

Hepatitis Diary

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If one day I find myself undone by misfortune, destroyed, helpless, in the utmost physical or mental misery, or both—for example, if I were cut off in or condemned to the high mountains, buried in the snow, freezing to death after a fall of a hundred meters bristling with the sharp-edged ice and rocks, both legs wrenched off, or my ribs splintered and broken, their points perforating my lungs; or in the bottom of a ditch or an alley after being shot, bleeding out in what will be my last grim dawn; or in a hospital ward for the terminally ill, losing my functions hour by hour amidst wracking pain; or homeless, abandoned to the vicissitudes of beggary and alcoholism; or with gangrene creeping up one leg; or in the terrifying grip of a spasm of the glottis; or completely crazy, attending to my needs in a straitjacket, imbecile, ignominious, lost—it's most likely that, even with a pencil and notebook at hand, I wouldn't write. Nothing, not a line, not a word. I would definitely not write. But not out of an inability to do so or because of the circumstances, but rather for the same reason I don't write now: because I don't want to, because I'm tired, bored, done. Because I don't see the point.

January 23, 1992

Tuesday

What a sense of interminable error... obviously the result of the situation. This afternoon I tried to sleep, tossing and turning in bed in a state of feverish agony... Suddenly I became aware that I had slept, only a bit, maybe seconds. Or an hour. Impossible to say, and what's more it's not at all important. The only certainty was that I was already awake again. I knew I'd slept because I remembered the dream: I or someone from my point of view was eating ice cream—lemon, I think, because it was white, and there, in a corpuscle of the cream, in a drop that popped out, were little men...

Then, it shames me to say (to what lengths will this suffering drive me?), I began to try to attract the dream again by thinking about them, threading together the comic or perilous adventures of the little ice cream men...

Wednesday

A bird sings. It's a moment. A flower opens. Another moment: the same. A moment in the cycle. It's time for something or other to happen. Like the mechanical shrill of a bird I know well. The song opened. The flower sounded. The senses bloom in hollow circles where the ghostly light passes. The bird's day came and he sang. The Middle Ages of the Bird attained, the song wavered in the air, gave a leap, and became sky. The bird's moment wasn't in time, but in this afternoon, in these rare slowings of my heart—and also in time. From the bird to the flower is a curve that coils itself like a gold wire about my dog's tongue. One of my dearest desires is to write a book about the drill, the tormented and metallic return from death to life.

Thursday

Style and substance. Unity of opposites. Meditation, *zazen*... It's important to meditate, I agree... But on what? Why does everyone talk about meditation without offering a clue as to what to meditate on? I don't understand. I don't accept it. I can't. It's too strong for me. "The contents are what matters!" I cry in my bewilderment, a cry literally contentless, without subject.

But when the contents show themselves futile, fleeting, empty (and that doesn't take long) the only thing that goes on seeming real, the only thing that sustains the comedy is the form, the label, the husk.

Perched on the cornice of form like a bird on a branch, I can't help feeling a certain

curiosity for the contents still down below
spinning in the drill...

Which is how I ceased to be a bird and
transformed myself into a worm performing its
spirals and helices within those highly
interesting materials. But now the bird is singing
over my head, a terrible clarion note...

What? It's raining!

I can't believe it: the sky just let go while
I was thinking.

Thursday

A good reason to distrust the spiritual
teachings of X or Y is the very pedagogical
intention that drives them. Why would wisdom,
other than out of a benevolence not actually
substantiated by these doctrines, have to be the
object of instruction? The transition from
knowing to teaching is supposed to be natural,
inevitable, gravitational—and it's completely the
contrary! If the ambitions of a guru are to
increase his clientele, or not feel so alone, or to
stand out somehow, then he's a false guru, a
perfect fraud. And that's impossible, it's wrong
thinking, it's playing a charlatan's game. The
best explanation is within the doctrine itself:
whatever it is, the doctrine being taught can only
be realized only once everyone has understood it,
when the world is complete and the Reign of
Love and Knowledge established—only then can
there be a minimum of love and knowledge. Of
course that will never happen. Not even the
wildest utopian can seriously think it might...
It's like in Soloviev—why do we have to practice
sex? Because there is no other way at our
disposal by which to produce the advent of the
Reign of Love. We can't love until all the sex has
been had, and all of humanity is not enough to
do that because humanity is exactly what sex
reproduces...All the buddhisms and taoisms, all
philosophies in general, are just more of those
exciting and entertaining inconveniences with
which we avoid the intolerable. There is only
one area in which this mechanism has an effect,
and its efficacy is absolute: language.

Friday

I go walking in one direction...in one
direction, not the other...on the Rue de Rivoli in
the rain...no, not in the rain itself...but rather in
what starts, I mean: it starts to rain...no, it
doesn't start, it stops. It starts and stops at the
same time. Stops and starts. It's an indecision in
which there's rain. I'm getting wet! And what's
more—lost! No, not lost because it's the Rue de
Rivoli... But all the same I'm lost, I don't know
why if this is the street I'm looking for... of
course a street, especially if it's the street one is
looking for, is the ideal place to get lost, it's the
place where one is always already lost if you can't
find the other street... And this despite looking
at the map every twenty meters; I unfold it (it
gets wet), I always look for the same thing, find
it and keep going... It can't be, but it is. The
street is infinite, every moment I'm more lost in
this labyrinth of a straight line, my anxiety
growing measurably as the rain seems about to
pour down at every moment...

Until finally it hits me...it was so
simple...I go in the opposite direction! I was
going fine, just backward. The street was
backward on the map!...I turn the map
around...it's as if now I weren't getting wet, as if
with that it's enough... Maybe so, finally. It
wasn't just the map: it was me too, I was
backward in my head, everything was backward,
starting with the map because I looked at it
backward... I have to reorient myself: okay, just
put my face where the back of my head was... It
turns out the street itself was actually backward:
I should cross to the sidewalk on the other
side... Luckily the Rue de Rivoli actually has a
reverse. The line is not abstract: it's real, it goes
there and back... If not... Now the inversion is
complete, absolute, a whole world. The rain was
on the other side and Paris too, absolutely
everything—completely. Luckily I've never been
to Europe, never been to Paris or anywhere else.

Friday

What is entropy? I say entropy just to say something, anything. I was paging through this encyclopedia of useful information... I don't know why I bother... I forget everything immediately. The examples stay with me but not what they are examples of. The author explains entropy, as follows:

There are nine men in formation, standing perfectly still. They are ordered to take one step in any direction—it might be forward, backward, to the right or to the left.

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They obey and take a step. If all of them step forward, order is maintained, the formation reproduced in a new location. But the possibility that this will happen is one in $4 \times 4 \times 4 \dots$ (nine times), the total divided by four, for the four possible directions in which they could step.

I'm not going to do the math, but it's in the billions.

You can see how difficult it already is to keep order. And with only nine little men! (With two or three it would still be enormously difficult.)

How much more with the staggering number of atoms in the world... It's immediately not even worth hoping for the possibility of a coincidence... And this is the disorder produced with just the first step.

It's disheartening. The world starts and it's already in chaos. Take a step, the first step, and already there's irremediable disorder. I'm going to start right now, I'll make the first move.

Friday

I know a lot about witchcraft. I don't think anyone knows more than I do. I've been under a spell since birth and at forty two (almost forty three) years I still haven't managed to awaken. Why would I? I'm in the deepest of enchantments, entirely bewitched, a toy in the hands of the sortilege that masters me. Which is

why I know everything there is to know on the topic, more than any studious necromancer who has dedicated his life to it, more even than any charlatan who earns a living talking about horoscopes and parapsychology on TV. I know blindly, wholly, unflinchingly, as a material knows it's atoms.

Midnight

Write? Me? Write again? Write books? Write a page? I? How could such a thing even occur to me? All by myself? All that work?

Never. Even if I wanted to, even if I were such an idiot, I couldn't. I would need that slightly demented persistence I must have had in my youth to trudge through all those infinite preliminaries all over again, to answer all those questions.

Saturday

A high percentage of our mental activity is dedicated to the strictest functions of survival: maintain equilibrium, avoid collisions, coordinate movements, heed calls to attention...liberated from these the mind could expand, reach new limits.

Habit frees us. Autopilot takes over. But obviously not nearly as well as it should. It barely leaves us in a condition to effect the minimal mental activity necessary to realize our own limitations. Certain kinds of ritual activities can contribute, however sporadically; for instance a highly rhythmic, repetitive dance that "possesses" us thoroughly. The same with those technological devices—floating in a tank of warm water, etcetera.

What intrigues me is what happens afterward, once the mind is expanded. Surely there one would encounter new functions to occupy it almost entirely, leaving once again only a tiny margin at the edge through which to glimpse new expansions. Then someone will come up with a new technology designed for the

new automations and new dances of a second expansion... And if so, will it be worth it?

Saturday

Why read?

To do something for my culture. To remember.

To do something for myself. To forget.

The best books have to be those we forget, books made with such art as to offer us the ecstatic experience of forgetting. But the best books can also be used for the opposite.

Philosophy, for instance: I read it to have an academic foundation with which to teach classes or write articles. Or I read to transform myself. But the objectives inform one another: what other worthwhile transformation is there than to become an esteemed professor and author of philosophical treatises. Isn't that the only possible transformation? And the simplest, in that any other seems to involve a great deal of manipulation of knowledge, a lot of "conviction" (a lot), sincerity, hypocrisy, dissimulation...

Saturday

Okay, I'm not going to write any more. Why? It's not so much the work that appalls me. On the contrary, what appalls me is the vacuum without any. It's the curse of the project. I can't write without a project, and the project extends into the future, annihilating the present, erasing it. It's a sacrifice. The sacrifice of life in installments.

It's hard to escape the project.

I don't know... I could have abandoned the project instead of embracing it. Like in my history of the drill, that stupid novel project I had...

I'd prefer to never do anything ever again, ever, than to have a goal.

Saturday

How is it possible that people have not grasped the beauty of the pure Tao of inaction? I'll go running after them like a crazy man, a teaspoon held high between thumb and forefinger.

How is it possible that there are still those who have not perceived the grandeur of the pure Tao of contemplation? I'll go running after them, the hinge from my window in hand.

How is it possible that anyone gets on a bus without having seen the pure Tao of wisdom? I'll run behind for kilometers brandishing a screwdriver so they can see it through the rear window.

Monday

Write again? I? Never.

The synchronization. That's the worst.

To synchronize the work of writing with the actual writing... words with their intent, meaning with meaning.

To contemplate it all in the single time that makes up our lives is dreadful enough. But two times! That's beyond any imaginable imposition. (And nonetheless there are people who like the idea, people who would like—horror of horrors—to have been Joyce, to have written *Ulysses*, to be writing it... And that's what they do, poor fools.)

Tuesday

A master of wisdom says: "When one has a toothache, one goes to the dentist. That is our way." The Tao. Agreed. Perfect simplicity. What could be simpler?

The Tao is the perfect way to the perfect act. Fine. But isn't that contradictory? Long before being perfect, to even begin to be possible to assess, the act has to be effectual. And that alone is enough to initiate a whole chain of cause and effect. I don't think we go to

the dentist in search of an effect because we are experiencing a cause. That doesn't seem very Tao. Nevertheless, if we are to believe the master, going to the dentist is the consummation of the perfect Tao of inaction. Could it be that action and inaction are the same thing?

Tuesday

Ulysses—somebody has to say it—is nothing. Absolutely nothing.

The time it took! It's horrifying. The time it took Joyce... It's like a warning: the profession of novelist. It could happen to anyone.

"Today I did good work..." "back then I was working on my novel..." "I went to a retreat in the mountains to write..." "In the afternoons I write at The Select..."

Never again will I succumb! Fortunately that's all behind me. And not so much out of laziness as respect for my fellow man, so not to make him the victim of that boundless narcissism.

Believe you have a real life! Proclaim it!

Has anyone noticed that writing written with a process doesn't actually need to be read? Except out of distrust, of course, to prove that the rules of the process have been stringently obeyed. The process is instantaneous, heterogeneous with the time of life, and when placed in a continuum with life or work the result is happiness and plenitude, never one of those laborious and depressing books that in reality derive from a confusion of "process" and "project."

Wednesday

This crisis of the novel concluded, the birds go about their business. Above an interminable series of sharp snipping sounds—a great shrill. This goes on all day, as long as it's light out.

There are birds who imitate. Could there be inimitable birds? Maybe that's all any of them set out to be. Maybe all we are hearing are harmonic maneuvers designed to make imitation impossible. Strange complications to disorient the imitator. If that's the idea the repetition isn't a matter of clumsiness, it's the subtlest of skills.

The air enters through my window, backward, in the form of nothing.

In came the air, rigid as a rock.

In came a thought, swaggering.

In came a pink plastic ball and dropped on my bare foot.

Wednesday

How do I, I wonder, acknowledge with proper eloquence the unheard of privilege of watching those things we see pass above our heads, those shapes, those weightless heaps, those volumes.

Wednesday

My favorite writers. I once had to list them:

Balzac
Baudelaire
Lautréamont
Rimbaud
Zola
Mallarmé
Proust
Roussel

Thursday

The straight way of the Tao forgets two fundamental elements: procrastination and gratuitousness, elements otherwise related to one another as counterweights at either end of causality.

Thursday

Not write. My magic recipe. “Don’t write anymore.” It’s that simple. It’s perfect, definitive. The key that opens all doors for me. It’s universal, but only for me, I would never dream of imposing it.

How did it occur to me? Now I think I know—and this explains its efficacy at the same time: I happen to be a writer. I’ve turned out to be one, something I never would have hoped for, to be honest. Readers are the ones who can fantasize about writing, about the humanity of time. Writers, no. Not me. I’ve done with that.

Favorite pastime?
Epilepsy.

Friday

A new application for the continuous occurs to me: the negation of thought... At the edge of that negation is an affirmation by which thought takes shape again without interruption.

I don’t know how I’ve been able to practice this contradictory pastime of searching for “examples of the continuous,” given that examples are discontinuous and the continuous can’t have examples because it has only itself.

Except that it does have examples: it has transformation, which, if we care to go on thinking, can only be apprehended in the form of examples.

Friday

The undulation of reality. No, that’s not right. Better just say: the undulation. Reality is an adjective.

Saturday

After an eternity of clouds in one direction... It has become natural to watch them flow right to left... The direction was a part of their very shape.

Today at dawn I’m watching them slide backwards. They’re replaying. I’ll see all the clouds I just saw. That makes me think...I wasn’t paying them a fixed attention...and an erratic attention isn’t attention.

I hadn’t even distinguished the necessary from the possible.

Saturday

On consideration, everything in prose is parentheses, especially in self-conscious prose—prose pleased to be known as prose.

Prose is the mechanism of the parentheses, which I think is better than the reverse.

Prose is written language freed from the restriction of memory and the irreversibility of meaning.

To write is to enter an enchanted kingdom of riddles.

Riddles. Parentheses.

The solutions to riddles are always written upside down.

Saturday

I’m in the street. Dizzy, weak. Shuffling along like a cripple. Suffocating in a Saharan heat. And I discover...

In my short hallucinatory walk through Flores, I discover: that everything is exactly as it was... More, much more: that everything is exactly as it is.

The world has transformed into world.

Saturday

It's not so much that I worry about being a good writer, being better than bad writers, or even being irrefutably better... Because people, ignoring the irrefutable, generally claim the opposite—actually, they always do; and afterward, centuries later, posterity says the same thing everyone always did. No matter if those beneficiaries of fame and fortune are subject, in the present, to manifestly unfavorable comparisons with good writers (the ones doing the comparing, in person or indirectly), if said beneficiaries are sloppy, facile, complacent, mercenary hacks. It doesn't matter because the misconception is stronger and no misconception has ever resolved anything. Misconception is the interior force of metamorphosis. The author to whom the doors of glory are opened is the clumsy fraud on whom time and misconception have worked a marvelous transformation. And that is as it ought to be, I say with pain, with tears (to admit it is to admit I am wasting my life), but it's fine, because transformation is worth more than the mere persistence of the essence. Without transformation there would be no continuous and the world would be reduced to a collection of inert examples.

The gold that is Góngora, Racine, Shakespeare, Balzac, is made with the pitiful clay of García Márquez, Marguerite Yourcenar, Isabel Allende... Even more—Lautréamont is made of Sábato.

On the other hand, with me no transmutation will ensue, no misconception will lock into place and turn a gear within me. I made the mistake of wanting to actually be Lautréamont, as if that moment hadn't long gone. And who cares? Sterile, forlorn, skewering my posterity like a complete nothing.

Sunday

Light, mother of dreams.

White industry of the yawn,
somnia, and deep sleep.

Hypnotic clarity.

Eyes that close on the transparencies of the air.

Day that lulls me in its brighter and brighter depths.

Narcotic blaze.

Monday

Whenever we talk about the second conscience, "the conscience's conscience," and the third conscience, and the fourth... I can't help thinking that the way to arrest this escalation is to create a fiction, a mechanism like something out of Literature to serve as stage, laboratory, final play space for all the infinities.

Wednesday

Proportional numbers. It seems there are those that form a series in which the fourth is to the third what the second is to the first, such as half or double. Of course when the relationship is more subtle, for example if one is half the cube of the other, it must be almost impossible to complete the trio. Nonetheless, there's a method, and apparently everyone in the world (but me) knew it: you multiply the second by the third, and divide by the first. Let's see if it works

8	11	20	...	27.5
2	4	9	...	18
1.5	3	5	...	10

Yes! It works out! It never would have occurred to me.

Friday

There's a woman in the neighborhood, tall, thin, blond, of indefinite age, who wanders about repeating "Begone Satan." It's her incantation, her practice, her OM. She comes

and goes all day: she must have her base of operations at the evangelical temple here around the corner. I watch her from the window.

The neighborhood is going through an odd moment: an old woman endures agonies in a bedroom on the first floor, the street window open, the bed beside it, the lamp on the table lit twenty-four hours a day. Another elderly woman, of a deforming gauntness, keeps watch in the doorway of the house on the corner, just in front of my own window. They take her out in a wheelchair at eight in the morning and there she sits until night, barely covered by a white nightgown, showing her skeletal legs.

The birds, shrilling, take out the screws of these interminable days one by one.

Begone Satan.

I wonder if these sorts of inclusions actually exist: I am in my bed, my bed is in my house, my house is in the neighborhood, my neighborhood in the city, the city...

Maybe they exist, but in an instant register, without duration. Time is displacing them constantly, even as I go on lying in bed.

My bed is in the world, the world is in the neighborhood, the neighborhood is in my house...

It's not so much a system of inclusions as a system of expulsions: Begone Satan.

And it's less an incantation or warning than a description. The expulsions consume themselves endlessly, at great speed, all the time—an incessant and tormented displacement.

Argentine poetry in the sixties is inconceivable without "la loca." She's the central character, the recurring figure. If someone someday proposes to do a study of the poetry of Alejandra, paradigmatic poet of that era, they'll have to start with "la loca."

La loca was a poetic token, devoid of meaning, whom it took years to reclaim. But here again, to reclaim her is not to incorporate her, but to expel her.

"Expelled by the emptiness of the creator" (Lezama Lima).

Friday

Someday I'll have to write about these crepuscular contemplations. How I sit in front of the window, eyes fixed maniacally on the sky, on the pink, without blinking... First the pink. Then the plus-pink. This repeats at intervals, until my friend, the little black cloud shaped like a bat who hangs amidst of all those slabs of pink (incidentally, my little cloud was adorned with a topknot of gray vapor today), until my little cloud catches fire, chars, and the cadaver takes the form of a castanet, clashes with a clap-clap in the midst the thousandth stage of plus-pink, and slices vertically toward the top like an arrow.

Saturday

The horrific experience of the end of the world. Though experienced innocently, almost aesthetically.

In the Plaza Flores. I had a lump of sugar in my hand, held between forefinger and thumb. Suddenly it dissolved between my fingers. If for an instant I could imagine it was the humidity, I soon realized otherwise. The air had taken on a yellowish green brilliance and to breathe was to die. All of us, the whole world, died in that instant.

Nonetheless, there was some sort of a survivor (there always is) to think the following: the chemistry of the atmosphere has been destroyed, speeding atoms spread catastrophe everywhere, in an instant all life on the planet ceased. Very well. But who knew? The scientists ceased living too. There was nobody left to go on doing science, therefore nobody to study the phenomena.

Unless...in some way it had been studied beforehand. For example, what was I doing in the Plaza Flores with a sugar cube in my hand?

There's also the possibility it may have been a dream.

Tuesday

The birds sing because they are far away, and vice versa. The distance that separates me from them is the song, the drawn spring.

If they were nearby I would have left off hearing them long ago, in another time, in another era. I would already have forgotten.

The clouds don't admit the least change of location, much less of position. They must remain perfectly still, the least displacement destroys them.

Thursday

It's utterly impossible that I should hear bird song. For that, the bird would have to be on its "radio;" that is, there would have to be a kind of circle with me at the edge and the bird at the center and a line connecting us.

And where is that line? Who has seen such a thing? If it were to exist, it would be one phenomenon more added to the world.

Through that line the song would come swiftly, without interruption. It would be the way, the Tao, and the Tao can't be in the world before I am. There can't be a path just waiting to convey to me all the meaning that catches and accumulates in a ball along the chirp.