

*NOTE: This sinuous piece of writing was found in a sketchbook, in rummage sale in rural Thuringia, in 1991. Much of the handwriting is indecipherable due to water damage and time. The portion below is the most clear, and most succinctly articulates the theorems outlined by the writer[s] in question.*

...By the moment of our last breath we must realize that our lives have been forgotten, and therefore did not exist. That's how I have always imagined dying — not always, actually (I will get to that soon). But certainly for as long as I choose to remember, that is how I have perceived death. Who will remember us if we cannot remember ourselves?

I cannot recall the face of my father, whose time expired as his single engine plane dropped into the filth and muck of the Hudson Bay. I was told the engine gave out, a crash that was 'by no fault of the pilot' was the phrase the telegram used. That was how my father died. He was survived by me. I remember him throughout my life, dispensing articles of wisdom and filling the living room with laughter and a heaving cloud of tobacco. He could quote passages of literary text from memory, and though he generally despised British writing, among his favorites to perform was Auden. One time from the kitchen, he recited as if on stage at the Old Vic:

“Do not imagine you can abdicate;  
Before you reach the frontier you are caught;  
Others have tried it and will try again  
To finish that what they did not begin:  
Their fate must always be the same as yours,  
To suffer the loss they were afraid of, yes,  
Holders of one position, wrong for years.”

This is how I remember him, but my recalcitrant mind fails to materialize what he looked like. My curious eyes guzzle up movement, color and light and regurgitate them into my brain, producing all I believe to be in front of me, but cannot recreate the image of a loved one whose presence guided that same brain for so long. Still, the very idea of him bellowing Cioran from the countertop, his reading of the Sunday paper on the porch, carries his aura further than any fading mental apparition could. This sense of memory — memory of the concept of, not the physicality of, is all powerful, indestructible, and for this reason I have not looked at a photograph of him since he died.

This unknowing of physical memory lends itself to an artistic dialectic as well. By now I have read through a wide amount of my father's library (generously bequeathed to me, excluding the smattering of religious texts, which were left to my Aunt Sylvia). These works, some lifeless and sterile, some powerful and vibrant, generally have one thing in common. They have some sort of photograph of the author on the book jacket. Authors and artists live on in the minds of

readers by the images or portraits of them that have lived through the ages. The lone photo of Rimbaud shows a timid and haunting face that will soon leave writing behind for a harsh life of iron and sand in Yemen. There are powerful symbolic tremors that lay beneath the debonair early photos of Hemingway, and that power only increases when recalled contextually near the tragic and bloated photos of his later life.

Any writer before the era of easily reproducible photography has this effect; the limited physical presence provides them with an air of mysteriousness and authority to their work. My father's body of work — his life — should be no different. An author I cannot recall implied in one essay that he chronically put off beginning his masterwork novel for he was not through "living it". Why should a work of life be thought of on separate terms?

When confronted with a work I enjoy by an author who is not photographed, I seldom pursue a photograph. Off of my father's shelves came Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*, a frigid portrait of babbling narcissism. However, I read it three times. The power that this work held over me must lie in part what Hamsun looks like is entirely unknown to me, and for that reason, his work has a sort of homeless quality to it. I can read and become lost in the words themselves, yet I have nothing to ground the textual experience to; the essence of the work is a ghost, and the missing icon of the author is the shell, nowhere to be found. And so he never existed.

It feels appropriate to confess that those were not entirely original thoughts, but appropriated from the one of the filled up notebooks my father left behind. Perhaps one day I will continue where he left off, and add my own words to the tapestry of his life.

My father seemed to struggle with the idea of memory as an abstractified concept, and was constantly searching for a way to circumvent this feeble mental process. As a result, many of his notebooks are filled, with impeccable detail, of his daily routines. They read more as an itinerary than a diary, and fulfilled what he described as "an encyclopedia of all mundane detail, perhaps the first item of interest to be overlooked by the cold indifference of memory." He held that in compiling the small and minute weavings of his life (when he drank water, how much he drank, which cup he selected, where he set the cup upon completion), he held a sort of existential ownership over everything within it. It was his life, his and his alone, now that it lived on paper. As Isherwood wrote, "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking". This was indeed how this period of my father's writings appear, all seeing, all remembering, not much feeling.

Towards the last few years of his life, as he became slowly more withdrawn and aloof, my father apparently became obsessed with what he wrote of as "true memory". Time, as my father wrote, really travels neither backwards or forwards, but vertically. The more of one's own life (in this case, his own) that is remembered, the stronger and more direct that unending vertical line is. This leads up to "total memory", which is self explanatory: when every second from birth to present is held in memory. It is only then, when one can "grasp with the surging electricity of full memory can one possess full ownership over life in its totality". When I first read those scrambled thoughts in his leather bound notebook, I scoffed, dismissed them as idealist jargon.

They appeared as flimsy words that were empty and unconnected to real, tangible, existence. Ideas like this can only begin to take on a life once they are obtained, remembered, and strung together with other fragments. Almost always this subconscious weaving leads to nothing, garbled noise that is deposited during dreams or sublimated into mindless tics. But there are moments, very few, that a beautiful tapestry of thought can be born. This process unfolded over the first few weeks after my father's funeral, as I reluctantly became more immersed in his intense worldview. The weeks passed, fall began, and I returned to my schooling.

I lived in a small apartment in Freiburg, Germany – near the Fluckigersee. At the University I studied Macroeconomics. This decision, quietly disapproved of by my family, was made due to the inexplicable comfort I found in the absolute direct permanence of the linguistic rules of the market. A word meant a word — a number meant the number — there is no room for indulgent nuances of untethered language. Perhaps my attraction to the blatantly direct came subconsciously to escape the totalitarian presence of my own emotional perplexities. Words, memories, and recollections become insignificant in the face of even the vaguest dread. The comfortable blandness of business offered a cursory escape route.

Because of my newfound proximity to concrete language I found myself drifting into the arrogant fixtured permanence. I ate out, went to parties and clubs, spoke with friends on matters pointless and banal. The conversations I held contained such little room for exegesis that I found myself ceasing to listen, and it made no difference anyway. The words were all there, but were not my own, only borrowed phrases from others. I always found it a sickening mixture of strange, tragic, and comic, that as the structures of neoliberalism gradually shrink what is public and open into what is private and closed — words perform the opposite. Once a romantic strand of autonomous communication, holding one's power and intent, or as Coleridge framed it, “[language] contained the trophies of its past and the weapons of its future”, words have become communal and diluted — and lack all of poetic and revolutionary potential of the inglorious past.”

The only vessel of abstraction that imposed its presence were those pedantic journals of my father's that I brought along for the semester. On the surface, the pairing of these idealist writings with the methodical studies of Keynes and Ricardo went together like an aged Pinot Noir and a rotting banana. Still, a muffled part of me held that underneath the cavernous brooding of my father and the diligently produced rhetoric of the dismal science lay some sort of artistic kinship, one that only myself and others similarly inclined could appreciate. As I spent my nights poring over dense numerical formulas and coefficients, the haunting allure of forbidden thought burnt away within me, like a spider biting hot metal. My father often wrote of the joy that could be found by pairing dueling texts, which is why he “always reads four or five books together at once, devoid of any order or congruence with the subject... as a means of distilling the poetic truths to the surface, and leaving the cracked shells of words and sounds at the bottom”.

This method of textual exploration can at times leave much to be desired. In one notebook, he wrote of an idea of reading “all of the major holy books at once... *The Bible, The Quran, The Torah... The Upanishads...* all in a manner of seeking out what drives creative human endeavours, and what projects “mere jumbings of letters and sounds into the celestial realm”. This idea fizzles out after what appears to be a few weeks, with just a lone entry on it appearing a bit later on, describing his frustration simply with a quote from Borges: “To extend man’s life is to extend his agony and multiply his deaths”. This would prove to be something my father would not have to worry much about. But the sheer depth of this abandoned project was admirable, and the regret of its demise blended into his writing, particularly in the final month. One entry, for March 13th, simply reads “horse”, followed by an gratuitously extended ellipsis (will not reproduce here). Glimpses of the old self still appear, here and there, like tadpoles coming up to the surface for air. Three days before his death he wrote, on the intersection of memory and activity, “[Regarding] true memory, strands of recollection untainted by outside imagery, the act of remembrance and the physical process of the act or sensation being remembered must be one in the same... The moment in question never ends or begins, but falls in tandem with the iron railways of the mind... True memory and real experience then loop around the brain of humanity, forever picking up more cargo at each stop”.

It was these sorts of thoughts, my father’s and by osmosis my own, colliding with my academic research, infiltrating my social life, all housed in the well worn covers and folders between my warped ocher toned shelves, that filled my head at every second of the day. Inescapable — I sat, night after night, reviewing studies and textbooks, the inchoate sensation of lingual doom encroaching, in search of the correct set of numbers, letters, words, phrases, ideas. By February, the semester nearly halfway complete, I had realized that finishing the school year was unthinkable; I had wrapped myself up in my work but had not understood one decimal of it. My father’s cryptic journals had seen to it that every moment of my brain’s activity was to be spent turning over passages, rearranging his phrases into my own, and vain ruminations on whether I had experienced the “vertical line of time”. In a vain search within, channeled thoughts unoriginal, that I had no hand in writing, emerged new vessels and modes previously unknown. In creating these words, and in him creating his own, we have created nothing.

*\* A newspaper blurb is pasted in on the following page, it will be reproduced in its entirety.*

**The Napanee Post, July 14, 1981:**

Disaster struck earlier this week as a small private plane crashed off of the coast of Amherst Island, resulting in the deaths of three people.

The cause of the crash is unknown. A fishing vessel nearby described seeing smoke billowing from a single jet airliner before it plummeted into the water.

Of the four passengers, one survived, a Humphrey Geir, a Canadian-American Pharmacist.

One of the passengers, Leonard Bloom, is well known in American academic circles, and published four books in his lifetime.

The other two passengers have not been identified.