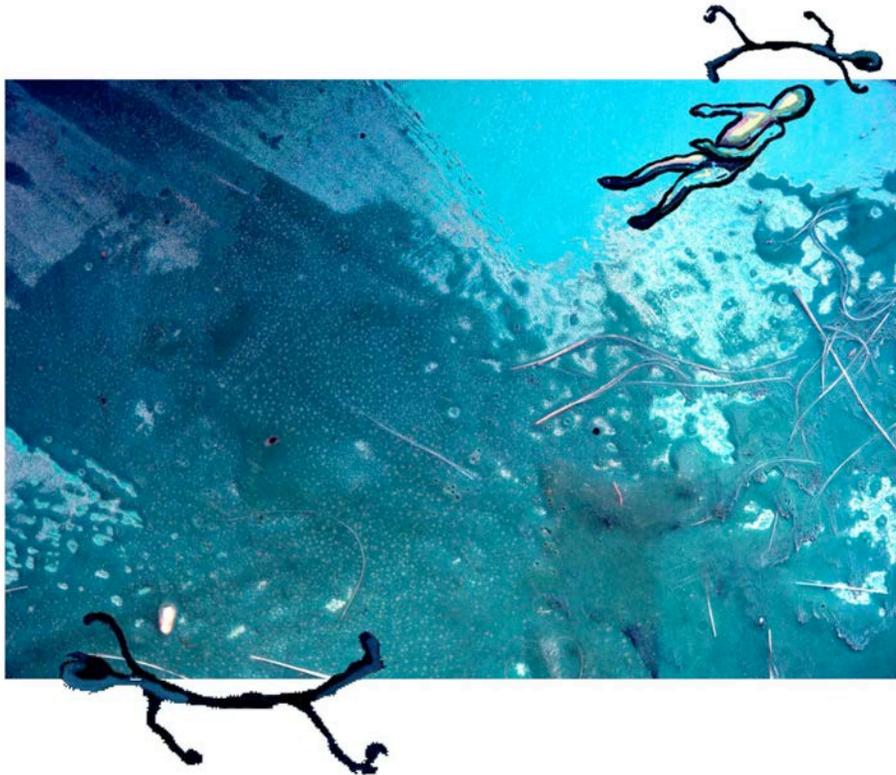


Ethics and Lao-Tzu

Intimations of Character



Ed Mendelowitz

University of the Rockies Press
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The author would like to express appreciation to Kristina for permission to use artwork, transcripts, notes, conversations and assorted printed materials. It is her story, or perhaps ours, that binds together the disparate elements of the greater narrative. I would also like to express thanks to Kristina's father for permission to incorporate email exchanges. My book is about nothing if not the complexities of the self. I find, in this light, this unanticipated gesture moving indeed. Finally, my gratitude to my editor, Louis Hoffman, for a willingness to endorse work blithely unconcerned with convention.

For Robert Coles,

“Those honor Nature well who teach that she can
speak on everything, even on theology.”

Blaise Pascal

You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary.

Leviticus

PRELUDE

THE SETUP AND THEMES, A GIRL WHO HEARS VOICES,
AND, OF COURSE, A FEW WORDS ABOUT BECKETT

A NOVEL ABOUT DISENCHANTMENT AND ATTRIBUTES,
MATHEMATICS AND MURDER, GARDENS, LAO-TZU, AND MODERNITY

ART OF THE NOVEL

RESURRECTION AND PROVIDENCE
(TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST OF THE HEART)

ART AND AWARENESS

INNER BLUEPRINTS

THE SOUNDTRACK,
OR THE MUSICIAN WHO WANTED TO BECOME A SAINT AND WHO MADE IT
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POET AS SEER, POETRY AS ELIXER

ANOTHER NOVEL, THIS ONE ABOUT
TIME, PREJUDICE, AND THE LAMED-VOV

CHUANG-TZU

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ASYLUM

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INTERLUDE

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(A LATE IMPULSE RECORDING BY COLTRANE)

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(DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY FIGHTS FOR ITS LIFE)

COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS
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(I AM THAT)

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(NOW AM I CHUANG-TZU DREAMING OF BEING A BUTTERFLY,
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CODA
WATCHING THE RIVER FLOW
(RETURN TO THE SEA)

INTRODUCTION

A few evenings ago, I turned on my television set to watch Michelangelo Antonioni's transitional and largely unknown *Il grido*. The film was made in 1957 just two years before the filmmaker's breakthrough masterpiece *L'avventura*. Before I could switch to the video, however, I stumbled upon a replay of an interview originally conducted ten years ago with a former member of the infamous Charles Manson gang. The woman, Leslie Van Houghton, had only recently been denied parole once again, the authorities and other concerned parties maintaining that the dastardly nature of the collective crime (a wretched act committed decades ago by tragically confused and grotesquely misguided youths) was evidence of a deranged and violent core categorically different from that of others. Such a defect, the former prosecutor argued, would always pose a threat to society. I do not know much about Van Houghton or the course of her incarceration. As I listened, however, I was struck by what seemed to be a contrite and forthright woman who, in years of enforced solitude and personal reckoning, had thought more deeply about herself than many—about glaring former conflicts (fuelled and capped by a runaway, ultimately perverse, impressionability) and the terrible bloodletting in which she had participated. Is it possible that Van Houghton is not the cold-hearted killer people claim and fear? Is it possible for a person to change in unobserved and profoundly uncommon ways that normative types themselves do not sufficiently fathom or see?

Considering the dubious state of the world, the spate of recent conflagrations, wars, and corporate scandals, the travesty of our political campaigns and elections, it would seem that ethics is hardly a binary or superfluous thing. Manson himself, disturbed as he is, is not without awareness of a sort, though, to be sure, his self-serving brand of antinomianism (which lets itself too conveniently off the hook and balks at more thoroughgoing self-examination) is self-indulgent and dangerous in the extreme—far removed from the sort of carefulness and care for which we shall here be lobbying. Still, it is at least conceivable that Van Houghton's quiet and halting demeanor (acquired, one surmises, through long years of self-reproach and remorse) may present us with a real-time moral sensibility in comparison with which the glib generalizations of experts and talk show hosts may reasonably be said to pale. I recall once having witnessed transformation of this sort at closer range while working in a California correctional facility (the very same one in which Manson himself at that time was held in solitary confinement) during my graduate training in psychology. Listening to the interview for a few moments, I found myself contemplating the gullibility of what Ibsen had called "the compact majority," realizing that it is not only cult members who fall prey to conformity or influence and thinking, moreover, that the story before me bore on matters of complexity and character I have tried to underscore throughout this book. Inevitably, we are talking about exceptions rather than crowds.

It is a strange world we live in, one in which images promulgated by the ever-burgeoning media and mass define people and events according to easily recognizable emblems and attributes, ones which are simple-minded and quick and do not take up so much of our time or energy that we miss, God forbid, the next story or commercial. There is rampant "TelePrompTer" opinion, as a young woman we will soon meet puts it concisely, but too little substance or soul, steadfast inquiry or circumspect passion. Is it possible that we overlook the essential integrity of a woman who would take responsibility for the weight of the cross that she, too, must now bear while overestimating the endless chatter of well-paid "experts" who have, it is plainly apparent, never undertaken such protracted inward scrutiny and stock? It is a

world that the Danish writer Kierkegaard already had critiqued in the middle of the 19th century and about which many perceptive observers had subsequently warned during the one we have only inexpertly and recently traversed. Not long after Kierkegaard, the wandering philosopher Nietzsche prophesied the impending dark side of our vaunted, yet essentially godless, democracy: a world in which reality would be determined by an increasingly leveled human consciousness and globe and the perpetually devolving mean. “We have gained reality,” wrote the Nietzsche-immersed Robert Musil in his novel *The Man Without Qualities*, “and lost dream.” We will have time to briefly ponder that monumental achievement and meet there a fictional criminal who, not unlike Manson, captures the public imagination of his particular location and day and whose thoughts and psychology, by no means wholly sound, have nonetheless their idiosyncratic coherence and logic.

It is understandable, though unfortunate, if it turns out that we fear setting loose another one of the chastened, a woman who, through guilt and metamorphosis, might conceivably expose the epoch's collective new clothes and thereby, perhaps, assist the rest of us in finding our way back to something more substantive and real, possibly even to ourselves. The centenarian filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl (director of *Triumph of the Will* and other films by turns intriguing and troubling), only recently deceased, like most of us, never lived behind physical bars. Even in old age, she continued to balk at insinuations that she bore any culpability for the atrocities of the Nazis or for furthering their sinister projects and darkened cause. Like many of us, she would conveniently forget the incriminating facts—claimed, I suppose, that she pulled no trigger and released no gas, that she didn't really know. Riefenstahl was a talented and oftentimes moving artist, her films infused even with mystical overtones, the very splendor of nature and humankind. Yet the more inward struggle was absent or, more likely, deeply submerged and, hence, atrophied.* She fascinated us, in part, because she served as a kind of mirror, predisposed as we are to externalizing demonized axes of evil while going easy on our own idealized projects and selves. The threat Van Houghton poses, by way of contrast, may well turn out to be to our own smug complacency and abiding self-righteousness, our moral/intellectual/ religious lassitude/platitudes, our robotic inability to look more earnestly within. Manson, coincidentally, has always contended that he, too, is our mirror.

The daimonically brilliant Federico Fellini, a filmmaker whose work resides on visionary planes far surpassing merely stylistic/opportunistic/native talent (intimations of character, aversion to politics in pursuit of more rarified goals), early on in what was to become a staggeringly rich, even effusive career, wrote presciently:

There is a vertical line in spirituality that goes from the beast to the angel and on¹ which we oscillate. Every day, every minute carries the danger of losing ground.

The director was speaking about the “still, small voice” and the inward struggle, truer *jihad*. Kafka, before whom Fellini seemed oftentimes worshipful, had written that only our misconstrued conception of time

* This is a far cry from the pervasive integrity defining the films, for instance, of Riefenstahl's émigré compatriot Werner Herzog. Herzog's recent *Invincible* quotes a hallowed passage about saints and sinners (the few and the many) and inconsolable woe from Schwartz-Bart's elegiac novel *The Last of the Just*, one we, too, will encounter in our study. The ethically informed and often spellbinding New German Cinema (Herzog, Wenders, Fassbinder, and Achternbusch, for example): intimations of character, last minute variations on a theme.

led us to conjecture a Day of Judgment, that it was, rather, a kind of summary court in perpetual session, not least of all in our own minds and breasts. It is insufficient that we passively ponder primetime's ethical extremes and exemplars while failing to apprehend for whom the bell more nearly tolls. Where on earth shall we be heading from here?

Although I have envisioned this work as having broad, even literary, appeal, I have wanted to relate it especially to my own discipline of psychology and to the fields of psychiatry and mental health generally. The non-linear, flowing, and polyphonic text eventually takes up and returns repeatedly to a young patient of mine, Kristina. It is an extraordinarily moving story by any account and an approach that allows us to contemplate relevant narratives and themes through a kind of "direct pointing," thereby undercutting theoretical/polemical abstraction and returning us to immediacy, context, and encounter. I have done this, by and large, by letting Kristina speak for herself rather than discussing our work with textbook precision or scholastic detachment. The fuller chronicle is dizzyingly intricate such that any attempt to render it completely would be tantamount to writing an encyclopedia, with the result that reading it would quickly become as daunting a prospect as well. I have opted instead for a fragmentary presentation of material, the vast majority of this having been accumulated while I was writing the book itself. In the end, both client and therapist are gratified to see how effective this approach has been in communicating an unusual woman's remarkable mind and experience and the nature of her interactions with psychotherapy, system, and world. We have much to learn from this wise and tortured soul, this unremittingly searching—often eloquent—and very human voice. Readers should pay close attention to the interplay of numerous literary/filmic/philosophical/religious/musical passages with voices, visions, dreams, reveries, revelations and other "rogue states" of consciousness, which I have been determined to illumine and amplify if not wholly redeem. Artwork is, excepting a few noted instances, courtesy of Melody Lee or Mele, the child artist within Kristina who speaks quietly, though movingly, through pictures as opposed to sermons, stump speeches, lectures, or words (intimations of character: keen observation and rendering). Again, the return to the immediate and personal is central and key.

Readers will notice that I have indicated no page numbers for the numerous quotations included in this book. Early on in the process of putting it together, I gravitated toward a cleaner, more aesthetic format and look as opposed to the timeworn academic approach. This flies in the face of a Zeitgeist that aims at strict denotation of chapter and verse so as to ensure legitimacy and forestall litigation and, I suppose, make the case for originality as well. The irony, of course, is that writers and publishing houses compulsively obey the dictates of the marketplace with the result that methodology becomes paramount and genuine individuality recedes into the proverbial woodwork—symptomatic of the matrix within which such writing occurs. Rather, all quotations have been faithfully rendered, each consulted text indicated in the list of references that appears at the end of the book. Similarly, whereas endnotes have sometimes taken up very nearly as much space as the article itself in my previous writing (a classic instance of the tail wagging the dog), here they have been foresworn entirely in keeping with the spirit and objectives at hand. It is doubtful that Lao-tzu would have concerned himself overmuch with exactly who said what and just when she or he said it or on what page you will now find it in whichever edition. We have gained reality and lost dream.

In Pirandello's novel *The Late Mattia Pascal*, we encounter a character who offers ironic commentary on this matter. There the aged librarian Romitelli, a doddering retiree, obsessively memorizes the names of composers and the dates of their compositions from out of a gargantuan

compendium, *Historical Dictionary of Musicians, Artists and Amateurs, Living and Dead*. The tragedy, of course, is that the poor fellow never gets to the thing itself—music, which, as Coltrane had suggested with typical tact and sagacity (form in movement, intimations of character), might have spoken more volubly for itself:

I watched in amazement. Why should a man in his condition, on the brink of the grave, care what Birnbaum Gianvanni Abramo had printed in Leipzig in 1738 in octavo? Apparently he was unable to do without those dates and pieces of information about musicians (and he himself so deaf!) and artists and amateurs, living and dead, before the year 1758. Or did he perhaps think that, since a library is made for reading and since no other living soul ever turned up there, the librarian himself was obliged to read? Perhaps he had picked that book up at random and might as easily have chosen another. He was so senile that this supposition is possible, indeed more probable than the first.

Thankfully, there are still a few souls, living and dead, who apprehend the absurdity and haven't misplaced their senses of perspective or humor.

There is in the Zen literature the story of the master who points imploringly at the moon while all the disciples remain stuck, unthinkingly, on the master's finger. What matters is that substantive words and thoughts are sometimes relayed and uttered and, further, that we, the beneficiaries, receive and utilize them to personal and planetary advantage. Innumerable professionals pride themselves on articles and books written according to manual exactitude while our collective disciplines languish in tedium and error nonetheless.

Here, as elsewhere, we may consider jazz as metaphor, taking note of the manner in which adepts of the genre honor pantheon and tradition as well as ever-shifting signatures and codes and where unselfconscious sharing commingles, often seamlessly, with freedom of expression and unique utterance. Listen to Eric Dolphy's astonishing *Out to Lunch* on Blue Note, recorded shortly before the reedman's untimely death during the seminal mid-sixties, attending especially to the manner in which Bobby Hutcherson's vibraphone deftly replaces the piano, thereby opening up further space for exploration. Check out alto saxophonist Jackie McLean's *Destination Out* and *One Step Beyond* or Hutcherson's own *Dialogue* for further Blue Note evidence of gods who dance and mortals who know how to commune. These recordings are stunning displays of convergence and creativity to which the rest of us can only clumsily aspire. Though I fall woefully short of the mark, it is this sort of melding of interlocutors and style that I have had in mind in arranging my own composition or symphony, perhaps only song.

Still, in comparison to the schools of thought that currently hold sway within the professional scene (the so-called "positive" and "cognitive-behavioral" psychologies, no less than the familiar pharmaceutical expedencies, seem to have effected virtual strongholds on the clinical tenor and marketplace), the present work may well be considered a notable reminder or feat, immersing itself in nuances, aesthetics, and ideas that these popular yet pedestrian reductions inadequately broach. It is not so much that these approaches are wrong but rather that they are self-impressed and constrictive beyond decency and very nearly beyond belief. It is as if the powers in professional preponderance had tacitly conspired to sanction only the middle bandwidths along the ontological spectrum while relegating all other frequencies of experience and consciousness to the back pages of avowed science and history. There are now experts who will train us in the purported art of cajoling our minds into providing

consistently pleasant dreams, or who will at least take our money for claiming to have done so. Can you imagine Shakespeare, Beethoven, Ellington, or Dylan constrained to just the middle octaves and major chords? Could we easily tolerate a world in which the choices were either New Age music or Elton John [the latter capable of real poignancy in the days before stardom or fluoxetine or, perhaps, the obligatory amphetamine rhythm and pitch]? “Pascal on Prozac,” as Coles somewhere laments; the master’s disciple stuck dumbly on middle or, perhaps, a chemically-induced and shrill high C.

Concerning the final ascent of just one of the members of what Nietzsche had called that epoch transcending “republic of genius,” Thomas Mann writes in *Doctor Faustus*:

. . . Beethoven’s own artistry had outgrown itself, had left the snug regions of tradition, and, as humanity gazed on in horror, climbed to spheres of the totally personal, the exclusively personal—an ego painfully isolated in its own absoluteness, and, with the demise of his hearing, isolated from the sensual world as well. He was the lonely prince over a ghostly realm, from which came emanations evoking only a strange shudder in even the most well-disposed of his contemporaries, terrifying messages to which they could have reconciled themselves only at rare, exceptional moments.

An instant later, the matter is reconsidered—in a manner Mann’s contemporary Musil (who, like Freud and Jung, had little feeling for music) had called “essayistic”—from a different perspective and, hence, somewhat revised:

In fact, Beethoven had been far more subjective, if not to say, far more “personal,” in his middle period than toward the end; at that earlier stage he had been much more intent on letting all conventions, formulas, and flourishes . . . be consumed by personal expression, on fusing all that with the subjective dynamic. Beethoven’s late work . . . had a quite different, much more forgiving and amenable relation to convention. Untouched, untransformed by the subjective, the conventional often emerged in the late works with a baldness—as if blown wide open, so to speak—with an ego-abandonment that, in turn, had an effect, more terrifyingly majestic than any personal indiscretion. In these structures . . . the subjective entered into a new relationship with the conventional, a relationship defined by death.

. . . Where greatness and death came together . . . there arose a sovereign objectivity amenable to convention and leaving arrogant subjectivity behind, because in it the exclusively personal—which after all had been the surmounting of a tradition carried to its peak—once again outgrew itself by entering, grand and ghostlike, into the mythic and collective.

Put another way, for all those legions who would equate mental health with well-being, easy listening, and the descending norm, it may be useful to invoke Dylan’s stark and simple caveat: “*And don’t criticize/What you can’t understand.*” More expressionistically, the poet reports back from the front:

Now at midnight all the agents
And the superhuman crew
Come out and round up everyone
That knows more than they do
Then they bring them to the factory
Where the heart-attack machine
Is strapped across their shoulders
And then the kerosene
Is brought down from the castles
By insurance men who go

Check to see that nobody is escaping
To Desolation Row

(Have I mentioned the ominous roles that insurance companies and the pharmaceutical houses now play in our protocols of psychological understanding, treatment, and care?) Dylan, it seems to me, also travels a high road and star-bound trajectory (similar to, though different from, Beethoven's: intimations of character, variations on our theme), one with hopefully miles and years still ahead to play itself out.

It is hardly surprising that the current schools of thought cling to their shibboleths and supports while avoiding the great figures and texts, paradoxes and conundrums, melodies, scores, and ideas. Yet wouldn't the globe itself be distorted (a word the "cognitive" camp has somehow managed to appropriate in order to circumscribe the thoughts of others without, apparently, trying it on personally for size), indeed bereft, without Hamlet and Lear, those last sonatas (what Mann is meditating on) and the Late Quartets, *Mood Indigo* and *Solitude*, *Visions of Johanna* and *Desolation Row* (to say nothing of the ethically instructive *Ballad of Hollis Brown*, *Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, *Who Killed Davey Moore?* and God knows how many other ones as well)? "We certainly should not want to do without these performances," we read in Kafka's own final fiction, "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk." Our intrapsychic/institutional/global prejudices and truncations, we are discovering belatedly, have resulted in uniformly unsatisfactory outcomes and works. We are survivors in an endlessly expanding universe of ever-diminishing returns.

I am reminded of my old mentor Rollo May, a Promethean figure in the field, musing somewhere upon the eager but ridiculous psychologist who is denied admittance into heaven after a lifetime of fanatical industry because of the cardinal sin of oversimplification. ("*You have spent your life making molehills out of mountains,*" the psychologist is told on his Day of Judgment; "*We sent you to earth for seventy-two years to a Dantean circus, and you spent your days and nights at sideshows!*") It is unthinkable, we must insist straightaway, that, say, Dolphy or May would have encountered such otherworldly entanglements with bureaucracy: intimations of character, spirits of complexity. No doubt, the psychologist had, in his rush to succeed, passed too coarsely over Coltrane and Coles, Buddha and Buber, Kafka, Kristina and all the rest. It should not take a mind such as Pirandello's to remind us of wider vistas we have forfeited for the trees. Heaven, we are being regularly reminded, isn't taken by parochialism or narrow-mindedness, errant energy or misplaced force.

The excerpts from the *Tao te Ching* interspersed throughout the text, all double-spaced, are taken from Stephen Mitchell's excellent translation. You may wish to consult the novel itself if you would like to know when Pirandello said it and on what page it is written. I worked from two different translations, I recall, while once writing an essay on that particular piece—further evidence of enigma and flux, the compounding of dilemma. We will have ample time to contemplate the manifold problems associated with absoluteness and precision, articles of inadequately investigated faith in the current professional and political scenes.

There is a saying in the East that one cannot nail a block of wood into empty space, a notion that traces back to a Taoist understanding of the flow of all things. It is what Emerson has in mind when he speaks out poetically against fixity in mores and habit. It is noteworthy that our most decent human specimens often believe in little that is given, coming instead to an understanding of things based on awareness and transience rather than graven images, guidelines, or gurus. Such ways of being are fully in keeping with what we have gleaned from modernist science, literature, music, and art yet viewed

quizzically as quaint curiosities by legions of card-carrying professional experts who, having learned the salient and marketable codes, overlook loftier designs and observation posts. There is an egocentrism and mercantilism at play tending in the end toward mediocrity, myopia, gluttony, even death. In this work, I have sought to redress the imbalance by pondering the ancient signs and modernist equivalents to all that we hold sublime in the moral, even spiritual, domains. It is at once a looking back and summoning forth, a plea, among other things, for caution, circumspection, and courage.

The entire book has evolved out of a brief and elliptical paper presented several years ago at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association. That event was poorly attended, unlike the ostentatious opening festivities during which Jesse Jackson, playing the part with great flourish, was introduced as “the moral conscience of America.” Those who were present at the ancillary session seemed, nonetheless, to respond to what I had to say. That briefer statement, as well as this more fully elaborated piece, is dedicated to the child psychoanalyst Robert Coles, a rare and gifted man whose life and work, it seems to me, embodies much of what I have been pulling for in this discussion of character and ethics. Let us call him the Chekov of psychiatry; surely, one can hardly do better than this. Also instructive are two comments made by the posthumously famous Walter Benjamin that I chanced upon while engaged in this work: first, that one writes a book only insofar as one is having difficulty finding the book one is wanting to read; and, second, that Benjamin, a man of prodigious mental and literary talents, had as “his greatest ambition,” to quote Hannah Arendt, to produce a work “consisting entirely of quotations.” These two thoughts, taken together, go some distance in further locating the present piece. Ennio Flaiano, by the way, is the Italian writer who, among other endeavors, had co-scripted some of the Fellini’s early films. Italian friends inform me that his was the self-effacing mind behind the maestro.

Il grido, it turns out, translates to “the outcry,” an apt expression with which to convey an essential aspect of this book or assemblage or collage. Granted, I am not up to the artistry or grace of Antonioni. But the careful reader will note a similar sense of solemnity and dismay that had defined the painterly films (meditations in which dialogue is sparse and image is the thing) of this other Italian master—all set against an increasingly industrial/technological/virtual/shrunken collective consciousness and globe. Certainly, my rendition, like the filmmaker’s, details the many ways in which we moderns, like a bad Internet experience, too often disconnect and miss our mark. It is my hope that my own voice, and the manifold wiser and more articulate ones I have here rounded up, will strike a few chords and resonate within certain minds. It would be good to think that this work might affect some readers in the manner that Antonioni’s transitional work or, if I am right, the transformation of that shame-ridden and soul-searching penitent, now graying and still waiting patiently in prison, that evening affected me. “Some books seem like a key to unfamiliar rooms in one’s own castle,” the youth Kafka once wrote to a friend. “The light gleams an instant,” muses Beckett, “then it’s night once more.”

Ed Mendelowitz
Lexington, MA
7/04/02

ETHICS AND LAO-TZU

Intimations of Character

Do not be confused by surfaces; in the depths everything becomes law.

Rainer Maria Rilke

There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid.

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
"Circles"

But to wear out your brain trying to make things into one without realizing that they are all the same—this is called "three in the morning." What do I mean by "three in the morning"? When the monkey trainer was handling out acorns, he said, "You get three in the morning and four at night." This made all the monkeys furious. "Well, then," he said, "you get four in the morning and three at night." The monkeys were delighted. There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger. Let them, if they want to. So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer.

Chuang-tzu

Here first an assurance respecting my own humble person. I shall be as willing as the next man to fall down in worship before the System, if only I can manage to set eyes on it. Hitherto I have had no success; and though I have young legs, I am almost weary from running back and forth between Herod and Pilate.

Soren Kierkegaard,
Concluding Unscientific Postscript

'They spell out—as you can see here—transcriptions of reality from translations of ancient Chinese instead of quietly reading the original text of their own lives and responsibilities. To them the day before yesterday seems more accessible than today. But reality is never and nowhere more accessible than in the immediate moment of one's own life . . . All it guarantees us is what is superficial, the façade . . . [O]ne must break through this. Then everything becomes clear.'

'But how does one do that? How does one proceed? Is there some sure guide?'

'No, there is none,' said Kafka, shaking his head. 'There is no route map on the way to truth. The only thing that counts is to make the venture of total dedication. A prescription would already imply a withdrawal, mistrust, and therewith the beginning of a false path. One must accept everything patiently and fearlessly. Man is condemned to life, not death.'

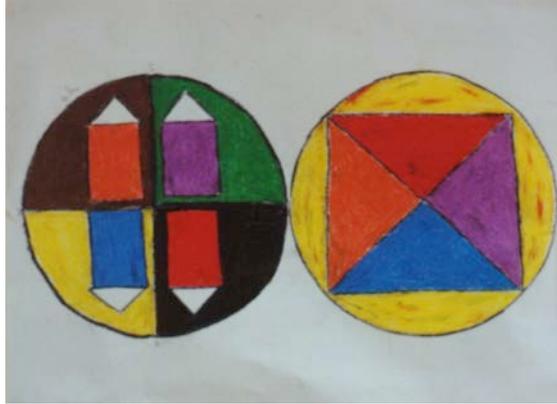
Gustav Janouch,
Conversations with Kafka

Why do people have to complicate a thing so simple I cannot make out.

Samuel Beckett

PRELUDE

1



"Inner Realms" 12/98

2

I find myself thinking lately about the moral dimension, about ethics and grace and the manner in which we live our lives. Professionally sanctioned guidelines have grown in size and detail over the years, yet a deeper moral sensibility has not followed suit. We may distinguish here between standards stated with numeric precision and a subtle truth more difficult to embrace. The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao, the name that can be named is not the eternal Name.

We are quoting Lao-tzu, Chinese mystic and unpremeditated founder of Taoism. Uncredentialed and a graduate of no program we know, he knew what he was talking about and—though he said little—much that he said had to do with ethics. “He who knows doesn’t speak, he who speaks doesn’t know.” I thought we might talk about him.

Lao-tzu, whose name translates to something like “Old Master,” is said to have been the slightly older contemporary of Buddha, Confucius, and Heraclitus. Historically speaking, his reputation is vouchsafed. Reticent by nature, Lao-tzu’s philosophy suggests that he spoke hesitantly and was disinclined to write. What we have of his, the *Tao te Ching*, is a slim collection of eighty-one thoughts or epigrams set down reluctantly in old age. As legend has it, the text was offered in deference to the gatekeeper as Lao-tzu passed through the Great Wall of China into wilderness and worldly retirement. He was not heard from again, but what he left behind has resounded as another still, small voice echoing through the corridors of time.

Stephen Mitchell, translator of the world’s spiritual literature, elaborates:

Like an Iroquois woodsman, he left no traces. All he left us is his book:
[a] manual on the art of living, written in a style of gemlike lucidity,
radiant with humor and grace and large-heartedness and deep
wisdom: one of the wonders of the world.

The dearth of biographical detail is fitting. Lao-tzu himself had said it: “He who knows others is learned, he who knows self is wise.” It is as if we are very close to the source and, further, as if, here as

elsewhere, this source is disinclined toward volume or self-aggrandizement. The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao, the name named not the eternal Name.

3

We moderns have programs and protocols for all things, even our gods. One cannot earn a doctorate without a pocket calculator. Sagacity tends toward knowing when to let things be. Here one finds no canons or creeds but rather observes lives lived in simplicity and wonder, in sympathy with the flow of time and existence and our fleeting earthly sojourn.

When they lose their sense of awe,
people turn to religion.
When they no longer trust themselves,
they begin to depend upon authority.

Therefore the Master steps back
so that people won't be confused.
He teaches without a teaching,
so that people will have nothing to learn.

You may think this the sentimentality of ancients and mystics rendered obsolete by knowledge and advance, yet even for Einstein religious feeling is

a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law revealing an intelligence of such superiority that, in comparison, that of human beings is an insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of [the scientist's] life and work.

Let us not fall prey to the current rage of confusing science and scientism. Physics, too, pays tribute to the beyond in the end. And Emerson as well, with his talk of "common heart" and "transcendent simplicity," "ineffable" and "Spiritual Laws"—all essentially Taoist conceptions:

Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descended into use from we know not whence. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine.

Rivers, obeisance, and mystery.

4

If such speculations seem far removed from our Western touchstones and shibboleths, I would suggest that they are kindred to an essential spirit therein. Abraham's god, too, teaches Buber, is "a wanderer" who exists with "no fixed spot, no 'house.'" No immutable celestial icon, this deity "wanders hither and thither" and, like a Buddha, "comes and goes." Foundational here is movement but also the piety in silence: the significance of the pause. Sabbath or *shabbaton*, "a time of rest" consecrated to Yahweh or Void and what lies beyond. Here in silence, teaches Buber, one apprehends not merely

“human law” but the “universal” as well, that which has “only to be discovered and separated out.” Thus does time itself evolve, in human terms, as “the ever-returning passage from toil to appeasement,” “discord to harmony”: Emerson’s “perpetual presence of the sublime.” Buddha and Buber, ethics and Lao-tzu—“a day of stability,” “untroubled serenity,” “utter peace between Heaven and Earth.”

THE SETUP AND THEMES, A GIRL WHO HEARS VOICES,
AND, OF COURSE, A FEW WORDS ABOUT BECKETT

5



"Imprisoned Freedom"
Mele 5/97

6

And so we have a philosophy that leans to the (neuro-hemispherical) right and the East, one that would counterpose liturgy with awareness, pinpoint with perspective, ego with self. Resistive to all linear and formulaic expedience, it points to an ethos of heart over creed, words once carved in stone now a cabalist's letters in flight.

The psychologist who is one of my profession's poster persons on matters of ethics has an apparent fondness for bow ties and is not shy of the spotlight. He is quick to point out his involvement with this case or that, gives lectures that incorporate overhead projections and jokes that aren't funny. He is a hard drive of information regarding lawsuits and laws and how to stay out of trouble, smiles broadly, seems intent that we laugh at the jokes that aren't funny. One wonders about the price of success and why it does not free itself to delve more deeply into the ethical terrain. Is ethics, perhaps, synonymous with public profile and popularity?

Robert Coles is a very different example. He dresses simply and, so far as I know, is not given to affectation or bow ties. His manner and bearing stand in stark contrast with those of the camera-ready representatives of the moral domains, his preoccupations correspondingly so as he meditates on the tension between the "thinking materialist" (one bound, for example, by professional protocol) and the "anxiously aspiring creature who bows [the] head and prays." Coles looks here where we, too, might

look—"toward the beyond, toward that 'Another'"—as he ponders "this matter of two minds" and the uncertain fate of a world "gone secular."

7

The Master doesn't try to be powerful;
thus he is truly powerful.
The ordinary man keeps reaching for power;
thus he never has enough . . .

When the Tao is lost, there is goodness.
When goodness is lost, there is morality.
When morality is lost, there is ritual.
Ritual is the husk of true faith,
the beginning of chaos.

Therefore the Master concerns himself
with the depths and not the surface,
with the fruit and not the flower.
He has no will of his own.
He dwells in reality,
and lets all illusions go.

8

Frieda Fromm-Reichmann was, along with their mutual mentor H. S. Sullivan, one of the two finest therapists Rollo May ever knew, though he recalled her as diminutive, awkward, and unprepossessing. In Hanna Green's autobiographical novel, a psychotic girl recounts the course of her work with this tiny doctor "known and loved by madmen the world over." It is the strength of Fromm-Reichmann's character—and also her patient's—that allows Deborah to emerge gradually from her inner world of Yr (a world that once offered succor but now threatens to consume), the relationship itself a model of unselfconsciousness, engagement, humor, and care:

"Show me," she said. "Show me the arm."
Deborah undid the sleeve, burning with shame.
"Wow!" The doctor said in her funny, accented colloquial English. "That's going to make a hell of a scar!"
"All my dancing partners will wince when they see it."
"It is not impossible that you will dance someday, and that you will live in the world again. You know, don't you, that you are in big trouble? It's time to tell me fully what brought you to doing that business there."
She was not frightened, Deborah saw, or horrified, or ridiculing, or making any of the hundred wrong expressions that people had always shown in the face of her trouble. She was only completely serious. Deborah began to tell her about Yr.

Deborah has that eerie precocity (an autodidactic acquaintance with Coles's "that Another") we oftentimes find in childhood and early madness. ("*I'm sorry I'm young*," she tells an older veteran of the wards with mock contrition; "*We have the right to be as crazy as anyone else.*") And there is, too, that penchant for metaphor and irony and a yearning for justice too seldom found. During one particular session, Deborah tells her doctor (affectionately christened "Furii" in an gesture that personalizes a relationship that will become for awhile her very lifeline and hope) about an incident on the unit involving staff impropriety and about which she has complained without acknowledgement or response:

At last Furii agreed to mention it in the staff meeting, but Deborah was not convinced. "Maybe you doubt that I saw it at all."

"That is the one thing that I do not doubt," the doctor said. "But you see, I have no part in what is to be done on the wards; I am not an administrative doctor."

Deborah saw the match lighting dry fuel. "What good is your reality, when justice fails and dishonesty is glossed over and the ones who keep faith suffer? . . ."

"Look here," Furii said. "I never promised you a rose garden. I never promised you perfect justice . . ." (She remembered Tilda suddenly, breaking out of the hospital in Nuremberg, disappearing into the swastika-city and coming back laughing that hard, rasping parody of laughter. "*Shalom aleichem*, Doctor, they are crazier than I am!") . . . and I never promised you peace or happiness. The only reality I offer is challenge, and being well is being free to accept it or not at whatever level you are capable. I never promise lies, and the rose-garden world of perfection is a lie . . . and a bore, too!"

With such forthrightness and lack of pretense does a therapeutic relationship evolve and Deborah's Yr voice with its incessant refrain ("*You are not of them*") gradually recede as she learns that it may yet be possible to trust what is known, in the lexicon of Yr, as an "earth-one." Slowly, this other "veteran of many deceits" learns to inhabit a middle realm between the within and without, the here and there, one pointed to by Buddha and Buber, Einstein and Emerson, Coltrane and Coles.

9

There seems to be no agent more effective than another person in bringing a world for oneself alive, or, by a glance, a gesture, or a remark, shrivelling up the reality in which one is lodged.

Erving Goffman,
Asylums (a book quoted by R.D. Laing in *Divided Self, Politics of Experience, Politics of the Family* and perhaps elsewhere as well: as Kristina's father will soon tell us, "significant to me")

10

There is a story out of Beckett called "Dante and the Lobster" in which the protagonist goes through his day pondering literature and existence. He purchases a lobster for his aunt that is attacked

by a cat while he attends an Italian lesson and discusses the Florentine poet on the themes of pity and damnation. Arriving later at the aunt's, he unwraps the lobster and is mortified to find it still alive:

"They assured me it was fresh" said Belacqua.
Suddenly he saw the creature move, this neuter creature.
Definitely it changed its position. His hand flew to his mouth.
"Christ!" he said "it's alive."
His aunt looked at the lobster. It moved again. It made a faint nervous act of life on the oilcloth. They stood above it, looking down on it, exposed cruciform on the oilcloth. It shuddered again. Belacqua felt he would be sick.
"My God" he whined "it's alive, what'll we do?"
The aunt simply had to laugh. She bustled off to the pantry to fetch her smart apron, leaving him goggling down at the lobster, and came back with it on and her sleeves rolled up, all business.
"Well" she said "it is to be hoped so, indeed."
"All this time" muttered Belacqua. Then, suddenly aware of her hideous equipment: "What are you going to do?" he cried.
"Boil the beast" she said, "what else?"
"But it's not dead" protested Belacqua, "you can't boil it like that."
She looked at him in astonishment. Had he taken leave of his senses?
"Have sense" she said sharply, "lobsters are always boiled alive. They must be." She caught up the lobster and laid it on its back. It trembled. "They feel nothing" she said.
In the depths of the sea it had crept into the cruel pot. For hours, in the midst of its enemies, it had breathed secretly. It had survived the Frenchwoman's cat and his witless clutch. Now it was going alive into scalding water. It had to. Take into the air my quiet breath.
Belacqua looked at the old parchment of her face, grey in the dim kitchen.
"You make a fuss" she said angrily "and upset me and then lash into it for your dinner."
She lifted the lobster clear of the table. It had about thirty seconds to live.
Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all.
It is not.

11

Here we have a man of patent genius who has read everyone in sight right down to our own William James and who understands that there are no easy answers and, in a sense, no answers at all. Like Lao-tzu, Beckett points beyond certainty and schema while nonetheless "striving all the time for definition" not essentially a matter of words:

My work is a matter of fundamental sounds. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And bring their own aspirin.

Yet Beckett lives an impeccable life from the moral point of view. Visiting an ailing mother in Ireland when war breaks out in Europe, he returns to take part in the resistance, preferring, as he later put it, "France in war to Ireland in peace." There he might stay unimpeded in Paris were he to remain uninvolved. But the Nazis were making "life hell for my friends. I couldn't stand with my arms folded." Still, Beckett seems

to have no particular need for acclaim and later dismisses his considerable efforts and risks as “boy scout stuff.” [“*All true grace is economical,*” he would one day write, likely without thought of himself.] When rumors begin to fly that he will win the Nobel Prize, Beckett makes it clear that he desires neither distinction nor attention and later complains that the award has compromised his relationship to his work. [“*A breakdown of communication,*” observes science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, “*there is the real illness.*”] The money received he gives away to struggling artists. With what remains he purchases a phone that can call out but cannot receive. The voices he wanted, it would seem, were already there.

12

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
“Self-Reliance”

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can, old man,—you who have lived seventy years, not without honor of a kind,—I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that. One generation abandons the enterprises of another like stranded vessels.

Henry David Thoreau,
Walden

13

Richard Ellmann, in his study of Joyce, depicts the strange and poignant relationship that inhered between two Irish masters:

Beckett was addicted to silences, and so was Joyce; they engaged in conversations which consisted often of silences directed towards each other, both suffused with sadness, Beckett mostly for the world, Joyce mostly for himself. Joyce sat in his habitual posture, legs crossed, toe of the upper leg under the instep of the lower; Beckett, also tall and slender, fell into the same gesture. Joyce suddenly asked some such question as, “How could the idealist Hume write a history?” Beckett replied, “A history of representations.” Joyce said nothing . . .

Sabbath or *shabbaton*, the significance of the pause.

14

And so the modernist playwright is less bizarre than we had first surmised, lives a life of surpassing quietude and decency during his finite sojourn on what Pozzo had called “this bitch of an

earth." Eschewing all talk of "closed systems" whereby one might escape "the contingencies of the contingent world," Beckett finds, rather, an ethos in nothingness, "a coming and going in purposelessness." It is a credo grounded in nullity, if you like, and the real message of Beckett's enigmatic example and code is what we are to make of it all. "The light gleams an instant," observes Pozzo, "then it's night once more." If our mortal lot is without preordained import or destiny, there is nonetheless the possibility of this-worldly dignity, human immersion and sympathy. Beckett's terse and evocative language is here exquisite: "form in movement," "a little mercy to rejoice against judgment." "We are not saints," muses Vladimir at the end of his play, "but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?"

15

The phone rang and the doctor rose and went to the desk to answer it . . . Furiu shrugged in a little helpless sign of apology and spoke for a few moments. "Now . . ." she said, sitting down, "where were we?"

"In the bell-clanging world." Deborah [answered] acidly.

"Some of the calls I cannot stop—they are long distance or made specially from doctors who have no other time. I free us from as many of them as I can." She looked at Deborah with a little grin. "I know how hard it is to succeed with a 'great, famous doctor.' There is always such a desire to even up the score a little, even if it is with your own life, to keep her from an imaginary 'perfect record.' I tell you I have many failures too . . . Will we work together?"

"We were talking about contaminat[ion]," said Deborah.

"Ah, yes . . ." Furiu said.

Hanna Green,
I Never Promised You a Rose Garden

16

Moral to a profound degree, Lao-tzu's thoughts never let us forget that *we* are the human beings who must struggle and choose for ourselves, *live* with ourselves, that there can be no ethos that disregards the emotional, even conflicted, domains by leaping too conveniently into the established and concrete. ("The danger," writes Beckett, "is in the neatness of identifications.") There is no equation to be had that overlooks the being who equates, a point once again in keeping with avant-garde physics and new-millennium mathematics but overlooked by professionals and experts so impressed with themselves and, sadly, too many others as well.

Again, we quote Mitchell:

The teaching of the *Tao te Ching* is moral in the deepest sense. Unencumbered by any concept of sin the Master doesn't see evil as a force to resist, but simply as an opaqueness, a state of self-absorption which is in disharmony with the universal process, so that, as with a dirty window, the light can't shine through. This freedom from moral categories allows him his great compassion for [even] the wicked and selfish.

The symbol for the Tao is, hence, no graven image but rather the flow of water as in a brook or river, always in motion and forever following the lay of the land. And, so, we find ourselves, once again, in a

realm beyond organizationally/normatively applied/approved conceptions of morality and relations. No fixtures in nature. Rivers, obeisance, and ethics.

A NOVEL ABOUT DISENCHANTMENT AND ATTRIBUTES,
MATHEMATICS AND MURDER, GARDENS, LAO-TZU, AND MODERNITY

17



“Life in the Shadows” 1/01

18

One of the more remarkable novels of the twentieth century must surely have been Robert Musil's never-ending *The Man Without Qualities*. The novel, set in the twelve months preceding the outbreak of the First World War, was written, the author had said, in order “to provide help in understanding and coming to terms with the world”—an attempt at “dissolving the existing world and pointing toward a new synthesis of elements and ethics.” Musil, a mathematician and engineer by training, was deeply unsettled by his epoch and world, teeming as they were with nationalist ebullience, the worship of technological speed and advance, and rounded off with modern man and woman's self-adoration. He understood, like his contemporary Einstein, that mystery lay even at the heart of mathematics.

Perusing his collection of essays, *Precision and Soul*, we encounter “The Mathematical Man.” There, writing brilliantly, Musil says this:

All the life that whirls about us, runs, and stops is not only dependent on mathematics for its comprehensibility, but has effectively come into being through it and depends on it for its existence . . . For the pioneers of mathematics formulated usable notions of certain principles that yielded conclusions, methods of calculation, and results, and these were applied by the physicists to obtain new results; and finally came the technicians, who often took only the results and added new calculations . . . and thus the machines arose. And suddenly, after everything had been brought into the most beautiful kind of existence, the mathematicians—the ones who brood entirely within themselves—came upon something wrong in the fundamentals of the whole thing that absolutely could not be put right. They actually looked all the way to the bottom and found that the whole building was standing in midair. But the machines worked! We

must assume from this that our existence is a pale ghost; we live it, but actually only on the basis of an error without which it would not have arisen. Today there is no other possibility of having such fantastic, visionary feelings as mathematicians do.

Numbers and certainty, precision and soul. Rivers, obeisance, and mystery.

19

Ulrich is the central subject and object of our novel's attention. He is a man, much like Musil himself, of surpassing technical prowess and accomplishment yet dogged by unremitting questions about meaning and life, culture and existence, values and their apparent decline. To be sure, these are not the sorts of things upon which a young engineer is encouraged to dwell. One finds no cash value there and inefficiency is sure to ensue. In "A Sort of Introduction," we learn a bit more about the inward musings of Ulrich, someone at the top of his game and the end of his rope:

Finally, Ulrich realized that even in science he was like a man who had climbed one mountain range after another without ever seeing a goal. He had now acquired bits and pieces of a new way to think and feel, but the glimpse of the New, so vivid at first, had been lost amid the ever-proliferating details, and if he had once thought that he was drinking from the fountain of life, he had now drained almost all his expectations to the last drop. At this point he quit, right in the middle of an important and promising piece of work. He now saw his colleagues partly as relentless, obsessive public prosecutors and security chiefs of logic, and partly as opium eaters, addicts of some strange pale drug that filled their world with visions of numbers and abstract relations. "God help me," he thought, "surely I never could have meant to spend all my life as a mathematician?"

And so, the man without qualities retreats from a world in which he might easily succeed in order to move to the margins of life where, he hopes, may be found possibilities for renewal and respite. So much for obliging receipt of the reigning standards and visions, so much for the unqualified pursuit of material truths!

20

Ulrich lives in a time marked by an embrace of progress and patriotism, perpetual idols of the New. This is a weirdly distorted world in which, according to newspaper accounts, even a racehorse may be accorded the status of genius. Alienated to an extreme, Ulrich's mind is permeated, to put it quite simply, by a "mistrust of the usual certainties." Matters of convention and ethics, reality and belief, madness and mores, loom, for the man without qualities, exceedingly large. In Part II of our novel, "Pseudoreality Prevails," we read:

Psychiatry calls great elation "a hypomanic disturbance" . . . and regards all heightened states, whether of chastity or sensuality, scrupulosity or carelessness, cruelty or compassion, as pathologically suspect—how little would a healthy life mean if its only goal were a middle condition between two extremes! How drab it would be if its ideal were really no more than the denial of the exaggeration of its ideals! To recognize this is to see the moral norm no longer as a set

of rigid commandments but rather as a mobile equilibrium that at every moment requires continual efforts at renewal.

Ulrich questions norms that equate health and virtue with the median, holding forth the possibility of something more ennobling and vital. Obviously, these are not the thoughts of a man who might find gainful employment in politics or hedge funds or, for example, the marketing of an antidepressant like Prozac ("*now available in weekly administration: positively influences patients' attitudes*") for Eli Lilly.

We discern something of Taoism in all of this. Ulrich perceives the modern European as having blind faith in currency and the times but little sense of nuance or wonder. "We have gained reality and lost dream," muses the man without qualities in an updated reaffirmation of a biblical code. Outwardly, he witnesses unthinking acceptance of progress and protocols. Inwardly, people live in their private worlds and worn-out mythologies, peacefully quiescent on a locomotive without engineer. Ulrich, however, remains unappeased by what Hanna Hickman aptly calls "the obsolete fetishes of epoch, nation, race," the New, or you name it. This man without attributes is recalcitrant!

21

Some say that my teaching is nonsense.
Others call it lofty but impractical.
But to those who have looked inside themselves,
this nonsense makes perfect sense.
And to those who put it into practice,
this loftiness has roots that go deep.

22

For Ulrich, and Musil as well, morals reside neither in logic or system, abstraction or edict, but rather in the contextual depths of oneself in relation, often contradistinction, to one's situation and moment in time. Here, in these realms, one is acquainted with what Musil calls the "Other Condition," that part of experience forever linked with complex, essentially ineffable stirrings that effectively counterbalance the runaway rationalism of our world. Ulrich seems almost alone in his presentiments concerning these matters and, though he has no trouble finding friends in high places, is uniformly unsuccessful in bringing others to a similar point of awareness. What has been lost in the name of progress, Ulrich emphatically feels, ought nonetheless not be dismissed:

No more lounging under a tree and peering at the sky between one's big and second toes; there's work to be done. To be efficient, one cannot be hungry and dreamy but must eat steak and keep moving. It is exactly as though the old, inefficient breed of humanity had fallen asleep on an anthill and found, when the new breed awoke, that the ants had crept into its bloodstream, making it move frantically ever since, unable to shake off that rotten feeling of antlike industry. There is no need to belabor the point, since it is obvious to most of us these days that mathematics has taken possession, like a demon, of every aspect of our lives. Many of us may not believe in the story of a Devil to whom one can sell one's soul, but those who must know something about the soul (considering that as clergymen, historians, and artists

they draw a good income from it) all testify that the soul has been destroyed by mathematics and that mathematics is the source of an evil intelligence that while making man the lord of the earth has also made him the slave of his machines. The inner drought, the dreadful blend of acuity in matters of detail and indifference toward the whole, man's monstrous abandonment in a desert of details, his restlessness, malice, unsurpassed callousness, money-grubbing, coldness, and violence, all so characteristic of our times, are by these accounts solely the consequence of damage done to the soul by keen logical thinking!

As we have said, technology and speed coexistent with an evident decline in values. The specter of life void of substance, reality without dream.

23

Notwithstanding the myriad problems inherent in each individual heeding the promptings of her or his heart, Musil apprehends equally the error of equating virtue with an upholding of inherited norms and obeisance to powers that be. Like Lao-tzu and many others, protagonist and author discern that systems imply a parting from a way that is more process than destination, perspective than platitude, orientation as opposed to technique. In "Ideals and Morality are the Best Means for filling that Big Hole called Soul," we find this statement of the dilemma:

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the burning desire to obey only the call of one's soul leaves infinite scope for action, a true state of anarchy, and there are cases of chemically pure souls actually committing crimes. But the minute a soul has morals, religion, philosophy, a well-grounded middle-class education, ideals in the spheres of duty and beauty, it has been equipped with a system of rules, conditions, and directives that it must obey before it can think of being a respectable soul, and its heat, like that of a blast furnace, is directed into orderly rectangles of sand. All that remains are . . . logical problems of interpretations, such as whether an action falls under this or that commandment, and the soul presents the tranquil panorama of a battlefield after the fact, where the dead lie still and one can see at once where a scrap of life still moves or groans. Which is why we cross that bridge as quickly as we can. If a person is plagued by religious doubts, as many are in their youth, he takes to persecuting unbelievers; if troubled by love, he turns it into marriage; and when overcome by some other enthusiasm, he takes refuge from the impossibility of living constantly *in* its fire by beginning to live *for* that fire . . . For only fools, fanatics, and mental cases can stand living at the highest pitch of soul; a sane person must be content with declaring that life would not be worth living without a spark of that mysterious fire.

It should come as no surprise if we note in passing that Ulrich's father is a man of definite qualities, one who knows just where he stands at all times on all matters, most especially those revolving around ethics!

24

Recoiling from what Musil calls the "utopia of precision," "a reverence for what is common," Ulrich is nonetheless mindful of the problems that inhere in unrestrained subjectivity as well and is,

indeed, suspicious concerning the manner in which uncertainty, too, has effected a “comeback.” Consternating over the excesses of unfettered technical propensities and, equally suspect, the ascendancy of the romantic “unfocused type,” Ulrich searches instead for what the Czech writer Milan Kundera (himself a great Musil enthusiast) has, more recently, called “the spirit of complexity,” a middle way between technique and the mind that might render world and experience more faithfully:

He believed in reality without believing in any specific moral system. Morality is generally understood to be a sort of police regulations for keeping life in order, and since life does not obey even these, they come to look as if they were really impossible to live up to and, accordingly, in this sorry way, not really an ideal either. But morality must not be reduced to this level. Morality is imagination. This is what he wanted to make Agathe see. And his second point was: Imagination is not arbitrary. Once the imagination is left to caprice, there is a price to pay.

Precision and soul. Do you see?

25

So much of Musil’s novel has to do with an investigation into this “Other Condition,” the non-rational aspects of experience and consciousness to be found, for example, in music and mysticism, eros and art. Vienna is sick at the core, Ulrich is aware, though he can find no one who takes seriously his concerns or dismay, as all of Europe behaves as if asleep on a railway car that speeds headlong toward derailment. Amid myriad banalities and a surfeit of prosaic ideals, Ulrich’s personal quest for integrity becomes, simultaneously, an attempt at thinking through Europe’s continental divide as well. It is some sort of merging of precision and soul that is needed, muses Ulrich, as he finds himself contemplating an approach to character and life he calls “essayism”:

It was more or less the way an essay, in the sequence of its paragraphs, explores a thing from many sides without wholly encompassing it—for a thing wholly encompassed suddenly loses its scope and melts down to a concept—that he believed he could most rightly survey and handle the world and his own life. The value of an action or a quality . . . seemed to him to depend on its surrounding circumstances, on the aims it served; in short, on the whole—constituted now one way, now another—to which it belonged . . . Ulrich regarded morality as it is commonly understood as nothing more than the senile form of a system of energies that cannot be confused with what it originally was without losing ethical force.

This passage, it should be noted, goes some distance in explaining why those lectures on ethics gather mostly around staying out of trouble: tiresome presentations where, as we have said, even the jokes are essentially dead. “Language,” Emerson somewhere observes, “is fossil poetry.”

Ulrich’s “essayism” argues, essentially, for “a *possible* person,” “a *possible* image of the world,” urging a free-spirited yet circumspect merging of disparate elements—something beyond schema and unbounded flights of fancy as well. The unabashed romantic’s retreat from intellect in the name of the inflated soul can only further compound distortions and error. Musil envisions, rather, a morality grounded in an amalgam of presence, reason, and being. Such an approach is premised upon the subtle

art of integration, encompassing both self and the world while remaining open to the moment at hand. The goal cannot be deduced all at once, pinned down for all time, or otherwise set in concrete or stone. Ulrich, in short, haunted by a “sense of possibilities,” seeks a “dynamic morality,” a striving for awareness through a union of dialectical, even multiple, aspects, worlds and perspectives. With such thoughts, he rejects the modern-day ethos with its predilection for diametrical extremes and its equally noxious “mania for cutting things down to size.” The man without qualities seeks something more.

26

Moving beyond the “monotony of facts” and, further, “the pointless battle” between “scientific thinking and the claims of the soul,” suggests a way of experiencing reality and life that embraces the human dilemma in its overarching perplexity, responding fluidly to the situation and moment at hand. Openness to the Other Condition ensures that experience will be marked by “a deeper embedding of thought in the emotional sphere,” “a more personal relation to the [self].” Here, in this merging of perspectives and tensions, “the border between self and nonself is less sharp than usual.” “Whereas normally the self masters the world, in the Other Condition the world flows into the self, or mingles with it or bears it, and the like.” Hardly another pat formula for morality or character, we hold forth here the prospect of an individual who rises, perhaps only slightly, above “the transactions of the world,” proceeding with dexterity and style. Such a possibility unfolds, as Musil once said of the poet Rilke’s life and work, without “leaning up against the wall of some ideology” or “world experience,” without “support or hold from any side,” but, rather, as something “left over, free and hovering.” Inevitably, one is thrown back on oneself and the manifold contradictions, possibilities, and voices within.

Musil’s, in essence, is a temperate path updated for these modern times and, yet, in the end, not so different from, say, the “Middle Way” once suggested by the Buddha. This Other Condition values clear-sightedness and soul, each in its place. The dangers that inhere in reification/deification of soul ought not go unattended. As he wrote his masterwork, the novelist apprehended that Europe was heading toward disaster for the second time in less than a quarter century. He was painfully aware of the emotional disturbances that lurk beneath the banners of unrestrained nationalism and sentimentality. “Masculine logic” will certainly not do, and “pseudorealities” lead likewise to cul-de-sacs and often to war. Something new is required and morality is involved.

27

Under the aegis of Nietzsche, Musil reflects in his essay “Mind and Experience”:

What characterizes and defines our intellectual situation is precisely the wealth of contents that can no longer be mastered, the swollen facticity of knowledge . . . the spilling out of experience over the surfaces of nature, the impossibility of achieving an overview . . . We will perish from this, or overcome it by becoming a spiritually stronger type of human being.

Writing here in the early 1920’s, Musil already intuits the deluge of computer/sound bytes/bites—the sheer cacophony and chaos of things—that will eventually gather around the notions of information

highways and postmodernism. Given a situation about which little, seemingly, can be done, how does the frail human specimen proceed?

28

There is a criminal in Musil's great novel. His name is Moosbrugger and he has murdered a prostitute. The trial becomes something of a *cause celebre* amid the backdrop of the frantic daily round of Viennese life and the never-ending preparations for the empire's grand celebration, the "Collateral Campaign," meant to compete with Germany's own self-glorifying festivities. Many are enthralled by trial proceedings that become increasingly byzantine as they unfold. Ulrich, drawn to the case along with the rest, begins to feel a strange identification with the itinerant laborer whose behavior, admittedly bizarre, seems no more aberrant or unthinkable than that of anyone else that the man without qualities meets or observes. Ulrich's Nietzsche-immersed and genius-obsessed friend Clarisse, disappointed that her husband Walter (who sits at his piano for hours playing Wagner) will never be the great man she had once imagined, turns her thoughts increasingly to Moosbrugger. And, in fact, the apprehended man's crime is by no means the cold-hearted, calculated act that the prosecutors claim. "Something must be done for Moosbrugger," Clarisse implores Ulrich at last; "This murderer is musical!"

There can be no doubt that Moosbrugger thinks and lives in a way that is outside the confines of society. Yet to claim that he is materially less sane than anyone else or that his actions can be reduced to neat diagnosis or linear analysis is a step Ulrich is unwilling to make. Moosbrugger, a man who uses "all his enormous strength to hold the world together," becomes yet another device with which Musil contemplates the natures of mind and modernity, ethics and consciousness, no less than an illustration of the price one must pay for living outside established criteria and codes:

When he was feeling on top of things Moosbrugger paid no attention at all to his voices and visions but spent his time in thinking. He called it thinking because he had always been impressed with the word. He thought better than other people because he thought both inside and outside. Thinking went on inside him against his will. He said that thoughts were planted in him. He was hypersensitive to the merest trifles . . . but this did not interfere with his slow, manly reflectiveness . . . [H]is thoughts flowed like a stream running through a lush meadow swelled by hundreds of leaping brooks . . . Moosbrugger's experience and conviction were that no thing could be singled out by itself, because things hang together.

We should note that Moosbrugger's "experience and convictions" about the interrelations of things mirror the insights of Einstein and Emerson no less than Heisenberg and the man without qualities himself.

The psychiatrists are called in, predictably, to render opinions and showcase their prowess. Yet no one seems able to get inside the mind of Moosbrugger with anywhere near the acuity or skill of the engineer-turned-author who is telling his story to begin with! Each is careful not to transgress professional decorum and bounds or otherwise risk reputation and exposure. And each, in the end, really misses the point, fails to realize, for example, that Moosbrugger's reflections about not "singling out" because "things hang together" are, as we have said, of a piece with avant-garde philosophy and science that, even now, do not adequately inform our approaches to psychology and mind or what has been

called, perhaps too self-assuredly, the code of the soul. There are depths within Moosbrugger that the experts cannot plumb, voices and narratives that counterpose the world's preoccupation with fashion and advance, its mania for classifications, compartments, standards, and rules. "If mankind could dream collectively," Ulrich thinks to himself, "it would dream Moosbrugger."

29

Aside from the one great attempt by Nietzsche, we Germans have no books about people, no systematizers and organizers of life. With us artistic and scientific thinking do not come into contact with each other. The problems of a middle zone between the two remain unsolved.

Robert Musil,
"Commentary on Metaphysics"

[There is] an abiding miscommunication between the intellect and soul. We do not have too much intellect and too little soul, but too little intellect in matters of soul.

Robert Musil,
"Helpless Europe"

The scientific objective world is not the world of real life. It is a highly sophisticated artifact, created by multiple operations which effectively and efficiently exclude immediate experience in all its apparent capriciousness from its order of discourse.

R. D. Laing,
The Voice of Experience (a late distillation in which the Scottish psychoanalyst quotes lengthily from Musil's novel as a frontispiece to a chapter called "The Objective Look")

He is of that rare breed in which scientist and artist dwell in the same skin.

Rollo May on R.D. Laing

30

There is an industrialist in Musil's novel, an impressive sophisticate and crowd-pleasing writer named Arnheim. A plausible friend for Ulrich, the man without qualities is not really interested in this Prussian globetrotter and man of the world. Arnheim, often the object of Ulrich's irony and dismissal, is, however, hardly without eloquence or intelligence, his own moments of lucidity and vision. If he is less pervasively disturbed by the many imponderables that preoccupy Ulrich, Arnheim is by no means a philistine. Concerning "the deep moral mystery of the individual," Arnheim thinks to himself:

There is no such thing as boundless happiness. There is no great happiness without great taboos. Even in business, to pursue one's advantage at all costs is to risk getting nowhere. Keeping within one's limits is the secret of all phenomena, of power, happiness, faith, and the key to the task of maintaining oneself as a tiny creature within the universe . . . And the businessman, even as he rules the world, respects kingship, aristocracy, and the church as pillars of the irrational. The legitimate is simple, as all greatness is simple, open to anyone's understanding. Homer was simple. Christ was simple. The

truly great minds always come down to simple basics; one must have the courage to admit, in fact, that they always come back to moral commonplaces, which is why it is hardest of all for the truly free spirit to defy tradition.

There is more than a little here that we have been intimating in our meditations on ethics and Lao-tzu. Arnheim is, furthermore, hardly lacking insight concerning the darker nature of the entrepreneurial world, its irrational worship of equations and sums, its unmodulated materialist assault:

All this having to watch your arithmetic and make sure you get a profit out of everything, all the time, runs strictly counter to the ideal of a great and noble life such as was possible for a man to aim at in happier times long ago. In those days they could make of murder the noble virtue of bravery, but it seems doubtful to me that something of the sort can be done with bookkeeping; there is no real goodness, no dignity, no depth of feeling in it. Money turns everything into an abstraction; whenever I see money I can't help . . . thinking of mistrustful fingers testing it, of loud arguments and much shrewd manipulation, all equally repulsive to me.

Notice the facility with which the debonair industrialist deconstructs the mad pursuit of money and wealth that constitutes the Holy Grail embraced as virtual godhead of these modern times and mercantilism. Arnheim says much that is wise despite the businessman's native propensity "to give sublimity the slip."

31

Be passersby.
The Gospel of Thomas

I think that our own lives and problems are part of the therapeutic process. Our feelings, our own disorders and early sorrows are for us in some fashion what the surgeon's skilled hands are for his work

...

We cannot solve many problems, and there are the world and the stars to dwarf us and give us some humor about ourselves. But we can hope that, with some of the feeling of what Martin Buber calls "I-Thou" quietly and lovingly nurtured in some of our patients, there may be more friendliness about us. This would be no small happening, and it is for this that we must work . . . Really, there is much less to say than to affirm by living.

Robert Coles,
"A Young Psychiatrist Looks at His
Profession"

I crave simplicity. The other I have already.
Otto Rank to Jessie Taft

32

In the end, Ulrich retreats increasingly from the machinations of world into the simple beauty of his garden and a rekindled relationship with his sister, as the two move their lawn chairs about during the course of a summer afternoon in concert with the sky path of the sun. It is as though the man

without qualities, unable to impress his message upon those who wield power, has found meaning closer to home, becoming a follower of natural rhythms, trajectory, and the Tao. (*"All that is very well,"* concludes Voltaire's *Candide* at the end of his travels and travails, *"but let us cultivate our garden."*) And, indeed, Musil, in his final diary entry before death, jots down a note to himself to inquire further into Sufism and Lao-tzu. The man without qualities—for, as Musil acknowledged, he was none other than the author himself—turns out, paradoxically, to have been a man of uncommon quality after all.

ART OF THE NOVEL

33

Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire. They can cope with the novel only by translating its language of relativity and ambiguity into their own . . . dogmatic discourse. They require that someone be right: either Anna Karenina is the victim of a narrow-minded tyrant, or Karenin is the victim of an immoral woman; either K is an innocent man crushed by an unjust Court, or the Court represents divine justice and K is guilty.

This "either-or" encapsulates an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to look squarely at the absence of the Supreme Judge. This inability makes the novel's wisdom (the wisdom of uncertainty) hard to accept and understand.

Milan Kundera,
The Art of the Novel

The unification of the planet's history, that humanist dream which God has spitefully allowed to come true, has been accompanied by a process of dizzying reduction. True, the termites of reduction have always gnawed away at life: even the greatest love ends up as a skeleton of feeble memories. But the character of modern society hideously exacerbates this curse: it reduces man's life to its social function; the history of a people to a small set of events that are themselves reduced to a tendentious interpretation; social life is reduced to political struggle . . . Man is caught in a veritable *whirlpool of reduction* where Husserl's "world of life" is fatally obscured and being is forgotten.

Milan Kundera,
The Art of the Novel

It's some time now since the river, the nightingale, the paths through the fields have disappeared from man's mind. No one needs them now. When nature disappears from the planet tomorrow, who will notice? Where are the successors to Octavio Paz, to Rene Char? Where are the great poets now? Have they vanished, or have their voices only grown inaudible? In any case, an immense change in our Europe, which was hitherto unthinkable without its poets. But if man has lost the need for poetry, will he notice when poetry disappears? The end is not an apocalyptic explosion. There may be nothing so quiet as the end.

Milan Kundera,
The Art of the Novel

I am driving to Providence (the one in Rhode Island) to celebrate Easter Sunday with friends and friends of friends. On the radio there is a story about a youth camp located somewhere in Maine, its mission to provide a meeting ground whereby Arab and Israeli children can get to know one another in a way that is all but impossible in that blood-soaked biblical world back home. The camp directors see their program as a chance for the future, “a Middle East of the heart.” “It’s going to sound really simple,” says one of them; “We try to teach the children how to listen.” She goes on to point out how discussions, particularly of the political variety, devolve too quickly into mental acrobatics—tests of rhetorical skills and powers of persuasion (one listens, really, only to win)—but rarely a letting down of cortical guards that might allow for interpenetration, sympathy, and care. My mind wanders momentarily to Nietzsche and his aversion to politics for this very reason, his predilection rather for the creative type’s politic of the soul. It is moving to hear Palestinian adolescents speaking of their stereotypes about Jews and Israeli counterparts their prejudices about Arabs, to hear children discuss life in refugee camps and stories with which they have grown up about the death camps of Europe.

One of the directors relates a story about a young Jordanian girl who, like many others, had been changed by her experience in this more enlightened camp here in New England. The girl turned to the visitor who was sitting beside her one particular day, her own King Hussein, saying, “If you want to make peace with your enemy you have to go to war with yourself.” The ailing king, it is said, was moved to tears. He had been waging war in that Middle East within all his life and must surely have recognized in his youthful subject a fellow freedom fighter. By the time of his sad death, the king was firmly located, as Melville had written, in that “Providence in the other,” of which the ones in Rhode Island and Palestine are “horologe” reflections. The child herself, should she survive the madness about her, will have no need of Nietzsche, whose metaphors of war and strife we now, nonetheless, more easily surmise. What more can we ask on a day meant to commemorate a wisdom teacher’s long-ago resurrection and exodus, a movement, as William Barrett had put it, “from closed to open worlds”? And, here, we observe the wisdom of Jesus: there is sometimes life after death after all.

In Great Eternity every particular Form gives forth or Emanates
 Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision
 And the Light is his Garment. This is Jerusalem in every Man,
 A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness, Male & Female Clothings.
 And Jerusalem is called Liberty among the Children of Albion.
 William Blake,
Jerusalem

The Jew has a right to Palestine, not because he once came from there but because no other country will have him. The Arab’s fear of his freedom is just as easy to understand as the Jew’s genuine intention to play fair by his neighbor. And despite all that, the immigration of young Jews into Palestine increasingly suggests a kind of Jewish Crusade, because, unfortunately, they also shoot.
 Joseph Roth,
The Wandering Jews

We merely discuss these matters, too often abstractly, rhetorically, with self-justifying pieties and simple-minded slogans. And, indeed, no antipollution law will clear the air of all the hysteria, the abusive words, the apocalyptic warnings, the sly appeals to hate, the open calls for violence; as long as we remain free, our ears will suffer the noise of wily and banal propagandists.

Robert Coles,
"Still and Quiet Consciences"

"Know thyself" does not mean "observe thyself." "Observe thyself" is what the Serpent says. It means: "Make yourself master of your actions." But you are so already, you are the master of your actions. So that saying means: "Misjudge yourself! Destroy yourself!" which is something evil—and only if one bends down very far indeed does one also hear the good in it, which is: "in order to make of yourself what you are."

October 25. Sad, jumpy, physically unwell, dread of Prague, in bed.

Franz Kafka,
Third Blue Octavo Notebook

Suppose that the world's author put the case to you before creation, saying: I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own 'level best.' I offer you the chance of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?

William James,
"Pragmatism"

There seems to be no agent more effective than another person in bringing a world for oneself alive, or, by a glance, a gesture, or a remark, shrivelling up the reality in which one is lodged.

Erving Goffman,
Asylums (a book quoted by R.D. Laing in *Divided Self, Politics of Experience, Politics of the Family* and perhaps elsewhere as well: as Kristina's father will soon tell us, "significant to me")

The new sounds are there if someone wants to listen.

Eric Dolphy

ART AND AWARENESS

39



Mele's copy of Monet's *Les Regates a Argenteuil*

40

Many, no doubt, will be familiar with Monet's later work, paintings on display at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts at the time I wrote an early draft of this essay. It is hard to think about Monet without recalling the water garden at Giverny and his constant striving after beauty, touchstones of the later years. "The richness I achieve," wrote the artist, "comes from nature. I have no other wish than to work and live in harmony with her laws." Especially relevant to our reverie on fixity and flux are works done in England in the dawning moments of the 20th century: *Houses of Parliament, Sunlight Effect; Houses of Parliament, Seagulls; Houses of Parliament, Symphony in Rose; Houses of Parliament, Sunset*. Here our artifacts and architectures, our capitols and codes, waver before the majesty of larger patterns and greater designs. Human laws seem at last to assume more humbled proportions, houses of legislature made literally of stone now shed of their pretense in the haze and the sun and the colors and shadows. "So many factors," observed Monet, "undetected by the uninitiated eye."

41

For the work of art carries within it an integral aesthetic and philosophical unity; it is an organism. Living and developing according to its own laws. Can one talk of experiment in relation to the birth of a child? It is senseless and immoral.

Andrey Tarkovsky,
Sculpting in Time

I can very well do without God both in my life and in my painting, but I cannot, ill as I am, do without something which is greater than I, which is my life—the power to create . . . And in a picture I want to say something comforting, as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to convey by the actual radiance and

vibration of our coloring . . . Ah! Portraiture, portraiture with the thoughts, the soul of the model in it, that is what I think must come.

Vincent van Gogh,
Letter to Theo

You know, Don, I was reading a book on the life of Van Gogh today, and I had to pause and think of that wonderful and persistent force—the creative urge. The creative urge was in this man who found himself so much at odds with the world he lived in, and in spite of all the adversity . . . beautiful and living art came forth abundantly . . . Truth is indestructible. It seems history shows (and it's the same today) that the innovator is more often than not met with some degree of condemnation; usually according to the degree of his departure from the prevailing modes of expression . . . We also see that these innovators always seek to revitalize, extend and reconstruct the status quo in their given fields, wherever it is needed. Quite often they are the rejects, outcasts, sub-citizens, etc. of the very societies to which they bring so much sustenance. Often they are people who endure great personal tragedy in their lives. Whatever the case, whether accepted or rejected, rich or poor, they are forever guided by that great and eternal constant—the creative urge. Let us cherish it and give all praise to God.

John Coltrane,
Letter to Don DeMichael

I've always regarded the movie palace as a sacred shrine, a place to have respect. Recently, I went into a theater in Rome, and there was only one person there. He had his feet propped up on the back of the chair in front of him, and while he was watching the picture, he was listening to his Walkman. He was wearing roller skates.

Federico Fellini,
In Charlotte Chandler's *I, Fellini*

42

The invert-mystic Kafka is forever presenting us with characters who are thrashing about in search of law, truth, and way. Yet for all their inexhaustible efforts, they fail even to earn for themselves a respectable name. Kafka understands the ludicrousness of the compulsive quest and, when all is said and done, sides (still in his ironically obsessive manner) with quiescence and the uncanny. Meditating on liturgy, he writes:

There are two main human sins from which all others derive: impatience and indolence. Because of impatience they were expelled from Paradise, because of indolence they don't return. But perhaps there is only one main sin: impatience. Because of impatience they were expelled, because of impatience they don't return.

Franz Kafka,
Third Blue Octavo Notebook

Clearly there is something of Lao-tzu in Kafka, in his use of paradox and aphorism and his eschewal of an ultimate "route map" that might be clearly defined. [*"Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!"* exclaims Beckett's Hamm.] The quote in our frontispiece, in fact, follows a discussion of the wisdom of ancient China and, more specifically, German translations of none other than the Old Master himself. Let us consider it once again as Kafka talks with his young friend and acolyte, Gustav Janouch:

'They spell out—as you can see here—transcriptions of reality from translations of ancient Chinese instead of quietly reading the original text of their own lives and responsibilities. To them the day before yesterday seems more accessible than today. But reality is never and nowhere more accessible than in the immediate moment of one's own life . . . All it guarantees us is what is superficial, the façade . . . [O]ne must break through this. Then everything becomes clear.'

'But how does one do that? How does one proceed? Is there some sure guide?'

'No, there is none,' said Kafka, shaking his head. 'There is no route map on the way to truth. The only thing that counts is to make the venture of total dedication. A prescription would already imply a withdrawal, mistrust, and therewith the beginning of a false path. One must accept everything patiently and fearlessly. Man is condemned to life, not death.'

Gustav Janouch,
Conversations with Kafka

43

A thought:

Lao-tzu: an exegesis of Being without Action

Kafka (the fiction, not the man): an exegesis of Action without Being

Another thought, another way of putting it:

Kafka: a literature of Diaspora

Lao-tzu: a guidepost for return

Still, both ancient and modernist contemplatives knew what they were talking about. Kafka himself was wise as a Zen master and, as we have seen, a sometimes student of the East. He must certainly have resonated with these lines from Lao-tzu, his forerunner in certain respects and early adept of the form:

The Tao is called the Great Mother:
empty yet inexhaustible,
it gives birth to infinite worlds.

Even, of course, to Kafka and his worlds as well.

INNER BLUEPRINTS

44



Kristina's "First Picture"

Made at the start of psychotherapy, 9/95

45

On 4 December 1998, Kristina sends me this electronic message entitled simply "Blueprints":

We stand silenced in awakened understanding. Our souls hollowed out by the noise of others, we lean inward and become a house of people, empowered by necessity. Our resilience becomes the walls. Our hopes build roofs; our anticipation: the doors. Our transparencies become windows. Our reality becomes the ground; our expectations: the sky. Silence becomes the night; our vision: the light. Intuition becomes our roadway; revelation our universe.

Cara Peale



Untitled 1/99



Untitled 1/99



Untitled 1/99



Untitled 1/99

Kristina made these drawings during the first of more than twenty hospitalizations. They signal the emergence into relative consciousness of a parallel inner universe of two "houses" or "worlds" of "alters" (orange and purple), mirroring precisely the two extant, more salient systems (red and blue/blood and tears/action and reaction), the "known worlds" of experience. The pictures were made with crayon on cardboard boxes, the only materials available to Kristina at the time.

THE SOUNDTRACK,
OR THE MUSICIAN WHO WANTED TO BECOME A SAINT AND WHO MADE IT
(JOHN COLTRANE)

47



"Vacation Packing"
Mele 8/98

48

And where there had been
just a makeshift hut to receive the music,
a shelter nailed up out of their darkest longing,
with an entryway that shuddered in the wind—
you built a temple deep inside their hearing.

Rainer Maria Rilke,
Sonnets to Orpheus

49

It is not possible that the world will soon see again the likes of John Coltrane. Another veteran of fundamental sounds, admirer of Einstein and J. Krishnamurti, Coltrane was a man whose musical ideas could change at a meteoric pace, often metamorphosing beyond seeming human capacity from week to week. It is now understood that the music he created in the early sixties with his hallowed quartet and the sometimes addition of Eric Dolphy constitutes one of the high water marks in music of any genre. At the time, some called it "musical nonsense," anarchistic, "anti-jazz." There seemed to be a belief that this new music was inspired by irreverence for tradition and possibly anger, this despite the fact that Coltrane and Dolphy had achieved a kind of enlightenment rare enough on this bitch of an earth and did not seem to possess an angry thought or bone between them.

Neither Coltrane nor Dolphy gave the impression of needing to talk very much. Both men seldom spoke. Still, the abuse that they took from far lesser souls [eventually necessitating the parting of musical paths] somehow catalyzed a rare *Downbeat* interview entitled, inauspiciously enough, "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy answer the Jazz Critics." Listen carefully for, as we begin to discern, those who

speak softly often have much more to say. Asked about the “deliberate” influence of bird songs on his haunting soprano/alto sax and bass clarinet solos, about its “validity,” the angry and drug-abusing cacophonist Dolphy responds:

I don't know if it's valid . . . but I enjoy it . . . At home I used to play and the birds always used to whistle with me. I would stop what I was working on and play with the birds. Birds have notes in between our notes—you try to imitate something they do—maybe it's between F and F#—and you'll have to go up or come down on the pitch. Indian music has something of the same quality, different scales and quarter tones. I don't know how you label it, but it's pretty.

The danger, we recall Beckett admonishing, lies in the neatness of identifications. What is of the essence, rather, is form in movement.

Asked now about the “purpose” of their music, Coltrane (who has been listening in “frowned contemplation”) speaks briefly about his relationship with Dolphy, as if the music perhaps has no special purpose and may, indeed, derive out of the I and Thou as opposed to calculation or premeditation. After a “thoughtful pause,” he adds:

It's more than beauty that I feel in music—that I think musicians feel . . . What we know we feel we'd like to convey to the listener. We hope that this can be shared by all . . . We never talked about just what we were trying to do. If you ask me that question, I might say this today and tomorrow something entirely different because there are so many things to do in music.

But overall . . . the main thing a musician would like to do is to give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows and senses in the universe. That's what music is to me—it's just another way of saying this is a big, beautiful universe we live in, that's been given to us, and here's an example of just how magnificent and encompassing it is. That's what I would like to do . . . [W]e all try to do it in some way. The musician's is through music.

Cogent thoughts and words, unprepared and unedited, from the mouth of a nihilist who is being asked to defend himself against the charge of having lost his feeling for form.

Dolphy now interjects:

Music is a reflection of everything. And it's universal. [As if] you can hear somebody from across the world, another country. You don't even know them but they're in your back yard.

Coltrane and Dolphy have found their groove. They are on a (decidedly nonlinear) roll. They are doing what they always did so effortlessly and with such style, improvising now even without axes. Coltrane, his good friend by his side, has for the moment no aversion to *this* sort of talk and the conversation continues. We bless our good fortune at finding ourselves flies on the wall, know when to simply shut up and listen:

Coltrane: It's a reflection of the universe, like having life in miniature. You just take a situation in life or an emotion you know and put it into music. You take a scene you've seen, for instance, and put it into music . . . [W]hile a guy is soloing,

there are many things that might happen. Probably he himself doesn't know how many moods or themes he's created. But I think it really ends up with the listener. It's a sharing process—playing—for people.

Dolphy: You can feel vibrations from the people.

Coltrane: The people give you something too. If you play in a place where they really like you, like your group, they can make you play like you've *never* felt like playing before.

Asked now about the accusation of being “anti-jazz,” these consummate artists of music and tact are nonplussed yet without evident resentment:

Coltrane: Maybe because it doesn't swing.

Dolphy: I can't say they're wrong, but I'm still playing.

[*Does Dolphy feel that he swings?*]

Dolphy: Of course, I do. In fact it swings so much, I don't know what to do—it moves me so much. I'm with John—I'd like to know how they explain “anti-jazz.” Maybe they can tell us something.

Coltrane: There are various types of swing . . . {E}very group of individuals . . . has a different feeling, a different swing. It's the same with this band. It's a different feeling than in any other band. It's hard to answer a man who says it doesn't swing.

This sort of untutored gentility was typical of Coltrane and Dolphy as well. People find it difficult to recall any unkind gesture or remark forthcoming from either of these men of impeccable character and mesmerizing creative genius. Each went his way humbly doing his thing, playing music and treading lightly, always with his gaze fixed steadfastly on that Another which, indeed, had imparted such grace. About how many people can you truly say that?

50

There is a resonance between the singer, the song, sung and heard, and the listener. A melody reverberates and regenerates feeling, mood, atmosphere, nuances of pathos, that no scientific discourse can convey, let alone scientific method begin to study, across widely different people, cultures, times and places.

R. D. Laing,
The Voice of Experience

Song, Hasidism taught, is a ladder, whereby man comes to a heightened consciousness. It has many rungs and must descend into dark depths before it can rise to luminous heights. It unites what is above with what is below and evokes forms yet unseen. Great is the song composed of words and melodies, greater is the song in which melody suffices, but greatest is the song that needs neither words nor music.

Ruth Mintz

Here in the brief intervals between their struggles our people dream, it is as if the limbs of each were loosened, as if the harried individual once in a while could relax and stretch himself at ease in the great, warm bed of the community. And into these dreams Josephine's piping drops note by note; she calls it pearl-like, we call it staccato; but at any rate here it is in its right place, as nowhere else, finding the moment wait for it as music scarcely ever does. Something of our poor brief childhood is in it, something of lost happiness that can never be found again, but

also something of active daily life, of its small gaieties, unaccountable and yet springing up and not to be obliterated. And indeed this is all expressed not in full round tones but softly, in whispers, confidentially . . . Of course, it is only a kind of piping. Why not? Piping is our people's daily speech, only many a one pipes his whole life long and does not know it, where here piping is set free from the fetters of daily life and it sets us free for a little while. We certainly should not want to do without these performances.

Franz Kafka,
Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk

51

Returned home from her Bible belt college for "vacation," Kristina struggles to vouchsafe difficult strides forward as she finds herself momentarily immobilized/exhausted/repossessed in the presence of primal offenders. She writes movingly about this and the resultant dissonance in composition and rhythm:

In looking for some light to follow, or even some small, half-beaten path that might guide me out of this overgrowth of darkness, I have become aware that I have completely lost my place and direction. I have made up these paths feeling as if they might provide accurate means of escape. But it cannot be that way because they are blueprints of the parents' path. When I am here, I duplicate them unknowingly. They define what is and wasn't, what was and isn't. They define the paths and very darkness that begins to pervade; they define the hardness I feel beneath my feet, which at any moment they seem to have complete power to pull from under me. My very fall to the earth is orchestrated on their mind's paper. And I follow it, as if my whole body were just an instrument for their melody.

Cara Peale

Who would dare say that these words do not swing?

PICTURES, VOICES, AND PSYCHOTHERAPY
(DECAPITATION AS DEFENSE MECHANISM)

52



"Who to Become?" 5/99

53

So what does this have to do with psychology? This question arises wherever I go, and I am always taken by surprise. It's hard to know what to say to a man or even woman who says it doesn't swing. And, so, I relate here the briefest excerpt from a psychotherapy session with Kristina that occurred during that very same vacation. Understand that Kristina is someone for whom matters of character have always loomed ominously and large:

During the session, the inner guide Cara picks up a pad of paper and writes:

Character is the way you behave when no one is looking

I add these words:

even if you are as solitary as Thoreau at Walden

We are quoting a line out of Coles that Kristina had come across in a college assignment a year or so earlier, one that had moved her enough to share with me at the time. Somehow it comes back to us now. Cara reflects and writes further:

Character is looking when no one else is

She pauses and continues:

Character is a way of being when others have a way of behaving
“There are many ways it can go,” says Cara, thinking about the sentence but also about
character. She is her own proof she is right.

54

We are reminded here, once again, of the dignity of suspension and silence and the courage often embedded in observation and vigil. This contrasts sharply with the images that issue unremittingly out of magazines and Hollywood and can win Academy Awards and even elect presidents yet may be starkly empty at their core. Nietzsche became suspicious even of asceticism over the course of time and thought, discerning ego and an irrepressible will to power that perhaps lurked behind apparent self-abnegation. Certainly the recent spate of stories about pedophilia within the Catholic Church is enough to give the ardent believer reason for pause. Emerson, who Nietzsche so much admired, expressed skepticism about what we may call normative philanthropy, wondering what it was that the philanthropist had done in the first place to have enabled him or her to have become so selfless and generous: what kind of guilt alleviated, what kind of mercantile karma resolved?

In Isaac Beshevis Singer's *Shadows on the Hudson*, a novel about Holocaust-obsessed Jews in the New World of Manhattan during years immediately following the devastation, a man laments the hypocrisy even of the recently damned as he meditates on sainthood and fallenness. His interlocutor responds cynically:

There are no saints. You're still clinging to outmoded notions. If you see someone ready to sacrifice himself for you, you ought to know that he gets the greatest pleasure from it. Try to stop him from sacrificing himself, and he'll stick a knife in you.

Skeptical to the core, the Yiddish master understood that it is all too easy for us to leap over the fathomless entanglements of self and existence in order to *prove* our virtue. The new sounds are there if people want to listen. The heaven of compassion isn't apprehended by force.

55

Later in the session with Kristina, the precocious child Meg comes forward and asks me if I know Rachel and Reanne. I tell her that I have met them. “Do you know them?” I ask.

“I hear their names sometimes. Is there a boy with them?” Meg inquires, recalling a dream of two girls and a boy she has recently had. I tell her I do not know but that the girls tell me they are eight and nine, respectively, and part of Kristina's “green world” of experience.

“Do you hear their names now?” I ask. I realize it will be our last face-to-face contact for some time and want to make sure that as much happens as can and should. Meg nods. Perhaps I am being prompted, and so I call now for Rachel and Reanne who come forward almost as one. I ask about them, about their place in the

system. "Do you know Kristina?" I inquire. Rachel nods faintly but affirmatively. "What do you know about her?" I ask.

"She comes here sometimes. She talks to us about what is going on above." I ask about a boy. Again, the same faint affirmation. I ask his name and am met with a deadpan expression. I ask once more and, again, the same blank stare. "It is not time yet. We will tell you when you are ready to have this knowledge."

"I think I am ready now," I say, thinking about the pressures of time, yet without any attempt to strong-arm or dictate.

"How would you know when you are ready to know?" the child Rachel replies. This trenchant response, with its implied putdown of professional presumption, pleases Meg enormously. "I *like* this girl!" she says gleefully as she pokes through momentarily to express her delight. I return to Rachel and repeat my question. Again, the same quizzical look. And now, at last, a name written in very small print:

Benjamin

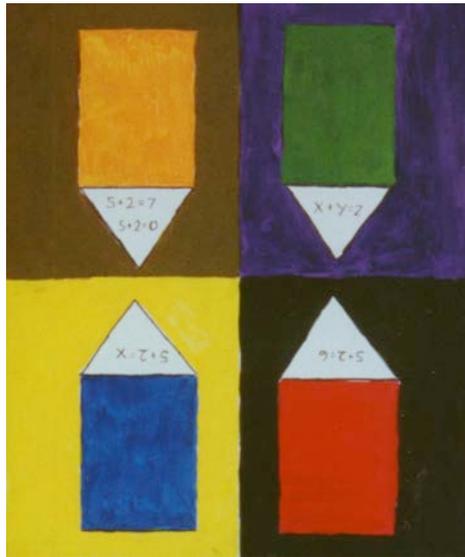
"He's three," says Rachel quietly. I thank her, pleased with this very small step forward in our work and relationship and the circuitous journey, promising to talk with her and Reanne again soon.

56

Two small children, Sharon and Sarah, are out briefly during the hour, but it is difficult to say just who it is who now draws a representation of "Musicman," someone who had apparently raped Kristina in early childhood at the church that her family had attended when they lived in the South. Tears are this time held in abeyance:

no head

Kristina scrawls now in the disorderly handwriting of a child, as she attempts to excoriate the memory of trauma with course, heavy lines abruptly drawn through the words she has just written. It is, perhaps, the infant Sarah who, for all these years, has held this memory and now attempts to obliterate it, something that could be contained in childhood only if the face and head were excised from consciousness. Decapitation as defense mechanism, one even Anna Freud may have missed.



"Codes" 5/99

Many sketches representing the four houses and worlds of Kristina's inner landscape and architecture are drawn spontaneously during the hour. All point to the urgency of connection, movement, and form. Cara writes:

Reinvent yourself.

Each must journey to the other side and find their way back.
This is the plan.

Go digging—this is what she means.

Houses become arrows, each roof must be pointing to another. And then the digging begins.

Kristina is articulating an inner code, her own existential schematic and calculus. Suddenly, as if self-exploration and character may not be separable, Cara reverts back to her earlier theme:

Why do some people have character and others not?

I say the right thing this time, which is nothing.

Cara changes course abruptly again, leaping from the general to the particular as she reflects on her own situation and psychotherapy:

We don't want to go back to the other doctors. We don't get anything done there.

We talk about the options forthrightly, as doctors and staffs have often seemed quicker to protect themselves and get through their day than really try to help, let alone understand, an admittedly complicated young woman. It has often been difficult to stand with my arms folded. We find ourselves in less than ideal circumstances and times and must contend with the resources and Zeitgeists at hand. Even Deborah had much to complain about in a somewhat more auspicious era and setting. Listen as she relates her frustrating experience with a stand-in psychiatrist while Furii is away:

But Yr also held its regions of horror and lostness, and she no longer knew to which kingdom in Yr there was passage. Doctors were supposed to help in this.

She looked at the one who sat fading amid the clamor and said, "I told you the truth about these things you asked. Now are you going to help me?"

"That depends on you," he said acidly, shut his notebook, and left. *A specialist*, laughed Anterrabae, the Falling God.

59

Without the lynchpin of relationship, and the mutual commitment therein implied, Kristina and I would never have come even this far. And still the distance to the other shore (that fabled intrapsychic Promised Land that theorists call, with such confidence, "integration," "goal," and "self") is almost beyond apprehension. Still, we have made a bit of progress once again against odds, have kept our appointment. Kristina is gracious and emotional as she departs. "Thank you for everything," she says as she leaves the office; "I will *never* be able to repay you." She is talking about more than just money as she breaks momentarily into tears. "You are paying me," I tell her; "You pay as you go." I am telling Kristina that her continued growth (and my privileged, if difficult, role as psychotherapist) has its own meaning and inherent reward. She understands, intuitively, my point with its unspoken exhortation that the journey continue. I think about the eighteen-year-old girl who found her way into my office several years back and who hung so precariously in balance between the living and dead yet showed an eerie nobility of soul [*real character*] from that earliest point. We embrace for just a moment, a ritual that, over the course of time, has come to mark our final session together before Kristina's return to her current state of residence, a gesture renewing a now tacit contract, an expression of communion and faith. Kristina knows that she must do the work for herself and that I will continue to help as well as I am able. You pay as you go and she is.

60

There are scientists who are fond of repeating that they are not philosophers, theologians, ontologists, metaphysicians, moral philosophers or even humble psychologists. When this is a testament to their modesty it is becoming and appropriate, but more commonly it is a cursory dismissal of whatever they cannot see by their way of seeing. It is ironical that such scientists cannot see the way they see with their way of seeing.

R. D. Laing,
The Voice of Experience

Yet I see Organization Men in psychiatry, with all the problems of deathlike conformity. Independent thinking by the adventurous has declined; psychiatric training has become more formal, more preoccupied with certificates and diplomas, more hierarchical. Some of the finest people in early dynamic psychiatry were artists, like Erik Erikson, schoolteachers, like August Aichhorn, or those, like Anna Freud, who had no formal training or occupation but motivations as personal as those of a brilliant and loyal daughter. Today we are obsessed with accreditation, recognition, levels of training, with status as scientists. These are the preoccupations of young psychiatrists. There are more lectures, more supervision, more examinations for specialty status, and thus the profession soon attracts people who take to these practices. Once there were the curious and bold; now there are the carefully well-adjusted and certified.

Robert Coles,
"A Young Psychiatrist Looks at His
Profession"

There seems to be no agent more effective than another person in bringing a world for oneself alive, or, by a glance, a gesture, or a remark, shriveling up the reality in which one is lodged.

Erving Goffman,
Asylums (a book quoted by R.D.
Laing in *Divided Self, Politics of
Experience, Politics of the Family*
and perhaps elsewhere as well: as
Kristina's father will soon tell us,
"significant to me")

61

"You were never a mental patient, were you?"

There was no smile at all, and Furi, as grave as Deborah had ever seen her, said, "No . . . I am sorry, too, because I can only guess at what it must be like. But it will not stop me from being able to help you. Only it makes it your responsibility to explain everything fully to me and to be a little patient with me if sometimes my perceptions are a bit slow."

She went on and the quizzical look returned. "I think now, though, that you are a little too happy with yourself for the trouble you have. I think you are giving up too easily, so let me say again that I will not betray you."

At last Deborah had her tinder. "Prove it!" she shouted, remembering with what good cheer the teachers and doctors and counselors and family had dispensed deceit and misery over the years.

A hard proof, but a valid one," Furi said. "Time."

Hanna Green,
I Never Promised You a Rose Garden

62

A good traveler has no fixed plans
and is not intent upon arriving.

A good artist lets his intuition
lead him wherever it wants.

A good scientist has freed himself of concepts
and keeps his mind open to what is.

COWBOYS, INDIANS, AND BUFFALO
(ONE NEEDN'T GO TO POLAND TO FIND A GOOD CONCENTRATION CAMP)

63



Mele's First Picture with Paint 10/97

64

The very beginning of Genesis tells us that God created man in order to give him dominion over fish and fowl and all creatures. Of course, Genesis was written by a man, not a horse. There is no certainty that God actually did grant man dominion over other creatures. What seems more likely, in fact, is that man invented God to sanctify the dominion that he had usurped for himself over the cow and the horse. Yes, the right to kill a deer or a cow is the only thing all of mankind can agree upon, even during the bloodiest of wars.

The reason we take that right for granted is that we stand at the top of the hierarchy. But let a third party enter the game—a visitor from another planet, for example, someone to whom God says, "Thou shalt have dominion over creatures of all other stars"—and all at once taking Genesis for granted becomes problematical. Perhaps a man hitched to the cart of a Martian or roasted on the spit by inhabitants of the Milky Way will recall the veal cutlet he used to slice on his dinner plate and apologize (belatedly!) to the cow.

Milan Kundera,
The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Concerning the Ken Burns-produced documentary *The West*, one episode concerns us especially, focusing as it does on the advent of railways and the genocide of the buffalo. This juxtaposition of relentless advance (Ahab's "iron way" articulated by a New England writer who preferred, in the end, to "speak for the heart") with a more subtle code merits our scrutiny. On the one hand, the self-absorbed ebullience of a young man by the name of Frank H. Mayer who finds his unthinking destiny offered, as it were, by chance or fortuity:

I was looking for adventure . . . The buffalo didn't belong to anyone. If you could kill them what they brought was yours. They were walking gold pieces. I considered that I was one of Fortune's children.

And on the other, the native/plaintive but starkly effective (if too seldom received) voice of Little Robe, with an economy of words and respect for earth and the median that would have made Lao-tzu proud: "You kill our buffalo when you aren't hungry."

Frank H. Mayer quickly dons the mathematical ways of a certified, perhaps certifiable, accountant or even psychologist in transcribing the aggressive act into matters of probability and profit. He calculates with alacrity—twenty-five cents per cartridge and three dollars per buffalo:

I could kill one hundred a day. That would be \$6,000 a month. Was I not lucky that I discovered this quick and easy way to fortune? . . . It was a harvest. We were the harvesters.

With such departure from the I and Thou (Dick's "*breakdown in communication*") does violence issue and genocide ensue. For the Plains Indians, recalls N. Scott Momaday, it was a loss of something "ineffably sacred"—"wholesale slaughter," "a devastation, a wound in the heart."

Well . . . the burning business is slowing up a little . . ." one of the attendants said, without much conviction.

"That would be her 'new morality,'" Doctor Fried answered with her little smile. "She said that she does not wish to involve other patients in her sickness, so she must get her fires elsewhere. She has made some restrictions on the stealing."

"Do they . . . do they have considerations like that? I mean . . . morals?" It was a new man asking. They all knew what the answer was supposed to be, but few of them really believed it. Only a few of the doctors really believed it and only some of the time.

"Of course," Doctor Fried said. "As you work here, you will often see evidences of it. There are many examples of such ethics or morals, which have moved 'healthy' ones to awe over the years—the little nicety, the sudden and unexpected generosity of great cost to the patient, but present nevertheless to remind us and to kick the crutch from our complacency. I remember in Germany, a patient gave me a knife to protect myself. This knife he had made in secret by grinding down a piece of metal for months and months. He had made it to save against the day that his illness would become too painful for him to bear."

"And did you accept it?" someone asked.

“Of course, since his ability to give was an indication of health and strength. But because I was coming to this country,” she said with a gentle little smile, “I gave the knife to one who had to stay behind.”

67

A few years after the interview, Eric Dolphy was dead at thirty-six. He died alone of insulin shock in a hospital room in Germany where he had been mistreated for the very last time; this quiet prophet of the virtues of music and fruit juice mistaken, many suspect, for another heroin-addicted black man who had the audacity to consider what he did art. It was a loss that sent the jazz community (which in those days, especially, tended often to exist on far higher moral/spiritual ground than the conventional scene) into mourning. Only in the aftermath of Dolphy’s passing did Coltrane express a bit more of his displeasure with crowds who too often and quickly string up the wrong man while letting criminals go free. Recalling the vitriolic press that had forced their separation several years earlier, Coltrane remarked:

Oh, that was horrible . . . [I]t just seemed so preposterous . . . because they made it appear that we didn’t even know the first thing about music—the first thing. And there we were really trying to push things off . . . Eric, man, as sweet as this cat was and the musician that he was—it hurt me to see him get hurt in this thing.

We are struck here by the contrast (Nietzsche’s “pathos of distance”) between two sentient beings and the pedestrian variety who are more nearly the norm. Listen to that astonishing performance at the Village Vanguard in November of ’61. Listen to *Spiritual* and *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise* and now to *India*. Listen once again to *Spiritual*, to what Nat Hentoff has called that “spiraling intensity” and those passages of sheer “calm and grace.” It is the Sermon on the Mount newly translated with improvements, just possibly, over even King James (no words at all: “*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*”), a treatise on what it’s all about and how we might live, instruction on vision, spirit, and ensemble. Do you want to talk about Jesus or Krishna? How much more can one say?

68

Eric Dolphy was a saint—in every way, not just in his playing.
Charles Mingus

The two things I remember about Eric Dolphy were his extraordinary humility toward his art, his fellow artists, and toward the miracle of creation—that and his unquenchable curiosity to learn, absorb, and grow. And in that eternal quest . . . he burned himself out at an early age. For Eric belonged to that select gallery of geniuses who know that the more we learn, the more there is left to learn. He transcended the usual definitions of classical or jazz musician, black or white musician. His blackness was never in question but he did not flaunt it, and with a rare combination of humility and pride he offered his remarkable skills and powers of expression in the service of music and humanity. He was, in short, one of the most beautiful men that

one could, in a lifetime, be privileged to meet, and I consider it a privilege to have loved him.

Gunther Schuller (edited just slightly for effect)

69

Art Spiegelman has said that the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick was the Kafka of the latter half of the 20th century, and we are surprised to find even Coles referring to the work of this “radical futurist.” Yet Dick was someone who looked back as much as forward and has been placed, correctly I believe, within the gnostic traditions of Christianity. His life’s work, he had written, consisted in reveries upon two related themes: the natures of reality and authenticity. In an essay entitled “How to Build a Universe that Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later,” the author holds his own with the most self-impressed articulators of postmodern mayhem as he laments an artificial landscape of “spurious realities” and imagines, longingly, the arrival of “fake fakes” (just as Thelonious Monk could sometimes, though rarely, hit “*wrong wrong notes*”) who might actually be real and, thus, take their stand against the charade:

I consider that the matter of defining what is real . . . is a serious topic . . . And in there somewhere is the other topic, the definition of the authentic human. Because the bombardment of pseudorealities begins to produce inauthentic humans very quickly, spurious humans—as fake as the data pressing at them from all sides. My two topics are really one topic, they unite at this point. Fake realities will create fake humans . . . [F]ake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually, into forgeries of themselves. So we wind up with fake humans inventing fake realities and then peddling them to other fake humans. It is just a very large version of Disneyland. You can have the Pirate Ride or the Lincoln Simulacrum or Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride—you can have *all* of them, but none is true.

70

Kristina’s dream fragment:

Basically, the dream was about a robot that looked human and took my place in the world. I don’t remember the plot, just that it took over for me and no one could tell I was gone.

The filmic version, of course, is called *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but Kristina is dreaming about something that, if we aren’t careful, will become our collective nightmare as well. The aliens came in business suits. No one could tell I was gone.

71

[U]masking the lie, identifying the unauthentic, and taking apart the indefinite or false absolutes continues to be, for now, the only corrective resource—a mocking inexhaustible safeguard—against our bankrupt history while we are waiting to be prepared to propose and to live under a new hypothesis of the truth.

Federico Fellini,
In Peter Bondanella’s *Cinema of Federico Fellini*

As he buys his ticket, it's as if the cinema-goer were seeking to make up for the gaps in his own experience, throwing himself into search for 'lost time.' In other words he seeks to fill that spiritual vacuum which has formed as a result of the specific conditions of his modern existence: constant activity, curtailment of human contact and the materialist bent of modern education . . .

. . . One thing, however, is certain: the mass audience can only be a mixed blessing, for it is always the inert sections of the public that are most easily impressed by excitement and novelty . . . We now have a situation where audiences very often prefer commercial trash to Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* or Antonioni's *Eclipse*. Professionals find themselves shrugging and predicting that serious, significant works will have no success with the general public.

Andrey Tarkovsky,
Sculpting in Time

I have this idea about a trilogy on heaven, hell and purgatory, set in three different cities. I don't know yet where I'd set heaven or purgatory, but I think I'd set hell in L.A.

Krzysztof Kieslowski

72

With Taoist intuition, Dick discerns the genuine in negative terms and in smallness:

The authentic human being is one of us who instinctively knows what he should not do . . . and . . . will balk at doing it. He will refuse to do it, even if this brings down dread consequences to him and to those whom he loves. This, to me, is the ultimately heroic trait of ordinary people; they say *no* to the tyrant and they calmly take the consequence of this resistance. Their deeds may be small and almost always unnoticed, unmarked by history. Their names are not remembered, nor did [they] expect [them] to be . . . I see their authenticity in an odd way: not in their willingness to perform great heroic deeds but in their quiet refusals . . . [T]hey cannot be compelled to be what they are not.

Psychologists would do well to recall those troubling studies by Stanley Milgram about too many people who turn up the voltage and look away from the pain, experiments that should have reminded us only of what we'd already surmised: about the many and the few and the just and forlorn—and, yet, even still, "the still, small voice," Kafka's "attendance upon grace."

73

Kafka himself, master caricaturist of freneticism and external obsession, points also to a deeper truth. In the *Fourth Blue Octavo Notebook*, we read:

There is no need for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't even wait, be completely quiet and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked . . . in raptures it will write before you.

Perhaps Kafka was thinking about Pascal, who had mused that all the evils of the world could be attributed to the fact that people were incapable of remaining alone in their chambers. On this point

Deborah, too, is “observant,” has her place of benediction, a Taoist sanctuary within the inner landscape of the mind:

The Kingdom of Yr had a kind of neutral place called the Fourth Level. It was achieved only by accident and could not be reached by formula or act of will. At the Fourth Level there was no emotion, no past or future to grind against. No memory or possession, nothing except facts which came unbidden and which had no feeling attached.

Sabbath for the schizophrenic, a seventh day of rest and Lao-tzu so as to see through the forest and forgeries, the simulacra and senselessness: the significance of the pause.

Beckett’s characters invariably hear voices and more than a few are en route to the asylum. The schizoid worlds they inhabit are easy neither to fathom nor endure. Overwhelmed by absurdity and despair (and retreating regularly into the realms of numerical permutations and formulae for succor or certainty), even the most far-gone among them have their epiphanies, glimpses of a greater design. In *Malone Dies* we read about one such moment of release for a character named Sabo:

But he loved the flight of the hawk and could distinguish it from all others. He would stand rapt, gazing at the long pernings, the quivering poise, the wings lifted for the plummet drop, the wild reascent, fascinated by such extremes of need, of pride, of patience and solitude.

Sabbath, we have said, for the misfit and schizophrenic, the significance of the pause.

74

I see the lark soaring in the spring air as well as the greatest optimist; but I also see the young girl of about twenty, who might have been in good health, a victim of consumption, and who will perhaps drown herself before she dies of any illness.

If one is always in respectable company among rather well-to-do bourgeois, one does not notice this so much perhaps . . .

Corot, who after all had more serenity than anyone else, who felt the spring so deeply, was he not as simple as a workingman all his life, and so sensitive to all the miseries of others? And what struck me in his biography was that when he was already very old in 1870 and 1871, he certainly looked at the bright sky, but at the same time he visited the ambulances where the wounded lay dying.

Illusions may fade, but the sublime *remains* . . . And I think that in moments when one does not care for nature any more, one still cares for humanity.

Vincent van Gogh,
Letter to Theo

75

Kristina expresses, poetically, the notion of a Middle East of the heart (a still point of quietude amid outer intrigue and noise) in an electronic message labeled “Inner Acquisition”:

Here, inside, she began breathing, recognizing the free movement of the air where no hand stops it, where no foot crushes it, where no eye watches it. And she began to survive within. Inside there is recognition; outside alienation, annihilation. Her steps, once meticulously measured in inches and feet, no longer invisibly restrained. Here she knows no limit or boundary, only the immeasurable possibilities. Those outside who unwittingly birthed this innocent, indiscernible creation hold their hands out to direct where it should grow and go, how it should be, do, and know. Inside there are no directions, only enlightenment and exploration. Outside they grow down and around; inside they grow beyond.

Cara Peale

76

If you do not fast from the world, you will not find the kingdom.
The Gospel of Thomas



"Nothing New Under the Sun"
Mele's Self-Portrait 12/98

Here is Emerson's "Each and All":

I inhaled the violet's breath,
Around me stood the oaks and firs;
Pine cones and acorns lay on the ground;
Over me soared the eternal sky,
Full of light and deity;
Again I say, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird; –
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

In "Lay Down Your Weary Tune," the youthful Dylan also yields to the greater awareness and song [the "universal melody" writes Steven Goldberg in an article entitled "Bob Dylan and the Poetry of Salvation"] and the mystery of nature, disclosing a mystical/spiritual core to which he has regularly returned:

Lay down your weary tune, lay down,
Lay down the song you strum,
And rest yourself 'neath the strength of strings
No voice can hope to hum.
{chorus}

Struck by the sounds before the sun,
I knew the night had gone.

The morning breeze like a bugle blew
Against the drums of dawn.
(repeat chorus)

The ocean wild like an organ played,
The seaweed wove its strands.
The crashin' waves like cymbals clashed
Against the rocks and sands.
(repeat chorus)

I stood unwound beneath the skies
And clouds unbound by laws.
The cryin' rain like a trumpet sang
And asked for no applause.
(repeat chorus)

The last of leaves fell from the trees
And clung to a new love's breast.
The branches bare like a banjo moaned
To the winds that listened the best.
(repeat chorus)

I gazed down in the river's mirror
And watched its winding strum.
The water smooth ran like a hymn
And like a harp did hum.
(repeat chorus)

Dylan aficionado Michael Gray has called this song "one of the very greatest and most haunting creations in our language," pointing to the unusual way in which verse and chorus comprise a single melody, thereby underscoring the unity of vision expressed:

Never before or since has Dylan created a pantheistic vision—a vision of the world . . . in which nature appears not as a manifestation of God but as containing God within its every aspect . . .

Underlying an exhilaration so intense as to be saddening, there is a profound composure in the face of a world in which all elements of beauty are infused with the light of God. Rejecting, here, the habit of . . . mixing poetry with explicit philosophizing, so that it is explained, in a prose sense, that the divine light shines through everything, Dylan registers the same conviction with true poetic genius—making that dissembled light a felt presence throughout the song.

It is this sense of cosmic awareness that, in part, informs Dylan's poetic genius and underlies his passionate/restless/ultimately heroic life and accomplishment. It may not be what the man taps into at every moment or turn, but it is abundantly there when desired, needed, or sought. Here Nietzsche offers a pointed and cautionary word: "Pure spirit is pure stupidity."

Poetry is a choosing in the infinite . . . [I]t is a fire that has extinguishing and dissolving force. Each word of the poet is single; and yet there lies around each a ring of ungraspable material which represents the sphere of the infinite vanishing . . . Of the poet it can be said that his heart is the hub into which the spokes of polarities converge: here is not a suspension,

however, but union, not indifference but fruitfulness. The poet bears the antitheses of the spirit, and in him they are fruitful . . .

Thus the poet is the messenger of God and of the earth and is at home in the two spheres. The force of fire is his force; it burns in contradiction, and it shines in unity.

Martin Buber,
Daniel: Dialogues on Realization

80

Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.
Albert Einstein

Knowledge we have. Anyone who strives for it with particular intensity is suspect of striving against it.

Franz Kafka.
Third Blue Octavo Notebook

81

Coltrane was then asked about his religion. He answered: "I am [Christian] by birth; my parents were and my early teachings were Christian. But as I look upon the world, I feel all men know the truth. If a man was a Christian, he could know the truth and he could not. The truth itself does not have any name on it. And each man has to find it for himself."

When asked about the future he said, "I believe that man is here to grow into the fullest . . . At least this is what I want to do. As I am growing to become whatever I become, this will just come out on the horn. Whatever that's going to be, it will be. I am not so much interested in trying to say what it's going to be. I don't know. I just know that good can only bring good" . . . [A]sked what he planned to do in the next ten years, [Coltrane] answered, "Become a saint."

John Coltrane (on his final tour through Japan the year before his death, during which he visited Buddhist temples and war memorials and wondered who the famous dignitary or movie star on board the airplane might be as he debarked to meet the banners and cheering throngs),
In Eric Nisenson's *Ascension*

"Do you mean that Truth is always closed to us?"

Kafka was silent. His eyes had become quite small and dark . . . For a few moments he contemplated the tips of his fingers as they lay on the desk. Then he said gently: "God, Life, Truth—they are only different names which we give to one fact."

I pressed him further: "But can we grasp it?"

"We experience it," said Kafka, in a slightly troubled voice. "The fact, to which we give different names, and which we try to apprehend by various processes of thought, pervades our veins, our nerves, our senses. It is within us. For that reason perhaps it's invisible. What we can really grasp is the mystery, the darkness. God dwells in it. And this is a good thing, because without protecting the darkness, we should try to overcome God. That is man's nature."

Gustav Janouch,
Conversations with Kafka

What Rembrandt has alone or almost alone among painters, that tenderness of gaze which we see . . . that heartbroken tenderness,

that glimpse of a superhuman infinitude that seems so natural there—
in many places you come upon it in Shakespeare, too. And then above
all he is full of portraits, grave and gay.

Vincent van Gogh,
Letters to Theo

82

I find poetic links, the logic of poetry in cinema, extraordinarily pleasing.
They seem to me perfectly appropriate to the potential of cinema as
the most truthful and poetic of art forms. Certainly I am more at home
with them than with traditional theatrical writing which links images
through the linear, rigidly logical development of the plot. That sort of
fussily correct way of linking events usually involves arbitrarily forcing
them into sequence in obedience to some abstract notion of order . . .
In my view poetic reasoning is closer to the laws by which thought
develops, and thus to life itself . . .

Think of . . . Pasternak, Chaplin, Dovzhenko . . . and you'll
realize what tremendous emotional power is carried by these exalted
figures who soar above the earth, in whom the artist appears not just
as an explorer of life, but as one who creates great spiritual treasures
and that special beauty which is subject only to poetry. Such an artist .
. . . is capable of going beyond the limitations of coherent logic and
conveying the deep complexity and truth of the impalpable connections
and hidden phenomena of life.

Andrey Tarkovsky,
Sculpting in Time

Filming for me is an illusion planned in detail, the reflection of a reality
which seems to me more and more illusory.

When film is not a document, it is dream. That is why
Tarkovsky is the greatest of them all. He moves with such naturalness
in the room of dreams. He doesn't explain; what should he explain
anyhow? . . . All my life I have hammered on the doors of rooms in
which he moves so naturally. Only a few times have I managed to
creep inside . . .

Fellini, Kurosawa and Bunuel move in the same fields.

Ingmar Bergman,
The Magic Lantern

I believe there is more to life than we yet know or will ever know. The
religious; the mystical, the psychic, the miraculous; fate, destiny,
coincidence. The land called the Unknown. I know I have been laughed
at and ridiculed sometimes for my openness to everything from A to Z,
astrology to Zen, from Jung to Ouija boards . . . but the promise of
marvels fascinates me. I am not stopped by snickerers or scoffers. Let
them live planted in the mundane, those who believe everything has to
have a pragmatic scientific explanation. I don't wish to know people
who can't say, "Imagine that!" in response to some awe-inspiring,
unexplained phenomenon. Wishful thinking is the most important kind
of thinking. The advances of man are made in the belief as to where he
can go without regard to what is already known.

Federico Fellini,
In Charlotte Chandler's *I, Fellini*

83

We have been talking, in part, about the awareness and silence that are integral to actions of
courage and every instance of character, about that solitary leap of faith that each of us must make in

order to advance along an ethical incline, hopefully while there is still time. Frank H. Mayer reminisces in later years:

One by one, we put up our buffalo rifles and left the ranges, and there settled over them a vast quiet. The buffalo were gone. Maybe we'd served our purpose in abolishing the buffalo. Maybe it was our ruthless harvesting of them which telescoped the control of the Indian by a decade or maybe more. Or maybe I'm just rationalizing. Maybe we were just a greedy lot who wanted to get ours and the hell with posterity, the buffalo, or anyone else. Just so we kept our scalps on and our money pouches filled. I think maybe that is the way it was.

And, so, the Plains Indian who had seen in the Caucasian "a queer kind of man," one who would "always be greedy," was not entirely correct. Penance (belatedly, like Kundera's human being roasted on a spit by inhabitants of the Milky Way) is, it seems, possible.

ANOTHER NOVEL, THIS ONE ABOUT
TIME, PREJUDICE, AND THE LAMED-VOV

84



"My Room"
Meg B/98

85

Andre Schwartz-Bart's *The Last of the Just* is a hallowed novel on the theme of man's inhumanity to man. It is founded upon the ancient legend of the Lamed-Vov, "a tradition that certain Talmudists trace back to the source of the centuries, to the mysterious time of the prophet Isaiah." According to this legend

the world reposes upon thirty-six Just Men [they may, of course, also be women, and, God forbid, needn't be Jews], the Lamed-Vov, indistinguishable from simple mortals; often they are unaware of their station. But if just one of them were lacking, the sufferings of mankind would poison even the souls of the newborn, and humanity would suffocate with a single cry. For the Lamed-Vov are the hearts of the world multiplied, and into them, as into one receptacle, pour all our griefs.

"[M]ost pitiable" of all, say the scribes, are those Lamed-Vov who remain "unknown to themselves." Jeremiah and Jesus were, perhaps, spared such a fate, but we can be less easily consoled in the instance of Hecube who Schwartz-Bart leaves, with Euripides, "shrieking at the death of her sons":

When an unknown Just rises to Heaven he is so frozen that God must warm him for a thousand years between His fingers before [the] soul can open itself to Paradise. And it is known that some remain forever inconsolable at human woe, so that God Himself cannot warm them. So from time to time the Creator, blessed be His Name, sets forward the clock of the Last Judgment by one minute.

Ontological doctoring in the other world: messianic mathematics, the significance of the pause.

Schwartz-Bart's novel begins in the year 1185 in the city of York and follows the descendents of the martyred Rabbi Yom Tov Levy ("the very gentle and luminous Rabbi Yom Tov, who by his own hand slit the throats of two hundred and fifty of the faithful—some say a thousand," so that they mightn't be otherwise slaughtered by their assailants), this story itself "only a minor episode in a history overstocked with martyrs." The Eternal later comes to Yom Tov Levy's son, Solomon, in a dream, saying:

Here me, Solomon; listen to my words. On the seventeenth day of the month of Sivan, in the year 4945, your father, Rabbi Yom Tov Levy, was pitied in my heart. And therefore to all his line, and for all the centuries, is given the grace of one Lamed-Vovnik to each generation. You are the first, you are of them, you are holy.

(We are reminded that Deborah, too, bears witness to a girl who will later take her own life, "a gentle, generous veteran of mechanical psychiatry in a dozen other hospitals"—this, also, another minor incident in a discipline now overstocked with technicians and bureaucrats equally in need, perhaps, of God's pity and grace.)

Our novel traces the narrative of Yom Tov Levy's descendents, thereby chronicling the macabre fate of the Jews of Europe. The last of the just is Rabbi Ernie Levy who finds himself living on the lam and under the sign of the swastika:

"Oh, Ernie," Golda said, "you know them. Tell me why, *why* do the Christians hate us the way they do?" . . .

Ernie put his arm around her shoulders solemnly. "It's very mysterious," he murmured in Yiddish. "They don't know exactly why themselves. I've been in their churches and I've read their gospel. Do you know who the Christ was? A simple Jew like your father. A kind of Hasid."

Golda smiled gently. "You're kidding me."

"No, no, believe me. . . [H]e was a really good Jew. . . sort of like the Baal Shem Tov—a merciful man, and gentle. The Christians say they love him, but I think they hate him without knowing it. So they take the cross by the other end and make a sword out of it and strike us with it! You understand, Golda," he cried suddenly, strangely excited, "*they take the cross and they turn it around, they turn it around, by God. . .* They say that some of the Just Men remain outside the gates of Paradise, that they don't want to forget humanity, that they too await the Messiah. Yes, maybe he sees it. Who knows? You understand . . . he was a . . . Jew, a real Just Man . . ."

They laughed. Golda took her harmonica from the bottom of the basket, flashed sunlight off it into Ernie's eyes, and, still smiling, brought it to her lips and played a forbidden melody. It was Hatikvah, the ancient chant of hope . . . [A]s she inspected the Square Mouton-Duvernnet with uneasy eyes, she tasted the sweetness of forbidden fruit.

Hatikvah and hope, and that other Another of song.

Prague. Religions get lost as people do.
Franz Kafka
Fourth Blue Octavo Notebook

Ernie Levy dies in the gas chamber at Auschwitz where he instructs the children who gather around him for solace, "Breath deeply, my lambs, and quickly!"

And then he knew that he could do nothing more for anyone in the world, and in the flash that preceded his own annihilation he remembered, happily, the legend of Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion, as Morecai had joyfully recited it: "When the gentle rabbi, wrapped in the scrolls of the Torah, was flung upon the pyre by the Romans for having taught the Law, and when they lit the fagots, the branches still green to make his torture last, his pupils said, "Master, what do you see?" And Rabbi Chanina answered, "I see the parchment burning but the letters are taking wing . . . Ah, yes, surely, the letters are taking wing."

In his pre-Holocaust and rarified *The Wandering Jews*, Joseph Roth jots down his observations of the famed "wonder-rabbi" of Eastern Europe:

Many people believe in him. He himself, the rabbi, does not distinguish between the most faithful followers of the Scriptures and the somewhat less faithful ones, no, nor even between Jew and *goy* or man and beast. Whoever comes to him is assured of getting his help. He knows more than he is permitted to say. He knows that there is another world above this one, which is differently constituted, and he may even sense that certain commands and interdictions that make sense in this world are of no consequence in the other. What matters to him is following these unwritten, but all the more valid, laws.

The Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski (who had said that anti-Semitism was a stain on his country's conscience that could never be wholly absolved) here echoes the wisdom of the "wonder-rabbis":

The world is not only bright lights, this hectic pace, the Coca-Cola with a straw, the new car . . . Another truth exists . . . a hereafter? Yes, surely. Good or bad, I don't know, but . . . something else.

There is, sadly, and yet with fitting Taoist simplicity, no *Yod Vashem*, no Holocaust Memorial Museum, to commemorate the slaughter of the buffalo. Here memory itself and the story of Old Lady Horse will have to suffice:

One young woman got up very early and, peering through the haze, she saw the last herd appear like in a spirit dream. Straight to Mount Scott the leader of the herd walked, behind him came the cows and their calves and the few young males who had survived. As the woman watched, the face of the mountain opened. Inside Mount Scott the world was green and fresh as it had been when she was a small girl. The rivers ran clear, not red. Into this world of beauty the buffalo walked, never to be seen again.

And, yet, it is not unthinkable that Schwarz-Bart's elegiac benediction may serve the buffalo as well as the Jews of Europe and thereby our greater point about all sentient beings and humankind's too frequent brutality—about suffering, loss, and redemption:

Yes, at times one's heart could break in sorrow. But often too, preferably in the evening, I can't help thinking that Ernie Levy, dead six million times, is still alive somewhere . . . Yesterday, as I stood in the street trembling in despair, rooted to the spot, a drop of pity fell from above upon my face. But there was no breeze in the air, no cloud in the sky . . . There was only a presence.

Surely it is the teardrop of Ernie himself, the Last of the Just, who, not wanting to forget, remains waiting outside the gates of heaven.

91

And lest we convince ourselves that all this is pertains to a misguided past and that things have now changed for the better and for good, our poets and seers continue to witness the charade and sound the alarm. Dylan's 1993 compact disc *World Gone Wrong* is a passionate rendition of traditional blues and folk songs on which he had grown up and which he continues to admire, no less than the troubadours who had written and sung them. Dylan's stance toward these simple and heartfelt songs and their wandering minstrel creators is, at times, worshipful as he relinquishes earlier attempts at pinning down God and theology. The poet, like Buber, is in tune with a mystic awareness that God wanders "hither and thither" and, like Moosebrugger, understands that things can't be "singled out" insofar as events "hang together." Like music itself, all things flow.

Commenting on the hauntingly beautiful and serene final selection, Dylan writes:

LONE PILGRIM is from an old Doc Watson record. what attracts me to the song is how the lunacy of trying to fool the self is set aside at some given point. salvation & the needs of mankind are prominent & hegemony takes a breathing spell. "my soul flew to mansions on high" what's essentially true is virtual reality. technology to wipe out truth is now available. not everybody can afford it but it's available. when the cost comes down look out! there wont be songs like these anymore. factually there arent any now.

The poet's Kerouac-immersed and Blakian/gnostic eloquence (which will not be constrained by grammatical precision or punctuated nicety) may fall a bit short when measured against our own ponderously detailed publication guidelines and codes, but the results are compelling nonetheless. Here, in a few words, Dylan says more than bookshelves of professional dissertations and treatises, journals and theses, inaugurals and sermons—all of which too often constitute the very falsity of which the poet admonishes and sings. Art and artifice, Dylan and doctorates, buffalo and holocausts, lamentation and lunacy, ethics the ether and Lao-tzu.

[T]o save something one must begin by renouncing that which we are, that is, begin by renouncing our "culture," in quotation marks, because true culture is something else, it is the one known to illiterates in a certain sense, that is, how to live in the environment, how not to offend it, how to respect others. This is culture, and speaking of love, I don't want to equivocate. Love here is understood as something very broad, very vast, very divine: it is the love that includes, above all, the possibility that we someday may no longer be able to exercise it, that we someday will go away and have to leave behind a memory of ourselves that is, if nothing else, at least decent.

Ennio Flaiano,
Concerning Satire, Boredom, Faith (an interview
conducted two weeks before Flaiano's death)

This World is a World of imagination & Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees.

William Blake (or, as Heraclitus
says, "Character is destiny")

Not knowing how to live is separateness, the division of the world into self and others. I sit inside my skull and look out as a frightened man from a moated castle. Me in here and the world out there. We negotiate, we make deals, exchanges but we are no one. I am an entity, complete. Never do I lose sight of where I stop and the world begins. With sleepless vigilance I patrol the edges of selfhood, warn visitors away. I am independent within this domain, but am dying. It is my wholeness that destroys me. I long for partness in a greater world.

Allen Wheelis,
The Listener



Crayon Picture 1997

the sun is
lazy
for most afternoons
it is resting
on my shoulders

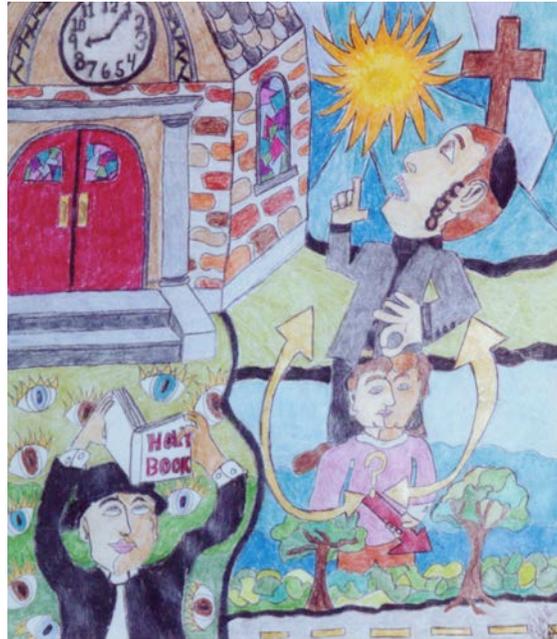
the unseen

if I were given
three wishes
i would choose
to live once
to love once
to die once

the unseen

CHUANG-TZU
TAOISM'S WISE GUY AND HUMORIST

95



"Looking for God" 2/00

96

It would be unseemly to write a piece on Taoism without mention of Chuang-tzu, Taoism's chief ironist and gagman. Chuang-tzu had captured even Thomas Merton's imagination as "a Chinese recluse" who shares "my own kind of solitude and who is my own kind of person":

Chuang-tzu is not concerned with words and formulas about reality, but with the direct existential grasp of reality in itself. Such a grasp is necessarily obscure and does not lend itself to abstract analysis . . . [T]he whole teaching, the "way" contained in these anecdotes, poems, and meditations, is characteristic of a certain mentality found everywhere in the world, a certain taste for simplicity, for humility, self-effacement, silence . . . a refusal to take seriously . . . the push and self-importance which one must display in order to get along in society. This other is a "way" that prefers not to get anywhere in the world, or even in the field of some supposed spiritual attainment . . . Chuang-tzu would have agreed with St. John of the Cross, that you enter upon this kind of way when you leave all ways and, in some sense, get lost.

Chuang-tzu, we may say, is Lao-tzu with an attitude, a quiet iconoclast who takes hermetic pleasure in poking fun at the powerful and vaunted and their maddening "need to win." Here even the spiritual zealot who accumulates merit through a lifetime of obedience is sent packing. In a story

Chuang-tzu tells about Lao-tzu, such a one travels very far to learn from the quiet sage “the elements” of his teaching. Lao-tzu responds only reticently: “If you persist in trying to attain what is never attained, in reasoning about what cannot be understood, you will be destroyed.” The acolyte is then instructed in the art of “[knowing] when to stop”—forgoing, thereby, what Beckett had called the “mania for symmetry”—as only proceeding thusly “melts the ice.” Water and ice, ethics and Lao-tzu, the hard and angular metamorphosing into the fluid and flowing.

97

I find the religion and philosophy in the music. I don't find it anywhere else . . . I don't adhere to rabbis, preachers, evangelists . . . I've learned more from the songs than I've learned from any of this kind of entity. The songs are my lexicon. I believe the songs.

Bob Dylan

For my part, I have finally found myself compelled to *give up the logic*, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably. It has an imperishable use in human life, but that use is not to make us . . . acquainted with the essential nature of reality . . . Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it. If you like to employ words eulogistically, as most men do, and so encourage confusion, you may say that reality obeys a higher logic, or enjoys a higher rationality. But I think that even eulogistic words should be used rather to distinguish than to commingle meanings, so I prefer bluntly to call reality, if not irrational, then at least non-rational in its constitution.

William James,
“A Pluralistic Universe”

As for William James, . . . it was his peculiar genius to understand that what he, what the rest of us, still happen to call “religious experience” inevitably has to do with our moments of vanity—our wish to persuade ourselves that we have once and for all fathomed the mysteries of the universe, our desire to make our mark during that moment of eternity in which we appear and disappear . . . But he need not have worried; humility and gentleness grace just about every page of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—an outcome he knew enough (knew enough about himself and maybe all of us) never to take for granted.

Robert Coles,
“The Varieties of Religious Experience”

98

In Singer's *Shadows on the Hudson*, a man weighed down by earthly pursuits and extraterrestrial conundrums gazes, alongside Coles and all the others, toward that Another and ponders:

What Grein sought did not and could not exist: he wanted the fear of heaven without dogma; religion without revelation; discipline without proscriptions; Torah, prayer, and isolation built on a pure, unadulterated religious experience. But he also knew that what he desired could not be. He was waging a war that was lost before it began. He had to guard against developing a perversion or a spiritual illness.

The difference that Grein seeks and to which Chuang-tzu points resides "in [the] heart," observes Merton, rather than the abstractly or conventionally religious or moral. It is a difference that is felt rather than understood such that even the sage "does not know how [she or] he is different."

99

Here is Chuang-tzu on matters of analysis and systems, those makeshift blocks of wood hammered [against more fluid understanding] into empty space by throngs obsessed with stasis and fixed abodes:

The disadvantage of regarding things in separate parts is that when one begins to cut up and analyze, each one tries to be exhaustive. The disadvantage of trying to be exhaustive is that it is consciously (mechanically) exhaustive. One goes on deeper and deeper, forgetting to return and sees a ghost (the externals of things only). Or one goes on and imagines he has got it and what he has got is only a carcass. For a thing which retains its substance but has lost the magic touch of life is but a ghost (of reality). Only one who can imagine the formless in the formed can arrive at the truth.

And here is Kafka:

He sat over his accounts. Great columns. Sometimes he would turn away from them and rest his face on his hand. What appeared from the accounts? A dreary, dreary account.

Franz Kafka,
Fifth Blue Octavo Notebook

100

In the waning pages of Singer's novel, a conversation occurs in which a struggling artist discusses theology and messianic mathematics with a woman who has long admired him:

"I have abandoned Judaism. I am no longer a Jew," Anfang rapped out . . . Frieda felt as though her brain were rattling in her skull like a nut inside its shell . . . She had no idea what to say. "Why, exactly?" she finally managed to ask.

"You're shocked, aren't you?" Anfang demanded. "I was reading, and the New Testament attracted me. There I found an answer to all my questions."

"What does it say that cannot be found in our own sacred books?"

"I don't know. But at least there is no brutality, and no animal sacrifice."

Frieda's eyes filled with tears. "Perhaps not, but the Nazis exterminated six million Jews and the Christians were silent. The murderers carried out the slaughter and the priests looked on."

"Those were not the true Christians."

"Who exactly are the true Christians?"

"We Jews,"

"Why should we call ourselves Christians? God isn't three persons and has no son."

"It's all symbolism."

"The Inquisition was no symbol."

Anfang did not answer. Frieda looked at him. Through her tears his face seemed blurred, distorted, shapeless. He smiled weirdly. Frieda wiped her eyes. God in heaven, have compassion upon him, she prayed to herself. This poor man is in great anguish.

And it is too sad, really, to think about how much needless energy has been expended, how much blood wantonly spilt, over Chuang-tzu's "three in the morning" and "four in the evening" and the lunatic confusion between belief and awareness, wisdom and knowledge, the one and the many, ethics the ether and Lao-tzu.

101

Returned to her college and attempting valiantly to complete the semester without decompensation, Kristina makes up a tongue-in-cheek ordinance in an effort to keep all respective "alters" in line during the academic homestretch. It is written by Anne (Kristina's obsessively focused student aspect) and makes specific reference, in turn, to the inner guide, Cara, as well as the child artist, Mele, who has been, of late, "missing her hands":

From the Director of Student Life:

I appreciate the effort being put into this establishment. I understand that if something disruptive can happen, it usually will, and that this will typically occur at the precise moment when I need to be at my most "directed" state. If noise was a problem in the past, it will be a bigger problem, again, when I need to be at my most directed state. Therefore the following regulations are to take effect immediately:

- 1) During the last week of school all personnel are required to log overtime hours so that required work, having been left till now (e.g., grades, bills, papers, studying, etc.) can be completed by the end of the week deadline.
- 2) Any employee wishing to contest the conditions outlined in Policy #1 must submit a complaint to the Public Relations Office/Attention: Cara Peale.
- 3) Complaints submitted to the Public Relations Office will not be processed until after the first of the year due to the enormous backlog of already unprocessed complaints.
- 4) It is not acceptable for any employee of this establishment to cease in their duties even if they have submitted a complaint to the above-mentioned office until they have received an acceptance notice from the office. No such notices will be sent out prior to Memorial Day.
- 5) All complaints must be submitted in writing; verbal complaints will not be considered valid.
- 6) Employees who are not capable of submitting an adequate written complaint (i.e., children or persons who may be missing their hands) are required to see the Director of Child Services.
- 7) Please note that at this time we have not found anyone to serve as Child Services Director. This is a delicate job, and as of yet the Board of

Directors has not found one person who can completely commit to the responsibility.

8) All children who wish to file a complaint must wait until after the first day of January when adequate attention can be paid to their particular issues. At this time, they may make verbal complaints to their group leaders.

9) Responses to complaints will be made in the order in which they were received.

All questions concerning these policies will be addressed by my secretary who is currently visiting family for the holidays. She will be back in approximately three weeks.

Two days following receipt of this piece of mock legislation (which, in addition to being funny, accurately reflects Kristina's inner architecture and populace), I am woken up by an urgent early morning page from Mele, who, having "lost her hands," finds herself flooded with a succession of disjointed images and flashbacks that now jostle, merge, and threaten to overwhelm. Without the use of her hands, Mele has, temporarily, no creative outlet. The influx of chaotic, reshuffled flashbacks are, in turn, likely a consequence of Anne's present efforts in the direction of what William James had called, skeptically, "vicious intellectualization" and corresponding inattention to the imaginative realms. We have gained reality and lost dream.

I support Mele through her confusion and panic as deftly as possible, considering my own groggy state of consciousness. I then call for Cara, the one I would prefer to be "out" during periods of instability and stress. Mele protests, saying that Cara is sleeping. "That is what I was doing," I tell her, pointing out the obvious inadequacy of the response. Alternatively, I request to speak to Anne who, coming forward hesitantly, asks why I have awakened her when she was trying to rest for a few hours before her examination! She is summarily apprised of the situation.

Later that morning, Anne forwards these follow-up legislative attachments:

Amendment 1-6 to Policy 1-9, drawn up the Sixteenth Day of December 1997

A1) Due to the overuse of some public communication systems (especially that of the telephone) by children living in this establishment, all calls directed by persons under the age of accountability or who have prior records of irresponsible telephone use are required to receive permission for such communication via the Communication Office/Public Relations Office, once again, Attention: Cara Peale.

A2) The Communication Office is located on the top floor of this establishment. Operating hours are from 8 a.m. till 1:00 am. All parties finding themselves in need of communication after these hours are required to withhold such communications until the office opens on the next business day.

A3) Persons, particularly minors, finding themselves unmistakably in a hostile situation, dangerous environment, or unsafe predicament are so ordered to contact their group leaders who, upon assessing the situation, will decide on the most reasonable course of action.

A4) Minors who remain under the supervision of Cara Peale, and all

persons designated as group leaders, are required to receive the approval of Cara Peale before attempting to alert this entire establishment.

A5] At no time is it acceptable to wake the Director of Student Affairs in order to obtain such permission.

A6] From this Sixteenth Day of December, Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Seven forward, no telephone receiver, either in the place of residence or in the public domain, shall be manipulated in any way without the prior permission of the above-stated offices and persons.

Kristina is, no doubt, enjoying herself. It takes her, she says, just a few moments to come up with this parody—the dissociative’s rendition of Chuang-tzu’s “three in the morning” taken to levels of intrapsychic absurdity. How long do you think it takes the House of Representatives or our respective professional organizations or the UN? Further, she is siphoning off a bit of pressure even as she jests with her therapist. In so doing, even the studious part of the personality allows for the spirit of play, briefly taming the omnipresent tumult and cacophony of impulses and voices within. Once Cara herself is back out and in charge (and feeling that explanation is in order for the early morning disturbance), she forwards a more reflective account of the situation without resort to officialdom or legalese:

Doctor,

Mele is experiencing what she would call “color pain,” a representation of events defined in color patterns. She would also say, “the colors are angry,” which means that three or more memories, ideas, thoughts, etc. are mixing and that she no longer has the ability to separate them. This leads her to become increasingly upset with Anne, who is completely absorbed in her studies and cannot hear her beckoning. “Mother is making color again,” Mele keeps repeating. The only way I could explain this one would be to say that, again, pain is color. You know, if you hit your head really hard, or if you close your eyes really tight and cover them with your hands for a long period of time, the darkness is not only black but also turns into interesting patterns and colors. I believe that at times (since she never directly experienced the physical pain of certain events), Mele’s only connection to them is through color and darkness, her pain and frustration. The more frustrated she becomes, the less able she is to make distinctions between things, her reality and others’. She does not make sentences that connect. She begins to exist almost traveling between other peoples’ experiences, not knowing what to make of them. Anne told me that you woke her up this morning after Mele had called you. I will work on getting her a chance to draw after this first final. I think, under the increasing pressure, Anne will submit.

Cara Peale

Do you see the irony? Anne’s formal declaration of law is meant, despite its uncanny internal logic, as a joke. That it is written by the obsessional part of the personality is evidence of real progress. After all, obsessives are rarely so humorous or circumspect. Kristina, despite an oppressively fundamentalist upbringing, would easily understand the old Jewish adage: “Man thinks, God laughs.” Further, Cara’s observations are far more instructive in shedding light on the dynamics at hand than

those of the vast majority of her elected counterparts in our various legislative bodies. Anne's declaration of do's and don'ts is almost made to order for my own professional organization, whereas Cara's subtler commentary would not find a place on any managed care form I have seen. Kristina, despite her disarray, is further along than most in her appreciation of the subjective and personal and the shortcomings of the doctrinaire. Not surprisingly, she is pursuing a degree in psychology. After the semester is successfully navigated, she wonders: Will there be real freedom of spirit and thought when and if she makes it to graduate school? Or will it be more rote learning, makeshift guidelines, and rules? I am almost afraid to tell her the truth.

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On insomnia or wakefulness, as opposed to what the Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas had called "the merchants of sleep":

Questioner: Your work is altogether imbued with a moral preoccupation. Curiously, after a period of liberation in which it has been rejected, science and, notably, biological discourses have led men to pose ethical questions. What is your view about this evolution?

Emmanuel Levinas: Morality has, in effect, a bad reputation. One confuses it with moralism. What is essential in the ethical is often lost in the moralism which has been reduced to an ensemble of particular obligations.

Questioner: What is the ethical?

Emmanuel Levinas: It is the recognition of holiness . . . [T]he fundamental trait of being is the preoccupation that each being has with [its own] being. The concern for the other breaches concern for the self. This is what I call holiness. Our humanity consists in being able to recognize the priority of the other, as if one could not think without already being concerned for the other.

Emmanuel Levinas,
"On the Usefulness of Insomnia"

The Lithuanian philosopher on forgiveness and its limits:

Questioner: How does a Jewish philosopher like yourself view the Barbie trial?

Emmanuel Levinas: For me it is of the order of the horrible. Horror that could neither be repaired nor forgotten. By no sanction, that is certain . . . This trial, more horrible than any sanction, should not happen as it is happening. Across the inevitable formalism and juridical artifices, it would be necessary to go to the sentencing without banalizing the horror in its apocalyptic dimensions.

Questioner: Does the man remain "other" for you?

Emmanuel Levinas: If someone in his soul and his conscience can pardon him, let him do it. I cannot.

Emmanuel Levinas,
"On the Usefulness of Insomnia"

Though I see . . . so many pictures which . . . are faultlessly drawn and painted as to technique, yet many of them bore me terribly because they give me neither food for the heart nor for the mind, because they have obviously been made without a certain passion.

Vincent van Gogh,
Letter to Theo

Complexities of thought and poetic visions of the world do not have to be thrust into the framework of the patently obvious. The usual logic, that of linear sequentiality, is uncomfortably like the proof of a geometry theorem. As a method it is incomparably less fruitful . . . than the possibilities opened up by associative linking, which allows for . . . affective as well as . . . rational appraisal. And how wrong it is that the cinema makes so little use of the latter mode, which has so much to offer. It possesses an inner power which is concentrated within the image and comes across to the audience in the form of feelings, inducing tension in direct response to the author's narrative logic.

Andrey Tarkovsky,
Sculpting in time

I start from a feeling, not an idea, certainly not an ideology. I am in the service of my story, which wishes to be told . . . I have to understand where it wants to go.

Federico Fellini,
In Charlotte Chandler's *I, Fellini*

A film is a living reality . . . I don't want to make a mystery of my work, but I would like to say that my system is to have no system: I go to a story to discover what it has to tell me.

Federico Fellini,
Fellini on Fellini

I took with me to the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute a book . . . by Kasimir Edschmid, who in one chapter . . . discussed Kafka.

"Have you seen this?" I asked.

Franz Kafka nodded. "My attention was drawn to it."

"And what did you think of it?"

Franz Kafka shrugged his shoulders and made a helpless gesture with his right hand.

"Edschmid speaks of me as if I were an engineer. Whereas I am only a very mediocre, clumsy draughtsman. He claims that I introduce miracles into ordinary events. That is, of course, a serious error on his part. The ordinary is itself a miracle. All I do is to record it. Possibly, I also illuminate matters a little, like the lighting on a half-dark stage. And yet that is not true! In fact, the stage is not dark at all. It is filled with daylight. Therefore men close their eyes and see so little."

Gustav Janouch,
Conversations with Kafka

Coltrane, of course, will not be so easily subdued, keeps his sights on that “place beyond” the “outer rim of heaven” (a “place,” writes Plato, “without color or shape or solidity” yet “the subject of all true knowledge,” “the soul’s steersman”), as he wrestles with matters of notation and musical scripture. Speaking reticently and, observes Lewis Porter, “with utmost humility,” Coltrane reflects wisely on methodology and fluency:

I found there were a certain number of chord progressions to play at a given time, and sometimes what I played didn’t work out in eighth notes, sixteenth notes, or triplets. I had to put the notes in uneven groups like fives and sevens in order to get them all in . . . I want to be more flexible where rhythm is concerned.

Contemplating that place beyond numbers, borders and words, Coltrane reflects further:

My goal is to live the truly religious life and express it in my music . . . [T]he music is just part of the whole thing. To be a musician is really something. It goes very, very deep. My music is the spiritual expression of what I am—my faith, my knowledge, my being . . . When you begin to see the possibilities of music, you desire to do something really good for people, to help humanity free itself of its hang-ups . . . I’d like to point out to people the divine in a musical language that transcends words. I want to speak to their souls.

Music and meaning, sacred chords and letters in flight, ethics the ether and Lao-tzu.

And in a picture I wish to say something that would console me as music does.

Vincent van Gogh,
Letter to Theo

A melody is a patterned sequence of notes of different pitches. The absolute pitches of the notes are their quantity, their relative positions and the parts they play in the dramatic dynamic structure of the melody are their qualities. The melody does not consist of the notes separately or alone, but in the form generated by the sequence of ratios of the pitches of the notes. These ratios are not themselves notes. They are the differences between the notes. They do not themselves make a sound. If the music gets to us, there is an instant sympathetic vibration through which we resonate and commune with it. This resonant communion is not the way objective facts are communicated.

R. D. Laing,
The Voice of Experience

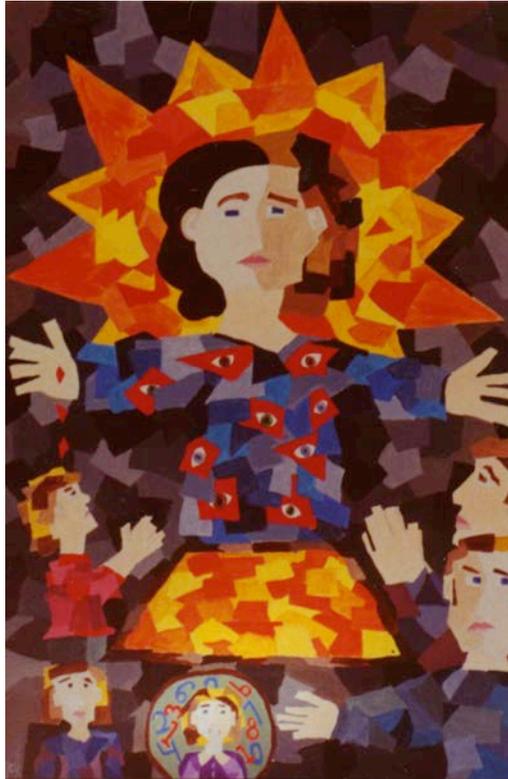
Now the sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never.

Franz Kafka,
Third Blue Octavo Notebook

When you have names and forms,
know that they are provisional.
When you have institutions,
know where their functions should end.
Knowing when to stop,
you can avoid any danger.

PSYCHOLOGY AND FILM
(IMAGES OF THE HOLY LAND)

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"The God Mother"
Mele 11/98

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I believe . . . that what I care about most is the freedom of man, the liberation of the individual . . . from the network of moral and social conventions in which he believes, or rather in which he thinks he believes, [but] which encloses him and limits him and makes him seem narrower, smaller . . . even worse than he really is. If you really want me to turn teacher, then condense it with these words: be what you are . . . discover yourself . . . To me life is beautiful, for all its tragedy and suffering . . . I am moved by it . . . I do my best to share this way of feeling with others.

Federico Fellini

I began with the documentary. I abandoned it because every nonfiction filmmaker ends up realizing one day the boundaries that can't be crossed—those beyond which we risk causing harm to the people we film. That's when we feel the need to make fiction features.

Krzysztof Kieslowski

I am trying to change the world.

Jean-Luc Godard

I would like to briefly consider the evocative work of Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai. Uneasily received in his homeland and relatively unknown in ours, Gitai is nevertheless widely admired in Europe for his sober reflections upon diaspora and ethnicity and a keen sensitivity in documenting the paradoxes of history and time. The foci of Gitai's films vary widely. Biblical themes (*Esther*, *Golem: The Spirit of Exile*), documentary (*American Mythologies*, *Film Diary*, *The Arena of Murder*), and history (*Berlin-Jerusalem*, *Kadosh*) are all incorporated within the unflinching scrutiny of the filmmaker's camera eye. We are returned, inexorably, to landscape as point of reference, as we are pressed to consider the struggles, aspirations, and follies of peoples/races against the universal backdrops of nature and time—humankind's fleeting, uncertain sojourn within space and eternity.

Uprootedness, exile, and violence (masquerading too easily as ethnic self-righteousness) are prominent among Gitai's themes. *Esther* retells the well-known scriptural tale of ancient anti-Semitism. Shot conspicuously in an abandoned Haifa slum from which Algerian Arabs had been forcibly removed, the film's ironic implications are impossible to ignore. During the reenactment of an ethnocentric text that revolves around persecution, resistance, and revenge, the ominous roar of Israeli jet planes can be heard periodically punctuating the biblical narrative. Time and myth are conflated. The camera wanders episodically from the sparse, almost biblical, setting to glimpse the modern urban scene.

The Jewish feast of Purim celebrates the collective memory of this tale, as Esther and her uncle Mordechai outwit the Jew-hating Haman, prevailing in the final hour upon a distracted, ineffectual king in order to bring about a villain's demise. Gitai, however, does not stop here with the Sunday school rendition but rather continues to relate the rest of the narrative as well. Mordechai, not satisfied with Haman's execution, would put to death each of Haman's sons and innumerable potential aggressors as well. In short, the once victimized now wantonly plunder and murder. As the film ends, the actors deconstruct into their truer identities, each in turn saying a few words about her or his own story, who she or he really is. Some of the actors are émigrés from Europe; others are natives of Israel and Palestine. The role of Mordechai is played by Mohammed Bakri, a Palestinian actor and director deeply influenced by "the suffering of the Jewish people" who has nonetheless grown increasingly frustrated in his efforts to effect reciprocal understanding. The sensitive viewer is drawn irrevocably into the radical complexity of things, finds him- or herself far beyond easy distinctions between good and evil.

This, of course, is precisely Gitai's point. He comments:

In many ways, this is a film about memory—memories which are reflected through image and songs, through tales and music; memories stored in the songs of the Yemenite Jews who crossed the Arabian desert and reached Jerusalem about three generations ago; memories kept alive in Palestinian exile songs.

The truer narrative thus transpires on the far side of politicized slogans of the Israeli government and Palestinian Authority. The new sounds are there if someone wants to listen. Anguish is not ethnocentric, nor is violence.

Speaking at Harvard University's Carpenter Center, Gitai states that the film received a single screening in Israel where he was accused of having re-written the story in the interests of politics. Bible in hand, however, Gitai showed that the narrative was, indeed, more complex and psychologically

profound than the abridged adaptation on which Jewish children are generally reared. He had, in fact, left out the most horrible parts! Here is a man committed to vision and art and the documentation of truth, a reexamination of ethnic and ethical codes. There are, to be sure, no easy answers, but symmetrical hatreds and racial divides will lead only to heartache and death, rage and revenge, and still further heartache and corpses. Asked about his feelings concerning his native land's neglect of his work, Gitai is focused and succinct: "I have my work to do. I will settle accounts with Israel later on."

American Mythologies is a meandering, low-budget documentary, an assemblage of images made at the time of Ronald Reagan's ascendancy to power. The film interweaves conversations with Jane Fonda, Francis Ford Coppola, a Los Angeles fashion designer, a programming executive for NBC with sundry documentary clips as Gitai travels across the breadth of our nation. He interviews a Native American woman amid the squalor that surrounds her dilapidated home on the reservation, asks her about life and culture and what has been lost. She is spent by years of indignity and hardship, the pervasive emptiness of her life. Void of all spontaneity, this woman is unable to mourn or, seemingly, even to grasp the annihilation of ancient rituals and ways with which she, the descendent, has been long since unacquainted. Gradually, yet irrepressibly, the awareness emerges that America is neither so free nor well-intentioned as we would like to believe, that authoritarian free enterprise constitutes its own form of violence, mind and monetary control, corruption and greed. Packaging, Gitai implies, plays a crucial role in this country of ours. Blake's "mind-forged manacles" somehow crossed the Atlantic alongside those freedom seekers of yesteryear, intruding insidiously into these modern times. The film ends in People's Park in Berkeley as we listen to the jive, colloquial, ultimately intelligent, insightful rap of a young black man who articulates, effectively, precisely this point.

Gitai's collage-like and elegiac *Arena of Murder* incorporates documentary reportage with poetry and memory, autobiography and history, graffiti and scripture as the filmmaker returns to the land of his birth in the aftermath of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination. The Israeli rock group to which Gitai repeatedly returns seems a bit off-putting at first but gradually arouses admiration as the lead singer speaks through songs (and in between them as well) of his admiration for the slain leader, a man who had evolved from war hero to pacifist. The youth meditates on the prospects for the future of the Middle East if respective parties are unable to carry forth Rabin's vision of peace and, in knee-jerk reaction, return to the self-serving agendas and oversimplified ideologies of Netanyahu, the Liked, and the rest. "If an old man like Rabin can do it, then we can do it, too," he tells his youthful fans as he proceeds to sing a sort of love song to the fallen prime minister.

Clinton's moving expression of sadness and affection in the face of Rabin's death is surreally captured in a newscast monitoring room. This heartfelt yet eerily stylized outpouring of grief elicits a difficult-to-pinpoint discomfiture many of us had hoped the talented politician might some day allow us to outgrow. One senses that his convictions and beliefs, laudable as they may be, are neither as thoroughgoing nor deeply felt as were Rabin's. There is not quite the sense of this man having wrestled with angels and prevailed. Still, his dismay is not insincere. Gitai captures this nuance and ambiguity with a single shot of a very long row of monitors all broadcasting that same poised, confident, and photogenic face. We are reminded that once we had a *really* good actor in the White House and lament that we have taken such a sizeable step down.

And so it goes. Gitai's *Golem—The Spirit of Exile* transposes the biblical tale of Ruth into modern-day Europe, drawing inspiration from the cabalistic legend of the Golem as protector of exiles and

wanderers. Set in Paris, the film includes a cameo appearance by Bernardo Bertolucci and incorporates the stunning cinematography of Henri Alekan—the great master who had worked with Renoir, Cocteau, and, more recently, German filmmaker Wim Wenders as well. Dialogue meanders back and forth between French, Hebrew, English, and Arabic. Palestinians as well as Jews become emblematic of the turmoil of dislocation and prejudice. The film, not unlike the text on which it loosely is based, implies that life itself is an experience of wandering and exile. Only a compassion that cuts across ethnic/racial/national divides can hope to heal the ontological breach.

Kadosh explores the interminable religious laws and shibboleths that obtain within Mea Shearim, an insular and ultra-orthodox section of Jerusalem. Here fanatically self-righteous and self-perpetuating mores and codes are invoked to break up a truly loving but childless marriage even as matrimony is foisted on another woman where sex is [there is really no polite way to say it] nothing but rape. It is instructive to observe the contrasts between sex scenes both within the film itself and across the director's work generally. I am not aware that we Americans have anything to compare in authenticity, subtlety, or scope. The story ends in tragedy for a genuinely pious woman who is abandoned to loneliness and shame, yet more ambiguously for another who leaves her childishly obedient and violent husband, pausing briefly as the sun rises and sets over the Temple Mount. Perhaps she will find her way out of the myopia of mindsets and myriad rules of religions that, at their worst, delimit and level every facet of life. Perhaps she will emerge into the greater consciousness and world. As we behold the majestic beauty of this ancient and war-torn land and the indescribable nobility of its timeless religious structures, we recall those paintings of Monet and his unwavering faith in Nature's own code. Again we observe the wisdom of Jesus: there may be life after death after all.

Gitai's latest film, *Kippur*, is a semi-autobiographical retelling of the filmmaker's experience in what is known, from this side, as the Yom Kippur War, a conflict in which the helicopter aboard which Gitai flew rescue missions over Syria was shot down by enemy fire. On the way to the front, Weintraub (a fictional representation of the filmmaker himself) discusses Marcuse and over-consumption with his friend Russo, less philosophically inclined, though clearly more sanguine and sturdy. As the conflagration erupts, chaos and confusion gradually ensue, as all refined thoughts and would-be heroics are obscured by the bedlam of war. What begins for Russo and others as a chance to defend their country by putting the Arabs forcibly back in their place gradually bogs down in a nightmare of stagnation, horror, and death. It was in the aftermath of this experience (the downing of a helicopter in which the Gitai himself was called upon to try to do some partisan good in this troubled part of the world) that the director-to-be decided to exchange his degree in architecture for a camera as a means repairing the world. "I did not want to spend my life designing shopping malls in occupied Palestinian territories," Gitai later reflected. If only adversity might more regularly yield such spiritual fruit. Dylan, of course, had said it as well: "*If God is on our side/He'll stop the next war.*" It is a goal toward which we and the upper realms, in tandem, might conceivably work.

Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the kingdom is in heaven,' then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside you and it is outside you."

The Gospel of Thomas

His followers said to him, "When will the kingdom come?"

"It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here it is,' or 'Look, there it is.' Rather, the . . . kingdom is spread out upon earth, and people do not see it."

The Gospel of Thomas