Blog Posts: 4/17 – 6/23

yet another blog post

Apr 17, 2017

Ah, what the hell. I am still procrastinating, and suddenly I’m in the mood for some freewriting.

I need to figure out some way to ensure that my students do their reading. I think I have two or three students who are actually doing the reading. I tell myself that the other students are making a choice for themselves - the choice to not participate. The kind of teaching I do really works best when the students have done the reading.

The course I am currently teaching, Modern American History, is very reading intensive. To be honest, I struggle sometimes to keep up with the reading. Of course, I have to read closely in order to teach it, and I have the habit of underlining and writing marginalia.

I love marginalia. I write in all of my books. The more densely packed a book is with my pencil scribblings and Post-It notes, the more closely I have read the book. Some books have only a few annotations. Others are so full of annotations that they are nearly unreadable. It slows reading down, which can be frustrating, but it definitely increases my reading comprehension while stimulating new ideas.

Sometimes I’ll comment on an author’s argument, writing something like “Ha!” in the margin or calling out some kind of bullshit. Other times I’ll quote something from the page, copying it into the margin. I think in instances like that it is not so much about reading the quote in the margin as it is about spending more time with a particular passage. The act of copying the passage makes me mull over what I am reading, passing back over it a couple of times.

# another day

Apr 18, 2017

# …yes, another day

Let me just play around a bit with Markdown. It’s a dead simple language, but I’m not satisfied with the way it presents photos. The text doesn’t wrap around the image like a floated image in html. I suppose the solution is that I should write any multi-media blog posts in html. As long as I include the Markdown header html works great.

I don’t have anything much to say. My irritating neighbor just let her friend in the building. The friend arrived outside and shouted, “Yo! KK!” Didn’t ring the bell. Didn’t call “KK.” The front door to this building is just outside the window next to my desk. I really don’t have a better spot for the desk in my apartment, so I have to deal with idiots shouting and smoking on the front steps and clomping up and down the stairs and moving furniture, it seems, upstairs. I’ve shouted at this woman twice now for using the n-word out in public. It really fucking offends me, and she’s got this white-woman-thinks-she’s-trying-to-act-black thing going on when she’s angry. In the end she’s only acting like an asshole, so I yell at her like an adult scolding a child. I know it’s paternalistic, but she really pushes my buttons.

Maybe I had more to say than I thought. I’ll tell you, this woman really irritates me. There’s this constant ruckus of friends coming in, then going downstairs to smoke on the front step, then back upstairs, over and over, every day.

I need a vacation. That’s it. I need a warm place where nobody will bother me so I can just swim and read and drink cold beer. That’s what I’ll focus on. As soon as I get a decent paying job I’ll start putting away…. Fuck it. I’m imagining a Caribbean vacation. This is about VJ. Ah now, I guess I’ll have to think it through. I really have come to love the Caribbean, so I can’t just say that my desire to go to the Caribbean is about my ex-wife. She may be from the Caribbean - or rather, she’s first generation American - but I can find my own part of the Caribbean where I can plant myself in the water, drink a beer, and watch the boats go by. I want to go snorkeling. Fuck it. Let me start figuring out where I want to go.

# procrastination

Apr 19, 2017

I’m procrastinating right now, writing a blog post when I should be working on my PowerPoint notes for tomorrow’s class on World War II. I just can’t face another photo of Stalin right now. Dude gives me the creeps.

Of course I’ve been over this material before, but this time around I’m struck by the idea that the Sino-Japanese war, beginning in 1937, marked the start of the Japanese conflict of WWII. For that matter, the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria is also an arguable beginning. I don’t really know why it strikes me. Maybe it’s just that I hadn’t previously considered 1937 as a starting year for the war. Usually, people point to Germany’s 1939 invasion of Poland as the beginning of the broader war while Japan spread it’s military and economic power across China and parts of South East Asia.

In any event, this is the kind of stuff I should be writing up just now. In fact, let me copy and paste the last paragraph into my notes.

There I go. Back on track.

# writing every day

Apr 20, 2017

# posting every day

I am going to write a post every day for a while to see what happens. My only sense of trepidation is if someone should stumble upon this blog they might think my writing is all fucked up. I’m freewriting just to get words on screen. The idea is that with practice one’s frewriting will become more focused and sustained. That’s the idea at least.

I’ve never been good at blasting out a bunch of writing on a regular basis. I have the horrible habit of writing sentence by sentence, not paying any attention to the flow of the language. Freewriting should help me break the habit. There’s nothing worse…strike that, I hate that fucking cliche. Let me re-phrase: I don’t particularly enjoy formulaic or stilted writing. It feels like long fingernails on a chalkboard.

For now as I move along I am going to post only unedited text. As I go along I’ll rewrite and edit some pieces and probably trash others. Again, the idea is to produce a high volume of writing, paying little attention to the quality. I want to be able to fully separate writing from editing. I hate this thing I do where I edit as I go. It’s very inefficient.

Anyway, I just took a break to eat. Lost my train of thought. I guess that’s it then.

# my nose hurts

Apr 21, 2017

# you ever get a pimple on the inside of your nose?

I know, it’s gross, but it’s bugging me right now. My nose is very sore because I have a large pimple on the inside of my right nostril. My nose is throbbing, and there’s nothing to do but chomp some Advil and try to ignore it. The thing can’t be popped, so I just have to wait it out.

I don’t even know how I got on this subject. I suppose when I was sitting down to write it was the first thing that came to me. Freewriting is supposed to be absolutely free, but my wish is for a more directed approach. Depthful writing, for me, has always come from a response to reading. In other words, it isn’t enough to sit and write in volume if you don’t have anything in particular to say.

That being said, my purpose with this blog is to simply improve my freewriting. How about this. Before I begin to write I need to at least brainstorm a proper theme. Today’s bit of writing started off in an obscure, juvenile manner. In the end, I am hoping to improve my academic writing, so snarky bullshit is not helpful.

Ultimately, though, I should be freewriting on paper. I am much faster and more comfortable with paper. Perhaps this blog is meant to help me learn to freewrite on the computer. The computer is where my writing chokes up and becomes halting. Even with this freewriting exercise I have stopped a couple of times to change the direction of a sentence. Really, the idea is to not stop.

In any event, I am far from the place where I even want to edit these posts. For now, it’s all about the flow.

# two posts today

Apr 23, 2017

I didn’t write anything yesterday, so I am going to write two posts today. It’s not that I didn’t think of it; I did think of it, I was too lazy to do it. I hate this lazy streak I have in me, trying to fuck off from work when things get overwhelming. It really isn’t laziness at its base. At its base is just confusion as thoughts and feelings bottle up and cloud my mind. Somethimes the only defense I have against the craziness of life is to disconnect.

Disconnecting is a big thing with me. Even the way I dealt with divorce mediation - threatening to simply withdraw from the mediation if certain of my needs were not met. Valerie triggers me like that sometimes. She crowds in, demanding an answer to something or other, and doesn’t seem to realize or care that she is trampling on my sense of pride every time she does that. Being separated has only slowed down her tempo as an inquisitor. I still get it from time to time.

Valerie’s big thing recently is to tell people that she is coming to terms with the fact that she has no control over what happens in my house. Well of course she has no fucking control over what goes on in my house. The real question is how did she come to believe that she should exert some control over my house?

To be continued…

# freewriting

Apr 23, 2017

…continued from last.

Here I am bitching about my ex when I should be turning my thoughts to work. My aim is to ultimately beef up my freewriting ability within the context of my need to do academic writing, not vent my frustrations about my soon-to-be-ex-wife. Fuck it.

Freewriting requires that I write without stopping which is what I am doing in writing this stupid sentence. All I am doing right now is putting words on the screen. One of these days I need to start to direct these freewriting exercizes toward my academic work: Sun Ra, Fela, history stuff I may be teaching at the moment.

In fact, let me meditate on Sun Ra a bit. One project I need to finish is listening to all of Sun Ra’s recorded works while taking notes, both words and notation. It’s one of those exercises that could produce some good writing, or it could be just notes. I don’t know what I’m going to hear. I mean, I’ve heard all the music before, but every time I do a focused listening with a piece of music something different stands out. The real project would be to listen to the entire catalog (or as much as I have access to) for an extended period, taking notes and freewriting sometimes, but other times just letting the music absorb. I always find it is best to listen to music in several ways before giving it a full account. If the music is unfamiliar to you, spend a bunch of time with the music as background. Play it while you do the dishes or some other household chore. If the entire genre of this music is unfamiliar, spend enough time with it. Try not to do any focused listening to a particular piece of music until that genre of music at least sounds familiar to you. Chances are, the music sounding unfamiliar, your first impressions will be only that of difference, missing the ways in which the piece is or is not a decent expression of the genre.

Lost my train of thought. Sorry if the paragraph ends abruptly, but I’m freewriting without editing for now. I’m dying to edit this writing - parts of it are bad - but for now I am working on the flow of language as I write.

# getting ready to teach

Apr 24, 2017

I love the feeling of being prepared for a class. I don’t always like the preparation itself, but usually I do. I like having a full PowerPoint presentation with good images and documentation, find a video to break up the pace, place the video in the presentation so that it reinforces the reading and the lecture.

Remember that this is supposed to be freewriting. Stop editing as I go, please.

Last week, when discussing the Spanish Civil War, I showed the students an image of Picasso’s Guernica. I swear not a single one of them looked impressed. What I have to remind myself all the time is that I teach these classes more for myself than for the students. Don’t get me wrong, I love teaching, but teaching comes from a love of learning. The thing I love the most about teaching is the opportunity it gives me to keep learning.

# mad at my students today

Apr 25, 2017

# Some days teaching can be a real drag

I found two of my students sleeping in class today. One woman actually had her head down on the desk and she had an attitude when I asked her to lift up her head. It’s all so incredibly disrespectful, I don’t really know how best to deal with it. So far what I have done is to let my displeasure be known. Maybe that’s enough.

The other student dozed off and started snoring a little. I have been steaming since. I’m glad I didn’t speak up about the second infraction. I might have said something I might regret.

Actually, I’m so mad I can’t think straight. Let me not torture myself.

# two posts again today

Apr 28, 2017

I need to do two posts again today because I didn’t write anything yesterday. Yesterday, though, I did work on the site because the posts from the day before weren’t deploying. I finally figured out that my messing with the config file then messed up Jekyll’s ability to re-build the site. I just fiddled with the config file a little bit to mess it up, so I was almost surprised when I was able to fix it. Apparently Jekyll is finicky about the state of the config file.

I don’t have much to say just now. I am trying to find an avenue into my work today, and so freewriting may help. I say may rather than will or should help because I’m not feeling that optimistic today.

Fuck it.

# second post today

Apr 28, 2017

# neighbors sometimes suck

As I said I would, here is the second post for the day. I just went to enroll Zanaya in school in Springfield, and the weather is so Spring-like I could have been wearing shorts. I say this only because it is so late in the school year to be moving the kid…

Damn it, the fucking upstairs neighbor is out on the front step loudly calling someone a fucking bitch. Earlier today - and this is no exaggeration - she came downstairs by herself, opened the front door and shouted, “It’s my birthday bitches!” to nobody in particular. I tell you, everything about this asshole is shouted out loud. I don’t want to know when she browbeats her mother on the phone for not allowing her to do laundry at her parents’ house, but she makes sure I know. I don’t want to know when she is out in the street calling people niggas, all white 200 lbs of her, but I know it. I don’t want to know that her boyfriend - I’m sorry, her “baby daddy” (did I mention this asshole is white?) - is going to beat up on so-and-so when he gets out of jail, but I know it. I don’t want to know it when the boyfriend gets arrested in the house (twice), or that he beats up on her from time to time (she came knocking on my door in the middle of the night for help with a raging boyfriend. Thankfully he’s a coward, so I asked him to leave and he did.).

Fuck it, this is consuming my time. Unfortunately, I can’t get away from it since so much of her life takes place on the front step outside my window, smoking cigarettes and hanging with friends. The friends are another story altogether, but I won’t get into it just now. Suffice to say I am not happy with them.

# trying to ignore my neighbor

Apr 29, 2017

# …my loud fucking neighbor

Let be just try to ignore the thing in my life that irritates me like a pebble in my shoe - and even then, a pebble I can do something about, while I am powerless to do anything about this irritating neighbor.

Here’s the latest from her. Last night she told me that they were going to keep down the party noise for my sake and for Zanaya’s. No fucking way. Up and down and up and down the stairs all night, from cigarettes on the front step to I don’t know what upstairs. It’s a constant pattern every day. Kids congregate at this house to hang with “KK,” who is apparently the only one among them who has an apartment. Up and down the stairs, all day and all night.

I can’t think straight.

What I would like to do is to write for a while and see where I end up. The idea of freewriting is that you don’t stop. But yet I keep stopping. I think maybe I should use a timer to force myself to continue writing for longer periods of time. The way it seems to work now is I will have bursts of writing followed by either inactivity - or rather, trying to regain the momentum - or, all too often, I’m distracted, taking a hit of weed, getting some more coffee, looking at Huffington Post, whatever, it’s all the same: it’s not work.

What would be good is if I can develop a sense for how long five minutes it, and then plan my writing in five minute freewriting bursts. That way I have a sense for how long I can sustain my writing without needing to rely on a timer all the time. Five minute bursts of writing, strung together, can create a whole bunch of words if properly situated and motivated. Instead, I seem to be able to produce about a paragraph of text before my attention wanders. In five minutes of non-stop freewriting I’ll bet I can produce nearly a page of text.

And my mind just wandered off for half a minute. Usually, when my mind wanders, I am thinking about what I’m going to write, when really I should just be writing.

Fuck it.

# freewriting nothing

May 3, 2017

Nothing to start off with; no ideas popping out. I’ll just keep writing. Even a little bit of hesitation makes me nervous. I don’t really know why, but I seem to have convinced myself that halting during freewriting is cheating. It isn’t, of course, but I am trying to habituate myself to longer bouts of writing. It’s the hesitation that kills me.

The other thing I have been doing since I began to work on my freewriting is that I look at the keyboard and try to avoid looking at the screen. When I look at the screen I see my mistakes, and I then want to begin editing. Even a few minutes ago I looked up at the screen, saw an error, and fixed it. It was just the one edit, but it threw off my flow. I’m not going to go so far as to turn off my computer monitor, but it may help at some point.

# waiting for my students

May 4, 2017

It is 9:30, and only one student has shown up. I am going to write for five minutes and then see where we are with these kids. Usually there are two yound women who come early. Today, the only person who showed up on time is someone who is usually late.

9:32 and three students came in through the door. I’m still going to wait.

Four students. It’s possible I may be teaching to four students today. Damn it.

So I guess I’ll keep writing for a few minutes. My Powerpoint is ready, or at least as ready as I could be this morning. I had one of those mornings when I set the alarm for 3:00, but when I dozed a bit I woke up more than an hour later. That’s the kind of morning I’ve had so far - everything feels behind.

I’m going to post this now and write more later.

# back at it

May 4, 2017

I’m back at it after teaching my class this morning. I had maybe 6 or 7 students show up, and one of them has been dropped from the class already. I don’t know what happened over the course of the semester, but the attendance was atrocious all term.

I don’t really have much to say, so let me just freewrite for a while. I’m getting a bit better at writing nonstop, but I still tend to look up at the screen.

And now, today, I’m struggling to keep at it. If I just think of something other than writing I may get somewhere.

Or not.

# one more try

May 4, 2017

So it’s a while later now. Let me see if I can freewrite more productively.

Productive in terms of ideas. Writing non-stop is one thing, but it gets boring quickly if I have nothing to say.

I have been thinking a lot about this story I heard in the news a while ago; an active duty Navy SEAL was found to have performed in a whole bunch of porn films, many of them with his wife. I don’t really know what’s bugging me about the story, except to say that I find it incredible that someone who made a career out of being a SEAL would jeopardize his career like that. Or, possibly, the dude doesn’t see any conflict between his work life and his other work life; maybe this kind of behavior is the dude’s normal. Porn has become so mainstreamed now.

This isn’t working for me today. I need to figure out some writing exercises to get me going. I know I have a few books about writing lying around somewhere.

# trying out a new text editor

May 5, 2017

I’m checking out the Atom text editor. I’m not really going to do a whole review, I’m just typing away, thinking through some of its options.

Visual Studio Code works with Git, which is why I have preferred it lately. But with GitHub Desktop I don’t really need an editor that has Git integrated. At some point I need to study Git more closely, possibly making the shift to Git on the command line. I also need to figure out branching.

This hobby I have developed with coding is still in its beginning stages, but I feel I need to keep pressing. At the very least I need to practice my HTML and CSS skills. Maybe one way to work on this would be to write my posts in HTML rather than Markdown. Markdown is super convenient for writing, but its layout options are limited.

So far Atom seems ok, but I’ve only used it to write this post. The next post I’ll do up in HTML.

# my neighbor again

May 8, 2017

Again this morning, an epic battle over the phone. This morning she was bawling out her mother for not giving her money. Swearing and all. What a fucking pain in the ass.

I’m not sure this freewriting stuff is working for me. I need a book to help me with the writing. I seem to remember the book Writing Strategies was full of practical advice on how to get unstuck.

Fuck it, this freewriting stuff is whacked. I can’t seem to sustain any lengthy burst of writing. I’m still…

Off she goes again, yelling at someone. I’ll tell you, it must be really difficult to be a member of her family. Maybe they’re all like that, who knows?

Really, I’m having trouble sustaining my thoughts today. One thing I’m doing today is worrying if I am writing with any depth at all. Among the writing exercises I do maybe I should practice drilling down on an idea, practice writing full paragraphs based on one idea only. Freewriting itself is ok, but at some point there needs to be some structure to the writing I produce.

I also need to reevaluate this idea that freewriting is always only automated - that there can’t be any interruptions, pauses. I don’t think in a continuous stream, it ebbs and flows. Maybe the act of writing should be full of pauses, like the text itself.

# I found the writing book

May 8, 2017

I found the book I was looking for, but I had mixed up the title. The book I was looking for is A Troubleshooting Guide for Writers: Strategies and Process by Barbara Fine Clouse (2010), not Writing Strategies. There is a separate book titled Research Strategies I have used before.

Here’s an interesting concept to check out: looping (Clouse 2010: 22). The idea is that you freewrite on an idea. Then, upon reading back what you have written, choose a particular piece of what you have written and do some more freewriting. Keep repeating the cycle as long as you can, looping through new ideas or new perspectives on ideas. This is similar to what I wrote about in my last post - drilling down on an idea. Looping seems to break the task down while keeping it focused.

I’m wandering again. The idea with this blog is to freewrite, but the blog ensures that I need to do my writing on the computer. At some point, though, I would like to switch back to pen and paper, freewriting on paper and typing up a first edit of what I have written. For now, I’ll just stick to freewriting directly to the blog.

I hope to hell nobody stumbles across this blog and reads it. So far it probably reads like a fucking mess.

# looping

May 8, 2017

I thought I might write a little bit about the concept of looping. In my last post I wrote about the idea of looping from Clouse (2010), freewriting for a time, then freewriting some more based on one idea from the first freewriting session. Repeat this pattern as long as you want.

In fact, what I am doing just now is a form of looping. I wrote for a while last time, and now I am writing about one idea from that first session. This could produce quite a lot of writing given that it is essentially multiple freewriting sessions strung together. One of my goals is to be able to work up to longer freewriting session, building up my stamina, so to speak. Stringing together multiple sessions of 15-20 minutes - or even 10 minutes for that matter - will produce a shitload of writing.

I don’t know how long my current writing sessions are, but I will begin to use a timer. Having micro-goals along the way is a very useful strategy for me, especially given my attention deficit issues. Using a timer for studying has long been something I’ve known would help me, but I have resisted. One of the issues I don’t have with my attention deficit is the ability to park my ass at my desk for hours. I can go for hours straight without taking a break. The problem is that often I am unproductive while at my desk, and when I am productive I have a hard time staying on task. I am hoping that the use of a timer for writing sessions will help me with the lack of productivity and focus.

# another loop

May 8, 2017

I am going to try out exactly 5 minutes of freewriting, so I have set a timer and I am typing away. I’m going to keep going until the timer goes off.

This writing stuff is ok, maybe a bit frustrating just now. I don’t seem to be able to stick exactly to the task while I am doing this. I have paused a number of times and spoken to Zanaya since I turned on the timer. My purpose here is to get a sense for just how much text I can produce in five minutes. So I’ll just keep going.

I am getting frustrated with my efforts to get Zanaya enrolled in the Springfield school system. I have been there three times now and she is still not enrolled. They want to put her in 9th grade….

This is five minutes of writing with a few distractions and pauses.

I’m adding another sentence to I can re-sync GitHub Desktop

# and another loop still

May 8, 2017

Ok, now 10 minutes of freewriting.

Here I go, non-stop.

Except now I’ve paused.

This is another loop again, related to the last two posts. This iteration is a loop of a loop, coming third in line.

Again, a major pause. One of the things I would like to iron out with these writing exercises is the ability to maintain my focus for longer periods of time. The whole idea of freewriting is simply to get words on the page, so I am literally doing that just now. In fact, it feels a bit like I’m perseverating on an idea without having an actual idea in mind.

Oh, that’s right, in the last loop I began to write about my struggles to get Zanaya enrolled in school. Or rather, I mentioned I had problems and then the timer went off. The deal is that they want to enroll her in 9th grade rather then 10th, and I can’t produce anything that tells them to do otherwise. So now, on top of the debacle that has been our experience with North Star, the kid is a year behind her peers in school.

This is 10 minutes of writing with some significant pauses.

# my students are taking a test

May 9, 2017

My students are taking their final exam right now. Or, rather, some of my students are taking their final exam while most students haven’t arrived yet. In any event, I’m going to take their exam time to write, and hopefully I won’t be interrupted too often.

I’m not going to use a timer this time around as it might be disruptive to the students. In fact, I’m worried my typing might be distracting. Ah, fuck it.

Right now I want to freewrite on Sun Ra for a bit to see where that gets me, then loop an idea and so on.

One of the things that fascinates me the most about Sun Ra is his - sorry, interrupted just now - ability to read and drill down on ideas such that he is able to incorporate the totality of his study into the music he makes. One thing I need to do is sit down and have a focused listening for all the Sun Ra recordings I have, taking notes and freewriting. In fact, this sounds like a notebook kind of project. In any event, I want the next stuff I write about Sun Ra to be informed by close listening rather than endlessly citing others. I need to develop my sense of close listening as similar to close reading, reading/listening analytically the textures and signified meanings of the music as well as the key centers, harmonies, melodies, counterpoint, etc. Rhythm and harmony especially.

My mind is wandering too much. Let me post this and move on.

# still waiting on students

May 9, 2017

I swear, an hour into the exam and a student walked in. Before that, one student came in, looked at the exam, and then left. I think she’s been dropped from the class anyway, so I was confused to see her show up.

Let me loop a bit on the idea of critical listening or close listening or whatever you want to call it. It’s important to get good stereo separation when listening to the music. Producers will often spatialize different aspects of music by panning in the stereo field or by adding reverb. That’s a part of the syntax of audio production.

Now I’ve lost my train of thought. I didn’t sleep much last night, so I’m feeling a bit dopey just now. Maybe I can be more productive this afternoon.

# waiting on the kid

May 10, 2017

I’m waiting for the kid to come home from her first day ate a new school. I think on days like this I may be more nervous than she is. One thing I know about Zanaya is that she is very sociable, much more so than me. If I could get through this kind of first day stuff when I was a kid, she can do it much better I’m sure.

One of the issues I am running into with this freewriting blog is that I am short on actual ideas. Maybe I should also brainstorm and outline ideas before I freewrite. I’ll try that out later today.

But for now I’m just waiting. Apparently she is doing some online stuff at this new school, trying to work out the final six weeks of the 9th grade curriculum. I really hope the kid has an opportunity to catch up to her peers. I fear that we’ve kind of fucked her over with the move to North Star; she needs the structure of a school.

So the kid is home now. Here’s a quote, “Didn’t see anyone I know, sat by myself, didn’t talk to no one.” Charming. This is going to be an adjustment.

# the newspaper creeps me out

May 11, 2017

## **weird news**

I just read an article in the NY Times about polyamorous couples. The article gave me the creeps, thinking how awful it would be, given the way that I feel, to be a part of one of these relationships. Nobody in the article sounds all that secure to me, though that seems to be the main point the writer is trying to get across - the sense of security these couples feel. And really, should we be talking about them as couples still?

I’m not sure why I feel so creeped out by the article, but I do. I think it has something to do with the divorce - with the idea of VJ dating someone else. I know it’s inevitable, but at this point I still don’t want the divorce. I still feel cheated of the opportunity to reestablish our relationship after VJ finished he Ph.D. I feel cheated of the ability to make any choice of my own. I just feel cheated in general. It wracks me.

Wrack. That’s a strange word. And yet it was the most descriptive word I could find in the moment. Wracked implies torture - long, slow pain, jabbing in my chest like the aftermath of a punch, black, blue, and throbbing. The whole divorce has been a recovery from a painful, unguarded gut punch.

# a longer post today

May 12, 2017

## **let’s let it flow a bit today**

Rather than pressure myself to write a certain amount in a small amount of time, I thought today I might take another tack. I’m starting this post, and I will write until I don’t have anything to say. At that point I will leave the file open and ready for me to come back to it and add text. I may still push to the server when I’m done with this first round, but I will consider this post to be unfinished until the end of the day.

So that being said, I’ll be back.

Here’s something weird. Jekyll has stopped rendering headlines in Markdown. The headline above is posting on the internet as just two hash tags and the text. I’ hope this is a kink that works itself out. I do not have the knowledge to be able to fix something as complex as this. Or maybe I should give myself more credit. In any event, it’s an irritating little problem.

Now it’s mid afternoon and I’m waiting for the kid to come home. I cut my hair and my beard drastically, so I’m back to the close-cropped-all-around look. In fact, my head does look best like this. I don’t know why I’ve been letting my beard get as long as it has. Probably something to do with the divorce (bitch) aaahhh!!

Sorry.

# trying to figure out Jekyll

May 13, 2017

## **headings still don’t work**

Coding is fascinating, but sometimes it frustrates the hell out of me. I know the problem with the headings started after I pushed changes from my laptop. I think that changed the file structure of the repository somehow. On top of this, none of the photos on the site work.

Again, today, I think I’ll dispense with the rigorous time limit for freewriting. Instead, I’ll write some now and some later.

So now it’s later.

I need to clear off my desk and organize myself for the change that’s going on in my job situation. The class has ended, so I think I get one more paycheck. At least I think so. In any event, I’m jobless again. Jobless and stoned and feeling like I’m ready for Spring cleaning. It’s a rainy day today, so maybe not today, but at least I can start with organizing my desk. There is a pile of paper here that I’m almost too intimidated to look. Fuck it, here I go.

Didn’t end up clearing my desk. I’m still trying to figure out what’s going on with my site when I noticed that the url had changed - I wonder if Netlify got hacked. The url is now that for the GitHub repository. When I try to open pulablog.netlify.com it creates a weirdly formatted page with a gigantic cat logo and what looks like unstyled html. Very frustrating.

# cleaned off my desk

May 14, 2017

I cleared a bunch of stuff off my desk this morning and it really does feel better. I think for a while now I’ve been avoiding the ever-growing pile to my left, adding to it bit by bit but still trying to ignore it. In any event, I don’t feel as confined while sitting at the desk. In fact, until now I wasn’t aware that I was feeling confined.

I need a desk with drawers, and a separate setup for music. Half the shit cluttering up my desk is there because I don’t have a drawer to put it in. This fucking table is ok, but I need storage.

Or really, I need to get rid of a whole bunch of shit. Both things need to happen, of course, but I have the feeling that I could get rid of a whole bunch of stuff if I just got ruthless about it. I’ll bet half the paper I have in file boxes could be tossed. I already threw out all the old drafts of my dissertation.

Time to get my Spring Cleaning on.

# rainy Monday

May 15, 2017

I went out early this morning to move my car. I had to park in a metered space last night because there was no space on my street. So this morning I had to move the car before I got a ticket.

I saw a guy outside who I talked to once last week. He’s been working on the house two doors down for the past week or so. Last week, when I walked out of my building, I found a smashed bottle of Sriracha practically on the steps. I was standing there looking at it when the dude saw me and commented that it must be difficult to live in my building with all the drama going on with my neighbor. I told him it was difficult, and then I kept moving because I was late for something, can’t remember what.

In any event, after I left, with the Sriracha still on the ground, it occurred to me that the guy thought I was lazy for not cleaning it up. In fact, I came back about 20 minutes later and cleaned it. I picked up all the glass and then got a bucket of water to slosh all the hot sauce off the sidewalk. But since then I’ve been thinking about the guy and the hot sauce, and there he was this morning. I’m not entirely sure why this was significant to me. Possibly I felt embarrassed about walking away from a mess and not showing some responsibility in the moment. In any event, I did eventually clean the stuff up.

Another meaningless post. I need to do something to step up the quality of my writing. In fact, my best writing has almost always been in response to something I’ve read. The answer to this writing quandary is to read.

# my car has been booted

May 16, 2017

I went out to my car this morning and found that it had been booted for non-payment of fines. I knew I’d been on thin ice for a while. One of the other issues, aside from the $1500 in parking tickets I owe, is that I think the registration is lapsed due to the same issue. The fact is, Springfield is very quick to give tickets, and I have a terrible habit of not paying them.

So the fucking car has one of those boots on it, and unless I can pay all the outstanding tickets today - I can’t - the car will be towed tomorrow morning. At that point I’ll also owe for the tow and for any storage of the vehicle. On top of that I need to get my yearly parking permit.

I’m really fucked just now.

I should spend this energy somehow, punching a bag or complaining about my neighbor. The neighbor has become kind of a sport, she is so easy to complain about. Everything about her is loud and out loud, permeating everyone’s space. As I’ve written before, I wish I didn’t know as much about this woman’s life as I do, but I just can’t escape the drama. The walls in this apartment are very thin, and she has an awful habit of starting conflicts with people in the common areas of the building. I don’t know why she doesn’t bug me more than it does - I really could work up a bad mood over this doofus, but all I do is complain a bit to let off steam. In the end, I don’t really give a fuck.

# blogging about blogging

May 16, 2017

I don’t have a strong reason why I chose the title I did. I guess I thought it might be time for a little meta-commentary on the process of this so-called blog. It is a blog, that’s for sure, but its contents are nonsense to anyone but me. My purpose with this entire blog is to become more comfortable with freewriting on the computer. If I can cut out the middle media of pen and paper I can improve on the productivity of my writing. In other words, I am just writing for the sake of writing, purposefully choosing to not edit what I have written (except for a few typos here and there).

So there is no deep message in what I’m writing in this blog, though there is some thought as to the purpose of writing it - simply to produce text and to become more fluent at freewriting on the computer. That’s it. At some point I’ll probably delete this blog, though I guess I could just continue as it is. I also want to figure out how to style the pages, but that’s going to entail really learning either Sass or Less (I can’t yet tell which CSS preprocessor is being used). I’m still a newbie at this web development stuff.

# waiting for my car to be towed

May 17, 2017

I started this file at about noon, but I haven’t begun to write until after 9:00 PM. I did mean to get to this sooner.

So I assume my car was towed away. I’ve had a sick feeling in my stomach all day knowing that it will be towed, and therefore be much more expensive. I’m beginning to wonder if I borrowed enough money. In order to pay off the tickets and everything else I had to borrow money against my retirement fund. I’m waiting for the money to be transferred to my bank account, and the longer I have to wait the more expensive it will be. My hope is that the money shows up tomorrow. If it doesn’t show up by Friday, then the car will be in storage over the weekend, costing that much more.

Just as a tangent, I have found that my ability to write on a computer without editing has greatly improved. I simply need to make sure that this kind of free-flowing style can carry over to my academic writing.

But back to the car. I’m on a financial edge as it is, and now this bullshit with the car. I’ll be lucky if I can pay my rent this month, let alone buy sufficient food for myself and the kid. This has got me anxious as hell.

Ah, fuck it. I can’t think straight.

# a pause in my posts

May 21, 2017

Well Atom isn’t working today, so I’m back to Visual Studio Code. I need to just settle on one text editor and stick with it.

I haven’t posted for four days. I swear it feels like I just wrote a post yesterday. In any event, the idea with this blog is to write every day, no matter what. The way that I look at it, I owe myself four separate blog posts in order to catch myself up. I don’t want to miss out on an opportunity to learn.

So let me not labor on too long, though I should try to create posts with some substance. Of course, the substance is only relevant to my life and to the goals I have set for myself in improving my writing. I do need to remind myself, though, that the overall strategy I have put in motion with this blog is to simply loosen up my writing, making me more comfortable with writing at the keyboard.

Another step in becoming more fluent at writing at the keyboard, I suppose, it to improve my typing. As it is I need to look at the keyboard while I type, which is probably very inefficient. My typing instruction, such that it was, consisted of me sitting at the typewriter with a good sized beer next to me, picking out letters with painful slowness, punctuated only by gulps of beer. As it is now, I type with only three fingers on one hand and two on the other.

Let me post this, mid thought, and write some more again later. I have to go do laundry, and I have been procrastinating all day.

# late night

May 22, 2017

I was out late this evening doing laundry, and now it is late and I am sweating. The weather outside is cool and humid, but inside it is just humid. This house really absorbs heat during the day.

So back to the idea from my previous post regarding the need to write every day. I really do feel as if I have cheated myself when I don’t do my daily writing. I have noticed a distinct shift in my ability to maintain some focus on what I am writing, and certainly my posts have become longer. For now I am going to stick with the freewriting model since this seems to be bearing some fruit for me. Ultimately, what I need is to be able to extend this freewriting technique to produce better academic writing. In the end, that’s my goal.

So I have written two posts today, and I should write three tomorrow. That will catch me up. I don’t want this freewriting to become a chore, but I seriously don’t want to rob myself of the ability to move forward.

# can't sleep

May 22, 2017

I can’t sleep just now, so I thought I would get a head start on my day. I was going to write three posts today anyway.

I’m a little confused just now because I haven’t gone to sleep from yesterday. Now it’s 2:00 AM and so today is the day ahead, not behind. So today, Monday, I am going to write three posts, and this is the first.

I’m quite annoyed with a number of my students. Seven of the registered students didn’t bother to show up for the final exam. In every case the students’ attendance was very low, so really I should be giving out seven Fs. This I don’t want to do. I assigned grades to the students who did take the exam - most of whom did very well - and left the others empty. This may be a problem with my supervisor. Technically, her office is supposed to be on the students about their attendance and such, but I suppose she wouldn’t know to harass a student about attendance unless I told her about some lapse. In any case, I always find it disheartening to assign an F to a student. It feels bad.

Let me post this and try to get some sleep.

# coding blues

May 22, 2017

I’ve literally been thinking about both the blues and coding this evening. I’m going through some online coding stuff - another site - while I’ve been thinking about two jobs at Berklee I just applied for. The Berklee jobs have me thinking about music - about being around musicians all the time like I was while I was a student at Berklee. This, of course, has me thinking about the blues. At least that is what has me thinking about it now. It all started with Beazle and our discussion of Freddie King and Bessie Smith and how I think St. Louis Blues is a masterpiece song and Bessie is the goddess of it.

Actually, I’m having a hard time maintaining a flow of thoughts just now. I really am thinking about Berklee, I’m just having a hard time getting it down on the screen (I almost wrote, writing it down on paper). I guess it’s one of those things where I want to dream about it - working at Berklee would be ideal - but I really can’t afford to put that much energy into thinking about something that most likely won’t happen. The reality of doing a job search is that, for my own sanity, I have to treat every job application as if I know I won’t get it. I have gotten attached to a few applications and then felt the sting when I didn’t get it - or, more often, when I never hear back. In any event, it’s dangerous to dream.

At least in this case. This job search is tied up with my sense of self-worth, especially given that I spent so many years in school, ending up with fuck all for employment. A teaching gig at Berklee would be ideal. In fact, I really want both jobs, one teaching harmony and the other teaching history. I would be a pig in shit if that were to happen.

So now, this is the problem - I begin to think about a better situation - an ideal situation, in fact - and I begin to become invested in the idea. When it doesn’t come through - it seems to evade me, this get-a-job thing - it hurts. Nothing more to say than that. Nothing more is necessary. It just fucking hurts.

# early mornings

May 23, 2017

## **I like early mornings**

This was one of my favorite things during graduate school: to get up early in order to read. And when I say read I include writing notes and annotations. Writing, for me, is all about reading. At least the academically substantive writing is very connected to reading. This freewriting stuff isn’t.

Anyway, I like early mornings. I like the idea that most people are asleep while I’m starting my work. I love the fresh-brain-in-the-morning feeling, making it easier to find some sense of flow with my work.

This morning is not one of those productive mornings, though. I keep spacing out at the keyboard, thinking about the jobs at Berklee I just applied to. I think I have a good shot at the music history position, as long as it’s not an inside-hire type of job advertisement. You know, when they legally have to advertise a job even though they already have someone in place. That happened to me last year with a job I interviewed for at SIT. That’s one of those job applications that ended up hurting me because I wanted it. As I said in a previous post, I can’t afford to care too much about these jobs I apply for because most often nothing comes of them.

That said, I really want either of these jobs at Berklee. Any kind of teaching employment at Berklee would be incredible.

No. Must stop. Must…stop….

# lazy afternoon

May 23, 2017

## **damn I wish these headings would work**

I have officially done fuck all this afternoon. The one coding tutorial I tried is really poorly organized. At least from my perspective it is. I played the guitar for a bit, Elizabeth Cotton’s Freight Train, but I didn’t really click with it. I don’t know why such a shit-simple song should be as difficult to play well, but after all these years I still fumble through it.

So, not getting anything else done of any consequence I thought I might write for a bit. I have to say that most days I look forward to writing some. I have never before been able to satisfy myself with daily writing, writing instead in bursts. But the bursts are exhausting, while this daily habitual writing is actually quite easy. I have been blogging for just over a month and I probably have 20 full pages of text. I know I am focusing on freewriting just now, but imagine this kind of ease with writing while producing something that is focused.

In fact, that’s it. I need to do a close listening to Sun Ra’s music anyway. Why not use a blog in order to produce a collection of notes. This is my next project, though. I want to continue with the freewriting for a while longer. I don’t know how long, but my goal is to shoot for something like one blog post every day for a year. Freewriting is loosening up my writing, but at some point I will need to switch to a more focused blogging style.

# third post today

May 23, 2017

I don’t have anything particular to say, but I just felt like writing. If I end up producing a bit more text in a day that’s ok with me.

One of the things I struggle with the most is that I can easily think or speak much faster than when I write. Part of the issue is that when I think an entire sentence I still need to translate my idea to paper (or screen). My typing is atrociously slow, and my handwriting, though quicker, is a mess. Ultimately, I need to adjust to writing at the keyboard. Hence the freewriting blog.

As I have hinted at in other posts, my fluency at the keyboard is becoming better. At least now I don’t need to keep looking up at the screen for feedback. As for pauses in my writing, that’s just part of my style. The trick is to make sure the pauses don’t become full-blown distractions - all too easy with me.

That’s about all I have to say just now. Just keep plugging away.

# writing as therapy

May 24, 2017

This is a total cliche, but this freewriting blog is becoming cathartic. I look forward to doing the writing, and I don’t sweat about how long I write.

Well, maybe I do care a bit. I think my goal per post ought to be at least two or three substantive paragraphs. At some point I should increase that goal, but for now I like that I am not pressuring myself to produce a lot every day.

Instead, I should spend some of my freewriting time planning the next phase of writing practice. I have been toying with a couple of ideas, like daily blogging about news articles (similar to the way I used to write long comments on Huffington Post), or daily blogging about music I listen to (the Sun Ra catalog idea). For now I’ll continue with the freewriting, maybe directing it more toward planning. In any case, the next step should be where I begin to use pulamusic.com regularly. The WordPress site is just sitting there unused. I have needed to revive that site for some time now.

But I like the idea of a blog of my notes on listening to Sun Ra’s whole catalog. Or maybe I should just specify a couple of albums and blog one tune a day. I will need to do some thinking as to what I am listening for. My notes could include some transcription, key centers, harmonies, rhythms, etc. They could also include commentary on the music or on the liner notes or on some image of Sun Ra I find somewhere. There ought to be some sort of standard outline that I use for each composition, allowing for each tune to have its own narrative while adding some sense of thematic development over to course of the blog.

In other words, what I need to do with the rest of my time with this freewriting blog is plan for the next step. The next step is where the writing begins. Don’t get me wrong, freewriting is writing, for sure. But it will feel good to stretch out a bit. For now, though, I need to keep banging away according to the plan.

coding and writing

May 24, 2017

I have been coding for much of the day today, and I feel as if something is finally clicking with Bootstrap. Bootstrap is one of those CSS frameworks that requires you to know a lot of CSS classes by memory. Fortunately I don’t have to memorize them all since the Bootstrap website has pretty good documentation with lots of code to steal and hack.

But this is an aside. I have been thinking about the next step with regard to blogging, and I can’t say I have landed on any one approach. The two approaches I wrote about earlier today are a Sun Ra listening log or a running commentary on the news. Some combination of the two might be fun as well, as long as my output is consistent. Though I won’t start out creating greatly substantive posts, my ultimate goal is to improve and expand upon my writing. The freewriting practice is stretching out my ability to maintain a narrative while composing at the keyboard. The next step in blogging needs to wed my flowing narrative idea with some more meat (“where’s the beef?”).

So, again, I don’t need to make any decisions now, but I do need to start planning. Maybe I should consult some writing books while I’m at it.

Which reminds me that I need to crank out a book proposal. That needs to be a part of my set of writing goals. In fact, let me start a list (the order is random).

1. book proposal
2. Sun Ra listening journal
3. commentary on the news
4. a music practice journal.
5. transcriptions
6. fiction
7. what else, I don’t know

Let me think on it.

# fucking DOR

May 25, 2017

# I want these fucking headlines to work

The Massachusetts DOR has put a lien on all of my bank accounts, so I can’t do a damn thing. Now I can’t buy groceries, pay my rent, anything. The lady at the DOR wants a copy of my 2008 tax return in order to get me “current.” I really have no idea what that means, to get me current, and I have no idea where my 2008 tax return is. This is a total cluster fuck.

And I had been having a good day, thinking about the possibility of working at Berklee. It would be great to get back into an environment where I could practice every day. I really want musical practice to be part of my academic routine, and that is only going to happen if I work at Berklee. Even a regular music department at another college or university would probably require too much academically to be able to maintain any kind of substantial practice routine. Berklee, for many musicians, is the ultimate teaching gig. At least that’s the way it seems from the outside.

I better get back on the phone with the DOR in order to sort out the cluster fuck. Damn I’m in a pissy mood just now.

# back to writing

May 25, 2017

Enough with my money problems for now. I dropped some paperwork off at the DOR office downtown, so I assume things are being straightened out. At least I hope so.

Back to the writing. For the past couple of days I have produced more than one post per day, and that is feeling ok. Perhaps it is time for me to consciously increase my output. I need to commit myself to a decent length per blog post as well as to two posts per day. That ought to beef up my writing.

Just as a reminder, the overall goal of this freewriting blog is to become more comfortable with writing at the keyboard. I still prefer writing by hand, but it would be good to try to remove a step from the writing process.

So for now, two or more posts per day, and a decent word count. In fact, maybe I should be writing in MS Word so I can use the word count function. I would still need to copy and paste the text to a text editor in order to write clean code, but especially once I start writing more substantial posts I will need all the writerly functions of a word processor, like the ability to add citations.

So I just copied and pasted this text to a word processor. The text through the last paragraph is 212 words. Maybe I should be shooting for between 250-300 words per blog post. This is helpful.

And now I’ve hit the 250 mark. It adds up quickly.

But back to a previous post where I wrote about next steps for this blog. If I want to continue with freewriting I should probably go for the Sun Ra listening journal idea. I still need to come up with a framework for listening. In fact, that should be the first task of the blog - brainstorm and edit together a rough framework for listening. I need to choose the albums and compositions I am going to give a close listen, and just dive in. A goal could be to create a framework for listening through the process of listening to the first album. Of course a framework can always be revisited, but there needs to be something that assures some consistency in the writing across all blog posts. It could even be that I revise earlier posts to reflect some important aspect of the music I only caught onto later on down the line.

Now I’m up to 414 words as of the last paragraph.

# continuing on

May 25, 2017

I feel like continuing with the writing, so here I go. I think I was beginning to speculate as to what a Sun Ra listening journal would look like. It would be cool if I could include at least one image and one embedded sound file with each post. This is easy enough with WordPress. I’m just not sure how much space there is for website resources like images and sound files. They do tend to be large files.

In fact, if I am going to include images of albums I could begin collecting them now. I know in my dissertation folders I have a bunch of images that could be useful. In fact, I think I divided the images into separate files for Fela and for Sun Ra. I know I have a bunch of Fela album covers because I included some in the diss. I’m not sure about Sun Ra album covers.

I can also search for lyrics to see if I can save some time doing my own transcriptions. I have some stuff transcribed, including, I think, the entire “Space Chant” lyric from the Live in London album. The lyrics by themselves could be entire blog posts.

In fact, now I’m looking forward to the next phase of writing. Let me stay with the freewriting blog for a while longer, increasing my output, and then sometime this Summer I’ll begin with the listening journal. If I am going to stick to the two or more posts per day model, then maybe one could be a listening journal entry while another could be commentary on the news.

Ultimately, I should shoot for something like 500 words-per-day, but for now I’ll use the leisurely 300 mark. 500 words is still modest, but over time it really adds up to something substantial. In fact, I really should be writing on a word processor so I can use the word count function more regularly. I like measurable goals.

Let me keep going so I can see what 500 words looks and feels like (I’m using a word processor now). If it is not that much I could probably use it as the length goal for my daily posts. Today, for instance, I have produced three posts, including this one, that have between 250 and 500 words. This post will be the longest of the three.

The pulamusic WordPress site really needs to be worked on. I’m still not satisfied with the look of the blog. I think the kente cloth is too much. I think I need to include my photo as well.

I wonder how hackable WordPress really is. It would be nice if I could manipulate the HTML and CSS directly – at least for the front page and the about page. In fact, ultimately it would be nice to also host a static website – my primary GitHub pages site, for instance – that could be featured in a portfolio page on the pulamusic blog. That’s the site I can use to really show off my coding skills.

500 words.

# Love in Outer Space

May 25, 2017

Lots of auxiliary percussion. In fact, too much for my taste. It’s all over the place. The organ sounds a bit cheesy. I think this tune sounds like a bossa-nova-type tune, in fact. It would be a cool arrangement.

The version of this tune is from A Quiet Place in the Universe. I need to find another version of the same tune. This version has no horns, only percussion and organ. I don’t have a sense for the melody of the tune, and I’m wondering if another album might have a better version. In fact, I should look for the first studio recording of the tune. This album is live at a small club. At least that’s how it sounds to me.

I swear, the whole horn section must be playing percussion. It improved when there were percussion solos, but this is too much.



Here’s a better version of the tune. More piano, plus a guitar solo.

[The embedded video didn’t translate to Word]

middle of the night

May 26, 2017

I’m up in the middle of the night because my obnoxious neighbor’s new guests were ringing the bell and banging on the door. Obnoxious friends of my obnoxious neighbor.

Back to writing about writing. I tried one post while listening to Sun Ra’s music. It was pretty thin, but it is a start. Maybe what I need to do is find the best versions of tunes to listen to. The version of “Love in Outer Space” I listened to was from the live album *A Quiet Place in the Universe*, and I can’t say that I liked it. I listened to part of another version that was better, but I can’t say that I like this tune at all. It almost sounds like it should be a bossa nova, though.

Rather than a uniform approach to writing about tunes, maybe I can develop several different types of commentary. If I blog about a video, I can comment on the visual element of performance. If I transcribe music I can include the transcription along with some indication of key centers and harmony. If a tune includes lyrics I can write a lyric transcription. In fact, each tune should stand on its own as material for a blog post, though I should still outline some areas to touch on.

Things to write about:

1. musicians
2. harmonies and melodies
3. looseness or tightness of the music
4. ideas from Lock’s and Szwed’s books
5. ideas from my diss
6. ideas that pop into my head

More later.

# laundry day

May 26, 2017

I need to do laundry today. I did some last weekend, but I didn’t clean most of my clothes.

I have been playing around with Google’s Web Starter Kit. Fun stuff. The example page is a bit much - a lot going on - but this thing is really not for a personal website - more like business websites. Interesting to play with though.

I’m trying to force myself to write just now. This may not be the best way to write, but I feel like I need to get better at writing on command. One of the things that bugs me the most about my own writing is that I tend to go with inspiration rather than craft. This writing blog is about improving several aspects of my writing craft, especially freewriting. In fact, maybe I should be looking beyond freewriting to…I don’t know what. Time to get out the books on writing.

I especially need to find the book on how to turn a dissertation into a book manuscript. I just need to pump out a book proposal and move forward with the MS. The longer this thing sits idle the longer my career will be on hold. I really should have sent out a proposal a few years ago now. I can’t believe it’s been four years since I defended my diss. Time has flown, for sure.

laundry done

May 26, 2017

I finished my laundry and now I’m back writing again. I’m also on hold with the DOR again because they haven’t released the hold on my bank account yet. This has to be sorted out today or I’m stuck for the weekend with a negative $3600 balance. Fucking DOR.

I think the DOR thing is sorted out. I’ll have to check my bank account in a while to make sure.

While I was doing laundry I read a book about CoffeeScript. It sounds simple, but in a complex way. I still need to know how JavaScript works in order to write CoffeeScript, but the syntax for CoffeeScript is shit simple. Once I am more comfortable with JavaScript, CoffeeScript should be easy.

The fact that CoffeeScript is a JavaScript preprocessor reminds me that I know a little Sass as well. Or rather, I know enough Sass to know that I really don’t know Sass. I haven’t found CSS to be a drag to write, so I’m not sure about the value of a preprocessor. I guess it’s just one of those things that will make sense to me when I find I have a need for it. For now, plain CSS is fine with me.

Speaking of coding, maybe I could begin to list the languages I will ultimately need to know in order to become a decent web developer.

1. HTML/CSS
2. JavaScript
3. Python
4. Git
5. Sass
6. CoffeeScript
7. Ruby

Also, the Google Developers site has a whole bunch of stuff on coding for smart phones which would be interesting to get into at some point. I have been focused on full size websites when the real trend is toward using phones.

I just solved a writing problem. There is an Atom package that does word and character count. Now I know just how long each post is. This will make it easier to hit my target.

# ummagumma

May 26, 2017

I couldn’t think of a title just now, so I made up a nonsensical one (actually, isn’t “ummagumma” the title of a Pink Floyd album?). In any case, I have no particular direction for my writing just now.

Zanaya just asked me if she could get her nose pierced. I’m not crazy about it. Valerie wants to check out the shop to make sure it is sanitary - not the response I had hoped for. I had hoped for a “Hell no” from Valerie, but I guess she thinks it’s a girl thing or something like it. Why do 16-year-old girls want to pierce their noses? It’s all a frustrating mystery to me.

Now it’s the following day. I got distracted yesterday and never came back to it. Let me just finish this up as a short post and move on to a new one.

# a lazy day

May 27, 2017

I finally found a way to make the headings work. Still don’t know why they aren’t working with the hash tags.

My asshole neighbor is having her asshole guests move out. Now all of their stuff is on the sidewalk. Lovely. The asshole neighbor should be fully gone by the end of the month. It can’t come too soon.

Today I need to write just for the sake of writing, without pauses, flowing on until I have nothing left to say.

The word count function doesn’t seem to be working. Instead, I am seeing something that marks the line I am on and the number of characters per line. I really need the word count feature, and I thought I had sorted it out. I’m not sure how to set the preferences for that package.

Ah, I got it. Problem fixed.

So my goal for each post now should be 300-500 words, which today is feeling like pulling teeth. I’m not teeming with ideas just now.

I went out for a while in the middle of writing this post. I went to the medical marijuana place, but my prescription has expired. Frustrating. I went to Guitar Center and bought a Voodoo Labs Pedal Power ISO 5 for my pedal board. Finally, a decent power supply for my pedals. Every gig or rehearsal I have had to jury rig my pedals and just hope the batteries don’t run out - a pain in the ass for the MXR pedal that needs a screwdriver to change batteries. This way I can set up my board and leave it plugged in. I don’t switch pedals all that often, but I do like to leave the compressor on all the time.

I need to get back to regular musical practice. The last productive period I had was guitar only, but at this point I haven’t played regularly for some months now. I wouldn’t mind periods where I don’t play guitar if I could substitute some other aspect of musicianship for daily practice. At the very least I need to listen to music every day.

I can feel another guitar playing period coming up. This time around I want to simply practice the chord solos I was working on last time while also doing some transcription. I need to tune up the ear.

Speaking of which, maybe I could include some ear training in this next period. At least some of Bruce Arnold’s CDs, though I really should work on my sight singing. If I get one of the jobs at Berklee I can listen to the CDs in the car, and work on the sight singing in my office. Just a dream at this point, but I assume I have as good a shot as any at either one of those jobs. At least I hope so.

later in the day

May 27, 2017

the asshole neighbor

My asshole neighbor is out on the front step with her friends, at least two of whom were kicked out of the building yesterday by the landlord. The asshole had been trying to supplement her rent by inviting room mates into her apartment, but she never informed the landlord. Apparently there is a whole bunch of stuff broken, so clearly she’s been treating her apartment about the same as she has been treating the entire building: as if she owns the house and is the only residence.

Chill. Don’t get worked up about this.

Back to the writing. Unless I can come up with a good outline, I’m afraid my Sun Ra blog post idea is going to be difficult to write. I did one dry run and unfortunately only wrote a little. Let me brainstorm a bit more about what to include in my musical posts.

1. instrumentation
2. musicians
3. different versions of a composition (Get out the Sun Ra discography)
4. recording fidelity (some of his albums sound like recordings of rehearsals)
5. a composition’s relationship with other compositions
   * thematic
   * musical
   * whether or not the tune is sometimes used as part of a space chant
6. session dates and places
7. key centers
8. compositional structure

It’s also interesting to think about which jazz tunes from other composers Sun Ra chooses to record. Also, I should give a listen to Fletcher Henderson so I can begin to get on top of the musical relationship Sun Ra has envisioned between the two of them. Certainly, Sun Ra played in Henderson’s orchestra for a while, but on top of that, Sun Ra always claimed that Henderson was his ideal of a jazz composer.

That being said, I think there’s also a relationship to be discovered between Sun Ra and Alexander Scriabin, particularly where the light organ is concerned. Amiri Baraka about Sun Ra using a light organ in the 1960s. In addition, there is that white guy who performed his own version of the light organ in the 1970s. In fact, this guy’s light organ sounds so much more complex and musical than a simple organ that produces light according to the pitches. The white guy sounds as if he created a unique instrument. It would have been fascinating to see one of those gigs.

# having a beer

May 27, 2017

Let me take a break from the movie I’m watching to write a bit. I won’t pressure myself to keep on until I hit my mark. Just a little at a time.

I drove all the way to Northampton today to buy weed at the dispensary. Even though my card says it expires next month, apparently my prescription expired yesterday. All that way for nothing. I love weed, but I can’t say that I’m anxious about being out of it.I do love weed though. It’s a contemplative thing for me. I love to get stoned and read or play the guitar…or write for that matter. It really lets me relax into it. It’s entirely possible, of course, that I suck at writing when stoned, but who cares really? I love weed.

Now it’s the next day and I am drinking orange juice with ice. I don’t have anything to say just now, so let me post this and write more later.

# Sunday morning

May 28, 2017

JavaScript is kicking my ass. I have to say that I don’t really get the algorithmic nature of JavaScript. I can do basic stuff, but anything beyond basic and I am completely lost. I do understand the language better than I used to, but it still evades me, for the most part. This is the big sticking point for me.

jQuery might be simpler. Maybe I should start the jQuery tutorials before finishing the JavaScript tutorials. I am well into the third of those and am completely lost.

Another thing to improve upon is my ability to design interesting looking pages. I can make simple HTML pages, but they look kind of boring to me. I need to get more comfortable with creating decent color palettes and with web typography in general. Code School has tutorials in web design that ought to be helpful.

Ultimately, I need to sort out both development skills and design skills. While design may seem like the easier of the two, I have a feeling that the way design impacts syntax and signifying value is a deep subject. The goal, of course, is to create designs that enhance the readability and the clarity of a site. Not all of the important information of a website resides in the text. In any case, the book above the fold ought to be able to sort out some of these issues for me. I am not a good designer, but as with all things I can easily improve.

So currently I am in the middle of the first design tutorial, having covered typography and color so far. I have to say that these tutorials throw a lot of details out there, leaving little room to absorb them. For instance, there are complementary and analogous color schemes - these are the ones I remember - but I can’t say that I fully understand the difference. Something about changes in hue, lightness, and saturation.

Just a quick look and I have found a explanation [here](http://www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-theory-intro.htm). This ought to be a decent reference site. I have long thought that I need to use a better palette of colors for the pages I create, adding some thematic consistency. This is something I need to work out.

Ultimately, I would like to expand both my coding and design skills so that I am able to create a truly interesting and interactive site. What the site will be still alludes me to a certain degree, but I do know that I am not interested in creating a boring site that nobody will want to visit. My goal is to create a site for my students and for potential employers that highlights my work and interests. In a sense, the entire website could be a portfolio for my work. Either that, or it could be a blog with a separate portfolio.

Here I am hitting the 500 word mark. Let me finish up this post and start a new one later.

# Memorial Day

May 29, 2017

# I hate Memorial Day

I really shouldn’t say I hate it, but I do. It feels like a non-holiday to me for some reason. I’m not meaning to be disrespectful of the military, but particularly over the past 15 years or so the military has been horribly used by our government. To me, Memorial Day feels like a massive insult to our military, asking them to continue to sacrifice for a war that creates more opposition than it defeats. In any case, I can’t support a holiday that does not support the military when it claims to do so. It’s nothing but bullshit.

VJ just called to ask me to sign the divorce papers. I told her that today is not a good day to talk to me about divorce. Since last night I have been thinking about how pissed I am at her. She didn’t allow for any kind of separation, she just went straight for the divorce. I have no choice, no say in the matter. All I can do is suck it up and go along when I don’t really want to. How can she just throw away 20+ years of marriage? I don’t have the sense that she fought for it.

Fuck it. I don’t really want to spend my day thinking about this. Divorce is a drag, to put it mildly. To put it less mildly, I feel eviscerated, and yet, I still don’t want this divorce. What a miserable thing it is.

What I would rather make myself do is write about writing. This freewriting stuff is certainly improving the flow of my writing, but at some point I need to write more substantively. How about this. At some point I can freewrite most of the week but revise my posts once or twice a week. In fact, I can maintain this freewriting blog, but then use the pulamusic blog for more finished writing. This should be in addition to the Sun Ra listening log. It would be best, I think, to make sure there is some variance in the stuff I write. Sameness is not really my style anyway.

370 words. Moving along.

I need to go back to the writing books to figure out some new writing strategies. So far I have been mostly freewriting with no strategy as to how to do it. I did spend some time doing looping (freewriting for a while, and then freewriting some more, expanding upon an idea from the first freewriting session). I don’t think I really explored that like I should have. In fact, why don’t I do it with my posts for today. I’ll finish up this post just now and then revisit an idea from the post later. That will help me to develop some thematic material from post to post. Ultimately, this is one of the strategies that will help me to write more extensively.

500 words.

# writing for the sake of writing

May 29, 2017

Writing for the sake of writing is not all that productive from my point of view. It is always best to have some goals in mind. That being said, I should be able to pump out text on command whether I have goals in mind or not. The trick is to relax and just write.

I know that sounds kind of goofy, but it makes sense to me. It’s kind of like the advice Jack Jarrett gave our composition class while at Berklee: a composer should be able to compose music on demand. The craft of writing, like the craft of musical composition, shouldn’t be dependent on “inspiration” in order to be productive. A real writer will write no matter what. In effect, this is what I am trying to accomplish with this freewriting blog: to be able to write substantively and voluminously on command.

So the idea is to write without stopping. I have a sense now as to what 500 words looks like, so I can glance at the word-count function less often. Even though I have set a goal of 350-500 words per post I want to be able to write without any external preoccupations. Word count should be about the last thing I look at.

That being said, there is some craft involved in being able to hit a particular length or word count. It’s not a trivial thing. Freewriting to a certain length is one thing, but being able to edit one’s writing to fit a specific length is ultimately important for getting things published. In the end, that’s the goal: publishing. Writing for the sake of writing is really not all that helpful if it isn’t done in service to becoming a better “published” writer.

Becoming a published writer ought to be the goal for all of my blogging. This current blog produces the raw material that can then be edited into more substantial posts for the [pulamusic.com](http://www.pulamusic.com/) blog. Those posts, ultimately, can lead to better and more consistently produced writing.

On a tangent, I’ve just discovered that Atom does not have a print function for text. I have been using Atom to write, but now I’m not sure that’s the best way to do it. In order to edit and revise these posts I really need to print them out. I have always preferred to edit with a pencil rather than doing it all online. I wonder if I can open Markdown files in MS Word.

No I can’t use MS Word, but TextWrangler will allow me to print, albeit with fucked up margins. I think the best approach will be to write in MS Word and then copy and paste to a text editor for blog publication. I wonder if MS Word will allow me to save a file as Markdown.

Again, no I can’t. MS Word will allow me to save something as a plain text file, so maybe that’s how to do it. It’s all a bit confusing since I am straddling both the coding and writing worlds. MS Word is so much better for writing, especially where I will want to begin adding citations; I can write in MS Word using Endnote for the citations, removing the citation coding fields from the Word version and saving as plain text. Either that or copy and paste. I wonder if Word’s formatting will copy as well.

where is my kid?

May 30, 2017

Zanaya apparently left school this morning after the principal confronted her for wearing a non-uniform top. My phone isn’t working today because there is still a hold on my bank account, so I can’t call DOR or the bank to sort this out. Since Zanaya is missing I can’t go out to the DOR office or the bank. Now the police are looking for her - they’ve been to the house twice - and all I can do is sit here to wait for her. I’m not that worried about the kid, but I do want to find her soon. I need my baby home.

Here’s another Markdown table. Atom has a table snippet that makes table creation super simple.

| **Header One** | **Header Two** | **Header Three** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| something | something else | and again |

I can’t really focus my thoughts just now. Let me post this and then write more later.

# the kid is home

May 30, 2017

Zanaya came home when Valerie offered to take her out for food. It figures food would be the palliative. Food always makes the kid relax. It’s amazing that you can see her in a rotten mood, but just a few bites of food will turn her around almost instantly. This would be concerning if she was overweight, but this isn’t the case. Food just brings her some comfort. Now I just need to figure out how to get her to go back to school tomorrow.

Back to thinking about my writing. I have started to also post on the pulamusic blog. In fact, WordPress makes it very easy to grab a news story or YouTube video. Much simpler than using Jekyll for blogging, although I have other reasons for using Jekyll like learning to work with static site generators, GitHub pages, and Markdown. In fact, in order to style the Jekyll site I am going to need to learn Sass. I was able to change the background color by editing the compiled CSS file, but most of the styling for the site remains inaccessible to me because I don’t understand Sass. Another coding project.

Between the two blogs I am now putting out a fair amount of material. The WordPress site is particularly good at helping me to comment on music and on the news. This Jekyll site keeps me focused on the text, allowing me to spread out my writing a bit. The two blogs really complement each other. In fact, I think they will both help me to improve my writing, albeit in different ways. I am still committed to freewriting with this blog, but with the pulamusic blog I will edit my posts to produce some better quality writing. In fact, at some point I should re-write some of the freewritten posts and publish them on pulamusic.com. That ought to make for some interesting reading.

The other thing I could do is to maintain them as separate entities. In fact, that is the way I am doing it now. I have been able to maintain a regular schedule of writing for a short while now. The trick is going to be making sure that I maintain my writing momentum. Baraka said it best: the thing that made him a writer was the daily habit of writing. Even if my daily habit can seem trivial, I do feel the difference in my writing as a result of maintaining this blog. It’s been just a short time, but I am now much better able to hit my word-count mark with ease. I am only now and then struggling to find something to write about…mostly because I write about writing. That and life in general. No shortage of thoughts there.

At some point I would like to produce more thematically related freewriting - more than just writing about writing and coding and life, it would be useful to maintain an idea across multiple posts.

There we go. Now I’ve hit on something. Let me check out the writing books and see if I can devise a strategy for moving toward a more sustained aesthetic. While I am enjoying the no-pressure attitude of this blog, at some point I need to tighten it up.

# the kid and school

May 31, 2017

So the kid refused to go to school this morning. Essentially, the principal yelled at her yesterday for not wearing a proper uniform. Zanaya got angry, yelled back, and left the school. Now she thinks she can just not go to school. Valerie now wants to move Zanaya to another program so she can get her GED, and I put my foot down. We have moved this kid to different schools so often she has not been able to establish a community of friends other than the few she has picked up here and there. If Zanaya totally refuses to go to school then we are really fucked. I refuse to move her again. I’m putting my foot down, and this little girl is going to listen.

This has got me upset now. I need to force myself to write about something else.

I came across a strange blog post yesterday. This woman had done the entire Free Code Camp front end certification without understanding how to construct a simple HTML page separate from CodePen. She felt the need, in this post, to point out that Bootstrap is a CSS framework, and that jQuery is a subset of JavaScript. How the hell does somebody get so far along with a program without understanding what I consider to be some of the very basics of coding? Really, it was quite a weird post. Stranger still, there were a number of comments on the post thanking the author for her clarification.

Do people really not pay attention to the fundamentals? One of the things that holds me up is the fact that I focus on fundamentals, but at least I have a solid foundation. Having this foundation makes me confident that when JavaScript finally clicks for me it will really click. It’s the algorithmic logic of JavaScript that trips me up, making it impossible for me to write anything other than very basic code. One thing I have learned along the way, though, is that almost any question I have about JavaScript has already been answered by someone on the internet. I have a feeling that, for me, this is the way to learn - learn by doing, and the understanding will come.

Speaking of coding, one thing I haven’t tried with Markdown is its ability to present code in a post. Let me try it out below using an example from one of my CodePens.

*var input = document.querySelector('.numberInput'); var para = document.querySelector('#output');*

*function squared(num) { return num \* num; }*

*function cubed(num) { return num \* num \* num; }*

*function factorial(num) { var x = num; while (x > 1) { num \*= x-1; x--; } return num; }*

*input.onchange = function() { var num = input.value; if (isNaN(num)) { para.textContent = 'You need to enter a number!'; } else { para.textContent = num + ' squared is ' + squared(num) + '. ' + num + ' cubed is ' + cubed(num) + '. ' + num + ' factorial is ' + factorial(num) + '.'; } }*

# coding again

May 31, 2017

Coding is interesting.

Well that’s an obvious statement. I fall short of calling it fun, but it is very interesting to me - another kind of fun.

At some point I need to make a connection between my improving coding skills and my academic work. Essentially, I am ranging into the area known as the digital humanities. What I need to do is research the digital humanities to figure out where I fit - this collection of HTML, CSS, and JavaScript skills needs to mean something with regard to my work. Maybe, for the moment, this just means that I continue blogging as I have been doing. In the end, however, these skills need to add up to something academically substantial - something that helps my teaching and scholarship.

Brainstorming about this for a moment. What would be helpful for my teaching is to create some sort of database of materials I can use for teaching. Maybe the blog is enough, though a full website would be more comprehensive and substantial. The idea, in the long run, is to create something that saves me from having to repeat myself in the classroom or in class assignments. This may be a separate website, or it could be another version of the pulamusic site. Really, what I need to do is create an online database of teaching materials that is both useful for my teaching and interesting to the general public.

One way to start might be to post my class PowerPoint presentations online, including links to media. I have a sizable collection of rough PowerPoints from my American history and African American music history classes that I could somehow dump online. I need to figure out, though, how to either embed a PowerPoint presentation into a website, or how to reconfigure each presentation into web pages. It sounds like a lot of potential work, but if there is some tool that could help me convert the presentations that would really work best.

All of the presentations for the American history courses include embedded videos from Crash Course that should probably be added to the site separately. Crash Course US History is particularly interesting because it is written, I think, using the same two-volume textbook I have used in teaching the courses. At least I think they use the same text, given that they make reference to the author, Eric Foner, in a number of the videos as well as the fact that the videos follow the same narrative as Foner’s books. I love how complementary the videos are with the text. Having the students view the videos in class is just another way of emphasizing and complementing the content of each chapter.

But somehow I think I am missing the broader impact of the digital humanities on academic work. A website is cool, but much of the digital humanities has to do with using the processing power of computers to deal with large datasets. Maybe a database of teaching materials suffices, but I have a feeling that I am just hitting the tip of the iceberg. In the end, this just confirms for me that I need to keep banging away at improving my coding skills. As I move along I need to keep thinking about how it intersects with my academic work. That’s the way to go - slow, steady, and always forward.



# teaching materials

May 31, 2017

I have found a way to embed PowerPoint presentations online using Google Docs. When I open a presentation to view one of the extra options is the embed code. Let me test out whether this will work in Markdown.

[The PowerPoint presentation did not embed in the Word document]

Yes! it works very well. This may be one of the best ways to share my teaching materials. I will need to re-write the presentations, though, since the embedded videos don’t work in the embedded version of these presentations. Something to work on.



I finally figured out that I can use HTML tags to include images as well. In fact, this helps to explain how I can better structure my bog posts when I find that Markdown is not cutting it. I need to keep in mind that Markdown is an HTML preprocessor, so including HTML elements in a Markdown post will work well.

The next step is to figure out how to create a gallery of photos. In fact, since Jekyll accepts full HTML pages - with the Markdown front matter, of course - I could easily create whatever I want.

Jekyll is still teaching me quite a bit. Among my next steps with Jekyll will be to study the Ruby programming language. Jekyll seems to use Ruby as its base code, with Markdown simply being the primary language for writing. A basic understanding of Ruby should help me to be able to build out these pages, possibly adding things like background images and further navigation. I do like the simplicity of the Jekyll site, but something about it is too simple for a public website. I know that I am writing this blog only for myself, but it would be nice if it was more presentable in case someone stumbles onto it. A Google search for Markdown, for instance, may lead someone to my post on Markdown. As this blog is just a collection of freewritten “essays” it probably looks like a mess to an outside observer.

# still writing

May 31, 2017

I’m in a writing mood today, so here goes my fourth post for the day. Each post has either approached or surpassed the 500 word mark, so I should have written about 2000 words by the end of this one. Something tells me, as well, that this may not be the last post of the day. I’ve got my writing on.

Freewriting has really helped me to become a more productive writer, so this is an exercise I am going to continue for a while. At some point, though, I will need to make the transition from pure freewriting to a more academic form of freewriting. The ultimate goal, of course, is to improve my professional skill set with regard to writing.

For that matter, practicing music is also part of my professional skill set. Perhaps I can, at some point, approach my practice routine in something like the same way I have done with freewriting. I’m not sure what the equivalent would be in music practice. Maybe I should start by using a timer to limit the amount of time I spend practicing per practice session. One of the major issues I have found with regard to musical practice and my academic work is that I tend to obsess about one to the exclusion of the other. In other words, when I am going through a period of academic work, my musical practice falls away. The opposite happens when I am going through a period of regular musical practice - I am less likely to read and write.

It would be nice to find some sort of balance between reading, writing, and musical practice. Writing doesn’t need to take up much time, it just needs to happen regularly and consistently. Freewriting has helped with that. If I can find a way to incorporate the other aspects of my professional practice in a more sustainable way that would go a long way toward improving my productivity.

Coding is fast becoming part of my professional skill set, especially if I develop my broad interest in digital humanities. I do need to be careful, though, once I have a tenure-track job, to make sure the work might be counted toward my tenure progress. Of course different institutions have different requirements with regard to what counts toward tenure, so wherever I end up I need to make sure I am not spinning my wheels.

Ultimately, I need to turn my writing energies toward getting my dissertation published. Probably I should start by reading the book I have on turning a diss into a book manuscript. First, though, I need to write and send out a book proposal. There is no sense in doing a lot of editing before I have some idea of what a specific publisher is looking for. Maybe, though, I can do some of the formatting required to produce a manuscript. It would be nice if I can send a properly formatted MS when asked.

# life sometimes sucks

Jun 1, 2017

I just yelled at VJ on the phone. She is now interested in sending Zanaya to a therapeutic school, while I’m putting my foot down about sending her anywhere else. This is fucked. Every year or so we change the kid’s school, and now she is tired of being moved around. The kid refuses to go to school, refuses to do any work, and Valerie’s response is to send her to another institution. I swore at VJ, and when she told me that was unacceptable I told her that divorcing me was unacceptable. Then I called her a selfish, selfish bitch. I’m telling you, divorce sucks the big one.

Let me move on so I can reduce my blood pressure a bit.

I was looking back at some of my posts yesterday, and I was a bit surprised to find that less than a month ago I wrote that the freewriting wasn’t helping me all that much. This is surprising since my more recent posts have pointed out the benefits I am reaping from writing this blog. I have found that my writing flows better, and it is easier to hit my word count goals. Even just a few weeks ago I was struggling to put down 300 words. Now I’m easily hitting the 500 word mark without worrying about it. Also, I have lost some of my anxiety around the need to continue writing without a break. If I have to take a break in the middle of a post, no big deal. The post still gets written in what seems to be a short amount of time.

And again, because this is a freewriting blog, I am not editing anything I write. I may fix a few typos here and there, but these posts are purposefully unedited. Editing is taught as writing in most writing classes. Or, rather, editing is taught in the place of writing. Freewriting is an important part of the process that usually gets only a bit of lip service. What I have found is that the freewritten stuff, while in need of editing, is the best stuff I write - it flows better and causes me less agida than the more usual practice of writing one crafted sentence at a time. Freewriting postpones the editing process and allows me to focus on narrative.

All this to say that this blog has really helped. I am writing more often, and writing more when I do write. That being the case, I really should keep doing this freewriting blog for as long as I can. At this point I have only been doing it for a month and a half. Let’s see if I can do it for a year. I would imagine, given my history, that this blog practice will fall away, but I need to keep going for as long as I can maintain it. Doing at least a year of this kind of daily writing would be a great big boost to my writing in general.

# ups and downs

Jun 1, 2017

Zanaya has been skipping classes at school, talking on her cell phone while in class, and showing up for school without her uniform. I had to take her home, and now I don’t know what she is going to do. We seem to be headed toward her dropping out of school altogether. At some point she is going to need to gain some maturity and suck it up. Nobody likes high school, but she seems to be convinced that she is the only one.

Let me move on here. This is getting to be painful.

I have begun doing exercises on FreeCodeCamp.com after laying off their site for a while. I got hung up on one particular project that required me to work with the twitch.tv API. In the end, I gave up on it and submitted a half-assed project that doesn’t work. I printed across the page:

## **“I…give…up…on…this…project”**

I then moved on to some of the intermediate JavaScript exercises, which I also don’t understand. I have to say that I am in a very frustrating space where JavaScript is concerned. Maybe I should move on to a language like Python which is supposed to be simpler. Apparently YouTube is powered by Python. It would be nice to use a coding language I can actually write. I feel like, with JavaScript, I know enough to copy and paste and fiddle with it a bit. I have no confidence in my ability to actually write the code from scratch. Maybe I’m just being impatient. Ah, who knows. The best I can do is keep on moving forward.

I’ve run across a few posts lately - mostly on GitHub - that complain about FreeCodeCamp’s reliance on CodePen for its projects. CodePen, in my opinion, doesn’t allow people to learn how to put together full HTML pages. As I create these projects it really is up to me to take the next step to post these pages elsewhere. This is one of the advantages of GitHub Pages - I can create websites on demand. As it is I have a portfolio site and a blog, and I certainly can publish nearly as many sites as I want. It might be best, though, to use these projects to better develop the portfolio site. In fact, I really should re-do the entire portfolio in order to highlight my coding skills in addition to my teaching materials. The site looks a bit too simple as it is.

The current rough outline of the site has a homepage as well as pages for teaching, scholarship, and music. For now I should pare it back to just teaching and coding, adding music and scholarship when I feel better able to put together substantial pages. A coding page will be easier to produce given that I have created a few projects in CodePen. Rather than giving each project its own page, though, it would be best if I can create one larger page with scrollspy navigation. In fact, let me start working on it now.

# living with the news

Jun 2, 2017

I both love and hate reading the news; I like to stay informed, but the news often pisses me off. Even something as interesting as Sen. Al Franken being interviewed on Comedy Central. The Senator can’t help but act both seriously and funny at the same time, yet the political substance of the interview points out some of the more irritating aspects of Washington politics (I’m thinking here about [a recent interview with Sen. Franken by Trevor Noah](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/al-franken-daily-show_us_59310c8ae4b0c242ca22b661)). Here’s a quote: “I like Ted Cruz probably more than most of my colleagues in the Senate…and I hate Ted Cruz.” Funny and cutting at the same time.

My other blog ([pulamusic.com](http://www.pulamusic.com/)) allows me to comment directly on the news while also posting about music and whatever else hits me in the moment. So far I have also commented on a few Sun Ra compositions and printed some lyric transcriptions of Fela tunes. As long as the musical commentary continues I feel comfortable producing a wide-ranging blog. And while this current blog is meant to be pure freewriting, I won’t mind if the two blogs overlap thematically. As long as this blog remains freewritten I’ll be cool with it.

Blogging is a curious way of writing. I publish these posts knowing that nearly no one is going to read them. In fact, with the freewriting blog I am counting on nobody running across it. Publishing this blog is more about adding that public tension to an extended writing exercise that is essentially private; the public aspect pressures me to keep going while the private nature of the blog helps me to improve my writing.

The blog also helps me with my coding. While I am far from being able to write my own JavaScript code, I know enough to be able to search and copy code to achieve modest results. What I should do, along the way, is keep track of the little coding tricks I have learned along the way, since each example may be reusable at some point. Certainly I can re-visit any of the JavaScript exercises associated with the FreeCodeCamp front-end certification.

I recently figured out how to paginate this current blog, saving me from a seemingly endless front page. It would be nice, as well, to figure out a way to add a blog archive to a sidebar, much like WordPress does. I’ll have to search that one as well. A simple Google search led me to the code for the pagination (it was in the Jekyll documentation as well, but not as clearly explained as the dude I found on GitHub). The same search strategy may help me to create a sidebar, or it may not. FreeCodeCamp always suggests a Read-Search-Ask strategy. I read and search, but I haven’t yet had to ask for help on a public forum.

In the end, coding is just another aspect of my professional skill set, just like writing, teaching, and playing music. Digital Humanities is where it’s at.

# playing with jQuery

Jun 2, 2017

jQuery is so much easier than JavaScript I wonder what the advantage of full-blown JavaScript is. I know that jQuery is just a subset of JavaScript, but it is so useful it may cover everything I need from JavaScript for now. If I concentrate my efforts on jQuery, then, I may make better progress with coding in general. JavaScript is the big hangup for me.

And as I wrote in a previous post, maybe I should put JavaScript on the back burner for now. In addition to jQuery I could reacquaint myself with Python. I have a feeling that Python’s simplicity, combined with jQuery, ought to add up to a pretty powerful coding package. Of course, Ruby would be more helpful in learning how to play around with Jekyll, but let me not bite off more than I can chew. Stick with jQuery for now.

I would like, though, to create a sidebar on my Jekyll page. I like the sidebar in WordPress, but I also love the simplicity of Jekyll. Just a couple of items in a sidebar would really be cool. I need to look at the Jekyll documentation regarding themes and navigation to see if I can tweak the site. Always remember to read-search-ask.

It’s some hours later and I have just finished driving the kid to a movie. I’m alone again tonight since she is sleeping over at her friend’s house. I’d love to go get some beer, but I am going to have to drive later.

I wrote a long email to VJ yesterday, and as I expected, no response. I swear the woman is emotionally constipated.

This has me distracted. I’m going to post this and start again with the writing tomorrow.

# I am a chauffeur

Jun 3, 2017

I swear, some days my only interaction with the kid is to drive her to her appointments and her friends’ houses. On days like this I feel like my life isn’t my own. I suppose this is a common experience of parenthood, but that doesn’t make me feel any less used. What am I going to do, say no? By driving the kid around at least I know she isn’t taking a chance on riding with someone else.

Now that I am done driving for a while I have some time to do my own work. One of these days I need to take my computer over to the public library and try writing there. Libraries always inspire me to be productive. The best library situation, of course, was when I had a lockable study carrel at the UMass library during graduate school. Too bad they don’t extend library privileges to alumni. I would make the trek to UMass regularly if I could still conveniently use the library.

Instead, I am going to spend another day blogging and working on my coding skills. I know JavaScript is kicking my ass, but every little bit helps. One of these days I am going to find myself writing JavaScript with some confidence. For now, though, it is still a mystery to me. jQuery is a bit easier to understand, so for now I will focus on that. A lot of the functionality of jQuery is included in Bootstrap, so that is one way to start using it.

I want to try using tabbed navigation within a page. That would be one way to write a single-page site with multiple sections. That or a parallax-scrolling page. Or just a big-ass page with a scrollspy navigation menu. In fact, let me start working on that today. My portfolio site on GitHub pages would be the best place to do that. I don’t like what I have up at the moment, so I need to begin working on replacing it. The portfolio page has got to be the slickest site I have.

And again, let me comment on the usefulness of writing this current blog. My ability to pump out 500 words has improved greatly, allowing me to write with few stops and even fewer edits (in fact, I just edited a couple of things in this current sentence). I need to begin practicing the use of looping and any other strategies that will help me to improve upon my ability to get words onto the screen. What I have now, with this entire blog, is more than 80 pages of text, some very short, and many at around the 500 word mark. If those posts were thematically related I could easily edit and re-write them into one cohesive narrative.

In fact, one thing I may consider doing is purging the blog of unnecessary posts such as those where I am just testing out Markdown features or trying to “push out” another post that wasn’t being rendered (a useless exercise, by the way). I wouldn’t necessarily want to re-write the posts that I have written so far, but if I can go back through the posts I have published so far I might be able to expand upon them in new posts. In the end, I need to go through each post to copy and paste similar text into single-file essays.

Enough writing for now. Let me begin to work on an improved portfolio page.

(I’ve hit the 600 word mark today without breaking a sweat. More later.)

# my coding portfolio

Jun 3, 2017

I have just spent some time creating test pages for a new portfolio site. I think the vertical scrollspy page is going to be the cleanest. What I need to do with it is clean up the colors and text and begin adding my own content. The question, I think, is whether I should stick with the current portfolio outline - about, teaching, scholarship, music - or should I simplify. I don’t really need to add a section for coding since the entire portfolio is essentially one coding portfolio. As long as I use a number of tricks and features I have learned along the way it should be cool. I need to remember to include a modal, the Sun Ra quote generator, and any other trick I can dredge up from my reusable code folder. I don’t want to create an including-the-kitchen-sink kind of page, but I do need to show off the range of my coding abilities.

In addition, the portfolio should show off my site design and writing skills. I should really go through the entire web design process in order to make sure the site is dead clear. This means I may need to ask someone to play with the site and give me feedback. I’m sure Beazle will help me with that. In fact, maybe I should set a time goal of August for finishing a portfolio site so I can get multiple people to look at it while we are all visiting mom. It may be the only time I’ll have a sizable captive audience who I assume will be willing to help. It may also help my family to better understand what it is I do.

One of the ways I look at coding is as a means of creating frameworks for publishing my writing. Writing, in this case, is really everything I do: teaching is writing, music is writing, blogging…every professional activity I do can be boiled down to some type of writing. This is another reason why freewriting is so important to my overall professional skill set - improving my ability to write quickly will improve my overall productivity. I would love to be able to stress a bit less about creating teaching materials for my classes. That’s an activity that seems to take up a good portion of my working time when I am in the middle of teaching a new class. I will look forward to re-teaching the American history classes, though, given that I already have a good collection of substantial PowerPoint presentations for each chapter of Eric Foner’s Give Me Liberty! texts.

And speaking of these teaching materials, it will now be easy to include representative PowerPoint presentations in my online portfolio since I finally figured out how to embed them using Google Docs. I will need to edit the presentations since embedded videos don’t work well within the PowerPoints, but that’s not difficult. Any materials I post with regard to my American history courses need to be supplemented with links to the Crash Course U.S. History videos since Crash Course seems to have used Foner’s texts as their reference material (I should write to the Crash Course people to confirm that this is the case.).

Let me get to it.

# local hosting

Jun 3, 2017

I just finally figured out how to use MAMP in order to locally host a content management system (CMS). I just installed a new Drupal site, and now I am faced with learning how to use Drupal. I can’t say it is as intuitive as WordPress, though I’ll bet I can get it up and running quickly. I’m excited about using MAMP, though. I should also be able to run a local version of a Moodle site. This will be extremely helpful in being able to develop online course materials.

Ultimately, I want to be able to deploy a Moodle site to the internet so I can include fully developed online teaching materials with my web portfolio. In addition, a Moodle site will make it easier for me to create online homework assignments for my students, again saving me time in the long run once I have the lessons up and running. This may be a better place to use the Crash Course videos rather than showing them in class. Using these videos in class is helpful when my classes have been two hours long - the videos reinforce what I am teaching from the textbook. For shorter (normal length) classes, the videos would be better used as homework, though.

Web development is certainly a very diverse set of skills, requiring knowledge of a number of different coding languages and protocols. MAMP is an Apache/PHP/SQL server, which is all new to me. At least I have been able to successfully navigate it once. Moodle may take a bit more time (I tried setting it up, but the mySQL server won’t start, saying it is being used by another program. Grrr.). In any case, it is a new technology for me.

This is my third post for today, bringing my daily word count up to c.1500 (assuming I hit the 500 word mark with this post). I don’t think I should be shooting for that much text per day, but I certainly don’t mind if I have the energy to produce more than the minimum 500 words per day. Two days ago, for instance, I wrote more than 2000 words in four posts, but the next day produced only about 700 words. I should stick with the 500 word minimum and simply be satisfied if I produce more. The idea, in the end, is to write at a steady pace. Forcing myself to write too much will wear me out too quickly. One of my goals with this blog, after all, is to maintain a daily writing practice for a year or more. An ultimate goal, of course, would be to maintain a regular writing practice that is not bound by the one-year goal. Just keep writing.

And again, I don’t want to pressure myself to do anything more than freewrite for now, but I should be looking toward creating at least some thematic consistency among the posts. I do tend to hit the same categories over and over (coding, writing, teaching, life), but I’m not developing ideas from one post to the next. Maybe all I need is a little planning in order to write more consistently across posts. Yeah, let me do that with my next post: a little brainstorming and outlining. Yeah, that’s it.

Onward.

teaching materials

Jun 4, 2017

I just created and posted a page with links to my [PowerPoint presentations from my American history classes](https://pulamusic.github.io/PowerPointSlides.html) on my GitHub portfolio site. This is a first step in putting my teaching materials online. I should probably also post the syllabi for the classes, but let me take this one step at a time.

The teaching page for my GitHub portfolio looks like a mess now. I need a better design for the entire portfolio site. I originally created this portfolio as a temporary site, so I did envision replacing the site. I like the typography I have chosen, for the most part, but the pages need to be better organized into sections. The home page really needs to be divided up into column-delimited sections with a summary of what one will find on each page. It also needs to have an About section with a short biography and a link to my CV. In fact, the home page should be the About section since the entire site is meant to be about me.

Here’s an outline for the portfolio site that may help me to re-think the site as a whole:

1. Home page
   * biography
   * CV
   * summary of other pages
2. Teaching
   * syllabi
   * online teaching materials
   * other teaching materials
3. Scholarship
   * dissertation
   * list of conference presentations
   * links to pages of interest (e.g., Sun Ra and Fela)
4. Music
   * sound files
   * scores

This is just a rough outline. I think the first thing to tackle is the home page. I have the beginning of a biography as it is, but I need to add the page summaries.

Let me just sit with these ideas for a bit. I really should wire-frame the pages in order to get the layout tight. In fact, that will be my next step.

One of the things I have never been good at academically is creating a set of goals and objectives before I begin to plan a syllabus or a site. This could be be done at the same time as the wire-framing, but goals and objectives are crucial to creating a simple yet full-featured site. Additionally I need to figure out who it is I am writing my portfolio for. Ultimately I would like to be able to include a link to the portfolio in any cover letters I send out with my job applications. An online portfolio may help me to stand out.

One link that does not need to be included on the portfolio site is for my freewriting blog. This blog is personal. In addition, there are some things in the freewriting blog that would be disastrous for a potential employer to read. The pulamusic.com blog is a more appropriate, on-topic site to link to on my portfolio page. In fact, I need to remove all links to the freewriting blog so that potential employers do not stumble upon it.

# Sun Ra

Jun 4, 2017

Sun Ra is one of those musicians you either love or hate. I love most of his music - sometimes it’s a little too sloppy for my taste - but I really dig the person. Sun Ra was one of the primary intellectuals of the Black Arts Movement according to Amiri Baraka (arguable the central intellectual of the BAM). I would have loved to have met the dude.

One of the more fascinating aspects of Sun Ra is that he did not consider himself to be primarily a musician - in short, he called himself a teacher who wrote and played music. He would have been a fascinating teacher. He once taught a class at UC Berkeley, handing out a syllabus that required the students to find the reading materials in the library. When the students complained that most of the materials were not in the library, his response was that that was the point of having them search for the materials - why weren’t they in the library in the first place?

Currently, I am listening to Heliocentric Worlds, vol. 1. I’d love to know how Sun Ra structured his free improvs. There is too much consistency among the various musicians for there to be no direction at all. Certainly the music isn’t scored out, but there must be some way the musicians are directed. The free passages have varied textures, with individual musicians and sections of musicians dropping in and out like there is a conductor. If it weren’t for the fact that Sun Ra is playing the keyboards throughout, I might have imagined that he was conducting.

I find this idea of free jazz composition to be fascinating. I really got some insight into how free improv can be structured from reading an interview with Marion Brown about his composition Afternoon of a Georgia Faun. Brown organized the varied sections of the piece in terms of wind and water sounds, wood and metal instruments, as well as each musician’s primary, secondary, and tertiary instruments. Anthony Braxton, for instance, played saxophone as his primary instrument, flute and bass clarinet as secondary (doubling) instruments, and various incidental percussion instruments as the tertiary instruments. The entire composition has a consistent structure to it even while Brown didn’t write a “score.”

In fact, my position is that Brown certainly did write a score, he just didn’t write the equivalent of a European art music score. The same kind of open composition is what fascinates me the most about Sun Ra’s compositions. Certainly a composition like “El is a Sound of Joy” has a more standard big band feel to it - it definitely was scored out at some point…or at least that’s the way it sounds to me. That composition has some beautiful counterpoint and some thick chords in the horn sections. It also has one of the most swinging piano solos I have heard Sun Ra play.

I can feel that I am getting closer to resuming my musical practice. I’m getting excited about music again.

# I feel like writing

Jun 4, 2017

The major benefit I have noticed in producing this freewriting blog is that I want to write more often. This is now my third post of the day, and I am not struggling to find motivation. I have some free time, and so I am drawn to writing. The 500 word goal feels eminently doable - not too long, but just long enough to feel satisfying. Usually I am able to keep writing until I’m done, though just now I feel a bit distracted.

I was just re-reading part of The Craft of Writing with regard to drafting. The authors recommend freewriting a first draft with the assumption that most of the text will not survive in that state. I have found that when I freewrite sections of my academic writing, most of the freewritten text makes it into the final draft. The authors of The Craft of Writing seem to suggest that multiple revisions is the way to go for substantive writing. I agree, and yet a good deal of my dissertation is really just second draft text.

That being said, I do not wish to repeat the experience I had writing my diss. Don’t get me wrong, I loved most of the process, but at the time I was still writing in a slow, sentence-by-sentence fashion, eking out my words like a dentist pulling teeth. Freewriting, on the other hand, feels much more natural. In fact, one of the issues I have with writing is that I can’t possibly write as quickly as I can speak. When I speak the words come right out. Writing - whether it is typing or writing by hand - is a naturally slower process. I wish I could simply forget about the rules of grammar and syntax as I write, as that would make things faster. This freewriting blog, though, has greatly improved the flow of my writing.

This blog has also re-introduced me to the idea of writing for the sake of writing. Writing, for me, has long been a utilitarian skill: something to use for academic work, and not much more. Writing for the sake of writing is more about having fun and exploring some ideas. Even now, I should go back and revise the last sentence - I don’t like it - but I won’t. Freewriting is about moving forward no matter what; it’s about getting the words down.

I really should be writing this blog using MS Word. If I plan to re-write any of it in the future I will need to have it in some sort of printable form. Atom doesn’t have a print function. I like Atom’s simplicity, but it is built for coding, not writing. In the end, I am a writer in the making rather than a diehard code geek. I do need to use Atom to create the Markdown files for the blog, but I could easily copy-and-paste from Word files. As it is, if I want to revise any of the blog text I have written so far I will need to copy the text, file by file, into Word.

Maybe one of my goals with this blog should be to produce first draft text for a book-length project. That would require a little bit of planning, but, as I am finding, producing the raw text is just a matter of pumping out a little at a time. The trick is going to be finding a subject worth writing about. And yet again, that subject may already be there in what I have written so far. I know it’s a cliche, but if writing is about finding out what I think, I may already have stumbled upon an idea worth writing about. Time to begin re-reading the blog posts to see if there is a nugget or two in there, breaking from my practice of writing and moving on.

Time to start milking this process.

# the kid and school

Jun 5, 2017

So basically the kid is headed toward dropping out of school. This is disturbing, to say the least. We are trying to get her to pay attention to the credit rehabilitation program she is in now, but even this seems to get her down. Frankly, I have no idea what to do. She is drowning. and I am stuck on shore. One of the suggestions on the table is that she enroll in the Gateway to College program. I think this is a terrible idea since the Gateway program includes college-level classes. The kid’s butt is being kicked by high school at the moment.

This is too depressing to continue with this line of thought. We do need to figure something out, though.

Writing is a kind of cathartic exercise, but I do find that I pull back when I hit on an emotional issue. I should be able to write out my thoughts with regard to the kid, drilling down on the problem so as to bring all my ideas to light. Something about personal issues keeps me from putting too much out there.

And I think that VJ is emotionally constipated. I’m just as shut down in many ways.

But back to writing. I’ve just been looking at John Van Maanen’s book Tales From the Field: On Writing Ethnography to get some ideas for helping my writing move along. One of the concepts that has stuck with me is what is now called autoethnography (Van Maanen calls it impressionist ethnographic writing). The idea is that since one’s presence within a cultural group necessarily affects the group, the most honest way to approach ethnographic writing is to write about one’s own experience. If I had been writing this blog while we were in Carriacou, for instance, I would have simply written the story of my experiences on the island; the ethnography grows out of my writing on the subject I know best.

In any event, I need to re-read Van Maanen’s book to get some sense of how I can deepen my writing. Freewriting is bringing me along in terms of being able to pump out text, but at some point I need to have some direction other than what flits through my head while I type. Some kind of autoethnographic focus would help to bring some substance to my daily freewriting.

This also brings up the subject of next steps where my freewriting is concerned. Freewriting by itself only produces raw text. At some point the text needs to be revised. One way to accomplish this would be to blog revised text developed from this freewriting blog. In order to do that, though, I will need to gain more focus in what I am freewriting about. I can’t just take any old writing and polish it up - there needs to be some thematic consistency. So far I have written about writing, coding, and life, none of which I have tackled with any depth. Or maybe my writing is more depthful than I think (not).

In any event, at some point down the line I need to work on revising. For now, though, just keep pumping out the freewritten text.

# the writing bug

Jun 5, 2017

One thing I have noticed with regard to this freewriting blog, as I think I have written before, is that the more I write the more I want to write. Just today I had to keep myself from producing a second post until later in the afternoon. The last post I wrote was somewhere between 500-600 words, and I felt like I could keep going. Now that I am back at it, the words are coming pretty quickly.

In a sense, this entire blog is an ethnographic study of how I am seeking to become a better writer. I need to be able to produce text quickly, and I need to be able to discard that text if need be. This is something I found with musical composition - I need to be willing to discard an idea and start over. When I first began to compose the process was so laborious I would keep working at something even if I knew it was crap. The same holds true with writing - I need to be willing to get rid of text that leads nowhere.

That being said, one of the informal rules of this blog is that I don’t discard anything. Freewriting is about putting down ideas as they come, no editing involved. When I do eventually move beyond the freewriting stage (not soon), I will then take the freewritten text and mine it for gold. Until then, I need to just keep pumping out the words.

All of the writing and coding I do is reminding me that I need to reestablish my musical practice. At the very least I need to practice the guitar, but I should also re-start my compositional practice. A while ago I was working my way through Schoenberg’s Theory of Harmony, and that seemed to be helpful. But really I need to write music, not exercises. I remember once reading about a guy who blogged a new song every day for a year. I should produce something like that. A future blog project, perhaps. I don’t know about writing a song a day - I’m not a songwriter after all - but it would be cool if I could produce some regular lead sheet compositions, possibly with bare bones recordings and occasional midi renderings. I am a musician, after all, and I have ignored that aspect of my professional skill set for far too long.

One thing I would like to do is record myself playing solo guitar so I can include the audio files in my portfolio site. I already have some sound files of group performances of some of my tunes, but I don’t have anything that highlights my skill as a guitarist…or as a singer, for that matter. I need to be able to highlight the diversity of my skills such that I can justify to potential employers my wide range of professional skills. In essence, I am an academic, a musician, and a budding web developer. All of these skills need to be present in my portfolio, whether they are highlighted on individual pages, or, as is the case with coding, are demonstrated simply by the presentation of a site (I may need to make it clear that I designed and created the site rather than hiring out to someone). The portfolio site is a representation of my entire package of professional skills and accomplishments.

Let me ruminate on this for a while. Musical practice is crucially important to my professional skill set, but I seem to use up a lot of my creative energy learning to code. Let me not ignore the thing that makes me a musical academic rather than just an academic.

writing on a rainy day

Jun 6, 2017

Today is a rainy day, and I am using that as an excuse to not go anywhere. I don’t know why I would need an excuse, though - I hardly go anywhere as it is. In any event, here I am at the keyboard again.

I was poking through Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style* this morning, just refreshing my mind on a few writing conventions. A book like this is really about how to best edit one’s writing, but my freewriting can also improve by simply increasing my understanding of sentence structure and punctuation. The way I feel about this book with regard to freewriting is similar to the way Charlie Parker once described how to improvise: you learn scales and chords, practice for years, but when it is time to play you forget all that shit and just blow (I’m paraphrasing very loosely, of course). With Strunk and White it is good to learn some writing best practices, but when freewriting it is best to forget the details of what you have learned.

That being said, I really do have a fairly limited repertoire of sentence structures while I am freewriting. I would like to improve on this, bearing in mind, of course, that anything I write can be revised later. As much as I can get right the first time, though, the better.

I’ve also been looking at YouTube videos today of various people teaching Soukous and Afrobeat guitar parts (funny. The spell check function for Atom recognizes the word Soukous, but not Afrobeat). It’s amazing how much good and bad stuff is out there. One guy really ran down the proper right hand technique for the seben part of Soukous such that I now feel confident I can practice it on my own. Another guy played his guitar parts along with a recording of Fela’s music, but his guitar was out of tune with the recording. Very irritating indeed.

Another guy still did a series of fascinating transcriptions of Fela’s compositions, presenting them as screencasts while playing various individual instruments and sections of instruments on Sibelius. I could easily do a screencast of “Mr. Follow Follow” - I have the transcription in Finale. I suppose the real benefit, though, is in doing the actual transcription. I really should get back to charting out some of these tunes. I like that I was able to get every instrument with my transcription of “Mr. Follow Follow.” At the very least I should transcribe the rhythm section parts.

Thinking about my musical practice there are several areas I need to work on:

1. Musicianship
   * ear training
   * sight singing
   * tonal hearing
   * transcription \* reading
   * scores
   * lead sheets \* piano
2. Instrumental technique
   * guitar
3. Repertoire
   * guitar
4. Composition

I need to somehow combine this list of skills into one or two daily practice activities so I don’t get overwhelmed by it all. My last spell of practicing had me memorizing a bunch of chord solos. I need to get back to that as well as getting back to transcribing and composing.

Let me think on this for a bit.

musical practice

Jun 6, 2017

I need to reestablish my musical practice, but I don’t want to over-plan this. Just a few things to practice at a time. I can start by refreshing my memory about the chord solos I had been working on some months ago. I had most of them memorized before so it shouldn’t take much effort to get them up to the development stage. I should also reacquaint myself with the walking bass line stuff I had been working on.

And let me not get too ahead of myself. Here’s a potential progression for my practice routine:

1. Re-learn chord solos and work on developing them to performance-ready status.
2. Re-learn the walking bass lines I had been working on. Begin to transpose lines into different keys.
3. Reacquaint myself with Bruce Arnold’s key note recognition sound files.
4. Re-start my study of Schoenberg’s *Theory of Harmony*.
5. Re-start my piano study of Bartok’s *Mikrokosmos*.

This seems like a lot, but the first two will go fast. Well, maybe not fast, but it shouldn’t take much time to have the tunes memorized again. Just a few months ago I was playing all the chord solos and some of the bass lines from memory. Once they are memorized I can work slowly and steadily on developing them (really just playing them over and over for some time).

Arnold’s key note exercises should also be fairly quick to get back in the groove. My memory is that I had gotten good at the major keys and was struggling along with the minor keys. I don’t know why the minor keys are more difficult than the major keys, but they are for me. For some reason I have a hard time hearing the 4th degree in a minor key.

One thing I need to guard against is letting my musical practice eclipse any writing I do (and vice versa). Writing is one of my core professional skills, and probably the one I avoid the most. This freewriting blog is really helping me to break that bad non-writing habit. At some point the writing needs to become more focused on my academic work, but for now I am comfortable with the way this blog is going. I find that as I go along my freewriting sessions are quicker and more productive. I’m beginning to find some focus behind this seemingly un-focused writing.

I nearly just wrote something about my “authorial voice.” Not only does that term sound snooty, but I can’t say I really know what it means. If it means that I am developing a sense of comfort with my voice as a writer…I still don’t know what that means. A quick Google search doesn’t really answer the question for me. I suppose it just refers to my particular style as a writer - a style that is unmistakably mine. This is another advantage of freewriting, I suppose: I am learning to relax and write in my own inimitable style. If that’s what an authorial voice is, then so be it.

# playing with code

Jun 7, 2017

I’ve been playing with jQuery and CSS a bit in CodePen. Let me see if I can embed the Pen in this page.

Yes, it works! Way cool. This would be a good way to blog about code, embedding a Pen in the page. I’ll have to think about this one. Coding is one of those things where I’m beginning to understand it, but I still struggle to find ways to make it relevant in my own work. This embedded Pen includes some jQuery/CSS trickery to either show something that is hidden or to change the formatting of a particular block of code. I’ll have to figure out, at some point, how this can be used in my pages.

Really, it is the portfolio site that needs to have some bells and whistles, paying particular attention to the index page. I could just add my Sun Ra modal or the Sun Ra quote generator to the page rather than linking to them on the music page. In fact, let me do something about that as soon as I’m done with this post.

This morning has been a bit difficult to start writing, but I’m hitting some flow now. The trick to freewriting, of course, is to just keep going. If I halt a little bit here and there, no problem. Otherwise, just keep going.

I’m beginning to understand jQuery enough to write my own code rather than just copy-and-paste from w3Schools.com or from the Bootstrap website. I’m the kind of person who needs to understand what I can do with code rather than simply learning in the abstract. I can hang with abstract, but I need to know why something is useful. jQuery is very cool, but unless I can keep learning the practical side of using it I will likely lose interest. Coding is only cool to me as long as I can use it to create. I just need to figure out what it is I want to create.

Freewriting should help me to sort out some of these issues. Freewriting is the part of the process where I begin to figure out what it is I am thinking about something. I start with nothing, and in the process of putting words down I range through some ideas, hopefully hitting on something juicy. Eventually, when I have enough text down, I can print it out and begin to edit. For now, though, I am going to remain committed to producing text through freewriting.

One thing to look forward to is the establishment of daily writing practice beyond just pumping out 500 words a day. I should continue with the 500 word goal, but also spend some time each day revising. This could be early morning stuff so that I’m done early.

Let me think on this one some more. Writing is one part of my professional skill set that brings me more anxiety than pleasure. I have a bad habit of writing as if someone is reading it while I write. I read a quote from Margaret Atwood yesterday where she said that she writes for nobody when she is working - she writes as if what she writes will never be read, even by her. The trick is to come back to it later, when it is nearly forgotten, and treat it as wood ready to be carved, so to speak. I like to whittle, so this is a nice metaphor. A new piece of wood needs to be carved up a bit before it begins to reveal what it will be. Writing is the same.

# writing some more

Jun 7, 2017

Writing this blog is therapy for me. I guess that’s why I want to write more just a short time after finishing my last post. I don’t have anything particular to say, but I’m feeling some anxiety around money and the impending divorce so I thought I would put down some thoughts.

And now my head is empty. Or, rather, my thoughts are so many and so jumbled that I really can’t think straight. Let me see if I can freewrite my way out of this funk.

Blah blah, I don’t know what to write. The purpose of freewriting is to figure out what it is I think about a particular subject, but when I have no subject other than freewriting, the way forward can be difficult. Of course, the answer is to just keep moving. But movement also implies that I have somewhere to go. Currently I have nowhere to go.

I’m angry with VJ because she won’t speak with me, but paradoxically she won’t speak to me because I am angry. I don’t know any way out of this because I don’t like to hide my feelings. One of the things that exasperates me the most about VJ is that she pretends to be calm, yet bad-mouths me to others. I don’t know how she doesn’t see this as dishonest. When I have a problem with someone I speak directly to that person. I may yell or use profanity, but I don’t walk about pretending I am not angry. VJ’s passive aggressiveness feels dishonest to me, and that dishonesty drives me to distraction. But she won’t listen, and she won’t respond to me, at least not in a way that satisfies me.

In the end I will need to let go of my anger, but I have no mechanism for resolving it. I wish I could set up my punching bag. That would help a lot. I need some kind of cathartic fix. Swearing feels good in the moment, but I usually regret it later.

This is getting me nowhere. Let me post this and write more later.

# later in the afternoon

Jun 7, 2017

So now it’s later in the day. Let me see if I have more energy for writing now. Earlier I seemed to be blocked. Let’s hope I have an easier time this time around.

At some point in my career I need to pay more attention to improvisation. This could be part of my transcription and ear training practice. It would be good if I can re-start the Wes Montgomery transcription project I started at one point. In fact, I should learn Montgomery tunes without writing down the transcription at first. In the past I have gotten so wrapped up in notating a transcription that I didn’t bother to learn the tune in question. That can’t happen again. I would rather be able to play along with a tune than have the transcription written out.

That being said, I also need to transcribe Fela’s and Sun Ra’s compositions as scores. I did a transcription of “Mr. Follow Follow” that I included in the dissertation, but really I should do more. I have a collection of Fela’s lyrics that I can post online, and it would be good to include musical transcriptions as well. There is a really interesting guy on YouTube who runs through the Sibelius scores of a number of Fela transcriptions he has done. He even transcribed the alto say improv at the beginning of “Gentleman.” I can easily do the same. Or rather, once having transcribed the tunes I can easily create a screen-cast of my commentary. I like the way the guy was able to solo instruments as well as play smaller groups of tracks to get the sense of the instruments’ interplay. Fela’s music is all about rhythm and counterpoint.

So my writing is much smoother now. Earlier this afternoon I couldn’t get my head clear enough to write anything of consequence. The benefits of chilling out a bit.

I just had a thought with regard to the benefits of freewriting to my overall development as a writer. Kenny Werner’s book Effortless Mastery runs down a bunch of thoughts on how to chill out and practice music for fluency. The same principles can easily be applied to writing. Essentially, Werner contends that the ego gets in our way, tripping us up and adding anxiety to the process of playing music. I haven’t read the whole book, but it includes a CD for meditation, which should give me some idea as to his approach. I’m not big on the idea of meditation, but if it helps I will try it.

Additionally, I need to figure out a way to move beyond simple freewriting within my writing practice. I would like to be able to maintain this blog for at least a year, but at some point I also need to practice revising freewritten text. As I have written before, it may be best for me to draft these posts in MS Word, making them more accessible to me when time for revision comes. I think for now, though, I will stick to the procedure I have: draft and publish blog posts using a text editor. Atom doesn’t have the writer-friendly functionality of MS Word, but it is a simple thing to bang out a post and upload it to GitHub. Let me not mess with a system that works well for me now. I simply need to stay focused on moving ahead.

woke up late

Jun 8, 2017

I woke up very early this morning to find that the kid was on her way to school. That’s a surprise. I went back to bed only to wake up late this morning. Bummer. A good portion of the day is gone.

Let me just prattle on a bit about coding. I finally worked out a few things in jQuery yesterday, animating divs and adding classes to elements with button clicks. I felt like I finally understood something even if it is dead simple code. I now have a sense that I can work my way through simple jQuery. I still don’t feel confident with JavaScript, but that will eventually come to me as long as I keep it on simmer. Eventually all this stuff begins to make sense.

That being said, I still wonder if I should go back to learning Python; its syntax is simpler than JavaScript, and I have a sense that its algorithmic way of working with data will be that much more clear. At least I think so. I may be wrong. In any event, I really do need some sort of simple coding system to create interactive sites. I would like for my portfolio site, in particular, to have all the bells and whistles I can muster; not so that it is too much, but some elegant way of adding some wow to the site. Maybe a photo carousel on the first page, in the jumbotron. I’ll need to find a few photo I want to feature and re-size them to fit a small carousel.

I’m having trouble maintaining my focus just now. The best thing I can do to get unstuck is to keep my fingers moving on the keyboard. Don’t stop. This kind of writing reminds me of how I get back into running shape after not doing it for a long time. I start by walking with a little bit of running interspersed. As long as I do it regularly the periods of running become longer, and the walking becomes shorter. I haven’t been in that kind of habit with exercise for quite some time, but I feel like my freewriting is doing this for my writing as a whole. I run more than I walk at the keyboard.

Speaking of keyboards, I need to get back to practicing some basic piano at some point. Piano helps my musicianship in general since its notes are so logically arranged. It also helps to understand the range of instruments in a complex score. In addition, if I am ever going to teach in a music department I need to be able to play basic piano parts in class.

So here is another outline of what I need to practice in my upcoming practice routine:

1. Guitar
   * chord solos
   * walking bass lines
2. Piano
   * Bartok’s *Mikrokosmos*
   * Haerle’s book on jazz chords
3. Ear training
   * Arnold’s books and CDs

This is a lot, so I will need to find a way to pare it down. The chord solos and bass lines shouldn’t be too difficult as I am merely reacquainting myself with the material and working on developing it to performance-ready status. The ear training doesn’t need to be a big deal either. I think the piano is going to be the only thing that requires some concentration and energy. And yet again, I have played the piano some in the past, so a good deal of my piano practice will simply be about re-gaining skills I have let atrophy.

Practice sucks, but I love the results.

# Hawaii Five-0

Jun 9, 2017

I have been in a funk lately, watching episodes of Hawaii Five-0 non-stop. I think I’m more attracted to the idea of living in Hawaii than anything. I mean, the show is very badly written, and it has ruined two very interesting actors for me: Grace Park and Daniel Dae-Kim. Both of these actors have had fascinating characters on other shows: Park played Boomer on the remake of Battlestar Gallactica and Kim played one of the more fascinating characters on the show Lost (I’m forgetting his character’s name). For some reason, though, I can’t stop watching Hawaii Five-0. Places like Hawaii and Alaska appeal to me because they are so far away from here. I would love to be able to go somewhere and begin my life over again. Part of me hopes I get a job a long way from here.

But I don’t want to miss any part of Zanaya growing up. I suppose Valerie and I could discuss Zanaya coming with me if I had to move somewhere. No matter what, though, I need out of the situation I am in. I am broke, unemployed, and depressed with no prospects on the horizon. Life feels like a big shit sandwich just now, and I wish I could at least see my way out of it.

Let me change the subject - writing about my life is just depression compounded upon depression. Let me write a bit about coding. I have re-started learning Python a bit since yesterday. It is a shit-simple programming language that I have a feeling will be very useful, but for now I have no idea how server-side programs like Python can be used to create websites. At least with JavaScript and jQuery I know how to create and link to .js files. I’m not sure of the procedures for including .py files. Maybe the python.com site has something in its documentation.

My ultimate goal with my coding skills is to be able to create websites that help me with my work, both as a showcase for my skills as well as a repository for my teaching materials. It would be nice to have one central place on the internet that I can use for teaching and homework assignments. For this reason I do need to get Moodle set up on the internet. Moodle is tailor made for online teaching, so it would be nice to set up something that I can re-use. It could be useful especially for student assignments. Let me make sure I can sort out my Moodle site on MAMP first, and then I can think about finding a web service provider who can upload the site for me.

What I really need to do is to start with plans for my online classes. I have several books on creating online teaching materials, and I know that they recommend creating a highly planned outline of each class, laying out goals and objectives before settling on teaching materials. I have never been able to be that organized when it comes to creating my classes. I usually decide on the readings and then divide up the semester according to the outline of the book. Just once I would like to do a class right. I have a feeling my classes would be more dynamically complete if I were able to stick to a proper course outline procedure. In the end, it’s all about teaching.

# divorce sucks

Jun 10, 2017

I know it’s a cliche, but divorce sucks. I feel like I’m getting raked over the coals by the woman who used to say she loved me. Now the issue is that she has hired a lawyer to go over the divorce mediation agreement, and I can’t afford to hire a lawyer to watch over my interests. I feel like I’m being fucked over yet again because I am without resources. Every time I think of VJ now I feel the word bitch bubbling up from below. I can’t help but think that this is going to suck even worse as it goes along - the real hurt hasn’t arrived yet.

Let me change the subject. Divorce is sucking the life out of me. I’d rather write about writing or coding. Coding is one of those things that I understand on a micro level, but I don’t yet have a full grasp of the macro. I need to make a long-term commitment to learning JavaScript, but it has been so difficult it is becoming frustrating. I think for a while I might put it aside and concentrate a bit on Python. It’s supposed to be a simpler language to learn. Simplicity would help, but I also need to figure out how Python is used in creating interactive websites. If I can’t ultimately do something creative with it then it is of no use to me. I’ve begun to get a grasp on jQuery, so I can continue to fiddle with that, but I have a feeling that jQuery has its limits. HTML and CSS are easy to understand, though I have a feeling that CSS is much more complex than I have grasped yet. But it’s the interactive part of creating websites that I need to work on the most.

Also, with regard to my writing, it is the production of pages that I need to work on - and I am doing so. This freewriting blog has me at the keyboard every day, pumping out text that could be revised if I wanted to. But again, revision is not really my plan just now. I’ve finally become comfortable to the 500-600 word post size, but I need to become even more comfortable. Ultimately, it would be cool if I could produce 800-1000 words a day, and then revise. That would really drive my writing along.

But it’s more than just text length that I need to pay attention to. I need to be able to fully revise my writing, not just change a few things and fix typos. I have found that I tend to repeat myself in this blog - or rather, to put it in a more positive way, I return to the same themes from post to post. What would be good at some point is if I can combine a bunch of posts into one larger text, tossing out redundancy and expanding on what I have. Several rounds of revision are needed, though, yet again, I am more concerned just now with producing text. I don’t care so much just now if I even re-read what I have written. So far I am just writing and moving on.

This really needs to be an early morning writing practice. I need to get myself up early, pump out some text, and move on with my day. One of the things I like the most about this blog is that I don’t care about what I have written: I write, post it, and then move on. I have a feeling that this is the best first step in the writing process for me, leaving the revision to some time in the future. Daily freewriting is actually liberating when I think about it this way. It does mean, though, that at some point I will need to take on the monumental task of printing out and revising all this shit. I’m already nearly at 100 posts. Of course, many of these posts can just be tossed, but a number of them may be useful. In any event, this is a project for some time in the future.

musical practice again

Jun 10, 2017

Just to help me think through my musical practice, let me first lay out all of the things I would ideally like to work on.

1. guitar
   * repertoire
   * bass lines
   * chord knowledge
   * scale knowledge
2. piano
   * repertoire
   * scales
   * chords
3. composition
   * compositional study
   * composition
4. musicianship
   * ear training
   * score study
   * reading

A number of these things overlap, and some of them are unnecessary. I don’t really need a piano performance repertoire so much as just a working knowledge of the keyboard. Probably for piano I should just warm up with some scales and chords and then use the instrument for ear training, composition, and score study…for general musicianship. Guitar needs to be the thing that I practice primarily. How about something like this:

1. guitar (1 hr/day)
   * repertoire & bass lines
   * scales & chords
   * comping the blues and rhythm changes
2. musicianship (1 hr/day)
   * basic piano musicianship (scales & chords)
   * ear training CDs
3. compositional study (1 hr/day)

This seems like a lot still. The guitar repertoire and bass lines are something I simply need to refresh and build upon. The chord and scale practice needs to be short and to the point. In fact, let me break it down like this:

1. guitar (2 hr/day)
2. musicianship (1/2 hr/day)
3. compositional study (1/2 hr/day)

I could easily spend three hours working on music, and this does not get me bogged down in the musicianship and compositional study at the expense of my guitar playing. In the end, the one thing that most defines me as a musician is my ability to play the guitar. In the past I have either practiced the guitar the the exclusion of the other aspects of musicianship, or I have focused on musicianship and ignored the guitar. Even worse still, I have often fallen out of the habit of practicing altogether.

Let me post this and think about it a bit. I need to gather the materials together so I have a better idea of what exactly I will be studying.

# coding sucks today

Jun 11, 2017

Some days I enjoy coding: I learn something new and have an “aha!” moment. Other days it feels like pulling teeth. Today is one of those days. Simple jQuery is easy to understand, but more advanced jQuery is nasty, and not in a good way. I have to admit that I am completely lost in the current jQuery tutorial I am working on. Very frustrating indeed.

Let me move on to another topic, since clearly I need a break from coding. The asshole former neighbor is back in the neighborhood, hanging out with people across the street. The only difference now is that I don’t need to hear her so clearly. It used to be right on the steps outside my window, blabbering on and smoking and fighting with her friends and generally making herself a nuisance to all the rest of the neighborhood. Interestingly, when it came time for her to move out her mom helped her to store her things, but then sent her off to live in a homeless shelter. Even her mom can’t stand to have her around.

Now let me move off this topic; I guess I’m in a pissy mood today. In fact, I’m not really in the mood to write, but let me at least write something. One of my goals with this blog, after all, is to write something every day. Let’s see if I can at least make my 500 word minimum.

…ah fuck it. This post will have to do.

# need more words

Jun 13, 2017

This is becoming an obsession, trying to hit my daily word target. I didn’t write anything yesterday - couldn’t be bothered - but today I feel like I need to produce enough for today, yesterday, and the day before when I only wrote c.260 words. I really want to stick to this 500 words-per-day minimum.

That being said, I’ve hit a dry patch with my writing. Maybe it’s not such a great idea to force myself to write when I don’t have much to say. On the other hand, just like with musical composition, I shouldn’t have to wait for inspiration in order to put words down on screen (again, I nearly wrote “words on paper”). In any event, the main purpose of this freewriting blog is to make it easier for me to be able to produce text when I have to. Whether or not I want to is an entirely separate question.

And yet, nothing much is coming to me today. Maybe I should write about something other than writing. I have a Skype interview next week for a job at Berklee, maybe I should write about that. In fact, except for the fact that this in only a part-time gig, this teaching job is one that I have worked toward for years; teaching African American music history at one of the premier music schools in the world. After that, if the gig doesn’t turn into full-time employment, I should have enough juice to trade up to a tenure-track job. I would be very interested, though, in staying at Berklee full-time. I would love to be around that kind of energy again. I could easily find a teacher for lessons in musicianship and/or guitar, making my musicianship that much more a part of my professional skill set.

I really need to get back to working my way through Schoenberg’s Theory of Harmony. I have a feeling that this book is a motherload of musicianship. What I need to do is play all of the exercises at the piano, not just write them and move on. I’m not a big fan of Schoenberg’s music, but I can see through what I have already read of this book that Schoenberg arrived at his serial compositional methods once he had reached the limit of his understanding of the tonal universe of music. I reject the idea that tonal music is played out, though. In fact, serial composition and atonality in general seems to have fallen by the wayside. It may be good for developing unique compositional structures, but much of it just sounds like crap to me.

But some tonal music also sounds like crap to me. I don’t like simplistic. I have no patience for music that is devoid of voice leading. I particularly can’t stand guitar parts that are only root position barre chords. My favorite thing to do in a band is to sit back and rock the voice leading, sticking to three-note chords, for the most part. I like being an anchor with the drums and bass. This is my role in a group: brick-layer. That’s the way to rock it.

posting again

Jun 14, 2017

I actually created this file yesterday, but then I didn’t write anything. Let me pick up today where I might have left off yesterday.

I just watched some great interviews with Joe Walsh and Bill Szymczyc (sp?) talking about some of the albums they worked on together, and Tony Levin talking about his approach to playing on sessions. Levin is a truly humble guy who reads charts but is also adept at crafting both his sound and his parts to fit the composition at hand. Very cool that he started as a classical bassist at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, playing upright gigs with Steve Gadd. Levin is also a compulsive blogger, so his website is particularly fascinating. What a great creative guy.

Joe Walsh is one of my all time guitar heroes, probably for many of the same reasons his playing appeals to anyone. I love that he is able to combine finesse and virtuosity with the same sort of “hit the instrument” ethic of a punk guitarist. What a fantastic musician. Great ears, great chops. Definitely a player to emulate, in the broadest sense of that word.

I have a tendency to not listen carefully to other guitarists, something I should be doing often. I don’t like playing along with albums, while this is exactly the kind of instrumental ear training I ought to be doing regularly. I ought to get back to transcribing music, even if I don’t write most of it down. Being able to play a part as it was originally played on record should really be the cornerstone of my practice as a guitarist. In fact, I can easily qualify that as both ear training and instrumental technique as well as building repertoire and working on my timing and musical memory. Too often when I play with others I am searching my brain to come up with parts when I really should be listening to and emulating the great musicians who came before me. I’ve been too focused on not focusing on anything in particular. This needs to stop. I need to be able to play within certain specific genres.

So here is a list of players and/or groups I think I should be practicing along with:

1. The Meters
2. Wes Montgomery
3. Freddie King
4. Booker T and the MGs

It’s a short list for now, but deep stuff. This is in addition to the chord solo stuff I already have under my fingers. It also means that, for the most part, I need to work on my flat picking chops. I have gotten increasingly comfortable with fingerstyle playing, but that really doesn’t cover the extent to which I want to play the instrument. Even just returning to practicing scales and arpeggios will help. This time around, though, I should intersperse legato playing with the more rhythmic strict-alternate picking.

In any event, I need to fire up the Strat and wail away. The guitar is beginning to call to me.

# writing about music

Jun 14, 2017

One thing I have noticed about my writing with regard to music is that I don’t have a consistent way of approaching an artist or a composition - I just spew out whatever comes off the top of my head. Freewriting is cool, but I need to brainstorm the best way I can approach writing about music so that there is some thematic and stylistic consistency.

First off, I need to figure out how to cite musical works in WordPress. None of my posts regarding Sun Ra or Fela have references to their recorded works. This is especially difficult with Sun Ra given that he released multiple versions of many of his tunes. In any event, I should at least include one citation per post. It’s the least I can do to help anyone reading my blog find an album.

This is, of course, in addition to the embedded YouTube videos. The Sun Ra videos on YouTube are limited, though. Most often they are fully commercial albums, while Sun Ra released a lot of self-produced recordings of rehearsals and concerts. The guy really had a handle on the business side of being a musician. Or, rather, his manager Alton Abraham had a handle on the business, though I would imagine that Sun Ra was still in charge.

Fela’s music is more straightforward in that he released albums with only two or three tunes on them. His whole thing was creating long-form, jazz inspired tunes with the improv coming before the vocal sections (he did release one or two instrumentals, such as “Dog Eat Dog”). Citing his recorded works will be easy because I have most of his albums on CD or as iTunes-purchased MP3s.

Again, citing these recorded works is the least I should do in terms of presenting commentary on an artist’s works. Other things I might write in a blog post are a list of featured musicians, the rough structure of a musical work, key centers (if any)…. Fela usually composed music in modal keys, especially Dorian. One of the things I have noticed from the online transcriptions of Fela’s tunes is that there is no sense of the kind or plateau-modal structure that Fela used. Some sort of simple lead sheet diagram of his compositions would be really helpful for musicians who aspire to playing his music. The full score transcriptions are very cool, but people who play Afrobeat are most likely not great readers (except maybe for horn players). Some sort of lead sheet outline would be greatly helpful.

All of this means that I need to go back through my blog posts and add citations and harmonic sketches. Sun Ra’s music may be more challenging in this regard, but at least I should try. Additionally, I already have a bunch of lyric transcriptions - mostly of Fela’s music - that I can add to the blog immediately. That would be an easy thing to do. I don’t have much of Sun Ra’s lyrics transcribed, but his lyrics, except for a few cases, are generally simpler (though profound). I know that I did transcribe the lyrics for the “Space Chant” on the Live in London album, but I think it is only handwritten. I would be hard pressed to find it. I do remember, though, that I included a footnote about the compositions included in that particular version of “Space Chant” (a title given to these medleys by Graham Lock, I think). I’ll have to dig that up.

So here’s my project: post my lyric transcriptions with some commentary as well as definitions for the Yoruba and Pidgin vocabulary he uses in his tunes. A bit of busy work, but it should make for interesting blog reading.

# thinking about Keith Richards

Jun 15, 2017

I don’t know why I am thinking about Keith Richards today, but I am. I guess he is one of those famous musicians I would actually enjoy sitting and talking with (and unfortunately, B.B. King is dead). I have long had this kind of fantasy of running into a celebrity after being bumped up to first class on a flight. Nobody in particular, and nothing to talk about in particular, but just a friendly chat. It’s a little pathetic, I know, but somehow this feels validating for me.

With Mr. Richards it would be cool to talk books with him. I’ll bet he has a lot to say. This is one aspect of musicians’ lives that fascinates me the most: what are their intellectual interests, and how have those interests informed their lives as artists. This is what fascinates me the most about Sun Ra and Fela - both were intellectuals in their own right, talking to and with their audiences about the ideas they encounter. Sun Ra went as far as to call himself primarily a teacher, and only secondarily a musician, while Fela apparently would lay out a bunch of books on a table at the Afrika Shrine and lend them to audience members who engaged him in discussion before and after his performances. This is the kind of stuff that really sparks my interest in musicians - the background information that feeds the art.

I have a feeling that Mr. Richards - I don’t know him so I will not call him Keith - would be one of those musicians for whom self-education is important to their development as an artist. And by self-education I am not meaning to imply that musicians in general do not pursue formal education. Fela got a degree in music education from I-forget-which-university in London, and Sun Ra completed part of a degree at Alabama A & M. But especially with those two musicians their real learning seems to have taken place on their own. Sun Ra was a public library junkie who dealt with chronic sleeplessness by reading anything he could get his hands on related to his interests in spirituality, history, and music. Fela probably read less, but was a big proponent of Walter Rodney’s How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. I have a photo somewhere of Fela reading to an audience during one of his yabis performances.

The funny thing about my interest in Keith Richards, though, is that I am only a lukewarm fan of the Rolling Stones. I feel like their music has had some highs, a lot of lows, and yet they are still written and talked about as being one of the “greatest bands” of rock and roll. Rock and roll, to me, shouldn’t be about celebrity. One of the things I admire most about Mr. Richards is not his celebrity, but rather his musicality. The guy still swings when he plays guitar. I wish more rock and roll would pick up on that kind of syncopation. Most pop and rock music these days is very metronomic. I don’t know if that has to do with people recording to click tracks or what - I suspect that’s the case. It is a struggle for many musicians to find the right rhythmic feel when playing along with a metronome.

I understand the need for click tracks, especially when working with other musicians doing overdubs. But one of the things I love about Miles Davis’s 1950s recordings, for instance, is the fact that you can hear subtle tempo changes over the course of a tune. That kind of temporal and rhythmic flexibility is missing from most music these days.

# a day of coding

Jun 15, 2017

I just spent a number of hours putting together a weather app from a YouTube tutorial. The app doesn’t work. I really don’t know what is wrong with it because I finally got it to where Dev Tools showed no problems. Still, it keeps telling me I have an invalid api key even though I have confirmed that I am using a valid key. I’ll need to check this code against the other weather app I created in CodePen. Let me do that now while I am thinking about it.

No luck. I made a few minor adjustments but still struck out. I’m really not sure what the problem is.

Coding is a fascinating hobby that I have spent far too much time on. Ultimately, I want coding to be part of my professional skill set, similar to musical and academic work. Still, I really should not spend as much time on it as I do - I’m avoiding other parts of my professional work. I need to be practicing music, reading, and writing. I feel confident that this freewriting blog is helping me with the writing, but I haven’t read anything substantial in a while, and I haven’t been practicing music. That all needs to change; I can’t let these things fall by the wayside. If I do, I’ll lose my edge.

This all assumes that I begin to work again. I am tired of unemployment - it is dragging down my entire psyche. It’s the depression hammering on me, I know, but at some point I need to say to myself, “enough is enough.” Until I do I am going to continue to wallow in this depressive funk.

Thinking about and practicing music is what will most likely lead me out of my funk. I need to be able to separate my ego from music, though, since I constantly do battle with myself, beating on my head over where I should be rather than where I am. Maybe what I should do is begin going through my Berklee notebooks in order to refresh my memory on some concepts I learned. My experience at Berklee was intense, to put it lightly, so I would imagine that my notebooks have some gold in them. That’s the kind of school that drops a lifetime’s worth of study and practice on you without breaking a sweat. Those notebooks are the key to something.

Among the things that I remember from Berklee was the study of arpeggios and approach notes. These, along with scales, should provide a solid background for single-note playing. Improv is a real weakness of mine, although improv does not really come directly from scales and arpeggios. I need to bear in mind that scales and arpeggios make for a nice warm-up, but they are not music. It’s a lot like writing by reciting the alphabet over and over again. Probably one of the best uses of my time would be to learn parts of tunes playing arpeggios and approach notes, and then practice them in all keys. That and regular transcription should help to greatly improve my improvisation.

# cold black coffee

Jun 16, 2017

I have an irritating habit of drinking leftover black coffee in the morning rather than making a fresh pot. I’ll make coffee if there is none, but if there is any left over the next day that seems to suffice. It’s probably kind of gross, but I don’t really mind. I guess I could claim that I am being frugal when I do this, but really it’s laziness. I like my coffee - and I certainly prefer fresh coffee - but it’s not so important that I need a fresh pot every time.

This kind of reminds me of dad’s workshop. Looking through the workshop there is all kinds of evidence of finely detailed woodworking he had done, but the stands he built to hold his table saw and scroll saw are really crappy workmanship. They are clearly put together with scrap wood and old rusty nails, like he didn’t give a shit about them. But that was dad. He wouldn’t have given a shit about the table that holds up his band saw. All of his energy would have gone into the musical instrument or boat he was working on at the time, and almost no effort would have gone into building a workshop stand. Funny guy, but there it is.

I almost feel the same about freewriting. My practice with this blog is to just pump it out and move on. In the case of my writing, though, there is a larger purpose to what I am doing - I am trying to improve my ability to bang out some words without thinking much about it. I am doing this because I am tired of the writing practice that has brought me as far as I have come. Granted, I have written an excellent doctoral dissertation along the way, but my writing has always been slow and meticulous, as if the reader is standing over my shoulder reading as I write. I much prefer Margaret Atwood’s suggestion that a writer should write as if what he is writing will never be read. That is my attitude with this blog - I don’t expect it to ever be read. I, however, may go back and re-read and possible edit some of what I have written in this blog, but that step is a long way off. For now I am going to continue banging it out and moving on.

I haven’t made any attempt with this blog to set specific themes or subjects to write about, though I would imagine I could find some if I were to re-read the blog. Perhaps I should do a periodic assessment of where this blog is headed so that I can begin to give it some structure while I am still freewriting. Freewriting doesn’t necessarily have to be anything off the top of my head. No matter what I am writing about, the idea is to be able to gain a sense of flow in my writing. This blog has already massively helped, especially since I have set a 500 word minimum for my posts. At some point soon I am going to need to increase that minimum word count, but for now the 500 word goal is good enough.

# I feel like writing

Jun 16, 2017

I just finished a post a short time ago, but I feel like writing some more. I don’t have anything in particular to say, I just feel like putting more words down on screen. In fact, let me write a little bit, do something else, then write a bit more. I have already done my 500 word minimum for the day, so anything I write in this post is above and beyond.

And so, after all that energy I had early this afternoon, now it is six hours later. I’ve changed the time of the post to reflect when I really got back to it.

I’ve been thinking a lot about revision today. Not that I want to begin revising this blog - I’m sold on the usefulness of freewriting - but maybe I should start revising sooner than later. I want to keep up my 500 words-a-day goal, but I think revision is really more a part of the craft of writing than I have been giving credit. Freewriting gets the words down, and revision helps the words make sense. These freewritten posts, while fun to produce, are probably terrible writing. Of course, I won’t really know for sure until I begin to re-read the posts. In fact, let me make it a project this weekend to re-read and begin revising some of what I have written. That ought to answer a few questions regarding the viability of what I am producing with this blog.

I’m not going to print out the whole damn blog, though. That would be a big project even now - I’ve got nearly 110 posts already. Let me start by printing out 20 or 30 of the more substantial posts and begin revising from there. Some early posts are really too thin to be of any use, so I should probably get rid of them. Otherwise, I think this blog is going better than I expected. I have produced a lot of writing while limiting myself to just a few subjects. While revising I need to be willing to throw stuff out and to freewrite some more. Like my dissertation, this writing needs to be revised several times before it will be acceptable. I’m still going to write as if nobody will read it, but finished writing really needs to be published.

In fact, I hadn’t thought about publishing anything from this blog. I’ve been so focused on freewriting that I’ve hardly even thought about revision. Let me not latch onto a larger goal like publishing. It really is a step to begin revising. Let me just keep the publishing idea in the back of my brain, as something that may happen in the future. That way I don’t need to begin stressing about what I write. The freewriting has been liberating for me, and I want to hang on to that feeling for as long as I can. Let me be gentle on myself.

# Saturday morning

Jun 17, 2017

I woke up early this morning and, not knowing what to do with myself, ate some cold pizza and watched part of an episode of Orange is the New Black. It’s a lazy way to begin the day, but it’s Saturday morning. When I was a kid I used to get up very early on Saturdays because that’s the day for cartoons. No Cartoon Network, no cable television. I liked to watch Super Friends and The Jetsons. Bugs Bunny was my favorite, though. Till this day, when I hear even a few bars of Wagner’s “Flight of the Valkyries,” I think of Elmer Fudd singing “Kill de wabbit, Kill de wabbit.”

I really can’t stand to watch cartoons now, as an adult, because I no longer find them to be as transporting as they were when I was a kid. I’m not saying that the older cartoons are better than the new ones. I’m saying that my sensibilities are different. I require a lot more substance from the popular culture I consume, even if my tastes are sometimes a bit lowbrow (sometimes I can’t help but binge watch Netflix shows). In any event, this is part of the mystery of growing up: what happened to Saturday morning cartoons?

Writing is not really a replacement for something as airy as Saturday morning cartoons, but I prefer writing, these days, to other trivial pursuits. Writing is a way of clearing my mind of its cluttered thoughts. Freewriting, in particular, feels cathartic to me. In fact, this entire blog of freewriting is like cheap therapy: I blurt out my thoughts and feel some relief for having unburdened myself. It’s not as expertly moderated as a good therapy session, but it’s free. I like free.

One of the things I would like to do in my life is to see if I could write a novel. I’m not sure how I might tailor a blog such as this to create a fictional narrative. Maybe a narrative already lives in this jumble of freewritten blog posts, but I’ve been thinking a bit lately about the structure of Vladimir Nabokov’s novel Pale Fire as a way of writing. My memory is that the novel is written as a forward to and footnotes on an epic poem written by another (fictional) writer. I can’t remember any of the substance of the novel, but it reminds me of the footnotes I wrote for my dissertation. In some places the footnotes are the most interesting bits of writing on the page. They act as a metacommentary on the larger narrative of the diss. What would be interesting is to cobble together some sort of narrative from these blog posts, and then write a second narrative as a commentary on the first. I don’t know if other writers have used Nabokov’s novel as a blueprint, but it’s an idea worth exploring.

I’ll need to re-read Pale Fire. Let me order a copy online just now.

Done. I’ll be very interested to re-read this book. I think I read it as a Freshman in college, and I’m sure my understanding of the work will be much different. I still have some snapshot memories of the book, beginning with an image of the writer sitting in an easy chair writing his poetic couplets on index cards. My memory is that the writer has died before the poem was finished, and the narrator is a fellow academic who edits and publishes the poem, sometimes at odds with the writer’s widow. It’s a complicated narrative, though, given that Nabokov basically had to write two books: the epic poem that serves as the center of the novel, and the commentary, which is the bulk of the book.

guitar gear

Jun 17, 2017

Like most guitarists I have a fascination with guitar gear. If I was wealthy I would buy a few more guitars and amps along with a shitload of pedals and recording gear. Given that I am not wealthy, though, I can only think about it.

Ultimately, it would be nice to get together some kind of small recording rig as well as a small gigging/practice rig for the guitar> As far as guitars go, I have two beautiful instruments that I will probably keep as long as I can play: a nice early-80s Gibson ES-335 with Bartolini jazz pickups, and a 2013 Fender reserve American Standard Stratocaster with Custom Shop pickups. Here are a few guitar purchases I would like to make.

1. I’d like to sell my early-30s National Duolian in order to buy a more contemporary instrument with pickups. My National guitar is really too fragile and quirky to be gig-worthy, but when it works it sounds nasty good.
2. A custom-built Warmoth Telecaster in which I can install the Gibson pickups I took out of the ES-335. This would be setup for slide guitar playing.
3. A cheap beater of an electric that I can setup for Nashville tuning. This would add some jangle to my playing without the bother of getting a 12-string. Great for recording.
4. I need to replace my broken-ass Taylor acoustic. I prefer a small parlor-guitar style instrument for fingerpicking the blues.
5. A small Fender tube amp. I would prefer something the size of a Champ, but with reverb and vibrato. If I could find something like a Princeton Reverb amp that would be cool.
6. A Fender bass of some kind. I haven’t set my mind on either a Jazz or a Precision bass.
7. A mandolin for little tasty bits of rhythm and melody.
8. A cheap hard-tail guitar setup for MIDI.

A couple of these options are expensive, while others are cheap or mid-range. But I need the flexibility of having a few instruments around.

In terms of recording gear, I don’t need to get fancy. But there are a few things I would like to get.

1. A high quality audio interface for my computer. A Universal Audio interface would be ideal.
2. At least one good condenser mic, but ideally a few.
3. A couple of mic stands with at least one studio boom.
4. A small MIDI controller. An Akai controller would be cool.
5. Ideally, a control surface for a DAW.
6. Pro Tools DAW software.
7. A better mixer with more channels.

I’m sure there are a few other things that would be nice or even necessary to have. Of course none of this is necessary, and none of it makes any sense to purchase if I don’t play more often than I do. I would, though, like to permanently setup my practice space so that I can record ideas without needing to do a lot of gear switching and rewiring. If I could simply fire up Pro Tools, start a drum track, and record any ideas that come out I would be more likely to practice and record regularly. As it is, I don’t practice enough and I rarely record. This is not very good for my identification as a composer. In the past I have done all my composition either on paper or by entering notes directly into Finale with a mouse. I like the idea of being able to try out musical ideas on guitar since my piano playing sucks.

Of course none of this makes any sense without a dedicated room for music, preferably with acoustic treatments and some sort of baffling. I have some simple plans for making acoustic gobos, so that would be a project to do at some point. Setting up a studio probably won’t happen, though, until I am living in a building that I own. This divorce has put the squash on that.

# third post

Jun 17, 2017

This is my third post of the day. Apparently I have some energy to spare today since I have already written two posts over 600 words each, and now I’m coming back for more. If I’ve got the energy, why not.

I’ve been thinking a little bit about this blog as a broader writing project. I don’t know if it will turn into a series of essays, or short stories, or a novel, or what. It may just stay as freewritten and unvarnished as it is for all I know at this point. I’m not invested in any particular scheme or goal at this point. My only plan is to keep writing.

That being said, it wouldn’t hurt to give some forethought to what I am writing. So far what I have done in terms of pre-planning is to write down the categories I am going to be touching on before I begin to write. But these categories are extremely broad, probably making for kind of jumbled writing within each category. The writing category, for instance, already has 70 posts attributed to it, none of which were planned to lead from one to another. If I were to print out all 70 of those posts I would probably still have a jumble of ideas.

It may help at some point to write an outline for where I want to go with my writing. This wouldn’t necessarily spoil the spontaneous nature of the blog, but it would add some consistency in the writing between blog posts. If I could maintain the same sort of freewritten spontaneity from post to post, why shouldn’t I try to create some sort of meta-organization?

Meta-organization? What the fuck is that. I guess I mean some sort of structural plan or outline. Listen to me with the snooty language, meta-organization.

Ah well, moving on.

Freewriting does not necessarily mean I need to write only what comes off the top of my head. In fact, I really should employ the looping strategy I wrote about way back in this blog. In fact, this post is really a loop on what I wrote two posts ago. If I can settle on some kind of an outline I should be able to develop some ideas more rapidly and consistently.

I like the idea of writing three posts in one day, but it is probably not a sustainable way for me to approach this entire project. The 500-words-a-day minimum is a much more sustainable goal. Hit is an quit it I always say.

This all being said, I could use the same sort of strategy for getting my practice routine up and running again. I can start with just 30 minutes a day of practice and see where it goes from there. One of my problems with starting a practice routine is that I become too ambitious and freak myself out, not attaining many of my goals because I become overwhelmed by it all. Four hours a day of practice is something I need to work my way up to; I can’t just plan for it and hit the road cold. Any car that starts out doesn’t do so at 70 MPH - it has to accelerate to get up to that speed, passing through several gears. Like the accelerating car, I need to start off slow and smoothly change gears until I am at some sort of cruising speed. And even then, maybe I want to take the 40 MPH back roads to get where I’m going.

Something to think about.

# I hate Sundays

Jun 18, 2017

Actually, I don’t hate Sundays, I just couldn’t think of a better title for this post. I think it’s kind of funny that I choose a title and some categories for a post before I begin to write, as if I know what I am going to write when I clearly don’t. That’s the whole purpose of freewriting: to write about what comes off the top of my head with little idea of where I’m headed. The title and categories, though, may help to give me direction; they give me a glimmer of a lighted path when the way forward is dark.

Well that last sentence seems kind of pretentious. I can’t stand pretentious writing. I guess academic writing can be quite pretentious, though it has its audience and its time. I like to read other people’s academic writing. I’m not crazy about my own academic writing, though. It makes me feel like I’m faking something about my life. I don’t speak in theoretical language, though I do love to read Foucault, and reading Foucault has boosted my confidence as an academic. I love that I am able to understand his writing, even if I am reading his stuff through questionable translations. If I was truly serious about Foucault I would work on my French and try to read what he wrote in the original. But I’m not a Foucault specialist, so there is no real reason why I would need to do that.

If I were to work on my French I really would concentrate on translating a bunch of articles and books for publication. I did start to translate Carles’s and Comolli’s Free Jazz, Black Music a few years ago, but I dropped the project when I couldn’t get an answer from their publisher. It’s surprising to me that the book has never been published in English. Maybe it has been at this point. In fact, why don’t I just continue to translate the book for my own sake. Fuck the publisher. If I can’t get the English language rights then I’ll do the translation for my own benefit.

Writing, for me, has long been something that I am good at, yet I usually find it to be a burden. Writing this blog, though, has been freeing for me. I love that I can sit down, bang out 500 words, and move on. In fact, some days the ease with which I can write this blog is what brings me back for a second and third time. Yesterday I produced three posts at more than 600 words each, and I didn’t break a sweat about it. Hopefully I can find the energy to do the same today.

That being said, I need to bear in mind that the goal is really 500 words per day, not 1500. But if I have a productive day why stop?

Ah fuck it, who cares. Writing is writing, and this blog is really about adding a sense of “I don’t care” to my writing. I am writing as if nobody will read it, as Margaret Atwood stated (and as I have written in the past). Hit it and quit it. To be meaningful, though, I am going to need to re-read everything at some point, printing stuff out and combing through it like I would read a student’s writing. But for now, let’s just keep it cool and on the surface. The primary goal is still to help me relax and melt into a sense of flow with my writing.

600 words now, but somehow I don’t feel finished. Or maybe I do. Fuck it. I’m done.

guitar gear again

Jun 18, 2017

I don’t know why guitar gear fascinates me the way it does. I am generally a minimalist where effects and instruments are concerned, sticking mostly with a tuning pedal and a compressor. I’ve added an overdrive (Danelectro Daddy-O) and a volume pedal to my pedalboard, but I’m not sure I like the Danelectro, and I have never really understood how best to use a volume pedal. Apparently I could get a new range of tones from my guitar by playing with the levels coming from the guitar into the amp, but I haven’t figured out how to do that yet. Mostly I just adjust the amp and the guitar settings. The volume pedal is supposed to add a gain stage to the setup.

But really, I need to find a good overdrive tone I can use regularly. I like overdrive that just adds a bit of a nasty edge to the guitar’s tone but that backs off when I play more softly. I just want a tad of bite and grit added to the signal, not a full on rock and roll fuzz.

One idea I got from watching a great blues band (the Crawling Kingsnakes) is to use a Pignose amp as a preamp for a small combo amp, breaking up the guitar signal in a really nasty way. The guy I saw playing that rig got a really clear, biting tone which worked great for blues. I should give it more of a try than I have in the past.

I need to sell my Fender amp and buy a Princeton Reverb or something like it. My current Fender amp has a 410 cabinet, so the thing is about 70 lbs. I hate bringing it to gigs, but it sounds so fucking good. I’d like that sound in a smaller package: either a 210 or a 112 cabinet. Of course, I could always go for a separate amp head and cabinet, which would reduce the weight of any one piece I have to bring out.

I guess I should also think, at some point, of selling the Gibson. In fact, I think I would only sell the Gibson in order to buy another Gibson. I love Gibson guitars, but the ES-335 is heavy. I’ll have to think about that one. What I really need is a good guitar for playing fingerstyle jazz, and I have a feeling that another type of Gibson hollow-body or semi-hollow might suit my playing style better. I need to find a music store somewhere that has a bunch of Gibsons so I can try out a bunch of different types.

Let me run down my guitars again, commenting on the changes I’d like to make.

1. Gibson ES-335: Think about selling this guitar in order to buy a hollow-bodied Gibson.
2. Fender Strat: This instrument is a keeper. I would like to stabilize the tremolo bridge at some point, though.
3. Warmoth custom Tele or Strat: This is the guitar I would like to put the Gibson humbuckers into. I have the pickups, but I just need the right instrument. This instrument should be setup for slide playing.
4. A cheap guitar setup for MIDI: I have the MIDI pickup and box. I just need to install the pickup on something.
5. A new National Duolian: I need to sell my current National since it is not so gig friendly.
6. Some kind of parlor guitar acoustic.
7. A cheap guitar strung for Nashville tuning.
8. A Fender bass: I’d like to be able to work up my bass playing to where I could play out.
9. A mandolin: just for some sonic variety. In fact, I wish I had never sold the mandolin I used to have.

# coding with Python

Jun 19, 2017

I finished a couple of online tutorials regarding Python, and now I am working on a tutorial that walks me through how to create a weather forecast mailer. Python is a much simpler language than JavaScript, though I’m still struggling with the algorithmic logic aspect of coding. I know enough of the Python language to follow along as someone else codes in the language; the structures she uses are familiar to me, but the logic is still beyond my ability.

I would like to be able to create my own apps and post them on my website. I guess a weather app would be interesting, but I would really like to be able to explore some other possibilities, like a news feed or some sort of interactive website functionality. I have noticed, the last few times I have visited it, that the BYM Camps website is a truly interactive site. That’s the kind of site I would like to be able to create. I’m sure they use JavaScript and jQuery, but I think Python can do a lot of the same stuff. jQuery is a fairly simple coding language, like Python, but I’m not completely in the dark with full-on JavaScript. I like the way the BYM Camps site animates their transitions from one page to another and from one section of a page to another. It really adds interest.

I guess the way to go is the way I have been going: continue to develop the content of the site while also working on my coding skills. My memory of the BYM site from a year or two ago was that it was the typical static website with separate pages for each new class of information. The site, as it is now, seems to have more information per page, but some of the information is hidden until it is clicked upon. It then loads new information without reloading the page. This produces a very cool, slick effect. I want my site to act like that.

Pulamusic.com is currently a WordPress-powered blog, but I think I can make better use of that url. The site should contain a blog, but it should also have all the stuff I am currently putting on the GitHub portfolio site. I would like for their to be some sort of interactive jumbotron on the first page, possibly with a carousel of images, and/or maybe a sound file clip. The site should basically scream musician and academic, featuring my work and my blog posts. I would like a simple, clean blog like this Jekyll blog, but wrapped in an interactive page with some sidebar functionality. Basically, I like aspects of both the WordPress and Jekyll blogs, but I would like to find a way to combine the best of these two models with some slick interactivity.

Coding really needs to be a kind of back-burner skill set - useful for me academically, but not core to my professional practice. Maybe if I were to make a commitment to digital humanities I could then justify putting a bunch of effort into coding, but for now it is essentially a hobby, albeit a hobby that I spend a significant amount of time working on just now. In any event, let’s see where it goes.

# repetition

Jun 19, 2017

I haven’t re-read any of my blog posts as I go along, but I’m aware that as I go along I have been repeating myself across posts. No big deal, but I think the repetition is probably a good thing; it means there may be some thematic consistency across posts that I can work with if I begin to revise my writing. As it is I have written about 110 posts already. Probably 10-15 of them I could delete because they are devoid of any substance.

Most of the posts, though, have some bits of usable writing scattered among them (at least I think so). I thought maybe this past weekend I would begin to print out the various posts, but I think I’ll just keep chugging along for now. My original concept for this blog was that I would never re-read or revise anything, choosing to exercise my freewriting muscles instead. So far it is making a difference in my level of comfort with producing text rapidly, and that alone is good enough for now.

But I probably should plan for some sort of revision, though revising for what is not clear to me just yet. I really don’t know if there are any stories or essays lurking among the posts. It would be cool if I could cobble together a rough draft of something. I really need for my writing to take several steps toward a more professional practice. Now that I am writing this freewriting blog I have gained quite a bit of confidence in my ability to produce. Just as with composing music, I need to be willing to throw everything away if I don’t think it is worthwhile. When I first began to compose music I found it so laborious that I continued working on a piece even if I didn’t like it. After a while, though, I got more comfortable with composing and became willing to abandon something if it wasn’t speaking to me. I need to adopt the same attitude with writing.

Freewriting, for me, makes it possible to work with an abundance of words rather than the slow, meticulous way I have written my whole life. Now I write like I don’t care, allowing my thoughts to wander over a subject, chew on it a bit, and see where I end up. I suspect that when I begin to re-read my posts I will find some stuff that is worth keeping and expanding upon. I may be wrong, but we will see.

What I would like to produce is one longer narrative rather than a series of essays. Perhaps, at some point, I’ll start over again with this blog, writing with more focus. For now I am happy to keep banging away at my keyboard, writing whatever nonsense that comes into my head.

Let me brainstorm a bit on what I might focus the blog on if I were to re-start this project. I could write specifically about musical practice, or about writing practice. Writing has been one of the more consistent categories I have hit upon in this blog so far. If the writing is to be revised I need to be looking for the repeated topics - those are the main topics that have been crossing my mind. Repetition is a good thing in art, though, as H.L. Gates put it, “repetition with a signal difference.” That’s the real art of writing: knowing how much repetition to leave remaining and how much to cut away. Repetition in writing should add depth, and shouldn’t feel repetitious. As the title of a book I once read puts it, I am searching for The Fine Art of Repetition.

# waiting for an interview

Jun 20, 2017

I’m sitting at my desk waiting for a Skype interview to possibly teach at Berklee.

And now I’ve had the interview. They called while I was in the middle of writing the first sentence. I think the interview went well. They seemed to get that I am a professional - that I know what I am doing and feel confident about my abilities as a teacher. They said they are going to call back several candidates for in-person class teaching in mid-July, and I know that is my way in. If I can get in front of a group of students I know I have an advantage. I wouldn’t imagine there are many applicants for this job that have as much experience teaching as I do. I think I’m in like Flint.

I would love, ultimately, to teach full-time at Berklee. It sounds as if they want to hire people to fill several sections of the African American music history course as well as for a Freshman seminar. It would be lovely to teach only at Berklee rather than at STCC. I love my students at STCC, but the pay is abysmal. Berklee, because it is in Boston, would most likely pay much better. In any event, it would be nice to teach at Berklee - any musician who teaches music history needs to know that Berklee is one of the best music schools in the country. Being able to influence the minds of a bunch of musicians would be a fascinating exercise in teaching; I could stretch out a bit and really dig into some musical info while hitting them with the cultural history.

This also means that I really need to get back to regular musical practice, at least resurrecting my fingerstyle jazz repertoire. Musicians can be tough if they think their teacher is not up to snuff with their level of musicianship. I need to have some confidence in my abilities as a musician in much the same way that I am confident about my teaching. I need to know that I have some decent music under my fingers.

I also need to work on my writing about music. I know that this is a freewriting blog, but I could write about music more often than I have. When I do write about music it is usually about what I need to be practicing rather than what I think about a particular genre or composition or musician. Especially given that my dissertation is waiting to be edited into publishable form, I really need to put that high on my list of priorities.

But freewriting, in and of itself, is very cool. I can easily now write 500-700 words per post without breaking a sweat. I’m sure my ability to write rapidly has been there all along, but I have had it ingrained in me - most writers have - that my writing needs to go down on paper fully formed. Freewriting has helped me to move past all that. I do at some point, though, need to pay some more attention to writing revision. As I have written before, I should try to revise some of the writing on this blog at some point, shooting for a book of essays, or possible just a book. I don’t really know yet if the substance of a book can be found in this blog. This post will be number 114 since I began the blog, and I haven’t re-read any of it. At this point it will be a lot of work to re-read everything and copy and paste the stuff I want to revise. It will probably be a rewarding exercise, though.

humidity sucks

Jun 20, 2017

I couldn’t sleep well last night because of the humidity. I kept waking up wet, turning my pillow over and over to try to find a dry spot to put my head. I’m a big, sweaty guy as it is, so even a little bit of heat and humidity will make me crazy. Sometimes I find myself in public with my shirt drenched all the way through. I’ve even taught classes with a soaked shirt. Disgusting, really.

But enough of my petty discomfort. I really need to spend some time thinking through my writing. It seems to me that, in addition to freewriting, I need to be revising and outlining what I write. Pumping out a bunch of text feels great, but it all comes to naught if I don’t revise it into some kind of acceptable form. What that form is, I don’t know, but I need to begin exploring what it might look like. Let me try to brainstorm a list of what I might be able to do with this blog’s posts.

1. A diary of a depressed academic and musician, struggling to find my way through the fog.
2. A musical practice diary. This option would require a lot more writing focused on music. It would also require that I brainstorm and outline my vision for moving forward.
3. A writer’s diary about writing. Again, and revision of this blog that emphasizes writing really should begin by brainstorming and outlining. There may be some starter themes already among the posts.
4. A mini-autobiography. This would require some planning, but much of the blog so far is simply my writing about my thoughts of the moment. With a little planning I could redirect my thoughts more toward my life. In particular, I might want to write about my experiences in Africa.
5. A journal of random thoughts. This would require quite a lot of revision to make it readable.
6. A novel of some sort, fashioned along the lines of Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*. There may be a story among the posts. Again, I won’t know until I look.

But really, until I begin to re-read my blog posts I have no idea what I might find. I have been so focused on freewriting that there is no plan at all. This has been extremely helpful for improving my confidence in being able to crank out some pages, but I won’t have any idea what those pages are worth until I begin to go back through them.

Again, there seems to be a lot of repetition in my writing from post to post. This is something I need to manage in the revision process, bearing Gates’s concept in mind that I should be striving for “repetition with a signal difference.”[1](https://pulamusic.github.io/jekyll-base//life/writing/2017/06/20/humidity-sucks.html#fn:1)

This blog has been extremely helpful for me. I now look forward to writing every day - something I did not feel before. I guess I’m beginning to hit my stride.

1. Gates, Henry Louis. 1983. *The Signifying Monkey*, p. xiv. [↩](https://pulamusic.github.io/jekyll-base//life/writing/2017/06/20/humidity-sucks.html#fnref:1)

# I'm tired

Jun 20, 2017

I’m tired and I don’t really feel like writing just now. Let me give it a go anyway; a good sense of work discipline is an important thing to work on as well.

Freewriting is both freeing my writing and causing me to repeat myself too often. This, of course, is something that can be fixed in the process of revision. Because I am freewriting I shouldn’t worry too much about repetition, or my over-use of cliches, or my overuse of any kind of language or structure - just write.

In fact, cliches and idiomatic language can be kind of fun, I must say. I like to wallow in the cliches and poke fun at them, but I can’t seem to keep them out of my finished writing. Not that any of the writing in this blog is finished - it very purposefully is not. In any event (a cliched phrase I use too often), I need to stop thinking about it.

I need to just write. Let me go on for a while without stopping. In the first three paragraphs I stopped a few times to have a sip of beer or to read what I have already written. For now, though, I am going to continue writing.

I need to get more exercise. I need to go to the gym I pay a membership for. I also need to walk/run around here. I can start by walking up the street and around the STCC campus. That long hill going up will be a great workout. Then, down the hill I can run a bit. It’s all a matter of managing my lack of fitness. I hate going to the gym when it is crowded, as it always is at the West Springfield gym. I should try out the one here in Springfield, or I should go back to the one in Chicopee. I liked the Chicopee gym - nice and sparsely populated. Lifting weights is a solitary thing for me. I don’t want a bunch of meatheads hanging around while I struggle with light weights. It’s an ego thing, I suppose, but I do like to be on my own when I lift weights.

Writing is also a solitary endeavor (that’s a no shit statement if I ever heard one). I like it when my mind quiets down and the words start to flow, not worrying about what will come next because, lo and behold, it almost always comes. But it does take some quiet to maintain the focus so that I can write. I remember reading an interview once with Nadine Gordimer in which she talked about her need for solitude in order to write. I also like Margaret Atwood’s contention that she writes as if nobody will ever read what she has written (I have mentioned this concept several times throughout this blog). But this is what I am doing while writing this blog - I write as if nobody, including me, will ever read it. Of course, I will read it at some point in order to revise and see if there is some larger project lurking in there. But for now, just hit it and quit it.

Let me leave it here for now, at c.550 words.

# no wifi

Jun 21, 2017

The wifi is out so I won’t be able to upload this post when I am done writing. I can’t read the news or work on one of the coding tutorials, and I can’t check my email. In general, I have become very dependent on the internet for my daily work and pleasure. I wish I was more independent of this technology, but I really seem to need the stuff.

Now it is later and the landlord has fixed the problem. I checked in on the news and now I am back to writing. I don’t really feel like writing just now, but I need to forge ahead. It is important to me that I pump out at least 500 words every day. This minimum word count is beginning to feel a bit too light for me, though today it is kicking my ass.

Let me just post this and move on.

# a long drive

Jun 23, 2017

I got up at 3:00 am and drove from Massachusetts to Maryland, arriving just before 10:30. I stopped once for a bathroom break and gas. Zanaya slept most of the way, and she is sleeping still after we have arrived. Tomorrow Zanaya is off to camp, and I may drive all the way back to MA in order to go to Don Geesling’s cookout. Let me see if I can rest up a bit so I may have the energy to do it.

Otherwise, let me do my writing for today. I didn’t write at all yesterday, and I wrote fewer than 300 words the day before. Time to pick it up again. Now that I have produced more than 110 posts, though, I don’t feel I need to pressure myself to write every day. It would be best if I did, but nothing will fall apart if I don’t.

After writing this post I think I will spend some time reading through my blog posts, looking for the gems that I might revise. Again, I don’t really know if there are any gems, but you never know. If there is nothing I think worth revising, then I definitely will need to reevaluate what I am doing with this blog. The blog so far is mostly directionless freewriting, but you never know, there could be something substantial lurking under the surface. The trick will be to recognize what I have created and copy and paste it into a Word document. Then I can print it out and go at it with my pencil.

I suspect that there is something to revise in my multiple statements about writing. I know I have been repetitive, but even the repetition might reveal some different direction I might follow. I wrote a couple of posts, for example, on the freewriting practice of looping: freewriting on a subject followed by more freewriting on one aspect or theme of the first bit of writing. Repeat as many times as you like. I could expand on this - probably by looping - and find other similar strategies for getting words down on the screen. If I expand on writing technique I should do a thorough literature search for writing materials and begin working up a bibliography on writing.

Or - and I’m just spitballing - I could work on something having to do with both writing and musical practice. I would like to be able to use this writing practice to bring me closer to a conscious and conscientious musical practice. Since writing, in general, is about trying to decide what I think about a particular subject, writing about my musical practice should help me to hone my ideas and point out new paths of discovery. Perhaps something like a journal of my working through Schoenberg’s Theory of Harmony, or an ear training journal. Who knows what I may be able to pull out of the hat.

Let me work on re-reading my blog posts and see where that leads me.

# in Maryland

Jun 24, 2017

I’m in Maryland visiting my brother and his family. Zanaya just went off to camp this morning, and I didn’t have the energy to drive back to Massachusetts today. I had thought for a bit about driving back this morning so I could go to Don’s barbecue, but I can’t face doing that drive two days in a row.

I’ve noticed, in my writing, that I have a tendency to write sentences with two independent clauses with a conjunction. I need to learn to vary my use of sentence structures. Maybe I need another visit to Strunk’s and White’s book on writing style. What the hell is the title of that book? Ah, who knows. Actually, it’s going to bug me until I look it up.

The Elements of Style. That’s it. Brilliant little book that hits all the high points of concise writing, written with great concision. This ought to help me work out a better repertoire of sentence structures. Again, I am striving for artful repetition, not repetition as a result of ignorance. I wouldn’t want to get bogged down in crafting perfect sentences while I am freewriting, but it wouldn’t hurt to have a more diverse repertoire of sentence structures at my fingertips.

But this all is more helpful for writing revision. I am not yet at the point where I am revising my writing. I have, though, copied most of my blog posts to a Word file so I can print it out. So far I have 78 pages of single-spaced writing to print out and begin to edit. My first step ought to be to find the bits of writing that work best, so I can build from there.

It may be helpful for me to decide just what it is I am writing: a book, a bunch of essays…nothing so far, more likely. You never know, there could be some gold in there. I didn’t have any plan in mind while I’ve been producing this blog. So far, at least. Maybe reading through the posts will suggest a direction for further writing. My attitude toward what I have written, ultimately, must be one of willingness to throw it all out and start over again. The real benefit of writing this blog is that I can write quickly and move on - I’m not that invested in what I am writing, so I wouldn’t mind throwing it all away.

One way or another, though, I need to make what I write more meaningful. I do need to have some plan as to where this writing project is going in order to turn this writing exercise into part of my professional practice. This is why I want to find some sort of useful writing within the posts I have already written. Even if I could use only five pages of what I have written so far that would be useful. I hope it will be more, but five pages will be c.2500 words of useful writing. That’s a start by any measure.