

*A Thought
Is the Bride
of What Thinking*

— by Lyn Hejinian —

TUUMBA



*I have re-invented many things.
Other men, for example.*

— Paul Valery

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VARIATIONS: A RETURN OF WORDS

Think again . . . the twin brother . . . order inscribed . . .

Thought, or, advances. He has, for this aureate making of things, further care.

☆

Lucidities, or, lights (a starry angular). The staring, bright varieties of word and idea. I've always thought so, one who is willing and quite able to make use of everything, or anything. On the nectarine and the clarinet distinction casts a light, in its turn. One has only to look at the thing, and think a little.

Diversions, or, the guitar. It is in rereading one's journals, especially the old ones, that one discovers the repetition of certain concerns, the recurrence of certain issues, certain chronic themes that are one's own. You ask that whatever comes out of the five books on the shelf be new. It is now that I realize that that is impossible. Certain themes are incurable.

(Repeatedly I come upon the thought that everyone thinks, or wishes to think, of himself as unique. Often, one thinks that what one feels, what one experiences, is somehow **more** than what others feel or experience: **my** love, **my** suffering, **my** insight.

To be unusual, original, or new, is thought to be, somehow, important. It is thought, indeed, that to be otherwise is to be repetitive, or banal in thought; to be old and usual. It is implied then that one plagiarizes the past.

Artists often court madness, find insanity romantic, and point out their own eccentricities to prove their special validity.

That is from the notion that the suffering of the madman is especially real—that his madness in fact proves the reality of his suffering and the intensity of his experience. It has 'driven him insane.' But, really, the opposite is true. What characterizes insanity is that it divorces its victims from the actual, producing a state in which a private reality so dominates the attention as to exclude all other general realities. It is simply that the suffering of the madman is endured in its own non-relational context; it may be no greater than ours. A small bell rung gently in a small box may seem to produce an enormous sound, and, in

eclipsing the only peephole, may loom large.
(Craziness is more light-hearted.)

The noble, or, the fierce. If a thing seems true, even if only for a short time, then is it true? The truth has a past tense, perhaps. Reality is both temporal and temporary. A cultural reality may make a change, and what was thought to be characteristic be revealed as only apparent. Like the culture of the American Indian, undone in these times.

Combination, or, the metaphor. One refers to 'the courage of his convictions.' The difficulty lies not so much in adhering to one's beliefs as in remembering what they are, in a social confusion. One is constantly exposed to an abundance of valid opinion.

Any thought can be kin to another. The agility of the imagination and its whimsy make this possible.

Nonsense, or, the party. Bursts of talk, this is what is expected of one. Yet one prefers lengths of silence. Neither talk nor silence is by definition charming. Insofar as the charming is aware of itself, it too is not charming. It rattles.

(How rarely one follows a thought through, to its 'conclusions.' How infrequently one comes to the end of a thought. Indeed, in these times, it seems, we back away from thought altogether, we scarcely think at all, given the diversions or the mechanical aids that block thought by making it unattractive or unnecessary.)

Surrealism, or hooves of the clattering trolleys. The figure of action is in motion, yet what moves is not to be seen. I hear the trees, he would say, am a participant in a thin fog rising. Is this confusion, or a spectacle? he asks.

On television the surreal is to be seen in non-revolutionary form. I am thinking, for example, of the show in which the hero's mother returns from the dead in the form of a talking car.

(As I originally conceived of this piece, it was to be a series on varieties of nonsense, but it came thereby to express a cynicism, if not a sarcasm, that I don't really feel, and it was changed accordingly, in conception and in fact. Even in poetry, honesty is more important than felicity.)

Style, or, ink. Occasionally, one must make a choice between a colon and a dash, while verse, in its flounces, sashays about the grounds.

Devastation, or, the wreck. One can't write the words 'wild,' 'cruel,' 'horror,' etc. and by naming it communicate it. Brutality can only result in an extreme and emotional response, and not a written one. In contemporary jazz, the scream, the artistry of high-pitched harmonics, is a primary expression, in response to contemporary brutality.

Further thought, or, further advances. This, or this again, in different terms, may serve to add either complication or clarification. In either case, thinking does in some cases contract but in most cases expand the consciousness. With regard to the former, I am referring to what we call over-thinking, that painful circling which taunts the mind. Yet even then, further thought of a different kind serves finally to propel one out of the morbid circle, toward some insight or conclusion.

(Often what is interesting, when an idea is first related, is not to know the thought alone but to know who is thinking it, who is 'in on' the idea, who is involved in it. This is the flesh and context of the thought.)



As chance must lead you first one way and then another, and as comedy does not always sustain laughter but may provoke tears, so here what is reflected is not always what is visible, and art is seen not to be a mirror.

And here are these other drawings, which perhaps you would want to see. There are elongated letters and numerals, superior, polite, and strange of.

If to think is to dance, it is to fall while dancing, as well; it is to dance among ducks and elephants. Also, of course, it is to dance among the winged horses, the angels, and with the albatross.

(I have read that the albatross is able to stay aloft for long periods of time, often for as much as a year at a time, its wing span being so great, and the winds so strong and constant in the Southern latitudes where the albatross is at home, that the bird can rest in flight. Beneath it are the constantly rising waters and the battered triangles of their troughs.)

And the curving roofs of the old houses in the scattered villages.

Francis Ponge wrote of a comment made by Picasso: "To speak thus is to show as much modesty as courage, as much lucidity as ambition."

To learn a foreign language is somehow akin to working with mathematics. Yet to work with one's own language is very far from mathematics. One is so familiar with one's own language that its rigidities, its laws, pass unnoticed. It is fluid, and in it one is lost, experiencing as often as not the pain and difficulties that such freedom imposes.

There is an artistic technique which could be called a technique of first gestures. One makes a form, sketches it out, looks to see it, and pursues the suggestions it has made. The initial step is a random gesture—the random result of a gesture. In writing, one makes a first word or phrase (less often, a sentence or a paragraph); in music, a first sound or texture of sound.

Relative to this I recall a class I took in college, given by an anthropologist who was also a friend of Robert Motherwell, Grace Hartigan, etc. The course was a study of correspondences between prehistoric cave art (specifically that of the caves at Lascaux), Australian Aboriginal art, and Abstract Expressionism (the New York School).

What is possibly my earliest recollection is of a brilliantly yellow flower sharp on the grass. From that period also come other purely visual memories. I remember clearly particular wall-papers, the small yellow roses on the yellowing paper in my grandmother's room, the faded green stems and leaves, and the dark green paper of my own bedroom. In still another room was a pink paper, newly hung, which I tore off the wall in long strips as I lay in my crib for an afternoon nap. Because my memory is visual in its nature, that I should have become a painter follows logically. Yet, though my father was a painter, I am not.

Probably all feeling are clichés—which is not to say that they are invalid, or stupid, or even absurd (though like anything else, they may be). Feelings are common to us all, never new, stunning only to the person feeling them at the time, and foolish (or boring) to everyone else. Thoughts, however, can be affective whether one shares them at the moment or not, and they can be original.

Feelings have no potential, they can never be anything but what they are. Ideals and thoughts, however, are full of potential. That is to say, love or melancholy only become more or less

as they develop as feelings. Yet the idea of love or melancholy ramifies indefinitely and can lead off in an infinity of directions.

This is not to belittle feelings—any more than one would belittle the lungs, or the intestines.



(A characteristic of the morbid intelligence, in its manner of thinking, is to think backwards from a given thought, to search behind even the most trivial and commonplace thought, for its motives (and one's own, in thinking it), and then, to reach again behind that, and again behind that, into the unclear brine of the mind itself. It is a cheerless search.)

Devastation, or, the wreck again. There have been heavy frosts this spring, and the blossoms on the fruit trees have been blackened. The blossoms are black as saints. The ants writhe in the sugar box.

Distortion, or, error. To err is to wander, or to turn, probably in an unanticipated direction, inadvertently. The mistake is not necessarily without advantage, however, nor, if such should be necessary, irrevocable.

Ink, or, the guitar. Returning from the middle distances, to the same points, repeatedly, from whatever direction, one homes, like a migrant bird or fish. Perhaps that is a function of thought, homing. In any case, one doesn't, perhaps can't, escape one's concerns. That is what constitutes a personal style.

Nonsense, or, distinctions. The German is ornate in terms of language, the Frenchman in terms of feeling. One can distinguish between the baroque intellect and the baroque heart.

Explanation, or, explication. In one's journal, one need only write a few words (though, on the contrary, it is there, in one's journal, that one tends to be most verbose, where privacy makes occasion for release rather than restraint. There, too, one may experiment with, and repeat, the shape and sound of old and new ideas.) For oneself, however, one may write, say, Boot, or Inclusion, and summon for oneself the cogent images and their array of meanings. For others, however, explanations are due—if, not forthcoming.

(The connection between thought and nonsense is this, that the double is not divisive. Those things which we term opposite

ought, by rights, rather to be termed complementary. That is how we term colors, such as orange and blue, or yellow and purple, which stand opposite each other on the artist's color wheel, and serve to highlight each other, intensify each other, and under certain circumstances can be brought to merge into each other. So it is with love and hate, with light and dark. So it is with thought, which when pretentious is nonsense, and when exercised under certain circumstances is absurd. Thought used as analysis risks absurdity. Also definitions of 'the right way.')

☆

Now, here is the jolly noon. There is a lilt in telling it. The vision climbs, the response is in retreat. The circle becomes careless as one becomes weary. There is a qua ! qua ! of fleeing geese, while thought is a form of lingering.

A THOUGHT IS THE BRIDE OF WHAT THINKING

Bravery is what they boast of.

The writer works from the inside out, but never gets out, partially because he can't and partially because, in any case, he doesn't want to.

It is only the mind, with its heart, that recognizes immaterial things; the senses are incapable of doing so.

The long sweep is to tell you no one's been there for awhile.

Lordy—what more can you say than that? He made up every story he told, and you still believed them, and would today, with us all. His cat kept rolling in the dust, like a dog or hen or an empty wine bottle. Nothing shiny about it.

He'd been up in the dark, he told us once. Walking. There was this fat woman staying there, and she had taken the medicine for her asthma, which was bad, especially in the spring. She'd been there awhile, and he loved her a bit, and was good to her two little children; she thought to go sit in the garden to get her breath, and there she sat and died. He came back from his walk and there she was in the moonlight among the little lettuces.

He was upset, of course, but with the help of a neighbor they got her into his car and he drove her to the hospital. They arrested him there for transporting a dead body, and took the children away and put them in a home.

His things sat there a long time.

Hawk this, little songster: the kitchen, the gas station, the shoes and socks, the toothpaste, the wooden chairs, the noodles, the catsup and coffee, the aspirin, the water, the shit, the newspaper, the pencil, the coughing, the toenails, the interesting minutes.

Often, and particularly in the hot weather, horses will stand side by side but facing in opposite directions. The one, as he switches his tail, drives the flies from the face and neck of the other, and no doubt stirs a breeze. Occasionally horses which are particularly fond of each other (and horses do develop very marked friendships) will rest their head on each other's rump.

He kept his horse, a young black gelding, in a field below his house with a flock of some thirty or so sheep. I've often seen the horse, his head hanging down over the rump of one of the sheep, while the sheep grazes or stares out over the field.

The poet plays with order, makes order of disorder, and disorder of order, intent upon confusing all the issues. He is unwilling to distinguish reality from veracity, and veracity from tale, and sees what he thinks to see.

His is a positive though a pessimistic view of life. Much is amusing as much is disgusting, but he says he's not afraid.

THE VIRTUES OF THE DEAD, OR, THE RETURN

Though the veil remains, the leaving off is inevitable. Someone else must rage and sorrow, hovering or thrown over the mortal smoke and wood, the mortal tongues, the mortal swinging and shit and dark green, bricked in with activity. Now she's the patient mother, or the mother of very patience herself, though perhaps she wondered what she'd been waiting for, during that last long episode of history.

Often during the last fifteen years of her life, J's grandmother talked of her death. She told the family that she wanted to be buried in a coffin of solid bronze. When she did die, finally, the request was honored, though no one in the family approved. Their disapproval, in fact, was the main topic of conversation throughout the period before the funeral and afterwards. It was covered with roses.

To what degree can one choose one's personality? or even control the outward signs of one's personality? If one admires quiet people but is naturally talkative, can one choose to become silent and consistently remain so? And is there something dishonest in thus adopting a role?

What about the person who disguises a shy disposition with chatter? or the person who feels loud but is silent? the person who feels quiet and is yet talkative?

His loud voice was like a curse.

I am not afraid to curse you.

I am not afraid of anger.

I divide you with my anger; May you
fall apart

May you
be separated from what you love
what you love and
what you hate

May your tongue fall out and all your words
be lost

May your fingers be lost
and your home

But most of all, your tongue
and your right eye.

May you be divided in that way.

An old Indian woman in Arizona said that in some instances the souls of Indians have returned to inhabit the bodies of White

Men. If this is true, then though it is still possible to say that the Indian in his time lived in a more harmonious manner, and with greater reverence for his natural world, than the White Man, and that the Indian way is in fact more honorable in this respect, yet it is no longer always possible to distinguish the Indian from the White Man, for the White Man is not necessarily a White Man, nor the Indian an Indian, anymore, in these days.

The pathway to the heart, he said, and a dignified death. Time has a switch on us. You shrink as you stand, of course; but who's to know? Out beyond the stars the hours grow, unhampered by the dirt clods. Here lies a kid only a day old. Beside him, his grandfather, eighty-nine. The life simply went out of him. And here is he whose father and children outlived him, in the dimensions of their present lives.

The cut on the hand
and the brown elbow
To the tooth
of the mosquito some flesh, how plump
a word.
I, too, smast the beast
its minute harm.

Where spring is a major distraction, the potatoes rise among the daffodils. Who is cursing the poet for his poetry? What I write all day, o mirrors and pilots, is engraved in the type-writer. I keep running across his name.

What was a passion is now a pencil. What was a glowing sunset went down. What in winter was (an) abandoned (wasps' nest) now writhes. What was a dash remains one.

What was a letter has been sent.

Writing, at the end of the day, off the top of one's head, seems much easier with a typewriter than with a pen. The mind remains free of its own words by being distanced, visually and tactilely, from the paper to which they are transposed. And the privacy of the thought is shielded by the clatter, just as background music provides a wall of sound through which you don't hear the noises of anyone else.

Tonight is silent; I hear my own pulse and a distant coyote.

A secret inner fantasy life, full of romance. I've never out-grown that, nor many other things. Perhaps one simply learns to conceal oneself, the secrets becoming more so. Perhaps not.

The Man of Honor may lie to anyone but himself. The trouble with lying to others, however, is that, as one tells the lie, one comes to believe it, and so to lie to oneself after all. Motives and intentions become distorted, and one thinks oneself better or worse than one is. It is thus that one becomes lost in one's egocentricity, and thought contracts into a tight ball of anxiety.

Alone, I have no personality and usually prefer that.

A Man of Honor will defend his principles, but not blindly. 'Loveliest' is too easy an answer.

And the artist, old ballad? bold balladeer, the road fell the mud a delight lay a beauty the field stares a cow and shakes its bell, the bell, shakes its bell; delight lay a beauty
in 'Everyday speech
isn't rich enough for the ideas it's got to contain
'... know enough about poetry.'

Is art, then, a moral force? or morality an artistic force?

Perhaps, by definition, but not of necessity. And only if one can make certain distinctions, between the artist and the artistic act on one hand, and between the artistic act and the work of art, on the other. That is, one must be quite certain of the difference between what is done and how it is done, between the act and the acting. (These distinctions are quite artificial, if not arbitrary, and are made for the sake of the argument, as they say, to order one's understanding. In reality, to isolate one factor from another is to neglect the most important factor of all, namely, the relationships between them.)

Whole days unlace themselves.

It is the acting that concerns us here; ethics need pertain to the artist only as it is reflected in the quality and nature of his acting, the quality of intellect and attention, the bringing all powers to bear. It has nothing to do with the finished work of art, which may but needn't have moral import or a moral message. Most often, in fact, the work itself maintains ethical neutrality. (However, it's effect is usually beneficial, in that great Art serves as great Nature does, to both elevate and humble the observer. This is its effect, but not its purpose.)

Nor are the moral qualities of the artist himself relevant, who may be a liar and a cheat, a murderer, a sneak and a thief, or indeed a generous and saintly man. For, alas, he who maintains that one must be a good man in order to produce good works is subtly mistaken. In a question of ethics, the Good differs from its adjectival form used, say, as This is a good poem, or, even, This is a good cookie.

It is important, however, to think about everything—or, at least, anything—but not such that one ceases to enjoy; not so as to pull dead flowers off sleeping branches.

I believe in the . . . of the old dark room, piano. One responds—it's the responsibility makes me—say, the real is as real does. Humbles the wormy, fertile hand.

And yet I maintain that it is both well-meant and intelligent, and in that, kindly.

Certainty is given to the simple-minded. To know what one thinks under all circumstances, to have definite and final opinions, is a challenge to the ethical intellect. (It is different with decisions, which often enough the intelligent man makes easily, if arbitrarily.) The delicate intellect, in seeing all sides of the question, is apt to forget which side is his own.

The room is dark in its four corners. Something drapes the walls.

One wishes for an inclusive art; of what occurs, the corollaries and to what occurs, the tangents.

On Wednesday afternoon, a friend said, 'You can't say anything unless you can say everything; that's not what Hegel said but it's what he meant to say.'

To say everything, or to attempt to do so, is an act of integrity, insofar as integrity may be defined as "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety." This becomes relevant to ethics by association. "The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness."

The artistic act has integrity to the extent that it is a generally inclusive reckoning, which takes anything into account, the diverse and the disparate. The artist, thereby, displays a vast tolerance, and his work exerts the moral force of combination.

He must be both responsive and responsible, for his work reflects an intensity of response, reciprocal with the world.

In Athens is an inscription which says:

"The People of the Oropians
to Timarchos, Son of Theodosos
on Account of His Virtue"

and George Seferis, in his journal, writes, "I do not know this Timarchos, nor his virtue. Never mind, they felt the need to mention it."

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*"My friends, let us love what we
love. The man who damn well refuses
to love what he loves dooms himself."*

— VAN GOGH

*In the light of certain theories of
history in which man is characterized
by an economical struggle for survival,
the persistence of poetry is a difficult
fact to account for. Poetry is the
history of man's disinterestedness.*

— WALLACE FOWLIE

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