

Notes

1

From *War and Peace*; from the page where my father stopped reading:

“When the apple is ripe and falls—why does it fall?”

2

Notes for Lecture on Triads and Unisons—

A major chord is made up of three notes. CEG makes the chord C.

This harmonic arrangement can be adapted to matters of literature and visual composition, depending upon one’s knowledge of the language, or key, that one is working with.

A simple literary triad might involve the words *key* and *lock* and *hair*, as in Alexander Pope’s “Rape of the Lock.” Study the common things of this world long enough and things reveal increasingly what they have in common: namely, the language by which we describe them. This search for detecting forms of order and arrangement, always, is the work of all artists, regardless of form.

Art joins; war, like pornography, separates.

Bosnian, Croat, Serb—this the great triad of Yugoslavia . . .

Fuck Pope. Won’t work.

3

The artist uses the pun to connect that which *feels* disconnected. The artist—the hand of God—employs the pun to deflect attention onto the feeling of wholeness and interconnectedness aroused by the work.

Pun is the wrong word: a fusion of meaning, a verbal pivot—this device provides just another way of looking.

For example: A common triad of photographic expression in Sarajevo involves images of *glass* and *eyes* and *boots*.

The eyes, you see, are the windows to the soul. Here the windows are all shattered, thanks to the men in boots. A man's boot—or a woman's shoe, a child's sneaker—is designed to protect the human sole. This language has become increasingly iconographic and, consequently, clichéd.

Prose writers and poets often work with triads, which merge, or join with, other triads—a common root holding them together; but then prose writers and poets have the luxury of narrative—melody—with and in which to make their jazz-like discoveries. Jazz-like for the way words and their meanings permit various notes to bend—to make a sustained sixth, for example. To improvise and syncopate and bend the form to provide tonality.

Each composer signs his or her name by way of a signature.

Likewise, photographers often develop bodies of work which embrace thematic unisons.

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A unison—two notes, the same, though played on a stringed instrument in different places—is a prime interval. A common photographic unison in Sarajevo involves images of blood and images of bread. Sometimes the images of bread are soaked in blood. The image—its scale—is a consequence of a shared historical context. Namely, the breadline massacre outside the Austrian Market on Ferhadija.

One Sarajevan photographer, Kemal Hadžić, is taking photographs of the city's empty morning streets, glistening with rain, and the sewers which collect that rain. The photographer goes to the Holiday Inn and exchanges the film he has shot for chemicals and more film with members of the foreign press who, in turn, publish the photographs of the photographer under their own names.

Other unisons?

Sebastio Salgado's photographs of migrations in seas and waves and all those people drowning therein;

That French guy's books which always have naked women and cats. Ugh;

James Nachtwey's photographs of dead bodies which leverage among other things the implications of the word *lie*. Dead bodies, or those bodies in the state of dying, don't tell lies. (Rather, governments which cause dead bodies do.) Eventually all dead bodies lie down. This becomes in effect one's resting place.

Peter Messinger's photographs of convicts and industry—that which makes the bars—and the ways in which he repeatedly frames those photographs, thus confining further the subjects while, concurrently, releasing them.

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Take theater. Our understanding of which is premised on Shakespeare's observation that all the world's a stage. Even in a *theater* of war. This theater/play unison is gaining currency in Sarajevo. Show the photographs of Mladen Pikulić and Milomir Kovačević. Here the children are at play with guns, acting out the scenes. On the surface we see pictures of children at play wearing cardboard flak jackets and kitchen pots for helmets, and we are deeply moved; below the surface that feeling is charged and informed by the relationships amid our collective understandings of the words *theater* and *play* and *stage*. *Play*, in this case, is the pivot which connects one meaning with another, which charges our feeling with understanding, and vice versa.

Harmony, the heart of the triad, means different things to different people.

Unison means *all together*.

4

A Quiz:

Q. What was the prophet Mohammad's first command to the faithful?

A. *Iqra*. Or, *Read*.

A Parable:

Montenegrins are treated by way of Yugoslav humor roughly. They are lazy, this is the pith of it. Where does a Montenegrin woman place her money to keep it safe from her husband? Under a shovel.

One day the Diplomat of Montenegro was talking with the Diplomat of China. The Diplomat of Montenegro was quite serious about declaring war. We are going to declare war, said the Diplomat of Montenegro. Montenegro, of course, is a small region of, let's say, three hundred thousand. Be that as it may, the Diplomat of Montenegro was very serious. He said, We are going to declare war on you in China!

The Diplomat of China said, kindly, That would be unwise. We are a big country.

How many do you have there, anyway?

A billion, give or take.

Ah fuck it, said the Diplomat of Montenegro. Too many graves.

Militarily Speaking:

Q. What is the Common Ground?

A. The Battlefield.

The Stars:

In the old days one honored the king, the dictator or president, as a way of honoring the people. In the old days one looked to the stars.

Lightning, it came from the sky, and gave us electricity. Something to plug into. Then came modernity, industrialization, and light pollution. In these vast modern cities of suburbs and malls the stars disappeared from the sky.

So we had to find our stars elsewhere. So we had to turn on the TV.

There is a star up in the sky for everybody, my father used to say, pointing to the night sky. At the time there were billions in the sky. Go out some night and look. What do you see?

∞

God is light. A young boy when you place him on your shoulders is also light. The heart beats lightly just before it begins to die, or wake. A ship's wake is typically filled with the light of the sun or the moon or the darkness of the sea. To wake is, in all things, the test and end and means of art. To wake is to celebrate the dead. To wake is to return. To wake is to open up your eyes and see the light.

9

From *Ways of Seeing*, by John Berger:

“To be naked is to be oneself.

“To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.

“To be naked is to be without disguise.”

10

Worst Dental Stories:

A catalog, from last night:

I told my story—the abscessed molar, leading to an emergency root canal in Guatemala, leading to a hospitalization in Panama City.

Summerville told a story about a bull, lots of pulleys and ropes—for the bull, not the tooth—eventually involving a small sledge, which did involve the tooth.

Anna confessed that her husband refused to go to a dentist who was not a woman. If he must have his face plastered up against another's chest, then that chest had best belong to a woman. Anna is

always having to call to make sure the dentists and hygienists are female! Very embarrassing, apparently, but an embarrassment she tolerates. This condition of their marriage is prefigured too by a particular incident. Once in London her husband needed two new crowns, which he had done there. After fitting them, the dentist (this one male) left the final work of sealing those crowns to the assistant (also male) who proceeded to glue them on. But in so gluing the assistant reversed the crowns—accidents happen—so that the wrong crowns were attached to the wrong teeth. Apparently Anna’s husband’s jaw is still a wreck, though this incident—the permanently bonded crowns to the wrong teeth—took place years before the birth of their child.

Messinger told a story about a man he knows blinded in one eye—permanently—on account of the dental assistant—in-training sneezing with the ice-pick thing in her hand.

Ado said, Who would believe such things?

King me, Gulliver used to say, playing checkers.

11

On Graves:

Q. Where do they go?

A.

12

From *Camera Lucida*, by Roland Barthes:

“The photographic look has something paradoxical about it which is sometimes to be met with in life: the other day, in a café, a young boy came in alone, glanced around the room, and occasionally his eyes rested on me; I then had the certainty that he was *looking* at me without however being sure that he was *seeing* me: an inconceivable distortion: how can we look without seeing?”

A transcript of a conversation regarding the pizzeria Chuck E. Cheese which features among other attractions a brightly lit arcade: the conversation which follows took place between Gulliver Metcalf-Brings, then Age 3.2, and his Best Friend, Liam Smith-O'Connor, Age 3.1, on the way to Humboldt Park in the backseat of a red 1987 Jeep Cherokee. In keeping with the laws of the state, both boys sat in their car seats. They sat each like a king upon the throne.

- Liam: I want to go to Aerrnn Cheese.
Gulliver: What's Aerrnn Cheese?
Liam: It's where you live.
Gulliver: No. I live in Honore Street.
Liam: What's Honore Street?
Gulliver: My neighborhood is Honore Street. I live in Honore Street. What's Aerrnn Cheese?
Liam: I want to go to Aerrnn Cheese. You get a cup with coins in it.
Gulliver: I live in Honore Street. Do you want to ride my bike?
Liam: What's Honore Street? I want to go to Aerrnn Cheese.
Gulliver: What's Aerrnn Cheese?
Liam: It's where you live. *L*. You say, *L*. It's where you *live*.
Gulliver: No. I *live* in Honore Street.
Liam: What's Honore Street? I want to go to Aerrnn Cheese.
Gulliver: You can ride my bike. After I show you, first.
Liam: I don't know how to ride bikes.
Gulliver: That's okay. I'll show you. What's Aerrnn Cheese?
Liam: I told you. You get a cup with coins in it.

From *The Mind's Eye*, by Henri Cartier-Bresson:

"My passion has never been for photography 'in itself,' but for the possibility—through forgetting yourself—of recording in a fraction of

a second the emotion of the subject, and the beauty of the form: that is, a geometry awakened by what's offered.”

15

A Catechism:

- Q. Why do you believe in God?
A. Because without faith the only thing left to believe in is what's on television.
Q. What's wrong with celebrity?
A. Not everybody gets invited to the table. In the old days everybody had a chance to be redeemed.
Q. If heaven is a myth, can't Hollywood whip one up?
A. It can. Problem is it will last typically under two hours.
Q. Do you *really* believe in God?
A. Yes.
Q. But don't you want to be a star? Don't you want to see your name in lights? Don't you want to have your picture taken?
A. I want back my son.

16

Another Parable:

Once I watched a movie about Thomas Edison. The movie starred Spencer Tracy. My father loved Spencer Tracy. He said, Spencer Tracy, he's a good man. How my father knew this I have no idea. My own thinking is that Spencer Tracy is a *weak* man: back always hunched, mumbling through his teeth, scamming on Katherine Hepburn, whom my father also admired. In the movie about Thomas Edison we are to understand that Spencer Tracy—Everyman—is under a terrible strain to be a genius, which is why he invents the electric pen. He invents the talking machine, or phonograph, and thus the recording industry and Madonna. But the *real* thing he invents, the utterly amazing thing, is the electric light. Spencer Tracy in the manner of Thomas Edison found a way to make the light of this world electric.

At the end of the movie Spencer Tracy in the manner of Thomas

Edison delivers frailly a speech imploring humankind to bring science and humanity into balance. It is an effort to join, to bring together, the elements of this world lest it turn to ash. What is fire if not the essence of consumption? I think my father admired Spencer Tracy because Spencer Tracy exuded an air of humility; my father, after his wife died, my mother, never married again, and was lonely for the next thirty years, what with my not being able to fill that place in his heart my mother had. My mother died; my father died; I will die.

My father died knowing that my son was lost.

Maybe he'll come back, my father said, before my father died. Maybe he will find his way back home.

17

From *On Photography*, by Susan Sontag:

“A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats. The camera’s twin capacities, to subjectivize reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them. Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself. The narrowing of free political choice to free economic consumption requires the unlimited production and consumption of images.”

18

The Stripper’s Last Word:

First, she takes your eye. She places herself at a distance so that you may observe her fully—she appears, always, to be admiring you

the way you are her. Now she places her hand to her breast and raises it to her mouth. She licks the tip of her breast, the nipple, which incites arousal on the part of the viewer.

She puts her hands on your shoulders and draws you in; she puts her breasts into your face, her nipple to your eye.

Spit in the eye, she thinks. Take that.

19

On Meaning:

Q. What does Stephen mean?

A. What does anybody mean?

20

On Teeth:

In this part of the world the officials do not attempt to match unidentified bodies with their dental records, though still the snipers in Sarajevo often aim to hit the jaw, at least on a man. For a woman, the snipers seem to prefer a breast, as if to eat it.

21

Note to Self:

Q. How do you exit the program?

A. Hit *return*.