

Stating the Obvious: A Manifesto

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Man is absolutely not the crown of creation: every creature stands beside him at the same stage of perfection...And Man is, relatively speaking, the most unsuccessful animal, the sickliest, the one most dangerously strayed from its instincts - with all that, to be sure, the most interesting!

-Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ, 1888, p136

The true lessons of evolution have still not been learnt. What was really exposed was that throughout humanity's entire existence, it has been lied to. It has also been a liar. If you want the history of humanity, imagine a mind believing its own lies - forever.

Our minds have been asking all the wrong questions, then acting surprised when there were no answers. All philosophy, all attempts to justify the world in an area that floats outside of it - in thoughts, beliefs, fears, can be disposed of as worthless. Nietzsche has his eternal recurrence and will to power, Sartre his existentialism etc, but they are still asking the wrong question. Why are we here? Answer: Because the process of natural selection gave us opposable thumbs and abnormal brains. That is all. The world may be absurd, but that is certainly no justification for it. To look for justification is to miss the point. 'Why we are here' means no more than why a dog is here, why an ant is here, why a rock is here. There is no why - they simply are.

From an evolutionary standpoint, the only meaning we are given is that we must continue, the species must survive. Of course, we know that even this type of talk is not right - it is species-centric. There is absolutely no evidence that our species is the crown of creation, the end of evolution's arrow. So the ultimate goal is the continuation of all species, plants, and the world itself, a task that we have failed spectacularly. Indeed, homo-sapiens will prove to be the exception that proves the rule of evolution - for the first time the fittest will not survive, they will destroy themselves. An unholy

aberration, simultaneously discovering and destroying all the Earth's binding rules. And the true sin of humankind will not be that it destroyed the world, but that it knew better. This (my) generation will be the most hated, as we know that we are murdering our world for the sake of nothing but creature comforts, and yet for all our knowledge and pride we cannot help ourselves. We are merely addicts and junkies throwing away the world for one last hit of our own comforting decadence.

But in all this fallibility, hogs snout's rummaging the trough, is there any meaning to be taken from the desolation, any cause at all? No. This is not the right question.

Measured by the scale of Eternity, all action is vain -(if we let thought undertake an adventure whose result would be infinitely grotesque - an important fact for the knowledge of human impotence). But if life is a bad farce, with neither goal nor initial labour pains, and because we think we should withdraw as fresh as washed chrysanthemums from the whole business, we have proclaimed as the single basis of understanding: art.

-Tzara, quoted in Caws, 1918, p299

Here art, in all its forms, becomes not the answer to a question, but a way of understanding that there is no right question. Those monkeys with quills and chinese brushes, sitting silently under gauzed lamps, are the scientists of forever. They may not give meaning, but they do provide a respite, a hope. But art cannot save the world.

The human experiment's grave will rest everywhere; in the furious weather, the labyrinthine landfills, the vacant skyscrapers, the thickened air. Of course it is unlikely there will be another creature who will know these fossils for what they are, we have scorned natural selection, this arrow head will be broken off at the wound. But if natural selection creates another aberration of understanding, the true fossils will not be concrete and styrofoam, but recorded in our words, our writings. If any structure survives the species, let it be a library. The history of the whole world, wrapped in love, hate, and folly. If no one ever reads our books is it all for nothing? Yes. But remember, it was always for nothing. Literature remains the one speck of hope. It's the slimmest of chances, but maybe future species can do what we could never do: learn a simple lesson.

This is not much to sustain us. It is true that a writer cannot save the world - no one can. It is already dust, waiting to be blown away by the wind. But the

writer can survive the world, in pages of description and discovery. And this nothingness must be enough. It implies a duty to the writer beyond that of constructing a good sentence, it bestows the writer as the true cataloguer of the lesson that is humanity.

So stand up and take knives of ink to the largest walls! Tell the future that there were a few humans who fought against contented self-deception.

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So, taking off the lens of eternity, what should the contemporary writer write? Always the writer should aim to expose the falsity of the perceived human condition; unveiling the hooded religions that put us on a pedestal above our fellow animals, debunking the pseudo-psychologies that diagnose symptoms and call that a cure, defrocking the lingering notion of love that dulls our ambitions, and delousing the hopeless greed that seeps into the pores of every human from their first words to their last - in short, everything we have known and considered valuable - must be shown as worthless, games invented by ourselves, for ourselves.

Our current world view seems to be that we are the transcended ruler, sitting on the throne, the understanding, controlling driver of existence. Good writing should rip this fake transcendence from our eyes and show true meaning, the world as it is, as it always was. Real transcendence is just the opposite, it finds its ascension in the act of unmasking the lie we have become to show that we are in the world, of the world. With every word literature should strip away humankind's perceived divinity.

Many intelligent people, who have begun to make this journey to truth above self-delusion, now acknowledge god's absence, and accept evolution. But there is a lingering false idol that is not often discussed, an area where even self-proclaimed atheists prescribe themselves as better than the world: the pseudo-transcendental nature of love. If we are hairless apes, an aberration of evolution, then why are we the only animal to possess this miraculous emotion of love? 'Love', as we know it, is a result of hormones, chemicals, and a hard-wired instinct that every animal has to mate for the preservation of the species. Many who don't believe in god turn to this hangover from Christianity, saying that 'love will save the world'. They are replacing one blindfold with another. A writer should never totemise or exalt love, but always show that it is merely an emotion,

based in the brain, another of the mind's tricks on itself to keep us in line.

It is only when we have shed the many lies we have imposed upon ourselves that we can see the world from outside itself. Of course, this may not be possible, we are still viewing the world through that which lied to us in the first place - our minds - but it is the writer's burden to struggle to find this place, beyond all lies, and see if a truth comes shining through. If it does not, then nothing is lost, as nothing was ever had. The writer's struggle is that of all us; to stop believing in the lies stabbing from all sides and rise above to an understanding of the truth - to comprehend the encompassing totality of our complete meaninglessness, the utter void of divinity or sublimity, love or faith, and to realise that the human story will be a history of lies believing lies. But the fact remains, hanging like an exclamation point at the end of a sentence, that humans are, forever, the most *interesting*.

I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development.
- Orwell, 1946, p83

When I was nine-years-old, after moving to Australia from America, my parents split-up. Divorced. My mother, with her degree from Cornell and PhD in evolutionary genetics from Washington University, moved to Wodonga to lecture at LaTrobe. I stayed with my father, an academic and life-long atheist, in Melbourne. After a year or so, my father had a mental breakdown. My father (who I have always called 'D' for some forgotten reason), started telling me that God would look after us, He would give us all we needed on Earth. Being nine, and D being my father, I did not question this. When he gave away all his possessions on the nature strip, I had the sense to grab his wallet, as I did know a little about money. Eventually I asked a teacher at my school (D had asked me to stop going, but I did anyway) if this was normal. The teacher, thankfully, called my mother.

So I went to live in Wodonga. But every second weekend, throughout the eight years of school, I travelled on a train down to Melbourne to see my father. I never played organised sport like the rest of my friends because, although I could go to training, the games were on the weekend and I would miss every other game. A few years ago I worked out that I had spent well over a month of my life on that train.

I spent this time reading. Whatever I could get my hands on, I read. From horror to verse poem to fantasy to script. In between reading and staring out the window at the slowly browning country, I started writing.

Writing about fiction has become a far more important matter than writing fiction itself. It's one of the best ways you can tell the pure novelist nowadays. He's not going to waste his time over the messy garage-mechanic drudge of assembling stories and characters on paper.

- Fowles, quoted in *Postmodernism*, 1984, p12

For this manifesto I wanted to write 'my' manifesto, not just for writing but for the whole of life, in the style of a passionate Modernist with an axe to grind. But after reading over so much of my past writing, it quickly turned into a form of self-parody. After struggling against myself for a little while, I decided that the true Modernist manifesto is something that lets it all hang out, that does not feel shame. In the sweeping generalisations, the laboured hyperbole, the repetition, you can see the ridiculous seriousness of a young man who has spent too much time reading Modernist novels and philosophy and not enough time playing Frisbee in the park. However, it must be said that the manifesto is completely me - I have deliberately taken excerpts out from several different writings, dating back to my teenage years, creating a world view I do believe, if a bit less fervently.

But does the manifesto explain why I write? I struggled with this idea all semester. Do I live by my own manifesto? (Does anyone?) As I am writing a short fiction for my thesis this year, it's worth examining the process that this piece has gone through, and its relevance to my manifesto.

The idea for my thesis, like so many of mine, was born out of anger. I work at a bookstore, and, on this particular day, I wanted the shift to be over so I could go to a party that I knew I was missing with every moment that passed. I concentrated on trying to make time pass faster, but this had the reverse effect of making it seem interminably slow. The anger this gave me has blossomed out into an idea for a thesis. But throughout the evolution of the idea, which has been influenced largely by research, I knew something was hiding. The whole thing just wasn't *me*. The ending kept eluding me, and I found that I couldn't start writing. But I kept blind faith that the ending would come, and it would become something I not only believed, but believed in.

I found it in my research. To explain the ending I will need to explain a little of the theory behind it. I discovered a recent study by Eagleman that seemed to show that the present is not quite happening *right now*. If you click your fingers, the sight and sound appear to be synchronous, however it takes over 100 milliseconds

between clicking your finger and that sound reaching your ears. Human beings can easily perceive 20 milliseconds difference in timing (Eagleman, 2002). So what's going here? Eagleman's theory is that between now as we experience it and the real present, there is a bit of lag. Enough time so that the brain can edit together the vision of the click and the sound of the click so that everything makes sense. We don't know how long this lag is.

The way in which our perception of time slows down during an accident has always interested me. Eagleman argues that in a severe situation the brain works harder, it pushes itself into another gear. In doing this, it is getting closer to the real present, not the perceived, edited present. The reason we do not experience all time like this is because, as Eagleman says, "like everything, (the brain) works as slowly as it can get away with" (Eagleman, 2002). This provided an ending for my thesis - Gary Gray, the main character, after pushing his brain to its limits, will finally break through to the real present, the world as it's happening, outside of the mind's filter:

Suddenly everything turned on its head. It seemed to Gazza like he was a jet and the whole world was his roar trailing behind him the sky. The people were out of sync like a badly dubbed movie, talking over each other, jumping and moving and thrashing out of time. But they didn't know it. Disjointed and obscene, he gaped as they grafted their own little worlds - and each other's - together, like some palimpsestual mess. He tried to tell them they were being fooled, hoodwinked. But he had to wait for the words to get to his lips, for the sound to get to their ears, for the ear's translation to get to their brain, and for the brain to edit everything together. The words had long since avalanched into meaninglessness, the cavalcaded syllables twisting in on themselves. He was just too fast, too muddled, too far ahead of himself, no one could understand him. He was forever interrupting.

The sky, meanwhile, had changed from blue to a stretched and streaked grey, tumultuous to the point of nauseousness. The people, the doctor included, had slumped, resembling roaming apes, slouching and shuffling, with low brows and dragging knuckles. He saw the apocalypse squatting there, surrounding them, just a moment away from them all. An instant. And all they could do was mill around amidst the devastation. A complete deception, he thought, not by any ruler, computer or corporation, but by their

own self-serving minds, writing the whole of existence as a fiction, to cater to their vain social, evolutionary and psychological desires. Now, he thought, he could understand why a baby comes into the world crying.

And suddenly the thesis made sense to me, I could get excited, I could finally start writing. This was just before writing my manifesto, and I wanted to examine my previous work to discover why this ending felt so right. It quickly became apparent that it encapsulates everything I have always written about. For an example, I will show the ending of a story written in June of 2004, called 'The Heresiarch'. It details a man who has "captured time", and cannot stop typing or he will lose it. This is the ending:

I am evolving. vBut this is not what it should be, I want meaning. This cannot be the next step up the spine, the successor of we mighty homo--sapiens. I glance at the mirror again; its grit and grime stick to my face like mud. My fingertips are outstretched to the swirling future, nbut I am not evolving to a higher understanding, to an answer. I..I.i I am nott this. IykhgI' can no longer hold onn....time is escaping, my grip loosening, I must take life for /granted sometimes. I am evolving to a being thatobeys time,, but worse yet0 - abeingthatdoesn'tthinkaboutit.Doesnt'worry'aboutt it.I ambecoming everyting ihaveeverhatedd;athaj'ofhmuadd./

Amongst the void, the maelstrom, the dissonance, the asphalt sky, the thunder, the burning clock-tower, this silence, these dystopian shadows, the hopelessness of the hopeless, this halo is becoming a noose; these puppet-strings are spiderwebs and, screaming till I lose my voice, screaming till dirt-yellow paint chips rain down from this binding ceiling, I shatter my reflection before it shatters me. That stupid grin, that almost autistic grin swallows me whole, the light spins, the shadows dissolve, and amongst the whole world, every spider and every wolf, every grain of sand and every mountain, every memory of every human, amongst this world existing I understand, I transcend, I evolve to the simplest of simple realisations - Ignorance Is Bliss. I have evolved to happiness, to meaning, even if it is mundane everyday meaning - ignorance is immanent, the answer to the meaning of life is in the question - to live.

Again, I find reading this a little embarrassing, showing the overwrought angst of a nineteen-year-old. However it links into several themes I am obsessed with; time, evolution, the mind, the meaninglessness of the 'meaning of life', ignorance/knowledge and finally transcendence. I have always written about my own interpretation of transcendence, which is brought about by the pure act of thinking, of wrestling with one's own mind and, for once, winning.

This is, in effect, the irreligious revelation, the realisation of an idea, that drives to write. An idea starts in the place where knowledge and imagination spark to light a fire. Exploration and research fan the flames until the fire starts consuming other areas, and you have the start of a story. I do not understand a story not based on an idea. A dull description of a room's contents, aptly portrayed, means nothing to me. I do love a well-put together sentence, and I love editing. But ultimately, I wouldn't be driven to write if it was merely the construction of a sentence. My love of words comes from reading them; my love of ideas comes from having them.

Writing is the act of giving the fiery idea life, in the hope that others will experience the same act of revelation (transcendence?) that I had when the idea first sparked. For me the spark occurs as a by-product of reading. Good writing should make you want to write. On the train of my childhood I would read until I felt like thinking, when I would stare out the window. From this an idea would spark, often completely unrelated to what I had been reading. Remember, the brain, like everything, works as slowly as it can get away with. By reading you push your mind into action, you strike the flint.