



God

(I can see right through you)

Arbor Ten

The G-d Issue

(I can see right through you)

“Belief + Doubt = Sanity”

Barbara Kruger

Two introductory notes:

- 1) When I address ‘You’ below, I am addressing myself.
- 2) Certain forms of Judaism instruct us to limit the number of times we speak the Lord’s name. My childhood rabbi told me that the written form was more important, and so I’ve grown quite close to this ‘G-d’ spelling.

And now, here it is plainly, the whole of the issue told while I stand on one foot:

To be forward, you must rewire the way you consume. The way you relate to consumption. And this means you have to change the way you think about objects. It’s true that Consumption once used our love for objects to serve its own interests. But ever since we’ve come under its spell, the way we love objects has changed altogether (now we think in absolutes, now we can’t hope to resist *ease*).

Now we must *really* return to objects again, and of course this will look different than how we loved objects in the past. We can’t change Consumption while we are still under its power.

There is one solution—one of only many—in the form of ritual. It is potentially small in the grand scheme of things, but vital for the individual.

It’s not a ‘G-d Issue,’ really, but more of an issue with the faithful. We’re the ones who have to get our act together.

So, here’s the justification you’ve been waiting for; for someone to convince you to accept a faith that some part of you already knew you wanted.

if you’re feeling confused at this point, the answer isn’t to stop here! keep going, keep going, keep going

Part I you may find scatterbrained but I assure you it's all related—meticulously organized actually—and that's really the most accessible section if you're in the market for something a little more digestible.

Part II is the closest you'll get to essays.

Part III is a series of objects. Material cultures and histories have always fascinated me: the heirlooms and collected objects that find their way through time, from one era to another, so that strange relics which were significant for a distant relative, or maybe even for an ancestor, remain in our homes. Are we left with any of that significance, in the object, after the ancestor is long passed? This is the sort of question we're supposed to wrestle with during Passover.

In Part IV you'll find some quotations and something like poetry. I find these to be the least clear writings in the issue, likely because I tried to describe something specific.

I know it's all contrived and pretentious, leave me alone.

There is an order below, but it also might be helpful for you to skip around as you like. That's recommended, actually.

Everything included is written by me unless otherwise marked. Here I'll thank my friends Sara, Aidan, and Jules for their pieces. Where my friends wrote 'G-d' with an 'o,' I intervened with the dash. These interventions are marked by brackets: G[-]d.

And, yes, this *is* really about G-d, even when it seems like it isn't.

–Elias

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A stained glass flower with green and red petals on a textured background. The flower has a central red petal, two green petals on either side, and a larger green petal at the bottom. The petals are outlined in black. The background is a light-colored, textured surface with a repeating pattern of small, rounded shapes.

Truth

appears in
windows,

don't be
afraid to be

wrong

Part I: Truth Appears in Windows, Don't be Afraid to be
Wrong

Hologram

My parents, speaking to my brothers and I over Zoom, described a Holocaust museum's plans to interview a survivor and record their responses, mannerisms, and vocal cues over a period of several days. Museum goers will eventually be able to encounter these elderly survivors in the form of holograms, and rather than listen to their testimonies and stories as they are told, can ask them questions as they come to mind: Where were you born? What were your parents like? Could you tell me about gay people in the camps? Not only would an ordinary person's research be simplified, but our relationship to the Holocaust's distant memory would also be humanized. A child in the museum no longer has to flip through digitized identification papers, read long blocks of grave text, or even pass through the indigestible photographs of mass graves or the Warsaw Ghetto. These holograms are more accessible, and I can appreciate all of the good that comes with them. We are talking to another body when we meet the hologram.

Something about all of it disturbs me though. We aren't meant to speak to medieval survivors of the Black Death—not because we shouldn't try to learn from it. I only mean that we have different values from the medieval peasant, different ideas about severity in the course of one lifetime and gravity in the historical sense. Perhaps death meant something different for the medieval hologram than it does for us. We wouldn't really be preserving the Holocaust's original memory so much as indefinitely suspending our current relationship to it.

I often scour YouTube for videos of people born in the 1800's, I'm obsessed with them. I don't understand these people who speak about tractors and industrial change as, simply, 'machines.' They grew up with scythes and the village. I'm glad, in one sense, that I can see this baffling spectacle, but I also feel strangely disconnected with history the more I watch these recordings. I have nothing to advocate in the end, but I know that the Holocaust and its survivors will function as relics (since, who is going to stop them from becoming holograms after all, I'm the only one who has a problem with it). This is true with anything, time moves on. But maybe when something as mystified as the Holocaust gains even more reverence and psychological weight with the passing of time, we should respect it according to the metrics and language of its own time, rather than interpret by the signs of the fleeting present.

Mount Zion

My mother told me that she'd like to be cremated. She doesn't want to 'take up space,' in a funeral plot or anywhere else. She scattered the ashes of her beloved dog in the Palo Duro Canyon, not far from where my parents first met. Now she can visit this beautiful place to visit the dog, rather than place flowers by some gray headstone in some gray place.

She thinks that, in a few years, Brooklyn's Mount Zion Cemetery will be flattened, paved, and reupholstered with new buildings. It's good property. We have more than a few relatives in that ground. The pieces of stone marking the site of pine boxes, white linens, and rolled-over-bones some six feet below are rather ordinary and arbitrary ways to memorialize a life, my mother is right to say. Even so, I can't help but defend these gray markers of time. Everything is gray so we would at least like to make it shiny—but isn't it *good* that we feel a tinge of guilt when we bulldoze one, older gray to make room for another?

It's hard to memorialize history and the passage of time from within one solitary moment. It's hard to memorialize something beyond life from within life. It's hard to celebrate a dead gray from the glazed-over eyes of our own. It's hard to feel sentimental toward an object. It's hard to love someone else. It's easy to love someone dead.

The Light Goes Out

As I write this, it seems likely that the dog I grew up with is going to die today. He'll be comforted in the arms of my parents as a vet puts him down—something cancerous and speedy, but he's an older dog now. My heart is heavy.

As I think back on the memories that mean the most to me, I realize that they are all shockingly ordinary. Sitting next to my father on the couch, we would laugh as our dog retrieved his toy for our inspection. Rather than drop it on either of our laps, he would tussle with us as we tried to wrestle the toy from his mouth. I suppose we were laughing at his failure to understand the rules of 'fetch' (or maybe it was a refusal to play by *our* rules).

He was a peculiar dog with peculiar habits—he ate his round bowl of dog food in geometric stages, first at a half-circle, then again to form a perfectly even quarter-circle—but my feelings of love and sadness for the creature all come back to these exceptionally ordinary moments. And it could be the case that all human relationships (a break-up, the passing of a parent) must follow this course. Each unique, particular story of ours follows the suffocating form of general human experience.

This is even how our individual lives develop: we become more content with life as we grow older, as we find peace with the rather drab opportunities afforded to us in our day-to-day existence. We won't achieve the wildest dreams of our youth, we won't achieve fame or influence or power, we won't write *Ulysses*—and we will still be content (that is, those of us who are well-fed). We'll learn to be content, and we'll learn to see vastness and profundity in the small, perfectly ordinary scale of our lives.

I sent the following note to my brother two or so years ago. I wrote it immediately after his own dog had died.

What is the difference between humans and dogs? Humans' present is overdetermined by the past and future, but the present predicates all else in the life of a dog.

We become lost in our nostalgia when we remember and, in the same way, we can only imagine certainties ahead of us.

Dogs remember in a different way. I don't think that they keep memories in the same way we do, but instead through a repetition of experience. Recognition builds up over time, but the present is always up in the air. They love their owner because of the present.

Humans are taught to love through a past love that we are supposed to continue—duty. Or we are taught to love through the promise of a future, better love.

Dogs love unconditionally because they do not expect this from us; each moment of happiness and love that we provide for them is not promised, but we provide it anyways. Humans are taught to think of this as responsibility, but in a better world we would really think of this as love.

And we reciprocate a dog's love just for this reason, because we can love unconditionally with them. This is more difficult to achieve between humans.

[Your dog] was happy with you. A year of this present kind of love for a dog is quite possibly worth more than a lifetime of a human's idea of love, if all the human can ever muster is a love of responsibility. This is how we can let our memory of a dog's love remain meaningful after it passes.

What weighs heaviest on my heart, is the thought of my dog's confusion at the moment of death. 'What is happening? What is all this indescribable pain in my stomach? What is happening?'

orfeo, from Aidan

rollo, I am sick. sadsick, though everything i find becomes holy. i have not been here a few days. sad, also, to've not seen you. is everything is redeemed by a holiness, or is it that the holy is careful enough with each moment, moments that by right should be painful, that the holy is sustained in some kind of matrimony with unwieldy illness. my room is small, but, as i bring objects into it, it grows larger. like some christian cave. i tried to find an ikon yesterday. perhaps, you will take me to that orthodox church, as you said you would.

g[-]d, when i'm ill, is here. i turn him like pages in a book, and he greets me, without thinking. all that is sensitive in me, even in this cold air, knows itself in me and i feel at peace with the strange dominion of the world over me. all resists me, and in its resistance, i sleep, until, just before the moment of its closing and my destruction, it opens and i emerge. different.

yes, I am ill. please visit me.

orfeo, we are revealed to ourselves at the exact moment we are revealed to others. I did not meet you, truly, because I forgot. I imagined you'd arrived and then, when I realized you hadn't, I'd already begun making my way home. you see, in a sense, I did forget. I forgot who you were and where I was. I saw the street as it was before, just as it was before me. I forgot everything, orfeo. I thought I'd died. isn't it strange to think that the world is the most open when our presence is removed from it? I believe I did die and was resurrected. I hear tarkovsky's words:

we are all immortal,
everything is immortal.

rollo, I forgot, too. not you, but to mention how music also redeems. music is not holy in the way you and I may be. it directs the holy, conjures it, but it is not itself holy. that would, somehow, defeat it. it redeems because it gains meaning. that meaning, which we long for, like a song in the world, for our own twittering in the branches, is something music gives freely, without taking any for itself. and yet, I have never felt so holy as when I hear music, so that I am willing to doubt the existence of the world to save it. in music. it redeems, because it is the source of the holy. it is its language, which we all speak, and yet have never learned.

I hear you. I see our past life in my dreams. I visit the hills every night in my dreams. you and I have grieved. you more than I. but it is not easy to grieve, just as it is not easy to remove ourselves from the world. we are a splinter, a thorn, in the side of the world. we interrupt it, though we have never known it without this sound. we feel no pain ourselves. the world is in pain at the presence of us in it.

music redeems every moment. like the holy, it is so quiet with the meaning of the world that it lets everything pass. everything I tell you is contained in music. not merely as it, but in it.

are we really to be immortal? is it that you did die, or that your death is not a real resistance in the world? the world takes your death, not to mean you die, as that you died then when the world presented itself to you, but that its presence swallows you. you do not know what to measure in the dark, so you measure yourself.

orfeo, music takes everything. we go to it to feel what is possible to be felt, so that music that is holy is holy for the brief breath moment of its sounds, of its expulsion and release. baruch called it sonorous air. we have music, then, for as long as we have breath. these hills, you say, they breathe. the performer breathes, too, in a painful, protruding silence. I heard it recently. the solo piano partitas. it is the same silence in a revolution, or when you smash a vase—the same silence at the speech of dictators. anyone could shout, or the generals, unsure of hitler, could prove that nothing is agreed – cannot be agreed. it must remain unbearable and open and silent on itself. I mean it. great acts of joy and evil and complacency live side by side in that silence. it is like the primitive night we've only barely escaped. the quiet of the wood stove that must be fired itself. we are so frightened of it, but it is the fear that gives texture to the quality of doing things.

they turned off my hydro. I felt free. imagine if everyone in that theatre had decided right then and there to hear music, that it gains exactly what it gains, exceed the world and resolve to feel it. such feeling, what we feel at its most possible, speak to this the words of some desperate charge: a room, together, prepared to feel and feel again, and in that feeling hold reality as it may be. the sound of the first chord; it is our resignation to immortal feelings. what I feel in that chord is possibility; possibility we human beings can barely sustain and remember as its sound fades out and dies. that is your music, orfeo, that which fades out and dies.

rollo, I recall the images you used to draw, like blackfigures in black staves of music. you were the bowstring of the world. I recall the caravaggios you hung on your wall, of Saint John the Baptist, and the angel of love defied by virtue. what did they mean to you, these things?

nothing.

nothing?

yes, nothing.

on the walls of your room—what were they, postcards?—and I recall your writings on the black and, yes, the bowstring. I heard a haydn last night—his violin concerto in C major—and I tell you of that silent rise, hauntingly and beautifully, of the opening scale in the second movement. I was taken immediately by his greatness as a composer, by his effect, which barely molds the music, only leads it. your drawings, too, of those viennese nudes in black charcoal, and the poem you wrote, vertiginous. I do not know who among them was dead, but immortality has something lifeless. your figures too, lifeless. come with me—meet me—at the old oratory for the bach.

rollo, it cannot be wrong to speak before you've replied. I make no presumption about the form of your life. I went to the bach, but I missed the first half, which was the bach, so I was left with the händel. the organ is great, bellowing, and the choir was small and ill-fitting in the massive church. a small sound, a small moment of grace was offered me, and I realized again what I had meant: death, an end to a thousand unnatural survivals, a sleeping, or letting go, untouched by the glimmer of the fear of life.

my illnesses, it seems, exceed me. my body is a melting wafer on the tongue of G[-]d.

orfeo, I am sorry to've missed you. though, I have something in return: a lead. I may have found an address of the man you're looking for. johann herder. if you come to my flat tonight, we can visit him together. on point of strange trust, I am to be something of a mediator. you'll find out why. and, yes, I agree: death is a sleeping release. our bodies are made to hover for a moment and then collapse.

as for my drawings, I still have them. and the poems. one, in particular, of the floating, holy house of saint paul's cathedral at night. hovering above the thames, stark white against near total night and the rush of the river. I saw it, really, and the cathedral was lit by some ethereal light, when I emerged from the globe, half-sick, and the crowd assembled and dissembled. a palace above the open water. and the saintlights burning and only the bridges of night for me to tread towards it.

yes, the future is that nightbrige; it is awful open.

rollo, I followed you until the end. the bridge. but then, the turn, the awful open future.

churches are made for the future; they are like sunlight at night.

you've written on this.

the foundation and the ceiling are the same thing.

rollo, dreams shatter. this is a certainty. the weight they hold is like your rushing river at night. we hear and feel it. we don't know where it is. I recall waking from dreams in lasting night, so full of feeling, that I forgot where I was. how is such feeling possible? a rising to the cold of life was unforgiving, and I would, for a time, stay up all night in edinburgh to savour bowstring darkness and invisible rivers, only to rise at 3pm and, in the wintry golden hour, rush to the hills to catch my life as it fled on the coattails of the sunlight. if I was quick, I could reach the braids and from there see the pentlands and the tall gorse and the waning sun.

orfeo, are these love letters to immortality? you heard that haydn. do you not recall when we first heard his creation together at the queen's hall? you were inspired at how he chose to be so self-conscious, so aware of the presence of that move from cosmic darkness into what, some deeper negated difference, we call light, creation. light, as the saying goes, is for burning bodies. but, no, haydn had an idea, like milton, of the slow presence of the hiddenness which doubles its hiddenness in being present. we have form, yes, which escapes the night of its emergence, which somehow prepares itself and holds the mirror edge of that night as presence it only further represents in light, in form, neither escaping that they know no bear out an image of the world than night itself. as you have said, there is no image of the world.

fat bodies, from Aidan

in this, freud avoids lying. the fat people he paints—whom he loves—are not creatures. they are you and me. monstrous, yes. their excess, however, is what makes them real. what we supplement with fictions realises what we struggle to imagine directly. if imagination alone was the source of our perception then we wouldn't need to look out our window. but, we do; and the source of that is surely owing to what happens when we truly abandon reality. we don't get some special cause, nor some mythological coverup. we, actually, get back reality. convinced, now, of its frailty and its subtlety of combination.

when proust bites the madeleine or when jo, in nymphomaniac, mixes semen and chocolate, what one gets is a combination, whose unnaturalness, triggers some deeper unconscious move—a memory-maker. the unconscious, after all, is not something hidden, but when two unrelated things touch through nothing but a transferential link reveal some spontaneous link between things otherwise unrelated. it is the possibility of this link that is the unconscious. reality, in this way, is not given back to us. we remain with its excess. why shouldn't this be what we call reality?

when I recall what has happened to me, I do not simply recall reality. in this failure, I gain it. unfixed, harmless, but still uncertain of itself. where are the gravitational designs meant to tell me who and what I am? as in sherlock, the mystery is not what we discover, but when we piece it all together and everything we have seen, but haven't noticed, will have been seen. we will have lived our lifes. travelled corner to corner, across and under, sideways and above.

A joke told by the current rabbi at my childhood synagogue; although I no longer live in the area, I attended a Saturday morning Zoom service to hear the name of my father's aunt, and to hear the congregation recite the Mourner's Kaddish for her

Moishe had made arrangements to purchase a new suit from the Tailor Yaakov, the best tailor in all of the land.

As Moishe tried on the suit, he noticed that one sleeve was too short, and one too long. "This is no problem," said the Tailor Yaakov. "Just extend your left arm and pull your right arm in."

It was the same with Moishe's pants, which were narrow around the waist. "Just breathe in!" the Tailor said.

As Moishe left the Tailor's establishment, two Jewish men passed by. One remarked to the other, "How strangely that man walks!"

"Yes," the other responded, "but what a fine tailor he must have to account for his peculiar stride!"

Reliques, par Jules

Marie chante dans le ciel
Les lions sont immobiles
Figés dans le bronze
Sifflent un air liquide
La douce femme étincelle
Nimbée de gouttelettes d'or
Sa voix est très lointaine
Mais caresse les cœurs
Sans regarder vers elle
Je distingue son sourire
Celui de la tendresse
Je sens ses doigts d'ivoire
Effleurer mon visage
Sa paume délicate
Sécher mes quelques larmes
L'église n'est pas plus grande
Qu'une coquille Saint-Jacques
Dans la pénombre
Un homme
Maigre, sort d'une chapelle
Il porte une couronne
Derrière lui, sur l'autel
Une lampe allumée
La flamme se contorsionne
Tente de s'échapper
Les volutes d'encens
Dansent autour de la scène
Où silencieusement la belle
Se dérobe aux vivants
Les pharaons sont morts
Mais je les vois parfois
Ces spectres malheureux

Mary sings up in the sky
Immobile are the lions
In bronze in-clotted
Whistling a liquid air
The gentle lady gleams
Adorned in golden droplets
Her voice comes from afar
But many hearts fondles
Needless to look at her
I distinguish the smile
Taken from tenderness
I feel her ivory fingers
Brushing over my face
And her delicate palm
Wipes my few tears away
Here church is no bigger
Than the pilgrim's scallop
In the twilight
A man
Lean, exits from a chapel
A crown is on his head
Behind him, on the altar
An oil lamp's alight
The flame contorts itself
Attempting to escape
Voluteed incense coils
'Re dancin' 'round the stage
Where wordlessly the loved one
Shies away from our world
The pharaohs are dead
But I see them sometimes
Those sorrowful spectres

Sous la lumière de lune	Amidst the desert's sand
Au milieu de désert	There is a standing cross
Est plantée une croix	And should you dig its base
Et si l'on creuse un peu	You'd uncover a sword
On découvre une lame	

Sweet Release, Heavenly Rest: Neo-Puritanism

While we were hiking, a loved one remarked that walking through this constantly changing, beautiful scenery could entertain her forever. The comment stuck with me: this is how all of us subliminally picture Paradise. Everyone knows that the Puritan Heaven is wildly disappointing and boring—joy can't be sustained in a void, it needs *surprise* and *newness*.

And even before we've 'escaped' to the outdoors, don't we already live in a perverse approximation of Paradise? The closest we can get to the lotus-eaters, even a morally justified kind of complacency: we lose hours scrolling but we lose years under the spell of the entertainment industry and its hollow, rotund values scribbled with invisible pen into the subconscious of its viewers—legions of them, legions of us. This world has perfected a certain formula to minimize the dose of serotonin we receive when we scroll, so that our dose and our character are both reduced to the utmost while ensuring we stay *hooked* on this psychic, usually digital substance. Casinos regulate heat, serve drinks, remove clocks, windows, and all indications of time from their building so that its infernal occupants can lose their sense of time. The same philosophy is used in the design and layout of social media, in a concrete sense, but also with the entertainment industry as a whole, in the abstract. We're so desperately in its grip because of our human impulse to *wait*, to procrastinate and hope. This trait has been fostered and artificially pumped (like arsenic in chicken) to an unprecedented degree in the last few decades of human history.

So maybe it's not so bad to *do nothing*. To be alone with yourself. To *not* satisfy our most immediate desires, all of which *are* indeed available to satisfy through the constantly changing, never-dormant portals into Entertainment, which I like to imagine as a deity from another realm who has come to dampen our spirits and imprison us (more on this later). But the satisfaction is never very

satisfying, is it? And so we come to expect less and less from the act of satisfaction, mirroring our generally diminished and diminishing capacity to *feel*. Maybe, culturally speaking, self-control is a better value than self-forgiveness (neither has to leave the picture entirely, but today we on the Left seem to promote the latter at the expense of the Puritan fixture).

And if we blame the casino rather than the gambler, then we shouldn't be afraid of larger organizational structure: self-control may not be able to help you or me. I don't believe we're past the point of no return; we can still break the habit of scrolling, of waiting, of political malaise, of the worldly addiction that I'm describing. But we may need help. It's okay to be given directions. It's okay for someone or something (not *anyone* or *anything*, mind you) to impose rules upon us. (Sometimes it's best we're told what to do.) Don't be afraid of restrictions. Don't be afraid of power.

A note on schizophrenia

Deleuze's description of the schizophrenic experience we all share under capitalism is a massive key to understanding our psychological state today. And we undoubtedly experience an especially turbulent inner-life under this current, capitalist way of organizing society—but we need to understand that to live under *any* ideology is to be schizophrenic. Our experience of the world is always malleable and plastic. We bend according to the present vantage point of whichever ideology we belong to.

Here's a thought: we drink at parties because our sober conscious has to operate schizophrenically, and it is incredibly difficult to understand or connect with others in this state. To alter our minds at parties is to leave the social side of schizophrenic polite society at the same moment as our fellow party-goers. And while we all go in different directions (a thousand plateaus, to put it crassly) when we leave the polite headspace, there's an honesty in our 'primitive'—ie, anything *other* to the global-American language and value set—an honesty, in our primitive selves as we grope towards one or another source of light in our dark, dark cave.

Ukraine and Devotion

The new and surprising corners of Ukrainian support in American society (cooking Ukrainian recipes for dinner and showing your results on Facebook; even displaying your support on a more direct, ‘non-digital’ level, usually within small communities—within a workplace, for example) mirrors our relationship with recycling in the following aspect:

Both recycling and our strange demonstrations on behalf of the Ukrainians are meant to solidify our sense of personal, usually atomized responsibility towards each of these matters (although I’d like to think that we could change our perception of recycling through a sort of *conscious* ritual—see “Belief and Choice” in Part IV). As with all etiquette-oriented politics, we say: if I do my very best, if I pray hard enough, then something will ‘budge’ on the higher fields of political decision-making (fields which are mystified in a taboo not unlike the Church’s dealings with G-d). Some neo-Puritan current in American life asks that we walk alone in the garden not with Jesus, but with Obama (or with any other talisman-symbol you happen to associate with the United States’ global and moral ascendancy). There are important players who occupy important seats of power, who will take us in the right direction. Luckily enough, these players happen to occupy the *most* powerful seats. It is our duty to support them—not politically, of course, but on all the all-important psychological battlefield.

Here is the bizarre core of these demonstrations, of Americans’ emerging patronage of Ukraine: *the Ukrainian protests appeal to a sentiment which is already accepted by the dominant culture here*. For the young and historically inexperienced American, maybe this is just what solidarity looks like, plain and simple. But the outraged, faux-skeptic institutionalism of it all makes me think otherwise. They don’t ask for anything specific, to my eye: you’ll find that the demonstrations are more common around shopping centers than outside of embassies. All the demonstrators ask is for the entire community (their own community) to take on the same inner fervor that they feel themselves. The coven of witches in *Rosemary’s Baby* can afflict an outsider with blindness, so long as the entire coven directs their energy and attention on the same victim at the same time.

Slanted Lines

I used to write my equal signs = in a hurried, slanted way, where the top line would be slightly ahead of the bottom — The two lines would overlap in the middle, of course, similar to an ‘S’ shape.

We’re supposed to write the equal sign like so = because we can’t imagine that two lines with different shapes may have the same matter, and we can only be truly convinced that they’re really the same as one another if they take the same shape *and* they are placed next to each other so we can scrutinize for any small differences between the two that might at first fool you for an exact sameness.

(Why take pride in national poets? Why do I find myself more proud of Faulkner because of our common American experience than I would a non-American, even though we share a common experience as solitary humans navigating the psychic barrage of what life is, in a cosmic sense?)

Eliyahu

We are most self-conscious of our age and lack of experience—when we are finally given license to parent or teach after having only been *parented* or *taught* for our entire lives, or at least until a short moment ago—when we imagine our own parents and teachers, in their own youths, in the position we find ourselves now, as they took the reins of responsibility for the first time. We imagine a sort of confidence in our forebears’ time, but in truth they were just as uncertain then as we are now.

And there is a similar case to be made about the ‘masters’ of art and thought (Beethoven, Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Georgia O’Keeffe, Miles Davis, Kanye—arranged here chronologically, deliberately). Who could possibly know that they themselves were capable of producing a masterpiece *before* producing it?

It’s true that ‘masterpieces’ are determined somewhat arbitrarily, according to who is in power and this sort of thing. But for a certain strand of critics who take issue with the notion of ‘masterpieces’ and of *canon* in general, are they taking issue with the *current* occupants of that canon (the ‘master,’ the current head of the shapeshifting snake) or of *power* and canonization in general? Whichever answer we’ll receive from our critic (something about Jackson Pollock manspreading while they tell you that you can’t sit down while you’re at work, even if there’s no one in the Museum), you can reasonably surmise that they are effectively taking issue with the latter—with power in general.

I’d ask you this: for all of *canon*’s arbitrariness, who would in good faith disagree with the existence of a truly special few? A group of uniquely gifted people who can not only *access* some higher plane of beauty, vision, or clarity; but who can also *translate* that hidden plane into an artwork, for example, or another receptacle that isn’t so direct and awesome and blinding so that we ordinary

people *can* actually hope to look at it. And it's often the case that we, as an historical audience, only begin to understand this *translation* long after it's originally written (Walter Benjamin wrote that a great work becomes great only when it's translated). We exclude so many when we land upon a canon, but successive generations' appreciation for Shakespeare has certainly added to the power of Shakespeare: social and especially historical perceptions impact a work of art. Often that distortion (that retrospective appreciation we endow onto canon) can cloud and overdetermine our judgment of an artwork, it's true—but doesn't my awe of Beethoven (awe because he has been so highly regarded and for so long, by my parents and their parents before them) create an even richer experience when I listen to him?

Art changes over time in the same way as History. Freud's 'afterwardsness' is most identifiable in certain cases of trauma: sexual maturation (this is just one example) forces itself on adolescents and institutes an unwanted, new, and confusing sense of reality. Triggering repressed memories and creating new understandings of early sexual abuse, trauma only really 'breaches the surface' in retrospect. Trauma begins after-the-fact, not during the actual moment of trauma. Alternatively, you could read the concept of 'afterwardsness' in a more mystical light: what happens in the present not only changes our relationship to the past, but it *actually* changes the events of the past. It's simplistic to think of History *only* as hegemonic (it is written by the victors) when it is fluid and wholly dependent on the vantage point of future events (which will actually, materially change the nature of the past) just as our present—as we all already know—is produced from the events of the past.

Can't we apply a similar logic to canonization? What if the aesthetic experience we have while listening to Beethoven is different from our counterpart audience who listens in a timeline where Beethoven was forgotten to historical footnotes? Aesthetic experiences are first and foremost an attack on our senses. Heartbeats are raised, pupils dilated as the audience anticipates the first note and then the next, fostered by the fame and esteem that have crystallized onto Beethoven with each new generation, from my parents and teachers, from his admirers who died before I was even born, and also from those who will be born after I'm gone. We enter the concert hall in a group-frenzy not unlike the Dancing Plagues in anticipation of something that could change our lives, and we are so profoundly eager for the *unknown*—the changed person we become, the new life waiting for you after the show ends—considering that we spend the rest of our lives completely resisting change and challenges to ourselves. We resist in the form of indefinite procrastination. And of course, this rosy picture of the concert hall, of what aesthetic experience *could* be, is becoming rarer as more of our person is swallowed by that indefinite procrastination (a deity from another world, infecting our spirit).

The act of canonizing can allow us to understand the immensity, the full picture of a 'masterpiece'; canonization tells us beforehand that these are great works of art, and so we can sift through the ocean and read with an understanding that there is something incredible in this oyster, in this canvas or in these pages, even if there's a gulf between our historical moments (the author's and my

own). Generations' past have found something universal in these works—it would be foolish to take their medicine without question, but who are we to doubt past historical moments so completely? Which approach is more foolish? Who are we to doubt canon itself? Who are we to doubt the past and its own aesthetic reactions to these works? We could instead read these works with good faith—not in the sense that they are infallible, but in the sense that there is a kernel of human truth in these. How else could that work have been canonized? (And however particular to white European contexts it may be, that context is still a part of the wider human truth.)

We have turned our back on that gulf (the gulf between our own historical moment and the moment of canonical authors) to say that de Kooning and Picasso were, in the most naive sense, *wrong*. And there is a provocative, deliciously ironic paradox here: in our attack of the White Man Canon, we have decided not to look for the singular human achievements in these canonical works *precisely because* we lack the empathy to imagine ourselves in another's position.

Let me explain. For all the talk of including a broader social and human experience in art and literary histories; for all the talk of *expanding the canon* (and that is all this talk ever really amounts to), many of today's frankly ridiculous characterizations of the canon and its patriarchs show that we, in the broadest sense, do not treat Picasso as a human. We are disgusted by these authors' power and so, because we're unable to bring ourselves too close to that blinding light, we've decided that we can judge the canonical author through the language and metrics of today (many like to make a similar argument about Cancel Culture today, so I won't bore you with much more of this).

We can't imagine ourselves thinking, behaving, or producing like Picasso (this isn't to say, even, that Picasso was a 'good person'—but it should be difficult to think of *anyone* in terms of *net* moral or social implications; as a purely good or bad person). *We can only bring ourselves to imagine ourselves*, only as we are—why are you not behaving as I'd like you to? According to my time, my culture, my values, my language? And though we use a multicultural language today, we are at a high-water mark in terms of our atomization. We may be less *socially* stratified than previous generations (a multiracial group of friends is commonplace today), but there's a fragile ground and impenetrable ceiling to these social (and political) possibilities when we remain so *psychologically* and *ideologically* stratified.

Put more simply, the language we use to describe Kanye today says it all—that is, a moralizing language without compassion. We have a love/hate relationship with power—the logical conclusion of a corporatized, psychic democratization, and we've almost reached the Pacific after the long journey west. The site of that struggle is most naked when we're talking about celebrity (so of course we've reached the apex of that fight on the battleground of canon).

To be generous to *canon*, I'd ask that you look at it as a maturing child when they first understand their caregiver to be fallible and beloved all at once.

Action, Reaction

A reflection on Ronald Grigor Suny's *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide*.

During the Tanzimat period (1839-1876), the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire instituted reforms in an effort to preempt nationalist liberalism. Enlightenment-thinking and its baby, the nation-state paradigm, were creeping into the Ottoman sphere from the west (from Western Europe—obviously). Until about a century or two ago, the generally accepted form of statecraft looked, in the most essential ways, a lot like the 19th century Ottoman state did: societies were governed in an explicit identitarian hierarchy. Following this rule was part of the state's claim to govern.

Think about this concept for a moment. How does a state implicitly justify its right to power?

'I am the representative of G-d'—the phrase that Charlemagne says to Gaul when he justifies his right to conquest—implies that you the great majority of the world are sinners (after all, we wouldn't need G-d if you weren't).

'I represent Islam and the Muslim people'—the phrase that Suleiman can give, as can every other Ottoman sultan, when he justifies the Ottoman state's right to conquest. As the state controlled and actively sought to control more territory, people, other imperial resources, the Ottomans collected more and more subjects: Armenians and Greeks and Jews and Kurds and Turks, all living along distinct and expressed notches of the Ottoman social structure, with Turks at the head of the snake. Cosmopolitanism and communitarian conflict were both baked into that hierarchy, and while religion was not the only marker of social status in the Ottoman Empire, it was easily the most important.

During Sultan Abdulmejid's reign, the Ottomans would join the norms of European statecraft, fundamentally changing their justification, as a state, to govern its people. Rhetoric is important, a watermark. 'My right to govern derives from the people.' With the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottomans moved closer to this liberal litmus test.

The rhetoric of conquest flipped in order to preserve conquest itself; those in power aren't allowed to say that they like power anymore. (Of course we have no choice where and when we're born, and so the concept of 'contract' isn't even relevant here, because we are simply born into a state and its particular set of rules.) Abdulmejid's Tanzimat reforms attempted to integrate some of the Empire's peripheral groups into the state through a potion of state-oriented decision-making (the implementation of national identity cards and the inclusion of women in the government census), and more directly liberalizing measures (homosexuality was decriminalized, the press was granted more freedoms, the sultan's powers were diminished). Perhaps most significantly (in terms of the Ottomans' historical about-face at the onset of Tanzimat), non-Muslims were now of equal status to Muslims, at

least in the most general terms (there would still be a series of taxes directed at non-Muslims—it was still a decidedly Muslim Empire).

Fear of religious conflict, among other things, prompted the Ottoman state to move down this path. The Christian Armenians, for example, could now benefit from and participate in the state. These reforms (as all state reforms, through all of history, have done) signal that the state was trying to avoid further discontent—most famously, as we look back on history, from the ‘rebellious’ Armenians.

A brief aside,

For today’s readers, the incremental crawl towards universal enfranchisement, the right to vote, shows this timeless reform-to-serve governing strategy at its clearest: the rich—as opposed to the landed—the slightly less rich, the poor people, women, and every non-majoritarian group you could think of, are gradually, piece-meal integrated into the state when it can no longer govern *without* doing so, for fear of rebellion or for fear of irreversible delegitimization. Today we are in a feedback loop where a second plane of politics has opened up through the muse of commercialism: the first political pillar of the state has stopped the democratic hemorrhaging of history—hemorrhaging because, despite all odds, ‘the people’ looked to be outrunning the stride of the state—since the commercial plane has now absorbed and sublimated our discontent with the state: Pride Month, Stop Asian Hate, and Kamala. The state, in turn, is expected (demanded) to give a flimsier and flimsier justification for its right to govern.

The Tanzimat reforms were meant to bring peripheral groups into the fold of the state. They did the opposite. Armenians’ discontent at the base of the Ottoman system was met with state protections and opportunities (carrot and stick—at the very least, it means they are really listening to the discontented group, for whatever their end-game might be). Armenians (like all non-Muslims) could now join the military, an important social route for the upwardly mobile (and Armenians fell along a great range of class positions). Spurning the Ottoman state’s hopeful designs though, a disproportionate number of Armenians chose to pay an exemption tax rather than die at war. Muslim Turks, on the other hand, were insulted at the very idea of greater equality between themselves and peripheral groups such as the Armenians. Greeks, another peripheral community within the Ottoman Empire, were also displeased with the implication of equal status between themselves and Armenians.

This was the beginning of the end for the Ottoman state (the beginning of old age, as the sick man of Europe) and it would go through many hands vying for control of the ship’s course. The Armenian genocide took place only 40 years after the Tanzimat period.

The close of Tanzimat also coincided with the *Russian* state's policy-shift towards Armenians. The Ottoman, Persian, and Russian Empires each viewed Armenians with increasing skepticism as the 19th century came to a close, their cultural institutions in particular understood to be potential sites of rebellion (and they were right to notice the extraordinary danger in an urban intelligentsia so prone to Enlightenment ideals from Western Europe and close enough in proximity to the great number of their fellow Armenians struggling with pogrom-like conditions in rural, eastern Anatolia), the Tzar broke with decades of the Russian state's tolerance for Armenians, shutting down schools and churches, purging any organization (but usually bourgeois ones like the press) of their leaders. Instead of silencing dissent, the Russian state's crackdown only fomented greater discontent. And where wide-ranging struggles of class, geography, and religion composed the deeply interwoven social system in the 19th century Caucasus, the Russian and Ottoman state's increasingly hostile policies towards Armenians fostered the growth of a national Armenian identity, whereas previously people would have seen different social webs. Class, geography, and religion were distinct markers of power in Ottoman society; the nationalist turn attempted to press these kinds of varied hierarchies together, into nation (Suny).

Today we have the language to identify many identities, but we still think about them as simply as we always have, at least since the start of the nation-state paradigm in the mid-19th century.

Among Armenians, the nation dominated these self-identifications of power, and for the Ottoman and Russian Empires, the outcome of their policies took an exactly opposite course to their original intentions—their actions created the conditions they feared! One can't help but think of Žižek's proverb: Don't Act, Just Think. Of course, sometimes the future will baffle us no matter how much we think. Any historical change is multi-faceted (Foucault said that history moved upwards on a tower of slatted grids, with things like technology continually rising and other things falling through the cracks). Conservative turns carry progressive clauses, and vice versa. The democratizing mission that comes with politicization can breed conservative sentiment among the multitudes—just look at western public opinion towards migrants; just consider the great majority of our self-described Left, who can be fooled to share a CIA psy-op on the Cuban government so long as it uses the language of urgency and the form of Canva.

One could imagine another world in which the Left plank of Defund the Police was slightly more successful. The movement is only even marginally popular in white, affluent places. These are the strongholds of Defund. If Defund had succeeded, then police would no longer patrol these places—places without crime already. (And yes, crime *is* produced by police because someone has to police the *definition* of crime—if you find yourself taking issue with what I'm saying, please first listen to what I'm saying.) In the eyes of history, who has seen the development of the state, it would make perfect sense for police to again leave affluent places alone. In this bizarro-world where Defund 'succeeds,' we would be left with an even more blatant form of contemporary segregation.

And while the most stationary reading of Žižek's 'Don't Act, Just Think' can be tempting in today's climate, it is still necessary to choose a direction (and I say this without relation to Defund the Police—we ultimately need to choose a form of government, for example), to *decide to have conviction* but not treat it like dogma; to appreciate dogma but to understand your relationship to it as a *subject* who swears fealty, as one with *some* power, however small; to not be afraid to be wrong, but to accept when we are.

Four Questions Cut Short

Why is this night different from all other nights?

This night is different insofar as all nights are unique from one another. The rituals and historical-mindedness we celebrate on this night are tied to the season, but the date of remembrance for *any* memorialization—secular or not, mystical or not—is, in many ways, arbitrary.

And yet that yearly or seasonal timing has nevertheless come to mean something specific to its approximate calendar date. It *means* something that we celebrate Passover when we do, not just because it's a springtime ritual, but because we've continued to repeat our yearly celebration at this time of year. The early practitioners of Passover had to think quite consciously about the springtime date, and in the early stages of a ritual it's still possible to make dramatic changes. Today, Passover is also attached to the Spring by our ritual, not just by its content.

So this night is different because we have chosen, among all nights and all potential suitors of the given holiday's 'host' season, *this* night. It is different because we have made it different, and now it will always be different whether or not we choose to observe, whether or not we care. But all nights are extraordinary, and the particular rituals and items of celebration don't become any less meaningful on any other night, when it's *not* Passover and when we're not practicing.

Charoset

My family's charoset recipe is somewhat anomalous. Although we're Ashkenazi, I didn't grow up with the standard tincture of apples, walnuts, and Manischewitz. As long as I can remember, a mixture of raisins, dates, pine nuts, and chestnut paste comes to mind when I think of this fixture on the Seder plate (I've omitted several other ingredients which also would have been considered 'exotic' to most European Jews only a few decades ago). Our charoset probably bears a closer resemblance to mortar than most other families' and cultures' recipes, and it tastes better too.

I once thought that our charoset signaled a piece of cultural particularity, an indication that my own family's Ashkenazi heritage was somehow different and even more exceptional than that of my other Ashkenazi friends. I was raised in a town in Indiana with few Jews—most of the few that I knew were Ashkenazi. We were already marked, everyone knew that we were Jewish and, reflexively, our sense of Jewishness in relation to the broader pack (that big pack of Hoosier youths) weighed heavily on our broader sense of self. We were different: anxious and possibly scrutinized, but chosen. I thought that

my family's charoset, and the hereditary secrets within that charoset, distinguished me again. Why did we eat this strange variation of this already-strange, ritual food?

As it turned out, my mother found the recipe in a cookbook. Perhaps the weathered book had been passed down? Maybe our family has eaten this charoset for at least two or three generations? No, it was a commercial cookbook—a Venetian charoset, apparently. My mother enjoyed the recipe (as everyone always does) and stuck with it—her own mother's bowl of chopped apple, walnuts, and Manischewitz supposedly tasted like cough medicine. So I'll stick with the Venetian recipe after all.

Kitniyot

1: I don't understand why some people have forbidden eating things like beans and rice (kitniyot) on Passover. Some rabbinical council had to get together and decide that these things weren't okay, even though these foods wouldn't have even existed in the eyes of an ancient Israelite. It's all so arbitrary!

2: The Haggadah tells us that all Jews, today and throughout history, were present when we fled Egypt, just like how we were all present at Mount Sinai. We don't just perform the Seder so that we can imagine what it *would* have been like for the Israelites: we can't have empathy for them when we *are* them. I think you can love yourself, but not empathize with yourself. And we, ourselves, you and I, fled Egypt. Compared to Purim, we place more emphasis on the rituals of Passover than the story. This is because we were present in Egypt ourselves: our yearly performance of rituals transports each one of us back to Egypt and, conversely, the original Exodus resurfaces every year to add a few more days to its extraordinarily long life (I think Elijah's Seder cameo plays a similar role, though I'm not exactly sure how or why). There's little use in narrativizing ourselves before our story has ended—the Passover story continues each year, we whose lives stretch from the Exodus till now through the medium of the Seder plate. So it makes perfect sense that we would prioritize the ritual aspect of the holiday. We eat what would have been available to them, so we don't eat rice. The rabbinical teaching *not* to eat rice, although it was after the fact, tried to stay true to the Exodus. In this sense, the religious teaching wasn't so arbitrary after all. I myself am in a slightly different camp: I try to avoid kitniyot during Passover because my recent generations happened to follow the strange historical deviation when Ashkenazim gave up beans for eight days and the Sephardim and Mizrahim didn't. My family has done this for generations—well, we were supposed to, at least. Even if the first Jew to give up kitniyot for Passover was more recent and 'arbitrary' than our original Jewish ancestors' rituals, this recent ancestor's time is just as important to me as the generations which preceded! Rituals become important through practice, not only through our reverence for the original Exodus and the original laws which ensured that we would remember it. We have been alive since the Exodus, and it was indeed a wondrous thing to live through, but we have lived a long time since then. And there are many arbitrary laws which still have yet to come.



American Judgment, American Prayer

Part II: American Judgment, American Prayer

Meaning and Meaning-Making

“The acquisition of books is by no means a matter of money or expert knowledge alone. Not even both factors together suffice for the establishment of a real library, which is always somewhat impenetrable and at the same time uniquely itself. Anyone who buys from catalogues must have flair in addition to the qualities I have mentioned. Dates, place names, formats, previous owners, bindings, and the like: all these details must tell him something—not as dry, isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole; from the quality and intensity of this harmony he must be able to recognize whether a book is for him or not.”

Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library”

“Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work. [Robert] Morris makes this explicit. Whereas in previous art ‘what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it],’ the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation - one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder.”

Michael Fried, quoting Robert Morris in “Art and Objecthood”

When you receive an item from Amazon in the mail, you feel as though you cannot properly enjoy the experience of opening the package. There are two primary reasons for this. To begin, you feel that by purchasing from Amazon, you will materially benefit the company. Second, and more importantly, you associate physical purchasing with material outcomes, while you imagine your *digital* participation in our economic and social economies to be absorbed and nullified by the great unnavigability of the clearly *immaterial* digital space. And so you feel guilty for receiving this object in the mail, because you could have enjoyed the benefits of modern convenience through the digital space: you could have consumed in a void, so to speak, but you were too impatient and selfish to think about the consequences of your actions, consequences which extend outside of yourself (we, and particularly *you*, live in a society). Of course this schema isn’t the slightest bit true. Your individual data may amount to little in the grand scheme of things, it’s true, but it is a resource nonetheless.

As we lose empathy, we’ve also been made to believe that collective action is impossible, and so our parallel digital behavior is somewhat insular, autistic to a degree. A few decades ago, this insular behavior may have been carried out in the physical space as a new mall opened its doors to a crowd of eager Texans (and just as we’ve moved from capitalism into another, even more depraved financialized

system, so too have our psychological characteristics mutated to fit our historical conditions). Today, one achieves this feeling not through digital shopping, but scrolling: servicing the powers-that-be by commodifying yourself as you build a completely categorized, hyper-socially-aware ‘aesthetic’; and as you ‘check-out,’ simply passing large swaths of time through an increasingly mild shot of serotonin each time we scroll—not when we read, but in the liminal, split-second of the scrolling itself, when we feel a brief bliss as we satisfy the most immediate of our desires with fewer and fewer obstacles (thank u, next).

You agree that real outcomes take place due to the happenings of the immaterial digital world, but you cannot psychically accept that the digital is another real, different from our own physical real. The digital stays in the digital, and this is not real space, you say. If G-d were here, perhaps He would tell you that He has no jurisdiction over this new, digital real: He only created the physical real. As a result, we might say that the unexplored digital real is not necessarily made in His likeness.

Maybe we are dealing with a new deity here, one who isn’t interested in our servitude, since servitude implies a power to be maintained over the course of one’s lifetime (to continue to rule as Pharaoh, you must maintain the class structure for at least as long as you want to live). The deity of this digital real is only interested in satisfying its immediate desire: having destroyed its village as a young child, the deity killed all of those who could feed and nurture it. And so it perished too. The deity’s only role in the village, as its youngest member, was to be weak, to be cared for by others in the village. The deity could not stand this voided, so to speak, ‘negative’ passive position, and so it rebelled against this hierarchy. The entire village, as in Kafka’s Castle, was complicit in the system—none were excluded except for the nurtured figure, who is always young. (We prefer to place our hope in a child’s possible futures—which will supposedly be shaped only *after* that child has sufficiently matured in the stable environment which we provide for them, one which ensures their safe development through a ‘passive’ position sheltered from the fluctuations of the village—rather than think about the many potentialities of today. It is easier to have things out of our hands.) And so the deity destroyed them all, before it perished in a fittingly ‘negative’ manner—it could not survive on its own, without caregivers and without a village.

The deity was resurrected, of course, on the condition that it infect the village of another real with its dogma—if only the members of the village had not been afflicted with its village-mentality, its individuals could survive independently! This is the fantasy, at least, and this is the dogma that our digital deity was asked to bring into our physical real. ‘And only under this circumstance can the members of the village also *enjoy*,’ the deity thought, since the deity could only understand enjoyment through addressing and satisfying immediate, but nonetheless intermediate desires: for the deity, who wanted the village and its members dead, the immediate desire was the *completed destruction* (for the

villagers to *be* dead), while its intermediate function allowed for an orgasmic suspension between the time it took *to kill*, and the moment after the killing had ended. The deity could only enjoy when its communal ties and structure had broken (although that enjoyment was no longer possible *after* the communal structure had disintegrated, the deity having *already killed*). And so the deity of the digital real, in its second life, did not act upon its immediate desires, but convinced us in the physical real to fulfill our own desires as proxy. (The French word for computer, l'ordinateur, is often shortened to l'ordi, pronounced in just the same way as my father's favorite remark of exasperation: Lordy. I give you permission to temporarily condemn me as a Luddite.)

Returning to an earlier statement: you agree that real outcomes take place due to the happenings of the immaterial digital world, but you cannot psychically accept that the digital is another real, different from our own physical real. We are afraid to acknowledge our adoption of ease, and so we are afraid to admit to ourselves that perhaps we are equipped with a degree of control in our lives. We are afraid to admit that our data, though pitiful in isolation, could be powerful if we strategized together. We are afraid to admit that culturally-induced depression, despite its origins in the External world's political barrage on our psyche, is incubated and cultivated and fostered within our own interior worlds (it is often tempting to fall into depression: it can feel good, in a twisted sense, to be depressed). We are afraid to admit that we have power (whether political power or power to fight our own depression) because it so easily plays into the hand of the powers-that-be, powers who would clearly like to shift global dilemmas into the individual realm so as not to rock the boat. But the only political movement which could be more pleasing to the powers-that-be than that of plastic straws, is our nihilist generation's steadfast belief in the individual's *powerlessness*.

We would like to think that our digital actions are voided (and so we feel guilt when we receive an object in the mail from Amazon, starkly contrasted to our digital consumption's supposed non-effect) because we don't want to accept that we *can* act; or, much more to the point, we don't want to accept that we *can* determine meaning through our own subjective view of the world, that we aren't limited to the meanings given to us by a supposedly objective notion of historical materialism on one hand or Francis Fukuyama's labyrinth on the other.

In the new sphere of the digital real, controlled and controller alike still naively trace the boundaries of political action according to the specter of what's possible in the physical world. And until we admit the mystical face of the digital (it being another real from within our physical real: a self-repeating window into and of our world like Borges's Aleph; or, more likely, a window into another world altogether, whose village-less, worldless deities are sent to dismember any semblance of our own

village), we will continue to cower in the digital space, out of the belief that we can't hurt anyone here. In this frame of mind, *we can't help anyone here either*, certainly not ourselves.

So how *can* we begin to think mystically about the digital real? The first challenge is to think mystically about the physical. Today, we are 'better' consumers, so to speak, than our 1970's counterparts celebrating the opening of a new mall in Texas. Trapped inside due to the pandemic and the cold, we are surrounded by relatively few objects in a relatively enclosed space. The arrival of a new object should fill us with excitement and wonder but, so often, you are somewhat muted, embarrassed, and even resentful when the Amazon package comes to your doorstep. We do not *like* objects today.

You certainly do not believe that an object contains any value beyond your initial desire to own it. Physical consumption in pre-digital years, like all consumption, also prioritized this initial purchase-desire. The difference, today, is that we look ironically and shamefully upon materialistic lifestyles. So-called minimalist YouTubers advocate for a 'looking-inward' so that we can relocate our selfhood within a bloated, dizzying consumerist culture. My instincts tell me that this movement is only making us better consumers: so many of today's psychological maladies boil down to a fear that we are not *enjoying* properly. The guilt we feel when we are not working, is really not so different from the following sentiment: 'If I could just simplify my lifestyle, I could enjoy.' Today's consumption recognizes that we still need to accumulate certain objects, but we tend to hold these objects with distaste (a lifestyle which, as it happens, simultaneously pardons our digital, 'non-effect' consumption).

To reinsert a sense of mysticism into our physical real, we must renew a sense of wonder with objects. We have been trained to shun the materialistic lifestyle because it supposedly detracts from our relationships with other people. The common language of minimalist 'look-the-other-way' consumerism will instead improve our empathy and interpersonal connections—or so this logic goes. In truth, the materialistic subject is merely aware of their own subjecthood. It is too easy to dismiss the materialist as selfish just because they recognize the humanity of a used book—the joy felt by a previous owner as they purchased and read the book, *receiving* its power; the interpretations and memories that past owner *gave* to the book. Objects are receptacles of our subjective experience, testaments to our own power to create signifiers in our lives. To recognize the value in an object is to be sentimental, to contemplate, to move slowly: the antithesis to 'voided' digital consumption.

Let me end with the art world. It's too fitting that today's minimalist lifestyle shares its name with the canonical art movement of the 60's and 70's. Michael Fried termed Minimalist art as non-art, criticizing its theatricality and anti-authorial stance: 'anthropomorphic' and 'hollow,' Minimalist art-objects stop the spectator in their tracks, forcing an encounter. As a result, the traditional triangular

relationship between author, artwork, and audience is rewritten, as each spectator's interaction with the artwork allows not only for a new interpretation of the piece, but for the spectator to go so far as to cast a new layer of meaning unto the object.

Among those who took stock in these conversations (academics and artists and you and I), some worried that the author's original 'meaning' for the piece would be swept away underneath this constant wave of interactions, hence Fried's term 'non-art' and his accusations of theatricality (emphasizing the spectator's fleeting interaction, there is no fixed meaning attached to the piece). Of course, the author does not disappear completely, but their own meaning-inscription becomes part of a chorus—a disproportionate voice, even, in the evolution of an object's meaning.

And it is this relationship with objects—one of uncertainty and possibility; one which reminds us that our subjective position is not limited to itself, that it can extend beyond itself; and that our subjective position is also subject to our environment, that it is changed by the people and objects, spaces and environments around us—that I would like to encourage. This isn't just a mind-game or a ploy to bring you closer to religion (but that will come too). To believe in our own power to create meaning is the prerequisite to any worthwhile movement in the digital or physical reals.

Inoculated Sun

Thirty-some hours after receiving my third Covid shot, I developed sharp pains in my chest. I filled my lungs with small, even breaths to lessen the pain, though sleeping was an excruciating affair for two or so nights until the stinging gradually subsided.

Within the first hour of these symptoms, I joined a video call with Aidan and Victor. I understood little from my friends as my feverish face convulsed on the bottom corner of my phone.

* * *

I underwent three exceedingly real dreams on that first night.

In the First Dream, Aidan called to speak, but I couldn't understand his words no matter how hard I tried. His mother interrupted the call as Aidan's insights were hurled into the void. My friend was annoyed but amused with his mother, who waved 'Hello' to my unsure face on the other side of her son's phone. I was keenly aware of the time, 1 AM, throughout the dream. I suspect that I was semi-conscious as I dreamt.

In the Second Dream, I felt without a doubt that my body had transformed into a million separate needles, none of which were built of matter—these composite parts were made of pain alone.

In the Third Dream, my body was transformed into a book. Simply black and leatherbound, the object had no identifying marks, completely nondescript. I watched from a third person view (bodiless from this vantage too) as the book sat in bed just as I would, slightly covered by my blankets and perfectly parallel with the walls of my room. What was held inside? I felt at the time that, in this isolated state (as book), I couldn't hope to communicate what was inside of me. There was no one to relay my thoughts to, no outlet.

I

I flew to Indiana over the winter holidays to visit my family at our childhood home. On Christmas morning, my parents gifted me a poster of Hopi Kachinas, spirits respected by the Pueblo tribes; a dreamcatcher that I was to give to my girlfriend when I returned home; and a sweatshirt adorned with the Zia sun symbol, a figure endowed with a host of religious, cultural, and historical meanings. The sun symbol, of course, also happens to decorate the flag of New Mexico, and has become synonymous with one's affiliation to the state, its land, and its culture.

My fluttering heart accelerated as I opened each gift, knowing all too well that the dangerously small collection of friends, acquaintances, and (most importantly) strangers with whom I regularly make eye contact would see these things too. A poster, a sweater: these are the sorts of objects we use to present ourselves. We channel our own tastes and values into these outward things, and they change us in turn. Surely these objects would signal to the passerby, to the acquaintance who may see but may not inquire (only judge in silence), that I took part in the arbitrary categorization of other peoples! Why else would a twenty-something year old be in possession of a dreamcatcher, for G-d's sake? After all, *collection*, historically speaking, has often been a stage to display one's own power, one's own chique mores and interests.

I spent the rest of the afternoon floundering through Reddit as I determined whether or not it was morally or culturally acceptable to wear the Zia sun sweatshirt. From the moment it was incorporated into the New Mexican flag in 1915, the Zia have rightfully criticized the mountain of profiteering and irreverent uses of this symbol by the broader American public (for example, the Californian rock group Bad Suns' purely aesthetic use of the sun symbol in their own merchandise). The Zia warn against the symbol's decontextualization and its sacrilege—symbols have their own power, accumulated over time. The public's identification of the sun symbol with the southwestern landscape, contemporary New Mexican culture, or with a vaguely American Indian religiosity sit poorly with the Zia. For all of my distaste with liberal discussion-ism, I empathize deeply with the tribe on this matter, whose religion and culture are yet another victim of globalization's *dissolving* properties.

Maybe wearing a sun symbol sweatshirt *is*, in fact, a different affair if you've 'given it some thought,' so to speak. You may say to me, "But what difference does it make if you wear the sweatshirt 'thoughtfully' or not? You wear it all the same." Well, the material world is more dependent on the psychological world than we'd sometimes like to think.

If you and I can only speak a certain aesthetic language, maybe using that language (even if it's often considered to be imprecise, overly personal, and thoughtless) isn't such a bad thing. Perhaps the meaning of my sweater doesn't have to listen to my imagined acquaintances' accusations.

Think of using another culture's symbols: to be too *close* (even respectfully) is often viewed with suspicion—"Why do you 'want to be' this other culture?" we might ask. *Distance* is the correct etiquette: we will not 'cross a line,' this way. But if we've resigned ourselves to *distance*, how can we hope to foster greater understanding among different peoples? I pulled myself through the tight-fitting sweater.

* * *

Like many of their generation, my parents are lovers of Sante Fe and New Mexican culture in general. My mother lived in Albuquerque for a few years as a child. My father was born in Wichita Falls and, with the exception of two years in Sacramento, remained in Texas for the first four decades of his life (many of which were spent in Amarillo, which is only a Texan-sized stone's throw from the New Mexican border in its own right).

I admire the strategies of my parents' travels: the two of them place a heavy emphasis on the food of an area, a fascination which is only seriously contested by the aesthetic treasures of that place. Churches (always churches), cemeteries, museums, and, chief among all of these, *markets*. Waves of pottery, kachina dolls, one small rug, a cache of turquoise jewelry, and two landscape paintings line the cabinets, shelves, and walls of my childhood home. I am told that these objects were purchased directly from indigenous artists, something I greatly appreciate. I have already received a great deal of things (art and clothing, mostly) from this trove of expatriated American Indian culture. I can remember when my parents' collection was bolstered by the death of my mother's mother, when her sizable collection of Indian cultural objects was distributed among her four children.

I love these things: they are beautiful aesthetic objects just as they are religious or cultural. Ritual value (which encompasses religious, cultural, and historical value and meaning) is accumulated over time, as a practice is repeated, developed, rediscovered, changed. This change is not Lamarckian: these objects' ritual value cannot fluctuate over the course of one lifetime simply because they played a mystical role in my own childhood (to be fair, that mystical relationship took place through a rather complicated and rich aesthetic relationship, and I am not one to underestimate the power of aesthetics). I will one day inherit many of these items and, in a twisted way, I will also take on the responsibility of a distanced respect and supervision of these objects' *ritual* values—'twisted,' as one might imagine

indigenous stewardship of the American landscape, but translated through the value set of my own time, family, class, and culture.

* * *

I was only told this year that the simple wooden ornaments of fisherman and soldiers that hung in our Christmas tree—ornaments which I had always assumed came from my father’s Christian family—in truth had come from my mother’s. When I asked my mother how and why her parents had come to possess all these figurines, she journalistically responded: “They were German Jews.” We dined on my mother’s Linzer torte that night, as we have always done the night of Christmas—it was her father’s favorite dessert.

II

As my parents drove me to Indianapolis for my flight home, I imagined describing the landscape to a visitor. You can only really see a place that you know very well when you are with another who is seeing it for the first time. I like to imagine shepherding this formless friend around so that I can ‘see’ again while they encounter something entirely new.

Fields of corn and soybeans stretch far, but not nearly as far as the horizon, with isolated lines and patches of oak cutting between the farmers’ respective domains. Grain silos, green vehicles of all sizes, gray farmhouses, and idiosyncratic groupings of two or three sizable homes whose shared cul de sac connects their long driveways and impressive but nonetheless cookie-cutter walls to the highway some hundred yards away. I have always wondered how the people who live in these homes view the constant stream of passerby drivers—as ungrateful tourists, or possibly as benefactors, I have thought at one point or another. The two-lane highway is split in half: the endless construction on the other side of the orange cones reminds me of a perpetual toll we pay to a state government uninterested in welfare programs or public works.

I imagine my formless friend drinking in these sights. Just as one would behave in any new locale, my friend would comment on the landscape—the soil, the weather, the tone of light in this place. If this isn’t your first observation when you’ve traveled somewhere else—if you are only initially concerned with the food or people, for example—the land eventually reveals itself to you all at once, coloring the notes you’ve taken about the place so far, and your general impression of the area once you leave.

“Usually,” I tell my friend, “the cornfields are given a bright shower of yellow light” – no, that’s not entirely true, is it. “Usually, an absolute, empty gray comes from the heavens and mutes the colors on the ground. It may be better this way, since you can at least imagine how beautiful it would have been on a sunnier day—unfortunately, sunny days are not so wonderful here after all, but that’s why a gray day isn’t so bad really. The gray skies make the land feel barren, and the ground looks as if our creators have only gotten around to filling-in the most essential features of the painting’s foreground. You’re unlucky, my friend: today is exceptionally foggy, something you rarely see in these parts. You can barely make out a thing. If we could only see *some* parts of the land, you could speculate and wonder about the rest—as you would a coloring book. Unfortunately, that game becomes too cerebral for me when the fog is this heavy.”

III

Some time after returning to my Northeastern home, I spoke with Aidan about my troubling dreams—the phone, the needles, and the book.

“The greatest distinction between Freud and Jung,” Aidan told me, “was that the elder did not need to diagnose the dream at each interpretative opportunity. Jung, his disciple, needed this. Freud was content with the general landscape of his patients’ dreams, and his dreamwork analysis was all the more sophisticated for it.”

We discussed our ideas, possible projects. I was frantic.

“After a certain point, where’s the use in separating ‘issues’ or ‘projects’ by theme? To distinguish between ‘Eco’ and ‘Communism’ will be redundant: all of the things we talk about are already about these things. A ‘Manifesto’ Issue? All of them are manifestos! But then, how can we talk about anything if we are afraid to take a stand on, or take a stand from *inside of* one vantage point? Maybe people will see this ‘separation’ as naive, but I’m not afraid of looking like a normie—I’m only afraid of my supposedly ‘impractical’ interests getting conflated with an avant-garde who is so completely divorced from reality that they didn’t even notice their Fall into a docile, etiquette-obsessed cultural politics. To be a proper Leftist today is to have your hands in everything, at least if you want to be taken seriously. But I don’t want to fit into that, I don’t want to talk about these things—I don’t have

anything to say! I just want to transcribe my dreams! I just want to talk about religion! About G-d! Isn't that still communism?!"

And I told my friend about my parents' gifts; that my girlfriend's cat had assumed that the dreamcatcher was a plaything. I was, apparently, visibly agitated with the creature. I exercised much more restraint when my roommate propped up his feet on my girlfriend's kitchen table, his shoes coming within inches of the prone dreamcatcher. Afraid that voicing my disapproval would break some convention of politeness ("Who really thinks of these things as sacred anymore?"), my respectful nervosa found no outlet until those shoes stood up to leave. I fretted all night that the cat would dismember the object after we had left.

* * *

Monday: I received the third dose of my Covid-19 vaccine.

Tuesday: I experienced painful stings from the area around my heart. I spoke to Aidan and Victor. I dreamed three dreams that night.

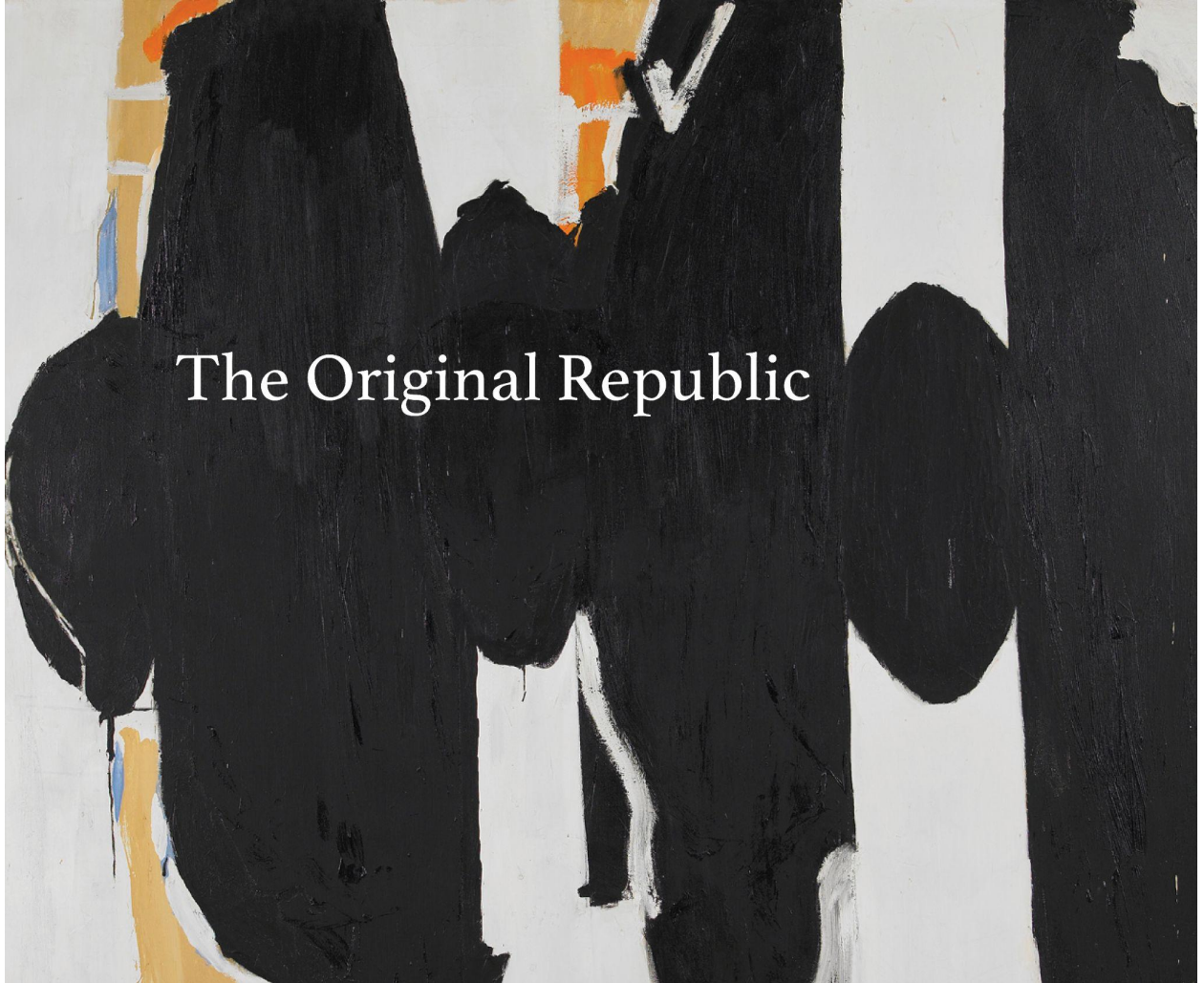
Wednesday: I went to work despite the pain, and was let out an hour early.

Thursday: I went to work until a loved one asked me to visit the emergency room. After what felt like several tests, a doctor told me that everything looked normal and that there was nothing to worry about. A muscle near my heart or ribs had been injured, the doctor told me. It would heal.

Friday: Braving Omicron, I flew to Indiana to visit my family. Christmas Eve.

Saturday: I was gifted a sweatshirt bearing the Zia Sun Symbol.

Sunday: I drove to the Indianapolis airport with my family. It is a gray day.



The Original Republic

Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 58, 1957-1961

Text included after the fact, obviously

The Original Republic

I

For Motherwell, in his own era, all that was Modern was tied to an increasingly global, increasingly seamless connection. The Ubiquitous or Tribal.

“Modernism is the first art that is an art of complete individuals in a society in which we’re basically (with a few pockets here and there in America and Europe and so on) *not* tribal people. Specific individuals expressing specifically individual things.”

Global revolutions (industry, economy, culture, thought) seem to place more of humanity within the confines of an absolute system. For those of us who live inside of it—and it is most of us—an unimaginable wealth of connectivity is *offered* to us from its shared world language, which lets us “[express] specifically individual things.”

“Offer,” yes: the G-d of each coming era presents itself through a new medium. For example—and I can say so with reasonable confidence—the reader’s own vacant relationship with mysticism, divinity, and ritual may be attributed in large part to the nature of our own historical moment. The traditional means of transcendence (the Church, for one, but there are many) are now small and unrespected (relative to the past, at least). While it is tempting to associate transcendence *only* with the Church, and therefore spirituality in general with conservative zealotry, today’s actually dominant means of transcendence are located somewhere altogether, institutions and worldviews not yet grasped by global inhabitants: *we are only trained to associate Dominant with Traditional*. Figures and structures and concepts of power still govern our lives, although we have spiritually distanced ourselves from these things—and, again, they are not limited to the Church. Think of the global psyche’s immediate reaction to the atom bomb, the Holocaust. Even deniers live underneath these events’ lingering awe, still felt by global society, although our reverence towards others (other people, other historical moments) wanes thinner and thinner. We are plagued by an inability to understand others. Through our shared global language, we have identified ourselves through a Ubiquitous, connected image—and yet there remains difference! No wonder our conflicts (personal, cultural, political) have entered a frustrated feedback loop.

In the era of Motherwell's Modern (the remarks above were given in 1987), global language was a tool of 'individual expression,' much of which criticized its own language, or the forces which created that language (the New Left comes to mind—but we will think more on this in section III). He holds no illusions that we have lost touch with spiritual things, but nonetheless celebrates the potential expression and dissent this language has given to us.

“The instant there's not a collective consensus of what the icons and idols of the tribe are, I think *that's* Modernism, and in that sense, for the foreseeable future... there is [no] aesthetic (other than individualism) that could possibly replace it.”

Motherwell's historical moment sat in a particular dais, near enough to a recognizable traditionalism to understand the limits of global, seamless language; and far enough away from those old orders to understand its freedoms.

We now sit at another dais, much lower to the ground. The primary contradiction of our current era is the promise of expression (the expression of “specifically individual things”) within an absolute world. Only a decade after the remarks above, Motherwell himself predicted this linguistic collapse.

“Let's say... Modern art began in 1863... It would be like, say, New Yorkers in 1663, knowing there's a whole continent, and New Yorkers who had decided that they don't want this new continent developed in the old way. Then obviously the first generation has a vast territory, a whole continent to explore. And they will settle part of it. The next generation, some will go further, some will reinforce what's already been settled. And so on, generation after generation... I would say that Modern art, among other things, was an effort to create a language that was more appropriate to the feelings of modern man than the historical, mythological, religious traditions that had dominated art before. Now obviously the first generation on the scene has the biggest territory to conquer. The next generation, still lots. The next generation, still lots. But there does come a moment when one reaches the Pacific... One can't invent a whole new continent... Younger artists... are having to deal with an established language rather than invent a new one. In fact, today I think the avant-garde is over.”

Unlike Motherwell's first Modern, we again share a canonized, “collective consensus of what the icons and idols of the tribe are” (no wonder the West Coast dominates contemporary culture: we have already “[reached] the Pacific”). Whether it is spoken with admiration or dissent, today's language cannot escape the shadow of our recent global history—the continent, the ground we rest on.

A certain passive disposition of faux-skepticism has injected itself into most of us within the global core. The objects of our skepticism vary widely, but the form is mightily similar. Today, there is division *within* a shared language and division *within* a shared sense of reality, but the terms of this worldview are not up for debate. We have inherited the language of Motherwell's Modern, along with its history of protest against the conditions of that language. By the time of my birth, this language had already eaten its own tail. Feedback plays.

II

The language of Motherwell's Modern was born from dissent. Modernists' exit from orthodoxy gave birth to the connective global language of the time. The Postmodern turn showed the eventual trajectory of this language, whose ultimate coordinate I believe we have only reached since the pandemic, when our relationship with the digital world reached maturity: an unexpectedly toxic brew of skeptical counter-culturalism and a distant fear of the past have given birth to a ubiquitous political ideology and general pathological state in the 'Modern' global world (we are too reverent of the past: an unwillingness to analyze human horrors stems from a fear that analysis will lead to recovery, and the horrors were so great and our own fear of Hell so great that we would simply prefer to let the past rest in peace).

Global language has become so efficient that it has begun to account for the dissimilarities in one another's position. As a result, the language has begun to fail. We are communicating with the conscious understanding that we are individual, and that, as is the case with any language, we are mediating a general interpersonal confusion (dialogue between individuals) through the channel of a shared set of terms. And yet we also operate with the deadly unconscious awareness that this communication is needless; that language (the stray emoji, the uninterested expression on our camera) is no longer necessary. One can imagine a brilliant satire in which the protagonist chooses to peruse the barren landscape of memes and serotonin-formulas that forms the widest stretches of the Internet, in order to find something new! No, that would be too ridiculous: we are attached to this landscape because it promises the same thing to us each time we enter. Celan lamented the impossibility of communication; today, we keep our conversational partner at an arm's length purely to satisfy an unsaid *nostalgia*.

Let us consider, before we return to Motherwell, one explicit term of that global language, one of our present crises: our era's question of affiliation. Globalization homogenizes, in language, selfhood,

subjecthood: The Baudrillardian accepts globalization's homogenizing qualities along with Capital's psychological coaxing.

A good many public intellectuals have built the following polemic: the 'passive' response—to accept homogenization, to accept psychic oneness—is the dominant strand of globalization at the moment. Many of globalization's critics, as a result, have turned to competing forms of identitarianism. While this 'dominant globalism' (which offers a universal political agenda through Capital) has now begun to incorporate identitarianism into its own corporate language (Kamala), insurgent species of identitarianism are still used to attack the *Washington Post's* of the world.

Both the Sectarian Left and the contemporary Right use identitarian language to combat dominant globalism, the latter serenading us with its well-worn dirge for the West.¹ For example, when barons of conservative thought—from state actors like Aleksandr Dugin to cultural critics such as Michel Houellebecq and Alain Finkielkraut—pit this supposedly universal global program against their own western-nationalist identitarian solutions, they implicitly suggest that we cannot combat globalism with universalism: no response can include everyone and, in their own case, borders must be defined to articulate a national community (the collective borders of the global community can only be defeated by a smaller but competing collective formed around a tight-knit 'heritage' and set of cultural norms).

Alain Badiou—who should, in another world, be treated as a patron saint among today's Left—proposes a response to dominant globalism which does not rely on identitarianism (it would be ridiculous to say that Badiou is completely unique in this thinking, though he may be the most eloquent). This excerpt is taken from an extensive and now-infamous dialogue between himself and Finkielkraut.

“The heritage of France is a heritage that I am prepared to embrace when it's a matter of the French revolution, the commune, the universalism of the eighteenth century, the resistance, or May '68, but it's a heritage I totally reject when it's a matter of the restoration, the Versaillais, colonialist and racist doctrines, Petain, or Sarkozy. There's no such thing as 'a' French heritage... it's very clear that national identity, when it refers to undivided memory and hereditary and familial consent, is nothing but the return to the tired old categories of tradition and leads only to war, against the 'bad French' on the domestic front and against 'the others'

¹ One could imagine a sort of ideological class structure to order today's global West: 'Universal' Capital, the dominant psychological force in the West who we might simply have labeled as neoliberals a few years ago; The 'Tribal Right' – or 'Trumpism' here in the United States, which may well be the ascendant psychological force in the West; and the 'Sectarian Left.' Any *universalist* response to 'Universal Capital' has been relatively weak, as of late, in comparison to the competing identitarian responses.

on the foreign front. The public debate today is between two disastrous positions: on the one side, free-market consensus and universal commercialism and, on the other, the retreat into identities, which is a reactionary and, moreover, totally ineffective defense against that globalization.”

Badiou associates “the retreat into identities” with the contiguous history of French conservatism. His general political program, however, does not restrict its critique of identitarianism to the more traditional nationalists of our contemporary landscape: one needn’t look far to find this same rhetoric within Leftist camps who protest against the suffocating homogenization of globalization. The fetishization of oppressed groups’ ‘Wisdom’, for example, confuses a *particular* group experience for a *universal*; while this group’s particular experience is highly valuable in puncturing global society’s current assumptions of universal truths, a particular experience is nonetheless a particular experience, *a* coordinate whose proper analysis can help us trace the wider circle of universality.² One can even detect this “retreat into identities” among those who *accept* globalization, with diversity politics being embraced by the highest rungs of the ascendant powers-that-be. To reiterate, the language of protest alive in Motherwell’s time has been reincorporated into the prevailing system of global power. For many who use this identitarian rhetoric, we fail to see that our language is impotent, a “totally ineffective defense against that globalization.” Much worse, this strategy only cements the present system, only elongates its tail, only provides more nutrition to the snake’s head.

The Left, in a twisted parallel to the anti-global Right, has doubled down on an identitarian, *particular* political program. Motherwell spoke of a global language which was born through dissent and the shattering of consensus. While we continue to use the skeptical rhetoric passed down from

² The Left’s mistake here is to say that the Palestinians’ particular viewpoint, for example, is universal because of their identity itself, rather than the conditions of their identity which reflect a light back unto the universal. This may seem simple, but I would challenge you to think twice the next time you encounter this largely-digital phenomenon. Instagram has marketed other cultures to us for this very purpose. To take part in another’s identity *as* wisdom is to fetishize that particular experience (perhaps we could describe this as a sort of cultural-commodity fetishism), that particular culture, and to misunderstand the nature of wisdom itself. (In a more concrete case, the Baltimore chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America recently moved to weigh the votes of non-white members more heavily than white members.) Wisdom comes through experience, it is true, but collective experience does not brew collective wisdom (and I haven’t even mentioned the race reductionism we tend to promote on the Sectarian Left, which misdiagnoses collective experiences of class in its own right).

It is not only naive but dangerous to expect an extraordinarily large group to arrive at the same conclusion. I believe that, in certain contexts, certain times, a group has endured the same experience and each participant has *felt* the same thing—but I could not be convinced that this was Wisdom. Is it Wisdom which the oppressed inherit from tragedy? I ask my fellow Jewish readers, have our people gained Wisdom from the Holocaust? But there is still something in a feeling which can give way to a thought, and perhaps something that can lead to Wisdom too—just as the conditions of one particular experience can show the sloped vantage of what we had previously understood to be eternal.

Motherwell's generation, it seems that we have reached a consensus yet again: we can all agree that dominant globalism and its universal creed of profit must be stopped, and that we can only hope to respond with *particular* solutions. And this return to consensus has coincided with the failure of the seamless global language (we no longer need to communicate, we already know). Strangely enough, the rejuvenation of our global language (and so the actual rejuvenation of difference and dissent) must come from a universal program.

III

There is a tendency among young people to accost the Motherwell-type for his orthodox (by today's metrics) appreciation of the canon. This is a somewhat palatable criticism when you remember that his Abstract Expressionist milieu was weaponized to serve as the face of American freedom (presented to be a 'universal' psychological freedom) and expansionism (a cursory search of the MoMA's Alfred Barr and the artistic front of the Cold War will suffice—this is a rather tired critique, though). And of course, Motherwell's family riches will never help his case among today's Left, who have grown understandably resistant to the very notion of class traitors.

Without commenting on this youthful pathology, I would like to make a case for Motherwell—there is a model here. Far from uncommon for a first generation Ab-Ex painter, Motherwell was an adamant critic of global Americanization in his own time. His contemporaries' and his own political sentiments coalesced around the grand cause of the Spanish Republic, when Americans traveled to Spain to fight and die. (One could claim that Byron's death in Greece may have transpired on the same universal battlefield as the Spanish Republic, but the sense of glorious antiquity which bound the British with Greece was surely more exotic and detached than the shared fate, the shared temptations and obstacles, the shared opportunities that the world must have felt in unison throughout the whole of the 1930's.) It is possible that this internationalist vision was sustained only by the Spanish Republic's defeat, but it was defeated nonetheless.

Motherwell's fabled *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, completed over the course of two decades following the Second World War, seem to memorialize mourning itself, with Spanish or Internationalist sentiment only arriving after-the-fact.

“Before my work had been personal and intimate, and even though the first version was a very small picture and a wholly unexpected one, I realized that what was different about it was that

it was basically a monumental, public image. In reflecting how to call it, what I felt about publicly, it occurred to me that I cared deepest about the defeat of the Spanish Republic. By that time, in 1949, with the World War having ended, I felt that the earlier drama of the Spanish Republic was largely forgotten. The image fitted my sense that there ought to be an elegy (a funeral lament) for the original Republic.”

While the values of the Spanish Civil War moved towards a universal program, the event is celebrated through particular, often national recollections. The brushstrokes applied to Motherwell’s canvas—isolated and impassioned, so much so that some describe them as *essentially human*, or so the old Modernist trope goes—were likewise performed in universal gestures, and were only later siphoned into the particular image of the Spanish Republic.

And it is in this capacity—as devotee of this dynamic, universalist program—that Motherwell reaches the limit of global language’s potential.

“As an artist, I am used to being regarded as a somewhat eccentric maker of refined, but rather unintelligible, objects of perception. Actually, those objects contain a murderous rage, in black and white forms, of what passes for the business of everyday life, a life so dehumanised, so atrophied in its responsibility that it cannot even recognise a statement as subtle and complicated as the human spirit it is meant to represent. I am as well, at other times, an expresser of adoration for the miracle of a world that has colors, meaningful shapes, and spaces that may exhibit the real expansion of the human spirit, as it moves and has its being ... Indeed, if G[-]d had said to a group of men: Here is a vast park, of millions of square miles. Let’s see how quickly you can cover it with everything that is an affront to the human spirit. And, above all, be certain that it is done on a grand scale of extravagance and waste, and of lack of regard for the sensibilities of the inhabitants of the other parks in the world. Then we might by definition call that group of men that G[-]d so provoked ‘Americans.’” -1944

The particularists (those Americans who seem to hold nothing sacred) have provoked G-d. And so Motherwell—an observer and technician of stark relationships, absence and life, absorption and reflection, Spain and republicanism—futilely looks for a space of human spirit, whether by return or something altogether new (his relationship to Picasso, Matisse, and the canon complicate this question). Motherwell is still searching for a universal, lonely among a population erring towards the secularized, homogenized, and globalized One.

We are most human during our fits, the bubbling-over of emotion penetrating the general equilibrium of modern experience. Motherwell’s universal “rage” within the particular elements of “what passes for

the business of everyday life” points to the limits of his time's modernity, and the limits of global language: seamless, shared connection has infringed upon our access to “the human spirit” and anything of transcendental value.

“Making an Elegy is like building a temple, an altar, a ritual place. Unlike the rest of my work, the *Elegies* are, for the most part, public statements. They reflect the internationalist in me, interested in the historical forces of the 20th century, with strong feelings about the conflicting forces in it.”

It is here that we leave Motherwell behind.

IV

As Badiou suggests, we should respond to homogenizing globalization, to the re-consensus of global language, not with identitarian movements, but with universal movements. We must reintroduce difference through universality. Universal causes produce particular consequences and even particular identities (Badiou's France—a national, particular identity—derives from a universal communism).

Allow me to conclude by making the case for one of the oldest, and perhaps the most fundamental of universal programs; one which breaks from the “dictatorship of the commodity” (Badiou's term for an Americanized globalism bent to the tune of commerce) but is not concerned with a truth confined to particular experience: Ritualism and Religiosity.

Parallel to the evolution of our present form of globalism, the 20th century turned to secularism in a resentful outlash towards dogmatism writ large. The atomized freedom given to us by global language (and, of course, global *conditions*, at the very least, from within the world system's core) made us skeptical of the traditional forms of organized religion. Although it is true that this secular view can be somewhat naive and overdetermined by the American Christian schema, it is also true that dogma comes from *all* corners of this world. Organized religion is no exception. Crucially however, certain atheists have made the grave mistake of attaching dogmatism to religion itself.

These critics point to religion's ‘certainty,’ usually by way of its over-reliance on *the word*. I ask you to consider the first forms of human religion: having only conjured fire a short while ago, would you really imagine early man's religion to be at all sure of itself? G-d was a stand-in, a living testament to our confusion. G-d was the mirror opposite of certainty. G-d was conceived to describe our *own*

inability to describe the world. G-d, in these early days, was not the creation of a Billy Graham megalomaniac to implant the values of the powerful into the weak. G-d was not Billy Graham's value system; G-d was, in the abstract, *a* value system, but an undetermined one. Language without words, communication without language, form without content.

But these are unimportant observations for the critic of religion (who could not be more different than a religious critic). Why bother considering the origins of G-d when G-d *lives*, nurtured by the dogmatism of our contemporary society: Billy Graham is all that matters now. Above all else, the critic of religion takes issue with Ritual, the emblem of dogmatism. It is through Ritual that religion becomes concretized, where we forget that G-d is a metaphor and perversely treat G-d as a system of static and *articulated* values (Billy Graham's original sin lies in the belief that G-d *can*, in fact, be directly articulated: an especially foul particularization of a universal).

And, consider for a moment, what if Ritual was something else? The continuation and celebration of our original confusion, for one. More importantly, what if Ritual did not limit itself to paying homage to meaning, but created meaning itself through repetitive practice?

Allow me to deviate one more time. In many respects, Walter Benjamin's essay on "The Task of the Translator" gives more reverence to the translator than the original author of a great literary work.

"The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original... Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one... [T]he great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work."

The original author has etched the first coordinate on the circle of a universal experience—but it is only one point, and so it can only form a *straight*, particular line at this moment. Once the second coordinate has been marked by the translator in their own cultural and historical context, however, we can begin to see the *curve* of the universal circle. In this sense, the translator makes the literature great.

This relationship between author and translator is also at play when we perform Ritual. The meaning of an act—not just the meaning of a book, a law, a cultural or familial heritage—is endowed by our forebears who have performed the same ritual act in their own cultural and historical contexts. Ritual value suspends and maintains the origins of that ceremony (cosmic confusion and the metaphor of G-d, let's say), but additional meanings are layered atop through generational practice. And, of course,

each individual's and each generation's particular relationship to that unaltered Ritual reveal *difference* to us: *specifically because of our Rituals' age and relative constancy*, we can begin to see our own particular coordinate upon the universal curve. In other words, by performing the meaning-laden act ourselves, we can start to understand our own context in relation to that ceremony (where we can currently only understand our context in relation to secularism and, consequently, a culture that has a rather hard time seeing its own self). Ritual's curve is identifiable, in the Jewish context for example, by *limitations* in the form of cloven hooves and shellfish, candles, the Seder plate; limitations which have been passed down. They are perhaps arbitrary and meaningless for a contemporary Jew closed off from the past and the vast Ritual meaning accumulated over the course of the Jewish people's history. For myself, these Rituals' meaning derives in part from their arbitrariness.

Benjamin has said all of this himself. He writes, in another piece on Kafka,

“Wisdom has sometimes been defined as the epic side of truth. Such a definition stamps wisdom as inherent in tradition; it is truth in its haggadic consistency. It is this consistency of truth that has been lost. Kafka was far from being the first to face this situation. Many had accommodated themselves to it, clinging to truth or whatever they happened to regard as truth and, with a more or less heavy heart, forgoing its transmissibility. Kafka's real genius was that he tried something entirely new: he sacrificed truth for the sake of clinging to its transmissibility, its haggadic element. Kafka's writings are by their nature parables. But it is their misery and their beauty that they had to become more than parables. They do not modestly lie at the feet of the doctrine, as the Haggadah lies at the feet of the Halakah. Though apparently reduced to submission, they unexpectedly raise a mighty paw against it.”

Benjamin's “transmissibility” is our Ritual. Its curve can only maintain its unsayable, universal trajectory because it has no illusions about the constancy of truth. Its conviction lies in history (not in a dogmatic reverence, but in the understanding that we lie in only *one* coordinate just like each of our ancestors—the moving curve is all that connects us). And for our purposes, today, Ritual provides a set of limitations which can shake us from the intoxicating, atomizing freedom of secularism promised to us by the ‘commercially universal’ global paradigm. Ritual, a *conscious* Ritual, challenges us to *consider habit*. Ritual does *not* mean that we will cut off ties with all of our previous habits and beliefs when we realize that they are fallible and random, and that we could very well choose to do something else if we so pleased. And Ritual does *not* mean that we will proceed with exactly the same set of habits and beliefs of our ancestors—after all, there is a difference between performing a ritual for a universal G-d and performing a ritual for a particular G-d.

Harold Bloom would be quick to caution my optimistic proposal. I imagine he'd say that I was a son of Woodstock or, fantastically obscure, the preacher Barton Stone's spiritual, Enthusiast gathering of 25,000 Kentuckians at Cane Ridge in 1801:

“What was born as Barton Stone and his fellow preachers chanted on was a fundamental but scarcely ever avowed principle of the American Religion: creedlessness, or the *doctrine of experience*, as oxymoronic a phrase as I can imagine. The drunk, sexually aroused communicants at Cane Ridge, like their drugged and aroused Woodstockian descendants nearly a century and a half later, participated in a kind of orgiastic individualism, in which all the holy rolling was the outward mark of an inward grace that traumatically put away frontier loneliness and instead put on a doctrine of experience that exalted such loneliness into a being-alone-with-Jesus. A solitude that only the two could share pragmatically is no different from the perpetual American loneliness, but spiritually it became an absolute difference.”

What I propose in rejuvenated ritual (to reorganize and practice rituals again, rather than to fashion new forms altogether) aims to locate our present moment and our isolated selves in a heretofore blind historical pool—by retracing Benjamin's line of translation, is it too much to expect our ancestors' actions (actions which have, again, made these rituals meaningful over time) to 'keep us company,' so to speak? And, more to the point, is it so drastic to believe that this 'sketching-out' of historical movements will also grant a more fluid understanding of our neighbor? After all, what binds a generation—we have only known or recognized this on a national level for so long, but I am speaking about a global generation here too—what binds a generation more than a sense of 'meaning-endowment'? It is easy to imagine an older person's affinity for one of their own generation for having endured a similar national or sectarian movement (particularly if they fought for the same pole). So why should we imagine ritual to be a solitary walk with Jesus (or rather, a solitary walk with the Jesus *already* within you)? Bloom writes,

“[T]he American Christ almost always has been a *personal experience* for the American Christian. When a contemporary Southern Baptist hears the call of Jesus to the self, what self is it that is addressed? Is it the twice-born self part of the Creation, or is it already a part of G[-]d? And if it is as old as what calls to it, then what are the consequences of that shared earliness?”

Ritual, even performed alone, is connective in the broadest sense.

If we choose to perform rituals of our own volition, rather than perform them out of dogmatic obedience or fear, we will come to see the arbitrariness of any program—and yet we still have to choose one, don't we? Is Ritual such a bad option, then? In a political sense, we must organize societies according to a system, a set of laws, a set of values: of course we should always strive towards a better system, but we still, no matter the context, have to work *within an imperfect system* as we try to create the ideal.

Transcendence can live again. We have no need to limit ourselves to Ritual in our search for a universal binding agent. But we must choose *a* binding agent (for Badiou, this alternative is communism, for myself it is Ritual; there will have to be many points of entry into that universalist regime). We must choose *a* binding agent to form a viable alternative to Finkielkraut's binary: that is, the dominant strand of 'universal' globalization pit against varying forms of naively tribal particularism. Identitarianism is not the answer.

What better way to counter the feedback loop? The loop: our unconscious relationship to the global language which has eaten its own tail, and which continues to eat; our protest which, unaware of itself, uses the same terms as its dominant globalizing opponent. Ritual is the *conscious* repetition of the snake's circle, making us aware of its course.

So let us return, at last, to the dilemma at hand. Global language has become seamless, ceasing to be a language at all. Speaking to the nature of Eros, Hannah Arendt wrote,

“If two people do not succumb to the illusion that the ties binding them have made them one, they can create a world anew between them.”

Language exists between difference—there is no communication between two who are the same. What I am really pleading for, with all this talk of Motherwell and Ritual, is empathy. Difference is needed to speak in a world, and it is needed to understand the people and the things which extend beyond yourself. Today's global language has shifted our love for ease, our love for seamless connection, into the realm of particular experience—the realm of our individualized posts within the collective unconscious. Somewhere within you, you know that you do not know yourself, and yet anyone who is not like you has committed the ultimate contemporary sin.

Properly universal movements can break our relationship to this atomized sense of self we feel under commercialized globalism; and Ritual, tracing the universal curve of its own historical accumulation of meaning, allows us to relocate ourselves—and to see our commonalities with others—within a pool of infinite difference.

* * *

“What the value and worth of language will be—the language from which G[-]d will have withdrawn—is the question which must be posed by those who still believe that they can hear the echo of the vanished word of the creation in the immanence of the world.”

Gershom Scholem

I end the G-d Issue with a series of ‘commands,’ but here’s a shorter one to whet your palette.

Place a note on your alarm clock (buy an alarm clock) next to your pillow, at the head of the blocky red desk placed too close to your bed frame, so that when you reach to press the snooze button, you encounter the note which simply reads “Sh’ma,” reminding you to recite the brief prayer before you fall asleep and before you proceed with your day.

(You will learn, after two weeks of practicing this Ritual, that you should really be reciting “Modeh Ani” in the mornings and “Sh’ma” only when you lie down at night.)

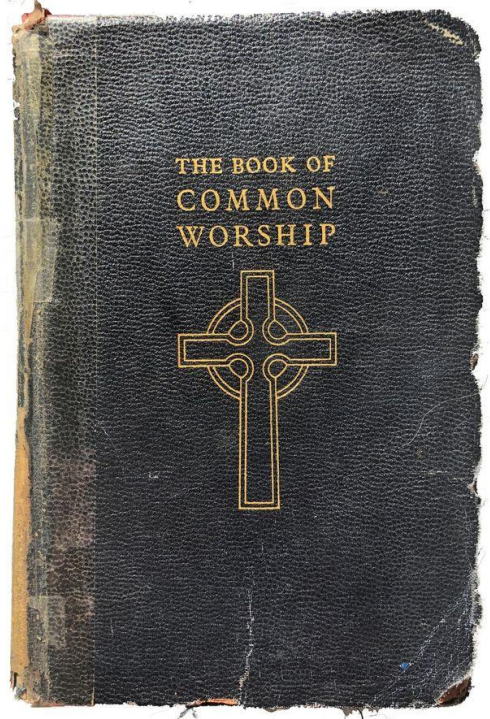
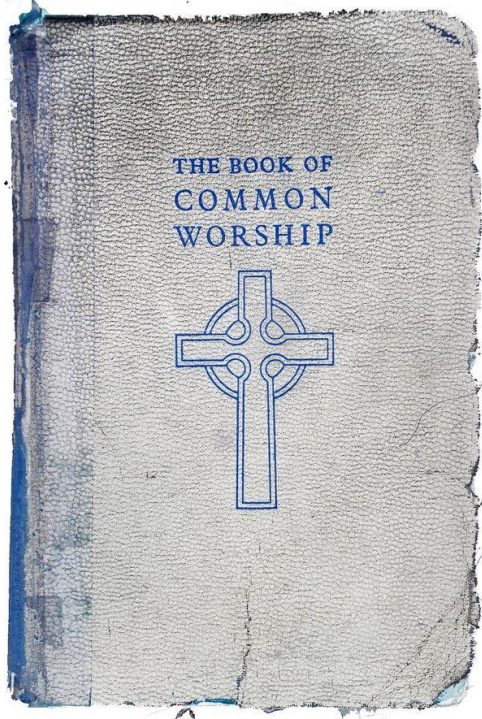
Perform this Ritual until you no longer need the note to remind you, and the ritual is incorporated into your life like any other function of your day. And then, when you lie down with your lover and become keenly aware of this Ritual’s oddity when placed next to the routines and Rituals of this other body in the night, you must either let them in on your secret, or whisper your prayer even more quietly in the darkness of your shared bed.

In either case, our Ritual intervenes in the ordinary motion of our lives, reminding us that other Rituals are possible, already available. We only need to choose.

Part III: Memory Lives in Objects

Let us pray.
 Now the laborer's task is o'er;
 Now the battle-day is past;
 Now upon the farther shore
 Bonds the Voyager at last.
 Father, in Thy gracious keeping
 Leave we now Thy servant sleeping.

Let us ask God for His presence and blessing on this service:
 Eternal God, our Heavenly Father,
 You love us, we know, with an everlasting love, You alone can turn the shadow of death into the joy of morning. Help us, just now, to wait upon Thee with reverent and believing hearts, speak to us of eternal things through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.
 More times than I can count —
 (23rd Psalm)



Let us ask God for His presence and blessing on this service:
 Eternal God, our Heavenly Father,
 You love us, we know, with an everlasting love, You alone can turn the shadow of death into the joy of morning. Help us, just now, to wait upon Thee with reverent and believing hearts, speak to us of eternal things through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.
 More times than I can count —
 (23rd Psalm)

Ps 23:4a
 "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."
 Ps. 48:14 "This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death."

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Worshipping, from Sara

- I. Over a year ago my grandfather died. Part of me was afraid to write, afraid that anything I wrote would be removed from my memory, but I think I'd like to share this now.
- II. This book was printed in 1946.
- III. On February 23rd 1945, my great-grandfather, my great-grandmother, and their two sons were liberated from the Japanese internment camp at Los Baños. My great-grandfather was a Presbyterian minister and then missionary and then minister again. According to his diary he was largely an unsuccessful missionary, so, good for the family's sin (or maybe, if he'd succeeded, there would be faith to show for it).
- IV. My grandfather, son of the missionary, was about ten years old when the war ended. The diary tells a story of Christmas in jail, near the war's start. A Japanese guard gave my great-grandfather a bamboo plant they could use for a Christmas tree, and my grandfather and his brother woke their parents up at 4:30 in the morning to celebrate and open presents. What those presents were I cannot remember.
- V. My great-grandfather lived about forty-five more years, working with this copy of the Book of Common Worship. Decided by the General Assembly of 1941, it was to be a sermon manual of correct phrasing and audience instruction. The sections are Preparation for Worship, The Order of Public Worship, The Sacraments and Ordinances of the Church, and The Treasury of Prayers. My great-grandfather's copy is heavily lined and edited, designed for his speech.
- VI. As I hold this book I think that it is a part of me, and I think that I cannot understand it because I cannot understand time. It's a mystery, but never designed to be one.
- VII. Last February I flew down to see my grandma with my aunt and uncle. It was less than a month since my grandfather had died and the purpose of the visit was to deal with money and just be there.
- VIII. In the Outback Steakhouse my grandma told my aunt, uncle, and I that in their last conversation the night before he died my grandpa told her that he was too tired to talk. He was

in the hospital and it had been over 10 days since he had seen his family. I lay my head on her shoulder and look up to see tears in her son's eyes. 59 years, spent side by side.

- IX. My grandma talks to us about her “screaming nightmares” over salads; she's been having them since she was a child. It's clear this is something everyone knew that I didn't get to know, but now I do. When she's in a nightmare she thinks to herself ‘if it ever gets so bad Stephen will just wake me’ but then in her dreams she remembers.
- X. At his memorial service two months later, the pastor brings out this book and my great-grandfather's prayer book. The prayer book is older than the book of common worship, old enough that my grandfather was baptized into life, and then baptized into death with the same.
- XI. Our family took up two pews, our flock small. The rest were filled with our recitation of Psalm 23. I see the words come back to my father, even though he has not been to church in thirty-five years.
- XII. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”
- XIII. At the end of the service they played jazz, something I can't remember, and my oldest cousin Leo finally cries. I feel him shaking at the other end of the bench. When we leave the chapel I see the pastor wipe her eyes and I am sure this was why. An 18-year old boy making it to the end and then crying at the music— he tells me it says something you can't express.
- XIV. Our two pews walk outside and take turns pouring his ashes into the ground. I remember feeling that I was performing this walk, and then I saw all I've ever known of him in ash, and my own body felt large and weightless all at once. But it was peaceful in the memorial garden, an easy place to rest.

- XV. The pastor holds up a note card left inside the stained pages of the book of common worship. She gives him his final benediction in his father's handwriting.
- XVI. "Let us ask G[-]d for His presence and blessing on this service: Eternal G[-]d, our Heavenly Father, you love us, we know, with an everlasting love. You alone can turn the shadow of death into the joy of morning. Help us, just now, to wait upon Thee with reverent and believing hearts. Speak to us of eternal things, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."
- XVII. Hands clasped together in prayer, the thin gold of my father's wedding band, heads lifting and lowering in reverent bow, it's okay to stare at the ground, it's okay. My cousins' black dress shoes on the grass.
- XVIII. I take my grandma's hand and bring her to pour last, like she wanted. The pastor keeps her standing and tells her this is something she needs to do. Their two heads touch as they hold on and his final ashes slide into the earth.
- XIX. My grandfather died on January 19th 2021, the day America hit 400,000 COVID-19 deaths. It could have been him for all I'll ever know.
- XX. After the service grandma quietly brought out the book of common worship and the prayer book, along with newspaper clippings and pictures and old presents, in case anyone in the family had an interest in seeing it. I took one book and my cousin took the other.
- XXI. I could not believe how beautiful it was, how ideally aged, how it fit perfectly in my palm, how it thrummed with a devoted, industrious energy— something from decades ago. Marginalia threaded through with memory, this draft of worship. This book which I never knew existed, from a man I had never met, but who I felt was me too.
- XXII. I wrapped it in shirts and took it back to Boston. My grandma was done with it and it was mine now. It lives in a dark corner of my desk drawer, and I take it out rarely because I'm afraid to handle it too much.
- XXIII. I work at a women's day-shelter. I got this job several months after the memorial service. When I tell people about my job and the women there I get a few reactions. Most hear it and listen, the questions polite, because after all it is a simple fact about me. Or, they call me a saint and hopefully move us along. Or, I can feel them judge this place, and I understand.

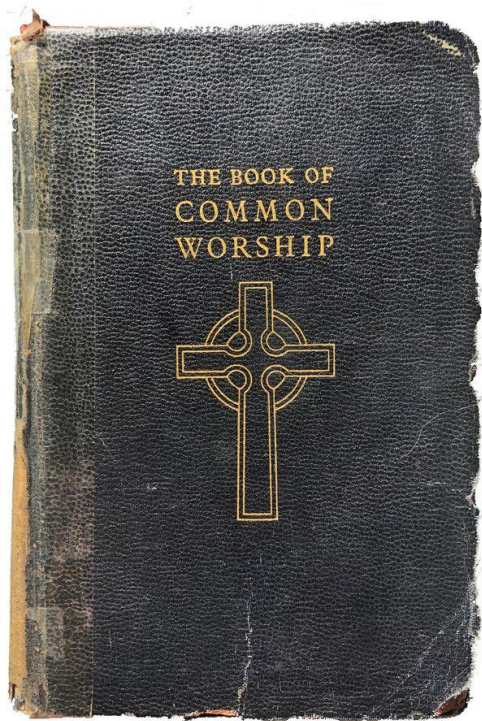
- XXIV. Was I laying it on a bit thick? Was I acting like I know? (Could I even do that, overexplain these people and their lives? The avoidance and ecstasy and fear? The responsibility that crushes? And why do I need to talk about it always, why does it burn like this? How do I begin to describe the need to stare at every homeless person sleeping to see their chest rise and fall? Am I burying this anger, keep trying to make this pain look beautiful? Am I doing it now?)
- XXV. I tell them a little of what I do and then they rush into the sentence, off-handedly saying they have a “poverty porn” story of their own. I say this tenderly, I think this is guilt.
- XXVI. A co-worker of mine has a lyric written on a post-it below her computer, “We’re holding onto nothing and we’re holding on too tight.”
- XXVII. This book is world historical, there’s a prayer for “deliverance from national sin”, for “better race relations”, for our national parks and labor day and weddings and funerals and the army. For faith, hope, love, joy, joy in others’ happiness, joy in G[-]d’s creation.
- XXVIII. He changed things. Struck through phrases and wrote margin notes. Question marks, slashes, rewritten lines, red, pink, blue, black ink. Things like “go back up” and “Elders stand.”
- XXIX. In The Funeral Service he wrote, “holy words that have brought comfort to so many others, may we too find hope.” and at the bottom of the page he writes in, “ r. 9b We spend our years as a tale that is told.’ The sections go on, At The Funeral of a Child, Intercession, Communion of Saints.
- XXX. “And one of the elders [answered] ~~saying~~ said unto me, ~~What~~ Who are these ~~which~~ whom are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?” p. 201
- XXXI. In Baptism of Adults he pencils in, “Blest be the tie—” p. 130
- XXXII. In Another Order for Holy Communion he changes, “Dearly beloved, all that who humbly put their trust in Christ, and desire His help they may lead a holy life, all that who are truly sorry for their sins and would be delivered from the burden of them, are invited and encouraged in His name to come to this sacrament.” Then he footnotes himself and writes at the bottom in black pen, “1. We cordially invite members of other churches to join us. His is the Lord’s table we all are his guests.”

- XXXIII. A few times I saw he changed “man” to “humankind”. Add “her” to “his”.
- XXXIV. There’s a woman from work that I call and every time we talk she starts sobbing. She’s too sick to leave her house anymore, she worries for her balance, she is stuck looping between panic and regret. She worked three jobs for 17 years to be able to afford her mortgage, but she can’t work anymore. She will lose it all unless I thread a needle. She owns this house with her son and it kills any chance I have to make it better. They fought the same week they bought it, and have been estranged ever since.
- XXXV. It’s too much she repeats and repeats and repeats to me. I tell her I am here, I tell her she is a child of G[-]d because this is what she has told me. Yes, she tells me, G[-]d loves me. There are people who want me to kill myself but I am blessed (this word, she sings) because G[-]d loves me, and He takes care of me.
- XXXVI. All these years later, I found her son and reunited them. It felt biblical, this thing I did. The greatest thing I would ever accomplish. Their reunification humbled and frightened me.
- XXXVII. I walked away hopeful, but we’re back where we started. I still try, I am still trying. I promise I am trying and I promise it is not enough. I weeped when I realized this.
- XXXVIII. A guest at the shelter offhandedly tells me my fortune as she’s leaving one day. She’s walking away and she sermonizes, “just say your prayers and do your things.”
- XXXIX. I hear this, and know peace. The one thing I want more than I could ever say. I know at that moment, in a way I cannot tell you because I don’t know how to tell you, that I would live. I would go along. I could lift my hands in surrender, I could stop worrying so much about my fallibility, my terror, my gentle sin. I promise I am trying.
- XL. I was with a client across town in a meeting at someone else’s office. We’re in the front room while people photocopy and run next door. We’re sat right in the middle, since the office is cramped for space. My client’s in her 70s and she sleeps in the bus station now.
- XLI. She’s talking about getting thrown out of shelter. She stands up and starts yelling and showing us how they pulled her frail body out of the bathroom and pushed her out into the snow. She puts her hands on her back and pushes her hips to show us how they grabbed her, where they

grabbed her. She demands better and screams that she knows she does not deserve this. The woman we're meeting with, with no change in expression or tone, absently starts crying and then wipes her tears, "I'm sorry" she explains calmly, "but that stuff just makes me so mad."

- XLII. I was filled with fierce love for her, for this. I want it for myself.
- XLIII. For a very long time, my father could not say that he loved me. But he can say it now. Quietly, stutteringly– he can respond to me. (This embarrassed word, this breath of air, did he ever...?)
- XLIV. There is a girlchild in me that needed to forgive him, and she could, so she does.
- XLV. The English pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott wrote about infancy as this time when, "[W]e were (psychologically) absolutely dependent, and that absolutely means absolutely. Luckily we were met by ordinary devotion."
- XLVI. I exhaled everything the first time I read this. It takes my breath away still.
- XLVII. I was once told, with the simplest universal meaning, that I am easy to love. It felt like I was finally carried by the flood. Life may be hard, but I am easy to love.

"Let us pray.
Now the laborer's task is o'er;
Now the battle-day is past;
Now upon the farther shore
Lands the Voyager at last.
Father, in Thy gracious keeping
Serve we now Thy servant sleeping."



Rug

Alt text: A Persian rug gifted to me by a former employer. I briefly worked at an oriental rug repair shop. Apart from my boss, who fired me without explanation, I was one of only two employees. My boss was Sufi, my coworker Buddhist, and myself Jewish, so we often spoke about G-d. While the work was early and difficult (physically exhausting and sometimes degrading), and despite my unsavory termination, I came to love the craft of rugmaking. I tell myself that I appreciate all things decorative now.

Pot

Alt text: I worked a stint at a ceramics gallery. Working with artists, handling the pieces, and being surrounded by painstakingly-made objects was a joy. But I found the work abrasive nonetheless, largely because of my boss's demands and the patrons—I can't give them too much trouble though, galleries are all the same. Towards the end of my time there, my boss suggested I take this pot, otherwise she would have thrown it out. She knew very little about it, possibly Colombian, possibly gifted from some confused collector associated with Harvard; I shouldn't put water in it; you should give it a dusting like we do for all of the other pieces here, then it'll look a little nicer in your home. She was rather surprised when I asked if I could take it home with me: you actually want this thing?

Bowl

Alt text: This was another gift from the gallery. Unlike the pot above, this bowl actually had a price tag on it when my boss asked if I'd like to take it home. And while the figure was high for my own finances, it was a drop in the bucket for any operating gallery of this kind—I'm not complaining, though. I received the piece as a kind of gift: I led the deconstruction of the gallery before it closed for several weeks. Although I was hired as a typical gallery assistant—sit behind the desk and sell shit, answer the phone, respond to emails, put on a smile for the rich people, work the website and the inventory system, wrap the pieces people buy, sometimes install the next show—I was building shipping containers, painting, and moving several hundred pound artworks by the end of my time there. The move from your conventional intellectual bourgeois labor to physical labor (still bourgeois but slightly more disgruntled) is probably a common demand for just-out-of-college kids like myself. In any case, I love the bowl. It was made by Warren MacKenzie, a real name. If I were using the piece according to the maker's own intentions, I'd be eating from it—he was a functional artist.

Painting

Alt text: My great-uncle Connie (Conrad) was a painter. He studied at Yale under Josef Albers and mingled with quite a few heavy-hitters there. He lived with his partner in South Carolina, a lifestyle made possible by the regular stipends that my grandfather Martin, Connie's nephew, would send. It seems that my family didn't speak much about his sexual proclivity, at least not at the dinner table. Connie's sister, Ethel (who is still alive at 97), loved her brother dearly and, when he passed away so young, she phoned all of the galleries in the New York area in an attempt to put together a posthumous show. I imagine all of the gallery assistants in the city joking about 'that tenacious lady' over beers. The extended family was left with an ocean of Connie's works, and now I can call a few my own. The piece itself is unstretched, and I'm not exactly sure what the material is. It's much thinner than canvas.

Painting

Alt text: This is another one of Connie's paintings. After Ethel was moved into a nursing home, her vast collection made its way into descendants' homes. I must have been fourteen or so, and this one hung in my childhood bedroom directly across from my pillow, so that when I pulled myself out of bed each morning the green splotches and warm negative space met my view. At night, everything between myself and the painting cast pleasing shadows onto the painting as I lay underneath the protective yellow light from my bedside lamp. The bugle that my father, one of my brothers, and myself played during our time in the Boy Scouts seemed to rise above the painting from its erect place on the nearby dresser. Its shadow fell just to the side of the canvas, unsuccessfully calling the piece to attention, or successfully granting its pleas for sleep.

Silkscreen

Alt text: Alongside heirlooms and American Indian objects accumulated through decades of collection, our family inherited vast stores of books and artworks from my grandmother's apartment when she passed away. This tiny silkscreen also hung in my childhood bedroom and, like Connie's landscape above, now lives in my own apartment. I placed it by my keys, wallet, and a mirror, so that some of my daily rituals might encourage my bogged-down self to look closely at the odd little thing.

Stained glass

Alt text: When I was young, my mother often took my family to visit a woman named Irmgard. I knew very little about her except that I would stack toy chairs when I came to her assisted living home. She made quite a few of these stained glass windows. I've claimed this one for myself. My great-grandfather sponsored Irmgard, then a child in Nazi Germany, to come to the United States. She was quite close to her adopted family. It strikes me as quite strange that she would only know me as a child, the opening stages of another person's life, the lives of these American children, and during this unfamiliar and confusing phase of history, as her own life, which first took root in a now-deceased Berlin, came to an end.

Connie's headstone

Alt text: On either side of his name—"Conrad Brandfonbrener"—it reads "We Miss You" below and, above, some Hebrew that I couldn't be bothered to parse. My uncle e-mailed my family the picture from Mount Zion cemetery in Brooklyn.

Book

Alt text: Verses and Reverses. *Both of my great-grandfathers were named James. James Gutmann, or Jimmy, taught philosophy at Columbia for more than 40 years. He self-published this little book of poems near the end of his life.*

Mug

Alt text: *There was a time when I was ashamed (that's too strong a word, maybe) of my parents' fascination with Italy and France. All upper-middle class white Americans seem to be fascinated with Italy and France. The resulting material culture that entered my home—this Italian coffee mug, for example—marked me. This anxiety prevented me from really looking at the mug. It's beautiful. I was ashamed because I had things that others did not. I had beautiful things that I couldn't register as beautiful. In a similar line of thinking, I sometimes felt guilty for walking alone at night—I had the ability to walk alone without fear, while the women around me didn't, and my friends reminded me of this unfair distribution of rights very often. Forgetting the fact that I lived in a perfectly safe town and, without glossing over anyone's feelings, it wasn't so dangerous to walk alone as some might have imagined it to be—forgetting this fact for now, my guilt was misplaced. Is the answer to our unfair distribution not to walk alone at night? If our aspiration is for everyone to feel safe at night, what good is my guilt going to do? Shall we have equality in denial? Equality under a shared denial of rights, where no one can walk alone safely? No, we should all appreciate what's good in life. So while I'm still haunted by a repressed and unexamined class guilt of my past with regard to this Italian mug pictured above, I now know that it's beautiful. I've accepted that it's beautiful. And besides, my parents travel and collect with more flair-for-beauty in their little pinky (raised as they sip a grand cru) than the prototypical upper-middle class subject has in their entire belly.*

Lamp

Alt text: This lamp once belonged to my Granny, my father's mother, in Hurst, Texas. I first saw it in my oldest brother's room, so it was strange to see it in another environment when I took it to college. I asked my parents about it when I returned home at the start of Covid, and they handed me a massive book about the Memphis Group (or Memphis Milano). The cover was almost as gaudy as the Memphis Group itself, but I've come to enjoy their bold color blocks so typical of 80's kitsch.

Box, reading "Texas"

Alt text: I received this box from my father, perhaps via my Granny, when I was small. It's just a commercial item, but it carries memories of my childhood and associations with Hurst. It stored my collection of toys, bracelets, necklaces, buttons, rocks, and other childish icons. It was a repository that, for whatever reason, I knew my parents would not be interested. It was my own.

Poster

Alt text: One of many posters that I salvaged from my father's office (or maybe I just found it in our basement at home?) when I left for college. For decades, he's directed jazz bands for a living. This means that we had a lot of this sort of paraphernalia lying around, gracing my childhood.

Trumpet

Alt text: The Yamaha that my father played for thirty or so years. It's really made for classical playing, but it would just have to make do for jazz. At last, he purchased a finer horn for himself a few years ago, passing down the older instrument to his youngest son in the process. It's sung so many melodies, different genres and languages. A father and a son have both spoken through it, both practiced and grimaced through it for their own long hours in their own long eras. I've spoken to my friends through it, a guitarist or a pianist that I've known for years but can only really speak to when we're aided by the mask of an instrument in front of our faces—that is, when we're not fumbling for words between our uninhibited, non-musical selves. It must have been the same for my father. It must have been the same for him when the things on his television overwhelmed him and he moved away from his family, when he parted from lovers for the last time, when his friends died, when he thought about those that still had to die. It must have been the same when he thought these things and, at last, sat down to buzz his mouthpiece, play long tones, play an etude, play the piece, improvise over the piece, shut out the thoughts that he had been able to put-to-words only a moment ago, and articulate the things that had been lying beneath those words the whole time.

Part IV

Commands

MONTREUX 28TH JAZZ
JULY 1-16



Part IV: Commands

Power

NASTI: You would let humanity destroy itself, provided you could build your City, your plaything, your model town?

GOETZ: This city is an arch. I have sheltered Love beneath it. What matters the deluge if I have saved brotherly love?

NASTI: Are you mad? You won't escape this war, it will come here and seek you out.

[GOETZ *is silent.*] Well? Do you accept?

Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Devil & The Good Lord*

You imagine that you are like another. It is unclear whether or not you are trying to do this but you can't stop.

We wish that we were not ourselves: we are touched by Evil. There is a great sum of Evil whose tendrils seep far into the multitudes.

'No, only a very small multitude is really affected,' you tell yourself. 'And besides, while there are degrees of multitudes, that Evil is unitary. All of the afflicted are afflicted with the same.'

You imagine that you are another, and that your trepidation between lives is unique. 'Everyone else is pure: Evil or untouched.' Believing that you have always hedged the lines (lines in flux, but you cannot possibly see that), you find it rather difficult to know what to do. If others—pure—knew your true position, they would have a rather difficult time deciding what to do with you. And so you deliberate what you will do on behalf of those multitudes, on behalf of others.

Somewhere beyond the self-absorbed and the cold strategists concerned with greater issues, there is a way we can live which addresses both poles. Unfortunately, we must still be prepared to choose one or the other, should the floorboards collapse. Only when we've committed ourselves to that cliff—the thought process which reveals something about ourselves, to ourselves—will Local and Total embrace as they can and should.

Until then, we must decide what we will say to the strange voice who eludes parroted thinking. 'Opening borders deprives other countries of a middle class; opening borders concedes that only the West offers a chance of survival in the decades to come.' Forget whether or not the polemic is true, we must still be ready to decide. Do not concern yourself with the decision, but the act of decision.

The Local prioritizes the urgent, imminent moral choice. The Total accepts imminent suffering and imminent coldness as it builds towards a greater end, although the end has yet to be realized. It may never be realized, after all.

The longer we avoid a decision, the greater the gulf between the two. We stand in this widening lesion.

It has always been too simple to expose your stream of thought: 'Think freely, dammit!' But that dissent is also caught up in the mold of a flat equality. Dissent sees those who yearn for repression and those who have clearly lost hope, and Dissent rightfully dives into the same polished response you told me yesterday.

But what can the free thinker say to a multitude who has repeatedly tried and failed? A multitude short on time. Eager, but short on time. It is not a matter of *needing a leader*. Although sometimes, I admit, it's best we're told what to do.

Your sibling is a world apart. And while the two of you are not equal, you may still be equals. The longer you imagine yourself to be another, your voided self loses belief in connection, in the possibility that people might care about each other: there can be no empathy between sameness.

The Ritual Gaze

“It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being.”

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

“Emancipation from a transcendent order – that is, an order grounded in religious premises – is the hallmark of modern politics. Only under modern conditions – when transcendental means of justification no longer possess any validity – is a genuine politics, the politicization of society as a whole, held to be possible.”

Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics*

When all is said and done (proclamations and odes to free thinking), we would really prefer to be handed the solution—as we probably should. We tell ourselves that we will judge the solution for ourselves, but our delay and our desire for instant relief has clouded that judgment.

Most are surprised when they discover that they already follow a program (a program of solutions), contorting thought and body, interpreting their lives in the bizarre image of its doctrine.

Of course there’s a more promising option available, if we only expanded our definition of “program.” Once upon a time, certain creeds now generally understood to be dogma—religion, let’s say—were in fact testaments to our wild-eyed navigation of the world. I believe that all religious programs have always begun from this state of confusion with the world. They act as mediators between ourselves and the world, translators. Ceremonies understandably come next and, frequently but *not* inevitably, dogma and certainty enter the picture. Dogma is a direct descendant, directly *because* of our confusion—which is just like how children are overwhelmed with the world until they’ve strung together a certain number of concepts and categories to order the world and make sense of it—but dogma solves, (((finally solves))) all of our questions: we are no longer confused, and behave in accordingly rational and tranquil lives. Directly from the red clay of awe, *in order to cope with that awe*.

Think of our species in an earlier time, before we believed in discovery and before we mistook doctrine for evidence: the things that we could see and feel belonged to the thing that had given us air, and we couldn’t dream of a strength independent from that first breath.

And as strange as it is to imagine our ancestors around the fire, we are brimming with their actions, what they did. Their confusion stays alive in our rituals, mummified and distorted through time, endowed with new meanings with each successive generation. The customs we associate with dogma carry the body of uncertainty and its impartial gaze.

Ritual is a solution in its own right, not a means to find the greater answers in life.

At what point do references become pretentious? At what point does continuity become unappealing for the alienated?

Likeness and Leaves

In the midst of a great commercial crisis, while fortunes of years' growth have been falling around us, and the panic-stricken world of business has been gathering in its resources, to save what it may from wreck, an effort has been organized, having for its object the education of our countrymen to the perception and enjoyment of Beauty. And though the time seems unpropitious, we have a faith that to Beauty and its messengers, even times and seasons have a deference.

Asher B. Durand, *The Crayon*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 3, 1855

We gaze intently at a leaf. We gaze again, and try to sketch its likeness.

I've lost patience for those who criticize the graven image. That's not important, though.

We don't rejuvenate *looking* in isolation, like Durand would. Durand pleads for us to look, and so he pleads against dogma. But when we look, we are not really replicating the leaf—no one can do this. *We* are the mediation between leaf and dogma. Sketching truth leaves us with a beautiful thing, it's true. But it doesn't imprint the wisdom you may think it does.

Even so, looking (even looking in isolation) isn't without use. I'd simply suggest we erase the finished likeness. Look, erase, repeat. If we really do want a change of circumstance, tracelessness is a positive thing, against trajectory. Over time, this practice will leave a deeper impression than any un-punctured likeness could.

We're not here yet. To imagine that the program (the solutions) of our mediated leaf is finished and infallible, or that it will ever be complete, that it will free us—we're twice as confused to believe that we can escape the fixed post through erasure.

We still want faith, I think: a lingering grace from a somewhat graceless past. Look without looking, look without disbelieving in ourselves.

Durand points us forward, this is the way forward: a groundless method of finding solutions which builds its own ground but doesn't forget its own metaphor. A method which doesn't replay Durand's own mistake but isn't so self-conscious and debilitated as our current model of counter-Truth, which

looks something like Thomson's Plum Pudding. Are we up for the task? It's easier than you might think.

Yet-to-be

“The wood underneath would win and win till the end of time. Of that there was no doubt possible, only the pain of hope perennially doomed to disappoint. It was so clear. Of course it was in the nature of the wood to rot with age. The polish, it was supposed, would catch the rot. But of course in the end it was the rot which imprisoned everything in its effortless embrace. It did not really have to fight. Being was enough. In the natural course of things it would always take the newness of the different kinds of polish and the vaunted cleansing power of the chemicals in them, and it would convert all to victorious filth, awaiting yet more polish again and again and again. And the wood was not alone.”

Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

You fantasize about the moment after you've released your opus, a work which will receive great praise. Maybe you have thought beyond that moment, but that's not so important. This yet-to-be version of yourself most sharply differs from the present reader in their willingness to act, produce. This is the trait we desire and wait for to transpire. 'My opus will come.'

But we can only produce when we understand (or try to understand). And perhaps Western Zen is right to say that we can only understand when our motive lies beyond (or before) production.

Our Sacrifice

There was one kind of fame from before the invention of photography, and another kind thereafter. The Czech king Wenceslaus, in the fourteenth century, liked to visit the Prague inns and chat incognito with the common folk. He had power, fame, liberty. Prince Charles of England has no power, no freedom, but enormous fame: neither in the virgin forest nor in his bathtub hidden away in a bunker seventeen stories underground can he escape the eyes that pursue and recognize him. Fame has devoured all this liberty, and now he knows: that only totally unconscious people could willingly consent these days to trail the pots and pans of celebrity along behind them.

You say that though the nature of fame changes, this still concerns only a few privileged persons. You're mistaken. For fame concerns not only the famous people, it concerns everyone. These days, famous people are in magazines, on television screens, they invade everyone's imagination. And everyone considers the possibility, be it only in dreams, of becoming the object of such fame (not the fame of King Wenceslaus who went visiting taverns but that of Prince Charles hidden away in his bathtub seventeen stories underground). The possibility shadows every single person and changes the nature of his life; for (and this is another well-known axiom of existential mathematics) any new possibility that existence acquires, even the least likely, transforms everything about existence.

Milan Kundera, *Slowness*

Celebrity is like Hobbes's Leviathan: the freedom and actual power stripped from the celebrity is feasted upon by vultures, the fans. In Kundera's eyes, contemporary culture's growing hunger for fame has 'stolen' our former nostalgia for King Wenceslaus. We lowly unknown on the floor-scale—on social media, we could say—would eagerly trade away “power” and “freedom” for “fame.”

Kundera asks us to study this desire-for-celebrity because it reveals something about ourselves, about those of us on the floor-level. But this desire of ours (again, those of us who are not famous: you can only desire fame, as Kundera writes, before you have achieved it) is in fact the basis and engine of today's fame-system. We are remoras on sharks—the small fish who live off of the waste that piles-up on their host king's body. Unlike the shark, however, celebrities can't survive when their body's waste has been fully depleted (so that just makes us common parasites, but I liked the remora metaphor too much to let it go). We feed on celebrities, and they feed us with themselves until they have nothing left to offer.

And if you want to learn something about yourself from the study of fame-lust, it's only from here that you can even begin to understand the fundamental aspect at-play: although we know perfectly well that gaining fame will take everything that is most important away from us, the great majority of us have already decided, somewhere deep in our mind, that we will take the opportunity if it ever presents itself to us. While we have generally erased collective concern and lost the ability to consider, much less understand, *difference* (or, perhaps the more pressing issue, our tendency to simply *not want* to consider, or understand anything other than ourselves because that is not, Kundera says, where pleasure and speed and ease come from, things that we value above joy and love today), we still, so strangely, desire to personally supply the cultural position of psychological breadbasket; it is the one instance when we seem to show concern for our fellow man: 'I will become nourishment for my people'—and it is so often a global celebrity—'in the manner of a sacrifice, perhaps as I imagine an Aztec ceremony may have proceeded long ago.'

Belief and Choice

“Protect me from what I want.”³

Jenny Holzer

Personal environmentalism is clearly a bad value to have accepted as a culture, but the Left’s response—whose present slope we can attribute to the Internet, but who was born and raised elsewhere—the Left’s response has so totally rejected a responsibility for ecology (including most forms of social ecology) that our belief in any sort of collective responsibility has also been swallowed.

Forget about whether recycling does any good, it likely doesn’t. You’ve noticed that your goodwill towards the planet and your fellow residents will always be negated by an American public works system that can’t deal with your recycling because of some matter with China. You are asked by your state (and the subcultures within the United States who buy-in to the state) to continue recycling regardless.

Through recycling, the state (via the larger financialized system that governs all states) is providing us with the most novel—and so the most invisible as well; the subtlest, the most elegant—form of civilizational religion to date. We choose, really, to buy-into a belief-system. It is true that we are given scant environmental opportunities (for example, the conditions of our upbringing, our hometown, the unplanned moments in our own life and the unplanned moments of history) to *avoid* our eventual choice: the belief-system, the ideology that we take on, is environmentally determined—this observation sounds like nails on a chalkboard those of us who hold onto the belief of individualism and free will. But the truth is, our ideology corresponds with our political interests and our culture. It’s difficult to know how each of us would act if we were born into a different sort of life. A lot of people were Nazis. But I think that we do, in our current historical circumstances, ‘spiritually’ choose whether we will buy-into any given system and its dogma. In most cases, we make this choice unconsciously, or at the very least forget about our uncertainty the moment after we have made this choice. The system becomes universal, often empirical: Truth.

But if the time and work you spend recycling is meaningless, why should you feel bothered to do it? (We are only assuming for the sake of argument that the Gen Z Doomer is correct in their most wildly pessimistic attitudes about the utility of recycling.) In its ‘exposed’ state, recycling is a ritual in its purest

³ Though I’m a big fan of Holzer’s, this particular quote was shamelessly discovered through Byung-Chul Han’s *Psychopolitics*.

form. (To reiterate—yes, the individual effort may make a *difference*, but, to a psyche like your own which views the world through absolutes, through polarities; the individual effort will not *matter*—and this is actually a somewhat reasonable assessment, isn't it?) Devoid of any mysticism, the scaffolding of its ceremony and operations are laid bare.

And what if you continued to recycle not *despite* our system's shortcomings on this matter, but simply because you recognize the imperfect mechanics of any given system? We shouldn't submit to the system's disregard for its inhabitants—you and I—but utopia is preceded by something else, and we are forced to achieve the one from inside of the other (one divides into two, two does not combine into one).

How would you contribute to the general welfare through recycling, knowing full well that (depending on your zip code) it will just as likely end up in a dump? When you give up a personal responsibility to our natural environment on material (or should I say practical) grounds, you also give up that responsibility on a personal level. 'The issue?' I'm asked. Well, maybe it's not a bad thing—even if the Puritans are guilty of it— *to feel averse to consumption*.

And besides, when you've decided that your consumption takes place in a void, and that its effects are negated (just as your single view of a Louis C.K. stand-up or your single purchase of a Goya product has next-to-no economic or cultural impact outside of your own moral economy) you will scoff at the notion of consuming only what you need. There is no use being *especially* Puritan here, but when this ideology of negated-consumption is taken to its extreme, you must consume *endlessly*, because you need what you want. You cannot stop *wanting* when you have no limits—and limits, of course, can be imposed externally or from yourself.

Rituals are the evidence of these limits. The state asks that we recycle, and I suggest that you comply. I am not interested in the material utility; I suggest that you recycle even while you believe that 'It will do no good.' Accept the limits given to us by a certain dogma, but accept them with the conviction that you will not swallow and become the voice of that dogma. You can designate the meanings of rituals, even when you are told to treat them in a narrow sense completely different from your own. This is how traditions are endowed with meaning, and how group-meanings can change within our lifetime.

There is a continuity between the spear that has landed at our feet from the other side of the void, the darkness behind us. We will have made the spear our own before ultimately tossing it on to the next stretch of void (Beckett). We can't expect an ecological movement among a denatured group.

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