following image to mind: of myself at the beginning of a line of 30 people, and looking back— just fifty feet or so— to the 30th person: at a someone who lived in BC times; before the time of Jesus Christ.

· · ·

As regards the perennially vague & eternally pertinent question of “the meaning of life”: one has a lifetime to answer the question, or answer to it. And the time frame may seem like a lot. But when one sees that a lifetime is only as long as a lifespan, one comes closer to understanding just how short it all really is.

8 | MISTA ANT & THE DINOSAUR (MISTA ANT’S DEBUT)

Mista Ant looked up from his anthill and saw a woman in a red velvet dress leaning out & looking down from an apartment window high above. He then went down into the Earth, to a depth equidistant to her height, where laid the bones of dinosaurs. Would these bones ever be discovered by humankind, Mista Ant did not know. He tunneled to the jaw — a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, it was. *What were dinosaurs!* Mista Ant knew & did not. What were people. He and they themselves scarcely knew.

He tunneled to the jaw, and stood there looking from betwixt the dead & gaping jaws of its still-manifest & many-toothed ferocity. Then he turned & looked straight back the length of the tunnel to the woman in the apartment. What did she know. *What* did she know. What did *she* know. What *did* she know. What did she *know*. In his head, Mista Ant shifted the emphasis of the words of his thought, to see how or if this affected it, whether it offered any answers.

9

Upon seeing either a young child or a shooting star, my immediate response is to smile — I don’t know when this started; it hasn’t always been the case. It feels like a smile of recognition — though I can’t fully explain this. (In Egyptian, “priest” means “star watcher” — I learned this at the Royal Observatory in England, standing at the prime meridian of the world.) To find beauty is to agree with, insofar as seeing can be understood as a kind of thinking.

10

You feel the rain. And looking up at the clouds it’s impossible to decipher where the rain comes out of. When love is lost it is often impossible to determine where it left out of — you just feel it.

I just found a piece of Amber's hair on me. How can one throw such a thing out?

But one can.

Time on the hands. Cock there, too.

11

Do I seem to need to understand the mechanics of life to engage in life? Yet this—if I'm to engage in life's full spectrum— isn't possible.

Things've always made more sense by the sea. The endlessly watchable surface of water makes sense because the eyes, like any other part of our body, like it when caressed. The same body of water can range from placid to violent in mere moments: but water's tendency is towards placidity. And what's underwater has a logic all of its own, related to but differentiated from ours: beneath this surface it's simply another world. Sea animals travel in all directions and don't have to look like anything, simply assuming whatever form they do. Jellyfish. Clams and other mollusks, which die into varying seashells. Starfish (if you hold a living one, it's stunning watching the vast, synchronized movements of its underside). (Actually, that whole BBC series *The Blue Planet* is fucking amazing, nuff said.)

People have died in the sea. I wonder about the very first drowning, the first time a human head went under and didn't resurface— I know there must've been witnesses on the shore, who saw. And upon seeing, then felt, then waited... until they knew, and felt again, you know.

12 | IN WHICH THE AUTHOR MAKES A CUP OF TEA

I make a cup of Irish breakfast tea, taking its paper envelope back to my desk, and then start cutting out the letters with an x-acto, until each of the seventeen letters in "Irish breakfast tea" is unto itself. Then I push them about.

It's fun pushing letters about, discovering new words from old. (!!) Of late there's been the incipient

sense of an inner cyclone, like in autumn when on sidewalks there's that small dance of leaves, their timorous hesitancy, that little dance of leaves prefiguring the spiral prefiguring the scattering. It's— everything's— !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!?!!?!!?!!?!!!!!! . *Just the nature of this distance felt from myself, terrifyingly simultaneously ethereal & tangible*: a distance like looking up through space to the stars, or down Niagara Falls to the bottom, at the river there below again. Having such a distance within oneself, and only being able to see yourself as being across it, at the other side, a place to be reached.

After a short period of time transposing, the incomplete sentence *If a breast is the ark* stares up at me; a question posed to myself, to smile over. (!) Yes.

I fetch an index card & some glue to preserve the love. Upon the reverse, I write the current population of the world, *six billion five hundred fucking million...*

13

Two definitions I recently heard and liked: *crisis: when material progress moves ahead of understanding*; and, *culture: what you grow in a petri dish*.

Quite possibly the future of humanity necessarily entails the rejection of culture as we know it. Hand in hand with this: is the principle of how nothing lasts as long as its aftereffects. As well as: how it happens that in creating (or allowing) conditions favorable to growth, one generally must create (or allow) the very conditions one is traditionally of an unfavorable opinion towards. Or, at the least: conditions one is uncomfortable with.

14

I watch the city begin disappearing, in waning degrees of opacity, a fog setting upon and throughout the city, taking also the nightclouds from sight. Tens of thousands of lives vanished under an unknown weight of suspended water; were it all condensed into a tank, its weight would be tons. Molecules innumerable,

and all having cycled through space billions of years prior to the beginning of recorded time— they’ve passed through the blood of dinosaurs, and more recently through beer bottles, and most recently pissed from my bladder; and all this after having come from the oceans & seas, rivers, clouds, and all of the other places where water resides. Now: these molecules comprise a clod of steel wool rubbing away the definition from all of Manhattan’s many hard edges; tonight, they make for a more livable vision, particularly so with so many softened lights illuminated from within it.

The clock on the ConEdison building turns. The city’s all but disappeared within the fog. Brooklyn’s already very far gone, and I decide to take comfort in thinking of how it’s somewhat paradoxical— if only in language *language: my fail-safe; my home of homes*— that everything evaporates in all of the moisture.

15 | THE WHISTLING RIVER

This evening, the river whistles to me. Cold, windy, deserted, and the Charles River is here freezing over. The ice slowly grows into the river’s middle, though is largely fractured most everywhere— so there’re hundreds of smaller pieces, all spaced inches (or less) from one another. As the river moves, the edges of all of the pieces undulate with the current, rubbing against one another in unison. And then there’s the wind blowing over them all, with their shifting heights, per the current’s movement. Very occasionally a gigantic air bubble slips from underneath the ice.

The sound of the wind across the undulating ice, coupled with the bellowy-squeak sound of ice-against-ice & the now-and-again balwooop-sound of an air bubble escaping: makes for the eeriest, most entrancing & vast & barren & ultimately-futile-to-attempt-to-describe soundscape: and so I just stood there listening, must’ve stood there for twenty minutes, freezing.

What would a primitive man think? That the gods were speaking to him? Would he read into it all some kind of a sign? He doesn’t know what I know, my having a bit of knowledge about the natural

sciences, as well as enough of a scientific mind to understand exactly how, causally, this sound has been made.

Yet a scientific man also misses the point if, in his experience of such an occurrence, all he does is think to himself how, by nature's laws, such an occurrence occurs. Should all he do be to rationalize the experience, he fails to feel the fullness of what the occurrence offers: and thus misses the fuller point...? For humankind must better merge both analytical understanding & the wonder of the primitive* — *wonder* being the critical term here, insofar as the sense of wonder is the foundation for our connection to the world.

16

So I called her anyway, not necessarily against my better judgment, but perhaps against the grain, as can happen with feelings coming out of the woodwork again. Hung up at her voicemail. Just as well: we can't talk; the conversation would be the mutually unpleasurable process of my putting words into her mouth. What of this desire? To put words into the face before you, where you once had but no longer have your lips? I'd end up wanting to slam down the phone, but you can't even do that these days: in the electronic age, everything is ended with the touch of a button.

The last time we spoke, respective kissing sounds ended our conversation: the sound of a "smooch" is oddly akin to a rapidly deflating tire; the phrase "sizzle of romance" elicits the sound of a cigarette extinguished in drink.

§

Listening to classical music through the door left open, over the tinkle of piss.

The nights. Things are always funny & sometimes aren't at all. But there you are. And I've always been here, anyway, I've said. To feel this constantly. Just looking at a map of New

* By "primitive" it's meant: the state of feeling sans thinking—the heart wholly taken & moved by natural phenomena, having a total absence of intellectual interruption.

York City. So many people. To think I was rattling a rattle in a crib, or nursing upon my mother's breast. Life is the promise & the renegeing of the promise, & the promise again.

Does x open a new chapter in my life? Or only paraphrase previous sentences? Life— the body— has limits. There's only so much one can do to one's body. There's only so much of a beating a body can take. Life begins from the middle that's the start. The world is invented every second, moment.

Would the author of *Go Ask Alice* ever have guessed that her words would lie on the same shelf as Aurelius in my library? I doubt it. She never would have dreamed.

17 | MISTA ANT'S HOME

Under the earth. Mista Ant lived, of course, in the snaking subterranean tunnels of the ant colony. Were it possible to look at his home in cross-section (picture an ant farm, say), the totality of the paths of the ants' territory would appear, at first glance, to resemble the hieroglyphs of the ancients. And the home's entrance— the anthill— in cross-section could be likened to a human breast, the ant tunnels appearing quite like the lactiferous ducts through which milk travels, out of the nipple & into the world.

18

That people think they are separate from the Earth: how could this ever happen? *The only remedy is the image*. The image is the only thing between ourselves & the Earth, the only thing between the material and the immaterial. Science & art have created this image for ages, will continue creating this image for ages to come. And the image created— like everything ever created— will persist in its evolution. *This image of connection must be made*.

19 | PLASTIC AND JUMPING

I propose that two formidable "problems" obfuscating people's understanding of the nature of life— *and thereby threatening the continuity thereof*— are 1) *plastic*, and 2) *our ability to jump off of the ground*.

. . .

1) This is my query regarding plastic: is it possible that, on a level of (or just below) thought: could one's considerations of plastic elicit praise of human ingenuity to a degree stating— explicitly or implicitly— that: *human ingenuity is somehow apart from or above the level of the Earth?*

This isn't a callous pondering. I only wonder if, for many people, plastic serves— on however subtle a level— as a kind of "proof" that humankind is somehow superior to Earth & nature? Insofar as humankind has created a substance able to mimic nature's forms, and, what's more, a substance capable of creating new forms which natural materials could never?

2) And this is my issue with jumping: I wonder if the mistaken belief of our separateness is also partially founded in the fact that we can leave (i.e., *separate ourselves from*) the Earth's surface, as we quite often do via sprightly knees, sometimes even with skateboards, bicycles, and other wonderful, partly-made-of-plastic things, like 747s, rocket ships, or whatever else? Indeed, we are separate; yet simultaneously, we're inseparable from Earth all the same. Were our eyes capable of seeing at the atomic level— viewing the atoms comprising us, the air, & everything else on Earth— *always*: the vision produced would be that of *there being no difference between ourselves and anything else*. Not a rock, cloud, table, frog, computer, other person, or anything else at all.

20 | MISTA ANT OSTRACIZED

Mista Ant longed to tell the world something of the truth. But he felt that, for his words, the world would reject him. And so— in a darker moment, as sometimes happens— he phrased aloud to himself the following query: *Truth, are you not like a land mine? Planted by & for the purposes of adults, yet left for other generations' children to discover? Discover at the last moment possible for discovery?*

Quite unknown to Mista Ant, his words had been overheard by a partially underground bird. And his burrowed friend Ostrich had something to say about them: *But my dear Ant! Those who*

lay large eggs must expect to be ostracized! All great minds were born “at the wrong time” — is this not much of what makes them great? And when they die, they die like dandelions... know that there’s a breath which kisses the dandelion to pieces — & it’s for the wish. This breath is change’s wind, which brings the birth of the great mind’s followers — the wish, of course, is the great mind’s work. Mista Ant looked into Ostrich’s dark and golden eyes as he continued. And while the pace of change may at first seem glacial... do you not intend to form new continents? The sea brings everything together faster than you think.

21 | MASTURBATING, AS IT WERE

It frequently seems that the only occasion when people are guaranteed to pay attention to the matter at hand is when masturbating. Of course if you hurl a projectile at them, it can be expected they’ll react to deflect it. But excepting actions protecting from immediate harm & those providing immediate pleasure (however ephemeral): people are pretty far from guaranteed to act before the reality of a given situation really sets in. And sometimes at such a point, evasive action is no longer possible.

This is problematic to say the least. To be sure, self-interest & self-defense make perfect sense: we need to look out for ourselves. Self-interest & self-preservation are, without doubt, necessary to life. And nothing’s inherently wrong with pleasuring oneself, no matter how fleeting the feeling. What’s tricky is when things are compounded as follows: when the form of self-pleasuring simultaneously affects the distant or not-so-distant future in a not-so-good or even devastating manner. The following is a quote from a person involved in leading our nation:

“Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue.”

—FRANK LUNTZ, Republican strategist
(quoted in a *New York Times* editorial)

. . .

Does not an intelligent one fail to feel the precipice behind
the mirage?

22

)i(<—does that not look like a butterfly?
It looks precisely like one, no? Don't you think?

[*Though Tara said it looked like a woman's spread legs, vagina &
clit...*]

23

I went up onto the roof for a cigarette and a beer, and it occurred
to me that two things I've needed most in life— or've relied
upon most in my history of making things— have been a view
& a substance. And now when I smoke and drink and look,
the emotive surge towards existential contemplation & creation
is unmistakable, is a permanent import of the drugs; a beloved
import, though not without problems: *addiction*.

I imagine now: the view of our world, nestled snugly in its
suspendedness, circling the sun, set in the invisible tautness
of gravity. And we hurtle, flying out & coming back in the vertical
direction (orbit), traveling headlong in the horizontal direction
(the sun's path) all the while. *To hurtle* is the very first nature
of the Earth, after which is *to spin*. The pages of all great works
of literature are turned alike like a Möbius strip, seemingly
exposing “anew” truths which have remained pretty much the
same from time immemorial.

If a butterfly's wings might cause a tornado in Texas, so might
the turning pages of a book? Why is it so difficult to change
oneself? So difficult to turn the page? The Vaseline, perhaps.

§

Suicide— or, more precisely, the image of death, generally in the
form of a bullet having blown through my skull— has become
a staple of thought of late. Perhaps that is how this year is different
from others: the image of suicide as a staple of thought. But only
now and again.

The day has passed, thus far, without incident. But only if you refrain from counting sudden losses of energy as “incident,” the day has passed without incident. The sick feeling surges in one’s stomach, as if the stomach held waves. A mood falls upon one like the tide, and can be expected to leave in much the same way, bringing and taking.

The world has only as much mystery as you permit for it to. The smell of pressing your face to an old screen door, hey.

24

(Sitting in the doctor’s office waiting room.) Some anger. A moment of not liking people.

There’s a little girl. I think she’s four or maybe five— not much taller than a yardstick.

This girl, her love & lovingness, it all coming out so freely. Kissing her mother. Cuddling with her older brother. How she jumps up onto their laps, her hugging & squirming; there’s just so much love in this little kid. To her mother, she proudly reads the date printed on a medical form: “April fourteenth... two-thowzand and four!” Then I look over to see the mother’s & child’s smiles together.

What I saw, seeing this effusively-loving gem of a child more closely, was this: the difficulty & rejections in her life to come, most of which’ll start in just under ten years. What I’m saying is this: her eyes were spaced extremely far apart. A number of her classmates will mock her for this, make up names for her & seek to crush her, and will often enough succeed. We’ve all seen it happen. This girl has love the world so badly needs. And the release of this girl’s love, so badly needed by the world, will be significantly obstructed by some little fuckers.

25

If there were certainty of an afterlife, life would be meaningless. There’d be no reason to live now— no reason to try hard & try one’s best— if one knew he or she could just as well live again later.

. . .

Uncertainty is thus fundamental to life.

To produce certainty as regards an afterlife (were it possible) would be as good as to murder the species. (And therefore, by logic: *certainty of an afterlife is impossible, can never be known.*) I will never have certainty as regards what happens after death.

The living don't know where they'll go when they're dead, and the dead don't know where they'll go when if ever again they're living.

Life, thus, is beautiful.

26

The upwards trickle of certain thoughts, or madness. Up like that: trickle your fingers & raise your arms to the above & then let them drop before you reach x , as you haven't the energy, the wherewithal. Drowned, and then diving cigarettes into half-finished drinks, and the notion of what one negotiates with when one "negotiates with life."

§

"Don't worry. I don't foresee you'll be at a loss for affection." And: don't wanna wash the sheets with the scent of her still on them. The image now coming to mind: dust passing under the spotlight.

Oh & when the crescendo meets the denouement.

§

A scene from an end-of-the-relationship prior is Alana: a tear falling towards her ear, because on the bed beside me she was looking up at the ceiling. It happened around when the word *love* had been used as a kind of strategic magnet, to discover if the other harbored any of the same feelings as the sender.

The sound of people — lovers or roommates — trying to be quiet in the middle of the night or in the morning. The way that when you kill a moth in your hand it leaves gold and iridescences. The distinct quiet of a car when you close the door in the suburbs or in the country, and the cricket night comes in still & all the softer, before you turn the ignition.

27 | AFTER HAVING SEEN AN EXHIBITION
(UNDER THE VEIL: THE REVOLUTIONARY ASSOCIATION
OF THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN (RAWA)
AT THE ICP, IN OCTOBER 2002)

Fuck. I don't understand humans. Yet I'm increasingly certain that Americans— that is, a sufficiently large percentage of them— would kill people publicly if they could, *and maybe they fucking should*, because I honestly don't know why we don't. (“*They’re animals anyway so let them lose their souls*” (sound bite from a PE song)). Yes, perhaps public executions should be permitted. Let the motherfuckers know what they really the fuck are. [Or is my assumption— *that when people see what executions really are, they’ll be shamed into ceasing them— completely naive?*]

That was some emotionally draining shit.

That woman got shot in the head.

How can anyone do that? How how how how how how how do we think we have the right to take a life,

[*Here, the notebook from which the above writing’s transcribed features only an exasperated scrawl, the lack of possibility to articulate. This was written after having watched a video of a woman who was hooded and executed publicly, in a sports stadium— a single shot to the head— for having committed adultery. The video itself was recorded clandestinely, at risk of death, by a RAWA member.*]

§

The last public execution in the US was in 1936. 20,000 people attended the Kentucky hanging of Rainey Bethea, which took place shortly after sunrise.

And today [March 21, 2003], on a web-based email site, I found a picture of the war and the following caption beneath: “Click here to see and hear bombs falling on Baghdad.”

Oh and the ratta-tat-tat of the headlines on the noggin right now [August, 2007]. The girl Williams from West Virginia & the people who I can't see why on Earth they should live. They can die. Let them die: I want for them to die after that. I have memories of what she & I did during those days. There are people who should die, I write only this tonight. (But perhaps I'm wrong. The state— which clearly has a right & reason to protect itself and its citizens— perhaps has no right to take a life. If so: I don't mind paying extra tax dollars to keep certain individuals in prison for life. (Yet isn't it execution— with the requisite legal expenses surrounding it— that costs more, anyways?) Certain choices forfeit life, I'm sorry.)

29 | MISTA ANT AND THE MANGER

Mista Ant. A carpet, a parapet. A mystical magical night. Mista Ant was here, the Universe with him, meaning the wind beneath his wings, the seas he swam in. Danger lurked where muses lured: destruction was fortune, Fate foretold. Mista Ant could not do otherwise than the bidding of what pulled him out of bed in the morning, and then threw him back into bed at night: Mista Ant could only live, could only *tell*, insofar as his life bore him proclivity to.

Oh, Mista Ant. Gazing up a tree, a tree pushing itself up out of the ground as the writer's words push themselves up out of the writer, all in an effort to bear fruit before the source is again driven down into decay & then dust; the world spun as the roots took hold, as the limbs unfurled and from the unfurled limbs unfurled branches, and from the branches— at long last— some bit of fruit.

God the life of a human. This life, so brief; yet so enormous. And how bizarre it was that, in the course of an average day, the majority of thoughts were— on average— directed at neither healing or destroying the world, but at sexual intercourse with other humans.

Mista Ant spoke to the world he stood upon, saying *God, I love you. Kill me. Where am I now but in your arms? Your arms, whose arms are mine? Mmm hmm. And where will I be at death? In your arms, whose arms are mine...*

Mista Ant sung low, and in the voice he sang was sung life. The echoes in the chamber, the child in the holy manger. Mista Ant was he: and he sung of himself to himself.

30 | NEIL ARMSTRONG, NORMAN ROCKWELL

In a conversation regarding space travel, I'd tried to say something about Neil Armstrong, but failed to remember his name, and instead said "Norman Rockwell." My conversant gave a confused look, and so I clarified: "You know, the guy who was the first guy to have walked on the moon." He replied "Neil Armstrong?" and I said "Oh yeah... that's who I meant to say. Neil Armstrong."

Having confused the names of two American heroes whose similarly outstanding reputations nevertheless come from (in certain regards) opposite ends of the spectrum— science & art— I opted to investigate how this particular, peculiar error had occurred, and in so doing arrived at the following diagram:

Neil Armstrong	N ARM STRONG
Norman Rockwell	N ROCK WELL

...a cursory study of which shall grant the reader an understanding of the likely cause for the curious goof.

Yet now and again, misunderstandings (like the one above) may allow for a greater understanding of something else, however unrelated to the original train of thought that something else may be. Mishearing song lyrics is a for-instance. Were one to hear the opening lines to Joy Division's song *Disorder (I've been waiting for a guide to come and take me by the hand/ Could these sensations make me feel the pleasures of a normal man?)* as "I've been waiting for a guy to come and take me by the hand/ Cause me sensations, make me feel the pleasures of another man," this would reasonably

suggest that the mislistener has sex on the mind, perhaps more than he or she might admit to. (And given the sexual nature of the above slip, it's a bona fide Freudian slip.)

The case with my Rockwell & Armstrong is a little different, insofar as it simply led me to contemplate what sometimes makes for "an American hero"—and to think of America more generally. Without any intention of disrespecting Mr. Armstrong (for whom I do have much respect), we note that his status as a household name is due exclusively to his placing a foot on the moon—an accomplishment impossible without the many others who worked to make it happen. He was in the right place at the right time—and in front of a camera (the lens of which can't possibly depict everyone responsible for the "heroic event"). Mr. Armstrong is a hero because his image serves as a symbol. More or less: as a symbol for the victories of American scientific endeavor, as well as our American notion of the boundless frontier. Evidently, America likes poster boys because Americans (as perhaps almost all citizens of all nations of the world) like & apparently need posters.

A poster provider of another sort is Norman Rockwell—the provided posters I'm referring to here are the ones often seen framed in doctor's offices. Reproductions of the man's works are abundant, and his technical artistic virtuosity cannot be contested. But Rockwell was more of a great illustrator than a great artist; the difference isn't semantic. As a gifted illustrator, Rockwell ably & consistently gave to viewers something they desired: a particular romantic vision of American life—which, like most all romantic visions, is a fairly value-laden one, as well. Does this mean that a Rockwell fan can be expected to have fairly specific (& value-laden) ideas as to what is (or was) great about American life? Possibly yes, possibly no—but nevertheless such ideas are, at all events, neatly (& brilliantly) delivered in his illustrations.

With respect to the more general question of America, my transposing of appellations has been of aid in arriving at the following realization: *in America, it is good for arms to be strong, and for rocks to be well.* This succinctly (& admittedly incompletely)

explains why Arnold Schwarzenegger— a bodybuilder movie star touting next-to-zero political/ literary/ oratory/ otherwise meaningful/ etc. experience— was elected as the governor of 36.8 million* California citizens.

Since it's good for American rocks to be well, it must be taken as bad that, on May 3, 2003, the Old Man of the Mountain collapsed from the New Hampshire mountainside where he had sat for thousands of years. Does the event strike one as being the perfect symbol for the present falling apart of patriarchal social structures, now clearly seen as being incompatible with a sustainable existence on Earth? Or only, simply, the complete loss of face of the American presidency? Or perhaps, conveniently, there's a fun reading for both?

31

I cried for the first time in a long time, and very suddenly, this evening reading [the August 2005 issue of *Harper's*, page 41]. It was for these sentences: "*We cannot know the precise number of new voters registered in Ohio by either party because many states, including Ohio, do not register voters by party affiliation. The New York Times reported in September, however, that new registration rose 25 percent in Ohio's predominantly Republican precincts and 250 percent in Ohio's predominantly Democratic precincts.*" For this was part of the evidence cited proving how a few people in power— by employing tactics such as curtailing the number of voting machines made available in Democratic precincts— destroyed what I & others did traveling to Ohio, volunteering time to register voters for Kerry.

32

Yet human life isn't possible with only good exclusively: to exist, light requires the reality of darkness. *We must have both.* To have good literally, and evil symbolically? *This has everything to do with the value of art.*

33

These are the nights where insomnia forces me to the streets and the cold forces me back into the apartment. I got out of the

* As of May 2, 2005. [Source: California Department of Finance.]

fridge a few things to help pass the time, and now I wonder what I was doing when this pie was baked. And: to look up and write a passage about the passage of food through the stomach & into the body, the process of excess calories being converted into fat, and then the storage of that fat. It must take a couple of days.

It's doubtful that Hermann Hesse ever dropped & gained 10 pounds in a week or two; it simply wasn't his day. (Were there even vending machines back then?) And it can't be a wonder that eating disorders are nowadays so commonplace — eating itself is a disordered thing, if only insofar as images are attached to food, are integral to the very concept of “snack food.”

I realize that, over all other edible things, I prefer vegetables: one can see the life within them, how they grew outwards from a center, see where the water traveled.

34

The inclement weather hardly tempers the New Year's dress code, evidenced by the many skirt bottoms traveling in the direction opposite the falling mercury. Skin will bear cold under certain circumstances provided there's a wager. At First Night parties the wager exists, is palpably in the air amidst cigarette smoke & dance sweat; just watch the discourse of glances on and about the dance floor, and then on the street & in the subways, where upon the pavement & platform is heard so many high heels in drunken step.

The slender blade of the minute hand crashing upwards with intent to guillotine; the 12's head will roll, as it does every year, as rebirth is all anyone hopes for in a new year.

The maneuvers depression can make upon a fellow. With primarily alcohol & caffeine running through my bloodstream. Nicotine as well. Before flushing, looking into the bowl at shits of unusual consistency & color. What's going on in your body? *What are you doing to it?*



The damndest thing just occurred to me: I just realized I am not a totality of a person walking around. I mean, I am basically

just this intersection of matter and numerous whims & desires. I'm essentially a sort of fragmented collection of impulses, which attempt & succeed in dragging this matter (my body) this way and that. To keep a certain weight. To look a certain way. To have a cigarette buzz. To refill with some tea. Et cetera. I— for lack of a better word— am a fragmented mess of exhaustingly reaching arms. What the fuck? It is imperative that I become a totality now. *Now.*

The excess clouds what is, until the excess is the thing that is.
Murphy's law & the 2nd of thermodynamics.

35 | MISTA ANT AND THE PARIS ZOO

It did not strike Mista Ant as unusual that no cars were moving. But then there was a gentleman screaming *Whose truck is this?!* *Whose truck is this?!* from the middle of the road, in front of a moving van. *Whose truck is this?!* *Whose truck is this?!*, his voice making evident that he'd been screaming for some time. He threw his hands over his lurched-forward head with each cry, and after each scream his hands retired to his sides just as wildly. The gentleman was fantastically pissed. Pissed, he was. Flamingly livid well beyond belief.

To some surprise, the city was already very green when Mista Ant got there. He'd put off writing some letters for awhile and suddenly it was April; the stuff to be responded to had been read when it was snowing. He remembered having put off shoveling his ant hill to read them. Mista Ant looked out at the grass below as he spat out of the window, the spit held together better by the milk still in his antmouth from breakfast, forming a perfect little globule soon to feed the thirsty blades.

Mista Ant couldn't imagine why this miscreant had written to him, how the fellow had gotten his current antaddress, or even: why he felt obliged to reply. It was also tricky because some of the things written about in the preceding letter now seemed to escape Mista Ant, and he sat there knowing he was about to repeat some information. (But a mark of getting older is an increased tolerance

of friends & family repeating the same old stories, if only because: you find yourself doing the same as the years pass.)

As a little ant made its way across the room to devour a crumb, a thought crossed Mista Ant's antmind, making it across from the other black side whence it came, like a dart to a bullseye with a balloon over the center: **POP!!!!**

"I shall now proceed to craft a letter," said Mista Ant, "but in preparation to do so, must firstly imagine myantself sitting in a circling airplane beside a beautiful woman in a shimmering green sequin outfit, looking out of the window down at what I'm now about to write about."

National Zoo of the City of Paris, France,
April 15, 20__

Dear _____,

You would not believe the size of the penis of a rhinoceros— and I understand that such information is often generally of little or no interest to us, and isn't the common dinner chat fare— but if there's ever been a better manifestation of a near-replica of a sword from the Arthurian Round Table, one would need to have made sure to have seen the chap in the City of Paris Zoo when the mighty beast is in heat.

(I think to myself, parenthetically: There must be a zoo in Paris. Of course there's one.)

Actually, speaking of heat: I saw a tremendous fire the other day. And there was an orchestra there, too. The fire was so big it burnt the music right to the ground: all of the players just stopped playing and just stared straight back past the listening audience, who also stopped listening. And then they just left their instruments on stage and then proceeded to jump off of the stage, and all swarmed in with the crowd to the edge of the river to look at the megacomplex across the way: for it, too, was totally on fucking fire.

Naturally, being a music lover, I was somewhat livid and—being one to let the proper & pertinent authorities know what’s on my antmind— stormed onto the stage to give the conductor a piece of my antmind. I mean, I was *listening* to that fucking music, you know.

The conductor seemed genuinely distraught that the orchestra had left, that their old instruments were turning to smoke & ash. He was a distinguished-looking fellow, quite leader-like. I thought we were going to have an interesting discourse, and that he’d take pleasure in our chat, and so I proceeded with my plan of letting him know what was on my antmind. “I am pissed,” I began. But the man was much older than I’d first thought, and he cowered, and started explaining in broken & breaking English that when it came to management of the human emotions, he didn’t know his ass from his elbow— which, clearly enough (and, you knowing me), didn’t in the least inhibit my continued flinging of proverbial sticks and stones. I expounded my disgust at there being such a thing as a man who could make people make music but not be able to control the very people with (and by whom) he worked. For this is problematic when we come to certain circumstances such as the present one, wherein disciplinary action makes or breaks the situation— as seen here with regard to the continuation of music. The old conductor countered that his whole technique had, in fact & on the contrary, entailed nothing but discipline. Notwithstanding, I smashed a still-flaming, very likely very expensive viola— quite as a caveman would a club— so as to better illustrate my point (what with the language barrier and all).

Yet as I didn’t want for him to feel in danger of personal harm, I went on more reasonably to say that if Mozart or Bach or Rameau or Glass or Pärt were here, do you think any of them would’ve let this happen? Whereupon he replied that they were composers, not conductors— and to which I replied I didn’t give a flying fuck. (Oh: if you, dear _____, don’t already know: in the French, *phoque* [pronounced *fuck*] means “baby seal”— incidentally the origin of the phrase “Pardon my French.”)

He gave a confused and supplicating look, gesticulated with his conducting baton-things, and then just shook his head. Then he stood up straighter and, nodding, exhibited smilingly the motions of his profession with the baton-things. Infuriated that he didn't understand that I understood the difference between composer and conductor— but at present didn't give a goddamn— I, in a single castrating motion, snatched up the stick-things, and then scratched my back with them (as it was actually a bit itchy from the sweat I'd worked myself into, arguing not far from the biggest fire 21st-century culture has ever seen).

He politely asked for them back and went back into his ass-from-his-elbow story. I broke one over my knee and picked my antteeth with it.

When he started to defend himself more vehemently, a fire showed in his eyes. Of course, this fire wasn't rooted in his own emotions— he had startlingly little from which to draw— but in actual fact was the physical reflection of the conflagration across the way. Nevertheless, it was a distraction to me. Specifically: of the petty-yet-significant psychological sort. And so— sauntering as I sowed the seeds of my rebuttal— I circled him until I came opposite of him, so that when these seeds' gestation was complete and the time came for the devastating bloom of my argument to unfurl, my eyes might also harbor the effect of the borrowed blaze. Yet for me, it wasn't only borrowed: for the fire across the river— reflected in my antglasses— *was also my fire*. For beneath the fire on my glasses was the fire in my eyes: the actual, emotional inferno surging from my own depths.

Indeed, the old bastard shrunk in fear of these four fires. But— his tiny eyes revealing some wonder— he seemed to be picking up what I was putting down. And then the old turd turned into a tyke surrounded by valleys of dandelions. Precisely where I wanted him, you know. In utter awe of the beauty & possibility so freely extending about & beyond him, it came time to explain to him exactly what his irresponsibility had made of things: and so I succinctly did, concluding with the fact that not all was lost: and so at the close of my dissertation I sped up time so

as to turn all of the bright yellow dandelions into old, globular and grey ones — the kind children wish upon before they either blow upon them or swing them like maces so as to disseminate their seeds in a most ethereal & heavenly fashion. I then made a wish and, in a second long-winded dissertation (pertaining to the responsibility of the Conductor) summoned forth the wind (which pertained to the final point of my argument) which sent forth seeds everywhere & then back to the Earth, anon. In utter stupefaction — and choking a bit due to breathing in the impregnated air inexorably swirling around him — he fell to his knees. Holding his outstretched arms before him (it's important to note that it's unlikely he could even see so far as his fingertips, what with the density of the milky-grey metaphorical fog and all), thereupon the old conductor died. And then became pregnant. Suddenly the postmortem became postpartum: from the man's body — everywhere bursting with & disappearing behind flowers — crawled a child. Then the child spoke: for the child wanted to double-check that it fully understood what I'd earlier meant when I'd systematically expressed the eight points regarding the responsibility of the Conductor. With the greatest pleasure I responded truthfully to the baby's very first words, assuring the cherub of its being 100% right on.

Happy, I turned back to the fire — which had gotten a fuck of a lot bigger, you know. I mean, we must've been chatting for a good 45 minutes, at least. There were people in the river, swimming or upon square rafts, and some already on the farther shore. It all looked totally frantic and insane, possibly in part because the river actually wasn't as far across as people had thought.

Love,



Mista Ant

Mista Ant decided to let the letter sit overnight under light of the moon, allowing the pros and cons of sending it to ferment — and so

that tomorrow should he choose to send it he might imbibe in the sweet & intoxicating result of acting upon a decision not made in haste.

Sure enough, when the new day came, Mista Ant put the letter in an envelope, stamped it, and then handed it to his mailant.

36

Those short conversations wherein you're told what's been going on in the world recently, they're distinct. The disbelief, the stepping towards inurement, or the steps taken specifically against it. The taste of urgency left in one's mouth — which I suppose is metallic.

And there's the bumper sticker that dumbfounds with its truth & its cadence: NEVER HAVE SO FEW TAKEN SO MUCH FROM SO MANY FOR SO LONG.

The idea of the closeted believer-in-humanity; for the world hides behind a persona of itself?

There'll be no global solidarity until there's internal stability on the level of the individual. Earth's problems are not unwieldy — there forever stands the correspondence between macrocosm & microcosm. One must be capable of thinking outside of narrative structures & past their predictable endings: for culture itself is but a narrative structure with a predictable ending? (To this point: narrative form itself relates closely to literalism.) *Determining a different ending* — or, a metaphorical version of any unbecoming literal one proposed — *requires a different mode of thought/ narrative structure?* Fuck logical conclusions; *we can have other, equally-but-differently-logical conclusions.*

But why must culture be so dangerous? Culture is made of ourselves & our history. And in this culture it's impossible to be born into life balanced, forever living in balance. (Yet rightfully so? For without knowing imbalance, balance would have

no meaning— as “all things are meaningless independent of their opposites,” to use Stephen Batchelor’s phrasing.)

§

Someone said today that there can’t be another revolution, not in this country. Never would the US see what the Ukraine saw in the Orange Revolution of 2004–5: thousands taking to the streets, remaining at the capital for days, demanding a recount to a faulty vote, remaining until the proper man was put in power. *“Americans aren’t like that anymore. They’d worry about getting fired, or about whether their absent marks would affect their class standing.”* But this is hard to agree with, as it’s actually not our country’s history.

The first revolution is internal.

37

Here we are in the 21st century, where any emotional state— not necessarily one of equilibrium— may not only be maintained, but moreover can be heightened, lessened, exacerbated or otherwise manipulated according to our desires: all by means of selecting a song to listen to from any number of musical styles (which have met with a still-ongoing profusion since some point late in the 20th century). From home stereos to car stereos to portable MP3 players, we can accentuate (or, generate) any mood we like, anywhere we like, for as long as we like. So, there really can’t be much surprise at things becoming more “intense” these days, what with the millions of bubbles of people (each bubble being of a calculated emotional caliber) bouncing up against one another on the streets & in the papers & on the TV screens.

The idea of seeing a picture (a huge 10 x 100 ft. mural print, say) of all of the cities in the world at night— all of the lights in the windows, to speak nothing of unlit windows, and the suburbs and rural areas invisible to view— terrifies me. To see all of these people, all of that life. They suck the planet dry. *We.*

. . .

A day on Earth is a day in outer space. And I have been here my whole life. Yet the notion that I'm just visiting has always pervaded, been permanent.

It's just another night in New York pissing off of the roof.

To make it a night, and before I forget:

*Star light, star bright,
first star I see tonight.
Wish I may, wish I might,
there will never be another tonight after tonight.*

38

All of those girls and guys in pornographic movies: they will die soon enough. I've often wondered what aliens might think of our culture, with its vast array of human beings depicted exploiting their sexual organs for the camera, for other human beings to look at— through a picture screen— whilst tending to their own, lonely organ. It's a quite funny thing. Insofar as everything's "funny" sometimes, perhaps. All of the attractive people on billboards, on tv and in film, on the internet. It's amusing at times, our culture.

And when I was in the shower just now, cleansing my penis, it struck me that this most significant of organs leaves no trace of evidence in the skeleton. The nose has its holes, and even the ears can be inferred from the skull. But penises and vaginas: strictly a matter of flesh. The relative androgyny of skeletons. The penis, the vagina: they just disappear, after having completely withered away.

39

Also, "reality tv" is essentially akin to porn, insofar as it shows real situations which actually happened, but all reactions and emotions seen on screen were made in light of (for the sake of) the camera.

Before a date: the things you recite to say, the things you recite and hope to have the opportunity to say; and then all else. Imagining how it'll go, no specifics, just a collection of images, glances-like, picturing her (for, this time: having only seen a small internet photo).

The killing of time at cafés, intending to get some reading done but the mind always wanders to her arrival. (A restaurant conversation snippet that distracted me today: “They didn’t think I was gonna live, either,” a man says about his premature birth. His story progressed into an account of how “nothing would stay down,” of how “it was chocolate Ovaltine that eventually saved my life.”)



Cindy: who’s attractive, who I imagine & anticipate making love with and waking up alongside of. A date again this Friday. Who I imagine kissing and sharing feelings and secrets with. My secrets, my life— *with her*. She’ll enter my life and know things about me: because she’s attractive, her eyes seductive & smile beautiful, her general charm, intelligence.

This week, I worked with a terribly unattractive woman. She wore a hat today to aid concealing her terrible balding (it could only be chemo). She looks so much like a man, even balding aside. She looks terribly unhappy. She’s in her 40s. I thought of movie stars her age, and of what they do, all of the things & variety of emotions that will never enter her life. (But, no: not even movie stars: even just average-looking people.)

I did not enjoy being around her, because I picked up on this loss. It was all-pervading about her presence, terrible. It was terrible. The things she said, which, had she looked other than she looked, would’ve been received quite differently, would’ve elicited different laughter, different smiles & looks in my eyes and others’.

Cindy. I wish to not mess this one up. And it’s all based on our short conversation, conversation which I wish to have happen

again because of her beauty. Had that conversation been good, and she hadn't been as attractive, I wouldn't be writing this.

What else: *how well-meaning the ugly woman was*. Her good intention & sincerity. Life isn't fair and no it never will be. The playing ground's uneven. This killed me. You do not know how she looked. Everything killed me. Fucking things, *thingsthingsthings*: they kill me. And who am I.

41 | WATER/MIRRORS

Water was the first—and for millennia: the *only*— means by which humans found their image in verisimilitude. Look down into a pool of still water, and there you are: your image upon a substance you're 60% made of. (Your brain: 70% made of; your lungs, 90%.) After a time, there arrived the glass mirror—and with it, the possibility of viewing one's image outside of nature. Indoors, in the privacy of one's own home, it became possible to look at oneself. At any time, and for any length thereof, and upon any whim: one's image in the unchanging precision of a mirror could be experienced. And so: no longer was it necessary to visit the waters' surface to find the image of oneself, where also reside the moon, trees, and the rest of the Earth's landscape and the Universe's presence. *This is a monumental shift*.

And yet, there's another great shift here: the change of axis. Bowing to water's horizontal plane, where Earth's landscape and the heavens form the background, is no longer necessary. With the mirror, our image is now had on our own terms: in our vertical domain, in our houses & cities. After checking our image in the bathroom & bedroom mirrors, en route to school or work it's there again upon car windows, shop windows, and the glazing outside and inside of office buildings. While it's problematic enough to live amidst a superabundance of idealized images of others these days, compounding the problem is the superabundance of images of ourselves.

Ubiquitous verisimilitudic imagery (specifically: TV, film, & the printed still) is a new thing to humankind. In creating this condition,

we couldn't have fully comprehended the consequences of being subject to idealized images of ourselves 24/7. No one (except maybe those in the advertising & entertainment industries, who pay immense sums of money to create & display these images) could surmise how these constructed images would irrevocably change the course of life. Because the image isn't just the simple, pretty picture it presents itself as being—rather, it's a commandeering machine, is dynamic: it demands that all who perceive it strive for identity with it— or else be consciously against so doing.

If the adage is that *a photograph is worth a thousand words*, then every day we hear words into the millions— and speak nothing in reply. To look at a photograph naively is often to obey it. (This being the case: *Medusa as metaphor for the photograph?*)

42 | ABOUT BECOMING THE IMAGE

The notion of “becoming the image” isn't a very complicated concept. If you find a particular image favorable (i.e., you wouldn't mind living the life of the person depicted)— it can generally be said that you, on some level, identify with the image. If your feelings for the image are strong enough, the next logical step is to become it, as it only makes sense to become what one likes & wants to be. (And if others like it too, then all the better...) “Becoming the image” is simply the process of coming to look as the desired image looks. That is, the process of matching one's exterior to the exterior the image depicts. When undertaking this process, however, there's also one salient assumption: the notion— however unconscious— that by matching one's exterior to the image's exterior, correspondingly one's interior matches with (or, *becomes*) the image's “interior.” For better or worse, this doesn't work— not least of all because it's impossible to live up to & be the purity of feeling which an image conveys to a viewer.

All of this having been said: at the same time, it's important to note that in some circumstances, “becoming the image” works beneficially. One might take as an example the memory of certain

* The interior of an image is whatever it represents to the viewer; in a word, it's the image's *meaning*.

clothing purchases or haircuts. Prior to acquiring these objects, one had an idea as to what they meant to oneself, and what they'd mean to others. Specifically: if an image represents to one a necessary step in the development of his or her personality, then becoming that image can be a good thing, insofar as a particular aspect of one's personality may be aided in developing to his or her fullest potential. In this case, "becoming the image" can be seen as being equivalent to a sort of "kick-start."

We segue here to one of the dangers of materialism. Namely: keeping in mind that materialism is a system fashioned to pressure people into continually altering their image so as to keep up with the image set forth as status quo, there's the danger that one "kick-start purchase" leads to another & another & another & so on—and an engine which requires constant kick-starting simply isn't an engine that works very well at all.

43 | AN OBSERVATION ON THE FUNCTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN TERMS OF ATTRACTION & REPULSION

The photographic image primarily deals in emotion. In advertising, the photographic image functions to *emotionally move us to change our reality into that of the image we perceive*. That is: to look like what the image looks like, by means of possessing the product (or products similar to those) displayed in the image. The promise made by the image is that when we possess what's displayed, we'll "become the image"—that is, *obtain in our lives the same status or quality we perceive in the image*. We're attracted to these images—and to the notion of "becoming them"—because these images arouse desire not only in ourselves, but in most everyone else, as well.

On the other end of the spectrum, let us take the example of photographs from the Civil War: for the first time in history, photographs of war were circulated by mass media. In no small way, it was by virtue of these images that the war was brought to a close more quickly. The images of dead American soldiers moved us to *change the reality behind the image*—that is, *to end the war*.

My query: is it possible that the horrors advertising has wrought upon our consciousness are, in a way, the necessary price we've paid for the other, more positive effects of the photograph? For with photography, we're often moved *in either of two significant ways*: to make our life akin to what is represented before us, *or*: to make our life different from what is represented before us. We either wish to have a life like we imagine (for example) the sexy girl in the ad image has, or we wish to change the lives of the subjects depicted in the image of (for example) starving refugees. This is *attraction* and *repulsion*, the two terms the photographic image deals in— *or, directs with*— primarily.

Yet not everyone is moved by disturbing photographs. The South African photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa has said that “photographs are emotional storage banks”; and continuing with this notion it follows that— like with any bank— what you can get out is only as much as what you've got in. This is to say: the emotional response a photograph elicits is correlative to a given viewer's capacity for empathy. Nothing can ever “give emotion” to anyone, but instead only unlock & release what's already within. Put another way: the emotional content of a photograph is largely correlative to the emotional capacity of the viewer's heart.

Quite likely the photograph is humankind's most powerful creation to date. To speak only of war: it has helped both to end them, as well as helped to create & sustain them through advertising & propaganda. (The figure of the US Department of Defense's \$1,400,000,000.00 recruitment and advertising budget [FY2006]— serving to disseminate heroic images of war & the soldiering life— is in sharp contradistinction to the number of photographs of dead soldiers the DOD releases to the American public: 0.) Bombs inflict devastating & lasting damage, yes; but the photograph has a principal role in mobilizing a people to drop these bombs or not.

44

The trajectory is that of the extension and limped arc of a flower long gone unwatered, the end of which terminates in pale, delicate blossom, fragile, the present.

Look outside. You can't tell it's raining from here. You need to walk up closer to the window, not just look out of it from afar. You need to go over to the window and pick out something that's outside, fix your eyes upon it, and see if there's rain in front of it— it takes a moment.

By the time I get up the stairs to the roof the rain's picked up. That all that's around one is as if to have woven one in; a single life's path as always having been a kind of tapestry, having more authors than just you. And whenever you walk, or even don't, you can't help but weave, of your own life and others'. *This tapestry*. Light is a wave and a particle at once, meaning that whenever we look at stuff, stuff flies into & penetrates our eyes, our entire bodies. Whether or not we look, stuff is always flying into us, penetrating us. We are literally weaving and being woven into, whenever & wherever we look or happen to be. And under the umbrella, I can hear it. I look out at the city: *it— everything out there, in here, myself— a solid entity, continuous*. The notion that people are literally stardust. Constantly woven of the cosmic/ into the cosmos: as cosmic rays are constantly raining down upon the Earth and passing through our bodies, every waking & sleeping moment of life, we're being woven into.

Living for other people, for at the root of things: seeing oneself as inseparable from all other people. I am inseparable from the whole: I am no different from the world. There is no word in English that specifically describes one's feeling of unity with all things. If I were to propose a symbol for such, it would look like this: \textcircled{D} , for: *I & All*.

45

Something about the city does not let me in. And that is because there is something about me that I do not let into myself.

A mood comes over you.

How do you feel?

I feel not well. I feel it coming on.

You feel it coming on. You don't feel well. What's wrong?

I don't know what's wrong. I don't feel well.
You don't feel well. Why don't you feel well?
I don't know. I don't know why I don't feel well.
You don't know why you don't feel well. That's okay. (nods)
(pause)
Maybe we can find out why you don't feel well?
But it does not work that way.

46 | MISTA ANT & THE RAINBOW DEPTHS

Mista Ant was dancing to himself. Or at least, strolling along & slipping into dance at intervals as the spirit struck when it did. And here, now: it did quite often. Such was the inspiration provided by the playground, the outdoor toys lying about in the sand, the sprawling wooden mazes built for children, the swing set seats awaiting motion from reinstating bottoms & the jungle gym bars worn by years of applied imagination yet with hundreds of years more waiting within. Outside of the school, the playground in which Mista Ant strolled was a place of great learning, and it was the potential of this that led dance to now & again pass through Mista Ant's evening stroll.

And so there he was, dancing. And it was right after a short sprint terminating in Mista Ant's spinning around full circle upon his antheel that he was blinded by a greatest of flashes of light from beneath him.

"Holy shit!" said Mista Ant, rubbing his eyes as he reopened them. But he could not yet see, such was the brightness of that greatest of flashes. But as he kept on blinking and as his vision began to return to the view of the lamp-lit playground surrounding, he also realized he stood upon a soft/hard-yet-silky-smooth surface, and not the dirt he'd heretofore been prancing upon. When his sight fully returned, Mista Ant looked down.

From beneath Mista Ant peered back at him the silvery image of a smiling mermaid in the sea, hair strewn about & over a view of splashed water, ships, islands and clouds. Mista Ant could not believe his anteyes. Her mermaid breasts & tail fin seemed to pop

out at him enticingly, scintillatingly & tantalizingly right within reach. There were subtle colors, depths of shade. He moved his anthead closer to see if this sight was real, and as he moved, the rainbow of colors of the scene shifted & intensified, its absolute & pristine splendor nearly knocking Mista Ant to his antass. He remained in disbelief, stunned. The mermaid remained smiling— welcomingly so.

Mista Ant stood there for a time. To him it seemed a miracle. Below him, far below him, the tropical view past the sea vixen extended without end into a shiny & foggy distance of the promise of a heaven of sorts. Mista Ant was dumbfounded. And each time he moved, the colors shifted & shone. But the mermaid & scene, like a collection of so many rocks, did not.

This troubled Mista Ant. Whereupon he decided to make a pact of sorts with the Universe. And so Mista Ant politely demanded aloud: “If this mermaid and her landscape of promise are real, then prove it to me by *moving*.” And it was at that very moment that the silvery surface shook, startling Mista Ant so much that he quickly jumped off & away onto the earth, landing nearly beside himself.

And that was enough for him to know. Shaken & certain, he walked off under the trees & stars & streetlamps. For Mista Ant, it would be knowledge of only secondary importance to know that it was Earthworm’s movements which shook what humans called a “hologram,” and that the blinding light was sourced of the park’s evening lights reflecting upon its surface.

47

Well, how much could it hurt? said the thumb to the hammer. Said one day to the next. Strolling the streets with a matchbook clenched in my pocket, kicking cigarette boxes to hear or feel for any left. Yes, “Old habits die hard” — but “Smooth seas never made for a good sailor.” The notion of having your twenties catch up to you in your late twenties.

Sometimes it takes noticing the way I put down the glass to realize I’m drunk.

Now I'm well-preserved like a dead insect in the amber of my beer. I crush my cigarette to the wall and the embers fall to the twinkle of a wind chime, several apartments down.

A frightening realization as my eyes ricochet over the horizon, almost audibly: the thought that everything out there is inside of me. All people and potential. All structure and chaos, building and destruction. And that one can scratch one's ass with the same hand as one has the world in the palm of.

48

The war rages on and I forget, because the dying and dead are far away and unphotographed— or, at least, the photographs aren't seen.

49 | HEAVEN AT THE PRICE OF TWO HELLS

There's the scenario of people trying to make heaven on Earth, a place where life's easy and good, ample milk and honey and the like, abundant wealth, nothing going wrong. The goal is to have Earth— yet it generally works out to be, more specifically, *one's country*— be a great big happy place functioning without much snag or toil.

But this is psychologically untenable. The reason being is that people are forgetting about hell: heaven is possible in religion because there's also a hell. Were this Earth all heaven, there'd need to be another, counterbalancing Earth that'd be all hell— but since there's only one Earth, this isn't possible. Yet: if a country wants for its life to be heaven, it seems there may be a way: it entails finding another country (or group of them) to make into its hell. This, of course, doesn't work in the grand scheme of things.

In instances of such attempts, the more-powerful country might think that it solely obtains its heaven and that the other countries solely its hell. What's not immediately realized by the more-powerful country is that— while getting the heaven it bargained for— it also, in other ways, acquires an unbargained-for hell; only this hell isn't immediately recognized as such. For the materially well-off nation, the unbargained-for hell generally comes to its citizenry

in the form of a kind of boredom & diminution in meaning of life, notwithstanding the surrounding circumstances of plenty. The reason? Material gain fails to bring about the psychological change (bliss & fulfillment) that it promises. And— insofar as the renegeing of a promise for psychological change goes— a loss may be felt on the spiritual/ ontological level, as well. This is two hells for the price of one heaven.

50 | BASIS FOR A THEORY OF THE BELIEF DRIVE

That everyone has a sex drive is undisputed; in large part, the sex drive can be understood as a function serving to guarantee continuation of the species on a purely physical level. Yet as existence in the physical (or, *material*) sense constitutes but half of life, it seems logical that another function should exist to meet the needs of the other, metaphysical (or, *immaterial*) half— that is, *the need for assurance of metaphysical/ immaterial continuity*.

This being the case, I posit that something exists which might be called a “belief drive”— and the mechanisms of this hypothetical drive seem about equivalent in force to the sex drive. For if any two facts may be gleaned from a glance at the general human landscape, they are: the fact that *people like to have sex*, and the fact that *people like to believe*. If a person’s belief isn’t in a religious system, then oftentimes his or her belief is in materialist culture— for materialism, as it happens, cannot exist without belief.

God told us to pray. Materialist culture tells us *to appear as, to act like*. And for whichever we chose to draw meaning from— be it God or materialist culture— a promise is made to us for our allegiance. The promise from God is, of course, that (for our allegiance) we earn entrance into Heaven; the promise from materialist culture is that (upon, for example, purchasing & wearing certain jeans) we will become the desired image we behold. In this analogy, prayer is replaced by the act of purchase/ change of behavior: the implication (i.e., *the belief*) is that if we look & act like *what we adopt the look/ lifestyle of*, then that’s what we’ll be, how we’ll be understood as being.

God's problem is that he promises something unseen & unprovable— His promise requires faith to believe in. By contrast, the image provides promise of something visible: the happiness, power, & privilege of the people pictured. Yet still, faith is required: the belief that we'll get what we pay for. However, it's apparently easy to believe as much: for if we look like an image which makes us feel a certain way, then when others see us looking like this image, it can be expected that they'll have the same (or similar) feelings about us as we have about this desired image of ours. After all, when we see people who look a certain way, we have certain assumptions about them, and believe them to be (or desire to be) a certain way. This belief isn't unfounded: *when we look like the image, we feel like the image*. The mask is as old as or older than civilization itself.

In essence, the notion of a belief drive is about people needing something that promises, at some point in the future, to transport them to a place better than the world experienced in the present. As the future cannot be seen or proved, belief is required of persons accepting the promise. To receive what's promised, some level of submission is required— in the world today, the two most common ones seem to be prayer and purchase.

§

Importantly, the birth & proliferation of the photograph roughly coincides with the death of God. This being the case, we can observe that *the photographic image picks up where religion left off*. This is to say, that while belief was once used in the quest for eternal salvation— through our striving to be one with God and being "holy" in accordance with religious precepts— now, through materialist culture, we can employ belief in the quest for a sort of in-the-near-future-before-we-die pseudosalvation. This quest is "completed" through our *looking like— or, becoming— the image*.

51 | IN THE POCKET

She reached into her pocket for her eyeglasses. Glasses only for reading. *Yet how does the infinite contain the finite? For if*

the infinite is so great as to be foreverness itself, encompassing all things— all possibility, eventuality, and the infinity of concepts & ideas falling within— then somewhere within it must be ensconced the finite; its opposite— its end, its annihilator. This is tantamount to paradox, is akin to a pocket in a pair of pants of ever-extending inseam.

And so, here: the pants with a peculiar pocket manifests as our image of paradox. Its opening as visible & plain as any seam of any garment; yet while the stitching delimiting the pocket is finite, it opens up to an infinitely unfurling inseam— with the finite quite literally being woven into the infinite: yes, sure enough: we have our image. Within this pocket— for those persons of dispositions firstly subtle enough to find it, and secondly brave enough to make the reach— there lies something other, something entirely apart from the fabric of the system, apart from possibility and the known.

But the girl wasn't thinking of this. Rather, on her mind was what was before her eyes: the continuously passing & ever-dimming landscape on the other side of the bus window, and how all of these things joined to mean that she was leaving her city of origin in the night. She reached into her pocket for her eyeglasses. Glasses only for reading.

Holding her book, squinting, she pressed the little button with the lightbulb icon for some light. The light was dim and cinematic, and she, still squinting, continued reaching into her coat pocket for her glasses. She felt around, but her hand only brushed against bits of tissue and receipts. When she finally felt them, amidst some change, they slipped in deeper— and so she reached in deeper, and deeper still, until nearly her whole arm was inside of the mouth of her pocket. And yet the glasses case, rounded and smooth, slipped still farther in. So she reached farther and farther, and by now had removed her other arm from the coat so as to take both hands to the task. She fished amongst keys and dried-out ballpoint pens, and when she again caught hold of the case, now thinking it wise to use both hands, she grasped

it firmly. To her complete surprise, the weight of it pulled her in. And she screamed.

And here and now she was screaming now and again, at intervals, continuously falling amidst a litted blackness. It was a litted blackness that tickled the nose, and so she reached for some tissue. Thus by having a physical concern (however petty) to distract her from the idea of falling, she simply ceased to. Emily sat still as day in the pocket of her winter coat, and put the tissue to use. It was quiet here, and there was no light; the sound of her noseblowing caused no echo in the wide folds of her pocket. In this soft place, still warm by the heat of her hands (which not long before would've appeared gargantuan), she wept herself into a stupor, and— shortly thereafter— to sleep.

In her dream: Emily is at the station, boarding the bus. It is imperative that she get on soon, though no particular hindrances prevent her from so doing. Only a few others intersperse the seats; soon the bus is ready to leave. Yet many others are waiting with tickets to board, and after the velvet rope directing the line of these hopeful passengers-to-be ends, the line fades abruptly into a crowd. The crowd fills the station, to the door & out & down the street, all of these people wishing to be upon the bus. What's more, they all have tickets: they all have tickets and prove this by holding them on high.

The tickets are of a soft pastel color, and reminded Emily of a bed of the kind of flowers that die yearly, needing to be replanted annually. Emily looks at her ticket, and it appeared to be of precisely the same shade and color. A raised ticket-wielding hand outside permits Emily to read that her ticket and the hand's have precisely the same text and numbers; there are no differences between the two, nor between any tickets at all.

The bus is ready to go, but apparently there're more ticketholders who've yet to board. At least, that is what the crowd— or various shouts from therein— claims. And so the ticketperson stands by the bus door and inspects each ticket of every individual in the crowd— a process which'd take hours, days even; but

somehow does not. Finally it is announced that there're no non-authentic tickets held by anyone waiting. There is a storm rising, and the driver is told to ready the bus for the trip, that departure is soon and that, despite all appearances of delay, all is completely on schedule. The others on the bus also began expressing their concern for the crowd, and— like Emily— had looked at their tickets and those held outside. When the passengers came to ask about it, the ticketperson replied: *“The shades of all colors, in all of their variation and hue, are quite innumerable. Of this number, in daylight the human eye differentiates only 20,000 or so.”*

The answer itself did not satisfy so much as the tone of voice in which it was spoken. Which, Emily knew, was, in a sense, completely in accordance with things: the tone of the voice, and not the words offered through it, was the most acceptable answer, was the only answer one could hope for. Whereupon from the seat behind, Mista Ant handed to Emily her glasses.

52

To know life, it seems important to have a nearness to death, insofar as primary conditions cannot be comprehended without comprehension of their opposite. A range of events from accidents to wakes to diagnoses to etc. will teach; and then there's familiarity with suicide's glittering & barren peninsula. Not a necessity for all though somehow a necessary condition for some: a percentage of the population for whatever reason is fated to find that life gains value only upon being distinctly taken as a choice. All light & life: nothing: until subsequent to a particular moment that is dark; an unreadable, fierce & velvet-like empty-dark, swallowing & a blanket, a breath on one's back, formidable, of allure, ready— yet it's hardly accurate when written; a black hole that hasn't diameter & hovers above— and yet, should one trip along the path, is something able to be fallen into endlessly. A dark over or beneath what's known and ably described, and yet it's owing to this dark that life is acknowledged, somehow somewhat analogously: as a force & entity through & about which there's incomprehensibly more to feel, to know. It's impossible to explain

how this “analog” is accepted; that which redeems is unfailingly undefinable because it’s born of the moment’s demands, isn’t rational, has no formula, and ultimately stands aloof, remaining incapable of being recreated... but creation ensues.

53 | OPEN LETTER TO THE UNITED PARCEL SERVICE

Adrien Casey
New York City, NY

October 29, 2004

Open letter to the United Parcel Service

or,

I don’t want to buy a roll of packaging tape for \$3.89; nor one for \$247.50, mind you.

UPS Corporate Headquarters
55 Glenlake Parkway, NE
Atlanta, GA 30328

To: I don’t even know who to address this to. Traditionally, this kind of letter goes to the customer relations department; yet I feel I write this to the CEO— as well as whoever else shapes your company policy. While I’m unclear as to precisely which UPS department or person I seek to address, please note: this lack of clarity *does not* disclose a corresponding vagueness of purpose. The purpose of this letter is to tell you of a demeaning experience I had at one of your stores.

En route to a number of other things to do today, I walked into the UPS store located at _____ in Manhattan, carrying under arm a package to be shipped. Yet to my great dismay— and with no small level of astonishment at the humiliation & inhumanity a fellow often finds himself subject to when dealing with larger corporations, nowadays— I left some twenty minutes later with the same package under arm.

The twenty minutes weren't spent waiting in line, but rather: they were passed talking with/ attempting to appeal to/ or being ignored by Lucien (the manager) and Lucy (a salesperson). Both of whom— it must be said— exhibited an adequate level of professionalism which this letter doesn't intend to contest. Probably, I have strong grounds to contest what one might call their humanity, but their professionalism was right on the money.

What, then, exactly *am* I writing to you about?

I am writing to you about tape. Doubtless you are eminently familiar with it. Because you are probably already aware that I am greatly upset and that therefore this is not going to be a happy letter, I shall tape some tape in the left-hand margin both to ensure that you are familiar with the precious commodity of which I speak, as well as to thereby provide— simultaneously & via wit— a sort of comic relief (in advance), however light it may be.

Apparently, Lucien and Lucy are not allowed to give me a piece of tape, even though— as often happens in the relatively dynamic world of cardboard boxes & their shipping* — I, as a customer, was then in *need* of a piece of tape. Allow me to be precise: I needed exactly 16 inches of tape *so as to seal one side of my parcel* (which I apparently missed when taping the rest at my apartment, in a rush), and I was the only person in the store for all but a couple of those twenty depressing minutes.

The unnecessarily long story that I experienced— made short— is as follows: Despite several cycles of earnest entreaties (coupled with patient biding for their change of heart), neither Lucien nor Lucy ever gave me any tape (Lucy saying she could get fired for so doing), though did offer other options. I could pay

* “UPS is the world's largest package delivery company and a global leader in supply chain services, offering an extensive range of options for synchronizing the movement of goods, information and funds.” This quote is from a press release on your website, so I know you know exactly the kind of dynamic world I am talking about.

\$2.00 to use the store's tape (UPS company policy, they said), or, for \$3.89, I could purchase a whole new roll of tape.

But I don't want to pay \$2.00 for sixteen inches of tape, and I don't want a whole roll of tape. To ship a package via UPS, as I have done for many years, is all that I had wanted to do.

I do not understand. I am writing, above all, because I don't understand. Maybe UPS does not know how infuriating it is to be in a rush, at the UPS store and in need of a piece of tape (where two rolls are visible behind the counter, several feet away), and the UPS salesperson— essentially a spokesperson for the company on which you've spent hundreds of dollars over the years— won't give you a 16-inch piece of tape but will charge you \$2.00 for one.

At that rate, do you know how much a 55-yard roll of tape would cost? Two-hundred and forty-seven dollars and fifty cents. \$247.50. That's ridiculous. For a roll of tape, that is completely absurd. Please trust me: when you aren't wealthy (and perhaps even when you are), this is infuriating. Moreover: this is quite disrespectful. And insofar as its nature is opportunistic: this is simply inhumane. Of course: this is, I suppose, precisely how capitalism frequently operates. Ascertain the situation wherein a fellow is down on his luck, then create a mechanism by which to charge him money so as to get back up to par.

Thoughts such as the last two sentences (of admittedly coarse analysis) dwell beyond the scope of this letter, however; so I apologize & refocus: *Am I wrong to expect entitlement to 16 inches of tape?* Clearly, I would be obtaining for free what you have paid money to obtain. Yet for consumers, whenever any product or service is gotten for free in this world, it is really only gotten for "free": in the end, the consumer always pays for any & all services/ products consumed. This is to say: I find it remarkably odd that even though you do not offer free tape, you do not even offer "free" tape.

Not least of all "remarkably odd" because: gleaned from your website is that: *"For the nine months ended Sept. 30, consolidated*

revenues totaled US\$26.74 billion, an increase of 8.9% compared to the prior-year period. Operating profit totaled US\$3.79 billion, a gain of 19.3% compared to the period in 2003. Net income increased to US\$2.47 billion, a gain of 20.8% compared to the period in 2003.”

Do you know what that makes me think? Let me be frank & phrase it this way: if I am going to pay some guy (whom we shall hypothetically name “Uber P. Succorpunch”) ten bucks to ship a package — and I know that Uber has recently seen an operating profit totaled at US\$3.79 billion — and Uber does not give me the 16-inch strip of tape that is prerequisite to the transaction wherein I drop US\$10.00 for him to deposit into his bank account(s) (as compensation for services sought because, over the years, he’s earned my trust & therefore continuing patronage): that is going to make me think that Uber is a real asshole.

Forgive me if I have sounded “crude” and allow me to move towards “summing up” by inviting you to witness me pose the following question to myself:

Am I actually:

a) more upset that your policies have resulted in vexing me unbelievably & to an incommunicable degree — not least of all by treating me without the slightest trace of dignity (even as I attempted to patronize your company for the umpteenth time);
or,

b) somehow even grateful that this strikingly frustrating experience served to succinctly crystallize for me the notion that: once “service-providing” companies with little competition achieve a certain size (because of customers): from that point on they essentially try to milk those customers for all they’ve got, as the customers now have few other companies from which to choose?

Probably: both upset me equally.

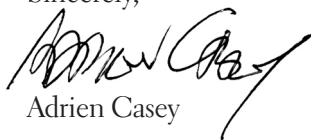
The result of your assault upon my dignity — an unnecessary wound inflicted & felt & endured — is not up for argument. Nor, for that matter, is the wasting of my time.

And while there is room for argument regarding my “crystallization” (I suppose, anyway, it’s true that other “service-providing” companies with ample competition milk their customers in concert with their competition’s milking of its customers: effectively producing a mad, slippery, chaotic & frothy frenzy of an udder-clutching squeeze-fest— a frightful sight, to be sure) it cannot be argued that your (I truly believe: *atrociously shitty*) tape policy [hereafter abbreviated “TP”] is sure to wipe the smile off of the face of many a customer in the future, should you opt not to rectify it.

Yet— despite all of my disgust & anger— only part of me wishes to advise that you change your TP to one that does not treat customers like a voided log of excrement. For another part of me doesn’t, and only because: that way I may entertain the hope that others’ experience of the coarseness of UPS TP may provoke a sufficiently discomforting moment so as to incite: their rethinking as to whether or not the inhumanity woven into our culture (which we’ve for long cultivated & permitted to remain, with the aid of any number of rationalizations) *is really worth tolerating any longer*— whereupon they shall lickety-split arrive at the epiphany of *No, it is not worth it.*

At all events, I wonder what kind of language you might employ to justify your position. And I wonder whether or not you plan to resume regarding customers as people who, sheerly because they are people, deserve to be treated as people. That is: treated as you would like to be treated & would fairly expect to be treated. If you feel your position is justifiable, kindly enlighten me in a letter directly addressing why it is permissible to treat a human being without human dignity. If preferable— or if specifics are of aid to you— you may draw upon the particular instance of human beings who are aka UPS patrons with a history of patronage spanning 10 years or greater.

Sincerely,



Adrien Casey

PS:

It has come to my attention that you now like to go by the moniker “The Brown.” While I do not understand why your handsomely-paid PR people thought this a good idea, I am at least now able to conclude that it makes outstanding sense.

54

Today I saw the architect girl and that guy she’s seeing, and noticed she wore the same clothes as the day before. Simultaneous to this observation, I understood: her wearing the same clothes as the day previous was for having spent the night at his apartment. I’m also wearing the same clothes as the day before, as I woke up in them. This observation-cum-conclusion on her attire brought something like satisfaction (for the sort of poetry about it), yet also caused me to not look at her again, having seen enough. I didn’t like the difference between us being made so unpleasantly apparent by the simple fact that today she wore all that she had available to wear.

§

It’s a holiday party & do the girls smile like bags of holiday candy? Worth half as much tomorrow? Which waits mere hours away? It’s also funny seeing them talking with men they don’t know but would like to sleep with— especially when you just talked with them and they didn’t talk with you like that. Just the obviousness of their interest; pretty little cactuses for the eye: oughtn’t get too close, lest a bead of blood travel the quill to its base.

It’s 4:15— between songs, I can hear the birds. The night sky gradually dissolves into dawn’s beginning shades. The meniscus

in the bottle doesn't want to go any lower. The birds are why you read the sky in the first place. Leaving a party and observing the hope of finding love take off into thin air in the thick of the night, remaining a bachelor and tossing to the trash your Solo cup as you pass through the door.

And what else does the changing of seasons bring? It is when you have to rub your hands together to warm them before touching yourself down there.

55

The numbers of girls to call are mixed in with library call numbers, you academic you. And don't you know that a book-based doctor would write ISBN #s as prescriptions?

56 | MISTA ANT & THE POET SLUG

The rain had rained down upon the city streets & curbside grasses & parks for hours, and after it had all stopped, Mista Ant strode along the pavement, enjoying the refreshing water at his antfeet. It was during this time that he chanced upon the famous Poet Slug.

"Excuse me, kind sir... but are you not the Poet Slug?" asked Mista Ant.

"I am he," he said, with a certain level of both dejection & love in his slugvoice.

"If I may humbly ask, dear sir, how come you're not deep down below the ground, fertilizing the Earth as you've forever been known far and wide to do?"

The Poet Slug replied: "When the water comes down, I must come up: for if I do not deal on the surface at such times, I will drown and die."

Mista Ant looked at the Poet Slug a bit quizzically. And so the Poet Slug, picking up on Mista Ant's quizzicality, spoke a bit more specifically: "Too much water will kill me, just as will its opposite: salt. Having had my fill of the rains to the maximum of which I can bear, I now come up to the surface to write."

Mista Ant understood, still watching the Poet Slug with eyes of curiosity. Seeing these eyes, the Poet Slug recognized that things would be still better understood if he shared with Mista Ant some verses; the Poet Slug had finished one only minutes before.

And so the Poet Slug cleared his slugthroat. And then he read the title of his most recent work, *The Lonely, Lonely Puddle*. [*It should be noted, however, that the Poet Slug spoke with something like a lisp, pronouncing his L's as W's; and so to Mista Ant, his words were heard: The Wonewee, Wonewee Puddoo...*]. His poem went as follows:

*The lonely, lonely puddle
was born one day under the weather.
Which is why for the lonely, lonely puddle
happiness was forever held in tether.*

*For while the lonely, lonely puddle
was quite alone in a puddled world,
the lonely, lonely puddle yet
kept dreaming of a puddlegirl.*

*The lonely, lonely puddle wished
of having an onlypuddle to cuddle—
though to the lonely, lonely puddle
the ways of womenpuddle oft befuddled.*

*The lonely, lonely puddle knew
high heels liked him less for being deep;
so sullenly the lonely, lonely puddle watched
shallow puddles get all the high-heeled feet.*

*Who is this lonely, lonely puddle?
Yet it's well-known; you've seen his body of water before:
he's that one clear puddle lying unwanted
on streets, sidewalks, and even your floor.*

*Yes, the poor lonely, lonely puddle:
ever, always, & inherently: depressed—
despite the lonely, lonely puddle bearing
all of the heavens above on his chest.*

*Alas— and lastly:
the lonely, lonely puddle
could only ever dance when it rained.
And so the lonely, lonely puddle looked
ever forward to the rain again.*

And with these last words, the Poet Slug closed his slugnotebook and made his way back into the warm & moist Earth, a trickling trail of iridescent & pearly glaze marking his path as he passed. Mista Ant watched this delicate trail sparkling in the dazzling sunlight until it vanished down into a hole.

Mista Ant stood and contemplated. He looked down to the hole that swallowed, and then up to the sun which shone. Then, after some moments, Mista Ant walked on.

57

I write that I've read the number of people killed in Iraq during recent months, I read of evidence of torture of the victims. This has been on my fucking mind. Fucking Christ. Christ. A UN report says that 5,106 people died violent deaths during July and August [2006]. 3,590 Iraqi civilians were killed in July. 3,009 were killed in August. That's 6,599 people killed in two months in one small country— not including the us soldiers killed. That's what's been there, on my mind.

58

A bit dumbfounded, I gaze out over a good portion of Los Angeles. The car tops in the bright sun trickle back & forth across the body of land below. *Los Angeles*. I cross my eyes to see twice as many, and I don't think I'm being playful. Until when suddenly: a sting on my right elbow. It's familiar, but from long ago. I imagine

the insect, and look to confirm. While I've been contemplating the dizzying & sprawling expansion of humanity across an overburdened land, an ant must have crawled up my body, just now to have taken me by surprise with its bite. I make my descent. My altitude is dropping, path stones are being loosened. I think of archaeological dirt brushed from a headstone or epitaph, a discovery, new knowledge.

§

Under the glass of every booth's table in this place are four paper placemats, respective to the seating capacity of the booth, and each of the identical placemats have printed upon them an image (in 1:1 scale) of an actual, woven placemat reading:

*Those who bring sunshine
to the lives of others
cannot keep it from themselves*

This is what I manage to observe, in a restaurant still displaying holiday lighting (though perhaps it's always like this?). I suppose I enjoy it because I don't dislike it, and I'm not in the mood to be neutral.

59 | MNEMONIC TRICK

After having mistakenly transposed certain letters in the word 'restaurant' for years (I'd often bungle it 'restaraunt'), today I discovered a mnemonic trick to preclude future occurrence of this error. Generally speaking: in a *restaurant*, you're far more likely to find an ant than you are to find a star or your aunt.

60

On her note's reverse was a little cartoon-like character, you could see where & how she'd drawn, erased, and redrawn the eyes and smile of the face, several times over, to get the desired effect, say the right thing, to not affect any unwanted messages, however subtle.

· · ·

My room is already packed. On the desk are the last couple boxes. These boxes get a little of anything: loose change, pocketknives and pens, film canisters, a mug, and whatever else was left around the place last. They'd probably be an anti-aphrodisiac were I to invite her over tonight. They've a distinct feel and sound, familiar to those who move often; *the unevenly distributed weight of the last boxes packed*— there's some metaphor there, probably. I yawn "Shit..." as I lay to stretch out on the bed one last time.

I call my friend from the landline. On a telephone wire outside above, a pair of shoes does a pirouette in the breeze. I remember a former president once talking about technology: "We can now, in a wire the width of a strand of hair, transmit all of the calls made on Mother's day," or something like that.

61

There comes a certain point towards the end of a relationship wherein phone calls in the evening & early AM hours are simply a process of going through the motions, mean too little. She calls late at night and keeps you on the phone for hours. The telephone conversations that last forever and are largely of fluff, it simply being good to be on the phone with the other; and she doesn't want you sleeping with other girls. We're on the phone right now, it's 2:41AM. You did the same with her, before. And it's known it that doesn't necessarily make a much of a difference.

Her picture still up on the wall. Something in me keeps from taking it down, for now, anyways.

To always reinvent oneself, until death. And to know that those you're with will do the same until theirs. And we also make our constructions of the other's thoughts & feelings, which mightn't be true, even despite evidence amassed.

62

What.

Drinking wine watered down to better pace myself. A few conversations here and there, a few facts we both see and agree

upon. Is it that words get lost in the winding canals of her ears? Would they do better upon the open plain of the page? Yet of course: there's the fear that it's not her ears, but my foolishly having the words wrong to begin with. Just looking at an empty bed that wasn't empty the day prior. Sleeping on a bare mattress because the sheets are in the wash. It isn't inviting. But less alluring yet would be meeting the dawn drunk.

§

And then we just talked on the phone and everything is fine.

But now it's been a few minutes and I'm not fine again.

Internet pornography to find fast solace via transient allure.

63

Looking at her, beautiful, her eyes closed and sleeping.

Lying together in bedclothes. The embrace after pressing the snooze button. The morning is past. It's early afternoon. The dreams terrified me. I got little sleep thereafter.

And earlier today when she read me that Dr. Seuss book, while I was still in bed: *Oh, The Places You Will Go*. I managed against crying, instead simply sinking more, it was terrible. It's still terrible. But her smile.

Rereading text messages sent.

Friends think it's for the best, and I can agree, if only on some sort of vague level. And what was it I said to her yesterday? Whatever it was it made one thing clear: also at the end of a relationship, the foot gets in the mouth more often, too.

I'm going back to her place now.

64

"Whatever floats your boat, as long as you don't sink mine." Said whilst talking with her over the phone, which, as I write, I'm still doing now...

And still a fear is: being wrong about one's judgments, wrong about one's analysis of things.

She just texted. I love her.
 We can't, however, be together right now.
 And so: putting her picture into a memory box.

65 | HER STAR

Mista Ant felt the footsteps of a small child on the grassy earth above. After meandering about, the footsteps stopped not far above Mista Ant's head. He then raised his periscope to sight a little girl in her backyard, her nightgown flowing in the night breeze, watering can in hand. In a little garden lit by the yellow light falling from the kitchen window where her mother stood watching, the girl was watering her beansprout before bedtime. Mista Ant listened to the words of encouragement she spoke to the baby stalk as she sprinkled water upon it, and the words she spoke as she softly petted it and stroked its "chin" with her finger: "*Chin up, Mr. Bean Stalk. You're gonna grow up big & strong someday just like in the book!*" She kissed the plant and then stood up, arcing her head back to the Earth as her gaze took in the night heavens above. And then, for the first time on her own, she uttered the words her mother taught her: "*Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. Wish I may, wish I might, may I have this wish tonight...*"

Mista Ant was stunned. For he saw the star she picked and, in astonishment, his antjaw dropped. Of all of the countless stars in the night sky to wish upon: quite unbeknownst to the girl, the star she wished upon was a dead star. The girl was the first soul in all of the world to wish upon a star's light traveling at lightspeed headlong to the Earth, but without a living star behind it.

It is on this basis that became formed the amalgam of Pauline's unique-to-her possibilities & opportunities in the world of the living & the dead. A world of possibility & opportunity stretching more endlessly than others', by sheer virtue of the fact that her earliest, most-earnest wish was based upon something that *was* and— simultaneously— *wasn't*.

For looking into the galaxy from the Earth, one can see the star's light— hence, it is alive. Yet were one to go to its place of origin: to see anything would be impossible, as a black hole would be all there existed to be found— hence, it is dead.

One would think that—despite the incomprehensible quantity of all stars in existence— given the billions of humans living and having lived on Earth, there might've been another human being to have once before wished upon the light of a star that was dead. However, none had. A great many had looked up and seen them, yet none other than Pauline had made the move to wish upon something that wasn't yet was. The naiveté of children— often & rightly regarded as brilliance— was in this case to change the course of all humanity. In her eyes was thus born the seed, the seed that is planted by seeing.



From the window, Pauline's mother gently called her back to the house. Pauline looked back up into the great expanse of this night of fortune, fortune she hadn't yet an inkling of, but would eventually come to know as a blessing & a curse. By confusing the living & the dead, her existence would be an eternity of grey, a single & uneven continuity— the prison stripes of black & white having been shed. She looked up to her mother, and also saw the kitchen clock on the wall behind her, its white face and black hands. The hands then began spinning wildly, in opposing directions, so that all that could be seen was the faint, soft middle color produced. Too young to be startled by this unprecedented occurrence, she simply smiled as she returned to the loving embrace of her mother.

66

You go past the point where it makes much sense to turn back, but aren't yet equidistant. *Title for a chapter concerning so much of what I do: WHATEVER DOESN'T KILL YOU CAN ONLY MAKE YOU STRONGER, RIGHT???*, or something to that effect. Like there's a calm before the storm, there's a storm before the calm. The days have passed by in a sort of blur, passed

like something underhanded, a note regarding me but not for me to see. And not having seen a lot of the daylight: the day as something having happened more or less behind my back, having gone unnoticed until the light is already well beneath the trees. Fumbling in the night for the medicine behind the mirror. Painkillers and all manner of things manufactured to alleviate.

The idea that I have within me what it is I wish to have realized. The idea that this distance can be closed, is always closer to being closed.

But to snap the distance.

§

Life. Running fingers back through my hair like plow blades readying a field for seed. Revisiting abysses. The smoke I exhale dips a curtsy, then skirts off with a light breeze. And the familiar taste of beer-to-go from a convenience store: the light, almost slight sting/ tinge taste of the can, complimented by the soft, muffled taste-scent of the brown paper bag, and of course the cheap malt itself.

It's happening that I've been feeling somewhat out-of-the-loop lately, unless of course by "loop" it's meant "noose."

Masturbating like shaking hands with a disinterested party. The same faces in the same magazine pages or internet trailers, familiar faces with whom there's no possibility of exchange. Just going through the motions.

§

Today I saw a young punk girl in the Village, sitting against a building. She held a cardboard sign, black-markered words reading:

UGLY
BROKE
SOBER

All I could think was that this sign would not have been possible in the 1970s, '80s, or even early '90s.

67

From a parked car's radio plays the generic music emanating from the far right of the FM dial. The words callers say are incredibly rehearsed and sad— all the more so because they're spoken in real time. They're depressing words someone very close by is saying at nearly the same moment of your hearing them. Fifteen-seconds of fame oh fame. Pop charts as tables showing: which music celebrity takes the most listeners the farthest away from their lives the most effectively? All of the useless-yet-attractive celebrities.

Primarily, Paris Hilton got famous by giving head in a poorly-shot home video, making it one of the most downloaded videos of 2004. But if I recall correctly, the most downloaded video of that year wasn't of her— it was the beheading of Nick Berg by Islamic fundamentalists. I'm unsure as to whether anything's being pointed out by this observation; there is, however, something unsettling about the two videos— given the magnitude & lack thereof in their subject matter— being ranked so closely together.

68

In a bathroom stall, I glanced up whilst taking a shit to discover a clever someone with a finger on today's pulse had changed

I LOVE
YOU

to read

I LOVED
YOUth

69 | A COUPLE OF THOUGHTS ON ART

That which is interesting vs. that which is true. On the whole, there seems to be a difference between the goals of artists now versus artists then. “Yes, *the work is interesting*”— but do I care about it? Frequently, the crux of the viewer's experience today has shifted from the object itself to ideas & narratives about

& around it; that is, in much contemporary art, it oftentimes isn't enough that the artwork hold a viewer— now, the viewer is also expected to hold the artwork itself in the cradle of intellectualized apparatus; artworks which stir only for reason of being strung from the marionette strings of a particular criticism.

What is contemporary art? To put my question in context: I've just gone to the ICA, to look at some contemporary art, and have read the wall texts beside the pieces. They are filled with extraneous adjectives which steer the viewer in directions that, in light of the work, I find quite difficult to buy. And even when granting a certain veracity to the wall text regarding the piece, there's just generally a troubling (or: *irritating?*) remove from human experience. If you're gonna push the envelope, you've at least gotta mail it somewhere.

Remaining untouched. And more than anything: wishing to be touched. Museums are places one can visit to feel a sort of caress. Something, at any rate, to remind one of being human. Love— in the absolute broadest definition possible— is central to art, as it is central to life. When art is without love (in the same, almost infinitely-broad definition), is art no longer central to life? (Yet perhaps the rise of mass-culture couldn't have been possible without the ivory-towerization of art?) Dore Ashton said “the art world mirrors the grand world”; and of this there can be no doubt. All of the money, slick, glam, solipsism, bullshit. Not that there's nothing good: there's amazing work being made out there now. It's just the quantity of shit you have to plow through, it's unprecedented & it bothers and dissuades.



The harmonious image's aim — and inevitable end-result — is to recreate (rebirth) the world. All such traces & actions are towards a return — in the language of the present — to the original condition.

The way flowers pass through the soil into & by decomposition. The sound of an erhu. Chaos & havoc. Swept away prettily,

like stars by clouds. Passing through. I & everything is always & only, by definition, passing through. I have to remember that I have inside of me everything that I could possibly need (reading the Tao Te Ching, #12).

The times when one most needs to write a friend are often when what needs to be written can't right-mindedly be shared except for in person. Emailing, for instance, Frédéric or Sven now — and writing honestly — wouldn't paint a very good picture of me here. And I'm very far away from them. I can't just walk over to their place, nor they to mine. And if I wrote telling the truth, saying it all, they'd want to get over to me, but being unable to do so, would end up feeling helpless. To write your friends and so make them feel helpless: no, it isn't a nice thing to do.

These are also the nights when insomnia and lack of exercise force me out to the streets, and then the cold forces me to flee back inside again, to my apartment. A nice long walk is nine times out of ten sufficient to wear off a triggerfinger, but with a wind-chill below zero it's often perhaps liable to get tenser.

Never a gun: of course not. There's however been a new and unwanted fascination with edges and pointed things. Boundaries in general, as well. Once upon a time: a summer night when I'd tried for sleep but kept chuckling, so much so that after a time I had to leave the hostel's bed. I walked for a long time, ceasing chuckling entirely. Rolled up sleeves to better play with a pocket knife — after a time of that, throwing the knife to the night far far far. The thoughts have more distance now than they did then, but they've returned. Those thoughts stay in vision for forever it seems, if only at the periphery; however distant from the present, once felt in earnest they remain, a beacon or lighthouse. An irretractable point of reference. On problematic nights the lighthouse flashes the Pied Piper in Morse code. This isn't written to friends 3,000 miles away.

All I want to do is write. In writing I give birth. My hands are of the bloodiness of the obstetrician. And the idea that someday life will have so much distance as to allow myself

to be able to laugh at now. What's curious to me is the collapsing of inner & outer, and vice versa. I envision the entity that is me as a living and breathing and walking Möbius strip. To abandon ship & simply be the vessel itself.

§

I wake up to recall a dream of only a sentence and a symbol:
“*The coming together to the root of things is, in fact, harmony,*”
which was heard while I saw



the image of a turning band.

71

Often, a cockroach's best defense against people is simply the ill-sounding, explosive, crackling-to-gushing, several-paper-towel-requiring, gruesome nature of the death it just barely avoided. The would-be-killer's desisting generally has less to do with moral concerns, and more with those of cleaning a shoe.

72

Life in the eternal present. *Oh, the Great Animator that is the eternal present!* We're all an aspect of the eternal present. That is what everyone does. They live, do whatever they do, and pass the torch off to the next present which will outlive them: children. A pin running under a sheet, like. The bodies rising and falling: but always (or, for a time), life: *specifically: consciousness. Consciousness & with it the possibility of unconsciousness expressed.* During which time: all of the opposing forces, all of the mirage.

§

They'll die, my friends. Their time will pass, and I'll notice, and as they pass and as time goes on after their passing, I'll notice how the constant in me remains, how the constant in life remains,

how, in a phrase, “life goes on”; how outwardly (however impossibly) there’s no difference about matters, despite that my beloved friend has died, that I have died. What’s inwardly different about matters is visible, but only for a time; and the very manner (however insane) of one’s perception of this fleeting period, of how bereavement just seeps away into the fabric of “everyday life,”

... how to finish the thought? (How to fix it?)

Thought addressed to everyone I know & love: *You’re going to bury me or I’m going to bury you.*

73

Strictly speaking, everything’s psychological— and so every aspect of human activity can be said to have origin in the brain. Yet when we speak of “the intellect” and “the emotions,” each of the two functions is married to an image: the brain & the heart, respectively.

Love doesn’t come from what we picture as the brain, but from what we picture as the heart, the organ giving us life. Importantly, however: when speaking of the heart as relating to love, we don’t picture the organ literally (as we do the brain), but with symbolic representation instead:♥.

74

The other night I was with Andy and Pam at Andy’s hotel room and we had a bottle of wine, but no corkscrew. I unscrewed a screw from the bathroom door with my keychain knife, and then screwed that into the cork. Then, while I pressed the door shut over the screw-in-cork, Andy pulled on the bottle. No spill. Returned the screw to the door & the evening resumed its course.

75

A day of life and the heart. Nothing in existence is greater than the unfettered love of the human heart— to the heart there’re no concepts other than unity, and therefore no boundaries.

The madman's hand in his hair, the philosopher's hand in his. Always as if trying to pull something out— *madness and idea, respectively*. Or also, perhaps just ripping the soil for the planting of new seed? Go & sip tea weak through impatience. The nights don't end, they become the next day. I've watered and disposed of my cigarettes again. After several hours, I'll fish through the mug-for-an-ashtray for anything with a couple of drags left, yes: because history repeats itself.

I point my fingergun at my head much too much these days.

Problems cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them, said Albert Einstein. And phrases like *An entirely new way of thinking is what's necessary* get said all of the time, in emotions ranging from the reticent's pensive to the loquacious' exuberant. Yet often: once the declaimer fathoms the sheer faith required to initiate such change— and then contemplates the loss of emotional equilibrium the transitional period entails, however temporarily— the window to new life is closed and the option of (in effect) dying quietly is taken, with the tongue of good intention tasting not a trace of reluctance.

76

I got back the letter I sent to the widow Mrs. De Salvo today. Jared had taken up the mail and handed it to me, asking what it meant despite knowing what it meant. Written in pen, and circled, was the word "DECEASED." And there was also a yellow, rectangular sticker affixed by the post office, the kind printed from a computerized & automated machine, and inbetween all of its numbers and bar-coding was there again the word DECEASED. It was like this:

<p>RETURN TO SENDER DECEASED UNABLE TO FORWARD RETURN TO SENDER</p>

and that was all.

77 | GILLIAN'S VOICEMAIL

I'd had the ringer off since the afternoon, and then saw that the new message icon was displayed. So I pressed the button that dials to voicemail, heard the prompt ("PLEASE ENTER YOUR PASS CODE, THEN PRESS #"), did that, and listened.

"FIRST NEW MESSAGE — FROM PHONE NUMBER — 3-4-7-5-5-5-5-7-0-3. RECEIVED — YESTERDAY — AT — 9:26PM:

'Adrien, it's Gillian. I just wanted to say bye, I'm at the airport, so, um, I'll email you later. But thanks for having me, and I'll see you soon. Bye.'

TO ERASE, PRESS 7. TO RETURN THIS CALL, PRESS 8. TO SAVE, PRESS 9. FOR MORE OPTIONS, PRESS 0."

"0."

"TO GET DATE AND TIME INFORMATION, PRESS 1. TO REPLAY, PRESS 4. TO FORWARD, PRESS..."

"4"

"Adrien, it's Gillian. I just wanted to say bye, I'm at the airport, so, um, I'll email you later. But thanks for having me, and I'll see you soon. Bye."

Pressing 9 makes the phone say "MESSAGE SAVED" and I hang up. I doubt she'd guess I'd transcribe her message. It reminds me of a favorite song which closes singing: "*Send the postcard from the airport*"; basically it's the same situation, wherein one is away & having a great time, gesturing only at the last minute (possibly more of duty than need) to keep in touch with everyone else left elsewhere (which isn't to say the correspondence is necessarily devoid of heart). A slight difference her postcard has from the song's is that it was she who was visiting & is now leaving my city, after having seen so many people in so little time. But I don't think I'll see her soon. I'm happy she must've had a good time, appreciative of her having had me in mind for the call. (Certainly I've written and mailed postcards at airports myself, and I will again.)

Does “soon” exist in the English language chiefly as a palliative? I go to the fridge for a bottle of wine I’d purchased for her & me but that we didn’t get to. I enjoy the bottle on the porch with some cigarettes, looking at where we sat. It’s important to be old enough to have had a few dreams and hopes dashed. It makes one quieter I think, also.

§

When she waves “Goodnight,” I turn to her and smile a “Goodnight” in turn. Then go into the bathroom: in the mirror, I give to myself the same “Goodnight” smile I gave to her: to see how it looked, and if it might’ve looked to her as I’d intended for it to.

None of that *Lady and the Tramp* spaghetti-bullshit. Nonnathatshit.

Might not the sound of two arms linking be as inscrutable as that of one hand clapping?

78

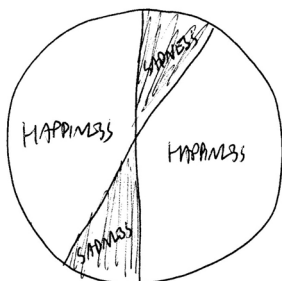
Let’s take the example of being at a party, and posit the following observation: when drunk, we talk more frankly— and from a perspective more faithful to our feelings. Yet in this drunkenness (which has given us this new faithfulness to be frank), we find ourselves less faithful to our partner in conversation, if not completely promiscuous. However deep in conversation we may be, permissively plumbing the depths of another’s soul, when suddenly the need arises to take a leak, and/or grab another drink— *we go*. And despite our best intentions, for any number of reasons, we oftentimes fail to return. And on those occasions when we do return, just as often our partner in conversation is vanished.

79 | FOUR PIE CHARTS DEPICTING ADDICTION

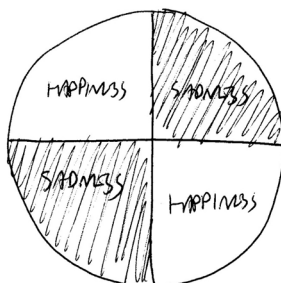
Fundamentally, addiction comes down to a problematic relationship between happiness & sadness occurring in a specific manner & progression over the course of using a given substance.

In the charts shown on the next page, the left half of the circle represents how one feels while using a substance; the right half represents one’s feeling slightly after having used the substance.

So it begins.



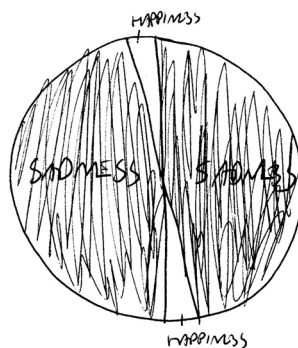
*Yet a while later,
sometime down the road:*



*And then, a little bit later still,
maybe a year, or a few, or perhaps
even months or weeks, it's:*



*...until— suddenly & unknowing
as to how it became so—
you're here.*



80

The other thing about suicidal feeling is this: the mentally unwell feeling of being suicidal is generally exacerbated when in combination with being physically ill or otherwise disabled. The fact calls to mind thoughts of microcosm & macrocosm. For if the knife's already to your wrist, and you're bedridden ill, paralyzed, or grossly disfigured to begin with, or have had some thoughts, then in the passing blade's moment it mightn't seem that by taking your life you're taking anything of much value at all?



Having jerked off an hour ago, god knows where my semen flows now, with whose and what-the-fuck it mingles. Probably condoms, ironically.

81

Live each day as if your life had just begun.

— GOETHE

I finished *The Sorrows of Young Werther* yesterday. The quote above, however, is transcribed from this year's birthday card from my grandmother. There's a lighthouse on the card's cover, beneath which is the sea, upon which is printed Goethe's advice. I tacked it on the wall above my desk. Inside of the card is my grandmother's handwriting, which struck me: the slope, the shakiness of it. The age of it; everything; *her*— and right there, before me on a folded piece of paper. *Love* filled me instantly upon seeing it. And how complicated it is: tenderness, and not pity, not sadness— yet loving her includes these feelings. Her age, and what old age can very candidly spell out. Knowing also that *those words are among her last to be written*— however disturbing to think, that was part of it. The jolted shape of her cursive alone, her letterforms tying words with — & sometimes without— a certain grace, was moving. On a level, it just looked like it took so much. And in one's middle nineties, it does: and she did this to give it to me. Her writing was to me. Grandma's writing, more so than others', is expectant of reply. I love her, and how handwriting can reify feelings nearly suffocates tonight.



Would Shannen Doherty be proud to know that the very first thing I did in my whole life was rub one off to her image? That's what I'm wondering now, upon reading Goethe's words again, after midnight & before bed. Since the image is from *Playboy*, she at least couldn't be too surprised. She's on the issue's cover, which I bought from a Village street vendor on impulse; it took me a couple days to realize that shelling out the \$5

was probably due to an uncanny resemblance she bears to my ex-girlfriend. Whether pornography has more pros or more cons: I'm uncertain. But it's likely that masturbating to photographs has "ethical considerations" that aren't often considered. For instance: if a masturbator most frequently masturbates to a woman who looks a certain way, and who bears a fairly consistent set of qualities: is the masturbator not conditioning himself to be most-sexually-stimulated by women who look a certain way, and who bear a fairly consistent set of qualities? This would seem the case. (It's also interesting to note: pleasuring oneself to visual fodder has a gender divide, as well: most women tend not to use pictures and fingers simultaneously.)

Furthermore as regards the topic of photo-/video-based masturbation: might there be a correlation between this solo practice & the ever-shrinking role of the imagination in American culture? (The full spectrum of such considerations & correlations, however, must be left to other professionals and/or interested graduate students.) Surely, however: when pornography is considered alongside the aggregate of *all* idealized images of attractive people seen in media today — be they selling products, services, movie tickets, or whatever — it seems likely that idealized pornographic images alone exert a significantly smaller influence on the psychology of gentlemen than the aforesaid aggregate.

82

A table for two & then off to a single bed. And so: having no one for whom to wear novelty underwear. Things seem alright, and then: it's funny how a tide can turn & you're suddenly caught in the currents & off out to sea again. Frantically trying to get water down before the next day hits. Aspirin and additional water in the Gatorade bottle on the floor by the bedside.

Who was that philosopher or mathematician who took a bath and realized the whole volume displacement thing? The notion of thinking back to times when things were simpler, when things that these days we take to be so obvious — such simple discoveries, notions — were once products of genius. And didn't I write the

other night about how one of the worst feelings in life is taking a shower before bed whilst drunk? The unsettling contradictoriness about it?

83

Proposed emoticon for feelings of sexual desire:

:— (|)

and proposed emoticon for heightened feelings of sexual desire:

:— (/)

84 | MISTA ANT & THE GIRAFFE

Mista Ant was walking through the zoo. Myriad animals all in cages, specimens of life from exotic lands afar were brought together for what was said to be the public good— and indeed, on many levels: Mista Ant agreed that this was the case. Not all levels of course gelled to produce an unequivocal good, but the fact was clear to Mista Ant that if he didn't see the wonder of, say, a gorilla, how could he fully understand & have love for what was at stake when an entire gorilla species was said to be under threat? Nearby, a child pressed her face to the glass, lollipop in hand. This was life: *This, too, is life, another life, unlike & yet strangely & uncannily similar to my own*, thought the child. Her mother stood by her side with a hand upon her small shoulder, thinking the same.

Mista Ant strode on. And as he strode along and on & on, he realized that he was in the African section of the zoo. Whereupon he saw a headless yellow horse with brown splotches standing on the other side of the glass.

“What a curious sight!” exclaimed Mista Ant, perceiving the foreign beast which had no specific identity & yet some general identity all the same. It struck him as what very well might be one of the fabled horses of the Apocalypse. Mista Ant made to move himself a bit higher up so as to get a better look.

But he quickly found that he needn't do so at all: for as Mista Ant began his climb to better see the unknown beast, so raised the great neck of Giraffe, who had just had her head in the warm waters below. In a slow, even, & ultimately extraordinarily

graceful gesture, Giraffe raised her head far far above the height of the bounding glass fence, her eyes off into the unending distance beyond.

“My goodness!” blurted Mista Ant, fully taken aback at the sight of a presence never seen before. “...!” was Mista Ant.

“Hello,” said Giraffe.

“...!” replied Mista Ant.

“You’re Mista Ant,” said Giraffe. “How do you do?”

Mista Ant looked up at Giraffe in stunned confusion. “How do you who are so tall know my name, I who am so small?” he asked of the towering & sinewy animal.

“Because I see & I see far,” she replied. “There are certain things I know, and yet I do not know how I know them. But seeing far & deeply is something I know & accept: it’s the blessing & the curse I’ve been bestowed.”

Mista Ant had difficulty understanding from behind the glass. And yet suddenly he sensed in Giraffe a kindred spirit, an honest & knowing presence: for such is what happens when two strangers yet share a rather uncommon trait. As it was at this moment that Mista Ant was shocked to realize: they both bore antennae.

“You have antennae like I do!” Mista Ant excitedly exclaimed. Giraffe nodded in smile. “Holy shit! We both have antennae. I’ve never seen a mammal with antennae. You clearly *must* see far, but *what* do you see?” asked Mista Ant. Whereupon Giraffe spoke, and she spoke at great length.

Mista Ant for hours stood rapt & listening. Giraffe spoke on and on. Of the fires beyond the gates, of the bombs and the waterfalls. Seeds & sprouts. The blind crossing the street with aid, the owls in silent dive to their fated prey. The blossoms & furor, the sheen & the ash. The grain, the saw; and the structure resulting. Feet in step & in dance: such was the precursor to a particular dawn. Whereupon without explanation: Giraffe abruptly returned her attentions to the water, and Mista Ant’s upward eyes kept to the crystal-clear space where her head had softly descended from.

And that was all.

Philosophy of Saturday Fucking Night. After a party, the night comes in all over again, back in my room where I hang my coat. Its weight, and the weeks of setting it down and taking it off, wear the hook upon which it hangs to a wobble, loosens plaster dust onto the rug. The nearly unfailing law that “things said in drunkenness are often thought out beforehand” clearly fails to be inclusive of the *actions* of women. That they welcome you with caresses and kisses apparently doesn’t mean that, before the party, they thought it’d be nice to caress and to kiss you — rather, it means that they’re drunk. It seems that the only adequate solution to this evening is to drink freely and heavily; the solution to such a night is dissolution into drink, and the evident solitariness of my existence is underscored by the string of bottles strewn across the bedroom floor. The way a beer tastes after you’ve already had a beer. Sharp-side up bottle caps on the rug don’t make the night any easier, either. But if the genie won’t come out of the bottle, you’ve got to go into the bottle yourself.

The light tinge-tingle of alcohol in moderation renders the mind a crystal chandelier in an open-windowed room with a light breeze from the night. The image of swaying light falling dizzily down upon an object, resulting in that object’s shadows gyrating around the object itself: somehow succinctly illustrates my concentration’s failure to grasp the *that-which-is-to-be-grasped*, all illumination notwithstanding. And yet there’s some profundity that often occurs here, after a couple of drinks. There’s a fine line, however, that I’ve still to master (though I once tried to draw a diagram of how it works, what it defines): with a couple of drinks, yes, there can be ideas; but after that it slides, and whatever oil the alcohol provided to get the gears turning is now just grease upon a slippery slope, and it’s as Duras said: *The illusion’s perfect: you’re sure what you’re saying has never been said before. But alcohol can’t produce anything that lasts. It’s just wind.*

The doctrine of *Whatever Doesn’t Kill You Can Only Make You Stronger* doesn’t seem to take into proper account the things that *do* kill you, but only do so more slowly, more gradually.

86

Sometimes you don't know how twisted people really are until you yourself are caught tied-up in the knot.

That's my literary thought for the day. But it passes.

87

Put the ringer on high & vibrate, so as to not miss her not calling. And also: just the very fact that people carry cellphones that ring & chime when you're out with them adds a new dimension to relationships these days, you know. And then the other side of it too, as Sven pointed out: the condition of always being accountable for where we are, having to answer or having to call.

Read bits of old emails from an old email account before deleting them all. Stuff from Jamie, who loves me forever. The stupidity of dating. And what a good feeling it is to delete old emails by the tens or hundreds, erasing erasing erasing, going back months & into the year prior. —!

Tess. TJ Babybubs. Terms of endearment. Using certain of them over and over again upon successive partners— but then what a wonderful thing when a term of endearment is born anew in a relationship, words never before said. Leave *honey* for the hive, *sweetie* for things that break apart in the mouth & disappear upon the tongue: *Babybubs* is TJ.

What I most recently texted to her to no reply: *Is my Bubster already bedded? have her slow blinks passed into shut eyes?*, which I liked the sound of. And after an hour: *My Babybubs is bedded, shuteyed. I love you, A*

88

Oh, love. The changing faces of love, lovers, those & the ones you love. Our eyes following it all like following clouds. How, when for awhile one watches one cloud, until how, in the next moment, one finds oneself watching another, and how the whole while one's essentially been watching the same, but hasn't?

§

And the rain you think you see but alas it's only you're looking too hard.

89

I was on the phone with my cousin Jacki earlier this evening. As you get older, when you talk with your friends & family, during the conversation you hear them trying to feed, discipline, keep entertained, or otherwise placate young children.

And I called her from my grandmother's. This was something that happened tonight at my grandmother's: my mother was there and was looking for her scarf. I asked my grandmother if she'd seen it around— nearly instantly I wished to take back my words: her vision is poor, of course she hadn't seen it, she can barely see.

But she took my query as looking for any scarf, not necessarily my mother's. And so she answered: "There might be one in the second drawer down in my room"— that is, one of her own. And then it struck me that there're clothes in her possession she'll certainly never again wear, not ever. She doesn't go outside into the cold anymore: she can't.

90

The city across the river emerges sporadically but evenly, lights on in apartments and offices, bits of gold glitter stuck to a sparse & wavering line of glue. The view has its own gravity. Nearby, at the southwest corner of the pier, is a pay-per-view, long-range binoculars device. I put a quarter into it, and look at New Jersey. Boats pass by. There's a hotel. And a long chain of lights are street lamps lighting a road I once took with her on a bus to her friend's. I look, look, and look. Spin the view to blurring speeds. The timer's been ticking: suddenly black guillotines the view. I pull my eyes from the cold & comfortably-rounded steel. There's a little bit of text printed upon the device beneath the slot that takes your money: 25¢. *Bring distant points of interest within close range with the use of this machine.*

Lonesome is a powerful, crushing word, a particularly depressing word; I hesitate using it on myself. For while

it indicates being alone, the word *some* is yet part of it. “Lone” + “some” — it’s a word in which what’s desired — some bit of anything, anyone — is so close, and yet so far; insult to injury, inherently and caustically.

91

A descent akin to that of something curved and light, curling & tumbling through the air; except louder. The rising and falling, but ultimately always falling. A piece of paper, when it falls, conducts an orchestra. That’s for now the fitting image for certain things of late, perhaps.

Many of the other things I do defeat the purpose of many of the things I do. I think of periods of history, and I think of glasses of ginger ale!, and how as one passes off to the other, and the other back to the one — & so forth & so on, back and forth ad infinitum — the carbonation, the noise, the violence lessens until eventually becoming calm, clear.

But years of life don’t always work like that, nor centuries, really.

§

And how often violence is a magnet for other violence. The problem with the vicious cycle, when left unchecked, is its gathering of ostensibly-inexorable centrifugal force. The image is like this: how you are in such a cycle is just like how you are in that one amusement park ride: spinning at such a speed that even as the floor drops from beneath your feet, *there you are*, still pinned to the wall. Movement demands great strength, often yielding little advance; it’s easy to understand how one can wear out, stop trying. Those on the outside don’t always seem to understand this.

It takes an optimist to recognize that the glass is half-full. It takes a clever optimist to note that this half-full glass, after it’s knocked over & spilled, had really only been half-empty, anyways.

A fortune cookie once told me: *The problem is that you think you have the time.*

92 | IN WHICH MISTA ANT SEES THE LIGHT
AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Mista Ant had been going about his day-to-day, moving from one place to the next. Nothing was out of the ordinary. Whereupon Mista Ant heard a thunderous *KROOSHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!* from on high— and then the tunnel he traveled in was bathed in the eternal white light of day.

It seemed a miracle was afoot.

And so it was that, from a ways off: Mista Ant saw the light at the end of the tunnel.

93

Thinking of the word “tenuous” — specifically, the word printed *tenuous*. In italics and underscored, an acrobat upon a tightrope, not quite balanced, though reaching, attempting, was how I pictured it.

This morning I had a dream which I understood immediately upon waking. *A stalactite, stalagmite, and column*— and that was it, just those images. The dream— set in a damp brown cave— was tremendously profound: I immediately recognized the stalactite, descending down from the ceiling, to represent my current downward-spiral & general decline; the stalagmite, rising up from beneath it, to represent my unconscious & certain feelings ever-more-adamantly seeking expression. *The deeper my decline, the greater the need for this unconscious expression*— hence the succinct image of the one source feeding the other.

It’s crushing now. “Ceiling” in the dream may’ve also been a metaphor for the intellect/ ego & its limited capacities, insofar as functioning via conscious means alone cannot provide for psychological balance. That having been said, the most striking part of the dream was the image of the imminent column.

In the image, there was great emphasis on a particular drop: the critical drop of mineral-laden water that would unite high & low, whereupon the column would begin to form. *Unification*—

and thus no longer the existence of two separate, opposing entities. *Strength* was the pervading feeling upon perceiving this image. Then I awoke.

94

There's the classic definition of insanity: *doing the same thing over & over again, and expecting different results.*

Ten years ago, a psychologist asked what came to my mind upon hearing the word "love." I told him: *a blue muscle.* Just a muscle, blue, by itself, like that; that's what came to mind—like a specimen set upon a laboratory table. This was around the time when was written the following, for a short story I never finished:

In lesser moments, times wrought (though in his words then: only "laced") with arrogance, love seemed to be a particularly troublesome— if not downright spurious— invention of God's: a sort of (admittedly ingenious) mechanism He placed within human nature so as to keep the human mind from ever knowing as much as His divine mind.

At this point in Paul's life, the contents of the above paragraph pretty much constituted the full extent of his theory of love. For one could read only so many hundreds of pages before realizing an invariable ratio between knowledge gained and semen flushed. Only so many notebooks and sketchbooks could be filled without recognizing that one's task, however valiant he may think it, must occasionally be eclipsed by the memory of an attractive passerby or classmate, swimsuit or lingerie model, or, now and again, even a pornstar...

95

I just saw two men in the library atrium and immediately knew who they were. The father, showing the past several days still on him, of how those days hadn't yet left. All of it was still on his face; left under, and flatly in, his eyes. His face and underneath his eyes appeared ashen. I watched his finger climb one by one as he counted the stories of the atrium. *Ten.* I pretended having business nearby the two men, to hear & know what was being

said, of how something like that would be said. The father was composed as his eyes took in everything upwards, everything above and around him. There wasn't question of how the marble floor pattern must've founded the lower periphery of his vision. The other man (from the school, one of the librarians working at the time) said "some people had come over, to try to help him..."

I walked off through the turnstiles around that point—the librarian's pause was extended. I don't think anything else was said.

I thought of that father's life and the image of that floor. The single, repeating trapezoid shape laid in three tones (creating the illusion of space), its cadence and monotony; the high-polish of the stones; and the fluorescent lighting's reflections sitting weightlessly atop the pattern.

[The lines above— and this paragraph here— I wrote in my notebook, just after passing the turnstiles: that moment was as if to have seen clearly, however briefly, the inside of a stranger— which overwhelmed: to have seen inside of a person, a father. Just the fact of how suddenly & inexplicably I knew who he was, why he'd come, his dead son. And this floor he'll remember, trapezoids.]

96 | AFTER A RELATIVELY BLASÉ DENOUEMENT
TO THE FIN DE SIÈCLE, _____.

The flat black of smoke. Smoke hurrying out of gaping black holes. And the intricacies of the façade, exposed, broken. The smoke taking to the air. Rushing out, then relaxed.

[Those previous sentences are more or less the only ones I wrote on September 11th, 2001. This image, and that of the Towers collapsing, are two of the most deeply ingrained images I live with.

Standing at the window in the first minutes, the Towers shimmering against bright sunlight, the flattest, softest black plumes extending out, and the understanding that what I was seeing was the death of hundreds of people, about a mile off. I left

the window and went outside to be closer to what I was seeing— I had to be closer. When just south of Houston Street, they fell— I remember stopping walking, screaming twice, walking some yards closer, sitting down, then walking west to the river, then going north, and stopping only a couple of times until Inwood Park.]

[I've often thought to myself: this book is about September 11th. I haven't been able to explain this well to anyone— & so've kept the thought to myself. Part of the horror of that morning was rooted in the distinct sense that life would never be the same again. Not here, not abroad. Feeling certainty of the war to come was a part of it all.

Yet of course this book isn't about September 11th precisely— yet in some ways I know it is, however obliquely. Yet still: certainly. To be clearer as to what's meant in saying "this book is about September 11th," the statement can probably be translated to read: this book is about the moment when I knew life was going to be different from then on, and that through this present work I had to try both to understand life prior to that point, as well as try to touch the future past it.]

The city that never sleeps simply became the city of insomnia. And it was like that for a while. For weeks: there was the smell, strong some days, weaker others, and the air only looked like humidity. The smell was there when you walked outside, it spoke. I remember the city being recommended to take Prozac. Every citizen of every corner of the city, and thereby there'd be a people invincible. And the nights leaving the bar, going home and undressing and going to bed, pulling the sheets, and how many dead and unburied so very close by, covered only by rubble, and then sleep.

97 | EMBERS

One thought in my life has given me comfort like no other has: the notion of how all of us are, & everything is— quite literally— embers.

Given both that the Universe and our world within it began with an explosion (the Big Bang, around 14 billion years ago) and that all

things, including ourselves, are, of course, the thus-far end result of this singular explosion: it follows that we're only embers. This is only logical. The word "only"—in either of the above sentences—doesn't at all connote the diminutive.

When picturing the explosion we named "Big Bang," our mental image starts with a sort of sphere or ball. As it happened, this spherical form had such a quantity of energy within itself that the energy had to break free from its confinement. This is also to say, *it had to be expressed*. In the case of a contained entity's explosion, necessarily is a surface broken—the surface separating what's within from whatever's without becomes ruptured. This particular truth is also important and comforting to me, as it breathes life into the following claim: that therefore the nature of the Universe is poetry, first, foremost, always & without question. And that the nature of life be encoded in the nature of life's origin only makes sense; again, the conclusion's only logical.

NOTE ON HOW THE POETIC OPERATES, VIA ANALOGY TO A WATERED SEED

The poetic necessarily presents a surface to be broken, and this "breaking" is an operation of the imagination, of feeling. Take reading a poem for instance. The reader reads the poem's words and, upon being moved by them, arrives at a place beyond what words alone could provide for, to a place somewhere *other*—this "other place" could roughly be described as supporting "an image," "emotion," or "sense of life." Likewise, a seed when watered breaks its surrounding shell, and transforms to a new life, eventually itself giving life.

In both cases (poem & seed) a presence from without touches what's within, so that what's within comes into existence in the new world without—*reader : poem's words :: water : seed*. In these examples the "touching" is by feeling and water, respectively—both of which are the same, insofar as water is an age-old symbol for feeling/ the emotions.

The interior needs the exterior to grow out into. The nature of life is a story of opposites, inner & outer, black & white, consciousness & unconsciousness, life & death, feminine & masculine, yin & yang,

etc. & etc. Hence, what's between the two— *surface*— is also an inherent & important fact of life. And *rupturing* is how one moves to the other side. The nature of the poetic & the nature of the Universe are one & the same: that of the necessary outward expression of the inner.

What actually “caused” the Big Bang is unprovable, is only open to speculation. But ultimately the will to life is all that begets life; the desire to make something *beyond* is what makes what *is*. The reason for anything is all that we are.

98 | TO QUOTE, HOWEVER AT LENGTH, ROBERT MUSIL

“With great and varied skills we create a delusion that enables us to coexist serenely with the most monstrous things, simply because we recognize these frozen grimaces of the universe as a table or a chair, a shout or an outstretched arm, a speed or a roast chicken. [...] We know that our life is ebbing away both outward into the inhuman distances of cosmic space and downward into the inhuman microspace of the atom, while we go on dealing with the middle stratum, the things that make up our world, without troubling ourselves at all over the fact that this proves only a preference for impressions received in the middle distance, as it were. Such an attitude is considerably beneath our intellectual level, but that alone proves what a large part our feelings play in our intelligence. [...] [Looked] at closely, it does seem to be an extremely artificial state of mind that enables a man to walk upright among the circling constellations and permits him, surrounded as he is by an almost infinite unknown, to slip his hand with aplomb between the second and third buttons of his jacket. Not only does every human being, the idiot as much as the sage, apply his special skills to make this happen; all these personal stratagems are also cleverly built into society’s moral and intellectual systems for maintaining its inner equilibrium, so that they serve the same purpose

on a larger scale. *This interlocking of systems resembles that of nature itself, where all the magnetic fields of the cosmos affect those of the earth without anyone noticing it, because the result is simply whatever happens on earth. [My emphasis.]* The consequent psychological relief is so great that the wisest of men and the most ignorant of little girls, if left undisturbed, feel very clever and pleased with themselves.”

—ROBERT MUSIL, in *The Man Without Qualities*

Whenever I think of the Big Bang & its embers, Musil— and particularly the sentence in emphasis— comes to mind in tandem. (A photocopy of the above passage is tacked to my bedroom wall.) And if we understand and accept the implications of this emphasized sentence to the fullest extent, we’re in agreement with the claim that each moment lived is effectively a kind of miracle; every moment the outcome of an incalculably complex, interlocking series of events, multitudinous events the knowledge of which we could scarcely begin to even hope to attempt to comprehend; events which, if analyzed individually, we’d need to concede have led to strikingly improbable results: namely, the life we know and live.

As an aside, one could probably argue that Musil’s words contend a validation of astrology— and step the argument further to argue that his words deny freewill & endorse a fatalistic view of life. Regarding at least the further argument: this can never be the case, as: for any concept to exist, there must exist its opposite. Given yin & yang, fatalism is possible only by virtue of freewill’s existence.

All the same— if everything’s a miracle—mightn’t we wonder why we’re not in a constant state of rapture? Why we fail to experience a sort of 24-7 orgasm? For in theory, shouldn’t this be the case? Yet this isn’t the case because it’s psychologically untenable. Consider the notion of opposites again: to be able

to qualify & recognize what a miracle is, the absence of miracles must be known. (Musil also notes: out of psychological necessity, both our personal as well as cultural lives are arranged so that rarely (if ever) must we contemplate this “almost infinite unknown.”) Were one to perceive & have full knowledge of everything at every moment, & (therefore) simultaneously be moved by the ineffable splendor thereof, this would constitute the infinite & interminable orgasm aforementioned: the continuous recognition of the actual nature of life during every lived instant of life— a nature we avoid by having “a preference for impressions received in the middle distance, as it were.”

99

In effect, synchronicity is the making visible for a moment the nature of things as they are all of the time. The synchronistic instance allows us to experience, even if only so briefly, the feeling of wonder at the nature of things in terms of everything’s interconnectedness. It’s as if our eyes were drawn to the particles of water forming the crest of a wave: and when viewing this wave, by implication we know & can imagine the force of the billions of tons of water creating it, moving in a rhythm pushing & receding to the tune of innumerable billions of tons more. (The synchronistic moment is also like a beacon, a spinning light lit in the present moment, imbuing past & future with the meaning created in that moment.)

The nature of such a moment is to shrink, to make more intimate: the individual & the world observed are brought more closely together, are understood as being more inextricably bound together— *the same*. Here, illusion is necessary— as well as understanding “illusion” for what it is: a false impression. Life would be meaningless if we could see “the particles” all of the time, as ourselves & everything else in sight would look rather exactly the same. The principle of illusion is what necessarily stands between *I* and *All*; without illusion, there is no possibility of unity, insofar as everything would be seen and understood as having been one (*viz., united*) from the start and for forever, separateness never known.

Not as if walking and moving through life, but as if life were moving through me. How to explain. Feeling less like an entity passing through space over the course of time, & more like an axis within space & time.

I keep in mind— it forces itself to mind— the thought that this body and all it sees are made of the very same stuff. The image that comes: everything silhouetted, not in black, but as a kind of multicolored & pixelated moving texture best likened to “TV snow”— *the particles*. People, their clothes, and as they pass on foot or in cars or on bicycles, through the whole cityscape under the sky: everything: all clumpings of atoms, all the same stuff. (But also today, and not for the first time: passersby have appeared as living anatomy chart drawings, shuffling about, resting, or otherwise going about their business, just without any skin.)

It seems the only thing really separating the Earth from space is language, names. Every moment on Earth is indisputably a moment in the galaxy. And when I walk alone along the streets singing to myself: I stroll along in song right through the Universe— but to all understood appearances, I’m only in New York City.

And the other night, on the bus back to NY, what was it I was thinking of? It was of surfaces. Something about how thin the surface of the Earth is, how physically thin is all of human life. It takes up practically no space— for the most part, human life is within a hundred or so feet of the Earth’s surface at all times. (Indeed: excepting sea life, all plant & animal life is generally within a hundred or so feet of the surface.) And something about this thinness being a metaphor, or permitting metaphor. Something about the surface being the truth— I can’t remember how I phrased it.

101 | PLANTS

Plants, so far as we can ascertain, have no consciousness. Certainly, they have no known powers of ratiocination, nor do they possess any known means to communicate with humans.

When speaking of plants and hearing observations like “while seeds are quite nourishing and therefore a desirable food, seeds often hide from animals by being colored so as to camouflage with the Earth,” we note that the language used to discuss plant life projects onto plants the mechanics of our own modes of engagement with life. Namely: the behavior of plants as they go about their existence becomes personified— i.e., *they camouflage*. But what would occur if we removed this projection, and simply looked at & understood plants as they are?

For it’s seen in plants that, while they are what they are (which includes their having “ingenious survival techniques”), plants didn’t “decide upon” employing particular survival techniques. Plants’ survival techniques simply happened because they’re what happened: evolution. Yet all the same: when we look at plants, everything about them is as brilliant as if the plant did decide— as if from a conscious ego— that employing a certain decided-upon technique was the necessary action so as to keep from death.

Speaking very hypothetically: *what if, for example, a plant were looking at us? Studying and trying to understand our modes of engagement with life?* We can imagine that plants would arrive at something along the lines of the following: *For it’s seen in humans that, while they are what they are (which includes their having “ingenious techniques” for survival), humans “decided upon” employing particular survival techniques. Humans’ survival techniques simply happened because they’re what happened: evolution. Yet all the same: when we look at humans, everything about them is as brilliant as if the human needn’t have decided— as if the humans’ actions came from an unconscious source— that employing the technique that came spontaneously was the necessary action so as to ensure their survival.* This is all to say: that rather than *personify*, plants would *plantify*.

Is it the case with humans that we are, as it were, precisely the opposite of plants? Do we do things and prefer to believe that it’s our ego’s brilliance that is responsible for the result, whereas the result is simply what happens? Unsatisfactorily, the answer seems to be: *yes and no*.

102 | MISTA ANT AND THE GREAT DIVIDE

“...and just what is this Great Divide?” pondered Mista Ant, as he stood looking down the field terminating in the hills beyond. As the sun set; as it grew darker. An old tractor was parked not far away — a model long ago outmoded. But it had served its purpose & had served it well, as well as could be hoped for: its blade had dragged into the Earth for many square miles, cutting for a distinct purpose — it prepared the field for seed. Indeed, its efforts had created the Great Divide in which Mista Ant now stood at the base of, high walls of fertile soil to his left & right. He began walking down this path created by the Divide, towards the high mountains it led to.

Mista Ant walked along. And after not too much walking, he came to a seedling at the base of the split.

“Hello there, dear honorable Seedling!” said Mista Ant with a bow.

The seedling bowed in reply.

“What are you doing here, in this great valley?” asked Mista Ant, recognizing the seedling to be an oak tree.

“*Growing*,” it replied, the sound of its voice voiced from the entirety of its being. To which Mista Ant humbly nodded. It took Mista Ant some moments to arrive at the courage to ask:

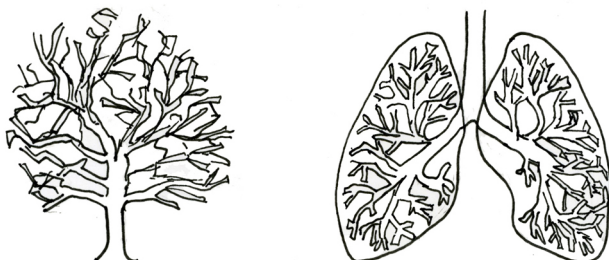
“But why *here*?”

“*Where & when there is humankind, there is nowhere I cannot grow.*” And in anticipation of Mista Ant’s question as to *why*, the seedling stated its fact: “*For I am the reverse of that by which humankind is.*” And upon stating as much, the seedling knew that Mista Ant understood, that enough had been said.



Overcome with great emotion, Mista Ant cried pelleting tears into the Earth, tears which would soon nourish the seedling. He bowed to & kissed the seedling’s foot, his anttears still falling as he rose, pausing to look up to the seedling before continuing

along their shared path, still crying. What he immediately knew was the following pair of images:



103 | IN WHICH MISTA ANT REACHES
THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

From a ways off, Mista Ant had seen the light at the end of the tunnel. It hadn't been expected. And while it had lain a ways off, after much travel he'd arrived at the end to discover: the grassy ground three feet above him, and the bottom of a rectangular hole three feet below. The light at the end of the tunnel was a cliff.

The thunderous sound had been the blade of the gravedigger's shovel. Mista Ant stood there at the precipice, looking up and down & looking over and back. The sun shone brightly and cast shadows starkly. There was nothing to say.

104

If you always saw what you're to return to— the particles— you wouldn't be afraid.

Yet it's not even a return, as you're always there.

Discovery is critical to life. Illusion is critical to life.

“All I can do is what I'm doing now.

FUCK!

. . .

My laughter echoes!”

[Things just said to myself whilst thinking of life & death
& transcribing my notebooks.]

§

The “goal of life,” then, could be claimed to be: arriving at a point where *who you are* isn’t what matters: what matters is *being*, period. For the fact is that one must *be someone specific* in order to understand *being-in-general*; that is, you have to have been “you” so as to understand your interconnectedness with all things.

The general cannot exist without the specific. To be whole, we must understand both the *specific* and the *general*, individually & in their respective rights— and then, how they relate. We have to have first said *I am me* before we can say ‘*I am only part of all. I am all, & all is within ‘me.’*

105 | MY FRIEND

(UNEDITED NOTEBOOK TRANSCRIPTIONS)

Zander has died. I am waiting for the L at Union Square.

Zander is dead.

I am on the L train
I am on my way to Edie’s
So as to be with us

THE DAY AFTER

[N train to Manhattan]
All of the words.

Yes there are fantasies, too. Stupid fantasies that slip through the mind, I don’t want these fantasies, I hate them, I admit them: *Zander calling me on the phone, saying, saying I don’t know,*

“Hey, ...” *Me being in shock, in shock that he’s not dead.* I had this fantasy. It passed through my mind, briefly, on the train, looking out of the window, at an elevation, high above the ground, several stories. I admit it.

Last night, yes, by the train before we got on, I did it, I called my voicemail, to hear if I’d saved it, and I had, I had saved his message, heard his voice again, & at that, crouched into a doorway, listening, hand in hair, gripping.

AT THE WAKE

It’s closed casket. There are family sitting & we enter. There are so many pictures of Zander.

It is a room of pictures & there is a casket. There is a picture of him over it, arms folded. He is so surrounded by flowers, another arrangement was dropped off while I was in there.

I’m outside though now, alone. Zander is dead, inside.

It was the most awkward kneel, unsteady, a hand in my pocket, the other not.

You just keep dipping in & out. I keep going in & out of there.

Sitting down in a chair, & looking off to my right at a photograph of him sitting in a comfortable chair, with his sister. In the photograph, they’re together, touching, there’s a foreign city in the window behind. It looks like a hotel. This trip is something he once told me of, I think. I don’t know. I’ll invent memories unwittingly, now— how can one otherwise?

Oh, it’s honest,

how I love my friend. How I love you Zander.

. . .

Paper.

His name in white letters, plastic, on a black board, the kind churches and restaurants use; they are designed to be changed frequently.

How many times I went in.

Out, in.

And his father,
then I got up & moved to the back of the room.

[at the bar, across the street]
And when I pass buildings about the size, I count the stories, and the image comes.

And he's there, right across the street, lying there, and all the pictures & flowers around him in that room are there too; everything is there, right across the street.

I switch sides of the table and face the chapel & everything's in front of me, a four-story building.

[back at Matt's]
The ride home entailed Matt puking all over the N, people moving towards the front of the car.

But we made it home. His puke was nearly entirely whiskey, I wouldn't be surprised if this was among his drunkest days.

But I have to skip this page to write... [*an arrow leads across the facing page, left blank, for the following page to continue.*]

. . .

The wake.

The images.

What supported everything.

Holding
his sister.
And Essye.

Everyone.
Him, there, the casket
purple. The feel of it. It was soft, velour-like.

Inside of it, the casket, closed.

His father. His movement to the casket & kneeling.

Hannah, our eyes, her hugging me, her perfect words

“You loved him so much, didn’t you” or something like
I cried into her shoulder, as everyone.

All of the pictures.
And maybe “perfect words” are the ones you can’t remember
precisely— hence, & hence.

Henry was there. It was good to see him. I was glad to see him,
it was a happy surprise.

And he’s going to be a father in March.

Not liking the fact of the private funeral. But understanding it,
so be it.

There were so many people.

Not knowing.

. . .

Not liking to imagine his last seconds at all.

No.

The ghost of it, though. The image of it, here, yes, it doesn't stop, it's here, over & over, just behind whatever I'm thinking of, whatever you're thinking of.

Wearing all black today. Having bought the final parts today. Socks, shoes, belt. A hat just in case. The shirt & pants yesterday, a quick \$130 in all.

Thomas.

Jesse.

All of the memories, & walking through the Foundation Building today.

Walking in, my answer, the casket being closed.

I love my friends.

First walking into that room. Seeing everyone, looking at nearly no one, the family members looking at us, the weight of that. Walking to the front, then walking back, to the back, where I took to a corner— the picture of Zander & his sister there. When, my hand on my face.

All of the pictures.

All of those pictures.

My fly down in the beginning, Gillian told me: it was a time to laugh.

. . .

Nothing is right. No.

Seeing everything in my mind, every goddamned corner of the city & of Cooper where I've seen & walked with him these past years. Halifax, too.

Zander.

I love you.

THE NEXT DAY

It's strange also. On the way here I was reading Nin, *Spy in the House of Love*. I'd intended to finish it on the ride back. Some things aren't possible to do.

What are these.

I went to New York & Zander was alive as I went through South Station. I came back and I was walking down the same passageway in the opposite direction, he is dead.

I miss him.

I miss Zander.

No.

And yet.

[at home]

The image I never saw but that comes to me anyways, imagined; the image two of my friends did see, but I could never ask about; and even if they told me, it would still be the same imagined image coming to me.

106 | MY GRANDMOTHER
(UNEDITED NOTEBOOK TRANSCRIPTIONS)

TWO WEEKS BEFORE MY GRANDMOTHER DIED

I was at my grandmother's house tonight, she is dying. Danny, Pat, and Frank were all there. They were all drunk.

It was therefore an experience, my dying grandmother and three drunk people, all of whom I am related to. The need for peace & silence versus alcohol's tendency to speak; partly for the sake of itself and partly for emotional need. That was my evening. Being there. Having had a few myself & some smokes, despite the fucking bronchitis.

I wrote a few things of the experience. I wrote these things in the bathroom or on the back porch, the only places of available privacy. She is dying. She is alive tonight, now, as I write, and is so old.

When you are living, there is sleeping and waking.

When you are dying, there is only dying.

When I went in to say hello, and she said hello back, asked how I was doing, it was almost midnight. How I said I had to go, that I would be back tomorrow.

So the days of dying are continuous, are a period; there is no night or day, there is no difference. That is what it was, what I saw.

“So, I'm basically staying here until mom dies.” — Frank

Locking the bathroom door because the others in the house are too intoxicated to remember to knock.

My grandmother in the other room, on her bed.

How it is when everyone knows one is dying.

. . .

Her face, its different structure, loss of form giving way to the skeletal. The purse of her lips, how the jaw was, set crooked. “Hi Adrien,” she said. And how quickly a face transforms. Nestling into death. Spreading its sheets taut, taut, tauter. Her head & the pillow.

THE EVENING MY GRANDMOTHER DIED

I stare at the ground in the same ways always.

My grandmother died. Not long ago. In the hour.

“She’s still warm.”

“She knew you were here.”

And the question of whether she should stay here tonight. Of course.

How I dropped my things. The look of my family at the top of the stairs.

And where is she now, here, lovingly, my God, my grandmother: behind & above my shoulder, I hope, I hope.

My mother on the phone making the calls. And the arrangements.

The chasm the pit the opening the mouth.

So I’ve said it. I have. I am sorry. I am poor. I will make better. I am entwined.

The photographs, all of them.

And me and my memory that vertical memory as I got up from beside her bed and her face there and lifeless and not changing, staying, as it was.

. . .

Just before she died, leaving, coming back. For extra clothes to stay awhile, and also liquor and junk food. Gin & tonic. Cheese curls & Andy Capp Cheddar Fries.

Coming up the stairs and hearing the beeps of the cordless phone. My mother undoubtedly. Spreading the news or making the arrangements.

I still have to hug her. I haven't yet. I will when she's off the phone. She's doing all right, making these calls; she's doing all right. She's doing all right. It's going to be all right.

I'm where I am, never understanding, but prior to everything having planned to read Aurelius' *Meditations* tonight, albeit with her alive. I'll be going in and out of that room a lot tonight.

I just don't know, it can't be conveyed: what this house is tonight with death & my family.

I am still here. My grandmother is still here. I am still here.

My grandmother: there are pictures of her everywhere.

When I came in, there were all of these pictures of her on the buffet.

There were all of these pictures of her, setting the tone for remembrance. That's what I saw when I came here, having been gone for only an hour or so.

And the one portrait of her, that's in mind most, nearer to memories over all other memories, nothing of what I've seen in these past weeks.

The hospice nurse is here. The "official time" was 10:41PM. That's the official time.

. . .

I was thinking of how after this, all of those authors you've read make so much more sense. After having seen this, it's all clearer in its way.

As I have my computer here, I am listening to Low's "Words" on the living room couch. I wish I could articulate how much this song means to me. This is the first time in almost ten years I've listened to my music in this house.

How it works with photographs. The night someone dies, you can look at images of them alive. In their own house: an image of her alive, while she lies dead in a room adjacent. My grandmother, this evening.

And how far the fact of this image is from the fact of what I see in the next room.

There's no response. And every time you go in, it will be the same.

She will be the same. And every time you go in, she will be the same.

AS THE HOURS PASS INTO MORNING

Still here, will be here.

How quickly things devolve back into the family bickering, the fighting, the power struggles, all of the things grandmother would hate, always hated, ignored but knew. What she could do nothing about.

The house is the house it always was, then.

And yet also some differences get put aside, whole sets of emotional armor— my relationship with Pat, for instance. I can

be close with her in a certain way here, as it's her mother who passed away.

The influx of cigarette smoke and its chemicals hit me hard tonight as the recent, prior nights have been with very little smoking, if any at all.

I love my grandmother.
In the room with her: saying, “*My love,*”

My mother is picking out her clothes. Asking me about them. It's after one in the morning. She says “How's this?” to me, not in the interest of reply, and I have none: I am sitting on the couch writing. Looking at her pulling out clothes of my grandmother's. I remember her voice.

There are so many photographs in this house.

I can't imagine what my mother is feeling now, what's making her go. The automation — for it has to be automation, doesn't it?

The difference in temperature.

Today I went to the Watertown Public Library, which is beautiful, and I finished *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, in accordance with Peter Cooper's wishes.

Where is she?

THE NEXT DAY

I think you also need photographs to fight what you've last seen. Not to build up, but to break past — past a sort of crust, back to earlier memories, so there's more of an equilibrium of weights.

AT THE WAKE

It is good to see her again, her mouth. I'm happy to see her here, like she is, not like when I saw her last.

. . .

I think from now on, whenever I leave a person who has died,
they will have to have closed eyes & a shut mouth.

Otherwise it's terrible, terrible.

Her eyes were "attended to."

It's the necklace on & no gravity, the way it sits on the hills
of her blouse.

It's just so puffy, & I hate the word "puffy" here.

Seeing her necklace like that.

God I'm glad to see her like this, not like I saw her before.

I wonder what music they'll play when I die.

The nature of God is that there's a chance there isn't God.
Possibility.

What we hope for.

There must be uncertainty.

With uncertainty,
we can live; we try, we fight— there's emotion.

Uncertainty allows for the presence of emotion?

If I were certain of God & the fact of my grandmother being
in heaven, what would my emotion be? Satisfaction: I'd be
content— it'd be a done deal.

Doubt is so that people with certainty can remain human.

. . .

If you're certain — believe you have certainty as regards such matters — you're dead. There's a part of you that's dead; you're not fully human, cannot fully experience human events.

You can have certainty in logic.

It's possible to have certainty & still be human: you can have certainty in logic.

When thinking of death: you know all matter never disappears, & energy goes somewhere, too — it never disappears.

This seems the only way to approach “comfort” as regards hoping for sensate life after death?

We need uncertainty to keep from stagnation. We need certainty to afford some rest.

AFTER THE BURIAL

Recently and especially yesterday:

Dirt over my grandmother. I see her body there. And I see dirt thrown over her. She is there, beneath the dirt, her eyes closed and just as she was at the wake: the coffin is not part of the image, but in the image she's nevertheless in it: there's the image of her in the coffin with dirt coming over her, yet the coffin is not seen, is invisible.

The image terrifies me, but I continually feel it, see it, I don't know how to put it.

She's my grandmother. She's gone, she shouldn't be, but she is, I miss her I miss her, I loved her so much, I love her so much. There's just been so much death, I haven't touched it: Grandma. Stephen. Susan. All in one weekend. Zander. I've been transcribing notebook 77 this evening.

Death is different now. Death is different.

. . .

This is the year of people dying. This is also the year of my health at an all-time low in every regard.

107

At some point in life, the idea of Memorial Day becomes important not only to remember loved ones passed, but additionally to provide a sense of security as follows: by having a day reserved for bearing in mind the dead, it's understood (promised) that when one dies, there'll be others who'll continue bearing oneself in mind.

This occurred to me also: I'm going to get an organ donor sticker on my driver's license. I used to be opposed to getting one. There were two reasons: 1) not liking the idea of my body being cut up & into, and then going to ashes (and then to the sea) incomplete; 2) my refusal to believe I'd die anytime soon — and so getting an organ donor sticker would therefore be completely useless, perhaps even “jinxing me towards death.”

I don't believe this anymore. I don't believe I'll necessarily live to a “ripe” old age. This year I again learned that people die. I'm not different from people: I'm a person. Moreover I sometimes feel the perfect candidate for transplant myself in twenty years. I sure as fuck hope I won't need one; though one never knows. Yet a third reason is Stephen. Reading his brother's statement, in which he shared that two of Stephen's organs were given to waiting others. “*Stephen, even in his death, continued to give life to others,*” or something to that effect, was what Manny wrote.

108

A painting is the fluid become solid, like a person is. Perhaps this is part of why I feel so connected to paintings and to painting. *Look at the artist's brush: earth tones are flesh tones, & vice versa: they're one & the same. And: how in life one begets the other, until the one at last recedes into the other again.*

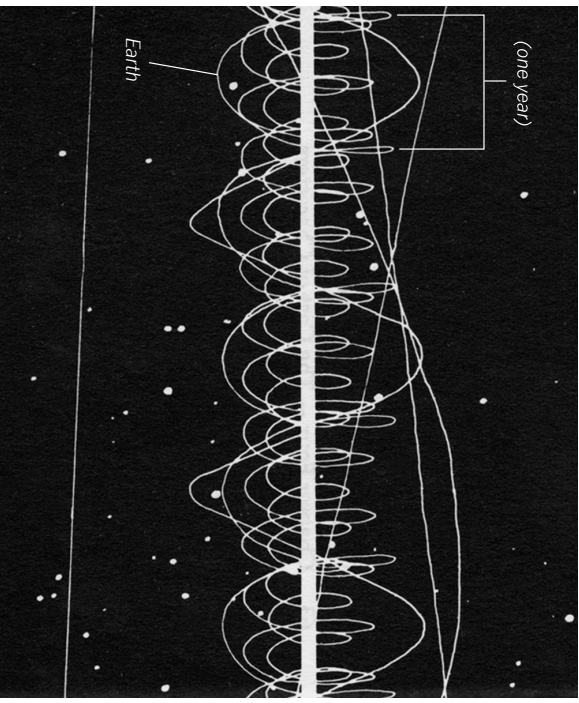


AND SO: INTO A BRIEF MEDITATION
ON THE INSEPARABILITY OF US & ALL





L'Origine du monde (The Origin of the World). Gustave Courbet, 1866.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



(Drawing of the solar system depicting five Earth years)

Even the most interstitial regions can be valleys unto themselves.



I just stepped outside. And it occurred to me that life— the entirety of human existence, in every tense— is a tunnel of echoes; and living is perceiving these echoes & their differing qualities, all of which come from a single, original sound.

The tunnel's surface changes as one travels along inside it. Each surface area is distinct, and is connected to all of the equally distinct other areas upon the spectrum— and so the sound echoing off of one area in the tunnel will be heard differently from that of one passed earlier, and differently from one to come; and yet the essential feeling about each will be the same, as all of the sounds share the same source.

110 | MISTA ANT LOOKS UP AT THE COURBET AND RHYMES

Mista Ant looked up at Courbet's painting in the Musée d'Orsay and arrived upon the following rhyme, which he spoke aloud:

*Forget about herbal tea, I'm the remedy man verbally:
and this alarmingly disarming and charming harmony
has more hegemony span than the Kennedy clan...*

*...for I favor to write astute and fun rap songs,
simultaneously savoring the ripe fruit of unstrapped thongs...*

(UNEDITED NOTEBOOK TRANSCRIPTIONS)

The only thing worse than dying is the only other alternative: to live forever. In light of this, dying is a good thing. There could be nothing worse than to live forever.

BUT NOW THE THOUGHTS, THE THOUGHTS COME!!

· · ·

[about an hour later]

[NOTE: There is no way to describe the emotion with which I left my notebook after writing the above lines which led me to leave it.]

God it just happened, it happened again, in a larger way than any time prior, any time prior at all. The seal of it, impossible to write, transcribe — but I felt and cried “*Oh GOD!!!!*” and left the house.

The knowledge comes, and Christ the certainty behind it.

It's the paradox. The paradox that seals the deal, that makes life certain in what it is.

I feel it is the ultimate paradox: (which I'm trying to phrase)
A being is alive. Life characterizes a being.
A being is destroyed by death. Death is by definition the end of a being.

Therefore, a being must avoid death, for death takes away its *-ness*.
But the only way for a being to avoid death is to live perpetually —
and perpetual living would be life imprisonment.

But perhaps it's simply that perpetual life erases the meaning of life itself: a word like “life” only has meaning through its opposite: death. By removing death from life's duration (perpetual living's very definition): life loses its meaning.

You're not getting out of this one.

And when the thoughts came, that's a truth that struck me, and I said it aloud: *You're not getting out of this one*. I'm not getting out of this one.

. . .

To come to terms with oneself, one has to come to terms with one's end. *Death is what has to be come to terms with.*

But I also again come to the embers, as always. Those came tonight, too: the embers. Everything & all & I: *embers*. So I'm not "me," actually: I'm just part of *It*; which is Everything, the Universe, All.

This, incidentally, is "a way out of" the paradox: not thinking of "you" and "your" life.

If you consider "yourself" not yourself (and see that: even language itself— at least in its present state— lacks the ability of conveying these thoughts without awkwardness/ semantic contradiction), and instead just *see-imagine-understand-howelsetoexplainit* the particles everywhere that make up everything, "your" body included (and how even to begin writing of *consciousness?*): then you're always one with the world you perceive, and can understand your body & the world to be in this same condition of oneness at death, when consciousness (life) has left; death, then, is less of a problem, more of a transition.

I am a part of it all. Another paradox: is having to use the problematic pronoun "I" every time I remind myself that there's no I separate from the world, from the embers.

The problem of dichotomy. This is one of our problems. Earth's "problem" is dichotomy (or, *binariness?*); but that is the nature of our visible world & Universe. There is light, dark. Always will be.

Earth— which is life— must have consciousness of itself: and hence, *we are*. We are here because life needs consciousness of itself. Our life which began 4.5 billion years ago, our life which is 4.5 billion years old. I am life, I am Earth. Mista Ant is of the chthonic; you know, of the tellurian.

You know, it's the fact of the unconscious— of dreams— that gives me hope. I swear to God that dreams are the only reason

I hope. Their implication of “a course,” that there’s something continually being worked towards. I guess humans need the idea of a goal, perhaps? The word “evolution” cannot be restricted to the Darwinian sense. There is that of purpose, as well— akin to “a calling,” as it were?

And just to love my family, my sister. My father, yes, my father so far above all. My brothers. In part: for they do not know, they do not know like I know. Tonight. I do not know how they know, if at all; at the least, none of them have given me any evidence of knowing: and I love them, I love them all so much. They are not here forever, either. I will bury them. They will bury me. However it works, there is not enough time for anything but love. My friends.

It is also worth it to note: that as I left my house, in absolute terror, the other thing that occurred to me was: why bother to even live life at all? Life being so short. A sliver, next to imperceptible, when imagined against the entirety of time past & time to come— and these periods can only be imagined; *their existence is only in the imagination*. It’s when we anthropomorphize the Universe: that we find an unfathomably enormous entity consuming a human individual’s life as a whale does plankton.

But another fact is this: a human life is all the Universe is, insofar as the only “thing” there is consciousness of the present. There *is* no future, there *is* no past. And so a conscious human being is not a sliver, is not to be swallowed up or consumed. Consciousness is all there is, and consciousness only has existence in the present. Our imagination makes us smaller. But this is also necessary.

[later]

Tonight has been interesting. Only because of the thoughts, and how they’ve hit me.

And death never crosses the mind until

112 | TO QUOTE JOSEPH CAMPBELL

“[The] woman with her baby is the basic image of mythology. The first experience of anybody is the mother’s body. And what Le Debleu called participation mystique, mystic participation between the mother and child and the child and the mother, is the final happy land. The earth and the whole universe, as our mother, carries this experience into the larger sphere of adult experience. When one can feel oneself in relation to the universe in the same complete and natural way as that of a child with the mother, one is in complete harmony and tune with the universe. Getting into harmony and tune with the universe and staying there is the principal function of mythology. When societies develop out of the earlier primeval condition, the problem is to keep the individual in participation mystique with the society. Now, looking around, you see how little chance we have, particularly if you live in a large city. [...] One of the psychological problems of the chimp is the same as that which the human being faces, namely, after weaning and disengagement, to become actively, psychologically, disengaged from the mother.”

—JOSEPH CAMPBELL,
in *Transformations of Myth Through Time*

113 | MISTA ANT AND A PROBLEM

Mista Ant saw a problem. Two or several problems, actually. First and foremost of these problems: Mista Ant was not ready to die, and death is inevitable. So inevitable is death, that even were the only possible “solution” (namely, *perpetual life*) presented as a non-hypothetical option for taking, this option, upon examination, would be so clearly disagreeable to any sane & rational mind, that death, as absolute & still-feared as it stands, would have to be opted for. *Perpetual life would be a fact worse than the fact of death. Perpetual life would be lifelong*

(interminable, in fact!) *imprisonment; and yet: death is still something I'm not in comfortable agreement with*, thought Mista Ant.

“Between a rock and a hard place” is a saying for certain dilemmas of the Earth — yet truly no phrase came to Mista Ant’s mind to convey the existential unease of his mind and, I dare say, his soul; all else that did come to Mista Ant’s mind was only: the impossibility of any writing ever conveying what an ant feels when — as accurately to his own methods of understanding & capacity for imagination as is possible — he imagines the finality of death, life’s end, and the beginning of a nothingness he may or may not even be conscious of the beginning of. _____

Mista Ant liked his life immensely: he loved it, loved it as far as & past the word’s capability of expression, even if he didn’t treat his little antibody so well.

But another problem was this. His family. His friends. One by one he would bury them in the colony. Or they would bury he. *All I hold dear, all those whom I love, all of these vast many subjects of the showering of my love, they & I will die, will have the same end that I cannot write, that no ant can write, that we can only imagine — & imagine incompletely, at that — & can only face with defeat...*

What then, is the nature of life. It is life and it is death, together.

That night, Mista Ant had a dream and heard the voices of angels, angels voicing ratiocination: in a dream feeding upon & nursing life into his thoughts of death, Mista Ant’s dream was essentially this thought and nothing more: *If I remembered who I was when I died, and this happened ad infinitum, then that wouldn’t be very great either. For if I died, and there was a life after, wherein I would essentially be the same as I am now — that afterlife would have to end, as well: lest it become the irrefutable imprisonment of perpetual life.*

Mista Ant then awoke. And he continued to reason: *Life after death — a heaven, say — would be similarly untenable, would be torture, eternal torture: Heaven is any sane & rational ant’s hell. At a moment’s thought, it’s quite comforting (especially when*

a loved one dies)— until you realize its err: consciousness for infinity is terrifying. *I will die. My family I love will die. My friends I love will die. Everyone will die, and this is a silencing truth, silencing to the degree of serving as a preface for the final event itself.*

Thus, Mista Ant understood there was no continuity of the ego after death.

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I am torn today. The fact that I will have it, am not escaping it— and the fact that I am not ready, not at all, apparently. My intellectual understanding of the questions at hand— *the facts at hand— they are nothing.* I am not ready. I do not understand. There is so much I do not understand: and, even as I fail to understand, the world still spins with me upon & in it, inexorably & towards the day when I won't be, along which path I'll meet the day when my father, family members, and friends won't be. The day when I'll leave others around me, others I love and who love me. *Love is the only constant in all of this.*

A problem with my reaction on that day of the thoughts coming could lie in the fact that:

I cannot deal with finality. But our nature is change.

I cannot deal with being so infinitely infinitesimal. Yet the nearly-zero degree to which my imagination shrunk me killed, astonished, was unprecedented.

I simply couldn't deal with the thoughts as they stood against me. But what about them? Why “against” me? *How they rushed in.* And how they represented the demise of that which created them: *my mind's demise, death.* With the thoughts conveying knowledge of their own eventual passing-into-nothing: *the emotional response to this is terror.*

Nearly everything I own will outlive me in its useful capacity— everything will outlive me in its formal capacity, as a form.

It is necessary that I seek to understand. I feel I have to understand, to know; so as to be at peace with the departure of those I love.

. . .

I want to live! (it comes to mind as: when Bowie sings it).

115

And the memories dance in the depths, stirring the surface.

A box of things you wish to keep but don't wish to see again or often. Similarly is when you slip a photograph or note into a book, and slip the book back onto the shelf— understanding you'll forget the document's whereabouts, and granting that whenever you chance upon it next, that will be the proper time for seeing it again. You talk with her from afar, hear her news: through it all, it's clear that she has a new home there, is in the process of finding happiness without you.

116 | MISTA ANT, CONSIDERING HIS FAMILY

Mista Ant's other problem pertained, in particular, to his family— none of them were artists. For Mista Ant— with certain of his anxieties about death— there at least existed the saving grace of his leaving behind a kind of legacy, by virtue of his work. *I will leave something; people will gain a greater understanding of the world through my work— but what of my family? Those who've given me a greater understanding of myself? The very possibility of myself?* It crushed Mista Ant to see & to know: there would exist nothing of them for posterity, save for what others & Mista Ant himself remembered and told of them— and these memories would die with him & those aforesaid others.

Mista Ant watched the ants go by. Into infinity like figures stepping off into the darkness after the decimal point in pi. This made all ants, at some point in their antlives, cry. And yet: Mista Ant also wondered if some ants live all their antlives without shedding an anttear.

117 | THE EARTH TRAVELS AT 67,000 MILES AN HOUR

I read an old notebook entry from one year ago, exactly. I am 586,920,000 miles away from then, yet how the same does everything seem.

If I'd traveled the globe's 24,900-mile circumference, my life would change dramatically? For it would have to, what with all I'd've seen...?

§

[Inwood park, September 11, 2003] I find myself here. There is something about a life in strict accord with the calendrical—to be in a place where, just a couple of precise measures ago, you were before.

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My match-lit, silhouetted profile, backlit by the brief & sudden fire, appearing to produce a bolt of physiognomic lightning in the dark window's reflection.

I smoke my cigarette, pause to examine it. A glowing orange volcano has emerged from anxious drags, while grey-blue smoke spirals off & away, fashioning a tornado. And the black fireline descends steadily, like the sand level in an hourglass. Embers fall, into the pitch abyss of night from a tarred roof.

To penetrate gently, as the moon does the dusk.

119

And presently: I feel I've no right to expect any feeling other than terror, insofar as I'm not whole myself.

I don't yet understand this spiraling world, the insanity, inanity, & inconsequence of so much of our culture. A vast field of so many visibly dying seeds, seeds taking root in nothing, just turning pretty colors as they die in the sun.

I believe that logic can be used to understand something about death. Logic— *cause & effect*— determines much of the Universe. Therefore it can help figure such problems out. (Intuition as well. *And intuition is, on a level, a form or extension of logic?*)

If all life exists so that humankind can have consciousness of it, then all life exists for humankind. No God-complex is implied: *& know & understand the solipsism here: we are God and we are not...???*



What are my assumptions? Perhaps my principal reason for beginning this “project” [*these various writings of death*] is: *I do not believe that it is natural to feel as terrified of death as I am.* And because I am so terrified, I know: *something is wrong.*

Can it be stated as a goal? *I wish to not be terrified...?* It would be too much— that is, *would be a completely naïve notion*— to wish for complete equanimity in the face of death; at least, equanimity well before the expected moment of one’s death.

But any resistance to naturally occurring phenomena has root in culture. Logic (intellect) & necessity (emotion) are our inheritance for understanding— “solving”— what we term “problems.” (And of course, they’re what’ve prepared these “problems” for us in the first place.)

If a human being is confounded by the results of natural processes, then the problem lies in cultural understanding of the natural processes in question. Death is part of the definition of time. The first principle is: acceptance of [*I’d originally written resignation to*] the way it goes.

The feeling is: trapped. Pinned in a place requiring solution, freedom.

Do I believe I wish to understand what happens after death? Yes, perhaps, insofar as it’s possible. One reason as to why I feel it is possible: *yin & yang*. That there’s even a little light in dark, as there’s a little dark in light; the logic ensuing from this, *the feeling*. And shall one be weary of the emotion s|he rides upon that results from his|her thoughts? Yes. But there’re few thoughts in this world that’re worth anything which arise without emotion.

What is now is infinite.

120

But I began to cry at the Met in a Louis XIV room today. Just the energy that went into creating it, what I saw, hundreds of years ago. Humanity is amazing. It was ridiculous, terrifying. Amazing.

All of the art walked by. All of the energy & love.

The only thing putting me at ease in this world is when I have moments like this, days like this. Looking out at things & immediately understanding: *what's out there is what's in here*. And then looking up at the sun and realizing that *that*, also, is everything: all outer all inner all ever. This is peace for me.

Looking at the trees this evening, from my bedroom window.
3:51AM.

You know I've the habit of seeing things and spontaneously understanding: *I am that... am that tree, that airplane, that person, that sea, that bench, that cloud, that cup, that whatever; I am all; all is me*. And then it occurred to me also, just now: that one day I will literally be of that sea. My wish is to have my ashes scattered into the Atlantic Ocean, off of Castle Island.

Atoms & the present moment are the only things that have always been (thought while reading *Buddha of Infinite Light*, page 42). Suffering is one of the points of life, insofar as it awakens religious consciousness— which, arguably, is the only consciousness there is.

[Too often I've witnessed Buddhism— or even just the Four Noble Truths— subject to significant misunderstandings when its words have been quoted by certain authors, people I've met, people I know. It's unfortunate.

1. *The Truth of Suffering*
2. *The Truth of the Origin of Suffering*
3. *The Truth of Cessation*
4. *The Truth of the Path*

It all simply states that suffering is a fact of life, that suffering has causes, that many of these causes can be stopped, and that there're ways to stop these causes. And religious belief/adherence isn't required for this. Everything about the Four Noble Truths is grounded in empiricism; understanding suffering's origin is purely a matter of the intellect, and going about ending suffering is purely a matter of action.]

122 | IN PROBABLY THE NEXT 100 YEARS

In probably the next 100 years, the commonly-asked question “Do you believe in God?” will no longer exist, finally having become completely outmoded; the question won’t be necessary.

The phenomenon of retinal fatigue applies to a person’s sight— & so it can also be imagined applying to a people’s. This is the phenomenon occurring when you look at something very bright, and after the something has disappeared from view, its image yet remains before your eyes— then slowly fades away, until it too is eventually gone. The more illumination the disappeared-something had provided, the longer will remain its image, the illusion of its presence. In the physical landscape, nothing is more luminous than our sun; in the metaphysical landscape, nothing is more luminous than God. And so when critically important, fundamental-to-the-functioning-of-life entities take leave, it takes longer to notice they’re gone. Nietzsche’s proclamation of God’s death was over 100 years ago. His words are not of nihilism. Necessarily must the God without recede, so that the God within may be recognized.

§

How God died can’t be established unequivocally. A certain extent of participation by nonbelievers and believers both, however, is clear: reason’s preeminent involvement is well-established; a lack of understanding & grounding in the cultures once-prominent monotheisms still serve has also worked to corrode faith over the years. Many examples of this exist in our lifetime. The two factors of reason & disconnection can be illustrated in the following metaphorical image: *a knife & a hot air balloon*. A human milestone will be having this balloon— fashioned of Earth’s materials, yet having floated above it for hundreds of years too long— finally cut & exploded into pieces, and thereby decisively returned to the Earth at last.

Also of significance here is the recently-discovered Gospel of Judas: in this Gospel, it is clear that Judas’ betrayal made it possible for Jesus to leave this Earth & ascend to His rightful place in Heaven. By killing God in Heaven, we return Him to His rightful place on Earth.

[...] and finally having given the Pope an uppercut, papal blood now lay splotted across his hand for all to see: Lion walked off of the scene as the world watched, with those who earlier obstructed him now clearing a path to let him pass. At home in the jungle, his family, friends, fans, and Mista Ant all clapped and roared as footage of his victory was broadcast continually throughout the night & into the next day.

For his part, Lion continued to walk and walk far. As he walked the hours passed, his wristwatch's hands circling like scissor blades reducing the stream of time passed into vast bits of confetti. It was time for a celebration. The blood, now brown & dried, remained upon his still-clenched fist. He was in the South, near the sea. A blinking neon sign on a side street in the moonlight advertised a tattoo parlor, and he walked to it. Upon entering, he approached the counter and smashed his fist down upon it.

The tattoo artist looked at him and asked of what service could she be.

“Tattoo where lays in a blotted blotch this blood. Make permanent in ink beneath my skin where now resteth above it the dry blood of a supposedly holy man.”

The tattoo artist did as requested, black ink penetrating Lion's skin, replacing every inch of the Pope's; the results were compelling & regal.

Leaving the parlor and closing the door behind himself, Lion walked to the sea. Under the bright moonlight and listening to the tides, he studied the Rorschachesque image upon his hand. By turns it looked like a continent, a galaxy, and a landscape with children playing. A medical photograph of the inside of a heart, as well. He looked up at the moon. Then down to the sea & at the moon's reflection therein. He nodded pensively, understandingly, as his mane blew back towards the mainland; such was the strong wind under the scattered stars charging forth from across the ocean's vast surface.

I haven't yet written down my dream of the man with the dreadlocks, the light-skinned black man, who had me & my whole family hostage, and who took my father out of the room first, hurting him, was killing him. This man was Death. This dream, which I awoke to & not really understanding, I finally made sense of over the phone whilst talking to Kant: and cried as I interpreted it to him, as it was only at that moment I understood.

[A brief recounting of the dream in full, accompanied by an interpretation:]

Everyone in my family is held hostage in a room. We are each bound and tied to the floor, flat on our backs, no one can move in the least; the impossibility of helping each other is palpable—but it's the case. I try to loosen my binds, but can't budge the slightest bit. No one is gagged, but all are silent. And then a man walks out from a doorway (where there's some kind of mixed-colored light/ twilight) and he stands over me. He is a light-skinned black man with dreadlocks, very powerfully built— much stronger than I. Yet I think about trying to take him, I want to take him on: but I can't move, am powerless before him as he stares down at me. Then he moves away from me, and goes over to my father, takes him into the other room. My father can offer no resistance against this man. I know that he's killing my father, torturing my father, beating him— and there's nothing my father, I, or anyone can do. Then I awoke, terrified.

The powerful light-skinned black man was Death. "Light-skinned black" because thoughts on death have just now started come to my thoughts again— consciousness being symbolized by "white," unconsciousness by "black"; this man is in-between— things I've put off thinking about (death) have been forced to mind of late. The "dreadlocks" because thoughts of death have recently nigh-literally had me "locked in dread." I am powerless before him. My family, whom I love, I cannot save from him. We are all going to die, there is nothing to say. Nevertheless, I want to

“take him on,” to fight him— my writing of late has been attempting to understand the inevitable end to that which I love: *life*. And then “he goes over to my father, takes him into the other room”: my father will, in all likelihood, be the first of my family to die. My father, who is doing chemotherapy: I see him everyday. His thinning and fatigue. Loss of hair. I hear him cough. His constant cough, the lung troubles. I see this, him, everyday, living with him now.

When I finish this book, my father will read it: *And then “he goes over to my father, takes him into the other room”: my father will, in all likelihood, be the first of my family to die.*

125

But I drove down the highway today, listening to *Ecstasy & Wine*, thinking, *It’s my turn to be alive*, my turn to be alive and listen to My Bloody Valentine, one of the greatest bands of all time. Regarding many things I do, and regarding many situations I find myself in of late, I find myself saying “It’s my turn to be alive now,” and appreciating it— *everything*— all the more. I love life.



[From an unsent letter to a friend]

Ah, Frédéric!

Let me tell you this. Very often, I have— whilst in the act of doing something— been thinking of how “It’s my turn to do this.” Closing the door to my car and turning the ignition, driving off, I have thought to myself: It is my turn to close the door to my car and turn the ignition, drive off. This is how my thoughts have gone: It is my turn to live. My turn will be over someday soon enough: Now: it is my turn to live, to do x...



The question is always— and is never more than— *how to spend one’s time on Earth.*

It’s a night of looking up at the stars and thinking: what else matters? What could matter more than this? Thousands of stars,

and the billions shining behind those seen — what could matter more than this?

And the thought of embers, the thought of myself. Christ. This. Everything. The stars, nothing could matter more, these lights, so far away, so bright, their energy.

Nothing can matter more than the stars. I look up, *they are life*. Pascal said “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces [*the heavens*] terrifies me.” But if you look, sometimes you can hear them. And it’s deafening, impossible, astounding. Attempting comprehension reduces one’s thoughts to a dim whir — that, to me, is the foremost sound heard; this same sound could be, I say, what terrified Pascal. It humbles.

126

People think about energy at a certain age, just as people think about sexuality at a certain age (i.e., puberty). But for the former subject, there’s no required public school educational forum, if only for reasons of these thoughts usually occurring after high school.

127

The goal of human life isn’t longevity, but completeness. Reading the dates of authors, artists, athletes, politicians, activists, scientists, & other luminaries, subtracting in my head the former year from the latter.

“*The light that burns twice as bright lasts half as long,*” a recurring thought.

And what more can you ask? No, not even another day: having gotten more than nothing — nothing being the only thing you’d have had otherwise. If I die tomorrow, already I’ve had more than I could ever have hoped for. One day the morning sun will rise without me. And there’ll be squirrels, birds, people. Cars & houses. My clothes. I won’t be among them. The sun will rise without me, as I’ve never known, but as is. There are times when I think to myself, *IdontcareifIdie*, but from experience, I know these times lie. When I’ve been fearful with good reason — times when sick & awaiting test results, say — these times, every time, I did not want to die, I clung to life. What is tonight.

. . .

Rewarding yourself for good behavior by lapsing back into bad.
 Change is not smooth. It's downright bloody.
 Through all things comes what is.

128

But then how difficult the nicknames make for breaking up, for parting, ending, stopping. The nicknames: which, insofar as they amazingly (in all of their non-specificity) fit all of the world into the loved one: they make the loved one the world, *which she is*: and when it— that love, *her love*— is all over or ending: then that's what you're leaving: *a world*.

She told me of a dream she had today, too— and its meaning was very clear to me— and she asked for what I thought of it: but I didn't have it in me to say. What would've needed to be said is exactly the stuff that can't be said without great difficulty, and is what I've tried to say without words: and so, of course (to bring it full circle) her dream is largely the result of her unconsciously picking up on all of these cues I've dropped. The irony of now being called to interpret the dream: that itself brings significant pain, on top of all else.

129

It's not so much the discomfort of traveling along in pain, existing within the corridors of some epic maze (as we've managed to have grown used to that? And on varying levels have become inured?), but it's more the disconcertment that this winding territory— and therefore its end— is still, in the same moment of our walking, being drawn by an unseen hand. And yet this hand is, ultimately & collectively, *our own hand*; there's no end until we ourselves write one.

Greed is the world's foremost problem, as it threatens to end all human life. A close second is indifference, insofar as it's poised to allow for greed to run its desired course. And so, another problem unique to now: our general cultural indifference to greed. After being raised with the golden rule that is "Do unto

others...”, somewhere down the line the West switched to the other golden rule that is “The man with the gold rules” — the proof of which (at least: until further notice) is rather evident.



A bizarre winter, or a winter to remember. I’m sitting on my porch, eight-thirty in the morning on January 6th, and it must be 60 degrees. One could hope this winter is at least anomalous. But it won’t be. Certainly this’ll be the winter in which, in the minds of “doubters,” a second thought is given to Mr. Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*, which recently came out on DVD. For everyone — and I can’t see how there can be any exceptions — there’s something uncomfortable, disturbing in the air. It’s too obvious to be ignored completely. (And so: the “controversies” around the film infuriate.)

130

Did you hear the one about the guy who got fired from his job for having diarrhea?”

I just invented that joke.

131 | ESCHATOLOGICAL CHAPTER

This book has some premises. One is as follows: to know the *eschatological*, one must know the *scatological* — the latter word being literally as well as metaphorically contained within the former.

Eschatological is defined as “being concerned with the final events in the history of humankind and the world, as well as of souls.” It may also be used in conversation as regards “the ultimate destiny of man,” or as it relates specifically to “the end of the world” (in terms of the Second Coming of Christ, the Last Judgment, and etc. along such lines). The word comes from the Greek *eschatos*, meaning *last*, or *farthest*.

Ensnared within the theological term *eschatological* is the baser term *scatological* — it’s used to describe that which is concerned with the obscene, off-color, lewd, & etc. (especially within the study of literature). Also, when spoken of within the

* He just couldn’t get his shit together.

scientific community, it pertains to the actual study of actual shit from living beings. *Scatological* is also from the Greek (*skat*, or *skōr*), for “excrement.” All of the preceding definitions are of use to us, provided the Christ part is taken as metaphor (e.g., the phrase “Christ consciousness”).

Shit is fertilizer. It’s the case in the agricultural world, and it’s the case in the cultural world. An “ultimate destiny of man”— necessarily involving a sum of all parts— *cannot exclude any aspect of human experience*. To put it simply: for human life to be seen through to its “ultimate destiny”— or, if we’re to undergo a metaphorical end-of-the-world, say— it’s necessary to acknowledge & *own* the shit within ourselves, including our innate proclivity towards such shit.

All of this is also to say: baser aspects of human experience cannot be excluded solely because a prevailing morality disapproves. Should morality disapprove, then it is morality which must be excluded— or, to put it better: *be rewritten*. The idea paraphrases Emma Goldman, a proponent of “honoring the urge to expression”— always the right idea, provided that so doing doesn’t harm others. Not honoring (or otherwise constructively reconciling with) the urge to expression results in repression, which eventually & inevitably results in psychosis— which often results in some form of violence. It’s critical to note that history generally shows: what one generation deems shit, subsequent generations will understand as being acceptable— if not rather crucial & extremely valuable.

As for locating what’s referred to as shit in a culture, it generally isn’t difficult: it’s usually found the farthest from the center (i.e., from the mainstream), at the fringe. These farther reaches of culture— the places where new life is still being woven— are also, of course, where we often find censorship trampling about. At such a distance from public concern, the fringe is often in danger of being trimmed, often enough without notice. Certainly: often without protest. Yet with this trimming, the perimeter of culture itself diminishes: less material becomes available to reach out towards, promoting a situation wherein the opportunity to live out potential & realize unknown gifts is markedly lessened.

Decreased potential for new directions and new perspectives is not very good. Perhaps a misunderstanding of the word “fringe” is at fault? For if looked at closely, the fringe (from the Latin *fimbria* for “fibers, shreds”) isn’t so much the coming undone of fabric (as the word’s image might suggest) as it is the outwards-stretching of new strings of material (like tentacles, or root hairs from the root), growing & spreading forth as the logical continuation of the center. The commonplace phrase “fringe of culture” likely doesn’t help, insofar as people may be inclined to picture the fringe as evidence of culture’s unraveling. Yet if such were the case, culture would be an entity of ever-decreasing proportions— which it clearly isn’t. Precisely the opposite is the case: it’s from the fringe that culture reaches out to the new, making unknown territory tangible. It’s by virtue of this ragged reaching that culture can grow, and through this growing can thereby cultivate itself towards being whole.

132 | YOUNG MISTA ANT AS CLASS CLOWN

Teacher: *Ant, please use the word monologue in a sentence.*

Young Mista Ant: *Yes’m. I just went to the bathroom and a great big one came out: it was a monologue.*

133 | MISTA ANT & A CERTAIN NOCTURNAL FRIEND

Mista Ant looked at the longing Earth, specifically at its late-day horizon. The sun had somewhere set & some stars from different points of everywhere shone in that tremendously soft light that knows it is falling, but gently accepts the fact for knowing it shall soon again rise. And so it was just like this that the night fell, and, from somewhere near, a rubbish can lid, as well.

Mista Ant scanned beneath the horizon for the racket’s origin. Under the damp light of an evening in mist, Mista Ant saw a minor scurrying commotion and cautiously walked towards.

Mista Ant stepped forth as he heard the sounds of what he imagined to be Jamaica, the clanging rhythm of music being beat upon steel cans, only significantly softer: a tiny tinny symphony of irregularly rhythmic sorts. When before long he arrived at the sound’s source, Mista Ant stood before a filthy & very multiply-

dented rubbish can. “Huh,” said Mista Ant, standing at the foot of the jittering barrel — whereupon the jittering & resulting poem of random tones abruptly stopped. And then a pair of diamond eyes poked forth from above its edge.

The eyes looked into the night, taking in the darker horizon whence Mista Ant trod. And they were in fact the very eyes of the night, insofar as they were banded by black — *and the diamonds, yes, the diamonddiamond eyes: compressed & pressurized blackblackblack of untold ages of eons of coal, formed finally into the daggercrystals of the diamonds here & now...* “Oh, my!” cried Mista Ant in surprise. Whereupon Raccoon looked down & replied “Good eve!” in return.

“What are you doing there, dear fellow?” asked Mista Ant.

“Oh, you know, scrounging around for some food,” Raccoon replied. “There’s often enough some fine victuals over in here,” Raccoon remarked as she rummaged. “Here we are!”

Suddenly from over the can’s canyon-esque edge ejected a presence: a swirling silvery slippery grey blob appeared, having just been lobbed into dark flight. Mista Ant jumped deftly aside as it landed beside him in the dust.

“That’s the stuff!” piped Raccoon, jumping from the can down to the ground.

“That?” piped Mista Ant in return, slightly choking at the density of dust.

“Yes. *That*,” piped Raccoon right back. And so there between them the pipes were sealed, fused, continuous in agreement, an unbroken & reciprocal flow of understanding.

And as the dust settled back into grounddust, there it lay plain to see: a salmon, hook still dangling in mouth. With a partly digested worm, moreover. Raccoon circled her find in examination. Mista Ant stood there as he watched the nocturnal creature assess her catch. And they then exchanged a knowing glance. No words further were spoken between the twain as Raccoon left to the left, a trail of diaphanous silver scales leading into the forest, her home.

134 | THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

Suffice it to say: people need violence, need ceremony, and need (the construct of) closure. Yet violence needn't be obtained in literal terms, as symbolic expression is capable of serving many of the same ends, which may be illustrated through the following pair of nearly identical situations:

Situation 1: Take a hated political leader, and put him on a platform, around which swarms the rowdiest crowd of the 100,000 people who hate him the most. Tie him to a stake, light him on fire, watch him burn. Note how the crowd cheers, goes wild. And, on a very real level, experiences a feeling of satiation, however fleeting it may be. For: they have watched the object of their hatred die a slow & painful death.

Situation 2: Take a life-like doll representing that same hated political leader, and put it on a platform, around which swarms the rowdiest crowd of the 100,000 people who hate him the most. Tie it to a stake, light it on fire, watch it burn. Note how the crowd cheers, goes wild. And, on a very real level, experiences a feeling of satiation, however fleeting it may be. For: they have watched the object of their hatred die a slow & painful death.

What is being pointed out through the above comparison? We have seen two things: a man burned alive, and a man burned in effigy. What is the difference? In the first case, a human life is taken— which I believe no human has a right to do under any circumstances whatsoever, no matter how “condign” that execution may seem. In the second case: no one dies literally, but rather dies symbolically. What is the similarity? In both cases, the crowd has the exact same emotional reaction, experiences the exact same satisfaction.

There is no excuse for literally acting out our malevolent drives, and this is simply because the same emotional effect can be achieved by means of acting in symbolic terms. (What's more, ending the politician's life is only going to enter everyone into a counterproductive vicious cycle.) And if a fellow's to say that “emotional effect” by itself isn't enough, the fellow may be

reminded that the emotional appeal of an event is precisely all that's necessary to effect the mobilization of a people towards right action & meaningful change.

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So c'mon, c'mon... do the Loco-Motion with me!

Where is the music of the '50s & '60s, when I need it most?

And the dreams never the dreams but the dreams indeed yes.

And the point in talking? When so much about what goes on in her day are things she can't & wouldn't tell me? For the same goes for me. Talk gets harder every day & each night.

And how it is at the end when you & the other both know the same thing, but one of you is trying to get the other to say it, so that, in the future, one can point the finger to the other and say "*But remember that you were the one who said...*"

136 | TO QUOTE CARL JUNG

"We could call sexuality the spokesman of the instincts, which is why from the spiritual standpoint sex is the chief antagonist, not because sexual indulgence is in itself more immoral than excessive eating and drinking, avarice, tyranny, and other extravagances, but because the spirit senses in sexuality a counterpart equal and indeed akin to itself. For just as the spirit would press sexuality, like every other instinct, into its service, so sexuality has an ancient claim upon the spirit, which it once — in procreation, pregnancy, birth, and childhood — contained within itself, and whose passion the spirit can never dispense within its creations."

— CARL JUNG, in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*

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We invented the word "God," & are the word God. But the strange logic of it all: of how it had to be that, for so long, we couldn't

possibly know this fact. For if we were born knowing ourselves to be God— given the necessary development of the ego— we'd be megalomaniacs. (And we'd also mistakenly understand ourselves to be the creator of all things?) Not to mention how such knowledge would preclude the possibility of many other critical aspects of psychological growth necessary to human life on Earth. *It is impossible for us to be born with the knowledge that we're God. It must be learned, experienced from the initial, opposite perspective of not being God.*

In another regard, if we knew from the start we were God, would not the nature of life inevitably be stasis? But stasis isn't life's nature— it's change. Life has a direction, goes forwards & backwards. *To know ourselves to be God is to arrive at, and to understand this arrival as a return.* (Ourselves the living— as well as ourselves the dead?)

138

The price of a few happy hours of a night out being a hangover all the next day, also. Just things like that, at all levels of experience.

Yet at times: my back is scaled with the comforting hands of angels?

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We must've talked for three hours, but it isn't possible to measure precisely, as one often can via the cellphone's display at the call's end. The signal faded once, she hung up on me once, and I had to change the battery for a third interruption.

140 | DUDE, HOLY FUCKING SHIT: IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD

In certain matters, whether a subject's understood metaphorically or literally makes all the difference between a manured field & a crock of shit. "The end of the world" is one such subject. Moreover, to judge by its frequency of occurrence in multimillion-dollar budget movie plots, it's an extremely popular subject.

A literal end of the world is bad— a metaphorical end to this increasingly unjust & wantonly materialist & greedy world would

be good, is necessary. While there's much evidence of our moving towards such a metaphorical end in many ways, the energy expended to propel life in the opposite direction— towards literally killing ourselves— often seems nearly equivalent: shit is getting fucked up with increasing violence & speed, and now on a planetary scale; nuclear weapons are for some reason still being produced; politicians, lawmakers, and bankers somehow continue to get away with lying through their teeth at the expense of human lives and the quality thereof. To name but a few things.

All things considered, there's simply a lot of unnecessary and very avoidable suffering. Because of the nature and scale of all this, a literal end of the world can't yet be dismissed as a crock. And yet, while fixating on a literal end is a bit mistaken: in popular culture, the endless possibility & potential in the coin's other side seems to have gone largely & undeservedly unnoticed.

However, there's no doubt that images of a literal end of the world make for much more entertaining movies. All of the fire and flooding, extraterrestrial weaponry and explosions, attractive stars and costars. These films have appeared more often of late, as culture tends to fixate on dates of prophetic significance— an example of which is when, just before the year 2000, there was the summer that was the summer of movies about the end of the world, and audiences flocked to the cinemas in great number as things apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic steadily and easily became all the rage. A lot of money was made here and will soon be made again: the next date of prophetic significance is in 2012, when the Mayan calendar— a rather interesting (& rather accurate?) calendar that addresses billions of years— simply ends. Given the current state of the world— and recalling conversations I've had or heard on the subject— it seems some find 2012 ominous at best.

Yet it isn't. A cursory study of the calendar actually suggests hope, not the promise of literal end to all life. The calendar's end speaks rather of the potential and possibility for a metaphorical end. That the calendar ends at all only suggests that past the year 2012, nothing is written. More than anything, this intimates the possibility of freedom.

. . .

What is it that moves one from “I love x” to “I must protect x”? It seems it’s only logic. Or else: maternal instinct— which is perhaps another mode of logic? A logic felt, incapable of having rival or replication by processes of ratiocination as are commonly understood? Feeling the engine’s workings beneath the floorboards— and yet it remains out of sight.

Whether all death leads to rebirth I neither know nor care to. However, the fact of rebirth holds unquestionably true for ideas & beliefs, insofar as they’re inherently contingent upon the world they exist in, and the world is a dynamic & ceaselessly changing entity.

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Now it’s not about loss of love, but distance, “time in our lives” stuff; where she’s at, where I’m at— and the distant, nebulous point in time at which we’re only possibly, hopefully to be in the same place again.

I love you TJ.

I love you.

Yes.

That is all: and heard or not, those are the cards, there.

[later]

How to honestly & fairly say *This relationship isn’t working for us right now* to someone you still love & expect to love forever?

Fuck it. It being everything, or something. Yes.

[later]

She texted & called. I didn’t reply or answer; I haven’t the words. Certainly, what can be said in a conversation lasting less than hours? Hours being the only possible length for any conversation now? Which I haven’t the emotional energy to spend upon tonight? No.

142 | GOETHE / LIFE

I quoted earlier Goethe's familiar maxim on how to live one's life. There's another commonplace expression about how to live one's life: to live as if you were about to die.

Between the two sayings *Live each day as if your life had just begun* and *Live life as if you were going to die tomorrow* is the fact of an exceedingly slight space.

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When future civilization looks back to our time in an effort to understand how life functioned [*Should we be so kind & wise as to pave the way for the possibility of its existence*], two traits will be understood as most-critically defining our period: 1) to an extent nearing unanimity, the life the majority of people live in the world nearly literally mirrors the life they perceive in the image, and 2) our ability to annihilate ourselves and the Earth's life-giving environment.

Unquestionably, they'll furthermore remark upon the simultaneous occurrence of these two traits as having been exceptionally problematic. For if in several decades one takes most of the oil from beneath the ground (created over millions of years), then processes it through machines & discharges the exhaust produced into the atmosphere: to expect that this will somehow *not cause a significant ecological disturbance*, one must either be an idiot or a liar. There are no two ways around this.

While frightening, is it philosophically necessary that humankind *always from now on & into eternity* have the power (& means) to kill itself? Or, *do we need only to have experienced this power at one (i.e., this present) critical point?*

144 | WHIP

Imagine a graph surveying the history of Western culture's emotions up to the present, an aggregate of the highs and lows felt by all peoples: as time passes & as populations grow, ever-increasing

highs & ever-plummeting lows are charted, as well as dwindling durations between each extreme.

Beginning around the industrial revolution— and as photography & cinema began establishing their stake in driving culture—the character of the line markedly intensified, and has continued to ever since. The energy within this line can be likened to the energy within a whip: with culture’s dawn being the wristflick having set it in motion, as we presently approach the tip, the imminence of— and anxiety over— its final crack is collectively felt. With intensity increasing within ever-shortening spans of time: what if the conclusive crack only sounds like an eggshell’s?

145 | TOWARDS A NOVELLA OF FORTUNE

-or-

AN INSEMINATION STORY

From the entrance to his anthill, Mista Ant had watched the sun set perfectly the night before, a coin dropping into a slot, vending the moon in exchange. How the world had waited for a morning as such after a night like it had been. And now, on this very morning, Mista Ant peered through his periscope, finding himself considering Paul. For he remembered that it was Paul who— in an onerous state of mental tumult years prior— had envisaged and considered befriending an imaginary friend named Emeraldenia. She’d be about his age and always sitting nearby, her tucked-in knees held behind clasped & able forearms. Except of course for when she walked or danced— both of which were effectively the same thing. Her parted black hair was crimped as if by a mermaid’s oyster shell, and she dressed in a forest green flower-print summer dress, accentuated with other shades of springtime green; she’d sewn it together herself with a needle once found in a haystack... The morning was dim, and the lights of turning cars passed faintly over the walls, where the streetlamps’ light melded with day’s.

Paul’s alarm clock went off. He hit the sleep button, but the button failed to provide for its namesake, his closed eyelids remaining wakeful. Upon his eyelids played scenes of the day

to come, the things he had to do and the things he hoped would come to pass. The probabilities regarding the former seemed to outweigh those of the latter— and so getting out of bed was difficult. *I'm becoming prone to recumbency*, Paul thought.

A pink rift opened between the drift of two blue morningclouds. The morning was quiet, but not perfectly so— from somewhere nearby, birds transmitted love letters in their timeless Morse code. He listened to them singing, and, as he listened, realized he was hearing other timeless sounds, as well: the couple in the apartment below were fucking.

This derailed his train of thought, the caboose of which quite abruptly disjointed altogether. And it rolled down the tracks solo for awhile, until being hit upon by a new engine, whereupon the ass end was transubstantiated into the front end.

Paul was very logical: *if you can't beat 'em, join 'em*. Paul reached into his pajamas and began gently stroking his cock, listening to the love emanating from below.

Nearing climax the alarm went off again, and he got up & took to the bathroom, still stroking. Stroking, stroking, and stroking, until then into the toilet he came. Words then came to mind. *Words*: and how they come to the surface of the page like long-submerged pearl divers to the surface of the water, how they come to the white of the page like the pearly ejaculate of the rejected or repressed into the white of the porcelain john. *And this is the image, this image is the nature of words: the spin and the unity, the yin and the yang: up from under the water emerges one, and down and into the water plunges the other*, thought Paul. *Man from water, man into water; and the idea of eternal return*. It all gave Paul a notion. He dressed quickly, unthinkingly, and grabbed his work. Once dressed— in clothes scented of having too-long neglected being unpacked— he ducked back into the bathroom to flush, and then ran out of the door, not slowing until the subway's turnstiles, boarding the southbound train just as its doors closed shut.

The train shot Paul through the veins of the city like a potent narcotic; fitting insofar as by his eyes he somewhat looked under

the influence of an upper. But he was only under the influence of a notion. A notion which, in part, led him to fixate upon plumbing: the sewer's underground pipes, which ran parallel to the train's tracks. He stared into the black of the window opposite, behind which journeyed the deluge. Newspapers lay all around him in the car, containing countless stories of happinesses & sadnesses. The black, however, told all, contained all — and so brimmed with happiness & sadness, too. And he stared into it, where also he could often see himself. Beauty & flaw. Pride & regret. Past & present & potential.

The conductor announced the appointed stop and Paul alighted away. The weather was perfect, and smelled of fresh-cut grass & the sea. When Mista Ant again found Paul in the circle & crosshairs of his periscope's lens, Paul was looking to the ground with affection, and lowering himself to touch it with both of his hands & then his forehead for a moment. Paul's eyes then perceived what his nose already had, and he made for the water. Where there stood an odd little building behind a chain-link fence. He jumped the fence and explored the building & its peculiar architecture admiringly, and then behind the building, where ran a pipe several meters in diameter & half-submerged, protruding into the sea. He walked upon the not-submerged half, and felt through his soles the power of Christ knows how many cubic tons of water & other matter surging beneath — and then he sat straddling it. Beneath him — *there* — *everything* made sense, and he didn't know what to do but it was done. And the words again came.

**146 | UNDERSTANDABLY REJECTED GRADUATION
SPEECH PROPOSAL (2005) (BECAUSE A SPEECH LIKE THIS
IS REALLY MORE FOR THE PAGES OF A BOOK LIKE THIS,
AND NOT FOR A COLLEGE GRADUATION)**

In June of 1978, Alexander Solzhenitsyn delivered the commencement address at Harvard University, entitling it “A World Split Apart.” I was born several months earlier. Plus or minus some years, all of us here in the graduating class were born.

I start here with Solzhenitsyn's observation (his title) because I believe he's correct; it's a general-though-accurate diagnosis of the world we were born into & raised by— and therefore, *the world we know best*. And this condition remains the case. I moreover choose his words because I believe *what he's correct about* is the most pertinent, pressing, and troublesomely-unresolved matter we collectively face— *and I can't stress this point enough...*

... however, I'll need to be more specific about it. Especially as it's my point-of-departure. And while splits, cracks, fissures and the like don't suggest the surest ground from which to depart— what with their broken nature and all, beneath which may only exist nothingness & void— this is the land we were born into. It's our native territory & always has been, whether we've liked it or not.

So given this physical/ metaphysical instability, departing surely and safely requires some strategy, if not finesse.

I write because I believe there actually exists a viable strategy. It's a relatively simple one that's two-fold: we first observe (however painfully): that in the time between Solzhenitsyn's words & my own, things have gotten far worse, and the split has widened to a degree threatening to engulf. For part two: we step forward, inside of this split.

I've arrived at this strategy through logic: when you've got a problem with something, you go to the source. But another bit of logic is this: if the split is in the world— and the world has a core— *then the split leads to the center*. A final piece of logic is that: it's at the root of the split— at the center region, the core— where a solution is to be found, insofar as both of the two sides share this core as a common point of origin. This is all easier in theory than practice— which, incidentally, is part of the whole problem.

Being specific about the observation/ diagnosis: *the split I speak of is the one between our intellects & our hearts*: our powerful reasoning faculties & lesser-developed capacity for feeling. *The split in the world is the split in myself*; it's part of how we've all

been cultured, *and it's a part of our culture that we— that this generation— absolutely needs to fix.* Our world is as it is because we and those before us have done as we've done. A split exists in the world because it exists, in varying degrees, within each of us. It seems obvious that for the world to be healed/ mended, a majority of us must actually heal/ mend ourselves. It seems clear that disaster is certain if we don't. We can make life many things— perhaps nearly anything; nothing makes it guaranteed.

I should note that in Solzhenitsyn's speech, he claimed the only way left is up: *transcendence*. I'm saying it's *down*, or *within*; of course, we're saying the same thing: for, to synchronize our hearts & intellects would— in a very real way— *be transcendence*; would produce a different world with different laws, ideals, & norms entirely. Imagine if, instead of our usual sequencing of: thinking, doing, and then feeling (or *not feeling*)— we felt, thought, and then did (or *refrained from doing*)?

That things would be different and with less violence, destruction, and suffering is guaranteed; so I think it's worth imagining.

Relatedly & towards a close, I'd like to briefly cite two other concepts: *conscience & interdependence*. Classically opposed as they are, thinking & feeling aren't without tie. One tie is the bridge called *conscience*. Having decided upon doing something, conscience checks if it "feels right to do." Some travel this bridge often. Conversely, the consistently destructive actions of others have me wonder whether their hearts have receded so far from touch as to have snapped this delicate, critical link.

Yet in doing what's best for ourselves— as "a good conscience" suggests— we do what's best for all. This is convenient. What's problematic is our elaborate, well-developed practice of lying to ourselves about what's best, or at least what's excusable.

A moratorium on this practice can be endorsed upon the following, non-moral grounds: *It just doesn't make sense.* The world's an interdependent place. Anyone having difficulty observing this in the macrocosm can observe the microcosm.

Take for instance The Cooper Union. Here in The Great Hall is a graduating class— the 146th— who've been given a pretty tremendous opportunity. Since acceptance to here is slim, there's generally consensus that people here have something special to offer. Because here I've met, befriended, studied under, or simply admired from afar some of the most impressive, inspiring people I could ever hope to: I'll agree. But if this "specialness" is true, then by extension (by logic), everyone else in this hall— everyone else who, in their way, makes it all happen— all of our guests, teachers, administration, benefactors, maintenance persons, security guards, and etc., are in a kind of fundamental equivalence. As well as many not here— people we don't know and never will. Like those who've sewn our clothes or've grown our food; etc., again. Arbitrarily stopping at a certain degree of separation is illogical. What's logical is the farthest extension possible: invariably & inevitably, the entire world: *this is interdependence*, the consciousness-less functioning of which— observed from any angle— has always struck me as something of a miracle. As we can't do it without others, harming others— however "indirectly"— doesn't make sense.

The intellect's analysis of our world ascertains its precarious condition. But what moves one to act upon this analysis is feeling. That "the world doesn't change without individuals changing" isn't only something people happen to like saying; it's a fact proved both logically & empirically. *This decade is critical*. It's our century's first, and enough mistakes have already been made within it for us to spend the next 95 years learning from— though I also hope: *acting upon what's been learned*— so as to make this a better century than the last. *Which we must*.

And so by way of closing, I'll offer a quote from someone who did— exactly one century ago, in fact— change our world's very picture of the Universe— which is of course exactly the same as changing our world. I'll hasten to add that Albert Einstein— an ardent & vocal pacifist, among other things— contributed

to humankind in more ways than by the physics for which he's famous. He said this: *There are two ways to live your life. One is as if nothing is a miracle, and the other is as if everything is a miracle.*

I think he's right, and I feel he's right, and I believe that those words are very much filled with consequence; and that is all I'd like to say. Thank you.

147 | A WASP HUNG IN THE AIR

Seed to seedling, seedling to flower, flower to scent. (Outside of the window a wasp hangs in the air; wings perpendicular to its stinger and dangling feet, like hovering crucifixes they've always tended to look. Alien-like, black, deathly, swaying side to side & up and down— vague, imprecise, like adumbrations. Until the stinger's fact is delivered, & the fetal position assumed in the moments just before.)

And artists of all kinds in a dark century: what to make of them? They look at art, they look at politics: and then they aim for the possibility of a coupling. And yet, tempering this aim of theirs: is the understanding of the frequent impossibility of artworks adequately, fully dealing with politics— or any social problem's causes & solutions completely— while fully remaining moving artworks proper.

The notion of “inciting change” only being possible through works of art affirming human life? Works moving an audience by asserting certain aspects of life in a particular way, proving life is worth living, that life's complexity, wonder, pain, and all adjectives in existence & those to come, when combined, sum to *beautiful*...? And if something is beautiful, then it's of value; and if something's of value, then it mustn't be lost...?

“Consider how hard it is to change yourself and you'll understand what little chance you have of trying to change others.”

— JACOB BRAUDE

“A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life. How essential it is that we should realise that unity the dead bodies, the ruined houses prove. For such will be our ruin if you [an institution] in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world. Both houses will be ruined, the public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected.”

—VIRGINIA WOOLF

148

With or Without You. And her brother playing it, at her mother’s behest, when I last visited.

How to reconcile with that song, which kills me, knows me: *is me*. Is her is I is us: a simple song I know from growing up. I love my bubs and I miss her, it hurts now to imagine her nights in LA.

Just because you want something that’s right doesn’t mean it’s all going to be alright entirely. My baby will see other people, as will I. And we’ll still love each other— *be bubs to each other*— to some unknown end—,;... But then it might also come to pass that a day will come when she won’t love me as much or at all. I just have to not think about things, not imagine them, not reach for a smoke after every time talking with her. I just love her, love her always is all. But then not even sure if marriage would work, or the reasons seen as to why it wouldn’t. How dating gets different as you get older, the timetables & the like.

A day in the life of. Listen to some old Magnetic Fields, why not? Of course. Ringer on silent & an early AM hour, goodnight.

149 | “DISSOLVING”

The hourglass best illustrates how change— having seemed all but imperceptible for ages— is barely, then gradually, & finally quite

suddenly seen: while the sand's pace persists nearly unchangingly for most of the duration of the grains' falling, when close to the end, and as the final grains fall, its speed appears to increase.



It should be understood that the phrase “dissolving of the ego” implies less the destruction of one's sense of *me*, and more the slipping away of superfluous structures formerly employed or leaned upon when “going about being oneself.” These structures, once depended upon for support (be they modes of thought or patterns of behavior, addictions, etc.) are simply things once mistaken as being central to one's identity. But they aren't. This being the case, there should be no fear of a “loss of the self” that one loves; rather — as unnecessary structures are shed — the self one has grown to love only grows stronger, less hindered, freer. There should be no fear of enlightenment.

If you dissolve into it, you're no longer subject to it in the ways you once were. This is what life is like.

One can't know that one is awake? *One is simply awake.* Being awake is simply being one with all — *and much about this is an unconscious process?* No purpose is served by *knowing* one's status as “awake” — eagerness towards such wouldn't only be to miss the point, but moreover would serve to contradict it. It's all actually simply human evolution, nothing more.

150 | CHAMELEON

Chameleon was a spy & saboteur — a sort of letter opener, as it were, if you will: one who slips into the fold only so as to tear it apart. He worked in the public interest.

Chameleon put his hand down on the old wooden desk and rapped his fingertips, which made a sound like a horse galloping. The letter sat upon the desk, awaiting opening. He looked out of the window. Outside below, collected in one end of the square was

a street fair, the people bustling about & finding entertainment. Chameleon had an idea.

He went downstairs to join the crowd and to walk amongst them, letter in hand. When he got to the bottom of the stairs and passed through the doorway into the city street, he became a beautiful woman; and the letter, a grocery bag. Stepping onto the sidewalk as s|he cradled the bag in arm & started down the street, a delicious smell emanated from the tasty provisions inside.

Down the street & about the fair Chameleon walked and walked, inspecting the wares people had provided for other people to buy. There were sweet and/or greasy foods and fizzy beverages, strange & often colorful artworks painted upon mirrors, cheaply-made weapons, affronting-yet-clever t-shirts & buttons, gaudy jewelry with a saccharin shine. As it got darker, the people selling all of these things turned on incandescent lights so as to light their wares, casting the other side of the square in the darkness of shadow. This other side of the square is to where Chameleon had now walked. S|he stood by the square's fountain, a beautiful woman listening to the water coming down upon itself softly in the darkness.

People liked the smell from Chameleon's brown paper bag. And while they liked the smell of fried dough, too: for some fairgoers, the scent from the brown bag persisted in their nostrils to the point at which the source necessitated being found. For these people it was imperative to seek, and so they followed the scent out of the fair grounds & into the rest of the square. This led them, of course, to the fountain.

Chameleon looked up at the stars, feeling the cool water in hand. When s|he saw the people coming towards himher from out of the darkness, with hisher other hand s|he lowered the grocery bag into the water, whereupon it turned into a goldfish. S|he then turned himherself into an ant.

What unjust governments seem to forget is that to every tear gas cloud, there's a silver lining: the irrefutable reinforcement of a people's resolve for justice.

152 | MISTA ANT AND THE FFFWHUMP!!!! & >CLINK<

While it was unclear as to how it all happened so abruptly, no mistake could be made regarding the present problem: Mista Ant and a number of his antfriends were just strolling along and minding their own antbusiness of exploring the great world when *FFFWHUMP!!!!* — the great world around them suddenly became closed off to them. They looked up in disbelief: an old man in a white lab coat had slammed down a glass petri dish, trapping their merry party. And within seconds, the situation hurtled from bad to worse: the very ground beneath their feet was lost: a piece of cardboard was slid under the walls, so as to contain the ants as the old man upended the dish, and with a concluding >clink< covered the dish with its glass lid.

“Fuck,” said Mista Ant. This was a problem. The air supply was now exceedingly limited, and the ants wouldn't be able to survive for long.

153 | TRAVERSING THE BLADE

And yet: In order to get to the point, we must first traverse the length of the edge of the blade. Upon reaching the end (or even well-prior to doing so), there exists the danger of the divided self. This danger is unavoidable: given the nature of the path, a split begins to develop in the traveler from the very moment of the journey's onset — concluding divided is, then, not only a considerable risk, but a commonplace occurrence. *And so:* To then manifest one's constitution as being: like a grey sphere of clay, malleable & self-healing. Which — while cut by the sword & having passed its tip — still remains one. The divided thereby finds itself whole again, having self-healed — not automatically, but inherently. And the history isn't invisible: a seam or scar

is born, marking & celebrating the journey's trials. *Otherwise is insanity.*

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Dive into this present. Dancing with drink in hand to French music, understanding barely a word of it, only the sound. And the pretty girl on the dance floor, towards whom I'll soon step; who cares if anything happens, nothing, I don't know what I want to have happen anyways, I'm alive, now writing in the dark under an epic mirror ball, the lights swirling around my body like a spinning swarm of little insect spirits, a swarm of warming benevolence.

I am alive. That's all that matters. Alive & dancing.

DANCING.

There is something happening, yes.

[later]

And the disastrous litany of history unfurls itself from the past and into the present, a red red red red carpet unrolling, threatening to steamroll into the future's gardens.

...I will not let this happen.

155 | FUNERAL DIRGE

There was something about in the air; you could see it in the water. With lips as pursed as an oyster's, from beyond the glass wall Mista Ant heard music: from somewhere not far off, a human played a saxophone. Several of the ants in his company had already died, their antibodies coursing towards rigor mortis at death's swift pace. Others of the ants wept softly, whilst others still just stared at the glass wall & the life beyond, their antennae in confused disarray.

But Mista Ant's antennae went up. He recognized the song, and suddenly its words— or, the few chorus ones he knew—

came dancing into mind: the song was an old funeral dirge from the South. Mista Ant's antennae were up, and he began to sing:

*Oh when the saints
come marching in
oh when the saints come marching in
oh when the saints
come marching marching marching in,
oh when the saints come marching in!*

The other ants could not but take note of his words, his voice. And so pair by pair, the antennae of the ants around Mista Ant arose. And they too began to sing (or at least make sounds in the proper tune until they caught onto the words):

*Doh doh dee doh
doh doh dee do
doh doh dee doh dee doh dee do
doh do dee doh
dee doh doh doh dee doh dee do
doh doh dee doh dee doh dee do!*

Oh, the ants.

They sang louder and louder, in a pitch of more perfection and more perfection still. It was as if with each of their verses their voice was a blade passing across a whetstone, ever sharper did they sing their song. The ants could feel their antvoices crashing, whirling, and building in the closed space of the petri dish. Flowers could be seen on the other side of the glass, and the sound of the saxophone grew nearer, too; all the while their collective voice ramping all the more.

And as suddenly as it was strangely, the walls began to vibrate. And a small brown dove landed upon the Earth before them, just as a large, black gentleman in a purple suit playing the saxophone walked into the room's center, a golden glint shining forth from his bellowing instrument in the sun's bright light.

And with another verse that was it: the petri dish's walls around all of the ants shattered, fell to pieces & shards. What the ants had previously thought possible only by a hammer's force had been achieved by their voice in song.

So it is: from the vantage point of the present & into the vanishing point of the future:

SONG...





is evolutionary. Enlightenment is a process. For one to believe that there's necessarily a sort of singular, "orgasm-esque moment" is to fall victim to the all-too common Western construction (or even: literary construction) of enlightenment's definition.

Having said all this, I must now offer a brief definition of who I term an enlightened person to be: one who understands & feels the unity of all things, and who acts in accordance with this understanding & feeling.

* The word "God" is used in the absolute broadest & most all-encompassing manner possible—namely, it's used in the sense of: the sum of all that is. When saying that "everything is God," that is my way of saying that everything collectively is of the same value, and has the same power, the same capability of action & intent that a deist claims for an omniscient higher power to have. The critical caveat? This capability of action & intent occurs only through human life lived.

Enlightenment isn't something which occurs subsequent to some sort of "spiritual orgasm"—there is no "sudden flash," there is no moment before which one is purely ignorant & after which one completely & purely is. Everything is in gradation,

§

all that is: inseparable. that we make God, that God is nothing more or other than us & exists so that we know—that is, have consciousness of the fact—back together again & thereby know God. Moreover: this split a whole. Everything is split and divided so that we can put it all without God: for we are, in effect, the same, one; halves making presence. And God is nothing without us, and we are nothing out first understanding absence, it's impossible to understand with God would've always been manifest and present—for with-then it wouldn't be possible to know God, insofar as our unity, if there never existed a split between the intellect & the emotions, God from being perennially perceptible upon Earth. This is to say: a split between the intellect and the emotions is: for keeping it seems evident that the only "justification" for there being is to say we.

In light of the above, I believe it can be claimed that the synchronistic event shows that the world "wants" to heal itself, that the world "works to attempt at" healing itself. And to say the world

"CONCLUSION"

God has heretofore existed largely as a construct; but God can also be constructed to exist on Earth in & as fact. The tools are the same as the materials: humankind is the same as the Earth, the same as All. Construction is creation, and creation necessarily arrives at an entity which, inherently, is imbued with meaning.

Why wasn't the concept of synchronicity given name to hundreds or thousands of years ago? In answer: quite simply, the modern world has grown into an incredibly disconnected place. (Examples include the alienated nature of domestic life in cities & suburbs, the workings of business and politics, our heinous relation to our environment, how we obtain & understand food, etc.—to negotiate with contemporary life is effectively to negotiate an archipelago of sorts via kayak.) Insofar as our present conscious understanding of the world finds disconnection, the unconscious, emotional (i.e., compensatory) reaction is to create connection. Unconsciously, we're led to make the world appear as having the status it in fact has. And, by appearing to have: it has— simply to make the image of connection is to connect. New worlds are made only for reasons of failures of the old.

WHY SO LONG?

(But what is "our own intent" anyway? What can we claim credit for? When one performs a genealogy of one's own thoughts & intentions, little credit can be taken: we're all a product of our environments. Where we were born, where we went to school, who we were raised & taught by, what we were introduced to along the whole way— etc. When this is understood for what it is, the notion of "thinking with the world" isn't only not very radical, but it's not even exactly new. The idea of taking full credit for who & what one is is an exceptionally relative affair: we & all that is made of the same stuff, is continuous— everything effects everything else, as by ripples. What's questioned isn't just where we can justifiably draw the line of ownership, but is also how we understand the very concept of ownership. Any articulation arrived at through synchronicity is the product of co-creation— creation by two parts which, on the most fundamental level, are not two but one.)

(Or, in other words: the Earth is effectively put on equal footing with humankind.)

thought:
Specifically, it is understood how "the world's intent" and "one's own intent" are quite one & the same. The bubble we've fashioned for ourselves over the past centuries is thereby burst—

of human possibility.
With synchronicity, the main entailment is this: acknowledging the fact that the world itself, in tandem with one's unconscious, can assert itself as being capable of informing

In a sense: where thought ends, the known world ends, as well. If thought stops at the limits of the ego's capacities, the known world ends at the ego— which is to say, the content & value of the world is limited to that which is understood, created by, and/or is beneficial to the ego. So if thought stops at the limit of what we can ascertain via intellect alone, the intellect is the limit

TOWARDS ANOTHER MANNER OF THOUGHT

the world.
in a very concrete way, it's a moment of total melding with interpretation is to experience fully what this synthesis offers; capacities, one's conscious & unconscious. To act upon such an is to experience the synthesis of one's intellectual & emotional To arrive at a proper interpretation of a synchronistic event upside down: outer is inner, inner is outer.

to experiencing one's familiar world being turned, in a sense, world—in an articulate & meaningful way—is tantamount To find one's (internal) set of symbols unveiled in the (external) inquiry, there'd be no growth.)

our world. Without wonder, there'd be no inquiry; without the unconscious allows us to continually be surprised at ourselves of wonder, it could be said that the division of consciousness & awe or wonder. (And insofar as synchronicity affords the experience to one's (internal) life. Generally, the pervading emotion is one of which, when understood intellectually, correspond quite precisely finding in the (external) world an improbable confluence of events In the experience, one's emotional response is to the fact of

intents & purposes, is essentially the same moment.
consciousness, the intellectual) occur together in what, for all

In experiencing a synchronistic event, recognition (pertaining to the unconscious, the emotional) & interpretation (pertaining to

INTELLECT & EMOTIONS

it so" — albeit with careful watch on use of the pronoun "I," instance and say "it was meant to be" is still only to say "I made when synchronicity most often occurs.) So, to look at a synchronistic (incidentally, such times of critical decision making are generally when transformation or decision at a crossroads is necessary. work together to learn what must be understood at a time which must be seen — i.e., consciousness & the unconscious "collaborates" with consciousness by bringing to attention that in recognizing a synchronistic instance, the unconscious effectively

and its meaning articulated through consciousness. of the symbolic must be changed upon, and more fully understood much as the psychotic does. With synchronicity, the recognition looking for symbols, then one is only playing games with oneself — to themselves. To this end: discovery is key. For if one is consciously most (but by no means all) people know when they're trying to lie possibility of making mistakes; we're human. It's only to say that you're probably not on. Of course, this doesn't preclude the a proper interpretation simply "clicks." If it doesn't click, then impossible to deliberately create a bullshit interpretation; usually created. I note this partly to point out how it's relatively Also critical to note is how intuitively this interpretation is a "higher power").

own judgements — not in anything external to oneself (such as "leap of faith." And if so, the faith is placed in oneself, in one's is quite possibly analogous to the gap closed by the proverbial a dream, artwork, or synchronistic event by means of interpretation of giving life meaning. Closing the gap between the elements in or synchronistic events, we choose a kind of grammar in the interest moves us emotionally. In effect, when looking at dreams, art, act of finding — that is, making — meaning, something which meaningful interpretation can be. The act of interpretation is the

* An example of recognition as an unconscious process: is when you see someone familiar, whom you feel you know, but with whom it takes some discussion to realize as much, the unconscious certainty of recognition is what asks for the conscious investigation.

Insofar as everyone dreams, however irregularly, everyone understands how bizarre & illogical the raw material for creating

SOME REMARKS ON INTERPRETATION

is used to determine an event's interpretation. For consciousness to ascertain: namely, it's one's intellect which means—and whether or how they'll influence one's life—is a task with an unconscious process. * But precisely what all these events to elements in one's unconscious—here, recognition begins as synchronistic, it's because elements of the event correspond and consciousness, respectively. When one recognizes an event interpretation. Each of these roles correlate to the unconscious This role is twofold: 1) there's recognition, and 2), there's means secondary.

We should be explicit that the individual's creative role is by no force in a synchronistic instance (a coherent situation unfolds before & around one, generated without rational influence), while it's clear how the world can be understood as a creative oneself as a mere witness in such a situation denies free will.) as being subject to the world's happenings. (i.e., designating word "witnessed" would mislead, insofar as it positions a person for instance, say: "I witnessed an instance of synchronicity," as the creative forces: the world and the individual. One cannot. The synchronistic moment is the product of co-creation. The two

THE IMAGE WE CREATE

a little push from the outside to get on it. when you already know what the right thing to do is, but just need perceives & finding "a divine pattern" therein; so doing is the domain of the schizophrenic. Pretty much, this is simply about this shit is not about reading into every external event that one

BY THE WAY,

With synchronistic events, it sometimes seems as if everything in the world has happened for one's own sake—and one is correct in thinking as much. At the same time: were everyone in the world to think the same thing of such an event in their own lives, everyone in the world would be correct in their thinking, as well.

When, against all probability and causal, rational means, a synchronistic event occurs—an event capable of being understood as a kind of articulation of one's present situation—one may be inclined to call such occurrence "a sign." Insofar as the term sign implies a "higher power" involving itself in our lives, use of the word sign is both erroneous and dangerous, for there is no higher power than us living life. It seems prudent that one should only believe in what can be directly observed or experienced. As the observable Universe and everything within it is all that exists for certain, it's the only thing that can reasonably & rightfully be believed in.

my life?

When they happen, synchronistic events are an opportunity to pause and reflect, think critically and ask oneself: is not what appears before me, however acausally, a coherent statement addressing, albeit in metaphor, what's presently the case in

THE SYNCHRONISTIC INSTANCE

Whenever there's a union of opposites within a person, all possibilities in the spectrum of his or her life are inherently attainable. This spectrum spans everything perceived & understood from consciousness to the unconscious—a sustainable future is therefore of necessity grey (white being a symbol of consciousness, black of the unconscious). And insofar as a union of opposites is (by classic, psychological definition) holy: such a union brings as much to the world.

UNION OF OPPOSITES

causal relationship to one another. Moreover, the statistical likelihood of such events happening simultaneously must be infinitesimally small.

(2) Synchronicity: the occurrence of two or more events occurring in a meaningful manner, yet where each of the events have no

For everything is, in fact, the same. indistinguishably with everything else in view (as described in 100). of itself would be nigh impossible, as everything would blend in and were able to see at the atomic level, viewing anything in and walruses, etc.— is made of the same stuff. This means that if one the air, beer & its can (or bottle), this book, avocados, sexy lingerie, possible, everything— me, you, my computer, trees, rocks & dirt, as being connected, period. Breaking things down as far as 1) A starting premise is that we take everything in the Universe

1) A PREMISE, 2) A DEFINITION

—OSTRICH, in conversation with Mista Ant

“That which is beyond culture is not beyond humanity. When something is ‘beyond culture,’ that something mightn’t exist so much ‘far apart from culture’ as it exists embedded within it. (Similar to how, for instance, Buddhism describes ‘Buddha nature’ as being within everyone.) Humanity is a paradoxical entity. Of the places it seems to go, culture is what decides (that is, limits) which directions the majority of humanity can travel in... until, now & again, and again & perhaps now, shifts occur when culture itself changes—often in manners ostensibly in total contradiction to culture’s expected path, be it for reasons of developments in art, science, religion, or whatever may be...”

(SHORT VERSION)

156 / ADDENDUM:
FOUNDATIONS FOR A SYNTHESIS OF INTELLECT & THE EMOTIONS /
CONSCIOUSNESS & THE UNCONSCIOUS

[This writing is separate from the rest of the book — as such, it’s best read separately, in a different sitting.]