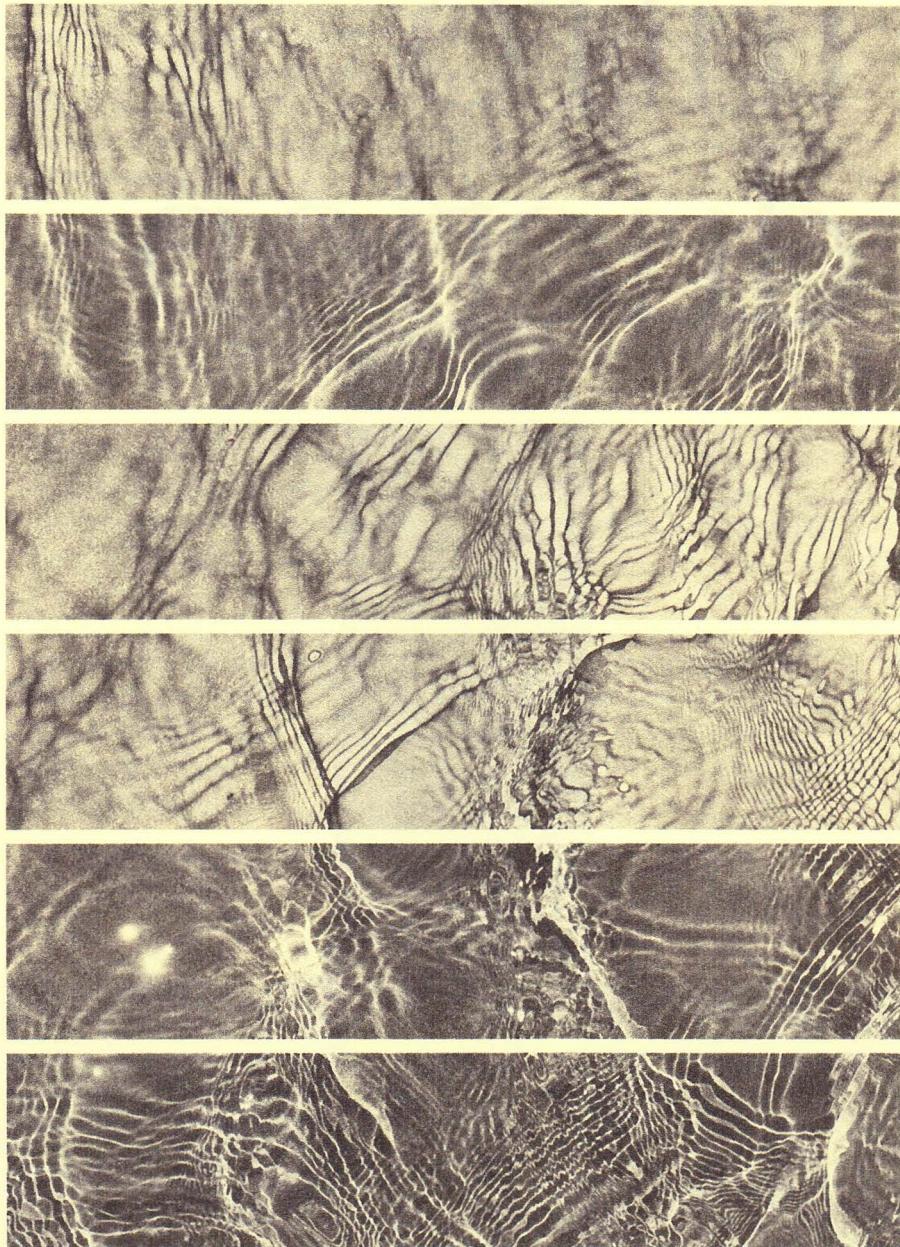
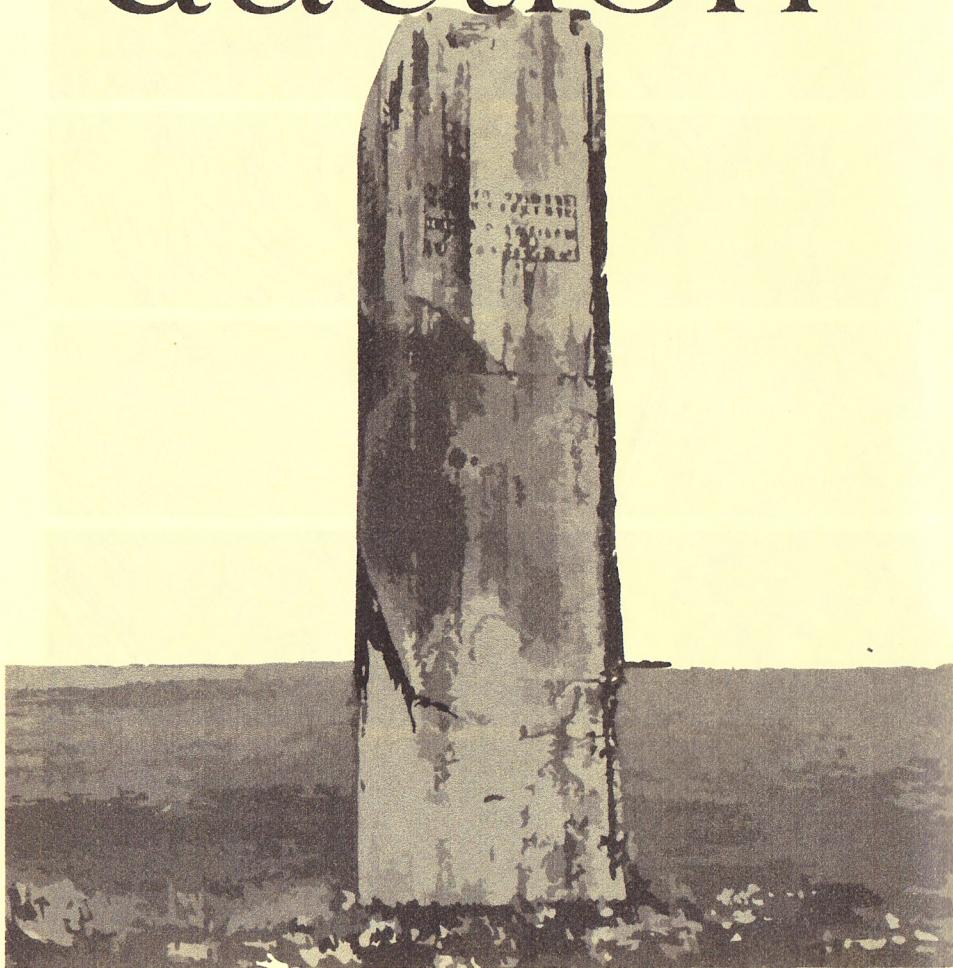


RIPPLE

2020
#1



Intro- duction



six pieces i wrote this year

2020 is the year that everything unraveled & 2020 is the year that i unraveled & i was sick on the first day of the year & i wanted to be healthier so i did nothing about it until everything went away so i stopped loving people & things & started loving words & trees & people & people who loved words & that drake lyric, "i think i like who i'm becoming"

inspiration struck every wednesday night at 1:30 AM & nothing else in the world made sense but i meant something for a moment in time & people kept dying & i cried about the taco bell menu & that vampire weekend lyric, "things have never been stranger/things are gonna stay strange"

i laid under a tree in the park every day for a few weeks until i understood what poetry was & i flew across the planet to tap my roots & remember what love is & i'm holding it so tight & that lil peep lyric, "all the stars have a reason"

2020 is the year that one day monoliths starting appearing & disappearing because people just wanted to leave a mark & everyone took credit for each one but i never learned how to use power tools because i was afraid to lose a finger so i put on the home depot music & mixed my words with my ink to make them real; this is my monolith



Day-dream-ing

My imagination flourishes with the consistency of my surroundings. Daydreaming is now a daily occurrence, mental escapism. In the walls of my home, in the books on the shelf, in the leaves of the trees, I see visions of both my past and an imagined future.

I stare at the bowl of fruit and am taken back to the still life paintings at the Royal Gallery in London. In that gallery, I cry for the first time from seeing a painting. It's by the landscape artist JMW Turner, but it lacks much detail at all. My family is perplexed but has come to accept that I do strange things like spend hours in a single wing of a museum. Meanwhile, my brother manages to circumambulate the entire building twice in fifteen minutes. His speed of consumption is unmatched, even if the quality of the jokes he makes by captioning works of art on his Instagram stories is questionable.

In my record collection, I see a record that I've never listened to, gifted to me by a friend I don't talk to. She bought it for me when she spent her summer in France. The French National Football team won the World Cup that year, so I run through the streets of a French city that I've never been to, shouting in glee for a team that I've never seen, living a life I've never had. My unfamiliarity causes stereotypes to abound. I celebrate with mimes as baguettes and bottles of wine fly through the air. And there's a chef with a rat on his head. A true celebration.

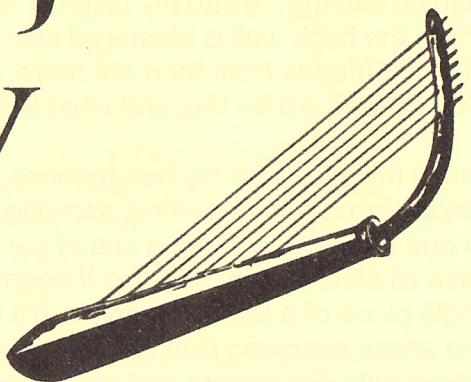
I run my hands across the sweaters I would wear in school, and walk through the hallways of Alpharetta High School. I amble slowly, remembering all of the class changes, and when I worked for the front office during a free period. I imagine sauntering into my favorite teacher's classroom, where the back wall is plastered with Harry Potter posters. All of my friends from then are there, and we chat about what college will be like, and what the future holds.

I close my eyes with my headphones in, blasting music. I dance like no one is looking, showing off dance moves that no one should see. I'm in a sea of people that moves as one. I lose all sense of my body, as it seems to move as its own, a single piece of a larger organism. It's the perfect concert, one where everyone is in tune with the music, one where our individuality disappears and we are simply all simply a moment in time. Everything dissolves but the moment.

I find comfort and hope and joy in these moments, where I leave my surroundings, and can just exist far away from reality. Maybe one day I'll be able to live these experiences. Maybe not. But until then, I'll just be daydreaming.



A Musical Journey



Every year, Spotify stirs up a small storm on social media with the release of their “Unwrapped,” offering a tidbit of their users’ data back to them in the form of a few interesting stats: their top five most played artists, a total of minutes spent listening to music with Spotify, and a playlist of a hundred songs that they listened to most. I always enjoy predicting what mine will look like, being inevitably wrong, and learning things about people as I remember that people listen to so much more than what we bond over.



My favorite part of the Unwrapped is the “Top Songs of <Year>” playlist. As I’m shuffling through this year’s playlist, time loses its linearity. Each song corresponds to a certain time of year, usually attached to a particular playlist for a particular purpose. “King’s Dead” by Jay Rock, Kendrick Lamar, and Future comes on, and I’m back in March, jamming with my roommates to one of our favorite songs to dance to. We look forward to growing closer during the few weeks we expect the pandemic to last.

After a short pause, “Youniverse” by Avelino starts playing, a mainstay of my writing playlist. All I see is a blank page. I’m pacing, thinking, brainstorming. I’m laying in bed and sitting at my desk. I’m typing and deleting. Over and over again. I’m writing my newsletters, my poetry, my essays, my journal. I’m pulling my hair and punching my desk. I’m grinning wildly and laughing at my jokes. I’m experiencing it all, and the song finishes.

Next, Phoebe Bridgers plays, bringing me back to the weeks spent in the Panhandle, laying alone in the grass staring at my perfect companion – a tree, who I don’t need to name or label, who offers her shade to me without fail. I sit with her and Phoebe and feel the grass poking through my too-small blanket. I sit until the wind takes me home and until I move on to new sounds.

I start to skip, skip, skip through my playlist, pushing past the moments I want to forget to the ones I’d like to live in again. I’ll listen to them all again, eventually, but not today. To a hi-hat-laced beat, 24hrs repeatedly croons, “I wanna go back to Atlanta,” and I’m laying in my bed in San Francisco, homesick. And I’m on the plane home, covered in PPE. And to the closing notes, I’m taking off my headphones, happy to be here now.

Book Club

About eight weeks ago, I was on the phone with my mum decrying the overwhelming boredom that I was experiencing at the beginning of quarantine. In passing, she suggested that I start a book club. I was hesitant. I have had a lifelong love of books but I had never really thought how they could be social, beyond conversations focused on trying to seem sophisticated by recommending books that sounded impressive. Despite my qualms, I had to live up to my reputation as the world's greatest son and decided to listen to my mum. My first stop was Twitter.com, the basis of my entire social life. I made a tweet asking if anyone was interested, expecting to only get responses from a couple of friends. Instead, I received a torrent of responses, many from people I didn't even know. It was clear that an online book club felt like a way to connect with people, from friends to strangers. I decided that ten was a good number for the book club.

Over the next eight weeks, our group spent an hour every single week in a Zoom call chatting about *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee. It's the story of an immigrant family over several generations, starting in their home country and following their immigration to the land of their colonizers. With each generation, the family has an increasingly complex relationship with their home country of Korea and then their new country of Japan where they're never fully accepted or seen as belonging.

By experiencing the book with a group of people from families of immigrants, I felt like I was able to get closer to

the text. We each were able to relate to different characters and parts of the book, drawing comparisons to our own families' struggles with colonialism and immigration. Unlike high school English class, which was often a pedantic fight for participation points by namedropping literary terms, our discussions were aimed at finding deeper meaning in the work. We would see the characters as real people, attempting to empathize with their struggles and trauma, wondering how we would've handled what they went through.

We initially started with a goal of reading a light, happy book that would help us escape the stresses of the world and ended up experiencing an incredible amount of tragedy and sadness within the novel. Yet, through all of those negative emotions, we were able to connect with the characters and with each other. More than anything else, the book club gave me an opportunity to meet and get to know people on a different level. Even though we didn't spend much time talking about our lives outside of the book, our discussions revealed parts of our hearts and lives that we normally wouldn't share in other contexts.

To start each meeting, I made sure to come up with weird icebreakers ("what food would you want to bathe in?") to bring some levity to counteract the intensity of the book. By learning about our food baths or our go-to karaoke songs, we gained more complete pictures of each other. With each passing week, our meeting felt a little less like an obligation and some of us would stick around a little later than usual to just chat. With each passing week, it felt a little bit more like I was with a group of friends.

"Good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life." – Mark Twain

Writers' Group

For a long time, I thought writing was a highly solitary career path – one which involved countless hours staring at word processing software without any external communication. That's what I would do to write all of my newsletters, the only form of writing I really knew. My brain figured out the math: time plus solitude plus a writer equaled a completed piece of work, right?

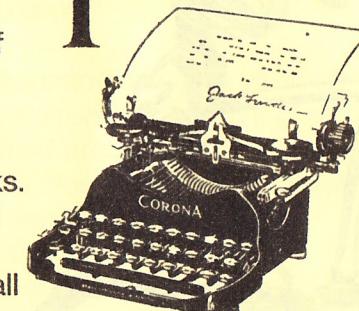
Despite my STEM degree and many hours of calculus, this formula was faulty. Writing, like any other art, is best done in collaboration. I'd known about the quasi-mythical stories of the Lost Generation's artistic group (Hemingway, Picasso, Stein, Fitzgerald, etc.), yet dismissed the approach for myself, thinking that it was reserved for real artists, real writers. Eventually, feeling lost and confused in my writing, I decided to try it out anyway, hoping that perhaps some feedback would help me figure out new directions for what I wanted to say and how to say it.

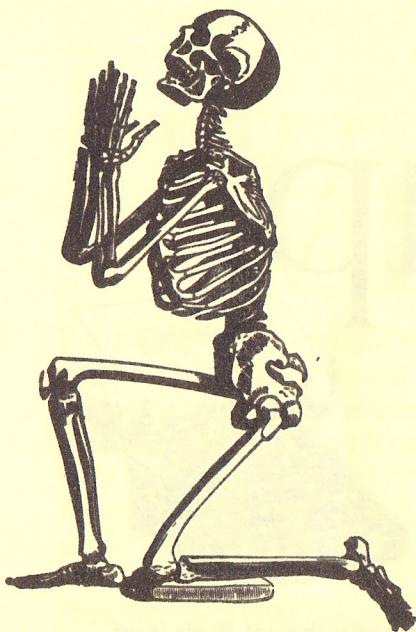
I expected to join something rather transactional, where we would read each other's work and offer lists of comments and criticisms, forgetting that we were sharing our creative babies. Our acts of sharing were forms of vulnerability – first meeting by baring our hearts, showing our insides before knowing much else about each other. And so, we formed communities.

In order for someone to dedicate so much time to putting

words on a page and call themselves a writer, they must adore words in all of their forms. They must have obsessions with story structures and reading and punctuation marks. And this zeal must be shared. And so these logophiles write. They create futuristic societies and small scenes and alternate realities. Yet, even the most productive author cannot exhaust their love for the art. So these people come to a writers' group – a time for writers to express their joy over each other's work. We find joy in each other's consonance and characters and conflicts. Yes, we give feedback and encouragement and suggestions, but we also bond over our art, letting each other in on the oft-solitary process of figuring out our thoughts and our stories. We push each other, teach each other, and ultimately shape each other and our work.

I now understand why every book has an acknowledgments page, and that to be featured on such a page would be the greatest achievement. A page that says that these people inspired this book, these people saved this book, these people shaped this book. A page to remind everyone what art is – love from many sources, shaped by an individual, to be shared.





Sur- ren- der

When I would regularly participate in religious discussions in college, more often than not, someone would suggest, "surrendering to God is probably the answer." And it usually was. When it came to everyday problems like calming test anxiety or facing moral quandaries, absolving yourself of control in favor of God was a great way to do that. When it came to the longterm goal of dissolving the ego and being able to selflessly serve the world, surrendering to God was a logical path there. At some point, it felt a bit humorous that regardless of which topic our discussion focused on, we would eventually resign ourselves to the answer of surrender.

Since I grew up with these ideas, the concept always made sense. As long as I can remember, I've always believed in God and wanted to find solace in God, even as my definition and understanding of God changed. I feel like most people I

meet these days aren't religious, but I feel like the idea of surrender can be valuable to anyone. Anyone can choose to surrender to a higher power, whether it's to God or a movement or a belief or a philosophy or the love of another. In general language, the word "surrender" is one of defeat and weakness, of giving up. Yet, is there anything harder than letting go of control? Is it easy to cede the power that you think you have and the emotions you cling to when trying to accomplish the things you want?

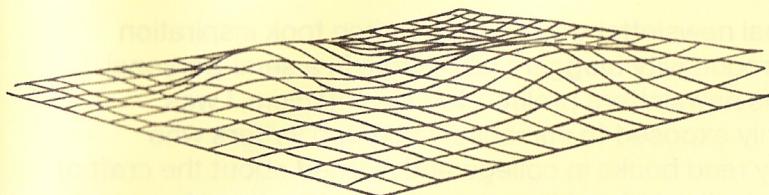
What surrender actually entails is zooming out from your individualistic view of the world. By surrendering to a higher power, you accept the greater context around what happens in your life and the world around you. You release your belief that everything has to do with you and that you are in complete control. This is not a passive act. It involves working in favor of things that you surrender to and accepting that results of your actions are not in your control. That looks like continuing to learn and give and write and teach and not looking for anything in return.

I'm constantly overwhelmed by the world. I have been for years and years, with varying levels of success. And in those times, I have to surrender my mind to something. Lately, I've been surrendering to the wrong powers, like my impulses to ignore everything in favor of TV or social media and an addiction to news media. Instead of zooming out, I've simply been looking away. I want to surrender to my higher power, not just to God, but to how I see God manifesting in the world. That is, I want to surrender to my belief in the inherent goodness in people. I want to surrender to the power of the activists who have been working towards progress for years and years. I want to surrender to a brighter future I know is just beyond the horizon.

Reflecting

One summer day in July of 2017, I decided to start a newsletter. In passing, my friend Stephen had mentioned wanting to start one, and I stole the idea since great artists steal or whatever. I had recently finished my second 100-day project, where I created 100 illustrations over the course of 100 days. I loved that project and how it taught me how creating regularly made me feel my best. With that project finished, a weekly newsletter felt like a less stressful way to keep a rhythm of making stuff. As I signed up for my Mailchimp account, I thought about how cool it would be to grow my newsletter into an enormous list, with hundreds or thousands of people reading my writing or be able to look back and say "I've been publishing Splash weekly for 10 years straight."

I'm still writing Splash, almost 3 years later, but it's different. When I was doing annual 100-day projects trying to find a creative practice to define me, I never thought that writing would My Thing. I had dabbled in so many different creative practices that I always thought something else would stick. I wanted something else to stick. Since I put so much pressure on this hypothetical life-defining activity, I wanted something more exclusive and differentiated. Writing is something that everyone learns the basics of, especially nonfiction. Being able to weave beautiful fictional worlds is an incredible skill, but if you're just writing essays, how are you better off than a talented high school senior?



To find the answer, I read a lot of nonfiction. Disappointingly, I discovered that some nonfiction isn't much better off than what a talented high school senior could write. There's a great market for boring self-help and pop-science books that consist of some research pushed into a formula and marketed perfectly to be a bestseller. Fortunately, there's more to the nonfiction world than that. I discovered phenomenal writers like David Sedaris and Jia Tolentino who would construct gorgeous essays and profiles, consolidating their lives with their subject matter, weaving humor and heart and love and pain together. I found the type of writing that I wanted to do. And I was finally able to accept that, yes, I'm happy to be a writer, because I know there are writers that I'd be happy to be like.

For a few months in the middle, I stopped writing my newsletter. I was overwhelmed by my job search and a general feeling of ennui that made writing seem like a fruitless pursuit. In the face of dozens of daily job rejections, digging up enough energy to write something that wasn't an overwhelming list of complaints seemed impossible. I lost the desire to share much of anything and questioned whether my time spent writing over the past few years could have been better spent trying to be a better job candidate.

When I finally got a job, I pulled myself out of that strange mindset and slowly started to write again, but it was months before I felt like I was able to write something good enough to share once again. Around the same time, I started seeing more newsletters than I had ever seen before. When I first started writing Splash, I had no reference point for what a

personal newsletter could be, so I often took inspiration from productivity bloggers who wrote in a semi-personal tone. As newsletters proliferated as a medium, I was suddenly exposed to immensely talented writers who actually read books in college and learned about the craft of writing, instead of making computers spit out numbers and making really bad video games about a vigilante stopping bagel-related crimes. Discovering these other writers has made me want to step my game up in terms of my writing, to put more thought and effort into newsletters than ever before, and prove to myself that I'm a real writer.

Over the past three years, this newsletter has been a public record of how I've grown as a writer and a person. I've learned a whole lot and changed my mind a whole lot. I've written some great letters that I'm really proud of and some horrible stinkers that I never want to even think about again. But the most amazing part of this whole experience so far has been the fact that dozens of people take the time out of their busy weeks to read what I have to say. People from family and close friends to distant acquaintances and strangers have followed along with my weekly babbling as I try to find my voice and bring something to the world. So to all of my dear subscribers, thank you so much for being here. To the ones who have been here since the beginning (hi mum!), I wouldn't have made it this far without you.



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