

Why I Am Ambivalent About Christmas

by Paul Strashok

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Vancouver,

Some people are intent upon making Christmas a big occasion in their lifestyle and purpose. They truly believe that it is a celebration of the birth of the Messiah (The Almighty God manifesting as that Child in the manger.) During my studies with one particular Christian organization, we did not keep Christmas as such, but

instead had intensive Bible trainings for 10 days over the holiday season. During those times, high vision and revelation were the order of the day. I never realized till much later how blessed were those trainings in the New Testament Scriptures. They affected my life and music many years later.

The best Biblical scholars put

the birth of the Messiah at 3 or 4 B.C. Even the accounts of His birth in Matthew and Luke seem to be in conflict and require a much diligent searching out of the Scriptures with studies and helps to determine the validity of the writings. (It is important to note that the Gospel of Matthew portrays Messiah as the King in the Kingdom, while Luke portrays Messiah in His perfect humanity and for that reason, the Gospel accounts may differ.)

Suffice to say that Christ's birth was supernatural and divine – we can all agree with that. However, those same scholars put the birth of Messiah in the late summer or early fall of the year (shepherds would not be with their flocks in the winter season).

In these troublous times in which we live, it is important to be accurate in our understanding of that which we believe. (I even heard one man say that, because the Muslims regard Jesus as a prophet we should keep Christmas. I'm sorry but that doesn't cut it for me!)

Ever since that time in which I would attend Bible trainings in California over the winter solstice, I have had ambivalent feelings about

"...Christ's birth was supernatural and divine - we can all agree with that..."

keeping the Christmas holiday. Yes, I have seen A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens many times (the first time I saw it as a five-year old it scared the living daylights out of me!).

This season can be a trying time for many of us. The other day, I was in Starbucks with a client in my Peer Support Work. They were playing a

selection of seasonal tunes by different

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musicians in the background. The most touching one was by Sarah McLaughlin. I could feel her heart coming through.

Something in my heart tells me that we are rapidly approaching the end of this present Age of Grace and that Messiah's Second Advent is very near. I want to be prepared to meet the King when He reaps the harvest of the earth. I am not 100% sure that keeping Christmas will make this any more of a reality. May His grace be with us in these trying and troublous times.

Remembrance Reconsidered

by Satya Devi

I had the priviledge of having Remembrance Day Lunch at an Old folks home. Some were in fact veterans with their various crosses and medals over their johnny-shirts. I doubt if many of them knew about the war they fought and how it changed the world. Years earlier, I had refused to buy a poppy from a Veteran saying, "I hope you know why you went because if the shoe were on the other foot, I wouldn't do it for you."

" they shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them."

-----For the Fallen, by Laurence Binyon

I attended a Meditation for Remembrance Day, and afterwards talked with some friends about war and one said, imagine being born to kill your fellow man, who Mother Theresa says is Christ in his terrible disguise. We know of many battles, there's always wars and destruction. "Knee deep in the Big Muddy, and the Big Fool says to move on"—Pete Seeger. I also know from the Bhagavad Gita, the long, lonely pain of Arjuna and Krishna as Arjuna is preparing for a battle, which he does not want to fight.

And then, there is the One, who would not, could not, for any reason, kill his brother and offered his own flesh and blood of the new Covenant, passing the wine around saying "Do this in remembrance of me."

How beautiful a cup of wine, to loosen the tongue of remembrance.

Editorial Note

by Jim Gifford

Photos of \$20 million plus homes for sale in British Columbia were the front-page story in a local paper recently. Meanwhile, on the streets, destitute persons scrounge for food, clothing and shelter.

A cornerstone of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's principles was his vision of 'Just Society'. Isn't it about time?

The Editorial Board of In A Nutshell welcomes letters, articles, and poetry on mental health issues from you, our readers.

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Christmas Reflections

by Jim Gifford

Gazing out the window of the Wired Monk Coffee House in Kitsilano, after a night of downfall, snow is laden deeply upon the Earth. It caresses the grass, the street, passersby, and clothes branches of the trees in a white comforter. A few cars and trucks, and the odd bus, have the sound of their wheels and motors muffled by the robe of winter. An aura of silence permeates the world around me.

Silence, that elusive quality both inner and outer seems so absent amid the hectic pace of the Christmas Season. Persons seem to be caught up in the shopping mentality of hustle and bustle, succumbing to emotional and mental overload. In aborted honour of the sacred physical birth of "The Prince Of Peace", stress and tension take hold, our culture manifesting a state of mania. Depression, flip side of the

same coin, also appears, the two poles like waves and troughs of universal vibrational energy.

The lesson for humanity this morning is it's okay, vital and necessary to slow down. Hurry is the devil itself. As The Bible says "Be still and know that I am God". In each moment enjoy being with family and friends, for they, along with good

tes the Up. Our sojour tes the for sissies. It re *"Amid psychic to dis-ease practice as the art of swim- processes, keeping in the sea of to the art of swim- processes, keeping in the sea of to the sea of the sea of to the sea of the sea*

your head above water."

health, are the truly important values of life. Yet there may be friction between our masks of persona, resulting in dysfunction, and we may find it a challenge to keep our sanity when not communing with the Heart of hearts.

Surrender to Here and Now, but Never Give Up. Our sojourn on this plane of existence is not for sissies. It requires courage (grace under

> pressure) and perseverance. At times tragedy and struggle may overwhelm you and it may be difficult to stay afloat. Amid psychic dis-ease practice the art of swimming in the sea of unconscious processes, keeping your head above water. Unfortunately, we may be paralyzed into inactivity. Yet there is wisdom even in this dilemma for, as the obverse of a popular saying states, "Don't just do something; sit there." When you are ready you will know

what to do next. Enjoy life; play the game; go along for the ride; and remember the universe is unfolding as it must. Love and be content, for whether baglady, madman or king, we are simply performing in The Magic Show Of Life as The Magnificent Masquerade of The Creator.

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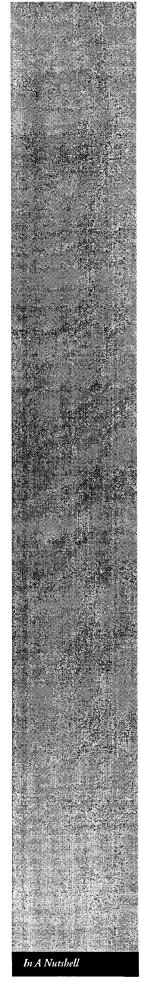


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Quote:

"For although memories, of a season, for example, Melt into a single snapshot, one cannot guard, treasure That stalled moment. It too is flowing, fleeting; It is a picture of flowing, scenery, though living, mortal, Over which an abstract action is laid out in blunt, Harsh strokes."

John Ashbery



Ode To A Skylark

by Terrence Levesque

Having caught up on my reading, I am downloading the television. All I do is switch channels. Our reception is not the best and I struggle to find any program with interesting content. With the wide range of programming, picking and choosing what to watch is an act in itself.

When I tire of television, I turn to some music on the radio. I am truly disappointed that all the music that is played is retro music, which has been played over and over for the last forty years. I

wait patiently for someone to break through in this new age – like the Beatles did in '64 or Elvis did in '56.

I need this electronic stimulation most often to lift me out of my depressing moods. When I am not watching television or listening to the radio, I relax with a cigarette and a beer. To me this is not a sin, but rather it is a vice.

Many other people smoke cigarettes and drink beer. I am not the only one. I also drink a lot of coffee in a day. I can see no ill effects of this consumption and it keeps my body in a relaxed, even state.

Some other people (doctors included) want me to stop whatever I am doing. They are not happy with my consumptive behaviour. However, I feel that without this input I would not have a life. And so I continue down this ruinous path and I know that drugs are prevalent among the young people of today. However, for one reason or another, I do not do drugs. At my age now (sixty) I am getting too old to be hanging out at the bar and I now try to get my proper rest by sleeping through the night rather than being out there running around all night.

In the morning the newspaper is delivered to my door and I begin my day by reading the morning news. In this new time it does not matter what year it is. It could be 2005, 2010, or 2020. It does not matter, it's all the same. I do want to

> know what day it is and also what time it is on the clock. I no longer hold a regular job and I do not work from 9 to 5. I have a lot of free time and I like it that way.

I am diligent in keeping any appointments or meetings that I have and I make sure I change my clothes. But enough of that. Where are we going in this life? What is there yet to accomplish? I may be sixty but I have

not given up on life. I have a bus pass and do not have a car. I do a lot of walking.

Lest you think that this article is mundane, let me tell you that it is a prelude of things to come. The very heart of matter moves. The universe is unfolding. You might say that this is an ode to a skylark or some such thing. Or art for art's sake. I wish you well my friend, hang in there and adieu.

Quote:

"The very heart

of matter moves.

Theuniverse is

unfolding."

"There is a sacred horror about everything grand. It is easy to admire mediocrity and hills; but whatever is too lofty, a genius as well as a mountain, an assembly as well as a masterpiece, seen too near, is appalling."

Victor Hugo

Let's Step Outside

by Frank G. Sterle, Jr.

I suppose that if I, some years before I'd be diagnosed with clinical mental illness, had known what was to happen, I'd have listened to my mom's warning to stay home and finish my school assignment—and to keep away from the ruffians at the arcade.

The arcade—the Laser Palace, or the Loser Palace, as a few of us referred to it—was considerably full that afternoon; and being a wet, humid day only exasperated the already-stuffy atmosphere inside. Nevertheless, I went straight for the *Space Shuttle* pinball machine and

plugged into its slot my two bits.

Taking off my worn, woolinsulated jean jacket, I noticed Barney, who was standing next to an adjacent video machine, looking at me ... glaring at me.

What's his problem? I thought to myself, returning my attention back to my pinball machine and pressing the start button.

"Michelson was up here, and he's looking for you," Barney informed me, seemingly gleefully. "He's drunk."

Barney—or Burney, as some knew him—was a fairly small-time,

small-hearted pot dealer. His faded denim jeans and jacket and weathered Dayton boots, coupled with his scraggly hair and beard, didn't make him look the least bit trustworthy. The fact was that he wasn't. And his rowdy appearance should have served to warn those of a pacifist predisposition not to deal with him and his conservatively portioned bags of grass.

"Thrills," was my response, putting on a brave façade—but I didn't mean it. The truth was that I really wasn't into a physical fight, and I began to wish that I had stayed home.

John Michelson was a tough-guy wannabe who frequently got drunk and then into street fights (people said he was a good fighter while under the influence of alcohol). He was also facing four years of jail time for rape, and the scum was attempting to live it up while on bail. His "good friend" Gary and his own brother, Rick, testified for the prosecution against John in exchange for reduced sentences for themselves. The three losers, no doubt stoned on dope and alcohol, one night attacked a girl who was hitchhiking.

I didn't want to appear intimidated by walking out of the arcade so soon, so I thought I would leave after a game or two. So I thought.

About five minutes into my game—I was doing well for a change (it figures)—through the corner of my eye I could see the arcade door opening. Sure enough it was John. But just as fast

> as he'd entered, he'd disappeared behind some video machines. *Where did he go?* I thought, as my heart started racing.

The next thing I knew, he was standing right beside me, and I could smell the liquor on him.

"Let's step outside," he demanded.

"When I finish my game," I countered, trying to at least appear confident.

John and I went back a few years, though we really only knew each other by face. The very first time I saw him I was walking along

Marine Drive on a summer's day in 1982. He was with two younger boys and walking in my direction. As they approached me and passed by, John gave me a very dirty look. I, not wanting to start something, turned my eyes straight ahead.

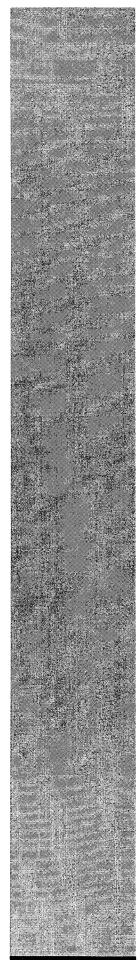
It wasn't until about two years later that he, acting as though he'd never seen me before, acted quite friendly towards me. Perhaps it was because I hung around with a rather-chubby Cree Indian, Daryl, with a no-nonsense attitude, but John, unlike that first time, seemed to have no problem with my presence. That was until I refused to "front" \$25 to him for an eighth-of-an-ounce bag of pot. He apparently felt that I should trust him with my money while he would disappear into the

(continued on pg. 14)



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"And his rowdy appearance should have served to warn those of a pacifist predisposition not to deal with him..."



In A Nutshell

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Minute Particulars

by Andrew Feldmár

Oppression is real. Oppression is pressure, shoulds, musts, have-tos; it's coercion, persuasion, scripts and expectations. A child growing up in an oppressive home, family, or school, will have certain survival skills, that may become crippling later in life, where, once used to tyranny and oppression, she will not know how to conduct herself in a loving, free environment.

If I can make myself absent, I cannot be controlled. Many times I hid behind the child sitting in front of me in school, to avoid being quizzed by the teacher; often I remained silent or lied in order not to trigger a bully's wrath. Predation is the first and most terrifying fact of life. The essence of trauma is to be captured and tortured. "Captured" means confined, unable to escape; "tortured" means having to endure any experience that is not of one's own choosing. Childhood, obviously, is often traumatic. Most schools are traumatic.

There are at least three forms of absence: one can hide oneself away for protection from invasive others (I know of a girl who was reduced to locking herself in the bathroom for hours, to avoid her father's compulsive, non-stop chattering); one can disappear into others (Elisabeth Shue, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, says that she is the best prostitute because as soon as she's with a man, she knows exactly what he wants, who he wants her to be, and she becomes it); one can remain supine, hardly exist at all (for safety, they trim and top trees, until they lose their magnificence and grandeur). Given the frequency of absence, a very good question to ask is "Are you there? Behind your eyes, are you there?"

Tyranny, pressure, reduces a child's existence to the plane of compliance vs. rebellion, or obedience vs. disobedience. This makes it impossible for the child to practice authenticity, for there is no time for living from the center, from the core of one's being. To the constant stream of commands and interference one can only react, and autonomous action has to be put on the backburner, waiting for peace and quiet and safety for manifesting oneself, creating one's life congruent with who one really is. Decades can pass and one is still in survival mode, reacting to pressures, by then unable even to imagine what one's own life would look like if only one could manifest it with

support rather than against hostile and humiliating opposition.

"Imagine freeing yourself from all automatic, unthinnking, unfeeling, wiredin, habitual, instant reactions..."

Living in fear, dodging the punishment implied in daring to be, one assumes impenetrable disguises, hiding one's mind from others, or altogether losing it, until one's real self may be difficult or impossible to find. Instead of love, calling it love, parents unleash their hunger on their child, thinking that they own him. Self-possession is an achievement.

W. H. Auden wrote, "The truth, like love and sleep, resents

Approaches that are

too intense." The first and foremost task of therapy is to find the other, however distant, absent, or confused, that other in the other who may one day tell us what he really wants. Martin Buber talked of "imagining the real." Imagine freeing yourself from all automatic, unthinking, unfeeling, wired-in, habitual, instant reactions, replacing them with slower, more considered, heartfelt responses. Habits are like viruses in a computer: self-serving automatic action sequences that perpetuate themselves and have no regard as to the destruction they unleash. We all have a sense of being thrown, our existence determined by the accidents of our beginnings, helplessly careening forward, watching but dazed and perplexed. Not easy to take charge, take responsibility, slow down and actively make considered choices. "As small as a world and as large as alone," wrote e. e. cummings. The danger of waking up, of taking charge, is that we'll be all

alone. As if company implied loss of freedom, and freedom comes with the loss of company. As if the price of belonging was loss of freedom. One can be dependent and directed, or alone and abandoned. How to unlearn such frightening constriction? If this were true, it would be equivalent of being in a room, not knowing what to do, for opening the two doors this room has, we'd glimpse death waiting at both doors.

What can a therapist do? "Uttering a word," Wittgenstein wrote, "is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination." The therapist can't or shouldn't be one more person vying

to be an authority, telling the patient what is or isn't right. The patient fears that innocence and truthfulness, spontaneous candor, will only bring out the predator in others. "Be a lamb and the wolf will appear," says a Russian proverb. Successful disagreement, attachment without merger, love and respect, trust and support, may be entirely novel experiences for some people.

Dependent and imprisoned patients need to be freed from psychopharmacologists and other pessimistic experts who foster life-long dependency and imprisonment. Acknowledging that a patient's defenses and behavior may serve sensible if antiquated ends, even admiring the efficacy of impenetrable defenses, eventually opens the door to despair, then mourning and grieving what needed to be dealt with in order to survive. The therapist aims for the experience of *noninvasive closeness*.

The tragic consequence of coming from an oppressive background is the difficulty of sustaining what is voluntary, and beginning to experience it as compulsory. One rebels even against one's own will, let alone the will of another. When in a love relationship I express my desires, my preferences, in effect revealing to my partner how I would like to be loved, and my partner misunderstands me and instead of gratitude for the instruction, feels resentment for being controlled and subjugated, the relationship cannot last, it deteriorates into needless bouts of power-struggle.

Love is *voluntary* slavery. With tyranny in the background, love becomes unsustainable, impossible, one learns not to trust or believe even in its existence.

A. S. Neill, a Scottish progressive educator, founded Summerhill School, with the idea of creating an environment for children that did not

> deprive them of their freedom. His efforts were misunderstood and opposed. Very much like R. D. Laing's experiments to provide a safe and free environment for those who otherwise would be taken over by psychiatry. There is a tendency to perpetuate tyranny, and mistrust freedom.

On a more optimistic note, here is the poem I quoted from above:

maggie and milly and molly and may went down to the beach (to play one day)

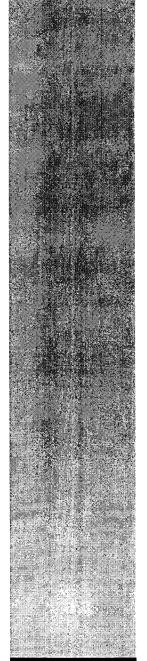
and maggie discovered a shell that sang so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

milly befriended a stranded star whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

may came home with a smooth round stone as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me) it's always ourselves we find in the sea.



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Quote:

"The therapist

aims for the

experience of

noninvasive

closeness..."

"Your children are not here to fill the void left by marital dissatisfaction and disengagement. They are not to be utilized as a substitute for adult-adult intimacy. They are not in this world in order to satisfy a wife's or a husband's need for love, closeness or a sense of worth. A child's task is to fully develop his/her emerging self. When we place our children in the position of satisfying our needs, we rob them of their childhood."

Aaron Hess



In A Nutshell

The Wall

by Oliver Cross

"Ich bin ein Berliner."

-John F. Kennedy

Shortly after I was diagnosed schizophrenic for the first time in 1991, I met a wonderful friend who continues to be a big part of my life. She believed in me. In fact, her whole family believed in me more than my own did. When my family was trying to get me to believe I was crazy, she talked about the imperfections of generalizing and the socialization of excluding someone, focusing on someone's differences.

I believed her and started to fight, internally. I didn't know anything of what she was talking about, the literature of R.D. Laing and writings of Anaïs Nin for example.

Time is all we have. What do we believe?

We had our times, I tested her faith. I was committed so many times in subsequent years. When she finally gave up a bit and started to concede that perhaps I was sick and would not recover, I had learned and practiced enough that I knew I could end this, I could see a light at the end of the tunnel, I was getting out of here and nothing could stop me. It was too late to give up on me, although this was a hard thing to explain to anybody.

I continued to heal, slowly but surely, and continued making mistakes. I finally also found a psychiatrist who believed healing was possible.

A few years later I met a woman I hoped to marry. We died at the hands of aggressive lawyering in the legal system. She was encouraged to put me on the spot to have a psychiatric assessment. I refused. She was coerced to be complicit in the active destruction of our relationship, in the dishonouring of what it was. She did participate. I helped destroy it as well, I lost time protecting myself. I still don't see what happened as necessary. What was necessary was that I did not find myself participating in my diagnosis in psychiatric terms again.

She put me in harm's way and claimed she did not.

I learned out of this, I accepted that some people are unteachable. Sometimes all the patience in the world is not enough. It's true that we cannot learn when on psychiatric drugs. However, people not on them and with no other good reason who simply refuse to learn—what is that? Outrageous! I now accept that such people exist.¹

I do not believe that God would intend me to focus on building a life with one woman and no one else. I believe that we must have multiple soul mates. I did love her. I do love her. Otherwise, I would not be able to forgive her.

I have needed to grieve her as a loss in my life, to see it as a death of a loved one. I miss her, I miss the way I felt with her.

What a waste.

I still remain the best of friends with the other woman, the first one who believed in me (sometimes we agree to disagree).

Psychiatric diagnoses are like cars, there's a new make and model every year. We don't have to buy them.

Here's a reminder that anyone can be diagnosed, and not always voluntarily because that is the nature of the mental health act. And diagnosis is forever (even if sickness is not).²

Psychiatry does provide relatively easy answers, and no one needs to provide as easy an answer to turn away from psychiatric beliefs.

(continued on pg. 13)

Aunt Jenny

by Alex Winstanley

A fallen bridge in your eyes, and on the far side the lilies of lucidity.

Satan called you out into the garments of death convinced you to swallow those pills.

And you lay dying in your room for two days, slipping into dreams, as cool green water trickled over your skin;

You were prom queen, a princess of sunflowers in your youth.

But then you were Ophelia.

That slithering awkward word, the diagnosis stretches between us like green rope and I cry for the broken stem of your mind.

A fallen bridge in your eyes, and on the far side, the lilies of lucidity.

highway blues

by reinhart

i've been stuck in this old lonely town a long, long lonely time that old restless feeling has once again captured my heart and my soul and my mind

this city life feels like a jail there's stone walls everywhere we're either guards or prisoners doing time either here or there

my apartment house is my prison cell i'm doing a life sentence is there no-one who will pardon me and accept my sincere repentance

i step out on the concrete streets the pavement's cold and hard the trees and grass they only make me feel like i'm out in the prison yard

these city lights hardly ever dim it's enough to make you weep sometimes i get so very tired that i can hardly sleep

so i get up every morning drink my coffee and smoke my smoke it's what i need to get me through dealing with the city folk

'cause every day i'm out there breathing fumes the exhaust and pollution that's everywhere i have to drive a hundred miles just to get a breath of fresh air now i want to get away from it all climb inside my automobile throw my cares and worries to the wind and live my life behind the wheel

that restless urge for rambling and wandering o'er that land the freedom of the open road is where i make my stand

because i do anticipate an awful future where the world is a prison where there is no place left to escape to and no more hopeful vision

i'm tired of feeling like a slave i'm sick and tired of paying my dues it's been so long since i felt free i've got a case of the highway blues

i need to get in my car and on the road i need to make the highway my home i need to drive and drive for evermore underneath the heavenly dome

it's not like i have a destination someplace that i want to go it's the road itself that is calling to me and the journey i want to know

for now there's still some pristine spaces where a man can find his soul i need to see these virgin places through my windshield while i roll

so give me a car and give me some gas and give me a street to drive i'm a traveling man and i'll never stop as long as i'm still alive

Ghosts

by Alex Winstanley

While lounging in the psych ward I kept company with many a dead man.

Sitting under the white covers of my bed, Shakespeare appeared, and his ghost heaved with jest. While I stared sadly in the mirror he'd laugh at my suffering. Coloured poems fell from him like an Autumn tree shaking its leaves.

He called me Prince and pressed me against his paper heart whispering his condolence.

Walking in the rain outside the cold stone hospital Milton belted out verses into my earthly ear. The cherubim gathered in his shining gold coin eyes, like minnows of light assembling in a pond, light radiating from his blindness.

While getting some yogurt from the over-clean fridge Thoreau called me "Messiah" as he sat at his desk by the heavenly blue-hued pond, gazing calmly into the trusted future chipmunks and loons and owls crying in his independent hardy thoughts. His mind, cutting through the centuries, alighted on my heart.

I thumped a ping-pong ball against the walls, testing my reactions. Even Ginsberg visited my room, force-fields of howling words coursing about his ghostly form, his truth was a pigeon of light fluttering through the whirlwinds of my dislocated mind.

Now I see living men in my home, and they watch me softly, with blue eyes, sitting at the kitchen table.

(continued from pg. 8)

The lessons learned from psychiatry are transferable to other areas of life. Peace of mind is right there, within us, yet we cannot grasp it, there is no use chasing it, reaching for it or striving towards it. It comes to us. For a mental patient in psychiatric hospital, freedom is right there, right outside. Yet there's no point running for it or trying to force it.

We can be filled with fear and ignorance. That does not stop us. Learning, and teachingeducation-and the time it takes... remain the cure for that.

¹Although, I must have been contemplating the idea for quite some time because I have always and continue to write using a nom de guerre.

² The assumption that if we have nothing to fear we won't mind being cooperative with authorities is not good enough.

The Chaos and the Liberty of Insanity

by Alex Winstanley

The beauty of insanity is the liberty. I cannot express to you the joy I feel having once lived overwhelmed by the mental white rivers of psychosis, and having survived, memories intact.

When I first began to unhinge into the wonders of psychosis, I psychically attacked witches dressed as normal, overweight Mexican ladies. Crouching down in the basement, I did not eat, as demons infested my body with their black defiance of God. How they screamed to be so near a being as holy as me. I stared in the mirror, naked, hours on end, burning the demons with fists clenched.

"I've been crazy so many times all the corners have been knocked out of my mind," the old caucasian woman told me, both of us in hospital robes. I saw cherubim tugging at her ears; and told her, to heal her mind, she should plant a garden in her backyard. Her necklace contained dark emotional energy, so I smashed it in front of her, proclaiming her free from the Antichrist.

I remember flying to see the Devil where he lived in a distant solar system. He roared at the very air of existence; he rebelled against singed his tormented black body. I also recall whispering endless messages of love to my superstar girlfreind, Lauryn Hill. I remember falling out of sleep, back into my physical body, and hearing Jesus call me to a new life of healing the world with my magical powers.

I was so gifted I could kiss every girl in hospital. (I was trying to cover every race on the rainbow.) So magically gifted my doctor had to threaten to put me in a locked facility. When I went home at Christmas, I danced with Shakira naked in the living room.

(My doctor later said, "If I was dancing naked with Shakira I wouldn't want to be taking my meds either.")

A razor blade-the mysterious division between this rock-solid reality and my own invented universe-cut through me.

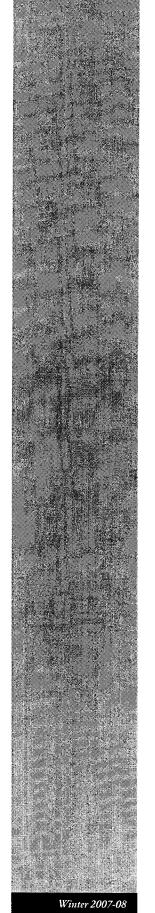
And oh, the pain I caused my loved ones who would visit with hope in their eyes! "Maybe he will be different this time, maybe he will be better, maybe he has gained some insight." They'd find me, crouched by my bed, mumbling about the Second Coming, head bowed, hardly making eyecontact. They would look into my eyes and see only emptiness-like an early death-bottomless holes, and suffering.

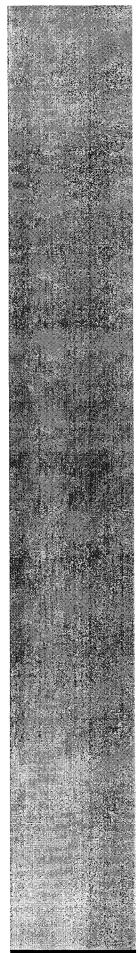
I was standing in a moving tunnel, trapped by an earthquake. I floundered in the depths of the earth, worried about the invisible creatures surrounding me, screaming at me. The dimension I was lost in had so many textures and nuances, all mere shadows of reality.

Once I could find endless beauty in the romance of my once unhinged mind; look at stars and see the life on that star: alien races with two eyelids, who, when opening the second set, looked straight into your thoughts.

(continued on pg. 17)







In A Nutshell

(continued from pg. 5)

rented house of some drug dealer who supposedly refused to face most of his customers.

Although John insisted that there was nothing for me to worry about, I insisted—but to no avail—that I go with him into the dealer's residence. John, my Cree friend warned me, was known to, at best, pinch a couple joints' worth of pot for himself or, at worst, even help himself to all of the money.

Following that tense disagreement, John decided that he didn't like me and that I was a "rat" (i.e. police informant).

One Saturday night, he, along with a couple of his friends, expressed his contempt for me by throwing little pieces of rolled-up paper at my head while I, like usual, was racking up a high score on the *Star Wars* video game. But what was I to do? Pick a fight with all three goofs? Not bloody likely!

The next day, I was drinking a mickey of Southern Comfort at

Daryl's place with the previous night's humiliation lingering in my thoughts. And the alcohol (surprise, surprise) stirred up in me passionate anger and a confident determination to even the score with my nemesis. By the time we had driven uptown to the arcade, I was as obnoxious and cocky as a drunk could get—and I would pay the price for it.

I went inside and called him out onto the cement parking lot. Once outside, and with about a dozen denim-jean and leather-clad onlookers from the arcade surrounding us, we got physical, and I got the very worst of it

Ever since that fight, I felt somewhat subordinate to him, while he, on the contrary, seemed to feel superior to me. But it didn't take me very long to rebel against that perceived subordination, and I started to give him dirty looks. One day I even gave him a shoulder bump as I passed him on my way from the Laser Palace to the Muffin Break.

Not good enough, was his mute response, as he assaulted me from behind.

It was, in my opinion, a clumsy attempt at getting me into a headlock, for I fairly-easily managed to slip out of his grip. But he continued to wrestle me, as thoughts raced through my mind—thoughts which included Shane's voice telling me that he'd come up town to get some stuff for his mom, and my mother's voice telling me that I should stay home and finish my homework and to stay away from the ruffians at the arcade; but perhaps the most intense thought was that of my defeatist complex, which told me as I was being hit that I was in deep trouble and would be the loser.

We both landed on the red-carpeted (albeit cement based) floor and rolled around for about five seconds, each of us determined to get on top of the other and thus gain control. Fortunately, I was able to get him on his hands and knees with my right knee pressed down onto his back.

> "Now it's your turn!" I told him, while returning the assault. However, with a sudden burst of energy, he threw himself up and me off his back. John's friends took him outside

to wait for me and cool off at the same time. I, on the other hand, stayed inside with my skinny knees knocking together, while I looked around on the floor for my glasses; I soon discovered them all twisted up

like a pretzel.

"I was as obnox-

ious and cocky as

a drunk could get

- and I would

pay the price for

it."

I had fear in my heart, and he had drunken rage in his. About ninety seconds later, he came back in. "Come hear, Frank," John demanded.

"No way, man," I declined, as he approached me.

He started rambling on about why he was ticked off at me, anger building up in his voice.

Likely feeling confident that I wasn't going to strike back—probably from the frightened look in my eyes—he hit me once on the left cheek. But my reflexes rather than my nervousness dictated my physical response, for which he was off all the worse.

Our roles were temporarily reversed. I had become the aggressor while, it appeared, he became the fearful.

Seeing this, the arcade attendant—short, but with heavily built arms (perhaps through the use of steroids)—jumped me from the side and held me to the floor; and, meanwhile, John went outside to wait for me there. I was then left with no choice but to step out the door.

The moment I was outside, I was engulfed with debilitating fear, as the drunken asshole walked towards me with a malicious facial expression. And it was because of my fear that he was able to wrap his arm around my neck and,

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with ease, throw my body, which was paralyzed with fear, to the concrete ground. He was also then able to drop his knee to my abdomen—though I do not recall feeling any pain—before being pulled off of me.

It was then and there that I chose to leave, which would be for the last time; for the Laser Palace would be closed down only days later by a city council embarrassed by and fed up with all the criminal activity which occurred at the place. (Maybe some good did come from the fight; a proverbial silver lining of the dark, gloomy cloud.)

I walked out the door, with my coat over my shoulder, a gash on my cheek and mangled glasses left behind in the arcade. *What a day!* I thought.

"Frank!" came the enraged cry from behind. John had taken off his shirt and was running towards me, Clint Eastwood style.

Glancing around, I then ran across the street and onto the shopping-mall parking lot. I dropped my coat and watched the lunatic charging at me.

With an audience from the arcade running behind him, he stopped and attempted another assault on me. I pulled back, and he missed. He was obviously starting to wear thin and lose coordination.

It was immediately following his clumsiness that I proved to him, in a physical sense, that he should've quit back at the arcade.

But finally, he did quit. And I started my way home, with the eyes of shoppers on my cut face.

However, all the commotion must have caught somebody's attention, because the police were called.

The police officer, having heard my story, seemed to make an effort to be sympathetic; nonetheless, he still insisted that I go to the hospital to have checked-out my condition. Once there, and feeling foolish, I went through the paperwork; and I couldn't help but ponder over how I got into such a mess.

Finished with administration, I was escorted by the police officer to the examination area.

Walking through the entrance to the "With an audiexamination room, I once again endured the brief presence of that ence from the scum, John, who must've been taken arcade running to the hospital shortly after I'd arrived. He sat in a wheelchair with behind him, he his head hanging down as though he stopped and was passed out. attempted an-He was the reason that I was at other assault on

the hospital and faced with the prospect of an emotional mother greeting me when the officer got me home.

Goof," was the last and only thing I would say to him. (Yes, I did see him again; but nothing was said, and, by way of silent yet mutual agreement, there never was a rematch.)

I should've stayed home, I thought to myself, while hearing my mother's voice in my head. I should've listened to her.

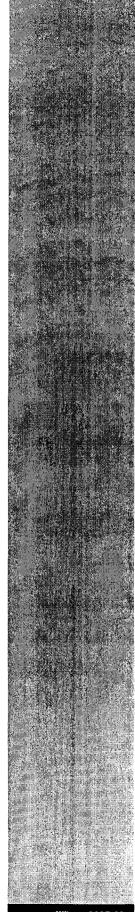
www.mentalhealthconsumer.net/ FrankGSterleJr

Quote:

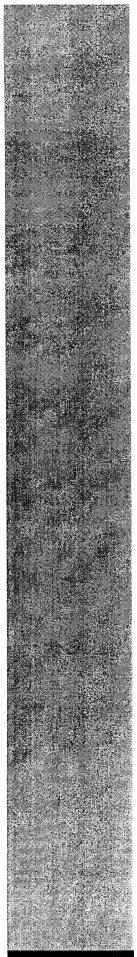
me."

"Today so much rebellion is aimless and demoralizing precisely because children have no values to challenge. Teenage rebellion is a testing process in which young people try out various values in order to make them their own. But during those years of trial, error, embarrassment, a child needs family standards to fall back on, reliable habits of thought and feeling that provide security and protection."

Neil Kurshan



Winter 2007-08



In A Nutshell

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Bookworm

<u>Profanations</u> Giorgio Agamben Zone Books, N. Y., 2007

Reviewed by Andrew Feldmár

These are essays, meditations on memory, oblivion, literature, photography, philosophy, history and film. Agamben is professor of aesthetics at the University of Venice. I was pointed in his direction by two older men I respect, John M. Heaton in London and Robin Blaser in Vancouver, independently and with great synchronicity. Ever since then, I've been reading everything Agamben wrote and exists in translation.

Chapter 10 is entitled **The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema**. It's about the end of Orson Welles's movie, **Don Quixote**. Agamben asks, "What are we to do with our imaginations?when, in the end, they reveal themselves to be empty and unfulfilled, when they show the nullity of which they are made, only then can we pay the price for their truth and understand that Dulcinea – whom we have saved – cannot love us." The beautiful can be cruel, and the ugly can love...

Often, Agamben's prose slips into poetry, as it does in Chapter 6, **Desiring**: "The messiah comes for our desires. He separates them from images in order to fulfill them. Or rather, in order to show they have already been fulfilled. Whatever we have imagined, we have already had. There remain the (unfulfillable) images of what is already fulfilled. With fulfilled desires, he constructs hell; with unfulfillable images, limbo. And with imagined desire, with the pure word, the beatitude of paradise."

The first chapter is about genius, which in Latin was the name for the god or *tutelary* spirit, or *daemon*, which becomes each man's guardian at the moment of birth. The Arabic word *djinn*, Anglicized as genie, is a comparable term. The spirit that was assigned to a woman at birth was called *juno*. You'll find in **Wikipedia** the following: "Originally, the genii and junones were ancestors who guarded over their descendants. Over time, they turned into personal guardian spirits, granting intellectual prowess. The juno was worshipped under many titles: *lugalis* - protected marriage; *Matronalis* protected married women; *Pronuba* - protected the bride; *Virginalis* - protected virginity. In addition to the genius or juno of each individual, regions, families, households and cities had a genius (*genius loci*). The genius of the Romans was a winged, naked youth. The genii dedicated to places were usually depicted as snakes. The origin of birthdays (*genetliaco* in Italian) comes from the custom of making sacrifices to one's *genius* or *juno*, on one's birthday.

The genius is that which generates me. So genius is not only the life force that lives me, but it is also what divinizes me, the telos or organizing principle that governs and expresses my entire existence. Agamben writes, "One must consent to Genius and abandon oneself to him; one must grant him everything he asks for, for his exigencies are our exigencies, his happiness our happiness. Even if his - our! - requirements seem unreasonable and capricious, it is best to accept them without argument. If in order to write you need - he needs! - a certain light yellow paper, a certain special pen, a certain dim light shining from the left, it is useless to tell yourself that just any pen will do, that any paper and any light will suffice To defraud one's own genius, means to make one's own life miserable, to cheat oneself...." The life one lives when one surrenders to and serves one's genius is called genialis, genial. This sounds very much like D. H. Lawrence when he talked of *desire* as sacred, originating from the same mysterious place where the life that lives one comes from. It is a sin to turn away from, to ignore this pre-individual guidance, and a whole science of psychosomatics could be developed from the friction between one's genius and one's ego. "Everything in us that is impersonal is genial. The force that pushes the blood through our veins or that plunges us into sleep, the

unknown power in our body that gently regulates and distributes its warmth or that relaxes or contracts the fibers of our muscles – that too is genial.... If we did not abandon ourselves to Genius, if we were only ego and consciousness, we would not even be able to urinate."

Agamben quotes Walter Benjamin as saying that a child's first experience of the world is not his realization that "adults are stronger but rather that he cannot make magic." We all have to learn the limits of

what can and what cannot be willed. When I am willful, I am being stupid, pushing the river that flows by itself; when I am willing, I might be stupid, submitting to somebody's will out of fear, not love. What is a true limit, and what is a selfimposed limitation? Courageous trial and error, learning from one's own experience is the only way. T. S.

Eliot wrote that in order to know how far you can go, you have to be prepared to go too far.

One of the themes of this wonderful book is the play and dialectic between the sacred and the profane. Agamben guesses that the author of the following poem wants to "confuse and render indiscernible the threshold that separates the sacred and the profane, love and sexuality, the sublime and the base." From Medieval France: Grinberge uncovered her ass and cunt and squatted down over his face. Shit fell from her ass in great profusion. While Audigier lay down on a dungheap, Grinberge sat on him and rubbed his ankles. Twice she had him kiss her ass until it was wiped cleaned.

Courtly love? This parody is an inversion of chivalry and the knightly quest. "It is always astonishing to find an obscene and burlesque drive alongside a more refined spirituality," concludes

Agamben.

"We all have to learn the limits of what can and cannot be willed." Revelation, for Agamben, is the world's irreparably profane character. Salvation is the discovery of the sacred precisely in the profanity of the world, of its being-thus. Agamben writes, "The Irreparable is that things are just as they are, in this or that mode, consigned without remedy to their way of being. States

of things are irreparable, whatever they may be: sad or happy, atrocious or blessed. How you are, how the world is – this is the Irreparable.... The world – insofar as it is absolutely, irreparably profane – is God."

There is a lot here to chew on...

The Chaos and the Liberty of Insanity

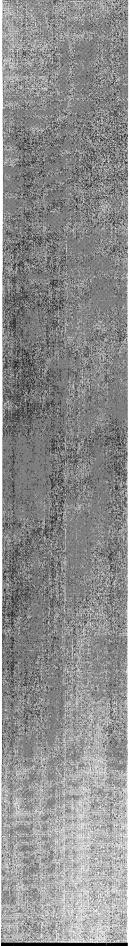
(continued from pg. 13)

A beautiful living thing juxtaposed on the lifeless sidewalk.

Boiling gallons of misplaced passion. A burning kiss sent by the sun.

I wrote eleven psalms of the modern kind. When visitors came, I would have them choose a psalm, then I would preach it to them. My walls were covered with paintings, done in conversations with Fidel Castro, George Bush, and Jaeena (my guardian spirit), to name just a few of my advisors.

I alone regret the tears my mother shed, as she saw me floundering about in an imagined world, like a bird with a maimed wing, that can only fly sideways through the coursing winds.



Websites of Interest to Consumers/Survivors/Ex-Mental Patients

This list is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive, and has left out many well-known sites that are widely available and easily accessible from local directories. This entire page in separate e-form for easy clickability will be sent upon request from: <u>duhring@shaw.ca</u>)

Organizations (General)

www.mind.org.uk www.power2u.org www.mhselfhelp.org www.wnusp.org www.tao.ca/~pact www.u-kan.co.uk www.mentalhealth.com www.icspp.org www.oikos.org www.icomm.ca/csinfo www.aapd-dc.org www.mindfreedom.org www.geocities.com www.mdri.org www.breggin.com www.cvdinfobase.ca/mh-atlas/ www.szasz.com www.antipsychiatry.org www.peoplewho.org www.walnet.org/llf www.mentalhealth.org.uk www.fsu.edu/~trauma/ip.html www.radpsynet.org www.contac.org www.buildfreedom.com/ft/psychiatric_survivors.htm www.samhsa.gov www.nucknfuts.com/index.php www.cam.org www.lino.com/~raiddat http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Antipsychiatry http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~nstaman/alternatives/OVNVinternational.htm

Advocacy and Activism

www.mental-health-matters.com/activist.html www.m-power.org www.narpa.org www.protectionandadvocacy.com www.cchr.org www.popan.org.uk www.advocateweb.com www.gamian-europe.com www.hri.ca www.hrweb.org www.jahf.com www.benzo.org.uk/prawi.htm http://members.aol.com/jimhofw/jimho.htm

Alternatives

www.talkingcure.com/index.asp www.alternativementalhealth.com www.medsfree.com www.moshersoteria.com www.transtherapy.org www.patchadams.org www.healthfreedommovement.com www.weglaufhaus.de www.elcollie.com www.stopshrinks.org www.lstpm.org www.emotiosinbalance.com www.the-bright-side.org/site/thebrightside/ www.doctoryourself.com www.emotionsanonymous.org www.projectresilience.com www.bu.edu/cpr/rr/alternative/ www.religiousfreedoms.org www.wildestcolts.com http://stopbadtherapy.com http:// nht_amhl1.blogspot.com http://essence-euro.org/iasp/ http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/erthworks/ nonmain.htm

Drug Information

www.larsmartensson.com www.drugs-and-medications.com www.drugawareness.org www.outlookcities.com/psych/ www.canadiandimension.mb.ca/v35/v35_5ab.htm#three www.nmsis.org www.antidepressantsfacts.com www.socialaudit.org.uk/1.4.html www.chemsense.com www.prozactruth.com www.quitpaxil.org www.talkingcure.com/archive/ drugs.htm www.truehope.com www.astrocyte-design.com/pseudoscience/index.html http:// members.fortunecity.com/siriusw/Biochemical-Imbalance.htm http://groups.msn.com/SIDEEFFECTS www.benzo.org.uk

Children & Youth

www.voice4kids.org www.aspire.us www.hearmyvoice.org www.ritalindeath.com www.p-a-r.org www.adhdfraud.org

Tardive Dyskinesia/Dystonia

www.power2u.org/selfhep/tardive.html www.wemove.org www.dystonia-support.org www.dystoniafoundation.org www.iatrogenic.org/index.html www.breggin.com/tardivedysk.html www.caromont.org/16036.cfm www.emedicine.com/neuro/topic362.htm www.drugdigest.org/DD/ Articles/News/0,10141,513136,00.html www.psyweb.com/Diction/tardived.html www.thebody.com/ pinf/phenos.html www.reglan-lawsuit.com www.ninds.nih.gov/healthandmedical/disorders/ tardivedoc.htm www.easyweb.easynet.co.uk/simplpsych/tardive.html

Bulletin Board

The Self-Help Resource Association of BC (SHRA) conducts regular Facilitator Training Workshops for Self-Help and Mutual Aid Support Groups. They also publish a Directory of Self Help/Support Groups in Greater Vancouver with over 600 listings, many of them dealing with mental health. SHRA is located at suite 306 - 1212 West Broadway, Van. BC V6H 3V1 Tel. 604-733-6186 Fax. 604-730-1015 e-mail shra@telus.net . Website - www.selfhelpresource.bc.ca

Vancouver/Richmond Mental Health Network sponsors many self-help groups andhas recently moved to its new office at #201 - 1300 Richards Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 3G6 Tel. 604-733-5570 Fax: 604-733-9556 e-mail vrmhn@vcn.bc.ca

Named after Vincent van Gough's homeopathic doctor, Paul Gachet, Gallery Gachet works to provide a safe, borderless. place of artistic expression. It is located at 88 E. Cordova, Vancouver. Tel. 604-687-2468

Ron Carten, former Executive Director of Vancouver /Richmond Mental Health Network has a new blog on-line at www.aimstest.ca. Check it out for interesting information and dialogue on consumer/survivor issues.

Websites of Interest to Consumers/Survivors/Ex-Mental Patients

(continued from previous page)

Electroshock

www.ect.org www.banshock.org www.idiom.com/~drjohn/review.html http://bmj.com/cgi/content/ full/bmj;326/7403/1363

Forced Treatment

www.freedom-center.org www.namiscc.org/newsletters/August01/MindAid.htm www.hri/doccentre/ docs/gosden.shtml www.garynull.com/issues/Psych/Index.htm www.psychlaws.org www.kqed.org/w/ hope/involuntarytreatment.html

Mental Health Law

www.bazelon.org www.ac.wwu.edu/~knecht/law.htm www.psych.org/public_info/insanity.cfm www.forensic-psych.com/pubs/pubADment.html www.psychlaws.org www.imhl.com www.ialmh.org www.justiceseekers.com www.safe-trak.com/main/competencyl.htm www.abanet.org/disability/ sites.html www.experts.com www.expertpages.com/psychiatry-psychology.htm www.psych.org/ advocacy-policy/leg_res/apa_testimony/testimonysub-crimeposted91800.cfm www.ilppp.virginia.edu/ www.law.cornell.edu/topics/mental_health.html www.helpforparents.net/LegalResources/ 1LegalResources.htm

History of Mental Health Care

www.psychiatricsurvivorsarchives.com www.webcom.com/thrive/schizo/kdarch.html www.cwu.edu/ ~warren/addenda.html www.epub.org.br/cm/n02/historia/psicocirg_i.htm

Online Publications

www.mentalmagazine.co.uk http://members.aol.com/asylumpub http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~expert/ psychnews/



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