

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Summer Blockbuster

My housemate lied continually on his bed in boxers. When he spoke soberly the words abruptly from him, in this case it was the word No.

I wanted to go to a movie, and was urging he put on some pants and come with me, and he told me how he always went alone. You don't have to share an armrest, no one ruins your experience of it by trying to inject their perspective. He told me to just go.

So one Saturday (upon which I had forgotten that's when people normally go to movies) I went in with a large crowd, determined not to be intimidated by my aloneness among the couples. The old theater absorbed all my discomforts, from then on I was hooked. I went to all movies alone.

That new habit, stimulated by the selfish tendencies my housemate had exhibited his whole life, opened up doors of realization for me.

In passing, at an average bar, maybe when the band has taken a break, I will mention how I had to realize that people went to dance clubs to dance, because they liked it, for the activity itself.

Some realizations, like this one, are born of a slowness, and catalyzed by others. But there are some which are born, in the limbo of time.

Like when one goes to the movies, and one has the tenth experience sitting alone on a Tuesday afternoon.

I go back to that little comment about activities often, not because it lands well on its audience, but I still have that suspicion retained from adolescence, they're not *really* going because they like dancing, it's a bonus, but it's not: it. What about love? (that stray puppy)

I wait .. for anyone around to object, that the activity, has nothing to do with it. All of us, smart enough to realize, that saying something like that, would not be sexy.

—

I opened the door to our small house and Dolly, the blind, diabetic border collie, greeted me with milky eyes and swinging tail, like she always did whenever my housemate Jason didn't have her in his room with the door closed. Only knowing Dolly in her last months, she remains the ideal of pet ownership to me. She was Jason's dog, so I didn't have to buy food. She was trusting, loving love when it was available. Habitual, but not to a fault. Blind bumping into chairs never failed to make me laugh. Energetic in short manageable bursts, a relic of her younger days (Jason said she used to run for hours).

Soft fur on broad heavy set haunches that always seemed to be in reach, to stroke and pat. And just lovely in that way it must be that hey, this chick would help me fight a bear.

Jason and I bonded over Dolly, and hazy inaction. In the months before she died, even though he mainly preferred weed, Jason would get terribly drunk and sit on the floor of my room explaining that this wasn't really him, he was just preparing for her death. And after she died, when our landlord and himself overcompensated by adopting 3 dogs for our 5 rooms, I could tell that he told the truth, he didn't get that drunk anymore.

I still do. Not for the same reasons, but at that time I was convinced that the truth was surrounded

on all sides by sleep. Good sleep is the answer to most problems when your by yourself.

I would average 10+ hours, and the drinking helped the stasis. It also helped retain the poignancy of each moment, and facilitated the realizations that I coveted.

Before that house I lived alone in a studio apartment that I could afford to rent for less than a year. I had sat at 3 in the morning, reading *Nausea*. Watching QI on my laptop on my full mattress that I left on the floor.

I had the feeling that my self was changing, in tiny little flashes during hangovers that had me seeing my overworked white blood cells.

And though drinking has always helped, the dogs, and Dolly, helped me avoid the real problem, that still now feels like I've been cheated with/on. That my changed self was my real life, but that this was worth nothing.

That before my life could really begin, I had to go backwards again, to find an identity I didn't want. This type of thinking creeps into your life, carrying on its shoulders a deep sense of vulnerability. Vulnerability which had seemed to be completely avoidable, and you don't know which is worse, the sense itself, or the failure of preventing it, knowing that it never needed to be there in the first place.

But there are plenty of distractions.

For example, there's this essay I've been thinking of.

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“There's this fleeting moment in the first Lord of the Rings movie where the companions are floating down the river beginning their journey. They pass between two large guardian sculptures with out-stretched arms. The movie excellently draws out this moment showing you to scale their size (the size of the boat vs. one large foot of the statue).

And as they approach Aragorn has this line:

'Long have I waited to see the monuments of my fathers'

Considering the time and digital effort producing that 30 seconds took, that scene seems the symbol for all blockbusters. With their enormous budgets, they are the real monuments of our fathers. A suggestion which begs the question: how come all that money isn't funneled into *actual* monuments?

Big towering granite right off the interstate that charges admission to touch its toes and have use of the swimming area.

Firstly, practically, its profit possibilities aren't as high, but the idea isn't so far fetched.

I think directors even share something of a resemblance to sculptors (especially now, with special effects driven cinema, blockbusters are carved with a mouse).

But unlike sculptures, these movie monuments carry different symbolism. They have their own unique visual symbols (I lump blockbusters together because as an aggregate of these symbols they are more), but in every case its necessary that you see their visual grandiosity. And the bigger they get, the less subtle they become. I love awing at their simplicity.

These symbols in concert then, make a monument *Not* to real feats, wins, or tragedies.

They are monuments to our battles with self.

They are our gut links to the past (the 'fathers' of self), and they are similar because the self sprints in small concise circles.

But Tolkein is an obvious choice to start with. Written exactly for these monuments with excellent built in symbolism.

Just like the self, men are attracted to the ring of power both unaware and aware that it will not actually help them, that it serves only one master.

But its because the adaptation blends so nicely, its a good place to begin.”

—

I called Jason a taker, I wandered angrily into his room after he took the last bit of cash I had saved in my backpack. And he was a taker, but I enabled it. Now, trying to sort out my identity problem, I've tried to forgive myself for being attracted to takers. I'm part of the 3.5 billion who's gifts lie in understanding other people, and on guard of my own ambition, takers have kept me sane. That is to say, they have kept me from focusing too much on ambition. And picturing Jason with his dogs, and him telling me he couldn't afford Dolly's insulin, that pained emptiness on his face .. it's far less painful to wring a takers life into your inkwell.

When I left for good I scribbled on permanent marker on my CD case I gave him 'Thanks for reminding me to be unconscionable sometimes'

But it was only sometimes.

When he had weed he would smoke me out, together him lying and me sitting on his dirty mattress, I could pet Dolly lying on the floor. When it had been just Dolly, his mattress was dirty out of laziness, but after she died, with three dogs on his bed, it was entropy, the visible, flaking, paw prints looked like a purposeful pattern the sheet maker had stamped there.

Sometimes I would get too high and leave to be by myself, but mostly I would lean back on one elbow as we watched Antiques Roadshow.

What will be the antiques of the information era? I wondered aloud.

Jason answered questions posed to him with the self assured confidence of a taker. Untranslatable, except for the purposes of pure translation. Like once, he said to me, that we live in an annoying time.

Antiques of the information age, I figured, that they would be things you couldn't predict, but bigger. Maybe something like commercial airliners. But really, I think it will be our attitudes that our generations will look back on, the intricate molding patterns through which we strived.

That is to say, antiques are the combined history of action.

“In any blockbuster series, the origin story has always been my favorite.

In Christopher and Jonathan Nolan's *Batman Begins* we are given that artfully sculpted monument of mythology. While I enjoy the whole of its sculpture (and its iterations, *The Dark Knight*, and chaos to its construction) one scene sticks out for me in its misguided attempt to ground us to our modern reality.

Bruce Wayne has slogged off Batman in dinner conversation, and buys a hotel to compensate for

his (presumed) prostitute guests swimming.

At this moment his true love enters, and he tells her that he is more, inside.

She responds with “It's not who you are underneath, it's what you do that defines you”

As the audience we know that this is not a truly tense moment, for we know he is more, he has already conquered many impossibilities.

And it is this precise unambiguity that gives me pause, reflecting on its pure mythology.

Let's digress. In *Death of a Salesman*, Biff the eldest son comes to terms of what it means for him to strive for a career. In his realization of necessity to provide for the family (that which he re-negs, but that if Willy had survived he would have been forced to confront again) he is reminded of his business shortcomings, his actions.

He whistles in the elevator. On hot days he is inclined to run off to go swimming.

It's poignant in its history because how distant it seems. Whistling in the elevator wouldn't be so noteworthy because elevator silence has usurped everything as the norm. The action of business and careerism has replaced the natural desire to whistle. Likewise, running off to go swim on a business day is unilateral legal grounds for dismissal.

The true action of our present is a suppression of action, only that which is an undefined definition of active conformity, receives material gains.

And that's why Bruce Wayne is a wholly excellent monument, he is both silence and whistle. His action is predetermined. That's why he needs chaos to keep him interesting.

Although not a monument in the same way as a blockbuster, the Spanish film by Alejandro Amenabar, *The Sea Inside*, is a compelling reflection on what we think of action.

The paraplegic Ramon Sampedro is limited to his bed in his brothers house, and relies on whistling as his primary action to get the attention of his helpers.

The film entices me with its metaphor on writing. It depicts his inaction as entirely dependent on others, but he persists trying to help anyone who will come into his unfortunate situation.

He battles against the State (that which has become life silence in the elevator, the norm for private existence) to let him die, as he is unable to do so himself, and his actionless action is meaningful so that others don't have to bother. But the crux is that we believe all fighting is useful. The philosophical combat of his words is as important as the lack of physical prowess, and he *believes* that (as he writes poetry using a special pen he can control with his mouth), along with his willingness to die from physical inaction. Inaction is death, but it is this idleness that illuminates reality, as action itself usurps language.

Ramon's whistle may be just a whistle, but because it is only this, it leads us to something sweeter.”

—

In the attic above our house there was a large room where someone always lived whom felt like they had little to do with our lives. But for a short stint in the summer a nice guy stayed there while he worked for the Renaissance festival. He adored dogs like we did. Wanting to feel more involved he suggested we take Dolly to the dog park. I liked the idea, but Jason didn't want to go, he said we should just take her and at the time I chalked this up to laziness, but I think he was also aware how painful for him it would be to see her struggle with what he had known her to do easily as an

energetic adult.

And it was, painful, as the path we took was quite challenging for the blind girl.

On the way down it was a bit easier, weaving through trees and clear underbrush I let her off the leash like the other dogs, but she would get lost easily and while I tried to be patient I would bang a stick on the ground, or whistle and call her name from time to time, so she could hear us. Free to run other dogs would tear past us, barely stopping to acknowledge, which was good, because any dog sniffing her got snarls, and I was afraid as she snapped at them.

The comedian walking with me was kind. I found out that he did dirty poetry, and its interesting how the raunchiest innuendo is the representation of a soul so honest. He was just now getting married at 40, a side effect of what I chalked up to that honesty. He wasn't a great pretender, he didn't get lost in the idea that was the Renaissance Faire, and so was neither a Faire person or a nightclub person.

This, the ambiguities of his success interested me, and he was still waiting for his big break. He had the eternal nature of the crude joke on his side (as they have remained similar for thousands of human years), but it was this precise un-topicality that had him working the Renaissance faires.

There are very few things so long unchanged like the dirty joke. One might be inclined to say music, but my counter to that is Mozart. Listening to Mozart to me is like watching the Marx brothers, I fully understand the punchline, but it doesn't make me laugh.

Sex still makes me laugh, its physical action so balanced on the tuning strings of time.

We lead Dolly to the lake, and she swam, snout barely bobbing over the waters plane, I fidgeted on shore and threw the stick obsessively in the shallow end to keep her close.

The way out of the park we had to go uphill.

On one particularly steep stretch I found myself pushing her backside up the wood steps they had placed to stabilize the slope. Exhausted, I paused near the top, she took an honest step and slode down the side of the hill nearly to its beginning. I grabbed her 80 (100?) pounds by the midsection and carried her near the top again, as she wheezed under my tight grip.

Back in the car and at home she seemed exhausted but happy. But while panting all dogs look happy to us. We hosed the mud from her belly and paws as she barely stayed standing.

And I still hold it against myself that she died three weeks later.

Her kidneys started shutting down, and I remembered all that effort we had put in to get up the hill. Without the strain of that walk she might have lived peacefully in our house by our feet for months more.

When you hold anothers life and happiness in so high a regard, you are stricken with the disease of control.

In her last days Dolly barely moved from the living room rug. She had been urinating on herself and the rug, so when Jason went out for a few hours I felt like I should help her outside.

One step forward from my arms, she dipped right into the thin grass. A strong cool late summer breeze blew, and with her nose in the air she smiled.

I wanted to let her lie there forever but it was cold, and how could I explain to Jason if she died, or deny him his last moments with his friend.

I stood by the door for a minute, hoping to overcome myself.

....

They say doctors don't die like other people.

If diagnosed seriously, most will go home and live out their days best they can.

It's easy to imagine that if you've spent your whole life in a hospital, you would refuse to die in one.

I think that article I read on it was supposed to make you think about doing things their way, after all, they are the experts. But even knowing this, I know I will die like a patient, like everyone else.

I will be startled and confused, someone will give me advice as my (bowel cancer) gets treated incrementally with this really great new medication .. but I will never feel better, my bottom will feel about to fall out.

As I get another year and a cutting edge 3D printed large intestine, I get to look at my new bowels and marvel at their viscosity before their slipped into me. But, with my undiagnosed heart condition, on the surgery table I die under anesthesia, from heart failure.

A doctor will not have marveled, a doctor will know all too well, what an operating room smells like.

The point is, an expert chooses for themselves for different reasons.

Doctors treat sorrow and death, and have experienced a lot of it, but with their expertize they don't have a monopoly on these things. Just like lawyers argue, but don't own rationalization and chefs aren't the only ones who eat.

Poets likewise have no authority on love, but in the same way, they don't love like everyone else.

Jason came home and when he had been out he'd been drinking and he had more plastic vodka and with Dolly on the rug he sat on the couch with that facial expression that comes from the control of love.

I stood by the door again, this time on the inside, making idle conversation with a half drunk man. Death was on our minds.

I said that before I died, all I wanted was one great love affair.

Jason, with puffy earnest eyes said, slowly, that Dolly was his love affair.

The next day we put her down at the Vet and Jason was so drunk he couldn't drive the two blocks that we figured would not be fun to carry that soft rear end.

I was angry at his weakness for getting drunk, to not take this thing soberly, that my own rationality would not have a partner.

She went quickly with the injection, and I drove away to walk alone by some abandoned buildings.

For a long while after that, I felt every failure to start a love affair as a severe depression, knowing that I will never understand death, not while I have yet to understand affairs.

Which is worse yet, because love was the only possibility for me to be an expert at.

I only knew how to begin with the crude joke of love.

Like watching a dog, when you see them hump another dog or inanimate object, this is funny, and when your mom told you they were just playing, she was telling the truth.

Insemination in dogs happens as the male penetrates then flips the other way. Insemination is a

strain in two directions, often taking hours.

I've loved the intellect for it willingly admitted it knew nothing of these things related to time .. like that bogart the self. An idea seems so real and easy, in its limbo, without identity. But the laughter of love lay away. The physical action of love, and its crudeness.

So one lives vicariously, through takers and their stories of online dating, bringing chubby women to their stained mattress. The routine of seduction that Jason would tell me. But these stories too, did not help me define what a love affair was. Was it frequent and crude? (my suspicion) Or, did the absence of time, not really make love.

There are two stories in my head of love, where two people meet and are suspended in time. It is the fall, sweater and hand holding weather. The setting must be outside to watch time not pass. To watch a leaf suspend it's descent.

One story is what I know of love, a time before the self was even being considered, a young age. A story that ends with the question: whether a relationship builds in time, or whether time builds around it.

This story is set in a park, the two are confused, as they work together to understand this new existence. This story is subtle, the dialogue .. appropriate to the situation, which is still boldly absurd. They grow to understand small things of each other in this stasis. Of the two stories, it is the most story like.

The second is a compendium of realizations, that only the absence of time allows for their blurting.

1. The boy believes that women are most attracted to things closest to their final form, because women are the glue of society. To this declaration, the woman is unresponsive, rightly, for we are all just people in this mess.
2. The desire to want to be looked on as just a person can describe the bad boy phenomenon. But eventually said bad-boy will not want to be just a catalyzer to your normalness.
3. Men are obsessed with moments, even though women have a natural predilection for emotion and have an appreciation of time more wholly, they've never felt a moment like a man. With a dick that's all you have. Seconds and minutes and men who commit their whole lives to miniscule actions with the possibility of greatness, their moments which they can only hope will jolt them back into time.
4. Men aren't afraid of career women they're afraid of your momentum, trying to tug their moments from the blur.
5. It is the time of women, and thank god. But if you admitted (admitted to un-normalness an aforementioned impossible task) you had both the sexual power you've always had (the inherent sexual power, in most cases, a man has to earn love), and the political careerist power, could we solve this whole thing?

The last line of course, a fleeting glimpse of why people get married. A naïve line, and passive, which is precisely why it needs the absence of time.

A young man's line, trying to avoid the self.

“There are many lines of similarities to be drawn between big budget movies. Star Wars--Harry Potter. Superheroes. Capers. They all start with something that is already a product, a lump of stone or granite to sculpt. Many modern artists and sculptors re-appropriate existing things into their art. But like the sculptors of old, the blockbuster gets its beauty from the delicate chiseling it does to essentially the same face.

When I was young my mother had a 10 inch replica statue of David sitting on our bookcase. When friends came over the exposed genitalia was often a small joke and brief embarrassment. At some point his boldness was replaced with a permanent swivel, where his face and balls were contemplated by the spines of books, and everyone else moved past that easily ignorable ass. The self is confusing in this way, so easily ignorable in many respects, it only takes a minor swivel and that which is a replica to a great monument of human progress makes us laugh, and consumes our attention.”

—

I sit in a Barnes and Noble and think about the self on my lunch break. I see a dad sitting with his two kids at a counter-top in front of me, and the dad is reading *Blues Harmonica for Dummies*, which strikes me as the funniest book title I've ever seen. I listen to this mans conversation with his children, as writers are generally enthralled upon witnessing a one-sided conversation.

| You see that, Prologue, that's French, that word is French [Dad points at book]
| I've read all these, so you pick one you like and [inaudible]
| You read one and then move onto the next
| Go look over there, that one, ask her she'll help you [little girl exits]
| I've read that whole series, I'll help you. What do you think?
| Well that's your choice [little boy begins to exit] Oh, grab [inaudible. Dad sits]
[Little girl enters and sits down with Mammalian Anatomy: The Cat]
| Woo that's a book
| Well you see there are a lot of factors

I lick finger and flip page.

| In this situation there are many intricacies, Robin Hood [inaudible]
| Grandma and grandpa are very smart about animals, they know a lot, they had two farms.
| I don't know though, we have to consider many things like could g'ma and g'pa take ON that responsibility
| Robin Hood is going to take a lot of care, a-lot of care
| I can tell by the way you're acting here you feel [inaudible, runny nose]

I too, have thought a lot about animals.

| See what we have to do is realize we're at a Barnes and Noble

| This is the way it is, it's the way life is. Its the way life *is*
| We have to understand, what's over there can't affect us now. Whats over there doesn't affect us over here, now

Quote from J.M. Coetzee pops into head

“Dishonor is no respecter of fine distinctions. Dishonor descends upon one's shoulders..”

Honor? What do I care of honor? The seriousness of a man who wants to get from a book how to play blues harmonica no longer makes me laugh. His seriousness bothers me.

| At Barnes and Noble, what can we do? Get a book, *learn* about Robin Hood
| We can only affect what we do in the present, we can't worry about those other things [Young face being wiped like an automatic windshield wiper]

Can't worry, can't worry

| We'll take Robin Hood to the vet, but it's complicated

Pets too, are like one sided conversations

| Go ahead, you can look [little girl leaves, wiping gone tears]

We tell them what is right

[Little boy enters, inaudible tentative excitement]

| We were talking about Robin Hood and [inaudible]

| Yeah, I liked that one you got there, that one gets alot right

| You'll get it, you'll get it

In China, I was odd couple with a golden retriever, in a life that belonged to neither one of us.

Our golden hair together was funny, as I reached down to scratch his chops like only the one odd security guard did.

My employer smiled standing with his hands behind his back.

Over there there is still the tendency to treat all animals similarly, like animals. Which seems more natural, natural outside my nature.

They have a burgeoning culture for pets that accompanies the wealth, yet still one imagines many years before anyone is bothered by puppy mills.

Nights I walk with the retriever. He became my charge, out of a pity that I hadn't given my life purpose already. Of course that's hindsight, but there's no other explanation, my employer already had plenty on his plate, having me walk him in the evenings was a gift.

But unable to see that he was doing it for me, I wondered what he got out of controlling an animal that was just an animal. What did he get from leaving the dog in the cage all day, knowing he would be more than a handful when we got back?
What did he get from the control of his life, that had more action than love?

I let the leash go, the dog runs I chase him. On a bench I tell him I am *lonely*, over sweaty breath.

He sits for a moment and licks my face.

But he is interested in the small garden, and dirt patch and pond.

Come, come, come here I said.

Gwòlái