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Is heaven boring? Why is it so difficult to write about it—the afterlife? Is it because it is unknown? What if we were hazard to say it is not so much that heaven is dull, it's just that it is abstract. Or, its only as boring as it is abstract. Which put differently might be stated, if you find abstraction boring you might equally feel the same way about heaven. But I am fascinated by the abstraction of heaven, even if words to describe what i mean by heaven escape me. When I see it in my mind's eye, it conjures up the image of an endless and undulating abstract painting. Still, it isn't a purely optical effect. I don't believe Victor Vasarely painted heaven.

There is something like gentle laughter in this abstraction that i keep seeing, yet it doesn't lack profundity. Maybe it is boring, but boring in the best way. Like when you were a kid and you could daydream out the window and the shapes of the leafy trees would become swaying figures in the summer sun and a whole meaningless drama would start to unfold in the afternoon before the rain or in the dull heat. I doubt that i ever actually stared out the window as much as i suppose i did as a child. No doubt from the vantage point of my middle age I gloss over much of the anxiety that i inhabited when i engaged in daydreaming.

As a child "of divorce" I often stared out the window in the lower-level bedroom at my Dad's house wondering when my Mom was going to come get me; like the way a dog whimpers at the window sill waiting for its owner to return. God, I missed my Mom so much then. Looking back at it now it must have felt like some incurable disappointment to my Dad...this daydreaming of mine. I was and remain a total Mama's Boy, but i did the same thing with my dad when he was away at the office. I wonder if today he has any idea how ecstatic i was when he would come home. I hope he does and did.

My Step-Dad has now been gone almost three years now and I think about him all the time. I even try to dress like him to remind myself of him: faded blue jeans and tan suede slippers, which my in-laws gave to me. I love them, both the people and the footwear. I am sure it is difficult to understand...the relationships in a divorced family for people who didn't come from one. I think it must be hard to understand even for those that do. But Joe, my Step-Father, meant so much to me. I knew this when he was alive, i feared his death and what it would do to me. For many years I wondered if i'd be able to handle it. His passing shocked me even though I knew it was coming, that it was immanent. It tore me open and shattered me. To this day I still associate the first color i saw when his passing was confirmed with death...a vibrant shock of green. A flame like color

But the point here isn't to focus on the horror and sadness that crippled me for so long, but instead to say something about how I liked the look of myself in his eyes. It may sound vain



to you...but maybe you will recognize that feeling of seeing yourself through someone else's eyes...in the eyes of someone for whom you could (not "do no wrong" exactly) but somehow could do anything. Like a belief someone has in you that gives you the courage to be better than you actually are...and yet through that look, which is some sort of miracle, you can be.

Why

am I telling you this? As a child "of divorce" I often (ok all my life) struggle with the guilt over paternal allegiances...which is in some basic sense seems totally irrational...like i was betraying my Dad for being so close to my step-dad. Not that as I child i had much of a choice. Sometimes I felt like the rest of the family resented that closeness (except my mom). I tell you all this not to unburden myself of this baggage—which to be honest a lifetime will not be enough time to do. I am writing about that look from my step-dad and his love for me and mine for him because it has something to do with a phrase that kept popping into my head after his death and which i made a painting from, the first piece of the Assembly.

Life without consanguinity

I guess i take it to mean something like, love beyond blood relations. I was not my step-dad's blood as they say, not his biological child, but nevertheless there was that look and our connection. Somehow I believe there must be something to be learned from that look and that relationship that could be a difference in a world ruled by "me and mine." To have love without consanguinity. Which of course is how love with sanguinity comes into being (at least in the romantic tradition). Families start with two people falling in love who are not family. Love and the family love that comes after isn't cut from the same cloth as it were but become one.

This is the ethic of the Assembly.

This is the heart of the USSA project.

So I am suggesting that look is the look of heaven. That the Assembly is a kind of loving abstraction. You can't catch it or grasp it. It doesn't have substance. It isn't blood. I know, i know, this all sounds hopelessly mystical and new age-y. But what if heaven was something like this love w/o consanguinity?

Life without consanguinity

i don't want to instrumentalize my loss and my personal life, my family but somehow...that someone could love me so much and make me feel loved and be open to love without being my blood relations struck me so profoundly after Joe's death. It still does. I can't shake it and feel like there is message or a lesson there that i need to give form to and to share with people. Uffff! this sounds so painfully evangelical but it's not simple-minded-church-malarkey. It's crazy political maybe even potentially radical. Love.

i just finished the storied/

famed literary critic Erich Auerbach's *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, where Auerbach basically argues that what makes Dante's *Divine Comedy* great, why it's so powerful, is its grounding in Dante's actual world. That the characters in the poem are real people from Dante's life and that it can be read as a series of portraits. He goes further to say that these portraits or figures no longer exist in the flow of times but persist through memory and in persisting in memory can transformed in the poem to take on the weight of myth and have a quality of the eternal about them (if even today no one knows who they are).

All of heaven can't simply be this, my experience that I am trying to relate to you. It's not. But somehow it feels Of a piece and True and Real. And Real, True, and Of a Piece are by necessity abstract.

Sometimes I feel like

people get too hung up on the 20th Century's shape(s) of abstraction. Which can be a superficial take on abstract form; devoid of the content that many abstract pioneers were surveying. Abstraction may have the "look" of abstraction but not the abstraction of abstraction, if that makes any sense. That abstract-looking art could actually be abstract in the substantive way in which the old pioneers were after, but I think it's important not to lose sight of the verb and the idea that abstraction is a process; to pull something out of something. Abstracting gold from the ground = a form of abstraction.

In Dante's sourcing of his

actual life to create the otherworldly (as per Auerbach) he could be considered to be something like an abstract painter. Pulling from life and recreating a world: the afterlife. A divine comedy abstracted from earthly life.

Heaven might be like this. Heaven as put forth by the Assembly is abstract in this sense.

Life without Consanguinity

...a type of abstract love to save the world. Heaven.

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: TEXTING

Is it possible to write an all-over text? Like an all-over painting and have it make any sense? A clear-cutting form of writing that takes everything in one fell swoop? And not have it be annoyingly decorative and/or abstract? Is it even possible given its (writing's) digital/nacheinander (sequential) nature as opposed to painting's analog/nebeneinander (spatial) modality to borrow Joyce-borrowed-Schopenhauer phrases...When you think of everything at once it tends to become horribly nostalgic...Like just now I remembered the taste of saltwater in my skull after having been tossed in a wave on the beach—summer.

You want to set the impressions right...Give them some sort of logically referent or structure to build the bridge to the mind of the reader

but associations flood in = your friends, your parent's friends, their pets, what they were watching on the news that day you stopped over at their house...Tom Brokaw the night of the US invasion of Iraq.

You want to

keep from crying as you think of atrocious human nature that clings to cruelty instead of love. Why? Why? You desperately ask. And then your blood boils over at the thought of the ignorance embedded in phrases like “white privilege” a euphemism for something so wicked you(i) don’t know what to do with yourself ... being white...And hardly aware of what a deep venom that represents...You want to forget but you can’t forget because it’s all around you and nobody else is forgetting...not forgetting cause most of the whites don’t even remember in the first place...no one is forgiven and can’t be if they don’t possess even a basic memory of the horrors of slavery and its legacy of white supremacy...then there is (my) anger over the cruel stupidity of whiteness...so cruel and stupid it’s clearly willful...My whiteness that soaks the landscape...the cruel and stupid american landscape.

I have been told “everyone is racist.” This is not a satisfying thought. It’s a misconstruction turned alibi. Power loves these kind of constructions. Power loves freedom of speech. It loves to silence dissent under the banner of freedom. This is essentially the thinking that led to the “Liberation of Iraq.” We will be greeted as liberators!—we were told. I am for freedom. Freedom, however, does not belong to the powerful they have chosen oppression. Time and time again they choose oppression. But does that mean the “weak” are the only ones that possess freedom? No. They are not weak, those who lack freedom to foist freedom on to others. Freedom is not a possession.

These are words placed side by side. Thoughts: associative and otherwise...Typing this out on my phone...Texting to myself...Texting, email, tweets, Facebook, etc...it is, it turns out, a golden age of writing...Gary Shteyngart I believe understood this with his novel, *Super Sad True Love Story*. Has anyone written a novel in a text message? If so could that be an all over text...Especially if there were multiple authors?

I can’t stop looking at my phone?

Looking for a message? Someone is out there? Some *thing*? The comedian Louis C.K. talked about sitting without the phone and getting used to the unbearable silence of mortality...is being connected to technology a kind of connection to immortality?...Prosthetic gods...Each and everyone of us...What kind of future does that augur? What type of heaven might that be? Or Hell?

THIRD EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: ON THE WRITERLY ARTIST

Getting covered in paint does something for me. Reckless material abandon feels wholly different from day to day life; the endless riv-

ers of emails, professional engagements, cell phone noise, and the digital swarm. Sometimes I like all those things too—When they get covered in paint! I'm material. Paint is material. It's like gooey thinking.

Writing

is different. It's not so materially gooey. I don't need a special room to do it in. Just a little space. Sometimes just enough time between thoughts to track them. A pen. A scrap of paper. A notebook maybe. The romance of the writer. Cafes. Corner stores. The pedestrian locale. The airport. The train station. The "Good enough" place as any to jot down writing. Our kitchen table is usually where it starts to get more serious. Paragraphs. Word choices. Addendums. Amendments.

There are movies. Movies about writing or writers. Hal Hartley's *Henry Fool* is one of my favorites. "Run." Good advice for any writer. People often complain that these movies about writing because the film leave out the object, they don't display/reveal the art in question or read the poem. I guess they hope to measure it [the writing in the movie] against the actual art of writing (or painting). This always seems to me miss the point. The point being: the mystery or the magic of that which is being addressed in one medium different from another. Andrei Tarkovsky manages to do this in his epic *Andrei Rublev* at the end of some three and half hours of film he pans across and zooms in on the icon. The shift from black and white to color helps effect the magic. But writing...

The romance of writing carries me away. I never catch it or even come close to fully inhabiting it. I want to be angst-y and intellectual; chewed up by writing. Most likely this has to do with the chip on my shoulder from years of being relegated to "Special Ed" classes. Tart Class was the taunt. Stigmatized for being dyslexic through high school and into college. To this day nothing burns me like being called an idiot, even if it's said only jokingly. Not that I don't do idiotic things like anybody else. I do. But to be labeled in that way...to have a disability that one can't see and be made to feel inferior the way one can be made to feel after losing a game of chess. Your entire life...That gets to me.

So there is my motivation to write. Painting. Art. They were a zone where I could do things with my invisible impairment. Make it my ally. This is not an unusual story for artists I suspect. Art Class. A place to excel when all else failed...Or was it? This feels nostalgic. Let's get back to writing. Writing proper.

I am not a writer. Or: I am no more a writer than i am a breather. Everyone does it. But I like art that uses writing. I like that *my art* uses writing. I like that i can wound the reader the way i was wounded. To translate efficiently—be direct. That you can know what I am saying. A reflection on the work can't speak for itself. I suppose this makes me a bad painter or sculptor or what have you because I use writing. I'm OK with that. I am interested in stitching the two together like a comic book...a comic

book broken open...texts...images...stuff out there in the world...residing in it... changing it...shifting it...writing it. I am not alone in this

interest. I think this is what Liam Gillick is doing; Frances Stark for sure; David Robbins = yes; Jill Magid in a different way; Iman Issa; Karl Holmqvist too? Pope.L? He is an influence.

Who has time to read? I like

the idea of publishing a book in a periodical like Dickens or Joyce. I like the idea that all writing forms a novel. My reviews, interviews, emails, text messages, it is all writing. I wonder how to give it shape? Like a novel...

I don't like that i say: i like so much in this piece. I blame Thomas Hirschhorn. His writing. I was reading his collected writings he kept saying: I, me, mine (countless times). Then I read he used the personal pronoun intentionally to emphasize that it is he who is speaking and taking responsibility for what is being said. I like that idea. Responsibility. The birth of the author. It's; what Roland Barthes wrote late in life. Recanting his much ballyhooed "Death of the Author," saying that it was in fact biography that interested him now. That he was wrong. How intellectual honest and brave.*The Preparation of the Novel*. The most important book. I keep returning to it. It is like one of those movies about writing. Somehow he did it! Barthes wrote the novel about writing a novel, stripped to its protean form: Magic.

Rambling on and on and on and on

on.

Writing.

—Heavenly God! Cried Stephen's soul in an outburst of profane joy—

—On and on and on and on and on!—

Reading.

But who has time for it with all the writing we have to do. I think Schopenhauer advised against it—too much reading he claimed was a distraction from writing. He was a miserable misogynist. Reading. What if that was the art. The art of reading—it is one but how to share that art with others. That mind melding process of reading. Maybe it doesn't need to be. Maybe its devotional. reading.

Quirky. Quirky style.

Write clearly. Be disciplined. Don't wander so much! Say something clear...

True...Useful. Get there. Back to art.

Art writing. Get

there.

Say something.

It colors

things. It shapes things differently. The whole crux of Iman Issa's work. The wall texts by the sculptures. You can't look at them the same. You can't un-suture the thing from the non-thing. That process is always happening with art. Word. Image.

Word-Image-Object. W.J.T. Mitchell's great essay on Robert Morris. Really all of his work (both of them) influences me. This.

Writing.

Jan talks about how all

the voices crowd in when you write—his voice does quite often when I do. I like that. For him songs appear. Ghosts in the texts. So many.

David Foster Wallace talked about how fiction was a way to try on someone else's mind or something like that. If that is so, then art writing or the work of the writerly artist, is like setting up installations in the mind of the reader; and seeing as the mind is not hemmed in by interiority then it makes sense that the writerly artist *makes* reality...More to the point Peter Sloterdijk says that writing is a form of mind control over non-writers...it is a kind of evolutionary argument he makes in his book, *You Must Change Your Life*. So

if you have another project besides selling your wares, you write. You write to change the world.

No.

You write.

You art write to make a world.

FOURTH EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: MEDIATION ON THE COSMIC NATURE OF
THE ALPHABET

Letters, which have no meaning by themselves, signify only the elementary phonic signifiers that make sense only when they are put together according to certain rules. Analysis substituting painting and pushed to insignificance, such is the rationality proper to the alphabet and to civil society.

—Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

I am not enamored with complex systems. Hidden meaning or rooting out the definition that can solve a riddle. Robert Frost once said through the mouth of Job, “Get down into things, it will be found there’s no more given there than on the surface.” Superficial understanding is the pejorative term to describe someone’s relation to an object as shallow; intellectually lightweight. But is there ever anything more than superficial understanding ever to be had in the first place? Really? The possibility to me seems dubious at best. Mystery is mystery for its own sake. The joy of the journey and that journey itself is a type of knowledge. Knowing then, is not a fixed point but a flowing with and together. Flowing along the surface of a letter. The pulse of the alphabet and the aura of letters in various configurations is a mystery—THE MYSTERY. A labyrinth beyond the sky. Four letters. Saints. Gods. Four Seasons, Four Horsemen. One God. One letter. Four in one. An alphabet.

No mysticism. I don’t want to impress you with mysticism. I can’t. No impressions. I want to dig into your brain and carve these letters into your consciousness.

Then what do they mean (these four letters in one)?

I can’t tell you.

It



is not that I don't want to. I literally can't tell you what they mean. As I described above they are superficial. Meaning: What they look like, is what they mean. There is no deeper meaning to them than there is to be found in the alphabet. Still, they are not fixed. I see them now glowing and they glow precisely because i (who wrote them) never understood their meaning. That said, the letters are not empty signifiers.

One problem with much art is the will towards meaning. Un-meaning is what is crucial to art. This is not anti-intellectual stance. Just the opposite (i hope). It is precisely in un-meaning where we are tasked with thinking and engagement. "Meaning" itself is superficial (superficial, meant here in the conventional and pejorative sense of the word).

The Gods don't mean.

The Gods are an alphabet.

The Gods are working together.

The Gods are sounding out the word. The Gods are restoring the cosmos.

The Gods are living life.

The Gods are living death.

The Gods are dancing.

The Gods believe in themselves.

The Gods are without meaning.

The Gods are within meaning.

The Gods are filling up the void.

The Gods are calling for a referendum.

The Gods are asking for a retrial.

The Gods are in open rebellion.

The Gods have moved Heaven and Earth.

The Gods have moved each letter.

The Gods have moved themselves.

The Gods have removed Heaven and Earth.

The Gods have elected.

The Gods are without mercy.

The Gods are pleading for forgiveness.

The Gods reside in the place beyond meaning.

You know the place I mean. The place seems like random accident and cruel chance. You are wailing.

Your wailing is their laughter.

Their laughter does not make light of your pain.

The Gods laughter is sympathetic. (It is the same as yours).

The Gods pain lives up to what you'd imagine it to be.

You sing with the Gods' laughter.

Their pain fills up the galaxy.

The Gods are composed of every letter you have ever written and each alphabet that has ever been described. Lost or found. Letters and letters and letters and letters and letters articulating each God of the cosmos.

The Gods can't stop.

They keep changing.

They are moving out sideways from time.

That movement bespeaks the nature of consciousness.

U have become paralyzed with fear.

U keep searching for answers.

U can't escape boredom.

U want to see your family one last time.

U can't push the stone off your heart.

U twist and turn.

U run

Mile after mile. It's not far enough. It's never far enough—to wipe out that memory, to hold on to that face.

The Cosmos is shrinking.

The light is scattered.

Your shoes are worn out.

U can't stay awake.

U can't fall asleep.

Something else must be possible.

Something other than that.

Something like dreaming, like dreaming that never stops, like a dream that feels so real.

Something other than this.

Some sort of plan.

Some way to escape.

Some way out.

Some alternative.

Some connection to your past.

Some way that it won't hurt (even if only for a moment). Some choice that makes sense.

Some sort of logic to it all.

Some calculation that you could do. Some chance at hitting the mark. Somehow that they will know.

A guide

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FIFTH EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN ERASED DE

KOONING

13 : 4.7–5.1

What if all your relations ended at once?
What if things that kept you tied to the world came loose?
What if love became abstract?
How would you give that a form, a shape?
Could you make something out of nothing? If the nothing kept rushing in...
You could scoff at the prospect of being taken seriously.
You could say you don't care what people think.
What if it was Alzheimer's?
What if you realized it wasn't a matter of where you put your toothbrush but knowing what a toothbrush was, being able to hold it and find your mouth on your face?

Now, knowing and not knowing this, make a painting.
Be famous.
Art historically famous.
Now be those things and get spoon fed your supper.
Now say: New York School and not know where you are.

Now say: Clement Greenberg or Jackson Pollock and try to pretend with every resource you can muster that you know your own name.
Say you've seen your ex-husband.
Now forget your first born's name.
Be transformed into a bird.
Frolic in the next life.
Surrender the past, relinquish the present.
Watch your loved ones starve, rot in their own filth.
Scream for reasons you can't understand.
Not know where you are.
Not know when you are.
Not know who you are.
Buck up and smile at the ceaselessly unfamiliar.
Steel yourself for the chaos of your own mind as it fails to make the neural connections that helped make you who you are.

I love you mother. I honor your courage in the face of this slow moving and relentless destruction of your brain. The disease is defeating you but for your sake I won't let it defeat me. For your sake, I will not give into despair. I watch powerless as your world crumbles and vanishes. Similarly, I see my own impotence in the face of life's cruelty and injustice. Even if we lose, we will win.

14 : 5.2

1 Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*,
trans. Adam Kotako, (Stanford, Stanford
University Press, 2015) 262.

2 Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge,
Harvard University Press, 2015) 84.

I embrace the abyss not out of nihilism but love. Blank.
Heaven.

SIXTH EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: DEAR CAPITALISM, YOU CAN HAVE MY
ETERNAL SOUL BUT I'M KEEPING THE BODY

Prelude

What does it mean to be a “little off”? To not be lining up with the world in ways you are accustomed to? What kind of thoughts might follow that misalignment? What kind of writing?

It’s probably true that we, those of

us who are fortunate enough to get to think in public, want to present ourselves as competent...convincing even...Maybe contribute something that makes us stand out from the thicket of thoughts and aesthetic nuance. But surely thoughts that are “a little off” must have merit of some sort, seeing as many of us whether we want to or not embody that off-ness on a regular basis...That off-ness is the rule and competency is the exception might be reason enough to share thoughts from a scene of being not quite right...

In this regards I think

of de Kooning’s late paintings...The spare paintings that are often dismissed as being the ones he made when he had dementia...And therefore not up to par with the work he made at the “height of his powers”...This dismissal strikes me as sad for a couple of reasons. Primarily because it seems a missed opportunity to think about a mind in the state of dementia...Not as a kind of sympathetic appeal for the artist (though why not that too?), but because it is a state that we all share or will share in our own life or through relations with someone we might know with the disease. It should go without saying dementia or Alzheimer’s is not simply a little off, it is rather a radical alteration of being in the world. What’s more, it ripples out to the loved ones and it effects them in drastic and painful ways. Ways that bind people to the disease that they could have never anticipated...To point where one who does not physically have the disease, might be justified in saying: I have Alzheimer’s.

Such is the impact the disease has on a familial relation of someone with Alzheimer’s. You may not have it physically but you definitely are hit with it psychically. Imprinted with a new reality. This is the space that I conceived the lines that follow. The ever present backstory that shadows each word of this text. Over the last six odd years I have watched as Alzheimer’s has effected my mother’s brain...How it brutally altered her reality...I won’t...I can’t...go into detail what that means...Other than to say it’s a horror I hope you who are reading this will not have to experience...Instead I want to share a line of thinking that perhaps could have only developed through an intimate encounter of watching someone’s brain change and be witness as their reality glitches to the



point of dissolve...
since this encounter) a little off.

have my eternal soul but I am keeping the body...Ps. I hope you choke on it:
My soul.

What is a body? What is a soul? My body? Your body? Body and Soul. Your body and my soul? My body and your soul? What are they? People smarter than myself have wondered about these connections and have arrived at more sophisticated conclusions than I could have arrived at on my own. I have read their texts or at least some of them and they have influenced my thinking...

This then is (as much of my writing

Dear Capitalism, You can

What is a body? What is a soul? My body? Your

body? Body and Soul. Your body and my soul? My body and your soul? What are they? People smarter than myself have wondered about these connections and have arrived at more sophisticated conclusions than I could have arrived at on my own. I have read their texts or at least some of them and they have influenced my thinking...

Giorgio Agamben notes that:

The soul, just like form-of-life, is what in my zoe, in my bodily life does not coincide with my bios, with my political and social existence, and yet has ‘chosen’ both, practices them both in this certain, unmistakable mode. It is itself, in this sense, the mesos bios that, in every bios and every zoe, adventurously severs, revokes, and realizes the choice that unites them by necessity in this certain life. Form-of-life, the soul, is the infinite complement between life and mode of life, what appears when they mutually neutralize one another and show the void that united them. Zoe and Bio — this is perhaps the lesson of the myth are neither separate or coincident: between them, as a void of representation of which it is not possible to say anything except that it is ‘immortal’ and ‘ungenerated’, stands the soul, which holds them indissoluble in contact and testifies for them.¹

Agamben lingers on the indissoluble gap between body and soul, or somehow he seems to think that the soul is a gap that can't be crossed precisely because it is immortal.

Judith Butler posits,

...bodies are themselves vectors of power where directional forces can be reversed; they are embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action to counter force with another quality of force. On the one hand, these bodies are productive and performative. On the other hand they can persist and act only when they are supported, by environments, by nutrition, by work, by modes of sociality and belonging. And when these supports fall away and precarity is exposed, they are mobilized in another way, seizing upon the supports that exist in an order to make a claim that there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support without ongoing employment, without net works of interdependency and care, without collective rights to shelter and mobility.”²

Body and soul.

Last summer, I found myself running a lot. Training for a marathon. I was out running in the sun and I noticed things. My shadow, my breathing, they way my mind would disconnect from my body after hours of running and I would take note of what was happening to me...It was not exactly an out-of-body experience...I was still very much in my body...but I could see my body functioning like a machine...The questions generated from running weren't questions of fitness...though I suppose that is how I arrived at some of these ideas...

What was striking to me then, as it is now, is somehow I could witness an uncoupling of my body and soul...the soul being eternal—it wasn't mine...was that I, being possessed of a soul, was in something like a rental agreement of sorts where I got to participate in eternity...a time share, if you will...and yet the body, as I observed while running, wasn't really me either...somehow I was balanced between this very particular thing that was running along Lake Michigan, variously sweating, breathing, thinking. A body that got tired or energized and this other thing that was impersonal and timeless...my eternal soul...which was and was not me...then as my feet kept hitting the asphalt I wondered maybe...I am neither of those things...maybe...maybe I am the AND...the and in the expression Body and Soul...this seemed to make sense to me later with what Agamben and Butler were describing...with Agamben maybe the AND was a gap, with Butler the AND was our infrastructural cohabitiation our link to each other...its funny to identify with a grammatical connector, by which I mean it felt destabilizing but with that destabilization something interesting happens...we get to choose...We can choose to make our AND an OR...Body or Soul.

Capitalism.

What can you do?

It's such a big term that it's hard to really say anything about it that doesn't feel like pretty vapid leftist quasi-academic posturing...I don't know much about it really...its history sort of...its reality—I live it every-day as do you I imagine...I watch: and what I see are screens...people staring at screens, shuffling email around the underground cables and in aboveground cellular transmissions in the cancer soaked air...I see this and I see the unhappy way we orient our bodies...eating poorly because we are on the move...working...the body is getting used up as Capitalism gobbles up all our resources but we are capitalism in a way too...we are eating up our own bodies...consuming and being consumed...we hunger for things (stability, health insurance, recognition, worth, sex, money) and our hunger doesn't seem to stop because we are Capitalism which is an ever consuming beast...maybe best exemplified in America today

by Donald Trump a beast that feeds off itself...a hole in reality...That sucks the life out of life...reality television infecting reality itself...anti-reality...but I don't want to invoke that monster...I want to invoke something that will give us a difference from the logic of eternal consumption.

Therefore I

propose we choose the body and relinquish our eternal soul to capitalism and let it feast on the eternal...The Church was capital and had all the capital (maybe it still does) but now Capitalism is our church and I want a new religion...Endlessness is just not worth it. We need new gods. Temporary gods.

So,

while Capitalism is munching away on the souls of eternity we can care for our bodies and each other...we only get one body...True the soul can incarnate multiple bodies but...the body that is here now is singular...a carbon based form tied to the heat register of our sun which will one day flame out...So let's be with each other in these bodies...take care them and build them as weapons of resistance...no, lets not do that...let's resist the rhetoric of resistance too (it's a pawn of capitalism)...why rescue the body to turn it into a weapon?...let's side-step any stupid war altogether and let the brave souls duke it out...capitalists vs anti-capitalist...I am a body...my body marks my singularity and yours and I want to share that singularity with you while we can before the sun goes cold...I want to feel your presence now in this moment...the touch of your skin...our skin which is just as mysterious as abstract notions of the soul...

But even if

I am wrong and what I am calling the body is really the soul I am not sure that really matters...does it? It's about feeling you here i? Feeling together? My Body in your soul...Your soul in My Body...touching Love and Friendship...Heaven...Our Bodies and Our Souls and and and and

Postscript

But of course I am wrong...The body I am describing is abstract...Or, using my white male body as a point of departure sounds to me now abstract; or presumptuous...Maybe I'm not wrong about my body and the running, my experience; but it's only partial...Specificity matters when we speak about bodies doesn't it?...Isn't that what I am proposing in way with my temporary gods and the like? I can't speak for other bodies but maybe I could talk with them...listen...Try to hear them more...More than I have been doing...Listening to your own heart beat is good...But I want to try hear other hearts beating too...Don't want to be alone...

I hear female friends talk about

their bodies...often about being stuck in a body that is exposed and subjected to ageism, sexism, misogyny, and violence...at the workplace, in the museum, in school, in transit, at home...Really, take a minute to reflect on the enormity of the wickedness that stalks women the world over and it will destroy you. Take another moment to think about courage and perseverance each woman musters to face that

wickedness and you are left in awe.

It's true—I must be guilty of idealizing women...and that is no doubt part of the problem too, but look what I have to work with in the opposite sex (my fellow men I mean)...and the odds against anyone trying to resist idealization...

The system is designed to warp your mind, pervert desire on a massive scale...I read and re-read this passage in Eva Illouz's book *Why Love Hurts*:

Following a managerial system which devised new methods to package and distribute goods, an industry of cosmetics promoted the body as an aesthetic surface, detached from moral definitions of personhood. This process was accelerated and generalized as across all social classes the cosmetics industry collaborated with the fashion and movie industries. The cosmetics and fashion industries became all the more powerful because they received the endorsement of the cultural industries of movies, modeling, and advertising and were amplified by them. The movie studios, women's magazines, advertisers, and billboards functioned as popularizers, codifiers, and amplifiers of new ways to put forth the body, foreground the face, and eroticize the flesh. Women were incorporated in consumer culture as sexed and sexual agents through the ideal of sexualized beauty that was aggressively promoted by the conjunction of economic sectors that solicited and constructed a self based on eroticism. The new cult of beauty in women's magazines and movies 'explicitly connected make-up and sex appeal' in seamlessly weaving together cosmetics, femininity, consumption, and eroticism. In other words, an array of new industries helped promote and legitimize the sexualization of women and, later, of men. The body was apprehended as a sensual body, actively looking for sensuous satisfaction, pleasure, and sexuality. Such search for sensuous satisfaction gave way to the sexualization of the body: the body could and should evoke sexuality and eroticism, arouse it in another, and express it. The construction of eroticized female bodies, across all social classes, was thus one of the most formidable cultural accomplishments of early twentieth-century consumer culture.³

AND:

The foregrounding of the body in US culture and the intense commodification of sex and sexuality made 'sexual attractiveness' a cultural category in itself, detached from moral value

per se. The cult of beauty, and later of fitness, and the definition of masculinity and femininity in terms of erotic and sexual attributes were relentlessly promoted by the cultural industries and had the effect of progressively transforming sexual attraction and sexiness into positive cultural categories in their own right, making sexual desirability one of the central criteria for choosing a mate and for shaping one's own personhood. The commodification of sex and sexuality –their penetration into the very heart of the capitalist engine –made sexuality into an attribute and experience increasingly detached from reproduction, marriage, long-lasting bonds, and even emotionality.⁴

Illouz profoundly maps out the problem of the body... the female body as it is instrumentalized to sell us stuff and false corporate imaginaries of the good life...God help me...I don't want to re-foreground the body in that way...The capitalist body...The body as commodity...The monetized body of desire...That drives the hungry beast of capitalism...Fever dream of want.

But capitalism is not the whole story...There are other stories, other bodies, other ways of being together...

THERE HAS TO BE.

In the new forward to her book *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit makes a strong argument for this possibility to show how it already exist...another type of body (so to speak). She writes:

Most of us would say, if asked, that we live in a capitalist society but vast amounts of how we live our everyday lives—our interactions with and commitments to family lives, friendships, avocations, membership in social, spiritual, and political organizations— are in essence noncapitalist or even anticapitalist, full of things we do for free, out of love, and on principle.⁵

Solnit concludes her book by noting:

We are all activists in some way or another because our actions (and inactions) have impact. And it [Hope in the Dark] was written against something—a defeatist, dismissive frame of mind that is far too widespread. We talk about politics as they were a purely rational exercise in the world of deeds and powers, but how we view that world and act in it has its roots in identities and emotions.⁶

These are new gods...Rooted in identities and emotions...New bodies...Particular...Resistant...The future is female...and...

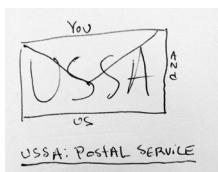
DESIGN

Everything is a postcard→ A letter to a someone with hopes of making it to a somewhere→ An image or images with words and with words unsaid→ Trying to find that other mind→ an other space to inhabit and populate→ Communication into communion→ Each action we take is a question to the future→ Stamped and placed in the circulation of events→ personalities→ and environments→ It is embarrassing to admit→ all the literature i have yet to read on the subject→ Derrida's *The Post Card*→ Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*→ and on and on→ Maybe it's just laziness→ Maybe i'm too busy→ Maybe that is the same thing→ But maybe it's my daydream and not theirs→ My Postal Daydream→ i've read and am reading other books about letters and the mail→ They started dreaming in me→ Each action is a postcard mailed→ Walter Benjamin, Susan Hiller, On Kawara, Ray Johnson→ Notes→ Letters→ A world starts spinning→ i look on in wonder→ i don't want it to stop→ don't want to catch it→ then the postcard is out there→ the letter is immanent→ it is total imagination→ Almost arrived→

→

Email→

All these messages constantly shuffling→ text messages→ notes being passed→ was how a friend described it to me→ Hot Spring day in middle school→ the only thing we could concentrate on→ Neither math nor science→ Not English nor Social Studies→ just the dawning erotics of note passing→ never much in circulation→ just my sweaty forehead pressed against the laminated wood desktop with the grid and other references to pre-algebra that looked interesting and cool but i didn't understand→ So maybe that's what motivates my interest in the postal service→ it is inherently erotic→ desire→ A lag in communication→ a space to breathe and the mind to wander→ A space marked by promise, anxiety, joy, dread, disappointment, and surprise→ Somewhere in one of his aphorisms Schopenhauer claims→ you don't really know your genuine feelings about someone until you receive a letter from them unexpectedly→ So a postal service maybe a wild erotics of communication→ What's more it questions (or could question) the virtuality of communication→ The Chicago Post Office Building is at least one city block and lies vacant on Canal Street→ a monument to the mail→ What kind of building could possibly contain the amount of electronic mail in use today→ We write more than ever i would guess→ then that building (which is no building) would of course be the internet→ the rapid growth of which another friend told me has been compared to the growth of a star→ Now throw in text messages in



and what are we talking about it? → e-flux indeed! → The Bible or at least the new testament is made up of a series of letters → epistles → people trying to reach other people trying to reach god → Spreading the “good news” → the gospel → the news to come → in the beginning was the word → God → the news → the word → mail → heaven → kingdom come → heaven on earth → the original mail art →
But mail is also full of bills and accounts to be settled → Miscommunication → Misreading → misinterpretation → The expansion of the US Mail network helped connect a young country and its nascent states → But it also contributed to its Civil War → All these people writing, turns out, did not all share the same worldview → practiced differently → acted differently → Hated differently → the postal service helped people know this → see other worlds → worlds collide → and break → heartbreak → Dear John → goodbye → farewell → I’m sorry → letters end things → the signature ends the letter → What happens after the end → What lasts? → What remains? → Corpse of letters → and connection → John Doe →

→

→

Start a letter writing campaign → write your congressmen → write your senator → write your elected official → Learn how to write in a world soon to be set against reading → If you could harness the star that is the explosion of writing → what could it do? → Could it tear down a wall? → depose a despot? → could it shake the markets? → Could it feed the poor? → could it make a voice? → a god-like voice → shape the world → create an eden → Start over → reset → Do-over → i am writing you this now → trying to help found a republic of hope in a nation of fear → i want to believe in you → i want the postcard to find you → i want it to be surprising → i want it to see something in you that you don’t already see in yourself → when it gets there it will be different than what i sent → it will be postmarked → stamped → dated → official → touched by many hands → found its way through machines → been exposed to other climates → its corners bent → its faces scuffed → But it will have found you → and it will be there with you → in a way that is touched by luck and design → we might be there together → in a way → by luck and design

EIGHTH EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: NOBODY NEEDS TO SEE WHAT YOU ARE
DOING

Remember this is the age of the YouTube channel, Facebook account, Twitter feed, Instagram post.

Remember produce constantly and

spin yourself... “Let people know what you are up to.”

Remember people don’t remember.

“Be present.”

“Be accounted for.”

Remem-



ber you are just an algorithm in somebody else's mind. Remember you are just filler.

...Filling in the gaps of concentration for endless swaths (pronounced Sway-theez-s) of the population that just can't—CAN'T—contemplate the finite nature of their existence...That, they are in fact, going to die.

...Everyone.

Remember that

if you can.

It's alright—distractions...but can you stand them if you become one?...From "hey look at me" to "hey why are you looking at me" to "hey stop looking at me" to "hey" to "help."

Remember some people actually do care. Remember even the ones that don't kind of do. ...But remember many don't.

Remem-

ber you are often one of those that don't and sometimes you are the other that does.

Remember you had trouble getting out of

bed before this all happened. Remember that before this it wasn't easy either.

Remember this was supposed to be a theoretical text and not devolve into some sort of half-baked poem.

Remem-

ber the title...(that will help)

Remember how you were

going to write about political subversion through children's literature or more precisely through comic books...Marvel.

Remember you

were going to cite Alexander Vvedensky, an Oberiu poet from Russia that got caught, prosecuted, and punished for Counter-Revolutionary activity in the Soviet Union.

Remember how that was going to make the rest

of your argument seem less sophomoric.

Remember you

were going to write about the X-Men in the 1980s and how comic book writer Chris Claremont had inserted his anti-Reagan/anti-Right Wing Religious slant into his storytelling for The Uncanny X-Men.

Remember how

you were going to use yourself as an example of how: NOBODY NEEDS TO SEE WHAT YOU ARE DOING ...to be effective politically...

Remember that the X-Men and Marvel Comics shaped your sense of ethics and justice.

Remember how you thought all of this was vi-

tal for rethinking political engagement in the Trump era.

Remember it was just one mode of political engagement among many but that as artists we have the capacity for something like mind-control or Psi-Ops.

Remember that is a very slippery slope, but then, what slope isn't slippery when it's raining?

Remember that you

are most effective when people underestimate you.

Re-

member that you thought it might be useful not to be seen in order to do what you need to do.

Remember that being seen is tiring, but don't

forget not being seen at all can be exhausting.

Remember

you wanted to make a country inside a country...an invisible republic...A world

of letters...that the alphabet will win... Remember to re-arrange the language...if you re-arrange the language, you change the furniture in the room... Remember that if you change the furniture in their house...you can fundamentally change the place how they live, if you do this...you win. Remember winning is not anything to be proud of...Re-arranging the furniture is. Remember that if you remember, you will be haunted. Remember that it's the haunting that brings you back to the comics...The Comic is haunted...that's why it is laughing... Freud's Uncanny. Remember that you have friends... friends that make you laugh. Remember that laughter is haunted and it is in being haunted you find your people...wandering souls...lost ghosts...and that's where the fun is... Remember we are all living ghosts laughing at the present and haunting the future...Us all X-MEN and X-WOMEN...Poor ghost-haunted-future. Remember to keep laughing...even when the blood comes spilling out of your arm... Remember this is a theoretical text and not a poem. Remember how much you forgot...you forgot so much. Remember you were frightened by thought of somebody putting a gasoline pump to their mouth and drinking... Remember he was your roommate. Remember how you weren't so different...That loss is everyone's story...Loss connects us all. Remember what it feels like not to go where you wish. Remember you needed to stop. Remember you needed to be more open. Remember how insanely lucky you are. Remember that collapse can be a gift. Remember you have someone who loves. Remember Hell and back is not just a saying for some people. Remember how you felt when you took your first breath of fresh air. Remember how dizzy that made you feel. Remember she was there waiting for you. Remember she stayed. Remember that there are people who love you. Remember that this is not over. Remember to stay grounded. Remember to ask for help. Remember watching the sun cross the sky all day...day after day...Remember people can't read your mind. Remember how sometimes things work out. Remember you can still talk to the dead. Remember it's ok to imitate the ones you love, to feel them inside your skin. Remember it's fine if nobody knows what you are talking about just now. Remember you are not the only one.

Remember that every hero has failed, one way or another...that we all die...that there is no amount of philosophy or art or music that can take the sting out of this...That the sting is what makes us alive but we can't let it take us...

Remember that the sting is both the love and the poison...that they are in fact the same thing... But please...

Remember...to stop. ...Turn off...shut down...give up...sleep...rest...dream...forget...let go...weep...laugh...relent...stop...forgive...breathe...breathe...slow...stop.....stop...stop...stop...stop...now...breathe...slow...release...fade...quiet...still.....nothing...stop.....stop.....stop.....

NINTH EPISTLE TO THE ASSEMBLY: SELVA OSCURA

Far from the shores of contemporary art...almost against my will...I started reading the poems of Mary Oliver...Maybe it was a yoga a class...Maybe not...they weren't radical and their edges weren't sharp...

My taste...I like to cut my tongue on trouble...But here were poems for a stiller mind...It's so hard to do anything with stillness but wait for nothing...Hope for nothing...Be nothing...It is work...sometimes it seems religious...But I can't say

Warrior one, Warrior two, Warrior three

I really can't say...how one can shift from edges to centers...How the scream of one, can be replaced by the pull of the other...my aunt told me that life begins at forty...And it definitely did begin (for me)..In earnest...maybe Mary Oliver's poetry is made of beginnings, which is like saying it's made of ends...like life...a story we tell ourselves and read together

Are you still paying attention after all the talk about the center?

That's ok... You can wonder off...I'm not trying to control you this time...I want to release you into the sun...release you into the sunlight...Star...Maker of life on earth...I don't want to hold on any longer...I've lost my grip...I'm floating in the sky ...four miles above the earth...Sun...Clouds...ok I'm falling—not floating

You think you know me reader but you don't...Each word is a fawn at dusk...Silent but alert...listening for you in a field...Predator...they see you...their ears prick up...Their tales flash...and then they're gone

But they are not gone ...they're just out of sight...in the woods now they make their way in the dark...I'm there with them...I'm silent...Each word gathered round me...Sniffing the air...Stepping between the fallen branches...Shot gun blasts and human laughter fill our world but fawns still move in the night through the forest of your dreams

Characters = you and someone you love

Setting = Airports and the Sky

You see yourself in a line walking up a mobile staircase...the kind at airports... You see yourself boarding a plane...the weather is nice...sunny...you see the one you love ahead of you...infirm but well enough to move along in the line...(but really, not well)...you are trying to stay close to them as the crowd jostles you around...the attendant pulls you to the side and says you need to wait right here... You watch as your loved one boards the plane...you feel a rising panic in your chest as they close the door...you argue with the attendant...you say you have to board...that your loved one is on the flight and can't be by themselves...that they need your assistance to manage...the officials do not budge...now the panic has taken over your body...you're not thinking straight ...all you know is you can't leave your loved one by themselves...your mind starts racing and then...then... then you act...when the official isn't looking you sneak onto the outside of the plane...of course it's tricky because it is slippery—the plane is aerodynamic—but somehow just near the tail of the plane you have found something like an emergency exit on the roof of the plane...there in a little divot or dimple in the plane's surface...you found something like a service ladder ...the plane lurches back... “Well I have my coat on,” you think to yourself...the plane starts picking up speed on the runway...you are holding on...somehow you may have blanked out for a minute or two but now all of the sudden you are miles above the earth... somehow you are still there on top of the plane...holding on to the service ladder ...it's metal you observe...the sound is deafening...you must be going over six hundred miles per hour you estimate...how am I still here you murmur...the air somehow just passing over you...you're protected by the dimple...but then you notice you can't feel your hands...you cannot feel them at all...you look down and they are still holding on to the metal ladder...maybe they froze onto the ladder...worry sets in how am I going to hold on to this ladder if i cannot feel my hands...I can't feel my hands...but somehow you are not as worried as you thought you be...not as worried as you were at the thought of separation from your loved one before the plane took off...that makes no earthly sense... none at all...sheer terror should be screaming through the halls of your mind...but you are alive...you are still there holding on...the plane is polished aluminum... the sun is very bright...even though you are at 27,000 feet the sun is warming you on the shiny surface of the plane...Ok...ok...we are going to South America

you remember...how far can that be from Chicago? Five hours? I can hold on for a few hours...I can just grip this ladder for all my life and my loved one's life...somehow I am still here...somehow I haven't been dislodged from the little air-pocketed dimple and my service latter...Optimism starts to wash over you ... like a ringing numbness...are you still holding on? can you feel anything?...I just need to hold on for a few hours...only a few hours before we touch down in South America...I think we are going to South America... And then...

Oblivion

...You're falling from 27,000 feet up...or at maybe you dozed off from the freezing temperatures...You did not see this coming...you were holding on...you knew you could hang on for dear life...life itself...willing the impossible...defying death...heaven...god...nothing could make you let go ...nothing could pry loose your grip...nothing

But then you awake in South America...somehow you survived...you made it...impossible you think to yourself...impossible...the airport is crowded...there are no signs in English...its darker than it was when you holding the service ladder...obviously...tropical trees are inside and outside the window...it's warm but you are alive...then you realize: Where is your loved one...where did they go...again panic...you start running around the airport and asking after them but nobody speaks English or you don't speak any Spanish...except for the phrase I don't know how to speak Spanish...you are freaking out...and then you realize you have lost your phone and your wallet you have no ID...no money...no way to call anyone...then you realize you did fall...that it wasn't a dream but somehow you survived ...you have no idea how you could have survived a fall from that altitude...Altitude! You literally fell miles to earth...you should be dead but you aren't...what has happened...you finally find a screen with all recent flights from this busy airport and you realize your loved one's flight has taken off to the next city

...you are waking up...you are

at home now...you are sweating...of course you are sweating...you know exactly what this has all been about...it has been about reconciling yourself to things you can't control...to holding on those you love even unto death...even past death...and that somehow love...like consciousness can't be accounted for by the science of physics...I do not know why...you think...somehow you know that this love...this dream-love can warp time and space...it has something to do with heredity...genes...you think to yourself...genome of humanity...memory of love that shoots through time and space...you want to sound kind of hipster...and say: it's code or something ...an embedded DNA-like code that runs through the species that somehow can open a gap in the space time continuum...which is weird because bodies seem like such perishable things...but the code...the love embedded in the

species...that weird thing that only fools try to explain...is not temporal or not governed by the laws of time as we are given to understand them...and you know time itself clearly is not something we understand...love...a sap-like-matter that runs through us...cosmic tree.....you heartbeat is starting to slow down...some sort of tension has left your body...corpse-pose...or not corpse-pose but something still...maybe...maybe it's not still but it's not panic...it's not panic...try not to panic...your home