

100 MINIATURES

CLIFF CREGO

*“I see and approve of the better way,
but follow the worse.”*

OVID

for the young

(1) *Metaphor?* A movement of resonance perhaps, a rhyming not of sounds or words, but of meaning.

Do you not know this light and quick
movement of energy as two separate
thoughts touch wings and fly off
into the distance together?

(2) **F**lowers are to the background green of meadow and forest what a well-made poem is to the constant chatter of sounds which surrounds us. How strikingly beautiful they are, these centers where essences converge.

(3) ***M**irrors made of sound?* When strings at rest reflect in sympathetic resonance the movements of other sounds around them, we hear the beginnings of Love and Compassion in the physical world.

(4) **N**ature knows no conflict, no contradiction, no waste. It is possible to say, therefore, that the spiritual or religious life begins not with any dogma or belief, but rather with the deeply held intention to live a life without conflict, contradiction, or waste.

(5) **I**n limit, there is freedom; in freedom, there is limit. Even the wildest of rivers creates itself the boundaries of the bed that order its flow.

(6) **W**e shape the world and the world shapes us.
The most insidious of all degradations is the loss
of something vitally important for which we do
not yet have a name.

(7) **T**he simplest and most powerful of all possible freedoms is the freedom to stop doing, regardless of the difficulties thus encountered, that which is inherently contradictory or wrong.

(8) **T**he simplest of all possible tests is the test of doing without.

(9) **A** free economy is a strictly limited one.
Even the busiest of thoroughfares still retains
a thin white line, protecting the rights of those
of us who prefer to walk.

(10) *The economy of Art?* You know that your composition has achieved a certain integrity not just when there is nothing left to take away, but when changing but a single part means that you must go back and retune the whole.

(11) **A**rt is balance in flowing movement demonstrated. Art is also *about* balance in the metaphysical sense—balance within ourselves, between ourselves, and in our relationships with the world around us. I may begin a poem with a scream, but the scream itself instantly moves to find its proper counterpoint in the gentleness of a whisper.

(12) **N**ew meaning necessitates new form. After drinking from the source of a hundred mountain streams, even the finest of wine glasses may no longer suffice.

(13) **C**hance *proposes*; Intelligence *disposes*.
No one can predict which flower the butterfly
will pass by next.

(14) *Complication Cycle?* Complicatedness—in contrast to the richness of natural complexity—is difficulty which serves no purpose and is therefore without reason or meaning.

Complicatedness is essentially the result of a failure of perception, leading to convoluted and unnecessarily difficult systems of thought and design. These, if left unchecked, go on to further reinforce the original failed perception, which in turn, like a dog chasing its own tail, leads to still more difficult systems of thought and design.

Remarkably, complicatedness, because it wastes energy, is not a feature of natural structure or organic movement.

(15) **A** weed is a species of movement which feeds on chaos and roots in imbalance.

(16) *Money*? A movement which always seems to be going in the wrong direction.

(17) **S**ymbols refer to meaning as currency refers to value:—only in a highly abstract and intellectual way. The danger with such abstraction is that it tends to wander off on its own, losing its basis in actual fact.

Eventually, symbols may refer only to other symbols, and meaning then becomes merely a systemic property inferred from the symbols themselves;

Likewise, value may no longer be grounded in natural richness, but simply in more currency itself.

Before we realize it, it will seem logical to say that life began with a bang, and markets must end with:—

a crash.

(18) *Way of Culture?* There are those cultures that go the way of oil, and those that go the way of gold; They don't last.

Only the cultures that go the way of forest, of soil, of clear, freely flowing air and water, may possibly find the wisdom and intelligence that endures.

(19) **T**he fewer keys I own,
the freer I am.

(20) **T**he spring gives freely of its water,
but only in freedom can I drink.

(21) **C**hange is the second most difficult thing,
understanding—the first.

(22) **H**umans are the only beings in Nature who are constantly preoccupied with what they are not.

(23) **P**assion only comes with the route
one has found for oneself.

(24) *Well-connected?* When you know there could be a disturbance, there already is.

(25) **W**e shape the world and the world shapes us.
The more spiritual and in harmony with the natural
world a culture becomes, the fewer and fewer words
will be needed to say ever-more important things.

(26) *Rhythm?* The colonization
of Space and Time
by the outmoded religions
of the past has been replaced
by the formative forces
of outward material wealth.
In the town where the lights
flash night and day,
every day, the symphony
searching for the harmony
of the Universe is left,
until the very moment
of liberation,
forever uncharted
and unsung.

(27) *Muzak*? We shape the world and
the world shapes us: In the past,
background:—
prepackaged sounds,
all the salient features
lobed off by a filter of mediocrity;
Unnoticed, transformed into
foreground:—
without the long rows
of cereal boxes, detergents,
garbage bags and
entertainment guides,
having come full circle,
now standing firmly—
center stage.

(28) **W**here the climax of complexity comes we can never know for sure, but natural movement always begins and ends with simplicity.

Draw a circle which is not surrounded by emptiness;
Speak a word which does not emerge from and return to nothing at all.

(29) **W**hen music loses its relationship *to dance*, it loses its sustaining and nurturing resonance with the physical body, both of the individual performer and, by implication, that of the Earth itself; When music loses its relationship *to poetry*, it loses its sustaining and nurturing resonance with the human voice and, by implication, the more subtle realms of meaning and things spiritual.

(30) **I**n both Music and Poetry, what is important is not so much what we think of as *style* or *aesthetics*, but rather the quality of energy which manifests in a piece as we bring it to life in performance. What makes Music or Poetry relevant or new, regardless of when it was composed, who is playing or saying it, or from which world culture it originates, is the strength of resonance its energy has with the repertoire of metaphysical urgencies of the present moment.

(31) **I**n the Arts, the degree of precision required in any particular situation should not be dictated merely by largely arbitrary external standards, but rather informed by the inner movement of meaning within the widest possible context being considered. *Irrelevant precision results in the imprecision of something relevant.*

(32) **I**n Music, relationships—not things—are the fundamental units of reality.

(33) *The essence of Science* is not so much proof, but rather the willingness to drop a theory or a particular way of looking at the world if it appears to be contradicted by fact;

The essence of Religion is not to be found in any particular set of doctrines, dogmas or beliefs, but rather in the willingness to explore together the sources of disorder, conflict and waste;

The essence of Art is not to be found in self-expression, nor is it revealed in any system of aesthetic convictions, tenets or norms, but rather in the willingness to continually purify our perception so that the harmonious and the beautiful may be clearly seen and, with time, hard work and much luck, brought into manifest form.

(34) *When I play true*, even though I may make mistakes, all the many voices move as one, and even the softest of sounds can be heard;

When I play false, though I do not drop a note, the different voices begin to contradict and fight against each other, until even the loudest of sounds can be heard by no one.

(35) **E**very habit is its own formative cause.
The coffee cup's brim turns from one cup to
the next, filling with the effect which becomes
the cause, the satisfaction which becomes
the need.

(36) **S***quare of False Rationality? Inside the Square,* discussion is neat and orderly. One could say—clean—almost. That is because Truth and a whole angry horde of assumption-threatening details are kept at bay, far beyond the walls of the Square.

Inside the Square, discussion will continue until the unavoidable moment arrives when an avalanche of contradictions breaks down the walls; Or, alternatively, until one steps firmly and resolutely—

out of the Square.

(37) **I**n Art as well as Nature, there is a necessary complementarity between the conservative tradition which embodies and safeguards the knowledge of the past and the revolutionary insight which reveals the new. One is mechanical in a subtle way, the other is creative. The balance between the two is crucial. Too much stubborn repetition and the source of fresh meaning goes dry. Too much of the new and we lose all the skill needed to make the new manifest. A creative tradition is then at once both constant and changing, like the solid bed of rock which allows the river to flow wild and free.

(38) *Understanding the Shape of Change*: 12 primary concepts for the description and generation of movement in Music, Poetry and Dance:

- difference
- complementarity
- qualitative temporal-spatial ground
- density
- directionality
- constant/variable
- regular/irregular
- continuous/discrete
- homogeneous/heterogeneous
- spatio-temporal hierarchy
- simple/complex
- universal somatic constant

(39) **M**uch of Western classical music moves as if there were no lower body below the neck; Much popular music moves as if there were no head above the groin. That's bad.

(40) ***P**ATHETIC FALLACY?* When a machine is given the attributes of life, Or worse—when a living being is given the attributes of a machine.

(41) *Three chaoses?* *Generative chaos* is the rich polyphony of simultaneous orders of movement, characteristic of, for example, both living sound and water;

Degenerative chaos occurs when movements, natural or otherwise, contradict, that is—*speak against*, or fight against, one another. The most extreme example is perhaps human conflict once it is energized by absolute belief;

Passive chaos—perhaps the most difficult of the three to understand—is the mysterious state of *motionlessness* or silence which is full of the potential energy of neutrality.

(42) *Talent?* Everyone appreciates the wildflower's brilliance, but few care to follow the slow, steady ripening of the seed.

(43) **O**nce a culture is defined more by what it wastes than what it creates, more by what it destroys than what it builds, a culture crosses a critical divide down the road of its own demise.

Remarkably, this is a road which—as the ultimate act of self-deception—will be seen as the only reasonable path to future prosperity.

(44) **W**hat we think of as tonality in Music is perhaps nothing more than a confused concept about how sounds are centered in Space. Like a tree which reaches from root to crown, suspended between earth and open sky, sounds move to naturally center themselves in a dynamic web of relationships.

Implied in this is that what has been called *a*-tonal music simply cannot or does not exist. At the same time, it must be said that much music has indeed been written that lacks strong, clear, articulate centers. Trying to find one's way in such music is much like the exasperating experience of trying to navigate on foot through prototypically featureless urban landscapes. Who does not know this feeling, when offered no center, of being lost before the very beginning?

(45) ***HUMAN GENOME PROJECT?*** It is true:
Changing but one note in a Beethoven symphony
might destroy the whole; But studying the same note
in isolation will not show us a single—thing.

(46) **T**he *small mind* counts and measures, while the *large mind* attunes itself to the qualitative weave of differences and similarities within the whole. The small mind asks, “*What note is that?*” The large mind responds, “*It makes no difference—the music is too dense, too long, too loud.*”

(47) **F**or the *metaphorical mind*, what others perceive as isolated facts are but unrealized opportunities in the dance of relationship.

For the *literal mind*, the dance has stopped; with laser-like precision, it focuses on the outward features of things:—shards, numbers, fragments of flux.

For the metaphorical mind, water in flowing movement brings us closer to the essence of life; for the literal mind, water is but potential pressure behind a dam.

Clearly, in proper measure, we need both.
But even more, we need to see the
difference between them.

(48) **I**n both natural Space and Time, the most difficult of all tasks is to find and know the living centers.

(49) **I**n each life, learning has a center. The teacher is the one who helps the student find it. Nourishing content, and a free, open, protected space in which this center may clarify and flourish, are the cultural imperatives of any community or tradition dedicated to the fostering of creativity in the young.

(50) *Three mistakes?* The first mistake in Education is to separate learning from the body of the Earth; The second mistake is to separate learning from the body of the student; The third and most serious mistake in Education is to separate learning from the observation of the workings of the mind itself as it learns to learn.

(51) **M**aster the complex to teach the simple;
Teach the simple to master the complex.

(52) **L**ife-like mechanical simulations of outward patterns of movement do not mean that we have necessarily understood or discovered the inner workings of the generation of organic form.

The computer programmed to make a rubato while performing Bach does not do so because it is actually listening; Or because it has perceived the rubato's meaning within the movement of the piece as a whole.

Nor have the stunningly beautiful computer displays of fern-like fractals necessarily captured the essence of the fern's inner formative movements.

What the program programs is the intellect manifest in past performances; What it necessarily leaves out is listening itself—or intelligence—which is not of the past, but always now, of the present moment.

(53) **L**istening is never 2nd-hand. Creative tradition never repeats. The works of the past can only be discovered afresh by ears made vigorous and young by the challenge—and the wonder—of the New and Unknown.

(54) *2nd-hand world?* Every mechanically reproduced image of a natural world, whether it be the photograph of a flower, or the recording of a violin, must to a certain extent be recomposed by the viewer or listener in order to bring it back to life. The truer the reproduction, the less we will have to do this. Ironically, this is rather like *healing the image*, which of course constitutes a profound reversal of how, in the thousands of years we have walked the land as a species, the sights and sounds of Nature have generally, without any special effort on our part, soothed and comforted us. This largely unconscious ability to make the image whole *does* however presuppose a long-standing intimate relationship with the original, or at least a certain familiarity with, for example, *actual* plants or *real* acoustic instruments. Tragically, children who are for whatever reason denied this primary relationship with things natural can only with great difficulty re-create pictures or sounds in this way. Theirs has become in part a 2nd-hand world of ghost images projected on the proverbial walls of a high-tech cave.

(55) **W**e shape the world and the world shapes us. After killing the river and building the dam, we quickly lose the sensitivity of ear that once heard the music which is now no longer there. Children who grow up in a world of straightened and muted rivers will themselves never know that no one ever taught them how to sing.

(56) *Spring of Learning?* For the child, the journey from the spring of learning's single, clear, free-flowing braid to the vast complexity of the distant sea is the journey of a lifetime.

The teacher is the one who returns, both to safeguard the source of the spring, and to hasten the children on their way.

(57) *Deficits?* All agree that spending more than we earn is a bad thing. Why then allow wasting more than we clean up? Who shall deal with the debt of alien artifacts we leave behind?

(58) **Z**ero pollution; 100% recycling; Zero war.
Begin with the work of cleaning up the thought
which thinks it's not necessary; then the one
which says it's not possible.

(59) **T**o protect the *beautiful*, study the *ugly*.

(60) **K**eeP your knives sharp! Laboring with a dull knife's edge is like having to think hard with bad ideas.

(61) *Essential Art?* The question of which musical body we consider primary—that of the large orchestra or the small instrumental ensemble or soloist— is related to the similar question in literature of which form we see as more important—the full-length novel or the shorter poem. In both cases, I would argue for the latter. This is perhaps especially so in times of metaphysical crisis such as the current era, because economy of means allows for, and strongly encourages, both the cleaning up of waste and the clarification of essence.

(62) *Concerts?* Every concert is a poem;
every poem, a concert.

(63) **T**he only thing that's worse than the fragmentation of Music and Poetry is when we in fragmentation try to unite them.

(64) *Entertainment* gives us the powerful illusion of passion, of risk, of great adventure; *Creativity* even though it depends upon and is characterized by the reality of those very things, does not give them to you for free. It does however *instantly*—turn off the illusion.

(65) **Q**uestions open the door to the unknown;
tests shut it. Tests only demonstrate the failure
of the one who tests.

(66) **A** sound, natural limit in any system is when there is no contradiction or conflict between what *does* and what *does not* happen.

(67) *Concerts?*—A concert without a première
is like a wedding without a bride.

(68) **P**owerful expression in the Arts is channeled by invisible, yet equally powerful, natural limits.

The mystery of limit is that we never see it, and yet it guides every step of Creativity's dance.

Who has not marvelled at the clear sound of rushing mountain water? And yet the rocks that bind together the movement remain silently in the background, ever-more polished, ever-more serene.

(69) *D*etermination, *D*iligence, *D*evotion—three
guiding lights in the constellation of the Arts.

Determination has me complete each work,
even when I am sure I have failed;

Diligence has me give every detail an abundance
of attention, even when fatigue tells me it will
make no difference;

Devotion is the love-energy which sustains the
whole, even when doubt tells me there is no
one else who cares.

(70) **A** mistake is a mistake repeated. Even the best of performers can make a habit of practicing—sometimes for years—the wrong notes.

(71) **I**n Music, the voice roots the instrument in the sense of the text; And the instrument carries the voice beyond the literal world of everyday discourse. Few are the more basic of unities.

(72) **T**here are those artists who transform the string of precious stones which is melody into mere black marks on a page;

And there are those artists who transform the black marks on a page into a string of precious stones.—Music is the difference.

(73) **I**n the Arts, we may easily be misled by a work's surface appearance, and therefore only belatedly awaken to its deeper, perhaps more questionable, metaphysical or spiritual source. It's like the water of any large city: at first it may seem perfectly clear, refreshing. But after a while we may come to sense the drop of poison which has been added to keep us from getting sick.

(74) **O**nce there is difference, there is complementarity. Once there is complementarity, there is movement. Art happens in the balance thereby created.

Sometimes we look for Art where there is intense activity, either on the performance stage or in the political arena. But how frequently we come away disappointed because of the lack of any movement of a significant kind. Despite the camouflage of all the noise and commotion, as well as the allure of the superficial sophistication which comes with complicatedness and unnecessary difficulty of every description, we feel somehow cheated because what is happening makes no *real*, that is, *relevant*—difference.

(75) **I**magine Nature reduced to a place filled with straight, dry, brittle stems covered from root to crown with prickly thorns. That is what we ourselves become when we lose the complementarity of masculine and feminine principles.

(76) **I**n the present era, we abandon each other so readily because, both individually and collectively, we deserted long ago the very earth upon which we stand.

Without a soil made rich by generations of devotion and care, even the most heartfelt feelings can find no place to set root, no place to call home.

(77) **W**ithout a shared sense of natural limit with regard to the genders, there is a danger that mere competition between the sexes may take the place of a much deeper complementarity. Once competition has become the dominant force in relationship, division and fragmentation will necessarily increase to the point that both men and women alike cannot help but move—even when sharing the same household—in their own largely isolated different directions. Children are the ones left to suffer—suspended as it were—in the chaotic, empty space which results in between.

(78) **T**he *Dionysian* longs for the cold
crystalline nights of high mountain Winter,
and the steady measured movement of ordered,
silent stars;

The *Apollonian* longs for the rushing sound
of glacier torrents, and the wild rhythms
and summer passion of earth-bound fire.

What Man or Woman, or Art, or Culture,
would not sanction their perfect, fertile
union?

(79) *Consonance in Music* is like measured rhyme in the rhetorical Arts:—We desire and are comforted by smooth, even, regular sounds, and a harmonious embracing of similar movements. We can go too far, however, as monotonous periodicity becomes the norm, and we get fat and lazy on too much sugar and cream.

Dissonance in Music is like violence in the literary Arts:—We want grit, edge, reality. Again, this can go too far, as hypertension becomes habit, and we rigidly stare down dangerous streets full of nothing but barbed wire and shards.

Balance between the two? Observe the marvelous middle way of natural language, where soft, sensuous vowels dance arm in arm with the consonant's strong, persistent—noisy drum.

(80) *Aphorisms?* The place where Logic follows the markings on the flower of Poetry to embrace in the sweetness of new meaning.

(81) **D***ifference between limit and control?*

Control imposes order *from without* by projecting the predetermined thought, conditioned by the past, of what *should* happen. The need to control invariably increases as the disorderly, unexpected, side-effects of past efforts accumulate, which results in ever-greater unnecessary difficulties or complicatedness; In contrast, limit allows order to emerge *from within* by determining only what at any given moment *should not* happen. Limit is therefore open to the future, and tends strongly towards ever-greater simplicity.

(82) **F**orm emerges out of movement; it is the outward envelope of the rhythmic pulse of life. The river creates itself the boundaries of the bed that order and give structure to its flow.

(83) **T**ime folds into Space like a thread wound into a skein; The *one-at-a-time* folds into and becomes the *all-at-once*, and the myriad differences become co-present. Listen to the notes of Melody wind round themselves, becoming Harmony, as the piano's sustaining pedal is pushed down. That's the sound of Time becoming Space!

(84) *In Praise of the Economy of Buds?*

Store up the light and quick energy
needed for next Spring during the slow
and easy months of high Summer;

Prepare for the worst of Winter by making
oneself small and motionless against the twig;

Forget about absolute size and rigid sequence,
knowing that beauty resides in the measured,
rhythmic unfolding of the well-proportioned
web.

(85) *Pictures for sale?* Nothing fades faster than an Art that has descended to the level of being no more than its own commercial.

See the flower cluster that advertises itself with showy, yet infertile blooms along its periphery. No need to remind it that real nectar must be offered at its center to attract for long.

(86) *No Frame, No Thought?* Without a frame—that is, a border or limit of some kind—there can be no relevant differences. Without relevant differences—that is, meaningful contrasts or distinctions—there can be no thought. This is evidently so simply because, without frames, there would be nothing to think about. If thought is for whatever reason active, and there are no relevant differences present within the field of perception, thought will itself fabricate non-existent differences in order to occupy itself. This shows us why in both **Science** and **Art** the function of frames is perceptually essentially the same, even though the actual content they outline may be radically different. In both Science and Art, we may put frames potentially in the wrong place, and therefore ask the wrong questions; or we may create potentially inappropriate or ‘false’ frames, that is, frames which tacitly tell us that there is something relevant or important inside while in fact this is not the case. *The thought of all frames*—the frame which holds the whole, including all of thought itself—is evidently where our thinking itself must properly come to a stop. This is so because we cannot go beyond this limit, although we can never say for sure when or where this limit has been reached.

(87) **T**here are those inventions which impose structure on the mind, forcing us to think in unnatural ways as we might walk with one foot tied behind the back;

And there are those inventions which are already implicit in the workings of the mind at its very best, letting us create with all the ease of freely flowing water.

The humble *hyperlink*, tying together all the unique thoughts of the world without arbitrary limit or boundaries, brings home and makes explicit a key fact of the new era—that the mind of humanity is indeed somehow one.

(88) *INTERNET ABC?*

A: a wire through which people
and relevant, new meaning
are brought freely together;
or,

B: a wire through which it is
easier and easier to say
more and more things which
are less and less worth knowing;
or,

C: a parallel world-wide network of trails—
a Path of all Peoples—moving on foot
from center to center to center, thereby bringing
the potential of *A* forcefully down to earth,
and allowing it to fully, that is—
actually—flower.

(89) ***S**tealth? Secrecy? Security?* For every weapon, there is a counter-weapon; for every defense, a counter-measure; for every firewall, a way of breaking through; for every scheme of encryption, a key. Where does this all end? Oh dangerous dance, when at last all movement of communion lies frozen in fear, and even innocent children are suspect.

(90) **L**et me remind myself here:
Do not mistake—*density* for *intensity*,
randomness for the *unexpected*,
complicatedness for *complexity*,
sentimentality for *simplicity*,
intellectual virtuosity for *subtlety*,
length for *depth*,
or merely a loud voice
for vitality.

(91) **W**e rehearse *information*, but perform *meaning*.

Information is like the web of links in a wire fence; *Meaning* is like the cascade of waves on a mountain stream.

One we can stitch together endlessly, capturing what we're looking for, and keeping out what we don't want in. The other, just by drawing a circle around it, vanishes before our eyes.

(92) **W**hether or not the seeds of new meaning set root and flourish depends not so much on any form of promotion or publicity, but rather on their strength of resonance with our inner need for clarity and truth.

(93) *Simplicity?* In Politics, the most *radical* idea is simplicity; In Art, the most *difficult* idea is simplicity; In Science, the most *necessary* idea is simplicity; In Religion, the most *mysterious, arduous, complex* idea, is simplicity.

(94) *Path of Peace?* Nowhere are the paths of violence and peace related, nowhere do they cross.

The Whole sees war as but the left hand of humanity fighting against the right;

Compassion sees war not as two sides, but as two rooms in but one house, now burning itself to the ground;

Intelligence sees war as perpetually unnecessary conflict. Name one thing humanity needs more of, than less unnecessary conflict.

(95) *Path of Violence?* *Violence* is like a pool of poison water threatening the river of life. Gazing out over the whole of the river, one sees that answering violence with violence never stops the corruption of the water, but rather becomes a part of the pollution itself;

Violence is like a fire raging in the house of love and good intentions. Never putting out the flames, answering violence with violence is the fuel that burns the house to the ground;

Violence is like a noise drowning out the symphony of all peoples. Answering violence with violence, noise replaces music, soon becoming the only sound we know.

(96) **H**ow complicated the ways we wander
once Truth is lost;

how without meaning—
the waste.

(97) **T**he most creative of all acts is that of bringing people together in new, unknown ways. It is also the most arduous. What could be more urgent or necessary than this?

(98) **D**ialogue is like a journey we make together on foot through unknown terrain. Where we do not move as one, we simply stop and start over again.

(99) **E**very well-made path was once only a possibility. Because it is well-made, daily use only makes it more beautiful.

(100) **O**n the way, what was once a gift
of Chance sometimes becomes Necessity's
next step into the—Unknown.

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