



the veil of forgetting



the veil of forgetting

*the peaks and potholes of 2016
formed into a fascicle by Don Shewey*

ACCENTS ACTIVISM ANTARCTICA ANUS ART AWE
BAMBOO BLACK LIVES MATTER BOWS
CANCER CHALLENGING CHARACTER CHUTE COMFORT COMPASSION
CONCLUSIONS CONTAINMENT
DIAGNOSIS
EARTH ECLIPSE EGO ELDERS
FORGIVENESS
GARDEN GUNS
HOME
ICELAND IMAGINAL HYGIENE INITIATION INTEGRITY
JAMES HOUGHTON JOKES
KILLING
LIFE LONELINESS LOVE
MASK MASTURBATION MEMORY MINDSET
NAKED NUMBING
OLD
PARANOIA PARENTING PASSION PHILANTHROPY PLEASURE PMS POLITICAL
EFFECTIVENESS POWER PROFESSIONALISM PSYCHEDELICS
QUEEN OF SOUL QUEER QUESTIONS
REGRET REJECTION REPETITION
SAUDI ARABIA SCIENCE SEX SHAMANISM SHAME SNEEZING
SONGWRITING SPEAK STRESS SUFFERING SUPEREGO
TEA PARTY THEATER TIME TRAVEL TRUMP TIME
UGLY TRUTHS
VALUES VIRTUES VISION VOTING
WEIRD WORRY WRITING WYOMING
XXX
YEAR IN REVIEW
ZEITGEIST

ACCENTS

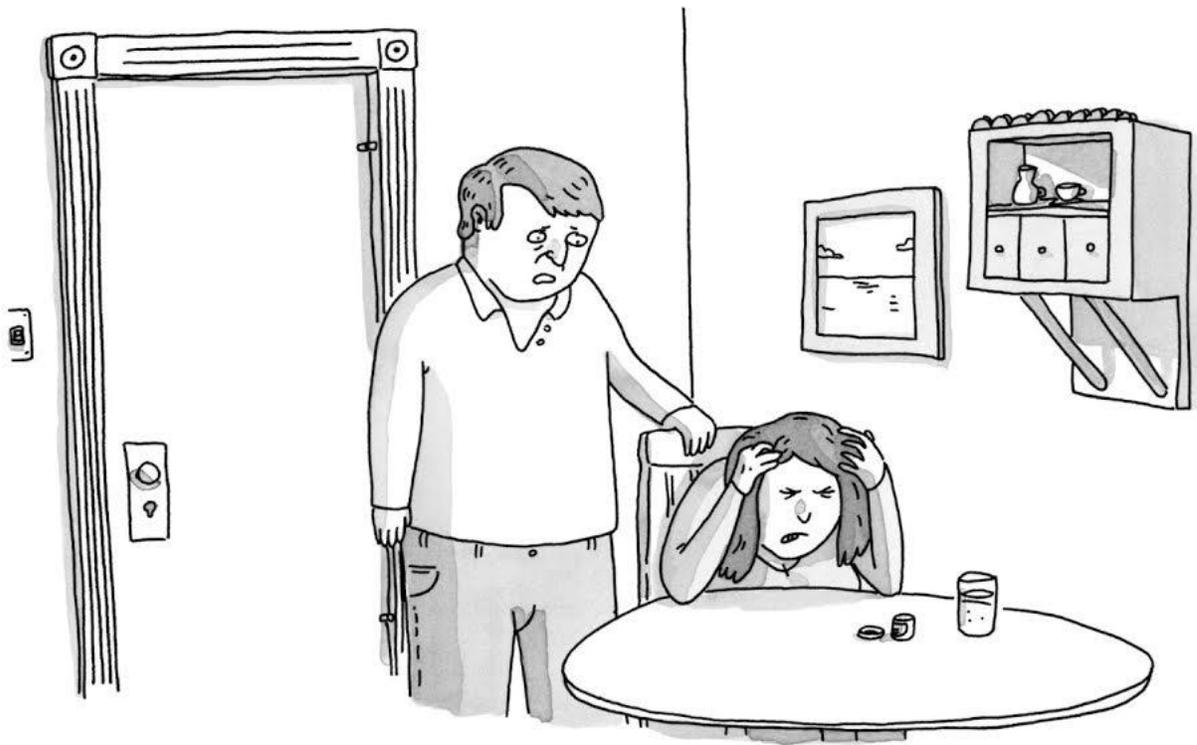
I hear you're a new father to a baby boy. Congratulations. What's his name?

Hudson.

I guess you can see the river from your office.

It was either Hudson or Window. It didn't occur to me until recently actually that my son is going to have an American accent. Because I guess in my head that's never how I've heard my child speak, and I think it'll be odd that I'm going to sound different from him. And he'll hear me have to change my voice for automated machines. You probably don't have to do that. On the automated phone lines, all the time — "No. 4." "I'm sorry, I didn't understand that." "No. 4." "I don't understand that," and I have to say "No. 4" like a kind of a sedated John Wayne. And it feels like such a defeat. There's almost a smugness in there: "Ohhh, No. 4."

--John Oliver, interviewed in *New York* magazine



Kanin

"I'm sorry your head hurts, sweetie—is there anything I can do to make you shut up about it?"

ACTIVISM

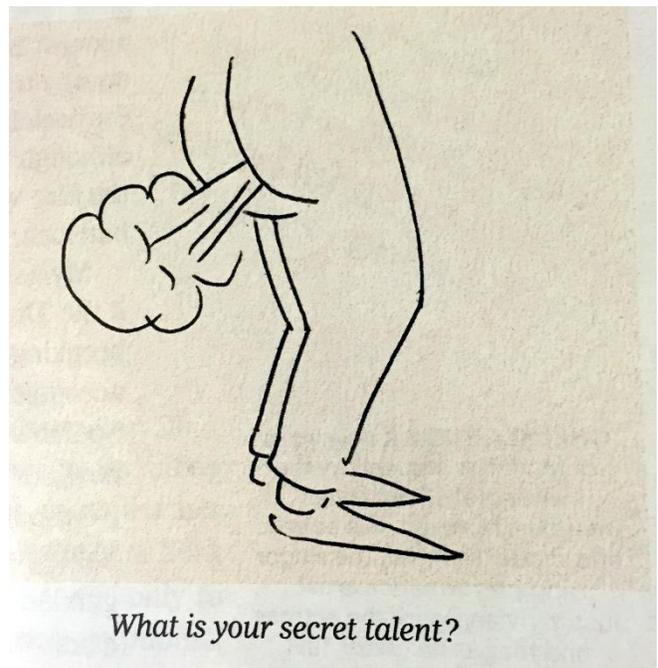
In ACT UP, we instinctively used the same strategy that Martin Luther King articulated in his amazing "Letter from Birmingham Jail." First: educate yourself to your own condition. Second: make demands that are reasonable and doable. When those demands are refused, move to the third step: purify yourself; it's a kind of spiritual preparation in which your values are put to work toward your goals. Fourth: engage in nonviolent civil disobedience until the goals are met.

--Sarah Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*

ANTARCTICA

I'd never before had the experience of beholding scenic beauty so dazzling that I couldn't process it, couldn't get it to register as something real. A trip that had seemed unreal to me beforehand had taken me to a place that likewise seemed unreal, albeit in a better way. Global warming may be endangering the continent's western ice sheet, but Antarctica is still far from having melted. On either side of the Lemaire Channel were spiky black mountains, extremely tall but still not so tall as to be merely snow-covered; they were *buried* in wind-carved snowdrift, all the way to their peaks, with rock exposed only on the most vertical cliffs. Sheltered from wind, the water was glassy, and under a solidly gray sky it was absolutely black, pristinely black, like outer space. Amid the monochromes, the endless black and white and gray, was the jarring blue of glacial ice. No matter the shade of it—the bluish tinge of the growlers bobbing in our wake, the intensely deep blue of the arched and chambered floating ice castles, the Styrofoamish powder blue of calving glaciers—I couldn't make my eyes believe that they were seeing a color from nature. Again and again, I nearly laughed in disbelief. Immanuel Kant had connected the sublime with terror, but as I experienced it in Antarctica, from the safe vantage of a ship with a glass-and-brass elevator and first-rate espresso, it was more like a mixture of beauty and absurdity.

--Jonathan Franzen, "The End of the End of the World"



ANUS

I am not interested in a hermeneutics, or an erotics, or a metaphoric, of my anus. I am interested in ass-fucking. I am interested in the fact that the clitoris, disguised as a discrete button, sweeps over the entire area like a manta ray, impossible to tell where its eight thousand nerves begin and end. I am interested in the fact that the human anus is one of the most innervated parts of the body, as Mary Roach explained to Terry Gross in a perplexing piece of radio that I listened to while driving Iggy home from his twelve-month vaccinations. I checked on Iggy periodically in the rearview mirror for signs of a vaccine-induced neuromuscular breakdown while Roach explained that the anus has "tons of nerves. And the reason is that it needs to be able to discriminate, by feel, between solid, liquid and gas and be able to selectively release one or maybe all of those. And thank heavens for the anus because, you know, really a lot of gratitude, ladies and gentlemen, to the human anus." To which Gross replied: "Let's take a short break here, then we'll talk some more. This is *Fresh Air*."

--Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

ART

The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions hidden by the answers.

--James Baldwin

AWE

Awe is the distinctive religious emotion because it combines two emotions that otherwise tend to be opposite: fear and fascination.

--Huston Smith

BAMBOO

The growth pressure of plants can do an impressive variety of tricks. Bamboo can grow three feet in 24 hours, an accomplishment that is capitalized upon, legendarily, in that exquisite Asian torture in which a victim is strapped to a mesh bunk a mere foot above a bed of healthy bamboo plants whose wood-like tips have been sharpened. For the first eight hours, he is fine, if jittery; then he starts turning into a colander, by degrees.

--Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*



"But first we're going to watch your phone die."

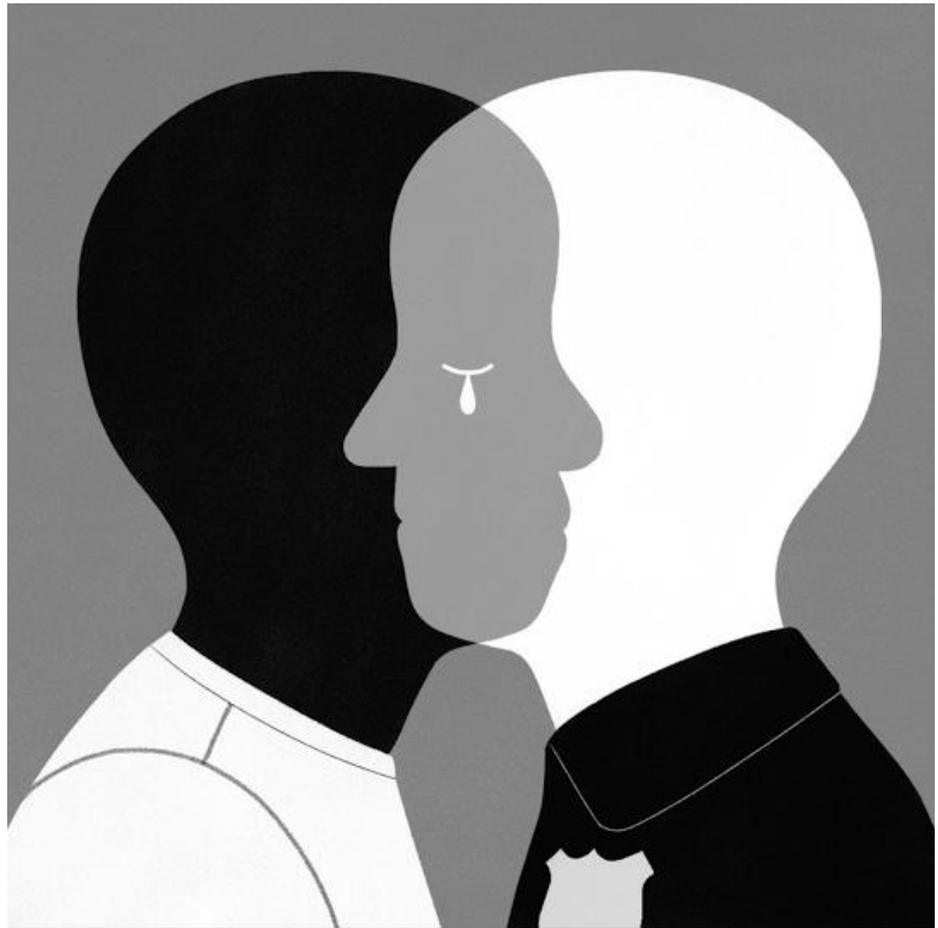
BLACK LIVES MATTER

And there is no (Black) who has not felt, briefly or for long periods, with anguish sharp or dull, in varying degrees and to varying effect, simple, naked, and unanswerable hatred; who has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter in a day, to violate, out of motives of the cruelest vengeance...to break the bodies of all white people and bring them low, as low as the dust into which he himself has been and is being trampled; no black who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment...yet the adjustment must be made – rather it must be attempted.

--James Baldwin

because white men can't
police their imagination
black men are dying

--Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*



BOWS

Dee Hoty, my mother in *Bright Star*, said, “Can I just give you some suggestions on your bow?” My curtsy was kind of apologetic and subdued; it may have come from spending 14 years in Great Britain, where there’s a vibe of: “Bowling! We shouldn’t have to do this. It’s about art, and no one should have to clap at us.” Dee said: “You don’t need to be embarrassed by your bow. Go out there as the leading lady that you are, take in the audience, look at them and smile in a way that says, ‘Didn’t we all have a good time?’ So now I stand there for a moment and smile and do a proper waist bow with my hands interlaced.

--Carmen Cusack

CANCER

Why should I have been surprised?
Hunters walk the forest
without a sound.
The hunter, strapped to his rifle,
the fox on his feet of silk,
the serpent on his empire of muscles —
all move in a stillness,
hungry, careful, intent.
Just as the cancer
entered the forest of my body,
without a sound.
--Mary Oliver, "The Fourth Sign of the Zodiac"

CHALLENGING

There is an important idea in Nietzsche of "*amor fati*," the "love of your fate," which is in fact your life. As he says, if you say no to a single factor in your life, you have unraveled the whole thing. Furthermore, the more challenging or threatening the situation or context to be assimilated and affirmed, the greater the stature of the person who can achieve it. The demon that you can swallow gives you its power, and the greater life's pain, the greater life's reply.
--Joseph Campbell

CHARACTER

Character – the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life – is the source from which self-respect springs.
--Joan Didion



CHUTE

I am not one of those people who cannot throw things out. I'm an apartment-dwelling, limited-space New Yorker. I toss a pair of high heels down the garbage chute, I've gained 200 cubic inches of closet space. I love throwing things down the chute, especially after a breakup. I feel sorry for people who do not live in apartment buildings and cannot terminate relationships with the finality of the chute, who never get to experience the whole satisfying slam thunk of the metal door and the drop: Hot-air balloon instruction manual. SLAM, THUNK! Collapsible fishing rod. SLAM, THUNK! Silver tray from San Miguel de Allende. THUNK, CLANK, THUNK! all the glorious 14 floors down.

--Joyce Wadler

COMFORT

Not long ago, I asked a graduate teaching assistant to give a guest lecture. "But I'm not comfortable talking in front of that many people," she said. At first, I was flabbergasted. What was she doing in a program that often leads to a teaching job? Then I remembered: She is part of a generation reared to believe that feelings are paramount and that life requires trigger warnings. Like many things, these ideas grew from good intentions – combating prejudice. But they came to mean that no one should ever feel uncomfortable. This is a counterproductive, even dangerous, notion. We cannot be protected from every risk and challenge. If we were, we would never learn anything. The best way to get comfortable – and good – at something is to do it, even in the presence of severe phobias. Research shows that immediate exposure to a feared experience is the best treatment.

As a graduate student, I was devastated when my papers were rejected by academic journals. It seemed like a condemnation of my choice of a profession. I thought it wouldn't happen once I'd "made it." I've now published more than 120 papers, and most still get rejected on the first try. I'm no longer devastated by rejections – but I am not comfortable when they arrive. Nor was I comfortable writing my first book. It was a struggle. But if my papers sailed through the review process, they would be worse. If I had decided to quit while writing the book, or not start it at all, I would have been more comfortable in the moment – but missed the opportunities it opened.

If you are comfortable, you are not learning. Feeling uncomfortable is not a reason to reject an opportunity. It's a reason to embrace it.

--Jean Twenge, "Comfort Is Overrated," *Psychology Today*

COMPASSION

When we practice generating compassion, we can expect to experience our fear of pain. Compassion practice is daring. It involves learning to relax and allow ourselves to move gently toward what scares us....In cultivating compassion we draw from the wholeness of our experience – our suffering, our empathy, as well as our cruelty and terror. It has to be this way. Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.

--Pema Chodron, *The Places That Scare You*

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are arrested ignorance on the path to less ignorance.

--Lao Tze

CONTAINMENT

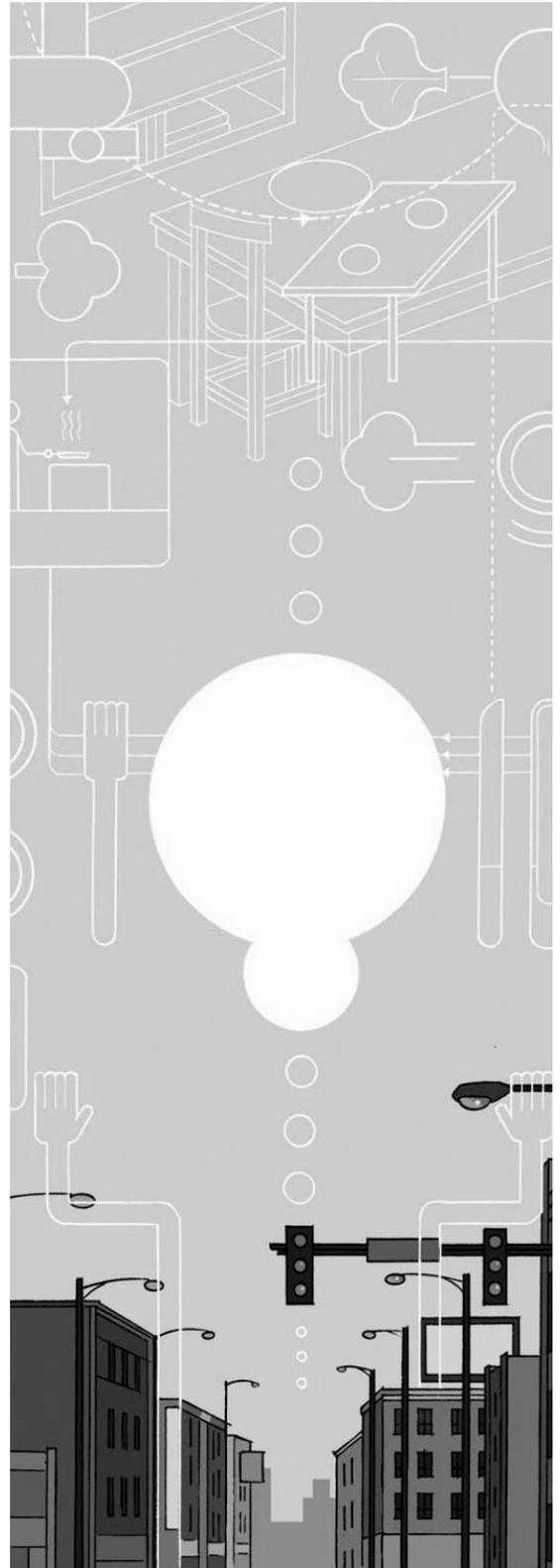
Yours is to live it, not to reveal it.

--Helen Luke

DIAGNOSIS

The minute the doctor says colon cancer you hardly hear anything else. He says other things, something about something. Tests need to be done, but with the symptoms and family something, excess weight, something about smoking, all of that together means something something something something, his voice a dumb hum like the sound of surf you know must be pounding, but the glass window that has dropped down between you allows only a muffled hiss like something something. He writes a prescription for something, which might be needed, he admits. He hands you something, says something, says goodbye, and you say something. In the car your wife says something something and something about dinner, about needing to eat, and the doctor wanting tests doesn't mean anything, nothing, and something something something about not borrowing trouble or something. You pull into a restaurant where you do not eat but sit watching her eat something, two plates of something, blurry in an afternoon sun thick as ketchup, as you drink a glass of something-cola and try to recall what the doctor said about something he said was important, a grave matter of something or something else.

--James Valvis, "Something"



ECLIPSE

I have said that I heard screams. (I have since read that screaming, with hysteria, is a common reaction even to expected total eclipses.) People on all the hillsides, including, I think, myself, screamed when the black body of the moon detached from the sky and rolled over the sun. But something else was happening at that same instant, and it was this, I believe, which made us scream.

The second before the sun went out we saw a wall of dark shadow come speeding at us. We no sooner saw it than it was upon us, like thunder. It roared up the valley. It slammed our hill and knocked us out. It was the monstrous swift shadow cone of the moon. I have since read that this wave of shadow moves 1,800 miles an hour. Language can give no sense of this sort of speed – 1,800 miles an hour. It was 195 miles wide. No end was in sight – you saw only the edge. It rolled at you across the land at 1,800 miles an hour, hauling darkness like plague behind it. Seeing it, and knowing it was coming straight for you, was like feeling a slug of anesthetic shoot up your arm. If you think very fast, you may have time to think, “Soon it will hit my brain.” You can feel the deadness race up your arm; you can feel the appalling, inhuman speed of your own blood. We saw the wall of shadow coming, and screamed before it hit.

This was the universe about which we have read so much and never before felt: the universe as a clockwork of loose spheres flung at stupefying, unauthorized speeds. How could anything moving so fast not crash, not veer from its orbit amok like a car out of control on a turn?

Less than two minutes later, when the sun emerged, the trailing edge of the shadow cone sped away. It coursed down our hill and raced eastward over the plain, faster than the eye could believe; it swept over the plain and dropped over the planet’s rim in a twinkling. It had clobbered us, and now it roared away. We blinked in the light. It was as though an enormous, loping god in the sky had reached down and slapped the earth’s face.

--Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*

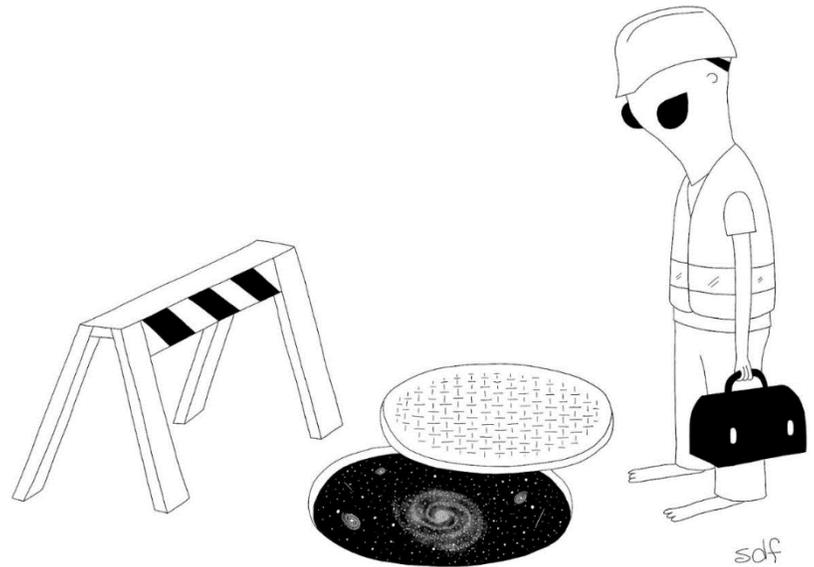


“See? Instead of Permanent Press, you selected Parallel Universe.”

EARTH

Let the day grow on you upward through your feet,
the vegetal knuckles, to your knees of stone,
until by evening you are a black tree;
feel, with evening,
the swifts thicken your hair,
the new moon rising out of your forehead,
and the moonlit veins of silver
running from your armpits
like rivulets under white leaves.

Sleep, as ants cross over your eyelids.
You have never possessed anything
as deeply as this.
This is all you have owned
from the first outcry through forever;
you can never be dispossessed.
-Derek Walcott



EGO

The ego doesn't own stories or want to write new endings; it denies emotion and hates curiosity. Instead, the ego uses stories as armor and alibis. The ego has a shame-based fear of being ordinary (which is how I define narcissism).

--Brene Brown, *Rising Strong*

ELDERS

I think the best thing that the elderly can give to the world is a model of how it is possible to accept life's inevitable limitations in good cheer. That's what we're working for. Wiser than despair – that's another phrase that has come over the horizon just recently. I don't know where it came from, but there it is: "Wiser than despair."

--Huston Smith

FORGIVENESS

In Christianity, I believe, one is supposed to forgive others whether or not they know they did something wrong, whether or not they stop doing it. Jewish forgiveness is not this way. Maimonides wrote in the late twelfth century:

Repentance and Yom Kippur only atone for sins between Man and God. Sins between one man and his fellow are never forgiven until one pays up his debt and appeases his fellow. Even if he returns the money he owes he must still ask for forgiveness. He must appease and beseech until he is forgiven. If his fellow refuses to forgive him then he must bring a group of three of his friends (presumably the injured party's friends) and go to him and ask him [for forgiveness]. If he still does not forgive him he must go to him a second and third time (with a different group of three people). If he still refuses to forgive him he may cease and the other is the sinner. If [the injured party] is his teacher (rebbe) he must go to him even a thousand times until he is forgiven. It is forbidden to be cruel and difficult to appease, rather, a person must be quick to forgive and difficult to anger and when the sinner asks for forgiveness he should forgive him willingly and wholeheartedly.

In other words, justice requires that the person causing the pain say that he caused it, take actions to undo it, and start an amends process. He must directly ask the harmed person for forgiveness *three times*. Like a lot of things in traditional Jewish culture, justice requires frank, truthful acknowledgement, recognition, and overt accountability on the part of the person who caused the pain. This is in strong contrast to a culture of passive forgiveness. "Father, they know not what they do," Jesus said. The desire to "let things go and move on" because accountability is uncomfortable, troublesome, and difficult is very *goyishe*. This stark contrast proves, yet again, that the idea of "Judeo-Christian culture" is a fantasy. Jewish and Christian cultures are distinct, and they are motivated by very different value systems.

--Sarah Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*

GARDEN

Don't go outside your house to see flowers.
My friend, don't bother with that excursion.
Inside your body there are flowers.
One flower has a thousand petals.
That will do for a place to sit.
Sitting there you will have a glimpse of beauty
inside the body and out of it
before gardens and after gardens.
-- Kabir translated by Robert Bly





Two weeks after a gunman attacked a gay disco in Orlando, the newly formed Gays Against Guns marched in the NYC Pride March, led by the Human Beings representing the 49 victims. Since then I have joined the Human Beings at two protests against gun manufacturers in Manhattan representing Veronica Moser Sullivan, the six-year-old killed at the 2012 moviehouse massacre in Aurora, CO

GUNS

On March 17, 2000, [President Bill] Clinton and [Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Andrew] Cuomo announced the deal: among other things, Smith & Wesson agreed to develop a smart gun and take steps to prevent dealers from selling to criminals. Cuomo declared, "We are finally on the road to a safer, more peaceful America." But on the day the deal went public the N.R.A. denounced Smith & Wesson as "the first gun maker to run up the white flag of surrender." It released [smith & Wesson CEO Ed] Shultz's phone number, and encouraged members to complain. He received many threats. One caller said, "I'm a dead-on shot, Mr. Shultz." Another executive took to wearing a bulletproof vest, according to "Outgunned," a history of gun-control politics, by Peter Harry Brown and Daniel G. Abel. Online, a boycott took hold, and sales of Smith & Wesson guns fell so sharply that two factories temporarily shut down. In ten months, the stock lost ninety-five per cent of its value, and the company was sold the next year for a fraction of its former worth.

--Evan Osnos, "Making a Killing," *The New Yorker*, June 27, 2016

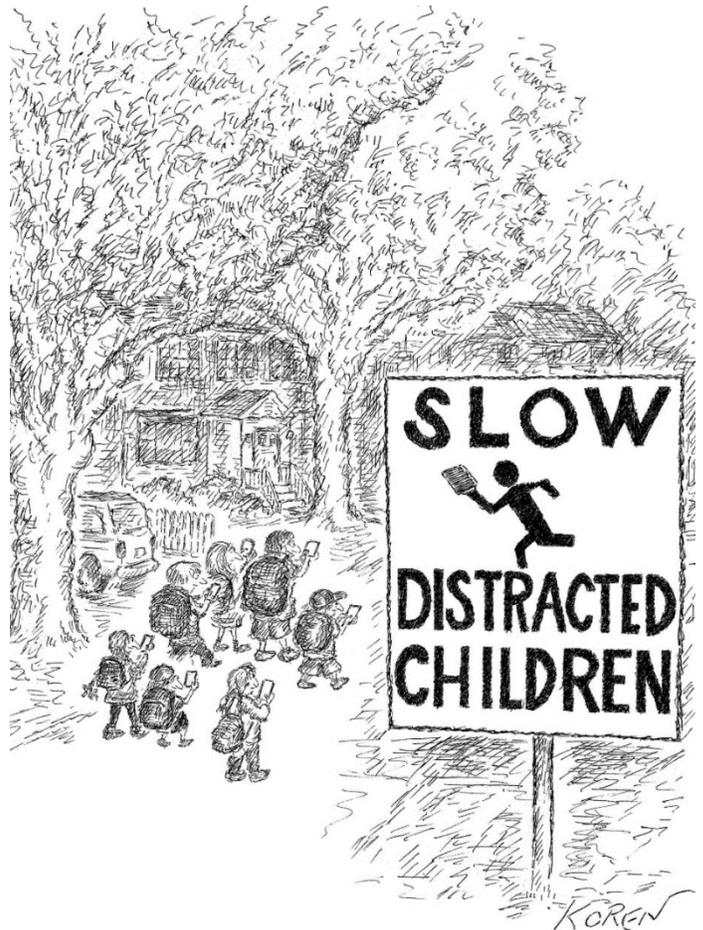


HOME

When evening had flowed between houses
and paused on the school ground, I met
Hilary's blind little sister following
the gray smooth railing still warm from the sun
with her hand; and she stood by the edge
holding her face upward waiting
while the last light found her cheek
and her hair, and then on over the trees.

You could hear the great sprinkler arm
of water find and then leave the pavement,
and pigeons telling each other their dreams
or the dreams they would have. We were
deep in the well of shadow by then, and I
held out my hand, saying, "Tina, it's me—
Hilary says I should tell you it's dark,
and, oh, Tina, it is. Together now—"

And I reached, our hands touched,
and we found our way home.
--William Stafford, "One Time"



ICELAND

In thinking about Iceland, one is always whipsawed between two facts. On the one hand, there's the tiny scale of the place. There are only three hundred thousand-plus people in the country, and a Presidential election, even though it gets a huge, Nordic-style turnout, will still top out at about two hundred and forty thousand voters, about one-third the number in a single congressional district in New York City. One might read that, as a proportion of the population, more Icelanders died in the Second World War than Americans did, which means two hundred and thirty, most of them in seafaring accidents. "Icelanders suffer from ecstatic numerical aphasia" is the way that Heiða Helgadóttir, a prominent alternative politician, put it one morning, over milky coffee, the country's *vin ordinaire*. "We are convinced that we come from a country of at least two or three million, and nothing dissuades us." On the other hand, Iceland is an honest-to-God country, not a principality, like Monaco, or a fragment fallen off a larger one, like Montenegro. It has a language and a history and a culture entirely its own, it fields competitive teams in international football tournaments, and it can claim about as many famous artists—Björk, Sigur Rós—as its far larger Nordic peers.

--Adam Gopnik, "Cool Runnings," *The New Yorker*

IMAGINAL HYGIENE

Imaginal hygiene is the inner art of self-managing the imagination, to defend it from forces that compromise, pollute, colonize, shrink, and sterilize it, and to cultivate those that illuminate, expand, and nourish it.

-- Morgan Brent

INITIATION

There is no initiation without humiliation.

--Mircea Eliade

What is to give light must endure burning.

--Victor Frankl

INTEGRITY

Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them.

--Brené Brown



JAMES HOUGHTON

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and I are both in Los Angeles and when we found out yesterday afternoon [that Signature Theater founder and producer James Houghton had died at age 57 of stomach cancer] we left work early and met up downtown to talk about our beloved mentor and producer and brother and friend. As I drove to meet him I realized I was driving through a world without Jim. Even though I'm on the West Coast, it felt markedly different.

Ever since I met him, Jim has been someone who I talk to in my head or in person when I need a dose of artistic integrity and equanimity. The other people I talk to in my head at moments like these are my favorite artists--Chekhov and Agnes Varda and Thomas Mann. But Jim is always there hanging out with them, because his rigor combined with his lack of anxiety about money or fame or good reviews (or at least the lack of anxiety he projected in my presence) and his kindness and searing intelligence always brought me back to myself, and what I really wanted, and what I really believe in. And now even though I can still converse with him in my head he is no longer a phone call or text away. That's another thing about Jim. He was always a text away, wherever you were in the world. A family member. I remember last summer during the run of JOHN he met my mother and he told her that I was driving him crazy but that he still loved me. And she said: I feel that way too!

There's another amazing thing about Jim that is hard to articulate without the fear of offending people who aren't Jim. But this is something I've discussed with other female artists who have worked with him and they feel the same way...it sounds so simple but in fact it is so unusual and important: he wasn't scared of women. He liked women. Not in a flirty way. Not in a performative, pat-yourself-on-the-back way. Not in a condescending, teacher-y way. He just had respect for us and our vision. We were his sisters. We were his colleagues. He took us seriously. It takes being around a male mentor and leader who takes you seriously to realize how many others haven't taken you seriously in the past. That man has created and revitalized the careers of so many female artists and he did with such modesty and respect. I admitted to him once that I was interested in directing my own work at some point and he never stopped reminding me of it and asking me when I wanted to do it. That was an extraordinary thing. I wish he could have led a workshop called How to Be a Man in Power Around Women. I wish he could have led so many workshops on so many things.

I remember almost every conversation I ever had with him in his office because those conversations were always honest and intimate and vulnerable and invigorating. I always wanted to write when I walked out of there. I valued everything he shared with me about his life and he always gave me the best advice about mine. He gave great notes. When everyone in the audience was moaning in early previews about how dark and quiet my play JOHN was, he told us that we should dim the lights even more. He was right. And he never lorded how right he was over us.

There is so much else to say but I'll stop here. I'll just start addressing Jim himself, in my head, like I probably will for the rest of my life. Thank you my brother. I love you.

--Annie Baker

JOKES

Among the standard topics of gag-writing back in my day were: mothers-in-law, parking problems, headaches, fags. One of the categories was fag jokes. I'd done them, but it never occurred to me that what we were doing was wrong. One day at a grocery store in Montauk, a deep voice standing next to me said right into my ear, "Really, Cavett? Fag jokes?" I turned directly into the face of the great Edward Albee and I realized, My god, yes, that time has passed.

--Dick Cavett, *New York Times*

KILLING

I killed a spider.
Not a murderous brown recluse
Nor even a black widow
And if the truth were told this
Was only a small
Sort of papery spider
Who should have run
When I picked up the book
But she didn't
And she scared me
And I smashed her

I don't think
I'm allowed

To kill something

Because I am

Frightened

--Nikki Giovanni, "Allowables"

IF GUNS WERE AS REGULATED AS CARS

	
Title and Tag at Each Point of Sale	Title and Tag at Each Point of Sale
Driver Training	Gun Training
Written Test	Written Test
Practical Test	Practical Test
Health Requirements	Health Requirements
Liability Insurance on Each Vehicle	Liability Insurance on Each Gun
Renewals and Inspections at Intervals	Renewals and Inspections at Intervals

Occupy* Posters owsposters.tumblr.com 

LIFE

Life is not to be taken seriously. Most people are dumb as fuck. If you look at their voting habits and their eating habits, you realize people are stupid. So we could talk about stupid people or we could just stay with smart people who know how to have fun and not even focus on what dumb people do. It's not worth it. I tell you this as someone who's a smart motherfucker: Don't waste your time fooling with dumb people or trying to figure them out or trying to educate them. It doesn't work. It's a lose-lose situation.

--RuPaul Charles

LONELINESS

Loneliness does not come from being alone but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important.

--Carl Jung

What does it feel like to be lonely? It feels like being hungry: like being hungry when everyone around you is readying for a feast. It feels shameful and alarming, and over time these feelings radiate outwards, making the lonely person increasingly isolated, increasingly estranged. It hurts, in the way that feelings do, and it also has physical consequences that take place invisibly, inside the closed compartments of the body. It advances, is what I'm trying to say, cold as ice and clear as glass, enclosing and engulfing...So much of the pain of loneliness is to do with concealment, with feeling compelled to hide vulnerability, to tuck ugliness away, to cover up scars as if they are literally repulsive. But why hide? What's so shameful about wanting, about desire, about having failed to find satisfaction, about experiencing unhappiness? Why this need to constantly inhabit peak states, or to be comfortably sealed within a unit of two turned inward from the world at large?

--Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone*

LOVE

Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

--Rumi

Very few people know what love is. 99% of people, unfortunately, think sexuality is love – it is not. Sexuality is very animal; it certainly has the potential of growing into love, but it is not actually love, only a potential. If you become aware and alert, meditative, then sex can be transformed into love. And if your meditateness becomes total, absolute, love can be transformed into compassion. Sex is the seed, love is the flower, compassion is the fragrance. Buddha has defined compassion as “love plus meditation.” When your love is not just a desire for the other, when your love is not only a need, when your love is a sharing, when your love is not that of a beggar but an emperor, when your love is not asking for something in return but is ready only to give – to give for the sheer joy of giving – then add meditation to it and the pure fragrance is released. That is compassion; compassion is the highest phenomenon.

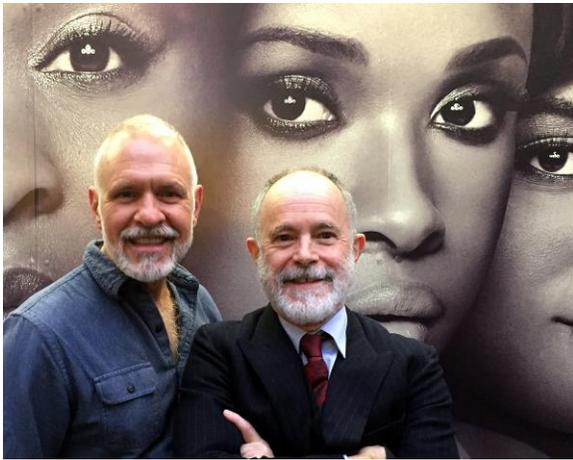
--Osho, *Zen Tarot*

MASK

Your own mask would give you at least that release from self toward which all religions strive. A little piece of night, rightly placed for giving you its freedom without renunciation. Your center of gravity is moved from the ego to the object; through the true humility of self-denial you arrive at an all-comprehending unity with life, and only thus can great works of art be accomplished.

--Isak Dinesen, “Carnival”







MASTURBATION

So if you're not looking on the internet, what do you jack off to? Are you one of those weirdos who buy porn on DVD?

Here's a weirder option: Take a little longer and try to get your imagination frothed up to where it gets you off. What a strange exercise! I hadn't done that since 1998.

And how's that going for you, masturbation-wise?

It's gone pretty well. I kinda like it. It also means: Maybe store it up for a while and wait until you actually have a sexual urge. I don't know what it's like for women, but for a lot of guys I know — and myself — masturbation is an anxiety release. If I'm trying to get some work done and getting irritated, just go rub one out and it calms you down. It's a shame to do that as a swap-out for real sexual connection to your virility and your sexual drive. I don't have a perfect record, but I am trying to see if I can just let a sexual urge be. Having an internet prohibition really helps. I sometimes have gone to jerk off when I'm not even hard. I'm in a bad mood, so let's put on Google and find something to get me off. That's happening every second around the world.

--Louis C.K., interviewed in *New York* magazine

MEMORY

The worm drives helically through the wood
And does not know the dust left in the bore
Once made the table integral and good;
And suddenly the crystal hits the floor.
Electrons find their paths in subtle ways,
A massless eddy in a trail of smoke;
The names of lovers, light of other days —
Perhaps you will not miss them. That's the joke.
The universe winds down. That's how it's made.
But memory is everything to lose;
Although some of the colors have to fade,
Do not believe you'll get the chance to choose.
Regret, by definition, comes too late;
Say what you mean. Bear witness. Iterate.
--John M. Ford, "Against Entropy"

Facing page, pictured with me and/or Andy: David Zinn; Allen Siewert; Laurie Anderson; John Ballew; Ben Seaman, Matt Alber, Tom Varney



Kanin

"Well, maybe if you let me work from home I wouldn't have to look at porn on my work computer."

MINDSET

My research started out looking at how people cope with failure and setbacks, especially students who were asked to solve challenging problems. Some students acted as though a failure was a catastrophe, while others actually relished the challenge. I was particularly interested in the latter group. I vowed that I'd figure out what their secret was and try to bottle it. It comes down to whether you focus on growing your abilities, as opposed to proving and validating them all the time. When you're in what I call a fixed mindset, your goal in life is to prove you're a smart, competent, worthwhile person and avoid doing things that could undermine that image of yourself. In the growth mindset, you believe these abilities and talents can always be developed, so you're not on the spot every second to prove yourself, and you can focus on developing those abilities through taking on challenges and seeing them through. You can be more resilient from setbacks because they don't define who you are. In other words, the fixed mindset is the idea that you have a fixed amount of intelligence, ability, or talent, and the growth mindset is the idea that you can always develop these abilities and talents. Of course, people differ in their abilities, but the underlying premise that separates people is the degree to which they believe they can develop their talents and capacities further.

--Carol Dweck, interviewed in *Psychotherapy Networker*



NAKED

To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude....Nudity is a form of dress. The nude is condemned to never being naked.

--John Berger

"Because of the weather, we don't have proper plazas in the Italian or French style," the writer Magnus Sveinn Helgason explained to me. "Beer was banned in Iceland until 1989, so we don't have the pub tradition of England or Ireland." The pool is Iceland's social space: where families meet neighbors, where newcomers first receive welcome, where rivals can't avoid one another. It can be hard for reserved Icelanders, who "don't typically talk to their neighbors in the store or in the street," to forge connections, Mayor Dagur told me. (Icelanders generally use patronymic and matronymic last names and refer to everyone, even the mayor, by first name.) "In the hot tub, you must interact," Mayor Dagur continued. "There's nothing else to do."



Not only must you interact; you must do so in a state of quite literal exposure. Most Icelanders have a story about taking visitors, often American, to the pools and then seeing them balk in horror at the strict requirement to strip naked, shower and scrub their bodies with soap from head to toe. Men's and women's locker rooms feature posters highlighting all the regions you must lather assiduously: head, armpits, undercarriage, feet. Icelanders are very serious about these rules, which are necessary because the pools are only lightly chlorinated; tourists and shy teenagers are often scolded by pool wardens for insufficient showering. The practice was even the subject of a popular sketch on the comedy show "Fostbraedur," in which a zealous warden scrubs down a reluctant pool visitor himself.

That one of the buck-naked bystanders in that viral video, Jon Gnarr, was later elected mayor of Reykjavik demonstrates that Icelanders are quite un-self-conscious about nudity in the service of pool cleanliness. This was made most clear to me, perhaps, in a dressing room in the town Isafjordur, where a chatty liquor-store manager named Snorri Grimsson told me a long

story about the time a beautiful Australian girl asked him to go to the pool but then revealed that she doesn't shower before swimming. He mugged a look of comic horror, then brought home the kicker: "It was a very difficult decision. Thankfully, the pool was closed!" I could tell this bit killed with his fellow Icelanders, but my own appreciation of it was somewhat impeded by Snorri's delivery of it in the nude, his left foot on the sink, stretching like a ballet dancer at the barre.

"It's wonderful," an actress named Salome Gunnarsdottir told me in the pool one evening. "Growing up here, we see all kinds of real women's bodies. Sixty-five-year-olds, middle-aged, pregnant women. Not just people in magazines or on TV." Her friends, all in their 20s and pregaming for a Saturday night out in the bars, nodded enthusiastically. "Especially pregnant women," Helga Gunnhildursdottir agreed. "You can see: Oh yes, she really got quite big."

“It’s so important,” Salome said earnestly. “You get used to breasts and vaginas!”

As a journalist, I will never forget the uniquely Icelandic experience of shaking hands with handsome Mayor Dagur and then, just minutes later, interviewing him as we each bared all. (In the tradition of politician interviews everywhere, an aide lurked nearby, in a manner I would call unobtrusive but for the fact that he was also naked.) I admit I found this disconcerting at first, but eventually there was something comforting about seeing all those other chests and butts and guts — which for the most part belonged to normal human-being bodies, not sculpted masterpieces. And that comfort extends out into the pool proper, where you might be covered — only a little, in my case — but are still on display.



The pool in Hofn, an old trading port on the northern coast. Credit Massimo Vitali for The New York Times

But near-nudity, by encouraging a slight remove from others, also allows the visitor to focus, in a profound and unfamiliar way, on his own body, on its responses and needs. Despite its being a social hub, the pool also cultivates inwardness. Results of a questionnaire distributed by Valdimar’s research team suggested that women in particular go to the pool to seek solitude. According to women I talked to, most everyone respects the posture of aquatic reverie — head tilted back against the pool wall, eyes closed, mouth smiling a tiny smile of satisfaction — that you adopt when you come to the pool wanting to be left alone.

Sigurlaug Dagsdottir, a graduate student researching the pools, speculated that the *sundlaugs*’ social utility in Icelandic communities derives in part from the intimacy of the physical experience: In the pool, she said, you can “take off the five layers of clothing that usually separate you from everyone else.” As such, the pools are a great leveler: Council members in Reykjavik make a point to circulate among the city’s *sundlaugs*, where they often take good-natured grief from their constituents. The filmmaker Jon Karl Helgason, who is shooting a documentary about Iceland’s pools, said, “When people are in the swimming pool, it doesn’t matter if you are a doctor or a taxi driver.” His girlfriend, Fridgerdur Gudmundsdottir, added, “Everyone is dressed the same.”

--Dan Kois, “Iceland’s Water Cure,” *New York Times*

NUMBING

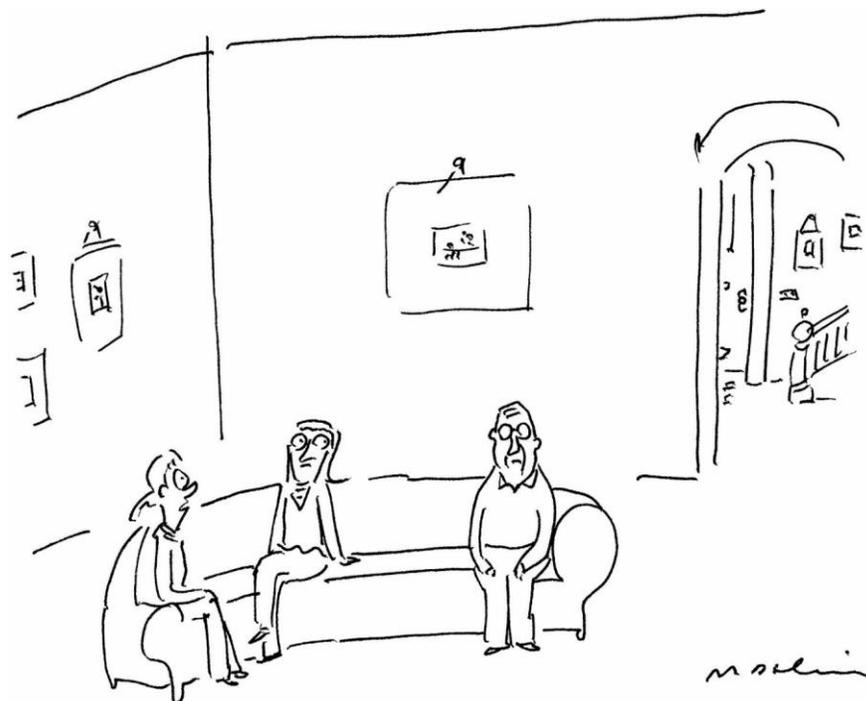
Picture emotions as having very sharp points, like thorns. When they prick us, they cause discomfort or even pain. After a while, the mere anticipation of these feelings can trigger a sense of intolerable vulnerability: We know it's coming. For many of us, the first response is not to lean in to the discomfort and feel our way through, but to make it go away. We do that by numbing the pain with whatever provides the quickest relief. We can take the edge off emotional pain with a whole bunch of stuff, including alcohol, drugs, food, sex, relationships, money, work, caretaking, gambling, affairs, religion, chaos, shopping, planning, perfectionism, constant change, and the Internet.

And just so we don't miss it in this long list of all the ways we can numb ourselves, there's always staying busy: living so hard and fast that the truths of our lives can't catch up with us. We fill every ounce of white space with something so there's no room or time for emotion to make itself known.

But no matter what we use, we can't selectively numb emotions – when we numb the dark, we also numb the light. When “taking the edge off” with a couple of glasses of red wine becomes a routine, our experiences of joy and love and trust will become duller, too. With less positive emotion in our lives, we are dawn to numbing. It's a vicious cycle, and the viciousness is as likely to be unleashed at a fancy wine-tasting party as it is with a 40 wrapped in a brown paper bag.

If we numb compulsively and chronically – it's addiction....We are still the most in-debt, obese, medicated and addicted adults in human history. Looking back over the past fourteen years of research, I've come to believe that addiction, like violence, poverty, and inequality, is one of the greatest societal challenges we face today. There is not a single person reading this right now who is not affected by addiction. You may not be the one who is or was addicted, but I guarantee that someone you love, work with, or is important in your life is struggling.

--Brene Brown, *Rising Strong*



“What happens in Marvin stays in Marvin.”

OLD

To be fully old, authentic in our being and available in our presence with its *gravitas* and eccentricity, indirectly affects the public good. This makes oldness a full-time job from which we may not retire.

This word or idea “old” that we old ones enact is more than a word and an idea. It is an image of compacted layers. The mind’s eye can imagine old in the elephant, gnarled trees, Great-Aunt Evelyn wrapped in a blanket, the neighborhood alley before it was redeveloped. Images spring to mind. That is why “old” is the appropriate term for people in late life. They are called “old” not simply because of their aging, but because of their value as images of oldness.

On the one hand, life review is the study of one’s personal biography and its main character who lived it, tells it as a story, and now reviews it as critic, appraiser, judge, inquisitor, and defendant. Life review is an activity that separates the strands of “old” – the aged sensibility, the olden times, the tottering body, the accumulated richness of days, the whitened head of the authoritative elder, the forgetful fumbling foolishness that lapses into fantasy. These strands of complexity give “old” its substance and present themselves together “in an instant of time,” fulfilling Pound’s definition of “image.” Old age means arrival at the condition of an image, that unique image that is your character.

Far better than comparing “old” with external ideas like “fresh” and “young” would be teasing apart the web of ideas stuffed into that one short syllable. The Bible needs at least nine different Hebrew terms plus many variations, while our English language compacts them all together.

Olam = ancient olden times. *Gedem* = days of old, as before time. *Rachoaq* = old as far away and long ago. For old people like Sarah and Job and for old counselors there is *zagen*. *Zignah* = old age. “Cast me not off in the time of old age;/When my strength faileth” – a theme restored in our time and reduced to personal love in the Beatles’ line: “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty-four.”

There is *sebah*, a good old age of gray hairs, full of days; *balah*, a sad one, worn out like old clothes. Then there is *athaq*, to be removed (advanced in years): “Wherefore do the wicked live,/Become old, yea, wax mighty in power?” Also, *y’shiysh*, to become very old, and *yashan*, which is said of old things like stored fruits, gates, pools.

These kinds of old, and more, course through us. These are the strands and rhythms of human complexity. One morning we feel we are a bag of bones, a tattered coat upon a stick; on another day, we belong to a time before time began, an anachronism as old as Methuselah. Some days we know ourselves as a number only: 76, 81, 91.

I am a forgotten castaway, a sharp-eyed wise man, still standing like an old gate, immersed in reminiscence of long ago and far away, enjoying wickedness and power, an old plaything of God like Sarah or Job. On yet another morning I awaken in fullness of my character and all the days of my life, tearful, grateful, and satisfied. My complexity cannot be reduced to anyone of these strands. To be only a mean old man, or always a list of complaints, or a record-breaking centenarian of 105, or a head blowing with long white hair and issuing long tales of cautionary experiences is to reduce the uniqueness of character to the unity of a caricature. The Bible does not allow that monistic mistake.

--James Hillman, *The Force of Character and The Lasting Life*



PARANOIA

Anyone can become paranoid – that is, develop an irrational fantasy of being betrayed, mocked, exploited or harmed – but we are more likely to become paranoid if we are insecure, disconnected, alone. Above all, paranoid fantasies are a response to the feeling that we are being treated with indifference. In other words, paranoid fantasies are disturbing, but they are a defense. They protect us from a more disastrous emotional state – namely, the feeling that no one is concerned about us, that no one cares. The thought “so-and-so has betrayed me” protects us from the more painful thought “no one thinks about me.”

--Stephen Grosz, *The Examined Life: How We Lose and Find Ourselves*

PARENTING

It's not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It's our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless.

-- L.R. Knost



Samson Pessah

PASSION

Passion is attachment longing—the longing for emotional connection twined with attunement and erotic exploration and play. Passion is about so much more than responding to novel stimuli or ramped-up lust. In the dance of sex, passion can be constantly renewed, not simply by finding more exotic sexual positions (although who can resist being intrigued by the positions in the new *Joy of Sex*, such as Wailing Monkey Climbing Tree) but by changing the level of our engagement in the moment and with our lover. If we really understand love, we can also understand how to shape lasting passion.

In today's world, we're surrounded by impersonal sex—to the point where young men are routinely seeking help because, having conditioned their brains every day since the age of 12 to respond to porn sex images, they can't get an erection with their girlfriends. We're also regularly told that sex in long-term relationships is almost always “vanilla,” bland. To be spicy at all, it just has to be ramped up with constant novel stimuli, new lovers, rougher sex, new toys. So let's look at the difference between impersonal—what I call avoidantly attached sex—and sex that's infused with emotion and attachment.

This focus on emotional safety may be a particularly crucial defining element in sex for women. If you expose men and women lying in brain-scan machines to explicit or subliminal sexy pictures, everybody's brain lights up. But only in women does the cortex—the judgement/control center of the brain—light up. Women's brains naturally pair up desire and safety concerns. Makes sense! Sexual intercourse is literally much riskier for women. So women most often need to check out the relationship context—to talk as part of foreplay before allowing themselves to descend into conscious, active desire. Women, in particular, may be physically aroused (their body registers a cue as sexually relevant) but may not necessarily translate this into explicit desire—wanting to have sex.

All the new evidence is that women are more sensitive to relational context—safety!—and so for them, desire often follows arousal, versus the classic model of sexuality, where desire comes first. Desire is in response to interactions with their partner. Note: this means that a woman can be totally healthy and normal and never experience spontaneous sexual desire. This research helps me explain to a husband that the fact his wife doesn't come on to him or instantly respond to any sexual signal isn't a sign that she doesn't desire him—and that the emotional context he creates is key in moving her into a sexual space. The way he demands sex actually activates her sexual brakes—pushes her out of sexual and into safety/survival mode. He needs to get curious about what context cues activate her sexual accelerator.

Bonding science says that a loving relationship also offers us a secure base to go out from. What this says to me is that great sex is a “safe adventure.” Thousands of studies show that safe emotional connection fosters curiosity and confident exploration. Think of a zip line: the freedom, the exhilaration you feel comes precisely from knowing you're on a line and you're held. Would you be screaming, “Weeeeeee!” if you weren't sure that the line would hold?

Hundreds of attachment studies show that safe emotional connection is the opposite of deadening, in or out of bed. Security increases risk-taking and spontaneity. A secure base allows us to play, to learn, to explore each other's bodies and minds. Thrilling sex is about being secure enough to surrender to the moment—to let go and see what happens.

--Susan Johnson

PHILANTHROPY

The culture of overweening politeness in American philanthropy is leading to our ruin. It keeps me from telling you, in the clearest possible terms, that your five-year, \$2-million initiative to end homelessness is well-intentioned magical thinking at best and boneheaded ignorance at worst.

--Albert Ruesga, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*

PLEASURE

Many people doing all kinds of work are able to take pleasure in aspects of their work, but something different happens when the pleasure is not only taken but openly displayed. I like to make that different thing happen.

--Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

What we learn with
pleasure
we never forget.

- ALFRED MERCIER

PMS

I've had two abortions and given birth to two children, and I suspect I had a miscarriage once. And of course I have had more periods than I can count. What I can tell you is that nature is bloody and brutal, and creation goes hand in hand with death. Saying goodbye to a fertilized egg can be a heart-wrenching experience – but so can saying goodbye to an *unfertilized* egg sometimes. The ovum is by far the largest human cell, and I believe that some of them have such a powerful longing to become alive that their “death” can be devastating. What we call PMS feels to me like a grief that sets in when an unfertilized egg gives up its quest for life. It's as if a part of you has just died, and you feel anger and sadness, and you see darkness everywhere. There's a lot of death involved in living, and I think women experience that intuitively in a way men don't. An abortion is a death, yes, but so is a period. Because women are forces of nature, and subject to all the dark forces, they also represent choice, playing God every time they give birth or don't. Damn it, you have to trust your individual choices.

--Ani DiFranco, interviewed in *The Sun*

POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS

The NRA, to my knowledge, has never held a mass demonstration or march. You know why? Because, like all the most effective lobbies in this country, it focuses on just 535 human beings called senators and representatives. That's where its efforts begin and end. The NRA knows everything about these politicians: who funds them, what primary challenger they're most afraid of, who their doctor is, who their lawyer is, who they play golf with, what their personality and character weaknesses are, whether they are susceptible to flattery and like to be taken on junkets. That's why the NRA is so powerful. Add to that the NRA's political action committee, which rewards obeisant public servants on Capitol Hill with campaign contributions. And the NRA knows how to punish, too. If a politician stands up to the NRA, it will back a candidate in a primary to try to beat him or her. Members of Congress are afraid of people who are extremely energetic on a single issue. That's the secret.

Activists usually hold mass rallies against war or climate change in Washington, D.C., on a weekend, when members of Congress aren't there. All this energy that it takes to put together a rally sort of goes up into the ether. The event doesn't get that much coverage either, because there are not as many reporters working on the weekend. The activists don't take up a collection at the rally and raise money to open an office with four full-time employees. With two hundred thousand people, you can quickly raise enough to pay four people's salaries for a year. Then, when the members of Congress came back on a weekday, they would find more than just a bunch of crushed cups and soda cans on the Mall. They would find four full-time advocates who are connected with a lot more people.

We have to be smarter in the way we lobby. I always say, "Don't just hope that the government will hear you. Summon the senators and representatives to your town meetings." We are the sovereign people, and we have to make our hired hands in Congress come to our events and do their homework on the issues. Then we're up there on the stage, and they are in the audience with their staff. Why don't more people do that? It's so much fun to make these politicians squirm.

--Ralph Nader, interviewed in *The Sun*

POWER

I have a working definition of power, which came to me in an anecdote about Prince. One night at the end of last summer, according to someone who was there, Prince, the elusive chanteur, went to a concert in New York. Twenty minutes into the show, he decided he wanted McDonald's French fries. Fifteen minutes after that, McDonald's French fries were served to him on a white china plate. He ate standing up. Power like that has no uniform.

-- Sarah Nicole Prickett

PROFESSIONALISM

Who do you regard as a mentor?

Early acting and dance teachers in Pittsburgh who taught me that professionalism is not earned when you get an Equity card, but when you start acting like a professional. Show up on time, take the note, don't bad mouth your peers.

--Tim Federle





PSYCHEDELICS

What do you see as the relationship between the use of psychedelics and spiritual practice?

As I gained experience in the use of psychedelics, I realized that I was accessing spiritual planes of consciousness. These chemicals can get you in the door, but you don't stay on these planes like you do when you become adept at meditation. However, the psychedelics give you faith in these new, spiritual perspectives – faith which is necessary for later spiritual growth.

In the Buddhist system, faith is one of the five “spiritual powers,” along with wisdom and awareness, effort and concentration. So you’re suggesting that even though psychedelics may not develop these other capacities and powers, they can give an enduring faith of a certain kind.

Psychedelics can't give you a permanent spiritual immersion. But they can give faith about the existence of these other planes, and you need faith as a foundation for spiritual practices. Psychedelics gave me the faith that allowed me to get to Maharaji. So psychedelics can open doors, and if later you want to revisit these spiritual planes, having had such experiences will make it easier.

But on the other hand, if the psychedelic experience is too mind-blowing, it can detract from your ability to recognize the spirit in the moment. Because this moment doesn't necessarily have the pizzazz of the psychedelic moment.

--Ram Dass, interviewed in *Higher Wisdom: Eminent Elders Explore the Continuing Impact of Psychedelics*



“Now I have a question for you.”

QUEEN OF SOUL

Late on a winter night, Aretha Franklin sat in the dressing room of Caesars Windsor Hotel and Casino, in Ontario. She did not wear the expression of someone who has just brought boundless joy to a few thousand souls.

“What was with the sound?” she said, in a tone somewhere between perplexity and irritation. Feedback had pierced a verse of “My Funny Valentine,” and before she sat down at the piano to play “Inseparable,” a tribute to the late Natalie Cole, she narrowed her gaze and called on a “Mr. Lowery” to fix the levels once and for all. Miss Franklin, as nearly everyone in her circle tends to call her, was distinctly, if politely, displeased. “For a time up there, I just couldn’t hear myself right,” she said.

On the counter in front of her, next to her makeup mirror and hairbrush, were small stacks of hundred-dollar bills. She collects on the spot or she does not sing. The cash goes into her handbag and the handbag either stays with her security team or goes out onstage and resides, within eyeshot, on the piano. “It’s the era she grew up in—she saw so many people, like Ray Charles and B. B. King, get ripped off,” a close friend, the television host and author Tavis Smiley, told me. “There is the sense in her very often that people are out to harm you. And she won’t have it. You are not going to disrespect her.”

Franklin has won eighteen Grammy awards, sold tens of millions of records, and is generally acknowledged to be the greatest singer in the history of postwar popular music. James Brown, Sam Cooke, Etta James, Otis Redding, Ray Charles: even they cannot match her power, her range from gospel to jazz, R. & B., and pop. At the 1998 Grammys, Luciano Pavarotti called in sick with a sore throat and Aretha, with twenty minutes’ notice, sang “Nessun dorma” for him. What distinguishes her is not merely the breadth of her catalogue or the cataract force of her vocal instrument; it’s her musical intelligence, her way of singing behind the beat, of spraying a wash of notes over a single word or syllable, of constructing, moment by moment, the emotional power of a three-minute song. “Respect” is as precise an artifact as a Ming vase.

“There are certain women singers who possess, beyond all the boundaries of our admiration for their art, an uncanny power to evoke our love,” Ralph Ellison wrote in a 1958 essay on Mahalia Jackson. “Indeed, we feel that if the idea of aristocracy is more than mere class conceit, then these surely are our natural queens.” In 1967, at the Regal Theatre, in Chicago, the d.j. Pervis Spann presided over a coronation in which he placed a crown on Franklin’s head and pronounced her the Queen of Soul.



The Queen does not rehearse the band—not for a casino gig in Windsor, Ontario. She leaves it to her longtime musical director, a seventy-nine-year-old former child actor and doo-wop singer named H. B. Barnum, to assemble her usual rhythm section and backup singers and pair them with some local union horn and string players, and run them through a three-hour scan of anything Franklin might choose to sing: the hits from the late sixties and early seventies—“Chain of Fools,” “Spirit in the Dark,” “Think”—along with more recent recordings. Sometimes, Franklin will switch things up and pull out a jazz tune—“Cherokee” or “Skylark”—but that is rare. Her greatest concern is husbanding her voice and her energies. When she wears a fur coat onstage, it’s partly to keep warm and prevent her voice from closing up. But it’s also because that’s what the old I’ve-earned-it-now-I’m-gonna-wear-it gospel stars often did: they wore the mink. Midway through her set, she makes what she calls a “false exit,” and slips backstage and lets the band noodle while she rests. “It’s a fifteen-round fight, and so she paces herself,” Barnum says. “Aretha is not thirty years old.” She is seventy-four.

--David Remnick, “Soul Survivor,” *The New Yorker*, April 4, 2016



why it smell like Empress?

--overheard on Gunnison Beach

QUEER

Q: What about the whole phenomenon of queer celebrity? I’m thinking about Caitlyn Jenner. Does her very public transition make a difference for social change?

A: Sometimes we get it backwards. Average, ordinary, unknown queer people coming out made it possible for queer celebrities to exist, not the other way around. But it does become a self-reinforcing dynamic. Now queer celebrities make the world safer for average, ordinary queer people to be out. But there weren’t out queer celebrities until average, ordinary queer people started coming out.

In much the same way, now you see out professional athletes, like Michael Sam. And the skier who just came out, Jason Collins, who I admire tremendously. I think he’s wonderful. And every time they come out, there’s always a lot of talk about shattering stereotypes, such as the one about gay men being bad at sports or effeminate. But it was really the hairdressers and ballet dancers that changed the world and made it safe for Jason Collins to come out, not the other way around. It was the queer people who couldn’t hide that made the world safe for queer people who could and, for a very long time, did choose to hide.

--Dan Savage, interviewed by Suzanne Stroh in *The Gay and Lesbian Review*

QUESTIONS

You may have wondered about the fact that I almost never answer questions during therapy. Instead I usually ask the patient to change the question into a statement. The question mark has a hook the patient may use for many purposes, such as to embarrass the other person or, more often, to prevent himself from discovering what is really going on. This asking for environmental support keeps one in the infantile state. You will find that nothing develops your intelligence better than to take any question and turn it into a genuine statement. Suddenly the background will start to open up, and the ground from which the question grows will become visible.

--Fritz Perls

REGRET

Except for the bottle, I always walked the straight and narrow: a family man, a good provider, never cut up, never did ugly, and I regret it.

--Joseph Mitchell, *Old Mr. Flood*

REJECTION

What has being a writer taught you about rejection?

Well, my first novel, *Forgetting Elena* wasn't really my first novel. It was about my fifth novel, but I had submitted maybe three of them, they had all been rejected, and then this one, *Forgetting Elena*, which I thought was actually good was rejected by 22 publishers. In those days you couldn't multiple submit, you had to wait until one person rejected it until you submitted it again. Anyway one of our best publishers Knopf was considering that book for maybe six months, and then they finally rejected it.

I was living in Rome, and I remember going to American Express and getting my mail, and reading the rejection letter, and I just sobbed, and sobbed, and sobbed. I was walking along through the forum, and I was saying, "I can't speak, I can't speak, they won't let me speak." I was sobbing away, and then I decided although I'm in atheist, I always make bargains with God, and so I made bargain God that if he sent me a beautiful angel, or a man, that I would not commit suicide.

The next thing you know this really handsome blonde Venetian came up to me and said, "Oh why are you crying? Can I help you?" We went to bed, we had a little affair, I was 29, but what did I learn from it? I guess I learned from it that God exists although I'm an atheist.

--Edmund White



REPETITION

Freud tied repetition to death. He considered the desire to repeat to be an instinct, rooted in biology. This instinct's first aim is to bring back an earlier condition, so that the repeated story represents a piece of the past (though disguised), lifts repression from the past, reduces anxiety and tension. Now, asks Freud's theory, what is the very earliest condition that the instinct desires to return to by means of repetition? Answer: a prevital, inorganic condition of pure entropy, a state of non-being in which there is no tension whatsoever – in other words, Death. Freud called this static condition Nirvana, and the instinctual drive toward it Thanatos. In later life, the compulsion to repeat indicates death at work in the soul, Freud would say, much as geriatric psychology asserts that repetition is one indication of the failing organism on its way to ultimate stasis...

Because repetition is so tedious, we have gone far out for inspiration from philosophers so that we can lift it from banality. Nothing more tedious than practicing your scales or mumbling your beads. Yet the accomplishments of art, the efficacy of prayer, the beauty of ritual, and the force of character depend on petty repetitions any instant of which, taken for itself alone, seems utterly useless.

--James Hillman, *The Force of Character*

SAUDI ARABIA

Nearly all the women I met during my November trip to Jeddah were heavy users of Uber or its Dubai-based competitor, Careem. The advent, in 2014, of car services that can be requested through mobile apps has given women a freedom of movement that had seemed impossible just months earlier. The long, sweltering waits for drivers, which had been a daily feature in the lives of educated, middle-class Saudi women—whose families didn't restrict their movements on principle—vanished, along with driver drama, in all its various, much discussed forms: drivers who spied and reported to fathers and brothers; drivers whose services had to be shared with sisters; drivers who refused to stop and ask for directions, despite the fact that many Saudi streets are unmarked.

Saudis do not work in many service jobs, including as Uber drivers. Oddly—or perhaps conveniently, given Saudi Arabia's dependence on foreign labor—the company of foreign workers of the opposite sex, particularly those from developing countries, is an unofficial but widely tolerated exception to the prohibition against gender mixing. A Saudi woman may ride in an Uber car driven by a man from Pakistan, and a Saudi man may have his breakfast served by a housemaid from the Philippines. But the same degree of proximity with another Saudi, or a Westerner—or, for that matter, a white-collar worker from a developing country—of the opposite gender would be unthinkable.

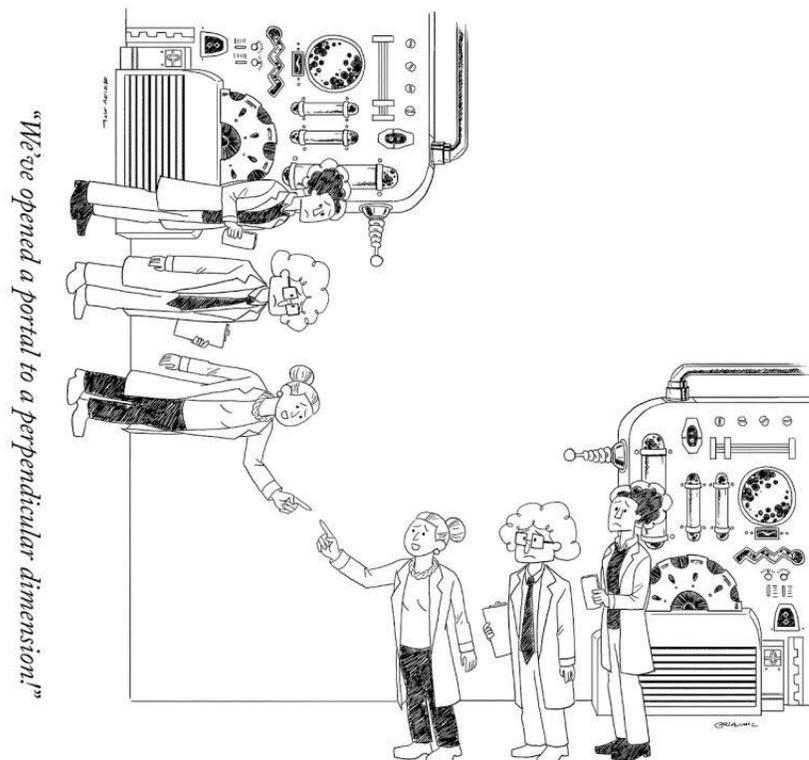
--Katherine Zoepf, "Sisters in Law," *The New Yorker*



SCIENCE

We all know what a scientist looks like: a wild-eyed person in a white lab coat and utilitarian eyeglasses, wearing a pocket protector and holding a test tube. Mostly male. Usually white. [But when I was growing up in Hampton, VA,] the face of science was brown like mine. My dad was a NASA lifer, a career Langley Research Center scientist who became an internationally respected climate expert. Five of my father's seven siblings were engineers or technologists. My father's best friend was an aeronautical engineer. Our next-door neighbor was a physics professor. There were mathematicians at our church, sonic boom experts in my mother's sorority and electrical engineers in my parents' college alumni associations....I knew so many African-Americans working in science, math and engineering that I thought that's just what black folks *did*.

--Margot Lee Shetterly, author of *Hidden Figures*

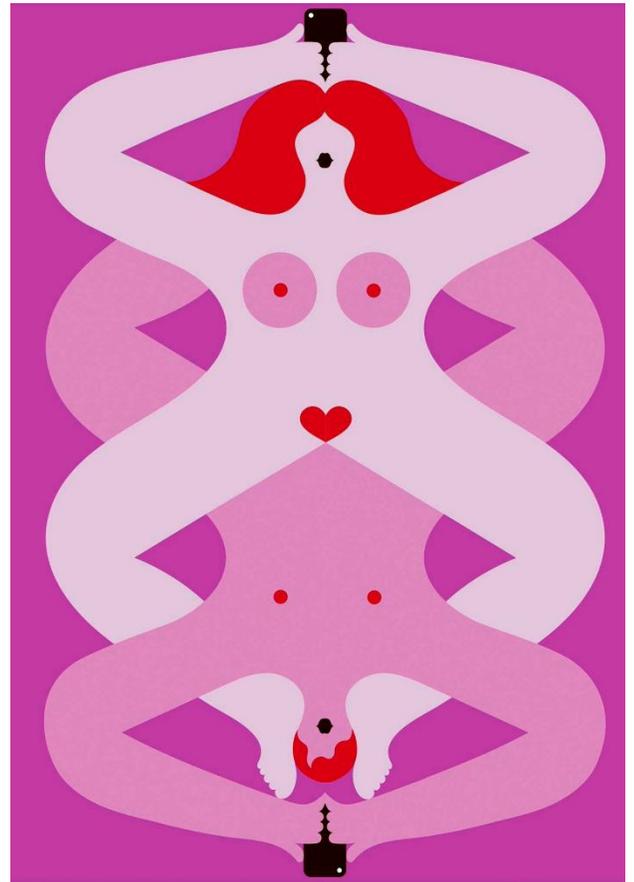


"We've opened a portal to a perpendicular dimension!"

SEX

Since parents are confronted daily with their children's curiosity about sex and enthusiasm for vigorous physical activity and strong sensations, it is a wonder that they manage to be such hypocrites about it. A form of culturally induced schizophrenia allows them to make sentimental speeches about the fleeting innocence of childhood and the happiness of years unburdened by responsibility of carnal lust, then to turn around and spend an incredible amount of time policing the sex lives of their children. Children are celibate because their parents prevent them from playing with other little kids or adults. They are shy because they are not allowed to go naked any longer than is absolutely necessary to take a bath. They are not innocent, they are ignorant, and that ignorance is deliberately created and maintained by parents who won't answer questions about sex and often punish their children for being bold enough to ask. This does not make sex disappear. The erotic becomes a vast, unmapped wilderness whose boundaries are clearly delineated by averted eyes. Sex becomes the thing not seen, the word not spoken, the forbidden impulse, the action that must be denied.

--Pat Califia



SHAMANISM

It's well known that some shamans can leave permanently, when they want to, but the trick is to come back here and do the healing work. We aren't given ecstatic knowledge just so that we'll look forward to our deaths. We are given this knowledge, and the spiritual empowerment that goes with it, so we can help to reduce suffering, pain, and spiritual ignorance here in the Middle World.

--Michael Harner

SHAME

It's always helpful to remember that when perfectionism driving, shame is riding shotgun.

Perfectionism is not healthy striving. It is not asking, *How can I be my best self?* Instead, it's asking, *What will people think?...* If our story includes shame, perfectionism, or comparison and we're left feeling isolated or "less than," we need to employ two completely counterintuitive strategies. We need to:

1. Talk to ourselves in the same way we'd talk to someone we love. *Yes, you made a mistake. You're human. You don't have to do it like anyone else does. Fixing it and making amends will help. Self-loathing will not.*

2. Reach out to someone we trust – a person who has earned the right to hear our story and who has the capacity to respond with empathy.

--Brene Brown, *Rising Strong*

SNEEZING

In the year 600, Pope Gregory the Great declared "God bless you" to be the correct response to a sneeze. It was once thought that sneezing was an omen of death, since many dying people fell into sneezing fits. People responded to sneezing with good luck chants. Later, the Hebrew Talmud called sneezing "pleasure sent from God"; and the Greeks and Romans believed that sneezing was a good omen. They responded to sneezes with "Long may you live!" or "May you enjoy good health." Pope Gregory introduced the response of "God bless you" when the plague was at its height in Europe, hoping that the quick prayer would protect the sneezer from sickness and death. As the plague spread across Europe, the new response spread with it and has survived to this day.

--The Writer's Almanac

SONGWRITING

When people talk about Leonard [Cohen], they fail to mention his melodies, which to me, along with his lyrics, are his greatest genius. Even the counterpoint lines—they give a celestial character and melodic lift to every one of his songs. As far as I know, no one else comes close to this in modern music. Even the simplest song, like "The Law," which is structured on two fundamental chords, has counterpoint lines that are essential, and anybody who even thinks about doing this song and loves the lyrics would have to build around the counterpoint lines.

His gift or genius is in his connection to the music of the spheres. In the song "Sisters of Mercy," for instance, the verses are four elemental lines which change and move at predictable intervals . . . but the tune is anything but predictable. The song just comes in and states a fact. And after that anything can happen and it does, and Leonard allows it to happen. His tone is far from condescending or mocking. He is a tough-minded lover who doesn't recognize the brush-off. Leonard's always above it all. "Sisters of Mercy" is verse after verse of four distinctive lines, in perfect meter, with no chorus, quivering with drama. The first line begins in a minor key. The second line goes from minor to major and steps up, and changes melody and variation. The third line steps up even higher than that to a different degree, and then the fourth line comes back to the beginning. This is a deceptively unusual musical theme, with or without lyrics. But it's so subtle a listener doesn't realize he's been taken on a musical journey and dropped off somewhere, with or without lyrics.



That song “Hallelujah” has resonance for me. There again, it’s a beautifully constructed melody that steps up, evolves, and slips back, all in quick time. But this song has a connective chorus, which when it comes in has a power all of its own. The “secret chord” and the point-blank I-know-you-better-than-you-know-yourself aspect of the song has plenty of resonance for me.

I like all of Leonard’s songs, early or late. “Going Home,” “Show Me the Place,” “The Darkness.’ These are all great songs, deep and truthful as ever and multidimensional, surprisingly melodic, and they make you think and feel. I like some of his later songs even better than his early ones. Yet there’s a simplicity to his early ones that I like, too.

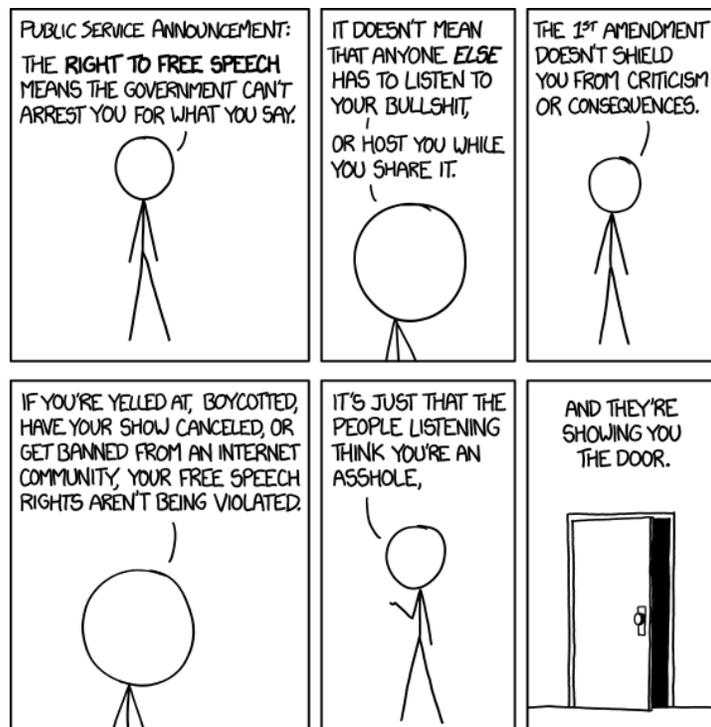
I see no disenchantment in Leonard’s lyrics at all. There’s always a direct sentiment, as if he’s holding a conversation and telling you something, him doing all the talking, but the listener keeps listening. He’s very much a descendant of Irving Berlin, maybe the only songwriter in modern history that Leonard can be directly related to. Berlin’s songs did the same thing. Berlin was also connected to some kind of celestial sphere. And, like Leonard, he probably had no classical-music training, either. Both of them just hear melodies that most of us can only strive for. Berlin’s lyrics also fell into place and consisted of half lines, full lines at surprising intervals, using simple elongated words. Both Leonard and Berlin are incredibly crafty. Leonard particularly uses chord progressions that seem classical in shape. He is a much more savvy musician than you’d think.

—Bob Dylan, interviewed by David Remnick in the *New Yorker*

SPEAK

Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down, and suggest it’s personal. And the world won’t end. And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had....And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution.” And at last you’ll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.

--Audre Lorde



STRESS

Can you explain how our stress-response systems work?

All input – feelings of hunger or thirst, loud noises, the sound of someone’s voice, some information we learn – first enters the lower, more primitive part of our brains, which determines if this input is familiar or unfamiliar. If the input is familiar, it then travels to a higher, more evolved part of our brain, where we decide based on memory whether it’s good, bad, or neutral. If the input is unfamiliar, the brain’s default conclusion is *This can’t be good*. Any novelty – even desirable novelty, like learning something new – activates our stress-response system.

Some stress is actually good for us – for example, the stress related to meeting a new person or traveling to a new place. Predictable, controllable, and moderate activation of the stress-response system has been shown to build our capacity to manage challenges. When a child has the opportunity to challenge herself in the presence of supportive adults, it builds resilience. It’s the dose, the pattern, and the controllability that determine whether the stress is adaptive or harmful.

Let’s say you’re a six-year-old boy, and up until now your life has been OK. Mom and Dad split up, and there was some conflict around the divorce, but nothing too horrible. Then all of a sudden Mom has a new boyfriend in the house. That’s novel, so it generates moderate stress. At dinner he raises his voice at you; that’s unpredictable. He soon starts barking orders at you more frequently. He yells at your mom. He hits you, or he hits your mom. Your stress-response system doesn’t have time to return to baseline before another source of stress arrives. You start having anticipatory anxiety about what will happen next. Your baseline level of stress increases; things that would not have bothered you much before now bother you a lot. A harsh tone of voice that may have been mildly upsetting is now overwhelming. If the boyfriend’s behavior continues, your stress-response system may start to register any angry tone of voice as threatening. You’ve become what we call “sensitized.”

Conventional wisdom might suggest that the boy would get used to the angry, violent behavior and be less affected by it over time, but you’re saying the opposite is true.

Exactly. The more our stress-response system is activated in uncontrollable ways, the less able we are to handle even small amounts of stress.

When you are overstressed, you no longer have efficient access to your higher brain functions. By the time you’re in a state of alarm, significant parts of your cortex – the highest-functioning part of your brain – have shut down entirely. This is adaptive if you’re confronted by a predator, because you don’t want to waste time thinking about how to respond: you want to fight or run away. But to do your best reasoning, you need access to that sophisticated part of your brain. To learn and plan, you need to be in a relatively calm state.

Let’s go back to the six-year-old boy in your example. What happens to him at school?

The brain is good at generalizing from one kind of experience to another. Most of the time this ability is a gift, but this boy may generalize that all male authority figures who raise their voices are terrifying. This starts a vicious cycle: The boy arrives at school already on heightened alert due to his home situation, and he can’t pay attention. The teacher gets frustrated and raises his voice. The child is now even more on red alert. It’s impossible for him to concentrate. The rational parts of his brain shut down. Instead he has access only to the parts that process information valuable in threatening situations. He’s attuned to the teacher’s tone of voice, to whom the teacher is smiling at. He’s learning to read nonverbal cues. The calm child will learn the state capitals; the sensitized child will learn who is the teacher’s pet.

Can he recover from that?

Yes, opportunities for controlled, moderate doses of stress can shift these systems back toward well-regulated functioning. The key is that a moderate challenge for a typical child may be a huge challenge for a sensitized child.

The achievement gap in schools has a lot to do with the child's home and community life if the family is concerned about not having money for food or rent or a doctor's visit, that creates a pervasive sense of anxiety and unpredictability. The longer the child is in that environment, the worse the vicious cycle at school becomes. Eventually the kid says to himself, "There's something wrong with me. I'm stupid." And he drops out as soon as he can.

What about the character-building benefits of facing down adversity, of "rising to the challenge"? Is that ever applicable in these situations?

If you start from a healthy place, adversity can be character building. But if you grow up amid constant adversity, you are less likely to have the flexible and capable stress-response systems you need to face down adversity. Certainly many children do grow up with remarkable gifts and strengths despite their challenges, but when this happens, it's often because there were people in the child's environment who helped create a safe, predictable space for the child at least part of the time.

Are there instances in which well-intentioned parents protect their children from stress too much?

Yes, I've seen upper-middle-class children develop anxiety disorders because they had never been given the opportunity to explore the world. They'd been told only, "Don't do this, don't do that, don't get dirty." By the time these children went to preschool, they hadn't learned to tolerate even slight discomforts. They became overwhelmed by the novelty of preschool and had meltdowns.

Resilience comes from stress. It's important that parents, teachers, and coaches not be afraid of it. Exploring, getting dirty, and falling down help you build resilience and tolerate novelty and discomfort.

How might we apply this to whole communities?

First we have to understand that feeling connected to other people is one of our most fundamental needs. We feel safer when we are with kind and familiar people. Tension can arise from being part of a marginalized minority, whether you define that minority status by economics, race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual preference, or whatever. The marginalized group has a much higher level of baseline stress. It's not a specific traumatic event; it's a continuous sense of disconnection.

Our brain is constantly monitoring our environment to gauge whether or not we belong someplace. If we frequently get feedback that we don't belong – or, worse, overt threats – then our body's systems stay in a constant state of arousal. This increases the risk for diabetes and hypertension and makes learning, reflection, planning, and creative problem-solving harder. Over time it will actually change the physiology of your brain.

For example, for someone who already feels marginalized and is hypervigilant, even a relatively benign interaction, such as a police officer asking for your license, can trigger a volatile reaction. This is true for both the person being stopped and for the cop who's doing the stopping. They both can be sensitized. People in law enforcement should know the principles of stress and trauma. It's the key to understanding why some of their policies and behaviors have a destructive effect.

--psychiatrist Brian Perry (author of *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*) interview by Jeanne Supin in *The Sun*

SUFFERING

Contrary to most professional opinion, [a] gnawing dissatisfaction with life is not a sign of “mental illness,” nor an indication of poor social adjustment, nor a character disorder....A person who is beginning to sense the suffering of life is, at the same time, beginning to awaken to deeper realities, truer realities. For suffering smashes to pieces the complacency of our normal fictions about reality and forces us to become live in a special sense – to see carefully, to feel deeply, to touch ourselves and our worlds in ways we have heretofore avoided.

--Ken Wilber

Nobody will protect you from your suffering. You can't cry it away or eat it away or starve it away or walk it away or punch it away or even therapy it away. It's just there, and you have to survive it. You have to endure it. You have to live through it and love it and move on and be better for it and run as far as you can...across the bridge that was built by your own desire to heal.

--Cheryl Strayed



Central Park, September 11, 2016

SUPEREGO

Were we to meet this figure socially, as it were, this accusatory character, this internal critic, we would think there was something wrong with him. He would just be boring and cruel. We might think that something terrible had happened to him. That he was living in the aftermath, in the fallout of some catastrophe. And we would be right.

--Adam Phillips, *Unforbidden Pleasures*

TEA PARTY

Liberals have long wondered why working-class voters support policies that (the liberals think) hurt the working class. Why would victims of pollution side with the polluters? Theories abound. Thomas Frank accuses the G.O.P. of luring voters with social issues but delivering tax cuts for the rich. Others point to the political machines built by ultra-wealthy donors like Charles and David Koch. Still others emphasize the influence of conservative media like Fox News. [Arlie Russell] Hochschild sees these as partial explanations but wants a fuller understanding of “emotion in politics” — she wants to know how Tea Partiers feel, on the theory that the movement serves their “emotional self-interest” by providing “a giddy release” from years of frustration....

Hochschild...assembles what she calls the “deep story” — a “feels as if” story, beyond facts or judgment, that presents her subjects’ worldview. It goes like this: “You are patiently standing in a long line” for something you call the American dream. You are white, Christian, of modest means, and getting along in years. You are male. There are people of color behind you, and “in principle you wish them well.” But you’ve waited long, worked hard, “and the line is barely moving.” Then “Look! You see people cutting in line ahead of you!” Who are these interlopers? “Some are black,” others “immigrants, refugees.” They get affirmative action, sympathy and welfare — “checks for the listless and idle.” The government wants you to feel sorry for them. And who runs the government? “The biracial son of a low-income single mother,” and he’s cheering on the line cutters. “The president and his wife are line cutters themselves.” The liberal media mocks you as racist or homophobic. Everywhere you look, “you feel betrayed.”

Hochschild runs the myth past her Tea Party friends. “You’ve read my mind,” Lee Sherman said. “I live your analogy,” Mike Schaff said. Harold Areno’s niece agrees, and says she has seen people drive their children to Head Start in Lexuses. “If people refuse to work, we should let them starve,” she said. Actually, anger this raw may depart from the 1990s, when welfare critics often framed their attacks as efforts to help the poor by fighting dependency. The resentments Hochschild presents are unadorned, and they have mutated into a broader suspicion of almost everything the federal government does. “The government has gone rogue, corrupt, malicious and ugly,” one Tea Partier complains. “It can’t help anybody.”

Did welfare really “end”? Conservatives say no. Cash aid plummeted, but food stamp usage soared to new highs and the Medicaid rolls expanded. There’s room for debate, but the grievances Hochschild presents feel immune to policy solutions. As long as larger forces are squeezing whites of modest means, it’s going to “feel as if” people are cutting in line. In Lexuses.

--Jason DeParle, reviewing Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* in the *New York Times*



David Zinn's set for *The Humans*

THEATER

Someone who was very influential in the way that I give notes was George C. Wolfe. I remember, when we were doing *Angels in America*, the notes session would always start with "What did you think?" And he would go to every person and say, "What did you think?" I always thought that was very, very useful, not only to be able to express to him what I felt like the night before or the performance before but also to hear what everyone else was thinking. It was a great equalizer for the notes session to start. He wouldn't respond. He wasn't judging or negating whatever our experience was. I think I tend to do that now because I found it useful. Although in a play that I did recently, one of the actors told me that they really hated that question. They were interested in what I thought. I said, "Well, I know what I think. I want to know how you felt about the performance, and where do we align, and where do we differ? How do we bridge that gap if there's a gap? But I don't want to presume that *my* experience of the preview was *your* experience of the preview. I'm curious; it's just curiosity because the experience of performing it in front of an audience is vastly different than watching it from the last row of the theatre."

--Joe Mantello, interviewed by Trip Cullman, *SDC Journal*, Winter 2016

TIME

[With "Pee Wee's] Playhouse," [Paul] Reubens revitalized Saturday-morning programming, a wasteland of cheap animated series that served mostly as glorified toy commercials, by discovering an aesthetic wormhole connecting late-night comedy and early-morning children's programming. The sensibility of stoned 20-somethings at midnight, he realized — marked by an unreasonable love of repetition, absurdity, narrative disjuncture and jokes that either last way too long or flit by in a short-attention-span-accommodating blink — had significant overlap with that of little kids in pajamas, laughing themselves silly over breakfast cereal. "Those are the times of the day when there aren't rules," Reubens said of morning and night, standing as they do in idiosyncratic opposition to the more conventional prerogatives of the prime-time dial. "Rules are for the other times."

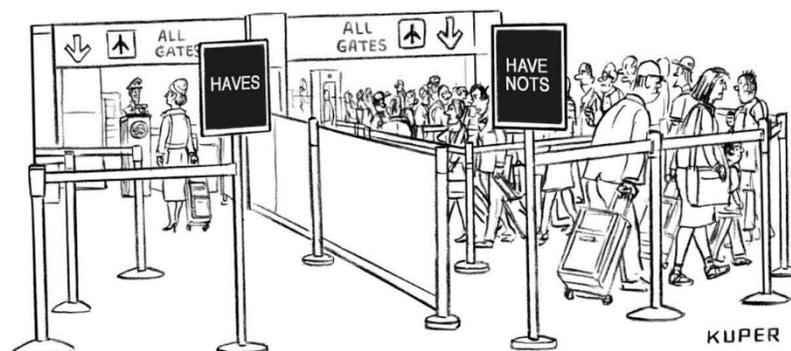
— Jonah Weiner, *New York Times Magazine*

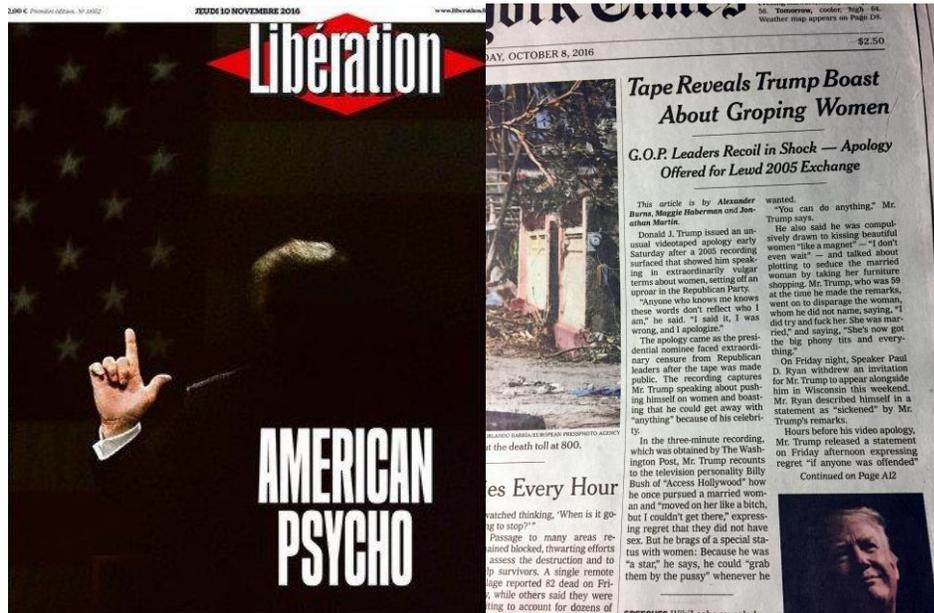
TRAVEL

You wrote an essay in *Conde Nast Traveler* in March encouraging people to travel, especially in light of world events, saying, "I am not afraid of the world, but I am afraid of people who are afraid of the world."

Generally speaking I feel like I want to encourage people to have the most expanded version of their life they can possibly have in every way — spiritually, creatively and geographically. That's the bell I keep ringing: to live a bigger and broader life. The smaller your world gets, the smaller your mind gets, and the more your fear grows and the worse your decisions get.

--Elizabeth Gilbert, interviewed in the *New York Times*





TRUMP TIME

Americans are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience. Now is a good time to do so. Here are twenty lessons from the twentieth century, adapted to the circumstances of today.

- 1. Do not obey in advance.** Much of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then start to do it without being asked. You've already done this, haven't you? Stop. Anticipatory obedience teaches authorities what is possible and accelerates unfreedom.
- 2. Defend an institution.** Follow the courts or the media, or a court or a newspaper. Do not speak of "our institutions" unless you are making them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions don't protect themselves. They go down like dominoes unless each is defended from the beginning.
- 3. Recall professional ethics.** When the leaders of state set a negative example, professional commitments to just practice become much more important. It is hard to break a rule-of-law state without lawyers, and it is hard to have show trials without judges.
- 4. When listening to politicians, distinguish certain words.** Look out for the expansive use of "terrorism" and "extremism." Be alive to the fatal notions of "exception" and "emergency." Be angry about the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary.
- 5. Be calm when the unthinkable arrives.** When the terrorist attack comes, remember that all authoritarians at all times either await or plan such events in order to consolidate power. Think of the Reichstag fire. The sudden disaster that requires the end of the balance of power, the end of opposition parties, and so on, is the oldest trick in the Hitlerian book. Don't fall for it.
- 6. Be kind to our language.** Avoid pronouncing the phrases everyone else does. Think up your own way of speaking, even if only to convey that thing you think everyone is saying. (Don't use the internet before bed. Charge your gadgets away from your bedroom, and read.) What to read? Perhaps "The Power of the Powerless" by Václav Havel, 1984 by George Orwell, *The Captive Mind* by Czesław Miłosz, *The Rebel* by Albert Camus, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, or *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible* by Peter Pomerantsev.
- 7. Stand out.** Someone has to. It is easy, in words and deeds, to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. And the moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow.

8. Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights.

9. Investigate. Figure things out for yourself. Spend more time with long articles. Subsidize investigative journalism by subscribing to print media. Realize that some of what is on your screen is there to harm you. Bookmark PropOrNot or other sites that investigate foreign propaganda pushes.

10. Practice corporeal politics. Power wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Get outside. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends and march with them.

11. Make eye contact and small talk. This is not just polite. It is a way to stay in touch with your surroundings, break down unnecessary social barriers, and come to understand whom you should and should not trust. If we enter a culture of denunciation, you will want to know the psychological landscape of your daily life.

12. Take responsibility for the face of the world. Notice the swastikas and the other signs of hate. Do not look away and do not get used to them. Remove them yourself and set an example for others to do so.

13. Hinder the one-party state. The parties that took over states were once something else. They exploited a historical moment to make political life impossible for their rivals. Vote in local and state elections while you can.

14. Give regularly to good causes, if you can. Pick a charity and set up autopay. Then you will know that you have made a free choice that is supporting civil society helping others doing something good.

15. Establish a private life. Nastier rulers will use what they know about you to push you around. Scrub your computer of malware. Remember that email is skywriting. Consider using alternative forms of the internet, or simply using it less. Have personal exchanges in person. For the same reason, resolve any legal trouble. Authoritarianism works as a blackmail state, looking for the hook on which to hang you. Try not to have too many hooks.

16. Learn from others in other countries. Keep up your friendships abroad, or make new friends abroad. The present difficulties here are an element of a general trend. And no country is going to find a solution by itself. Make sure you and your family have passports.



17. Watch out for the paramilitaries. When the men with guns who have always claimed to be against the system start wearing uniforms and marching around with torches and pictures of a Leader, the end is nigh. When the pro-Leader paramilitary and the official police and military intermingle, the game is over.

18. Be reflective if you must be armed. If you carry a weapon in public service, God bless you and keep you. But know that evils of the past involved policemen and soldiers finding themselves, one day, doing irregular things. Be ready to say no. (If you do not know what this means, contact the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and ask about training in professional ethics.)

19. Be as courageous as you can. If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die in unfreedom.

20. Be a patriot. The incoming president is not. Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come. They will need it."

--Timothy Snyder, Yale University historian, professor, and Holocaust expert

Donald Trump, it is worth stating, is married to an immigrant [Melania Trump, nee Melanija Knauss]...Trump's mother was an immigrant, too, from Scotland; his first wife was born Ivana Zelníčková, in Zlín, Czechoslovakia. If he's as concerned as he says he is by all the "people that are from all over and they're killers and rapists and they're coming into this country," he might consider building a wall around his pants.

--Lauren Collins, ["The Model American,"](#) *The New Yorker*

If you look at the footage of Trump realizing that he might actually be the next President, you will see a man who suddenly grasps the enormity of his own miscalculation. I don't think that Trump had any intention of actually winning; he wanted to rabble-rouse and then move on to his next moneymaking venture, which would have capitalized on the lawlessness and anger that he helped create. Now he must answer to his own rabble. The American population that elected Trump has very real problems and needs a leader to represent it, not a reality-TV star with no capacity for serving others. When a political candidate is allowed and encouraged by his peers to push the hate and racism buttons for far too long, this is the result: a man who didn't really want the job, representing people he couldn't care less about. Now he'll have to slum it in Washington, answering to his own angry constituents until it becomes apparent to them that they've been duped.

--Laura Stephan-Corio, letter to the editor, *The New Yorker*





UGLY TRUTHS

As a longtime resident of Montgomery, [Alabama, Bryan Stevenson] often thinks about Rosa Parks, whose refusal to sit at the back of a local bus in 1955 set off the modern era of the civil-rights movement. “We have reduced her activism to this celebratory tale—‘It was all great,’ ” he told me. “Here’s what most people don’t know. After the boycott was declared officially over, and black people were sitting on the buses, there was unbelievable violence. There were a dozen people who were shot standing waiting on buses. We had white people going around Montgomery shooting black people who dared to get on the buses.” For a time after the boycott, the city shut down bus service altogether. And then, to make way for the I-85 highway, the local authorities, led by a state transportation commissioner who was also a member of the Ku Klux Klan, bulldozed the city’s major middle-class black neighborhood.

Stevenson believes that too little attention has been paid to the hostility of whites to the civil-rights movement. “Where did all of those people go?” he said. “They had power in 1965. They voted against the Voting Rights Act, they voted against the Civil Rights Act, they were still here in 1970 and 1975 and 1980. And there was never a time when people said, ‘Oh, you know that thing about segregation forever? Oh, we were wrong. We made a mistake. That was not good.’ They never said that. And it just shifted. So they stopped saying ‘Segregation forever,’ and they said, ‘Lock them up and throw away the key.’ ”

--Jeffrey Toobin, “The Legacy of Lynching, On Death Row,” *The New Yorker*

VALUES

One thing I like about all your writing is the way you refer to the baths frequently as an icon of gay life, and I wonder how you would explain the appeal of the baths to straight people.

To me family life is domestic and bourgeois and Christian or Jewish -- religious, anyway. But there's something about homosexuality that is to me inherently pagan and has a different value system attached to it. There's something not particularly Christian, bourgeois, or domestic about homosexual values. And homosexual values are for some reason to me epitomized by walking down the hallway at the baths and seeing men in towels in their room. The first novel I tried to write in New York was a novel about a man who is simply in the baths for a year trying to write a novel about it. For a long time, I would never go to the theater or a movie because I equated everything with the price of admission to the baths. If for six dollars you could go to a play or to the Everard, I would go to the Everard because it was infinitely more vivid and more fascinating than anything the theater could produce.

--Andrew Holleran interviewed by Don Shewey for the *Boston Phoenix* in 1983

VIRTUES

Let me move back to the virtues that are common to different wisdom traditions. There are two mechanisms by which such traditions work to inculcate these values. One has to do with precept or doctrine, and the other with practice. The first acts as a road map – one with as much crystalline clarity and detailed accuracy as possible. One must keep that road map of life’s pilgrimage in place. That that includes the virtues that one should seek to cultivate as part of it.

The second mechanism is practice through setting an example. That is, not keeping it solely a head trip. There’s the adage, “What you are speaks so loudly to me that I can’t hear what you’re saying. The most powerful way of teaching virtue is through the influence and impact of one’s own attainment. But of course you have to have a huge sense of humor when you talk about spiritual attainment!

The West tends to target the virtues, especially humility, charity, and veracity. But Asia gets to the same place by targeting the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion. These are what stand between us and the virtues. With a Western background, we always think it’s good to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. So I asked Asian teachers, “Why do you take the negative approach to the same goal?” And they said, “If you focus on the positive virtues, they are way out there and you’re striving. But the poisons are right here and we have to deal with them every day. That’s what we should work on, with the assurance that incrementally, drop by drop, to every extent the poisons are eliminated, they will create a vacuum into which the virtues will flow automatically” So I feel sort of the same way about society. Let’s target what we want to tone down, get rid of as much as we can, and then the visions of a good society will merge in greater clarity as we succeed.

--Huston Smith, interviewed in *Higher Wisdom*

VISION

I want to live a life that is interesting to me and useful to others.

--Bobby Levithan

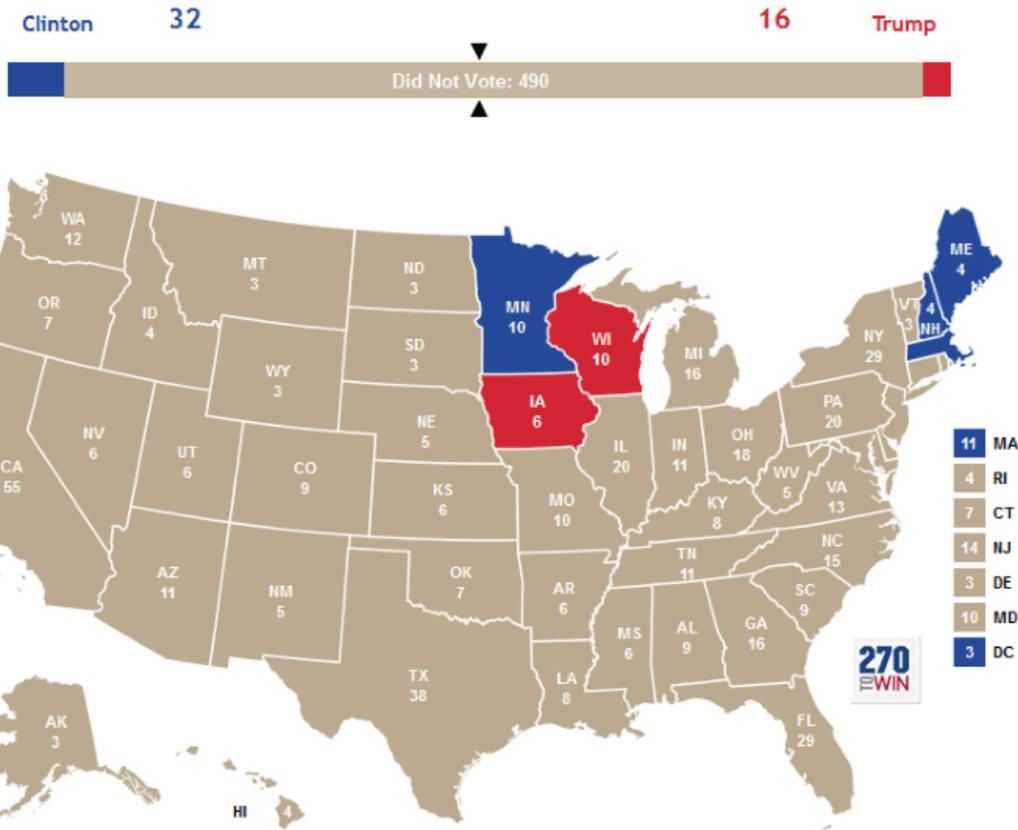
VOTING

Voting seems to be a case of what social scientists call want-should conflict. I know I’m supposed to watch “Schindler’s List,” but it’s more fun to indulge in “The Avengers.” I realize I should eat the salad, but the pizza looks delicious. To borrow a turn of phrase from Mark Twain, I want to *have voted*, but I don’t want to vote.

The first problem is that for many people, voting has little to do with their identities. Do I see myself as an American? Absolutely. Do I think we live in a great country? Of course. I’ve shown my national pride in various ways. But it never occurred to me that voting could be one. If we want people to vote, we need to make it a larger part of their self-image. In a pair of experiments, psychologists reframed voting decisions by appealing to people’s identities. Instead of asking them to vote, they asked people to *be a voter*. That subtle linguistic change increased turnout in California elections by 17 percent, and in New Jersey by 14 percent.

The reason is that nouns are more powerful than verbs. When I think about voting, I can skip it and still see myself as a good citizen. But when I think about being a voter, now the choice reflects on my character. It casts a shadow.

--Adam Grant, “Don’t Like the Candidates? Vote Anyway,” *NY Times*, October 2, 2016



The map above shows what the 2016 US Presidential Election results would have been if votes not cast for Hillary, Trump or one of the third party candidates had gone to fictional candidate “Did Not Vote.”

Only 6 states + Washington DC, had high enough voter turnouts where one of the actual candidates won more votes than people who did to vote. Iowa and Wisconsin for Trump and Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire and DC for Clinton.

A few other 2016 election facts for you:

- As a [percentage of eligible voters](#), Clinton received **26.27%** (60,839,922) of all votes compared to Trump’s **26.02%** (60,265,858) and Did Not Vote’s **43.1%** (110,450,842).
- Total voter turnout was estimated to be **56.9%**.
- It is the **5th election** since 1820 when the winner of the popular vote lost the presidency (the others being **1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000**)
- Donald Trump received **667,646 fewer** votes than Romney did in 2012, but Hilary Clinton received **5,075,873 fewer** votes than Obama did in 2012.
- Neither Candidate even won a majority of votes cast, Clinton got **47.8%** vs Trump’s **47.3%**.
- As a percentage of the entire US population (including those too young or other ineligible to vote) Clinton got votes from **18.73%** of the population and Trump got votes from **18.56%** of people.
- Washington DC is the only area in the country where a majority of all eligible voters (whether they voted or not) voted for Clinton (**90% of voters**, voted for Clinton on a **55.7%** turnout). In the other 6 states listed above, victories were simple pluralities.

WEIRD

Something Janani said in your *Bluestockings* interview really, really resonated with me: “...but I think to a degree challenging systems of power also involves coming to the revolution with all our strangeness and loneliness.” This isn’t an idea I see recognized often enough in the arts, that there needs to be space made to recognize weirdness. Alok, in the same interview you self-identified as a “weirdo.” Can you expand a little bit on this idea of centering weirdness and the way it ends up working itself out in your own work?

Sometimes we say we’re the “W” (weird) that got left out of “LGBT.” It’s tragic, actually, that even the arts world becomes an (unironic) haven of normcore. But transforming this heavy, heavy world into beauty, ugly, meaning, joy and comedy demands a commitment to strangeness. Making space for the strange and terrified parts of ourselves that are so often discarded from public space is exactly the goal of so much of our work.

--DarkMatter (Janani Balasubramanian and Alok Vaid-Menon, right) interviewed in *Paper*



WORRY

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn
as it was taught, and if not how shall
I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows
can do it and I am, well,
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,
am I going to get rheumatism,
lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.
And gave it up. And took my old body
and went out into the morning,
and sang.

--Mary Oliver, “I Worried”

WRITING

Unselfish work leads to silence, for when you work selflessly, you don't need to ask for help. Indifferent to results, you are willing to work with the most inadequate means. You do not care to be much gifted and well equipped. Nor do you ask for recognition and assistance. You just do what needs be done, leaving success and failure to the unknown. For everything is caused by innumerable factors, of which your personal endeavor is but one. Yet such is the magic of man's mind and heart that the most improbable happens when human will and love pull together.

--Nisargadatta Maharaj

Go in fear of abstractions. Use no adjective which does not reveal something.

--Ezra Pound

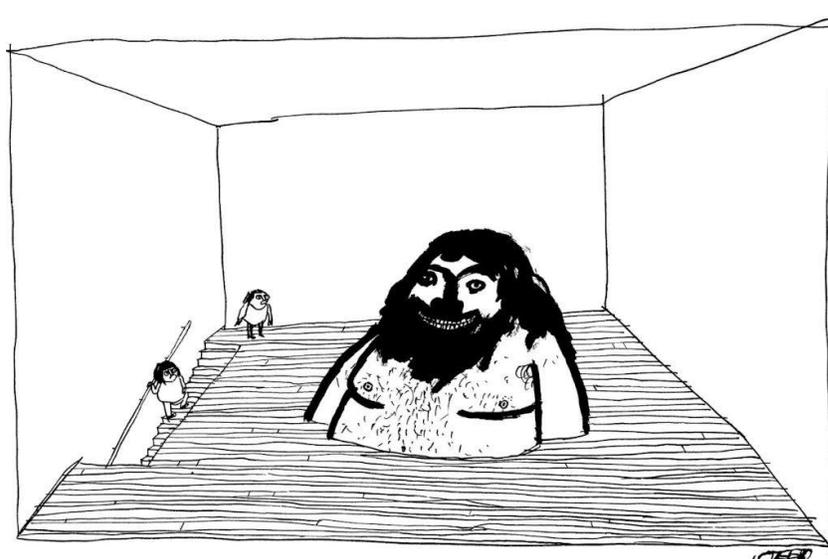
WYOMING

Wyoming is geographically huge—you could fit all of New England inside it, then throw in Hawaii and Maryland for good measure—but it is the least populous state in the Union; under six hundred thousand people live there, fewer than in Louisville, Kentucky...

The rest of the state could be daunting, with its successive mountain chains rising like crests on a flash-frozen ocean. But at least it had grandeur, and verdure. In the east, by contrast, you could travel five hundred miles and not see a tree. Precipitation was similarly scarce. The Homestead Act offered Western settlers a hundred and sixty acres—not enough, in that landscape, to keep five cows alive. In winter, the mercury could plunge to fifty degrees below zero. People froze to death in blizzards in May. Frontier Texas, the saying goes, was paradise for men and dogs, hell on women and horses. Frontier Wyoming was hell on everyone.

Perhaps because it so desperately needed people, Wyoming was, from the outset, unusually egalitarian. Beginning in 1869, women in the territory could vote, serve on juries, and, in some instances, enjoy a guarantee of equal pay for equal work—making it, Susan B. Anthony said, “the first place on God’s green earth which could consistently claim to be the land of the free.” Despite resistance from the U.S. Congress, Wyoming insisted on retaining those rights when petitioning for statehood; in 1890, when it became the forty-fourth state in the Union, it also became the first where women could vote. On the spot, it acquired its nickname: the Equality State.

–Kathryn Schulz in *the New Yorker*



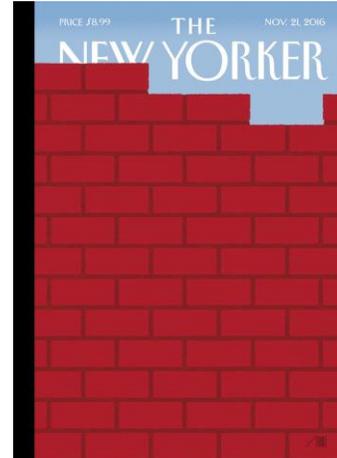
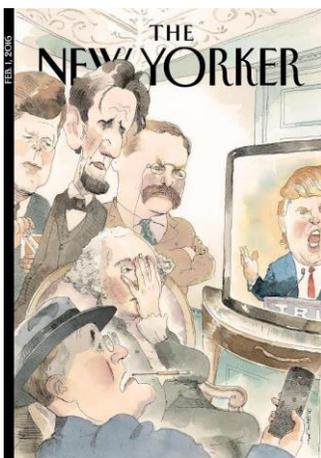
“This explains the penis we saw downstairs.”

XXX



YEAR IN REVIEW

I don't really have the heart to say too much about this dispiriting year of terrible losses, public disasters, and political outrages. I couldn't wait for us to put this year behind us but after the election I shudder to think what turmoil awaits the Divided States of America and the world it impacts. *New Yorker* covers don't say it all but they say a lot.



TOP THEATER:

1. Notes from the Field – Anna Devere Smith's latest triumph in channeling the zeitgeist focuses on education, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the killings by police of black men, zeroing in on exactly what we need to be thinking and talking about. She gives voice to an astonishing array of characters with precision and extreme down-to-earth humanity in a way that arrives at hope and inspiration. I wish this show were broadcast on TV for everyone to see every week for the next year.



2. Kings of War – Flemish director Ivo van Hove, one of the great theater artists of our time, brought his virtuosic Toneelgroep Amsterdam to BAM to perform this wildly ambitious 4 ½ hour mashup of six Shakespeare histories (from Henry IV to Richard III) in Dutch with English surtitles. The breathtaking inventiveness of Jan Versweyveld's multimedia design made these political dramas excruciatingly immediate. A countertenor, four brass players, and a DJ provided strange and beautiful underscoring, and Hans Kesting gave an unforgettable performance as Richard III as a demonic wounded monarch cocooned in the mirrored chamber of his power-madness.

3. A Life – Adam Bock never fails to impress me with his gift for character, language, humor, soulful reflection of contemporary life, and most of all the extraordinary freedom he takes to shape his narratives in theatrically surprising ways. He outdid himself with this show at Playwrights Horizons, which occasioned a low-key yet astonishing performance by David Hyde Pierce, with a uniformly excellent supporting cast well-directed by Anne Kauffman on an ingenious Laura Jellinek set.

4. The Encounter – Simon McBurney conceived, directed, and performed this fascinating experiment in theater-via-headphones (on Broadway!) depicting an American photographer’s adventures with South American shamanism, similar to the terrific Colombian film *Embrace of the Serpent*.

5. YOUARENOWHERE – former Wooster Group associate Andrew Schneider (below) and a cutting-edge tech-savvy design team created this dazzling mindfuck of a performance piece at 3-Legged Dog.



6. A 24-Decade History of Popular Music – Generosity of spirit, woke politics, musical chops, and playful theatrical nerve made queer genius Taylor Mac’s epic vision a delight-filled call to arms, with peerless costume-design-as-gesamtkunstwerk by Machine Dazzle and music direction by Matt Ray.

7. Steve – Mark Gerrard’s script captured the intersection of sex, relationships, and social media in gay life today to a T. Cynthia Nixon directed a fine cast for the New Group, but Matt McGrath’s performance dove several layers deeper than almost any I saw this year.

8. The Crucible – I didn’t think I needed to see another production of Arthur Miller’s classic again but damned if Ivo van Hove didn’t find a dozen ways to make it a stark and terrifying reflection of today’s chilling political climate, with another mind-boggling design by Jan Versweyveld and a cast mixing terrific Brits (Ben Whishaw, Sophie Okonedo, Saoirse Ronan) with great downtown actors not usually seen on Broadway (Bill Camp, Jason Butler Harner, Thomas Jay Ryan, Brenda Wehle, Teagle Bougere).

9. portrait of myself as my father – Nora Chipaumire’s exploration of black African masculinity is set in a boxing ring. But the costumes, the gestures, the masks, the soundscore, and the movement pile onto the boxing metaphor numerous other frameworks: hiphop concert, voodoo ritual, club performance, shamanic trance ceremony, and Wooster Group-style mediated theater. The three performers (Shamar Watt, NC, and Pape Ibrahima Ndiaye, below) push themselves to extremes of physical ability, gender identification, and cultural cross-reference.



10. Dear Evan Hansen – Steven Levenson’s morally complicated book, Pasek & Paul’s tuneful score, Michael Greif’s staging, and the lead performances by Ben Platt and Laura Dreyfuss made this the most substantial original musical of the year.

Some Other Goodies: the Encores production of *Sunday in the Park with George*, especially Annaleigh Ashford and Phylicia Rashad; Benjamin Walker’s central performance and Duncan Sheik’s ‘80s-techno score for *American Psycho*; the Canadian dance company Holy Body Tattoo’s revival of *Monumental* with poetic texts by Jenny Holzer and a brooding/squalling score performed live by Godspeed You! Black Emperor; Charlayne Woodard in Branden Jacobs-Jenkin’s *War* at LCT3; Kiki and Herb at Joe’s Pub.

Some Great Music: *Ego Death* by The Internet, Bowie’s *Blackstar*, Leonard Cohen’s *You Want It Darker*, *Black Noise* by Pantha du Prince, multiple Mixcloud playlists compiled by Nick Francis (Quiet Music), lowlightmixes, and Halftribe.

Some Great Films: *Moonlight*, *Manchester by the Sea*, *Tangerine*, *Arrival*, *April & the Extraordinary World*.

ZEITGEIST

There’s always been craziness here, but the explosion in nonstop media has ramped things up so much that it’s as if a pervasive fever dream is wafting over our society. None of us fully understands the tsunami in which we’re being swept along, but you have to start somewhere. And if you want to point to a single culprit responsible for our increasingly unhinged connection to what we once called sanity and ordinary reality, you might begin with our troubled relationship with our digital devices.

Most of us can’t go for more than a few moments without yielding to the urge to plug into the global information network as if it were a kind of life-support system. We’ve become enslaved to that little thrill of knowing that somewhere, somehow, someone wants to communicate with us each and every moment of our lives. And we just can’t resist the urge to scratch that little itch. It’s like a vast epidemic of trichotillomania of the soul.

We live in a world where walking down a city street has become deeply hazardous—not because of elaborate terrorist plots, but because so much oncoming pedestrian traffic comprises people with their eyes down, glued to their gizmos, fingers frantically tapping and swiping, utterly in thrall to the little object in their hand. The vast digital universe it conveys to them is so much more enticing than the wan, paltry, flesh-and-blood world all around them.

And have you ever had the experience of reading an attention-grabbing article online—maybe it’s about the election, the media controversy du jour, or more likely, Beyoncé’s latest video—and then you take the plunge of reading the comments thread, and to your horror, you suddenly find yourself transported to the world according to Hieronymus Bosch!

Then, there’s the souped-up craziness of our various collective anxieties, served up piping hot hour-by-hour by the armies of professional fearmongers dedicated to keeping our psychic fires blazing within. The most obvious is the fear of terrorist attacks—even though the chances of anybody in America actually being the victim of such an attack range from minuscule to minute. According to statistics by the people who study these things, rather than being killed in a terrorist attack, you’re much likelier to suffer the following: being killed by brain-eating parasites, by lightning, by falling out of bed, by drowning in your bathtub, or—if your specialty is solitary risk-taking—autoerotic asphyxiation.

So there you have it in a very nutty nutshell. We’re a society awash in obsessive-compulsive narcissists with anger-management issues, no impulse control, prone to delusional thinking, and clearly in the throes of a kind of free-flowing Mardi Gras of the primary process. No wonder life in America seems like a swirling, 24/7 cable-news-covered psychodrama.

--Rich Simon, *Psychotherapy Networker*



Yes, a homophobic, Latino-hating, Muslim-hating, racist, sexist pig won the US presidency, but for a beautiful moment in time I got to stamp my feet and refuse to vote for Hillary. You'd understand if you saw how many people on Facebook were impressed with me at the time.

2016 THANKS TO

TONY ADAMS * JONATHAN ARNOLD * JEFF AUTORE * JOHN BALLEW * GLENN BERGER * SHARON BERGER * MISHA BERSON * IAN BJORKLUND * PAUL BROWDE * COLLIN BROWN * MICHAEL COHEN * LIAM CUNNINGHAM * PAUL DENNETT * TOM DENNISON * STEPHEN DILLON * MATT DREYFUSS * GAMELAN KUSUMA LARAS * DEE DEE GOLDPAUGH * JEFF GUSS * NICK GUSTIN * NEAL HARRELSON * KEITH HENNESSY * STEPHEN HOLDEN * ANDY HOLTZMAN * IYENGAR INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK * ROBERT JOHANSON * WENDELL KEATING * BRIAN KLOPPENBERG * ADAM KUBY * JAMES LAWER * ADAM MARTIN * MAX MARTINEZ * SIMON MATHIS * PETE MCWILLIAMS * MICHAEL MELE * JAY MICHAELSON * CRAIG MURRAY * THE NEW YORKER * DAVE NIMMONS * PAUL PINKMAN * DAVID REY * GEORGE RUSSELL * STEVE SCHWARTZBERG * SCRUFF * BEN SEAMAN * JIM SHALLAL * MICAH SHEPARD * ALLEN SIEWERT * STEPHEN SOBA * KEVIN TOPPING * BRANDON TURNER * ANDY WILLETT * JONATHAN WOOD * DAVID ZINN

RIP

EDWARD ALBEE * ALEXIS ARQUETTE * BUZZ BENSE * DAVID BOWIE * LEONARD COHEN * ALICE DRUMMOND * JAMES HOUGHTON * PAUL KANTNER * BOBBY LEVITHAN * PRINCE * LEON RUSSELL * MALICK SIDIBE * ELIZABETH SWADOS * MARK THOMPSON * JOHN VACCARO





n.c.c