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03/08/2022 di

You know that most Chinese people can’t spontaneously write the Chinese character for sneeze.

They can say it. They can type it in alphanumerics: pen ti, but most people can’t with confidence just whip it out from memory. I think this is very interesting, and soothes me a little as my definition of bing a competent MANDARINIST has fluctuated over the years. Different shades of hazy anxiousness.

The colored lighter in the jar-- red, blue, yellow, sturdy Bic lighters like the ones from shell across campus.

Victorians loved shell. The XXXX family made a fortune selling intricately beshelled jewerly boxes to the natural history awestruck Victorians. Dinosaurs, dragons, discoveries. Dragons are real. Seamonsters are real. Natural beauty was experiencing a spike in its commodification. One of the XXX family members ended up branching away from jewerly boxes and into to fossil fuels. He brought the family brand along though.

The Shell Station at the corner of Foster and Kimball looms large in my late childhood. Often a late night destination. A railing point. A focused break. Not sure that I ever even purchased gas there, but cigarettes, cdertainly. Occasionally snakes. Back when the beverage coolers of America were still appealing to me. OOO-- a new kind of Mountain Dew!?! Code Red!?! Pour me a tall one!

The 3 pack for ten dollar deal was not quite as charming as popping my 5 ($2.50) Deutchmark coin into a streeside vending machine and getting back a crisp pack of *West* brand cigarettes, nor was it as dangerous inexpensive as the 5 kuai (60 cents) a pack of Zhong Nan Hai’s that I smoked with determination once returning to China in 2008. I truly loved the Chinese ciagertte stands. Their colorful packages displayed with care. The impenetrable pecking order of quality and flaovr and prestige. Occasionally getting asked what I smoke and getting scoffed at. Ultimaltely finding that Zhonghua’s were a tasties cigarette, stronger, but also 10 times are expensive…

In the end all these Guanxi pulling brands and image building brands and addiction stringing along brands were really just selling one thing-- death.

As a traveler, on the move with change in my pocket, uneven sleeping habits, intermittent waiting, time to smoke, time to mark time.

I remember having just arrived in Xi’an, still jet lagged- having been packed into a small car with out luggage and snaking through the countryside and the notty traffic in seemingly rural areas. Drivers driving on the shouler, grid locking the shoulder. Drivers driving into the oncoming lane, grid locking that eventually too. Until we inch and inch and get to this bend in the road where there is a truck that got hung up trying to make the turn because it did not have enough room. Somehow this whole mess resolves itself and we roll on toward the city, knowing that we have arrived there by the sixty foot high city wall that circumscribes the city, intermittently breaking to allow traffic to flow in and out of the city center through numerous gates on each of the cardinal sides. In the center of the walled part of the city is the bell tower with a sweeping roundabout running around it connecting to the Big streets extending out for the historic structure.

And then later marching with the Mardi Gras like Christmas demonstartors in costumes with masks, releasing firecracker strands attached to helium balloons. This would have been 12/24/2005. We spontaneously joined the marching throng after having tuned up in a local restaurant. Eating and drinking and then singing Christmas carols that one of our fellow teachers had printed out for us.

We ate well-- washing back our saucy palates with light German influenced lager-- We joined the marchers on Big East Street and became making our way towards the bell tower, which was suddenly free of the constant stream of buses cars, taxis, bicycles. The people had just totally taken over the streets. How did this happen? Was it a happening?

Probably drank too much, smoked too many cigarettes, sang myself hoarse, walked myself ragged, kept my mind up too late.

03/08/2022

The time you took with Entroy was so sweet and appreciated and you enjoyed it the way I hoped you would enjoy it. I feel like I couldn’t express that very well when we were together. I have had such an uneasy realtioship with writing. It has become such an amorphous inchoate thing. THiat despite my pragmatic attempts to give it a title, a role, a list of responsibilities and duties, I have yet to be able to do it. I have yet to be able to harness it and have it feed me and my family for example. Thus is that way it becomes a distraction. A road block. Something to get over and work through to get to the real, necessary stuff. I have a hard time why writing is so necessary to me and why I want it to be an unconflicted interface for me. This is something I have been working at and iteratively approaching and failing at and getting confused and distracted and forgetting my intentions.

At the end of the day, I realize I really just need to be steady employ and a lot of the other questions will likely line up and answer themselves.

Entropy, the corporate order, the melding and mixing of cultures and cultural influences. The expanse of our country and history. Highway 41 physically and symbolically connecting it all together, especially as I wrote the poppem when I was 41-- metaphorically riding my very own person Highway 41 through the pandemic and beyond!

Incomplete thoughts. Meandering thoughts. Psychdelic thoughs. Pysctoc thoughts. Delusions are dangerous dreams

Have kept feeling like I am approaching something more elemental and settled, but then a door in the floor drops open and I descend down yet another level lower.

September 15th, 2021

Dear Becca,

I need a little Christmas now

I so appreciate your annotations on my Entropy poem. Thank you for engaging with it. That was truly delightful. That poem, a handful of others and now a couple of songs have attached themselves to me and I am so grateful. In many ways, I realize all I have ever wanted from writing is to find a way to carry pieces of it with me(and for the process of engaging with it to help ground and settle my view.

I have this hacking module approach. This nervous unfocused. Long Frieday approach. I should probably just be stretching.

Stretching. So grateful for stretching. Maybe its just my the aging process, but I do not remewmber stretching feeling this good. It’s a fair amount of work but

Trying to stretch… reflecting on my physical state and mental state.

Yoga-- stretching-- a strength built in stillness. But its all bullshit unless what? I get a good job? I get really buff? I feel good and positive and stable and productive for an extended period of time with a residing feeling that I have tied up my loose ends of the past and I am ready to move forward a more mature and positive and supportive and productive human being.

La crosse balls. Pressure points. Myofascial release. Total ‘barefoot’ running convert. Running less. Feeling healthy about the whole thing. Feel like I rusn much more in myself.

Leaner

Stoned -- stretching at the standing desk and the smashing forward feeling his energy going down smashing the piece against the wall and Micah coming down and then kind of fleaing.

Nostalgia

1. Restorative
   1. - Make America great again…. Restore the Mother land
2. Reflective
   1. Learn from the past, forge ahead, build a new identity

**Ethical perspective**

**Exile**

**Immigrants**

**Individualism**

**Nostalgia**

**Sensitivity**

**2/26/2021**

Svetlana Boym *The Future of Nostalgia*

*The Turner Diaries* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

**Restorative Nostalgia**

* (MAGA)

**Reflective Nostalgia**

* *A Time of Gifts­*- weeping for the German Innkeeper, moderate, civilized kind, soul-seeking, calmly sees the Nazi to the door. “Sorry about that… you know how it is.” He is killed 6 years later fighting for the German/Nazi Army on the Front in Norway.

Digging into the past in an empathetic way. Seeing the souls as souls, not as Germans, or Nazis or liberals or conservatives.

We create enemies.

Enemies are wonderful useful life organizing levers… to a point…

Strength… we have a strong leader. He will take this all the way. He will drive his conviction right through your heart.

A conspiracy against conspiracies (Boym breaks down very cogently how a manufactured conspiracy can lead to an actual conspiracy of violence.

Where is the seriousness. The stagnation. The rumbling, rumbling below the stagnation.

The Nazis are believed to have killed over 11-14 million civilians.

**Nostalgia**—ways of giving shape and meaning to longing.

“longing might be what we share as human beings, but that doesn’t prevent us from telling very different stories of belonging and nonbelonging.” (Boym)

**Restorative:**

* make sense of homesickness
* Do no believe they are nostalgic, their project is about truth.
* “this kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the anti-modern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths, and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories” (Boym 41)
* Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.
* Restored or invented tradition: “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition which automatically implies conformity with the past” (thinking of the Hasidic Jews of New York with their invented antiquity of dress etc..)
* Rapid modernization entrenches these traditions.
* Moderization => moved to the city, decoupled from religion. What about the holy market of ideas?
* The stronger the rhetoric of conformity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is presented.
* Comforting collective script for individual longing (void of social & spiritual meaning.)
* Fatality to continuity.
* Communities based on more than just ethics and national principles
* Reestablish social cohesion, sense of security, obedient relationships to authority
* Manipulate “new” nostalgic practices.
* Cultural intimacy
* Identity => “native games”, unwritten rules of behavior, inside jokes, a sense of complicity.
* Modern restorative nostalgia restores the past selectively
* Make America Great Again

Reflective: view relationship to collective home

*Nostos:* rebuild lost home, patch up memory gaps

*Algia*: longing, loss, imperfect process of remembrance

We do things that we do

* Listen to certain broadcasts
* Follow and venerate certain individuals
* Defend certain symbols
* Attached subjective yet specific symbolic meaning to things

(Boym circa 2001)

“The conspiratorial worldview reflects a nostalgia for a transcendental cosmology and a simple pre-modern conception of good and evil. The conspiratorial worldview is based on a simple transhistorical plot, a Manichean battle of good and evil, and the inevitable scapegoating of modern circumstances is thus erased, and modern history is seen as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. “Home”, image extremist conspiracy adherents, is forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy.”

To conspire means literally to breath together, but usually this breath does not smell very good.

Psychotic substitution of actual experiences with a dark conspiratorial vision: the creation of a delusional homeland.

“We” => feel insecure in the modern world, thus find scapegoat for our misfortunes (someone different), project dislike on them, begin to believe that they dislike us and wish to persecute us.

“They” conspire against “our” homecoming, hence “we” have to conspire against “them” in order to restore “our” imagined community. This way, conspiracty theory can come to substitute for the conspiracy itself. Indeed, much of twentieth-century violence, from pogroms to Nazi and Stalinist terror to McCarthy’s Red scare, operated in response to conspiracy theories in the name of a restored homeland (Boym 43).

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

* Napolean III political invective repurposed as anti-Jewish propaganda.

**2/15/2021**

Russian émigré poet; *Less than One*

Banality of Evil:

Lack of individual, reflective thinking and sense of personnel responsibility can turn everyday following orders and cliches into participation in political evil.

An ethics and artistic individualism is not the same as smug moralism.

Pornography is limited to “copulation cliches”, obscenity must be mater with banality because every kind of aesthetic enjoyment has to be entirely replaced by simple sexual stimulation. (Nabokov)

Nostalgia too easily mates with banality, functioning not through stimulation, but by covering up the pain of loss in order to give a specific form to homesickness and to make homecoming available on request. For Nabokov, kitsch, poshlost, and the acceptance of the world of ready-made thoughts and emotions is static; it excludes reflective thought.

*A single curl of Anna Karenina’s neck.*

A great work of literature => technology that can represent inner states and even change them.

1. Experience of life under authoritarian regime.
2. Discovery of democratic individuality through the art of estrangement.

Reflective thought, not reactive thought.

Practice reading, practice writing.

Arriving daily, heaven bourn.

Brodsky engaged in a program of self-education. He learned [Polish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_language) so he could translate the works of Polish poets such as [Czesław Miłosz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czes%C5%82aw_Mi%C5%82osz" \o "Czesław Miłosz), and English so that he could translate [John Donne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Donne). On the way, he acquired a deep interest in [classical philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_philosophy), religion, [mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology), and English and American poetry.

In 1963, Brodsky's poetry was denounced by a Leningrad newspaper as "pornographic and [anti-Soviet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Sovietism)". His papers were confiscated, he was interrogated, twice put in a mental institution[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-NYT-10) and then arrested. He was charged with [social parasitism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parasitism_(social_offense))[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-14) by the [Soviet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) authorities in a trial in 1964, finding that his series of odd jobs and role as a poet were not a sufficient contribution to society.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-Oxford-8)[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-15) They called him "a pseudo-poet in [velveteen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velveteen) trousers" who failed to fulfill his "constitutional duty to work honestly for the good of the motherland".[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-NYT-10) The trial judge asked, "Who has recognized you as a poet? Who has enrolled you in the ranks of poets?" – "No one", Brodsky replied, "Who enrolled me in the ranks of the human race?"[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-NYT-10)[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-16) Brodsky was not yet 24.

For his "parasitism" Brodsky was sentenced to five years hard labor and served 18 months on a farm in the village of Norenskaya, in the [Archangelsk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archangelsk) region, 350 miles from Leningrad. He rented his own small cottage, and although it was without plumbing or central heating, having one's own, private space was taken to be a great luxury at the time.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Brodsky#cite_note-New-9) Basmanova, Bobyshev, and Brodsky's mother, among others, visited. He wrote on his typewriter, chopped wood, hauled manure, and at night read his anthologies of English and American poetry, including a lot of [W. H. Auden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._H._Auden) and [Robert Frost](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Frost).

* Susan Sontag’s *The Rings of Saturn* is dedicated to Joseph Brodsky
* Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* introduced me to him
* *Less than One* (1986)
* Nobel Prize of Literature (5th Russian speaker to do so(1987))

**American Dream**

“Unreal estate”

* Creative properties
* Family

vs. “Real estate”

**Immigrants**

* Resist sentimentality
* Insist on details

**Ethical perspective**

“Ethical perspective offers a special kind of optics that focus on the relationship between words and deeds, between general and particular, between abstract ideals and ideologies and singular acts.

* “Ethics” => storytelling… moral recourse

Anarchic responsibility => responsibility for the other individual in the present moment and justified by no prior commitment.

An ethics of literature learned from books not everyday life surrounding.

Emmanuel Levinas: “Attentiveness to what is occasionally human in men.”

1st philosophy proceeding

Conceptual knowledge

Moral laws

Metaphysical precepts

Ordinary murderers during war; ordinary people who refuse to kill.

**Exile**

“An exile is always a Robinson Crusoe who is desperately trying to communicate with indifferent natives—yet is perceived as something of a barbarian (even if an over-educated one) while the natives are overly civilized.”

“Democracy provides a writer with safety, but renders him socially insignificant.”

Let the market decide => we’re all carnival barkers now.

Nostalgic for homeland, nostalgic for significance.

Brodsky: “To be an exiled write is like being a dog or a man hurtled into outer space in a capsule (more like a dog of course, than a man, because they will never retrieve you)… before long the capsules passenger discovers that it gravitates not earthward, but outward: this outward direction of exile is of extreme importance. The anonymity and alienation teach humility and provide an additional perspective.”

Art of estrangement becomes art of survival

Retroactive => merely nostalgic

Exile story: tragic comedy, adventure tale; not melodrama

The condition of exile opens up new vistas onto the world for which there is no yardstick except oneself (341).

Perhaps our greater value and greater function are to be unwitting embodiments of the disheartening idea that a freed man is not a free man, that liberation is just the means of attaining freedom and is not synonymous with it… However, if we want to play a bigger role, the tole of a free man, then we should be capable of accepting—or at least imitating- the manner in which a free man fails. A free man, when he fails, blames nobody.”

Flee place, not towards.

Freedom from oppression not necessarily synonymous with freedom to explore new reality.

“Free man” is someone who succeeds in developing inner freedom independent from external politics (Boym)

Privacy = clandestine aesthetic and erotic practices.

Russians are better at this due to totalitarianism (have to take it underground)

Creative exploration of inner freedom

* Writing
* Meditating
* Reading
* Film
* Stretching
* Substances

In this case “free man” is someone who learned his lesson of inner freedom, but who also confronts the challenges of a democratic society in which political freedoms are guaranteed, but often taken for granted, or worse, conflated with consumer choices.

Convoluted syntax, excess imagination.

The free exile stope being a victim perpetually in search of a scapegoat, eschewing the culture of blame and identity politics.

“Reflective nostalgia doesn’t lead back to the lost homeland but to that sense of anarchic responsibility toward others as well as to the rendezvous with oneself.”

Gaoxing Jian: *One Man’s Bible*, *Soul Mountain*

**Individualism**

“If art teachs us anything… it is the privacy of human experiences.”

Individualism / individual ethics – from literature or law / politics

**Nostalgia**

Reflective nostalgia has a utopian dimension that consists in the exploration of other potentialities and unfulfilled promises—promise of modern happiness.

Resists total reconstruction of local culture and the triumphant indifferences of technocratic globalism.

Instead of economic globalism from above, the reflective nostalgics can create a global diasporic solidarity based on the experience of immigration and internal multiculturalism. The Second generation Indian in Green Bay, WI who has family in Africa and Iowa.

The eccentric easterners whose imagined homeland lies in the mythical West, see themselves as the last of the Mohicans of the Western creative individualism.

**Sensitivity**

Sensitivity is a combination of attentiveness and curiosity, truthfulness and tolerance for the pleasures of others and apprehension of pain (Boym 338)

Sensitivity allows ethical tolerance and aesthetic bliss.

Aesthetic bliss: “ a sense of being somehow, somewhere connect with the other states of being where art(curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is a norm” – form afterward of *Lolita*, Nabokov

Be flexible: flexible toward yourself and others.

Richard Rorty: “Contingency, Irony, Solidarity”

My family (conservative)

* Primal conservative pull that leads them by the nose in to fights that don’t represent their values. And how embarrassing to me it is that they are being played by Donald Trump. They love this man. He has tapped into some very old forces here and it is astounding. And it is wild to see religion accommodate it and good taste and humor and culture and family culture and I have found it excruciating. And I somehow need to stop taking it so personal, but it is hard, because it is so personal. My moderately liberal political views and lifestyle has made me a pariah in my dysfunctional rural Santorum Catholic family, which is kind of a gift, but its so hard to get out without there being bad feelings, especially if the relationships just aren’t there to support the extra wide hug that would be necessary to wrap around all the other stuff between us. For my part I have had zero wherewithal for anything and have tried to maintain some sort of “grad school” mindset, staying focused on coding and studying and writing when I felt like everything was boiling up and over a little too much.

The coal they burn in England was once giant ferns and the other ancient growth of dinosaur inhabited glades.

Hazmat suits. Graves. Separation. Disruption.

Have tried to ride the silver lining. I left and now life a space capsule screaming through the atmosphere, my reentry causes heat, sparks. Comments in defense of the confederate flag over coffee. You know why the shiner’s wear red hats? They symbolize shed Catholic blood.

***Transubstantiation:***

I have been listening to *Glassworks*. I’ve decided Philip Glass is the Radiohead of the classical world. Or Radiohead is trying to be the Philip Glass of the Rock and Roll milieu. Either way, they are both great and have been a brooding, cathartic soundtrack to fool my brooding sleuthing for catharsis. Wonderful headphone music, truly transporting, settling, stirring-- emotional alchemy conjured up with tone and rhythm and dynamics, key signatures, frequencies, waves transporting us across cerebral seas.

Last fall was *Carrie & Lowell*. It is an album about trying to make sense and honestly grieve and cathartically celebrate the death (and life) of his mother. My listening of that album turned into a sort of therapy experience where I tried to work through my complicated relationship with my mother. As I came to some new and health conclusions the 2020 election blew the top off of civility as aggressively piled on her politics of resentment and judgement and accusation. She talks about *THEY* a lot. *THEY* are an amprophous group, but *THEY* do very bad things and by bad I mean liberal and socialist and sinful. “Thank God for Great Americans like Tucker Carlson!!”

When I tried to remind my mom that we had agreed to a politics free zone in the family feed, my brother lashed out on the feed-- instructing me “to bite my tongue and suck it up” and that I should respect my mother and that I had no idea how much she has sacrificed for me. I retired from the family feed and my brother and I have been increasingly distant from one another. He is truly an ass and I am having a harder and harder time loving him, which makes me feel bad, he’s my brother for god sakes, but I feel so rejected and judged and unaccepted by him, that I do not trust his offers of love. Even if I trusted his offer of love and acceptance as being made in good faith, I don’t believe that he has the wherewithal to follow through on it. I suppose, at some level it really is just about recalibrating your relationships and accepting this adult distance and having some sense of how it all grew up over time. There is a lot of co-dependency going on here. You can be co-dependent on someone’s moods, someone’s stresses.

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喷嚏

So lovely to see you and draft off tropical conviviality of socializing you churn within your wake. In a year of isolation and inwardness, I’d say it was something to celebrate. I am celebrating my geekiness these days. Anytime I have a little Geeky whim I try to follow it. Make a tic-tac-toe game. A text-based-role-playing game. Your footnotes which I am sure I did not express my thanks adequately enough.

18 months of focus and work has brought me to another place. Your footnotes on the Entropy poem were so wonderful.

I apologize tht it has taken me this long to process them and respond. I have been absolutely buried. All self-directed work, but the work that seems to need to be done to get from A to B, though the path is unclear. The work is hard and confusing at times and there are many other things I would rather be doing.

Lydia Davis-- the poet of the racing mind. She lived with Paul Auster in France when they were young starving artists. Young writers trying to feed themselves by translating French works into English. One of my “Chinese” texts that I come back to again and again for its portability and easy to digest, but engaging content is Paul Auster’s *Red Notebook*. It is a small red book. I bought it in China where small red books have a whole other connotation. It is called the Red Notebook and came with a small red notebook where one could record their thoughts. And is that the magic of Auster? All you have to do is record the particulars of your life and suddenly you have this magical, nourish, engaging mystery on your hands.

All you need is red notebook and *voila*! You are a writer.

What is the point. Make references to be difficult. I realized I am writing poems to try and stitch together disparate information in a way that I can carry it will me. A meditative koan to ground me when all the swirling forces having me feeling the old vertigo. These words somehow help return my sealegs to me. And that is a good thing.

***Wolf Inn***

Located 15 miles north of that lumber stop town,

Where the asylum brought us together

and the prison kept us around.

The Wolf Inn was a bar that was up the road from my Grandma’s house where my grandparents would play weekly Euchre tournaments and where my grandmother worked for a while tending bar and dropping the deep frying in back to make delicious French fries from potatoes with their skins still on and we would, my cousins and I hang out at the bar and shoot pool and play videogames and read the songs on the juke box, it was out in the milddle of nowhere 15 miles north of Newberry, Michigan named after the Railroad/lumber tycoon who built up the town to extract the lumber from the surrounding area which in the 1950s? Had a state mental facility built there. This brought my mother’s family (9 children) to the area. Later the hospital was decommissioned and turned into a medium security prison where three of my uncles ended up working.

Enjoyed a very easy drinking Portuguese table red the other day. I think my palatte has finally amphibian style dragged itself out of the sea and onto the shore for good taste, leaving my affinity for cheap box wine back where I lost my enthusiasm for that which cloys. Though I am a sucker for quantity and value, I suppose I have evolved to a slightly more enlighted bud collection where my bitters are now more often than not beating out my sweets for culiany attention. My scalded rubber tonue has matured into its current funk savoring middle-age.

A child singing from the other room and a something hush intermittent traffic from the street outside.

Guten Abend Bruder,

Momentarily forgetting the time difference between us, I called you at 9:30– my time– on the Sunday evening of the long, cold Thanksgiving weekend. Over the weekend the seasonal change finally, fully blew through us. Dropped our body temps. Began to thicken up our blood. Our only answer has been fire. Two fires in fact.

The first fire was is the yard our of friends Bec and Sam, who hosted us for Thanksgiving. They have a two flat in Albany Park on the same block as the North Park Covenant Church, and just a block up from North Park's campus. It was a cold day and colder evening. And there was a biting snap to the wind gusts. But still for a good while, while the turkey was being grilled to perfection in the back yard, we, gathered-guests, hung around a metal outdoor stove with a chimney that shot flames when its round base belly was fed well enough— Helena and Esmé swaddled in blankets, sipping warm cider. Then, inside and feasting.  After the big meal, I slipped out to the back with a couple of folks for a cigarette. As I lit up my bummed square– something I do about once a quarter these days- I looked out from the second story back deck and there triumphantly glowing on the other side of Foster Avenue was the very Shell Gas Station where I bought my first pack of cigarettes  way back in 1998.  That first time I only bought one pack, but at some point I definitely began appreciating their 3-packs-and-a-lighter-for-$10 deal. This strikes me, these days, as a dangerously reasonable business transaction– regardless of your smoking status.  But anyways, it was pleasantly nostalgic to behold that glowing yellow and orange Shell sign again though I was also reminded why its not all that fun to be cold...or smoke stale tobacco.

The second fire was the following day– Black Friday. We had a sleepy, relaxed morning and then Miles and his fiance Deb and Pete and Deb Baker stopped by around noon and we hung out around a fire in the yard. We drank a Heineken in a holiday can and chatted and got cold and put more wood on the fire. After they left I did some odd jobs around the yard– including scraping with a  shovel the frozen, and very flat, rat carcass off our  freshly paved alley. It's weirdly the second rat that met it's end in that exact same spot this fall. I know this because it is exactly just where betsy enters the alley from our yard and loads Esmé onto the Xtracycle in the morning on the way to bike to school. A flat rat in your path first thing in the morning is something to try and avoid for sure. It's just unpleasant. I covered what wouldn't scrap away with a shovel full of dirt.

I tended the fire between my chores and then for a while I just stood near the warmth doing some stretching as well as some poetry recitation to the fire. The burning coals were a receptive audience and good to look at as the next word bubbled up.

In the evening I felt a tired that would not be negotiated with. It was a cold weather tired. An earlier sunset tired.

Awoke the next morning feeling good, somehow more acclimated to the season. Esmé and I went ice skating at an outdoor rink (something else I probably have not done since about 1998).  We had fun and stayed warm, though I think the temp was up a little. At any rate, I might have to make a tradition of tending a fire and trying to get a little cold on Black Fridays (weather permitting of course), you know, just to thicken the blood!

Hope you and Morgan and Alice are staying healthy and keeping it cozy! Your Indian feast looked like a wonderful stand-in for the standard-fare. And your tree looked lovely too! We swung by Menards today and picked up a fine Frasier Fir. Still not fully decorated, but already strung with lights and cheering up our living room through gloam of the elongated evening.

2020 Thanksgiving Thank you

November 26, 2020

What a complicated year. Covid complications. Political tensions. Economic upheaval. Canceled sports matches.

Thankfulness suffuses all.

Thankfulness for good friends, supportive, reliable, considerate landlords (not to mention friendly and humane).

Dan, Tricia, Owen, Micah, Susan, Zev, Haas, betsy, Aaron, Esme, Helena

Turkey, Stuffing, green beans, sweet potatoes, rolls, brussel sprouts,

He potato shed his jacket and his eyes

Lemon rinds and eggs shells piled in the compost bin

Beside the motely leaves

Yam skins, pairs bean tips

Hard mushroom stem ends

Turkey innards, organs into the earth

Feathery celery tufts

Feather’s beak, eyes, feet, Phoenix claws.

Stately waddle, grandiose strut.

We took the Queen’s gambit and bet the feast on a full Lemon Chess

Molasses ginger snap, Rosemary and Rye

Witness to the rolls second rising, proved worth the wait.

Waxing gibbous moon, belly full, full moon plate made new.

Red wine sunset in the west of our nation

The Red sun leaves us with a benediction on the

Transsubstantial potential of cranberries.

Fleeing into the night with lights implicit offering of transubstantiation of cranberries,

Color spectrum diffusing up to blue heaven.

Beyond the mash potato whisps and the fat possum moon, Waxing gibbous, fat belly sunset, red wine sunset, Falstaff sunset, ascending into orange zest, lemon chess, green beans ascending to the sky.

While below where heaven meets earth the red fun departs with a parting benediction on the transubstantiaial potential of cranberries.

Sweet potatoes slip from the red and ascend to the skin

Through the pallor of the lemon chess and butter and salt

Of the long cut beans, and on and on us into the sky,

Orion standing by hunting for his plate, straightens his belt,

Affixes the moon, and then takes his shot.

None of this is normal.

Normal is taken for granted.

Normal has become an indulgence.

An irresponsible act.

An affront to civil society.

What’s a meal anyway?

Something, anything, to break one out of their tunnel vision work. Receiving an excuse to take the weekend. To pull together with friends and family. To break bread. To teach another generation what it means to be a family, to be close, to be together, to converse and communion in the multiplicity of our needs, perspectives, talents.

Turkey colors in the west blue and green and yellow and orange and red

What a complicated year. Something less than blue moon,

A gibbous bith

Gibbous moon

Giblet

Turkey feathers

Puffed up like a Lord after a bumper harvest

The crops plumped, the lord was extra lordly throughout the holy season. The verdancy of the land had increased the abundance of his flesh to an obscene level of health/robustness/prosperity.

11/25/2021

Dear Liz,

Happy Holidays! Thanksgiving weekend is upon us and I am sitting here at my desk writing wrestling with how to begin the day-- should I begin by writing a letter to Liz Smith, replying to her letter from a least a month ago now? A letter is a nice thing in that way-- it is a bit outside of time.

I’ve been trying to keep things calm. Take people at their word-- no trying to overthink, not trying to dig too deep-- grabbing a level view of things. I see a path before me and it feels steadying. Computer/tech related competency upgrades and opens up a brand new world of opportunities for me and my family. I feel like I am deply on the outside of all worlds-- career, family, even my wife-- this profound alienation is as a retuls of my pot smoking or something else which my pot smoking has been trying to cover up. Perhaps mitigate… obviously it is not eradicating it. Trying to get closer to the metal. Improve systematic thinking. Associative thinking.

11/23/2021

“In a world of immediacy, there’s still a place for perseverance.”

A lot of the true things in life are all about slogging through, sticking with things, being smart about investment (TIME even more than money), trusting the process.

I don’t know how to layer all of the different impressions and have them come out true-- correct, realized…

The world expands and contracts, interconnects and then rips apart, like the tides, like respiration. Life sliding into death, death making life possible and so on and on around the horned mystery of it all.

We may have lost our religious traditions, but we still remain very humbled by the mystery.

Sandra Bullocks enormous three dimensional tear floating through the space above Lake Michigan where we sit in the plush seat of the IMAX theater at Navy Pier.

I have written a lot. I have coded a lot. I have played a fair amount of guitar. Spent a lot of time with my girls all while doing my damnedest to keep back the existential dread accompanying the fact that I was completely without career and just sort of floating in space until I could catch enough traction with tech.

My writing and poetry has been an incredible distraction. Necessary, but almost cripplingly distracting at times. I hope in the final analysis of things (once I have finally transitioned to the once again settled position of gainful employment, I’ll be able to get some stability to my socializing. Balance has been out on a couple of fronts and this has been unsettling. Destablizing. Confusing. Scary. Manic. Wandering. Brutish. Regrettable. Enlightening. Weathering. Replenishing. Renewing. The low of lows. The high of highs. The best of times. The worst of times.

Progress has been on a lot of different fronts and thus slow, interminable… but not without some synergy. My typing and my guitar playing for instance. Both my typing and guitar playing have reached a definitive all-time high for competency-- fluidity, control, strength, etc. My stretching. My body is now more flexible than it has been at probably pretty much any time since high school when my various sporting activities kept me a bit more limber. The stretching has been a direct answer to the tension and stiffness that I have developed from trying to sit for marathon amounts of time coding or writing.

We need a little Christmas.

Stretching with Helena climbing all over me. And then the line about the Angel on my shoulder and I am up jumping around and marching with her. Combating the shit with the good. Finding that balance of not being an empty headed “see no evil- hear no evil” type, but at the same time not being beholden to every stray atrocity that flies uponthe screen. This is a sort of mind control at some level. Flood the zone with shit and what not. We can control people with conservatism and we can control people with liberalism. The bottom line is control though.

11/12/2021

Back to the river bucket by bucket-- each notebook a bucket fifty layers deep. The bookworm came feasting till the fat job’s complete and all the work has been digested-- its lessons not learned, but beat.

My freedom comes from ether, releasing substance to the spheres, seeking instead the mysterious connection between the easily accepted but infinitely infinite challenge of love.

Philip Glass found me this fall via Youtube. My Solfeggio frequencies, Radiohead, Eric Satie, Debussey, Amelie soundtrack probably primed the algorithm for this. *Glassworks* popped up, which is supposed to be one of his more accessible cycles. Glass goes Pop or something. Whatever it is I really like it. And just from the tonal space it occupies I’m sure the old boys from Radiohead like it too. Would like to do a deeper dive into Glass’s works-- they provide such a padded room and make hours of coding related tasks seem a bit more civilized.

You situation with the Blazers sounds rough…my condolences. We on the other hand are super fortunate to have a complete rebuilt roster. And it was done really well! No process needed. It was orchestrated by the same guy that built up the Denver program. I love it. Assuming there are no big injuries… which seems like a big assumption these days… probably all days really I guess, the playoffs will be really fun. Setting up a nice summer sports schedule when combined with the World Cup, which I have also been lowkey following, which is something you can do with the World Cup cause the whole qualifying process is pretty glacial and spaced out. This round is tinged with very recent memory of not qualifying for the World Cup.

Watching the three games simultaneously on the tv in the Air BNB in St. Louis after running around the what neighborhood? Describe the buildings… the boarded up buildings. The decimated parts of the city abutting historic neighbourhoods. How did it come to this? Me running in the cold, feeling old and slow. But starting to gain some steam. Lost in my p[ath in some ways. Working at Graff where I was an absolute fish out of water and without the new vision for a tech career coming together in my field of imagination yet (still six months and a trip back to China off)

I am trying to become an exceptional writer.

I am trying to fully overcome my creative block and accept my work and own my work flow as a creative and productive individual. Who feels comfortable expressing himself and recording his thoughts. And has been developing an ever shrewder judgement on how to turn these inchoate personal expressions and thoughts into something that can be nourishing and connecting to other people.

Writing and songwriting as a way to abstract the processes and challenges and get them to line up a little bit.

I have been living in a THC induced state of mania in order to be productive, in order to be creative, in order to focus.

Let go, give space, feel flow, go, unyielding into the everything ahead.

10/24/2021

It had been saying rain all week. We’d had to move the party up two days. Instead of a Sunday afternoon “Animal Predator” seventh birthday extravaganza, we’d do it on Friday- the kids would come straight from school or chess club or aftercare. We’d all gather at 4:00 in our back courtyard on Cuyler. Autumnal color up and down our leafy street. Witches at their cauldrons in windows. Bones and skulls scattered

Concrete and cemement and ivy green and gone orange and red creeping up the wall and the chain link at the top and the the tracks and then the deep blue of the late afternoon sky and they roaring and rizing and the metra northshore obscures the sky and banshee races south towards downtown. Where is even the next Metra stop after Lawerence? I should look at a map.

We’d string the crepe paper and colorful bunting and set up a table with some snacks and later the chocolate cupcakes with woodland creature plastic decorative toppers and the aluminum foil wrapped owl pellet cake pops- a mouth watering combination of chocolate dipped mix of cake batter and frosting with secret ingredient dry, crunchy Ramen noodles to simulate the mouse femours and shrew skulls found in the actual owl pellets that the kids would be disceting after a few rounds of *Birds of Prey*-- a game involving dropping badminton birdies from the various levels of or three stories of porches into the back courtyard while a child in an animal mask attempts to swipe the falling birdies out of the air with a butterfly net, and before the *Woodland Creature Scavenger Hunt* where the children while wearing woodland creature masks will scurry around our yard collecting bits that have been stached around for them while the two big bad predetors-- a Kodiak Bear and a shifty eyed owl-- betsy and I with grocery bags over our heads that betsy has cleverly drawn an alarming bear and a convincingly predatorial owl on the other. The singing, the cupcakes and cake pops and then the pinata, of course, also a giant owl pellet. This one dissected less delicately. Instead of delicately probing this “owl pellet” with a tooth pick, we’d whack it with a big stick we found in the yard with a short nub on one end that some of the livelier kids used to impale the giant turd shaped pianta like they were gaffing a sea creature. When the pellet finally popped, it burst forth tuffs of faux fur and plastic bones from ripped apart dollar store decorative plastic skeletons as well as a bit of candy. The kids were delighted. Chipmunk, Weasel, Badger, Squirrel

Now, Sunday, waiting for the rain. The party a success. Two more parties attended on Saturday as Esme and her classmates tick one by one their seventh rotation round the sun. And we sit around the breakfast table chatting about predatory wasps (Mud Daubers) and attempt to tune out Helena’s whining which somehow doesn’t completely destroy