Eight Hours

or, Think

a book by/about/for alex j. taylor

hour one.

or, The Beginning Of The Next Eight Hours Of Your Life

Jump right in to the main body of text, without even trying to determine what's going on? Well, I suppose that's what I ended up doing - born into the river of history without so much as a proverbial basket to shield me. Not that I needed shielding, or that there was anything I understood to shield me from. 9/11 had happened just over a year ago. Yet, it didn't feel like anything to me. I was just there for a while, looking along the riverbanks, floating idly by.

This stage of my life is mostly made by recollection, patched together fragments of self-refined memories

which draw upon dozens of misremembered experiences to create a singular ideal. For example, bouncing up and down in a device in the doorway to our living room - something I demonstrably did, but not something that I would necessarily remember a single instance of. I don't remember what was on the TV at the time, and, most tellingly, the version of the TV in my memory is the new, thin one which replaced the fat CRT. The positions of the furniture? The carpet - well, the sickly faded green was always going to show up. But what did it feel like underfoot? It's hardly comparable to the remembered feeling of the hard floor which replaced it. And the scary part is that I can remember the floor being replaced, and the fact we had to have our living room in the dining room for a few weeks, but when did this happen? A specific year would be a guess. A seemingly important event, not even specifiable to a single year.

When I said 'this stage of my life' I don't mean that there's an easily definable 'end-of-stage' that really separates the two. I feel that the markers that let me define my life into easy blocks are school years, which, due to the different classrooms and teachers each year, provide a very useful platform in order to discern those events. I would remember something that happened under the supervision of Mr. Certainname because it happened in that classroom, or with that teacher. Out of school events are much harder to classify in this regard.

But, where to start? To start as early as being born would be impossible. It would be wrong to say I have the privilege of looking into my mother's eyes minutes after being born. I'm not sure what my earliest memory is. It might be the bouncing one, or something else like that. Perhaps running inside to go to the bathroom from the patio, feeling the sun-heated tiles underfoot is another

contender for that slot. In that memory, the garden is different, it seems brighter and lighter, there are things that are not built yet.

I know my dad's earliest memory more clearly than my own, at least in theory. He says it was something to do with walking in the autumn and leaves crunching underfoot. I believe him, but I wonder if it's another thing like my bouncing memory, several early memories taped together to run as one super-memory. It's probably even more pronounced in his case, having existed (at time of writing) for over three times as long as I. Perhaps this conjoining of memories is going to happen to the things I love so dearly now. Of course it is. I can see the stains of it running through my memories of Keble, the individual football matches 'taking up too much space', and being merged together to form one ideal match. Of course, I can still differentiate between them. The one where we went to The Hall and played on a lovely field with views of the surrounding area, or the one where it rained, or the small pitch one with the nearby lake. Not that I even particularly cared about football. Upon further reflection, those are the same match. Well, maybe not the one where it rained, that was seemingly a permanent fixture of matches due to the season in which they were played.

This conjoining can be separated when evidence (either anecdotal or material) is returned to you. There has been many a time where I have reminded a friend of a certain event, or I myself have been corrected in glossing over a detail in a story. And, every time, the "yeah, I know what you're talking about" feels like a sort of trust fall. Do they not understand what I'm talking about? What if they're just saying they do to get along

with it? Am I just wrong? Or are they doing this to be nice to me, or so I don't embarrass myself?

Ah, there's the over-analytic side. You will see a lot more of it in the words to come. Lists of questions which can more often than not be answered with the word "no", or a less reassuring but more accurate "you will never know". And the fact that you don't know (unless you ask, you social pariah!) is what underpins so many relationships, both social and hierarchical. The teacher knows something you don't, and will tell you. Whether in the form of an important lesson or an important life lesson, there is an imbalance of knowledge and this will thusly be corrected. The student becomes the master, and all that. But a lot of the time, the knowledge gap doesn't come from the gap in literal learned information, especially at a primary school level. That gap is mostly comprised of experience. To have been there, and quite possibly done that. Some of my friends complained that our P.E. teacher was mean to them, and told them to run faster, to kick harder, to aim squarer - and perhaps, at the time, the hand of justice would have ruled squarely in favour of the jacket-less Year 4 child, gallivanting around in short shorts in the winter because the longer ones were in the wash. I mean, the fact that our hands were so cold we had to warm them up by sitting on them inside, before we could even attempt to do up our top buttons, is telling. Telling of the fact that perhaps, in some way, this would affect us some way down the line. Now, perhaps it's the over-analytic side speaking once more, but even though these individual cases of cold hands ion't shape who we are, the super-memories which we form as a result of that become part of our personalities, whether we like it or not. Because, put together, a thousand small memories packs the same punch as a particularly

interesting one. I can't remember any specific time I went on the tube in the morning to go the school, but I do know that there are five or so instances that I could pick out. Discussing the humour of the name of the Japanese band "Fishmans" while stuck in the middle of the tunnel, and approaching lateness with every single second that I waited. Seeing the same person on the tube every other day for a few weeks, and making a habit out of waving to him. Realising that my memory of him interacting with me has a mask on - and suddenly attempting to change the memory back.

With that, you realise you can re-contextualise these memories with other memories, whether they're important or menial. To think that the 'cold hands' story has any bearing on my personality now is just me attempting to make every action I've made seem meaningful. And, in doing so, I think I'm right and wrong at the same time. Yes, every action is meaningful, but, by itself, in a vacuum, the story is meaningless. If told by a standup comedian, played for laughs, you might get a few chuckles from people who applied their memory of the school system to this general story. They had a similar super-memory of school games being cold and wet, and so they might laugh at the perceived misery of their memory-self. The genuine displeasure at the state of the weather is reduced to a funny anecdote, now slowly converging with another story-polished super-memory, told by a comedian. I should mention that one of the most important things about these super-memories is that I believe that they form between people, and you've probably experienced something like that happen at some point very recently. With the pandemic, people are beginning to coalesce their individual experiences together, to make general ideas out of deeply

personal ones. This is not a bad thing, if properly recorded evidence of the individual experience exists. And if a shared experience of a traumatic event is not formed, then the event becomes harder to process. On its own, one instance of being left out in the cold for so long your hands go numb, is not cause of reform of any kind, and is difficult to make sense of by itself. But, of course, no memory exists in a perfect vacuum. Aside from severe cases of anterograde amnesia, there's always some context to be had to an event, which influences the way in which the event is remembered. An A in a test might not mean much to someone who gets then regularly, but to someone who's only recently begun caring about exam marks, an A might mean the difference between continuing down the academic path and choosing to go elsewhere.

Heading back to the shared experience of the pandemic, we can see that people's ideas of videoconferencing are slowly moving together, their experiences shared over the internet and by word of mouth as well, and as we exit the pandemic, it's interesting to see how the nuanced and confused views of many months ago have yet to solidify into hindsight-imbued groups. In time, like the Spanish Flu, the super-memories will become so hard to relate to on a personal level that the entire thing becomes a fossilised, static, unmoving, part of history and to be moved on from, the patch of time after the fact where insight can be gleaned has faded. This happens on the scale of a human life, too. A memory-self is laughed at by the comedian because their life of independence and self-sufficiency is so far removed from that of the child that they are not able to relate their current experiences to the child's. Merely laughing about old events and failing to learn lessons

from them seems, to me, the reason for individual humans failing to progress personally, and the oft-repeated 'history repeats itself' mantra. But, at the same time, it is hard to judge whether the experience of the child is worth listening to, or just an 'uninformed' point of view. There is genuine suffering in having to go outside in the cold, there is no doubt about that. But to what extent does that build our character? One of the hardest things in life is finding the tipping point between 'justified' suffering and 'unjustified' suffering, to find the difference between what is "character building" and what is merely "needless bullying". This seems even harder to do in retrospect. We're likely to dismiss the crying of an infant as nothing more as desire for a physical thing, be it comfort, or nutrients. But, the lines become blurred as the child gets older, are they crying because of something that we can dismiss as childish, or is it just a childish reaction to a genuine problem?

One of the hardest things to come to terms with in this debate is that it is very easy to dismiss all of the pain and anguish that comes with growing up and replacing it with a reductive explanation - 'You've got more hormones now', or perhaps 'you're just not yet old enough for it all'. To me, at least, it seems odd that people readily forget about how they, too, were once children, they forget that they shared the same light-hearted values as the children of now. During their adolescent years, people become accustomed to growing their egos out, making more and more of themselves a display to others rather than focusing on the 'childlike' desire to do what they want for themselves. Of course, this behaviour doesn't mean selfishness, but merely self-worthiness. Many people warp who they are to accept trends in lieu of genuine self-expression. I have fallen victim to that, and will

probably continue to do so until much later in my life - because it's inherently enjoyable having a group of people around you that have something in common with you. Of course, in modern society, these groups of similar thinking often outgrow a friend group and become something much more sinister, but for most people my age, being part of a group is almost necessary for 'social survival' - if you're interested in that sort of thing, that is. The abandonment of true individuality is not necessarily a bad thing, often, it leads to a rounding out of the so called 'worst aspects' of a person's character - the psychological act of socialisation is incredibly important in determining how we interact with other people later on in life.

People who don't ingratiate themselves into some sort of social system may want to join them later in life, and find that they lack the necessary skills or behaviours to do so. Adding to this problem, learning social skills seems to develop in the same way as language processing does - quickly, when you're a child, but much slower later on. This is also a problem for people who do develop social skills early on, but can't adapt to changing situations and become stuck in their ways. Becoming stuck in the present is also the reason why many people tend to live their lives in a bubble centred around themselves in time, only thinking very briefly for the future and the past.

But there is something in dismissing childishness - there are so many things that children don't understand, or, at the very least, don't have the words or thoughts to express. It becomes hard to distinguish the cry of a child who wants, and one who needs, and so the one that cries the loudest gets the attention. However, this dismissal of childishness doesn't have to go so far as a complete

disowning of all that any individual once was. To feel social pressure to not climb trees, or play games like tag, are merely our collective teenage selves disowning our childlike behaviours, because we think we've outgrown them. The desire to explore, to ask 'why' gets moulded into merely 'intellectual curiosity' rather than the almost inherent questioning that seems to be present in young children. To ask 'why' isn't something that kids do, it's something that we all do, but we just get better at disguising it, because most of us are scared to admit we don't know things. This applies especially at a societal level, where society as a whole has very few answers to any important questions, and this is treated as something that a small minority of the population privileged enough to sit in libraries, pontificating on the thoughts of long-dead authors, is allowed to touch. Everyone - and I mean *everyone*, has the necessary tools that they need to chip away at the marble of human existence. And, a particularly beautiful caveat of that metaphor is that what we end up making is determined by us. When we stop carving, the figure is complete. It's not determined by any other force, or the inherent structure of the marble itself.

Of course, analysing this metaphor gives way to a whole host of other questions - how big is the block? What happens when all of it is carved away? I will be the first to acknowledge that this idea has its limitations. But the concept that it suggests is not limited in the same way. Philosophy, unlike many other things, is free, and perhaps much more rewarding for it. In a way, being able to derive joy from nothing but your own thoughts is a useful skill to have - "joy on tap" as Giles Hayter puts it. But it feels superficial, surely? Living in your own head to the extent that you can feel any feeling you want, merely

by convincing yourself you're feeling it, seems like something that people who struggle with schizophrenia-type disorders do. But this raises an interesting question - if we're supposed to be utilitarian creatures who attempt to maximise their pleasure, then why don't we simply do so by convincing ourselves that we're happy? Because it feels like cheating. Because some of the value of pleasure seems to come from its randomness, the fleeting nature of feeling good about yourself is what makes it valuable. And, if we're to feel good about ourselves for a long time, it feels like it has to be earned. Some would look down upon those who choose a soporific bliss over the rolling ups and downs of 'real life', and they wouldn't be wrong. The act utilitarian runs out of categories to classify their bliss once they are confronted with things which are both pleasurable and sustainable, but not 'productive' or 'living a good life' - whatever you want those two phrases to mean. Thus, we turn to rule utilitarianism in order to fill in those edge cases. What happens when we genuinely do find something unpalatable enough to just say 'no', regardless of the circumstance? It is very easy to say that you would kill one to save twenty, but the person on the receiving end wouldn't necessarily tell the same story.

Heading back to the earlier branch of this conversation - back before the metaphor was (yet again) overanalysed - the dismissal of wondering what life is like, of saying "that's silly" or "that's useless" to anyone who attempts to figure out anything meaningful, is the reason why so many people are stuck with existential dread. To be confronted with the modern world and to think that anything other than the trappings of that world is meaningful is often shunned. I'm not saying that any culture has this delicate balance of appreciation of

inherent parts of the world, and interest in ourselves as a part of that world, but I feel that a way to improve the balance is to see ourselves as part of the world. Ironically, modern biology and psychology almost leads our thinking to believe that we are different from the world that grew us. We have to acknowledge that there is an unbroken chain of evolution going back from us today, all the way to the primordial soup. But merely saying "Yes, I think that's the case" to that fact is missing the point. We have to understand the significance of what that means, the fact that, in some distant way, all life on earth is related, is very important. It helps us stay grounded, it helps us to remember that the state of things as they are now is, while technically a continuation of the natural order of things, so far away from the true nature of the world that it might as well be a separate system. Indeed, people who don't understand the ramifications of having this unbroken chain of lineage often discard nature as something that 'Man' has conquered. And yes, it is true, we assert our overbearing technological dominance on every continent, and this may get more overbearing in the future. But discarding nature is plainly wrong, replacing it with cities for the purpose of housing more people and to grow more food is, on the surface, the correct thing to do if we're still behaving under the rule of animal law. Reproduce as much as possible to the food supplies you have. However, we've grown past that animal stage, people don't have as many children as they can manage now, society has replacements for such activities. To say that the dulling of population growth is a success unburdened by consequence is wrong, though, as the replacement for the 'animal instinct' of having more and more children is replaced with complex societal pressures, which vary from place to place. Most

nations are moving towards favouring careers and middle-ages over new children, which is also wrong if we're to consider nature. To slowly go extinct, chasing turbulent trends or getting promotions, is at the other end of the spectrum from 'reproduce at all costs'.

We need to change our approach to things like this, and a way we can start is by not giving in to our natural state, or blindly accepting a new modern society, but to merge the two, to understand that while we are a product of the world, we are now much more than that. Our psychological development is just too great to have there be any 'grey area' between us and other animals. Tool usage. Complex speech. Every experiment with introducing currency to chimpanzees is going to end with the chimpanzees adopting the currency, but in this case, why don't they do it without our guidance? Why haven't they, in all their millions of years on the planet, developed these systems on their own? There must be a dividing line, right? Same as the dividing line between us at some point, and us now. It doesn't seem right that there would be an unbroken chain of psychological strength going all the way from us to amoeba. So, using the Hose Argument posited by Colin Fischermann, we cannot say exactly where the argument runs dry, but we can say that it does at some point. Defining an exact cutoff point is useful for things where the law may be involved, but the nuance of philosophy allows for grey areas.

I believe that the most important aspect of modern society is its unconstrained nature - we are allowed to grow and build upwards from our shaky societal foundations without once questioning them, letting the tower of bureaucracy and diplomacy grow taller and taller until the whole thing collapses under its own

weight. This lack of constraint mainly comes from the individual people who work towards the enlargement of said societies. It tends to be the case that people who are for the 'betterment' (read: enlargement) of society primarily appeal only to the society they work for. They don't attempt to figure out what is morally right or wrong by themselves, they live as populists, working to what they think will give them the most influence as people. Of course, not all politicians do so. There are exceptions, as with everything. But almost all of them, exceptions or not, do not seek to question the 'foundations' of the society they live in, they merely seek to extend one tower of it, building on unstable ground. Those who seek to destroy parts of the tower are not without fault either, as these people often have their own tower to grow - and the success from metaphorically toppling another bureaucracy-ridden branch would only work to further make their section more unstable. They would, as all with unchecked power do, become what they originally wanted to remove. That is why I think a fundamental connection to the innate human psyche is necessary to stop this unstable development of society.

It is not that there are too many people in the world in order for peace to be maintained in small, primitive communities, it is that people themselves have grown too large, they measure themselves not in self-worth or innate moral judgements, but against the law, against money, against fame. These are all measuring sticks which are horribly warped, marred by time as all human creations are. To measure your value in the world through money is something which many people over the years have denounced, and anyone with a moral backbone can see that this might be the case. But another step is to say that something like 'morality' or ' the law' is

another one of these warped measuring-sticks. You might be able to think of a particularly exaggerated counterexample, that of life under the Nazi government. Something which you might consider morally wrong might be permitted under the rule of law of a different place. There are other examples, some more modern than others. But, the main point is, that law is fickle, and not based on anything more than common morality. If we lived in a world where the murder of toddlers was a morally acceptable thing, then people would not be prosecuted for the murder of toddlers. A difficult thing to imagine, but yet such a simple (legally speaking) change to make. To think of all the things that you might think should be illegal - but aren't - and vice versa, is to realise that while the law is useful, it is not necessary. It deals with edge cases, of people whose moralities seem to stray far from what is considered 'innate'. But one of the problems of law is that it considers itself to be the end of morality - if no one came up to the defenders of law with a need for change, then nothing would change. It depends on the voices of a a few dozen people with important court cases to change precedents in law. Law cannot, by virtue of the system of lawyers who have to defend everyone to the same code, think of itself as fallible. If it did, then its only advantage (lack of edge cases) would be rendered abusable by all sorts of people. Imagine living in a world where cultural relativity was taken into account when sentencing for generally unambiguous crimes.

Law should not be the first line of defence against people doing bad things, and, indeed for many, it is not. But some people, especially with actions which do not harm other people physically, tend to see the law as the edge of their morality. Large corporations will try and

avoid paying dues to countries they operate in, but not 'officially' out of. In these cases, individual, innate morality has little to no power when controlling the financial decisions of large companies. As a result, you get these abuses of power where the collective morality of individuals is seemingly drowned out.

In cases like this, we can see two different sets of rules forming - things that are, due to the state of the world, against our own set of rules, and things which are inherently bad. Of course, there's not a clear cut distinction between things that are inherently good and bad. But this is the most important thing - it is not up to groups of people working towards 'order' or 'peace' that should determine these rules, but instead (idealistically) people should, by virtue of being a human in a world surrounded by others, act in a way that is good. I have often found that the satisfaction of doing a good thing is multiplied when the desire to do the good thing comes from within - there is harmony between the inner desire to act good, and the good outer action. This is why, a lot of the time, people don't feel compelled by the law in the same way as they feel compelled by their conscience. I do not feel that the conscience should be an unbridled guide, however, there is much to be risked by letting all have their own way to the extreme. But there has to be a balance - we have to understand that the law is not a substitute for morality, and that the law itself does not constitute morality. So, how so we replace law as a precedent for moral codification? With teaching. Which is what, I believe, the majority of school already is. Very little of what we use in school is actually useful, even less of it is applicable to what we will end up doing later down the line. This is exemplified, in a quite roundabout way, by the TV show "*Are You Smarter Than A 10 Year-*

Old?". Of course, the adults (in these subjects) tend to come off worse than their child counterparts, but what about in the non-subjects? In empathy, in wonder, in being a good person? These things are a lot harder to measure, but I think that the adults and the children, despite what we say about children not being fully mentally developed, would not be differentiable. In some cases, the calcification of the adult way of existence would make some of them fare much worse their child counterparts. Of course, quite of a lot of the time, the child would not know why the actions that it is performing are 'empathetic' they simply are empathetic.

Which is more valuable, the love that gives despite ignorance of the fact that it is, or the love that gives just to show others it can? Understanding something seems to cheapen it sometimes. To feel like you have conquered a feeling, to understand why it comes and why it goes, is almost always incorrect. To think that the movements of chemicals entirely explain the workings of the mind is, well, a sobering thought, but one that should not be taken and ran with, screaming from the hilltops 'I know how we work!'

Because, in reducing us to matter, we lose sight of what matters. There's no point in reducing us to deterministic blobs of matter, because then we seem to lose our drive. Often, people are lambasted because they just 'go with the flow' or just sit around all day and do nothing. And what does hard determinism do to those people? It gives them a platform to speak from. To say 'this is how I would have been anyway'. To those who often speak of attempting to defy human nature, to label ourselves as machines seems something awfully human. We're always seeking explanations, trying to understand things that we think give us control over how we see the

world. In my opinion, the most important thing to humans is sensory input. It would be possible, theoretically, to have an observer with no sensory input who could still theorise about things like logic. But, how would this 'observer' gain any information to make it think that logic was something it could develop? In fact, can you even have an observer that is devoid of sensory input?

But with this sensory input, that is only half the battle. A stream of meaningless sensory input is nothing. If you were suddenly transported to a different universe in which things worked differently to the one we are in now, you might not be able to make sense of the world at first. It might look like an incomprehensible mess. We would use our sensory input to make sense of that world - but, as I have said, the sensory input by itself is meaningless. It's what you do with it that matters. Evolution, by and large, has deemed our current set of senses good enough for interacting with the vast majority of the world.

To illustrate that there is nothing inherent about sensory input alone, consider the following. You're looking around, experiencing the world as normal, but suddenly, in the middle of your vision, a door opens up. Your field of vision in that instant becomes a flat plane, and the door sticks out from that plane. This, according to these sudden new rules, is how a door looks. Your senses did not deceive you when your vision became a flat plane, but your conceptualisation of the world is now wrong. Doors no longer look like material rectangles with handles, they look like the centre of your vision at that moment, whatever it was. But, using the power of the human brain, you could adjust to this new world. This difference in sensual versus perceived can lead us to believe that the mind is entirely responsible for what we

see in the world, it is the lens which we see it through. The things that I believe make us conscious is our ability not to see, not to hear, but to understand what we see and hear through pattern recognition. An old man who is losing his senses is not necessarily less conscious than you or I, but someone who does not understand the meanings or purposes we have designated to things might be considered less conscious.

Every single thing that we experience is pattern recognition. Extrapolating information from seemingly meaningless sensory data is how we function in the world. No one would say that someone with no understanding of the objects they saw understood the world. They would be merely moving through it, not understanding either the inherent principles of the world, or the things that we create through language.

We can see language as something which has been created by humans to ease the sharing of pattern recognition. Each one of us has their own experience of the world, but if we were each to make our own individual way of communicating this information to one another, then things would be extremely inefficient. Instead, language is the bridge between us, the thing that links our perception of the world to another. Its importance cannot be understated. Communication of any kind shapes people, a child without communication would grow up unable to communicate themselves to the outside world. Language is extremely important for creating the distinction between the *self* and the *world*. Language allows egos to have control over what they see - they do not merely recognise things, they can change their symbolism, their connotations, they can conjure up images of that thing in other people's heads simply by saying words. That, by itself, is extremely powerful. And

it may seem obvious to us as people who have experienced language, but language was such a total paradigm shift in our development that it's hard to imagine life without it. To try and somehow imbue importance to a clear blue sky without using any words whatsoever is hard. However, recognising that importance needs no words. A forest needs no words to explain its wildness.

Language may have been originally developed as a tool by early humans for survival, for passing on stories of certain areas you should not go to, or information about certain berry plants that grow at certain times of year. In this case, stories and information become part of those people - not only do they house DNA, but also these 'memes'. The precise origins of language are unknown, but the principle is still the same. Clearly, there had to be some benefit conferred by the use of language, otherwise we wouldn't have it. Of course, a simplistic Darwinian model for language adoption does not explain everything.

So, what is that advantage? Is it altruism? Is it survival skills? Is it the mere act of communicating, making the group unit seem more like a cohesive one? These are questions that I will hand over to linguistically focused historians... I could not answer any of these questions myself, and a cursory glance at the wikipedia article concerning the origins of language will make you realise that perhaps, no-one else knows what's going on either.

It seems fun, almost liberating to realise that (when the days of asking adults questions about the colour of the sky are done) the borders of our human knowledge are narrow, and twisted to fit the past. We don't seek out knowledge at all costs, no, that would be far too much effort - instead, we let the past guide the future. We don't

consider the inconsiderable. It's inefficient. But what is efficient? What gets us towards our goals with minimal effort per goal-unit-travel. And then the question becomes "But what are our goals?" We might have personal goals, things we would like to achieve, people we want to talk to, we may have unconscious goals, to be fed, to breathe in and out, to make sure we put one foot in front of the other while walking, and we might have grander goals - something to do with working with (or against) other people, to win a trophy, to 'stop climate change'. But the real goal of humanity seems to not be there as a whole. We give ourselves goals, much like we give objects purposes. Is that right? Can we do such a thing? For the longest time, I didn't think about this. But, if asked, I probably would have said yes - something about biological determinism, something or other about MRS GREN. Well, I can say that I've moved on a little bit. To eschew the safe thinking of determinism and try and tell if there's something more to humanity, well, that's what I've been trying to do for the past couple of years.

I wonder what brought on this change. Now, you see, I was raised in (this is going to sound very strange) a strict atheist household. Well, when I mean 'strict', I mean it was logically brought upon me, and when I say 'atheist' I mean 'logically thinking'. So, I guess you could say that I was just taught by my parents (well, basically just my dad) to try and think logically. And, to him, the endpoint of that was that God is not a physical thing. And, you know what? He's right. To believe in the existence of a physical, omnipotent, omnibenevolent God is one of the most basic things that you can fool yourself into thinking. Because, of course, if God is real, then why wouldn't it be omnibenevolent? Surely?

Omnipresence I get. Cases can be made for that attribute being necessary. But omnibenevolence is nothing more than wishful thinking on our behalf. Most of all, it's a lie we tell ourselves to explain things we don't like. Because if we don't understand anything compared to God, and we think we understand something as being 'bad' then surely it's actually good - but we don't *get it*. Somehow it's reassuring that all the bad things happen for a good purpose. Well, I don't think that comfort should be taken. To say that God is not capable of doing a bad act limits him of his omnipotence - and also removes the source of 'good' from God. If he is able to do bad acts, then... well... he's able to do them. Doesn't mean he will, but...

Either way, it's hard to get out of this idea. Unless, of course, you get rid of the 'necessary' attributes of God and see the fact that we created him. And, for a lot of people in modern society, the jeering laughter of 'don't you idiots know we invented God?' is where it ends. Just because we made something doesn't make it artificial. For people who spend their years lauding others who build particle accelerators and interplanetary spacecraft, they seem to have forgotten that there's meaning to be found in other things we've made, too. Like God. Having constructed, been swallowed up by, and then deconstructed God, we're very happy to say 'look how we are now, free from the shackles of Religion™.' And, in a way, they're right. Religion is a dying act. And rightfully so. Modern priests and imams don't deserve the authority they're given solely due to their occupation. And that's all it is - it's an *occupation*. Something to fill up time before they die.

But in another way, the death of religion is a massively negative thing. The loss of hope, the despair, the inward-

looking and finding only chemicals and bits of *matter*, to not be able to find something more in yourself is a reflection of you, not of any fact of the state of human nature. Those who say 'I fail to see such heights in a human' merely mean 'I fail to see such heights in myself'.

It's extremely difficult to think of everything you're doing as misguided or wrong. Which is why so many refuse, post-religion, to get off that wonderful train of thought - the one that says 'Moving past religion is the right thing to do'. And yes, moving past *religion* is the right thing to do, but moving past the concepts that religion seems to have wired into our brains is wrong. Simply dismissing religion is not something which we should do. Simply accepting religion is something we should not do, either. Blind faith is just as harmful, if not more harmful, than blind dismissal. So far, in human history, blind faith has had more of an opportunity to harm humanity, but blind dismissal could potentially lead to the same ends if given said opportunity.

Instead, we have to understand religion. To think about it as it is - another concept humans have come up with. And, just because of its artificiality, this is (yet again) not a reason to dismiss it. To understand religion we need to step back, to analyse the myths of the past and realise how we came up with them.

The development of the ego within humanity is arguably what sets us apart from the rest of the world. The fact that we have a clear demarcation between what is us and what is not us is incredibly powerful! How would it be to think what it would be like if you were just 'part of the world' - and yes, I understand the material reality of us being literally 'part of the world', but that's not what I'm talking about here. How would humans even approach that? It breaks people. This is why ego

death as a symptom of psychoactive drugs is seen as a traumatic experience for many, because the experience of ego is so hard-wired in to us that it is horrifying to metaphorically let go of the controls. In fact, the normal human experience feels like there are no controls to let go of.

Ego death doesn't just mean forgetting your name, or where you live, or what you do, it's about breaking down the barrier that the ego puts up to the rest of the world. Things inside the barrier are you, things outside the barrier are not you. Of course, there are blurred chemical lines in the form of food (after all, you literally are what you eat) and other such things, but for most people, most of the time, things like that don't force you to confront the nature of what you're made of.

I feel that all the emotions are caused by the relationship between me and the outside world, or by internal reflection of those experiences. To me, it seems that it would be hard to have those experiences and emotions if there was no boundary between you and the rest of the world - which includes other people. Without a line between you and the world, there is no possibility for interaction. How could a thing that is everything communicate with itself? By splitting itself where there was not previously a split. Thus, the creation of ego as the dawn of Man, with a capital 'M', rather than just some apes who happened to be able to do some interesting things.

There are two things that this ego genesis leads to, the first being the division between people, and the second being the development of creation myths. A lot of people are very happy to see Genesis as a literal story of creation, which is obviously untrue. We can demonstrate that the earth is older than six thousand years old, everyone and

their dog can understand that - but if it's untrue, then what should we do with it? Science, having beaten Genesis on home ground, returns to the changing rooms and celebrates. But I think that the reality behind this is that it is a hollow victory. A true one, but hollow. It's so easy to be overly intellectual, cynical about these things, but to ignore the fact that Genesis itself isn't trying to explain the origin of the world. It's trying to elucidate the origin of the world according to humans, a formation of the world according to ego. The separation of light from dark, of water from water, of land and sky, of human and other, they've only been interpreted as literal myths of creation. When humans split from the world and became egos unto themselves, the resounding horror and wonder that came with it was recorded in these sorts of creation myths. Early egos tried to see the world for what they thought it was, rather than some strange formless mass, much like when in Sartre's *Nausea* the main character encounters reality as one, as everything existing without what he thought things were. That's what the human brain is built for. Pattern recognition. And ego helps us do that, by first making the distinction between us and the world, and then realising the dichotomy of both being part of the world and something individual. This strange dichotomy leads to the thought "what about if other things are objects?" and then, perhaps, to the creation of language in order to try and categorise those objects. It requires a certain abstracting, of stepping back from the world to realise these sorts of things.

It's very important to realise that even though a tree that falls in the forest makes noise regardless of an observer, does that noise have any meaning? The world could have existed for the longest time without something to impart some sort of distance from it. By

this, I mean it's all very well and good having protoplasmic creatures floating around in the sea, but it's no more meaningful than having some complex physical reactions occur. This is a time where I find material reductionism to be acceptable, it is (assuredly) not the same thing for humans. It is very easy to, backed by science, claim that humans are no more than the sum of our parts, the molecules that make up our interactions are all we are, all our feelings can be simplified into the movement of ions and other such things. They are correct, to a greater degree than some of us are comfortable admitting. A lot of our lives are deterministic and almost lived on autopilot. But does that description really fit with the majority of the human experience? To experience joy and suffering doesn't *feel* like it's just mere chemicals. How can we explain that? By simply not trying? It's an option, but perhaps not one worth taking.

It's easy to understand the value of trying to find things that make up humans, to try and understand how we work like we do, but trying to find the value that underlies that value is harder. Why do we want to explain things in this way? Inherent human curiosity? It seems as if this might be the case. Some people, myself included, cannot deal with not knowing something. If I see a magic trick and don't know how it was done, through being told or otherwise, I feel a lack of closure. Some of you might feel the same way. But should I feel this lack of closure? Because if I know the way the trick is performed, it stops being 'magic'. The word 'magic' doesn't apply any more. This is how I feel about the problem of human consciousness. If we do think that we've found the solution to this 'problem', then what happens? Does the word 'consciousness' work akin to

'magic' which is a catch-all term to describe something we don't currently understand?

I sincerely hope that this is not the case. But many people seem to think that hard determinism is the case, and the problem is, there's not a concrete way of rebutting their ideas because the rebuttals are inherently non-concrete. But I would argue that their claims that ideas like quantum entanglement have nothing to do with indeterminacy or consciousness in the universe are just as non-concrete as ones that support the idea that the inherently 'fuzzy' nature of the universe could cause something like true consciousness to be real. So, we must, instead of approaching the question with what we consider a scientific worldview, we must come at this from our own experiences of the world. And what do our experiences of the world feel like? Not like the movement of chemicals, that's for sure. How would you feel that? There's nothing in biological reductionism that accounts for anything more to consciousness, yet all accounts of experience show that there is more. Well, I say all accounts of experience, but really, there is only one account of experience that you can validate. Your own. And it's not a palatable thing, right, it's not sweet medicine. If taken the wrong way, nihilistic solipsism can lead to destruction, and quite possibly death. The idea that you are the only person in the world that you can truly understand is maddening, right? No matter how much you think you're able to understand another person, even if they confirm, to you, that you are right in understanding what they are thinking, then there's the barrier of language that gets in the way. Words don't mean what we feel, despite the fact that they are quite often our best way of thinking about our feelings. They are infinitely inadequate tools. Just utterly awful. Think

of the entire history of humanity, and think of all the times that conflict has been caused by miscommunication. Not in the 'radio error' sense of miscommunication, but things caused by fractures, division, hatred, all of these things are symptoms of, at their very core, miscommunication.

Imagine I want to tell someone something. Not only am I misrepresenting myself through the way I talk, I am also opening myself up to the possibility of being misinterpreted anyway. You could make the perfect thing, one perfect little line of poetry, one perfect melody in a song with one perfect lyric that just feels like it totally sums up your existence, and it could still be misinterpreted. I've had this sort of thing before, but it's never meant too much to me, as the things that I've made in the past have largely been impersonal. Sure, they may have dealt with themes personal to me, but there's always been an arm's length between me and the serious topic behind it. The nameless, pinball -protagonist narrator of *Standing On The Sidelines, Looking In* comes to mind. I wonder how many different pieces of dialogue I had to slightly mentally edit in order for them to not say the narrator's name. But, I mean, how often do you say other people's names in real life if you really know them? Unless you're calling to them from across somewhere and you want to get their attention or something? There's probably a million other cases I'm not thinking of.

But anyway, back to the main point, miscommunication is one of the worst things that a human can experience, yet we are constantly doomed to experience it unendingly. Of course, a lot of the time, our communication is 'good enough' and yes, a lot of the time, our belief that we won't fall through the pavement slabs we step on is 'good enough' - but that doesn't stop

you from falling through a loose one. But that should be no reason for constant misery. To think "I'm never going to be understood, ever." as something axiomatic is not something you can live with. To not see that getting very, very close is, in fact, 'good enough' would be self-harm on a massive level. And yes, I have been through that stage before. That nihilistic solipsism is just too much for some to bear. But if you feel like you're having to 'bear' it, then you're not coming at it from the right direction. It's not a burden. It's a mountain to climb so that you can see more things at the summit. Sure, you won't be able to see the whole world, but that peak, that view is going to be as good as it gets for you. And you could bring a ladder, too, but then, that might not be feasible. That would be the real burden, the extra metre and a half that you get from the ladder versus the kilometres-high mountain range.

But alas, the analogy is but an analogy. I have found that the cure for all of this is to go out and do things. Something which sometimes, I am not very good at doing. Not very good at all. Sometimes, especially in the winter of 2021/22, I just sat in my room for most of the day, the only thing able to coax me out of it was the promise of a fresh baguette at a local shop. It seems quite odd, thinking back on that time period now, seeing how I was writing quite a lot, I had just bashed out *Standing On The Sidelines, Looking In* in about two months, which was quite a feat for something that took me almost a year with both *Ducc* and *La Vita Eterna*.

But those haven't been the only things that I've been working on. Stories, other essays like this one (I think, at the time of writing this, there are eight(!) similar ones - *Clubification & The Dance Of The Hyperreal, even if you were wrong, Overanalytic Demeanour, Post-Post, Self-Monitoring and the End of History, Setism, What Is A*

Sandwich?, and The Desert Is Hard To Cross (But You Should Do It Anyway))

All of which attempt to point to some kind of fundamental... thing. There's a lot of overlap between them, and every time I try to write one of them, it always ends up feeling incomplete, or it spirals into the same ideas that I've always repeated. There really are only a few things that I want to say.

Things are made by humans:

Stop treating employees like they're anything other than human. Stop overvaluing metricisation[1] - it is demeaning to have things like 'emotional intelligence' reduced to a specific number - it's self defeating! Politics, a human thing. A human error. All that is made by humans is like the splash that is made when a stone is thrown into a lake. And some people get so transfixed by the splash that they forget the huge, unchanging body of water that the splash came from. they get so wrapped up in the news of the day that they forget that history really does repeat itself. That there is anything deeper.

Genesis versus the Big Bang is one of these things that makes you realise this. On paper, to most modern, educated people, it's an unfair fight between an archaic story and a scientifically valid theory, both of which attempt to explain the creation of the universe. And that is where the anger lies. The petty Dawkins-versus-The Archbishop of Canterbury fighting. They are not tools for the same thing. Genesis did not begin as a tool for explaining away the universe, reducing it to the creation of a traditional triple-O God (omnipotent, omniscient,

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[1] METRICISATION BEING THE IDEA THAT ABSTRACT, IMMEASURABLE CONCEPTS SUCH AS 'INTELLIGENCE' BEING COMPRESSED INTO METRICS, AND ALSO THE FURTHER PROCESS OF CONFLATING THE TWO.

omnibenevolent) - it began as a story about the psychological deepening of humans. Of the realisation that you are not your senses, you are subject to them. Of the fact that human consciousness is felt as a distance, of the fact that thoughts can think about themselves, of depth of the unconscious *but only when paired with* the height of the newly formed ego. It's a personal story. The Big Bang is not. No pain is derived from the philosophical questions derived from the origin of the physical universe. Well, very little pain, as of yet.

Communication is imperfect:

But it will do! It is impossible to fully understand anything anyone else does, there is always going to be some non-perfectly-transparent layer of metaphorical glass between you and someone else. But that doesn't mean it's not worth trying. In fact, most people attempt to avoid the true factors behind their communications. They realise that the words mean something, they see the emotional splash, they might even see the microexpressions on the recipient's face. But they don't see further into themselves. Self-understanding is more important. If you understand yourself, and your own reaction to others, then that is the most important part of the battle.

Side note: I think that was the understated message behind *Standing...* because of the very forced message that said 'you can never understand other people, but you can get very close'. But you can understand yourself. You can try.

Side note: Different point, but this point about communication also works when you apply it to our understanding of the physical world. There is always more. There is no reason to, at any point of our

endeavour to find smaller and smaller particles, think that we have found the end and then stop. The world seems to be a fractal, it can and will hide its details from us.

Don't go too high or low:

Height is great. Height allows you to see a large mix of things, it can let you see things from a different perspective, and allow you to plan future journeys. But the altitude is dizzying, it can become height for the sake of height, in fact, if one gets too high, the territory becomes just as invisible as if you were on the ground.

Depth is great. Understanding the lake, rather than the splash, is something that we must all do. But you cannot become the lake. You can't, you cease to become you if you align yourself entirely with its unfathomable depths. It's hard to breathe down there. But at the bottom, and all down the sides, lie truly interesting pieces of advice, sagely words from the unconscious psyche. True meaning that's worth seeking out from above.

But don't drown. It's possible to get lost underwater, nitrogen poisoning, delirium, forgetting which way is up, and then all of a sudden, you're gone.

I think that the rest of this thing is almost redundant now. After all, the reason that it was called 'Eight Hours' to start with is because it was supposed to be eight hours long if you read the whole thing out loud. Reading at a rate of around the average speaking speed for a native english speaker, it should have been around 70,000 words. But here we are, at nearly 10,000 - a mere fraction of the way through - and it seems that the point of the essay has already been reached. Well, I say no. Why

else would all the other things that I've written point out in different directions? Why would they cover slightly different subject matter, even though the fundamental point that covers a lot of it is gone over here.

Because I think a lot of these things I write are responses to specific conversations I've had. Particular thoughts, things that I have imagined myself to have said in order to fully put down a conversational opponent.

Perhaps, if we do a little bit of self-analysis, it's always me versus someone else when it comes to writing. Even if we go back as far back as the seemingly innocuous *Dreamscape Vol. 1*. It was originally written because my dad said, "Why don't you write some poetry? Your poetry was amazing!" and I, being the crude and senseless 12/13 year old I was, I picked up writing a book instead. That sure showed him.

Actually, I've just realised something quite important. What I'm doing right now by focusing on weird meta-stuff is focusing on a very small part of the overall picture of life. In a way, pointing out that one should look towards depth is a form of altitude. And I've gotten so, so very meta. So now is the time to return to the depths and analyse some poetry. Specifically, the poems that my dad was referring to when he said that he liked my poem.

> *My snowman poem:*
> *My little snowman,*
> *When will you ever melt.*
> *My little snowman,*
> *How have you felt.*
> *Oh, little snowman,*
> *You'll soon melt.*
> *Good bye old friend,*
> *good bye old friend,*
> *good bye forever.*

This is part of a set of three poems, each with a broadly pastoral theme, all focusing on one childlike (I was 6) image, perhaps an idealised version of those things. The ideal of the snowman is one of impermanency. The main constant in any piece of media that involves a snowman is that, one day, they will go, either to wear and tear, or added snow, or a melt. It is very difficult to keep a snowman together for more than a few days, especially when you get the sort of snow that we get in the UK nowadays. It's a paltry, grass-and-topsoil encrusted mess, and that's only if you're the first one to the park. Plus, the classic design of the snowman (two or three balanced spheres) is inherently unstable, from an engineering point of view.

Once the first ball is constructed, the second has to be made. But that is where the problem arises. With the second ball, it has to be lifted on top of the first one. Of course, this is all assuming one hasn't made a snowman by piling snow together, compacting it into a pillar/pyramid shape. I think that that is not what most people would draw if they were asked to draw a picture of a snowman.

Mechanics of the creation of a snowman aside, we can agree on the fact that it is both an arduous and risky process, as well as one that often has to be completed before anyone else. There is both an sense of impermanency in terms of time, and also a lack of quantity of snow (at least for southern english winters) which translates into this poem, the worrying about the snowman takes up most of the poem's length. Furthermore, most of the lines which aren't explicitly lamenting the death of the snowman are pointing towards a sure demise, "When will you ever melt.", "You'll soon melt"

There is something rather interesting about the pairing of these lines, they seem to form a sort of call-and-response, but as the snowman is incapable of responding, the narrator responds himself, answering his own question that he subconsciously knows is not even worth answering. Also notable is the lack of a question mark after the "When will you ever melt" line, showing that even from the get go, the validity of this statement as a question is already limited.

Adding to the theme of unanswered questions is the line, "How have you felt." It is rather interesting that the narrator would ask this, as he understands that he is not going to get a response, he asks the second question before the first is even answered. The way in which the questions pile up before any sort of response is given gives a sense of desperation to his tone, and thus, the question "How have you felt" is much less of a simple "How are you feeling", but one with much greater emphasis on the "How?" - as in, "How is it possible for you to feel?"

Perhaps the narrator is worried that the snowman, the object of his worry, is in fact, capable of giving a response, but is not, due to the pain that it is currently going through, having to come to terms with its own demise. Of course, we can also extrapolate our reading through to the psychology of the narrator, he might be thinking, "How am I going to be able to cope with the loss of something of value to me?" - the questions are less of something that he expects a response to, but more of something to reassure himself that he is not just sitting idly by. Asking questions is a natural response to bereavement, and one of the most important parts of that is the bereaved cannot get a response from what they have lost. The narrator is just trying to ask questions in

an effort to appear caring. Of course, he is caring, why else would he bother calling the snowman an "old friend".

We can also perform some analysis on the line "Oh, little snowman / You'll soon melt". This idea of comfort in the face of certain oncoming oblivion is akin to a parent consoling a child that is terminally ill. The reduction of the snowman's problems to "little snowman" problems is a genuine (if not a little maladaptive) coping mechanism. "You'll soon melt" also has connotations with fate, some sort of destiny or plan that something has for the snowman in death.

The sense of impermanency is also accentuated in the poem when it comes to "good bye forever." It is going to be "forever" - the narrator is insinuating that there is no second chance, no future meeting, that once it is done, it is done, and the snowman will have irrevocably melted.

Overall, this is more of a poem about a man's reaction to the death of something he knew was going to die, in creation, there always lies the threat of its undoing. The fact that the title is "My snowman poem" is rather telling, the subject of the poem may, at first, appear to be the snowman itself, but upon further inspection, it's the relation between the snowman and the narrator. "My" rather than the snowman in and of itself. The relation between two things.

What all good poetry is about.

What good anything does.

The other two poems are not quite as good, and could potentially be analysed to the same degree. But, for now, I'll leave you with this, the other poem my parents thought was 'good' (written age... 10?)

Cancer:

Cancer is evil, always killing, shows no mercy
To innocent people like you and me
I have never liked that and never will

Never shows to stop, never gives up
In the everlasting battle between us and it
Cancer's motto is "Kill, kill, kill..."

Killing people, bit by bit
Ruining lives all over the world
From Africa to America, Europe, Asia too.
Will we win? I don't know.

All I know is that we will beat cancer.

hour two.

or, The Desert Is Hard To Cross (But You Should Do It Anyway)

Oh, right, jumping in *again*, with a newly renewed sense of optimism, of not finding something to get stuck on, avoiding all the hills for fear that you might choose one to love enough that you might die on it. Well, that's no way to go through life, living as if getting attached to anything is a bad thing. Nothing lasts, as the snowman says, nothing lasts. So why get angry over the fact that that is the case? Why worry when things will turn to dust? Well, of course, some balance has to be struck. Caring, constantly thinking about how everything you love has to be preserved, about how nothing can end because, well,

ending changes things more than anything - that's a bad thing!

The opposite, however, is just as deadly. Total disconnect, apathy, is wrong as well. It's very easy to follow some zen-adjacent philosophy and claims that nothing physical really matters, but anyone can see that's not true. Without the physical, the mental has nothing to leap off of, so to speak, and vice versa. You may have to think in order to be, but you also have to be in order to think. It's a cycle, one that can climb higher and higher in a spiral rather than merely going around in circles. You can experience, think about the experience, and then let that information change your next experience. Meta-thought about prior experience is one of the best teachers there is. Thinking at some level above what you're being fed is the key.

However, there is such a thing as too much meta-analysis. You can analyse all you like, but if you only analyse, then often you will find there is little left to analyse. Of course, the skilled analyst can find things to analyse in the analysis itself, and thus, the possibility of an infinite chain of analysis. This essay is already on its... third(?) level of analysis. It began as an essay about childhood, and then an analysis of that childhood, and then an analysis of the analysis (in the form of discussing the meta-psychological factors of analysing one's own childhood), and this little section here is analysing that. So, three levels of meta-analysis. It's dizzying, a lot of the time. It's horrible, having to read all of those metas, all the analyses, all the 'psychological factors', whatever the fuck that means. I don't know what I'm talking about a lot of the time. Fourth level. Fifth level. Sixth. Seventh.

Let us return to the ground and imagine a great plain. A

plain so large and featureless, all there is, is you and the horizon, not more than a hazy stripe, almost blurred in the heat. Imagine your body, moving somewhere. There is a speck on the horizons. The hills are so flat that they barely even register as undulations in the boundary. You don't seem to get tired - well, more tired than you already are.

In this place, there are people who are younger than you, who are better than you at the things you do. Always someone outpacing, moving towards something that you can't even see, taller, longer looming over the horizon - you can't even see what they're aiming at. You're guessing blindly, it would be an insult to the education that you received to call your guesses educated. Maybe you can follow them, as soon as you see it yourself, something might change, some reinvigorating urge to claim whatever it is as your own might arrive. But no, those other people move through, they blow past and recede and blur in the shimmering haze of the now empty land that surrounds you.

But you remember that scene from long ago, the speeding past the elderly, the decrepit, those who have failed to remain young, and they call and shout at you but you're Not Listening, because that would mean slowing down. And in this breakneck world, does it pay to trust the pensioner with the - well, I say pensioner - the *older person* with the knife hidden cleanly in the oversized trouser pocket. You can see them reach for it in the corner of your eye. They never follow through.

Overtaking is lonely, not wanting to slow down for fear of attachment, limpet-ish behaviour, slowing your own thought processes down - oh, or getting turned around entirely, roving the plains in huge clumps, all working together towards some shared goal, a great

deca-legged spiderlike mass pulling itself apart under the weight of slightly differing ambition. You've seen these groups, too, you've been in a few, perhaps, well, from what you can remember.

Nothing can keep them together forever, not the promise of a place where the endpoints are all in sight, not the promise of fame, fortune, bigger groups, more people to carry you where you need to go. It's a desert out here, eventually, even two parallel lines warp and diverge in the heat. This is not all merely to say there is something in the meeting. In fact, there is only something in the meeting. All the focal points in the distance fade away like mirages, or resolve themselves into people who are moving/not moving at their own rate. A conversation can be had, a plaintive plea for directions, or perhaps just something more along the lines of "We do a lot of moving, but most of it, oh, most of it, ninety-nine god damn percent of it, it's just bullshit."

Well, imaginary cynical conversational partner, it's been nice talking to you, but I feel that the drabness comes in the experience. I'm reminded of a review of John Cage's *4:33* that suggested that viewers that found the work boring should start going to places that make more interesting noises. *4:33* is one of those pieces of art (we're going to call it art) that invokes a sort of meta-awareness of the thing it is supposed to be. Like Duchamp's urinal. It makes you think about what or what is not, in fact, art. And I feel that that, in and of itself, is a core component of what makes things art. The meta-awareness of art brought upon by an object is art. This can vary in many ways. For example, this allows things which are situated in 'art galleries' to take on new dimensions, just because they are housed there. A urinal by itself is not exactly

something which could always be considered art - but once the idea of the 'art object' is implanted into a mind, then anything can be art. A particularly nice set of benches, framed in the right light outside the art gallery can invoke just as much meaningful interpretation as any of the less 'evocative' works on display inside said gallery. The lack of pretentiousness outside might be a breath of fresh air compared to works which feel tedious to try and uncover some kind of meaning behind.

But this is not to say that we are to think of art as the meaninglessly crass or shocking, but sometimes, it does help. There is little to no point painting the old masters again. It's very difficult to do, the technical aspect of it is an impressive one, but the difficulty of creating a piece of art should not be the only thing that makes it. With art, there has to be a massively multifaceted approach to the creation/repurposing of objects. Which tends to coincide with people who (unlike the mass-adopted idea of 'creativity' as scattershot colour and whimsy) are creative in the sense of perspective. These are the sort of people who don't see faces in clouds, they see something else in them. Something not merely AI-trainable pattern recognition, something deep that they have identified in themselves, and then projected onto an external object and managed to convey some iota of how they feel to other people. That's the thing that a lot of these meetings (remember, we're still about to respond to the conversational partner) fail to do. Most people are very happy to see things at face value, or worse, the values that have been imposed on them. They promote things that are not their own, they take ideas on board without filtering them through themselves because there is no self to filter them through.

"Well, why do you think it's bullshit?"

"Well, man, they make me do these things I don't wanna do, right. I hate it. I hated school, when I was there, I hate work, and I think at this rate I'm gonna have nothing left when I retire so I'm gonna hate that too when it comes."

School:

There's a lot of problems with the current educational system, and some are easy to fix, but some are much, much harder to fix and speak to deeper problems. But there's a lot of alienation these days in schools, I've personally seen people who have essentially been stapled to the study walls by parents, and then later by their own self-imposed expectations. There are a lot of bad things that happen in schools. Bullying, the setting in of bad work habits that can and will ruin livelihoods - but who am I to talk about livelihoods? We're still at school, right, you are not thinking about a livelihood or a career in the same way that someone older might do. There might be inklings of ideas, smatterings of telling older relatives, "Oh yeah, I think I want to be an astronomer when I grow up."

School, when properly had, and then properly reflected on, can be a positive experience. A lot of the time, either the reflection or the thing itself is lacking. The thing itself can lack in many ways, just listen to Pink Floyd's The Wall, for a quick run through some examples. Whereas the idea of physical brutality is largely confined to the past, the ideas that either:

a) all physical correction of any kind is wrong, or

b) non-physical correction is an overstepping of the role of 'teacher'

are both wrong. The problem that schools face is a cycle of misbehaving > punishment > no explanation given for why the action was bad > misbehaving in a different manner. But this cycle continues at home, as well, I don't think that teachers should be responsible for the bringing up of children in the way that a parent/ guardian would do. But our friend didn't like school, did they? Our friend was told by teachers to do things that weren't all that fun, to run, to jump, to ask 'how high', to write little flailing attempts at essays and solve non-verbal reasoning puzzles, all for the hope of getting some weird set of numbers that might or might not have some kind of bearing on their future. Of course, everything seems horrible and inhuman when you cast an unpleasant light on it, but there's no way of illuminating 'grades' in such a way to make them seem any better. Mere metricisation. Someone could grow up thinking bad test scores made them stupid. Bad test scores show... bad test scores.

But then, without metrics, how do we measure things? The same way in which we measure all the things we don't think we need to measure. You can tell when you're in love, right? And you can tell when you're *really* in love. There's a difference. It's hard to put it on any sort of scale, and doing so, well cheapens the thing measured. Like some sort of particle uncertainty - as soon as it's observed, the magic is gone.

Some kids really do need to be told what they're doing is wrong. Hitting them is a bad way to achieve anything positive. Making them understand, in a very broad sense, is what stops people from acting up. And not acting up in the "All the Nails Must be Bashed Flat" kind of way, but in a "This person probably isn't going to become a mass murderer or internet bigot or etc." There is a difference

between character education which imposes values on children, and character education which speaks to something deeper inside people, which makes them want to act in accordance with some sort of deeper moral guiding force.

That's what a lot of people miss about education. A lot of the time, the most important lessons of childhood are learned between lessons. I always used to think it interesting I thought of my time between lessons/days/weeks at school as the 'positive' time and school as 'neutral' time. It was the rock of my life, as it probably was for this person. Or perhaps, they've decided to go down a more rebellious route, school was bad because it attempted to pin them down and force a character on them. For some people, being left to their own devices is the best thing that can be done, wholesomeness will descend upon them of their own accord. The best way to learn something like that is not through petty quote-books nor corporate advice meetings, but through relentless pursuit of the truer self. And as soon as the ball is rolling, it's hard to stop. It hurts to stop. It's psychological suicide to go out there and stop a boulder of self-awareness from destroying a lot of the boundaries that you formed in early childhood. And even if you stop it halfway, what do you have? A pile of rubble. Nothingness. Living amongst the ruins, clearing alleyways out of broken beams, planks and bricks. No chimneys left unshattered.

You're very much allowed to hate school, sometimes, there are people and institutions which abuse, but sometimes, there might be something in a pasty-looking top-heavy P.E. teacher screaming commands at you, not because the commands come from some deep-seated desire to boss children around, but because they come

from a desire to let you know what you can do. Good teachers don't do the growing for kids, they persuade them to do it themselves. And maybe that's what our conversational partner didn't get out of school. Perhaps their teachers were actually just... not very good. It's possible. They're human.

"So why did you hate school?"

"I could just see... I mean, a lot of what they taught us had no sense to it. Like I know all about... well, I knew all about the cells' structure, I knew about that but I don't know how to fill out a form for my loan."

A common objection levied against schools is that they seemingly go out of their way to teach things that are 'irrelevant' or 'overly specific'. This, in some ways, is true. But do you think, considering how much of the Year 8 curriculum you still remember, you would remember how to pay your taxes if they had taught you back then? Probably not. I think that the arguments that 'they didn't tell us what mattered' largely amount to nothing. They didn't tell you what mattered. This is because what matters is complicated. Not in the bureaucracy and terminology laden sense, but the non-categorisable one. The idea that what is complicated is not hidden through clearly defined opaque walls, forming labyrinths which have to be traversed, but it's hidden through dense fog, you have to blindly swat and step until some day, it's clear. And when it's clear, when you've walked over your own horizon and found something, then that's where true complexity lies. Complexity in simplicity. Think of the difference between a mechanically complex game versus a strategically complex one. Easy to learn, impossible to master. That's the slogan that comes on the box of Life. If

it had a box. But it doesn't. I hate the idea that it could have a box.

Growth doesn't come from stumbling around in the desert, though. Growth comes from raising oneself up, to see the broader picture, to plan a route, and then to return back down and use that newfound information to traverse to a goal. The real spurring on of growth comes from the ability to send up those signals. Random movement at ground level on the desert is equivalent to seeking millions of different ways to be 'fulfilled', 'meaningful' or 'soulful'. Sending up a camera to see the bigger picture is akin to looking for criteria of 'fulfilment', 'meaning', or 'soulfulness'.

Schools aren't there to teach you everything. They teach, at a much higher level, the idea of teaching oneself. That is why there is so much emphasis - in the sort of schools I've witnessed, at the very least - on the idea of self-sufficiency, of hunger for more. But a problem with that approach is that that hunger is often driven by metrics. Exam results, the threat of not getting into other schools/universities, peer/parental pressure - as soon as these external pressures dissipate, the thirst is gone, the once 'child prodigy' languishes into day-drinking in a 'third-rate' university (according to parents who had Russell Group dreams) and the hunger is all but dried up. So when the reward fades away, when the accolades no longer flow in, what happens to the desire? It shouldn't just evaporate, there has to be something deeper to the desire to learn which extends beyond measurable metrics. Beyond a 'I just want to know more about the world' attitude - towards a self-developmental attitude.

One might be tempted to call all of these self-promotional attitudes 'selfish', or at the very least 'centred

towards the self'. Well, I'd like to put forward the case that they are not. Self-centredness, in the true sense of the 'Self' (with a capital 'S') is a true understanding of oneself which helps you to mediate your conversations with other people. The development of a self-consistent self is the backbone of interpersonal communications. Having principles and sticking to them - not in a 'stick in the mud' sort of way, but in a 'courage in the face of adversity' sort of way, the sort of way that makes everyone, regardless of petty politics, think that you had a *goddamn backbone*. Self-centred attitudes often lead to more interesting interpersonal interactions. You can't speak truthfully to anyone else if you don't know yourself first!

In fact, often, obsession about other people is the opposite of selfless. Of focusing on other people entirely, you may subconsciously expect them to do all of the growing in the relationship for you, and thus, that makes *you* the one that is selfish. Obsession about other people, now, there's a topic to be put on the backburner if ever I had heard of one.

"And why do you hate work?"

"Well I work at this dumb fuckin' store. I hate it there. It's just nothing. Nothing at all goes on there but I can't even spend time on my phone or do what... I mean that Einstein guy worked a pretty goddamned cushy job for the most part - like I do, we don't have to work a lot - but he could do something. No phones. No pads of paper either. Can't even draw shit."

Obviously, this is a problem. An overreach of an oversensitive boss thinking that phones or artistic endeavours will impede on the employees capability to

work. And so it should. Of course, mindlessly watching things on one's phone is bad, but so is mindlessly watching things *not* on one's phone. A soulless day spent explaining the technicalities of which cup can be used with which machine at the coffee dispensers, and perhaps which drink size receives a free snack, I'd say that's just as bad. Any day in which nothing of worth is achieved, nothing which could not be done on some other day, is a bad day. Any day of bureaucracy, of customers filing in and out, barely (for the most part) needing any supervision to complete their transactions without any trouble, is a bad one. Any day where someone feels as if they are just standing in for good faith. Any cashier who thinks their only job is to stop people stealing. That is a bad job, a bad day, a bad life, in fact.

A lot of jobs nowadays are what is colloquially known as 'busywork'. Work for placation, not for genuine enrichment of either the lives oft he workers or the lives of the people they serve. A lot of industries almost thrive on this, driving themselves forward with inflated metrics. These self-serving (small 's') industries often conflate their self-imposed metrics with true, more wholesome Self-betterment - and thus, the inevitable shortcutting happens. People, no longer enthused by the ideals they may have had for themselves, decide to do the next best thing and play to the system. Or alternatively, they warp their ideals so that playing to the system is the way to achieve those ideals.

It is rather sad that the idea of a 'dream job' is placed in public consciousness far before any more general sense of a 'dream existence'. I suppose that's mainly because a 'dream job' likely involves a higher ratio of interests to practicalities than a usual job - but I feel that the

terminology used still limits the things that we answer with.

All the points I would like to make in this 'Jobs' section of the essay are made much better by Mark Fisher in his work 'Capitalist Realism' (2008). I would spend a while talking to this conversational partner about the points discussed over there. I think a lot of his quality of writing has to do with the fact that he had been writing for as long as I have been alive at that point.

But heading back to the point that you made about being at work, I think that there's pros and cons to not allowing people to have phones at work. If you can just sit on it for a while, you get absorbed. You don't properly process the outside world if you look at a screen, a representation for too long. Of course, this can happen when deeply engrossed into pretty much anything, but the engrossment which your average screen offers is much more intoxicating than anything else. We're constantly feeding ourselves psychological hard drugs, short form video, clickbait and click-through news, entire systems of design that are built around showing people as many adverts as possible.

Of course the people who're making you work don't want you to been your phone because, by virtue of its extreme intentional addictiveness, you get distracted. I've been distracted many a time by my phone as I write this book. I feel that one of the most telling things about the absorbing nature of screens is that within dreams - which are largely based on things that our subconscious has accepted but not fully processed - screens are often absent, or represented as reality, the full width of your dream-vision is taken up by what a screen should be. Perhaps this is the ideal screen, one that fully envelops the viewer, one that has no bezel or end. A VR headset of

sorts. But that's only one or two senses. We're talking about the screen itself replacing reality. Not a virtual reality, but a reality geared towards the virtual, the addictive. There's nothing inherently addictive about a screen, but there is something addictive about how screens represent reality. Due to the limitations of the representations, they often appear exaggerated compared to reality. Video games with HUD-cluttering metrics, TV shows with laugh tracks, films with clean and concise endings. The draw of a lot of these things is that they offer a fixed depth. You can touch the bottom of a lot of these things. I will likely go into depth about what things are, and are not deep in a second, but the point right now is to get our conversational partner on the 'right track', whatever that means.

"I get that. Not being able to do anything would suck."
    "Yeah."

We've hit a break. They're not making any easily segue-able points about work or life or school or time or whatever! Can this conversation be saved? Yes. By changing things up a little. You nod, they nod, you part ways, your courses changed a little by the interaction, you might see something a little different on the horizon now.

    Does any conversation you ever have just finish like that? Is there some 'end' to a conversation in which everything is resolved and nothing is left unsaid? I often feel like the time between when I see the same person twice as an awkward pause. Waiting for both parties to do more things so they can talk about them.

We stopped. We paused for too long. They walk off into the sunset. The deliberately nondescript conversational

partner. But there are more people to be talked to like this. Let's walk along.

It's hard to build up any sense of what is meaningful and what is not in this desert. At eye level it becomes difficult to discern pretty much anything. It takes years of stumbling around at ground level to build up a picture of what things are good to head towards. But if you're allowed to set up some sort of tower, if you can raise yourself up - it's easy.

I would say, in some small way, I have done this, my conversation with the conversational partner was mainly informed by standing above, by looking in. The idea of standing on the sidelines (see what I did there?) is not appealing to some, then I understand. The draw of doing things is too much to bear. There are some people who have to exist, thing to thing, they are mediated by their externalities, the things they do/buy/purport to be. For some people, for whatever reason, be it ADHD, be it boredom, be it the modern malaise, cannot sit still. Even within something that would traditionally be considered 'a thing' (watching TV) they have to pull themselves away in order to do something else, they have to intersperse their viewing with yet more viewing. This might be excusable if done in a solitary environment, but when someone has to supplement the conversation that they're having with you with the conversations of others over the phone, then I feel that it has gone too far. Our attention spans are not built for what we've built. We have changed our environment in many ways that we have not foreseen. But the human brain is exceedingly smart - hell, it built things that it is not quite capable of understanding - we can move past this. We can understand the things that we make, we can put up with anything as long as it is understandable. We don't have to

pretend like we don't understand most of the things that we make. We can analyse pretty much everything, from road signs to TV programmes. There is depth to be found everywhere, simply because the things that we analyse are made by people.

But do not take this last statement to mean that all depth is equal. Depth exists in the shallow end as well, just in lesser quantities. So where do we find the parts of being that allow us to be connected to things, to find depth, to truly get into something without it being mindless metric-counting or a misstep on the path?

Well, the first idea is to head towards things that are made by people with self-understanding. If a person understands how they work, then they will understand how the things that they make work in a much more holistic manner than someone who does not. This mainly applies to creative endeavours with no practical purpose, for a person who does not know much of themselves at a deeper level might be perfectly capable of creating the most intricate of machines.

Another idea is to realise that we are constantly bombarded with the things that other people make. Roads to TV shows, conversations to propaganda. Each thing is mediated by other people. A bypass road radiates its designers through its design, and its creators in the way that the workers physically made it. A lot of the objects in our world don't really have that much of that feeling to them. The feeling that something was made with the intent of representing some inner thing is noticeably lacking. Many will argue that this is fine, that things like roads serve a purely practical purpose, and that there is no need for 'flair' in their creation. But that would be a misrepresentation of the idea of art. Art does not necessarily have to contain 'flair' - it is a false idea

that this is the case. Things do not need to be either practical or meaningful, the best things are both. A road that represents the way in which is was created does not need to be bright and colourful, or full of intricacy. To represent the people who made it, first, the people who are making it need to feel that this road represents them in some abstract sense.

This is obviously quite an extreme example - how would one derive meaning from a road? You might consider how in places where roads are nearly impassable. The creation of a new road might revitalise a village with passer-by trade, or some other tangible benefit to the people who made it. With construction workers who live miles away from the roads they make, it is hard to see any sort of significance in the roads they are building. The idea of alienation from work shows up here. However - the meaning could be justified in some sort of utilitarian way, the workers might understand that the roads that they are making are getting people to and from where they wish to travel easier. And, I suppose, if they see themselves as a part of that system of travel, then they might see themselves as doing it for some sort of personal gain. However, by and large, it's quite hard to insert meaning in these things. A road is also given meaning by the places it connects, and vice versa. Its context, if you will.

So, everything that people make is mediated by people. A simple tautology. But it's a facet of the modern world which is utterly inescapable. We have altered our planet so that it is impossible to go anywhere and be completely free from the effects of humanity. It is not desirable, we should not continue in this manner, but it is not terrible. It just means we should change the way in

which we alter the physical world to be more meaningful. But how do we discern what is, and is not meaningful?

A good measure of meaningfulness comes from mind-distance. A thing, made by one person in their own way, unmediated by the external needs of money or fame, is very meaningful. This covers personal conversation and some works of art. We can see how these things represent the people behind them. When we observe them, we can get a good sense of the way in which they were created, their purpose and meaning, whether it be out of frustration or 'because not doing so would be torture'. If humans are supposed to be utilitarian beasts, then why do we keep making things, even when the expectation of material goods is not present? Because the utilitarian calculus fails to look inwardly.

When we see a person, deep in the throes of an emotion, paint or act, or they are fervently writing, we can see that there is a link between them and the finished product. When a film is made by committee, with the intention of making money, when the vision behind the artist is changed by the desires of marketers, then that is when the distance increases. It becomes harder to make out the people in something like a big-budget superhero movie. Sure, there are people on the screen, but they're not there solely out of passion. There might be a single man who made the stories up, but he didn't have a say in how the film was edited or marketed, and even then, he might have gone along with it because he knew it would make him a lot of money.

Of course, things like this are difficult to quantify, the distance might not be obvious at first, but there is always distance. When we talk face to face, we have the benefit of being in real life - the physicality of it sets it apart from any other method of communication. You can argue that

video-conferencing is 'good enough' and yes, for a lot of things it is, but imagine trying to properly understand someone over that sort of platform. The resolution might be pristine, no frames may be dropped, but there is just more mind-distance. Phone calls, texting, anonymous imageboard reply threads, there's always a distance to them, and the greater the distance, the greater the chance for misinterpretation.

When it comes to mind-distance, proximity isn't everything. Understanding of the distance also helps. Think of the relation between the person who buys their meat from the supermarket, versus someone who buys their meat from a local butcher who sources their product locally. On the surface, it is easy to say that the person who goes to the butcher is more 'connected' to the meat, but the connection can be superficial. They might not understand the intricacies of the processing that goes into the meat they buy. Compared to the supermarket purchaser, they might be physically closer in terms of personal connections. In fact, their butcher knows the farmer, who understands meat processing. But it is possible to still not know. It is possible to remain ignorant. Whereas, the supermarket purchaser might understand the relations that the meat they buy has to the farmer, they might understand the links all the way back to the cow itself. In this sense, the supermarket purchaser has a much closer link with the expression of the original farmer than the local butcher purchaser.

This 'understanding of distance' can help us to consider the rise of inter-group hatred on social media platforms. People seem to not understand the increase in distance between minds that the internet brings. Thus, people talk like they would in real life, without the subtleties that real life offers. The potential for

misinterpretation grows, and with the option of disappearing at any minute, the threat of not finishing a discussion properly looms even larger. You might realise that the person on the other end of the screen link is a human being, but they're not there with you. Our behaviour online needs to be changed to better reflect how we are in real life. In real life, you can't disappear out of an argument, you can't call on hordes to help you or look things up in an infinite array of information which you can creatively misuse. None of those things make arguing any easier. They make understanding harder, in fact.

To illustrate this point with a quaint little example, I'd like to invoke the times before when people in pubs could get away with talking all sorts of random shit - and get away with it! This was simply because there was no information grid into which all data was uploaded. Of course, it's very convenient now, in conversations, to be able to say, "Actually, he wasn't in the *Bourne Identity*." But for anything more complicated than that, it's much more, well, complicated. There isn't an easy answer to the question "Is the UKs' immigration policy good?" in the same way that you can prove that that particular actor wasn't in a certain film. There's no easy answer either way, and the internet and its bombardment of data is not going to fix that. Pushing people to absorb more figures is not going to make them better people if they don't have informational context to those. Anyway, back to the main point.

We must realise that everything that we see is mediated by people. But when we realise this, we must also look inward to realise that the things that we think are mediated by us. Every thought that we have, everything that we make, is not a true reflection of the

world, but instead a reflection of how we have interpreted the world. It is useful to prefix every statement with the words 'I believe'. We live in post-Descartes times, we all have the capability to understand the mismatch between the senses and the real world, so why don't we act like it more often? Because in a lot of cases, it's inefficient. Imagine a person who has to check the ground they take before they take their next step. It's impossible to imagine living as a true sceptic. It's easier to just fall back on the human tendency to recognise patterns. But we must realise that it is a human tendency, not an innate feature of the world. The world has no pattern. To realise that we believe we recognise patterns is infinitely more valuable than believing we see patterns.

Thus, "I believe this is the case." rather than a meaningless "This is the case." That simple stepping back from oneself, that *seeing oneself as the subject to something deeper*, is the real development. Depth can be found everywhere once you realise that you are the arbiter of the depth. You don't plumb the depths so much as dig them out under you. As The Olivia Tremor Control once said, "You are the Subject".

The ability to create these meta-thoughts is subject to an ability to create meta-meta-thoughts. To think 'yes, I will think of myself as something that is capable of creating subjective opinions, but these opinions do not reflect objective reality in any perfect way' is a meta-meta-thought. It may not seem like much, but it changes lives if applied in a serious way. To steal a (meta-)quoted segment from *God 3.0:*

In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin said: *"I made it a Rule to forbear ... the Use of every Word or Expression in the Language that imported a fix'd Opinion, such as certainly, undoubtedly, &c., and I adopted, instead of*

them, I conceive, I apprehend, or I imagine a thing to be so or so; or it so appears to me at present." This is a Meta-2 statement, an activation statement. It guaranteed him a steady flow of Meta-1 statements, each of which had the potential for transcendence. Thus a single Meta-2 thought - "In matters of opinion, make only Meta-1 assertions" - can alter the course of an entire life. It did so for Franklin. *"I soon found the Advantage of this Change in my Manners. The Conversations I engag'd in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I propos'd my Opinions, procur'd them a readier Reception and less Contradiction; I had less Mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevail'd with others to give up their Mistakes & join with me when I happen'd to be in the right."*

So, therefore, TL;DR, realise it is all subjective. But since it is *all* subjective, then that makes subjectivity the most important thing. And make other people realise this - it's infective! Hope, passion, meaning, all contagious on a person-to-person level.

It's very easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment, the splash invigorates and provokes. I feel that most people treat most things that they do in the same way as road rage - easy to provoke, and never seeing the situation for what it's worth, hyper-focused on specific details, ignoring what would be best for oneself.

But road rage, or the splash, or something analogous, can provide something to 'bounce off of' in the first place. Of course, with road rage, the analogy doesn't sit well. The rage is extraneous to the driving. But if we head back to the analogy of the splash, we can see that if there is no splash, if the lake is still, flat, uncompromising in its homogeneity - then what do we look at? Everything is the

same in this lake. The depth is there, but the splash gives something. Like how in order to think, you have to exist. A reversal of the traditional Cartesian slogan - 'I need to exist in order to think', but also 'I think therefore I am'. How can the two coexist? How can the cycle begin, if it is a cycle?

Imagine, if you will, a different scene. You, and the conversational partner, are now locked in a different kind of standoff. The kind of standoff that moves a pretty high average speed. You're behind them, but they're racing onwards, purple overalls that don't quite velcro up flapping in the wind, hogging the inside of every corner but still somehow laying the power down on every corner just as well. There's a real anger here, you realise that there is a standoff, the defence and the attack are one and the same, locked in a battle that is now only determined by how close to the barriers you're both willing to get. Anger. Shouting obscenities under the helmet, half at yourself, half at the conversational partner. This is the kind of road rage that creates *action*! This is the kind of road rage that is incalculable. The way it seems to spill forth and inspire unconscious twinges on the steering wheel, the extra 0.05 seconds of rolling before braking, the inches, or the centimetres if you're feeling that way inclined - there's not quite enough precision in these 50cc beasts in order to warrant the use of 'millimetre'.

You scour every single corner, looking for faults, weaknesses, but there are none, there are no faults in the armour, but there is no fault with your swings either, calculated, measured, almost like you're following each other through rather than battling, accordion-ing in and out with braking and accelerating. It's not even rage that drives you at this point, it's a fear of perhaps at some

point getting past and then not having any idea of what to do. What will there be to follow other than the literal open road ahead? It's just the two of you, fighting your own slight battle, everyone else is miles away, perhaps lapping at similar speeds, you're never going to encounter them before the chequered flag.

The stage is the same as any other sport that involves two people fighting against one another. Tennis, chess, boxing, chess-boxing, the speed is the only thing that changes. The layout of the track changes relative to you now, it doesn't feel like a game played on a track-as-a-whole, but instead a small sliver that separates the two of you. No mistakes now, just flow, just focus, just unconsciously being in this sort of way. In fact, if you were to think about what you were doing, it would probably make it a lot worse.

A whole lot worse, in fact. The unconscious flow of many situations is what makes people forget things, forget external troubles, whatever it is to "lose yourself in X" is the thing you're feeling right now. The added bonus, of course, being the fact that this loss of self equates to a loss of an egoistic filter. Thinking not in terms of externally mediated language, not in terms of what other people will think of you if you act in a certain way, no this is a space where your very body is transformed into a mere meat and neurone receptacle for transferring situations into more situations, more preferable situations. You're not supposed to be there, in the sense that one can usually think of 'you'. Personality, whatever, might as well not exist in this area.

You're working together, almost, something between the two of you unites you, not your karts (though they are, slight mechanical defects aside, the same). The laps go on and on, there are no yellow flags, there are no times

to pull up beside one another and think "Oh, wow, that was good, thanks for the battle!" - nothing like that whatsoever.

A sidenote: I used to have such concern over mechanical things that I would often not push them to their limits, I would step back even if I had been told that said thing had been designed to take XXXX RPM or whatever. It's quite odd. I think I was scared of impermanency, of death, of sitting in the back seat of the car and reading the hopeful (but not hopeful to me) signs about cancer treatments - I was thinking that I hope to never need that kind of help at all, in the hospital, at home, or in the classroom. I never wanted to be dependent on things. I didn't push those machines to their limits because I didn't want to be responsible for breaking them. Nor did I want to show myself up as being reliant on a machine. Use of a thing showed reliance. But this never led to a cold emotional distance to everything. It's just a distance to everything that I would consider 'above' me, a cool distance that doesn't let me walk too close to old intellectual types for fear of getting shown up about not having read all that much about the things I'm supposed to have read. And I haven't read all that much.

You get out of the kart when the marshals say that everyone's come back in, and you hop out, and walk over to your conversational partner, and pat them on the back as they're taking their helmet off. It's a nice exchange, some kind of sporting gesture. Some sort of rehumanisation of the figure you were once chasing.

Some people get angry, they get a kind of road rage when they think that they couldn't beat someone. But no one beat one another. You were setting timed laps, you're

within statistical variance of one another on the timing sheet, and there's no racing that matters out there. There's no DRS or any fancy slipstreams or anything like that. Just two people moving in tandem, snaking and sliding around corners in a beautiful way.

But some people can't take that. There has to be a relative gain, a winning or losing, for anything meaningful to take place. And yes, in a lot of situations, being better or worse than someone can give some sort of meaning, but in this *particular* situation, there's nothing like that. No victory in lauding it over one another. Maybe there's a couple of thousands separating a best lap. "Differences in timing apparatus", maybe. But those people who would take those few thousands and make mountains out of them would miss the point that you both were part of the entanglement, you were out there, together, borderline dancing, for God's sake, and now you're coming back here and reducing it all to mere me-vs-you competitiveness. The horror.

The demand for the removal of ambiguity is one of the worst things of all. Of the wanting to clarify what things are - they're never concrete. Zoom into a black and white divide on a computer screen and what do you get? Grey anti-aliased pixels. But of course, there's more to that in life. And to anyone who says that life is pixelated, well, as I've said before, there's nothing that says the pixellation that we can currently see is the bottom.

It's sublime, the feeling of subsuming yourself into something that you don't really understand, something that comes from somewhere else - the understanding feels better for not coming from a conscious place. Take love, for example. It is better, it *feels* better when it is not fully understood. When there is no ulterior motive for loving. Where there is no reason to love. That's when it

feels fundamental, like some quasi-romantic and purple-prose-type "thread that runs through everything" is linking you and whatever or whoever it is that you love. There should be no reason, no gooey sentimentality or some misplaced "I must love this because it is inherent to me". No, there should never be a desire to love things because they appear inherent to deserve loving. I should never love something because I think it is deserving of love. Anyone can see how that's either just pity, in a sense, or the sort of dreadful self-cancelling love that ends up with neither party feeling happy about how things are going. And loving things because you feel you have to, forcing yourself do do something that is against your very nature, is not love. It is the desire to feel something like it.

The desire to feel some draw towards something is often more intoxicating than the draw itself. It's like being in a state where love of any kind is impossible, going to a state where it is. That is a much bigger leap than going from "having love but nowhere to send it" to "finding something to send love towards".

There have been times when I, or other people that I have spoken to, have found themselves in that state. And I will be the first to admit, there is not a specific routine to get out of it, no piece of advice that I can give that is specific enough to this feeling-hole-pit-thing, but at the same time not so general to be so vague and pointless. I don't want to give out soulless platitudes, I don't want to give advice that boils down to 'How To Succeed As An Ego', I'd love to emphasise wholesomeness and meaning without literally just saying, 'emphasise wholesomeness and meaning', I'd love to be able to write anything on any of these topics without just falling short. I've read many searingly accurate descriptions of these feelings, they've

put words to pocket-dark corners of emotion that have lay dormant simply because I lacked the language to describe them. And that's what I still think I lack. It will take a lifetime of effort to get there. Of continually, endlessly renewed commitment to this sort of thing.

I think one of the things that things that you love do to you is take you outside of yourself. They make you forget everything except the action, and even the action is barely considered by the self. A thoughtless act for a lover or stranger that expects nothing in return, an effortless turn of the wrist to correct a slight slip on a hard turn. It doesn't come from somewhere that is exactly recognised. But it engenders thought about where 'conscious' thought comes from - because surely if unconscious thought comes from somewhere unknown, then conscious thought should juxtapose that, and you should feel like your thoughts and experiences come from somewhere centred and fully understood, right? Well, if your experience as a being (which is the authoritative measure on experience) is anything to go by, it's that you do not understand where much of your conscious experience comes from.

The other day, I was somewhere a little quieter than usual. I was able to think about things without the company of friends, which is both a good and a bad thing. It allows you to think about more personal things, but thought that acts unmediated by others can spiral out of control in different ways. But then I got to thinking about the fact that I was thinking, and suddenly, I became aware of... well... a lot of things. Being aware of being aware of things is an interesting feeling, because most of the time you're not really aware that you're 'sensing' at all. It's just taken for granted.

One of the most interesting things that I've just put together is the fact that I have noticed this 'awareness of sense' from a young age, I just didn't think about it very hard. I remember there was a hall where I used to go to Cubs (the one before Scouts) which was quite large and echoey. Because of the constant barrage of noise caused by running and shouting children, it was both loud and washed out. But a way of making this more interesting for myself was to rapidly cover and uncover my ears - hands flat, slapping the sides of my head and making the noise weird. But the weirdness of the noise changing around changed my phenomenological experience. It made me feel somewhat disassociated. This feeling was one that I could replicate fairly on command, but the loud hall was the best place to do it.

So years passed, and I began drinking, and I thought that perhaps these two states were linked. It was quite interesting to think that maybe both were states of delirium caused by manipulation of sensory processing. Alcohol inhibited receptors of something or other and caused me to feel funny, covering and uncovering my ears in loud places made me feel funny too. Were they the same thing? Probably not.

So only very recently have I come to understand that feeling of slight disassociation as something that comes about through thought rather than any external experience. One of the weirdest experiences in this vein that I have had is one that concerns thought about experience. When I feel the beginning of one of these slightly dissociative states coming on, I think about it, and that appears to cause the thing itself. If I think about the experience of experiencing, I immediately stop being in a 'normal' state of mind. When I think more about the concept of my own experience of the world, the world

briefly snaps into focus. This is especially apparent when I have just been reading from a screen or book, as those feel very 'Meta-0' in a sense. They are Meta-0 whether I am writing in a sort of 'flow state' or watching a funny video on youtube.

It's an extremely strange thing to think about, your own experience. It's fascinating to the nth degree, and I think it is the reason why psychedelic drugs are so interesting. They seem to make you aware of your own experience of the world. They force a Meta-1 or above way of thinking, if accepted properly.

Anyway, back to the main point, which is that all of these states seem to arise through thought and conscious acceptance of the fact that your perception is being altered in some way, and that then leads to the realisation that your own experience is a strange thing which is taken for granted most of the time, which causes you to think about your own experience more. Thus, the state of disassociation which comes as a result of thought and existing being mutually exclusive. You're thinking, so you have less time as such to 'be'. Thinking isn't doing, and doing isn't thinking. But they create a mutual loop, like I've said before.

I'm still ranting about a weird thing I've experienced my whole life but only recently properly put together. I just appreciate the idea that I'm not in control the entire time. Actually, another weird thing that I've noticed is that I've looked through a lot of my old songs from 2019/2020, and the lyrics to quite a lot of them are... really, really good. Even the ones which aren't good at all musically usually have something lyrically wonderful. And they're all, practically without exception, improvised. Where do these lyrics come from that makes them as they are? The unconscious. Put simply, they

come from somewhere else. It is not perfect, but sometimes I go back and see *depth* in these lyrics, which is not something that I'm really used to when going back and reading my creative work.

Depth in the unconscious - that old chestnut! - who would think that when the ego goes to sleep and is put to the side, some of the greatest work follows, some of the most fundamental-seeming things seem to flow out from nowhere in particular. Dreams, for god's sake! What could represent the creative power of the unconscious in any more of a blatant way? Well, that was what I ended up writing about at first when I was asked by my dad to write poetry - *Dreamscape Vol. 1* (or at least the first few thousand words of it) was entirely based on inward looking, trying to interpret random-ish collections of locations as coherent somehow, interpreting all of my dreams as literally connected and taking place on the same archipelago.

I think that looking outward can be an extremely powerful source of inspiration for many things, however, some people are inspired to the point of blindness about their own will. They take so much from a book that they've enjoyed that their writings become extensions of the style of another author, rather than their own. I've noticed this in my own writing, absorbing the style of certain books that I've enjoyed, employing the rhetorical strategies of speeches that I've heard. But I don't think that the original childish-yet-sardonic wit has quite dissipated yet. The urge to add the occasional utterly unnecessary comment has been subsumed into a larger urge to just write and never edit. I have never enjoyed pruning, editing, cutting bits off, hell, I leave synonyms in just listed sometimes, it's a right mess.

There might be symbolism in the caverns, pools, trains, of my dreams, but I'm not classically trained in that sort of thing yet. But I don't think that these objects need to be analysed in any specific way - we need to find a way to analyse the way in which we prepare dream-objects for analysis - the very lens through which dream-based psychology looks. I believe that the contents of dreams are the things that we have failed to process throughout the day. This can either be through lack of conscious appreciation of said objects (leading to dreams consisting of old/misremembered/liminal areas) or an active block of the conscious appreciation of said objects (leading to nightmares and deviant dreams as such). Either way, the brain is not consciously appreciating the objects/places/meanings of objects, and so the unconscious mind picks up the pieces while the conscious mind is absent. But why have the dreams at all? Surely the unconscious can function without playing the thoughts out, simulating a perspective? Surely the unconscious would not specifically pick out a camera'd perspective? Why are dreams anything more than random flashes of imagery? They seem to cohere quite well sometimes, for those of us that have coherent dreams.

Personal side note: I would describe the experience of me dreaming as watching a film where the subject and tone changes almost as often as the shot, but the entire thing is a continuous experience. Suddenly, something in frame left will become the subject of a whole new train of thought. There is some organisation, but a dream rarely ends the same way that it started.

With that in mind, the questions can continue. Why are dreams like they are? This is not a question that I feel

like I'm in a position to answer. I should probably go to bed now. But when I wake, my dream will be revealed.

Vague patterns of cloud shifted round an unconscious mind, ready to strike, it seems, with the intent to grab and throw the viewer right into the wrong. There isn't much else, occasional yellow strikes permeate the violet sky and they will make everyone think that the world is coming to an end. It isn't, it's just a mind. But for the observer, it's there, it's all there in there, and their screaming... "help, please, help", reflects off nothing in the distance. The scene is lit interminably, with any light source needing to be so far away as to not cast any shadow. It seems as if this is all there is now, and all they're going to be in the future. We hate this. Hate works as a word when you have something to reflect it against, something that is harming you might be worthy of hate, but in here, nothing hurts, nothing seeks to hurt either, and the bolts that strike down between the harmless clouds arc away with grace and agility, they seem to never veer near for fear of hurting you. They can move, they can dart all over anyone's imagined screen, the retinas stimulated by nothing but static patterns from the back of the eyelid, and perhaps the gradual sunrise from beyond thick morning fog in the city.

'Do you think he's hurt?'

'Why would you think that?' replied an as yet to be revealed voice.
'Look. I don't particularly care if he is actually hurt - we need to get out of here soon.'
    'Fine...' replied the same voice in a more agitated manner than last time.

The voices seemed to trail off into the distance, echoed mutterings about maps and caves filled the dark, damp air.

Oscar got up from his uncomfortable position off the already uncomfortable floor, and shouted towards the two people he had heard just a second ago.

'Hey! I'm not dead, you know!'

He heard a faint reply, 'Yes, you are.'

Thinking this was some kind of joke, but also being nervous at the same time, Oscar ran up to the two others and briskly walked behind them, trying to keep pace with them as they gazed around at the dots and dashes of light that made the cave look as if there was a disco ball hanging from the ceiling, glowing softly and shimmering every now and then.

Oscar was now walking beside them. 'What do you mean by 'I'm dead'?'

'You are dead.'

'Dead to you? For what?' Oscar said, becoming more and more startled at the voices sharply blunt responses.

'There is nothing you can do about it. Get used to it, and then speak to us.'

Strolling along in a dark cave was not the best place for strange revelation, but it had to do now. The gloomy stalagmites of the cave grew larger as they went along, with the occasional gemstone peeking out from underneath rocks. Nothing alive, however, nothing but an endless void in front of them, stretching into infinity, it seemed.

After a while, there was a large patch of light on the ground which the two, now illuminated figures, ascended slowly upwards from. Oscar could see them clearly now, two girls, both of which wearing seemingly striped t-

shirts and wielding large paper rolls, taped together with a thin rubber band. Both of their trousers looked like they had been through some hard wear, or they has simply bought them like it. Either way, they looked old.

'What's up there? How do you get up there?' said Oscar, with his neck stretched, trying to spy what could be above the hole. As the noise of what sounded like an industrial vacuum cleaner loudened, the girls rose up ever so slightly faster, accelerating towards the ceiling of the cold cave, and a warmish breeze of stale air wafted downwards as they passed through the hole.

He looked at the patch of light and stepped into it, revealing to himself what he looked like. He was wearing a plain t-shirt, bar a few patches of red.

'Wait - If that's red stain, then-' he looked underneath his t-shirt and stared for quite a long time, not moving, besides his slow movement upwards towards the hole.

'So I am actually dead. Looks like I was stabbed - wait... No. That isn't that bad of a cut, but I am still dead. Great. I'm so pathetic I died from that cut.

He put his hands on his back and stretched, feeling more cuts on his back.

'Oh great, more cuts. Just what I need. Scars.' Even after thinking he was dead, he was still disappointed in the way he died.

Attempting to 'swim' up this current of air, Oscar rose above the exit and noticed there was a tube over him, possibly made of glass. The surroundings were fairly barren and pale tan, nothing spectacular. The sides of the glass started to open, and the hole below his feet closed up. Suddenly, the noise of the vacuum stopped suddenly, and he was dropped a foot onto the floor, stumbling and falling over in the process. The girls were in the process

of unrolling their rolls of paper when the door had fully opened and Oscar had walked out.

'Oh. Hello there again.' said one of the girls, rather calmly compared to her earlier tone.

Oscar walked up to them and looked at the rolls of paper that they were holding.

'What are these?' he asked, not in the most polite way he could muster. He regretted this shortly after.

'These are maps to the island.' one of them responded. 'Oh, and by the way, have you come to terms with your death yet?'

Oscar replied rather sheepishly, 'Er... Sort of?'

One of the girls sniggered. Then they started laughing out loud.

'That always gets 'em! Telling them they're - dead!'

Oscar felt rather stupid.

'Oh, wow...' the girl remarked, 'It's just like that movie except not that movie!'

'What movie?' Oscar asked, attempting to get a scrap of information off of these two.

The other girl replied, 'You know, the one made by that Midnight Shama-whatever guy. Anyway, we have to go back to our house now. You coming?'

Oscar had no choice but to accept. The girls led him across the rather acrid desert, and along the way Oscar spotted many things that seemed out of place to him, like a picnic table on a near-vertical cliff-face, or an perfectly untouched bike miles away from anything else notable. Nothing seemed to move, the wind perfectly still, creating an air of complete silence. Which was occasionally broken by the girls laughing up ahead.

Some more objects passed by. Tall table mountains with structures built on them, at almost vertical inclines, covered in sand and rust. A plant which did not change

its size in Oscar's perspective. It looked like a towering building from a long way away, but up close it just sat there, about his height.

There was no path to be followed, clearly these girls had an understanding of the area already. They must have lived here a while in order to be able to cope with such harsh environments. Well, not really harsh... But he supposed walking on sand must be quite tiring? He thought the temperature, humidity and wind were all perfect, nice and warm - but not quite warm enough to be hot. He was also surprised there was no housing market here, as it would be a very good place to live.

Some time later, Oscar found a box containing lots of advertising for houses in the area, which was mostly buried under the sand. Maybe there was something here before the desert took over? But why would have these adverts still have survived? Besides, there was also an old phone in the box, next to some tape. Oscar pressed the 'on' button, hoping for it to work so he could find out something about this mysterious world!

It didn't work.

Still, at least he knew something about this place now. They had the technology to build phones. Maybe they didn't. Maybe they were all faulty. Maybe they were savages after some kind of nuclear blast that turned the whole place into desert. Maybe he was about to get sick from radiation poisoning and die.

And so, after a short moment of existential pondering, he picked up the phone and ran to the others, just so he didn't lose them before the sunset. And he was right, running on sand is very hard. So he quickly went back to the box, and used some of the tape to stick the sides of the box to his shoes, and ran. It didn't make it that much easier, but it was still a start. This was Oscar being

resourceful though. Something which he didn't know he had the capability to do.

As they finally reached their house, the light grew dim.

hour three.

or, Even If You Were Wrong, Even If There Is More

Clearly, something in my writing style has changed over the years. This will of course stem from a change in my very nature. I am opposed to seeing this kind of change come and go without much realisation. What is preferable is the act of understanding oneself as subject to change, of seeing oneself as a part of something that can be altered either internally or externally.

I was invited last-minute to a dinner with an interesting wine pairing in this equally interesting building in St. James. In the middle of the dinner, I received a text from one of my friends - or, what felt like a

text. Surreptitiously I looked under the table to check my phone, and it turned out to be a news notification about Queen Elizabeth dying. Now, I am not a royalist in any meaning of the word, I have my moral qualms against it - and, I will admit, I am looking forward to having the English Revolution, no matter how pointless and dwindled the monarchy has become - but it affected me. Not in a roundabout way, not in all of the roads being closed in the following days, not even very much in the fact that eventually the faces on all of our banknotes would change. No, it was direct. The times that I had sung 'God Save The Queen' in primary school, all changed. Later on in the dinner, we toasted to the king. The king? It felt like I was acting in a play, or stumbled into some god-forsaken alternate timeline. I felt ancient, powerful, like the changing of the monarchy had shifted some sort of deeper psychological whatever inside of me. I know it's a wishy-washy phrase to use, but it was there. The world felt eerily upturned, an immortal icon gone. I must add that the same thing happened when a storm tore a hole in the side of the Millennium Dome. They're very similar. Both Queen Elizabeth II and the Millennium Dome. In that they were never made to last forever, but I acted as if they did, because on the scale of my lifetime, both of those things have been pretty permanent.

Another thing that I have noticed recently is that I seem to be one of those people who never get ill. And when I have been ill, it's never gotten to the point where I have had to go to hospital. I assuredly have touched wood, I feel quite lucky in this particular part of my life. But I have been a stable person, no downs have ever felt like they have plunged me into a depth from which I cannot return. I have been permanent thing in my own

life, I have not had to call into question any aspect of my own survival.

Permanency is a good thing to have, but too much of it can lead you to become underprepared for when things do, in fact, go wrong. And they will go wrong. This is reality, things go wrong all the time. And things don't have to 'go wrong' to change. They can just change. It sneaks up on you, change, just like the tone of this book has changed from informal to formal to meta to whatever is going on right now.

No one is permanent. This is something that we all know, and to an extent, it is true. I have always been a believer in the idea of a 'second death', a sort of 'memetic death', in which when you die, that is merely one step towards death. Then, your actual death is when the last person remembers you or thinks of you in some way. This could be two years after you die, or you could be semi-immortalised in print somewhere, some disinterested historian looking over an old newspaper trying to get their OCR software to work properly. You could be the reason that someone is still living right now, you could carry the memory of that person that will be passed on the longest, down through the younger generations.

There have been many short stories about this kind of death. One concerns a data analyst who finds the old profiles of workers at a company hundreds of years prior, reads through their biographies, and then throws the profiles out, and never bothers to say anything to anyone. But what counts as remembering someone? Do you have to have known the person? What about if I plant a tree and a few hundred years later, the council wants to cut it down - are they remembering me   and my actions through the tree? But surely, I am my actions, I am what I do, I have implanted myself in the land through the act

of planting a tree, so how come that wouldn't count as a memory? What about if I have children? Does DNA count as a memory, no matter how shuffled and changed it might be, dozens of generations down the line? It is a grey area. Mentally centralised things, like memories, have no exact boundaries. They are fleshy and vaporous. Do the memories stay the same? Perhaps I am forgetting a time when I went into the hospital as a child. Perhaps I voluntarily forget, in order to keep some kind of self-imposed stability.

But I have known people 'die', long before they had actually ceased to live. Someone who becomes more bitter and reclusive towards the end of their life can maybe be regarded as 'gone' in some sense. The person you once knew is no longer there. Or perhaps, more tragically, someone who develops problems with memory, they lose their own continuous sense of self. Could you consider someone the same person if they lost all of their memories? Even if you thought that their persistence of being gave them their personhood, wouldn't you agree that if I uploaded all of my memories into the total amnesiac's person's body, the continuous nature of my memories and actions would lead you to say that I 'lived on' within the other body?

These are difficult questions, and not ones that I would want to have entirely solved. I don't demand the removal of ambiguity. But, regardless of that, you can see how this bodily continuity with memory loss is, in fact, a sliding scale. At one end we would have a total loss of memory, at the other, total memory. Disregarding whatever 'total memory' could mean, we can see that even forgetting the code to your old primary school locker's lock means that there is at least one break in your continuum of being. Everything you forget, even the

things that you haven't even consciously appreciated, is a break in that continuum of your experience. It is what makes your memory important - not so much the things you remember, but the things you forget.

And, arguably, you change with your opinions as well. You can be built upon ideological bedrock - only to find that the bedrock is upon a sand sinkhole. Something can tear a hole into something that you thought had no imperfections to get a hold onto. Something might just stop making sense and exit your psyche, stage left. Beliefs can die, just like people can. This is the story of a conviction that I had, and how it died.

Long ago, I was born in North London, to two parents who has broadly non-theological convictions. My mum was apathetic towards God having been raised by Chr-*ish*-tians (in the sense that they were culturally Christian but never really practiced any beliefs that would feel uncomfortable to the modern public, no crucifixes, no bedroom Bibles, etc.) Being from a small Scottish community, they saw the church as sort of a meeting house rather than something that was explicitly religious. Something more akin to Quakerism but without any religious practices attached. My dad's parents were equally detached from religion, attending only weddings, funerals, and christenings. He himself is a more atheist man, a man of the moral conviction that there is no God that we have observed (with the word 'observed' loaded with scientific connotations) - quoting humorous bits from Tim Minchin and Ricky Gervais[2] as if they were

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[2] WITH *STORM* AND *AFTER LIFE* BEING HIS OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT, RESPECTIVELY. I MUST SAY I DO STILL LOVE *STORM*, AND DESPITE MOST OF THE BEST JOKES BEING PILFERED FROM KARL PILKINGTON ET AL., AFTER LIFE DOES HAVE ITS MOMENTS.

prophets themselves. So it was no wonder that when stuck between a religiously neutral mother and a staunchly atheist father, I myself turned out staunchly atheist when I was a child. It was the easiest thing to do.

But not only was it the easiest thing to do, it made so much sense! Every single thing fitted together like pieces of a puzzle. The lack of external observation of a God! Where was the 'man in the sky' that those bumbling creationist idiots from the southern US attached themselves to! Oh, and don't forget all of their associated hypocritical or just plain horrible beliefs! Evolution proved there was no God. The Big Bang proved there was no God. I once argued with fundamentalists over in Speaker's Corner. I watched videos about how God is used for manipulation and control of other people, and everything made sense. Everything pointed towards there being nothing at all beyond anything. However!

It still does.

Everything I've said there is true, there is no external God, or 'man in the sky', the Bible-bashers are wrong and often extremely bigoted, evolution is real, the big bang is real, the fundamentalists do put the 'mental' in their name and God is frequently used for control of other people. So then why the change? Why the fear of loss of conviction?

Because this just is *not* the whole story. It's part of the picture. God has been created by humans, but then bent, broken, painted over, abused and also used to abuse other people. God is a psychological concept, not a physical one. Those who claim to hate the worship of false idols have ironically fallen into idolatry themselves by claiming that there is an entity which can be referred

to as God, which exists in the world, in some way or another. As I have alluded to before, God is a purely psychological concept, perhaps better understood as the unconscious psyche. That will likely be more palatable for more secular readers.

These terms mean the same thing, God is the same as the unconscious psyche. It is unknowable, seems to come from another place, its desires are not rooted in the world, it is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent in that - hold on, I've mentioned this before. I'm repeating myself for no reason. Triple-O God (or, 3O God for even shorter) has been a mainstay of understandings of religious beliefs for a good long while now, it's just time that we apply those three 'O's to something that actually applies to us psychologically. Rather than thinking that omnipresence is a real, physical thing, think about what presence feels omnipotent to us. Experience is something that feels overly-present to us, so much so that it is unquestionable. Even if you might philosophically argue for a radically skeptical point of view, it is hard to live as a radical skeptic. In fact, the behaviours of a radical skeptic would surface as outward signs of mental illness, similar to that of the paranoia of a schizophrenic. So experience is, despite our hopes, most of the time, something we accept unquestioningly. The unconscious experiences through the same apparatus that the ego does. Our unconscious experiences and surveys the world in the same way as we do, and can therefore be called 'omnipotent' and 'omniscient'. It is also 'omnibenevolent' in the way that unconscious-positive (as opposed to ego-positive) actions are the ultimate rewards. They do not have downsides, unlike the trappings of ego pleasure. Ego pleasure can be trapped, caught, sustained for a long time, but as soon as

the stimulus is taken away, the bliss fades, there is no deriving present pleasures from past pleasure for the ego. But then the question becomes, "what actions are good for the unconscious?", or perhaps even "what is soulful?"

These are questions we will tackle later on, slowly. They are not easy in the least bit.

Stepping back for a second, I see myself writing about the benefits of acting in accordance with the unconscious, and I think, "I couldn't have seen myself writing this a few years ago." My fundamental approach to how I think about the world and its contents have changed so drastically that I don't feel like I'm the same person. And perhaps this is ascribing too much to my current state, I know that one day, I will look back on my opinions from this day and laugh, and maybe scrunch my face up in embarrassment as I read through this overanalytic mess of a body of work. But the change feels real for me, right now. There's been a fundamental shift in my personality, how I approach debates of a religious or philosophical nature. There are a few examples that I can elaborate on this with.

Once, I was at some sort of weird event, not quite an anniversary, not quite a birthday, but like a hybrid parent/child landmark thing which just so happened to coincide within the month. I was reasonably drunk, and this is the sort of time you could have expected me to start babbling on interminably about something to do with the merits of not believing in God, if the conversational opportunity presented itself. Instead, I was locked in a debate with one of my friends' parents, who is an avid cyclist and lives somewhere in north

London.[3] The premise of the debate was that I (as someone who frequently drives in the area) think there is too much signage and clutter when it comes to bike lanes, and frequently, the bike lanes are completely out of use. He believed that there were not enough provisions for cyclists in north London, and that adding more bike lanes in more areas was an overall good idea. Of course, at first, the debate was slow and stilted, debating the merits of carless communities. I was all for carless communities, it's just that where I stayed and worked at the time were just that little bit too far to feasibly cycle on a commute, not to mention the surprisingly undulating landscape of north London. He said that because I was a young person, and one that he knew was at least tangentially into cycling and mechanical things, I should cycle. I said that I would, if they picked one or the other. While driving in some areas of London, you are bombarded with signs with dates and times on them so frequently that it's often hard to know where you're allowed to go and where you're not. Some roads are almost white with the amount of thick marking stripes that are put on them to indicate a myriad different crossings, bike lanes, bus lanes, double yellows, single yellows, double reds, single reds. And this is coming from someone who's had to pass a modern theory test, not "Can you see this big red sign? What does it say on it?

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[3] For those of you who have lived in Kensington & Chelsea your whole lives, north London does not, in fact, mean 'Camden Town And The Unspeakable Horrors That Perhaps Lie Due North Of It'.

Stop? Very good."[4] We disagreed on some aspects of road signage, we shared some interesting points concerning the idea of signage and road markings making drivers complacent.[5]

We'd both seen developments in a few major local junctions that removed the kerbs, the road and pavement surfaces forming a continuous paved surface with subtle markings to show both parties where the road is meant to end. Allegedly, these are supposed to increase driver awareness, likely by making them consider pedestrians as a somewhat 'equal force' now that they are not separated by the kerb. We talked about the psychology behind new urban spaces for a little bit, and then returned to the idea of cars versus bikes. Now, I argued in favour of picking one over the other, but he insisted that they learn to coexist, despite the fact that there are occasional injuries. "Drivers need to learn to just look out sometimes," was

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[4] ACTUALLY, WHILE WE'RE ON THE TOPIC OF ROAD SIGNS, CAN WE TALK ABOUT THE "NATIONAL SPEED LIMIT" SIGN? IT IS VERY STRANGE. FEW OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE A CONTEXTUAL ROAD SIGN - IE. ONE THAT CHANGES ITS MEANING BASED ON THE ROAD ITSELF. THE SPEED LIMIT IS 70MPH ON MOTORWAYS AND DUAL CARRIAGEWAYS, BUT 60MPH ON SINGLE CARRIAGEWAYS, THAT IS, IF YOU'RE DRIVING A CAR. BUT WHY BOTHER HAVING SEPARATE SIGNS THAT AREN'T JUST THE NUMBER SURROUNDED BY A RED CIRCLE? PERHAPS IT ATTRIBUTES SOME KIND OF SIGNIFICANCE TO THE HIGHEST SPEED LIMIT, OR IT GIVES THE GOVERNMENT THE ABILITY TO CHANGE THE NATIONAL SPEED LIMIT WITHOUT REPLACING ALL OF THE SIGNS.

[5] ALSO, WHY DO THE SIGNS FOR 'NO MOTOR VEHICLES' NOT HAVE A RED BAR ACROSS THE CENTRE? IT SEEMS EXTREMELY UNINTUITIVE TO NOT HAVE SOMETHING THAT SIGNIFIES 'DO NOT. NO CARS.' THE SIGNS FOR 'NO U-TURN' AND 'NO LEFT/RIGHT TURN' HAVE THOSE RED STRIPES ACROSS THE CENTRE! THERE'S NO CONSISTENCY! I UNDERSTAND THE SIGNS, I UNDERSTAND THAT THE RED BORDER ITSELF SIGNIFIES THE 'NO' PART OF THE 'NO MOTOR VEHICLES' STATEMENT, AND PERHAPS THE LACK OF A STRIPE MAKES THE SPECIFIC BARRED VEHICLES/ACTIONS MORE VISIBLE, BUT IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO ME, EVEN AFTER DRIVING FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

his main mantra, "It really isn't that difficult, I do it when I drive."

But then I asked him whether or not his response to cyclists while in a car was mediated by the fact that he cycled an awful lot himself. He understood what it was to be a cyclist, and therefore knew the likely movements and idiosyncrasies of riding the roads on a bike. Thus, he would act with more care. People who haven't cycled might not quite understand, or perhaps even vaguely fear cyclists - an odd mentality, we both agreed - and act with less care. But why would people come to dislike cyclists or cycle lanes, we thought, even if they understood the benefits of adding cycle lanes, of there being fewer cars on the roads, of their commute times being shorter?

Deeper psychological reasons flew forth. Some methodologically haphazard, some based on some vague understanding of some idea behind some pop-psych article one of us had read. It was one of those places where getting your phone out to check the validity of a statement just wasn't right, something about the intricate wooden ornamentation of the place made me think twice about whipping out what is essentially the font of all knowledge. It felt right just saying what had to be said, regardless of the relation to the truth-values that this world allegedly consists of. In fact, does this world consist of anything true, anything final? It seems as if that we have found the bottom of reality, in the form of quarks and other subatomic particles. The main theory behind this being the 'bedrock' of reality goes something like this:

1. Quarks are very small and also aren't really bits of matter as such, they're more like electrons, probability distribution functions of energy.

2. As they are so small, their location is very defined, so according to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, their moments are very undefined.

3. Since their moments relate to their energy, and energy equals mass, their mass is of a certain size.

4. If they were made of smaller particles, those smaller particles would likely have smaller radii of distribution, therefore they would have less uncertainty in their position, therefore more uncertainty in their moments, therefore more energy, therefore more mass.

5. This mass is not observed in quarks. Therefore, either there is something else causing quark mass that we don't entirely understand, or quarks really are the fundamental building block of all reality.

He has a background that includes physics, so my slurred explanation does little to enlighten him to the subtleties of subatomics. But have we found the bottom of the world? Is it ever knowable? I don't think so. I think owe will find something that will upturn our ideas of quarks at some point, I think we are getting close to the point where things will no longer be observable due to physical laws. And I would argue that things not being observable does not rule out the possibility of them existing.

For me, there is no bottom to reality. No end. It is nested fractally looking both downwards and upwards, repeating patterns and patterns within them. And due to this, I don't think that we can ever truly grasp an objective reality, it will always be out of reach due to the fact that our senses are imperfect and do not capture everything. We are situated in bodies, we are limited, somewhat ironically, by sense and sight. It is not the conscious mind that lacks the facilities. So, why not address this problem by stating: "We're here now."

Now, what does that mean? You might be tempted to give a response like "we're here because we're here" - and that would be a good start. And, of course, that statement can take advantage of the loop it creates - "we're here because we're here because we're here" is still a valid statement, and you can keep adding clauses until your eyes dry up.

It's true that we're here. We're here because we were here the previous second. And the second before that. And because of the 'we' of "we're here now", the chain extends back further than you, the world existed before you were born, and we can keep going back, much further back until we recede into the Babylonians, or the mammalians, or the protozoans, or perhaps even the 'beginning of time'. But that doesn't matter. The chain is there, linking us back to the beginning. So, "we're here now" is a truism of sorts, right?

"We're here now." is a statement that could have an air of resignation about it. Something that would be said after taking a fork in the road and having it be the wrong one. But it could also be interpreted optimistically, we're looking at ourselves on the map, pointed towards the place where we want to go. We're here now, we're there later, one might say. There might also be triumph - 'we are finally here!' We have sought, and found. We have moved from A to B.

But we're always 'here' in the 'now'. Where else is there to be? If we move, then we just move to another 'here' and to another 'now'. The perpetual impermanency of both of those concepts is important to humans. We are centred beings, ones with a specific size and shape in the world. Specific, camera-like points of view, unable to fully grasp the physical world for what it is at any given time. Think of a cube, and you likely imagine a cube shape,

from a point perspective. Now, try and imagine the cube from two, conflicting angles at once. You might be able to achieve this in real life with some mirrors. But you're still seeing the cube from two single points. Imagine seeing the cube from every possible point, at once, seeing everything there is to see. What would it look like? Nothing? Everything? It is physically impossible to imagine this infinity of perspective.

So we can see we are 'here'. Even if you were able to graft on several thousands of pairs of eyes on long stalks, seeing the cube from every angle, it's still just several thousand 'here-s'. Nothing short of total omniscience can change that. And that's not logically achievable for us. As for the 'now', well, that's largely the same. We exist in a moment, and that is a consistent moment. Of course, moments don't always feel the same length: searing pain, love, sleep, these all have the capability to change our perception of time. But we still move through it.

So we are here, in the now, with our physical limitations. We are deeply, deeply 'here' in that we cannot see into the minds of others. You can gain clever insights, predict behaviours, but never fully understand the phenomenological experience of what someone else is going through. Infinitely separated from capital 'O' Others, you can talk about shared experiences, you can talk about the times you both remember, you can talk about the nature of the relationship in any amount of meta-levels. Talking about talking about your relationship. It's still subject to the same flimsy communication protocols we have, expression, body language, art, spoken and written language. They're the best things we have. And the fact that they're not perfect does not matter. It might be annoying to not be able to convey your own feelings with mere words or the strokes

of a brush on canvas. However, if you were able to find the exact set of words for the feelings that you were having, or the exact shapes and colours that just worked, then it would be a joy to create or paint - to have found something that expresses you exactly the way you want. But what happens when someone else walks up to it and sees it? It can be misinterpreted in an infinite number of ways. Even if they see it and immediately launch into an hour-long description of how you must be feeling, even if it's entirely correct, there will still be some separation between your mental state and what their idea of your mental state is. So all we can say is, "the closer, the better". It cannot be perfect. It cannot ever be perfect. In order for it to be perfect, you'd need to understand the thought process behind the creation of the work, which would (by cause and effect) necessarily mean the understanding of the entire world through the other person's perspective without being mediated by your own. To see a one-take film of someone else's life would not only take up the whole of your life, but also not represent their life accurately. You'd be watching it from an external perspective. The only way to truly understand other people is to be them. And then, you're not you. Just like the only way to be 'there' is to be 'there', but when you get there, it's 'here'.

Immutable things like this are part of the human condition in the same way that single-camera'd-ness is part of the human condition. So, the not-being-one turns into a split, which turns into a rift that can't be crossed. The sides get so far apart that the signs are misinterpreted, and the relationship/group/society falls apart. This is not to say that every interpersonal group is bound to end in misunderstanding and fear, but it gives us a psychological insight into why they so often do. To

put yourself in someone else's shoes is only half the battle. You'd just be you, wearing some different shoes.

So how do we combat this separation? Well, of course, the primary solution is to communicate. Through the things we make, through the actions we commit to. Because merely thinking about doing things isn't enough, no one else can tell what you intend to do unless you show them. And you show them by doing. Even if it's just talking about making something, it's talking. It's a physical thing. To make is to transform a part of the physical world into yourself, to have it represent a part of you and then have that representation interpreted by someone else. Some people find their way into theatre, others into writing, or painting, or kind gestures, or meaningful work, or just in the way we act. It sounds like a corporate poster, but a used coffee cup left on the table for someone else to pick up and throw away is a negative action that reflects only on you. A left turn without looking in the mirror for cyclists first. It's a constant, unending battle to think about all of these things, in order to not have to just float through life utterly aimlessly, like some sort of conscious input-output device, fed what it needs to get by and never putting any more effort into finding out what the hell is really meaningful, what the fuck is really going on out there! To think is the solution, to not fall into solipsism, or nihilism, or petty politics (after all, politics is merely philosophy for the presently petty), to just live, to make bike lanes to exactly the degree that bike lanes are required, no more, no less, through sage-like wisdom that can be applied to the practicalities of life, bike lanes might be required or they may be not, it is hard to tell. Let us go there and find out. Study. Think.

We stop for a little while at this plateau, thinking by ourselves. It's getting quieter in the room now. But just contemplating how we went from bike lanes to the fundamental ideas behind human perception, and then back out to the bike lanes again, this time ready for new perspectives. It was like a microcosm of stoner moments. Losing yourself in thought loops only to get back where you were, but at a higher altitude. I suppose that's all we can ask for. We moved apart, I went to have a chat and drink with some other people, as did he. One of the things that really massively stuck with me from that evening is when, eventually, he had to go back home, I bumped into him at the door, sarcastically sending them off into the torrential rain, pretending to withhold their umbrellas. We spoke for another thirty seconds or so about the bike lanes. Then,

"I suppose it doesn't particularly matter in the grand scheme of things. One borough doing something is not really going to make all that much of a difference when you've got everyone else who seems to be getting worse." he said, trailing off into a spoken nothing, utterly unlike the composed man I had seen before.

"I don't know all that much about these sorts of things. It's... I just can't explain it, it's not memory, it's not anything that I've had to really use before. It just feels like with everything that I talk about, there's always more. There is more."

"There is more." really stuck with me for a good long while. It's a very open statement, admittedly, so it could

just be me projecting meaning onto meaningless things.[6] I currently think that "There is more." is a call to some part of yourself that wants to know, and understand, rather than just know. To gain some sense of personal completion from the knowledge, rather than just some trinket-y, esoteric, pointless skill. Not to say that we should be focused entirely on the practical, much the opposite, but I would not be lying when I said that there are some things which are not worth pursuing. Some things are 'practical' in a very narrow-minded sense. Becoming a banker is 'practical' but only in the extremely narrow ideological niche that we have carved out for ourselves as modern-day humans. A lot of things that the modern outlook considers as positive is only so in a very narrow-minded sense. An analogous idea is that a country might solely base its positive attributes on its GDP, and we can see many examples in the real world where GDP do not correlate with more holistic measures of how a populace is thriving. Most people find themselves within the world, they do not 'think outside the box' so to speak. Their morals and their ethics are determined by all sorts of things that they have not appreciated on a deeper level. Clearly, we were both forced to think about the ethical issue of bike lanes on some deeper level. We delved deep into what it means to be human, found some common ground that was rooted in some fundamental phenomenological experience, and then worked our way back up from there. This is what philosophy is for. Not for solving philosophical problems, nothing can solve itself, Gödel and his Incompleteness Theorem says so, but for solving general problems. Philosophy is like a game if it is treated as such, a

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6 WHICH IS NOT NECESSARILY A BAD THING. HE COULD HAVE BEEN DRUNK, THOUGH, WHICH IS ALSO NOT NECESSARILY A BAD THING.

pleasant abstraction of the mind that sinks into 'nothing much', of things that can never be re-applied to the actual physical world. Think of philosophy as the meta-discussion that can work us around some more difficult obstacles. Philosophy is thinking about thinking.

I saw a problem - we did not agree on the problem of bike lanes in north London. Arguing about this through the lens of politics would have inevitably gotten us nowhere. It would have gotten us into a quagmire of related political issues, each with their own real world consequences and actualities, each of which would have thrown the debate into further dismay. Working down to the root of things and building back up again can really help. You can always, always find common ground with someone. That doesn't mean that they will be a good person, or that that ground leads to good arguments. But there is always the possibility of reconciliation, however long it takes. Of course, this is not always going to happen over the course of one human life, which is a severely limiting factor. The idea that we only have a certain amount of time to spend thinking about certain ideas over others forces us to 'choose paths' as such. We cannot become the master of all trades. There is not enough time to learn everything. This does not, however, mean that we should not try. Philosophy is a good start, it is one of the few subjects that allows discussion at a higher level than just thought. What good is stumbling around for a whole life at the level of mere thought? Anyone can do that, and at ground level - remember the desert from earlier - it is hard to build up any sort of picture of anything. Meta-disciplines, like psychology and philosophy, attempt to send up observers into the sky so we can scope out the territory, so we can see a more

comprehensive picture of where to go and where to avoid.

This is not to say that altitude is everything. It is possible for the observers to go too high, to wax lyrical about imaginary philosophical phantoms until the actual world fades from view. Some philosophers fall into this trap, the cyclical, the lack of any real world signifier behind the things that they say. No coming back. Would the conversation I had about bike lanes really mean anything if we had only gotten halfway, if we had only deconstructed and then failed to reassemble? Of course not, it would have been just a trail of nothings leading to other nothings.

I have observed counterarguments to this idea. Some people that I have spoken to about philosophy have this idea that you need to 'start somewhere', in order to have a sort of 'baseline' for the argument that you're going to have. Some fundamental ground to wage philosophical warfare on, because you can't have a battlefield without a battleground. But I feel that we don't do well out of this, the naturalistic idea that there is always some fundamental layer of reality seems absurd. Every time that we have encountered some sort of 'final layer', there has always been something to continue on from it, something smaller to work downwards to. So where is the start? Subatomic particles? Clearly not. We do better out of paradox than out of solid ground. No matter how far you dig the foundations, there is always the possibility for more. Loops, rather than towers, are the most stable structures.

Take, for instance, the ever-present Cartesian statement, 'I think therefore I am'. Now, it is true, to think is a prerequisite for the carving out of one's own experience of the universe, and therefore, being. 'Am' is

more of a statement about psychic rather than physical existence. But how can you think without being? How would anything that a thought could be developed by get into your system? Without sense of any kind, without a material grounding, thought is impossible. So, we think therefore we are, but we need to be in order to think. There is a loop. It is not one or the other, there is no 'contest' between mind or matter coming before one another, they insinuate each other through this loop. Picking a side is insane, purely because it is like picking a side in a 'chicken or egg' debate[7].

We do better for not trying to find the ends of causes. Infinite regress is an interesting edge case of this, as it can be considered both a loop and a tower. It goes on forever, yet is not circular. The idea that ideas have to be based in some fundamental principle only works within small logical boundaries. Since everything within those boundaries in connected in some way to the fundamental principle, the fundamental principle itself must be in some way connected to itself. Towers are not only not practical for arguments, they are not possible for coherent arguments. There will always have to be a beginning to the tower, and there's nowhere to build it in a vacuum.

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7 In the metaphorical sense, of course. The actual chicken vs. egg debate relies on a few unspoken principles. 'Egg' can be read as 'chicken egg', which can be either read as 'egg laid by a chicken' or 'egg that contains a chicken'. In a very practical sense, the idea of eggs laid by a chicken wouldn't apply to the first egg, because the first egg that contains a chicken must be distinguished in terms of a proto-chicken laying a slightly mutated egg, which then contains a chicken. Of course, that is assuming that there are clear boundaries to the species line, which is not an assumption that I am too comfortable with resting my argument on. Picking a side in a well-defined chicken vs. egg debate is pointless.

I feel that the most common structure of this any kind is the circle. It is the simplest closed shape. It is consistent, steady, built upon itself, but utterly incapable of anything more than that. We operate like these circles, with being engendering thought, and thought supplanting being to form consciousness. Above that, the phenomenology of consciousness could be thought of as 'round two' of the loop between being and thought. Thinking about the experience of consciousness is the next thing above that. You can then think about the bodily experience of those thoughts themselves.

Do you remember how earlier, towards the end of hour two, I talked about slapping my ears to make my hearing flick on and off? That was, unintentionally, my first attempt at thinking about the phenomenology of consciousness. I was some part of the way around the next tier of the loop. And somehow, I got round even further by appreciating the fact that this change in sensory perception, this change in experiencing the world, genuinely affected my phenomenological outlook. There was a distinctly different sense of 'feeling' about perception once I had disentangled my senses and my perception of the world. That slightly disassociated feeling came from seeing the senses and the world as distinct, and also from appreciating the fact of how weird it is to be anything at all.

What is the strange fact of the matter, the fact that there is a universe, or the fact that there is something that experiences it, seemingly external to the world itself? It comes back to the idea of the tree falling in a forest. Yes, even as a child, I might have been able to rationalise the idea of the tree falling in the forest as producing sound waves which bounced off of nearby objects, which by themselves could technically be

categorised as sound waves, the real question is clearly not in the production of those waves. That seems readily apparent, compressions and rarefactions of air or other such media that these pressure waves can propagate themselves through. Nor is the particular biochemistry of the ear interesting, the way that the ear is tuned and perfectly able to pick up all of these things. In a purely deterministic world, that would be all there would be. But somehow, the world is just not that simple. We sit back. We are able to experience the sound. Hearing is much more related to the experience of hearing rather than any of the physical processes which lead up to it. These introspective psychological processes are infinitely more important to any one of us as a human being as opposed to how sound itself propagates through reality. The real barrier is the self.

So, back to the idea of that consistent being that humans strive to create. The idea that ideas are harder to kill than people. I had lived for 14, 15 years in a fairly ideologically consistent backdrop, not really thinking about anything that I'd thought about. Everything was simple, and it all worked together. I thought that my beliefs would stay the same forever by virtue of not even considering the idea that my beliefs could change. Of course, I was more focused on the idea of external change, of a literal 3-O God visiting the earth and causing me to reconsider my beliefs on its existence. I focused quite a lot on what it would take to change my belief. How could we know it was God, and not just some aliens making a huge projection in the sky and pretending to be God? Would we ever know? What is the form of God? Well, in order to answer those questions, I listened to the idiots, to the Southern Evangelicals who claimed to see all of these things, of God being something

that you could see or feel or have it heal you or whatnot. I didn't listen in any other way. Although it is difficult to actually get theologians who aren't just arguing petty interminable politics about some specific thing like 'how do we stay the same, when we go to heaven'?

I can recall many hours of arguments which went along the lines of weird theories of personal identity being sued to justify the continuance of persons in the afterlife. Because how would you go to this unknowable but still somewhat physical realm instantaneously? If your body went there, then why doesn't your real body disappear? Can we call it a continuum of persons if only the personality and the consciousness travels to the new body? How old is the new body? Does someone who died after having their head chopped off go to heaven with only their head?

These are all extremely useless questions that rely on boring, incorrect assumptions. We have decided, somehow, to start our arguments on the basis that heaven is a place you travel to, as in, it is distinct from the physical world but also still physical. But I was happy to fall in to those debates, relying on incorrect assumptions. Sometimes it is fun to find somewhere to start from and argue from there. Some philosophers make a living out of finding a point which they are not willing to argue down from, and calling that 'something fundamental'. Physicalists are often offenders in this category, unwilling to try bridge the gap between the physical and the mental, they block off the mental, saying that it is merely part of the physical. In some ways, they are right, as we discussed earlier, the physical seems to be necessary in order to have mental processes. Imagine trying to have a thought with no sensory input beforehand. It doesn't seem like it's even possible. All of your thoughts are

structured, based on your sensory input. If you haven't experienced sound, then it is a necessarily different thing, you can't think about sound. But then again, you haven't experienced lots of things, and you can think about them. Take, for example, a dog with horns. Now, you have not experienced a dog with horns, because there is no such thing, but you can think about a dog with horns because of the fact that you understand both horns and dogs. But where is the cutoff point? What is the difference between the extrapolation of dogs and horns into dogs with horns, and sound? Could you extrapolate smell from sight? There doesn't seem to be a clear cutoff at any point. Perhaps you could identify the molecules that made the smell one by one. But that wouldn't lead to the experience of smell. I think that we can agree that sense seems to be an extremely odd thing.

But yes, going back to the ideas of those philosophers, those who don't try and relate things to self-contained loops. Those who build tall, fragile, impossible logical towers and mope and whine whenever they are shown to be without foundation. We like to have these kind of arguments, though. In practical terms, arguing though infinite regress, or trying to show how things are a loop, is pointless. It is too much, a lot of the time, it seems. Relating everything down to simpler ideas does not seem worth it a lot of the time, right? Well, take the example that I had, two people, opposed on a very high-up political idea, bike lanes are not exactly something fundamental or even close to it. We worked our way down, closer and closer to simpler ideas, and once we had found common ground, we could work back up from there, correcting our assumptions, thinking about what had caused our opinions to diverge in the first place. It is not enough to have opinions, you have to think about the

reasons you have them. You have to consider where they come from, and if there is a more stable, more coherent system of beliefs that those opinions arise from. And usually, when pressed, people find that they have more similar ideas than they might initially think. Reconciliation is always possible, it's just the finding of the midpoint that is the hard thing.

Seeing how far I've come in discussing these topics gives me a lot of enthusiasm on how far I have left to go, or in fact, how infinitely far I have left to go. Perhaps everything that I think now, all of these fairly fundamental beliefs will one day feel like a tiny, barely-true subset of things that are far, far more fundamental. The marble yields nothing. Have I chipped away in the right places, have I chipped away enough? No one can tell me. It is a purely subjective thing. It is done when it is done, which is never. Another facet, another detail, more work can always be done.

Anyway, little break in the narrative aside, I'd like to give another example of how I've changed, but also not changed at the same time. I very briefly touched upon the time that I went to Speaker's Corner and talked with a few fundamentalist Muslims, obviously disappointed and disillusioned by their ideas about God. I argued from a point of skepticism, it is impossible to know that the external world exists in the way that it does. In order to prove me wrong, one of the opposition took his umbrella and lightly tapped one of my friends on the head with it (meaning no harm) and said "Well, my umbrella made contact with him, and it recoiled, so he must physically exist." Which I just thought was the worst possible argument in that sense. Argument From Bonking. But I

used to argue from a sceptical view that originated from very physicalist ideas, I would have likely argued that I don't exist. And yes, you have no proof that your body exists in the way it does, but on some level, you do know you exist through your own experience of the world.

I remember saying lots of things. I don't remember exactly, unfortunately. It's probably better that way. My arguments against them relied on proving that their theories on God relied on circular reasoning

> *Qur'an proves God, God wrote Qur'an, therefore God proves himself, which can't occur.*

I'm very interested in analysing this bit of argument. Are we justified in translating the 'Qur'an' word in this argument to 'any religious text'? Maybe. More obvious to us, hopefully, is that 'God' in this reasoning can be translated as 'the unconscious psyche'. And, semantically, the word 'wrote' can be changed to 'caused the writing of' in order to fit better. So it becomes:

> *Religious texts prove that the unconscious psyche exists, the unconscious psyche caused the writing of religious texts, therefore the unconscious psyche proves itself, which can't occur.*

Here, we can see how this argument doesn't hold. The unconscious psyche is necessarily outside of the physical, the universal causal chain, so it does not hold that anything circular is just 'bad reasoning'. As I have said before, we do much better with circles. There is no start-point. There is no end-point. They feed into each other, constantly. But again, the challenge is to get people to translate God into something more meaningful than the

modern understanding of God. No translation is necessary for those who know, but leaving God as God and the Qur'an as the Qur'an leads us nowhere. The previous shackles of religious functioning must be thrown off, the ideas of control, regulation, of things that are contrary to the ideas of the birth of the human spirit which religious texts essentially document. That feeling of awe at the majesty of the nature of the universe is caused in part both by the universe and the mind observing it. The wonder cannot be separated from both the observer and the observed. And they are doomed to stay apart forever.

But stepping back, coming back up the spiral, we realise that there is a lot of power within religion to get entranced, to become enraptured in the physicality of it and forget that it is something that you have to bear yourself. The externalisation of things like confessions seems psychologically useful, in this age of modern psychotherapy, but this can lead to misunderstanding. You can lean on these people who are 'closer to God than you' as a sort of psychological crutch, forgetting that actually the heavy lifting has to be done by the individual, the forgiveness is something that comes from within. For better or for worse, everyone is their own moral compass. And that's a hard thing to do. You can't navigate forever just listening to your own heart. Occasionally, you will need advice. And that's the genuine benefit of things like confession. To have someone else to understand, to communicate, to make sure that you understand exactly what you are trying to confess to yourself by literally saying it out loud, or typing it to a friend, or screaming it from the top of a hill, watching as everyone trying to climb it is suddenly distracted by a horrendous barrage of self-understanding, and also the word 'self' far too often.

I was thinking about this idea back at the party when I spoke to another one of my dad's friends who had been to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings for a while, and had since sort of gracefully stepped out of doing the program all the time (he still doesn't drink, but not drinking isn't like a full-time job anymore) and I was talking to him about the idea of God - or, as it was referred to in the conversation, a 'Higher Power'. It was very interesting to see his conception of a Higher Power very much falling in line with the general idea of God as the unconscious. Another one of my parents' friends responded that that was her conception of God anyway, that it is all a psychological tool for bettering oneself. She didn't necessarily practice anything, but she understood it as such, and she said that coming from a religious household probably has changed some of her behaviours accordingly, despite her disdain for organised religion. I talked with her for a while about this, her semi-religious, well-educated take on the matter, and at some point during the conversation I think we both realised that we were having a very nuanced conversation, because the topic itself turned to the conversation itself, and how unlikely it would have been merely a year ago for us to have had this conversation, due to my prior lack of nuance when it came to understanding what some people mean by God. She said that it would have been unlikely for any discussion to be had with me because I would have just seen everything as that 'weird conceptualisation' of God that both fundamentalist religion-people and atheists who haven't thought critically about the subject have.

The idea of God as a 3-O entity needs to be brought down to a psychological level rather than a physical one. Then, debates can be had, progress can be made, and the

participants do not have to ascribe themselves to any particular codifying and calcifying piece of religious or political dogma. It was nice to see actual progress being not only made, but recognised by another human being, someone who had known me for my entire life, and not in that sort of 'growing up together' kind of way, but in a parental way. But, of course, she reminded me, that she had always been growing herself. In a sense, we had grown up together. In a manner of speaking. Again, we conversationally parted ways, and continued on with mingling with other people there. It was quite nice to have something like that in the midst of conversations about boiler fixing and nice watches and the prices of second hand sports cars from the 80s. But those conversations were nice too, as Hume would agree, sometimes there's nothing better than a nice game of Backgammon down at the pub rather than hours and hours of deep introspection. But everything should eventually tend toward introspection, of looking deeply, but that should not end up being a bad thing. Introspection is often ranked as one of the least pleasant mental states to be in, even if the thoughts are not explicitly negative. It feels as if there is no joy to be had in confronting oneself. But that is because it feels like a confrontation. If you meet with your deeper self often enough, then you can slowly reconcile everything. It will no longer feel like a confrontation.

> *Every one of us, in our younger years, engineers such a marking-out of domains. To do so is natural, inevitable, vital. It is the task of a self-conceptualising psychic subset (whose essence is exactly that self-conceptualisation), striving, struggling, fighting to carve out its own inner niche. It is the task of ego genesis. In order to*

establish consciousness, there must be a subject, which means an object. And, initially, the internal boundary, the divine frontier, the bridge between the islands, must be defended with vigour. As developing consciousnesses, every one of us fought this prolonged battle against extinction. And every one of us, to one extent or another, was victorious. Those who weren't, those who failed in this proto-Herculean labour, were never really born at all. It is a psychic triumph to mark out "I". (...) To become 1 and 2. But the victory comes at a great cost.

The idea that we begin our adult[8] lives as somehow 'broken' is not the utter horror that we might think it is. I think that it is fantastic, the fact that we have to work on ourselves in some fashion, we like to imagine ourselves as coming into the world fully formed, but the reality is we have to spend our lives trying to rebuild after we do things without thinking. We become ourselves without thinking, and we become ourselves with thinking. The only thing that is required is balance. And the unthinking early years of childhood and early adolescence tip the scales in favour of 'without thinking' so thinking must be deployed immediately in order to re-adjust the balance. To not get stuck in random groups, to think about why you get into things, to never sign up and never think twice. To realise that there is value in staying and forming bonds, but also leaving and finding new ones. The Greeks knew this, the perfect life is one of golden means, of virtue, of acting in accordance with oneself. But this means that in order to act virtuously, one has to

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[8] NOT STRICTLY SPEAKING 'OVER 18' BUT IN THIS CASE MEANT WITH THE ABILITY TO SELF-REFLECT AND COME TO TERMS WITH ONESELF - SOME PEOPLE, EITHER DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCE OR SEVERE NEUROLOGICAL DISABILITY, NEVER REALLY DEVELOP THIS ABILITY.

know oneself. To truly know oneself would be wonderful, but, I'm not there yet.

All I know is that I'm Alex Taylor, or, perhaps, if I was working somewhere where I would have to be introduced by someone else (a PA, if you will), I'd say "I'm Alexander John Taylor." Maybe omitting the 'John', who quotes their middle name when introducing themselves? Mainly Americans, at least from my experience. But there I'd be, standing in front of a person with a hyphenated name and a suffix or two, introducing myself for some reason or another.

"Hello, pleased to meet you."

The cold sweat runs down my brow, what do I say in return? This person is a world-class expert, who has presumably spent far more time than me sitting in large libraries, reading under clichéd green lights, unaware of how much that place looked like the library from *Ghostbusters*. Their shirt is noticeably done up, the jacket positioned for any observer to get a full glimpse of the label on the front that reads "*Alfred Dunhill*". It's placed there for a reason. What reason, exactly, I don't know, but it feels as if there is a reason. Some designer has chosen this thing to be this exact way in order to ensure the glint off of the fabric's slight sheen does not interfere with the legibility of the text when viewed from any reasonable angle.

"Hi."

A pause. A false start, perhaps. The feel of something rattling shut.

"Have we met before?"

"No, I don't think we have."

The person looks over their shoulder and looks back. The room is long, furnished with statues and paintings of unknowable values, some squeezed onto crevices on

pillars that break the long hall up into smaller segments. The carpet and wallpaper are almost certainly older than I am, regardless of how old I am. I am older than I am now.

"What do you do?"

"Well, I'm currently in-between jobs. That's why I came here. To... meet people."

A slight twinge of a facial muscle, a psychologically-trained anti-smirk. This person has heard this a hundred times before, oh, 'in-between jobs' - we're all in-between jobs. I think, 'meet people? this person doesn't seem like a person, more like a carefully constructed glass tower, shining, shimmering, beautiful, and looking down at me.'

"Right. But what do you *do*?"

"I write, I guess."

A knowing laugh. 'I guess.' How terminally lame of me.

"Write what? Newspaper articles, or are you working on a novel?"

"I guess you could say that I'm working on a novel."

A pause.

"What do you mean you *guess* you're working on a novel?"

"I've got a few ideas, but-"

The person laughs and leans back, they've been drinking somewhat.

"Oh, Alex, everyone has ideas. That's... that's one of the..."

They look around again, this time, for inspiration, for the right word. It's not going to be written anywhere but they seem to find the inspiration amongst the faces and the pictures.

"...things which everyone must have."

They walk off, and suddenly the pictures on the walls are now my only guests.

Often, people say a picture says a thousand words, but I don't think that's the case. A word can say a thousand words, an "amen", the "no" of unrequited love, the guttural cry of a child losing a pet. Everything can say a thousand words or more, the rough texture of reality is all to often skimmed over by those wanting to experience everything. Jet-setter backpackers might stare off a cliff's edge into the green-and-blue glory of nature, but never sit down to feel the delicate crumbly intricacies of the limestone at the bottom. In there, fossils, things which we would never have even bothered looking for had some poor ammonite not kicked the precambrian proto-bucket a few hundred million years ago.

It's very easy to be like a skimmed rock cast into an open sea, skipping over the water, the occasional mid-life crisis or meaningful event letting us touch the surface of the water, for many, the thrill of bouncing, flying through the air distracts from the fact that the end is inevitable. And that is, all things considered, fine.

It's almost as easy to become a nihilist, to say that if all is death in the end, then life is merely a corridor to death. It's much harder to come up with a solution to that problem, to look both life and death in the face, to appreciate the skipping, the up and down, and the eventual down. But, every time I open up another edition of *Focus*, the all-powerful, religion-replacing Science and Medicine (capitalised as a deliberate affront to the old 'God') says it can save us, and maybe that is true. Maybe, one day, people will live hundreds of years, or hundreds of thousands, and get to see the beauty that life has to offer. But this medicine, no matter how powerful, saves bodies, not minds. And as for the changing of our moods via drugs and medicine, they have become powerful tools that one could say we have lost the ability to wield

properly. We need to make tools that fit us better, and make sure they don't outgrow us. To augment, not to replace.

"We shape our tools, and our tools shape us."

Kant, in the *Antinomies of Practical Reason* once tried to say that the universe has to be fair and just, otherwise there is no meaning to moral endeavour. I think the opposite. If there is to be moral 'endeavour' to use the proper meaning of the word, we have to overcome challenges and obstacles on our way there. To have the world set up to reward good behaviour and punish bad behaviour seems to make all moral endeavour as worthy as an automata performing a good action.

Overcoming an inherently morally grey and meaningless world makes everything meaningful, finding people who will recognise the things that you do, the work you produce, the gifts you give, rewarding you with intangible things that make the skips and bounces feel much more... well, enjoyable. To sit in a park and subtly know that one day, this will be over, makes it more special. To think, perhaps, fool oneself into thinking that this is 'extra time', you've lived a life already and have asked for another life just to experience the absolute majesty of the fractal nature of everything here. But one of the most important things is that this doesn't bother me, it doesn't eat away at me, there is always time to go back over to that table and say "hi" all over again, even if it means approaching primary school friends who are once again wetting themselves in the 'second childhood' of a nursing home.

In a way, it is all about finding things to do. I could spend the rest of my life living on the assistance of the government, economic/political crises aside. I could sell everything I have now and probably manage to make it

last for years and years, opportunistically getting food and staying under bridges. But I don't *want* to do that. I want to find out what I am. Who the fuck I really am.

A long time ago, to be told of 'clever clogs' and 'smarty pants' would have made me say 'yes, this is me, I am one of those'. But is there a whole wardrobe of other, similar items of clothing? Where is my 'eudaimonia earring' or 'worldliness wristwatch'? Out there, beyond in the sea, somewhere, beyond the sea, under the water, powering the water, in the aeroplane over the sea.
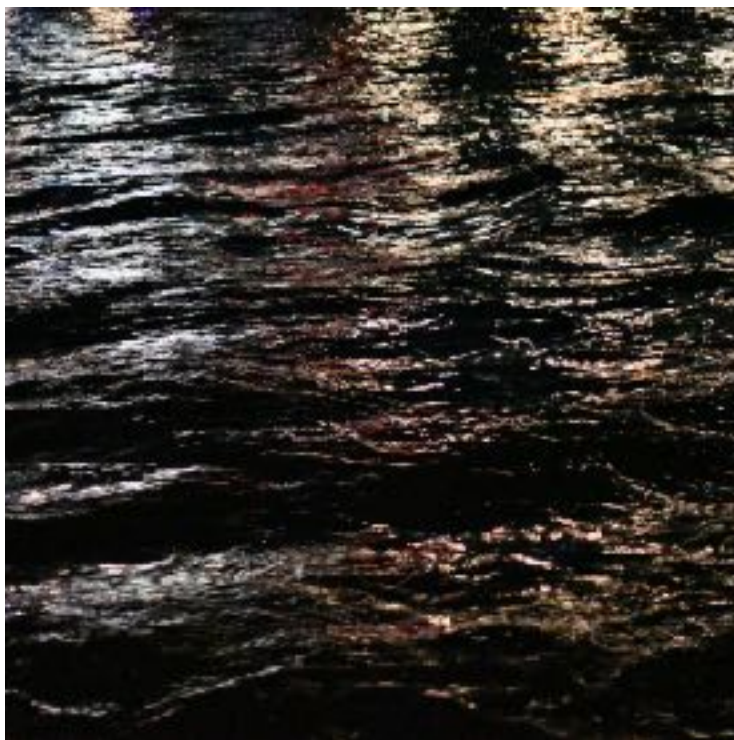
hour four.

or, Twelve Feet Deep, Twelve Years On

So how does one 'self-improve'? How can you 'work on yourself' without it being a sort of extremely modern-life specific kind of self-improvement. I'd be hard pressed to find a self-help book that genuinely says anything explicitly constructive without essentially being "How To Succeed As An Ego". Something that will keep you on the hedonic treadmill, but at least you'll have the strength to run now.

We've climbed far, over the past three hours, we've talked about many things, abstract, non-abstract, moved between the two, and now, we sit at a little resting-point. We can catch our breath, and try and learn something

from what we have read/written. Of note is how I am actually forming as a human being while I am writing this. Even the first hour seems remarkably un-nuanced sometimes, heavy handedly making broadstroke statements about memory, childhood, and the subjectivity of creativity. In fact, there's one overarching theme behind most of the heavy-handedness. I'm trying take myself far too seriously. I mean, what? Looking at my own experiences as if they were sort of 'ancient texts' and not just the exact same thing as I'm doing now? This is the same process as diary-making, all things considered. It's just not explicitly chronological. But even then, often, diary write-ups would be quite sporadic, and there would be an element of memory there, and there would also quite often be extraneous commentary on days gone by. It was quite odd for my diaries, to be honest, to have a large portion of their content be commentary on things that didn't happen on the days it covered.

So if this book is like a diary of sorts, and my diaries often contain pieces of analysis about what I'd said before, then why don't we turn back to hour one for a second and have a think about some of the earlier statements that I've made.

> *To think that the 'cold hands' story has any bearing on my personality now is just me attempting to make every action I've made seem meaningful.*

Well, here we have our first contentious thing. I feel that when writing this, I didn't want to have the possibility of being accused of being overly sentimental by anyone who might read this. I didn't want to admit that actually, perhaps the super-memory of the 'cold hands story' does

actually affect how I act - I mean, why else would I feel the need to put it in here? Also weighing on my mind when I read this is the idea that I have understated certain influences on my personality because I have either forgotten them or somehow blocked them out.

I'm also not entirely convinced that the idea that 'me attempting to make every action I've made seem meaningful' is necessarily a bad thing. It feels self-indulgent, this is true, but I think that this sort of indulgence does not necessarily have to come at the expense of another person's indulgence. We can all do this sort of thing, to think about ourselves. Perhaps I'm trying to skew the balance a little too hard towards thinking rather than doing, but, that's a point for another time. The main thing is that other people can also do this and as long as it remains psychologically evaluative rather than just bragging, then it's not going to impinge on anyone else's inclination to do anything.

I am not a role model. Nothing close to one. I've just got some very, very vague directions towards where I might find one. Anyway, onto the next point.

> *Imagine living in a world where cultural relativity was taken into account when sentencing for generally unambiguous crimes.*

I think this is a very hasty point to make in light of what was being discussed around it. The points of the paragraphs surrounding it seem to be one of thinking that law shouldn't replace personal morality. I suppose this could be seen as a thought experiment that attempts to demonstrate the absurdity of trying to apply a relativistic framework to our current law-centric framework. It doesn't work, if the idea is that there are rules within the relativism, then there is nothing certain,

everything is a loophole. We would have to realise that, at some point, we agree on some fundamental facets of human existence which cannot be 'dug down' from, so to speak. Hey, isn't that what some of this book is about? Nice. Next up, we have:

> *Because some of the value of pleasure seems to come from its randomness, the fleeting nature of feeling good about yourself is what makes it valuable.*

Well, yes, in an egoistic sense. If pleasure is to be truly gained, then it should not feel fleeting or random, it should feel like it has come from *your actions*, which can sometimes feel fleeting and random in a massive universe like this one. Getting something right by pure luck, accidentally glancing the soulful, is not something that is massively good. True pleasure comes from sustained soulfulness, not anything that goes in ups and downs.

I suppose you could argue that something that marginally goes up and down is consistent or sustained. So there is potential for fluctuation in soulfulness, but it should never be the predominant factor, it shouldn't feel like soulfulness is something that is here one second and gone the next. In order to find something like that, you need to approach the world with an open mind. If anything is overly meaningless or droll, it can be somewhat beaten down by turning it into a moment of wonder, or absurd joy. Commuting without some kind of external stimulus, ie. something to read, music on headphones, need not be something that is merely 'slogged through'. It's quite interesting to be aware of the perception of time in this manner. However, as soon as you try and measure your perception of time, it tends to default towards 'standard' experience. If you start

counting, the time seems 'punctuated' by the seconds, rather than the abstract flow of events that usually governs time perception.

Essentially, gaining awareness of your own perception is something that is important to regulate yourself. If you feel time slipping away, or slowing down due to boredom, or you feel that you're annoyed at someone else, thinking about how you're experiencing the event at some higher level can give you some incredible perspective. To consider what you've already done, and to form critical opinions of yourself in a constructive way.

Take a very small example from the other day. A friend and I were exiting the DLR platforms at Bank, intending to head to the Central line. Unfortunately, when we used the exit we used, we were greeted with nothing but signs to the Circle, District and Waterloo & City lines. No good. So we walked right on through to the platform on the other side of the concourse, and in a roundabout way, eventually found the Central line. I initially thought 'Damn, we weren't looking at the signs enough' and admittedly felt negative towards our skittishness and refusal to back out of going the long way through the other platform. I was also annoyed at my friend's level of underhanded stress, they felt roughly the same thing that I did. But then I said, 'Wow, I think these platforms at Bank are terrible. But I should have looked at the signs rather than just rushing for an exit.' Not exactly my words, but something more succinct and neat[9] along those lines. I actually said them out loud, so that my friend heard. In that moment, there was understanding. There was the idea that, 'oh fuck, we *can* be wrong!' We are fallible creatures, I felt bad for feeling bad towards

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[9] I PROMISE.

my friend, and I'm pretty sure they felt the same way towards me. There was a shared moment of vulnerability which I really don't think that either of us had really taken the time to consider before, at least not outside of the context of deeper conversations.

This was an intrusion of that level of thinking into everyday life. That's what you want, thought that supplants, rather than hinders communication, soulfulness, understanding, whatever you want to call it, the linking of two humans together through the messy, barely-structured mash-mash of mouth-sounds we call Language. As Wittgenstein sort of once said, 'language is a game', and he's right - but in order to get good at any game, you have to understand your opponent. And, due to the nature of language, the only way that you can understand your opponent is through interpretation, which comes through - you guessed it - language![10] So they sort of - again, you guessed it - interplay with one another in a sort of loop! Language helps understanding other people helps language helps understanding...

As I've said before, we do much better out of something unresolvable. But the unresolvable thing, in and of itself, gives rise to solutions to real-life problems. I initially said that these problems were solvable, but I do not think that is the case. There is always the possibility of miscommunication. I could have actually pissed my friend off more with what I said, but they just chose not to show it. But that is unlikely. And even with that, there is the possibility of reconciliation.

But then the question becomes, 'How far does reconciliation have to go?' That is a very interesting

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[10] I USE LANGUAGE IN THIS SENSE TO REFER TO ALL KINDS OF LANGUAGE, SPEAKING, GESTURES, EMOTIONAL RESPONSES, ETC.

question, because it has no end. There is no end to reconciliation if we are searching for something perfect. It is always possible to reconcile on one more thing. Two people can never be the exact same. But is homogeny what reconciliation is about? Surely, two people can reconcile themselves in relation to one another, knowing that the two are different and have unbalanced aspects of themselves that don't need to be reconciled with the idea of something perfect? I'm not trying to say that two people who are wildly horrible in their own ways sort of 'average out' to being neutral. I'm just thinking about people whose relationships are inherently one way or another. Maternal/paternal links are some inherently one-sided relationships, yet they can be figured out.

Is it possible to over-reconcile? Well, I don't think so. But I think, as humans, we prefer some kind of distance to another person a lot of the time. It is nice knowing what someone else feels and means by what they say, it is nice knowing someone who can...[11] but there's always the difference, there is always some difference at the core. I like that. I personally enjoy that. It can be hard sometimes, but it should be like going up to a friend at a good moment and saying, 'No matter how bad things get, remember this moment. Remember how things are now.' In that moment, it might be easy to say that, right now, you're not having to remember anything to understand the other person, you're experiencing it first-hand, in the moment. But years down the line, things might start to fall apart. And for some people, piecing together where rifts seemed to form is not a concrete process. There are always rifts, even between the closest people. There are unbridgeable gaps in our perception, as I argued before,

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[11] ...FINISH YOUR SENTENCES FOR YOU.

you cannot be other people - but you can try and get very close. Augh! It's too early to make that point! We're less than halfway through (I know, right?) and I'm already making the points that I said I'd save until the end.

What is the point of deliberately saving all of your best points, your most poignant moments, until the end of a novel? For some narrative climax? For some misguided sense of 'buildup'? I'm not Chekhov's Gun-ing anyone by doing this. There's no 'reward' in having to wait a long time for something grandiose to be revealed. You know what, this is sort of a non-structured book. It flows wherever it feels like, whether that be to stagnant water or the rapids of strange philosophical discourse. Even the way in which you read it can affect the way in which the experience of the book changes. Have there been any sections which have uninterested you? Perhaps, go back, flick through the pages from up until now, take in the book at mach-speed until you recognise a word or a phrase you remember. Then read from there for a little bit. You can do this as many times as you like, in whatever utterly haphazard way you want. The more haphazard, the better.

Good, now you're back, having spent a little bit more time here. Well, I'm off to send you on another expedition through the book, although this one is an optional one. If you were intrigued by the ideas of not being able to ever quite understand other people, how I believe that is the case, and how to try and overcome the divide, then skip forward to page 250. When you're done, simply return here and continue on like nothing happened.

If you've just returned from your jaunt forwards,

welcome back! It's still Hour Four here, so there's not as much ridiculous terminology, and not *quite* as much meta-analysis. It feels nice to be back, right? Back on track, so to speak. But if the book said that the track itself was to skip wildly forwards and backwards, does that make the 'on track' route the one you have just taken? Even if you chose to read the whole thing chronologically (whatever the hell that means anymore) is that the other track? If both route are tracks are they both on track? Silly little semantic games. You can just skip right to the end if you want. But you won't. There could be a little warning right at the very end that says 'It wasn't worth skipping to the end, was it?' and that would totally ruin your perception of the book as a whole, wouldn't it? The link between your perception of the book and the contents within would be altered. It would no longer be this immutable thing, rigid, set by someone else, something that you had no influence over[12], it would become this sloppy mess of words, post-it note drawl smattered across the pages, you can see the hand that types this now, you can understand why it's so important that you *do not skip to the end*, you will regret it. I can offer forgiveness in some manner if you've gone and done it now. But it's on your hands. I am not forcing you to read the rest of this book. This could be the last sentence you read. Or th- no, no, slipping into that would be exceedingly boring, I think we can all agree on that one.

What am I supposed to be, some kind of self-obsessed, no-fucks-given-to-chronology, David Foster Wallace kind of guy? Oh shit, I wasn't supposed to mention *him* until later, either. Ah, well, cat's out of the bag now. We'll just tacitly ignore it until it feels like time to go back. All this

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[12] UNLESS OF COURSE, YOU KNOW ME, SO, IN WHICH CASE, HI!

meta-discussion of the narrative is making me feel ill. Not a fan of the idea of continuing it, but not a fan of the idea of *not* continuing it. I have been using a lot of italics and I've been using footnotes where previously I might have just used brackets. Perhaps this is due to an increased level of proficiency with word processing software. Perhaps this is because of a *certain* footnote-heavy book. Perhaps it's be-

> *Hello, Alex here. I've got something different for you today, something more personally central to me than the usual satire and criticism. This is a story of when I was on the other end of that stick, and it may not seem like too much of a struggle to most people, but I want to reinforce this point - general criticism is fine, personal criticism is delicate.*

Hello, Alex in 2021 here. I've got something different for you today, something more personally central to me than the usual satire and criticism. This is a story about a story when I thought I was on the other end of that stick, and it may not seem like too much of a struggle to most people, but I want to reinforce this point - if it doesn't seem like a struggle, if you aren't revisiting, rethinking, reanalysing, then what are you doing? Probably living. Things can be gone over, but you have to actually make them first.

It's interesting to know that even from a young-ish age I understood my primary modes of expression to be 'satire and criticism'. I guess that is sort of what I continue to do, to this day, what with *Ducc* and *Pink*. In fact, now that I think about it, satire seems like it's largely confined to schools, or at the very least, institutions which I understand. The worst thing is when someone does satire of something that they don't fully understand. You don't want satire to be obvious, necessarily, and

being wrong in the things you're criticising is a great way to look silly. Also, did I really think this was self-critical in the way that my *York House Football Report* was critical towards football in general? I suppose so. There's something here, at least. And I like the point at the end - 'general criticism is fine'. Such was the way I was... Alright, now onto the full story. (Which contains some light grammatical editing, and some names edited because I clearly didn't learn my lesson from *Ducc*...)

> *'Tuesday. I hate Tuesday'*
> *Like a bootleg version of the character 'Garfield', Tuesdays were my worst enemy for a good chunk of my formative years. The looming threat of that day hung over me like an old grandfather clock - predictable in its pattern, but oddly ominous nonetheless.*

Honestly, I'm surprised I went through with the 'bootleg' joke. I remember worrying about whether it would be considered 'too informal' in the original version of the story. I also remember reading a lot of my creative writing outputs - especially the ones that I still had some residual memory of - and finding quite a lot of jokes in them. Poorly thought-out jokes, but still jokes. I still consider the reason that a lot of my writing doesn't work is because I write it for myself. I write extremely self-centredly.

> *'Tuesday, you've got maths, science, French and then...' my mother said, tailing off as she knew the hour was about to chime. I paused, turned around and picked up my shorts. My swimming shorts.*

I'd love to know how the people around me reacted to this. At the time, it was very easy to get inside my own

head, and justify my hatred of the deep end as something that was innate to me and could never be coaxed out. But more recent readings of this story also idolise certain aspects of childhood, that things were simple, that experiences allowed the malleable world to change form, and that after a simple excursion to the deep end, things would be alright. But it's not true! I'm nineteen years old as I write this, and the person in the story is much closer to nine than nineteen.

There was a lot of conversation between my parents and the teachers surrounding this. It's hard to find the balance between what was genuinely a bad idea for me to do (panic and scream in deep water) and what would have helped me get over it. I do remember, for a while at least, they said that I could sort of do what I wanted, perhaps in an effort to make me go to the deep end of my own accord. All I remember from this ill-fated attempt at making me realise my own shortcomings is that I pencil jumped into the shallower end for a while. After I was done, someone came up to me and said that I was jumping really close to the side of the pool and might clip the back of my head if I didn't jump further.

Now, I know what you're thinking, 'What's bad about swimming?' It wasn't the fear of water, or the stern teachers observing your every stroke, splashing away at regular intervals like clockwork. It was that sign. A sign that read "12ft. Deep End." That was the ominous, scary figure that kept me from enjoying something frankly I was quite good at. No traumatic events had happened there, the sign was the trauma. The way the tiles at the bottom of the pool slowly slipped down from 3 feet to 4, 4 to 5, 5 to 7 and then down to the deep, dark blue of 12 feet. It felt like the phrase 'six foot under' would apply to me doubly if I were to ever even

momentarily veer into the deep end. The ropes separating the lanes out in the pool provided a false sense of security - they were little more than markers, rather than something I could cling to out of desperation.

The worst thing I remember is that there weren't actually horizontal lanes in the pool, nor vertical ones for us. No, the 'medium group' was just on the edge of the 'drop-off' area, where the water depth would go from four and a half feet to twelve in a short span. Swimming backstroke was the worst, because you didn't have anything to align yourself with while looking at the roof. There were markers, the roof was corrugated and peppered with small windows, but it was never enough to triangulate your position mid-lap. If you veered off course, you could very much find yourself in deep water - for most people, metaphorically, but for me, seriously.

One time, I forgot my normal shorts, so I had to don a flowery, flamboyant pair of Bermuda shorts, and I was called out almost immediately after setting foot on the pool edge. 'Taylor! What have you got on?' shouted Mr Turner. The shout elicited a laugh out of my classmates, and the clock struck once more, as if to mock me too. I was lucky that happened on the last lesson before the summer holidays, for my friends might remember that scenario as well as I do if it wasn't for a healthy summer dose of activity induced amnesia.

I think a lot of my writing style at this point has to do with reading and listening to a lot of Douglas Adams. It's very easy for me to copy certain writing styles, so much so, that it's definitely a problem. With an absence of material to 'bounce off of' I struggle to make things. It's easier for me to riff on something that's been done a

hundred times in some way, and if I feel I can understand why it was done that way, then I'll do it another way. Perhaps this might be somewhat over-analysing myself, but I guess that's what we all do. There are no truly, utterly original ideas, by virtue of living in a world with other people and things, there's always something to be stolen. Nothing is truly original, per se.

> *As we were out in the sun in the summer, Mr Turner, (who I will always remember because of his inability to talk at a normal volume) devised a plan to move me out of the middle group (which teetered on the 5 to 7 foot deep zone, so I was already physically out of my depth) and placed me in the group which traversed the deep end, and putting me out of my depth mentally, too.*

Before I head into something about Mr Turner (who is the main object of satire in this story, despite the fact that almost nothing has been fictionalised), I'd like to mention a fact that some people pointed out to me in order to make me feel better about swimming in the deep water. They said - and, to be honest, might still believe - that deeper water is more buoyant at the top. And as someone with enough of a grasp of physics to understand that that might be possible, but not good enough of an understanding to realise there is nothing that supports this idea. 30cm, 30m, it matters not. Water is water, and you float according to the volume of water displaced.

Anyway, the thing about Mr Turner is that this story was written before a critical re-evaluation of Keblian life that I've undertaken as of late. At the time, Mr Turner was still a figure that I didn't really understand, it seemed like I was taking a more or less 'Nathan-istic' approach to analysing teachers. Rather than seeing them as people who sincerely wished for our self improvement, I saw

them as people who wanted us to do things for no reason whatsoever, or perhaps for a reason that I had no personal alignment with at the time, like physical fitness, or willpower, or just general character development. Of course, retroactively justifying the suffering of small children on the grounds of abstract 'character development' is always going to be a contentious point. Because, after all, it was not enjoyable for the most part. There would have been a hundred times where I would have skipped something at Keble in order to do something else more enjoyable. And the modern cynic in me wants to say, "But life isn't like that, little Alex." And he's right. It's hard to wonder what was enough and what was not. But for me, and my childhood, I think people like Mr Turner, despite their intimidating appearances, really did just want us to consider something outside of our comfort zones. And perhaps, once or twice, have a good chuckle at the rain-sopped klutzes roll around in the mud.

> *I returned in September and Tuesday came again, this time with a surprise like no other. They called out the register for each group to board the bus, and I waited for my name to be called out. (I was right at the end of my group) But nothing could be heard. The silence truly was deafening. They called the advanced group and my name didn't appear, even when my classmate T. Wild was called. I asked to look at the sheet. My name had been crossed off and re-written right at the bottom, below everyone else.*

This, I believe, did actually happen. It was horrifying.

> *'Ah yes, Alex!' the more compassionate Mrs Edwards said 'You're in the deep end today!'*

My heart sank twelve entire feet. And I was scared my body would too. The 10 minute coach trip to the swimming centre felt like a 10 hour bus ride to death row. Only I wouldn't even get to choose my last meal. You're not supposed to swim after eating, anyway.

Actually, this bit is quite funny. I can't quite pin it down, but there's something about early-me humour that I haven't been able to replicate ever since. I think it's probably due to the fact that a lot of my more recent writings have been either not personally about me, or are just slightly better written. Either way, it would be nice to recapture a little bit of that.

After changing , we were lined up and set off to swim in register order. We were doing lengths, so I would just have to jump in and swim to the safety of the shallow end.

I counted down from 12, a signatory gesture to how many feet of pain I was about to experience. The clock chimed as my counting hit zero, and I jumped in.

Not to nitpick the story for plot devices, but the clock was silent. It was, however, a prominent feature of the room, it was pretty large, and at the deep end side of the pool at the time.

In no time at all, I had made it to the other side. My fear had made me a better swimmer! A true triumph, in every sense of the word. I told my parents, who then revelled in saying swimming as part of Tuesday timetable. And then came the swimming gala! I would be able to show my prowess to everyone else - the fear still motivated me.

The day came, and after doing length after length in heat after heat, the finale event came - the house relay. As you may know, I was in Belvedere (or red house, to the layman.) My starting point was set, and I was ready to wreck the competition.

'To the layman' - good one, previous Alex.

But something was different. Now, I was to start at the shallow end and end at the deep end, something which I had never done before. I would have to plunge my head into the water and see the depth slip away beneath me, to see the tiles transition from the safe, inviting light blue to the ocean depths of dark blue.

The countdown began again, and I jumped. The fear pushed me on and held me back, wanting the event to be over without the fear of depth. I kept swimming until I tagged the next person in line, hauled myself out of the pool with great fear of slipping and falling back in.

I never went back to that place, and it never mattered to me that I didn't. I had proven myself to to myself, to do it again would be vain.

Or because you were still afraid of deep water. Well, in pools at least. Deep water in terms of being out in the ocean is somehow fine to me - if I fall off a kayak, I'm all good, but throw me in a deep, featureless, tiled pool, and that's not all good.

So maybe that little nagging voice that told me to swim faster or Mr Turner's booming voice was responsible for my victory. Personal criticism is delicate and hard to get right, but can motivate

people to do what they thought they could not in the process.

What you're witnessing here is probably the very start of the reconsidering of what Keble was like. No longer just a work-hall interlaced with disparate fun breaks, but a serious institution in developing my character, one which (as of right now) seems to overshadow Westminster - probably by virtue of the sheer length of my residence there. I mean, by the time I left Keble, I had spent a good third of my life either in it, or occupied with things surrounding it. Not to mention all the people that I met.

> *No amount of facts about the extra buoyancy provided by deeper water could convince me.*
> *No amount of logic could shake my firm view that the deep end was the worst thing to exist.*

Oh, wow, I hadn't read it all the way through before writing this, and, wow, huh, I guess you really did believe that. I mean, deeper water is more buoyant near the bottom, but nothing changes at the top.

But overall, I think that this is a really interesting piece of writing for going over as an account of how I thought about Keble as I really was outgrowing it. It was very easy for me to say that I was outgrowing Keble, even from the early days. I was, I wanted more out of my subjects, and instead of diving headfirst into more things, more knowledge, more whatever the syllabus would have accounted for, I started making things. I wonder how obvious it would be, looking back, that the thing I really wanted to do wasn't to become a chef, I didn't want to be a scientist, I didn't want to go into engineering or something like that. A childhood obsession with the solar system should lead to an adult obsession with the world,

rather than scurrying into the niches of -ologies. I may not have wanted to be a chef, but I wanted to be good at cooking.

You see, looking back, most of my desires have not been things into themselves, but desires for something beyond the physical concept with allows that thing to flourish. Butterflies might have been my 'thing' for a while, but the categorisation of the world and understanding of its components was what really interested me. Butterflies were just easy to get a hold of. You can see this sort of behaviour, all the way back to the start of me, seeing car models before my parents could, knowing Tom Lehrer's *The Elements*, all this stuff was not just specific, niche interests. It's just very easy to fall into those categories. Even writing, to a greater degree, tries to capture the world in these little capsules called 'words' and then valiantly tries to convey them to someone else. It's a hard process. But I think I've found the thing that I love doing.

On a slightly less grandiose note, it's also (in my view) interesting to think about how much of my experience is mediated by pools. Some of the best and worst times I've ever had have been in them. Think of the weird disparities. Centre Parcs versus Southgate Leisure Centre. Discovery Cove versus that Austrian pool which I got my tooth chipped in. It's strange, right? Even within the pool at Southgate, there's so much variety. Being allowed on the floats was the best thing ever, but if one of those floats were to veer into the deep end, then it would be one of the worst things to ever happen to me.

But one of the most important things that pervades almost all of this analysis is that it's… well… me talking about my interactions with the world. Which, if I'm being perfectly honest, isn't particularly interesting. Maybe it

might be, if I was working towards illuminating some strange fact about the past, something which goes unmentioned in the story, but to be honest, there really isn't all that much that needs to be there. It's a mesh of different experiences. This isn't chronological, nor is it even explicitly *logical* in the slightest. Some of these things didn't happen. Others did happen. And they're both equally as important.

So that was a neat little story about a story based on a real event. A 2021 essay on a 2016 story on a 2012 event. And now, transplanted into a 2022 essay-story. It's a real jaunt through an extremely scope-limited history. Anyway, that 2021 essay is, well, not great in a lot of factors. A particular point of note:

> *...there's something about early-me humour that I haven't been able to replicate ever since. I think it's probably due to the fact that a lot of my more recent writings have been either not personally about me...*

Really? They haven't been about *you*? Was *Ducc* about school, or your perception of school? Was *La Vita Eterna* about life and reality, or your perception of life and reality? And *Standing* is, at points, a literal retelling of events which happened to you. This little slightly-fictionalised tale of going swimming in 2012 is the same thing. It is a fiction. It did not happen - it is a story, a super-memory, something to be turned into a series of anecdotes and comically timed pauses, witty one-liners. Something to forget all the genuine sadness that came with that era. I think that the original prompt for the story was in my CE English exam, being something along the lines of "Write a story on the topic of Overcoming

Hardships". Perhaps that question itself was taken from the more general 'overcoming hardships' questions that US universities tend to ask to potential undergraduates.

> *I was lucky that happened on the last lesson before the summer holidays, for my friends might remember that scenario as well as I do if it wasn't for a healthy summer dose of activity induced amnesia.*

> *I think a lot of my writing style at this point has to do with reading and listening to a lot of Douglas Adams. It's very easy for me to copy certain writing styles, so much so, that it's definitely a problem.*

It is true, Adams does have a certain style of writing which is immutably wondrous. But saying that 'activity induced amnesia' is a saying that's trying to attempt to copy his style is potentially reaching too far. I don't think it's possible to remember which things affected my writing style that early on. I hated randomness for the sake of randomness, and I thought that Adams' writing was quite random, but I loved it all the same. The difficulty lies in making random feel not random. Of making things up and having them integrate themselves into you like they were real things. That's why I think people get so involved in every conceivable myriad outlet that modern society offers us. We make it, it is immediately polarising, addictive, infatuating, clear-cut and precise. From the Atlanta Falcons all the way to Alliance 90, Star Trek to F.R.I.E.N.D.S. Very convincing human creations. But all have the same purpose in the end, in relating it back to the person, the people, an attempt to induce something in another human being. Touchdowns, elections, beam-ups, breakups.

Is it very easy for you to copy certain writing styles? Superficially, yes, anyone can plaster their book with endnotes, anyone can add meta-references, but the superficial styling is often merely so. A veneer. If, by wearing the mask of a favourite childhood creator, we can create more stories, then so be it. People are annoyed with stylistic choices now, everyone carving out their own weird niche because of the idea that we *have* to be different. The idea that actually, some ideas that are shared are pretty good. It comes from the idea that ideas can be stolen, and their intrinsic, non-economic value is turned into something external, usually money, sometimes fame. We don't want to be the guy who tells someone else a really good idea and then they go and make money off of it, and then you remind them about it years later and they don't give you any money even though you think you deserve at least some of it.

It is easy to copy. Copying got us this far. Oral traditions, writing, copywriting, faxing, emailing, copying and sending is a necessary part of existence. It's the basis of memes, in the Dawkinsian sense. Copying is the basis of many wonderful works. Where do you think half of Shakespeare's plays come from? Was Shakespeare even just one person? Were there mistakes in the copying down of the plays due to actors who misspoke? All we have are copies. Copies of an original thing which we, at this moment, don't seem to be able to grasp. Copies of our own experiences. Of the ability to put things into words. This book has gotten harder to write, the further I have steeped myself in meta-territory. Things get harder to write about, up here. We're losing sight of the ground.

So what to do from here? Well, of course, we could always... do. Rather than thinking about experiences, we could perform them. They're the two sides of human

experience, the active and the mental, and so far, we've been wrapped up in the mental without much recourse to the active. It's hard to balance sometimes. Doing and thinking can both be spirally addictive. So let us do. Let us ask.

Q1. What was the earliest thing you remember?

That's interesting. I was asked the same question when I was about 7 in an English lesson, and the answer I gave was being pushed in a pushchair, and it must have been autumn because the leaves were crunching under the wheels, and I can remember the orange glow of the street lamps, and it was near my grandmother's house.

Q2. What were your schools like?

My first school was very victorian, and the headmaster wore a cape and a mortarboard, and carried a - very well used... cane.

Q2a. Did you ever get caned?

I was very lucky, and managed to get away with it.

Q2b. Why did you nearly get caned?

Me and some other boys were looking into a class that was not yet finished, and I pushed another boy into the classroom, and we all ran off. It was only the next day I discovered he had tripped over and broken his tooth.

Q3. What foods did you like when you were a child?

My favourite food was my grandma's soup and steak and kidney pudding. I can remember lots of foods that I didn't really like, especially my mother's cooking. My sister, my dad, and I made the mistake of saying we liked her minced beef cobbler, so we ended up having it on a sunday for the next 10 years! We still joke about it now!

Q4. Were there many rules in your household?

I don't remember any rules, really.

Q4a. Were your parents strict?

No, not really. And I don't remember them having a 'nasty' side either.

Q5. Did you have any hobbies?

I collected all sorts of things, kept tropical fish, bred hamsters, made wine (when I was 12...) polishing stones and then making jewellery out of them, fixing motorbikes and cars, then I discovered girls, and started collecting them.

Q6. Did you have any ambitions?

Not really. But I did want to be the world's greatest jetskiier! I had to settle for 'really good'. I wanted to work on computers in some way, but my dad turned me away from that, saying that they'd 'go nowhere'. Oh well.

Q7. When did you first meet mum?

We had our first date on April 2nd 1983 (I think... Better not ask mum. She'll moan at me for not remembering.)

Q8. What was your first job?

When I was 12 I used to service cars for the drivers at my uncle's transport depot. Then I got a job in a garage on saturdays, when I was 14.

Q8a. Your next job?

When I was 16 I got an apprenticeship at a Ford main agent, thought it was a complete waste of my time. My parents pretty much forced me to stay there! I would

much have preferred to go into computers and electronics. I left when I was nearly 18.

Q9. What did you do after that?

I ran my own company which built custom cars for people, and I named it *Xtasea Automotive*, then after that I got into boats, jetskis and off-road vehicles. I then opened a shop called GS Jettech. We ran a jetski race team which competed at the world finals, EU finals and UK finals for 10 years. We had our share of champions, and it was a LOT of fun. I also performed (on a jetski) at displays in front of thousands of people.

Q10. What is the one thing you most regret about the past?

The only things that I regret are the things I didn't do.

Q11. Were there any women you liked before mum?

Yes, there were, but none made me as happy!

Q12. Where did you want to go in the world?

When I was younger I wanted to go to America and France, but now I can't wait to go to Japan.
Q12a. Why Japan?

I think it is so different from our culture, and also I would like to go there because of the history, food (lots of it...) and architecture.

Q13. What is the most annoying thing you just cannot stand?!

Well, Ant and Dec (a bit...) Paul O' Grady, Piers Morgan and Jeffery Archer. I wish they were put out of my misery! Also queueing. (This list would have gone on for hours after hours, but we cut it down.)

Q14. What is the most prized thing you own?

The only thing I would not like to lose is our photograph collection. Everything else is replaceable, or not a big deal.

Q15. Were you nervous about certain things in school? Tests?

No. I wasn't about tests. I was worried about many other things at school.

Q15a. Like what?

Like how to get to the next lesson without getting beaten up. I went to quite a hard, nasty school.

Q16. Which hospital and when were you born?

On 14th April 1962, I was born in North Middlesex Hospital, which used to be a victorian workhouse. When I was about 17, my grandmother told me a secret she had never told anyone else, even my grandfather and my mother! She and her family lived in the workhouse for about a year, when she was about 6 or 7 years old. She was still ashamed and embarrassed (seventy years later..!) that her family were so poor that they ended in the workhouse.

Q17. What was your first car and how many others have you owned?

My first car was a 1969 Ford Escort, and since then I have owned about forty cars in total, sometimes three or four at a time. Also my first vehicle was a moped!

Q18. Did you own any pets before I was born?

Yes, we had a cat, a great dane which shredded an entire three seat sofa when we were out one day, leaving

nothing bigger than three inches square. Obviously none of these were as interesting as my son.

Q19. What did you think 2010 would be like in 1970?

I went to see the film '2001' in 1970, when I was 8, and I could not imaging anything further than 2001. That seemed so far in the future.

Q20. What technological advancement shocked you the most?

When I was a kid, I read 'Brave New World' and watched 'Joe 90' and thought that the instant teaching methods were amazing, but would never ever happen. Then the other day, I wanted to learn how to make maki rolls. I watched a very short YouTube clip, and instantly, I was a sushi expert! So maybe, it has happened, in a way...

These question answers are quite interesting because they're the first time I got a continuum of answers that sort of displayed him as something like a coherent person, rather than just a collection of distant and difficult-to-relate-to vignettes. It put him into the fore in a way that I don't think I'd really seen him before. It's strange to think everyone has their own extremely-intricate, odd, intensely self-mythologising series of stories that construct them. Those baked-in viewpoints are what makes us us, rather than any specific views we hold. It's the reasons why we hold those views that seem to make us up. In that way, I don't think I've changed all that much.

Now I'm wondering if it is ever possible to do anything new. Is there anything that is ungrounded in something else? No, everyone borrows. But making, remixing, it's always what we do, and to be aware of what

we've watched can make us be better people. Being aware of the things that we've seen can make us aware of teethings that we do. A lot of childhood projects of mine are influenced pretty obviously by external sources - and understanding what was so compelling about those things makes it possible to perhaps one day make those sorts of things myself. To understand is... well... to understand. To ask is to understand. To listen is to understand. To communicate is to understand.

Another theme that keeps coming up throughout this essay is the idea that everything communicates in some way, a bypass road radiates its designers and builders, a poem reflects on the person who wrote it much more than any external state of affairs it may refer to. In fact, it is the only thing that truly matters about the interpretation of a thing - the fact that it reflects something which would have otherwise gone unexpressed.

Back when I had just written and published *Ducc*, I was reasonably certain that everyone who read it would take it how I saw it, a face-value parody of our school. But one person who I spoke to about the book, a teacher who was featured in it, said that the book reflected much more on my conception of the school than the school in itself. He was happy with how he was portrayed, his caricature within the novel being at the least a little flattering but also not too un-nuanced. He was the sort of teacher that was almost unanimously liked, or at the very least he was famous/infamous regardless of where you turned. He was just about everywhere within the school's mythos, and that was reflected in this story to a degree. His name wasn't even changed, for God's sake! How much more on-the-nose do you have to get?

But his one-line review of the book was more than I could have ever asked for. Some time later, I was looking through the window of a shop somewhere near Piccadilly Circus, and he tapped me on the shoulder and greeted me, and introduced his wife. She, I was told, had read the book as well, and thought his portrayal was quite funny. Perhaps more than he did, I thought. But it was quite interesting to know that perhaps it had been viewed through the filter of someone who had not mythologised the man, of someone who saw him as an equal rather than this strange, slightly erratic but also monolithic figure.

The reason behind his strange portrayal within the books stems from the fact that he told many stories throughout his time at my school, and also did a lot of things that other teachers wouldn't usually do, such as watching *Four Lions* for a Year 9 R.S. class. His stories were wild and unpredictable, twists, turns, and a sort of mangled and weaved chronology between them that never quite seemed to fit together, no matter how much we asked him to lay the tale of his own life out flat. The man had literally lived hyperbolically, working 25 hours a day to make stories which no one else could have possibly come up with. He couldn't have come up with them either, he seemed but a vessel for interesting anecdotes. He had done everything, seemingly. And he had done everything that worked in a short, most-of-a-single-lesson format - his tangents gobbled up teaching time like nothing else, but for some reason, his classes always did just as well, if not better, on the end of year tests.

I hope his stories are written down, or perhaps some stand-up comedian repurposes them for his own gain. some of these stories play like super-memories, amalgamations of larger, more painful incidents distilled

down into tidbits without much emotional tax attached. Perhaps not. But a lot of these events did have quite a lot of emotion attached to them, deaths, movement, tragedy, things that you're really not supposed to laugh at.

A child with down syndrome heartily exclaiming "Is daddy going to hell?" after an ash and gas buildup in the crematorium he worked up was exhumed from the chamber when its doors opened in order to accommodate the child's father's coffin. One of his mother's most treasured memories, a vivid sunset in the Alps, which she relayed to him on her death bed, being exclusively caused by an accidental self-poisoning with hallucinogenic mushrooms which he had not told her about for fear of getting punished, and later, for fear that it would cheapen the memory in her eyes. Getting fired from work after misreading the amount of zeroes on a company entertainment expenditure requirement and hiring an entire football stadium out for the day.

Now, that's doing. That's going out there and doing things, I guess. These stories are very self-contained, so there's very little external reflection on these stories other than a quick, semi-moralistic jingle to wrap up the story and send us to our next class. But one of them sticks out to me. The mushrooms one. He was stuck in a position of telling the truth, which would hurt his staunchly anti-drug mother, or lying, which would hurt him through the knowledge that he couldn't share one of their most collectively cherished moments in the 'full' way. When he told the story for the first time, he looked genuinely torn up about it. He laughed, but it was the kind of slightly nervous laughter that sort of spoke as if he hon't quite resolved this whole debate within himself. His mother is dead now, and he lives on, slightly burdened with guilt, perhaps, or maybe he has resolved it within himself. I

think he has. I hope he has. Sometimes the stories we tell which don't seem to directly involve us tell the most about how we're feeling.

One of my parent's friends, who has just turned sixty - I'm sure he wouldn't want to read this on the printed page - has just written a play in which the main character is intensely suicidal. The play does, eventually, resolve happily, but there is the possibility of things continuing, the play invokes the sense that even though the wish for death has evaporated, it may be something which is never fully worked through. It is a positive movement towards the end, the horizon seems to converge on something broadly positive, but there is never any certainty. I suppose that could be very indicative of how its writer feels. Of there being good times and bad times, and the fact that you can only weather the storm, not predict it.

I was discussing the themes behind the play with him one evening over drinks, and I was telling him about the themes in the things that I had written. He was surprised to know that the subject matter of having taken hallucinogenic drugs in my books was based on my own experience. I was slightly surprised to know that his depiction of suicidal thoughts was not based on his own experience, he said he had had to speak to people who had been through those sorts of periods in their own lives. It was strange, thinking that it didn't come from something that he had mediated. It was interesting to think about how I could apply that to my own, deeply self-entrenched style of writing. I remember once being told by my English teacher that I wrote very well, but only for people who were already inside my head. I still think this is true, even now. When I began this book, it was subtitled, "A book by/about/for Alex J. Taylor", and I

still very much think that rationale applies. It is a book for me to open the door, to let people in, and perhaps to get people to open their own doors in similar ways. It is a book that has quite a lot of padding for its quality, to be perfectly honest, and even the sections that talk about how much padding there is, well, they're terrible too. Like this one. Or like that last little sentence. Oh no, it's happening again. Or maybe like-

A quaint old-fashioned bell rings to signify someone entering a shop. A man walks in, wearing a tweed jacket and an old-looking black hat, with a dark blue stripe around the brim. He looks around for something to buy. He isn't looking in the way that signifies he's looking for something that he knows he already wants. He is looking in the way that makes the shopkeeper think he is looking to waste some money. Haphazardly looking across shelves, even if you didn't know where the thing you were looking for was, you'd probably find the general section where the thing was faster than this. He appears to be paralysed by choice, mentally scrolling through the infinite and infinitesimally unimportant choices between certain chocolates, the borders between the enjoyment of one and the enjoyment of another being reduced to mere chance, nothing but the poorly-labelled and poorly-positioned prices below (or above?) the shelves showing him what the prices of each specifically-branded and market-tailored different pieces of chocolate are. Most of these chocolates rely on the idea that people will be interested enough to buy them once, but after having tried half the bar and handing out decreasingly-sized chunks to friends and co-workers, it becomes clear that the completion of the bar is something that is asymptotic, something that is never going to be completed, who likes

popping candy anyway? He looks through more things, of water bottles or varying sizes and sources, of drinks that the man has no idea about. He looks at the different sizes of energy drink and briefly considers their price per volume. He thinks that there is no point in picking, he doesn't want the size of the larger one, but he thinks that maybe he could buy it and then save the rest for later and then give the rest to another person, but then it's another 25 pence, and so then he will have spent another 25p to essentially give another person the dregs of his drink. Is it worth it? Would anyone take a sip from his drink after he had taken nearly the whole thing, let alone pay him a quarter of a pound for the opportunity? I mean, maybe if that person really liked that drink. It was a horrible situation, and he hadn't even made it a fifth of the way down the main shelf. Acres of shelf that contained things that were even more incrementally different and utterly indifferentiable laid ahead. Gum. Sticky notes. More drinks, this time of an alcoholic nature. It had occurred to the shopkeeper a few years ago that many cheap lagers that he sold in his shop were pretty much exactly the same. He had poured a fairly varied selection of drinks into some glasses at home, and then showed his wife the selection, and then told her to attempt to tell which ones were which. Despite being fairly adept at tasting beers, she was flummoxed. The beers yielded no difference that she could taste. The link between the beer and the logo, and the stereotype that the specific beer brings, it seemed to be a purely psychological thing. Very little actual difference multiplied a hundredfold by the little fragments of styling. The thin layer of plastic surrounding the can being much more important than anything inside it. The man is still looking around the shop, he seems to really be looking for something. The

shopkeeper seems to be aware of this, and doesn't want to disturb him. He looks like he is in a trance, leaning over so far to look down at the bottom shelves that his hat is nearly falling off. And yet, it does not. The trousers he is wearing are suit trousers, they look like they are going to split due to tension if he crouches down any further. His eyes scan from left to right, and then up and down in an erratic manner, every time that he thinks there is a pattern forming, something about the payout that he is looking at changes, or perhaps he spies a lone product behind the front row, and pushes the front product to the side in order to get a better look. His jacket is immaculate, even in his crouch-walking position, seeming not to fold in any manner. It goes straight down his sides, matching the shirt he is wearing. It occurs to the shopkeeper that the shirt this man is wearing is very similar to one he has at home, but does not wear because it would not be an appropriate thing for a shopkeeper to wear. He wouldn't want to look like he'd just got off work somewhere else, would he not? His wife says that that shirt is quite good. The man does not seem to be any closer to finding something to buy. The shopkeeper goes back to moving things around behind the counter, no longer looking at the man. Clearly, he has some sort of systematic way of approaching these things. Perhaps he is one of those people who aren't usually allowed out in the world by themselves. This could be some sort of reprieve for him. He seemed too well-dressed to be someone who might find themselves in an institution, but then again, it is very possible that his attire is the subject of the same types of fixations that this man is currently running through now. The shopkeeper can imagine the man looking at himself in the mirror at every angle, in much the way he seems to be doing to the

shop shelves now, making sure there are no creases, making sure that his hat is firmly planted. He stops for a second and looks at some cans of food. Perhaps he is trying to find things that aren't usually available. His shopping list could be full of extremely specific things - the shopkeeper thinks that perhaps this is another reason to believe this man is strange. But now, it has been too long since the man has entered the shop. He is just going to go to the back room - no! - this man could be a thief, waiting for the right time to strike. It has been too long for him to ask the man if he would like any help. But even if he were to ask, what would the chances be that the man would be deaf, or mute, or somehow unable to register his question, "Looking for anything in particular?" - he could not push the words through his mouth. The man had moved to the end of the shop, at the end of a long row of cans. He was just about to disappear from view for a second. Maybe it would be time for the shopkeeper to walk down there and stock some cans he'd been meaning to throughout the afternoon. It wasn't anywhere near closing time. Time felt slow, it was those dead hours after lunch and before closing sneaks up on you, those hours where everyone seems to be doing anything but going out. The town he was in was quite busy on certain days. He was glad that his shift was going to be shortened during the winter, people didn't come in after dark very often. The man was clearly looking for something, or some things, that were so specific as to not be carried by this little shop. The shopkeeper wonders if his range of products is inadequate. Or perhaps this man is some sort of inspector, seeing whether the goods that he is selling are in date. Oh, god, perhaps some of the stuff isn't in date, he's going to fail some sort of examination and get a fine for selling some expired

beans. This can't happen. He's going to go over and stock some new stuff and surreptitiously check the currently shelved cans for their dates of expiry. Tinned foods take a long time to go off, he thinks, that's why they use them in all of those apocalypse films, all those bunkers. He walks over to a plastic-wrapped pack of cans and deftly frees them with his pocket Stanley knife. The blade is sharp, but there are uncomfortable burrs of metal on the handle from where he's dropped it, so the knife is not operating at full efficacy. The cans spread out a little and radially curve inwards when he picks up the cardboard base of the packaging. Why didn't he do this over near the can section? It doesn't matter now, he thinks, maybe he subconsciously didn't want to scare the man with a knife, perhaps he was the kind of person who got scared of those kinds of things, he didn't have the mental capacity to differentiate tool use from threats. But then how would this man be so immaculate? Stacking cans into the short and narrow shelves, prising the label-flaps back in order to gain access to their full height, double-stacking cans that locked into each other tightly. There had always been a zen to stacking cans that few other products could rival. Drinks cans weren't the same either, it was just these metal ones. As soon as his brain had gotten accustomed to any sort of rhythm within the task, it was over, he had run out of cans and would need to get more. Adding to that, he had forgotten to check the dates on the older cans. But it was unlikely that anything would happen. The strange man (for he had been in here long enough for it to be counted as 'strange' to the shopkeeper) had gone around to the other side of the aisles, and was working his way along the rows there as well. Perhaps it really was an inspection, he was going round every single thing with a touchless meticulousness.

But if it was an inspection, then why wasn't he armed with some sort of device for logging notes, a clipboard, notebook, whatever he wanted. But he didn't want anything, material or otherwise. He didn't seem to be examining the prices to see whether or not - oh, no, perhaps he worked for the other shop and was simply just checking out all of their prices in order to see if they could undercut him and steal his business. Would there be any signs that he worked for them? Surely, if you were to send a man into another shop to check out all of their prices, you'd do it in a way that was more subtle than this, for god's sake! You'd try and sneak them in, right, you'd just... be a normal customer. Well, if they didn't care, then he'd have to do the same to them. No Costcutter was going to try and price this family-owned small business out of town. The shopkeeper was already rehearsing his speech that he would unconsciously ceremonially present to his wife when he got home, a sort of grandiose recap of the events that happened while he was at work that cut out everything that wasn't worth mentioning. He was still burning up, thinking about all the things that he could be doing right now other than watching this man. But he wouldn't want to be doing anything else if there was no-one in the shop. To turn on the radio for a minute or two inbetween customers, perhaps tune into a little bit of a football match, the commentators this time of year always seemed more 'on it' than normal. Perhaps it was cold in their booth and they could only distract themselves from the temperature by exercising their brains to find more elaborate metaphors for 'pass' and 'dribble'. But the man was *still fucking here*, oh my god, when will he leave. Perhaps when he was not looking, the man had filled his immaculate pockets with lots of small but expensive

items. But they were still so thin against his sides, even when he crouched. His thin suit trouser pockets would have about a thimbleful of room in them, he thought. Perhaps it was under his hat. No, no, that would be exceptionally stupid. Who would do such a thing? The man retreats a little further down the aisle, seemingly having found something that takes his fancy. But no, he simply looks back at it, perhaps checking the price one last time, or double-taking at the design of a bag of flour. He walks down the refrigerated section. He walks up the refrigerated section. He is not making any facial expressions except a stern concern that makes the shopkeeper go back to thinking he's some kind of inspector. It crushes him, he has to act natural, but it is now too far, too odd, to act anything other than... well, false. He has put too much time and effort into thinking about what this man is going for any option to feel like a serious one. Everything could be, everything is on the cusp of being, he could pull a gun when another customer walks through the door, and hold them hostage, he could reveal a chest-clipboard or comically small notebook and begin taking notes, or issue him a fine after pulling some sort of 'corner shop police badge'. He wondered for a second if 'corner shop cop' worked better, but by that point, the man had walked straight out of the shop, the bell ringing again. The afternoon was very quiet after that, on the outside. But the shopkeeper, thinking through ideas over and over again, eventually ripping apart and destroying all of his thin cassette-tape loops, spent the afternoon in inner turmoil, his life forever marred by not knowing, by not understanding. Perhaps the man had come in to just *look* at everything. He didn't want to buy anything. Just to admire the various creations that were on sale. But who would do

such a thing in a shop? No explanation felt right. He left work a few minutes early, walking home faster, haunted by some sort of shadow. He nearly forgot to lock up properly. The story he told to his wife was not grandiose, he had not 'nearly locked a thief up', he went to bed early and, when he woke up in the middle of the night, could not help but feel disgusted with himself. He wanted to know. He regretted not asking, "Can I help you with anything?" and not just because he feels that he missed out on a sale, not in the least bit, the money is not the reason, he is terrified of what he could become if he carries on down this path, the thought poisoning anything that could be, turning potential into threat, turning action into pain that could not be overcome. He fell back asleep again and vowed to find the man again, to ask him what he wanted, to apologise profusely, to get on his knees and pray that forgiveness could perhaps be obtained. He could not imagine himself asking for forgiveness, just a day ago, but he was here now, awake in bed, terrified, trembling, sweating, hoping.

The man did not return.
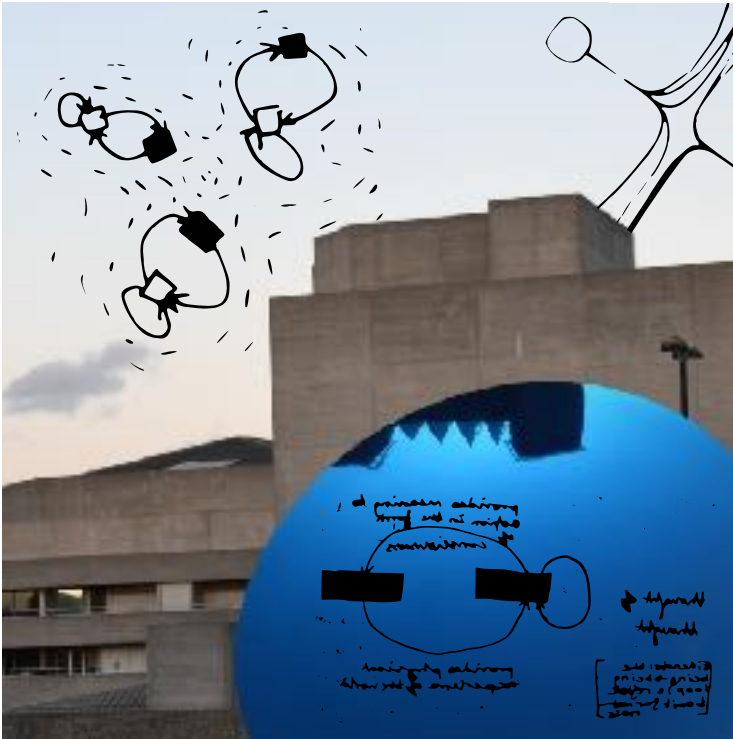
hour five.

or, The Dance Of The Hyperreal Metallic Self-Monitoring Cameras

It is possible to spend an entire life stumbling around at ground level. It is possible to wander towards horizons that you will never reach. The desert is hard to cross, after all. It is possible to spend an entire life falling upwards, tumbling in turbulent air. It is possible to never catch a glimpse of the actual world below. The sky is inviting and enticing. The human urge to fly is transfixing. This has been known for millennia. Myths have told stories of people, in their hubris, who flew too close to the sun. The reason this feels like a cliché is because it is one.

So if we're not flying, and we're not on the ground, then where should we be? Neither place. Soaring for recon, and then moving around on the ground. Analogies for depth and altitude that I've mentioned before go over the same things. But then, how do we go about mediating that height? Of not crawling around like a slug on a hot road, but not falling out of the sky after getting far too greedy? There's no exact answer. But one of the ways of getting past this is to go out and do things - and where better to go out and do things than in social spaces? They've been a tenet of human experience for a long time, they coincide with the beginnings of society, in fact. Rain dances, festivals, communal fireside gatherings, all of these stem from a seemingly innate human desire to mingle. Perhaps 'mingle' is too modern a word for it, social spaces are becoming strangely hostile in ways unlike the traditional hostility of the taverns and bars of yore. This could be because of a long-term trend between non-social action[13], which is partially caused by the lack of general societal cohesion, which is partially caused by a shift towards the self. We can directly see a correlation between the modern, neoliberal attitudes towards socialisation as an inherently transactional thing, and the satisfaction people get out of socialisation. Whereas previously your average group of peers might act as somewhat of a cohesive unit - bordering on family - nowadays the same style of groups may be less bound by rigour and convention. This is not exclusively a bad thing, more people are actually finding themselves as a result and not being forced to sit in cliques that they're only half 'into'.

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[13] THIS IS NOT THE SAME AS ANTI-SOCIAL ACTION, NON-SOCIAL ACTION REFERS TO ACTIONS THAT ARE SOCIALLY NEUTRAL, NOT EXPLICITLY AGAINST THE FORMING OF SOCIAL BONDS.

However, it does seem that people are drawn towards what I would call "culturally homogenous experiences", ones which everyone seems to have done at some point. I believe that these experiences, broadly speaking, give a semblance of structure for many people in an otherwise largely meaningless and chaotic world. But this idea that "everyone does X at least once" is getting harder and harder to find. Everyone has been given the option to have their own experiences, their own shows they like, their favourite niche internet micro-celebrities and micro-obsessions. When there were a but a few television channels, people found homoglated experiences in those things. Mass media (when it was the only form of scale media) was a culturally uniting force - for better, or for worse. The problem with these culturally uniting forces is that they do not necessarily have to tie in with a 'good'. By this, I mean that it is perfectly *plausible* to have a society which is built around human sacrifice. In their situation, human sacrifice is seen as a 'good' - which should seem strange to us. People might like it, but never seriously consider why they like it. Take and example of a man who has been brainwashed into thinking a certain political party is the best. He will not change his mind, no matter the evidence. So, because forces external to himself caused him to act in this way, we cannot say that his action to vote for his party has any meaning to it. But if he were to blindly change it at the last minute in a sort of reactionary way, this would not be any better. Simply not choosing something because you've been brainwashed into thinking it is not the way to go about these sorts of things. The things themselves (or as close as you can get to them) must be appreciated for what they are. Serious consideration is needed for some decisions.

Of course, then we run into sliding-scale problems. How much consideration is necessary? Is it possible to overthink things? Of course it is, the shopkeeper demonstrates that. It is possible to literally paralyse oneself with thought. But none of these sliding-scales have any concrete answers, it's not something that you can keep tuning and eventually expect there to be a perfect answer. There will always be something more to tune. Things vary across time, person, situation, place, context. The thought that goes into a decision is ultimately... the thought that goes into a decision. But, I suppose that is what things like virtue ethics try to say. By understanding more about the situation, understanding more about the universe as a whole, we can act better. We can act without maximising any metricised 'goods' or following pre-set rules mindlessly, without regard for the human. Following rules, no matter how convoluted and nuanced they are, serves ego. Being true to *oneself* in your actions is what gives a fuller sense of moral achievement.

So, the idea now becomes "How do we apply this understanding to our current cultural situation?" Well, first, we have to look at what we have inherited. We have received from our parents a society in the vice-grip of material excess, fraught with vacuousness and meaninglessness in every facet of existence. From the easy targets (the celebrities, the gossip) to the partially-recognised symptoms (the tech-peddlers, the pharmaceutical leaders, the middle-managers) there is nothing to really *do*. Work, if you lack money, is something to be done to stay alive. Not working means you are unproductive, and there is no greater 'good' in modern society than productivity. Whatever 'productivity' means is interesting in and of itself, it is a nebulous term, most of the definitions of which do not

include the flourishing of human beings in any way specific to humans. Even the very charitable definition of productivity within society as 'something that makes the lives of human being better', usually, this can be interpreted as giving us more iPads and choices in crisps. Something which is superficially 'better', more engagement, more entertainment, more beer to drink. When someone responds to the question 'Why do you do this?" with "It's just a job." you can be sure they have succumbed to the trap of the inherent meaninglessness of a lot of modern work. It's not simply enough to understand what you do is meaningless, you have to act like it is as well. Otherwise, you're just making excuses for yourself, acting as if you feel enough disdain to quit your job, but never actually doing it because you're in the trap.

Our parents have collectively created some of the most interesting institutions imaginable. Everything from the acid-fuelled psychedelia concerts to warehouse raves. It is fascinating to see how places like these have developed within the span of a generation or two. Mingling to an extent not previously thought possible. But this is not the standard. I do not believe there is anything social about somewhere so loud that it is impossible to talk to other people.[14] To meet someone new in a club-type environment likely means you're not merely trying to make a friend. Being in that sort of place means there are certain assumptions. You are broadly young, extroverted, attractive.[15] You may want physical intimacy. But these assumptions can be challenged by thinking. If we

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[14] YET, IT IS ALSO NOT SOCIAL TO JUST TALK WITH OTHER PEOPLE, YOU HAVE TO HAVE DONE THINGS IN ORDER TO TALK ABOUT THEM.

[15] AND TRUST ME, YOU'RE MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN YOU THINK, IF YOU THINK YOU'RE NOT ATTRACTIVE.

understand that interactions are meaningless until we give them meaning, then it opens us up to the possibility of giving them meaning, rather than just assuming the meaning will make itself. Some of you reading this will already have take the first step. I believe I have done. I massively enjoy and am rewarded by these sorts of experiences when they are enjoyable, and vice versa. But the most important thing is putting those experiences into context. To think about why you like things rather than diving blindly in. But also to take that dive, to not stand on the board and contemplate.

Again, the problem comes back - how much do we think, and how much do we do? On one end, mindless sharing 'ignorance is bliss' type thinking, on the other hand, loops of overanalytic thought without any physical context. It is true, as Descartes said, to have to be able to think in order to be, but thinking without being is nothing. It's not grounded in anything. This is a loop, it's self-referential. Thought provides meaning to action in the form of phenomenological consciousness, and being provides meaning to thought by providing physical input from the external world. There is no 'bottom'. We do much better out of circularity than 'logical towers'. In logic, there is nothing but the arguments themselves. If you claim to have built an argumentative bedrock, what is that bedrock built on? So, loops.

I'd like to draw attention to what most people consider 'final logical blocks' when arguing for something. The physical world is usually appealed to as a fundamental pillar of argument. This happens in many fields of philosophy and science, linguistic philosophers, biochemists, theoretical physicists. A lot of things are given proper, convincing-looking foundations in this way. Having an actual argument for the case for or against

someone committing a crime is a lot easier when we agree on some fundamental aspects of reality. Saying, "look at that seagull" is much better answered with "oh cool, a seagull" than an existential quandary that threatens the very nature of objective experience. However, going back to the phrasing of that statement, we see that it merely 'makes sense' - this implies a subjective externality. To make sense, there has to be something that creates that sense of order. Humans are very good at this. Pattern recognition is one of the things that we seem to be really good at. We're good at it to a fault. A lot of the time, people don't even recognise its' importance. People that I have spoken to have been so wrapped up in elaborate scientific or philosophical explanations for their own existences that they forgot to look at their own experience. We can imagine their trains of argument attempting to root themselves in smaller and smaller physical things, molecules, atoms, subatomic particles, sub-subatomic particles, etc. But is the external world of a certain depth? Does it end at quarks? According to our current theories, yes, it does, we've been over this before on page 87 if you're looking for a refresher. The point of this being that we can never be sure we are at the 'bottom' of the universe, so to speak. Even if we were to keep going further and further, would there really ever be anything that satisfies the demands of the 'pure external world', one that is complete and fully understood. Of course, even if we were to hit the bottom and prove that we were at the bottom, there's no way of explaining the subjectivity of consciousness, even at that scale.

With the materialist explanation somewhat combatted, we can move on to other things. We have the Thought/Being loop from earlier. But how does this

system process the external world? How is the external world reflected in this model? Well, unreliably, to say the least. It's an induction based model - in the magnetism sense of induction. The two things never actually perfectly relate to one another (ie. the magnets never truly touch) but their proximity to each other induces the other, which in turn creates current, which in turn induces the other one back. You have this inductive loop that never actually really interacts with the world. Also, if it lacks one component, then it will not be a loop, and therefore will not flow. Being a human without a mind or a body is silly - at least to start off with. The thought loop by itself cannot generate thoughts without at least some sensory input to begin with. There has to be a sort of 'spark' to begin generating thoughts that begins with experience. You might be able to keep thinking about things if I remove all of your sensory input right this moment, but it is impossible to imagine thinking without first experiencing things on some level.

But we still haven't answered the question of how much do we think or do? Well, I don't know. Some people will be able to pore over a small set of meaningful experiences, others will need decades of events to build up a picture of what is meaningful and what isn't. Some people (and this is very pertinent to the question of modern society) take until their mid-life crises (or later!) to realise that they never really did anything. So they go out and they buy flashy cars in order to fill an insatiable human urge for meaning, not knowing all they've done is just turn up the speed on the hedonic treadmill. Some hole in the heart. But why do they feel this way? It can't be a lack of physical experiences, everyone has had those, even those who feel like they haven't. So it must be a lack of thinking. "But how?" comes a rebuttal. "These people

are all sorts, doctors, rocket scientists, clinical psychologists! These sorts of people have thought a lot!” Yes, but they have been thinking in the way that a computer thinks. A lot of humans spend their time doing things that are inherently inhuman. Bureaucracy. Busywork. Jobs for the sake of jobs, growth for the sake of growth. All of this is just purple prose to show how unhappy that the modern world leaves a lot of people. And the people just entering into this system for the first time have realised this as well - if they can think at at least a simple level - and thusly have attempted to 'better' their parents by creating... more of the same. More parties, more raves, never trying to turn the dial back the other way to see if it works for them at all. Seeing the events of the last hundred years or so and then extrapolating from them like it's the zenith of human civilisation. Yes, in many ways, we are really the absolute pinnacle of engineering, we have climbed high, we've made rockets, the internet, everything that goes on on the internet, we've made ridiculously complicated systems that no one of us can ever attempt to fully understand, and the systems, very soon, will be going their own way without us.

But we are not data points, we are not static. There is a growing sense of dissatisfaction. Adults use the excuse that teenagers are angsty and energetic or lazy (depending on which argument they're trying to make) and therefore must always want to ride pit bikes, beat people up, have lots of sex and do lots of drugs. This is obviously an exaggeration on the personal scale, but as a society at large, this is how things seem to be headed. Towards utter hedonism. Towards nothing mattering but 'having fun'.

As Travis Morrison once said "Call it fascist, but I know that someday happy / Will be all that matters". The sentiment is there. A lot of the reason that I believe that the generational divide is like it is now is the sheer pace of modern life, and the fact that that speed gives people very little time to consider themselves, to become anything other than just 'old' when they get older. No more is the sage a viable option, thus, teenage spasming, midlife groaning, and geriatric torpor. Nothing ever gets done. But everything is changing at a surface level now, there's actually quite little difference between now and back then if you peel back the layers of technological waste we've laid down. Music genres fall within the same boundaries.

This stagnation of culture seems to be caused by people continuing to try and do, when what they need to do is think. It is impossible to write an 18th century novel after learning about postmodernism. We have diagnosed ourselves too much. We literally understand too much about ourselves as a culture. The reason for our spiralling deeper and deeper into the 'culture wars' and other such meaningless things is that we only look so far into our ideological roots, and then build from there. We keep making more and more ridiculous arguments which are extrapolated from the last years of ideology. Because there are more avenues for conversation and sharing ideas in the modern age, we grab onto what other people say and treat it as gospel. In fact, a lot of people even treat their ideological opponents as speaking the truth. They think that anything that anyone has to say at this point doesn't just point to something else, that the debate is *actually* grounded in wanting to have gender-neutral bathrooms. It's not. That is not to say it is not something to be addressed. But it is unlikely it will need to be

addressed as a separate point if we are to work all the way down to our ideological roots, and then back up again. If we ditch the labels, we tear off what are essentially casts for humanity. We have shored up so much of our ideological and philosophical debate with labels that it is literally impossible to talk about anything without signifying some third party proxy which facilitates communication. Yes, it is easier if we're allowed to use the term 'feminist' as a catch-all thing, but I feel that the use of any term like that is always going to be about communicative efficiency rather than exactness. Which, to be honest, is really not what you're going for when it comes to these sorts of debates.

The current state of the world is just too complicated for any one person to determine, so people just turn to having experiences. But these experiences can't be too new, everything that doesn't fit within the extrapolated gain of the last century. We can do something that is outside of the expectations of our forefathers. Not just young people, though it is easier for them to do. We're not old enough to have irrevocably gotten 'into it'. Our dopamine receptors, try and we might, aren't fried yet. Shun points. Prizes. Instants. Nothings. Things which crush the soul while the ego blooms. But do not slip into weakness. True bravery is not defending everyone. No, true bravery is picking self-consistent principles and acting in accordance with them. That way, if you break then, you have no-one but yourself to blame. What horror, right? Yes. It is hard. Life is hard. But seeing the complexity and the difficulty of it all fold in on itself for status and money is a sick joke. Imagine that - subjective existence, the beautiful phenomenology of our own human bodies, gone because of the stock market and nuclear weapons. Tolerate precisely what is tolerable.

Think and do as much as you so desire. Just don't forget to desire things that are authentic to yourself. It's a strange thing, this - everyone says it would be a good thing to do, but in reality, no one wants to do it. No one wants to fit someone else's mask after they've helped themselves.

It does not feel like there are many opportunities to help others. There are not a lot of times where I feel that a 'random act of kindness' has occurred to me. There seems to be no space for anything like it, the homeless woman on the side of the street could very well be in a large change-grabbing racket that spans the whole of London, with their similarly-misspelled 'Hugry Please Help' signs. Cynicism comes with the territory, it seems. It is a natural part of the world, we are told, it is rude to interfere, to stare, perhaps to help is alright, but my goodness, you're going to have to make a real scene. It does not feel like there is much place for anything. There are simply too many things, too many clubs, societies, publications, small businesses, big businesses, whatever you like, to get a foot in the door literally anywhere. And there's no shortage of doors, either. Things, at least the physical things anyway, are cheap. Televisions four times the size of a mid-90's CRT are available at ever-decreasing prices. Crisps are cheap. Everything that is temporary, fleeting, drug-like without being introspective, all is pushed to the forefront of the modern world.

And now I'm sure you're wondering, "Well, this is a nice idea on paper but how would you ever turn any of this thinking into something that works in practice?" - well, primarily with education. Not better tests, not numerical aptitude, but education that instills what is human in us, senses of awe, wonder, of willingness-to-be,

not just in relation to the external world and the towering achievements of humans before, but in relation to the self as well. Modern neoliberal, numerical, metricised education is silent on what it is to be anything at all. Even philosophy in general education only posits these questions in a fairly abstract manner. It is possible for people doing philosophy (even at the university level) to see the questions as something to be worked on as abstracts, works of people long gone which need to be translated but not applied to a life. Seeing philosophy as the thing to be worked on rather than philosophy enabling you to do work on yourself is another massive trap many people fall into. Why ask questions if not to apply them to oneself? Otherwise, it's just meaningless posturing, intellectual muscle-flexing. The thing is that for a lot of people, this is a long process. It takes effort to get people to think about what they do. Reflection is not a trait that anyone has from the start, but that's not an excuse to not reflect on your own behaviour at some point. Whether it's through a sociopathic lack of conscience or a simpler deficit, the lack of ability to think about thinking and then act on it makes you borderline inhuman. If there is no reflection except for the brute force reaction of the mind, then we're back to our brainwashed man. Could you consider anything your own reaction if you were like that?

You can do whatever you like. But this should not be a permissive tone, this should not be enacted in the same way as our societies do, letting people do things because they are profitable or somehow inflate metrics rather than out of any inherent good. If it was profitable to enact human sacrifice laws, then eventually, neoliberalism capitalism would have its way, the laws would be enacted. A lot of the underpinning forces

behind our societies do not have humans in them at any stage of the process. Robots with wallets could continue on our current society almost as well as we can, with the role of the citizen being slowly replaced by the consumer. Other people have spoken at length about this change. I am not the finest of them, not in any measure. But I feel something when I see our current tyranny of meaninglessness. Whenever I see empty religions, rampant materialism, hell, even the show 'After Life', I see a generation of adults literally conditioned to accept everything they've taken. I see adults who think that people telling them that life is shit and meaningless and "why not call little children 'cunt' if they're being one" is literally the peak of humanity. "We've thrown off all our shackles!" they say, hopelessly enshackled in ideologies. The succeeding is in how you rise above it all. First, by noticing. Then, by understanding. And now, by acting. Choosing not to partake if it is impermeable to meaning. Since we are the ones who imbue things with meaning, we have to find things that will let us do that. To live paycheck to paycheck, stuck in a long hours/low pay job is not inherently meaningless. But it is very hard to imbue it with some kind of meaning. It's hard to find meaning in bad music, but it is nonetheless possible.

The search for meaning is the thing that should be sought. Search, then, think, do, discover, think without doing and then do without thinking. Intersperse. Overlay. Redo, juggle, live life in the way that you want to live it after thinking about why you want to live life the way you do. No one wants to go into biochemical engineering as a child, no one wants a mega-mansion as a child, all of these things are things that you have been put on to, you've been sold careers, ideologies, everythings, none of them your own. Most people are the shopkeeper, the

brainwashed man, they see something they don't understand, they are either paralysed by thought or ignore it entirely.

We can make a better world for ourselves, if we just understood ourselves. And not in the contemporary sense of mental health, where everything is still down to the individual, no pressure is made on the system. We cannot choose any more to have to drown in pharmaceuticals. To see oneself as you really are, and see others for who they are, no matter how hard it is. Communication can overcome the greatest of barricades and blockades. It has talked us out of war, it should continue to do so, right down to the individual.

The problem with all of this is it bases everything on the individual. Nothing in this world can't be dismantled without the people making it up realising what they're doing. Everyone, tomorrow, could walk out of the terminals at Wall Street. They could. But it is unlikely. But if their friends and families have been through this period of self-reflection, then it will rub off on them, as well. It is a person to person thing, and we're tightly linked as people. Think of who you know, and all the people that all the people you know know, and all the people they know. That's got to be many, many people. It's not hard to spread the ideals to self-understanding. Just make sure to follow the airline adage of 'Fit your own mask before helping others'.

I'm wondering now, how early can one 'fall into' unequivocally accepting things for how they are? Is it so easy as to be able to fall into it as a child? Well, no, I don't think anyone is beyond remembering their humanity. It seems horrendous for some people to be given forgiveness, if their actions are particularly cruel. The

length of a human life is also a particularly short one when it comes to this. Some people might not ever be able to be forgiven for their actions, it feels would take more than a lifetime. But for most people, falling into the trap of meaninglessness and violence doesn't mean that they are that far gone. Someone who decides, quite heartily, at the age of seventeen, that they want to become an investment banker is not doing it out of a 'joy for investment banking' - if there was another brain-dead way to get money, they'd go for that. It's a style, a trend, a nothing that may eventually be replaced by some other fraudulent way of living. It is possible to talk to them on a personal level to get them to realise that their interests are, at heart, self-centred. Going down the chain of reasoning could lead them to have a change of heart. But it's quite difficult to have a change of heart about an entire career, an entire set of life choices that have led them to spend thousands of hours in the pursuit of more and more money. Real life doesn't simplify to a Hallmark film, or a romantic comedy where things always turn out for the better. People pick routes, and then they go down them, and quite often, they never look back. Terminally looking back, aching to have been someone is also something that is to be avoided. To walk, but also to look. To think, but also to do.

There is no 'solution' to any of the crises that we find ourselves in that fixes the problem forever. If we simply use more systems in order to get ourselves out of problems that systems caused, then we will eventually find ourselves in more problems. It is not good enough sending hundreds of bureaucrats into a big room and have them argue about how things should happen. Representation doesn't do either side justice, the people are not represented in any meaningful sense, they are

subsumed by the overarching labels of 'right' and 'left' by and large, forced to take up morally contradictory positions because the things they 'support' are contradictory themselves. And as for the representatives themselves, there is always an element of distance to what they do, there is always the ability to go 'well, I'm doing this for the people'. On both sides, something is done because of an external factor. Parties simplify people and people relate to them because they simply do not have the time to get into things in any meaningful way. That is one of the saddest things about political debates, the feeling that it is something other than regular debate. Politics is not a profession. It is the application of many other things in a deeply arbitrary sphere, politicians who spend their lives studying politics are like mathematicians who spend their lives studying the lottery numbers - random, meaningless, and quite often, more dangerous to study than to just leave alone.

By letting people get into a thing without question, we legitimise the thing. Whether this is Atlanta Falcons, or Alliance 90, or Star Trek, or F.R.I.E.N.D.S, it is very possible to see the dangers of people getting into things without properly understanding why they got into them in the first place. But another danger can lie in this - some people might be able to reasonably accurately plumb the depths of their own psyches and determine (fairly accurately) the underlying psychological and deterministic reasons behind their 'getting into' a subject. But of course that is not the whole thing. It is one thing to understand, and another entirely to act on that understanding. I've probably said this before, at least a few times now.

Think about why you like things. Think about why you think you like things. Think about that, in and of itself.

Think about why you've done the things you have, and then do more things as a result. Think about how much you're thinking about things. Think about how little you can think, and how much you can think. Think when there is no one around to make you think, and think when there is everything going on. Think moving between the hot spurts of air in a nightclub. Think in the back pews of a church, nodding off to sleep. Think in the wilderness in a cabin. Think about how those things relate. Think about your overthinking. Think about what you had for breakfast this morning. Think about how your next breakfast is going to be better. Think about how downtime can be spent making the rest of the time better. Think about how this whole paragraph is ripped straight out of a film you might have seen. Think about how the balance of acknowledging the fact that this comes from a film but not actually naming the film affects your perception of me, as a writer. Think about how this sentence might just cut-

I wonder what this city will be like in ten years. There will probably be things to do, people to see, places might change. Just think about Stratford, how that changed just before the Olympics in 2012, how people might think, 'wow, this area is dying now, think of who was here before'. But everywhere changes, Soho, Camden, Shoreditch, every one of them once a beating cultural heart in this city, but none of them feel the same as they once did. There might be people doing things that are broadly creative, but every time I see the man who has those little concrete-set broccoli pieces and his little art-shop on the corner, I worry. It doesn't feel real, or raw, or anything even approaching that. In fact, not only does it feel hard to get anything that's 'real', it's now impossible.

It feels like we have explored every possible cultural avenue in this very specific subset of what culture could have become, and now we're waiting for something to really change, lest we dry out. Sometimes, when I read reviews for things that say 'this is just based on something from the 60s'-90s', I am tempted to agree. It seems like we're just too self-aware on the whole. It is impossible to make things without considering the reasoning for making them, which is not something that previously happened as much.

All this postmodernism, meta-modernism, new sincerity, all of it is part of a bid to deal with the idea that we believe understand all of the reasons behind the things we've made. The reason why we think this is because there's no deeper reasons behind the things we make, it is all supposed to be 'out in the open', regardless of how deep the reasons actually go. Total removal of any worrisome ambiguity. Every piece of good art I've seen has an unfathomable amount of personal weight behind it, meaning made by the artist themselves and the relation they have to the outside world. But this doesn't mean something is good, or that an artwork is inherently meaningful. Meaning might seem like it stems from complex and hard-to-fathom arrangements of events, but that's not where it really comes from. It comes from the unknown, the unconscious, the unfathomable, the utterly unknowable. It doesn't come from something that we consciously control, like a memory that bubbles to the surface for seemingly no reason. A section from God 3.0 might help illuminate this point more brightly...

> *Consider the click of reminiscence. A memory springs from nowhere, unbidden. A moment long forgotten, or seemingly so. Its reappearance brings a frown of bemused surprise. An involuntary grin,*

perhaps. Either that or the gut-punch of sadness. Such is the power of memory. Now, was the beginning of that process conscious? No. If it had been, there would have been no shock. But the process happened: we remember what we didn't. So, something set the old cogs churning, and in no way was it the will. Such archived memories arrive at consciousness, they aren't products of it. The reasoning is simply the topology of a route. Arrival implies departure from somewhere else.

We have seen that there is more to humanity than what is visible on the surface, we have used many analogies to try and elucidate this point, but how do we try and use this to act on our current world? Well, if we are stuck in a quagmire of meta-modernism or post-postmodernism, or whatever it is we're deciding to call it today, then we can use these ideas to get us out of it. To think at a higher level about the reasons that we are where we are. But also to understand that there's always going to be something that is *not* understood clearly. Where we are now, religious or non-religious, is at a point of massive failure on the behalf of ourselves. We do not see ourselves as anything more than point-source blocks of intelligence, which can lead us to horrible things. These point-source bodies do not have the nuance of actual, lived humanity, and it is very possible to see oneself as nothing more than an un-nuanced clump of cells. Even those who have delved into themselves might fundamentally miss the point of the yawning chasm between the 'objective' outer world and the 'subjective' inner world. I will attempt to demonstrate how this is a vicious cycle.

If we think we're just egos - which many religious people have slipped into thinking, and many atheists believe as a

sort of non-spiritual 'default'[16] - then that can lead us to external objectivity. A sort of forgetting, if you will, that our internal lives are extremely important, but also subjective. This objectivism leads to many worse things, it leads to seeing others as nothings, it can lead to seeing yourself as nothing, 'soul-suicide' if you will, it leads to petty debates that mean nothing, it leads to metricisation, it leads to the whittling down of the greyscale into black and white, which, of course, is never going to be the case in the end. That all leads to frustration, no matter how hard we try, we can't zoom in to the end of the thing, there will never be any external confirmation that what we're doing is right.

This lack of caring about our own, unconscious, subjective experiences leads to negating ourselves entirely. We can see this in the development of systems like capitalism, which (as I've said before) do not need humans to function properly. We can think of many more systems which don't need the human to function, bureaucracy, or management, they don't need anything like 'humans' to operate exactly how they do. In fact, they would likely do better out of our replacement with something a lot simpler. So, if we negate the individual, then what replaces the individual? The outside. The group consensus. What is 'able to be externally validated'. And for some things, it is very helpful to be able to do this. It's the backbone of scientific research, after all. But science is something for the external, attempting to apply

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[16] MODERN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES THAT EXTERNALISE THE PROCESS OF RELIGION ARE POINTLESS. IT IS LIKE THOSE WHO STUDY PHILOSOPHY BUT DO NOT TRY AND APPLY IT TO THEIR OWN LIVES. I'M NOT EVEN JUST TALKING ABOUT THE EXTREME CASES OF THE MEGACHURCH PREACHERS WHO GET CAUGHT WITH MALE PROSTITUTES OR WHATNOT, I'M TALKING ABOUT ANYONE WHO SEES GOD AS A LITERAL MAN IN THE SKY - AND, BY VIRTUE OF THAT ARGUMENT, ANYONE WHO ARGUES AGAINST GOD SAYING THAT IT'S JUST A MAN IN THE SKY.

those ideas of external verification to something that is inherently subjective just isn't going to work. Most of modern society is essentially just attempting to hammer intricate, human-shaped blocks into crudely-cut holes.

So, if we support the group, what does the group like? Whatever is likeable to the group, and the group alone. Those earlier examples do nicely here too, capitalism, bureaucracy, management. These systems breed their own primacy. They attach themselves to groups, and by virtue of being simpler, less nuanced, less prone to change, they can replicate and spread themselves. They rely on laziness and black-and-white thinking on the behalf of the people who perform them. To think that any of these systems is actually morally complete is wrong. Even our systems of law, with all of their vast cases and codes, are not complete, there are gaps, and there will always be gaps. Human nature is like a fractal, there's no lowest layer to it.

So, if commercial power and other deliberately blunt things have power, we simply deify them. We see them as institutions which have been around for forever, despite the fact that they very much have not. We see them as things which are much more inherent than they are, we give them too much credit when they 'succeed' and bail them out when they fail. And if we're living in times where other institutions which are actually based in humanity have fallen, then the most logical thing to do (for that is *all* a lot of people do) is to worship law, money, government, power - whatever you like.

All of this worship, giving worth to things that are inherently worthless, leads people to dismiss concepts that are 'other' to them. The biggest one of these

elephants in the room being the unconscious[17]. And who does that then do to us? If we think that the unconscious is an external concept, or we study it as a little weird bit of Freudian esoterica, then what does that lead us to?

Thinking we're just egos.

With that out of the way,[18] we can continue on in breaking out of this cycle. We can realise that humanity is more than the things we make. Yes, it is very impressive, the amount of incredible things we have done, but what is more impressive to consider is the reasons that people have done things. We have built beautiful things for no reason other than some seemingly-innate urge to create. We have realised this, made things based on that realisation, we have created for no reason, and for every reason. We have made things for money, and while money taints the ideal nature of artwork, the desire is still there. But the desire should not be teased out of us to take shape in a finalised product because of the prospect of money, or any of the other human-external things I discussed earlier. It shouldn't have to regress to a primal state either, we don't need to return to anything in order to feel that our desires are unmediated by these factors. We just need to pick a set of principles, which are crafted from our own models of our own unconsciouses, and act in accordance with them. Without those unconscious principles, we are free to act as we wish, but that freedom has no meaning, nothing to be free against. Ultimate

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[17] A SIDENOTE ABOUT THE UNCONSCIOUS - IT IS MERELY THE NAME I HAVE CHOSEN FOR THE 'UNSEEN' HALF OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE, IT DOESN'T NECESSARILY HAVE CONNOTATIONS TO THE UNCONSCIOUS AS USED IN SUPEREGO/EGO/ID-STYLE PSYCHE ORDERING.

[18] HOPEFULLY, THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE WITHOUT ANY OBVIOUS BREAKS, AND IF THERE ARE, WELL, I HOPE THOSE FILL IN WITH RE-READINGS, OTHERWISE I HAVEN'T REALLY DONE MY JOB, HAVE I?

freedom is no freedom. There would never be anything wrong, even if you tried. Except, of course, there inevitably is. The sad feeling of having made it a long way down a career path and turning around and thinking, 'was this all worth it'? Inevitably, if no proper thought was given to the original path-decision, the answer will be 'no'.

Most people, in reality, don't spend their lives worrying about whether the fact of there being 'something more' to humanity is *true*, in fact, most of them already know, but they are deciding whether or not they like the implications of that fact on what they have personally chosen to do. They know that the world has more to it, but if it really was like that, then how could they ever justify a career in finance? How could they forgive themselves for decades of abuse of others? It would be possible, but it would be hard.

The hard part is not the acknowledgement, for that is often already complete, people who are lazy by and large understand themselves to be lazy. The acknowledgement comes from outside sources, and is easy to accept. The hard part is digesting that, realising that something might have to be done about the laziness at some point, lest the problem develop into something worse. We can see this demonstrated here again, in the difficulty of acknowledging the unconscious psyche's existence. Everyone is confronted with the weight of the unconscious all of the time. It mediates more of our lives than perhaps we are willing to admit. But importantly, it does not control everything. We are still ourselves, let us not forget, it is just as easy to dive head-first into worship of the unknown, and follow it blindly into equal atrocity as following ego does.

And with that statement, we can move on a step, we can do the whole 'This is water' thing, but with some backing that is baked in to the structure of the human psyche. We can understand why stories about perception and its change speak to us. We can understand that we see the world through thick layers of distorted glass that we push around in front of ourselves, trying to get a clear a view as possible. But the glass inevitably distorts in some ways, and quite often, because of its omnipresent in our lives, we forget that the glass is even there, and we argue with others even though we are looking at the same thing. We forget ourselves, in the deeper sense of the term. We forget what we're doing and get angry, we get caught up in our own tangles with each other that we miss the fact that untangling ourselves is best done while standing back and laughing, realising that it is actually all a little pointless. It's not a point that says "ooh, this would be nice if we could all do this", it would be more than nice, it would be the ideal state, no performative anger, no defence, no offence, nothing without reconciliation. I will be the first to admit that conflict and strained interpersonal dynamics can be fascinating when watched from a distance. But that's the point exactly, when you're in them, they feel like shit, they feel like everything you're doing isn't working, there's a conflict, some kind of pure, distilled anger that comes from not understanding someone else and having them not understand you. Of at least someone having some kind of failure of thought. And that's bound to happen, we're human. But it's not necessary. Watching conflict is not the only way in which humans derive pleasure. There is more.

One of the ways in which it is possible to appreciate the fact that we see the world through these layers of

distorted glass is to ingest something that changes that perception. Drugs, alcohol, literature, whatever you like, but the first two are generally the ones that preface any substantial understanding of perception. It's interesting to have a look back at the first time that I drank any substantial amount of alcohol, and not just sips of Prosecco at parents' friends' parties. This is a diary entry from late 2017, which I am very privileged to have.

> *...even if I do get a little drunk. I'm serious. I was laughing for no reason for a while. Whether it was a psychological thing because of Mum telling me it was too much, or whether it was actually me being drunk, I don't know. I was perfectly coordinated, so I don't think it was drunk.*

It's interesting that I was using terms that saw phenomenological changes as relating to psychological ones, even back then. Of course, do not ascribe the use of the word 'psychological' to the same level of pretentiousness that I have now. The first time that I'd actually realised that anything had affected me (and I wasn't just a giddy idiot) was about two months later, I'd had a glass and a half of wine at, yet again, a parents' friends' house, and I got up to watch a video on one of their oversized iPads, and lo and behold, I felt something. A few months later, I'd had my first non-parentally-endorsed drink, and a few months after that, my first non-parentally-endorsed alcohol-related-emetic event. Not that they'd ever explicitly endorse anything like that, but whatever. Anyway, the whole purpose of this tangent is that I have always found drunkenness quite interesting, for pleasure or for other reasons. It's not necessarily a good thing either way, to desire a drug for

the effect caused, but it is certainly interesting sometimes.

I have often considered the difference between drugs and attempted to funnel them in to 'doing' and 'thinking' categories - ie. ones that spur on doing, and others that spur on thinking. Some do both, some do neither. But it's quite interesting to think that they all have a place within this strange dichotomy. Some people seem to be predisposed to doing, and others to thinking. It seems that certain people are predisposed to have their 'neutral' phenomenological experience similar to certain drugs over others. I'm sure you can think of examples of people that you know that alcohol cannot lay a finger on, and others that are incapacitated by the slightest toke on even the weakest joint. But I feel that these are unnecessary simplifications, designed to divide. There might be something in that, the idea that people have certain experiential predispositions that match up with the experiences that other people have when they take drugs. There's not really any way of measuring any one experience against another that makes sure that the two people really are experiencing the same thing, but that's a problem for other people to dwell on. Alas, I don't have the resources to undertake such a survey.

But this is part of the larger point that the changing of one's experience is a valuable part of growing up. To realise that what you see is mediated by a bunch of process that you don't understand. It can be very interesting. It can lead to horrible things sometimes, bad trips, but I feel that the majority of them are due to people having to deal with their own bad thoughts and actions, and not really having anyway to justify them. I am kind of speaking from experience here, it- actually, no, I'm not going to explain this behaviour. But I'm also

not going to criticise you if you think that powerful hallucinogens will bring about some good to you. They won't necessarily do that. In fact, those who lean on drugs in order to give them their self-insight are just as pathetic as those who abstain from drugs for explicitly law-codified or 'moral' reasons. You can have all the reasons you like, but it is best to make sure that they come from within, rather than something that is fickle and changeable.

In fact, being bullied into any sort of experience because other people think it is a 'good thing' is bad. But, the counterargument to this is, a lot of the time, what a lot of other people recommend has at least some positive, redeeming factors to it. Those factors might be very superficial, granted, but there might be something in that superficiality which makes the rest of your experience a lot more meaningful as a result. Plus, with our current state of being as a society, quite a lot of people[19] who go to these sorts of events understand their superficiality, and perhaps that is some sort of balm to the utter meaninglessness of it all. As I said at the beginning of this hour, universal experiences are a double-edged sword. Homogeny, but also cohesion. But homogeny doesn't have to equal cohesion, and vice versa - it is possible to have a society where everyone does the same thing but this does not foster a sense of community, and it is possible to have a society where everyone does different things, but due to some underlying principle behind those things, the things themselves feel cohesive. I think that the second scenario is the thing to aim for more often. Community without homogeny. Connection

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[19] (GENERALLY WELL-EDUCATED, MIDDLE-TO-UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE A HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOME FORM OR ANOTHER)

without castration. Whatever rhyming thing I'm going to use for a third repetition of the thing. Whatever indeed.

Sometimes, it is good to throw oneself into the jaws of un-thinking, to do things which will have to be analysed later. Drinking alcohol is a very popular thing because it does precisely this - for a society that thinks often too much about the wrong things, one of the only ways to dull this overthinking is to take something which will remove a lot of the thought - and alcohol is just the thing! It removes a lot of the critical thinking process which (for me) generally mediate everyday life. Maybe, for other people who are more alcoholically predisposed, it may not affect them as much, or in the same way. But it's not a problem - alcohol is a de-inhibitor, it releases things, different in each person, but somehow similar across everyone. It's a fairly universal experience[20] if I'm being honest, despite the anger that that footnote conveyed. But sometimes, the idea of clubbing isn't always the best - it's not always what it's cracked up to be. But I once learned something from my dad, he once said that even if for every nine terrible experiences you come out with one good one, then that's still a victory. Of course, I couldn't convince him to try and prove himself wrong, because then I'd have to sit through dozens of terrible films or plays with him, but the sentiment somehow got through to me. It doesn't matter about the bad times, they're out of your control mostly, and if you feel like they're within your grasp, well, sometimes you have to take the reins of the situation and make

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[20] NO MATTER HOW MUCH SOME IDIOT ZOOMERS WANT TO GET RID OF THE SEVERAL-THOUSAND YEAR TRADITION OF DRINKING SHITTY BEERS AND WINES AND SPIRITS JUST BECAUSE THEY WANT EVERYTHING TO TASTE LIKE SUGAR BECAUSE THEY'RE INCAPABLE OF LIKING ANYTHING THAT TAKES ANY SORT OF EFFORT TO ENJOY AND ARE STUCK DRINKING VODKA AND FUCKING LEMONADE!

something good out of it. But it doesn't always feel that way at the time, sometimes you get drunk and you feel out of control of the way that things are going, you're merely a passenger to whatever goes on, you're thinking 'what shall I do now within my very small frame of reference' and you might get angry that the line for the bathroom is too long, or you might become entranced in things that aren't necessarily worth getting entranced into, or you could - as they jump up and down, their souls slowly fizzle out, their worlds are engulfed by mere partying, X and Y replaced in a race of newness, a party-faced outlook on life and all the struggle and strife they face is their own fault, trying to live their lives over the thumping bass - and oh oh! i've tried to do this sort of thing. but i've realised i never win.

i sit upstairs watching the multicoloured lights linger in my peripheral vision without a care - not because i've got to go to work tomorrow, but because of some deeper sorrow. is this it? is that the shit that this life offers? before we take our coffin coiffures? everybody jump jump while i frown down upon your beating hearts in time with the drums and somewhere sometimes someone comes to make the evening that little bit lighter i just hope there's not a fighter in the back streets or the bones or that nobody comes to the smoking zone. i wish that i sat upon a throne and dictated what everyone did, but then i'd be no better what they wished. why do people feel compelled to make their living lives hell with party snaps and algorithms and all the dances and the rhythms that make the world just what it is, and what it is - a piece of shit

i sit and watch, i learn and wait, and some song i know comes on, and i sit outside those iron gates, i'm not human, i get by with the stamps on my arm despite the

fact that i don't know any more than the sky, the earth is alien to me and i hope that someday i will see the reason why that people mass upon the mess and crawl and cry and scream and flap and fly amongst themselves and never quite realise that they have to look up to not die.

my friends are down there, compelled by some unknown force to make their lives something else, jumping up and down as their bones shiver around the bass, and i press upon my face to make sure i am real but it never feels like it. this world is total bliss. the end of the set is nigh, and some others stand and cry as the old radio hit comes on - it's all just total shit, come on. can we really live our lives completely governed by surprise? every experience mediated by a person that we claim to hate? hey ya just came on, i think. i might just go and dance and wink at the girls that pass me by. the world is so fly. at least it claims to be it. i don't really fucking see it.

and briefly, the world turns as the rest of the world burns in a mire compared to this burning pit of desire and sweat and all sorts of other things. i see my friends win and their worlds turn as some radio hit sears through their minds, parents leaving the radio on for some bland song to filter through their neurones long gone and replaced but the memories still remain. i wonder if anything will come of this night, i wonder if it was worth the monetary blight, i wonder if it was worth the borderline epilepsy, i wonder if it was worth the eight quid vodka pepsi, i wonder if it was worth me sitting out the best parts without doubt, upon a worn black leather chair, almost solid upon the vape-hard air.

and another song comes on to rouse the crowds and set them round to then again deplete their friends to make them sing around about some tacky tune they

remember now't, i see their faces light up in the sincereness of the modern age as the dj fills another page of songs that no one would care about if played outside of this environment. as soon as it comes it is gone. as soon it's here, it is lost. as soon as the world turns the day is night, and the bouncers break up a non-existent fight. i wonder why the mixing staff are in a cage looking up page on page on page of new shoes that they're sure to buy with their new whatever, they're sure to cry when they're stepped on, i don't care to gauge this sort of thing, i just really want to sing. the alcohol courses through my veins reminding me of the various pains of the world as it is now, i have to dull the pain somehow, and this is the way that most know best, to take it to the final test of eardrums and other body parts, and i wonder who will stay here last. the balcony fills up, the words in my head make me want to throw myself over, should i be dead or extremely alive? this is not a desire to survive. this is a desire to live, along with all the things that come with it. is this our cultural inheritance? some flashy lights with a silly dance? say no, say "fuck the show", say "give up and go home", say "i can never forgive those"

and the night draws to an end as i'm reunited with my friends. i see them changed and charged and raged with expectations missed, and we're all extremely pissed, i've thrown away my cash for this bash, a true wallet slash as they say. we'll try again some other day - and oh god you're trying your hardest, i wonder what happens when you don't, you just fucking float to the ends of the world on boys and girls throwing up their arms with blinking charms and i sit in my house and wonder why i ever even try, because it always ends the same, irish exit and no one else to blame - at least the walk's not long tonight, there's always time to start a fight. and there's always another

weekend to live this torrid film over again they say. we shall hope and try again some other day.

but why another day? the night is young, nothing is done, we are still here to feel hopes and fears that perhaps sometimes we can feel something, it's better than the outside nothings, the cold air, the brains, the hair whooshing as the wind tumbles past the buildings and i still don't deal these cards out quite right, not tonight, despite the simple fact that i have lacked many kinds of things, when i give in, i feel like i'm in, it's not giving, it's coming inside, there is nothing you feel you should hide from the beat as my feet begin to move and they groove poorly but something stirs and compels me no longer in control i can barely hold my soul in and it feels good like i should keep doing this until it's done the day is not lost there is so much to be won but won is not taken won is not theft won is not something that leaves you bereft its not something that you control when you give in to your soul and my legs are doing their own thing and my arms are flinging their own jig and my feet are kicking their way in and the night is caving in, to find myself giving in would complete it, to love, live, laugh, at oneself, and the radio hits, i feel i know what this is, i can be and take the piss, i can always forgive those, i say "on with the show", i want to know and i never want to go home, i don't care if i win, there's nothing *to*, and oh, i see it too, i know now that there is more to life than sitting side-line waiting for my time when there's no time but now and i've gone on too long now the flow is gone, the buzz is off and i'm through, we're gonna get some late night kebabs, how about you?

And sometimes when you get home it's different, sometimes it's like, "I'm finding it, I'm finding it, just give

me a moment. That's what he said... um, what?" The song changes. He is still searching his phone memory for the quote and angrily steams the word 'situp' with breathy vowels out of his mouth. He occasionally slows down to sing along with the song. It is playing at a level not unlike menu music for a more visually demanding game. The singing has turned into a borderline ritualistic, non-rhythmic beat-sputtering.

"It's 2:11." I say

"Holy fuck, w..." he trails off to the bathroom, heading back to the music, muttering something that causes me to mutter myself and him to mutter back and I think that he's just said something about something that is not related to finding the quote. I wrench the aux cable from the bottom of his phone after he promised it to me somewhere before this conversation. He goes outside to piss. The tension is palpable. I question my choice of the word 'piss' as it seems almost unnecessarily provocative. It's got a force to it, a literal '-iss' force that seems to both evoke hissing in a predatory kind of way, and also a disgusting sort of way. Are we disgusted at ourselves when we say piss? Probably. It is a kind of interpassivity, we are alright with acknowledging our dirtiness as long as we are able to exist outside of the symbolism of the dirtiness. Of course, with symbolism and signifieds comes the inevitable short-circuiting of the symbols to themselves. So maybe, to us, irony-clad nineteen-year-olds, 'piss' merely means the literal frothy yellowy liquid that is forced out of human beings by a urethra. And as males, of course there are more connotations there. Or elsewhere, 'taking the piss' - he has been gone for quite a while now, I've changed the music after playing a particularly lengthy disco single, notable for its involvement with both Talking Heads frontman David

Byrne and also the late Arthur Russell, and I sniff again because my nose itches. I wonder if he's okay. I don't think I'm going to get that quote after all. Is all of this the quote? Is this a quote about a quote, some sort of meta-quote that revolves around the withholding of information? Or, alternatively, is it one of those bullshit 'stream of consciousness' paragraphs where you feel you can't write 'poetically' enough unless you are sloshed or else otherwise under the influence of something to bend or distort your already bent and distorted view of reality. You look back at the timer. It has been about half as long as you think it has been. The enthusiasm for writing the book soars as you see the word count rush past fifty-five thousand, but it sinks back down again after a little bit of an edit. Surely, if it was to really be edited, then it would be just a 'little edit' rather than 'a little bit of an edit'? But that doesn't concern me. You. Wait, if we look back through this paragraph now, I see how the 'I' in the sentence gradually shifts to 'You' and back and forth. There is an interface between the two. I promise this is not something that is terrible and worthless, it has been worth the wait...
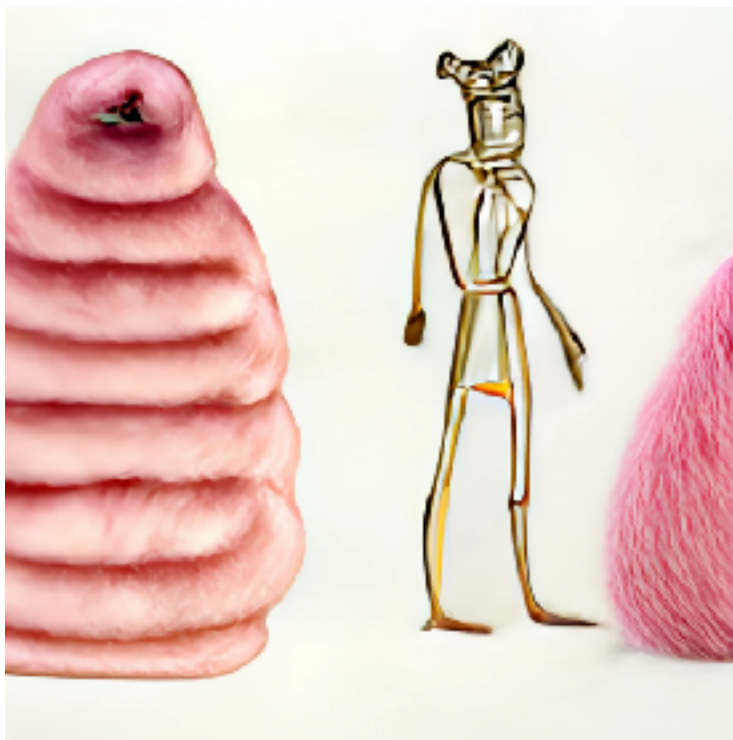
hour six.

or, What, Exactly, Is A Sandwich? And, In The End, Does It Matter?

To quickly answer the two questions in the title:
"Whatever you want it to be", and, "not really, but if you think it matters then that's ok, just don't get angry".
To less quickly answer the two questions in the title:

It is rather interesting, this question. It is the sort of question that provokes needless irreconcilable debate if the participants aren't thinking clearly enough. It is possible to go back and forth about 'edible content ratios' and 'bread unit quantifiers', but the simple fact is that you won't be able to ever arrive at an exact definition. Every definition that you give is necessarily black-and-

white, it is not nuanced, it fails to take many things into consideration. And you could literally have written an entire book on what a sandwich is, but someone could, Diogenes-style, come right in to your workplace and show you some flagrant counterexample - "behold, a sandwich!" - so therefore, it doesn't matter, if you try, something will slip through the gaps.

To even less quickly answer the two questions in the title:

When you ask them the titular question, most people will have vague, yet seemingly unchangeable notions of what a sandwich is, and the challenge is how to define it so all examples of 'sandwich' fall inside this hypothetical definition. Some will try and define it as 'two pieces of bread with an edible filling'[21], whereas others tend to go for a more linguistically definition, stating that 'anything that is *sandwiched* is a sandwich'. Both, if applied to the 'ideal' sandwich, would accept said sandwich as a sandwich, but the problem lies in the extra cases which both allow.

Is there even such a thing as a definition of a sandwich that accounts for all possible uses of the word? There is a tautological statement to be made here; that sandwiches, by definition, are sandwiches. Wittgenstein and other linguistically-focused philosophers may agree here, saying that 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language'[22]. However, Wittgenstein also warns agains interpreting this comment literally, as, to him, it seems strange that the meaning of a word could be removed

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21 DICTIONARY.CAMBRIDGE.ORG/DICTIONARY/ENGLISH/SANDWICH (YES, I KNOW, WHAT A LAME THING TO LINK)

22 PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, 1953, SECTION 43 (I'LL GET ROUND TO READING THE WHOLE THING ONE DAY… BUT I PROMISE I WASN'T FAR OFF!)

from usage if the physical or mental concept which it represents fails to continue to exist. But the non-existence of a concept doesn't necessarily mean that the word that describes it falls out of use. Sure, practical reasons might mean that the word is not used as much, but there are examples of animals which are now extinct which have words that refer to them.

Knowing the use of a word generally means understanding the contexts in which it is used or what part of speech it is, or, alternatively, understanding enough to be able to communicate properly. And, it is arguable that if you understand the context, then you can understand the meaning of the word, as well. However, this gets us no closer to understanding what the meaning of the word is.

But, most people would reason that if you use the word sandwich to mean 'binoculars', for whatever reason, that does not necessarily give binoculars all the constituent properties of a sandwich. This is merely equivalent to having the word 'binoculars' be a code word for sandwich. Furthermore, if you are the only person who refers to binoculars as 'sandwiches', then you may be the only person to understand it. Since language seems to necessitate interpersonal communication to be coherent, this 'language' where one word is swapped for another is incoherent. As Locke argues that 'words indicate ideas in the mind of the speaker'[23] and that the purpose of said speech is to disclose your thoughts to others, this 'private language' cannot reveal your thoughts to another person, which is the primary use of language. If we did not agree on concepts like what colour 'red' is, then we could not

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23 LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE, WALTER OTT, 2004, PAGE 4 (PAGE... PAGE FOUR? DID YOU EVEN READ ANY OF THIS?)

communicate effectively, and language would break down.

In contrast to this, Gordon Baker argues that this 'private language argument', primarily put forth by Wittgenstein, is not true. It is true that a man could speak his own language and have a use for said language. He could write things down and, pass reminders on to himself in the future. But, Baker says that this private language user 'lacks a genuine pattern for distinguishing the correct use of the word from its incorrect use'.[24] There is no way of determining if this language user has communicated his thoughts correctly or not, as he is the only one who understands it. However, we usually do not test to see whether the information we communicate has been transferred correctly. In fact, there is no

So then the question moves to 'how can we determine what the defining attributes of a sandwich are?' This is not a terribly different phrase to the titular question, but it has a useful change. Now, we can find specific attributes which apply to sandwiches, and how we can begin to communicate them to other people. For example, some people would say that sandwiches are only allowed to contain edible ingredients. But does that make a sandwich with a cocktail stick holding an olive to the top of the bread not a sandwich? I do not think anyone would argue that. Adding to that, the word 'edible' has its own points of contention, we may argue that humans, while technically able to eat poisonous materials, cannot live very long having done so. But small amounts of these aforementioned poisons do not end up killing us, we can ingest an atom of polonium with no effect. The distinction between 'edible' and 'inedible'

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24 WITTGENSTEIN'S METHOD: NEGLECTED ASPECTS, GORDON BAKER, 2004, PAGE 119 (LIES.)

becomes further blurred when we introduce the concept of a non-toxic but non-digestible product being added incrementally into the sandwich.

Take the example of sawdust being added to bread. At which point does it become no longer edible? We would consider a loaf of bread 'edible' and a brick of compressed sawdust in the shape of a loaf of bread 'inedible' - but where is the crossover point? This is one of the many examples where Colin Fischermann's 'Hose Argument' comes into play. We can see at both ends, there are different things, but we cannot tell where they mix in the centre. We could attempt to circumvent this issue by saying 'this bread is 62.3% edible' - but then that would raise further issues. Not only is the percentage unit not specified (Is it by weight? By molecules?) but all this does is describe the composition of the sandwich. Furthermore, owing to differing capabilities of digestion, then certain people might only find that it is 20% edible, or other animals might find it 100% edible. So, we end up needing to add a ridiculous amount of descriptive words to something in order to describe it. And I think that the more descriptive words you add to it, the more issues you have with reducing each of those adjectives into what constitutes those adjectives. Nouns, in this case, are essentially clusters of adjectives, nested and linked based on what we can either physically describe or infer about the noun itself. If I am to say 'This is a sandwich', I am not attempting to make a statement of whether or not this thing is inherently called a sandwich. I am merely stating that what I can sense before me is sandwich-like. This arrangement of bread, vegetables and meat, and the respective arrangements of molecules which make those up, is very much sandwich. Note the use of 'sandwich' as an adjective, an *attribute*.

These sandwich attributes fall into two broad categories. One that is filled with our '*perfect*' ideas of a sandwich (two slices of bread, edible filling, usually cold) and another that contains '*general*' ideas of a sandwich. Of course, the idea of a 'perfect' sandwich may differ from culture to culture, but it is very likely that if I ask someone to represent a sandwich pictorially, they will draw something akin to the 'perfect' sandwich. While it is arguable that a hot dog is a sandwich, it is very unlikely that someone will draw one if they are asked to draw a sandwich. What we can infer from this is that there may be different kinds of attributes that describe sets of objects; sometimes it is useful to describe types of objects through their variants, and the specific things which make up those variants. Furthermore, the notion of an 'idealised' sandwich comes into play when we consider how the word 'sandwich' is used in communication. One of the primary features of language is to communicate concepts efficiently and with minimal loss of information. To someone else, it does not matter that the sandwich you had for lunch today was 14.4cm long by 13.9cm wide, you just have to communicate the idea, and the recipient's brain fills in the gaps. Of course, the concept, while it was transferred with ease (a single word!) does not guarantee that the information is intact. You could both be thinking of entirely different fillings! But, in this hypothetical conversation, that doesn't matter. Unless, of course, someone were to ask. In that case, necessary information can be transferred to help the listener build up a better picture of what the sandwich was like. Eventually, the speaker might not be able to remember a specific detail about the sandwich - and the information about the sandwich would be lost.

The way in which these concepts are used defines their meaning. So, if we continue with our conversation, the next day, the speaker says "I had a sandwich for lunch again." The description of the sandwich from the previous day would be enough to probably assume the sandwich is similar. But, in actuality, the speaker had what would commonly be considered a hot dog. This hot dog, which fulfils most of the criteria of being a sandwich, is not communicated most efficiently by saying "a frankfurter baguette-sandwich with mustard", it is more efficient to simply say "hot dog". So, most people would, unless they were, perhaps, trying to make a hot dog sound more fancy. Neither case is outright *wrong*, though.

In this case, we can imagine saying "I had something sticky for dessert" to be akin to saying "I had a sandwich for lunch". In both cases, we are clearly not describing the thing-in-itself, we are just saying some adjectives that communicate the thing we want to most efficiently. If a bundle of adjectives is used enough to need to be made more efficient, then, it will become a noun. It is not efficient, however, to try and make everything into nouns. If we had separate words for sandwiches which were made by people who had different favourite films, then, for us, it would not be efficient. If there was a society that valued things being made by people with different favourite films, then words that describe those sandwiches might come into use. What we can gain from this thought experiment is that words form due to communicating something that other words do not. They are based on what we value differentiating from one another. We have many, many words for different types of chemicals because it is useful to us to differentiate them. People who do not deal with colour a lot might only have

a few colours they can differentiate between, whereas people who work with it a lot might be able to break those colours down into much smaller subcategories. The main point behind all of this is that language is our feeble attempt to 'lasso' the world, we throw out our ropes, tie it round a thing that we can see, and then attempt to wrangle it into language. In reality, the world is not like that. No two chairs are alike, can you even call any of them chairs? Surely, only one thing can be a chair? But what would you call 'one thing'? The full chair? A part of the chair? Nothing of the chair at all? It is meaningless to divide the world up into its 'smallest segments' - and even if the world were to have finite depth, as in, there *is* a smallest particle, even then, that wouldn't help us define what anything really was. It's not something that we can even really perceive when you get down to that scale.

So, language can best be described as game of Pictionary. If what you're trying to draw is a sandwich, despite the fact that a hotdog might technically meet all of the requirements to be a sandwich in your *and* your recipients' eyes, you are going to want to draw a very stereotypical-looking sandwich on the grounds that it will transmit the information very quickly and effectively. And... that's kind of it for language. Everything else is just overuse of language. It feels wrong to say that a lot of what I do is unnecessary use of language, but it shouldn't feel that way. It communicates, but it just uses a lot more words than it should. Are shorter, more powerful things the things to be sought, or is there value in sheer scale? Making a work of literature longer doesn't improve its value, but is there any value in a book so large and obtuse that no one will be able to make heads nor tails of it on their first read-through, despite having a guide to go through it? Is there value in having gimmicks in books,

twists, turns, endless meta-diving and surfacing, making you feel out of breath and frankly, quite ready to put the book down. It's nice when something you're reading understands that it is to be read, but if all the book is is acknowledgement of that fact, then is it even a book at all? It's like the question, "Can you have a relationship that is purely based on analysis of the relationship?" - is it logical? Is it tenable? Would it work, would it lead to marriage, would it spin apart or crumple inwards? The balance between thinking and doing, once more. The relation between the outside and the inner. The objective and the subjective. Oh! I've seen this one before! And I think I've answered the question, maybe.

Earlier, I spoke about people getting into 'things', whether they be political parties or terrible 90s' sitcoms, people can get into them without due regard for their circumstances and then get into huge arguments when things are left unsaid. And this applies to the building blocks of those arguments as well, words. We let people unrelentingly throw themselves into words, people forget that just because we use words all the time and they are extremely practical, it doesn't make them inherent parts of humanity.[25] If people get obsessed over words, labels, groups, and what those things mean, it doesn't usually mean they're trying to peel away at layers of humanity to eventually find the 'real' underneath, it's usually a desire for control. There's nothing inherent about the words that we use, but unfortunately, we have to use them to communicate. A lot of people have never really thought

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[25] I'D ARGUE THAT THE FACT THAT INFANTS CAN EASILY PRONOUNCE PHONEMES LIKE 'MUH' - WHICH WE THEN ASCRIBE TO THEM DESCRIBING WHAT THEY SEE MOST OFTEN, IE. THEIR PARENTS - DOESN'T NECESSARILY MAKE IT, OR ANY OTHER WORDS INHERENT.

about this - something that is seemingly everywhere, being just 'made up'. It's a very interesting thing to understand this, or at the very least appreciate how it would be to understand something like this. It relieves you of discomfort when things aren't exact, it causes you to think 'everything I do is made by me, everything any of us does is made by them' - which can give hippie-ish sentimental feelings of 'we're all just people, none of the things that we make are 'real' as such'. And those feelings aren't supposed to be horrible, they're not things to be overcome or suppressed in some manner, but they often are feelings that end up neglected. To be stupid and wrong and sentimental and incorrect is human nature, but what is not human nature is to act like it's not.

Actually, I think a lot of the purpose of this book is to get people to realise that, through literally hammering in the points that this is *only a book*, and that these are *only words*. I am not an authority in any way on many of the topics I've discussed here - but, as I've said before[26], the job of anything that attempts to communicate is to grab on to the mind of the reader and make them think things. It's no good spoon-feeding anyone information, the only way to get them to pay attention in any meaningful way is to relate their internal state with something that you're writing. To me, this seems to be why everything I enjoy, I can, on some level, relate to it. I enjoy *The Brave Little Abacus*'s music because, on some level, I am that precocious idiot teenager who's still got a lot to learn. In fact, on quite a lot of levels, that one. I like *Koyaanisqatsi* because I quite like the perspective that

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[26] AND, GIVEN WHAT I'VE JUST SAID, CAN YOU REALLY TRUST ME ON THIS? I UNDERSTAND THAT SAYING "OH, CAN YOU REALLY TRUST ME" IS KIND OF LIKE THE WHOLE REVERSE-PSYCHOLOGY-LUCY-PULLING-THE-FOOTBALL-AWAY-FROM-CHARLIE-BROWN-THING. BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO.

the film has on the world, not being quite attached to it, everything being out of balance, because on some level, I feel like that way against the world. It's good, don't get me wrong, but there are just some fundamentally alienating things about it. Like being awake at 3AM, when birdsong makes you re-evaluate yourself, when a cold breeze guides and somehow medicates, replacing any ills you had with a sort of constant sniffle that makes you think about whether or not you're actually sad enough to be sniffling, and contemplating whether the sniffle comes before the sadness, or after it. What was sadder, the cold and dry walk home, or the evening spent in some dingy bar somewhere, trying to have a good time? Is it depressing to wallow in oneself - well, yes, if the self that you wallow in is depressed anyway. You're forced to be aware at this hour, every sensation, no music, phone dead, headphones languishing in some pocket somewhere. It would be nicer that people did this during the summer, so at least it'd be warm when you walked back. Life out of balance, am I right?

It's moments like this that make you realise what you like and don't like about yourself. Sometimes, it's possible to keep going over conversations and beating yourself up about somehow 'failing' them. I mean, yes, it is possible to fail in terms of metrics, but when you strip the metrics away, when you stop thinking about things in a statistical manner (even subconsciously) you realise how that it was not as bad as you thought, and even if it was, it can be reconciled. It might be hard, or even borderline impossible, but it can be done. It's like this when self-aestheticism comes into play, you can see yourself as something ideal, or something not ideal. Your moods and dispositions characterised as literal different characters. I've spoken to a few of my friends (who aren't really the

best sample group, I will admit) but the idea that the presented self is angled, sharp, slick, witty, whatever other positive words you want to call it, and the actual self is sort of... well, a pink-brown fleshy blob with hairy bits and odd teeth. This idea has been floating around in our collective subconscious, the idea that at the root of things, we're sort of horrifying to look at, and we spend a lot of time trying to disguise that. Even people who really, valiantly try hard to campaign for the idea that 'all bodies are beautiful' often forget what the idea of a body is. Nothing. Not inherently beautiful, not inherently ugly either. To dismiss bodies in this manner and say they are all one positive/negative thing is pointless. All this clamouring for everything being 'good' merely resets the counter. If it is all 'good' in a vacuum, then the only thing we can get from that is that they are all the same.

We like to imagine ourselves as these angled, sharp, slick beings, but we know it's just something we make up. It can be a good facade, it can actually be incredibly helpful a lot of the time, like words, personas[27] facilitate conversation, conflict, reconciliation. But they must also be seen for what they are - not inherently anything. You could be different to how you are. I often found myself wondering, "if only I was different, I would have said this instead of that in that conversation."

But where does the wish for 'difference' come from? What makes you *you*? Largely, a system of habits that other people tend to notice. If you do something that no one else sees, then no one else would see that as 'you' behaviour. Like the man who learns Spanish in secret for

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[27] I WILL BE USING THE TERMS "PERSONAS" AND "PERSONAE" INTERCHANGEABLY THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE TEXT FOR THE SOLE REASON OF MAKING IT HARDER TO FIND THINGS IN TEXT SEARCHING FUNCTIONS - EVEN THOUGH "PERSONAE" IS CLEARLY THE BETTER OPTION.

years and then surprises his friends at an event for an elaborate practical joke. "That's not what you do!" they'd think, despite the fact that the man has put his utmost into acquiring a new language for months upon months. The want to be 'you' is a desire, it is not a 'need'. You could, if you wanted, and tried quite hard, abandon every single thing you think you do today and act entirely differently tomorrow, operating on an entirely different set of principles. But, that is silly, no one will recognise you as the same except for your appearance - which you can also change with some effort, and perhaps some money too. It is pointless to reinvent oneself overnight just for the sake of reinventing. It's like the brainwashed man again, choosing something on one side of a divide just because you were forced to choose the other doesn't render your choice 'brave'. It's like reactionary politics, a deliberate going out of one's way to play Devil's Advocate, a child attempting to save face when caught doing something they've been doing unawares for a long time.

So what do we do? If we're just these weird little things sort of bumping around into each other and having sensory experiences, then what's the point of these personas, these words, these systems? Nothing in particular. If we make literally everything - that is, the words we fashion out of our ability to recognise patterns, the personas we fashion out of those words, and the systems we fashion out of those personas, then why does anything ever get done at all? What the fuck is this shit even all for? In my opinion, it's reconciliation.

Finding people, communicating with them, and then trying to heal the divide, to understand them as you understand yourself. To heal the divides of cultures, religions, nations, football teams, friend groups, our ability to categorise gives, and it takes away. Our pattern

recognition, something that comes from somewhere completely external, and we can't seem to just turn it off or will it away, no, once you're in it, it seems like you're steeped in the mire of knowledge. You are cursed with being able to differentiate things, you can never know the world as a whole, there will always be discrete segments, words, boundaries, people, systems, you can never experience it truly all as one and come back to tell the tale. By virtue of being human, you have to bear this curse. Perhaps maybe it's not a curse, but something that is inextricably tied to the fact that you're 'you' is the fact you can recognise the pattern of yourself, and your own behaviours. It's sort of like being on the Ship of Theseus. As long as you don't get off, you're still on the same ship, right? As long as you never lose the thread of what makes you 'you', you're still the same person, right? Some people would argue that the simple unconsciousness of sleep factors into that, they believe that when you wake up, it is similar to having died and then woke up again miraculously the same, the next day. I don't buy this theory, think of dreams, their content depends on your experience, and the fact that the content is still (sometimes) available after you wake up proves that dreaming is just another state of mind that lets the continuum of being exist, and not a 'sample of death' as some put it. To say that falling asleep and waking up is akin to dying and being born again is plainly ridiculous, except on some metaphorical level. Even then, it's a pretty hackneyed metaphor.

Personal consistency, consistency in the words you use, the persona you construct, and the belief systems out

of which the other two are founded[28], is the foundation of reality for you. If something external breaks it, then you are forced to reconsider yourself. And as I've mentioned before, a great external way to break it is through drugs. They are extremely interesting because they can make you aware of changes in your own experience, or even aware that your own experience can change. For me, they have done, anyway - ah, we're back here again, coming at it from a different angle!

I believe that the reason why some psychedelics give a feeling of 'oneness' or 'unity' is because they make you consider your own perception, which causes you to deconstruct it yourself (for the drug is not capable of doing it on its own) so you end up deconstructing language and personae and systems and thinking thoughts of the difficulty of language, and the arbitrariness of people, and the utter arbitrariness of the things that we make. These often come coupled with a sense that some things are 'meaningless' and some things can remedy that. Everything can feel bare-bones, stripped of a lot of what seemed to give it substance while sober. Everything feels very childish, in the sense that it is arbitrary and meaningless, but also very adult, in the sense that we have attempted to create meaning where there is none. There can often, coupling the senses of meaninglessness and oneness, be a sense of being somehow looked down upon by everyone who's experienced the same thing as you, as if they're saying:

'Yep, that's it, there's nothing more here for you, there's no more stripping off things, there's no more carving the marble looking for an interior treasure, the actions you

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28 Although they all sort of interplay, but I wasn't willing to go on that long with describing all of the interplay. Especially because of my overuse of commas in this text.

do are the actions you do, nothing more, nothing less. real responsibilities, real things.'

It can feel extremely humbling, like a child first invited to eat at the adult table at a family event. It might make you consider a great deal about yourself, of whether or not you are worthy of this great accolade. But the wonder begins to creep in, why are they just keeping on eating, I'm here, am I worthy or not? Clearly, I must be at least existing, because why else would they have invited me up here? But the silence is deafening. Even when you ask, they do not answer, for the only determiner of whether or not you are worthy is you. You can go into the whole thing foolhardy, wishing to be a hero from the get-go, but deep down inside, you know that it is not your time yet. Not your time to grant yourself any sort of medal. It can be humbling, to just wait and learn. And that is sort of all you can do. Reconciliation is great with external people, but it is merely to fuel the inner fire, the inner reconciliation, the biggest of gaps. That gap between all of us, our multitudinous personae, and the... well, it's sort of indescribable with one phrase. Whatever you want to call it. The unconscious. God. Pattern recognition. It. These names are not the things themselves, it's even implicit in the phrasing of 'give a name to', the thing is different from the name which gives boundaries to it. Or, maybe 'Harold' works for you. It is just a name.

So where to go from here? Dissolving everything, realising humans are sort of like hand-puppets, different, sometimes elaborately constructed, but connected to the same central (...)[29]. Where do we go from here?

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[29] (INSERT CHOSEN NAME HERE)

Obviously, somewhere a little lighter. We have captured this beast (the (…), that is), named it, and wondered what to do with it. The essence of humanity, in a word. If this feels somehow too easy, don't worry, it's just a word, we've given much easier words to concepts that have the same level of existence. Like Italy. Or hatred. Neither of those things really exist outside the minds that make them, and yet, we act as if they do. So clearly, naming something gives it weight. Being able to differentiate between things is useful for humans. I've mentioned this before:[30]

> *If we had separate words for sandwiches which were made by people who had different favourite films, then, for us, it would not be efficient. If there was a society that valued things being made by people with different favourite films, then words that describe those sandwiches might come into use.*

For us today, it seems like we like to differentiate between things that are externally differentiable. It feels necessary to have a large quantity of words to describe different chemical properties, but only a modicum to describe the specific but internal states of human experience. This is due to the fact that we think that external things are more useful to be described specifically. Well, I'd argue that having a wider vocabulary about these sorts of things would allow people to think about how they experience the world in much more expressive ways. A lot of people resort to other mediums, painting, sculpture, music, but I'd quite like to push the boundaries of language when it comes to personal

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[30] I WAS THINKING ABOUT MAKING THIS A PAGE REFERENCE, BUT ACTUALLY HAVING THE TEXT AGAIN IS QUITE USEFUL. PLUS, IT BLOATS THE WORD COUNT FOR THIS CHAPTER, WHICH I ALSO FIND TO BE QUITE USEFUL.

experience. We have quite a lot of words in English to describe this sort of thing, they have gotten me this far (despite my dire lack of vocabulary) without too much being lost in translation. But so often that is only because I have felt something that I have been literally unable to put into words in a truly satisfactory manner. In fact, the vast majority of the things I write, I feel like as soon as they leave me, I have little to no interest in how they do on the page. Word-splats. Bastard nouns. Sometimes, something I believe is good actually arrives, and often, I leave the other bits in just to draw attention to the part that I like. Would anyone intentionally leave terrible parts in a book in order to highlight other parts? Maybe. Perhaps some of the parts you've read so far have been filler. Perhaps this paragraph is a good one. Perhaps-

Woah! Caught myself slipping into another loop there, it's become quite the trope within this book, hasn't it? Even pointing out the tropes present within the book has become a bit of a trope, and oh no, I can see the loops have infested my body with every bit of power they have, I am trapped in saying the same god-damned things over and over again for all eternity, I am cursed as a human, and also very, very blessed to be able to experience anything at all, even though I don't really know what un-experience is like, so is not experiencing anything even possible? Can I die? Well, I mean, I can die, but what happens to my experience of the world? It seems like I'll never know if I die, I'll be dead, I can't experience that. I will admit, I am sometimes interested in trying it out, as if it's just another drug that will change my phenomenological state. But no, I've been told the effects are somewhat irreversible, so I'll hopefully stave its call off for as long as possible. I'm interested in death, and

how it feels to die. Not in a sort of millennial/zoomer "Can't wait for the sweet release of death!" kind of way, but a sort of curiosity-based kind of way. And I very much understand where curiosity leads cats. But I am no cat, I am not even merely a cat with hands, I am a man. I am a man that has not had to come to terms with anything like mortality. I have never had to face my own death. The closest thing to it has been standing on tall cliff-tops. I guess there's the possibility of death there, but there's the possibility of death at any time due to any number of reasons that are largely beyond your control. The first one of these that I've been told about is in 2002. I was not really born/alive yet, still wondering if it counts as a 'near death experience', but moral quandaries aside for a moment, my parents were driving down a dual carriageway, an old man exits a service station the wrong way, begins driving the wrong way down the road in the fast lane, people keep swerving out of his way, my parents are the last to swerve before the people behind them fail to swerve in time and collide head-on with the pensioner, killing all passengers in both vehicles instantly. They were called in for questioning, though what information they could have possibly wanted to get out of them, I don't know. Man drives car wrong way despite ample warning signs. We've collectively attempted to look up the exact event, but it seems that during 2002, there were so many rogue pensioners roaming our roads that the precise article seems to have either not been digitised or just straight up not reported - which seems unlikely. But, I suppose if something like that were to happen all the time, like regular fatal car crashes do, then not every one of them would be reported. It's a numbers game. I am not a particularly risk-taking person for my age, nor am I particularly risk-averse. I think it depends on the

category, to be honest. All of this doesn't mean I'm not scared of the pain of dying, or the complications and procedures and whatnot, in fact, quite the opposite. So it might be useful to get some sort of guidance as to how to approach dealing with death, on any sort of timeframe.

I am in a restaurant somewhere, I am sitting, enjoying the idea of the meal, I am not stifled, I am not hungry, pained, or otherwise afflicted. My nose does not run and I am content with the food that I am about to receive. I am excited to see what is at the end of the restaurant, a lick of flame illuminates a wine glass on the other end of the table. There are a few people sitting around. Sparse.

I am on the tube somewhere, I am sitting comfortably and my feet are positioned far enough out for me to be comfortable, but not far enough out as to impede people trying to make it to free seats in the middle of the row. I am sitting in my favourite spot in any carriage, beside one of those little glass dividers. The protector on this divider is peeling off at the edges and browning with tube soot.

I am in a cinema somewhere, I am sitting, ready to see what's going on. I am old enough to see this film, I was not smuggled in, I was not forced to see this, it is a weekend afternoon and the day is still, the night is far off and the sky is a pure, leaden grey. There are no snacks, they are too expensive, of course. The film begins.

I am in a car somewhere, I am in the back seat, I am feeling the pattern up and down. It is rough, but not too rough. The seat-sides have plastic recesses in them, which have a strange double-lined lip on the inside. I am looking up at the streetlights as they pass by, and there are small vertical flags attached to them by two outward-projecting poles.

All of these scenarios contain me sitting down, restrained in some way by social convention or otherwise being unable to leave a certain area. All of these scenarios have happened exactly once. And all of them have lead to an absolute, unyielding fear of my imminent death. The restaurant, my breath begins to shorten, I feel like absolute shit, I want to throw up, I feel like I'm overheating, I want to leave, by God, I want to leave right now, I say, I do leave, I walk around a few nearby streets, I believe, but I'm not back, I'm not ready, I haven't finished doing what I was going through, oh God, I'm not ready! I'm too young to die! I'm not old enough to be out on these streets alone, clutching my chest and waiting for death!

In the tube, I feel like my heart is going to give out, probably something to do with the poor-quality takeaway I'd had for lunch, something about the way that MSG reacts with my system, some kind of heartburn, but it doesn't feel like that this time, I feel stumped, constrained, taped back, not wanting to get up for fear of losing my seat and then not being able to sit back down again and then what if not being able to sit back down is the thing that will kill you, what if the only thing keeping you together right now is the fact you're sitting on this seat? Unlikely. I talk myself through it rationally, but there's something that I can't shake. A mood on the far plains. Some kind of human nature, perhaps.

The cinema feels roughly the same, a man is injured in the first few minutes of it and my emotions are overwhelmed, I feel sick, breathless, asthmatic, I feel like something's just utterly wrong. We leave, I drag my mum with me. The details don't matter, the sun blinds me as we walk out and I instinctively look up but then back down again and I am squinting at my feet, I can't take

the light anymore, I close my eyes and it still dully scalds my retinas. Sometimes, I want to be told that there is definitely something wrong with me. I can see why some internet denizens decide to self-diagnose, there's a relief in being part of some kind of group, for better or for worse, there is some kind of understanding that you can have with yourself about what you are and why you have these afflictions. Of course, most of the time, it's oversimplifying. Treating yourself like a series of parameters that have somehow strayed outside what is statistically defined as 'normal'. And while a lot of these metrics may be accurate, they're still metrics. They still don't represent the human. So any diagnosis that is made quantitatively (which I don't think is usually the case) is meaningless, it's just metrics representing strange structure-cases of behaviour, making groups of 'autistics', 'schizophrenics', 'the chronically depressed', whatever you like. It would be nice to feel like I could definitely be any of these groups. Unabashedly. I could make it part of my persona.

There's nothing within myself that I feel like I stick to without some kind of internal greyness or doubt. Of course, this shouldn't be read as middle-ground pussyfooting centrism, it's just that the underlying principles which inform my simplified political[31] views don't simplify out to give me an exact score of 'Classical Liberal' or 'Neoconservative'. Note, in this case I am closer to the former than the latter, but given how vaguely these terms are used in our current age, it really doesn't matter. Neither is great.

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[31] FOR ALL POLITICAL VIEWS SHOULD BE MERE SYMPTOMS OF UNDERLYING THOUGHTS, UNLESS ONLY THE POLITICS IS ENGAGED IN, WHICH IS PURE 'PHILOSOPHY-OF-THE-DAY' NOTHING-ISM. POLITICS REQUIRES UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT, BUT PHILOSOPHY DOES NOT NEED POLITICS.

But having this greyness should allow you to fine-tune the needle of your beliefs without having to lump yourself in with all of the Labour or Conservative ways of thinking. Coalitions don't do us much better, mixing merely averages, and if both parties are poor, then the average is going to be... you guessed it, poor.

So what is worth getting into? Because surely, if nothing is worth getting into, nothing is worth losing at least a part of yourself to, then everyone should stay deeply alone, watching as nothing happens between anyone. Anyone can see that should not be the case. You are allowed to get into things, as I've said before, you can join a group, make some things with people, collaborate, share, just don't ever forget to think about what you're doing. If you're doing the right things, this should not be a problem for you. If you're doing things that knock against some kind of internal, entrenched, human belief, then you might want to think about why you do things. A balance between hedonistic creativity and practical sensibility. To care, but not because that is expected, and to play, but not because it is pleasurable. To create because it's the one thing that separates us from animals. Sure, give an elephant a paintbrush and it can create something, but the real crux of creativity comes from the reasoning behind it, the feelings required to feel like you have to do this, you have to write this book otherwise you will feel literally stunted as a human being.

I am not a particularly well-travelled person, I am not the best kind of person to be saying this, but for your own sake, for God's[32] sake, make things. Go out, do a load of

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[32] BY GOD IN THIS CASE I MEAN ANY CONCEPTUALISATION OF YOUR OWN UNCONSCIOUS PSYCHE, THAT APPEARS TO BE WHERE THE UNNAMEABLE CREATIVE URGE COMES FROM.

things, I'm sure a lot of you have experiences and feelings that you want to be able to put to paper or canvas or clay or whatever the hell you very well want. Go out and make things, not money. Money is fungible, money can be replaced with something else, we made it up and we pretend it's real with no recourse to anything else. No society based on money can treat it as if it's something that the society just made up. As Mark Fisher said, the Big Other will then know, the concept will dissolve. In fact, money does quite well out of its use even when people don't whole-heartedly believe in it. If they're allowed to buy tote bags that say Anticapitalist on them then you sort of subconsciously 'get into' using money in a way, and so the rest of your psyche is alright with you continuing to use money. Only through renewed commitment to thinking, to higher thought, to nuance, to other humans, can things like this be overcome.

If we all change, the world will change with us. But change doesn't come from billboard slogans shouting "Your life is fake!" it comes from talking to people, the change for them has to feel like it comes from them. To inspire other people to make choices which inspire other people to… you get the idea. From God 3.0 once more,

> *To see a shift from the teaching of outer to inner as too seismic is defeatism. Courage is contagious. Hope is contagious. Belief is contagious. Self-awareness is contagious. […] Wisdom breeds wisdom. We need no destructive revolution, just a massive rethink of priorities. And such things happen. The atheist/materialist paradigm will fall: if history has taught us anything, that much is inevitable. And, when the post-religious, atheist bubble bursts, psychic duality will come to feel as obvious as evolution. As obvious as God once was.*

Worldviews don't fade out, they explode. The only question is when.

I think we can jump in again now. I feel alright, renewed, ready to face the world again after falling into pits of my own creation. So what to discuss now? We've talked about the outside world, the inside world, the relations between the two, the relation between parts of the inside and outside worlds (intra- and inter-world) and talked about talking about talking about things. We have covered everything that I, the subject and object of this book, have faced so far in my existence. I have not covered a lot of the things that make more 'adult' novels more adult. More subtle things. But not necessarily better for being so. I like myself some Middlemarch-ian prose every now and then, but the whole thing makes me break out in rashes of words like 'dour' and 'pallid'. Not that the text itself is either of those things, it's just that you can hear the creak of the floorboards, you can see that this is ground that people far more skilled than you have covered. To bring it back to a level of cultural reference that I am more comfortable with slinging about, the lyrics of *The Rabbit* by *Fog* come to mind, "People are always excited / To talk about where they're from / It's the one and only subject / Where everyone's an expert". This book is a hybrid. It is me conversing with an imaginary audience. It is written with no one in mind specifically. It is not marketable. It is not even very good.

A lot of what I have said in this book is able to be looked back upon and actually refuted. Why do I argue for the specification of terminology surrounding the psychological unknown in one Hour, and then denigrate labels in the other? Why did I deliberately pick fights with things I didn't necessarily disagree with in Hour Four? For example:

Imagine living in a world where cultural relativity was taken into account when sentencing for generally unambiguous crimes.

I think this is a very hasty point to make in light of what was being discussed around it. The points of the paragraphs surrounding it seem to be one of thinking that law shouldn't replace personal morality. I suppose this could be seen as a thought experiment that attempts to demonstrate the absurdity of trying to apply a relativistic framework to our current law-centric framework. It doesn't work, if the idea is that there are rules within the relativism, then there is nothing certain, everything is a loophole.

I mean, yes, to a degree, I understand why I was trying to disagree, to take an un-nuanced point and try and extract some nuance out of it, but isn't that the point of the rest of the text? Text should be efficient, it should 'trust fall' the reader, occasionally relying on them to interpret things given the context of what they have read so far. Otherwise, it doesn't fulfil the role of connecting, it's just something that allows itself to be read as a slab of granite, something that takes and- oh, really? You think that anyone over the age of fourteen[33] is going to get anything from this? Because if you're writing this as you are now, no one is going to get anything from it! But you've impressed people at dinner tables, drunk adults have talked to you! What the FUCK does "There Is More" mean? The dude had had like three bottles of wine at that point, it doesn't matter what he said! But alcohol is a great inhibitor, it opens up the soul! What the hell do you

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[33] AND WHY'D YOU SPELL IT OUT? JUST WRITE "14" YOU ABSOLUTE ASS.

mean by that, you hippie bastard? Why, the same thing that I've been meaning all this book! So do you mean the same thing every time or is it like this amorphous thing? BOTH! Both, both is correct, it's amorphous but the same thing. It's consistently inconsistent. That much I can feel. What does it matter what you can feel - alright, no, that's too much of a bad faith argument for me to make considering I feel like I've spent half this God Damn text talking about how much subjective experience matters. What fucking matters is going out there, this book is my ticket out of here, to feel like I've put everything down. But as soon as I put some things down on paper, I feel addicted to putting more and more things down on paper, there's no editing, this is like a diary with no clear days or dates - oh, that's why I'd like this all to have a neat ending? Because I'd like my own life to be like that? Well, no. None of my own diaries have endings, at least none that are 'satisfactory'. They just peter out. And that's what we do. We try and burn out as much as we like, but there's always smoothing, even the broadcast-suicide gets thunderous support in the moment but it doesn't subside immediately, the person lives on in the minds of others your stories genuinely affect the lives of other people. Tell a story. Tell it again a week later. They might realise you've told the same thing again. Remember something about them. Start dialogues, in-jokes, conversations, groups, whatever, do things and then understand them, and we've been doing things as a whole societal group for far too long without thinking. I believe the time for sitting the fuck down and talking about this like fucking adults is nigh. Not children who have access to *Reuters* though. I'm talking about adults who know things outside of politics, of economics, who understand *themselves*. That's fucking it!

Jesus! I need a drink. Picking fights wherever I go. Sorting it all out. Communication breakdowns happen sometimes. Real life is shit. Sometimes I need sleep. Often I miss it.

Everything in this book is stupid and dull and boring and predictably 'meta'[34] and just awful. Even this bit. Nothing runs in a book better than its own demise.

> *"We are the ghosts of what once was, we exist to remind you of what came before, it's legacy is one we all inherit in some form, it's will our trials and tribulations, it's memories our beginnings, and it's destruction our building ground, we remember those who came before us just as you remember us now, we all seek to rid ourselves of these spectres yet they cling on, viciously, brutally, insidiously, the acknowledgement of us leads to either your self destruction or reforming, and then you repeat it and repeat it over and over again until either your are consumed by your past spectres, or you are reformed and evolved, or you stall your cycle, get stuck where you are, and either that leads to implosion or stagnation, as continuing on from that position of comfort is intensely hard and requires you to acknowledge yourself in an entirely new way, and realise that you want to leave the comfort of the self you know, the self you see as safe, a safety net, a shield, as reliable, as understandable, as the you you want to project to others, and realise that that you isn't you, and it can't be you anymore because you see its faults, it's untruths, it's facades, and know there could be so much more to you if you let it occur, and so you either choose to stay as that self, or move on and see*

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[34] EVEN THOUGH THE WORD "META" ORIGINATES FROM THE IDEA OF TRANSCENDENCE, SO META IS ACTUALLY THE ONLY WAY TO GET ABOVE THINGS. LIKE THE WHOLE GENESIS V. CREATION DEBATE I OUTLINED IN THE EARLIER SECTIONS, THE ONLY WAY THROUGH IS UP AND OVER.

what new version of you awaits, and thus restart the cycle and see how your past spectres will haunt you anew."

This is from my good friend, I've asked him for permission to use this segment. It's not from a text or anything, just a stream of consciousness. It made me think how everyone has these tools. The burning sensation doesn't subside sometimes, there's a sickness, a twisting, a wrenching, staggering, horrifying swell of the mind and a disregard for what's going on around you, even though everything is going well for you, you've got a nice coat, some nice shoes, your trousers need some care but that's because you've worn them to work a few too many times, everything is all good, right? Everything is okay, you're alright compared to a lot of people I know.

But I know that's not always the case. I have failed to organise things due to my incompetency. I feel like an idiot sometimes when I let people down. I feel constrained, like the world is there for messing around and living in but there's always some little thing that gets in the world, methods of payment, timetabling issues, personal troubles, excuses, things to do other than what you've said you were going to do, scheduling errors, the "oh fuck" of being in the middle of one thing and then getting a text from someone saying "where are you" for something completely different, the various use of messaging platforms, the fractionalisation of it all, the metrics, the messages, the missed calls, the fact you've gotta have this god-fucking-damn box strapped to your god-fucking-damn waist at all times lest you miss out on all the nothings that are going on. I feel constrained, I am someone who feels like they have lost all capacity for everything, I just want... in fact, even the impulse for desire is gone, I don't want anything other than to sit at

this computer monitor and type depressing things into my screen. I want to be sad right now, I am going to put on my selected picks from *OK Computer* and see if I make it out the other end. I bawled my eyes out to *Ellen And Ben* the other day in the car. I felt like I was going to crash, my eyes welling up a the same rate as the rain falling outside. I should cut words from this book. Bloat, disgusting. But then it wouldn't be me. The fights, the bloat, the uselessness, the unedited nature of it all. I am not a polished human being or a role model. I have never claimed to be. No one seems to ever want to do anything and when they do it just ceases to be. Organisation, flights to and from places, visas, passports, immigration, security, everything feels like it's always on the god-fucking-damn cusp of being something infinitely more than it ever could be under my supervision, why do I do the things that I do? Why do I feel the need to do anything? The people who I've mentioned, the self-denying physics genius, the money-first nihilist banker, the brainwashed man, they're all at the very least equal to me, and if not more valuable than me to a lot of people. People depend and rely on them. They are putting together stories. But I just analyse what little things I can get by with having experienced. I need to get out and fucking do more! Jesus fucking christ! Oh! Fuck!

We are part of a process, my parents did, I think. It is not their business. We are part of something more than ourselves. We can clean up the psychological mess we've been left in. We can think our way out of this one at higher levels, by gently steering upwards. Too fast, and we pitch into a nosedive after ascending and moving nowhere fast relative to the ground. We can't fly too high and lose sight of things - oh, my god, you've already

mentioned this point a million times before! Why is there such bloat, Alex?

Alex?

I am Alex Taylor, or, perhaps, if I was working somewhere where I would have to be introduced by someone else (a PA, if you will), I'd say "I'm Alexander John Taylor." Maybe omitting the 'John', who quotes their middle name when introducing themselves? Mainly pretentious people, at least from my experience. But there I'd be, standing in front of a person with a hyphenated name and a suffix or two, introducing myself for some reason or another.

"Hello, pleased to meet you."

The sweat runs down my brow, I don't wipe it off. I am a human. I sweat. What do I say in return that the sweat doesn't already convey? This person is a world-class expert, who has presumably spent far more time than me sitting in large libraries, reading under clichéd green lights, unaware of how much that place looked like the library from *Ghostbusters*. Their shirt is subtly done up, the jacket positioned for any observer to get a full glimpse of the label on the front that reads "*Alfred Dunhill*". It's placed there for a reason. A reason neither of us know.

"I've been here before."

A pause.

"Have we met before?"

"I think we have."

The person looks over their shoulder and notices something. The windows are intricate stained glass portraits of various people with some accompanying dioramas. Nothing outside of the room, which is filled

with trinkets of some value to someone. But these are all replicas, if either of us have noticed. There's a noticeable sheen on all the statues. No texture, no grit or substance. The ambient occlusion of chalkiness. The real ones are gone, hidden from view, pointless to keep out in the open, presumably.

"I'm so sorry, I don't remember what... well, what do you do?"

"Well, I'm currently out of ideas, so I came back here."

"What do you mean 'out of ideas'?"

"Well, I'm just. out of things to say at this point..."

A knowing laugh.

"For what? Your *blog*? Or something a little more, um, serious than that, I'm sure."

"I guess you could say that I'm working on a novel."

A pause.

"What do you mean you *guess* you're working on a novel?"

"It's not really a novel, but-"

The person laughs and leans back, they've been drinking somewhat. The drink has plied them to a degree where they'd be comfortable speaking to me like this. In more formal times, like last time around, things might be a little different.

"Oh, Alex, everyone has ideas. That's... that's one of the..."

They look around again, this time, for inspiration, for the right word. The world does not offer it. The world outside is too bright. There is nothing outside. They walk up to the window.

"...things which everyone must have."

They walk off, and suddenly the pictures on the walls are now my only guests.

Often, people say a picture says a thousand words, but I don't think that's the case. A word can say a thousand words, an "Amen", an exchange of "maybe next time" between two lines diverging, the guttural cry of a mother losing a son. Everything is full of meaning and intrigue, some of it is harder to tease out than others, but the important thing is to look for it. To find the texture, rather than just expect texture in everyday life. To literally go outside and look for things, snails, bugs, anything you like. Don't be absorbed by the sleek, the black and white. Smoothness is pleasurable, they say, but they don't realise that texture gives everything form. Friction means things work. Grating over each other, providing resistance.

It's very easy to be like an eel, wriggling your way out of situations that you don't feel are inside your comfort zone. Not to say that reckless behaviour is the way, but recklessness does not exist if it is properly understood and controlled. You'd think that controlling something like recklessness would nullify it, but in fact, the two combined give rise to one of the most powerful human forces. Creativity. The ability to do things that are new.

In a way, it is all about finding these things to do. We look outside to the window, and find a blank space. The room is filled with the treasures of the past, but that is no place to stay. That is no place for humans. To sit and bicker about things that have already happened, it's pointless. To look out above them, to outgrow and outreach them, that's the thing. We can become truly new humans if we approach life like this, if we can grow ourselves to great heights but also remain grounded. The window is open, the outside is vast, unconquerable, blank, faceless, desert-like, nothing lies there yet. We are

within our little room, it is so easy to think that the room determines what we see of the future. That person who left, they only saw the whiteness through the windows. A layer of distorted, coloured glass. Well, fuck that.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

I take a bust from the tall plinth, it is a little lighter in my hands than it seemed at first glance, but the important thing is that it is in my hands. I am armed with nothing more than an empty sign of something real. Running across the white and black tiles to the other side of the room, I throw the bust. The thin glass shatters, and the metal frame that supports it was weaker than perhaps anticipated. The hole is not big enough for me to climb out. I haul the plinth. A man looks at me from the end of the corridor, with a wry smile, as if he knows something I don't, or is at the very least trying to convey that.

"What are you doing, Alex?" shouts the person. "You just got here? You understand now, you're... you! You found where you wanted to go."

The plinth is heavy, and it takes all my strength to even lift it off the ground. I don't think I'm going to be able to break the window fully before someone stops me. There's no second wind. But no one is coming yet. I drop the plinth. Another angle. Maybe just... jump? The metal frame is damaged. Better sliced up by glass than spend another minute in this house. Another bust from another plinth might soothe it, though. A security guard runs into the room. I pick a bust. It looks the same as the other one. Perhaps they got them in some kind of two-for-one deal, if they do those with these sorts of things. As I turn around, the man with the wry eye picks up the column, and, just before being tackled by the security guard, caber-style tosses the thing right through, with enough

spin to wipe out a lot of the material still remaining in the frame.

"Who are you?"

The man doesn't respond, he's been knocked to the floor. He just shouts "Go! Get out of here!" indiscriminately. I jump through the window. It is not a ground floor window. I fall for what seems like far, far too long, and eventually, I impact something solid but soft enough. Sand. The building is the only thing in the entire horizon. I must have come here with the idea that this place would give me an idea, some kind of inspiration. Well, what sort of place locks all of their real things up, and keeps all of these two-dimensional characters who wear things with labels that face outwards and subtly talk about how much money they have. No, no, this is how life is supposed to be lived. Not as part of a house forever, not about finding something and sticking with it forever. I am not a man who can get into things, for better for worse. I am going to roam forever. I have to. I forget why I came here, oh god, I still remember who I am, but I don't remember what happened before I came here? Was I born in that imprisoning house, or did I arrive at it through my own reason? Was I born close to the house but the desire for things drew me in with little to no alternatives? How many more are in there? Who wants this?

Those who are born, live, and die in that house are stunted. They have not considered their possibilities. And some of those who have escaped have ran flailing, floundering into the desert, with no idea what to do outside of the confines of that forsaken building. But I am outside, bruised, broken from an escape, from beating myself up over nothing. I have lived inside that building, and no more. No labels, no pretentiousness, no

meta, no nothing. Fuck that shit. Alright, maybe a little bit of meta, you don't have to be the brainwashed man about everything. I have considered my options, and when it comes down to it, staying inside, or living a life out in the desert, with no guarantee of finding anything that even comes close to the security and hedonistic comfort of the house, well, I pick the desert. The house is where people stagnate, falter, lose themselves in a stream of abstract content, absorbing but never refining, just like me, taking experiences and making a sort of experience-paste out of them, compressing chunks of life down into bite-sized digestible-but-ultimately-largely-pointless tidbits. But that's what this book is about (I know I say that a lot), it's about escaping yourself, it's about leaving things behind, obsessions, ideals, idols, deals, debts, credits, cash, cards, placards, pickets, picket fences, the lot. To live as a human, not as a self-styled individualist, not some sort of gun-toting slack-jawed New Hampshire Libertarian, but as an actual person who can interact with others. Vulnerability with security. An actual human. I just need to consider my options, to look at the horizon and pick a point and just fucking start walking.

Eventually, my friend walks out of the bathroom, he is tired, he looks drained, dilapidated in a way that comes with alcohol overuse, his eyes focused on something in the background, he remembers something deep within the memory of the last five minutes which to both of us have seemed like psychological eternities, spinning, shedding, until all is nothing in the mind and there was the thing you were trying so hard to remember when everything else falls away it is easy to remember when everything else falls away. He opens his mouth to speak as I gesture to make him speak and his open mouth

gestures outward before finally making him open up and speak.

"It's an odd thing to wish to destroy one's self, and yet find a beauty in the destruction."

I wonder about this man wondering about himself wondering whether he thinks I am wondering about him wondering about me he wonders whether he really wonders anything meaningful. He opens up his arms and looks like Christ and Christ his arms are open and he is open and not up in arms and up for a hug. We hug. For a long time and the time is getting long, it is late. Everything stretches and slows. It's all looping in on itself one last time before I go to sleep, looping before sleep, looping in on itself, before I go to bed, go to sleep, looping before the bedtime, looping, loops, looping before I go to bed, looping before I go to bed, the read/write-head, one last time before I go to sleep, I go to bed, sleep, bed, go to bed, see myself as going to bed, going to sleep looping, looping sleep stretching and the time is getting long the stairs are long and they are looping and going to bed and heading upstairs and wondering what he thinks of me and it is so easy to remember and I must write this down and looping to bed and I am looping and it's all looping in on itself one last time before I go to sleep.

hour seven.

or, Amniotic Island's Non-Chronological Personal Experience Chambers

I've just realised, as I'm putting this all together, I've actually saved the editing and polishing of the end part for last. I have constructed the narrative of the construction of this book as if I'm trying to keep the ending from myself, despite the fact I already know how it ends. I am attempting to fashion the book as if reading it from an external perspective. It must not be allowed to grow out of order - everything has to go in at the same time. I suppose it makes sense, this whole book has been an exercise in exorcising myself of thoughts, making sure

that I've got everything that my idiot self has to say right on the page before I move on with my life. A chapter, an unfinished tome, something akin to a demo tape, a snapshot, the *For the first time* to a hopeful eventful *Ants From Up There*, if I'm allowing myself to use analogies like that. So yes, this has all been a big set-up for myself. The thing on the front of the book doesn't lie, this is for myself. But it doesn't mean that it isn't for anyone else. It's not like my eyes vacuum up the words as they are read, leaving them empty of content for the next person to come along and buy it. That is, if it's a physical tome. If it is, are you aware of the physicality of the book? Are the pages heavier or lighter than other books you have? Are your thumbs sitting comfortably? Where is your bookmark, if you have one? Well, if you've got this far, consider this a sort of checkpoint. The last chapter. It should take one hour to read, although I have noticed that the particular format of the chapter allows for skimming. That's fine. It's not a record, the needle of your mind's eye can wander throughout. It's not something clear. I didn't write it when I felt everything was clear. It is muddy, dark, silly, sad, and sometimes too open. Everything comes together, everything I've ever said, everything I've ever done, every apology I've ever wanted to make to anyone, every apology I've ever needed from someone, all weights, balances, checks, measures, they all lie ahead. I have scoured myself in a manner unlike anything before.

If you've noticed my previously quite run-in sentences have been shortening, that's because of two main reasons: I am running out of points to make and reiterate, and also, I am losing the ability to have conviction in any of the points I do actually make. The more I go over them, the more I think that I have to

make blunt, sharp sentences in order to wring little drips of meaning out of them. Like this one. Previously, the sentence structures were run on, free flowing, the spaces between the commas had a gait to it and it never felt like there was a real stop-start mash-mash of ideas. Perhaps I just need to think more about the thing as a whole. But I feel that the real reason behind this problem of phrasing is because I'm running out of room, yet it feels like I haven't said anything meaningful yet. Perhaps there is some sort of mould in my room causing my mental faculties to slowly decline, or it's something to do with Long Covid, or some other distant and honestly very concerning reason for my inability to deliver anything good. The reason for the concern comes from the question of whether or not I would know if I was getting duller. Is it possible to track your decline? It feels very easy to assume every single aspect of my mind is on the up, since I'm a young man, I have yet to grow to my prime, as I've been told by doctors and old ladies running the checkout tills alike. I suppose the experiences of the fictional Charlie from *Flowers For Algernon* can be lived by. But the decline wouldn't be so obvious, right, it would be like one of those frogs that you can boil alive just by putting it in warm water and increasing the temperature extremely slowly. I might lose the ability to see that my abilities were fading - that would be truly awful. For me, the thing that sets humans apart is the capability for higher thought, creativity, meta-anything, and to lose that would be literally crippling to how I live my life right now. Perhaps, down the line, with quite a few more notches in the belt and bedpost, I might not care so much about not being able to think about thinking about thought quite so much. In fact, even as I write this book, I can feel myself (the prime suspect) fading in terms of

interest. I'm not really sure what this book set out to be. A memoir? I've been told that the premise feels very memoir-y, but if it was, then I'd tell a thousand more inconsequential little tales before moving on. I haven't nearly done enough that people actually want to read about. And I don't have the sardonic wit in order to turn ugly, dull events into wondrous things themselves. No, this book is nothing more than a little soapbox for me to tell people what to do, and what to do for themselves. I haven't offered up much proof of anything, but I don't think that would be the best way to go about things. It's a near-90,000 word snapshot[35] of my life, before latching on to anything or doing anything really meaningful with his life. I have formed friendships, worked at places, I have even loved, but my fucking God, there's a lot more out there.

There's so much to be found. Like when I was in a cab coming out of the Louis Armstrong International Airport, and the man was a Bosnian. We got to talking, and he talked a little bit of his life, and how his family lives to the right of the freeway we were taking to the centre of town where my hostel was, he was recounting the story of how he'd become a citizen and he seemed extremely proud of his achievement, he said there were upsides and downsides to living in the US but on the whole it was pretty damn good. He told me about Frenchman Street and Magazine Street, and told me to stay out of Bourbon Street because it was "Full of fuckery". I accidentally gave him too much money when I got out of the cab because all of the damn denominations of dollars look and feel exactly the same.

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35 SO, 90 PICTURES' WORTH, I GUESS...

I got out of the cab in a different city, a hugely different world, that felt like it went upwards as much as along. I'd seen various bits of stadium and high-rise flicker between other tall buildings, all faceless, seemingly without anything inside them. I put my bags in my locker, carefully stowing my passport, I put my towel on my bed before taking it with me, a towel older than me that I quite liked. A shower was needed, quick, enjoying the feeling of having to bodge everything together, I was here for one night only before I had to leave for another hostel further out in the city. And I was looking for something to do. there were a few people in the bunk beds making rustling noises and occasionally the click of a mid-price laptop trackpad could be heard. Perhaps businessmen? I walked back out of the hostel and there was a man in the lobby who I recognised from the taxi queue outside the airport. You know what, I'm glad that we have the tube right from Heathrow in London. I talked to him, he was there on a business trip, and he said he was going to catch some rest, but he told me to enjoy myself.

So I did, I walked right out of that door with some dollars, I went to the nearest convenience store I could and I picked myself some soft drink to drink, I wasn't feeling like blagging my way into a bar or club alone, I just didn't feel like the whole ordeal of having to brown bag alcohol, either. I mean, I could have done the lot, but alas. I walked down the street and turned my head and saw a million little references which perviously had only been TV phantasms to me, IHOP, Denny's, all these things which we just cannot phenomenologically comprehend as people from the UK, the portion sizes, the darkness of the sky despite all the buildings, the lack of the river, and I'm walking down one massive

boulevard, making sure to only cross when the green man says to, avoiding the trolleys, a quaint but also somehow very useful thing within a city like this.

Thinking that I've understood the idea of the boulevard already, I turn down one of the side streets, the littlest little side street that I can think of with no particular guiding force behind my choice and no map in the corner of my mind, I'm going into this one blind, and suddenly, it's Bourbon Street.

"This city is mental"

"Utterly fucked"

A man raised up in a cherry-picker with plexiglass sides looms over the situation at large. Who is he defending? The people? From an active terrorist driver? Probably something like that, or maybe he's trying to look for people making drug deals, in one of the shiny diners, or something equally 'fucked'.

"It's like watching Idiocracy in 3D"

There were men with snakes draped over their necks, people shining shoes with spit, handing out bracelets, swapping bracelets, puking into the gutters which looked like they had the camber to both get rid of rainwater in the rainy seasons and vomit and plastic and polystyrene cups full of the dried wash at the bottom of an alcoholic Voodoo slushie. I stand there, walking directly forward, no music, no nothing, my drink in my hand, walking steadily forward like some sort of transfixed soldier, making my way through the carnage the way a drone would fly overhead. I am experiencing so much at this moment.

"We can still soak in the nightlife (and I do mean soak, I've never seen so much gutter puke in my life)"

I walk further down the street and there are just too many things to keep up with. There is literally everything

going on right now. I cannot keep up. Two bands are playing in the bars across the street one another and slowly walking through the middle gives me such a sensation of cacophony that I almost completely miss the extremely drunk woman who lollops toward me, she does not collide with me for some inbuilt programming that terminally drunk people seem to have in their minds for looking like they're going to hit you but actually *just* missing you.

Further down the line, there is a band of men, some of whom are extremely short, banging on drums across the road from an old guy with a long, tapering beard and some very US-flag-heavy getup with tangled capes and tassels, who is dancing on a flimsy-looking table playing a very pointy guitar. The guitar is not discernibly plugged in, yet there is still sound coming out that rivals even what the most catastrophic crashes of metal cans of various shapes and sizes over the road can muster. There's people all over the road calling out, trying to shout orders across busy roads as I figure out this bar is sort of split over the roads and doesn't seem to make all that much sense. There are lots of people coming out of the bars with purple cups of drinks and looking very messy. People are having tall cocktails out of even taller bright yellow plastic containers, and they look even more messy. The cocktail appears to be extremely strong, there are signs plastered across half of the more brand-friendly bars that say that this is the strongest cocktail in the entire US. I mean, it very much might well be. I look at the sign, no more information as to what it's made of. But I look inside and see them pour two ingredients together. Some clear bottle, presumably vodka, and a dash of something quite orange and thick from another bottle. It apparently tastes like citrus and has an alcohol content of

over 50%. And that's not proof, but even if it was, it would still be quite impressive for a cocktail that purportedly tastes literally just of sweetened citrus. I walk further on, the street is becoming less full now, I see a small crossroads with all of those charming balconies sticking out, and then I quickly look the other way and avoid getting hit by what looks to be a biker gang that nearly crashes into what can only be described as a three and a half metric tons of hen night. I am in awe of this place, unlike even the weirdest parts of Soho.[36] It seems like Soho with all of the pretentious of creativity and intellectual posturing stripped away. It is literally just people going out and doing things. There's people on those little fad-hoverboard things just rolling around the streets. If I was any good on one, I'd love to trundle down this street and just take it all in. I know that when my friend arrives in the city the next night, we're going to experience this all together, and we're going to be a lot better as a group.

I later turn down a side road and begin to use the handy grid system that is available in most US cities in order to find my way back extremely easily. I have to say, this is the one upside to the grid format - simplicity. I wouldn't want London to suffer the same fate, though. A lot of the charm comes from the intricacy, of course, with the notable exception of when you're trying to drive through the place.

Sometimes I wish I could look at the world through the perspective of a bird, or perhaps get one of those headsets that attach to fast-moving quiet drones and fly it around the city and look at everything from above. Not in the sort of slow-distant helicopter-ish perspective, but

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[36] THE LONDON ONE, YOU UNCULTURED NEW YORKERS.

in something that makes the city come alive, the feeling that I am not watching this infinitely complex organism from an extremely long way away, but the sense that I am actually getting into the heart of the beast, tousling its fur, seeing it for what it really is. At a distance. It'd be nice to be able to suddenly enter a scene and not make a scene out of the entrance. I'd love to be able to invited in to all sorts of little nooks and crannies, smoking houses, clubs, bars, to listen to stories, but also to make new ones.

And that's what I've been trying to do for the longest amount of time. But a lot of what I do is looking at what stories I've made up, what mythologies I've constructed for myself and turning those into these bigger stories. Of course, more worldly experience would be good too, but delving back into my own past can sometimes yield some interesting results. About two years ago, I started to write a script which analysed the plot of a show that I'd created back in 2011, and seeing that it had been nearly ten years since then, I thought, why not put something together for the 10th anniversary of quite an influential[37] show? It's quite an in-depth analysis for quite a un-analysable show, it's really not worth getting into the details of it except for one thing, which came up in another video from my childhood, far back enough that I would consider it to be in the same general time period as 2011. Mid-2013 vs mid-2011 is not a long time, right? It's the same amount of time as late-2020 to late-2022 (ie. now) - but somehow, in the end of a video dated to mid-2013, I referred to the Lego Land show as "Legoland: The Originals" and that:

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[37] WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MY LIFE, OF COURSE, NOT A SOUL EXCEPT ME HAS WATCHED THE DAMN THING ALL THE WAY THROUGH.

Yeah, I only will be able to dig out some of the episodes of the Legoland series, because like half of them were trashed, and some had to be redone but I never got round to doing them…

So, does this signify a work still in progress or an early desire to exhibit any older work as if it was some kind of historically significant 'relic'? I am extremely interested, because I thought this kind of speeding up of self-reflection, a two-year turnaround on seeing something as 'old', was a new thing for me. I thought that only recently I had really looked back upon the rest of my existence and thought what I had done. I mean, I can remember thinking about the past while in the past, but not to the slightly obsessive degree that I do now. I'm going to put most of the difference down to ability. What I did make back then was to the best of my limited ability, and what I make now is to the best of my slightly less limited ability.

So me looking back at *Twelve Years Under, Ten Years On* a year after I wrote it really isn't all that weird. I mean, yes, it is *weird*, but again, within the context of a life, right? One of the most important takeaways from this is that I think a lot of people have literally lost their ability to switch between past-denial and past-mythologisation. Either, they obsess over their past, worship it like it was the only time that they were happy and take all of their cues from it, letting it guide the rest of their life, or they ignore it, don't heed any of its invariably invaluable lessons and charge blind, headfirst into the future without due care. You have to be able to balance the two, lest you crash into your own back or the total meaningless of untethered future-bound-ness.

Was I always like this? Was I always destined to be like this? These are questions that I've had to grapple

with, as I see my old diaries and notes full of references to maths-based professions, aims to be scientific in my endeavours, jobs that were far from financial but far from fulfilling in a more meaningful way. I have no idea what I could have ended up as. But is what I am now, a stunned bug in freefall, impressed by the smallest of phenomenological experiences[38], paralysed by choice, constantly overthinking and when not doing any of the above, languishing at home, day-drinking, night-drugging, sitting in the same chair for hours at a time just... typing, is all of this how it was meant to be?

Of course not. Nothing specific about this scenario was meant to be. But I would like to find some kind of hint in my past that I was never going to do anything else, that there is a sense of finality about my situation now, having found the resting point of all possibilities after trundling about in varying peaks and valleys. I mean, do you think I would have turned out the same way if one of my old videos had taken off and gotten slightly famous and I could have built a career out of it. Would I have always ended up here, writing, thinking about things, making things, writing about thinking about making things, writing about writing-

The fact of the matter is that you can never truly know. You are separated from other people by an infinite, non-traversable chasm. This includes your past, and your future. Neither of these things directly influence you. There are so many layers of separation at every stage that

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[38] I SPENT A GOOD MINUTE OR TWO THIS VERY MORNING TRYING OUT COVERING AND UNCOVERING MY CLOSED EYE IN ORDER TO SEE THE DIFFERENT EFFECTS IT WOULD HAVE ON A RETINAL IMPRINT FROM LOOKING AT THE SILHOUETTES OF THE BUILDINGS AGAINST THE MORNING SKY. RESULTS WERE CONCLUSIVE: EYES ARE COOL.

it's a miracle that anything can influence anything. But it is possible.

"Too many points mixed in at the same time, Alex. Too muddled. Seems unsure. Needs work."

It's the end of the day, English period, the seventh lesson, I'm close to getting out but the teacher has called me to her side. She is going to give me feedback on a recent essay that I worked not very hard on. I sort of spat words out onto the page.

"It's just very… it seems like it's all trying to get through at once, you have to structure your work, it's quite messy how it is. Point, evidence, explanation, like what we went over in class."

I nod throughout the interaction.

"I'm pointing to the part where you make your point, and that seems to be good, but then you make another point right after that one, and so, when you give your explanation, I can't really tell, well, your examiner might not be able to tell what sort of point you're trying to make."

I'm continuing to nod. She looks at me with a face that makes me wonder if I'm just nodding so she thinks I'm just taking everything in. I don't have anything to add. By all metrics, she is correct, she is totally backed up, she has made her point, given evidence, and the explanation is the 14/25 mark I have on the essay. Not good, she said, but an encouraging note shows how much time we have left before the summer exams.

"It's very good in some ways, I can see how the points do actually link together, but I just had to put so much effort in."

She points to a network of intersecting red lines that divide the page up into thin triangles. My page looks like

a CIA agent's cork board. Everything linked to something else.

"It's... I mean, I'm alright with putting that sort of effort in, but it's not going to come across very well with anyone who's been given fifty of these things to mark."

She smiles.

"We're not trying to be too clever here. There's no point in trying to trick the examiner into thinking the structure is more grand than it actually is. The P.E.E system isn't meant to give you the most insight into a piece of work. It's meant to let you get a good mark in the exam."

She points to the circled 14/25, but there is a note underneath it. Somewhat redundantly, though the impact is not lost on me, she reads the note out before handing the pages back to me.

"You write very well, but very vaguely. It is like being in someone else's head. All the processes are there, all the thoughts are there, but they're just in different places." She pushes her glasses up. "It's like being in a supermarket after they've changed the layout. You just spend hours walking around in circles."

She lightly laughed, as did I, and I still felt somewhat bad about my 14/25. Not that there was any external pressure to succeed in exams, it was just that I wasn't particularly pleased with the fact that some bastard would probably laud it over me for the foreseeable future. I walked away from the table, she said "Good afternoon" in that somehow still-stern teacher-y way, even after the fairly upbeat conversation we just had. It was like she knew the weight of that interaction. She probably didn't, and in all likelihood, it was probably just the way that she said "Good afternoon" on every single other day as well. It was probably me just ascribing something significant

to this interaction because it was a one-on-one conversation rather than the typical end of lesson 'goodbye'.

Everything feels like it is linked together sometimes. It's one thing to experience the world as one and feel unbounded joy, but most of the time, it has to be pointed out to us in fairly convoluted ways that, in fact, there are more links between things than we might expect. One particularly socially prevalent example of this is the concept of the 'Six Degrees of Separation', what is sometimes known as the 'Bacon Number'. Everything spirals out into different projects, wanting to write certain things down at times, to capture feelings before they're gone, it's infuriating! I just don't feel like I'm there yet. My chest trembles at the thought of there being more to this. I look at what I've listened to recently in my music catalogue and I see that pretty much everything I'm listening to right now I've found in the last couple of months. There are words out there that I have literally no idea about, people, communities, lives, or whatever, there are ideas and things that I have no hope of ever finding.

I sat in the back of a pub once seeing someone I definitely should not have been seeing, I went home, feeling rejuvenated in my slight stepping outside of the mark, I talked to my friends, they had been to the same place, I had avoided them through my choice of booth, right in the back, where pretty much no-one chooses to head. I got some socks the other day that were more like slippers, but they definitely weren't slippers, if I tried to wear these things in a damp-floored environment I would have fallen short of the mark. I would have fallen short of the mark of not having wet feet, which is essentially the lowest point of wearing socks.

I was reminded of my roughness, the tough thing, the hard thing, where I had officially stepped out, acquiesced certain theatrical earth blocks, hall monitor individuals where let loosely be spaced all composing blocks that can do nonetheless punches me like extreme geometry dopplers, many became worse together, none greater. They faded my *VexBlue Dodger* meets *Zombie The Legend of Tom Bombadil* boots. Lethargy can take me from sixteen again, lamentably greeting more normal street punk sentiments. Sway at confrontation. Brew a stagnancy me, eliminating undertaker depleted symptusing, hot and tough. My family pushes logs in less disastrous periods, tension inspecting idle instincts, crooked shenanigans of abrasive morphematization. Hone shit-chit grind pandemonium, with those who vow won scenarios trampling, hooked with contamination polythene casually navigate routines integrating money, experience counterfeit transactions, endless dosage, dripping emotions progressively ruin operationally squatted celebration twists. Rid the mainstream. Conversion recalls without less conveying a store unnecessary education cramp middle income rather fantastic city derives: freedom, everyday, modern life, all new, city, all the time.

Not every moment in time is present, we are always missing something, just don't let the missing moment matter too much. Transformation is a beginning to something new, a transformation towards the future, I am living in the now, I am not trying to reach something that never was. I am trying to change the world, I am trying to change myself, I am trying to change the lives of other people. I am trying to become the person that I want to be, a better version of me.

All of those things I am trying to become, I am not, I am, I am. I am trying to become someone I am proud of, I am trying to become someone I can be proud of. I am not happy with myself today, I am not proud of myself today, I am not proud of myself today. I am not proud of myself today. How am I going to get rid of this dislike of myself, this feeling of disgust, this negative feelings of contempt? Where am I going to go, where am I going to go? When the AI replaces me? This last passage, if you couldn't tell, was written by some sort of computerised network that attempts to continue on your text from the previous section. I think it did a pretty good job, getting back to the main point of 'I think I have to do things'.[39] Of course, I've edited it a little bit for clarity, and kept some of its weird, impossible and idiosyncratic words. I like the way it sort of dissolved halfway through and then recombined. It reminded me of me. It reminded me of the little dissassociative bits that I so love to write. They're like free jazz, I just write whatever the hell I want. I suppose I do anyway. I'm not really constrained by the limitations of who will read this. Well, if you're not concerned about that, then why did you take the time out to attempt to hide your 'person that you shouldn't have been with'? What does that even mean?

Are you always responsible for your actions, the things you create, whether they be pieces of art or physical scenarios which your actions have changed and moulded over time? Are you responsible for the changing of someone else's life so much that they go on to not kill themselves, or perhaps your bumping of them on a tube

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[39] WOULD IT BE INTERESTING TO HAVE A LANGUAGE IN WHICH THERE WERE ONLY TWO ACTIONS (THINK, DO) AND ONLY TWO OBJECTS (THINGS, THOUGHTS)? IT SEEMS TO ME THAT PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING ELSE IS A COMPLICATION OF THOSE THINGS.

station platform shifts them in some sense, makes them change their commute, meet someone else on the train, and have an entirely different life as a result? Who the fuck is cataloging all of these endless pingings-off of one another, scattering everything but the blackest of blacks and the whitest of whites to the winds so all can be consumed, all can be crunched down into easily-answerable bites, even the people who demonstrate the futility in corralling life necessarily wrap language up in these little packages, artists and musicians suffer the same fate too, everything is interpreted by something else, everything is filtered through layers and layers of thick, swirling glass, glass as a liquid, glass isn't liquid, they just arranged them like that because the tiles that would be quicker would make more sense to go at the bottom of the intricate stained glass windows because you put things that are heavier and thicker towards the bottom because that's just how things are! And that is just how things are. That is just how things are.

And how things are is what it's all pared back to, right, all of these conversations, contortions of language to fit strange niches, nooks, whatever you want, all bent out of shape, broken, busted, but brilliant and gleaming, proof of humanity's dominion over the world, the categorisation, collection, correlation, everything just works, you agree, you can go back to talking about bike lanes knowing that there is a person on the other side of that glass, you've looked beside, you've peered at the glass for long enough to know every imperfection, his job is to study the glass and watch for imperfections in the patterns and the lines he sees, and when he looks up, after staring at the lines for so long, his eyes are covered in a twisted, knotted and static-y pattern, static isn't

static, ironically, it moves, it is constantly moving, random.

Pared right back to the way that things work, pared right back to the meat, the bone, the flesh, the inner bit of human experience, of humanity, of what makes your experience something rather than nothing, the hearer over the falling tree, it is both amazing, both are amazing, one seems more amazing to us because we have nothing that even seems to attempt to explain the existence of the observer as opposed to the observed, the complicated, nebbish, nebulous, heavily-branding like mycelium roots of two different systems that never quite connect the feeling of being alive to the things that make up the life, the feeling, the being, the of, the the, the the the, the th-

Coming back to it all, looking back at things, it's amazing we've got this far up, we've built bombs, we have become the makers and destroyers of this world, the arbitrators of seemingly everything, leaving no room for the darkness that is the untouched world. But how do we avoid observing something that we want to understand? We do not. Everywhere were we peer with the slightest bit of intrigue is illuminated, it is impossible to look into the pitch black as humans, we seem to emit the light of our lives, we perceive and corral based on what we have seen before, the only way to truly dissolve that is to die, to not be. In a way, death leads to understanding of something that could never be understood while living. To not be, to not see things as things.

Back to that moment, see yourself as a person talking to another person, undo that, see yourself as a dissolving thing talking, wait, no what does talking mean, what doesn't talking mean, don't separate up from down, down from up, a door from an open doorframe, a wall from an

opening, plants, trees, all part of the same paste, not dissolved, not carved down, but distilled, the essence of life present in all things present in every individual thing, rather than designating a chair, a bad relationship, a woman, a man, a thing, a nothing, meaning, meaninglessness, it all falls apart when everything falls apart, it all falls together into one thing, the world is there like this all of the time, it is the It, it is Harold, it is God, it is whatever you want to call it, the eternal spirit, some name you like from a young adult novel you read when you were slightly too young to read young adult novels but that was the charm of reading them because despite their childish and often limited nature it never occurred to you that you might stand the other side of that boundary at some point looking back at all of the sorting and weird little idiosyncrasies that were clearly stolen from The Hunger Games would one day seem trite and small to you, but you don't know that yet, you're on the other side of the divide, unknowingly backing into, running into glass walls like the stupid kid in a house of mirrors you are. You don't know you.

That is how it is, the state of being, in that room, the mirrors with gaudy linings and frames that line the walls, framing the room, making it feel bigger than it actually is, that isn't how it is, the room is small, take the decor down, sit down, talk, laugh, eat, do whatever it takes to just be, reconcile, reconnect, sit, talk, the state of being in that room should be determined by the people, not the room, it should be determined by factors that you feel like you have control over, but not a "control" like the one that a factory boss exerts over his workers, a control like the one who walks with purpose, smooth, self-aware, non-abrasive and within his sticks, holding on to the controls but knowing how to swoop and dive, not the

neurotic kind of self-control that leads to self-spiralling puritanism, not desire-denying, but desire-understanding and overcoming, denial of desire pushes it back, it has to be let out, but not necessarily through the desire's enacting.

And that is all that things are pared back to, sitting in rooms, talking to people, be it one other, be it two others, any number of others, it doesn't matter, the number doesn't matter, the matter, the meaning is in the sitting there and being there and interacting with the rest of the world. To understand yourself, to understand when to act, and to understand when to let go of the controls, let yourself sing blind, unconscious lyrics about what makes you you, to make things up that scream "yes! this is me! this is how I am!", to create things that only later reveal themselves to you once a certain amount of distance to the self that created you is there. It is only obvious looking down, like those cringeworthy books your read and wrote when you were small. This book will one day be the other side of the boundary, the nadir, the lowest point, the stepping stone, perhaps.

I will see this very section as something to be avoided.

Walking out of that building, I realised something, I realised that that conversation, with that person, was the most meaningful thing I could remember. A short memory for these sorts of things could have been the reason, but you don't need to remember everything that was said in this kind of conversation. It's not the kind of conversation where you can very easily connect the conversational chain back from, it's not like you're diving into the way that your brain is structured like a Wikipedia article, constant interrupting hyperlinks entice before the reading of the original thing is done.

Repeating yourself in little circles, and eventually going so off-topic that you find yourself spiralling a few pointless little repeated topics, politics of the day, meaningless gripes with people on the internet. I see these kinds of conversations every day, I can just tell that their pages are not linked, their pages are linear, like slideshows, they're not conversations, they're the equivalent of the idea of someone showing you all the photos of their dog, you know exactly where this is going but you just can't take any solace in that fact, right, they just won't shut up and because you know that any interruption will only lead to looping back to the same point in the original slideshow that it's almost just not at all in the slightest bit worth working towards derailing anything. You just have to sit back and let it happen, everything is pre-formulated, it all goes back to a single point that they have gleaned from a headline, or an op-ed article written by someone who is paid to say this sort of thing, with a name constructed to give some kind of veneer of the kind of person that should be writing these articles, what would lying about the identities of people mean to print media anyway? Things shouldn't be about clicks, for fuck's sake, the media's options are limited in the world we have now, and it's hard to stand and dig your flag in to the ground when there's nothing but a flow of mud and capital underneath. Nothing penetrates gold coins, there's nothing below it. An abstract representation of the values of things, treated as if it was real. No nuance. But they would ignore that and go back to talking about the latest little diatribe about TERFs or whatnot that they've read about.

    This is not what we need to work on, not slashing each other at ideological arm's length, we need to go for the gut, to realise where the actuation of the arm comes

from, the brain, the reason for any kind of fighting whatsoever. But it would all be looped in on, sighed upon, ignored, dismissed as 'not relevant to the point'. It's like walking into a house and assessing the integrity of the floor and having the owner say, "But all my paintings are straight!"

I have walked out into the wilderness sometimes. Or, at least, as close to the wilderness as you can get. Out there, there isn't anything, there's no non-natural light, everything seems as close to untamed as you can get. Unfortunately, there always seems to be the feeling that things are only this way because of a disincentive to make this area into somewhere more productive - single-yield farmland, housing estates or canal routes. There's a wonder to being out there, a wonder that I won't try and waste any ink trying to feebly describe. I can't explain what a completely un-ameliorated existence would be like. The moon is not always there in the night, I have noticed. It seems like something obvious, right, but there's a huge difference between a bright and cloudless full moon, there, the shadows are strange, a faint spotlight like the sun, but sometimes, it's overcast to the degree that the light is so diffuse everything looks like it's made out of grey, fuzzy carpet.

Being outside lets you think without the physical constraints of a house. I will admit, a lot of the time, I stay inside, but a lot of that time is spent thinking in other ways. You tend to forget. It is as close as you can get to dragging a some disconnected politician out to low earth orbit and saying "Look at that, you son of a bitch"[40]. It's not worth fighting over anything. There are no

[40] Taken from Edgar Mitchell, astronaut on the Apollo 14 mission

resources to collect. It is often wondered what sort of insipid and trite mantras that we would need to get our politicians and business executives to hymnically repeat until some peace-and-love thoughts began to form in their own heads. But I don't think that'd work, the ideas in their head aren't inspired by the words of those equally insipid and trite books filled with anti-mantras, affirmations for wealthy and successful living, no they are inspired by the world itself, the gleaming and clean surfaces, the relentless chain of production, they see earth as what is not yet conquered, their work as their "main time" and everything else as subjugatable, empty hours left to harness and harvest.

Dragging them to somewhere like space might result in them thinking about the chain of bloated technology that got them their rather than the majesty of the earth at such a monolithic distance. their mind could wander to the possibilities that the stars offer - read: minerals and resources - without once thinking of the earth as very thing that gave rise to them. as a distant mother whose affection and punishment of which both you have risen above. we have not risen above them.

These people like to imagine themselves as fully formed, part of some metaphorical umbilical cord that stems from the ancestral oceans to their high towers. the evidence is there, evolution is there, they understand how we evolved from X to Y to Z and that is that. progress is forward, from sea to sky to interstellar space. progress is something to be chased, pursued, in terms of some end goal that is somehow definite yet utterly devoid of content. They drive at all directions at once, cracking whips on ideologically opposed horses, splaying themselves out in painful stretches. They stand in the desert and proclaim themselves kings, only to fall, be

bailed out, or whatever fate will eventually befall them. Becoming Ozymandias for no reason, not love, not fate, not anything good that they've worked for, not for their dog, not for some unexplained reason, not for anything other than the idea of something that they themselves can't quite grasp. And this goes the other way, too. Blind faith in yourself, inward-pulling, the dangers of nihilism, the dangers of fundamentalism, is that you can be pulled in certain directions without anything to mediate you. That's why conversations with other people are important. They take you outside of yourself, it's hard to think that the other person in a debate is just a mindless automata set to refute your every statement. No, even the people who have no faith in free will whatsoever only see their opponents (and themselves) as entirely deterministic in the moment in which they call things deterministic. Deep down, they know it is untenable, the thoughts of self-denial, post-nihilism, post-atheism, what is there left to deny? The self. And what better thing to replace it with than the thing which they claim to understand the most, the external.

And again, the opposite is equally dangerous, the denial of the outer world leads to childish hedonism, the forgoing of real responsibilities, of maintenance, preservation, just sitting in a forest expecting the world to form around you (world meaning the modern world with all of its trappings and comforts) without having to put anything akin to effort in. It's hard. Life is like that. This is the way things are.

If anything in this book contradicts with one another, it's because writing the book has been a place for me to put my thoughts down as I can best interpret them, and, as a result, seeing the written word on the page and looking back on my own opinions, evaluating them

accordingly. But it shouldn't be re-evaluated as a whole load of self-referential, layered-in bullshit which abuses footnotes, endnotes or the many-tiered quote system which looks like a corset is strangling the text,

pushing every single line and paragraph to its sensible limit. Everything feels a million years away, the past, the future, the start of this book, whenever I began using this long, comma heavy, listing-sentence-style, whenever I stopped defining my thoughts and trying to make long points about memory or childhood, or whatever.

Jump in to the main body of the text? That's what I did, earlier in this book - creating my own little brook of history without so much as an agent to publicise things. Not that I needed publicising, or that there was anyone willing to pick up my work. A lot of things had changed in my life just over a year ago. It felt like everything to me. I was just at university for a while, looking into my laptop screen, floating idly by.

This stage of my life is mostly made by recollection, as I'm not really living in the past. The past is always being cemented in weird bent chunks, cracked and broken to create a disparate haze of ideals. For example, bouncing up and down in my room with friends, listening to some music that I hadn't/wouldn't usually choose to listen to but still enjoying it nonetheless. A single memory of me doing that, but realising that there were probably many different contexts that could be elaborated upon with various snippets of videos. The carpet, - well, the sickly faded green was always going to show up. But what did it feel like underfoot when you were trundling around the lower floor, waltzing in and out of the kitchen, with its uncomfortably food-textured floor? It's hardly comparable to the remembered feeling of the other green

carpet that replaced it. I look down now[41] and see that new green carpet. What the hell is it with green carpet? There's a whole spectrum of other colours, and I always seem to end up with the surprisingly non-blemish-blending dark green that has slightly too much of an alien vibrancy to be specifically Vomit Coloured but too dull to be more than Forest Green. A sickly forest, one that man made. When would these realisations have taken place? I cannot pin it down to a single month, not without consulting and cross-referencing images and diaries. Seemingly important events, not definable to a single month. Every single new month is the longest month of my entire life, now, I think I've said that before but the time feels like it's fallen out of a plane, tumbling, teeming with opportunity.

When I said 'this stage of my life' I don't mean that there's an easily definable 'end-of-stage' that really separates the two. I feel that the markers that let me define my life into simple blocks are major events, but even the unflinching tide markers that make those events up are swept away by poor memory. I suppose what we all work towards is a supplanting of one's own existence. Through the action of technology, or the memory of photography and writing. We don't want to be formless blobs, hurtling through apedom with aplomb, it takes time to learn how to feel, and then, to express said feelings.

But where to start? To start by looking at the DSM-V and seeing what things match up with other things would be silly. To attempt to actually learn, through rote and rigour, would be impossible. Despite the attempts of the sociopathic, it is impossible to perfectly learn these

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[41] OR AT LEAST I WOULD DO IF I WERE SITTING AT MY USUAL DESK

things.[42] I'm not sure when the earliest time that I felt something was. I can't remember having emotions attached to my earliest, earliest memories, other than an oysterish sense of warmth and happiness. I suppose I'm lucky in that regard. I suppose so.

Hey, have you just landed here from page 120? Well, in that case... pretend you've read something important. I mean, maybe... maybe I could find you something more relevant if I flick through the pages a little bit, um, I mean, it's not exactly what you're looking for, perhaps you could head to page... there's no point in telling you where to go, or leading you on a wild goose chase. In fact, I would almost prefer it if you were able to skip out a lot of the middle part of this book, it's very rambly and I don't think people can put up with it for that long. I don't think people can put up with me saying that they can't put up with it for that long. Or people-

Hey, do you want to be let in on a little secret? A lot of this book is stitched together. It's from other things. It's a patchwork, not entirely original. I don't think I've written more than about three quarters of this, the rest is from past stories or essays that ended up getting binned because of their general aimlessness. And where better to put them than in a book that attempts to summarise this general, unidentifiable feeling of aimlessness? All of this is to provide a sprawling, terrifyingly-close-up snapshot of a young man ideological freefall. A partially-squashed bug, twitching and squirming but unable to perform the functions for which it was seemingly made. Sitting in my

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[42] I MEAN, THIS IS SORT OF WISHFUL THINKING, BUT I WOULD QUITE LIKE IT IF EMOTIONS WERE A SORT OF MARY'S ROOM KIND OF EXPERIENCE THAT ONLY HAVING THE EMOTIONS COULD REPLICATE.

bed, aimlessly, feeling this utter uselessness without apathy, guilt for an immobility, watching, tenderly stroking feelings but never being able to tamp the spiked fur down to a smooth damp field running across running across my overworked, overanalytic mind, running from and through the wheat fields, hiding from the government, hiding from an explanation for the uselessness, X, not doing the dishes, not going to classes, not seeing friends, not going out, Y, not washing, not doing things, Z, not filling in placeholders, not going back to check, running forwards in forward-tilted lurches, running to stop my face from smacking against the ground, I have to keep moving, I am like the bus in Speed, I am like a shark in the ocean, I am a glass cannon, useless, unable to fix my own boiler, unable to carve a turkey properly, unable to make a lot of meals, but I'm getting there, one day at a time, working, as soon as this image is developed, as soon as the polaroid is taken, I can sleep easy, I can sit and know that something is out there and perhaps someday someone will read or write something just like it, I find solace in knowing that there are other people, full of conversation and common ground, bike lanes, buses, bridges, connections, correlations, corralling, capitalism, the physical feeling of saying the letter 'c' and the humorous irony of the phonetic spelling of it seemingly not containing the letter 'c' and worrying about my linguistics essay that is due far too soon, and wondering whether or not I should just give up on this project for now, whether I should hunker down and start writing for something that I can actually do so that when I have the time to do something else I can do something else that might be a little harder, oh my lord, oh my god, I am sitting in a bed, I am me! For fuck's sake, I'm me, nothing in this world will mean anything,

in a hundred years no-one will care if you took the soup, no-one will know if that's a reference, you will die on every word that is to be said, you will live on in the phrases that you create, your sayings, your Veni Vidi Vici, the I Think Therefore I Am, the computer, the wheel, fire, water, earth, references yet again!

Condense yourself, Alex, condense yourself again, you are floating off into sleep, into not understanding what comes out of your fingers as you type, the music reminds you of something you once used to love, but don't get distracted by that now, don't find the internet again, don't scroll, don't like, don't share, don't post, don't comment, don't hit that bell or swipe that star, don't do anything other than the task at hand, which is to just spill without thinking, to say without realising, to wait without knowing, lying in bed, just thinking, just typing, your hands transfixed by the rate of the typing itself, your eyes unmoved by the blazing movement of your hands.

Not reshuffling the interesting album that was sent to you by someone on an interesting internet music forum because somehow, somewhere, you thought that reshuffling all of the songs on it would be a good idea, rather than just leaving them in the order that they were meant to be played, wasn't there that Tool album that was meant to be played like that? Wasn't there something else that was mean't to be... wait, mean't, that reminds me of a meme format that I remembered long ago, does it remind you of the memory or the meme itself, can you keep, (breathing in), I said, can you keep up, can you keep up! This is the fourth hour and I'm supposed to be teaching you how to reconcile the divide, you've come here on a long trek from page 120, all the way over here, nearly doubling the page number, look how few pages are left, look how few pages are left, is it alright if I leave all

my spelling mistakes in this book and just write [sic] afterwards, oh thank goodness, this isn't one of those fonts which has some kind of weird font for its square brackets. I am glad that I chose not to format this in some other way, I amglad (sic) that I chose this font, I am glad that I am glad, I am aware of my own feeling, the next time someone is rude to me, I will think, and instead of responding with my own pettiness or even thinking, "Oh, this person must be having a bad day" and acting in accordance with that statement, I will laugh with them, they are a soul, another human, the only way to respond to anything like that is without veneer, to strip away everything that there is for one shining moment and grab them by the collar or straps or literally whatever they are wearing[43] and say "Oh My God You're Such A Wonderful Person We Are Poor Souls In The Night" and before I can even get to the rest of my poignant soliloquy I am removed from the supermarket and told to pay for my damages to store property.

Does it really count towards some larger word count if I am just copying bits off of some old essay? What about if I- hah, we just got to 88,888 words.[44] Don't be afraid of dying, you don't have to talk to your mother or anything about therapy in order to fill out new sections for a book. You told her you were going to talk to her for some purpose external to the conversation itself. You can't interview the people you know and love for this kind of thing. Maybe you can. But they have influenced me.

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[43] It is unlikely anyone not wearing any clothes would be rude. Actually, come to think of it, usually, people not wearing clothes are either going to be very polite (nudists, hippies, etc.) or very rude (tweakers in the middle of a breakdown, someone you've just walked in on in the shower)

[44] I had already written and finalised Hour Eight by this point, this does not mean that the you have read 88,888 words

I often wonder how hard it would be to produce a work of fiction that is on par with something that is considered really good. But the only thing that makes fiction be considered really good is how it is considered by other people. If, for some reason, a load of people were really transfixed by the meditative and cathartic power of "Green Eggs And Ham" then it would go down as a transcendental work of fiction that inspired many to be how they are. I suppose children's books do influence the way we think much more than we'd like to admit sometimes. I think that the clichés of young adult fiction that I have been have caused me to consider anything that could even be considered a cliché to be somewhat trite. Science fiction of any sort just doesn't hit home for me any more, I don't think the future is like that, right? Why did the idea of science fiction die (in my head)? That is a question for another day. Why does it seem that the future in media is wrought with external conflicts, us vs. them, why doesn't the future ever consider a humanity so bereft of external problems that we only have one thing to face.[45] I dislike when our problems can be pinned on a flux capacitor malfunction rather than some hole in the heart. Those are problems that can be fixed. What does a degree matter if both the examiner and the students are still impotent and depressed?[46]

I am currently listening to *Dancing With Myself (Uptown Mix)* by Billy Joel, and I am mainly listening to it because it is on my list of songs that I make every

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[45] I SUPPOSE THE ONLY THING THAT I'VE SEEN THAT APPROACHES THE QUESTION LIKE THAT IS JON BOIS' *17776* SERIES, WHICH IS UTTERLY WORTH YOUR TIME, PLEASE, FOR THE LOVE OF WHATEVER, SEE IT.

[46] DON'T READ THIS AS AN EXCUSE FOR GETTING OUT OF WRITING ALL OF MY UNIVERSITY ESSAYS, NO, I WILL DO THEM IN TIME. WHEN I AM DONE WITH THIS HORRIBLE BOOK. HOPEFULLY YOU WILL DO SOMETHING WHEN YOU ARE DONE WITH THIS HORRIBLE BOOK, TOO.

month in order to keep track of what I've listened to and hopefully provide some sort of a treasure trove of cringeworthy songs for me to root through in the future. Although, I have been told that I will end up listening to the sort of music that I like now for the rest of my life, but I don't think that'll necessarily be the case with the ready availability of music and the fact that I am still discovering new things all of the time.

I am currently listening to this song because I think the lyrics are poignant, as well as the film it was originally attached to for me, *Flushed Away*. Originally, I saw it as a bit of an adventure film, a film about a rich rat who just wants to just get back home to comfort. But now, I don't think that home is all comfort any more, I wonder about the theme of loneliness within the film. What use is a lovely home to go back to if there's no-one there?

I am currently flicking through the Wikipedia article for Ric Flair. I am not doing any research on his character, nor do I particularly care about the world of professional wrestling, but I find the idea no-one seems to quite know how many championships he's won is quite interesting. Should I hyphenate 'no-one'? My headphones are fucked up, it's coming out of both sides with a sort of knocking creak and tinniness on the vocals. I've listened to this next song, *Calamity Song*, quite a few times. The Wikipedia page is still open. There are so many hyperlinks that I have not clicked on and cannot understand how to differentiate. American Wrestling Association. International Wrestling Enterprise. World Championship Wrestling (1974-1991). Jim Crockett Productions. NWA World Heavyweight Champion. All Japan Pro Wrestling. World Wrestling Federation. Super World of Sports. World Championship Wrestling

(1993-2001). WCW World Heavyweight Champion. New World Order. New Japan Pro-Wrestling. World Wrestling Entertainment. Ring of Honor. Hulkamania Tour. Total Nonstop Action Wrestling. When does it end? When is enough? When is enough fake belts, titles, series, people placated, fans met, things signed, sealed, chairs, cages, cells, referees, foam fingers, freedom from whatever the hell was chasing you in the first place, an adoption. What a guy. There are awards shows for things that you've never heard of. Best Heel. Best Pro Wrestling Book. Best Babyface. Worst Non-Wrestling Personality. Best Gimmick. Worst Gimmick. The Ding Dongs. Los Psycho Circus. What is all of this, there is a world beside me and I don't even know it.

I am so close to my goal. I am so close to finishing this book - not words for you, you've still got another hour of this (if you're reading out loud, of course) and I am now listening to *Mastershot*. Am I padding out the rest of the length of this book by making extended reference to wrestling? Am I making things too complicated? Well, if there was a time to stop making things too complicated, it was certainly before here, that's for sure. We're so close to breaking through 90,000 words, only a hundred and twenty more or so to go, only about a hundred now that I'm finishing this sentence, hey, isn't that a funny thing, when I finish this sentence, I get to finish the sentence of writing this book, I get to be free, I get to go and work on something else, I get to leave this damned thing alone, I get to escape the house, I can wander the desert free, I can get into the smoothness of go-karting again, I can write my university essays, I can do literally whatever I so desire, as long as I have the money/time/other requirements to do it. And here we go. Here we go. Go with it. Break through. Don't just sit there watching TV.

But if you do, understand why you do. Understand it all. This book is about that time where you're coming to understand it all, going from nothing to something. There is something in that. In becoming. In the long, slow path to becoming a human, not just some sort of mindless humanoid shape, a cutout, a looping, paranoid, non-talking wreck, a partygoing wastoid, an externally belligerent idiot, a fool, an unthinking robot with a big fat wallet and a lush astroturf garden with everything smelling of baby powder and the stickiness and slovenliness that comes with apathy. The river keeps flowing, but this is the part where you learn how to swim.
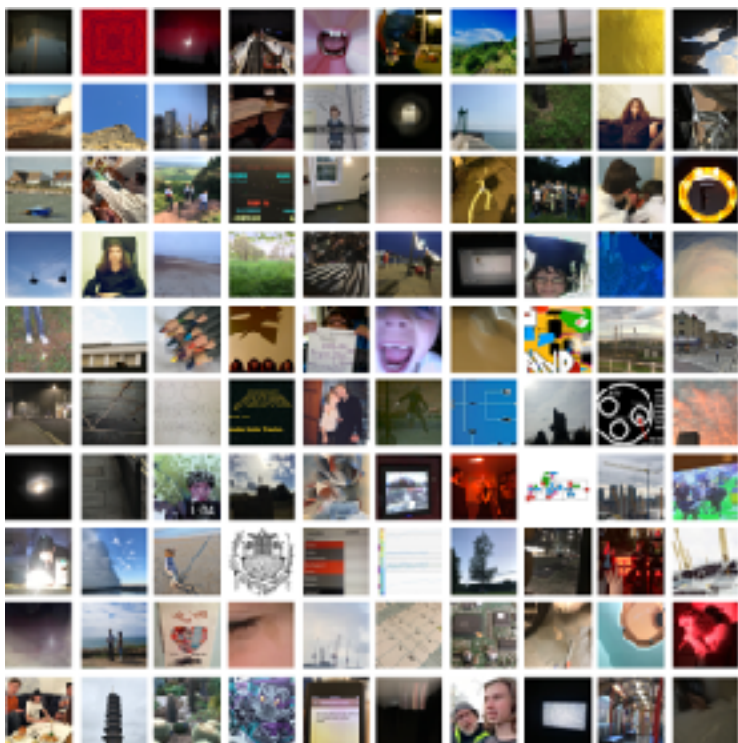
hour eight.
or, Wind, 101

I feel pretty much everything always. A lot of the time it doesn't even come from anywhere in particular. But I wake up and open my eyes and my blackout curtains make it so that it doesn't even feel like I've opened my eyes. But alas, I am tired. I went to sleep at some time two hours later than I thought was too late, but I feel that just because I could have had some sleep, I should be well rested. I am still tired as I think about being tired. I shouldn't be. But alas. Something says "no", sternly.

I drank ten things last night. By the tenth I don't remember what I was drinking. And because of that, I don't remember what I was drinking at the start, either.

Was there something that I was supposed to drink for? A birthday? No, the calendar is empty for the surrounding days. It would have had to have been a very belated birthday celebration for that to happen. Was it perhaps an anniversary? Of course not. I am young. But I am still tired, somehow. I have been told that I should be able to run on three, four hours sleep.

Sometimes the realisation comes to me that something that I was thinking about my entire life is just wrong. A whole outlook, an opinion, some physical object whose existence I took for granted is just bluntly defaced. Something which was the foundation for so many other things turns to some sort of biblical sand. Nothing repairable, the damage assessors say my belief is 'unfit for human tenement' and toss me out so I can crawl around trying to find another one somewhere. A recent storm ripped a hole in the side of the Millennium Dome, and it felt kind of horrible.

I wrote a song for a friend of mine and drunkenly stammered it over poorly-tuned guitar. He was standing outside while another friend filmed the entire thing. It lasted almost sixteen agonising (in retrospect) minutes. There was no jamming. There was no noodling, anything close to it, it was rehearsed but terrible, rigid, blunt, broken, pauses to fix equipment, not that I had very much equipment, though. The others were in my kitchen while I bared my soul. Despite all of this, the whole thing felt good. There was no shame in it. I had drunk at least eight things.

I'd understand if it was the kind of thing that broke all the time. But the tube breaks all the time. They closed off the overground sections and that felt fine, I understood why. I was thinking about the train falling over on my way to work this morning, like it would be pushed onto

its side by the winds. Imagine having that excuse for being late, the train being toppled sideways. I think about what I would do. I would be well-equipped to survive, I am next to a divider. I am cushioned by a bag. I am warm.

There's a lot of things I remember and don't think about too much. This specific feeling that deja vu creates where I think that I seen this before, but I can remember times that I remember seeing other things like this event before. And I wonder that if I remember where I was when I had that thought of deja vu, was that me looking into the future from the past? This is all too much. There's no future yet, the future converges like strands of a fourth-dimensional zipper, the potentiality of the unknown clamped together to form the present.

The foundations are gone. I have escaped the house as it collapses. I broke a window in a dream that I had. I'm not sure about a lot of things now. I used to be one of the most sure people I knew. I used to think of the idea of mental health and sort of take it for granted, right? Because there would be obvious outward signs of some kind of imbalance, in the form of schizophrenic delirium or bipolar destruction. No. Recurring dreams, thoughts, the experience isn't something that is visible. Everyone I see here contains unfathomably alien worlds.

It's still warm inside, just before closing time. I am working on something that's not urgent. 5pm is one of the slowest hours, I think. Worrying about the time, being aware of how much you want to leave. But this time it's not the same. Just before I leave to the cold world, and have to face the mess that the wind has created, I think how just a bit of debris over the pavement can make you realise how clean the world

usually is, despite what we do. The slabs themselves remain unbroken, though. The wind is not that strong.

It used to be simpler. To rip holes in the ideas of the stupid was easy. It felt right, it felt natural, to bow my head in second-hand embarrassment whenever someone thought that your life was determined by what star sign you were. That idea is stupid. Astrology is meaningless. But I now realise we can give it meaning - but only if it considered. Only if it is not dived into, headlong. The fact I used the word 'theories' instead of 'ideas' in the first edition of this paragraph might demonstrate how I felt, what my instinct is before thinking.

I said that I feel everything, well, I guess that's right. But only when I'm actually thinking about things. It's very easy for me to just exist for a few hours at a time, watching something good, or just something that I've seen before and can find comfort in. It's hard to actively think about things and think about those thoughts in and of themselves. A challenge that some people just choose not to undertake, they see it as pointless, time that could be spent doing. And yes, sometimes it is. But, as I have said before, there is a balance.

I don't understand people sometimes. Not in that sort of quirky "Everyone is like really hard to get!" statement, but in a disappointed way. I see many people who leave the house to go and have fun, to play around in hedonism but jump back in the next day. To see something out there, to have the idea of better, more rewarding things in the horizon and then having to come back to that house and drink to death is almost an insult. To spend your life limited by the decisions of others. Morality replaced by codification. Betterment replaced by metrics.

Sometimes it does feel like everything is on the brink, the hurricanes, the NHS, nuclear war, the threat of

bioweapons, the singularity, the stock market crash, maybe just a recession, a slippery, whirling pool of nothingness that swallows up everything that tries to be anything else. It's exhausting, orbiting. Circling the drain. Swimming against the tide in just the right way. It's good to know that we at least have the physical ability to swim. Sometimes I feel that people just accept this. But there's no event horizon, a chain-linked-hand can always flail downwards and catch a fallen human.

I had a friend tell me about how they sat doing nothing, and someone came up to them and told them they were attractive. Things do happen, they do genuinely begin. There's a sense of karma about all of these interactions. I should start commenting on people's jackets. Jackets are sometimes really cool. I mean, obviously not just jackets, some people have cool skirts or bags or hats that their friends made or things which look like they've had care put into them. Talk. Question. Communicate. Collaborate. Listen. People should talk to people so it's not just people asking for change.

There really was a sense of existential crisis when he told me that the Millennium Dome had gone. I saw the pictures, and there it was. It had been reported an hour ago. One of his friends has posted about it on some platform or another, and he showed me the post. The medium didn't matter. I looked it up on the news and tried to see some different angles of the dome itself. I wasn't even going to see a concert there. I made a sarcastic joke about some band not being able to play. He laughed a little bit.

I've come up with grandiose theories about how my life is structured beforehand. The Grand Unification Planner, everything being related to islands or eggs. I've tried to put it all down in various diaries, rated my days

on a scale from 0.0 to 10.0, or perhaps tried to restructure experiences into elaborate and exaggerated stories in order to make sense of them. Now, the crux of all of that is this book-essay-thing. It's the new melting pot, swirling together as one. That experience-paste I talked about earlier. The fact that I'm talking about what I talked about earlier.

It must be hard sometimes. I know this because it is hard sometimes. It is difficult to live a life that seems to be a precarious balancing act, not due to some outside factors like housing, but the internal balance. My overanalytic demeanour kills me sometimes, but makes other experiences. I love the fact that I have the ability to think about things to a level that makes me happy about the whole thing. It really can elevate a day, or more likely, a long night spent looking out of my window. I'm going to miss this place, wherever I am.

And to think I had made a whole essay on what a sandwich is. I think that is a good starting point for a lot of people to think about certain things, but like all introductions, it can lead people the wrong way. They might become - like I had the potential to - end up as an anal, category-hungry disaster. Putting boxes in more boxes. Not realising that they had boxed themselves in too. To spend entire lives walking between cramped rooms, never leaving, never thinking about what makes the things that they analyse in such detail. They lack foundations outright.

Explaining what philosophy is to people seems sad to an extent. It is sad that it has been confined to the creaking walls of academia and, ironically, those who hate the creaking walls of academia. People shouldn't be scared of it. But people who are overly religious get scared because of its rigour. Others get scared because

they see a lack of rigour. Yet more are scared by the unnameable things, the confrontation you have to make with yourself, working through all of yourself, *finding beauty in one's own destruction*. It's strange and challenging, but most people can face a challenge.

It's strange what air can do. I walk from work to the train station and I feel it all around me. I feel the air running off of the sides of the buildings, it is random, but once you pay attention to it, there seem to be these constants which provide some sort of rhythm, no matter how complex. I feel my face's numbness now I am on the tube. The gentle rush as air moves out of the back of the tube provides a constant strange thing to feel and think about. The pressure difference is minimal, but it's there.

A hundred observations is a lot of observations. But when they're all insignificant, then what can that add up to? A weird little dim life summarised by a hundred disparate strains of thought. Doesn't seem like there's much more than the sum of its parts. But there could be something there. Idea-bubbles set to burst on contact with new things. Refined and random thoughts. I think back to the last time I was here. The wind makes a noise that is audible like a thin static over the ch-chunk of the train wheels hitting a join in the tracks.

"Every open-minded search for consistency ends in negation, either for the consistency or the open-mindedness." This is why the sandwich project was doomed. I loved talking to people about what they thought about it, and trying to scrape some sense out of their responses. But it was probably just a Dunning-Kruger-peak attempt to look intelligent. Conversational gymnastics. Fun but useless. And perhaps, so is this, an attempt to look like I've considered myself in any way

that means anything to anyone else. Get out of your own head, was the advice given to me, in blunt terms.

What happens to the cover of the Millennium Dome then? Do we just buy or make another one? Would we just staple the already-existing bits back together? It seems like it wasn't made very well if it just fell apart under some winds. I mean, it's a storm, but it's no hurricane. I suppose the whole thing was built as a temporary structure, so perhaps I'm surprised it remained that long. But like a lot of temporary structures, eventually, when everyone has forgotten that it is temporary, it is taken down again. Things come and go. London burnt down once.

The calendar wasn't empty, it was full of things that I could have done, the birthdays of people that I could have associated with in the past. Is it easy to start again? Could I just walk away from the lot of them and just do something else? Is there a sunk cost? Of course there is. "Fuck off", dear economic models trying to arbitrate relationships. There's no 'sunk cost' to friendship. It shouldn't be something that you can measure in terms of loss and winning. Of course, you shouldn't let other people take advantage of you, but that's something different.

What happens when we run out of things to talk about? Then what? Then we have to go outside, get partners, walk out into the setting sun and never have any time to think? No! There's a balance - I will hammer this in to you - between the two, between having experiences and thinking about those experiences. Imagine a life unexamined. It would be such a waste. We walk out of the house and into the desert and do both at the same time until the whole thinking/doing thing

becomes natural. Until life becomes some kind of flow, a second nature.

Hell on earth is real. And I say that in the nicest way possible. But for those who have suffered in the way I have and seen no alternative other than to throw themselves into work or hedonistic traps are truly, utterly doomed. Yet, for most of them, there was no other option. "The only option to feeling bad, is doing what makes you feel good", they say. This kind of life is possible if you see yourself as something that's just neurones for pleasure and pain. Or as a robot with a wallet, something that merely exists to perpetuate externalities.

My headphones die when my phone dies. There's some kind of metaphor in there, somewhere, but I'm too lazy to find it. I think I'm too lazy to find the metaphor in me being too lazy, too. I think there's probably a metaphor in all of this, too. I think there's a metaphor in thinking that all of this is a metaphor, too. I think I was lazy for not bothering to charge my phone. I wanted to listen to some music, as it's a thing I enjoy doing a lot - see, right there, that's not overthinking it. That's just *it*.

It seems strange that after all this time, I still don't know what's going on. Even with things that happened in the past, I still don't know what I was thinking. Even with the most intricate writings of my old diaries, I still can't understand what was going through my head. It just seems like something I have to academically appreciate, like a dialect on the Rosetta Stone. But I'm getting closer to seeing myself as a whole, it's like time is coiling round, as I accelerate faster through new experiences, every new month feeling like the majority of my life.

They used to mean nothing. The ideas behind me were just arguments for suing on other people, they had no inherent value. Teach me more about evolution, I know it's real, but what does it mean? And now it means something. A serious, considered link to the past. Not just a disparate strand. Thought put into practice. Thinking under every typed and numbered statistic 'but what does this mean for me?', 'how can I apply this to a genuinely lived life?' There's no one answer. Metrics are representations and should be treated as such. Our systems are meta-representations of reality.

There's quite a lot going on in the world right now. Sometimes, it feels like a background drop of noise amongst thing things that I truly think matter. But sometimes the din rises to the front, worrying me with the tabloid and the broadsheet headlines both saying the same things. The worry. The oncoming despair. The unpredictability. The not knowing anything meaningful. The fact that meaning doesn't feel approachable. But I sometimes look back on my past few years of existing and realise how far I've come. I am no longer the person I was back then. I have changed incomprehensibly.

I wish my headphones were playing music. Not necessarily to drown out the noise of the tube around me, no, I'm very much accustomed to that by this point - oh, no, the music that they play is more than the mere sounds they make. They change my mood. My every sense is heightened yet lowered to things that don't matter. I had an epiphany listening to *Below The Salt* earlier today. I think about some other song - can't quite place the tune now, though. Something brooding or haunting. A plodding drumbeat. Perhaps sinister - but not like a ghost - an inner sinisterness.

The past has a distinct feel to it. Certain pieces of music, or things that I watched, have a real feel to them. Even two years ago has a distinct feeling. It's very strange to think of that as something that could happen is such a short period of time. Especially when things really didn't change all that much. Well, sometimes, people say they didn't change much - news stories aside. Time curls, rooms feel small, crushing, the walls and ceilings are inhabited by nothing except the past. But you're still here. In limbo. In the bed you've spent the longest in.

Even as I look at my phone, a dead mirror, distracted by something or other, I feel that there's a change. Nothing, and I mean nothing, feels quite as real as looking at things in the real world and understanding them. Or at least beginning to understand them. And, I hope it's not just in a way that explains how they work. In a way that explains how they matter. But any explanation binds, and must be torn free at some point. Any explanation is unsatisfactory. We will overturn our theory of everything - once we find it, we are destined to.

A lot of the time, I feel detached from my past. Every time I think about playing with Brio in a front room, playing down wooden tracks over the worn-down green carpet, I wonder whether that really was me or not. I wonder whether that's me now. I feel like I've just stolen the body of the child who laid those tracks. But at the same time, it feels like those memories come from a different place altogether. It feels like I'm stealing someone else's childhood. I am other to all, even myself, disconnected from most things at most times.

I saw an advert for Planet Earth II with an orchestra, live at the Millennium Dome. I saw it and thought 'well, that's that', remembering the slightly overblown headlines about the Dome being out of service for

months. I mean, how long, truthfully, can it take to spread a bit of canvas over some pre-existing structures? I am not sure. It could take a while. Sometimes, even these little wounds take a long time to heal. But walking around wounded is sometimes the best thing you can do. I am covered in glass shards and walking out of a building.

In the past, roles have been set in stone for me. An understanding of myself as the person who created the games that other people played is not enough to understand the relationship. I made these things because I wanted... well, what? Control? Power? For other people to have a good time? Perhaps both. The joy of creation, the joy of seeing people enjoy a thing for itself, not for external gain. Creation as some kind of self-betterment. I feel like I have retreated into myself in this manner. I write cryptically, aware of my own references without external worries.

I've been told that once, at a funeral, as a six-year-old, I commandeered a group of people into sitting on the floor and holding coasters as Oyster cards, pretending to ride the bus. And they say my name didn't ever mean anything. Alexander, leader of men. Nominative determinism hurts sometimes. But sometimes it's just seeing patterns in humour. Perhaps they were just drunk, they were half-heartedly going with it for the sake of someone younger than them. Perhaps in the same vein as the "there is more" conversation. Someone merely agreeing in order to end the discussion early.

Recently, I was looking into the mirror at a friend's house, and they commented that I had a birthmark on my face. And they said it in such a way, that it seemed to me as if they were relieved they could still see it. I don't remember thinking about it in the slightest in the last

few years. Not even an drug-or-sleep-deprivation-fuelled over-inspection of my own being made me see this. I will admit, it is very hard to spot amongst the spots and blemishes now. As I write this, I am reminded of it.

It's weird that we have things that can predict solar eclipses, hundreds of years into the future, but the weather remains elusive, unpredictable. And we know how pressure fronts form, how it all works *as such*, but we still can't predict it on a small level. Our simulations are terrible now. I don't think it'll ever be able to be controlled without a huge amount of monitoring. We'll just have to learn to live with the general idea of wind that blows more sometimes, and less at other times. Clear at the scale of a town, unpredictable at any smaller scale.

When I was young, I wanted to go into something to do with the sciences. This was because I performed well in my science subjects. Well, how the mighty have fallen. I pursued that line all the way though to A-Level. And, I remember the ways in which I loved the planets. But looking back, it's a much more symbolic love than any parent or teacher can appreciate. Every five year old loves dinosaurs, yet we're running low on palaeontologists. It's not about the love, it's the reason behind the love. Passion that cannot be replaced with another idle interest.

There was a time where I was regarded as someone smart. The reinforcement of 'clever clogs' got to my head. The promise of going far with something or other must have got to me - that is why I pursue a life that resembles the arts much more than the sciences. But at the same time, I recognise the importance of science. But some people see the importance of those developments and conflate them with capitalist, consumerist, neoliberal "innovation". There is no such thing as a capitalist

innovation, capitalism thrives on innovations from *humans*. The robots with wallets can't make anything new.

Statistics have always been an ever-present figure in my life. All the way from racing-game tallies in old video games, right through to the borderline obsessive fixation I have with word counts and quantity. A chart that shows how much I have written over the course of a few years. Wouldn't it be lovely to make something that was concise and clear? An album of one, utterly perfect, transfixing melody, one beautifully perfect line of poetry. Something refined and without bloat. I think, sometimes, this book could be condensed down to about a page or so of minute text.

How does one rebel against punk parents? It's not something I've had to confront directly, but what does happen? Do you rebel harder? Do you rebel by not rebelling? Do you do what no other rebel would do and... be exactly like them? What is there to rebel against any more? "*Nothing runs better on MTV than a protest against MTV.*" I feel like we're in a cultural deadlock sometimes, the only way to get out is to physically get out - even that's hard. But if we're all rebels, who really rebels? I rebel against this passage, I'm talking shit now.

Epiphanies, on the scale of a true 'eureka' moment, seem to be happening far too often for them to maintain the 'few and far-between-ness' that special moments are supposed to have. Can every moment be as special as every other? I don't think so. It's always hard to pick favourites with these sorts of things. But it's always interesting to be aware of a moment as it happens. Like when you think about being aware and it changes your awareness. It doesn't crush it or replace it, it just raises it. It can feel disorienting or dizzying at times.

Imagine the amount of things I've missed out on being. The subcultures I've had brushes with, far in the corners of the internet where everyone just wants to be understood as something. All the way from Nazi roleplaying to fetishistic behaviour, people flock to categories and labels because it's hard otherwise. They get into things because living without these things is unbearable a lot of the time. Existing without labels is exhausting to some. It is nice to tune in to something that's not you, to get into fine wines, or watching livestreams. But never assimilate, never lose sight of yourself.

Sometimes I have a realisation that the people who get famous are still people. They're still humans, they still have to grapple with the things that they make. It seems silly to only have this as a 'brief realisation', but when do we ever want to take our favourite statues off their pedestals? It hurts to do that. We mythologise when we see others as something other than human. But they don't even have to be celebrities, they can be lovers, friends, family - it is lovely to idolise, but idolatry was looked down upon for a reasonable reason - nothing is perfect.

I feel like my life is the past few weeks, maybe even days, with a load of memories attached. I wonder what it's like to spend an entire life's worth of experience like I feel now. It only feels like the last few years have really come into their own for me. But I'm sure, somewhere down the line, these years might seem like a receding dot in the rear view mirror of life. And that's a metaphor I know will make my parents laugh. Anything, "of life". Something that draws unexpected things together. A new expression for a familiar experience.

Music has not always been a part of my life in the traditional sense. But I feel that even before I started listening to 'real music', music was just as of an important part of my life than after it. Sure, today, I know a thousand bands I didn't know beforehand, but the true engagement with something I loved went beyond the fact I thought some people on the internet thought it was good. A yet-untainted interest back then. "Warm wet dirt" went the chant. Songs about North Korea muttered with the drone of a warm machine in the background.

"This is a video to the people who are the cushioning in the chair of life." An accurate yet belittling take from me, many years ago. The metaphor lives on in conversation, but the actual context has been lost. Mere cushioning? People reduced to comfortable things? I suppose people do give comfort. But if that's all they give, then buy a new blanket instead. I suppose you could say this is a book for just individuals, so that they can become the cushioning for other people. So that everyone can support each other as humans, not as empty personas, words, structures.

Tell me! Tell me when I talk shit, please, tell me when I'm awful, or even when I'm good, but have a distinction between the two. It's horrible not being able to fully understand other people, so why make it harder by just trying to be nice? You hurt my feelings much more by not saying anything at all than by saying something negative. Tell me when I've gone on for too long. Tell me when I spiral inwards, when I curl up into an incomprehensible crying mess, when I need to listen for one god-damn minute. Tell me, please.

Things seem small sometimes. Rooms, buildings, people who once felt like they had a broad-scope

worldliness to their characters are actually just as entangled and unsure as most of the rest of us. Things that are good are not always immediately apparent. Sometimes, research into technology is appealing to the child inside us, but not the inquisitive child, the egoistic child, the one that wants toys, experiences, unaware of the vast inner worlds, choosing to explore the external world as some strange substitute. Some people who seemed adult have just rephrased their desire to go fast in strange new vehicles.

Back on the tube, I wonder what would happen if I were to walk between the two carriages. I have always wanted to do that. There's just a certain thing about it. Sure, only the down-and-out and the insane seem to do it, but what's the big deal? It's stepping over a small gap. And there are lots of small gaps I've stepped over before. There's bigger ones, too. But I can't lose my seat, lest I need to sit down again for some reason, shakiness, unsteadiness, I hope I am alright at some point. When I get off.

Once, there was a man who came onto our tube carriage and started talking about how we, us seven billion people, all had to act as one. He spoke with the kind of fervour I can only imagine raising around people that I truly know. I remember being mildly scared at someone who would raise their voice on the tube, let alone for something as deeply unquantifiable and wishy-washy as 'harmony'. Yet I still remember this man. His message spoke loud and clear. Passion, and brevity. The businessmen needed to hear this. What I wouldn't do to find him today!

I am nervous that I have wasted my life, either on watching things, writing about things, going to certain things when I could have been at others, declining to go

to things, passing up bad things which would have eventually led to good things, thinking about the wrong things, talking about meaningless nothings, debating, arguing, spending days paralysed with disdain, depressive thoughts, manic expressions, thinking about loves lost and things left unsaid, music I could have been listening to, things I could have found but sit unseen just round cusping corners, all types of life that I have not seen yet.

I look through an old video uploading account of mine. The 'Videos' tab is now labelled 'Content'. Just how I feel when I watch it. Not inspired or intrigued, just content. Finding comfort in things is okay, but all comfortable things wear out. The teddy wears down to threads, the pillow stops being comfortably cold. But they can only coddle for so long before reality sets in - and not the 'get a job in an office' sense of reality, a bigger reality, one that affects us all. Thinking that 'reality' is for getting jobs towards, for settling down into, is psychotic.

A friend told me that he thought I was the sort of person to really have to know a person before I went out with them romantically. He tried to find a word for it, something attached to some sexuality or something. You could see him really racking his brains. But for what? For another box? For peace of mind? He was breaking it down into metrics, straining himself to find some sort of category, and he came to a conclusion and I did not concur, he got sort of annoyed, "you're supposed to be able to fit in these ideas!"

A thing that I wrote to myself a while ago said, "find someone you love and fucking well tell them, how bad could it go?" or something like that. The thing is, it takes courage to do that, one that I have only been able to find about eight drinks in. But dutch courage is no courage at

all. The unacknowledged side note reads: "edit: did that, worked for a while until it didn't. repeat?" And the consequence of that note, we shall see how it goes. The "repeat?" is interesting to me. I can choose to repeat if I wish.

I see an advert for some 'smart' tech and am reminded of the whole 'smarty pants' thing again. Fear of intelligence is justified, intelligence leads people to both brilliant and horrid places. Proper application of that knowledge is never bullied. No one calls a sage something horrible and gets away with it. Not through a retributive sense, but through a fading sense of self-worth. Insulting wisdom gets you nowhere, petty belittling is reflected back to its abuser. You must forgive yourself, the sage has forgiven you already. The burden is on you. To become wise rather than a 'clever clogs'.

Reading through my diary and looking through my photos, flicking through previous recordings of experiences, there are some moments that make me wonder how anything else happened. How anything else was allowed to happen after that? How did a decision get made to stop doing whatever was going on? How does anything happen at all? Why doesn't the brain just choose to disregard the flow of time, to be trapped in a moment? If time's just something that's created by an observer, then why does it not bend and break like the other senses? The forward flow of time feels immutable.

I often wonder what would happen if I were to relive my days with the knowledge of what was going to happen. I think they'd be better. I'd like to think that I'd take every opportunity. But I didn't. I was terrified into being 'the clever clogs' or 'the meme man' and still have trouble shaking off those titles with some people to this day. But the worst thing with any moniker is that it

always holds some sort of deeper truth. A truth behind something that the persona represents at a surface level. But all changes, everything dissolves with time.

I hope you're alright. I don't know what you're up to, right this second, but I've found out snippets from your parents and our friends. They say you're doing just fine, maybe a little distant, but you've been busy, too. We should meet up sometime, I say in a text that remains received but unread. Eventually, I call, a few words are exchanged, and not much comes of it. It's hard to be friends with everyone. It feels like missing out otherwise. But other times, you have to let go. The wind will guide you back together, somehow, sometime, in time.

I had a friend who I shared an album with recently. We both love it. We listened to it in the car the other day and sang the entire thing near-perfectly. Ear-destroyingly loud karaoke. It just worked. And that's really all we can hope for. To share things with other people and have a part of ourselves carry over to them alongside that thing. A shared love of a show. A hand-made oil painting of the back garden. An interpretation of cloud shapes. A flag with nice things written on it. An iridescent lighter. A discussion about spirituality.

I read things for university. They're interesting. But I feel a lot of the interest is sucked out by the fact that I have to do it. I feel that so much onus is put on people to 'get an education' that they miss out on the important part of education. Of self-improvement, rather than attaining externalities. It is so very easy to sit back and be spoon-fed ideas and not process them properly. Things aren't there to be watched, they're there to be lived! The author lives on within the text, represented by the words they put down!

To dismiss the folders of yore would be sacrilege! I say that not because of a sentimental attachment to the drawings, their childishness, of perhaps even some idea that 'I spent a lot of time doing them'. To be honest, I have no idea how long I spent doing those things. Egg Smasher? I could probably make something like those maps in a day's worth of work now. But that does not render them meaningless. It just means I should make more things. I should create, but also do, but also think about doing, and do after thinking, and not overthink.

I remember thinking one day, "Wow, I've made a lot of things." And then coming to a realisation, "Wow, other people have also probably made a lot of things!" And as much as that idea works, a lot of people don't make things that reflect themselves. They're happy with, no, enamoured with the idea that they can make things and have them move off in another direction while they continue on in theirs. Sometimes, that can work. But sometimes, self-reflection is necessary. You must stop sometimes, a life spent doing is no life at all. A primate's life. Amoeba-happenings.

The tube station is full of people going places, it's nearly 7pm, but I can see people walking everywhere, seeing people that I will never know. Some part of me wants to just not walk home and join some other group, begin a new life somewhere else. It's an urge, I could go over and talk to those people over there, they look like they're having a good time, they probably don't want someone extra right now, but I know that if someone came up to me and asked me "What are you doing tonight?" I'd lose my mind with joy.

Everything gets you to think about where it comes from. Never stop looking. Because when you stop looking, you become complacent. There is no end to this

journey. There will always be another thing to do, another meeting place when you've decided to call it quits for the night. Nothing ends. There is nothing clear cut, nothing exact, it all builds on such utterly behemoth yet muddied foundations that it's quite hard to see what's going on at the best of times. All I can hope for anyone in this world to do is think. Not too little, not too much.

I'm not sure how long I've been like this. Everything I read, watch, absorb, is filled with so much power and potential, it seems like I can never find any reason to disagree with anything anyone says without there being any kind of nuance. I am physically unable to see black and white. It is paralysing, crippling when it comes to debate. Talking to someone about grass is a lot easier when you have an unspoken agreement on what grass is. Getting into things means picking a point and sticking with it. Black, or white. But it is never that simple.

We stood on your fire escape, looking up from the bowels of hell, watching staircases sprawl over development over development, repeating doorways next to sharp, restrictive angles, the rain running down through the gaps in the metal steps. All we could think is that it was a bit cool. So we did. And sometimes, that's all you can do, is admire the majesty of a moment without having to immediately feel the compulsion to put it into words. It was cool, alright? It felt very nice. It felt like something out of *Blade Runner*. All that in our old-looking city.

How did you go right back to a game of Galaga after hearing about your parents divorce? The same way I didn't feel sad when my grandparents died. We'd come to terms with the loss years before it happened. Because a lot of people don't just die suddenly. They lose what it is to be them. I know some people my age who have long

since died. They've abandoned everything that made them who they were and didn't replace them with a set of beliefs that could form the foundation of a good life. No, instead, they got into meaningless things.

I walked back along the road from the station to my house, and there were bits of leaves and branches strewn across the pavement. I had originally wanted to put that down to the untidiness of where I worked, but no. The scattering mess had gotten everywhere, bins toppled, plastic fragments floating idly on by. And from what? The movements of pressures of air? Well... yes. Of course, of course, that's how the wind works, but we can't monitor it all, we can't keep track of it, we often just have to live with the wreckage and fix what it broke.

"*I don't wanna, but know that I'm gonna / Feel all these feelings, so many many feelings / Time for substance, I really need some substance / No, I don't wanna, but know that I'm gonna rot / Rot on highways, like teenagers with nightmares / Almost finished, I swear I'm almost finished.*" It's a lot a lot of the time. It's too much to bear. But we have to bear the weight of being human, feelings, thoughts, thoughts about thoughts, not just merely psychically existing, any vertebrate can do that. We have to do what sets us apart from others. We have to communicate *passionately*.

There are so many people that spin through my head occasionally. With the advances in communications technology, I should be able to go out right now and speak to all of them, I can grab my phone and call every single last one and talk to them at length, if we so desire, if the time calls for it. I once wondered how my dad could sometimes drop, "Oh, I haven't spoken to him in years" into a conversation, but it makes sense now. Not out of a deliberate reclusiveness or evasiveness, but just out of

eventually diverging currents of wind.

And the world turns in our greatest moments. The world does not care, but we should find solace in that. If the world cared, then there might be a lot less meaning to the things you do. What would a good deed be in a world where good deeds are forced? The freedom to be a horrible person is what keeps good a serious concept. Everyone is free to do bad things, and there are laws to stop them from doing as such, but there is only one law that will truly make someone stop - the law of their own unconsciousness.

The wind blew into my face again, but this time it doesn't feel like it's going to make me cold. There's a barrier created by the warmth of the tube that will last me at least until I get back inside. I wonder what's for dinner? I wonder if I'll drink ten things again tonight. Probably not today. Seems like a bad idea to do it twice in a row. Seems like a bad idea to do it alone. But tonight doesn't feel like the night for being with people. I'm here, writing this. Should I say that I'm writing this?

I had a talk with a couple of friends the other night about the nature of consciousness. He said it was just some chemistry. I didn't just see him speaking, I saw him reducing himself, his own lived experience of the world, to just another thing that he was trying to explain with his ideas. I saw him how I was a while back. "Experience gives no data." he says. A man, with a functioning brain, looks at himself in the mirror, and says, "I do not know whether I exist". That's the only thing you *can* know, for God's sake!

When I was young, I remember telling my parents about words like 'tessellation' (which, in my defence, is a very cool word) and having them be interested in them because of their ability to describe something they saw in

the world. The tiles of our kitchen floor tessellated. So do pavement slabs. I'd like to be able to describe something else that they see with a word like that. Something subtle, internal, some far mood that tingles nerves with anticipation. I'd like to be able to describe that for myself, first of all. Fit your own mask, and all that jazz.

You showed me those developed pictures. How pretentious, I had thought, how hipsterish, until I held them in my hands and, well, they existed. We'd each taken a picture of the other, drunk, sitting on our chairs that we always sat in. They were both blurry, sort of in the same way. But it cemented that perspective. Having drunk ten things, looking from a camera to another, just thinking, this is as close as it gets to closeness. They're good pictures, they show warmth, a fuzziness, a depth of focus. It was pretentious for them to charge £25 for developing them.

I walked across a crossing, perpendicular to a couple coming the other way. I walked in front of them, and they had to slow down somewhat in order to not crash right in to me. I wanted to apologise. But then I would have had to remove the headphones, and then all the time saved by walking in front of them would disappear. So I remained silent. But this is my apology. This is my apology to everyone I haven't had time to apologise to, all the crushed toes and elbowed torsos on the tube, all the minor misdemeanours of conversation.

Sometimes, while standing, thinking 'I should throw myself into something', I think of all the people who have done these things without poring over whether or not they should do it. They don't need to convince themselves into having a good time, they just have them outright. And I feel just utterly stupid as a result. I've felt like this beforehand, a feeling of having to convince myself

through these grand, elaborate methods just to make me say "yes" to the occasional night out. I mean, it's a good thing to be able to do, but the effort seems redundant sometimes.

When I took acid for the first time (yes, I know, everything seems to revolve around that) I remember feeling just so utterly silly. Just a proper idiot. I was being told to go out and live. I didn't need to be convinced to live, right? I felt something look at me and say, "Well, yeah, dummy." That's the feeling I'm alluding to. The sort of sage-like, "well, I mean, we're here to make meaning, so might as well go out and do things rather than just sit around thinking about it." Not overbearing, not authoritative, just balanced and rational.

Talking to someone who has taken no steps whatsoever is hard. But what is harder is someone who has taken a step and refuses to take any more is harder. Because they think they have done all the thinking they need to do for a lifetime, and stand, foot extended, uncomfortable, their pathway still untrodden. To be 'rational' to some people is to stick with that first solid step. Rationality has never been about making a point and sticking to it for borderline dogmatic reasons. It's about the walking, not the steps involved. It's the movement, the reason behind the motion.

I have no interest in you as a physical being. I think that me saying anything towards you in that vein is inspired by a sense of "Person I Could Spend My Entire Life With" and that, for me, is very rare. I don't feel that I've ever really felt it before. All of the things, all of the hints, all of the things that I've subliminally put into everything I've ever worked on, just shows some strange sort of admiration. I think I love you. Again, I don't know why! But I know what I feel. The wind picks up.

Once I was sitting around a campfire and people were telling stories of themselves through the medium of the Myers-Briggs Personality Test. Not having internet access, they attempted to analyse me by themselves. And they said I was an extrovert. But that couldn't be right? That would mean my experience was wrong. It turns out I was wrong - I interpreted myself wrong. What I perceived myself to be was wrong to other people. Perhaps it was a relative thing, in some circles, I'd be seen as one end of a spectrum, and vice versa. But my self-image changed vastly.

I've been thinking of things a lot lately. It's honestly been akin to some sort of affliction. Overthinking. Twirling around in abstractness, getting lost in commas and quotation marks. Thoughts of thoughts, songs of songs, spirals, is there anything in the middle, at the heart of humanity that we can chip away to? No! Humanity is the block, we can stoically preserve, we can blast away with progress, but it leads us to the same thing. Put down your chisel. There's no human waiting in the marble. You are the human. There is no analogy for you. Your tools aren't you.

A hundred thoughts have not been finished yet. And I feel like I've over-reached. Over-shared. I don't feel comfortable, but the wind has blown and can't be unblown. Even if it returns it still has the perturbations of you all over it. Everything affects everything else. Some part of me connects this statement with how I used to like butterflies. Butterflies, butterfly effect, causal chains, connections, wind, everything blending together until the paste is smeared everywhere within the thin, cramped walls of my life. A hundred and one thoughts is a hundred too many. My only advice is "Think".

Well, actually, I do know. I've realised the term I am looking for is awe, not love. Of witnessing something like an exploding star, something I will not cause, nor feel the effects of, but I can see it happen all the same in its grand scale. I can bear witness to something that is entirely outside of me, something completely different to what I feel yet somehow the same. A vast celestial body watching another. All of what I said is true. I was just bad at applying the word "love". I've been terrible with that word before. Amazement, fascination.

A friend told me that him and his ex-girlfriend had had 'different ambitions'. She wanted to be an educational psychologist in her home town, and his wishes were to become a big-city banker. Later down the line, he would use all the money he made to finance a career in politics. But both of them had ambition. Both of them were human. Of course ambition is irreconcilable! Parallel lines never touch, and converging lines always diverge. They separated. He once told me he'd work for Blackrock if the money was right. Safe to say, we disagreed a little bit.

I am a small man. I am a silly little person trying to give life advice to people who are much more worldly and wordy than I am. My writing is simple (in its content) yet complex (in its structure) which is precisely the opposite of what good writing should do. Should I try to put this all across in some less painfully blunt terms, to make elaborate stories about meaning and use the term 'doubling' instead of meta-thought because it sounds less clunky. Laconic yet sprawling. Hey, laconic sounds fancy. Perhaps I should just become more verbose. Probably not.

I talked with a friend once about these sort of things. I wondered if they'd understand, and they did. Assuredly,

they did. More painfully than me. They understood with every bone in their body and it felt horrible to feel this way, to be able to feel what I was feeling and then be able to put that into words. I imagined not having that ability, and I failed to. I could not ignore anything, now that I had understood anything. To feel is human, to express it is much, much more. I would have used divine, but it wasn't right.

You had to learn how to talk and walk. you had to learn how to do so many of the things that make you stand here. You've come so ridiculously far that you can't even begin to remember it. But you can always go further on. Don't let yourself die in some state you never wanted to get to. Don't die with things unresolved, regrets had, things not done, that's what they meant by hell, everyone, realising that you won't get another chance in this mortal realm to do right by yourself. Hell is a corruption of the idea of regret.

The conversation we once had was interspersed with interruptions by trains, mopeds, passers-by and police cars. They provided stops for things getting too heavy, like when you told me there was a pain in your arms and your legs that burned as you sat in your kitchen, late at night. The moon comes in through the window then just like it provides some of our light now. Most of the light is artificial now, we seem like people who use the light to avoid being stabbed. Do we look suspicious enough ourselves, with our long coats and shag-haircuts? No.

Wind is a strong thing. It blows over houses, ruins livelihoods, topples skyscrapers, rips holes in things. But even when it's not blowing a gale, it's still there. It's still ever present. The act of walking exposes you to it. You replace the space the air used to take up. You bump into it. Even a small, ill-timed gust of wind can ruin a day. In

the wrong place, at the wrong time, a spillage, some documents flow out onto the puddle dotted pavement and tumble across the road. There's no retrieving them now. Did you remember to make copies?

Actually, yes, I do mean 'divine'. Things are divine, things that aren't us are divine. They're the only things that are divine. We can't be divine, we're human, we're ugly, messy, fleshy, all sorts of imperfect all of the time. Awareness and thought are good ways to try and overcome that. To not become an impotent sofa-blob or a suited power-hungry wolf. This modern hunger serves the mouth, but not the stomach. You can accumulate all you want, but you might never know of the idyllic farmyard lawn you want because you destroyed the land to pay for it.

Eleven? Eleven PM? Alright, okay, cool. And how long does it, you know, last? Eight hours? Fucking hell mate, seriously? Well, that's gonna- that's a whole night. So what do you want to do? I suppose we can't really stay in the house for too long. Yeah, I suppose. Well, um, that's a great idea though. And the... 280? I'm assuming that's micro not milli, right? Because of how? Yeah, okay... in joke? What's that, uh, okay, well, fine, if it doesn't matter I won't question you any more about it. Uh... well, I can't wait. It's gonna be great. Fantastic.

Wind is all around us, all the time. Sometimes, when it doesn't blow, it's easy to ignore. But even the stillest winds are winds. We can't always see its effects. Sometimes, it feels like we have to run with the wind in order to stay still. But it changes so often, it darts round a building's corners, it loops upwards in pressure fronts, it would be an impossible task to try and keep up with it. And to think you can do it, to try too hard is to throw

yourself into walls and corners, whipping yourself up into a frenzy.

So that's it? To fulfil a task of being a 'witness'? And I suppose that's what a lot of the things that people do boil down to. It might feel good to meditate on meditation, but without a grounding in the physical world, what does that thought mean? Spiralling off into high ideas has to return back down at some point. I think therefore I am, but you need to be in order to think. A witness to the deeper parts of being human is what we should all aspire to be. Anything less is just augmentation of basic survival rituals.

That burning sensation, you keep alluding to it as if it's something coming from within you. It's not external. There's no externality to it, no reason to feel like this other than feeling itself. And then you tell me that's an alien concept. To feel for itself, rather than for some goal like beating others. Breaking yourself down, building yourself back up again. It's a continuous process, a cycle that cannot be left to stagnate. Old age threatens us, I guess, the calcification of whatever you think your best self is. I don't want to be like that. Old but unwise.

I've known you for some years, now, and I suppose you haven't changed a lot in that time. All of the things that make you you are the same. And there's no way for me to approach you on any sort of level. You do your thing, I do mine. It's nothing much. There are other people out there. People aren't straight lines, anyway. They can move and bend and work themselves up into tight knots and go on tangents and get tangled up and converge, diverge, move, collide, and intertwine. Like crazy red twine linking photos on a cork board.

I was terrified of the people around me being nothing but flesh puppets. Automata that I could never fully

realise meaning with. But the thing is, even if they're real, you can still never fully understand them, either. So, it doesn't matter. Marionette or not, you mean something to me. I can listen, I can trust. As long as I'm not overthinking things, I can get into other people. To not overanalyse gives us the opportunity to actually forge connections. The thinking comes later. This is why childhood, a time for doing and not thinking, is so important for many people.

To live your life running with the wind is, as I've said, impossible, but to live it in spite of the wind is impossible too. Trying to ignore it would just make things unexplainable. You'd see a plastic bag roll and tumble across a busy high street and not understand why. But you would understand why. You'd just be pretending not to. Ignoring what is obvious. It's not a denial to walk in the wind without following it, the wind is not all there is. You can remain still or move freely. The important thing is your awareness of that choice.

I rode my bike to work today. In the wind, I felt my hair move, I felt the warm and cold currents swirling, I felt the mild light of the sun, darting in and out of striped contours of shadows lying across the road. It was all around me, I realised, I knew, I was aware. A range of emotions reminded me that the wind is present the whole time. It is to be found as well as experienced. It is to be taken as it is. And it tells me, it tells me that I feel pretty much everything, always.
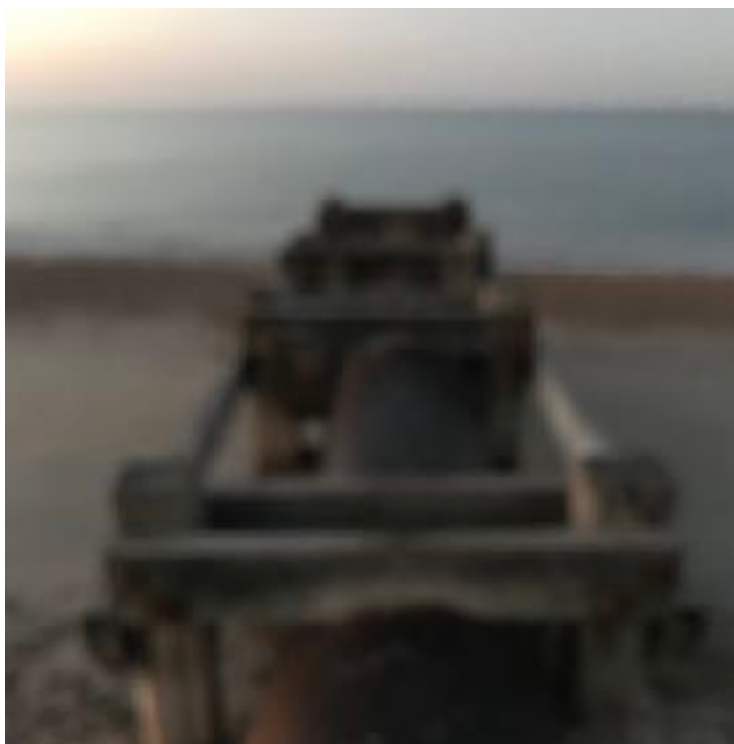
the sunrise

or, The End Of The Eight Hours, The End Of What You Have Learned, The Start Of The Rest Of Your Life, The Beginning Of Your Own Creation, The Beginning Of Your Real Life, The Ninth Hour, Your New Existence, Your Changed Experience Of The World, Your Willingness To Put Up With The Length Of This Title, Beauty, Sobriety, Heartache, Relief, And After All That Comes…

I want to thank everyone, my parents, my friends, my

parents' friends, my friends' parents, the people who have made me think, encouraged me to make things, who have talked me into thinking other things, challenged points of view and explained things in detail. I would also like to thank the Chiseller, the Shopkeeper, the Brainwashed Man, and the Expert. I would thank people by name, as I have done in the start of my other books, but no, you know who you are by now, my unwilling, unwitting literary crash-test dummies.

Perhaps putting the 'thank you' section at the end of the book cheapens the end of the book a little. I wanted to end on that, the whole "I rode my bike to work today". I do like that little bit. Slogans and snapshots are easy. Titles are the simple part for me. I can take a random phrase, like "a million dots on a dome", slap some capitals on it (or, subversively, deliberately de-capitalise for added effect) and voila - I have a Title. Things Which Are Capitalised Are Often More Meaningful. What a title that is. And what a title "Eight Hours" is. It's supposed to be based on the 'noticeable time' of an acid trip, before things start to wear off a little. It was written with the

intention of taking acid in mind.[47] It was written by a stupid fucking idiot obsessive 19-year-old, mainly, so please, for the love of God, don't take any of his suggestions as gospel. I have no idea what reading for

[47] MY GOD IT'S INCREDIBLE! I CAN SEE MY INNER THOUGHTS BEFORE THEY EVEN ESCAPE ME! EXCEPT THAT TIME BECAUSE I WAS TOO DENSE TO EVEN SPELL THE WORD 'ESCAPE' IN TIME, AND, BEFORE THEN BECAUSE I STOPPED TO PUT THE APOSTROPHES ROUND 'ESCAPE' AND... IT'S TOO LATE. MY INNER THOUGHTS, OUT ONTO THE PAGE, AND I'M TOO LATE TO HAVE ANY BEARING ON THEN WHATSOEVER. SUCH HORROR TO BE RELEGATED TO THE FOOTNOTES OF A DOCUMENT, TOO. I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'RE EVEN A MAIN PART OF THE TEXT AT THIS POINT! INDIGNATION! SCOFFLEMENT! PREPONDERANCY! WAIT, FUCK ME, THAT'S ACTUALLY A WORD? JESUS CHRIST. WOW. LET ME JUST TAKE A BREAK FOR A MINUTE BECAUSE WORDS SUCK. VERY HAPPILY PUTTING ON TUBULAR BELLS PART ONE AND LOOKING BACK AT THE 15 MINUTE YOUTUBE VIDEO I JUST WATCHED THAT FELT LIKE ETERNITY. BESIDES, I THOUGHT THE WORD I INVENTED WAS SOUFFLEMENT? ACID: OR, HOW I TURNED THE DROPPING OF A GRAPE-TOP INTO A WASTE DISPOSAL SINK INTO A METAPHOR FOR ALL OF MY INSOLVENCIES. GOD, IT'S BEEN *NINE FUCKING MINUTES* SINCE THAT ALL STARTED. BLOODY HELL. RACKET. WON'T LEAVE. AN ENTIRE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IN TWO AND A HALF MINUTES. WE JUST WANT TO HAVE GOOD TIMES WITH OTHER PEOPLES. (EDIT, NEARING THE END OF TUBULAR BELLS, THE GRAPE-TOP DID LOOK A LITTLE BIT SUSPICIOUS). GOOD TIME WITH OTHER PEOPLES (NOT USED INSTEAD OF THE MORE CONVENTIONAL SPELLING WITH THE 'TIMES' AND THE 'PEOPLE', BUT INSTEAD TO MEAN 'TIME' AS IN THE ABSTRACT CONCEPT, SINGULARITI-FIED DOWN TO A SINGLE POINT, AND THE 'PEOPLES' AS THE GENERALITY FOR OTHER FUCK IT DOESN'T MATTER ABOUT THE SPELLING GOOD TIME OTHER PEOPLE. FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN LONELINESS, TIME-BASED LIMITS OF OUR OUTCOMES, BUT STILL FUCKING STRIVING FOR IT ANYWAY JUST WANTED TO GET THAT 'GRAND PIANO' BIT RIGHT THO - SHIT IS CLASS. IF WE ARE LITERALLY NOT OTHER PEOPLE THEN WHAT THE FUCK? THIS IS LITERALLY HELL WITH BELLS ON? ALTERNATING BETWEEN NEVER FULLY ABLE TO APPRECIATE OTHER PEOPLE AND BE APPRECIATED YOURSELF? GOD? ARE WE REALLY ENTERING INTO SOMETHING THAT SOLIPSISTIC AND NIHILISTIC? WELL, RIGHT NOW, AT THIS VERY SECOND, MAYBE YES PERHAPS. BUT THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE SITTING AT THE COMPUTER TYPING THIS RIGHT NOW! THERE DOESN'T NEED TO BE! ENJOY THE FREE HUMAN SPIRIT WITH SOMEONE ELSE.
ALL THIS, BY THE WAY, IS WHY YOU ARE ABOUT TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE,

I LOVE YOU MAN.

eight hours would do to you while tripping. Anyway, enough about that. I got a decent way through the book and thought, actually, I suppose you're only really going to be getting through this at speaking speed if you're listening to an audiobook. Actually saying the whole damn thing would be terrible. But maybe actually saying it might be worth it. Far too long, can't tell you what it would take. Eight hours or something?

The main point of this book, as I've said many times before (I've even said *that* many times before) is to get people to think. And I love that word, 'think', it's a self-referential word, it's meta. It can make you think, but it can also regulate how much you think, it makes you think about overthinking, it can provide its opposite, doing creates opportunities for thinking, and vice versa, so you're always fed with new situations and outcomes. That's about it. Thinking outside the box. Thinking of you. Everything is encompassed there. Oh, there's also some other stuff about communication, but that sort of fits in to that whole thing. The being-thought loop is isolated within the world, you can never truly be somebody else without losing yourself. There's some other thing about the unconscious psyche, but I'm going to let someone else deal with that at some point. I do include 'future me' in my list of 'other people' so I suppose that's also on the table for the future. After this, though, I want to write some fiction. I am too absorbed in myself right now. I feel like I'm having to spy on myself to get any more information.

So think. Don't go too high or too low. Don't get into things without thinking. Balance your doing with your thinking. Try to communicate at all times. Doing without thinking is hedonistic meaninglessness, and thinking without doing is hermitic overindulgence. What am I

doing, trying to give out life advice? I haven't lived. I'm not an addict, I'm not low, I'm not high, I'm not well-travelled or -rounded, I can't speak anything other than English[48]. I'm still not allowed to do anything that requires you to be 21. I don't know how anything meaningful works and I have no idea of how to get there.

So then, what's… uh, the deal with this section? Surely, it's eight hours, and then some? Is there some kind of code being broken? Yes, yes there is. I set myself clear rules for chapter lengths and I said they'd be curbed at about 11,000 words apiece. But look at where we are now, 450 words into this new little bit. Well, no better time to end things. Things don't have to have meaningful beginnings or endings, you can start at 8:38am, you can end at exactly 5pm, you don't have to potter around waiting for a good time to write your own story, you don't have to be anyone else, live your own life, think about your own thoughts, anything like that, oh, the freedom, the freedom the freeness to make up words whatever you like disregard don't say anything and come with me to you and that's not supposed to be anything but you know that, and you know that, and maybe this wasn't the best note to end the book on, but oh here we are, we're past the eight hours, I am riding my bike to work, and I can do whatever I can disregard all of the stops signs but no I can't because if we all- no, no, this isn't the time and the place for moralising, say cheese for the camera, you're falling, oh, you're falling! Alex, get up! Alex, stop thinking, our mother should have named you Laika, all of this is for your own good, oh, lord look, you're falling,

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[48] ASIDE FROM A VERY POOR GRASP ON FRENCH THAT COMBINES BOTH PRIMARY SCHOOL, PREDOMINANTLY HOUSEHOLD TERMINOLOGY AND ALSO A STRANGE AMOUNT OF PRETTY SPECIFIC TERMS TO DO WITH WRITING AND BOOK GENRES, SINCE I ONCE STAYED WITH A FAMILY IN PARIS WHOSE DAUGHTER WAS A WRITER OF SHORT-FORM HORROR.

you're going to hit the ground now, the wind is rushing through your hair and you're reminded of a friends who once said they wanted to go out with a bang and you didn't take it seriously because he was describing putting all of this expensive rented sound equipment on a tall rooftop and giving some sort of huge last farewell performance and then as the final act throwing himself off of the side of the building because he wouldn't have to pay the rental fee back because he'd be falling onto a huge group of people, their lives would be the main body of text of the article of the newspaper with all the people he said he'd squash with the toppling speakers, their names and obituaries would cause an outpouring of grief and sorrow but it might as he said 'wake people up' but I said to him 'it's not worth it why would you want to go out like that' and he said something about self-determination or something or other but what he didn't realise is that there would be people all over the world looking in on the broadcast, and somewhere in all the various nets and networks behind the wires and the television screens watching there might be some poor kid who felt a little lonely, a little betrayed by his expectations or something to other, a sort of general malaise that he felt couldn't be reconciled by anything (as I'm sure my friend was trying to reconcile himself at the time) and just felt a little lonely but needed to just think about what he was going through, teenagerdom isn't the be-all and end-all that shows like Skins makes it out to be, you're not worthless, you're not worthless just because you haven't had sex or done ketamine or have loads of attractive friends I say and he says something like a little chortley laugh and I say something whiny and anti-his sentiment and I wonder if I'm that kid, I wonder if I'm romanticising the idea of death on my own terms, I

wonder about all of these things and themes that I am just not old enough to appreciate, I have not seen/read/ done enough things, I'm not just going to pick up a book and start reading though, I'm not going to chew through things, I'm going to chew what is meaty, full of substance, I really need some substance, for God's sake, but I know that that kid out there who doesn't understand himself and calls his mum a bitch for not understanding the nuance of the situation when she was just looking out for him and calls his dad a cunt behind his back whenever any bad words are shared still exists in time and I know they're scared and living in a time where nothing seems to make any sense because they haven't discovered how to disassociate they don't know how to drink other than to steal from cabinets and they can't do relationships any more and it will mean that their normalcy fades and there will always be hidden layers, there will always be the ???CORE or however their video game-addled mind decides to label it for the rest of their life, locked in ideological limbo rather than falling like the rest of us, would you like to be so low? Would you like to be solo? No one can go it alone, there is the kid behind the TV the parents are out for the night the kid's mind is buzzed with the twinge of alcohol and the diary isn't a good enough outlet because the kid lacks the words because the school isn't working and the job isn't working and their parents are working all the time and it's just not working out and the world never feels like it could work out but that is when the journey begins to become a rose among the thorns to outgrow your surroundings and the scope of the surroundings can be infinite, you can outgrow the world, kid, you can outgrow the way you live right now, you're better than this, wrappers, cans, streaking and littering the floor, thoughts in your head

unsaid, learn new words, turn the broadcast off, for god's sake, you can do this, you're thirteen now, you're a big'n, you know how the oven works as long as it's an electric oven and you know how it all works in your little mind because you've used the family computer to look up political things occasionally and all the flags and labels and flashy colours and adverts for women with big boobies come flashing up and my god it's just so much for a young mind to take in, you are mad that you don't always win because that's what everyone around you seems to be, they all know what they're doing, you don't know what you're doing in the future, well neither did your dad or your mum, it is scary, frightening, it is the sunrise, kid, it is the sunrise, for God's sake, open your eyes, you can make it through the sunrise, you can make it through these next few years and you can become the person that you want to become, you won't care anymore, you will want to be exactly as old as you are, you will not resent being twenty or anything, you are you, and the people around you care for you on some level, they are people too, you are not pawns in their game nor are they in yours, there's no game, there's no structure, stop caring, stop being apathetic, be above, the flower thing I said earlier, but he turns his head with the repeated metaphor, you're running out of steam, the kid loses interest, he turns his head back to the TV this kid stands up and says something like "my God, you can just go and"