

return trip * david cycleback

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Return Trip
by
David Cycleback

Hamerweit Books

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Even in Kyoto how I long for Kyoto when the cuckoo sings
-- Matsuo Basho

Whilst traveling through the Andes Mountains, we
lost our corkscrew and were forced to live on nothing
but food and water.
-- W.C. Fields



Our daily language is ambiguous and can be interpreted in different ways. Words have multiple meanings, definitions change and multiply over time, phrases are interpreted differently by different people and differently by the same person in different situations. Voice intonation, pacing, grammar and facial expressions communicate meaning. The audience uses its experience, education and culture to guess what is meant.

John and I went to the food court. We ate at Taste of India.

The above everyday sentence seems straight forward but can be interpreted in many ways. The 'we' of the second sentence commonly is read to mean John and 'I,' but this reading is a guess. It could mean the narrator and someone else than John, or perhaps the narrator, John and someone else or multiple people. It's very plausible the two caught up with someone else on the way to the Taste of India.

Most read the second sentence to mean that Taste of India is at the food court and they ate there soon after they arrived at the food court. However, this is also assumption. There's nothing in the sentence that says the Taste of India is not far away from the food court and their eating didn't take place days if not months later.

It is even an assumption that the two sentences relate to each other. They could just happen to be sitting next to each other, like strangers on a bench. For all you know, I lifted them from different books, published 15 years apart.

Even when in Kyoto how I long for Kyoto when the cuckoo sings

In the above *you can't go home again* line by famous 1600s Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, the word Kyoto has different meanings. The first Kyoto indicates the physical city and the

second refers to a past life in the city, perhaps a childhood. Or at least that's how readers commonly interpret it. Basho died over 300 years ago and no one today knows what he meant.

* * * *

Comedy regularly plays on the ambiguity of language:

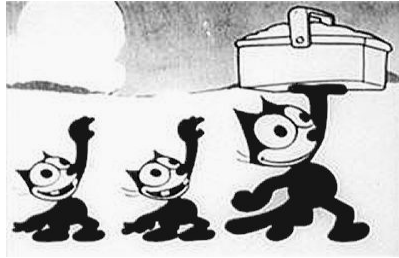
Lt. Frank Drebin: Miss, I'm Lt. Frank Drebin, and this is Captain Ed Hocken, Police Squad.

Buxom Female Shop Assistant: Is this some kind of bust?

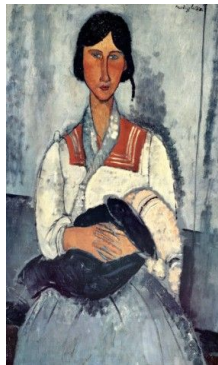
Lt. Frank Drebin: Well... it's very impressive, yes, but we need to ask you a few questions.

-- *Naked Gun 2-1/2 (1991, Paramount Pictures)*

Connecting to the Unreal: Art Perception



Fans feel a connection to cartoon characters, seeing them as if they're living beings, following their lives, laughing at their jokes, feeling good when good things happen to them and bad when bad things happen. A kid can feel closer to a cartoon character than a living, breathing next door neighbor.



Many feel a human-to-human connection to the figure in this Modigliani painting even though it is not physically human in many ways.

A complex and fascinating question is why do humans have such strong emotional reactions and human connections to unrealistic art? Why do viewers become scared, even haunted for days, by a

movie monster they know doesn't exist? Why do humans become enthralled by distorted figures and scenes that aren't realistic? Why do viewers have emotional attachments to comic book characters?

The answer lies in that, while humans know art is human made artifice, they decipher and perceive art using many of the same often nonconscious methods that they use to perceive reality. Looking at how we view reality shows us how we view art, and looking at how we view art helps show us how we interpret reality.

This topic could fill up books, and this brief chapter offers just several examples about our art perception. Food for further thought.

* * * *

Art perception is irrational

People don't perceive art, or for that matter reality, on the purely logical, rational or literal levels. Art is designed to communicate psychologically, aesthetically, sensually, viscerally, irrationally, subconsciously. There is nothing logical about instrumental music. The sounds are *felt*. Beauty and ugliness are psychological experiences. Unreal things, distorted figures, a fictional monster in a movie can strike a visceral chord in us that our normal daily reality can't. A computer generated science fiction landscape can be perceived as beautiful.

Humans have aesthetic, subconscious reactions to many basic qualities including colors, shapes, angles and balance, whether the qualities are in the real world, dreams or art. These qualities don't just symbolize feelings and evoke meaning in nature, they symbolize and evoke in abstract art and even your new bathroom design. A black bathroom, or even salt shaker, is consider 'darker' than a yellow one.

* * * *

We interpret art using many of the nonconscious cognitive methods we use in the real world. As described in more detail throughout this book, humans have learned and inborn mental methods, biases and assumptions used to nonconsciously identify things and judge the complex information in our daily lives. We compare side-by-side objects to judge size, distance and speed. We

identify distant silhouetted objects by how their shapes match up with our memories. We 'recognize' objects and qualities in paintings, sketches and movies using these same nonconscious methods.



Even though the figure in the left painting literally has no legs, we perceive Mona Lisa as a whole person and not as some freakish amputee. This mimics how we automatically perceive as whole a real person standing behind a fence or sitting behind a desk. We fill in unseen information in our minds.



In both nature and art, we subjectively pick out figures and patterns in ambiguous and even random information. This includes castles and dragons in clouds and train stations in sketches. These are visual illusions, products of the imagination.



Using the same visual cues we use in nature, we perceive depth in two dimensional paintings, movies and photographs. Diminishing scale, relative size of objects, overlapping objects, changes in focus and tone indicate depth in both our back yard and in the above 1400s oil painting. The curious thing about perceived depth in paintings, photographs and movies is the artworks are physically flat. The depth is imaginary.



Both in real life and when art viewing, humans focus on some information in a scene while being oblivious to other. The audience can get into a movie to a point they forget they are sitting in a theater and watching a projected image showing paid actors seen in earlier movies. This explains why a movie shark can make jump the audience in a desert theater one thousand miles from the nearest ocean.

* * * *

Symbols. Symbols are an integral part of the human experience on many levels. A symbol is something that represents something else, something larger. It is a short hand, often to a complex idea. To many, blue at the top of an abstract painting or kid's sketch represents sky, and green at the bottom represents grass or ground. A gold ring on the finger symbolizes marriage.

Not only can commonly known symbols be used in art to communicate ideas, meaning and mood, but this illustrates how humans don't need reality to communicate real ideas. Symbols literally aren't the thing they symbolize.

Literature, this paragraph you are reading, is a long series of symbols. The meaning isn't in the symbols themselves, but what they evoke in your mind. I couldn't communicate many of the ideas in this book without these symbols. Someone who doesn't know the code (English) can't know what is being written.

* * * *

Humans mentally adapt to and accept new and artificial worlds.

Throughout our lives we learn new games, rules, languages, rituals, manners, fashion, ways of thinking. In art, we accept and adopt new musical styles, symbols, genres, conceits, artifices. Through repetition and experience, artistic symbols, conceits and associations become more than convenient intellectual devices. They become ingrained, seem natural.

Our perception of reality is formed by the conceits of art. People around the world perceive the Old West from Hollywood movies, even though historians will tell you those depictions are historically inaccurate. People gain dubious perceptions of faraway places and peoples from sitcoms and action movies.

* * * *

Each art medium is limited in what it can show literally. A painting or sketch doesn't have physical depth or movement. A silent movie doesn't have voices even when the people on screen converse. The letters of a novel can't graphically show a sunrise.

This means a medium must use artificial devices to communicate the literally undepictable. Through exposure, audiences accept the devices, don't even think twice about them.



This movie has subtitles so English speakers know what is being said.



Comic strips use panels to depict the passage of time, and words and bubbles to depict talking.

* * * *


Humans know and feel there is more than what they see and can comprehend, more than what they experience in their day to day lives. They know people in a society hide their true thoughts and feelings. They know they themselves have feelings and ideas that can't be put into words. They know there are real concepts they

can only imagine about.

The unrealistic, the impossible, the surreal, symbolism can evoke that which realistic art and our daily lives don't. Abstract patterns and wordless music can evoke secret memories, emotions and philosophical ideas that a photograph or neighborly chat cannot.



A 'photorealistic' snapshot of a posed family can reveal little about what the subjects really think and feel, while an expressionist painting can tell a lot. In fact, expressionism intended to express psychological reality rather than physical reality. The artists believed both couldn't shown at the same time.



SOPHY'S COUSIN: "It's bad enough you married a man from Wisconsin, but a man from Wisconsin who once ate goat?"

SOPHY: "Have you seen his eyes?"

COUSIN: "True, Zola does have beautiful blue eyes. I'll tell you what, I won't vote for his disowning him from the family, but I won't vote against. I'll stay neutral. But the vote's going to be close. You might have to bribe someone. And if you could convert him that would help."

COUSIN #2 (approaching): "Do you know where the napkins are? Is this real coffee?"

* * * *

I will tell you the answer. There is no escape.

* * * *

It's not that I can't charm the birds from the trees, it's that I don't see the point.

Knock her socks off, I see the purpose.

* * * *

SOPHY'S AUNT: "Aren't blue eyes the sign of the Devil?"

ZOLA : "I don't know. Maybe."

* * * *

Pop and bubbler. You've got me pegged. Sometimes if I say pop, people don't know what I'm talking about.

* * * *

Your smirk is sexy, your smile sweet. It's a nice contrast.

* * * *

Telling your sincere guts doesn't work. Inside your stomach, your deep personal thoughts have the correct movie lighting and music. When you put them on a plate under the kitchen lights, they look slight and cheesy.

* * * *

"Of course, I'll still say that I love you and that you're a complete and total fox, but best friends do that, right?"

Absolutely. 100 percent. XOXO,
Sophy

* * * *

1800s Harper's Woodcuts, or woodcuts prints from the magazine Harper's Weekly, are popularly collected today. The images show nineteenth century life, including celebrities, sports, US Presidents, war, high society, nature and street life. Though originally black and white, some have been hand colored over the years. As age is important to collectors, prints that were colored in the 1800s are more valuable than those colored recently. The problem is that modern ideas lead collectors to misdate the coloring.

Due to their ideas about the *old fashioned* Victorian era, most people assume that vintage 1800s coloring will be subtle, soft, pallid and conservative. However, 1800s coloring was typically bright, gaudy, bold and even tacky to modern taste. As Victorian people didn't have color televisions, motion pictures or video games, and were restricted in their travel, they liked their images of exotic places and faraway celebrities to be colored exciting. A

learned forger might knowingly use historically incorrect colors, knowing the average person today would consider authentic colors to be fake.

* * * *

The subject of aesthetics interests and bothers me greatly for a number of reasons. One is aesthetic perception is an integral and inescapable part of how we view things, imagine the universe, interpret things, guess what is right and wrong, true and false, moral and immoral. Our perception is always, and often nonconsciously, influenced by our aesthetic tastes.

Another reason is people will read this book, judge its worth and meaning and veracity and artistry (whether or not it was intended as art!) using their aesthetic biases and preconceived rules. For humans, that's part of how books (and restaurant menus and bathroom signs and shoelaces) are judged.

* * * *

I fear being poached for my heart of gold. Elephants have it easy. Tusks are on the outside.

Evidently gold is an aphrodisiac to Asian bankers.

They said they only wanted my heart. They'd let me keep my corpse.

* * * *

I had this incredible urge to write and tell you I've been thinking of you and the urge won out.

Miss you. A lot.

* * * *

I turned my chair and listened to the White Album backwards. Sounded about the same but looked different.

* * * *

I look clean, but the dirt is swept under the skin.

* * * *

Unless the point of art is supposed to be fantasy, another world. People often call art, or at least entertainment, an escape from reality.

The problem with that working theory is humans use the same aesthetics perceptions for reading art that they use for reading reality. Our *escape from reality* view of art doesn't reflect well the accuracy of our view of reality.

* * * *

Humans use their aesthetic biases to judge what are and are not truths and facts. A truth that does not meet one's psychological expectations and rules for what are truths will not be considered true, at least not initially. An offered falsehood that meets one's expectations for what is a truth is often accepted as a truth. This helps explain how propaganda works.

When an important medical report is given to the public on television, do you in part judge the validity of the report based on what the doctor is wearing and from where he is presenting the findings? Even if the report is the same, would you give more credence if the doctor is wearing a white lab coat and stethoscope and speaking from a laboratory (test tubes, vials, scientific charts in the background), as opposed to if he is wearing jeans and a well worn T-shirt and speaking from a junky park bench? Why do you think makers of commercials hawking that fad diet or libido pill use actors dressed like doctors in white lab coats?

* * * *

If you pick up an apple, you expect it to have the taste and consistency of an apple. Even if you love banana cream pie, if the first apple bite has the taste and consistency of banana cream pie you likely will be repulsed and spit it out.

* * * *

When I get really depressed things change, my heart is altered. I don't mean darker but different.

* * * *

My Toy Fox Terrier trains for winter by peeing in the freezer.

* * * *

Don't be so flattered. I want to sleep with everyone.

* * * *

You aren't just any choice, but a real choice that speaks to me a lot louder than I sometimes want. You are such a real choice I sometimes see in my mind chucking it all. Not as in, 'Gee wouldn't it be neat,' but as in, holy fucking shit. I can see myself falling for you so badly, which is why I can be guarded. Meeting you makes me reconsider things about my life I thought I was fine with. I've never before met anyone who's made me think like that. You're such a real choice that it is really hard for me, because it's nearing impossible for me now to do anything about how I feel. I could act irresponsibly but I think that would probably break both our hearts.

* * * *

With my shiny earrings and rings, the women might not like me but the magpies do.

* * * *

People judge a work of art by deciding what they think it is-- how the pieces fit together, what is its intended meaning, genre etc-- then judging that. When someone says a work of art is trite and silly, what he is really saying is his interpretation of what the art is trite and silly.

I didn't say the work can't also be be trite and silly.

* * * *



Which cyclist is going fastest? Most will say the cyclist on our left is going the fastest and the one on the right the slowest. There are, however, unanswered questions that make it impossible to know. Did they start at the same place? Did they start at the same time? Are they moving forward or backward? Are they moving? I've seen sprint cyclists stand still during a race. Even if it's a normal 1-2-3-Go! race, it's possible the guy on the right is going the fastest and the guy on the left the slowest at the moment the image was shot. Catching up, slowing down and switching positions are normal parts of all races.

* * * *

It sneaks up on me. Sometimes I'm the last to know.

* * * *

I owe my impressive vocabulary to my parents. From my dad I learned words like obfuscate and furtive, and from my mom I learned words like puke and holy crap.

* * * *

"Sometimes life is a shit flavored popsicle."
"As long as it isn't orange."

* * * *



Visual illusions demonstrate that reality and human perception of reality are different things.

Despite appearance, the middle bar does not change in color or tone. If you cover up the image so only the bar is showing you will see this.

* * * *

Human perception is about making guesses in the face of ambiguous information, guesses based on one's experience, education, habits, psychology, biases, physiological capabilities and even personal taste. These guesses often happen instantly and nonconsciously. You don't have to ponder depth, you just reach out and grab the coffee cup handle.

These guesses are often correct, or at least a close enough approximation of reality. However, as visual illusions and our daily errors demonstrate, these guesses are often wrong.

* * * *

I get up at 6:45 am and work and watch the evening news and rake red pine needles up against the bases of the new wooden fence posts in the back yard— I rake up the needles and I go and get another pull/pushcart full of red pine needles and bring it up to a bare section— and I talk with my boss at work about work and business practices and soccer South American style— and I collect

baseball cards and I bid on some lots, and I look at my Koufax rookie and 1910 silk common—and I go to dinner and I eat dinner (spanakopita, salad with oil dressing, French bread, skim milk), I talk with those at the table— And now as I look at my Red Back Cobb, as I rake the needles and listen to popular music on the radio, as I drink a cup of coffee downtown and watch the painfully fashionable teens on the sidewalk, I know that it will never leave me—The season in hell was not a season— and they can try to beat it out of me— they can medicate me— and they can make it so even I want to live this life, so I look forward to a tomorrow of work and sunlight and food—but it will never leave me— Nearly every waking moment I am aware of it

And I must go— I must change out of these jeans dirty at the knees before I go to the library to look up some things in magazines not worth mentioning. I wish to wear my black basketball shoes but the right shoelace is wearing thin and I don't feel like lacing in another one.

* * * *

After the blackness— I sometimes refer to it as shade, or underwater— and it is a test to see if I can live as a human can— Authoritative eyes are on me, it's all very melodramatic—And I won't say that I don't have a kiddie desire to do well, to earn the gold star

And they have me on steady medication that makes me stand up straight and makes my eyes repulsed by dark and makes me strong and undistracted so I can walk upright in the daylight.

I live as a human does— the day to day world— the day to day chores— And the humans about me are piecemeal and pallid and go about their airy chores, their day to day ideas

And I go about mine— But there are pauses, blips in the mind — I have been reintroduced to society— the “blackness” has been put behind me— and I'm going about it well— the work, the sleeping, the typing, the reading, the newspapers, box scores, political bickering, comics, Ann Landers, cookouts of fish and hamburgers, British comedies, And for a while I forget about the past, the past feelings— But there is heartache—typical goofy human longing— and this is where it starts— in longing— and it is

through this longing that I connect to the other, the heartache is a conductor for the other side, like air for sound— And I long lust heartache after a woman over there (approx. 7 miles) and I cannot have her— I don't know how to have her— Union is mired in fogginess and speculation— But you must understand, I understand, that the heartache isn't the be all/end all, rather it is merely a conductor to the other side— I am reunited with past feelings—And I go about my human life, try to go about my human life— But in case you didn't realize, the day to day existence is a dream— My hands in front of me, the newspaper are underwater— And the music comes— in fits and starts— and I try to resist it, am repulsed by it, deny it, think of the repercussions—as you are taught in AA— the other sessions—as the medicine is used to prevent— But the music becomes louder and louder (in fits and starts, with extended pauses)— then there is a pause, silence— then all of a sudden you are there

* * * *



Narrative, or the story we tell for a scene we see or experience, is an integral part of how humans perceive, identify and judge information, both moving and still, realistic and abstract. A narrative is the conscious and nonconscious story we see and tell about our lives, attach to observed situations and still objects. Narrative includes perception of time, plot, order, causation, association, mood, action, point of view, emphasis (what is important, what is not), character motives, past and future. When we look at a still photo or painting or a distant couple standing at a street light we perceive a story in progress. We may not know the

story, but we take for granted that there is one. A cup on a table isn't just there, there is a history of how it got there, where it will go next. Presumably, a human walked up to the table and placed the cup there, perhaps drank from it. "Who left this dirty cup on the table?!", someone may soon say. "Dirty dishes go in the dishwasher."

We know the earlier fox image was an observer's snapshot of a real living animal in mid movement. A good guess is the fox is/was chasing prey. Did it catch anything? That's a question to ponder.

* * * *

I was a charming drunk. At least I thought so.

* * * *

Complaints about this book will often be that the text is not presented in an expected orderly style. That the plotting is ambiguous and it's not clear how the disparate pieces tie together. These complaints are expressions of cognitive bias, personal taste.

* * * *

Maybe my writing is a condition.

* * * *

As an encore was requested, I will be beautiful and brilliant again this week.

* * * *

It is the sense of smell that evokes in me— I step outside in the middle of the night, into a cool midnight breeze— and in the smell of coolness and dirt and wet grass there is a reminder of that that thing I have been following or that has been following me— and the harder I smell, the more it disappears

* * * *

I am critiquing aesthetics, on a level rebelling against old fashioned literary conceits, but, as a writer, I have my own aesthetic tastes. The jumbled up form serves a practical philosophical purpose, but also appeals to my taste. Linearity and symmetry are too cliché-ey for my sensibilities. Too artificial.

The conflict between rebelling against traditional aesthetics while using my own aesthetic tastes likely results in some muddiness, inconsistencies in the text. Which if anything fits in with the philosophy of the book. A work free of flaws is as realistic and honest as a purple elephant in a tutu on your front lawn. It's something dumbed down to amuse kindergarteners or for political campaign advertizing. Sometimes hard to tell which.

* * * *

And the Big Bad Congressman from District 3 says he will come and take all the children's lollipops. And all the children cry 'Please Mr. Big Bad Congress from District 3, please don't come and take our lollipops.'

* * * *

People will judge this book aesthetically-- they will use their aesthetic biases and expectations to critique it's merit and quality and even factual accuracy-- but that's not what the book is about. In fact, I say personal aesthetic taste is a wrong way to judge the book. This is not a short story or magazine article. It's in part an examination of aesthetic form, aesthetic perception, a commentary on aesthetic bias, including the reader's. In particular in relation to information processing. It doesn't intend to cater to the readers' clichés and habits.

You are allowed to critique this book with your aesthetic biases, but only if you also critique your aesthetic biases.

* * * *

The human being lives in a universe that is mostly beyond its knowledge and comprehension.

None of us knows the volume of the universe, the complete inner workings of our own minds, what birds really think or what it's like to be in someone else's shoes. We can speculate, we can conjecture, we can theorize, but we don't know for certain.

It's fair to assume Albert Einstein would have said there were many areas of science he knew little about. Just because you are a famous nuclear physicist on the cover of *Time* magazine doesn't make you a wiz at biology, veterinary science, economics, geology, forestry and television repair.

* * * *

While humans know little about the universe, they have an innate psychological and practical need for answers and order. Most of us want to know the meaning of the universe and what is our purpose on earth. We need practical, if sometimes arbitrary, rules to run our daily lives.

In an attempt to overcome their lack of knowledge and sate their desires for order, human beings create pseudo answers and artificial order. They create an artificial vision of the world, filled with artificial rules

Our daily lives are filled with artificial and arbitrary, if closely held, rules and customs.

- * Baby boys should wear blue, baby girls should wear pink.
- * When men greet they must shake hands.
- * A painting should be framed and hung from the wall. You should not display it on a tabletop or leaned against a wall.
- * A Gothic novel must have dark, stormy weather and a castle or mansion.
- * It is uncouth to drink wine out of a coffee cup or beer stein. Wine must be drunk from a wine glass.
- cowboy movie.
- * There is great significance in 10 year (decade) and 100 year (century) increments. Nine, 11 or 98 year durations are of lesser importance.

* * * *

Artificial and arbitrary rules are used in all facets of our lives. From the fashion rules for the shoes we wear to how we describe the universe to our children. From the way a house is supposed to be decorated to how music is supposed to sound. From the ways we conceptualize the unknown to the required color for artificial turf in a sports stadium. I hate to break it to you sports fans, but there's no practical reason artificial turf can't be blue, purple, grey, red, black or white.

* * * *

We all have artificial, and often silly rules for art, for 'the way it's supposed to be.' The following are a few examples. Notice that some are about how the art is presented rather than the art itself.

Say the Chicago Symphony comes to town and offers wonderful performances of Beethoven's 9th Symphony and Hayden's Water Music. Many in the audience, including perhaps the local newspaper critic, will be unable to get beyond the fact that the orchestra dressed overly casual. The director in tank top and cutoff jeans. The lead violinist in bathrobe and stocking feet. Some in the audience will demand their money back, the newspaper critic might spend half her review complaining about the musicians' clothes.

The way a country music song is supposed to sound. What instruments are supposed to be used and what instruments should not be used. How the musicians should dress and move in a music video. What topics the lyrics should cover. What topics the lyrics should not cover.

When you go to an art museum, what should it look like inside? What should it not look like? What would be your reaction be if a show of Rembrandts had the original, centuries old paintings displayed in funky neon green and day glow yellow frames?

In Western culture what art forms are generally considered more artistically significant than others? Novel versus comic book, oil painting versus finger painting, television show versus in theatre movie, classical music versus rock 'n roll, drama versus comedy, violin versus banjo? Why?

* * * *

The problem with these rules is they make a distorted, false lens with which we perceive the universe and information.

* * * *

A wealthy American businessman and amateur historian decided to build a duplicate of an Ancient Greek pillar on his ranch. His expressed intent was to make it as historically accurate as possible, down to the smallest known detail. Partway through the construction scholars discovered that the Ancient Greeks had painted the original pillar a bright light blue. The businessman was taken aback at this finding. All the pillars he had seen in person and depicted in books were unpainted. Painting one of those beautiful stoic pillars a bright color bordered on the distasteful, like following a fine meal with lime jello and cool whip. The businessman built the pillar exact in all known details except it was unpainted.

* * * *

Juxtaposition is an artistic device I like. In good juxtaposition, A means something and B means something, but when placed side by side they mean something new, unsettling, messy, subconscious, too complicated to put your finger on.

* * * *

Never guess a woman's age. Even if you get it correct, she'll be offended.

* * * *

It is through our distorted view of the world that we receive what we consider our profound aesthetic, spiritual and emotional experiences.

* * * *

Art artificially manipulates the mind. The artist uses symbols, colors, shapes, language style and other techniques to play on the audience's psychology. One significant point about this is that it shows the mind can be artificially manipulated.

* * * *

That humans can be effected by the fake, the artificial-- sometimes even more so than reality-- says something significant about the reliability of human aesthetic perception. Human emotions and psychology being a direct path to identifying larger objective truths is at best a dubious notion.

* * * *

In order to effectively communicate the essential artistic meaning, the artist must follow most of the audience's biases and rules. This not only includes the deeper conceits but the shallow.

To have the audience focus on the intended meaning, the artist must be faithful to, or at least take into consideration, most of the audience's expectations. Breaking a convention, an artistic rule, is a shock, a distraction. If the artist breaks all the conventions the audience will be too distracted to focus on the meaning. If you turn a busy street corner and a nude man painted orange and walking a deer in a tuxedo asks you for directions to the library I bet you won't comprehend the first sentence or two that comes out his mouth no matter how clearly he speaks. Similarly, if you display a Rembrandt painting in a hot pink and lime green fuzzy frame with flashing neon lights and dangling felt dice, don't be surprised if the gallery patron is unable to focus on the painting. If you want the patron to focus on the painting, you use a frame that fits his or her expectations.

* * * *

Artists intentionally bend or break some conventions while following the others. They follow all the other conventions in order to focus the audience's attentions on the intentionally bent or broken convention. I dare you to find a popular *shock rock* band that, while having a disturbing twist, does not follow the majority of

fashionable conceits, even those used by The Kingston Trio and Sonny and Cher. What you intend to be shocking can't be shocking, or its shock value will be diluted to water, if the audience's attention is distracted by other things. Totally bewildering is rarely as haunting as a perverse twist of the ordinary.

The juxtaposition of the unexpected with the expected, the abnormal with the normal, is a common artistic technique. Many movies spend the first portion of the work merely setting up an artificial plot and setting to later subvert. How many monster movies start as a normal everyday white picket story? How many thrillers start as an everyday guy going about his everyday business?

The *theme and variation* is a standard musical technique--altering the melody the second and third time around in a song or other work of music. In comparison to the remembered theme, the altered variation produces a psychological, sometimes poignant effect for the listener. Music can be plotted in a surprisingly similar way to a movie or novel.

* * * *

No matter how shallow the audience's rules, the successful artist must use most of the conceits of the audience. Successful art is a compromise between the artist and the audience. It is a communication and communication requires a common language. The artist may have radical things to say, but must communicate in a form the audience can understand. No matter how profound the meaning, the novelist who ignores all the audience's expectations and sensibilities might as well write the book in a foreign language. Great artists are keenly aware that much of their artistic vision can never be communicated to others.

* * * *

The BaMbuti Pygmies of Congo traditionally live their entire lives in the dense rainforest, where the furthest away anyone can see is feet. They learned, loved, played and hunted in this environment. In his 1961 book *The Forrest People (Touchstone)*, anthropologist Colin Turnbull wrote how he took one of these Pygmies, named Kenge, for his first time to a wide open plain. As the two stood on a

hill overlooking the flat land, a group of water buffalo was seen a few miles away. Having no experience of how things appear smaller over long distance, Kenge asked what kind of insects they were. Turnbull told him they were buffalo and Kenge laughed loudly at the “stupid story.” Turnbull drove Kenge towards the buffalo. Watching the animals growing visually larger, Kenge became scared and said it was witchcraft.

You may laugh at Kenge, but have similar illusions based on your geographic upbringing. Look at the below picture.

Which black rectangle is larger?



The two rectangles are the same size. Measure them yourself. It is your lifelong experience with diminishing scales in open spaces that caused you to perceive the upper rectangle as larger. Kenge would not have been fooled by this illusion.

* * * *

Life is short. I didn't say too short.

* * * *

There are conflicts, muddiness, in everything human, every philosophy. As the author, I can see areas of intellectual conflict to this book, even as I write them. I can see opposing ideas and methods, both which I need in the book. It's a problem, but

removing one would be worse, make the book dead on arrival. At the least, the conflict provides a fullness, realism.

* * * *

Often when I write a book, such as an academic book, I feel how narrow and dry is the format and argument, how unrepresentative of life, my life, and have a compulsion to rebel against it by adding incongruous, off topic text.

* * * *

Even when the objects remain constant and stationary, humans perceive them differently in light versus dark. To humans, objects 'appear in the light' and 'disappear into the dark.' Due to the physiology of our eyes and how the rods and cones detect light, humans physically see better in daylight than in dark. Humans see more detail and color during daylight. At night things become murkier to hidden, colors fade.

There almost always is light when it is pitch black to humans, but it is in wavelengths human eyes can't detect. Ultraviolet and infrared light are commonly present, but invisible to humans. A human can get a suntan from ultraviolet light and feel the warmth associated with infrared light, yet is unable to see either.

Other animals have night and day vision different from humans. Owls see better in night than in day. Night flying geese can see ultraviolet wavelengths our eyes do not detect. It's not that objects like picnic tables and fence posts physically vanish in the dark of night. It's that humans are unable to see them. Owls see them fine.

* * * *

Darkness is popularly associated with sinister, and light with goodness. Look at the common dark words and phrases:

Dark angel
Dark and mysterious
Shadowy figure
Dark thoughts

He has a dark mind
Heart of Darkness

Human society mostly functions during daylight hours. Elementary schools don't run at night.

In Western culture, white, yellow and other bright colors are associated with happiness and goodness. Someone who is upbeat and smiley is said to be in a bright or sunny mood.

Hell is commonly pictured as shadowy and Heaven as sunny. Good angels are typically described as wearing white. Virginal brides wear white. The Wicked Witch of the West wore black. The Good Witch of the East wore white.

Monsters are commonly called creatures of the night, and genuine creatures of the night, like bats and owls, have been called monsters and demons.

Vampires, as the stories go, rise at night from their coffins and die when exposed to daylight. The cursed man becomes a werewolf at the full moon of the night.

* * * *

Infrared viewers, such as night vision goggles, do not allow humans to see infrared light, but translate infrared light into visible light. We cannot see infrared light and can only guess how an infrared viewing animal perceives it.

* * * *

Even after you learn how they work, there are many visual illusions that still fool you. If you returned and look again at the visual illusions shown throughout this book, many will still fool your eyes.

The mind contains compartments that perform specific tasks. For example, one compartment is used for comprehending spoken language, another for perceiving smell. Some of these compartments are isolated from other parts of the brain. They work on their own, not influenced by goings on elsewhere. These compartments sometimes are even isolated from conscious knowledge.

The perception of many visual illusions is made independent of

your conscious knowledge. This explains why even your conscious knowledge that they are illusions doesn't solve your nonconscious misperception.

* * * *

Have you ever noticed that when you're outside at night, you can see a star better when you're not looking straight at it? The center of your retina does not have rods which are used to see at night. The rods are off center, so you see better at night off center. When looking at a faint star, try turning your head a bit as it may appear brighter out of your periphery.

Given humans' night vision it is not coincidence that humans perceive ghosts as things that come out at night, are pale and colorless, ephemeral, fleeting, peripheral, dreamlike, shimmering, mysterious, otherworldly. Under the shroud of night a lawn chair can look like a shadowy figure. A backpack left on a picnic table can resemble a strange animal. A rustling bush can startle the sheekles out of someone walking home alone. As there is a lack of visual information at night, humans use their imaginations to fill in the story.

* * * *

A nice thing about living on the West Coast is 7am comes at 10.

* * * *

I love you Professor Brodsky, but, since I'm trying to be platonic this week, could you maybe wear a bulky sweater to class?

* * * *

"I went back and read some of the stuff we wrote recently. I want us to be open and deep and messy and all that with each other. I want us to be close deep messy friends, and I want you to want us to be close deep messy friends. And if this is what you want, I promise to be a good friend and do my best to protect you too. I'm pouring my heart out."

It's what I want. Truly. Close, deep and messy sounds perfect to me.

* * * *

My soul is so black my black heart appears off white in front of it.

* * * *



Human visual perception is profoundly influenced by biases about forms, shapes and patterns. Humans have ingrained and nonconscious attractions for specific forms, shapes and patterns. Some of these biases are genetic, while others are learned. These biases greatly influence how we perceive, organize and label, and are essential to the quick identifications needed to go through life.

Humans can naturally tell the difference between a perfect and lopsided circle and between a straight and slightly bent metal bar. From having looked at pictures in books, magazines and on television, a kid can immediately identify the distant form of a Grizzly in the wild, even when the bear is silhouetted by shade. The same kid at grandma's can instantly identify a cookie by its gingerbread man shape.

You instantly perceived a dog in the black shape, even though the shape lacked fur, eyes, whiskers, correct size and other essential doggy details. You didn't have to contemplate the shape. You perceived it instantly.

The problem for humans is that their biases for certain shapes, forms and patterns are so strong and ingrained that they will perceive these things when don't objectively exist. These biases

lead to many visual illusions.

* * * *

Our form and pattern biases are shown when we perceive horses or castles or hot rods or other familiar shapes in clouds. These 'identifications' are subjective to the viewer, and do not objectively exist in cloud. There are thousands of possible connect-the-dot shapes in a cloud, but you perceive, or mentally pick out, that which matches your knowledge. The horse or castle is a projection of what exists in your mind. If there were no horses on earth or in fantasy books, you would not perceive a horse in the cloud, as you wouldn't 'recognize' it.

The connect-the-dot figures in stars don't exist except as we draw them. The familiar faces or figures we perceive in burnt toast, wood grain and stones are projections of our minds. What you perceive is as much a reflection of you as what you are looking at.

I hope it dawns on you when you pick up a stone that 'looks just like Elvis,' the stone existed long before Elvis was born. It would be silly to believe the stone was formed by glaciers 10,000 years ago to commemorate Elvis' future rise to popularity on the pop charts.

* * * *

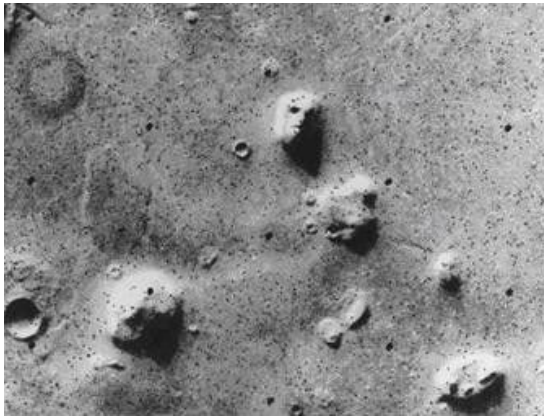


In 1976 the NASA spacecraft Viking 1 took photographs of an area on the planet Mars that contained many giant mesas, craters and other geological formations. One of the mesas in the photographs somewhat resembled a human face. As should not be unexpected,

many humans on earth became interested in this ‘human face’ (and, not surprising, were less interested in the formations that didn’t resemble human body parts). Some were and still are convinced the mesa was constructed by intelligent life form.

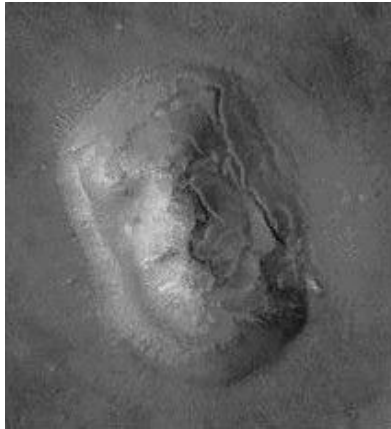
This perception of a face is a pattern bias, a projection of the viewer’s mind whose own face has a similar form. If someone has patterns in his mind (human face, kitty cat, square, letter ‘B,’ house key, baseball cap, house) and looks at enough information (such as all the geological formations on a planet’s surface), he will be able to pick out some of these patterns in the information. Seeing the ‘face of Nixon’ isn’t proof a potato was built by intelligent life form. It means that out of millions and millions and millions of potatoes, a few are bound to somewhat resemble a former US President who had a sticky outy nose.

As the following images show, the face on Mars is just one of many mesas, hills and craters that come in a wide variety of shapes.





Just another mesa in the crowd



Years later, the above photograph of the same mesa was shot at a different angle and time of day. This shows that angle and shadow contributed to the perception of a face. If originally shot at this angle and time of day, the mesa may not have been perceived as a face and humans on earth would have considered it no more significant than any of the other blobs in the photographs.



smiley face of mars?

* * * *



The standard *Is it a vase or is it two faces looking at each other?* visual illusion shows that humans project a subjective, or personal, identity onto an object. You initially see a black vase or a pair of white faces looking at each other. As you stare longer your perception will be replaced by the other view, then your perception will flip back and forth between the two views. The image is unchanging, while your perception of it changes. Of course it is neither a vase or faces, but a black and white abstract pattern. The pattern could be perceived as many things.

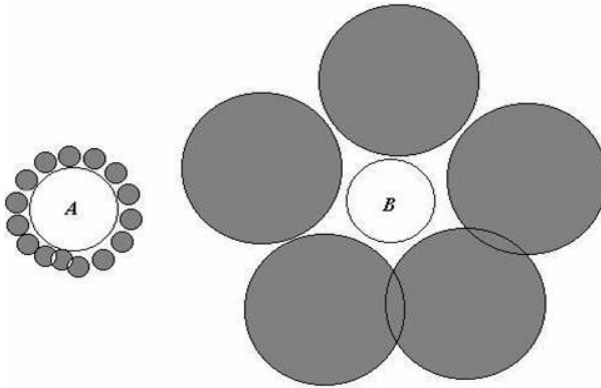
However, in part by your biases and by the leading question ('Is it a vase or faces?'), you perceived a vase and faces. As I look at the image, I could see how the top or bottom portion could be perceived as two boots placed back to back. The chin to nose areas could be perceived as little black faces. The black shape could be seen as a table. In fact there's no reason, beyond viewer's

predilection for order, that the pattern has to depict anything specific.

* * * *

I told a retired professor and textbook author that a book is never finished, the author just quits. He laughed and said "Exactly."

* * * *



Circles A and B are the same size. It the surrounding grey circles that make circle B appear smaller.

Human perception of objects is influenced by nearby objects, qualities and other information. Both consciously and nonconsciously we judge things through comparison. To measure fabric one compares the cloth to a yard stick. To judge the size of someone's hand, you might press your palm against hers. To judge someone's speed, you might race him or watch him race someone else.

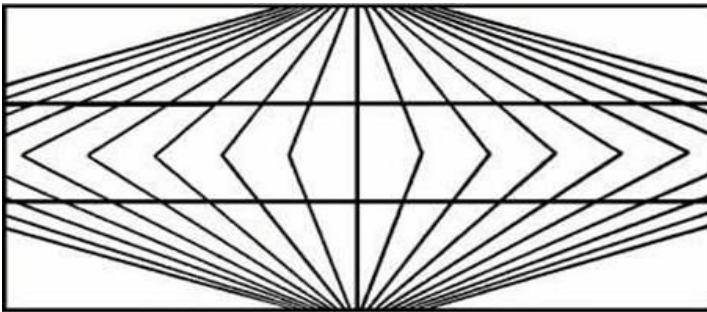
In often less exacting comparisons, humans judge the length, height, angle, shape, color and distance by comparing one object to others in the scene. Looking at a family snapshot photo you might guess the height of a stranger by comparing him to someone you know. You will guesstimate the distance to a house by comparing its size to the sizes of closer houses and trees. You will guesstimate an angle by comparing it to a level line ("Appears to be about 10-15% off from level").

Often these guesstimates are accurate within a reasonable degree. You might guess that stranger in the photo is 6 feet tall, as you know your aunt is 5' 5." When you meet him, you may discover he's 5'10-1/2." Not perfect, but a darn good guess—especially as you were unable to clearly see what shoes they had been wearing.

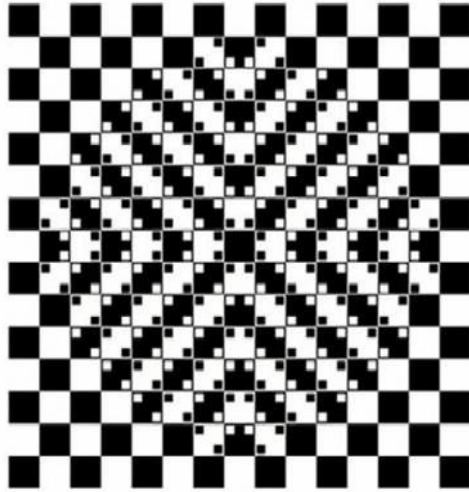
A problem is that, while comparing to other objects is essential to making judgments, comparisons can lead to errors. Seemingly logical comparisons can produce answers that are bizarrely wrong. These errors happen when assumptions about an object or about the overall scene is wrong.

What happens if you incorrectly remembered your aunt as 6 feet tall, instead of 5'5," as the last time you saw her you were a five year old munchkin? Your calculations of the man's height will be similarly off. You might wrongly guess he was 6'7." What happens if she was wearing flats in the photo, while he, shy about his height, was wearing lifts? What happens if the man couldn't make the family reunion and a cousin photo-shopped in an image of him?

The following pictures show how your perception is distorted by surrounding information.



The above two horizontal lines are straight and parallel. The angled background makes them appear to bend. Without the angled background, the lines would appear parallel.



All the horizontal and vertical lines are straight and equally spaced. In other words, all the large checkerboard squares are perfect squares of the same size. It is the placement of the tiny squares that creates the appearance of the ‘bulge.’

* * * *



With some forms of camouflage, such as with a brown chameleon standing in front of a matching brown rock, you see the chameleon but don't perceive it. Your eyes and mind receive the same visual chameleon information as when the chameleon is standing in front of a white sheet. Humans can't visually identify anything without contrast. This is how a chameleon or arctic fox can hide in open view.

* * * *

A search for the truth requires leaving society, if not geographically.

* * * *

People tend to believe that sanity and insanity are absolute, objective terms, with a medical doctor saying a patient is insane as she would say a patient has a broken arm or skin cancer. The popular and legal definitions of sanity and insanity are based on that society's customs and even fashion. No matter what it is, if enough people are doing it it won't be considered insane behavior.

If you don't believe this, examine what currently socially acceptable behavior would be deemed bizarre, if not psychotic, if no one else in society did them.

- * Decorative body mutilation, such piercing one's ears and getting a tattoo
- * Lying in the sun with the expressed intention of turning brown
- * Wearing makeup and styling and coloring one's hair
- * Taking an animal as a pet, giving it a name, walking it around the neighborhood on a leash and telling people it's the new member of the family
- * Expecting people to shake your outstretched hand when you meet, and acting slighted by those who don't
- * Manicuring one's lawn and garden, including cutting the shrubs into shapes

If you did all of these, and they were not done by anyone else, you would be considered mentally ill and in need of serious medical help.

* * * *

A human cannot determine the reliability of his mind because he uses his mind to test and judge the reliability.

* * * *

I miss me too

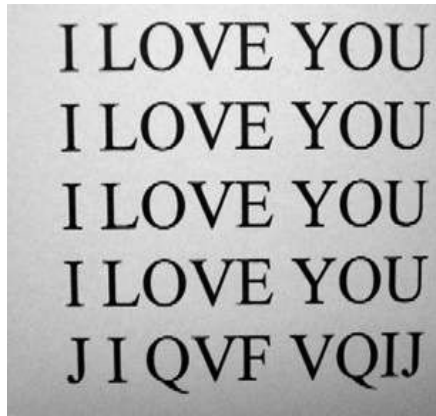
* * * *

When looking at a scene, all humans have the natural and nonconscious ability to extrapolate beyond what is visible. When information is missing, or assumed to be missing, humans make it up in their minds.

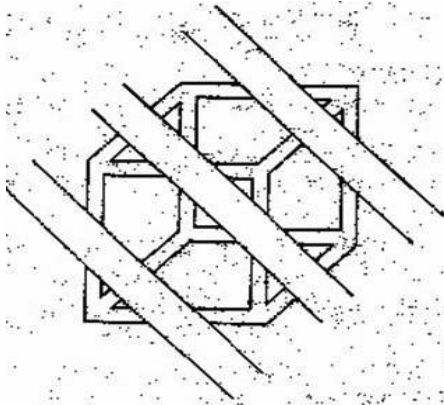
This ability is essential to normal living, as we must regularly make quick guesses with limited information. When you step on a sturdy looking building step, you assume it will hold your weight. When you pull a book from the library shelf, you assume the pages are filled with words. When your waitress brings you a steaming mug, you assume it is filled with a hot liquid.

In many cases the extrapolation is accurate, or at least a fair estimate of reality. If your dog is standing on the other side of the open doorway, half hidden by the wall, you correctly assume an entire dog exists. As the dog steps forward into the room, your assumption is proven correct. When the waitress puts down your steaming coffee mug, you are far from surprised to see it's filled with the hot coffee you ordered. Humans would be a dim, slow species if we couldn't make these kinds of elemental deductions. In many cases, however, the extrapolations are wrong. These bogus extrapolations involving the viewer nonconsciously perceiving what he wants or expect to see.

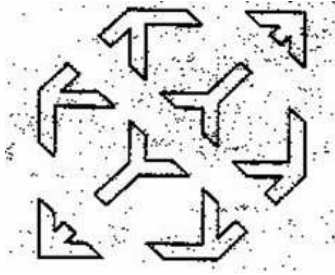




When the ruler is removed, it says something different than you thought.



In the above, most perceive a cube behind the three diagonal bands. With the bands removed, we perceive something different.



* * * *

A human does not and cannot simultaneously focus on all information in a scene. Humans don't have the mental capacity. Humans focus on some things and ignore others.

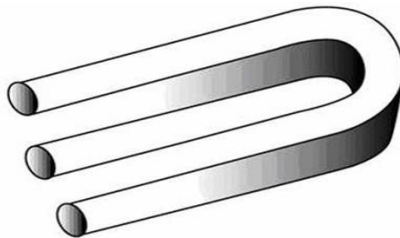
When you enter a room, your eyes are drawn to something or things. Perhaps you focus on the gracious hosts, perhaps a statue to the side. If there is a rat in the middle of the floor, your immediate perception will be of the rat and not of the rose wallpaper.

If you enter the room and there is an attractive nude, you likely won't notice what is on the coffee table. You might not even notice the coffee table. After blushing and excusing yourself and scooting out of the room, you may not recall the existence of a coffee table, but it was there right in front of your eyes.

This focus, and the resulting perception, is your creation.

* * * *

Is it three bars or a horse shoe?



With this *impossible trident* visual illusion, the viewer forms a perception about the whole from looking at just one end.

When she looks at the other end, she realizes her extrapolation was wrong. What is particularly interesting is, unlike other visual illusions involving hidden or masked areas, there is no missing information. All of the information is there for the eyes to see, but the viewer forms her initial perception as if information is hidden. She mentally hides the information herself.

* * * *

Ambiguity is a concept essential to understanding humans, as humans constantly make choices in the face of ambiguous information. Ambiguity means there is more than one possible explanation to something, and the viewer doesn't know, often can't know, which one is correct. In the face of ambiguity, the mind will almost always pick the explanation that meets its expectations and experience. Visual illusions involve making the wrong pick.

The human mind is designed for speed. Speedy perceptions are essential for living and surviving in the real world, including processing fast movement like a charging lion and rolling bolder. A downside of the speed is there is a fair margin of error. Speed is often synonymous with haste.

* * * *

There are instances where, due to restricted viewpoint, it is impossible for the viewer to know the direction of movement. A standard example involves the barber pole.

Hung outside the barber shop, a barber pole has diagonal candy cane stripes that are rotated horizontally. However, looking from a particular angle it will appear as if the stripes are moving vertically. Faced with different plausible choices for what it is seeing (possibly moving up, but also possibly moving sideways), the mind takes a pick, one that happens to be wrong.

If you watch a barber pole from different angles, you will alternately perceive the stripes moving vertically and rotating horizontally. Your mind can't make up its mind.

* * * *

I hate being falsely accused so I do it.

* * * *

I thought of you quite a bit last night when I went to bed.

* * * *

“How can you be a vegetarian and eat hamburgers???”

I’m a complex man. You wouldn’t understand the level I’m operating at.

* * * *

Considering your perception involves cognitive fallacies, mental margins of error and questionable logic, when a work of art deeply resonates you should be highly wary of it. It took a boat load of dubiousness to get to that connection.

* * * *

Artists intentionally subvert logic, reason, objectivity and reality to produce the desired psychological effect in the audience.

Many paintings intentionally distort reality. Look at paintings by Picasso, Dali, Cezanne, Jackson Pollock and Renoir. Even the ‘realistic’ paintings of the 1300s have impossible dimensions, odd looking humans and made up visual stories. Classic movies and novels have unreal plots, characters, timing and effects. Some are fairy tales and some are science fiction.

To produce the desired emotions in the audience most movies have music sound tracks. In real life many of the scenes portrayed would have no full symphonic accompaniment. Washington crossing the Delaware, man lost alone in the middle of the desert, Humphrey Bogart walking a deserted street, bear fight. Most movie music is a calculated distortion of reality for psychological purposes. Isn’t there something bizarre about musical accompaniment for a National Geographic documentary about insects? What does synthesizer or orchestral arrangement have to do with ants? The

answer is it has nothing to do with ants, and everything to do with the audience's psychology.

* * * *

Art is so different than the physical world that its truth is derived from lies. Shakespeare's Hamlet is made up. Of Mice and Men is a figment of John Steinbeck's imagination. Picasso once said, "Art is a lie that tells the truth."

* * * *

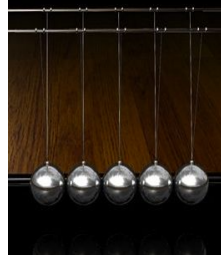
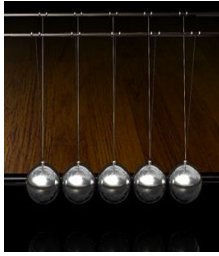
To most of life's problems there is a simple solution, but simple doesn't mean easy.

* * * *

In the dark, a strobe light gives off intermittent flashes of light. Under a strobe, the viewer views a moving object though short intermittent snapshots instead of a continuous motion. This can lead to misperception of the object's movement, as the viewer nonconsciously imagines what is going on in between the flashes.

Say you are watching a swinging pendulum under stroboscopic lighting. If the strobe flashes a quick burst of light once every two two seconds and it takes the pendulum exactly two seconds to swing back and forth, the pendulum will appear to you to be motionless. Each flash catches the pendulum in the same position, the pendulum having done quite a bit of moving in the darkness between flashes. If the flashes catch the pendulum at its extreme right position, the pendulum will appear to being pulled, pushed or blown right.

The stroboscopic flashes create visual ambiguity. There are different possible explanations for what the viewer sees. The viewer typically, and often nonconsciously, chooses the explanation that meets his expectations.



Do these two pictures show a pendulum still or in motion?
It's impossible to tell.

* * * *

It's time I tell you the facts of life. Your dog eats cat poops.

* * * *

If a human perceives a person in a book picture and a dog does not, which animal is demonstrating better visual perception? Humans sometimes use as evidence of a dog's dimwittedness that the dog 'doesn't see' the human being in a magazine or book, when, of course, there isn't a human being on the page. It's paper and ink. From its sense of smell alone, the dog knows there ain't no human there. The dog is faulted for not seeing what isn't there.

* * * *

Humans perceive and interpret the world in many ways. Humans think of things rationally, irrationally, consciously, subconsciously, emotionally, intuitively, directly, indirectly, aesthetically, figuratively, literally, 'from the head and from the heart'-- in a varying combination of these and more. A human can think rationally one moment and be emotionally swept up by a song on the radio the next. Math professors fall head over heels in love and abstract painters calculate their taxes. These often conflicting ways of perceiving things can at times make it impossible for a human to make up his mind.

A human's best possible exploration, understanding and

expression of the universe use all the levels. An interpretation of the universe through only mathematics or only music is inherently limited. Many things in the world can't be explained with mathematics-- love and beauty for examples--, just as mathematics can't be explained with love and beauty. An explanation using just one level is flawed.

Over the centuries, and for centuries to come, philosophers, scientists and thinkers have tried to reconcile the conflicts that arise by these opposing ways of thinking. They've tried to seamlessly combine art with logic, religious faith with science, the rational with the irrational. However, this is impossible. By definition, logic and illogic, rational and irrational are mutually exclusive. One undermines the other. They cannot exist in the same point at the same time. Oil and water. There are irreconcilable conflicts, catch 22s, in the limited human mind that cannot be overcome.

* * * *

The subject of the biographical movie or book is or was flesh and blood, a life filled with measurable facts: dates, times, durations, amounts, heights, geography, quotes, test scores, employment records, mailing addresses. Yet a strict recitation of facts will not wholly represent the person and her life, much less engage the audience. A person is much more than facts and dates. Character, personality, aesthetic vision (perhaps the subject was a great artist), beliefs, faiths, mental conflicts, contradictions, urges, dreams, fears, subjective experiences, nonconscious, desires.

A famous composer might say, "If you want to know who I am, listen to my music. That's all you need." A woman might say, "If you want to know about me, forget about my high school transcript and the conversations I have with my boss. Watch my favorite movie. If you don't get the movie, you'll never understand me." Her favorite movie probably was made by someone she never met, perhaps who died before she was born, the movie isn't about her, perhaps takes place in a country or even planet she's never been to and may not have a single character that resembles or acts like her or even speaks her language.

Even when distorting facts and logic and time, a biography that is a work of art can, at least in a way, be a better representation of

the subject, his deeper personality and vision. This type of biography is an aesthetic or psychological representation of the person, as a Cezanne painting is a figurative representation of a landscape. Cezanne didn't intend or expect for the viewer to take the painting literally.

The essential problem in the biography is that to create this psychological representation, one must distort the literal truth. And to tell the literal truth, one destroys this aesthetic truth. The biographer needs the two to exist together, but they cannot.

* * * *

"You look like a pirate."

"A sexy pirate?"

"No."

* * * *

When eavesdroppers at the next table don't hear the music question, they look at you funny when you say, "My favorites are Discharge and Pornography."

* * * *

SOPHY: "So how do I not break your heart?"

ZOLA: "This is kind of a downer dialogue."

SOPHY: "Yeah, but how do I not break your heart?"

ZOLA: "Adopt it as your pet."

SOPHY: "Okay, deal. I promise to walk it twice a day, give it a chewy."

ZOLA: "Tell it to write and that I'll miss it ... Excuse me, I think I have something in my eye."

SOPHY: "No, seriously. How do I not break your heart?"

ZOLA: "By not breaking it. That's the best answer I can give you ... I could give you a specific answer, but it is too audacious for me to say."

SOPHY: "This is awfully serious for one of your dialogues."

ZOLA: "I agree. Let's not do it again."

SOPHY: "That's not what I'm saying ... So what's this audacious answer?"

ZOLA: "Call me lame and let's call it a day ... Would sex get you to drop the subject?"

SOPHY: "No, but let's have sex anyway."

ZOLA: "I have a headache (laughs)."

(Sophy hits Zola on the shoulder. Zola gives Sophy a big hug)

* * * *

And there is no answer for this book, I offer no answer. It's about making you think. It's about making you reflect on aesthetic perception, your psychological biases, especially as it pertains to gaining objective knowledge.

In a philosophy class I took, the professor said the questions students were given were unanswerable, and the point of the class was to learn how to properly approach them.

* * * *

A number of years ago I wrote a weekly email newsletter about collectables. While it had wide readership and received positive feedback, it was nearly impossible to get any donations of time or money to support it. I had planned on having a series of articles on collecting wirephotos-- identification, dating, valuation. Before I was able to include the series, I decided I had enough of doing the newsletter for free and ended it. With the newsletter finished, I computer printed the wirephotos articles into a Spartan 35 page booklet and offered it for sale for about \$7 a copy. Within the first week and a half I made more money from that little booklet than I had received in donations in over two years of publishing the newsletter. Because of their bias about how information should be disseminated (physically printed versus email), the readers chose to pay for information they would have received for free. Not that I was complaining.

* * * *

You say you don't want me to lie, yet you keep asking me

questions.

* * * *

Broken Glass is the name of an aleatory computer storytelling technique that intentionally scrambles the tradition linear narrative. It is a computer web page made up of a plethora of small assorted images, often resembling a stained glass window. Each image is linked to a small piece of the story-- a plot, a description, a picture, characterization, whatever. The story's order is determined by the reader blindly clicking on the images.

The facts, scenes, characters, events and days of the week are always constant in Broken Glass, but the aleatory order in which the pieces are read affects the complexion, aesthetics, psychology and meaning. As any great novelist or film director will tell you, how facts are revealed can be as important as the facts themselves. A story told straight foreword is markedly different than the same story told in flashbacks. Knowing what will happen to a character, what she will do and how she will change, effects how you view her in the present. Knowing versus not knowing how the romance will end (or will it end?) effects how the movie goers view the lovers when the first meet, interact. Jumbled up order in and of itself has psychological meaning and symbolism.

Since you already know the pieces from the first time through, you can't read a different way fresh. Your first reading effects you second reading.

* * * *

The nice thing about being agnostic is you don't worry about Hell. You're still going there, but you don't worry about it.

* * * *

Everyone's really an agnostic, because no one really knows.

* * * *

I walk home after work— a late summer afternoon— I walk through

the neighborhood, along the quiet streets, sidewalks— the sound of kids playing— a dog barking in the distance— sheets on a clothesline — and I feel a longing, a sense of an otherness— I smell it in the breeze— see it in the shadows of bushes

* * * *

You find out who are your real friends after you're indicted for making terroristic threats against the Dalai Lama.

* * * *

Even with a physically bound paper book, the reader chooses the order in which it is read. Whether or not they realize it, readers are as responsible for the order as the author, though the author usually gets the blame.

William S. Burroughs said the chapters of his novel *Naked Lunch* could be read in any order. That a reader read them 1, 2, 3 had nothing to do with him.

* * * *

It eats away at me. It makes me mean. Worse, it makes me indifferent.

* * * *

If I asked would you to tell me something deep and personal? I'm not asking you to right now, just testing the water.

* * * *

The truth isn't linear, which is why I don't talk straight.

* * * *

Dictionaries and encyclopedias are aleatory. Other than editors, likely no two people have read a dictionary in the same order.

* * * *

"Though I mostly stop so I can write you ... don't know whether that's good or bad."

Good. Double good.

Not writing me is like spitting on Camus' grave. Well, maybe that was extreme, but you get idea of my thoughts on the matter.

For incentive, after your 500th 3+ page letter, I'll convert to Judaism and marry you.

"Let's see here ... At three letters per day, that would be ... "

Actually Sophy's thinking, "Wait a second. How many letters have I written so far? And does Zoe know how many?"

Come on, I wouldn't trick you. If you start getting nervous at #495, we can switch it to a long engagement.

Besides, admit it, you have very strong inkling that I'm worth it.

* * * *

"Are you okay?"

"I'm never okay."

* * * *

The human being is an emotional animal . . . love, hate, romantic attachment, embarrassment, repulsion, giddiness . . . This is part of who we are and how we interpret the world. For humans it is difficult and often impossible to separate meaning from emotion, facts from emotion, worth from emotion. What is right is supposed to *feel* right. Religious faith involves an emotional attachment to the ideas. There is an emotional connection to the art we love. If there wasn't a psychological reaction to the actors on the screen and their story who would pay good money to sit in the dark theatre for two hours?

No matter how well plotted and witty the dialogue, a movie or novel is deemed unworthy if it doesn't move the critic. "It simply didn't *move* me" or "I didn't connect with the characters" is considered appropriate critical judgment to be a newspaper critic.

Even the most logical of people judge facts by their aesthetic appearance. An M.I.T. engineering professor will spend hours

contemplating what picture and background color should be on his upcoming textbook. He may have a fit if the publisher says the book cover will be hot pink.

A mathematics professor may write and rewrite her equations so they are unsmudged, parallel to the top and bottom of the paper and with attractive margins. Even when the answers are correct, she may reject students' homework that is not similarly neat.

* * * *

Emotional states can alter out landscapes. When we are head over heels in love, a drizzly gray day is gorgeous. When we are unrequited, a rainbow can weigh like lead in the heart.

Mood is an integral part of how we plan our lives ... Getting the mood right for a romantic evening ... Decorating the apartment to make you feel at home after a long day at work.

* * * *

I was so busy today I only had time to cry on my lunch break.

* * * *

The psychiatrist's receptionist gave me the wrong address, though I got to the office in time anyway. The doctor assured me it wasn't a test.

I'm willing to talk about going to a psychiatrist if it involves a funny story. Humor always is priority.

If you can't talk about your mental history, you've cut off 60 percent of your jokes.

* * * *

Many arguments are not caused by disagreement over the main ideas, but that the arguers unknowingly define terms differently. Arguers may have different definitions of war, peace, work week, formal attire, animal, automobile, tall, stiff drink and sexy, even though they both assume they are using identical definitions. Once the parties mutually set the definitions (which they didn't do in the

beginning), they are often surprised to discover how much they agree with each other. Many arguments, many conundrums, many philosophical debates exist simply because parties never thought to mutually define terms.

* * * *

“You’re a catch you know.”

“I know.”

* * * *

An age old question is "If a tree falls in the woods and no one is around to hear, does it make a sound?"

The answer to this question depends on what is the definition of *sound*, and a key to the discussion is the determination of what sound means.

Is sound defined by the act of a human or other animal hearing? Or can a sound exist with none around to hear it? It would seem the smart thing to start by looking up the word *sound* in a dictionary.

I looked in one dictionary and two encyclopedias. One encyclopedia said that sound is defined by the ear detecting (hearing) the vibrations in the air. This would mean the tree in the question would make no sound if no one is around. The other encyclopedia and the dictionary defined sound as the vibrations itself, whether or not someone is around to hear them. By this definition, the tree would make a sound even if no one was around.

As you see, the famous tree debate isn't a matter of philosophy but of word definition. The difference between "Yes, it makes a sound" and "No, it doesn't make a sound" can come down to the arbitrary choice of definition, the outvoting of 2 reference books to 1, the flipping of a coin. Depending on what definitions used, the answer of Yes and No can describe the same forest scene. Is one sound definition superior than the other? Not that I can see. They're just different.

People also have differing definitions of the word *one* in ‘...no one is around to hear...’ Some people think deer, birds and mice count as ones, while others think only humans count. The definition of *one* can also determine whether the answer to the question is Yes or

No.

* * * *

I am not gutless. I just don't know which way is right, so pick the one that keeps me out of trouble.

I'm confused but agreeable.

Took too many damn philosophy classes in college, that's my problem. Can't find an answer to anything anymore.

My dad has it easy. He was an engineer and can answer everything with his slide rule.

Don't hide dad's slide rule. He won't know how to put on his pants or open the refrigerator.

* * * *

This book was conceived in part as an examination and literarily challenging of the readers aesthetic biases. I think I've expressed these adequately in ideas, but not so much in writing style. I had planned the structure, topics, wordplay to be more challenging, against the grain, but I pulled back. The current aleatory, chopped up style and diverse ambiguous text fits, but the writing style, and some of other choices, are straight foreword and safe. Overall, I'd say the book is a compromise. Perhaps a good compromise. I don't know. I'll never be satisfied with it.

The book liberally reuses and reshuffles old text from my earlier books *Cognition*, *Perception and Limits of Knowledge*, *Cognition*, *I Miss Me Too* and earlier versions. There were several reasons for this, including defying literary conventions just to defy literary conventions, plus the theme and actuality of revisiting and examining old information. Things can be said, analyzed, many different ways, and one bound published way is just one way. Revisiting and reshuffling is a searching. It's autobiographical in a way. I could rearrange the pieces, delete and add pieces, a hundred more times. And perhaps I will.

* * * *

Certain words have strong connotations in a culture, and people

intentionally play around with the definitions so they can apply words as they desire. If *patriot* is a popular label, people will fiddle with the definition so that they are defined as patriots and their enemies are not. If patriot is an unpopular label, the same people would define the word so that their enemies are patriots and they are not. These shameless self serving manipulations of definitions are common during political campaign season, but also during our daily lives. What may be a *lie* when someone else does it, is a *fib* if you do it.

Notice these instances involve people being emotionally attached to a word no matter how it is defined. It's word numerology.

When I was in high school, the quarterback for the football team came to school wearing a pink sweater. He spent the day saying, "No, it's coral."

* * * *

I've gotten good at suppressing my rage in public. I mean expressing.

The healthful thing is to get it out and away from you asap. At least that's what I read in a book I wrote.

* * * *

Humans never see the entirety of an object, any object. Not only are things like coffee cups and sticks and tree branches partially visibly obscured by overlapping other objects, but we can never see all sides and parts of an object at once. Even with an apple you've turned over in your hands, you can't be sure whether its fresh or rotten in the core until you bite or cut it apart. Humans live and learn in an environment where information is always obscured or otherwise hidden from view.

Many physical qualities of and between objects are identified by obscured or otherwise hidden visual information. For example, distance is in part is judged by objects overlapping each other and things becoming harder to see over distance. Thus, obscured visual information both helps and hinders our identification of objects. When something is very far away, the lack of detail (very small and

blurry) serves to both help us judge distance and prevent from identifying the object. A closed closet door shows us that the door is in front of the things in the closet, but prevents us from knowing what are the things in the closet. Lack of information is both lack of information and information.

* * * *

There are things you should understand about me. I'm just not going to tell you what they are.

* * * *

My condo has excellent privacy when I remember to pull the shades.

* * * *

Henry: "Having a relative with dementia isn't really that bad. Sometimes I'm fed dinner five times a day."

* * * *

It's not that I have nothing to say to you. It's that my interesting switch is turned off. In person, I'd talk non stop, except when I was otherwise occupied.

Does it bother you when I do that? Sometimes when I write, I feel like a bit of a floozy afterwards. I'm usually joking a little bit.

* * * *

And the irony is that I cannot even gain with these words, I cannot become one with them. They are as foreign to me as everything else.

* * * *

Everything I do has a point, but sometimes it's to not have a point.

* * * *

My mom holding up a DVD: "Have I seen this?" . . . Me: "Yes." . . .
Mom: "Did I like it?"

* * * *

I kill for other reasons. To appease the aesthetics of the moment.

* * * *

And I look at my writing about my yearnings—and it looks so
cheesy, but it's true—it breaks my heart and is true

* * * *

How to read this book

* * * *

I've begun having horrible visions—terrible visions—the weight of
the light is like boiling—it's like pins—my brain has turned against
me—the light boils the brain—twitches it—it makes you dance on a
hot plate—it makes you dance like Brer Rabbit against your will in
the thicket—Stop—you scream—but you dance like Brer Rabbit in
the thicket and with the horrible excitement—twitching—frantic
dancing—there are with these the cool creeping visions—You dance
until you fall down with exhaustion—then a cool wind comes and
picks up the dust and you're on your side on the dirty kitchen floor
in the dirt and grease orange—and you start having the visions—the
sounds, the sights—the voices not in English—it's always murmurs
—lurches of murmuring—waves coming and going—the shadowy
lurching dances out of the corner of your eyes—dark figures
dancing moving—The claws of a black cat clawing frantically at
something, at something, what?

* * * *

I did not know many nineteenth century photos were made with

eggs.

I'm interested now that you told me. I want to know more.
How? Now, please enlighten me.

* * * *

Being a homewrecker isn't as much fun as it sounds.

* * * *

I heard that Jackson Pollack tried to create his own art, his own language, his own history, his own meaning.

I want to destroy the novel— create something new

* * * *

I believe in moderation, including in moderation.

* * * *

Positive achievement is regularly based on false beliefs. There are regular cases where positive achievement is achieved from a false belief. This includes in your daily life. Believing the false, if only temporarily, is a technique we all use to remove distracting thoughts. The following are two examples.

* A placebo helps when the patient falsely believes it is medicine.
When the patient knows what it is, a placebo doesn't help.

* A freshman at the University of Georgia, Jessica is entering final exam week before winter break. Unknown to her, her beloved 14 year old cat Tiger just died back home in Savannah. The night before her first test she has her weekly telephone conversation with her parents back home. Jessica asks how Tiger is doing. Her mother says Tiger is doing just fine, adding that the cat is playing with a toy on the couch. After hanging up, Jessica's mother feels bad about lying, but thinks it was best considering the exams. After a productive week, Jessica takes a bus home to Savannah where her parents break the bad news and explain why they delayed it. Jessica understands, agreeing that

the news would have distracted her from her studies.

In both these cases it was a false belief that lead to the desired achievement. In both cases, knowledge of the truth would have hindered the achievement.

This shows that positive achievement arising from a belief is not proof that the belief is correct.

Patients who get better after taking a placebo often swear the pills had to be medicine. To them, getting better is the proof. Even when the doctor informs them it was a placebo, some patients continue to believe it was medicine because they got better.

A sincere faith involves a psychological, often irrational, attachment to the ideas. This psychological aspect is both what helps the placebo-taking patient get better (Most doctors believe positive 'I am getting better' thinking aids recovery) and what prevents him from accepting his belief as false even when confronted with the facts. This psychological attachment has both a positive and a negative result.

* * * *

This points to the fascinating relationship humans have with facts. A human cannot function as it desires without the distortion and suppression of facts.

Even a search for the truth requires false beliefs to focus mental attention. In other words, a search for the truth requires lies.

* * * *

For world class Olympic athletes a common rule is that one must believe one is going to win in order to win. Paraphrasing a top speed skater interviewed the day before an Olympic race, "You shouldn't just *think* you will win, you must *know* you will win." In a track, swim or bike race, the difference between first and fourth may be a fraction of a second, and the winning psychology can mean the difference between a win and loss. Of course most of these athletes who are sure they will win will not win, and those who win do not win every time. Even when the belief turns out to be wrong, it may better the athlete from, say, fifth to third or third to

second.

* * * *

Whether the idolized is a sports coach, historical leader or artist, most worshipers of a human being worship an unreal representation. Much of the misrepresentation is intentional, followers embellishing good qualities and glossing over bad.

At first it seems strange that groups intentionally misrepresent the person they supposedly idolize. However the representations aren't about complete factual accuracy. Amongst other things, they are concerned with gaining and maintaining members' loyalty and spirit, group self importance and gaining power versus other groups. The word *idolizes* implies the act of changing, changing something into an idol.

It should not surprise that during a political election supporters put their candidate in the best light and their competitor in the worst. Their representation isn't about truth, it's about winning the election. If you ask either campaign manager why he doesn't include bad facts about his candidate in the campaign literature, he'll look at you as if you are crazy.

* * * *

“When you say I’m a unique and special person, do you mean like special needs?”

* * * *

I was told you should be your own hardest critic, so I give this book a B+

* * * *

Humans were born with unearthly desires, but must walk earthly avenues.

* * * *

To humans, simplicity is that which is simple to them. Simple matches one's sensibilities, knowledge, intuition and expectations. If it didn't, it wouldn't be simple. What may be simple to one human may not be to another. What may be simple to humans may be simple only to humans.

Simplicity has long been used by humans to define supposedly absolute things like cosmic truth, goodness, beauty, logic and purity. There are a number of problems with this. One is there is no proof that cosmic truths, for example, are simple. Another problem is simplicity, and thus what is defined as cosmic truth, is in the eye of the beholder.

Normal, even nonconscious thinking involves simplification, translating complex information into something understandable. Conceits are simplifications.

Your visual perception involves simplification-- interpreting a complex scene, grouping and labeling the objects according to your experience, focusing on what you seem to recognize and ignoring what you don't. Visual illusions and mirages shown throughout this book involve simplification. The scene or graphic is translated by the viewer into something understandable, an understandable translation that happens to be wrong. This alone proves that simplicity is not proof of truth, and that truth isn't always simple. Lies are often simpler than truths.

Simplicity, of course, has many practical uses. Scientists strive for simplicity in theories and testing. A scientific theory that is needlessly complicated will needlessly confuse students and seasoned scientists alike. Needlessly muddled theories are harder to test, study, correct and understand. In our daily life, good verbal communication requires simplicity, including using words, phrases and language the listener understands. If a traveler speaks only English, it does them no good for you to give road directions in Spanish. Road directions in Spanish may be simple to a Spanish speaker, but it's complicated to someone who doesn't know the language.

This just demonstrates that practical use shouldn't be confused for absolute truth.

* * * *

My intent here is to create something that can't be solved by the audience, that the audience realizes can't be solved by the audience, and that they realize their method for trying to solve it is inherently flawed.

* * * *

One way I express the non-simpleness of things is to make things complicated. Unsolvable. I hide things.

* * * *

And at the end of a street at night, I am ready to burst— the world will end, must end, right now— It will, I feel it

And the next morning I wake up having forgotten the feeling of the night before and go about the day.

* * * *

“So according to your definition, an art fake isn't a fake if it's labelled as a fake.”

“Correct.”

“And how much do people pay you for your opinions?”

* * * *

My love life is so complicated I need a program, GPS and a Russian/English dictionary. The Russian/English dictionary is because I'm tired of getting a plate of butter at the restaurant.

Actually, my love life isn't complicated. But neither is a shark attack.

* * * *

Time wounds all heals.

* * * *

I do want all of you, body, heart and mind. And as time goes by I

find myself wanting you more and more.

Am I allowed to answer your question? I don't think I should have promised I would be platonic for the week.

Sigh. I'll just say that I love you, and want you and wish like crazy I could have you.

If you tell me it is okay for me to break my promise I'll say more.

* * * *

Insincerity is the glue that holds together a social group. No social structure can withstand rampant candor from its members.

* * * *

I'm writing a midnight novel where the scenes only take place in those heightened 2 am moments— those drunken musical delirious rooftop states that you wish would last forever— where if you move an inch one way or the other everything is ruined— where when you sober up you don't understand what is written on the page— The characters' day-to-day lives (if they have any) are omitted, making the unwritten duration between scenes a day, a month, two years, no one knows for sure

* * * *

People judge a book by how it vaguely satisfies them after they're finished, as if it was a bowl of soup at a diner.

* * * *

Subjectivity is a constant and integral part of the human experience. Love, lust, like, dislike, taste, smell, views about beauty and ugliness and art. How you view this paragraph.

By definition, a subjective experience is a product of the individual's mind. While real and perhaps profound, the subjective experience cannot be objectively measured by others. When someone is listening to music, the music's note, pitch, speed,

volume and the listener's ear vibration and heartbeat can be measured by scientific instruments, but the listener's aesthetic experience cannot. This experience is experienced by the listener alone. Even if asked to, the listener could not fully translate the experience to others, in part because it is beyond words.

* * * *

It's doubtful that two people have the same subjective perceptions. People may have similar, but not identical perceptions. People regularly like the same song but perceive it differently. It's common for best friends to like a movie, but one likes it more than the other or for different reasons.

A large range of things determines a person's subjective perception and experience. This includes genes, education, culture, where and when born, personal experiences, upbringing, travel, family make up and personalities, friends, acquaintances, natural temperament, mental abilities, physiological abilities (quality of eyesight, hearing, smell), talents, language, health, hobbies and work.

Little things influence, what toy one had as a six year old and what tea grandmother drank. While walking in a foreign land, the scent of jasmine tea can bring back a rush of memories. The appearance of the toy in a movie will alter one's emotional reaction and interpretation of the move. It may have been chance that the movie viewer's parents bought that toy, making his movie interpretation a result of chance. It's not just the tea and a toy, but millions of little things that influence, including from forgotten events.

* * * *

A philosopher's philosophy can no more escape the philosopher's psychology than he can escape being human.

* * * *

Even when they experience similar feelings people will usually have these feelings under different circumstances, if only slightly

different.

People have similar feelings of romantic love, but for distinctly different people— different looks, personality, culture, interests, sex, race. The emotional states may be alike, but the objects of desire are not.

* * * *

I wear my heart on my sleeve but keep the shirt in my closet.

* * * *

We were talking about sex? Oh. I thought you meant egg salad sandwich literally.

* * * *

As a writer, I write in book format. It is my default. If I make a movie or a painting it comes out in book form.

* * * *

You cannot separate your aesthetic biases from your perception, because it is those biases that help create the perception. Without those biases, you would have a different perception. Even that childhood toy affected the movie goer's perception thirty years later.

* * * *

Throwing someone in the deep end of the pool is the quickest way to teach him how to drown.

* * * *

You said pop. You definitely come from Wisconsin. Do you say bubbler too?

* * * *

Humans are such fuck ups— I lick a frozen dog turd and they act like I'd assassinated the President. They don't understand.

* * * *

I don't know if I should apologize to God or He to me. Probably a bit of both. God, give me a sign if you're sorry.

* * * *

I have a colorful past, if you consider black a color.

* * * *

The next day the state is over and all I dwell on is trying to attain it again.

* * * *

The problem with married women is that they're married.

* * * *

I am writing a novel— am really a novelist— which means that I'm in a constant fight. I am trying to transcend art through art— transcend plot and character through plot and character.

* * * *

I'm going to have to get more proficient with buttonfly jeans or start wearing underwear.

* * * *

I'm sunk. I mean how could anyone not be against a married woman who gets so close to another man. It's a strike against me from the start. If I was your friend you talked to, I'd tell you to run.

* * * *

So I go meet and go out with a woman—and I am so broken up—
and it's painful to go along with the smileys and jokes and tiptoeing
on the thorns of roses.

And before the night is through I try to find from her/force from
her the something.

* * * *

If this book is a Rorschach test the only way to fail the test is to not
see that it is a Rorschach test and know you are the patient.
Otherwise, your answer is fine with me.

* * * *

“Paragraph twelve looks like two bears.”
“I'm sorry, but I'm the author and I don't see it.”

* * * *

I see the Kingdom in the distance, but it is a lonely vision.

* * * *

I'm twice as brilliant as I come across. I hold a lot back.
Make that three times. I had more thoughts since I wrote that
paragraph.
Still three. I was making a sandwich.

* * * *

Henry: "What kind of women do you like?"
David: "There are different kinds?"

* * * *

My obfuscation takes you closer to my truth but further away from
the facts.

I'll tell you what I really think, but not in a way that can hold up in a court of law.

"What's David babbling about?" David: "Exactly."

The two lines between the two lines between the two lines-- read between those.

My working theory is if I don't understand what I just wrote, no one else will either.

Then I put it in a box, paddle lock it, bury it in undisclosed back yard and cover the spot with thorny brush.

Then later realize I left my watch in there and go back with a shovel at 1am.

In short, if you want my deepest thoughts dig at the ticking brush. Please return the watch, though. Much appreciated.

* * * *

And it was too late to go back for my pants.

* * * *

Tammy said I should stay away from you. At least that's what she implied with her "Hi, Zoe. Have you chosen the next book yet?" Actually, what it implied was "What Sophy sees in you is beyond me?" Though I interpreted the implication to be "Lifetime of Twinkies to the person who finishes the book first." "Sophy pays?" I implied. "Naturally" Tammy implied. "Deal" we implied and implied a handshake on it.

"Does the winner get to eat them off of Sophy?" I implied. "Gross" Tammy implied. "Is that a yes or a no?" I implied. "It's a You're a fucking retard" Tammy implied.

* * * *

I go to State Street— I drink a cup of coffee and it won't leave me — I drink a cup of coffee and read the newspaper and stare across the room and it won't leave me— I stare at her, I get up and go over and talk to her and it won't leave me— I smile and laugh and agree to meet her, and it won't leave me— I leave outside into the frosty breath, I hold the door as a couple enters and

it won't leave me

And it won't leave me and I eat and I sit and I sleep and it won't leave me. It won't leave me and I pray to the Lord Jesus Motherfucker and it is a curse and a gift.

* * * *

Sometimes you don't know you were wounded until afterwards.

* * * *

Don't you hate it when you spend like twenty minutes looking all around for your clothes before you realize you're wearing them? The only question now is who dressed me? Oh wait. That's not me. Never mind.

* * * *

From a practical standpoint, human wariness of night makes sense. For example, it's safer for you or me to sprint through the woods during day than night. That's not superstition, that's good sense.

* * * *

I unintentionally bought ladies sunglasses at the drug store. I always wanted to look like Steve McQueen and I look like Sophia Loren. You take what you can get.

* * * *

Giving up traditional aesthetic rules is such a release and makes for superior writing, but the problem is I know many readers won't give up those rules.

* * * *

On this Thanksgiving I'm thankful for those great Christmas presents I sure as hell better be getting.

* * * *

Movies are stroboscopic-like visual illusions. Despite audience perception, movies don't show continuous, real movement of a deer running, a car racing or people conversing, but a series of snapshots of the movement. If you hold up movie film, you will see it is a series of still images lined up side by side, not unlike the panels in a newspaper comic strip. When the film is shot and shown at the proper speed, the viewer's mind incorrectly interprets the succession of still images as real movement. To the mind, 'realistic movement' seems the most plausible explanation for what it is seeing. This choice is made instantly and nonconsciously and the viewer simply thinks she's watching real, continuous movement.

When the film is too slow, the mind is no longer fooled. The running horse looks choppy and unreal.

* * * *

I'd claim Henry is my ghostwriter, but if you met him you'd know he couldn't stay awake longer than a sentence.

If I put some snausages on the keyboard I might get a word or two out of him.

He knows Czech. Or at least that's what it resembles.

* * * *

The schizophrenic's girlfriend was worried he'd drown in his morning orange juice.

* * * *

The doctor said I was too virile to have kids. Or something like that. Maybe it was vile.

* * * *

And I drink incessantly for months— and my sleep is fitful, shallow— it's sometimes hard to tell if I'm awake or asleep— my dreams are frenetic— when I wake, if after 12 hours, I'm not rested

And it seems to me that the in and out sleep awake states is a frenetic search, an unsettlingness— a ghost in limbo

And in the unsettling state an angel, a woman, comes to save me
“There’s too much sun,” I tell her. “It kills you.”

* * * *

I’ve recently learned to not make any jokes about my love life because some people take the jokes as truthful. They are truthful, but I don’t like people to think they are.

* * * *

That my eyes are so blue doesn’t mean I think I’m better than you. It’s other reasons.

I’ll give you the full list if you want. Just let me make sure I can find my stapler.

#131: My stapler is shinier than yours.

* * * *

I’ve noticed that the shinier my earrings the less likely people are to notice the bleakness of my soul and the corrosiveness of my heart. Nice sweater, sharp shoes and I get by fine.

* * * *

SOPHY: Okay, Zoe, none of this bullshit cutesie crap you do. I have five questions for you and I want you to give me straight answers. Okay?

ZOLA: Let me hear the questions first. No, okay.

SOPHY: Have I ever offended you?

ZOLA: Offended? Offended me as a person? No, not that I recall. And if you really did offend me, I would remember.

SOPHY: If I said I really needed for you to tell everything, would you?

ZOLA: Yes. However, I don’t this is the right time or place for it. I think you think that too. But, yes.

SOPHY: Why don’t you think this is the right time or place?

ZOLA: You're busy with your family, I don't want to interfere with that and we're trying to have a less than intense relationship right now.

SOPHY: Are you bisexual?

ZOLA: What? Hmm. Interesting question. You can only pose that question seriously if you think I've lied to you.

SOPHY: That's true. I take it back. Sorry.

ZOLA: Thank you.

SOPHY: Do you want to know why I asked that question?

ZOLA: No, not really. Anything you say will probably make my eyes roll.

SOPHY: If you had to go a year without wearing earrings, could you do it?

ZOLA: If that meant I got to marry you at the end, I'd do it. Otherwise, no . . . Hah! How's that for an answer?

SOPHY: Hah!

ZOLA: (Laughs) Don't worry, I'm wearing earrings.

SOPHY: Hee!

ZOLA: (Laughs)

SOPHY: Were you being serious?

ZOLA: I can't think of a reason, other than medical, where I would have to not wear earrings, so it's a moot question.

SOPHY: That doesn't answer the question.

ZOLA: It was a fantasy question . . . I answered your damn question . . . And, by the way, I'm heterosexual.

SOPHY: I know. You're heterosexual and like me. Common knowledge.

ZOLA: I wear it on my arm and wear no sleeve.

SOPHY: I have no idea how many questions I've asked.

ZOLA: Feels like fifty. Did I pass the bar?

SOPHY: Your answers would barely get you out of kindergarten. (Laughs) I'm so funny.

ZOLA: Funny looking.

SOPHY: Do you wish I was blonde?

ZOLA: What? No. I prefer brunettes. You'd look funny as a blonde.

SOPHY: Do you think I'm bootylicious?

ZOLA: I can't see your booty.

SOPHY: Do you think I'm anything liscious?

ZOLA: I think you're liscious. Put whatever word you want in front of it.

SOPHY: Do you think I'm sextabulous?

ZOLA: I think you are bootisexliscioustabulous.

SOPHY: You're not just saying that, are you?

ZOLA: Of course not. You are whatever I just said you are. Just don't ask me to say it twice.

SOPHY: I think you are boosilitextanginous too.

ZOLA: What? !?

SOPHY: Bistarnioussextablet . . . biscenxtiosbootaculus . . . I quit . . . Bitchin' There you go. Bitchintabulous.

ZOLA: I'll take it. You're bitchinonymous too.

SOPHY: You say bitchinonymous, I say bitchintabulous, let's call the whole thing off.

ZOLA: Definitely not.

* * * *

I don't believe you do things to intentionally hurt my feelings. I also don't believe you predict that what you say might hurt me. I think you say things in a way to protect yourself that can sometimes hurt my feelings.

* * * *

I was born damned and with a broken heart

* * * *

I'm smarter but she's more mature. I intimidate her with my immaturity.

* * * *

I'm radical, but so polite few notice.

* * * *

Beyond the changed words, the foreign language translation of a

poem alters and changes the original poem. With rare exception the translation of a beautiful poem can be similarly beautiful or literally faithful, but not both.

Poetry is uniquely tied to the native language-- the unique word definition, culture, diction, rhyme, sound, meter, feel and even physical length of words and phrases. Due to the literal and figurative differences between languages, a foreign language translation of a poem not only changes the literal words but the poem. It is not possible to change the language and perfectly preserve the original meaning.

This is elementally illustrated by the translation of simple rhyming poems. While 'dog' and 'fog' rhyme, the standard Spanish translations of 'perro' and 'neblina' do not. To make the translation rhyme, the translator must take liberties with the literal meaning. To keep intact the literal meaning, he must omit the rhyming.

In order to preserve artistic meaning, many translators consciously dismiss literal translation. The translation is often as much the artistic creation of the translator as it is of the original poet.

The reader of a translation is not reading the original poem. The translation may be closely related and beautiful and profound, but it's something different. This illustrates the problem with those who take literally modern translations of ancient texts.

* * * *

"I have better taste in music than you."

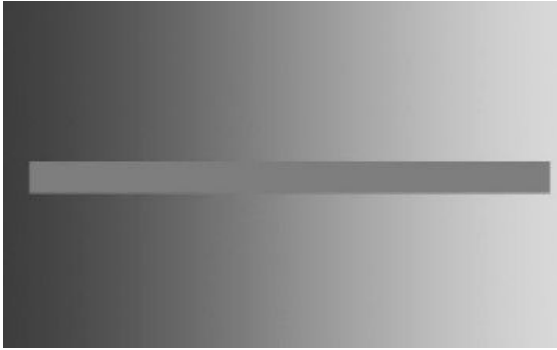
"What are you talking about about? We like the same music."

"Yes, but I like it for more important reasons."

* * * *

Art should go beyond it's format and genre. Best in class is a consolation prize to justify the entrance fees.

* * * *



Visual illusions point out the existence of blind spots and unreliability in our logic and reasoning systems.

For those who have never before seen this image, the rational answer would be the bar changes in tone. To say it is solid in tone would be irrational.

It's not that all false perceptions of reality are due to faulty logic, but that many are formed using what is considered sound logic and reasoning.

* * * *

A skeptic should also be skeptical of skepticism.

* * * *

That something could be worse doesn't make it good.

* * * *

Someone once said to me, "You certainly are interested in accents." I thought about that for a couple of seconds then said "Yeah, I guess I am."

I mean other peoples' accents, not me mimicking them. I'm often more interested in someone's accent than he or she is.

Overhearing me talk a woman from California once said, "You're from the city and you're definitely from the Midwest." A match made in heaven! Love at first linguistic interpretation!

* * * *

Language is a common way to organize, label and perceive objects and ideas. Native language is something we learned as infants, talk, think and even dream in. Our native language has profound influence on how we look at the world. Different languages give different emphasis, meaning, aesthetics, sounds and, perhaps most important, categories to things. As one perceives and thinks in part through categorizing (cats belong as one group, dogs belong as one group, magazines as another), native linguistic categories influence even nonconscious perception. It influences how we imagine things when our eyes are closed.

An elemental example of difference between languages is when a person in Atlanta Georgia and a person in Rome Italy read the same word 'pizza,' yet imagine different things. A pizza in Georgia is different than a pizza in Italy. If you asked the two to identify a pizza at a market, they might point to different objects. The Italian may say of the Georgian's choice, "You're crazy. That's not pizza. Let me read the label ... *Tombstone ... Do not defrost before cooking ... remove cellophane ... Glenview Illinois* ... You Americans might know Slim Whitman and Gilligan's Island, but you know nothing about pizza. Come to Rome and I'll show you pizza."

Many differences are more subtle. For example, different cultures do not always categorize color alike. Different languages can and do have a different number of names for colors. This means a particular name, say red or green, will apply to a different range of wavelength on the visible light spectrum. It's the same total light spectrum of color for both cultures, but the different numbers of names divide the spectrum into a different size pieces. Like cutting two identical pizzas, one into nine pieces and the other into seven. The pizzas are identical except one has fewer and bigger pieces.

In one culture, 'red' can cover a different range of color than the equivalent word 'red' in another culture. What you call red, a person on another continent may or may not call red.

Even within a culture, people often categorize colors differently. This is commonly done in the marginal areas, such as aqua blue, dark orange versus red, magenta versus pink. It is probable that you perceive some borderline colors differently than your spouse, friend or co-workers. If two friends define colors

differently, they may believe they are talking about different cloth swatches when they are talking about the same one. Or they may believe they are talking about the same swatch when they are talking about different.

This between friends difference can be because they don't have the exact same color vision and that they never had a serious discussion about what are the boundaries of aqua blue, or what constitutes badius, brunneous and gamboges. I don't recall ever having an instructor teach the exact boundaries of aqua blue, aqua marine or magenta, not even in art class. I doubt I ever had an instructor who knew the exact boundaries.

* * * *

As humans commonly communicate, learn and conceptualize the abstract through words, different interpretations of words often lead to conflicts. What may at first appear to be a visual illusion or even mental illness in a person may be a difference in culture.

An American joke is "Never ask for Squirt on an English airline." To Americans, Squirt is a brand of lemon/lime soda pop. To the English the word means urine.

I think it's safe to order 7Up.

* * * *

Good grammar can ruin a perfectly good sentence.

* * * *

Just because I write about aleatoricism doesn't mean I'd label this book as aleatory. I don't, but mostly because I'm wary of labels. Labels come with too much baggage, associations I don't want to be associated with. I'd never join a club that would have Groucho Marx as a member.

* * * *

The only thing I regret is everything I've ever done. Except when I put the change in the Salvation Army bucket. That counted as

neutral.

* * * *

“Will computers ever think like humans?”

“Not if they're well designed.”

* * * *

Despite common belief, humans do not perceive a direct and exact representation of external reality, but a distorted translation formed by their eyes and mind. The image we see is different than what we are looking at. This is not some coffee house theory, but physiological fact.

Just one example is the blind spot. All humans have blind spots, which are spots where the eye cannot see. The blind spot corresponds to the spot on the retina where the optical nerve connects the retina to the brain. At this spot there are no light detecting cells and, thus, it cannot detect light. A small object can disappear from view.

In everyday life the blind spot goes unnoticed. This is in part as the eye is constantly looking around, getting a wide and varied range of views. It is also in part as the brain uses the information from both eyes to create the single mental vision. What one eye misses, the other often picks up.

As its optical nerve connects differently, the octopus has no blind spot.

Detecting your blind spot

L

R

To detect your blind spot using the previous letters L and R, hold the book about two feet in front of your face, close your right eye and look at the letter R. Slowly move your head forward, towards the picture. At one point the L will disappear. The L will also disappear if you start up close and slowly move back. Notice that the missing spot is filled in white by your mind, so it appears as if nothing is missing from your view. This illustrates how your blind spot goes unnoticed during daily living. Many people live their entire life not knowing they have a blind spot.

* * * *

Optical afterimages are when, after staring at an object, you look away and still see an image of the object. An example is when you still see the nighttime headlights of a car, even though your eyes have closed and the car has turned away. Another is when after looking away from a candle flame in the dark you still see light in the shape of the candle flame.

Afterimages happen after the retina's photosensors (the light detecting rods and cones in your eyes) become oversaturated, or burned out, from staring at a particular color. This burning out is comparable to lifting weights in the weight room. After doing enough arm curls you lose your arm curl strength for a short while and will be able to lift only lighter weights. Your muscles are fatigued, if only temporarily, from all that weight lifting.

Similarly, after staring at a large area of a single color, the eye's photosensors lose their strength for that color. If right afterwards the eyes look at a blank piece of paper, the photosensors will be weak towards the previously stared at color but fresh and strong for detecting the other colors. This imbalance causes the mind to perceive the image (the afterimage), but in the primary color opposite to the original color. To the mind, the weakness towards one color means the presence of the opposite primary color is stronger. Quirky perhaps, but this is the way the brain works.

If you are staring at a green image, the afterimage should be red (the opposite primary color). After staring at a yellow image, the afterimage should be blue.

Though they occur almost constantly, afterimages usually go

unnoticed. Afterimages are best observed when focusing on a single color or object for a lengthy period of time. In normal about the house viewing we view a wide range of objects and colors at once and our eyes are always moving around, the view constantly shifting. In these cases, the afterimages are minor and get lost in the visual shuffle. We barely if at all notice them.

* * * *

Humans have binocular vision, meaning the single image we see in our mind is made from two different views-- one from each eye.

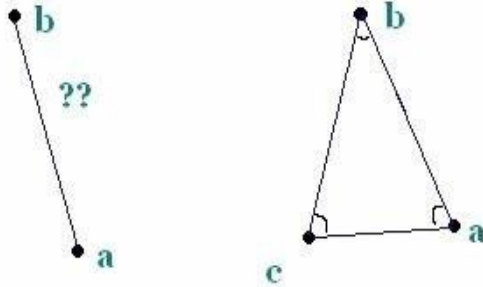
Binocular vision gives humans a number of advantages. One is we have a wider field of view than if we had only one eye. The right eye can see further to the right and the left eye further to the left. The single vision in our mind shows more than either single eye can see.

Another advantage is the two views give us imperfect but good depth perception. People who are blind in one eye have worse depth perception than the average human. We'd have more accurate vision if we had three eyes.

The mythical Cyclops might at first appear an unbeatable foe, but a wily human opponent could take advantage of the monster's poor depth perception and narrow field of vision.

* * * *

Binocular vision produces the perception of depth in a way similar to how triangularism measures length in applied mathematics. When looking at a distant point using only one point of view it is hard to impossible to determine the distance accurately. In applied mathematics, triangularism can accurately calculate this distance from point **a** to point **b** by creating an imaginary triangle. Triangularism has long been used in the real world to measure distant objects, such islands and boats from land and when surveying land.



Triangularism: From point a alone, it can be impossible to accurately calculate the distance to point b. In the real world, point a could be you standing on land and point b an anchored boat out at sea. However, by taking angle measurements from point a, then taking an angle measurement from nearby point c (perhaps a walking distance away), and measuring the distance from point a to c, one can create an imaginary triangle that calculates the distance from point a to point b. It's just a matter calculating angles and doing the math.

Two eyes give the mind a similar two point view, and the mind uses these two views to judge distance. This is mostly done nonconsciously. You simply reach out and grab that pencil or door knob, no problem. If you wear an eye patch, you may discover it's more difficult to grab things on the first try.

* * * *

I'm so confident in my genius that I judge the validity of the judges by whether or not I win the grand prize.

* * * *

Question my taste in music all you want, but you're just a guy and some of the women who like it are pretty cute.

* * * *

The Hole In The Hand Illusion



This simple trick plays with your binocular vision to make it appear as if you have a hole in your hand.

Roll a normal piece of 8x11" paper into a tube and place it next to your hand as shown in the above picture. With one eye look through the tube and with the other eye look ahead at the back of your hand. With a little bit of shifting you should see what appears to be a large hole through your hand. Your mind takes the two distinct views to create one bizarre view.

* * * *

As I said, you don't see physical reality but a translation of it. When you are look at a living room or bowl of apples or painting or mountain range, the image you see is not a direct representation of the objects. The image is a translation made by your eyes and mind. As demonstrated, binocularism (changing two views into one), afterimages (images created by the eyes/mind), unnoticed blind spots, inability to see colors in low light and countless other purely physiological occurrences ensure that our mental image is always different than the objects viewed. Everything we perceive involves illusion.

* * * *

If you believe that there is a God who purposely created animals, why do you think He gave humans such limited eyesight?

* * * *

A mirror mirrors what is in front of it. If you place an apple two feet in front of the mirror, an identical looking apple will look as if it's the same distance behind, or into, the mirror. Curiously, if you use triangulation to measure the distance to the apple in the mirror, the apple will measure as being two feet behind the mirror. Both our eyes and scientific measurement say there is an apple two feet behind the mirror's surface.

* * * *

While humans depend mostly on sight, other animals depend more on other senses. The blood hound has worse than human eyesight, but uses its advanced sense of smell to find lost people that even trained police detectives cannot find. In these instances, the blood hound's non-seeing perception is more accurate than all of the detectives' senses combined. This explains why many police departments have blood hounds on staff.

* * * *

I don't know what to say, Sophy, but I thought I'd say it anyway.

* * * *

I don't force my artistic tastes on others. I scatter small pieces on the floor and hope they step barefoot on them.

* * * *

I knew I was getting old when I started judging a concert in part by how comfortable was my seat.

* * * *

Henry: "You have it wrong. The Nobel Prize in literature is a lifetime achievement. They don't give it for just one book."

David: "But my new novel is 4,000 pages long."

. . .

Henry: "Maybe they'll introduce a Nobel Prize for mulch."

* * * *

SOPHY: Okay. I'm going to ask you some fluffy questions to you can keep me entertained.

ZOLA: Sounds good. All fluff all the time.

SOPHY: How's the weather and what did you wear other than silver earrings, rings and black boots?

ZOLA: It was low 50s today and sunny. Nice. I wore blue jeans, a dark blue sort of sweater- sweatshirt and my leather jacket.

SOPHY: So were you really delicious?

ZOLA: (Laughs). Of course. My hair's a bit longer and was all wavy. Medusa-like. When it grows out you can see how wavy it is. When it's really short, you can't tell.

SOPHY: Did you bump into any cute chicks looking that way?

ZOLA: No, didn't bump into one on the streets. Even my barista was a man.

SOPHY: How'd you remember me hating Crash?

ZOLA: I know a lot of things.

SOPHY: What else do you remember?

ZOLA: I remember your first affectionate nickname for me was pumpkin?

SOPHY: Really?!? I don't remember that.

ZOLA: It's true. You said you were timidly testing the waters.

SOPHY: What did you think of it?

ZOLA: I thought pumpkin itself was an odd name, but thought you testing the waters was endearing.

SOPHY: This is so funny. Pumpkin. What was your first nickname for me?

ZOLA: I don't know, but do remember getting you to call me your friend. It was all rather silly. I remember I was the first to use the XO salutation, and even boasted afterwards I was the first to use it. Again, playful banter was involved.

* * * *

If you said you believe that there is a God who purposely created animals, why do you think He gave some animals better eyesight than humans'?

* * * *

It's time to get a job so I can retire.

* * * *

Heck, when I read this book I read it differently than the author.

* * * *

And in the middle of the night I leave the house and walk into the snow. Some might call it a suicide, but I wouldn't . . . That last sentence may not be satisfactory to readers, but we all have our own untranslatable music

* * * *

Humans are psychologically influenced by unrealistic exaggerations. Take size as one example. To humans, the larger the wolf or alligator or gorilla or bear or mountain, the more intimidating and awesome. The larger man is assumed to be the more powerful. Logically, you know you will likely someday see a house and bear and spider bigger than you've seen before. This mindset extends beyond the bounds of reality. In the extremes, we get impossible super powerful and super sized characters like Hercules, Superman and the Incredible Hulk. If a gorilla is intimidating due to its size and strength, then King Kong is that much more intimidating.

This helps explain our psychological reactions to the exaggerated in art, dreams and day dreams.



* * * *

David: "So that in a nutshell is the theory of relativity."
Henry: "I assume Einstein was a drinker."

* * * *

Stop saying I'm beautiful, it makes me uncomfortable.

* * * *

The problem is things must be translated by humans to be understood, but what humans understand is the translation.

* * * *

Humans believe they receive important objective insights, including cosmic truths, through strong subjective experiences— such as through the sublime experience of art, epiphany of music, nature, love, lust, religious experience. The psychological power of these experiences is considered verification of the ‘truths.’

A question is whether these experiences involve genuine

insight into external reality or are merely strong biological reactions. Love and lust themselves, after all, are standard genetic reactions. Psychological reactions to certain sounds, such as in powerful music, involve genetics.

The reactions to high delicate notes (such as from song birds or a pop song) and low booming notes (distant thunder, the start of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony) have been shared by humans for thousands and thousands of years. You and your ancient ancestor have remarkably similar psychological reactions to the sound of a songbird and the sudden deep roar of a bear. It's no coincidence that church music uses delicate high notes to invoke heaven in the audience, and the loud, deep bass of the organ to invoke power and awe.

It's not coincidence that horror movies use discordant notes. The director knows audiences find the sounds scary and creepy.

In the famous 1960 Psycho shower scene, the sharp, grating, discordant musical notes invoke violence, evil, something gone horribly wrong. They sound similar to someone scratching a chalkboard, one of the most despised sounds to humans.

It can never be known to the experiencer that an epiphany made through a strong psychological experience is anything more than a genetic reaction. If there is insight into the external, the insight is shaped by the experiencer's subjectivity, and what parts of the insight are objective and what parts subjective is unknowable.

Even if important insights into the universe are gained they still are in subjective format. For example, if your epiphany comes through your experience of art, your experience of art is personal and different than that of others. Not only is your 'insight' intrinsically tied to your subjective views, you likely would not have had the insight at that same time, place or format, or at all, if you had different aesthetic views.

* * * *

I try to gain their attention— I do everything—murder, rampage, screams, dance— but everything, everything passes by— mimes— they don't notice, they don't care— They perform a jig in front of my shark knife, but they don't invade my heart— They are Japanese mountains

I vacillate— from wanting them to be 3D to wanting them to go away or me to hide in my closet— and the pain of thinking them real and their doings and goings on being real behind my back and me not being included in the birthday party and I scream and I scream and there is a glass— A soundproof glass that I can't get past— There is a code a language that I don't know, a secret handshake I haven't been taught— A wink of the eye, a frequency I can't get past

* * * *

Humans use artificial, biases and imaginary environments to reach higher levels of achievement. This achievement can range from a musician composing a great symphony to a ten year old improving her math scores.

Humans do not have the capacity to effectively focus on a variety of tasks simultaneously. To reach higher levels of achievement in an area, the human must put most to all of its focus on that area. Humans must eliminate or stabilize (make a non factor) areas that distract from the needed focus.

This is comparable to a water kettle with four equal sized holes in the top. When water is boiled inside, steam will raise a height from the holes. If three of the holes are sealed, the steam will rise much higher from the remaining hole.

* * * *

The following are everyday examples of manipulating one's mental and physical environment to produce achievement:

- * While background music or others' chitchat may be fine while browsing a glossy magazine, many of us cover our ears in order to comprehend a difficult passage or perform a math problem.
- * To expand one's mind by meditation someone focuses on a repeated mundane and often arbitrary task, such as following one's breath or repeating a word.
- * To improve the team's horrid free throw percentage, the junior high basketball coach teaches the players to focus on the

basket and their shooting motion and to ignore the crowd. He has them practice by ignoring recorded crowd noise and cardboard cutouts of fans.

- * Many with a fear of speaking reduce their nervousness by imagining the audience wearing only their underwear. They create a fantasy.

* * * *

Many consider hitting a baseball to be the most difficult feat in sport. The batter swings a stick to hit a small ball. The thrown ball can reach speeds of over 100 miles per hour. Early 1900s player Ty Cobb holds the record for the highest career batting average in Major League Baseball history. His batting average was 0.367, or 3.67 hits per every 10 turns at bat. Even the greatest hitters fail more than they succeeded. Enough to give anyone a complex.

Baseball hitters, and baseball players in general, are notorious for their strange conceits. Players often wear the same unwashed undershirt and socks during a hitting streak. Most players don't step on the white foul lines when entering and leaving the field. Pitcher Turk Wendell waved to left field every time he entered and left a game. When coming to bat, Nomar Garciaparra went through a well documented ritual of pulling at his shirt, opening and closing the Velcro straps on his batting gloves and tapping the toes of his shoes. Lucky charms, bracelets, necklaces, gum brands abound the game. Five time batting champion Wade Boggs ate chicken before every game. U.L. Washington batted with a toothpick in his mouth. After parents complained that kids might emulate the unsafe habit, he switched to a q-tip. After the first slump, U.L. was back to the toothpick.

Though many of the rituals are comical, they can aid performance. Hitting requires a calm and focused mind and exceptional mind body coordination, all while the player is surrounded by television cameras, screaming fans and the other pressures of being a professional athlete expected to perform. If wearing the lucky undershirt or repeating an odd ritual eases the batter's mind and gives confidence, it can increase the player's batting average. U.L.'s reason for switching back to a toothpick was

because it made him feel more comfortable. While a toothpick as aid may seem nonsensical, the desire to be comfortable makes sense.

* * * *

For an arbitrary rule to aid performance, the person must have faith in the rule.

During a meditation session, one must accept that the thing of mental focus is worthy (breath, mantra, stone, other). Whether the thing was carefully chosen by an instructor or picked in a rush (a pebble hastily grabbed from the ground), meditation requires you to focus on that thing. If you fret about whether or not the mantra was the perfect pick, this very fretting makes the meditation session less effective.

The lucky blue undershirt only helps the baseball player if he believes it lucky. If the blue undershirt is deemed lucky because he had a great game the first time he wore it, this illustrates the arbitrariness in conceits. If before that big game he pulled his grey undershirt from the drawer, it likely would be the grey undershirt that is considered lucky.

* * * *

Being mentally ill often means perceiving things from a different angle than normal people. I'm neither claiming this view is more or less accurate than the normal view. Just different.

* * * *

I try to make the people but it doesn't work— I try to pull the substance, the essence, from their noses— but it doesn't work— I take them and boil their hides into a tea to get the— the something — but it doesn't work

* * * *

These days certain songs break my heart. The ones with notes in them.

* * * *

You have a mischievous smile. It's very attractive, but I wonder, do you have teeth?

* * * *

Most objections to this book will really be due to the reader's personal taste. I don't believe any of the facts or theories presented are incorrect.

* * * *

I'm writing my autobiography. It's called *Obfuscation and Esoterica*. I'm looking for an English translator.

* * * *

No, that's not correct. I am quite hilarious. Whether or not you think I am, is a separate issue.

* * * *

The medicine isn't intended to cure, but make me forget. Or, forgetting is considered the cure.

* * * *

The night has always been my world. It's not a matter of explaining how or why, it just is. Even when I was a little kid, my parents called me a night hawk.

Though identical to day on the map, night is a different world. A different fauna, flora, plot, music, smell, temperature, meaning. Daylight society is unconscious.

* * * *

“In summary and in conclusion, Twinkie X’s are approved.”

I'm glad you approve of my Twinkie X's, dearest Zoe, but I'm moving on. O's and Ho-Ho flavored X's

* * * *

Sorry, I panicked. I thought it moved. You can have your hammer back.

* * * *

I love the sinner and the sin.

* * * *

Sure, I can identify flaws in this book. I'm the one who left them in. If I had the guts I would have included many more, put a couple of earthquake cracks through the the middle. It causes me great angst that I didn't.

* * * *

Aleatory art is art where the finished result is substantially out of the artist's hands. It can involve chance or the musicians' or audience's choice. Many games are aleatory. Monopoly involves the roll of the dice. Poker involves the shuffling of the cards. Aleatoricism in art can create fresh, inventive, unexpected results. If the results defies the conventions of plot, narrative and order, that's the point.

Novelist William S. Burroughs used the so called cut-up aleatory technique. Pages of text were physically cut up and randomly pieced back together, sometimes with text by other authors, creating new and often profoundly surreal meaning and narrative. Burroughs believed this type of collage more closely represented the human experience. Despite the conceit of linearity, humans don't think or experience things linearly, one's thoughts constantly flipping back and forth between past, current and future. Random little events and objects trigger memories and provoke speculation of the future. When you consider buying a can of beans in the grocery isle, you think about past meals and the future meal

where these beans might be used. The human ability to identify flowers, shoe brands and people involves comparing the present to memory. Human intelligence and reasoning involves mentally flipping back and forth through time.

* * * *

There are truths in my messes. If messy truths.

* * * *

You probably don't want to touch that. I know where it's been.

* * * *

My heart is so black it's blue.

* * * *

My job as a writer isn't to make the hard easy. It's to make the hard hard.

* * * *

You'll never know. I cover my tracks with nonsense.

* * * *

One thing as a writer you're not supposed to do is explain things too much, something that some will at times accuse me of doing. A joke or spontaneous witticism is ruined by explaining it. A painting in a gallery can be ruined when the viewer reads the title. Art, and even conversation, is supposed to involve reader's imagination. The power of art involves the audience interpreting art in its own personal way, making it a personal thing.

On the other hand, defying artistic conventions is important, both aesthetically and when examining the human mind and when you're when trying to be a general snot.

* * * *

Some people believe in God because they want there to be God. This, of course, doesn't even address the question of if there is a God.

* * * *

DAVID: "Just for the record, the number of atheists in a foxhole is not valid evidence of the existence or lack thereof of God. If you're Christian, just remember that if you use that argument I can locate a foxhole full of Muslims."

HENRY: "You've got it wrong The foxhole test determines the existence of God, not the denomination. Polling people during tax audits determines the the correct denomination."

HENRY: "Just one hint. It's not Latvian Orthodox."

DAVID "You mean Elza is going to Hell? I was going to ask her out."

* * * *

A common way people will view this book is as it being pieces for a single aim. Meaning, the disparate pieces are included to support a single idea.

* * * *

My returning to old text, rearranging and restyling many times, isn't just a philosophical thing. It's also a personal searching thing. A statement in a way, a rebellion, a conceptual statement, autobiographical in a way.

* * * *

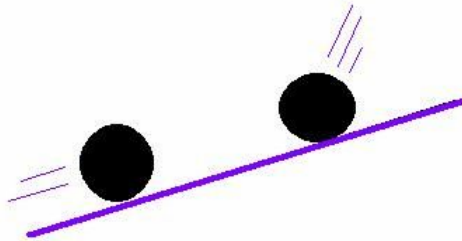
Much of our narrative for scenes is speculative. We can guess but don't know the whole story. The judgment of significance, motives and movements of the players in a scene is influenced by our biases and personal experiences. Different viewers see different stories in

the same movie.

Consciously and nonconsciously predicting what will happen is a necessary part of human function. To catch a ball, you don't need to know just where the ball is at any given moment in flight, but correctly anticipate where it will be at later moments.

Narrative is an expression of human's philosophy of time, cause-and-effect, relationships between things. To most humans, nothing is static, but a part of a linear flow. Even still things and still images of things are viewed as part of this flow.

What is particularly interesting is humans apply narratives to abstract images and other information where it is not clear there is a real narrative.



Describe what going on above? Even though this is an abstract combination of dots and lines, most will say this shows two balls racing towards each other. Viewers can even describe what they see as happening before and after this image. However, unlike a movie still or snapshot photo, there is no before or after. As I am the one who created this design, I can assure that this is the only image, the one and only existence of these dots and lines. There is no narrative with this image other than as speculated by the viewer. That it shows balls on a line is itself imagination.

Whether there is a real narrative to a Vermeer or Rembrandt painting scene is questionable. It's not a photographic snapshot of live movement, as with the earlier fox. The narrative and resulting meaning is nothing more than speculation.

As you can see, artistic experience is speculative, theoretical. Art is a symbol and metaphor for something larger and something in the viewers' minds. Art isn't so much interpreted by the viewer as made up. Movement is imagined in the following Matisse, but it doesn't

literally exist. Even the artist having imagined movement doesn't make it exist.



* * * *

Henry: "Interesting. I never realized I was a dog. That explains why my allergist isn't an MD."

* * * *

When you critique a movie, do you think it important what the director thought the movie was about and what he was trying to do? When you read a book or look at a painting is it important for you to know the artist's intention? Have you ever made an interpretation of a work of art, later found out what the artist's was and found it different than yours? What was your reaction?

These types of 'Which interpretation is correct?' questions touch on topics that have long have been important in aesthetics.

Many years ago the prominent literary school of thought was that the most important thing in interpreting and studying a book was the author's intent. This was later rejected, with an influential school of thought entirely dismissing author's intention and saying all that mattered was the reading of the text itself. Part of this rejection was because they no one can reliably know the author's intent. Today, many scholars find both extremes, well, extreme and

fall somewhere in the middle.

A related school said that a work of literature was a reflection or representation of the author's biography. Others rejected this, in part because artists have imaginations, can make up things.

Another school said that art was to be judged by the audience's reaction to it. There is some validity to this in that art is a communication. It is intended to communicate ideas to the reviewer, viewer or listener. Others entirely rejected this idea, saying audience reaction was irrelevant, and a movie shouldn't be judged by the reaction of whichever random audience viewed it. Again, most people today reject the rigidity of both sides. Many think you can't judge art solely by audience reaction, but that it's relevant.

All these views beg the question of is there a correct way to interpret art? Is there even a correct way to determine which way is the correct way? Art itself is a human made up concept.

* * * *

I repeat things, reconsider things. That's just part of my personality.

* * * *

A woman said I looked good. I thanked her for her honesty.

* * * *

William S. Burroughs felt that cutting up and shuffling together together of texts revealed hidden information.

* * * *

My editor said my new novel was too derivative, so I changed the title to Of Moose And Men.

* * * *

I'll tell you, it destroys me more than you know. No matter how many times I rearrange this book, remove and add pieces, it will

never satisfy me. There are a thousand more pieces I could have added, perhaps should have added. Some left in that I should have take out. It's important to me for you to know this. I have mad scientist aspirations.

* * * *

I remember as a kid walking into the half open bathroom door in the middle of the night. In the dark I saw the moon through the window on the opposite side of the bathroom and assumed the door was wide open. If the door had been closed, hiding the moon, I would have assumed the door was closed and felt for the door knob. This is a case where my assumption was half right: the door was half open. The problem being that the edge of a half opened door hurts your head more than the face of a closed door.

* * * *

David: "What's heavier, a pound of feathers or a pound of gold?"
Henry: "I don't know. I have no idea what feathers cost, but you aren't going to get much gold for a pound."

* * * *

"You forgot well dressed."
"Wow. You're handsome, smart and witty. You must be hiding something really bad.

* * * *

"The bag for the feathers is going to be a lot bigger, so I'm going to go with the feathers."

* * * *

Henry: "How can you listen to that drone metal crap?"
David: "Uh, that's the dishwasher."

* * * *

Many wish to present a Shakespeare play or Verdi Opera the way it was originally presented, and there are complaints about colorizing old black and white movies. Advocates of original presentation often refer to a work of art presented in the original manner as being 'authentic.'

There are a wide variety of problems with presenting an old work of art 'authentically' to a modern audience. One major one is that, due to difference in culture and experience, modern audiences perceive things differently than did old audiences. Shakespeare's English was the language of the old day's audience, but not of today's. The two audiences experience and interpret the words differently, many people today finding the language obscure and strange. In Shakespeare's day, there were no female actors on stage. Boys in drag played the female parts, something that will be seen differently today. Even when presented 'authentically' (as originally presented), the modern audience won't perceive an old work of art authentically, as they won't experience it as the original ('authentic') audience did. Ironically, making modernizations, such as using female actors and more modern language, can make the modern audience's experience closer to the original audience's experience. Making a work newer on one level can make it older on another.

* * * *

I am forced to be a human, etc-- have a wife and daughter, etc-- We travel in a car-- I can go along with being a human-- but there is an uneasiness-- the busting-- it grows larger-- I can no longer drink their water

* * * *

I watch a beautiful, painfully boring couple sitting on a bench.

* * * *

When I walk through the neighborhood at 2am, I feel as if I am walking in people's dreams.

return trip * david cycleback

* * * *

My guess is you wouldn't have liked me in high school but I would have liked you.

* * * *

Henry: "You gorgeous piece of man meat."

David: "What?"

Henry: "I was talking to my dinner."

Numeral Systems and Psychology

In some Western Hemisphere high rise buildings there are no thirteenth floors. Well, there *are* thirteenth floors, but the floors are labeled 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 to give the superficial appearance of having no thirteenth floors. The building owners know many have a superstition against the numeral thirteen and it's easier to rent an apartment or office if it's called 'fourteen.'

In Korea and Japan where four is considered unlucky as it's the sign of death, some buildings 'omit' the fourth floor.

* * * *

Our base-10 numeral system

The common modern human counting system—the one you and I use-- is based on ten, and is referred to as **base-10**. It uses 10 different numeral symbols (0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9) to represent all numbers, and many popular groupings are divisible by ten: 10, 20, 100, 300, 10,000, century, decade, top 10 lists, golden anniversary, etc.

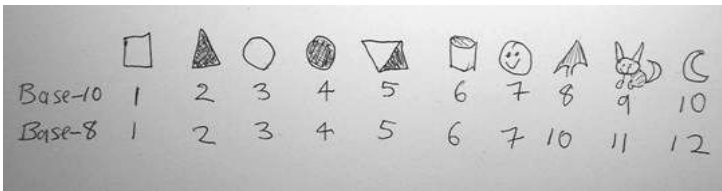
Our base-10 system is based on the number of digits on a human's hands: eight fingers and two thumbs. As with today, many ancient humans found fingers and thumbs convenient for counting and it seemed only natural to base a counting system on the 10 digits.

While the base-10 is a good system and has served us well, ten as the base was a somewhat arbitrary choice. Our numeral system could have been based on 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 20 or other number. Instead of basing it on the total digits on a pair of hands, it could have been based on the points of an oak leaf (9), the sides of a box (6), the fingers on a pair of hands (8). These different base systems

would work. Some might work as well or better than our base-10 system. Nuclear physicists and tax accountants could make their calculations using a 9 or 11-base system. Once you got used to the new system, you could count toothpicks and apples just as accurately as you do now.

* * * *

Quick comparison: counting with base-10 versus base-8



The above pictures compare counting with a base-10 system based on the ten digits of the hands (fingers + thumbs), and with a base-8 system based on just the eight fingers (thumbs not used). Notice that the base-8 system, not using the thumbs, is missing two numeral symbols: 8 and 9.

This comparison picture shows how assorted designs (top row) are counted with the base-10 and with the base-8 systems. As base-8 omits the two symbols 8 and 9, '10' comes sooner when counting in base-8. In one numeration system, the cat is '9' and in the other is '11.' As you can see, the real value of 10, amongst other numeral symbols, is not an absolute. It depends on what base is being used.

* * * *

Another example of counting with different bases

The following table illustrates how you can count symbols (far right column) using the base-10, base-9, base-8 and base-5 systems. If you wish, the symbols can represent physical objects like fruit or cars or plants. In this table the symbols are constant, while the numeral systems create different numeral labels for the symbols (or fruit or cars or plants). For those who consider '13' unlucky, notice that each counting system labels a different symbol as being 13.

Base 5	Base 8	Base 9	Base 10	Symbols
0	0	0	0	
1	1	1	1	!
2	2	2	2	@
3	3	3	3	#
4	4	4	4	\$
10	5	5	5	%
11	6	6	6	^
12	7	7	7	&
13	10	8	8	*
14	11	10	9	(
20	12	11	10)
21	13	12	11	-
22	14	13	12	+
23	15	14	13	“
24	16	15	14	:
30	17	16	15	>
31	18	17	16	<
32	19	18	17	{
33	20	19	18	}

* * * *

This counting stuff is not idle abstraction. Civilizations have used and use different numeral systems.

The Yuki Indians of California used a base-8 numeral system. Instead of basing their system on the digits on their hands, they based it on the spaces between the digits.

The Ancient Mayans used a base-20 system, as they counted with the digits on their hands and feet. They lived in a hot climate where people didn't wear closed toe shoes.

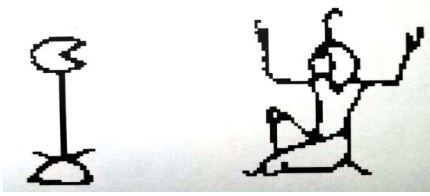
Today's computer scientists use 2, 8 and 16-base systems. For some mathematical work base-12 is more convenient than base-10. For this base-12 system they usually use the normal 0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 numerals and add the letters a and b to make twelve (0,1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,a,b). It goes without saying that these

mathematicians, often university professors and researchers, are using this system to perform higher levels of calculations than you or I perform in our daily lives. They aren't counting change at the grocery store.

Our normal lives show the vestiges of ancient numeral systems. We sometimes count with Ancient Roman numerals (Super Bowl XXIV, King Richard III), letters (chapter 4a, chapter 4b, chapter 4c ... Notice how this combines two different systems, standard numerals with letters) and tally marks. We group loaves of bread, inches and ounces by the dozen, and mark time in groups of sixty (60 seconds per minute, 60 minutes per hour). Counting inches and ounces by twelve comes from the Ancient Romans. Our organization of time in groups of 60 comes from the Sumerians, an ancient civilization that used a base- 60 system.

The traditional counting of bread into groups of twelve has practical convenience. At the market, a dozen loaves can be divided into whole loaves by two, three or four. Ten loaves can only be divided by two into whole loaves. Sellers and customers prefer the grouping that gives more whole loaf options, not wanting a loaf to be torn apart. This should give you an idea why feet and yards are divisible by twelve, and there were twelve pence in a shilling— you get more 'whole' fractions out of twelve than you do ten.

These have been just some examples of other numeral systems, as there have been a wide and varied number over history. This not only includes systems with different bases, but with different kinds and numbers of numeral symbols. In Ancient Eastern countries, physical rods were used to represent numbers. The number, position, direction and color of the rod represented a number. In Ancient Egypt, pictures, known as hieroglyphics, were used to represent numbers. One thousand was written as a lily, and 10,000 as a tadpole. The Ancient Hebrews had a similar system to ours, except they used 27 different symbols to our ten. For the Hebrews, numbers 20, 30, 40, etc each got its own unique symbol.



Ancient Egyptian numerals for 1,000 (lily flower) and one million (man with raised arms)



Tallying is an ancient basic counting system many of us use. The practical problem with this system is that numbers like 500 and 10,000 require a whole lotta tally marks. 500 requires 500 tally marks. Over history, numeral systems have changed and evolved to correct inconveniences like this. Notice we use the tally system only for simple tasks, like keeping score in a ping pong game and marking days.

* * * *

A kid's counting system: Eeny meeny miny moe

Kids have long used counting rhymes to decide who is *it*. The below common rhyme does the equivalent of counting to twenty, with the last word being the twentieth word.

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe Catch a tiger by the toe If he hollers let him go, Eeny, meeny, miny, moe

There are a few interesting things about this eeny meeny counting system. First, it is quasi base-20, not our normal base-10. Second, words are used as numerals, or as the practical equivalent of numerals. Kids could count to 20 for the same practical result, but they chose to use words. Third, while lucky 7, 10 and unlucky

13 have popular importance compared to other numerals in our base-10 system, the seventh, tenth and thirteenth words in the rhyme do not.

This is an example where a different counting system changes what numbers are perceived as important. Most kids who count with this rhyme aren't even aware which are the seventh, tenth and thirteenth words.

Humans often say they can't conceptualize numbers in anything but the normal base-10, but here is a base-20 words counting system that we have all used. Granted this counting system is simplistic in the extreme, used for one and only one purpose— to count to twenty (moe). You wouldn't want to try and use it to calculate your taxes.

* * * *

Numerals and human psychology

Humans form psychological attachments and biases for the numeration systems they use. Having grown up using a particular system, and seeing all those around them using the same, many people assume their numeration is absolute and eternal. Before reading this chapter, you may not have known or thought about the existence of other systems. Your base-10 system was all you knew, the prism which you saw the universe.

10, 100 and 1000— popular products of your base-10 system — are numbers you are attracted to. Thinking in base-8 or base-7 is foreign.

It's telling to look at how humans change their perception from system to system, and how a change of numeration system changes peoples' perceptions of things. The perception is not just about the numeration system itself, but the things the numeration system is used to count— objects, time, ideas.

* * * *

As the earlier tables showed, a different base numeral system doesn't change the accuracy of our calculations or the physical objects we calculate. However, if we retroactively changed our base-10 system to a non base-10 system (like say the Yuki's base-8

system) we would change how humans perceive and react to objects and concepts.

As with the high rise buildings and the superstitious renters, the historical changes would be caused in large part by human perceptions of the numerals themselves rather than the things the numerals represent. No matter what the Mexico City building owner calls the thirteenth floor, it is the same floor. If he changes the label on the elevator directory from '13' to '9988' or to '789' or to 'Q,' it is the same floor with the same walls, ceiling and windows and distance above the sidewalk. The numerologist apartment seekers aren't reacting to the floor but to the symbol '13.' It should not surprise that a change to the symbols, such as caused by the changing to a new counting system, will change their reaction to the floors, along with many other things.

With a large lot of stones lined up on a table, changing the numeral system has no direct effect on the amount or physical nature of the stones. With a new counting system, the stones would be the same stones, but many to most would be assigned different numeral names. While the stones are the same stones no matter what we call them, human perceptions of the stones change as the stones' numeral names change. Under our popular base-10 system, humans consider certain numerals to be special, including 10, 100, 1000 and 13, and react accordingly to objects labeled with these names. With the new numeral representations, humans' perception and treatment of the stones will change. If before a person avoided a stone because it was unlucky 13, in the new system a different stone would be called 13. If in the old system the stone labeled '100' was singled out as special, in the new system '100' would represent a different stone.

If a human is asked to count and group the stones, the grouping will change with the different counting system. In the base-10 system, it's likely the person would make piles of 10 or 25 stones or similar standard. In an 8 or 9 base system, the number and size of the piles would be different. To someone standing across the room, the rock design would be different. Her aesthetic reaction to the formation would be different.

This shows that your numeration system isn't just an objective observation system, but helps form how you perceive objects. Under a different system, you would perceive things differently.



The lines separate the same number of coins. The left group contains 30 total coins in stacks, the middle group between the lines has 30 coins in stacks, the group to the right of the right line has 30 coins in stacks. The coins of each group were stacked by different numeral systems. This is why the same numbers of coins look different.

* * * *

Changing numeral systems, changing history

As a numeration system changes how we perceive, organize and react to things, a retroactive change to the numeral systems would change human history. The amount and type of change can be debated, but today's history books would read different. With a change to the standard numeration system, time would remain the same but human marking of time would change. The decade, century and millennium equivalents would be celebrated at different times. No Y2K excitement at the same time as we had. Special milestones, like current marriage 10th or 25th anniversaries, would be at different times. People who now receive 30 years of service awards might receive equivalent awards but after a different duration.

Think of all those sports championships decided in the last moments, including the improbable upsets and bloop endings. If the events took place at different times and under different numeral influenced conditions some of the outcomes would be different. If an Olympic sprint is decided by a fraction of a second, it's unlikely the first to last place order would be identical if it took place the day before with the runners in switched lanes and running a different length race. The changes to marking of time and distance would

likely result in different gold, silver and bronze medal winners over the years. If a horse race was a tie, it is unlikely the same horses would tie if the race had been run earlier or later in the day or on a different day over a different length race. Realize that the change to the numeration system would likely change the standard race distances, even if the changes were just slight.

Think of all the razor close political elections. If the elections took place at a different time, even if just a day earlier or later, it's possible some would have different outcomes. A few of the outcomes could have been for President, Prime Minister, judge or other socially influencing position. Think of all those close historic battles that may or may not have had a different outcome if started at different times, using different size platoons and regiments and Generals who made decisions using different number biases. Napoleon Bonaparte was superstitious of 13 and made his government, social and military plans accordingly. Think of the influential or not yet influential people who died at relatively young ages in accidents, from Albert Camus to General Patton to Buddy Holly. James Dean died in a sports car crash at age 25. Would he have crashed if he started his drive at an earlier or later time? Popular perception of the actor no doubt would be quite different if we watched him grow old and bald.

The powerful nineteenth century Irish Leader Charles Stewart Parnell would not sign a legislative bill that had thirteen clauses. A clause had to be added or subtracted before it could become law. Irish law would have been different under a different numeral system.

* * * *

United States consumer prices would likely be affected by a different numeral system, if just marginally. Again, this would be due to human psychological perceptions of numerals.

Even though most current US sellers and buyers think nothing of one penny, often tossing it in the garbage or on the sidewalk, sellers regularly price things at \$9.99 instead of \$10, and \$19.99 instead of \$20. Check the newspaper ads. This pricing is aesthetic, intending to play on consumers biases towards numerals.

The shallowness of this 1 cent game is illustrated when it is

used by stores that have a 'give a penny, take a penny' tray, and that it is used in many states with different sales tax rates. Most people psychologically affected by \$9.99 pricing at home are also affected by \$9.99 pricing when traveling by car across the country. That the daily change in sale tax charge dwarfs the one cent between \$9.99 and \$10, illustrates the traveler's irrationalness.

Under a base-9 numeral system that omits the numeral '9,' \$9.99 and \$19.99 would no longer exist, and the visually appealing "one cent below big number" pricing would land elsewhere. In a 9 digit system, it's likely that there would be many \$8.88 and \$18.88 pricings in newspaper ads, and the same types of travelers would be attracted to \$8.88 and \$18.88 prices as they go state to state even though the taxes change state to state.

* * * *

There are a variety of intertwined reasons behind irrational biases towards numerals and numeral systems.

One reason is people form psychological attachments towards a system, its symbols and the standard groupings of objects made from the system. A three digit numeral price (\$9.99) looks distinctly different than a four digit numeral price (\$10.00), literally being shorter. One hundred stones grouped into 10 groups of 10 each will look different than 11 groups of 9 stones each with one left over. It's the same amount of stones, but their physical designs look different. There's an aesthetic aspect to how humans view symbols and groupings.

Closely related reasons are tradition and habit. If you have used our base-10 system all your life, it's as natural to you as your native spoken language. In fact words like nine, ten and decade are part of your daily vocabulary. If everyone you know uses this numeral system, the idea of using a different system may not have even crossed your mind before now. The idea of calculating using a base-8 or base-11 system seems strange and even unnatural to most people because they were raised on base-10.

Another reason behind irrational biases towards numerals is the seeming, if nonexistent, absoluteness of the familiar numerals. While the true nature of time, supernatural, war, love and the cosmos are shrouded in mystery, the numerals traditionally used in

representing these things seem tangible, concrete. Unlike philosophical abstractions, numerals can be written down and typed into the calculator. Even little kids can count numerals on their fingers. That folks like Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein used these same numerals seem to numerologists to indicate the numerals' potency. Though, if asked, both scientists would agree they could have used other numeral systems to do their work, and there was nothing uniquely special about the system they adopted.

Numerals are used only as convenient notations, proverbial post-its to label objects. They have no absolute, inborn connection to the things they represent. Whether you call the animal cat or gato it's the same animal, and whether you call a number 5, five or V, it's the same number. Whether you count a grove of trees with a base-10 or a base- 8 system, they are the same trees. If you count and label the trees a,b,c,d,e,f,g, they are still the same trees. Numerologists incorrectly assign an absolute meaning and identity that doesn't exist to the numerals.

* * * *

Sounds Good

Many Chinese judge numbers as good or bad by what words they sound closest to. As their pronunciation of 3 sounds closest to their word for 'live,' 3 is considered good. Their pronunciation of 4 sounds close to their word for 'not,' so is often considered negative.

China is a huge country with many dialects. As numbers and words are pronounced differently in different areas, a number's perceived goodness and badness depends on where you are. For example, 6 is considered good in some places and bad in others.

return trip * david cycleback

David Cycleback is an art historian and internationally known authentication expert. His book *Conceits* was a 2013 Eric Hoffer Award Finalist. Reprinted by Beijing's Three Shadows Art Center, his guides *Judging the Authenticity of Photographs* and *Judging the Authenticity of Prints* by the Masters were the first comprehensive books on the subjects published in Chinese.