

THE LITTLE CLAVIER

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*new poems and texts from
Camp Lost & Found*

CLIFF CREGO

a picture-poems.com rucksack book

THE LITTLE CLAVIER

Each poem, each text,
is a miniature makeshift
piano; they're all
tuned slightly
differently,
a bit beat up, perhaps,
with a few misplaced or broken
strings, but it's the best we've got.

We do not play,
but simply
push the pedals down,

sitting quietly,
listening to the strings
resonate or sing,
giving back

voices

hidden within
the marvelous sea of chaos
that surrounds us.















The Little Clavier: Part I

Along the way, what was once
a gift of Chance sometimes becomes
Necessity's next step in the unknown.

WATERCOURSE WAY—a prologue

Quaerendo invenietis
(Seek and you shall find)

Simple and *complex*, two sides of one movement. Water is my guide, my mentor, my paradigm. Always flowing downhill, water shows us such an extraordinary example of simple, unambiguous limit, of such legislative clarity!

Yet, the patterns of water in flowing movement are at the same time so rich, so complex, as to be vastly beyond all human seeing and knowing.

Look at the wonderful contrast how the trees stand perfectly erect:—bold, steadfast statements against the harsh odds of cold, wind and snow. But there they are, branching out into the high mountain air in an endless display of inventive variation. One simple vertical constant, ornamented with a baroque delight in complexity, like old Bach improvising at his little clavier or harpsichord, showing us a phrase, a theme, then letting us hear it this way, and that. Ah yes, *counterpoint*, a movement of many voices together, flowing in parallel, interwoven streams.

And yet, the song birds always have known this. Each spring morning is a marvelous unfolding of song. *This* is real polyphony, sound finally freed of the constricting bars of music's strict measures. The Robin marks the time with its almost but

not quite regular sharp chirps in threes. The chipping sparrow sounds its sustained snaredrum roll. While the song thrush, newly arrived from sunny Mexico, tosses off its filigree figures of braided silver and gold, each phrase a water-like spiral floating upwards through the spruce and fir, then tapering off towards the sunlight above.

And ever-present in the background is that steady, rushing sound of clear mountain water, water rushing down from all the sides of the steeply walled valley around me, a near timeless roar that for me somehow holds the whole, the whole mystery of living sound.

NIGHT ODE

One bright clear flame,
hearth-center of my tent at night.
I watch its moods—a
single white candle—one
moment a motionless monk,
the next, a fickle young woman
looking for her lost car keys,
flickering back and forth
with the whims of a cool autumn breeze.
Either way, the candle burns wholly now.
Not tomorrow, when markets
or farms may fail,
or yesterday, when other
calamities reigned supreme.
No. The candle burns wholly now,
centered and silent,
letting the winds of the world
and the coming winter
bring what they may.

CHILL MOUNTAINS OF THE HEART

Wind out of nowhere,
Rocks fracturing from high vertical cliffs,
O Chill mountains of the heart,
When will I learn the ancient Art
of stonepine and nutcracker?
Of making my stash of seeds of hope,
come good years, and come bad?
Chill mountains of the heart,
steep descent into the winding waters of compassion,
slow steady rise of mist and broken light,
razor ridge dividing known from unknown,
and unknown from unknowable,
Horizon forever retreating as I come near.
O Sheer signal fire of peace.

EPITHETS OF A SPECIES

—for David Landrum

Miraculous. Mischievous. Miserable.

Epithets of a species placed
in the order of your choice.

Mischievous. Miraculous. Miserable.

Born naked into a web of dependencies
in a harsh, brutal, indifferent world.

Miserable. Mischievous. Miraculous.

Instrument of the mind, a compassionate
intelligence of infinite subtlety that mirrors
both itself and the whole.

Miraculous. Miserable. Mischievous.

Sole life-form that till the end of time
must walk the sharp knife-edge of its
own self-destruction.

Miserable. Mischievous. Miraculous.

The choice of epithets is our own.

THE BEAUTY OF THE SUNFLOWER WAY— *a reflection*

Biking on the flats, into the strong, persistent afternoon North Dakota headwinds coming straight out of the West, sometimes I'll turn a question over in my mind. Just in a playful way, like looking out the kitchen door to see what kind of mischief the neighbor's kids are up to in the backyard.

Today my question is: A new poetry, a new music, a new art deeply rooted in place. What would they look like?

Consider the sunflower: it has no intention of being “rooted in place,” or beautiful or popular in any way, and yet it is loved and admired everywhere—on the wild prairie, the roof-top garden, in a child's drawing.

Along the ways of the wild Northwest, perhaps what is most dear to me is this beauty unaware of itself, humble and persistent in its growth, and rooted deeply and unselfconsciously—were it stands.

I lean forward into the wind coming straight off the Rockies and think about how much I like sunflowers, and that fact.

ON THE NECESSITY OF POETRY

(i)

Walking from spring to spring,
one tires quickly of all
the intellectual bushbeating,
telling me I'm not thirsty
when I'm thirsty.

(ii)

Let's be simple:
A house without a hearth
is a home without a center.

After somebody lets the fire
go out, they always like to tell
you it wasn't important.

(iii)

Have you ever noticed that
bird calls are often answered
by silences of equal duration?

Who is to say which one—
the sound or the silence—
is more important?

(iv)

We are born naked; we make
love naked; and we die
naked;

Though not strictly necessary,
doing poetry naked seems to work
just fine, too.

(v)

Once the commons
are fenced in and sold,
on that very same ground
we'll argue incessantly about—
the necessity of poetry.

BOOTMAKER

—for Gary Johansen

Long after the dust and hubbub
of mechanical motion settle to the ground,
and cars and trucks and snowmachines
are out of fashion or out of gas or both,
the humble bootmaker
will still be bent over
his worktable,
stitching together the soles
that allow us to do what
we have always done best: walk.
Without his art, how would
we climb up into the clearer, lighter air,
just below an eternity of sky, far above the
noise and dark clouds of daily life?
I may think I climb alone, but this is not so:
good beginnings are more than half the climb,
and the beginning of each ascent
is prepared, and secured,
and hammered and glued, by the bootmaker's craft.
I celebrate his work, which gives us these
coverings for naked and tender feet
that are made to last
in a harsh and oh-so indifferent world.

CASSANDRA FALLS—*a children's poem*
in common 4/4 time

I know a place where dreams are found,
Cassandra knows it too.
Where waterfalls and pools abound,
And visions just for you.

The Elephants whisper,
The Owls still sleep,
The Mice dance rounds
About the Stars so deep.

I know a place where dreams are found,
Cassandra knows it too.
Where moss and mists and firs abound,
And visions that are true.

**Cassandra* was given the gift of prophecy by Apollo.
When she betrayed him, he turned her gift into a curse
by causing her visions, though true, to be disbelieved.
Cassandra Falls is located above the trail between Muir
(Crater) Lake and Little Eagle Meadows.

LET'S GO CAMPING!

*“Omnia mea mecum porto.
All that is mine I carry with me.”*

There seem to be two distinct styles of Northwest living. One has the appealing improvised quality of old-fashioned hill-billy living, frequently featuring trailers of long, linear proportions, designed more to be pulled by trucks on an interstate than to be lived in, and sometimes surrounded by a kind of protective mote of neatly stacked firewood, wrecked trucks, old refrigerators and broken snowmachines. Such homesteads proudly project the libertarian metaphysics of both life-is-a-vacation-inside-a-beer-can, and “Big-brother-government-California-suburbanite-KEEP-OUT!”

The other style of Northwest living seems to be concerned more with the outward display of material wealth. It displays large, expensive Disneyland-like designer structures placed squarely upon equally squarely and recently fenced off, just-cleared forest or old worn-out ranchland. For someone travelling from abroad, two striking features of this type of homestead which stand out are their airbrushed fastidiousness—indeed, they look hardly lived in at all—and their size. They are big. Very big. Whole extended families from Mexico or Africa could comfortably take up residence in the garage.

The only accessory these first two styles of Northwest living might have in common is an American flag. For the cultural

anthropologist, this is a classic example of the display of an identical icon with, interestingly, two radically different meanings. For what one flag may implicitly pledge allegiance to may flatly contradict the other. One may salute the lost hopes of a whole generation, a generation forced to execute and suffer the insanity of Vietnam; for example; the other may more pay homage to the power of Wall Street, and the growing praetorian guard being assembled to protect that power in our name. One flag; two meanings. But this, of course, is just a minor detail distracting me from my theme.

I would argue happily for a third, more contemporary, style of Northwest living. Something new, something shaped more by the new possibilities, technologies, insights, and urgencies of our time. It would be something like the *less-is-more* of a Bucky Fuller Geodesic, made entirely of recycled materials—light, airy—the physical structure in fact weighing less than the air it contains—strong, energy self-sufficient, and expand-contractible. And when the land upon which it stood showed signs of needing a rest, or when climate patterns became less auspicious, it might also be easily packed up and moved. This is not the strength of reinforced concrete, but rather the strength in resilience of native Prairie grasses, with their deep roots for long droughts, and flexible stems for winds of the storms which are still to come.

LICHENS AS SILENT WITNESSES OF TIMES GONE BY . . .

Lichens, mutually beneficial composites of two simpler life forms, are small wonders. They are composed of a fungus, which provides structure and a hold on rough surfaces like rocks, and an alga, which provides the solar power necessary to synthesize food out of the raw materials of carbon dioxide and water.

Lichens obtain their water and nutrients from the atmosphere, so they frequently tell us much about air quality. And lichens are patient. very patient, in their growth, typically expanding out from a center in slow motion, about one or two centimeters a century. Imagine that!

So, many of the different colorful species of lichen I see everywhere as I trek around the Wallowas—beneath my feet, on granite rocks, on the limbs of Ponderosas—were perhaps present before the dams on the Snake were built (completed c. 1958). Or even before the first European Americans arrived. (c. 1805). What stories they would have to tell.

WEATHER IN THE WEST

3 months of hot as hell,
3 months of cold as hell,
and 3 months of lord-knows-what
in between.

ALPINE GEOMETRY

Horizontal lines of water,
vertical lines of trees,
everything else *fractals*
in between.

DRAWING CIRCLES

What's an island but a circle we draw around some part of the world, a line of difference, of demarcation, separating that which is in-side, from that which is out. It all begins, of course, with an actual physical island, separated by its coastline from the sea. From here, the idea of island proceeds to be transformed in thought, easily and seamlessly, by the miracle of metaphor into the realm of the more subtle and unseen.

Thus we have “islands of beauty” in an “ocean of ugliness,” “islands of security” in a “sea of violence,” “islands of peace and tranquility” in a “non-stop turbulent flood” of useless data and misinformation.

The width of the circle of these metaphorical isles is entirely of our own making. We may carry the circle in our own breast; or it may expand to embrace the entire world, or beyond.

Imagine for a moment with me a spaceship full of friendly beings from some unknown outback of the Universe. As they first come in sight of Earth, they would almost certainly be utterly amazed at our planet's beauty, the striking blue of its seas, the amazing white flowforms of the clouds of its atmosphere. To them, I'm very sure, it would seem “an island paradise,” an extraordinary circle of life in a vast ocean of orbiting waterless rough rocks. It might do much to attune our own thinking of Earth's unique place in space if we were to draw our own meta-

phorical circle in much the same way.

DIVERSITY?

All Nature abhors a monopoly. Diversity is the signature of natural intelligence.

PLACE FIRST!

In all illness, the first place to look is place. The second, is water. The third, air. And then, the farm and nuclear facility right down the road.

LOVE & WATER

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

There may well indeed be another planet in the Universe with high mountains and streams of pure, fast-flowing water, but we do not know that for a fact.

There may also be other beings in the Universe capable of Love and Compassion, but also that we do not know for a fact.

Love is like water: wherever it is there in abundance, life flourishes; And water is like love: wherever it is wasted, polluted, blocked or dammed, we abuse not just Earth's defining essence, but also somehow our own.

LOVE RESONANCE

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

See the electronic keyboard—the *synthesizer*—with its brittle octaves made of wired concrete, and its complete lack of sympathetic resonance. When similar sounds no longer spontaneously vibrate together, when like sounds no longer reflect one another, no longer mirror each other's energies, upon which

instrument shall we play our songs of love? Upon which instrument shall we teach our children the principles of Nature's way?

LOVE IS ROUND

Love wants to come round.
The performer who must sing,
who must play,
in a space without echoes
quickly cancels
all future
engagements.

HABIT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

When all the world
begins to look
like a photograph,
it is time
to put the cameras
away.

SIMPLE DESIRES

I want to live my life like a bell, resonant and whole—ringing out from a hill on all its sides into the clear, open air;

like a frog, hungry for love,
singing the instant it digs out of the muddy spring earth, one eye to the stars, the other, to the dark spaces in between;

And I want to die my death like a tree
brought down by fall winds on the forest floor,
year after year of heavy rain, new green life sprouting out from every crack and crevice of its body;

like a stream leaping out
from its sheer granite cliff, disappearing
into the late summer air, nothing left to see
but the steady rising mist of its now muted roar.

SIGNS OF EMPIRE

The second surest sign of the self-corrupting, decadent, one-sided power of Empire, is when children grow up learning no other culture, no other language, than their own. The first, is when teachers of the young know this to be true, and couldn't give a damn.

INVERSIONS OF MEANING

With the perverse inversion of the sheer brilliance of the digital communicationsv revolution into the dark and sinister world of firewalls, censorship and systems of surveillance, at a single stroke, the meaning of the word “web” flips from “one world connected” into “gotcha!”

LANGUAGE OF WAR

Learn the language of your enemy and you may soon discover that you no longer *have* an enemy.

GO BIKES!

Bikes make an excellent model for a new, *life-is-round* economy. Every part has a name, a number, a manufacturer, and someone, somewhere, who knows how to fix or replace it! Bikes are best sold and serviced by relatively small shops. That's because the shop serves an area where cyclists can easily ride to have work done, or pick up new parts. Bikes are the "slow food" of machines. Made to last; made to establish strong face-to-face relationships between buyer and seller; made to make the environment, as well as the user, healthier the more they are used.

And bikes are cheap. An investment of \$500 will last you a lifetime. You don't need a license; you don't need insurance. It's said that the energy equivalent of 4 liters of gas (\pm a gallon)—32,000 calories*—is enough Clifbars (\pm 133) to power you 1000 k (600 m) down the road. Now that's math that's got more than a bit of music to it!

*source: Scientific American Podcast: Steve Mirsky:
IV.2007

IN PRAISE OF NATURAL COMPLEXITY

From a single trunk, a thousand branches;
From a thousand rivulets and rills, a single stream.
Simple to complex; Complex to simple.

Complexity is richness, is diversity, is always good.
Complicatedness, or the unnecessarily convoluted or
difficult, is always bad.

Complicatedness, because of the contradictory, meaningless
way it wastes energy, is never a feature of natural systems.

ROUGH ROAD AHEAD?

All passengers in a car running on a full tank of fundamentalist religion, we're tied up with Freedom and Democracy in back. Money's in the driver's seat, with Nation States, spinning one against the other, for wheels. "Hey," somebody just yelled, "Get out at the next right!"

A NEW TENEBRISM* — *towards an Art as light as mountain air . . .*

In Poetry and Photography, the title or frame creates a background shadow of knowledge of things implied, but left unsaid or unseen.

Out of this background emerge dramatically contrasted centers of light and focus.

The balance of the resulting pattern as a whole is its composition; the strength of emotion thus awakened, the depth of its expression.

*from the Latin, *tenebrae* = *darkness*, or play of primary the contrasts of white and black, light and shadow

THE FLAT-TIRE MODEL OF REALITY

20 miles out, 20 miles back.

Got a flat; That's a fact.

Hard as nails, Life's like that.

Gotta act—now; That's a fact!

Excuses, excuses, excuses—

Why can't I live like that?

HABIT & TRUTH

Habit loves to be reformed;

Truth, however, loves to be demonstrated.

ROAD OF CHANGE

Down the rough road of change, a mountain bike's wheel keeps its true by centering in the clear intentions of its motionless hub.

THE WORLD'S WORST BAD IDEAS

The world's worst bad ideas have two key features which refer both to *truth of function*, and to *truth of content*, in equal measure:

First, they not only prevent us from clearly seeing some important, relevant aspect of the world, but also distort it beyond all recognition;

Second, they strengthen their hold on thought and perception with self-reinforcing, equally false “evidence.”

Thus, this essentially closed devil's loop easily hardens into the motionless, self-destructive, rigidity of fundamentalism and absolute belief. Why would we allow this to happen? One word: security. We take refuge in delusional, bad ideas, because they offer us a kind of comforting—albeit false—sense of security.

Education, in the view being outlined here, has a vital role to play in an open society. In a democratic republic where the freedom of ideas and their expression is guaranteed, centers of learning ought to be places where these intellectual freedoms are both exercised and demonstrated at the very highest possible standards of excellence. To fail at this task is to risk the failure and loss of these hard-won privileges of democracy itself..

ZERO DOLLAR DAYS

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

A crisis comes, and a President takes the bullhorn and admonishes his citizen-children not to save and to prepare for hard times or worse, but to go shopping.

How strange . . .

Where are the days of finding peace and security in the timeless wisdom of *less is more*, in household economies based on hard work, saving, and the waste-not-want-not of conservation?

I say, to hell with the Consumer-in-Chief. Stack proudly your zero dollar days—the days in which you spend nothing, not one penny at all—and stack them like newly minted gold coins. The more you stack up the better, the more cause for celebration. And know that, the less you spend, the freer you most certainly are, the less harm you most likely do in the world, and the more there is left over for others, others of very most likely far and far greater need.

THE ASPEN OF FORGETFULNESS— *a prose poem*

Some things we wish to remember; others, we'd rather forget. The latter we'd prefer to see turn yellow and dry, see wither away till they fall like autumn leaves, feeding the fertile humus of some common past under our tired feet.

Descending a steep southern slope, I stop to rest a while under an old Doug-fir. The late-summer draw is dry, but still full of the lush green of Aspens.

Heart-shaped leaf on a long, slender stem. Some say the most beautiful of all trees. Blades now quivering in the afternoon wind like the soft skin of a young woman first falling in love. Sound of the leaves glistens with light filled silences. Shape of the whole coming in slow, easy waves that seem to say in a receding, ever-softer echo, "*Let it go. Let it go. Let it go.*"

I look for a pen to write something down, which I can't find, and then look at the new blank page I had ready. This I fold up and put back into my pocket, as I shoulder my pack, stand and start walking down the steep hill again, happy to have rested a while among Aspen and Fir, and happy to forget about all those things in the past that now seem so many continents away.

AN EXTINCTION OF A DIFFERENT KIND

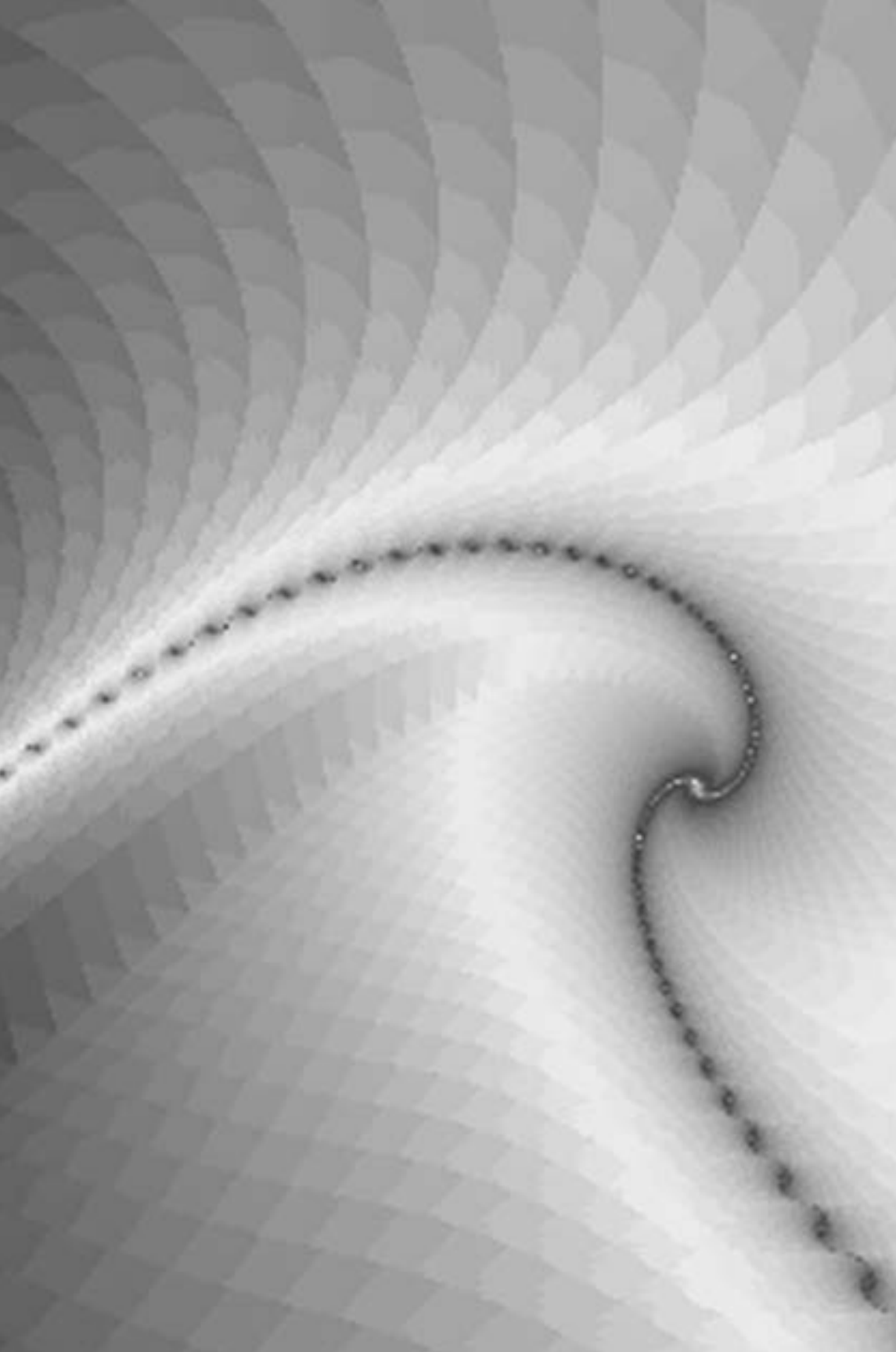
Of all the extinctions currently underway—we are told a quarter of all mammals is under threat, as well as a third of all frogs worldwide—the one that saddens and frightens me most receives little if any attention. It is the extinction of *the free spirit*. By “free spirit,” I mean exactly that: an intelligence that is not tied to anything, and which can therefore find out the truth of a matter with integrity, independence, and, most especially, without fear of loss.

This is the man or woman, young or old—age here makes no difference—who is capable of examining a thought or idea and following it like a thread through a labyrinth of possible dead-ends, missed implications and inconsistencies, to its logical source.

My contention is that the man or woman of free spirit is becoming exceedingly rare. I hope that I’m wrong.







The Little Clavier: Part II

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?

**A
QUINTET
OF
LONG-LINE
SONNETS**

THE VAGABOND OF THE GRANDE DIXENCE

There he stands on the dam he helped to build,
Defiant voice of the river that no longer flows,
Spirit caretaker of the eternal snows,
Witness of a great valley's slow, but steady decline.

Gone are the meadows, gone are the shepherd's huts,
Gone are the silent ways of the alpine winter.
The stars of Orion no longer guide us
To the chamois' retreat, to the slopes of the rusty rose:—

All fade in the bright lights of rented Chalets,
In the endless highways of Sugarsnow.
Swish goes the scythe of the Banker in Touristland,

Whetted on the bent backs of mountain farmers.
“*Tout fini,*” he cries, his words fracturing
In crystals of frozen ice, a rainbow avalanche of light.

for Maurice Chappaz (1916 - 2009)

*“At the end of a writer's life, I think I can say
that it is much harder to make a poem,
than to bore a tunnel.”*

Maurice Chappaz

FASTNACHT—*The Night of Mountain Carnival*

Drumming out the bad spirits of mean-man winter,
Screeching at them with a horror of horns and pipes,
Marching down cobblestone streets and under bridges,
Where monstrous demons tend to congregate.

This is the music of the anti-divine,
Anarchy's orgy against an excess of sanitas,
Recompense for the far-too-much of not enough.
Where all is fire, is noise, where all is chaos,

Where Kronos readies to castrate the Patriarch.
The Pope belches and strokes the buttocks
Of his favorite Swiss guard: "*Let the wretches*

Have their night of fun." But the children know better.
Faces painted for a holy war, they take to the streets.
This is the night that shall balance all the rest.

THE LUTE

O come again sweet love, soft rounded belly of wood,
Resonance rich with bright stars and dark loam,
Pure instrument of the unseen platonic realm.
By what strange demonic twist of fate

Did your fine form fall into disfavor? Like a Queen,
Much beloved, yet banished to a far-away isle,
You've suffered eternities of turbulent seas,
Waves of sharp steel strings, of harsh amplified sounds.

So now:—come again sweet love, let us dare open
Your velvet protective case, let down your youthful braids,
And let the coming age find new spirit on your strings;

Let the recluse tune your pegs by mountain springs,
Poets find new rhythms to match your most dissonant chords,
And bards play to Kings bent on war, as you sing of peace.

upon hearing Nigel North
play John Dowland

THE MOONS OF GALILEO

Io. Europa. Ganymedes. Callisto.

Messengers of the stars, rough surface of the moon.
Eternal lights, now circling with predictable
Regularity round a new, radical, idea.

Brightest object in a great awakening's night sky.
So much for Dante. So much for Aristotle.
Grand Book of the turnings of the heavenly orbs,
O celestial fact—one of how many yet?—

Silent for centuries that suddenly explodes.
So much for Rome. So much for its dogma, its torture.
Even the power of all the marble and gold

In the Universe could not cloud the new lens of truth:
That scripture was wrong, and Copernicus, right.
It's shining above for all to see. *Lux eterna*, indeed.

GRAND PARTITA

“Wir sind das Volk!” How are we to translate
The wonder of liberation? *“We are the people!”*
Leipzig: City of Lindens; City of Bach.
Through the cracks and fissures of Lenin and Trotsky

Rises the defiant sound of a solo violin.
Bolshevism it seems was good for discipline:
Oistrakh would get up in the dead of Russian winter
And play his Shostakovich cadenzas cold.

When Glenn Gould played Bach at the Bolshoi, nobody came.
But by the interval, half of Moscow was there.
So the Wall fell, not with tanks and tough talk, but with spirit.

The Church—Bach’s church—is packed with ordinary people.
All eyes are on the young woman playing her Bach. This is
How the Wall fell. When even angels listen, it must be so.

*after hearing a recording of Viktoria Mullova play the Bach Chaconne
in the Church of St. Nicolai, Commemoration Concert of the Peaceful
Revolution & Fall of the Berlin Wall 1999*

IN A WORLD AT WAR WITH SILENCE

The most basic complementarity of music is that of sound and silence, just as the most basic complementarity of the pattern language of the printed page is the contrast between the black of letters and the neutral white background of the paper.

In the early vocal music of Western culture, silence meant breath, silence meant the new beginnings of birth, and silence meant a kind of the recurrent rounding off of a full life with the stillness of death. Like all complementarities, it draws in the smooth sand of the quiet mind a pattern of movement that is not a straight line, but rather something more like a circle, or cycle. The silence of death becomes the silence out of which the cries of rebirth are born.

I sometimes joke with old-timers I meet along the way in the great landscape of the Snake River Country that they could bottle the silence there and sell it like spring water. Imagine that, uncorking a vintage cask of *Oregon Silentium* and savoring it in New York or Amsterdam! Ah, but the petrochemical-military complex, and their accomplices in crime—the entertainment-information industries—are seemingly everywhere at war with silence. And with what success! Imagine the difficulty. How is it possible to turn the noise of trashing the Earth—in glaring self-evidence at every bend of the road—into the universally broadcast and

readily consumed illusion of wholesome development and good fun?

These are the questions that confront you in the depth of silence that resonates throughout the Wallowas. Why have we gone the way of noise? Why have we broken the sound / silence cycle apart? Why have we filled every empty, silent corner of the world with the noise of more cars, more computers, more TVs?

I suspect that if one were to walk these hills long and hard enough, that one may very well find the first beginnings of an answer to these questions.

That, in any case, is my prayer . . .

ON THE LITERAL MAN & THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF METAPHOR

The world of the literal man is a world of extreme fragmentation.

In this broken-apart world of the literal man, the natural weave of the interdependencies of wholeness has been ripped apart, and 'facts' and 'things' exist in all but complete isolation.

It is a world, therefore, in which the *this-is-like-that* of analogy and metaphor not only makes little sense, but is no longer even possible. And it is a world, because nothing is felt as being connected to anything else, ethical responsibility has been reduced to the exigencies of hard cash and personal survival.

It comes as little surprise that the literal man makes the perfect foot soldier in the technological armies of mechanistic science, the same science that has given us the modern weapons industry. Here we find the literal man in the form of the brilliant physicist who without the slightest ethical qualms diligently increases the yields of each new nuclear device; Or the literal man in the form of the virtuoso economist who spins the market trends with great short-term success and mathematical élan, while completely ignoring every single relevant feature and consequence of the wider, long-term context; Or the literal man of the genetic engineer of genius who cleverly creates seeds that self-destruct, seeds that you must now forever buy because they

terminate in their own infertility.

The final extreme? A world resource empire that hordes the very water of life itself, and which sells it back to us at a price only he, the literal man, can afford. This is the “participate or perish” world of the literal man. It is a world in which morality has been reduced to the tightest of circles around ‘the me.’ It is a state of mind and being which now, sadly, manifests in Western culture in both genders about equally.

COMPLICATION?

Complication—in contrast to the richness of natural complexity—is about making things at least twice as difficult as necessary, thereby making it easy to do *really* difficult things—not at all.

BETWEEN THE WORLDS

All mischief begins with distance. *Poet, scientist, farmer, teacher*:—be the messenger between the worlds.

**AFTER FALL STORM IN HIGH
MOUNTAIN SUMMER**—*three 37-step poems*

(i)

Fast, flowing clouds stream
over constant red rock mountain,
stonepines give voice to cold winds, sun

peaks through, new

day so late in the afternoon. The
nutcrackers will not fly today.

(ii)

The lightning bolt strikes
the stonepine, as it bursts apart
in a flash of flames. Ancient tree

on solid

rock. Science can't say
which tree will be the next to go.

(iii)

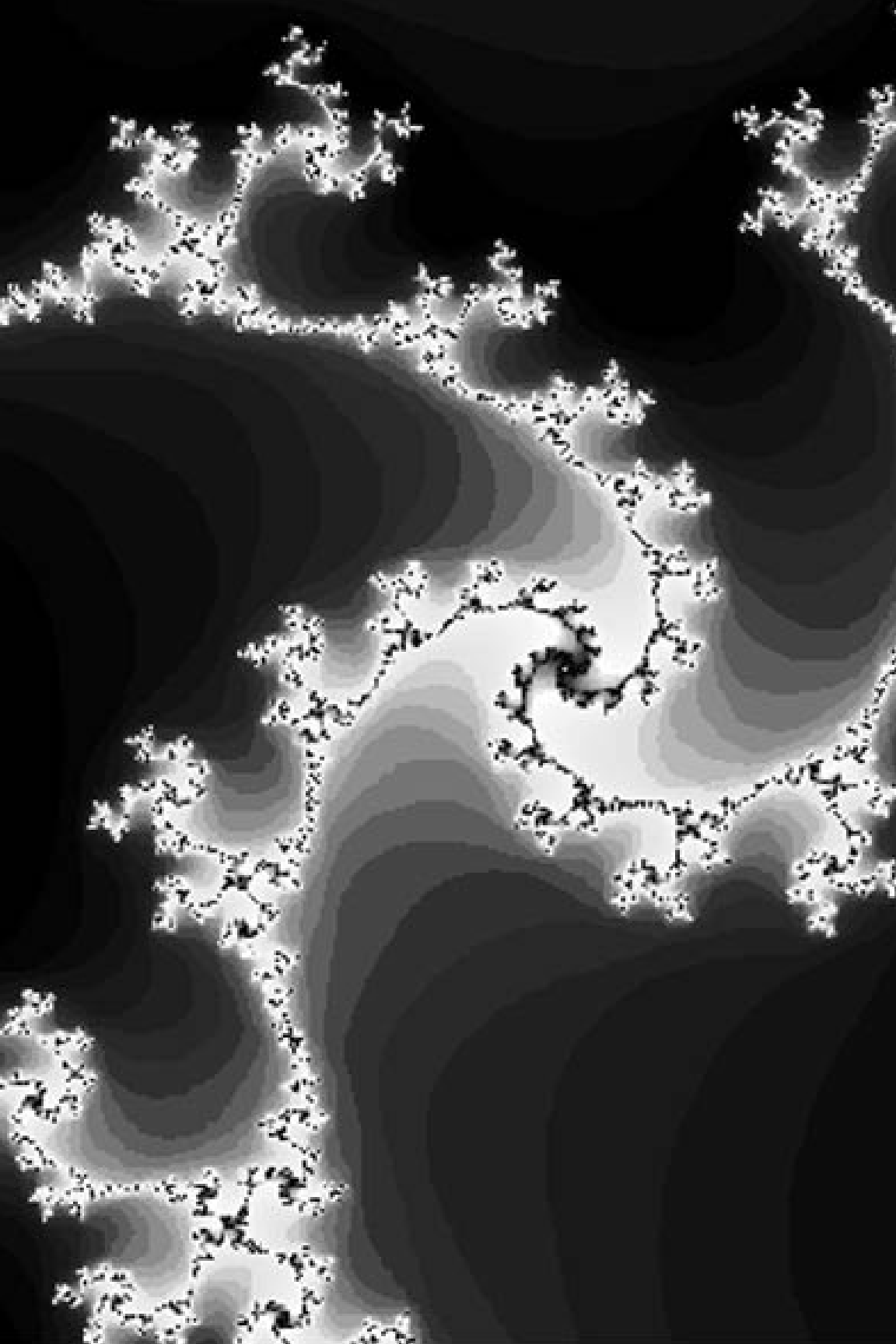
One prays for sun, puts
up with rain. Every zipper in
the tent is broke. A chipmunk gives

a sermon

on cheerfulness:—the
nutcrackers will not fly today.







The Little Clavier: Part III

Mirrors 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.

ON CHANCE

One of my recurrent themes is a difference I see between mere mechanical randomness, say, like a computer so easily generates, and chance. Chance I see as something far more mysterious, both in terms of its nature and its source.

An event may seem like chance only because its matrix of causes lies outside the field of our vision or comprehension; Or it may at other times appear as an almost divinely inspired confluence of hitherto separate ribbons of fate, say, as when two strangers unexpectedly encounter each other on a path and instantly feel bonded by some kind of deep sympathetic resonance.

I in no way think that such a view must retreat into a vulgar dreamlike romantic subjectivity. On the contrary, such an open view of chance appears to me almost unavoidable as we by hard, cool thinking reach the end of the road of logic and reason, and enter into the pathless land of the unknown. This is where Art and Science, I feel, may possibly join hands and walk together for a while, for who would deny that what we do not understand of reality is a vastly—perhaps infinitely so—greater realm than that little domain we with some degree of certainty can say we truly know or understand. And who would deny that image and metaphor are not just as necessary items of our intellectual equipage as are mathematics and formal models when it comes to exploring

new and still uncharted terrain.

So, in this spirit, here is a little flutter of a piece which turns around this idea of chance and what I like to call the butterfly way . . .

A TOSS OF THE COIN

A fork in the trail appears, with two wooden signs, each pointing in opposite directions, each of equal appeal.

Which way shall I follow?

I could stop to study my map.

Or wait a while to ask a fellow passerby.

Or I could leave it to the gods of chance
and toss a coin, *heads* to the left, *tails* to the right.

Always willing to bet on good fortune, I give
my last lucky nickel a stout thumb-flick
up into the clear morning air and watch
it spin as if outside of time, in slow motion.
Before my disbelieving eyes, it changes
into a little blue butterfly.

What to do? Why of course:—

Follow the butterfly way!

ON THE LOSS OF RHYTHM

The body of contemporary Western culture is but half a body, divided or cut off at the waist, centered not in the heart, or solar plexus, but in the eyes. Sitting at the controls is this halfbody's activity of choice. In front of the TV, the computer, or steering wheel of a car.

But what of the poor feet? They might tell us that one cannot think clearly about much of anything—especially *dance*, or *music*, or *poetry*—without living a life deeply grounded in the slow, measured cadence of walking.

Witness the automobile: so utterly without rhythm; it simply wishes to continue without interruption on its smooth, mechanical trajectory . . .

And so, our sense of rhythm, of movements of all kinds large and small, is falling by the wayside, conditioned deeply by machines like the automobile, and atrophying like muscles or organs we no longer need or use.

And so, we get bored. Bored for lack of rhythm. Indeed, boredom has become a key feature of this culture of the halfbody, a state which we seek to escape remarkably by more sitting in front of ever-more sophisticated controls.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS OF THE COMPASSIONATE MIND

A key feature of the compassionate mind is evidently its need to move freely with the unseen relational resonances implicit in every produced or used artifact, every thought, every action. The apple may indeed be superficially beautiful, but to ask how, where and by whom it was grown, is a quintessentially spiritual question.

For the student of any age, the key thought experiment is: begin with the end, or manufactured object, and then unravel it into its many simpler constituent threads or parts, thereby going back in time and space like a movie playing backwards. Imagine all the objects in a room returning to their ultimate earth-bound source in this way. And then, run the movie in your mind's eye fast-forward until all the objects converge again into their motionless, present form.

What parts of the movement are necessarily so? What parts are wasteful? What parts cause harm? Which objects do you now see as necessary. Which do you see as wasteful.

It is the beginning of a much wider circle of ethical awareness.

FREEDOM & LIMITS

Highways exist to *move traffic*,
As Internets exist to *move bits*,
And Economies to *move goods*.

All three are paths of movement,
of exchange, of communication.
And with all three, freedom flourishes
only when it is strictly limited by universal,
clear, unambiguous laws.

Without clear limits, the worst and most brutish
of our natural tendencies shall come to rule
the many roads that run between us.

THE WONDER OF WALKING

In the mountains,
one may go up a climber,
but always comes down a pilgrim.

RETRONYMS?

Retronyms? With every step we take away from the wisdom of Nature's way, the more difficult it becomes to clearly see what we have lost or left behind. *Acoustic* guitar, *organic* tomato, and—as a possible future, *n a t u r a l* human being. Once the crucial sensitivity threshold is crossed and we can only with difficulty distinguish the artificial, industrial mimics from their originals, what then? Imagine sitting at a restaurant table, and a guy asks, “*Hey, the girl at the end of the bar, is she...?*”

NOTATION & THE KNOWN

To really hear, or listen, is to forget for a moment the notation—whether it be words and letters, numbers and equations, or the notes of a musical score—we use to think about things when we write them down.

In this way, perception is unconditioned by the fetters of the past, and therefore open to the energy of the new insight.

It is a great art to be free for a moment, as a kind of meditation, of all measure, of all art.

PATH OF VIOLENCE / PATH OF PEACE

The first mistake we make in dealing with the violence of the world is to name it evil. To name violence “evil,” instead of simply calling it mistaken or bad, is to give violence the status of an independent “force of darkness” which is somehow actively out to do us in. All beings, all systems, indeed, all materials and machines, have inherent points of weakness between elements that may break down, that become subject to illness, or are otherwise easily corrupted. *Iron rusts; trees rot; people lose their humanity.* But this does not mean that some sinister autonomous power seeks to prevail, but rather that for whatever reason the goodness or wholeness of integrity has fallen apart.

The second mistake in dealing with the violence of the world, made possible by the first, is to see this violence as somehow outside of ourselves, as somehow separate from our own essential nature, and therefore something to be fought against with the very same use of force we feel threatened by in the first place.

Finally, *the third mistake*, made possible by the first two, is to believe that the resulting path of violence is somehow inevitable, and that we must therefore prepare for it by doing whatever is necessary in order to dominate when force becomes necessary, as we believe it most certainly shall. So the preparations to defend ourselves against violence become—as a kind of *perpetuum mobile*—a primary cause of violence itself.

ART OF ARTS

I say to you, Poetry is the energy of insight made manifest in the images and rhythms of the speaking voice.

Poetry, I say to you, is the *ars artium*, the art of arts, of the new era.

Nowhere else do rhythm and sound, do meaning and feeling, so forcefully converge by such sparse and simple means to transform our way of seeing and being in the world.

ART & NATURE

Art does not so much imitate Nature in its mode of operation as it does emerge out of the same ground or movement of intelligence which is Nature's source.

That is why real seeing or listening—which can give rise to new insight, new meaning, or new form—never repeats, is never merely 2nd-hand, and is necessarily of this moment, here and now.

MISCONCEPTIONS & CORRUPTION

Misconceptions self-perpetuate because, when I'm wrong, what is right is bound to seem wrong to me.

Corruption self-perpetuates because I quickly become dependent on corruption's privileges.

Misconception and corruption fit together in a kind of false, synergistic way, that serves to mutually reinforce both.

If I see you as inferior and subhuman, and therefore think I have a natural right to treat you as my serf or slave, I will thereby force you into the actual subhuman conditions of poverty and illiteracy which come round to further sustain and strengthen my misconception. At the same time, I profit greatly from the corrupting use of your free labor, so much so in fact, that it becomes impossible for me to imagine life without it.

BEYOND ALL COMPARE

We can only know disease by comparing it to health, just as we can only know fragmentation by comparing it to wholeness.

As I walk the land, I frequently ask myself, what would this meadow, this forest, this river have looked like two hundred, or two thousand years ago? What grew in between the sagebrush before overgrazing and cheatgrass and medusa-head took over as far as the eye can see? What would the color of the water have been, its temperature feel like to the hand towards the end of summer before dams were built, and forests cut down.

Questions like these go unanswered if there is nothing with which to compare these highly disturbed states. This is, without a doubt, one of the many meanings of wilderness. Wilderness is where we go when we want to see what health or wholeness really looks like and not just think about what we assume them to be.

WOODEN FLUTES, AND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *THEORIES IN NATURE & THEO-* *RIES IN CULTURE*

With Nature, we describe a relatively autonomous world. When our theories are wrong, when we say, for instance, mistakenly, that the Sun revolves around the Earth and not the other way around, neither the Sun nor the Earth are evidently affected.

With the Arts and Culture, however, we describe a world largely of our own making. When our theories are wrong, when we say that, for example, flutes made of concrete sound the same as flutes made of wood or silver—*a column of vibrating air is after all a column of vibrating air!*—our perception of sound and flute playing may begin to change, potentially in a very negative way.

Freedom from the unavoidable formative distortions of this description/perception cycle comes only when we give serious attention to the workings of the cycle itself, and not merely to the outward nature of the particular theory or way of looking with which we begin our enquiry.

PROTECTING THE COMMON GROUND OF LANGUAGE

The cheap and flashy slogans of politics and commerce are like aggressive alien weeds, overrunning the sacred common ground of language with a kind of false—or *irre*-poetry. They numb and corrupt our natural sense of the refined sonic elements of verse, reducing subtleties like rhythm, anaphora and rhyme to mere clever instruments in a grab-bag repertoire of tricks eager to serve the abuse of power and questionable gain.

One of the first tasks of Poetry is to protect this common ground of language, especially for the young, in the same way we might protect the Earth itself, whether it be a patch of prairie along a busy road, or the delicate balance of species in a remote and pristine alpine meadow that no one ever sees.

INTERCONNECTIONS . - _ /

The movements of intelligence in Nature resonate together like the circular waves of water droplets merging on the surface of quiet water. Shake one, and they all shake. Leave one out, and another steps in to take its place.

This is why machines like computers, which are based at present not so much on the all-at-once of the resonance of natural intelligence, but rather on long, complicated, necessarily explicit strings of logical thought that so easily break. And they do this, as we all know, in frequently highly disturbing and unpredictable ways. Their connections must indeed be ‘hard-wired,’ so to speak, one at a time.

Given the present need for this surface absolute precision, and therefore the lack of the greatly more flexible relational movements of resonance, computers, computer networks and the software upon which they depend, are all prone to go haywire with even the slightest low-level error. Remarkably, if one were forced to tune the complex weave of interconnected sounds and rhythms of an orchestra in this way, one would not make it past the first bar.

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *LIMIT* & *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 and freedom.

ON NECESSITY

The perception of Necessity can be liberating, because the way is then made free for clear, decisive action. Indeed, how could this be otherwise?

When something must be so, the mind—whether that of the individual or that of the collective—quits wasting energy by fighting against itself, and, without forcing, comes to a unitary vision or flow.

The peak is in view. The problem clearly defined. Let's get on with the climb!

TWO PATHS

Two paths, one returns,
one does not. And I

still don't know, which one
leads home.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING

Compassion sees war as the left hand
of humanity fighting against the right;

Intelligence sees war as the waste of unnecessary conflict.
Name one thing we need more than less waste,
than less unnecessary conflict.

WAR GAMES

Every general will tell you very convincingly that he needs more of something: more men, more guns, more, more accurate missiles. He never tells you what he needs most, however, which is more war.

TEMPO OF PERCEPTION

I want to move through the world in a way that awakens—indeed, demands that I awaken—not just a narrow, arbitrary bandwidth or fragment, but rather the whole of my perception.

I want to think out the route through a problem with my toes, hear the crash of a tree before it falls with the back of my ears, sense the next storm with the pores of my skin. I walk down the busy road and see all the isolated, obviously unhappy people caged up in their expensive, noisy, conspicuously large and inefficient cars and trucks. And I ask myself, is this how the gods meant the marvelous instrument of our perception or intelligence to be used or played?

The pace or rhythm or speed of perception is like the tension of a string.

If the string is too loose, it makes a hardly audible, flabby sound; if the string is too taut, the sound is painfully sharp, and always just on the verge of breaking.

I say to myself: slow down. Or like the telling figure of speech has it, “unwind a bit.” And I say to others, especially young people, “Get out of the damn car!” Then and only then might we see what the mechanical fast-forward artificiality of the automobile has made of us and our perception of the world.

BALANCE OF PERCEPTION

Balance of perception is simple in principle, yet difficult in execution.

In part, it is like carrying two complementary types of lenses in your outfit.

One, binoculars, to bring the very far away into clear view; the other, a simple magnifying glass to bring the details of the very small and just out of reach up close.

I never go without both, these marvelous technologies of what I think of as the magical middle realm.

RIGHT MEASURE / RIGHT ACTION

Clear thinking and decisive action necessitate good systems of measure.

The world-wide problems of waste, runaway militarism, water and food scarcity, pollution, over-population, and climate change demand that the people of the world work together to find solutions in new and unprecedented ways. And to work and think clearly together, I would say that we must have a common language and system of measure.

What better time, what better opportunity, to throw out the thought-constricting and painfully outmoded feet, fahrenheit and gallons of North America—sad relic of its colonial past—and bring the world together in an up-to-date and unified metric system.

This was first brought home to me many years ago while working in the Alps. I was milking cows for a mountain farmer friend of mine there. And one afternoon, he asked me, “*How many kilos of milk did you bring down this morning?*” I thought, “*Kilos?*” I had measured liters. Then I suddenly realized they are one and the same. “*Brilliant!*” I thought, while at the same time amazed that I had not seen the relationship myself.

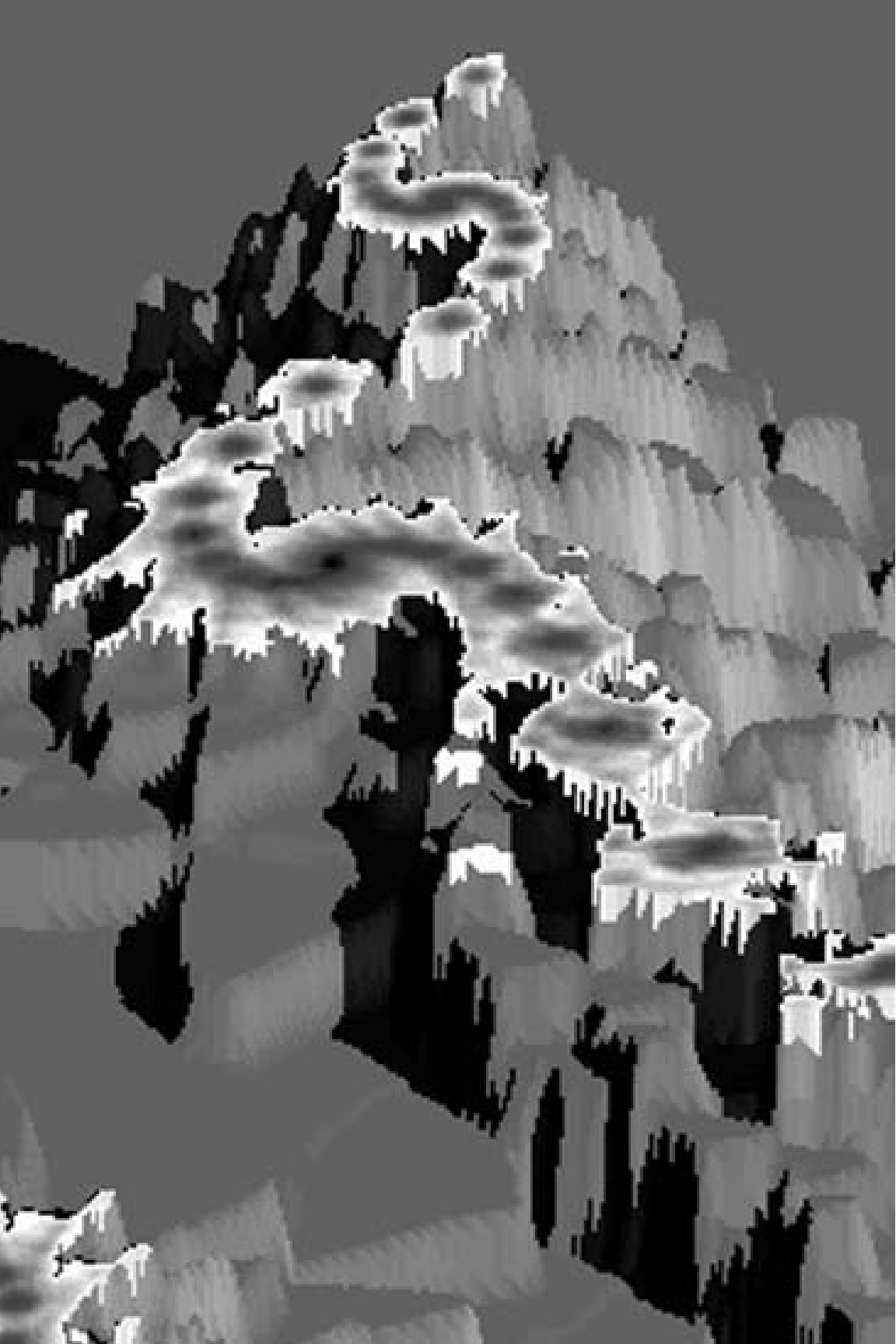
But now, North Americans seem more worried about the wrenches in their garage, than the gears of conversion

kid's strip in their brains trying to memorize antiquated and illogical systems. Clearly, the whole world now needs urgently to focus collectively and with great energy on the significance of an increase of just one or two degrees C. average temperature. No translation. No conversion. Just what it means. What it feels like. And what to do about it.

Right action, and right measure, it seems to me, necessarily, just may go together.







The Little Clavier: Part IV

If you want to be a poet,
call yourself a farmer;

If you want to be a farmer,
call yourself a religious man
or woman;

If you want to be a person of religion,
call yourself a teacher.

The first student is always yourself.

BARBED-WIRE, WEEDS & OVERGRAZING

Tragedy of the West?

Barb on wire,

Barb on plant.

I hate barbed-wire. Everything about it.

Perhaps more than any other innovation, I think barbed-wire—an invention patented in the 1870s by Joseph F. Glidden of Dekalb, Illinois, and first called “devil’s rope” by those who opposed its use—has made the current style of confined grazing possible. When animals are confined and not carefully shepherded from place to place in a rhythmic way—as in many regions to this day is still done in the Alps—overgrazing will most certainly be the result. This culminates in a Cheatgrass-Sage-Dry-Dirt landscape that now covers vast tracts of the West as far as the eye can see. In this way, the door of habitat destruction is left wide open to extremely tough and determined alien species like *Spotted Knapweed* and *Yellow Star-thistle*, which in turn sets up a vicious and ugly cycle of more habitat fragmentation and loss.

I would not place the responsibility for overgrazing on the ranchers. Ranchers, especially those of small, family owned operations with deep roots in community and place, are just trying to make a go of it under very difficult condi-

tions. I think the problem has its source in yet another kind of fragmentation, this time between the in North America relatively small agricultural community and the wider culture. Let's face it, meat in the store bears for the buyer little or no relationship to the rancher or cow in the field. This is fragmentation of the most insidious kind, because it forces to the point that the rancher has no other alternative than to keep more and more animals on a given parcel of land. To say that this is just the way markets work is, in my opinion, as short-sighted as it is irrational. For the health of the land and the health of a culture are most certainly inextricably interlinked. And yet the destruction of both passes me by as I bike across the Northwest, mile after mile after mile.

Who, we may ask, wants this? The ranchers I speak to don't. Consumers, generally, have no awareness of the problem. So, the question, it seems to me, is what is the source of this kind of all-pervasive fragmentation?

GARDEN VARIETY VERSE

Literary journals are to poetry what formal botanical gardens are to wild mountain plants. There they all are! Bright lily, gentian, arnica, even a beautiful patch of cotton grass next to the pool. All precisely labelled and well-fed. And so easy to tell apart! But after a while, I've noticed that one starts reading the signs first. That's bad.

LEARNING MAKES THE CIRCLE ROUND

Master the complex to teach the simple;
Teach the simple to master the complex.

Learning naturally moves from general to particular and back again in a gentle, unforced, cyclical fashion. It is gentle because details are studied only as they become necessary and relevant; and it is cyclical because it moves back and forth from broad overview to the fine grain of particulars and then back to broad overview, like moving easily from mountain peak to valley back to mountain peak. In this way, learning does not so much imitate Nature as do what Nature itself does.

After all, the many different species of willow and oak, so hard to distinguish one from the other, only very gradually developed into such wonderfully complex diversity.

THE FARMER & THE ARTIST

The farmer does his best just to be one of the boys, preferring to be a part of his herd. With the artist, it's the other way around; he'd rather stick out, be the exception, the wild one in a barnful of tame and chained animals. But are they really so different? Where is the farmer who stands out because he goes quietly his own way; and where is the artist who is like the bird who fills each morning with the enchantment of its song, but whom we never see?

A NECESSARY UNITY

Art, Science, Religion:—three branches of one great river of life.

See the promise of the spiritual energy released if they were to flow freely, naturally together.

See also the tragedy of their current fragmentation. The energy, the opportunity, lost.

The necessity of unity says, “*Take down the dams!*”

BEAUTY AS BALANCE

Beauty abhors the contortionist, the Yogi who wraps himself in a wire-ball of knots, the Paganinni who charms with his devilish slights of hand, the Architect who with a virtuosic flourish folds metal like crushed paper into the form of a smashed guitar.

The more a culture goes the way of this mastery and worship of mere outward difficulty, and the more this is projected as *an ideal-to-be-achieved* to the young, the more this culture will lose its resonance with the at once simpler and infinitely more subtle and complex spiritual dimensions of its art.

ABSOLUTE

Is there anything in Music which is absolute, a kind of unchanging touchstone of relevance, of beauty and truth?

If we begin by saying that the primary elements of musical reality are not really things at all, but rather relationships, then it becomes clear that the yin and yang of the balance of relationship is of primary importance.

So, in a way, what is unchanging in Music is change itself, and the absolute necessity of the dynamic movement of the balance of relationships that this demands.

RESONANCE

Imagine a series of nested circles, one within the other, expanding into natural time and space. Then, imagine a kind of harmony, a kind of mutual fitting together, of the movements of the circles, one within the other.

Now imagine putting the whole of this movement of expanding, nested circles inside a small, tight, little leaden box, thereby isolating and fragmenting the movement from the larger world. This is what happens to Art and Culture when they are no longer rooted or nested within the natural world. Once this happens, one of the primary tasks of Art is somehow to open the box.

THE MASTER & THE APPRENTICE

Just as assuredly the the moon moves the tides, intelligence moves the mind in mysterious and subtle ways. The teacher is the one who discovers first the rhythm of this movement in him- or herself, and then awakens it just as naturally and invisibly in the student.

The teacher is one who protects the student from a metaphysics of education that forces children into a career of tourism on the periphery of learning and creativity. How much better to find one's calling early in life, when learning is still largely an unselfconscious affair, and skill and aesthetic sensibility become easily, as the apt expression has it,

ON THE NECESSITY OF ROADLESS AREAS (I)

Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor
(I see and acknowledge the better way, but follow the worse.)
Ovid (*The Metamorphoses*)

Because of the near complete motorization of North American culture, roadless areas have gained in the past twenty years or so tremendously in significance. Now, at road's end, we also reach the spiritual end of what I see as a defining imbalance of the made-in-the-USA metaphysics of the world, namely, a remarkably one-sided way of thinking about freedom. North Americans seem largely to take a self-centered view of freedom, what we might call the freedom to of the individual. Why might this be imbalanced? In my view, it is because it fails to take adequately into consideration the possible harm caused by the potentially negative consequences of our actions as they reverberate out into wider contexts, into the wider community. It is really very simple, this idea that freedom always has two sides, the freedom to, and the freedom from. Take the example known well to every big city apartment dweller: I want to listen to my loud music in the middle of the night; You want to sleep. So to make life livable, we have to work out some kind of a balanced agreement between us. What I want to suggest is that all freedom works essentially in this same way. And what is more, individuals and cultures may be characterized by which side of the two they tend to give emphasis, give the most significance

and legal protections. We can easily imagine the extremes, and it is good to do so for the sake of clarity. On the one hand, we have the state of absolute lawlessness, where every one just does as they please; And on the other, we have the state of total control where no one is allowed to do anything at all freely. Whereas North American culture has evolved an exemplary balanced form of liberty in the areas of freedom of speech and expression, it seems to me extraordinarily imbalanced when it comes to the three key defining areas of finance, private property. or anything powered by hydrocarbons. If I can make money, if its my land, or if its my car or truck or dirt-bike, 4-wheeler or snowmachine, the basic assumed metaphysics is, “*Get out of my way!*”

Even though the original idea of setting aside large tracts of land without roads of any kind undoubtedly originally concerned itself with the harm wrought upon the environment by the negative side-effects of mechanized travel, roadless areas now also offer us a place to experience the benefits first hand of a more balanced idea of freedom. In addition to the freedom to, we now have a complementary freedom from. Predictably, the freedom from part of the equation deals mostly from the unwanted by-products of car culture, like freedom from noise, or the freedom from air pollution. Like water meanders through an alpine bog, finding a kind of living balance by turning now to the left, now to the right, I think this more balanced idea of freedom is something beautiful to behold. But don't take my word for it. It might be worth making a bit of an effort to get out of one's car and hike up into one of those areas just to rediscover for oneself what freedom is really all about.

BEAVERS & THE ECOLOGY OF NATIONS

After a mere one hundred years of white exploration and settlement in the Columbia River Basin, by 1900, beavers were nearly extinct.

It is a telling story of the intersection of the ecology of hats and the ecology of young nation states competing aggressively for new territory. Until 1825, when in Paris the silk hat became the latest fashion rage, beavers were trapped for their furs wherever they could still be found in North America. The Pacific Northwest joint-use agreement between Great Britain and the United States of 1818 led the Hudson Bay Company to assume that, after a period of ten years and as the treaty was set to expire, the border would be drawn at the Columbia River. They therefore set out to achieve a competitive advantage in the fur trade by systematically exterminating beavers found to the South and the East of the river, thereby depriving the Americans of an important resource. A remarkable fact, hard to believe today, but the botanist David Douglas already complained of the scarcity of beavers in the Willamette Valley as early as 1828.

The next wave of destruction arrived in the 20th century with the massive hydroelectric water projects. (There are at present 38 major dams knotting up the arteries of the the Columbia watershed.) It was especially the damming of smaller tributaries the caused new habitat loss, making for artificial bodies of static water where once smaller rivers flowed.

Beavers are, however, happily making something of a comeback. I always think it is beautiful to see how they shape the landscape at a scale that seems fitting and appropriate in many beneficial ways, creating small pools for fish spawning, filtering and cleaning the water, and in other ways regulating the flow of nutrients. The story of the beaver is in many ways the story of the interconnectedness of both the natural and cultural worlds. Who ever thought that Beethoven's fur hat would impact not just beavers but also the salmon of the great Columbia River Basin? And who ever thought that such a humble, relatively small river animal one rarely has an opportunity to observe in the Northwest might show us better, more ingenious ways to live with the natural flow of the Earth's living waters.

TEMPO OF CHANGE

(i)

What are avalanches and wet soft snow
to the wings of a raven?

What is drought to the morning
dewdrops of the field mouse?

Perched on constant alert,
some of Earth's creations are
more ready for sudden change
than others.

“Who said that? Change?”

(ii)

Future Crisis? Who would not rather face the Sun,
and not the storm building behind us.

(iii)

Crisis in Photography? If there is a crisis in photography,
then it's to be found in the outmoded, out-of-focus
worldview hiding behind the lens.

BEWARE!

(i)

In every Capitalist's office
is a graph that charts
the price of Gold & Oil against
the value of Freedom & Democracy.
Once the two lines cross,
let the Republic beware.

(ii)

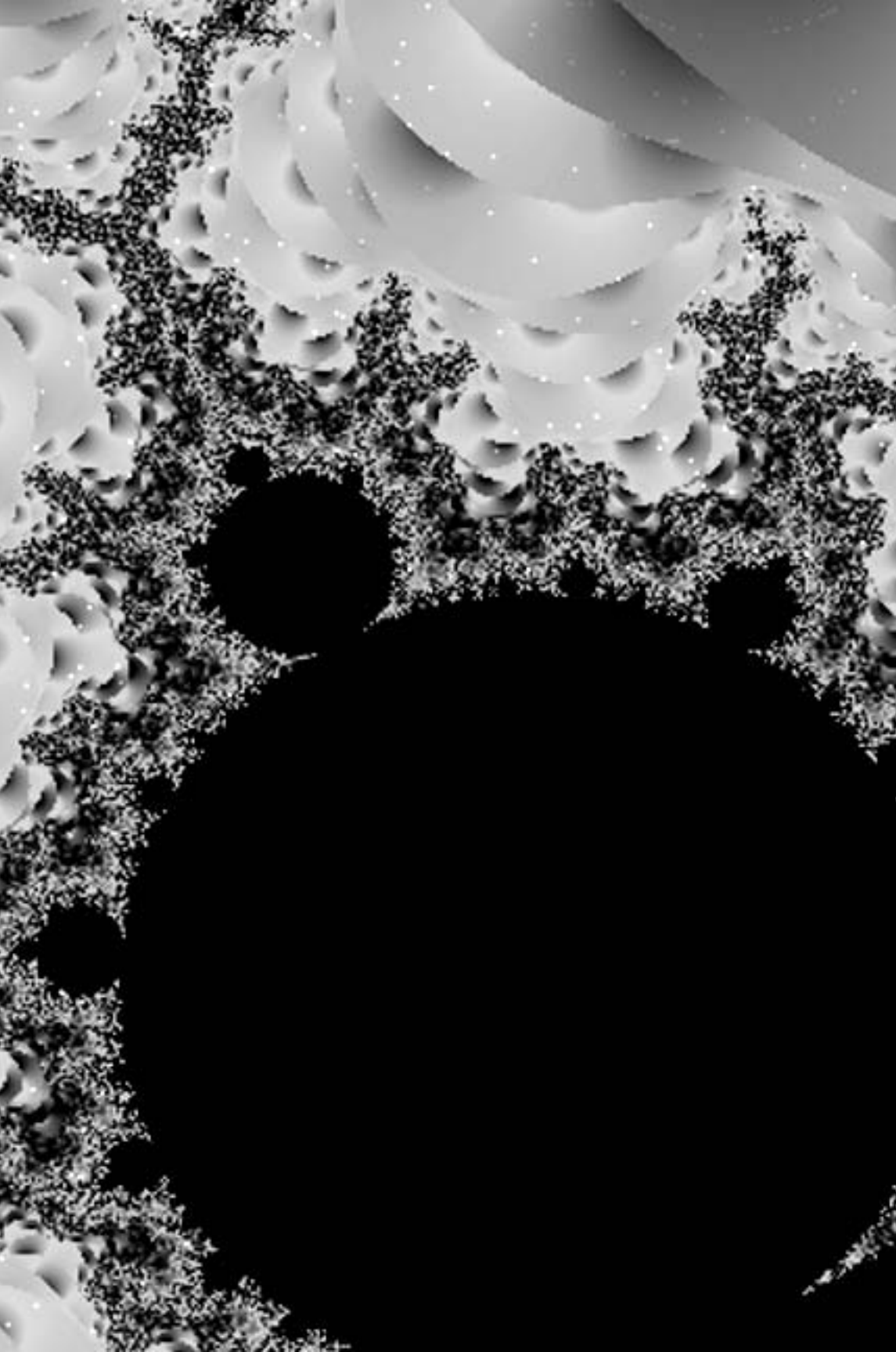
Tragedy of the West:—
Barb on wire;
Barb on plant.

(iii)

A Creationist? One who believes in horeses
and mules, but not in asses.







The Little Clavier: Part V

Nature 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.

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *THE BRUTISH BRAIN & THE COMPASSIONATE MIND*

“You’re either with us, or against us.”

versus

“Whatsoever you do unto the least among you, you do unto me.”

This is what I see as one of the signature divides of our time, between the brutish brain and the compassionate mind, two defining features of our species that are now profoundly at odds with each other.

On the one hand, we have the brutish brain, which embodies the deep and rich legacy of the human animal’s natural history, and has clearly evolved to meet and master the many demands of survival. It is not at all that different from the brain of a wolf, or a bear, or an ape. The powerful engine of the brutish brain is the mechanical intellect of problem solving. How to make a better stick for digging roots, a better skin for carrying water, a sharper stone for a more deadly weapon. Its means is force. Its ethics is essentially the ethics of *the me*, my group, or my nation. The identification of this smaller me with the larger group, which is then radically divided from the wider environment, is a key feature of the brutish brain. *What’s good for me and my group is good; what’s good for my opponents is bad.*

On the other hand, we have the evidently uniquely human compassionate mind. The compassionate mind sees itself in the other, sees itself mirrored everywhere in the world around it, and, like an infinitely large grand piano, its strings seem to resonate and reflect all the other sounds of the symphony of life played around it. The energy of the compassionate mind is not just the problem-solving, computer-like ability of mechanical intellect, but rather intelligence. Intelligence is in this view a vastly more subtle movement of consciousness; it is this energy of intelligence which is evidently very much broader in scope and source than the isolated individual self. Its means or method is understanding. Its ethics is that of the good of the whole, the good of the widest context of which it is aware.

Now, I think we could say that the brutish brain, if it is not limited in some way and simply left to run off on its own, is potentially the single most destructive creation of evolution. At the same time, the compassionate mind, as far as we can know, is evolution's most creative achievement. The problem, of course, is that we in a confused way embody both.

Clearly, the mind of compassion has come into being in part to limit the over the millennia ever-increasing lethal capabilities of the brutish brain, through understanding and insight, like a patient, loving mother checks the wayward tendencies of an overly aggressive, self-centered child.

We are now at a kind of tipping point, or threshold, concerning the relationship of these two, either conflicting or complementary, movements of consciousness. By this I mean a point beyond which it will become increasingly difficult to change course. The fundamental question is down which path will we go, down which path will the energy of the world, of humanity, be led? Clearly, the brutish brain at present has tremendous mechanical power behind it. Its instruments are the corporate and military-industrial complex, and the financial and legal systems that have co-evolved to support, profit from, and protect these. Government at present, call it what you will—oligarchy, democracy, tyranny—serves overwhelmingly to safeguard these corporate and military interests. That is my view, and I stand by it.

At the same time, the more enlightened democracies worldwide embody in a tragic way the very contradictory division of consciousness which is my theme. Freedom and civil rights are guaranteed. But only insofar as these do not get in the way of the more primary corporate and military interests.

This is why even potentially good leaders will be torn apart by the present systems of government. Because the worst half, so to speak, dominates. So leaders promise peace, but give us more war. They promise universal health care, but sell out to the insurance companies. They promise to address climate change, but give us more coal-fired and nuclear power plants. It is in a word why politics is at present the very worst place to look for leadership.

Unquestionably, the way of the brutish brain, if it should for whatever reason be allowed to prevail, will lead to its ultimate apotheosis of total self-destruction. This is self-evidently so, especially when considered over longer spans of cultural time like two or three centuries, because of the already realized destructive potential of its weaponry, or simply because of the rapacious waste of resources and resulting damage to the biosphere inherent not only in their possible use but solely in their development.

But the way of the compassionate mind, even though its voice is at present weak in the political arena, has the power of necessity behind it. And that will make all the difference. That is, if we see the difference with clarity, and with the energy of our whole being.

***TERRA MADRE*—THE LIFEBODY OF THE EARTH & THE SYNERGY OF THREE**

In a dream, or in a kind of half dream-like state, I'm not quite sure which, I recently while at one of my basecamps doing fieldwork had this figure come to me in a strikingly vivid, forceful manner. I got up straight away in the middle of a stormy night to write it down in my notebook. It is a very simple vision of Mother Earth, or Terra Madre, as it in symbolic form presented itself: [drawing]

Here, we have a translation of the figure: [drawing]

The message is clear: the physical lifebody of the Earth—what a scientist of Western culture would call the biosphere—is actually our own larger, in a very general sense, life-body. That is how I experience it, with the “breath” being the air, the “skin” the living surface of the soil, the “blood” the great circulatory cycle of water, and “hair” and “fur” the grasslands and forestlands, respectively. And finally, “spirit” as represented by sound, or the soundscape of the whole. I was especially struck by the latter spirit / sound relationship, as it should be in a way obvious to a musician like myself, and yet it is strangely and tellingly ignored by the present highly mechanized dominant form of society.

For me, the figure approximates what I sense in a direct, simple, emotional way—yet at the same time completely

open to rational consideration—as self-evidently so, or true. In this brief sketch, I would only like to call attention to two implications of the diagram: First, is what I think of as both the negative or positive triangle of interrelationships represented by the figure. In a single phrase: as a general principle of the synergy of three, abuse one, wreck three. That is, cut down the forest, and you'll wreck both the water cycle and the atmosphere. Treat the atmosphere like a sewer, and you'll wreck both the watershed and the forest. Dam the rivers, and you'll wreck the forest and dry out the air. Etc., etc. Note also that the principle has a crucially important positive formulation: improve one, heal three. Bring back the forest cover, and improve the health of the watershed and the quality of the air, etc.

Second, the principle of the synergy of three addresses the issues of ethical culpability for harm done, as well as the ethical responsibility of us all to act decisively to stop such harm. In countries with an established tradition of the rule of law this last statement is well established as far as the rights of individual citizens and other legal entities are concerned. This is without a doubt a great achievement that deserves our sustained vigilance. On the other hand, when it comes to the Earth and the land, our ethical awareness has very much taken a back seat to what is generally thought of as “economic development,” which in turn is deeply conditioned by the life-is-a-machine formative metaphor.

So instead of a lifebody of the land worthy of unambiguous protections, we think of a set of disconnected, essentially replaceable materials which can be used, owned, and sold essentially without limit, just like bolts and gears and fuel. Thus, when we say, for example, ‘land rights,’ or ‘water rights,’ the first thing that comes to mind is the rights of individuals to own and use these as resources, and not the rights of protection of the land and streams themselves. In the view of the synergy of three being discussed here, this is a profound error of perception and thought—a kind of illness of consciousness really because it is a mistake that is made repeatedly and wantonly—an error which is in urgent need of examination and healing.

That is for me the clear and simple message of the Terra Madre figure. The Earth is our mother, our greater life-body, in both a literal, and spiritual sense. So when I see, for example, a photo of a farmer in Ohio pumping his soil full of anhydrous ammonia, my gut reaction is no different than when I hear of a human being subjected to the torture of water boarding for whatever reason: *“Good god, this must stop, now.”*

I stand by the clarity and simplicity of this view.

EUROPEAN CULTURAL BIAS & THE RULE OF REASON

The unique privilege of the pilgrim or wayfarer is the opportunity to observe cultural custom and bias from a certain distance. This distance I like to think of as a kind of neutrality, which is simply an unburdened readiness to move or change, or to correct mistakes quickly, like an agile biker banks left or right maintaining a steady center of balance.

Consider alcohol. I've noticed that there is a certain relationship in the Northwest between the number of gas stations, and the number of bars and liquor stores in a town. They are usually about equally co-present. (Similarly, in the trendy economies of Arts & Crafts / Ski towns, a related connection seems to exist between the number of realtors and espresso shops.) So, if one pulls into a town as a stranger—and don't forget, on a bike of any kind in North America one is always a stranger, or something of a cultural curiosity or outsider—one would naturally assume that custom dictates that one first fill one's tank, and then get a drink.

Alcohol:—clearly, balm to some; bane to others. And an ancient feature of what is in many ways arguably the best of European culture. After all, there is hardly a book in the Iliad or Odyssey of Homer in which wine does not figure prominently. But what interests me here—and the

question that comes repeatedly to mind as I've biked through the stubborn head-winds of North Dakota and Montana—is why certain addictive substances are legal, and why others are not. The answer is that there is no answer. That is, an answer in the sense of a reply that would satisfy the still-unfettered intelligence of a young child. It is simply arbitrary.

Now arbitrary norms and values in an enlightened society based on the rule of reason make for bad laws. We see the beginning of the problem in the word-history of 'arbitrary' itself, coming to us from the Latin *arbitrarius*, from *arbiter* or 'judge, or supreme ruler.' So we must deal, for the sake of a child's understanding, with this potential contradiction between the ultimate authority of the arbiter, and the potential unfairness of this authority when it is based not on argument, but rather on mere whim or pleasure or some hidden agenda. (Note that what the child most likely does not but should know here, is that this kind of doubt and serious questioning of governmental authority is done in the spirit of perhaps one the greatest of all North American traditions: that of a simple commoner, for instance, like Thomas Paine, standing up to, and soundly defeating intellectually, the (arbitrary) authority of the King of England with but a single pamphlet published in 1776, *Common Sense*.)

So what is a reasonable society to do with the myriad of addictive substances that when used by people of certain

cultural heritages and with an appropriate sense of measure—these two seem to go hand in hand—do little harm, but when used to excess by others leads to almost certain self-destruction? I would argue that we should do nothing. First, because of the inherent arbitrariness discussed above. Why are alcohol and cigarettes legal—both demonstrably potentially deadly substances—but not coca and cannabis? Second, because, when it comes to addictive substances, the perhaps well-intentioned effort of law-makers to increase peace and order at home, evidently invariably increases violence and disorder abroad where they are produced. Witness Columbia, the coca leaf and cocaine; witness Afghanistan, the poppy plant and heroine. Both Columbia and Afghanistan are, most would agree I think, essentially drug-ravaged states, and will tragically remain so until the root cause of the disorder—the vast amounts of drug money coming in from the US and Europe—is eliminated.

So, abuse of addictive substances is best dealt with in my view not by judges and the threat of prison time, but rather by sympathetic doctors and open clinics. At the same time, cultures by definition must necessarily strive to draw out the best of each individual citizen by the natural—that is, non-arbitrary—authority of the demonstrated ethical good example. And the good example here is much more than just using such substances in a modest, temperate way, if at all; it is perhaps much more a question of taking responsibility for one's actions at home as their consequences resonate

throughout the wider world community. First—do no harm, is here as it is everywhere a good ethical point of departure. And arbitrary drug laws which turn common plants in an endless source of dirt-cheap criminal gold, are without doubt wrecking havoc with the world's shared economic household.

THE EXPANDING CIRCLE OF ETHICAL AWARENESS

“The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land.”

Aldo Leopold

A key challenge of the current era, it seems to me, is the need to awaken a new sense of ethical responsibility, and a key challenge of this new ethics is to develop a sense of responsibility strong enough to counterbalance our, in historical terms, newly-found and massive destructive powers. The image that presents itself is simple. It is the image of an expanding circle of awareness, one which grows to embrace the whole of the living Earth.

This image of the Earth as seen from the surface of the Moon—certainly one of the great leaps in creative awareness since the discovery the Earth was not flat but round—has already deeply and irreversibly transformed the consciousness of humanity. At the same time, few of its implications have been realized. And many of the outmoded straight-line, flat-earth habits of seeing, thinking and acting are still fully active and dominant.

Chief among these old habits of thought are the concepts of war and waste. They are old because they are not in

harmony with the new reality of one world and one humanity; And they are habitual because they lead us to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

Underlying these old habits of thought is the tacit metaphysics of fragmentation, with its complementary illusions of separation and independence. Separation assumes that the consequences of my actions, or the actions of the group with which I identify, do not extend much beyond the physical boundaries I can see with my own eyes. And, in a related way, independence assumes that what happens beyond the very limited circle of my, or my own group's, visual circumspection is not relevant, does not touch or affect me personally. It is easy to see from a wider, perhaps what we might call a philosophical perspective, that both assumptions are patently false. At the same time, it is crucial to realize that this was not the case as recently as just two hundred years ago. This, I think, is a remarkable fact. Two hundred years ago, a family's waste did not venture much beyond their own backyard, but now the pollutants it generates everyday in amazing quantities routinely resurface in some of the most remote corners of the planet. And so it is also with the consequences of war. Now that the atom has been split—arguably the ultimate phase in self-destructive fragmentation—a handful of bombs can take down the planet, and the waste of but a few reactors comes full circle to remain a threat for more generations than we can honestly think about.

Clearly, a concomitant great leap of ethical creativity is called for if we are to effectively limit our new-found destructive potential. And equally clear is that it would be naive to think we could solve problems of a global scale like Climate Change by not at the same time addressing the directly related and in my view more fundamental problems of war and waste. Just the fact that about a third of Earth's resources are presently devoted to either preparing for war or actively waging it, should demonstrate the necessity of this. Or the parallel fact that present styles of consumption are so extraordinarily short-sighted that they would require the resources of two or three Earths merely to sustain into the near-term future.

So, Aldo Leopold's expanding circle of awareness of the Land Ethic must now of necessity be expanded very much further. Every child can see the truth of the path of renewable energy. And every mother can see that life on planet Earth is not the straight line to nowhere or somewhere else of war and waste, but rather eternally and wholly round.

DICTIONARY

My favorite book.

An Indra's net of interdependencies, each word, each node, reflecting in its own way all the others.

Pick out the crystal of but single word from the ever-changing shimmer of reflections, hold it up to the light of enquiry, and watch how new meaning sparkles and shines from all its sides.

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INFORMATION & MEANING

We rehearse *information*,
but perform *meaning*.

Information is like the web of links in a wire fence;
Meaning is like the delicate ice crystals
that appear out of the blue on a cold January morning.

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

DIABOLUS IN MUSICA?

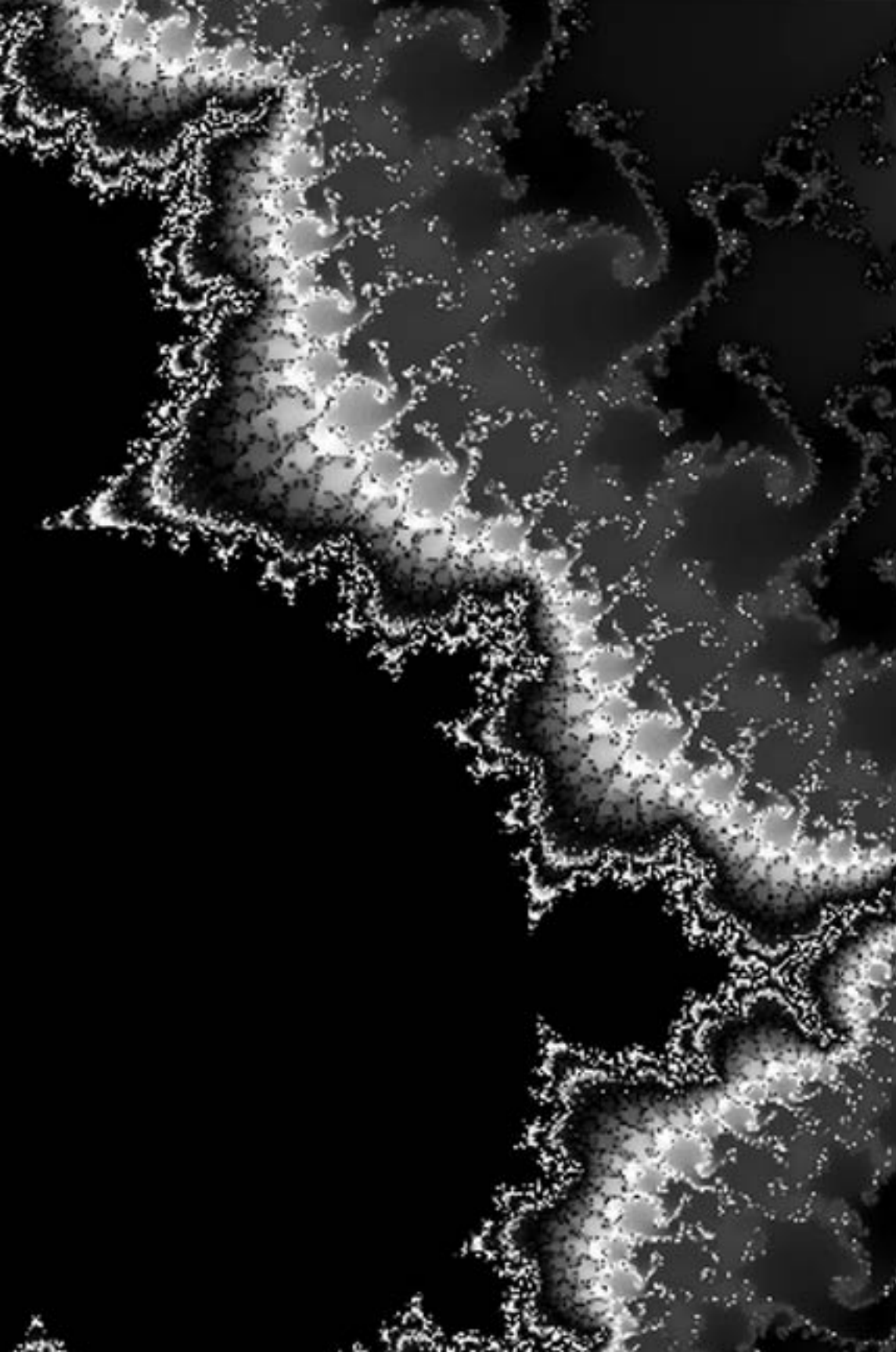
The *tritone*, as found in situ in its natural home or place within the harmonic or overtone series, is one of the most primary relationships between sounds. It might be called the interval of neutrality because it is the only sound that both divides the octave in half, and is neither consonant nor dissonant.

The tritone *is neutral* in the sense of being motionless and yet in some mysterious way it contains within its motionlessness the potential of all movement. Like the fine balancing point of the edge of a high mountain ridge, the rock or the drop of water can fall from this point on either the bright sun-facing or the dark shadow-facing sides.

And, like a culture's sense of balance between the masculine straight line and the feminine curve in the visual and architectural arts—a balance which is easily pushed too far in either direction—much is implied and revealed in our relationship to this one single interval.







The Little Clavier: Part VI

Flowers 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.

CATHEDRAL ROCKS

Strong, simple, bold, clear lines.

A cloud passes by . . .

Strong, simple, bold, clear lines.s

Southern counterpole of the Matterhorn of Hurricane Canyon and located on the westside of the spectacular East Eagle Valley, is the formation I like to call Cathedral Rocks. This seems to me a good name because of the manner in which it reflects the early morning light, especially when seen from the valley floor during the summer months. Like many places in the Wallawas of great power and dignity, Cathedral Rocks has been somehow given a name—Granite Cliff—which seems to me rather like a lame cartographic afterthought.

First, because the formation is limestone and not granite. Second, these empty generic names are like calling your beloved family dog simply, ‘dog.’

But in all seriousness, the point is not so much what a formation is called—Castle Rock is another name some old-time locals know—but more the fact that names are important precisely because they are how we weave together our own internal maps of the poetry, the story of a place.

If you want a direct sense of how this works, all you have to do is look up at such a mountain with a small child. They

will point at it with the index finger of either their left or right hand—the digit which seeks to indicate the meaning of the names of things—and ask what it is called. With children, bad names confuse, whereas good names will light their faces up much like Granite Cliff itself begins to glow with the first light of a summer's day. This is a vital part, I would say, of how a young person can be helped to grow up with deep roots in the living spirit of a place.

A NEW WORD FOR SOUND

Somebody help me here:

How are we to describe natural essentials,

like, *good air, good soil, good water,*

and well, here we have a little, but serious, problem . . .

good sound?

NO GLACIERS IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK BY 2020?

According to Dr. Steve Running, professor of ecology at the College of Forestry and Conservation of the University of Montana and one of the lead-authors of the most recent IPCC (co-recipient with Al Gore of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize) report on Climate Change, the resident glaciologists at Glacier National Park now estimate that the Park will lose all its ice fields by 2020. (Down from a former estimate of 2030.)

Similarly, the estimate for the Alps, according to the Zurich-based World Glacier Monitoring Service, has been revised from 2050 down to 2037. The European glaciers have also been hit by dry winters and hot summers, the two primary causes of retreat. 2003, with its record high temperatures, saw on average an unprecedented 2.13 meters (7 feet) loss of ice thickness. And in 2005, massive summer runoffs of melt water caused widespread flooding.

Glaciers are not just objects of rugged, pristine beauty, or opportunities for summer skiing fun and mountaineering; Glaciers are also—all the Earth's estimated 160,000 of them—the world's largest source of fresh water, second only to the Poles. I like to see as a kind of giant watershed savings account, where precipitation is stored up, for leaner, drier times. But now, most of the Earth's glaciers are vanishing before our eyes. Reason enough, it seems to me, to pause and consider why.

CLIMATE CHAOS

Higher temperatures (an increase ± 1.6 F. in the Northwest over the last 100 years), earlier mountain springs and shorter winters, with less precipitation, and less of that falling as snow. All are evidently features of long-term climate change.

Less predictable, however, are extreme weather events. That is, less predictable in terms of when and where they will strike. That they will strike is a relatively certain feature of what I think of as degenerative chaos, i.e., a type of chaos that tends to destroy or corrupt—and not create—already established and relatively stable, balanced systems.

In November of 2006, Glacier National Park and the famous Logan Going-to-the-Sun-Road were hit hard by such an extreme weather event. A record nine inches of rain fell in a 24-hour period. Normally, in a mountain environment, even in September and October, rain would fall as snow at the higher elevations. Instead, it fell as an hyper-intense high-density rain-storm, washing out whole sections of the newly rebuilt road. This is precisely the type of storm that is terrorizing parts of the European Alps. In August of 1987 I was camped in Switzerland at 1600 meters when such a storm hit. I'll never forget the experience. It was as if it were the end of the world. Huge boulders came thundering down the steeply-walled valley from





the highest ridges, and by morning, the road to a nearby village was totally washed out. The Swiss quickly called it understandably “The Storm of the Century.” But by now similar events have repeated themselves so many times that this no longer seems appropriate.

By way of footnote, some two and a half million cars pass through Glacier Park every year. Cars and their emissions are without a doubt, in my view, a primary cause of the warming trends and the remarkable acceleration of the loss of the once great ice fields for which the park was named. In German, a beautiful expression for glaciers is *Ewig Eis*, or in English, eternal ice. It certainly ought to stop more than mere tourist traffic to witness eternity melt in front of our children’s eyes.

CONSERVATION

Conservation is a way of dealing with Nature's basic asymmetry: that growth is *slow*, and destruction *fast*.

CULTURE OF CHAIRS?

The first person to come up with a chair had back-pain. Then he gave it to the rest of us!

MUSIC?

Music? The one thing humans do that makes the rest of Nature jealous.

THE ENERGY OF CORRUPTION

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

“*Clean coal*” is like the idea of a healthy, “*low-tar*” cigarette;

“*Safe nuclear*” is like a time-bomb with but a slightly longer fuse.

O vested interest, clouding the future with the smoke of deliberately deceptive language and false promise.

As the dust settles on the present dark age of fire and hydrocarbons, and we are dug out by future archeologists, the central question asked may well be, not why the SHELLS & EXXONS of the world lied with such dogged tenacity—that, after all, is merely self-interest—but rather why the rest of us, privileged as we are to live under the hard-won protections of freedom of thought and freedom of expression, believed them?

Where are the free spirits who refuse to buy their propaganda, and who refuse to join the citizen congregations of the faithful that now follows their drumbeat straight to the inner circles of petrochemical hell?

SOLITARY STARS

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

When individual actors become more important than the plot, or soloists become more important than the music of the concerto itself, both the drama and the spiritual essence of each work will almost certainly be lost. Why? Because they become false centers of attention, like the overly attractive face of a young news-reader which prevents us from hearing the actual content of the news itself.

This is the price we pay for the cult of worship of mere solitary stars.

MIND / BODY SPLIT

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

The greater the cultural split between mind and body, the greater will be a culture's tendency both to denigrate physical labor, and, in order to supply the necessities and sustain the privilege of its non-physical life-style, to become dependent on some form of slavery, whether the slavery of the whip, or that of the bare minimum of a survival wage.

COFFEE—*the Good from the Bad*

*for Tadesse Meskela and the makers of the documentary, Black Gold: Wake Up and Smell the Coffee (2006),
Nick & Marck Francis*

Things have changed for me. Perhaps irreversibly. As I brew my morning cup of coffee, I see before me now a large sorting room filled with Ethiopian women. Some of the women are older, some are very young, but all wear colorful headscarfs, and have, it seems to me, a certain dignity and beauty. The women are separating good, unroasted, sun-dried coffee beans, from bad coffee beans. One at a time; all by hand. They are paid for this work about fifty cents a day. And all of this for me, for you, for the pleasure of our morning coffee. Truly, I say to you, the day of reckoning is now nearly upon us—upon you, upon me, the day some even more subtle, invisible, hand of judgement shall separate us, too. The good, from the bad.

MORAL COMPASS?

A question for our time? “*Have we lost our moral compass?*”

“*Nonsense!*”—says the Devil’s banker. In the much-will-have-more of the universe of money, there is no North and South, no Good and Bad! There is only more of more of more!

GRACE

Bless those who grew this food.
May they also be happy, well-fed, and safe.
Bless them, brothers and sisters, all.

NOISE & THE MIND

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Noise weighs down on the mind the same way oppressive heat weighs down on the body. Think of it: the early mornings of summer, air fresh and cool, when the body is as light as a feather. But by noon, all physical movement seems like pure drudgery. So it is with noise and the mind. See the reprieve of silent nights when clear thoughts seem to come and go like shooting stars. But by daybreak, we enter the realm of harsh, loud mechanical sound that long ago broke past the limits of the tolerable and thought is reduced to the bottom lines of urban survival.

How is it possible? This pressure pounding at the portal of the ears—our gateway to the subtle and unseen—seems to turn thought in upon itself, like a dog chasing its own tail, or like a New Year's rocket that has fallen out of its upward trajectory and now lies spinning wildly on the ground before it finally explodes.

What has been lost? Truly, how could we ever know? Where is now the land of healthy sound and silence with which we could compare the present culture of universal noise? A Monteverdi, walking back to us from four hundred years ago through a window in time, might be able to say. Or a Stradavari or Vivaldi. Or a Bach or Mozart. But by Stravinsky or Varèse, it was already too late. Think of that!

OLD & NEW ECONOMIES

The difference between the Old and New Economy is that the one says, “*Let your money work for you!*” While the other says, “*Let the Sun work for you!*” Remarkably, this one difference will necessarily and in a forceful way help bring the world of Culture back in step with the world of Nature.

PROOF WITHOUT WORDS

In matters of Philosophy and Design, demonstration is everything. Once one stands atop the mountain they said could not be climbed, has played the piece they said could not be played, nothing more need be said.

IN A WORLD OVER-POPULATED WITH PETROCHEMICAL ARTIFACTS

Eighty years ago, the population of California was under two million. Now it is over 38 million, about the same number of people that lives in the whole of Canada. According to current population growth models, the world adds about that many new individuals to the human family every 14 weeks or so. Imagine that:—Every three or four months doubling the populations of California or Canada. Where would they live? What would they wear? How could they be fed? But perhaps the still more urgent question is:—what would they drive?

COLOR IN WINTER—*seven 37-step poems*

(i)

Red means life, as well
as violent death; it means against
a background of deep black: “*Pay careful*

attention!”

Red is love, is sex.
Red means: You! Get ready for change!

(ii)

Blue is the color
of cool reason, of balance, of
contemplation. The temple of

peace has no

color, although some
say that blue may show us the way.

(iii)

Green is growth, not of
money, but of sense, of new leaves,
of new ways of harvesting light.

Flowers tend

away from true green,
but then, they don't last quite as long.

(iv)

Pink is the color
of nurturing, of hope, the stars
mirrored in a young girl's eyes, of

bright balloons

set free atop a
snowy mountain, lighter than air.

(v)

Azure is the color
of the sagebrush steppe at first light.
O sky! Thin sphere of life above,

more mood than

color, more warning,
admonition, than prophecy.

(vi)

Fiery orange-red of
the fortissimo of sharp brass,
the pianissimo violet

of mute strings.

O movement of sound . . .
Double rainbows bridging extremes.

(vii)

Snow is not white; it
is a thousand colors, none of
which have a name, save the

touristland's

sugar-white. This snow:—
is melting away as we speak.







The Little Clavier: Part VII

In 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.

ON THE WAYSIDE—*four new 162-step poems*

*. . . Randomness repeated
does not look like Chance . . .*

BEER CAN

Five cents a piece is
what we the
people pay the man
with his garbage bag
full of cans, gathered along the

shoulder
of a noisy, filthy, awful

highway. For thirty
years, the cans have bought five cents
more of freedom, a sure, certain
insurance for the down and out.
From their cars, others

watch the man pick up his cans,
one by one, like metal mushrooms.
From the safe, fuel-injected time-
space of their speeding
vehicles, a faint voice comforts,
saying, *“This can’t happen to me.”*

But who can say? Economies
blow-out much like tires:—

always at the peak
of their performance. Then boom, bang,
collapse. Hard times lie just outside
the locked doors. Ask the man with cans.
Five cents each, we pay.

SEARCH GOOGLE

It's always been so,
that the one
who controls water
controls the kingdom,
and the one who controls the flow,

the source,
of information controls thought.

But now, the dam at
Fort Dalles powers data about
data, a new kind of meta-
control, a thirst for power
that drinks rivers whole.
The Dalles, once natural meeting place,
now hub of North American
squalor, the perfect site to mine

data for quick cash.

Like water, data flows, can be
filtered, turned off, colored red, blue,
black, invisible. First we asked
the river to give

us cheap cans. Now we
ask the river to connect up
the thoughts of the world. Water, like
data, can be used for power.
Let's hope for the best.

DAM

It always begins
with a straight
line, a straight line drawn
at a distance, a
line of force, of control, of thought

slamming
straight into the order of things,

a potential that
is wasted, just spilling into
the sea, in thought, just spilling, a
tight, high, knot in the arteries
of the pulsing earth,

a knot now filling a vast lake,
filling a vast lake with pressure,
spinning turbines that are heard from
here to Alaska,
spinning turbines, power of thought,
of force, of control, from here to
Alaska, electric nights, big
city, nights without

stars, rivers without fish,
fish so thick a horse would not cross,
water so clear you could see stones
of bright gold dance on the bottom:—
O river of knots.

SLAM

It took Africa
the pulse of
a whole continent,
to shake us alive
out of the trance of 2's & 3's

set in
harsh stone by Bach & Mozart. Yet

even Africa
could not stop the fall back into

the soft chairs of the bourgeoisie.
Great rebirth of rhythm, dammed from
day one by the so

dazzling flood of disco-dollars,
sounds that sell soap on radio,
the supermarket of TV.

Why is 4 so square?

Captains of industry that beat
their rock 'n roll drum in the time
of buy, buy, buy, hammers that pound,
flatten dead the soul.

Tune in MTV,
cheap cheeseburger of trash-sound . . . Born
to be wild in a cage wired shut
by the tyranny of 4:—Try
to be serious.

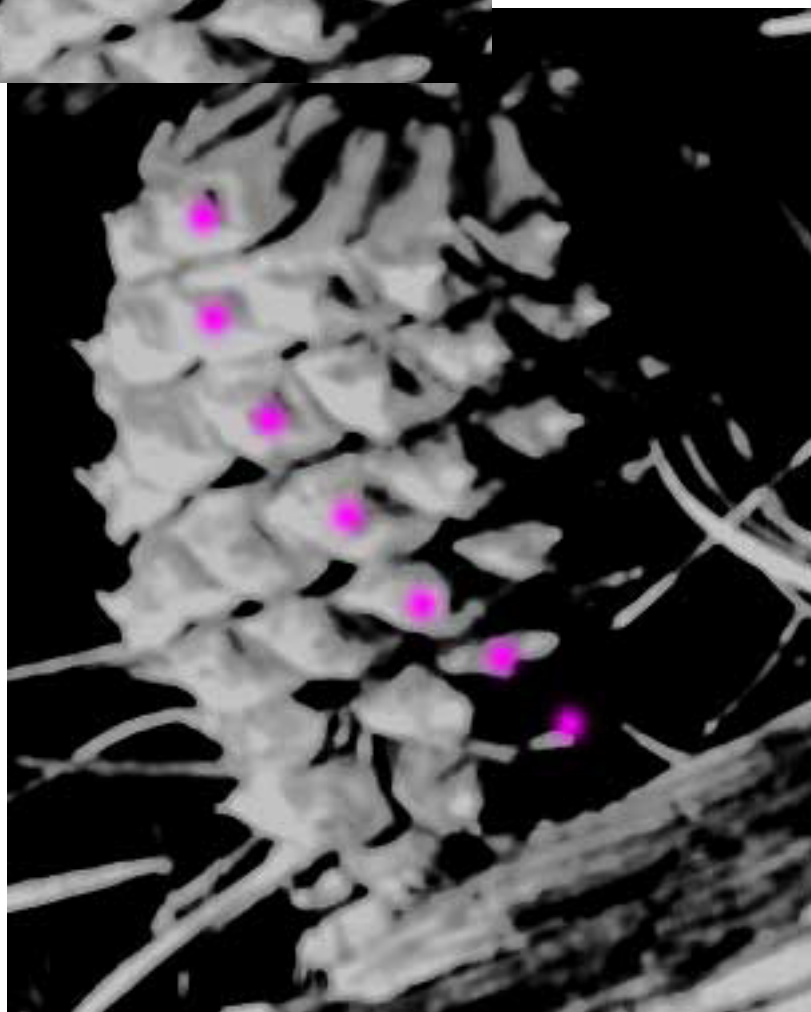
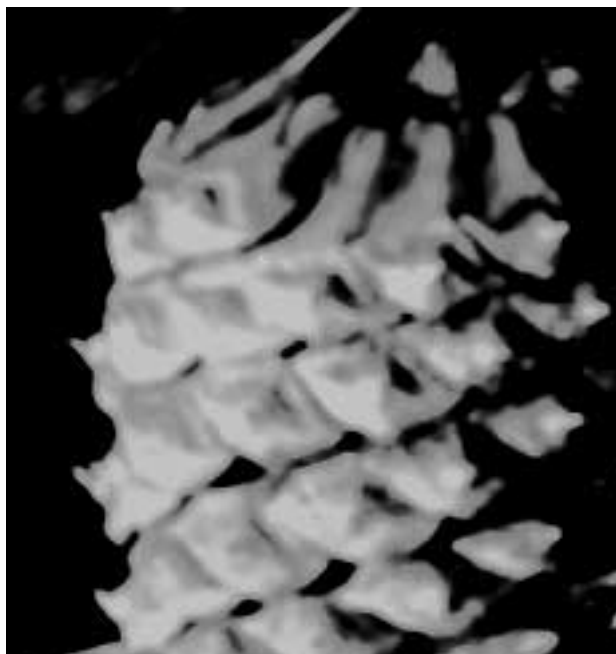
MIRROR OF RELATIONSHIP

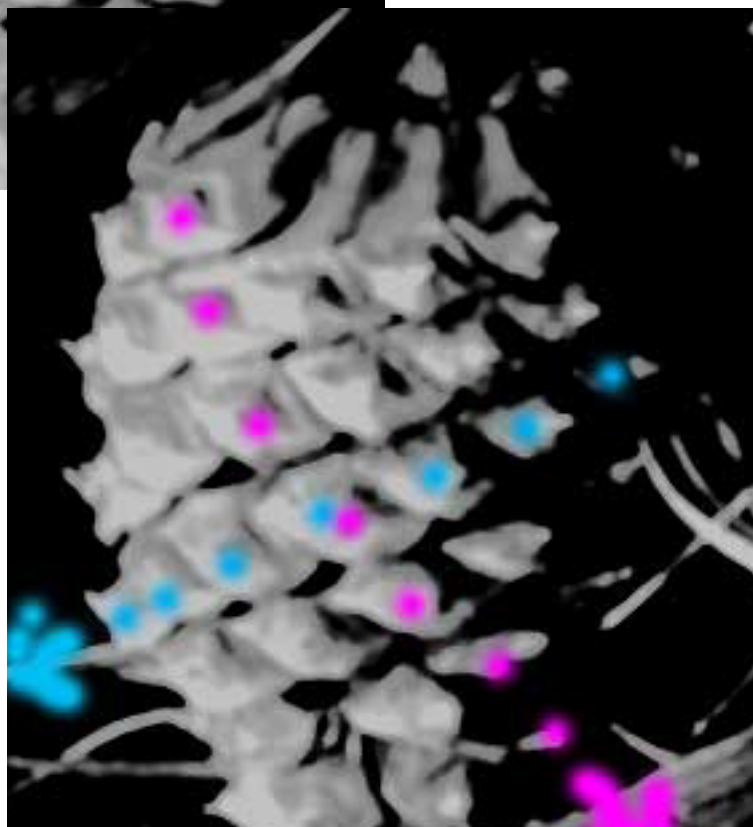
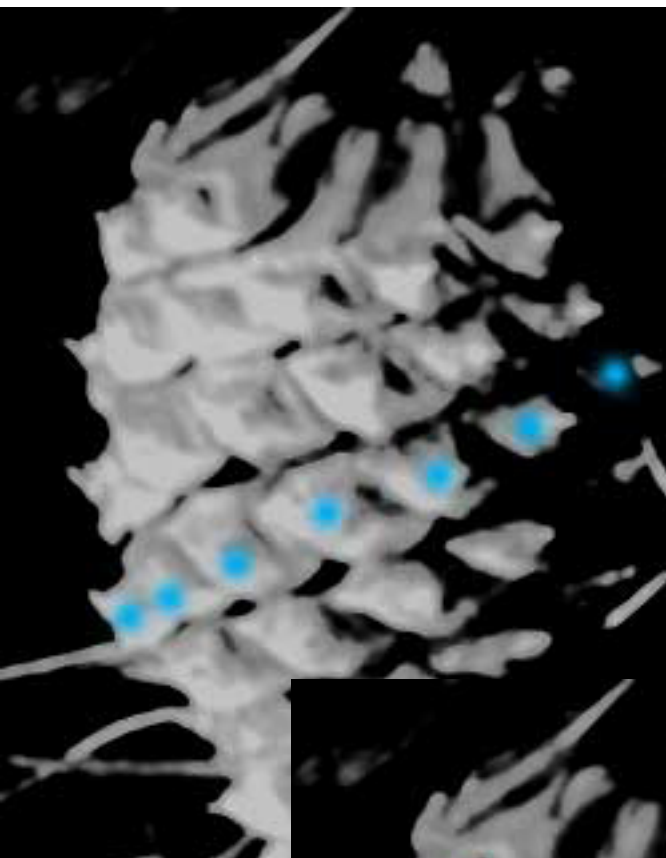
Every pattern is like a story.

Every story, like a path.

And every path is like a stream,
not of water, but of relationship.

As one moves through the land,
each step reveals something new
about ourselves, about the land,
and about the much larger spirit
which envelopes both.





PINCECONES & FORM AS MOVEMENT . . .

If you've never looked closely at the form of pinecone, you might be surprised to see that it has a lot to teach us. Here's an outline of the ponderosa cone pictured above:

Pinecones are for me a kind of archetype of complex form that emerges out of two simpler spiral movements.

One spiral *turns right*; The other spiral *turns left*.

The two spirals fit together (harmony) in a remarkable composite (simplex = *one-fold*; complex = *many-fold*).

In both poetry and music, this gives us a clear generative model of form that emerges naturally out of the weaving together of two simpler movements.

Gregory Bateson, the anthropologist and philosopher, was fond of saying, and I'm quoting here from memory so forgive me if I change his own words somewhat, that "*a sacrament is the outward manifestation of an inward spiritual grace.*"

That's exactly right. An inward spiritual grace.

The handiwork of some profound natural intelligence.
Where our description ends, along the forest trail, that is where
when we our lucky a new spiritual art might begin.
Why is it new? Well, only because it is not in books, not
in buildings like churches, and it doesn't really have anything to
do with belief. It has more to do with how natural beauty—an
inward spiritual grace—brings thought, and music, and poetry,
and all imagery to a temporary complete stop; It has to do more
with when we suddenly sense
ourselves resonating with something both deep inside and
vastly beyond ourselves.

All in a pinecone we find along a mountain forest path and
can hold in our hands . . .

ON THE DYNAMIC BALANCE OF PRIMARY CONTRASTS

What the rhythmic back and forth of sound and silence is to music and poetry, so the movement of bright light and deep shadow—white and black—is to the visual image. Both are primary complementarities. In other words, if the right balance between the poles of sound and silence, and the poles of light and darkness is not found at this fundamental level, the less basic planes of the composition will necessarily rest, like a house with its walls out of plumb, on shaky ground.

In music and poetry, it seems to me that the back and forth of sound and silence is directly related to the breath, and hence by implication to things spiritual; In the visual arts, the contrast of white and black is more directly related to the realms of being and non-being, or the explicitly manifest world of things, people and other physical objects, and the more subtle realm of the about-to-become of non-being.

As a general rule, I would say that the more silence, or the more darkness, a composition can hold and yet still maintain a kind of tension in balance between its complementary pole of sound or light or brightness, the more the composition tends to fill the space with an air of mystery. This, however, is difficult to achieve, and most likely not to be achieved in any self-conscious way. One can however

simply be aware of its great inherent importance, and when lucky, and when opportunity presents itself, get out of the way in time and simply let it happen.

WHOLE & PART

Sometimes, given an inherently limited field of vision, one can only reveal the whole by showing the parts.

SECURITY & WHOLENESS

Security is a property of the whole and its parts, not of fragments.

CREDO—a confession

For me, Religion has little or nothing to do with books or belief. Rather, for me, Religion has more to do with a kind of remembering, or reconnecting with something vastly bigger, more basic, and more important than myself. What I experience is a kind of coming back in resonance with a quality of wholeness, like a lost overtone retuning its alignment with the far deeper ground sound which is its source. This quality of wholeness is, it seems to me, in and of itself—regardless of how we think about or act towards it—sacred.

Notice the many “*re*” prefixes I use here. Although the etymology of the word religion itself is evidently obscure, many others have pointed out that it possibly stems from the Latin root, *religare*, meaning ‘*to bind, or connect,*’ as in the word ligature used in both medicine and music and meaning ‘*to tie together.*’ So we have the idea of tying together or linking. But also, importantly, of *re*-linking, *re*-remembering, *re*-connecting, perhaps even *re*-resonating, all of which strongly suggest to my ear and way of thinking a circle, a cycle, or recurrent coming round of some very basic spiritual movement.

Religion then as a movement for me begins at road’s end, where the way is too steep and too narrow for the orderly, systematic logic of thought to follow, and where the rigidity

of belief easily gives way to the more water like flexibility of the ever-possible. Here, I seem to find the mystery of the abundantly new and the unknown made manifest with each breath, with each passing step, with each unexpected bend of a trail.

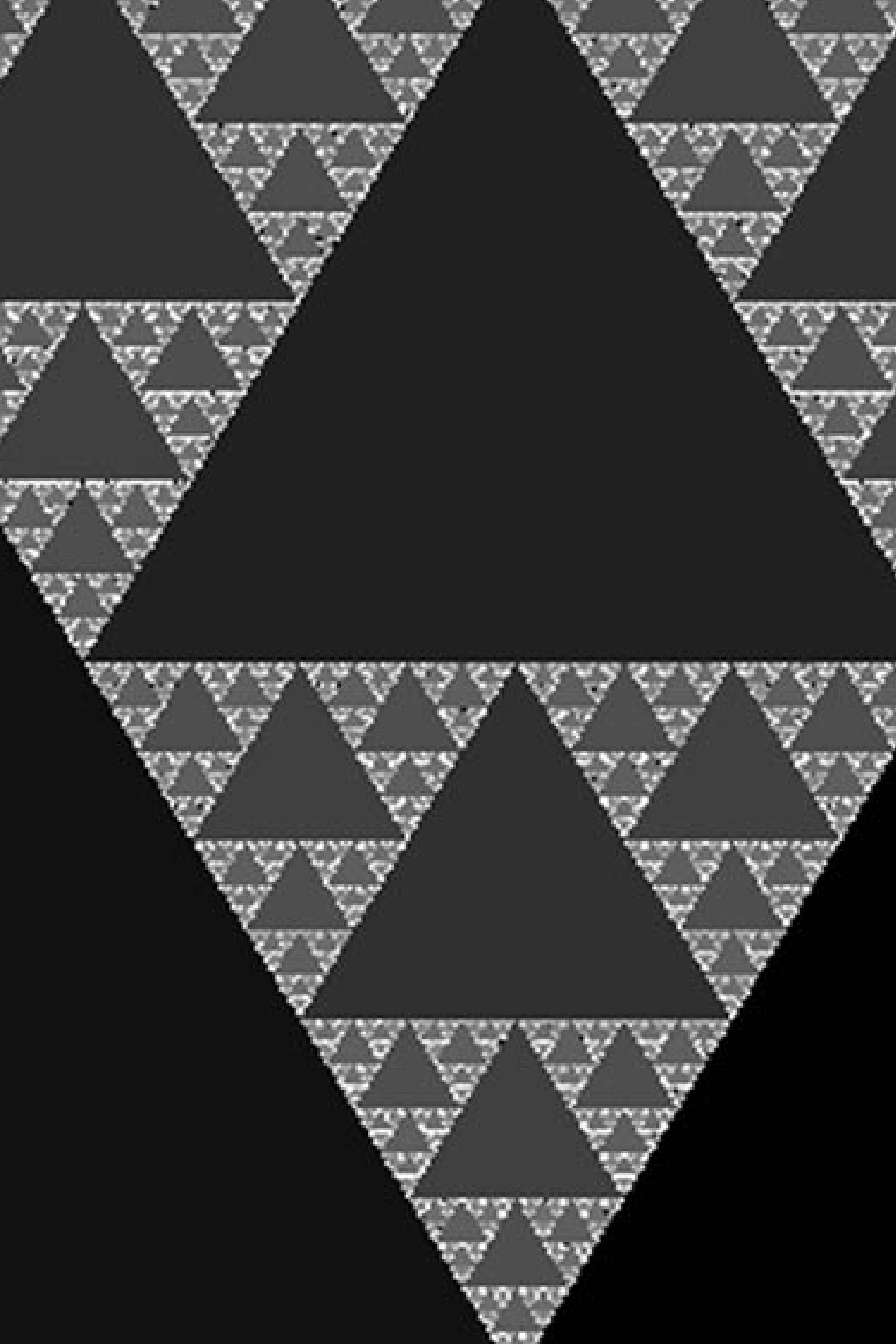
I light a match to a campfire, and see a timeless ring of humanity before me; I step out of my tent in the middle of the night and see a comet streak across a star-filled, moonless sky and wish only for more such nights; I awake to the distant sound of a bird I know I have never seen, perhaps never will see, but recognize and cherish its song, sounding its long, silver-thin notes in a pure, effortless way as if it were singing to all the mornings of the world.

I only ask myself, “*Why can't I sing like that?*”

That's something of what religion means to me.







The Little Clavier: Part VIII

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

ENERGY IPOD

Sine sole sileo
(Without sun I am silent)

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

The only reason we do not have an iPod for energy right now—a handy little device you could put in your pocket that condenses and stores, instead of an entire library's worth of information, an entire household's worth of kilowatts—is that those who profit from keeping us dependent on the stone-age fuels of fire and hydrocarbons wish to continue doing so until the supplies are exhausted. And for obvious reasons. That Exxon-Mobil wants to keep selling us oil until we enter a new dark-age is only reasonable and logical. That is, after all, their business. But that governments world-wide do likewise is not reasonable and logical.

Clearly, if the whole of Shakespeare can be condensed to the head of a pin, so can the whole of Einstein.

Clear also is that this will not happen until money and the distortions of power it buys are in a bold and simple way eliminated from politics. The only force capable of making this happen, it seems to me, is the natural convergence of common sense and the reasoned voices of public opinion and civil debate.

An iPod for energy may not be as far-fetched as it might sound. For the light of the sun to burn at night, and a new solar era to begin, we need only to turn off the switch on the blinding glare of wholly unnecessary corruption.

CONTRA NATURUM

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Humans are the only species now born into the world without a proper place to be, without a place to stand like a tree, or dig a simple hole like a squirrel, or build a nest like a winter wren.

For how many people does this lack of a place to be remain a life-long problem, beyond all hope of resolution? A quarter of humanity? A third? Or more?

Just as every human being has a self-evident right to clean air and water, so all have an inalienable right to enough land to meet their basic needs.

See the majesty of the solitary Douglas-fir, the depth of its roots as yet unsounded, the circumference of its spirit still unmeasured, still unknown, yet so fully present around the center of its growth, around the place where it stands.

SNOW COCKTAIL

Zinc from China,
Cadmium from Japan.
Atrazine from the Basel.
Mercury from Seattle,
Lead from Detroit.

Snow cocktail of the High Wallows,
pure spring water mixed with crushed snow,
these drifts that linger into the lazy heat of July.

Clear. Cool. Refreshing.

I drink to your health, friend.
For better or worse, we're in this together,
married to the oneness of the world.

SORRY, THIS SPACE IS TAKEN

One morning, you decide to take your children to the opera.
They say it is one of the greatest stories ever told.
Of great rivers.
Of great forests.
Of great snow-covered mountains.
Outside the opera, there are
hundreds, thousands, waiting to get in.
There is excitement everywhere,

so to the young heart,
the young mind.
The doors are flung open.
The building seems transparent,
as if it were made entirely of glass.
You enter with your children.
The orchestra is tuning in the distance.
You see a sea of seats, every color of the evening sky,
arranged in a circular array.
“*Odd,*” you think. “*What’s that?*” your daughter asks.
The seats all have identical signs.
A polite young woman in a neat blue uniform
and straight shoulder-length blonde hair
smiles sympathetically, her thin, pale lips not parting,
but somehow showing a slight trace of empathy, as she walks
towards you and says, “*Sorry mam.*
The seats are all spoken for.”
She adds, “*It’s always that way. Sold out.*
Nobody comes. Ever. But they’re always
sold out.”
She echoes your own words, “*Odd, don’t you think?*
The orchestra plays. The singers sing,
They don’t seem to notice that no one’s there.
They say it’s one of the greatest stories ever told.
Your children begin to cry. You almost do, too.
The crowd is pushing behind you.
“*Sorry mam. You’ll have to leave now.*
The show is about to begin.”

STOP WEEDS

Help!

**WALLOWA CO.
CONTROL
NOXIOUS WEEDS**

- PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE
- WHITETOP
- YELLOW STARHISTLE
- KNAPWEED *DIFFUSE-SPOTTED*
- LEAFY SPURGE
- TANSY RAGWORT
- SCOTCH THISTLE
- RUSH SKELETONWEED



CONTROL NOXIOUS WEEDS!

All the way from Fargo, North Dakota, across the whole of Montana and Idaho, and now circumnavigating the Wallowas, this is hands down the most striking weed sign I've encountered. As you can see, I was lucky enough to get a photo of the sign before it fell, or somebody knocked it over. Notice that its seven word message is full of metaphysical assumptions, like "control," and "your responsibility." But it does nicely fit the additional controlling metaphor of war, as in, war on weeds. The enemy is to be shot on sight (mistaking effect for cause), and the responsibility for both (that is, both the shooting and the cause) is yours, i.e., the little guy, you and me, the consumer with a few dimes in his or her pocket, or the rancher with a handful of cow/calf pairs and 160 acres.

The language hides—not in a deliberate, but still, in my view, insidious way—the dirty details of a vastly oversized livestock herd in North America (100,000,000 animals at this writing), an equally obscenely imbalanced agricultural energy household with huge areas of land growing corn to be force-fed to cattle (100,000,000 acres, an area the size of Oregon and six times the size of The Netherlands or Switzerland), and a good 100 years or more of both culturally acceptable and systematic overgrazing. The general economic motor which underlies all of these excesses is not need, and most certainly not a campaign to end world

hunger, but rather a subtilely orchestrated and artificially created demand for highly addictive, cheap, industrial, junk food.

That would make quite a sign, wouldn't it?:
STOP WEEDS! BOYCOTT MCDONALDS!

Now, that really would be my responsibility.
Viva la slow food!

HABITUAL MODES OF PERCEPTION

Images have become cheap.

Perhaps you've noticed as I have that the typical consumption of pictures has a more or less regular rhythm to it. Much like the picking of berries from a bush, putting them hungrily in our mouths as our hand reaches down to grab still more, and sustaining the feast as long as the habit of "browsing" magazines and photobooks in much the same way. The tempo of both types of browsing—berries and images—is upon closer inspection remarkably similar, about two beats or quarter notes in 2/4 time, metronome marking 80 to 84. One, two; One, two; One, two, etc., etc., etc., with each repetition marking a flip of the page. Like most human rhythm, this is most likely tied to the breath cycle and heartbeat. (Clicking through images on the internet is basically the same, although perhaps a bit more limited or slower, depending on the speed of your connection.)

As a musician, I find this interesting. I find it also disturbing. In browsing berries, such feasts are rare. But not so with contemporary images; they are everywhere, hitting us on all sides. It would be interesting to know, on average, how many still images a person of Western city-culture encounters per day. It is almost certainly orders of magnitude more than a wholesome visual diet might desire, or might be able to accommodate.

So, for artists putting their whole soul into each image they make, this is not good news. The problem for me is simple: how to get the window or frame of each image out of the world of mere consumption and back into the natural world of very much slower, not consumption, but contemplation. The latter, in my experience at least, is tied not so much to browsing, but rather to walking, and then on frequent, special occasions, sitting. Sitting to let the scene, the object, the tableau, the movement, speak to you. This is just like one might naturally stop and sit and listen to what an interesting stranger encountered on a path might have to say.

Perhaps this is why museums, which I have come to dislike almost as much as I dislike the 2nd-hand decadence on display in classical music concert halls, still have something of a role to play. First, we expect museums, like libraries, to be silent. Second, we expect to walk from space to space—certainly a more noble rhythm than mere page flipping. Third, we expect to experience if not objects of truth and beauty, than at least something which is artistically in some way meaningful, or as the initiated say, “shockingly original.” Admittedly, the light, or the air, or the tap water, or the soundscape, won’t quite match what is offered in the mountains at any time and at any season entirely for free, but at least it will allow us to exit—if for however briefly—our everyday images-as cheap-browse habitual mode of perception.

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN METAPHORICAL & LITERAL MIND

For the natural state of metaphorical mind, what others perceive as isolated facts are but unrealized opportunities in the dance of relationship. For the literal mind, this dance has stopped; with laser-like precision, it focuses on the outward features of things:—shards, digits, mere 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 so many more massive dams.

Clearly, in proper measure, we need both, both the metaphorical and literal minds. But even more, we need to see clearly the difference between them.

ON THE CULT OF COMPLICATION

The contemporary worship of complication confuses the unnecessarily difficult and obscure for the true mystery and complexity of the new and unknown. Complication goes on to mistake the cleverness of mere mechanical intellect for the insights of real inspiration and intelligence. Always: such mischief begins with the loss of resonance with the simplicity/complexity cycles of the natural world.

ON THE SOUND OF RUSHING MOUNTAIN WATER—*a reflection*

If someone were to come back to the high and rugged Glacier National Park watershed from just a 100 years ago, the first thing they might notice come the end of September would be an eerie silence. Where is the sound of rushing water? With mountain spring coming two or three weeks earlier than in the past, and glacier ice disappearing faster than any one had ever thought possible, streams normally fed by snow- and ice-melt towards the end of summer and early fall evidently now tend to be mute and dry.

Walking the land resonant with this unnatural silence, I kept asking myself, *“Is this what is going to happen to the Alps, as well? Will they, too, not just lose their great and magnificent living bodies of snow and ice, but also simply begin to dry up?”*

I can't help but carry this question with me wherever I go.

ON THE NECESSARY SEPARATION OF ETHICS & RELIGION

One of the great fundamental insights of the U.S. Constitution, derived from the traditions of ancient Roman law, is the idea of balance of power. Of equal importance is the principle of the separation of religion and state. Now, it seems to me, that we would benefit greatly if we were to in a similar spirit of balance and clear structure separate religion from ethics. Indeed, I would argue that a new set of demanding moral problems makes such a division imperative.

Why? Because, in the view being roughly outlined here, the theater of moral debate demands that we check our cloak of sectarian beliefs at the door. For with moral questions, just as in a republic no one may claim to be above the law, in democratic dialogue, no one or no argument may make claims to absolute authority.

How then are we to decide what is good, right and just? Well, I would say by placing calmly the arguments, the evidence, or the competing theories on either side of the scales of truth. And then weighing their relative strengths and weaknesses within the widest contexts deemed relevant. For if we really consider this process carefully, what is of crucial importance—indeed, sacred, some would say—is the motionless, neutral center upon which the fair, unbiased balance of the scale depends.

ON THE FRAGMENTATION OF RELIGION, SCIENCE & ART

Religion seems lost in a prison of outmoded rigid hierarchies and absolute belief.

Science seems lost in a reductionist labyrinth of inferences, driven not by insight, or by the ethical imperatives of a deeply troubled contemporary world, but merely by exceedingly abstract, and / or profitable, theoretical interests.

Art seems lost in a supermarket of entertainment, mistaking cheap techno glitz for real passion, and quick thrills for real spiritual uplift.

Like three vain goddesses lost in the walled garden of their own self love, they gaze in their separate mirrors day after day, and fight and bicker about who is the fairest.

If Truth were the judge, not *one of the three*, but *the three as one*, would be the most beautiful of all.

NIGHT THOUGHTS ON A FUTURE ENERGY HOUSEHOLD

As I see it, one of the primary opportunities presented by the universal ascendancy of digital technologies is the potential elimination of waste. With all types of hardware, for example, whether cameras, or laptops or other associated electronics, the answer is resoundingly clear: closed-loop recycling and/or cyclical leasing. You lease a new camera from Canon or Nikon, use it till it breaks or is not right for your work, and then trade it in at a price for a new one, knowing that Canon and Nikon are committed by law to responsible recycling. The same kind of cyclical leasing would work for a laptop from Apple or Dell. And in terms of distribution, there is now the possibility of a shift in our thinking away from cars and hydrocarbons to networks of flowing bits and electrons powered by ever-more efficient renewables.

As I see it, the bottom line of all this is the movement of energy. By this I mean both the physical electrons, but also energy in the much more subtle sense of meaning. The key thing to watch in this general movement of energy, the key limiting factor, is again waste. Waste in terms of what I've called complicatedness, or poor design, and waste in terms of squandered intellectual energy or meaninglessness.

If you think about this a little, the free, efficient flow of

both physical and cultural energy fit together quite well. Perhaps necessarily so. Why? Because we need a free flow of information and meaning to grow a superior quality of learning and education, one soundly rooted in an exuberant yet ethical scientific spirit, in order to create the necessary new technologies. And, of course, we also need the new technologies to establish such new networks of learning.

So, we can see an exciting energy revolution unfolding right before us. Keep an eye to the more subtle sides of cultural change. Watch shifts of meaning. The meaning of rooftops is bound to change as you see your neighbors turn the old wasted space of waterproof, insulating surfaces into rooftop gardens and pv-powerhouses. Watch the meaning shift as you come to see they are not only attractive, but also spinning their meters backwards. Watch the meaning of that fowl and filthy and repugnant relic of empire—the suburban lawn—implode as you find traces of an indeterminately long and synergistic list of unwanted substances in your well water, and then see others happily harvesting a cornucopia of veggies from their victory gardens, and herbs from the butterfly patch.

All else will look like, as the turn of phrase has it, senseless waste.

EPIPHANIES—*three 37-step poems*

(i)

Lover of wisdom,
Pythagoras hears two anvils
sound octaves at a blacksmith's shop.

Suddenly,

half of weight is half
the length of a lightly touched string.

(ii)

“Wa-ter. Wa-ter. Water.”
Thrice the fingers of the teacher
write in the palm of a girl's hand.

Suddenly,

all things have names, and
the girl sees more than those who see.

(iii)

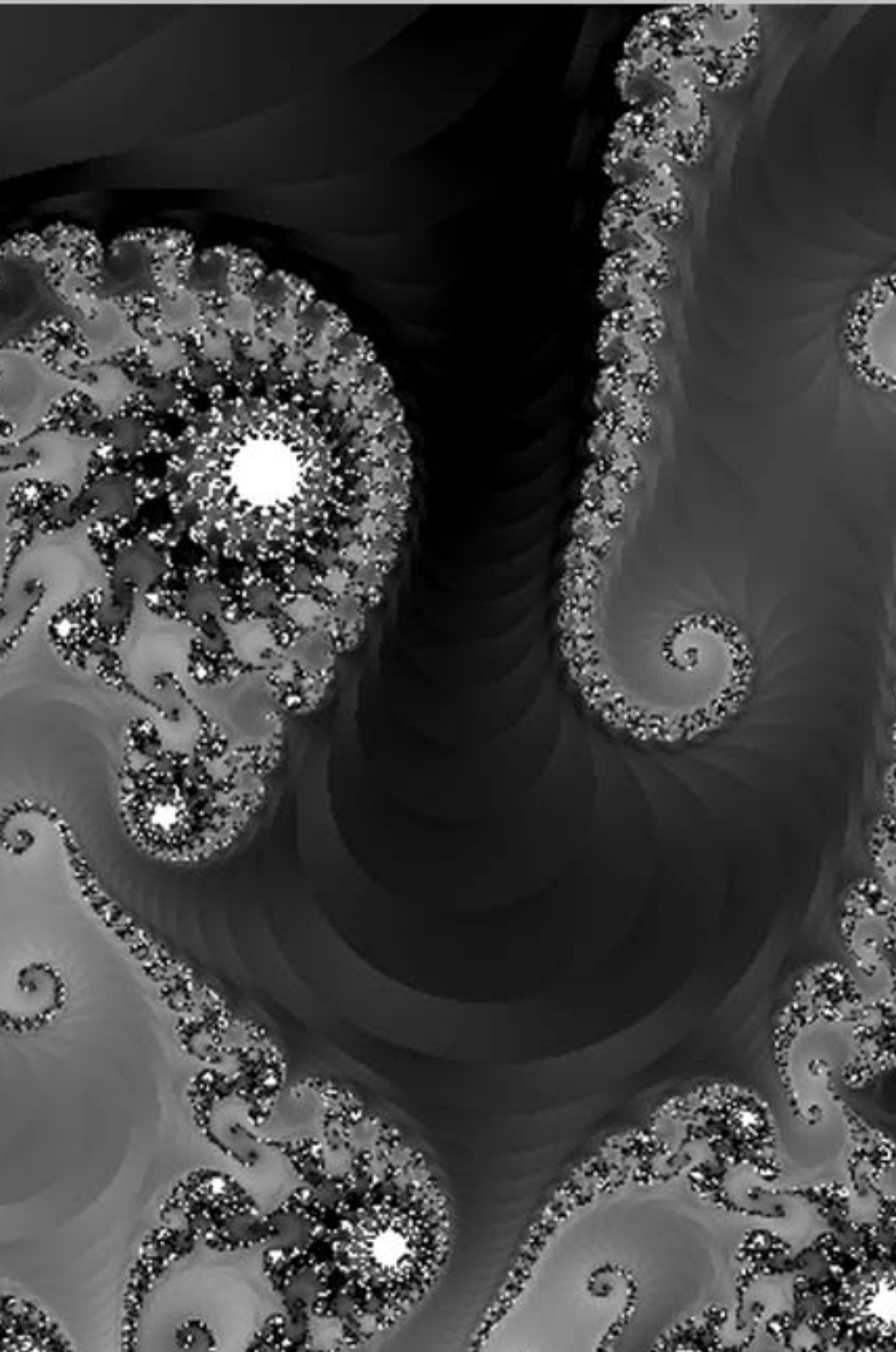
Strangest of creations,
a serpent with arms and feathers
slithers to the edge of its cliff.

Suddenly,

take-off, thin air! Boot







The Little Clavier: Part IX

The most insidious of all degradations is the loss of something vitally important for which we do not yet have a name.

ON THE NECESSITY OF ONE FREE WORLD-WIDE WEB

Just as economies move goods, and roads move traffic, the Internet's function is essentially to simply freely move bits.

Freely is a key word here. Freedom of flow, in my view, can be achieved and safe-guarded only by the democratic, open and transparent structure of public works. Public roads are perhaps the best example. Notice that around the world we hardly need add the epithet public, because roads are by now almost by definition, 'public.' My contention here is that public roads would serve as a good model for the Internet and the World-wide Web as well. Why? Because the Internet, just like roads, has already become far too important a resource to let it be controlled and determined merely by the short-sighted and highly fragmentary vision of commercial self-interest.

Imagine for a moment a patchwork of roads and highways broken up into arbitrary pieces, all designed, owned and managed by different individuals, families and clans, with gateways and check points that require that you stop your vehicle and pay a fee for right-of-passage. Indeed, in the not-that-distant past, roads in many parts of the American Northwest started out in just this way. The problem with this kind of wild-west model of development is that, while it may function well at first to get things started, in the long-term it lacks real social intelligence which comes with

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accountability and spirited, open debate. It will therefore eventually reveal itself to be the bottleneck of economic development and community well-being that it really is.

Why? Just imagine for moment that I build a bridge across a stream that is difficult to ford. And say that this bridge cost me about \$10,000 to built. Now, I charge 10 cents to cross, a fair price I think, and an average of about 100 people cross each day. So in less than three years time I've recouped my initial investment, and can look forward to both an increase of traffic and perhaps a measured yearly addition to the fee I charge as well. I have a monopoly, because I have the only way to gain access to the other side of the river. You might say I have a pretty good business model. The only flaw is that, when seen from the wider social context, the model is unambiguously bad for everybody else. So, in an open society based on democratic discourse, very quickly, the community will decide that it should take responsibility for the bridge and purchase it from me, drop the charge, and finance its maintenance with public money.

After having biked so far more than five thousand kilometers all around the Northwest of the US the past two years, I can say without hesitation that the state of the Internet is as far as I'm concerned a complete mess. Connections are slow. Connections are hard to find. Connections are expensive when you do find them, and even when paying a relatively high price, they are unreliable. In sum, I would say—and I am by no means an expert here but simply amazed

that it is not the top priority issue that it deserves to be—the development of the infrastructure for the Internet has been left to what is essentially the private road paradigm sketched above, with all its inevitable random profiteering, helter-skelter, confused and outdated infrastructures, and ultimately, nearly universal end-user frustration.

In other words, there is a total lack of vision.

What is remarkable is that this lack of vision is entirely at the social and political levels, and not at all in terms of the science of the Internet's technical infrastructure. Here, the Internet sparkles brilliantly on all its sides with the robust simplicity and foresight of well-designed open source protocols, and their nearly miraculous decentralized physical embodiment as servers, routers, and an increasingly rich polyphony of Internet-enabled portable devices.

So why, we might ask, are things in such a state of disarray at the social and political levels? I would say because of a chaotic confusion of meanings. The basic question is, "What's the Internet good for?" Shifting from our road analogy for the moment to the image of the Internet-as-pipe, we might then ask the question, "What flows through it?" Clearly, for some, it is cash. For others, it is entertainment, not that different from TV. For others, it is communication, not that different from the telephone. Or others might say more generally it is information, not that different from radio or print journalism, or what you might find

on the shelves of your public library. One pipe; many different contents. Many different contents; many different meanings. What they all have in common, however, is that they are social, cultural networks based on the free flow of bits of data. Where they differ is again, what the network is for, who controls it, and who pays for it.

My own view is that in a highly abstract, subtle, and yet at the same time completely earth-bound, physical and tactile way, the culture has become the network, and in a reciprocal manner, the network has become a central and key manifestation of the culture. In other words, it is vastly more than the mere sum of its parts, vastly more than just television, or radio, or motion pictures, or telephone. And yet these are still the predominant controlling models used to grasp the network's nature. In the view being sketched here, with the Web's great and still largely unsounded cultural promise becoming potentially locked down in traffic jams behind a motley assortment of unnecessarily blocked gateways and toll bridges, none of these seem adequate.

Far better would be to have one adventurous and creative city, or small nation anywhere in the world demonstrate to the rest of us the extraordinary cultural benefits of realizing maximum achievable bandwidth combined with universal free access. I would guess that the rest of the world will stumble over itself to imitate their success. After all, a good third or more of the world's resources are presently squandered on the highly questionable ends of war and its

weaponry. It might prove much more effective to shift and enlighten our paradigm, and focus not on weaponry, but, as R. Buckminster Fuller used to say in his charming and inimitable way—livingry. Livingry, yes. Not a bad image for a network that links us all together, and thereby both celebrates and protects, the rich diversity of the world.

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 make more and more money, and 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.

WHEN GROWTH IS ‘FALSE COMPARE’

*“What grows is good.
And if something is good,
it’s good to want more of it . . .”*

Behind the intellectual facade of economic growth lies the harsh, hidden reality of a very real, and in terms of the natural world, anti-growth. Anti-growth is the wholesale destruction, either by means of over-use or contamination, of the shared vital resources of the world community such as air, water, forests, or soil. Anti-growth is not just an unfortunate side-effect; it is an absolute necessity needed to fire the engines of an inherently destructive economics of expansion. And that is the ironic twist here because it conceals itself by means of the illusion projected by what in essence is false analogy.

Let me start over again: As every bard knows, there’s nothing worse than, to use Shakespeare’s phrase, ‘false compare.’

Language shapes perception; and perception in turn shapes action. Analogy, or the this-is-like-that of thought, is essentially finding similarity in difference, or finding a common feature in seemingly different patterns of movement.

For example, we say: “Forests grow.” And by analogy, we say: “Economies grow.” We all know that forests actually grow, whereas the transference of growth as a property to describe patterns of change in economies is an entirely different matter.

This may be more or less true, or it may be false.

My contention is that it is false. And what is more, I would argue that the property of natural growth when transferred to current industrial economies is intrinsically confused and confusing.

For clarity's sake, let's consider growth in the natural world for a moment.

As we all know, from the human perspective, growth is more often than not a slow, steady process. Very slow. So slow in fact that we normally cannot see it. That is why time-lapse photography of a flower bud unfolding, or a glacier wasting away at its surface, breaking apart and retreating, is so revealing. Natural growth is frequently measured in areas of space so small, and spans of time so long, that it lies beyond the grasp of both our normal sense of proportion and the resolution of our temporal perception. For example, a lichen grows about one centimeter a century. And the soft, rich humus layer of soil in the high mountains around treeline increases its depth 10 times slower yet: about a centimeter every thousand years. That's 30 human generations or so for every finger-width of soil stable enough to support the alpine grasses under your boots. Slow growth, from the human perspective, to be sure!

A second key point is that natural growth is normally cyclical. And it is cyclical in a highly rhythmic way. As everywhere in

Nature, there are limits. And because there are limits, there is balance. In other words: without limits, there can be no balance; as well as the inverse: if there is imbalance, limits have somehow broken down.

So natural growth is not normally simply a matter of the endless linear expansion that economists evidently have in mind. And more especially, natural growth is not the species of expansion known as exponential increase, as I've argued elsewhere. Increase or expansion in Nature is always balanced by a complementary and equally essential movement of contraction, or a rhythmic movement of decline, and—ultimately—death and decay. Nowhere do we see this from the human perspective more clearly than the life of the soil, to which we all know that we too shall return some day, and which depends on this continuous composting and transformation of dead and dying organisms for its sustained vitality.

Now let's return briefly to the implications of the false analogy. When politicians or theorists speak of economic growth, they do not have in mind anything remotely similar to the .01 mill growth rate of the alpine soils mentioned above. As I suggested, they are really thinking of largely unnatural systems of linear expansion—a kind of always 'getting bigger' stretching out without limit to infinity—as well as the notorious expansion-of-expansion of compound interest. If you are focused on dollars or euro amounts, a change or expansion rate of just 5% compound interest will more than double your money in just 16

years. But the question which is never asked, is how long can this unlimited interest-on-top-of-interest continue to increase before it collapses, as it necessarily must? In contrast, natural growth is by definition always limited and self-sustaining. And, as suggested with the concept of anti-growth mentioned above, the economist's use of the analogy is in actual fact a pernicious inversion of meaning. In the reality of the natural world, Wall Street's expansion means Nature's loss, not growth. Why? Well, simply because of the lack of all reasonable and rational limits, and because of its rapacious need for ever-more raw materials. One need only think of paper. From the economy of false compare's perspective, razing the boreal forest—which is actually taking place right now—for paper pulp used in toilet paper, or for millions of unwanted glossy commercial catalogues, is growth, which is of course, utter non-sense. That is the essence of the contradiction.

And so we come full circle to the dead-end of the speculative mind, so at odds with the family forester's, or organic farmer's, or small-scale rancher's point of view. It is as I've already said above a confused and confusing notion of growth which rests on the blind hope and downfall of every gambler:—that each toss of the dice will result in the impossibility of a straight-line series of wins going on forever. A shaky notion of growth, and bad analogy, indeed!

OUT OF CONTROL—*the runaway economies of systemic imbalance*

I have argued elsewhere, that all truly free economies are necessarily strictly limited ones. This goes, of course, radically against the prevailing metaphysics that freedom increases with the decrease of regulation. Let's see why. The model I like to use is that of an essentially self-regulating, self-organizing network of highways. The point I like to make is that systems of roads function as well as they do because they are ordered not on principles of control—that is, rules that tell you what to do—but rather on principles of limit—that is, rules that tell you what not to do, like no faster or slower than x.

My contention is that a small set of clear, unambiguous rules or limits is a hallmark of all self-organizing systems. (A rule of thumb—with no play on words intended—is that, if you have more limits than fingers on one hand, something is wrong. One ought always be able to tick off the rules quickly and rhythmically as a test of clarity.) What do I mean by self-organizing? Well, in human terms, the key feature of self-organization is that it requires little or no policing. In other words, the system exhibits natural in-built safeguards against, and correction of, all breaking of limits. I don't want to crash into you, and you don't want to crash into me, so we naturally both readily accept all such reasonable limits. Another way of saying the same thing negatively is: a self-organizing system has failed, that is, has demonstrated an inappropriate or ill-designed set of limits,

when it is in need of continuous control by use of force. The key point I would like to make here, is that this is a systemic problem, and not an ethical one concerning a few individuals of questionable moral character. For example, in my view, current US drug laws are a textbook illustration of such failure, causing far more suffering and disorder than they eliminate, both on the streets of North American cities and in the developing countries where source plants like poppies and coca are grown. (Even arch-conservative economist Milton Friedman thought this to be the case.) So, excessive use of force by the State in democratic countries is, in the view being sketched here, a plain indication that somewhere in the background of an arcane legal system lurks a poorly conceived, self-defeating labyrinth of unjust laws and self-serving legislation. So, what would a clear set of self-organizing limits for a free economy look like? In this miniature, I'm not going to try to answer this question directly. Rather, I'd like to state by way of two examples drawn from current financial headlines what a truly free—and therefore strictly limited—economy would not look like.

In 1999, the Clinton administration repealed a key depression era piece of legislation known as the Glass-Steagall Act. This act was designed to keep—in other words, to limit—savings and speculative investment banks separate. Repealing the act removed the limits, thus effectively giving government sanction for bankers of all stripes to imprudently throw the dice, so to speak, with the money in our savings accounts.

A second crucial misstep occurred in 2004 when under the Bush administration, then chairperson of Goldman Sachs and now Secretary of the Treasury, Hank Paulson, convinced the Securities and Exchange Commission to lift limits on required investment capital.* This led to the remarkable situation that, when Bear Stearns went under, they were leveraging, to use an ugly phrase, 33 dollars of debt on every dollar of equity, to use another equally cumbersome expression. In other words, the 1930's depression era saying, "A dime will get you a dollar," had become under Secretary Paulson's influence, "Three cents will get you a dollar!"

Now, to continue with our analogy of a self-organizing and self-regulating network of highways, the repeal of Glass Steagall and allowing the savings and investment branches of the banking system to merge, is the roadway equivalent of allowing NASCAR to run races freely on the Interstate. And to add insult to injury, the 2004 repeal of capital limits is the equivalent of giving the fastest and most high-powered of those race-cars a loan of essentially free gas (3 cents on the dollar . . .). The result has been, as everyone now knows, catastrophic. The collapse, in my view, while not perhaps in all its on-going gory details, but rather in its general outline, was completely predictable. And what is more, it is not the mere result of the greed of 'a few bad apples,' but I would argue of systemic poor design. That is, the utter failure to compose a clear set of unambiguous limits. Again, just as is already universally the case with networks of roads around the world.

My central point, however, does not concern the details of reform that would lead to less corruption and a more equitable distribution of wealth and access to resources, but rather one of basic logical necessity. Most readers are probably already aware, that, in the recent US election cycle, Mr. McCain received about seven million dollars in backing from Wall Street; While Mr. Obama received about 10 million. My contention is that, as long as it is possible to purchase influence in this way, and on this scale, the economy must necessarily be skewed to the expensive race cars of the already reckless hyper-rich, resulting in a continuous cascade of unnecessary and unpredictable pile-ups and crashes. And, if we fail to take heed of this basic difference between, on the one hand, intelligent limit, and on the other, rigid mechanical control or regulation, then we had better prepare ourselves for more self-induced world-wide economic runaways charging headlong into degenerative chaos. As Virgil has it in his arresting image of his Georgics: *“The world is like a chariot run wild, that rounds the course unchecked, and, gaining speed, sweeps the helpless driver onto his doom.”*

** data drawn from an excellent Democracy Now! interview (X.17.2008) with Paul Craig Roberts, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Department in the Reagan administration and a former associate editor of the Wall Street Journal.*

FASTING AS PRINCIPLE

(1) Every habit becomes its own formative cause;

*(2) The simplest and most powerful
of all possible tests is the test of doing without.*

My theme here is perhaps not what you might expect. Anyone nowadays encountering the word “fasting” naturally thinks of doing without food for a while, deliberately, so as to loose weight, or perhaps as part of some kind of spiritual discipline. My concern here, however, is very much more general. I would like in this context to look at fasting in as broad a view as possible, as a kind of general principle of doing without. Doing without anything. Cars. Coffee. Computers. French-fries. Fasting or doing without really is, as the saying above has it, “the simplest of all possible tests.” After all, we do not have to learn, or buy anything new for the test to take place. Instead, we simply stop doing something we are used to as a kind of open question. What will happen if I stop doing x? What will happen if I stop drinking soda? What will happen if I stop watching TV, or writing at my computer?

Because we have generalized the principle of fasting in this way, once it is grasped, there is no limit to its application. That is the meaning of the phrase in the epigram above, “the most powerful.” For it might be not just a question about me, or you, or other separate individuals. It might be a question about

a very much larger context. For example, a rancher might ask what might happen if he stopped grazing a particular pasture. Or a farmer might wonder what would happen if she stopped using anhydrous ammonia as an energy input in her corn operation. Or a group of teachers might ask what would happen if they stopped segregating classes by age, or if they stopped grading and testing altogether.

From here, we can easily see the circle of possibilities widening to include whole cities, states, nations, or even groups of nations. For example, what would happen if there were a universal highway maximum speed limit of 100 k (60 mph.)? How would that effect CO2 emissions worldwide? Or, more in keeping with doing without, what would happen if cities, or states, or countries would experiment again, as was done back in the 1974 oil crisis, with “auto-less Sundays?”

What if? That is the spirit of this surprisingly simple yet powerful question. Just what if . . . ?

Now that we have a rough outline of fasting as a general principle, let me continue by briefly illustrating the how and why of its use.

Why try doing without something anyway? For example, doing without soda. “What’s the problem?” you ask. “I like pop.” Well, that’s just it. In most cases, we are confronted by, or trying to solve, a difficulty or problem. The word problem itself

is interesting. Its root meaning is, “something thrown at you,” suggesting a thing we must deal with whether we want to or not. And, indeed, it is clear that life does seem to be constantly throwing these difficulties at us, of all shapes and sizes, both individually and collectively. Things that are in need of some kind of resolution, that have to be worked out ideally here and now. Say you are chronically overtired, or that you are overweight, or that you have a small child that has difficulty focusing on reading and other learning tasks, both at home and at school. Or that you have, for the sake of our example, all of the above, which is frequently the case. Then you read something about high fructose corn syrup allergy and suddenly realize that both you and your child drink two or three cans of soda a day. As a test, you decide to stop drinking soft-drinks altogether just to see what happens. Note that I’m not saying one should or should not do this; it’s just the principle I wish to make clear. And what is clear is this, I think:—the elegance of the approach. See for yourself. What would you rather do? Take your high blood-pressure medications with Coke, or just stop drinking the Coke—most likely the root cause of your problem—and get off the medications entirely?

Now, what exactly are we stopping? Clearly, it’s a kind of habit, is it not? Habits, in the view being explored here, are of key importance. They come in all sizes, large and small, and varying degrees of subtlety. And they by no means merely concern food. It might be something else, like watching TV for hours on end without a break, now nearly universal in Western culture. Or it

might be the habit of always driving wherever you go, near or far, even if it's the grocery or the library down the street. Collectives of people like nations also have habits, but sometimes with ramifications amplified a thousand fold. For instance, the US has the habit of behaving like the rich brat in the international neighborhood, always having to get its own way. The point of habit is that it is a pattern of doing things that is at once largely unconscious and, at the same time, frequently the cause of our own undoing. Habit is really a unique species or pattern of movement, a pattern of movement of energy that has tied itself up in knots. At best, it is a waste of time and resources; at worst, it may be tragically self-destructive.

By now, you may ask, "If habits can so easily be dealt with, and at the same time potentially cause so much harm, why don't we act?" The answer will in an experiential way become self-evident if you personally try a little doing-without yourself. Not necessarily with food. That might require the professional help of a nurse or doctor. Start small. Try turning off your TV, or computer, or cellphone for a week. Then remember: our little epigram above says, "the simplest of all possible tests," not the easiest!

What will very quickly become painfully obvious is that it is not just not easy, it is in fact incredibly hard. At least at first. And that's the answer to our question. Every adult knows the classic symptoms of the pain of withdrawal when we suddenly stop ingesting or taking some substance we are habituated to

like coffee, or tobacco, or worse. Addiction is from this point of view simply an extreme form of habit. Nothing more. And the Western bias of sanctioning some addictions like coffee, or chocolate, or alcohol, and prohibiting others is just that: a bias of a specifically cultural and arbitrary kind. Generally, the more subtle or a part of the intellectual realm the addictive habit is, the less it is considered as such, and the less it is considered in Western culture as something of concern. That too, is completely an arbitrary bias. (More on this below.)

My contention is that, though the object of habit can evidently vary without limit, habit itself as a pattern is always the same. And, what is more, that the reversal of habit—untying the knot as it were—is also as a pattern more or less always the same.

In a future essay, I hope to sketch out what I have come to think of as the Five Stages of Freeing Oneself from Habit: *(1) pain; (2) doubt; (3) reversal; (4) hope; (5) freedom.*

In closing, just let me note that the implications of what we have seen about habit so far are considerable, especially in terms of the young. One of the strongest indictments of current economic systems I can think of is the ruthless attempt to colonize the tastes, wants and desires of the young child through the propaganda of advertising, most of which takes place sitting hour after hour, day after day, year after year, in front of televisions.

This is what I meant when I stated that, the more subtle the habit, the less serious the attention Western culture gives to it. Whereas the body is deemed worthy of a whole host of largely counter-productive protections, the mind, or spirit, or psyche of the young child is for all intents and purposes completely up for grabs. Appalling, indeed.

This is clearly where mother nature and wilderness may come to our rescue. As it has so frequently in the past ever since humanity came to live so far away from the land in large urban centers, getting out hiking or backpacking is a way of finding our roots, our grounding again. Without going to extremes, if you can carry enough food on your back for just a day, I do not for a moment doubt that you will get a sense of all five stages of doing without, perhaps even a taste of freedom. It's like crossing a pass. It really is. At first you think you'll just never make it. But if you can somehow persevere and keep going, step by step, you may just make it to the other side. And it's all downhill from there.

FALL-BACK

With all fundamental change, we should prepare ourselves for what I think of as *fall-back*. This is a sudden slide back into an old habit of thought and action.

Say, I quit smoking. Then one rainy day, in a moment of weakness, someone offers me a cigarette, and I'm right back in the old groove again. Or, we decide to take apart at great cost the horrendous mistake of atomic reactors, and begin the complicated task of getting rid of all the hazardous waste. Then one dark day, oil and electricity prices soar, and suddenly we want to turn the reactors back on again. (This is actually taking place in Germany right now as I write this.)

The transition from old to new, from an old regime or pattern of movement—and way of seeing and thinking—to a new, better, healthier one. This process or period of change from one state to another should have a special name. It is always an exacting, exciting time, alive with new challenges. But it is also a vulnerable, tender time, like spring, in which new, emerging growth can be frozen dead in an instant with the return and harsh indifference of a late winter's frost. But see the reddish tinge on many new shoots and leaves. It's natural 'antifreeze,' Nature's way of protecting new growth during the transition time from high-country spring to summer. We would do well, I think, to mimic the wisdom of this kind of just-in-case protection. This tendency of to fall back is made very much worse by

those who for whatever reason do not wish to go along with fundamental change. In the shadow cast by real innovation's forward momentum, there will always be those who will remain doggedly committed to the old, outmoded technologies, like nuclear energy and fossil fuels, perhaps because of some special, vested interest. It's only to be expected. But from the wider perspective, these are just natural, temporary slips on the bright if sometime difficult path of progressive change.

ON TWO IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS TO NATURAL MOVEMENT

The natural web of life has deep roots in both space and time. Its strength is not just its resilience, but also its ability to quickly adapt to change. These changes may be small and hardly noticeable, or large-scale and catastrophic, but both are frequently initiated by what are essentially chance events. The responses, however, are anything but determined by chance, and are rather swift adaptations shaped by highly developed forms of natural intelligence. This complementary back and forth of chance and necessity results in a deeper formative ground which is remarkably free of waste and contradiction.

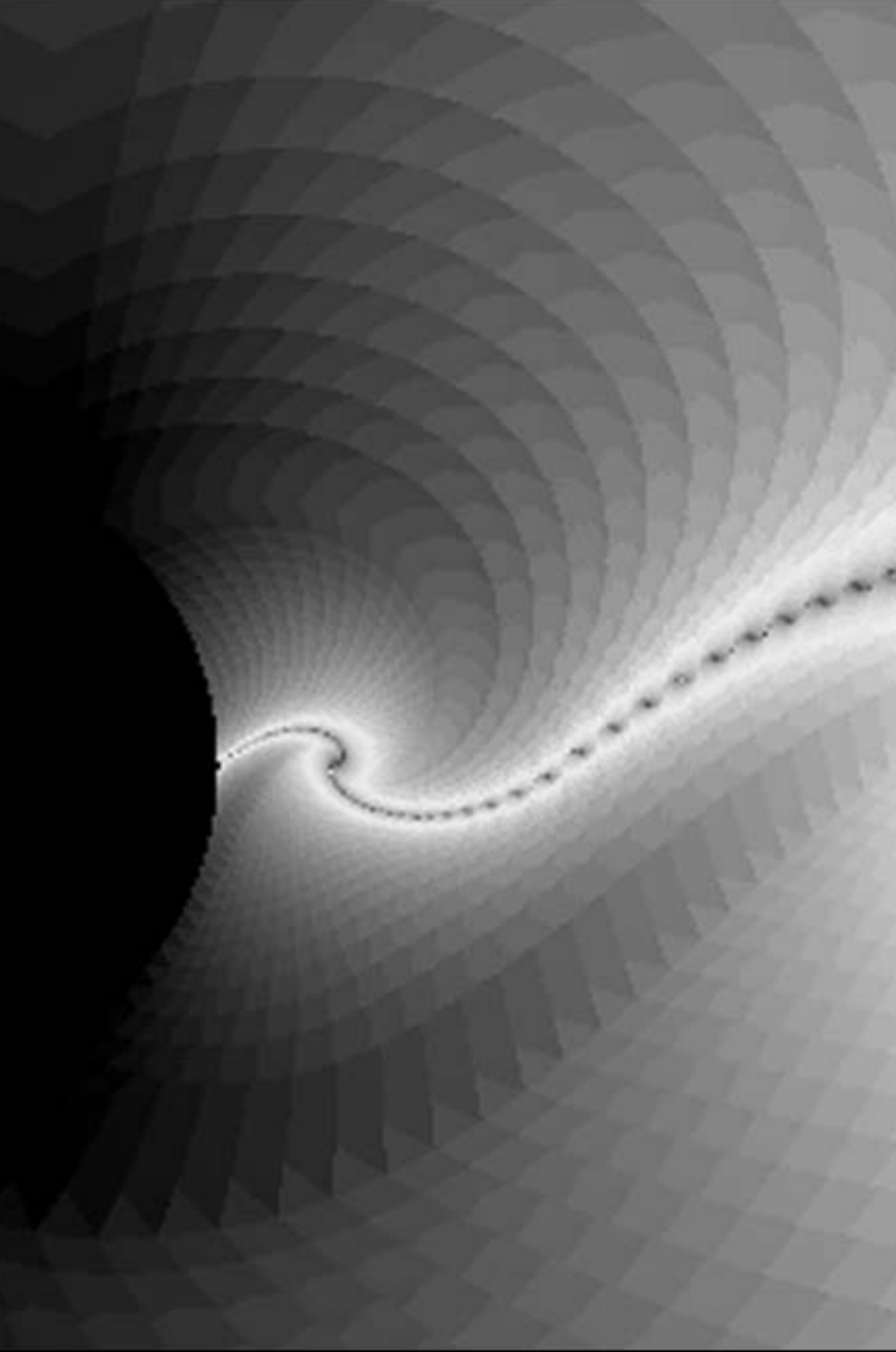
Two uniquely problematic forms of movement which are evidently not native to this web of life but which are characteristic of humans and the artifacts which we produce are: First, *the total absence of movement*, as for instance where toxic wastes accumulate in life-web environments as essentially dead, inert weights because of their inability to break down and thereby become reassimilated as new components of natural cycles; And second, the other extreme of *exponential runaway growth*. This occurs, for example, when species which are not part of the life-web are for whatever reason introduced, and then go on to fragment or tear apart the fabric of interrelationships and dependencies. Because such runaway growth is clearly a movement which, as we say, *is out of control*, it contradicts what I see as the universal principle of natural limit.

My contention here is that, because both extremes violate this natural order of movement, they are also both potentially and in a remarkable way extremely destructive. They both place themselves, so to speak, outside of natural movement by either *refusing to move*, or by *refusing to stop moving*. One could say that both sides of this refusal defy the central ordering principle of limit, which in turn is both the complementary side of freedom and a key feature of the dynamic balance of all self-sustaining natural cycles.

One expansion of this idea into the realm of finance I might mention here is how the mathematics of compound interest results in equally destructive cultural movements: one grinding the debt of the already poor and landless into an absolute insoluble toxic standstill; the other running away exponentially with more and more wealth going to the already rich, seemingly without end or limit. Remarkably, in an almost identical way to natural systems, this imbalance must necessarily lead to total collapse. And also remarkably, the key missing concept or feature is again simply limit.







The Little Clavier: Part X

Humans are the only beings in Nature who are constantly preoccupied with what they are not.

FOOL'S PROSPECT

Dear reader: *What do you think?*

How ought I best spend my days?

Should I dig in dank dark loam for new poems,
or ought I better be out looking for specks of real gold?

O, how I envy the industrious ant,
but a mere millionth of my own weak weight,
dragging past me

the lifeless carcass of another species
very much larger than itself.

What booty! What satisfaction
at work well done!

No doubt or hesitation there!

Yet here I sit and scribble away
at works as useless as they are ignored.

Away with meaning and beauty, I say. Enough!
Money is what I lust for. Pockets filled with cash.
A thousand plastic cards. More loans from god,
from the devil, who cares!

And then, as my pan comes up empty again,
reality strikes with nothing to show for my work today,
nothing but cold hands and a sore back,

O slowly, slowly, slowly . . .

How slowly I learn to see, to hear that all that sounds
right on my composing tablet may,

once put under the neutral hammer of truth,
be but more shiny, attractive—
yet oh-so-easily shattered—
fool's prospect.

MONEY AS NOTHING

New to the West? Don't be a fool
looking for gold!
The real money is in nothing!
The nothing of the insurance man
making millions out of the nothing,
the misfortune that does not happen;
The nothing of the banker
who makes millions out of the nothing
that backs up his loans;
Of the nothing of the powerful industrial war-maker,
presidents and whole congresses in his back pocket,
the man who makes billions out of the nothing
he is about to make out of us all!

FRACTALS AS PATTERNS OF RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT

Fractals are the discovery of the convivial and brilliant French mathematician, Benoit Mandelbrot. Mandelbrot noticed already when he was a young student that he had a unique ability to solve equations by visualizing them in his mind's eye. Later, this gift became essential in his quest for a new geometry, one not based on the simple squares and triangles of Euclidian textbooks, but a geometry that could more accurately describe the complex forms of nature like snowflakes, the serpentine flowforms of rivers, the ragged edges of ridgelines, or the patters we see pass by everyday in the heavens above. Indeed, one of his favorite sayings is evidently, "Clouds are not spheres."

Whereas the details of the formal mathematics upon which fractals are based are for me I'm afraid something like a horizon I'm strongly drawn to but which retreats as I try to come near, I greatly enjoy looking at them as a kind of meditation on form. I experience fractals like I do all natural form, not as static shapes, but rather as complex composites of rhythmic movements. In other words, I experience them as a kind of abstract music.

The three key generative principles of fractals are amazingly simple. In my own words, they are: (1) self-similar patterns; (2) manifested at differences of scale; (3) by means of an, in theory, infinite number of rhythmic repetitions or

iterative movements.

Music indeed! Any composer, or photographer, or poet would do well I think to study seriously Mandelbrot's work. And, of course, because of the in principle unlimited number of steps involved in their generation, we can make good use of the largely untapped processing power of the now ubiquitous home computer to make them visible to us. That is, or we can just go outside and study the shapes of flowers, of ice crystals, or of the symphony of clouds overhead!

ON FREEDOM'S NECESSARY BALANCE

Primum non nocere
(First, do no harm)

Freedom, it seems to me, is always a question of the balance between *freedom to*, on the one hand, and *freedom from*, on the other.

I might feel, for instance, that I should be free to mine for gold upstream from your homestead. You, in contrast, may feel equally strongly you have the right to be free from the danger of the cyanide from my leech ponds getting into your well-water. Or I might feel that I should have free, unrestricted access with my new snowmachine to any wilderness I choose. While, you, in contrast, feel I shouldn't even be allowed to take the thing out of my garage.

Clearly, the task of the rule of law is to protect in a fair, balanced, reasonable way both freedoms, carefully weighing the *pros* and *cons* in each case in an ongoing way. Balance between the two freedoms is not a fixed state, but more akin to keeping a bike upright as the rider shifts his or her weight, now to the left, now to the right—counter-intuitively—in the direction of the fall.

Notice, too, that freedom so balanced is always *ethical freedom*. Why? Because real balance demands that there be no

arbitrary limit to the width of what we might call *the circle of concern*. That is, it is freedom that must be necessarily mindful of the myriad potential negative consequences of actions undertaken by free agents as they reverberate throughout the wider community, or the human-plus-natural-environment, as a whole. As always: First, do no harm.

ON THE FUNDAMENTALISM OF ABSOLUTE BELIEF

“Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve.”

Karl Popper

Fundamentalism is the tying up of the energy of intelligence into a knot of absolute belief. It thereby prevents the natural awakening of the compassionate, ethical mind.

Fundamentalism’s key feature is rigidity, rigidity in the way it holds onto one particular way of seeing, and in the intensity with which it will refuse to admit the validity of alternatives.

This means that fundamentalism of any kind, whether it be of a spiritual, or political, or of a more social nature—is essentially irrational.

In contrast, if we accept that the essence of a more enlightened scientific attitude is the willingness to drop a belief or theory when it appears to be contradicted by experiment or fact, it follows that fundamentalism in all its forms lies entirely outside the realm of scientific and rational discourse.

It also for similar reasons lies entirely outside democratic debate. Yet, ironically, fundamentalism is notoriously easy to harness by demagogues to undermine democratic values by the democratic means of the ballot box. It thus poses a unique double threat to otherwise stable democracies.

What is more, fundamentalism will usually feel that its very existence is under attack by this open and free spirit of science. Indeed, it will frequently feel the need to go on both a highly confused and a highly uncivil counter-offensive against various representations of the scientific community, whether they be institutions, journals, or individual researchers.

The source of this wayward tendency of belief to become absolute—as distinct from the benign relative form of belief which assumes something to be true only in a provisional way—is evidently a malfunction of thought as it seeks security in what is essentially an extreme form of self-isolation.

So, in an era of sharply increasing population and dimin-

ishing resources, the resulting increasing lack of security, would lead one to expect a parallel rise of the fundamentalism of absolute belief. That, indeed, is exactly what is everywhere happening. What is more, the mechanical nature of the energy behind this movement easily lends itself to be amplified a thousand fold by the virtually unlimited resources of authoritarian oligarchies. These are either fundamentalists themselves, or worse, simply eager to exploit its inherently obsequious nature as a means of building powerful, popular support. All the more reason to see fundamentalism for what it is—a reflex of the animal, brutish brain gone haywire. Crucially important, is that the very act of seeing liberates because it disempowers the destructive self-righteousness of its illusions.

NATURE'S CIRCLE?

Between the sharp needle of the Spruce and round leaf of the Water-lily, Nature draws her circle.

ON JUSTICE & TIME—*a meditation*

Justice neither looks forward nor backward. In my view, that would be to make the fundamental error of placing justice in the stream of time. Justice, it seems to me, when seen as a formative principle guiding ethical action, is essentially timeless. In a way we might say that justice is like the motionless, neutral center that balances the two sides of the judge's scale.

Justice is then about the imbalance caused by wrong action, and is not necessarily or essentially about what is normally thought of as “the getting even” of retribution, or punishment. I would argue that justice is first and foremost about truth, and about coming by means of calm, reasoned deliberation to the common ground of a shared perception of what that truth is.

An implication of this view of justice as timeless is that great wrongs of the past, such as colonization by force, or the wholesale destruction of natural preserves for monetary gain, or the deliberate corruption of the democratic process, do not just go away because we choose to ignore them, or hope that the ever-more opaque mists of the past will continue to hide them from critical view. Rather, these wrongs remain active in a remarkably insidious way, rather like massive troubling presences looking down upon us from a spiritual or intellectual realm, until they are somehow, by

bringing them into the clear light of day, resolved.

So, justice neither moves forward nor backward. It does not, in fact, move at all. it's simply motionless, and like the neutral, unbiased center of the judge's scale, allows the evidence to be weighed, and the truth to be told.

ON NORMS

Norms or standards follow the way of the natural and profound asymmetry between creativity and destruction. It takes a thousand years or more to grow a giant sequoia. But it only takes a few thoughtless seconds to cut one down.

So it goes also with ethical norms. One single act of torture, and the work of more than two hundred years of constitutional law and civil rights is instantly called into question. One single act of torture, and the suffering and heroic work of countless generations of setting ethical and humanitarian standards is razed to the ground.

One single act of torture, and for the whole of the enlightened world, America is always a torturer. That is the knife-sharp edge which necessarily separates creativity from destruction, and ultimately, also separates freedom from tyranny.

FOUR MINIATURES ON *SALT & SUGAR MAN* AND EVOLUTION

(1) *We shape the world and the world shapes us.*

Just as an excess of sugar and salt in the diet drives appetite into the much-will-have-more of culinary runaway, an excess of sex and violence drives film and TV into the obsessive frenzy of too-much-is-never-enough. Evidently, imbalance seems strongly to favor a kind of synergistic co-evolution in multiple, parallel dimensions simultaneously. Either way, junk food for the eye, or cheap thrills for the tongue, both are not just, as the saying goes, ‘tasteless.’ More importantly, they leave us with the sad, ever-dissatisfied feeling of self-abuse, an abuse which quickly degenerates into the most hard and fast form of cultural habit. So the salt & sugar man develops hand in hand with the couch potato sex & violence connoisseur, verily an evolving subset of a potentially new species, an *Homo seduto* shall we say. Yes, “Man with his ass glued to the seat of a chair.”

(2) *We shape the world and the world shapes us.*

From the ecological, energy household perspective, a deficit of input—especially of an absolute necessity—may become a major force or drive behind creative leaps of the evolutionary process. Who is to say that the wings of flight were not adaptations to the fact of great distances between ever-scarcer sources of water?

(3) *We shape the world and the world shapes us.*

Humans are the only species that does not live in a world of fact. Think of it. We do not really directly see the world as it is, but rather as a complex map-like representation. A cattleman's, a goldminer's, a developer's, an ecologist's or a conservationist's map or representation of exactly the same territory will look very different. That is because they each abstract or draw out from any given territory a different set of what they see as potentially relevant facts.

Because we possess this extraordinary capacity to create an unlimited supply of these alternative representations, each with their own varying degree of truth content, we are also provided with a unique and unlimited opportunity to falsify, ignore, deny or lie about facts. That is, as long as we can get away with it.

So we play false, largely because of some form of self-interest, both individually and collectively, with our great natural gift of representation. The task of Philosophy and Metaphysics is to help clean up the resulting mess and keep as honest as possible the rules of the game.

(4) *We shape the world and the world shapes us.*

Adaptation? A million solutions to a single problem—*change to fit the fact.*

AN EYE TO THE SKY

A long time ago, I noticed that television and radio weather reports, great resources that they may be, create not only a kind of worrisome dependence on their often in the mountains inaccurate information, but also take away our motivation, perhaps even our innate ability, to look and read the clouds for ourselves.

I have noticed also that the best readers of weather I've met where the older mountain guides and hut caretakers in the European Alps. They seem to watch, to be alive to every minute change in the alpine environment. Not just the shape and movement of clouds, but also the winds at different altitudes, the behavior of the birds and other wild animals, the sound the mountain streams make, the sound the snow makes under their boots at last light. And they invariably go out two or three hours before sunrise to read the night sky.

The reason why these guides are so watchful is simple. Everything depends on it. A climb is first completed with one's safe return, and having auspicious weather conditions is frequently the determining factor.

Awakening this 'eye to the sky' should be a part of every young person's education. Just as awakening a sense of the limits of any technology should be a part of every enlightened teacher's objectives.

HIDDEN LAKE—*a rhyming children's poem
in 4/4 time*

*for three young teachers from Portland,
Susan, Scott & Phil*

Water at rest wants to be round,
Clear crystal mirrors that hold and reflect,
The echoing waves of wind and sound,
A place to remember, love, and protect.

ETHICAL DESIGN

Repair, reuse, recycle—the three imperatives of a new spirit of ethical design. Ethical, because it expands the circle of moral and legal responsibility to include the whole world of creation and the living Earth. Imperative, because it sees with granite-like clarity the necessity of the first principle of all design: no waste.

... **FIRE RING** ... *three 37-step poems*

(i)

A circle of stones,
sure, silent sign that others have
camped here around fires before me,

shared sense of

safe stars under high
firs and night skies. O bright clear flame.

(ii)

A circle of stones . . .
always round and never straight squares,
offerings of flat ground and cool,

clear water,

that sharp, crisp, crackling
sound of fire—fires past, future, now.

(iii)

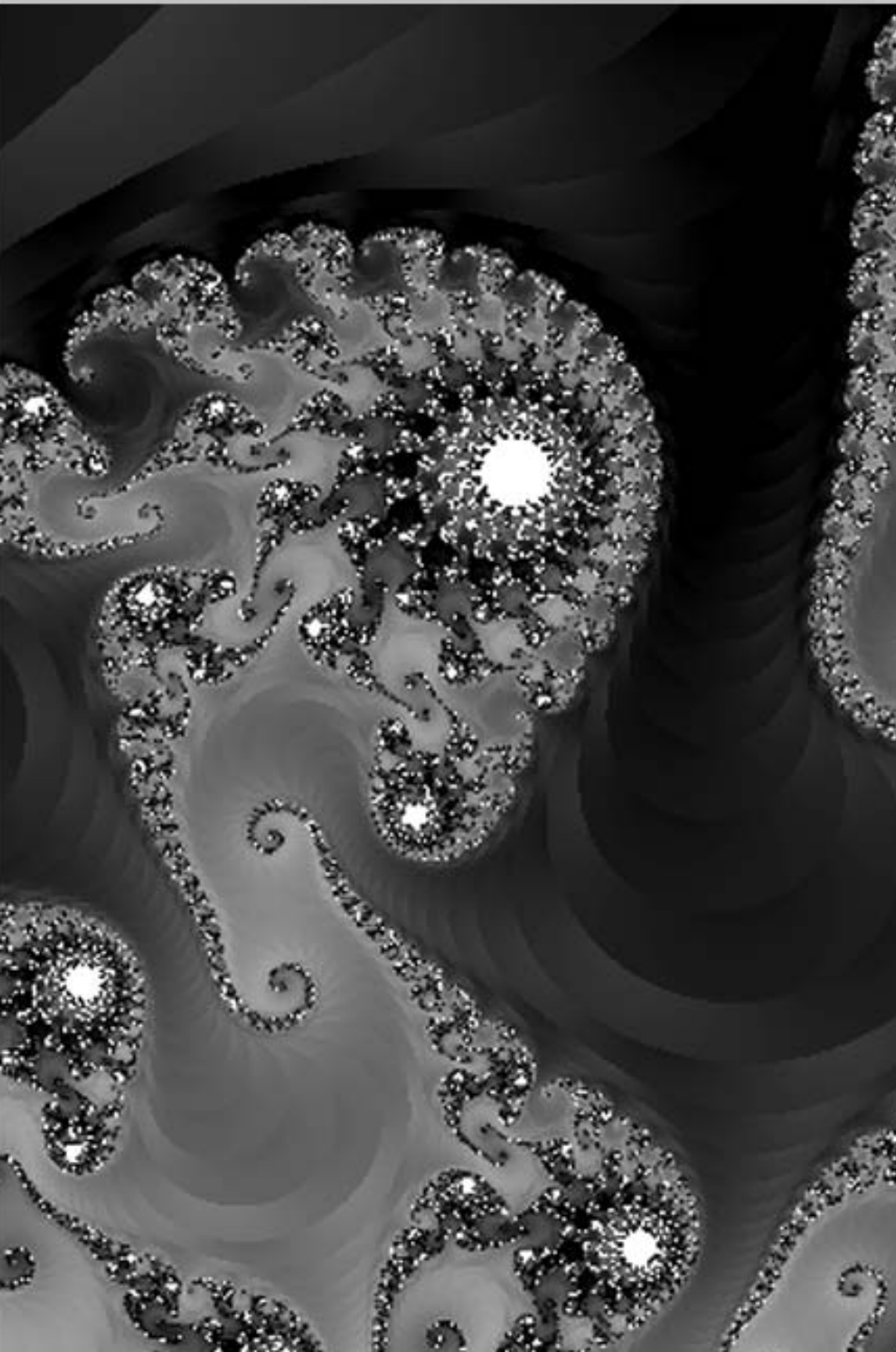
A circle of stones
burned black as raven night. Deep, dark,
bare, blank centers flashing with the sparks

of stories,

of rhapsodies sung
to young eyes shining with new light.







The Little Clavier: Part XI

Well-connected? When you know there
could be a disturbance, there already is.vv

HIGH-TECH / NO-TECH

The simplest and most powerful of all possible tests is the test of doing without.

As far as I can see, there is only one way to understand the relationship between myself and the technology upon which I depend: *do without it for awhile*. In the quiet interval in which the machines are turned off, I can observe both what they give, and what they take away, both how they empower, and how they disempower.

I think of this as a kind of high-tech fasting. This is fasting in a very much more general sense than we usually think of it. It is fasting in the spirit of asking a question: *What will happen if I stop doing this?* In questions of diet, for example, it is easy to see how this works. What will happen if I stop eating overly salty or fatty foods? I simply stop eating these, and within a week or two, my body comes back with an answer.

With technology like cellphones and wireless laptops, this fasting works in essentially the same way. I stop using them for an extended period of time and see what happens. Leaving the problem of the potentially harmful constant immersion in electromagnetic fields of varying strengths aside, what is interesting about these digital tools is not just how they work in and of

themselves, but also the fact that they are now connected to an unprecedented non-stop world-wide web of potential distraction. Now that the Internet and the Web are for many people “always on,” even when on the move, the problem of the mind wandering off to read and send messages or news reports, watch videos, etc., has become nearly universal. In other words, the contemporary mind, whereas it has been tremendously amplified in its creative power by all these new technologies, has at the same time become a mind which is essentially in a permanent state of distraction.

It’s interesting I think that the sound of the word “distraction” itself reveals that it is closely related to other states of psychological concern like “disturb,” or “fracture.” We have in the Latin root of distraction two parts, *dis* = “apart”+ *trahere* = “draw or drag.” So the image is one of one’s being being dragged apart, as it were, like the two horses of a chariot taking off in different directions. But what precisely is being drawn apart? In the most basic sense, it is my awareness or my attention. Attention we might think of here, following Krishnamurti, as an unforced state of mind which is unique for this very reason of being undivided, and is altogether different from mere concentration, which always has something forced about it because of a division of some kind.

I discovered for myself something about the nature of distraction some time ago in my troubled relationship with telephones. For me, the problem is straight forward: I don’t like them. I

noticed that I not want to be interrupted, especially not at random intervals, and even more especially interrupted by sharp, loud, sounds of any kind. So I got rid of phones in my life. Already twenty years before the introduction of the now-dominant cellphone. The question everyone must ask themselves now is: which is more important, a kind of background which encourages a calm, steady, focused state of awareness, or one which is constantly connected to random bursts of mostly non-relevant, i.e., disturbing information.

The more subtle and less obvious aspect of this problem is that, as I like to say to friends, if you think you *can* be interrupted, *you already are*. In other words, at a deeper level of our psyche—the part of us, say, that will without the slightest bit of training sit straight up in the tent with a shock of fear upon hearing a bear walking around a camp in the middle of the night—this deeper level of the psyche constantly monitors in a wonderfully unconscious way the potential for disturbance. It does this evidently so we can give our attention to other, more important matters. So my theory is that we are by immersing ourselves in this chaotic sea of potential hi-tech interruptions overloading this inner circuitry to the point of abuse and near break down or collapse. In other words, just the mere possibility of interruption is simply still more interruption in a yet more insidious, subtle form. Such thoughts do a lot more mischief at deeper levels of the psyche— both public and private—than I think we realize or are willing to admit.

Let me illustrate this idea with a little anecdote. One of my passions is teaching, especially the performance of classical music. Well, once not that long ago, I was working with a string quartet made up of North American young people. The cellist was late to the rehearsal. She then walked in, sat down, and even before tuning up, put her cellphone on the floor in front of her. I was new to this, so I thought I would not say a word and simply observe how things progressed from there. The first thing I noticed is how the three other slightly younger musicians were magically drawn into this contemporary digital object of desire. They could not keep their eyes off of it. Now meaning, especially musical meaning, is a mysterious thing. What the cellphone-as-hip-consumer-artifact did and does is in a way not just disrupt or break apart the focus of the rehearsal space; it totally usurps meaning and attention. I could before my very eyes see this wonderful *élan vital* that great music gives young people go straight down a dark, dank hole into some demonic hi-tech abyss.

So, the two great dangers of high-tech distraction in the view being sketched here are: First, this break up of awareness to the point that it cannot focus creatively on much of anything. And second, as people become more aware of the first tendency, there is a real danger that they will simply react mechanically without understanding and reject *all* new technology. My feeling is that we are already seeing a radical increase of both.

The whole purpose of this kind of philosophical discourse is here simply not to be swept away by a growing wave of irrational sentiment concerning very real problems. I would argue for a more measured approach. As I've outlined elsewhere (see *The Liberation Triangle* below), as far as children are concerned, the first thing to try doing without is television. Why? Because commercial television, in dramatic contrast to the computer, is distraction not because of abuse or misuse, but rather *distraction by design*.

But don't take my word for it. You can easily test the theory for yourself. Experiment. Pull out the plug. And best of all, get in the habit of walking, going on treks, immersing yourself for an hour, a day, or a whole week or two in wild nature. And because you can only take so much with you, you must go through the ritual of deciding what. What are the essentials; what can be left behind. It is a life-long discipline that reveals more than I can say.

ON RELEVANCE

“Information is a difference that makes a difference.”

Gregory Bateson (*Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*)

To keep your little lifeboat of meaning afloat in a turbulent sea of misinformation, full of the riptides of false, irrelevant data and treacherous whirlpools of consumer temptation and potential debt, stay close to the coastlines of the broad, historical, polycultural view.

Learn the languages of foreign ports of call. Seeing things for oneself from many different perspectives naturally lifts the best view up into awareness, like a single bright beacon one suddenly sees clearly on a distant horizon.

And when the mist of night closes in, keep your moral compass close to your heart, and let it point to the true north of sound, ethical principle.

A TWO-PART MEDITATION ON BOTH *THE BRIGHT* AND *THE DARK SIDES* OF COMPUTERS & COMPUTER NETWORKS

(1) *Computers Up*

Computers make it dramatically easier to . . .

—transcend arbitrary borders or limitations of any kind, thereby bringing people and new meaning together in unexpected and creative ways;

—develop new, both quantitative and qualitative, descriptive languages of especially movement, which may be modeled and displayed freely across networks in both the more traditional numerical, visual and auditory ways, as well as via other modalities yet to be discovered;

—greatly diminish the corrupting influences of both outward material wealth, as well as outmoded and divisive religious beliefs, as the primary determining factors of culture, creative tradition and shared worldview;

—introduce a new appropriateness and simplicity of design, made possible by more co-operative, open, and democratic work processes which more easily call attention to inconsistencies, contradictions and unnecessary difficulties of every kind;

—break the cycles of violence presently conditioning human interaction on all levels by replacing dominance and aggression with more sustained and serious efforts of communication and understanding;

—make explicit and real the already implicit interconnectedness of not just one isolated group or nation of people, but rather the whole living web of humanity.

(2) *Computers Down*

Computers also make it dramatically easier to . . .

—clandestinely monitor all aspects of our intellectual and personal lives, both past and present, and thereby grossly and in the most insidious of ways violate our right to privacy and other basic civil liberties;

—create vast informational networks for ever-more centralized runaway economies, which, because they are virtually invisible, are shielded from the negative human and environmental consequences of their own internal contradictions;

—generate increasingly complicated stores of what is perceived to be strategically vital information, which, because they are vulnerable to attack, must be protected by ever-greater covert measures, leading in turn to a general and all-pervasive ambience of fear and mistrust;

—break apart the Universal Somatic Constant, or the necessary unity of body and mind, in all human creative activity, leading to a dangerously illusory culture of disembodied artifacts and relationships;

—drive Art and Science away from the guidance of spiritual and philosophical insight into the highly fragmented

realm of theories based solely on inferences from other theories and data-sets derived from a narrowly specialized instrumentarium;

—replace our sense of natural Time and Space, as well as our more general sense of Earth, with a highly seductive yet largely unreal reality which speaks only to a very limited portion of the entire spectrum of human intelligence, thereby creating unawares a cycle of corruption in our basic perception of both ourselves and the world around us.

ON THE NECESSARY UNITY OF FREEDOM & DEMOCRACY IN THE WORKPLACE

Just as there can be no partial freedom of speech, there can be no halfway or partial democracy.

Democracy at the ballot box without democracy at the workplace is like being able to freely choose which train to get on, but having nothing to say about when and where to get off. What kind of freedom, what kind of democracy, is that?

SOCIAL ECONOMY

What is the difference between a Market Economy and a Social Economy? One is based on mere profit; the other is based on both profit and ethical responsibility.

Clearly, a necessarily self-destructive feature of all Market Economies is that they ultimately will ravage the very foundation or ground upon which they depend. This is so because this is the easiest and most direct route to monetary success. Social Economies, on the other hand, because they are by their very nature self-limiting, must necessarily like a good farmer be concerned about the long-term health of his or her soil.

HYPERLINK

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

There 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.







The Little Clavier: Part XII

Chance proposes; *Intelligence* disposes.

No one can predict which flower the butterfly
will pass by next.

SUNSIGHT!

—*for Mark Simmons*

Each morning, the Earth
turns to greet the Sun.

We are all turning.
The Muslim turns.
The Christian turns.

Even I turn, with my religion
without a name.

WALKING THE WORLD: *Look at the Mountain!*

Having physically touched and lifted countless rocks, my eyes sense effortlessly the mountain's rough, cold texture, its immensity, its great weight.

But this image, while certainly as real as it is beautiful, is still just an image, strangely ungrounded, distant. Looking through my glass, I notice how the sight of two climbers slowly crossing a steep snowfield instantly provides not only proportion, but also a feeling for absolute size—a kind of kindred presence, bringing that which is far away closer to home.

And yet, to actually cross the snowfield oneself—step by step, breath by breath—is in some profound sense truly to make the mountain your own. And that's the wonder of walking: it threads the world and oneself together into one, inseparable weave. I say the world is not just seen, but made—made with the soles of my feet.

... SUNSIGHT / SUNCLIPSE ...

The great 20th century poet-philosopher of design and inventor of the geodesic dome, Buckminster R. Fuller (1895-1983), introduced the complementary concepts of sunsight and sun-clipse to replace the traditional words, sunrise and sunset. He argued—very convincingly in my view—that our language should reflect the actual turning or rotation of a spherical planet Earth on its axis, instead of the ancient illusion of the Sun making an arch over an essentially flat surface.

You can test your own intuitive perception of this movement in the following two ways: (1) See if you can answer quickly and without strain in which direction the Earth turns; (2) Make with your hand a circle which corresponds in direction to the Earth's rotation. Few people can do either one. My experience is that most indeed can tell you where the Sun 'comes up'—is sighted—in the East, and where it goes down in the West—is eclipsed by the Earth. But few can tell you where the Sun will be at mid-day!—South—and fewer still can move their hand West to East, earthwise. Remarkable, don't you think? These two little tests ought to be enough to convince most of us that we do indeed still live and think in terms of these powerful illusions of Flatland.

CENTERS OF LEARNING

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

It takes more than a school to educate a child; it takes, as they say in Africa, an entire village, a village deeply rooted in place.

In each life, learning has a center.

The teacher is the one who helps the student find it.

SEEING

I tell myself:

To study Nature, learn to see;

To learn to see, watch seeing in action;

To watch seeing in action, observe the blocks,
the dams, all the stuff that's in the way.

HOW THE WORLD CHANGES

Don't waste time trying to save corrupt politicians,
or reform corrupt institutions. How much better
to start afresh and teach the young! It takes but nine
years to educate a entirely new generation. Of scientists,
of artists, farmers, and healers.

At the entrance way to your school of a wholly new way
of being, place but one sign with three imperatives:

*“All who enter here, leave behind your old ideas
of war, of fear, and of waste.”*

HOW TO PROTECT AN ALPINE MEADOW

Hike there.

Find water.

Sit.

Move as little,
and stay as long,
as possible.

MOUNTAIN RHYMES

Don't tempt fate:—

Better to leave too early,

Then too late.

But if you never risk a fall,

You'll be home too early,

Or never climb at all.

ON THE ILLUSION OF INDEPENDENCE

(i)

The further we go into the unknown of the wilds, the more we become aware, not, as one might think, of how free, or how self sufficient, we are. It soon becomes clear that each of us is nested within a web, a web of human mutual dependencies. We are indeed not just as Aristotle would have us believe, a *political* animal, but rather I would argue a thoroughly *social* one.

For it is a strange thought, is it not? “*I don’t need anybody!*” It comes, some say, with money, especially an excess of money. Money, as we all know can “grow” in an abstract way without limit. This gives us the comforting illusion of a natural world which *also* can grow without limit: giant trees that we can cut down forever; oil wells and clear springs that flow on into eternity. Money also conjures up for us a powerful and absolute idea of independence. What I need, I buy. At the neighborhood store, there’s an endless supply of toilet paper and coffee cans. I buy one, and somehow, magically, the next time I’m there, another has materialized to take its place. And so on, and so on, we naturally assume, without end. These are the two prime and unavoidable confusions or contradictions inherent in the idea of money as we now know it—that it begets more of itself without limit, and can buy what it wants *also* without limit—which

make it possible—even seem absolutely necessary—to sustain utterly bankrupt economic systems of thought. Folly? Yes, I would say so.

We might ask the great explorers who went to the Poles 100 years ago. Or those who went to the Moon and back just forty years past. Once those amazing expeditions were ‘out there,’ so to speak, they became necessarily proud exemplars of independence and self-sufficiency. Yet it was this extreme isolation itself that brought into intensely sharp focus both the limits of such isolation, and the delicate yet movingly beautiful reality of this human web of mutual dependence.

Alone in the physical, earth-bound realm, we are nothing. Remarkably, this is what we grow aware of the further out we go, and the more surrounded by that nothingness we become. And when we are lucky enough to return, we are indeed changed human beings.

(ii)

Always take three of any essential necessity when packing out into the unknown: one, for the soothing illusion of independence; two, for the pride of the self-sufficient; three, for the happy fact of the illusion of independence as you, with luck, find your way back home.

IDEAS & WRITING AS PERFORMANCE

Ideas mostly come to me in a single complex image or tangle which may take me days of quiet contemplation to fully unravel.

I suppose that I would say that ideas, or new ways of seeing, are my main focus; They are also, if I may say so because of the context here, my only gift. I mean the latter in the literal sense, as something that arrives in my head *as is*, like it or not, unasked for, and in raw form.

So for me, there is an ever-present difference between ideas and writing. Writing I see much more as the discipline and hard work of performance. And like performance, some days you 'will be on,' others, less so. The idea, in contrast, is more a kind of impersonal inspiration, the source crystal or seed of energy that gets the writing, whether it be poetry, miniature, essay or music, into manifest, comprehensible form.

So, if the ideas are more like a kind of timeless, abstract geometry, the performance of writing is just that: a kind of improvisation that can be notated, experimented with, and, with time and work, perhaps improved.

Without this empty space of contemplation, however, these ideas would most likely clutter up my head like piles of neglect-

ed and knotted-up climbing ropes in a messy garage, showing a bit of promise because of the bright colors peaking through the oil-crud and dust, but not much more than that.

To get these ideas onto paper and into the world, the only thing I really need is silence, especially what I think of as mountain silence. Mountain silence is different. Very different. This is because it cannot normally be interrupted. The nearest road is perhaps days away. So I can in a blissfully unforced and unself-conscious way let the ideas have the free, unfettered space they seem to require.

I frequently do this with my camera in hand. After setting up a basecamp, I'll go out very early to do fieldwork. As I walk, I simply study and photograph whatever presents itself along the way. At the same time, this geometry of ideas plays itself out happily in the background. And then, if I'm lucky, a constellation of thoughts around a particular problem will just crystalize, and I'll write it down in rough form right on the spot. So, for better or worse, everything you read here has for the most part been composed in this way, out-of-doors.

LIMITS

In the measure of things, there's always a degree of difficulty, a line drawn in the sand, or in the snow, or on a piano keyboard, beyond which one has never dared to tread. The challenge is to know without a doubt and with complete conviction when it is time, when one is ready, to step over that line. Of primary importance, it seems to me, is the nature of the energy that moves us to venture beyond known limits of any kind. If it's merely self-centered ego-energy, that would seem to imply the use of brute force, out for material gain, or claim to fame for oneself. Or if it's simply desire, that would most likely lead to the foolishness of mere wishful thinking.

Perhaps the real transcending of limits is something more like the nature of a simple, honest question—the very essence of impersonal intelligence—the “what if?” of testing the outer boundaries of the known.

ADVENTURE

Where a well-worn path goes, that much you know. Real adventure begins where the route you have worked out for yourself in advance hits a dead-end, a sure and certain sign that you are entering the realm of the unknown and wholly new. This is where the real adventure begins.

LEAVES

A single silver maple leaf
falls upon my page,
marking the passage
of this most liminal of seasons.
Sharp north wind
rising high above the sound
of cold rushing water,
scattering yesterday's thoughts
of where I'd be today, and today's
hopes of where I'd
be tomorrow.

LOGISTICS

Getting ready for a trek: A thousand things to do and pack up; and a thousand things to remember. From the calm, near-timeless summit of overview, we have order. But in the lowlands of practical reality, where things must be done necessarily one at a time, we have chaos.

The problem is simple: regardless of how many thoughts you may have, and regardless of how fast you can write or type—*look at a Mozart manuscript!*—they can still only be written down one letter, one word, one note at a time. Just as when you're packing up gear and food for a trip, all the myriad things on your list of stuff to be done can only be 'walked through,' as it were, one step at a time.

What to do? In teaching, whether it be a young student or just oneself, I've come to think that it is important to practice—actually practice like a pianist practices an etude—making a pause or stopping at regular intervals. Why? Because in the interval of the pause we can observe this nearly universal tendency to run away in an accelerating loop of impatience, or as they say in the Alexander Technique (AT), *end-gain* a goal, or point of completion.

I've noticed too that, when the mind runs ahead to the summit

when the feet are still in tough and unpredictable terrain, that this is when you're most likely to make a mistake. The pause helps you anchor your feet in the present moment, from which point we can quietly consider the lay of the terrain ahead. And this can make all the difference.

IN PRAISE OF COMPLEMENTARY WORLDS, LARGE & SMALL

There are some complementarities that are not only basic, but also somehow essential. One that comes immediately to mind is a balanced culture's need to have both a Lunar and a Solar calendar. Another, is an individual's need for both a small, intimate, protected space for the body to rest at night, balanced by the need by day for a vast, open, unbounded Montana-like sky to allow for the wild side of one's spirit to let go of the known and fully unfold.

A third related essential complementarity is that of large and small, of the birder's binoculars and the botanist's magnifying glass, or the photographer's wide-angle lens for the big view, and the close-up macro lens to give voice to the myriad miraculous details of the worlds of the small and the very, very, small.

Don't take my word for it. Try it! It's good for the eyes, good for the mind. Like drinking pure spring water at its source, or throwing oneself after a good sweat into a cold, fast-running stream. Reaching out to take in the far away; and reaching down to bring up into better view the more humble, often neglected, yet very beautiful and very near.

CELESTIAL LEXICON & THE EPHEMERAL SHIMMER OF MEANING

In any language, it is possible—at least in theory—to make a more or less complete map of all the words in its lexicon. Of course, new words could always be added, and old ones deleted, and the map itself might even be a part of the description.

Perhaps one could say that, if it is true that the meaning of words is like a web or constellation of mirrors, each word pointing to or reflecting the significance of others—very brightly for those close by and more dimly for those which are far away, like stars in the night sky—then we could say that in some very subtle sense each word contains every other word. These implications might be thought of as mutual reflecting resonances, or mirrors made not of glass and light, but of sound.

Most importantly, in contrast to the discrete lexicon of a language, which, because it is at any given moment explicit, and therefore in principle knowable, the universe of newly unfolding meanings given articulate form by this lexicon is not knowable in this precise way. This is because the repertoire of mutually reflecting resonances of meaning is always implicit and changing. In the future, this difference between words, on the one hand, and their implied meanings, on the other, will be seen as a primary limiting factor of machine or mechanical intellect.

THE IDEAL OF CRYSTALLINE PROSE

(1) The more in tune with the worlds of nature and the mind a culture becomes, the fewer and fewer words will be needed to say ever-more important things.

*(2) Who is to say which is more important:
the blackbird's song,
or the silence just after.*

For me, poetry at its best seems to appear out of the snowy quiet of the blank page. The meanings of this subtle movement of emergence are many. Each sound, each word, each image, is given thereby a certain weight, a certain importance. The rhythms, the rhymes, the repetitions, all come together collectively to form the mysterious composite movement of sound and sense which is each poem's signature, and is as unique as the one-of-a-kind species geometry of a flower, or the unmistakable characteristic flight patterns of a bird.

By contrast, how out-of-shape and verbose does our contemporary prose seem to me. By comparison, it seems to suffer not just from a surfeit of cheap printer's ink, or web-page electrons, but also from a scarcity—a decline to near extinction, really—of seasoned, well-practiced musicians under both writers and readers. So we write mainly with the eye, and not with the

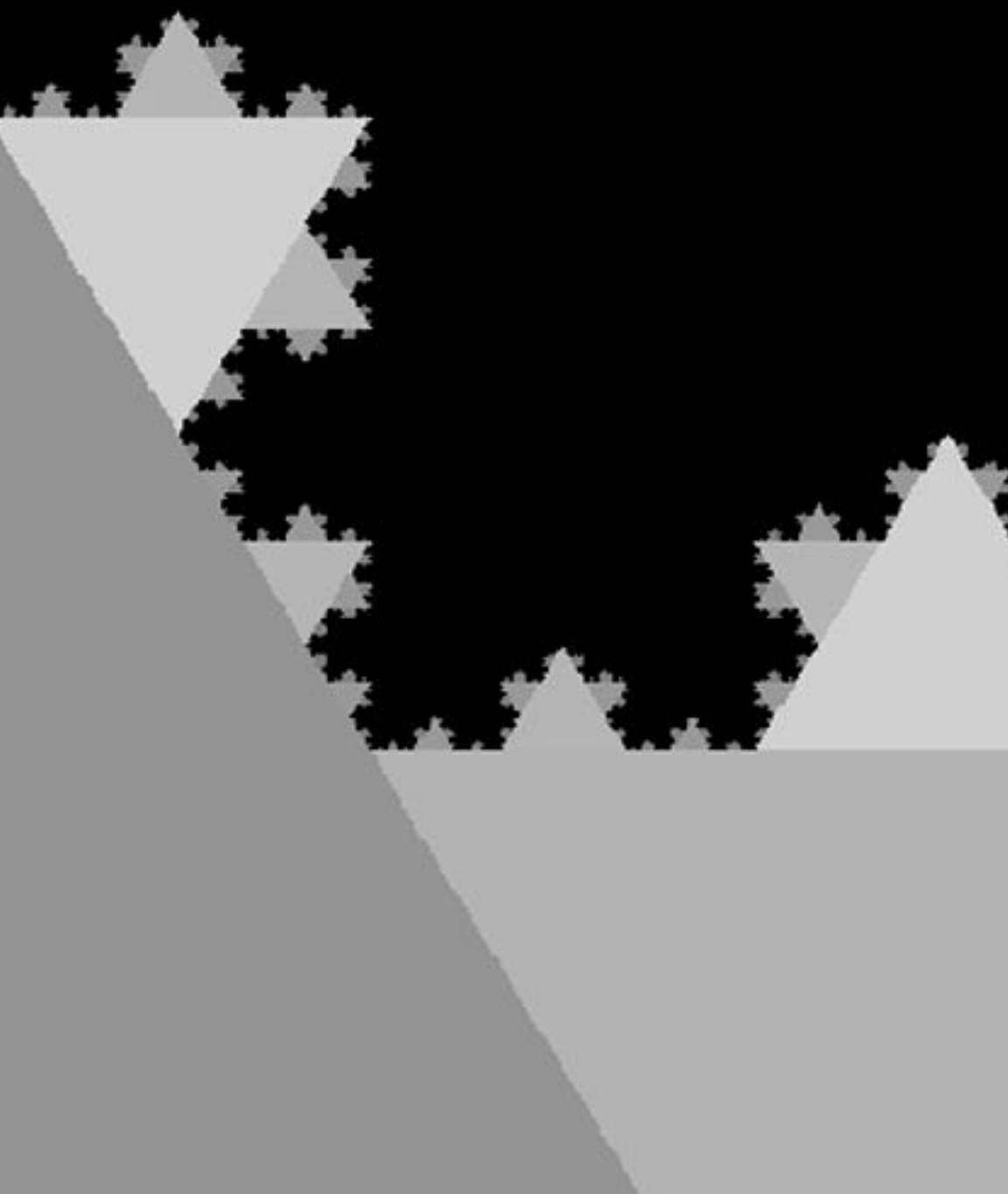
ear, which evidently encourages the run-on, endless mechanical line that no longer pauses, like a practiced singer, to take a quiet breath.

How different the more musical ideal of more with less, I would say, very much more with less. By this I mean crafting each sound, each word, each phrase, like one might carefully polish a multi-faceted crystal of clear quartz. Reading such prose, one finds oneself pondering ideas, thoughts, turning phrases over in one's mind in an open space full of emptiness and silence, as one holds the crystal up to the light and admires the wonders of its form.

It is true: this is but an ideal, and a hard one to achieve at that. All the same, I think it's well worth considering.







The Little Clavier: Part XIII

In 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.

THE LITTLE CLAVIER

Each text, each poem,
is a miniature makeshift
piano; they're all
tuned slightly
differently,
a bit beat up, perhaps,
with a few misplaced or broken
strings, but it's the best we've got.

We do not play,
but simply
push the pedals down,

sitting quietly,
listening to the strings
resonate or sing,
giving back

voices

hidden within
the marvelous sea of chaos
that surrounds us.

THE LITTLE CLAVIER & THE IDEA OF SYMPATHETIC RESONANCE

*“The illusion that we are separate
from one another is an optical delusion
of our consciousness.”*

Albert Einstein

Pedals and the Physical Instrument

For those readers who are not very familiar with actual musical performance practice or acoustics, the poem’s central idea may be a bit difficult to bring home at first. The image is one of movement:

*“...we do not play,
but simply
push the pedals down . . .”*

Perhaps you’ve had the opportunity of hearing a concert pianist perform on a grandpiano at a recital and noticed him or her doing something with his or her feet. Every good instrument has two or three pedals, the most important of which—the sustaining pedal—raises the felt dampers on the piano’s many strings all at once. Because of this, the strings may continue to sound even after the pianist has taken his or her fingers off the keys.

This very ingenious mechanism makes it possible to, for ex-

ample, transform the notes of an arpeggio—which sound in sequence, one after another, into a rich composite chord, the notes of which sound all together at the same time. (This difference between one-at-a-time of melody, and the all-at-once of chords, much like the contrast between sound and silence itself, is one of those primary features of perception generally which is shared by musical cultures around the world.) The sustaining pedal gives the piano something like a built-in echo chamber; it is what allows an individual performer to create a truly remarkable sense of space of almost orchestral proportions. As is frequently the case with everyday miracles, however, I feel that many classical musicians have in a way come to take this magnificent pedal technology somewhat for granted. But for those of us, who, like myself, are more philosophically inclined and rather less gifted in playing our Bartók and Bach, it is still possible to sit at the keyboard and ponder this uniquely mysterious movement. We hear time—or melody—folding into pure space, or harmony. In a way, this is much like a thread rolling itself up into a skein. One cannot help feeling that something very profound is being revealed to us, but what exactly?

The Affinity of Similarity

Yes, “push the pedals down.” Even though the poem is short and rather playful in tone, I do wish to suggest something of this quality of vast space. I also wish to go further and suggest something still more subtle and perhaps a bit harder to visualize, but not to sense: the idea of a motionless or neutral passiv-

ity which is at once quiet and yet full of energy, ready to reflect or respond to the world which surrounds us.

Imagine this: The performer—who is both the poet (as well as you, the listener or reader, perhaps)—takes his place center stage at the keyboard. But instead of touching the keys to produce a sound, as in the above example, he simply depresses the pedals and remains completely silent. Do you sense how the image moves very quickly in several different directions at once? For me, these different possible vectors of meaning all share the same idea, namely, that of sympathy.

A Play of Words and their Origins

In English, the word ‘sympathy’ suggests a “feeling with” or sharing something of the emotion and experience of another. In other languages of Indo-European origin, the adjective form, sympathetic, also implies ‘one who is capable of this’, as in a friend who can not only be counted upon, but also who ‘reads’ our feelings without having to say a single word. Like the Italians say, ‘molto simpatico’, or in Dutch, ‘heel erg sympatiek,’ both literally meaning, very sympathetic. Sympathetic in this sense might be used to describe not only a person, but also, for example, something less tangible, like a way of doing music or poetry. Perhaps we could say that this is more than merely like or dislike, but rather a kind of deeply shared resonance or mutual affinity. So instead of seeing the world as composed of static, isolated objects, we are now entering a world of move-

ments which merge and interpenetrate one another. This naturally brings us back to musical instruments, both in actuality and as metaphor. As they say very charmingly in German, ‘mit schwingen’, or literally, ‘to swing together with,’ like two strings which move perfectly together. Rilke, the great master of image-as-movement, awakens in us this very idea in the famous Love Song which begins his New Poems:

*“And yet everything which touches us, you and me,
takes us together like a single bow,
drawing out from two strings but one voice.”*

Sympathy. Mitschwingen. Moving together. Eight centuries before the Europe of Rilke, the spiritual teacher and seer Mechtild of Magdeburg suggested something very similar, only still more general:

*“And all strings
Which are touched in Love
Must sound.”*

So, we see that a great deal is implied in the ‘affinity’ or ‘moving together with’ which characterizes sympathy. Especially when sympathy moves on in depth and subtlety to compassion which we might describe, following Jiddu Krishnamurti, as ‘seeing the other in myself.’ In this context, we might think of this as a kind of resonance which is essentially selfless, or a ‘swinging with’ the whole of life. This is why, in the poem, the

performer is utterly without movement; he is there not so much to play his own song but more as an instrument which manifests the voices he hears around him.

The Poet as Beat-up Piano

Indeed, the mysterious world of sound and vibrating bodies demonstrates to us in the most directly perceptible of ways that aspects of our consciousness as complex as sympathy and compassion are incipiently already present in something as simple as a single silent string. At the same time, it brings out an important limitation—some might say, a tragic flaw, of the current electronic and computer technology. I'll return to this last point briefly by way of conclusion.

In the spirit not of Plato's Academy, but of true Pythagorians, pondering together under starry night skies the significance of rhythm, mode and interval, it is always better to experience an acoustic principle first hand, instead of just thinking about it intellectually. Then when we do think about it, our thought is perhaps rooted in something deeper than mere numbers or what we see on the screen. To bring out the difference, let me share with you a little story:

Once, a number of years ago, a young boy visited a studio I was working in at the time in the Netherlands. I had been out in the forest all day with his father, a Dutch sod farmer, clearing a tangle of Douglas-fir windfall after a freak fall storm. As we

were coming inside, a bit cold and tired, the boy saw a shiny little brass hunting trumpet I had laid out on top of an old grand piano that was standing in the corner. I handed the boy the trumpet, which wasn't much more than six feet of hammered brass tubing with a mouth piece at one end, and told him to give it a loud blow. Which he did. Then I said, "Listen to this!" while I pushed the pedals down and he played another loud note. I didn't bother opening up the keyboard cover.

He was amazed. So was his father, who was watching somewhat anxiously at a distance. How could it be, he thought, that the piano echoed, or reflected, like a mirror made of sound, the different and yet similar sound of the trumpet. But, of course, the trumpet was big or loud, while the piano's reflection was quite small or soft. It was this difference of perspective that gave the sound such a great sense of space, and which dumbstruck the boy. It was as if we were standing together, all three of us, in an immense cathedral or concert hall.

A physicist calls this the principle of sympathetic resonance: two orders of similar movement which merge to form a third which reflects in a unique way both. Notice that the strings must be perfectly quiet for this to take place. And free. That is, not impeded in any way.

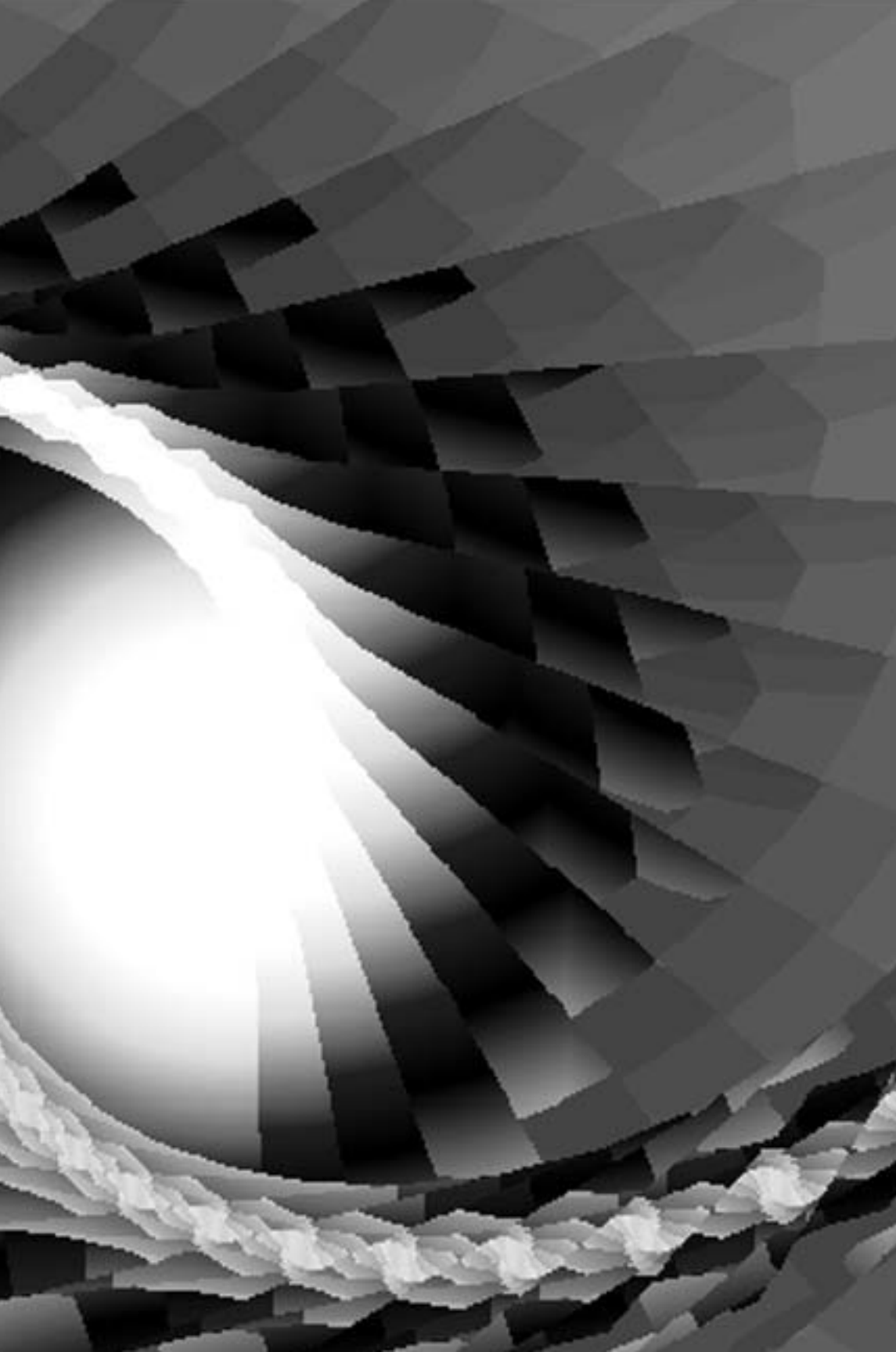
The Natural Limitations of Artificial Sound

By way of conclusion, just let me say that the little epiphany

of the trumpet / piano anecdote recalled above would not have taken place if we were to substitute the acoustic piano with an electric instrument or synthesizer. Even if the trumpet were to play as loud as possible. With an electronic instrument—even the most current and sophisticated and expensive—the transistors, or diodes, or bits of its curcuitry and software remain, as far as us human beings are concerned, totally isolated and indifferent to other voices or sounds played around them, including their own. Now that's a powerful image, indeed. What does this have to do with poetry? I feel very strongly that it would be a good idea to find out.







The Little Clavier: Part XIV

Aphorisms?

The place where Logic follows
the markings on the Poetry's flower
to embrace in the sweet nectar
of new meaning.

PILGRIM

for Evelyn Fischer

Armies have sergeants.

Monks have masters.

Pilgrims must go it alone.

Somebody give me a word for the energy
of breaking camp, and stepping out—
into the unknown.

PILGRIM'S PATH

There are many stones on the pilgrim's path.
Under each one lies another piece of yourself.
You trip, you stumble, you fall.
Sometimes, you turn the stones over
and find faded pictures of lost loves,
long lists of things you should have done, or could have said.
But here, now, at this crossing, which way to go . . . ?
Down that jeep-track over there to the city below,
or follow this ridgeline up into the pathless country
of lord-knows-where?
Which way to go, which way to go . . . ?

The sound of rushing water rises into the cool morning air.
It's time to go now,
Time to go.

QUIET WATER

Sitting. Waiting.

The quiet sound of morning water
fed by meager snowfields.

A plane flies up the steeply-walled valley,
the sound of its motor wrapping round itself,
beating, fighting against its own echo—then
tapering off in a low, harmonious hum.

So civilizations come and go,
each in their own time, in their own way,
yet the sound of their final silence is always the same.

A chickadee goes *tja tja tja tja*
flittering from fir to fir, same lively little bird
of the fiddle-top spruce in the Alps.

The quiet water flows with flashes,
sparkles, faint stars of morning light,
fed by meager snowfields.
Sitting. Waiting.

The final silence is always the same.

LAND ABOVE THE TREES

Paradise only lasts a day.
Let Time stretch out to eternity.
Let Space open up to the stars.

The new ice you found at the spring this morning is already gone. See that Lily over there: it only lasts an hour.

Write that love letter you've been waiting for for a thousand years. Figure out those equations that Einstein knew he had wrong.

The sound of the rushing water mixes with the late summer wind. As it always has; as it always has.

Your next life can begin another day.

THE POOL OF LIFE—*a meditation*

The bite of a trout breaks the surface of the water's morning calm . . .

Small fish are protected by their lightning-fast speed; Large, by their greater weight and water-wise ways. But neither is safe from the folly of the farmer's banker as he in his unquenchable thirst taps off the last drops of the pool's water.

O round pool of an alpine tarn, waves resonating, ringing out into the distance. Who is to say where they stop? See the subtle society of their merging, their complex composite forms.

Some cultures just rush right by, so full of fear are they that the banker will lock his doors before they can make a final run on their cash. Others, give the reading of such waves their complete and utmost attention, protecting the quiet waters upon which they are composed from interferences undue.

As the autumn morning shades into afternoon, a lone golden eagle turns wide, soaring gyres above the pond, first sun-wise, then widershens. I lay back on the soft heather tundra and remember images from the Alps, the past. "*Sempre solo, tutti cresti!*" says the proud Italian mountain farmer. Not far away, a man came out of the time-warp of glacier ice, *Ötzi*, more than four thousand years old, with boots—see the miracle!—made of four different kinds of leather and a layer of matted straw for warmth.

Who is to say? . . . Out of the ice . . .

Perhaps that is all we are. Just patterns of waves,
and mostly water..

ON THE MEANING OF NATURAL LIMITS

Powerful 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 and shapes 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.

WILDERNESS IN NORTH AMERICA

A goddess chained to a rock
with on all her sides
the greedy grind of petrochemical lust
racing to road's end—
ready to take the wild bitch for a ride.

MEDITATION—*a way of looking*

Meditation, it seems to me, may very well be the natural state of the mind. Rather than simply an art or skill to be learned or achieved, one might instead come to meditation by taking away all the blocks that are in the way.

Meditation then, instead of adding something new, might essentially be a movement of negation.

From this point of view, meditation might be something like a great watershed of the mind in need of restoration: take away all the sources of disturbance and pollution, the blocks and dams, and we might once again drink freely from the flowing waters, and see something of the mystery of the bottom of the pool.

MATTER & SPIRIT

Where does matter stop, and spirit begin?

This is evidently a question which not only cannot be answered properly at present, but which will continue to confuse the mind as long as it is posed in this manner.

This is because the question of where does matter stop and spirit begin assumes separation in space. If one thinks in terms of sound, however, separation in space is not a part of the problem.

Spirit, or intelligence, might be thought of as a very subtle form of resonance.

This might be a kind of resonance body which envelopes the whole of the less subtle and more dense physical body, the one nested within the other.

There is no separation in space in this view, only a movement of resonance from gross and physically manifest—and therefore measurable—to the more subtle and less physically manifest, and therefore still beyond the instruments and conceptual framework of present empirical science.

PATH OF DIALOGUE

Stow away your conclusions and opinions in the bag of unnecessary gear you leave at home. The path of dialogue begins with real questions, with real problems. And with a few simple words which get us started in the right direction: *“I don’t know; Let’s find out!”*

PATH OF CONFLICT

I refuse to have enemies.
I have only potential students,
first and foremost,
myself.

PEACE MAKER

Be the destroyer of arbitrary borders,
the creator of paths, of patterns, of bridges,
that connect all peoples.

POPLAR OF FORGIVENESS

A Poplar tree offers me shade,
moving from ridge to valley,
I rest a while.

It's the sound, the sound
of the wind moving in the leaves,
a sound wholly absent at the more austere altitudes,
that washes away like the water of a Lourdes
all the hurts and pains of the past.

How we long to go back, go back and set straight
our mistakes of the past, to say
that it wasn't like that, or that
we didn't intend things to turn out
the way that they did.

But the sound carries these thoughts
away to somewhere else I know not where.
I open my eyes. A leaf, already yellow, falls.
A Blackcap chickadee flutters by.

I must live a better life.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM

Along a trail through a high
cottonwood meadow,
horsemint and death camas
grow side by side,
the one healing herb,
the other poison root.

Such is the strangeness of the way things are.

Sure sign of “evil” as a dark
force of nature, out
to do us in?

Quite doubtful . . .

More the ever-present possibility,
as we cross paths with the good,
and the bad,
of not knowing the difference
between them.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS MANDALA

A ritual circle which brings the far away, the very small, the ignored or half forgotten, into the magical middle realm of the contemplative compassionate eye.

A circle which not just mirrors the Beautiful, but reflects also the Strange and Ugly through the clear, yet necessarily imperfect and always slightly blurred lens of partial truth.

ON THE NECESSITY OF ROADLESS AREAS (II)

It is true: once a road is built, it becomes easier and easier to get to places that are less and less worth going to. If it can be said that roads have a tendency to bring out the worst in people—the noisy grind of greed and self-centered haste—then paths bring out the best, the waste-not-want-not of a rugged, timeless kind of self-reliance. One, a sharp-edged knife that rips apart the fabric of forest and meadow; the other, a single thread which in the walking weaves itself back into the natural world.

Clearly, we obviously need good, well-designed roads. But even more we need the wisdom of natural limits which tells us when not to build them.

TOWN

A place to park the truck.

100 steps to the Post Office,

40 to the Café,

20 to the Bar.

A place of reduced speed,

where we drive slow enough to see if a neighbor

has a new girlfriend, or wave politely to local elders,

but fast enough not to think or worry about,

all the broken windows,

or why children no longer play in the streets,

or even the high price

of bad land.

END OF MOUNTAIN SUMMER

The fall winds have again descended upon me,
and summer has departed like a beloved
headed South

in the middle of the night,
the door left open,
and leaving not even a short note behind.

I wake up in a cold sweat
thinking to myself, “Shall
I follow her? Where on earth could
I find her? Tending her flocks of sheep on the pampas?”
No, I’m staying put.

I’d have to search every Tango
joint in Rio. She’ll come back when she’s ready.
I’m already digging in.

Time to shorten up my long-winded Mediterranean lines
into something more like Spartan, tough-minded,
laconic couplets.

What was it Dienices said at Thermopylae
when told the Persians would rain down a cloud
of arrows so thick it would block out the sun?

“Good then. We’ll fight in the shade.”

HOPE IS . . .

Hope is the patch of blue sky high above on the mountain before me as it begins without a trace of wind ever so gently to snow;

Hope is the first fish that returns in the fall from the sea, knowing that others—against all odds—may soon follow;

Hope is the young cellist who already knows all her Bach by heart;

Hope is the loud, raucous sound of nutcrackers stashing pine seeds for winter, or the tiny buds of a grouse-berry already prepared for the coming spring;

Hope is the sound of the British choir boy's voice echoing off the great stained-glass windows to the west, singing vespers, at Chartres;

Hope is the labyrinth we all must walk as the silence of nighttime descends upon the land like a benediction, and we suddenly realize that we too must continue our journey alone, after these few, and lucky, and rare, and all-too-brief moments of warmth, and sharing, along the way.

INAUGURATION

A timeless day, just above the clouds,
new snow from horizon to horizon.

It says to me: Cars do not exist.

Money does not exist.

America does not exist.

The first man and woman

look through our eyes down upon

what seems like mile-thick glacier ice,

filling whole valleys with their motionless white water,
sweeping away all that has been.

So the world celebrates the first day
of its new beginning, without fanfare,
without the confusions of false promise.

The trees bear witness.

The air bears witness.

The rivers bear witness.

O suffering of the world. What have I done today to end it?

It says to me: Nations are not great.

Armies are not great.

Flags are not great.

See the bridgemaker, speaker of many tongues,
the planter of trees and freer of rivers . . .

O clear signs of a calm birdless sky.

*I.20.2009
Stonepine Overlook,
Eagle Cap Wilderness*

THE DIFFERENCE OF BUT HALF A STEP

Bright sun on grayish-white granite,
a major key ascending,
rising beyond the high snowy peaks and distant stars.
A cloud passes by with misty rain
and suddenly all changes to shades of
dark reddish brown volcanic ash and wet rock,
a minor key descending without end,
falling with roots to the middle of the Earth.
The happy and the melancholy,
two sides of one movement . . .
How could I ever choose?
O mystery of creation,
why do we no longer ponder this difference
of but half a step,
no longer play this lyre of solace and peace,
forever tuned and tempered, not to one,
but to both?

ON MUSIC AS COMMODITY

Once we have divided the world into the separate conceptual frames of *living subject* and *lifeless object*, it is but a single easy step from lifeless object to resource, and from resource to commodity.

This habit of the mechanical brain of mapping life onto the lifeless has conditioned historically how we see and act towards rivers, towards forests, and soil and the land generally. So it should come as no surprise that we now follow the same pattern or habit of thought when it comes to Culture.

Consider music. Music in high-tech Western culture is no longer something that we *make* or *play*; Music has been reduced to a mere object or commodity we must *have* or *buy*. Music has become life-style. What does the Pope, or the President have on their iPod? And to think that just two hundred years ago, Thomas Jefferson is said to have practiced violin for two hours a day. Or it was perhaps a French translator's lively fiddle playing that got Lewis and Clark and The Corps of Discovery safely across a vast, wild continent and back.

So what have we lost in the wake of our technical sophistication? I would say it is the life, or the spirit of the sound. The sound of real plucked and bowed strings. The sound of a real

trumpet across a quiet forest lake. The sound of the living, talking drum.

WASTE OF TALENT

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

See the empty glamour of the contemporary music virtuoso. Technical sophistication perhaps, but without the joy and passion which come naturally with the journey of discovery into the wilds of the unknown. How many more complete Beethoven cycles do we need? Such a waste of talent, such great poverty of spirit, of meaning. Like love for sale, the movements may look exactly the same, but everybody knows your heart isn't in it.

THE TWELVE PRIMARY CONFUSIONS

- (1) The relationship and significance of human beings with regard to the whole of creation. Are we merely a fortuitous accident of evolution, or is our being, while clearly a product of evolutionary processes, also somehow an instrument which in a unique way holds and reflects the whole?;
- (2) The nature of the living center of each individual, or what we call 'the self,' and the relationship of this center to the whole of life, and what might be called the spiritual realm;
- (3) The relationship of individual consciousness to the consciousness that evidently pervades the whole of Nature;
- (4) The natural similarities and differences, large and small, between the genders;
- (5) The necessary unity of Art, Science and Religion;
- (6) The necessary unities of learning and love, of freedom and limit, and of security and wholeness;

- (7) The source and significance of intelligence and creativity;
- (8) The difference between mechanical and creative change or evolution;
- (9) The difference between true complexity and that which is merely unnecessarily difficult or complicated;
- (10) The nature and meaning of natural birth and death;
- (11) The nature of energy as it manifests in the movements of life, and its relationship to all of the above confusions;
- (12) The source of the form of but a single poem or flower.

MAN OF ONE CUP—three 37-step poems

(i)

Empty, round, metal
cup I use every day, how I've
grown fond of the feel in my hand,

center with

gifts from near and far . . .
Hot tea steeped in cold spring water.

(ii)

Square grid without a
center, towns built with quick money,
with gold, whiskey, easy women.

Your home was

always someplace else.
O Silver Maple, so far West.

(iii)

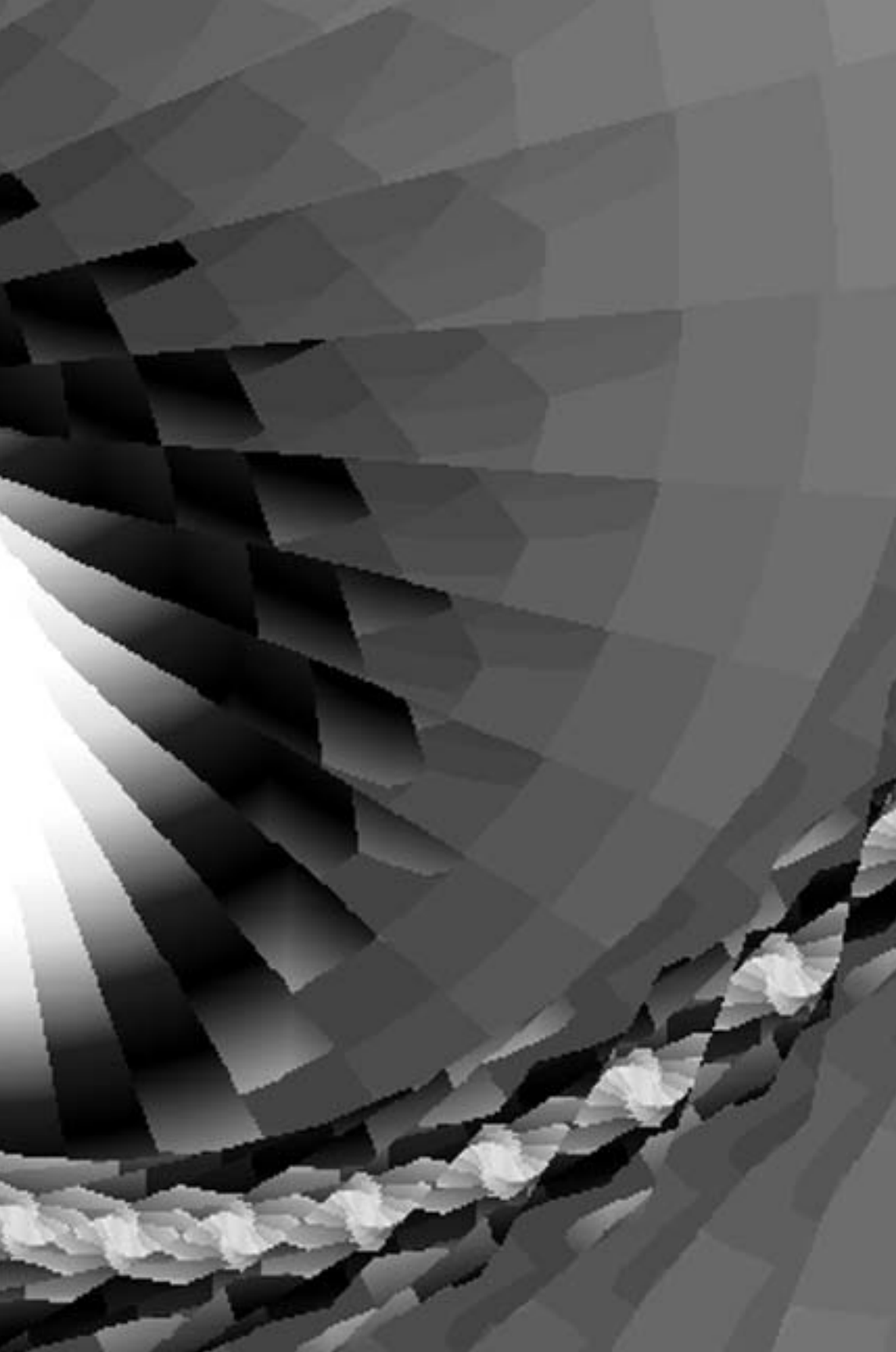
Boom days of easy
plunder now a thing of the past,
Speed's run flat dead knowing that the

direction

was wrong. *Cut down. Dig
up. Put barbed-wire around the rest.*







The Little Clavier: Part XV

Time folds into Space like a thread
wound round into a skein;

The *one-at-a-time* folds into and becomes
the *all-at-once*, and the myriad differences
become all co-present.

Listen to the notes of Melody wind round
themselves to become Harmony as the
piano's sustaining pedal is pushed down.

That's the sound of *Time* becoming *Space!*

THE LIBERATION TRIANGLE—*a meditation on cultural change*

I've always felt that the simplest and most powerful of all possible tests is the test of doing without. It is simple because there is nothing to buy, no new set of skills one must master, no lessons to attend. One simply stops doing something that one is used to doing. And it is powerful because we quickly become aware of how habit shapes perception. After all, it is possible that what we once thought was absolutely necessary and essential may turn out to be largely arbitrary and, in a deeply insidious and unconscious way, destructive.

So, here are three key do's of present Western culture I've turned into don'ts [drawing]

There are other sets of three, of course. Perhaps some readers might come up with better collections themselves. It must be said that they are simple only in principle. To actually live them would be difficult. But also, I think, revealing. That is why I call the set of three The Liberty or Liberation Triangle. By just doing one of the three, we step outside of the dominant stream of everyday behavior. This is rather like venturing up to clearer, higher ground and looking down on the whole of a culture's activity in certain areas and directions. From the new perspective, suddenly we see pattern, we see motivations, and we see consequences and inter-relationships. And, we are surprised because the new vantage point makes these seem so obvious.

The Triangle can also be reversed. Interestingly, if we introduce just one of its three sides into a culture which hitherto has remained unexposed, we might conjecture that the integrity of that culture will quickly fall apart. This, it seems to me, suggests that the petrochemical cult of cars, the mesmerizing propaganda blitz of TV, together with the highly addictive nature of industrial agriculture's junk food make for a kind of mutually reinforcing illusion. A kind of perceptual prison. Hence, the idea of liberation, of freeing oneself, by doing nothing more than not doing three key things. Simple indeed!

ETHICAL IMPERATIVES—*a meditation on Earthrise*

The first imperative of ethics is that ethics itself should not be thought of as belonging primarily to what is now considered religion, but rather as a primary dimension of all human activity. ‘Primary’ means that it is the first aspect to be considered in all action and decision making, and not the last, as a kind of half-hearted, feel-good, clean-up action on Sundays intended to mask and cover-up guilt.

All action resonates in space and time. Sometimes only a second or two, sometimes for centuries; Sometimes only a few centimeters out from my own body. sometimes perhaps to infinity.

Outwardly, this is *ethical consequence*; inwardly, it is *ethical conscience*.

The key feature of this complementary inner and outer movement of consequence and conscience is the breadth of the circle of awareness and responsibility.

The great leap of consciousness brought home in the historic Earthrise photograph of forty years ago—perhaps the most important image of our time—is that it shows to the mind of compassion with granite-like clarity that the necessary breadth of this circle of awareness and responsibility begins and ends with

the whole of the living Earth, and not with largely arbitrary, conflicting fragments like nations states.

Necessity is a thing of great philosophical beauty. This is so because necessity awakens, and in a most powerful way brings together, the very best of our intellectual and spiritual energies, both individually and collectively. Just as the wild proposal of the poet-scientist that we must go to the Moon not because it is easy, but because it is difficult crystallized and brought together an entire generation of creativity, we need now to see that the dual imperatives of the new millennium are ending waste and war. Waste, because it in one word summarizes where the conventions of Culture are out of line with the laws of Nature. Eliminate waste, and you solve the problem of pollution, renewable energy, corrupt agricultural practices and climate change all at once. And War, because of its destructive insanity—and it is insanity because the entire Earth is at stake—of contemporary weapons technology stands before us as the central fact of our time:— that it is no longer a question of violence or non-violence, but rather of non-violence or non-existence. Seen from this larger perspective, it becomes clear perhaps that War & Waste are essentially two sides of one problem.

Who would say that from the perspective of the Moon that waste is not humanity's total war on Nature, and that war in turn is not humanity's total waste of its own spiritual essence and promise?

FOUR MINIATURES ON ART

(1) In all Art, the primary criteria of what is good, right and beautiful are not to be found just in philosophy and aesthetics, but rather in a life devoted to the diligent observation of Nature. Once artists no longer live by the seasons, the four directions, no longer know the birds and flowers, their work will eventually come to refer only to itself, or, at best, merely to other art. Such work denies itself the guiding, nurturing, and sustaining resonance with the symphony of natural sounds and forms that surrounds us.

(2) The silent joy of making things instantly vanishes if unforced, unselfconscious anonymity is lost. The deer in the meadow are always uneasy about someone surreptitiously looking on from a distance.

(3) The only thing we can know for sure about creativity is perhaps *what it is not*, or what blocks it. Fear, greed, jealousy:—as easy to spot as weeds in the summer garden. But the source of the seed? One looks up to the heavens and is brought down to earth, clear blue skies in all directions.

(4) The most creative of all acts is that of bringing people together in new, unknown ways. It is also the most difficult. What could be more necessary than this?

THREE MINIATURES ON SOUND

(1) The 2nd-hand artificial sounds of electronic recordings and instruments corrupt the ear just as assuredly as the oil-refinery colors of suburban lawns and hybrid flowerbeds corrupt the eye. Edges must be made sharper, colors made ever-louder and more saturated, and forms made ever-more confined to tight rows marching to the square box of a 4/4 beat. Start with the facts of corruption. Children now take a new instrument out of the case for the first time, already eager for recording contracts, instructed by teachers who tune their guitars by machine, teachers who are unable to hear a true 4th by ear, who cannot sense the difference between a living tempo and a computer's dead and dry click track. May the Muses have mercy upon us.

(2) Odds are, that twenty years from now, when you ask a current user of earbuds & iPods about the music they used to listen to back then, they'll say, "*What did you say?*"

(3) Once walking the land has become an extinct species of movement, the atrophy and then loss of a deeply rooted sense of rhythm will inevitably soon follow. Poets will compose lines that miss all the beats, they will compose lines without cadence, that never pause to rest, and that have forgotten about the necessary breath of silence.

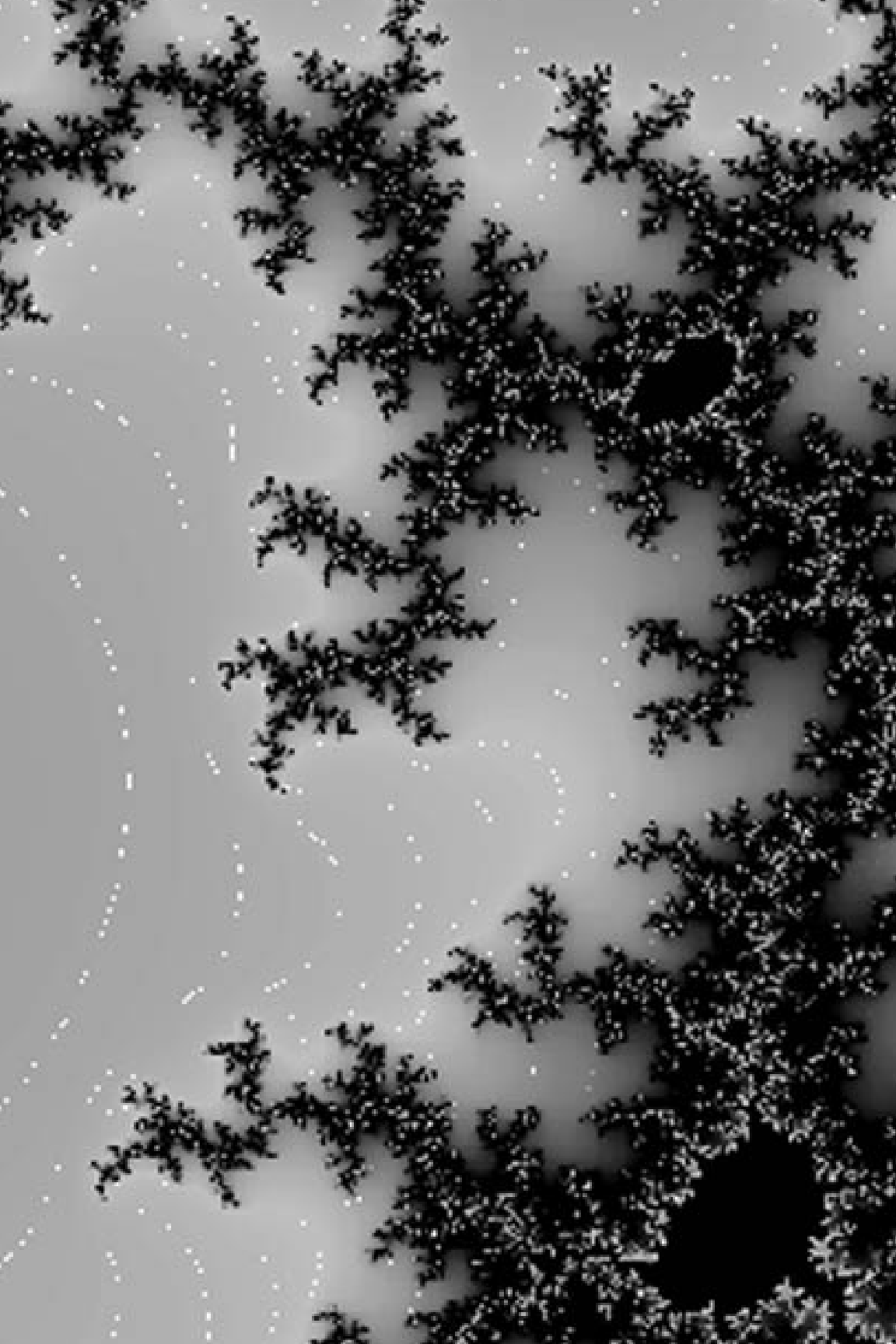


FAT TIPS





Budweiser



The Little Clavier: Part XVI

Form 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.

A QUINTET OF *NEON GRAFFITI*

Written in a rare,
inert gaseous element,
obtained by a fractional
distillation of much
suffering.

Colorless,
but glows reddish orange
in an electric discharge.
displayed on
walls...
soon to be taken
down.

“Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard and misapplied words, with little or no meaning, have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation, that it will not be easy to persv but the covers of ignorance, and hindrance of true knowledge.”

from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
John Locke (1632—1704)

d & d

unen**D**angered

sp**E**cies of

deadly substances la**C**e

w**O**mb of earth,

con**N**ecting

wi**T**h nothing other than more of themselves,

l**A**unching

Multiple waves of

indeterm**I**nate effects,

reso**N**ating

in w**A**ys so appallingly contorted in their

insoluble complica**T**edness,

that **I**, as

one among countless millions of other members of creatura
wish we would have **N**ot produced in the first place,
&
given the fact that i myself, too, **D**o need, as you, perhaps, too,
and many others, also, do need mor**E** than a modicum
of purifi**C**ation and cleansing,
why on earth does the w**O**rd not put its foot down and simply
insist that
we stop thinking up ever-more new deadly **M**aterials
which **I**'m sure, too, nobody
really wants or need**S**,
at lea**S**t
until **I**t (science)
effectively has the **O**ld profound mistakes of the past

thoroughly **N**eutralized, and, well: the urgency
of all th**I**s should by now be obvious — it is after all rather bor-
ing — in that
the world which seeks security in **N**-weapons — (¿contradiction?) — might soon
need more than than just more **D**econtamination & **D**ecommission**I**n**G**.

(read as if in one breath)

ACRONYMSPEAK

: an everyday rhetorical practice of introducing new words—each of which forms its own unique visual icon and sound—which come to represent new concepts, organizations or technical procedures; Best used with care, sparingly, like one might orchestrate musique concrete sounds into a symphony of sonorous acoustic strings. If we remember that the evidently intentionally humorous wake-up sound in a vintage acronym like **WAC** stands for **Women’s Army Corps**, and that the term **RADAR** was cleverly pieced together from “**r**adio **d**etecting and **r**anging,” we see, that, because of this recent history of their usage in English, acronyms frequently have a military-like or governmental ring to them. Indeed, the military seems to like acronyms as a convenient way of putting a clean, surgical, scientific-sounding front cover on the technology of death. To say, for example, that a country has 20 **ICBMs** (an abbreviation for **InterContinental Ballistic Missiles**, each outfitted with megaton payloads) pointed at enemy territory, with another 12,000 or so such warheads stockpiled somewhere, is deliberately deceptive use of language. It is as if the **ICBM** acronym were designed to be dealt out like chips in a table game which plays with big numbers and high stakes, while in reality, just one or two such weapons would be enough to kill 10 or 20 million human beings. Politicians are fond of using acronyms and abbreviations for similar reasons. Just one or two encoded first-letter icons per 8 1/2 by 11 page will give any report an aura of thorough preparation and expertise. That is, to those who for

whatever reason are motivated and knowledgeable enough to have figured out the code. Who would suspect that the **DOE**, or the **Department Of Energy**, imitating the same sound we write and make for a peaceful female deer, is the governmental agency responsible for the development and safe care-taking of the above-mentioned nuclear weaponry? Of course, if you run **ICBM** through a spelling checker it will probably tell you to change it to **IBM**. Indeed, computer scientists and programmers, following the military-style interconnected building-block systems approach, have introduced acronyms and abbreviations into the everyday language in a very big way. Again, a bit of history reveals something of the interesting relationship. Who would ever guess that **ARPANET** or **Advanced Research Projects Agency NETwork** (now **DARPA**), originally intended for the development of military technology, would become the precursor of the hugely popular Internet and World-wide Web. (**DARPA** financed much of the infrastructure development for the Internet, including versions of **UNIX** (an important operating system) and **TCP/IP** (Protocol Suite Transmission Control Protocol over Internet Protocol))? By now, to make an impression in a hard-wired, high-tech world, one must learn to effortlessly crack cryptic acronym-speak or live with the fear of an embarrassing flame from someone more perspicacious or, as one says nowadays, savvy, than you.

(read as if in one breath)

FOUR EASY STEPS . . .

TO A RADICALLY NEW POPULAR MUSIC

- (1) don't play 4/4;
- (2) don't say "love;"
- (3) don't say "baby;"
- (4) pull out the plug.

BASIC BALLOT

BASIC BALLOT
(mark one only +)

left

right

(+) no viable alternative

vote *yes* for no!

AT THE KEYBOARD

R h y t h m, mmm,
that sound, one hears it whole,
but the fingers trip and stutter
slightly,
mmm,
we back up...
tap,tap, tap, tap, tap,
like the quick little flights and chirps of
birds, each word, each sound, makes
its own special flutter of movement,
thinking with 10 fingers, they say,
a woman can easily do this dance
and talk to a hundred men at once.
(What would he have to say?)

R h y t h m, an ancient sounding word,

no, no, no, b a c k u p, correct th/
mmmm,
tap, tap,
tap, tap, tap, tap, t a p,
tap, tap,

t a p

push, save, shift,

rhy-thm, yes
mmmmm,

taptap, tap

What would he have t/

mistake,
e r r o r,
k e y,
Type, Tap, Drift, Shift, Sif-t

l e t - t e r s
n o t - h e r s

TapTap!!

What?

t e a r s,
f e a r s,
t e a r s.
y e a r s,

tap,tap, type, ripe, hype, r, rr,

mmm,

(tension in the neck and wrists)

Tap, twist, tap, twist - e r,

he said/

y o u?

d o ?

“Do it!” Oooooooooo.. . . .

Twist, tap, rap, trip, err, or,

tear,

t e a r,

s c a r e,

terro/

Tap, tap, tap, tap, t a p, t a p- e,

(/ e s b o r e d)

she s e e s, s e a s, he, w a v e s,

r a v e s, s a v e s,

“How much/ an/

tap, he,

rap, rap,

/hour?/

(satascatarataback), Ooooo, pain/ stiff/
sorry, rift

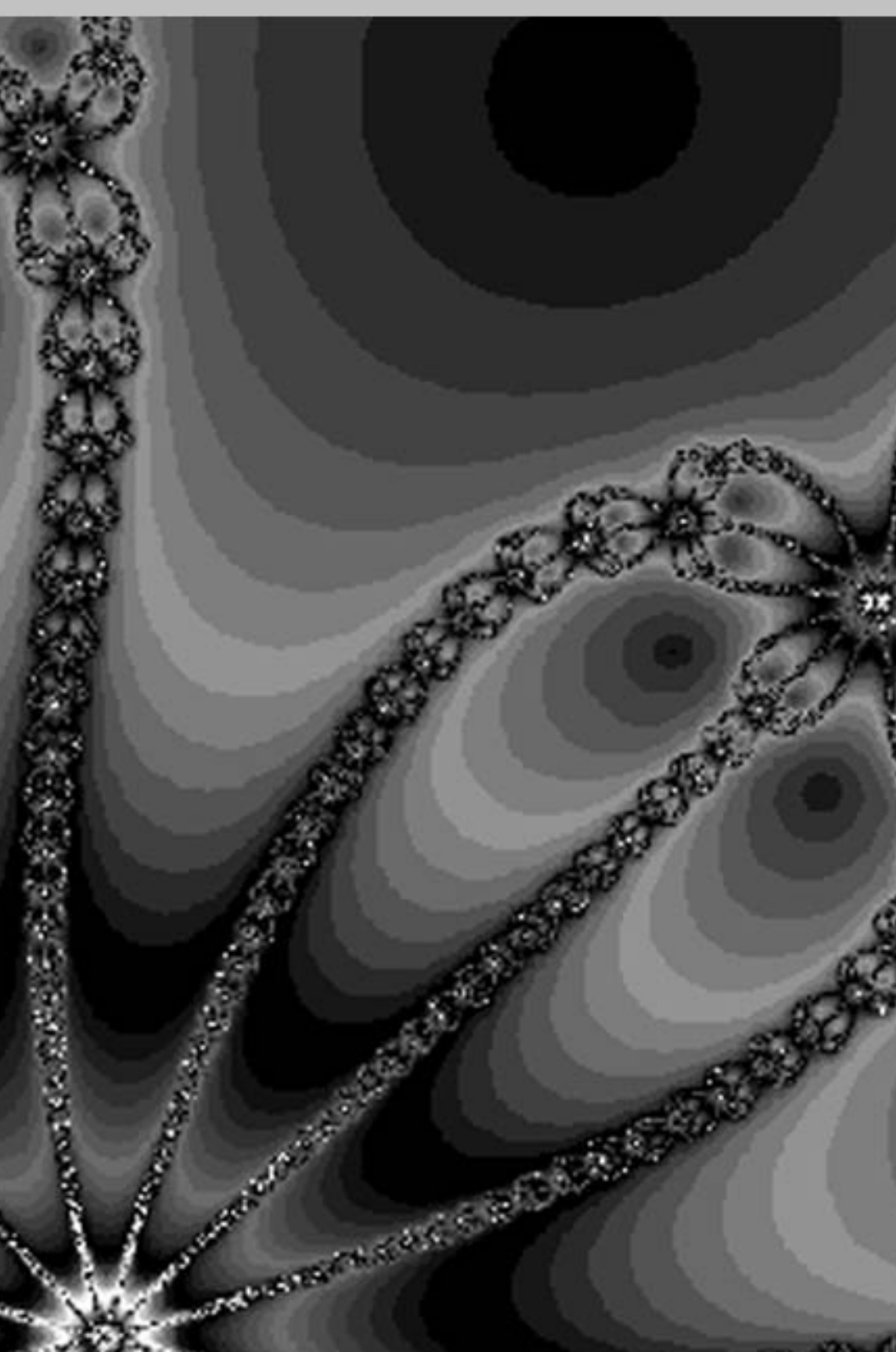
(tapazapawapawap),

she's ss, ooo, o, o, ta-lenttttt t t t , t , t , tt—
oo, mmm, rrr, r h y - t h m, oh , u m, s o r - r y,

“Print it out!”







The Little Clavier: Part XVII

In 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.

ON THE FRAGMENTATION OF NATURAL WATER CYCLES

*The spring gives freely of its water,
but only in freedom can we drink.*

First off, just let me say that I don't really know first hand what a truly large-scale natural water cycle is like, because I have never lived for a sustained period of time in a culture wholly nested within one. At the same time, I do know and have extensive experience with what a natural water cycle is not. And let it be said from the outset, that I do not like what I see, both in the parts of the European Alps that I know well, and those areas of the Northwest that I am presently exploring.

I do not like this recurrent pattern of the radical fragmentation of natural water cycles: break the flow; dam the river; fill the reservoir; divert vast quantities of water for frequently questionable, wasteful ends. Perhaps most importantly, I simply do not like the folly of attempting to control what is not really understood. The rich and chaotic complexity of the natural water cycle has been treated as if it were as neat and orderly and precise as a Swiss train. And now, only some fifty years after the great boom time of mega-dams, everywhere the negative side-effects of the extraordinary hubris of this philosophy of control are building up before our eyes like piles of unpaid bills.

The facts are unequivocal. In the Reuss / Rhein watershed

of the Alps, where I've worked for many years intensively, the salmon stopped running in 1958; And now, by some very strange twist of fate, the part of the great Columbia watershed in which I'm now focusing much of my attention—the South Wallowas—the salmon also stopped running that same year: 1958. Those are facts.

But in a far more subtle and tragic way, some vast, essentially unknowable, natural movement has been lost; it has stopped turning, as it were, as if a heavy wrench were thrown into the delicate spokes of a finely tuned wheel.

So the movement of the cycle fragments, breaks up into essentially out-of-phase, partial, disharmonious, smaller half-cycles. The result is that the entire life-community that depends on this rhythmic flow of a watershed as a whole begins to suffer—one species at a time—begins to pull back, decline, dry up, and, finally, vanish. “Vanish” is not, I believe, an exaggeration here. In both areas mentioned above—the central Alps and the South Wallowas—there are at present no real recovery plans for salmon, which means that they are effectively being erased from consciousness.

How has this happened? Well, I would say because of confused meaning.

The basic question is, “*What is a river?*” Is it something like a vein or artery of the living Earth? Or is a river more like a

sewer or water pipe, with precise, measureable properties? These questions of meaning and perspective are more basic than the facts of objective needs, like water for irrigation, power generation or human consumption, as important as these might be. Why? First, because natural limit always trumps need. If water managers say they need for a town of 5,000 two million liters of water a day, and the basin provides only one million, well, the “needs” will just have to change. Full stop. Second, it is meaning that shapes this all-important perception of natural limit, just as meaning in turn is shaped by a culture’s primary formative images or metaphors. If we think of water as money, for example, then it is clearly a waste of capital to let water just flow out to sea without making it work for us. So, just like money, we put water in “banks,” by building reservoirs and dams. And, just as with money, we act as if there is no natural limit: more is always better. The crucial flaw, I would argue, in this water-is-money style of thinking—its essential contradiction—is that there’s no compound interest when it comes to water, nothing like the money-begetting-more-money of for example a 5% loan that hedges against doubling its cash in a mere 16 years, and that essentially out of thin air! Water behind a dam, it is true, does build up for a time, but its quality rapidly degenerates, and the knotting up of the natural flow evidently invariably sets off a cascade of contradictions throughout the wider water-based web of life. The water silts up; water temperatures rise as vital oxygen levels decrease; the thermal weight of such large bodies of static water may set-off a micro-climate forcing, raising ambient temperatures enough to melt snowpack

on the higher peaks before that snowmelt is needed, or cause more precipitation to fall as rain instead of snow; agricultural pollution is no longer periodically flushed out from the system; the complex nested rhythms and dynamic balances of the ebb and flood of the water-year are broken; the macro flows of essential nutrients from mountain forest to the sea and back again are destroyed. These are just a few of the facts, not in my view as it is euphamistically put, “concern,” but rather of collapse.

Contradiction—or how the all-important limits of Nature and the artifacts of Culture ‘speak or fight against one another’—has two key features: First, it points to weaknesses in our way of thinking, or philosophy of design, which are at the same time happily always new opportunities for discovery; And second, contradictions are always non-sustainable. That is, opposing movements grind against each other until the wheels of the system at some point simply fall off.

This means that, regardless of how we think about them, where there is contradiction there will be collapse. It is up to us—and this is the problem’s ethical dimension I think—to use the best of our science to untie the knots, so to speak, in an intelligent and measured way, or else be swept away in a highly unpleasant flood of mostly unforeseen negative consequences.

ON THE NECESSITY OF ROADLESS AREAS (II)

It is true: once a road is built, it frequently becomes easier and easier to get to places that are less and less worth going to. If it can be said that roads have a tendency to bring out the worst in people—the noisy grind of greed and self-centered haste—then paths bring out the best, a kind of waste-not-want-not of a rugged, but increasingly rare spirit of self-reliance. The one, a sharp-edged knife that rips apart the fabric of forest and meadow; the other, a single thread which in the walking weaves itself seamlessly back into the natural world.

Clearly, we obviously need good, well-designed roads. But even more we need the wisdom of natural limits which tells us when not to build them.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS MANDALA

A ritual circle which brings the far away, the very small, the ignored or half forgotten, into the magical middle realm of the contemplative compassionate eye.

A circle which not just mirrors the Beautiful, but reflects also the Strange and Ugly through the clear, yet necessarily imperfect and somewhat blurred lens of partial truth.

TOO MANY VARIABLES

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

To master the complex, keep things simple.

To keep things simple, keep the number of variables to but a single dial.

Turned all the way down, the dial produces the sleep of rigid dogma; turned all the way up, it produces the runaway confusion of random noise.

Better to keep things focused on the clear limits of the middle way.

EIGHT MINIATURES ON LEARNING

(1) *Schools?* A place where the gift of wonder becomes the fear of failure and exams.

(2) Questions open the door into the unknown, tests shut it.

(3) In all learning, the first thing we need to do is create a space free of fear.

(4) *Awards? Competitions?* Why do we not see that the sweet offered as a reward is the other side of the same stick of punishment? Real learning transcends the mere conditioning of pleasure and pain, and ascends to the demonstration of mastery in performance.

(5) The discipline which is imposed from *without* quickly becomes the hurt carried *within*.

(6) Reading for hours at a time narrows the mind to the stuffy confines of a room without windows; Listening, in contrast, whether *in-* or *out-of-doors*, is much more alive; it allows the eyes to roam freely about, no longer straining in a small, constricted field of vision. Listening allows for great space. And a polyphony of simultaneous, complementary movements. Don't take my word for it. Try it. Experiment. Take what your reading and record it in your own voice, or let a computer speak it for you. Then go out side to some, quiet place and listen. Watch

how easily you can follow the flow of what is being said and still observe the flowers, the birds, the wind in the trees, the movements of clouds and weather. Watch how that, if you go on to write yourself, with time, much more space will begin to enter in the rhythms of your prose. And if you compose, you may soon discover for yourself the most basic of all movements in music—the back and forth of sound and silence. Listening. It's perhaps the most beautiful and primary of the arts.

(7) If we do not love what we teach, order and discipline, which naturally come from *within*, must be imposed from *without*. The result is learning spaces which are all too similar to industrial farms, with their animals chained in barns or behind fences, monocultures in tight, neat rows, harvests that fatten but do not nourish, and a soil which hungers for proper respect and care.

(8) The essence of natural learning is sympathetic love resonance. Here, a strong inward movement of intelligence awakens a similar movement in the child. When you know a path by heart and yet still discover it anew every time you walk it, the child will follow your footsteps perfectly without giving it a single thought. When you love the path you walk, the first step holds all subsequent steps, just as the first sound of a poem or a symphony holds implicitly the whole story it is about to tell. A child senses this instantly. The integrity, the craft, the truth of it. The story is passed on; the seed has been planted. And, most wonderfully— afterwards, the first thing a child wants to do is share or teach what he or she has learned to a friend. This

is why the master / apprentice relationship ought to be seen as something primary and sacred, and as the central learning space of choice in all creative traditions.

THREE MINIATURES ON SEEING

(1) The greatest instrument of change is the new idea. It brings together both for the individual and the collective our hitherto scattered, diffuse and confused creative energies into one unified movement. The new idea does not show us the details of *how*, but rather the necessity of *why*. And that makes all the difference.

(2) The interval between two tones, the shadow cast by a tree, the flashing sparkles of waves on a stream or leaves on a tree, all are not static “things,” but rather movements of relationship. Perception is always a problem of relationship.

(3) One advantage of eyes that grow weaker with age is that one sees less and less of all the disturbing detail reflected in the unforgiving mirrors of physical decline. But then there’s also the possibility that the mind’s inner eye, if it learns to see more deeply into the nature of seeing itself, with such insight grows younger, brighter, and ever-more resilient with each passing day.

TWO MINIATURES ON PLANTS & NOISE

(1) To love the plants is to know them. To know the plants is to make them your friend. To make the plants your friend is to surround yourself with teachers as old and wise as the Earth itself.

(2) Just as no one ever wanted to cloud the skies with the smoky haze of accumulated car exhaust, or wanted streams to run muddy with plastic bags and human waste, no one ever wanted the world to become a noisy place. But noisy it is, all the same.

And, now that noise has become a part of practically every landscape—even the most isolated and highest mountain ranges have jets roaring above them—how shall we ever know what the deeper, more subtle effects of noise on the human psyche really are? Or on Nature as a whole? For the question has in a way become: where are the untouched control groups to be found? And where are we to find even a single researcher who has not been to some extent profoundly conditioned—even while still in the womb—by a sea of surrounding noise?

My guess is that noise works on the mind something like a slowly contracting air-tight room. As the noise levels increase, the walls of the room close in and the pressure builds. Finally, one finds one's face pushed up against the wall, until one can no longer hear oneself talk, or even think. An *ur*-scream of almost unbearable angst would almost certainly be the result.

Remarkably, no one designed this environment, or intended this to happen. It just did. Think of it. Noise, like other forms of pollution, is entirely a by-product, a side-effect. And yet has become a dominant factor of much of urban and even rural life. What kind of philosophy of design is that?

FOUR MINIATURES ON FORM

(1) A melody, or a phrase in a poem, is not built up of parts like a wall is made of bricks. Fold into fold, the parts reflect and refer to the whole, while the whole in turn gives structure and order to the parts. It is the quality of the movement of the whole that is primary. Vitally important is that this movement can only partially be seen or studied on the printed score or page.

(2) Form—whether that of a musical composition, or of a poem, a ribbon of water, or of a flower—emerges out of movement; it is the outward envelope of the rhythmic pulse of change.

(3) Complicatedness is difficulty which serves no purpose and is therefore without reason or meaning; it is difficulty which is unnecessary. Nothing else defeats the mind more quickly than having to deal, on a day-to-day basis, with unnecessary difficulty which goes unresolved. In any traditionally hierarchical social structure, whether it be a school, an army, a symphonic orchestra, or large corporation, this is the single most important factor which frustrates the intelligence or creativity of the indi-

vidual.

Remarkably, in this sense, complicatedness in Nature does not exist, because it wastes energy, and therefore contradicts Nature's economy of the watercourse way.

(4) Just as water flows around all obstacles, intelligence naturally moves to resolve unnecessary difficulties. Poor design imposes arbitrary blocks or limits to the freedom of this flow.

TWO MINIATURES ON RELATIONSHIP

(1) Some people make us smart; others, make us dumb. Some people make us happy; others, make us sad. If dialogue and compassion form two sides of the triangle of friendship, then *encouragement*, or the mutual generation of the creative energy that makes real change and discovery possible, might be the third. This is how the world becomes a better place, two people at a time.

(2) Have you ever thought about why the world of Nature no longer informs or shapes our manner of movement or dress? Or why, in a more general way, contemporary culture no longer seems shaped or informed by a fertile interaction of human creativity and place? Is this not in part because of a kind of not physical, but rather *spiritual*, colonization?

In the past, the colonization of the mind practiced by organized imperial religions wanted us to believe this or that as a means of spiritual dominion and control (The actual details of content are in my view irrelevant.); Now, the instruments of commerce, corporations, governments, and, yes, once again—churches—all wish in similar ways to take possession of our souls. They do this by conditioning our likes and dislikes. Consider that by the time the average student arrives at a North American university, he or she will have seen a solid 12,000 hours of commercial television. Extraordinary, by any standard.

These new instruments of control thereby gain great influence over how we vote, how we spend our money, and how and what we believe is true and important. And this they have done with amazing success.

If you think this exaggeration, imagine this tableau: put a young person from China, India, Japan, Australia, North or South America, or Europe on a forest path anywhere in the world. Remarkably, they will in a nearly identical way look wholly out-of-place. Their movements will all seem to emerge from one simple, common, programmed language. These movements say, “*Hey, dude! I speak MTV! Get out of the way.*” A revolt of youth? Quite doubtful. Personally, I wish it were. But that would require at the very outset the inspired austerity of *doing without*, of throwing away the keys to the car, tearing up every logo in sight, swearing off trash food forever, and smashing your CD’s and lining up for execution in the backyard your TV.

Perhaps the most endangered species of the Western world has become the free spirit, the young or old person—age makes no difference here—who can think, see and act with intellectual integrity and independence.

I say to you, to outfit oneself in style for the coming peaceful, inward revolution, one need not buy or purchase a single thing.

Now Imagine that!

SCIENCE. ART. RELIGION.

Science begins with the willingness to drop a theory when it is contradicted by fact.

Art begins with the willingness to tear down a museum or concert hall and put up a new ones when they no longer fit what we see as meaningful or beautiful.

Religion begins when we are willing to drop rigid belief and claims to absolute authority because we have seen that these are the very source of the barriers that divide us.

Attempting to unite Science, Art and Religion in their present state of disarray, however, would certainly be folly. It would most surely result in questionable hybrids, like a Mozart Mass pumped up with drums and bass guitar, or a pseudo-science constructed consciously as a smokescreen for a fundamentalist conditioning of the young.

And yet the fragmentation of Science, Art and Religion corrupts the high-country springs of our collective creativity. Better to take down the arbitrary blocks and dams that are the root cause of their present division—one at a time and all at once—and let them flow together in what are for us now wholly unknown ways .

RUNAWAY DECEPTIONS

A runaway deception is a false, or negative, idea which is put into a positive feedback loop, much like a microphone feeding back on itself and wildly amplifying its own sound.

Runaway deceptions as ideas tend to be self-reinforcing. Once you have the idea that, for instance, all Arabs are terrorists, just the earthy, guttural sound of their language, which few in the West feel any sympathy for, let alone speak fluently or understand, is enough to trigger fear and hate and violence. And when we approach the world with such fear and hate and violence, the world will most likely answer us in kind, thereby wrapping round itself and giving still more energy to the deception.

In this way, runaway deceptions also tend to be self-destructive. In their extreme, fundamentalist form, the survival of the false idea of the deception itself—that it should prevail—may very well become more important than one's own survival. Runaway deception, indeed.

TREE OF WISDOM

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

If Religion and Metaphysics are to mean anything, they should help us age and grow older not merely as an ever-larger and more burdensome collection of broken physical parts, but rather with the slowly increasing wisdom of a tree, a tree which has seen and holds the complexity of the centuries with its ever-clearer, ever-more mature and beautiful, spiritual form.

WATERCOURSE WAY

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Balance in Art follows the natural movements of water and weather. Fast mountain streams give way to the slow, supple curves of lowland rivers, and the broad expanses of the sea. Dark, cold rains are followed by bright skies and the happy warmth of the sun.

Balance is never either/or, but rather the course which runs between extremes. The culture which has lost direct contact with these movements of the symphony of life will also necessarily lose its sense of balance and measure in its Art.

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MEMORY IS SPATIAL

We shape the world and the world shapes us.

Arrange the objects you use every day in a clear spatial array and you'll never have to think of where to find them. The hand simply moves to the left, or to the right, and picks up your book and writing pen, without giving it a second thought. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the more important meanings of "second nature." The objects and tools and artifacts we work with become easily and naturally extensions of ourselves.

This should be a guiding principle of digital design: finding things should never be *self-consciously visual*, but rather *unconsciously spatial*. We shouldn't have to think about the tools that help us make and think.

MACHINE INTELLIGENCE

The Crow asked the Squirrel, “*Can Computers think?*” And the Squirrel said—

“*Just as airplanes can fly!*”

AGAINST *STURM & DRANG*

Beat-up inside teutonic kettle drums,
the much-will-have-more of self-expression
lays waste to the wilderness of the Ear,
banging away at the bars of crazy codas that
find no way to inflict the final blow.

Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. The orchestra of a
thousand marches across past battlefields
still hazy with the smoke of holy wars.

Yet see:—a truce has been called:
Waves of water write signs upon the white sand.
The Song Thrushes have arrived again from the south,
and at any moment may speak
to the clear northern skies.

DECIBELS

The Chainsaw said to the Jackhammer, “*Who’s making all the noise around here? The Electric Bass or the Drummer?*”

Tolerance for noise? They say, a frog in a pot of water, if you turn up the heat slowly enough, will let itself be boiled.

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*.

SNOW MACHINE

Riding wild chainsaw over pristine news snow,
high pitched grind of the mind of the angry young man,
the in your face ethics of the who cares?
if my fun is your loss get and the hell out of the way!

SNOW DEVILS

Spirit of the mountains,
turning round and around.
Wind North by Northwest . . .
Put the cameras away!

WINTER STORM

After every storm
comes the day of clearing.
Hope is the motionless flame
which burns quietly bright
as the winds
rage.

THIS MORNING

This morning

I awoke in total darkness
sleeping on five feet of snow.

Ah, hot coffee made
of crystals of ice!

Before first light, the sound
of a woodpecker drumming on larch.

Right place, right time.

March the 1st!

We've made it through
another winter.

ON THE MASCULINE ENERGY OF CONTROL

*Once the balance of masculine and feminine principles
is lost, mere competition between the genders
will replace complementarity.*

There's something about the decidedly masculine energy of control that loves the crisp, clear, straight lines of a laser's or bullet's trajectory. Think of it:—straight walls, straight pipes, straight roads, straight dams.

Pity the time when we no longer cry out that life is not only a matter of the shortest, most efficient route between points *a* and *b*, but that there is more, and that life is from another perspective—the eternally feminine—essentially round.

Pity the time *when time itself* is not just an arrow flying fast and furious to its goal, but also a mysterious, rhythmic pulse of wheels turning within wheels which comes round with the miracle of each new birth.

Pity the time when we acquiesce in our silence and become at once both imitator and victim of this powerful, but one-sided straight-line universe of men in love with the illusion of mechanical control.

ON THE NECESSARY WISDOM OF ELDERS

Sudden change even a child can see. It is the slow, hard to perceive changes that require the experienced eye and acquired wisdom of the elder.

A wise eye may see that a certain bird species fails to return in spring; it may see when a new species of weed pulls into town and sets up shop; or when a small stream or creek runs dry in August, whereas a decade ago it still delivered reliable water for crops until the fresh new rains of fall.

The scientist studies, gets paid, and walks away. But the wisdom of the elder by its very nature stays put, and like a tree with deep roots, is more likely to stand its ground and protect the land of which it is a part.

One of the first lessons of the young should be the need to safeguard this wisdom of elders, for that is what in turn safeguards their own future, and their children's future. Likewise, one of the tasks of the older generation is not to get stuck in the tight jeans purchased from the cute teenager at the big-city mall. It must learn again to move proudly with, like the dignified ridgetop stonepine that has seen perhaps a thousand winters, the slower, deeper, and much more resonant drum beat of wisdom and great age.

MIRRORS OF LIGHT & SOUND—
three 37-step sounds

(i)

High walls of contrast,
flat surface of an alpine lake, giving
back wind and clouds, bright moon and faint

planets and

stars. Mind of Earth, eye
rejecting none, accepting all.

(ii)

Flat, even surface
of neutrality, water reflects,
receives, both a god's self-love,

and the thoughts

of humble fishes
caught in the swirl of a moth's wings.

(iii)

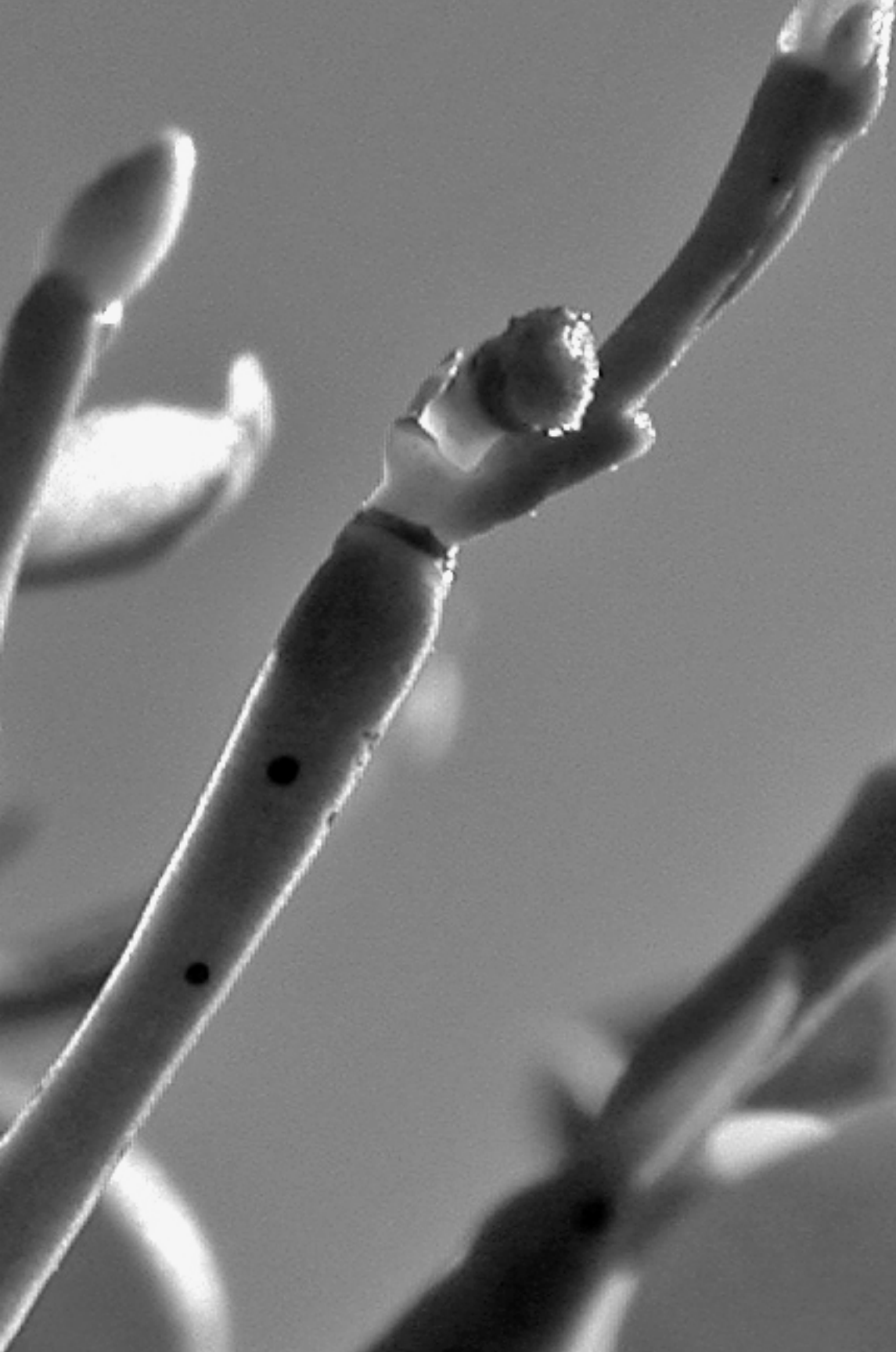
Mirrors made of sound,
piano-forte of the mind,
sets of celestial strings that

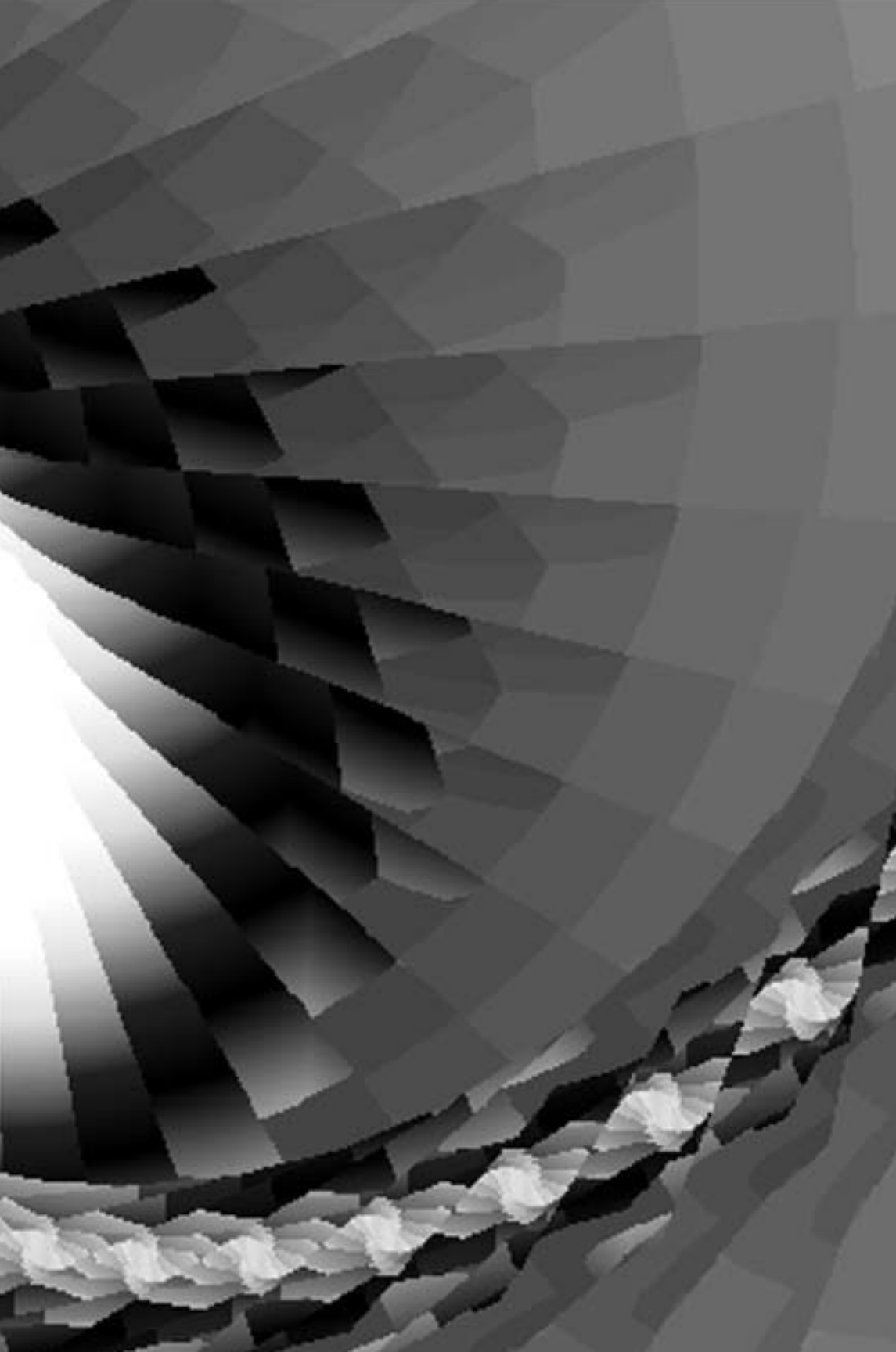
resonate

with life's sympathy.

O sound of the soul, eternal.







The Little Clavier: Part XVIII

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.

* * *

Change is the second most difficult thing,
understanding—the first.

POLLUTION, WHOLENESS & THE PLASTIC BAG

In a way, it is possible to say that the pollution of the Earth, especially at the extraordinary and massive scale at which it is now taking place, is only possible because of a radical fragmentation of our thought and perception.

It's interesting that pollution is not an end in itself. In other words, pollution is not something we do deliberately, but is rather almost entirely a result of the unwanted side-effects of everyday actions and habits. Because pollution is not an end in itself, or goal, it is therefore very easy to, as the apt figure of speech has it, "put out of mind." In other words, we focus with laser-like precision on some goal, like making a computer, or powering a car, while ignoring the pollution factor or the ratio of kilograms of toxic waste which results from each kilo of product produced. Again, my contention is that this denial of such highly relevant facts is only possible with an equally highly fragmented manner of perception.

From the philosophical point of view, what's interesting about pollution, is that it does not simply go away because we for whatever reason avoid thinking about it. In fact, this is precisely why pollution is so revealing: it is because of the very wholeness of the natural systems of the Earth that pollution—like it or not—comes round as a kind of highly unflattering mirror of our

own fragmented styles of thinking.

There is logical beauty in this because we have before us a clear reflection of where we have gone wrong. Pollution is telling us in its own way where mistakes in design need to be corrected. And as part of the natural system ourselves, this is indeed what we would do—that is, correct our mistakes—as long as there is nothing blocking us from doing so.

This is easy to test for yourself.

Consider this: it is a fact that plastic shopping bags are wrecking havoc with the water cycles of the world. For example, the area that has become known as *The Great Pacific Garbage Patch*, a vast surface whirlpool of plastic-based trash between the west coast of the United States and Hawaii and now covering an area the size of Texas, is full of these ubiquitous white items of convenience. Ugly, yes. Harmful, doubtless, I think all would agree. I would also argue that it is unethical, unethical in the most direct, straightforward way because the facts show clearly a failure to take into account the harmful wider-context consequences of our actions. This is especially so because white shopping bags are in no way necessities; they are merely a habit of convenience and could easily be replaced. Here, it would also be reasonable to suggest that, like all activities that are by consensus found to be harmful to the common good, the bags should naturally be prohibited, as is already the case in many places from China to San Francisco.

The sport of philosophers is to watch meaning change. Just as rooftops without gardens or banks of solar panels are beginning to look like a great opportunity lost, and vehicles which still have exhaust pipes are morphing into ill-designed instruments of mindless waste, artifacts like white plastic bags have for many already shifted in meaning from the once stalwart icon of clean consumer convenience to the needless foul filth of the world. All because of an idea, a new way of seeing, that happens to be true.

OUT OF TUNE

As the harmony between Nature and Culture, between Law and Convention, collapses into contradiction, there will be a parallel loss of the sensitivity of perception required to see the corruption. The result is a devil's loop of mutually reinforcing devotion and degeneration. This is dangerous because, once the downward spiral begins, it becomes increasingly difficult just to see it, let alone stop it.

Witness in the present era the loss of excellence in matters of musical culture. Here we see clearly that the inability to sing or play in tune goes hand in hand with the preference for louder and louder, and less and less subtle, sounds. Perhaps it could be said that the penultimate phase of degeneration is when we sing out of tune and no longer hear it. The last, is when we no longer care.

REAL THING

Real passion, real inspiration, cannot be imitated.
That is why we imitate them.

ON THE TWIN GUIDEPOSTS OF *YOGA & THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE*

A mistake is a mistake repeated.

In this sketch, I'd like to suggest that the twin guideposts of all learning and education are Yoga and The Alexander Technique. Yoga is much more than simply doing daily exercises or stretches, but is also the life-long practice of learning to work and move and do things, important things like learning itself, without force. And The Alexander Technique (AT) forms the complementary life-long practice of learning to work and move and do things without unnecessary tension.

So we have movement *without force*, and we have movement without *unnecessary tension*.

Together as one, the twin guideposts of Yoga and AT form a kind of path, a path of awareness. What we become aware of is essentially waste, the waste of intelligence, and the waste of physical energy when unnecessary force and tension are used to accomplish ends or goals, in whatever form, at whatever level.

The twin guideposts of Yoga and AT also point us clearly in the direction of an implied constellation of ethical and aesthetic criteria. To do things—whether writing at a table, working at a computer keyboard, or learning the flute or violin—without unnecessary force and tension is always good; it is also always

beautiful. Children, I think, sense this instantly, for it is essentially how the young mind innately engages the world.

So, in a way, the twin guideposts of Yoga and AT serve to strengthen, nurture and protect gifts which, by their very nature, are already implicitly there, waiting as it were just under the surface, and ready to be developed and fully awakened.

THE THREE MISTAKES OF EDUCATION

The first mistake in education is to separate learning from the body of the Earth;

The second mistake in education is to separate learning from the body of the student;

The third and most serious mistake in education is to separate learning from the nature of the mind which learns.

To learn is to learn the numbers, the flowers, to sing and dance, and most importantly, to learn—by life-long observation—the nature and the formative workings of the mind itself as it learns to learn.

ON THE PROTECTION OF TREES

Unlike the European Alps, in which the environmental factors of high altitude, cold and snow limit the growth of coniferous trees and forests, in the East-side mountains of the American Northwest an additional factor plays a key role at lower elevations—namely, drought. For the large and graceful and beautiful trees that are native there, the lack of reliable yearly amounts of precipitation is just as severely a limiting factor as a deep snowpack that lingers well into the summer months.

Accordingly, I've come to see the great forests of fir, spruce and pine not so much as static masses of green, but rather as a kind of dynamic, living movement. The movement is suspended, like a question on a string, between these the two limiting extremes of altitude and drought. With different amounts of snowfall and rain, or higher or lower mean temperatures, the forest will respond by moving up, or down, the mountain; and by expanding or contracting into or away from the dry plains and arid canyonlands.

In the middle of this movement, it seems to me, stands the Ponderosa Pine. It is the yellow-green ribbon of the arbortetum's rainbow spectrum in the the Oregon forestlands; it is the middle C of forest's frequency scale, the strong, stable triangle between geometry's circle and square. Where the ponderosa forms large stands, it takes the happy middle ground between the colder, more moist preferred habitats of Douglas-fir, Subalpine Fir and

Englemann Spruce, and the little rain and searing summer heat endured by Juniper and Sage.

One must have an ear for the of words to hear consciously the adjectives, ‘massive’ or ‘ponderous’ in the Ponderosa’s name. And one must have more than a keen sense of forest history to imagine the prodigious giants lost to bandsaws and trains. Trains? Yes, in Northeastern Oregon, whole tracks were built for the single and sole purpose of carrying them away. In the North Wallowas, already by 1926, few of the grand old ponderosas were left, and the tracks constructed for their wholesale plunder from Minam to Enterprise are now but a footnote for Sunday tourists. And as with all natural destruction, who is there left with first-hand, direct experience to speak to the children about the grandeur that has been lost?

I frequently remind myself, “If one wants to know the ponderosa, go to the ponderosa.” And sacred ground it is. No better place to camp. No better place to build a home. And no better place to discover a new creative spirit which takes as its epithet not ‘man the destroyer,’ but ‘man the creator,’ the generator of new habitats for the whole web the symphony of life.

THE TWO FACES OF EMPIRE

“Oderint dum metuant”

Seneca

Sometimes, Empire puts on a happy, cheerful face as it takes what it wants from you, all the while promising you peace and protection, and giving you a solid silver medal stamped with a President’s image.

Other times, Empire puts on a more straight forward, mean and ugly face which projects military power and a willingness to use it. Like the Romans said, and the epigram above has it, *“Let them hate, as long as they fear.”*

For those peoples who are suppressed and exploited, which face, say, an American president puts on makes very little difference. Democrats, for example, seem to prefer the cheerful face, whereas Republicans evidently tend towards the mean and ugly. The real question, however, is not the face which is used, which after all is merely a projection. The real question is rather how much longer the violence of Empire can continue to wear the cloak of Democracy. For this is a hybrid, contradictory form of government if ever there was one, a form of government which should for reasons of clarity be called exactly what it is: Democratic Empire. Democratic Empire is contradictory because, on the one hand, it is based on the hard-won constitutional principles of equality, freedom and civil rights, while

on the other it requires massive forms of exploitation and economic slavery beyond its visible boundaries to sustain itself. Democratic Empire will therefore necessarily be threatened with collapse on two fronts simultaneously. There will be the protest on the home front by citizens—especially those who do not benefit from the spoils of empire or who feel that it is morally unjust—demanding more open and less corrupt representative governance. At the same time, liberation struggles in the physically far away but in terms of modern information technologies right in your living room resource colonies will resist, as they always have, all suppression and exploitation.

So, regardless of which face is put on for public display, Democratic Empire must necessarily collapse because of its contradictory nature. It did in the Greece of Athens. It did in the Rome of Julius Caesar. It nearly did in the Great Britain of Winston Churchill. And now, in the North America of Mr. Obama?

Contradictions, as any naturalist knows, are non-renewable.

Contradictions, because they are in essence conflicting movements of energy fighting against one another—can only be kept alive by massive artificial inputs of energy from outside the system. And these in turn can only be obtained by equally massive amounts of waste and use of force. Not a pretty picture, not a pretty face, indeed.

TWO PATHS

*“It is no longer the choice between violence
and non-violence in this world;
it’s non-violence or non-existence.”*

from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s last major address,
April 3rd, 1968, *“I Have Been to the Mountain Top.”*

One of the most persistent illusions of human consciousness is that it is possible to come to peace by way of war. It is the tacit assumption of this thought that conflict is inescapable—an idea that is largely hidden under the surface of awareness, yet actively shapes our perception and actions—that itself leads us to incessantly prepare for war. Yet, preparing for war is not like preparing for fire, or for a hurricane. In contrast to the prudent readying for the inevitability of natural disaster, preparing for war has become itself a primary cause of war.

There are evidently only but two alternative paths: One follows the drumbeat of leaders so lost that they are marching us straight off the precipice of non-existence; The other path is the still largely untried, and unknown path of peace.

Nowhere do these two paths cross; Nowhere do they meet. The great and historic challenge before us, both individually and collectively, is the demonstration of the necessity of this truth.

ON THE SOUND OF RUSHING WATER— *an appreciation*

Just as the smell of freshly cut hay or just turned garden soil seems to somehow contain all other smells, so also the high sparkling sound of rushing water seems to hold all other sounds.

The sound of the wooden flute, the violin or oboe is there. And the trumpet or the human voice. Or the deep sound of skin drums, or strings of tiny metal bells. All are held, it seems to me, in the mysterious rushing sound of flowing water.

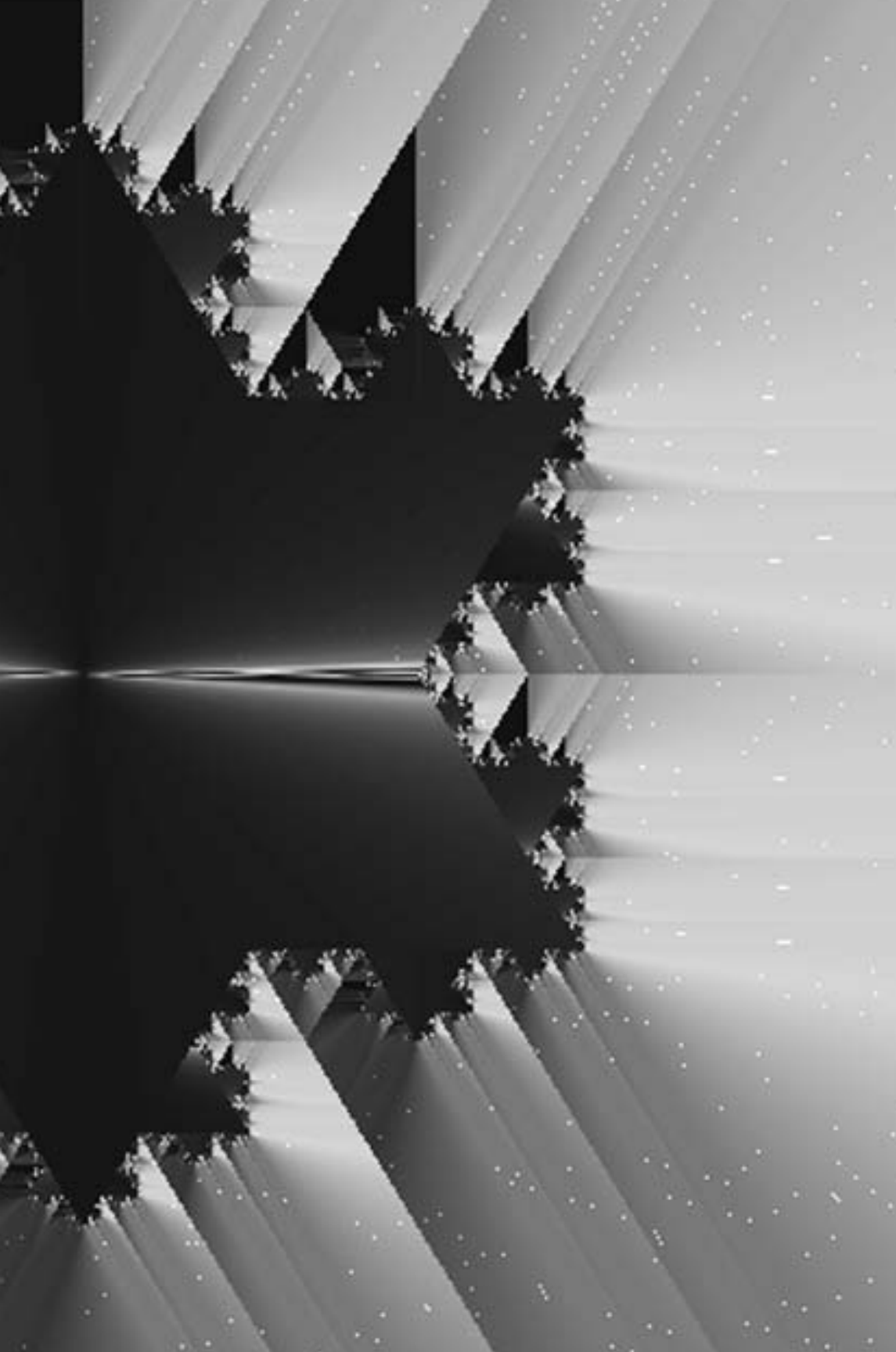
Perhaps that is why we sleep so peacefully in the sonic embrace of a quiet stream. No other sound has such deep roots in our own natural history's story. Indeed, how could this be otherwise? For where there is clear flowing water, *there* there is security of the very most basic kind.

The sound is whispering, as it were, a soothing reminder to someplace deep in our common unconscious that, like love itself, where there is water, life flourishes.



500





The Little Clavier: Part XIX

How complicated the ways we wander once
Truth is lost;

how unnecessary the wars,
how without meaning—
the waste.

WAR DEAD—a prose poem

—for Dickevicki,
Vietnam Vet, lover of poetry, and friend
on many of the happy backroads of my Berkeley days

Imagine two flocks of white doves released like colorful balloons at a ceremony's end. The doves take off up into the bright morning air, but then remain by some tragic mistake tethered to the ground. Repeatedly, the birds fly up towards the blue skies, but then fall back just as quickly to the earth in a sudden tug of violence. Most of the people present, perhaps because of their own grief, because of their own great personal loss, seem somehow unaware of this suffering of the doves. Just so, at the end of this wall, remain two questions which the heart releases, and which flail helplessly about in need of some resolution, some serious, believable, answer: Where are the other names, the names we cannot pronounce, the names that would have increased at least five-fold the wall's already tremendous, horrible, terrible length? And will this be the last such wall, the last such war, or shall we repeat again, and then again, the same wholly unnecessary, brutal, mistake of making more of such wars, and of such walls?

At the end of the wall remain two questions, questions a child might ask that the heart releases, and which flail about in need of some resolution, some serious, believable, answer.

VETERAN

See that guy over there,
under the bridge?
He was Commander-and-Chief.
They took away his stars.
The other guys don't like him much.
He gave the orders.
They dropped the bombs.
In Hell-on-Earth, they stand
around and share the same fire.
He's at the bottom of their ladder of honor.
The bottom. Hell has its rules, as Virgil knew.
The other guys tell him their stories.
He still doesn't listen.
They recite by heart on cloudy nights
the speeches of the commanders of Troy
as they breached the ramparts guarding the Greek ships,
that real men have a duty
to fight with the men they command;
They sing verses from *Mutter Courage*;
And repeat again and again Vonnegut's
healing reverse of the fire-bombing of Dresden,
planes flying backwards, weapons deconstructed,
laid to rest in the womb of the Earth.
He still doesn't listen.
He never did.
He gave the orders.
They dropped the bombs.

WAR

War is never an end in itself.

Neither is war a *means* to an end,
other than to more war.

War is simply the ultimate *dead-end*,
a path not to peace, but to the deafening roar
of a perpetual motion machine
fueled only by more war itself.

THE WATER IN US . . .

How the water in us wishes to lie flat in deep repose at night, like the water of a clear mountain lake high in a hidden valley.

And how the water in us wishes to hold and reflect, like a lake's quiet surface, all the stars and planets and galaxies of the cloudless July night sky.

The water in us: *Here. Now. Timeless.* The water in us: but a mere fraction of the whole, yet resonant with a Universe without beginning, and without end.

HYMN

One by one,
in the stony silence of the nearly dark cathedral
the choir boys proceeded from the domed apse
pass the altar to the high, massive doors
opening to the West.

The procession did not so much move
as float, the young feet whispering
in a measured hush that's been rehearsed and mastered
and passed on over many, many centuries.

One by one,
the boys blew out their candles
in a perfect single, rhythmic puff.

And so, one by one,
what began as a circle of light became a serpent unfolding
into a gently curved straight line which grew shorter
and shorter, contracting into but a single point
which seemed to hold all that has ever been
and ever shall be of time.

As the last candle was blown out,
a darkness fell heavily upon the floor
just as a collective sigh rose,
an out-breathing of some commonly held grief,
a sadness which cannot be expressed when we are alone.

One by one, without a sound,
those gathered together stood and began
to walk out the massive doors facing West.
So the smaller infinitude inside the cathedral
gave way into the larger eternity of the evening,
—an evening resting motionless it seemed in the great cycle of
seasons, neither the end of winter
nor the beginning of spring—
and into the gentle, forgiving hands
that seemed to hold them both.

BAPTISM

The preacher was new in town.

He had his work cut out for him,
that much he knew.

In a land where rain is rare, and drought common,
it is hard to break the sacrament of
living, holy water,

but here it has been done with a vengeance
and forgotten about generations ago.

Here, at the village center, stands no well,
no fountain offering the wayfarer the gift
of the waters of this and this place only, where
a young man would come first to drink after
returning from war, or an exhausted
midwife would go to wash her hands
with the returning first light of day.

In its place now—this even a child can prophecy—
will be a filthy parking lot for cars and trucks, and a phone
that takes your money, but doesn't work.

The preacher was new in town.

He had his work cut out for him.

More than just a surfeit of funerals.

He knew, although he couldn't quite say it in words,
that it takes a village to raise a child, and that in turn

it takes pure, living water to sustain the life of a village.

And yet, that this was a land where nothing
was sacred anymore.

Nothing about it. Not even water.

And this in a land where rain is rare, and drought common.

In the past, when there was still a place for horses
next to the south doors of the little wooden church,
under the deep-rooted, broad-leaf trees—

the silver maples, black walnuts, the elms—
seedlings brought all the way from the richer,
greener fields found east of the Ohio country,

and when neatly-dressed women of all ages
still had a faint scent of freshly cut hay in their hair,
he reminded himself that people came in with the church,
and that people went out with the church.

Now they just seem to go out.

He had his work cut out for him.

That much he knew.

That much he knew for sure.

I'M TOO POOR IN THIS WORLD, AND YET NOT POOR ENOUGH . . . *after Rilke*

I'm too poor in this world, and yet not poor enough
just to stand before you like a Buddha,
or naked, like a new-born babe;
I'm too clever in this world, and yet not clever enough,
just to vanish before your eyes
like a single leaf, or blade of new spring grass.
I want my world to be shaped by meaning, by sense,
and not by greed, or envy, or corporate gold.
I'm sick of war, of waste, of conflict,
of presidents who lie, and governments
who slaughter in my name and call it peace.
I want to walk with those who speak
a wholly different language;
with those who ask questions, real questions,
and who listen with a certain selfless fierceness
regardless of where the answers lead.
I would like to sing.
And I want my song to resonate with your whole being
and not just some narrow backwater of your soul.
I would like to pray. I would like to pray
that my song might come alive with energy,
like the sound of rushing water,

like the ecstatic counterpoint of ravens
after all the hunters have gone home,
like a bell on a misty hill ringing out into
the darkness from all its sides,
like the sound of gently falling snow beneath
the dome of angel stars that gives us both refuge
in this most uncharted wildness of all.

FOR THE YOUNG—*a few necessities
of the artistic life*

An abundance of wonder.

An absence of fear.

The fierce doubt of spiritual freedom.

A love of self, a love of other, a love of Earth.

The calm of clear, cold night air just after a winter storm.

The quiet patience of a stonepine.

The excellence which comes with determination, diligence
and devotion in all matters of craft and technique.

Like a mountain spring, a natural ebb and flow of giving and
receiving, indifferent if others do, or do not, choose to drink,
while asking nothing in return.

And finally, an intense passion for awakening—one at a time,
and all at once—all the above qualities in the young,
or just younger than you.

DEEP WATER

In an adverse cultural climate, with its perennial waste, and war, and utterly mindless violence against the Earth, mimic the alpine plants:—grow close to the ground, keep a tight cushion of friends clustered around you, wear a coat of densely woolly white hairs, and especially, send roots through every crack and crevice down to deep, reliable water.

WEST WIND AT POP CREEK PASS—

a prose poem

Each time I cross a pass, I suddenly remember something I always seem to be forgetting, forgetting about the energy of insight, about how similar for me the two experiences are.

This moment of crossing over, the epiphany that fills us as a new horizon appears before us and instantly rushes in. This is the energy, it seems to me, of sudden awareness, of suddenly discovering a new way of seeing or looking. Where does it come from? What is its source? It doesn't seem personal to me, a mere mechanical product of my own memory. No. Insight seems to be coming to us from 'someplace out there,' from someplace truly intelligent or divine, an 'in-breathing of the gods,' as the ancients used to say. To me, the energy of insight is just there, ever-present, like the clear sound of fast-flowing water moving around me everywhere. One can either choose to listen to it, move with it, or just walk indifferently right by and ignore it.

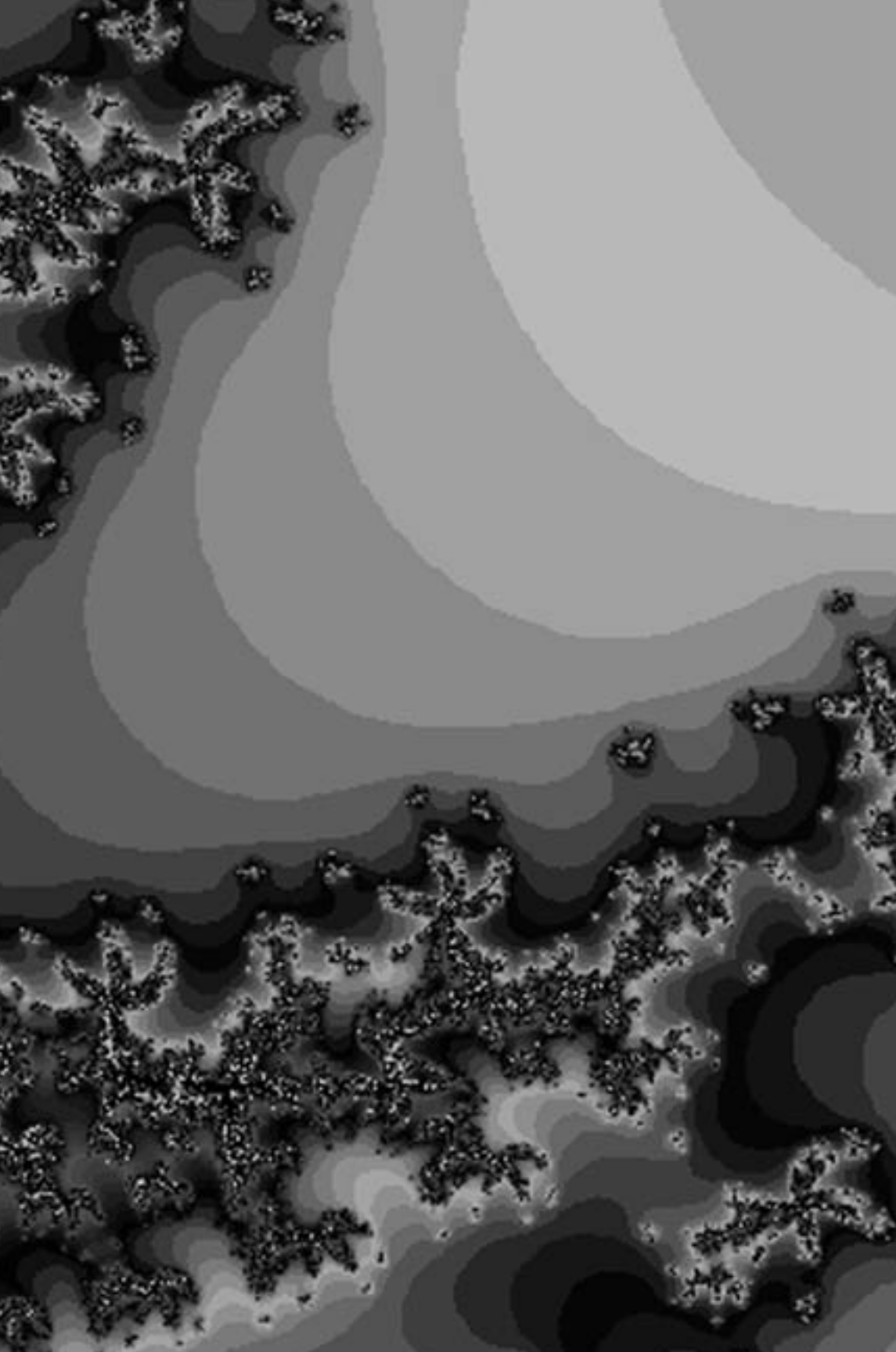
A steady west wind roars through the ridge crest firs and pines, blowing the last few thoughts of the past decisively away, and bringing the sound of what seems to be a distant ocean near. O view of the known world . . . I turn to look a last time at the valley whence I've come. Just before I step across into this new world, the flashing white outline of a nutcracker's wings catches the last light of day as it shoots straight up, sheering the

strong winds like surf, and vanishing almost as quickly out of my field of sight. And all this as if to say, *“Ah, you poor people people. Will you ever learn to fly, learn to fly free of the fetters of fear, free of the fear of falling?”*

These are the thoughts that fill me, as I take out my headlamp, adjust its single bright beam, and start finding my way slowly down a steep talus slope as the darkness of night descends upon me, happy to once more have been reminded about these things.







The Little Clavier: Part XX

Dialogue 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. It is the movement of the journey itself that is primary, and not any particular destination or goal.

* * *

Every well-made path was once only a possibility. Because it is well-made, daily use only makes it more beautiful.

WINTER LINES

The lines of winter poems
lie tightly together
like buds tucked close
against a leafless twig,
stopping short of snow
and cold:—
seeds of crystals,
of new ideas,
listening
for the chance,
just the chance,
of an echo
in the surrounding silence of total white,
of mist and snow.

WINTER PATHS—*The Alps*

In the mountains above 1,600 meters, just below treeline in the north of the Alps, winter comes and remains for a good half of the year. And once the snow falls, it stays. This is because the air at that altitude is lighter and colder, and because the sun retreats behind the higher peaks to the south. For those of us who have not had the opportunity to experience such a high-country landscape first-hand, I can easily imagine that this sounds terribly forbidding. But in fact, the very opposite is the case. I've frequently heard older German climbers say that the higher up a peak they go, the closer they feel to God. Well, if we were to say that God is truth, or God is beauty, I would certainly agree. Part of this is because we sense a return to natural simplicity; instead of a meadow of a thousand blooms, we now have vast expanses of the purest white. But there is also the great blanket-ing effect which comes with deep snow. Imagine all the noise of the world—without a doubt wherever you read this will have the not-so-distant roar of traffic in the background—as a pile of the foulest filth, but now being progressively covered and muted with layer upon layer of soft, fluffy snow, snow the color of freshly washed cotton, the color of mother's milk. Come about the beginning of January, all that remains is silence. And yes, if we were to say that God is silence, I would certainly agree again.

So, with each passing storm of winter, the snow pack grows deeper and deeper, and thoughts of religion as cathedrals, and

religion as belief in some kind of savior, become like the clamor of cities— nothing but faint, distant memories. What is sacred but that which I walk upon? And as the snow rises and hardens and consolidates, first one foot, then two and then five and six and more, there is a new found freedom about the land. Asphalt vanishes, concrete disappears, and even large boulders and small spruce trees are completely buried. So, after the storms clear, nature presents us with a new blank page upon which to play the diverse figures of our own music. But this play, the winter paths in the snow we create, moving from hut to barn to house, tells a remarkable tale. Perhaps it's the beautifully balanced, graceful curves. Or the steady, unhurried rhythms, movements which have left a trace, like melodies of a wooden flute lingering in the evening air. A very human trace at that. Perhaps that is it. Not an alien landscape shaped largely by aggressive entities like cars, but wholly by us, and by us alone. That is the great beauty of winter paths.

WINTER PATHS—

*two sets of
seventeen 17-step
poems*

WINTER PATHS—*deep snow . . .*

(i)

The blank page
of freshly fallen snow.
Where shall our first new path
begin?

(ii)

How deep snow heals.
The old wreck
of a car is gone.
Almost gone, the cross.

(iii)

In one single night,
the rudeness of machines
and straight lines—
is erased.

(iv)

Children and snow
go together: *Try. Make.*
Break. Play. Angel. Snowman.
Wings.

(v)

Cars hate snow: Stuck. Skid.
Flip. Swerve. Won't start. Crash.
Oh my god, I'll
be late.

(vi)

Snow means slow,
quiet, peaceful.
Cars mean fast, heavy—
get out of the way.

(vii)

When two movements
bite or fight each other,
this is called—
contradiction.

(viii)

The fieldmouse tracks
go, "hop, hop."
Straight line of tail
never leaves the snow.

(ix)

The snowmachine's tracks
cut ruts in the snow;
its sound, smell,
carry miles.

(x)

The silence of snow
is deep. If we listen,
we, too,
become silent.

(xi)

Overcast again,
new snow tomorrow.
Good day for lichens
and buds.

(xii)

If snow comes and
goes in winter, then,
you're not in the
right place for snow.

(xiii)

The white death
of snow comes fast.
He went to the barn
and never came back.

(xiv)

The way of snow shows:
Never trust the
man who is
absolutely sure.

(xv)

Today's traverse
may be tomorrow's trap.
How hard, this art
of waiting.

(xvi)

After storm, new snow.
All the old paths are gone.
Time to begin,
once more.

(xvii)

See the primrose
nested on south-facing rock—
the patience
of deep snow.

WINTER PATHS—*refuge . . .*

(i)

Inverted sled
at winter camp: after
storm, two fieldmice
call it home.

(ii)

Among the alder
with hanging catkins,
a nest
that was left behind.

(iii)

Where is the Dipper's
house? Behind the waterfall,
the rock,
or the stream?

(iv)

The hut was locked
all winter long:—
a sure sign of
mean-spirited times.

(v)

The barn cat has
the best of both worlds:—
free mice, free milk
set out, each day.

(vi)

Eagles return to the same
twig nest each year. Why
change what is
just right?

(vii)

It remains a deep
mystery where the ravens
find cover
at night.

(viii)

The limits of natural
refuge
are bounded
by clear necessity.

(ix)

Hording space,
building fences,
making money,
the land I rent to you.

(x)

The best refuge of all
is intelligence,
the worst,
is fear.

(xi)

Beautiful!
the light of welcome
seen through the snow
of a winter storm.

(xii)

Safe. Warm. Dry. Out of
wind. Close to fire.
The snow above
never lets go.

(xiii)

The sign read: "*Foreclosed.
Evicted. For sale.*"

There was not a
soul in sight.

(xiv)

The guestbook read: "*I
was lost. Found all
I needed here.
Door was open.*"

(xv)

As she left, she
built a tepee fire,
and left a matchbook
with a note.

(xvi)

*"Strike this match
to light friendship's path.
May it stay lit
all along your way."*

(xvii)

An overturned boulder
as big as a house:—
it all began:—
right there.











