# Ch 4 - Spring and a Storm

The concrete ephemera of contemporary life provides a kind of paradoxical fascination within the abstraction of beauty in the world. On one hand, perhaps the most universally life-changing tools in the history of our species—being the common cell phone and subsequent infrastructure that make it possible—allow us to interface with just about anything we can think of at any given moment of a day. The development of the internet laid down a revolutionary framework of mass cultural expansion the likes of which no other Earthly animal was ever capable of achieving. With all that information accessible practically anywhere and everywhere, we’ve come to find ourselves inheritors and contributors of a vast and ever-changing web of content and culture alike. On the other hand though, because we have an endless supply of content—seemingly packed into a thin wafer-sized slab of metal that fits in (most of) our pockets—it is becoming increasingly hard to separate and distinguish time in and outside of this brand new digital reality.

That, and the vastness of physical capital provide an increasing amount of reasons to stay inside and interact with others, by one’s self. Going on hikes has become more of a niche hobby and visiting great feats of nature are events of vacations, not of regular life. Now, I’m certainly not here to argue that we ought to drop all of our responsibilities, in digital and physical space, and “go touch some grass”—that’s not my point. We’ve just got so much *stuff* that occupies our attention; we no longer have to bear the brutishness and angst felt by being in the world at every waking moment in our lives. Distractions are not only plentiful but highly profitable, developed specifically to take advantage of the reward systems within the brain, making you hooked. Because it is imperative as a company to keep you interested in their platform over others, another social system emerges, fueled by capitalism itself. A system within a system, aiding and strengthening each other; social media is a beautiful thing, but it is a piece of technology and technology can be used in immoral ways. It is absurd.

As with all problems, the first step in resolving them is to realize they exist. It is imperative that we question the nature and consequences of social media so that we may begin to offer alternative solutions. Before we can do that though, we have to question what already works. But it’s not like we can all be personally involved with fixing the troubled structures of society. It is not our job to care about the dirty practices of social media companies or banks, or governments for that matter.

Except, the principle of questioning one’s surroundings and beliefs is a very useful tool for living an authentic life. Amy Krouse Rosenthal, an excellent author and creative, caring person, once described the importance of being in the world and finding one’s place within it, saying, “for anyone trying to discern what to do w/ their life: PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU PAY ATTENTION TO. that's pretty much all the info u need."1 It’s funny to me, after reading a bunch of philosophy texts and whatnot, that a serious attempt to do the same (ish… I mean, kinda. It’s sorta like that) would stress importance on something posted to Twitter. But this tweet is perfect—Rosenthal, in sharing her approach to authentically being herself among billions, captures one of the most important principles of consciously experiencing human dignity.

Like shaking an addiction, becoming aware of your actions and beliefs is a Sisyphean task. Awareness is a chronic pain, something that will always be hard to maintain. Social media is just one example of contempt or distraction from that pain. Again, I’m not saying that being on or enjoying social media makes you a mindless zombie, rather it provides reasons to stop seeing why awareness is worth it. Awareness brings with it its fair share of angst, but along with that angst is a recognition that beautiful things exist and are worth protecting. Contempt for the state in which we find ourselves gives up on what is beautiful in the world. It claims it is not in fact worth protecting, that the world is going to shit anyway, so who cares if another beautiful thing is lost to history. The world is chaotic and sometimes that chaos stakes a claim on beauty.

But beauty occurs despite the world having any obligation to support it. The Earth very well could have ended up as a planet devoid of life. But for us? We were thrown into this world—this nonsense world—with nothing to do but to live and die in the absurdity of our own creation. We are something, out of nothing.

I’m really not interested in contrarian bullshit, feeling the need to undermine the good things in life with the massive evidence of all the bad. That gets us nowhere and I suspect you know that. Harboring a vast misunderstanding of what makes something beautiful makes me think you’re submissive to a certain blind contempt for the state of the world; unable to find something worth living for, something you find beautiful, you instead wish to infect others with the same familiar nihilism that isolates you. “In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration when civilization will give first place—far ahead of the formal principles and degraded values of history—to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of [humanity] and the world [we live] in, and which we now have to define in the face of a world which insults it.”2 Camus believes beauty is an essential component of what I’ve come to call the the essential catalyst. Compassion recognizes beauty in its most basic form, consuming and radiating it in the name of solidarity. At first, I thought I would need to heavily impose my own perception of beauty as examples to list in this chapter. Instead, I think, I’m going to ask you to find your own beautiful examples of life, and perhaps death, out in the world. If you think you can do that, put this thing down, go walk around wherever, and just observe. Don’t be in your head thinking about other things, just exist in the moment and remember to pay attention to what you pay attention to. If you think you may need a little help or guidance for finding beauty, if you find yourself too focused on the chaos, I’ll do my best to provide an example of how I try to see the world.

I am such a curious person when it comes to how things work and why. Part of the reason I got into computers was that it was a complete mystery to me, but my friends offered me a look under the hood, so to speak, and I ran with it. I sit in the bus on the way to class and force myself to just be in the moment. I have been trying not to be on my phone if I have no real reason to be, so as I sit on the bus, I just watch the clouds or the shadows moving about, reflecting off the metal or occluding the carpet. As a 3D artist, that kind of stuff really interests me, but I’m confident that most would not find that particularly “beautiful.” That’s why you’ve gotta get out there and find what *you* find beautiful and *why*. I like knowing how things work and what astonishes me the most is the stuff we often take for granted. For example, we can only hear things because vibrations in space get displaced in the air we breathe and find themselves pushing up against our eardrums, which gets translated by our brains into an interpretable signal. We have that capability because of the way the atmosphere exists here on Earth. We also owe clouds, rain, and snow to the atmosphere. We all know of the cycle that enables rain, but have we looked at a cloud and thought, “wow that’s a lot of singular droplets of water sticking to dust and salt particulate in the atmosphere”? Usually, we just see a cloud—but the cloud is basically just water floating around in the wind! I’ve found myself more empathetic to the everyday-ness of life in general as I have begun to cherish the beauties therewithin. That is my hope for you too. I mean, how can you expect to find beauty in others if you can’t even find it out in the world.