ERASMUS

Edition 1

think deeper.

JANUARY 2024

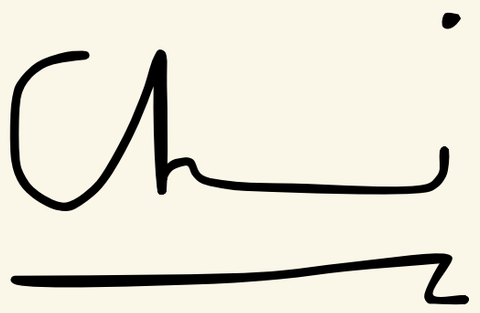
Dear voyager...

Welcome to this little space where ideas abode
and abound.

Welcome to a reading experience devoid of
topic, time and word constraints - just as our
writers are devoid of topic, time and word
constraints.

Welcome to *Erasmus*.

I hope you enjoy your stay with us,
and I hope these essays will stay with you.



Chenrui Zhang

In Defence of Handwriting

A new sheet of stationery: freshness. A clean desk. An expectant fountain pen. Pop — off goes the cap. Poised in the air, hand and pen draw near to the paper: then contact. Flow and intimacy. The mind pours itself out in suggestive rhythmic streams. All is music.

What makes handwriting so special? Many people will agree that letters and Christmas cards are best written by hand; usually words like ‘personal’ and ‘authentic’ are used to describe the effect. On the other hand, it is slower, messier, and apparently unnecessary. Those wishing to preserve the practice of handwriting cannot simply insist on tradition and taste and authenticity. It is necessary to think more deeply about this widely felt appeal.

A first observation would be that writing by hand avoids the problem of distractions which besets devices. This is true, although I wouldn’t underestimate the power of a good pen to trap unsuspecting writers in quarter-hour doodling sprees. Granted, there is a certain purity and safety in the medium of writing. But if this were the important point, a typewriter would do just as well, free as it is of digital distractions. We have not gotten to the heart of the matter.

Maybe, then, the appeal of handwriting lies in in its slower pace, which is half or even one third of the speed of most typists. Here I think we are onto something. The expression

evoked is ‘Think before you speak’, as well as the satisfaction of putting it into practice, of considering a thought carefully before voicing it out clearly and concisely, rather than succumbing to verbal ping-pong with an interlocutor. Handwriting encourages the former at least partly because of its slowness. ‘Hang on’, it asks, ‘take your time: are you sure that’s what you want to say?’ Especially if you want to be consistently legible, it leaves you no choice but to be deliberate and intentional in expression.

In the track-and field of handwriting, the pen is very clearly an inferior runner to the mind, unable to match its pace. I think the race ought to be rigged that way, for when thoughts are communicated at the same pace as they are generated, the result is easily disorganized, unwieldy, and giving a mild impression that the writer is just stringing words together.

Then again, would a slow typewriter do the job equally well? No: it is not just slowness which lends itself to clarity and concision. It is the absence of a backspace key! Although pencil can be erased and even ink can be scratched out, nothing compares to the brute force of the backspace key. We students know very well what it’s like when writing an essay to type out a sentence and then to delete and retype it in quick succession about six times until it looks half right. It feels like playing Battleships, and the effect on our writing style is not a good one. With pen, the stakes are higher: you might get away with a few corrections, but you know that the more changes you make, the more unseemly the page becomes.

The difference between stage acting and film acting is a useful comparison: the stage, like the pen and the paper, is a performance space—the real thing—where mistakes are costly. The film set and the Word document, on the other ha-

-nd, are spaces of perpetual rehearsal with endless possibilities for modification and redoing, where the present tense is always subordinated to the future and its revisionary power. So then, we write better than we type not only because we take our time, but because we dare to act with a bit more permanence and decision.

At this point one might suggest taking my slow typewriter and removing its ability to edit or start a new page. That would certainly come much closer to handwriting, but it would still be essentially different. For now we come to the physical act of handwriting. When I write a sentence, the shape of each individual letter and the amount of spacing between each word is unique and irreproducible. Not only is it unique when compared to someone else's handwriting; it is unique every time I myself write it. I might write "felix culpa" fifty times on a sheet of paper and communicate the same thing each time (though one might argue that the very style of the handwriting affects the reader's interpretation of the phrase).

But though I have written it fifty times, each individual instance of "felix culpa" is uniquely different from the others. I have written it fifty times in fifty different ways, even if the variations are only slight. Typing, because it is mediated by a machine, produces identical results whenever the inputs are the same, akin to arranging Lego blocks in a certain order for which there are a finite number of possibilities. Writing is more like a drawing a portrait, which literally has an infinite number of potential variations, and far greater potential for expressiveness.

It makes sense that we should like uniqueness: it is a very human thing. Each of us is a unique and unrepeatable instance of the genus "human", a fact central to our concept

of personhood. So when we look at a handwritten page, we are not looking at a sequence or an output, but at a creation, or, to go back to an analogy, a performance—just as every *Moonlight Sonata* played by a pianist is never the same as the former. In this way the handwritten page demands both the attention and appreciation we accord to a performance as well as the wonder and response we accord to a human being. And indeed many people say that when they read a letter or a card, they feel as though the author is there in the room speaking to them.

These things, then, constitute the special merit of handwriting. Slow and deliberate, it is a fruitful servant to the mind; unfriendly to revision, it elicits greater thought from the writer; and most importantly, being unique and irreproducible, it carries the personhood of its author in the very ink of its letters.

But there is more to say. I have spoken of handwriting as a performance: this thought can be expanded. We can describe the action that is handwriting, but more importantly we should address the Act of handwriting. The poetical perspective is no less intellectual than the scientific, and in any case handwriting has been so bound up with prose and verse for most of its history that it would be strange to avoid that mode of thought when discussing it.

In the act of writing, the writer enters into a solemn relationship with the pen. He has purchased its life; embraced it in his hand; lifted it up from its slumber in a desolate drawer and granted it its deepest yearning. Equally, the writer is priest, joining the ink and the paper in an insoluble union, and declaring it good. The writer is certainly a little Creator, and he delights in the creation on the page; but sometimes he delights in the pen itself, for it seems to take

him by surprise each time just how well it writes. As creator, the writer makes sentences in his own image, and whoever reads a letter sees the face and hears the voice of its writer. The paper itself becomes a kind of creator, finding ever-new ways to speak to each reader and even to the author himself. The creation lives a life of its own.

I believe that imagery and awareness of this kind, as envisioned by each individual writer, is lifegiving to our appreciation of handwriting. This is not to say that all writing tasks should be handwritten rather than typed. Typed essay examinations may well be a justified innovation. It is rather the tyranny of the keyboard which poses the gravest danger: the enchainment to the machine at the cost of the extinction of the quill.

For the pen to thrive, it must be reiterated that the whole drama of pen and paper is staged in the mystery of handwriting. As with all meaningful rituals, we are not watchers nor even doers, but participants in a whimsical theatre. Any proper valuation of handwriting must therefore address both its inherent benefits and its poetic dimension.

When all is done, you put the pen down, and you look with satisfaction upon the work done. The pen lies exhausted on the desk, but, I am sure of it, with a smile and the peace that comes with the knowledge of having accomplished one's purpose. You pick it up again, more gently this time, and say to it, "Well done, good and faithful servant: you have worked well. Now go and return to the slumber from which you came, and take your rest." And so it shall do until that hour when it will be called forth and rise again to new and radiant thoughts.

Andrei Lambert

our petit philosophe

Timely Immeditations

Overcoming the Übermensch

In 1933, Adolf Hitler arrived at the Nietzsche archive with a whip in one hand. When he left, he traded it for a ceremonial gift: Friedrich Nietzsche's walking stick. For decades, this image, of Facism with a Nietzschean crutch, tainted the polemic scholar with an unearned reputation as the genealogical thinker of Fascism. Though he might have felt pangs of sympathy for the soldier caste creation of Nazism, with its reconciliation of culture and politics, socially and intellectually, he must have shuddered in his decaying Lützen coffin as bourgeois pretenders instituted a government predicated on the popular will.

Rescued from a Hitlerian fate, Nietzsche's claims to philosophical perpetuity should be tempered. Admittedly ambiguous in output, for instance, the uncertainty of the completeness of his thoughts on the Will to Power, evidenced only by a letter claiming its completion, Nietzsche's heavy clarity of thought can be misconstrued as a profound perceptive power for the ages. The willingness to detach a philosopher from his thoughts is to fall for their trick, for in locating those ideas in an atemporal setting, the student admits to their validity as objects of eternity. Coated by the galvanising title of 'philosophy', the murmurings of a recluse become the voice of an era. And so, the wild shrieks of a

recondite academic became the reasonable doctrine of his time.

Sue Prideaux and Lesley Chamberlain are the proponents of a modern revision of Nietzsche. The latter attempted to submerge the reader into biography of the German scholar in the last period of his life. The use of intimacy was a subtle stimulation for sympathy. Both reground Nietzsche away from the claims of his former Fascist proponents. Particularly in Prideaux's analysis, Nietzsche stands as an eminently modern figure, highly sceptical of orthodoxy on issues as eclectic as women's sexual educations to antisemitism. Yet unconventionality should not be misrepresented as progression nor prescience. Difference for Nietzsche was power, aggression was evidence, and disbelief was his divinity. We must not revive Nietzschean power philosophy without noting the mind from which they sprang, and in doing so, become more wary of universal claims, especially when they come from men so divorced even from their own time.

Nietzsche's most profound revelation – the diminution of spirituality in an industrial age, the corruption of faith in the capitalist market, the violent death of God by mechanisation – was a theory produced and proven by his own derangement. Overbeck, the friend who was subjected to the berserk ravings of a hermit historian, intermittently lucid and impenetrable, testified to Nietzsche's perverse fulfilment of his argument:

"Sometimes, in a whisper, he produced sentences of wonderful luminosity. But also uttered terrible things about himself as the successor of the now-dead God…"

The Nietzschean Übermensch, whatever other contemporary

relevance it incidentally caught, was the product of an anachronistic academic enveloped in his energetic fantasies of the Greco-Roman world who sought to reconcile politics and culture through a devotion to this-worldliness and artistic attribution of meaning. Even Nietzsche, the philosopher with a proverbial hammer, espoused truths on a universal, cosmic, and religious scale, all of which were contingent on the conditions of his being and the environment of his era.

Nietzsche was the rarest of historical actors: a figure so consumed by a structural truth of his epoch, yet who was so apparently outside of his own time. Nietzsche's philosophy was not so much an abstract curiosity as a psychological necessity, for in staging the death of God within the theatrical recesses of his self-absorbed, tortured mind, Nietzsche required the destruction of the divine for his own sanity. Zarathustra may have come down the mountain, but Nietzsche went purposely up it, with a pre-rehearsed speech crumpled in his pocket planned for his spectacular return.

Pierre Bourdieu wrote regarding artists that, traditionally, they have defied sociological explanation because their powers are assumed to be universal, as though they have access to truths transcending time and society. The implications of philosophical musings may have relevance outside of their ages, but the instance of Nietzsche comically proves that a belief in overcoming had its genealogy in highly conditional self-gratification. The man who spent his hours considering ancient heroes in armchairs and sickness invented a caste of warriors as his only claim to membership among them. Through the philosophy of the Übermensch, Nietzsche was relieved of his irrelevance to take on a new form.

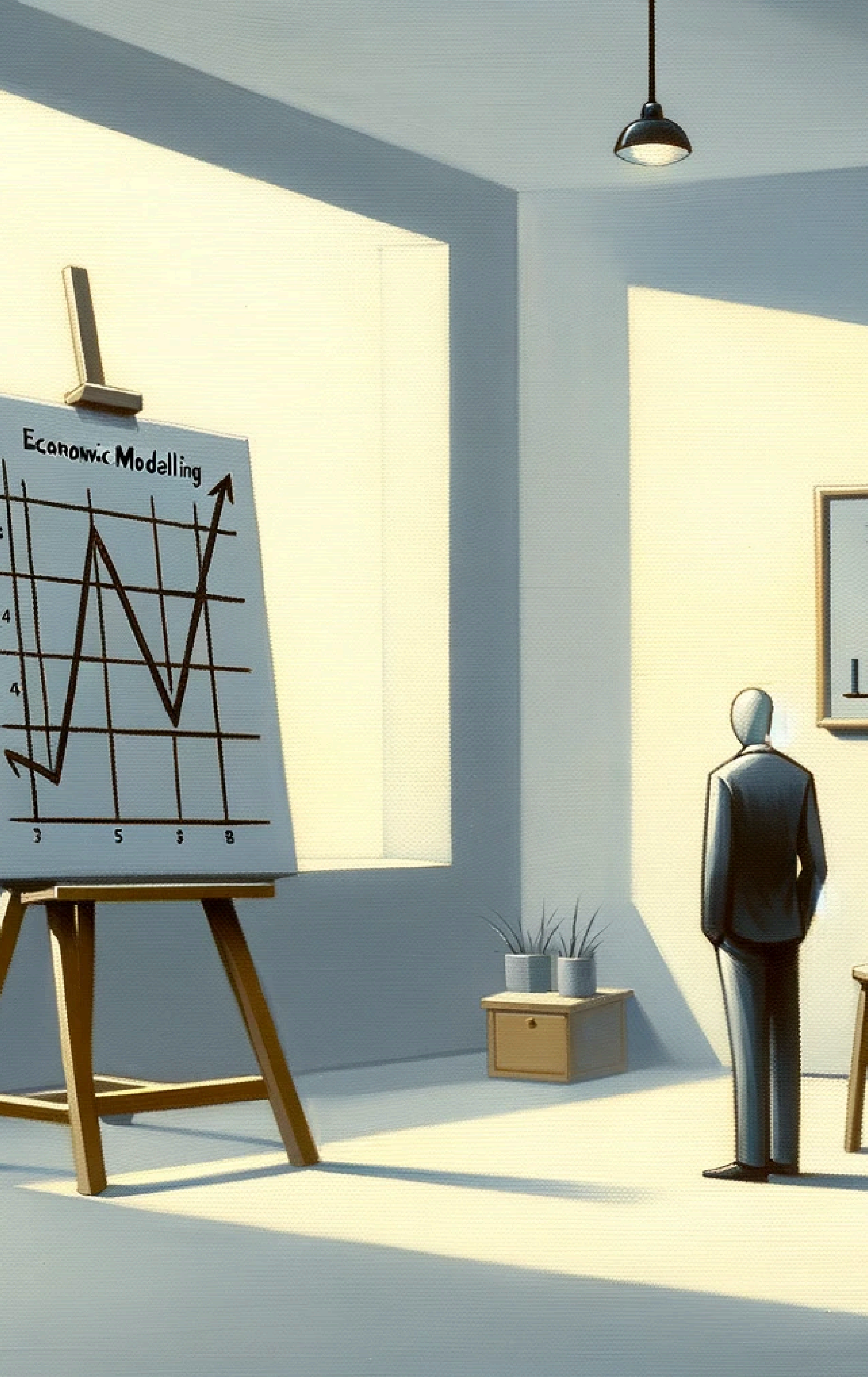
Just as he accused the Christians of inventing a thought system which justified its believers' demography, converting suffering into virtue, so Nietzsche established the basis of his unstable life on the principle that only an intellectual engulfed in classical knowledge could recognise be burdened with such insight. Madness was not the product of his investigations, but the aim: "you must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame; how could you rise anew if you have not first become ashes?" Is it too poetic to suggest that the Übermensch was an invention of a man who had no intention of overcoming himself, but who swore by it to plunge into a self-imposed torment.

As Peter Gast perceived:

"I believe Nietzsche would be as grateful to his rescuers as somebody who has jumped into the water to drown himself and has been pulled out by some… coastguard… as though he were only pretending to be mad, as though he were glad to have ended this way!"

Nietzsche wrote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that, "the higher we soar the smaller we appear to those who cannot fly." Nietzsche appeared very small indeed, but there was no we in flight. He was no dynamite, he was a man, and one whose reputation does not deserve to be rehabilitated with such rapidity.

David Evans
our chaste libertine


Economic Modelling

Thinking like an Economist

'Economists do it with models.'

This is a quote from my economics professor, who explained this to me far more lucidly than I am explaining it to you. This means we try to find a way of representing the phenomena we are trying to examine with a set of assumptions about how it works.

Why do this? We hear a lot of insane examples from this, excluding a lot of stuff we expect to be important. Surely, we should just look at things in their full complexity if we want to see how they work in the real world.

However, in economics there is an immense amount of 'noise' to our 'signal'. A person's choice of buying an apple will depend on a million things: the person's mood, how recently they have seen an advert to be healthy, and so on. If we try to understand everything at once, there is no hope in understanding anything meaningfully as any result can be assigned to a million causes, and nothing can be definitively proven.

Economists resolve this by trying to build a simpler set of rules - taking some things as given, some things as irrelevant - and trying to build simple rules which can logically connect

to both be logically plausible in their own right, and represent the relationships we can see in the real world.

IMPORTANTLY, a ‘model’ is not a description of how the world is, a great example being the utility maximiser model. A common assumption is that an agent (a person in effect) in a model has perfect information and derives a numerical value of ‘utility’ from consuming goods and has some kind of cost constraint which they are trying to maximise utility of.

This is not how I buy things, and I’m sure it is not how you do either. And it’s not meant to be! But the reason we make this assumption is that this is a much simpler way of seeing how we make decisions and we can use it to understand the way that real people do.

Suppose you go to the shops and you buy an apple, a chocolate bar and some other goods. You had a variety of complex and inscrutable reasons for this. Feeling a craving, feeling guilt for the craving and wanting to be healthy, buying laundry detergent because it smells like the one you grew up having used (which has been shown to be a real determinant for which laundry detergent people buy).

Now, imagine a ‘utility bot’ does the same shop with the same budget and has a set of arbitrarily assigned utilities associated with each product in the store, which leads it to make the exact same purchases as you do.

Now suppose the prices changed a little, maybe pears were a little cheaper, or your chocolate bar was a little more expensive. You might make different choices here, or you might not, you might decide that you just really want an apple, even if a pear would be cheaper, or you might switch.

The utility bot might make different choices as well. If the utility bot made the same changes you did, maybe we can say it models your preferences well, in the sense that if we want to know how you would probably react to a change in price, we could just plug it into the utility bot and have a pretty good guess.

This gets a lot easier when you consider that we are trying to estimate the decisions of the average person. Say instead of just you, 100 people went to shop in the same store, all with their own unique foibles, interests and variances. The average was taken, and a utility function is used to create the same results. If there was a slight price change, we would expect the results of the function and the 100 people to be far more similar as the variances and eccentricities would be more likely to cancel out, leaving only the response to price (which is what the utility function should calculate). If we talked about the average of a thousand people, or a million, then the utility function starts looking like a very reliable model for behaviour indeed.

This is a defence of the model of utility maximisation, but more generally I am trying to express that models are necessary and valuable in economics (and many other disciplines) because there is so much going on with so many different possible causal factors that isolating the cause or consequence of anything is extremely difficult in the real world, but if we make a simple, comprehensible model with relationships we understand and it resembles the real world data, then that allows us to learn things about what might actually matter within the complex model.

OK, we should now (hopefully) be convinced that using models is a good way of learning things. So, what is a model?

And more importantly what should it do? A model is, at its simplest, a ‘set of assumptions’, assumptions being things we assert to be true. For example: ‘all cats are orange’ and ‘all orange things have one braincell’ is a model, and we can even draw conclusions from it (all cats have one braincell). Obviously, this isn’t a very good model, but it is a model.

Usually, in economics we deal with models mathematically. For example, we may say that the real interest rate is the nominal interest rate minus the inflation rate or write an equation to explain the impact of capital and labour on output. These are still assumptions and behave in the exact same way as the simpler assumptions above. We design a set of claims about the world and see what conclusions we would have to draw if these things were true.

From here we can test the conclusions we draw from the model against what we see in the real world. If there is a strong resemblance (what we’d expect to see in the model is what we actually see in the real world), we may be able to do two things.

Firstly, we can gain insight about what actually is causative in the real world. For example, if a model which solely assumes economic growth is mathematically related to technological changes is mostly right about the trajectory of economic growth, then that tells us that technological change is probably an important factor which needs to be included in future models.

If the model is very close to being correct (or even just the closest we have to being correct) we can even use it to predict things about the real world (if there was a technological breakthrough tomorrow, what would it do to the economy).

However, models run into two very big problems.

First, if you are trying to get a sense of which factors are important through a model, it isn't sufficient to merely observe a strong correlation. If factors are associated, even very strongly so, this doesn't mean you have shown causality.

For example, perhaps two factors which seem interrelated are both just consequences of a third factor, or the one which you expect to cause the other is in fact the caused factor, or causality does exist, but only under a specific set of circumstances which you don't recognise. It is even possible for the whole connection to be purely random chance, as economics is so big, with so many factors, that you are virtually guaranteed to see some apparent correlation even by sheer chance.

This means economic models can't just be justified by resembling the world, they must also stand on their own logic. If we make a model which states that X is caused by Y, or even that X is correlated with Y, we cannot just point to past examples of X and Y being correlated, no matter how numerous they are. Instead, we must also provide an explanation for why this model makes sense, else we run the risk of just matching variables which appear correlated without actually considering the interconnection between them.

Suppose we have done that and have created a model which links concepts in a sensible and well justified way. Now we must suppose we have a model which describes the future and can feel confident predicting the future based on it. Unfortunately, this runs into our second problem, which is that there is a fundamental trade off between the simplicity of the model and what it can explain.

We make models because we want to capture what we care about in the world simply, but as a model grows more complete, it grows more complex, with more things needing to be considered and included. A simple elegant model, which explains a concept directly and clearly (and so is explainable and actionable) likely doesn't explain the full situation properly, and a model that includes enough to truly capture all that is actually happening is probably too complex to really aid understanding. Thus, model making in economics is a balancing act of explaining things simply enough to be clear, and complexly enough to be true.

The upshot of this is simply that economists think with models to understand and explain the world, and that models can be used to accurately represent complex topics simply. This means we can grasp concepts and solve problems by working out what is and is not significant to complex economic issues. However, a model is by nature, never a complete representation of the real world, and are worth looking at, and asking questions about what it assumes and what it leaves out.

The final part of this little essay is 'why should I care', but I think this is an easy question. Models are used by people to solve real problems which affect you: the Bank of England consults models to set interest rates, the government consults models to promote growth. If these models are wrong, then the mistakes people make because of that will massively affect you. In addition, even if the models aren't wrong, it is dangerous to not understand them. Economic models should not be this incomprehensible dogma, if they are, people will accept unnecessary and unfair hardship with the conviction that the model can't be wrong, or fall to conspiricism with the conviction that economists are just making it up. To be a

a good citizen and to fully take advantage of the democracy we live in, I believe it is necessary to understand the rules which govern us and form opinions on them, and that applied to economics too.

I would like to thank my economics professor, James Forder, for explaining this to me, and my reader (if you have bothered to get this far), for trying to understand.

Ian Chakravarti
our Braincell

How to be lucky

Luck is an oddity we can neither control nor understand. In fact, it is because we cannot understand it that we cannot control it. And yet, luck is malleable.

Consider what we consider lucky: winning the lottery. If I only bought a single lottery ticket and won the jackpot of a million pounds, I would be considered extremely lucky. Why? Because my reward of a million pounds far outweighs my cost of a single lottery ticket. I am also very lucky because the reward is not something I can control. There is no mechanism by which I can ensure I will win anything.

What we begin to see is that luck functions as a kind of ratio balancing the reward of an action with its cost. The higher this ratio, the greater our perceived luck.

Whilst the reward contains an element of unpredictable chance, we often forget that there is another side of the ratio we can control: our cost. If I spent a million pounds buying lottery tickets and won a million pounds, I would not be considered very lucky because my certain costs equal my uncertain rewards, thus ‘cancelling’ any sense of luck.

Conversely, if I did not buy a single lottery ticket, there is no way I could ever obtain the ‘luck’ of winning a lottery. My costs are zero, so my reward can only be zero too.

In this sense, perhaps luck is more like a fraction that a ratio, with uncertain rewards as its numerator and certain costs as its denominator.

$$\text{luck} = \frac{\text{uncertain rewards}}{\text{certain costs}}$$

Presented thus, anything above 1 would figure as lucky, and anything below 1 as unlucky. So if my costs are 0, then that renders the whole fraction null.

Continuing with this model of luck as a fraction, we can work out how to increase our luck: either by increasing the numerator or decreasing the denominator. In other words, we can increase our luck by either decreasing our costs or increasing our potential rewards.

The concept of decreasing our costs is fairly simple. In our lottery ticket scenario, it means buying less lottery tickets. If I spend £1 on tickets, I only need to win more than £1 to feel lucky. If I spend £5 on lottery tickets, I would need to win more than £5 to feel lucky. Thus, I would be luckier if I bought *less* lottery tickets - and not, paradoxically, more.

So much for decreasing costs. What about increasing potential rewards? Surely I can't simply 'choose' to win a million pounds? True. We don't get to choose how much we win, if anything. However, what we *do* get to choose is what kind of reward we want.

In this instance, I chose my potential reward to be a million

pounds by entering a lottery where the jackpot is a million pounds. Whether I get it or not is beyond my control. Had I entered a jackpot worth a thousand pounds, there is no way I could get a million pounds no matter how 'lucky' I am. Thus, the second way to increase our luck is to choose a greater potential reward.

Only, if it was this simple, why does not everyone choose greater potential rewards? First, because greater rewards often come with greater costs. For instance, a lottery ticket with a one million pound jackpot may cost more than a lottery ticket with a thousand pound jackpot. Not everyone is willing to pay the extra certain costs for an uncertain reward, however great.

Second, because greater rewards often come with a greater risk of not getting that reward. Imagine this: you enter one of two lotteries. The first lottery has a hundred tickets, one of which is worth a million pounds, with the rest worth nothing. The second lottery has a hundred tickets, one of which is worth a thousand pounds, one of which is worth nothing, with the rest worth ten pounds each.

If you want to increase your potential reward, you would enter the first lottery. However, I suspect you'd go for the second. Why? Because in our luck-fraction, we forgot one thing: that costs can be uncertain too. Some costs are enacted immediately; others take a longer time to surface.

Thus, we revise our fraction.

$$\text{luck} = \frac{\text{uncertain rewards}}{\text{certain + uncertain costs}}$$

Looking at this, we may wonder: if costs can be certain and uncertain, why are rewards only uncertain? That would be because luck is only concerned with that which has yet to happen: the future, where everything is almost certainly uncertain. Whereas some of our costs are certain because we pay them in the present, our reward can only be given in the future and is thus uncertain by default.

What our little model of luck finally teaches us us that life is fundamentally uncertain. Laws evolve, empires fall, people change. That which we believe is certain is only certain at the time of our believing. Because we do not and cannot know the future, all our actions contain an element of luck. We may be able to control our luck, through increasing our potential rewards and decreasing our certain costs - but we cannot escape it.

Chenrui Zhang
our thinking buddy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The Smurfological Imagination

Six months into university, I sought help.

"Smurfs Village is taking over my life," I confessed. My therapist nodded ever so kindly. "I haven't been sleeping for the past two months. I'm always on my phone. Harvesting crops. Planting *more* crops. Changing my time zone so I could harvest *those* immediately, I've been getting these Smurf-related nightmares…" so the session went.

I downloaded Smurfs Village—a mobile farming and village-building game for players aged 4-plus—with a clinical mindset. I was emulating methodology from Professor Bonnie A. Nardi's book, *My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft*. For my sociology paper at Yale University under Professor Julia Adams, I was "investigating" the "capitalist-Marxist duality and the manifestation of creativity and individuality through self-directed world-constructive gameplay." But then I was just kidding myself—I was simply obsessed with the game.

Upon deep, sociological reflection, I realized that Smurfs Village stages a fascinating confrontation between capitalist and Marxist worldviews. Smurf-world is modeled as a Marxist utopia (just wait, I'll defend this point later).

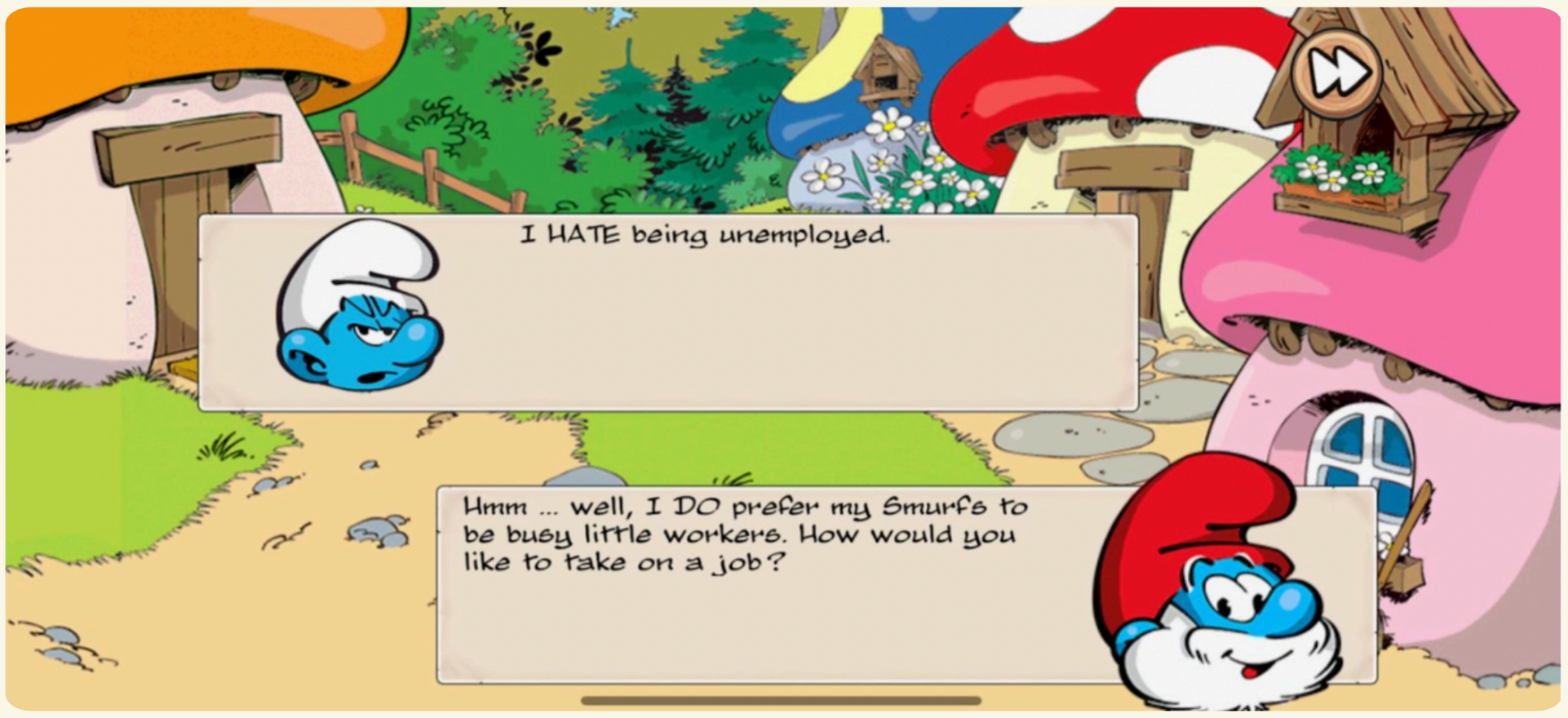
However, as a player embodying what Max Weber describes as "the spirit of capitalism," I brought a ferocity into playing the idyllic farming game that surprised even myself. I began asking myself: why do I try to maximize the productivity of my Smurfs in a game that's supposed to be an escape from the capitalist nature of work? If what Weber calls the "iron cage of capitalism," shapes even my attitude towards leisure, how can we ever escape?

Building Marx's Paradise—One Mushroom Hut at a Time

Before I make the case for Smurfs Village as the epitome of a Marxist utopia, I'd like to help you visualize this world. Below are screen-captures of four Smurfettlements I created, in the Magic Grove, Mountain, Planet Swoof, and Village, respectively.

Consider this. In the world of Smurfs, all farmland is communal. Smurfs have no use for money. Dressed in near-identical work-pants, Smurfs often say lines like "Boy am I glad to get back to work! When can I start?" According to Papa Smurf, the village elder, it is within the innate nature of a Smurf to love working. Even Grouchy Smurf, who hates everything, *specifically* hates being unemployed. Each Smurf works according to his ability, and mushroom huts are provided to each Smurf according to his need.

While Marx's critics can scoff at his idealism about human nature, claiming that "upon the abolition of private property all work will cease and universal laziness will overtake humanity," this is *by nature* will not be the case for Smurfs. You cannot convince me that Smurfs Village is not the embodiment of a Marxist fantasy—the fact that Papa Smurf sports a beard nearly identical to Karl Marx's is only the cherry on top.



Beyond surface-level similarities, Smurfs Village addresses key Marxist critiques of late-stage capitalism. I remember a particularly striking line from *The Communist Manifesto*, "the bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe." The market system has converted the doctor, the musician, the teacher, and the scientist into paid wage-laborers.

Smurfs Village addresses this capitalistic critique. Occupations in the game are held by "Specialty Smurfs." Each professional niche is inhabited by exactly one specialized Smurf. Greedy Smurf is the village baker, Miner Smurf mines all the ores, Painter Smurf paints all the mushroom huts, and Reporter Smurf reports all the news. In philosopher Marshall Berman's book, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, he emphasizes that modern artists, intellectuals, and professionals, "must compete (often brutally and unscrupulously) for the privilege of being bought, simply in order to go on with their work." When even creative work is proletarianized, and we all just work to sell ourselves piecemeal. But in Smurfs village, the halo around work remains very much intact. The game reflects our wish for work to be sacred again, for jobs to be equal again, and for money to be irrelevant for once. Yet it isn't.

Enter the Capitalist Player

Smurfs Village was created to make money. Of course it is—although it's free to play, its in-game purchases exploit human impatience. The game's main money-making scheme is Smurfberries, magical berries that can be bought for real money (in packages for as much as $49.99) to speed up the growth of crops and the progress of the game.

Former players, you may have thought of this question already. If Smurfs don't use money, why are there coins in the game? Indeed, the game allows players to put Smurfs “to work” (planting crops, building huts, and going on quests) to earn coins and XP (experience points). In order to level up and purchase decorations for my village, I began strategizing about how I could maximize profit from my Smurfy labor force. Even when capital isn’t tangible, I still wanted to accumulate it.

Marx observed that “one fact is common to all past ages... the exploitation of one part of society by the other.” Through farming, a Smurf’s time is the player’s currency. The player's time, through ad revenue, is the game-makers’ currency. The player effectively imposes a wage-labor system on the Smurfs (although they are blissfully unaware), and time is parceled into growing slots. Through the player’s management of Smurfy tasks, she or he must also parcel their time (in the real world for harvesting and planting) to maximize profit accordingly. I find myself as the *de-facto* bourgeoisie, finding ways to exploit Smurf labor.

Even in Smurf-world, Berman’s claim about the nature of capitalism seems to hold: “the only activity that really means anything to its members is making money, accumulating capital, piling up surplus value, all their enterprise are merely means to this end.” The last thing I wanted to do is replicate the iron bars of capitalism within my village—yet, I did.

Replicating the Iron Cage of Capitalism

You may have been wondering why I've been describing capitalistic society as an "iron cage." Max Weber gets the credit—the "iron cage of capitalism" is one of his most influential contributions to sociology, first appearing in his book, The Protestant Work Ethic. He explores why capitalism was so uniquely successful in America, eventually crediting our (yes, dear reader, I am American) Protestant faith, a religion that saw worldly success as a sign of divine predestination.

Then, the capitalist system started evolving a culture of its own, outgrowing its Protestant beginnings. A culture valuing overwork and profit becomes a cage when it constrains our freedom to develop into full individuals. I remembered the adults in my life molding my dreams into jobs that would

earn me a high salary. Talents that were not marketable were not developed. It is not their fault—they have grown up in the iron cage, one that is so omnipresent that they couldn't even see the bars. The iron cage of capitalism prevents us from developing into full individuality, and "if Marx is fetishistic about anything," Marshall Berman argues, "it is not work and production but rather the far more complex and comprehensive ideal of *development*."

At a café at Yale, I once overheard an undergraduate student bemoaning to her date that though the insights she gained from her humanities seminars were life-changing, they "are useless because they aren't marketable." Dear reader, I wish I made this up. In this absurd world, I find myself wanting, like Marx, a version of reality where we aren't stunted in our upbringing to develop only the skills and talents that are marketable.

It was as if Smurfs Village heard that wish. A society without money, where Smurfs can just be Lazy, Grouchy, or Jokey without being punished for unproductivity, was made for me. And yet by playing the game, I brought the spirit of capitalism into Smurfs village. I imported what historian E.P. Thompson called the "holy equation of capitalism," time equals money. Time *is* money.

Time is Money: Why We Desire Productivity, Even in Leisure

For a long time, I used Smurfs Village, ironically, as a productivity timer. Before I would start an assignment, I would gauge how much time it would take. I would then chose a crop with a harvest timeline that matches the length of my task. For my macroeconomics problem set, I would plant 1-hour strawberry crops. To get ready in the morning, I

planted 30-minute blackberries. 8-hour tomatoes for sleeping, 15-minute cucumbers for chores, 2-hour brussels sprouts for brunch, and 3-hour peas to savor my sociology readings. Even a game that is made to consume free time can be repurposed as a mechanism to parcelize productivity. The difference between using crops to time my productivity rather than my Google Calendar is that my Smurfs would be productive with me—and I would be rewarded with money and XP after every task completion

Within Smurfs Village, I felt continuity in my progress. In contrast, my real-life progress rarely moved with perfect linearity as I faced setbacks, writer's block, and similar imperfections. However, in Smurfs Village, there were rarely significant setbacks. No matter what kind of "productive activity" I did, my experience bar would always go up. And I liked that.

But why did the designers of Smurfs Village make farming and mini-games that felt like work? And why did I like it? I was never fond of real-life farming—and now I catch myself setting alarms to wake up in the middle of the night to harvest virtual corn. The monotonous, repetitive task of planting, tapping, harvesting, counting the hours between each harvest, and immediately replanting certainly feels like work.In fact, I was shocked to find entire Smurfs Village WikiForum pages where veteran players create tables and graphs of complex cost-benefit analyses tailored towards maximizing coins, XP when farming, discounting for the "hassle cost" of planting and harvesting, with evaluations of each crop's "fit" for each player's real-life schedule.

According to the forum, planting strategies are divided into "Overnight Crops" ("if you're going to bed and will check your village when you wake up"), "School Day" (if you're an

elementary/middle/high school student and have not figured out a way to play Smurfs during the school day"), and "Active Player" (when you have a lot of free time to grow and harvest 2 or 3-hour crops, but "don't really want to arrange your day around crop harvesting"). Another player posted a programmed Excel sheet titled the "Smurfs Calculator" to help "plant more efficiently in order to gain the highest amount of coins or XPs wanted." Looking at the color- coded Excel sheet, I marveled at how players brought instruments of work into the game.

Not only are Smurfs Village players willing to whip out their calculators and Excel sheets to grow virtual crops, they were happily motivated to do it—much like the Smurfs were happy to tend to the crops. I came across one particular review of Smurfs Village in the app store posted by a user named King_Arth3r. At first, King_Arth3r was contented with having "some fun and a nice low level village," and then he was increasingly drawn to "theorize," spending "hours upon hours, days upon days, memorizing build times, finding the probabilities and chances... filling up a full sized whiteboard with graphs to find my optimum coin output, bending the laws of reality just to make MORE SMURFS." King_Arth3r ends the five-star review with a self-diagnosis, "I have a problem."

Despite this diagnosis, anyone who reads this review can discern the unmistakable tone of pride about putting in seriousness and dedication to the game. Similarly, in another game, World of Warcraft, as described by Bonnie Nardi in *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, having raids in the game begin to "feel like work" could be seen as a benefit rather than a detriment. Treating the game like work "connoted focus, concentration, and empowerment." In fact, farming in Smurfs Village and World of Warcraft creates a "reward

directly addressed a player's object of performative excellence and continual striving to 'improve yourself.'" From these posts, I was reminded, again, that we are living in an iron cage where self-development is seen to be limited to practicing productive labor.

Changing the Clock and Overworking My Smurfs

After a month of gameplay, I discovered the age-old "cheat" for the Smurfs Village and other similar games—instead of waiting hours for crops to grow, bridges to be built, or exploration to be completed, I would change the time zone through my phone settings to "hack" the game's internal temporal locus. Growing corn, instead of taking 10 hours, collapsed into a five-second process of changing my iPhone's time settings 10 hours forward. Once I discovered this cheat, I would use it over and over again—with constant positive reinforcement. Game-makers evidently knew of the cheat and would give players a slap on the wrist each time. Papa Smurf would give players an unpunished warning that they "overworked" their Smurfs.

This distortion of the clock harkens back to Thompson, who observed with acuity that when capitalism began, "clocks at factories were often put forward in the morning and back at night, and instead of being instruments for the measurement of time, they were used as cloaks for cheatery and oppression." We distort time to cheat because we are impatient. Or perhaps we are projecting our overwork-mentality onto our Smurfs. Our workers, being nonhuman, perpetually happy Smurfs, do not express their dissent or know they are being exploited.

Problematizing the Work-Play Dichotomy

Why is leisure in capitalistic societies often organized along the same lines as work? I have a theory. When players realize they may be wasting time playing Smurfs Village, they are conditioned to feel guilt. I noticed myself working harder to grow crops and XP-farm whenever I felt like I was wasting too much time playing the game. I seemed to double down on applying the holy equation "time=money" in the game when I was keenly aware of the opportunity cost of gameplay when I could be doing more "productive" tasks. Thus, Berman comes upon the fundamental rationalization of us, moderns, in iron cages: we are so accustomed to others treating our self, our time, and our passion as a means to an end, that we are slow to realize when we are, in essence, also exploiting ourselves.

By modeling games after work, game-designers cleverly reduce the guilt I would've experienced choosing nonproductive play over productive work by blurring the distinction between the two. By tricking the capitalist mind, farming games lead players to feel as if they were satisfying their constant ache to be productive. Through work-simulat-

-ing and earning-adjacent activities in a virtual space, our "sweet tooth" is satisfied so we do not feel our anxiety about "wasting time on leisure" creeping in during gameplay.

Even the portability of the game paralleled the portability of work in modernity. With minimal hassle, I could open my laptop up to work almost anytime, anywhere. It was even easier to open my phone to farm—and I could feel productive while playing without the guilt of letting my time slip through my fingers—"wasted" on nonproductive leisure.

Saying Goodbye to Smurfs Village

After I finally said goodbye to Smurfs Village, I found myself a little sad. I had reconstructed my iron cage on a virtual canvas, as beautiful as it was. I made a world in my image, but I didn't like my reflection in the world.

What is paradise to Marx? A space for the free development of everyone's full potential. His fantasy is a yearning for freedom within community, individualism within collectivism. Marx sees development as the ultimate balancing point between the individual and the collective. In cartoon form, Smurfs Village showcases this "free development of all Smurfs for all" in the sheer diversity of passions and occupations held by Smurfs.

No occupation is better than the other, none are paid, and thus no social classes are created out of wealth stratification. Individuals do not see "development" as the continuous perfection of the self to become better commodified and sold to the market. Without wages, development is not used to climb the wage ladder to "seek social mobility" either, and each Smurf is happy to stay where they are and just find joy.

But in the real world, we "develop only in restricted and distorted ways" where "traits, impulses and talents that the market can use are rushed (often prematurely into development) and squeezed desperately till there is nothing left." I borrowed those words from Professor Berman. He goes further to say that "everything else within us, everything non-marketable, gets draconically repressed, or withers away for lack of use, or never has a chance to come to life at all." I theorize that we are drawn to video games, in a way, to attempt awakening the withered, repressed version of ourselves whose interests do not align with what is marketable or profitable.

I was a grown woman playing this game, but at the end of the day, it's marketed towards children. Will children, having lived in this iron cage less, play differently from me? Nonetheless, Smurfs taught me that play is not just for children. This year, my resolution is to become more childlike. I want to play. I want to bring the passion I have for play into my work. I'll try to bring about a future where we can all develop into rich individuals, undistorted and free from the iron cage of capitalism. But until then, I'll cultivate my village.

Elaine Cheng
our Revolutionary Smurf

The shaping suppression of Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism, a concept without a fixed definition, manifests in various forms, most notably through oppressive rule and the creation of 'docile' individuals. These forms are vividly depicted in classic literature, such as George Orwell's "1984" representing oppressive rule and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" symbolizing the creation of unthinking masses. Often viewed as separate, repression and manipulation in totalitarian regimes are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.

The essence of totalitarianism lies in the immense concentration of power, which sociologist Steven Lukes breaks down into three dimensions: The power to make decisions and impose one's will on others, as Max Weber described; the power of setting agendas, keeping certain issues out of public discourse; and the power to shape the beliefs and desires of others, making them accept or even prefer choices against their own interests.

While Lukes' classification is enlightening, power is not so easily pigeonholed, as both Michel Foucault and Judith Butler observe. Power, according to them, produces subjects through a discursive system. Foucault, in particular, expands the concept of power beyond just administrative or governmental control. He notes that power exists in various interactions – be they discursive, romantic, institutional, or

economic – where one entity seeks to influence another's behavior. This expanded view of power, incorporating Lukes' three dimensions, highlights that shaping is not limited to one aspect of power but is inherent in all its forms and actions.

The question arises, why is shaping an integral part of power? Without the shaping process, power cannot take form. Philosopher Louis Althusser illustrates this with the "hailing" theory. Consider a person walking down the street who hears a policeman shout, "Hey, you there!" The person turns around, acknowledging the call, and thus becomes a subject shaped by power. This example illustrates not only how identity is formed through power and language but also how power itself is established in this process. Power is not just in the act of calling; it materializes when the call is answered. This dual process of summoning and responding creates both the subject of power (the responder) and the wielder of power (the caller).

The shaping of power can lead to self-censorship and thought control among individuals. Under social pressure and authority, people may limit their speech and behavior to align with the norms set by power. This suppression of independent thought can hinder innovation, diversity, and the free expression of individuals.

However, shaping alone does not fully encompass the nature of totalitarian rule. In repressive regimes, for example, repression and shaping are inextricably linked. Totalitarianism constructs a societal "framework" shaped by the exclusion of dissent and demands universal submission to a stable social order. In this process, the regime not only shapes individuals to fit its norms but also suppresses and excludes those who do not conform. Interestingly, the term

"part" is more apt than "subject" here, as totalitarian power often trims and reshapes even conforming individuals to better fit its norms. The emergence of a particular social framework inevitably involves both repression and shaping, thus revealing that even in forms of totalitarianism perceived as primarily shaping, repression is a crucial component.

Kurt Li

our cosmopolitan

Unexpected places

In conversation with A. E. Stallings,
Oxford professor of poetry.

BC: Professor Stallings, you have just completed the first term in your new role. In a previous application to the post, you described excitement at its flexibility and said you wish to be open and engaging with students. How do you plan to make your time unique?

A. E. Stallings: I suppose each professor is perforce unique. I've heard that Robert Graves would meet students in a pub to talk about their poems. I want to be closer to that model, to be approachable, and to attend things myself. Perhaps my being American (and a woman) might make me more approachable to others who feel they are in some ways outsiders.

I am hoping to, besides doing the odd generative workshop or craft seminar (on meter, rhyme, etc), keep some office hours — though I don't know whether this would be at a pub! — where people can come by with poems in progress or to shoot the breeze about poetry or translation or what have you. If people see me on the street, they should feel welcome to say hello and introduce themselves.

BC: One of your predecessors, the late Geoffrey Hill, said he wanted to see a modern poetry which is “highly architectonic and yet sounds spontaneous” with “some sense of order battling anarchy within the very structure of a poem”. It could be said the main current of your work has been a com-

-mitment to received forms in a time that looks down on their use as backward. With that in mind, to what extent does Hill's account resonate with your own idea of style?

AES: I am not sure I could entirely paraphrase what Hill is saying. I do like the architecture of stanzas in particular, and I am interested when there is tension, say, between registers of words, or unusual syntax. Maybe that is partly what he is talking about. I think about poets such as Ange Mlinko or V. Penelope Pelizzon who do this I think. I also think one does want, most of the time, poetry that sounds like speech, but of course it isn't speech, it is on the page—this is more of a performance than people give it credit for.

I suppose there is a strain of criticism and reviewing that looks down on received forms; rhyme in particular gets called out, because it is most visible or audible. (Meter almost never.) But this has never been a barrier to me for publication or readership—the opposite perhaps. So I don't pay much attention to it.

BC: Which living poets do you feel a kinship with in this respect? More generally, do you feel alienated from the trends of poetry today and do you think a recovery is possible?

AES: Mlinko and Pelizzon are two (Pelizzon has a knock-out new book forthcoming) — I am a big fan of Don Paterson, in the UK—some other living poets I admire (and this is a loose list, with lots of omissions) — Josh Mehigan, Catherine Tufariello, Patricia Smith, Jericho Brown, Ishion Hutchinson, Mark Jarman, Ernie Hilbert, etc.

There are trends I feel alien from — the idea that sincerity or honesty is best performed or expressed in flat language without formal structure. Poems that seem to be about dem-

-onstrating the suffering of the poet, who is somehow a more sensitive individual than others, without regard to what is happening in the larger world and its sufferings. Poems that have no room for wit or humour or interest in language itself. Poetry must entertain. It must be at least as interesting as prose.

BC: You have described rhyme, especially perfect rhyme, as the most “mysterious” of formal qualities. Please try to clarify this special love for “the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre”.

AES: That's a lovely expression from Wilde I had entirely forgotten about. I love that rhyme is about irrational connections, that its music becomes reason, that it can lead to unexpected places. Can there be too much, can it become jingly? Yes. There are times even I need a break from it. But I am always lured back in.

In English, it is hard to have complex stanzas without it, because complex meters very rarely work in English—short lines and long lines, yes, picked out by occasional rhyme. But even things like Sapphics or Alcaics are devilishly hard to succeed at, even in stress/unstress versus long/short. That said, I adore syllabics where it is merely syllable count at issue, although, even there, I like the odd rhyme picking out the ends of lines.

BC: Equally, you have spoken of the central place of rhyme in actively shaping composition, relinquishing control and letting the poem speak for itself. Can you walk us through how this process unfolds, perhaps with examples from your work?

AES: I do believe rhyme is a method of composition, and

reviewers that think I compose a poem and then stick in the rhymes as ornaments have got it the wrong way round. The rhymed poem would not exist without the rhyme. If anything, I could write a rhymed poem and then try to take the rhymes out and see what happened.

“Visiting a Borrowed Country House in Arcadia” is one poem generated by a formal choice: it came about largely because I decided to see what would happen if I followed Cavafy's expressive rhyme scheme for “The City.” And I liked that the rhymes gave me such incongruous words as “shitty” and “pity.” It showed me that it was working.

BC: To end on a practical note, you have had success with a recent generative poetry workshop which explored the triolet and its paradoxical sense of repetition and change. The prospect of further workshops has excited a broad range of students even outside the humanities. Are there other such rare forms with similar, what you call ‘addictive,’ qualities that you would encourage young poets to work with to strengthen their craft?

AES: Triolets are addictive, aren't they? They are short, easy to write, and explosive. I don't know of any form quite like them, but I can see doing work with pantoums, or syllabics. I plan to do a seminar on scansion, because I think a lot of people find it confusing or intimidating (partly because it is badly taught as a rule, and, unfortunately, makes use of ill-fitting Greek terms). And I am planning a seminar, with some other poets, to be announced soon, on the puzzle and challenge of palindromic and alphabetical verse. I would also like to do the odd workshop on literary translation.

Ben Callan

our Renaissance man

Farewell, provenance!

Provenance is a term that describes a simple concept in complicated terms. Provenance is simply the origin of a piece of information – the provenance of a pencil is the pencil factory, the provenance of this article is the publication ‘Erasmus’ and myself, the author.

Historically, humans have relied on a number of different sources of information. During the Middle Ages in Europe, information would come from individuals deemed trustworthy. Seniority, wealth, and religious affiliation all played a part. The reasons for this are entirely sensible. The Duke of Somesuch is likely wealthy enough to pay for accurate information, learned enough to read sources and scripture (and if it’s scripture you agree with, you know it’s true, especially if it’s divine), and honourable enough not to deceive you. The elder has spent her whole life foraging, and given her status as being alive, probably knows what she’s doing.

Medieval people would also get information from non-humans. Observing the behaviour of animals and birds tells you of the weather, and the weather is a reasonably good predictor of how much food you’re going to produce in the harvest. Some things we would recognise as superstition – a medieval person would likely blame bad weather on the sins of the community, and say that a good harvest is divine favour. Yet for the most part, a medieval person probably

knew what they were doing when it came to staying alive and looking for natural cues of what would happen next.

A resident of Medieval Europe would also look at architecture and art for information. A brilliant example of this is the Cathedral – Cathedrals are decorated and built in a specific manner to tell a specific story. A modern person sees stained glass. It looks cool to us but that's about the extent of it. If you were to grab a medieval person, there's a good chance they'd be able to point at any point of it and say – here is where God shows his strength, there is a certain Saint we find important, here is a Biblical story, that is David and there is Goliath, here is Jesus. Any given statue and how it is made would communicate a lot about the person it depicts and perhaps even a moral or religious lesson or a reminder of something important. While as a European I am very Eurocentric in this, one can see such phenomena elsewhere. The Aztecs had extensive visual depictions of religious concepts and even kept records via images. Design is everything, and has a lot of meaning to it.

Most people until the 19th and 20th centuries are not literate – within any given region, you would find at most a third of men are literate (and that's generous – note that women were far less likely to be literate because of a conscious decision of restricting their access to writing and reading). But they weren't stupid. They got information from a huge variety of places. Someone today would be incapable of getting anywhere close to understanding nature and architecture as well as people of the past, simply because we have not grown up immersed in it. The modern person gets their information elsewhere.

And it seems that our sources of providence is narrowing significantly more. We have lost the ability to gain meaning

from buildings – or even the ability to put meaning into them. A skyscraper, while impressive, does not tell a particularly complex story. I'm sure most of us have the experience of being in an art or language class and being shown symbolism, and practically everyone thinking it's a bit of a stretch. The curtains are blue, because they're blue – it doesn't mean anything. Things only mean something if they explicitly say they mean something.

The age of print taught us to trust the written word more than the spoken one, and the advent of TV and Radio taught us to trust broadcasters. The broadcasters have a face, a name, and a reputation. It's the British Broadcasting Corporation. You know where they're based, you know who reports for them, and you can figure out their agenda.

The internet changes this somewhat. Want to know what's happening in New Jersey? Hop on a local forum and ask away. Don't trust the news on what's happening in London, or in Trieste, or in Cheyenne? You can check for yourself, as though by going onto a forum you can walk out onto the streets of a far away city from the comfort of your bedroom and see what's really going on.

But the internet has continued to grow. It is now so vast, that you are once again reliant on intermediaries. YouTube Channels, TikTok influences, Instagram posters, and so forth – all communicate via shortform formats. The structure of YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other social media formats, encourage you to consume many many small videos and posts, and agglomerate infromation and messages from an incomprehensible amount of sources. If I went on Instagram reels right now, I could watch 20 or 30 news related reels in under an hour. There is no focus or coherent

narrative – in many ways, social media content makes you compelled to just keep going, not stick around in one place for too long. Here is where provenance dies.

There are very few individuals who are the source of news. Information on social media is a toxic glob of contradiction, paranoia, and discontent. Social Media, with its brief exposures to dozens of different sources, gradually impairs the regular user from being able to consume long-form content. After relapsing into social media, I find myself struggling to read a book, or watch a movie, or listen to a podcast. Social Media does not kill other sources of information, it makes the user incapable of consuming them. Cathedrals are not destroyed, you are simply blinded to their message.

AI brings further changes. Any image online can be a deepfake, any piece of text written by a machine. You can never really tell anymore. Yet a generation of people have grown up with social media as a key source of information, one that has blinded them to other ones.

All one can do is pick out bits of information – using AI for assignments means that you never really take ownership of your own work and creativity. Imagine you have used an AI to summarise all of your articles, to write all of your papers – all you do is prompt. Writing and art are the mirror image of the blind – when there are no mirrors, you cannot see yourself. Even the self becomes untrustworthy. Humans are robbed of their creativity, in a way, by their own laziness.

The children of tomorrow will grow up with this confusing mass of artificial information and, without sufficient parenting from parents, relatives, and friends, may be robbed of their ability to create and perceive information outside of

the internet. Just as we can no longer interpret the architecture of a Cathedral nearly as fluently as a Medieval person, those who grow up terminally online may be trapped unable to discern information outside of the digital ecosystem. Their connection to the world is robbed by algorithms that compel them to keep going, like a drug addiction.

What now?

Well, I predict that the past will eventually return. One will no longer be able to trust the internet (really, I doubt we can trust it now) – and thus to find information about something like the Ukraine War or the Genocide in Palestine, you will need to contact real people. In order to connect with the world, it will be necessary to observe it. If information is censored online, it may be necessary to convey it in more permanent ways that are difficult if not impossible to censor – architecture, for example.

Nicholas Haque
our resident contrarian

‘ELPIS’ IS A BIRD IN GLASS

“Love is hope for other people.” - Kristin Cashore
‘Elpis’ - Ancient Greek spirit of Hope

Scene I.

Hope is a stingingly fragile thing. It is something most of us experience the highs and lows of on a daily basis, often labeled as ‘positivity’ or ‘negativity’. Love is elusive, a definition which millions have attempted to elucidate upon in the written word, in music, or through visual art.

My definition, if one can even be found, will not be anyone else’s. However, there is a reason why certain parts of love stories, particularly written ones, resonate with people. To the bitter or the wounded, *love is hope* sounds like a knife wrenched into an aching wound. To the lonely, it is a wound of salt. To mothers, daughters, brothers, it is almost perplexing.

The Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is one of love: a love lost to death, and a hero who descends into the Underworld to win her spirit back, succeeds, and loses her at the last moment because he does not follow the directions of the god of the dead (*“Do not look back to see if she really follows you home”*). Orpheus sees her figure for one fleeting moment, then she disappears.

In Virgil's *Georgics* Book IV, this tale is hidden in a treatise on farming, and the cultivation of bees. This might seem quite odd, for though the prose is beautiful and vividly brings to life a world of fragrant flowers of all colors and soft grass and endless blue sky—*"let green rosemary, and wild thyme with far-flung fragrance / and a wealth of strongly-scented savory, flower around them / and let beds of violets drink from the trickling spring"*—it does not seem like a place for a love story, or an epic quest. The *Georgics* contrasts this soft world of the earth with the violence of bees, of death and decay and sharp, sudden change. The bees keep buzzing. They die. They make homes. They soar amongst flowers, headlong into the rain. They fall. The sun sets and rises again.

Orpheus goes into the Underworld to reclaim his wife, brokers a deal, and with every step back into the world of the living the doubt cuts deeper into his soul. What if she is not there? What if Hades has lied, and he walks alone? What if the faint footsteps, the scrape of feet and the rustle of fabric, is not Eurydice? He should not look back. He has promised not to look back, he has sworn an oath that he will not look back to see if she is there, if she is alive, he should *not look back*—

He looks back.

Eurydice is struck by grief as she vanishes, and it is this line —*"I am taken, wrapped round by vast night, stretching out to you, alas, hands no longer yours."*—that sticks out the most to all who have read or heard the tale. *My hands no longer yours.* She reaches out to him as she is taken away, and the loss almost feels like your own.

Why did he look back? Orpheus looks back at Eurydice

because he simply cannot bear not to. He does so because the hope of love lies in looking back.

There is a paradox in feeling, wherein there has to be an absence in order for there to be plenty. A hollow must be filled, and so one wonders: is love only meaningful because it ends? There are two ends, really—one at the start, and one at the finish. If love is a ribbon, it must be cut on either side, otherwise it cannot be a ribbon, it must be something else (and I am not a philosopher, so we won't get into the debate of what makes an object what it is. Suffice it to say for this essay, love is a ribbon and it must be cut on either end). So then, love is born from loss. In order to experience love, one must first experience the lack of it, whether that is by simply being unborn and then receiving the love of a parent, or by browsing through Tinder for the twentieth time this week to stem your own loneliness from the dire drought of uni dating.

Scene II.

All these musings on love are about what it means to *us*. An *us* that is a family, that is a couple, that is that couple, or this couple, that is the world.

Us, us, us. Like a girl who steps out of a dusty hotel in a desert town, leaving her family for a love they do not approve of. Her mind is filled with the soft movements of her mother's hands as she braids her hair for school, the taste of her father's cooking, the scratchy rug in the living room that she lay down on as a small child. Her mind is filled with the soft embrace of someone who truly sees her. The wind whistles across the dry golden plain, and her heart is hollow and filled at the same time. One *us* exchanged for another.

Even if the story is just—even if the family is horrible to the girl, even if she is better off without their cruelty or neglect—she will look back.

Scene III.

It is Orpheus *and* Eurydice, almost as if they are one thing; two ends to a ribbon that has been cut. Modern interpretations to the myth cast off Orpheus, bring Eurydice into the light. They wonder if she loved him as much as he did her, if she wanted to be left alone in the Underworld, if he was selfish and foolish, filled with pride, when he looked back. Did she even *want* him to look back?

Sarah Ruhl's play *Eurydice* is brilliant and stinging, filled with youthful love, and foolishness. She doesn't shy away from the cracks of love, its imperfection, its occasional waver. It is complex, about the love of family, and the ways in which people run away from each other, more so than it is about the original myth. The line excerpted below is almost divorced from the ultimate point of Ruhl's piece, but it speaks to what is repeated, over and over, by all these adaptations of Orpheus and Eurydice.

ORPHEUS: How will you remember?
EURYDICE: That I love you?
ORPHEUS: Yes.
EURYDICE: That's easy. I can't help it.

Scene IV.

All of love is outside of our control. The way it fills us, or leaves us empty, is not up to our own minds or desires. If love leaves you bleeding, or curled up on the floor of your

childhood bedroom, or in agony as you lie awake at night, it does not feel like hope. This is where the human mind fails us, or perhaps tricks us. The fact that it hurts so terribly is because there was hope at the start of the ribbon, hope that has unfurled and unfurled, until all the threads unravelled.

Orpheus weeps himself to death on the bank of a river, so consumed with the grief of losing Eurydice that the world goes on without him. In that moment, there is no hope.

But the grief which breaks bones and shreds lungs is made from love, and love is made from hoping for the best for others. Hoping for kindness, hoping for their happiness, for them to get better or like themselves more, and treat themselves kinder. If you've ever had a friend tell you to eat a meal, or have a cup of tea, or go to bed early, it is from their hope that you will be okay. And what is that, if not love?

There are two pieces to Orpheus and Eurydice, two pieces to this way of explaining love. One is that there must be emptiness on either side, in order to make it possible to hope for something more than what there is. The second is that hope and love sting so terribly, are so all-consuming, that even when it ends, you will always look back.

Did Eurydice want him to look back? It is impossible to say, of course, but if Orpheus looked back because he loved her so much he could not bear not to, I wonder if Eurydice also wanted him to. Love is painfully immediate, without any concept of foresight. If Orpheus hadn't looked back, they would have lived out the rest of their days together. But if he hadn't looked back, he wouldn't have loved her as he did. Eurydice is a passive character in this myth, a figure who is loved, who is lost, who is gotten back, and then lost again. Retellings are important, but they can't erase the original

text, in which she is passive to a hero's journey. An interpretation of that original myth, interplayed with all of the hundreds of retellings, and all the meaning assigned to the motions of this story arc, is valid, but it is an interpretation. However, this essay is not about critical reception or analysis. It is about the way that we all feel things—whether we are fiction or flesh and blood—and how reflections of these feelings cut us to the bone for how it reminds us of our own loves and losses.

It is a simple thing, that Orpheus acted as he did because the hope of love is in looking back. It is simple that this interpretation of his actions arises from an inherent hope that that is what love should be—that looking back is not weakness, or foolishness, but hope. A fragile bird trapped in thin glass, wings beating as if they will break it.

Scene V.

EURYDICE: "Do you love me?"
ORPHEUS: "I went after you."
EURYDICE: "Lots of people go after other people."
ORPHEUS: "I love you."
EURYDICE: "Hm."
ORPHEUS: "I looked back, didn't I?"
EURYDICE: "The shades whisper down here. They say you looked back because you were afraid Hades had got the better of you, that you'd lost a challenge."
ORPHEUS: "I see." Silence.
EURYDICE: "Is it true?"
ORPHEUS: "What do you think?"
EURYDICE: "I think I knew your mind, once. It has been some time since then. I am dead, aren't I?"
ORPHEUS: "I looked back because I wanted to keep you."

EURYDICE: “Like a shiny, precious thing? A bird in a cage?”
ORPHEUS: “You are precious to me. You are yourself, and I wish I could steal even a minute longer with you.”
EURYDICE: “Oh. Is that why you looked?”
ORPHEUS: “You know my mind.”

Scene VI.

ORPHEUS: “Do you love me?”
EURYDICE: “I followed you.”
ORPHEUS: “I asked you to.”
EURYDICE: “I followed you.”
ORPHEUS: “And?”
EURYDICE: “And I love you. I followed because you asked.”

Angèle Baum
our Elpis

Cashless chronicles

In a world where the rustle of banknotes and the clink of coins have been as rhythmic as the ticking of a clock, it's almost revolutionary to imagine a day when money, as we know it, ceases to exist. The value and ideology of money have gyrated through the corridors of history, whispering different tales in the ears of kings and commoners alike. But what if, come tomorrow, money disappeared, dissolving into the annals of history like a myth long forgotten?

From the first Mesopotamian shekels to the digital dollars of today, money has been more than just a medium of exchange; it's been a storyteller, a holder of value, and a symbol of power. In ancient times, money wasn't merely a facilitator of trade but a marker of societal status and a tool for storing wealth. The Romans didn't just use denarii for buying and selling; these coins bore the faces of emperors, intertwining wealth with power and propaganda.

Fast forward to medieval times, and we see money becoming a character in religious and ethical debates. The love of money, as the Bible famously warns, is the root of all evil. Yet, money's role was paradoxical; it was both vilified and venerated, a necessary evil in a world growing increasingly complex.

The Industrial Revolution turned this complexity up a notch. Money became the lifeblood of capitalism, driving innovati-

-on, exploitation, and the transformation of societies. Wealth accumulation and capital growth became synonymous with progress. This era carved deep trenches between the haves and have-nots, a disparity still visible in today's skyscraper-studded skylines.

In the modern era, the ideology of money has been a cocktail of consumerism, capitalism, and at times, confusion. Money has not just been about survival or status; it's been about identity. What you earn, how you spend it, the brands you invest in – these have become chapters in the story of who you are.

But let's indulge in a moment of speculative fiction. What if money disappeared tomorrow? Imagine waking up to a world where bank accounts are as empty as the promise of perpetual happiness from a shopping spree. At first glance, it may seem like a utopian dream – a world freed from the shackles of economic inequality, where goods and services are exchanged through barter or goodwill.

However, the disappearance of money would be no fairy tale. Money, in its current form, is the grease in the wheels of global trade. It's a language understood across borders, a measure of value that, albeit imperfect, has enabled the exchange of everything from bread to supercomputers. The abrupt absence of this universal language would plunge the world into chaos, a Babel of bartering where the value of goods and services becomes as subjective as beauty in the eye of the beholder.

In this moneyless world, inequality might morph into new forms. Power could shift from those who have wealth to those who control resources. Imagine New York, a city where the power of the dollar is as iconic as the Statue of Li-

-berty, now bartering its way through daily transactions. The Big Apple's bustling streets could become a surreal marketplace where skills and goods are traded in a complex web of negotiations.

Moreover, the absence of money would upend our understanding of value. In today's world, money is not just a physical entity; it's a concept, an agreement. We trust that the numbers in our bank accounts have worth. This trust is the bedrock of economies. Remove it, and you shake the very foundations of modern society.

Yet, in this chaos, there might be a silver lining. A moneyless world could force humanity to reevaluate what truly holds value. Relationships, community, and sustainability might take center stage. We would have to relearn how to live, not as consumers, but as contributors to a society where success isn't measured by wealth, but by well-being.

In conclusion, money, throughout history, has been a chameleon, changing its value and meaning with the times. It's been a facilitator of progress and a catalyst for greed. Its disappearance would be both a nightmare and a revelation, forcing us to confront the very foundations of our societies. But as long as humanity thrives on innovation and interaction, some form of 'money' – whether physical, digital, or conceptual – will likely always exist. It's not just a currency, but a constant conversation about what we value, a conversation as old as civilization itself.

Elias Turing
our experiment

Ascending towards the sea of fog

Meditations on Caspar David Friedrich's 'Wanderer'

I still remember clearly when I stumbled through the crowd in the Caspar David Friedrich exhibition in Hamburg, yearning, yet dreading the moment I would come face to face with the painting of his 'Wanderer'. I could not walk straight, or think straight, or do anything straight for that matter. I was wandering through the exhibition, wandering through a fog of passion and reflection. That was until I saw the painting. I collapsed mentally. I stopped in my tracks and summoned my notebook, scribbling down my deepest intuitions:

A work [The Wanderer] through which the whole epoch of thought can be expressed. Hitherto, man has found himself beneath the clouds of the divine. For the first time, he has ascended beyond it. Only to find himself utterly alone.

When one sees Friedrich's 'Wanderer' for the first time in person, one is not confronted with comfort. Rather, one is hit with a nauseating sense of paradox, the clash of the higher and lower aspects of human nature, the juxtaposition of the finitude of man's corporeal experience with the infinite calling of the soul.

In order to do so, I shall meditate. Meditate on the ‘Wanderer’, and more importantly, to meditate on the human condition. The goal of these meditations is not to present what ought to be the proper interpretation of Fredrich’s painting. Rather, I aim to analyse what stood out to me in this painting. To tell a story, not only of my love for the ‘Wanderer’, but to tell his story.

I believe that this is no simple task. Therefore, to aid my endeavours, I have prepared the fireplace. I am comfortably reclined in my armchair. My cigar is lit and my glass of whiskey filled. It is time to close my eyes and ponder the mysteries of the ‘Wanderer’.

I.

“A solitary man ascends the mountain, the final stretch before the summit. Just as Abraham said to his servants before Moriah, “stay here, while I ascend the mountain with my son, we will worship and come back to you”, so did this man depart from his men at dawn, saying, “stay, while I ascend the peak with my soul, my conscience, and worship.”

Long has this man wandered the world, found himself blending into the homogenous mess which was contemporary man. On one peculiar winter day, he decided to visit the sea. As the cold wind billowed through his hair, he felt his essence draining from him, his life force dissipating into the sea. The waves lapping across the sandy beaches, stealing his faith, his hope, his love.

How could this be? He has achieved all which men would envy—wealth, health, status—yet, in the praise of man, he saw naught but vanity. The slow, indomitable movement of

time which returns all to ashes. The beyond stood out to him. The universe is reciprocal,' he thought, 'it can only take as much as it can give. If the infinity of the sea can drain one's soul, so too must infinity offer it back.' Yet into the sea he could not go, for bear in mind, his civilisation had not the maritime technology of the present. Therefore, towards the skies and the vast infinity of space, he decided to ascend."

I jolted awake. This is the start of the story of the 'Wanderer', this is his essence. Caspar David Friedrich was an artist, a thinker, but most importantly a prophet. His works, so beautifully and intricately painted, can be said to have encapsulated the Spirit of the 19th century. But what is the Spirit of the 19th century which he represented?

The 19th century was a groundbreaking movement for religious thought. The Spirit of the Age is best viewed as a child endowed with the inheritance of the Enlightenment which led thinkers, both Christian and secular, to wrestle with the Kantian divide between faith and reason

To Christians, the world is viewed through a lens of dualism, humans struggle not only against internal temptations, but are also thrown into a realm of spiritual warfare. Life, despite its finite expression, is not the end of human existence, but a mere stepping stone to an eternity with God. To the secularist, humans are alone in the universe, our finite existence is all that there is, our sense of the divine, merely an expression of our own propensity for the infinite.

Between these two polarities is Fredrich's 'Wanderer', resting on a knife's edge. To the Christian, Fredrich's paintings, his 'Wanderer' in particular, presents the vastness of the divine and the finite lens through which we try to comprehend it. Christians, correctly or incorrectly, are forced to respond to

the *sensus divinitatus* endowed to them by God, forced to carry their solitary cross through the world. Alternatively, for the secularist, the painting reflects the sentiment presented at the end of my short *Poema*. Regardless of how far one runs from God, we are yet to eradicate from our souls the sense of the infinite. It is for this reason that Nietzsche's madman is not joyous. Instead of celebrating the message of God's death, the madman's proclamation is a warning. Now that humans have debased the universe from all that is holy, having slain God and offered His corpse on the altar, one must conclude, as Feuerbach once did, that it was in the act of sacrifice that man became God. Thus, under a secular reading, the 'Wanderer' is not only a symbol, but *iconography* of the man-God.

But let us move beyond the sombre implications of the age. We are yet to truly understand the consequences of God's death. Just as Nietzsche's madman came too soon, so have we, and I will speak no longer of this tragedy. I turn now to the essence of wandering. Are we not wanderers? Solitary beings attempting to penetrate the unknown?

Well, with another puff of my cigar, and a long sip of whiskey, I closed my eyes once again, and descended into the 'Wanderer's story.

II.

"The man's pursuit was religious, for any pursuit of the infinite is religious in essence. He remembered his father's stories of a distant land named Cathay, where Mandarins worshipped the sky "天" as God. He recalled the tales of old, where the council of gods lay above the fog on Olympus. Lost in the traditions of old, he gathered his servants and sa-

-id, “I hear the mountains calling for me, my soul longs for its renewal.” Thus, up the mountain he went, in search of a God which he knew was above the sea of fog.

As the man began to ascend the mountain range, he stumbled across numerous icons and ruins of past ages. There would be buildings made of faded rock, tall steeples with rusted bells. Empty windows with stained glass shattered across the floor. In a window which was still intact, he could vaguely make out a man whose heart was exposed. The man smiled meekly towards him, beckoning him closer. Yet as he tried to clear the cobwebs off the glass to take a closer look, his touch shattered the window into fine dust.

In the ruins, the closest thing he found which would have given him any knowledge of the lost culture was a book titled *Novum Instrumentum*. It was a peculiar work, for the pages were separated into two columns, both in scripts which were alien but looked familiar. A translation, he assumed, of what? He didn’t know.

He skimmed through the pages, hoping to understand something, yet most of the ink had long faded into illegibility. One line he make out but couldn’t understand was this *“Qui em uoluerit anima fua feruare, perdet eam. Qui autem perdiderit animam fu am mea caufa, inueniet eam.”* What could this mean? From his recent studies into the language of his friends from Aragon, he assumed that it was about the loss and gaining of one’s soul. But in what context? To what end? That he pondered for many more days.”

‘Yes! Yes! That is right!’ my heart sang in jubilation, ‘That is the very nature of wandering!’ Old Heidegger once said that we are beings which have been thrown into the world to unveil the mysteries of Being. By unveiling this mystery, we

become its shepherds, we dictate Being, defining it with written word.

Imagine a man in the dark. He wanders with a small torch. By walking in the darkness, he begins to become familiar with his surroundings. He begins to define for himself the meaning, the significance of the objects in the darkness around him. Yes, there is an objective external world that he explores. Yet this world is only defined from his lens of subjectivity.

In the same way, the state of our thrownness lays the foundation for our act of discovery. The precondition which allows man to create for himself a brilliant tapestry which is the story of his existence. His subjectivity imposing value onto the chaotic mess of objectivity. It gives us freedom and the ability to join God in a *creatio ex nihilo*—a unification with the Johannine manifestation of mystery into the Logos (word) which became flesh. By writing out our story, we too become gods in our own right.

Hence, Friedrich's 'Wanderer' is not afraid. He recognises his solitary mission which he accepts with boldness and certainty. Tolkien once wrote 'Not all who wander are lost.' This is the essence of a wanderer. We may not know our destination, or even whether there is one. But the lack of destination does not imply lostness. For lostness is not a physical phenomena, but the state of the soul, the lack of identity and calling.

Thus even if all else fails, when all else fails, to recognise one's lostness and being proud of it is an identity, and if one takes upon the calling to be a wanderer in response to that lostness, then all the better to him. In that moment, one no longer negates the soul in personal hatred, but becomes like

Camus' Sisyphus—happy. Happy with one's place in the world, happy with one's wandering towards infinity.

The wind blew outside my window. The occasional gust finding its way into the room through the gaps in my roof. I pulled my armchair closer to the fire, my heart longing to be warmed by nature's greatest gift. I gazed softly at the fire. The beauty of the dancing flames enchanted me, a portal to the land of Hades where lost souls flicker here and there. In my trance, I could not help but reach towards the fire.

Within a second, I stupidly burnt my hand. I curse. I was deceived by nature's beauty. How can that which is so beautiful cause so much destruction? Yet, for all its dangers, perhaps it is precisely the beauty and danger of nature which makes us long to wander in it! This is the secret that Friedrich discovered.

As a herald of Romanticism, Friedrich's works confront man with the theme of nature. Since the birth of mankind, many civilisations have risen and fallen, different technologies have been developed, philosophies have come and gone, yet in all this change which epitomises the ephemeral Spirit of humanity, nature maintains the same.

To man, nature symbolises the infinite, it is the closest tangible thing we have to our Father in Heaven. Nature is indomitable, peaceful, yet deadly all at the same time. Just as the boat in the sea, however strong, can be battered and sunk by the strongest of tempests, no one can escape the passage of time which brings the end to both the rich and the poor.

We often ask why the innocent are struck with incurable diseases. Last Friday, Bob was at work, by Monday he had been swept to sea by a tidal wave during a weekend fishing t-

-rip, never to be seen again. This rawness and irrationality of nature can be a cause of fear to some. Yet despite all of nature's challenges, one knows at their core that nature has no justification, not because it can't make one, but because nature doesn't need one.

In face of the indifference of nature, it is often tempting to fear it. But fear is not the right response. One must respect nature, for nature has been there long before us, and will be there long after us. Yet, to act in a quietist resignation towards its power would be to forgo nature's greatest gift. For the very thing that kills us also gives us life. Therefore, we should be bold, face the risks of nature with a smile on our face. Stand tall and free like Fredrich's 'Wanderer', accepting nature in its awe-inspiring beauty, all the while being at peace that it can strike us down at any moment.

Yes! Tall and free! That is how the story must end.

III.

"We return to the present. After many nights upon the mountains, our friend found himself at the base of the peak, the final stretch of his journey lay in front. The closer he got, the man felt more exhilarated, his spirit lifted, despite his legs being weary from his hike. His hopes were raised, the strength that he lost to the sea was slowly returning to his sinews.

At dawn, he gathered his courage and spoke to his servants for one last time, "stay, while I ascend the peak with my soul, my conscience, and worship." With that he turned his back on them, tucked his overcoat tighter and hiked forward. It was frigid, yet his heart was warm; it was difficult to breathe,

yet his soul sang. He felt the calling from the skies, the calling from God that he sought for so many months, beckoning him on as he ran up the final stretches towards the peak.

And then he made it. He had stumbled, for the first time, above the clouds. He attempted to gain his footing, to turn and face the God that he knew was there. Yet when he finally found the strength in his soul to stand proudly, solitarily on the peak, he gazed out over the fog and the abyss, and found himself dreadfully alone. It was at that moment he realised the calling of the infinite was nothing but his own, and in the place of what he knew was so definitely God, he found something all too familiar—his own soul."

To end off this meditation, I will write on the theme of ascension, which is apropos for our modern day. Caspar David Friedrich's art places humanity at different altitudes, by the sea, on the side of a cliff, in the mountains, and finally above the fog. What does it mean to ascend? What is its essence?

Ascension as presented in the modern age has long been debased of its intrinsic value. It is no longer the pursuit of the sublimity of the soul, but has been caught up in the social and political movements of mindless materialism.

Growing up in the cosmopolitan city of Hong Kong, it is often the case that the most important currency in any interaction is social status. Those who are considered less socially valuable are left in a rat race to attempt to climb the social hierarchy, and those who are on top of the ladder, are afraid to interact with said "social climbers," preventing those below from ever reaching the peaks of existence. Under this schema, one's metrics are completely reduced, in a Marxian sense, to one's socio-economic position, devoid of

both individuality and personality.

Of course, it is difficult to critique anyone from falling into this Marxian distinction of socio-economic class. Given the confines of capitalism and incessant competition, it is rational, reasonable to try to seek for the heights in this "dog-eat-dog" world. Those who are lower on the hierarchy naturally desire upward social mobility. Alternatively, if you were to place yourself in the shoes of the social 'Wanderers' —the Spirits above the fog— what is in it for them to debase themselves to help those below?

In this way, it would seem that ascension in today's setting has gone beyond all forms of saving. It has become defiled into a mere socio-economic reductionism, devoid of spiritual significance. Yet despite this debasement, I argue that there is a higher form of ascension. One that is able to be discovered only if one is willing to see through the smoke screen of Marxian reductionism.

I will now try to unveil the mysteries of this heightened form of ascension. I believe that the goodness of ascension is not the ascension of the physical, but rather the spiritual. The process of undertaking one's religious calling to become Wanderers in the world. To live a life of goodness and virtue, despite the circumstances around us.

'Stop for a second!' my mind cries to my soul, 'This is way too abstract! How can one live this out?'

'You adulterous mind!' my soul accuses, 'why do you ask for a sign? Has not all that you need to know already been revealed?'

'Nay!' my mind sighs in despair, 'even in his time, Christ provided the sign of Jonah!'

‘So be it!’ my soul concedes, ‘I shall finish my explication on the virtues of the Wanderer!’

The cross of the Wanderer is the development of a good life. A life forged through the practising of the virtues of faith, hope, and love. These are the virtues of the Wanderer, and just as it is written, of the three, love is the greatest. This is true. Love is the primary essence of the ‘Wanderer’ because it is love which is solitary.

But how can love be solitary? Is not love the communion between two souls?

In its purest form, that is correct. However, how many times do we fail to live up to the ideal of love? In fact, if love is the treatment of the other as an end in themselves, which entails the treatment of the other as oneself, is not most love debased by jealousy?

Kierkegaard once said that to judge if one had true love, one need only posit another person in the relationship. Does one become jealous about how your partner interacts with that other, or is one happy, from the bottom of his soul, for the newfound friendship. By entering into a game of comparison, a game of competition for attention, we notice that we no longer love in a pure way. We love them for the attention and love that we receive in turn. We have, in essence, reduced the relationship to a mere expression of utility.

In order to avoid debasing love with envy, love must be solitary. One must love the other regardless of what the other does, both to themselves and to you. Love in its highest form is unconditional. The love of a mother for her child, the love of God for man! Love can only be expressed through a love from God. We love because He first loved us. We do not at-

-tempt to love on our own accord, but to channel God's love towards the world.

As such, love is a leap of blind faith. The love of the other regardless of all the risks and tribulations, the betrayal, the disappointment, which inevitably would arise, must arise in this fallen world where love is impure. From this, John Wayne's words ring ever true "the bigger the man, the deeper the imprint. And if he loves, he suffers, knowing it's a dead end."

This is the essence of the 'Wanderer'. To carry one's cross is the highest calling, the purgatory which allows for our souls to ascend above the sea of fog.

Joshua Yen
our wanderer

This is just to say...

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