

GIMMES OME TRUETH

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Every piece of writing I've ever finished, or attempted to finish, has been more or less concerned with the idea of disconnection. Valleys. Abysses. For as long as I can remember, I have been haunted by distance. I am fascinated by the impossible divides which prohibit us from understanding each other and understanding our own selves. Despite our best efforts at honesty and transparency, despite the patience and good will- a lingering separation. Whether it's in our interactions with other people, as in external relationships, or whether it's confined to the dimensions of our own psyche, as in self-knowledge- there is so much we cannot explain, so much we cannot understand, unknown.

To live with a woman for ten years, and for her to utter a statement which renders her as a complete foreigner, an outsider.

To wake up one morning, covered in vomit, with all your money gone and wasted on another bender, when you promised yourself different.

You think you know somebody until...

You think you know yourself until...

We're here, together, staring into each other's eyes- yet somehow, we're not.

Sometimes these gulches manifest as a presence of the 'alien', the 'other.'

We never quite seem to get it right.

We never quite seem to be there, together.

There's always this thing, blocking us.

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My curiosity around distance, the close attention I find myself paying towards these gaps, is due to several factors. It likely involves my father, the way my father left our family. A con man, a criminal, a liar- over the course of a single day, laid bare, abandoned by a man never to return. It also probably has something to do with my Catholic faith, my upbringing in the church. I was taught that the human creature is sinful, that creation has fallen, that we are part animal and part angel, and though we like to think we can make a go of things on our own, without the grace of God we are abjectly lost. It might have something to do with the fact I am an alcoholic in recovery, and the demonic possession of active addiction will be a memory I carry forever. It might even have something to do me being a father now myself, in a position to watch a human being emerge and blossom- an observer, an attendant to the development of people from wombs to baseball diamonds.

Either way- everywhere I look, vast expanses. Starlight receding into the blackness, further and further away.

Between us.

Within us.

Asunder.

Yet, we manage to hold something together. We create neighborhoods and paste stamps onto letters at the post office. We can point to a glowing rock in the sky and utter the word "moon," teach it to our children. We are relatively safe. We are relatively decent. We take vacations. We go to restaurants. We buy a new pair of jeans. We meet in places like stadiums or middle school parking lots, where our circumstances draw us near to our fellows.

We can operate in the world, in the midst of the disparity.

Despite the receding lights...

This world we have created, the modern society of social media and phone screen delivery confirmations- it works, though it isn't enough. No one is satisfied. We sip on our cups of coffee, we finish the big sale, we tuck the kids into bed- but it's not enough. There's something missing. We aren't satisfied, or fulfilled- let alone happy.

My life has been nothing but a search for fulfillment, for a feeling of completeness- and it has been unsuccessful and mostly tragic.

Has yours?

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In JF Martel's *Reclaiming Art in the Age of Artifice*, a distinction is made between Reality and The Real. It's a useful model in that it provides a ground to explain the dilemma at hand, the difference between our 'sensed' experience in terms of external inputs, matter and motion, and our 'felt' experience in terms of a wordless, mysterious spirit. The parts of life we can put our finger on, and the parts we cannot. Certainty, and doubt. Rationalism, and faith. Grocery lists, and serenity.

On the plane of Reality, we are restricted to our sense perceptions, our psychological states, our brainwaves, Newton's laws and television streaming services. We see the world as the world. We are confronted with perplexing dualities like life and death, good and evil- we uncover them, but their appearance does not prohibit us from turning the keys in the ignition of our car. It is on this level that having a "life" is possible- though it is essentially untrue.

Because it is incomplete.

Reality sits on top of the Real, as a kind of interface- a filter, amidst the flux.

When we speak of the Real- we speak of the grounding for being, the unified totality of various Realities. A nexus. It is the theater in which our version of Reality is to be played upon. It is the means for our lifetimes. The building, the script, the costumes, the lights- the

Real allows for Reality to emerge. It exists outside of it, as the bricks of a theater exist outside the content of the Third Act, but without them there would be no performance. Because the Real exists 'outside' of Reality, it is beyond our comprehension. We have no language to approach it. We have no knowledge of it, in the traditional sense.

The Real is where the separation, the dislocation is conquered.

The Real is where miracles happen.

So why are we unable to allow the Real to occupy our minds and hearts, in order to live in a more complete way?

An anecdote on Thomas Aquinas: at the end of his life, after a 'visionary' experience in which he made contact with the Real and declared all that he had written, his entire life's work, was as worthless as a pile of straw. Arguably one of the brightest, most intelligent human beings to have ever lived, a man dedicated to growing in his knowledge of God through analytical methods, through philosophy, through rigorous discipline- to declare in the final hour that he had said nothing. To decide, after a lifetime of work, that he had failed in terms of bringing the Real within our reach.

Had he lost hope?

Have you?

His final months were spent in seclusion, his pen frozen and useless.

Perhaps this was a blueprint- a pilgrim of silence, whose voiceless faith becomes the ultimate proclamation.

Though we can obtain no knowledge to name or describe or pin down the Real on our terms, I believe nonetheless we can be opened in such a way that it can seep into us, like sunlight through the chinking of an old log cabin. It can reach us, and thus be felt by us- only we cannot convey our contact with it by language, by ego constructs, or any other of our usual tools.

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You might be wondering what makes the Real so important?

If the play goes on, what does the actor care whether the velvet curtain is thirty-six feet long and twenty feet high?

Many do choose to ignore the dimension of the Real. In fact, we have built a modern society which denies its existence- silly are notions of souls or spirits, of higher dimensions, of a cohesive ground of being, of the One. In any public forum, we instantly dismiss even the possibility of such things existing. The play goes on. We have our supercolliders and our genetic sequences- there is no appetite for Aquinas or his Latin. Some of us are even convinced that with more data, a few more numbers, the big answers would be revealed- on our terms, accessible to our cognition. Bygone fundamental questions like 'What am

I?' or 'Why am I here?' have been reduced, discarded. Unconcerned. Another cheeseburger, another plate of French fries.

How could we accept such a state of obliviousness?

I suspect it is a choice well made. By sacrificing contact with the Real, we gain the ability to connect with one another. There is a tradeoff- by concerning our development and our energies with Reality, we are able to find our footing. Reality is the place where language allows us to build consciousness, to create a "we" between an "I" and a "you." Whatever underlies this connection also underlies our conscious life. We can have a conversation on the couch. We can open a bottle of wine with a friend.

Reality, to us, then, ought to be far more important than the Real.

For the most part, it is.

But the antagonisms between the two are not eliminated. The antagonisms create the distance, and the distance is intrinsic to our experience. Here we have arrived full circle. Picture it: on the couch, a friend next to us, two glasses of wine- we want to say something, to clarify our position on how we feel, on who we are, but we never quite accomplish our intent. The wine is drunk. The night winds down. We lie awake in bed, wondering what we should have said, how things could have gone different. We wonder about our friend, about the contents of his or her being. We continue to wonder, and then fall asleep. And so we are faced with another gulch. Our experience in Reality will never meet the satisfaction of our most secret hearts.

Why can't we be understood?

Why can't we understand others?

If only...

If only she knew...

If only he realized...

We yearn for more. We yearn and yearn and yearn. There is no end to it. Every situation, every word exchanged, every midnight tangle between lovers. We want to go further. But we can't.

A thirst which cannot be quenched.

*Abyssus abyssum invocat*- Psalm 42. "Deep calleth unto deep." There lives inside us a terrible longing for contact with the Real. From the depths of our soul, beyond our immediate Reality- we sense we are somehow a part of the Real, connected to the source of it, and however our lifetimes progress, whatever choices we make, whatever words we utter- we fail, unless we progress our lives and make our choices and choose our words in accordance with the Real. In harmony with it.

We will remain incomplete, and we will continue to feel unfulfilled, unless somehow a connection is restored.

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So how could we maintain our perspective, our anchors in Reality, and simultaneously move beyond it?

Psychedelics, religion, art- these are human inventions, exclusive to our species. As cultures have changed, as time has passed, these elements continue to present themselves no matter the place or the people. Art, first and foremost, marks the beginning of the human story. It is also by far the safest of the three! But the role of shaman and priest and painter interweaves, as each serves a similar purpose. And the purpose of art, with respect to our discussion, is to awaken us to the presence of the Real. It partially removes us from Reality, or obscures it, and hints at the dimension of the Real. We can bring our perspective to a piece of art and walk away changed forever. It draws us closer to the Truth, as we become more remote from our truth.

An aside: sex can achieve similar results, when undertaken in the warmth of love. United in mind and body with another, with a lover- we move beyond our local limitations. Eros, the counterpart to Thanatos- the lover, and the beloved.

Another aside: when I speak of Truth I don't intend for you to think it has anything to do with explanations or meaning or formulas. It is a Truth beyond conception. It cannot be held within the confines of our brains, understood in the context of a conscious experience. There's nothing that can be written about it. There's nothing that can be said. Though, we can touch it, and when we do, it transcends us- it carries us beyond our humanness. It bridges all disparity. Sublime.

The contact may only be a moment, a couple of minutes- we lose it, and return to our Reality. We can't remain outside of our Reality for long- if we do, if it often the result of a grave psychiatric disorder. But nevertheless, that contact can remain stuck to us, embedded in us, serving as a reminder for the rest of our days.

Art wakes us up to the fact we are lost- it cultivates a feeling of lostness.

Great art lays out a path to follow- a way home, to the One.

Vincent Van Gogh wrote in a letter to his sister, near the end of his life, "I would like to do portraits which would look like apparitions to people a century later."

From appearances to apparitions- from Reality, to the Real.

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It's no surprise Terence McKenna, the anthropologist gone madman prophet of the twentieth century's timewave apocalypse, the greatest advocate of psychedelics in modern history, was so deeply impacted and effected by the writing of James Joyce. His affinity for Joyce makes perfect sense. One of the essential features of the psychedelic experience is a

dissolution of Reality, and thus, an incursion of the Real. And the nature of the psychedelic experience is mirrored in Joyce's work.

If you don't know agree, there's no way for me to explain.

Joyce is able to communicate so much beyond the words on the page. He's portraying the essential qualities and features of conscious human existence, of life, of experience, within the fabric of the Real. If you're tuned into it, reading him, it's a breathtaking experience. He's the only writer I've ever encountered who can bring you there within the confines of the pages of the book. And while engrossed in his work, it becomes apparent the Real is concerned with light, and life, and love.

Is it style?

Is it rhythm, or word choice?

In *Ulysses*, Joyce's goal is to connect you to the person, the lived life, of Leopold Bloom. He transports you inside of Leopold Bloom, to be alive, inside the character, subsumed. But not in the process of the reading, cognitively- it's beyond the dialogue, the images. There's something there that no one can explain or describe, beyond qualifiers or a classification system- it's the Truth.

When it happens, it's magic.

A spell.

Joyce broke through the walls.

It's achieved through the heart, if you'll allow me to phrase it in another way. Joyce unlocks the presence of the spirit by detailing the topography of the heart of Leopold Bloom. It's beyond our kabuki theater of wake up in the morning and call the plumber and pick up your shirts at the dry cleaners- though ironically, at the surface level, that's exactly what the novel is about! The scenery of the novel couldn't be more mundane! It's butcher shops. It's pubs. It's the office. It's toilets. It's pharmacies. Yet, by entering so deeply into Bloom's Reality, Joyce found the Real.

And his writing draws you into that place.

If you allow yourself to go there, because of how inundated we are in our culture, with our ego games, our nonsense- it presents itself like a freight train.

It does for me.

It did for McKenna.

There's no way to write like Joyce, but there's a way to communicate like Joyce.

I hope.

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To summarize: by our very nature we require external intervention. We build ourselves up to be civilized, social creatures, and the world we create serves that very purpose. Our process is mostly successful. We have to find a way to live together, all of us, to account for all our singular Realities. But even so, within this 'successful' world of ours, we do not feel complete. Something is missing.

Via encounters with art, drugs, mortifications, sex, a brush with death—some of us are brought into contact with the sublime, and are transformed by it.

Why do only some of us receive the grace we need?

Why does so much of my writing fall short?

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A goldfish doesn't know it's trapped in a plastic bowl.

We do.