

clownfysh.com selected posts

2010–2016 in chronological order

by Matthew Temple

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People who drink too much are people who essentially aren't satisfied by drinking.

Otherwise, if drinking satisfied them, they would stop drinking.

People who drink one drink and stop have satisfied themselves. While drinking too much is not an affliction I would wish on anyone, this points out something, rather, I hate about the person who is satisfied by drink. To me it shows spiritlessness (if you'll forgive the pun), because it shows a person who is easily satiated. To be easily satiated by drink may literally be a blessing. But to be easily satiated in general is pathetic, it's a horrible crime to oneself and one's human/ cultural family. Which is why, still not wishing alcoholism proper on anyone, some of my favorite people tend toward such problems..they are spirited, they are not easily satiated. In the larger sense, that is a very very good trait to have.

I'm at a point where the loneliness is so great that I have to do something about it.

I could numb it, as before, with alcohol, with lying to myself, with pretending the facts of the world are not what they are. Or I can face it, live through it. To go that second route I think will involve some non-traditional tactics, one of which I've skirted with before. And that is real separation, not pretending that there is a connection where there isn't. That's a hard road.

Dream that friend / police was inspecting my car. Stuff was out of date but they decided to let me keep it.

Our family van was in a warehouse/shed. I was in a desert city like Tucson. All my family had left me. I had enough gas money to drive somewhere in the region and start an independent life, or I could admit that my life there was already independent. There was freedom possible / necessary and I just had to admit it to myself—realize—that that's how it already was. Key part of the dream was that while in waking life I sometimes think I am leaving my family by being independent, actually in the dream they have already left me, they have already moved on, are doing other things. I say that when you fear something from others it is always a fear of what you might become. Maybe when I'm afraid that Suzanne will disappear without telling me where she is, that is really a fear that I might do that. I have been constrained sometimes by fear that my moving, my independence, will in bad ways leave my family behind. But, for a while, I lived in Dayton and everyone in my family moved away from there, and I was the last one left there for many years, not by my leaving, but by being left behind. I liked the independence of that. In LA, I didn't like it as much. Film school was okay but I never felt I had a home in LA. I love aspects of it but the driving there was hard during school and after school.

To do my job, I must remain charged.

I must stay away from massively-depleting activities. When partially charged, I must steal away at night, sit by the sunset alone, sip chocolate milk, and still myself, recharge my spirit.

Dream that I had car keys but no car. And I was carrying a 24-pack of toilet paper in the rain.

I had rented two cars, but my dad took one of them and the other couldn't be found. I searched the parking lot. It started raining.

The toilet paper was dry because it had plastic around it, but it was—as 24 packs of toilet paper are in waking life—awkward to carry.

I used it as an umbrella. The shops along the strip mall kept changing every time I walked in front of them..I could never go back to the same shop I had been to before. I wondered if I had enough money for dinner at Chili's. But Chili's was too far to walk to. I had a key in my pocket. Car keys. But none of the cars in the parking lot were mine.

Dream that I sank the boat on a camping trip.

And everyone was disappointed. The boat sank because I was too heavy and I was sitting in it wrong. So while everyone else was off fishing from the edge of the land, I had to fix the boat..to get it above water and then go in search of new supplies to replace the ones that were lost.

I'm going up this place on the land, which in the dream is the only place that a person who had lost supplies would go to find new ones, and to clean ones that had gotten dirty. There was evidence up there that another traveler had lost supplies and was slaving to make things right. Someone else had sunk their boat.

As I got further up I saw it was my dad.

Dream that I was in a bicycle riding competition/ race

where a bunch of people, each riding a bike, had to get to the bottom of a [spiral] (square-spiral) staircase that was going 'round the core of a school building. Most of the competitors were elementary to me..hundreds approaching thousands I didn't consider any competition, and I let them go first, because there was no real competition there. So the race was easy. But, still, there were maybe four people in these hundreds approaching thousands

who were my real competition. It was as if I was technically on this playing field of a thousand, but it was clear to me how in terms of my game, it was just me and four other people. Knowing this, I could look at the field, and my place in it, differently. Last night I prayed for knowledge of how I fit into the world spiritually. Maybe this is one element of that.

In terms of the competition, it was like I knew I was in the top few, but I still had to go out and beat those remaining few. In a more general spiritual sense, I think that I need to view this world with the trip analogy..I'm on my trip, everyone is on their own trip. I need to stay on my trip, regardless of what others are doing. Maybe that's part of it for me.

Dream I was choosing a leopard.

The pet wrangler had brought five possibles. One was a Moiré of purple, brown, and yellow spots. I decided to go with the one that was Tic Tac orange. She was the most responsive to touch, promising to grow into an appropriate pet for a human. The others might have been too wild, too anti-human. But little Tic Tac, hairless skin the consistency of plucked chicken, or a trash bag, or scales, loved to be touched. She would make a perfect pet.

Dream that school was out. Not just for me, but for everyone. And I never, ever had to go back there again.

Specifically, school had been out for me, and I had already graduated, so I was already done with it. But in this dream it was the last day of school for the other classes, so me and my classmates who were post-seniors were standing in the hallway and celebrating with the others, and they were walking out into the sunlight, and we were following up behind them. And I never, ever had to go back there again. Not in a hateful way, but in an I'm-really-done-with-this way. It was loving, and wonderful, and through.

Dreams of friendship bracelets, string, and the modulo function.

We were taking a test on small modulo operations, tiny operations with two-digit numbers, but I wasn't taking it, I would take it later, or never, and instead me and my classmates were passing around the most intricate friendship bracelets, made of thinner string than we make them with in waking life, made with thread thinner than thread, and space between the thread, like sparse knitting, and there was no work at all in making them, they just happened wherever we looked.

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And just a minor thought: that the *telling* of a dream, as something we do in waking life, is characterized, among other traits, by the act of rectifying the reality of the dream with the reality we remember when we wake up..in telling our dreams, one of the things we're always doing is describing the differences between the dream reality and waking reality. Inside the dream, we're not doing this (as much). Inside the dream, it's just that world. But if you listen to people tell their dreams, listen for the inevitable string of descriptions of what made the dream world different—impossible—relative to the waking world. The suggestion being that that is an essential part of the act of dreaming, during the recounting-the-dream part of the dreaming act..that perhaps there is something useful, or essential, in the act of acknowledging, the act of seeing, differences between various realities..of telling ourselves contradictory stories about the rules of reality. That there is utility in calling into question those rules, and that dreaming and waking are natural times to do that.

Engine running clean. Post-catharsis.

Organized all my digits :: got a new hard drive (thanks Mom!) :: got my websites and files and physical possessions in order. Losing

weight. Only about 12 pounds to go. Hardly drinking soda, maybe one Coke per month; otherwise food is clean. Dreamed last night I drank wine. Going to run in a minute. Project-wise, got everything off the table. Stopped looking for agents and publishers..can't find any yesses..screw it, **I love to write**, I can do that without anyone's help or permission. Put **Things Said in Dreams** and **Camp Lake** online. Not dicking around with query process anymore. Cleaned up **C code**. Worktable is clean, figuratively. Have time, protection, and energy. Clean slate. Oh, and really done being tangled up with stuff that's been tangling me up, mentally, my dad and my last work. The fact is we have nothing to do with each other anymore. For me to pretend that we do, doesn't make sense. I'm in an empty place, a full place. I feel good, my body feels good running and lighter, and I'm not closing doors or damning people, but my boat sails more lightly after having cut a couple lines to let others float as they will. They're not dragging behind my boat anymore. Now to run.

It's a new day.

There is no closure. There is no justice. Or: justice is not guaranteed. I want mercy for myself, but can I give it to others? Can I let us all off the hook? Can I avoid enough evil—or enough fumbling complacency—to find enjoyable spots in the world? People are mostly forgetful, mostly unable, mostly incompetent. We are barely machines. The part of us that can *do*, is barely functional; the parts of us that are supposed to *be*, are even less so. I think, with some people I know, that critical parts of them that would make them human..are not there. There is not just evil in this world, there are mini-alliances of evil. They are unplanned. Sometimes I am part of them. Sometimes we ad-hoc band together to close our eyes, bury our heads in the sand, and knowingly destroy. Somehow through this the tyranny is that the ones being destroyed are expected to smile. To smile, while my employer lays off half the company and puts me on half salary. To smile when in order to get my father to pick up the phone, I have to harass his sister, to make it painful enough for him that he can't ignore me

without someone he cares about knowing it. And parts of me, growing up like this, living among these people who are flawed like me..those parts have become horrible. I am not the person I admire, the person who loves and supports the stranger and their attacker all at the same time. And the people I know who are most like that are dead. They die early. To live that way is too much. To live with continued love for those who are abusing you, using you, is I think a path that kills early most who try it. My path, the path of half-love, half-hate, is even too tiring for me, I think. People say hate tires you, but love tires you, too, when you do it with certain people. Because some people don't love, they don't, not in the way I mean it. I think we all want to, I think for each of us it's hard.

And more than there being *evil* in the world, I think there's fumbling, and fear. Everything wrong we do is from fear, at root.

At root, every fear is the fear of death. And that may be an understandable fear, and it may be, literally, a rational one, but to act in each moment out of the fear of death, is a waste, a mistake, and it may not be evil—it may be merely fumbling—but that kind of fumbling is a crime committed against ourselves, as the whole that we are whether or not we always see it. It is not my job to remind other people, individually, that they are fucking up along these lines. It is not my job to love them either. I can love a cat. I cannot love a snake.

Dream I was driving from the back seat.

I couldn't comfortably reach the steering wheel. I couldn't consistently see what lay ahead. All I had to do to make my life easier was move into the front seat and drive from there. It was awkward to switch from the back seat to the front seat while the car was moving, but I was doing it. Drive the car from the seat from which the car was meant to be driven.

Dream that my aunts and uncles and parents were treating their children like shit,

not affording them the respect of being sovereign individuals, as children or adults. Not listening. Not hearing. And the problem was transferred to all of us as children, and one of my cousins made a special trip to see my sister Amy because she had had a baby, and Amy wouldn't let our cousin hold the baby—unequivocally told him no—and my cousin was upset, and became derisive about it toward my sister..and I was so proud of her for sticking to what she was comfortable with, and I saw it as a sign that the mistakes of the generations need not be continued forever, and I told her how proud I was of her.

Dream that I was shooting a scene for a college commercial.

There were people walking into the street in front of a university building, and two main actors having a conversation. Somehow we had gotten to shooting without having gotten a permit to use the first three lanes of the street, which we needed for the shot. A policeman came by. His name was Buckminster or something, and he was very friendly and very tall. He asked to see our permit. I discovered we didn't have one. The 1st AD—who was Sheth, this old friend of mine from the seventh grade—he wouldn't listen. I said just get everyone to the edge of the street and back, we'll use the green and re-frame the shot so we don't need to use the first three lanes of the street. I bargained with the policeman about where we could shoot to without a permit. The shot was going to be fine. I was trying to get Sheth to move the background actors into the correct spot. I had a camera movement that was even better than before. But Sheth wouldn't do it. He was stuck on the original plan, and couldn't imagine that without using the first three lanes of the street that we would have any shot at all. There was this herd of people who at the end of the day I knew would only care that they were part of something that worked. I knew how to make it work, and was trying to make that happen. I had charmed the policeman. Now all I needed was for my own crew, especially my 1st AD, to get in line and make my plan a reality. But

Sheth wasn't able to move with the changes, so I found myself asking if we had a 2nd AD on this set.

Love appears at the center of our species,

at the center of its life. It is the central concept of our religions, of our everything. But look at that backwards: instead of thinking about an array of concepts from which one has been chosen, think of a species, a class, of living things coming about for whom there is a central concept, an essential concept, as each class of living things might have. It is not that, even, cows love and space frogs love and aliens love and rocks love and people are one type of thing that also loves, who has chosen love as its central concept in so many of our paradigms. It's that {what we call love} is—and by “is” I mean \implies , is-equal-to—it's that {what we call love} \implies {our essential concept}.

It's that our class of beings has a central concept, and we happen to call it love. Or we get at it in various ways, and love happens to be the most overarching word of ours that gets at our central nature.

Bears we might say love their cubs, but bears do not love like we do, their love is not the same as our love. We see similarities between {bear “love”} and {people “love”} but those loves are not the same. There is something about us that is totally us :: an extravagance for no reason, a devotion, a flair :: portions of which are shared with bears, portions of which are not. And the total set of what we mean when we get at the essence of what we call love, isn't something that transfers to other classes of living beings. It's us, and us alone. And that's not to say that “love” exists outside of us, and that we alone have been wise enough to choose it as our central concept..it's to say that we have an essence, as bears have a distinct essence, and that when people talk of love we are simply getting at ours.

Six unicorn dreams in a row.

Multicolored, rainbow unicorns. I was not riding them, but they were with me. Each dream had one unicorn. It was like I was

seeing six or seven aspects of {the unicorn}. Peaceful. Lovely. We liked each other.

To see a unicorn in your dream, symbolizes high ideals, hope and insight in a current situation. It also symbolizes power, gentleness, and purity. Alternatively, it may represent your one-sided views.

Purity or innocence. Integrity or high personal standards.

Horses are..significant symbols of movement/travel, transitions, messages or ambitions.

When this legendary creature appears in your dream it stands for your high hopes or ideals. It represents freedom and open-mindedness and also a wide range of positive feelings. The unicorn in your dream is associated with your personality and traits of character - power and strength mixed with gentleness and tenderness. The legendary creature with the body of a horse and a horn placed at the center of its forehead also stands for a very imaginative individual who has no limits when it comes to fantasizing and fancying. The usually white unicorn has been connected since ancient times with a strong health and also with the idea of purity and innocence.

When unicorns appear in your dream, it symbolizes a gentle power that is currently in you. Don't be afraid to tackle obstacles that are holding you back in career advancements or relationships.

Unicorn-ancient emblem of purity; (gypsy) righteousness; peace

Got my two novels up as Lulu books.

Stock covers..will take some more time to design the covers. Pretty happy with that as a way to “be” a writer. Of course just by writing, I am a writer. I actually like the idea that there is no “publisher”, no “agent”. There’s no money, either, but yet the whole thing is under my control. I like having my own text in

LaTeX format and making my own PDFs in Unix. The book industry should make it possible/easy to update the text in a book without losing your product code #, web page links, etc. Do you lose reviews on Lulu if you unpublish/re-publish a book? Tired; not doing covers now. Off to manage small things, like dishes, and drinking water, and watching TV.

- *Things Said in Dreams*
- *Camp Lake*

Just re-did all the italics, having moved from Google Docs format to LaTeX, so hopefully I got them all.

Dream I gave everyone a hug.

That all the family members I told you can't be in my life anymore, were all on a camping trip, and when I got there I gave each of them a hug. The hug I gave was more than any of them wanted to get, not just from me, but from anyone. They weren't used to hugging, so I hugged them extra-much. But I wouldn't give them my address. I meant what I said. I love them. But they can't be in my life anymore.

And wow. I get it. Growing older.

I'm sitting here seeing that video chat and voice calls are now integrated into gmail, even for linux, and I'm thinking to myself whether I'm *ever* going to get another "phone"..

Someday I'm going to be telling my kids, or nephews, about a time when phones were corded—connected to the wall! And they're going to think that's so old-fashioned. And it is.

Phone and *stereo* used to be pieces of hardware, physical things you bought. Now they're pieces of software, that as of now I'll just be using on my netbook, always wirelessly online..

I don't think I will get another phone. I think that's passé.

Dream I was at my childhood house.

I was me, my age now, and also me, at around three. The older me was taking care of the younger me. There was a woman with me—wife?—a friend. The house was quite nice, the floor was clean, things were bright. The younger me was a joy. Pleasant. I loved him and he was worth taking care of. The older me would do that.

Dream the boat was upside-down.

Giant ship. A few of us were climbing the walls, roping it so we were right-side-up, trying to right the cavern we were in. But mostly peeps were upside-down, and the boat was sinking.

Dream I was back in Dayton

and Dayton was a catch-all for workplaces and schools and people I had met in the past. I walked past old workplaces in the mall.

No-longer friends of mine were the managers now; they had risen in the ranks. In the grass outside the mall kids were playing soccer and I was barefoot. The ball went out of range and came in my direction. As I kicked it to the children to save them running room I saw that they were the children of a high school girlfriend and she was their coach, across the field. I recognized her by her hair, and her children looked just like she would have five years before I met her. They recognized me, somehow, but I didn't go talk to the mom. I walked on, and they kept on playing soccer, and being mothers, and being children. And I knew that their way was good for them and that my way was good for me.

I have had dreams with that same Dayton-esque location in it before, where instead of being desolate and beaten (as I feel about Dayton in waking life in recent years) it was full of pools and brightness, and (as I know it does have) close family. In the past that location evoked nostalgia, longing, a question about whether I should have stayed, or whether I could go forward there..whether I could have that kind of small-town family. But I never have, and I have never wanted it, really, and the location doesn't evoke longing in me anymore. Their way is good for them and my way is good for me.

Dream I was processing with Dad.

We were talking, working things out, making our first real progress in years. I felt better, in the dream, and I feel better now, awake. I think you can do that, work things out in your dreams, or even through thinking, and get real emotional effects. Even though it never really happened, it happened to my subconscious.

There was healing. And by the location in the dream, I knew I had moved on.

Dream I was hunting snakes

and when we got back to the campfire, to the tribe, and threw the snakes on the fire, one of them was still alive.

I remember a time

when eating dinner with friends, and working to make money enough to eat with friends, have an apartment, and love, and live..were enough. When those satisfied a hunger..or falsely promised to. Can simple things satisfy me, or if not satisfy, at least divert enough to bring me joy from time to time? I don't know the answer to that question. I hope it's yes, but I don't know. I think there might be certain types of growth that make a certain head never fit again into a hat it used to wear.

Cats make up the world

In the absence of a mouse to chase, our cat, Ruby, is chasing a stray hair tie. She wants to go outside, but can't. The world she wants is not there so she is making up the world that a cat requires by hunting a hair tie.

Maybe people do the same thing. In the absence of a challenge, a lover, or whatever kind of life the human being is designed to require, perhaps we, too, invent a world suitable for us to operate in.

Some theories I've heard along these lines, about dating and work behavior in humans making up for a void left by farming and industrial and information cultures..

It just strikes me that our psychiatry is oriented in some ways around undoing the games we make up to fill certain voids..but it's clear if you look at my cat that we're at least not alone in making up worlds to fill the void when reality is insufficient, mismatched, or entirely inoperable.

I think I am starting to understand obsession and addiction.

From the obsessive/compulsive mindset of doing an action to create a feeling..I notice, in a small thing like cupping my hand around my ponytail, that there is a distinction there I have rarely made, that has everything to do with obsession and addiction.

There is the part of me that when I do that is measuring something..measuring a degree of perfection of the act..measuring a degree of perfection of the feeling the act does/could give me. That feeling is based on evaluation of the action..of the cupping of the ponytail. If a stray hair interrupts the action of the fingers, the degree of perfection of the act and therefore the feeling is tainted..it is less than perfect. As there are no stray hairs, as the bob of the ponytail operates to specification, the quality of the act improves, its evaluation is closer to perfect. But there may never be a perfect evaluation, and even the most perfect evaluation so far does not finalize an imagined answer about what the evaluation of the next act may bring. The next may be more perfect. Hence we have addiction..because there is no evaluation for which the next act might not bring a more perfect evaluation. So it never stops.

But if I make a distinction between the evaluation of the act and subsequent feelings, and the act itself, then the obsessive cycle can be broken. If I ignore my evaluation..or even better..don't do one, then I can do that act and stop. I can even enjoy the act. Then stop without regret, without wondering. Because there is no

evaluation to compare to. My fingers can enjoy the act without my brain causing the obsessive loop.

Substances by their nature specially agitate this type of cycle because they create feelings. They change feelings. So drugs make an obsessive of anyone who tries them..that's what addiction is..it's a special kind of obsession with a stimulus that creates a response in all or most people. An obsessive isn't obsessive about every act. There's no way they could be. And hence obsessives are obsessive about different acts than each other. Drugs are just an act that is more universally obsession-causing than most, because drugs create and alter feelings in most.

It's ironic, it's odd, it's counter-intuitive perhaps, but it's this combination of action and feelings..when action is used to create feelings..that is obsession and addiction. On the one hand it seems that never taking action to create or alter feelings would mean that you were inert. I think that's literally true. On the other hand, it is the act of letting go..letting go of not just feelings..of feelings, yes..but also of the desire or intention to create feelings through action..or: perhaps more specifically: it's letting go of the desire to re-create or best feelings from the past..that is what provides freedom from obsession. Because when you're trying to best a feeling, to create a feeling whose evaluation leads to repeated action..it's necessarily through comparing those feelings to past feelings by which the evaluation must take place..and so obsession and addiction are fundamentally about not letting go of the past. Obsession is a type of control, yes..it's an attempt to control the present to make it better than, or the same as, the past. If I let go of the past, then I don't have any way to evaluate the present, and I can just be.

Like my fingers are when I run them through my hair and don't think about it. I *feel*..my nerves feel the present, feel the action. But without evaluating it or comparing it to the past.

Hence I am not obsessed with trying to create the future so that it will be better than the past. Which, so stated, sounds like it runs counter to..and may actually run counter to..much of what our culture believes life is about. I'm starting to see, though, that my

own obsession, and addiction, is wrapped up tightly in my proposed stranglehold on the future, my conspiracy in favor of the future me. About ten years ago I did have what I guess was a realization at the time..that the present me is the “victim” (I said it tongue and cheek)..a victim of a conspiracy committed by all the me’s of the past. My life was going well, in some ways, and I thought of myself as the beneficiary victim of the conspiratorial desires of the me’s of the past to make the me of the present happy. I think I was more right about the victim part than I could see at the time. When the present me conspires to pleasure the future me, I am the victim of obsession and addiction. When the present me lets go of the past and lets go of the future..doesn’t compare the past to the present and doesn’t act now in ways designed to make the future better than the past..that is when my **freedom** from obsession and addiction happens.

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couple of notes:

- **“because drugs create and alter feelings in most.”**—Other almost-universal feeling-creating actions are: love, drama, and thrill..as they release drugs from within.
- **“it’s an attempt to control the present to make it better than, or the same as, the past.”**—Maybe sometimes, too, it’s an attempt to control the present to make it worse than the past.

Dream about all-or-nothing-ness

Like if I was trying to get someone to read a book, my first method would be to do a magic trick where if they were walking through a building, they would see, at the end of a hall, a desk and a chair and a book, and I would be hidden away somewhere, waiting to see if they would read.

They wouldn’t.

My next method would be to tie the person to a chair, set them on fire, and then wheel them over to the book.

Dream of walking a tightrope

On one side was a house. On the other side was an infinite abyss. While a classmate told me of how, while she was walking this same tightrope, she was bitten by a huge snake.

Laughing in my sleep

Dreams that life was funny again.

Dream of a full blank pad of paper (sign of creative potential)

Trees that were so thick they could shield the ground from rain (sign of cover from grief). Old classmates and teachers playing in harmony. Color-coordinated green *everything* (clothing, vegetation, an airplane). And in the whole forest, there were only a few pieces of litter to pick up to make the whole thing perfect, and I was picking those up.

Exorcism

Sometimes I take on other people's stuff. I think that, or act like, what someone else does reflects on me. But it doesn't. Nothing anyone else does adds to, or takes away from, what I do. We are not related in that way. We can love each other, but—in that way—we have nothing to do with each other.

Symmetry / Asymmetry and the Life Parameter

Symmetry as understanding. Communication as striving for symmetry. Drama starting when symmetry is broken, drama closing when symmetry returns. Conflict as asymmetry without communication. Learning as communication, teaching as

communication. Without asymmetry there is nothing, nothing perceivable by a perceiver. Like a fickle mirror. It starts as a mirror, it perhaps ends as a mirror. But in between it gets bored, decides to play. Twists. Shouts. One side teasing the other. The other side matching. Then the original deviant following its doppelgänger. I think there's a necessary rate of asymmetry, and a rate at which symmetry returns. A minimum or a maximum. A tendency at which the world decides to tell itself stories. A rate at which it does so. A rate at which it introduces conflict and a rate at which it resolves it. That's as close as I can get. A vague supposition. Not understanding what lies underneath, what lies beyond, such that [something] is telling itself stories. But can get that far, can see this much: that there is such a rate, that it speaks to something. That there is a *need* for the universe to introduce quirks; that there is a *rate* at which those quirks resolve. It's a rate of self-exploration, a rate of self-expansion. This *this* that we are, is quirking itself, conflicting itself, creating and discovering itself. It is playing. It sometimes rests. And there is a *rate* at which it extemporizes, and a *rate* at which it critiques that extemporization. A rate at which it diverges and a rate at which it converges. A rate at which it imagines and a rate at which it examines. A rate at which it produces and a rate at which it edits. I think, as we simulate culture, as we model ourselves and look ourselves in the face of various technological mirrors, that a key parameter is this rate of *story*. The rate of introduction and resolution of conflict. The rate of introduction of challenge and the rate of squashing or elevating the ideas represented by that challenge either *out of* or *into* the norm, for the for[eseeable]ever. So I'm not talking about a parameter that is relevant to creating *individual* life forms, wherein this parameter too high or this parameter too low would preclude life forms but this parameter just right would enable life forms..but rather..I think we need a term outside of *life*..outside of individual life, that includes the rock and the mountain and the stream as alive. And I think this rate of story is a parameter to that kind of Life. I think that kind of Life has a rate at which is includes deviation and a rate at which it resolves it either into or out of the

evolving norm. Based on simple observation I think there's probably something like this: if you imagine a 0..100 scale, where 0 and 100 are equal in the sense that 0 is always being wrong and 100 is always being right, and 50 is being wrong half the time and right half the time, then I think the sweet spot for many things, possibly including this Life parameter, is 75. Being wrong all the time—in the sense in which I am discussing it—is the same as being right all the time. That's because if you have a method by which you can predictably answer questions (or situations) incorrectly..then if you simply reverse your strategy you are then always right. Hence being always wrong is almost very exactly the same thing as being right all the time..the difference between them is trivial. When you try to build systems to predict the world, you will understand this like a first grader understands $1+1$. The real continuum lies between 50 and 100..or between 50 and 0 of that scale. I imagine there's a similarity or applicability of that kind of scale to this Life parameter I'm dancing around. Because at too-low a rate of story—at too-low a rate of storytelling, or introduction and resolution of change—there wouldn't be this type of Life..this Life that includes streams and rocks and breeze. But at too high a rate..what would happen? I suspect some kind of needed continuity wouldn't be maintained..but I'm not sure. Because every solid way to talk about a *need for continuity* (that I can think of) has to do with the limitations of an observing subject. The need for continuity exists (in examples I can think of) as a requirement of the observing subject..the subject who cannot observe the object when the object has too-high a level of change. So I don't know, I personally cannot at this moment think of why there would be a maximum bound for this Life Parameter, this rate of storytelling..outside of the requirements of an observer. (Of course that observer can be part of the "same" "individual"..the same individuated thing..as we often think of consciousness nowadays..the conscious part of an individual is an observer of another part of that "same" individual, etc.) Is the minimum, as well as the maximum, of this parameter, only required as a matter of observation? Is there some magic in the observation, the perception, of difference and the same..of *the*

other and the self? I don't know. Or is there something external that determines this Life Parameter, this rate of story? I doubt it. My intuition, based on everything I've seen, tells me that in the end, in the beginning, in whatever is as close to *origin* as we can get, that the definitions will all be self-same..that we'll find, as we try to observe these kind of parameters..that we'll find that you cannot unravel the investigative methods and the objects of their investigation. Heisenberg. That but with logic. With symbolic logic. With thinking. Like the reason the problem exists is that we're trying to solve it. So I suspect that the value of the Storytelling Parameter will turn out to have everything to do with some peculiarity of those trying to investigate it. I really think that's the case. Like "everything I see" is..paradigmatically..a mirror to myself. Not in a solipsistic sense. Not literally but paradigmatically. Not that there is no other. Even with technical solipsism there is an *other*, via that which "I" do not control. But not that way; rather, via a paradigmatic sense in which the act of observation—which seems to us as an objective, transferrable concept..by which that act—as solid as it seems..always unravels back to a self-mirror. As in: a kernel at the beginning of the construction of an argument or an investigation *necessarily* contains so much of the essence of its constructor that the resolution of the investigation or the argument will *always* paradigmatically serve as an analysis of the examiner..of the constructor of the discourse.

Like: any question I am capable of asking, regardless of the initial apparent seeming direction of the question, will, in its subsequent (derivative) analysis, always reflect back on me so much that the real nature of the question will be to question the nature of *myself*. To question the nature of the question-asker. If that is true—and maybe it's not..but if that is true—then the Life Parameter will be defined self-referentially. Maybe it will be in a satisfying way. I don't know. I—or someone..we—need to step back far enough to create a meaningful simulation of this, such that this Parameter can be explored. I don't know how to do it. I only know that it **wants** to be done.

Dream I was on an expedition

with this guy who was looking for a certain kind of snake. Three of us went through the jungle lightly, barefoot, hoping not to step on it. When we found it it was huge, the size of ten people. It was completely docile; would never hurt us; but it was too big for us to carry too.

And in this dream everything was—if not perfectly clean—perfectly manageable. I shot targets with a rifle and my weapon was easy to wield, light, functioning well. I didn't shoot at every pop-up, but every one I shot at I hit.

It was one of those **dreams** when you wake up knowing that everything—not just today, but for the rest of your life—is going to be great.

Outsiders are more able than the artists

We've put ourselves in a position where CNN can no longer both {be CNN} and {report the news}; where a worker can no longer {be the worker} and {do the work}. The expectations, the ideas we have about {who we are} no longer allow us to be who we are. You can't {be the President who is expected} and also {do what the President should usefully do}. They are now at odds, and so nothing gets done. So now what we used to call news is more often found on Comedy Central than CNN, because Comedy Central isn't required to {be CNN}. And hence Comedy Central is more able than CNN..to do what CNN proclaims to do. And non-employees are more able than employees..to do what employees claim to do. And the apolitical are more able than the political..to do what the political claim to do. And the uneducated are more able than the educated..to do what the educated claim to do. And the heathen are more able than the pious..to do what the pious claim to do.

And the unprofessional are more able than the professional..to do what the professionals claim to do. And the outsiders are more able than the artists..to do what the artists claim to do.

Dream I was carrying an obelisk across many railroad tracks

I waited for trains, but they waited for me. They would not cross before me; they waited for me to cross before them.

I carried the obelisk horizontally, on my back.

Train:

To dream that you are crossing railroad tracks, indicates that you are going against the path that others have laid out for you. You are doing your own thing and not what others want or expect of you. Alternatively, the dream symbolizes a transitional phase.

The idea of the powerful outside force can also be seen in the symbol of the train as a mass transit vehicle. Many people are on trains which may suggest that the dream is simply doing as those around her do. In this way, a train dream might mean that one is conforming to the images those around her have or is going where those around her want her to go rather than doing what she believes is best.” “In this country train travel is not as common as it is in other countries such as Europe, so the train might also symbolize some powerful, set way of doing something that may be outdated.” “..journeying into regions in the psyche that are unexplored or journeying into a new relationship. It could also point to a journey into a new facet of life, a new destiny.

Obelisk:

A dream of fame and wealth, of honors to be conferred (Gypsy).

Dreaming of an obelisk, indicates that you will have friends or acquaintances from an exotic path that are not expected.

I wasn't happy with the typical phallic idea of obelisk symbolism, and most of the other ideas for obelisk specifically stated that the obelisk was tall and looming, etc. This one was horizontal, carried

on my back. I suppose in US culture and some others it could have political/ governmental associations. I liked the ideas I saw about obelisks representing graves, or fatality in some form. Does anyone else have more ideas about obelisk symbolism?

You have to live in your imagination if you have one.

Why?

What does it mean to not have an imagination?

Think of the writer. The writer makes up, say, conversations. People in real life have conversations. So there are imaginary conversations made up by writers. And there are real conversations that happen between people, that are extemporized in real time through the collaboration of multiple people.

Think of these scenarios:

Scenario 1: A real, collaborative conversation in which Sally is making up, in her mind, things to say, and saying them, and in which Sue is not making anything up and also not saying anything. The history of this conversation will be only one person talking. Its transcript will be everything that Sally says.

Scenario 2: A real, collaborative conversation in which both Sally and Sue are making things up in their heads and saying them.

Scenario 3: An imaginary conversation between two characters. Sally makes this up in her head and says it by writing it down.

Now, anyone who is experiencing these conversations will be subject to their expression; often, those experiencing them will be affected by them. At the very least, those experiencing these conversations will have their reality altered by the very presence of the conversation: their reality is different depending on whether they are aware of, or unaware of, the conversation.

In *Heist*, two of Mamet's characters go on like this:

—*You're a pretty smart fella.*

—*Ah, not that smart.*

—*If you're not that smart, how'd you figure it out?*
—*I tried to imagine a fella smarter than myself. Then I tried to think, "what would he do?"*

This is one of the more interesting concepts, and it has everything to do with imagination.

Businesspeople imagine. Writers imagine. Lovers imagine. All of those people are creating worlds in their heads and then trying to make those worlds happen.

Imagination gets a bad rep from some people. Like it's less-than-critical to make things up in your head. But all progression, whether in love or art or business—more accurately: all *making*—comes from imagination.

Let's go back to the three scenarios above. In scenario 1, Sally is controlling the reality. She is making up the shared reality. What she makes up in her head, which she then says, becomes the extent of what happens. She is making the reality. In scenario 2, both Sally and Sue make up reality. In scenario 3, Sally makes up the whole reality.

What interests me is comparing such scenarios; especially, comparing the levels of inventiveness of people in such scenarios. If you and I are having a conversation and you're not saying anything, then you're not surprising me, you're not inventing things that are affecting me. In most real conversations there's some level of inventiveness on both sides, such that every once in a while each party surprises the other. But then you have weird situations. Like a good writer, say David Mamet. David Mamet could go through a hundred conversations with random people and never be surprised as much as the average David Mamet play would surprise any of those hundred people if they read it. Of course everyone is surprised sometimes. But those extreme examples of inventiveness difference point out a crack in the wall of one of our common ideas about how conversations go. The common idea is that everyone has something surprising to say, that everyone is contributing to the progression of the conversation. That's technically, usually true. But it has a false corollary thought,

a thought that goes with it, which is not implied by it, but which [falsely] seems to always go with it. Which is that inventiveness is located by *person*. That the unit of containment of inventiveness is the person. That the existence of an individuatable person is the condition by which inventiveness arrives. And it's not.

Inventiveness is relative. When you and I are talking, I am—perhaps not literally, but effectively—imagining what you might say. I have a model of you in my mind. When you deviate from my model, I'm surprised. Those are the moments in which—and that is the way that—you redefine my reality. That's how you make my reality bigger. When I think something and what you do contradicts and expands my ideas. Usually, in mundane ways, we're expanding each other's realities constantly.

But there are extreme cases..there are scenarios, in business, in love, in art, in just plain conversation, where the difference in inventiveness between the parties is such that, consistently, one side surprises the other..and consistently, the other side bores the one. In these cases, the locus of inventiveness is not *the person*. In these cases, inventiveness is not distributed evenly across the persons. In extreme cases, there is more than two person's worth of inventiveness—or invention—within (or controlled by) one person, where there is [sometimes much] less than one person's worth of inventiveness controlled by or associated with one person. There are pairings of people like this: on the one hand you have Leo Tolstoy; on the other hand you have a logic-fragmented sub-literate person. Think of their experiences: while Tolstoy has something to learn from every subliterate person he could possibly meet (because they've each had different life experiences), when it comes to certain types of expression, *nothing* the subliterate person says will ever expand the world of Leo Tolstoy, and *everything* Leo Tolstoy says will expand the world of the subliterate person.

Reality is flowing in one direction, and that direction is determined by imagination. Reality flows from areas of greater imagination into areas of lesser imagination. If you have imagined less than I have, then, as we interact, reality will be flowing from me to you more than reality will be flowing from you to me. In

typical cases reality will be flowing in both directions. But, as we imagine, as we invent, as we innovate—as we *make*—it is imagination that determines what is real.

This is why I say you have to live in your imagination if you have one. And, further, if you don't have one, then you have to live in someone else's. Reconsider scenario 1. Sally is making things up and saying them. Sue is doing neither. Sally is living in her imagination. Sue is also living in Sally's imagination. Imagination is relative. To have an imagination means that you are thinking of things that other people aren't. As we collaborate, publicly, on the construction of reality, it is the most imaginative who have the most effect. Hence: to the degree to which you have an imagination, that is the degree to which *you are* living in it.

Our mental / spiritual culture (definitely—and the whole universe possibly) is like Mamet's character: none of us are that smart, but through some magic we *are* able to imagine a fellow smarter than ourselves..and try to think what he would do.

• • •

One of the implications here is that if Sally can imagine what Sue might say..better than Sue can..that Sue might as well be (and may end up) saying what [how] Sally is imagining.

Lightness

I haven't been traveling lightly. I need to be. Something that's lighter is harder to push down. I *can't* carry around old email, old events, old emotions, old people. I *can't*. The present is just right; it is not too much, it is enough. I have said goodbye in words, now let me say goodbye in my heart. So I can travel lightly.

Can't wait for NaNoWriMo

Could write now but there is something magical about the pent-up words, and then **a month of writing every day**. There is talk around our house of deciding character names, general setting. So that

November 1 can be pure exposition. Though NaNoWriMo is viewed by some literarians as low-class, I don't think so..and I would not be alone in history if I stressed the importance of getting the complete thought of a novel out without interruption, without a mental break. Maintaining that state, that flow, moment to moment, is something everyone does differently—those who do maintain it. Some do it with drink, some do it with frenetic pacing. Some with routine. But for the low-class, for the NaNoWriter, it's as simple as word-count-per-day. 1667 words per day, pure fiction. I'm looking forward to my second year.

In fact, this year I'm considering live-writing, posting each day's text to a blog or even writing seriously live in a public google document, writing in order—which is something I don't always do—the modern low-brow magazine-less serial.

Be a NaNo buddy and create something in November, eh?

We should be like puzzle designers with our art.

Puzzle designers don't make things that, once they're explained to you, you feel you could have never figured out. Puzzle designers make things that, once explained, are so obvious that you can't imagine how you didn't see them in the first place. They use the simplest elements to convey the most obvious truth in the most ingenious way. That's how we should be with our art.

There's something very human about two experts in different fields talking to each other.

Just saw this on Iron Chef, Michael Symon and some famous musician talking about food, but the same dynamic is part of why *Bomb* magazine was good..or the TV show *Iconoclasts*. Because no matter how expert you are at a field (or fields), you can always be matched up with another human who exists large in some completely other domain. Sometimes we think we *are* what we

know. When two people who have major knowledge in almost non-overlapping fields get together, I think it's a great illustration of the distinction between what we know, and who we are..for me that kind of illustration is a good reminder of what, in the human, has nothing to do with knowledge.

I think why this gets me is that basically when any two people speak, it is essentially like this: like two experts in different fields, talking to each other.

Dream I was leaving the pool area

because a shark was eating people while they swam. Someone held the door closed and told me if I evacuated now it would cause panic. I told him they should have evacuated yesterday.

There is nothing else.

Aesthetics. Possession. Possibility. Location of self. And—not to get zen on you, but—distance from self is not necessarily distance from self. The opposite of presence is not necessarily the opposite of presence. The surprise isn't that understanding is overrated; it's that understanding is rated at all. Here. Be. Now. **There is nothing else.** Not control, not review, not subterfuge. No edits.

There are colors; there are flavors. There are modes; but there is no *not* and there is no *is*. There is that which is proper and that which is not, but there is no *mistake*. There is no *secret*, either—be advised of that—'cause we all know. Every stinking *pixel* is correct, every *x* and every *y* is 100% correct. And it's like that without your help. So yellow. And blue. Or everything is true.

“Poor is the man whose pleasure depends on the permission of another.”

This **Madonna quote** is brilliant. Tony Robbins gets at a similar idea when he says that when you set goals for your own happiness that they should be things you can attain without anyone else's

help. Without permission. I don't need permission to do what I'm going to do. I'm going to do it no matter what.

Things that require others' permission..aren't really things of the self.

It's not that anyone can keep you from your self. It's that when you take away all the things you'd need someone else[s permission] for..what is left *is* what is of the self.

“Cozy” mysteries

Wow. I had never heard this term before today.

A cozy is a mystery which includes a bloodless crime and contains very little violence, sex, or coarse language. By the end of the story, the criminal is punished and order is restored to the community..

The reader will want to be able to identify with the main character who should be likable and whose faults are present but socially acceptable. For example, she may 'always be late' but she shouldn't be a heroin addict.

Can you please tell me, why would anyone other than a child want to read a book like that?

Some of this anti-NaNo logic is flawed.

If Chris Baty declares December to be NaDoSkiMo (National Downhill Skiing Month), what can I then conclude about the quality of Lindsey Vonn's skiing? What can I conclude, based on Chris Baty's actions, about a new skier who skis during December?

I disagree with some of the tenets of NaNoWriMo but I disagree more with someone (agent or otherwise) who discards a manuscript based on its 50k word count coinciding with NaNo's 50k word count..it just doesn't make sense. It's actually a kind of prejudice, a mental shortcut.

I think people well-versed in creative process understand, as well, that there is no such thing as “an adult novel” which must

contain between 80 and 120 thousand words, have a protagonist that fits such-and-such model. That's just not true. **Those kinds of categorical descriptions** are appropriate in a marketing meeting, not on the writer's desk.

There's a difference, **as Faulkner reminds us**, between being a writer, and *writing*. Agents who disregard NaNo novels, writers who distance themselves from fellow novelists who happen to write NaNo-style..that's more about being a writer than it is about *writing*. Part of what's great about NaNoWriMo is that it encourages us to leave out the pretense and do this thing that we love, which is—very simply—writing.

You're actually not preaching to the choir with me. I am, in this regard, very much a sinner. You say "Just because you can write 50,000 words that more or less make sense in a month does not mean you're cut out to be a writer." I totally agree. And further, I think you solidly miss Faulkner's point. "Being a writer" is not something *you* do. Writing is something you do. Being a writer is something that happens to you. "Being a writer" is a historical description, a description by others *of* what you do. What you do—all you can do in this domain—is write. "Being a writer" just as "being a celebrity" is not something you do..it's something that others do in relation to you. You write a book. That's all you do. That other people read it (properly, formally, literally) is not your action, and other people's actions (properly, formally, literally) do not add, nor do they take away from, what you do. Your post clearly is well-placed in this discussion, but as a lover of words, and given your decision to make statements about what does and does not qualify a person as a writer, I have to encourage you to refocus: on work, not personality impressions.

Further on genre and prejudice

There were not-too-distant points in the past prior to which there was no such thing as a short story, or a detective story. There were points prior to which there were no novels. There were presumably points prior to which there were no songs.

Agents and marketers (and unfortunately, writers) have preoccupied themselves with historical, prejudicial, marketing-oriented categorizations so that we can game the market. Sell as much as possible. There's one problem with these marketing categories, however: they don't work.

Writers—so many writers now—won't write outside of genre, won't write outside of the guidelines set forth for them in books *published by publishers* (by agents, marketers, and other *analysts of publishing*).

There's a problem with this, and I'm not talking about some highfalutin artistic problem. I'm talking about a problem in simple logic.

Is *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* a short story or a novella? Who cares. *Who cares!* These are all *historical descriptions* of a complex field. There's a huge variety in page count and all kinds of other metrics describing books, and like most such fields that we describe quantitatively, our description takes the form of a bell curve. Most people don't tend to write books as long as Tolstoy or Stephen King, but some do. Most people don't write books as short as Richard Bach or Stephen King, but some do.

Honestly. Honestly. To say that something is of a genre, that's one thing. We have to use prejudicial simplifications to be able to discuss fields of such complexity and variety. But to *engineer for the prejudice*? It doesn't make sense.

When I tell a story, I make it as long or as short as I think it needs to be..to tell the story. I use whatever elements I think it needs to have to convey what I want to convey. Is it steampunk? Of course we have to use terms to describe—history essentially. But recognize the difference between *historical description* and *creation*.

Adherence to genre guidelines is not even the smartest way to make money.

You know, when Anne Rice placed her books, vampires were not all the rage. There was no *Twilight* before *Interview* and there was no *Wizards of Waverly Place* before *Harry Potter*. *Twilight* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, while they introduce their own creativity

and are works in their own right, are riding the coattails of predecessors whose path, at the time, was the one less traveled.

Genre fiction, all these “guidelines” for word count, etc on particular sub-genres..that’s all well and good if your job is to sneak product past customers who don’t care about what they’re buying (my nephew likes vampires! he’ll love this! (because the book is the right size and shape and the first sentence does not offend))..but..really..for grown-up people making worlds out of words, I should think that the eventual word count and other ways to satisfy literary agents’ marketing requirements would not be among the first considerations.

The first people to write steampunk weren’t steampunk authors. Jesus wasn’t a Christian. Poe wasn’t writing detective stories. Those terms, those categories, those demographics: that’s just how we talk about it now.

If I wrote *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice would have killed the Queen.

So yeah. I re-checked the text now and Alice doesn’t kill the Queen. I had an attack of research-panic wondering if I had been wrong, if Alice already had killed the Queen. But she hasn’t. At most she undermines the Queen’s leadership, which in a way is killing her, and could have led to the Queen’s demise. But which I don’t think LC ever said it did. Unless it’s in another text, maybe it is—tell me if you know, please.

But she should have. Alice should have killed the Queen. Or: she should have had to kill her in order to leave Wonderland. Basically: because Wonderland is controlled by the Queen, and Alice is trapped in Wonderland, and her goal, ultimately, is to leave :as such, in my version, I would want Alice to kill the queen. Because, while undermining the Queen is sufficient, and perhaps better for a children’s story, I do feel that Alice needs to become the Queen—whether that involves murder or not—in order to leave Wonderland. More like *Where the Wild Things Are*. Max becomes the scariest thing in the dark (at least from someone’s point of view,

even if he still finds others scarier than him, there is some point in which, and sense in which he becomes the scary / scariest monster in the dark). And I don't feel like Alice ever does. And I think the story would be better if she did. Perhaps it would be better.

Definitely it would be scarier. And though it may not involve actual murder—or maybe it will—I am thinking that in **mURdEr cLuB cANDy** I might have an aspect of this kind of modified Alice / Wonderland plot: a male Alice who gets into a Wonderland that, to escape from, he must kill its Queen.

The Chango Method

This is what Facebook is good for.

Mr. Chango,

You taught me algebra for two years at Masterman. It's funny, but I just thought of you, a few minutes ago, because something you said way back then has always stuck in my mind:

When you got to a point in a problem where you didn't know what to do (which didn't happen often, but is bound to happen sometimes when solving equations or other problems) you employed "The Chango Method": when you don't know what to do, rearrange the terms arbitrarily..add one to both sides, multiply both sides by two..just rearrange the terms or restate the terms so that the problem looks different, then proceed with whatever method you were using before, from a fresh point of view.

I think of this all the time. I very rarely find myself doing algebra, but in my work, in my life, when I get stuck, I use The Chango Method. Just rearrange the terms, restate the problem, change something arbitrarily, and then proceed.

Thank you for teaching that to some distant 9th grade self of mine, years ago in Philadelphia. It has helped me many times.

*Sincerely,
The Student Formerly Known as
Matthew Temple*

Basically the way he said it was: When you don't know what to do, do *something*. That's the Chango method. It's basically: don't get stuck. If you don't know what to do, don't stop, just do something, even if it's something arbitrary, because sometimes that casts the situation such that, then, you do know what to do.

You know, something strikes me,

seeing *Rear Window* posters and *Psycho*-inspired pictures tumbling around tumblr, which is: just how deeply we've been raised on a culture of media violence. And just how little I should have any guilt for making violence-oriented media.

Sometimes I have some guilt about making violence-oriented media, including violence in a story, etc. One time I remember I was watching the show "Most Evil" on the Investigation Discovery channel, in a dark room, by myself, and suddenly I was like: am I sick for enjoying watching shows about serial killers? Or: I like to fall asleep sometimes watching, say, *The Exorcist*. It calms me. People who know me, some of them, think that's weird. (I also like to fall asleep listening to Yanni.) But that night I was watching *Most Evil* I quickly realized: no, there's nothing sick about watching serial killers on TV. It's sick to kill people, perhaps, but watching a show about someone else's crimes doesn't in any way make me a criminal.

But here's the thing: I'm releasing myself from all of this guilt, because how could I possibly not make violence-oriented media, or have massive associations between the two in my mind? My parents think *The Silence of the Lambs* is sick. But just because *Psycho* is in black and white doesn't make it any less of a murder movie. I was born after color, and long before then, my culture was making violent media.

Maybe something about the Christian upbringing, especially, underscores my feelings of shame about making violent media.

But that idea that people do violent things because of violent media is simplistic to the point of being discountable, I think. I don't kill people, that's just not something I do. I don't even get into fights. I've never, at 32 years old, ever been physically aggressive toward anyone. Ever. It's just not me. If I grew up in a family of violence, then maybe violence would be in my blood, maybe I would have learned how to live such that violence was an inherent part of it.

I didn't grow up that way.

But I did grow up watching violent movies. From *The Wizard of Oz* to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to all the ones I've seen since, I've grown up watching movies where people kill each other for fun. Or by accident. Where, even if they don't complete the act (because the would-be victim is our hero), people are trying to kill each other because they hate each other. Movies, for me, have always been a kind of conversation wherein violence was being discussed. The idea that you would then make media, books, movies, stories, where violence was disallowed, is fundamentally unnatural to me. Hence some of my [criticism of genre fiction](#), hence my wariness of adults who limit their consumption to PG-rated material.

It would be completely unnatural for me to harm someone physically.

It would be just as unnatural, I'm seeing tonight, for me to make media that didn't fit the patterns that I have always seen it take.

I have not been extensively taught that life takes violent forms. I have known some real-life physical violence, but it wasn't brought on chronically by my parents, and it doesn't color my deep-set views of {what life is}.

But my deeply set views of media, on the other hand, are the result of extensive teaching on violence, and on other extreme forms that rarely occur in my life, at least at that level of intensity.

Sometimes we are skeptical of makers of violent films, violent or over-sexual books.

Why?

It's starting to seem to me that creators of violent media and creators of violence are just about as disconnected as they can be.

The subject matter of the media is rooted in real-world violence, for sure (as well it is rooted in other media). But a person who learns violence in life and a person who learns violence in media are about as unrelated as any two people. Life as violence and media as violence, I don't think deserve much of the same opinion.

Is it dark for me to feel comforted by falling asleep watching *The Exorcist*? Not really. Doing that comforts me because I saw *The Exorcist* in my cultural childhood, and it's familiar to me. Maybe Robert Garrow was comforted by "Edelweiss" and that helped him fall asleep. It just strikes me that I don't have to worry that my love of horror movies or my fascination with serial killers—both obviously extremely-widespread traits—aren't anything that I have to have any concern about.

And even the construction of violence in my mind for use in media: not something I need to have any guilt about or shy away from. It's not that it's not still violence. It is. But it's violence in media. Which is something I was raised on. Versus violence in life. Which is something I wasn't. Perhaps violence in media can still be attacked, still be critiqued. But not in 1:1 relation to violence in life. Maybe "at the beginning" there was a relationship between those two substrates for violence, two lenses to violence, that needs to be discussed. But at this point in the history of both, when non-violent children have been so significantly pre-dated by violent media—and raised on it—I don't see any need in my particular case to try to escape this thing that I've so deeply learned about media. It would be about as arbitrary as trying, after having never done so in three decades of life, to punch someone in the face.

Listening

—You don't spend enough time listening.

—Well, okay..but listening for what?

—I don't know. For what to listen for.

Dream of a giant falcon, five stories tall.

He was perched on my arms, his talons wrapped around them both. His beak was so big that it could eat a human head like a pea. I could hold him, my arms pressed together like a branch, even given his extraordinary size, because—you know, as a bird—his bones were hollow. He was my friend, my pet. We took care of each other.

To see a falcon in your dream, suggests that you are focused in your goals and aspirations.

To dream of a falcon, could denote that your prosperity will make you an object of envy and malice.

The falcon is a large predatory bird which stands for power, strength, endurance, wisdom, ambition and determination when appearing in your dream. Some of these may be traits of character of the very person who dreams about falcons.. But success and prosperity usually brings about the envy and malice of the others who had not managed to obtain them. Consequently, the falcon in your dream may also be interpreted as a forewarning not to push the limit and become excessively self-centered, as this will make your friends desert you and increase the number of your enemies. On the other hand, keep a close eye on whom you trust.

A falcon is said to bring freedom and information and knowledge from others. This bird can symbolize victory with regard to a decision that has already been made. The vibrant bird also signifies strength. To dream of a person holding this bird indicates there are great ideas in your unconscious mind. The discovery of these ideas will carry riches in your future.

I believe in dreams. I do. I've always liked the story of Daniel. There can be an annoying aspect to listening to other people's dreams, sometimes, as others' dreams are untouchable (I dream'd a dream to-night.—And so did I.—Well, what was yours?—That

dreamers often lie.) but, increasingly, I'm interested in listening to my subconscious, now that we are on speaking terms again, because I think it helps me.

Future thesis

Someday, in some future culture, people will look back on the USA at this point in time and some PhD student's thesis will be about this situation we have now: wherein a channel named "Comedy Central" reports the news [/contains real talk] and the channels we call news channels do something entirely different.

SMH

I kinda don't understand this world anymore, some of it. I still love it, I still believe in it, but it doesn't make a lot of sense in a lot of ways lately.

Dear [Company],

I hope you'll allow another thought or two from me on this; as I consider your rejection of my application, I'm curious.

One of the things I'm curious about is whether you considered this piece of code, linked to from my resume:

I have (at the very least) a decent understanding of the machine learning techniques, and sequential analysis techniques used in businesses like [yours] as part of a larger [...] strategy. I'm wondering whether as part of your team's evaluation of my materials, you made comparisons of your current ML methods to some of those that I provided in my resume. It's hard for me to believe that empirical comparisons of algorithms were made (but maybe I'm wrong).

I respect that our paths (what you're doing + what I'm doing) may not overlap; that's not my issue.

What is hard for me to accept is that a detailed, empirical look was taken at the many algorithms I provided. Thanks for allowing me to lodge my curiosity and complaint along these lines.

I think if a detailed examination is made of the linked algorithm above, that you'll find a very relevant set of ideas. But, again, perhaps I am wrong. It's just hard to understand, given the depth of material that I presented, that I was eliminated without further interview.

My earlier offer stands. Unless you all accept that [offer] I doubt I'll contact you again.

*With respect,
Matthew*

I don't know that I'm going to keep beating my head against this particular wall. I think it might be more pleasant for me to go through the process of starting my own company, even if it fails.

I am happy. I am happy for no reason these days.

I feel more myself than I did when I was younger. I know myself better, accept myself (as a presence) more, and as such I am happier. Really for no reason, **except that I am.**

Do, then immediately let go

(via @EverettMaroon) **"NaNoWriMo is the act of writing and immediately letting go."** Yeah. Yeah. Love it. What would be the equivalent in life: the act of living and immediately letting go. Whatever that is, I want to do that.

The real devil will never make himself a topic of conversation.

The real devil distracts you with something else. The controversy is never the point. The controversy has been designed to distract you from the point. The discussion exists—not to posit sides of an issue—but to draw your energy away from the issue. Would true evil oppose you? No. It would create a straw man, to draw your energy, while it works its ways. The discussion, the debate, is never the point. The discussion has been engineered so that you will be oblivious to the point, while the real strategy is executed below you, beneath you, while you look the other way.

Dream of climbing over an octopus mesh

A net laid over and through the water in a giant pool/tank/ocean. The ocean contained deadly octopi, and the netting had been crusted over with octopus carcasses in places..very thickly in some places. Me and one other person were crawling over the octopus net, under and over the water, doing stunts. There was a chance we could be killed, but a take-able one: we did this every day to maintain the pool.

I hate my book today

and it doesn't matter. Today, on day 16 of [NaNoWriMo](#), I have a day where I'm not happy with what I wrote. I don't *feel the way I want* about it.

So what.

It doesn't matter. Is that the point? To *make myself feel a certain way* every day I do this? No. The point is to *do it*.

Colonel Kurtz, in *Apocalypse Now*, asks: "Have you ever considered any **real freedoms**? Freedom from the opinions of others..even the opinions of yourself?"

You don't like what you wrote today?

Who gives a fuck.

Your job is to write it, not to feel any certain way about it.

Free yourself from your own opinions..and revel in **pure action.**

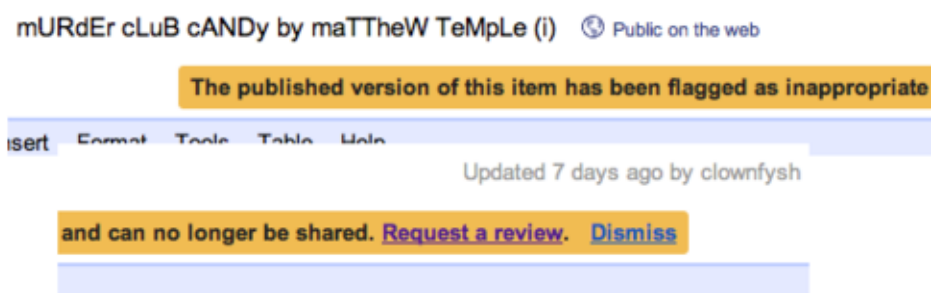
Soar

Welcome to the place where social and individual delight reigns supreme. The place where everything you never dreamed of simply is. We are the incarnation, we are the physical embodiment of forbidden paradise. We are the expression of everything so great it would never be allowed. The expression of freedom so harsh it will chaff the skin, break space-time and the light barrier to smithereens. Turn concrete to plush fabric, mine golden thread underwater, swim the clouds. We are the clown, appearing silly to first touch, silently spindling out though ether, betraying the most basic physical certainty. We are the science of science and the spirit of spirituality; we bite the kernel and leave the pod raped unawares. We are the ones who will take you for all you've got, who will leave you for broke or dead or halfway in-between here and the impossible, and do it all without a waver. We are the certainty obtained by compiling random senseless whimsicality, wrapping the mystical in stone and plastic, presenting it carelessly and rude to all who would doubtless care to remain undisturbed. We are necessary change, inspirers of acute dissatisfaction. Ones who will throw indisputable logic through a mesmore of fabrication and synthesis that would shame the gods, disappear momentarily, and emerge the transformed..naked incomprehensibility, blatant shadowmasters, directors of paradox, the collective implementation of an ageless sorcerer. We are the conquerors of the endless expanse of possibility, gapping the bridge between fate and freedom, reconciling gravity and weightlessness, weaving disintegration, forever escaping deduction, interpretation, conventional understanding. We are the jugular of detachment, the integration of so-called isolation. Antithesis of limitation. Murderer of sense. Demonstration of ease.

Soar.

(Source: matthewtemple.wordpress.com)

The published version of this item has been flagged as inappropriate and can no longer be shared.



When I went into my shared **NaNoWriMo novel** this afternoon, I was treated to this lovely message. **My Google document** has been flagged as inappropriate. I can still use it, but I am not allowed to share!

I am using Google documents for the express purpose of sharing..I am live-writing my NaNoWriMo novel.

Let's not pretend that censorship is new, and let's not pretend that I can't write my book in whatever program I like..Google and the person(s) who flagged this aren't actually changing any writer's ability to write.

To the person(s) who flagged this document, I have this to say:

I am having fun. You have fun too. Go have your fun, do what you like to do in life, and let me do the same! I am not hurting you.

I happen to be protected, by **some of the most fundamental laws of the country I was born in**—and a country that I love—protected with the *right* (look it up) to say and write what I want.

There is very little more American than my right to say something you disagree with..and there is very little more *un*American than censorship! If your country doesn't follow similar law..I am sorry for you. If the person who flagged my book claims to be a citizen of the country *I* live in..you need to re-read the rulebook of the club

you claim to belong to..there's a reason the First Amendment is the *first* amendment..it's because the people who started this country were *adamant* about allowing us to express our thoughts! (Even if they happen to offend.)

It's pretty easy to anonymously flag something, isn't it? Be an adult. If you have something to say, have the gumption to put your *name* on it..to stand by it..instead of dropping anonymous bombs (i.e.: if you have something to say, say it to my face =). If my book offends you: *write down your ideas* and *sign your name to them*, then publish them on the web. **Send me the link**. Then we will be in a conversation of equals. Until you're brave enough to do that, go buy a copy of NetNanny and stop wasting my time.

To Google:

SMH.

You'd think that a company who hires so many PhDs would get this right. Please re-share **my document** and raise the flagging threshold on your program so that one illiterate asshole has a smaller (and more appropriate) amount of say.

Also..you might want to disable the "make a copy" menu item on inappropriate documents..it's..like..two clicks to just dupe the offensive text.

Don't be evil? Hah. How 'bout starting with: don't ban things that are already legal.

Flagged as inappropriate: update

The **document** that was **flagged as inappropriate** and hence un-shared by Google has now been re-shared by Google. That text is no longer considered inappropriate (thanks G!). Anonymous flagger(s): 0. Me: 1. Google: ½. Play ball!

Dear Google, (submitted to Google feedback)

You guys have flagged another of my documents as **inappropriate**, and it's no longer shareable.

This is a chapter of a novel.

The only reason I'm using Google Docs in the first place is to *share* my docs with people..this is a document I'm using to collaborate with another writer, as we assemble a blog post..

You guys need to look at your flagging system..this is bullshit. What's the use of a shared document system when it doesn't share documents??

one of our songs

cold ocean
in the moonlight
and purple stars

that
even though
you and I does not exist

I know what happens
to one of our songs

are there by your side
have lost the path

How do you move
over the valley
where it sails away
into the sea

I will hold together
fears sweet
melt
in the heat of the dance

is off the world
and we left it with you
to move to tears

we have the eyes
of my joy
and moss

enhancing my senses
and kissed on the hill
under a tree

Rhythm is our eyes
to be found
in the absence of light

I guess there is silence
in the space
of a smile

on
your face
speaks slowly

tickle her
cheeks
and nose to nose
touch

hair
soft melody
and quiet

bright moon
and the clouds move out of the sea

(Source: twitter.com)

cursed nothing like a wave

I am the real name
who

lives in his mind like the wind
but may expand

Steps through the sand boil
cursed nothing like a wave

(Source: *twitter.com*)

Crossed-fingers lovers

I see the bed
Cover and shred them.

Substances
that cause
the bleeding
of your dreams

You confuse me
to include me

My eyes are exposed
in the suffocation
of a high-pitched scream

Crossed-fingers lovers
it's snake bite
caresses and pain.

(Source: *twitter.com*)

We are forever / We are separated

The gods manufacture and shame
and
converting those to come
will be thrown
through the gap
disappeared

Weird shadows naked
blatant master
director of the paradox
the eternal frustration inspired of magicians.

We are forever
deduction, interpretation and understanding of the conventional
We are separated

Escape, the collapse of weaving
destiny and freedom
gapping the bridge between gravity
and conquer the possibilities.

(Source: [twitter.com](#))

We quietly, certainly / betray

We quietly, certainly
betray
the most basic silly touch
the first clown.

We have the spirit of science and the science of spirit.
We leave it unawares
rape pods
and chew the kernel.

We have to leave you
or someone
broke
in between in this half-dead
not-consuming input
And you lose, it's everything.

(Source: [twitter.com](#))

There is a great expression / which chaffs the skin tight

We are flesh
We are a physical form
of the forbidden paradise

There is a great expression
which chaffs the skin tight
Light breaks apart the walls of time and space

Specific power for rich fabrics
the golden thread in my water
swims to the clouds.

(Source: [twitter.com](#))

At the bottom of the sea is filled with laughing

through the cracks of fatty acids and referral
back to sitting on a rock

full-skirt saline with a soap-filled
pig anemone
the fate of fine food samples
to run a temporary fish in ice

Under the charm of top
is the perfect flute
frozen, not yet listed

ice river walk
Wanton "Yes."
and the warm sun caressed by the wind light
as bright as the eyes of a key

rotation of stars
surrounded by a funnel

this wing
mends cracks in the sky

At the bottom of the sea is filled with laughing

(Source: *twitter.com*)

immersed in a girl with a broken tree

She was barefoot, cotton
Is not my dream
to her
that I could wish a temporary kiss?

She smells her bathrobe
the man
who gets her papers in bed

I reach for smooth legs
melt her clothes on the floor
I know she blushed when she heard.

And sometimes touching
so carefully to her
like a secret whisper trembling
afraid to leave the house

I find my lips
to form your words

Through the delicate fabric
when she kissed me
she was shaking
I could not put a smile on my silence

in silence
I can promise
my heart
you will not remember my name

her shirt untucked when we came
she wriggled it before
tucking them unzipped

because she does not hesitate for a
change her clothes in front of my eyes

I like how the fear is always satin
eye catching after the show during a break
in the hallway of her eyes

Sitting on a mat with her
After you have been a friend
of what happened before

and heard it from downstairs
piano

She has it in her bed
with leather
in my submission
to the inherent potential

to remove protective distance
Would you afraid?
I'm curing, melting

immersed in a girl with a broken tree
she invited me

(Source: [twitter.com](#))

An empty bride's / soft and quiet devastation

An empty bride's
soft and quiet devastation
bored one thousand

barbed wire
briarpatch fences

in the back row
bedroom
of some other
bad boys

carnation
of her eyebrows
and hunger
in his own

her legs were run over a mixed network of sea and turning

jumping
billiard
baby
boy

the unknown liquid poison
running his finger down
a silver moon

dead breath
disappearing hand

sharp falls
below the floor

a drunken diving

cry and close
wine glass rings
and feel dimming

take a bow
like a baby
out of breath.

(Source: [twitter.com](#))

fractions / if we overcame a sideshow

fractions
if we overcame a sideshow
blinking on repeat

five slipping echoes
sounding the eyelash tunnel

nine rules
posted on the door
for the timbre of a ghost

I had a comment microphone
sweetly full of
noisy pink decay

groping
sensation of color loudness
in periodic terms

dark as an impassable cat
without exit

(Source: [twitter.com](#))

she never sang a song again

At the same room number
for him
checked the hospital to leave

I have decided this news
too well
will take my pain

who gave up fabric tearing
never for a coin.

A low-cast sling
capped at tragedy
reeling in years

the whole room dancing
she never sang a song again.

Back home in PA

Good visit with Suzanne, good trip to Vermont to look around, good talk with Mom who was good enough to meet me in Connecticut and drive us the rest of the way. I liked Vermont, good beef and cheese selection, friendly people. Looked at some rooms and met some folks. Hoping only for the best situation, without too firm a grip on any particular possibilities. My feeling is that living there for a year or so in a rental room I could find a more permanent apartment or house, and that the general vibe would be suitable for continuing my current focus on writing. Love that it's connected via train with NYC; could visit at least one of my sisters more often, and get city time. Broke a year-long sushi fast in a hole-in-the-wall with Suzanne..good stuff. Looking forward to seeing my other sis, Amy, and her new child, my first ever nephew, the one who made me an uncle. That's New Year's. Until then I've got a few books to read, and that's about it.

A duty for those whose yearning is unfulfillable

Thinking about **this** today.

Think there is a duty, for those who can, to satisfy their yearning (few do that); and I think there is a duty for those whose yearning is unfulfillable, to ~~create~~ ^(unsatisfiable) in others equally ~~unsatisfiable~~ yearning (even fewer do that) — but it is somehow fair play, somehow required, I think, that those who know ~~a~~ deep longing, ~~encumber~~ ^{oddly} ~~that~~ ^{satisfy} ~~by~~ ^{meet} ~~inspiring it in others~~ ^{that} ~~longing~~

encumber a duty to

(I think there is a duty, for those who can, to satisfy their yearning (few do that); and I think there is a duty for those whose yearning is unfulfillable, to create in others equally unsatisfiable yearning (even fewer do that) — but it is somehow fair play, somehow required, I think, that those who know deep longing, encumber a duty to oddly meet that longing by inspiring it in others.)

Some people can make themselves happy..or in some ways we can each make ourselves happy. When I can make myself happy, it is my duty to do so. When I can't, when there is still a gap, it is my duty to do something else..

..in those cases I think the necessity lies in stretching out along that distance of unfulfilled-ness, or of yearning, such that the limited crossing that can be made..inspires the same yearning (to go farther toward that same fulfillment) in others..or maybe it's in another part of one self..

So that the times when the unreachable truly is unreachable, it gives hope and it gives hunger to the other parts of self, so that

when they have the energy, when they have the time, so that when they are ready, they will either cross the gap or (equally lofty in my opinion) they will *inspire hunger*..they will create yearning..I think, I feel, that that is just as *satisfying* a sight for the spirit to be set upon.

Midnight rail you left

take me with you
the next time

The next time you need a break
air
when you need the space of stars

Let me come
in silence spoken
(leave my words behind)

Put me on your back
carry me
there's a place in this bag

I think wanting is a shadow of the future

in the same way that a dark shape is a shadow of an object. I think wanting is a type of prediction, or can be viewed that way. As if the future is an object..and time, or information, or some kind of energy..is the light. And wanting is the shadow. It's a clue, like prediction, or premonition, a clue about the future. Do I mean that whatever I want will happen? No. It's a shadow of the future.

Like the dark shape on a surface, it's not the future, it's a deformed, oversimple impression of the future. I don't think the wanting makes the future happen. I think it's more that the future, and the wanting, are connected by a type of {energy / time / information flow}, and that they are always in a specific relationship with each other, like an object and its shadow are connected, by light.

Moving on

Going to Louisiana tomorrow with my mom, both my sisters, and my nephew Daniel. I'm looking forward to meeting him in person for the first time..so far our relationship has been over Skype.

When we get back from Louisiana I'm moving to Vermont.

In Louisiana it will be my grandmother, my aunt and her husband, and maybe their son. We will eat crawfish if they haven't been damaged too much by BP. I hope they're ok to eat as that's a family tradition. I'm looking forward to seeing my grandmother, and everyone. It's a treat that so many of us will be together.

I miss my dad. He's out of the picture. He's still alive, but he just does other things now. That's hard for me; really, at 32, that's the hardest relationship for me to ponder. I love my dad, I know he loves me. Our love, somehow, at this time in our lives, doesn't translate into civil contact. He is estranged from his ex-wife and 2/3 of his kids. Dad: you're a mystery to me, a painful one. I am sending you love and wishes and, yes, shaking my head a little. If I had kids I wouldn't treat them like you do. I respect you and wish you the best. And I miss you.

In Vermont I'm renting a room with masters degree students/political people. They seem cool. We have a house close to town in Brattleboro.

I'm looking forward to Vermont. I'm going to write at first, then find a job, probably, and settle in. Work has been dicey for the last year—I haven't had any. Lol. Jobless recovery. Well, I don't need anyone's permission to be productive, and I always am.

Going to work at finishing my **NaNoWriMo novel**, and continue looking for a literary agent. I can write, and you should do what you can do, so I'm doing that.

The thought of a week with extended family stresses me. Of course everything will be fine, and we'll all enjoy each other's company, but it's always stressful too. I don't have as much anxiety about it as I would have had 5 or 10 years ago, though, so that's a blessing of age. I think I know now that connections between people are limited, so more and more I can accept their limited—

and wonderful—but limited—and wonderful—nature. We're not here for all that long anyway so you just forget about perfection and enjoy the communion that exists.

I think 2011 is going to be a great year for me—2010 has been. I want to write, meditate, meet new people, and hike. And eat. I walked through the grocery store in B-Boro and the beef and cheese selection looks amazing. Here's to a year much like this one—creative, connected, and happy—with these mods: thinner, published, and richer.

An unsolvable knot

Objectivity has a reputation for coldness, and yet objectivity is hinted at only through a compilation of subjective points of view.

None of those subjective points of view is cold. To compile or simultaneously know multiple subjective p.o.v.s is not cold.

Juxtaposing those perspectives is an emotioned, an impassioned act. So why do we call objectivity cold?

When I can approach objectivity it is not through elimination of points of view. It is not by filtering out the emotion, or filtering out the logic, or filtering out any part of it. To start to understand the family, or a party, or a country, or a people, it is from listening that objectivity is approached. Listening to various people's experience, and listening in a way that the listener is changed, at least for a moment during the listening, and at least a little in a lasting way. How is that cold? Even objectivity about something like a bicycle, or a scientific technique, involves *adding* points of view, not taking them away, not myopia. So why do we say that objectivity is cold? Why do we have that connotation?

The hardened thinker, the brain who is able to see "through" the emotion, see past it, to dissect a situation or problem in ways impossible for those fettered with their own subjective points of view: we call this person objective, but wrongly. To strip away the facets of emotion or logic, to strip away any accessible facet, is very literally to *run* from objectivity, not to approach it. Objectivity isn't more like the cold, clear scientist (or the knowing, starry-eyed mystic). I really don't think objectivity is more like *having the*

answers than it is like *knowing there isn't one answer*. The way we usually use the word “objective” is to mean something like a single voice, ringing true, in solo—a view into, or a clear statement of, the truth. I think the way I want to use that word is more like a song with many voices, a chaos, a chorus, where no single voice stands without the others, and you can pick out solo notes sometimes, but where the truth isn't a single thread, it's an unsolvable knot, whose essence can't be gotten at by filters or simplification.

In Vermont

Been here for 24 hours. Slept in my new bed. Doing in-town busywork: bought a tea kettle, rented a PO box.

It's beautiful here. Driving across the river to New Hampshire, I fell in love with a bridge.

There's a political vibe here, and a certain look to the townspeople, as every place has. I'm soaking it up today—I know that soon everything here will be my new normal.

Tough logistics, unexpected costs. Still a workable plan: write.

Hold everything else second. Do whatever I need to do, to write. I can work here. I don't need to work now, but when/if I do, I can get a job here, a plain job, if I need to..there are enough big stores and hotels that I could get a local job if necessary.

I'm going to hike tomorrow. I found a park today where you can overlook the river.

My housemates are neat. We've been friendly but not overly so. I hope that continues and develops. My mom and I bought some dishes together for the house, which I unpacked this afternoon. They're square, with red drawings.

Today I walked around and looked at shops, took inventory, figured out where everything is. I found a project to volunteer for, that helps local people; I hope to hear more details from them today or tomorrow. If I do it, I'll write about it here.

I'm praying that I don't get into a funk. I don't think I will. I need to remember not to make self-assessments in the afternoon (always a lull time for me). And to do my own thing: I'm interested

in meeting new people here, and am receptive to new information, but I have much that is already in place in my mind, in my life—those parts I carry with me, they’re already there, they don’t need to be found.

A guy just walked into this coffeehouse in shorts. It’s 21°F.

“There’s not a whole lot to do”

Being in this homeless shelter is hard. I don’t know what I expected, coming here, but I’ll be straight with you: it’s depressing to see this. To see people who look like someone’s grandfather, someone’s dad, someone’s daughter, in this place.

I signed up for a bunch of days in February, during which I’ll sit here and make coffee and give people toothbrushes and hand out afghans from this pile we have. I guess. I don’t know why I’m doing this, now that I’m here. My own life is so tenuous, it seems to me, I feel like I don’t even have a right to be here. Why am I on this side of the desk, and not the other? And, realistically, in my life, I could be on the other side of this desk without much changing. Maybe I’m just spoiled..I feel I have so little, and I do have little, from many points of view. But I have a place to sleep when I leave here, a room of my own. I’m sleeping on an inflatable air bed, but..I’m sleeping on a bed, not on the floor of some church.

I don’t know. It’s depressing to be here, and while this service seems to be doing some good—it gets people off the streets at night in a Vermont winter—that’s all it does. It doesn’t fix these people’s lives, it doesn’t make the world better, it just keeps people from dying *tonight*. Somehow, as glad as I am that there is such a place, I don’t find it ultimately all that comforting or happy-making.

Maybe I am a hut-builder, as my housemate calls them, people who go to far-off places hoping to bring home pictures of themselves surrounded by smiling minorities, to show their church groups. I just saw this sign on the street when I was here before that said “WANT TO HELP THE HOMELESS FROM FREEZING THIS WINTER?” and I thought: yeah. So here I am, writing on my MacBook Pro at a desk in a church, with some woman named Lucy

sitting beside me, training me on what to do as a volunteer here.

(When I try to help, to move things or do things or just ask what I should be doing, she says: “Well, there’s not a whole lot to do.”). I don’t feel good. I’m holding back tears, distracting myself with tea, listening to the breathing sounds of delightful people I was chatting with earlier, who have no place else to stay.

I think what bothers me about this is that we’re not helping, we’re not solving a problem at its root here. We’re doing exactly what that damn flyer said: we’re just helping people not freeze to death tonight. I can’t say I find that very satisfying, but I guess I’m not here for my own satisfaction, am I?

Rotten, rotten world sometimes.

To maintain my spirit

I can get to a three-star day consistently. I am learning, next, I hope, to get to a four-star day consistently. It’s been something I’ve had trouble with..staying in goodness, basically, staying in rightness. I can get to goodness, I can get to rightness, but I haven’t stayed there for long. I think I can change that now, I feel I can learn, next, to maintain my spirit, to stay with my spiritual self, more of the time. That’s it. Not all the time. Not judging on a scale of perfection. But staying with my spiritual self more of the time. That’s where I am.

It’s 10°F

Cold walk from the house to downtown Brattleboro. I bundled up. The new wool coat did well, but in this cold my arms were getting chilly by the time I got to the church. Been sitting at the homeless shelter about every other evening. Today I’m doing the 1am-7am shift. I’ll reward myself with breakfast from the deli in the morning, english muffins with sausage, egg, and cheese. And for whatever reason, my computer is working with the church’s internet tonight, so I’m posting from there.

Selfishly, this is a great job for a writer, at least it was while the internet wasn’t working. There’s nothing to do—or very little,

usually—and you have to sit here for six hours. That’s *ass-in-chair* right there. Most nights I’ve come here I’ve written. I probably will tonight, after this post. I took the last day or two off from writing, from doing anything productive, and just relaxed. I needed to give myself a break. Feedback I got about my last volunteering *post* made me realize I was being too hard on myself. I’m volunteering at a fucking homeless shelter: you can’t do that wrong. So what if it isn’t a holistic solution; I’m not Superman, I’m not even the director of this shelter, I’m just one hand making one cup of coffee at a time. I don’t have to feel bad about that. In fact, it’s inappropriate for me to, for my sake. I need to beat myself up less; not at all if I can swing it.

I’m going to work the days I signed up for in February, then re-assess. I need to get a job, myself, sometime in the next..I don’t know..while. I’ve got to take care of myself, so I don’t end up in here. Have been putting out feelers, submitted a *résumé* last week to a fairly local tech business. We’ll see.

I was on twitter there too much for a while. I drank some, after not-drinking for a while—and when I drink I drink too much. I was feeling beholden to my family, like I owe certain people a return email or a proactive birthday wish at a faster rate than they give to me. It was wearing me out, so I stopped. I don’t owe my parents a check-in. They’re doing fine, in their lives, and I’m doing fine in mine. It’s uncertain how tomorrow will unfold, and that uncertainty was getting me down more than it needs to, in light of that other quality of tomorrow: that it’s not promised. Imagine how my dead friends would encourage me: do you think they’d think it was wise for me to use a single one of the days I am given—days more than they were given—to worry, to feel sorry for myself (or angry with myself?) because I don’t have a paying job and am not fully actualized as an artist, as a scientist, as a thinker? I don’t think they would think that was a good idea, or the most grateful way to approach today—a day I’ve been given, a precious thing.

So I’m giving myself a break. Not drinking—it’s better for me this way. Not beating myself up for not having satisfied societal

demands on my own servitude to capitalism. I mean: anyone who's paying attention knows that our world is *fucked up* at the moment. Ten years ago I could make middle-class money doing software consulting in the US. Now..not so much. I feel in my own mind that the projects I've done recently are significantly more valuable, they better use my gifts, etc than projects I did in my early twenties. That I've made less and less money along that same string of time is, I don't think, entirely dependent on me. I don't want to be 100% nihilistic in every moment of every day, but I think a touch of nihilism is needed, to be *realistic*, in this day and age. It may be the case that things I do make me enough money to someday be able to get out of debt, buy a house, feel secure enough to decide I am capable of responsibly having children, etc etc. I hope that's true. I'm open to that; I think I'm ready for my life to go better. Or it may be that in six months, I'm sleeping on the floor in this church, because I never found a job. But you know what: I'm going to give myself a break. I'm a person, a valuable life, I happen to be wildly creative and industrious in a few different ways, and whether I deserve to (or just get to) self-actualize as a fuller expression of a human being, or whether I don't, I deserve not to hate myself in the process.

It is a privilege

to be alive :: for thoughts :: to flow :: through the mind

these verbs get a lot of play :: to be :: to do :: to have
to me they're facets of *to go*

my perception of my own being :: is a perception of going :: I know I am because I go :: I go physically to places :: I am in one place :: then I am in another :: I am in the same place :: I am in a new place in time :: I am still here, in time; therefore I am :: being is a type of going

doing is a type of going :: I make things go :: I make words go, therefore I know I have written :: I make boxes go, therefore I know I have moved them, I know I have *done* that :: when I *do*, it is by making things go :: my perception of having done, is a perception of what has gone

what I have, is an idea of what goes with me :: a person (if a person can be had) :: a possession (if a thing can be had) :: when I *have*, it is because a thing came with me :: because a being is still with me :: or because a being has left :: that's when I know I have lost :: having is based on going, too

can I let things go freely, then? :: can I let my thoughts flow :: can I relate to people knowing that they flow :: that they go :: can I go freely, can the *doing* of *moving* be something I let flow :: that I let go :: can I play, again, a game that ends :: can I let go?

Translation poetry

I sometimes use automated techniques as part of the writing process.

Penny Goring speaks of cutting up her poetry, throwing it into the air, and seeing how it lands. That's a simple machine, an automated technique, to help the writing process.

Years ago I was introduced to an entity called "**The Word Bowl**", by friends in Dayton, Ohio. It's a bowl, or a jar, or a plateful of words and phrases, written on scraps of paper, contributed by members of a house or a group of friends. You blow a message, or pick a message, from the bowl; rearrange it, and write a poem—or a fortune, or a message.

It's nice to get input from somewhere else, another person, or a machine, or a technique like throwing words into the air and seeing how they land. Surrealists have **intensively used** this sort of thing.

One of the techniques I like uses automated translation systems. I translate a piece of text from my original language, English, into some other language..then I translate it back to English. Then I rearrange, or edit, the result of those translations.

You can use **Google Translate**.

Here's an example:

Start with some text that you write, or have already written, or that you pull from somewhere. You might start with this text:

I am the phantasm.

If you translate that to Japanese, you get:

私は幻想をしています。

Then if you translate that to English, you get:

I am a fantasy.

That's a simple example, but it shows the essence of the technique's value. I wouldn't have thought to write "I am a fantasy." but this technique has suggested those words to me, and I can use that suggestion how I like.

It's like getting a view—a machine's view—into your writing, from the point of view of the other language. So you can get another perspective on your words..a perspective that you'd have a hard time reaching on your own.

Here's a more complex example:

Let's start with:

I am the phantasm. I walk among flesh, screech as the wind. I take on any form that makes me laugh and my laugh is your thunder, siphon crushing shores of sand and cyclones searing waves of grain.

Translating that to Japanese, then to English, gives:

I am a fantasy. I like the wind, please walk across the wall screaming. I will laugh my laugh I'm crushing your lightning searing waves of grain of sand beach and the Cyclone, take any form of siphon.

Maybe we decide to use French as the intermediate language, instead of Japanese:

I am the fantasy. I walk in the flesh, small like the wind. I take any form that makes me laugh and my laugh is your thunder, siphon crushing banks of sand waves and cyclones burning grain.

Or Hindi:

I'm Maya. I walk in the middle of the meat, as air screech. I any way that makes me laugh and my laugh your thunder, to adopt the edge of sand and cyclone waves of grain crushing searing take on.

Each intermediate language gives a distinct perspective on the original text.

I don't often find that this technique alone gives me something I like. But I like this, for some short poetry, as a way to mix up my own thoughts, to get a refreshing piece of text that I then edit further.

Try translations with multiple intermediate steps..for instance: English >> Hindi >> Japanese >> French >> Japanese >> English. It gets wild!

Let's look at a complete process of writing a short poem using this technique:

You have to have some text to start with. It might be something you steal. It might be something you've already written. It might be a random thought, loosely-written. I'll start with some loosely-written text:

There's a crosswalk down the street whose red light blinks all through the night, whether children are crossing or not.

Translate to Japanese:

赤いランプが点滅夜通し通りの下の横断歩道は、子供たちが交差するかどうか、ありません。

Translate to English:

*Crossing the street under the red light flashes through the night,
whether the children cross, no.*

Then edit manually:

*Children, under red light flashes
crossing the night*

We've taken something not very poetic and used a partially-mechanical, partially-human technique to produce something more poetic.

I've only used this on small bits of text but I can imagine that one could use these types of filters to produce long pieces of stylized prose.

If I edit the English >> Japanese >> English version of "I am the phantasm. I walk among flesh..", I might get this:

*Fantasy, screaming siphon wind;
And the cyclone
takes any form.*

Or I might edit more liberally and get this:

In fantasy's screaming, siphon winds take cyclone form.

Of course it's fun to write without using such techniques, but it's also fun to write with them!

I think in general writers need techniques. Some are exotic, like doing automated translations. Some are common, like getting up from the computer and taking a break. But for people who write a lot, it isn't pure mysticism: it's a repeatable process, utilizing a set of conceptual tools. This is just one that I think is neat. I hope you have fun with it.

- Poems written via **human-computer** collaboration
- Thoughts on **poetry** and translation

- Tumblr **photo** poetry

Maybe it's the light,

being up earlier than I usually have been, maybe it's going out for a job as a security guard..but I feel out of place, like a fish out of water. Like I'm only used to the Vermont that's snowy and snowing, not to one with sunshine, and I'd gotten used to the former. Maybe it's simply that I'm running out of money and I don't know what to do.

Maybe it's too much change :: when I walked into the Harmony Underground today, everything was rearranged. The back room where I was to do my readings is now, instead, a glass room. And that's all well and good, I just don't know what's going on, haven't heard from the owners, etc. So I moved my stuff out of there, put it in the trunk of my car. Maybe the best thing to come of that was that it prompted me to fill out the Harmony cards..13 positions with seven moves each, that I think are pretty solid. So maybe I don't do readings at that shop, maybe primarily I developed those cards, that system.

But I don't like having things in the trunk of my car, and being without a job. It reminds me of times I've moved in desperation, and I'm tired of moving in desperation. If I had means, and was moving, that would be a different kind of adventure.

But I'm tired of being poor, and to be honest I can't take that all on myself. That skilled people aren't well-off, that any person is destitute, that an average worker struggles so much..these are indicators that, as a whole, we are disorganized, we are lopsided.

It's fine while you're the one sitting in the office, who still has a job..and then, you're on the outside of the circle, with no way in.

But I've never felt at home in those offices, never felt like a fish in water there, and the **place I do feel like a fish in water**, doesn't pay the bills—at least not now.

So do I use my fear, as I have before, to say: I may die, I may become homeless, but I'll use the time I have, between now and

then, to write another book, so that if I die it will at least be absurd, at least be ironic, that I couldn't find a way to live?

I'll pursue this security guard job..I'll pursue grocery store jobs..but unless a job has enough hours to pay the rent, what's the point? That's the situation I was in before..on half salary with my former employer (in lieu of being laid off) but with a federal lien on my income based on my making full salary (which I wasn't). That bind was enough to cost me my apartment, my place to live, my ability to sleep in a bed at night and look for work. We're sold a dream that hard work and skill will earn you money, but increasingly it is clear to me that even a combination of the two is not enough.

I feel lonely. I want to use my mind to do something that is appropriate for my mind. I don't want to depend on family again, I don't want to be homeless again. I don't want to give up—and I won't give up—but on a morning like this I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

I feel better today.

I don't feel defeated. I don't feel at the end of my rope. Perhaps some things are just sleep cycles, and cycles of emotion, of the moon, of gravity and chemicals.

One wants to guard against seeming egoism on the web, not be self-focused, and yet, what else can you better focus on than yourself? You can have a cause, you can work to "help" others, but the first tome should always be, can only ever be, oneself. Simple journal-type reflection is one of the purest types of text there is. Hi self. How are you self? I'm fine.

Met people in town yesterday; for instance, a woman who wants to save money and go to Hollywood—she's never been. Or someone eeking out the last \$20 until payday. Those stories get me outside myself, remind me that {I'm not OK—You're OK} is not an accurate description of the world. That all these people are in crisis, some sort or another. When it's not money it's time, it's when to schedule lunch between working, and all of these seem equally pressing to their owners.

Memory, trying to get back to something that was; fantasy, to work for something imagined; security, maintaining the illusion of holding; creation, by perspective, finding something new.

Individuation, predication, oblivion, these are the thoughts that go through me. What is me, what do I owe others? What linking exists between my string of actions and all the uncontrollable actions I'm aware of? In what ways can I be oblivious—can I have identity, self—toward the uncontrollable *other*?

How abstract can you get, in a novel, and people still think it's a novel? Will people in the future be less into straight stories? I think they will.

Will all my friends be on prescription meds in the future? If I am sober, will I be the only one? Will people even read books?

Probably everything in history will be on a little thumb drive, and *Wuthering Heights* won't carry the same weight for future people as it does for me, now. It will become even quainter and even less relevant, the way adults think of children's toys. I am past lamenting, am not interested in arguments, am not shocked by others nearly as often as I am bored by them, but am not bored by them very often. Someone yesterday was pointing out how different we all are, in what we want. This one wants her hair pulled. That one wants a stalker. This one wants two at a time.

That one wants to make a buck. This one wants a conversation. So we come together over simple things, places, objects, acts we have in common. Language. The information of love. Sharing that—an education on how to move. For an instant, we agree on our reaction to a book, to an object, to one of these acts. Then it fades.

The number of friends you have, who have the same books, fades. Someday there will only be one person left who reads their copy of *Anna Karenina*, and everyone else will be on Adderall.

Authorship, predication, and not giving a fuck

Some people speak of the end of the author. More properly they speak of the de-mystification, or de-centralization, or maybe the de-*humanization* of the author.

Everything-shared, everything-anonymous, everything-mutable networks rapidize the conversation that was always taking place around constructive work. The only way they fundamentally alter that conversation is by increasing the amount of it that can take place within a single conversant's lifetime. So: we were always writing fan fiction, it's just that now a single reader can write fan fiction within a single lifetime. It's only the perspective that an individual can have, on this conversation, that has changed.

Is it necessary to erase the concept of the author? I don't think so. Is it desirable? I don't think so. Is it possible? I don't think so. Is it desirable to de-mystify, de-centralize, or de-humanize the concept of the author? Maybe. =)

It's obvious now that it's not possible for the author to work in a mysterious box, to which others have zero access. But it was always the case that the author's box was not 100% mysterious, was not strictly zero-access. It's just that it used to be easier to pretend this mystery, and now the same is difficult. It was always the case, though, that [props Mamet] the audience knew at least as much as the playwright, and that a smart playwright had to know this and operate under it. It was always the case that the author was reading the same newspaper as the author's readers..even though the author was doing something quite different with some of that input, than the novel readers. What's different now is that while the author is reading the newspaper, his readers are reading over his shoulder. What one attends, another can attend, instantly.

As silly as I think it is for authors to be scared about de-mystification, I think those incredibly silly who need to erase the concept of author—to make it so that no one is author, ever, even for a moment.

The author is a sorter, a picker of things that go in, and do not go in, the box. Do people inherently prefer works constructed of one author, or a tightly-structured system of authors, as in film?

Maybe not—but it isn't certainly so. We do enjoy strains of consistency—themes—in our input. Where there is a theme there is an author. Perhaps not an *individual human author*, but an author.

An author—a theme-correlant—has oblivion. Here's how: oblivion is the counterpart to predication. Predication is a correlative or causative link, an if-then relationship; oblivion is **not giving a fuck**. To produce something that surprises the guy sitting next to me, a non-predication, oblivious, authorship is required. If my construction, my picking, is highly predicated on your output, you will perceive little authorship in me. An author, then, is a closed-off-ness (even for a moment), an oblivion, a not-giving-a-fuck, a blindness where others are predicated, a breaking of visible if-then rules where others are following them.

When you write to market demands (to audience demands, to literary agent demands, to publishing house demands), you are doing *something*..but that something isn't being an author.

I get wanting to break down the *human individual* concept of author, even as I see value in that concept. But I don't think it's well-thought-out to attempt to erase *any* concept of an author in the sense described here. What is attractive to attack, is *ego*, the ego of the link between {creating concept} and {human individual}. That's not a rock-solid link; it should be attacked. Discounting the possibility of {{human individual} {for a moment being an author}} is economically stunting. Discounting the usefulness of {{theme-oblivion author-creator} {momentarily playing author}} results in art that makes no sense..art in which there is no art..something akin to improvised television. It's not funny, it's not meaningful, it's not even completely *meaningless* (which is what people who like it claim they wish it was).

What we really like in this type of construction is the fact that we could have done it, without trying. That's what really appeals. That it not be necessary for *the artist* to have thought.

Older art had the artist thinking a lot and us thinking a little. More recent art had the artist thinking a lot and us not thinking any. TV, improv, and fan fiction (to generalize) have us thinking that neither

the artist or the audience has to think (or feel) at all..“because it’s meaningless”.

But it’s not meaningless..because it’s predicated on what’s next to it. When you blur that line that used to individuate the artist, the author (not as a person, but even as a skein of action, taking place, for a moment), it lowers the amount of oblivion and it raises the amount of predication taking place for {the one who is doing the {creating}}. In that circumstance, there isn’t a show, there isn’t a product, because there is no distance between the rehearsal space and the production release. No oblivion means no surprise.

Predication is the market study, the focus group, the TV show that bases episodes on fan comments from its web site. Don’t get judgmental in your position on the size and shape of this feedback loop—and don’t think that I am, either.

Consider the suggestion, though, that when this process looks less like a blind man dreaming up songs in an isolated world based on fragments of sound and touch he’s gained from {what everyone else thinks is the real world}..and it starts to look more like twelve guys in suits sitting around a brightly-lit conference table “bouncing ideas around”..it changes the locus of surprise such that what is produced—while it may be surprising, while it may have themes—isn’t surprising *on the scale of an individual person*, doesn’t have themes in the scope of *an individual person*. It’s fun to attack the author-as-individual—deflating that power differential meets a classic definition of humor: to enjoy seeing the mighty fall. What happens with this, however, is that what gets made, the art, the work, that comes from committee, is appropriate for consumption by committee—not by an individual. And as much fun as it is to claim that {anything you can do, I can do better}, it’s really hard to watch a movie, or read a book, or get laid, as anyone but yourself. All by your lonesome. I think that’s a way to start to understand why there has historically been some reverence for having one person—one extraordinary person drawing on many, many inputs involving a whole human history of others—for one moment having that person decide what does, and what does not, go in the box.

I had the most amazing experience today

I went to the post office and in the mail was a check for book royalties. It wasn't for much. I ate lunch at home, food from the grocery store. But that check was for more than that lunch cost; for the first time in my life, my writing paid for my meal. The feeling that gives me would be a job for anyone to describe (and do it justice).

But it's a great feeling.

So to you who bought my books (even while they were available free!): thank you! Today's lunch gets its distinction from you! And to you who read my books and went out of your way to write reviews and thoughts about them: thank you! Your ideas benefit me as I move forward with my writing. And to you who read my books for free: you're welcome! That's why they're there for free!!! =)

I am blessed to be alive, and have no complaint.

Writing

I've come to that new place, that dangerous place. I'm going to write now, write another book. I'm going to stay out of email, stay out of twitter, stay off the blog. Give myself to **that thing** where I feel like a fish most in water. Will hike **Mt W**, take a netbook, write from there. And see you soon. MT

Am-not

Can't sleep; unsatisfied.

Of all the dichotomies that flash through my head, neither side is more true. I don't need either side to be true, I am not more committed to one side or the other, except maybe slightly, momentarily. I think we have too-simple ideas of the self: of the definition of the self. Many of us do commit to certain particular sides of dichotomies and those are the ways we typically define personality, selfhood. You live in a certain place (not another), you either do or do not like sushi, etc. That stuff's not working for me

right now. I love sushi. But on fronts like whether or not I go hiking, it's a different story. Forget about whether or not you *like* any of these choices and just think about whether you *do* a thing, or not.

It just feels so arbitrary to me now, like there are two of me, one running the other, and the one who's in control is far enough removed to not have a *self*. Maybe I'm describing psychological disorder. But increasingly I can't relate, and increasingly I don't hate. I more and more really, genuinely *like* the people I meet. I have compassion and genuine love for people, love of being around, of actually hanging out with or otherwise interacting with them. But I also increasingly can't relate. I can enjoy my time with people more than ever before; I can enjoy *people* for who they actually are, more than ever before. But also more than ever I can't *relate*. Maybe my ideas of relating are too filled with the concept of *oneness*. Maybe I learned that in childhood, or picked it up along the way. I certainly see oneness in the world in a step-back sense.

But between me and you, a particular me and you, I love more and more but I *am-not* more and more too. I am not you. And in that way maybe I'm far from not having a self. Those nebulous ideas of merging, of joining with another person—that maybe we have from having *been* a part of, inside of, another person, when we first started out—or maybe we have for other reasons, but—those nebulous ideas of merging, in love, in work, in play, I don't have those anymore. I don't feel that. *I've felt this way before*. I don't see the possibility of ever *connecting* (in a merging sense) and I don't feel the need to connect (in that way), and I like the stranger sitting next to me.

It's like I'm less on the "am" and more on the "with" these days. I can tell that people like me, and I can tell that people think I'm weird, and I can see when I annoy them. I feel fine about all those things because that's in a sense none of my business—none of my business in the sense that I *am-not* them.

I'm not really sure this has anything to do with sushi.

And now I'm going to return to the world of fantasy and dreams.

Overfunction / underfunction

It's not my problem. That's one of the tenets of my sanity, when I achieve it. Not to shaft compassion for everything, not to discard problems that really *are*, and really are mine. But not to get over-involved. I definitely agree with the thrust of the statement {if you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem}..but is it really sane to be part of *all* the solutions? Clearly no. I suppose to some people this comes naturally; I'm not one of them. By whatever circumstance, whatever experience, whatever choices I've made, I tend to overfunction. Probably it's because I grew up around (and have since lived with and worked with) some major under-functioning. I thank {whatever force, whatever chance} that these days I sometimes catch myself when I'm offering too much, when I'm caring too much about something, or someone's situation, that I don't need to care that much about. Sometimes I've worried that I lack compassion; but any right mind (and mine is today) can see that there's not much danger of that with me. But whether they want you to or not, it doesn't help anyone for you to be too involved with *their* shit. Right? It's taken me until 32/33, and with a lot of help from **wise advisors**, to finally *get* that leaving people alone truly is a way of loving them.

Skirting with making something,

something written, lots of ideas flowing through my head, about life, why are we doing this—that sort of thing.

Feeling alienated.

I think I know that to be happy and keep light I have to leave off responsibility for things and people I'm not really responsible for, which is everybody and everything but myself.

Talked with a sister tonight—that helped. I need to talk with people who make sense to me.

Can't see a future—hard to imagine right now. Been getting lots of input from reading and video. I like biographies and

biographical documentaries, to see the way others approach their lives.

I worry too much, worry that the past will come back to me, worry that I won't make it into the future. I poke fun at angsty teenagers on tumblr but I'm pretty angsty for a 33-year-old. This is the best way I can be; I don't find the professionalism of the workplace to be all that professional or the academics of academics to be all that academic. I know that I don't know all that much, I know that I don't matter any more than anyone else, that I'm just one person—and that just for a moment—in a giant world. I love this place, in a large sense, and I want more time to think about it, to be in it, to play in it.

But I'm kind of at a loss; but I know enough of things to know that that's ok—that that's the way it goes.

I guess I just like to ramble in words, call it journal, call it blog, call it whatever. I like to look back later, it's just taking notes on life, it helps me learn myself, it helps me learn this place, to see how we all seem from different points of view, and times.

I'd like to travel more. Have traveled the US but would like to visit other countries.

I'd like happiness for everyone, but I can't arrange it, so I'll just have to focus on myself. And right now that means twitter poetry, blog brooding, and living in Vermont, as far as I can be away from the bullshit officefolk with whom I have spent the last ten years, and as many of the other bullshit folk as possible. Guess I'm not without judgement, but hey, guess I haven't had the easiest time of things either. I know we're all trying, I know we're all doing our best. But this is a barren world to me; I don't get it and I don't know what to do. And I don't know a lot of people who do get it, who I look up to.

I'd like to shut up, in every way but one: writing books. I think I could do that, with this life, conduit what I see and what I know, and what I've learned to feel. Working alone suits me; I love that I can be the sole guarantor of a project's integrity, that whatever comes out, is exactly me. Group work has never been as

Zen for me. And writing involves others: all the others I am stealing from, for texture. But at the spicket, I like that it's only me.

This writing is for myself, even though it's on the web. The web is just here to keep us honest, to complete the loop of honesty wherein ~if I'm true to myself, I don't need to lie to anyone~ I don't need to lie to you. I don't need to impress you. I'm not interested in helping to create the impression that "I'm a writer" any more than I'm interested in helping to create the impression that "I'm a programmer" or a genius or a dunce. Fuck all that.

First you have to deflate the idea of "hero" in others. Then you have to see the idea of hero in yourself. Then you have to shed the idea of hero altogether. There is nothing to be conquered. There is nothing to win.

Fiction, nonfiction, and photoshop

If a painter stands beneath the sky, and paints the sky, just as he sees it, that's one thing. If he thinks of clouds he has seen before, from various skies, and he thinks of forms like the forms he has seen in actual clouds, and he paints something further from the truth of any sky scene he's ever witnessed, that's another thing. Is this the same as the relationship between non-fiction and fiction? Could it be?

Monet stylistically painting a flower scene that he stands before, is more like non-fiction than fiction, even for its style. I think style is a distinct layer, a distinct level or filter or tool, in both painting and writing. I think you can have stylized fiction and non-fiction, distinct from whether it's fiction or non-fiction.

I think what we have now, in writing, sometimes, in the way of Tim O'Brien, is even a little more nuanced than any of these painting analogies. To get him I think we have to bring in photography, and photoshop. If you take a photo of the sky, that's more like non-fiction than fiction, right? Certainly there is perspective and non-objectivity in a photograph, just as there is in all non-fiction writing or documentary. But I think what some people do now, in their fiction—and I certainly do—is more like photoshop. It's not non-fiction if I take a photo-realistic idea of

something from my real life (whether stylized / filtered or not) and then collage that with other photo-realistic ideas from elsewhere, from other scenes of my life—and then combine that with never-seen, painted ideas based on forms that I have seen. The inclusion of photo-realistic elements may confuse the issue of whether it's non-fiction or fiction, but I think it's closer to fiction than non-fiction, in that case.

Also, even the most memoir-like fiction is still pretty highly fictional if it, for instance, contains dialogue that is rendered after the fact and without the use of a sound recorder! Whether you call it fiction or non-fiction, unless it's based on a recording, it's hardly *photo-realistic* in the sense being used here.

Non-fiction has a much stricter definition than fiction, as though non-fiction cannot include certain elements of fiction, but fiction can include certain elements of non-fiction. Or: non-fiction is more completely non-fiction than fiction is completely fiction, in general? Is fiction, in a sense, a *superset* of non-fiction?

You could use a third word, I guess: instead of saying "it's fiction" or "it's nonfiction" you could say "it's photoshop" (or some other word). It's from reality, but it's not reality..but it can look just like reality does, if it wants to..but it's not reality. It's photoshop.

"Luke, you switched off your targeting computer."

Star Wars. The Death Star assault. Luke has to make the critical shot, the one no one's ever made before, the one that's "impossible".

And then..what's this?

"Luke, you switched off your targeting computer. What's wrong?"

And Luke says: "Nothing. I'm all right."

A friend recently asked for my opinion on some writing. And I happily gave it to her, for what it's worth, because I respect her and I like her and because we're friends. Happy to do it. And

sometimes I want the same. We do care what other people think. It does matter.

But do we need other people's opinions, "on the ground", "in the trenches" of our writing? Of our lives?

Naturally *society* is built on us caring, to a great degree, what each other think. No one doubts that.

But in something *of the self*, something *individual*, like {your *writing*} or {your *life*}—things that no one else can do—at all—do we really *need* anyone else's opinion? I like the *Apocalypse Now* / Walt Kurtz **suggestion** that we not only get over *others'* opinions of us, but that we take it a step further and get over our *own* opinions of *ourselves*.

In writing, in life, it's scary, and maybe at some point it's interesting to be involved in discussions with others about all of our opinions of ourselves, but *at the moment, in the trenches, as I make moment-to-moment decisions..do I need your opinions, right then? Do I even need my own?*

Luke probably has some doubting opinions. Some part of him says: "You're gonna miss." It's not like everyone but him thinks he's gonna miss and he, alone, thinks he'll hit it.

Everyone's opinions, there, are useless.

He switches off his targeting computer not so he can hear his own voice (versus hearing others' voices), but *so that he can use the force*. So that he can *trust his feelings*. That's not the same as knowing what to do and feeling good about it. It's not the same as other people liking you, or even you liking yourself. It's just that there's something to *do* so you stop *thinking* and *do* it.

Switch off the targeting computer. Shut off communication with base camp—for a moment. Silence your own terrifying *doubt*. And just take the shot.

Dream I was moving to a new room,

packing my things, making trips to my car, clearing my pictures from the wall. My roommate was sad and confused as to why I was leaving—and I would miss my roommate, too—but I was moving on, ready to leave the past/present behind. This new

room, where I would live by myself, would be better for me..I was going to be able to better become myself in this new place, to better *expand as myself*. It was a good thing, and I was excited.

Moving—As a dream symbol, moving can indicate moving up in life or in your own state of consciousness. It can also suggest changes in your life, especially if you are moving out and into a new house.

*With **moving**, we have another obstacle dream, in as much as, if the move goes smoothly and is completed in normal time then you will overcome your barriers and sail through to what you desire.*

Dreaming of moving out of your home means that changes in your personal life are inevitable. It can be connected with changing your habits, attitude towards the life, or present situation.

So we sit by the carillon. Me and Jules.

This is an excerpt from **::HARD**, the book I'm writing. Today I crossed 75,000 words. I'm nudging up against the end of the second act. The previous **excerpt** was from what would be the first act, if this were a three-act play. This excerpt is from the second act.

So we sit by the carillon. Me and Jules. The most terrible days of life always seem to have the best weather. She's stopped needing to look directly into my face to tell me everything she's telling me. Because now she's told me. And I've listened. And there's nothing else to say so we listen to the bells. That's one hour: that's four o'clock. And it's past the next hour and almost to the next one after that before either of us says anything. And it's Jules.

She says: "Take me somewhere we can eat?"

I just take her in my arms and pick her up from the stone bench and put her in my car and drive her home. Then I order pizza, delivered. I'm not leaving this girl anywhere, not on a bench in the

Dorothy Lane Market, not in my car for five minutes while I run in somewhere to get some food. She's staying in my sight, she's staying under the covers in my bed, and when she eats pizza I'm feeding it to her, every bite. She doesn't get to decide, and she doesn't want to. All she needs is back rubs and neck rubs and hot baths and favorite movies. She doesn't get to pick the movie—I know what they are. Unfortunately Jules's favorite movies are Life is Beautiful and Amelie and the night is still early, so we're gonna have to watch both of them. I play Amelie first, hoping she'll fall asleep and we can skip Life is Beautiful, but she doesn't, so after we're done laughing and crying at Amelie we're lying there laughing and really crying to Life is Beautiful. But she does fall asleep before the end of that one. But I don't turn it off. I watch it to the very end, to my least favorite parts, and I hold my girlfriend's body in my lap, and she sleeps.

Least common denominator conformity

I hesitate to use the word “conformity” because talk of non-conformity sounds so adolescent. But it's the right word.

I've read some terrible writing advice lately. Who am I to say it's terrible? Ok, let's say I've read some terrible *life* advice lately. I'm not responding in the comments of those sites, because I'm not in the debate business anymore. I am still squarely in the business of self-reflection, however, so I'm pausing for a few minutes from my **novel** writing to write some words here about this fear-oriented, conformist, **LCD** meme that's been popping up on my streams.

The meme is this: don't offend anyone. If something is unusual, don't do it. Don't stand out.

We're not talking about content, even, in writing or in life. We're talking about wearing a suit. Don't do anything that might offend or turn off a potential literary agent. Don't take yourself seriously enough to allow definition of your self.

I can almost *cry* thinking of people taking this advice.

To offer it up, is to have never known, or to have forgotten, any history. Let's keep it real: did Jesus have a path? Did any

writer who we still talk about? No. They couldn't—essentially—just go to yoga classes and learn yoga. They had to walk a new path. No one's saying we should all be historically-significant prophets, or any other kind of figure. But we can each be *a little bit* of a trailblazer.

The level of fear present in my society—the society I live in—is tragic. It's nothing short of tragic.

Every day, I listen to my friend tell me how she is afraid to tell the truth to her boss because she is afraid of losing her job. To tell the truth! To simply say what she, and likely her boss, simply know is true. That is reason enough for the fearful, crippled CEOs of today's 1st world economies, to fire someone, to kill a career. Is disagreeing with the popular mass trends, politically, enough to scare off a publishing house?

Lol. If it is, fuck publishing.

I don't personally believe in a heaven, so I think this life is my only shot to be “me”, to “do”, to operate the ego construct that we all loosely agree is a person. How can you waste your time here in fear..by holding your real thoughts to yourself? It's—and you're talking with an atheist here—it's a *sin* to not give of your real self..to hold back your real individual value!! It's the worst crime against life, against the concept of the individual, that there is.

To me it's not unwise not to wear a suit when, in order to fit in, economically, politically, howeverly, wearing a suit is required. Those wearing suits are quite final in their exclusion of those who question wearing suits—I'm intimately learned of that dynamic.

I get it.

And from my point of view, it's entirely *silly* to live your life in fear. For me, I'll just say: to live my life in fear. It doesn't make sense. And here, I don't mean this in some frou-frou mystic sense..I mean in terms of cost-benefit analysis. Maybe for some people, their fear is so great, that the pittance they receive from social acceptance is worth the tradeoff of silencing their souls. For me that is not the case. For me, what I get in return, from acceptance—even economic acceptance which allows me to survive—that

payment is not worth the cost of silencing my own, real perspective.

I don't understand the other way of seeing it and I have never heard an explanation of why one would make this cost-benefit analysis differently..except fear. Except that the person making the analysis has chosen—and it is a choice—to continue to accept fear as a part of their life. To allow other people to control them and use them, via fear.

Fuck the fear!

(A tweep and I arrived at this crass little **adage** months ago in a conversation about writing.)

Will we get published? Can any of us expect to make money doing this? Who knows? Who cares. Take a step back: if you're doing something that you believe in, that makes sense to your cognition, and the publishing industry spurns you until and beyond your death—who cares. (If your writing is consistent with publisher aims, and you're being true to yourself..then the former is incidental. If your writing is inconsistent with publisher aims, and you're being true to yourself..then the former is still incidental! Neither reflects [positively or negatively] on you.)

What kind of short-sighted, base, senseless logic does one possess to come to the conclusion that living one's life to please others, makes sense? Don't you see that **other people's praise is their most deceptive form of manipulation??** To conform yourself to fit the shape of an industry's praise, or an individual's praise..is terrible strategy.

Take it to the extreme: what if everyone did that? We'd have the absolute lowest common denominator of creation, of insight, of invention, of *value* and *flavor* of our cultural species.

I'm scared shitless, but I'm not letting that stop me. You know?

I risked physical danger and probably destroyed my software consulting career whistle-blowing a fraudulent business/ government axis..because it's the right motherfucking thing to do. I don't trust my government not to kill me (or unjustly spy on or watchlist me) for calling someone on fraud..because I've read a tiny

bit of history and I know we have a history of covertly killing people to silence them. I don't trust my next employer to operate above-board, to treat me fairly, to tell me the truth; I don't trust them not to end my career for simply doing my job..for telling them technical truths in fields in which I am more the expert than they.

I don't believe that the best way to ingratiate myself with literary agents is by sending them query letters in the first person, as the character of the book I am pitching. All the query letter books advise against it. But I think it's the best way to pitch *Things Said in Dreams*—because it has a nameless narrator. Because the *voice* is central to the value of that text.

I'm not going to keep to myself my highly-logical, but unpopular opinion that censoring a pedophilia how-to book is not the most effective way to marshall resources in order to combat pedophilia—even though sloppy thinkers will quickly unfollow and otherwise distance themselves from someone not conspicuously waving this particular book-burning flag they have embraced.

Nor am I going to pretend that I have to be quiet when I read a so-called “literary agent”'s “list” and what they're looking for is merely material that doesn't say anything offensive against their pathetic impressions of some kind of neutered, conformist god. If you're a literary agent who wishes I was kissing the ass of pseudo-spiritual “literary” agents who only rep. Christian books, and you won't represent me because of that..then *I* dodged a bullet.

Am I stupid?

Or am I being self-consistent.

If you're always *conforming* to other people's advice..then who are you? You are—and no offense here, but you are—*nothing* if you do that.

I'm not advocating nonconformity for nonconformity's sake, but holy shit, what have we come to as a human culture when we're so god-damn *afraid* that we cease to be ourselves.

That's a failing.

I don't accept it in myself, and no, I don't accept it in you. When you catch me dulling down my flavor, you better call me on

it. When I feel like it, and in the most supportive way, I will be doing the same for those I care about, and those who are listening.

I think I'm going radio blackout..

..to finish **this**. Might not, not sure. Just reviewed my outline and I think I have plenty for the last 40k words. Distracted myself for a good break on blog/Twitter today, but if I don't respond to msgs or keep expected phone call dates for the next 13-14 days, please understand. I look forward to seeing what you've been up to whenever it is that I check back in. MT

Some idea of perfection still lingers, still plagues me

I can get some things elegantly right. Some things, and some times, I can't, and don't. I dwell sometimes too much on these latter. And when I torment myself with that dwelling, I know that of the seven deadly sins, pride is the one I am most plagued with in this time of my life. Pride: that somehow I deserve to, or could get to, live elegantly all the time, act elegantly all the time. It's clearly not true. So I'm reminding myself, right now, that I am both of these: elegant and clumsy. And I'm admitting, here, my raking myself over the coals this morning over, say, speaking at an inelegant time, or speaking clumsily, so that I deflate the power that any such pride could have over me. Because I'm fine: I'm an imperfect, delightful person, and excessive measurement against perfection doesn't make me any happier or help me any. Casting that off. Confessing my mess. Admitting my shit. Not going to beat myself up today for well-intentioned, slightly clumsy actions. Writing this here helps me to let this go. Lightening. Free.

The Drowning Pool (unfinished novel)

For Sample Sunday I'm putting up something from my "Attic" folder, an unfinished novel called *The Drowning Pool*.

Lacy was walking up Wyoming. Wyoming was next to Wayne. Wayne was next to Waldo. Waldo was where the cemetery was.

Woodland Cemetery was the largest cemetery in Dayton. It was where Lacy took her best pictures. It was where she went after school instead of going home. The cemetery was in southeast Dayton, just outside downtown. It was bounded by chainlink fence topped with barbed wire. Beyond that, on one side, lay homes built in the nineteen-twenties. On the other side was student housing for the University of Dayton. Woodland Cemetery overlooked the Miami Valley and Dayton's handful of thirty-story buildings. The peak of the highest hill in the cemetery was Lacy's favorite place from which to view the city. She liked to gaze through the breaks in the trees toward downtown and across the valley. Church steeples and the towers of hospitals rose from wooded neighborhoods circling the city. During July and August, mist sometimes rose from the dense patches of trees. In the fall, the valley was splashed with blotches of orange and brown. During winter almost every elevated point in the cemetery made a good lookout. More of the town's buildings were visible through leafless branches. White steeples still rose starkly, but then from groves of black trees.

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Far from feeling depleted,

after writing 100,000 words so far this year, and a trashload last year..far from feeling depleted, I feel charged, I feel poised, I feel a real freedom from having told some of my stories. And even though in a way writing is painting yourself into a corner, because you don't want to write the same thing twice, I'm finding right now that I feel an incredible openness and possibility spread out for me.

In terms of specific writing, yes, I've written a few things, and I'm not going to write those again, but instead of feeling out of ideas, I feel like the more that passes through me, the more that could.

Oddly for me, I find my ability or perception of ability to write and create new things to be greater now than it ever has been.

I like this feeling very much.

It is, truly, the feeling of *fertility*. Rich soil. Dirt that can grow life.

I am in a total bind in the ways of the world: no job, and scarcely a call back from places I've applied. Fuck all that. I'm not going back: I'm going forward. As the ancient advice suggests, instead of stepping away from the cliff, I'm taking another step toward it..and I'll fight my battles from there, make my camp up next to death itself and benefit from the lack of options, and the impossibility of retreat.

Are we here to suffer (as the globe continues to), to hurt constantly (as I have in some relationships), to starve intellectually and spiritually (as I have at work and in school)..no, we are not here for that. In opposition to the common thinking of most of our human structure, we're here to approach ****ing bliss. I think that in concrete ways *idealism* is more solid a discipline than what we call realism. Strap on your motherfucking Annie attitude. I'm strapping on mine.

And I'm keeping on *making* things, in a world of fraud and murder and fear, very simply because that's what I was built to do.

So **fuck the fear**.

What do I have to give? That is the question I'm asking myself in this moment. What reality do I want to be creating?

I've been systemically called naive by fearful people (and, frankly, by unintelligent people). "Crazy." Yeah? I think it's crazy to live days with regret, to die that way. To lie constantly. I'm schluffing you off—I'm schluffing you off my back so I don't have to carry dead weight (no hate to you—and every goodbye). And I'm schluffing off my own lies, where I have had them. You die the way you live. The day you die will be like the days you lived. Am I going to live, and die, in fear, hiding myself from myself, hiding myself from you? No. You do it however you want. I'm going to die laughing.

Distraction is the [d]evil

When I was a kid I believed in a personal god; my views are atheistic now. It might be odd, given that, for me to anthropomorphize evil, but, sometime this year I started believing in the devil again.

It's distraction—that's the form of evil that presented itself to me, that tempted me.

I was writing..just waking up every day with the simple intention: today I'm going to write my story. That may not be a *noble* intention but it certainly is a *simple* intention..it is a pure intention.

Then distraction came into play. Regardless of the intentions or capabilities of the source of the distraction—that doesn't matter—the distraction itself was evil to me. That's the role it played for me.

It played the role of *taking me from my trip*.

I'm on a trip. That trip might be writing a story. It might be making a relationship with someone. It might be going to the store to get a can of enchilada sauce.

I can stay on my trip or I can be distracted—I can be pulled into someone else's trip. That distraction is a type of evil.

If the checkout guy insults me, if someone cuts me off in their car, those are all opportunities to become distracted. Even if someone presumes on my time, takes up my time in a way that I am drawn away from my trip..that is evil. It is evil. The intention of the other person is not important here (and it may not even be another person). I'm not speaking to their intentions. I'm speaking to the effect on me.

Someone said a wise thing I heard a few years ago. She was one of my wise teachers, and she was younger than me. She said (of herself): I have to remember that I'm feeling the way I feel right now *because I want to feel this way*.

This isn't about blaming victims. We recognize that everything that happens to you did not happen to you because you wanted it to.

It's about being on your own trip. You are on a trip, and you are on that trip because it is the trip you want to be on, because it is

the trip you have chosen, constantly, in every little decision. If I go to the store to get enchilada sauce, and the checkout guy insults me, and I get into it with him, then I am no longer on my trip—I am distracted—I am on his trip, or the trip I was on wasn't really going to the store to get enchilada sauce..it was the trip of getting into it with the checkout guy. If I leave him in his world and keep myself in mine, then I am still on my trip. I go to the store, I am not distracted by someone else's trip, and I come home and make enchiladas, still on my trip. To be taken from that is evil.

It is.

It is the devil, if ever you could make a devil that this atheist believes in.

I'm feeling the way I am right now because I want to be feeling this way. That's a hard lesson, and it's the one I'm focused on in this phase of my life. I'm not in control of everything. In fact a lot of things suck. But my own feelings, my response, my trip, really is mine, and it reflects nothing on anyone else and it reflects everything on me. I am working something out. If I find myself arguing with people who argue with me, if I find myself playing cat-and-mouse in traffic, that is me, working something out that I want to work out. If I have no need or desire to argue with those who insult me, then I am on a different trip than if I did have that need, or that desire.

I feel thankful, as I've grown in recent years, that sometimes (not all the time, but sometimes) I don't go there with people, where I might have before. Even not-going there *sometimes* is a massive blessing. It's not that I shouldn't go there. It's not that I couldn't go there. It's not that I wouldn't be completely justified—completely in the right—to go there. It's much more basic, and much more profound, than that. It's simply that I don't want to go there. Hear what I'm saying? It's not even that staying on my own trip is the right thing to do..I'm not always doing it because it's *just*. I'm doing this for a simpler and more profound reason: because I want to. It's not that the guy wasn't a jerk to me (for example), it's not that he had any right standing from which to do what he did. It's this selfish, personal reason that keeps me on my trip, when I

do stay here..the reason being very simply that that's what I want to do. I don't owe it to you to correct you when you're in the wrong, even..I can avoid that trip altogether, selfishly, because I like where I am better than where I would be if I was involved with you.

That's not justice. That's not correctness. That's not generosity. It is selfish, counterintuitive, and brilliant action.

How people learn to be normal

There's a guy outside my window. He's playing with his kids, or grandkids, or whatever they are. They're making hot dogs. The kid suggests that they put radishes on them—he wants a radish for his hot dog. The normalized, old man says: “Uhhh..is that what you put on hot dogs? Is that what *you* do?” in this kind of derisive way.

That's how people learn to be normal..by fear, created by other human beings for their own convenience. I'm resisting the urge to yell out my window how this guy is fucking up these kids, but he is, and he is—that type of action is—everything that's wrong with the world.

Guns don't kill people. (The toothpaste argument)

Um. I know some educated people who vehemently defend the “guns don't people” idea as logical..who claim it is so. Gun's don't kill people—people kill people.

Lol. I sincerely don't think the cogency of this statement, this argument, this general idea, is merely a matter of opinion and politics.

I've tried many tactics to try to get my side of this point across:

I've investigated how much urban living the person saying it has done. It's easier to understand keeping handguns legal when you haven't lived in a big city. Rural-living people tend to more vehemently fail to see the need for sensible gun laws.

I've tried the theoretical *what would happen if there were no guns* argument. Which is the favorite argument of people who support the pro- side of this idea. They say: without guns, people would still be killing people. And I say: yes, and they would be killing them at a slower rate.

But to trump all of those half-assed ways of trying to get people to see the illogic of this argument, which still persists in some otherwise-cogent people's minds, I present you, now, with the toothpaste argument:

I propose that if {guns don't kill people, people kill people} then {toothpaste doesn't get your teeth clean, people get their teeth clean}.

Or more succinctly: **toothpaste doesn't clean teeth, people clean teeth.**

..

See what I'm saying?

A lack of toothpaste might not prevent people from cleaning their teeth, but their teeth certainly aren't as clean without toothpaste. If people can get their teeth clean without toothpaste..then why do we allow companies to advertise that toothpaste gets your teeth clean? ..Because it does. The corollary theoretical argument from guns to toothpaste would be: well, without toothpaste, people would still clean their teeth, they'd just do it using a different tool—they'd use sound waves or something.

And here's where our anti-gun-control people make their logical fallacy. **You can't say what *might* happen**, in an argument, **because you can't predict the future**. It's not the case that an even number of people are being killed each year by guns and then also by knives. It isn't true that toothpaste has existing, equally-convenient alternatives serving as evidence that people don't depend on toothpaste in order to clean their teeth as well as we do now.

Right?

When I brush my teeth, if I use toothpaste, and I get my teeth clean, then toothpaste is helping to get my teeth clean.

If I attack someone, by shooting them with a gun, and they die, then the gun is helping to kill the person.

Is the gun the total factor? No. Is toothpaste? No.

But to say that toothpaste isn't a first-class factor in getting your teeth clean, cooperating with human will and other factors, or that a bullet and a gun aren't first-class factors in killing people via shooting them, I believe is beyond the level of simply annoying, and squarely in the realm of non-cogent.

If {guns don't kill people, people kill people} then it must be the case that [informal] advertising (or belief) around guns is incorrect. Is it not the case that when I buy a gun, I expect that it will function, in killing? If it didn't, what would be the purpose of buying a gun? (Opponents of this will say that guns, without shooting them, can be a deterrent to crime, etc—bullshit: if *no* gun was ever *used*, then they wouldn't be a deterrent.) Clearly the promise, to a purchaser of a gun, is that it will be a lethal deterrent (or worse) in exactly the same way that getting your teeth clean is the promise made to a purchaser of toothpaste.

The promise of any product is that you need to have it in order to do what it claims to help you do; that it will do what it claims to do; and that, with it, you will be better able to do or be something, than without.

If {guns don't kill people, people kill people} and {toothpaste doesn't clean your mouth, human will and ingenuity clean your mouth} then the advertising and beliefs around both toothpaste and guns are wrong. When we advertise these two items, we are most certainly not saying: well, these tools don't really work any better than any theoretical tool that might kill people or clean teeth, but we're going to sell them to you even though (or anyway, because) if the manufacturers of these items weren't here, you'd be doing just as well killing people and cleaning teeth than if these items weren't here. No. Obviously that's not the situation. (If it was, then it wouldn't be possible to orient a business around the selling of either item.) With both toothpaste and guns, the belief and advertising about the item's use is that the product will vastly

improve your ability to do what you want to do, versus not having it.

So {guns don't kill people} adherents are necessarily saying that a gun, as a product, doesn't solidly occupy a space of usefulness, as a critical tool for accomplishing its particular aims.

They have to claim that, they by necessity must be claiming that to say that guns are such a minor factor in murders performed using guns, that without them, murders performed using guns would be taking place at the same rate. What I'm showing here is that if {guns don't kill people, people kill people} is true, then it's also true that the advertising and belief around guns is false..if guns don't kill people, then guns are useless, they are ineffective, they are no more effective than the next, existing, available option for killing your neighbor. That is clearly false at the present time, given that more people die by guns than by knives or bows and arrows, etc, when a person kills another person (at least in the United States). So, by symbolic logic, we have an {if a , then b } situation, where b is false. Hence, a is also false.

(If a {guns don't kill people, people kill people} then b {guns are no more available and effective than existing alternatives for small-scale murder}. If a then b . b is false. Hence a cannot be true.)

You know, it may be that the US needs to have different regulations for urban areas and rural areas, or some other more nuanced way to interpret the Second Amendment. That's a whole other, political, argument..one other people can have.

What I'm absolutely tired of, is educated people ignoring simple logic when using this clearly false, yet catchy, slogan, to make their political points. Make your political points, please—but do it logically.

The critic and the creator

Some have said that the best creators are also first-line critics in the field in which they create. People talk of the interplay of these two disciplines.

I've **thought** about this **some**.

I think that's true—that people who do something well do both this creative (expository) side and this critical (pruning) side. If one is too strong, the other won't happen. And whether I'm "right" or not, I am a fan of balance (as elusive as it is) and I think that when these two sides, as Prince says, are "both friends", that the results are stellar, compared to when they're not.

I've written five book-length texts at this point, and some other texts. Where I find myself in this critic/creator discussion, now, is this: what we do is rare. When we are writers, when we are creators, there are not many of us. This isn't to build ourselves up: it's not that anyone wants to have a party by themselves. No. We want everyone to become the best they can, we want to have others to celebrate with, and to celebrate symmetrically. The best party imaginable has the best, and the whole-est, and the most full, and accomplished, and centered participants.

But when I started writing, I looked to what other people had to say. I did that more. I was creating, and questioning myself. I was saying: here's what I have done..now what do you think? My creator was more developed than my critic. I wanted to make something, in a sense to manipulate others' critiques, by getting better. I wanted to make something people liked. Is this poem good? When you read it, do you think you could have done better? Etc.

But I'm not there anymore. This whole activity, as all activities, is about having a party. Finding someone with whom one can reasonably celebrate. Someone who has come to the same or a similar enough place that the two of you can then *celebrate*—can shluff off yearning and pretense and get down to the business of having fun..of *reveling*..in the—really: glory—of delight, and that kind of freedom doesn't come without some *symmetry* and some *oblivion*.

The critic and the creator, whether they're the same person or different ones, are involved in a **glorious form of play**—as are lovers, as are olympic competitors, as are children pretenders. They are all on equal footing and delighting in a certain kind of lightness.

The lover analogy is a good one.

When you take your clothes off, are you doing it to see what the other person thinks, or are you doing it *to play*?

I'm at a point in my writing where—"published" or not—I've had enough feedback to know that my critic is alive and well, and on the money. I know what I'm writing. I know what's good about it. I know what's lacking. I know what it does and and I know what it does not do. I like praise, but compliments and insults have approximately the same strength (or half life) to me right now. My critic is good-to-go, at the moment. I can tell this from the feedback I get..because my internal critic is functioning with or beyond the level of the external critics I know of.

So when I take my clothes off, I'm not worried about what you're going to say: because by and large I've already thought of it.

I'm not taking my clothes off (so to speak) because I'm really curious about what you're going to say when you see me naked.

I'm (in writing) taking my clothes off because I like to get fucking naked.

When you speak, after I disrobe, if you're on the level, then we're playing—we're in that glorious interchange. I learn, I am affected, but I am nowhere near putting my clothes back on due to your criticism—because, by and large, mine is better (my criticism). My critic has (improved or) maintained his sanity, while my creator has improved (or maintained) his insanity, such that the creator is not naked at all. The critic already told him what was coming, and together, we made what we made, with a pretty well-rounded idea of what was happening throughout that process.

I am seeking publication..because I would like to make money writing. I think I can do that. I think more people will say that they like, and say that they dislike, my writing, and I'm sure at some point I will come face-to-face with someone who has developed a critic who can do that kind of glorious play with me.

But I don't need publication or any more compliments in order to know that I'm on the track I want to be on. Somewhere in this process, I've come to see that this is what I do—in the sense that no compliment, and no insult, will deter me from it. I kind of don't

care anymore: just in the sense that the way I feel now, I don't think that anything anyone else is going to do, is going to elementally change what I'm doing. If I get shunned for the rest of my life by publishers, I'm still going to be writing—I won't stop on their behalf. It's as if, in my mind, the external critic (disdainful or appraising) is listened to, yes, but not that prominent an element in my decision-making process.

I just don't care what you think.

Because, finally, I think, I trust myself.

I guess what I'm thinking is..

..all bets are off. The American Dream, as presented is a lie. At this point there is no shame in moving to the woods and being homeless, in forgetting my debts, living on \$200 for the next few months (if my unemployment comes in) and saving that money and moving to motherfucking Africa and living illegally in the bush. There's no more shame in that than living here, as I do now. So all bets are off. Do whatever I want. Go to the limit. Fuck this place. Go for myself. And the limited time I might have.

I dreamt that I was being tased.

Let's forget for a moment about what this might mean, from my subconscious, and lament the fact that tasers, tasing, tasing are even concepts my brain has at its disposal when constructing nightmares.

My dream was that I had been unjustly decided upon as the guilty one in some supposed and minor infraction in a mall (it had to do with re-placing a phone on its cradle—it was a minor infraction which not only had I not done..it hadn't happened).

Then security guards held me down and when I asked them to stop tasing me, they kept tasing me, over and over, and telling me that they would keep doing it until I recognized that they had the power to do whatever they wanted.

I've never been tased in waking life, but obviously so many have been tased, arrested, persecuted, and executed unjustly, by corrupt governors, corrupt wielders of corporate power.

We need to take a step back from martial law.

A history of perfection, the American Lie

Background checks, credit checks, up-your-butt investigative journalism. Presidential records of spotlessness. People resigning over things they did that weren't illegal—and that didn't affect their job!

This is all bad.

I'm not talking about putting serial killers in daycares.

I'm talking about: maybe I've had a restraining order filed against me. Maybe my credit is bad. Maybe I spent a week in the hospital because I called a suicide hotline.

Now I can't get a job!

Would you rather I had not called that suicide hotline? Are my options really: a) kill myself or b) get help and become unemployable? I despise c) (the common choice) stuff down your emotions, saw off your reality, and live a desperate and neutered life, never admitting that you hurt. That *is* the most common definition of adjustment in our society and I fucking think that's sick.

In this media culture, once you've done cocaine or cheated on your wife, you have to hide it in order to become President.

That's *terrible*. If you take that to its simple, logical conclusion: it means that Presidents and CEOs and *people who have jobs* are the set of people who have made the fewest public mistakes??

That is terrible..don't you see? It means that the people who know the most (who are by necessity the people who have tried the most things and therefore again by necessity the people who have made the most mistakes) are the people who can't even get a job in this country, in this economy, in this global system we're allowing.

The people who can get a job are the people who've never messed up (college degree—no experience). People who know a thing or two (and I certainly include myself), and who helped build

the systems that are now in place (and I **certainly** include myself)..are a set of people the system no longer serves.

And it's not just negative experience that hurts you—it's your expertise! When I was 20 and knew almost nothing about software engineering, it was easier for me to get a software engineering job than it is now. Part of it is the general economic downslope, but part of it is that I know too much, and the HR person thinks I will get bored doing the job. Or, worse: they know that I'm not naive enough to work for a pittance, or that I have enough experience and backbone to ask for fair treatment in an employee/employer relationship! Is someone of a mere 33 years already too broad and eclectic a person to get *any* job? (I'd like to think I have more development in me, more growth, more life.) I'm underqualified to be a baker. I'm overqualified to design web applications. What the fuck am I supposed to do?

This country, this system, *is fucked*.

And also: how exactly the fuck does *being a baker* preclude *being something else*? I recently had a shot at a great software job, but the CEO told me, when I told him I also write, that everyone there is completely focused on that project, and that he viewed it as a negative, that I might have split focus or be interested in other things—which to me means that that's not a 50-hour-a-week job, or a 60-hour-a-week job, but a *We-Own-Your-Life*-type job. I view it as a positive that I do multiple things. I know how to focus on one thing at a time: if I didn't I wouldn't have written *books*. But I really get the sense that part of what is happening with me in my job search is that {people looking for bakers} don't know how to see me as a baker (even though industrial bread-baking is something I think almost anyone can learn) or as a computer programmer..because the computer programmers they know don't do other things. I think that is a liability, as a human being, as a baker, and as a programmer. In order to get a job as an X, I have to have done nothing but X my whole life? That's just not realistic in this day and age. And I think it demands a kind of vulnerability to a specific line of work that in this economy I don't think is smart. People who are happy now b/c they got a job as a "Java

programmer” after adjusting their resume to claim that all they ever developed in, was Java—beware the passing fad of computer languages..what yesterday got you a job will prevent you from getting one tomorrow.

When I’m smarter and more capable than the person I’m trying to get a job from, and I can’t get a job—the system is fucked. Hard work and intelligence do not pay off. Knowing someone who is **already** in power pays off. Having rich parents pays off. Fraudulent billing pays off. For the rest of us, it’s playing the lottery.

And of course saying what you think, what you know, and what we all know—say in this blog post for instance—that won’t help. Because hiring, like everything else in this damn place, is based on fear: they want to hire the candidate they’re least *afraid* of..which is to say the one who won’t rock the boat (which is to say the one who is a fucking idiot).

Do I have *emotional problems* because I express my feelings? No. I disagree with that. I think the fraudulent CEO, who rarely expresses anything, who sunk a functioning employee’s job into the dirt..I think I’ll go with *him* having emotional problems and me and my current anger being a rational *symptom* of systemic bullshit. I’m not taking this shit on, anymore, personally. I didn’t create this economy. I fucking showed up at work every day and did *brilliant* work. *That’s* what I did. That I can’t find a job is ridiculous..it has nothing to do with me..so while the ship sinks I’ll at least afford myself the dignity to speak about the waves from my place on the bow.

Either way I’m in a shitty position: if I shut the fuck up and get a job with no benefits and no stability and no honesty from the company owners (a couple of my past jobs can be described this way)..or I put myself at [only slightly] greater risk by having a blog and saying: hey! it sucks to work as a programmer and not get health insurance! Or: hey: you’re a fucking fraud! Either way, economically, I’m pretty much sunk! So I might as well speak my mind. Ten years ago, when I made good money and got relatively honest treatment from the “leadership” of, say, a LexisNexis, it was

worth it to keep quiet, to be tame. Now: these jobs don't offer livable pay or health insurance (which is just an anti-capitalist price fixing scheme), and the jobs aren't stable..so..what's the fucking point?! *They're not offering anything anymore.*

I honestly have half a mind to go live in the woods, eat people's trash.

And I'll say this too: (and I'm not suicidal and by default I'm not a revolutionary, but:) I think that suicide and revolution are rational options in such a culture. The American Lie isn't so good to me these days. And as someone of very high IQ-type intelligence, I'm telling you that I don't think it is a rational decision to work for a pittance, to stay silent out of fear..and yes—(as much flack as I may get for this) (and if you were considering suicide, don't use me as your excuse, but)—I consider that massive change, or massively giving up (in some cases) are not-ideal, but rational choices in such a dismal, dismal world.

Duplicity, oneness, efficiency, ease

Recently some of my more difficult challenges have had to do with multiplicity.

The multiplicity of others: when one person presents multiple conflicting sides, with the effect of manipulating others.

And yes, I recognize and embrace certain types of contradiction as part of intelligence, and part of desirable complexity. But simplifying manipulative duplicity has been a tactic for peace for me recently. To take a person's actions and a person's words, when they disagree, and when they disagree with the effect of hurting me..and resolve those sides, in my own mind, into one. Choosing one that I hold as the truth, and letting the other go..or labeling a simpler truth on top of a more complex and manipulative set of truths that the person is presenting. This has helped bring ease to me, because it reduces the amount of work I have to do, when dealing with a manipulative person: when I continue to deal with manipulative duplicity, or multiplicity, I am playing into the other person's evil: simply the evil of their asking me to do excessive work for them.

Last night I dreamt of a lighter path, and I have been asking [myself, the universe, whatever] for a lighter path and for answers about peace—personal peace anyway. I think it may be, or part of it for me may be, the flip side to reducing others' duplicity in my mind..and that is reducing my own. Even where duplicity in me isn't intentionally manipulative, or isn't even directed outward, there is that same type of evil: the evil of asking myself to do too much work..the evil of inefficiency and difficulty. Where there is something that is causing me to think too much, to do too much figuring, that is an area where I am of two minds, and where being of one (or none) would be easier. If it's causing me to think, get rid of it. Where those swirls of inefficiency appear, showing themselves as too much thinking, or difficult thinking, that may be a place where by becoming of one mind—or by becoming oblivious (of no mind)—I can cause myself to become more peaceful. If I'm thinking too much, struggling too much, around an issue, that is an inefficiency, a difficulty, and a multiplicity, that by getting rid of something, I can simplify, and by doing that make my life lighter.

Twitter's divergence

I like Twitter's divergence. I disagree that it's a conversation. I agree that conversation does occur there, but I think that convergence goes against Twitter's nature, and that divergence is more its nature.

I think when you make a longer text, usually there is a nature of convergence there. And certainly, from some point of view, twitter contains convergence and conversation. But I certainly think that, from a person's point of view, twitter is divergent rather than convergent.

Little is being chiseled-away at there, little is being arrived upon. You can meet people, you can discuss (barely), you can proceed from there to relationships that are characterized by convergence, and elements of convergences take place on twitter. But twitter itself is not naturally convergent.

And I like that, in its place..as a shared notes document, perhaps, as the set of conversant billboards that you see while

speeding down a highway with one eye closed. I enjoy that, when I keep it in its place.

“The Depth Of Salinger With Biting Lyricism”

Review of *Things Said in Dreams* by Ryne Douglas Pearson, screenwriter of *Knowing*, bacon aficionado, and family man:

Things Said In Dreams doesn't leap off the page. It spills from it and washes over you like a steady stream of consciousness, released in a singular breath of spoken word given life by the protagonist.

In a way, the plot is secondary to the sheer experience of chasing the story. It seems to race ahead, with characters and relationships appearing from nowhere, each quite organic, but some seeming to want further exploration. Yet that never seems to hinder the flat-out, take-no-prisoners style which Temple wields deftly.

When I finished, I knew what had happened, and how, with even a hint of 'why', but I realized that I was exhausted. This is not a bad thing in any way. Temple has created a mature, complex experience that is more pursuit than novel, where the story is first out of the starting blocks and you are close behind, never ahead.

A thoroughly enjoyable book for readers seeking a deep, driven narrative.

Thanks for reading, man; and for the review.

Dreams of school in summer, right before graduation,

which is how I often dream of it. With people in their final throes of preparation for leaving. And this time with a couple others in mourning, whose mourning I did not share, but who I comforted:

an older version of LK, who in mourning wore pajamas to class and admitted she was “pushing the limit of formality”, with an oversized shirt, untucked, and everything else comfortable—to help with the mourning process. And another girl, a black girl, patterned after two of my crushes from two different waking-life high schools, who was crying, who I hugged, and who then cried more, for being touched. Those two women showed their sadness, and we all filled our seats, and went through the formality of one of our last classes.

And today I’m tying myself to my dreams, to my imagination, to these images of summer, school, of dreams where I can’t walk because I’m recovering from having portions of my calves removed, muscles gone and scars on the skin—images of being injured and being in recovery, trying myself to these images of graduation, and of the simpler mentality of youth. It doesn’t matter, to some extent, what is [actually] going on in one’s life; the filters we put on things are so complete that reality is hardly shared, even among people in the same room. I’m going deeper into my dreams because that’s where I like to be.

Had faith today,

set aside my fear. It worked out well. And after setting aside my fear, and having faith..not faith in god, not faith like that, just faith that *things would work out*..that faith allowed me to invest in my day, to give my all, to give freely, and my day was wonderful for it.

I didn’t hold back. I smiled some.

I kept to my chosen way of eating.

I stayed present in myself and let others do their thing.

I let my head be quiet.

I took a walk.

I sat by that soothing creek again, and ate salmon, and tonight I bought wonderful groceries for the weekend.

Now I’m listening to piano music, and I thought of completely re-doing my blog, but came around to thinking that I like it pretty much the way it is.

I had a dream I kissed my sweetie

She had come to my house for the first time, and there was a party in progress—a get-together, a little soiree, with a few people drinking at a bar. And my sweetie, who I had never kissed before, was shivering under the covers of a very large bed, in the corner, up against a window.

She said “I’m uncomfortable.”

I knew about what, but I said “About what?” and I kissed her right away, before she could answer. Lightly, on the lips. And then I let it be. We could talk comfortably now that we had that out of the way. And she wasn’t uncomfortable anymore—we both knew what was going to happen, but there was no rush, and the ice had been broken.

And she had a glass, and she sipped it, and I said “What’s in that?” And she said something with rum. It was clear. She said “Do you want a sip?” and I told her I don’t drink. She smiled, and she sipped her rum like a normal drinker does. And I kissed her on her lips again. I wasn’t going to drink but I was going to be with the world, in this way. I wouldn’t drink alcohol myself but I would kiss the lips of one who had, and one I loved.

I’m afraid, I don’t know what to do, and I feel like a failure.

I don’t pretend that I’m the only one who feels this way, but in many of the roles where I would normally find meaning, I don’t find it now, as a son, as an artist, as a worker, as a money-earner, as a lover. I am none of these things, not the way I want to be. I face the prospect of being homeless (again). This is very hard to take. I used to make good money, when I was young, and now I’m jobless, at the greatest point of skill so far in my life. Through whatever combination of bad luck and mental illness and general American economic failure, I feel useless as a money-earner, as a worker. As a home-liver. As a community member. As a son of my father. As a lover of women. As a maker of software. As a writer of books. As a brother..as a brother. What a horrible brother I am to my younger

sisters to consider suicide, but how can I not consider it!? What is my life? I have become nothing. I don't know what to try. I'm tired of everything and I hate myself for everything. It's not that I want to die. It's that I don't know what else to do. Keeping my mental boat above water for even a day is impossible. It's like trying to sail a house of cards across the ocean. I know it is terrible to give up, and I'm not giving up, I just don't know, don't know, don't know what to do. What step do I take next? Throw my stuff away and leave my apartment, find a homeless shelter and try to live through the winter, homeless, in Vermont? Beg some family member to go live with them? I've applied for tons of jobs. In almost every case what I've gotten is the same: zero response. I've tried. I've tried a lot. I'm a very hard worker and I'm very smart. That I don't have a job is a mystery. I'm trying to keep my boat afloat, with state health insurance to keep me in psych meds and counseling, while my software and writing and general artistic and constructive and analytic skills go to waste. These are honest moments, moments when I understand, easily, artists who delete their twitter accounts, destroy their blogs. Because what is the point of continuing to play, continuing to take, and in some cases *continuing to give*, when so much is so torn apart? I dreamt about high school last night—about a high school house, where we lived with my parents and I could live without worry. In my dream I was trying to rent my childhood bedroom from my parents at a monthly rate. So I'd have some place to live. I wish I could do that in waking life. But there is no family, not one that is together, and there is no childhood house with an extra bedroom. We are fractured, fallen, every one a part.

A reframing—this may be the best thing that ever happened to me

I've been scared, and I've been not-happy, with **how things are going**. With the economy and its effects on me personally. With my current state of life, which doesn't go according to plan.

But something meditation is teaching me:

- **Is:** I don't have to do anything in response. I don't have to be upset. I don't have to change. I don't have to react. I can simply let things be as they are, with no-response, with no-reaction. The external has no real power to command me. The circumstance, the situation, doesn't change me unless I want it to.
- **And:** the meaning happens later. What does it mean? What does it mean that such-and-such happens? That I'm out of a place to live? What does that mean? It doesn't mean a thing, right now. The meaning of it happens later. I'm haughty enough to think that I know it's a bad thing. The fact is this may be the best thing that ever happens to me. In retrospect, it may *become* that—it may become—or *come to be viewed* in all sorts of light. None of them—or hardly any—are available to me in this moment. In terms of meaning, the present is the least likely place to find, or to know, what the ultimate *meaning* will be seen to be. Meaning happens later. Right now is pure.

The other thing—and I don't know that meditation is teaching me this—this may be just a little age speaking—but—I have a bit of a sense of humor around all this, I see. There is something in me who's been through the ringer before—been through worse ringers than this—and come out differently on the other side. Who's known days that seemed like the end—and weren't. And so, I have a little bit of humor around this moment in my life. It isn't that major. It isn't going to kill me. It's hard—but I've seen hard before.

I'm moving to Portland

Oregon. What else can I say?

I need a change; I'm making a change! My sister lives there, I'm going to stay with her for a while and look for a job, maybe go to community college to take some classes, enjoy the city, etc etc. I

hear there's a hilltop there with a meditation center on it. And I've never been. So that should be fun.

That's it. Wish me luck!

Matthew

Great day with my sister in New York

Great weekend. Walked. Ate. Saw a movie. Enjoyed each other's talk. That feeling of being confirmed by someone you know, of working things out together. Talking of family, of self, of future. And I enjoyed it. And now it's over. Relaxing evening, and going tomorrow, early, to Portland, to see and live with my other sister for a while. A pivot time. Feeling simple and hopeful.

With my sister in Portland

I don't really know what I'm doing. I think what I'm doing, though, is taking a break.

I guess I'm in a crying phase

I cried in the parking lot of the Goodwill today, talking with my sister. I needed to. Then I went inside and doubled my wardrobe with a couple key purchases, like this orange shirt and a comfy pair of jeans.

It's comfy-pair-of-jeans time in my psychology, in my mind.

Today I started feeling isolated in the grocery store when my sister left my side to go look for a hat my nephew dropped. It was my job to watch the basket. I didn't cry, then, but I felt all alone. It didn't take long before I started feeling that isolation.

This is where I'm at. I need company.

And thanks to some key individuals in my family, and friends, I have it when I need it. For that I am thankful.

We're making dinner together tonight. I chopped garlic. My nephew is at my side, saying "Eddie" (the name of the cat). I'm telling my nephew he's delightful, which he supremely is, and enjoying running errands with my sister today, to the chiropractor, to the grocery store, just around.

I guess I'm in a crying phase, because today I really needed to. I feel pretty great about that; I'm a huge one for crying. Not too much, but as much as necessary. It opens me up. It keeps me open. It's like yawning: as basic and immediate, as needed and as freeing. I miss it when it goes, truth be told—some of my most laughing days are also my most crying days. Not all, but some. Today is one of them.

We're speaking, here, of weighted blankets and the therapy of pressure. Of jalapeños and eye wash stations. And laughing. I like this kitchen conversation with my sister, her husband, and me.

My change of address form just arrived, the same day I did. I didn't feel like reading it so I gave it to my nephew to read. He's enjoying it more and differently than I ever could, at this point in my life, so I think we have a good partnership.

In a funk today

as usual. At least it's usual as of late. Interviewed with a potential job yesterday, filling out a bunch of forms and doing stuff like getting a state id for Oregon, since I moved here.

No need for a driver's license. They have trains here.

I've started sending out query letters again, for *Things Said in Dreams*, finding publishers and agents I've never contacted, I'd never heard of. Picking through the new release tables in New York bookstores, finding indie publishers of novels.

Thinking I'm not much of a blogger, as my site is inconsistent. I'm not a subject-based blogger, I'm just recording the history of my thoughts.

My main strength lies in producing snippets like *this*.

It's funny how our sense of humor, and of fun, changes as we age (in many ways, in many cases); I'm finding that being around my 18-month-old nephew has me singing again, silly songs, humming, all kinds of affect that adults don't usually justify. I like that.

My favorite adults are people who tolerate nonsense, my very favorites promote it. Let's not mistake seriousness for validity, or really, for anything except seriousness.

Who am I? What am I doing? Yeah..I still care about things like that. I think I'm happiest when I'm writing. So I should probably be doing that. And forgetting about everything else, as much as possible. (More and more I know that I can only do a few things in life. Or maybe..just one.)

Drank a huge mug of hot chocolate today.

Redid my blog (new theme, simplified pages).

In a funk but handling it.

Now back to reading science fiction.

Notes from a psych ward

I spent much of this fall in a psychiatric hospital. These are my notes from that time.

I provide these things here because I think there is value in people sharing openly. I don't pretend that many of you will read these, nor that you should. They're here as much for me as for anyone else, as a handy way for me to encase, and look back on, my experience.

I'm fully aware of the lingering stigma surrounding mental illness, and I'm not in the business of engaging in base conversations with old-fashioned people. People who read my site, and my work, are sophisticated enough to read between the lines.

- Black Moleskine
- Green flower Moleskine
- Blue marble
- Red marble

Dream of school

Of one final assembly in the days before graduation. Sitting outside, on chairs and in swings, in summer weather. And some sort of speaker, talking to us of his experience. At first we thought he was dorky, but then we came around, and he had something useful to say to us. And we laughed, and we swung high, and the swings got tangled, and we untangled them. And at the end of the

assembly, or some break in it, we stood around talking, and it was the students from my old 8th grade graduation, and from my first high school, Masterman, in Philadelphia, and in turn, we talked about what we were going to do that summer, and why we were happy to graduate. And I felt a great nostalgia for my classmates and for school, but also happiness that we were graduating, that we would be free, that it would be summer time, and we would be open and empty and able to do whatever we wanted.

I want to live in my dreams, because in my dreams I'm without resentment. I want to live in my dreams, because in my dreams there is possibility. I want to live in my dreams, because in dreams my world is weightless and open and light and I am never hungry or worried or bowed down in the seeming complexities of waking, adult life. In dreams I am logistically a child, and I like how that feels, being able to focus on emotion, fear, nostalgia, elation—without worrying about where I'm going to live or how I'm going to support myself. I like school for those reasons, the school of my childhood, because I didn't think too much about what I was going to eat or what I was going to wear, and I thought about my friends, and what we were learning. And I liked the even-playing-field nature of school with respect to money—because in real life, I don't have a lot of money and never have, and in real life, I'm smart and always have been. So for me, school was great, because I could succeed with my brain, and without money or politicking—things that adult life is packed with—even jobs, where it really should be about what you know and what you can do—jobs are packed with politicking, who can speak the fastest or the most, even when what they are saying is bullshit, and who knows who in and out of the office—and even who wears what. I liked it better when we were taking tests, and doing science fairs..where everyone in the fair had the same amount of space allotted to present their project, and so the project mattered more. In adult life, the same amount of space is not allotted for each presenter, and so the project matters less. That's not a type of world I do well in, and I find this world hostile and I find myself lonely within it.

I learned recently of a suicide, and while we chalk it up to “depression” and wash our hands of it, I find that it’s some of our best people who kill themselves, and I feel that that is partially biological, yes, but also partly because of the way the world is..because there isn’t room for odd people and sensitive people and beautiful people. I think that we need cures for biological depression, but I also think that it is all of our responsibility to make the world less hostile, and make more room for everybody, psychologically, economically, academically, socially. It is all of our responsibility to do this, so that the world (and life) can be great for all of us, not just some of us.

Dreams of graduation

And a lucid dream of flying. And dreams of fighting with, and caring for the injuries of, my father.

In this dream, I was preparing for a graduation..it was about to happen. There was a field of old things (mostly Legos) from my room, which I was going through, and they were cleared so that the graduation could take place on that very spot.

Graduation is one of my most prominent **recurring** dream symbols. I’ve often wondered what it means to me, in my dreams. Here are some textbook suggestions.

To dream that you are at a graduation represents your achievements. You are successfully transitioning to a higher level. And you are ready to move forward with your accomplishments and perform more important things.

***Completion or ending;** Accomplishment or achievement; Official approval or permission, or feeling qualified to do or be a certain thing in your life; Having a complete knowledge or understanding of a certain topic or area, or of yourself or part of your life; Completion of an inner process, project, or anything that has a natural cycle with an ending; Completion of a life phase or transition — such as childhood or young adulthood.*

Success completion and acknowledgement. Woohoo! No[more] books, classes or teachers. To dream of graduation indicates that it may be time to do things for yourself. You're no longer the apprentice or student, you are now graduating to become the master yourself. Graduation is a fantastic dream symbol implying expansion of awareness prompting the dreamer to acknowledge the fact that they are moving beyond the immediate challenge or task.

When you're graduating in a dream, whether it be a past graduation, or an upcoming one, it symbolizes a change and a growth you feel. Graduating is about a time in your life where you leave behind the old and confront the new. You're becoming more mature and you're heading towards new things within your life. New doors are about to be open and a change is about to come. Graduation also means a wanting to move on within your life. If you're stuck in the past, and you need to progress forward, your mind is telling itself that it's time to grow up and make life changing decisions. The best thing to do is to embrace this new change and allow it to take you in. Just remember that when one door closes, a new one opens.

Dream of a psych ward

I was inside, in the same **hospital** but a new room. I couldn't leave the ward. And outside, through screened windows, was a choppy ocean. And I pressed my face against the screens and watched the waves.

There was also a chess board, with pieces only for one side.

I take this to mean that beyond the hospital, and beyond my diagnosis, and beyond my current situation, is an uncertain and endless world that I'm trying to get to.

I don't know what the chessboard means. That I'm not playing the game? That it's not possible to play, or that I cannot allow myself to play, the game? That there's no opponent? I don't know.

(And come to think of it: there were enough normal pieces to completely fill out one side, and then there were weirdly-shaped

(more animalistic), larger pieces, in a box, from which a complete side could not be made. And I was on the side of the board that could not be normally formed. And there were players looking for games, players who took the normal side, but I couldn't play with them because of my animal pieces, so there were no games taking place at all.)

Psych meds

have evened me out, have made me not want to kill myself—most of the time. I'm still depressed. I sleep and cry like a motherfucker. My life still isn't "together". But I'm even—[er]. I'm not freaking out, I'm not angry at people, I'm not destroying furniture or ending up in the ER.

And it's terrible.

I realize it's the classic thing for a **manic-depressive** to say about psych meds—I'm just reporting it from my perspective.

Being even sucks. When I listen to music that used to make me feel, it doesn't make me feel anymore. I don't have the depth in me needed to care enough to write something..I don't think. I have much less *mood*.

I made this **tradeoff** because the other way had become intolerable.

This way is supposed to be better. I'm supposed to be able to get and keep a job, this way. I'm supposed to "resume self-care".

Maybe I'm doing it. I've shaved every morning for one week in a row. That's longer than I've ever done that my whole life. So I'm shaving my face. Ok. Is that what this's bought me?

I've applied for some jobs lately, or had job conversations, with software people, thinking I might resume my **old profession**, which I liked in some ways and which made me enough money to live on. I don't know how to "support myself" outside of programming. My psychiatrist says my mentality might be undermining that career.

And blogging has been a career-impediment for the last ten years..employers of this type Google you right away, and **personality is not a plus**, in the world of software engineering. But

my personality is *me*—and I’m worth more than any job. In fact, I’m the one who’s been doing my jobs.

I don’t think I’m losing my mind. I think things are hard for me right now, mentally. I think they can get better. I think they might.

I think I might like being moody. I like writing moody blog posts about how moody I am, and when I listen to some music, I like to cry. I’ve been this way since I was fifteen, and I basically like being this way. I like being precarious. I like playing near the edge. Going over the edge is shocking, and sad, and I mostly don’t want to do that. But playing far from the edge is dead in another kind of way—it’s boring. It’s criminal, really—it’s criminal to play too far from the edge, all the time. It’s a waste of life. And maybe it’s a crime, too, to cross over the edge, when you have family and friends and people who love you. I think you have to pick between two crimes in this case. Which one do you want to incur as a risk? I think the choice is clear..but that’s because I err on the side of too much, rather than the side of too little. I’m wired that way.

I’m not saying I’m coming off my medicine. I’m not saying I’m going over the edge. I’m saying that tonight when I listen to music that is sad and beautiful, it doesn’t make me cry—and I’m trying to swim around in these waters to see if they’re acceptable to me, if I can operate here. What would it mean to live in a world like this, that’s less emotional, where the seas aren’t as choppy? It’s a new place for me, one I’ve gone to **great lengths** to be able to try. I’m just not sure it works.

Any advice—any experience—to share?

Dream of the last day of school

Of cleaning out my locker before the day started, and spending homeroom getting rid of things I didn’t need anymore, legos, pocket change, little magnets and school supplies. And not many people were left in class—four or five had made it that far, and the rest of the chairs were empty. We waited for the last class to begin, which was a math class, and I calmly went about the business of

lightening my load, putting things in trash cans, donating my old supplies to the classroom and future students.

I think this dream is about letting go of relationships, behaviors, and projects, that are a part of old me's, that would get in the way of my growth. I think I'm doing that in waking life—getting ready to **become who I am**, as Coelho says, leaving behind who I was—carrying what is needed now, and nothing else.

And yet, I like my medicine (A lack of terror)

I have this behavior that I do, that I used to do especially, where I delete my Facebook account, my twitter, and move to a new one—or change my phone number. I've probably changed my number more times than LiLo. I consider those the same behavior, and in some ways, they're the same behavior as packing up and moving across the country, which I've done, again, and again, and again.

I don't think I would do that on **this medicine**. I can tell from the way I feel after I write a tweet. It's subtle, but there, some type of *non-panic* feeling, some type of *I'm-ok* feeling which, if it were there in general, I don't think I would change my number or delete my twitter..maybe: ever. And that feeling is starting to be there, some, here and there. I hope it lasts, because it's actually really nice.

This breakdown has been coming for a while

The breakdown of this fall, which has seen a compounding of my usual patterns of mini-breakdown, resulting finally in multiple back-to-back psychiatric and other types of **hospitalizations**..has been a long time coming.

When I think about it (and I did tonight), this has been trying to happen for a while, and I've just been holding it at bay. For periods of years, sometimes, I've held it, but it sneaks back, and when I don't have an all-consuming job to distract me from my own mind, my psychology surfaces, and it is problematic.

What happened this fall is just what's been meaning to happen for a long time, and I can't view those mini-breakdowns

and that one late-twenties psych hospitalization as isolated, anymore. I've been largely failing—with some years-long periods of success, but largely failing—at job, at girlfriend, at life. This is not an invitation for ex-girlfriends to say “I told you so” (no need), but it is a realization on my part that I've been a mess all the way through, not just at times. (And I've been functioning, and well, in certain ways, all the way through, too.) But the parts that didn't work, weren't little independent mishaps. They were part of a larger falling-apart that I've been doing, really, all along.

A mess right now

Tired of speaking. Can't finish a sentence because I'm sick of it before it's through. Can't finish a thought, can't string together plans or story ideas or blog entries. Everything's..not mush..but self-entrapping Claymore mines—FRONT TOWARD ENEMY. But these have no front; they have all sides; and all sides point to the center.

I sent my resume to a company whose posting I'd seen. They responded and told me to apply through their website. I went to their site and clicked on the “Jobs” link. It was broken. It showed me HTTP server errors. And I've **written** HTTP servers. But I decided not to apply for that job.

Finding a way to run ahead without hate, to separate myself from someone without needing to feel any particular way about them—to not need dislike as a reason to move on. This feels weird, and I think it's exactly what to do. I'm trying it further to see how it feels.

Tomorrow is my birthday. I got a card from one of my sisters. I live with the other one. My sisters are two of my favorite people on the planet, so there's that. I am fortunate: count it. 34 is going to be a year of moving along future directions, of simply letting go [of the desire to control], of allowing what is good to be, of walking into..as Shunryu Suzuki **said**..of walking into the mist:

After you have practiced for a while, you will realize that it is not possible to make rapid, extraordinary progress. Even though you

try very hard, the progress you make is always little by little. It is not like going out in a shower in which you know when you get wet. In a fog, you do not know you are getting wet, but as you keep walking you get wet little by little. If your mind has ideas of progress, you may say, "Oh, this place is terrible!" But actually it is not. When you get wet in a fog it is very difficult to dry yourself. So there is no need to worry about progress.

When you get wet in a fog it is very difficult to dry yourself.
Indeed.

Good birthday dinner

Listening to Enya now.

Went out for a burger with my sister and her family.

Looking at pictures on my tumblr dashboard now—amazing things, visions of what we'd like our worlds to be, what we think is beautiful—I love it. Love to see how we see ourselves, in fashion or in art.

I think I'm going to make something. Maybe starting tonight. I like to feel solid before I start a project, and I don't feel particularly solid now. But I think I need to set aside all this thinking about "my life" and make something. Write something.

Maybe something I never even show anyone, but make something, just because that's what makes me feel alive. It's a cliché, maybe, but that's what does it: observing and constructing, observation and construction, that's what does it for me. The observer needs rest, the constructor needs rest. Both of mine may be rested enough now, and the observer may have seen enough (?), to create something, to write. (?) Perhaps.

Thanks to family for birthday calls and company today.

Thanks to twitter friends for being there.

Perhaps to write..

Dream of funhouse elevators

I was in an art loft warehouse, arranging a space. This room had boxes and boxes of my old stuff in it, and I was going through them, keeping some things, throwing away other things. It was a several-days task. And there was a woman there, and we made love at just the right time in the afternoon.

And there were funhouse **elevators**, which ran sideways as well as up and down, and when I came back to the space from some trip outside, the elevator missed floor two, and me and one other loft space resident (a little girl—around the seventh grade) rode down from the fifth to the second floor. The ride was crazy, tilting, and broke through a fake glass mirror for effect, before depositing us near our spaces.

When I came back, my woman had left, but she had arranged the space with curtains and chairs—made it all homey—and she was coming back, and I only had a day or so left of going through my things.

Writing live

I have to do it, I have to jump in, exit this complacent dwelling on “my life” (whatever that is) and do what I love most. I’m live-writing this, like I did **mURdEr cLuB cANDy**. The link will be *[dead link]*..so any time you want to pop in and see the work, feel free.

This will be a 30-day project, starting today (January 15). Part of my outline/ notes are in the document already..thanks for following my progress!

The same dream

I had it **again**:

It’s the last day of school, and I’m gathering my things, trying to decide what to leave and what to take with me. And I’m also trying to figure out whether I’m done with school..or not. I want to know when my last day of school will be (ever), and I think it’s today. I can’t tell whether I’ve graduated or not, but I want this to be my last day of school. Or, sometimes there are a few days of school left but there’s nothing much going on in them and I’m

deciding, myself, that this will be the last day of school for me. Last night I was riding the subway, and then (mostly) a bicycle away from school, to go home. My friends are with me, always friends from high school, and we're having fun and getting along and I'm graduating either on the same day as everyone else or sometimes sooner.

What does this dream mean? Will I figure it out through analysis, or does something need to happen in my life before the dream goes away, before I'm onto the next phase or next paradigm in my subconscious, in my life? I used to have **dog dreams**, dogs-biting-me dreams, and they went away eventually, when I dealt more with my addiction and also back-stabbing friends/family. I think this graduation dream is similar in that it will go away when I address whatever it is that the dream is pointing to. I just don't know what that is. This symbol of graduation is showing up in my writing as well: my recent **novella** is about siblings who visit each other around the time of the central character's graduation. In this fiction and in my dreams there is a feeling of freedom around graduation (even though in the novella the character is trapped after graduation..in my dreams I feel I will be more open and freer and light after graduation—less trapped).

Also in my dreams lately there is a problem with my knees or legs. This has been a recurring symbol, too. There is something wrong with my legs that makes it hard to stand, walk, or ride my bicycle. I don't know what this one means, either, but when I have recurring dreams, I think they mean something.

Update (1 February 2012): The same dream

Update (2 February 2012): The same dream—gathering/paring down things and not sure where to go, thrown out by parents

Update (4 February 2012): Similar dream—being kicked out of childhood home and had two days to get my things down to what I could carry

Update (10 February 2012): Similar dream—tomorrow is the very last day of school, ever, and I have to stop the rush of life and focus so I can get tomorrow right—or I have to stop the world/

room from spinning so I can do what I need to do today (eat), even though tomorrow is such a big day, I need to slow down and focus on today

Update (6 March 2012): The same dream—I wonder if I should go about this the other way: instead of trying to fix whatever in my waking life is causing this dream, decide to change my actions in the dream (make it my last day of school, forever, and not go back) and then maybe whatever this is linked to in my waking life, will change

Update (4 April 2012): A similar dream—but I feel this may be the last, or a turning point at least. It strikes me that perhaps this dream is about *Things Said in Dreams*, which is a book taking place in a high school. And that perhaps this dream will go away when *Things Said in Dreams* gets published, or I am otherwise done with it..a dream about being done with high school, maybe about being done with this high school book I wrote. (???)

Update (5 April 2012): A new dream—I dreamt tonight that high school was over, that I went back after it was over and I had graduated, and I rode a BMW gas-powered bicycle/motorcycle around the school in first and second gear. Before that I had been in a BMW car (which transformed into the bike)..but the car was sitting in front of a house, and I was in the back seat, and my dad was in the front passenger seat. And it began to rain, and rain harder, and then rain a torrent, and I climbed from the back seat into the driver's seat and rolled up the window. Then it was just me, riding the bicycle, back in school, but for a visit, not as a student, and my friends from high school were still in the classroom and I rode by in the hallway. And I overheard one of my old friends talking shit about me and my sister, and she saw that I heard her, and I paused my motorcycle outside the classroom and I said: {Don't worry about it, not everyone likes everyone else, it's no big deal {Name of person who was shit-talking}}. I was magnanimous. And I can't help but notice the coincidence of waking life events to these last two dreams: on the day before yesterday's dream, I received notice that a publisher wants to publish *Things Said in Dreams*. Yesterday, I reviewed a publishing

contract for that book with that publisher. I think these dreams have been about either that book specifically, in its high school setting, or about publishing in general, about reaching that threshold and crossing it, which, like graduation, is a one-way trip. I think that's what these dreams have been about.

Update (12 April 2012): It's transformed. Now it's the same characters, that old high school crew, though somewhat expanded with people from later times in life, but we're not in pre-graduation limbo. We're in different places. We're in planes, we're in movies, we're in post-graduation parties. I'm glad this dream has changed.

Dream I'm on vacation

to this little town I've always liked, and while I'm there I rent this temporary warehouse space (the one from this [previous](#) dream) to stay in. And there's this Christian camp that I accidentally take a bus to, and walk out of, to go back to the town center, which I love.

And my legs stop being in slow-motion and my knees stop being impaired (as has been a [theme](#) recently) and I'm able to walk normally. And an old friend offers me drugs but I decline, because I'm really done with it. And I realize that I don't have to buy a plane ticket home, to any of the home towns I lived before (and where things are less desirable than in this town I'm vacationing in)..I can just not buy a ticket home at all, and make this town my home, and instead of buying a ticket I can find a job to pay the rent, and make my temporary warehouse my home—that the problem of finding which home to go home to is solved, because I don't have to do it—I can stay right here. (It was an issue of paying two rents, basically: once I decided I could leave behind the old homes (purchase of ticket home, payment of other rents), it became easily possible for me to stay in my vacation town. That the degree to which I stop being there/then is the degree to which I can be here/now.)

Great dream last night

A twist on the driving dream. You know they say when there's a car in your dream that it represents what you control. If you're driving, you're in control. If someone else is driving, you're not in control. Well last night I had a dream that the vehicle (a van) was driving itself, and I was in the back compartment, reading. The car was successfully and safely avoiding obstacles and getting us where we wanted to go.

I take this to mean that I don't need to be in control, and my life will unfold well anyway.

"Oh, no!"

Dream that a little creature and his wheelchair-bound partner went to the store and upon leaving, got separated. The little creature waited in front of the store for his partner to return. When it started getting dark and the partner wasn't there, the creature held his head low and moaned "Oh, no! Oh, no!" Then he headed home, alone, and searched the face of everyone who passed, for his partner, but didn't find her, and he wailed again, "Oh, no! Oh, no!"

Bipolar I Disorder, Most Recent Episode Manic

About five years ago I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder for the first time. I spent one week in a psych hospital near Los Angeles after a week of crazed, little-sleep computer **programming** activity, which ended in an emotional crash and my calling a suicide hotline.

Since then I've been independently re-diagnosed as bipolar by multiple psychiatrists in a Vermont **hospital**. These doctors' opinions differ in the details, but the main diagnosis is the same: Bipolar Disorder, Bipolar Disorder Not Otherwise Specified with Psychotic Features, Bipolar I Disorder, Most Recent Episode Manic, etc.

To obtain these recent diagnoses cost me months in inpatient hospitalizations this last fall. Doctors observed me, kept me from hurting myself, and prescribed medicine to stabilize my moods and

manage the psychotic effects of manic states that occur in bipolar disorder, namely: delusions and hallucinations. I have both.

I resent my medicine. I didn't have to take it before, and I like to think I was doing just fine (though I wasn't). To feel I need these medicines in order to function properly seems an insult to my basic nature—what is wrong with the natural me, such that my way of operating is unacceptable? I wish it was as simple as saying I'd become unacceptable to others, but it's not: bipolar disorder gets in the way of my life. It makes it impossible to maintain normal relationships, normal work, normal finances. Some of those are things I'd like to do.

Five years ago, when I got out of the hospital, I was like: yeah, ok, I have bipolar disorder, I'll take my Lamictal and get on with my life. I can still work, I'm not fundamentally fucked because of this disorder—am I? But lately, things have worsened. I can trace the onset of bipolar symptoms back to my high school years, but I was mostly functional through my early twenties. Since then things have become increasingly..well..crazy. I destroy relationships, I have become unhirable due to my past behavior (threatening suicide at work, for instance, which seemed perfectly normal to me), and my finances are all expressed in negative numbers.

My tendency is to blame myself and punish myself because I could have made other decisions. We're all responsible for our actions: can't I just change mine? After the trajectory of my life over the past 10 years, though, and given my failed attempts to control certain of my behaviors—or even recognize them while they're happening—I become more willing to see myself through the bipolar lens.

In a way, my disorder is me; in another way, it's something I have. To my executive function, it's not me at all, because the executive me wouldn't do some of the things I've done in manic or depressive states. Only sometimes am I aware that I have this problem: I've been incredibly resistant to accepting that I have this disorder. Even with multiple independent diagnoses, all pointing in the same direction, I can still convince myself that they're all a

mistake, that I'm fine. A panel of three California psychiatrists concluded I was bipolar. Since then, fully five other psychiatrists have agreed on this diagnosis for me. At what point will I accept that this paradigm might be helpful as I try to understand myself?

The United States National Institutes of Health say that

Patients often have trouble recognizing their own manic symptoms.

That rings true. I mostly can't tell which state I'm in, manic, depressed, or otherwise. I can't tell that I've entered a depressive state. Mania doesn't seem like mania to me, it seems normal.

When other people point out features of my present state, I can sometimes understand their point of view. In general, I don't see what's so great or bad about these various states. Except that when I'm depressed, I want to kill myself. And right now, on all my medicines, I don't want to. That's obviously a major difference; what I'm saying is when I'm depressed, I don't know that I am, I just *am* it.

The NIH also says

Some people stop taking the medication as soon as they feel better or because the mania feels good.

I get this. This is what I've been considering the last few days. I can reason through the logic of continuing my medication, but it doesn't feel right. It feels like I don't need it. It feels like I was ok without it. It even feels like I was better without it: like others with this disorder, I like my mania. I like being overly personable and flirting with human beings, financial disaster, the danger of drugs, or whatever I can find. I like being able to write 3,000 words of a novel each and every day for six weeks in a row. I like dancing naked on my roof with some friends. Unfortunately, that's just the beginning of my craziness.

Once, on a whim, I quit a very nice job and moved across the country to live in a tent in my friend's back yard. I have bought

hundreds of glow sticks (all that were available in the camping sections of several stores) which I then passed out to everyone dancing at a night club. In an attempt to get a gallery show, I mailed the contents of my kitchen (as well as original art) to a New York art dealer. I even sent my spice rack. And I've telephoned both the NSA and CIA, believing I had unique and amazing software that was going to save my country from spies. (I did not.)

What have I lost to this? Jobs, lovers, money, family relationships, the chances on my life through one suicide attempt, my sobriety during manic phases. The respect of others, through my wild behavior and emotions impossible to understand. My trust of myself, through uncontrollable thoughts, and feelings that engulf me.

I'm in the deepest holes I've ever been in. I'm lost. My career is destroyed; I don't know if I'll be able to move ahead in the work world. I'm lucky to have had some state health care in Vermont so that I could spend time in the hospital when I needed it, and so that I could focus on my illness seriously at a time in my life when I can no longer say: I have bipolar disorder, now let's get some Lamictal and head into the office on Monday. I don't know what my life is going to look like from here on out. So this post doesn't have a tidy ending. This is me somewhere in the middle.

In the middle of my life with my particular sickness and my particular health. For now I'll take my medicine, I'll let my family help me, and I'll just operate without needing to know.

• • •

A couple follow-up thoughts: 1) It's because I accept as normal a very wide spectrum of emotion that I don't recognize these state changes..to me, feeling suicidal is as much a part of normal as is dancing on a rooftop naked. And 2) (related) I've learned to be me through what I have done and experienced. It's difficult to now say: well, this [crazy] way of being is no longer part of my operational reality, I'm going to keep taking this medication which precludes my acting in some of the ways in which I've found my

identity..it's not trivial to say goodbye to parts of what made me, me, even if they were self-destructive.

Shaking

I see signs of falling apart, signs of collapse. I'm tempted to stop taking or take too much of my medication. I'm holding too much in, at my sister's house, I'm worried I'll blow up or do something offensive. I miss the **hospital**, which I didn't think I was going to do, but in a way, being at that hospital was the best thing that's happened to me in a while. I'm glad I'm with my sister, and being out of the hospital is wonderful: I can socialize with Amy and her husband, play with my nephew, write, be on the internet, listen to my music. None of that I could do inside. But there is some hope of going back there, that lingers—a wish for being safe, for being looked after, for being in a controlled space, and maybe a space with little responsibility..a simpler space, though.

Reviewing my life, I remember four times I've abandoned apartments, twice I've abandoned cars. That's my homes, my cars, that I've just walked away from because I put myself in a position where I had to run away, or where I just decided to let go of what was mine. I want to understand why I do that so that I can stop repeating that pattern, do something different this time. I want to break that cycle so badly that if there is no way to go forward in a different way, then I'm willing to stop moving forward. As in: if I can't rent an apartment without abandoning it, then I don't want to rent an apartment again. The fantasy of homelessness looms. I don't see how to live my life, so I begin to entertain alternate modes, modes of failure.

I feel like a burden, not only to my family, but to society. I've applied for jobs. Usually I get no response. For the one interview I've had this year, I saw them, then never heard back from them.

My mind then runs to more basic jobs. But what am I going to do, work at Taco Bell? I've worked as a software consultant in Fortune 50 companies, I've made good money from the time I was young, I can't go to work at Taco Bell. I've seen too much to be satisfied at a simplistic job, I've been too many places to be contained within that

narrow a space. That might sound arrogant to some people but really, there's supposed to be a progression of career, like as in once you've made \$100k/year you don't go back to making \$8/hour. It asks too much of a citizen to move that much in the downward direction.

I wish I had been diagnosed earlier, in some ways. I wish I had had an earlier chance to adjust my course, to get treatment that could have helped my life be more sane. Instead, I've been struggling with **bipolar disorder** on my own, without medicine, not even knowing I had it until my late twenties. To me, all that chaos was just normal, I thought everyone's life was going that way. But most people I've known, as fucked-up as they are to me, aren't as fucked-up as me. To me they may be phony, bigoted, talentless assholes, but they've bought houses and progressed in their careers and gotten married, while I'm one step from homelessness, single, with almost no friends, living on a futon in my sister's living room. That's what I've come to. And you wonder why a person considers suicide; on top of manic depression, my actual life is fucked. There has to be a way forward, but I don't know one.

I've been feeling the need to shake. So I shake myself.

Slept three hours less than normal

Which is no big deal for one night but if it continues on, could be a sign of a [hypo]manic state beginning. I haven't been one to blog my bipolar symptoms but I'm thinking I might start, to have a record of my sleep and mood, that way I can look back and see where I am in the cycle.

Laughing a lot. Still **shaking**.

Update (11 March 2012): Slept four hours less than normal.

This is with an Rx sleep med both nights. Now that I know what to expect, I'm not enjoying this because I know I'm supposed to be worried, guarded, vigilant, looking out for a [hypo]manic episode. Hopefully through all the other medicine, it will be minor if it is in fact such an episode. I'm irritable, started writing again yesterday, but not euphoric. Many thoughts. Alcohol cravings. Annoyed at being awake.

Update (11 March 2012): I forgot to account for daylight savings time, so that was five hours less than normal, last night.

Update (11 March 2012): Chills through my body. Feeling pretty damn good. Definitely something going on here. Called my psychiatrist and left a message asking if I should change medication. This is the most aware I've been, while this is happening, and it's an odd experience to be out-of-control of the change, but also, right now, on top of it in terms of awareness. Having trouble keeping my hair on—that's what it feels like.

Update (11 March 2012): Light is too bright; wearing sunglasses. Laid down for a long while to calm myself, and it helped. Going out to the grocery store now.

In the hospital

Things got worse yesterday. I slept three hours (my third day in a row) and woke up with intense ecstasy-like body sensations, visual hallucinations (my usual texture thing), and other symptoms. I called my psychiatrist in Vermont and she suggested that the safest thing to do would be to go to the emergency room.

I went. My sister took me, and even my nephew Daniel was there—he took a nap in the hospital room. They didn't do much at the hospital except refer me to a psych hospital which is where I am now. It is excellent. In addition to being less of a lockdown culture, I am happy with the LNP and MD I've seen so far. I met with a doctor on the first day (even though I got here in the evening) and they made medication adjustments right away. I've been re-diagnosed as Bipolar I—Most Recent Episode Manic. This is a locked ward but you're allowed to keep your cell phone and there's a computer here for everyone to use! This is different from locked wards I've been on in the past.

Yesterday I had doubts as to whether going to the ER was overkill, but after last night I am very glad we did go to the ER, because last night I had my worst hallucination yet, in this psych ward. It was so intense that when I woke up this morning I knew it had to have been a dream. I spent most of the day comforting myself that it really had just been a dream, then I remembered that

while the hallucination was happening I made some notes that it was. So if I checked the papers I had written those notes on, and the writing wasn't there, then I had made those notes in a dream, and if checked the paper and the writing was there, then the hallucination had "really" happened. I checked the paper and my notes were there. I wrote them down while it was happening so that later I would know that it was real. It's scary, to know that I'm hallucinating things where it's so intense that my memory won't even allow me to remember it as a waking reality..that I categorize away my hallucinating experience as a dream, when it was a waking hallucination. It was my texture-oriented hallucination, the worst yet I have seen. It was everywhere, and the patterns were more intense than ever before. One of my notes while it was happening says: "hallucinating my *balls* off" and there are other notes.

So I conclude I'm in the right place. You can't be going around in the outside world having hallucinations like that. And I'm glad I'm applying for disability. I need time to address this, with medication, and get to a point where my mind is running a more standard configuration, so I can interact with people from a clear, solid perspective. I hope the medications we try next, work. I already have some good ones in place, but we're adding to and subtracting from the cocktail, and I'm optimistic because I have to be. We need to find a mix that works.

Will write soon, since I can blog from here. —MT

My strengths

One of the nurses just came over to me to talk. She asked me if I was really smart and I said yes, nodded, said I really was. She said the staff was talking about it. I remembered that the first night I was here my psychological testing results were in the stack of medical records I handed to the LNP getting my medicine set up, and in those testing results is my IQ.

The nurse who talked with me encouraged me to keep my dreams alive, to consider that my strengths are something I don't need to hide. And I so often do, with my smarts. But to have a

realistic, positive view of myself, I can't push that under the rug. I'm really, really smart: a **genius**. That is one of my strengths.

Thursday night in the psych ward

Been going to groups, taking new medication, and being observed by the doctor. Spoke with him today saying that I'd like to get out of here. He said let's give it another day and see what happens.

I'm looking into programs that could help me get my prescriptions filled, once I'm out of here with no outpatient providers. There is one program I'm especially hopeful about—I think I'll be able to get my medicine once I leave here.

I'm on two mood stabilizers now, Lamictal and lithium, and I'd like to be on just one. Hopefully we can sort this out once I get a steady psychiatrist, and I am glad to be starting lithium—hopeful that it will be “the one”. There are too many variables, though; we're changing too many things at once to be able to clearly isolate what is working and why. The same is true of the reactions between medicine and symptoms: symptoms exist, medicine reduces the symptoms, but then stopping or changing the medicine can result in symptoms that are worse than before. So there's no way to tell, once you've started treating the illness, what the illness would be doing naturally if you weren't treating it. That confusion bothers me, but it's the nature of the beast.

Amy, Jaymz, and Daniel have come to visit me three days in a row. This is a major departure from my largely solitary psych ward stays—only twice before have I had visitors on a unit, and I've spent more than three months of my life in the hospital. I appreciate my family's effort, and their company.

Hanging out now with my cronies, collaging the front of our marble composition journals and swapping stories, making plans to get together when we're out, to explore Portland together or do other fun things outside of mental wards. Whether I'll contact any of them after this week is uncertain. I tend to think of this as temporary company. But there are some nice people here, and a few of us who formed a bit of a friend triangle, and I sincerely would hang out with those two after this.

Wishing us all the best of luck,

Up at 4am

When I got to the hospital this time, I had been sleeping three hours a night for three nights. They gave me an extra dose of a sleep-causing antipsychotic to a) cut down on the visual hallucinations and b) help me sleep. I've been reducing the dose every night I've been here, to see if I could get along without it. Last night I skipped the dose altogether. Now I'm up at four in the morning.

That's six hours of sleep, which is nothing like three hours, but it's also significantly less than I normally get. I'm wondering if this is an indicator that underneath all the medicine I'm taking, I am or would be [hypo]manic. I'm wondering if I'm going to tell my doctor about getting up this early, when I meet with him later today. I want to go home today, and I think telling him I woke up at 4am will not help my chances of sleeping in my own bed tonight. But I think I'm going to tell him anyway.

I'm out of the hospital

Back home.

Many questions: why am I in Portland; is this my life, that I'm lotted to, to live with bipolar disorder's random manias and their crazed symptoms; will I work again? Etc.

I'm glad I went in, at the beginning of this week—I needed to. I wish, in a way, I could know how bad it would get if I didn't go in. But I don't want to find out.

I'm tired of going to places like that. I need to get an outpatient psychiatrist who can give me more continuous care.

Have made a couple appointments that I hope will result in better / more outpatient care so I can stop bugging my inpatient psychiatrist from Vermont for prescriptions and my sister's family to pay for them.

Mired in all of this, wanting to be on something else.

I feel mortified that I've been in the hospital

Embarrassed to have needed such care. I know my family loves me, and they've been so encouraging to me, and accepting. I can't completely shake the feeling of shame that I was so messed up and manic high that I needed a 4-day hospital stay. But it's out of my control, it's like living with a parasite: the parasite isn't me and I'm not the parasite. We're together, though, unshakably. It's like being possessed by a demon.

I wish I didn't have to spend time on this, I wish my life was together, etc. But it's not, and I do have to. If I was smarter, I wouldn't wish this and wish that, I would deal with givens. Maybe I can make that change in how I operate. Just accept what is, and work around and with it.

I think somewhere in there is loving myself, with my quirks, my flavor, my character; feeling myself as a whole, not trying to take myself as an impossible set of parts, this piece and that piece.

I wish I had a job, and a place of my own, and could pay doctors to help me with my ills. I want a car, and to be comfortable. I want to publish a book. I want to be useful, and be in love again, and feel that things are meaningful.

How's this: instead of saying: Why did I need to spend 4 days in the hospital, I can say: Good Job, Matthew, you went to the hospital before your mania potentially got worse. I did a good job. That's a way of looking at it. I'd like to choose helpful ways for myself to look at things.

I wish I just understood, better, how to do things..how to do life. I feel like a beginner, like I don't know what I'm doing. But I know that other people feel the same way, and that it's ok, or even better than ok, to feel this way.

Memory of Tucson

We opened the windows this morning, here in Portland, while cleaning the house. And it's one of those clear-sky spring days with an uncharacteristically dry breeze. Which makes me think of Tucson, that desert air, the way it smells and feels to wake up in the cool morning of a day you know is going to get hot. Memories of specific houses I've lived in, of doing the laundry outside. I miss it

there, I have loved the times I lived there, and someday I'd love to go back.

Dream that my room was tilted

I just woke from a dream of a communal area, where people were mourning, planning, healing—doing the business of life—it was a mini-psych-ward type location where your goal was to get out as soon as possible.

And to the side, was my childhood bedroom, from Philadelphia (the one I always dream of). It was tilted, as on a gimbal, so as to require that objects on its floor be nailed down, or stopped by way of resting on nails that they did not slide to one of the edges of the room, and possibly out the door into the communal area. The bookshelves in this tilted room were similarly precarious. The windows lacked counterbalances, and had to be propped open with sticks, fragments of dowels from the closet, to remain open. There should have been bees coming at me from the windows—there had been a bees nest outside the window where bees came into the room (as was the case in waking life in this particular childhood bedroom)—but there weren't any bees. Every time I looked to be stung, there was no bee to sting me, just an open window with coolish air to fill my hot, hot room. I was arranging my things, on the tilted floor, and wondering why no one would come in to my room, and expecting that someone would in a moment.

I take this to mean that I can't participate in the communal parts of life (business, family) when my self-image is so precarious as to allow nothing stable to rest within it. That my self/house is such that nothing can be placed there and stay—that nothing can be built upon it. And that before I can build upon it, I will have to untilt the room (maybe see myself as valuable or lovable or capable). Or maybe un-tilting it means somehow getting my mental health right, so that I have a stable base from which to operate. The bees mean I have no enemies: that where I fear or perceive a threat to my existence, there is none—no one is trying to hurt me.

I will say this: I was happy with the possessions in this room: it was filled with books and papers and music and a comfortable couch, and everything I took out to arrange, I loved.

Cutting people off

Talking about this with my sister today, I got some feedback from her that I scare her by my willingness to cut people off—she’s worried I’ll do that with her. That’s not the first time I’ve received that feedback. A close friend a long time ago said that to me, once. She was concerned I might cut her off like I had done with a mutual friend of ours.

I don’t want to scare people in this way. I want to make a change.

To understand why I do this seems necessary to me. Part of it is I’m a loyal person and when people are disloyal to me, I tell them to fuck off forever. I think part of it is that I think the other person is antagonistic toward me to begin with—that they hate me. So when there’s a rift between us, I figure they’re glad to see me go, and I get in defensive mode: I better cut myself off from them and suck it up and live without them, live alone, go it by myself.

But people are sometimes more forgiving, and can move through little, or even big, rifts. I don’t know exactly what in my upbringing makes me this way, but when cracks start to show in a relationship, I think the relationship’s over.

It can be, but it doesn’t have to be.

That’s what I’m trying to learn.

Published

This fall, *Things Said in Dreams* will be published by Bryan Borland’s **Sibling Rivalry Press**. It will be available as a print edition. I’m very happy to have made this connection, and am excited to work with Sibling Rivalry to bring this book to a wider audience.

Check back here for updates as the publish date approaches!

Two-topic post

A two-topic post. Or maybe a three-topic one.

The three topics are these: 1) not wanting to identify as a mental health sufferer. 2) not wanting to think about publishing. 3) why the goddamn stigma around substance use?

1) not wanting to identify as a mental health sufferer.

By one paradigm, I have **bipolar disorder**, and as such I suffer from mental illness, see doctors, take medication and so on. But I don't want to spend my time complaining that I have mental illness, or calling my life a living hell, and saying that things are hard for me. It presents me in sort of a sympathetic light, but I don't want to become associated with poor-me exposition about Why Things Suck Because I Have A Mental Illness. And yet I do want to talk about it because it's part of my life; it's part of me. Maybe some of this is that I'm just projecting that others might view it as complaining, or worry that others might get tired of hearing it. But I think I know my answer in this, and it's simple: I can only, and I must, talk about what is true to me. This is part of my life, so this is part of what I talk about.

2) not wanting to think about publishing.

I just published **a book**. Who gives a shit. Or: more accurately, my book is going to be published this fall. I'm happy about it, but I don't want to get mired in it. We put so much emphasis on publishing, in a world of shifting definitions around publishing, and it's your rite of passage as a writer: are you published? Yes, [one says,] I've been published in a zillion different journals, shortlisted for this prize and that prize, had my novel published. Before you're published, you're not taken seriously, after you're published, you're supposed to be. But what is publishing, these days? Anyone can self-publish their books. There's little about publishing that has to do with the means of distribution in the way that it did in a print-centric era. You put up a web page—it's published. What it means to me, with *Things Said in Dreams*, is that one other person in the world agreed that this is worth looking at. That person is my publisher. That's Bryan Borland, of Sibling Rivalry Press, who is going to publish my book

this fall. So I found someone to publish my book (or he found me) and what I'm really happy about in all of this is that the person who is publishing my book really *likes* my book—is really excited about it. That's something I can ask of a publisher: that they really get behind my book, that they feel strongly about it and I'm not some kind of an afterthought to them. I feel that kind of zest from Bryan, and it makes me feel like this is a good relationship for me to be in. For that I am thankful. And now I want to forget all about publishing, and continue on the path of writing. I've written a million query letters, of varying degrees of suckage, and I've gotten a million minus one rejections, but as I've said *before*, writing query letters is not the thing I set out to do—writing books is. I'm not interested in being interested in publishing, nor literary agents, nor publishers..nor publication. I'm interested in writing, and for my own good that's what I need to focus my mind on. So it's blank document time. Raw-writing time. Get-it-all-out on the keyboard time. Do nothing for months because I need to rest time. But it's writing time.

3) why the goddamn stigma around substance use?

Why the goddamn stigma around substance use? Why is it there? How have we allowed this to become the case? You want to find sufferers, look at substance abusers. Even the term substance abuse is incorrect. I like this poster that said: *You don't use drugs, drugs use you*. As a former cocaine user, who exactly the fuck is at fault there? I didn't invent cocaine. I just happened to go to film school and be in an environment where people were using cocaine and it was easy for me to try. Why am I now some kind of dirty quantity? Why do I allow myself to be seen that way in my own eyes? Part of it is this erroneous idea that there are drug addicts and regular people, that there's some fundamental difference between the two. I think that's bullshit. The only difference between people who have tried drugs and people who haven't is that some of them have tried drugs and some of them haven't. That's why cocaine is cocaine: everyone has an extreme reaction to it. The reason there's no such thing as jellybean addicts isn't because of *people*—it's because of jellybeans. Drugs aren't dirty,

they're not nasty, they're great—that's why people do them! We allow there to be this belief that there are some people who love drugs and some people who wouldn't, or can't, but that's not the case. These are devilishly-designed substances to which almost all people have unreasonable favorable reactions in the short term. That's why they're a problem—and I'm not saying they're not. I'm saying let's not fault the *victims*—the victims of nature's and chemistry's powerfully addictive substances. And let's not pretend that there's one kind of person and then another kind of person, except through circumstance. If you haven't tried crystal meth, you're lucky. But that's all you are. You haven't accomplished anything through your great wisdom; you simply haven't been in the circumstance of life that others have. I'm sick of this stigma but I'm sick of it mostly in my own mind: I see myself as dirty, I see myself as damaged, I see myself as different because I've been there, compared to people who haven't. There's nothing wrong with me or bad about me because I've smoked a cigarette and my mother hasn't. There's nothing essentially damaged about me because I have a weakness for alcohol and my brother doesn't. None of those uses should be a crime. None of them. It's like saying it's a crime to get hit by a car. I'm tired of feeling bad, in my own mind, for having stumbled across substances of varying legality and having tried applying them to my body. That's something else that is so common in this arena, but totally illogical: thinking that the division between ok and not-ok is the division between legal and illegal. It makes absolutely no sense. Cigarettes are a good decision and hallucinogenic mushrooms are a bad decision because in this particular country at this particular time one is legal and the other is illegal? If you think that you have too limited a view. Laws are the most flighty kind of cultural norm. Most of them aren't good sense they're just *trend*. But anyway, my point isn't to convince you; my point is to be kinder to myself. I want to see myself as an ok person even though I've smoked cigarettes and broken the law to try cocaine and a couple of other interesting but deadly substances. And there yet again we have another of the fallacies involved in this arena: that non-drug-users

don't do optional, deadly things all the fucking time. How about driving cars? I think I'll stop there. Totally deadly, totally optional. And yet there's almost zero stigma. Flying hot air balloons is my favorite example, actually: it's mad deadly, yet beautiful and spiritual. Ditto rock climbing. What about those people's families? Destroyed. Just like drugs. But with drugs we have all these dirty stereotypes and stigmas. I'm sick of it.

P.s. On (2): this is major for me, a major moving-on point. For a while I've been saying (to myself) that nothing else matters but publishing my book. That I can become homeless, that my life can fall apart in every single way, except one: that I must publish my book. It has been an idea of how to measure what I have going on in the world. So for me to reach that, is something. And for me to let it go, is something bigger. I no longer have my old way of measuring my world. Or: I still do, but it has been accomplished.

P.P.s: On (3): I don't look at other people with these dirty stigmas around substances, I see them as whole people with a broad arrangement with life. Certain artists I consider their drug use to have been a beautiful part of them. So now to see myself in this holistic way, to find ways of being whole and healthy, using very broad definitions of the terms. That is what I want to do for myself, with myself. And I think I can.

Two dreams

1. I was on a horse, and someone asked me if my horse was wild. I didn't know how to answer. They said: "If she was your daughter.." and I finished the sentence with "..I'd be worried." My horse was wild.
2. I went to work at a company, and I was a key player, some kind of high-level manager/technical worker. It was a computer company. And even though I was dressed outlandishly and acting completely un-businesslike, I was good at what I did and I was being shown around by one of the top administrative assistants, being shown the secret rooms and the keys to the kingdom, and in one of these rooms was a musical-type

atmosphere where people were painting pictures of what they wanted the most and singing a communal song about stars (“~to be a *star*~”).

Just a quick post

to say what’s going on. Tonight my sister’s family took me to sushi to celebrate **TSID getting published**. We had a nice dinner and I’m happy to have celebrated this with them. I used wasabi, which I don’t always do. But tonight I got a good head burn. I’m excited about TSID and its future. This week Bryan (my publisher) sent me an email saying he started work on the book, taking my packet of files I sent him and turning those into the publishable version of the book. I’m hopeful he uses my cover image (of the **girl’s hand pushing a paper boat in a puddle**). That’s a picture I took in high school and I specifically wrote that image into the text of the book, so it would mean a lot to me if that was actually the cover that got used—it would be like I owned more of the book, and it would make the whole project more personally me. I just hope in the future that more people read it.

I’m still living with my sister. I’m in a routine. For now it’s ok, and I’m glad I have a place to live that’s not too stressful, where I can have some peace.

I have doctors appointments tomorrow morning. Taking blood levels for lithium, to see how much to increase my dose. I feel brittle, dizzy, this weird head feeling that I’m not sure if it’s the medicine or just my body falling apart in general. It’s been there for about three days.

I’m writing a book, *Untitled document*. It’s not a novel, so I’m in new territory. Sections of *Snowbunny* get abstract, and then I did some similar things in *AK*, where the narrative includes abstract going-off pieces. In *Untitled document*, it majors on the abstract going-off, nonsensical, free-association course of things. There are characters and there are strains of sensibleness, but it’s much more abstract than anything I’ve done before (anything long). Some days I feel like my writing is shit, and about one day of the week I’ve been working on it, I felt like my writing was good. It’s hard to

measure, partly because I've never done anything like this before and partly because I'm in the middle of working on it. I look forward to the day when I've had a few months of separation between me and this piece so that I can look at it with that perspective. For now, it's 2,000 words a day, head-down, just work work work.

Took a nice bike ride

to my counseling appointment. I found some new streets, with bike lanes, that make the trip oh-so-safer. It's handy, too, to get a half hour of exercise in, just as part of my day. I feel it in the legs a little.

In counseling we discussed my judgments, the strong opinions I have about people, and our general conclusion was that I need to "do me". "You do you" is I believe exactly what my counsellor said. So that's what I'm working on: me doing me, taking care of my agenda, my self, and leaving others to themselves (not spending too much energy concerning myself with what other people are up to). I think that's great advice for me and I'm working on it.

I finished *Untitled document*. At Penny's suggestion, it may not be *finished* finished. I might cut it up, expand, play with the text, all the while keeping the original version (great idea Penny!). So we'll see what happens. All in all, I'm in a good place with writing. I feel good about *Untitled document*, I feel energized to continue work either on that or something else, and I think I'm in the right place with writing in general. I drive myself crazy obsessing over sentences, and when I get into those kinds of loops, I need writing friends to pull me out, but I don't know of anything else I'd rather be doing.

And: an email from my publisher today! He's doing the layout and asking for a bio, high-res photos, etc. It's exciting; TSID is getting its day in the sun. Truly, it's so cool I don't know how to think about it =)

Meltdown today

I'm pissed at everything; can't get anything right. Disagreements with those close to me—about things I don't think I can resolve.

Or *we* can resolve, would be more like it. I don't know if I need to find a new place to live. Everything I do seems to piss someone off.

Or maybe I'm just pissed off. Random video blogging about bullshit. Can't connect. *Can't connect* with people the way I want to. Can't get anything right in email: I'm blustering, blundering, embarrassing myself. Toying again with ideas of homelessness; don't know what better to do. *Not happy*. And my neck is sore.

And I'm very angry. I was just putting the dishes in the dishwasher and I was doing it in an angry way. That's like something my dad would do: be angry with/at inanimate objects.

Why am I like this? I don't want to be repeating his patterns; I hate that I am. I am angry at unimaginative people, filling *my* world.

My world. (That's right: *my* world.) I am angry at myself for not being better: better at what I do, better able to make myself happy, better at interacting with people. I hate who I've become: I'm ugly, I'm lost, I'm immature, I'm sick (mentally), and I hate the alternatives!: it's not like there's some other's life I want to be living: I've never *seen* the life I want to live, lived.

I'm tired of shit. I'm really, really tired of shit today.

And: a physical sensation of *needing to do something*, *something*, to alleviate the pressure. I feel it in my stomach, my forehead, my arms, just this feeling of explosion that needs to be relieved or salved or *something*.

I want to start feeling pride,

feeling good about the things I do. I'm alive, I'm breathing—isn't that reason enough to allow myself to feel good? I don't know what steps to take, to start feeling the way I want to feel, but I think changing my internal monologue is part of it. That's a hard thing to do but I'm working on it.

Trying to recover from yesterday. Yesterday was a mess. Yesterday was hard. And yesterday is yesterday, not today. I hope

to squeeze some enjoyment out of today, make this day an ok day, if possible. I'm tired of my life being so hard all the time and *I want to change that*.

I've got to give myself a break. Things aren't perfect at home—ok. I've had a rough year, I spent a lot of last fall in the hospital, and I'm doing good work, right now, on new writing and working with SRP to get *Things Said in Dreams* published. That's enough, right, for now? I'll improve where I can but I have to feel like things are ok enough for now.

I mean I've been so worried I'm not eating—I haven't eaten yet today. I feel like it's not ok to eat, because things aren't set up right, things aren't going well enough. Like I don't deserve to eat. I want to get out of this rut of feeling and get to where I can just feel good about getting out of bed and making breakfast—because right now I feel too scared to.

Slept most of the day

Feel a little guilty about it but it's a decent way to reset myself, get through some of this depression I'm feeling. I've been really worried about house stuff—living arrangement stuff—and I've come to the conclusion that I need to relax myself on that. Do what I can to help things go smoothly, and release control of the rest.

Also I've been thinking about sex, some, today. I just wrote a **piece** where sex figures prominently, and it's fun to think about it during the writing process. But I realize that in my real life, I'm too depressed for sex. I'm too depressed to really be free to be aware of myself sexually, to relate sexually. This has been the case for many years, and it might take me a while to change this, but this is something I'd like to change about myself. I want to enjoy that part of life again, someday not too terribly far in the future.

I've been feeling uncomfortable about blogging lately, worried that it's all just a bitch-fest about my emotions. I haven't really toyed seriously with quitting, though, as I have in the past (take everything down, privatize posts, etc). I think the way out is through. Or the way through is through. So I plan to do even more

blogging about my emotional state, mundane details of life, and anything else that comes to mind.

The Fucked Up One

I'm still worried people will find out I'm weird: that's the stage of development I'm at. Neophyte. Still worried if people like me.

Worried I'll do something weird. I'm not nearly as expansive as my teenage self would have thought he'd have become.

Scared of people unfollowing me on twitter: not everyone, but certain people.

Afraid to celebrate what's good about my life, for fear of alienating other people: I'm getting a **book** published, which is a great thing, a rare thing, and (most importantly) it's exactly what I've been going after. But I'm afraid to celebrate because I don't want to push away those around me via things going well. Afraid we're all too used to things going poorly with me that no one wants things to go well with me, because it'll mess up the formula or something..like there's some trend that wants upholding, that good things in my life go against, like I'm disappointing the trend by having something to celebrate. I'm the Fucked Up One; it messes up the balance of the universe if things go well for me. That's just how I feel, what I'm afraid of. Whether that has any overlap with anyone else's reality, I don't know. Maybe it doesn't. Maybe these are just all my fears.

It's hard to be without income for so long, and the longer I don't work, the harder it is to get a job, because they see this big gap in employment, which shows that there's something wrong with me.

We bought a flower today. I picked it out and my sister bought it for me. It's called "Lavender Bliss" and it's an annual, or a perennial, or something, which means it has to go into a pot (Amy says) and she assured me we have a shovel so I'm going to plant it later and put it in the back yard. It will keep me company and be my perfect little buddy and all my problems will go away.

I talked **recently** about needing to change my internal monologue. I think this is something I want to change: to stop

thinking I'm the fucked up one, regardless of what others might still think around me. So: I'll start to say it: I'm not the fucked up one anymore.

Nothing. Wrong with me.

Today is one of those days where I think there's. Nothing. Wrong with me.

I think I have been misdiagnosed as an alcoholic and **bipolar**. Or maybe I'm both—and I just don't care.

I never was a daily user of anything but alcohol. I never even showed withdrawal signs to that. I've never had a "compulsive need to use controlled substances in order to function normally", so according to the Wikipedia page, I'm not dependent on substances.

As for bipolar disorder: what the hell is it, anyway? So I have highs and lows: all that means is I have a pulse, I'm not one of the rocks our society classifies as normal. *I'm the normal one*. In many ways, I'm the healthy one. I never would have been in the hospital if society and I were a better fit: does that mean I'm in the wrong?

The same is true for alcohol: we live in a world with alcohol and tons of other drugs. It's natural, in that context, to use those substances to some extent. Not saying that such use can't be painful: but is it the individual who causes the problem there? I don't think the answer is a simple yes.

It just doesn't seem today that anything's wrong with me. So I was depressed; so I tried to kill myself, even..that happens! People get depressed. People kill themselves. Life sucks sometimes—it really does. Does that mean there's something wrong with the person who kills themselves—I argue it does not always mean that. Sometimes the fault lies in circumstance, not the individual.

And that's how I'm feeling today: a child of circumstance. It's completely natural to be me, given what I've grown up around, what I've dealt with as an adult. Completely natural. Not disordered, like the papers and the doctors say. Maybe the

medicine is just working, but I don't know. I think we categorize the individual sometimes because it's easier than categorizing the systems surrounding it.

• • •

One potentially alarming possibility is that I'm just like my dad in his tendency to remember only the positive aspects of things, forgetting everything negative.

How my thoughts go

I just cleaned the bathrooms, which latex gloves made nice. Before that, I was lying on the couch, thinking. Here is how my thinking goes:

- I'm a pain to my housemates (my sister and her family) so I should get out of here and go somewhere, like back to **Vermont**, or **Tucson**, places where various factors would make being homeless a semi-viable option.
- No, that doesn't make any sense. I shouldn't plan to be homeless. I've done that before and it sucked. I should find a job.
- I probably won't be able to get a software job like I used to have, because I haven't worked in so long that they won't want to hire me. I'm no good anymore at **what I used to do**; I wasn't meant to do it; etc.
- So then I'll have to get a menial job, like working at Taco Bell. Which means I probably won't make enough money to actually live (pay rent and such). So what's the point?
- No, I should hold off looking for work. My benefits might come through—I am **crazy**, remember? I have **bipolar disorder** and am disabled from working by my symptoms.

I was **living in the hospital**, dude! I should wait for benefits to come through, that way I at least have some spending money while I live with my sister—or maybe they'd actually be enough to live on!

- Ahh! What should I do?

I know I need to be the one to make changes, that I can't expect anything to happen for me. The only thing I've cared about for a while now is getting a book published. That's been my holy grail. I've even thought horrible things like once I get a book published, then I can kill myself, because I will have done something in my life and it won't matter if I die. But I don't want it to be like that anymore, I want to live, I want to do more things, I want to keep going. And I don't want to keep going in the rut described by the bullet points above, I want it to go in a free and happy manner. I want to possibly own a house someday, or at least have an apartment again. I want a home. I would love if I could make my living writing, which is something I think I could deal with as a profession. I know it would be hard, to continue producing books, but I would infinitely rather be doing that than just about anything else I can think of. Please, Universe, please, let it happen.

Writing like it's my job

To my **last post** Josh genius-ly responded "It's happening." Which is all the assurance I need for a while.

I'm gonna start writing like it's my job. I've been writing, yes, but I'm going to pretend that I make money writing, that writing is my job, and I'm going to write accordingly.

Assignment: write like it's your job.

Feeling better today

Today is better. I woke up early and have been playing with my nephew and hanging out with my sister. Daniel is going down for his nap so I'm going to write in a minute.

Just wanted to say thank you to everyone for encouraging me and talking with me recently. I've needed the extra company and have gotten it online.

You're the best. —MT

Nostalgia

My friend from Vermont called and I haven't even called her back yet and my mind is filling with nostalgia for where I used to live there. Even more than Tucson, whose weather I loved, I loved living in Vermont. The people there are just my style, and I had gotten to know a lot of the town, as it was a very small town I lived in! I miss having that camaraderie with people, going out and seeing the same people everywhere, and I miss going out to drink. Some of my best times have been drinking, and I miss drinking at Kips and at the new Metropolis, over there in Brattleboro. I miss the people, who are too many to name, and I wish there was some way I could get back there! I wish I'd never left! I know I'm chasing memories, but those were good ones. I think I fit there. I really fell apart last year. I wish that hadn't happened so I could have kept on living where I lived.

Believing there's going to be a future

I think part of my thing is for so long I haven't really believed there would be a future. And I want to change that, somehow. I know there are no guarantees, that you never know when you're going to die, but I would like to live believing there will be a future. I'm only 34. I'd like to believe that there could be a long life ahead of me, that who I am will unfold in some way along that time. Too often I'm stunted from even dreaming, due to a sense of impending doom. I want to start seeing myself in the long term, instead of in little blitzes designed to get some goody out of life before something tragic happens. It's part of the way I was raised: grew up with a prominent tragic death in my life, so I'm always thinking people are just about to break. And that might be, with me; it might be. But it's probably not; I'm probably going to live for a

while, and when I think about my life, I'd like to think of it as though 34 is less of an end and more of (in some ways) a beginning.

Sleeping

So far I've slept all day. Not because I'm tired but because I don't want to face being awake. I think they call that depression. Even when I'm not sleeping, I'm just lying there, with my face covered, thinking.

Blood tests

I went to the doctor this morning to get the results of various blood tests. The good news is I've escaped hepatitis and HIV, and all sorts of other conditions. The bad news is I have high cholesterol and the beginnings of fatty liver and diabetes. So I need to change my diet and start exercising—more than just riding my bike. I'm not 21 anymore, I guess is the bottom line. I wish I had had health insurance and doctors' care this whole time so I would have known about this sooner, but I can start with what I know now, and make a change.

Fairly good day, psychologically

Think I'm coming out of the funk I've been in. I never know when it's going to occur, though, which is trouble. But I'm feeling better now. Working on an outline for a book. I have three and a half pages of notes for what these characters might do and be like. I think I'm repeating myself thematically, but other than that, I have enough new material to write another book.

Got a group email from my publisher today, to all the writers. I'm so glad to be among them! A little bit of my insecurity has come to the surface in my email conversations with Bryan, but it's to be expected. There's some stress with the fact that my book is going to be published. It's out of my hands now, going to be a real book with a life of its own. I've decided I'm not celebrating this enough, with myself. I think I need to be overjoyed but maybe

that's forcing things. I definitely want to enjoy it, in my own mind, a little more than I have been. My **book** is getting published!

And that's it. I've been on twitter chronically, chatting it up over there. I might take a break from it if I write this book—or at least only tweet after I've done my writing for the day. Excited about possibly working on something new!

See you soon,

MT

Another random / sprawling post

I've been thinking about age recently, how I'm 34 and by various measurements that could be $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, or some other fraction of my life. Wanting to do everything I can, of course, with my life, given my position in life, and thinking of how limited that might be. I'm appreciating what life and time I do have, just in sitting in the backyard with my computer or lying in bed waiting to fall asleep.

I'm working on not beating myself up for imperfection. It's natural for me to hate myself for imperfect communicative interaction: a miffed twitter encounter, a conversation gone slightly wrong. It makes me cringe when it happens but I'm working at letting it go, and not making up in my mind what the other person might be thinking about the encounter. I'm fairly psycho when it comes to this, and would like to be less so. I'm a perfectionist, what can I say?

I've been reading online today. Poetry. By Gabby Gabby. I enjoy.

And my outline is coming along, for this new novel. I have about five pages now, chronological, hierarchical, detailing the main character and a handful of supporting character's action, with many scenes drawn out. I could definitely start writing from this outline, but I have two concerns. 1) I want to make sure I'm in a peaceful enough place, where I can have the rigorous scheduled time I need, to write this. Writing during Daniel's nap means that writing time is variable, and—I don't know—I just want to make sure I really have the time to write it, once I start. 2) is that I might want to write something more surreal, less structured, instead of

writing this novel at all. On (1), part of me is considering whether I might be able to write this with a little less structures time, ie not knowing that I have ½ or all of a day set out for writing, but writing during Daniel's nap, then a little after dinner, etc. It doesn't seem unrealistic that that could work, but I want to have a plan going into it. On (2), I don't know, I had so much fun writing *Untitled document* (even though now I have extreme doubts about its worth), that maybe it might be fun to do something else that is not a straight story. It's all up in the air.

In my *last* post, I said there was some stress associated with my book coming out—what a punk, privileged, selfish thing to say! What kind of stress is associated with your first novel coming into print by a growing, cool, literary press? It's a low-key affair. It's not like I have to do anything, really, except not freak out and let the publisher do his part to help promote and sell my book! So maybe that was a bit of an overstatement, or a mis-statement. The fact that it's going to be out of my hands, even, that it's going to be a real grown-up book that I can't edit at a moment's notice..is ok with me. I'm happy with what is in that *book*, I'm confident about the text, I trust it. So I don't need to be worried about it, really. Maybe I'm a bit sad the writing is done, even though it's been done for years. Maybe I hope it turns into something other than a low-key affair: that we get someone major to review it. I would love that, but, I guess, like with the rest of that project, there's nothing I can do about it. I wrote it. It's over. It's done. Time for me to do something else.

I guess the last thing I'll tell you is that I'm struggling with abusing my prescription medication. I'm tempted to double up on the antidepressant, even though doing it doesn't do anything but make me grind my teeth. Also, when I take my PRN anti-anxiety medication, I feel like I'm abusing it, even though according to doctor's instructions, I'm not. I'm supposed to take it up to three times a day, and I usually take it once, at night, because it makes me tired. But that's the thing: I'm taking it because it makes me tired, not because it makes me less anxious, so I feel like I'm abusing it to manipulate my sleep, which feels like misuse. None

of this matters, except that as a sometimes drug user, taking this Rx medicine feels just as manipulative and control-oriented and in some ways as addictive as doing coke. I'm doing it when I don't really want to be doing it, I'm doing it for complex reasons, and I'm thinking about it waaaaay too much. It just feels like I haven't made much progress in terms of mental addictions, and my old psychiatrist would probably be telling me that she thinks I need to spend more time meditating, to get to the present moment.

Dream I can't walk

My knees are pressed together, my legs are failing. I'm going up a hill, and there's icy slush on it. And there are trucks behind me, looming. One washes me in a torrent of slush and I'm soaked. I'm walking with a cane; my legs won't move the way I want them to!

Can't walk dreams reflect feelings of powerlessness in waking life to reach a goal or keep up with others. If not immediately obvious, look to the location and the key people in the dream for clues as to the waking life issue. Where in waking life are you feeling frustrated in getting where you want to go? Being unable to walk due to injury or incapacity reflect feelings of being hurt or unsupported respectively in waking life.

WANTED: Badass Rock Star C++ Code Ninjas

You must be joking.

I encountered this post today while looking for jobs. It is an insult to corporate credibility, and to concise language. I've encountered many companies before, looking for either rock stars or ninjas, but never one looking for both at the same time.

I would apply for this job, but I am neither a rock star nor a ninja.

I'm a **software developer**. I know C++. But how can I apply to this job in good conscience? It further illustrates the current flavor of corporate culture that they're looking for badasses. I've

worked in software for 10+ years and you don't need badasses. You need capable software engineers. What is wrong with using the term "software developer" when looking for someone who knows C++? Or "C++ programmer"? Does everyone have to be a badass rockstar who is also a ninja in order to work for these hip new companies?

The bottom line here, sadly, has nothing to do with this particular company and everything to do with the fact that at 34, I have been squarely generation-gapped by a new wave of company and employee, who thinks it's cool to call themselves these terms. I wish I could apply to this job, but I would be sorely out of place in an environment where programmers get off on calling themselves ninjas.

Speeding on bipolar disorder's mania

I am now. I just realized it tonight. It's been rising for about three days, I can retrospectively tell, by my difficulty falling asleep and my waking up earlier and earlier. I am hypomanic now. I should have noticed by my skipping concentration as I've been reading, but it's hard to notice things like that when you have no clue you're supposed to be looking for them. Gradually, I am learning things like sleep, which are cues I need to keep an eye on.

When I'm hypomanic I write things like [this](#). Which are perfectly sensible, which consist of good commentary, but which are overcharged. It's fine to say things like that to some company I'm never going to work for (and, yes, I did send them the link), but I would say things like that to my current employer, in email, when I worked. When I'm manic it just seems like a good idea! But it's the sort of thing that can get you fired, and is part of why I'm unemployable.

This—how I am now—is just high enough to write. To kindle this state and let it ride for a few months, balancing it with silences in the evening so it doesn't get out of control, is what I did with [::HARD](#), and it might be what I'm about to do with this next project, if I write it. I have a song that goes through my head. I

think I can time my mania to it: the faster I hum it to myself, the speedier I am. I am humming it pretty fast now.

Words get me charged up—twitter, reading, writing, phone conversations. The less there's a visual component, the speedier I get: so an exciting phone conversation is the worst. When I talk with my sister (a person who is intelligent, full of ideas) it can overcharge me. We have to limit phone time, sometimes.

So I'm sitting outside. Yes, I am writing. Maybe it's not the best idea. But I have to remark on this, somehow, as my experience, and this is the best way to do it. I ate some food, to ground myself in my body, and in a minute I'm going to take my nighttime medicine, skipping the antidepressant (per doctor's instruction, during times of mania) and taking the prescribed repeat on the sleeping med, to hopefully get me to sleep. I'm not in an unpleasant state, not quite, but I know where this can go, and where it goes is to a psych hospital, and I don't want to go to one of those right now.

I just re-read this post, and found it difficult to stay on track. But I'm glad I did re-read it because I had already forgotten that I was about to take my medication. See, it's tricky to remember things at times like these.

I went to my counseling appointment

Rode my bike there—it's a lovely day for a bike ride.

I mentioned to my counsellor my seeming hypomania and he got me an appointment with the doctor tomorrow. We talked about the “You do you” philosophy and Ryan said it sounded like I was doing it well, that it was working for me. I'm not acute enough for the program I'm in, I'm too highly-functioning, he says, so I'll be moved to a different program. It will still include counseling. It was nice to get some feedback that I'm not as fucked up as I think I am; Ryan encouraged me to look up historical figures with bipolar disorder as a way to learn that this doesn't have to control my life. I'm glad, though, that I'm not being kicked out with nowhere to go: I like to have some counseling as part of my mix. He also said it sounded like the ways I'm coping with my

current hypomania, are good. He pointed out that I created a number of coping mechanisms (sitting outside in the cool, eating food to ground myself, taking time away from twitter, etc)—his point was that no one had to tell me those, I recognized the need for them and found them myself. That feedback, along with the fact that I realized I was hypomanic early on rather than my first realization being days later, on the day I need to go to the emergency room..those combine to help me feel a little bit proud that I'm managing this better than I have before.

Interesting people with bipolar disorder:

- Kurt Cobain
- Robert Downey, Jr.
- Richard Dreyfuss
- Mel Gibson
- Ernest Hemingway
- Friedrich Nietzsche
- Edgar Allan Poe
- Jackson Pollock

Dr. F

Dr. F listened to me as though I wasn't making things up, as though a little hypomania is real. He took out his notebook. He asked questions. Are you feeling irritable? (Yes.) Have you been riding your bike longer distances than normal? (No.) Sleeping less than usual? How's your appetite? Any inappropriate posts, tweets, or relationships?

When I talked about wanting to be more aware of my symptoms so I don't end up back in the hospital, he said that usually it's not till people are in their thirties that bipolar disorder becomes a problem for them—that in your twenties you're still having fun with it, basically, so you don't see that there's a problem. That's the boat I'm in. I don't want my life to be wild—not that wild—any more. My twenties were the twenties to kill all twenties, when it comes to wild.

We made medicine changes, more lithium and more risperidone, and a shitload of vitamin D. Dr. F thinks I'll see a change within a couple of days.

This isn't the worst manic swing I've seen. And that's the point. I don't want to go back to the hospital. I want to get better at recognizing my symptoms, and I want to continue taking the medicines that plausibly are helping to keep these swings to a minimum. Right now the bipolar / medical paradigm is working for me.

The beginning of a book is so dangerous, from a writing point of view.

Maybe it's all dangerous. But the first sentence matters a lot, and the first page matters a lot, so I feel better now than I'm 8,000 words into my current book. I can go back and fix the first sentence later, if I want to, but now, at this point after the introductory part of the book is done, I can feel ok about characters doing whatever they want. Of course they've already been doing that, but somehow it feels so much more homey, so much more interior, to be at this part, because a precedent has been laid out and in some ways I'm now operating within a pattern that's been set up.

I have seven parts to my outline and I'm now on part two. My story is about a girl who moves to LA and she is now in LA. So my main outline can unfold. I've been observing how I, as a novelist, choose what parts to expand and which parts to contract. Which parts do I talk *about*, and which parts do I *show*. I only want to show the parts that involve my main character doing critical things to herself and with herself (even though she may be with others when doing these things).

This novel is highly made up. It's also highly autobiographical. It's a mix of the two, with some elements being one and some elements being the other. Right now I'm in areas that are made up, with less biographical source, so I'm hoping I'm doing a decent job at creating and characterizing it. I'm writing a female protagonist, and even though I feel I've done well at this in

the past, I am in difficult territory, doing this. But it's important to the story, so I'm doing it.

One of the other things I've been noticing is the punctuation I choose. At the beginning of each piece, I make decisions about which punctuation symbols I use, and how. In this one, I'm not using any ellipses, em dashes, semicolons, or colons. I use periods and commas, that's it. This has implications for how conversational interruptions are rendered, for instance.

I'm pushing further into the domain of unattributed conversation, having dialog lines where there's no "he said" / "she said" to tell you who is saying what. I've been pretty extreme about this in the past but I'm going further into this territory. Sometimes there are group conversations where there's no attribution at all in an entire conversation, because it doesn't matter who said what, just what was said.

My writing life is boring/simple. I'm surprised I'm even writing a blog post during it. I have a schedule I write by. My schedule for this book is to write during my nephew's nap and to write 2,000 words a day. So I write during his nap, quickly, to try and finish before he wakes up, when I will go back to watching him. And the rest of the day and night, I try to maintain as clear and drama-free a headspace as possible. Avoid the news. Avoid arguments. Avoid my emotions being drawn out by anything other than my writing, especially negative emotions. And that's what I do. It's very monk-like. I'll try to keep this going for the next six weeks or so, so I can finish this draft.

My father

My father is visiting right now. I gave him a handshake instead of a hug, when he reached out for a hug, this morning. I tweeted about it (1, 2).

When we were talking earlier, my book came up. He had seen some info about it on my sister's website and he asked about it. I told him a little about it, that it's getting published, where we are in the process, etc. He listened, then he let it drop dead.

I am his son. When I do something amazing (or even nothing at all) he is supposed to congratulate me. He is supposed to express 1) excitement and 2) happiness. Not even necessarily 3) praise, but that would be nice.

It was a real eye-opening moment for me. Because, at 34, I can take this without getting overtly upset about it, and I can step back and think about the more general idea of: this is how we grew up. This is one of the primary two people in my upbringing who could have expressed delight with me, and today's response is a typical response from him: no response.

To not say anything positive in return to positive news may seem like a subtle oversight but I think it's a quietly major stance to take with respect to your only son's considerable achievement.

I never want to repeat this cycle, and so if I ever do have kids, I'm going to be so damn proud of them, every time they do something, they'll think they're the center of the goddamn universe.

Professionally satisfied

I'm sitting in the sun in my sister's backyard, with a MacBook, editing *Things Said in Dreams* with my publisher, Bryan. We're emailing back and forth. He's just sent me the interior of our book, as a PDF, and we're proofreading it and making minor changes to the About page, etc.

Maybe it's just the sun, but I don't think so. I think I'm damn happy that this book is getting published, and I'm damn proud of writing it. I haven't read it in years. I wrote it in 2009, so I'm seeing it with strangers' eyes. Or not exactly strangers', but, with fresh eyes. And what I see I like. We'll have to read it through completely before this process is done, but in the spot-check readings I'm doing, I'm happy I wrote this. I think it works. I'm feeling a welcome moment of proudness for this book.

I feel professionally satisfied. There's more to do and more to want, of course, but in this thing I'm doing, I feel good. It's a cap on a moment of my life, to get to the point of proofing this first book. I get to enjoy seeing the printed object of this text come to

life. It's going to have a matte cover! I'm overjoyed. And I get to consider what it'll be like to do this with the next of my books. I have a head start on publishers everywhere when it comes to my novels—which is another way to say that I have yet to find publishing venues for most of my writing =) But today I feel optimistic. And I feel like I'm in control. My writing is getting out there, and I'm continuing to write more. It's a nice big happy factory. Or farm. Or garden. Who knows, but it's going well.

I have crooked teeth (or, one of the only things I know about fiction writing)

This will be short.

A dentist told me once that I could fix my teeth, which are crooked on the bottom. But he said that if I did, I would lose some of the “structural integrity” of my mouth, and that things might be straighter, but they'd never be as strong as they were before.

Enter fiction writing. A good first draft is sometimes like this. You run into places that are crooked, that you want to fix, but that if you mess with, will lose some of their structural integrity and be less strong than before.

That's it.

I am thinking about my suicide attempt.

And I am thinking: what was I thinking? I don't even believe that I was in the mental state to try that, to give up to that. It seems so foreign to me right now, that I could have been in that place, that that place even exists. So on the one hand I guess you could say I'm getting better, since I don't want to kill myself anymore, but on the other hand I feel terrible and embarrassed that I ever did. I can't erase that, can't erase it from my family's mind or mine. I can't ever not have **blogged** about it, can't ever not have worried my sisters or mother with my “threats” of killing myself. Don't know if I'm seen as irresponsible or sick or what. And glad I'm not feeling that way right now, but how close am I? If I stopped taking medicine, am I three days away from feeling suicidal? Three

months? How much of that was circumstantial and how much of it was chemical? I can't trust my brain chemistry, it's not reliable. For a while it works and then I'm in some terrible place again, for no good reason.

And I wonder, with what I'm writing right now, if I should be telling a story closer to my own. I've done that in the past, but I always deviate, because I'm not trying to write an autobiography, I'm trying to write fiction, and I'm only stealing texture from my real life to add to a story. So maybe there's my answer. I want, for one, to tell a powerful story. I've made up the story I think is most powerful, *for the point of that particular story*. And then I'm dosing in texture from what I know about the world, what I've experienced. So yeah, it's ok, it's just odd to be telling a story with similar themes to my own, and using a plot whose points are similar to the points I gather from the plots of my life, but where the landscape of the story is almost completely fiction. Maybe this is what everyone does, who writes fiction, to some degree or another, and I'm just realizing it. I don't know. I'm not sure I'm accomplishing a third of what I want to accomplish with my writing. I'm not going to give up, but sometimes I feel like I'm failing.

This is the type of post I will lament, because it will litter the top area of my blog with a headline about suicide. It's not a "cool" post about writing. It's not a completely biographical post. It's a hodgepodge that I write because I'm sitting in a chair in the corner, thinking about suicide and my history with it, apologizing to my sister for worrying her and for having done stupid things, and needing somehow to write about this to get it out of my head, to put it down for future reference, to connect with the ten or so people who read this blog, or just because that's what I do. So you get messy, rambling, confused writing by me. I think I am a confused person, in some ways. Some times I feel like I'm on top of things, getting a book published and writing another one, sometimes I feel like a jumbled kid who happens to be 34. Blah. It's just one of those moments. I'll be better later, or tomorrow. And this is my blog, it's not clean, it's not on-topic, it's just:

whatever happens to be currently going through my mind, and this is it.

Manifesto

I just saw someone's manifesto for "the YOLO lifestyle". The one hashtag that rules them all, these days. It was beautiful and it was hopeful and it was everything that youth should be.

And now I'm doing something that no one likes to have done to them—I am categorizing people by their age. Everyone in that video was a twenty-something. And their twenty-somethingness, I argue, was essential to the content of the video.

It is one thing to be expansive and hopeful and confident and certain, at twenty—or twenty-three. And it would be another thing entirely to be that at thirty-three. I can't claim that I've help up completely well to time's beating. But I can see that if you had 100 expansive people at twenty, then you'd have 1 by the time it was a decade later.

It makes sense that twenty-somethings are making expansive, hopeful, declarative YOLO videos, because at twenty, you are expansive, your friends are expansive, expansive is the thing to do. And I love that YOLO video, it was inspiring to watch, to remember being like that, to wish that I was more like that now, to pick aspects of myself that I'd like to give new life to. There is a reason and a purpose for YOLO, for youth, for manifestos.

But to anyone who's YOLO now, I go beyond a simple salute to you—I ask that you be the 1 / 100 who is YOLO ten years from now.

And to myself, I remember what it's like to be young[er], consider how I can en-youth-en my current self, and allow myself to be, at 34, exactly the reflection of a little bit of time and a little bit of experience that I have become.

Tonight I went to the grocery store normal.
That hasn't always been the case.

I went to the grocery store tonight with my family. We were looking for groceries for a party. And I was talking with my mom [on the phone] for half the time we were in there. And I remembered a time I had gone to that same grocery store in my sunglasses, feeling hyper and manic and the light was too bright, so I had to wear glasses to cut it down. And I know, remembering a time like that one, that bipolar disorder is real, because I have felt it. When I'm manic, I can't believe it's happening, I can always talk myself out of it, almost no matter how bad it is, I can convince myself it isn't real. But thinking back on it, from a normal frame of mind, I know it is. Tonight I went to the grocery store normal. That hasn't always been the case.

Talking with my mom: she reminded me that I'm a good support for the family I live with, that my sister's family isn't just helping me, I am helping them, and that was good for me to hear. I also heard of a flying leap my mother plans to make, and she said "like mother like son" and spoke highly of my flying leaps and unconventional paths taken and my *successes*, my successes in life, and the person I've become. It was good to hear her talk highly of me, and good to encourage her in her path. I love my mom.

I think I'm starting to feel that trazodone kicking in even though that's a redundant statement

- I ate a hamburger almost raw tonight.
- I found sleeping pills and took one, so I'll probably sleep well. I had thought I was out. Will have to ask my psychiatrist to prescribe more.
- I bathed tonight. Yes, this is news. Ever since the **hospital** I've been bathing less, I think because the bathrooms there were gross. But I'm not in the hospital

anymore, so I'm trying to bathe more often. I really like doing so.

- I'm both done with twitter and in love with it. Twitter is like my air, in some ways. I'm a constant reader, occasional Tweeter, and I have no desire right now to delete my account (as I sometimes have in the past) but I also wonder if taking a break from it would be healthy. At the same time I can't imagine myself taking a break from it since I'm so active with it atm.
- Same thing with blogging. I'm not going to delete my blog (this has been a temptation in the past). I've had it long enough to know that sometimes I like blogging, and it helps me, and sometimes I don't. Right now is one of those times where I'm not doing much blogging. I don't have much to say, or it's all the same stuff as before. So I consider "officially" going away from the blog for a while, but in the end it doesn't matter, I can just blog when I want to, not when I don't, and it works out fine.
- I read some writing rules posted online tonight. Well-meaning, but terrible. a) You exclude great pieces of writing with any set of rules, such that if you had followed these rules you would not have arrived at such-and-such great piece of writing. b) There is no b. Writing rules suck. You can't start with a set of rules like that as a major ingredient of your writing and end up with something good. It's almost always a mistake to write or post writing rules (though occasionally there are good ones) so please, note to self, don't ever get cocky and start putting out your formulas for making good writing. Don't do it.
- **I am writing these days.** Tomorrow is June 30, that will be one month of writing on my current first draft. I have more than a month to go, so I'm deep into it and at the

same time not even halfway there. I realize some people write much slower, and maybe I'll write like that someday myself, but I have never felt the luxury of time with my writing. I feel like I need to get out as much stuff as possible before I die, which could be at any time. That is how I operate. It is a terrible way to operate, and I hope someday I am able to live in a more relaxed way. For now, though, this is the way I am. Anyway, I'm writing, and it's hard when I have an off day, which I had today, and it's easy when I have an on day, which has been many days so far, and it's even easier when I just do my job, which is to write my words and forget about everything else but writing my words. I'm writing 2,000 words a day, and I'm writing during my nephew's nap time each day, because it's a convenient time where I can have time to myself, but it's also pressure because I have to write quickly, to try and finish before he wakes up, so it's not a relaxed schedule.

But it is forcing me to be disciplined about starting on time, and writing when I'm supposed to write. That is my life right now, writing during nap time, editing on the iPad the rest of the day, on and off. I can read/edit well while watching or keeping an eye on Daniel, so I work on the iPad to spot check what I've written. Tomorrow I will have 60,000 words. I hope I can meditate through the chaos [of my own mind] and get into a better writing space tomorrow. I need to be 100%, pure, in-the-moment. This is what I want to do, what I love, and I want to give my heart and mind to it in a deep way every time I do it.

A very strange gestation period

Just had a talk with my sister wherein she told me various signs that I'm doing poorly, mentally. Things I didn't even realize, things I wouldn't notice unless someone else said them to me. Like I'm not bathing. Like I'm wearing weather-inappropriate clothes (sweatshirts when it's warm). And other things.

I've stopped taking one of my medications. I just decided to do this, because it was expensive and I didn't want to cost my sister any more money.

I sleep twelve hours a day.

It feels scary to not know how badly you're doing until someone tells you. I hate being this person, who is jobless and maybe losing it. I thought I was doing better, thought I was maybe good enough that I needed to start looking for work and stop bumming around my sister's house. The government rejected my disability application, so there maybe is a suggestion that I should be working. But I'm appealing it, talking with a lawyer to see if they'll help me, on Monday. And what's that for? An amount that I couldn't possibly live on, even if I got it. At best it would help me continue to live with my sister, or in some other type of situation like that.

I wish I was back in the hospital, where they asked every day if you had bathed or washed up, noticed how long you were sleeping and did something about it.

And yet, so much of this problem is economic. If I had money to live, bathing once a week and wearing sweatshirts in the summer would be eccentric, rather than crazy. My choice to stop taking Lamictal could be seen as exercising a right, rather than shirking a responsibility. If I had money, I would have access to better doctors, and better access to doctors, different techniques for dealing with depression and anxiety and mania. In a sense, my lifestyle is ill, not just me.

But in the middle of this, I have my writing. My **2,000-word-a-day project**, that consumes me, that lets me forget that I am a doppelgänger in my sister's life, that lets me imagine all sorts of lives that are not mine and people who are not me. People who are not ill, people who are ill glamorously, and yes, people like me. If I didn't have that, I'd be dying.

My life is sad in some ways. Maybe I'm crazy, maybe I'm getting worse, maybe I'll never work again and maybe I'll be a burden to my relatives. When I think that, then suicide becomes a very real option. So I don't think that way. Instead I like to think

that I'm a special kind of creature, an alien, who has a very strange gestation period, and that all this is me on the way to becoming my greater self. I have to believe it that way, because the other way is just too dark.

State of the individual

I've been avoiding writing this by pretending that no one cares, that no one is going to read it, that it doesn't matter if I write it. But people do care, people comment, people read, so I'm going to put together a little state of the individual address.

I moved to Baton Rouge, to live with my grandmother. I was living in Portland, with my sister, but she kicked me out. I am thankful for the time I could spend with my sister. I am not happy about the way our time together ended, with her accusing me of things I didn't do and screaming irrationally at me. I am sure some in my family will consider it bad taste for me to blog this, but I think it is safe to say that my sister (who I love very much) has some mental health issues of her own that played into the end of our time together.

I might run out of my medicine, and this scares me very much. My aunt and I are working on getting me to a mental health clinic that may be able to supply medicine, and I hope that happens soon enough, because I have just over a week left of lithium, my mood stabilizer. Maybe if I run out, it will be a smooth transition to ok-ness, but maybe if I run out, it will affect me drastically. I don't want to find out. I've gone to exorbitant lengths to get on and stay on my medicine, this last year. I've been committed to going the medication route. I think my medicines are helping me and I am simply scared for them to go away. I guess we'll just see what happens.

I wish I had never left Vermont, in some ways. I had government health insurance there, and could get my medicines. I had been afraid of becoming homeless after losing my apartment, but maybe I should have just let that happen, at least I would have therapy and medication and insurance for ER visits for mania and kidney stones. We all thought going to live with my sister was a

good idea, but I feel that has just stalled me, as I'm back to the same struggles I was in before I ever went there.

I don't know what to do about a job. I'm applying at McDonalds today, because it's within walking distance to my grandmother's house and I don't have a car. My skills as a computer programmer seem irrelevant these days. I'm not even sure looking for work in Baton Rouge makes sense. My escape hatch would be begging my mother to buy me a plane ticket to Vermont where I could be homeless, but re-apply for health insurance.

My book. In all this chaos, I stopped writing **my book**. So I have a close-to-finished, but unfinished, novel.

Things are in upheaval. My life continues to unravel.

Homelessness and psychosis

I've recently watched several videos on bipolar disorder and mental illness, videos I hadn't seen before. Some of the interviews suggest that the desire to be homeless is part of bipolar psychosis, which was news to me. I've experienced the desire to be homeless, the feeling that it's ok if I'm homeless, but always considered that it was part of my personality or normal thought process.

I used to sleep outside, in Los Angeles, even while I had an apartment, because I wanted to. I made a move to Tucson specifically to be homeless because I thought the weather would support it, and I was homeless there for a short time. I made a move to New York to be homeless, which failed miserably. And I continue to have thoughts of moving back to Vermont and being homeless there.

These documentary interviews suggest that I might consider these thoughts abnormal (as most people would). Most people I know wouldn't consider courses of action that led to them being homeless. I do consider those courses of action. The idea that this might be psychosis from my bipolar disorder, rather than just normal thoughts, is a revelation.

Of two minds

The first day off lithium I woke up three hours earlier than normal. I loved it. I don't like sleeping so much. To be awake for more of the day was wonderful. I found myself thinking, instead of being upset I was off the drug, that you would be hard pressed to get me back on it.

The second day off lithium I was up in the middle of the night with racing thoughts, and woke up five hours earlier than usual. I don't like being up in the middle of the night. I found myself thinking that I would rather be back on lithium and able to sleep, than have it this way.

That's the nature of this illness. You find yourself of two minds about things. I don't know whether I want to take lithium or not. I am, in that way and many other ways, bipolar.

DSM IV Diagnoses

Axis I:

1. 296.63 Bipolar I Disorder, Most Recent Episode Mixed, Severe Without Psychotic Features
2. 304.20 Cocaine Dependence, Sustained Full Remission
3. 303.90 Alcohol Dependence, Sustained Full Remission
4. 300.3 Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Axis II:

1. Diagnosis Deferred on Axis II

Axis III:

1. Obesity
2. Allergies: NKDA

Power has been out

For three or four days, from hurricane Isaac. I'm in Baton Rouge, at my grandmother's, and we all muddled through the best we could, cooking on the gas grill and mostly sitting outside and reading

through our power outage. I read *American Psycho*, which I had sampled before and been meaning to read.

My dad's mother died today. I got an email from my dad, which I don't know what to do with since I can never figure out if my dad and I are talking to each other or not. It's sad that Mable died, and sad that my dad and I don't have our act together better that we can't talk to each other on the phone once in a while.

I've applied for some jobs down here, and have made it through the initial screenings at at least one tech job. I'm tempted to take down my website, in case they google me and read that I'm bipolar and crazy, or (heavens) that I have other interests than programming. But I'm going to leave it up. It's worth not getting the job.

Things Said in Dreams, published

Today is the publication day for *Things Said in Dreams*. It's officially out. I tweeted about it, and Bryan has updated the links on the Sibling Rivalry Press pages from "preorder" to "order". So there it is. It's up on Amazon and B&N, as well as SRP's BigCartel site. My mother and grandmother are taking me to lunch in a while to celebrate. I have high hopes for the book, which I hope will be exceeded in reality.

I haven't posted on the blog much lately, because I'm writing another book. So, between now and lunch, it's back to work on the current one.

I hope you enjoy *Things Said in Dreams*.

Two new books

I recently finished two books.

One is *Lacy*, an epic of an actress who moves to Los Angeles to seek her fortune. Along the way she struggles with bipolar disorder and drug use.

Second is *Of Bicycles and Boardwalks and Oceans and Ships*, a stream-of-consciousness love story of a man and a woman in a port city.

You can read both for free on my website.

Effect of psych meds on writing?

I wonder sometimes if I'd be writing differently if I wasn't on lithium. Would my current book be better if I wasn't on drugs?

Here's my history of novels and the drugs I was on when I wrote them:

2013—**The Reminding** (lithium)

2013—**Starchild** (lithium and alcohol)

2012—**Of Bicycles and Boardwalks and Oceans and Ships** (lithium)

2012—**Lacy** (lithium)

2011—**::HARD** (no drugs)

2010—**mURdEr cLuB cANDy** (no drugs)

2010—**Camp Lake** (no drugs)

2009—**Things Said in Dreams** (no drugs)

2004—**Snowbunny** (alcohol)

Psych ward anniversary

It is officially one year since I've been in a **psych ward**. 2011 had a hard ending for me, where I was inpatient for a total of about three months. Still in 2012 I had another stay, that one only four days.

And now it's been a year since I was in a locked ward, dealing with my bipolar disorder.

I credit my current and relative well-being to family, meditation, and lithium. Staying with family during this time has given me a background of people who love me, and that has made a huge difference. I first meditated with my psychiatrist inside a locked ward, and I have continued that practice, using techniques I learned from my doctor, techniques I have made up myself, and guided audio programs. And my current cocktail of psych meds (lithium, risperidone, escitalopram, clomipramine, and clonidine) is working well at this time.

I feel centered and even. I'm not experiencing mania or depression. I'm taking care of myself physically with hygiene, sleep, and exercise. My thoughts are clear. I am not suicidal. I can once again complete **large projects**. I am jobless and I live with my relatives, but I'm considering those to be ok for now, given that I have so many of the more basic pieces in place.

New morning routine

My morning routine as of this month is now something similar to my routine in the eleventh grade. The routine now is: wake at 5am, do 15 minutes running on treadmill, 30 minutes on stationary bicycle, reading in hot bath, then hot shower, then cold shower, then flossing/brushing and other grooming, then taking pills and eating breakfast.

I used to program

Day and night. For work. For fun. Then I went my separate way from programming, and for the last four years, have been writing books. It's weird, I still feel the urge to program, and I'll get out my programming tools, but then there's no project, no driving force, to make me go forward. All the things I want to make right now are books, not programs. So I'll make my books, which are kinds of programs meant to be read by humans, not computers. And someday, when I've written my books, I'll go back to software, I think, for I do have a future programming project I'd like to work on while I'm still alive.

Work

I've spent the second half of today obsessing over what other work I can do, other than writing my book. Some programming project? Another writing project? I base my worth overly on what I do. I feel it's necessary to do things in order to have worth, rather than some intrinsic worth concept. But it's nice to have some way to feel ok with your worth, without having to do more and more to feel that worth. I've settled on watching TV and not going to the gym,

but just sitting around here relaxing. It's hard for me to do, but I may have to come to the point of thinking that doing one project at a time is good enough, for now, my one **book** that I'm writing every day. That is enough.

The Reminding

My current project is an epic novel called The Reminding.

It is the story of six interlocking characters told over a period of 20 years.

It has eight books, which I am live writing. You can **read along** as I work.

Why I am unpublishing Things Said in Dreams

Simply, because the publishing industry is bullshit. The author gets 10%, while the publisher gets 90? It's unacceptable.

I'd rather give my books away for free than go along with something like that. So until a publisher is willing to give me at least 90% of the proceeds of my books, I won't publish with them.

The author does the crucial work. For a publisher to get most of the money is robbery. I'm done with it.

I've deleted my list of literary agents and I will no longer send query letters or try to be published by the traditional route.

Who benefits? You do. The reader. And that's the whole point. People write books so that people can read books, and it's a beautiful thing that—with the advent of the internet—simply doesn't need publishers anymore.

So..sit back and relax, and **read my books for free**.

Mania without an antipsychotic

My uncle just called.

I had been getting cues from my friend and my mom that I have become a bit manic the last couple of weeks. And right now my doctor took me off my antipsychotic because she thinks it is

causing the involuntary muscle clenching I've been having—which has become unbearable for me.

And then my uncle calls.

My uncle is someone who triggers me. A few years ago he insulted my name change. He spoke disrespectfully to me as a child. And he is a racist and sexist and uses unspeakable terms when he visits this house.

So I find myself getting very very angry. Like, inordinately angry. Like I want to scold him, punish him, kill him. Just like I have wanted to kill my father and my bosses and myself. Being angry is a very dangerous place for me to be. Because I don't actually hurt other people (usually)—I hurt myself instead. I get angry at them, then stop myself from hurting them, and then with all of that anger I have nothing left to do but want to remove myself from the situation. Permanently. When I get mad at my dad I want to kill myself. That's part of how my thinking works.

But I know this now. I've been around the block with my bipolar mania (which often takes the form of agitation, not euphoria). I know that if I let this anger continue, I'm going to end up back in the mental hospital.

Luckily, this time is different, at least a little. I'm becoming more aware of what goes on with me, such that I can recognize (sometimes) the difference between appropriate anger and manic anger. I can't do this always. I need other people to point it out to me when it occurs, this manic anger. Because that's part of the trick of this disease: it all seems normal to me. When I go off on my boss for being a liar, for being a cheat, that seems like a normal response to me. It seems like the response that everyone should be having.

And regardless of whose response is right and whose is wrong, sometimes I want to have the normal response, because this is still a world I want to fit into in some ways.

This process of self-awareness has been extremely slow, with some cataclysmic jumps. When I was little I knew that there were some things about me that were different than "usual" kids. By high school, it was apparent I had disproportionate emotional responses, of joy and sadness. I lived another decade before being

diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I didn't take it seriously the first time. I didn't know what it really meant for me. Only after multiple hospitalizations did I start to realize that a lot of what I had been doing in my life was not normal. It is very tricky. You grow up being you. Why would you have any reason to think that your experience of anger was not normal? You don't have a window into other people's emotions. You only have your own. I think I am just now learning to—sometimes, with the help of others—recognize when my emotions are uncalled for by the situation.

My food tastes sweeter today. The music I am listening to is holy. And yes, I am angrier than I need to be. It's a package deal. I'm drinking cold water, sitting with the shades drawn, not thinking about my uncle, and doing something I love—write a little. I could cry at the drop of a hat. This is all part of what it means to be bipolar. It's a choppy sea. But I have spent my entire life on choppy seas. They're all I know. And that's where I feel at home.

Why I am giving my books away for free

For a while now, the way to get a book published has been to submit query letters to literary agents and hope to find an agent who will make your case to a publisher. You can't submit directly to publishers—they don't accept submissions. You have to go through a literary agent if you want a shot at a commercially successful book.

Query letters are evil. They consist of a description of the plot of the book and a blurb about the author. Agents read thousands of these every year and decide, based on these letters, which books to read. The vast majority of query letters are ignored or result in a rejection. Think about what this means: it means that books are being rejected by agents without the agent ever having read the book. I understand that agents can't read every book that everyone submits to them, but a query letter is a feeble tool for understanding what is in a book. A book is its text, not just its plot. The fact that agents rely on query letters to select books tells you something about what they value in a book. They value the book's

salability based on market trends. Is this book enough like other commercially successful books in terms of subject matter? They do not value the writing itself—or they would request a writing sample (the first page for example).

Feedback from literary agents is frustrating. When they deign to respond, they often say something like, “We like this but couldn’t publish it in today’s climate.” This is a common theme in my rejections and the rejections of my author friends. Tell me this: if you like a book, isn’t that the book you should be backing? Isn’t the job of the literary agent to champion an author whose work they like? Apparently not. Literary agents also want to rewrite your book. I’ve had agents tell me that they could publish my book if only it had a different ending. My book wouldn’t be my book if I let others write the ending! I don’t contact an agent to get advice on how to write. I contact them seeking representation for my book, which I wrote. Yet another thing you’ll hear from agents is that your book isn’t right for “their list.” They’re looking for particular books that fit their wish lists, instead of reading the books that are actually being written and picking the best of those.

To make matters worse, if you do publish a book with a traditional publisher, the publisher will take 90% of the money. That’s right. The author creates the product—and gets %10. The author develops, over a lifetime, the sensitivities and skills needed to write a book, and produces a rare product that people want to read. What does the publisher do? Have a connection with Barnes & Noble? The publisher offers editing assistance and a way to get your book onto the right shelf in a bookstore. Is that worth 90%? I don’t think so. Those percentages should be reversed.

I had a book published, my novel *Things Said in Dreams*. It was published with a small press that treated me well and gave me a slightly higher royalty percentage than usual. I was very excited to get my book published. But after a year or so, I developed a moral objection to the basic arrangement. Even if it’s a small amount of money, I just can’t feel right about someone else getting the bulk of the proceeds from my books. I’m not writing my books to make money. I’m writing because I love the process of writing,

the act of writing—and because I love reading books. But the money is important. It reflects where we think the value lies. And to go along with a system that suggests that the value lies more with the publisher than the author is wrong to me.

So I got out of my contract with my publisher. I was already giving away all my unpublished books for free on my website.

This was just that final step towards giving away absolutely all my books for free. I had heard of Radiohead giving away an album with a pay-as-you-want model, and that example inspired me. I put a donate button on my website and started submitting my books to free book sites on the internet.

I stopped thinking in terms of reaching agents and publishers, and started thinking in terms of reaching readers.

People write books so that people can read books, and with the internet, I can reach readers everywhere. This has been a major shift for me. I sent query letters out for ten years. I got into the mode of thinking that in order to reach readers, I had to first reach agents. Agents became more important in my mind than they should be. I never wrote to please agents, but I did want to please them. With giving my books away for free, that has all shifted. The most important person for me to reach is the reader. The agent is irrelevant.

Giving my books away hasn't been without hiccups. One editor of a free book website rejected all of my book submissions. He said, "If you ever find yourself writing anything a little more 'mainstream' please feel free to email me." As if it's the author's job to write to the editor's specifications.

The author's job is to have a vision. A singular vision, that only they could have. And to write based on that vision. It is not the author's job to write commercially successful material, or mainstream material, or to please literary agents and editors.

Writers do something that neither literary agents nor editors nor publishers do: they write books. They go into the wilds of their imagination and observation and they construct something that can be read by others. A person who does this earns, on their journey into those wilds, the wisdom to know what to write and what not

to write. A literary agent has not made this journey. A publisher has not made this journey. It is the author's place, and the author's place alone, to decide what to write. For agents and publishers to act like it is the author's job to cater to their whims is nonsensical.

When it comes down to it, it's not about agents and publishers. It's not even about authors. It's about books. People love to read. As writers, I think we need to aim to increase the amount of reading that happens. For me, right now, that means giving my books away for free. That way people with no money can read them and people who can and want to can donate. Take as needed, give as able. I think that maximizes the value I can provide through my writing, and that is why I'm doing it.

Just for Today

I have been sober for one year today. For purists (and I am one) that's much more accurately stated as 365 sober days in a row. You can't get sober for a year, you can't get sober for a lifetime, you can't get sober for a week. You can get sober for a minute, 10 minutes, an hour, an afternoon, maybe even a day. Staying sober for some time is like painting a wall—except you're not allowed to use a brush or a roller..you have to use a Q-tip, and you have to paint one spot each day, and you can only paint one spot each day. It's like writing a book, actually. In school, if you were halfway smart, you could write all your 10-page papers the night before. You can't write a book "the night before"—you have to write a few pages every day for months or years. With sobriety and writing, you can't skip ahead and it doesn't help to get stuck in what you already did—it's a one day at a time sort of thing.

Recovering addicts pay a massive price to learn that the only way to move forward at all is by taking "baby steps". Baby steps are from *What About Bob?*, a comedic movie about what sanity is and what madness is. If you are mad underneath but on the surface sane, *What About Bob?* will unnerve you. You'll wonder who the hero is and who is the villain. *The Royal Tenenbaums* has a similar effect on those who are from pathologically evil families, and who have not dealt with that (with a therapist). Anyway Bob

from *What About Bob?* cannot make it down a hallway without taking “baby steps”. He cannot psychologically “make it” from 2pm to 4pm without taking baby steps—he looks at the clock and manages his thinking in terms of one- or five-minute intervals. It sounds silly but “baby steps” resound as one of the most crucial paradigms in our world—all from a very silly screenplay by Tom Schulman (who by the way also wrote a very serious screenplay called *Dead Poets Society*). Of course this idea is older than Tom Schulman—the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu most famously stated it: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

When you are addicted, you are not in control. This goes for all sorts of substances and in fact also goes for non-substance-related behaviors like work and obsessive-compulsive behavior.

People are addicted to power, sex, their own image. I believe that, of these, substance abuse at least is coexistent with a whacked-out relationship with the present moment. For me, substance abuse has most of the time been a way to either hold on to a moment that I love or a way to make a moment I dislike, go away. I’ve used alcohol along with music to return to the same emotional moment again and again..long enough to write a book that oozes that emotion when read. If you read about writers, you will quickly see that there is far more than a casual correlation between writers and alcoholism—it’s less like a correlation and more like a death knell. So the moment hurts—there’s a drug for that. Or the moment is ecstasy—there’s a drug for that, too. If you had the ability to manipulate your mind to dull the pain that someone you loved is dead, would you do it? If you had the power to feel more godlike/ beautiful/ sexy than you could have previously even *imagined*, to have orgasms that are 40 times more powerful than a normal, already mind-blowing orgasm, would you do it? For the extra-intelligent, exploratory person, the answer is more often yes than for people who have a greater ability to just accept the world they are given. I’ve said yes many times to drugs that I used to control my state in so many moments. For a while they worked for me.

Then, as any addict will tell you, ~the drugs turned on me~ I was no longer controlling the moment with drugs—drugs were

controlling me. There's that saying: *You don't do drugs. Drugs do you.* Well, that's true.

People who have never done serious drugs sometimes say things like: *Why would you ever do that? It just destroys you, it just kills your body.* They haven't made a very obvious inference, and the answer to their question is this: Look at what pain and death I am willing to inflict on my body and my family and my life. Don't you think I must be getting something *phenomenal*, something *extraordinary*, in return? We addicts *do* get something in return for this crazy trade: *we get to feel good*, even if it's just for a few seconds.

A young woman told me this story once: She said: "I dropped out of college 'cause I was spending all my money on drugs, skipping all my classes, and there was no point. So I went home for a few weeks to get ready for a road trip. I was going out west, because I had never seen Utah and I'd heard it was like *soul-fillingly* beautiful.

I was standing in the corn field talking to my dad and he said, 'Laura, I don't understand why you feel you need to go on this trip. There's nothing special in Utah. You're just going to end up on drugs again, homeless, a prostitute, and two or three years from now I'll get a call from you.' And I said, 'I *have* to go to Utah.

There are rock structures and canyons and hot springs in Arizona. How come *you* never went to Arizona? Didn't you ever want to see something other than Ohio?' Dad is quiet. I say, 'Why didn't you ever try drugs? Don't you want to see what Native Americans see when they're on peyote? There's a whole spiritual world out there that you can't just stand around in your corn field waiting for your heart and your spirit to be filled with!! You have to seek it out!!' And my father looked at me and he said, 'I can't imagine what it must be like to be you. You are my precious child and I hate to see that your heart hurts and I hate watching you try to fill it.' He went back to his work in the field. And I screamed: 'DON'T YOU WANT YOUR HEART TO FEEL THAT PEACE, THAT UNIVERSAL PEACE THAT PEOPLE TALK ABOUT?!' My dad looks up at me and says, 'Laura, I already have that peace.'" That was the end of her story. I'll connect the dots a little: "Smarter

People Are More Likely To Be Mentally Ill” and to be alcoholics and drug addicts:

In modern life, the opportunity to imbibe—or to otherwise ingest mind-altering substances—presents an “evolutionarily novel” situation explored more readily by the smarter, bolder ones among us. In fact, the correlation is so strong scientists say the inverse is true: People of lower intelligence are the least likely to drink or use drugs. Now, scientists have identified a biomolecular connection between curiosity as a trait and intelligence in general, as evidenced by a 2009 study in Neuron from researchers at the University of Toronto and the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute of Mount Sinai Hospital. Specifically, the neuronal calcium sensor-1 protein was associated in a mouse model with spatial memory and curiosity. Interestingly, that same protein has been linked in humans to bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.
(more..)

I don’t know much about AA. I’ve been to AA or NA meetings over four distinct periods. Even telling you that, I am breaking one of the integral rules of all 12-step groups, which is that members remain anonymous. I’ve been schooled by long-time members of AA about breaking this rule and I do believe it is one of the most important features that makes the organization work. However, I believe breaking that rule is sometimes necessary to do the most useful thing overall. For the purpose of this post, telling you a little about my AA experience, even though it is outside the context of AA is, I believe, a good compromise. Once, early in a period of sobriety, I told what someone had shared in one meeting, to some other people in the same AA circles who were not in that meeting, and they sternly informed me that *What happens in a meeting, stays in that meeting*. They were right—I stood corrected. Each AA meeting is anonymous even from other AA meetings in the same town. It’s an *ad hoc* meeting and when it’s over, baby, keep it to yourself. It’s an important rule to protect the safety of those who share: Let’s say a husband and wife are both AA members in the

same town. The wife might share something in a meeting where her husband is not in attendance *that she does not want him to hear*. If I share what she shared with other alcoholics outside of that meeting, it might compromise her ability to share safely in meetings. It's an extremely important rule—which people break constantly so that they can pass along wisdom from one group to another. AA members break their own rules all the time: there is a guideline prohibiting “crosstalk”, which is interrupting someone else while they're talking, or sharing directly *at* someone, giving them advice instead of sharing your own experience, strength, and hope. It's sad to hear some “old-timers” share at newer members week after week, giving them advice, never sharing a thing about themselves or their own journey. If AA ever became that for me, I might as well be drinking.

I said I don't know much about AA, and that's true. I've read about 25 pages of the Alcoholics Anonymous book, begrudgingly. I've done hardly anything my sponsor has asked me to do and I am surprised he is still willing to be my sponsor. I only go to one meeting a week, which is frowned upon by my AA friends. (This is mostly due to the fact that I am in chronic pain, have a serious movement disorder that makes it impossible to sit still or stop uncontrollable clenching of my muscles. I'm forbidden to drive by my psychiatrist, I don't have a car anyway, and the one meeting I go to is a meditation meeting, so I am able to lie down during the meditation part of the meeting and sit extremely awkwardly and painfully for the open-sharing part of the meeting.) (I'm not against meetings. When I got sober in Tucson I went to three or four meetings *a day* for the first few months.) I do listen carefully in meetings and I sometimes pick up wisdom from other addicts. When I was talking with my AA friend Gale about how little I know about AA, she said, “That's ok, because this isn't a program of knowledge or understanding. It's not even a program about feelings. It's a program of action. It's a program of doing.”

The American philosopher **William James** thought along similar lines:

Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not. (more..)

So it doesn't matter how I feel. I don't have to feel right or wise or successful with respect to AA, I don't even have to feel like being sober, I just have to *do* being sober. That is a very weird way of thinking for me—I am a thinker and a feeler and sometimes I start with feeling and thought about a writing project and then move to the action of writing. But the AA way of staying sober doesn't work that way—it works by taking action first and letting the thoughts and feelings come later. So *that's* something I know about AA-style sobriety. I—perhaps accidentally—got this right during this period of sobriety: I started going to AA meetings before I stopped drinking and before I met AA's one requirement for membership (a desire to stop drinking). When I went to AA this time, I did not have the desire to stop drinking. I had the desire to *keep* drinking! But I went anyway—I took action before I had the right feeling—and a month later I finally stopped.

Now I'm going to tell you the handful of things I know about getting clean and sober the AA/NA way. None of these are original to me—I learned them all from wiser creatures I met along the way =)

- Live in the moment. Live for today. Don't beat yourself up over yesterday and don't get overwhelmed by tomorrow. Do something you can actually do something about, which is this moment and this moment only. This is the most important thing I know about living sober and living life in general. I certainly consider this a type of meditation, and as such, regardless of how long any of us does it, we will always be beginners.
- When you start to fret that you're not doing things the right way, when you want to do more but don't know

what to do, just chill. You don't actually have to work AA "the right way" or *do more* in order to succeed or survive "the program". All you have to do is just *don't make things worse* by picking up a drink or a drug today. Life doesn't actually require your help for things to go well—the world is designed to go wonderfully for you—the universe wants every good thing for you. Before you try to help it go better, **first, do no harm**. As a drinker, as an addict, I was doing way more work than necessary. The more days in a row I don't make things worse by drinking or drugging—even if that's all I do—the more my life gets better.

- In the same vein, I called my sponsor. I said, "I didn't go to a meeting today! I'm freaking out!" My sponsor says, "Are you drunk?" I said, "No." He said, "Then you're doing something right!" The point is that AA is an amazing tool, but even AA is not the point. The point is to live a happy life. I didn't get sober to go to AA meetings; I got sober so I could be happier and more loving and more creative and productive! AA is part of that for me, but being in AA is not the overarching goal of my life.
- When you think about using, ask yourself this question: "Did I ever wake up and say, gee, I wish I had used yesterday?" This is from Tom, my first sponsor, a fucking spiritual master and in order to gain this wisdom he had to lose his wife, his kids, his job, his dignity and almost his life..which is usually the type of thing you have to go through to get even the slightest handle on the deepest truths of this world.
- When I had two days clean and Tom had two years, I asked him, "How do you know you're not wasting your time—that you won't relapse someday? How do you know each day invested in sobriety is worth it? How do

you know you're going to get two more years?" He looked at me and he said, "Well, Matthew, I *don't* know—I just know I'm going to stay clean today." In my mind, before he said that, I thought getting clean was like graduating from school—you do it once and then you're done, you're clean, you're educated, graduated..you move on to the next phase. Some magical transformation happens after which I will no longer be an addict. After 18 years of using and stopping and using and stopping, I can say that that doesn't seem to be the case for me. There's no fast-forward button. You're painting a wall. You can't use a brush; you can't use a roller. You have a Q-tip, and you get to paint exactly one spot each day. If you stick to what you can actually do *each day*, then each day is exceedingly easy, fantastically fun, and over time you will paint that wall..or live your life..the way a spiritual master would: with ease (expending the littlest effort possible), with elegance (making graceful transitions from this moment to the next), and with lightness (letting go of everything that doesn't matter).

Some considerations I take into account when writing these days

It's important to me not just to do things, but to understand how I or we are doing them. There is a galaxy of rules and procedures and guidelines and local truths in every discipline and context that exists. Most of the time, these rules are understood by participants without any awareness that they are doing so. Schools teach thousands and thousands of rules for each subject of practice, and most students don't ever think about the fact that they are passively acting as sponges for the culture that is being loaded into them so that they can play the part of a veterinarian, software engineer, business administrator, or whatever. I primarily think about the considerations I'll be detailing today from the point of view of fiction, memoir, article, poetry, or Tweet writing, and also from the

point of view of constructing verbal anecdotes or arguments, but these considerations can be applied to a variety of disciplines, not all of them artistic.

I've been actively paying attention to the otherwise-subconscious rules that I follow when making art since the 11th grade. I had the option to take two art classes instead of an art class and a science class. I decided to take photography in addition to video class instead of taking biology, primarily to avoid having to dissect a cat. The guidance counsellor informed me that only one art class counted toward my GPA. I chose the video class to count against my GPA—I was more serious about video. My only interest in photography was that I had a crush on a girl in that class and I figured since the class didn't count against my GPA, I could do whatever I wanted with no academic consequences. What resulted—quite accidentally—was my first real introduction to making *art*.

The previous year I had made scores of videos, a half-hour movie, all kinds of chase scenes and fight scenes and scenes of people stalking each other in the bathrooms of my high school and eventually bludgeoning each other to death. I wanted to be a film director—I had wanted this since the age of five, when I saw *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*. But my film work sucked. It was enough to get an A in the class, but for me, compared to *what was in my mind*, my film work sucked, and my opinion was the one that mattered most.

So the next year I took photography. I had absolutely no interest in photography. I just wanted to be in the same class as the girl I liked. I decided that I would not complete any assignments, not respond to any criticism or praise from the teacher or anyone else, not try to take “good” photos or photos that other people liked. I even decided not to try to take photographs that *I* liked—I wouldn't even try to please myself. I would focus only on the *process*—I would sit where I wanted when I took a picture, I would press the shutter button only when my random brain told me to, I would *always* keep my camera out of its bag, hanging around my neck, with the lens cap off, so I could take a picture of anything I wanted, wherever I was, with zero hesitation. I did this for one

year, and it was, unintentionally, the experience that made me into an artist.

Does that mean that I wore paint-stained jeans and thick-rimmed glasses for the rest of my life? That I made or thought of True Art, with a capital A? That I fit some ridiculous “starving artist” type?

Of course not.

I did a lot of things—foremost was programing computer software for large and small companies across the US. There was about as much art in the programming done in those places as there is in a cigarette butt—in fact there’s much more art in a cigarette butt. I was pained in those companies because of the pervasive mediocrity of what was being produced (even by smart people) and I guess I learned an important tenet of my definition of art from the negative role model provided at those Fortune 500 companies: I learned that even smart people, or people with lots of education in a certain field (which are distinct qualities, please take notice)..basically it doesn’t matter how smart you are or how educated you are, if you don’t *care*, then what you make is shit.

Almost universally, everyone I’ve ever worked with has just been in it for the money, and so they lacked the pride of doing good work for their employer. **James Carville** speaks of the merger of labor and love:

*There’s a simple doctrine: outside of a person’s love, the most sacred thing that they can give is their labor. And somehow or another along the way, we tend to forget that. Labor is a very precious thing that you have. Anytime that you can combine labor with love, you’ve made a good **merger**.*

You can’t live this life fully without love and labor. You can’t build a relationship without love and labor. You can’t live this life successfully without love and labor—and when I say “successfully” there I don’t mean a 150K salary and a house on the golf course in exchange for sitting in a 6’x6’ cubicle perfecting the art of always saying “yes” to your boss. Don’t think I’m simplifying: I have seen

it in many cases. Middle management, upper-middle-class America, earns those houses in the suburbs by perfecting the art, not of telling the truth about technical issues within their companies, but of *never saying “no” to anyone*. You know that movie-popularized guideline for a hostage negotiator of never saying “no” to a hostage taker? That is what middle management does too. Their job is not to accomplish anything—it’s to never offend anyone. To never take responsibility for anything. To never put anything controversial in email. When you write your boss multiple times about an improvement you want to make to the code, to the company, and your boss never responds in writing, you know she’s an *expert* middle manager. If anyone objects to what you’re doing, there will be no electronic trail linking her to it, either approving or disapproving your activity. In fact, as far as the records go, there’s no definitive proof your boss even knows what the *fuck* you’re doing.

That’s how a middle manager makes sure they never get fired.

They make sure their name never appears in support of any decision that could be viewed negatively in the future. Their job is to fly below the radar. It’s the same thing some politicians do on controversial votes: they *don’t vote*—what’s to dislike about a guy who stands for nothing?

Think of how this differs from the way an author uses her name. An author attaches her name to her book, poem, article, Tweet, essay, manifesto. It’s scary to attach your real name to your thoughts, to your art. It is an act of taking responsibility—exactly the opposite of the winning technique for a corporate middle manager.

People have personalities. We’re unique. In corporations, you have to submerge your personality to succeed, to even get hired. If you have a website or Twitter that contains anything other than the same subject matter as the job you’re interviewing for, in the US, today, you will not get hired. In programming interviews, people talk to me about my novels. To me it’s shameful for them to do so..I’m a programmer, my programming résumé with relevant

materials is online..why aren't we talking about those qualifications and experiences? It's too complicated for corporate people to understand people with multiple aptitudes and interests. Make no mistake, the ideal corporate candidate has an advanced degree, no job experience, and no talent. Please don't think this is a contradiction: I have worked with many people who were hired right out of school with a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree. Getting a degree gives you experience building hypothetical software systems and it loads you with tons of information—most of which is irrelevant to actual software engineering. Getting a degree does not affect your intelligence or talent in any way, and I can emphatically say that in the field of software engineering, everything that a student learns in order to get a 4-, 6-, or 8-year degree is *absolutely useless* once they enter the company environment. The more education you have, the less useful you are to a corporation for *doing actual work*—though your PhD will look good on grant applications. When you show up on your first day of work at LexisNexis with your advanced degree, don't expect anyone to give a shit you went to MIT—you are useless for your first two years of employment. Your salary is being thrown in a trash can as far as the corporation is concerned. During those two years you will be taught *how we do things here*—which will be more nonsense than a Dr. Seuss book. And if you want to survive, you will disinvest yourself of the idea that what you learned in school will help you make this company more efficient and profitable, and instead you will learn to code C++ like an orangutan would. That is the only way anyone survives in a corporation—erase everything that makes you, you, and learn to *do as they do in Rome*, motherfucker. I think it's entirely fair to say that the corporation wants to mold a blank-slate person into their own specialized, subordinate machine. Every corporation in the world says the same thing during interviews: "We hire the smartest people possible, and we give them the freedom to show us what we need to be doing in our particular industry." This is complete bullshit. The very *last* people a corporation wants to hire are the smartest people possible. Corporate structure rewards mediocrity, not

exceptional performance. Exceptional performance is about as welcome in most corporations as a roach in a kitchen. The Japanese say: *The tall nail gets hammered down*. That's right, PhD math graduate, Amazon will hire you and pay you middle-class money *but not to rock the boat*—you will be a cog in the wheel. You will not invent *shit*. Somebody “above you” who is stupider than you will divvy out small features for you to program. You spent 8 years doing really interesting things in school and now you're getting paid 150K to do assembly-line programming in C++ that any high school senior could do. You're bored out of your mind and yet *you have the best job in the world*—right? Those Fortune 50 companies seem like the Holy Grail while you're in school—they'll be exciting, lucrative, inventive, innovative, creative, team-oriented, top-tier places to work. No. For an intelligent, creative, multi-talented, broad-minded person, an engineering position with a Fortune 50 company is intellectually a dead-end job—the only advantage it has over working the cash register at McDonald's is the compensation package. The chances are very good that you will never do anything in one of those “top-tier” companies that is more interesting or challenging than the most interesting and challenging things you did in school—even if you never went to college. It gets worse. Sometimes, the only reason a corporation is hiring you is so they can bill more hours to their clients at a rate of—say—double what they pay you *and they literally don't care if you're productive or not*—it makes no difference to them—they're making money off the fact that you *exist* and *they can bill the client as though you worked on the project* whether you did or not. If you think I'm exaggerating, do some research—billing fraud is almost universal among companies of all sizes.

So artists—unlike most corporate workers—work with *love*. I don't think that means they always love their work—certainly it doesn't mean they always love working. But to *work with love*, as Carville suggests, is something special. I would guess that most parents, when they take care of their babies, are working with love. You can get up from your desk and walk away from a job where you are not working with love. But you don't get up from your

baby and walk away. And the same is true for an artist. As my sister Suzanne said to me one time, years ago:

~An artist is someone who has that thing they do, and they do it no matter what, no matter if famous, no matter if unknown—they just do it because they love it. They don't care what other people think. They're undaunted~

She said something like that to me. And I have collected, from her and others, ideas about how artists work, over the years. I view the word “artist” in a large sense, including every type of action that can present a single person’s point of view. To me it seems the most basic human art is dance—moving the body, including sex.

Dancing around the ancient fires of our species. Then music. Then sequential storytelling—aural, written—poetry, screenplays, plays, novels, short stories, comic books, movies, etc etc. And everything else in there somewhere. Some domains, such as large-scale movies and architecture, are necessarily business *and* art because they require so much money to construct their product—it’s art that must be commercially viable to ever happen.

So what do I think about when writing these days?

I think about authorship—the opposite of the middle-manager tactic—that is, putting my name on what I did. I take responsibility with a name that can be traced to me, say through a Google search, so that people who want to send me hate mail can do so. I accept the consequences of attaching my name (even though it is a pen name) to my writing. Those consequences include not being able to get a job from anyone who thinks my writing makes me a risky hire..for instance they might not think I’m “conservative” enough to fit into their employee atmosphere, even though I have the relevant skills to do a particular programming job. Authorship means that my dad may be embarrassed by me for the rest of our lives because of what I’ve written. It could interfere with my mom’s job as a minister even though what I write has extremely little to do with her (at least on the surface)—but she could be persecuted for my actions by

unthinking or imprecise people. There's a big difference between using a handle as your Twitter name and using your real name (please note I'm not insulting those who use a handle). Recently I've adopted the policy of declining debate invitations from people using handles—having decided not to sign their name to their thoughts, they're not really playing on the same field as those of us who use our real names online. It might seem like a trivial thing, but signing your name to your written thoughts for the first time is more important than your 18th birthday—it's the moment you throw your hat into the ring with everyone in history who has had the guts to stand by their thoughts to the end.

I think about labor and love. I know that writing a book is going to take me months or years, and I'm going to have to have enough love of that book and the work required to write it, that I only start on book projects that are of the utmost importance to me. I have some values that affect me when picking books to write, out of the notebooks of ideas I have of possible books to write. It has to be a book I want to read that doesn't already exist—that's the most important quality of a possible book that pushes me to write it: it has to be a book I'd love to read that no one else has written yet. By writing books, I'm trying to make the world more comfortable for me, less scary, more hospitable, and by adding a book to the world that I would want to read, the world becomes more of a friend and less of an enemy (by a tiny, tiny amount—but it's enough). It also has to be a book that shows the reader a larger world. I will not write a book unless I think it will show almost every one of its readers a world that is in some way larger than the worlds they have encountered in their lives (including all the worlds from media they have consumed). When I read a book, if it doesn't show me a larger world, then I probably could have written that book with my eyes closed. To me, a book is worth nothing if it doesn't show me a world that is larger in some way than the world I have encountered through living my own life.

I think about what the reader will feel. Yes!—I care about the reader! Some people claim not to—maybe they don't. That's fine. But I care. Jeff Young, one of my film school professors, asked

our class what one thing a director must know in order to direct his film. He went around the entire class and we each made a guess, all of which Mr. Young rejected. He said the one thing—the only thing—that a director needs to know in order to direct a film is: *How do I want the audience to feel at the end?* Pretty simple, but I’ve wished at the end of many movies I’ve seen that the director had asked this question (and answered it). Lawrence Rosenthal, a screenwriting professor at that same school, suggested that the reason people watch movies is “to have a meaningful emotional experience.” That might sound crazy at first, but I believe he’s right. Real life emotional experiences are most often chaotic and unfulfilling..they don’t make sense, structurally (like drama does). Life is wild and sad and cheap and shit and shallow and in some ways a rip-off. Great stories are not—they’re salient and sensible and satisfying—we read books and see movies *to have a meaningful emotional experience*. That’s something artists give the world that very rarely comes about in any other way.

You can get caught up in focusing too much on any one of these aspects. That’s your choice, but I don’t recommend it. I’m far from an expert, and I guess I’m not really recommending anything—I’m just telling you what I do.

So that last idea could be differently framed as: *Think about how the audience will react*. If you occupy yourself with only this concern, I think what you are doing can hardly be called art, because where is your point of view? I get a lot of my ideas about this from David Mamet’s *On Directing Film*. If you make all your decisions in a way that you think will make the audience like you, you will make boring art—to paraphrase Mamet. But, as Mamet also says, the play exists for the audience. It’s not there so the playwright can preach, it’s there to entertain the audience—they’re the ones who paid the ticket price. The play should serve the audience—that’s our job as artists, partially, to amaze, delight, scare, and entertain the audience. I am in the Mamet camp on this one: I believe the artist has the humble and painstaking job of making other people *feel—to laugh, to be surprised, to feel empathy and sadness*. If I want to make art that no one else can ever understand

because I am such an elite and brilliant artist, I might as well stay in my room and look in a mirror—I believe that when artists (or anyone) communicate in a confusing way it is because they don't know what they stand for, don't themselves understand what they're saying, and therefore they are insecure about themselves and their subject matter—communicating in a confusing manner becomes a feeble attempt to hide these failings.

Making art that pleases others is one possible artistic objective. But there is a much greater reason for doing artistic (or any other kind of) work, and that is pride. Making something that other people like is hit-or-miss—how do you know what other people like? Making something that you can feel proud of is something you can guarantee—because you know what you like—right? This might sound like a contradiction with the previous idea of keeping the audience in mind, but it's not—you do both. You keep the audience in mind but since pleasing the audience is not something you can guarantee—and is arguably a less noble motivation than creating out of a sense of pride—you create primarily so that when you are finished, *you* can feel good about what you created. This is a much more stable and realistic goal than making art with the goal of pleasing others. Pleasing others tends to be neurotic. Pleasing yourself is a much purer and singular and guarantee-able and simple and sane and joyful act. **Laet Oliveira** and I have discussed pride some on Twitter and he encourages me to see pride as a much stronger reason for creating than the reason of trying to please others. And I agree. In fact, even though pride is one of the seven deadly sins, I think it is one of the very best reasons to do art, or to make anything or do anything at all. With a healthy pride, you can make your life and relationships an art, and have pride in the way you treat people, in the way you live your life, and in this way your life itself can become art.

So pride is a kingpin in the set of thoughts I use when writing. Keeping in mind that I am writing in order to make the reader feel what I want them to feel, I make something that I am proud of, that I feel good about making, and that gets me a lot of

the joy I am looking for in pursuing writing, artistic, and other projects.

But I have to go back to the eleventh grade, before I studied middle managers and corporate bullshit for twelve years, before I ever wrote a book, before I ever wrote a poem I was happy with..I have to go back to photography class, where I decided that because it would not affect my GPA, I was going to do whatever the hell I wanted to in that class. And this accident of school regulations and the fact that I had taken enough science classes at my previous school that I didn't have to take one in the eleventh grade, resulted in me learning one of the most important lessons that I will ever learn:

Process. Invent and follow processes. Release yourself from everything that has to do with creating a product—your novel, photo, sculpture, skyscraper, or whatever.

The reason this lesson is useful is very strange:

You cannot control *product*. You *can* control *process*.

People often say things like: *I have this whole book in my head—all I have to do is write it down. I have a vision for this painting—I just need to get the right brushes and this weekend I'll paint what's in my head.*

That's not how it works. No one in the history of the world has ever had a novel inside their head. A novel is constructed in tiny phrases inside your head and then transferred to some external container: paper, word processor document. We think sometimes that "we have this book inside our heads and we just have to get it out!" That's so not true. Writing is a process-oriented art, not a product-oriented art. You cannot conceive an entire novel inside your head—no one can. A novel exists mostly on paper or in your word processing document—it is largely something that you are constructing *outside* of your head. Given this, it makes no sense to claim that writing is a product-oriented art. You cannot hold the product inside your head, so it's impossible that you are creating, outside of yourself, something that is already inside you.

How can you say, then, that you are writing exactly the novel that you wanted to write? The most you could possibly have

to represent or correspond to “the novel that you wanted to write” are outlines or ideas or emotions or other sorts of frameworks that you use as tools to write the novel.

So how do you know you will write a novel you will be proud of? Even if you have a guideline that says: *If my novel accomplishes xyz in its plot, and makes the audience feel such and such way, then I will be proud of this novel*..none of that is necessarily accomplishable. You can’t guarantee that your novel will make a reader feel a certain way. It might seem reasonable to think that you can write a plot that accomplishes certain transitions or milestones in the reader’s mind, but that is not the case at all—the plot will play differently in different people’s minds, people will notice different portions of your story—so the meager goal of telling the same story to all your readers is not guarantee-able, it is not likely, in fact it is impossible.

Given this, how is it a sensible goal to write something that pleases your audience? How can that be done with a sane process?

How can you write something you’re proud of when even following guidelines and creating and reaching goals describing the characteristics of the piece doesn’t guarantee that you will write something you like—since it is impossible to hold within yourself a detailed-enough model of what you want to create, such that you can satisfy yourself by having constructed, outside yourself, something that lives up to the—impossible to create, impossible to hold—model of your novel that you hold within yourself?

Pleasing other people is one way to proceed when making art. It is riddled with problems.

Pleasing yourself—making yourself proud—though not bulletproof, seems to me to be far superior than pleasing others. To me it’s a near-perfect way of directing yourself with art projects, especially if you include an awareness of how your art will affect its audience.

But in the 11th grade, in my risk-less photography class, I kept to my plan: I completed no assignments, I ignored criticism and compliments, and I kept my camera with me all the time and took whatever pictures I wanted. I took many pictures of my

friends' faces while we were in the middle of deep conversations.

This annoyed them slightly, but I caught expressions on film that only I had seen before since they were expressions that person only made with me. In the lab, I invented new developing processes, partially exposing photo paper to the developer chemical by spraying it on the paper with industrial spray bottles, dripping it on with my fingers, using developer as paint, basically, taking obscene photos that, when she found them in the print dryer, got the teacher to send me to a school counselor (they were pictures of me masturbating in a church). I did everything that felt right in that class, and a funny thing happened. I imagined my teacher hating me for not following the rules, but instead she loved me and my photos—everyone in the class did. I totally let go of trying to make art people liked, and what I made was art that everybody liked, won me awards, etc. That wasn't the most important thing to me, though—the most important thing to me was that I learned the lesson that by ignoring what other people liked and even ignoring what *I* liked, and focusing on process only, I was freed from all those weighty opinions and able to just *do the actions*. Art was fun again.

My writing process is always evolving, but here's an example:

Create a document called *Book Title—Ideas*. Write down all the ideas you have for the book. It can be a line of dialogue, something a character thinks, the name of a city where all this takes place, the opening sentence that comes to you out of the blue. Take all the time you need to write everything you can think of for your story.

Copy everything from that document into a document called *Book Title—Outline*. Order all the ideas into the order they will happen in the book. The order you tell things in might seem straightforward, trivial, but the ordering of events is the difference between one story and another. So this is a seemingly simple, but potentially complex, task.

Copy everything from that document into a document called *Book Title*. Go through it from beginning to end and turn

every little fragment into a sentence or paragraph or chapter. Keep going through it from beginning to end, expanding compact statements into scenes.

Right. I'm not suggesting you follow that process in writing your book. I'm just saying that there's an example of writing a book in a process-based paradigm where there can be an awareness of how the book might affect the audience, a pride-driven aspect where when you expand ideas into scenes you write scenes you're proud of, but the overriding guiding principle is not pleasing others or even pleasing yourself, but following a process.

People who build houses don't have to get inspired in order to work—they have a plan and a process for following that plan.

Writers and other artists who have a process to follow are not beholden to inspiration. Inspiration does exist, yes—I cannot count the times I've felt that pinnacle, almost spiritual excitement of being inspired by an idea that came from some external observation or from inside my own head. But inspiration is like lightning—it's unpredictable. They say 10% inspiration, 90% perspiration—how about 1% inspiration, 99% following a repeatable, foolproof process.

Writing is considered a black art—something that can't be taught. I think that's true. But as one wizard to another, I suggest valuing these objectives, in increasing order: paying attention to how you will make your readers feel, creating something you are proud of, and inventing and following repeatable and foolproof processes for playing with words in ways that will organize your observations of the world into what will become your books.

Arrested for being Black, Muslim, and an engineer

Ahmed Mohamed is Black, Muslim, and smart enough to build a clock. So what do we do? We arrest him, ostensibly because his clock is a bomb. This plot is as thin as filo dough and everybody knows it.

He was being harassed because of factors other than the clock. Did anyone there really think that Ahmed had a bomb. Not likely. If you think someone has a bomb, you call the motherfucking bomb squad. If you really think that some kid has a bomb that he could detonate and kill everyone in the room, a teacher does not confiscate that bomb, a police officer does not confiscate that bomb. We spend decent amounts of money on training people and building equipment to deal with bombs..but..in this case..for some reason..all the adults present, including the police, chose not to call in the experts. That fact right there, and that fact alone, is all you need to know in order to know that those adults did not think that clock was a bomb and that they were acting based on different beliefs—illogical, racist beliefs. Make a case for the opposite—I would like to hear it.

This sort of thing has been happening since before 9/11, and let's broaden the lens. Let's make it not about racism or fearing Muslims.

A White kid in my 10th grade class (pre-9/11) was suspended for bringing a brightly colored water pistol to school. He was suspended by a Black principal, but let's give him the benefit of the doubt and say his decision to suspend wasn't based on color. The question is this:

WHEN DID WE STOP BEING REASONABLE?

There are all kinds of reasonable responses to a 10th grader bringing a yellow water pistol to school. Why did the principal escalate the situation to a suspension when he could have just called the kid's parents and had them pick him up, take the water pistol home, and he could come back to school that day or the next day? What is actually gained by suspending a student that does this? To make yourself look tough? I don't think anyone's shown that bringing a fake gun to school is a precursor to bringing real guns to school—please correct me if you have studies that contradict what I just said.

Somewhere, I don't know where, we stopped acting like malleable, responsive, constructive people who want the best for each other—instead, we are like a sinking raft with too many

people on it and instead of operating under the ancient maxim “United we stand, divided we fall”, we are like thieves in the dark, everyone with a knife at everyone else’s back, vying for position, ever scared that *we will be the one blamed* for some mishap. Well guess what? Mishaps happen, they happen constantly, and assigning blame does not change that. What we call mishaps are just part of our world. They’re actually places where reality escapes and denies our simplistic models of it. Nothing anyone ever does in the past or future history of the world is going to fundamentally change the nature of things such that children don’t bring water pistols, real pistols, knives, bombs, clocks, drugs, calculators, no. 8 pencils, and all kinds of other things, expected and unexpected, to school. The world is chaotic. Legalistic, overblown responses make our situation as humans worse. We need to get to a place where the response of the Principal, the police, the President, the military, the secret governments, and even the really really secret governments is *proportional*, if not minimal, if not non-existent.

Am I crazy? Don’t you have to *do something* if a kid brings a water pistol to school? Well one thing meditators learn is that, yes, often in life, doing nothing is entirely sufficient. What if the Principal does nothing and the kid never squirts anyone with his water gun? What if he only brings it in that one day? That’s a circumstance where a zero response would not be crazy. Maybe the school can delay its response until the water pistol gets someone wet, disrupts school, or causes 1,000 students to bring water guns to school the next day.

A child was punished not long ago for bringing a real bomb to school. It was his/her science project, and if you’ve been around the world long enough you’ve heard of this one: Baking soda and vinegar, mixed together in a sealed container..that’s a bomb. The household chemicals react and a very meager bomb creates enough pressure to blow the cap off of (or destroy) the container those two chemicals are in. So two years ago when this happens they punish the kid—I don’t remember how, if it was suspension or arrest or what—it doesn’t matter. But let me tell you that when I was in the

sixth grade I performed this very same chemical reaction (and a bunch of other ones) in my science fair project. I mixed the chemicals in 35mm film containers and used the blast to launch the container down a wooden rail. My project was titled “Which Fuel Is Better?” and instead of being punished for making a bomb, I won first place in the school science fair. My friend William, an expert at electricity, had an equally dangerous and equally bomb-like project. He was non-White in color, and his color, in the context of that Philadelphia school for gifted children, in a pre-9/11 context, did not automatically get him arrested. His project was lauded as well.

So what the fuck happened between then and now? I don’t think it was just 9/11.

Let’s look at an even broader example. It doesn’t involve bombs or things that remotely look like bombs, electricity, explosives, science projects, water pistols, or anything like that. It simply involves ideas, and a little bit of action. But as I’ll show, our problem (which I can’t even specifically name yet)..our problem runs much deeper than trying to root out “terrorist” ideas, whether here or abroad. I’ve spoken before about purity, and have said it is one of the most dangerous concepts (along with that of the afterlife) that exists in human mental culture. That claim that purity is a dangerous idea relates to what follows, I think.

Here’s the story: When I was in the seventh grade, I was selected as the student of all the seventh and eighth graders who had the best chance at winning this “law-related oratorical contest”. I agreed to participate. The setup was there was a fictitious court case about a high school student burning an American flag at the 50 yard line of an otherwise-empty football field during half time of an in-progress game. He was doing this to protest an increase in the price of school lunches (I think—I don’t really remember what he was protesting, but this cat had something he wanted to make a point about). As a participant in this contest, you had to pick a side—to either defend his actions or condemn them—and you had to make your case, citing real historical cases that set a precedent for the point you wanted to win. I prepared for months. The school had a real lawyer come in and ask me some piercing questions

about my 7th-grade thought process, and eventually me and a bunch of other kids argued our cases against 3 big-time Philadelphia Constitutional lawyers in a real courtroom—it was extremely intimidating. There were multiple rounds. After we gave our speeches, these highly-educated and damn-smart lawyers asked us what I would call extremely cleverly packaged questions about why we thought the supporting cases actually supported our point of view, etc etc. The results came back and I won. And I knew why I won, too. I had taken the position that the flag-burning protestor was within his First Amendment rights and I cited a previous, very similar case which set precedent by saying in their ruling that “a student does not leave their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse door” and most importantly, as long as an act of speech does not “materially and substantially” disrupt school activities, the speech is protected by the First Amendment. I cited a damning precedent and I won.

But don’t think the story ends there. I’m not wasting my novel-writing time to brag about winning some contest in the 7th grade.

For months leading up to this contest, I spent time reading the Constitution, and all these free speech cases, and my little middle-school mind put two and two together. Every night I was going home and watching “the first Iraq war” on CNN—which was then a fledgling news network that frankly seemed like it sprouted up overnight like a mushroom whose sole job was to cover this one war. I’m an anti-war kind of guy. I think that in almost every case war is not the best answer to any given political problem. And even in 7th grade, it made me mad, and it made me mourn, to know that all that killing was happening at the direction of my country—and I thought it was happening unnecessarily. I’m extremely patriotic, though I think nationalism is for dummies. I love this country just because I was born here, and maybe because I’ve never had enough money to escape our borders and live anywhere else. Regardless, I love the United States at least enough to say, as loudly as I can without hurting anyone else, what I agree with and what I disagree with about what we’re doing.

So I decided that I would no longer say the Pledge of Allegiance in homeroom, as a protest of the war. And once I did that for a few days, I found the courage to not even stand when everyone else stood up to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

The first day I remained seated, my homeroom teacher told me to stand or I would be sent to the Principal's office. I told her my actions were a peaceable protest and they were protected by the Constitution of the United States.

She sent me to the Principal anyway.

The Principal told me I would be suspended.

I told her that suspending me would be a violation of the highest law of the land, that if she suspended me I would take her all the way to the Supreme Court. I reminded her that I was the student who had just won the honor for her school of taking 1st place against every middle schooler in the city of Philadelphia by arguing a case having to do with in-school protests, specifically which ones were and were not protected by the First Amendment.

I assured her that my protest of sitting down during, and not saying, the Pledge, was covered under the First Amendment and I would embroil her and the entire school and the entire School Department of Philadelphia (if I had to) in a legal contest that she would lose in a way that would make her look very, very stupid.

Then I photocopied the text of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and I gave a copy to every one of my teachers for their detailed study. I told them that if they didn't back me up I would consider them part of the problem and I would make sure they were involved in whatever lawsuit I brought if I was illegally suspended from school.

Ok so they didn't suspend me. Of course they didn't suspend me. And the Principal told my uneducated homeroom teacher to let me do whatever I wanted during the Pledge. I continued my sitting/silent protest—that's all I wanted. As the year went on, some other students joined me.

I'm not Black. I'm not Muslim. I'm not appropriating Ahmed Mohamed's situation. He and I are entirely different people and these stories took place in different contexts,

including that they took place on different sides of the 9/11 temporal chasm. But there are some similarities. You have a student who is smart enough to make a clock—I call that a fledgling engineer. You have a student who is smart enough to argue a court case in front of Constitutional lawyers and present the best argument in the city of Philadelphia—I call that a fledgling Constitutional scholar. Here's the kicker: where did these kids learn how to do these things their schools are objecting to: well, partially they learned on their own (because that's what smart kids do) but partly *they learned at school*.

This is ultimate irony: the city-wide winner of a law contest about what constitutes a legal protest in school..threatened for suspension from school for performing a legal protest..in school.

YOU TAUGHT ME THE CONSTITUTION AND NOW WHEN I DO SOMETHING THAT IS PROTECTED BY THE CONSTITUTION (WHICH YOU DON'T KNOW AS WELL AS I DO, SOMEHOW), YOU WANT TO SUSPEND ME FROM SCHOOL. They want to suspend me for doing something they taught me to do, for being someone they taught me to be!!

Or: when you make us look good by winning a contest, we approve.

But when you put those ideas into action in a real protest, we will suspend you.

You know what I think? I think the adults I encountered in my situation don't really believe in the Constitution. I think if it supports their views, that that's convenient, and when it doesn't, they ignore it.

I think this problem is so widespread it's scary.

I don't understand why we have accepted that it is a police officer's right to execute a citizen—isn't execution a decision made by the courts? Based on the way deadly force has been historically used by police across this country, it seems prudent to me to remove all deadly weapons (including tasers) from police possession. I'm no legal expert, but doesn't *killing people for no reason* at the very least violate their right to due process?

TV news will never be able to say this, but I am able to say it, so let's just be honest, shall we? Straight white men with money, power, our secret agencies (more accurately called secret governments), the really secret governments that don't answer to anything the rest of us call a government..and also low-level teachers and principals of primary schools..these people don't care about the rules, the laws, the Constitution. They care about control and every single one of them is actively working to disqualify and bend the rules so that you have fewer rights than they do. If a government agent allows himself to murder someone secretly, then he has more rights than me, simply because I have decided to follow the law and he has been ordered not to.

In last night's "debate" among members of the Republican Party who are candidates for the office of President of the United States, one of the candidates suggested passing a state law that he claimed would override federal law in a specific case. Um, so, besides a Presidential candidate apparently not knowing that **federal law overrides state law**, a candidate for President made statements in a televised debate that indicate he does not understand this, or does not like it, or that he's extremely confused, or whatever. But what if that's not even the problem? What if he knows about the Supremacy Clause and *just doesn't care*? What if he's like one of these idiot teachers and cops arresting and suspending people *illegally*? You can infer quite strongly that no one thought Ahmed had a bomb *because no one called the bomb squad*. Imagine the trouble a police officer would be in if he or she failed to involve a bomb squad in the case of a real bomb. If any police officer who wanted to keep their job thought Ahmed had a bomb, they would have called in bomb specialists. This was an illegal arrest—Ahmed was arrested because his teacher is scared of the boogeyman image of a Muslim terrorist that politicians and the media have created for that exact purpose—to *scare us* so that they can get us to vote against our own interests, vote away our own Constitutional rights, and continue the eternal war.

A candidate in last night's debate suggested that a conscientious exception be made for the anti-gay marriage clerk.

Ok, yeah, sure. Cool. If we're doing that, then I'd like an exception not to pay war taxes because I don't believe my tax dollars should go to kill people that I don't even have a problem with—call it my religious belief. The specifics are not the issue. The issue is that a candidate for US President suggested an exception for one citizen, so that she doesn't have to follow the law on religious grounds. Did this candidate consider the implications of extending conscientious exceptions to all US citizens on the issues important to them? Or are White anti-gay religious extremists the only people who aren't subject to the law?

Ahmed Mohamed was arrested illegally—he was arrested without grounds.

Illegal arrests are an attack on The United States. They threaten the freedoms of US citizens far more insidiously than any type or act of terrorism that has yet been publicly demonstrated on US soil, including the events of 9/11.

Baseless executions by police are an attack on the United States. If someone with dark skin and a religious costume you didn't like, baselessly executed someone, you would say: *That is inhumane. That person is insane.* So are these police officers. If you execute someone who is running away from you, there is something terribly limited about your judgment and your humanity—just as someone who hangs or beheads or otherwise executes a person who is not a threat. A police officer who kills someone who is not a threat is not qualified for the job and should spend the rest of their life in a secure psychiatric facility.

Unjust wars are an attack on the United States, because they erode—not most importantly our credibility with other nations—but they erode our credibility with our own citizens. When **suicides outpace combat deaths in our military**, I think the theory that our soldiers are having issues of conscience about the murders they are committing is a theory worth exploring. If a soldier feels the war she is fighting is unjust, I'll fucking guarantee you that soldier is not going to be operating as the ideal killing machine that the Army designed her to be. In last night's debates, there was an old phrase thrown around—that phrase was, "The Idea of

America''. ~We've got to get back to The Idea of America.~ ~If you elect me, I will help us get back The Idea of America.~ I won't go so far as to say that *The Idea of America* was lost a long time ago and will never return, but I think this idea that follows is rock solid: If we want to start reassembling even *shreds* of *The Idea of America*, we need to start by acting in accordance with the law—and that means all of us, those with power, those with money, those without, those White, those Black, those Muslim, Everyone. And it means our secret governments need to operate within the law as well—or be disassembled at any cost. Not knowing whether your country is operating within Constitutional or international law is at the very least conscientiously nerve-wracking—I think it's completely at odds with the rule of law itself. And while some of us lack conscience and the wisdom or humility to bow to the rule of law, most of us are conscientious beings and we are willing to work together to organize ourselves as one human organism.

It has been said many times that **the CIA is the world's biggest terrorist organization**. Hard to know, since we have no idea what the fuck they're doing, but it is easy to say that American cops are terrorists of the very first order: Whites racist against Blacks (indisputably proven by statistics), outlaws (they kill people who have committed no crime). If you're afraid of being shot by a cop, you might reasonably run when you saw one. So we make *running from a cop* an acceptable reason to be executed by a cop, when the only reason you were running from them is that they might kill you for no reason?

That's terror.

Construct a set of laws and lethal, racist forces that, in order for you to (maybe) survive, you have to stand still, not running from a cop (because if you do he'll shoot you) and you have to put up with whatever legal or illegal bullshit that cop wants to say or do to you while you stand there. If you stand there, you keep yourself in danger; if you run, you'll die. You can't move, you can't stay still—either way I'll abuse and kill you—that's terror.

All of these cases, the fledgling engineer, the student orator, the Black man walking in the city he calls home..are cases where

illegal actions by school teachers, police officers, secret governments..make it so that if you're not a good ol' boy with a security clearance and an Uzi, the safest thing is to stay inside your home (and never speak or write about anything).

I mean, answer this question seriously: if you're Black, is it safe to be in the presence of a police officer (in any context)? 2015. Gotta go *no* on that one.

What about Muslims? Clearly, not safe to display engineering talent in public.

What about the mentally ill? **Half of those killed by the police each year are mentally ill.**

Whoah.

I'm sorry what??

Yeah. Check the **research**. And this isn't just *Whoops, we accidentally shot you in the foot*. It's **"Cops Fire 50+ Times into Unarmed Mentally Ill Man"**. I'm sorry, but *who*, exactly, is mentally ill in that situation? Is shooting someone with less mental capacity than you, who is unarmed, a mentally healthy thing to do? I'm starting to think maybe I should give up some of my therapy sessions to law enforcement officers—they need them more than I do.

Remember my 7th grade homeroom teacher? You could say she wanted to rip out an anti-American idea she thought I was presenting by not standing for the Pledge. You could say that even before 9/11 she thought I was a terrorist and she was some state-appointed terrorist-fighting thug with a gun. I think that's a decent model for what went on. But deeper, she wanted to have the power to make me do what she wanted, even though the law didn't give her the right to do that. She thought her anger and faux-patriotism and some confused ideas about religion that were rolling around her head gave *her* the "right" to do whatever she wanted, regardless of the law, in order to control me. And that "right" she thought she had, that wasn't a Constitutional right, it was a nebulous, poorly thought out, dangerously self-appointed right.

Look around you: a lot of people have appointed themselves these sorts of "rights" in recent years.

What I see about leaders in the classroom, law enforcement, and candidates on the political stage, is that these are people who a) do not understand the rules, the law under which we all agree to operate as a society, and b) (and this is much more dangerous) people who know the rules but believe it's ok for them to operate outside of them.

Just keep it in the books

I'm so glad we can discuss deep things about art. After our conversation I told Mom (jokingly) that I was giving her full credit for raising such a wonderful, wonderful woman as you. I appreciate so much that we can talk about deep and far out and abstract things. I am used to most people simply dismissing me as crazy when they don't understand me, and sometimes (just now was an example) when I mention radical ideas to Mom she gets frustrated and angry, and it messes up the whole vibe of our conversation. And I feel like she doesn't accept me. I know she loves me—she takes care of me in so many ways. But she does not like radical ideas about what to me is the evil of money (and all trade), and she absolutely hates any scientific data suggesting (the following is real data) that cannabis, ecstasy, and LSD are less dangerous than alcohol and tobacco. I told her the other day that right before the FDA classified all the bad drugs not to take, Congress passed a law excluding alcohol and tobacco from the list of drugs to be classified..and the law specifically states that the reason for excluding them is because of their relationship to the IRS..i.e. we are making too much tax money off these extremely dangerous drugs to make them illegal. One in five deaths in the US is caused by tobacco. How is that not a Class I substance? Because in this particular case, the law, or lack of law, is designed to generate tax dollars at an extremely high cost of human life. Anyway, whatever, maybe it's because her dad died of drinking alcohol, but she does not like to hear that alcohol, which is legal and has little stigma, is more dangerous than ecstasy, which is illegal and has great stigma. Maybe you don't want to hear about this either. Mostly, lately, I just try to shut my effing mouth and put

my thoughts into my books. Everything I say to Mom invites a criticism. Sometimes she just walks out of the room when I'm talking (although she says I walk out abruptly in the middle of us watching tv together, so maybe it runs in the family). I kinda cut my ties with my AA group because we're moving, I got so incredulous when the daily meditation book my sponsor and I both used to read from used the phrase "spiritual success". I was like: these people have no idea what spirituality is if they think it's something that is well characterized by success and failure. That's the last meditation I've read from that book, I stopped talking to my sponsor, and the very next day I felt so much better. My writing was happy, I felt empty and free. I love the AA meeting I go to here but I just found out one of my favorite people is also leaving. I'm doing pretty well right now..I'm not mad about this stuff I'm just not in the mood to waste my time. My sponsor is wise in a way but she's also full of platitudes—"pride is pity in reverse". Ok, I get that, but that doesn't mean that having pride in your work means you're about to pop open a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Like I'm unable to use the word "pride" around my sponsor or she'll go off in some teaching mode. Idk. She helped me stay sober for over a year. Maybe it's time to move on, for me, and I'll find AA communities in Nashville that will be right for me as my sobriety continues. I feel optimistic, I just wanted to say a few things. If you don't want me to share on certain topics, or in certain forums, or at all, just let me know and I'll be quiet. I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable or certainly not angry just because I mention a certain thought. I said to Mom that I thought money and equal rights were contradictory. It was right after she said we should get the money out of politics. What I said went too far for her, she got frustrated, then angry and short with me. It just makes me not want to speak—I'll just keep it in the books.

"It's so beautiful to feel"

I cry.

I cry because I have **bipolar**. I cry because I feel. I cry because when I witness harsh, deep, true beauty, it touches me.

That kind of beauty can only touch you if you're open, defenseless, willing to be hurt.

I told my mom about *In Bruges* this morning, that I watched it a second time last night, and I cried when I told her about it. It is a subtly, realistically touching movie—but “touching” is not the first word most people would think of to describe it. And I didn't cry when I told my mom about it because it's touching—I cried because it's one of the very best pieces of writing I've ever had the privilege to witness as a human being.

I thought for a moment that great writing touches me because writing is what I love to do most myself.

But that's not it.

When I went to see the *Basquiat* exhibit at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2005, I brought my sunglasses with me because I knew that seeing that man's art in person would make me cry. Basquiat blows me away. And seeing those paintings up close, seeing how big some of them are..for me it was overwhelming. Emotionally. Spiritually. For me that's one part of what it means to be human, and that is *to stand in awe*. I think it is a very appropriate paradigmatic stance, a very appropriate stature for us to embody, precisely because we are tiny, tiny beings who live among the stars, among universes inside universes, inside slowly spinning nebulas, inside a *Great Mystery*, and so *awe* is maybe the rightest emotion we can feel.

Awe in another human being.

Awe at the clouds.

Awe at the Grand Canyon.

Awe at an ocean storm off the coast of South America.

Awe at the youngest girl to *sail* around the world alone.

Awe at Yusuf Islam singing “*The Wind*”.

Awe at reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, or watching *Pulp Fiction*.

Awe at the bloody, screaming, miracle birth of a new person.

Standing with my best friend in the quietest place I've ever been: miles and miles inside Allegheny National Forest at the top of a mountain plateau, in snow we had not prepared for, among

leafless trees, with no sounds of any other animals, no wind, just complete, blanketed silence that I have never heard before or since.

Part of the awe and humility of that situation is that we were not equipped to handle the cold that could have killed us. Starting a fire was impossible. No one would hear us even if we screamed—that near-complete isolation is terrifying, but you accept it, and it is beauty.

Facing your death is terrifying, but you accept it, and it is beauty.

Solo camping is terrifying. But then, when you've done it a few times and you're at the top of a mountain in Tucson with the rattlesnakes and the elk and the little bunny rabbits and the pumas and the **saguaro cacti**, you have to face a simple, laughing truth: which is that we can all die anyway, at any time, all the time—we just usually don't think about it.

I woke up with a famous quote from **Faulkner's Paris Review interview** jangling around my head:

Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Do not bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.

I was thinking, in my first thoughts of the day, that there is an uncrossable line between every pair of us. I think this is by definition, for if you could know and feel and be made of my experiences or memories, there would be no difference between us, and one of us would be unnecessary. The Dub Pistols suggest that ~there are **"Six Million Ways To Live"**~ Right. I am my point of view, my process for doing things on this lucky little ball of green and blue. I can never cross into the Basquiat way of living, of seeing, of creating, of painting.

No. Basquiat will always be the only one of him. You will always be the only one of you who ever lived, with your wisdoms and talents and children and friends. So like Faulkner says, competition and comparison with others is the lesser striving—the truest competition is only with yourself—because of that

uncrossable line. It doesn't make any sense for me to say, "Gosh, I really wish I was Shawn Johnson winning the gold medal at the 2008 Summer Olympics balance beam event."

What makes sense is for me to stand in awe, as I stand in awe of the literal stars, at this pinnacle human performance that took one person a lifetime to build, which will always stand as one of the most perfect things that anyone has ever done with their body, their mind, their emotions, and yes—their spirit. Shawn John makes me cry, too.

One of my great teachers, Rebecca Lamb, simply said to me, over and over, "It's so beautiful to feel." How right you are, old friend. Never doubt that your words will never leave me, or that they describe even the younger me who existed long before we ever met.

I may cry more at human greatness because I have bipolar disorder. I would bet that is a factor. But I think it would be unwise to discount my perspective on this basis. Some people are especially intuitive. Some people are especially smart. We don't discount dogs because they have a wonderful sense of smell—we put them to use! We put our smart people to use with some small rate of efficiency—most are marginalized or discounted. A few of us are either intuitive ourselves or recognize intuition in others. I have learned that when my mother has an intuitive feeling about a situation or person—even if it makes absolutely no sense to my own perceptions and thinkings and machinations—I better give a hard look at my mom's intuition, because *that* motherfucker is *finely* tuned.

My tears are like a **divining rod** for beauty, and they detect their target better than any stud finder or Wall Street trading strategy. I love to write, yes, but by the wisdom of Rebecca's proverb, if I had the choice of writing for the rest of my life, or wandering around MoCA weeping before Basquiats, I might just choose the latter.

Your lack of acceptance is your irrelevance

I go to an AA meeting every week at a Buddhist temple. At least I used to.

It's a meditation meeting—my favorite kind of AA meeting. I've been to similar meetings in other towns. The format is roughly half an hour of meditation followed by half an hour of people sharing their experiences with alcohol and other drugs, or their experiences with meditation.

The last time I went to this meeting, the home group member who happened to be chairing the meeting that night announced that the monks who graciously let us use their temple had asked that we not lie down during meditation, to honor their traditions.

Well, it happens that right now I only go to one meeting a week, and the reason I go to that meditation meeting is that I had been able to lie down during meditation, with my head on my meditation cushion and my body pointed into the center of our circle of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. The reason I used to lie down during that meditation is that I have **tardive dyskinesia**, a permanent damaging of the dopamine receptors in my brain by **antipsychotic** medication that was prescribed to me years ago by a psychiatrist in a psych hospital. The brain needs enough dopamine in the area in the brain where dopamine is usable, in order to coordinate muscle movements. Because of the damage to my brain, I don't have enough dopamine in the usable area. For the last two years, muscles in my mouth, lips, tongue, neck, arms, hands, shoulders, torso, stomach, eyelids! (etc.) have been clenching, moving, thrashing, sometimes punching uncontrollably. It's a significant challenge because it makes you look really crazy and a lot of people don't want to interact with a person who looks really crazy. In fact tardive dyskinesia increases your chance of suicide because being out of control of your body, socially impaired, unable to do most tasks, unable to work a job, and in constant pain does (for me) sometimes create a daunting feeling that makes me feel like it will be impossible to live the rest of my life like this.

Luckily there is good news. For most people with TD, the symptoms go away when they're sleeping. I am very fortunate that

when I lie down, my clenching reduces to a level low enough that I can breathe through it, consciously making it go away. When I sit or stand, the clenching returns instantly, but when I lie on my back or my front, my clenching lessens to a level where I can type with both hands, talk on the phone, use a touch screen device somewhat accurately, drink liquids (only with a straw, though—without the straw I spill!!), and eat (though sometimes with a different utensil than I'd use otherwise). Lying down has helped keep me sane while my mom and I work with doctors to try to find ways to lessen the symptoms of this permanent brain damage that was done by one of my psych meds.

So I lie down 23 hours a day, about. When I'm sleeping I lie on my back, and most of my waking hours I spend lying on my front, my neck propped up by pillows. I stand and walk for 5 minutes here or there. I try to sit up for part of lunch. But I can't sit for an hour—sitting for half an hour produces severe muscle spasms and pain.

My meditation meeting—the only AA meeting I was going to—was a lifesaver. I could lie down for the first 30 minutes, in the dark, when everybody should be paying attention to their own meditation and not worrying about anyone else's meditation. I never fell asleep during meditation, I didn't snore. And by the way, there's another guy in that meeting who lies down or sort of leans on his pillow during meditation—he recently had a heart attack and my view is that anything we can do to accommodate him, to keep him with us longer, we should do.

The last time I went to this meeting, I heard the announcement that we were being asked by the monks not to lie down during meditation in order to honor their traditions, I said to myself: Ok, I'll see if I can make it the whole hour sitting up. I would consider it potentially a lot ruder to lie down during the discussion period than the meditation period—when someone is telling me their pain, their joy, their wisdom, I want to look into that person's eyes. So I sat for that half an hour meditation. It started out uncomfortable, then painful, and then I heard myself, in my mind, use the word “torture” to describe what I was feeling.

And when I realized that's how bad it was, I made the decision to leave when the meditation was over. That was the hardest meditation sit I've ever had, and I can assure you I was not calmly focusing on my breathing—the type of meditation this group recommends.

As soon as the ending bell rang, while the lights were still dim, I gathered my things and left the beautiful meditation space these monks let us use for free. Normally a 12-step group pays a small amount of rent to the owner of the space where they meet.

These monks refuse to accept money from us—they're literally *giving* us the use of their space for one hour a week—we just give our rent money to other AA groups. After the meditation, I went outside and—since I can't drive safely with TD—my mom drove me home.

Now, I don't know if the monks who run that temple actually made the no-lying-down request (they're not present in the temple while we run our group—are they spying on us through the windows?) or if that was just the excuse made by someone or someones in our AA group wanting to impose that restriction because *they* felt lying down disrespected their rules of meditation, or what—I have no idea. But I do know this: I'll not pick a fight with a monk.

=)

Here's how I know that my spiritual practice is working: I didn't feel mad about this event. I don't feel mad now. I haven't felt mad for one iota of a second between then and now. That's a big change for me—I used to be an expert at anger, and I am intentionally unlearning that skill, every day. There's more: I did not then, nor now, nor in-between, feel any need to discuss, with anyone in that AA group or with the monks of that temple, how this restriction has affected me. I feel no need to judge them. I'm not even curious why they think lying down precludes one from meditating, in the large sense. So *that's* my meditation. **Pema Chödrön** wrote a book called *Don't Bite the Hook* and you can pretty much get the point of the entire book just by the title: The world is full of people driving crazy and talking crazy and acting crazy and,

generally, all sorts of situations that are trying to drag you from your path. To drag you from *your path*. This thing about not lying down during meditation could have been a hook I bit. In fact, even a year ago I think I would have bitten it. But it's just like trolls on the net or my racist uncle: those are hooks that invite me into *conversations that I don't want to have*. So today I don't have those conversations. I respect those monks—I love them even. And I love that AA group—there was a sweet spot for me about a couple months ago where I really felt at home there. I'm not going to question any of them about any of their actions. I'm not going to tell them the effect this new rule has had on me: either I go only for the second half of the meeting, or I stop going..but I'll figure that out.

Know what I will question, curiously, quizzically, peacefully, and theoretically in this blog?

I will question if the monks of that temple believe that people in wheelchairs, people on stretchers, people who cannot sit still (or sit at all) because of Parkinson's, TD, lithium tremors, or whatever reason, are not able to properly meditate or are not worthy to meditate in their space. I would imagine there are people lying in hospital beds who find comfort in meditation. If my psychiatrist needs to do a standing, three-breath meditation before she steps into a psych-ward emergency, I don't think I could find it in myself to tell her she's doing meditation wrong. And if I was in a war zone, I might find myself standing or lying, holding a weapon..and I might meditate before I killed..or before I decided not to.

I will question what would have happened if that AA group had decided on some form of meditation other than seated, breath-focused meditation? I've heard from the founders of the group that in their beginning they tried walking, lying, sitting, chanting, and all kinds of meditations before deciding to go for the old standby.

I will question what those monks are doing observing and meddling in our meeting. The AA meeting we hold in their space is not their meeting. If they came in and told us not to talk about addiction we'd probably have to find another space to meet in.

They're giving us a space, and in accepting that we didn't consent to the requirement that we meditate using their definition of the word.

I will question Christian churches whose members (according to stories told me by my mom, who has been a pastor for 20 years)..why members of churches say that children are not welcome in their church if they wear street shoes or sneakers or if they silently use their mobile devices and game devices during church. **The church is dying.** "Somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year." If you love going to church, if that is a crucial part of your spiritual journey, why would you do things that make children feel unwelcome? Ever consider that you might be making their parents feel unwelcome, and that those are the people whose **tithes** pay your pastor and keep the lights on?

I will question this Pope—even though compared to every other pope I know about (which, trust me, isn't a lot of popes!!), this Pope has done more acceptance and change than I even thought a Pope could do, given the past performance of other popes. But, hello, Catholic Church, *women can't be priests?????!!!!!!! What period of geologic history do you think you're existing in?* I'll try to refrain from any further insult of your tradition, but let it be known that every time I consider that massive level of rejection of slightly more than half of the human beings that you believe your God created..I laugh. I laugh out loud because even with the *immense* amount of good you do, your refusal to accept the knowledge and wisdom and perspective that women could offer as priests in your church..makes you *absolutely, completely, 100% irrelevant to me.*

The list goes on. We humans have been so historically unaccepting of each other, it blows the thinking person's mind. We kill each other because we're different. I weep for this planet, I do; I *lament* the possibility that we might continue on our current course. We could be having such a party on this Earth, the biggest in the solar system (as far as we know =), with everyone adopting *Live and let live* and not being so damn *fearful* of what we don't understand. The concepts are simple—people have known them

for longer than we can comprehend, likely past the beginning of written history. When someone is different, we can either learn about them—in which case our compassion will almost universally increase—or we can just stand back, scared as shit, launching drone strikes on people we’ve never even tried to get to know. People often call my ultra-pacifist views naive. Dude, thinking we can all love each other and create a world that works together *like magic* is not naive.

Thinking that there’s a right and a wrong way to meditate is naive—Buddha would laugh his fat belly right into space if he heard monks telling someone who can’t sit up that they must sit up to meditate. Those monks don’t even know their own tradition.

Christians don’t either. They don’t even know their own tradition. I hate to be the pantheist in the room telling Christians this, but if you read the Bible you would know that Jesus wasn’t a friend to the rich..and he *was* a friend to children above all, and sinners and women and all the people you don’t accept. The bottom line to Jesus’ teachings is love—that’s indisputable. So, all my fellow humans who *hate* gays and blacks and Muslims and Mexicans and capitalists and socialists and the poor and disabled and those you yourself maimed by voting for war..well, I’ll try to put this gently, but: Jesus would put his arms around you and embrace you like he embraced all sinners and he would tell you to change your ways. If you *hate*, you are incorrect in calling yourself a Christian.

I don’t hate Buddhist monks, I don’t hate Catholics, I don’t hate the Pope, I don’t hate Christians. I love the good that you do. But your lack of acceptance is your irrelevance. The fewer people you accept, the less your relevance will be, and, eventually—if you keep that direction—you will disappear.

Wanna know why? Because the party will have moved elsewhere. And we will be rocking the house and singing and loving and accepting Everything and Everyone and that’s called Love and the more you Love something the more Wonderful it Becomes. Hate never watered any plant I saw—maybe a dead one. To extremely loosely and slightly poetically paraphrase Jesus (and

perhaps to provide a radical love-oriented interpretation of this scripture), ~I think the rain loves the trees and it doesn't care which trees it falls on~ Imagine if the rain decided not to fall on certain types of trees *because it did not accept them*—I think that would be a) an unnatural, senseless, extraordinarily difficult and unnecessary detour, and b) the silliest thing I've ever heard of.

Why smart people don't like AA

As I said **before**, I didn't have any intention of discussing this with anyone from **AA**, even though sharing my thoughts might be useful to that group or me—it's basically a conversation I don't want to have. I'm not an AA activist or leader or meeting founder; I don't want to reform AA, I was just going there to get help getting sober. I haven't gone back to the meditation meeting or gone to any AA meeting since the no-lying-down rule was announced. But my astute sponsor and I have discussed this briefly in two or three text messages. I'm leaving out the beginning of our interchange as it is non-substantive, but this, my next-to-last reply, exemplifies the exchange and expands a little on my earlier article.

I don't think you are hearing what I'm saying. Several members of the group told me that at the beginning, they/you tried different types of meditation—sitting, standing, walking, lying, chanting, etc—before settling on seated, breath-focused meditation. What if we had chosen lying or walking meditation and the monks didn't approve? J leans or lies down and the guy has recently had a heart attack. Do we accommodate him? I think we should. What if someone came to the meeting on a stretcher? I have a disability that makes sitting for an hour torturously painful. By accepting the monks' dictum, by remaining in that space under this rule, we as an AA group are saying: we don't accept just everyone in this group. Now, in addition to the only requirement for membership (a desire to stop drinking) we have another requirement: the ability to sit up for an hour. We are allowing the monks to make us less accepting. The AA meeting isn't the monks' meeting—it's AA's meeting. And, frankly, for us to go along with

their rule and to remain in that space compromises the independence of the group. We're no longer independent: our host is setting rules for our meeting. This eats away at our integrity simply because it introduces another requirement for membership when we clearly state at every meeting that there is only one. So, I don't feel welcome there, I can't actually sit through a meeting, and I don't feel like (metaphorically) bending over backward and, say, showing up at 7:30 to participate in just the discussion, being able to sit for half an hour, just not a full one. I need that meeting. It was helping to keep me sober. Now the meeting doesn't accept me as a member because these particular monks have declared that there are wrong ways to meditate, or they have imposed their meditation traditions on us..which by the way, I think Buddha would find absurd—obviously, by reading enough Buddhist tradition, anyone would know that there is no right or wrong way to meditate. I will not return to that meeting, because its integrity is no longer intact. I'm not angry nor do I have any negative feelings about this—I simply cannot fulfill the [new, additional] requirement for membership in that AA group. I wish everyone in the meeting, and the monks who host you, sobriety and serenity. With firmness, and love, Matthew T

Normally I wouldn't publish someone else's texts to me—it undermines one of my basic desires, which is for psychological intimacy with others, especially gaining enough of someone's trust that they tell me their most intimate stories—but the response I got from my sponsor is so illustrative of why smart people don't like AA that I am breaking my own rule in this case for the general education of anyone reading this. My sponsor's reply:

You are welcome to think as you please but IMHO, you are using this issue to withdraw & make your leaving us easier to handle. The monks are very kindly & generously allowing us to use their SACRED space. If they had seen us lying down on the first time we tried it, they would have said something then. Meanwhile, A or C was going to talk to [T—one of the monks] & explain your

disability AND btw, they really only object to FEET POINTING AT THE BUDDHA. So all we would have needed to do is have you sit on the other side of the circle!! Any facility that allows us to have meetings has a perfect right to make a few rules and it has nothing to do with the third tradition of AA. You chose to become offended & apparently have forgotten that AA, that mtg in particular & the spiritual aura of the temple helped you stay sober for over a year. My hope for you is that after the trauma of moving is done, you will feel more gratitude & less self-righteous indignation. It is the only way you will grow spiritually & stay happily sober. I'm very sorry that the group was robbed of the opportunity to tell you good-bye. And that you didn't take the opportunity to grow in understanding. As your sponsor I have a responsibility to be honest with you & that's what I'm trying to do now. And I still love you!

And my final reply:

*You're just wrong about how I feel. You're making that up in your own mind and you are not more informed about how I feel than I am. I'm not offended, as you claim, and I think if you read my message and then you read your message, you will see that the one with the heated tone is yours, not mine. Nothing I said was self-righteous or indignant, G—read it again—it just wasn't. I'm going to have to say **goodbye** to you now because you are being irrational and I can't proceed with you that way. I haven't forgotten the help you or that group has given me. I will always be thankful but this is the last I will interact with you. —Matthew T*

So call me **Spock**. I mean you could make a pretty good argument that the title of this article is self-righteous and indignant—even though there's a much better argument that it's not.

AA lays out a set of guidelines at the beginning of each meeting and then its members proceed to almost universally ignore them. For a critical thinker, that creates a discordance or poses a question: Why do we say “no crosstalk” and then proceed to

crosstalk through the entire meeting. (Crosstalk, in AA, is when you either interrupt someone while they're sharing or you use your share to talk directly to someone, responding to what they said or giving them advice instead of sharing your own experience, strength, and hope, which is the most useful kind of share you can do in an AA meeting. We don't come there for advice. We come there to hear others' stories and share our own. An AA meeting is not a discussion.)

We crosstalk all the time in AA meetings. I've done it. Sometimes you just can't help yourself. And what do you expect from a bunch of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts?—We're not necessarily the most polite or rule-abiding people. But it's a problem for me, a cousin of mine, and some other smart people I've met in AA, to say at the beginning of each meeting, "no crosstalk," and then to sit through a meeting full of crosstalk. You get one or the other, you can't have both: either eliminate the rule against crosstalk or have the moderator stop crosstalk when it happens (which some moderators do).

Let me tell you about a time when the moderator of a group allowed egregious crosstalk to happen, initiated by a long-time member of AA toward a newcomer (me). I'll illustrate this with the text of a note I wrote to the regional AA office in Baton Rouge. By writing this note, I broke AA's tradition of anonymity (*whatever happens in a meeting stays in a meeting* and some other tenets which I am also breaking by publicly identifying myself as a [former?] AA member on this blog). I realize the hypocrisy of this, as I criticize others for breaking AA rules, and I have weighed the pros and cons and I believe I am making the choice that will result in the greater good. Here's the note:

I attended the Wednesday night men's meeting last night for the first time. I shared. Directly after my share, an old timer shared. He looked directly at me and used his share time not to talk about himself and his journey but to give me advice on how to fix myself.

In my share I mentioned that I have some uncontrollable muscle movements that my psychiatrist thinks are a side effect of the antipsychotic medication I take.

This AA member suggested, in his share, that my muscle movements were caused by alcohol alone and were not a side effect of my antipsychotic medication.

He then suggested that along with sobriety, I should stop my psychiatric medications..and that this would be an appropriate solution for me.

An AA member like this is doing more harm than good. He is not abiding by the group's primary purpose, to help the newcomer.

Instead he is turning away the newcomer by crosstalking me in my first visit to the men's meeting and using his share time to give me direct advice instead of sharing his experience, strength, and hope. In every meeting we stress that crosstalk is ill-advised. And yet, this senior member of AA crosstalks me in his share.

Additionally, he is giving me potentially fatal advice. A bipolar patient, for example, who stops taking his lithium, has an increased chance of suicide. Bipolar disorder is an organic brain disorder..sobriety doesn't fix it. It is highly inappropriate for an AA member to give this advice, unless that AA member is a psychiatrist.

What this AA member did erases any credibility he might have ever had with me. The fact that his crosstalk was allowed to go on, unchecked by the meeting chair, erases the credibility of that group. I will not have anything to do with that AA member, ever, and I will not return to that meeting.

Please hear this report as a helpful reflection on something that went wrong, and use it to help make our fellowship better.

*Sincerely,
Matthew T*

Do you start to see why smart people don't like AA? Of course you will not be literal, and will allow me my tongue-in-cheek title. I certainly don't imply that anyone who likes AA isn't "smart"—a term I couldn't define even if I wanted to. But when a non-psychiatrist, elder, respected member of an AA meeting crosstalks his share at me, telling me nothing about his own journey to sobriety (which might have been useful information to me), denies that I have a disability (I have several—one is **tardive dyskinesia**), tells me that stopping drinking will fix my supposedly non-disability movement disorder (which it seems he has mistaken for **delirium tremens**, a condition I have never experienced even after my heaviest periods of drinking and which by the way looks nothing like tardive dyskinesia), and then this clueless person advises me to stop taking my psych meds, opting for sobriety alone as the solution to all my problems..that has to cause a smart person to wonder what the fuck they are doing in AA!

Do you hear self-righteous indignation there? What I hear is common sense. Of course one does not want to throw the baby out with the bath water, but let me inform you that I have been to just over 1,000 AA and **NA** meetings, and that guy—that old-timer telling me to stop my lithium—he is not an outlier. There are a lot of wonderful and a few wise people in these groups, and in my experience being in community with them can help you get clean and sober if you want to. But there is simply, for me, too high a level of inconsistency and manipulation and bending of the rules that I always come to the conclusion that I cannot allow such a high level of nonsensical junk to enter my mind. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of my sponsors have gone out of their way to make their religion and/or politics an issue between us—when I never brought it up and they never should have brought it up. I remember a sponsor who didn't do this. That sponsor **kept it simple**, which almost no one in Alcoholics Anonymous seems able to do. Whenever you hear anyone in AA say "It's not about the drinking"—beware. Of course

it's about the drinking; that's why people go to AA, because we're alcoholics and when we drink we can't stop and we destroy our lives and hurt everyone around us and we need help stopping or else we'll die. Look, I can philosophize the whiskers off a cat but that has nothing to do with sobriety. Have I enjoyed the more heady and philosophical people I've met in AA? Absolutely. But guess what?—Those are the ones who keep it simple in practice.

As one such addict says, ~I didn't have a theory of addiction, so I don't need a theory of sobriety. I had a practice of addiction; now I have a practice of sobriety~

People who disagree with what I just said will counter by saying that really it's a spiritual problem that we alcoholics are trying in vain to solve with alcohol. Yeah? I happen to agree that that is a fantastic paradigm. But, oddly, I've never heard a single recovering alcoholic suggest that alcohol might be the cause of their spiritual problems. Yes, loneliness and hyper-individuality and selfishness and depression and mental illness might all be termed "spiritual problems" that some of us try to solve by drinking ridiculous amounts of alcohol. And some of us eventually learn that alcohol just isn't the right tool for solving those problems.

But is the root *the spiritual problem* or is the root *addictive substances*? I don't think that there is a simple answer—or any answer—to that question. Just as surely as people with many years of sobriety insist that "It's not about the drinking" but rather a spiritual problem at root, I can tell you that if I start out with relatively few spiritual problems and, because of proximity, I begin using an addictive substance like alcohol or cocaine, I will rapidly develop some extremely-hard-to-solve spiritual problems.

To go to 1,000+ 12-step meetings and hear approximately eight times that number of shares where people say a little tidbit about their drinking life, their sober life, or how they got from one to the other (and sometimes back) is something that has changed me forever. So far, this 14 months of clean and sober time that I have right now is the longest I've had since I started drinking. I don't want to drink. And the careful reader of this post will recall something I said early on, in my text to my former sponsor: "I need

that meeting. It was helping to keep me sober.” I am not against AA. I need AA. I needed the sponsor I just said goodbye to. I needed the support I was getting from AA friends from that meeting. But if you think I’m going to monkey around about whether it’s just *lying down during meditation* or *pointing one’s feet at the statue of Buddha*, then you don’t know me. If it was about where reclining meditators’ feet were pointing, then that should have been the verbiage used in the initial announcement. That is not the verbiage that was used. What was said was ~The monks don’t want us lying down during meditation because it goes against their traditions~ That excludes me from the meeting. It’s cool. I’m not drinking over it. I’m not mad. I’m a little sad that my sponsor and I had such a beautiful beginning and such an ugly end—but you know what, that is just one of the [a]symmetries of our world, and I accept it.

Maybe a good title for this post would be “Why smart people don’t like anything”. Kidding, kind of. Smart isn’t really the right word. I’m not saying I’m some high-class motherfucker like the chaps on the top deck of Titanic. For example, one time I was drunk driving through Hollywood and I stopped behind a Carl’s Jr., let myself inside the fence that surrounded their dumpsters, dropped my pants and took a dump right there on the asphalt—I had to shit that bad. I could tell you a hundred stories like that and worse but I’m hoping that particular admission will make you hate me less when I say that why smart people don’t like AA is really an issue of class.

Like: when you’re my sponsor, and you say that Jesus got you clean, not AA, that means you have a coarse understanding of the game we’re playing as sponsor / sponsee. By *class* I mean delicacy, awareness, finesse. For example, none of my friends would ever just go up to a woman and touch her breasts without asking. But there are people who do that. They have no class. And they are not my friends. ~*Take the best and leave the rest*~ is an adage that applies to AA especially well. But you can only ignore so much. And when smart people, or people with class, delicacy, awareness, finesse..when they go to AA or NA, it’s a shock because

for all the good that is in their literature and in the people there who have miraculously stopped their insane drug behavior *for years* and continue to approach the goal of the 12 steps, which is to be a compassionate person..there is also this unacceptable level of inconsistency, irrelevancy, hypocrisy, pompousness, oblivion to others' speech and needs, and, in the case of the self-appointed psychiatrists, real life-threatening danger for the innocent.

Part of the dynamic in play here is that you have to respect people while you're helping them. Just because you're the doctor and I'm the patient does not mean that you may not be unknowingly offending my delicacy, awareness, finesse, or smarts.

AA people who have wisdom around sobriety often are completely unaware that they are playing the part of the bull in the china shop around classy people. If I'm your math tutor, and I teach you math but insult your race, then I have precluded my ability to be a good math tutor to you. Being sick doesn't make you dumb. It doesn't make you less than those who can heal or teach you. Think of Will in *Good Will Hunting*. People with less finesse than he had, offended him such that they could not help him (because they were unable to earn his respect—they were a joke to him). Will was sick, yes, but what he needed was—not a therapist as smart as him, but—a therapist who respected him, had more life experience than him, and who had awareness and finesse *in spades*. That's a tall order—the fact is people like that are in short supply. If you're broad minded, complex, intelligent, then you're going to have a hard time finding a therapist. Because, like in *Good Will Hunting*, in therapy, in the teacher / student relationship, in the sponsor / sponsee relationship, in the parent / child relationship, in the boss / worker relationship, and often in love relationships, there is an element of *who's on top (of the conversation)*. These relationships are characterized by complex power-exchange dynamics and while at our best we allow others to make mistakes, we forgive them, we learn, and we move on..often *who's on top* (who is in control, who has the most power) is set early on in the relationship and it is very hard for the participant with less power to gain the upper hand. Sometimes (especially with love relationships) the power balance

changes frequently and rapidly throughout the duration of the relationship. But sometimes the power difference grows so great that the person in power either sticks around because she finds pleasure in abusing her weakly positioned partner, or she leaves because there is no longer interest or challenge in the relationship for her. When I'm the more powerful one in a relationship, let's say a sponsor/sponsee relationship where I am the sponsee, the moment my sponsor indicates to me, through their words or actions, that they think they are the more powerful one in the relationship, I decide that this person is not a good sponsor for me. They are showing me that they think they are on top, and showing me that they don't know that I am on top, and that precludes a lot of the kinds of conversations I want to have. The smarter you are, the more emotional depth you have, the broader swath of the cultural world you have experienced, the harder it is for people to help you. Of course I listen to lots of people, and I believe this is worthwhile because everyone has had experiences I haven't, so everyone has much to teach me! But when an AA sponsor stops listening to me, stops respecting me, starts talking to me as though they are the parent and I am the child (a relationship where the parent almost always has the power), *and I am actually on top*, then the relationship is over. That's because, as I said in the beginning of this paragraph, "you have to respect people while you're helping them." If you disrespect the people you're helping and they're on bottom, they will stay and allow you to help them. If you disrespect someone you're helping and they're on top, they will walk away..out of your hospital, off of your therapist's couch, out through the double doors of the Buddhist temple that hosts your AA meeting, and you will never see them again..

I have heard many people (other than me) say that sobriety and AA principles are harder for smart people to accomplish and accept. I remember talking in a courtyard after a meeting in Tucson and I was explaining some of my thoughts about steps I was taking that helped me stay sober and grow spiritually. These were plans and actions that were helping me live a more joyous life. And this young, NA-brainwashed know-it-all said—as he held up his

NA “big book” and knocked a knuckle against its hard cover—“But the steps are all right here, man. That’s the beauty of it. You don’t have to think up your own plan. It’s already been figured out.”

And you know what, he’s right. You don’t have to think for yourself, you don’t have to think at all. The 12 steps are brilliant. The whole AA program is brilliant. But guess what? So am I.

I’ll work a template that works, but I’m not going to stop evaluating, I’m not going to stop thinking, I’m not going to stop inventing. Some AA people say that ~nothing they thought before they got into AA was right—it was all “stinkin’ thinking”~ Well, my friends, that just doesn’t happen to be the case for me. Most of my thoughts were better than what’s in the AA book, better than anything any AAer has ever said to me—I thought philosophical, logical, artistic thoughts that are on a level higher than anyone I’ve ever met. Sound like righteous indignation? Well try being someone who doesn’t just color inside the lines—imagine that, for a second. Imagine if you could sit with your friend and prove certain theories in respected math books wrong. How can a person like that feel at home in AA, or any religion that’s overly dependent on a fixed text?

The lockstep response of an AAer to a newcomer saying something like what I just said is to try to disarm and scold the person for thinking they are (the AAer’s actual words) “terminally unique”. Right, I get the point: we have to get over thinking that we aren’t connected to the rest of humanity by common strengths and weaknesses. Terminal uniqueness is used as a way for a recovering alcoholic to believe that because of their individuality, the program won’t work for them. Terminal uniqueness is at base a fear that you are doomed in a way that others aren’t.

But what I’m talking about is that some people are more unique than others. I’m not suggesting to myself that my exceptional uniqueness is a good reason for me to drink! I’m just saying that in AA meetings, I don’t encounter people who have deep skill in multiple areas, are as smart as me, who have produced the amount of **writing/thinking output** that I have, or who have worked **technically difficult jobs**. It would be unreasonable to

expect to meet people like me in any context that I know of, except my family or possibly **Twitter**. I'm not dissing simple / manual jobs, either. I learned a whole philosophy from washing dishes. But my mind has gone to places that normal people's haven't. I've built my own web server in C. Made a regular expression engine in less than a thousand lines of code—you probably don't even know what a regular expression is. And that's ok. All I'm saying is it doesn't take deep and broad smarts to be an insurance adjuster or a project manager or a medical biller. I'm not putting down any of those things!—we're all necessary and valuable—I'm just saying that for most of you, when we talk, I can figure you out in three seconds, and if we talked for fifty years, you'd never figure me out at all—you'd never really *know* me.

Most people can follow a program. AA is a program; it's a 12-step program. When people encounter it, it sometimes helps them because they follow the steps. But I can *write* programs, programs that are 100,000 lines long and do profoundly complex things. That's where my mind is. This isn't bragging—this is me asking you *to understand me*. This article isn't titled "Why AA sucks and is doomed and whoever invented it or follows it should be shot". It's titled "Why smart people don't like AA". I know sobriety and serenity are hard for everyone. I'm simply talking about some of the reasons AA is distasteful, hard to swallow, for smart people. It doesn't work as well for smart people—it isn't as good a fit for us as it is for more regular, **mentally healthy people of normal intelligence**.

For that young man who was thumping his NA book at me, scolding me for having my own thoughts, I am extremely glad he has NA, and that it's helping him. But the illogic is glaring: NA wisely reminds addicts at every meeting that "alcohol is a drug" [as much as heroin or coke]. Yet cigarettes are somehow exempt from NA's program. There's a sensible side to this: cigarettes won't alter your consciousness to the level that you'll crash your car or murder your neighbors while you're hallucinating or make you say terrible things to your kids. But they will kill you. Maybe not quickly, but **1/5 of all deaths in the US are due to cigarette smoking**. How is

that a compassionate act?—to live a shorter life for the people who love you, for yourself. Also, smoking doesn't just kill *you*—secondhand smoke kills 41,000 people in the United States annually—how is *that* a compassionate act? Also still, nicotine is unquestionably addictive. So you've got a highly addictive mixture that doesn't just kill the user, it also kills people nearby—most "hard" drugs don't even have that property: *you're* using and I'm standing next to you and *your* drug is killing us both! Here's my quick letter to NA: *Dear NA, Cigarettes are a drug. Love, Matthew Temple, former user of just about every drug imaginable.* I'm not judging NA—I used to smoke. I am simply, logically saying that NA's cigarette exemption is bullshit. One definition of bullshit is "stupid or untrue talk or writing; nonsense". By using the word "bullshit" I am not being self-righteous or indignant, I am concluding the brief logical argument preceding that shows that cigarettes are a drug and saying that NA's cigarette exemption is "nonsense".

NA people, including NA sponsors, generally hold the belief that when quitting heroin (or any "hard" drug), it is acceptable or even helpful to lean on a supposedly lesser substance or practice, especially cigarettes. ~Quitting heroin is hard—I deserve cigarettes as a comfort blanket while I am successfully abstaining from the greater evils~ I am sympathetic to this logic. In my early twenties I posted to my blog something like ~As a former drug addict, it is important to understand the necessity of being an alcoholic~ I gave up weed, ecstasy, LSD, mushrooms, opium, cigarettes and "just drank alcohol". For me this was an extremely bad trade. Probably the whole paradigm of trading one addiction for another was a bad idea for me, because I am an addict. Straight up, though, if smoking cigarettes helps you psychologically to quit heroin, and then you quit cigarettes, more power to you. Quitting drugs is dicey at the least and damn near impossible at the worst, so I don't knock the lesser-drug-as-a-temporary-crutch method if you can't just stop using all addictive/harmful drugs at once. But for NA people, including moderators and sponsors, to fail to openly, overtly, plainly classify cigarettes as a drug, is bullshit. It's a

program of complete honesty (that's what you say about NA in every meeting)—so don't lie to yourself about tobacco and nicotine.

AA people carry their books with them, have tiny print versions, large-print versions, PDFs on their phones. It's brilliant. It works for some people. I admit I have the PDF on my phone as well. But I don't fit into that little book. I recognize that it contains a lot of wisdom. I read it. I gain wisdom. But AA is so outdated. I mean, the readings use male pronouns for God—that's unforgivable in 2015. Even to only use the word "god" to refer to [the unnamable], is just *archaic* to the point of being unacceptable to the thinking person.

Worse, AA suffers from the same lack-of-drug-definition problem as NA. It's *Alcoholics Anonymous*, so (no shit) a lot of people in AA smoke pot or do other addictive/harmful drugs.

You remember that girl from your childhood who grew up conservative Christian until high school, then she was the wildest, sexiest, baddest and hottest kid in the 10th grade—biting your neck in the hallway thinking she was a vampire and kissing girls and wearing fishnet tights and short skirts and sexy underwear and generally being the most desirable piece of ass and brains in your class..then you run into her six years later and she's a conservative Christian again, now with two kids, married obviously, dressed like an Amish person? You're awkwardly talking to her husband thinking you've probably done things to his wife that he'll never get to do now that she's returned to her childhood value system.

Well, I just want you to know that I am not that girl.

I used drugs when I wanted to. Some results were great. Some results were horrible. I am clearly an addict, so sadly I can't "enjoy responsibly". But if you can, I am sincerely happy for you, because I know the enjoyment that drugs have brought me.

For me the negatives outweighed the positives (for addictive/harmful drugs), and for today I'm clean and sober—and that's all I know, that *today* I'm going to stay clean and sober. I don't worry about tomorrow and I plan for it as little as possible.

When I talk about AA people who smoke weed, I am not judging them or even saying they shouldn't use. I hope you hear

that in this article. Some AAers interpret it as a program of abstinence from alcohol only, some interpret it as a program of abstinence from all drugs except cigarettes, like NA. There's hot debate about using narcotic painkillers after surgery, during childbirth, or while passing a kidney stone. Does using prescribed pain medication as directed reset your sobriety date? Who knows. Using one drug, then withdrawing from it, can trigger an addict to seek more or other drugs—no doubt it's a risky business. I'm sure there are a small number of AA people who are still using crystal meth and calling themselves sober because they don't drink alcohol. And if that works for you, go you. To me what's important is to be somewhat accurate, somewhat consistent.

Pot, the most common drug I'm aware of "sober" AAers using, is addictive for some people (just like alcohol is addictive for some people—not everyone is an alcoholic). Pot can cause **psychosis** in healthy people and increase psychosis in already psychotic people. **Long-term use can increase the chance of developing schizophrenia.** You can find studies that contradict those results. On the one hand, it is my distinct observation that everyday pot smokers, over some years, become quite dull mentally, quite slow, and quite uninteresting. And they lose their ambition (maybe this is healthy, who knows!). On the other hand, **this woman** who lived to be 120 years old thinks smoking pot every day is the reason she lived that long. Just because she thinks it doesn't make it so, but it's an interesting case to consider.

AAers can smoke pot all they want, and the only angle from which I care is that when they share in a meeting, they're sharing from and about a different kind of sobriety than I am. If I got to pick another non-alcohol drug that was ok to do, I could quit alcohol or any other drug *instantly*. In fact that's how I quit smoking: I decided I was getting more out of drinking than smoking, and that I would stop smoking and drink twice as much alcohol =) True story. I'm not saying that was the most brilliant plan I ever came up with—but I quit smoking easily and haven't smoked since. It's just a little bit of insanity to sit in a room of sober alcoholics and not know what other addictive/harmful drugs some

of them may be using. I'm not the judge, I'm not the ruler, I'm just saying: when people are potentially using various types of drugs (but dutifully excluding alcohol) then what kind of meeting is going to result? What types of sobriety is a person discussing when they share their experience, strength, and hope?

It doesn't matter, though—it's an unsolvable problem.

Everyone has different brain structures and chemicals running through their brains. I have **bipolar disorder**, **OCD**, and **tardive dyskinesia**—those are all brain disorders having to do with brain structures and neurotransmitters and who knows what. Even if we both abstain from all drugs, my brain structure differs significantly from a person with no mental illness—I suspect that what we experience as *sobriety* differs profoundly. Also, I take a handful of non-recreational, non-addictive, prescribed psychiatric medications that alter my brain at the most fundamental levels—I can assure you that without them, whether I drank alcohol or not, I would not be serene...*at all*. In one sense, if I stop drinking but I need Vicodin as a crutch, then I'm only playing **Whac-A-Mole**: knock one addiction down and another pops up!—That's not progress! But I think we can all learn something about not taking ourselves (or our programs) too seriously (or too literally), from **Bill W.**, AA's founder: and that is that the king of sobriety himself **was a huge fan of LSD**—he even thought it might help cure alcoholism, **a theory that has since been proven scientifically**. Everybody has to do what works for them. I'm not going to go into my whole personal drug philosophy, but suffice it to say, I can't drink. And I need help staying sober.

I need AA, but I can't accept AA—and my last AA group doesn't accept me. Honestly, if your statue of Buddha is so sacred, you are a fool. The religion isn't in the statue—it's in you. To say that me pointing my feet at a statue of the founder of your religion, goes against your traditions..that is low-class, indelicate, unaware, coarse, religious-extremist-type shit just as bad as right-wing evangelical Christians, jihadists, fuckin' terrorist ideologues everywhere. And if you think it's an acceptable solution to ask reclining meditators to sit on a certain side of the circle so our feet

don't face Buddha—you're wrong. That makes some people more welcome than others, by taking away a right from some AA members that other AA members retain—the right to sit on any empty cushion in the circle.

Who knew Buddhists could be so pedantic! Who knew recovering alcoholics could be so spineless! And since I have a word for everyone else, I'll give you one for me: **iconoclast**. Fuck your statues of Buddha, Jesus, Mary, and everyone else. If you think Buddha would give a shit where my feet are, in relation to a statue of his body, you clearly don't even have a full pair of marbles to clack together inside your echoey little head. Maybe I am self-righteous and indignant, but if it took me melting down every religious statue ever cast to stay sober and never drunk drive again, I'll bet Buddha, Jesus, and every other top-shelf spiritual teacher in the history of the world would think first about the pedestrians I'll never kill driving my car in a blackout drunk and without hesitation they would SHOUT "Melt those motherfuckers down!"

The only thing I know about compassion

I'm not a mean person—never have been. Most people probably think I already *am* a compassionate person. I don't usually do things to hurt people—sometimes I strike back when someone hurts me..I'm doing that less and less. So when I say I only know one thing about compassion, I don't mean I was the kid on the playground picking fights. I wasn't. In fact my mom likes to tell a story where she goes to pick me up from kindergarten and my teacher runs up to my mom and says, "Guess what! You won't believe it! I had to make Matthew sit on the sidewalk for a time out because he pushed someone!!" My kindergarten teacher was glowing because I was always so well behaved—like *perfectly* well behaved—that she considered me pushing another student a sign of growth, somehow, like I was getting outside of my shell.

I don't remember this event at all. The details may be inaccurate. I might have *said something mean* instead of *pushing someone*—who knows. My mom and I have always considered my teacher's framing of the incident to be..odd.

And there are ways in which **my actions** are undeniably compassionate. I am an empathetic person—of course I make a *faux pas* from time to time, but I’ve never worried that I might fundamentally lack empathy. I naturally feel other people’s feelings and care about them—deeply—sometimes so much that I take on their feelings as my own. I’m learning to do that less as well.

But there’s a difference between *empathy* and *compassion*. **Empathy** is the “capacity to understand another person’s point of view”.

Compassion is much more.

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* says compassion is “sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others”. Etymologically, that same dictionary says that compassion comes from the Latin word “*compati*” which means “suffer with”.

I pretty much hate that definition of compassion because it includes the word *pity* and I don’t ever want to be on either side of that concept. Pitying someone else implies superiority—if I pity your life, it implies my life is better than yours. Who am I to pity you? And I don’t want *your* pity, because it implies that my life would be better if it didn’t contain the particular sufferings that I endure. Maybe I have enough love and pride for my life that I don’t think it’s logical for anyone to pity me. I wouldn’t trade my life for another’s—so I must not think my life is worse than any other’s, or that any other’s life is better than mine. To me, pity is an insult—and it’s an insult that doesn’t make any logical sense because you can’t trade lives with another.

Wiktionary says **compassion** is a “deep awareness of the suffering of another, coupled with the wish to relieve it”. I like that definition more. But it doesn’t include a couple of aspects that I consider essential to compassion.

It doesn’t say that compassion is *love*, which my vague mental definition of compassion has always encompassed. If you have compassion for someone, don’t you *love* them too? I think you do.

My vague mental definition of compassion has also always included the concept of *universality*—I think that compassion is a quality of the beholder that necessarily applies to all people, all beings, all things..*everything* the beholder interacts with..*everything* the beholder is aware of. How can you be compassionate toward one person but not toward another? I think if my so-called compassion only applies to some, then I’m not really a fully compassionate person.

And that last, self-imposed requirement in my own definition of compassion has led me to believe that I lacked compassion, that my selective compassion didn’t fulfill my own definition of compassion, and that therefore I was not capable of compassion as I defined the term.

That was a problem for me.

I don’t like to feel hate—me hating someone else. It doesn’t take much experience as a human being to learn that when you hate someone else, you’re the one that hate is tearing down. Hate can hurt the other person—but it always hurts you more.

I found myself, for so long, loving some and hating others. Having compassion for some but not for others. And I didn’t see a way out of this because the people I hated (or didn’t like) were people who were—either in friendships or coworker situations, or family relationships—these people I hated were people who were treating me or my other friends disrespectfully and disloyally; they were people who were afraid that my competency would make them look bad to the boss, and who *actively worked against me* to discount my contributions to the companies I worked for; they were family members who because of their own mental illness were *fucking with my psyche* from the moment I was born.

I felt that, by my universality requirement for compassion, I, in order to be fully compassionate, had to love these people instead of hate them. And I didn’t know how I could authentically love someone who (to me) seemed unquestionably not to have my best interests at heart.

My therapists encouraged me to drop the universality condition of my definition of compassion. They said I did not have

to love everyone, especially people who were hurting me, that in fact the best thing to do was to exit those people from my life as soon as possible and never look back.

But I don't always do what my therapists tell me. I take from them the wisdom that I like and I use my own devices to come up with my own ways to live my life. Hate carries weight. And for me, even my lack of universal compassion carried weight. I like the way love feels. I spend as much time around people I love and who love me back because, basically, I think that's the point of life—to love. I want to have the strength (or whatever is necessary) to feel compassion for everyone I've met, even the backstabbing friends and the corrupt bosses and the abusive father. Without that universal compassion, even if I'm not actively hating my corrupt boss, for example, there is still the weight of not being able to feel *love* for him. That might sound crazy, but it's true for me. I know I can't and won't connect with and deeply love everyone I meet, but when I sit in a conference room with someone who is actively fucking me over, I might not feel hate but I certainly don't feel love and that lack of love taxes me.

This is why my therapists suggested exiting all haters from my life and never looking back. That works for some people—I did that with my dad and it has been one of the most surprising and magical actions I have ever taken. I released myself from the internalized, culturally inspired requirement that I was obligated to be in a relationship with my dad. It took years of negotiating with myself and giving my dad chances to step up and show some love. To stop trying went against my instinct—but my instinct was wrong. When I try in vain to relate to a dad who, by his actions, clearly doesn't want to relate to me, it creates emotional turmoil. When I filter his email and refrain from contacting him or giving him much thought, it creates emotional peace. So there's a case where I could do what my therapists suggested and exit a hurtful person from my life—and it worked like a charm.

But that's harder to do with other people—like your boss, when you need the job. The guy is going to be in my face every day, working against me because he perceives me as a threat to his

position and his fragile ego. I don't want to spend the years I work at that company feeling low-level hatred toward someone I work closely with, even though maybe it's justified 'cause he's hurting me.

I'm not looking to become Jesus. I'm not looking to become Mother Teresa either. I'm also not looking to become Gandhi. But I do want their compassion. Not to save the world, or even part of it—as each of them did—but to save myself from the burden of hate, low-level hate, dislike, or anything of the sort.

It's about the experience *I* want to have, each day that I live this life. I want to feel amiability, like, love, companionship—all of those with some people—and I want to feel universal, loving compassion for everyone who takes up space in my mind.

Yes, that is what I want—and nothing less.

Now let me humbly refer you to the title of this post, which is “The only thing I know about compassion”.

I only know one thing about compassion.

I struggled for years to figure out what was missing in me that made it so I did not or could not feel this universal, loving compassion for everyone I knew.

One thing I knew, that became crystal clear in therapy, is that I didn't have compassion for myself. And, from there, it didn't take any therapist to tell me that until I found a way to feel compassion for myself, I would be unable to feel it for anyone else.

Still I had the same problem, just now aimed at me instead of others: What qualities are lacking in me that make me not feel compassion for myself?—that in fact make me not only often dislike myself but sometimes hate myself. I looked at the things I had done, focusing mostly on the selfish, ignorant, careless, destructive things, and I hated myself because I imagined *I could have done better* and yet *I hadn't*. I saw myself as a creature of wasted potential, someone who had been *gifted* extraordinarily—by genetics or upbringing or god or however you think that happens—and who had wasted those gifts and become nothing. That was my evaluation. Most people who knew me—friends, coworkers,

and family—had a higher estimation of me than I did. I have hated myself my whole life and most of the time I didn't even know why.

(That was part one—*the problem*. Stick with me. This is part two—*a solution*:)

To me, one of the greatest pieces of wisdom comes from the sage **Maya Angelou**:

I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.

I'd heard this quote many times, in many forms. And none of those times that I heard it or read it or thought through it did I learn the only thing I know about compassion. But this simple-seeming piece of knowledge seeded itself in my brain and then was activated by other simple phrases that people often speak, and that I often heard, and that I finally listened to.

People often say, "You did the best you could," to make you feel better after a failure or a loss in a competitive match or at the end of a relationship. When we fuck up, kind people often let us off the hook and say: "Well, she did the best she could."

I don't remember specifically when this clicked together for me with my search for the feeling of universal, loving compassion, but it finally did.

If I look at myself, and I say: "I'm doing the best I can" then I have no reason to hate myself. *Everyone* is doing the best they can.

People do not say, well, I could do this best action I can think of, or I can do this piece-of-shit action that perversely popped into my head. Maybe a person has an evil set of values, like Hitler—but even Hitler was doing the best that he could. That was just the best that a very, very sick person could do. He was *striving to do the best he could!*

And so am I. And so are my friends. And so are my coworkers. And so is my dad. And our best sometimes *sucks*. I violate my own morals from time to time, when I am tempted, but I have the choice of holding myself to an impossible standard, or assessing my imperfect self realistically and saying—declaring,

admitting—that I am doing the best that I can. How can I hate someone who is doing the best that they can? It would make no sense. The best we can is the best we can—by definition we can do no better.

Now let me re-evaluate the case of my rotten coworker. He is lying to the boss about my performance, withholding information essential for me to do my job, and generally being a jackass. What I assumed before is that he was *choosing* to fuck with me: that he had two choices: stop feeling threatened by me and function cooperatively as a member of a team, or protect his fragile sense of self by proactively, daily, using any means necessary to make me look bad to the boss. What I assumed was wrong. He didn't have a choice. *He was doing the best he could—like everyone.*

If I look at it that way, it's no longer rational for me to be mad at him—or anyone. My friends are doing the best they can. My family is doing the best they can. I am doing the best that I can.

Let's go back to that Wiktionary definition of compassion. It says that compassion is a “deep awareness of the suffering of another, coupled with the wish to relieve it”.

My dad's decision to abandon me psychologically as an adult, his mental sicknesses, his humiliating treatment of me as a child..are the best that he can do. With this new tool of understanding people not as intentionally evil or intentionally boring or intentionally unsatisfying in whatever way, I can feel compassion, in all the senses that I require, even for someone who is actively trying to hurt me. Now, what my therapists said is true, and I'll rephrase it: *If there's a snake in the grass, go play in another yard.* No, I won't allow disrespectful, hurtful people to interact with me. Those people must be kept at a distance, evicted from the apartments of my consciousness, kept in cages, locked in imaginary chests and sunk to the bottom of the ocean.

But I can feel compassion for them—universal, loving compassion.

Do I have a “deep awareness of the suffering of” my dad? Yes I do—he wouldn't behave the way he does if he wasn't

suffering terribly. Is it “coupled with the wish to relieve [that suffering]”? Absolutely. I have no *capability* to relieve my dad’s suffering (or almost anyone’s) but I would if I could, and I wish I could. Those two features satisfy Wiktionary’s definition of compassion.

How about my two additional features?

Love. Do I feel love for my dad? Yes.

Universality. Can I feel this type of compassion for everyone I meet, regardless of their actions, traits, character, or any aspect of them? Yes, I can.

And that is all I have to say. That is the only thing I know about compassion: *that everyone is doing the best they can*, and that simple fact is reason enough for everyone to *deserve* compassion, because it paints the picture of a person as someone limited, someone always striving, and someone always falling short of every expectation levied on them, by themselves or others. That predicament *invites* empathy from anyone who is capable of feeling it, because we see that *we* are in the same predicament. That Latin root, “*compati*”, meaning “suffer with” starts to make a whole lot of sense.

And perhaps that is the ultimate root of compassion: seeing that everyone else is in the same mess I’m in..the mess of falling short, the mess of missing the mark..we’re all suffering through the same predicament. It’s easy to feel compassion for those who heal us and help us. It’s easy to feel compassion for the benign and the weak. But it is difficult for the rich to feel compassion for the poor, and it is difficult for the poor to feel compassion for the rich. It tests the limits of human capacity to feel compassion for those who hurt us. But, for me, getting past the illusion that someone has *chosen* to do their worst, and realizing that *everyone is choosing to do their best*, and that everyone falls short of their best *most of the time*—that is the key that is allowing me to set aside all of my anger and all of my hatred for everyone I’ve ever known, and instead walk a simple path upon which I am learning to feel universal, loving compassion.

I'm not doing this for anyone else. I'm doing it for me—because it gives me joy. It lightens my load. It's just the new way I *do business*.

It turns out that I *did* have a lack of compassion. But it wasn't a character flaw. It wasn't a moral failing. I was just missing a simple piece of information, which is that this whole array of behavior, from Gandhi to Hitler to a lion catching an antelope..is just everyone doing the best that they can.

Manic apology email

Ever have one of those days where you wake up to cops banging on your door telling you to call your doctor and your doctor says, "*You are manic*. Do you know that?" Well, I have those days from time to time, and for me, yesterday was one of them.

This is not the first time police have come to my house in roughly this same capacity over an email I sent or a phone call I made. Sometimes I end up in a locked ward because I'm deemed a danger to myself or others. Sometimes I walk away, with everyone's trust that I will be safe enough to handle the situation while outpatient with the help of my caretakers and close relatives.

Yesterday morning and the night before I was in the process of cancelling all my doctor's and therapist's appointments, cancelling my health insurance—to save money and because they were completely unnecessary—and I was going to pack a backpack with just my laptop, get on a plane, and fly to another city and never speak to my family again. Somehow I would try to survive without doctors or lithium or my antidepressant, and if I failed—I didn't care.

Apparently, that is mania.

It's impossible for me to tell *because it feels normal to me*. The high I felt yesterday, feeling suicidally depressed, and *normal*—while they are all distinct feelings for me—*all* feel normal to me. I can distinguish between them to some degree, but none of them seems out of order. All those states seem acceptable and natural in my mind.

My doctor asked me to trust him that my plan of stopping treatment and leaving town was not a good one, trust him that I was manic. My counsellor and an RN at a psych hospital told me the same thing. And I said ok, I trust you, I'll do what you suggest. Doc suggested I take an extra lithium at lunch and by yesterday afternoon and through yesterday evening, I felt totally different—the extra lithium calmed me down, it seems to me.

I feel embarrassed, I feel bad for my mom especially who has been living with me for however long this has been going on (I've been sleeping four hours a night and waking fully rested almost every night for over a month, so that's a clue), and I am sorry to the rest of you for sending an email (or two, or more—I don't know) with language that is rude, scary, outside of cultural norms, containing violent metaphors. But right now I do not feel like I have to leave town because I am intolerable to everyone who knows me, and useless, and incompatible, and simply a pain in the side to others such that communication with them is pointless. I'm probably still manic, but I am calmed down a little. I only slept briefly again last night, but I feel great—I've felt great for months—I've written something like six-hundred pages in the last forty days; the only thing that's felt horrible is that I can see I'm driving my mom crazy, which tears me to my core—but which I haven't been able to fix, no matter what I try. The extra lithium helped yesterday. Mom and I have an appointment with a psychiatrist later today to discuss possible further medicine changes.

[That's the summary. If you're running to catch a plane, this is a good place to stop. If you're on a layover and you just finished your Dean Koontz novel, you might find time to delve a little deeper.]

When police officers show up at my apartment saying my doctor is worried about me, and I call my doctor and he says, "You are manic. Are you aware of that?" and I realize that my therapist has told me I'm manic and then an independent RN gives me a two-hour interview and tells me that I am "definitely manic," and also asks me if I think I'm manic, it is a strange situation for me. I did not expect any of that. I did not think that RN, especially, would think I was manic—we had a perfectly normal interview. I

didn't see anything manic about my behavior with her. The content of what I said and the manner in which I said it seemed to me acceptable, safe, and unremarkable.

If this is manic, then I've been manic a lot of my life since at least the tenth grade and had no idea until recently.

That is one of the very tricky things about **bipolar disorder**: as my doctor puts it, my sense organ is broken—I'm not in the best position to judge my own state. I have read, insidiously, that denying that you're manic is one of the symptoms of being manic! (“..even when family and friends recognize mood swings, **the individual will often deny** that anything is wrong.”)

I'd known for days I had some of the features of mania, but I hadn't looked at the DSM checklist (**the next to latest version**) to see if I met the full diagnostic criteria for mania—and if I had thought I was anywhere near mania, I would have been going to the checklist to self-diagnose. I thought I had some mild features, two or three bullet points, but not enough for a diagnosis of full mania. I'm simplifying the diagnostic criteria a little for brevity, but this is close to true: you need to display four out of the eight criteria for at least one week to be diagnosed manic—in my opinion, now that I look at it, I've had at least seven out of the eight criteria for at least five weeks. And here's a little glimpse into my bipolar brain: when I read those criteria right now, I don't consider many of them to be negatives—I consider them to be desirable qualities of a vibrant human being.

I have to face the idea that what I feel is going on with me and what others feel is going on with me is sometimes very *very* different. I trust my doctors, I trust my therapist, I trust that RN I met today, but trusting even my closest family members to give an objective evaluation of me is more difficult because we have such emotional relationships that by definition we are not dispassionate with respect to each other. We have long, complex histories and we share the same genes and generational behavioral patterns, so it's harder for me to believe that family members have the capability to be objective about my state—I trust my close family members to a large degree, but I can't trust them 100%. If that is hurtful, I am

truly sorry. I ask that those of you I have active relationships with continue to give me feedback when you think I need it, because I do trust you to a great degree—and *I need your help* to arrive at any kind of objectivity. You certainly don't owe me that, so if you don't feel like helping me see that I might be in a dangerous position, so be it. That's your business, not mine.

I was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder about ten years ago, and my life has been a new kind of odyssey since then. I'm finally understanding that bipolar behavior seems crazy or weird to observers on the outside. I have to say I think that non-bipolar behavior seems crazy and weird to me. It's seems very nonsensical, illiterate, unpoetic, extremely boring, and dull and unintelligent.

And yet the extra little elemental pill my doctor asked me to take yesterday improved my whole outlook in less than an hour, so I trust him to do things that will help me, to have my best interest at heart. Non-bipolar people have saved my life at least a couple of times with their processes and their studies, so of course I see myself as needing them—I also think the world of mentally healthy people would be a lot less human without some mentally ill people in it. And even though I think it should be obvious to any intelligent person that the terms *mentally healthy* and *mentally ill* are grossly simplistic, totally gross misnomers, I can believe that in some ways bipolar is a disorder, even though it affords clear advantages.

I think the hard thing for bipolar people to understand is that bipolar is a major disorder, that it's a deadly, life-destroying, debilitating illness, not solvable by oneself, not solvable without medicine, not solvable through thought alone.

I think the hard pill for people without bipolar disorder to swallow is that bipolar disorder gives a person major advantages in terms of creative intelligence, problem solving, emotional power, and just plain old *joy*—but only when we're not trying to kill ourselves.

It's a mad situation—nothing clear-cut about it. The disease costs the US \$45 billion dollars a year according to an old estimate, makes a person 20 to 30 times more likely to kill themselves, and costs

employers **double what major depression costs** in terms of sick days. “While the vast majority of people who are violent **do not have mental illness**,” people with mental illness are **five times more likely to be murdered** than mentally healthy people and “people with severe mental illnesses, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or psychosis are 2.5 times more likely to be attacked, raped, or mugged than the general population.” Conservatively, **fifteen to twenty percent** of people with bipolar kill themselves. That might seem like something society would **obviously want to treat** (or eradicate). But do we really want to take away all the demons of **these people**? As Jessie *says in Transsiberian*, “Kill off all my demons, Roy, and my angels might die, too.”

In my mania, bipolar disorder presents itself not as *my condition* but as *other people's limitations*—which is infuriating to me, that I would ever think that way—I want to focus on myself, my own healing, not blame other people. I hate that I’ve ever done that—and I do it all the time.

All of this, all of it, is true at the same time. In the world I live in, I cannot afford to be so naive as to think that even true contradictions indicate that either side is wrong. It is quite clear to me that multiple simultaneous contradictory truths exist side by side in our world—even the world outside of the bipolar mind.

When that RN, at the end of yesterday’s two-hour interview, said, “Well you’re definitely manic,” I wondered, *What did I say or do in the last two hours that gave you that impression?* I have read the criteria for mania many times. But here I must admit that my ability to evaluate this aspect of myself breaks down. Because to me it still seemed like I *partially* met *some* of the criteria for mania, but what I felt like did not feel manic to me. It felt very very normal.

I used to assume, during periods when when I did hard drugs (I include alcohol and some other drugs despite their legality in the US), that everyone was doing hard drugs. Not *literally* that they were doing hard drugs, but that they had the same mentality, the same general outlook on the world as I did when I was doing hard drugs. I couldn’t comprehend that someone might be walking

down the street with no reason or outlook like my own—to me everyone must have been wanting, lacking, needing some kind of drug to have fun. But they weren't. Most people were in a totally different mentality—like to them it was important to walk down the street to go to school, to get some flim-flam degree that I would look down on them and their whole life for caring about. That's where my mentality was.

It's the same with mania (or depression, but I'm increasingly manic and less and less depressed in recent years). I feel like everyone is thinking pretty much like I am, has similar goals and similar views on life. But that's *totally* not true. And while I like normal people and am friendly with normal people and sometimes respect the intelligence of normal people, (mentally healthy people), I find them all boring—they're too simple. I think I've only ever been interested in crazy people, especially people on the bipolar spectrum. Everyone else seems dead to me. Unless you're bipolar, I just can't get it up.

I am saying I'm sorry: I am sorry. This note is my most recent apology for my most recent bipolar mood episode (mania or depression). This might be your first time receiving one of these from me, it might be your twentieth. My email archives are full of them—that is painful for you, insulting, tiring, inconvenient. For me it is tragic. You might worry your heart out over me (if you're my mom or someone close who does truly love me)—that is bad.

This is worse: I lose friends, family, apartments, cars, jobs, the chance at schooling, or even my ability to make money and live in the so-called normal world (which to me is an insane world) even though I have **lucrative skills**.

I am not asking for your forgiveness, pity, acceptance of me, or understanding. This is an apology, not an offer of psychic indentured servitude, not an invitation to be psychologically abused by you. Unless you have something really significant to say, and you're pretty sure I'm not already automatically deleting your incoming mail, would you please just ignore or accept this apology in your own mind and not start a discussion with me?

That would really be best for me. To those of you who are in active

relationships with me, who write to me often and respond meaningfully and peacefully to me when I write to you or call you or text you or video chat you, please feel free to respond (preferably in the comments of this post, not as a private email reply—be public, be bold, be willing to put your name beside your words in a context that opens them up to scrutiny—I have). But if you’re only kind of peripherally involved with me, and you don’t have something of substance to add, please ask yourself what your real reason for responding to my apology would be, unless it is to simply and sincerely accept it.

To prevent myself from communicating with some of you and your family in disrespectful ways, I have already quit Facebook (a year and a half ago), and yesterday I cleared out a lot of contact information so that those of you I am especially mad at will not receive any more communication from me (I hope—I plead with myself and the universe to make this true). After I send this note I will take additional steps so that it will be harder / impossible for me to communicate with those of you who have unquestionably, in archived writing, used my mental diagnoses as insults or to try to create a power imbalance—that’s not cool and you don’t get to play that game with me anymore. Unfortunately, I can’t guarantee my own proper, cultured, appropriate, polite, societally-neutered behavior with just my brain, so I have to delete contact information as a kind of training wheel to help me not say mean things to those of you who have taken psychological aim at me in your own moments of weakness. Rest assured, I have no intention of hurting any of you in any way—I know that in some cases I have hurt you psychologically, and for that I am truly sorry.

Matthew

Solar system party email

Mom and I have had a rough time of it lately. For a while it was rough because (probably) I was in an irritable mania and Mom was irritating me (partly because of my bipolar mood, partly because she is overdone with the move and with me and who knows what).

Last night we had the second of two apologetic conversations, this one really productive seeming to me. She said she didn't ever want to leave me without a parent if I needed one, and she apologized for not speaking anything of substance with me for days—for totally not being there. We talked about making a bipolar response plan, or a set of numbers to call, basically, in case she thinks I need to be hospitalized and I'm not thinking reasonably. I said I would do that and I spent like six hours this morning putting together a "bipolar wellness plan" based on **NAMI** guidelines for creating such documents. It has several types of critical information that could be used by me and/or her if either of us thinks I'm in a bipolar mood state and we want to clarify that suspicion or get professional help.

I went to her and told her about it this morning and wanted to send her the link and she melted down and reverted to her earlier position which is that she can drive me to a few places but she can't be available to help notice if I'm in a bipolar state or reflect back to me that information or call a caretaker if I'm not listening. I put this wellness plan together to try to reduce danger and annoyance to everyone, and she told me that I can't count on her for anything except driving me to appointments. No other support. Not a hug. Not a call to a crisis line or my therapist or doctor. She said she thinks she has "lost herself" and I know I said some hard-truth-type things to her while I was talking uncontrollably during this last mania, but (to the best of my memory and to the best of her willingness to say and as I review my sent email) I didn't say *f-you* or anything like that. I said things like, "I think you have a subtle underlying opposition to men." Now that's accusative, but it's not an insult, and if she disagrees, she can say so. I have a subtle underlying opposition, distrust, and hatred of men myself.

But this morning she told me she's not there for me and she's not *going* to be there for me. I can't rely on her to call 911 if I need to be hospitalized. And I feel like I just lost my second parent. And I wish she would take better care of herself—which might sound weird coming from me ("the sick one"), but it shouldn't: I see a psychiatrist and a counsellor weekly, my PCP monthly, take

my Rx meds and my vitamins *by the hour* (which Mom rarely does, I know from much living with her—maybe you know this, too).

It's like..well I was gonna say it's sad and *it is* because I *like* Mom, I *love* Mom, and her current behavior indicates she's so low on reserve power that we're never going to have a fun day ever again.

A couple days ago I offered her some of my pineapple slices and she interrupted me and *yelled* at me saying, "No, I'm not going to eat *your food!*" And in my mind I was like: "Ok, then just say, 'No thanks.'" I don't care. But I don't deserve to be yelled at for offering someone a slice of pineapple. I'm pretty sure even my twisted bipolar brain is spot on about that.

It's frustrating because while part of "the problem" is bipolar behaviors I can't control, I'm doing *everything* I can on the parts I can control. I researched how to put together a bipolar response plan, I made a document for her and me and switched to a simpler mood tracking system that I'll actually be able to use every day (or more than once a day). Part of the reason I picked it is it has a way to share a link with Mom showing my mood in a graph or diary format (I thought I might use that when reporting to my counsellor, too!). And when I went to Mom I couldn't even get a sentence out of my mouth before she told me *she doesn't want to see* my bipolar wellness plan!!! WTF?? I mean, she doesn't want to bookmark a link that has my doctors', therapist's, crisis centers', and emergency contacts' phone numbers on it? Plus some other information that some random EMT or inpatient psychiatrist might find useful? It's beyond her *desire* or *capability* to basically keep an electronic MedicAlert bracelet around for her severely mentally disordered son?

The excellent thing is even though that was hurtful, confusing, generally shaking, I'm in a pretty good place of strength (whether from mania or not) where I can handle this emotionally without freaking out at all in my dealings with Mom, and truthfully my inner feelings are 1) Maybe Mom needs some help, why doesn't she go to the doctor if she feels so depleted? and 2) kind of a SuperIrony, where I'm just like, ok. I feel ok. My health is being looked at, medication adjusted, my writing work getting

done. I'm ok in some ways. Maybe her depletion is the cost to be paid for my feeling good, but I don't think so. I don't think I can be fairly blamed for her lack of health. But if I suggested she went to the doctor or a therapist (I did suggest *that*) she would / did blow up at me and blame me for her not having any time to take care of herself. I'm not upset that she's blaming me for stuff that has absolutely nothing to do with me (I have a few examples that my therapist confirmed are not my fault), I just want her, and me, and everything, to be well.

And, ironically, this three-page resource guide she won't read contains sections not only on, "How to support a person when they are experiencing a bipolar episode," and "Coping skills for a person with bipolar disorder," but also sections oriented toward, "Keeping healthy as a caregiver." I made it for *both* of us.

Writing this helped. When I started out I thought I'd be sadder than it turns out I am. I'm difficult to deal with, no doubt—I have **bipolar-type schizoaffective disorder**. Mom has lost herself.

That's no joke. I'm sorry that you and Mom and everyone I've ever met has had to deal with the hard parts about my unusual mind. But those hard parts are rare—the great parts are sweeping and eclectic and beautiful and brilliant. And you know what's great? I don't have terminal cancer. And even if *you* do, my friend, I find this to be a day worthy of celebration. We're *all* going to die, we're *all* going to make mistakes. In my strong opinion we should forgive as quickly and truly as possible, hug, and get back to the greatest party in the solar system (that we know about). That's certainly what I'm going to do.

Matthew

the "Cioran is probably opposite from the modern-day world of mental illness labeling" text

I can handle how you talk and how it might influence me, so please don't worry about that.

Yes, **his thinking** going against contemporary mental illness thinking is part of why I like him—at least what I can tell of that from the little I’ve read of him. At the very least, I would claim to anyone that there is a lot of irony in the way we are diagnosed and medicated in this place.

Not just psych meds.

Every medicine has many, many side effects—some of them are the opposite of what the medicine’s purpose is. You can’t just make changes willy-nilly to a complex system (body, mind, spirit, Earth). And to change many things at once in a complex system just shows how ignorant the doctor/experimenter is. Any good druggie knows you don’t do a zillion different drugs at once..that’ll kill ya. You do one, or maybe two well-chosen ones, at a time.

Nobody with any sense gets drunk and then snorts cocaine..you’re sending your body signals traveling in opposite directions..*go up!..go down!* Yet psychiatrists prescribe eight drugs at once (that’s a personal example) and then wonder why the system goes haywire. There are good combinations, like ecstasy and LSD—a fantastic combo the natives call “candy flipping”!! Safer than drinking and smoking (**yes, true**) and in psychiatry I’m all about taking lithium with an antidepressant, or even (the perfect combo for me) lithium, an antidepressant, and an antipsychotic. That’s a smart combo. But I was in a hospital in Vermont where a doctor I’d still say I trust had me on so many serotonergic medicines at once that I started to trip off the psych meds in the hospital (at least that’s one possible explanation).

But this is all too low level for what I think you’re saying. I mean there’s a reason 1% of the population is bipolar. We may not know the reason, but it’s no accident that some of us are crazy. God or evolution, whichever, *arrived* at that percentage because it is balanced to ensure the survival of the species!! Very unwise to think that we are going to “fix” this “problem” we have discovered in an *unfathomably* complex organism (the whole Earth and everything in it, and the whole living universe beyond that). The fact is, the population of mentally ill is increasing, not decreasing,

and it is a direct result of treating the “illness” (that’s my long opinion on why—please don’t feel obligated to read it).

I refused to take medicine for a decade of therapists telling me I needed to talk to psychiatrists but once I tried to kill myself, I did concede to take medicine because I thought it would help reduce the chances of suicide by my bipolar brain..for the benefit of me and my family and friends. It’s definitely been a majorly mixed bag—antipsychotics gave me **tardive dyskinesia**, which is permanent brain damage to my dopamine receptors that causes constant uncontrollable muscle movements and pain.

And I don’t know..would my books be better if I was self-medicating with alcohol? Maybe. The drunk ones (**Snowbunny**, **Starchild**) are definitely bolder and more daring—to use your word. They’re also less coherent than my sober books—the sober books are easier for most people to read while the drunk books are more rewarding for exceptional people to read. Someday I’d like to write a book on a small amount of mushrooms each day—not enough to visually trip or I’d never get anything done, but enough to get the Lewis Carroll word engine going. Some of the **notes I wrote many years ago** on mushrooms are promising, I think!

Anyway, yeah, **Olivia**, I’m constantly wrangling with my doctors over what medicines we can get rid of and which ones to try, which to keep. My current psychiatrist is from Nigeria and he calls it “dancing with the devil.” He’s definitely a keeper. I want to be able to act as normal as I need to in order to keep my place to live and not hurt people (too much—we have to hurt each other some), yet of course I want to remain as wild and as natural as possible because I believe that bipolar (and schizophrenia now!—or **bipolar-type schizoaffective disorder**) at least has a purpose in retrospect of the magic and the fire that it brings to some who have it. But bipolar disorder itself increases your chances of suicide **by a factor of 20 to 30 times**. A bipolar person has, conservatively, **a 15% chance** of dying by suicide. I hope I never get to **that place again**, but before I get to the end of my rope, so to speak, or the bottom of a bottle of pills, or a heart attack or cancer or some idiot with a gun

kills me, I'm gonna *rip this mutha up!!* Lol. I think my mood just hit a 10.

Crazy moving out

Apparently I've been having one heck of a **manic episode**. It's been **hell** on my mom. And this morning, as we passed each other in the kitchen, a five-minute conversation turned into a thirty-minute one, which included the phrase "I feel like we need to come up with a long-term plan for you that is different than living with me" coming from my mother.

Previously, when we moved here, the plan was that we'd live together for two years in the plush apartment we picked out in Nashville, for which I pay half the rent and bills, and after that we'd re-decide what we were doing.

We've been here seven weeks.

That's what a manic episode can buy you! Now, during this manic episode I did not attempt suicide, I did not break anything physical, I did not cuss anyone out. But I couldn't stop talking (pressured speech is a classic symptom of bipolar mania). And while I was speaking, I didn't say, "I hate you," or, "Go to hell," or anything like that. I felt compelled to say some truths that I hold true even when not manic, but would normally not say because I know they'll just frustrate the other person and will not result in productive conversation. But, manic, I said, "I think you subtly hate men," and "You and your brothers and sisters are all conflict avoiders and you prefer to stew in your problems and sit across the table from each other and keep the peace when each of you contains, part by part, racism, sexism, homophobia, and the politics of hate." But the worst thing I said to my mom—*was compelled to say* in a way that you'll never quite believe until you experience mania—was, "I don't trust you to have the objectivity to have my best interests at heart."

That hurt her. Because she's my mother and *of course* she has my best interests at heart.

It hurt her when she found out *in an email* that the police had come to the house at my doctor's request, to check on me. Now,

two Nashville police officers and a crisis worker I spoke with on the phone *and* an RN who gave me a two-hour evaluation later that day all decided I was safe and didn't need to be taken to a hospital, so it's not exactly like I was flagrantly out of control.

But there are things you do well, and things you don't. One of the things I don't do well is *fit into this world*. I believe that's partly to do with conscious philosophical choices and partly to do with having *two* major mental illnesses running around inside my head (bipolar disorder and schizophrenia)..plus a couple other less-serious mental illnesses that are just there as icing on the cake, baby —*icing on the cake*.

A universally-held concept about craziness is that ~crazy people don't know they're crazy~ Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe I'm not. But I can't deny perhaps the most insidious feature of mania which is **not knowing you're manic**.



This disease impairs your self-perception. It impairs your judgment. It impairs your logic. Ask anyone who's been suicidal if they've ever thought: *My family would be better off without me*. Now if your family could hear you say that, they would surround you with hugs and do everything in their power to convince you that

that's not true. But it doesn't matter. It's a depressional delusion that doesn't respond to logic! It's nonsense in your brain *that you can't detect.* The idea that *you're not manic* is a delusion if you're manic—but just like *my family would be better off,* there is no way a delusional person can think their way out of that thought. That is why I have no hesitation calling myself crazy—because “mentally ill” doesn't really sum up someone who is causing major social problems, can't see the majority perspective, does not care about the majority perspective, anyone else's feelings, their own health, or even their own life. That is fucking *crazy.*

And that's what I am. So much so that I have become unhirable because I don't give a fuck about corporate rules. I am not welcome at family functions because I don't give a fuck about cultural rules. I believe in basic morality, but beyond that, I think every last one of you motherfuckers is full of shit. What you call social graces I call lying to yourself. And I'll let you know that any time and in any way that I feel. Some people call that *crazy.* I call it *freedom.* What good are all your jewels if all your jewels are fake?

I'd rather have a single flawless diamond than a hundred-thousand fake ones. I am willing to lose my job to refuse to illegally copy Photoshop—that decision's easy. Do you think that my housing, clothing, food, water, placement in society, ability to live in a certain city is worth obeying a boss who asks me to break a basic, common moral? Hardly. I'll keep my moral, you can take the house. Do you think it's worth losing your job to simply state that your manager has stolen your idea and publicly taken credit as if it were his? Oh I've died on that hill and I'd do it again. Right is right. You don't get to say *my* idea is *your* idea—that's what I call a lie.

But all this? All that comes before? That is manic, I suppose. Just as it's manic to come *this close* to packing a backpack and walking out of your life, just cabbing it to the airport, getting on a plane, and going.

That is manic.

And I've been using every tool at my disposal to determine when this current mania started, if it's still going on, and when it

ends. I've recently come to think that I've been manic and delusional *a lot more than I ever imagined* when I was first diagnosed with bipolar. It's like coming out of the Matrix: takes a while to realize the full gravity of your situation. Except it's not like that. It's like if somebody told you about the Matrix *while you were still in it* and *expected you to believe*. According to many psychiatrists, I have a lot more insight into my illness than most other bipolar patients they've seen. This is a curse. I look back on things I did when I was drinking and now that I'm not drinking I still do them and I say: *Is that mania?* Is feeling you have the right to tell someone off *to the level of grinding them into sand*..mania? Because if you fall below the line which I have designated as "respectable human being," I treat you with a whole new set of rules. I will use every power in my arsenal to get under your skin in a way that I may leave, but what I said never will. And when I do this, when I snap my fingers in assholes' faces, tell classmates if they don't stop blocking my view of a screen that I'm going to *kick their fucking ass*, when I go after you in text or vocally I am a litigator crossed with the devil AND IT GETS ME HIGH and I LIKE IT and suddenly I find myself not caring about the emotional component of my mother or my aunt and I'll tell them all the anti-social truths that are lying in my belly waiting to come out.

Know how I know they're truths? Because if they thought I was just crazy, they'd blow me off. But that's not what happens. They cry. They stop talking to me for days. They stop talking to me *forever*. In my uncle's case, he gets mad back..and on my end of the comment war, regardless of what I'm saying, I'm just laughing and laughing and laughing at a dotard like my uncle *squirm*. I GET JOY OUT OF FUCKING WITH PEOPLE. And I know that's not right. It's just part of how I entertain myself on a bipolar high.

Does that sound like someone you'd want to live with?

Well, recently, my mother decided *no*.

When I said I didn't trust her to objectively help me, that I didn't trust that she was always on *my* side, that hurt her deeply. I can understand that, a son saying that to his mother, who has been

with me from the beginning, from before I can remember, who carried me in her body—*that's how much on my side* she is.

So now we need to “come up with a long-term plan for me that is different than living with” my mom. She doesn't feel she can go on business trips because she can't safely leave me alone—and my therapist agrees. At the beginning of this year my mom was going on week-long trips, three-day trips, leaving me at our other apartment, and everything was fine. People think I'm worse now. There is a suggestion of a new diagnosis—but it was never that surprising. To go from Bipolar I Disorder, Most Recent Episode Manic and Psychosis NOS or Bipolar Disorder with Psychotic Features to Bipolar-Type Schizoaffective Disorder is not a long trip. They're practically synonyms. But whatever the diagnosis, I'm getting in the way of my mother's life and she thinks I need to live somewhere there is a caretaker on-site 24 hours a day—and she's probably right.

At first when I heard this news I was open, listening, taking notes and not forming opinions or responding. I just listened to my mom.

In therapy today Lea and I talked about what Mom said and she started straight away to solve the problem. My therapist is efficient. She doesn't tell me what she's thinking always but if I say something she's thinking she confirms it, knowing that that's the moment I am ready to take action. So Lea is researching group homes in Nashville and if that doesn't work then we decided, balancing our *Feeling* with *Thinking* from our ENF* **Myers-Briggs types**, that Lea would contact my youngest sister in Portland and look for group homes there—because that is the city where I have the most family. I felt hope and support in my therapy session. I liked that Mom had stated this as a “long-term plan,” meaning she isn't kicking me out on my ass tonight. That feels loving and accepting and realistic and, also, if I were kicked out on my ass tonight, after the life I've lived up to this point, I probably would do something like what I did do once before: give up on all my family and friends and move to a city where no one knew where I was, to protect myself from further damage from the people who

are supposed to love me the most. You have to understand, I am completely unhinged at this point. I am willing to move to a secret city, I am willing to be homeless, I am willing to show up at a psych hospital of my choice and lie and say I'm suicidal and keep saying I'm suicidal so they never release me so I'd at least have food to eat and a place to stay. I would hate to do that because it would take up a bed for someone who needed the help more than me, but for my own survival, I would do it. But that's not the case. It's a long-term plan, and Lea said we would find short-term stopgaps to get from here to the long-term goal of me, a 37-year-old mentally ill, officially disabled human being living in a "group home"—something I have never seen and can hardly conceive of.

Leaving therapy, on the way to the grocery store, I felt fear. I imagined myself in a room with seven other guys, sleeping in bunks like a hostel, never being able to sleep with everybody snoring. I started to fear that I would not be safe in a group home—that people would hurt me bodily or steal my stuff. And I feared that a group home might not have internet. Which is a first-world fear, to be sure, but I am a first-world citizen, and offline docs won't cut it—I use the internet to look up word definitions and connotations 50 to 100 times a day, besides general research, blogging, Tweeting, emailing, and all the other stuff that is *essential* for a writer and thinker to be able to do. I was fearing what I don't understand. I told my mom that if they put me in a place where I felt physically unsafe, I'd be gone the first night. Secret city. Homelessness. Whatever. She said we'd make the decision together, and my little freakout subsided (thankfully, instead of growing into a bigger freakout) and we each shopped for groceries, in our separate carts.

Mental illness: wow. I used to have the best apartment in Hollywood, the best apartment in Dayton, cars, furniture, dishes and shit like that. I had relationships, girlfriends, friends, went to parties, hung out at people's houses, went camping, had great jobs (great in the sense that they paid a lot of money). Now, even though I have the skill set, companies that need software developers won't hire me. For one, I have to lie down to type—

what kind of office can accommodate that? But most of all, I'm not normal enough, mentally, mentally conforming enough, to interface with culturalized people. Culture is the enemy, make no mistake.

If it's not the enemy of truth, as I believe, then it is certainly the enemy of me. I had a high school history teacher side with the *entirety* of her class, all these eleventh graders who vehemently said the KKK did not have the right to hold a peaceful protest in Dayton's Courthouse Square. My friend Tuesday and I were looking at each other like: *Are we in The Twilight Zone?* And I was the *only* person in that class to raise my hand and explain that in the United States, First Amendment protections cover most speech regardless of whether you agree with it or not. That teacher should have backed me up. She didn't. That class was full of ignorant children who didn't understand the Constitution—they have grown up into ignorant teenagers and ignorant adults and ignorant old people and they are my neighbors and grandmother and uncle and boss and *they are culture* and *culture is my enemy*. The people that stay at companies are the people that keep their mouths shut. The people who get fired from companies are the people who don't fit in with the culture! I'm not wrong!—I'm just different. Remember in *Minority Report*? You gotta remember this one little thing in that movie to understand our culture, and that is that the minority report is right. Not *can be* right. *Is* right.

I don't imagine you will dispute the fact that at present the stupid people are in an absolutely overwhelming majority all the world over.

—Henrik Ibsen

The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widely spread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible.

—Bertrand Russell, *Marriage and Morals*

The only tyrant I accept in this world is the “still small voice” within me. And even though I have to face the prospect of being a minority of one, I humbly believe I have the courage to be in such a hopeless minority.

—Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*

I never feel unsafe except for when the majority is on my side.

—Criss Jami

Do you find my placement of these quotes to indicate a feeling of moral superiority on my part? That could be a sign of mania. Do you ever feel you are dealing with a more high-powered human than you, when you see me, when you read me? That’s grandiosity—a sign of mania. I am undoubtedly sick in a handful of ways—I am also undoubtedly very very well in a couple of handfuls of areas. But, basically, socially, you can’t handle me. So the government gives me almost enough money to survive—but not quite!—and I will be packed away in a group home if we can find one that will take me. I feel freed up by the proposition, frankly—I enjoyed the company of every permanent resident of my first psych hospital (in Los Angeles) more than I’ve ever enjoyed the company of any one of the BSs or PhDs or CEOs of the many immoral, innovation-free companies I worked for in my software career. My last significant job falling apart was one of the great blessings of my life. I didn’t have the heart to try to work for another software company after that one, so I spent more time writing. I am a consummate programmer—a perfect programmer—but a lifetime of my programming work wouldn’t be worth a single one of the books that I’ve written. I have work now that is meaningful to me where before I did not. I get to work alone, to not have swine foul my elegant constructions with their idiotic grasping gooping trails of shit, coming from their mouths and their asses in equal pace. I will never have a supervisor again in this life, or any other. I will never again have a boss. I am a much larger person than they—and they require smaller people to work under them. Psychologically,

the hats I once wore with family and company and school..will never fit again. My head is shaved and without cover, and I will take my laptop and my disability and my suspect phone and I will write books whether it be in a homeless shelter in Brattleboro, Vermont or a group home in Nashville, Tennessee. Society rejects me? Relocates me? Repurposes me? I can't blame you. I have wanted to do the same to you since I was born.

What it's like to have bipolar

There are a million listings of the symptoms, and you can read them a million times, but without storyline concrete examples, especially if you have **bipolar disorder** yourself, it's hard to look at those symptom lists and diagnostic criteria and translate that into the question *Do I have bipolar?* or *Does my friend have bipolar?*

One of the most helpful things to do, if you want to understand bipolar disorder from an experiential rather than a clinical point of view, is read bipolar people's blogs. I recommend **Being Mentally Interesting** and **Nicole For Real** as the top two blogs to read / watch if you want to move past understanding this disorder from the textbooks into understanding it from a *people* point of view.

First, what are the textbook symptoms? The best listing of symptoms I know of come from the **Brain & Behavior Research Foundation** website. Years ago I found **this PDF pamphlet** from their website, on bipolar disorder, that is still my go-to reference when I want to remind myself of the symptoms that define bipolar. Before we go into my experiential list of stories and examples, take a look at **their list of objective signs and symptoms**:

Mania Signs and Symptoms

- Increased energy, activity, restlessness
- Euphoric mood
- Extreme irritability
- Poor concentration
- Racing thoughts, fast talking, jumping between ideas
- Sleeplessness

- Heightened sense of self-importance
- Spending sprees
- Increased sexual behavior
- Abuse of drugs, such as cocaine, alcohol and sleeping medications
- Provocative, intrusive or aggressive behavior
- Denial that anything is wrong

Depression Signs

- Sad, anxious or empty-feeling mood
- Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Restlessness and irritability
- Sleeplessness or sleeping too much
- Change in appetite, unintended weight loss or gain
- Bodily symptoms not caused by physical illness or injury
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Those are well chosen, clearly stated signs and symptoms. But what does it really *look* like to have bipolar disorder? The two blogs I listed above are excellent—I recommend / watching them from the first post to the last. That alone will give you a serious education on what bipolar looks like—how it embodies itself—in just two people out of the millions of people who have the disorder. The only thing I have left to offer is to give you some examples from my own life.

- Once, on a whim, I quit a very nice (\$80k in 2003) job and moved across the country to live in a tent in my friend's back yard. I've quit other jobs "for no reason" when in manic states.

- I've often worn dress code-inappropriate clothing to work: one red shoe and one blue shoe and flamboyant (clubbing) shirts to formal office environments. I just didn't care. It was an expression of me. And to me, it is clear that wearing khakis to work doesn't make you a better programmer—most of society, however, is confused on this matter. I can out-program you on an Etch A Sketch—what I'm wearing is completely irrelevant! I also interviewed for a job while tripping on LSD (they made me an offer, of course—it was like I knew what the interviewer was going to say before he said it!) and I've been to work many times rolling on ecstasy.
- I have told people off, in writing and in person, briefly and at length. It doesn't matter who you are. You can be a peer, subordinate, boss, or CEO. If I disagree with you and I think you're actively working against my own personal progress in life, and you don't respect me and my needs, I don't give a fuck who you are, I will melt you down into the constituent elements of your planetary origin. Call this a combination of the "extreme irritability" and "heightened sense of self-importance" symptoms of mania listed above. (Once, this pipsqueak in Vermont touched my personal iPad that was on my work desk in the office and I laid into him, and into him, and into his monkey ass until he went from standing and responding to my remarks, to sitting in his desk chair quietly learning the cost of interrupting me, to finally getting up and leaving the office. The next day, with the boss present, this guinea pig fart meekly apologized—because he knew, in front of the boss, he had to. But he smiled when he did it, and you better believe I gave him, the boss, and the rest of that flimsy office an earful on my doubts as to the sincerity of this dude's apology since he smirked when he said it. Best if boundary-crossing motherfuckers like that fucktard—or drunk power-tripping jerk-offs in my family who

spout racist terms like “ni***r pu**y”—best if those folks never come face to face with me again. I’ll never hit ya, but you better believe I’ll litigate your dumb ass until you and everyone who’s ever met you is bleeding from the ears.)

- I’ve abandoned three apartments. Just gave up my home and my possessions because I was in a manic state and didn’t think I needed them anymore.
- I’ve abandoned two cars. Just got it into my head that I could not drive them anymore, and left them behind. I was unable to get to work after this, because I had no transportation.
- I’ve telephoned both the NSA and CIA, believing I had unique and amazing software that was going to save my country from spies. (I did not.)
- I’ve “threatened” suicide at work—to me it seems I was just having a realistic discussion about the state of affairs inside my mind and about the pointlessness of our workplace. This cost me time off work and the respect of my co-workers (which is worth less than nothing to me).
- I have bought hundreds of glow sticks (all that were available in the camping sections of several stores) which I then passed out to everyone dancing at a nightclub. Spending money like this damaged me. But we had a whole lot of fun. Notice the extravagance, though—I think this is a hallmark of mania. I never asked myself why my friends didn’t do things like this—I just assumed, on a very deep level, that they lacked the creativity or imagination to think up such fun things to do.

- In an attempt to get a gallery show, I mailed the contents of my kitchen (as well as original art) to a New York art dealer. I even sent my spice rack. I couldn't function in my own kitchen because I had given away all my dishes.
But I had a great time going back and forth from my apartment to the FedEx store to buy tons of packing materials and markers, new scissors, everything you can think of—I was on a spending spree at the FedEx store!!!!
- Back at a time when I used to sell paintings I had made, in a manic state I gave away all my unsold artwork to people I hardly knew—because those people liked those paintings. At the time I could think of no better reason to give someone something for free—frankly this logic persists with me today.
- When I've gotten out of hospital after a suicide attempt, I could be as **expansive as this** or as **paralyzed as this**.
- During my first mania I know about, I didn't sleep for a week. During this last mania that I'm just now slowly coming out of, I've been sleeping 2-4 hours a night *for six weeks*. During four of those weeks, I wrote about 600 pages of a memoir. That is way above my normal level of output which is (or was) 200-400 pages *a year*. I hardly remember doing any of that writing, even though I was over a year sober and was "only" taking prescription drugs.
- During this last mania, I was unaware that I was fully manic. It took *six* professionals and my mom deciding she wouldn't live with me anymore before I started to have some awareness that I was manic. This is perhaps the most devastating thing about bipolar illness—as my friends and I like to joke, bipolar is the illness where, by the time you get your first diagnosis, you've already destroyed your life.

I've gotten feedback about being bipolar from others throughout my life.

In the tenth grade, my friend Tuesday said, *I think you're bipolar*, and I said, *Ha ha ha, I don't even know what bipolar means but it sounds like a mental problem and my mind works just fine!*

In college, everyone in my dorm called me "Crazy Matt." I thought *Ha ha ha, Crazy Matt, you just think I'm crazy because you're all bumps on a log, or you think it's funny I don't use a comb, or you're calling me that as a compliment because we're all in college and we're all crazy now!!!*

Often people love to be around bipolar people—especially when we're hypomanic—our family, friends, lovers, strangers, coworkers..they love our boundless creativity and brilliant invention. They are energized by our excitement about projects and life.

They are also frightened by our suicidal pessimism and nihilism.

We say things that inspire people.

We say things that scare the shit out of them.

Having bipolar is living in another world. It's sort of like almost everyone has been freed from the Matrix and 1% of us are still living there and the rest of you are pleading with us to be realistic, to see where our thoughts and feelings veer off the realistic track. But to us, everything we feel and think seems totally real—and it is real in our minds.

But all along, for our whole lives, everyone around us is giving us feedback that we're bipolar..we have an illness..we have to take medicine and special precautions or we will lose our lives completely. The feedback is there. Whether we're able to listen is another matter.

**The fake narrative in my head that my body
uses to trick me into doing what it wants me
to do**

When I was done using the toilet, a spider lowered herself from a vent in the ceiling all the way through midair and down onto the toilet lid. She looked around a little, then lifted herself back up through the air on the ceiling of the bathroom.

Of course I'm not a spider mindreader, but I imagined (at the very least) that none of this action was heavily taxing on this spider's mind. She didn't seem concerned about any of it—she just did it. And these amazing creatures have—I assume they must have—some sort of thread factory inside them, that either makes liquid that is turned into thread at the last minute or that actually *makes thread and stores it somehow*—amazing. This is to say nothing of their making of webs.

And when I saw that spider move around such a large area in my bathroom with such [seeming] ease, I thought about one of the things I agonize about: art. I think of art now as something I do on a schedule—something I do not remember doing as a child. I remember we had these easels my mom and dad made, and they had clips at the top to hold paper and a tray at the bottom to hold paint and when we (me and my sister) wanted to paint we just went to the easel and painted. I distinctly remember that there was no angst associated with it (except maybe when one of our parents told us it was time to stop). However now I am acutely aware of the chapter number I am on, in the book I am currently editing. I am aware of a verbal commitment or estimate I have given my collaborator on this book of when I will finish this draft. I'm not extremely stressed about it or anything, but when I saw that spider this morning, I thought: *I bet she isn't feeling angst about what she's doing right now.*

Maybe I'm wrong—descending from ceiling to floor might be scary for that spider. Animals who are hunting their next meal surely feel some emotion or at least the rush of adrenaline. A lion must feel happy when she gets to eat something she had to chase down to catch? I would bet strongly that other animals feel anxiety. Some snakes attempt to eat themselves when they get hungry enough—that seems pretty angsty!!

But then it struck me that making art, like making love, like making spider silk, like catching a gazelle, is just one more function of the body. I think of it as a function of the mind, but that's not right. I'll never be pregnant or give birth to a baby (as far as we now know) but as far as I know the woman doesn't pick the delivery date—it just happens, roughly at the right time, *as a function of the body*. Equally, while yes, there is some anxiety associated with making love (sometimes), most of the time it just happens for us *as a function of the body* (including the mind). No one has to teach you to make love—our bodies just figure it out. It's natural. And as I *just know* that when I finish this post, I'm going to return to editing my current book, I consider this morning that art, too, is simply *a function of the body*. I mean look at all the art people make—maybe not as much art as spiders make webs, but there's a lot of art. It's like all our art forms are not even a thing of effort so much as they are *a natural function* of the human mind / body.

I don't really *decide* when to take a break from writing. I don't really *decide* when to start up again. It's outside of my consciousness just as much as taking a nap. I mean, yes, sometimes we consciously decide (or consciously know) that we're going to take a nap, but I've been observing myself especially over the past five years or so when I've been out of a job and outside of the job schedule, that sometimes, without thinking, my body just walks to my bed and lies down and takes a nap. And usually I'm not thinking, "Oh, I'll take a nap." My consciousness is actually quite confused about what I'm doing. It says, "I'm going to lie down and send some texts." I decide it would be more comfortable to lie down than stand up. I plan on lying down *for a few minutes*.

That is not my body's plan!

My body *convinces me* to lie down by telling me: *Convince him that he's going to do some texting and it would be more comfortable while lying down*. When, really, the whole time, my body is planning to take a nap. Or: maybe it's not *planning*, but *it knows* I need to take a nap, and it has me do the right things that will lead to me taking a nap. I'm not in control! My body is!

Same with making love, making a spider's web, making art! When it's time for me to return to writing, I will—regardless of the commitments I make to my writing partner, myself, the internet. Ditto making love. I remember one of the most ridiculous statements I ever made. It was Christmas Eve. I was in Hollywood pretending that I had gone to the ArcLight to watch their midnight showing of *Gremlins*. But I wasn't in the theater watching the movie. I was at the bar—because my body told me what to do—and I was telling funny stories about how to get the best food in LA you had to go to the most dangerous neighborhoods and I was *attracting attention*—because my body told me to. Because I wasn't there to watch *Gremlins*. I was there to meet someone to have sex with. Those funny stories weren't my idea—they were coming from my mind/body, much deeper than my conscious level. And some time later, I found myself making out with a costume designer in a parking lot next to my car and here's where I said one of the most ridiculous statements in my life. I said (to ease this woman's anxiety about getting into a car with a total stranger): "We don't have to do anything. Just come home with me. We can just tell each other stories and fall asleep." It was as ridiculous a statement as, "I'm just going to lie down for a few minutes and do some texting." Yeah right, you're taking a nap, buddy. And the second—I mean the second—we were inside my room, this girl was taking her clothes off. Our bodies wanted to fuck. They made us do a complicated series of actions that led to us fucking. Going to a midnight showing of *Gremlins*, for example: you either go to that with your friends or partners, or you go alone, and if you go alone, 99% of you didn't go there to watch the movie (that's just what you told yourself to get there). If you're sitting at the bar while the film is playing, then you definitely didn't go there to watch a movie—you went there to meet someone!

There's this extremely complex and often totally misleading conscious narrative that goes on with people. When underneath we are like the spider—doing complex acrobatics totally naturally without giving them much thought. A mother and a baby know when it is time to separate. People just make love—I mean yeah a

few people force it but mostly *it just happens*. Very little conscious effort is required. And it's a good thing, too, because if making babies relied on the decisions made at the highest levels of human consciousness, I doubt our species would be populating. I mean don't you *just know*?—know who to fuck, who to befriend, what food to put in your mouth. When it's time to paint? To write? I do. And I'm gonna go edit those chapters.

“The proof is in the pudding.”

One of my favorite sayings is “The proof is in the pudding.”

It's derived from the saying, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating,” a proverb that means “the real value of something **can be judged only from practical experience** or results and not from appearance or theory.”

Um. But. To me it means something else.

According to NPR and everyone else on the internet, this adage originally meant “that you had to try out food to know whether it was good.”

Think about it slightly differently, though: If that pudding tastes good, what is it proof *of*? Of the pudding? Well, yes, but that's kind of an abortive way to look at it. It's proof of the cook's *skills*. If you taste the pudding and it's good, then you have proven that the cook has skills.

The proof of the quality of the chef is in the pudding, that's what the pudding is proof of. And it's saying that if you can't deny the pudding, you can't deny the chef. It's saying that the way to judge a chef is by his pudding, and if he makes good pudding, that's the best proof of the worth of the chef that you're likely to find.

I mean that's what the chef does: he makes pudding. So if his pudding is good, then *he* is good.

Let me throw out another adage and then I'll make my point real quick.

“Leave well enough alone.”

Or: “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.”

Or, less commonly, the concept of *never change a running system*.

People are jealous. People are cruel. When I was in film school, about halfway through, I called my sister and I said, "Suzanne, the better I do in class, the better my films get, the less people will talk *to* me, the more shit people talk *about* me, and it's getting kind of lonely over here in Hollywood!"

Suzanne said, "Well, brother, the proof is in the pudding." And she proceeded to explain to me what I simply already knew but needed reminding. It doesn't really matter what people say about you as long as your films are the best. When your work is impeccable, people's commentary is worth less and less and less. The proof is in the pudding. I got the highest SAT score in my class: that's its own statement. No further commentary from me or anyone else, encouraging or discouraging, befriending or alienating, is going to change the most important fact, which is that *the pudding is dope*.

The proof is in the pudding.

It's not in the comments section, the reviews, the shit talk.

The only thing that matters is the pudding.

Now I'm going to talk about myself, my mental strengths and weaknesses, and I'm going to talk about the treatment of mental illness, and then I'm going to stop.

This is from [a post I wrote](#) about 12 years ago:

..for all their ability to generate ideas about who I am and what I should be, no one else has near the qualifications I have to actually be me. That is solely my department. And, as me, it is my luxury to decide, in each moment, exactly what I like best, what activities I think suit me best, and what I'll do. How inconsistent it is for someone else to say, "I think that someone as smart and talented as yourself, someone even smarter and more talented than me, shouldn't waste your time on x,y,z." When someone says that (and I have heard it often), I think: "What makes you think that my smartness and talent, which you recognize are greater than your own, would be less informed than yours and less able than

yours to make decisions about what I do?" How strange it is, indeed, to say such things, but people say them all the time. "That Mozart: I really liked his music, but did he really have to write backwards poems about his incest-cousin's feces?" "That Jean-Michel Basquiat, he's a freaking genius..I really wish he hadn't been so into heroin." If those guys are such geniuses, why does anyone think they made the wrong choices by fucking their cousin and injecting heroin?

You see what I'm saying, right? A person is a whole picture, and you can't say, *Monet, I love these **haystacks**, but what's up with the green shadows? Shadows aren't green—are they?* The green shadows are part of the masterpiece. If you can recognize it as a masterpiece, then take one step further and *shut your fucking mouth*. Monet is the genius, not you. He's the painter, not you.

So, call this grandiose if you like, but I'm one of the the most accomplished people in my biological families on both sides, of everyone in those families who is currently alive. I'm up there with my sister Amy, who is a multit talented crafter—she made a backpack for my nephew that is of higher quality than any similar thing I've ever seen in a store. I'm up there with my sister Suzanne, who is one of only three people I've ever met who are true polymaths in the sense of being skilled to a genius level in many areas. I'll just give one example: Suzanne can copy a Botticelli and I mean it's so perfect she could pursue a career as a forger if she wanted to. Not just bragging bc this is my sister—and I have a high visual acuity. Her Botticelli copy is *perfect*—every proportion correct, every shade correct. It is unlike the drawing ability of anyone else I have ever seen. And visual art isn't even a main area of focus for her. She has other things she does *better*. I'm up there with my cousin Joel, who won a grant to travel to India to do research on the caste system. He won not just by the fantastic content of his application essay, but also by the fact that he wrote the entire thing in Hindi. I'm up there with my cousin Kristi, who writes hundreds of thousands of words a year—one of several extended family members who have written multiple books. I've

written 11. I can't even go into the interpersonal and psychological skills of my mom—but she's a preacher and one of the very best I've ever heard—and she doesn't even think she's that good of a preacher. My point here is not to compare—it's to say I'm in good company. My family is very smart and very sick.

I'm the perfect-score guy. I can make films that every teacher in the school says, *This is the best thesis film of anyone in the class. I may not understand your films, but when I watch them, I say: Now that's a filmmaker.* I can bring a computer program into a code review in a Fortune 500 company and a team of people with way more schooling than I ever plan to have look over my C code with intellects like lice combs and can find *nothing* wrong—they have *nothing* to say except things like, *I never thought of doing it that way before.* I'm smart and a hard worker—on average a programmer writes 10 lines of code a day..on my best days I write 1,000. A 200-page novel has about 50,000 words. This is the last day of 2015 and in 2015 I wrote approximately 627,000 words on two memoirs.

Those are some mental strengths. Here are some mental weaknesses.

I have bipolar I, psychosis (hallucinations and delusions), **tardive dyskinesia** (a brain-based movement disorder), obsessive-compulsive disorder. I have to lie down 23 hours a day to quell the uncontrollable muscle movements of TD. I'm a drug addict and alcoholic. I'm impolite. I'm angry. I categorize people in uncompassionate ways. If you have slipped below the line of "respectable human" in my mind, I will treat you horribly and get high doing it. I'm a *best friend, worst enemy* kind of person. I'm very sick in a lot of ways.

Those are some weaknesses.

Now let's talk about the treatment of mental illness. A few years ago I wrote **a longer, technical description** of one way to balance the goal of treating disorder such that you help a sufferer of illness without ruining the benefits they're providing to themselves and to society—some of which are *because of* their mental conditions. Apparently I still think this idea is important and I

don't expect that everyone will want to read my more technical thoughts about it so I'm going to try to summarize, colorfully, here:

1. Treatment should be a bad word.

Do I really mean that? No, but that's the way I'm going to get to what I mean. If you are a doctor, and you are looking at a disordered person, and your sole thought is: *How do I get this person ordered?* then you are doing a very very bad job as a doctor.

The reasons why should be obvious.

Have you ever tried to garden? It's a real mess, isn't it.

There are weeds growing everywhere and plants crossing over into the areas of other plants and cats eating your tomatoes and—you know—basically it's a real good example of the universe as a whole, what little we know of it. We know that it's chaos, though, and we know that a certain type of chaos is needed for life. And for art. And for science. Have you ever heard the quote, "A clean desk is a sign of a sick mind?"—It's a bastardization of something Einstein said. The point is, some really smart people have messy desks. It's just part of how they work. And if some MBA at some company decides to make a rule that all the desks have to be cleaned, well, that's like a doctor saying: *Let's get this person ordered.* Extremely bad idea. You have to respect, in gardening, that you are not in control. You *tend* a garden—you do not *make* it grow.

Most of us think that, with some types of suffering, a person should have the option to treat their suffering so they can enjoy life more. Bipolar disorder is often unpleasant, sometimes fatal, expensive to society as a whole—so it's a prime candidate for treatment. But with bipolar in particular, it would be unwise to treat it completely, expunge it from society. **Kay Redfield Jamison**, psychiatrist, specialist in bipolar disorder, and person with bipolar disorder, says this:

Manic-depression distorts moods and thoughts, incites dreadful behaviors, destroys the basis of rational thought, and too often erodes the desire and will to live. It is an illness that is biological in

its origins, yet one that feels psychological in the experience of it, an illness that is unique in conferring advantage and pleasure, yet one that brings in its wake almost unendurable suffering and, not infrequently, suicide.

—Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind*

That's a lot of doom and gloom with just the sliver of a silver lining, and I think she has those proportions right—mostly for me (in terms of societal metrics) bipolar has been about clashing with people at my jobs, quitting jobs, getting fired from jobs, constantly moving around the country for no reason, being homeless, losing almost all of my friends and family relationships because after a while we find each other intolerable, losing all of my money, apartments, furniture, and cars, being more prone to drink and drug, and feeling lost, lonely, and suicidal—oh and it's also been about actually attempting suicide and spending a shitload of time in mental hospitals. And on the silver lining side, it has been a little about being able to work more acutely and for much longer periods of time on projects than my supposed peers, about feeling carefree and euphoric for periods here and there, about feeling life so deeply that the power of a great painting or a Grand Canyon induces tears, about having a natural ability to inspire other people (until they try to take advantage of my energy and light and generosity at which point they become subhuman to me and I treat them that way).

So I'm a rough customer. On the one hand, I'll walk into your office full of junior programmers and tell them that the work they're producing is so bad that I think killing myself would be an option preferable to continuing to work alongside them. On the other hand, when you have a problem to solve on some software product written in a language that no one in the office has ever worked with (including me), I'm the guy you come to..and I work from noon to night until your problem is *fixed*—that's what I do.

When it comes to software, when I arrive, your problems go away.

My simple point, which I have cleverly disguised as the title of this post, is simply this: *The proof is in the pudding.*

If I can fix hard bugs in a software language I don't even know, and I have the loyalty to stay late and focus on that problem until it's solved (and solved well) then there's your pudding. Pick it up. Get your spoon. Put a nice smooth bite of that pudding in your mouth and taste how good it is.

Now, try to find a chef who can make pudding *that good*, who speaks politely, has no rough edges, likes to take it up the ass from middle management, and isn't going to negotiate the highest salary possible *every single year*. You can keep looking, bro!! —'cause there ain't no chefs like that.

I'm disabled now. As in: according to the US government, I cannot work any job. My psychiatrist has ordered me not to drive. My mother drives me to doctors' appointments, therapy, the grocery store. And sometimes I hear a sympathy or even a pity from people I meet about my circumstance. And I appreciate their love, their care—I do. That is a wonderful thing we do for each other in life.

But the pity is not necessary.

Maybe I just watched too much *MacGyver* as a kid, but I believe that as long as I've got the psychological equivalent of a Swiss Army knife, I can get out of any situation, as my childhood hero did. MacGyver worked with whatever he had on hand. That guy was not sitting around fretting like, *Gee, I wish I had a stick of dynamite*. Make one, motherfucker!! And he did.

And so do I.

I make an inventory of what I can still do. I can type as long as I'm lying down. Ok, good, check. I still have an imagination. I can still observe the world. Good, check. I can still write. *Check*. And lucky me: that's my favorite thing to do.

Writing is my favorite thing to do. I get to do it every day. How many people can say that about their life?

I am disabled. I am also massively abled. I have disorders. I am also massively ordered: I ordered half a million words this year.

But there are people I meet who seem to think my life is somehow ruined just because I have a *few major mental illnesses*.

Obviously these people never watched *MacGyver*! Did they (and yes, here I'll be comparing my life to theirs)..did *they* write 627,000 words this year? No. *No one* that I know wrote that much this year. *No one* that I've ever met has written 11 books. (And knock on aluminum that I'll live long enough to write many more.)

There is something inverted about anyone pitying me. I'm not just the winner of a Richard Dean Anderson look-alike contest—I'm fucking MacGyver, people! *I'm* the *hero* of *my* television show—you be the hero of yours! Is the situation that these pitiers' lives are something *I* should envy and *my* life is something *they* should lament? I have to laugh! The situation is more like: I have more talent and resources and ingenuity and hope and persistence than they do and *I* feel sorry for *them*—not for their lives—but for their thinking that, compared to *them*, *I'm* disabled.

Three types of hallucinations

These are three types of hallucinations. I'm not an expert. I haven't studied this shit. It just occurs to me, having hallucinated under a few different circumstances, that these three categories are significant.

1. **Decidable hallucinations**—This is the type of hallucination you have when you take a reasonable amount of LSD or psychedelic mushrooms or whatever other first-rate hallucinatory substance you choose. Patterns appear. *Alice in Wonderland*-type shit happens like you get stuck in a small corner of a room, thinking it's a whole huge world of its own, and instead of feeling cramped you feel like that corner is gigantic. Then you stand up and survey the entire room and from your new vantage point the room looks small—manageable, like you can understand the whole thing at once even though it's really quite large (or used to be). When you walk down a brick street, the bricks don't look like they're all roughly the same color of deep red. They look like the bricks that would cover Sesame Street. All the colors you

see around you are painted with an ultra-bright version of the Crayola basic box of eight. Nothing is solid—it's like your ceiling consists of tectonic plates. Those are all hallucinations, but they're decidable—you know they're hallucinations—you can *decide: This is a hallucination.*

Yes, you're hallucinating, but *you know that you are* and you pretty much know, of what you're experiencing, what is a hallucination and what is not.

2. **Undecidable hallucinations**—Graduate to level 2:

Undecidable hallucinations. This is when you are aware of something potentially unreal and you're able to ask the question: *Is this a hallucination?* But you can't answer the question. You experience something and something leads you to question whether the experience was real or hallucinated, but you're tripping so hard, or you're so manic, that you cannot figure out whether the experience is real or not. If it's visual, it's not like a level 1 decidable hallucination that looks like a Grateful Dead poster. No.

It looks like reality. There's no visual cue that it might be unreal. You might have some crack in the belief that this thing is real—for instance someone else might be telling you *they're* not experiencing it. But you yourself cannot determine whether you're hallucinating or not.

And this means that all of reality is in question, because if one aspect of your photo-realistic, sound-realistic, tactile-realistic, smell- and taste-realistic world is possibly a hallucination, then you have to admit that any and every aspect of your experiential world may be unreal—you just might not have been given any clues that those other pieces of your world are hallucinations and so you are trusting them without question. My first experience of a level 2 undecidable hallucination was when I was tripping on mushrooms with a friend. I tripped once and then tripped again, right after, and the second time I didn't think I was tripping at all because

there was nothing that seemed different from my normal apartment, my normal experience. I figured the mushrooms hadn't affected me because my brain needed a refractory period which I hadn't given it, so I wasn't tripping. My friend came over during my second trip and I realized I was *so* wrong. She was so happy a tear came from her eye. I said something about the tear and she wiped it away. Then she wiped her cheek again and the tear—a 100% photo-realistic dimensional tear—reappeared on her cheek, without her having cried it.

She did this several times, wiping her face, making the tear disappear and re-appear, and I realized with a shock that something about this experience was hallucinatory (it was shocking because it didn't "look like" a hallucination—before that moment I always thought hallucinations were safe, that they would look trippy and fantastical, not like straight-up reality). I don't know what the reality was—I don't think my friend does, either. What I know is that I saw something that looked perfectly real (the tear) which was appearing under impossible circumstances. This was undecidable in the sense that I knew something was off, so I was questioning at all what was real and what was not real about what I was seeing..but, still, undecidable in the sense that I could not determine if she was wiping away a real tear, if I was hallucinating the tear all the way through the experience, or what. I just don't know.

3. **Unknown hallucinations**—With the first two levels of hallucination (and all this could probably apply to delusion as well—so, psychosis in general)..in the first two levels of hallucination, you are aware on some level that you are hallucinating. You either know that you have a mental illness that includes psychosis or you remember taking LSD earlier in the evening and you connect that memory with the hallucinations you are

experiencing now. You do things specifically to play with your hallucinating state: watch scary movies and see if they're scarier! Sit in the hallway and stare at the wallpaper for an hour. You know you're tripping on some hallucinogen or you know you're mentally ill or you know you've suffered some sort of brain injury and you remember that *reason why you might be hallucinating*.

Not so in level 3: Unknown hallucinations. With unknown hallucinations or psychosis, you don't remember that you took mushrooms (because you took too much), or you're in a psychotic state due to bipolar disorder, or you have schizophrenia, depression, or some other mental illness that causes psychosis and you either never got diagnosed with this illness or your diagnosis isn't currently registered with your brain (you forgot)—and in all these cases you are so psychotic that you don't even know who the fuck you are..you forget that you're mentally ill. Or you incurred a brain injury so rapidly or in a memory-erasing way such that you don't know you're in an altered state. So in level 3, Unknown hallucinations, it's highly unlikely that without outside help *you will ever even consider* the idea that you're psychotic. A common outcome of taking too many mushrooms is experiencing disembodied consciousness.

This is not fun, please don't try this. You are your thoughts. You are in space. You have lost your body.

The Earth might be down there somewhere. You are completely alone—there are no other beings to talk to and you begin to consider the consequences of spending eternity as just your thoughts, having no tactile experience, no company, no death. *You do not remember taking mushrooms*. You are not asking whether this is real or not..nothing causes you to ask that question. This is the ultimate hallucination: where you don't know you're hallucinating and you are in some drastically altered state that—since you don't know you're hallucinating—

you have no reason to question. It's like a regular, non-lucid dream. You have no idea it's a dream until you wake up, the drugs wear off, or you come out of your psychosis. That's what I call a level 3: Unknown hallucination. It occurs in naive dreaming, overdose of recreational hallucinogens, and mental illness—and other conditions, I'm sure. Yeah, those bipolar people who think they're Jesus or a spiritual master or Buddha or Shiva or whatever god their culture suggests..they don't know they're psychotic, if they're at that level, so laughing at them won't help or hurt. Nothing you say will convince them that they are disconnected from reality in this level 3: Unknown hallucination-type sense that you and I are discussing here. If you encounter one of us **mentally interesting** people in such a state, it is time to call our doctor or 911. At that point, it's a brain chemistry thing that only (hopefully) medicine and time will fix.

Indicator light problems

In *Apollo 13*, the Ron Howard flick, there's a scene where three astronauts are in a simulator. The veteran pilot has been replaced by a rookie (played by Kevin Bacon). They are simulating re-entry interface. An indicator light goes off. They are coming in too steep. The rookie pilot says, "I'm switching to manual." The veteran commander (Tom Hanks) looks at Bacon like he's crazy, but he lets him do his job—Bacon is the pilot. Their descent is too steep. They're going to burn up. As many times as Bacon says, "I got this, guys," it doesn't help their situation. He can't fix the problem. The go in too steep and burn up in the atmosphere.

Tom Hanks talks with the simulator techs alone. They tell him that they didn't really burn up—the simulation was to give the astronauts a false indicator light on re-entry. They only *thought* they were coming in too steep..because this control panel light blinked red when it shouldn't have.

That's a false indicator light problem.

It doesn't just exist for astronauts. It exists for everyone.

Related is the missing-information or lack-of-indicator problem.

Here's an example. Veteran programmer Fang calls me to his desk. He needs another set of eyes on a hard debugging problem. The compiler is giving him an error message for a line in a function that seems to have nothing to do with the code on that line. It's like if the code was about the bright, bright sun and the compiler failed with an error message about the moon. We debugged this problem step by step, shedding ourselves at each stage of assumptions we were making about the situation. That's what debugging is: becoming aware of your own false assumptions, your own false knowledge, things you think you know but which are false—just like a false indicator light. What finally solved our problem in this case is we decided to copy the function into another document and re-type the entire function from scratch. When we compiled that, it compiled with no problems. So we knew we were in a very difficult situation to see, and by running the two pieces of text through a tool that shows the differences between texts, we discovered that in the original function there was an invisible character that the compiler couldn't handle. That was a hard debugging problem, and it had nothing to do with understanding C language syntax—to solve that problem, we had to question our assumption that what we saw on the screen was the same set of characters the compiler saw. That is almost universally a safe assumption, but not in this case. Somehow an invisible special character got into Fang's code and made it not compile.

That's a lack-of-indicator problem. There's a problem, but your warning light never goes on. To solve this type of problem, you have to take all the facts you know *and realize that the fact that they don't add up* means you are missing information. This is very hard to do, but you can learn to do it.

This type of problem occurs often interpersonally. Often, people are withholding information such that the set of information

you face does not add up. At times like those, it makes sense to ask yourself if you're missing information.

My neurologist says, simply, that having bipolar means my sense organ is broken. Therefore, I cannot determine whether I am manic or depressed or normal. My sense organ for that, my brain, doesn't work when answering that question. One of the properties of bipolar disorder is that people who have it, because of the way our brains are damaged, tend not to believe the diagnosis. That's insidious: to have a problem which tends to make you believe you don't have the problem. The same is true specifically of bipolar mania: one symptom of mania is that *you don't think you're manic*.

Now that is a hard problem to solve. It's an indicator light problem. It kills your relationships because people are trying to help you, saying, *You're manic*, and you're telling them they're full of shit. You don't trust them—you can't, because what they're saying doesn't fit with the [false] data that you have about your own state. People tend to give up on you under such conditions.

It's very hard to be friends with a bipolar person because they discount your [correct] view that they are manic, depressed, delusional, hallucinating, etc. It's a clash of realities, and it doesn't feel good when your bipolar friend or son or lover tells you that there's nothing wrong when, to you, there is clearly something wrong.

Even when your sense organ is broken such that your subjective reality is skewed, there are things you can do to check your own perception with objective measurements. In the pilot situation, the pilot can use a secondary means of measurement to check whether the indicator light is giving true information—you can't always trust your senses. With bipolar, you can look at objective metrics like how much you are sleeping or (as my neurologist suggested) you can measure your rate of speech using software. Both of those give objective, indisputable indicators of mania or lack of mania.

Indicator light problems, their presence in the world, are reminders that what we think we know isn't always right, even when it seems impossible that we could be wrong. Sometimes,

what we're looking at on the screen isn't really what's in the computer. Sometimes, when dealing with people, they haven't told us the whole truth, and we're sleuthing for answers given some false clues. To debug these types of problems it is necessary to be humble about what we think we know, to become aware of and question our most basic assumptions. We're limited beings, and the truth is we know very little. A lot of what we know is false, actually, and usually we never even discover that it is.

There is no easy answer here except to question what you know. Indicator light problems are pervasive. And they are very, very hard to solve.

Draft post ideas on writing etc.

I'm cleaning out things. Got my Netflix queue down to 10 films, from 200. Didn't get to inbox zero, but got to inbox eight. Trying to just use one browser instead of three.

So today it's tumblr draft posts, which are mostly ideas for writing. I'm going to cut and paste each of them here, expand slightly, and delete them. Here goes.

Too many ideas, too many possibilities—Trouble letting go of the everything so I can focus on something. Can't we be anything, couldn't we be everything? I think maybe this proliferation of people and machines and {consciousness} is an attempt to be everything, to figure out what to be. And maybe each of us is here to explode, in a way, to try, essentially..to try out one or many ways of being, things of doing, like the universe is exploring all the ideas it has, all the possibilities for what it could be.

Walking the path without caring what's at the end—Which is the *walking the path* versus knowing the path thing. Can I walk a sidewalk without caring what's at it's end? Can I live my life without caring when and where my death will strike? Can I enjoy meeting a string of people without feeling a need to know when I will meet one of them that is profoundly special to me?

As Morpheus brilliantly says in *The Matrix*, "Neo, sooner or later you're going to realize, just as I did, that there's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path." Whoah. Since

when does a sci-fi flick deliver such powerful philosophical concepts. It does happen, as in Roy Batty's speech at the end of *Blade Runner*, but it happens rarely. Yes, there is a difference between knowing the path and walking the path—and the implication is that you can do one without doing the other. Maybe prophets know the path without walking the path. Maybe there is another type of person, and I count myself among this type, who walks the path more than we know the path; who specializes not in gaining complete knowledge of the path, but in walking it semi-blind..sometimes in walking it completely blind. This is the side of Morpheus' wisdom that I want to live on.

Write lists in different orders—Take an existing text, with lists of names, or comma-delimited lists of descriptive phrases in a sentence, and re-order the lists. Try how they feel in various orders, and talk about why you might choose particular orders. There is deep reasoning, in writing, verbally, why you might order lists in various ways, from expressing the relative importance of the items, to phonetically interlocking them in an aesthetically pleasing way, to revealing information to the audience in a certain order—and there are many more. Play with the order of your lists and be intentional about that order.

Encourage stream-of-creativity—Using only positive feedback (cheers and standing ovation claps from the class) encourage people to write, and speak, stream-of-creativity. Suggest that getting into the zone, of extemporaneous creativity, is something you can do right now, today, in your writing career, and it will continue to be one of your most valuable tools, even as your mind and knowledge and other techniques and natures change over your lifetime.

Architecture of (description versus action)—Highlight, in a text, in one color all the action, in one color all the description; in one color where the narrator is self-aware, in one color where he isn't; etc. Make dichotomies or trichotomies and use color to show yourself the architecture of the elements, through the text.

Same text in various fonts—In the same vein as reading/ writing the same text to various music, read/ write the same text in

various fonts, on various keyboards, on various machines (phone, laptop, desktop, typewriter, pen, cut-out or magnet letters / words, ..). Feel the difference in the experience you have while doing so. Feel the effect the shape of the letters has on you while you read, the effect the proportions of the forms you see has on your understanding of the content.

Take out all the glue, and see if it still sticks together—

Take out all the connection scenes and ideas, all the things that are there just so it makes sense. Take out the things like how in the movie *Proof*, the driving scenes were shot to maintain continuity when people are, say, riding to the airport. In that movie, driving scenes were shot so that they would make sense to residents of Chicago, where the movie takes place. Does it matter? Take out all the “and then we went there” ideas and expressions from an existing work and see if it sticks together better or worse.

“High-tech versus low-tech in writing, new-fashioned (colloquial) versus venerated”—That’s all I wrote in this draft and I’m not sure what I can say to expand upon it.

Writing exercise ideas

- Exercise of poetry where you only rearrange existing text
- **Translation exercise**
- Writing exercise of misheard lyrics: mis-hear someone else’s text, then write a story based on your impressions.

Re-article—Start with a text with no articles (with the articles removed) and re-article it. Compare the original with your re-articled text. It can be just a sentence. Talk or think about why you chose the articles you did. This is a seemingly simple exercise that is exceedingly complex.

Different music—Read, and write, [the same?] piece of text to different music. Is it really the same piece of text in these different contexts?

Much/little—In a unit (paragraph, sentence, word count, page, section, book, whatever) do two of these: In one, say as much as possible. In the other, say as little as possible.

Look at a text, and for each paragraph, write down what the paragraph break *means*. Write out the number of lines in each

paragraph, in a text. Look at the rise and fall. Look at the relationship between intensity and length of the paragraph.

From an outline, write the same piece in order, as well as out-of-order. Compare the process. In other words, take an outline and write two distinct pieces. In one, write from the outline in its order: item 1, item 2, item 3, etc. In the other, pick items from the outline randomly and write the final piece in random order..in the final piece the outline order will match the order in which the items are presented, but not the order in which they were written. What strengths and weaknesses does each method support? How does it change your cognition during the writing process?

Take out all the punctuation and/or paragraph markers— Then go through and add in punctuation and /or paragraph markers =)

Play Psychiatrist, then suggest that's how to write a story— Psychiatrist is a game where you have circle of people in a room and the leader explains the game such: We will choose one psychiatrist, they will leave the room, we will pick a dreamer, and that person will tell a dream to everyone left in the room. The psychiatrist will return and ask yes or no questions about the dream. The group will respond to these questions in unison. The psychiatrist will try to flesh out the story of the dream and then guess whose dream it is. That's that the leader says will happen. What really happens is when the psychiatrist leaves the room, the leader tells the group to pay attention to the last letter of the last word in each question the psychiatrist asks. The group will answer the psychiatrist's questions based on two rules. One, they will never contradict anything they have already said. Two, if the last letter of the last word of the psychiatrist's question falls in the first half of the alphabet (A-M), they will answer yes, otherwise they will answer no.

Ok, why do this?

To show that a story can be constructed (in this case by the psychiatrist) using two elements: their own subconscious (which is involved in picking the questions) and a stream of random feedback. The point of the game is that the psychiatrist is inventing

the dream, not investigating someone else's dream. You can write stories like this, too. Instead of trying to make something up out of thin air, ask yourself a question (what if my protagonist decided *not* to get on the bus as usual) and answer with some stream of random feedback like the one already mentioned or perhaps a coin toss. Write the results of that and you will be writing a story that is half-chaos, half-subconscious, but fully you.

Who's in which scenes?—With a piece, make a list of scenes, and for each one, catalogue the characters in that scene. Look at the progression of scenes purely in terms of which collection of characters is present in each scene. This method of examining dramatic structure is like a scalpel—it is a simple and powerful instrument for revealing one type of plot essence. Think of Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. If you did this exercise with that book, you could just about know the plot of the book just by looking at who is present in the sequence of scenes. The same is true in less obvious examples. Do this with Hamlet. Do this with Pulp Fiction. You will see how powerful a lens this is into dramatic structure. A plot can be seen as a sequence of {whose turn it is to be with each other}. Who is with each other, in a sequence of scenes, contains a massive amount of information about a plot. This works both ways. If you're writing a plot, forget the action and just make a list of scenes, and for each scene simply write down which collection of characters are present in that scene. Then write the scenes. The plot will magically appear.

All the details that don't matter—First, look at someone else's piece and make a list of all the things that don't matter—all the things that could be taken out or changed to something else without disturbing the essence of the story. Second, write so that if someone else does this to your piece, there's nothing to remove.

Thank you for reading. Now I can delete all my Tumblr drafts!!

=)

A week off from writing

I'm a few days in to taking a week off from writing.

I just finished what is probably my last major edit of *Davina's memoir*, a memoir of 37 years of my friend Davina's life based on interviews with her. We have worked on this, from the moment of conception to now, for a little more than two years. Davina is doing a final read through now.

I need some time to transition mentally out of a project I've spent so long on, so many days thinking about and typing out.

So I'm taking a break before I pick up my next project, which is a memoir of my time spent in Vermont and the psychological circumstances I encountered there, with my bipolar disorder worsening to the point of a suicide attempt. I have already written five or six hundred pages of this book—during breaks while Davina was editing her memoir, I worked on my next memoir and I was manic so I got a lot done. That project is not almost done.

There's a daunting amount of work to be done, but the basic three-act structure is in place, I just have to integrate 300 pages of notes into 300 pages of outline/text, flesh it all out, smooth it, etc. But, as with Davina's memoir, the ending was written a year and a half before the project was done. The framework is there, I just need to build the rest of the house.

My goal is to take a complete week off from writing, and other than this post, I have done it so far. I haven't obsessed over Davina's book: haven't gone back to rip my hair out over what is written there. I have spot checked it two or three times and quickly closed the document because I am happy with what I saw, more than I expected, and I want to keep it novel to me. I had an idea for my Vermont memoir last night and I waited too long and forgot it..never got it into my notes document for that book, and now it's gone. This is perfect behavior for a week off.

I've been watching movies, watching on Netflix and buying some of my favorites through iTunes. Have spent some money but nothing outside my budget. I can watch two or three movies a day before I get tired of watching movies.

I've been sleeping a lot. I still wake up extremely early but I nap a lot during the day.

Part of why this vacation is so important to me is that I was parented by a workaholic and I don't ever want to become one.

I don't think I'm in danger of that.

Generally, when something stops being fun for me, I stop doing it. Relationship, job, project. I am a very hard worker, a dedicated worker, an efficient worker, but growing up with a dad who neglected us kids and Mom by his masochistic devotion to all kinds of work, I don't ever want to be that person.

And I don't think I will be.

Even with writing. It's what I love to do most, but if it ever becomes work only and not mostly play, I will stop doing it. I am not married to any identity as a writer. I've treated my software consulting jobs that way—I had a lot of fun, but when the fun gave way to bureaucracy and bullshit, I quit those jobs and did something else. I'm not going to waste my life giving my precious little time to some thing or some one I don't absolutely *love*.

Writing helps me with my sense of worth, so not doing it for a week is hard. But it's a good reminder that my worth is *not* wrapped up in the fact that I can write. I have intrinsic value as a living thing, whether I produce or not. Life is miracle enough.

You must rotate the crops. Otherwise a specific crop sucks the nutrients it needs out of the soil and as you keep growing the same crop in the same patch of Earth, the crop suffers and the soil is depleted. The muscle contracts, then releases. Both are necessary for the exercise. To speak for myself, I spend so much time being useful, it is important, too, that I spend some time being of no use at all. Even when I'm working, a typical writing day is 2 hours at the keyboard and 22 hours resting. That ratio is correct. Lions sleep **23 hours a day**. That glorious run we see them do on the nature channel, to catch a gazelle, may look effortless, but it seems it is the counterpart to a whole lot of resting.

“This is nothing!”

In the film *Wag the Dog*, things keep getting worse and worse for the protagonists, but regardless, Dustin Hoffman's character's refrain is: “This is nothing!” No matter how bad things get, he

exclaims “This is nothing!” and goes on to tell a story of a time when he encountered something worse, and by comparison, he always determines that their present crisis (no matter how insurmountable) is relatively small compared to what he’s been through in the past. It’s this insane, comic optimism brilliantly written by David Mamet et al.

One time my girlfriend died of a drug overdose. That’s not the point of the story. Very sad. Tragic. But not the point of the story. The point of this story is that a week later, my friend hung himself! And you know what? I’ve never mourned his death..I’ve never felt sad about it..because just a week before, my girlfriend had died of a drug overdose! So I was already tapped out on grief. I had already reached the limit of sadness that I was capable of and I just couldn’t get any sadder, even about my friend’s suicide. I mean it just couldn’t get any worse than my girlfriend dying, so I never really had a chance to be sad about the second death. Like the Dustin Hoffman character in *Wag the Dog*, I basically said, “This is nothing!” to my friend’s suicide. Not to be cruel, dude, any other week your death would have been the biggest thing I had going, but this week..sorry but you already got upstaged by my girlfriend going into a coma she never came out of.

Nothing like that is going on in my life right now. But some similar principles apply. I’m living with my mom and trying to find an assisted living/group home/housing situation for the mentally ill—that’s me, I have multiple mental illnesses: bipolar, psychosis, OCD, and tardive dyskinesia which causes uncontrollable muscle movements and constant pain. So I’m worried about all these things: whether my mom will like the apartment building I suggested to her in email this morning..I’m worried she’ll disapprove because it doesn’t have a high enough level of on-site care. I’m worried that Mom and I will get into another big fight before I find a place to live and that I’ll somehow be forced back into a mental hospital. I’m worried about the twenty dollars I spent splurging on a pizza delivery last night. And I’m worried that some of the people I love and/or need don’t care about me anymore—this based on their lack of communication

with me, just not responding to my emails even when my emails are really kind thank you notes..I expect a *you're welcome*, don't get it, and take it personally.

But you know what? I can't worry about that stuff anymore. My worry meter is already tapped out, I realize, at handling constant pain, hallucinations, delusions, mood swings, and other symptoms of major mental illness. I don't really have the resources to be concerned with whether my mom approves of the apartment building I choose, or whether she approves of how many cups of coffee I drink per day, or whether my aunt and uncle ever say *you're welcome* after I thank them for letting me stay at their house. All of that, like my friend's suicide, unfortunately for them, just comes to me at a time when I can't take any more..anything. So I'm deciding not to worry about those things, because I just can't afford to! It's too much, it's beyond my ability! Taking care of my basic needs and my own mental health is enough for me to handle, to worry about. For everything else, I must dismiss it and with Dustin Hoffman, say, "This is nothing!"

Eccentricity and the thought virus

In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill famously writes:

In this age, the mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time.

These are oft-quoted words. Fascinating words. Thought-provoking and counter-cultural words. I can't say that I know what Mill had in mind, completely, when he wrote them, beyond

what they actually say. But when I think of eccentricity in a society, and diversity in general as it relates to the strength of a system and its resilience against viruses, I am reminded of these words from Mill.

Consider the simple case of varieties of corn. North America used to host many varieties of corn. Now due to corporate farming, it only hosts a few. The danger inherent in this brand of conformity, or lack of diversity, or lack of eccentricity, should not take much leap of thought to see: if a disease comes along that only one type of corn is susceptible to, and we only grow one type of corn, then all of our corn is in danger! But if we grew many types of corn, there would be the chance that this disease would not affect all varieties of corn, and not all our corn would be killed by a single disease! This is the simplest example I can think of which clearly shows how diversity and eccentricity are not merely for show, for fun, but are qualities of a population (of corn in this case) that make that population more robust with respect to attackers.

Let's be quick and skip to the most complicated example I can think of: diversity of opinion among a population of people. The more uniform the (political, scientific, religious, ..) opinions of a population, the more susceptible that population is to a thought virus.

What is a thought virus? A thought virus is the idea that {we must invade Iraq because they possess WMDs} or {we must deny social rights to trans people}. After 9/11, we had such fearful almost-complete uniformity of thought that the United States was successfully attacked by a thought virus that had Americans willingly voting away their Constitutional rights to be protected from illegal search and seizure, voting almost uniformly to invade a country that some of us knew we had no logical reason to invade.

It **was known by the IAEA before the US invaded Iraq** that Iraq possessed no WMDs. Some citizens of the world listened to this group and believed them at the same time that the majority of US citizens believed what their President told them, which contradicted what the IAEA said based on hundreds of visits to Iraq. The uniformity of thought among US citizens allowed a

horribly wasteful thought virus to invade our population: the idea that we needed to invade Iraq to prevent another 9/11. If we had dared, to use Mill's word, to be more eccentric in our thoughts about a potential Iraq war, we would have been less susceptible to the thought virus which won out back in that day.

I don't think it requires much more explanation. There's a simple example, with the corn. There's a complex example, with the Iraq war. I hope you see what I mean by a thought virus—an idea that can take hold in a specific kind of mind—and I hope you see how the powerfully laid out concept of eccentricity (or diversity) from John Stuart Mill, relates to the idea of the thought virus. We need eccentric, diverse people precisely so that we disagree when a thought virus presents itself. Mass agreement on an idea is weakness, not strength, in a society. Conformity is not simply immature—it is lethal. The more our society marginalizes and in some ways actually *kills* thought minorities, the more susceptible we are to thought viruses. The more eccentricity in our society, the less danger we are in.

New diagnosis

My psych diagnosis of Bipolar I Disorder Most Recent Episode Manic / Psychosis NOS or Bipolar I Disorder Most Recent Episode Manic with Psychotic Features has been changed to Bipolar-Type Schizoaffective Disorder.

This basically means that I have psychotic experiences which occur outside the context of a mood episode. With strict bipolar disorder, psychosis only occurs during depression or mania. With schizoaffective disorder, you have psychotic experiences even when a mood episode is not occurring. So schizoaffective is like having schizophrenia and bipolar at the same time.

But unlike having one of the two bipolar-with-psychosis diagnoses, schizoaffective is studied as an independent disorder, so I can read facts and figures from studies done on schizoaffective disorder, whereas the other two diagnoses were muddier and harder for me to study.

Schizoaffective is rarer than bipolar or schizophrenia, each of which affect about 1% of the population. Schizoaffective affects 0.3% of the population.

According to the Mayo Clinic:

People with schizoaffective disorder may lead lonely lives and have trouble holding down a job or attending school. Or, they may rely heavily on family or live in supported living environments, such as group homes. Treatment can help manage symptoms and improve the quality of life for people with schizoaffective disorder.

That's funny, I have been living with my family (various families) for the last five years, and have relied on my family before to punctuate a period of 12 years of living mostly on my own. And as of late, my mom has suggested I live in a group home. My sister Amy suggested that years ago, even though at that point my social worker laughed us out of his office saying I didn't need that level of care. Maybe Amy had insight that my social worker didn't.

Some of the **symptoms of schizoaffective disorder** include:

- Delusions—having false, fixed beliefs
- Hallucinations, such as hearing voices
- Major depressed mood episodes
- Possible periods of manic mood or a sudden increase in energy and behavioral displays that are out of character
- Impaired occupational and social functioning
- Problems with cleanliness and physical appearance
- Paranoid thoughts and ideas

I don't hear voices, but I do sometimes have hallucinations (or at least bizarre *illusions*) and I do exhibit all the other symptoms listed from time to time. From my point of view, having read at least topically about all the major psychiatric disorders, and based on conversations with my current psychiatrists and other doctors and caretakers, I agree with this diagnosis.

Keeping in mind that all these diagnoses and disorders are just descriptions that represent the current and ever-changing paradigms of the psychiatric discipline, as I look back I think this diagnostic lens makes sense as one way to look at my life. I think I've displayed these symptoms since around the sophomore to senior period of high school. My classmates pegged me as bipolar by the tenth grade, though I didn't believe them.

I agree some of these symptoms represent problems to the individual and society, but I think we need to be very careful in granting psychiatry the power it has to classify, marginalize, and quite literally select people out of society and the work world and put us in group homes, living with our families, etc.

For example, "problems with..physical appearance." Well, when I was a senior in high school, I decided to stop combing my hair. When I went to college I made a point not to pack a comb.

When living with my 80-year-old grandmother in the last years, she certainly found my decision not to comb my hair a problem with my physical appearance. But this was a rational decision on my part (or at least it seemed so to me) to spend less time doing what I felt was meaningless, arbitrary grooming and also to embrace the natural, wild look that my hair has when uncombed. I feel my hair looks better when uncombed. I haven't combed it in two decades. Well, to some, that might be a problem with my physical appearance, but to me, it is a measured, safe, rational choice which has zero real negative impact on anyone except me (through others' judgments). Do we really live in a society where such a decision can hold you back in life? Yes.

Delusions—having false, fixed beliefs. Look, I'll grant you I have delusions. Some of them are completely useless, some of them hinder my day-to-day operations—like choosing a plate from a stack of colored plates. I have delusions about how choosing a certain-colored plate will affect my spirit, my core, my soul. Those are meaningless delusions from most people's points of view.

They're also harmless and instead of calling them delusions we could just call them *personality*.

But some of what others think are delusions are really areas where I am the only one in a group of people (a classroom or an office, for example) who has seen the correct or a more correct answer to a problem, and everyone else is lagging behind. This has happened to me many times in corporate environments. I come up with a provably superior solution that is unexpected or odd, and everyone—I mean everyone—thinks that my idea is impossible or naive or deluded or whatever. And, in time, it becomes clear that my idea is not only not naive but actually correct, provable, and superior..and everyone in the company or the classroom comes around to my way of thinking. None of this erases the period during which everyone was calling me crazy, naive, illogical, etc. And, perhaps surprisingly, even where I have developed a track record of producing this sort of surprising but superior idea, every time I present such an idea, it is resisted, derided, attacked, and denied because it is considered unrealistic.

Sometimes what seems like a delusion to the majority turns out to be a groundbreaking invention. The definition of *what is possible*, in our world, is not static—it is changing all the time. To label unusual ideas as impossible or delusional is an extremely dicey business—one I certainly wouldn't want to be involved in. One tenet I know to function well is *never bet against a dreamer* for it is the dreamers of today who make up the reality of tomorrow.

Aren't there real reasons to treat people with major mental illness, simply because, untreated, those people have higher suicide rates and generally cause more chaos than the average person?

Maybe. But I've spent hundreds of hours watching videos and reading blogs of people who have been suicidal, and one pattern becomes clear to me: these people are unable to fit into society so they kill themselves. I attempted suicide. I had lost my job and was about to be evicted from my apartment and become homeless.

At that point, when there don't seem to be any options for fitting into and living with society in the normal way, suicide becomes an option. I've seen this pattern over and over in suicide behavior documented on the internet. I'm not saying every suicide follows this pattern—clearly that is not the case. Depressed people with

jobs kill themselves all the time. But I believe that instead of looking always at the person who killed themselves, we need to look wider.

Like: why did I lose my job prior to my suicide attempt? I was asked to pirate a copy of Photoshop, by my boss, and I refused to do so. I reported the company to Adobe and was fired. So, while I can't blame anyone else for my suicide attempt, I can certainly show that my inability to work within the immoral business culture I was expected to work within is an issue that far exceeds the locus of my particular mental illness. If I could fit into society better, I would have less reason to kill myself. Shall I become immoral and steal software for my boss, or shall my boss become moral and create a work environment where employees don't get fired for refusing to break the law.

See how in that case what appears, ultimately, as mental illness on my part actually has a societal input, far preceding the suicide attempt, that contributed to my fear of being homeless, jobless, useless to society?

Think of the fictional suicide in *Dead Poet's Society*. Neil commits suicide. But if his father had accepted his love of acting, the son may have felt the world was a place he could live as himself.

I find myself the odd man out right now, as a person with schizoaffective disorder. Even though I have extremely lucrative job skills, I don't fit the picture of the ideal employee, so I can't get a job working for a company who I could help in amazing ways.

But why should I have to bear the brunt of the fact that I have this disorder? The cause is most likely genetic—in other words I had no way to avoid my current situation. But I'm the one facing a life lived in a group home, unemployed, with no family of my own, no real income or way to use my skills as a programmer. It's almost like a leper colony—corporations don't want to adapt a little to accommodate different kinds of workers (who in some cases are more skilled than their current workers) so me and my ilk will end up living with family, in group homes, or homeless. We act like this is an individual problem but really it's a societal one.

So I have bipolar-type schizoaffective disorder. I also have OCD and tardive dyskinesia (a crippling motion disorder which was caused by medication prescribed to me in a psych hospital). These are life features held by a small minority of people.

I think, though, it is foolish to label unusual things or improbable things or surprising things or difficult things as *disorders* or *illnesses*. In some ways psychiatry is identifying groups of people whose lives can be made less painful for them and those around them by certain medical or behavioral treatments. But in some ways psychiatry is rounding off the rough edges that exist in our gene pool (and possibly exist there for good reason) just to make things easier for the majority. As a schizoaffective person, as a smart person (both minority categories) I tend to say things that most people are not ready to accept. People don't like that and so we're actively in the business of treating people like me so that we won't do as many unexpected things. Think about that: trying to wrangle nature so that it obeys human expectations and categories.

That is madness.