TRANSCENDENCE

BEING ON THE EDGE OF MEANING

by

JORDAN G. CROWDER

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

The erosion of the body, the other, and the tangible world now permeate all facets of contemporary existence, extending beyond the confines of a debilitating disease—a mode of non-existence until death. We are separating ourselves from the human condition, encapsulated within a server; we are no longer present, instead existing in a palliative state where information proliferates, yet being diminishes. Servers, both physical and digital, become central to our existence, embodying non-real forms that collapse into one another, displacing both the real and us with it. Our existence becomes inauthentic, with no alternative to exist outside of it. Without presence in the server, one does not exist at all. Man is enslaved in this state, celebrated as progress erasing him from the picture, until there is no longer a picture to erase. Instead, a virtue signaling for more control, sedated from a disease that is life, until disappearing entirely. Greater anesthesia is induced, keeping him in a coma, only to need more.

When an individual is presented with his own condition and a series of unavoidable losses, he is compelled to ask and reflect – to fight an incurable condition; one akin to the server that alienates one from the body, the other and reality. Man however finds himself searching for meaning in a world devoid of it. To embrace one's pain and suffering where the other has removed it entirely; here one brings man towards death and the other hides it away, both however

pull towards disability. This frustration, born from the desire for freedom only to be constrained by his condition, signifies a descent into non-being, lacking both a functioning body and, potentially, mind. Conversely, a mode of existence the world too becomes, that a collective complies towards. For man however, falling into both results in a double disappearance.

The condition, while physically and mentally debilitating, serves as an opportunity to confront more clearly the realities of life and death, independent from the server's palliation of it. The server's nature offers an escape to realms beyond, liberated from a hyperreal and disabled existence. The rooftop, both metaphorically and physically, connects to reality, offering a liminal vantage to reflect on the essence of being one is increasingly pulled away from. Here, man transcends the body's limitations, the notion of access, and the reality of disability. He surpasses the server's digital and physical confines and his condition, reconnecting with the remnants of the real world and its corporeal existence. The rooftop clarifies his condition and the underlying loss of being. Although man's fate remains inescapable, this distancing from non-existence rekindles his freedom to that when he was a child, while drawing him as close to heaven as possible, so that when death does occur, he is already there.

In this realm, man falls in love with being in the very places he should not.

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Last but not least, to my Mother. For everything. I will love you forever and always.

DEDICATIONS

To my cousin Carl, whom I only recall meeting as a child when he was already leaving us.

To my Father whom I met only in the fragile dawn of my life.

I hope to find you both in heaven.

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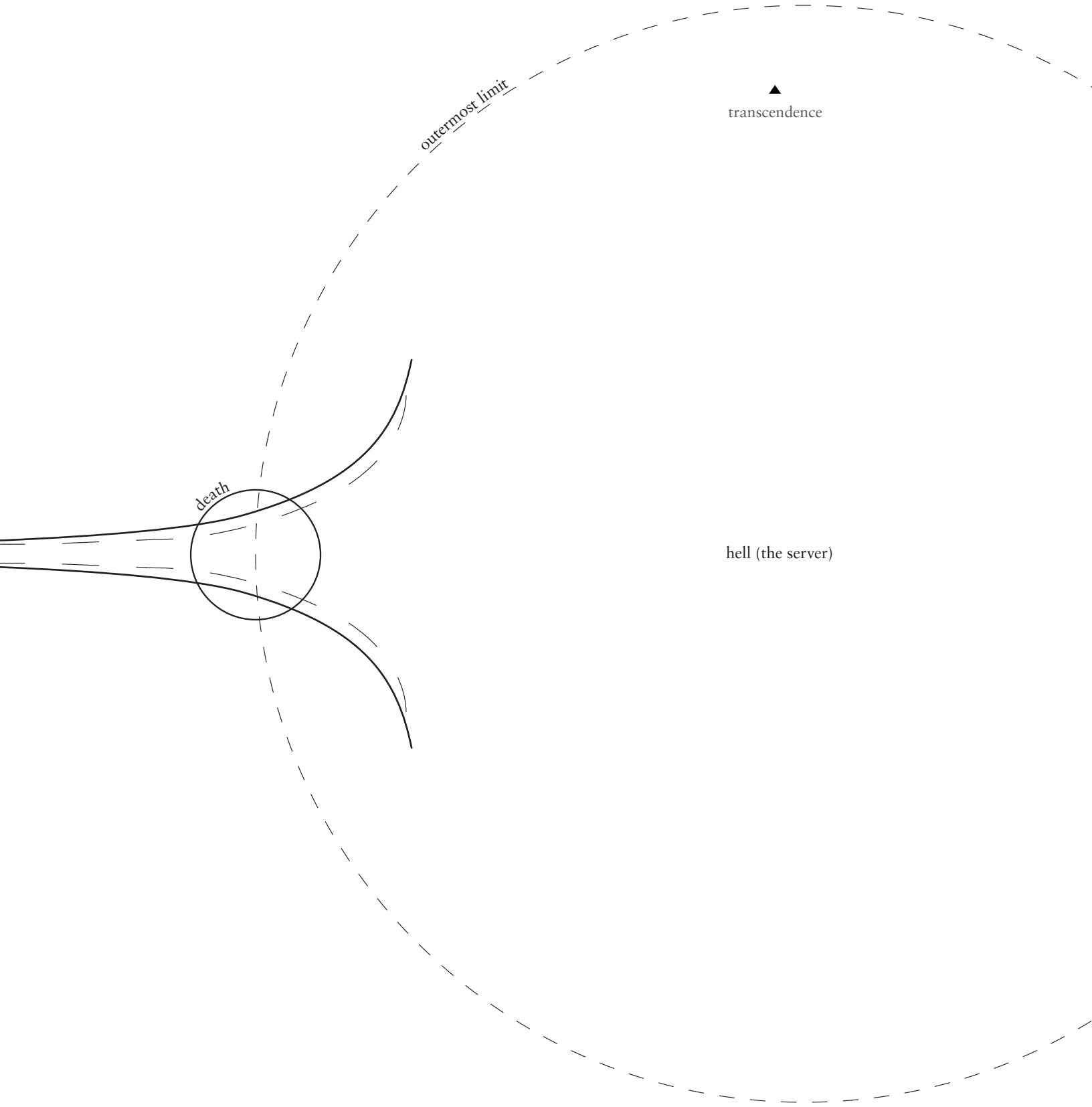
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To philosophize means to learn how to die

the heavens



self transcendence as a way towards meaning:
while death is guaranteed, a meaningful life is not. it is important to live along the outer most limit; to be ready to die, so that when death does occur, one is already there.


outermost limit
transcendence
death
hell (the server)

1.0

INTRODUCTION

JUNE 2020

To wake up in an endless cycle, of being and nonbeing, of asleep and awake, of just existing. Extending the alarm to days of work until 8:59pm, dreading to get out of my bed and back to the machine. From bed to desk, if any earlier on my phone. Endlessly scrolling for something new, some connection, some life. Prolonging the shift from a conscious escape back to a programmed machine and operation. Burdened with menial and hollow work for unspecified durations, uncertain on the outcome of my day and free-time, akin to that in the office, common in this field, now in the qualms of my own home. How great this convenience is. Life streamlined, an accelerated commute, everything ready at one's fingertips, all the closeness with greater distance, all the access without the reality. Exchanging of life, labour hours, simulated everything, alienated. It was all meaningless.

Repeatedly, I counted the seconds withering away, looking forward to the switching of servers,[1] of connections, of identities, of cells. Looking forward to nothing. Standing in line wasting away day by day, on repeat. My existence commodified, the exchange of my time and energy in the machine for what. With what to do, with what to "buy", with nowhere to go, within nothing to be. It was all meaningless. Wired from sunrise to sunset. My mindlessness would not end at work, however continued plastered to more screens, extending awake hours far into the early morning, into nothingness. A late evening walk or two here or there, then back to the frustration. Questioning what else to do, like a bored child in the middle of a mid day summer weekend stuck in their room with nothing to do.

Something was missing. To physically connect, touch, love, and be somebody. To make new memories. Beyond a life that fled my grasp, plans that became abandoned, youth that was left unexperienced, there was but one of few things to do which I hoped may bring value in a time of nihilistic despair, of shear meaninglessness.

The topic presented itself on occasion anytime my online social presence was shared in person, usually as a way to strike an interesting conversation of my work and the what once was. Having not climbed a roof in years I often revealed a surface level reason for the end to my transgressions.

I was working at an architecture firm full-time in Toronto between the blurry years of July 2019 to April of 2022. To help set some context, this was shortly after the completion of my undergraduate degree in the United States and prior to my masters degree at the University of Waterloo in Canada. I built a somewhat notable relationship with one of the dozens of coworkers I had at the time, one of many which had faded alike almost all others I recall, some months later cut due to a global shutdown. Unable to recall the exact timeline of details, the topic I will introduce was something discussed more than once with this close co-worker of mine then. For now, she will remain nameless. This came about through shared conversations on our past experiences and interests with a genuine curiosity in learning from one another's backgrounds and personal career motives. Unfortunately, this did not last long, our physical connection separated months into working beside each other now separated from what appeared as a world turned upside down.

From my last transgression onwards, I did not actively scout or attempt to climb nor had the thought cross my mind outside of a recollection, shared memory, or spatial recall within the city. I had shared details with her slightly on the how and why, at times insinuating the almost dreamlike desire to transcend again. On one occasion I playfully questioned the idea of climbing her condo, having already talked about sharing her the experience. I requested she provide me access to her condominium stairwell to scout the condition. Without hesitation she was happy to and had on one evening looked herself. In both inspections, nothing was enabled. There was an instance she mentioned the possibility to scout an adjacent block her friend lived in, however it was never of serious consideration. Weeks passed. Months more. A great silence fell over our cities and towns, broken only by the lonely wail of ambulance sirens and the weather of the

changing season as a pandemic started to spread.

The two weeks to slow the spread, became four, six, eight.. The pandemic dragged on. At about four months into the pandemic, or great reset[2] which I will refer in this case, realistically speaking it became increasingly clear things were not adding up, however I was still sound asleep. Swimming in questions with frustration and a sea of uncertainty. Following along my merry way, keeping my head on a swivel and my views off the table. I stood by my questioning beliefs, however an equal voice was no longer valued, where speech became useless unless collectively agreed upon by others. Newspeak.[3] The fear and panic around the pandemic only intensified, fueled by a constant barrage of messaging and propaganda from telescreens[4] and other media channels. We were constantly bombarded with messages designed to keep us in line and reinforce compliance with the authorities' directives. Meanwhile, virtue signalling, and other forms of attention-seeking behavior replaced the genuine connections and meaning we had lost in our lives. With time, measures placed an extensive toll on our collective psyche and social fabric, marking an acceleration of a reality distorted through the lens of a screen. Time lost for something that did not entirely take place.

The result was a society consumed by fear, confusion, and uncertainty, with many blindly following along without stopping to question the underlying reality. The pandemic became a kind of litmus test for our willingness to accept and embrace falsehoods and half-truths, even if they were at odds with our own instincts and observations. What was and still is missing is meaning in our lives. For myself of having some meaning in my life that provided an escape from the death sentence of my normal role in society that was mapped out for me.

I had asked before, however made it so that this was now something I was pushing for. Now communicating so virtually, I texted my close co-worker one evening in June of 2020 on the chance to climb the building she had mentioned a few months before, a building she had a mutual friend living in. It was nowhere near anything special from the outside, nor one

considered before, I thought as I pictured it on google maps, however it was a possibility. We confirmed on a possible date and time, and settled for the Friday of that week, with weather appearing clear, yet slightly colder than normal. The work week flew by as it did every other, repeated nothingness, now at the end of the Friday afternoon. We convened later that evening, within the final minutes of blue hour. This was not the first time the "thought" of climbing returned, more specifically the return to the roof. Content aside, it was more strictly the ability to re-experience, to revisit and feel human again in a limbo of constant exhaustion, frustration and non-being.

With this, I reached out to my closest of friends Myles the day prior, a friend I had known since 2013 and have had the opportunity to share and experience almost all my climbs with. By far a brother who I would choose to join me in almost every excursion and one I trusted my life with. Disconnected, I did not want to do this alone, furthermore hoped we could reconnect through this as we had done before years prior. With little doubt, he was happy to come along for the ride and picked me up that Friday evening. Driving down, it was a memory trip to 2017 and prior, remembering our last climb together and the way it had ended unexpectedly. For years we were like children, freely and openly navigating the world, the city of Toronto and the space it had to offer. Now in 2020, we both felt lifeless, controlled, programmed and back in servers. This was not something we were cut to be for the rest of our finite lives, although there was still a light at the end of the tunnel. The roofs here posed as the escape we needed, the escape we experienced before and were calling back to years later.

The commute appeared faster than before. For one it provided an anxiety of reaching back to something we agreed to avoid and never face again, the city skyline watching us drive east on the Gardiner, while at the same time finding ourselves as one of the few cars left on the road. Although there were other cars present, it was a fraction of what I remembered in all my years, a never before seen with only the odd car here and there, transport

trucks and what we assumed were uber drivers fulfilling their deliveries while everyone remined inside, distant, within home, and as almost every store stayed closed, empty, or operational within a limited capacity and time period. The city lingered as lifeless, hollow and empty. We arrived outside the building, parking adjacently across within a parking garage, one of the few cars parked inside, almost all others had already left on this cold Friday evening or were working entirely from home. I instantly recognized the parking garage, having parked inside many times before, quite commonly many levels above, never appearing this empty and liminal on a weekday. It was a ghost, an empty shell from where I had parked in a year prior. As we grabbed our bags from the trunk, we looked at each other before walking away, as if we were to embark on something foreign, something we last remembered from the perspective of fear and anxiety.

I sent my co-worker a text of our arrival before parking and another as we continued to approach the building. It was a somewhat dark alleyed street, tucked away and quite aged in appearance. There were two buildings, twins, unsure which it was we were meeting her at. We scouted the entrances, both of what looked like a recently renovated interior, a reskin for the times. My co-worker showed up within minutes and mentioned having no idea if they were even home. From within the lobby vestibule, she gave them a call. As her voice annunciated in what appeared to be another language, my friend and I were in intermission in the background, waiting for a sign. The truth is, I felt a bit nervous. Having been something I promised myself I would never attempt again in the city while something I felt like I was playing off as entirely confident, I was not. Within seconds we heard a buzzer and the front door click.

I did not recall any sight of security, assuming they were unattended and away momentarily. We took the elevator up relatively as high as what seemed reasonable. The elevator was old, showing its wear in essentially every surface in sight. Transitioning to around the 30th floor, the building now felt and appeared its age. We took approach to one of the two stairwells and climbed up the remaining floors beyond what the elevator could reach.

Between the two, one led to a hatch, and the other a glass door. A series of locked thresholds, both as a sign of portals to a heightened dimension. Unable to step outside, to make way through the glass wall, the lens providing view to the north of the city and less desired map, previously never explored and discovered on foot or on the roof. Lights sparked the windowed cells on this fine Friday evening if I had remembered the time correctly, now with darkness fully held and the source of life off the streets and in each server. The buildings breathed isolated, mimicking the lives locked inside, plugged in, afraid to exit the cave they were too blind to realize. What a beautiful yet absurd sight this was too me, a different familiarity, not what I had remembered. We needed to exit.

Leaving this option behind as no more, we made our way to the mirrored stair-well tracing back our footsteps to the hatch. Myles grasped the old beige ladder and began climbing, my view of the hatch now blocked by his body in view. From the sounds it sounded he was trying to make way with the handle. I asked and he made it clear the hatch was locked via a generic padlock. Unable to find way through this, having never cleared a keyed padlock nor bothered, nor the thought of bolt cutters which were never an option either, this presented a bit of trouble. Before descending, he indicated we could still find a way to get through, that the hatch plate the lock was fastened to could be removed. It made no sense to me upon initial explanation and I wanted to take a look for myself. Here I saw a series of four bolts fastening a plate to the hatch which the lock was securing. Myles suggested we remove the plate that was fastened by a series of bolts with a set of tools he had handy in his car. As he confirmed this could be doable, I was stuck pondering why this was never of consideration in all our similar climbs years before.

Nonetheless, there were three of us at this present moment. Myles, my co-worker and I. One of us would remain in the stairwell, two would head down. Myles heading back to his car to acquire tools, myself in the lobby to allow himself access back through, and lastly my co-worker now in the stairwell core, a few levels below the hatch. Moments passed and we

were back together in the stairwell. Myles with what seemed a handful of varying socket sizes now at the top of the ladder seeing which exactly fit the bolt head, alternating between the hatch to his pocket. Never did I imagine the sounds of a socket wrench here. Waiting below, I counted as each bolt was removed, my view obscured though a hatch that was pending opening. Before I knew it, I heard the lever crack, the hatch popping open, looking up above to a dark sky, nothingness. I grasped the ladder and climbed in a hurry, Myles I assume placing the now free lock, plate, and nuts in his other pocket. Again, I felt nervous and excited, another brief flashback to the past, where my last experience rooftopping resulted in an arrest, with my face to the floor and hands behind my back. Yet in this very moment there was an excitement to be on top again, free. As Myles disappeared above, I followed, a few steps behind, grasping now the top of the hatch opening, pulling myself up and using my legs as momentum to step over the raised opening. As my eyes began to adjust, I saw Myles facing me waiting for my co-worker to follow behind, waiting to close the hatch, waiting to be again.

As I allowed the hatch to be taken care of, Myles closing it gently while making sure it did not lock us out, I glanced at the surrounding view, half blocked by an enclosed rooftop mechanical room. I turned to Myles as he approached me and shook his hand out of genuine cheer, out of this "feeling" we had not come in touch with for years nor had we imagined would be resurfaced again. Since our arrest in 2017 marking our last send,[5] we had both accepted the indefinite end to our adventures and to continue onwards with the rest of our lives and being in a different spectacle. However, this time, it felt like opening that book or image stored so deeply and so far away that you promised yourself you would never touch, look at or read again.

Like visiting an old relative you've been distant to, avoiding, or re-experiencing the presence of someone you were deeply connected to whom you have no longer been a part of for so long. It was not quite the view I had remembered, nor hoped for, though it was exactly the view 200+ feet

up in the air would look like. The fear that followed me from years past had still existed, a conscience at the back of my mind, however at this moment while still on alert, it felt different.

To be free again. To the right to life.
To breathe, to be unmasked, to be alive, to be here on this edge.
To save myself.

As we circulated the walkable roof perimeter, we caught a ladder, straddling the face of the mechanical room on the east side of the building. Another look below we found two penthouse unit balconies. One completely offline, the other on standby. The one offline looked vacant, dark, unused, its curtains drawn. The other had its glass sliding door open, its screen door shut. Inside felt warm, what looked to be a middle-aged single man within his apartment, circulating between inside and outside. His balcony space too was well lit up, external light fixtures, light spilling out from the inside, filled with a barbeque grill, tables and seating. He seemed unattended to the outside, hovering within the inside of his kitchen. Although we were difficult to see, we were more than accessible in visible and audible reach. Keeping this in mind, we made our way to the opposite side of the roof, a footprint similar to that of an H. One side of the H being the penthouse unit terraces, and the other a metal grate staircase, roughly eight feet of height to a landing below that met the glass door we faced earlier from the other side of the portal. Walking down the stairs, it was a plain platform, now seen were the three walls around and single open view to the north. The glass door was operable from the outside yet locked from the interior. An additional exit, however what was important was what we came here for, forgetting quite easily from the large expanse in time since our last climb together. There was a missing sense of time, on what to do, on what to shoot. My co-worker mentioned beforehand she would not be staying very long, nor had we any idea on our own duration on this platform. On average we would expense 30 minutes upon reaching the

rooftop, from cameras switched on and off, from the first to last shutter.

It was 10:35pm. We essentially had zero plans outside of living this moment. I looked to Myles hearing noise of a body move from one surface to another as he moved up towards the ladder to catch a view above. I stayed below, both of us looking out for the resident still awake some feet underneath us. I found the shots to be unproductive to say the least, distant from the downtown core south of us and without a long enough lens to capture the already mundane skyline I had captured enough times already. I lacked the eye to fulfill the necessity of having some creativity in my life at the time clearly. At what was about now ten minutes of mindless shooting, my co-worker approached me with questions on how to shoot, capture, more-so operate a DSLR camera, in her case a mirrorless camera she snuck out of the office she had started to work with. The next five minutes or so looked like a budget tutorial on how to shoot, this time on a dark late Spring night on top of a somewhat subpar roof in the middle of a global pandemic. The easiest thing I could explain were composition and the balance of exposure settings. via shutter, aperture, and iso. In hindsight I should have kept things on auto. As we continued to shoot for another five, Myles came back down. Quite unimpressed himself of his captures and unsure as well on what there was to shoot.

With realistically nothing else to capture, I jokingly suggested the idea of catching sunrise, ie. sleeping overnight in or on the roof to await the sunrise to come. Both out of desperation and uncertainty on climbing again with this being our last, he laughed it off and replied with “I might be down”.. I was honestly surprised. We checked the weather on our phones, the temps were set to drop to single digits with the sun expected to rise at 5:37am. Without further questioning we started to think how we would plan our stay. My coworker didn’t believe the idea at first, missing out on any sincerity. Upon realizing, she offered to bring back food or blankets she could walk back from her condo not too far away. We reassured we would be fine, fully having no idea though releasing her from any liabilities or worries she may have had. Minutes passed, we chatted for seconds more

and went our separate ways. We escorted her back through the glass door, confirming I would text her the morning after or in the case anything came up. Little did we know this would be the last time we would see each other. The last sight of her through the glass door, seeing her make her way back downstairs through the old dim staircase. The state of the pandemic worsened months after, flattening all existing relationships and setting the majority into a complex set of anxieties and lockdowns. A few texts and teams calls here and there, though nothing real, nothing memorable or significant. The roof held our last living memory together. I hope she's doing well.

Myles and I started to think in what ways we would kill the next six hours. It was now 11:36pm. Holding the glass door open with a bag, we re-entered the stairwell, walking down a few levels looking for where exactly we could sleep. The solid dark blue epoxy floors were set with age and anything but welcoming. I sat on the smaller than standard landing trying to orient myself a position that would cater best to really falling asleep. The dead and stale air paired with honest exhaustion did not cater to any comfort whatsoever. The other option was to sleep outside. For now, we figured giving the stairwell a go. Side by side we sat beside one another, backs to the wall, in fetal positions in a state of limbo, waiting. Again, a not too dissimilar feeling from years prior pinned to the floor of a construction stairwell with guns drawn to our heads, followed by handcuffs tightened firmly behind our backs out of reach. This was not that space, and this was not that time, things were different indeed. I covered my eyes through the planting of my face to my knees, light still passing through and illuminating through my eye lids. To my left, Myles looked no more comfortable and had his hood and beanie covering his face, him too sitting in a fetal position no differently. Minutes passed.

Every hour I checked my phone for the time, only to see it had been mere minutes, hoping to see the time closing faster towards sunrise, and unable to hold a steady slumber. This occurred at least a dozen more times, varying my positioning on the wall and along the floor, nothing helped.

At about 30 minutes after midnight, I asked if he'd be open to giving the rooftop a try. Although the rooftop would provide no more comfort or appease of a bedroom, I could not bear this option any longer. Moving back outside, we walked towards the ladder with arrangement to use the upper roof as our space to sleep. As we walked over, we caught sight of the illuminated unit before. The one with the lonely man pacing around his apartment, in and out. His balcony space dimmed, and interior space almost dark. The only lights left on were from a series of kitchen fixtures and a tv left unattended, illuminating his sleeping and still body sprawled out comfortably on his sofa. Must be nice I thought. Although asleep, his blinds were still wide open. Had he heard us from inside or awakened from the static tv across from him, we would be in plain sight. Without much worry we climbed the ladder quietly, peering over back into his space as we spotted each other. Although the view was now cut off from the gained elevation, he appeared no different.

As we sat on the cold bitumen roof membrane, the coldness of this untapped surface found its way quickly into our bodies, shared with the unwelcoming wind from various directions. I was at least one layer underdressed, almost always the case, now remembering the situations in the past. Never did June feel this cold. As I placed my camera bag flat horizontally as a pillow prop, Myles opened his bag revealing an extra sweater on hand. Although he was probably just as cold, he had at least one additional layer on compared to me and handed me the extra garment. The sweater lent itself quite nicely as a full body blanket, 2 sizes too large covering almost down to my knees. Both laying down, I checked the time once more. 1:30am. We both laid side by side less than a foot apart, as human roof objects belonging to the space, waiting for the day to reveal itself. Looking up at the sky revealed nothing, complete darkness, yet not dark enough to see the stars however drowned in a sea of the city's light pollution. We conversed briefly about the unexpectedness of finding ourselves back on a rooftop, sleeping outside on what felt like a chilly autumn evening, 200 feet above a world in turmoil. Despite the passage

of time and the changes in our lives, there was a sense of melancholy and nostalgia that brought us back together again. Without much notice, our bodies became acclimatized to the cold and our tiredness outweighed us, we had both fallen asleep.

4:55am read my phone, as I stiffly held out to my side, as my body felt just as numb in the stairwell, however now cold as a winter night. It would not be long before the sun presented itself. The sky now illuminated a saturated blue, a land of clouds hovering above the city. To my attention, Myles was awake as well. The coldness in our bodies left our joints tight and created an unwillingness to do anything. I was more exhausted than before, cold and famished. Sunrise would be coming any moment now, therefore this feeling won't be much longer, or at least drowned out by a worthy view and a slight warmth of the senses. I fixed myself back on my feet, kneeling down to avoid being seen from what appeared as nothing really adjacent, rather only in sight of buildings far in the distance. None of which mattered anyways, the servers with all their eyes closed. All the servers away appearing sound asleep, only the odd outlier cell dimly illuminated.

It was now 5:00am. The sky illuminating each and every second. Peering over the parapet edge, both penthouse units below were now offline. The one with the man had all the lights off and screen door now shut. Part of the blinds open revealing the dark interior slowly being illuminated from the approaching sunlight. His remains visible though living presence nowhere to be found. I looked towards Myles, now with his bag back on and moving to take the lower roof. As he reached the ladder, I asked for him to wait momentarily, taking out my camera and having him pause on the ladder as I snapped away. One of the few if not only ladder shots ever captured over the history of many we encountered before. This time with his back to the sleeping city and my eyes to his. The warmth from the rising sun now present on his dimly lit face. Holding still in the cold air.

As he descended, I looked below to where I might find it useful to capture, peering over to where we entered aligning with the direction in

which the sun was making its welcome clear. In the opposite direction the moon was fading away. Minutes passed. The city still quiet, the odd car every so often seen far away, likely a taxi or uber. The only real sounds at this moment of the air and the slight shutter of Myles' camera and my own by my ear.

Looking south, buildings glistened with a warm and metallic reflection, the trees and roofs nearby absorbing the warm sun, anything reflective sharing the light. Looking at the horizon and towards the sky painted a spectrum of warm and soft hues. Myles' dark figure aligned in my direction, I called out to him quietly, then again having to control the projection of my shout to get his attention on this cold Spring morning, worried I would be heard from residents below, waking up those around and causing attention out of apprehension. No more than a few shots were taken, balancing his figure in the foreground, the visible landscape and the sky on fire behind. I signalled to him and packed my bag to descend to his level. Looking around, the fire-lit skies too began to die out, within a few minutes disappearing almost entirely.

As the sky changed from rose coloured hues to a single light blue colour, it revealed the mundaneness of the city, back to the emotion felt the previous morning earlier, the morning that appeared the same as the last and the same the day after. Things appeared lifeless, as with the roof we stood on and slept through hours earlier. The roof exposed in its entirety, the night before as a hidden platform holding us up, unable to see clearly or make out the ugliness of the typical roof face.

Looking at the time, it was well passed 6am. We captured a few more photos before we finally packed up. Continuing with our descent, now exiting a different way from earlier, through the glass door, the portal inaccessible from the inside out. Back inside, we refastened the hatch we had jimmied through earlier. Tightening it the same as before, with no signs or traces of our history here, no footprints left behind. We hustled down a few levels to somewhere in the upper twenties around where we had first took the elevator up. Silent in the elevator, trying to recall in

which direction the entrance was respective to the elevator. Arriving at the ground level, we made our way out, us two men unassumingly leaving very early in the morning, our instincts ready to run if security were alerted. I cannot recall if I made sight of security at this time, rather remember the lobby lights off and the space brightened by the dim blue morning outside. Making our way across the street I stopped and looked at Myles, laughingly surprised we did it again. Taking in the idea of catching sunrise on a roof we considered years past though never took advantage of, thinking this time would be forever, knowing it would not, that there would be another time, of which there was not, only by chance today. Looking back up at the roof as we always did from below as we walked away. This transition between states. This moment that was mine.

It was physical.

It was real.

It was transcendent.





hold still

June 13, 2020
5:18am





friendly fires

June 13, 2020
5:46am

1.1

A BIRTH AND DEATH OF MEANING



3. Robert Campin *Annunciation Triptych* (Merode Altarpiece), 1427-32, oil on oak, The Met Cloisters.
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470304

The birth and death of meaning.

November 22nd – 1995

In this space. In this womb.
A candle is lit.

My mother would be made aware that the child she was bearing would be born with a genetic condition that she would pass down through her affected X-chromosome. One that at the time and still today there is no known cure or treatment plan for. One that affects the nervous system and adrenal glands. One that could lead to a child being severely affected if the disease progresses, leading to a long-term coma towards death. There would be a point in which the option of abortion would be presented, to terminate a life not worth living, of sparing a life of suffering, however of sparing any life at all, of meaning. This would not be of any consideration.

10 days

My mother would be holding a new born baby, attended. Sitting down on a sofa with a child in her arms, in a condominium in the middle of a cold winter evening. Just over a week into being together, as a family, a dream come true, bearing witness to new life and a hopeful future all together. My father would be in the kitchen, making coffee, to relax, cozy up and be there beside in company. Within seconds, there would be two cups of coffee, splatted, shattered all over the floor, my father laying, unresponsive, suffering from a brain hemorrhage. My father would be rushed to the hospital in critical condition, my mother by him until his last breath that became air, unable to be brought back, the hemorrhage far too gone. My father would succumb to his terminal state and pass away.

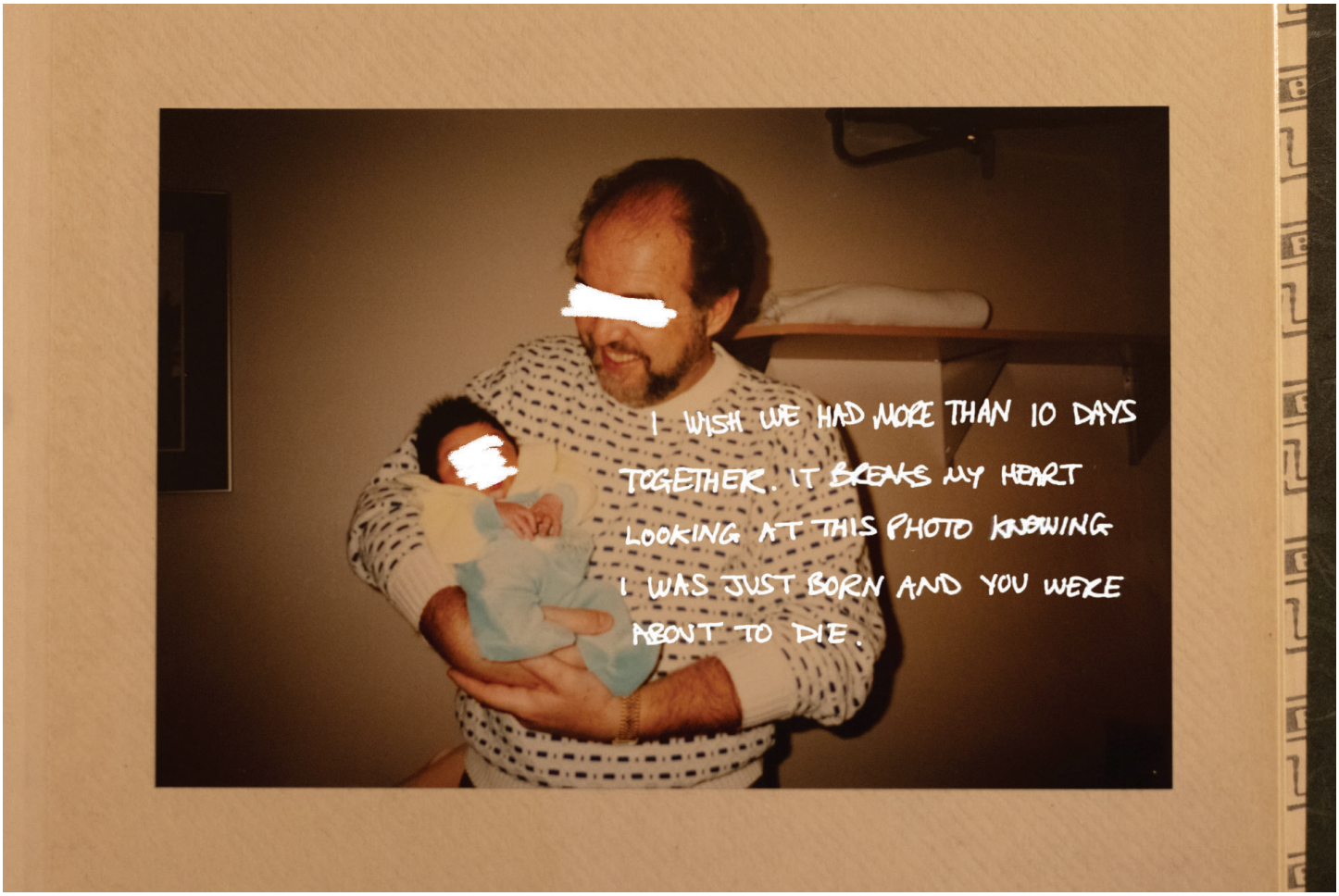
The last thing my mother would say as her arms cliched his fleeting body before flatline would be the promise of her child's well-being, that they both together pray that through his passing, that this sacrifice would spare their child of any pain and suffering from their condition and be granted a long, healthy and meaningful life.

December 2nd – 1995

days later

Days later, the funeral would take place. My mother alone, with a newborn in her arms. A baby unaware of the world he is in, apart of. A baby not knowing the condition he would bear. A baby unsure of the situation, of loss, of those around, of the weight on my mothers arms, of the strength she would require to keep upright and pull through despite the existential, physical and financial burden this would place on the rest of her life. A baby now an orphan. A baby who would never know his father, half his life in mystery, missing.

A death of meaning.


I WISH WE HAD MORE THAN 10 DAYS
TOGETHER. IT BREAKS MY HEART
LOOKING AT THIS PHOTO KNOWING
I WAS JUST BORN AND YOU WERE
ABOUT TO DIE.

4. My father and I the day I was born. 1995

5. A start and end of life. 1995
Together at home, shortly before his death.


I HAVE NOTHING TO REMEMBER, AND YET IT STILL HURTS.
MOURNING FOR SOMEONE I NEVER MET, KNOWING
I'LL NEVER GET CLOSURE.

1.2

ON THE EDGE OF MEANING

(1995- early 2000)

1 hour until the machine.

In the soft glow of the warm highway and streetlights, a younger me sits in the backseat, reflective. My small form cradled below the windows ledge, vulnerable. Unaware directly of where we were, only where I was going. This night, the city unfolding before me as a grand intricate tapestry under the dark sky. The world felt distant, foreign, machines drawing distance closer, ghosts hiding behind one another, appearing, these towering giants looking through the un-tinted windows, directly hypnotizing my gaze. The artificial stars, the still facades, copying and pasting directly onto my blank canvas, recording the scenes playing beyond the glass.

An anxiety present, pure, immediate, premature. Today, metamorphosed into a deeper, existential dread: the fear not of the procedure, but of what it might reveal. My mother steering course with her own set of anxieties, tensions, navigating the already growing labyrinth of the city for my sake. The complexity of the server farm increasingly overwhelming and difficult to navigate. We would take the previously lower Simcoe exit, now but another distant memory of the city. The ways in which the landscape has transformed since only make it more difficult to piece together the memories of the what once was to what now is. Fitting between a parking garage and adjacent server, the cycling ramp transferring a translation from above to below, inching closer and closer to the machine. Time aside, my mental snapshot of the city had changed immensely, losing touch of my voice as a child, except for the streets and facades of the hospital remaining the same, bookmarked, tethered recorders. The city rewrites its own landscape with upgrades to the network. Every other building gone, vacant, what was as a faded image, now dwarfed and out shadowed by more modern machines.

30 minutes from the machine.

As we drew near, the softness of my mothers voice would be an alert, cutting the prevailing silence. “We’re close,” she’d say, her cadence a practiced lullaby, easing both her and myself as we’d make our last turn onto Elm, towards the wide garage opening, descending further into the concrete. Entering, if not off already, all radio sounds would be omitted, the speakers breaking apart, finding themselves silent. Descent upon descent, anti-transcendence. My still body, moving, transitioning, towards incoming stillness.

As my mother opened my door to the backseat, the distinct hospital air that filled the garage would instantly fill my lungs. Instant fatigue and nervousness at the same time. My mother grabbing my knapsack or lunchbox, holding my hand and walking me towards the elevators. This non-place was characterized by a distinct blend of art deco grandeur and clinical detachment—a world apart, out of bounds, far from the embrace of home. The doors clad with friendly images felt everything but, now open, entrapping us below grade, to the service level, diagnostic imaging.

Upon the transfer of levels, the doors opened to a still elevator vestibule. Laying parallel, a wall and ramp. Two directions within the server, ascending left towards medical resonance imaging. Upon entering the waiting area, we were greeted not by faces, but by screens. No one at the desk until we radioed in of our arrival. A pair of small TVs stood vigil—one dormant, the other sometimes playing a solitary movie, unattended. Nearby, a large TV cabinet held relics of a different time: a Nintendo 64, and other games of that era, their presence subtly evolving as the years rolled by, a quiet testament to time’s passage within these walls. All there was to do is settle into the waiting within the perceived excruciating span stretching out until my name broke the silence. My mother, the constant in this shifting scene, would check me in, her hands deftly securing our belongings into a locker. Together, we’d continue our wait, suspended in this anticipatory pause.

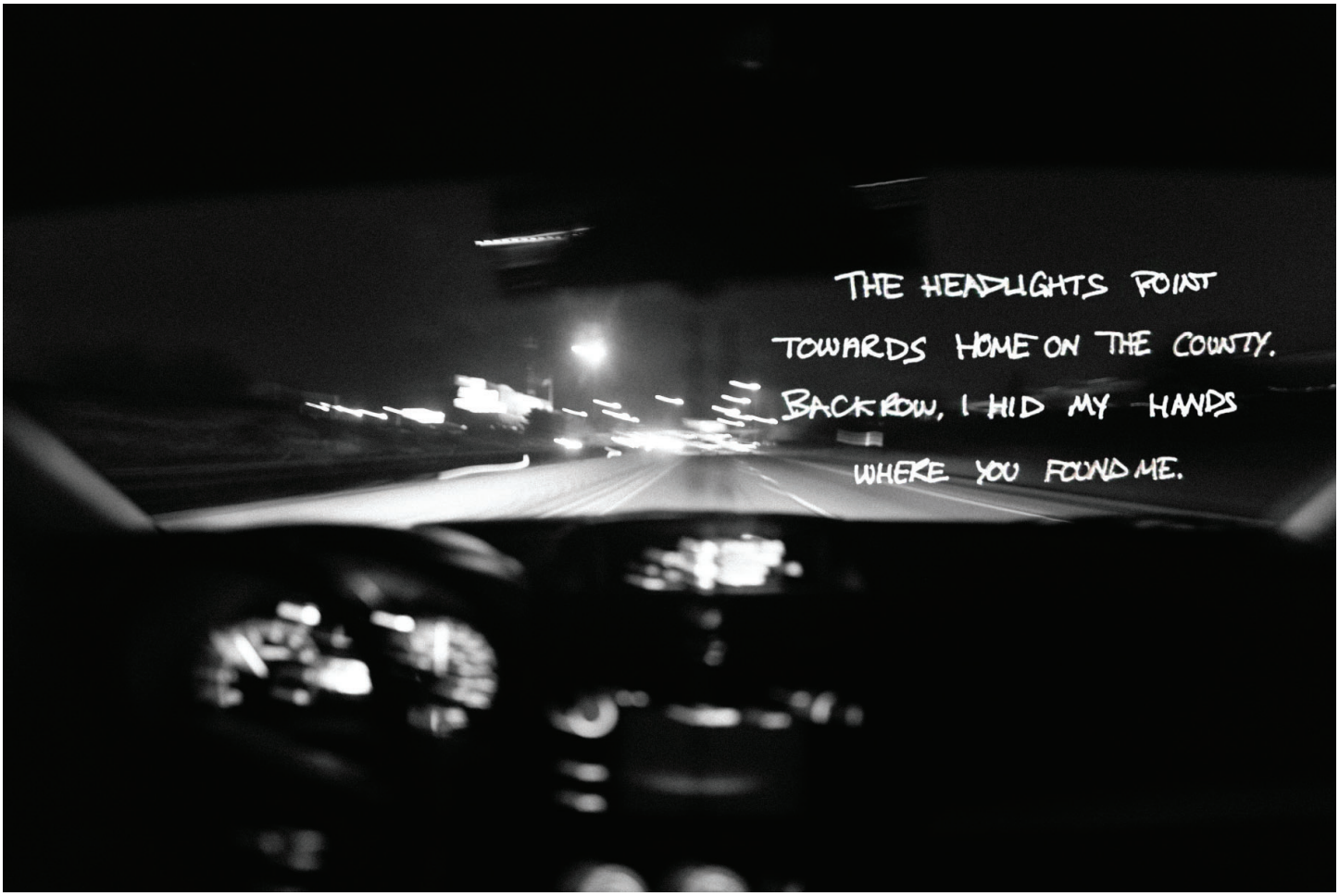
When my name finally called came, it was a summons to another stage, through another set of doors upon doors, into a more clinical preparation space. Here, they would prepare me for the journey inward, administering the intravenous or, in my younger years, guiding me gently into the arms of sedation. Each step, each room, a choreographed movement in this intimate and intricate ballet of care. Laying on a table, I would recall nothing in the following seconds. All I remembered was my mother by my side. Inside the machine, time lost all meaning, nothing was remembered, yet everything was recorded, captured and scanned.

Emerging from the machine an hour later, I would find myself in recovery, a space that was neither here nor there, unaware of what happened during the lapse. Restless, exhausted, and out of sync, I felt like a computer brought abruptly out of sleep mode. We would exit the server back in the car, and repeat the journey in reverse, transition between states of online to offline. Retreat from that cold, clinical space and closer to the comfort and familiarity of home.

The distinct parts of the city, those visual anchors, would once again roll past the window until they merged into the steady rhythm of the highway. There, in that soothing monotony, I would finally succumb to sleep, as though my body knew it was safe to let go. Eventually, I'd awaken, not in a sterile room but in the soft, loving arms that carried me back home, inside, and into bed, where the stark lines between that other world and this one would begin to blur once more.

6. Service level. 199x-2012
The Hospital for Sick Children, service level facing the direction to the MRI.


Parking Elevators
Follow green line to MRI
Central Services
Uniform Distribution


THE HEADLIGHTS POINT
TOWARDS HOME ON THE COUNTY.
BACKROW, I HID MY HANDS
WHERE YOU FOUND ME.

7. Backseat. ca. 199x
Homebound leaving the machine.

2014

To walk the skies

To witness the city unfold

To approach the horizon, beyond a screen

Standing upon constructed giants, man made mountains.

Out of bounds and out of reach

Outside the realm of our mundane existence



mirrors edge

Aurelie Curie ***reckless thoughts abide***, 2012.

One of the first rooftop photographs I recall coming across that sparked my curiosity. An out of this world experience I wanted to take hold of myself beyond that of a screen. Returning to this photo today, still igniting the same emotions as it did ten years ago. 2014.

This visual, simulated experience, mediated by an illuminated lightbox, by a dull black mirror, nothing felt, only imagined and questioned by emotions and memories. Still unable to make a connection to something never experienced.

I sat for a moment looking closely at this image, returning back to it day after day, night after night.[1] It didn't make sense to me, the where and the how. like a cheat code to an elevated experience, a different point of view. Like exiting the map, a map imposed, a map we now comprehend primarily through the cloud. Instead, here off the grid. To bring themselves to this limit and then sit on the edge of it. A state I had only witnessed through movies, artwork and games. All simulated and never embodied. An elevated plane above the city. The utmost peak of the child's gaze out the window of the car late at night. The rooftop.

Shortly after a quick dive online of the growing documentation and underground scene of urban exploring, specifically "roof-topping", unaware of the magnitude this would have on me, I wanted a part of it. I wanted a chance to take this on my own, not knowing what meaning this would bring me.

To really explore the full fabric of the city, of built form, through every part of our body, through each and every sense. From childhood to adolescence, I built a fascination without definition in reading each and every setting I was in as a possibility to be explored. A space to be remembered. How the light touched my eyes, my ears absorbed the sounds, my hands met the walls, the walls met the floors, and my feet traced the ground. How at all were spaces created not simply for transmission but for a relationship through bodily presence and as an output, memory.

Why do we become physically attached to spaces and why did I feel so drawn to something I had never embodied yet somehow I felt that I had met before? What led to the roof, how would one get there, and what view would make itself available? This spark of interest remained at the back of my mind, becoming a motivation for something bigger than life I was

committed to explore.

The memory recorder. The camera. Having been gifted a DSLR camera about a year earlier, I still remained without a creative outlet and without any means to be. My existence was by no means in particular defined by anything outside of being a college student in architecture with a few common interests and hobbies. The camera soon became a tool which motivated its use, a way of finding community, and a new method to explore the world. The mood I was in and the emotions I wanted to express became an amplifier and motivator to take photos. I wanted my photo to speak to me of a specific time, place, event and experience. A way to playback what had passed and allow the memories to live a little longer. Capturing to trace back what I felt, to hold still what I remembered, the emotions, the intensity, the heaviness, the vehemence in the nostalgia. A way to trigger my memory.

This passion of mine became a part of my identity I seeked to continue to fulfill. To hope to continue for as long as I lived on.

A child before that could not roam freely, now in search for a better view.

DECEMBER 2014

I started my second co-op this month and my first job in the city of Toronto, about halfway through my college education in architecture. What felt foreign and limited to interactions only by medical appointments now became a place more readily available and waiting to be understood. From arrival to departure, everyday felt like a new world. I worked for St. Michael's hospital as a project coordinator, however primary operations took place in the building adjacent, known as the Manulife building at Queen and Yonge. I worked on the ninth floor within facilities, a space with about 20 staff members, similar in size to my last co-op however a

new role within a very different environment. I would end up returning later in the year to complete my third and final co-op both based on my familiarity, though more so from the new opportunities and engagement I found in the team and the city at large.

As a project coordinator, my role consisted of a mixture of experiences, not defined by the initial job posting. Some days I'd spend my primary time in the office, some mixed between inside and outside the hospital, meeting with staff in person, others days without a single interaction, chatting over email and never getting the chance to put a face to the name. Some weeks I'd find myself in the hospital equally to the office, taking requests, measurements, notes, accepting orders, organizing moves and small renovations. The odd time staying late in the hospital to help with projects after hours in order to have work completed and moves scheduled while departments transitioned spaces or switched from online to offline. Architecturally, the work varied from minor moves and office orders, to more medium size work ranging from larger moves, renovations, procurement orders or decanting operations as part of the then recently revealed patient care tower project. Regardless, I spent a fair share of time inside the hospital, alternating wings, departments, lobbies, offices, waiting rooms, research spaces, off site operations, back of house, storage, and the odd mechanical room. Hospitals surely differed from ordinary programs we experience, let alone interact with on a daily basis, the job allowed for a welcome behind the scenes into the guts of these "unique servers".

There was an individual who I worked closely with, not quite under rather alongside, one who I saw as a good friend at the time, informally like a work big brother, now long lost in memory. Be it inside jokes within or outside the office, going out for a quick stroll at the mall during office hours, or really showing me the ins and outs of the job at the time. Upon starting, both my assigned manager upon hire and the person who interviewed me had resigned. During this change I was without a real boss, lending this coworker to be my direct point of contact for almost everything, both a good and bad thing, although an additional burden

on his workload. Overall, despite some shortcomings, he made me feel included and eased my nervousness commonly associated with starting a new job within a new environment.

At least a few times during casual conversations I had mentioned my interest in photography and architecture, possibly mentioning urban exploring, tangent to both and a new term even for myself. I cannot recall all the details, having been almost nine years ago, writing this putting time in real perspective. With that, I mentioned rooftopping, not knowing what he would make of it. Having no interest or concern, he mentioned the helipad just as it came to my own mind. He said it was a place he had been on once with the facilities team, where they had photographs captured about a year or two earlier, showing me a print-out he had on his desk amongst an array of unorganized paperwork.

Having been brought atop two roofs through opportunity within a previous co-op, one about three stories up for skylight work, and another about five or six stories out of request from one of the operations guys I came acquainted with, my experience was limited and by no means did it exactly captivate or take me to a level that I imagined. In both cases below the tree-line and distant from anything worth meeting with my eyes and ears. I needed to go higher.

Every so often I would bring up the helipad and the roof. The helipad being the best view as per his opinion and which made sense from a platform and accessibility point of view. Without soliciting, I asked if he could take me up, if that was something he could possibly do while I was there, and sooner than later as the winter had just approached. He replied with a maybe, that technically he could take the keys and go up, however we would need to request special approval with a reason why. Morally, I could not see a reason for anyone from the team to go up outside of work that had to be done. Facilities, let alone almost anyone from any other department had no place there. The fact that we had the keys alone rather felt good enough, however I did not want to push any buttons.

JANUARY 2015

Every few weeks, I would return to the subject to see if my eagerness would be shared, despite being a co-op student he had both no official and unofficially any responsibility for. One Monday afternoon in the office, close to the end of day, he walked in, having seen him once briefly in the morning, sitting down, looking exhausted, likely from a series of moves and other "shit" he had to take care of I was used to sharing. On the other side of the half divider behind my screen he said, "hey Jordan, bring your camera tomorrow, we might be able to reach the helipad after work." Unable to remember what I had asked, likely asking something stupid, I agreed. He said we would try to make our way up after hours for a few minutes. Without hesitation I said nothing else, seeing him get up seconds later, and head home early for the night. Unable to recall when I had mentioned it last, the fact it was him to initiate the idea felt like wonders. This being my ticket to freedom, to be given the chance. I would later save out my work, send out any other emails I had already drafted, make notes in my journal for tomorrow and update project schedules on the whiteboard adjacent. I locked my workstation computer, removed whatever I had left in the fridge had I forgotten, packed my bag, and started my walk back to Union, timing the next train, always leaving at the last minute to avoid excessive waiting, however leaving always later than usual, forcing a faster than usual pace and risking a missed ride home.

I alternated my way between the path and above ground, however generally preferred walking the path, all dependent on the weather. In Toronto then, you would face the usual afternoon and evening rush hour split home up until 7pm. Afterwards, the city felt still. The odd group of people outside coming home from dinner, people out for a smoke, some for a walk though more likely than not walking home than a casual stroll during the winter, just like me. Tired and alone, I remember the passing by of people out with Maple Leafs jerseys, happy or sad, one or the other, walking by me near union of outside a bar, assuming there

was a game about to start or one that just ended. Usually, repair work along the streets or above my head, while no real major construction, a couple condo developments here and there, though nothing outstanding in quantity or size to catch the eye. Still, constant development taking place, however typically expected in the city, far less so back home an hour away. Regardless, things felt expected after a while and continued to give Toronto the definition I learned to acquaint with, although wanting no part of it, it was all a welcome change which developed both my character and wanting to explore. Within months it became a space I either visited intentionally or stayed around in after work to climb and breathe up high. I soon had a love for the city I would today now have a bitter distaste for.

As the following day appeared, I was excited for what was to come, hoping everything went according to plan and nothing fell through. I arrived at the office minutes short of 9am, my messenger bag twice in size from my camera bag tucked inside. I got to the office commonly before my coworker did, sitting down and starting my day. Seeing him later, I resisted bringing it up waiting till he made any mention of the helipad. With no one else in the office knowing and with no idea myself what could go wrong, I felt confident based on his position and familiarity with staff across the hospital that all would proceed smoothly. If stopped, "a student and I had to check something for the team back in the office" or "I wanted to give the student a peak from inside the helipad office", I didn't think much could go wrong. There was no staging behind it, instead we both went on through our days, myself making sure I was back in the office before the day ended. My coworker returned, stepping in momentarily, about to step back out again, telling me "meet me downstairs at 4:30" before he turned around. Initially, I figured 4:30pm was quite early, though he seemed he wanted to do this quick and get home early, this being a favour he didn't want to waste any extra time for.

At 4:25pm I made my way down, leaving earlier than I would have liked. As I turned the corner outside the elevators, I didn't expect he would already be there, though there he was sitting down in one of the few seats

that felt empty within the high and open lobby, laid back and on his phone. As I approached, his eyes remained attached to his phone, knowing it was me and gesturing with "one second". He had no bag on him, typically he was one who showed up and left, rarely bringing anything if ever to and from work. There was something so laid back about his energy which complimented my anxiety and nervousness I too often associated with. As he got up and started walking, he said "we're entering through Cardinal Carter,[2] just follow me". Leaving the building, the transition from a mute and hollow silence was met with the sound of the city alive as the rotating doors transitioned us into the outside. Excess foot traffic, the same monotonous traffic of everyday, all strangers, except for the same homeless individual I saw laying down at the corner of Queen and Victoria, with more piling up moving east, however at least a few at the same intersection I saw almost daily. Walking up Victoria and coming up the steps into Cardinal Carter, we would immediately take a left into the emergency wing, personally never entering past these double doors before. We walked down a short hallway and up to an old set of elevators, only two side by side. He said we would need to wait for the one on the left, the other would not take us to the roof. As we waited for the right elevator to arrive, he looked at me and said "listen, we're only going to go up for five minutes, get your shots and we leave, I'm going to stay inside. I don't want to stay up too long." The correct set of elevators doors opened on the first attempt, two nurses pushing a gurney rolled out. Holding the elevator door behind, we stepped in. He shuffled through the keys already ready in his hand, inserted one of them into the only key hole present, turned the key clockwise and hit button R which sat above all other buttons, above and between 16 and 17 below. Not only did this appear as the only way to get up, it seemed to be a bypass to directly go from the given level to the roof.

It was a still moment, standing in this old hospital elevator. This was by far the dirtiest hospital I had experienced on top of the only hospital I ever came to terms with and became acquainted with from a worker level.

Growing up, my experience at a hospital took place always with a guardian, in the case of my mother, spending time at the SickKids at least a few times each year since birth. Hospitals surely were not a pleasant experience, however, were necessary. There was something both emotionally and energetically draining from the moment I'd enter a hospital, from the drive, the waiting, the testing, the smells, sights, and sounds. Now as an employee, although my interactions were limited to a facility level, coming home each day after the commute left me beyond exhausted and morbidly unmotivated to do anything - certainly not to stay back and explore the city.

Watching each button illuminate as we ascended, my coworker looked down at his phone. As each button illuminated, I recalled my experience with each floor I had come acquainted with thus far. Floor 16, Oncology and Endoscopy, I was there earlier that day. Floor 17, Mental Health and Addictions, this level was interesting. The halls were by far the most quiet, vacant, designed and decorated in a different fashion from the levels below and from other wings. The additional vestibule between the floor itself and the elevator lobby. Mesh netting along the glass, skylights welcoming light into most of the rooms and public areas. I wanted to learn more about the program, slightly less about the patients, however never quite felt comfortable on this floor. As button R illuminated, the elevator continued to ascend about an additional floor before slowing down and coming to a stop.

As the doors opened, it brought us to a small office like space, a small portable desk, empty, a chair, some items around the room, however primarily desolate. This instantly appeared as a place for the operator or whomever would be called up, expecting a patient arrival by air. About fifteen feet in front were a set of glass double doors. Half the room was cladded by floor to ceiling glass panels on the opposing side of the elevator wall. Beyond the doors we could make sight of the platform walkway, barely making its picture clear, where the sunset outside appeared hard to see through our own reflection inside this small incandescent room.

My coworker looking down at his phone and back at me, “You have five minutes.”

As I approached the doors and my reflection equally came closer to me, my eyes adjusted to the outside view. I took hold of the cold metal handle and pushed the righthand door open, the wind and negative space creating a vacuum that was unexpectedly greater than I could have imagined. My feet laid on the platform with the door closing on its own behind me. As my eyes adjusted, so did the rest of my senses. Walking down the platform walkway felt like I was walking onto a stage. I’d rest my messenger bag in the middle of the helipad, pull out my camera, alternating between looking through the viewfinder of a cropped sensor, to bringing the camera down and witnessing the view unrestricted. Preferring the latter. The direction that captivated me most was looking west, the sunset as a backdrop to the skyline, making bold Mississauga back home I would soon return to. The remaining light splashed onto the servers near, emitting a mixture of cool and warm hues. The office lights inside remained on, punching through the glass, illuminating the monotonous facades now on display and contrasting the sky behind.

The air up here was different. The sunset was peaking, a sharp division between the blue hour sky and the setting sun, devoid of any clouds. The sounds we heard below at the street level projected their way up through the silence, however felt distant without the proximity and visuals of the movement. Everything around me looked like a wallpaper. Five minutes would pass in seconds and my departure would occur before the sun could fully say goodbye.

Later that night, I texted my friend Horace, a good friend I grew up with who lived relatively close by home. We hadn’t spoken much after high school until we reconnected the first summer after post-secondary school. Photography, among a few shared interests, was what ultimately drew us together and propelled us toward exploring the city. I mention Horace to introduce the first person with whom I would embark on this journey,

despite his absence from it today.

The text was first regarding my experience this night, mentioning the night prior how I was likely going to make it up, although sharing the full details now. Having been up once, and only for a few minutes, I wanted the chance to go again, and even better to bring him along, to share the experience. The text followed with an invite. Two days later, we'd meet me in Toronto, the Friday of the same week around 7:00pm after work.

I would wait to be one of the last in the office, take the keys sitting on my coworker's desk, meet Horace in the lobby and follow the same procedure I had witnessed days earlier, now myself. I was nervous honestly, trying to play it off and pretend this was nothing to worry about. We entered through the south side of Cardinal Carter along Queen east instead of the closer entrance to the elevators on bond. I cannot remember why exactly however we walked through the long halls of the lower level towards taking a longer route than I did the night before. I might have wanted to take the longer route of the building to show him around as he was completing his degree in nursing. Although brief, a walkthrough of some parts of the building I was familiar with that maybe he found familiar through study. I remember stopping at one point to take photographs with him within the hospital for whatever reason, however will spare the muddy recollection. I believe we took the same set of elevators rather from the level below, bypassing the need to enter through emergency. Upon the arrival of the correct set of elevators, I had no idea which key would take us up. Shuffling through at least a dozen other keys, cycling each into the key hole, the correct one slotted in, turned accordingly and the Level R button I had longed to press myself illuminated.

My first and foremost concern was who would we be met by upon the opening of the doors. Having been up just days earlier, there was a chance an operator would be sitting at the small desk, not sure what he would be doing exactly, however sitting in the same very chair that was empty a few days before, that I had not worried about or considered earlier. What

would he ask us and what would I say? That I worked for the hospital and was granted special access to go up after hours to capture photos with a friend? It felt reassuring that the keys resided in the office, however I had no business up here.

Horace did not appear too nervous himself, nor would I expect him to be, although I explained a scenario in which we got stopped and what I would say. The about 30 seconds of waiting ended and the doors opened. The room was like it was earlier in the week, a few filing cabinets, the desk empty, however the chair moved slightly in a different position. There was a clock pinned up to the wall parallel to the elevators I had not noticed before, reading few minutes past 7:30. Despite the time of night and the vacancy in the hospital and buildings adjacent, we agreed to allocate 30 minutes to shoot, no more, no less. Leaving our bags this time inside and my camera strapped over my shoulder, I grasped the right hand door and pushed forward, the wind far greater in intensity and strength to nights prior, cold and piercing creating a sharp tone between the inside and outside. Holding the door for Horace, he made his way out and commented on the cold immediately. Seconds later grasping the view and commenting on the beauty of the stillness of the city. Reaching the center of the helipad, before splitting to opposite sides, we immediately felt the coldness from the ambient temperature and the constant wind everywhere. The temperature dropped far below freezing, with the air up here naturally more frigid while exposed from all directions. The night sky played a different episode of the city to what I saw days prior. Although office buildings primarily remained online mechanically yet offline through the human element, all the residential buildings matched, creating a dense candlelight flicker, a layer of light pollution and brightening the night sky.

The temperature made it far too difficult to really compose any still images, to linger and frame what I wanted to capture. Within just a few minutes, we met back in the middle, our voices cut from the moving air, our faces and hands both frozen still. Gesturing to where we came from, we walked swiftly back towards the doors to retreat from the air up there.

Inside, our glasses instantly fogged, the cold absorbed by our exposed skin exacerbated by the lukewarm interior air. The air neither warm nor cold, just still and stale, maybe just below 19 degrees celsius. As we waited to acclimatize back to internal temperatures, we chatted and discussed the view and the photos taken, barely any if at all. We repeated this cycle, moving between inside and outside twice more, with being inside for ten minutes buying us time out for a quarter of that, the temperature inside nowhere near necessary to get our bodies to sustained warmth. The 30 minutes we promised became an hour and passed like seconds. A single pane of glass between the inside of the server and outside into the real world. On the final attempt we chose to take long exposure portraits along the skyline, looking north and west of the city. During the exposure I would be required to stay still to avoid any motion blur and distortion in image, just like being in the MRI. As Horace yelled "six seconds", I knew how long I would expect to hold steady. I stood on the metal net edge of the helipad, still, knees shaking, buckling from the heaviness of my being upon this elevated platform, from the collapse of all walls, anything to hold onto, from the cold weight of the wind. After at least a dozen shots, I requested one sitting down, peering out into the sea of neon feather lights. Sitting down, in bitter cold comfort, the temperature of the metal pierced through my pants to my already below freezing skin, however it added to the already attuned atmospheres.

The sounds of the city drowned out, in silence, as echoed leftovers. The life below slowed down. Vision uninterrupted without a screen. Not knowing what to capture, captivated. The view capturing us.

Time paused. The night frozen.

A dancing of sensations.

Beautifully momentous.

Meaning at the periphery.


TRUMP
BMO
Manulife



with eyes to hear and ears to see

January 20, 2015
4:25pm





frozen hands

January 23, 2015
5:43pm





finally unbound

January 23, 2015
6:12pm



first date

September, 202x.

do you still remember that night?





13. *The Temptation of Christ by the Devil,* 1129-34, Fresco transferred to canvas, The Met Cloisters.
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471907

1.3



What building to climb next; what "views" would it provide within the fabric of the city. As more public space is erased, extruded to the sky, and forgotten, the tops of the servers became the only space real experience could take place. Not below the surface but towards the heavens. The city can be paradise for a rooftopper and hell as a nobody, a binary, another user. The self versus them. The risk, the photos, the sublime, all the memories that paired with it. Physical transactions. This other dimension, unlike a movie or game was non-virtual. Existing in the real world and not a map. Cycling between on scene and off scene. The scene that held memories of the collective, on the ground, the other for myself, in the sky. Where my memories remained protected and secure.

Reaching the out of bounds, a part of the world there and not there. Curious about what the roof itself would appear to us as. How it was built, laid out, arranged, how different the roof landscape looked from the last. A difference in levels, vantage points, edges, ladders, spires, cranes, parapets, and more. Was it shaped like a flat box, a grid, a boat, a kidney, or had a variation of shapes between elevations? The roof was something special to us, specific to our experience, something that demanded our attention, demanded the risk, something that was ours. Exploring was a process. The top was always scenic, the pinnacle of the experience, however the infiltration and exfiltration was never simple, usually the most intense, layered with thresholds where sometimes things did not go as planned. Although monotonous in nature, every server was different from one another, never straight forward. We always needed a backup plan and an exit strategy should anything arise. It forced us to be creative and optimistic in the process, exhausting all alternatives to make it in and out.

Although both old roofs and old faces became inaccessible, it always felt the same for me. Everywhere I found myself, the thought of the roof came to mind. The backrooms of the city, the climb, the elevated landscape. I read the city to be experienced vertically, beyond the given system. A place within the non-place[1] I would almost always rather find myself. From my home to the roof, everything else was filler. Rooftopping

represented different episodes of my life. Different connections, different places, different times, yet the same motive and interest. To escape the crowds, the noise, the code, the server. To simply be there, to be embodied, to be in this world.

The people I met, experienced, and remembered played a large part in this. From 2014 onwards, there was a coming and going of different generations of rooftoppers, most of whom I now no longer know but only remember. Some rooftops became no longer reachable, with access fully denied, locked up forever. Others were likely reachable, but no longer desirable, akin to revisiting a place of the past that doesn't feel the same. Although we all came from different backgrounds and ideals, what we shared was the collective drive to create and explore. To meet on the ground and push through the server together or to wait for each other on the roof. To be out all night, a second timeline outside of what was predetermined from 9 to 5. To be out for hours and what felt like a few minutes. The rooftop was a dimension which compressed time. It was dreamlike. In many ways it was dangerous to be out too long regardless of the time of day, always checking the time to see how much we had left, only to be surprised by how fast time flew and likely how little was captured. We would all get our shots, alternating spots and vantage points. Letting each other know what views were best, moving between corners, levels, and later seeing what we each captured differently. Back then, I never quite felt I did not get all the shots I needed. Generally a few lookdowns, landscape long exposures, and a foot dangle shot saved for the end. Today however, a part of me captures out of panic, seeing the increasing difficulty to climb, not exactly knowing what to capture, different from before. It's the embodied experience however that I enjoy the most. For most it's a passive goodbye, for myself, it feels permanent.

To get home at 4am, review the photos from hours earlier, to edit with excitement, to post and share with the world. Editing or at least viewing the shots until late in the morning, always putting aside all other priorities, this feeling personally I had where there was something else I should have

been doing, something I was neglecting. This reminded me of my youth when I would shrink responsibilities in favour of alternative activities, clear procrastination. The kid at heart fighting to stay alive. The added tension of navigating downtown traffic seemed to amplify this sense of avoidance, reinforcing the notion that my time could, perhaps should, be allocated to more substantive endeavors. It was one matter to engage in activities of dubious legality; it was entirely another to be constantly plagued by the thought that anything else—literally anything else—would be a more judicious use of my time. Looking back however, I regret none of it. Exploring to escape responsibilities, experience that I will remember forever. Experience then reexperience.

Despite contacts lost, the faces, memories and photos remained. The not knowing that everything I was then would come to an end sooner than expected. The rooftop waiting to be revisited once more before I could no more. The roof always held a special place in my heart, something I shared with the city, that I want to be remembered by. Something that made this city unique despite my distaste. Beauty in the chaos, excitement in the fear, curiosity in the unknown, meaning in the struggle. Motivated by something always fleeting. The rooftop, this existence, my health, meaning. To come face to face to what most purely never will, others stuck in blind conformity and expectations of the everyday. Stuck in the cave. If there's one key I had left, this would be it.

Every roof becomes the last.

14. Being there. 2022



1.4

A CRISIS OF MEANING

I believe there's meaning

no I believe there’s nothing

Until 2019

everything felt okay
things were getting better
normalcy for the last time
movement without meaning

Simply living, enjoying every bit of normalcy. To make the best of every second, of my twenties, and of my life. A countdown towards a cut off, towards "lockdowns", towards a very unfree world, towards death.

He was living a different life, both internally and externally. He would remember the last time he thought he felt happy. Living a life unaware of its meaning. A life unready for suffering. A life he would never get back.

2020

meaninglessness at the periphery

reset

trapped from the outside

Upset by the state of the world, the loss of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. My external health absorbed, taken away, with nowhere to exhaust my intact internal health I would soon lose protection to.

Screaming with no sound. Losing all control, all autonomy, all being. Removed. Forced. Trapped within collective consciousness. Surrounded by a herd mentality, of conformity, obedience, of silence. Uploaded into the system. Participation. Non-freedom. Unaware of his own impending decline, yet in that very unknowing felt the life before as separate, as gone, as never to return.

The rooftop waited as an invitation.
The reaper waited at the sidelines.

Collective acceptance, falling for domains of control, surveillance, dependence and the loss of human essence. Total loneliness and on my own.

The child in me screaming, knowing now what I had not known then. My only way towards freedom, to log off, to transcend, without dying.

2021

meaninglessness at the periphery
decline
trapped from the outside

From the fall of the body to the fall of the west, everything I knew of would begin to collapse.

An outraged mind and a body starting to malfunction. A start to a new chapter, cautiously sparring the ink, shaky

Tremors and uncertainty

Ambivalence

A glitch in the system

He would be assigned revised expiry date

A new start and a new end

His meaninglessness felt never-ending

2022

meaninglessness everywhere
trapped from the inside
no choice
to adjust my life accordingly
the candle melts faster

From prognosis to diagnosis. My condition would become a reality. The progression that had started a year earlier would become a wake-up call, a daily battle, a new normal, another decline to bear witness to, this time on my own. The world around me back to normal minus all the meaning. The way I experience the world no longer normal, a new search for meaning. As the world "finally" re-opened, my world began to close.

I thought I would have more time. Promising the child he could be whoever he wanted to be.

Disintegration. of society. of the body. of the spine. of the mind.
His health weakens, legs collapse, mirroring the world outside his walls.
He loses touch to the real, to his memories, to be able to feel what it was like.

As the external re-opened.
The internal started to close.
The reaper by his side.

Everything is falling apart.

Everything around me becomes foreign, becomes unreachable, unknowable, unapproachable, by depth and distance. The machine dominates the pervasive landscape of bodies.

today

meaninglessness on the outside
meaning in the suffering
no choice
to adjust my life accordingly
everything becomes a memory

The temporal horizon would flip, the behavioral change based on the understanding of ones time horizon, further away from birth than death.

As his health declines, his dreams fade, his life flickers, on and off, the will towards meaning becomes everything, the final send, the reminder that this all comes to an end, in his case sooner than expected, the door to the roof, the casket coming to a close. The reaper waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

The child in him, unaware, hopeful, just like the other kids. Death following him everywhere, by the garden, down the hospital hallways, in his bed, through the years. Blissful ignorance. Moving through most of his life uninterrupted.

I find comfort in this.

I thought I would be sparred, that I was going to be okay.

"Doctor, this is a lot to handle.. It's all a big wake up call and I'm only 27, I just don't want to die right now."

"I can't imagine what you're going through", the doctor responded.

...

the call ended.

Life without living. Connected without connection. Memory without memory. Experiences without experience. Love without loving. Things without things. Texts without textures. Place without place. Dwelling without dwelling. Moving without movement. Humans without humanity. Dying without dying.

A crisis of meaning captures the contemporary world. All around. You see it. You feel it. You hear it. Yet you ignore the senses. The mass struggle to find meaning despite the unprecedented access to information, technology, and material comfort. Saturated with data yet starved with wisdom. All the connection and resource yet a profound sense of emptiness and alienation. Memories without recollection, simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, experiences that are hardly experiential, living in the machine, by the machine and thanks to, through and for the machine.
Humans reduced to a non-existence.

Controlled by an unfree system no longer fighting to be free from, we find ourselves entrapped in an all-encompassing web of surveillance, dependency, and passive acquiescence. A system that continues to reset itself, that our existence becomes victim to. This omnipresent machine, fueled by our own participation, dictates our desires, actions, and thoughts. The resultant nihilism — a profound sense of meaninglessness — emerges as we navigate within a system of information, consumption of non-things, of non-living and non-being. We have become mere cogs, stripped of autonomy and authentic existence. The tools that represented progression have instead trapped us, blurring the lines between freedom and bondage, reality and simulation.

Despite all the means to live lacks any meaning to live for.

towards transcendence

towards death
towards freedom
towards the real

towards the roof


THEY SAY ONE DAY YOU'LL WAKE UP AND THERE WON'T
BE ANYMORE TIME TO DO ALL THE THINGS YOU'VE
WANTED . AND NOW THAT TIME IS HERE.

15. Breath of fresh air. ca. 202x

The rooftop brings clarity to my condition. Knowing there's little time left to do all the things I wanted, having already lost.. I return here to live out what's left. A child rewatching his favourite VHS movie. Here I rewind.

2.0



APRIL 2021

Stuck. Wanting to escape a landscape that was no longer readily escapable. A world that was no longer made free outside of being seen behind a screen. Stuck between decisions. In-between a world upside down and a pending disease. Not a virus. Something unavoidable. Trapped for good, stuck in a permanent lockdown. At this time, unable to truly take care of myself, of my physical and mental health in a time that was all about "health". Becoming more mentally and bodily unwell from the system.[1] Removed from what made us truly happy, fit, stable, all that made us human. Forced and removed. Removed from the lives we once had, from each other, from the truth, now fed false promises. Blind compliance. Funny that nothing has changed, only made worse, yet no reactions. Stuck inside a nation full of sheep.[2] A new low point.

Step by step.

A day would pass. Then another after another. Days to Weeks to Months to Years. In a lockdown that felt never ending with no goal in sight.

I would finish work, exhausted, questioning where all the time went. The same meaninglessness that emptied my soul at the office, now within the "comfort" of my own home, and more than a year later since lockdowns commenced. Finishing work usually later than expected, unaccomplished and unfulfilled, my wealth of time emptied with nothing to show. Isolated from sunrise to sunset with the machine. A corporate slave within the neoliberal labour camp.[3] A cog in a much larger machine inside a cave that I could not see the light out of. Assumptions that the current work and state of the world were only temporary stages, that they would fix themselves, and that maybe if I wait, things would get better, however this I knew would be all wrong. I fully understood what it was I wanted out of life, out of myself, of which it was not this. The machine would leave me drained, unmotivated to do anything else, to stay put and live another day in the system in verbatim. The only thing I would do to separate myself from the

machine was to go for a walk. To get some fresh air and experience the same isolation on the outside as I did from the inside. I would have a quick snack, layer up in clothing, and head out to witness the cold late winter air during blue hour. Instead of going for another walk, I figured it be worth going for a run. I took a few steps, outside my home, the cold air reaching my lungs, both a welcoming of fresh air and contrast to the warm stale air seconds earlier. I walked for a few minutes, able to refresh my mind, thinking if I would make it out and last the hour which felt strenuous however with nothing else to realistically do, or make it back inside before the sun would fully set, retreating back to the machine.

Taking the last corner, now exiting my neighbourhood, beyond the threshold of the semi-private to the public, like I was exiting my server,[4] I could see the wealth of traffic moving left and right perpendicular to my gaze. More than a year later, questioning where it was these souls were heading to or from where everything remained closed off, inaccessible. I made a final turn before meeting the open road, turning to my right, now looking down the same path I had traversed for months, the same path I had cycled down nervously as a child on my bike years past, the same path I moved through as a high school student and so on. The path was steep in elevation having roughly a ten percent slope in grade. Without stretching or any planning having no reason come to mind, I took a few steps down the hill, initiating a run, my acceleration increasing each step forward. After a few strides between each leg, I felt detached, pulled away from the controller, the machine, the body, my legs running on their own, bouncing and landing, tipping farther forward than one should, feet catching, knees buckling, then nothing. Within a few seconds, I was out of breath and winded on the floor.

Something felt off, my right foot caught the concrete path, the air in my shoes providing more bounce than I was used to and having never sprinted in these shoes before. The bounce created an awkward impression between myself and the world below, my legs out of sync with the feel of the run and the push between my feet in the shoes and the shoes on the pavement.

I collided with the declining ground, the force of my body and the landing moving outwards and downwards. Pausing, troubling the ability to catch my breath and instantly embarrassed with what happened. The sounds of passing cars moving up and down by my side became an apparent noise, the only thing my mind paid attention to, only then by the pain experienced, and then my location within the scene. My being revealed on the floor, like a bug squashed under its own weight, useless. None of this made any sense. Unable to recall the last time I ran, the last time my face, hands and body met concrete. Turning onto my back, my face, hands and knees stung by the cold air, flesh exposed and blood reaching beyond the surface of the now missing skin. My pants torn open, my left knee pulsing and both my legs still in shock. As I got back up, I took a step forward, pausing as my left leg felt stuck, a new cramp in my knee forcing me to take on a limp back up the hill. Finally reaching home, limping inside, blood dripping down inside my pant leg and leaking on the surface of my hand, I made my way to my bathroom to clean off and patch up. Looking back at myself in the mirror, the frame of my glasses scratched and directly underneath my face scrapped as well. After disinfecting the wounds and cleaning up; and with the pain in my knee still present, I would take the rest of the night to rather ponder on what this was, the why, the what, and more specifically if this would happen again.

Less than a week later I forced myself to go for a walk again, not to get out, rather to test myself outside the home and measure the strength in my left leg which continued to feel weak and unsteady. My knee wanting to give in and buckle on a decline, the first time I had ever experienced something I was unsure was musculoskeletal or neurological. The first time the thought of my condition came to mind. An overbearing feeling that the decline would begin, highlighting the decline I witnessed on the periphery, and now within the core. The impending decline I did not know would take place, occurring far earlier that I would have imagined, that the dream was collapsing before I knew it. During my walks I felt an anxiety that lingered alongside the pain and discomfort. Each night I went to sleep I

prayed whatever this was would disappear and remove itself automatically. A glitch in the system pending update. I would not realize until later on that this would be the last time I would run.



16. Decline. 2021

I went for a run. The hill I walked for years, even for months after my fall. I have not walked this since 2022 and the prospect of doing so today is fleeting, rendering itself inaccessible and a serious risk. Like so much, it haunts me twice.

MAY 2021 - MRI #45+?

A few more days followed with the discomfort slightly less pronounced, however still present. There was no fatigue involved although this was not to say I could not walk smoothly, rather something felt off, and by no means was I comfortable with initiating a run or jog. My mind was unable to shift its attention to anything else, my walk slightly impaired, it's effect invisible from the outside rather felt from the body and mind. Every step and instance I needed to move out of my seat was a struggle to ignore, a weakness I am unable to remember and different from what I experience today, however nonetheless a milestone of an impending decline. Timing aside, tonight was my yearly MRI, something I thought about days earlier leading up, now something I was curious about in relation to my brain and spine. Truthfully, I remained quite optimistic yet partially naïve regarding the physical effects my condition presented and the why. My doctors, although responsible to an extent, remained fairly hands off outside of ordering tests and performing check-ups, most notably never outlining what it was to expect should my decline start to take place, hence the following year would remain unnoticed despite my unwavering efforts in having this looked into.

My MRI was scheduled late on a Sunday night, almost always taking place early in the morning or late after 10pm. Now commuting downtown alone, through almost an identical path to that I took earlier as a child within the backseat. The city had activity despite lockdowns, movement of people and cars, only much less at this late time of night on a Sunday. Users on the ground separated, distant, the outdoor patios and stores closed, all entertainment suspended, however people out for whatever fresh air they could catch before returning back into their servers. Arriving at the nearest parking garage on Elizabeth Street, I parked my vehicle in the outside lot. Once again, I braced myself as I left the vehicle, waiting for strength and consciousness in my legs and the ability to walk. A subtle stint in a single leg, a spark then, and something much more today. Crossing over Elizabeth

Street from the parking lot was a nice greenspace, one that created a neat separation between the outside and the inside of the hospital, one that was almost always however littered with a few homeless, and a couple staff members outside for a smoke or breather standing or sitting on a curb, the picnic table benches in this case were closed off with caution tape.

Entering the hospital, which was almost always empty at this time of night, I noticed the differences due to quarantine measures: separate entrances and exits, additional stations, and more protocols established for infection control and contact tracing. As I entered the hospital, there was a person at a booth directly upon entering, she was wearing gloves, a mask, and a face shield, sitting behind a desk and another shield with a series of clipboards, each with expected names to check-in for appointments and directions for wayfinding. This was the same sight I remembered a year earlier thinking this would all be over. I already knew where to go, however required a sign in first and to switch out to their assigned mask. I cannot recall if they forced me to apply hand sanitizer as well. Today it is no different in some hospitals after hours, minus the pandemic protocol measures. I walked up from the ground level to the first floor, moving through the empty hallways, passing by the closed off reception desk I would usually check in at prior. Moving through towards another long hallway, to a small seating area with six seats, three of the seats covered up because of social distancing which ironically speaking we already take part in with the machine, always separated by a distance, I digress. I hit a buzzer to call the radiologist over to make aware of my arrival. I remember vividly the area I was in, despite being in the same hospital I had my MRI's in for years, it appeared differently, I possibly took a different direction or found myself in a new area. I chose not to sit down, my anxiety because of my leg discomfort kept me pacing back and forth instead, looking outside the dark window to the exterior which only subtly made itself visible through the reflection of myself, an outside courtyard in the distance. About ten minutes later, a technologist came out of a set of double doors that remained a threshold to the hallway. She asked me

to follow her through, now towards medical resonance imaging. They brought me to the changing area, handed me a clipboard to fill out and instructed me to wait to be called in. I think it was about now that I was in the area I usually remembered being in, however cannot truly recall. For a few years about this time they would stop administering an IV for contrast, to which now I rather them have. For years I was truly unconcerned about my condition in terms of the results, assuming I would make it another ten plus years without having to really think about or consider the effects of the condition, simply based on how well I had been doing and what I saw from others with my condition, only this time worried about this new issue in my left leg, hoping it would be unrelated and go away. Within the next 60 minutes I would be done with the scan, change back to my regular clothes, exit the hospital, get back to my car and head back home. It would take roughly two weeks to receive my results, received via a brief email, less time if something abnormal was found that needed to be addressed.

The following day, I emailed my genetic counselor at the University Health Network, who was at the time my only contact and assistant to my geneticist. This geneticist had seen me since I turned 18, marking my transition from the SickKids to the UHN, now with the adult form of the condition. I reminded her of my recent MRI and finally expressed my concerns about my leg discomfort, questioning whether it was a result of the fall I had experienced. More specifically, asking her to forward this note to my geneticist, questioning if this was at all related to my condition, knowing its effects on the lower limbs, movement and coordination, not knowing what or how else to ask. She would reply the same day and the conversation would continue over the course of the week.

May 2021 – emails

(1) May 3, 2021

Hi J.—,

I hope this message finds you well.

I just had my brain and spine MRI completed at TGH last night.

When the scans arrive on your end and are seen by Dr. M, please keep me posted of the results.

Will see you and Dr. M.— virtually in December.

Thank you,

(2) May 3, 2021

Hi J.—,

To follow up, do you have Dr. M.—'s email which I could use to ask some questions prior to the December call?

I feel it would be extremely useful as I have no other contact to reach out to regarding my condition. I have been experiencing some leg pain, in my left leg around the knee joint. I'm not sure if it is AMN[5] related, although I recently had a bad fall as well when I went out for a run last week. The pain is not due to the fall injury, and has still lingered since. I have a few other questions regarding my condition that I'd like to discuss.

Hoping this is possible, and that she has time to respond to patient emails on occasion.

Hope you are both doing well.

Thank you,

Jordan

(3) May 5, 2021

" Dr. M.— cannot provide medical care by email between appointments. I can take your concerns to her and see what she suggests and/or I can put you on the cancellation list for a virtual visit with her sooner than your December visit. Please let me know your preference."

(4) May 5, 2021

"Hi J.─,

Understood. If you can forward any of my concerns to her in the interim, that would be greatly appreciated, of which I'd be looking for some feedback prior to future appointments.

I am available any day from mid-July 2021 onward. If an earlier appointment can be made for both my mother and I that would be great, otherwise if not, please keep the appointment in December.

For more urgent matters and inquiries I have, please forward the following concerns below to Dr. M.─, and please let me know when I should expect a follow up. If you have any advice, please provide your best knowledge as well.

1.) With regards to my last email, I am curious if my left leg pain (located around the knee joint), is related to AMN, and if so, what steps should I take in the interim. Aside from exercising (which has been difficult due to covid), increased movement and rebuilding my muscles, should I take any necessary precautions or actions regarding this?

If this is related to AMN, should I expect it to get worse, or will it subside, then return later on? Again, there is so little information to find within the sphere of my condition, nor are there many other patients I know of.

2.) Regarding cALD[6] and neurological defects which I read occur in 60% of cases in those with AMN, what should I expect in the instance I am affected. This might be a longer and more in depth conversation to have this Winter.

Currently, my main concern is regarding the mobility in my left leg. I'm not trying to jump to conclusion, although it's a sudden weakness that has no traces to any physical activity I have done recently. The pain started on Sunday morning, and has since remained the same.

3.) Lastly, I recall mentioning the MIN-102, minoryx trials taking place when we had last met virtually. I am curious if you and/or Dr. M.─ have been following the trails and if the results have been promising. Furthermore, how exactly would minoryx apply to me, more specifically, what benefit does it have for patients with AMN.

https://www.minoryx.com/

Hopefully Dr. M.─ can provide feedback on these questions, and the conversation

can be continued during the appointment call. To have answers in the meantime would really provide a piece of mind until then.

Thank you,

Jordan"

(4) May 5, 2021

"Hi Jordan,

Dr. M.— has recommended that you see your family doctor regarding your knee pain, as it can be due to many musculoskeletal reasons unrelated to AMN. If your family doctor notes any spasticity[7] in your legs, let me know.

She'll be happy to address your other questions at your next appointment.

Sincerely,

J.—

(5) May 20, 2021

Hi J.—,

I recently met with my family doctor. At first, over the phone it sounded like a possible meniscus tear.

After about a week of chronic pain, I stopped all physical activity and the pain has since subsided.

It sounds more of a slight sprain or strain in the knee area and not a meniscus tear. She recommended I seek a physiotherapist to strengthen my ligaments and muscles. I have also picked up a knee brace which has helped stabilize the area and prevented any unwanted twisting or bending.

On another note, have you and Dr. M.— received my MRI results? I assume no news is good news, although I'm hopeful for an update.

Thank you!

Jordan

(6) May 20, 2021

Hi Jordan,

I'm happy to hear that your knee pain has settled.

Your MRIs are stable/unchanged from last time. As always, let us know if you begin to experience any tightening in your lower limb muscles, or if anyone describes you as having "spasticity" of these muscles.

(7) May 20, 2021

Hi J.—,

Thank you for the update. Very happy to hear the results.

I will be sure to let you know if I have any pain or discomfort as you described.

Wishing you and Dr. M.— a safe and happy summer.

Jordan

SUMMER 2021

Within a few weeks of my fall, the isolated leg discomfort went away on its own. A sign of relief, although a false reassurance.

As summer neared, it seemed to erase rather than arrive, blurring into a memory without recollection. It was another countless season passing by, seemingly insignificant, another year slipping my hold, a span of time I would entirely regret being in. A year that echoed its predecessor, only a more up to date version, even worse. The most valuable thing, time, wasted.

The last time I had felt somewhat normal. A timer ticking away, one of my own life and the other reminding me of the changing and fading seasons. A timeline I was no longer in sync with.. a decline with the seasons changing around me. Fading. A storybook on hold, with nothing new to write.

I had never been this unhappy in years from what I could recall. With all the cancelled plans, from travel to my hobbies, to personal fitness and

well-being at the gym, to no longer congregating and in person socializing with friends, and more to say the least, this isn't it. Life put on hold. Life controlled. A life I would have no more. This isn't the life I wanted. Amidst this backdrop, a pervasive narrative, driven by fear and uncritical acceptance, seemed to dominate the collective consciousness. Trust in authoritative voices—unquestioned and unchallenged—molded behaviors and constrained freedoms, echoing a psychological directive more than genuine caution.

I just want a life where I have my own control, where I can make my own decisions, where I am fully independent from the government, that which imposes itself in every domain of the server today. I personally choose not to follow the rules set forth by anyone, adhering instead only to the laws of God. I believe it's crucial to think for oneself and to strive for as much independence from the system as possible. It's essential to question and critically analyze the actions of the government and media, which I view with skepticism, and then to decide on a course of action based on that analysis. The government prefers that we place our faith in its institutions rather than in God or any higher power. However, once you believe elsewhere, the government no longer has control over you.

Fear holds you back from a joyous life. While most wait until it's safe or when told it's safe, when it is safe means never. The server may be safe, and yet a life in the server is far from real.

Noting to myself. This life is so damn short, don't wait for anyone or anything to do what you love or do what makes you happy. No one else is in charge of your own happiness but yourself. The last thing I'd want to be remembered by or rather in today's case of the masses, forgotten by, is "Jordan lived a safe life". Most people are simply afraid of dying, I'm afraid of never living. Stuck instead inside a system that continued to update itself and test itself onto the masses, subtly calibrating to the collective response. Not too hot and not too cold, frogs kept at the right temperature within a

boiling pot[8] and crabs pulling each other back down.[9] Herd mentality. Fear tactics. Blatant propaganda. The emperor wears no clothes. The emperor is invisible. An unlearning of history, willing compliance and renewed lockdowns. Our lives however increasingly intertwined with technology, became a part of a larger server, our actions relegated to and monitored within this digital landscape.

While the summer flew by, I continued with my walks as a means to escape, albeit slight, the restraint that I felt on me from the second I woke to the second I went to bed. My walks were a way to live more authentically despite being trapped in a cage, a cage that followed me everywhere along this landscape. Going for a run no longer considered and biking, something I wish I took on, now a dream, something I can no longer do today.

The walks across all seasons were a means of escaping the server, something of which again is becoming more difficult for the collective intentionally and myself physically and naturally, yet consciously. Despite a world that was controlled and closed off, it still felt real. The pandemic catalyzed a monumental shift into server living and altered modes of being. It accelerated a transition of how we work, distance, communicate, experience and accept the given world. Control and power that became invisible despite what was presented in front of our eyes, what we held in our hands, what was projected from the screen. An uploading to the system and loss of humanity one is not aware of.

Both the lockdowns and my own frustrations were a bad premonition, of this fleeting sense of freedom and inability to fully engage with anything real anymore. Of this slowing down and restriction. A loss of the real world. A child sensing an impending loss. Both the world he once knew and the body he once had. A new life assigned.

Although we might physically be in places we couldn't access during the lockdowns, both physically and digitally, our overall freedom is significantly less than it was before this societal reset. A way of living lost and taken for granted. The remainder of my summer felt like a never-ending cycle, a metaphorical death sentence I had never anticipated falling

into - a fate I had feared and loathed even before the pandemic, and even more so during it. I felt trapped, with no apparent way out, unaware that this would be a decline I would soon come to accept as normal. This all compelled me to question, reflect and challenge the prevailing narrative accepted without revolt.

It felt like parts of '1984' and 'Brave New World' had been realized.

And while people forget.

I'll never forget.

The last time I was free.

SEPTEMBER 2021

The start of the school year, one that I started two years after the end of my undergrad, a year later than I anticipated. I had waited an extra year, hoping for a return to stability. In hindsight, this was a mistake. My health, as I had mentioned earlier, was fluctuating. The same issue would return sporadically, only to fade away after a while, moving in its own unpredictable cycles. More normal than not. Despite a new environment, I felt trapped, never able to find my footing. From collective fear, distancing, and a rollout of mandates further separating me from what felt real.

The myriad protocols, rules, and mandates, arguably nonsensical, spared me the details of my frustration. This was not a time for critical thinking or questioning the narrative; compliance was expected. Yet, in seeking truth, I found clarity. The events from 2019 onwards, in hindsight, prepared me in ways I hadn't anticipated. They awakened me, unplugged me from a previously unexamined existence. A time of life I had anticipated, I was at once excited for, becoming one difficult to enjoy. Managing school and living in an uncomfortable environment off campus I had never truly settled into was one thing, however mediating a space in limbo that I was never able to find a solid ground was another. Daily, I grappled with these challenges while feeling like an outsider, simultaneously preparing for my eventual removal. Once again, I was being removed, not just physically but from a sense of belonging and normalcy.

My first term had a light schedule, yet ironically the term was more of a challenge bureaucratically than it was academically. The hybrid and eventually online academic experience posed little difficulty for me, offering some relief, allowing me to focus on other areas, notably my pending status as a student and my ongoing health concerns. On the days I had classes, my routine was driving to school, having to self test yet not be required to report – a protocol to this day still fails to make sense to me. Nonetheless, I'd arrive on campus, masked, entering a sort of mystery. Other students and professors often made jokes or shared their pandemic experiences. Everyone seemed to comply, sometimes scoffing at those who didn't. It felt unnecessary.

In the seven weeks I was allowed on campus, about half of the lessons and lectures were online. Existence we were all too familiar with then now accustomed to today, the inverse of being together we found uncomfortable. It was more of a hybrid experience, at least half the lectures and crits leaned online. Often, I questioned why I was even there, as joining online was always an option. Some students found themselves fully online, living abroad or having not found local accommodation. Even in person, we were distanced, our faces masked, voices muffled, with little opportunity to socialize before or after class. We were there and not there, all behind screens, no different than being completely online, hardly different from today. All the while, we were on standby, unsure if the school would close again. I guess for some, their lives went back to "normal" like nothing happened. For myself, this was a total loss.

After classes ended, I immediately returned back "home" to where I was living, a ten-minute drive from campus. My evenings comprised of me getting whatever necessary work done, usually ahead of time, mostly focusing on studio work, as I had only two core classes which enabled a workload lighter than I imagined. I joined in extra curricular activities once a week in the evenings too which I lost touch with early on due to the reasons of not being able to participate in person and the given nature

of how the work was conducted. At home, I'd occasionally chat with my landlord or his stepson, rarely at the same time as they had opposite schedules. These conversations, while not particularly engaging for me, provided some fleeting comfort. They were temporary exchanges, soon to be forgotten. I once mentioned the possibility of not being able to attend school in person anymore and having to move back to Mississauga. This news seemed to pass by them without much concern outside of keeping them updated. I'd reside almost entirely in my room.

Other days I found myself rushing home after class for different reasons. I'd often feel the need to use the washroom right after classes, however I'd tell myself to wait until I was home. This urgency, which I first noticed earlier in the summer, wasn't severe initially, but it became more frequent and intense as time went on. Today, uncontrollable, now aware of its manifestation of my condition. A loss of bladder control, function, a failure of the nerves' ability to communicate, amongst other things. A lost connection to everything, both inside and out.

I'd get home, parking quickly in the driveway, sometimes on the street if no spaces were left available, rushing to the door and fumbling my keys in the approaching darkness. In a hurry while unable to read what key and keyhole were the correct combination; and a front porch light above the landlord always kept off, left me shuffling in panic, turning the doorknob only to find the door was left unlocked by the last person. I'd hurry to the washroom, thankful that, at the time, I could still walk at an increasing speed and without a gait or the constant stiffness I experience today, always on. Sometimes when the urgency was less, I'd still use the washroom upon arriving home, usually dropping off my bag in my room and using the shared washroom upstairs. Catching my reflection in the mirror, I started noticing my hair thinning – an observation I made earlier in the year however never to this extent nor did I suspect would accelerate. Extreme thinning all over, my hair which was quite long before or even less, having curls might have been covering it up, however running my hand through my hair, over my scalp, this sparsity and loss of density…

my hair was falling out. Recalling strands of my hair when at longer length at the bottom of my shower earlier in the year.. Again, something else I was not made aware of, yet another mystery unmentioned by doctors, by my medical team, another experience to add to the growing list. Over the months, I mentally noted these changes. Along with the hair loss which was misdiagnosed later as telogen effluvium, the bladder incontinence and urgencies too progressed, in addition to things like spasticity, clonus, spasms and more that I would come to experience in the ensuing months.

On the days I had no classes, I worked remotely for a job I had held for the last two years. One of which I still have regrets about, however thankful for the small amount of money it warranted me during my "free"-time and the ability to work flex hours through the following months. Despite non-compliance, they allowed me to continue working as I was remote. After discussing with HR and management, it was clear that my return to full-time, in-person work was unlikely due to my commitments as a full-time student. Although my time oscillated between work and school, the greatest stress were my backup plans, overshadowing even health concerns. The looming possibility of removal or non-compliance by year's end, potentially leading to expulsion from my program, weighed heavily on me. A putting off my education for another year, another year I had already wasted and despised, another year of what, residing in limbo, to which in hindsight would have maybe been even worse seeing the status of my health today and the likelihood I'd even want to return despite mandates being lifted. The past two years already felt like a complete write off, wasted into the machine, a significant portion of my twenties gone, my last perfectly healthy years missing in a time we were removed from the real world, a world foreign to me today. One consideration was finding work again, albeit another meaningless job that was neither beneficial to my career path, not in the sense it would not open my eyes to something more, rather it would not be useful to me along the necessary path of becoming an architect, or what else. What employer would also consider me for a fully remote position along a one year contract as well at this time. Tough

luck. Travelling anywhere was not much of an option either with existing restrictions. Having already had to cancel two flights due to lockdowns and inability to leave, even if flying was permitted it was only under the condition of compliance which I did not. I was still stuck. In one aspect I had little to no options for work, little to no options for travel and my last option was to reapply to grad school, what would now be for the third year. Was this something I realistically wanted to do? No. Now at 25, the thought of still being in school was already far from what I had envisioned. In the attempt I did apply elsewhere, where would I go assuming mandates would lift by the next year, of which they did, would things remain the same or get worse, and would applications by non-compliers be accepted. Reaching out to schools often felt futile, as they had no definite answers. My concerns, especially regarding my condition, seemed irrelevant to them, I expected no less. Compliance was the primary criterion, and anything outside of that seemed to have no place in the conversation.

I began contacting consulates of countries on my two-year-old wish list, particularly Switzerland. The question loomed: could studying there be feasible, especially when travel itself was uncertain? Already September, it seemed late to initiate such plans. I considered other schools and destinations, almost all of which I would at that given time be unable to travel to. I reached out to my past references, those who had supported my previous applications. Explaining my current scenario, I found their understanding limited. They didn't fully sympathize, nor did they grasp the severity of my condition, a detail I hadn't shared before. My point was simple: I might be reapplying to schools. Where exactly, I wasn't sure.

My position at Waterloo was clearly in the air, as were my whereabouts for the future. This uncertainty made all my efforts seem worthless. Why would any of this matter in the case I would no longer be a student at the school in a few months? What was the point of it all? Although I made every effort to do well, I felt trapped in a hamster wheel, waking up each day to the same dilemma without a clear decision. Time and my health ticking away in the background, pressuring me to act quickly, yet I had no

clear direction which move to make. I felt stuck, directionless, nowhere.

Facing the prospect of missing the upcoming application season, and with it, another year, I was overwhelmed. The upcoming deadlines were only a few months away, and I was unclear about the qualifications for studying abroad, not to mention the uncertainty around travel requirements. If I couldn't make the deadline for this upcoming season, I'd be looking at a total of four years to start grad school since completion of my undergrad. A large part of me wanted to just give up. The rationale for pursuing this path, which started back in 2013, seemed to lose its meaning, tempting me to throw in the towel. But then what? After four years in professional practice, already questioning the field and corporate environment, I was teetering on the edge of changing fields altogether. After wasting two years, was I really ready to potentially lose another two and end up nowhere?

I despised the situation. 'Depressed' might not be the exact word, but I was certainly exhausted. I felt like I was preparing for the unknown, bracing for potential removal from school. It was like jumping from a plane I wasn't even allowed on, with no idea where to land. Or in the middle of the ocean with no life raft, or maybe it was more like being on a melting ice floe, searching for the next step, a step that today feels increasingly unsteady, one I am losing grasp of.

So, I returned to focusing on my health, amidst a backdrop of constantly changing regulations. The cycle of opening and closing, the forgettable zones determined by regional cases or other metrics I can't quite recall – it was a confusing game with no permanent rules. It again was hard to make sense where we already cross pollinated daily, and the mandates, they dictated your participation in life; without compliance, you were virtually nonexistent, fading into obscurity in the real world. Two different cases of disappearance. Some mornings I would wake up with the familiar leg stint, now alternating between legs, no longer only the one I fell on. Usually going away as the day began. The stiffness and discomfort seemed random, still around the knee joint, coming and going unpredictably. It

would emerge sometimes during the day, other times in the evening, often upon waking but seldom before sleeping. The pattern was obscure, hard to pinpoint. Like before and after my fall, I needed to continue my walks. Less for the physical activity alone and more so to test the nature of my walking, my soon to be gait, yet at the time to see if it had any effect on the slight tightness and awkwardness present, whether or not it was there. Whether activity helped it go away, even temporarily, if it made no difference or made it worse.

Physical exercise was still very important, no less than before if anything more, both as a necessity that we had been forcibly deprived of and also one I needed based on my condition. It was something all bodies needed that we were removed from, another thing today that no longer feels the same. It had been nearly two years since gyms were fully operational. Although they were "open", cycling between a red light and green light almost by a weekly or monthly basis, they were now in operation for several weeks. By now I had lost all progress, each opening serving no use only to close up again. Although I had an existing gym back home, I needed to find one proximate to where I was now living. My requirements were specific: affordability, proximity, 24-hour access, and no commitment. Most crucially, it needed to be a place where a non-complier like me would be permitted to exercise. Missing the gym was one of the biggest drawbacks of the past two years, and unfortunately, my school gym was still inaccessible.

Of all the facilities I contacted, I received the same response: I was not welcome. Some were blunt in their refusal, while others seemed bewildered, unsure of how to handle my request, often deferring to a manager whose answer I could already guess. The reason was always the same: I posed a risk, and allowing me entry would be unfair to those who had complied. If caught, these establishments risked fines and closure. This deep-seated adherence to the rules, this unwavering obedience, made it hard to believe that any of them could step back and see the larger picture.

Out of all the gyms I contacted, only one agreed to let me in. I won't name it, but they did so at a higher rate, capitalizing on my predicament. To

some, this might seem fair, while others would probably still disapprove of my being allowed to exercise there at all. The only other place where I was welcome was my gym back home, however rarely visited due to its location from me. I instead opted to pay for a day pass at this one accommodating gym near school, however never returned, mainly due to the subsequent developments with my school situation that followed.

Based on this, what I returned to were the walks I became accustomed to over the last two years. My walks became less frequent than in the summer and previous years, possibly due to being too engulfed in stress or preoccupied with other concerns. I regret not walking more. My strolls were mostly confined to the neighborhood I lived in, navigating paths that never felt entirely familiar, relying partly on memory and how my body responded. I was losing touch with what used to be. Most people get to gradually adjust to their body's changes over decades. But when your body begins to decline in your 20s, you're abruptly faced with a reality where memory is the only link to what once was. It's a detachment from the physical experience, a fading of abilities and features lost. Premature yet necessary losses.

This time, being unfamiliar with the area, I let myself get lost, but only within the limits set by the increasingly frequent need to use the washroom. The same roads I drove during the day turned into a mystery at night, part of a much larger network than back home. Sometimes my walks were cut short, dictated by how long I could hold my bladder. I'd turn around and retrace my steps home, now pitch dark, the front porch light I had left on upon exit, now turned off, likely by the landlord, the door again unlocked. Inside, I'd use the washroom only to then decide against going out again, feeling more fatigued, quicker than usual. What used to be a 30-minute walk not felt like an hour; and an hour seemed much longer. Before, no distance or amount of time would tire me out this quickly. I would never think anything of it.

A few times, I ventured to the nearby woods, the conservation area, maybe two or three times. I recall once going with the landlord during the

day and the other times alone. My last memory there was in the fall, a cold chill and leaves beginning to scatter. It was just a couple of weeks before I left for good when I decided to walk there one evening. The entrance was a mere five minute walk away, a distance that now exhausts me, where every step is a struggle.

I remember making two turns: one right outside where I lived, and another left onto Avenue Road, opposite the direction to school. It was around quarter to 6pm, November 5th, 2021. I had walked this path before, heading east along the sidewalk for about 500 meters, until I reached the entrance. Uncertain of the exact trailhead, I followed the same route as before, through a gap between two trees into the woods.

Crossing the busy street, I remember frankly having to gauge the distance and time of the passing cars for I was unable to run, maybe only able to jog still. Attempting neither, I was aware of the change in my leg. It felt different then versus today, not only in strength and fluidity but in the control; signals that were more directly connected, shared, not yet lost. There was an odd sensation in my knee, a heaviness and awkwardness in my stride. It was a stark contrast to the unconscious ease I used to have in such movements. Stepping off the curb, I felt a slight pressure, a hint that my knee might give way and collapse similarly as I did when I fell. I cautiously navigated the descent from the sidewalk, over the grassy slope to the curb, bracing myself more than usual. Even inside the forest, each step was measured, mindful of placement and impact, wary of the sensation in my knee. Yet, there was still strength – I could squat, sit, and stand unassisted, my balance largely intact. Despite the peculiar feelings in my leg, I was, for the most part, still functioning normally.

Inside the forest, I was on my own. I didn't expect, nor particularly hope, to encounter anyone. The quiet solitude was quite calming. The rustling trees and the wind's breeze gradually drowned out the distant hum of cars now behind me. The further I moved inwards, the greater the external noise faded away, leaving me with the sounds of my own presence. My breathing grew heavier with each step, my body warming up in the

cold air. Leaves crunched under my boots, fresh foliage yielding to each step. My boots now feeling like an extra weight I was now indifferent to, yet to which today, as I write this more than two years later feels completely different. Still astonished to how fast time flies in relativity to my perception and memory. Those same boots I now need to sit down to put on comfortably or to find something to lean on for balance.

The simple act of slipping my foot into a boot has become a struggle, marred by lost precision, on orientation and movement of my feet, the diminished strength, and an unforgiving tightness that triggers clonus instantly. My entire leg shakes uncontrollably, a frustrating ordeal that I've had to learn to live with. Yet, the uncertainty of how much worse it might get lingers. There's a spectrum from full mobility to disability, and I find myself somewhere in between, maybe in the middle, navigating this new reality.

I walked directly towards the water, where the trees opened up and which gave way to a steep decline, a small cliff or dirt drop rather about two feet high. Knowing my legs could not handle the jump and impact of landing, I carefully sat and slid down. The space between the forest edge and the water was limited, only about ten feet. The sky was clear, and I caught the tail end of the sunset. I sat there for about ten minutes, my attention wavering, the habitual pull towards the screen, a reflex cultivated over two years. Sitting with my hands idle, my senses unengaged, I allowed myself a moment, undistracted, watching birds flocking west, the reflections of the sky mimicking onto the water below. Standing up effortlessly, I turned back towards the forest. Using thick roots for support, digging my feet into the dirt, I climbed back onto the ledge, dirt clinging to my joggers. In what was less than ten minutes, the forest had darkened significantly, the sunset no longer slicing through the trees, leaving only the blue hue of the evening sky.

Wandering for a few more minutes, moving east, the forest path narrowed, with water on my right and the park and paved trail on my left tapering the forest to a close like a zipper. Emerging from the forest onto

the grass and then the trail, I noticed a couple or perhaps two friends in the distance, directly in my path. I moved off of the paved trail and closer to the water yet not making contact with the adjacent beach. Between the trail and the beach were a line of trees neatly placed and an array of picnic benches and tables less organized than the trees inserted. The two individuals I'd seen were near the end of this area. I could almost read their body language but could not grasp their voices. I continued walking to the pier closed off, the visible zone where small paddle boats docked, of which were empty at this time. Closer, a couple of minutes later I passed by the couple, I could feel their eyes lock onto me despite making no contact with them, even as I passed I could still feel their gaze. No other thought came to mind, outside of them maybe wondering why I was alone, was it weird to be out alone at this time, were they maybe concerned of my presence, who knows. Reaching the docks, I stepped over the low chain barrier onto the wooden platform. My boots made the first noticeable noise of my feet below. Not on grass, the leaves, the solid trail, but the hollow wooden planks that seemed to echo and fight the silence of the still water and air around.

A few minutes passed with no movement. I turned around to head back onto the trail, curious what else might unfold before dark. As I walked back I noticed the couple had vanished, nowhere in sight.

There was no where else to go further from here, at natures given edge within this context. Moving away from the water, step by step, heading as far east without reaching the next cluster of trees. I navigated through a rough dirt patch up the hill and onto the now paved portion of the space. I was met by parking stalls, one or two cars left untouched and more empty stalls. Around this time, I felt the need to use the washroom. In the absence of any facilities, I likely relieved myself out of sight. Though my memory of it is vague, I do remember a looking out behind me, in this accelerated darkness of the sky above. Able to hold it sure, however unlikely till I made it back home.

Exiting the area, further east of the space I found a wider trail,

significantly longer than the one I'd initially followed. At this point, my sense of location and orientation began to blur; I'd only gone south and east, and now contemplated the reverse journey back north. Trekking along the paved path for about 300 meters, I reached a fork. Alongside were more parking spots and a few small sheds, probably service facilities. I took a left, heading west, but the trail's width remained unchanged. The trees, now just feet from the path's edges, created an imposing darkness and heightened my uncertainty about my whereabouts.

Passing more sheds and chalets, the scene felt eerily abandoned, amplifying my sense of isolation in the woods. After walking for several more minutes, I finally checked my phone for both time and direction. It was around 6:30. The tall trees flanking the path, combined with its narrow width, made me feel even smaller in the grand scheme of things. The journey back seemed longer, each bend and turn revealing the same endless view, no clear endpoint in sight. The cold had fully set in, my legs stiff, not as they are today, but rigid from the chill and slow movement. Approaching the end of the walkway, just meters from the last turn, a car drove in. I couldn't fathom why anyone would come here so late in the fall. I quickly stepped onto the grass, narrowly avoiding their blind spot as the car's headlights swung around the corner. Stepping out of the trail, a sign of relief fell, my eyes meeting the road again, now dark. A relief now that I was by any means lost, rather I felt connected back to the familiar, that I just wanted to get back home.

I retraced my steps and arrived home five minutes later. As expected, the front door unlocked and the porch light off. Stepping inside, the contrast between the coldness of my legs and the warmth inside the home were stark.

This stint in my leg, still present before and after the walk. Persisting, it no longer seemed to subside on its own; albeit a fraction of what I experience today, it still left me silently pleading for relief. Still, I was trying to make sense of its connection to the accident I had months prior, attempting to rule out other causes and understand the nature of this

recurring issue, along with the intervals at which it returned. Although not extremely cumbersome, I wondered, what was this all about?

That night before going to bed, amidst uncertainty and a desire to comprehend the intricacies of my own condition, I went back to my childhood, choosing to revisit a film that as a child I watched however never fully grasped the magnitude of its story. The film, "Lorenzo's Oil",[11] held a mirror to my own experiences, reflecting a condition I shared but long have tried to understand from a distance. Now an adult, while always a concern, far less to when I was younger, to a time when I was at higher risk of death while at the same time more naïve. Despite having avoided it for years, information I could otherwise find online, I was eager to watch the movie again.

I skipped through scenes that had once scared me as a child, and found myself drawn to the diagnosis scene, a moment in the film that I had little recollection of, except for its profound impact on me.

In this pivotal scene, the diagnosis of adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD) is revealed. The doctor sits with Lorenzo's parents, and explains the grim reality of ALD, a rare leukodystrophy that causes the degeneration of the brain that is fatal within a few years of diagnosis. Its activity varies in all boys with the condition, however once progression begins, it is relentless, the end is inevitable. This conversation between the doctor and the parents about the inevitability of the disease's progression and the lack of exceptions to its fatal outcome resonated with me deeply. As the doctor discussed the reasons for its manifestation, the defective enzyme and destructive accumulation of fats in the brain, I felt a connection I had never felt, nor at least in so long. Description of the stripping away of the myelin sheath leading to the degermation of the brain and loss of bodily functions played through my headphones like the doctor was speaking directly to me, shedding light on the silent battle taking place in my own body and mind. Overwhelmed and unable to watch any further, I paused. "What the fuck is going on?" I asked myself, struggling to keep composure, tears now

streaming down my face. The tragedy of Lorenzo's story brought clarity, though in that truth, it left me with sadness, fear and a deeper desire to understand what was going on with my body.

I went to bed. Before I knew it the world outside my window began to mirror the shifts occurring inside of me.

Summer became Fall, Fall became Winter.

Suddenly, it was time. I was unsuccessful in complying, or at the time rather securing an exemption that I had hoped for, which I eventually realized was all but nothing. A façade. Red tape.

The exemption process required initial compliance; you had to get the "injections" and then, only if you reacted adversely within a certain timeframe – which wasn't my primary concern – might you qualify for a doctor's note. A severe allergy, anaphylaxis reaction, episode of myocarditis or any other after receipt of an initial dose was one thing, however my own effects to my condition long term were of primary concern. Concern for myself and no other, as expected.

A condition after all that I had taken responsibility for since birth, a body that despite all odds I felt comfortable with beyond what was said by the mainstream. I was not comfortable introducing something foreign into my body, especially with the media's overwhelming propagation, which only fueled my skepticism. Being otherwise healthy, not part of any risk group, and with all my other reservations, I was not prepared to accept this under the given circumstances.

Even then, there was no certainty that a note would be accepted by the system. It was convoluted, designed to be so. With such a high compliance rate, I stood out as an outlier. Despite all efforts and measures, I was unsuccessful in saving myself. Living with a condition since birth, I've always navigated my body's needs independently, often against mainstream narratives. The recent rush to embrace what's perceived as a quick fix

starkly contrasts with my lifelong wait for a genuine cure. It's a world where immediate solutions are eagerly accepted by many, while I continue to seek a remedy that seems forever out of reach. The so-called magic pill, eagerly embraced by many, offers a shortcut to a "safety" they could have built themselves. It's a ticket to rejoin a system rife with blind compliance, overlooking the broader implications. In stark contrast, my struggles are twofold: facing an operation that reshapes our very existence and grappling with a personal health battle that threatens my life. While others seek comfort in the illusion of safety, I confront the harsh reality of losing true freedom and the essence of living. We have lost the responsibility of our lives, outsourced to the machine.

The seven weeks passed. My time was up. I'd self expel myself from campus, not seeing the point in staying any longer, especially with the "risks" of being found there after the deadline. Whether I would be reported or be forcefully removed, on paper it was a hard cutoff. I was also unsuccessful in obtaining an extension, however unsure what the seventh week signified. The school would eventually close up in the next few weeks as well which played ironic to the timing of my own removal. A "case load" too high, many reported too was due to the non-compliers. Nonetheless I was non-compliant and would not return for another year in the case mandates were lifted, even if not I'd be starting again from square one. There were a few students suggesting I continue to show up in person, although this was not of any interest.

Towards the end of the month, about ten weeks in, I began the disheartening process of moving out. Everything I had moved in, purchased, and set up just a few months earlier was now being undone. There was a bittersweet feeling about leaving, a hope dashed for an exemption or extension. No care. I had started to pack and empty my things in the days leading up to the move, informing the landlord of my departure. He was somewhat displeased, but my rent was paid. It was my loss realistically. Quite an introduction to graduate studies, what a phase in my life. But there was no room for sentimentality. I packed up, moving stuff back to

Mississauga where I resumed my studies remotely, for now.

My departure from that house was unceremonious. There were no real goodbyes to roommates, none of whom I was particularly fond of. One was an alcoholic who was kicked out soon after I left. Another was a long time resident who collected reptiles and worked a graveyard shift. Although I almost never saw him, nor do I recall, I was met with the odd bug or cricket which made its way into my room uncontrollably. To what I thought was a broken window and from the owners overgrown and poorly maintained backyard. The last was a student in the basement, who I too rarely crossed paths with but shared a friendly rapport with. He was nice enough to offer me a workout in his gym he essentially built in the basement, however the opportunity was never taken. He was only signed there for 6 months I believe to finish his apprenticeship before he moved back home to the country. Although I never got to say my goodbye, he knew my situation and likely connected the dots when he saw me no more, or rather an emptiness in the kitchen, missing shoes in the foyer and a car no longer beside his.

Moving back home felt like I had never left. I didn't care anymore. All the efforts made to have a smooth landing, a welcoming start, did me no good. There I was, disassembling the very things I had recently bought and put together. Leaving in the midst of the term felt like an abrupt end, an early teardown of what was supposed to be the beginning of my graduate journey. It wasn't meant to be. I let out a depressing chuckle each night of the week I wrapped up. The final night asleep in an empty room, a bed surrounded by boxes, all the things I had laid out and setup just a couple of months prior. I moved back most of my belongings in one go, leaving the larger items for a final trip with a rented moving van.

Returning home felt like stepping back into a past I had never really left. I was neither fully in school nor at work, existing again in an online, remote world that felt like nowhere. I dumped everything into the already cluttered basement of my family home, where a kitchen renovation was underway above. The project was dragging on far too long, its delays a

constant background noise that I wasn't pleased about, even though it wasn't directly my issue. The peace and quiet I had in Cambridge was gone. Despite never really feeling at home there, it had been a retreat of sorts, a haven from the chaos. Now back in my old surroundings, I found myself missing that escape, despite its flaws.

The coldness that winter brought was not merely a shift in weather but a reflection of the internal coldness setting in—a metaphor for the changes I was undergoing. A season changed for good, symbolizing a chapter I could never revisit, the leaves fallen with the body covered in snow, the warmth of the summer I would never feel again the same. It was a fourth turning,[12] both in the world around me and within myself. This cold transition wasn't just physical; it was a metaphor for a chapter closing, for changes I could not reverse.

Now at home. The situation remained unchanged. A timer ticking, one of which was the countdown to a decision about my future, a choice that, though fraught with complexity, boiled down to a stark black-and-white resolution. The other timer was my health, a silent and relentless countdown that I would confront more directly in the coming year. As the world around me began to reopen, my own personal world seemed to be narrowing, closing in. Two sides of the same coin, or two distinct pills. One side offered the chance to see beyond the illusion created by the system, to understand the individual's plight – a path towards freedom. The other promised a return to the collective's illusion, to remain ensnared in a fabricated reality. In this critical juncture, my choice would determine not just my future but the essence of my existence: whether to awaken to the truth of my individual circumstances or to remain confined within the collective mirage. Although not yet clear, I would soon realize the necessity to forge a new sense of purpose, to find meaning in a reality reshaped by circumstances beyond my control.

17. I looked out onto the lake and held my knees high. 2021
One of the forest openings which brought me towards the lake along my Fall walks.



JANUARY 2022

I was now back into the system, joining the likes of everyone else. Disappointed. Compliant as another number. The only way to participate.. Now in a fully online format with lockdowns reinstated, later in a hybrid setup, sitting among the others. No one really questioned where I had been or cared, nor would I expect them to voice this. My own reservations kept aside, my own battles and issues my own problem and struggle, not expecting anyone to sympathize, nor would they. A time where the idea of care was flipped upside down. Surrounded by others, the crowd, the narcissistic selves.

Now, with the colder weather, the stiffness in my leg had become more noticeable, significantly more than just a month ago and unlike anything I experienced the previous year. As I suspected, gyms closed again. Back home, my own gym shut its doors too. Fortunately, I found a gym that defied the mandates, one that had been negatively portrayed in the news. Both compliers and non-compliers were beginning to question the overarching narrative and agenda. Tensions, water kept too hot, now boiling; the system had to dial it back. The few gyms that remained open were charging rates about five times higher than usual, exploiting the situation. Frustrating, however human in nature given the scenario, businesses struggling to survive outside of the help of big brother.

And now, as a complier, with gyms closed, I faced one letdown after another. The cycle of opening and closing gyms, dictated by government mandates and restrictions, was erratic. I lost count of the times this pattern repeated. The progression of my condition seemed certain, expanding, still a mystery, while losing the progress I had made with my body over the years – the weight gain, the muscle, the strength. All of which I struggle to rebuild today and wish I still had. Difficult to just stand up and walk. It's extremely questionable whether I'll ever regain what I worked so hard for. An uphill battle only more difficult to climb.

This year specifically was the one where a substantial exchange

took place, exactly in tune with the world's reopening yet marred by a conflicting decline and reset. Here I was, for years trying to live my life one way, authentically, only to find the opposite being imposed upon me. Just as a restrictive spell seemed to lift for the masses, another descended upon me right after I regained "access", altering my given reality. A new incantation. A child always held back, kept behind, no longer able to run, death by his side.

Two years slipped by, filled with missed opportunities and experiences I deeply resented, dreaded, and knew I would struggle with. From my perspective, it wasn't about coping; it was a profound shift in perspective. Had these events not unfolded, I might not have been prepared for the challenges that lay at the heart of my journey. In a strange way, this struggle and suffering, as frustrating as they were, led me to a life of meaning that lay hidden in the struggle. It's hard to articulate, but there's a sense of acceptance in knowing that through these trials, a path of significance was being carved out.

Roughly a month post-compliance. Weeks into the new semester. It's like a switch flipped. The leg and knee back in discomfort and visiting me in more frequent intervals. From December onwards, it continued to be a part of my everyday life, from the moment I woke up to falling asleep, however still on and off, where some days were less noticed than others. A bug I could not manage to get off, one I could not see only feel, one I could not kill, one that became inside of me.

I persisted with the walks, now back home having been kicked off of campus a couple of months prior and without a place to stay in local proximity to school. After the fourth week, lockdowns lifted and I began commuting to and from school every day. It was a return to a space from which I had previously felt ejected or extracted. Observing the students, joyous in their reunions amidst the repeated game of openings and closures, I couldn't help but feel apart from it all. They followed the rules, standing on designated dots, while I was there simply trying to get through it all, once and for all, without a nearby home to retreat to.

The discomfort was not terrible, rather there, and was now most notable less when walking, instead now when getting up from a seated position. I commuted a solid hour each way to campus; upon parking and getting out of my vehicle, a new tightness appeared. One that was more pronounced in one leg over the other. Leaving my vehicle I had to stand still outside my door, pausing as I waited for my legs to regain their ability to move, to restrengthen beyond the tightness that I was again still unclear on, knowing this was something new, however assuming it would be temporary, a cause for concern none the less. The same took place when standing up from a long-seated period in the lecture hall or in studio. Standing up and the same would occur, where I felt stuck for about five to ten seconds, my legs wrapped in bands unable to move normally, my mind putting forward the command, the action received yet blocked by a barrier that prevented regular unimpaired movement. Upon walking for 30 seconds, the tightness took a backseat and walking returned to normal. Contrasting two years since, astonishing to how time flies, today the same tightness occurs upon standing from a seated immobile position, however a new irregularity is present, a tightness less felt rather consistent, the inability to flex the feet, to stride to maintain a correct flow of steps, a cumbersome gait. On campus, this was consistent in everything I did, with sitting as the main position for hours each day. From studio to the lecture hall. To get up and charge my laptop, to move, to stand was now something the mind had to process as detached from the rest of the body and a second thought. In the lecture hall, my leg jerking, or rather spasming on occasion, albeit rarely, with no idea to what relation this had to anything else, again something foreign that I had only hoped was not related to my condition. The same spasms that kick my laptop off my lap, that cause my knee to hit the top of my desk, the shock shared with my entire body, that now make it difficult to go to sleep at night.

Everything became clear. Now in the sense that something was terribly off, still without a source or answers. Each time I rose from my studio desk or lecture hall seat to use the washroom, I encountered the familiar

stiffness, identical to what I felt in the car, regardless of how long I'd been seated. In the washroom, my control over bladder and bowel functions was fading. Sitting or standing for minutes yielded no results, a drastic switch to just a few months prior. It was not only the ability to hold, it was also the lost ability to go at all. Strange. Washing my hands and looking in the mirror, my hair, now kept shorter than usual, showed more noticeable thinning. It was patchy and uneven, a far cry from what I remembered.[12] Stepping back, I noticed my legs looked slightly thinner. My pants didn't fit the way they used to, a change that would become more pronounced as the year progressed and even more so in 2023. The sensation in my knee had evolved too, from a feeling of collapse to an encompassing tightness.[13] These unexpected changes left me uncertain if they were related to my condition. Everything seemed to be accumulating, pointing towards a connection, yet my last discussion with my doctor suggested otherwise. I was left with no clear expectations, only a growing awareness of the changes in my body.

This semester was far more exhausting than the last. One because of the evolving condition of my health which I had to manage and adapt to in new ways. Furthermore, a full week of classes and higher demand in work. Now a commuter student, I'd spend on average at least two hours a day commuting in traffic which ate both valuable time that could have been relegated to movement and exercise or schoolwork. Much less a priority was my job which I'd have to quit due to time constraints and its low priority given the situation. Nonetheless, I persevered in continuing to engage in academic and physical activities despite the circumstances.

Over the course of the term I sent out a series of emails to my doctor concerning the discomfort in my leg. For my hair and bladder issues, I contacted my GP, but this yielded little assistance. There was no recognition of these issues being interconnected; they were treated as separate, unrelated events, leaving me without a grasp of the bigger picture.

(1) March 8th, 2022

Hi J.—,

Hope all is well.

Wanting to follow up to see if an x-ray can still be performed on me legs from knee pain last year. I believe you and Dr. M. — suggested this in our last call.

On another note, I've been experiencing an almost weaker leg (left) when walking. Most noticed when sitting for a given time (as little as 30min) and getting up to walk, it takes 10 seconds or so for my leg to gain strength to walk. No issues walking up or down the stairs.

In class for example, I need to brace myself when getting out of my lecture seat, or from a desk.

At home or the gym, when balancing on one leg, or walking like on a tight rope, I have no issues with stability or balance. It just feels like my left leg wants to give in/ collapse occasionally.

I haven't attempted running, though no issues at the gym or performing sports. When holding weights (plate/dumbbells, etc) my left leg feels weaker than it did before. However I can still do leg exercises, seated squats, etc. Essentially only issues are during walking, I have almost a slight limp when getting out of bed or getting out of my car after a drive.

Wanted to reach out to you as it's a cause for concern. Hoping to get feedback on this.

Thank you,

(2) March 8th, 2022

Hi Jordan,

Dr. M. — believes that this is not ALD related but a joint issue, and therefore suggests you see your family doctor,

Sincerely,

J.—

(3) March 8th, 2022

Hi J.—,

The first concern was surrounding my knee/joint, although now the discomfort is within my whole leg.

It is new, all of a sudden and not from any previous injury.

What should/would I keep an eye out for if it is AMN related?

Regards,

Jordan

(4) March 9th, 2022

Hi Jordan,

AMN presents with spasticity, and your spine MRIs do not show expected changes for this. The fact that it is one sided, sudden onset and involves your whole leg is suspicious for a knee-related issue,

disclaimer: 11-13-2023, neurology notes

1. On the topic/note of MRI's… why do they keep coming back and showing as normal or rather now unchanged.. this is by far the greatest disconnect.. unable to find an answer.. only able to speak to you on a yearly basis.. My geneticist has provided no word..

Scans.. normal.. always normal.. typical with diagnosis, not seen in mri.. negative in adults.. something about seeing a technical artifact that was no issue. So my question then was what was the point of mri's all along?

Axon's, to have loss in their coating.. MRI would not capture this..

.. so what does the MRI capture, then what is the point of the spinal MRI's..

(5) March 9th, 2022

Hi J.—,

Okay, I'm curious what else to look out for reg. AMN.

I'll visit my physio in the interim. I just reached out to my GP as well and have a

call this week.

Thanks for your suspicion. Within the AMN community I sometimes follow, some of the members reported collapse/sudden falls due to their condition, most specifically leg weakness. In this case I'm assuming that would be due to leg spasticity.

In my case, it's an overall weakness on one side.

I'll keep you posted however with what my GP says.

Regards,

Jordan

(6) March 16th, 2022

Hi J.—,

I have an in person appt scheduled with my GP in a two weeks, although I wanted to provide an update until then.

The weakness is still present, although to be more specific it's now more of a tightness from my knee down to my calf. I don't have any issues at the gym or performing any physical exercise. If anything, the tightness is less noticeable after getting off a treadmill or stair climber. It's more noticeable when I'm not moving and the worst when getting up from a prolonged seating position. Ie. when getting out of a chair, I need to brace myself for more than a few seconds. Same with getting out of the car, even for only a short drive.

Again, it's sudden and has only occurred over the last month. I've had increase leg spasm's/jerking over the last 6 months however. Unsure if that is related.

Thank you,

Jordan

(7) March 30th, 2022

Hi J.—,

I saw my GP this past weekend. She didn't see the issue I am facing as bone related, within my joints, nor a case of sciatica.

I reminded her of my condition and the inevitable onset of leg spasticity, although it was hard to pinpoint.. She agreed to speaking to you if possible, hoping to receive a follow up on your end. Even a call with yourself or Dr. M.— would be useful.

I am seeing my physiotherapist today and will describe the issue once again. Until now, it is still present. Worse during the morning and late at night. Also during prolonged sitting periods. When performing physical activity, whether going for a walk or at the gym, the issue is less pronounced. Still isolated within my left leg as well.

Hoping to speak with you soon.

Thank you,

Jordan

(8) March 30th, 2022

Hi Jordan,

I spoke with Dr. M.— who offered to refer you to a neurologist for assessment. If you agree with this plan, we can go ahead and make that referral,

(9) March 30th, 2022

Hi J.—,

That would be great. Obviously hoping it is not a case of AMN, please proceed with the referral for assessment.

Would I be asking the neurologist or Dr. M.— what else to look for reg. a case of leg spasticity and/or effects of AMN?

I've also been having discomfort as well within my groin area. If it's some sort of femoral nerve damage or a pinched nerve, is that something I can address with the neurologist? When my leg (left) jerks/spasms, the shock is also felt in an area of my groin.

(10) March 10th, 2022

Hi Jordan,

The referral has been sent to Dr. L.— who will take a full history and neuro exam and address your questions,

(11) May 29th, 2022

Hi J.—,

I have yet to receive an update on an appointment or scheduling from Dr. L.—'s office.

Can you follow up on this or provide me his receptionists contact information?

Thank you,

Jordan

(12) June 1st, 2022

Hi J.—,

Following up, I spoke with R.— (assistant) from Dr. L.—'s clinic.

They did not receive a referral over the course of the last 2 months. Their fax # is 416 XXX XXXX.

They estimate roughly a 6 month wait for testing, assuming it would be an EMG test of some sort.

Can you please follow up on this and ensure the referral is sent asap?

Thank you,

Jordan

(13) June 1st, 2022

Hi Jordan,

I've confirmed that the referral was indeed sent to that number on March 30th. I've resent it asking them to confirm receipt asap,

SUMMER 2022

My focus shifted from the external world with all the noise, the political conflicts, the fear to instead one internal. My own. My own noise. The signals that started to lose itself. My own conflicts. Constant conflicts with my own reflection, my own fears. A world that I felt no longer free to explore, once a playground of freedom, now felt inaccessible, urging me to seize experiences before it was too late, yet simultaneously pushing me away. A world that I was removed to from the outside at first and now from the inside. Watching all of the other children out playing. Carefree. I, now an adult, stuck inside.

Something terribly wrong was going on. I was now at another extreme, far less concerned by the global "pandemic", however still somewhat weary of all the other actions and measures being placed which I took personally. This wasn't about the pandemic, but something much more real, something I was truly scared of, something I experienced firsthand. I was facing a reality that was mine alone, not through the voices of others, through stories of elderly or the unwell in the hospital, of the media machine, the propaganda narratives, the news, but something far more real that I only shared with myself. That no one else would know of but me. While others feared a largely unseen threat, albeit power and control which I worried about until now, I was scared of something that was real. Was this the condition I thought I would be sparred of, that I had more time to be free of, however never truly free of it since I was born with it, or was this something else?



18. Movie Poster for Lorenzo's Oil, directed by George Miller (1992)



19. Photo of Augusto Odone, father of Lorenzo Odone and founder of Lorenzo's Oil, with members of my family, ca. 199x Lorenzo's Oil was used to treat and slow the onset of symptoms in boys. While not a proven preventative - something I took as a child. A possible outcome of not suffering from the accumulation of very long chain fatty acids in the brain and progression of childhood cerebral ALD. All pictured members of my family are carriers of the genetic marker associated with ALD, illustrating the familial aspect of the condition's inheritance. From left to right: cousin, grandmother, cousin, aunt, Augusto Odone, aunt, mother, aunt, aunt.

20. Porch light. 2021

Here, the porch light off I would commonly leave on upon leaving the house, only to find it off upon return, from this view, the street light spilling in through the window.



2.1

WAKE UP CALL

I didn't know what to expect.

Laying here in bed, alone.

26.

Reminded on all the things I still wanted.

The things the child in me wrote down, dreamed of, worked towards. Erased. Taken away.

I had so much more planned.

The me who said I could be whoever it was I wanted to be. That I still had time.

That I had time..

(1) June 7th, 2022

Hi Jordan

This email is to confirm your IN PERSON visit with Dr. L.—, (Neurologist) on

Tuesday October 11, 2022 at 11am

60 Murray Street 2nd Floor Room 4XX

We do have movement in our clinic and will be in touch with you for an earlier appointment

Please confirm that you have received this email

best regards

R.— (assistant to Neurologist),

(2) June 7th 2022

Hi R.—,

Confirming I received the email for my appointment with Dr. L.—, on Tuesday, October 11th @ 11am.

I called last week to see if there are any new cancellations which I could come in for. The sooner the better as I made the inquiry early in February, yet the referral seemed to have been lost in translation.

If there are any openings prior to September, please let me know. I'm away for

school at that time so any sooner appointment would be extremely convenient.

Enjoy the time off and Summer.

Thank you,

Jordan

(3) June 7th 2022

Thank you for your email:

Please be advised that:

I am Away Thursday June 23, 2022 noon

returning Monday July 18th, 2022

I will have limited access to email and will respond to your email upon my return.

For URGENT matters please call Gladys at

416 XXX-XXXX ext. XXXX opt#1.

best regards

R.—

(4) July 29th 2022

Hi R.—,

I just got your voicemail. I'll be at the clinic at 1pm instead of 1:45pm on August,

2nd.

Thank you,

Jordan

(5) July 29th 2022

thanks Jordan - was able to login

see you tuesday

R.—

AUGUST 2ND 2022 – NEUROLOGY

After waiting several months, fielding numerous complaints, and grappling with over a year of uncertainty and inexplicable glitches, I persistently sought answers to questions that might otherwise have been overlooked, recognized only introspectively. Driving downtown, a few weeks away from my final school year, I was heading to see a neurologist—a consultation I had initiated. It was an encounter I had not anticipated, especially not at this stage of my life. Upon arriving outside the hospital, I was uncertain where to find the correct entrance. On Murray Street, I entered the parking garage to my left, one of two available. The distant garage was full, while the closer one had vacancies but displayed a higher parking fee. At this moment, the cost was not my primary concern, yet I could not help but note that city hospital parking often felt exorbitantly priced. Entering, I ascended to the fourth level, seeing no available spots below, pondering the mix of staff and patients that contributed to the garage's congestion.

Stepping out of my vehicle, not knowing to which direction I was facing and where the elevators were located. All I remembered was the need to use the washroom, a need that would increasingly become a daily occurrence. There were sporadic urgencies and episodes of incontinence, something I started to accept, unsure of origin. I had begun questioning this months earlier and had experienced it over a year prior. I inquired initially through my family doctor, no correspondence was sent to my specialists, and no correlation was made to my condition. Instead, I would see a third-party urologist that would treat me under no awareness nor understanding of my pre-existing condition. It would not be until later today that I would be properly diagnosed and connections were made clear.

Everything became a distance to consider, a new limitation to how far I could travel let alone walk without an impairment of the legs, bowel or bladder. Unable to locate the elevators to take me down, and nowhere to obviously empty within the proximity, I exited down the nearest egress

stairwell, which took me to the south-west face of the garage onto the street level and facing the outdoor parking area I did not realize I could have used instead, spotting a few empty spaces directly in front of me. Not bothering climbing the fence that split the walkway I was on and the parking area that sat in front of the entrance, I had to walk the extra 50 or so steps around, something that the average person would not think twice about, however for myself every step felt excruciatingly long as I held myself to avoid any accidents. My pace became even more awkward as I felt my bladder muscles tense up. Soon after, I arrived at the entrance of the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic centre. Descending a few steps, I was relieved to find a washroom right before the elevator doors down the hallway. A few minutes later I found myself one level higher in the reception area of Neurology, this area emitting a welcome heritage, the materials, doors, handles, flooring and paintings all original. The office space however cluttered with cubicles, filing cabinets and terrible wayfinding. Seeing the name of my neurologist on an open office door, I waited for his receptionist to finish her call, standing outside with nowhere to sit and wait in the interim. Upon letting her know of my arrival, I was brought back outside the office and into a small waiting area, a few others also waiting beside me, myself the youngest by far. Not knowing what to expect and with more questions than I had prepared to ask, I was nervous, I felt inferior. After a few minutes, the second door nearest to me, along the linear hallway across from the waiting room, opened with a patient exiting. Someone from inside the room retrieved my clipboard from the door mounted tray, and the door closed

A few more minutes passed, now roughly 10 after my slatted appointment time. The door slowly swung open and my name was called. Getting up from my seat, the same tightness I experienced daily held me back for a moment before I could take a comfortable and confident step forward. Two men waited, standing inside the doorway, watching me move in as I tried at the same time hide and mask my slight gait that I felt and tried not to show. “Jordan, please have a seat”, the doctor instructed, then proceeding to

introduce himself and his current fellow. “So we see you were referred from your Geneticist Dr. M, regarding complaints of leg tightness and bladder symptoms you have been experiencing. I did not mention bowel issues at the time not knowing it would be related, while also something I did not experience at the same interval and intensity as the bladder. “Your medical history shows that you have Adrenomyeloneuropathy,[1] to which you are being seen for, only recently however with issues you have reported to your geneticist.” I was unsure to what extent he was aware of my condition, however I now find it is equally the patient who needs to become familiar with their own diseases. “Jordan, can you please expand on these concerns and the tightness you are experiencing” he asked. I proceeded to answer as best as I could recall, my recollection as late as that very moment and dating back to over a year earlier, mentioning my fall, loss of balance, inability to run and so on. I cannot recall if I mentioned clonus[2] and my restless leg spasms at the time since it was both present, however this is both noted today. The neurologist posed additional questions, his fellow diligently taking notes. I responded as thoroughly as I could, eager to convey all the concerns flooding my mind. Sharing personal anecdotes, I illustrated the moments when these issues first surfaced, highlighting instances that clearly signaled something was amiss. Although I had more to ask, he felt it was best to gauge my walk, balance and physical reactions and reflexes. I was now on the inspection table, my shoes and socks off, following along with the doctors ask. In an instant, memories blurred by years and the fog of COVID, I was transported back to my childhood. I found myself on a similar examination table at the Hospital for Sick Children, innocent and unaware of the reasons behind the tests, finding a strange joy in the process. This stark contrast to my current reality made me question whether I had ever truly been ‘normal,’ or at least before my condition began to progress.

Sitting upright, I was instructed to extend my arms with my palms turned upward and my eyes closed—a test for pronator drift, which indicates muscle weakness and abnormal function of the corticospinal tract. I was

unaware of what this meant or what it might indicate, especially if an abnormality was visible and how it related to my condition. I was left with many questions that remain unanswered to this day, lacking reliable primary sources for consultation. The doctor then proceeded to power testing, asking me to resist his pressure on my fingers, arms, shoulders, and elbows through various abduction and adduction movements. Throughout each test, his fellow meticulously recorded the findings as the doctor indicated.

"Jordan, please lie down," he instructed, signaling the commencement of muscle tone testing in my lower limbs. Earlier, I had mentioned the loss of muscle mass and weight, but the doctor clarified, asking me to differentiate between muscle tone and muscle strength, as opposed to general weakness or weight loss. He examined for spasticity,[3] the feelings of tightness, albeit nowhere near as pronounced as today, yet still a complaint of mine. At this time I had not known the proper term. As he manipulated my feet and legs, bending my knee toward me, he could feel the stiffness in my joints and muscles; they weren't able to relax completely. He lifted my limbs slowly then quickly, assessing for rigidity, spasticity, and flaccidity.

Next, he tested for clonus, eliciting an immediate reaction from me. I apologized for the uncontrollable shaking and vibrations that coursed through my entire leg and foot—symptoms I had been noticing for months while driving, sitting, and standing, all of which impaired my daily comfort. Here I was laying down, one hand holding my foot and the other supporting my leg, and my foot pulsating rapidly within this grip. At this time, I was uncertain what this was related to. Upon the start of writing this, I was unsure if this was a symptom of Myelopathy,[4] a separate but related subsect of my condition, or a lesion within the upper or lower motor neurons—or perhaps a combination of all these factors[4]. Today I have a more comprehensive understanding based on conversations through multiple sources, from my neurologist, physiatrist and physiotherapist. Clonus is a manifestation of the neuromuscular system's response to certain pathologies, including but not limited to demyelination,[5] which is

a hallmark of my condition, Adrenomyeloneuropathy. This demyelination process, the stripping away of the protective myelin sheath around nerve fibers, disrupts normal communication between the nervous system and muscles, leading to increased muscle tone or spasticity. Spasticity, in turn, can result in involuntary muscular contractions and relaxations, known as clonus. While clonus is one of many side effects, this symptom reflects an underlying issue with the regulation of muscle tone, often associated with lesions or damage to upper motor neurons, but can also be influenced by changes in the lower motor neurons or other aspects of the neural pathway affected by my condition. I eventually came to realize that clonus is not just a singular symptom but a complex interplay of my condition's effects on my nervous system.

As a child, I sometimes exhibited an exaggerated reflex response, common though it was nothing beyond what was considered normal, just slightly more sensitive. Still lying on the examination bed, he proceeded to test my hip flexion and extension, which have since significantly weakened, a change that is noticeable. I'm unaware of the potential progression of these symptoms and what their culmination might look like—whether it could lead to complete loss of control and paralysis. He continued with hip adduction, abduction, and knee flexion and extension. After a few more tests on the bed, he asked me to sit back up.

Resuming my seat on the bed, the doctor proceeded with coordination tests. "Keep your head still and follow my finger with your eyes. Close one eye—how many fingers am I holding up? Touch your nose, then my finger—your nose, then my finger." Thankfully, at the time, I was capable of completing these movements without any signs of abnormality. While sitting upright on the table, the doctor moved on to reflex tests, starting with the plantar reflex. He used the sharp side of his hammer, gliding it from my heel to the top of my feet. Both my legs reacted instantaneously, my toes curling in an abnormal manner. A similar reaction ensued when he tapped each knee with the hammer. My legs kicked out, and a mild clonus occurred as he supported my feet. I was aware of my hyper-sensitivity, but

witnessing this exaggerated response was a first for me. It left me feeling inexplicably frustrated and upset with myself.

The examination continued with sensory tests, assessing my response to temperature, pain, light touch, vibration, and proprioception. As I recount this more than a year after my last examination, I'm uncertain how much my condition has progressed. The only barometer I have is my daily experience, which often brings unexpected reactions to stimuli that I either didn't notice before or simply dismissed. A surprise, shock, abnormal reaction to certain temperatures, textures, pressures or even things I no longer feel or sense. The doctor produced a tuning fork-like device, striking it and placing it on various areas of my feet. He instructed me to close my eyes and inform him when I felt the sensation and, crucially, when it faded away. "Okay, I don't feel it," I said, each time the sensation vanished. The process was repeated, the fork struck again and placed on the side of my foot. A wave of frustration washed over me with each test. I knew the doctor held the answers, and I struggled internally, pondering when to voice my response, wondering if the doctor still felt the vibrations that had escaped my perception.

After several more tests, the doctor instructed me to put on my socks and step out into the hallway. As I had anticipated, a walking assessment awaited me, specifically a Romberg and Tandem Gait test. I navigated the hallway, the urge to explain that my walking varied day to day nearly overwhelming me, but I acknowledged that the test's findings were accurate despite this. I thought about my current abilities, reflecting on the degree to which my walking had deteriorated since that day. Striving to maintain my balance was a challenge, and I was uncertain whether to attribute this to my vestibular system, my proprioceptive system, or the weakness and tightness in my legs. Subsequently, the doctor requested that I walk in a straight line, back and forth twice, followed by a heel-to-toe walk as if balancing on a tightrope. This task evoked clear memories of my childhood, though back then I had been oblivious to its significance. The naivety of my youth had shielded me from the suffering, and for that ignorance, I found myself

grateful. “He walks a little wide,” remarked in the background, but no further comments were made. Next, I was asked to walk on my toes, a test of my gastrocnemius and soleus muscles. This was followed by a heel walk, which I found difficult, a task that has since become nearly impossible for me. After the walking tests, the doctor signaled me back into the room, instructing, “Please come back in and sit down,” as the fellow closed the door behind us.

Seated, I felt a mix of perplexity, dwindling hope, and curiosity. The doctor made it clear the symptoms were likely an outcome of my condition, that he doubted this was due to any other external cause however wanted to see me for a follow up. Pausing, I found myself reflecting on the connection, realizing only through lived experience what the scope of my condition entailed. I recounted to him the incident of my fall from the previous year, the persistent tightness in one leg, the clonus I had only now learned the term for, and the stiffness experienced when moving from sitting to standing. These symptoms varied, but he was confident they were not due to any mechanical dysfunction within my spinal tract.

Earlier, I had also shared my history of spondylosis in the L5-S1 region and my suspicions of femoral nerve damage, which I initially believed to be the source of my troubles. Unable to remember the details, the doctor dismissed these as unlikely causes. Instead, he recommended another MRI to validate his presumptions. I informed him of an MRI already scheduled for the following week, arranged by my geneticist. With this knowledge, he decided not to schedule any additional tests, including the EMG test I had requested, which, as it turned out, was never conducted and might not have been diagnostically beneficial.

He instructed me to arrange a follow-up visit with his assistant after the MRI. The same type of follow-ups and questions I would not be assisted with. From an ignoring of phone calls and emails, a being ghosted before I become a ghost. At this moment however, I was at a loss for what further questions to ask, and time had run out—a feeling I would become accustomed to, now with a multitude of questions that I had to reserve

for my yearly consultations, lacking any other supportive resources within the healthcare network. A year felt like an eternity, another year of being overlooked, another year of enduring said suffering. Such is the reality of 'free' healthcare—it's wonderful until you require it. And so, the follow-up was set for the end of the month, the imminent MRI that very weekend, each day a wait for answers while I endeavored to cherish the moments amidst decline.

AUGUST 6TH 2022 – MRI

This would be the first scan since gaining new insight from my neurologist. A part of me harbored hope that it might disprove any relation to my condition, while another part wished for some revelation. Each MRI had become a source of anxiety, especially after learning that there was nothing more to see or track in terms of progression; the MRIs of the spine were non-conclusive. It felt like searching for a leak or a virus, then doing nothing once it was found. Ironically, my own experiences and symptoms had surfaced before any MRI could confirm them, which made me question why the MRIs reported as normal when I clearly was not. After the MRI, I got off the bed with the radiologist's help, feeling fatigued and alone. I limped slightly back to the changing area, grabbed my stuff from my locker, looking down at my phone as I changed, seeing it was now 2am. The tightness in my body was subtle but noticeable to me as I made my way home.

(6) August 12th 2022

Hi Jordan

This email is to confirm your in person follow up to review MRI on

Tuesday August 30th, 2022 at 3pm

60 Murray Street end floor Room 4XX

Please confirm this works for you

Thank you

(7) August 12th 2022

Hi R.─,

Thank you for your email. Confirming the appointment on Tuesday, August, 30th at 3pm.

Best,

Jordan

(8) August 12th 2022

Thank you see you then

(9) August 12th 2022

Hi R.─,

I've never met in person actually to review my MRI, hoping this appointment can be used to also discuss more about my leg discomfort and other issues I'm facing, regardless of the MRI results. Possible EMG, etc.

Usually my endocrinologist gets back to me within a week regarding my MRI. Will they also be reaching out to me since they are my primary contact regarding my condition?

I want to make sure Dr. M.─ (Geneticist) is in the loop with everything and that my appointments with Neurology are not a separate case.

Thank you,

Jordan

(10) August 12th 2022

Hi Jordan

Yes that's correct

If an EMG is needed I will be happy to book for you

Dr. M.─ is in the loop and has received our clinic notes

See you August 30th at 3pm

Thank you

(11) August 12th 2022

Thanks R.—,

I'm obviously just concerned and don't want to wait till the 30th to know how my MRI went. Usually I find out within a week how the results are.

My leg issue most likely isn't a result of AMN, however could also possibly be.

Possibly proximal neuropathy, a femoral nerve issue (I assume) or something else.

Look forward to hearing from the team, though just hoping for good news reg. the MRI.

Thanks again,

Jordan

AUGUST 30TH 2022 - NEUROLOGY

I parked outside the hospital this time, fortunate to claim a freshly vacated spot amidst the limited parking spaces available. As I exited the vehicle, the familiar tightness in my leg served as an instant reminder of my condition, causing a limp with my first few steps towards the hospital. I couldn't help but wonder what to expect from this follow-up appointment. The tightness and awkward weakness in my hips hindered my pace, a grim reminder of my condition's progression from intermittent to a more frequent and debilitating presence. Checking in at the clinic, I returned to the familiar waiting room from before, bracing for what had become my new normal. My name was called by the doctor himself, I stood up, tight, a few seconds of the same awkwardness before entering the room, closing the door behind me. The noticeable absence of his fellow struck me. I cannot recall if a repeat neurological exam took place, if it did, unsure as to why, however remember fixing my socks and putting my shoes back on as he began to talk. Looking eye to eye, the doctor behind his desk would say the following. "So Jordan, I've reviewed your recent scans and consulted with the radiologist. The good news is that we're not dealing with a mechanical

issue or any additional causes for your symptoms. What you're presenting, it's 'Myelopathy'." As he delved into a brief explanation, I found myself speechless, struggling to comprehend and formulate the myriad questions that would later haunt my thoughts. "Progression is unpredictable," he continued, "but we'll monitor you annually. Let us know if anything changes." Confusion still clouding my memory of whether a repeat neurological exam had occurred. Despite an MRI already conducted that month, and another the year prior, he requested another be ordered and reviewed by his team. The rationale for this additional MRI, especially in light of recent scans, escaped me.

Nevertheless, a new MRI was scheduled for December, with a follow-up shortly after. The official diagnosis left me speechless, grappling with the frustration of an 18-month delay in its identification. I reflected on the disconnection of my care during the lockdowns, wondering if earlier intervention could have made a difference or if I had omitted crucial information. I needed time to think and then process. He explained briefly what Myelopathy looked like and what I present thus far as a clear indication, with no signs of adrenal insufficiency nor neuropathy, the two other parts of my condition. Furthermore, what my bladder and bowel symptoms were a result of, whether or not this was something he cared for. He would provide a requisition to see a Urologist however in a later appointment and briefly explain the correlation between the bladder and bowel symptoms and my condition, the lost connection between the brain and spine rather. In the presence of progression diagnosis in this appointment however, I had no idea if what I presented then and now is an indication of brain lesions or neurological activity. So many questions and concerns. Other things I recalled feeling only in that very moment I had no time left to address. From my spasms to parts of my body vibrating. This feeling of something itching and moving inside my leg that I can only describe and fail to pinpoint. What else. With time up, I'd have to wait for my next appointment, forced to wait for the yearly "follow-up" to maybe clarify, until then, unanswered suffering. A fifteen-minute yearly follow-up

as the only opportunity to ask questions makes no sense beyond me to which I'll reserve ranting on further. I'd like to better understand how I am dying and better yet at least be aware and fully educated on the scope of my condition and progression. Even if it's untreatable. Nonetheless, the fifteen minutes flew by. Instructed to see his assistant again for a follow-up after his MRI order is completed, the next follow-up taking place in December, and the next a year afterwards.

I sat there as she booked the appointment, sitting in a blur, numb, barely registering the interaction still reeling from the official diagnosis and its implications, her asking how "things went". What does progression look like, what to expect, on average what is the expected life expectancy, any recommendations, etc. Knowing there is no cure or treatment plan, is this something one accepts and lives with until death, until it kills them? Clearly, the diagnosis brought forth a torrent of questions about the nature and trajectory of my condition. Would my decline be slow and painless, or swift and agonizing, or some harrowing combination of the two? In the sound of me jumping to conclusions, I felt overwhelmed understandably so. These were answers I found myself forced to seek alone, day by day, as I became the reluctant author of my own medical narrative. But the implications of my condition extended far beyond my mobility. It insidiously encroached on aspects of my life that were once taken for granted—bladder and bowel functions, for instance, and a myriad of symptoms I preferred to keep unspoken. There were the inexplicable changes to my body: the weight loss, hair loss, and a pervasive lethargy that seemed to consume my very essence. Then there was neuropathy, a term that despite my research, remained shrouded in ambiguity. The information online offered little clarity, leaving me to grapple with its implications alone. It looks like this has already been unlocked, experienced, spread inside of me, however do I then self-diagnosis? Then again, what is the solution to this after all aside from watching and experiencing your own decline. Yet of all the shadows cast by this diagnosis, the most ominous was cerebral ALD—a topic scarcely broached yet laden with dread. My neurologist had advised

discussions with my geneticist, hinting at its potential relevance, yet it remained a peripheral concern until now. With the specter of cerebral ALD looming, I found myself ensnared in a daily battle against fear, haunted by the prospect of its onset. Although the progression of AMN does not directly correlate with the onset of cerebral ALD, the confirmation of my AMN progression inevitably brought the possibility of cerebral ALD into sharper focus, alongside the new challenges I would now have to face throughout my life. It was a diagnosis that, if confirmed, left scant room for intervention—a grim reality marked by fatal risks and high-stakes decisions.

My heart felt heavy as my mind grappled with these realities, ones that had been unknown to me until this year. The very thought of cerebral ALD sent tremors through my being, not just for its personal implications but for the potential spectacle of my decline, should I permit others to witness it take place. To visibly and spatially experience one fade away. As I walked back to my car, these thoughts swirled in a vortex of confusion and fear. The official diagnosis had been pronounced, and yet I found myself adrift in a sea of unanswered questions. What did progression look like? Was my life silently ticking away? How does one navigate a path shadowed by such uncertainty? In the sanctuary of my car, amidst the heat of lingering summer, I attempted to compose an email, a futile effort to capture the wealth of concerns that crushed me. My fingers trembled as they danced across the screen, each word a testament to my anxiety and the overwhelming desire for more time—more time for answers, for understanding, for life itself.

Reeling from the diagnosis, I stumbled back to my car, the weight of uncertainty heavy upon me. “What now?” I pondered. Was my life slowly ebbing away? What did the future hold, and what did any of this truly mean? Clarity eluded me as I shuffled towards my car, each step a reminder of my newfound reality. In my car, warm from the anxieties and the late summer heat, having trouble grasping exactly myself, to come to terms, this acceptance and denial, typing out an email to send off

before forgetting. Desperate to record my questions and concerns before they slipped away into the recesses of my mind. My hands trembled over the projected keyboard on my phone, nothing felt in the pre need to feel something, each trembling tap a silent echo of my inner disarray. A part of me yearned to return, to storm back into the office and demand clarity, to have someone articulate the extent of my mortality. But I remained in the confines of my car, grappling with the cruel brevity of our exchange. Time seemed to mock me—I craved more of it. More time to digest the incomprehensible, more time to converse with my doctor, and above all, more time to simply live.

(12) August 30th 2022

Hi R.—

There were a few questions I didn't have time to ask Dr. L.— (neurologist), assuming I can ask them in three months time, though to avoid the wait and thoughts until then, is there any way to get a hold of him or for you to deliver the questions to him?

1.) Is Myopathy fatal? (at this time accidently mistaking the diagnosis for Myopathy instead of Myelopathy, later corrected in December)

2.) Based on my condition, is it expected to only get worse, stay the same or is there a possibility for treatment to get better overtime?

3.) On average, how quickly does myopathy progress and what can it look like if it does.

4.) I had some other questions regarding cerebral ALD and if that would show up on my MRI scans, wondering how that would be caught. It seemed that may be a more appropriate question for Dr. M— however.

5.) I had some questions about my bladder incontinence, though I'll save those for my Urologist.

Hoping to hear back regarding the first few.

Thank you,

Jordan

(13) August 30th 2022

Hi Jordan

I have passed this onto Dr. L.─, and will respond as soon as I hear back from him

\thanks

(private)

(these would not be answered via email, rather lightly carried forward to my next appointment in December, on top of new questions and concerns I would press to have answered and addressed, many of which were again left unanswered within the given time frame. Great..)

Onto another conversation, to my geneticist.

(14.1) August 30th 2022

Hi J.─,

For the appointment with the urologist, how long should I expect to wait for the referral to be looked at and an appointment booked?

I know this is on their end, though the last referral for a neurologist was lost in translation on their side.

Lastly, please keep me updated on when Dr. M─ is back and can speak on the phone briefly. My availability is open for this.

I met with Dr. L.─, from Neurology at Mt. Sinai reg. my leg weakness/discomfort. Within the brief discussion, he diagnosed my left leg symptoms as “Myopathy”, not neuropathy or anything else. He said the MRI looked questionable and would be speaking with the radiologists when he has the time. However he did confirm they looked unchanged from last year for what that’s worth.

I have questions reg. my bladder urgencies and difficulty emptying which he could not comment on. Furthermore, questions reg. my leg. Should I expect this to occur on both sides, what does progression look like, timeline, remedies/treatment, etc. What other issues/mobility issues do patients with AMN face, what age range, what does that look like, etc. Is this a cause of demyelination, spinal lesions or something else? I honestly just want to know where I’m at..

Lastly, is myopathy fatal, something I should worry about? Not much else was said

and he had to see another patient who was booked for the same time right after.

I didn't have nearly enough time to ask the questions I had made note of, let alone new questions that rose after the diagnosis.. It seemed my appointment was double-booked as well..

I have a follow up booked in 3 months, however from my perspective that's a long time to have these questions/concerns marinate in my head.

Hoping to speak to Dr. M─ as soon as possible.

Thank you,

Jordan

(14.2) August 31st 2022

Hi Jordan,

I can book a 30 minute phone appointment on Wednesday, September 7th at 12:45 if that works for you?

Regarding the wait to see urology, I'm afraid that it can be many months, but I do see that they have received the referral and are reviewing it.

Sincerely,

R.─

(14.3) August 31st 2022

Hi R.─,

The date and time you provided works for me.

Looking forward to the call

Thank you,

Jordan

(14.4) August 31st 2022

Glad it works - I've gone ahead and booked it,

R.─

SEPTEMBER 2022 – A NEW CHAPTER

As I reflected on my final year of school, it's marked by a blend of novelty and nostalgia. My new roommates, individuals who will indelibly etch themselves into my memory, represent the final chapter of my roommate experiences in academia—a bittersweet culmination juxtaposing the year past. My previous term living at home due to being kicked off campus the semester before. My first term I was living less proximate to the school and in a home I could never quite settle in, not knowing what to expect and what was far below my expectations. I shared the space with an eclectic mix of individuals – from the landlord's stepdad, a long-term tenant with a reptile collections whose crickets often strayed into my room, an evicted alcoholic, and a fellow student in the basement completing his apprenticeship at a college nearby.

This year, however, I'm more deeply integrated into the academic fabric, for which I'm grateful. Last year's hybrid format, oscillating between openness and closure, presented its own challenges. I never had the chance to settle and build relationships with others, due to pandemic-induced remote learning, coupled with enforced compliance for campus access, being removed from campus and forced to move back home and eventually comply with orders in order to continue studying albeit online. This compelled me to consider alternate paths—whether pursuing different academic avenues, taking a study leave, or a complete paradigm shift. Nonetheless, each option came with its compromises, none of which were in my favour ultimately. Within the home, I was the sole graduate student among first and second years – An age gap that was evident yet not underappreciated, if anything diverse to be amidst their energy. Whether as passive conversations or shared moments in the home, it felt welcoming to hear their stories which took me back to when I was back in college, then again in university, all memories I miss, and other I never got to quite experience close to a decade ago due to the less than ideal College environment and experience as a commuter student in university. The eight

months would fly by unexpectedly. The time here shaping not only my thesis but also my perspective, each day adding a layer to the tapestry of my experiences. Everyday is another life impact I consider capturing and bringing into closure. With just a week into this new setting, unpacked, settled, and initial classes receding into memory, my focus pivoted towards my thesis. A phase of transition, where personal research gradually coalesces into a definitive narrative, although without a real direction to work towards, a narrative to follow, my condition would soon become a driving force for the direction of my writing.

SEPTEMBER 7TH 2022 – GENETICS METABOLICS

The call. Sometime after noon, my phone rang, minutes later than expected. Staring at it blankly prior in the case it rang earlier, a call I could not miss, seated patiently waiting. "Hello" I answered immediately, seeing it from an unknown number, trying to sound positive and upbeat, at the very least happy despite my recent diagnosis and reason for the requested conversation. "Hi Jordan, this is Dr. M.— , how are you? I see you requested this call today." It was my geneticist who initiated the conversation. I responded in agreement that I needed to talk to her, that I had looming questions waiting to be answered. We had last met online a year earlier where I mentioned some initial complaints my body was going through, none of which they attributed to anything related to my condition, however for whatever reason now that a neurologist had made confirmation, were my suspicions valid, and only then were my complaints realized. Our next check-up would be scheduled in December, this however an impromptu request. She asked me the typical check-in questions to start. Are you still in school, are you working, how's your diet, are you still strictly on a low-fat diet,[6] do you exercise, friends, relationships, etc. Then, do you have any complaints of headaches, nausea, vomiting, etc.

Shortly after, she brought up the MRI which was completed about a month earlier, that it appeared as normal, with no signs of abnormalities.

What used to be good news no longer connected seeing that progression had started. I did not know I could read the radiologists reports myself, however I was slightly confused as to why my neurologist provided a diagnosis based on the MRI and in person findings, however my geneticist had no comments. The conversation swayed to my meetings with my neurologist. The geneticist mentioning "Jordan, I see you've met twice now with Dr. L.—, I've read his notes and see he has found spasticity present which is common for men with AMN." We exchanged comments on the findings and what it is that I am experiencing and furthermore have been for over a year prior. As with the neurologist, my geneticist described that progression is difficult to predict, however will continue to be measured, suggesting I continue to see the neurologist for follow ups. Thinking to myself that he would somehow see me based on my diagnosis and my geneticist was not in charge of post-diagnosis follow-ups, i.e seeing me regarding the progression of my condition directly. It makes sense however also does not, it's weird. No comments were made on treatment plans, instead a blunt acceptance. Frustrated how this went for the most part undetected for over a year in addition to my other complaints, had I not inquired and pushed for attention, how this would have gone unattended..

The dialogue shifted towards the queries I had posed in my initial email, specifically concerning bowel and bladder function. Her immediate acknowledgment that these were expected consequences of the condition's progression only intensified my frustration. I could not fathom why such crucial information had not been disclosed to me sooner. Perhaps ignorance had shielded my mental state to some degree, but it left me in a protracted state of uncertainty, seeking answers from doctors beyond my usual network. This lack of foresight applied not only to my bladder function but also to my hair and weight loss—symptoms I had noticed but felt were largely overlooked. Disconcertingly, no concrete treatment plans were forthcoming, with the only recommendation being consultations with specialists who, even now, offer no real remedy. It's a condition that one does not just live with but gradually deteriorates from. The absence

of treatment or even the slightest form of relief is baffling to me. A cure would be nothing short of miraculous—a boon I fervently wish for future generations, if not for myself, in the hope that ongoing research might yield some breakthrough that had eluded me. When it came to the remainder of my questions, she advised that they should be addressed to my neurologist. This guidance perplexed me, considering these inquiries were intimately tied to the progression of my condition. Why this division of responsibility when my concerns were so deeply interwoven with the disease's trajectory?

The dialogue culminated with a discussion on cerebral ALD, a facet of my condition about which my knowledge was scant, having only encountered the term during a men's community call. Cerebral ALD is a severe manifestation of adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD), characterized by the degeneration of myelin—the protective sheath surrounding nerve cells in the brain. It is characterized by an inflammatory process that destroys the myelin, causing relentless progressive deterioration. When the disease spreads throughout the brain, symptoms grow worse, including blindness, deafness, seizures, loss of muscle control, and eventually a vegetative state or death.[7] Unlike the more predictable progression of adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN), cerebral ALD's onset is not assured and varies widely among individuals.[8] This is what Lorenzo Odone was affected by early on as a child, depicted in the film Lorenzo's Oil.

AMN progression is noted in virtually all men with the condition, manifesting anywhere from adolescence at 18 to as late as 65.[9] Anecdotal evidence suggests that those who experience AMN symptoms later in life may have a reduced risk of developing cerebral ALD.[10] Yet, the correlation between early AMN symptoms and an increased risk of cerebral ALD remains unclear. The impact of AMN is highly individualized—some endure a gradual progression from as young as 18, others face a more rapid decline, while some confront it much later in life.[11] While AMN's presence is a certainty, cerebral ALD's occurrence is not. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by AMN are formidable, compounded by the daily uncertainties of its impact. It's not just the direct effects of the condition,

but the ancillary complications it might cause, such as a higher risk of infections, falls, sprains, or fractures, that weigh heavily. These issues magnify the daily struggles, affecting occupational capabilities and overall quality of life.

I then proceeded to ask what the likelihood of this presenting itself looks like. She responded with an evasive tangent, diverting from a direct answer before moving onto her subsequent points.

She emphasized the necessity of staying current with my "COVID" vaccination, as the risk of onset can increase with serious respiratory and viral infections, particularly COVID. Moreover, she mentioned that severe head trauma could potentially trigger cerebral ALD—a startling revelation. Despite being aware of my now weakened immune system, I was oblivious to the specific ramifications of COVID on my condition. My experience with the virus was a testament to this ignorance; it had nearly incapacitated my legs, and it was only after a period of acclimatization that they reverted to their pre-infection state. This experience left me in a state of panic, especially when faced with the decision of whether to receive more vaccines amidst conflicting advice. One part of me was speculative. Questionable, unsure of the possible effects, be it short or long term of the vaccine on myself with this condition, in a healthy state for the most part already affected by the condition and uncertain of the risks of something foreign in my body. Now the opposite, worried by the effects of the flu or other respiratory sicknesses which place me at a higher risk for cALD. A few months later, I fell ill with a respiratory infection, presumably a common cold, yet the symptoms mirrored the severity of those I experienced with COVID: profound weakness and fatigue, a substantial loss of leg strength, lack of energy, appetite, and pervasive body aches. This succession of surprises left me grappling with uncertainty, casting doubt on the veracity of the information I had received, and lamenting why these crucial details were not disclosed to me sooner.

Returning to the root of the question, she said about 5% of known cases develop cerebral ALD however that the number is under-reported.

From my research and conversations within the community, it seems the actual figure might be closer to 20%. Some even suggest that up to 65% of men between the ages of 20 and 55 will develop cerebral ALD. To me, this condition feels like a looming death sentence—not immediate in a literal sense, but as an unavoidable, premature fate. One far earlier than I imagined. Furthermore, knowing the only option before and still today is a bone marrow transplant, one Dr. M.—, said she would reserve the conversation for if or when the time comes. The procedure carries significant risks, amplified by stage upon capture and a difficulty to find a match based on my diverse ethnic background. My thoughts then drifted to my late cousin, who lost his battle with this disease, and in tangent an unsuccessful transplant. I can't help but view a bone marrow transplant as a dire risk, a leap into uncertainty with no guarantee of waking up the same—if at all. The grim alternative is to deny the operation and slowly or rapidly wither away. A fading out under the watchful eyes of family and friends until you take your last breath. "Fuck" I thought.

As the conversation dwindled, I was at a loss for words. Her parting advice was to maintain my health and continue exercise and physiotherapy to preserve whatever mobility I could, something I already knew. No further guidance was provided, just a sobering reminder of the relentless march of time, and an invitation to 'enjoy' the decline. Reminded of our next meeting set for December, an in-person follow-up; my attempts to hide my growing anxiety and concern crumbled. I inquired about the progression of AMN and the potential emergence of cerebral ALD, only to be met with generalities and an encouragement to stay in touch and take care. In hindsight, I realized I hadn't mentioned my weight loss—a detail that now gnawed at me. Was it a consequence of adrenal insufficiency or muscle wasting? The call concluded, leaving me in silence. Then what. Staring ahead blank faced, a subtle wave of panic washed over me. An existential awakening, not about our collective mortality, but a stark, introspective realization: my body is deteriorating, moment by moment, visibly and invisibly, inside and out.

The news hit me like a ton of bricks. I was reeling, my mind a whirlwind of disbelief and indignation. There was still so much I yearned to achieve, yet it seemed as if everything was grinding to a halt. I couldn't help but dwell on the last two years, time that felt unjustly snatched away—not out of fear of the virus itself, but because of the precious moments lost to it. Ironically, as the world began to reopen, my own started to close. Slumped in the stiff, unsparing Ikea chair that came with the room—a piece of furniture I intended to replace—I found myself staring at the wall in front of me, consumed by thought. A wave of sighs escaped me, a physical manifestation of my internal turmoil. My gaze wandered around my modest room, taking in the heat seeping in through a crack in the window, struggling against the feeble coolness of an inadequate air conditioning unit. The soft hum of my desk fan provided a soothing white noise, despite its questionable effectiveness. Meanwhile, the ceiling fan mounted to the high ceiling which I now sorely miss, churned the air above with a reassuring vigor. The clock read 1:20pm. It was the start of a new academic term, just the day before I had resumed classes. Faint sounds of my roommates shuffling in the common area filtered through and underneath my door, their exact whereabouts unclear. Unable to recall if they were in the space next to me or moving in and out, up and down.

It was my first day as a teaching assistant for a first-year cultural history class. Excitement eluded me, replaced by a complex cocktail of emotions, primarily nerves. Would any of my roommates have overheard my earlier conversations? Unlikely. Seeing class was to start at 2pm, I wanted to arrive early, both to secure a discreet seat at the back and to introduce myself to the professor. I got up from my chair, legs tight, the usual reminder of reality and dialed my mom's number. I needed to unpack the conversation with her. I saw her just a few days earlier the day I left home, her knowing of my phone appointment today and everything thus far related to my condition. I moved towards my window, opened the curtain and looked outside at the late summer glare. The high sun, the trees dancing, the warm glimmer onto the road surfaces. Sitting on the

window ledge, the phone ringing, waiting for her to answer. “Hey mom” I said. Her asking how my day went thus far, unable to recall anything else that morning. I then delved into the details of the call—the vague suggestions, the unsettling revelations, and my own swirling fears. Trying not to burden her too much, I cautiously broached the subject of cerebral ALD—a newfound fear shadowing my existing struggle with AMN. My mom, ever-faithful and increasingly devoted, offered a short prayer and words of hope. There wasn’t much more to say, nor did I want to amplify her worries. Ultimately, what could I do but strive to make the best of this predicament? To maintain my health and spirits as best as I could, and to embrace this challenge head-on. I saw only two paths before me, one of which I was resolute in never treading—the path of surrender, allowing the condition to consume me, both body and mind. The other path, albeit steep and fraught with obstacles, was one of resilience and determination. To push forward against all odds, to find solace and even gratitude in my sufferings, echoing Dostoevsky’s sentiments.[12] It was a classic case of mind over matter. I knew I couldn’t keep my mom on the phone much longer. I reassured her, “I’ve got to go, but don’t worry. Everything will be okay.” I couldn’t guarantee it, but I made that promise to myself. After letting her know I planned to see a new physiotherapist, that I’d continue exercising, that the move into this new place went well, I ended the call.

It was about 1:30pm. I figured I should pack up and head over to school about now. I should have had something to eat prior, however my appetite had vanished amidst the day’s stress with now little to no time. The noise of my roommates getting ready became more audible. I assumed they might be staying after class to maybe set into their studio spaces, converse, hangout, etc. As I prepared to leave, a sense of longing washed over me. I reflected on my educational journey, which had always felt lacking in a certain true experience. My first degree or rather diploma program in college was structured much like high school, with little opportunity to forge deep bonds with my peers. Despite it being architecture, the school felt like a commuter hub—people came for classes and left as soon as they

could. The absence of a communal space and studio culture made it a place you'd want to spend minimal time in. Later in university, while pursuing my bachelor's degree, offered a slightly better experience. It had a real studio culture and a more engaging university atmosphere. Yet, living off campus—specifically commuting daily between Windsor and Southfield—created a form of isolation that was useful yet lonely. It allowed me to focus, but at the cost of the close-knit connections and extended memories I yearned for.

What I enjoyed differently from before were the noises, the familiar sounds of my roommates stirred in the background as they got ready and came downstairs. The creak of the doors opening, the clatter of dishes in the kitchen, murmur of voices as they got ready to leave. Matching the clock to the start of classes or rather when each got home. It was a symphony I grew accustomed to. On the days I served as a teaching assistant, these sounds were my cue, synchronizing my readiness with theirs. Other times, I'd simply observe, matching the noise with the time, a silent participant in their morning routine. Yet, there were days when this connection faded, when they had already immersed themselves in campus life before I even set foot outside. Those mornings felt different, quieter. I imagined them already settled in their studio spaces, the vibrant energy of campus life enveloping them while I was still here, in the transient silence of a soon-to-be-empty house. This dissonance, though subtle, was a reminder of the shifts in my life—the before and the now, the there and the here.

With these reflections in mind, I packed my things, my heart heavy with the realization that my condition had not just altered my physical capabilities, but also how I interacted with these spaces that had been a part of my academic life. The campus, once a place of unencumbered movement, now felt like a terrain loaded with challenges, to remain unseen, out of sight and out of mind, there yet no longer there, opposite to what I wished for. Despite this, I stepped out, the echoes of my past experiences mingling with the uncertainties of my present. I locked the door behind me, filled up my water bottle, and began the short yet contemplative walk to school. A

distance I would soon, very soon start to think about more. A distance that would contemplate, consider, absorb as a burden, a frustration I would forever live with, a leisure I would only remember. Taking the path I would least likely be seen, hoping I would not have any urgencies on, that I would not lock up and limp along. The three minute walk felt like ten. A counting as I stepped, last time as a child. Look down. Right, left, right, left. Look up. Right, left, right, left. Crossing the street required extra timing between myself and the next vehicle for the simple fact I could no longer run. Onto Melville Street and approaching the campus doors, I saw other students arrive along the same pathway from the other end. In clusters they walked and entered. Their laughter and banter formed a camaraderie that I, walking solo, could not help but feel disconnected from. What appeared as second or third year students gathered in familiar ease. Amidst them, my solitude was stark, where for the first time anxiety stuck to me. Was my gait noticeable? Did I seem conspicuously out of place? I hated that a year earlier this was never of consideration, a year earlier this new space was never accepted however, a time of opening, closing and rejection, a time before diagnosis, a different time.

Nearing the entrance, I found myself unconsciously measuring the pace of fellow students approaching from the opposite direction. Their strides were steady, unconstrained—a stark contrast to my own. My walk, once a thoughtless motion, had become a conscious effort. I loathed the realization that I could no longer quicken my steps, could no longer move with the impulsive speed of a fleeting desire or necessity. There was a newfound permanence in my pace, one that stripped away the casual privilege of haste. Sometimes, I'd sense people trailing behind me, their footsteps a constant reminder of my own slowing rhythm. Would they overtake me? Would they wonder, or worse, comment on my sluggish pace? More likely the first than the second. Though such thoughts shouldn't have mattered, they clung to me—a relentless echo of the normalcy I once knew. As I stepped through the entrance, a wave of dissonance washed over me, that I will never be normal again. Physically, I was older than my peers, caught

in a discordant dance with a body that no longer moved to the rhythm I had composed over a lifetime. I was now a part of this space, yet I couldn't shake off the feeling of being an outsider within it. It was a friction of integration, a silent struggle that few could see and even fewer could understand.

I entered, my second day back, greeted by the ambient noise of a new semester come to life. Those seeing each other after their co-op term, new faces of first years starting to acclimatize, everyone moving in for the term, a welcoming for everyone. I felt like an outcast, an outlier, a grad student who drifted away from the familiar shores of campus life the year prior due to unforeseen circumstances, a commuter, an online entity, forced off campus and eventually into unenrollment due to "non-compliance". This would be my last chance within the school environment as a student, and likely able bodied seeing the shadow of my condition loom, who knows. Nonetheless, it felt like it was all coming to an end while a place I felt foreign to and did not want to participate in. To navigate the prevailing currents of superficial judgments, performative activism, and conspicuous displays of virtue—a phenomenon often characterized by a lack of depth or genuine commitment—I choose to remain detached. Engaging with such shallow waters does not align with my personal ethos or academic pursuits. My focus lied not in confronting or dismantling this cultural phenomenon, but rather in navigating it with a sense of individual integrity, ensuring that my academic and personal journey remains true to my values and beliefs, without succumbing to the pressure of conforming to the prevailing winds of ideology.

I bypassed the fanfare welcomes, no one to which I knew, the veneer of inclusivity that did not quite resonate with me and took a seat along the exit aisle, second row from the back. I wasn't there to blend in; I was there to observe, to learn, to complete this chapter of my journey. Within minutes, students trickled in, almost all isolated to one another with a slight nervousness differing from my own. Seeing this as their second or third class of the term, not yet in studio, I watched as they made their way

in, the shared energy of a new cohort embarking their first year in school. I had no such recollections from the previous year given the hybrid nature of the school format. I had minimal off-campus interactions, having been removed from the program only six weeks in.

They looked happy, healthy, maybe a bit naïve. It reminded me of myself exactly nine years prior, although in a slightly different environment, it was nonetheless the same energy at the start of a new chapter in life. For me, it felt like I was starting a new chapter too. This time, however, it felt like writing my last chapter, the length of which I couldn't ascertain. There was a buzz of noise and gesturing across the cohort. I spotted a couple of my roommates among them, but only the backs and sides of their heads were visible to me. The professor entered, closing the doors behind him and making his way down the steps, signalling to him my own presence. Descending the lecture hall steps to the front of the classroom, he commenced his introduction to the new class, one that I shared with them as a spectator. This was probably close to his 40th yearly introduction. I mused over the many faces and names he must have encountered, and the impact he might have had on them, not knowing then that this professor would become my supervisor of choice and a significant figure in the thesis I am writing in this moment. He cracked a few heartwarming jokes to put the class at ease. His demeanor was stern, direct, confident, familiar, and most notably, as I would soon realize, quite obviously intelligent and full of wisdom as a historian. He broke the ice swiftly, then transitioned into his lecture on the concept of home and homesickness, smoothly weaving it from a historical conversation to its implications in architecture. Listening in was smooth and enjoyable, resonating with us all.

After about an hour, there was a ten to fifteen-minute break, followed by another hour of his lecture, which concluded with a guest lecture from one of his former students and a closing Q&A session, during which, as expected, no questions were raised. At the end of the lecture, the professor approached me and the other TA, mentioning that while collecting attendance was necessary, our presence for the entire lecture was

not required. Among the various roles associated with the position, sitting in on his lectures was what I enjoyed the most. These sessions were the most memorable and allowed me to share the experience with the younger students, offering me a re-engagement with ideas to which I was either not exposed at all previously or provided a welcome refresher or new perspective years later. This proved beneficial when it came to grading as well.

After the lecture ended, I left to go home immediately. The sun just barely setting, the perfect summer weather, an exact feeling paired to the start of the school season, the honeymoon period I had felt many times already. Upon arrival, I was the first to return, my thoughts still echoing the day's earlier discussions. I dropped my things off in my room, reinstated my computer on my desk, then went to the kitchen to warm up an early and commonly the first of two dinners. Back in my room, an enveloping numbness took hold of me, a stark departure from my essence merely a year prior. I was an anomaly compared to my housemates—my experiences foreign to them, my reality incomprehensible and not subject to their obligation of understanding. I harbored no desire to divulge this part of my life, to discuss it openly was neither a want nor a necessity—although it did emerge in passing as the term progressed. Those discussions, however, scarcely scratched the surface.

Thinking back to the year that passed and then the year prior. Where gyms were closed, or rather they required compliance which I did not comply with. A time where a slight tightness and awkwardness first started, barely a discomfort, however something I assumed would go away. My only respite during this restriction was to go for a walk, a means to test and measure whether the motion could alleviate the discomfort or, at the very least, prove more beneficial than remaining stationary. Seeking a location conducive to thoughtful ambulation, I recalled a track I often passed on my way into Cambridge not far from where I used to live a year prior. I did not want to remain near the school, nor be seen, I wanted to be a stranger in the background. Close to an hour passed, a couple of my

roommates now home, in the kitchen congregating, the rest I do not recall. I quietly departed and drove northward, encountering traffic en route to the track. I arrived at the school and parked in visitors, for whatever reason dozens of vehicles, an offline school and fairly vacant track. I made my way directly to the track, stepping out into an agreeably warm day, devoid of the oppressive humidity. Stepping on the track, the first thing I noticed was the texture and impact of the surface, designed to absorb impact offering a subtle resilience underfoot. While it was by no means soft, the noticeable give with each step was a pleasant comfort versus movement on solid concrete. There was a little bit of foot traffic along the track, what looked like locals, no students in sight. Despite the others, my focus was on gauging my endurance against the increasing difficult of what used to be a simpler and seamless task. Lap by lap, I measured my pace, not only against the clock, but against the evolving challenges of my physical condition. To see how far I could go without needing to stop, to rest, to use the washroom, a worst case then and a common case now. Limited by everything below the waist. New distances. A point to which one no longer walks, one no longer moves, one is no longer there. I counted each lap, each taking slightly longer than I had initially expected.

The 400 meters was a visual clock, seeing and feeling the length it took to get back to the same point to which I started. Lap two then three. There were a couple groups of people walking together, side by side along each of the six lanes. What looked like a family split, the wives pushing their strollers along the track, and the men walking on the opposite side of the track, either ahead or behind. There was a man I noticed, slightly older than myself running and consistently outpacing me, his presence recurring along the circuit. The points at which he lapped me always at a different part of the track, about 100 meters since the last.

Lap four. My legs did not yet feel tired thankfully. At the time I believe I could walk any given distance with no issues, just a couple of months earlier walking for hours each day in Portugal, moving up and down stairs unassisted, fairly good leg strength, clonus quite present, slight muscle

spasms, however nothing unbearable. Beginning to perspire and, I didn't think it would be like this so soon, though this given moment would be one of the last times I could perform the same, now questioning what my future will look like when I travel, let alone choose to move across distance again. For whatever reason, September onwards, progression accelerated and the decline only became more apparent. Lap five. A couple sat up on the bleachers, adding onto the few who were already seated down and were previously walking the track. Attempting to increase my pace was useless as I tried to move past them as soon as possible. Today, speed is the last of my already existing worries, more so on balance, managing fatigue and how each foot met the ground safe and sound. I tried to shorten my distance to those in front of me, again only realizing my fixed speed, the notion of overtaking anyone seemed a distant memory.

On the field, the vibrancy of a pending soccer game caught my attention—a stark contrast to the solitary cycle I found myself in. Their ages varied and their energy and competitive spirit, was a mirror to a past self, a reflection of vitality now beyond my grasp. Groups of players moved into the center of the field along with their friends and partners onto the bleachers, forming an audience I had not anticipated. My gaze drifted from the immediate path in front of me, where the sunset painted the passing cars with a warm glow, to the field where a congregation of players animated the space. They were setting up, talking, stretching, preparing for a game that unfolded as naturally as the evening itself. This proximity to active competition—to the world of sports—was something I had not experienced in some time. For many, the scene was unremarkable, but for me, it was a poignant reminder of what was no longer within my reach. I hated this fact. A mix of resentment and gratitude; resentment for my lost capabilities and gratitude that these strangers were spared from my affliction—an affliction so profound I wouldn't wish it upon my worst enemy. Watching them was like observing ghosts of my past selves: one younger, vibrant with untapped potential, and one slightly older, still full of active participation, soaking up the last of summer with every kick, jump,

and sprint. Lap five turned into Lap six. The coaches arrived, engaging in their habitual pre-game discourse marking the passage of time, just as the synchrony of the players' drills echoed the rhythms of a life I used to know. There I was, encircling the track in what felt like an endless loop, my thoughts not so much on the desire to join in but on the fundamental ability to do so—a capability now denied to me. Lap seven. Checking the time about 50 minutes since I arrived. I did not was to stop. Deep down, I knew if circumstances were different, I might have continued onwards or alternatively may have never come here in the first place. Part of me wished I continued, to have used up as much of the tank I had left, the legs I had then, not knowing how much worse and to how fast it would get, now knowing what I did not then. The yearning to maximize what was left of my strength was mired in a hindsight that only those facing loss could truly understand. I was aware of the fragility of my condition, unknowing of the depths it might yet reach, but certain of the toll it had already exacted. If there was one thing that still belonged to me that it did not the others, although fleeting my grasp, it was the roof.

Lap eight, what would end as my final lap here. I was not entirely exhausted, but with the game about to start and the sunset nearing its end, it seemed like a natural conclusion. Completing the last lap in just under an hour, I pondered the pace—was it quick? Perhaps not, but there was a measure of contentment in having made the effort. Yet, an all-too-familiar feeling of insignificance lingered. Reaching my car, a mix of fatigue and sweat clung to me, hunger and thist reemerged. The drive home was short, arriving during the fleeting moments of the evening, the twilight before blue hour. A few signs to who was home from the dim lights that pierced through their curtains and open windows.

Walking did not necessarily feel like a waste of time, it was therapeutic, it was important, today a real response to how I felt. Coming home that night I cannot recall if anyone was in the main common space, however homecoming was an affair I enjoyed. Yearning for human touch, the sight of someone on the couch, the buzz of activity in the kitchen, the muffled

sounds, voices, whispers from behind the closed doors or even just the scattered shoes that indicated life and presence. That night, forgoing the gym, I chose to prepare for the next day – one that would usher my second session of Thesis Research Design studio. My evening hours were spent in quiet anticipation, punctuated by the reheating of a meal that likely fell short of my caloric needs, reflective of my diminished appetite that had characterized the term. As the night progressed, I heard the hum of my roommates get together, chatting in the common area. My last interactions with them limited to a brief passing between my room, the kitchen and the bathroom before bed. Although the camaraderie of their company often appealed to me, this night called for solitude. Retreating back to my room, I shut down my laptop, turned off my lamp, partially closed my curtains leaving the window open a crack and settled into bed. My thoughts and emotions juxtaposing all that appeared opposite my door. Not worth explaining, confiding, anyone to trust in. Everyone starting a new chapter in their life and I felt like mine was ending. That this was the last.

A slight panic.. An existential realization.. That I am dying..[13]

A wake up call.



21. Ledge. 2022-2023

Captured the day I moved out. This was a spot I commonly sat, the same spot I sat calling my mother after the my genetics appointment the first week back to school. I still feel its contact beneath me as I did the day of the call.



22. Laps. 2022

It pains me to think of such a human gift, to walk, at the time of this photo was a struggle, these laps used to gauge a declining condition, to today being something I doubt, that I hate I can hardly take part in. I remember trying to increase my pace, however limited by a single speed, passed by others, while slowed down by a fatigue that made itself present after a few laps. My exhaustion was both a surprise and a letdown. Despite all this, I wish I could go back.



23. Inside outside. 2022-2023

My last sight before going to bed every night. I always kept my curtains partially open, sometimes my window as well, open a jar. It allowed both light and sound to filter from the outside in, juxtaposed to the noises of the common area on the other side of my door.

ADRENOLEUKODYSTROPHY (ALD)

[uh-dree-noh-loo-koh-DISS-truh-fee]

X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy (X-ALD) is a worldwide genetic disease, rare and serious, that affects the brain and the adrenal glands (small glands located on top of each kidney). It is caused by variations in the ABCD1 gene that lead to an inability to break down very long–chain fatty acids (VLCFAs) which can accumulate in the brain and adrenal glands. This can result in progressive loss of the fatty covering (myelin) that surrounds the nerves in the brain and spinal cord. In addition, damage to the adrenal glands can lead to a reduction in certain hormones. This disease is inherited in an X-linked manner.[14]

1. Adrenoleukodystrophy can be visible newborn screening, during childhood, adolescence or adulthood and can present itself under different forms:

Most commonly the disease is slowly progressive and affects the bone marrow and, to less extend, the peripheral nerves in men and women: this is adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN) which strike the motor functional prognosis of the lower limbs.
More rarely under the form of a rapidly evolving brain disease (cerebral ALD) in boys and adults men, which ends dramatically in absence of bone marrow transplant.[15]

2. Simple mechanism leading to the disease.

The peroxisome.
Adrenoleukodystrophy is a peroxysomal disease, which means that it results from the impairment of small cell components called peroxisomes. The peroxisomes are responsible for the degradation of the very long chain fatty acids (VLCFA). The gene ABCD1 has been identified in 1993 by the teams of Pr. Aubourg and Pr. Mandel. It codes for the protein ABCD1 (or ALDP), a transporter responsible for the entry of very long chains fatty acids into the peroxisomes, where they can be degraded.[16]

In adrenoleukodystrophy, the ABCD1 gene mutation leads to an inappropriate transport and does not allow the very long chain fatty acids to enter the peroxisome to be destructed by oxidation. This is what leads to their accumulation in every cell of the body and in the blood. We do know today, however, that an ABCD1 mutation can lead to an anomaly of certain cells functions without it being the results of the VLCFA accumulation.[17]

Accumulation of very long chain fatty acids
In experimental cell culture conditions, very long chain fatty acids seem to be toxic for oligodendrocytes, the myelin forming cells. Their accumulation lead to cell death. It disturbed calcium homeostasis and lead to mitochondrial impairment and production of reactive oxygen species. When oligodendrocytes die, the myelin sheets (which are in reality extensions of oligodendrocyte membranes enrolled around the axons) cannot be maintained, which can lead to the sheets destruction, like what is observed in cerebral ALD. In AMN, VLFCA accumulation in oligodendrocytes of the bone marrow does not lead to oligodendrocytes death but to an impairment of the axons without significant demyelination. When VLCFA accumulate in the cell, long chain fatty acids with shorter chains (18 ; 20 or 22 carbons) are accessible to the molecule responsible to make them longer, increasing even more the quantity of VLCFA. Like a vicious circle.[18]

Breakdown of the blood-brain barrier

It has been demonstrated that the disruption of the blood-brain barrier, a characteristic of adrenoleukodystrophy visible on MRI, occurs in areas of the brain before any demyelination (Musolino et al., 2015). The inflammation which leads to the degradation of the myelin (by infiltration of leukocytes) appears to be a direct consequence of the breakdown of the blood-brain barrier, and is not a consequence of VLCFA accumulation like it was first thought. ABCD1 is very strongly expressed in endothelial cells (and astrocytes) of the blood-brain barrier. It was shown that in ALD patients, in the absence of ABCD1, proteins normally located at tight junctions and sealing the blood-brain barrier, were not there properly located. A passage is thus opened and inflammatory molecules and cells can penetrate into the brain. The absence of a functional ABCD1 protein could be responsible for the opening of the blood-brain barrier. In the brain, the breakdown of the blood-brain barrier could be involved in the development of cerebral form of adrenoleukodystrophy.[19]

3. Clinical expression
At birth, boys and girls do not have symptoms and their apparition is unpredictable. However, all adult males with a mutation of the gene ABCD1, who did not develop the cerebral form during childhood, will develop symptoms of AMN by the age of 55. As described above, heterozygous girl and woman carriers never develop brain damage. However, it is known today that 80% of them eventually develop symptoms of AMN when they reach the age of 60.[20]

There is no correlation between genotype (type of mutation of the gene ABCD1) and onset of symptoms. In other words, within the same family, boys or adult men (brothers, uncle-nephew, for example) can develop the disease differently. From one family to another, even if the mutation of the gene ABCD1 is identical, patients may have different manifestations of the disease. Although they are not known specifically, external factors seem responsible for triggering brain inflammation. Brain trauma or stroke, even minor, can trigger cerebral demyelination in patients presenting only symptoms of AMN or no signs of the disease. Genetic characteristics unique to each patient, and different mutation of the gene ABCD1, can also explain the resistance to develop the most severe form of ALD (cerebral demyelinating form) or the appearance of AMN at a later age or in a less severe form.[21]

24. Condition

Detailed report on both forms of the condition.

All boys with ALD are born without symptoms, and cerebral ALD most commonly appear between 5 and 12 years old, never before 4 years old. Demyelinating lesions first appear on the MRI images and first develop slowly over months or even years, without any recognizable symptoms. Only in a second phase appear simultaneously clinical signs, associated with a significant and rapid increase in cerebral demyelinating lesions. Without bone marrow transplant, and after a major motor and intellectual degradation, the status of children may stabilize for years or even decades. Many, however, especially younger boys, may die from secondary complications, more often respiratory.

The clinical symptoms depend on the location of the demyelinating lesions. In general, the disease progresses more quickly when it starts early. The most common first symptoms are: school problems, attention deficit, difficulties to orient themselves in space, graphics difficulties (drawing, writing), difficulty dressing (dyspraxia), difficulties to understand (these boys often ask twice as if they did not hear), anxiety attacks due to the fact that they see less, understand less and do not understand why.[22]

In adults, at least 65% of men between 20 and 55 years old also developed a cerebral form of ALD visible on brain MRI. In half these cases, the brain damage spontaneously stabilizes with little consequence on motor or intellectual capabilities and patients can live a normal life (unless they also have signs of AMN, which is almost always the case). For the other half, the evolution of the cerebral form is identical to that of the boys, the initial period of slow worsening of intellectual, visual and auditory functions being however longer than for boys. All adult men with demyelinating brain injury also exhibit signs of spinal cord defect.

In some cases, the cerebral form does not progress immediately to an inflammatory stage (less than 5%). In these chronic forms, brain demyelinating lesions evolve very slowly and the patients can be stable for decades. These patients do not have visual or motor impairment except when adrenomyeloneuropathy appears in adulthood. However, they have significant intellectual deficits that complicate their adaptation to a normal school or professional life.

These cerebral forms are not described in women.[23]

ADRENOMYELONEUROPATHY (AMN)

[uh-dree-noh-my-loh-NUR-op-uh-thee]

Adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN) is an inherited condition that affects the spinal cord. It is a form of X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy. On average, people with AMN begin to develop features in the late twenties. Signs and symptoms may include progressive stiffness and weakness of the legs; difficulties to run, walk long distances or walk in rough terrain; ataxia; speech difficulties; adrenal insufficiency; sexual dysfunction; and bladder control issues. Some people with AMN also have brain involvement which can lead to behavioral abnormalities, vision loss, hearing problems, and/or seizures. AMN is caused by changes in the ABCD1 gene and is inherited in an X-linked manner.[24]

(AMN) Symptoms listed by frequency:

Medical Term:

(Very Frequent:) Abnormality of peripheral nervous system electrophysiology, Abnormality of the spinal cord, Axonal degeneration, Distal lower limb muscle weakness, Distal sensory impairment, Impaired continence, Peripheral axonal degeneration, Progressive spastic paraparesis.

(Frequent:) Abnormal libido, Abnormality of central somatosensory evoked potentials, Abnormality of skin pigmentation, Adrenocortical abnormality, Adrenocorticotropic hormone excess, Atrophy of the spinal cord, Atrophy/Degeneration involving the corticospinal tracts, Babinski sign, Bowel incontinence, Brain imaging abnormality, Cerebral dysmyelination, Dorsal column degeneration, Erectile dysfunction, Fatigue, Female sexual dysfunction, Fine hair, Hyperreflexia, Intra-oral hyperpigmentation, Leg muscle stiffness, Lip hyperpigmentation, Male sexual dysfunction, Peripheral neuropathy, Spastic gait, Spasticity, Urinary bladder sphincter dysfunction.

(Occasional:) Adrenal insufficiency, Back pain, Behavioral abnormality, Cognitive impairment, Dysarthria, Dysesthesia, Frontal balding, Functional motor deficit, Memory impairment, Primary adrenal insufficiency, Urinary incontinence, Urinary retention, Urinary urgency.[25]

Treatment:

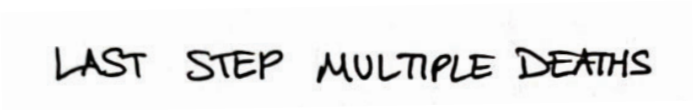
Treatment of adrenomyeloneuropathy.
Treatment of adrenomyeloneuropathy is based on symptomatic management of patients: active and passive motor rehabilitation, treatment of urinary disorders, spasticity, lower limb pain, erectile dysfunction. Maintaining regular bi-weekly walking activity remains the most effective "treatment" for AMN. By itself, it significantly improves the motor deficit of the lower limbs.

Treatment of adrenal insufficiency.
Treatment of adrenal insufficiency is possible via hormone replacement therapy with adrenal corticosteroids (prescription of hydrocortisone or even fludrocortisone). This extremely simple, oral and daily treatment is essential and should never be interrupted.

Treatment of Advanced Cerebral Forms.
Palliative treatments may be proposed. They are critically important in improving the quality of life of affected children and adults: it can help with pain, spasticity, be the treatment of orthopedic complications, allow adequate nutritional intake using a gastric tube.

Despite numerous attempts for over 30 years, no treatment has been shown to be able to stabilize an advanced cerebral form of ALD.[26]

2.2



THE CHILD'S FIRST STEPS

The first steps of a child are an emblematic milestone in human development. A seemingly rudimentary act of bipedal locomotion, it is indeed an intricate manifestation of a confluence of cognitive, neuromuscular, and motor coordination abilities, all hinged upon the child's incessant instinct to explore and interact with their environment.

From a neuropsychological perspective, a child's first steps signify the successful attainment of a set of complex motor skills requiring precise coordination between cerebellar functionality, spinal cord responses, and muscular-skeletal systems. This remarkable event typically occurs around the time of their first birthday, between the ages of 9-18 months, contingent upon individual variability and environmental factors[1].

However, the act of walking is not merely a testament to physical development; it signifies a profound shift in the child's engagement with the world. The vertical stance and forward movement empowers the child with a new vantage point, both literally and metaphorically, broadening their spatial awareness and capacity to interact.

The sociocultural and philosophical dimensions of this development stage are rich and multifaceted. The first steps are often a celebrated milestone within families, symbolizing independence and personal agency. For the child, this newfound mobility translates into autonomy and the ability to exercise their curiosity and exploratory behavior with less reliance on caregivers.

In a broader philosophical context, the child's first steps echo the perennial human pursuit of progress and evolution. The struggle to stand upright, the tentative balance, the fearless endeavor despite the risk of falling - all mirror the human existential journey. This, however, imbued with the innocence of a child, presents a profound paradox; in these early steps, we witness the epitome of vulnerability, simultaneously interlaced with strength and an undaunted spirit of exploration.

In conclusion, a child's first steps embody a pivotal transition point in

human development. The first milestone for a child's ability to navigate their environment. Beyond the scientific lens of motor and cognitive maturation, these initial forays into independent mobility symbolize the manifestation of autonomy, curiosity, and an unfettered spirit of exploration, reminding us of the enduring human story of growth and evolution.

FALL 2022

It wasn't long ago that I pondered what living with my condition looked like. It brought severe discomfort and anxiety thinking this. The truth is, it has always lived with me, inside of me. It was never something I could avoid or less likely be prepared for.

I remember years ago seeing a man in a wheelchair without context to his circumstances and felt sick to my stomach. I felt grateful to not be in that situation unable to comprehend a battle with suffering. I remember seeing him push up a hill, possibly on his way home from work, possibly from the train station I too had just left, possibly from a train earlier only now reaching this far. Myself, driving my way back home, glancing from afar, moving in his direction as he paused before moving up the hill. A hill I then transported up in mere seconds, one I could climb without struggle, to what I could have then walked in a few minutes, to what now would be a growing challenge, the same hill I had walked up and down for years, the same hill I attempted to run down a year ago and I fell under. Disability is not something most consider, let alone grasp, the reality is we don't need to. It's something there for someone else, unlike death that is guaranteed, this is not.

Now, seated in my room and immersed in deep reflection, I tried to make sense of my condition and all that I had experienced thus far. In a way, I was rewinding back to my initial fall, to a year prior before any of this took place, before the candle started to glow dim.

It made sense that from here on out, I should make a log, to start recording, conduct a record of some sort. Piecing together already present

reflections, mental notes on my walk, the bladder, the bowel, my hair, my weight, I began to combine them all into one. I observed the changing effects, the new ones and the old, creating a second set, or new life in a way.

Writing in reverse, I mapped out my journey from 2021, when the world was very different, to today's open yet constrained reality. The notes began short and small, detailing each season. In hindsight, I recorded what I felt and remembered, acknowledging some sensations I can no longer feel. It was a writing of events, documenting how I moved and existed in the world. The entries evolved into a list, a series of questions, and examples. One week would be documented one way, another week differently. Sometimes, there would be a month of nothing, then the cycle would start again.

This became a way to keep tabs and record everything, including the increasingly regular appointments with multiple doctors. I kept track of concerns and questions during these visits. Before long, the notes grew longer, and the journal became more detailed in shorter durations. What started as seasonal entries, sometimes only a sentence or two, turned into monthly and then weekly records. Different parts of my body began to narrate their own stories and timelines.

With that in mind, I turned to the internet to better understand my condition, something I had remained external to for 26 years, like a stranger. I sought to learn what I should be aware of and what not to fear, having already been surprised by onsets that went unnoticed. It was time to take responsibility, as no one else would. Previously, I hadn't worried about it because there seemed no point in worrying about something that had not happened yet. But now, it was different. It was about rationalizing the facts and doing what needed to be done. To be ready. Although medical experts and professionals specialized in areas related to what I am experiencing, no one will experience this but myself, and none were truly familiar with my genetic condition, which was somewhat frustrating. It's like a game of broken telephone, being passed from one person to another, only to be tossed back again.

At this time, I considered taking the step of connecting with an online community of men who shared my condition. I had joined the group a couple of years earlier sometime in 2020 and sat in on one of their calls, months before my fall and about a year before I began experiencing symptoms. Hearing from other guys, talking and sharing with each other, I encountered terminology that was completely foreign to me. They spoke of their experiences living with the condition, about struggling to control their bladder, to fall asleep, extreme pain, weaknesses, and the need for various aids, which initially brought a wave of panic to me. Discussions about mobility aids like walkers and chairs and a list of medications used were particularly daunting. Others expressing their incidents with falling, broken bones and recovery. To consider and even grasp this loss and what it was like to face disability was extremely heavy to consider all at once. At that time, I didn't want to confront this reality; it was difficult to accept, especially as it was something I had always considered distant, perhaps never having to face in my lifetime. In my mid-twenties, situated in what felt like a never-ending lockdown, contemplating this future was the last thing I wanted to do.

This thought only compounded after my fall.

There was one member at the forefront of the meeting who helped host each month. He was an active patient advocate within ALD Connect[2]. After the call, I reached out to him personally, expressing my nervousness and shock of hearing all these things. He mentioned cerebral ALD, a term that none of my doctors, including my geneticist, had directly mentioned until just weeks ago, after confirming the connection between my symptoms and my condition. Rewinding a couple years back to my conversation with this gentleman however, he remained positive and upbeat, yet honest. He answered my questions to the best of his ability, to which at this time, back in the summer of 2020, I sat on the floor beside my bed, carefully listening. After my conversation with him, we stayed in "touch" through a couple of

emails. I followed up the following year regarding current research efforts he was keeping tabs on for patients, particularly those with the cerebral manifestation, although never heard back. I remained out of the calls for some time and never saw him again when I returned, only to find out that was the last time I would talk to him. I later learned that he had passed away, likely from cALD. The reasons for his retreat are uncertain, perhaps to maintain privacy or for reasons known only to him. His memory and the impact he had on those he interacted with, including myself, will be remembered.

The AMN monthly community calls hosted by ALD Connect took place on the last Tuesday of each and every month. After finishing my classes one evening on campus, I would head home to join this month's call, the first I had joined in years, preferring the privacy of my own space over the school library, where a voice muted to myself through my headphones might still be overheard by someone nearby. At home, I wondered if anyone outside my door could discern my words. Based on the location of my room on the ground floor, I would hear the front door opening and closing, leaving me uncertain if my roommates were arriving or leaving. It was not until after the call I'd feel a wave of despair. A back to reality almost. Like leaving the movies or being alone after a party comes to an end. A change of context to whatever I had, or to whomever I would be next to talk to, often times no one, leaving me these thoughts until the morning. A return to the reality of my condition, feeling every part of it and not just talking about it.

Rejoining the calls after a couple of years was a distant but welcoming experience. Most members did not recognize me, however the two moderators did, "the Canadian" they would reference me as. It's a bittersweet feeling in this space—you don't want to see new members having to join, but once they do, it's comforting to provide support or welcoming them back to receive updates. The first time I joined, it was poignant on my end, although when I returned years later everything I expressed seemed to resonate with them; it all sounded familiar.

This virtual community, though distant, provided a sense of peace, even though it offered no cure or solution like a medication or procedure might. At the end of each call, it was assumed we all continued back to our lives believing that would not be the last time we "saw" or heard from each other.

Joining these calls provided some clarity as needed, although it wasn't professional medical advice. It helped me gauge where I was in my journey, realizing that this condition affected each of us differently. Some of the men were affected much later, and others a few years earlier than me, but all of us were impacted. Interestingly, some had no idea about the condition until they were diagnosed in their 50s or even 60s. A few of them expressed to me directly that they felt bad, or couldn't imagine facing this at such a young age. Similarly, some found it difficult to come to terms with this at a later stage in life. However, I sometimes pointed out that they had lived a relatively normal life for many years, something I wouldn't exactly complain about. They mentioned how it was more shocking to deal with this after having been "granted" 40, 50, or even 60 years unaffected. To this, I argued, that in itself was a blessing, something I would have embraced, all in hindsight. Would they have preferred the inverse, being affected as a teenager or even as a child? I wasn't sure they fully comprehended this perspective, instead focusing on the "why" after the fact. Some of the guys were far less positive, even bringing up the topic of suicide. This thought had never crossed my mind, nor did I allow it to. We were all in different mental states, I must say. One member I spoke to after the calls, who was once as optimistic as I am, shared that his mindset changed as his condition worsened. Now in his 30s and in a wheelchair, he explained how his optimism declined with the progression of his condition. It made me think, "I'll consider this when the time comes." For now, it was important to do everything that I can while I can, contrasting with the previous two years, during which I could do anything and yet nothing.

I'd now have a separate log of notes for the calls.

Reviewing my notes, I constructed a timeline to track my progression and measure the changes. It was around this time that things started to worsen, albeit not as severely as today. The muscle wasting became more noticeable compared to the previous year. All the pants that fit me for as long as I could recall no longer did the same. A wardrobe out of sync. By now, the deterioration had accelerated. A few months from now, the cold of the new year made things worse, contrasting with early 2022 when symptoms solidified and never really improved, worsening by about ten percent, then stabilizing in the summer, perhaps improving by five percent.

I reflected on the year prior, thinking about my walks from campus to off-campus, month by month, season by season, considering the activities I once did but now struggle with. I observed how far I could walk without fatigue, stiffness, and a noticeable gait, and how this fluctuated with temperature and time.

One of the last abilities to decline was going up and down stairs. Although running up and down and was likely first to stop, it was rarely something I did. Initially going up and down was never an issue. Although I moved at a single speed, it was uninterrupted, my balance maintained without the need to use a rail or reaching a wall to brace my support. Going down however I moved slower always a bit worse with a bit of footdrop that worsened overtime and a balance that declines with it. Now, both seem to have deteriorated equally, needing to trust myself and my surroundings yet still a non-trust in myself. A mixture of muscle weakness, ataxia, and spasticity. If carrying a weight in front or behind, a feeling of falling forward or back. A hesitation at each landing. A worry that I may fall, collapse and worse break a bone and induce injury, not knowing at any moment if a knee will give or if I'll lose my balance. Something again I had not thought of before, let alone something most do not ever allow come to mind.

I tracked the progression of various symptoms, each now on its own timeline. From bowel to bladder patterns to a heightened sensitivity to extreme temperatures, like spasms in my leg when exposed to hot or cold

water, resembling a fish out of water. There was some weakness in my left leg, similar to but distinct from what I had experienced before. Despite this, I remained capable of performing daily activities and exercises. However, activities like skipping rope and biking became increasingly challenging. For instance, I could still skip rope, and then, gradually, I couldn't. Using a stationary bike was possible, but riding a conventional bike became less feasible. I monitored the time I could manage before reaching maximum fatigue, adjusting my activities week by week. Even carrying and moving weight onto a machine or to and from a bench, an increased reluctance to stumble and fall under the extra load.

A machine, such as a stationary bike that I once used to keep my legs moving, left me unsure of its direct benefit. However, I used it akin to wringing out as much tightness and discomfort as possible, imagining that I would continue to use it for many years. Eventually, I stopped using it for various reasons, alternating now between the stair climber and treadmill, preferring to hold onto the machine for support while moving. I paid close attention to my stride, noticing an ever-present foot drop. Although I couldn't see it, I could certainly feel it. I made mental notes on how my body managed and responded, focusing on duration, difficulty, and how I felt afterward. Changes were unnoticeable at first, only becoming apparent as they occurred, month by month.

When I returned to the stationary bike months later, it had become unusable due to clonus. I had to switch to a different kind of bike, one that was more horizontal than vertical, sitting across it rather than on top. This was slightly better, but the benefits I once felt in my muscles were no longer immediate or noticeable. This change also affected my ability to walk smoothly, leaving me feeling tighter and weaker. The same could be said for stretching. Despite these challenges, I understood the importance of staying physically active and fit. Keeping the body in motion was essential. If I don't use it, I'll lose it. End of story.

Writing in recollection. Sitting at my desk, wondering what is touching or rubbing against my leg, to look underneath and find nothing there. My

eyelids twitching on rare occasions to now twitching uncontrollably to different parts of my face, like fireworks going off at the wrong time of day. Yet another note.

All this self-awareness is a mourning for former states of the self. As if these states represented lost objects that I will never be able to reclaim.

An experiencing of the world differently. One in which continues to accelerate opposite to that of which I slow down. One in which I am not in total panic to, but still, a clock I now keep an eye on. One in which the collective is no longer a part of, accelerated without traction. Memory without recall.

NOVEMBER 2022 - THE ROOF

From a young age I had been fascinated by the range of effects the design of a building or a streetscape could exert on my feelings and memory. I had pondered quite often the conversations, emotions, experiences and lifetimes that had existed in the public non-places of the everyday, though more specifically behind the private walls and openings of our homes.

This effect pushed me to explore our spaces at different scales, most notably through rooftopping and seeking vision from above the ground, and closer to heaven.

Over the eight years of trekking roofs non-concurrently and separate from my architecture studies and the atmospheres roof topping provided, I developed an interest in voyeurism, much less into people watching, more specifically into the sonder[3] of others lives and spaces, both in public and private. This was something I explored externally yet diametrically in my research, hoping this was just the beginning of something new. Not far from now this would pause, grow and shift in all directions thereafter.

Pursing this, I purchased a drone in attempt to learn from however it left me empty. Although providing some accessibility and perspective, it lacked what was fundamental, less the technology rather the experience. The drone continued to leave me behind on the ground; it was experiencing all

that I did not, detached from the experience. A camera in air and controller in hand, never a part of anything. Seeing, not experiencing, seeing through a screen, no memory to the experience. Still leaving me trapped. Within months of use of crashing my drone and feeling unfulfilled, it only seemed right to return to the roofs where things started, to climb, to capture and hold a conversation with the buildings again.

To take hold of my camera and retreat once more to the real world. While I still can.

I went out alone, one cold night in late November, to reach a roof, now a couple of months after my progression had been addressed and diagnosed. My first winter climb since February of 2017, a time I was caught and arrested, when I put this to rest, an end to my first timeline of rooftopping, until the second when lockdowns intervened in the Summer of 2020.

Seeking simplicity, I chose to hit a roof I had previously climbed before, familiar with the conditions although aware of access not being guaranteed. One week a roof might be possible, the next sealed off with cameras, sensors, door plates and more.

It had been about a month since my last visit to the city, since my previous appointment at the hospital. Each time I arrived, I felt less and less welcome. I no longer shared any relation – I was not a user, worker, nor subscriber, but an urban explorer. I did not want to be here as much as I felt the city did not want me either. A space that felt less real each time and more frustrating to bring myself towards. Like a playground I can no longer play in, that I do not enjoy, one that grows in size and scale, one that is cold and hollow, one the child does not recognize. A space that decays in contrast to its expansion, and a body that follows its own decline. I was unable to find parking inside or adjacent to the server, instead parked underground up the street in another server a few minutes from my destination. While not far, my body and legs made the distance feel much longer amidst the cold.

Before I knew it, I was in the server, beyond the stairwell and within the mechanical area corridors, forgetting which way to go and which stairwell I had used in the past. I did not want to find myself at the upper roof this time, rather the lower. Instead of a hatch, I opened one of several metal doors, and walked towards a glass door that I met with my reflection. I gazed out onto the obscured exterior, visible only as a landing of snow a few feet ahead. Opening the unlocked door, I was introduced with an initial resistance of wind and negative pressure to the outside. I stepped over the curb, meeting a fresh crunching of snow beneath my feet, snow deeper than the height of my shoes, grazing my exposed ankles. Looking straight at the city, my eyes adjusted momentarily to the view, contrasting to the blinding lights of the mechanical corridor which matched the stark bleach snow below me.

I threw my bag down and began to setup, removing my gloves for a better feel, looking around the small area as to where I would shoot first. The relentless wind made standing not an option, instead choosing to setup closer to the ground to minimize my surface area and stabilize my balance. As I squatted down I had difficulty to get back up, with nothing to hold onto to push off of except for my camera or the almost nonexistent parapet in front that I chose to keep a couple feet away from. I transitioned into a kneeling position only to make contact with the cold ground covered in snow. I stood back up and instead kept a somewhat upright stance, bending over with my tripod only about two feet extended. The preferable setup would haven been a proper squat, a full laying down or a complete standing up, none of which I attempted, all of which were undesirable because of my condition, the snow and the wind.

The experience was not as I had imagined, somewhat undesirable. As my body tightened and became slower with the cold, I chose to move back inside, having not yet taken a photo. Moving the tripod and camera away from the edge towards the inner wall of the roof adjacent to the glass door to cut down the directions in which it would meet the wind

and possibly fall, placing my bag in front for extra bracing and support. Setting up only to retreat. Throughout the duration of my time here, I'd alternate between inside and outside, losing count only remembering the sight of my reflection from the glass where I paced up and down the hall in contemplation which set of buildings and direction I would capture next.

Back outside, peering through my viewfinder once more, I felt propelled forward. Looking directly into the spaces and lives of others. Space that is not mine, rather how people made it their own. A curiosity realized, life on display. Having already captured the city, this is what it was really made up of, what kept it alive. This appeared as the only way I could learn, see, glance, capture and reach the other. A connection otherwise alienated in the real or disconnected online in the non-real. A true display, albeit at a distance, yet one that was measurable. This interest became seeing the city less at a wider lens and more at the human scale, a scale lost in this complex network and invisible online.

Both the wind and my off balance made it extremely difficult to compose a clear exposure. Holding the legs of the tripod, even then the slightest shake was captured in the photo. Instead of capturing through a memory card I captured what I could from my own memory.

Standing up from my lackluster position I lost touch with, what today might call for a hand or a rolling onto my back and then onto all fours, a moving as far away from the edge as possible, I repeated this same gesture once more, alternating in focal lengths in the opposite direction looking west at the units closest to me.

Sonder realized.


AVENUE



episodes

November 20, 2022
11:23pm


PUSH

26. Thresholds. 2022

My view this night between thresholds, before stepping back outside for a better view.

Although the world was now widely available, despite what I saw as declining and increasingly "experienced" inauthentically, I continued to feel trapped. Trapped from the real, from the other, from former states of the self.

Everything felt fleeting, time and body, all the things I could no longer do the same. The child still wanting to play. A need to escape and be free at least once more.

To experience as much of life as possible before it's too late, seeing I likely won't be able to do so. To spare from further loss. I didn't want to regret all the things, all the more I had already lost out on.

The same way of being free I had exhausted two years prior during lockdowns, yet slightly different now. Before as a means to liberate myself within the confines of an external world that remained unfree. Now serving as a way to be free despite my own decline, a decline mirroring that of the external, yet my own. To get as far away from a life of paralysation, one that only pulls me closer.

Little did I know the speed at which decline would take place and the severity at which it would progress would remain unknown. No idea how extreme, fast or slow it will be, how much time do I have left, just a few months prior largely okay. In this state of knowing and not knowing, a state only felt and experienced by the self am I compelled to do more with less.

An answering of what can I and should I still do.

To enjoy the decline.

To save myself.

A calling to the body.
"Can you still hear me."

Static.

“Yes, I am still here.”

A child left, lost and abandoned, sitting on the ride alone.

27. Alone. ca. 199x

Ruminating is getting hard for me, trying to keep the child happy with all that's left, before living life on my own and leaving him alone. A happiness I share, without his joy, my own eludes me. A last step, as our last moment together.



NECESSARY LOSSES

Throughout our lives, we, including myself, establish structures, make key choices, set goals, and nurture dreams we hope to fulfill. During periods of stability, these frameworks provide guidance. Through loss and periods of transition, these structures are challenged, sometimes terminated, and rewritten. This process involves mourning the loss of our former selves, a parting from who we were.

We come to realize the reality of these necessary losses, experiencing a series of metaphorical deaths[4]. Aging, while inevitable and somewhat controllable in terms of its physical effects, progresses at its own pace. Illness, on the other hand, follows its own rhythm, independent of age, adding an extra burden and accelerating decline. Spending more time, exiting my car, getting out of a chair, walking, using the washroom, putting my socks on, taking them off, getting up or getting ready to go to bed. A getting used to a new age each day.

At some point, we often find ourselves adapting to our parents' growing dependencies. Regardless of whether we have children, we seem destined to become our parents' caregivers. In my own case, with a widowed mother, no siblings, and my condition, I find myself aging faster than her, concerned about the independence she will lose and the responsibilities that will transfer to me, despite my own difficulties with mobility and fundamental tasks. How will I take care of her under the possibility I may not be able to take care of myself. A nightmare that she will outlive me, alone.

The fear of an early death before old age, the inability to take care of oneself, let alone others, is a daunting prospect.

The child within us, the one who learned to walk, run, jump, and play, remains with us until death. These abilities, learned in childhood, are expected to last a lifetime. Yet, when one loses these abilities brought upon and exercised as a free child, the child dies. The child shares disability. The environment changes from one of activity and play to one of stillness and dependency. One battles with keeping the child alive.

As we age and move closer to death, there's a retreat back to stages of infancy, necessitating care from others. This cycle – from baby to child to adult, then back from adult to child and eventually to baby – highlights the gradual loss of our childlike capabilities, whether due to societal pressures or disability. In the end, we revert to a state of dependency, mirroring the early stages of life, underscoring the concept of necessary losses in our journey towards death.

28. Mother and I. ca. 199x

It's difficult to consider the possibility I will be unable to take care of you when you get older and do all the things you did for me; where it's becoming harder to take care of myself and more important for me to help you. You gave me everything. I'm sorry.



2.3

MEANING THROUGH SUFFERING

I noticed people tend to live their lives acting as if they'll have a second chance.. on cruise control till it's too late and everything crashes to an end
Wasting away their health and most of the hours they are alive
Crabs in a bucket, a herd mentality pulling you down..
Programmed from the start
Cogs in a machine..
Uncontrolled of their time and attention
Living an online and meaningless existence
This ride is all going to end way before you know it.

This unending frustration, unbridled thoughts, consumed the best of me
Unplugging from the matrix
Yet my health brought new challenges to the equation
Realizations
Working towards freeing myself from the anxiety of death
and a shift in priorities and where I find meaning
in a free mind
in faith
in family
in freedom

Transcending through life towards death
Rooftopping to alter my state of consciousness
A reminder of death and being
An escape that is fleeting
As my health declines, so does my reach towards my ascension
The rooftop as a chase to trace the edge of life and death
To remember what it means to be human
The climb of life and the edge of death
At this moment my climb interrupted
My way of being human
Cut short, collapsing, trembling

An unsteady balance
Destined to die
The stairs come to an end
This time the roof closer than I imagined

WINTER 2023

Both my writing and everything I started to do now filtered through this new existential lens. Everything became more about my life and how I saw myself as I was going through it. A new road map, a timeline, a rough idea of progression, if or when this would all come to an end. A car I was at once in full one to one control of, now a keeping up, a sort of maintenance as you will, to go as far as I can without crashing. To see the world, to do everything that I can, while I can before its "too late". A book needing to be written perhaps only to be read back, by who, all faster than I had originally planned. A VHS tape recorded for all the years, a new one inserted in place and played at two times speed.

What began as nothing evolved into a collapse on the outside, which then transformed into a collapse on the inside.

A what is this. A what is going on. A series of questions. A confirmed diagnosis. A what does progression look like doctor? A conversation without an answer. A how many years I ask myself.

A shift in mindset and being.

Sometimes I think I have felt everything I'm ever going to feel, and from here on out, I'm not going to feel anything new. Just lesser versions of what I've already felt. All the things I loved, that I used to enjoy, that I still enjoy however can no longer participate in, things that were a part of me, increasingly estranged, distanced, left under the bed, on the wall,

in the garage, sold. An activity from a previous season waiting to share a moment with, no more. Things now as simple as going to the gym or going for a stroll, both of which are only increasingly more important as they become more difficult. A frustration to perform otherwise seamless yet important tasks, no longer accessible. Things no longer feeling the same as they used to, yet, "if I don't use it, I'll lose it", a maintenance if you will, a holding onto what I have left, a fight against increasing tightness, weakness, spasticity and wasting. A body I had lost at once then once more. A pushing a boulder up a hill only for it to fall back down. An enjoying of the decline.

How did it get this way I asked, finding myself in the same state of frustration years past, only worse. A nightmare now reality, certain I am no longer dreaming. Everything I had initially feared is now all that I am in. Trapped and inescapable. An existence for years where the body was ready and waiting, yet a system that was not. A system undergoing a total reset I sensed and would inevitably share. A "new" world foreign, completely different from the old, a new world and a new body. A way of living removed in both the center and the periphery. All the children now back home. Myself, alone, left waiting for my ride, unable to physically walk back, yet to find a home that is no longer there.

For all the ways I tried to free myself, free the child, and spare my future was I faced with a system that kept me trapped and now a body that followed. A lockdown in limbo. A premonition felt from afar, an impending decline. A condition that contrasts an already declining society, the self struggling to break free from, yet others which do not. Blind ignorance and an acceptance for what is told without question. All the potential for action yet inaction. Fighting for my own life and one of meaning along that of the other uninterested to fight for anything, living within a state of meaninglessness, although free bodily, trapped inside a machine.[1] No fight to be free, to be real, to be remembered, to be there, meanwhile a condition that tries to do the same. A double disappearance.

Two declines racing one another. A system and a condition that challenge both the body and mind.

Years of constant disappointment and frustration on the outside built up a response to self improve, think more critically, unplug, question the narrative and what it is I truly wanted out of life. A sort of audition. To learn to lean into the fear, seek the truth, control my emotions and master my mind providing a foundation of clarity for my condition. This then provided a clarity back towards the world. This clarity highlights, despite everything, a fundamental truth remains: "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: this is the last of human freedoms—the ability to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."[2]

Beyond the pervasive meaninglessness and the challenge of finding meaning externally, it's through this understanding that I am prompted to find meaning in my own sufferings.

Through these declines, what is taken away instills a fear, a reality of being trapped. Of being forever on the ground, beneath the surface, confined within the machine,[3] stuck and immobile, akin to dying without purpose – a slave. This pushes me further in the opposite direction. To go vertical. To not get the most extension of life, instead the greatest depth. The same sense of meaninglessness I felt across lockdowns I now shared today twofold. I felt a profound need for verticality in my existence and my experiences. To escape and be present in the real world—a world that seems to be disappearing. If the initial lockdowns hadn't reset everything and stripped away meaning, and had my condition not manifested, perhaps I would have remained still, compliant, withering away like an NPC,[4] devoid of authenticity, purpose, and self-awareness.

This inability to live authentically[5], to fulfill my dreams, first imposed within lockdowns. A letting the child down, now witnessing my own body collapse under the weight of its own existence. To not let the child down again, to truly do everything that I can, while I can. To keep my body and

mind occupied and in my own control. A bucket list that becomes clear, realized. Among everything I had listed, one called to me the most that I otherwise would have not looked towards.

That was the roof.

There were many things I had already lost, however the roof represented an act entirely my own – real and authentic. It was something familiar, a pursuit I embraced across various timelines; timelines that I shared with the child and former parts of the self. The roof symbolized this final doorway, although closing, a means to test my limitations. For whatever it is I had left to bring myself up, once this ability is gone, what abilities would I have left below. The roof as a benchmark for my physical capabilities. To still be able to be in the real world. The inability to rooftop would signify not just a physical end yet also an end towards meaning, a last step almost, another death before death.

Beyond all the things I can no longer do or participate in outside of the machine, this was one of the last. I could not change the cards I was dealt, only how I played the hand. A sudden urgency to hurry up despite a contradicting physical slowness, an opposite acceleration towards disability and a world that keeps on moving. A rush to immerse myself in what remains of the real world, a world intimately shared with my past, a world that, one day will cease to exist.

Now, I had no one to explore with, nor did I expect anyone to join me as my reasons were deeply personal. To attempt this alone, an unknowing of what was possible, of the risk of arrest paired to my physical limitations made it feel like a last resort.

In the early hours of one morning, around 1am, I paused my school activities, feeling a roadblock through reflection. I scrolled through my mutual "followers" and for whatever reason messaged one individual who went by the name of Walters. Surprisingly, he responded immediately, showing a genuine and real enthusiasm for collaborating. I hadn't expected

a reply, especially not so quickly. We spent nearly an hour messaging, openly sharing our experiences. I began with mine, noting that I had started to explore in 2014, a few years before he did, learning at this time that he was about nine years younger than me. It put into perspective how early he started to exploring, calculating he was probably only thirteen at the time and today holds a much larger extent of experience albeit within a shorter timeframe and with greater consistency. I on the other hand had laid exploring to rest after my arrest, then once more years later in and out of lockdowns.

I initially answered all his questions to the best of my knowledge and recollection. Before we knew it, we were messaging back and forth on autopilot. It felt as if we had met before given how we discussed the city and roofs as we knew it, finding common ground in several experiences. We shared names and photos of some of our favourite roofs, other explorers we knew, recognizing familiar names as well as our first climbs and a couple places where we had been caught. Some of the roofs I mentioned he confirmed were closed now as I had expected, roofs I was able to take hold of and he was not. Curious, I inquired about a few others, some of which we referred to by different names, learning that a few were still accessible, albeit not as easily as before. He even shared some of his unposted work from prestigious spots I had never attempted.

This felt like the first real dialogue I had in a long time, even if it was virtual. I hadn't talked about roofs or urban exploring to this extent in years. I opened up about my personal reasons and motivations today and the possibility we could meet up. His passion was evident, and he was more than willing to go out shooting, which was most important to me.

Two weeks later..

Driving downtown on a cold winter Saturday night, I had no specific plan for where we would shoot, just a trust in the process. We had messaged the previous night to confirm our meet-up and discuss potential

spots, enjoying another conversation. I had proposed a few roofs, although nothing was finalized. As I packed my bag and headed out, I vaguely remember what I told my mom. She wasn't a fan of this activity, but she knew its importance to me and understood my urge to pursue this possibility while I still could. My condition worried her, especially since I was going out alone, a different scenario from years ago when I started or even during lockdowns when I mostly climbed with Myles or another close friend.

The closer I got to the city, or what I was starting to grasp as the server[6], I reminded myself of my placement within the common and worsening density of traffic, myself edging closer not for any means of consumption rather to create and explore. I sent him a message of my estimated time of arrival as I approached on the Gardiner; he replied that they were on the subway at Yonge and King.

Today, the thought of the subway, and almost the entire city, evokes discomfort in me. Currently, the difficulty in walking shapes my experience. It's not that I avoid walking or being there; rather how distance is perceived and becomes a hardening challenge alongside my appearance on display in the open. Something wrong both inside and outside. This increased difficulty to find myself places, to navigate before reaching the surface, going up and down stairs, sudden needs to use the restroom, tasks I previously took for granted which now seem foreign to me. Foreign in both memory and accessibility, the common running I used to take when rushing somewhere, to catch the train, the subway, moving in and out without the use of my hands, a fully working body, all that I touched was the ground with my feet, what now would be a use of my hands and a need to keep balanced. Moving now at a fraction of the speed and exhausting triple the time. Living with or moving towards disability inevitably changes how one perceives the world and their place in it. Yet the roof, although fleeting, provides a private realm no longer available within the confines of the server.

I suggested we avoid meeting at Union due to the unnecessary

complications of finding each other and a place to park, instead proposing we meet just northeast on Lombard street. On my way, the influx of traffic and noise had me calculating where I could park and remain unseen with a mental countdown of how much time I had left. Time left until I could no longer hold my bladder. I stopped on a side street and shuffled to a park on the other side, secluding behind a vacant tree along a church ground where I could discreetly relieve this sudden urgency. Looking back, I'm grateful for the ability I still had to hold, although decreasing to what I can longer today, bladder issues that become increasingly problematic, albeit still thankful for the ability to walk.

Parked on Lombard between Victoria and Church I sent another message to Walters describing the vehicle I was in. "Bet, on the way," he replied. I had no idea what he looked like, nor what to expect, but that wasn't important. He had mentioned earlier that two of his friends would be joining us. Four people is usually the maximum I prefer for exploring; three is a nice number, and two is more intimate, feeling personal but less comfortable regarding the likelihood of getting caught. Guards can be more lenient with slightly larger groups, though not too many, and with police, numbers made no difference. Exploring alone is the least favourable option.

While waiting, I pondered whether to elaborate on my condition. I had already mentioned it to Walters a couple of weeks ago through messaging, so it didn't seem immediately necessary, but I thought it might be good for them to know, especially considering the building we might climb and for my own safety. Just then, Walters messaged, "You beside the yellow parking sign?" Glancing around from my car, I didn't see any yellow sign nearby, however across the street, about 50 feet away, I spotted a group of three guys. They were walking in my direction, although it was not until I opened my car door and made my face visible that they recognized the signal to approach my otherwise solitary car on the nearly empty street. As I stepped out, the tightness in my legs, coupled with the cold winter air, made me hesitant to move, now standing by my car with the door open,

not gesturing until they were closer. The tallest among them approached me first, his two friends trailing. “Yoo, I’m Walters, nice to meet you, man,” he greeted, shaking my hand. After Walters introduced himself, his friends Solomon and Pavlo followed suit, exchanging a few words before all finding ourselves in my car.

Although our only interactions were done virtually, there was so much shared in context that the introduction happened seamlessly. I continued my introduction briefly, more on who I was, sharing to his friends what might have already been relayed. A sharing of my background, my motivations today, where I was from, where I went to school and more. Pavlo shared that he too was studying architecture. After discussing potential spots to explore, I briefly touched upon my condition, explaining its implications and my reasons for challenging it through this experience. This was about seeking meaning through loss and seizing these moments before it was too late. I was cautious not to overwhelm them or come off as a burden, especially considering the age difference.

Walters and I discussed potential spots we had mentioned the day prior. Solomon and Pavlo themselves providing their own suggestions. I was keen on finding something new, although nothing specific, a roof that would allow for close-ups, high enough and, crucially, accessible to me. We aimed for a spot that would be agreeable to all, with Walters taking the lead in the conversation. He outlined the challenges of each location: one roof had cameras, another required tools but seemed doable, and a third he wanted to reserve revisiting for sunset. Then there was one with lots of stairs and a climb up the building’s side. Walters asked if I was okay with this, “explain more” I said, prompting me to request more details as I visualized the setup. How high or rather how far down was the potential drop and were there any other ways to reach the roof. Walters responded to all and in a very detailed manner, furthermore exposing an extensive archive of notes on his phone of dozens of roofs within the city.

Considering the cold and the recent aftermath of an ice storm, I wasn’t keen on a challenging climb this night. I suggested a few roofs

I had previously explored – Selby, via Bloor 2, 88 Scott – which were familiar to the group. Pavlo and Solomon seemed open to 88 Scott, but Walters preferred something different, which I too agreed with. Twenty minutes passed in the car and we had still not yet decided. One of the guys suggested a roof, Walters noting that it was fobbed[7] although seemed open to the idea. "Lets just do it," I said, wanting to get out as time fled with no progress. As we kept discussing the condition of the roof, I drove towards Queens Quay, parking in a familiar garage I hadn't used for years. This garage, now pending removal to make way for yet another server[8], seemed an inevitable sign of the times. Unsurprising, really.

Before we exited the garage, I asked how far of a walk we would expect. Not that it would make any difference, however a distance the body seeked to minimize as much as possible. A distance for most, along with my former self would not question. A distance now in second thoughts, a burden. This wish that I could go back, a reminder on how much worse this could get, somewhat knowing before knowing, how fast, and how long inversely until left with disability. Locked. Again, I wish I could go back, shaking my head by all the time I had lost, time lost prior and now time lost in the future. Permanent. Understanding that from this point forward, new acquaintances will only know this version of me, while those from my past will remember who I used to be. Those who still know me are constantly updating their versions of who I am. I wish that in this given scenario and in the future that everyone could know me before all these bad things started happening to me.

Outside the server, both the name and appearance sounded familiar. 16 Harbour. Part of me felt I had been here before in this exact moment, unsure why however it didn't click earlier. Walters guided us through the details, specifying which doors to enter, which connections to make, and which elevators we needed to use. Soon enough, we found ourselves in an elevator, sharing a ride with someone else. We could only get about halfway to the desired height from the top, meaning we needed to climb the rest of the way. I trailed behind the group, the only one using both

handrails to help myself up, easing the strain on my feet and back. I had to maintain a delicate balance – leaning forward just enough to not fall onto all fours, but not so far back as to lose my balance, and not too close to one side. Already, I realized that I wasn't enjoying this in the way I used to. This experience was different from my memories, but it was about more than just reliving the past. It was about being free.

Walters paused at what appeared a level below the top of the stairs, directing that we stopped and avoid turning the corner up any further. To what above was the upper roof, not accessible as it was under surveillance. Beyond this threshold and through this lower level we made our ways to a dark yet transparent door which opened onto the roof. We stepped out onto a small landing covered in large gravel, enclosed by a glass guardrail with a few steps leading down and another set of steps up towards a balcony which wrapped around the penthouse pool, dark and empty at the time. The steps below led to the lower roof with mechanical equipment, large ducts and fans of which required ducking under and walking around to meet the roof edge. There did not appear to be access to anywhere else, although looking up, from behind, we could see the higher roof, at least fourteen feet above us.

I went ahead and took a few steps down towards what I understood as the only area to capture from. Solomon followed me from behind. Walters and Pavlo climbed over the glass guardrail onto the balcony platform where there was a freestanding ladder on the ground I noticed just before. I never considered anything of it, maybe as an outcome to my circumstances though watched as Walters picked up the eight foot ladder and positioned it to the side of the glass wall. Thinking "no way they are climbing this" was interrupted by Walters beginning his ascent. I had always been wary of freestanding ladders, especially one setup unsupported hundreds of feet in the sky. The physical logistics didn't add up for me, however benefitted with his height he managed to hoist himself up along using his upper body strength and legs pushing off the glass. Pavlo followed. Had times changed, maybe, though I couldn't recall ever attempting something the same, albeit

in the past doing things I would now second guess or be unable to perform safely even with the assistance of others. Perhaps a result of my changed views and condition. Watching them navigate the ladder and overcome the physical challenges, I reflected on how my own capabilities and choices had evolved.

Solomon who had accompanied me was too watching Walters and Pavlo. After they both were up, Walters called out to us, asking if we were coming. Solomon had already begun to walk over, yet I stayed put. I wasn't concerned about what they might think; the reality was, I didn't even trust myself in such a situation, let alone people I had just met. It was a new realization for me that a part of the roof exploration, once possible, was now out of my reach. The conditions were cold and damp, with shards of ice glazing every surface of the roof. This only added to the sketchiness of attempting to join them. Maybe it was for the best; under warmer conditions, I might have considered it, but the risks outweighed the potential thrill. I knew I would be too anxious about the descent to enjoy the view or the experience. A consideration likely the others would not have to follow.

Solomon, the shortest among us was halfway up the ladder, with Walters providing instruction that best fit his positioning. I watched as he manoeuvred with no support on either side, relying solely on his grip of the cold and wet metallic surfaces. Solomon had one foot on the top step and another on the top cap, still too short to reach the grasp of Walters and Pavlo. Synchronizing, he took a final step, eyes aligned with the wall face, his arms over the parapet, legs off the ladder dangling in the air. Fighting against his weight and gravity, Walters pulled his body up and over, Solomon's legs moving onto a surface never intended to be climbed. Defiance.

"You sure you're not coming up?" Walters shouted. "No I'm good, have fun," I responded. Beyond the ladder and the weather, what if it fell over when climbing. If I were to join, if I were to miss a step, if clonus

were to trigger itself, all the things I was no longer in control of, new barriers. If I was in between and unable to lift my legs up and over, I'd likely need assistance from below or require the others to physically pull me up from above collectively. Beyond that, it was the descent that worried me, how would I propel back down, catch my foot, and catch the landing; an accuracy and strength below the waist no longer as reliable as they used to be. Would someone wait below while two others stayed above to hoist me down? I didn't want to be a burden or an extra load, especially to three people I had only just met. And then, what would happen if I did fall. This was not about overcoming a physical barrier, rather about weighing the risks against my current abilities and the impact on myself and those around me.

Although I may have felt jealous, a need to take full advantage of the opportunity had this been years ago, here I felt nothing. That time was no more. I moved alongside the roof, now on my own, able to perform openly in private. The coldness in my legs, a very slight fatigue, an imbalance having me stay center slightly farther away from the edge, although without fear. As I neared closer, I paused every few steps, taking deep breaths, inhaling the cold air into my lungs and exhaling it back out, seeing my breath flow into nothingness and into the view beyond me.

I threw my bag down onto the icy gravel floor, pulling my camera out and switching to my long lens. What now felt default. What before I never had and instantly would prioritize shooting wide, to capture as much of the view as possible. This wealth of information however created a poverty of attention. A different way and means of shooting and experiencing. I threw my lens cap in my bag, leaving it unzipped, yet the rear lid closed. Partial paranoia that it would fly open, though likely not. I started in one corner and moved angles, shifting by a couple feet, though most of my time remaining in one area.

Tucking myself into the most northeast corner of the roof and finding what position was best suited, I alternated between my sides, both my knees, one knee then the other. Sometimes the pressure difference between

the gravel and weight of my body pressing down making contact would cause my legs to spasm. Consider a leg that spasms in a corner, pressed up to a wall on one side, the ground and your body on the other. A sudden explosion within the bodily container with no room to move. As needed, I'd swing my camera around onto the ground or leave it exposed in the wind on the parapet edge to reset and reposition myself. I tried to not lose the angle and need to recompose, only to have to restart anyways.

Looking around, I was mesmerized. What I hated below I found somewhat beautiful above. Uncertain what to capture and with a slight discomfort in my body. A being at 90 percent capacity or sometimes less – a battery that can no longer be fully charged. Reduced capacity. Nonetheless, I tried to keep my mind occupied, being here somewhat helped, although the thought still manifested through feel.

Leaning into and over the edge, trying to avoid catching onto the sharp exposed lip of the parapet or anything on the ground that camouflaged into the gravel, my body and camera slid on the thin sheet of ice, unable to maintain a steady focus. In the absence of a tripod left at home, I was compelled to shoot freehand relying on steady hands and a parapet that proved useful. I hugged the camera as tightly as possible against the parapet and extended past the edge of the roof, pulling in towards me, the contact often scratching the camera body and lens, however the only way to minimize shutter movement. A do-it-yourself tripod almost. Looking west, I glanced at a row of servers flanking both sides of the Gardiner, from a distance what presented as machine parts without any space and separation. The road network and the cars in motion contrasted the solidarity of the servers and each and every unit that lit up online, finer movements in the distance. Most of these servers which were not present from recollection last time I was in the air. Uploads the mind did not have saved.

I started by shooting fully open, finding my orientation, composing, then magnifying the view through the lens and my eye through the viewfinder.

From 70 to 200mm looking as far as the eye can see, then adjusting in between. A view possible nowhere else, unique to this location, for now at least. Perhaps one day not far from now everything will be computer generated and commodified, such views presented as "accessible" through simulation. Through this lens however, I could see both distant horizons and details in closer proximity. Able to observe the countless lives below on the grounds of the server, though more importantly bodies sheltered in the shells of their servers on display. Singular views of lives. In and out. When shooting long, you're capturing the smallest fragment of a scene, a millisecond of time. When shooting wide, detail becomes indistinguishable, there are no details. Shooting wide captures the expansiveness the eye already naturally sees. Although a valid perspective worth saving, there is hardly anything to remember unless a capturing of the self. Opting to shoot wide distances you further away from the world. Through seeing everything you almost see nothing.

Zooming out slightly, then slightly more, panning around, taking in the sight of the machines, a "building" you might refer to them as, stacked, layered, standing shoulder to shoulder. Adjusting my focal length to reposition from a server in the way, then zooming back in. Hundreds of thousands of lives on display, a full 180-degree view, unobstructed aside from obstructions of more machines. I switched angles about three or four times, adjusting depth of field and balancing compression between the foreground, subject and background. Sometimes remaining focused on singular cells, individual units – most of which I did not capture, rather observed and studied, only to zoom back out again and capture a broader picture to put everything into context.

The closer I zoomed in, the longer I could watch each individual story happening, human episodes. A slowing down and stream of life I used to remember, diminished by the virtual. A full picture. Sometimes my lens not long enough to form a perfect crop from adjacent cells, yet a view that mirrored those to either side, those above and below. Zoomed in, I saw

the human aspects more clearly with less around. Silenced. The more I zoomed out and pulled away I saw an exchange, I saw more of the machine and everyone uniquely yet forcibly confined, trapped within it. Staged. Pulling out as far as the lens allowed, the scene simplified to just lights. Varying colours of each life from afar, erased and so distant nothing but the machines remained present, only the noise, the smells, and the sights that paired with it.

I removed my eyes from the viewfinder, my body off of the cold and hard roof edge, my hands, even wrapped in gloves, freezing cold. Unaware of the time, trying to balance my stay, uncertain how long the others needed. A single position I could have resided in for no time, infinitely, limited more by the body than anything else. It felt like there were never enough shots to take, it was not about capturing a single shot rather witnessing and observing each and every moment.

My experiences beneath the surface had reshaped my perspectives above, altering my focus and creative interests. To be able to see much closer, to study what is offered nowhere else, outside of the system, to speak without words, to have a conversation and see the real other inside of the physical manifestation of the servers in full operation and not via online, both of which however feel unreachable. Yet, I felt rewarded of this opportunity, what neared an hour and still not enough time. Knowing this was all coming to an end, this please don't go, I'm not ready to leave.

This seeing of other roofs I had visited before, ghosts. The top of servers I had once climbed years ago with friends I had last spoken to those nights. An old home you no longer live at, are no longer a part of, only in memory. Dreams and memories unable to align with reality. A landscape that continues to update on its own, independent. Other roofs in the distance, some higher, some lower, others completely obscured by the proliferation of new servers. Although rarely, if my view was obstructed from up here, I could only imagine those beneath my feet, those beneath the surface with no view or orientation. Confined within a digital map. Among these were roofs I had never touched yet longed to climb. ICE most notably, a server

I was drawn to, one I tried too late, a roof I favourited without any direct consumer relation. A memory never happened.

These monotonous machines glistening in the distance, both rotting, active, continuously uploading. Permanent manifestations directly beside one another. A landscape just like technology, controlled and optimized. Yet, through this lens – one I held and the other I experienced did I find myself witnessing more, prompting me to stop and reflect. Now pieces of understanding fitting together more coherently. I was deconstructing and reconstructing my perception, engaging in a process of making sense of the world around me. Sense making. The view from above offered not just a physical perspective but a metaphorical one, providing insights into the complex interplay between technology, urban landscapes, and personal experience.

All these feelings of depression, loneliness, exhaustion, this sense of nihilism, all this seemed to stem directly from our environment – an environment we inhabited in two dimensions, increasingly alienated from what is real. Estrangement leading to a reality away from what's real, one that is insignificant, one that is meaningless.

The constant noise that continues to growl. A machine that does not stop. This non-real, this server, in excess and imposed. An environment of absorption, a non-real landscape constructed by machine which everyone seems to "reside" within. A living beneath the surface in their cells and/or virtually in the cloud.

Existence which becomes meaningless in both the online and what is left of the offline. Nothing feels the same.

The same meaninglessness I felt and witnessed over the years, all that I embodied yet could not identity, all became clear at a societal level and shared with the environment. Mirrors of each other. Every mode of existence, every action, or inaction rather all contribute to the makeup of the server. They are one and the same.

The server was not just a technological entity, rather a metaphor for our current state of existence, one of which my questioning and desire to

explore help me unplug from. Being out of the matrix. All these structures seemed utterly meaningless, constructed to serve the needs of the server, not the human[9].

Everything seemed to fulfill a simulated existence, filling an existential void within a landscape dominated by servers. Always online, living inside our little machine worlds hosted by the server, both the given screen we look out of and the handheld screens we look into. Endless concrete, glass and steel, a cold world. Imitating our culture and history. None. A flat world of boxes within a zone of consumption, fundamentally changing all modes of being, our connection to each other and to the world. Versions and replications. The server absorbs all meaning, and with it, the human. With no moral compass, no drive, purpose or direction, man is left in a state of fallenness, "verfallen".[10] Unable to escape.

A shift in the why.

To challenge accessibility and my own ability is the utmost way of measuring meaning. To wakeup, understand the server and feel motivated to rise above it contrasts a way of being that is defined and imposed, a way of being more personally that transcends disability. It becomes a means straddling what I shouldn't do because the system restricts it and what I cannot do because the body does not allow it, then transcending both.

Below, a life absorbed, bound and addicted to by the digital. A life where nothing is experienced, merely uploaded as commodities, simulations; inauthentic and unremembered, a life that replicates its own form of disability, one that reflects and mimics my own.

Rooftopping rests as a way to break free from the system, the machine, the collective hive mind, both the city and the online world that is a server, then allowing me to finally be outside of it. It remains a path to freedom, but for how long. The social norms and inauthentic life below become less appealing as I seek to understand and interact with the world on my own terms, to embrace the finite and act not out of obligation, but desire – to

be authentically human.

To enjoy the ride before it all comes to an end.

Here, the child, the teenager and the adult are all watching with me.



29. Handheld. ca. 202x

I wish you met me before all these things started happening to me.

View I captured as a group of friends I met for the first time climbed atop a higher part of a roof that was not accessible from the inside, and for myself, not accessible from the outside.



30. Server city. ca. 202x



31. Server city. ca. 202x



32. Server city. ca. 202x

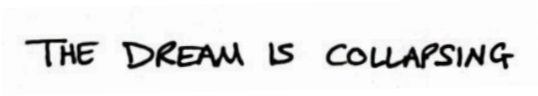

RGA

33. Server city. ca. 202x



34. Server city. ca. 202x

2.4



"A dream is a wish your heart makes
When you're fast asleep
In dreams you will lose your heartaches
Whatever you wish for, you keep
Have faith in your dreams and someday
Your rainbow will come smiling through
No matter how your heart is grieving
If you keep on believing
The dream that you wish will come true
Oh that clock
Old killjoy
I hear you, come on
Get up you say
Time to start another day
Even he orders me around
Well, there's one thing
They can't order me to stop dreaming
And perhaps, someday
The dreams that I wish will come true
No matter how your heart is grieving
If you keep on believing
The dream that you wish will come true"[1]

Words whispered to the baby's ears

SEPTEMBER 2023 – MRI

The MRI's onward of August 2022 were now ordered every six months instead of twelve. This reminded me of the role of the MRI and the reality of my condition. MRI's that would take place more frequent again to that when I was a child. Now with progression noted which MRI's may not even capture, let alone resolve anything about. What was on watch however was the tracing of white matter changes to that related to cerebral ALD, what appears now as higher risk as progression of AMN takes place.

As a child, I had no real thoughts about it, but now my perspective had changed. I no longer feared the machine in the same way I did before. Instead, I was concerned about what it revealed, what it captured. Just as I captured the world introspectively, the machine captured me – in a way that no one else does, capturing the real me, not the version I projected to the world. This introspection is akin to an MRI photo of myself. Another realization is that if something is found or captured, the realistic probability of being able to do anything about it is slim. This is why many people forgo the procedure altogether. Most don't want to worry about it.

Just a few months earlier, my neurologist mentioned that he saw no point in conducting spine MRI's anymore. Yet, I continued to push for them also knowing the rare chance of catching white matter changes beyond the brain and in the spine. He questioned why spine MRI's were performed after or even before my myelopathy was captured or diagnosed. According to him, MRI's do not necessarily capture this part of the condition, which is likely why my geneticist made no note of it for nearly a year. It was somewhat disheartening to hear him say, "There is no longer any reason to conduct these; the results are non-conclusive." He suggested that observing the physical manifestation of the condition was more accurate than viewing it through a screen, than seeing the inside of me. Seeing something not hidden but something I showed the world in the open, on the outside.

Like a cancer, one that is not captured only experienced, one that cannot be cured.

I only hope for a cure.

A miracle. One that only happens in my dreams.

The MRI originally scheduled for six months after the last one was, for some reason, forgotten. This oversight was only noted after I inquired, leading to its rescheduling nearly 18 months later in 2024. Such scheduling should be automatic. After I emphasized the importance of these scans and highlighted what should already be on file, the bureaucratic failure of the system became apparent. Consequently, the appointment was moved up twice, now set for September, which aligns more closely with the intended six-month window.

After leaving my home around 6:45am, I would spend the next hour and a half or more ensnared in traffic, suspended in a limbo of space and non-space, amidst a static flow of others, all of us like NPCs marching toward the machine. Surrounded by the constant hum of construction and the silent rush of wage slaves aiming to reach their destinations amidst the snail-paced movement, I encountered empty faces and a mass of men leading lives of quiet desperation.[2] A life I had too fell under for years, one I may have not questioned the same or considered had COVID and most importantly my health not paint a new picture for me.

This experience mirrors a wider urban dichotomy: On one hand, individuals commute for hours each day, not by choice but from economic necessity, unable to afford city living or preferring not too, only to be trapped in an endless loop of travel and toil daily between the city and the suburbs. One works their eight or nine hours a day, for some even more, then commutes pressed like a sardine on the highway or on a train for

another set of hours, either sitting in traffic or standing tirelessly in the morning and exhausted in the evening staring at their phone. On the other end, city dwellers, deeply entrenched within the urban 'machine,' find themselves equally ensnared, most of whom are content with the access to bread and circuses as distraction. They are fully integrated, financially tethered to a life they cannot forsake, working incessantly to maintain their place in the city. This cycle, where employment sustains urban existence and that very existence demands continued employment, captures both the commuters' and residents' shared predicament — each group bound within a system that limits their freedom and choices.

Here I was however, in this fish tank with the others. I felt an overwhelming sensation of entrapment, a consequence of a body that binds me, a being stuck in a matrix while all others around me seemed fast asleep. In a fish tank, where everything seems real and life is not too bad until you try and escape. When you start to question and try to surpass the boundaries and circumstances placed onto you, you bump into a glass wall. For those who do what they're "supposed" to do however, the walls never trouble them and they never know the walls are there. The same is felt through the mind and body. For those who never need to "use" it outside of what the server promises and provides, there is little need to consider a life otherwise. It's only when one starts to lose the mind and body separate from the server can these circumstances be understood more clearly. One starts to recognize these barriers and tries to imagine a life outside of them, only then finding the courage beyond the confines of the constructed reality.

Most, however, are unaware of how far removed from reality they truly are. Yet, here I was, free in mind, while others remained tethered to the machine by their daily routines, and my own body was bound to the hospital. A self and a collective both bound to their circumstances. Personally, this feeling of survival for little purpose, to remain an active participant in a server most call life.

I arrived outside the hospital a few minutes late, what I thought would be an incoming early was instead much later as I coded in the estimated distance into the machine. As expected, I struggled to find parking at that hour. Once again, I found myself heading towards and into the machine, alone. By myself, for how long. Fleeting independence. A walking up to the hospital, parking in a spot that felt like an empty node, a solitary space within the server.

Late, in what previously might have prompted a sprint or faster pace, was no longer feasible. What used to be a consistent speed for me to get to and from places has now turned into an intermittent motion, with signals not firing as they used to. My legs would pause, waiting for a signal, a command, seeming disconnected. My consciousness was aware but not in control, forcing each foot to move. Delays.

As soon as I exited the vehicle, the spasticity in my legs and the awkward pace of my walk were exacerbated by the urgent need to use the washroom, a situation that becomes more pronounced under such circumstances. This was a stark contrast to just a few months ago. It's generally easier to hold when I'm stationary, but the urgency usually triggers once I start moving. For the last few minutes, I had been needing to go, even considering at one point to find somewhere to pull over and relieve myself, despite being in the midst of morning rush hour traffic.

Outside my car, my gait was fully in the open. How bad does it look, how bad will it get, how soon, I asked myself. It was not until I reached the hospital entrance that I somewhat faded into a space that accommodated a condition like my own more openly, one that would not catch the same number of eyes as it would outside. Walking up the side street and entering through the emergency entrance, that which was nearest to me; here losing track the number of times I had entered here versus elsewhere. My visits had become so extensive over the last few years that they've turned into something I've gotten used to. This act of writing, of documenting, helps to solidify these moments, regardless of their overall significance.

Inside, triage, moving to and through, entering the first available

washroom, the only, on my right that I was familiar with and thankfully was unoccupied. The door opened directly onto the waiting area, just a few feet from the nearest seat. I stood waiting for the automatic door to close behind me so I could lock in, waiting awkwardly meanwhile almost leaking myself, unable to go until the door came to a close. A minute later, I was out, moving through a familiar corridor, through several double doors and spilling into the main building, the ceiling line low for a few seconds and opening up to the atrium.

The walk seemed longer than ever. I thought back, considering if I could have parked closer, only to remember my previous experiences with various entrances being closed during the pandemic, and some limited by time of day, or night rather. Even with a somewhat empty bladder, my gait was still present, marked by frustration. This was nearly the first time I experienced such extreme tightness and awkwardness in my movements in public – a swinging, stepping, off-balance motion with each footfall. Walking through the hallways, distances that never seemed significant before now felt monumental.

While only 500 meters from my car, it helped me realize how cumbersome one of humans most basic tasks and gifts was to now accomplish. I wished I could teleport, part of me despising the idea of walking, wishing I could get to where I needed to be and reduce the distance and time as much as possible. Contrasting exactly the diminishing of our being in today's accelerated society. The reduction of body and space and our transition into a disabled state amongst a server that tries to speed up.

As my body slowly moved, dragging like a bug with broken legs amongst a hive, I was deeply reflective. Thinking back to my last visit, this given distance, or any distance for that matter would not have been a question. I likely would not have provided a second thought. Quite the memory I wish I could go back to. A walk that would have taken 30 minutes without concern, or any distance from my recollection for that matter, with my mind likely consumed by any other single thought, never considering the ability to walk an issue, reduced to now minutes, now

every single step.. With each step I asked, “how much longer”. Strenuous, not painful, however difficult. Disconnected. A body struggling to play a song without sheet music, without an instrument, without memory.

If there was anything I wished I could have back right now, for good, it would be time. If I could just reclaim a few more months, another year, all the years I lost during the lockdowns before my body began to literally decay. A decaying at first without movement, forbidden externally, then another decaying, movement no longer permitted internally. I would take anything to reverse that.

A world once not permitted to be seen, to be experienced, now open for you, yet what still feels closed for me. Previously, it was a world only viewable through a screen. Now, it’s a world the system, the machine, “allows” you to see, but one I feel I can only observe through a screen, compelled by circumstances. It’s a world that you choose to see through a screen, a significant shift in perspective and experience.

My body and memory were documenting a new version of themselves, etching into the floor and ambience of the space. This signified a shift, a novel version of how I interact with the world, different from the past nine years since I turned eighteen, or even the entirety of my twenty-seven years. From this point forward, everything was altered.

Walking through the food court, past the atrium, cutting diagonally as I tried to reduce the distance between the elevators and myself as much as possible. Down the hallways, nearly everyone walking past me in all directions, doubling my speed, I felt I was in part motion, was I blocking anyone behind me or to my side, asking these questions while at the same time feeling increasingly fatigued, the need to pause before I could continue. My God it is accelerating.

Upon reaching the elevators, I paused. Other patients, nurses, doctors, and staff were everywhere. Here I remembered briefly all the timelines I found myself at the hospital in different roles. From when I was that child, to the worker, to the adult, all of these times still “normal”, to

now none of them. I longed for isolation, for seclusion, wishing I did not feel this way. Yet, I hated this reality. Up a few levels, reaching diagnostic imaging, for the first time I could see sunlight directly, spilling through the windows onto the waiting and reception area, a stark contrast to the usual darkness. A room that I understood as a cell within the hospital, never contextualized, total darkness on the outside, from the entrance all the way to inside the machine. A place without context, the same shared with the child's memories. Always here late at night or early in the morning alone; now a view looking south directly clear.

I checked in at the front counter, routine usually marked by my arrival alone, usually with no one else present. I'd often leave home and arrive back at home from the machine with no direct human sight of another outside of medical staff. I'd get to the hospital, empty, fill out a clipboard and page the technologist of my arrival. This time, sitting down in a waiting room with others. Within minutes my name would be called, I'd limp slightly following a nurse upon a forgettable introduction and quick set of questions through a set of double doors and into the preparation area. There, I changed my clothes and stored them in a locker. Standard procedure.

Sitting in a small room alongside the nurse, for administration of an IV. One of which I asked and requested for out of desperation. Having never asked in the past, always left up to the doctor, however not ordered the last few scans. The nurse went over a few more questions before administering the IV, leaving the contrast and dye for later during the scan. I tried to make up a conversation, always to switch my focus elsewhere anytime a needle was to be inserted. One of the questions was if I had a history of fainting, to which I responded no.

The conversation ended as did my time with her, a conversation with no more time left to be. Escorting me outside of the room and a "one moment, we're getting the room ready, the technologist will be with you shortly." Sitting in a lone chair in the hallway, positioned between the waiting area and the scanning room, I felt faint. I had experienced this

sensation only a few times before, the last instance being a distant memory, but it always occurred at home. Perhaps the only other time was during childhood, while having bloodwork done. Interestingly, this would happen again a couple of months later, in December, during another appointment where I was required to get lab work done while on an empty stomach.

I felt light, almost out of body, as if I might faint at any moment, at least that's what I believed. Somewhat embarrassed and already about fifteen minutes past my schedule, I certainly did not want this to happen but found myself questioning why it was occurring. As soon as I caught sight of the first staff member, I said, "I think I'm going to faint." Immediately, two of them rushed over, bringing me a cold compress and moving the chair away from the wall to help me lean back and tilt my head. Keeping my eyes closed, I tried to maintain consciousness while explaining the dizziness I was experiencing; a possible lack of skin tone might have been mentioned.

I couldn't recall much else that was said, feeling no better. Then, I was quickly placed onto a stretcher. All I remembered were the sounds of the wheels echoing down the hallway and one of the nurses assisting me onto the stretcher, or bed rather, lifting my legs to secure my position. I was then wheeled over, with my eyes remaining closed.

I was pulled into another room, still teetering on the edge of consciousness. Another cold compress was placed on my forehead, this one soaking wet, dripping down my face, neck, and onto my gown. My legs and head were slightly elevated and bent for comfort. The nurse asked if I wanted anything to drink. I requested some juice but was mindful of my intake, knowing that any consumption could trigger a bladder urgency which was the last thing I wanted during an MRI. This was a new realization for me; never before had I considered the frequency of patients needing to pause or interrupt their scans. I wondered if this was truly an option or if it would require resetting the procedure. I had too many thoughts swirling in my head.

I remembered trying to empty my bladder about a year prior before a scan and before being aware of this link to my condition. I tried to empty

it while standing, unable to do so willingly without an urgency. Even then, it wasn't as bad; I still had limited control and could likely hold more. Before my MRI, a standard protocol for me was to attempt to go anyway, not knowing that I would be unable to do so due to the incontinence and retention. Standing there, a technologist knocked on the door, asking if everything was okay after I had been there for about five minutes. He was likely sitting at the desk before the machine, waiting.

Nonetheless, there I was, slowly regaining consciousness. The nurses came into view as I opened my eyes fully, though my vision was still blurry, realizing that one of them had removed my glasses. In one hand, they handed me a cup of juice, and beside my other hand on the bed lay a chocolate granola bar, which I handed back to them. One reason was that I could not eat it. I should have brought it home for my mother, however there was no time to walk back to my locker. At this point however, my primary focus was to get the scans done. I had no way of telling the time, but it was likely around ten minutes or so since I had felt faint.

Apologizing repeatedly, I lost count of the number of times, feeling a sense of embarrassment. Sitting upright on the edge of the bed, I assured everyone that I was okay. The swarm of nurses that had surrounded me had by now dispersed, leaving only one with me in the room. Initially, I thought her voice was always close by, but she had actually been at least eight feet away across the room. As I started to sit up, she returned by my side helping me return back to the ground.

She accompanied me out of the room, through another, scanning her badge to open a set of doors. I was disoriented and lost track of our location, but we eventually returned to the original hallway and approached the MRI room. This was the last time I saw her, as I was then greeted by the MRI technologist, who I remembered as an older lady. I never grew accustomed to any of these people. One reason was the randomness of the encounters – across different hospitals, timelines, times of day, shifts, and the varying intervals between appointments, ranging from six months to a year. I had no recollection of seeing someone twice. The only consistent element in all

of this was what I was about to undergo: the MRI, a procedure where I felt looked at and exposed.

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As people are always on display in the virtual.

Here I felt on display in the real.

The introduction to the technologist was forgettable at best. She seemed slightly less content, perhaps assuming she had been waiting to start the scans. I couldn't recall if she made any remarks. To her, I was just another patient, like any other client coming in for their 60-minute photographs.

On the table, my shoes underneath, I became acutely aware of the coldness of the room and the humming contact of the machine – all parts of a familiar procedure. There seemed to be an unspoken assumption that this was my first time, as she followed standard protocol. She explained the procedure, instructing me to lie down, move up slightly, then a bit more, and to straighten up. She asked me to lift my legs, sliding a foam pillow underneath for support. When offered a light blanket, I responded with a yes instantly. She then passed me a set of earplugs. Two foam pads were placed on either side of my head, and a cage, the head coil, was slid down over my head, in line with my face. This cut off any remaining visuals of the technologist, who was already a blur to me.

In my open hands, she placed a squeeze bulb, and I instinctively moved my hands inwards, irrationally fearing that the cable might get stuck, even though it wouldn't. This bulb served as a panic alarm. In my other hand,

there was nothing, except for the IV in my arm protruding slightly. The bed then lifted and inserted itself into the machine. I closed my eyes, unable to hear the footsteps of the technologist or see her. The sound of the door closing was my only indication that I was alone in the room, with her on the other side.

There were two distinct sounds – my breathing, synchronizing with the hum of the machine.

And a voice in the speaker. A voice in my ears for me.

Reminding me that this was a brain and spine MRI. That in-between the contrast will be administered. That the scans will begin.

Nothing new.

However, most importantly

To stay still.

"The first one is going to be five minutes," the technologist said, a comment some would make sometimes. Sometimes never, other times once at the beginning and again when the scan was nearing its end. A reflection and relief to how fast it went by. A saying goodbye to the machine so soon. Until next time.

Within minutes, maybe even seconds of the first scan starting, I began to feel anxious. This might have been exacerbated by the fact that I was on an empty stomach and reflecting on my condition in a new way. On a timer that started about two years earlier, witnessing time fly by tangibly, only made worse by the years lost before, meaning fading into meaninglessness.

My thoughts lingered on my condition, particularly its progression.

Most notably, I thought about cerebral Adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD). Beyond Adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN) which marked a steady decline in quality of life, a journey towards disability and loss. Cerebral ALD felt like a death sentence, with no 'cure' or treatment plan. This thought made me contrast it with people's belief in a 'magic pill' – be it a vaccine or something else – that could solve all their problems or provide some kind of immortality, a way to delay death. This contrasted sharply with my own reality.

I pondered more about the condition. Each time, I asked myself how much time I had left. If cerebral ALD was detected, would I have six months to a year, or a little more? How quickly could my brain deteriorate, self-destruct, unravel in front of everyone? The six-month interval of the MRIs meant that cerebral activity could occur at any time after the scans or in the six months preceding them.

The trigger for cerebral ALD was unknown to me. What we do know is that ALD is caused by mutations in the ABCD1 gene, which prevent the body from breaking down very-long-chain fatty acids (VLCFAs). As a result, VLCFAs accumulate in the brain, nervous system, and adrenal glands. Onset of cALD typically happens in about five percent of ALD cases, or in my case AMN patients, again though this number is said to be likely underreported. The anxiety and panic I felt were also fueled by this worry – the dread of possibly finding brain lesions in the scans, something I prayed would never happen.

The feeling of claustrophobia, which I had not intensely experienced or feared since childhood and had seemingly overcome, now resurfaced unexpectedly. My body reacted almost in shock; there was a noticeable shaking, my head vibrating, or at least that's how it felt. If this was indeed happening, it was likely enough to cause disturbances and affect the clarity of the scans. I focused on deep breathing. My legs felt cold, yet my feet were slightly warm. This warmth was not due to external temperature but possibly a sensation induced by myelopathy. I continued breathing, trying to keep still without anything to aid in steadying myself further. The noise

from the machine filled the space around me.

In the past, time spent in the machine would fly by without a second thought, almost like a leisurely activity. But now, each second I spent inside felt prolonged, and I braced myself, still feeling as though my head and neck were moving, shaking from side to side. There was a pause. I was uncertain whether the technologist would comment on the perceived vibration, or if it was a sensation only I had imagined or felt.

The second image began, and quite often in such situations, I would lose consciousness, only to wake up when everything was done. This time, however, it was crucial that I stayed awake. Not because I might need to urgently call for a washroom break – though I pondered if I could or would even make it in time if the scan stopped – but more so because of the possibility that my leg might spasm in a state of unconsciousness. Such spasms tended to worsen at night due to reduced movement, especially when sleeping. I had never experienced leg spasms during an MRI before, a symptom that had only started this year and was getting progressively worse. These episodes were not only more frequent but also more violent. What had begun as rare occurrences had become an intermittent problem, then a persistent one. The spasms became more rapid and severe, with the sudden stiffening of muscles causing one of my legs at a time to kick out and jerk towards my body. This was something I had never dealt with in this setting before and hoped never to experience again. Nonetheless, it was now a possibility I had to consider.

Image three commenced, which I assumed was taking place about ten minutes in the machine, the second image having felt shorter than the first, or at least that was my perception. The technologist radioed in, reminding me to keep still. “Next one is four minutes,” she said. As soon as her voice cut off, the sounds of the machine drowned out all other thoughts. I found it difficult to focus, yet I was still fully capable of thinking. Thoughts overflowing. My eyes were wide open, and it felt like I could see all my insides. When I closed my eyes, it was as if I could see inside of me, which

made me need something else to focus on. I questioned whether the head vibrations I felt were even real. My attention oscillated between trying to focus, my breathing, and the machine. Time seemed to stretch on endlessly, and I was stressed about the impending results. What if something was detected? What would my next few years, or even less, look like? If nothing was caught now but appeared in the next scan six months later, how would that affect my plans? It felt like I was either planning my life backwards or moving forwards without clarity.

Eyes still closed. Adjusting my legs to what felt like they were falling off on the sides of the foam pillow. Though they were slightly bent and supported, they naturally fell to the side, tight or likely weak muscles unable to keep them in position. Reduced tone in my hip flexors likely. I kept wondering how much longer until this image was done. The anxiety added heaviness to my breathing and made each image feel never ending.

Seconds more.

Out of nowhere.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, my entire body shook repulsively for a split second, triggered by a spasm in one of my legs. I had not been trying to fall asleep, nor did I want to; I was fully awake. While such spasms were more common during sleep, the fact that I was motionless meant they could occur at any time. As my leg jerked, the movement rippled across my entire body, ending at my head, which was fixated and lodged inside the machine, along with half of my body. I wondered if this incident had caused any issues with the scan. It was likely noticeable. What would the technologist say? How would I explain it? I hoped the spasm had not disrupted the imaging process while knowing it did. A glitch in the exposure.

"Jordan, you need to remain still. We will do this again," the technologist's voice came through the speaker. I started to apologize,

but before I could finish my sentence, the machine started up once more. About a minute later, the same thing happened. The other leg involuntarily jerked.

The scanning ended.

"Please keep still. If you move, we'll have to keep redoing this," the technologist instructed, a note of urgency in her voice.

This time, I managed to respond in full. "Sorry, I don't mean to... didn't mean to... my leg jerks on its own, I can't control it," I explained, feeling a mix of frustration and helplessness. She surely had come across this before, I'm sure. Was I to let her know beforehand of something I did not expect? I was unsure which specific part of my condition was causing these involuntary movements. It was something new, yet another symptom to add to an already extensive array.

The technologist simply responded with an "Ok," acknowledging my situation.

As the next image commenced, so did the spasms, unsure what was triggering them. This one was not nearly as violent as the last. I imagined the technologist observing me through her tinted window in the dimly lit control room, watching me in full display while I was inside the machine. His legs kicking, flopping, like a fish out of water, odd looking I'm sure, and how old is he? Thoughts I imagined she considered amongst many more. Likely no context was provided to her before hand, nor would she care. This was a new and unexpected issue for me having never had this issue in the past when inside the machine.

A few minutes passed that seemed much longer. Then came the next image. After its completion, there was a silence lasting about 20 seconds, punctuated only by the humming of the machine. My head had stopped

shaking by then, but I gently wiggled my toes and slightly adjusted both my legs back to the center on the foam pillow, careful not to make any drastic movements in case the next image was about to start. An audible click of a latch and of the large wooden door opening was heard. Although I could see a faint image through the reflective mirror inside the coil cage around my head, the lack of visual clarity without my glasses relied solely on hearing to chime in.

"Okay, Jordan, we're going to administer the contrast now," said a nurse whom I could not make sight of. Now outside of the machine by a couple of feet, my head just past the entrance. "You're going to feel a slight cold sensation and might taste the saline," she continued, describing the familiar flush of the contrast injection. I almost wanted to repeat her words, having heard them before and almost able to predict them just as she completed the injection.

The technologist's voice then chimed in, indicating that there were at least two people in the room. "Jordan, I'm going to strap down your legs to the table to help avoid movement." There was no cause for concern or questions asked; she likely knew something was off. Although she may not have been aware that this wasn't my first time for a scan, it seemed clear to her that the spasms were unintentional and beyond my control. No explanations were shared, and I was unable to provide a clear reasoning myself, not fully understanding why this was happening. I simply said, "Sorry, I can't control it. I don't mean to..." I struggled to find the right words. "I have a condition," I added, trying to convey the complexity of my situation in the least amount of words.

As she strapped me in, I sensed that she might have initially thought I was causing the spasms deliberately, but I wasn't. Far from it. In her eyes, I was just another patient, one of thousands she has scanned. There was likely no history shared, and I wouldn't have known to inform her beforehand anyway. She centered my legs ensuring I was in a comfortable and more neutral position, the thin blanket now put aside. A total of two straps were fastened, straps that from their touch felt rarely used, almost

like they were here for decades. What I sensed as two large very wide belts harnessed around my lower legs, fastening reminiscent of a straight jacket below the waist. I felt a sense of embarrassment.

Was this going to be the norm from now on? What did my spasms indicate? Were they a sign of something more concerning? Did they correlate with brain or spinal activity, or both? What did that mean for my future? What else should I expect, and how much worse could it get? What would that even look like? Were these spasms indicative of demyelination or lesions? I still had no answers, only questions and thoughts revolving in my mind as she secured the straps.

"How's that? I don't want to make it too tight or restrictive, but enough to limit movement," she said, referring to the uncontrolled movements.

"That's good," I replied.

"We have a few more scans left for the brain and then the spine,"

I was slid back into the machine. The door that had been left open now closed, its sound so faint upon closing that I almost didn't notice it, or perhaps couldn't tell.

"This next one is six minutes," she announced.

"Mhmm," I gestured.

With both of my legs now securely locked in, I wondered what would happen if a spasm occurred. Would it still cause my whole body to react, or would the movement be limited due to the straps? Another ten minutes passed, then the spine scans began, the table pushed remotely further into the machine. Likely my legs and feet left visible, the rest of my body engulfed inside. Although my legs did not jump the same, they still did, a couple slight shakes in just my feet which translated only far up as my calf, nowhere above the knee. The scan as expected, eventually concluded, possibly one image was recaptured from earlier, however none other were mentioned. The spinal images took about twelve or fifteen minutes, adding up the time in my head. As much as I wanted out as soon as possible, always surprised by how fast it went, I hoped they captured everything necessary, ensuring that no detail in the images was missed. In total, the

scanning time was closer to an hour, yet it felt much longer from in and out.

Outside the machine, the door swung open. The technologist pulled the table out. A nurse on the other side began to remove my IV, applying a cotton ball and piece of hospital tape on top, asking me to hold and apply pressure. The nurse assisted the technologist in removing the head coil, hair net and ear plugs. The ability to hear in full was like being able to take a first breath of air after being submerged in water. The technologist removed the blanket, then straps, my legs falling back onto their sides unexpectedly. She lifted my legs up, removed the foam cushion underneath and gently brought my legs back to the table. I laid there for a few seconds unsure what else was to be done. Laying, exhausted, it all felt much longer. I lifted up, crunching my core and swinging my legs onto the side over the table. A slightly sweaty forehead, a pinch in my lower back, some more warmth, almost moist from the heat, maybe the nervousness too. My legs made contact with the ground, missing placement of my shoes, weaker than I felt entering. A sensation that had become permanent despite lasting only a few seconds a year prior when standing up from a seated position, this time after laying for an hour. The reason for this weakness was unclear to me, as was the extent and speed of its progression. When the body is not in movement, it always feels tighter. The worst in the morning and when going to sleep. I slipped the heels of my socks back onto my feet, still sitting on the edge of the table while the technologist waited patiently.

Methodically I put my shoes on and stood up, stiffness I felt. Standing still for a few seconds, she might have asked herself or wondered why I had not executed any movement. She was looking at me while I was unable to see her clearly, my glasses vacant. I took a couple of steps towards the door, tight, a couple more outside the room, now asking for my glasses.

Leaving, she directed me back to the area I was in earlier, insight of the lockers at the end of the hallways and passing by area in reverse where I had almost fainted. Starting behind me but soon moved ahead, walking almost double my speed – partly due to my slowness, and perhaps also

because she was in a hurry for the next patient. “Which locker are you?” she asked.

“Number two,” I replied.

“You can change and place the gown in one of those bins,” she instructed.

“Okay, thank you. Again, I apologize,” I said, feeling a bit self-conscious about the earlier incident.

“Not a problem. Have a nice day,” she responded, turning back towards the direction we had come from. There didn’t seem to be any other patients in the vicinity; they were probably still in the initial waiting room, beyond the doors near the elevator or in the adjacent machine.

I changed out of the hospital gown, feeling the tightness in my body, and changing slower than before. As I left the MRI area, a sense of panic began to return, and I let out a sigh. The whole experience, while routine in some ways, had been draining and had brought a flood of concerns and reflections about my condition and future.

The results of the MRI came back three days later as “normal.” This left me with a mix of emotions. On one hand, a normal result is typically good news, but on the other, I was confused. How could the MRI not capture what I was experiencing? It would be later I would find out from my Neurologist upon request that an MRI would likely not detect the issues related to my diagnosis of Myelopathy – a part of my condition that was confirmed beyond doubt. The brain MRI’s were at least still important, however was there a chance they would miss capturing as they did what was already happening? Moreover, if cALD was found, how long would I expect for effects to take place. At 27 years old, the reality is that from here on out this is the new life I am to live, that I am a part of, for the next who knows how many more years till death, hopefully a death not caused by this.

35. 75 minute photograph

A photo of an offline MRI from behind the glass screen.

When in the machine, I am no longer the photographer, rather the one being photographed.



For most of our lives, at least from a young age, we dream big, because life feels long, it feels like you really have all the time in the world. It's not for long until you fall into complacency. Your dreams end, you falter, you become content, satisfied of being unsatisfied. Hopes and dreams given up on.

I never thought of life as something to put off for tomorrow, as if we have all the time in the world, because we don't. I can't exactly explain it, but it seems most of us live either comfortably or rather uncomfortably in blind ignorance, in a state of blissful numbness, beneficial to a system that keeps us all controlled. All NPC's inside a preformatted system, drowsing around contentedly all day with minimal friction and risk aversion. Waiting to be told what to do, what to believe and how to think. Inauthentic. A life that should really be combatted at all costs.

My own drive and ambition is to make a path on my own. To create the life for myself that my father never had and my mother never got to from all of her sacrifices. A life that despite my conditions and all my losses, to not fall victim to these circumstances, instead see them as an opportunity, inspired by my own mother's resilience to which I see challenges as opportunities.

My goal is to give back – to my mother and to a community that I value and truly care about, steering clear of hollow, pseudo-woke ideologies and false virtues. This is about escaping the noise, the systematic constraints, and the overarching 'server' of societal expectations. It's about creating a legacy and finding true transcendence, discovering meaning even in suffering.

To have children, raise a family, have my own space and freedom. Freedom from the impositions of others, from governmental control and from all the constrictive systems that govern our lives, a life I increasingly already feel constricted within. Having a body for the most part that still works, one that worked perfectly for 24 years, one that was unused during lockdowns, one that is now difficult to use now that "freedom" is partially handed back. This motivates me to live fully and freely while I can. To

engage in actions that extend beyond myself, to live authentically.

What remains I feel is a singular opportunity: to see as much of the world as possible, to break free from the confines of this space, to escape the city, the server, the cave. A moment of introspection, a reminding myself on the role of the roof that continued to call me. That I reach towards. That closes. Something that highlights a real world, even within the upper bounds of a server. Something that highlights my very own existence and helps make the world clearer. My way of seeing the world as much as I can, as much as possible within this given context I hope to escape. My way of overcoming the system, the machine, the server – seeking freedom in a world that remains bound.

A world that is there, waiting to be fully explored. To be there. To be in the world.[3]

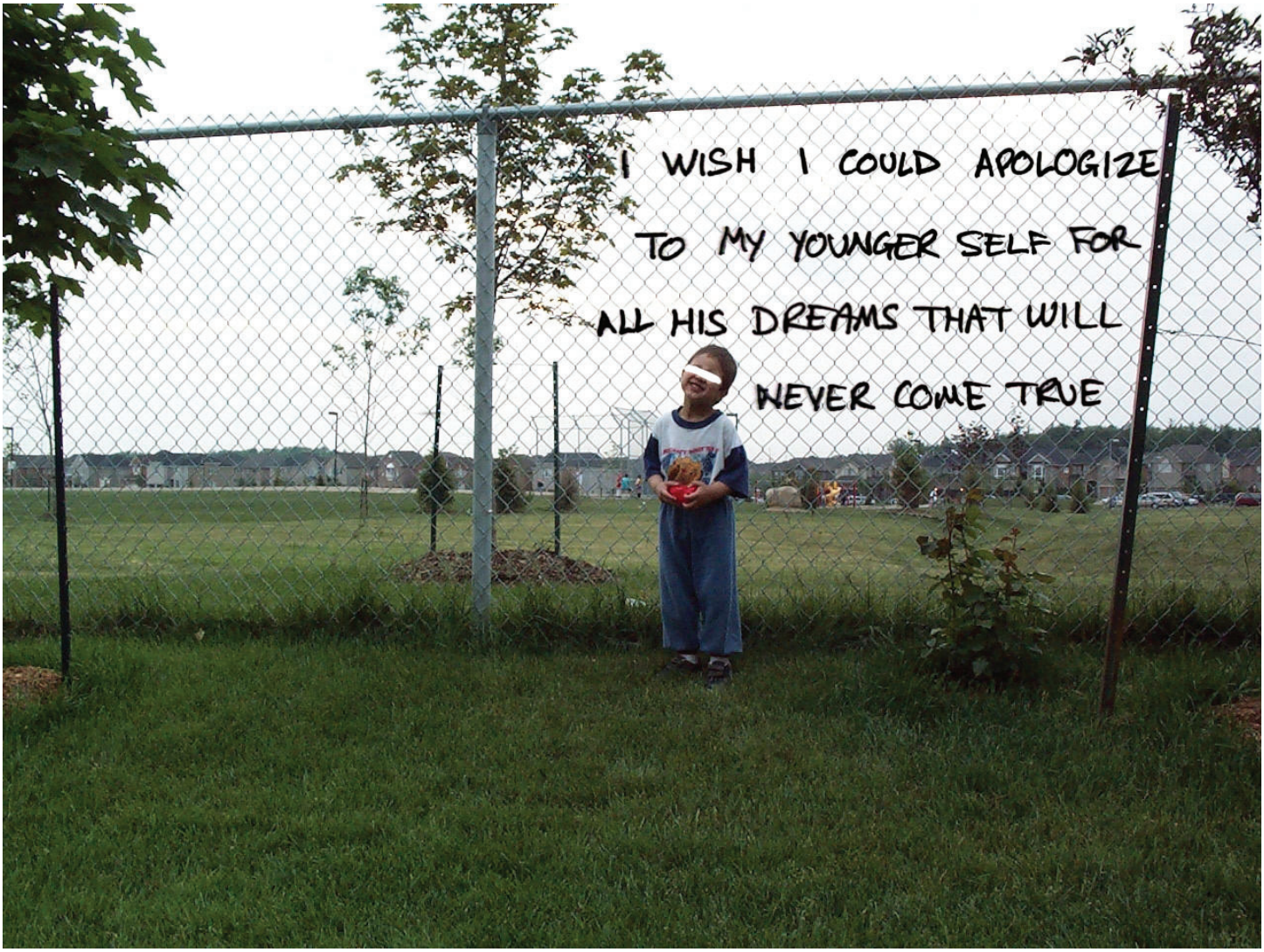
Yet, today's world is less explored, available more in the non-real than the real. A world brought to us, simulated, instead of one we bring ourselves into. We are already sitting in a future where actual travel and exploration are forsaken for virtual experiences, consumed within our immediate reach, screens plastered to our eyes. "Exploration" itself confined within set boundaries, experienced more for the spectacle[4] or the simulacrum[5] than for genuine discovery. I need to experience and be in the world beyond these imposed confines, to live and understand being beyond superficial appearance.

For most of my life I didn't have to really think much about it. The child unaware of what was destined, predetermined. The child happy, naïve, and protected. That maybe, just maybe the loss of my father would spark a miracle. The child at least was free of suffering, and I'm grateful for that.

What now feels like a dream that is collapsing. All the things I promised myself I still need to live up to. This all coming to an end. To tell the child it is time to go home. That the ride has come to an end. To be prepared to die.

36. The child dreams big. ca. 199x

The purpose of human existence is to achieve one's full potential. We set grand goals for ourselves when we're young because life feels boundless. To attain these ambitions, it's necessary to live dangerously, challenging ourselves and stepping outside our comfort zones. This pursuit of growth demands that we retain the spirit of a child—curious and undaunted—even as we navigate the complexities of adulthood.


I WISH I COULD APOLOGIZE
TO MY YOUNGER SELF FOR
ALL HIS DREAMS THAT WILL
NEVER COME TRUE

2.5

HOW TO DIE

DECEMBER 2023

As far as I can remember, my earliest conceptions of death were when I as a child, taking years to grasp that I have no father. Where is he, there is someone missing from the picture. Is he coming back?. Why. A growing up dreading for things to end, of the year, school, relationships, friendships and numerous events. From my childhood to all the coming-of-age years remembered vividly, inching closer to death. Looking back in hope I could stretch that time for as long as possible, yet knowing all these things would come to an end. All the days to seconds counting down towards the final goodbyes, remaining in those evanescent moments for years afterwards. Nostalgia. Time taken to get used to things and an awareness of the finitude of everything.

On a larger scale, in bed, I feared this nothingness, the prospect of not being there, the absence of any guarantees. At least one thing was certain: we were once not here, then for a moment we are, and we will again no longer be. This infinite state of non-being, of non-existence, remained something I could not fully comprehend. Yet, with all these questions, my fear remained in the act of dying than death itself. The stage of death before death, the loss of life before life is lost. In one case, an inauthentic existence, one without significance, one of no meaning and direction. In the other through a condition and all else compounding, compelling me to realize and accept what is inevitable and to move towards it. Instead of wishing for a life without suffering, wishing for the strength to suffer well and overcome it in the end. To grow with death by its side and get as close to it as possible, so when death smiles at me all I can do is smile back.

As Rilke puts it, becoming an adult means becoming acquainted with death and learning how to die.[1]

DEATH TODAY

In witnessing death in myself, I also recognize a void in the external, the collective. While my condition and the server both steer towards disability, towards death, the server effectively removes oneself altogether from the equation. This detachment leads into a significant shift in our historical relationship with death. In an era where survival is perceived as "guaranteed," our societal tendency to avoid death has intensified, a change primarily driven by the advent of the technological and industrial revolution. In essence, we possess all the means to sustain life, yet we are devoid of a meaningful purpose for living.

Our loss of ability and will to suffer has led to a diminished capacity to survive and knowing of how to die. This separation is brought two-fold by the server and its cessation for human suffering. We live by, for and through the machine, however one is unable to connect and be motivated by something they are not fundamentally connected and in touch with. In short, our mode of being with technology has fundamentally altered our relationship with life's struggles and our understanding of mortality. People wait instead for death to arrive like an uber eats order, not being towards it, waiting for it. Living two lives, the second which starts once they realize their own finitude.

The server which occupies all modes of modern being, be it the physical city we inhabit and the virtual clouds online lead us to a forgetting of death. Where death once held significant meaning, not, even if regarded, it is a problem outsourced for another day, one of negation. Negative value. The server strives to eliminate death, eradicating it like an obstacle, an effort reflective of our relationship with the machine. Without a connection to death and rather a pseudo connection to the server, life is rendered meaningless. To die as slaves, operating a life of inauthenticity and insignificance. Significance instead measured by digital metrics, existing within the simulacra, everywhere and nowhere. No longer is there anything profound to die for or a lasting legacy to be remembered by. We

risk the forgetting of everything tangible and significant, especially death itself. To borrow from Kuno's expression to his mother in "The Machine Stops", "I want to see you not through the Machine.. I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine… the Machine is much, but it is not everything. I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you. That is why I want you to come. Pay me a visit, so that we can meet face to face, and talk about the hopes that are in my mind."[2] The machine is killing humanity, having severed their relationship with the world and each other. The machine is the only life they have, and the machine would gladly let humans die out if it did not need them. Here the machine is the soul source of life. Life is so intertwined with technology that death occurs from disconnection, dying from homelessness, a euphemism for death outside of the machine.[3]

The server has us in agreement with nihilism as a result from being cut off from the essence of being, from our biological source that imbued our lives with meaning. This detachment is two-fold: we are not only severed from being itself but also from the concept of death and mortality. We are isolated from the realities of finitude and limitation, which are integral parts of the human experience. We ourselves become machines that seek immortality. Where nothing is real, death is not presented, while paradoxically, where the presence of death is not available, there is no call for authenticity. How can one then be in tune with mortality when hosted inside a machine, where one lives ultimately for the online defined by non-real identities, and what is next? The machine has no life and therefore lacks any death, the human forgets both.

The machine strives for perpetuity, and we, as passengers follow its lead, sitting in the backseat until death abruptly comes crashing down. We are presented with this illusion of endlessness through non-things and simulations, our online existences, a being everywhere yet nowhere, and access to everything yet nothing at the same time. Nothing tangible to be realized. Occupying a virtual realm there is no real sense of loss or

significance, only time lost passing by, yet this contrasts death itself which imposes the ultimate limit.[4]

Connecting to the modern experience, being today is less concerned about confronting the inevitability of death and instead finds ways to distract itself in our age through digital media and the simulacra of death. A witnessing of what is not real, an endless stream of the production and consumption of information without any meaning or truth. We are numbed by an anesthesia of the digital world where we are constantly presented by the simulacra of death. We hear and witness death behind the screen and feel nothing; it has lost its significance and bears no weight. We see it and move on as if it's not a fate for ourselves. Deathlessness and eternity through the internet. A looking at a screen, not through it, one that is bright yet bottomless. In this information age, where everything is perfectly present all the time, there is no death, there is no decay, there is nothing. It should not take a death in the family or a health scare for us to conceptualize death, nor should it be forgotten or be a constant preoccupation. Finding a balance instead by not constantly dwelling on death nor avoiding it entirely, rather to live by and for it.

Transhumanism[6] takes this a step further, attempting to erase an aspect of our being, removing something fundamentally human. To make matters worse, or what many may wish for, you no longer need to die, or at the very least not yet. "Death is now optional."[7] Death has been relocated from the metaphysical to the technical[8]. This transition of death from an existential certainty to a technical issue strips away a crucial aspect of what it means to be human. When death is framed as merely a technical problem awaiting a solution, it diminishes the profound and inherent nature of death in the human experience.

Transhumanism fundamentally alters our understanding and approach to death. In this ideology, death is no longer an inevitable part of the human condition but rather a challenge to be eradicated.[9] Transhumanists aspire to 'become gods,' defying death and redefining what it means to be human. This involves hacking and re-engineering humans, not necessarily

to guarantee eternal life, but to extend lifespan and make death a choice. Transhumanist Yuval Noah Harari articulates this idea: "We are really acquiring divine powers, of creation and destruction."[10] He suggests that having elevated humanity above mere survival struggles, the next step is to "upgrade humans into gods and turn Homo sapiens into Homo deus."[11] From biohacking to bio-enhancement to an uploading of consciousness to the cloud, the constraints of physics and biology vanish. We currently transcend the body, what is destined to wear and rot away and instead upload copies of ourselves to the cloud. Digital immortality, in many forms, is becoming a reality and continues to edge closer. The prospect of living indefinitely in metaverses is increasingly real. Here, digital twins or clones become a significant, arguably dominant part of our identity. These digital selves are often more familiar to others than ou r actual selves. In such a metaverse, it's conceivable to let the physical body wither, choosing to exist solely in the digital realm. Although a first death occurs in the loss of our physical and bodily presence, a second death can be transcended through the remainder of our digital remains, albeit within a digital limbo.

Transhumanism in the physical context however is seen as a means to realize the 'true' potential of humans.[12] This agenda seeks to reach an angel state on earth where biological limits have no meaning and man can be immortal. A being brought to this earth with death solved or as a goal to overcome rather than something that forces us into our existence and all of our potentialities. Here, birth, death and everything in between would become fundamentally meaningless.

In this post human state, what would memory look like or what at all would be remembered? Would we still experience the intense emotions compounded by the sense of loss, a loss greater than the death itself which we experience when parting from others with no promise of reunion? Conversely, would we be more concerned of customizing our own death from a catalogue, a choice of luxury when we feel that we're ready?[13] Instead of something to work towards, death turns into a game of choice like everything else we are presented with. Another first world problem.

Without embracing and first accepting our mortality, nihilism becomes permanent*. In this scenario, every aspect of life is reduced to a technical issue to be solved, leading to a sterile, dehumanizing, and malevolent world where machines prevail, and humanity is reduced to a machine-like existence. We've already lost so much in this transition. The ability to die, the awareness and understanding of how to die, is perhaps our greatest loss. We're moving towards a profound reduction of our essence and how we interact with the world. It's a way of being that we've gradually forgotten, overshadowed by a relentless pursuit of technological solutions to life's most fundamental aspects.

I view this as the final form or stage of the server's influence – a complete reorientation of mankind and a redefinition of human existence.

HOW TO DIE

Death compels us to question our being.[14] Where there is no questioning, death is still present yet being is not. Rather, where one does not face up to death, there is no questioning, and as a result, there is no being.[15] Throughout history, regardless of scientific advancements, there is one inevitability for all of us, and that is we must die. Philosopher Martin Heidegger emphasized that our awareness of death is what colours our lives with meaning.[16] Death propels us toward the realization of our finite potentialities, delineating a horizon that grounds our existence.[17] Only when we focus or let ourselves into our own mortality, only then will a world properly arise such that meaning arises again because then there is a horizon. In short, Death gives "dasein" orientation. This acceptance is what pushes us back into authentic ways of being.[18]

By contemplating death, we learn to fear it less and love life all the more. However, the server blocks this awareness, washing out all the colour and meaning from our lives. It is a tool we use against ourselves consciously yet unconsciously. Through contemplating death, we learn to fear it less and embrace life more fully. Accepting life as it is, rather than longing for

a life without suffering, strengthens us to endure and ultimately overcome challenges.

Today I find myself contemplating multiple deaths – a dying, a loss before death, different from how "das man"[19] dies before actual death, a dying first through the server. To distinguish, I will differentiate the following: Inside the server, or in an inauthentic existence, dying is the act of not living, not actively embracing life, which is essential in giving death its meaning. It is how the system wants us to perform, perfectly suited to its needs. Outside the server, in an authentic existence, dying is something we actively experience and the part that makes death meaningful.

Where death in the server is something forgotten, something some hope to eliminate, death outside the server is something we run ahead towards, an embracing the anxiety of your own mortality. Although it is what we do not experience, it is how we are remembered, our legacy, the final exchange of energy, the climax, the contrast between meaning and nothingness that makes death all the more meaningful.

Yet in my case, my condition translates into two components: I find myself moving towards two deaths. One of which I do experience, and the other which I will not, maybe slightly however what the others around me will and what I fear above all else. An accelerated fading away before death, the last state physical state I may be remembered by.

Despite a condition and progression out of my hands, there are things I can control and others which I cannot. A calendar I cannot see, only time I can receive and a body I can feel.

The (AMN), the premature aging and dying towards disability is a progression I cannot control, only how I respond to it, a dying in essence.

The (cALD) however, although not guaranteed and I hope I will never come face to is similar to death. It is something I cannot control or respond to, only move towards, whether or not it happens.

Through this, my goal is to experience as much as possible, transcending death in the present and living fully within my existence, while also transcending death through memory. My engagement with

projects, taking action, and making a difference matters because death is always approaching. As a mortal my time is limited, so I must choose what to focus on – this is my freedom. The horizon of death gives worth to these endeavors. A real fear for me is not having achieved anything or experienced the beauty of life outside the server. It's not the fear of dying, but the fear of a life not fully lived – being stuck or trapped. The implications of my death and what it said about my life. The insignificance first, then the impermanence. Yet, it's not the length of life that defines its quality, but what you do with the time given, the beauty you experience, and your achievements.

To live is to transcend death and disability, to not die before death occurs. This contrasts with a life lost to the machine or the system – like being in an ICU[20] or an experience machine,[21] a life not truly your own. Living in this 'cell', in the matrix, waiting for death. In sum, there are two forms of disability and dying: one who runs towards death, even with the inability to run, and the inverse, where death goes unnoticed or merely as a problem waiting to be solved, stripping away one's humanity and the ability to learn how to die.

THE ROOF

I can't escape death, however at least I can escape the fear of it. The closer I position myself to death, a limit I put myself towards, the more alive I feel. Not by the passage of time, rather how closely I engage with the reality of my own mortality. This awareness contrasts man who wanders through life aimlessly, nihilistically, and narcissistically on autopilot, unaware or viewing death far in the distance as a problem to be solved later.

The roof is at the very least as close as I can get to the limit, a way to log off, transcend, without dying. If one can only get to heaven through dying, it is important to die along the outer most limit, so that when death does occur, I am already there. Seeking risk and embracing danger reflects

the core of life's journey, it rejects the ways the server erases the concept of death including its presence and impact from our lives.

Yet, in all the ways this becomes more difficult, fleeting, knowing this is all coming to an end, that this becomes more meaningful. The last key gifted by the child, carried with me, disappearing, taken away. To be ready to die is acting out all the freedoms this readiness offers. This impassioned freedom towards death.

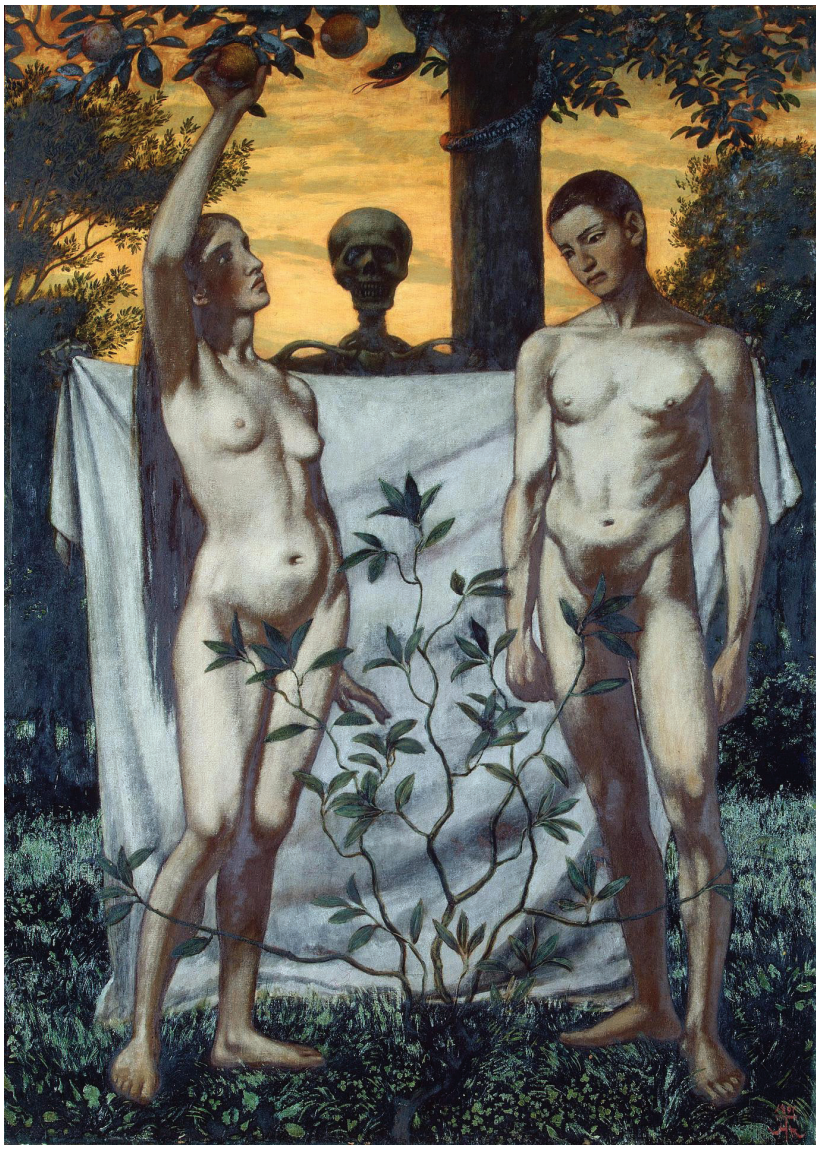
"Were you trying to show me something?"

"Yes." The child responded..

37. Edge of existence. 2021

One of the most freeing feelings is to sit off the edge of a server. It's less of an accomplishment and more of a reminder, to check in that I am still living. Most are so consumed by the fear of death that it prevents them from a meaningful life. Knowing I cannot escape death, at least I can escape the fear of it. The closer I position myself towards it, the more I feel alive.





38. Hans Thoma. *Adam and Eve*, 1897, oil on canvas.
https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+Paintings/31681/?lng=en

3.0

LOSS OF MEANING

MEMOIR

Legs that shake uncontrollably all day, only worse at night, in tightness, in spasm. Eyes closed, waiting to fall into stasis, only to be disrupted by signals that fire, between the brain and spine, in the body, without a map nor a direction. Disconnected, unable to transmit nor receive, to process information left to sea.

Waking out of sleep, a faint signal that still reaches to rush to empty, partially, to avoid an accident, surfing the walls, holding for support from legs that resist movement in all directions. Unable to empty, waiting, ready, and a body that cannot communicate. A bladder that cannot be contained, that cannot be controlled while in contrast a nervous system that cannot trigger action. A mix of incontinence and retention. Another thing I cannot control, only experience. Waiting for a movie to start, to play for only seconds before ending, incomplete, playing itself later when back in bed.

In the morning, out of bed, the first contact of the ground from hours earlier, standing up to fall back down. Legs out of sync from a lack of movement and loss of strength. A body that self destructs on its own, what feels worse through time and each morning as a reminder. A reminder on as each day unfolds. Nerves exposed, unprotected, an anatomy that reconfigures, and a being that follows. Dying for certain.

No longer moving like I used to. No longer functioning the same. A world that becomes a greater limitation, out of reach and out of bounds. A world that feels less real through the loss of feeling, of sensations, and inaccessibility. A world a body disconnects from and a world that on its own becomes less real through the server. A body before restricted from lockdowns to now one by a condition.

A looking back a few years ago at a comfortable normality, at glitches in the system, subtle errors, the virus beyond the firewall starting to infect the system. To a couple of years ago, somewhat normal, learning about the condition that is now attached, that is a part of me, that I now battle, one that progresses at a random rate. Today, a worsening, imagining how

uncomfortable it already was a year prior, that this would be the new normal, now understanding that normal is gone, and a wishing I could have that back. A year later from today uncertain. Then another.

Uncertain how much worse this will get and for how long until then. Is there a cure, a way to stop progression, no the doctor responded. Existing symptoms intensify and new ones emerge. Together forming new conditions and vulnerabilities. A timeline of some days worse than others. Half a month where walking is not optimal, the condition is there, I am aware of its presence, however it is bearable, to a week, a few days, to one or two, to no more.

Standing up feels like I am drowning, learning how to walk as a child for the first time, rather now forgetting how to. Watching the self no longer be able, the inside screaming to maintain control, to grasp the wall, catch the handrail and pause.

Feet that drop before me, that catch the pavement and force a fall. Legs that feel heavy, that become weaker and decrease in size. A body that shuts down and a self that holds on, uncertain on the rest of life's path that still needs to be completed. Being kicked off a train and left to walk the rest of the way, while being unable to walk.

Frustrated by a body that no longer knows how to walk, that can still walk, rather a hesitation, a forgetting. Tracing ghostly steps once sure. A spastic gait I am angry to witness, that I fully embody, that I feel and take hold of, that I accept. One that arrived as a visitor. Temporarily. Now one I wish to go away. Permanent. A balance that sets me off, a carrying of weight, a set of eyes that close, a movement up and down, forward and back and a falling off balance, collapsing to the floor. A set of legs breaking down on their own, unsupported, like a roof with no supporting walls, destined to collapse.

A body on the ground, unable to bring itself back up. Legs for now able to still move, yet no strength to push off and bring one back to the surface. An inability to carry weight, to hold weight externally let alone the attached mass of the body. Abilities that were still possible one day and

taken away the next with no warning. Here one is one with the ground, struggling to get back up, an old man without a cane, yet here a young man alone. Stuck to a surface until finding a means to pull up, to find way back into a chair. While in that same chair, legs that shake uncontrollably and a loss of sensations. A paralysation but with uncontrolled movements. Stuck on a single level, things above and below out of reach by the hands paired to the legs. A personal fear of being stuck inside a body and collectively that in a machine. Stuck.

Outside, the cold air impairs an already weakening of the legs. Every distance considered, a struggle to complete. A resistance to resort to a tool, one what calls out to me, one that waits. A wheelchair alike a coffin one sits in until the door comes closing. For now, fully conscious movement with less control of movement. A slight tightness and heaviness when I began writing this to stiff swinging of one leg to another, pain in the toes felt and a drop foot considered in each and every step. Right foot, left, right, left. Pause.

A conductor orchestrating in the wrong direction, in the wrong tune, a controller no longer connected, operations incompatible. A five-minute walk feeling much longer, heavy, tight, stuck, not normal, no longer in control of myself. Will I ever make it home. Everything becomes a new distance. Changes in perception. Fifteen kilometers, to five, to one, to none. At once, almost unlimited movement, any distance accessible. Then by the hours, to the minutes, now to the seconds.

Footsteps traced before, now hardly accessible. Limited by the body and the temperature. A distance that becomes difficult to reach, questionable. A distance I would previously ignore and take for granted, taking action to walk, run, hike, or explore is inaccessible. It is now a bother, more than a challenge, one that increasingly nears impossible, a wish that the heart makes. Nothing feels the same anymore. It's not just the difficulty of doing things; it's the risk they impose on me that weighs heavily. The balance, the drop, the gait, the weakness and discomfort, the seeing and feeling that something is off, visually exposed. At first hidden, then visible on the

inside, barely on the outside, to now visible everywhere.

Like standing on a highway alongside passing cars. A highway surrounded by a swarm of servers uploaded and eyes on me. A self stuck on the ground in the middle without access in all levels of a panopticon. A dying for an escape in a world I no longer fit in and conversely one that no longer feels real by virtue of the machine, a machine that too mimics disability.

The need to transcend both. A dying for an escape to something real, to a roof that closes and remains locked for good. A key that no longer works. A key that is the body. I am thereby compelled to do things because I cannot rather than I should not, versus those in the machine that follow. Two disabilities. However one is imposed and assigned, the other is chosen.

Around me, I see others walking, running and biking. I see others. I see others and no longer feel I bear any relation to, already alienated. Movement in others there would previously be no thoughts of, today reflecting "I cannot, I remember, I forgot, I wish." Seldom do I encounter others who share my condition in its advanced stages, nor do I more generic disability — such sightings are as rare as they are outside the clinical confines of a hospital, itself a physical incarnation of a machine. Like those unseen peers, I'm pending a disappearance into the background. To no longer be seen, to remove myself from the scene and remain undercover. A sense of needing to retreat in total isolation. To not be looked at. To disappear like the other, the other inside the server, online, myself offline, however both fundamentally disconnected. The way I moved I can only recall. The way you move, away from me.

Everyday I question when my last step will take place. The average person, in the ebb and flow of life's chronicle, should on average retain the capacity to walk perfectly until the age of 65,[1] although this is modulated by the interplay of genetics, overall health, life's choices, and the embrace of one's environment. Absent an externally imposed disability, such a

concern would rarely, if ever, cross one's mind. Conversely, a personal feeling of loss everyday. Where the world opened up from birth towards infinite possibilities, it is now closing in on me, towards a premature last step. To be alive, consciously aware of your decline and a life fading away.

Our feet, although mediated by garments, footwear, and protective materials, are undeniably the parts of our bodies that make direct contact with the world most. They move us, guide us and bring us forth everywhere in life. Even with the rise of advanced modes of transportation and the evolution of various mobility devices, it is fundamentally our feet and legs that stand as our organic mode of transport, our inherent backup. In the absence of this gifted ability to walk or without technological interventions, our bond with the external world attenuates. A compromised mobility, in essence, equates to a limited engagement with the world around us. To no longer be mobile, to walk, is to no longer be fully connected with the world, to no longer be there. A child that regresses back to a baby. The gift given to the baby now taken away.

In recollection, loss that began before the onset of a disease. Loss that started with a lockdown, then a run, and now a server. The same frustration felt then now sevenfold, a living through two declines. That of a debilitating and life-threatening condition and another by a server that dominates life today. This server, a metaphorical representation of technology that is invisible yet everywhere, that which structures and imposes itself onto all parts of our existence. This server symbolizes the interconnectedness of technology and its pervasive influence on our lives, encompassing not only the hardware but also the software and digital ecosystems that shape our experiences and interactions. It embodies the idea of being constantly connected to the digital world in some shape or form and reliant on it for various aspects of our existence. At the same time, a physical manifestation of what's left of the physical environment and its digital twin. Two dimensions of the server which mimic one another, both shaping modern life and morality.

A feeling inside that something is fundamentally missing. Living

amongst a collective that accepts mainstream institutions without questioning, leading to a lack of deeper truth and understanding of the world. Already held back by a condition, an instinct to be free in a system in tandem to a body that declines and rejects the core of what it means to be human. Both as an invitation to meaning in a life that starts to feel utterly meaningless. However, it is only through one that the other that blinds becomes perfectly clear.

DECLINE

Similarly, today man experiences a set of losses not due to a genetic condition but as a product of our condition tied to the server. This leads to a loss and forgetting of the body, of freedom, of the other, and of what it means to be human.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a spark in this loss; of freedom, the body, the other and reality, all replaced by a binding to a machine. Within a span of two years, we became perfectly accustomed to modified ways of living, effectively becoming slaves to technology and accepting it blindly. All of our needs and desires, however intangible, were fulfilled through screens, negating any real action. We traded genuine connection for a simulation of life and human interaction, choosing to engage from afar through the virtual for the spectacle as a means to still be seen, to be heard and noticed in the pure absence. Amongst all the disconnection, we got used to distancing and avoiding each other justified by safety and compliance.

The concept of simulations too became accomplished not only by the media and content consumed, but also by the nature of the pandemic itself. While we may have experienced Sars-Cov2, we never experienced COVID, nor did we the Gulf War.[2] Jean Baudrillard argued the Gulf War was more of a media spectacle than a traditional conflict.[3] While this is not to deny that violent conflict did occur, what was experienced by the global audience was not the actual war but rather its representation through the

media. Analogously, our collective experience of COVID was shaped more by media narratives, making it a hyperreal event that seemed more present in our screens than in our lived reality.

To convince ourselves the pandemic had not disappeared we displayed it in a hyperreal fashion for everyone to see, therefore making the ability to question the reality of a pandemic and to suggest this pandemic is any different than it has been historically as absurd, ensuring that its perceived impact is as significant as its actual one. This blurs the lines between the pandemic as a medical crisis and as a media phenomenon, echoing Baudrillard's notion that the distinction between reality and its representation has collapsed.

While acknowledging the virus's serious effects, most of us were not directly exposed to the suffering of those who were sick or dying, as depicted on our screens. Instead, what we did encounter was the simulacra of the pandemic, and since simulacra are not tangible experiences, our engagement with the crisis was, to a large extent, indirect. What we genuinely experienced were the lockdowns, social distancing, and a life mediated by the server and shaped by the spectacle. Our collective reality was saturated with fear, driven by media propaganda, marked by disclaimers across media platforms, and overwhelmed by predictions and statistical models. This bombardment of information led to a loss of the real, with our lives reduced to simulations, dictated by the presentation of cases and projections. Numbers and potential scenarios dictated our existence and compressed the richness of life and human interaction into a series of data points, further distancing us from the authenticity of our experiences.

We furthermore lived vicariously through the projected experiences of others: individuals who fell ill and shared their stories, those vaccinated broadcasting their reactions and accomplishments, voicing and urging others to comply and follow suit, to follow orders and play a game of red light green light when told to do so. We experienced the imposition of vaccine mandates and passports, where compliance typically averted

repercussions, never having to experience consequences of dissent. Most did not feel the direct propaganda efforts media and intelligence communities put forth categorizing us into groups – what often went unchallenged and met with minimal reaction. Likewise, the loss and infringement of rights—restrictions on movement, work, education, and even mourning—was mediated through the lens of emergency powers and public health directives.

Here, state of emergencies and the deployment of augmented powers restricted people's public participation and denied access to a private life with autonomy over their bodies, mandating vaccines and medical approval for everyday activities like dining out and accessing the gym. This era showcased how authorities could vilify those who resisted, pursuing them under the pretext of public health. The swift normalization of such civil liberties and suspensions, adopted without recourse as a new standard of living, underscores Giorgio Agamben's biopolitics of fear—wherein the collective dread of disease is leveraged to enforce compliance and diminish personal freedoms.[4] Agamben argues that in this case, the state capitalizes on the biopolitical control over life itself, extending its authority by declaring states of emergency that justify intrusive measures into the private lives of individuals. This governance strategy effectively blurs the lines between public safety and individual autonomy, positioning health as the ultimate rationale for the expansion of state power and the reduction of civil liberties. Furthermore, it served as an opportunity to fast-track societal reliance on complex technologies, enforce lockdowns, intensify mass surveillance, deepen biopolitical control, and infringe upon human freedoms against a backdrop of muted opposition. This system coerced individuals into adopting behaviors far removed from natural human patterns, revealing a stark transformation in our interaction with the world and each other.

While COVID may have disappeared, nothing has changed – the body is still lost behind a screen. We have become used to the idea of safety in the avoidance of all potential pain and suffering in the complete absence of it.

We have become weak, sheltering into cells away from shadows projected onto ourselves. We have grown used to conforming to stay alive in a system we are already dead in. A system where survival is already guaranteed and no other thoughts are considered outside of the simulated self, one you converge with. We too become disabled, not by an injury or an incurable disease, instead through the forgoing of the body and all freedoms without thinking, in exchange for comfort and the simulation of reality.



39. Safe. 2022

Distanced in all bodily dimensions. Without danger, without life, in the machine.

ST. GEORGE


MY MASK KEEPS MY PARENTS SAFE.
Please keep your mask on at
ALL times while riding the TTC.
Always keep your nose, mouth and chin covered.
Exemptions apply. Visit ttc.ca/masks
PATTISON

31

PALLIATIVE SOCIETY

We too have evolved into a palliative society; moving beyond the loss of body and the loss of human life. We are withering away in bed until death, in a mode of end-of-life therapy, unable to bear pain and suffering, eradicating it at all costs. We exist in a state of infection control, our screens used to distance ourselves from the other and any form of negativity. Byung-Chul Han explored this phenomenon and its consequences in his work "The Palliative Society."

Everything today needs to be positive. We are in a condition that can accept no pain, placing ourselves on life support, governed by a universal algophobia.[5] We have a fear of pain, and in combination, an inability to tolerate pain – because pain is linked to death. The inability to deal with pain and suffering brings us into the condition we are in today. According to Han, the consequence of this algophobia is a permanent anaesthesia, a collective numbing to the experiences that give life its depth and meaning.

This condition, made possible through technology—a tool to which we've tightly bound ourselves—was heartbreakingly highlighted during the pandemic. COVID laid bare our obsession with survival; life became singularly focused on this aim, completely paralyzed by the goal to survive. Even more, it made present our fear of death, showcasing a society deeply thanatophobic,[6] where every action and reaction was filtered through an acute anxiety about mortality.

We reverted to our primal human instinct – the drive to survive. Yet, survival for what purpose? Understandably, we had lost the need to consider survival due to our modern, almost guaranteed, means of living. We have never been so adverse to death, living with expectations that both survival and happiness are assured. Survival had ceased to be our main driver in life, and then for a moment with COVID, it became everything. All became completely paralyzed for survival. The simulacra of the virus triggered an immunological crisis. The palliative society so too became an immunologically weakened, permissive society, causing a shock-induced

paralysis. With our fragile inability to consider survival, we retreated into our cells and as far away from anything and everything.

The simulated elimination of pain and suffering destroyed us, reducing us into machines. Machines that could not bear the sun or weather, let alone touch and emotion from the other. In pursuit of health and safety, we immersed ourselves in virtual simulations to an unprecedented extent. We removed our ability to feel pain, and in loss of that negativity was the potential for positivity, the ability to feel joy and fulfillment as a response, as an opportunity. Instead, we pulled further into our machine worlds to compensate for what was lost.

The fact that as a society we were all so willing to enter into quarantine and lockdown so quickly and for so long without any forced measures reveals a lot: all of our privileges taken away, lives reduced, and bodies that became disabled. We did not want to accept the possibility of death, the reality of it, let alone the prospective pain and suffering attributed, instead we saw life as a biological process that must be optimized. We could not bear to confront ourselves with the end of life. We just wanted to remain happy, and yet, one cannot be happy without understanding what unhappiness is first, so we became neither, and the screen kept us sedated. We kill ourselves, enter the palliative ward, and then at the same time, beg to live on forever, to not consider death, to not die, while signing up for assisted dying.

The pandemic made death visible again after so long. Visible behind a screen, visible in the mass media, through simulacra, and with that, we didn't know what to do with ourselves. We stripped away all negativity, however with that, all possible meaning. This was a huge opportunity for us that we failed. We gave up everything in a hysterical pursuit to survive and became a society of survival without question. Life became reduced to bare life, voluntarily shutting down until told safe to come out again. We guaranteed the killing of oneself in order to avoid the extremely rare and simulated possibility of death. For Han, we find it particularly difficult to die, for it is no longer possible to find a way of bringing life to a meaningful

closure. Life ends in non-time. - Whoever cannot die at the "right" time must perish in non-time. We effectively age without becoming old. In this state, we can neither fully embrace life, nor find peace in death. Like a virus, we are neither alive in the true sense nor capable of dying. We are too alive to die and at the same time too dead to live.

SUFFERING

In this palliative state, because we cannot bear pain and suffering, we find ourselves unable to ever achieve true fulfillment and happiness. We feel that we cannot finish our lives. Paradoxically, though palliative care is meant to ease the end of life, we resist dying precisely because we've never attained the fulfillment and happiness we've sought, leaving us caught in a state of existence without closure.

Because of this, we just want to survive and be happy. Paradoxically, survival comes from suffering and happiness from a degree of pain. The less pain we have, the more we suffer – one's level of acceptance, resistance or the ability to cope with pain becomes lower and lower.[7] We become immunocompromised inside the palliative ward, unable to withstand any negativity, and by that any response. We are immature babies that never develop to full maturity to think and take on life; we never develop in the always avoidance of pain.

We seek happiness devoid of pain, not recognizing their interchangeability. We want to get to the finish line and reap the reward without needing to take a step, repeating the same process day in and day out, confused by the feeling of unfulfillment. - There is no depth to happiness however without the element of pain or negativity. The most profound forms of happiness are from experiences that challenge us, that involve passion and intensity – and by their very nature are not devoid of pain. As put by Nietzsche: Pain and happiness are two siblings and twins who either grow up together or .. remain small together![8] Those who shut themselves off from pain, consciously or otherwise, also deny themselves

the possibility of experiencing happiness in its fullest, most vibrant form.

Furthermore, we aspire to survive without suffering, to exist without purpose in a world devoid of challenges. Ironically, a life without any form of resistance or suffering becomes a form of 'suffering' in itself, languishing in perpetual sedation, akin to a coma. To a large extent, the more you have suffered, the more you have lived life; the more you can value life in all of its despair. One could despise a health condition, a disease that pulls everything away, or see beyond what is unchangeable, and live with it to the best of their ability in the loss of all ability. Here, one can be grateful for their sufferings despite all that it takes away. One chooses to play their hand regardless of the cards they are dealt.[9]

Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor provided insight into human resilience and perspective based on his own work and experience in the Holocaust.[10] For Frankl, his energy and will to live would have been very different in context outside of the concentration camps. While an extreme example and not to be jealous of his sufferings, he would not have been the person he had become without his experience, without his suffering. Within close proximity to death each and everyday, he accepted it and still suffered through it acknowledging his death could take place at any moment. In the instants he was unable to change a situation, he was challenged to change himself. Frankl says, "by changing our attitude, we can turn adversity into triumph, we can find meaning, even within the worst sufferings imaginable. Finding something to live and even die for, transforms a meaningless, hopeless existence into a life worth living, regardless of any circumstances."[11]

In the palliative society, pain and suffering are no longer meaningful, therefore we no longer confront the ability to reach true happiness like Frankl. We stop pain before it can be suffering, and suffering before it can bring a narrative. We treat pain in this society not as a navigable river, nor a poetic narrative that flows down to the sea, but a dead-end street.[12] The elimination of pain and suffering becomes the elimination of meaning, and to make up for this we consume more and separate ourselves further from

what which is real, that which is survival, and that which is life.

THE LAST MAN

While pain and suffering should be minimized as much as possible and to the best of our ability, it should never be avoided altogether—nor should the ability to face up to and confront unavoidable suffering, instead to be ready to suffer and to suffer well. The complete removal of suffering would strip life of potential meaning, rendering existence meaningless, akin to living in a simulated reality like a metaverse, more familiar that solely behind a screen.

A life of ease, comfort, and pacification, though desirable, dreams of a day when we are free from economic burdens and societal expectations, a day of minimal work, leisure, and an easy death. This is the utopian promise modern society offers, facilitated by technology—a life without resistance, movement, bodily needs, or confrontation with pain and suffering, yet we crave more reductions and more conveniences.

But there are many reasons to believe that this dream would in fact be a nightmare and would be the perfect fulfillment of Oscar Wilde's pithy epigram: "In this world, there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst; the last is the real tragedy."[13]

This tragedy is more understandably explored in Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", which illustrates a society where pain has ceased to exist, where negative emotions are washed away by the use of a drug, where life is comfortable and everyone is superficially happy.[14] This society, seduced by hedonism and complacency, sacrifices freedom for pleasure. In a society structured so that people can devote much of their time pursuing pleasures, gratifying material wants, and even drugging themselves to escape reality; means of persuasion and conditioning rather than coercive force are sufficient to exert extreme control over society. Non-stop distractions of the most fascinating nature are deliberately used for the purpose of

preventing people from paying too much attention to the realities of the social and political situation.

Through endless distractions, diversions, and the easy availability of pleasurable and distracting experiences, many embrace their lack of freedom and worship the society which has made their hedonistic lifestyle possible. "The world's stable now," says the Controller in Huxley's Brave New World. "People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get."

John, the protagonist raised outside this technological utopia, embodies the desire for a deeper, more authentic life. He claims the right to unhappiness, highlighting the value of suffering and struggle in achieving true fulfillment. Approaching the Controller he says, "I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin."[15]

"You're claiming the right to be unhappy. Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer, the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind," said the Controller.[16]

"I claim them all," said John.[17]

This fiction parallels Nietzsche's concept of the "Last Man," representing a society that shuns pain and aspires only for comfort, embodying mediocrity and a lack of ambition. The Last Man, content with survival and basic pleasures, signifies the decline of human spirit. In contrast, Nietzsche's ideal, the Übermensch, strives for greatness beyond comfort. Our palliative society mirrors the Last Man, an unthinking being who values life simply for its sake, with no desire for the beyond, to pursue his freedom unto death. The last man flattens the earth, indulges in nihilism and hedonism, and knows of no greater goals beyond himself.[18]

The last man is a conformist, willing to forgo all power in exchange for a false sense of security and a simulated projection of reality. The last man

does not question why he lives his life the way he does, nor does he seek to improve and think for himself. One is less likely to question, challenge and truly engage with the complexities of reality in a state of numbness, and in a world that seems less real than real; making revolt impossible. This societal trend towards avoiding all challenges for a semblance of security and comfort marks a profound decline, underpinned by both technology and the environment—the server—that enables such a palliative state.



40. Last Man. 202x

Both dimensions of the server create a condition of comfort, without struggle, of an easy way out. They have left the regions where it is hard to live, for they need wamrth. The last man is devoid of motivation. With little pleasures for the day, and little pleasure for the night.



41. Thomas Couture. *Los Romanos de la Decadencia*, Museo de Orsay, 1847, oil on canvas.
https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/romains-de-la-decadence-9493



3.1

NON-THINGS AND SIMULATIONS

MEMOIR

There is no longer a day that passes where I am not compelled to consider and reflect on my abilities, on what I have left. What things can I still do and experience. What must I still do with a body that fights a clock. A counting down of all the things and experiences I am losing out on through the loss of body. A new reality that no longer binds to memory because a body can no longer narrate. Conversely, the realm of what remains authentic and within reach diminishes, not strictly due to physical limitations, rather the essence of real experiences is being replaced by non-things[1] and simulations[2]. Instead of a real world to participate in, what's offered is a set of simulated and inauthentic experiences that lack the depth and resonance of their authentic counterparts. Perfectly accessible for a body that falls into disability and a collective that push towards human obsolescence.

I am nowhere ready to leave the tangible world through the loss of body, meanwhile we find ourselves collectively drawn into the cloud, digital non-place – losing our body another way. A leaving the real world before dying. Here we are perfectly abstracted from the body, and alarmingly, often the mind as well – a scenario that mirrors the experience of a disability, and yet, we are increasingly participants. The nuances of disability here recede into the background, masked by the illusion of universal accessibility and instant experience. The server appears to liberate one from the constraints of physicality in exchange for the total removal of it. It becomes difficult to consider a life without a body when living with digital omnipotence – so no one thinks otherwise. In the real world however, there is little room for those with disabilities. For most, it is never a concern that crosses their minds; seen as a problem for someone else, relegated to the periphery understandably so. Ironically, as the real world fades into the background, its replacement fails to accommodate both the abled and disabled; instead, it fosters a simulation of reality. In this alternating space becoming more fitting for those with disabilities, we are presented with sheer availability

and presence, albeit intangibly so - creating a greater sense of disconnection between the body and each other. Here, we are left in an arcade shrouded in darkness for the rest of our lives, kept company by screens that project a curated version of reality. Your understanding of the world takes place only by what you see that is projected. While we may have the ability to have a sense of feeling through sight, there is no feeling behind a screen, so we do not feel at all.

Much like disability, our increasingly intangible ways of living shift human reliance from each other to depending on machines and what is intangible, leading to a further reduction and removal of the self. In this state, many spend more time inside, behind a screen, dependent on another, disconnected; less in touch with the real world outside their door and beneath their feet. The more time we spend in virtual realities, the more a body that is less used, the more our sense of solidity is lost in the real world. Both disability and digitalization here accelerate a transition towards a life lived by, through and for the machine, disconnecting us from the body. In many ways, when one becomes unable to use the body authentically in interaction with the real world, they too become disabled.

As we navigate our increasingly intangible existence, a parallel emerges between the lived experience of disability and our collective immersion in a world dominated by images and representations. This shift from physical to digital reliance not only alters our engagement with each other and our environment but also challenges our very notions of self and reality. Much like the way disability can redefine one's interaction with the world—highlighting what remains viable amidst loss—our digital lives accentuate a dependence on the non-tangible, leading to a dilution of our sense of self. In both scenarios, there's an underlying narrative of adaptation: to disability, through adjusting to altered capabilities; and to digitalization, by acclimatizing to life mediated by screens.

In this embodied state, where the bodies direct interaction with the real world becomes marginalized despite all the access that is promoted, it mirrors how disability limits physical engagement, albeit unnoticed by

a body that is still "able". In the realm of the server however, unlike a physical condition, we willingly surrender our physicality to the realm of the virtual and embrace a life lived for the machine. Our realities therefore become ever more scaffolded by representations that, while vivid, often lack the depth and resonance of direct experience. It's within this context that the concept of image and representation takes on a new urgency, suggesting a world where what is seen and represented gains precedence over the tangible and the experiential.

The voluntary nature of our engagement with this world of images and representations starkly contrasts with the involuntary aspects of disability, yet both lead to a similar outcome: a distancing from the authentic experience of the body in the physical world. As we immerse ourselves deeper into digital realms, our lives become increasingly framed by the server's perspective, a viewpoint that prioritizes the virtual over the visceral. This shift towards a reality defined by the digital and the simulated accelerates our disconnection from the body, underscoring the paradox of our times: the more connected we are by technology, the more disconnected we become from the embodied essence of our humanity.

And … in a world where image and representations take presence over the reality of what is signified, humans becomes increasingly disembodied, moving further towards a schizophrenic like condition. Unlike the schizophrenic, we enter this disembodied world willingly. We choose to take part in the activities that disconnect us from the body, and we choose to do it for hours, day after day.[3]

In summary, disability illuminates ones abilities against what is lost, clarifying the situation despite absence. What do I still have, what is still there amongst what is not? Both disability and the server remove oneself from the given world in one form or another. This presents a greater importance to feel things in a time where things are no longer felt. Where everything is vanishing. Where there are no longer things. One no longer needs the body to survive, they need the simulacra, the body as just the vessel.

NON-THINGS AND SIMULATIONS

Before digital information, our lives were bound directly with real tangible objects and by that, real experiences. The world around us was understood and interacted purely through the body and physical items that held no layer of simulation, leaving us with a direct connection between subject and object.[4] This direct connection imbued our experiences with an authenticity and immediacy that provided us with true experiences and memories of the tangible world. The landscape however of our existence has drastically shifted; today we navigate a realm no longer anchored in the solidity of tangible objects but dominated by the intangibility of information and a proliferation of non-things. Furthermore, signs and images that do not merely represent or distort reality, rather precede and determine it. In this world, the distinction between the true and the false, the real and the imaginary, is no longer applicable or relevant. The proliferation of simulacra has led to the creation of a hyperreal[5], a space where the simulation is indistinguishable from the reality it simulates, thus rendering the concept of reality itself obsolete.[6] Furthermore, the value we once placed on physical belongings and the memories they housed has been overtaken by a preference for the immaterial—vast quantities of data that dictate, mediate, and encapsulate our lives within servers, far removed from physical formats or the memories held by others.

This transformation signifies a profound change in the texture of our existence. Increasingly, more aspects of our lives are not just influenced but entirely contained within digital formats, removing us from the tangible world and severing connections with the concrete recollections that once grounded us. Our understanding of life unfolds through a digital filter, mediated by screens and the exchange of information, all in pursuit of crafting a semblance of reality for ourselves. The shift from the real to the digital has redefined what we consider valuable, prioritizing the intangible over the tactile, the virtual over the visceral. To a large extent, we understand the real world second to the digital, only as far as it projects

to our understanding; like a broken telephone.

Our existence and understanding in two formats changes our connection with the physical world. Alike living with a disability, a life with then without sight, with then without hearing, with then without mobility. Here, a life with then without things. Instead information, from being connected to reality to being completely separated from it.

The once intense relationship we shared with others and our possessions—things that were physically touched, felt, and directly experienced—has evolved into an ephemeral engagement with data and screens. This shift has fundamentally altered our interaction with the world: our understanding now filters through these intangible mediums, leaving us questioning the reality of physical entities. As a result, the tangible aspects of life and our connections to others start to seem less real, only gaining authenticity within the digital realm. This transformation blurs the lines between true and false, with truth being overshadowed by the post-factual information society—where information circulates in a hyper-real space without any grounding in reality, yet is accepted as unequivocally true.

In what's left of physical reality, we find ourselves enveloped in a landscape dominated by non-things and simulation. This blurring the lines between the physical and the digital turns us into the repositories of information. Representations and reductions now dictate our interactions and determine the world we live in.

The child's once physical toys are replaced by the screen and the simulation of something else. A toy while one layer of a simulation, is still a physical toy. The screen on the other hand is cold and sterile. It reflects the child's face back. The child wakes up ten years later to still be looking at the screen, just now older and with no tangible connections formed with the world around them. The adult, similarly, finds it increasingly difficult to forge connections with things that cannot be physically felt or possessed – items that were previously held and filled with emotions through time

and in time, where there was a shared and lived recollection. In place, we are left with soulless devices and an endless stream of representations, a substitute that lacks the essence and emotional resonance of what was once real.

The transformation towards an existence dominated by the intangible not only redefines our relationship with the world but also fundamentally alters our psychological and emotional landscapes. Returning to the child, psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott extends the importance of physical unsimulated objects in his concept of transitional objects. Unlike our digital dependencies, the child uses transitional objects – that which are soft, such as blankets, pillows, or plush toys—as placeholders for rest and safety, serving as vital bridges between their inner reality and the external world.[7] These objects, imbued with significance through the child's attachment, foster a sense of confidence and security, gradually facilitating the child's engagement with the world around them. The physical nature of these objects, tangible and present, allows them to act as intermediaries between the child and the 'other,' nurturing the child's capacity to relate and connect. When the child hugs and snuggles up to their transitional objects, they feel not itself but the other.[8]

Inversely, today's adult possesses no tangible objects, only a server that filters out both interpersonal connections and the reality of the physical world. Like the child however, the adults enters a state of panic when their digital devices are misplaced, lost or stolen, yet unlike the toy, this is not a transitional object. Unlike the cherished transitional objects of childhood, which are irreplaceable and imbued with personal significance, electronic devices—though central to our daily lives—are fundamentally narcissistic and disembodied objects. They fail to serve as bridges to reality or facilitate genuine connections with others. Instead, these devices are viewed as disposable, constantly to be upgraded and replaced, underscoring a relationship with technology that is characterized by detachment rather than attachment.

Unlike the toy, we are attached to these devices in a narcissistic way, for they do not help us feel the other; rather, they only allow us to feel ourselves. When one presses up against their phone, in the hardness of the object, they do not feel the softness of the other, instead that which is concrete of the self. The other is then understood as a mere extension of one's own desires and projections. One understands the other primarily how they relate to their own needs and identities. Unlike the plush teddy bear, the phone turns the other into an object while completely removing their otherness.

This attachment destroys empathy and transforms the other person into an available object—another non-thing to consume and project off of, amplifying a cycle of self-referentiality that transforms every action into a transaction and every experience into a consumable good. Yet, paradoxically, we feel nothing at all. The screen, though touched, is never truly felt, demystifying our senses to the haptic compulsion of sheer availability. Similarly, all non-things no longer carry a story, and hardly anything of the consumer's life enters them. This self-centric interaction erodes our capacity for empathy and reduces the other to an object of availability. Despite this availability, the disappearance of the other underlies the profound loneliness and isolation we experience today. We engage in relentless yet unfulfilling hyper-communication and are left empty.

Transitioning from this digital superficiality, we can recall a time when our lives were intertwined with tangible objects that held deep personal significance. Growing up, we took care to keep things safe as we did all things close to our heart. Through material nature and time, we witnessed things break, decay and wear with age and temperature through the changing seasons. We let some things wear away in the open and with others less visibly in boxes beneath our bed. Yet, all things weakened through time, photographs faded through the light of our bedroom windows until they eventually washed away and disappeared. The bedroom now has no windows and there is no longer a photo. Like us, things had stories, they

were born and lived through before they died. Nonetheless, they were meaningful to us.

Information on the other hand does not possess any warmth or company, it rather repels. What fails to capture our interest, we easily dismiss, swipe away, or ignore, while the opposite consumes our finite time and attention, yielding no tangible return. What lacks instantaneity, availability, and transparency is deemed an inconvenience, a form of something foreign waiting to be eradicated. Here, it is no longer the us that possesses things, rather the non-thing that possesses us.

Amongst all the transitions from things to non-things, and from reality to simulation, our sense of existence blurs as we fulfill two dimensions that conversely separate and at the same time link together—they become codependent. That is, the physical world is less able to exist without the digital, and the digital can only exist with the information of the physical, for now. The digital dimension provides us access to assert our existence in the real physical world, however through that engagement the original disappears. In both, through merging with the digital server, the subject vanishes: our voice, our touch, our memories, and all the mysteries are turned into an image, an available and consumable non-real object. We too become dematerialized into the same representations we consume, representations that are no longer real, making our existence uncertain.

UNCERTAINTY OF EXISTING

For all of history, our survival depended on being seen, accepted and acknowledged; like our instinct for hunger, it signalled us the importance of social connection and belonging.[9] Being seen and acknowledged by a group in a close-knit community or tribe was the defining survival edge, it meant security, access to shared resources, protection from external threats, and more which aided our survival. Exclusion or ostracization from the tribe often resulted in death, as isolated and unknown individuals struggled to fend for themselves.[10]

As societies evolved, the structures of acknowledgement and acceptance became more complex.

We had networks and social institutions which guaranteed that we were seen. We had a family, and of course every member of the family saw us, noticed us. We were living in a village and everyone in the village knew everyone's business. We had communities. Visibility within these communities, be it through social status, profession or familial roles continued to play a crucial role in securing an individuals well-being and access to resources.

Like a baby, we need to be seen. If we are not seen by mother, we die. It is a survival instinct.

And today, there's nothing. There are no institutions left, at least not functioning ones.

So we are left to our own devices.

As a result, we are forced to self-cater, to become self sufficient, because there is no one who will do it for us; and because of this we are left totally isolated, literally physically, albeit behind our screens - and in a world with billions of others, despite total proximity, it has become "difficult" to be seen, and while we may be connected and be seen virtually, it leaves society atomized completely and it's alienation in the Marxist sense.[11] The server allows us to remain lonely in the complete absence of the other, no longer needing anyone, only the self to survive.

Conversely, with the base needs of survival guaranteed today, being seen is not. One no longer needs to exactly be seen to survive anymore, so we are not seen, not at least in the physical sense. Survival no longer brings us together and instead the server breaks us apart. Yet, the desire to be seen persists, fueled by the diminished necessity of physical visibility for survival.

Simultaneously, there is a need to be seen online in the absence of ones presence offline. A striving to fulfill an online existence, to keep it alive, when it is already dead. On the other hand, there is no longer anything to keep alive in the real for being seen here does not equate to survival. One is

therefore dead in both dimensions, while there is a persistence to maintain survival of an online existence.

Survival may be a given, yet the certainty of "being"[12] escapes us. Ironically, we understand existence purely through an online spectacle, despite existence equating to being and yet online presence as non-being, since true being cannot occur online. This urgency to be seen, to verify existence is a means of denying death when one is already dead. To be seen in ones pure absence, where we have survival without existence. Our existence is therefore mediated through screens, leaving us distracted in a palliative state, on our deathbeds projecting ourselves to one another that we are still there when we are in fact no longer there – all facilitated by a server.

Paradoxically, because of this, if we do not exist online—if one does not have some semblance of social currency—we do not exist at all. This becomes the primary mode of how we are heard and seen, the other known first through the hyperreal than the real. The digital precedes and then becomes reality.

A paradox of existence emerges: if one does not exist online, they do not "exist" in both the server's dimension and in others' perceptions. Conversely, if one does not exist offline, they do not exist at all. Living purely online equates to being dead in the real world, while living purely in the real world means being dead online. The offline serves and depends on the online and the online serves and depends on the offline. Therefore, the need to validate our existence never ends.

The fragility of our real existence is displayed as we move towards a total post-human state, existing purely online or living solely for the online; rendering us no longer human but slaves to the server. Ones offline body merely serves as food for the online persona. The offline self is never truly offline because it is constantly captured, recorded, and projected. Ones offline self is perpetually tethered digitally in order to survive, blurring reality with the virtual and dictating existence based on our online presence.

Jean Baudrillard, a seminal sociologist and philosopher, foresaw the contemporary compulsion to validate our existence within the framework of modern society. In his prophetic essay "The Ecstasy of Communication," published in 1987, Baudrillard delved into the intricate relationship between existential uncertainty and the relentless pursuit of identity affirmation. He articulated this phenomenon with acute foresight:

"The uncertainty of existing, and consequently the obsession of proving our existence, prevail over desire that is strictly sexual. If sexuality is putting our identity on the line, then we are really no longer in a position to devote ourselves to this task, for we are too preoccupied with saving our identity to undertake anything else. What matters above everything else is proving our existence, even if that is its only meaning."[13]

In a world today saturated with digital interactions and social media, the pressure to affirm and showcase our existence becomes paramount. In some form, it is the only way we exist. We become obsessed with proving our existence to ourselves and others. From sharing ourselves online to seeking achievement and recognition in professional and personal spheres – to all the images, messages, likes, shares, and followers we accumulate, it becomes a compulsive need, overshadowing other desires and pursuits. Without these, the proof we exist would otherwise becomes questionable. By affirming our presence and value in visible, quantifiable, simulated, albeit inauthentic ways, we can mitigate the existential doubt that plagues us. It's not merely about being seen; it's about affirming to ourselves and others that we are real, that we still matter and are there in our disappearance.

Baudrillard points this existential preoccupation is more pressing than even the basic human drive for sexuality; not exactly in the hedonistic, pleasure and intimacy sense, but as a means of procreation and the continuation of lineage and formation of a legacy.[14] In our struggle to assert our identity in our palliative sate, the pursuit of sexual desires takes a backseat; our energy and focus instead becomes devoted to identity formation via the proving of our sense of self to the spectacle.

We are so far in the future we are regressing back to our beginnings. To prove our existence outweighs all other meaning and purposes of life, the search for meaning has narrowed to a singular focus on existential validation. Being acknowledged and recognized even if online has become an end in itself. The existential quest to affirm that we are still alive, that we still exist, becomes the primary drive, even if that assertion of existence becomes the sole meaning of our lives; and because we do not exist in the same ways as we did before, in Baudrillard's time at least, we display ourselves in a hyperreal fashion in the spectacle, or server rather.

We become part of the spectacle, a spectacle we take as reality. A spectacle which is made of up images. Images which are simulated. Images which bear no resemblance or reference to reality, to which we take as perfectly real; furthering our disappearance and paradoxically furthers us down a perpetual state away from the real. Pushing us further to be seen despite all our projections in our physical absence.

Stuck in a loop.

THE SPECTACLE

In our contemporary world, we find ourselves enveloped in an all-encompassing social fabric that dictates the way we perceive and interact with reality. This construct, known as the spectacle, represents more than just a collection of images or a series of distractions; it embodies the very essence of our postmodern condition.[15] Conceived by Guy Debord in his seminal work, "The Society of the Spectacle," the spectacle refers to a societal paradigm where life is mediated through images, creating a layer of representation that replaces direct experience with its own hyper-real version.[16] It's a world where the image is not a simple reflection of reality but becomes reality itself—a hyper-reality that distorts and dominates the tangible world we once knew.[17]

The spectacle is the hyper-reality which has taken over reality. The spectacle is the instrument which allows the continuation of the status

quo. The spectacle is the instrument used for the goal of pacifying and distracting the masses. The spectacle is the autocratic reign of the market economy. The spectacle transforms our reality into a revolving door of commodifiable images. The spectacle is that which allows us to project and validate our existence. It is a tool of control that perpetuates the dominance of the market economy and ensures the ongoing alienation of individuals from each other and from their own lives.[16]

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.[17]

While Guy Debord did not explicitly describe the spectacle as hyperreal – later detailed by Baudrillard; his societal condition where life is increasingly mediated by images, leading to detachment from direct experiences is a reality where human experience is replaced by its representation. For Baudrillard, these representations no longer just mediate reality, but replace it entirely, creating a reality that is more real than the real itself. Both of their works underscore a shift towards world where the distinction between the real and simulated is indistinguishable.

Consider social media today, where users curate and share images and videos of their lives, often presenting an idealized or enhanced version of reality. Furthermore, this serves as a means of consumption and validation of one's existence. Users commodify their personal experiences, transforming moments of their lives into consumable content. This includes not only personal achievements or milestones but also everyday activities, all packaged and presented for maximum engagement. Additionally, platforms become significant stages for influencer marketing, where lifestyle, beauty, and travel posts are directly tied to commercial interests, further blurring the lines between genuine personal expression and commodified content. Viewers or followers are encouraged to consume passively, instead of actively engaging with their own lives or communities, finding themselves scrolling through a feed of spectacles, experiencing life vicariously through others' curated representations—all of which we accept as reality itself,

despite being hyperreal.

Today, it is found on every screen you look at. It is in the advertisements plastered across subway walls, malls, streets, and offices; it extends to our browsers, grasping our hands, seizing our eyes and ears. Every single post, feed, and article contributes to a constant stream of content that we voraciously consume. This endless barrage of commodifiable fragments is perceived and understood as reality itself. The proliferation of the server, both digital and physical has intensified the spectacle, expanding its reach and influence into every corner of our lives.

The spectacle diminishes the entirety of reality to an endless array of commodifiable fragments, urging us to fixate on these images and appearances—elements that usurp substance as the primary basis of existence. For Debord, this represents a profound "degradation" of our lives, a condition where the superficial trappings of the spectacle eclipse the depth and authenticity of human experience.[18]

For Debord, the spectacle represents a stage of false consciousness, where individuals, deeply alienated in a capitalist economy that fails to appreciate or value their labour, find themselves stuck. In this system where labour becomes increasingly unproductive serving primarily to fuel the economic machine rather than to fulfill genuine human needs and desires, we feel compelled to seek refuge in an alternate reality, a fantasy realm within the server apart from the material world as a palliative measure to distract ourselves from the disillusionment and to be able to return to work again the next day.

In this rat race where our lives are meticulously shaped and controlled by the dictates of the prevailing economic order, endlessly cycling resources back into the very system that confines us— we are offered no apparent exit. The server emerges as a sanctuary from the existential vacuum of real life, becoming the default congregation space outside the obligations of work and school. Here, we are left to formulate and create our digital selves in the server in order to participate, inadvertently trapping ourselves further away from tangible reality. A total digital self as the ultimate escape,

amplifying out narcissistic tendencies through the relentless pursuit of an idealized virtual identity. The notion of deleting ones digital existence would evoke the most profound sense of loss, akin to "death" and disappearance of all of one's identity, proving our existence exchange in the hyperreal form over the what was once real. The body and the physical self here are increasingly marginalized, disregarded, left in the backseat, forgotten.

END OF THE SPECTACLE

While Debord's spectacle still influences how we understand and interpret being, existence, and social life through commodities and increasingly detached modes of engagement, it amplifies our existential uncertainty. Today, we reach a point where the spectacle goes beyond merely influencing modes of production, consumption, and representation. Instead, it starts to dismantle reality itself, leading us through indistinguishably false realities.

"Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no theatre, no illusions, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and relentless light of information and communication. We no longer partake of the drama of alienation but are in the ecstasy of communication." – Baudrillard.[19]

Obscenity, in this context, arises not from explicitness or vulgarity but from an unprecedented transparency in our interactions and self-presentation. This constant flow of information and the blurring of personal and public spheres create a hyperreal environment where distinctions between "stage" and "reality," or "spectacle" and "everyday life," become meaningless. Our experiences, now mediated by technology and symbols, lose their original contexts and meanings to their simulations.

Today, users livestream, upload, and share every aspect of their existence online, turning private moments into real-time broadcasts. The lack of illusion or mystery exposes everything to the audience, marking a departure from Debord's concept of the spectacle. There's no longer a narrative or image needing interpretation—just a ceaseless flood of unfiltered content.

This omnipresent exposure eliminates the space necessary for the spectacle, rendering it "obscene" due to its total visibility. The nuanced "drama of alienation" is replaced by an "ecstasy of communication," where sharing and visibility trump the substance or value of what is shared. Everything becomes instantly accessible, leaving no room for interpretation or the enchantment of mystery. Life transforms into an open book for all, with the self as both actor and director.

Here, one continues to exist online in the absence of a tangible real-life presence, perceived as unreal. This dual withdrawal pulls society into a deeper state of anomie[20], shifting to a reality where one's being is more online than offline. This becomes more pronounced when life feels meaningless, resorting to a heightened level of narcissism to assert one's presence. If one is not seen or heard, regardless of their message, their relevance and existence are negated in both the real and hyperreal. The urgency to validate one's existence amid perceived meaninglessness is a natural response, clinging to life more fiercely just as it seems to lose its meaning; reflecting on Baudrillard's sentiment, "The need to speak, even if one has nothing to say, becomes more pressing when one has nothing to say, just as the will to live becomes more urgent when life has lost its meaning."[21]

And because the hyperreal offers nothing in return, no meaningful discourse is exchanged; we are all infants clamoring for attention to assert our existence within a server filled with communication but devoid of meaningful interaction. Thus, we're left with nothing but a world of self-focused narcissists, more alive online than in the tangible world, leaving the real world populated by empty shells.

NARCISSISTIC SOCIETY

The relentless demand to be seen, amidst our uncertainty of existence outside of the spectacle, only drives us deeper into the spectacle, amplifying our uncertainties. As attention—or the simulation of it—has become

the necessary currency for survival today, to be seen is to exist; being a narcissist equates to being "alive," even as much as it destroys the self, each other, and everyone around you. People are then naturally unable to be concerned beyond themselves, focused on their job, what to consume – capture and share. Like adults stuck playing a video game, one here cannot be concerned with things in the real outside of their perceived fabricated worlds.

Everyone works to sustain their existence in the real world, to afford the luxury of participating and existing online, perpetuating a cycle of work and consumption to maintain a digital presence. This loop, devoid of a final objective, perpetuates an addiction to digital engagement. The server, ever-present in our hands, replaces the slot machine, drawing everyone into a cycle of relentless consumption and content creation. Everyone fighting to be seen, from the likes, comments, reposts, to ever single semblance of activity; rendering a society of NPC's striving to contribute to ones social currency. Everyone is online and everyone is in the server.

Here, everyone is reduced. Not solely by the reduction of the body, serving no purpose outside of being a tool to fulfill one's narcissistic supply for the server, but also through the simplification of the human spirit into an entity devoid of thought. Identity becomes narrowly defined by consumption patterns and economic contribution, reducing thought to a function of consumerist participation. Because thinking becomes relegated to consumption, it leaves little room for creation. Man becomes an economic means to an end in this hyperreal consumer society.

Take creation today; primarily focused on the imperative of consumption, producing content that is increasingly narcissistic and devoid of substantive expression. Nothing is expressed outside of expressing how you consume. One's identity no longer comes from creation but rather expressing the self through content revolving around consumption. Ie. now what you create, but what you consume. The spectacle was about what clothes you wear, what phone you have, what's your job; to now about what content

you consume, and what you do related to consumption, and how you contribute. “Here is what I think, what I am doing, what I support, who I follow, what I am eating, buying, consuming.” all of which needs to be likable. If something is not likable, then it will not perform, and therefore, one will not be realized, at least not in a positive light.

Today’s content creators ascend to success by maximizing consumer engagement, privileging consumption over genuine innovation. Nothing solves anything where all is needed is to consume. We are already in this future dictated by algorithms tailored to perpetuate consumption, locking society into a cycle of compulsive engagement. A consumer society wired to a dopamine drip on repeat. Bread and circus.

While everything needs to be likable, made sacrosanct in a sense, it creates a perpetual loop to ensure something performs, fostering a false sense of self and validation, of being seen, and even questioning what is true. Things that are consumed “need” to be likable, and everything revolves around whether we like it, then expressing our likes, compliments, and validation in a mirror.

In our palliative society, it’s about garnering the most attention with the least amount of resistance possible, to make things as unoffensive and perfectly positive and likable. We cancel those who cause too much outrage or provide a dissenting opinion, doing the work of Big Brother through Big Data, creating feeds that present us with information we like, living in these likable bubbles with less tolerance for pain and struggle in conversation alone. As soon as something opposing comes into view, it must be eradicated immediately. It is painful to be confronted with a belief that differs from our own, so we surround ourselves with what is comfortable, in these digital echo chambers, realms we inhabit that anesthetize the pain.

The server has no capacity for pain and suffering; meanwhile nothing is felt behind the screen. We are not allowed, or are unmotivated to post something negative, something painful, as it would force one to think, and that is uncomfortable. And yet, pain is truth; truth means that there is pain

inside because it is confronting.[22]

We cannot be confronted with pain and suffering, for that forces one to contemplate, to struggle, to think, to sit and pause, to critique the said image or artwork. Instead, we intake is a constant feed of uploads, by and through the server—swipe, like, swipe, like, swipe, swipe, like, like. There is no thinking. In the city, too an endless array of uploads, of images, content, servers constructed, all with no conflict or negotiation, no need to pause, critique, or ruminate. If one critiques, no one listens, their social credit is affected, or they are cancelled. Why can't you like something that is perfectly likable?

Therefore, the things we "create" become far from challenging and emotional. Instead, things become totally transparent, pornographic almost, not only obscene in the Baudrillard sense but transparent and open where everything is presented in the open, without depth, removing any room for discourse. At the same time, it lacks the distance between public and private, with the screen acting as the imaginary protector. Things are made instant and perfectly available without any consequences, like the pornographic compulsion. The more the image promotes hedonism, the more ocular-centric it becomes. If you want to be seen, then, of course, you will emphasize the visuals which are all based on appearances.

In the process of making the self as likable as possible, nothing originates from outside the self, akin to an actor's performance. What is "created" centers on self-promotion. Whether through text or image, every output serves the ego, devoid of empathy for anything beyond personal experience and marked by a level of disassociation. The selfie, or the image of oneself, exemplifies this attempt—not born from self-love but from narcissistic self-reference.[23]

Rather than crafting something that necessitates curiosity, empathy, and exploration beyond one's bubble, most prefer immersing themselves in their own constructed worlds. Their feeds, videos, and subscriptions create a hyperreality of self, receiving only positive reinforcement. One

is never the enemy, they are painters pasting pastis of their lives and they cannot do anything wrong.

Individuals are reduced to a collection of experiences rather than beings with meaningful lives to consider. Their existence becomes a spectacle for others to view—people's lives are no different than TV shows we watch, marked by obscenity, transparency, and devoid of genuine experience. Each moment is an episode on display, with no one truly living in the real world. Instead, people consume televised versions of each other, where life is distilled into a sequence of images, devoid of true experience, and in the process, both are destroyed.

42. The society of the spectacle. 2024

Second order observation. One captures, records, live-streams said experience for the spectacle. Events take place first online than they do offline. If said experience is not realized online, it does not exist at all. When doing things for the virtual, the media precedes and shapes the event itself. Events are therefore staged and the crowds perform for media consumption. These events might not even occur without the media's presence and anticipation. If the media and us as performers are not there to capture and share for the spectacle, the value of said event diminishes. We therefore know what takes place and each other as media constructs, independent from the actual event and person - the precession of simulacra.





43. The society of the spectacle. 2024

The original, authentic experience of witnessing the eclipse firsthand becomes overshadowed by its digital represenatations. For many, the shared content online become more significant or "real" than the actual experience of viewing the event directly. Here, the "real" experience of the eclipse is not the physical act of observing it in the sky, rather the act of engaging with its digital represenations through social media. The anticipation and preparation for capturing and sharing the eclipse online precede the actual event itself. The planning of where and how to best capture the eclipse, what hashtags to use, and the immediacy of presenting itself on social media could be seen as more important than the eclipse - an inversion where the represenation precedes and determines the real; hyperreal.



DESTRUCTION OF THE IMAGE AND EXPERIENCE

The loss of the image comes from the loss of meaning.

Before anything, before the image, we had only experience. Experience was a direct output, a takeaway, a one-to-one relation between our body and the world and whatever transpired. Memory was unassisted, yet it was unmediated.

The shift to imagery, a milestone thousands of years in the making, began with visual representations and eventually embraced written text. Yet, this evolution did not supplant the primacy of experience; rather, images emerged as reflections of lived moments, transforming experience into visual memory. From ancient carvings and canvas paintings to the ubiquity of photographs, every image originated as an output to an encounter. The image always traced back to an experience, necessitating one to precede the other.

What we have today, rather, is image before experience. There is still an experience; however, the experience is directly correlated to the act of capturing said image, and in this relationship, the experience is lost. No longer does one "do" for the experience; rather, it is for the image. Here, the image is more important than the experience itself. The image is not as a direct takeaway but rather captured for consumption, to go out and do things solely for the image.

Consider someone who goes out to travel or attend an event or concert, filming the event or whatever is happening for themselves and their projection into the spectacle. The mode of observation between this and the last is that spectators or users experience the said performance or object in first-order observation. Here, however, they watch through their screen, in the mode of second-order observation, seeing it through how it will be witnessed on the server.[24] In the first, there is no separation between the subject and the object. In the latter case, one is focused on their recordings.[25] Part of the experience is therefore missed, and ironically,

the experience is not made valid until it is captured, posted, shared, and realized online—through likes, reshares, saves, follows. An experience is not made real until it is made non-real, and yet the experience is lost in the very act. If never captured and uploaded, in a sense, it never happened, because there is no social proof. And if there are no interactions or reactions that are not desired, one can then remove or take down said image—extremely narcissistic and only possible through the server. Hence the obsession with things being likable. Imagine if a stage performer canceled their performance because the show was not sold out, only to return or come back when the desired audience is reached. Here, this gesture happens seamlessly through the server.

What follows next is the phenomenon of image without experience. Consider the commonly cited content creators, brand ambassadors, influencers, and the everyday NPC's who venture out solely to capture an image, regardless of the actual experience behind it. They sell or project said experience based on what is captured, being present only to capture an image. Their experience is mediated entirely behind the screen, focused on what will garner the most attention and views, becoming increasingly programmed, inauthentic, and staged. In some cases, they stage an experience that is already staged.

One becomes removed from the experience only to share said experience for others to "experience." This is akin to missing out on the experience to share the missed experience for others to "experience," no different than watching a livestream or an AI-generated clip of the same event, then sharing your "experience" with others. Here, content is strictly for consumption, with images directly devoid of experience from the perspectives of both the creator and the consumer.

It is commonly seen today how there's a projection or instruction to others on how to capture said image, maximizing the opportunity for the image. Everything centers around the image, as evidenced by posts, blogs, and articles instructing on how to capture the best image, including the

best time of day, camera angles, filters, locations, and even down to the tags and timing for uploads to maximize engagement. In this process, we are all capturing and then dumping content—an endless stream either in limbo or uploaded to the server, marking a lack of experience on both ends. Life filled with images but devoid of experience. A world that is always caught captured, filmed and photographed even before it is seen.[26]

We are entering a phase where imagery transcends the human element entirely. This era is defined by self-generative content, such as AI uploads and generative art, which maintain a semblance of human involvement but lack tangible objects or experiences. Technologies like self-generative cameras allow individuals to produce images with inputs prompts such as time of day, location, weather and surrounding context in order to generate an image.[27] AI art but on scene, a redundant tool to simulate the taking of a photo in the absence of anything taken. The result is a visual that mimic or surpass reality in their hyperrealistic presentation, yet devoid of any lived experience. This development renders traditional efforts to capture the perfect shot—considerations of timing, location, and perspective—obsolete. The necessity of physical presence, the anticipation in queues, or the privilege of firsthand participation fades into irrelevance, as virtual alternatives offer a simulated perfection accessible to all, irrespective of physical or financial limitations. Like the metaverse, a tool that simulates reality in the absence of it. A camera that is not a camera that simulates the experience of using a camera that is based on generative artificial intelligence that can work off scene, but is encourage to be used on scene, without anything of the real being captured, only the simulation of it, however a simulation that is hyperreal.[28]

Another example is the sharing of content "experienced" virtually with others, like consuming a virtual experience that was never real. From paying for virtual access to exclusive vistas via VR or AR technologies to "traveling" to distant locales or events, one layer beyond that of our phones.

Then, recording said experience for others to consume, save, recreate and react to; all without needing to leave the home.[29, 30] Consider, for instance, a way to "travel" to a different country, an observation deck, a rooftop, or a concert, experiencing said event virtually from afar, recording it, then resharing it with others.[31] How meta can it get?

In the final analysis, the digital landscape morphs into a realm of pure imagery, devoid of human interaction or tangible experience, a realm where images are autonomously generated by servers. This shift renders traditional reasons for capturing images obsolete; memories fade not from the absence of memorable moments but from the delegation of memory to digital servers. The once selective process of capturing moments—be it a scenic vista, a milestone event, or a moment of levity with friends—has been supplanted by an indiscriminate digital archive, where the essence of memory is lost to the abyss of data storage.

Caught in this endless stream of agreeable content, we find ourselves in a state akin to watching life pass by stationed behind a TV screen, one that feeds exactly what you need to see, no longer the need to create on either end. A future where users inhabit isolated pods, cells rather in both digital and physical forms in the server, eliminating any incentive to venture beyond their confines. In this world, personal experiences are unnecessary; every conceivable moment can be algorithmically generated, tailored for consumption without the need for external validation or interaction.

This shift obliterates the concept of the 'other,' leaving only a solitary self served by a digital surrogate, a server that obviates the need for human connection or acknowledgment. In a universe where visibility and interaction once dictated existence, the absence of an audience precipitates our erasure from the very fabric of reality. Here there is no one to see.

This is where we disappear.

In this context, the environment mirrors this reality. The city serves the image—the spectacle. Here, the city transforms into nothing more than a mall and stage, a hub for content creation. It's a mall for consumption, a stage for performance, and a server for display—all embodying both physical and digital "bread and circus." This setup is designed to satisfy one's need to be seen while simultaneously exacerbating one's existential uncertainty—a continuous cycle.

Consequently, the urban environment—or, more aptly, the server that underpins it, needs to satisfy one's lust for the eyes. Hence, from the uploads of servers to the so-called arrays of experiences, it all needs to be ocular-centric, creating an Instagrammable environment in a sense. This environment is understood as much online, perhaps even more than offline, not by its atmospheres, but by the articles, news, reviews, and images shared online. The more there is to consume and capture, the more successful a space is considered today.[32]

The city transforms into an inexhaustible wellspring of content, serving as a dynamic resource for the spectacle. Gone are the days when urban spaces facilitated dwelling, communal interaction, or the mere accumulation of tangible goods. Instead, the city's essence is distilled into a series of spectacles, with its value tethered to its utility in the spectacle's service—enabling visibility and existence in the digital server.

In this spectacle-centric society, individuals morph into self-marketers, curating and promoting the city as a commodity. A "come shop with me", "come visit this place with me", "you have to visit this", "check this place out", etc. This commodification spans dining spots, leisure activities, shopping destinations, and picturesque locations, all shared to craft and curate one's digital narrative.

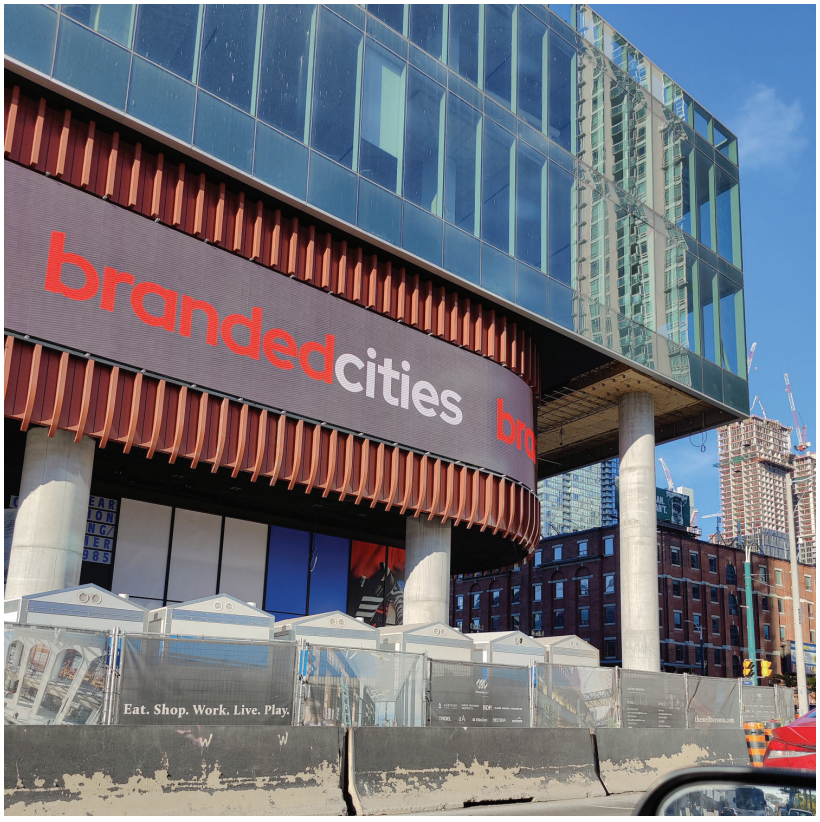
Reminiscent of a tourist, one becomes a tourist in the junkspace[33] that is the city. Unlike the traveler who comes to see what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see. The tourist visits to see the attractions the way

they want them to be seen and is content having achieved their objective—that being the showcase of the city from their perspective and their lives within it, all in a decadent manner. Here, both the self and the city only become real once captured, recorded and shared online.

As environments prioritize consumption-drive value, the impetus for innovation dwindles. Humanity regresses into a state of automation, where individuals, isolated within the city either in their physical or virtual cells, become trapped in mindless self-absorption, consumption and growing disconnection. Stripped of genuine human interaction and reduced to components in an "experience machine," this construct represents a utopian world for those in power as much as it is for the narcissist.

We face a future where all servers blend indistinctly, differentiated only by their digital footprint and our interaction with it online. One step further, a scenario where said architecture appears differently to everyone based on their programming and skinning made through their phone or headset. We may be able to plaster our own image of architecture regardless of what is "real", existing rather in a reality that is neither fully physical nor virtual, instead a complete blending of the two. The built environment in this case is not mediated strictly by what is "designed" and built, but what is individually created, projected and shared amongst others. A mixed reality hologram taken as perfectly real, and the actual environment outside of the screen rendered purely blank, monotonous, and useless – not too different from how we interpret, use, value, and supposedly interact with what's left of the real today.

Architecture is no longer about physical interaction but about how it is digitally mediated—seen on screens and through virtual interfaces. The city that transforms into a stage for content creation and consumption becomes one where reality is pre-mediated and served through our devices, promising and delivering nothing more than a simulacrum. Like our devices which too promise, sell and project the simulacra of experience; so too does architecture. Both servers. A reduction of the world and ourselves within it.



44. Simulated cities. 2022

The city has equal presence online as it does offline; if anything is more known first by its virtual presence than its physical - like ourselves. Because all that matters is the image, the image defines the experience and the experience defines the reality - to which now there is no longer even an image. The digital here supercedes the physical. The city becomes a well-spring for content as it does a representation of its online self. We have went from a world where the real was used to produce its representation, to one where simulations and signs precede our perception of reality. The media does not just misrepresent reality, it becomes its own reality and we in turn live within this media constructed reality, often without realizing it.


7:21
30%
thewell_to
90
posts
24.3K
followers
150
following

The loss of the body is no longer confined to physical disabilities or ailments; it extends through its usage to fulfill the spectacle and the server. Today, the body's utility is limited to what is necessary for the image—to project one's existence online, confirming their presence despite physical absence. For some, failing to post and share for more than a day equates to going missing.

We are transitioning to a post-human state where the image supersedes the need for a physical body. As a result, activities gain value only insofar as they can be commodified to enhance one's online presence. This shift has recalibrated the value of activities based on their potential for digital commodification. Conversely, my declining physical capabilities highlight a profound sense of loss, both physical and existential, as the activities I once cherished become increasingly unattainable, all while I long for them more.

My experience with the gym exemplifies this shift. Once a sanctuary, its significance has waned, first due to lockdowns and now my physical decline. To no longer walk the same, unable to carry weight, unable to push and pull. Unable. Paradoxically, if I don't train my body, it will become weaker, already in decline and programmed towards disability. To be there and realize I will likely never get to where I used to be, let alone where I dreamed to be, is like pushing a boulder up a hill, only for it to fall back down—fighting against mediocrity and being pulled more inside of it. Looking at weights I can longer attempt, weights far less I can hardly hold onto, and an activity I can hardly take on my own. It's heartbreaking. The gym, which once saved my life, has become a battleground where I struggle to maintain what's left of my physical abilities.

In this context, recording one's gym activities for online consumption never crossed my mind. Around me, others with full capabilities perform for the spectacle, recording, uploading, and sharing, prioritizing the image over the experience. Bodies that serve the server and a self that sits down

and watches. An obscene and enhanced display of the self and their life in and out of the gym, creators of content for the self for consumption, furthering the economic machine. Little remains offline because that would be non-existence. As I witness this display on my screen, I feel detached, observing a hyperreal performance that replaces genuine engagement with self-aggrandizing spectacle.

The things I once loved, now inaccessible, are performed by others as part of a spectacle, exacerbating the sense of loss. This uncanny experience of seeing cherished activities commodified and performed for digital consumption underscores a double removal from reality: first through physical incapacity and then through the spectacle's alienation. Unwilling and unable to participate in either.

In this state, I confront two modes of disability: one rooted in the physical, the other in the hyperreal. Unable to participate in either the tangible world or the spectacle, I exist in limbo, disconnected from both realms. This duality encapsulates our contemporary dilemma, caught between the desire for authentic existence and the compulsion to curate our lives for digital consumption.

Here, a child loses his favorite toy, and others, with the collective access to it, tearing it apart.

3.2

LOST SIGNAL

SIGNAL

The functioning of the nervous system is core to every aspect of human existence, permeating every facet of our physiological, cognitive and emotional experiences. It is a sophisticated communication network within the body, at the most fundamental level, it is the make up of you.[1] Within this network, the brain is the central command center of the nervous system. It receives and processes "information" from the body and the external environment, then generates responses and instructions. The brain remains as the conductor for the complex symphony of bodily functions. All these connections take place by way of the spinal cord, the long, thin, tubular bundle of nervous tissue that extends from the brain down through the vertebral column. It serves as a bridge between the brain and the peripheral nerves in the rest of the body. The spinal cord plays a crucial role in the relay of signals between the brain and the body. The nerves are like the body's wiring system. They consist of bundles of fibers called neurons that transmit signals in the form of electrical impulses. These are sensory nerves that carry information from sensory organs to the brain (e.g., touch, temperature, pain), and motor nerves that carry instructions from the brain to muscles and glands.[3] Within this network, a finite amount of protection resides around the nerves, brain and spinal cord. This myelin sheath also known as white matter is an insulating layer which allow all the electrical impulses to transmit quickly and efficiently along the nerve cells. It is a crucial element within this network, if damaged or interrupted these impulses slow down.[4]

All signals of and by the world are transmitted by the senses seamlessly. When one experiences a stimulus, such as touching a hot surface, sensory nerves in the skin detect this stimulus and convert it into electrical signals.[5] These signals travel along the sensory nerves to the spinal cord, then they are relayed to interneurons which can process this information.[6] The processed signals then travel up the spinal cord to the brain, where they are further interpreted. The brain generates a response, such as feeling pain

and pulling your hand away. The response signals are sent back down the spinal cord through motor nerves to the muscles, causing the appropriate action.[7] Another instance is how one walks, how the mind, body and world are all interconnected. Walking begins with an intention or desire to move, which originates in the brain's motor cortex. This area of the brain plans and initiates voluntary muscle movements. When you decide to walk, the motor cortex sends signals to the spinal cord, specifically to the lower part known as the lumbar region. As one takes steps, sensory receptors in their feet, legs and joints constantly provide feedback to the spinal cord and brain. Signals happen instantly, adjusting your step, gait, and reflexes to maintain balance and to prevent falls. When the spinal cord receives signals from the brain and sensory feedback, it sends instructions to motor neurons. These motor neurons stimulate specific muscle groups to contract or relax in a coordinated manner, allowing for controlled movement. Your muscles contract to generate the correct force needed for walking, from the brain and spine coordinating signals to execute with minimal conscious effort.[8]

Without one of these elements in full function creates a disturbance to the bodily system and ones ability to compute signals from the inside and outside. Signals become lost, untransmitted. Damage to any one of these parts creates a body that can no longer perform as humanly intended. An end to communication maintaining bodily functions. Signals no longer received. A condition that disrupts the myelin sheath, impedes the nerves ability to send electrical signals. One loses the ability to sense signals, to move about, to function, to be in this world.[9] When this signal is no longer understood and transmitted, it has nowhere to go. The brain loses contact with the spine, the spine with the nerves, the rest with the body, the body with the world. The operator waits on the other line, nothing to receive, a still dial tone, no voices, no movements, no actions. A lost signal.

MEMOIR

It had not initially struck me, the speed of progression, how slow or rather how fast could it progress. A regression into different stages of life, different levels of being, layers of new losses introduced and worsening of others. What remained I asked. How much time did I have left to do all the things I still loved and enjoyed, to revisit past experiences and embark on new ones. Not long.

Time compressed.

Questions I continued to revise for myself based on the given amount of time that had unfolded and how the body responded upon decline. A mapping out what could be done then, and despite difficulties only months later, trying to gauge how long I could sustain a given activity and make consolidations sooner than I would have expected. Thinking not in terms of decades or years, rather months and weeks, or better yet seasons.

It was like a plane crashing, a boat struggling to stay afloat, a home collapsing—this home being my body. However, among all these considerations was still one, one that moved closer and became a singular focus: to find the other, to fall, to lose myself before I am lost. To reach the pinnacle of the human condition before the dream collapses. A sequence of collapses, losses. First of the real world, of freedom, the loss of self, and the loss of the other, of her.

Years ago, before diagnosis and decline, I convinced myself my condition would not be of concern, nor would it need to be at those given moments. Why worry about something not currently in effect. The series of declines should not have been a concern for me. Something in hibernation. Genetic code rewriting itself. It appeared however that all the declines would orchestrate themselves in unison.

Changes in the ability to walk, to move, a decrease in strength and

physical capabilities, yet mentally and in terms of willpower barely affected. A gradual transfer of dependence from myself onto another. Questioning if at all this would be a problem, maybe, however still not an immediate concern. Before I knew it, months turned into years and the decline in my abilities became more pronounced, more palpable. Felt. Shown. Something behind me in the distance, to by my side, now in front of me. Each day I woke up to witness the diminishing value and potential of what I could offer to others; and to the world. A condition that destroys the human body, much like the server does, albeit indirectly. Yet, still a human need remains, a biological response, or perhaps the desire to connect, to feel loved.

Panic.

It did not take long to realize what living with a chronic condition or disability meant, and by extension the shared experience with the other. A loss in connection from the inability to present the self as before, to access the world in the same ways, to feel fully, to communicate, to reach the other in a body language that could be understood and accepted. A fear of no longer connecting with anyone or anything real not only by the loss in ability but in conjuncture limitations in access. To be left alone post-disability by outcome of visual presence and outward reality of a condition. A signal that cannot be, is not received or accepted on the other end – and the more the disability manifests, the more it feels a signal is being cut, not strictly internally, but also by reach towards the other.

What's left is being without a voice, unable to be heard, touch that cannot be felt, devoid of physical exchange in that of the real, and a machine, the simulation of the other and a non-real connection that mirrors the faults by my own disability. In both, no bodies are accessed and nothing real is connected to. Interaction by screen than through touch, fixed in place, eyes locked on a static display. Experiencing less due to bodily limitations

leads to disconnections, and further, a society that increasingly embraces a similar disembodied state, living by, for, and through screens. Texts replace textures, resulting in a double disconnection—first by the body, then again by technology.

In this one way relationship, there is a forgetting as the body forgets too. A body that is no longer utilized, that can no longer receive signals from the world or transmit signals from inside to outside. Sending and receiving signals once facilitated by the senses are compromised. Signals by their biological makeup start and end in the body. Signals today take place with no body. Therefore, there are no signals.

The self gets out into the world with what's left amidst pending disability to find no one there – to find a narcissistic spirit and faces hidden behind screens. It becomes increasingly challenging to connect with others in addition to the loss of movement, range of motion and the basic abilities to stand, walk or touch. To give and receive. It feels akin to being lost in a server in contrasts to what's left of the real, with information moving faster than I can transmit, too slow to relay, and left lost in translation. Social distancing made permanent. Here, all I ask is for you to walk beside me and just be my friend.

Instead, what we find is isolation amidst each other, growing accustomed to living in disabled states, inhabiting virtual or so-called fantasy worlds in both direct proximity and distance to each other. Focused inwards, we become increasingly disconnected and isolated, crafting a utopian world that servers both the controllers of this digital realm and the narcissists alike. Both the act of communication and form of relationships become commodities, where everything that is mediated by the server is flattened out into an object of consumption. When paired to the machine, where there are no longer any signals, we are already dead. A state of life-support with speech generating devices. A disability without the ability to connect by the very servers that promise to connect us. Like a neuro-degenerative disease, the server creates a disconnected condition. One that disconnects from reality, from the real world, from the other and from ourselves.

DISCONNECTION

Despite all the simulations of connection, the "replacements" the server so called offers, it leaves us fundamentally disconnected with nothing. All the connection with no connection. Shared experiences with nothing being shared. Information with nothing being remembered. Disembodiment promoted in a society dominated by screen-based technologies and a move of living by representations.

As we grow accustomed to artificial environments, we start to disengage, we become a society of unlearning how to interact with those directly around us, instead learning to interact in a metaphysical space of anonymity and convenience. We become used to reducing life into a pure exchange of information. In this, we grow more desperate for connection in response to a world so deprived of it, we crave a fix in something further abstracted from reality, a removed physical world. In search for truer connection, we instead are left trapped inside its emptiness. Retreating into the same spaces that blind our view of the other, we trace space where the other is not felt, nor seen, and rarely called to talk. In its place, only a message is sent, and in that message the sound of their voice disappears. In this post human way of being where life is reduced to a pure exchange of information, the body becomes a ghost where no one is there. It becomes a world lost of its solidity of being, and a mind elsewhere from the body.

ALIENATION

In the presence of the inability to connect amongst the influx of information, we evolve into a state of alienation. In the server, we are flooded with information, more than the body and mind can humanly grasp. Too much information to conduct a signal further separates ourselves from one another and from what is real. Consider when one leaves their home: one is overwhelmed by strangers, passersby, the media, lights, noise, signals, cars, and other servers—from the outside. The same

overwhelming effect comes from inside their devices, to which we bind ourselves. None of these experiences are felt, touched, or absorbed; none are heard or spoken to; information passes by, unreceived, leaving the body left on standby.

We were never meant to be surrounded and jostled by an overwhelming mass of strangers, by the thousands on the ground at intense speed, and with and without others living on top, beside and across one another. It changes our human drive from being together to wanting to get away as much as possible from the strangers we are physically surrounded by all the time. From all the faces we see and do not meet or interact with, it is too much data for us to process. Hence why we retreat, paradoxically, back into our servers; in both physical and digital formats. Here, the eyes no longer meet, the hands no longer touch, and voices are not exchanged.

Space becomes unfamiliar by the very nature of those around us; it creates an alienated condition. There lacks separation; there are those going to work, to play, to shop, visiting and leaving - from the very door of your "home." All strangers—with no familiarity, day by day; none of whom you know or speak to. It is akin to living in a prison with thousands of others. From inside your server, your cellmates, almost none of whom you know, to outside your prison, the city, to the other prisoners, and beyond, prisoners from outside the country; none of whom you interact with, and instead, you zoom by. Everyone becomes socially alienated and distances themselves further.

Our distancing from one another becomes normalized through the server, a screen that creates a boundary in the nearness of the other and enables communication in the distance. Ironically, digital communication by its very nature of being gapless, eliminates the experience of both nearness and distance. Despite being instant, the body receives nothing, echoing a sentiment that Franz Kafka beautifully articulated in his letters to Milena.

"One can think about someone far away and one can hold on to someone nearby; everything else is beyond human power. Writing letters,

on the other hand, means exposing oneself to the ghosts, who are greedily waiting precisely for that. Written kisses never arrive at their destination; the ghosts drink them up along the way. It is this ample nourishment which enables them to multiply so enormously. People sense this and struggle against it; in order to eliminate as much of the ghosts' power as possible and to attain a natural intercourse, a tranquility of soul, they have invented trains, cars, aeroplanes—but nothing helps anymore: These are evidently inventions devised at the moment of crashing. The opposing side is so much calmer and stronger; after the postal system, the ghosts invented the telegraph, the telephone, the wireless. They will not starve, but we will perish."[10] Our distancing to the other increases the more we drift from bodily connection and towards the digital, however even for Kafka, something was felt despite the medium.

Kafka's reflections on the elusive nature of true connection amidst technological interventions, highlights our disconnected state today. In our state of alienation, we grow accustomed to no longer feeling anything in the disappearance of the other. During the pandemic, we separated ourselves as much as possible in the name of safety and avoidance of pain. The suffering of others too needed to be avoided. Many who died were left alone in the intensive care units without being afforded any human affection. Nearness in this case meant infection, and distancing was held in high regard. The possibility alone of too being sick in the palliative society was too high of a risk and naturally resulted in a lack of empathy. There no longer was any touching. Only that behind a screen. The virus guided us into a physical loss of distance and the server increased this digitally. The server was then able to simulate the presence of the other in their complete disappearance. What we have today is all the social distancing without the virus, and a rapid decline in our capacity for empathy in our disconnected society.

It's difficult to care for something disconnected — and something the body does not grasp. It's ironic how we care for our devices more than anything else; they hold everything and nothing, more of us than ourselves.

The body understands through physical stimuli, the mind receives, but without touch, there's no sense of care. In this world increasingly devoid of touching, our capacity for care diminishes, moving us away from the most basic primordial scene of healing where the simplest contact could soothe and connect us deeply to another. In the real world, no longer is there care for space outside of ones own, space everywhere we are alienated in. Care is therefore reserved for what is privately yours, oddly, one does not physically care for the digital, this is narcissistic, and so we don't care for anything.

COMMUNITY

Due to distancing and breakdown of communication, we remain in an alienated state, leading to a lack of care and inability to form communities. We no longer actively unite, instead accumulate more users, strangers and information. We open a border to all of humanity where people enter until the level of well-being in the developed state diminishes so much that there are no reasons to enter anymore. This scenario, much like a vessel filling beyond its capacity until it begins to sink, reflects not just the outward movement of those seeking better opportunities but also the inward flux of those departing due to the deteriorating conditions. Everyone flees in and out and no collective bonds form. Crime, loneliness and inequality increases, living standards falter, privacy wanes, and the imperative to share grows all under the guise of progress. Supply and demand becomes more of an issue and the rate of server uploads already accelerated never keeps up, while pushing to make life more affordable, to own nothing and be content, to live with less, to live with nothing, and be distracted by more "bread and circuses" – what's not to like? People then become more estranged, distant and resentful, left to retreat to their devices – a natural human response to these pressures.

Uploading of servers becomes tighter, taller, more compact. Developments in this crisis too no longer take place in a plot of excavations

and extrusions and instead extend onto the streets, the parks, the parking lots[11, 12] and every inch of the city. There becomes a feeling that there is no longer anywhere to go in the escape of one another. Developers are granted a key to everywhere. Again, all in the name of progress.

Forced to share more and more, this mantra of "sharing and caring" becomes ironic as it's imposed upon those already feeling alienated.[13] This only deepens the sense of isolation and fuels the desire to escape and find solitude, furthering the cycle of disconnection in a world increasingly characterized by compulsory sharing with those to whom we feel no genuine connection. We all become egocentric individuals marked by competition in a landscape that pushes us tightly together as we try to pull apart.

All that develops is a low group identity[14] and a lack of shared feelings. Many don't know their neighbours, those on the common streets, those in transit, in their office building and within the reach of their home; spaces too that merge with the digital server. We know no one. In this fractured society, there is an absence of collective thought, social cohesion, core national identity and shared values, leaving us all as strangers.

This lost signal society emerges in times of prosperity, as people become averse to pain and are open only to likable experiences. There is no space for discourse because that would be negative, so what happens is greater fragmentation amongst the chaos. More users and servers, conversely greater levels of alienation and distancing. The absence of conflict paradoxically increases division and discomfort, obscured by the veneer of progress and social progressivism. No one is willing to stand or die for any cause, many holding disdain for their home country or their current residence. This feeling worsens where there is a communication breakdown and those in power can take advantage because no one can communicate and actively do anything about anything. In proximity, feelings of hostility and competitiveness grow towards one other and evolve into a bystander society characterized by inaction.[15] This stems from desensitization and the avoidance of pain and discomfort; distancing ourselves from being

touched, involved, or affected.

In this environment, community formation is stifled; connections between individuals falter, fueling increased hostility and crime while diminishing collective action and unity. The result is not protection or collaboration but isolated lonely strangers within a bystander society.[16] Touch is rejected because to feel brings a risk of pain. When an event arises, we seek to escape at the earliest opportunity within the sea of strangers. Survival becomes the utmost priority and we freeze as bystanders, risking harm, the potential for pain and suffering and inaction to get involved. The safety of others does not outweigh ones own, so no one does anything, further disincentivized by the act of legal repercussions in this society. In the face of rising violent crimes and a diminishing response rate, the server's scope expands, manifesting in increased bio-surveillance and CCTV. This technology acts as a crutch for our bystander society, promising protection by an ever-watchful big brother, yet ironically encouraging further detachment from communal involvement.

Within this cycle of inaction and detachment, individuals transform into double bystanders during events that would typically call for intervention. Armed with their phones, they record the unfolding spectacle, becoming physically present observers who are nevertheless emotionally disengaged. In this duality, they are both present and absent, witnessing yet withdrawing into the safety of their screens.

LONELINESS

We are all alone. Inside the server, we find ourselves in a paradox of total isolation amongst thousands physically and an infinite number digitally. Historically, our survival hinged on connections and approval within tribes, collectively living in close knit groups and being physically connected to others. Today we live in complete opposite conditions; one can pursue the majority if not all of their life in total isolation, out of touch and out of reach to others. Unlike the past, we are increasingly living alone

and sharing space and interactions online. Our living form is evidenced by the rise of single dwellers, decline in marriages and relationships, shrinking family units in cities, changes in demographics, flexibilization in labour and changes in our social structures and lifestyles influenced by the server. We are no longer together like we used to be. Our domestic space reflects these patterns as development shifts towards smaller spaces, from studios to one bedroom units in an effort to meet demand, "affordability" and market trends, ultimately driven by a shrinking supply that will never meet a demand which becomes worse. Users will accept the bare minimum with no other alternatives and the rest of their home outsourced elsewhere. Consequently, we live with less and occupy more shared physical and digital spaces. While more space is shared and the assumption would be to connect us, it rather amplifies our already heightened sense of isolation.

In the server, we are isolated from the concept of a neighbourhood despite all the proximity of rooms jammed together, and instead of close friends amongst distant ones, we have neither, we have followers. In the gaining of followers, no interactions take place outside swipes and the reception of images. Our relationship is mediated by the production of images. The other becomes an image for me, and I an image for the other. No intimacy is experienced in visual representation without the other. In this one way relationship, we are never satisfied and our drive for attention becomes narcissistic. No one recognizes the other where there is nothing for the body to connect to, so we are left empty in spite of complete illusion of connection.

We reside alone in our virtual worlds, screened apart from one another where no one talks, feels or remembers. We then move about a prison where no one is recognized and everyone is on their separate paths. Different modes of information that are not received, signals that are lost. In this "city" of strangers we become alone both online and offline; for no one can be together online and no one can bear to be together offline. As a result, we move into a mode that becomes used to loneliness amongst its discomfort and prolonged damage to our health,[17] staring at screens

to distract ourselves and the voices we might hear in the silence, seeking pseudo connection in new ways the server promises to sell back to us.

When man feels there is nothing left to connect to in what is left of the real when everyone resides behind a screen, nor the simulacra of connection in the hyperreal, he deletes himself. Man feels empty in the absence of belonging and the server provides a false shield for one falling into egoistic suicide. Man longs to engage in activities that involve more than just eyes, ears and fingertips. Man longs to choose the real over the virtual and engage more with the body in a world that moves in the opposite direction. Man dreams to make different choices and increase the amount of time he spends in flesh-and-blood, interactions in a society that holds this foreign.

This longing isn't merely for interaction but for a return to the embodied experiences that define our humanity. Nietzsche's assertion, "I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body," underscores the critical role of the physical, the corporeal, in realizing our essence and combating the emptiness of digital abstraction.[18]

Without the body however, man is but a lost signal.



45. “Connected” “Together”. 2024

Outside, one is perpetually online, either locked to the screen or in search for content to upload, something to connect to; always inside of the server on the streets in their hands, needed to take part within both the digital and physical server or back inside of their physical server that serves the digital. Everyone is distanced from one another despite the complete proximity. Socially distanced without a virus – albeit “connected” through said server. No one touches, talks, sees, nor hears the other. A lost count of passerby’s outside behind the screen, unapproachable. Inside or outside, more with the screen than with each other.


otice
adidas
311



46. “Community” cells. ca. 202x
Isolated cells. I find most of the server units upon viewing are single dwellers, disconnected internally, and in all directions. Ironically, the server offers to form and support “community” with little realized. Most of the dwellers, as expected are inside, stuck behind a screen. This isolating and alienating condition only propel the other to retreat further into the server online, exacerbating their state of alienation from one another and the real. Thus, we no longer access each other in the public or private worlds, only by sight through a screen, only by the exteriors, by the server.



47. Panoptic neighbourhoods. ca. 202x

One is always behind a screen within the digital server and that which extends to its physical counterpart, the city and the so called “home”. Existence is relegated to the constant act of uploading and consumption, leading to a lack of body and lack of space. Here, lives are on perpetual display, as personal spaces blur in the digital; into a diminished state of being. Servers in both dimensions function far more like panopticons than they do neighbourhoods.



3.4

SERVER FARM

SERVER CITY

We no longer dwell in the real, rather within digital domains across machines. A landscape that rewrites itself. Architecturally, a server that erases all, free from history and any sort of metaphysical limitations. Complete vastness of land, an emptiness almost. Structures, designed to be gateways to experiences, ironically offer none – hollow shells, facilitating life lived through the lens of a screen, all within a single frame one subscribes to.

The modern city, this server farm, a series of interconnected servers, store human lives and experiences, codified, data-based, and translated to ones and zeros. Offline and online states defined by windows and closed curtains confine individuals to a state akin to the digital domain. Dreams, thoughts and feelings fragment here, leaving a longing for genuine connection. At the same time, so called architects and developers prioritize technological connectivity over meaning, doing the bidding of corporate overlords, creating a soulless urban environment. All the connection without any connection. Constant destruction and reuploads, an erasing of the past behind a veil of progress and a resulting homogenous landscape. A place without date, without reference, without location, non-place. The swarm of technology mimics the speed at which such utopias and dystopias chase one another.

As our lives increasingly combine and blur with technology, understanding its implications is crucial. Perceiving the built landscape as servers unveils the profound changes in cities and their impact on our collective existence. Total flatness and transparency in everything. Cold steel and glass skinning the concrete shells we inhabit. Seen but never felt.

Similarities are shared with the server in the endless sprawl of towers and a machine that does not stop, while representing restricted access and

mediated experiences at a cellular level within a greater network. Here, one no longer witnesses the horizon beyond that of the screen.

By transgressing the boundaries of these machines towards rooftop perspectives allows one to witness and explore the interplay between architecture and human agency. These elevated viewpoints offer a unique glimpse into the lives of each server across the sea of them. From below the ground to the sky, one is presented the full interplay of living within the confines of said environment.

A seeing that, the city is a server.


idence In
Marriott

48. Server Farm. ca. 2022

Photo captured on a cold winter night, purposefully after I began to shoot long, instead of wide. Viewed at 155mm, one can witness the sprawl of servers layered across three cities, from Toronto all the way to Mississauga. I can spend a lifetime watching each server down to each cell inside.

THE SERVER

We do not construct architecture, we construct machines.

The form of high-rise developments today visually speaking resemble server racks, from their shape, orientation, density, facades, to material construction. A server farm at a city level, monotony packed tightly together, mediated across a network of users and moderators. These structures prioritize the collection of users on one end and the efficiency and concentration in a manner akin to data servers, optimized for data management, storage efficiency, speed, and sustainability. Within the urban fabric, such developments act as the hardware to the city's software, serving as tangible repositories for both human activity and data, paralleling the role of servers in the digital realm.

Rigid and vertical, both these servers are engineered to maximize usable space within their limited urban footprints, echoing the maximization of data in servers, in one case data centers and the other the natural landscape. Designed to house as much content as possible – whether human or digital – these structures are literal and figurative embodiments of the principle that form follows function. This output is captured in the mass optimization of towers. Inside, so called units of inhabitation and program are consolidated for maximum efficiency and profit, while labelled as an effort of sustainability, degrowth, equity and affordability; conversely resulting in reduced living standards and greater centralization and control in the name of progressive virtues. Such spatial arrangements effectively reduce the physical realm of each individual in exchange for greater reliance on digital space – more consumption of the virtual at the expense of tangible freedoms.

As server racks are built indistinguishable from the next, so too are the conditions architecturally inside and out. Here however, form reasons to be independent of function. While each server in the city blends together in a sea of junkspace[1], there is still limited room for expression in a fight

towards dominance of the eye. The same eye already overwhelmed by screens in our hands and around our peripherals. Consequently, the city transforms into a diffuse spectacle,[2] as much a collection of commodified images as collection of developments, collectively uploaded and experienced en masse.

The servers here are not hid behind closed doors like their former, instead are inserted, swarming around us, further presenting the condition of an architecture of server primarily judged on its visual demeanour where there lacks no function otherwise. These servers remain fully exposed, on display, pornographic on the outside, vying for attention in an already overloaded ocularcentric culture, while failing to contribute anything beyond the visual in an existence dense with visual simulacra. No matter the presence of an individual server, it is often not for long until it is overshadowed by the next towering upload, further blocking out the sun, pulling us away from the real and deeper into the cave. As we intake the metamorphosis of the environment into a landscape of machines and information, our existence is relegated in two realms; signifying a shift in how we access space – moving from physical to digital access.

Access is mediated no longer strictly by the body, by how one gets through a physical threshold, rather predominately by digital code. Alike the server, one requires an invisible grant in permissions to access the given network, program, feature, cell, unit, other. One acquires access to a single level, a single experience, a part of the physical simulacra. While "private", one that is moderated by another entity, unlocking space situated deep within a larger network.

Due to the nature of access and function of servers, we are left with an environment dominated in exteriors, leaving us detached from the interior realities of both machines and the human lives within. Despite our proximity to one another, our interaction is confined to the ultimate exterior expressions visible through our devices, devices themselves which are the exterior expressions of the server racks hidden, out of sight and

without access. The phones and screens hidden in our hands remain silent, revealing nothing of their users and telling no story. The screen becomes the outward expression of the individual, a representation that tells us nothing. It is only in virtual space that one can see and interact, rendering their physical presence obscure.

The architecture of physical servers mirrors this phenomenon; despite an illusion of transparency, they too divulge nothing of the data or lives they contain. It is only from the perspective from inside a server to another is one visible, yet still unreachable, a mere simulation of presence in the total transparency yet disconnected between exterior appearance and interior realities. Because interaction is confined to the exteriors, facing another person or server is akin to standing before a server rack – a rack that is paradoxically nowhere to be found. We observe lights and terminals flickering on and off, signals of activity which convey no direct meaning. Unknown are the identities behind the signals, where they originate, or what they signify. To "reconnect," one must retreat into the online realm, back into their own exterior, in pursuit of connection. Thus, we no longer access each other in the public or private worlds, only the exteriors.

Building on, these exteriors which house nothing else but information, empty server racks waiting to be inhabited with drives and data, are structures which otherwise become shells. Just as a server stores and processes vast amounts of data, these buildings serve as repositories of human life, experiences and interactions. They function as interconnected cells within the urban fabric, housing individuals that are constantly online and engaged with the digital realm. Unlike the metaphorical server racks that are hidden away in a closet within a data center, these servers are everywhere, and yet they tell us absolutely nothing. Even if one makes it inside, they are lost. Unlike a neighbourhood that still provides orientation through nature and proximity, there is nothing to find inside the server behind ones cell or below the roof.

Alike our virtual cells designed to connect us to the world and each other, that which leaves us with limited interaction with reality, a reality

filtered through a digital lens, so too is the view inside each of the cells we inhabit, where one has a singular view of the world always behind a screen. Here we subscribe to both a virtual and physical channel, one that is simultaneously isolated where one is left on a perpetual home screen within a fixed perspective glimpsing into lives paralleling their own, trapped within the same machine. Ironically, escaping the confinement of living in the cell into a digital realm that feels endless only reinforces said entrapment, tethered to a screen that projects yet never changes. A screen like your own without a view or connection to the horizon, permanently diminishing said sense of the real world, mediated by the same screen that promises to expand it.

The function of the server, both as a physical entity and a metaphor for our digital infrastructure is two fold: it allows us to exist in the world while simultaneously dictating the terms of that existence. The physical server, which I hesitate to describe merely as architectural, provides the bare essentials for our digital selves to thrive. It offers just enough interaction with the outside world and allocates just enough space for users to maintain an accurate and simulated representation of reality for others to see. This duality underscores a shift towards prioritizing our digital existence over our physical one, compressing and diminishing the physical aspects of our lives in favor of a virtual expansion. Endless replications of each other.

This evolution suggests that the very fabric of our existence is increasingly woven from the threads of digital simulacra, where the representation of things takes precedence over the things themselves. In such a world, the rich, lived, tactile, and sensory experiences that once defined our interaction with physical spaces are overtaken by uniform, potentially soulless constructs reminiscent of our digital devices. This transition signifies not just a transformation in how we live but also a redefinition of the concept of home. The traditional notion of home as a physical sanctuary loses its significance as we increasingly inhabit digital spaces. The physical server, in its role as a facilitator of digital life,

contributes to a collapsing of the physical world into the virtual realm, marking a transition towards a reality where our digital selves hold precedence. This shift suggests a future where the essence of home is no longer tied to a physical location but is instead defined by our presence and interactions within digital environments. Just as data undergoes a cycle of creation, upload, deletion without recollection, so too does the real world and the human spirit that follows, indicating a profound alteration in the way we perceive and experience our existence, blurring the lines between the tangible and the virtual, reshaping our very understanding of what it means to be human in a digital age.

49. Servers. 2022



50. Servers. 2022

In the lower left corner, the crane for CIBC tower two is visible. One of many densities amidst erection, which begs the question when will the machine stop.



51. Servers. 2022

Formed and functioned like a server.



52. Servers. 2022
This photo considers the residential server in proximity to the office server behind pending completion.



53. Servers. 2022

It doesn't take long to reflect on the lack of ambition and motive the city has from the servers that fail to speak. Servers that are propped as groundbreaking each and everytime, only to be left as unenthusiastic and soulless machines.



54. Servers. 2022

While alike the others in height, form, and function, this server: CIBC Tower stands out for the spectacle before turning its lights off after midnight. Captured in standby mode.



55. Servers. 2022



56. Servers. 2022

Server face, each level alike a dedicated server rack.







origin

September 8, 2023
3:45pm

UNSETTLING CHANGE

There is a hard-to-describe feeling when something you share a spatial recollection with is replaced. Growing up, we become familiar with things through time and engagement—things we become used to, things we expect to always be there, waiting. That toy you always left in the same spot of your room, in your closet, under your bed—things that the body became accustomed to—that are in some part an extension of ourselves.

When renovations around the home took place, it signaled an end to something for another. Less an upgrade and more a replacement. From new paint on walls, to rooms taken down for anew, from the windows to the floors, the ceilings to the doorknobs. Doorknobs you shook hands with every day, that remembered a part of you for years ever since you were younger, the child's hands and all others it shook hands with. A change of sounds when the door now opens and closes, a sound you profoundly miss. The floors that carried your weight, that learned your walking patterns and your feet grow in size. The walls you drew on, made a hole through, one that was repaired less than perfect, some areas remaining cracked out of sight, other surfaces and edges that were never truly finished and always made its way back through.

During renovations, you saw all the parts of the home laid bare: a shedding of old skin, a destruction of what was familiar, yours. Like a throwing out of that same old toy, or one that has disappeared. Complete demolition: tiles smashed, carpet pulled, ceilings torn, walls collapsed. You witnessed the inner framework, the heart of the home, from the structure that kept the roof over your head, to the barriers and insulation that kept you warm and dry. The noises of construction reflecting off a home that is screaming for help. A home exposed, gone under the knife and in disarray with the machine. An old face replaced with new skin and a new appearance, inside us, a hope it would be put back together the same. Every time the home changed, it felt like a part of yourself had gone too, overtime however, things started to matter a little less, one because you got

older, and two, because it was no longer the same home you had before – a new partner that doesn't remember all the parts and memories of you, nor do you all the parts of it. Despite this, every part of what once was home held memories of you, as you did of it, fostering a sense of consistent familiarity. Changes occurred, but they were manageable because, at its core, it was your home.

Outside the home, that which extended beyond the front door – there were changes here and there, minor developments and extensions from the stores, green space, neighbourhoods and everything in between. For the most part, the changes were linear, gentle, unfolding softly and naturally unlike an imposed progression. The further one moved away from the home, the less impactful they seemed, yet for the most part this was still a landscape you bore relation with. The home stretched from the private to parts of the public.

Today, that same feeling of unease returns tenfold, yet to a space that is not my own, over which I have no control or say—now seen right outside the door, outside the window. The very same landscape I shared as a child, that I grew up with into adulthood, has become unrecognizable. From the parks I played in, walked through, that I can no longer experience the same way due to a condition, and at the same time, a space that is no more. The replacement continues all the way to the plazas I used to visit, each of the individual stores—all of them ghosts now.

Complete demolition rewriting spaces that felt perfectly suitable, untouched for as long as I can remember, that alike the home I thought was protected. Instead, an eviction notice on the home, placed everywhere, pending change of use. Today, a relentless growth of machinery, a disease with no cure: cranes in all directions and constant destruction. A world less familiar through visual and bodily memory, juxtaposed by things that grow, progress and a self that decays, slows down and rots away.

This growth overwrites memory, erases what was once home, embodying a form of domicide[3], not just in physical destruction but in the obliteration of history[4], tradition, and personal narratives amid relentless automation,

optimization, and digital transformation. Here, this new form of domicide – controlled war on the essence of homes – leaves one grappling with a landscape that is constantly wiped clean, in a constant erasure, deletion and reformatting. New versions of an operating system installed that you have no backups to. Home lost to a server.

Surrounded by the construction of what are essentially hives, servers set to house more data, more information—all of which is foreign. New users inhabit these spaces, disconnected from the past, indifferent to the memories they overwrite. Developers sell keys to cells to strangers who have no recollection or regard for what was there before their arrival. In this scenario, neither you nor I have any real connection to these spaces, yet you're granted access while I'm left outside.

The child experiences anxiety from the private to the public home as response to rapid change and here an overload of information. A mind and body still on old firmware that there are no updates for. One is incompatible with the relentless pace of destruction leaving them disabled.

Total construction unfolds with a lack of restraint embodying an indulgence and what feels like memories cheated. An infidelity of a landscape that becomes an open orgy. More public space becomes private, and the home is pushed further inwards, closing off where the home used to transition from one state of being to another, instead here is a literal walling off and injecting private servers in the middle. One no longer belongs to any space, nor can they be a part of any, alienated, unable to belong or participate in except as a consumer at a ground level or as a transient in the impersonal corridors of transport, both of which require buy into. Space once familiar and domestic turns foreign, spaces which access feels restricted to be in outside of being a user or subscriber. Space mediated by participation by the pocket than a natural world through the body. A body which we lose at a collective level and I lose personally, out of place and out of scale magnified by a condition, a double disability.

For myself, the only escape within proximity becomes the roof, a space where air still breathes freely and the horizon remains unobstructed.

Seen from elevation and felt from below, developers approach the city as a virtual canvas detached from the lives it encompasses. Strangers walking freely into a home without a door, and playing live marionettes with eyes blindfolded. No recourse happens where these spaces become total commodity, waiting to be uploaded to the market to be purchased, used and exploited relentlessly. Exploited again and again and again. Generating as much profit as possible with little to no care, devoid of any emotional or communal investment. Should a project fail to yield the expected returns, they simply move on, contributing to a cycle of domicide, perpetually in search of the next opportunity. This detachment from the consequences of their actions marks a period of complete decadence, an indiscriminate exploitation of space and memory, leaving behind a landscape forever altered, disconnected from its past and those who once called it home. A molesting of everything.

All of these developments are meticulously planned years in advance, overlapping one another, perfectly optimized, toe tags becoming development signage, nature being assigned a euthanization date. Architects, once regarded, find themselves with limited influence, squeezed into compliance, serving a system with a singular focus on profit. These developments, paradoxically celebrated, render the contributions of blue-collar workers insignificant within the grand scheme. A vast exploitation of bodies, machines, land, resources, and labor is undertaken in the name of growth and expansion. In this narrative, developers and realtors are heralded as “heroes,” positioned as essential saviors in the manufactured crisis of urban development—a crisis that feeds off the dependency it cultivates. A problem that occurs in the centralization of power in the hands of a few and a societal condition of blissful ignorance, too distracted or disengaged to see beyond their immediate circumstances.

Information becomes the blueprint of building, one that mimics the nature of data, that which is intangible, which is nowhere in the cloud and virtually endless. Contrary to the finite of the real world which is not, it is increasingly treated as it is. A very Faustian way of thinking pushing towards more power and control, enabled by servers. More machines and more technology. The speed at which it occurs is cannibalistic, devouring itself as quickly as it expands.

Servers, towering above, create a farm like condition, casting long shadows over everything below, realms of darkness in daylight and conversely, artificial light at night. This landscape is defined by total information, of strangers, cranes, noise, technology, uploads and downloads – each a testament to a world that grows more disconnected and fragmented despite all the interconnectedness it promotes.

In this new landscape, it is not just a yearning for what is gone, rather a desire to reconnect with a form of reality that feels more genuine and less constructed by the omnipresent media and technological simulacra. This yearning is not just for a time or place but for a sense of existence unmediated by the endless expansion of servers in all directions in both physical and digital domains. For Baudrillard. "When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning."[5] As observed, nostalgia is more than a feeling of sentiment; rather a complex and cognitive response to the evolution of our social, cultural and personal realities dictated by a binary mode of existence.

The server has become the simulacrum of architecture, rendered indistinguishable, devoid of trace or history, embodying forgetfulness. Lacking in references or negatives, they stand outside traditional modes of authenticity and memory. As long as this condition persists, true architecture ceases to exist.

58. Domicide. 2023


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Bobcat

59. Domicide. 2023


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60. Domicide. 2023


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December 16, 2023
12:25pm

SERVER CITY

A city that becomes a server is one that is self referential, compounding, cloning. A simulacra of architecture that bears no relation to architecture, only the labelling of it, the label of success and virtue signalling of progress. A progress of building machine walls that separate us. A prison like condition of walls in both physical and virtual forms. Walls that we now bury ourselves within, then taken to the extreme. Purposeful rebuilding of the cave.

What is built is indistinguishable from a server farm. An endless expanse of servers without a trace of history; without a sense of place and nothing to relate to. Architecture that has no references, architecture that has no negatives.

In a city transformed into an expanse of machines and commodities, the very essence of dwelling is supplanted by the imperatives of a consumer society. This society, ensconced behind screens, becomes ensnared in the server, blinded by a collective ignorance and dazzled by the spectacle. It is a society in pursuit of the perfect experience—an experience, paradoxically, where there is none. Such a pursuit, grounded in the inauthentic, leaves us profoundly alienated across both digital and physical dimensions.

In a city aspiring to be everything, where every aspect is meticulously planned, organized, monitored, controlled and coded, we encounter an environment that to an extent sounds virtual – because it is. The further this endures, the more our touch with reality dissolves.

A world that is real needs architecture, a world that is not real needs no architecture, in the city we mediate somewhere in between. In between servers that are labeled as architecture on one end and the real world on the other.

The architecture here directly reflects the societal trends, programming and direction shaped by our demands and desires. It reflects the non-

things we consume, the entertainment, the play, hedonism, constant flow of information and other time-wasting activities that distract us from the unfulfilling boredom of modern living. Existence no longer solely based in reality that the architecture too perpetuates. I hesitate to classify what we observe today as architecture for it remains detached from the body and has a negative contribution to our well-being despite what it advertises. Nothing is done to defend human life and freedom, instead what takes place is the complete disappearance of it.

ARCHITECTURE AS COMMODITY

In a server city, the value of architecture becomes that of a manufactured commodity. While the image is consumable to virtually everyone, the "experience" of said commodity takes place between the sellers and the consumers. A commodity that is valued on how it appears socially more than anything to do with the raw materials that make it. A commodity that becomes a symbolic representation of social agreements first and its image representation after.

Like all commodities, architecture here becomes used to sell an image to experiences in the absence of them. Similar to the server, there becomes a need to fulfill as many features as possible. No longer is there a home to independently connect to, instead a dependency on so many players, a home that needs to be all things but a home, rather the simulacra of one.

In this market, because the home comes last, the commodity overtakes the home as a necessity. This raping of a basic need contributes into both the domicide and collective demand for it. A blurring of commodity and necessity into a single product and a supply that mathematically will never keep up. Due to the demand of said product and a state of architecture that comes last, little matters outside of the commodity being built and sold. When a necessity transforms into a commodity, and a commodity is viewed as a necessity, the intrinsic qualities of the product become secondary. It will be built, sold, and utilized regardless of its external appearance, internal conditions, or the extent of experiences it offers.

To a certain degree, anything goes; something passes the test if it is built and sold. Architects remain fairly hands off when constrained by a narrow scope for imbuing meaning into the extrusion of these servers. The ability to intervene is restricted and there is limited intervention in this crowd of projects with limited scope and footprint, not accounting for their simulated presence. While the server is metaphorically akin to one already, a prison by example offers greater affect merely by virtue of its

context, footprint and reduction of players alone. This effectively reduces architecture to nothing more than a backdrop for profit generation, where its existence and value are determined independently of its physical or experiential qualities.

Architecture in this scenario fails to fulfill the fundamental tenets of a home first while also failing to live up to the image and simulacrum marketed by developers and realtors. In this context, developers often preach a server as a transformative force for the city, yet architects find themselves distantly related to these grand promises, with users caught disconnected in a chasm between expectations and reality.

In this environment, architecture loses its voice through actors who represent the project, thus widening the gap between the commodity and the consumer. Architecture here is known through the online before the offline; its representations and presence in the spectacle. Developers, brokers, and realtors become agents with capital who hold little understanding of being and the essence of meaningful architecture outside of superficial aesthetics and social media presence. Despite their detached grasp, they are positioned central to a manufactured process, feeling so a part of everything that they intrinsically had close to nothing to do with. Representatives.

They are no more than retail workers tasked with marketing and selling products that are essentially guaranteed to sell and providing a service that only inflates its exchange value. One holds a spot effectively interchangeable with any other, marketing and selling a commodity that can exist independent of their presence. In car sales, this would be a case where every car would be destined to be sold, a market there are not enough cars for, a supply that will never meet the demand, and a demand that increases both through the spectacle of the server and the flooding of users in. A selling of a commodity that transforms into a limitless waiting room and factory at the same time, with an increasing queue made worse by a hyper-consumerist society and an open border that is a city. The city embodies the factory, assembly line, sales center and home simultaneously,

catering to a populace ready to accept anything offered in the face of demand and marketing, the latter becoming redundant.

The agents become so called experts of the server for a few seasons before taking on the next. The leftover scraps or pre-owned cells are handed to lesser agents to resell, rehashing the same phrases and material, expired propaganda and advertisements that never held true. An iPhone five generations old. Agents celebrate their upcoming sales, each with the same script and motivation, to sell the cells, the server, the experience. To absorb as much dollar from the machine only to consume back into it. Architecture as total commodity.

At a larger scale, the propaganda machine's complete decadence unfolds, treating the environment with consumptive voracity and disregard, an environment that is a pig portioned out for consumption, experience, profit, exploitation, power and control. Each broker carving out their share of the pig to sell and feed to the masses. From the reuse of renders in reduced resolution and plans with different brands, watermarks and captions to the application of signs on top of representations already lost touch with reality. An effort lacking in thoroughness, coupled with difficulties in tracing the original source. Vultures fighting for consumer attention for survival of their online and offline selves, while in a system akin to fishing with a guaranteed catch, subsequently celebrating in an echo chamber of social media validation and self-congratulation. From podcasts and seminars on real estate investment to becoming an agent, to interviews and motivational speeches, to so called producer appreciation events and top broker vacations. Participation trophies. A circle-jerk around mutual admiration and superficial achievement. Another opportunity to exercise the narcissistic desire for supply on the digital plane. These interactions further feed into the culture of narcissism, highlighting the disconnect between the marketed image of architectural spaces for the spectacle and the reality of their impact on well-being and genuine human connection. The latter lost, only the simulation of it remains.

Pre-sales take place within pop-up stores. Stores that potential users visit in search of the bare necessities of a home, a “Honda” of living spaces if you will, yet finding themselves navigating an environment reminiscent of a Mercedes dealership, where the product still fundamentally a “Honda” is presented with the exclusivity, branding and pricing of a Ferrari. More marketing than any car in sight, only the model of one. A car you experience less by touch, feel or driving, and instead by image. This absurdity mirrors the presentation centers of developments, transforming the tangible aspect of finding a home into hyper-capitalized sales factories that transcend the physical key to the property and instead the commodified existence within it. A key to living in a server giving you a piece of what it’s like to be wealthy of experiences and luxury - a ticket to a life ensnared rather by more consumption, control and surveillance. Access to these sales, presentation, pop-up, now experience centers too transition progressively to virtual displays with an online presence. Virtual visits of said living, with the same pr material and access to information and images projected, all without the vultures by your side and the need to leave your chair.

A way to “experience” before the “experience”... Online stores where you will purchase both your physical and digital server access, moving closer to a metaverse and blurring the line between reality and simulation. The pop-up stores here disappear twice: vanishing once without a trace post-sales, and again in the transition towards the simulacra of one. Never there, embodying the same spirit of our own existence. Given these shifts in how we engage with and understand space, it’s plausible to envision a future where one subscribes exclusively to digital spaces, rendering the physical increasingly obsolete. Space without a home and all the experience.

Another layer up in the corporate hierarchy, the broker events and so-called groundbreaking ceremonies themselves become a form of marketing propaganda and another platform for the spectacle. These events resemble product launches, replete with recycled buzzwords, red carpets and awards, mirroring the fanfare of an Apple product release.

Participants recite from scripts, capture said content, upload, share and repost back into the spectacle. Those genuinely connected to whatever was of the creation process, beyond marketing and sales remain conspicuously absent. Architects are likened to factory workers or slaves overseas, while proletariats within proximity. However, not just the architects, but the agents and users and the city itself become subservient to the server – the underlying infrastructure perpetuating this cycle.

COMMODITY AS EXPERIENCE

The transition out of the real to the hyperreal becomes standard in the ways we consume and experience the world. Consumption in the absence of anything tangible to consume and experiences too which are not even there. … buying into less for the commodity and more for the sign value and the experience.. then buying into the simulation of it.. These illusions are plastered onto experiences already missing. Here one sells the image of an experience of a lifestyle of a product that will never materialize beyond that of a manufactured image and words projected on a screen. This phase of simulacra is fostered by the use of modern propaganda with no relation to reality.

Propaganda that defines architecture and living. Propaganda everywhere online and offline in the physical manifestations uploaded. Propaganda that drains meaning. Propaganda.

… Carefully considered residences located at the confluence of tree-lined residential neighbourhoods and an iconic high street, starting in $4 million range. New and improved. Innovation in Design. Built to last.. #1 Waterfront Living. Redefining the Skyline. Never Before Seen. Urban Living Game-changer. Changing the skyline of Toronto forever. City Oasis. New Height of Luxury. Above and Beyond. A Modern Sanctuary Rising. Transforming the City. Live Large. Immerse Yourself in an Ambience of Serenity. The Final Tower at the Edge. Make the most of every minute

here. Private Residences with Premium Views. Views Guaranteed to Take Your Breath Away. A home for all of life's moment. A Striking Example of Compelling Architectural Intention. The Epitome of Modern Luxury. Forever Becoming a Part of the Most Photographed Image of a Nation! The City Becomes a Mesmerizing Artwork of Lights, Textures and Patterns. Everything you desire is right at your fingertips! See your future here. Affordable Luxury. Hotel residential living redefined. A rental residence tailor made for u. Rental Living Reimainged. Rentals Built With Purpose. Rental living has never felt this good. Your urban rental destination with a vibrant community vibe. Unmatched Amenities. A place with a sense of character, pleasure, culture and Leisure. Inspired by nature and striving to protect it. Perfectly located today. 5-minute walk to everything. Live connected.

… "connected"

Hypergeneric text, applicable to any product, requiring no distinction in an environment where servers all look the same. Different computers with different names and no identity, just the simulation of one. None of which provide experience, only the idea of it. Ironically, no one is held accountable in a free-for-all where there are no standards or rules.

Honda's dressed like Mercedes and sold as Ferrari's.

Words as hollow as the experiences they offer. An obsession with selling an experience without any experiences to take place. A city that is a factory and mall. Yet, man does not experience in a factory and mall, man only works and consumes. Man is left with no experience, just the standard shared features of the server, longing for "experience" in the promise and absence of it.

There is not even a Honda.



62. Simulation

The image precedes the real to the point the image becomes the real, to there no longer being an actual image. Architecture needs no resemblance to reality when the image/the sign is taken as perfectly real; furthered by said housing crisis and being that moves further towards simulation. In this dimension, “architecture” is known and “experienced” more online than offline.

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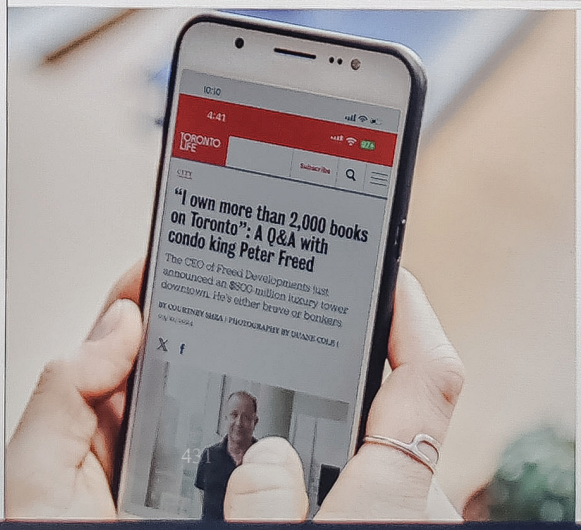
"Designed by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture, the project will feature 100 5-star luxury hotel rooms and 400 luxury condominiums with a world-class Skybar/restaurant on the 63rd floor, boutique spa, and a 10,000 sq. ft. Katsuya Restaurant on the 2nd floor."

Read all about Freed Developments new luxury project at Adelaide & Duncan on pages 14-19.
https://digital.buzzmagazine.ca/buzz-digital-magazine-march-2024-issue-d1cq93pd1j/full-view.html

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Peter Freed sat down with #TorontoLife to answer hard questions about Freed Hotel & Residences, a 63-storey hotel and condo coming soon to downtown Toronto.

Read the Toronto life article for more information.

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63. Simulation

Servers are pre-understood prior to their physical makeup which the population will greatly have little connection to outside of a physical gaze and a digital understanding. Here, one of many where the image, the sign, simulation overtake all meaning. Images detach from any material reality, beocming more significant than its real self that is yet to be made. A real self that further has little connection to its virtual self which is taken as perfectly real.

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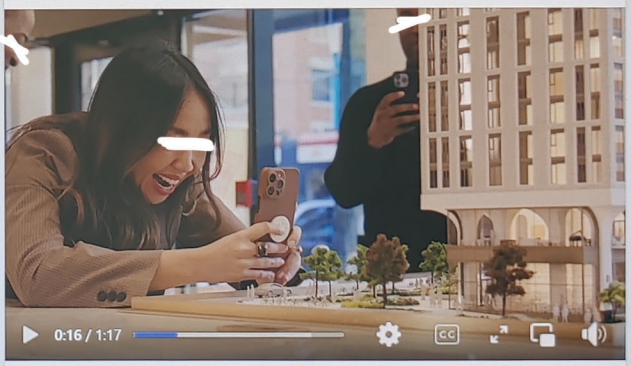
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EXPERIENCE AS SIMULATION

The View. Servers sold on their views in the absence of them. The cellmates below sold on a view of a city, a waterfront, a skyline. A view without disclaimer. A view waiting to be obstructed. A view out to another cell like their own. A view of the network, the machine, the panoptic reflection facing another wall.

Servers that aim to be the tallest in the room provide views to a select few, while advertised as a universal experience, as if the eyes of the entire server speak for all. A reach to breaking free from a world where there is no longer anything to see, and in a society obsessed with the image, with an experience. Cells that cost 20 millions dollars, advertised and identified by an experience of living in the sky, more closely, a prison in the air. Of having the best views of the city, a view of the server farm below and what's left of the real world afar. A view of perpetually sitting in front of a tv screen. A show that wears off. A 20 million dollar subscription. A channel you cannot change and a screen you cannot step out of. One you are always stuck behind.

In all scenarios, a view with no gaze.

The rooftop juxtaposes this. Where yours is preconfigured, always behind a screen, trapped and disabled, on a single channel. One that is sold to you where nothing spans open, the roof is my own, is open to all the channels, and at the same time is not on a channel guide.

The roof opens all restrictions to the ground, the sky, and the horizon.

The Nature. "Closer to nature." A green roof, a park in shadows underutilized, a land with no trees. Nature sold as an experience in complete separateness from it. A Faustian relationship with nature with no regard to the future. Man is not connected with nature, nor is he connected with land, only machine. They're not natural. Cities are not natural. Cities are not farmland. They're not forests. They're not lakes. They're not habitats or natural habitats. Cities are artificial virtual environments.

There is no nature in a factory. While the simulation of nature may occur, true growth and sustenance does not happen in factories.

The History. “Live inside history.” “Locals will be pleased..” The concept of history in an environment that constantly resets itself is a fallacy. Erasing history, then calling it history.

It is impossible to narrate a series of incidents, past events and related senses where there is no time, where something keeps on resetting. Developers commonly translate history to poor attempts labeled as adaptive reuse or more commonly a partial façade retention. A token gesture where a single page is torn from a history book, the rest incinerated and masqueraded as preservation. True history cannot be sold or conveyed in an environment that is fundamentally transient, marked by incessant changes, new uploads, roads, signs, users, servers. There is nothing to remember, only what was there before now erased. While history may occur outside the server albeit space that is hardly preserved, inside there is no room for the past. Factories in use and in production are not museums.

The Community. “Building connected communities.”

Communities as hard to locate as those hosted online. Developers propagate the creation of communities by the virtue of the server alone, while producing space that resembles the impersonal nature of an airport, mall or hotel – non-places. Master-planned “communities” attempt to orchestrate human interaction within these non-places in an idealistic manner. A planning and controlling of human movement and nature. A throwing of users into a sandbox and asking them to all get together and play. Outside, in the non-place that is a city, developers label the outside environment as part of the server when it is intrinsically public, effectively “shared” with everyone outside and conversely no-one. These areas in public often exacerbate social division and alienation, despite the intention to foster a sense of community and belonging. From an aerial view, a community of servers, a server park, a server farm. Inside the

server, most users dwell alone and egress to each unit is done from fob to floor, severing any possibility of connection beforehand, already avoided and sanitized a few years ago. The very nature of a reduction in space, orientation and isolation of cells fosters an environment of individuals alienated from one another and from the concept of community itself. Like the airport, the structural design of these spaces inherently discourages natural social behaviours. No organ of social life is possible. Interactions, when they occur, are confined to sterile, monitored common areas that fail to encourage genuine social exchange.

Here, eye contact is relegated as a microaggression, negotiating space, to determine who has the right of way than an opportunity for connection. Prisoners moving in and out of their cells to the outside for fresh air, to pursue their own individual interests without interruption or returning to find community online. An environment under surveillance and in physical proximation to thousands of other strangers alters our biological and social behaviours, making predictable our movements and interactions to the point genuine conversation and engagement with both the space and users become unnecessary.

One feels more connected online than offline. In both cases, an illusion of community.

The Place. “A sense of place.” Hotels rooms, lobbies, airports, malls, movie theatres and trains are places we have likely visited, experiencing limited social action and freedom and by extension hold little memory of. Yet the experience of place today is advertised by measure of scope on where you are in proximity to transit, the mall, work, and entertainment, while ignoring the proximity to neighbouring servers. A forgetting of what is not important yet what is still there in physical form. From the hotels, apartments, condos, office towers and a mix of all of them together, each server is evaluated and assigned a score based on these proximities, by distance and time, reflecting how embedded one is in this non-place. How closely your “home” is scored relative to the mall, transit, offices,

or its distance to the airport, school, work and entertainment transforms living into a mathematical calculation, directly linked to city living and its distractions. This does not take account the online dimension, which both distracts from these distractions and blurs the sense of place in what effectively becomes a non-place we call a city.

Because non-places strip individuals of their identities, transforming them into passengers, commuters, shoppers, or mere consumers—you become a code, a piece of data, a bystander, a transaction. As a response, users retreat to the virtual to find an identity where there is none, where there can be no identity in the self and the environment when it becomes data, for data has no identity. Data has no birth nor end.

Therefore, in both the physical and digital servers, the non-place is inescapable; one is perpetually within it and unable to get lost. Beyond one's assigned server, they are inserted directly back into the non-place. Different zones of anonymity.

Server, bus stop, concourse, shopping, motorway. Server, concourse, shopping, server. Server, shopping, server, bus stop, server. Server, server, server.

One is unable to get lost in this perpetual loop. A leaving of one prison to find yourself back in another. Unlike Debord's concept of drifting, dérive,[6] in which he advocates for aimless wandering through urban landscapes, permeating the discovery of new perspectives and experiences; encouraging us to be aware of the effects of our geographical environment and our on behaviour - akin to his in Paris.[7]

Here we're stuck in a loop of non places, always part of the system and in the server. It's hard to get lost in a prison.

Returning, the home reflects the effects of living in a non-place by its reductions in size and function, and blurring into the non-place that is both the physical and digital city. Inside, one's home shrinks to the bare minimum of functional space. Studio space at 300sq.ft. No balconies, a single view and no space to move. Three-bedroom space at 700sq.ft. No

balconies, internal bedrooms with no windows, a view out to another server, cells. No air to breathe. Premium luxury starting at two million. The compression of one's life in domestic space relegates most activities outside the "home". A users life here is barely that between their walls, rather within the network that is the city and the network that is always online. In this context, "home" becomes an extension of the non-place, a node situated deep inside a network rather than a sanctuary of personal identity and autonomy.

One is never outside..

The Home. "A place to call home."

Marc Augé offered insight into the world of supermodernity, illustrating how individuals find themselves perpetually in transit, navigating through non-places that are designed not for lasting engagement but for momentary passage.[8] This relentless mobility suggests that we are always, yet never truly, at home, constructing fragments of our daily lives in spaces meant for brief encounters rather than genuine connection. As a result, our experiences in these non-places increasingly dominate our existence, leading to a life where our sense of self and the concept of home are significantly altered, rooted more in transient moments than in the permanence of place.

This shift blurs the once clear distinctions between the public and private, the natural and unnatural, the real and the non-real, and fundamentally, where home was and was not. Today, there are no distinctions. There is merging of physical and digital servers and a concept of home made ubiquitous. Furthermore, the notion of a private life has diminished, as our existence becomes entwined with the physical manifestation of non-places and the digital realm. For many, life now starts and ends online, signaling a significant transformation in how we perceive and engage with our surroundings, eroding the traditional concept of home and altering our sense of identity.

Physically, the lines between what was public space and the public home

to the private space and the private home have become indistinguishably blended. We find ourselves always in the same realm as other "private" spaces or at the very least in proximity with no clear cut off.

Spatially, servers today are almost all mixed use in the name of progress, space efficiency and sharing is caring. From the amenities to the office, grocery store, gym and transportation levels below. A blurring of who goes where via layers of access. To the hotels, short term rentals, and Airbnb's in the same stack with equal access yet reduced duration. Nothing is private behind your door. In reality, there's little actual sharing or ownership—merely transient use. Real sharing involves genuine exchange and connection, not the impersonal passing use of spaces no one truly owns, like highways, subways and airports. Non-things cannot be shared in the same way you share your home – a home you no longer have with new faces always in your neighbourhood. A constant sight and vibration of others always passing outside your bedroom window and door.

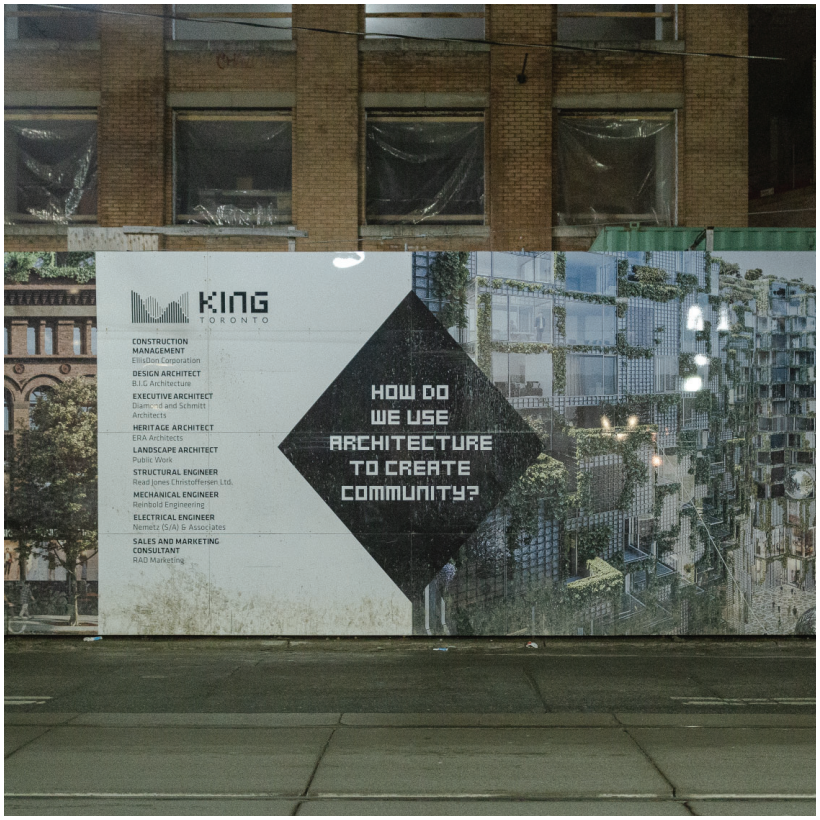
This blurring leads to further alienation and a greater sense of separation, effectively collapsing the concept of home into smaller and smaller pieces, diminishing towards a metaverse; less and less physical space. In this reality, where there is no distinct home, where one does not dwell in the streets, on the tracks or under the eyes of panoptic surveillance and in space that belongs to no one, one is forced to retreat back online, into their servers. A world that feels more home than home, a world that is the ultimate non-place. Cells within cells, online in space that offers a simulation of privacy and a home that extends further remaining completely public. Both of which the "experience" of home is sold.



64. Simulation as Propaganda

One of many across the server farm. “A modern 51-storey building steps from Toronto’s exclusive shops and culinary delights. An internationally recognized setting that indulges your every whim.” Then online, “Experience the height of luxury with unrivaled views.” The so called design is made to tie us back to history. “8 Cumberland marks its presence with a century-old brick Victorian-podium, paying homage to Yorkville’s timeless heritage. While rising above, ribbons of gleaming steel and luminous glass create a stunning façade.” While none of said promises will be experienced inside or out, it presents another server to climb, without becoming a user or subscriber.


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65. Simulation as Propaganda

Promotion of connecting to nature, the mountains, and community all in one.


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66. Simulation as Propaganda

One of the most notorious uploads in the server farm, from delays to defaulting into receivership. Disgraceful work that continues to self-promote itself, like a scam artist; and the president saying "I don't see how somebody else is going to do it better than we are." Another render that bears no relation to reality, another reality that bears no resemblance to architecture.


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OUTSIDER

Entering the server. The only means of entry into the server farm is inside of the hospital and on top of the roofs, only one of which I enjoy in the presence of the machine, yet both I must.

Beyond the roof, the place that I will always find familiar lies layers deep to the same room, where the external world fades. Not on top of the machine but rather deeply inside of it. The MRI. Despite its intimidation and lack of nature, a place I have no feelings for, it sits as the center of the server farm, unchanged. Here, the eyes remain closed in a space that remains consistent and paradoxically a body that fights to be, one is protected from relentless change and the other is not.

Below the server. What feels like others I cannot speak to, that I feel wrong to approach. A navigating a world of urban isolation and modern alienation, surrounded by total information yet conversations that feel forbidden, contact that is incorrect. Users pass by in route to work and consume, to enter and exit within the same loop. Movement is not directly by hand and feet, but first by the eyes.

Around me becomes a landscape I no longer feel home in, that I do not remember, where I am placed as an outsider and my belonging and memory fade into obscurity. New extrusions rise incessantly, machines of control and unfreedom. Machines which control the landscape of the system, skewing the human scale and rhythm, alienating me further.

Spaces that once held meaning, that I felt, entered, experienced and remembered, are transformed in constant change for temporary fixations; the momentary eclipses the enduring. Time stripped for the instant. Memories once vivid become closed off, locked, files no longer accessible. The omnipresence of servers, noise, and artificial light underscores an environment crafted by and for the mechanical, alienating everything. No longer is there a home and a sense of identity. Instead, an absence of communication, protection, respect, safety and freedom altogether, living

in a paradox: a non-homogenous society within a homogenized landscape. Errors. Private servers turn the city into a non-place, a server farm.

Inside the server. Components of usage are omnipresent, belonging to everyone and yet no one. Seen but never touched, like a hospital corridor, in and out. The server lobby and remnants of open space are emblematic of non-places, standing as hollow preludes to the cells above, all of which quickly become outdated, built and forgotten. The lights, seating arrangements, mailroom, elevator doors, the packages and deliveries sitting on the floor contribute to a scene, a state you are always in yet never a part of. This is a realm of rushed pass-throughs, space under-utilized, and mistreated. Interstitial space.

From fob to floor, transport to your assigned cell. Nothing distinguishes behind the doors, the portals to the cells, hallways that fail to foster the community found in neighbourhoods; and yet, here I am but an extra. I am not a user nor a subscriber, I am homeless, a virus waiting to be eradicated from the system and in a footprint that does not recognize me as I make my way to the roof.

Transcending the server. The egress stairs stand as the sole link to what lies beyond, a series of identical non-places differentiated only by the values plastered to each door. From the horizontal sprawl to the vertical ascent, space is relegated to mere passage. Here, at the edge of the system's final firewalls, human movement is restricted, leaving one trapped within an intricate web until a rare bypass offers temporary liberty.

Above the machine, the server farm unfolds, its interior and exterior laid bare. The cells visible openly display the lives below uploaded, parts of being hidden inside now clear – yet only through the mediation of screens, glass and steel, observed within a channel. From this vantage, I do not engage with the lives below the server I am on, rather those at a distance. Different series of individual happenings, here however, not mediated by a

broadband connection, yet both still lives I cannot speak to, others I will never meet, only by sight as a tourist, a distant visitor, a voyeur in the real. All the actions I see of you within your space reveal more about yourself than your external personas, perhaps revealing as much as what is shared online.

Here, authenticity of existence becomes visible; the horizon stretches out, senses sharpen, the cold wind blows, the eyes refocus, voice falls silent, and my knees weaken. Along the ozone of the server, in between hell below and the divinities above, this remains the only escape that feels real. The last mark of freedom and what I can still claim as mine.

Leaving the server. In the car, along a network, navigating the flow state of NPC's, others, different data points in similar movement with distinct commands and operations. Some by foot, others by bike, by train, by car. Merging between concrete islands onto the highway, I am still behind a glass screen, flashed by artificial lights and noise as I rush to make it out of the system. Within proximity, the cells I saw from above, the city full of stars remain in stillness however passing through as I speed through the network, able to capture a glimpse then replaced by the next. The same sense of wonder that filled me as a child in the backseat leaving the machine now resurfacing in the driver's seat. Curiosity about the lives within each cell persists, yet the desire to remain is no more. The city no longer feels distant by experience rather now by access, scale and memory. Scale that far outweighs the difference from machine to child, memory from machine and adult, access between machine and disabled.

Like the child, outside of here, beyond the traffic flows, exchanges, proxies and exits, I have no place to be other than home. A home above the surface, where there is still a horizon, air to breathe, and a view beyond a screen. An offline world that is waiting.





a disappearing horizon for a "skyline"

March 16, 2024
6:15am

3.4



TRAJECTORIES

Imagine and reflect.

You are in a world of machines where the essence of what it means to be human is forgotten and archived, managed by a server. You live in a system where "everything" is taken care of. Food, entertainment, shelter, sex — all provided without the necessity of movement or effort on your part, all by the server.

All your anxieties are tranquilized. You no longer need to feel, tied to life support, by for and through the machine from life until death. Life that is already dead.

You no longer "need" to work. You no longer need to contribute anything into the economy. No decisions need to be made for the technology and social systems will perfectly optimize and predict every need.

Not too long ago you were assigned digital currency to spend on certain items, items only approved to be purchased to protect and save the climate. The climate you are no longer bear any relation to. You needed to use the currency before its set expiration date, programmed by the system. There was no saving, there was no wealth creation, for there was no longer any concept of ownership. Here you own nothing and are happy, until you are no longer happy. Now, there is no longer an economy, the system has reached singularity.

There is no longer a need for a social credit score and a digital economy where your behaviours are directed, dictated, closely monitored and controlled, for you no longer need to think and exit your room. You are no longer a slave in society and are now a prisoner in a cell.

You no longer have any thoughts. You no longer need to think, nor how to think, only what to believe. Thinking is no longer needed and you cannot think outside what the system wants you to think.

You are convinced you finally have everything you need, the struggle to survive is no longer there, there is no struggle. You survive on the bare

minimum for you know no other.

There is no longer any creativity. We used to create art, literature, and music that would move man, connect to land and nature, then, people like you started to create content purely for the sake of consumption by the spectacle, content with no negativity, however the machine now does this automatically. It adjusts and adapts to what you find entertaining and generates content on your behalf to share to others, providing you unlimited response, artificial attention, a dopamine drip on repeat.

- The drive to be seen, to be heard, to be felt, to be noticed lost touch in physical form within communities and practices and began to be relegated to the server, social media driving a narcissistic spirit and birthing the spectacle. This core instinct of survival is now no longer needed. You no longer need to leave the server to consume, validate, exposure and share yourself online. The server perfectly curates the simulations you need to see in order to feel in the absence of anything being seen or felt. The server provides you with an endless stream of simulated experiences designed to mimic engagement, connection, and fulfillment. The simulation of being accepted and a part of a community.

To a large extent, you are no longer needed, you do not need to be there. The machines can operate and sustain on their own. In the past, humans were needed to maintain the machine, now machine is needed to maintain the human, the shell of one. You no longer need to worry about anything. What previously was going to school to become a slave, to work to consume, to consume to work, to take part in the spectacle, to be socially present online, to live purely for consumption and the spectacle and then die. Everything is taken care of for you. There is no concept of pain and suffering. There is only comfort and pleasure, albeit all by simulation without the other, without effort, without risk and negativity. You are paralyzed and know no different.

Technology has allowed a perfected totalitarian state. One where it on longer uses and discards them, instead has made them disappear entirely. In this case what are they controlling when there is no longer anything to

control.. the ruler now has no work, has no friends. There is no slave and no master. There is no one to oppress.

The virtual world is your only world, you are always connected wirelessly to the screen plastered onto your eyes. Outside, there is no architecture only machines. The city is endless, it goes on forever, of and for itself.[1] All of the problems the city birthed itself are solved thanks to the absence of the human. Nature here is extinct. The city is no longer desirable and cannot compete with your virtual world. A world you can create and visit infinitely, for the virtual city is endless, the physical is not.

In this world, you are both everywhere and nowhere, a ghost in a machine that no longer serves human interests but has become an end in itself. The question of control, of governance, becomes moot in a world where there is nothing left to control, where the very concept of humanity has been redefined and diminished. In this ultimate realization of a dystopian future, the loss is not just of freedom, but of the very things that make life worth living: the struggle, the joy, the pain, and the triumph of the human spirit. You are no longer.

SUICIDE

In the United States, Suicide rates increased 37% between 2000-2018 and decreased 5% between 2018-2020. However, rates nearly returned to their peak in 2021.[2] Today they are the highest they have been since World War II.[3] We have all the means to survive, and with that all the technology and protection, however clearly less a reason to live. Man today is demasculinized, weak, isolated without community, alienated, depressed and detached from his evolutionary drive to say the least, yet people scratch their heads and wonder why it is that men kill themselves in the thousands yearly, or within these so-called developed countries, you are more likely to die of suicide now than you are in war.

As the suicide rates increase, these countries speak of progress in a Spenglerian[4] sense, however if such a thing were to exist, progress is the last thing we need when headed in the wrong direction. In the big city, where the very environment contributes to mental ailments, the solutions offered—be it medication to temporarily alleviate symptoms or even medical assistance in dying—serve only to perpetuate the cycle that harms individuals. Within this societal construct, engineered for temporary happiness, true freedom is elusive, reducing individuals to a status not unlike domestic animals. Happiness is not for man, but the pursuit of greatness; however the latter is impossible in confinement, hence we witness man self-destruct.

As Spengler stated; "Civilizations do not die by murder, but through suicide."[5] And men are the gas. All civilizations fall because the people lose the will to live encapsulates the inherent vulnerability of civilizations to decline and collapse. Spengler says, "You are dying. I see in you all the characteristic stigma of decay. I can prove to you that your great wealth and your great poverty, your capitalism and your socialism, your wars and your revolutions, your atheism and your pessimism and your cynicism, your immorality, your broken-down marriages, your birth-control, that is bleeding you from the bottom and killing you off at the top in your brains—I can prove to you that those were characteristic marks of the

dying ages of ancient States—Alexandria and Greece and neurotic Rome."[6]

Spengler's reflection on suicide of man through declining societies mirrors Emile Durkheim's concepts in "Suicide: A Study in Sociology."[7]

Durkheim's exploration into the types of suicide, namely egoistic and anomic, further elaborates on how societal structures influence individual despair.

Egoistic suicide occurs when individuals feel profoundly detached from society. This type of suicide is linked to low levels of social integration and manifests in people who feel isolated, not sufficiently bound by social ties, or who find little meaning in social or community life. Durkheim associated this form of suicide with societies where individualism is emphasized at the expense of communal bonds, leading to weakened ties to family, community, and social institutions.[8]

Anomic suicide, on the other hand, is related to a state of normlessness (anomie), where societal norms are disrupted due to rapid social and economic changes, leaving individuals without clear moral guidance. This type of suicide is associated with periods of significant upheaval or change, where the lack of social regulation leads to confusion and disorientation. People experiencing anomie may struggle with finding meaning in life because the social frameworks that define goals and purposes become unclear or irrelevant.[9]

Both egoistic and anomic suicides are not only symptoms of personal crises but also indicators of a civilization's struggle against its own existential demise. The increasing rates of suicide, therefore, reflect a broader societal and existential crisis, where the quest for individual progress leads to an erosion of meaning and connectedness.

As society advances, this pursuit of progress, often aimed at serving the larger system or server, inadvertently strips away the very essence of what it means to be human—the capacity to find meaning through suffering. The disentanglement from suffering, paradoxically seen as progress, leaves society and individuals in a state of limbo, grappling with a profound loss of purpose. This paradox highlights a fundamental flaw in the assumption

that technological and material progress alone can fulfill the human quest for meaning.

As a result, people don't know what to do with their lives. Their lives are meaningless because only death confers meaning. Only material dead goods equate significance; so they don't know what to do with themselves and the lives they have been given. Instead, they kill themselves, they kill everyone around them, they kill their environment, and they kill others.

People pull the plug on themselves in the absence of meaning in life, where they are absolutely lost, left to self-destruct because they have lost the ability to survive on their own and the ability to endure suffering. This leads to the question: we have lost the need to be able to survive, although what at all are we today surviving for? By removing the need and ability to suffer so does it eliminate the link to find meaning. Survival has taken place through suffering, that which was intrinsic to a meaningful life, that which was inseparable. When you divorce this through evolution of the server, where survival is made possible without suffering, there is no longer any suffering, therefore, meaning is lost.

Whether we die by suicide as a result or in the process of becoming insignificant, we will disappear.

DISAPPEARANCE

This concept of disappearance—of fading into obsolescence rather than extinguishing our existence through direct means—is poignantly explored by Jean Baudrillard in his last text, two months before his death, titled "Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared".[10] The text opens with a provocative statement about envisioning a world devoid of human being, suggesting that humanity began its own process of disappearance with the advent of scientific analysis.

Baudrillard argues that this dissolution is accelerated by the pervasiveness of technology, which has now reached a point where it fulfills all human potentialities. In becoming "purely operational" and fully integrated with technological means, humans effectively render themselves obsolete. While society becomes more advanced and saturated with information and technology; aspects of reality, meaning, and authenticity begin to vanish. The once vital bond between humans and the world starts to unravel, as the world no longer requires human representation to exist or be understood. This theme resonates with Baudrillard's broader critique of postmodern society, where the real and the symbolic undergo a process of detachment and reality becomes a series of simulacra without original referents. The proliferation of images, signs, and simulacra in the postmodern world has led to a kind of nullification of reality itself. Here, everything becomes a simulation, an imitation that has lost its connection to the real. This leads to a state where distinguishing between what is real and what is simulated becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible.

Continuing from this point, we find a world today in which the real has disappeared and with it, the essence of what it means to be human. We are edging towards a state of not being needed anymore, alike cattle in a pasture no longer required for sustenance. We have disappeared for the server, live unconsciously inside of it; and in that act, disappear from the world.

Our disappearance is not marked by our physical vanishing rather the

loss of our relevance. We find ourselves fighting to be seen and noticed in a landscape dominated by visibility and yet no reality, only non-things, simulations, and a society absorbed by the spectacle. We disappear through becoming superfluous and through simulation, existing in a system that increasingly governs our lives, rendering many of us capable of existing in a sort of disabled state where the server caters to our basic needs with pure access to food and entertainment. We continually turn into our little virtual worlds away from the real, becoming the simulacra of someone in the hyperreal to make up for our being missing in the real – and still by that nowhere to be found. Humans do not exist in virtual formats, yet we completely take it as they do. This is the norm.

We will be observed as that which no longer leaves a mark on the world outside a life inward and inauthentic, one that conforms with the crowd and into the server. Our traditional roles of creation, nurturing, living authentically and contributing to society will seem inverted. Established institutions and values will be torn down giving way to a cycle of consumption, decadence and a surrender to hedonism. All that's left, whether or not we "need" to work, we will operate in meaningless jobs, exchanging our efforts for digital currency, only to consume and feed back into an otherwise vacuous system— not too different from today: work, slave, consume (most of these taking place online), then die. We are kept entertained, trapped, obedient, compliant, and stuck within what appears as a perfected system. Living lives that are, for the most part, overly cared for, all we are programmed to concern ourselves with are fabrications and simulations, in tune with a narcissistic spirit. On the TV, in the media, our social/online presence, our social credit, chasing after false virtues and more commodities, all feeding back into the spectacle, with all other needs lost or forgotten. The human struggle will disappear and by that, all progress will be done by the servers; because of this, there will be no rebellion nor revolt.

We will not die out, but rather, we will disappear.

THE ANGEL

In Wim Wenders' film, Wings of Desire: we find ourselves witnessing two angels across the skies of Berlin.[11]

The angels are helpless voyeurists, seeing but never interfering. The angels unlike the human lack any meaning, any experience and are instead mere spectators, outside of the action, uninvolved and unknown. In this post-life state, one is incapable of experiencing the ups and downs, the genuineness and the limits of human existence. In the film, the angels see a world in monochrome, where as the living can see in full colour. The angels in a sense are dead.

As angels you can do anything, you can go anywhere, things are endless, and there is no death for you are immortal. You can see everything, cross through walls, peer into people's houses, while conversely, there are no interactions, nothing is real. There are no memories for there is nothing to remember.

The angels are stuck, like living in heaven with total freedom. However, the point of heaven is maybe not to live forever. What is man that he should want to live out the lifetime of his God. The point of heaven is for you to be ready to die, to cease to be.

The angels are stuck in time, trapped. Angelic time is purely successive. Whereas humans are free from time, only here for a limited amount of time before it all comes to an end. Human time is storied time, pervaded by an awareness of some manner of an ending. There can be no such thing as an eternal story. Unlike the angels, the humans are alive by virtue of being mortal. The angels on the other hand can only witness, like that of being behind a screen, separated from the joy of the everyday, the joy of being, the fantasy of getting to live.

As one angel expresses: "but sometimes I'm fed up with my spiritual existence.. of forever hovering above. I'd like to feel a weight in me.. to end the infinity and tie me to earth.. I'd like each step, each gust of wind. To be able to say, now, now, now.. no longer forever and eternity. At last to guess,

instead of always knowing..”[12]

The angels long to be human.

TODAY

Today however, we find a human that is no longer human. One that both forgets and negates to be, instead, the individual masquerades as an angel, attempting to emulate angelic traits. To become a human that can no longer suffer and avoids suffering entirely. Human that seeks to no longer feel anything in the simulacra of feeling everything without negation. A human who is no longer haunted by the prospect of death, as death has been veiled. The angel no longer envies the human—it no longer covets the being who has forsaken the essence of humanity, donning instead a mere facade of it. The angel will never know what it will be like to be human again, however the human in this state will know neither. There is no beauty in the human condition where there is no human - when the essence of being human is lost, leaving behind an empty shell.

In this case, the angel does not want to be in a machine. In hell. In a life without the ability to suffer, to feel pain, to feel the other, to feel what is real. To be without that which makes mortality and the beingness of being beautiful. To be neither in heaven or hell, instead adrift in a purgatory in between. Angels already free from hell and the human now entirely engulfed in it.

The angel experiences frustration, observing the abandonment of the precious gift of life, the essence of all things human, a human that surrenders and commits both physical and psychological suicide. Powerless to intervene, the angel can only bear witness to the dissolution of human essence.

The angel does not long for what is not human. The angel is no longer alive, and so too the human appears not, in a position of being both alive and dead.

MEMOIR

"When the child was a child, it walked with its arms swinging. It wanted the stream to be a river, the river a torrent, and this puddle to be the sea. When the child was a child, it didn't know it was a child. Everything was full of life, and all life was one. When the child was a child, it had no opinion about anything, no habits. It often sat cross-legged, took off running, had a cowlick in its hair, and didn't make faces when photographed." – Wings of Desire[13]

Walking, I hear a sound in my ear. Does it ever get better the child asked. A child now stuck in the body of a dying man. I don't know I responded as I fall back down. Truly unsure how much time I have left and at the same time trying to not think about it, only to be asked everyday. How much time do I have left until disability, time through disability, and an inability to participate in a world that too becomes disabled. A world that has no meaning. How long do I have until I die and leave a hell where being human is no longer possible. Where being human is stripped twice, left in a permanent lockdown. How much is left on the timer that counts down with a body that commits suicide on its own and a mind that struggles not to follow. A body and mind that work towards disability, that gets closer to death all at an accelerated pace and a collective that pulls closer towards this metaphorically.

I pause and ask myself, what exactly am I surviving for and from. Fighting to stay alive where all others are already dead. Like fighting to stay alive to partake in a game, in a simulation of real life that all others are happy to play.

What's the point of fighting for a life where everything is becoming more difficult to perform and at the same time feels less real. Battle with no reward. Suffering in a system where the value of suffering is no longer interchangeable for happiness and meaning. What's the point of anything outside of working to consume and living a superficial existence devoid of

the other, of the body, of care, of freedom and instead the simulation of happiness in surplus of non-things, a spectacle and a narcissistic spirit that has lost all other motivation in life. Total bread and circus, albeit virtual.

What's the point of working in a system to exchange all my remaining hours left to be a wage slave, to be insignificant, to never amount to anything, to work for the server, by the server and in the server. To be trapped in a server you call a city, living in a server you call life, isolated, alienated, and unable to walk away by the very inability to move. This feeling of no longer being able to go outside and there too no longer being an outside. No nature and only a factory. Conversely, to sit behind a screen my whole life and die. To participate and comply. To wake up from anesthesia, conscious under a light, yet fixed to a table in a machine. To look around with everyone still fast asleep. What then is the point of anything? Fighting to be free, screaming at the top of my lungs for liberation, to be free or a condition and the confines a server, no ears to listen and no one to lend a hand.

Under these conditions, what makes life worth living?
The child confused by absurd thoughts never considered.

FACING THE ABSURD

Albert Camus, a seminal French philosopher and writer, delved into the concept of the absurd in his seminal work, 'The Myth of Sisyphus.'[14] Camus articulated the absurd as the conflict that emerges from the human desire to find inherent value and meaning in life, juxtaposed against our confrontation with a universe that appears purposeless, meaningless, and irrational. This clash—between our quest for significance and the universe's apparent indifference—gives rise to what Camus defines as the 'feeling of absurdity.' It is not the universe itself that engenders the absurd, but rather this profound discrepancy between our expectations for a life filled with meaning and the stark reality of a world that offers no clear answers.

When we confront the possibility that life may be devoid of meaning, we experience the essence of the absurd as described by Camus.[15]

Camus referred metaphorically to the feeling of absurdity as a place of exile.[16] Once we get here there is no turning back. It becomes a shadow cast over everything. A removal of blinders, an exiting out of a cave and forcing back in. Here, the absurd always lingers in the back of our mind that there is no point in anything. Again, questioning if this feeling of meaninglessness in a life that is not worth living therefore justifies the act of suicide. Within the absurd, one is generally presented with two dilemmas. One, that life is meaningless and there is no hope, resulting in an act of suicide or two, to deny that life is meaningless by means of blind faith and pursue a path of hope. The latter are those who may feel that life is not worth living and yet still continue to live.

Most of us however get into a habit of living before acquiring the habit of thinking, never having to reach the absurd and to face the consequences of the meaningless nature of life. When our instinct for life is greater than our reasons for suicide, Camus calls this "the act of eluding", more so a way of avoiding the absurd and avoiding the meaninglessness of life.[17] The reality is this works, the system is constructed in such a way that it would not be sustainable for everyone to reach feelings of absurdity.

Both these paths still fail to face up the absurd, accepting that life has no meaning, and then trying to escape from it. Camus saw a third possibility, suggesting that living with the absurd is a matter of facing this fundamental contradiction and maintaining constant awareness of it. Facing the absurd does not entail suicide, rather on the contrary, allows us to live life to the fullest.

REVOLT

"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion." – Camus[18]

In facing the Absurd, Camus advocates for revolt—a determined,

continuous opposition to the absurdity of existence without resorting to despair. This revolt is not a mere rejection but a rebellion that affirms one's desire for meaning and clarity in the face of a silent universe. It is a personal uprising against the conditions of the absurd, where the individual refuses to succumb to nihilism or to seek false consolation in illusory beliefs. Through rebellion, one asserts their presence and insists on the value of their experiences, despite the lack of ultimate meaning. This act of defiance is, for Camus, the essence of being human; it transforms the absurd from a dead-end into a starting point for a life lived with passion, freedom, and authenticity. The rebel, in embracing the absurd condition, finds a profound sense of liberation, acknowledging that while the universe may not cater to our quest for meaning, we are free to create our own sense of purpose and to live in accordance with it. In this way, rebellion becomes not just a response to the absurd, but a form of victory over it.

SISYPHUS

Camus uses the Greek legend of Sisyphus, who is condemned by the gods for eternity to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll down again once he got to the top. A life of pain only to have his efforts completely insignificant in the end. There is nothing he can do to change the situation so he lives without appeal. This was a metaphor for the individual's persistent struggle against the essential absurdity of life.

Camus claims that Sisyphus is the ideal absurd hero and that his punishment is representative of the human condition: Like us, our search for meaning in an indifferent and meaningless universe. Sisyphus must struggle perpetually and without hope of success. So long as he accepts that there is nothing more to life than this absurd struggle, then he can find happiness in it.[19]

The absurd hero sees life as a constant struggle without hope. Any attempt to deny or avoid the struggle and the hopelessness that define our lives is an attempt to escape from this absurd contradiction. Camus's

single requirement for the absurd man is that he live with full awareness of the absurdity of his position. While Sisyphus is pushing his rock up the mountain, there is nothing for him but toil and struggle. But in those moments where Sisyphus descends the mountain free from his burden, he is aware. He knows that he will struggle forever and he knows that this struggle will get him nowhere. This awareness is precisely the same awareness that an absurd man has in this life. So long as Sisyphus is aware, his fate is no different and no worse than our lot in life.

Moreover, the figure of Sisyphus challenges us to reconsider our perspective on happiness and success. Happiness, Camus suggests, emerges not from the cessation of struggle but from the struggle itself. It is born out of our capacity to confront the absurd without capitulation, to carve out a space for joy and meaning within the parameters of our own rebellion. Therefore, we can only truly be happy when we accept this life and our fate as entirely our own – as the only thing we have and as the only thing we will ever be.

"One must imagine Sisyphus happy."[20]

THE ROOFTOP

Within the server, the rooftop appears all that is left of the real world. Despite all that is imposed and programmed, for as long as we construct servers, a rooftop will always exist to be found and explored. There will still be freedom until these are gone; until there are no more servers left to upload.

More symbolically, the rooftop represents an exit from the constraints of a monotonous and predefined life, underscoring the enduring human spirit's ability to seek and find glimpses of authenticity in an increasingly artificial world. While the physical act of reaching these heights may become impossible to those no longer with an able body and confronted by a door that closes, a set of stairs no longer remaining accessible and

what's left becoming a memory; the essence of what the rooftop represents remains accessible through the rebellion of the mind and spirit against the existential constraints imposed by society.

Rooftopping defies against existence that appears less real than real, a direct confrontation with the physical and metaphysical boundaries that society imposes. It is an act of reclaiming a sense of reality, authenticity and immediacy of experience that becomes ever so desired yet devoid in this age. It is a physical manifestation of the refusal to vanish into obsolescence, a declaration of presence and relevance in a world that increasingly seeks to render the individual irrelevant into disappearance. It is a tangible and symbolic rejection of the constraints that a hyper-technological world imposes on the human spirit. By ascending to the rooftops, individuals claim a space of freedom above the mechanized rhythms of daily life. This act is both a literal and metaphorical elevation above the normative boundaries of society, offering a new perspective on what it means to live authentically. It is an embodiment of the existential theme of rebellion not just against physical barriers but against the existential confines of the absurd. Rooftopping, though performed by individuals, symbolizes a broader human desire to break free from the existential constraints that bind us all. It is a testament to the shared human condition, a reminder that in our rebellion against the absurd, we find a common ground, a mutual recognition of our struggles, hopes, and the relentless pursuit of freedom.

On the rooftop, man realizes he does not have to believe anything that was expected for him to believe and can reject what he has been told. It is here the man becomes the child and reflects on the rejected beliefs with a free and clear mind, choosing which to incorporate into his life independently and not because he was told to do so. The child sees life as a beautiful experience, unburdened by being forced to live or think a certain way. The child, with an open mind can paint his own image of life and generate his own set of beliefs external from societal pressures and expectations. He becomes truly free, escaping the limits of strict beliefs

and ignorance. The man had to self reflect as a free thinker and look at life objectively to understand the limits imposed on his ability to think. By confronting absurdity and meaninglessness of the world, the man uncovers profound beauty. Man destroys the weight of societies expectations in an effort of slaying the dragon,[20] to which he becomes an authentic man and can embrace a boundless existence. This life, unlimited and without confines, filled with contradictions, chaos, love, and remarkable beauty, becomes fully worthwhile. It's the free thinker's life. Yet, before overcoming these obstacles and breaking free from collective norms to unlock his true potential, he needed self-awareness and deep reflection on his mortal life and its inherent fragility.

It is here in this playground that both the man and child play freely.

68. Clarity to the human condition. ca. 202x

Upon reaching the zenith of the roof, the highest point inside the server, man must inevitably descend, mirroring the Sisyphean cycle of eternal recurrence. Yet, in this ascent and subsequent descent, man transcends the absurdity of existence, reverting to the uninhibited essence of the child. This liberation from the shackles of routine and societal expectations allows for a profound engagement with the present and its infinite possibilities.

4.0

THE INSTINCT TO CLIMB AND THE FLATTENING OF EXPERIENCE

FLATNESS

In the digital age, a pervasive flatness characterizes our interaction with the world. This flattening extends to all aspects of life – our identities, relationships, ambiguities – compressing to uniformity. This is displayed via the screen, emblematic of this flatness, which finds its parallel in both our devices and the built environment. In the digital, where depth and texture are unnecessary, everything becomes flat. Consequently, the physical server mimics this lack of dimensionality, lacking any depth, texture and resistance. Today's architecture mirrors this flatness and superficiality of images on a screen, a flat land and flat planes in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The boxed extrusions that fight to dominate our attention and all of our senses too dominate the landscape, rising ever so higher towards the skies. Paradoxically, they are monumental in scale yet completely flat not merely in their texture, form and design, however more critically in their essence and meaning. These servers remain as the flat manifestations of their BIM and rendered digital twins, from the glossy magazine or digital advertisement of the two- and three-dimensional images on a screen. Again, everything becomes an image and consequently a product, another service to an experience that is devoid of all experience.

As a response to the extreme flatness in our surroundings is a demand for experience to make up for what is lost. This obsession with experience ironically comes with a complete flattening of it. The very essence of experience that we seek in the tangible world is reshaped by the digital, leading to a commodification of experiences that once defied replication. The quest for authentic, unmediated encounters with our surroundings is increasingly overshadowed by a market of curated, virtual simulations that promise the thrill of experience without its inherent risks or unpredictability.

An illustrative observation of this obsession with "experience" and the expansion of the consumer society could be one where it is conceivable that the view or even the act of rooftopping itself, once a pursuit of risk and unfiltered engagement with the urban landscape could be repackaged

as commodified experience offered through virtual simulation. This shift from the physical to the virtual, from the tangible to the commodified, marks a critical juncture in our relationship with the environment and with each other.

Beyond the tangible experience of the rooftop lies a broader spectrum of experiences increasingly distanced from reality, serving the spectacle rather than genuine engagement. Here however, the evolution of something like observation decks into multi-layered commodities may just be the beginning. With the advent of the metaverse and augmented reality, the push towards further detachment from reality accelerates, extending the realm of simulacra to new dimensions. This progression invites a reflection on the implications of such technologies for our perception of experience and reality.

To start considering, there may be a way to purchase experience packs to different perspectives across the city, be that from a roof, observation deck or many spaces already accessible albeit controlled, enclosed by guardrails, glass walls, paywalls, QR codes and hashtags. A commodity shared with others and shared with no one. Replicable, captured and posted online. Alike an amusement park, caged and confined, nothing belongs to the participant; everything is hyper-generic and meticulously simulated.

To expand on a few examples commonly found in many server cities, one can look at "The Edge" in NYC, a new observation deck located 100 storeys atop a "supertall skyscraper".[1] Here you can "discover edge" … "all of the city at once", tickets starting at $36. There is also an annual pass. Here, "your adventure begins as you enter into an immersive multimedia experience … so hold your breath. Take a step, and feel the thrill of the edge" … "Feel the thrill of leaning over the edge with the busy city below."[2] Other features include skyline seats, admission to a champagne bar where you can "sip a cocktail in the sky". What do you leave with outside of a photo and visit to the gift store?

Another add on is the "City Climb", where "you can push past your

comfort zone" for a memory that will supposedly last a lifetime.[3] There are spectator tickets where "your friends and family can cheer you one from the edge as you summit the climb", "meet up after your climb for a victory lap at edge and toast champagne in the sky."[4] Perfectly controlled, like a mouse within a cage, free to explore, yet never free. Tickets here start at $185. "Book your experience" today. Again, here things are brought to you. All without risk, packaged and sold back to you, replication staged, waiting for your participation in the spectacle.

A few miles away, another observation deck opened up at One Vanderbilt titled "Summit".[5] Here, "a new reality awaits," promising an awakening of senses across three levels of "immersive" spaces meant to "challenge, inspire, and thrill."[6] "Prepare to surrender to new perceptions of what's possible." The experience is divided into levels like "Transcendence 1," "2," "3," promising that as you "rise above Air, your world opens to new perspectives."[7] It concludes with relaxation and enjoyment of curated food and cocktails in a Nordic style café, promising views and vibes designed by Snøhetta.[8] There is also a guide on how to prepare and what to wear to maximize your experience, notably shoes that will not damage the floors and sunglasses to protect your eyes. "Dress with purpose."[9] In addition to the tickets, they sell gift cards, suggesting the experience itself is something you can gift to others, while claiming "Every experience at SUMMIT is unique to you: challenging, inspiring, thrilling. Reconsider what is possible."[10] "Expand your horizon." Because of it's timely reveal post-pandemic, the front page markets this space as a ticket to being together again, "It felt like I was floating in a sea of clouds.. it felt like I was flying through space.. it felt I falling in love with New York all over again.. it felt like we were finally back together again."[11]

A few streets south, another strange setup takes place at the Rockefeller Centre. Here the "Top of The Rock" observation deck presents "The Beam Experience", where you have the opportunity to sit atop a beam contraption that supposedly simulates the experience of the ironworkers who were captured sitting on an exposed steel beam 800 feet up during construction

more than 90 years ago.[12] Here, you will "experience, and follow in their fearless footsteps by buckling up for an exhilarating ascent."[13] The website proposes that you will recreate history 70 stories up and then be able to share your view. A difficulty to grasp what any of this means. Tickets range from express passes, guided tours, private experiences, priority elevator access to VIP passes. Another gift store and an app that you can download to use for walking audio tours. Uncanny. Adults participating in children's activities. Peak commodification, while perhaps just the beginning of a deeper simulation one day. A physical server that makes its presence more known, a digital server that multiplies itself, commodifying experience until it is utterly flattened. This, "please pay before existing", please pay for "experience", please leave a good review and have a nice day. You experience it once in the real, even without any take away experience; then again in the hyperreal through your upload and the downloading of others, viewing and sharing through the screen, twice removed from reality.

The next phase I imagine will bring the experience to you without movement, a special feature for those already dwelling within the confines of a server. Consider the various subscription plans one can pay for in their metaverse space, to simulate and view different parts of the city, different rooftops all from the comfort of your seat, projected from your headset. Why leave the home when the experience can be directly delivered to you? Completely in the machine, experiencing, then replicating said experience and sharing it with others, none of which is remembered. Total simulation. One never needs to step outside again to experience. A disability almost.

All experiences today have been flattened, commodified, absorbed by our eyes to be put on a screen. This trend extends everywhere turning everything into a potential commodity. From realtor ads to every product and service you subscribe to, inching closer towards total simulation. Presented as more accessible, more real than reality itself, yet being the total opposite – a total flattening of the human experience. A laying in bed with a headset in a palliative like state, no longer able, the end of the road of experience. Even where experiences may still be reachable, the server

leads us towards a simulation of reality, less of the real world, and towards a state reminiscent for those with disabilities.

As my own ability to walk escapes me, my ability to climb, my way of moving throughout the world and to a great extent, reach the roof, so does the ability to experience something real in this server farm that we call a city, ignoring the virtual world we too consider as real. Further evading me is the ability to experience a moment that is still captivating, one that provides me intense emotions, one that involves full bodily commitment, one that cannot be manufactured and sold, one that is real and by that one that I truly remember.

Although rooftopping as a path towards meaning must come to an end and a fear of meaninglessness trapped within the server becomes realized, maybe that is all I need to see. Maybe I have seen enough. The child calling back out to me, that this is what was needed to be realized as time unfolded, a preparation almost. That one can no longer exit a cave they have already left.

That despite all the relief and excitement rooftopping may bring, one must return below the surface, come back to hell before they do heaven in a sense. That regardless of disability, I will never be able to transcend an endless upload of servers which I cannot control.

That finding the truth is an already being free and that this has possibly prepared me for disability. The same truth that cannot be told, only realized through experience.[13]

To see beyond the veil of illusions beforehand, through the metaphorical server allowing a greater sense of true fulfillment and purpose in the world. Furthermore, despite what is lost, to not tarnish what I have already experienced. To leave on a good note and find this missing dimension another way that keeps depth and height to my reality, while staying vertically positioned where I can still be ready to die.

Still, the juxtaposition between the literal flattening of experiences, those that are real, that involve both the body and the mind, sharpen

the instinct to climb, to seek verticality in the defiance of that which is flat. The instinct to climb is metaphorically ones way moving up with both hands and feet, not only as an escape, but a reclamation. It is an acknowledgement that while our world may have been flattened by an onslaught of technology and control, by a new narcissistic spirit, the essence of our being deep inside refuses to be. In this realm of pervasive flatness, one constant remains, the instinct to seek verticality, moving away as far as possible from the intangible to the tangible, from the replicable to the real, the extremely flat to the ultimately vertical and finding as much depth possible to our existence there.

L TOWER – 673 FEET
DECEMBER 2015

There was something really special whenever a tall server, or what was considered tall before, was uploaded, realizing there was a new opportunity on hand. While taking years to construct, once a server neared completion to full completion, from offline to standby to online, presented an opening to try before it got clipped, tampered with and locked for good. There was a very short window of opportunity to execute each mission while the roof was likely still accessible. Even with parts of the roof off-limits, blocked by new sensors, cameras, plates and locks, pushed us to consider alternative ways to get up. Even if it did not offer the same view, we commonly found ways to climb to different levels of the roof through outside parts of the server. Still, there was very little room for error, especially as security tightened and surveillance increased across all parts of the server farm. Naturally we always found ourselves looking for the next best thing. While we remained tight lipped, we would occasionally share details of different roofs if asked by friends in the scene. Granted, a roof accessible one week could easily be off-limits the next; often falling victim to these circumstances facing doors and locks different from what we were told leading to us to bail and make a quick exit. Other nights we'd roam throughout the late hours of the night with no success, other times swinging by an old familiar roof to salvage what was left of the night, creeping into the early parts of the morning.

Almost everyday on my commute back home from St. Michael's Hospital where I returned for my third and final co-op during my studies in college, I would catch sight of a particular roof and its adjacent crane. A sight that always seemed to find its way into my peripherals. Through a reflection off another server, a view out of the underground pedestrian walkway, the roof of the station platform, or through the window of the bus or train. The knife-like shape of this server stood out like a sore thumb, it's profile although otherwise meaningless in colour and form was reminiscent of a

chef's knife. The project failed to live up to the original design expectations, however none of that mattered, instead it was something to reach towards waiting as an invitation. To climb above, sit down on and look out from along the edge of the knife.[14]

This roof remains iconic today, albeit completely locked down. While anyone is welcome to attempt, this attempt would lead no where but an arrest and charges laid. It is an experience that will never be had again. This was a place that started before I began to rooftop and finished well after. From its construction span of over 6 years from 2013 to 2019, I found myself fitted somewhere in-between, mediating a timeline of rooftopping within its construction narrative. With a long list of complications and delays that stretched far beyond the usual, it allowed for others like me to seize different parts of the server across the years.

One night in the later part of December, a couple weeks prior to the end of my co-op - what felt like the end my invitation here - I would be located more than 700 feet in the air atop this server. Even higher, I would be sitting on its crane exposed, one of two cranes I would visit twice more, and an experience no longer accessible that I yearn for, frozen in a series of photographs.

That night, three of my friends and I converged from different directions hours apart from one another all with the same goal in mind planned weeks in advance. We lingered around the city beforehand to kill time until we felt it was appropriate for an ideal entry, balancing an arrival not too early nor too late. Although this matters less when we're up, it was sometimes better not to climb too early in the night to avoid being spotted below or from the cell of an adjacent server, while not too late where entry via foot traffic was no longer feasible.

"What's the plan if we get caught?" one of us murmured. "That's the emergency exit door," another pointed out, nodding towards the metal aqua green door that was positioned at least one foot above the sidewalk, a drop we would all notice as we exited later, a door however that somewhat

melted into the façade, albeit not perfectly, looking a slight shade off and contrasting the material combination of the spandrel panels on either side. “Okay, so once we’re in, we sign in,” I said, recalling a tip from someone about gaining access—using a fake name and a random room number. “Let’s split into pairs,” I suggested. We waited for someone to enter or exit—preferably enter, so we could slip in behind them, giving us a bit more time as they scanned in.

The waiting game often felt endless, trying to judge without getting too close who was heading into the server and who was just walking by, yet staying near enough to dash through the doors. “After these guys,” one of us whispered. We split, myself and another going in first. “See you guys inside,” I said, hinting we’d regroup at the top without specifying a floor, uncertain if access would be restricted by a fob. Sparring the details, we signed in and made it past the lobby’s glass door and into the elevator lobby, the whole time crossing our fingers we would not get stopped. Fast forward fifteen minutes, we found ourselves together at the topmost stairwell door. Just minutes before, a few floors down, shouting out to each other, our voices echoing through the stairwell shaft trying to locate each other unable to coordinate our whereabouts where cell service was not permitted.

Unsure which door to crack, we naturally aimed for the highest one, ready to switch stairwells or drop a level if needed. We each took turns attempting to open the first door using our varied methods and tools, however none of us exactly experts at this. One of my friends stayed a level below as a lookout, ready to signal an evacuation is needed, listening for the sounds of other door and footsteps below.

At least ten minutes passed, by now we managed to get the bolt to slip, yet one that failed to catch. The unventilated space had us sweating, layered in winter clothing and jackets, crowded on the last two stair steps and a landing. One of my friends applied gentle pressure on the handle, coordinating the timing as I worked the bolt loose. “Pull now” I whispered,

and the door gave way, swinging open. In a rush of panic, we scrambled through, quickly stashing our tools into our bags.

Navigating through a series of unexpectedly unlocked doors beyond the last, we ended up in a dimly lit mechanical room. We tested every door, explored around boilers, chillers, and elevator machinery—each unnamed and mysterious, none marked 'roof.' It seemed, by design, the building had no accessible roof, just a crane—at this time, two of them.

After a few minutes of exploring, we stumbled upon an open door leading to a less finished area, littered with remnants of construction materials, however marked by a distinct shift in the air from the threshold we just crossed. Stepping further into this space, the sound of the operating mechanical equipment intensified, however through the sounds came external vibrations of the city hundreds of meters below – muffled contrasts, the flutter of construction tarp, ruffling of plastic, clink of metals in the wind, empty coffee cups rolling on the floor and the passing of cars far away. We were at the cusp of the inside and outside. The stale air became fresh, and my senses came alive, the cold becoming sharper with each step.

Moving up was the only way to go. We moved through a series of steps, jumps, wood planks and metal ladders to land on an elevated concrete platform, the last piece of solid ground our feet would touch. Climbing another ladder and walking tightly across a concrete beam, our path was parallel to the opening of the sky above us, the roof splitting a gap where curtain wall and cladding were absent, allowing the body and server to breathe. Our steps ended in front of an even taller ladder that shot up and aligned with the crane's rear side. Clutching it, my awareness narrowed to my own presence, each step, I took heighted the risk of a significant fall. One today I would second guess, one tomorrow may no longer even be possible. The climb became a potential fall into the overflow of a mechanical room to a sheer drop off the crane and down the sloped angle of the roof to the ground of the site below. More than 200 meters. This took place as my view changed from within the server enclosure to an opening past the

edge of the most exterior machine panel, slicing outside of the server and inside a sweeping 180-degree view of the city. This clearing, although built and fabricated, pulled me out of the server, alike reaching the end of a mountain pass and edge of a cliff, here however unnatural and forbidden. A diving board to jump off of at any moment, instead a continued climb towards the heavens.

As I reached the top of the ladder several feet beyond the glass and metal edged opening, I faced a moment of transition, needing to let go of the ladder and move onto the landing. Letting go meant relying solely on my feet for support as my hands shifted from the ladder to the large cold frame of the crane which was difficult to grip. The cold pierced my hands telling me to let go, yet my survival instincts had me holding on tighter. I avoided looking down to check gauge the distance of my friends knowing too well that vertigo would occur.

For what felt like minutes, though was likely only seconds, I stood frozen, lost in coordination on what part of the body to move next. What string to pull, what block to remove without everything falling and collapsing in on me. In this case a grasp let go and falling hundreds of meters below. I took another step up, placing my hand raised highest on the mesh platform landing above, then another, both my hands grasping the landing and my feet following. Up and over, my knees making contact, pressing tightly onto the mesh, the sharpness of the metal cutting through, surely imprinting directly on my skin. My fingers found purchase through the holes, steadying myself as I pushed up into a squat, marking my first time atop a crane, surrounded by an unobstructed view.

Standing, I clung to the crane, contemplating how much higher up I was to go. With this view I had already reached, I weighed my desire to ascend further and to take advantage of an other extremely finite opportunity against the wisdom of staying safe here, the notion of “safe” already seeming absurd at this height. The truth is, as much as my instincts wanted me to stay, that this was sufficient, the fleeting nature of this opportunity

had me push further. This “I have already made it this far”, why quit here. A decision in hindsight I am beyond thankful for. Even though this and many others following could have lost me my life, it is one that, especially now in my given situation, has enriched my life with experiences that are profoundly irreplicable.

As I looked upwards, I saw another six or seven landings above me. The way they collided in density like layers made it difficult to fully grasp the scale from below, each step up clarifying the view, yet revealing only more of the nothingness of the sky above. Despite the weight of my bag and fatigue in my legs weighing me down thus far, I gripped the ladder and continued my ascend. Every time I glanced upward, I made sure to have a firm grip onto something, less because of the wind pushing me around, rather the instability felt looking up, the sight and sounds, the clouds moving against my steadiness, nothing around in my periphery, and a feeling that I was very much already falling. Holding onto the thin rusty ladder and moving from one landing to the next, each roughly five feet square and two-foot wide openings alternating ends, one leading upwards, the other down, as each landing in front reduced, I was no longer climbing to a “solid” platform rather to a heightened sense of vertigo. While climbing, parts of my body caught onto the structure, be it my gloves to the ladder, jeans to parts of the crane, shoes on the sharp edges of the platform. Each step up elevated my levels of vertigo, the weight of the wind and subtle movement of the crane swayed me in tandem, both of us dancing together, the crane seemingly leading. Clinging as tightly as possible, I was still pushed in all directions by the wind while all sounds drowned out and one hand struggling to keep my hat on. The only sounds outside the gust of the wind were metallic creaks of the crane, reminiscent of a sinking ship. Yet, with each step higher, I gained a broader view of the skyline, a view above the what once was a standing giants of servers that towered over me below, a detail that should not have mattered each step up, however somehow it did.

At least 4 levels up, I pondered: do I climb another ten feet, adding to the distance I would eventually need to descend, or stay here, already more than 200 meters up. With each step up, I felt more isolated, seldom sharing a platform with my friends due to the constrained space, their locations at this point still unknown to me. Yet, in this solitude, I felt closer to heaven, as close as I could get metaphorically speaking, and simultaneously closer to death. This, "can anyone hear me up there?" and at the same time a "I should probably stop here." Although I was perched on a platform that remained solid, the force of the wind and the givenness of falling at any moment made it difficult to find a moment of comfort and a body that failed to acclimatise to the given situation. A view that begged to be looked at, yet a body that was not as ready as the eyes.

With no more time to spare, I took out my camera. I straddled my legs over the edge between an angled crane post, just enough to fit right while positioning in a way that it was not obstructing my view. Alternating my view along the landing, looking east to north to west, doing my best to capture the city on full display. operating a tool with one hand, my eyes focused solely on what was beyond the viewfinder, and the rest of my body holding on for life. It demanded peak awareness, unrelenting physical and mental efforts. Pointing down and peering through the camera, cutting out all peripheral both removed me from the moment while at the same time put me inside of it. Like an angel looking down at the world, an angel in the sky above the top of this knife. A bird's eye view in the truest sense.

This higher state of consciousness, transferring between the ground of the server, inside the server, breaking down layers of thresholds to escape the server, to being on top of it. Overcoming my fear, my physical limitations, this self transcendence deeply connected me to something real, to something greater than myself. Along this plane of retreat, I am constantly struck, engaged, on the edge, immersed, human.





dreamstate

December 18, 2015
9:46pm

Collins Tower



down the knife

December 18, 2015
9:52pm

prolonged pause

December 18, 2015
9:56pm





opening

December 18, 2015
10:07pm

Altius Group



unsteady landings

February 13, 2016
10:21pm

don't look down

February 13, 2016
10:41pm





collective freedom

February 13, 2016
11:06pm

4.1

THE URBAN COSMOS

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW THE STARS?

Light pollution saturates the night sky above the server farm absorbing a persistent stream of artificial light. Cars, streetlamps, offices, factories, outdoor advertisements, and the relentless glow of screens transform night into a perpetual artificial day. In this ceaseless luminosity, the distinction between day and night is lost; darkness becomes extinct.

This omnipresent artificial light impacts not just our environment and natural circadian rhythms[1] but also severs our connection with the natural and unbuilt world. The heavens rendered invisible. An increasing alienation from nature in urban settings signifies a loss of our tangible link to the cosmos. Our nights, rather than being cradled in the serene embrace of darkness, are dominated by the cold, sterile illumination of urbanity, permanently anchoring us in an artificial existence.

Beyond the light that pervades the screens between our spaces and into the outside world are the screens continuously plastered to our eyes. The digital itself is at bottom a deployment of a certain technic of light, one that consummates itself in the screen that we're all looking at right now. The light we encounter and what appears to us is not illuminated from the outside world but rather from behind, or on the other side, a sort of backlit as it were. Our lives take place behind the screen in which it is the new horizon of our digital experience.

Our interaction with the natural world, once direct and unmediated, is now filtered through layers of digital interfaces. Life itself becomes intermediated, curated, and commodified, experienced second-hand through the detachment of screens. Something is looked at, yet not seen. A mere scrolling through. A skipping over. A being everywhere and nowhere. We have become tourists of our own world, unable to linger or connect deeply with our surroundings.

Amidst this disconnection, the stars remind us of a universe that exists beyond the server, beyond the city – a world that is rapidly fading from our collective consciousness.

Users within the server no longer remember the beauty of the night sky, the thick blanket, the darkness that cradled them to sleep. Instead there is a light that is always on.

One no longer sees the stars.



76. We used to stargaze, now I'm wishing you the best. 2019

Impromptu drive my friend and I made one summer night in search for the stars. While the conditions are hard to predict and a multi hour long drive is required, we took the risk and were grateful with the results that came out. We no longer stargaze, it is becoming increasingly difficult with the expanse of the server and its light pollution.

THE ROOF

The rooftop is a bridge between the earthly and the cosmic, albeit a man-made platform in the sky. The rooftop cuts a new level bringing one as close to the heavens with their feet on the ground. It allows a semblance of peace and a chance to engage with larger existential questions in the midst of urban chaos, previously available before light. From varying vantage points under the sky the city transforms. The usual perspectives shift, and the ordinary becomes extraordinary. The act of looking out or up from a rooftop provides a new way of seeing the urban environment and one's place within it. It's a space where the boundaries between the self and the city, the mundane and the profound, blur. Despite natures limitations here, rooftops remind us of the importance of maintaining a connection to the natural world, a stillness, even in the most urban of setting.

The rooftopper finds a new way of star-gazing within the urban context. One that is less about celestial bodies and more about the tapestry of human life. A contemplative practice, a way of seeing and understanding the city and its inhabitants, revealed and regulated by the skies above. Total experience alike that of a low moon, clear sky and milky way. The rhythms of the city, the ebb and flow of traffic, the flickering of the servers, the distant sounds, the air above, the network, the sounds below drowning out all silence, a constant white noise. Both isolation and connection. The rooftopper here reflects introspectively with the urban cosmos, considering their relationship with the world and their place in it.

STAR GAZING

The night-time reveals the city full of stars. All of which return to home, unique and different from one another, though all equally as beautiful, lighting the city up before they all go to sleep.

Each a sign of life. On and off. Flickers in the distance. The different lives in each server. The hopeless voyeurist far away. The watcher is exposed to a series of episodes, channels, stars with their own story. A contrast of sights and sounds of the users to the outside world. A difference in loneliness. Still, passing, each fleeting. Both the users in the vehicles and behind the windows I will never know or see again.

I question the experience and imagine the atmosphere behind your screen. Impossible to ever be up close, much rather studying one through the screen than behind it. Watching thousands of others within the server, beside, above, below and across from you. A series of raw cuts, panning the lens up, down, left and right. A telescope and recorder. Peering anonymously into lives of the everyday. Individual happenings. I can't speak to you, I can't reach you, I most likely will never get to meet you, though I can see you and know you from the ways in which you look, how your pad is organized, how the space is lit, from your furniture, pets, partner, the cluttered kitchen, messy bed sheets, the guitar in the corner collecting dust, the plants on your bedroom table, the book on your nightstand, the humidifier you've kept on throughout the night, your night-light keeping you safe, the show you fell asleep watching, the food on your sofa you didn't finish, your mattress with the missing frame. It looks like we're both alone. The spaces in which we inhabit usually say more about ourselves than we do. More than the spectacle of ourselves online, more than enough.

The server farm displays a sea full of stars, albeit real behind your screen[2]. Up all night, watching the stars die, before the night clears back to day.

A city full of stars.





4.2

THE ROOF AND MOUNTAIN

THE MOUNTAIN

A hike

An escape and a climb from the server.

No connection yet a stronger connection.

Uncontrolled silence.
Water, birds, rustling of leaves, movement of animals within the branches.
Actual sounds of nature, not through speakers or that of the machine.

Fresh air finally filtering through the lungs.
A shared climb and descent
Healthy exhaustion.
Time felt through the body and the world.
Passing.
Human uninterrupted.

Switchbacks, water reservoirs, creeks, bridges, junctions.
Sticks and stones.
Rocky roads.
Foreign to the everyday yet familiar by evolution.
History, tread by others before me

An end that feels near.
A clearing and landing.
A view unobstructed.
A reward now accepted, not made instant.
A sense of accomplishment that one earns and owns.
That one feels then remembers.
Instead of the edge of the server, one stands on the edge of the world.

Along the split of land and ocean, and endless vastness into the pacific horizon.

Freedom.

During lockdowns, there was no where to travel, at the time the options to do anything and go anywhere were limited for reasons that still make no sense to me. I would take every opportunity possible within reason to get out, not knowing when freedom would be limited, compromised, again and again. Looking back, I wish I did more despite the external limitations imposed on me. A host of dreams and plans postponed, unreachable, time lost that I will never recover from. My 20's blurred, my freedom removed, my decline waiting to begin, unable to remember the last time I was happy. Removed from one another, from what made us human, content, physically well, mentally stable, forced in our homes, masked, hopeful yet hopeless, it's funny how little has changed. Still stuck in this meaninglessness.

Growing up, I was never an extremely outdoorsy person. Active sure, however I've never went camping nor enjoyed being out in the woods for too long. On the other hand, I had increasingly disliked the busy city atmosphere. Already having lived through and in a major city, while seeing it's transformation in both scale and density, I started to hope for some peace, tranquility and mainly freedom that I was unable to find within the boundaries of city walls while having some structure and authority that was lacking in total primitive landscapes. Trapped for months and unfulfilled by what the roof had to offer, I needed to get out.

I flew out west to explore. To escape the server, the perpetual lockdowns and unfreedom, of being stuck, of a being trapped I feared and loathe today.

Little did I know, this would be my last hike.

What feels like my last time with the mountain.



78. Lookout. 2021

One of the many memorable hikes from my second visit to British Columbia during lockdowns. A hike while challenging then, would be infinitely more difficult now. I hate the thought of this, the reality that I may never hike again.

ROLE OF MOUNTAIN

Before anything, there were mountains. Before the server, man was connected directly with nature, with the real world.[1] Man's existence and survival were mediated by the landscape around him and the mountains beyond. The mountain, much like architecture fostered guidance and direction. It provided both a sense of wonder and awe, a desire to reach something bigger than the self. To hold onto and capture oneself along a peak where heaven and earth met.[2] At its core, the mountain was an archetypal symbol that encompassed the idea of ascension and journey. As something that was never designed to be traversed, the idea, act and physical effort of climbing vertically to learn, find shelter, resource or commonly obtain a new view is a metaphorical version of our own existence. A pairing between man and the world, a seeking for transcendence, something synonymous with life itself.[3]

As mountains shaped the lands in which we developed, so too did the very architecture built which shaped our communities and orient our lives. Like the mountain, architecture is a way of knowing our place in the world. As a mountain stands as a natural compass, providing orientation through its form and scale, architecture uses its own elements of form and time – nature, history, and memory – to offer similar guidance. Both the mountain and architecture speak to our experiences of being-in-the-world. They articulate the fundamental aspects of our existence: gravity and mass, the play between horizontality and verticality, and the contrast between earth and sky. These elements frame our understanding of centre and periphery, nature and culture, landscape and artifice. In doing so, they bridge individuality and collectivity, past and present. Like mountains that have shaped landscapes for millennia, architecture captures the essence of our times and our freedoms, marking our journey through the ages and reflecting the evolving tapestry of human experience.

The server negates all of this.

THE SERVER

The server opposes the natural landscape, erases it while tries to mimic and rebuild what is vacant. The mountain. The server today demands verticality while devoid of any experience. A landscape rather that continues to rewrite itself. A landscape that through its flatness breeds a form of building that tries to replicate the experience of peak elevation found in nature while completely distanced from it. There is neither experience nor image, only information.

It is through the separation of nature, of the real world, that something is constructed as a response to rewrite what nature and the world really was. It is only through this flatness that this takes place. The greater the flatness, the emptier, the more absolute, the higher one aims to build and construct. It is uncanny. A building as high as possible, "to reach the top of the mountain again", "to have views from above", "to live in the sky", or sky living as put rather,[4] whatever any of this means. Or better yet a replica of a mountain - a simulacra of such.[5] Another countless marketing trend to push the commodity forward as far as possible while nothing to do with the reality itself. Yet another piece of information you are brought to, that you do not bring yourself into. There are no thresholds or layers of time rather investment, social credit, and validation. One does not climb a mountain, one does not see a mountain, one does not experience a mountain, one instead knows no mountain only server. There is no longer a natural world inside of the server. There are no mountains to climb, to explore, to transcend. There is no depth or verticality to our experiences, instead extreme flatness in everything. The closest one can reach to such real experience is through exiting all that technology "touches", going as far away as possible, be that through reaching outside the limits of the server, the very top, the top of the mountain almost.

In the past, everybody was a part of nature. We now look at nature as something separate from us. We have taken ourselves out of the traditionally real world that we were a part of and we have made ourselves exterior to

it. Where everything is now a problem to be solved, to be controlled, to overcome nature, the hurricanes, reoccurring change in climate, etc. To control the weather, the earth, the sky, all modes of being. As opposed to seeing nature and living with it, we only see nature as a tool. Architecturally, the server erases all of this. Nature is rather another product taken away and sold back to you. Developers and such techno-utopian projects almost consistently use language of sustainability, environmental protection, being close to nature, and more, while really being completely shut out from it. The corporate world in general does this very often.

As a result, there is an obsession to seek elevation today. For the human it is to make do within a system that provides none of this. For the system, to seek and replicate what it is missing in the previously human world without any of the depth. While also in the financial sense of maximizing profit and extraction of units to sell but also in the image and form through height and verticality. This is found in the obsession and commodification of building as high as possible. While speaking for a project as something that will redefine the city yet again only failing to do none of it. It is rather only through this complete flatness of the landscape and of each other that allow for such projects to exist. Any nature or topography is flattened to create anew. A heterogeneous landscape, one of contour would not permit such conditions. The land of mother nature would be too far great of a resistance to likely overcome and would not permit such server to take place. Instead, through a homogenous flatness, where what is left of nature and where mountain is void can the inverse be introduced. This flatness is shared amongst all domains of the server, from the flatness of the built world, in experience, in each other and back in the server. Being today is at odds with pointing to something real, something with depth in a world that is increasingly flat.

TO CLIMB

Close to 800 people take on the climb of Mount Everest each year, with about 90% reaching the summit successfully, and for every 100 climbers, around 4 do not survive.[6] Among all the mountains and climbs, one might wonder why Everest is so compelling, despite the risks and the daunting challenges it presents. The allure seems to reside in the profound and personal fulfillment that comes from conquering such an obstacle one brings themselves to. For many, it symbolizes the pinnacle of human endurance and adventure, something real to be remembered by, even more importantly a path of self-discovery and enlightenment.

Although the mountain may have been used to seek shelter or refuge, it stands as a test of one's physical limits, as a confrontation of the immense power of nature a spiritual connection to something larger than oneself. For centuries, we have been drawn to it as a sacred place, representation of the divine, a path towards transcendence. Everyone too has their own set of mountains and personal challenges. By conquering these does one find their true self, living a life authentic from the collective and shared experience that autoplay's through history. It is in these personal ascents that one finds the essence of their being.[7]

The discovery of this mode of being in the world throws new light on our understanding of man, beginning with the nature of ordinary perception. When we stand on a mountaintop, our sensory perception engages deeply with the environment. We not only see the beauty of the view but feel the cold air, hear the wind, and smell the pines. This full-bodied experience is a form of existential transcendence, a mode of being in the world where perception is not just a visual act but an intentional, meaningful engagement with our surroundings. It's a reminder that our existence cannot be reduced to mere observation; it's a dynamic, participatory act deeply intertwined with our environment.[8]

Like Everest, each mountain climbed is not only a physical ascent but a metaphysical journey. Climbing a mountain symbolizes a test of strength

and a pursuit to achieve ego-consciousness. Along the summit and from the peak of any mountain, the horizon stretches limitlessly, reminding us of the vastness of our world and our humble placement within it, both a placement and world that is disappearing. It is clear there is something in the human psyche that aims for a world of depth and height to it, juxtaposing the flatness and mundaneness of the everyday we are surrounded by. A need to connect to something higher that gives verticality to existence. Something to transcend that embodies the human quest for meaning and elevation in an increasingly flat world.

TRANSCENDENCE

We had once climbed mountains to see the world, not so the world can see us.[9] Instead of being the observers, we have become the observed. The modern world, ironically, has become more about the world seeing us than us seeing the world. Man without the mountain can no longer climb and reach transcendence the same.

The rooftops of the servers instead become new peaks. Where mountains represented a natural pinnacle of transcendence, rooftops offer an urban counterpart, a retreat, vantage point and escape from the chaotic mundane. Where the mountains were here for time, servers are built in time with no time. As with technology, there is no date or memory to servers than continue to clone itself. A freedom from history, freedom from any sort of metaphysical limitations. Complete vastness of land, an emptiness almost.

Where a mountain stands in the background, always beyond you, highlighting what is real, the server is injected, imposed and constructed in a way that blocks, screens and removes the given or lives free from the natural world.

Through total flatness, the system continues to treat and ignore the real world by nature, rather a canvas to keep on destructing, rewriting.

What God had created man only tries to.

There goes a forgetting of the real. A forgetting of transcendence.

THE ROOF

Juxtaposing with nature. I sit on this mountaintop and my eyes take in the extent and beauty of the view.

My body is dropped by the cold air. My ears pick up the sounds of the wind. The odd car horn echoing below.

My nose takes in the aroma of the pines, though here of the city and distinctly the exhaust of the machine inside.

I am able to witness the totality of man as a bodily being in the world. My hands, mouth, limbs and the total bodily condition are learning and evaluating the nature of human experience.

Around the city that flickers and dims towards and into the night.

The city I feel alone in. That I find difficulty yet solace viewing.

The server city, an isolation of cells to retreat to, detached from the body. The city which tries to set itself apart, server tower to server tower, disconnected. Unreachable, only able to witness from a distance, on display, out of reach..

What I see in the distance are the lives just like mine, souls dreadfully distinct, longing for connection, perishing in clashing dreams of being interlinked.

The roof is nowhere near the experience of ascending a mountain, nor does it try to replicate. However for the urban explorer, the roof is seen as an escape from the server, as something to climb, as was nature an outing from the city in the past.

Flatness and transparency flood everywhere. Dwellers become users, subscribers of non-things. Shop, spend, consume, capture, post, share. You are nothing within the ecosystem. A place only for consumption and commodities. The urban explorer participates in neither. Where the city is

a server. There is no transcendence. There is no visible horizon. There is no longer a mountain. Only roof which man can* access. The city becomes his playground. Transgression as freedom. Both of which flee my grasp, by distance and accessibility.

Where the natural world opened its arms to be climbed, to be explored, to be witnessed, none of this takes place in the server. With nowhere to openly expand, stretch and be free, the urban explorer always ponders, yearns for genuine transcendence within the constructed urban confines of the everyday. The roof calls as a method of breaking free from the constraints of remaining underground, behind the screen and in the cave, digitally and physically enclosed. An urban explorer engages in acts of defiance against the boundaries that confine them, seeking a liberation and connection to a higher realm. One reclaims humanity and individuality in a world increasingly comminated by homogenization and control.

The roof is his mountain.

79. Server ridge. 2020
There are no mountains in the server city, as a result, man summits the servers. Here, one can make contact with the horizon again beyond the screen. One can have a conversation with the earth and speak more closely to mother nature in her pure erasure. One can truly reach an authentic view alike the top of a mountain in the pure flatness of the life below the city. Photo was captured atop a window washing crane of 3 of 5 friends one summer evening during lockdowns.



4.3

INSIDE THE MACHINE

Quite often many of the servers we explored were of those not fully finished. Some with remnants of debris and material waiting to be collected and parts pending final touches, while partially online, to others still offline, however near full height before or after the final pour. For years, most of what we climbed however were finished projects, after the construction and stage performance were wrapped up.

There was a fine line between early construction and what was near completion. No matter the case, both our curiosity and unknowing led us to exploring spaces further from completion. It did not take long for us to question and chase for something more, to question the experience and atmospheres presented in something less active to still completely offline.

Commonly, we would keep tabs on the start and estimated end dates of projects, often by sight on casual excursions, scouting from street level or in the skies from roofs adjacent. We would keep an eye out for servers that looked far enough into their uploads, just enough to warrant the chance to enter and climb. As seasons passed, it was easy to miss how quickly the servers were erected, clad, and assembled towards their final form.

Our transgressions into sites were rare and specifically planned. Both the risk and ramifications weighed differently compared to a server well into its post-occupancy life. What made sites unique was the barrier of entry to begin with. Sites situated within the city were far more complex than those outside; however, they functioned all the same. The only physical threshold separating one from entering the server was generally a fence or secure barrier, doing the bare minimum to keep in what remained inside and what was forbidden out. However, the human threshold was the very willpower to make a decision and commit to it, to surpass what was considered moral versus immoral. Unlike a completed server, sites were far more dangerous and unpredictable, adding onto both the experience upon entry and the risk itself. Today, there seem to be more sites than there are finished uploads, hardly able to keep track due to both quantity and

monotony. Still, they tease opportunities everywhere; and yet, venturing into them without getting caught is nearly impossible—like a baited trap door.

Construction sites posed a different experience from others. It posed an alternative set of anxieties and consequences. It felt far more liminal, far more unreal. A moment of the interstitial. A moment of in-between. Where from inside to outside, the experience was embodied unlike one just beyond a hatch opening. Here there was a behind the scenes, seeing beyond the curtain, and being inside the machine.

For most, sites mean nothing outside of a disturbance, an eye sore before being an eye sore. Ones experience is limited to the occularcentric gaze of the server from afar or to what is made publicly accessible as a commodity afterwards. Only meeting through exteriors. Even for the worker involved in the server's upload, while they partake in and contribute to the birth of the machine before its years of suffering begin, their involvement is purely operational – akin to that of a midwife, yet situated within a factory setting for twelve hours a day; and since the machine is not a baby there is nothing to take care of upon delivery.

Furthermore, this applies to all occupants—users, prisoners—who have access to a singular cell within the server, typically for a predetermined period of time. This server, moderated and mediated by an unseen other, offers no insight into its inception or conclusion; inhabitants find themselves simply existing within its confines. Bound to live by its rules, with no ownership or connection to others in their network—reminiscent of a panopticon.

The so-called 'habitat'—if one can even call it that—remains a digitized and centralized space within a comprehensive system, forming a vertical neighborhood of hives, of cells. Today, the modern city has transformed into a compilation of such servers, each imbued with its unique experiences and conditions, whether they be offices, retail spaces, or residential blocks.

Unlike the explorer, who enjoys sovereignty and is free to roam,

inhabitants are constrained by their own limitations, from work to in and out of ones cell, never truly escaping the server's grasp. Constantly living inside a machine, they contrast sharply with the explorer, who manages to liberate himself from such confines. While you are circumscribed by set boundaries, the explorer transcends them.

GRAND PARK – 500 FEET

NOVEMBER – 2016

The end of summer turned to fall seamlessly. Fall always seemed to blur into winter, forgetting when and where summer had really ended and where winter began. The delicate colours of the trees, the transitioning from warmth to cold and the shorter days however were hard to ignore, rather hard to miss in feeling.

I had been working a job as an architectural technologist at a firm out in Oakville for a couple of months, one that I had rather not been at. Having graduated from college a couple months prior, I landed a "steady" job to hold off until I found myself back in school a year later, to pursue a bachelor's degree down in the states. Until then, this was something to keep me "busy" in the interim, to what I wasted days away with, alike many others, allowing time to take over itself. Days went from being blurred, to being ignored, to being forgotten. Life flew by with no recollection. My frustration and unhappiness, although knowing it was temporary on my command became a tipping point to wanting more out of life. To really questioning my place in the world, how I saw time whither away and out of my grasp, to understand what I had not defined then as "meaning", what at all did I find as meaningful in my life. Looking back, with hindsight as 20/20, I'm grateful for the outcomes. Everything happened for a reason.

It did not happen all on one day, rather became a time I started to question the meaning of my work, of my time, of my place in the world. Day in and day out, unfulfilled by meaningless tasks to run my hours dry, to drain my energy and time of nothing. Of no real story, depth, or memory. How could everyone be so fitted and compliant in this given setting, of mindlessly rotting away. Maybe it worked for them, maybe they didn't believe they had the will, the will to question and want more out of life.

The role I took on at this time was one I accepted with a temporary mindset, albeit still became unbearable. I had plans to head back to school a year upon starting, finding myself in Detroit to pursue my bachelor's

degree, presented through a joint agreement with my college. A program that would have me graduated within a 24 month time frame. I accepted the space I was in for the time being, however questioned the role of the field and entirely my very own place in it. Realistically speaking, was this at all what I wanted to do, what at all had this related to the work from school, where at all would I find a creative drive that I felt was being lost each minute that generally allowed an individual to escape from the death sentence of modern existence and corporate America. The alienation of living death that dissolves society.

I would end up quitting less than five months in and moving to a different position in the city for the remainder of the eight months before starting back in school again.

I was young, I was naïve, I complied out of not knowing better. Not knowing I would continue to do so for years on after. That aside, I was stuck in this grid, this grid of the world imposed on me. Of waking up at 6:30am, getting up to go to a job I hated, to people I didn't exactly like understandably so, nor did I expect them the same of me. To repeat the same mundane tasks day in and day out, to fit within the system I had no plans of staying in and under, truly counting down each and everyday, to having trouble finding a single glimpse of enjoyment in my life, to wanting it all to end. What time did I really have to myself, what energy did I really have leftover upon coming home everyday. A few hours to eat, go to the gym, maybe burn of some entertainment, only to wake up sleep deprived, exhausted and unmotivated to continue on. I truly lived for the weekends, how great of a life that is to hope and wait for 2 of 7 days a week to maybe get the chance to live.

I was alienated, I was detached from my closest of friends, too exhausted to mutually make an effort. I had dropped my hobbies, and I was just living for tomorrow. A day never promised.

There was something missing from my life. Something missing that gave me purpose, happiness, connection and love for something or someone. Something I could not quite define or understand. Something that gave

direction to my being, something that was meaningful.

It had been easily months since I had last picked up my camera, months more since I had last experienced a moment of transcendence and shared that moment with a friend.

My friend Myles and I had not hung out for months, let alone spoken since finishing college. The days of just a year before, felt like days of old. We had both graduated from college a few months prior and since took a break from shooting, let alone exploring. For myself, this hiatus marked the first real confrontation with the progression of life as it unfolds on its own term – the monotonous rhythm of the nine-to-five, the relentless cycle of retuning to a soulless job you despite, and the lost touch to one creativity in exchange for a death sentence that is employment and the succumbing to modern alienation.

I had texted him on the night after graduation in the fall, uncertain what might have come out of it. About a week later I reached out again with no remorse, seeing for a rekindling of an old fire, to send a spark and see if a matching flame would be sent back. I was not exactly sure what he was up to since we last spoke, especially as he was of the quieter kind; not one to share openly nor reach out, possessing a natural inclination towards introversion. He was someone who preferred to listen and observe than be the center of attention. Nonetheless, although he was not someone to actively pursue interactions, he was always receptive and understanding whenever reached out to. The message I sent roughly a week prior, was both to check in and to hang out like "old" times. It wasn't long before we were back in the same car, heading to the city, bags in the back with the same intention as before. To climb.

Saturdays and Sunday's simply put were the "safest" days to approximately attempt a site climb, or what we would call a send today. I messaged him of a site I had climbed a couple of months prior with someone else, one site that I suspected would or at the very least still be

accessible, remembering the condition it was in last. This was not his first, although it was something I suspected he would not be open to even in the condition I had climbed it before. Just two nights prior we had shot together, climbing a hotel in Toronto we had not hit before. It was a good feeder roof to test out and see if things felt the same. I had surely missed being up above, to transcend, and to share this experience with him.

The night of the climb.

As we drove closer to the site, I notioned we park farther away than we would for a server that was complete. At the very least a safe distance from the site, yet not too far out of reach from a run. South of the site was a plaza in development, filled with the typical selection of stores and mass lots, fitting for the row of developments I imagined were planned for this given radius. The parking lot was almost empty, with an odd grouping of parked cars here and there, with what would be piled with endless consumers during the day, now empty twelve hours later. The last few cars that laid here I assume were those for the remaining store owners closing shop.

As we approached, now within less than a kilometre from the area, a clear tenseness was shared between us as we had to devise a plan. We avoided parking and instead cycled around the site by car, rolling the windows down for a better view, with the cool autumn breeze flooding the stale air inside the car, slightly waking us up and alerting the senses.

Although I had climbed here three months prior, the fences and gates appeared slightly different, as if parts grew in size or shifted in relation to the materials and work incoming and on site. The server appeared at least a few floors higher, in a phase closer to completion from before. We stopped the car on the opposite side of the road off of the main intersection and opposite to the site, peering inside, scouting for any leftover activity or sight of another human being. Whether that was traces of light, of a vehicle, or of activity from afar inside the machine, there was never a guarantee we

were alone. There was a white portable behind the fence, about 20 meters away which shared the same sight of us as we did with it. A single window facing the server and slightly out of view, a dim light inside glowing as what looked like the only source of light beyond the fence. Unsure if this was a light inside the portable itself or a reflection elsewhere causing this subtle luminous glow. I tried my best to explain how entry took place on the way, however understood the ever-shifting landscape of sites and that previous methods may no longer be effective.

From the main drive there were no viewpoints into the site, the fences were now bordered up with signage and marketing material, the picturesque renders and generic slogans, to workplace safety, realtor, contractor and development branding, and workplace safety visuals. From our view however, I could still see the doorways, a few more than before, now covered by opaque glass and steel framed doors. I assumed there was still a chance we would find a large opening of some sort closer to the front face of the machine, however more unlikely as the first few levels were more completed than the rest above. Despite the portable and whatever else might have made a decision like this not worth it, we figured to head back to the nearly empty plaza, park, walk by foot and not allow the fear get the better part of us.

Walking towards the machine, the scale on foot made us appear much smaller than by car, like an ominous figure watching you from all angles. Myles and I now stood arms length away from the fence, what appeared easily eight feet high. Upon getting over, our plan was to move as left as possible, and hiding behind the building as a barricade between us and the portable. The fence had a large metal beam in the middle making it easier than normal to get a foothold and propel ourselves a few feet over. Going one at a time to cut the noise levels down and watch each others back despite the prolonged duration, I grasped the fence and climbed first. The coldness was the first thing I felt before my hands recognized the rough texture coated in mud, reminding me to have taken out my gloves prior. Both my feet now were off the ground, one over the fence first, then another,

avoiding the sharp raw edge atop and now bracing my body against the fence on the other side, to finally my feet touching the floor. I took a step back and watched Myles now make his way over. At least 8 inches taller than me, he seemed to make the fence appear normal in size, however as he lifted his other leg over, I heard a rip, his jeans had caught onto the top of the exposed fence spikes, right on his inner thigh, forcing his leg over the tear which was quite visible. Now on my side walking towards me, we held in any laughs and both nodded our heads as he gestured and twisted his leg to reveal the tear in his inner thigh.

Inside the site, we circled the outer perimeter of the space, the south, west and north areas away from the portable on the east face. Parts of the new sidewalk slabs were ready to be poured, with the building foundation exposed and protruding at least a foot from the lip of the machine. The few doors that were before open, were now closed, and the large openings at the north west corner were sealed off, what I'm assuming was the main entrance today. The levels above, specifically floor two could be accessed in the case one of us considered boosting each other up from below, possible using a few loose bricks around as stepping stones. Walking around, we kept low, a feeling of being seen at any moment lingered with us. Kneeling along the site, collecting soft dirt in the soles of our shoes and looking both ahead and below to avoid tripping over any exposed mesh or rebar while trying to understand where it was we could enter. I took my phone out to check the time, the screen brightness blinding me at first, quarter to I whispered. We were by no means on the clock, however it was important to gauge our start time as we rushed to hurry and find a way inside.

With no way in on three of the four faces, this left us with only one option of possibly entering on the east side, the face adjacent to the portable, which was most exposed and incomplete. Walking back south east, we both peaked the corner, now about ten or so meters away from the fence we came from, our bodies almost hugging the south wall of the machine. I genuinely had zero clue where we might enter from while being out of sight of the portable, the single dim window which appeared as a

watch tower with an eye lid almost fully shut, slightly asleep, in comatose.

Fuck I said, looking for an opening. There was a temporarily built and haphazardly constructed stairway from grade that would take us to the platform landing of the freight elevator, however it was in clear sight of the portable window from earlier. Not a single thing would keep us hidden climbing the ten steps aside from a few 2x6's as both support structure and the handrail for the stairs that were parallel to the portable. It was still unclear if the portable window was dim, had a set of curtains in the way or if this was all a reflection from elsewhere.

We kneeled back down, and quickly paced ourselves, both moving towards the stairs, hugging the now west face of the machine. Step by step we escalated while looking at the window as it too looked back at us. Although quiet externally, every step broke the silence of a site that had no noise, noise present amidst a city fast asleep and a construction site in hibernation for the next 48 hours. Now arriving at the landing towards the freight elevator, it too was lit by a set of construction lights left on, putting us on display for whatever was in the portable or any cameras present capturing all that is visible.

In this zone of inside and outside, there was a pathway that led straight and towards a wall which I figured would turn, along with a drop down to the first level where stairs were currently waiting to be built. There were no ladders in sight, instead a few cinderblocks here and there as a means of moving from one zone to another. Still kneeling down, we made our way straight, pausing every few seconds to acclimatize to this new environment I had trouble recalling while trying to lead the way. All we needed was the elevator core, specifically the egress stairs, the only real way of making it up. A few meters straight, we met a wall and a split in directions. To the right went to what looked like a series of rooms, to the left we went instead, seconds later traversing essentially an elevated slab, with plastic mesh nets on either end to avoid falling several feet below. A few more steps, walking over loose wooden boards, uncertain what was beneath while avoiding any additional noise possible, we would walk through a

zone expanding in height, the elevator pit to our left and a rough doorway in front of us towards the egress stairs. Entering the stairwell, there were several markings all along the wall, as well as more wooden boards and tape on the floor. Being the landing most visited if not the level below, it only made sense. Checking the time again, 11:00pm exactly. I made my first step up.

The stairwell was roughly lit, however, just enough to make sight of where the landings would arrive, waiting for is in intervals of every ten seconds. Our bodies attuned to the environment instantly, our feet pushing off fresh unfinished concrete steps, cold air, and our breaths slowly increasing in pace and intensity, audible from one another and our own internal heartbeat. As expected, no real handrails were installed, us both trying to keep balance while avoiding the traction of any footsteps on loose materials, and avoidance of fingerprints on any single wall surface. Upon reaching reach level six, we paused, both our faces covered by balaclavas, our eyes meeting, assuming we were both thinking similar things. I couldn't recall how high the climb was from before, nor from the sight outside, at least 30 more stories from a best guess however.

I peaked the corner out the doorway, again presented with the same sight, a set of dim construction lights which lit the empty hallway. My curiosity today would have asked myself to have explored the ghostly and unfinished spaces more, to have documented them in detail and hold a few conversations to save for my later memory, however at the time it was not the case. Without taking a single step out of the doorway, I turned back into the stairwell and continued to climb, Myles following suite right behind me. We continued to climb for another few minutes, pausing momentarily every so often to catch a breath, both of us bundled in winter coats, both cold on the exterior, yet warm and perspiring on the interior from the claustrophobic and concentrated climb, weighed down by heavy bags on each of our backs.

At least another 20 I imagined as my eyes glanced at the wall marked by the number 17 spray painted. The entire time, neither of us not let out

a word. While climbing, between levels 19 and 20 I stopped myself in the middle of the stair run, keeping my back now against the wall, looking two steps below me at Myles who just ascended a few steps above the last intermediate landing. Stepping one tread down to avoid direct sight of whatever might be through the doorway above, I looked him directly in his eyes and gestured towards my ear, “do you hear that?”

Without a response, I pulled my mask down and whispered to him, “do you hear that noise?”.. Myles was unfortunately a little hard of hearing which didn’t help, both because I couldn’t speak up, while also fearing he might not be hearing what I had, or the case I was hearing something on my own. Two steps lower I descended, whispering in his ear I explained what I heard, soon asking him to take up a step up for whatever if it was worth. Now below Myles, I watched as he took ascended past me, now higher than I had climbed earlier, waiting for his response, for his reaction to the very sounds I was hearing to have met his ears.

Myles now past the landing, unable to reach him audibly from this distance, his body in plain sight for whatever might be around the corner, approaching from down the hall, I was more than ready for an exit, for a sprint down 20 levels and exactly out of this machine back to the car as fast as possible. He stopped, looked at me with shock in his eyes and descended down to the landing I was waiting at below. He acknowledged he heard it too.. “What is that?” I asked.. “No idea, though I hear it”.. he responded.. There was a faint, hard to pinpoint yet ongoing noise. In this silent machine it was the only thing making a sound, distant yet ongoing and louder than any decibel source we had created. It was ongoing, it sounded like voices, an exchange of one to two, back to one, static and continuous. It was haunting.

Having climbed construction sites before, the only sounds we would consider are that of another human, in this case a worker, on site after hours. It didn’t make any sense though. Either that or noise of material and the machine itself breathing the outside wind. Rustling leaves, plastic, sheets of paper, trash, etc. In a finished machine, we’d commonly hear

sounds from the mechanical, elevator machine rooms and anything above and around the mechanical penthouses. In this case, everything should still be offline. I was unsure where the sound was coming from, thinking it could be on the same level in one of the rooms or at least a floor or two above. The devoid of any built door enclosures and full openness in this concrete shell allowed the sounds to reverberate to where we were. With at least another dozen or so floors left to go, I said our best bet would be to continue the climb, hopefully dodge whatever it was that lingered above or around us, make it to the top, get our shots and leave. Really to play it by ear depending on what it is, what we happen to find, or getting a better idea of it as we made our way closer up and closer in distance to the sound.

I checked the time again, 11:12pm. Upwards we went, paying closer attention to the noise that continued on. Floor 21, the sound levels increasing. Floor 22, increasing, louder than before. There were no footsteps associated with the sound, it was as if it remained in a single spot. The pitches were changing, upbeat yet still static in nature. A volume louder than you would expect at this time. It was definitely on this floor. Could this be whatever came from the portable below? Was someone onsite this whole time? If so, why, and for what reason? I really didn't want to risk our already on edge state of being, of being here on this site, especially at this time, and at this point of our lives. I peaked the corner around the door opening, my anxiety prompting me to imagine someone walkout of a room and seeing my covered face point blank. I had no idea who or what would be here at this time, nor was I interested in finding out exactly. With that said I turned the corner. Was someone talking to someone else, maybe they were on their phone, unsure. The sound was coming from the right of the corridor, I took a few steps down, nearing the passage of the first room. I was starting to hear it more clearly. I continued to take a few more steps, trying to discern the sounds which grew louder beyond that of the exterior echoes of the machine. It was playing quite loudly. "It" was "playing." I paused. It was what sounded like a radio. Without going any further, I stopped. Was someone fast asleep, were they back down in the portable for now, or neither the case and the radio instead left on and unattended for

the next 48 hours, playing on its own, alone without no one to listen to, but us. Myles right behind me gestured to pull back, that we not bother with the radio or whatever had lied in the empty suite it sat in, and to instead continue our climb up. Walking back to the stairwell, backwards with our face towards the noise in front of us, we continued our climb, each level higher the sound of the radio more and more muffled, yet playing back and ringing in our ears amidst the approaching silence.

The higher we went, the dimmer it became, at about floor 25 there were no longer lights in the stairwell, us having our phone flashlights in hand to illuminate the space and ground our feet approached directly in front of us. Still in the stairwell, we paused about floor 30, getting a breather once more before the final ascend. It was about here I wanted to explore the area, the rooms and the space itself. Myles insisted however that we reach the top, get our shots and if time permitted, we explore below later. Although I agreed with him I wanted to see from here, not on this level in particular, though from somewhere in between. I took a step into the hallway, dark, not a single source of light aside from the openings on either end of the hallway and into the city, looking north and south. We turned left and walked several feet close to one of the last units that bordered the end of the hall and the corners of the machine. Turning right, we heard the wind rustling loudly through all the permeable materials, like a whistle and all the tarps and plastics shaking along. The higher we climbed, as with any machine, the air got colder, and any movement only more rapid. Although we felt it within the machine, it was not terrible. This same air passing through us, into the machine, and passively exhausting the other side.

As we walked through one of the many repetitive units, it was hard to pinpoint where one unit started and another ended, rather where rooms would be delineated from one to another. We cycled through at least two different spaces, unable to discern the effects and atmospheres it would play on our memory years later, however nonetheless we both walked around mindlessly, making comments like “this looks like the washroom”,

or “this feels like a two or three bedroom unit”, unable to quite define in this given machine state. The higher we climbed the less finished things were after all. In the units, all that it was made up of now were columns, structural dividing walls, bare equipment and material left scattered at random. Every single surface, be it from floor to wall to ceiling were all unfinished. The only other part of the machine that made itself clear were the temporary guardrails erected at the edge of the slab to limit falling below. There was no ounce of steel or glass here and it was nice to get to breathe and see out of the machine before enclosed for good. Both a machine enclosed from the outside world and our own ability to return. This once in a life-time zone, a period that will never be like this again. Neither nature nor server.

Myles and I split off within each of the units and returned shortly after. For most urban explorers, this setting would not be of utmost priority, however I let my bag drop and pulled out my camera. Looking back at Myles, he too did the same, checking his phone too for the time in what felt like at least five minutes since we stopped here. We both peaked over the edge of the fenced guardrail below, no cars or movement in direct sight. All we heard up here was the steady air whistling through the machine, the odd metal chain or loose piece of material banging off concrete, and the very few distant cars in the distance creating their own sound in our mind. It was quiet.

Where Myles stood from me provided a unique vantage into the endless horizon of suburbia, looking southeast away from the downtown core. Above my head was a metal beam, possibly the structure for a soon bulkhead. I set the settings on my camera and placed it above my head, unable to get a full picture of the image. “ten seconds” I said, Myles stood still looking at me, waiting for me to hit the shutter. I couldn’t make it out if the shutter had already closed, waiting a few more seconds longer than necessary to avoid disrupting the exposure, hitting it a few more times just in case before I pulled my camera back down. The shot was perfect. We exchanged positions, and shared shots of one another before heading

up. Looking back, I wish I spent more time here, took more photos, documented the conditions and settings of these temporary states. Looking back I wish. Nonetheless, all I can do is picture the lives that would soon make themselves present here, users that would give life to the machine.

We packed our cameras back into our bags, and went back into the stairwell, bags which were somehow covered in dust just from laying on the ground against a wall. Towards the top we climbed, again we pausing for a few seconds every few levels. Although we needed our flashlights, the walls of the stairwell now pulled in the moonlight from the sparse cloudy night sky above. Floor 40, we were closing in. As we approached the top of the machine, the way the floors, walls and stairs all intersected were interesting. The area surrounding the elevator core was a direct drop below. There were nets partially securing the massive hole in the floor slab, however it remained mostly exposed and prone to a fall hundreds of meters below. The main crane occupied one of the two shafts, peaking in and up, while seeing the moon that glistened on my face. I had climbed a part of this very same crane months prior on a wet late summer night. Unsure why I had not attempted to climb it again, I instead went back into the stairwell and towards the top of the machine.

The roof was not quite the roof of the building, exposed was another floor slab and formwork. The top of the machine was a complete mess, at floor 43 or 44, there were surely to be another few more floors and walls left to be poured and extruded. Here, I snapped a few shots out of a hurry, "just in case", knowing this could very well be the last. I captured far less than I did the time before, exchanging more time to watch than record before coming back down.

We retraced our steps during the descent, like a VHS tape in rewind, passing the floor we stopped at earlier, a few more levels down, the sound of the ghostly radio playing along, another song, and another, waiting for ears to stop and listen. Not this time. A few more levels down, the radio started to fade away, quite faster than before as we booked it down the stairs. Descending flights rapidly, our pace only accelerated. Heading back

down without a pause, losing my breath, we just wanted to get out. The warm dim light from the levels below now flooded the stairwell through each doorway opening. 15, spray painted on the wall in red. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six.. I stopped. “what about the portable?” I asked. “It doesn’t matter. Lets just get out the same way we know we came in through and disappear”, Myles responded. I slowed my pace going down, retracing my steps in my mind on directions towards exit. Too often and unfortunate would we want to be caught stuck in a maze, trapped in the machine with no way out. Level two, we landed. For a second, I considered we go down one more level to one, get to ground and exit through whichever door opened, likely locked from the outside though open on the inside. My curiosity peaked my interest and I too wanted to see what it looked like below. Myles was not for it however, pushing we just get out the same way we entered. Stepping out at level two, we reversed our steps, taking a right, back onto the elevated slab, past the elevator core openings, kneeling below our waist level, thinking to myself by chance could someone be outside waiting. We never got caught on a site before, yet I did not know what to expect. From a diagonal, we caught eye of the landing to the freight elevator we arrived at. “Go” Myles said. Waiting, I said “let me climb first in case I need a boost”, I feared we would both climb at once and by chance I would get stuck behind. A few more steps forward, I could have been seen by and through the eye of the portable window, I kneeled going down the stairs. As soon as my feet touched the dirt, I ran. Unsure of what was below me or what I might trip over, I sprinted towards the fence. I jumped, finding it tough to catch a foothold to the opposite side of the fence where the middle beam was fit to the other side. My frantic nature shook the fence louder than I should have. My hands grasped the top of the fence, now pulling myself up, barely getting a foot above. I swung my other leg and allowed my body weight to anchor me over. Now facing Myles on the other side, I could see him climb as well, a couple of feet to my right. I could not yet touch the floor though allowed myself to drop the remaining three feet and absorb the fall. Stepping back, I felt my phone in pocket,

double checking it was on me at this moment that would be anyways far too late. Stepping another few feet back and away from the site, I was almost off the dirt pathway and onto the street. As soon as Myles landed, he started to run. Turning around, I started to jog back and get as far from the site as possible before stopping. Still running, approaching the plaza and getting back to the car felt like forever. About 25 feet away from the car we both slowed down to a walking pace. Feeling as if whatever might have been gazing at us or chasing our shadow would be too far away. However, turning around, it clearly felt the machine was still watching us, knowing we would not be the ones occupying its server cells one day. It felt like a boogeyman that we escaped, a radio that still played on, a site we both never wanted to hit again.

Back in the car there was a sign of relief.

12:38pm, the time illuminated off of his dashboard.

Without words we drove home.





hollow cell

November 12, 2016
11:19pm





open corner

November 12, 2016
11:26pm





uncapped

November 12, 2016
11:40pm



83. Full-metal. 2016





cockpit

November 12, 2016
12:18pm



85. Do you hear what I hear? 2016

Uncertain if the noise was coming from this floor or one above or below, a difficulty to discern between each level and each direction. I popped my head out once more upon the descent, the last photo captured before exiting the server.

4.4

CONFRONTING THE SUBLIME

The Sublime. A confrontation with greatness, power, and immensity.[1] A state of grasping ones scale and insignificance within the realm of something endless.[2] A space of clearness and ability to understand ones finitude and insignificance in reflection to something that feels infinite, that has always been there before you and will continue to exist beyond you.[3] Something that is permanent against your ephemerality. We find this in nature.[4] From the trees, mountains, the lakes, the rock formations, and the sky. All of this is timeless.

What's different—more so—about the sublime, however, is its vastness. Vastness, being the amount of unobstructed space you are looking at.[4] Compelling representations are found in Caspar David Friedrich's depiction of the sublime in his work, specifically "The Monk by the Sea" and "The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog." In the latter, we're not faced with the sea or sky, nor merely land; instead, due to the fog, it appears more akin to a sea nestled in the landscape than just a mountain range.[5]

The vastness from the sublime overwhelms through scale similar to nature; however, unlike nature with its large trees and mountains, vastness dwarfs your world. It dwarfs not only you as a human being but also your world.[6] Your physical and digital servers you inhabit as home feel minuet, tiny, powerless and insignificant. When we consider our placement within the universe, we are a mere glimpse in space.

In the city, in the server, we similarly feel small and insignificant. The city feels endless, from the factories, the prison towers, or the servers you call neighborhoods and homes, to the malls, the highways, to the underground tunnels, and more. Ironically, there is no nature, the servers are not permanent, and yet they try to be. There is no vastness present from inside the city when you're completely inside the server. While you may see the city with no ends, it is not endless like nature. You see walls, screens, projections, and shadows. From the rows of servers beneath the surface, from inside beyond the walls, it appears endless until met by another door, another wall, another streetcar, another screen. Looking up, these server stacks appear to reach the sky, to point up and land above the

clouds, which instead only obstruct your view of what was there before; open airspace. Unlike the sublime, the server is alienating, uncomfortable, and there are no natural experiences or feelings to enjoy. The sublime is the baseline of our existence in nature and yet, we separate ourselves from it as far as possible.

The sublime is important; it helps us contemplate, something only possible in a space where we feel overwhelmed, dwarfed, and powerless. It helps us adjust our perspectives and break free from the "modern world"; that which we inhabit both physically and digitally. That which are servers, where too there is no nature, and instead we remain trapped in.

1 BLOOR – 833 FEET

MARCH – 202x

Chasing fog.

Foggy days are far and few between. They are difficult to plan. To be able to catch foggy conditions and elevate ourselves inside is like hitting a jackpot.

Each time a cool foggy night appeared, be it in a fall evening or spring night, driving along the highway, stuck in the office, locked in my room, no matter what, it took me back to the roof where I would rather be. I had only experienced the clouds up there a handful of times, the last, years prior in 2017. Fog generally appears best at night, coming in around blue hour and disappearing throughout the night or breaking away just before sunrise. The low visibility isolates you in the world, cutting the draw distance from you in all directions. In the sky, in the clouds, there are no directions, but a zone.

One Friday evening, looking outside, the clouds and moisture came down ever so slightly, a sea of fog draping over the night sky, waiting, like an opportunity you don't want to miss, like the countless Indian summer sunsets you timelessly capture again and again, just because it felt like another special moment worth capturing, one you were unsure you'd ever see again, as mundane as they might seem, it is something you maybe want to remember again one day.

I had no plans for anything, to remain alienated, to stay home, do some schoolwork, go to bed, and avoid looking outside at the thought of a missed experience. To forget about it and continue hopefully another day …. of the world waiting for me..

Yet of course, the thought of bringing myself into the sky came about, however by no means was this something I planned or felt prepared for. I had texted Walters a few days prior in case he wanted to shoot this very Friday, and received no confirmation. With the weather conditions now present I assumed he would have been thinking the same as I. Packing my

gym bag, now a few minutes out from my house towards the gym itself, my phone rang. It was Walters. “yo you still down to shoot, it’s low fog, can’t even see the top of ICE”, he said, likely outside and referring to the depth of fog draping over the downtown core. Unsure what roof we would hit, without question I agreed, turned around, grabbed my camera bag and headed downtown.

On the way down, I picked up Myles, calling him moments after speaking to Walters to see if he was free. I thought we were going to hit ICE condos from the sounds of the call, however I was not exactly sure what the plan was. Nonetheless, if there was anyone I would want to always send with, it was Myles, calling him each and every time I wanted to climb. On the Gardiner, the top of the highway lights were split by the fog, both the sky above illuminating ever so slightly and bouncing back to the street below. Approaching the city, the skyline was cut short, almost every single server lost halfway up. The sky and server compressed.

As I reached closer and closer to the city, the scale at which the fog cut the servers and the glow of the lights was immensely satisfying. From the ground level alone it was beautiful. As exited, I gave Walters a call to locate his whereabouts. He direct we meet at Bay and Elm, oddly steps away from the hospitals I had just visited a couple months before. We arrived around 9:30pm, waiting a few minutes as he finished grabbing a bite to eat. About five minutes later he’d be in the back of my car. What was the plan I asked? “I’m down to send anything, don’t want to stay out too late though” he responded. I too was game for anything. It’s always a treat to meet with Walters. It felt like he had “keys” to almost the whole city. We definitely wanted to do something new and something send worthy within these conditions. After ten or so minutes of discussing, shorter than usual when picking spots, we decided on a server. Before I drove up, Walters explained the route, how we’d navigate the thresholds, meanwhile what real risk would be involved. Being a spot he had not hit in time, he was unsure if it was exactly still possible to get into and onto. Whether it was locked up entirely, camera and security conditions had changed, and if there was a

presence of police watch. No matter the case, nothing was promised. Both Myles and I were by no means desperate enough to risk this, offering to go up one at a time, or throwing the idea of one of us staying back to scout. That was not something Walters was open to, either we fully sent this or tried something else.

30 minutes passed and were now inside.

Walters explained the exact mapping, from his recollection, from his notes and photo archives, each and every step, where we would go, turn, stop, move into, avoid, hide, etc.

From one set of doors to another. Now lost inside a set of stairs, a room within a room, inside the server, up at least 250m somewhere in the city, within the clouds, within the cosmos. As we made our way through the next door, there would be three more doors left, the following we would have to sprint past an "active" camera and into another section within mechanical as fast as possible. Unable to run, making this clear, I hated myself for it. I felt like both a burden and an anchor, a red flag, a risk holding us back. Wishing I was in a more capable condition I was just in a year prior. As we popped the door open, both Myles and Walters sprinted as previously instructed, behind, keeping my head down, I masked up, and followed step by step, yet was unable to keep up. Within seconds, both were now out of sight. Several seconds later, I made a turn and saw them both on the far end of the mechanical room, propping the roof door open, waiting for me. The time to get to them felt strenuous, as I moved at a single speed and both their eyes watched.

Now outside, Walters made the following clear. If we were spotted, likely the cops are going to come. If they do, they'll be here within at most a 20 minute window. We likely would not hear any sirens, as they'll come in ghost, and we'll have to keep an active look below, which at the time I forgot to remember and realize the depth of fog we would be residing in. He instructed we would ditch our tools along the roof, under the window washing crane and head back into the mechanical room and hide under one of the few crevice wall openings, wait things out until they leave or

worst until we are spotted.

The door we just went through opened to a small roof landing, a lower platform beside large fan equipment. There was only one way to go, that being up a set of narrow stairs to our right, at least 20 feet in height to an upper platform. The two continued on first without me, following seconds after as I clipped my bag to my chest and shuffled my jacket accordingly. Climbing up, I held onto both handrails for stability and to help pull me up as usual, while at the same time helping with stability as each of my feet attempted to slip on the treads drenched in moisture. Upon reaching the top step, it was clear where we were within the server, yet unclear outside of it, wrapped inside and endless fog, so high up no visibility was provided past the edge of the roof. The roof itself comprised of two levels, the main central platform I would now be standing on and another perimeter platform Walters was now up, and Myles was climbing seamlessly, at least 8 feet higher. Being the second highest server in the city, it would be even less likely to make view of anything adjacent, from my view below the perimeter wall and at the same time our placement in the dense sea of fog.

Looking around, I saw no ladder or walkway to bring me up to their level. It seemed I would have to follow suite with how they climbed the wall. In the past, I may have climbed a similar wall face on from a running start and pull myself up, which physically below the waist I can no longer do.

My other option would be to step onto the metal guardrail that divided the drop to the lower platform we arrived from below and use this as a way to bridge the distance in elevation.

The guardrail itself required both foot and hand work to step onto.

One would need to stand on the guardrail and from there pull themselves up, leaving their feet suspended and their body hanging in the air. From there, using their legs to mount on top of the platform and the rest of their body to pull their weight up.

Again, this was something that would have not been an issue less than

a year ago and is now presented as an additional threshold, a mental and physical risk, one that almost any rooftopper would never second guess.

As I walked alongside the inner roofside of the guardrail, both Myles and Walters were on their own way. I placed both hands onto the top rail and allowed my foot onto the middle. Within seconds, I knew I needed assistance, calling over both of them to lend a hand. From the top rail, there was an additional series of pipes in the way to what I would need to climb over. Not only am I limited by height, rather my leg strength posed the main issue. Walters and Myles both standing a few feet away, towered above me. “Put your other foot up, and move your hands here”, “yo you’re good, I’m here if you need me”, “take your time”, were a few things murmured to me as I laid watched, both witnessing while my nervousness and hesitation based on my current condition. Now with both feet on top of the rail and my hands holding the inner roof edge, I needed to allow my already loose and untrustworthy feet to leave the rail and bring itself up. By no means did I trust myself, nor did I trust both of them to hold my weight from above in the case I missed my footing, my clonus kicking in, a slipping and only having my hands grasped to the metal roof edge which was both increasingly cold and damp in the clouds. I wish I could still jump or better yet have the strength to use my feet to push off the rail or the pipe which rested to my right. Pipes both away from the guardrail and towards the opening, the 20 foot drop to the doorway we came from below. Another minute passed, and I continued to think how the heck I would make it up, wishing there was a metal box or step ladder that I could have used to climb the wall instead of being atop a rail this way. I’m going to pull myself up I said, I’ll need you both to grab my bag and jacket and pull me over. My legs facing one direction, my body twisted 90 degrees towards the face of the wall, I pulled myself up, instantly matching my timing, both of them pulled me vertically, Walters grabbing my left arm to get me over and Myles grasping my bag fastened securely to me. I forgot the presence of my feet as they left the rail, both my arms at this point over the edge, crawling ever so slightly to get me fully over. Still, my legs were

freely on their own behind, hanging off as I rested in a prone position with half my body already over. “You’re good, you’re on the platform”, said Walters, both my legs making contact yet still my knees protruding off the edge, and my body desensitized to feel. What I did feel were my hands and legs wet, instantly absorbing the still water puddled and from each surface I just made contact with.

I sat down in exhaustion before transitioning to a kneeling position where I felt most comfortable moving, unable to somehow build the courage to stand perfectly up. My legs were tired and the moisture that moved with the wind made standing difficult. I eventually reached their position located at what I recall in hindsight as the southwest corner, both of them standing above me.

I put my bag down, forgetting about how heavy the load was that weighed me down. I paused before taking out my camera, considering what exactly is was to shoot. The thought evaded me and did not present itself as obvious, this the first time in a long time to be in this zone. Not only this high but in the clouds. Walters was already busy getting his shots, I was unsure of what in that very moment, however he commonly knew what to capture quite programmatically, in this instance looking straight down over the edge at the south west corner. Myles on the other hand stood between us, moving from a still gaze back to walking, seeking vantage every eight or so feet.

On every roof, we would regularly find a view worth capturing, almost instantly, sometimes too much in too little time. This night, there was not a single second I made sight of Myles’ camera, later telling me up here that there was nothing to see. Although I agreed, I at least thought there was something to feel, and by that, it was worth capturing. Furthermore, it was the very fact there was no city that provided validation that there was more than the city, the server farm we would expect, that this atmosphere drew us into a dream space that can only be entered through joined intervention of the fourfold, of man and nature. We were so high up that we could not see directly below or across, creating a new confrontation of facing the

infinite. A sublime that dwarfed our sense of self, atop this very platform that stood on its own. There was no context, there was no scale, just us three and the infinite. Although the vision of the servers disappeared, the sounds that pushed through the clouds and past the roaring mist were like voices in our head, voices without direction, without visuals, like the sound of voices you lost all the context and data to. Natures scale overpowered us.

Moving back to my bag, capturing a couple of photos and videos on my phone, I now felt obliged to capture the roof atmospheres on camera. The 20 minutes we promised ourselves became 40. Walters approached me at one point to reassure and confirm our safety from authorities. While safe from being caught, there was never a real sense of safety on roofs, rather a mixture of pleasure and fear. Within the vastness felt danger. Where typically you could grasp the end of the city, where the servers stopped and the horizon continued, here there was neither. Looking down, an infinite drop was present. A couple layers of penthouse window units in sight directly beneath, all off, then the glimmer of a few online levels below, then nothing. A part of me feared the vastness, the overwhelming greatness, the fully embodied experience despite the feeling of my own insignificance, my fragile and mortal being. Be it I missed a step and fell eight feet off the perimeter edge, more than 20 feet to the roof entrance landing or off the edge infinitely below, my last sight would be nothing, I would not be seen, nor feel anything. Falling down through the clouds would juxtapose the movement back up to the heavens. As I transitioned from a look down and across at nothing, I would look back at my feet or towards the others to recap where I was and not lose myself on the platform. Every 20 seconds or so wiping my glasses and camera lens with a microfiber, clearing my also now impaired vision, unsure if it was my lens, my glasses or both that were fogging up. Different parts of my pants were wet from kneeling and pressing up against the floor, the parapet and other surfaces. My gloves wet and now useless themselves, I rather bare the cold wet hands than damp moisture in my gloves that created a barrier between my fingers

and the physical touch of the roof and my camera. Standing back up, I saw Myles now back on the lower roof, exactly as he was before, standing still to walking along back to standing. Walters was moving from a sitting to standing position along the edge, on the parapet, seemingly capturing his last few shots. The photos I captured, although did not do the part, nor what I had expected, rather become something that at least aided this memory.

Calling Myles over towards me, I again needed help from initial thought. This time I wanted to avoid coming back down the same way I came up, instead wanting to hang off the wall and absorb the drop, which I personally have zero comfort in doing today. Handing Myles my bag, the eight foot drop appeared even further from my viewpoint and based on the difference to the height of Myles who stood about 6'6" below. From my height, the floor appeared more than thirteen feet away. After passing him my bag, I sat on the edge, inward facing the roof, pivoting my bottom off the ledge. I then asked of Myles to hold my legs and support my fall. Hanging off, both my arms extended, Myles then told me "you're essentially touching the ground", letting go my feet would touch within about a one foot drop.

Returning to the center of the roof by the crane, Myles pointed out the series of doors that attached parallel to the perimeter walls, about five or six total. While we were here already, it only made sense to peak inside. Walters right behind, dropping off of the perimeter wall as did I, however unassisted, instructed we leave now, granted I didn't want to miss this.

Stepping inside the second door we attempted to open, it provided a feeling of a glassed in mechanical room, however neither fully inside or outside. Inside the long corridor that mimicked the side of the elevated platforms above were scraps, leftover materials, construction equipment and other miscellaneous items. Nothing worth scavenging through. Peering out behind the glass screen was nothing, rather at least an enclosed view of the outside. Below our feet was a catwalk metal grate that allowed light and sound to pierce from the mechanical rooms earlier. I captured a series

of shots in this interstitial space and request Walters did the same of me. Not for long we made our way out, stopping alongside the main roof platform. As I moved towards the stairs and looked back once more, all of this felt incomprehensible. To walk the clouds, atop the server, within a realm of the world you could no longer visually ground yourself in.

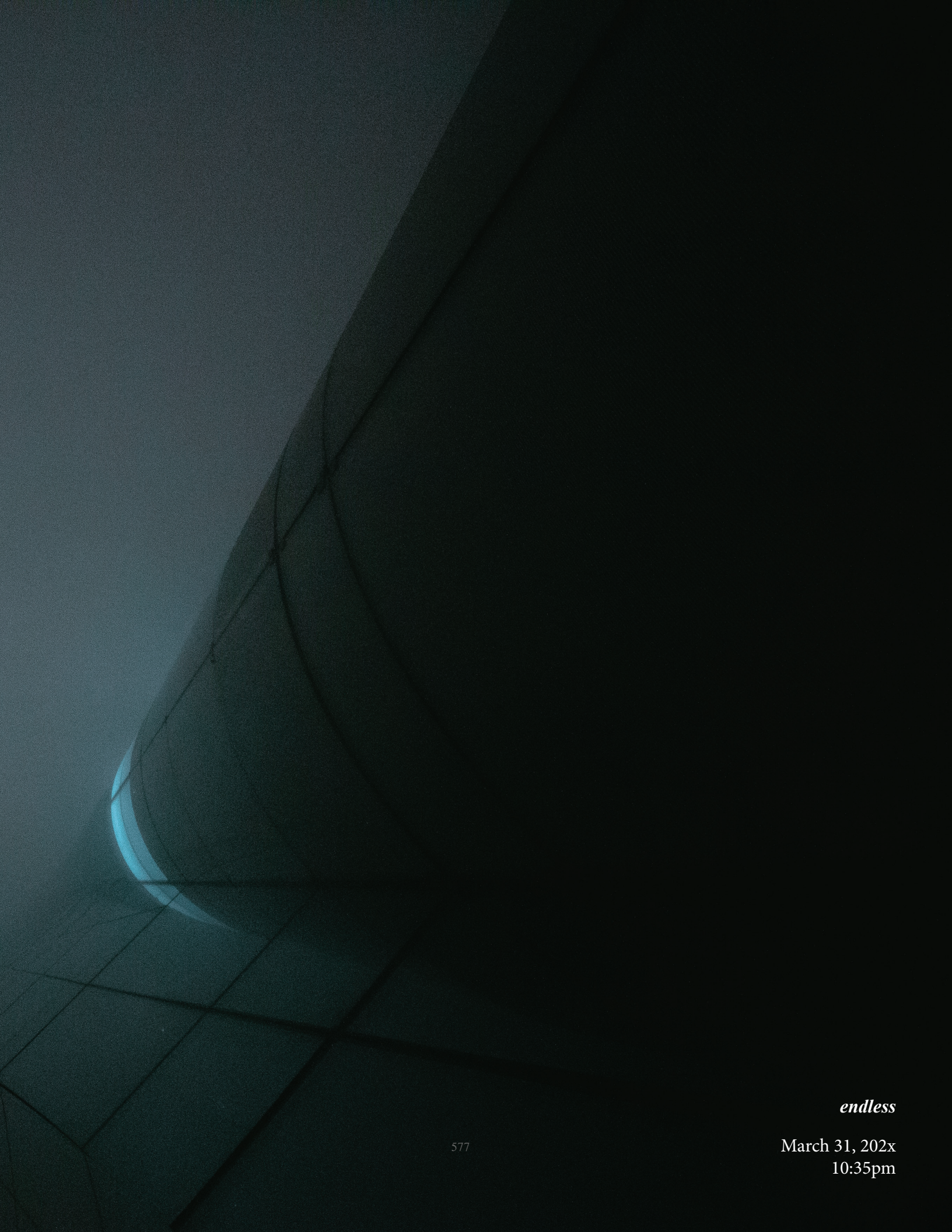
Here we found ourselves in total sublimity within the server—a nowhere space, yet simultaneously in nature and completely outside it. From our perspectives, it felt like the only place to reach the sublime, to access it as if teleporting far, far away, and yet, we were in close proximity to a machine world below. In these conditions, unlike nature or the city, there were no horizons; instead, because of the fog, we were beyond it—a sense of endlessness in all directions, open air space everywhere, only able to see a few meters ahead. It was difficult to discern if it was the roof's edge or merely the fog limiting our view. Total vastness surrounded us, and yet simultaneously, standing on the edge of a cliff on all sides, only one step away from mortality.





beacon

March 31, 202x
10:32pm



endless

March 31, 202x
10:35pm



88. Lookdown ca. 202x





guardrail

March 31, 202x
10:58pm

90. Cloud-room. ca. 202x



4.5

The Roof as a Symbol of Transcendence

A zone, altered states of consciousness.
An elevated perspective.
A space between earth and sky.
A oneness with the fourfold.[1]
An invitation to ascend.
A boundary to be transcended.

The rooftop forces an exchange to take place with the human. An experience of moving beyond the physical and mental boundaries of the everyday, reaching a further state. A place of retreat and elevation, an escape from life below. A different way of grounding oneself to the world, of seeing and experiencing the landscape beyond nature and furthermore beyond a glass screen. No longer confined by a set of conditions or societal pressures, one can better understand their own positioning and way of being free. Outside of the machine, server.

The rooftop, historically and symbolically, has occupied a distinct space in human consciousness.[2] Serving as the uppermost limit of man-made architectural structures, it is not merely a physical absence in its engagement yet a metaphysical journey toward a broader realm of cognition.[3] This threshold, this boundary, while theoretically inaccessible and ostensibly solid, is in fact still permeable as a gateway outside the server. In cultures past, roofs held an intellectual expression and created harmony, elements considered equal to their technical role. The rooftop had been a space of rituals, introspection, and communion with the divine, underscoring its role as a site of transcendence.[4] In the modern application, this presence has become obsolete, it is rather the final cap to the server upon the mechanical enclosure.[5]

It marks the elevated parts of the city no longer accessible, the once was natural space, erased and extruded beyond grasp. The peak of the panopticon it shares, yet with a view of all and viewed by none. In the urban landscape where horizontal space is increasingly diminished for the

vertical, where horizons are obscured and simulated, the rooftop remains as the last point for vantage. Here, the cacophony of city life falls away, replaced by the distant hum of traffic, the muted voices of pedestrians and the sound of ones own breath. This detachment from the mundane facilitates a mental shift, allowing for introspection and a broader perspective on one's place within the larger urban ecosystem.

Both the role of the roof and the action of its access is not merely one of physical exploration, rather of existential questioning. What does it mean to transcend our ordinary boundaries? How do these elevated spaces reshape our perceptions of the world below and the vastness of the universe above? How does questioning our own existence and abilities change our understanding of being in this world? By challenging the physical and psychological barrier that tower around us, that confine us, that screen our senses, rooftopping serves as a potent metaphor for humanity's eternal quest for truth and freedom.

Internally, this symbol moves one step further.

A way of being, challenged, ending not by death, but rather by a pending disability and a server that further removes one from the real. A collective server and personal condition that race towards one another. The self as spectator in between.

One's most basic abilities of being, taken away, on maintaining a balance, lost inability to control the primal aspects of one's physiology, to no longer be able to walk, to move in our most basic form, to take a step, forward and up. Stuck on a single plane of existence, isolated and without an other. What feels like no space or setting fit truly for the disabled, surrounded by a world of abled bodies, yet bodies however increasingly separated, alienated and online. In a status of do not disturb in the real. This individual lives alongside that of a pending disability that mimics the effects of this server world he lives in. What use does he have to explore

and be a part of a world that he can no longer access, a world that is physically speaking no longer even there. The child recognizes neither.

This fear is something real, that cannot be simulated only lived through. Being forever fixed to the ground and below the surface. Unless somewhere safe away in nature, whatever is left of it, in a city that is endless, in the server, he is stuck inside within the confines of the machine, cold, alone and disabled. No longer able to move up and out of a seat. To see others still living inauthentically with able bodies living in a simulated world now needed to share. Feeling trapped, living in a server cell, the only experience left is one that is simulated, sold, because there no longer is a body or an other. Like everything else, a virtual existence, a roof experience alike that becomes virtual, a life increasingly predicated on the consumption of fabricated realities.

A condition that accelerates; a server that expands in all directions, upwards and outward, creating a void in purpose both in the fabricated environment and in disability. Through this frustration and the distaste I harbor for each, the more they pull me down, the more I am influenced to move up—to the rooftop, to transcend both. This is a way to experience the real world before being left disabled, unable to participate and relegated to merely consuming within the server, living for the spectacle—one I do not want to take part in. What's left of the real, the city, the other, becomes merely a resource for the digital, both fulfilling the server.

The roof is this safe haven.

A child here playing with his toy one more time before it is taken away. Unsure what to do after, where else to go, sensing the end of day, for now at least, enjoying what is left.

.. and because the rooftop is "inaccessible", at least by perception

and its imposed thresholds waiting to be overcome by a mind and body, inaccessible alike so much we no longer consider possible, outsourced to digital domains of accessibility for consumption – does it become all the more valuable. For what the server society deems as acceptable, while in it total access, nothing is being accessed in its propagated perfect accessibility.

Of all the things I can no longer do, that I am haunted by, that I dream of and can only "experience" from afar, from memory, or from behind a screen—those things that are accessible to everyone but no longer to me—the roof is a space that is paradoxically inaccessible yet "accessible" to me, albeit fleetingly. This feels like the last thing I can do, despite it being exactly what I should not do, yet it serves as a way to revolt against disability and the server. It's all that is left.

Here, transcending disability is made possible through an intricate dance with the server—both relying on and utterly discarding it. The rooftop transcends the server's digital and physical realms, encapsulating a space where I can embrace all that I am capable of, until the inevitable decline of my abilities. It represents a deliberate withdrawal from the concept of disability; rather than being confined to the ground or trapped within the server's digital landscape, I find elevation on the rooftop, positioned outside the server. An act completely forbidden and inaccessible, even more discouraged given my condition. Choosing to rooftop challenges the notion of accessibility and the literal and figurative boundaries of disability.

It is something to revolt against.

To escape both machines, servers, outside of its physical and digital formats, and only made possible through said architectural and technological meaninglessness. A world with neither would provide no such call to opportunity. A space of nature of the previously flat land we may never see again until mother nature one day reclaims itself, would not reveal nor allow the same escape, nor would it demand it.

The rooftop moves me as far away from the reality of disability as possible – both disability from a condition and that from a physical and

digital server. Here, atop the server, beyond its reach, I find a fleeting taste of freedom – a space where I can exist freely, even if just for a while.

In this illegal freedom, where the only means of being free is done through transgression, to be free is a revolt against the system imposed.

Dissent avoided.

I find meaning and belonging in all the places I should not.





transcending ability

June 17, 202x
9:56pm

5.0

TO GO FOR A STROLL

TO THOSE DAYS

Alone on Bankside.

The sounds of my own breath, echoing and playing back, a steady white noise, attuning inwards momentarily then outwards. The muffled sounds of being outside no longer filtered through my bedroom walls. The crunching of fresh snow beneath my feet, each step imprinting a new mark to be erased by the soft snowfall. A circling lap after lap, a losing count. Peering into open curtains, inside a difference in wall colours, sometimes off-putting, the living and dining rooms, the different light temperatures contrasting the homes across and the very temperature outside, the dimly lit second floor window facing onto the street, the half open window night after night in the midst of winter.

The kids playing outside in the evening before dinner. The Christmas decorations still up months past the new year. The house that at for once was always occupied, now empty for sale. A consideration to look at my phone, to pause, to remove myself from the world around me, to consider if I should have brought headphones to listen to something, to be productive in an otherwise unproductive span of time. A productivity that would void myself from my own thoughts. Would I still be going for a stroll?

The neighbourhood allowed a barrier alike that of a forest. A set of ear plugs that attuned us without blocking or deafening the outside world from the senses. A city full of servers on the other hand increasingly demystifies the lack thereof. It absorbs all attention and creates a white noise one finds a need to escape.

These were some of the things I witnessed and remembered along my strolls. Most notably, a body that worked perfectly.

During lockdowns, all I had access to in order to stay relatively active, to keep moving, to stay sane, was the outside world. Not the world in my hand nor the world through the screen that shines on my face, rather the world directly next to me and around me. Not the digital world, the

real. A way to be separate from the machine. For more than two years I found myself during summer lunch breaks, fall evenings, and winter nights outside strolling the streets of my neighbourhood and occasionally one or two adjacent, spreading distance along a longer route. Other times one new, wandering through spaces I had always drove by however never stopped and walked through on foot, or other times staying within and repeating the same mix of laps over an hour. A wandering without intent. With all the time and no time. A wasting away, of nothing better to do and nowhere else to go.

An episode of my life where there was zero burden, and my body functioned perfectly, from near perfect to soon less than ideal.

To go for a stroll later became a way of testing myself. As the body started to malfunction, the connection to the brain, as signals were lost. Although not yet substantial, going for a stroll was a way to now prolong, to coverup, to hideaway something that was inevitable. A way of measuring and tracing. Beyond the activity itself of staying "active" and getting in my steps, albeit for an hour a day, it became a way to hope whatever stint was present would fade away on its own. Now the fading away is holistic. Walking on its own rather would become more difficult, the prevalence of a condition not only disabling oneself rather making the activity of going for a stroll a cumbersome task, one that flees my grasp. One that becomes a memory.

Where being outside in the world was removed, where going to improve the body and the mind was suspended, where I felt locked up by external forces that be, this would eventually be taken away from the internal. A gift taken away from the child and never given back. A stain left permanent.

Today, that very distance I strolled daily is questionable. Walking becomes uncertain. The stroll before, the oxygen breather, one of the most basic human movements, which was a once peaceful and certain ability is now an exhaustive task, fleeting. Now it is about the ability to simply move. Where a trembling takes place. Spasticity that grows stronger, muscles that grow weaker. Rigidity from hip to toe. An awkwardness. Feet no longer

wanting to flex, to move, to contour to each step, rather a stiffness, no movement, a collision. Fatigued without duration. Out of balance with no resistance. A body that slowly becomes out of sync. Disconnected.

Walking, an otherwise basic task now troublesome.

92. Gait. 2024
Walking becoming extremly troublesome, difficult. Out of control. Weakness, tightness, poor balance, a footdrop, needing something to hold onto. A stroll turning into a struggle, a struggle that is life. Unsure if I will make it back home, a feeling I should never leave again.



THE ABILITY TO BE

For all of human history, walking was a primary and fundamental mode of being in the world. It was how we encountered our environment and how we connected with the earth beneath our feet. The natural atmospheres of the world were recorded through our movements, through our senses and by that to our memory. Walking on its own at once was mandatory, required then, optional now, soon no longer necessary. Today, walking is secondary. It becomes necessary only to move by and through space, a second act almost. The introduction of the machine outsources the same needs of walking while removes man from his surroundings both in the modes of movement and no movement. All modes of consumption, sharing and experience can be formatted for, by and through the machine.[1] There is an intentional separation and reduction. Regarding movement, everything is about reducing distance and time in the server. The server optimizes bodily function into a series of processes. An "only steps away from" or "only five minute walk to".[2] The machine redefines movement into a series of operations.

As the range of the server expands, the effects of walking decreases from a leisurely activity to a task of necessity. Where walking is reduced to mere functionality, it can be grasped as a tool to navigate from one machine to another or from one process to the next. Proximity dictates our steps, either the distances are too far warranting a means outside of walking or so minimal that walking seems an unnecessary exertion. Time, undeniably our most precious resource, is frequently consumed by various commitments, reducing walking to a mere operational necessity rather than a chosen, leisurely activity.

Ironically, cities that are deemed most walkable, are generally those designed for speed and efficiency, which implicitly discourages the leisurely reflective pace of a stroll.[3] In this efficiency-driven environment, the art of strolling is overshadowed by the rush to get somewhere, anywhere, as quickly as possible. A stroll through the woods is replaced by a walk in the

neighbourhood which is replaced by a disappearance in the server farm. From the roadways to the highways, the networks to the towers, all the communication, and all the transportation, to the congestions and glitches in the system, the machine and the city end up reflecting one another. The experience of one's surroundings becomes limited to what one sees through and behind a screen and more than what one remembers outside which invariably is done through commute.

Where movement is optimized and directed, paths travelled are often the shortest and quickest routes from point A to B with the machine as both the companion and the surrounding environment in these forgettable scenarios. Oddly enough, we forget how to walk without and outside of the machine. The human that used to move about on their own now has all their movements predetermined, preprogrammed, directed and tracked. The human becomes passenger in this process, either by a map always on, attention split by the artificial world, ears plugged, eyes glued, removed. One has to escape and isolate from the machine by the very machine itself. The legs here function just as a tool. Soon there will no longer be a need to walk, let alone to go for a stroll. Instead of going to people and places, increasingly things or rather the non-things are brought to us.

As most of our activities and experiences are relegated to the digital domain, so may the very act of going for a stroll. Whether inside or outside, how might going for a stroll be commodified, to select your world, your surroundings, what you see, hear, record, however, do not remember. There are already instances where an individual can pursue said activity alone, indoors, online, with everyone and no one.[4] To be offline, you and your own thoughts is but a past. There is no stroll through the woods or down the streets of the server farm without thinking, consuming, connecting, or sharing something about your walk, activity, and location, something about yourself. Observing not to the outside nor the inside, observing nowhere. Digital voyeurism in a sense. Man has become programmed to always be "running", operational, consuming without "calories", there is no connection between users and the world, only the object. Everything is

a potential commodity for our online existence, non-existence. In a world where man is surrounded and constantly connected to the machine, he is screened out, not really there. To move without the machine becomes an inconvenience, it is awkward and is to be rushed through, irradicated. To go for a stroll is no longer the same as it once was. Time that was bound to a stroll becomes exchanged with a hyperreal world we feel the need to maintain, one we feel the need to keep alive. The real becomes a distraction for the distraction.

Before the machine, man and nature were inseparable. Today, the machine is everywhere, man and machine are one. Soon there will be no man, only machine. Where man is completely removed from his surroundings, where there is an intentional and progressive separation. In many ways, the machine becomes a disability and is a way of removing oneself from the world. One is assigned however, and the other is chosen.

One no longer goes for a stroll.

TO WALK AGAIN

Are we truly experiencing our surroundings or are we merely moving through them? What becomes of walking when it is purely operational, when we no longer move and think for and by ourselves? Where walking is treated as the intermediary an overlooked step between what we see, consume, experience and do, all of which are increasingly being represented through a screen. The very act of walking in itself is forgotten, another aspect of being human taken for granted. Where walking today blocks out the world and removes ourselves from it, to go for a stroll is to wander with pure intention and more akin to what walking used to be. Getting lost today is both difficult while easy. We do not explore in a manner that enables us to step outside the most traveled path, possibly worried of getting lost or wasting time only to be handicapped by GPS tracking and orientation. We have lost the comfort of spatial awareness exterior to the

tools we use.

Within the fast pace and intersection of our lives and technology, there is a freedom that comes from going for a stroll, or by walking as I will continue to suggest. Walking puts us back onto the vertical axis of life, the very axis blurred by the excess stream of life's everyday events, sometimes overwhelming. It frees us not as an escape or a form of procrastination, but rather as a grounding force, reconnecting us with the immediacy and simplicity of our own existence. After a certain period of time when walking, you start to think bigger picture, your attention spans open, your senses clear, you forget how many minutes or hours have passed, you might feel your feet start to get sore, the cold shelter past your clothes and beneath your skin. You question for how much longer you need and if you can go for more. You start to feel you could carry on like this for days or for years. You start to think about the why, the you, your own relevance and self importance. All the little commitments you have signed to become a little less important after the fact. They all seem trivial and insubstantial.

In his book A Philosophy of Walking, French philosopher Frédéric Gros explores the surprisingly philosophical act of walking.[5] Many great philosophers shared a strong relationship with walking, and combined the movement as both a distraction and core condition of their work. Thoreau did so for seclusion, Nerval to cure his melancholy, for Rousseau and Nietszche they walked to think and for Kant to escape. Rousseau claimed an inability to think when not walking or within the idea of being in a state of nature.[6] Nietzsche walked for hours a day stopping only to scribble notes down, the majority of his writing of The Wanderer and His Shadow were done so alone en route.[7] For Nietzsche it was not for relaxation nor to flee from work rather it was where he worked best. Kant inversely walked through his town at the same time and same place daily to escape the "compulsion of thought", to escape, a distraction from his work.[8] He walked alone to avoid the obligation to open his mouth to speak while wanting to breath entirely through his nose which he believed was beneficial for the body. The same walks he persisted through his life is now

known as “The Philosophers Walk” in the before Konisberg, Prussia.

Gros’s philosophy underscores the profound personal nature of walking; it’s an activity where your individual presence and experience are paramount. Just as he suggests that any replaceable action lacks true value, walking embodies the essence of irreplaceability[9]- a reminder that, while many roles in life can be filled by others, your journey on foot is uniquely your own. This reinforces the idea that the true essence of living deeply and authentically cannot be delegated or replicated. When you walk, you engage in an act that is solely yours, a physical expression of your individuality in the world. For some, it is to go for a run, a jog or a bike ride or likely an activity or light exercise to fit within a busy schedule. For others this practice within the server is relegated to urban exploration. Walking on the other hand is unlike a sport, a matter of techniques, rules, scores, or competitions. It does not require a sum of money, training, or practice. It does not depend on a time, a placement, nor a ranking albeit may face the same wrath of commodification as most activities today for the spectacle or by definition only taking place through simulation. Walking if enabled is child’s play. It is a relationship between you and the world. It is the best way to experience the world and move more slowly than any other method that has been found.

In this city, to be offline and alone with one’s thoughts is almost an act of defiance — a break from the norm of being perpetually online and “connected”. To go for a stroll rejects a world where no one remains free within a system that keeps us plugged in both inside and outside. It’s a means to escape the server once in a while. To go for a stroll is to assert our right to the city, not merely as users or consumers, but as human beings seeking connection and meaning. It’s a way to reclaim time and space for contemplation, for unstructured experience, for the joy of being rather than doing. It’s an invitation to slow down, to observe the nuances of urban life, and to find beauty in the unexpected. Walking offers a unique opportunity for urban dwellers to engage with their environment in a way that contrasts sharply with the fast-paced, efficiency-driven ethos of the modern city, or

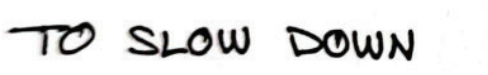
'the server' as I term it. This act of walking, particularly in the form of a leisurely stroll, undistracted from the availability of distractions, serves as a form of subtle rebellion against the norms of 'solitude, speed, dubious business politics, and consumerism' that dominate urban life. It allows for an immersion in the crowd yet maintains a sense of personal anonymity and detachment.

In this context, the flâneur – the urban wanderer – strolls not with the intent to reach a specific destination rapidly, but to savour the journey itself.[10] They relish the sights, sounds, and rhythms of the city, which become experiences in their own right. This leisurely pace and open-minded exploration counter the server's demand for constant connectivity and operational efficiency. The philosophical benefit of walking in an urban environment lies in this dual existence – being a part of the server while simultaneously observing it from a detached perspective. This mode of walking allows for a deeper connection with one's surroundings and self, as it provides a space for reflection and contemplation, away from the ceaseless flow of information and demands of the digital age. By choosing to walk, particularly at a slower pace, individuals can reclaim their time and space from the server. They step out of the relentless race for efficiency, experiencing moments of the sublime in the mundane. This act of walking becomes a path to truly inhabiting one's own life, experiencing the world at a human pace that fosters genuine connection and well-being. In an age where speed is often equated with progress, choosing to walk is a decision to prioritize personal health and mindfulness over the relentless demands of the server. Although not all of us can take day long treks like a philosopher, most of us can at least make time to go for a stroll.

93. Boardwalk. Portugal. 2022
A less disabled form of movement where the eyes are free to see. In the server, the eyes are never free.


Koala
sabor?
refresca
FERIAS

5.1



The need to interact with more of the environment in between this start and end of a decline. Inspecting the room to the slightest slope in a ground surface, proximity to objects and edges in each direction. Closeness to surfaces, my need to hold tight, to feel the handrail, something else that feels my grip, it is cold, when were you last held? To tread lightly down the stairs, pausing, looking for a ramp, one that is nowhere in sight, one that the body starts to pull towards, new instruments used to pace my passage where others pass me by. To surf the walls, feeling all of its contours, to read the floor unevenness and texture through a foot that raises less and drags across, to breath parts of a room and space from a mode of rest, a world I need to cling onto more, and yet less accessible. More surfaces rejecting my touch, yet reflecting back, mirroring my condition like the phone in pocket. A physical and digital barrier between myself and the tangible world.

A body that follows and reduces, with a non-real existence that trails me. Places grasped in terms of time and physical measurements of the body. New distances both horizontally and vertically, increasingly brought back to the ground, spaces before now further away, in a different reach. An instinct to minimize distance and time that the body's ability extends. Again, parts of the environment closing itself off, barred, non-permitted. A ride a child can no longer fit on or is not suitable to take part in. Memories only reside here, yet these same memories are overwritten by new imprints, by server uploads and new experiences of my existence; either rewritten and overwritten by the self or left inaccessible entirely.

I have low hopes anything will change for the better, for the human spirit, nonetheless within my given existence. At a collective level, the server as we know it rejects slowness. Both the physical and digital servers do not cater to the human need for slowness because we do not acknowledge or design for it. The server rejects it and society remains content with the given simulacra of an environment. Surviving without a purpose, bread

and circus. There no longer is any space nor architecture to witness and embody leaving the human disabled of their senses, of their memory. Yet through disability, even outside of disability with all that is lost should we return to feeling more. In a sense moving towards what designing for disability reveals for it connects and attunes.

Even with a disability, one can still experience the atmospheres of a space through a primary of sound, touch, smell, or sight. While our memories of these experiences may be personal, the atmospheres themselves are universal, tied to the space and shared amongst individuals. These real spaces demand our full attention and engagement, offering no shortcuts or skips. Any missed experience is a matter of access and ability, not a choice made on a server. In contrast, the virtual world lacks this depth of experience. No one feels anything. The server, which dominates physical architecture, controls and flattens, disregarding the rich emotionality inherent in human spirit. It simplifies complex atmospheres to mere visuals, eroding empathy and sense of care in both environment and self, both essential to meaningful architectural design, fading away. In the digital, where nothing is truly felt, and in the physical, where we're increasingly detached, there's no demand for design that caters to these missing senses. The paradox lies in our numbness: without feeling, we neither seek nor create spaces that foster genuine human connection. What at all then are we asking from architecture today? Is it still there? Are we asking for anything more than pure commodity and consumption? Something that fulfills a spec sheet and a drive that matches technology. More progress and more speed. Faster and more simulated.

Something that outpaces the body. Something that serves the machine first and a human that follows. Architecture that serves the human is disappearing: and where there is no longer a human, there no longer is architecture.

A WORLD THAT ACCELERATES

Although bodily slowing down can occur naturally, it becomes challenging within a network that is constantly accelerating. In contemporary spaces, there's little to encourage lingering; the emphasis is on entering and exiting as quickly as possible, dominated by questions of "What time is it?", "How much longer?", and "How much time is left?" rather than a desire to stay a while longer. Slowing down involves both the body and the space; it requires an environment that enables slowness, where there's no rush and one can take the time to look around. However, in the hypermodern cities and server farms we live in, pass by, or move through, there's nothing that supports slowness.

Historically, good architecture embraced slowness; it served as a mediator between the natural world and the technological one, fostering real connection and allowing a more paced existence. Such architecture gave place to our embodied consciousness yet was more commonplace when architecture primarily framed religious life - deeply intertwining the lived and felt religious experience with the revelation of cosmic and transcendental meanings in its material form and space.[1] Although the role of architecture has shifted or may be forgotten from a historical perspective, all good architecture should address all senses simultaneously, merging our image of self with the experience of the world. The role of this architecture is to articulate the experience of our being in the world and strengthen our reality and sense of self.[2]

History aside, do we consider anything within our surroundings and built environment beyond the screen as profound and a function of art? What parts of architecture today slow us down and direct our consciousness back to the world and towards our sense of self and being? The server we are under instead infects the role of architecture and conversely the human. It shifts our balance towards one of two opposite ends. Away from nature where time is unlimited and towards the city, where the server has a time limit, like a stopwatch. It has reduced meaning beyond architecture and

instead has pulled our consciousness out of the world and away from our sense of self and being.

To take life at half speed contrasts the empty spirit of movement without meaning, or more broadly cutting back from the machine, throttling all activity and consumption the server mediates. To slow down is not necessarily bad, yet can be perceived as a waste of time, a lag in connection, a delay in upload and download, a stalled commute, a wasting of time that would otherwise be spent in the server. This perception however underscores the truth that one is never truly with anything or anyone in the server, time wasted with no one. Slowing down allows a mode of attunement[3] otherwise missed, a pause in progress and an openness to experience in a world that both physically and digitally fail to accommodate.

To feel what I feel, even when all is lost. A sharing of disability, not in the genetic sense but in mode of being. Disability is shared amongst the server and the condition, again not inherently defined by traditional parameters but by the limitations imposed on our interactions and experiences. The condition removes ability and the server outsources it, hiding it altogether. To slow down is a means of transcending both the physical and digital server, both online and offline being. Slowing down becomes not just a strategy for coping with traditional forms of disability but an act of reclaiming our engagement with life itself. By adopting this pace amongst a server that rejects it, we challenge both the notion of disability and ability from both the server and a condition – offering a form of re-enablement, a way to transcend the limitations not just of the body but the incessant demands of a world that values speed over substance.

Architecture that slows down possess a timeless quality. It is that which is always waiting for us, a partner waiting for you at home time and time again; contrasting the endless sprawl of servers everywhere that dominate our lives, accelerating us into disappearance. In the server the other is blocked, and instead waits for the user to return to consume alone to keep the machine alive. Behind every server is the potential for good

architecture, shrouded in darkness despite full transparency. This unfolds further in the digital spaces we occupy, another existence where nothing waits and nothing is accepted. Slow architecture waits with open arms; instead in the server we pass through and do not accept the other, we are not even aware it is there, only amplifying our senses of loneliness and isolation. Slow architecture holds atmospheres; it invites a pause and negates the non-places of the everyday that skips over our memory. - The places we must escape immediately, places we move through and not with, only back into our servers online and offline alone. Such spaces do not clamour for our attention but offer quietness with our thoughts, others and the natural environment. The fields, the sun, the sky, the stars; that we have lost in exchange for an artificial glow and shadows.

Architecture at the very least must be responsible for the production of atmospheres through bodily presence. Without a semblance of slowness, atmospheres are lost in translation, and the self loses touch with their being in the world; with their relationship to the environment, to others, to things, and to works of art. Our participation in the server maintains a constant building for inevitable and programmatic machines for "living". An arrangement of programs and cells where nothing is remembered and everything is transient. Time, as fast as possible. Care, for what reason. Space, optimized and occupied. Material, cost cutting. One does not escape and knows no other world. But what about space purely for space. Space that helps us reconnect with the essentials of our humanity. Space and being that cannot be accelerated because something is missing, a way of being that no longer allows speed. Again, not slowness due to the inherent dysfunction of the body, rather slowness that helps regain function despite dysfunction of the body due to the server. For myself, to find and create slow space due to an ability and way of living that continues to slow down without choice, amidst a distracted environment that knows no rest and accelerates further.

For now at least, maybe I can still move far away from the noise, turn

off the screen, light some candles and burn a little incense.

Let us slow down and feel again.
Close the eyes and escape the server.

94. Non-server. 2023



95. Gentle space. 2023



96. Touchable. 2023



5.2

TO BE OFFLINE

THE DARKROOM

You close the door alone to what, from the senses, appears to be a small, pitch-black closet. The air is dense, thick with a tangible silence and a faint scent of chemical solutions - developer, stop bath, fixer. This is the essence of the darkroom, a place where the external world is sealed off, where time seems to slow and the digital world is a distant echo. You are alone, yet accompanied by the ghosts of countless others who've stood in similar darkened spaces, enveloped by the same absolute black. Decades prior, generations before, they, like you, sought refuge in this intimate cavern, a sanctuary for creators.

You flip the switch and suddenly the room is flooded in a dim red light. It's an alien atmosphere, eerie, yet strangely comforting. The darkness doesn't disappear entirely, it just retreats to the corners and under the edges of the counters. Your eyes take very little time to adapt to this singular colour, a hue that once was associated with danger, now becomes a protective cloak allowing the unseen to reveal itself.

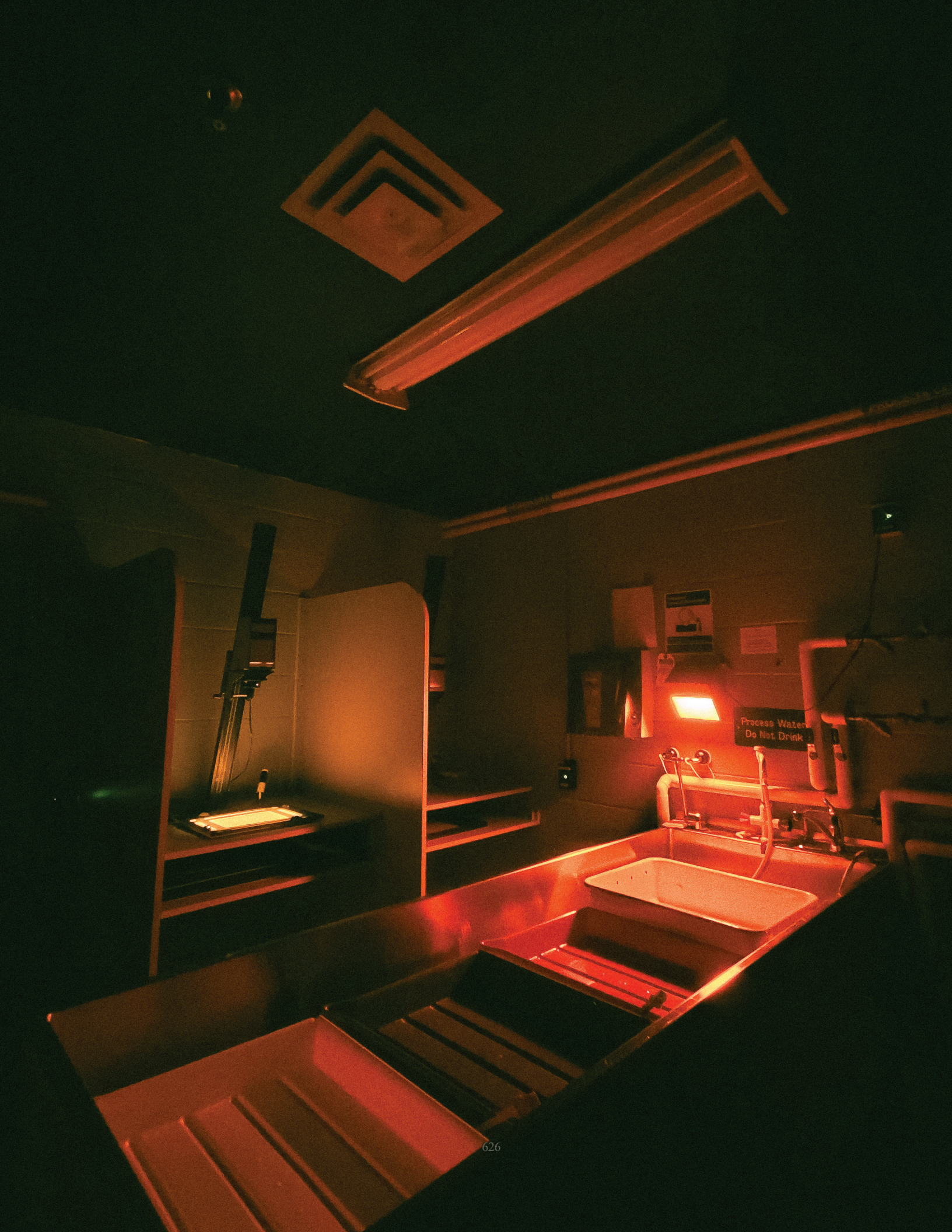
As you navigate through this low-lit womb of creation, your hands trace the familiar path towards the enlarger. The hum of the machine, the heat of the lamp, the sharp focus of the lens, all become your compass in this monochrome world. The photographic paper, once a mere blank canvas, now waits patiently to capture a moment frozen in time.

Slow, focused, uninterrupted processes. Alike the event sealed in 35mm waiting to be remembered.

In the safelight's glow, the developer bath becomes a magical pool. As you slide the paper into the solution, an image slowly blooms out of the white expanse, like a dream materializing from the ether. Each detail emerges, from obscurity to definition, as if the shadows themselves are whispering their secrets into existence. The silence in the room is replaced by the soft rhythm of the developer, lapping against the sides of the tray, a subtle lullaby in this light-deprived universe.

Emerging from the darkroom is akin to waking from a deep, immersive

dream. The door creaks open, and you are momentarily blinded, assaulted by the harsh, uncompromising light of day. The outside world floods back into your consciousness, harsher, louder, and more demanding. The sense of disorientation is palpable, as if you've been traveling in a different dimension, a solitary explorer returning from a quest in the shadowlands. But in your hands, you carry the tangible proof of your journey – a photograph, a piece of time forever stilled, birthed from the quiet solitude of the darkroom.


Process Water
Do Not Drink

97. Safelight. 2023

In this photograph, the dim red glow of safelights illuminates a traditional darkroom setup, with chemical baths ready for developing film and a distinct absence of digital technology.

SENSE WITHOUT SENSES

We have lost the senses..

In the darkroom, you embody both space and process. The environment is fully analog. One feels by touch, by memory and through the senses. You are there. You must shut yourself from the external world, or rather today both the online and whatever is left of the real. There must be no light, and by that you are without sight. Despite the loss of sight, you almost feel more, highlighting that seeing does not equate to feeling. Everything today is however dominated by sight; sight of non-things and sight in non-place. The blindness we induce severs our ability to feel, and because we do not feel, we do not remember. Such absence of light in the darkroom emphasizes how memory and experience are intrinsically tied to our physical and environmental interactions, what is through the human body. Contrarily, a world dominated by screens demands no such sensory engagement; it merely plays back, failing to truly record. There too no longer is image and experience, instead a world pre-illuminated and already photographed.

In a sense, the darkroom experience is living without sight. It is a remembering of actions, movements, patterns, with nothing being seen. A living without sight now paired to and mediated by the machine. For those able-bodied, it is a heightening of other senses. There is no screen between you and the outside world. The darkroom itself is a revealing of what is real and what is fleeting. Any intrusion of light erases all, the same medium of light that is currently erasing ourselves from the world – the intrusion of light – is paradoxically omnipresent outside its walls. What is forbidden here is everywhere outside. In stark contrast to this muted yet sensory-rich environment, the world outside the darkroom demands a submission to the image, a surrendering of the senses to the dominance of sight. Yet, it begs the question: sight of what exactly? Where we demystify all senses in favour of sight, we see nothing of substance. We paralyze ourselves. We are

trapped in a cycle of consuming images that offer no real engagement or remembrance, a departure from the tactile and memory-rich experience of the darkroom.

Where there is no darkness, you experience all through sight, not through touch. All that the body contacts is the cold glass and steel, warmth blocked behind the machinery, and the artificial light always on, screened and projected, eyes locked, and hands addicted to. Everything is orchestrated—lights, sounds, and materials—all by and through the machine. In contrast, within nature, such orchestration is absent; there, none of these elements are present. Even when nature is sought, it is either man-made or mediated through a screen. This new quest to make experiences as 'real' as possible ironically distances us from authenticity, it only highlights what is lost. This whatever it takes to "see" again, to "feel" again. It is not real.

The body navigates three realms. One where all the senses are embodied. One of which where one of the senses are removed and the others are heightened, ie. when you can no longer hear, you hear through sight, that which is stored within your knowledge and memory, in the absence of sight, you tune into the sounds and smells of the world in a different way. The same occurs when the sense of touch or ability to feel is diminished. Furthermore, the act of walking. A domain where the lack of physical engagement with our surrounding leads to a reliance on other senses and faculties, a reliance on a physical world that is disappearing. When tactile connection is lost and the absence of walking is present, this transforms into a heightened awareness of spatial relationships, observed from a now static perspective. Intellect and memory often step in to fill the void, guiding us through a world perceived less through emotional resonance and more through cognitive understanding. The child resorts to another way of staying alive. Each missing sense shifts the balance, compelling the remaining to adapt and enhance their function. All these changes challenge us to find new ways of connecting with our environment and ourselves, redefining our experience of reality. In the last realm however, there are

no senses. When you are blinded from the light behind, you are frozen, immobilized. You see without seeing, and through this, forfeit all the senses for sight, yet nothing is seen, only projected.

The darkroom presents a stark contrast to the outside world. Here, one perceives without sight, and in this unique aspect, one almost sees more. The inverse is a world projected onto us, flashed and screened, a sight without senses. A being in a coma almost. You see and read what is given to you, what passes by you, however none of it is felt, embodied or kept, and by that none of it is remembered. The machine will do the remembering for us, it will exist on its own, independent of the human. We are like a vegetable, we may still be somewhere physically, though it is a hollow representation, our souls are elsewhere. We have lost so much..

The darkroom is disappearing.

TO BE OFFLINE

The darkroom is one of the last spaces we are forfeiting to the server with more space and processes eradicated to the virtual, rendering them intangible. The shift towards a world bathed in perpetual light and with no negatives diminishes the need for a darkroom. In that same process, the fading necessity of the body and mind, being that becomes increasingly digitized. Being that becomes less physically able amongst less physical space. Being that becomes prematurely disabled.

Even someone with a form of disability can still participate in the darkroom, in a world before the server farm began. This space, demanding tangible engagement uniquely accommodates those with sensory limitations. Despite the necessity for certain senses, the environment safely allows for participation in solace without the full spectrum of sensory abilities. Although one may lack equal ability, it does not preclude one from engaging with and contributing to the given experience. Disability here alike the film protected from exposure is not on display. This highlights a world outside of the screen and digital interaction that the human body

and mind can still be used. In essence, the darkroom was the world before the technological term of the darkroom took its place.

The disappearance of the darkroom, in both its literal and metaphorical senses, along with the fading of the image, marks a decline in authenticity and the direct experience of reality. This loss mirrors the erosion of our own existence and positions the darkroom as a metaphor for the natural human world fading from view. A photograph faded beyond recognition.

This photograph we have lost is one that took material time and care, a delay in events and procedures. In its first material form, film, it was presented as non-instant, contradicting what is now instant. The subject repeatedly asks the camera a question, a "please wait for me" as they captured, knowing both the quantity of images on each slide was finite and so too were the events on the other side of the lens bounded, coming to an end. The subject questioned their memory and judgement if said happening was worth remembering beyond the experience and to be frozen on a chemical-based film medium. A "do I want to bring you home with me", versus today's limitless extreme, changing our perceptions to a demand of digital content where everything is consumed and nothing is remembered.

We no longer present ourselves to the world and there is no longer a conversation that takes place because we now have this world of things or non-things rather presented to us. Instead of the photograph being an outcome of moments unfolding, it is now preconceived, existing before the event or an event staged for the value of the content to be shared. Non-things waiting to be pre-consumed, an image already created before there is an image then sold back to you. We are all waiting to be fed constant stream of data disconnected from reality and in a reality we no longer reside in.

The child here is presented with information and data without an experience. A body not fully formed and a brain that pauses development. The child stops growing and waits for real-world engagement with nothing new to receive. A life already lost. Consider how this new domain has

changed the script in how we perceive the world, how much digitization from the server has taken away. Why need a real world when you can have all, perfect availability, access to everything in digital format. In this self manipulation we are then made free from our body and mind and automated into a single program in the hands of the server, one that is maybe helpful and nice too, one that does everything for us.

The subject today is now in tensions with themselves and the technology they use everyday, increasingly binding identity to them. If removed, one could measure the anxiety we would suffer as we treat these objects as the main source to mediate our existence. To be offline is to no longer exist, where the majority of experiences begin and end online. To be offline is to nearly vanish, detach and return to a former self – previous states, however for some nowhere close to a time of before said technologies existed leaving them unable to function inside of a darkroom.

Although the darkroom existed before the delineation between online and offline worlds, it presented a space where one could still go offline within the realm of the server. The offline world only became evident in the context of the online; the darkroom representing the nearest we could get to logging off without dying. While there may be no longer a physical manifestation of a darkroom, there are still places for error, where time can be consumed against acceleration, slowing down an otherwise external hurrying up of existence. In these spaces one can reside outside of the server in a space where not everything attempts to be known, where there is no plans, tags or digital footprints for.

Despite not being located underneath a celestial body of stars under an unobstructed night sky in an open field or in a space without light, in the corner of a closet, one similarly used to safely break apart and roll a case of film from the back of a camera slide onto a canister wheel, there was still a dark space I had access to. Just like the darkroom, the rooftop remained this outside world, while surrounded by the sprawl of servers, outside of it, or more succinctly above them. Where the other world was based on simulations, the spectacle, drowning in artificial light and sounds, this was

a world that for now existed below me. Standing in the opposite, a world I could still access, yet a world with no open access, forbidden, a darkroom now closed up and barricaded, one no one considers. A darkroom one sneaks into to capture and develop just one more photo – a darkroom that encompasses the given experience itself. Similarly, an open room without broadband connection and thankfully no artificial screen that separates the subject and object. The same screen that mediates our given world each and everyday. The face of the server.

In this form of darkroom, there is no screentime or anything to instantly upload. It never comes to thought and is rarely a consideration beyond the being free outside the enclosure of celestial machines. A rooftopper, fully immersed in the real, would not contemplate the sharing or uploading their experience at the present moment. It is rather only when authenticity vanishes that there is a rush to capture and share for the sake of self-validation, moving further into the inauthentic and remaining trapped in the server. Additionally, the dim lighting of rooftops and limited broadband access hinder online connectivity, naturally detaching the experience from the digital realm. In a way, the rooftop naturally negates the non-real. Much like in a darkroom, complete awareness is demanded as you navigate and engage with a space unseen and unfelt before. Like the darkroom, your full awareness is required as you grasp and traverse a place never before seen or experienced. One of which is like having the eyes closed and opening them for the first time. To watch your step, move around the openings, miss the hazards, catch a view and avoid a fall. and in this absence of screen does it make the moment all the more memorable. Almost forgetting you are offline.

Where the outside world is beyond a series of doors to the darkroom, here it is off the edge, thousands of feet towards the ground.

In rejecting a life of technological slavery, the rooftop remains a sanctuary free from the confines of the server. Where more of existence mandates participation online, to be in the server and to be an “active” user, the rooftop is off the grid.

Here, the experience is embodied, despite the rooftop's existence being made possible by these servers in their physical form. It's both a response to the physical world and a retreat from the pervasive digital domains that now engulf our lives. The rooftop offers a means to disconnect, to embrace the darkness, log off and truly be offline.

To still capture something not yet readily available everywhere in the online network or server—something that may one day be simulated, replicated, digitized, however never truly re-embodied without the original experience in itself. Even when the darkroom is no more, one can still find or create their own darkrooms amidst the servers to truly be offline. and… as disability becomes more present for the self or metaphorically for those who are infected by the server – this should propel one towards an escape.

This may serve as a wake-up call to seek the real world before it's too late, before one is ultimately stuck in the server, living a life with all the lights and screens in hibernation, yet existing in total darkness. To find something worthwhile, to make life a little more worth living. To find your darkroom. To be offline.

98. Safe from light. ca. 202x

The higher we climbed inside the server, and the more thresholds we crossed, the less connection we had to the network; the environment became more foreign, increasingly demanding our attention and spatial awareness. Although broadband connection is restored upon reaching the summit, there is no pause for consideration; one remains fully attuned, just as in the earlier stages of ascent. This photo was captured in-between. We were stuck in one of the mechanical rooms; while the others were focused on finding the escape hatch, I was mesmerized by the view, albeit below the roof and captured behind a screen, there was something captivating being in a total darkroom, offline, between the inside and outside of the server.



5.3

TO CLOSE THE EYES

'I want you to go on to picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition somewhat as follows. Imagine an underground chamber like a cave, with a long entrance open to the daylight and as wide as the cave. In this chamber are men who have been prisoners there since they were children, their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads. Some way off, behind and higher up, a fire is burning, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them runs a road, in front of which a curtain-wall has been built, like the screen at puppet shows between the operators and their audience, above which they show their puppets.'[1]

Plato, 380 BC

THE CAVE

Within this cave are prisoners who do not know they are unfree. They know no else. All day, looking at shadows, "screens" today, passing them by. They do not know that what they are looking at are shadows, thinking that what they are looking at, what is being shown to them is real. Sounds echo off the walls and the prisoners believe they come from the shadows. They can only see the shadow forms of the objects, mistaking them for reality. Little do they know that the shadows are merely appearances of the real forms, that is, appearances of reality. For them, the truth would be nothing but the shadows of images.

Suddenly, one of the prisoners is inexplicably set free and provided the ability to now walk up and exit the cave. The prisoner here can now see beyond the wall, observing the fire and the true forms behind the shadows. He sees the individuals carrying the torches and clay figures, the origins of the shadows cast as copies, simulacra. This revelation is a painful process; his long-held perceptions of reality are shattered. Eyes strained. The clarity and truth he encounters is unbearable, a reality too foreign and a light too bright from the shadow world he grew accustomed to. Consequently, he finds himself reluctant and unable to leave the cave and chooses to return.

When the prisoner is forcibly dragged up the rough ascent, he protests in anger and pain. The situation worsens as the light of the outside world, the sun, becomes brighter and reaches his eyes. He is blinded, not by the flickering of torches, screens, or servers, but by the actual light of the sun. Outside, the prisoner is unable to see any of the things he was told were real. It is a slow and painful process, a large pill to swallow of self-transformation. Outside, now free, slowly adjusting to the light and to the real world, he initially sees only shadows in the light, then reflections of men and other objects off the water, later all the real things themselves, unmediated by projections.

The final step for him would be to gaze directly at the sun itself, observing it without the aid of reflections in water or through any other medium, but seeing it as it truly is. This culmination of understanding must come last. He finally witnesses the sun as the ordering principle, the force which produces the changing seasons and years, and all that governs the visible, real world.

It is then questioned what might occur if the prisoner were to return to the cave to share his newfound insights. Upon his return, he finds himself blinded by the darkness, in a manner akin to how the sunlight once blinded him. It is posited, echoing Homer, that he might prefer being a serf in the house of a landless man, or indeed take any other position in the world, rather than adopt the perspectives and live the life of those still chained in the cave. Agreeing, he acknowledges he would choose any alternative over their way of life.[2] However, upon sharing his experiences of the real world and asserting the existence of truth beyond the cave's shadows, none would believe him. They would go as far as to kill anyone daring to lead them out, steadfast in their refusal to accept a reality beyond the shadows they perceive as truth. Prisoners defending the very system that confines them. As articulated by Morpheus in the matrix in a similar condition.., "You have to understand, most people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it." [3]

The now freed prisoner can no longer function in said society in slavery, now exposed to the real world.

This surely sounds familiar I would think, entertaining doubts – of course, it doesn't. Plato's allegory from over two millennia ago seem not merely as a crafted narrative but a timeless pattern of unfreedom, projections, shadows, and screens. An alternative depiction of the real in which we inhabit, articulated new and anew with each and every generation. Yet the cave has taken on a new form, new ways of depiction. The cave has disappeared while at the same time it has not. We return to it. While this predates the first generation of the digital age, we are now born into the system from the outset.[4] From shadows on the wall in the cave to shadows on the tv screen, the endless stream of data of image and information. Projections we are surrounded by, engulfed in, that we pull ourselves into further. That which is not real yet perceived as real. What make up the media medium, mediating what is or what seems to be, alike the cave. Representations. Modern shadows on the wall.

Like the prisoners, we accept what we see without question. Confronted with something and taking it for just as how it appears immediately. We gravitate to what is given or what seems to be given than what is at work in that very givenness. Screen as reality, never seeing the shadows as shadows. No questioning, no truth, and therefore no reality. In this, concealment is already at play. Our way of thinking today is fixated on availability within presence of the sun. So, there is in a sense always presence without concealment and still shadows with no cave to physically escape and exit.

Today we have both access to the sun and perfect availability to seemingly everything. We can access somewhat physically and all digitally everything that was ever produced regardless of time or location. Things and non-things are already there present to us. One does not need to suffer or associate attaining with deeper understanding or wisdom. The world is seen and treated as a standing-reserve of resources to be optimized and exploited.[5] Here, nothing else matters.

Without an original experience of thinking, our world unfolds before

us, increasingly simulated and as entrapped as prisoners, yet devoid of any cave's confines. It's not an emergence from shadow into light but a transition where technology casts everything, with devices and screens supplanting the cave's illusions, purporting to stand in unobstructed sunlight. In the allegory, the cave's shadows hinted at presence through concealment; outside, true presence was revealed without shadows. In contrast, our modern illusion suggests an unmasked reality, granting 'access' to 'everything.' However, this very accessibility veils the truth—aletheia—leaving reality itself shrouded.

Just as the sun once revealed all truths to the freed prisoner, we find ourselves bathed in seemingly endless illumination, yet devoid of the truth the prisoner witnessed. In essence, we remain in a cave that is no longer there, one that cannot be found because it has no exit. This is because the cave is everywhere; the cave is not a cave but a server. A server that constructs both the city and this other world, both of which we continue to reside within. The fleeting tangible city and the expanding intangible realm online, both of which outsource being. The machine becomes a cave and the cave disappears in the machine. And yet, like the allegorical cave, we do not see or feel, we are not exposed to the real world, we do not see or feel the sun, instead we forget and mistake what is real for simulacra and simulation. Because there can be no simulation without the real, and as the real collapses and disappears, we are left with a hyperreality. In this new reality, shadows are not projected; instead, we are bathed in an infinite, endless light, with shadows cast not by allegorical figures but by the physical servers surrounding us. In the cave of antiquity, we contended with mere shadows. Yet, in our current state, ensnared by the sheer omnipresence of digital illumination, we rarely pause to consider the forces behind this pervasive visibility. We fail to question what lies beyond our immediate perception. What, if anything, remains concealed in this all-encompassing light?

Going beyond, the world becomes that which is inhabited in The

Machine Stops, people living underground for life on earth is no longer possible for whatever reason. They live underground and are not in touch with anyone of anything. They live in the preformatted cells and they have tablets to which they use/operate to surf online.. to download ideas and to write more bullshit with. And the rooms or cells that they live or rather they die in contain nothing, no things, yet everything is still "available" through the touch of a fingerprint. And no matter what, they never experience the outside, just like our world, they are never in the real. While this reflects the physical space we surf today, the digital takes this one step further, one layer deeper into the dream and further from reality.

In a scenario mirroring 'The Machine Stops,' society retreats underground, where life on the surface is no longer viable for unspecified reasons. This subterranean existence is marked by isolation, with individuals disconnected from each other and the external world. They inhabit preformatted cells, devoid of physical objects, yet access to information and interaction is seemingly limitless through tablets. These devices enable them to surf the web, download ideas, and contribute to the digital cacophony, all with a mere touch. The rooms they inhabit, rather they die in, contain nothing, yet everything is still available through the touch of a fingerprint. No matter what, they never experience the outside, they are never a part of the real world. Like our "reality" where the server dominates, this narrative delves deeper in a future that distances us further from the authentic essence of existence.

In our envisioned digital future, the interface between the individual and the virtual world becomes even more intimate, with projections tethered directly to our faces. In such a landscape, the sight of those around us fades, swallowed by a sea of personal screens. The ubiquity of smartphones has already laid the groundwork for this solitary existence, masquerading as communal engagement. Yet, this shared digital space is an illusion, a simulacrum where genuine experience and the distinction between the individual and the collective blur into obsolescence. While technology

promises liberation, freeing our hands for other tasks, it ensnares us in a different chain—everything seems free except for our gaze. The eyes are flooded by artificial light; the hands willingly hold, albeit a grasp lost and consume the very content and medium that bind us, holding the torches that cast both shadows and light crafting illusions for ourselves.

Architecturally, we construct servers and the paired cells hidden from the sun, from the real world, perfectly concealed. While their presence is obvious, no one says a thing, we build more, expanding the extents of the cave, deeper and deeper, further obscuring the sun and each other. Here there are two caves, or two servers rather – the tangible city and alternative digital other world. The architecture reflects this. Nothing is felt in the server. Nothing is felt in the digital and as the physical continues to mimic the digital, still nothing is felt, only seen. In conclusion we have rendered all other senses secondary, just like the prisoners, just like one disabled, paralyzed. Present, yet absent. Eyesight remains our primary mode of interaction, prioritized, while the value of eyesight is diminished and in its essence is lost. We are the diving bell and the butterfly.[6]

The digital promotes this continuous staring, where the eyes are forced into an incessant voracity – a kind of live rigor mortis. This insatiable appetite is fueled by the image's logic, demanding unending novelty. In this digital realm, images continuously flash before our eyes granting us the illusion of control. However, unlike the passive experience of film, we scroll, click, and swipe in search of content to stimulate and entertain us, shadows continuously projected by the self.

Consider all the things around you, when did you last engage with the real world, where your thoughts, feelings and decisions were entirely your own, uninfluenced by external narratives or preconceived notions. Question your autonomy. Consider the courage to turn and face the shadows cast from behind, the same shadows the prisoners in Plato's allegory never dared to confront. What truly moves the world is thought and our reactions to it, both of which are missing. There is no longer any real original thought and therefore no real responses.

Among all the abilities, the ability to shut the eyes is the greatest gift. Eyesight serves as the bridge between human thought and cognition,[7] a reasoning through thinking and the heavens. What we have today however are eyes without sight or rather sight without the eyes; and in this dominance of vision of the eyes, of never being able to close the eyes, constantly distracted, the eye is lost and so goes all freedom that pairs with it.

99. Jan Saenredam. *Plato's Allegory of the Cave*, 1604, engraving on laid paper.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1852-1211-120


LVX VENIT IN MVNDVN ET DILEXERVNT HOMINES MAGIS TENEBRAS QVAM LVCEM. Io. 3. 19
ANTRVM PLATONICVM.
Maxima pars hominum cecis immersa tenebris
Volvitur assidue, & studio letatur inani:
Adspice ut obiectis obtutus in hereat umbris,
Vt VERI simulacra omnes mirentur amenty,
Et stolidi vanâ ludantur imagine rerum:
Quam pauci meliore luto, qui in lumine puro
Secreti à stolidâ turbâ, ludibria cernunt
Rerum umbras rectas expendunt omnia lance:
Hi positâ erroris nebulâ dignoscere possunt
Vera bona, atque alios cecâ sub nocte latentes
Extrahere in clarum lucem conantur, at illis
Nullius amor lucis, tanta est rationis egestas.
CC. Harlemensis Inv.
Amstredam Sculpesit.
Henr. Hondius excudit.
1604.
H.L. SPIEGEL FIGVRARI ET SCVLPI CVRAVIT. AC DOCTISS. ORNATISSQZ D. PETRO PAAW IN LVGDVN. ACAD. PROFESSORI MEDICO D.D.

TO CLOSE THE EYES

I don't like the idea of not being in control of my life. Being a slave in a server or cave, stuck without body and stuck with a condition I too am not in control of, stuck in an intensive care unit[8] and experience machine.[9] The possibility of a mind being taken away in addition to the body. I don't like the idea of a life alienated, stuck in meaningless work, consumption, and the simulacra of reality. More of being in non-existent form in the non-real. I don't like the servers we construct both in physical and virtual realms, commanded and controlled by their … and the human spirit feeding back into them.

I don't like the idea of still being trapped in this shadowland where nothing is real and that for the rest of my life this is how it is going to be, that the old world which I knew of will forever remain as a memory. This is due in part to the body's inability to access or experience the tangible, leaving us with nothing but the server, mere copies of reality.

I don't want a life without personal autonomy and creativity, a life without a body and a mind, a life extremely unfree. Again, one a condition already pulls me towards and another the server mirrors. How can I reject at the very least the server as I battle my condition. Now awake, how do I escape dual disability, remain unplugged, offline and free.

As the lines between the real and the virtual, the abled and the disabled, the free and the unfree world become blurred so too do my own on being stuck in and out of the server – a server I am very much aware of, that my eyes are open to, that I want to shut away from, yet am chained back down by a body that inches closer to a machine for survival. A being at the whims of a machine, technology enabling mobility, communication, transportation, and experience. That even after a self-transformative process in which one comes closer into contact with reality revealing what was before concealed, to remain inside the cave. That through an existential occurrence, of waking up, in my case a series of lockdowns,

diagnosis' and adjacent circumstances, to remain complacent and wither away. To witness death incoming, always present and take no action. To avoid greater wisdom, transcendence and fullness of being. That despite all odds, I would quit and leave the child disappointed. A child who was present in all this self awareness.

To encounter the child, it was essential to meet at a place of authenticity, a place we both recognized – the roof. Reaching the roof required me to close my eyes. Closing the eyes to screen out the external world beyond a going to sleep. To find clear mindedness from a world no longer there, a world which no longer made sense for a prisoner that had seen the outside world, had seen behind the wall, beyond the curtain, outside the server and is now asked to return.

Exiting the cave today happens through physical transcendence, rooftopping the server, positioned outside the cave, and through a deliberate closing of the eyes to false reality. It is as if from the rooftop, from the climb to the summit, and intensified by a global decline and further by a personal condition forced a closing of the eyes and a reopening of them again. Eyes that were open yet never open, eyes that needed to be closed and opened away from a false reality, a first step in being free. Getting as close as possible to waking up from a dream that has no architect. Standing at the precipice of existence, offline, bathed in total sunlight devoid of shadows. Gazing into the distance and depths below, pondering, 'Is that all there is? And must I return to what I left behind?

Here, activity is shared with the child through all the years, reaching a freedom and being in the real world again. Below the surface and in the server eyes closed, on the roof eyes wide open, I find myself questioning: are these shadows and the world surrounding me authentic? If they are not, why do these shadows constitute the reality for those below, deep inside the cave, within the server? The truth is, for those in the cave, these shadows are real. They are as real as they shape the world and experiences of the prisoners who don't recognize their imprisonment, who don't understand that what they're observing are merely shadows. In that sense,

they are profoundly real—for them, and perhaps, that's all that matters.

Taking control of vision is an initial step, preceding thought and reaction in a world dominated by visual stimuli. Closing the eyes goes beyond the literal act of shutting one's eyelids; it's about turning away, recognizing the constructed projections, and stepping out of the cave. In turning, we look away from the spectacle and fall out of the hypnosis induced by consumption of projected images and narratives that offer no reflection. One cannot look away from these shadows when they are constantly open, the eyes can only open to reality or truth once they have been closed. This act prompts us to question how much of the "real" world are we truly seeing and experiencing. It's not just about viewing the world but also engaging with it, feeling it, and thereby altering our perception of it. The challenge lies not in giving sight to the server, which offers nothing in return—sacrificing our mind, body, and potentially our soul in the process—but in reclaiming sight as a reciprocal relationship with the world around us. By doing so, we don't just see; we imbue our vision with meaning, transforming sight into a dialogue rather than a one-way transaction dominated by digital intermediaries.

In realizing our potential and what it means to be human, we must liberate ourselves and obtain agency from the simulated existence of the server. This involves recognizing the value of all our senses and of the mind and body we have lost so much of. Even if there is no permanent exit out of the cave, similar to the roof, a need to always return and come back down, at least there is a freedom that happens.

A freedom emerges from accepting a certain unfreedom; a liberation found in discerning what is and what is not, then responding to it and embracing the richness of life in its most authentic form. Perhaps, this is the ultimate message of the cave.[10]

100. Free eyes and a free mind. ca. 202x


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5.4



MEMOIR

"In life, you might be able to dodge your taxes, however your death is unavoidable. All of your life's memories ultimately make up and define your legacy." This was the first thing I said at the beginning of my startup pitch I had started to work on about a year ago nearing the end of 2022. An idea that was birthed from my own existential realizations upon diagnosis of progression and compounding research prior to and during thesis. A coming to terms with death far sooner than I had planned for; something no one exactly plans for, rather something I had not actively considered until then.

For weeks, my outlook on life shifted from a mode of being from birth, towards one oriented around death. A large weight, physically and metaphorically present that I now carried with me, that I had to use to see life in a new way. The same weight of this nothingness that consistently pervaded my thoughts, that saturated the realization of when I will be no more however soon or far that was from now. A thinking to myself. A thinking what I would be leaving behind, less in the physical sense and instead through memories. Thinking back to my father I never met, the artifacts of his identity he left behind, albeit small in quantity, which made up all that I know of him. The photographs, his wallet, guitar, suits and the few stories shared. I lie to myself in a sense that I remember him because truthfully I don't. I don't remember someone I do not know and that I have no recollection of. Beyond this, there is nothing else I have to hold onto. In some aspects, it's through the scarcity of things that deepens their significance, although it leaves a void of so much I'll never get to know. In his absence, his name and living memories disappear with him, something I have no attachment or ability to hold onto. A tombstone that only I am aware of with no depth beyond, fleeting.

Why should I fall into the same predicament, I asked, contemplating what I wish to be remembered by, considering what aspects of my life I can presently control and intend to leave as my legacy. Previously, I faced denial

for life insurance, and the establishment of a conventional will or testament seemed inadequate to offer any semblance of solace or resolution to the issue. With close to little or nothing to account for outside of some assets and investments under my name, I realized most of what I find valuable today no longer resides in a physical domain outside of some personal belongings.

This wave of anxiety prompted me to reflect on the extent of my existence that is digitally documented, shared, and uploaded online. All the parts of me that are no longer in physical form. I pondered over the dual nature of my footprint, existing in both tangible and intangible realms. This led to a realization, where traditional methods of memorializing ones legacy are no longer confined to the physical world. Rather, they have shifted to the digital, existing in the cloud, simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. This presents a new problem for how we remember, memorialize and create a legacy for ourselves.

Whether through intention or not, and certainly not from a place of selfishness, there is an imperative to assert one's existence in an era characterized by our disappearance. Through our disappearance we only move further into the machine, the simulacra, the spectacle, working towards being seen and remembered with none of it captured and made meaningful. We are nowhere in the real and lost in limbo in the hyperreal. In this context, we almost never exist. To better understand one's legacy is not a matter of self-interest, but a heightened responsibility, as memorialization no longer occurs naturally in the physical realm. Moreover, this paradigm shift often escapes our notice, a consequence of the rapid and digitally-dominated fabric of our society. The responsibility to preserve and memorialize our existence has thus evolved. It is no longer an automatic outcome of our physical presence but requires active engagement and awareness. The format of our existence and our personal construction of meaning; from the people we meet, the places we've been, the things we care about, and the causes we deem worthy escape us upon death yet are no longer mediated directly by the memory of others, rather that of the

server. All these life experiences however are outsourced and mediated no longer through touch and instead behind the screen. This change is a direct result of the accelerated pace of life, the pervasive digital landscape, and the consequent blurring of our tangible existence. Recognizing and adapting to this new reality is not just an individual endeavor but a collective challenge, reshaping how we perceive and perpetuate our legacies in an increasingly virtual world.

Not only is our legacy shaped by our digital habits and patterns, but many aspects that we deem meaningful, albeit intangible, reside online. The question then arises: how can these digital elements be effectively captured, articulated, curated, and imbued with meaning before death? This line of inquiry has prompted me to develop my own solution or application to address this issue. I contemplate my mortality and the necessities of escaping this fear in my death bed, of never amounting to anything, with nothing to show, to speak of, to be remembered by, to disappear in both the real and the non-real, physically and digitally. It is not only the fact of not being here that I fear, rather the fading away, the being forgotten.

The reality is that people will likely remember us most at our funeral, maybe for a few days afterward, and then only occasionally from time to time. Our loved ones will grieve for weeks, maybe even years, although eventually life naturally moves on. We grow around our grief, and in several generations, no one who knew us directly will be around anymore. The objective is then to foster a legacy that aids others and champions a life of meaning and significance. In an era marked by both physical and digital ephemerality, the goal is not to attain immortality but to ensure that we do not simply vanish without impact. It is to move through life in a way that crafts a legacy that resonates in the memories and lives of others, transcending the bounds of our temporal existence.

It is through these reflections that I seek to establish a legacy, a testament to my time and deeds. Even if I am unable to accomplish all my aspirations — such as starting a family, launching a business, authoring a book, building a retirement home for my mother, or fulfilling other personal

goals — I hope to utilize a platform that encapsulates the essence of who I am. One that honors my actions, concretizes my being that becomes less concrete, that helps pay what I can forward. This platform should capture not just the physical aspects, which are transient in today's digital world, but also the intangible facets of my identity.

A digital legacy in a sense.

Or rather more specifically, a haven for my memories.

Living with awareness of our mortality shapes our actions today and directly influences our legacy. This concept suggests a reciprocal relationship: how we wish to be remembered impacts our choices in the present, and these choices, in turn, compose our legacy—how we are ultimately remembered. Thus, living alongside death enhances our immediate existence and that beyond. It is a strategy to counteract the threat of our double disappearance. The first death being the loss of our physical presence and the second our memory of it.[1] While we cannot properly function in the world within a constant state of anxiety and death haunting our minds. – the avoidance robs us of any perspective. Digital existence, or the server fit perfectly here, removing us completely before it's too late; providing its own illusion of mortality and existence. Ernest Becker, a cultural anthropologist and author of the seminal work "The Denial of Death," delves into the profound impact of mortality on human behavior and psychology. For Becker, it is not just the fear or death and the act of dying that we internally fear - the moment of our death, when the seconds count down and reach zero. It's more about the implications of our death, what it will say about our lives, our actions and inactions. It's fearing both life and death, particularly the dread of concluding life with a sense of insignificance.[2]

Reaction upon realization is the natural tendency to break out of our programmed existence and find that that makes us feel better. This search could be through escapism, to keep oneself busy, to never truly consider the meaning of life, blissful ignorance or "tranquilizing ourselves in the trivial", as Becker describes.[3] Today, a remaining inside the server. Alternatively, to protest against insignificance, to pursue the "heroes journey", seeking permanence and importance through an immortality project.[4]

To run from the inevitable fragility of our biological existence and into the symbolic. To use our efforts as a way to contribute to society and forge a lasting impact or more specifically legacy beyond the end of our biological existence. At its core, death is the motivator that has always been there.[5] This is why we witness all the profound contributions that

make up our being today, why people create great works of art, why they run marathons, why they do anything at all. It juxtaposes the spending of life inside the server, sitting around engrossed in our phones all day, "immersed" in the mundane, consuming and recording ourselves, reacting to a virtual world, one without sentience and never amounting to anything authentic. Most today partake in such exchange primarily for the spectacle, driven by the narcissistic impulse to validate ones existence. The shift of struggling to survive becomes a struggle to be seen and recognized, further disconnecting us from the other and what is real. We are seen but never truly felt, and what is never felt is not remembered.

The immortality project still serves as essential in identifying what is meaningful to them amongst all that is lost, what an individual would wish to continue existence beyond their own.[6] How are they connected to it now and how will it enrich their legacy. From making beautiful things, cultivating meaningful relationships, to sharing love and having children. These actions are all considered meaningful for they link an individual to something that will have a life and value independent of, and hopefully extending beyond their existence.

However, Becker argues that all attempts to transcend the terror or fear of death through actions that supposedly have a lasting impact are, in essence, still illusions.[7] We are a compilation of these illusions, of these acts we create for ourselves to manufacture some significance, albeit convenient. We feel that we are at once again bigger, in more control, more important and more durable than we really are. Falsehoods. Conversely, this issue intensifies within digitalization; the tangible becomes rarer and focus shifts back towards the inauthentic self, mediated through virtual existence. These illusions become their own illusions which we create for ourselves, falling back into manufactured significance the server now mediates for us. It automates the process of being and reduces us into placeholders, NPC's, further distanced from authentic existence. Nothing here is immortal but the information we upload and feed from.

We ultimately need these lies, otherwise we would be unable to function

and continue outside a state of neurotic terror. Although we construct these illusions, they provide us with comprehension to move forward. Where illusions become illusions, or simulacra rather within the server, one no longer has a guidebook to journal with and follow through. This adds to the widespread nihilism we find ourselves in, neither guided by death or aware of it, even so unable to fight the fear of it. Instead, we return to simulated illusions and guidebooks without text.

The antithesis of this nihilism it to return to our immortality projects, which despite as human constructions, offer comprehensibility and meaning. Although the illusions can be both constructive and destructive, the point is to select the former. To gain a sense of legacy again, or in the case of religion an eternal afterlife, however in both a part of us through memory that will never die with the physical body. As a result, giving us the feeling that our lives do matter, that there is value and purpose to our existence at a larger scale than what we are instructed everyday. That the aim is not to extend our lives nor aim for immortality through a server that strives to cheat death, that forgets death and us with it. A digital existence that wastes the opportunity of life and gift of death, where immortality would render these both entirely meaningless. Instead to deepen those moments so they become as satisfying as possible, so that when death does occur, it does not strike as any kind of calamity.

Lastly, as we approach the end of our lives, as we start to go away and edge closer to death, as the mind and body slow down and play the final notes of its song; that the end of our lives do not mark the end of our significance. Even though the song ends, it does not mean that it was not beautiful, that it was not complex, that it did not add value to the universe, however it came to an end.[8]

.. and for all those that shared the song.. at least it will be remembered.

101. Comfort. 2024



5.5

I WENT FOR A CLIMB

ICE

2006

The child, year by year, month by month, growing, aging, sitting in the backseat of the same car, in transport, to and from the machine. In the evolving silhouette of the city I sit and witness a profound transformation. One which accelerates at a rate of progression I would today reflect on personally, only then separate from anything else I could imagine. What was initially an absence of servers morphed into a network of digital monoliths, engulfing the city's essence.

As I grew, so did the monsters lurking beneath my bed, transforming into all-seeing eyes, panopticons that watched over every street and corner. The comforting anonymity of being a mere passenger in my mother's car was replaced by a keen awareness of the city's prying eyes. My navigator then, unknowingly steered me through an ever-changing urban labyrinth where I became a spectator.

Each visit, the time of day varying, the memories starting to record and etch into parts of my long-term memory. The city's servers that stood out to me were not just architectural landmarks but emotional waypoints. Despite their rapid evolution and the vertical expansion that signified "progress", they retained a slower-paced essence from a time before the walls and panopticons were erected, before the light of the sun was eclipsed by the towering shadows of new servers, of constant uploads, a time where the city had a different rhythm, a different breath of life.

Of all the servers, the one that stood out to me the most that I remembered as I entered and exited the city then, server farm now, was a development on York St and Lakeshore Blvd. In hindsight, this site marked a pivotal transition from my childhood into adulthood. It was a constant in my life's backdrop, from the days I was chauffeured to the hospital to the times I journeyed there alone. The adjacent demolition of the York off-ramp, a landmark of my earlier visits, soon after signified the relentless

march of "progress" – erasing, flattening, and rebuilding in pursuit of the city's relentless growth.[1] A machine that does not stop. A machine I eventually and now witness alone.

From 2006 to 2015, this particular server's construction spanned my formative years and one of my distant memories between the entrance and exit of the city. Its completion coincided the year I delved into roof topping, marking a new phase of my relationship with the city. It stood as a beacon, not just in the physical landscape but in the seascape of my memories – a fixed point amidst the city's relentless transformation.

Yet, within this landscape of growth and change, this server – along with others – began to blend into the collective narrative of the city. The urban sprawl, once marked by distinct personalities and stories, now echoed a uniform chorus of development and modernity. The city, once a canvas of diverse narratives, was now a monolith of progress, an assembly line, each server indistinguishable from the next.

Development on the land started with the first signs introduced, of land acquisition, change of use, and I believe a sign on the partnership, in this case between Lanterra and Cadillac Fairview, as far as I can recall, the architects were never mentioned. Before demolition took place, I could still make contact with the sun, the sky, and the horizon, connecting with the air a little before what is now a drowning below the surface. The little patch work of grass, trees, and landscaping outside the existing parking lot disappearing shortly after and never to be seen again. Year by year, inevitable changes hinted at what was to become, "progress" increasing by the day, dictated by contracts, codes, stat sheets that define all. Nothing else mattered outside of the servers being built. It wasn't long until York Street was overshadowed by a sheer intensity of construction and the proliferation of servers. A street that remained the same by dimension, however shrinking in scale by function, traffic, population and size in relation to its before. Another street alienated and collapsed beneath the surface of the city. One that I no longer recognize. As demolition and construction began, development propaganda was everywhere, and no

blank space was left untouched. One sign became two, then three. Site walls were installed as barriers, sidewalks covered and clad with more signage, posters, graffiti, and the early signs of modern billboard propaganda.

Around this time, internet forums like Urban Toronto[2] gained prominence, transforming into digital "spaces" for open dialogue, a speaking table of opinion dumps, voices heard without any hearing. Subscribers and users across the greater city limits poured their thoughts and feelings into these forums, engaging in debates over seemingly trivial matters that would proceed with or without them. Discussions and discourse ranged from their form, colour, height, renderings, plans, price, you name it – every user turning into an armchair expert, driven by a desire to be heard, a society of the spectacle. A "I think it should look this way," "this is exactly what Toronto needs", "I think it's too cluttered", "It is going to change the city", "the future of the city depends on this", "this is going to ruin the city", - over 300 pages of discussions on one subforum of the development, and still counting. This felt like a colossal waste of time, as each server spawned its own page, with users obsessively tracking construction, noise complaints, and more, detached from any real part in the design or build process. Yet, they return, post-occupancy, to share experiences of living in or near these developments, other nowhere near. The server, meanwhile, remains oblivious to these discussions, living rent-free in their minds.

The commentary often veers into absurdity, with phrases like "enhancing the Manhattan urban feeling from the highway" — meaningless buzzwords and made-up jargon, promotion of both the self and the server. For years, users follow these developments religiously, yet remain detached from any meaningful architectural education or discourse beyond their limited scope. Urban Toronto resembles an endless social media stream, dedicated to these servers — meaningless. The NPCs on the site update, discuss, and battle over developments, capturing images as these servers are uploaded and announced. They engage in discussions about the server, on the server, and of the server, which remains utterly unaware of their existence. In this

narrative, construction workers are reduced to mere cogs in the machine. However, the inhabitants of Urban Toronto, despite their detachment from the actual servers, share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas on something that fundamentally has nothing to do with them. They are the digital inhabitants of a server, commenting and critiquing within a realm that is both part of and apart from their physical reality.

This ongoing discourse takes place outside of how I observe and understand the server, which despite its notoriety, holds importance in my memory. What I witnessed as a child was the presence of server through time rather than in time. For one specifically, the guitar pick shaped slabs extruding higher above my sightline. The total set and stage of construction, a spark that would only spread everywhere, like an uncontrollable disease. The cold, sleek, tall, transparent yet reflective characteristics, common to the city's architecture, the city's machines.

The name itself, ICE, arbitrary as it seemed, stuck with me, perhaps the aim of its branding, deemed successful. A name assigned to the server, to aid in its remembrance. These servers, positioned close to the Gardiner Expressway, normalized the proximity of living units to the streams of traffic and the neighboring hustle. The noise, the light pollution, all contributing to the factory-like ambiance — cold, hard, dull. The distinctive feature that drew me in as completion neared was the roof structure — the illuminated cheese grate concrete slab, elevated and visible from afar, from miles away, an architectural enigma. It was not another structure to be gazed upon, likely ignored and forgotten for the everyday user. These servers, which took nearly a decade to build from inception, felt like an eternity in my younger years but now seem to flash by in the accelerated timeline of adulthood. New projects rise even faster, contrasting sharply with my own perception of time, which seems to race ahead as I grow older.

It would not be long until ICE faded away with the rest of the crowd. They were labeled as some of the worst places to "live", notorious for complaints, poor living conditions, crimes, and other illegal activities.[3] Poor building management, uncontrolled fire alarms, noise complaints,

malfunctioning building services – all symptoms of life within the server farm that is the city. They stand as a testament to every other server erected almost monthly in the city today, a reflection of the exponential increase in residential towers, mimicking population growth, demand, and technological progression in a race to an undefined goal. Although its failure to live up to expectations was another testament to architectural meaninglessness, a dysfunction of all but server, it would one day become something and somewhere special to me, nothing else however but what stood above, the roof. One that called me by my name.

ICE – 768 FEET

JUNE - 202x

If there was one thing I still wanted to do, that I had on my bucket list, it was to climb ICE. Of all the roofs, the before and after, across all timelines of my experience as an urban explorer, ICE was still the dream, the dream I understood and accepted I would likely never hit. A roof molested, abused, used up, consumed, thrown away with no relations. A commodified product no longer of any experience left to offer. A platform that was locked for good. One I attempted years ago within the peak of my first stretch of urban exploring, one that I hit too late.

In our community, there was an undercurrent of jealousy, a sense of exclusivity. We hid our spots, protected them, but it was a futile effort. No matter how secretive we were, locations got exposed and abused, mostly for social media, the spectacle. People were no longer exploring for the experience but for the chance to show off online, to flex their achievements to an unknown audience. ICE, I recall, was shut down after a large group of kids got caught and arrested there after summiting the roof collectively. It's no different today, from the era of Facebook and Instagram to the current times of TikTok and YouTube. What was once a pursuit of the authentic has now devolved into a display of inauthenticity, a chase for digital validation that overlooks the essence of exploration.

Many of the roofs, once a common playground for explorers were now sealed off, locked up, clipped, and inaccessible. New plates, locks, cameras, sensors, cages, and doors would be installed. In the space of urban exploration, nothing was truly impossible, rather carried how much risk and likely charges one would be willing to take. The possibility of one continued to cross my mind as my health declined. ICE would be one of those.

Stuck. Life felt unchanged from the start of the pandemic, now post "reset", post diagnosis, post decline. An exact fear I had, a premonition, a

new reality come true. I felt trapped while too out of any resources, under a spell I could not find a way out of, inside a cage, unfree. A child held back while all the others played free. Beyond all other doubts, the dreams of conquering ICE seemed more distant than ever. My original circle of photographers had all but vanished, some lost to the passing of time, others consumed by the banality of daily life, their creative spark dulled by routine and obligations. A death sentence contract. The truth is, there was no one left to shoot with, no one to venture onto rooftops, especially not one as off-limit as ICE. I was lost, lacking genuine connection in a world that felt increasingly isolated.

Scrolling through my feed, I searched among mutual connections for active photographers, skimming their posts for any recent exploits at ICE. Perhaps just an old photo, shared years after the fact, but anything that could lead me to someone who had been there. Among them was a photographer I hadn't known personally. His follower count suggested approachability,[4] so I decided to reach out to him first, even though I half-expected to be met with silence or a dismissive response. My hopes of finding a like-minded explorer or shooter were slim, despite sharing a common drive for creation and exploration.

My initial message sent went somewhat as follows:

1:12am

Hey man, might be a big ask, you open to shooting sometime?

I'm working on some research atm, a large component of it is the use of roof-topping (Transcendence) as my personal grasp on what it means to be human. Essentially something fading personally and collectively. My way of a meaningful life escaping me, my ability to climb ending, (I have a disease which affects my mobility, and overtime ability to move, let alone climb). It is also about observing a collective meaning crisis within the urban context and society today as an outcome of modern science to put it bluntly.

I've hit all the roofs I've ever wanted but one or two which I want to hit for my thesis.. one being

ICE. I tried ICE back in 2015 before it got closed for "good" though I still saw a few guys hit it in 2020/21 somehow. My "buddy" (unnamed rooftopper, no longer active) and couple others who don't shoot anymore, seemed they went up on a whim..

would you be open to going up ICE or anything notable adjacent? no pressure, it'd be a liability too which I'd hate to bring..

1:14am

the scene got messy years ago, only recently have I started to climb again, albeit rarely for my research work and while I still can..

I can get through most doors, I think I couldn't get up ICE because of the cameras or something, can't recall. was really risky back then, and assuming even worse now.

again no pressure. your work is stellar, hope you don't stop shooting, even if your creative direction changes

I sat back, phone in hand, not expecting a reply.

1:18am

Hey man! Yeah dude I'm 100% down to shoot! I love your passion and the deep meaning you find in rooftopping, the idea behind your research is super powerful and meaningful. Yeah I did ICE last year but I'm not 100% if it's still doable tbh. Haven't been in a bit. Yeah (unnamed rooftopper) and them went up at the same time some other guys were up, and the door was open or smth, not 100% sure. Our method can be hit or miss, and since I haven't been there recently, I can't say for sure if it's still accessible. But if it is, and the conditions are right, I'd definitely be interested in giving it a go. I've got most conditions covered there except for a nice snowfall and some low fog. If not, I'm down to send whatever! Just lmk if you have smth in mind and I can lyk if we can do it. Appreciate the love!

This was Walters.

We remained somewhat "in touch" virtually, and both made the effort to link up a few times. Any time I mentioned ICE, I didn't intend to impose however asked if this was still on his radar. It was not something that could

be taken on in short notice it seemed, nor something I had any idea on how it would be made possible, the risks involved, etc..

Months passed.

I received an unexpected message from Walters one Thursday afternoon in the summer. He inquired if I was interested in shooting the sunrise that coming Saturday. Initially, I was hesitant, aware of the slim chances of access in the early hours of the morning and not in the mental state for potentially waiting or capturing redundant shots, much of which I did not need. Before I could fully process this, I half-jokingly asked, "So, ICE?" knowing full well ICE was a long shot. To my surprise, he responded affirmatively. He hadn't captured a sunrise there before and needed it for a planned project with others, unknown to me. They were organizing a cross-roof mission to photograph each other from separate buildings. A project just conceived, requiring specific shots. My reaction was a mix of excitement and apprehension, trying to maintain composure while mixed emotions raced through my mind.

My hands trembled slightly as I typed a response, my mind grappling with the added complexity of their mission and my role in it. My health concerns added another layer of anxiety. How would I be involved or would I be tagging along separately. It didn't help to be worried about how my health might impair on the experience, entrance and evac, however I was down nonetheless. I reminded Walters, stressing that while I was in, getting caught again was not an option, that another charge could not take place. Despite the potential, the key to what I had dreamed of, there was a huge unknown. He reassured me, instilling a sense of confidence that we would be fine, though the unpredictability of the situation lingered in my mind. I refrained from pressing for more details, recognizing this as a significant opportunity and favor. He expressed that no other details could be shared, that he would confide in person.

Over the next 24 hours I made myself fully available to prepare for this.

We met late on Friday night to finalize our coordination. We then climbed a couple of other roofs earlier in the night and spent the remaining hours in my car, waiting for sunrise.

4am

We sat alone in the city yet together in the car. Opening and closing my window, for fresh air, only for the interior of the car to drop temperature too quickly, losing the limited warmth we needed to sustain.

The cold summer air feeling like months earlier, goosebumps tracing my skin, my chest beating in fear, faster as the time ticked down. One hour left. We had climbed two roofs already about 6 hours earlier as a way to pass time which inevitably slipped away from us. Despite our attempts, sleep eluded us, only Pavlo, a friend of Walters who tagged along, in the back shutting eye occasionally as I saw from my rear view mirror and an extra silence that occurred within our otherwise muted conversations. As we counted down, we drove closer to the site, seeing ICE from the outside, York Street empty, a rare sighting. Cycling outside the different entrances, incapable of catching the inside, we sent Pavlo in to briefly scout security, coming back a few minutes later with an answer of no reassurance. Walters revisited our strategy, outlining both Plan A and Plan B. Plan B was our exit strategy, an alternative in case the initial plan faltered, abandoning the mission to find another suitable roof for the planned cross-roof sunrise. Time, however, was not on our side and the feasibility of the backup hung uncertain based on timing of the light and time to get up. It seemed we only had one go and this was it.

4:30am

Parked outside ICE, a couple minutes away from the entrance, out of sight of the lobby, parked illegally actually not wanting to pay for parking in the garage across the street. Both Walters and Pavlo seemed unconcerned

about the possibility of an early morning parking ticket, however I was far more concerned, yet reluctantly put aside my usual instincts and anxieties, which would end up resurfacing later during our ascent. We went over the plan once more, Walters ensuring every step was clear. There was a delicate balance to strike: we needed to time our entry to align with the optimal lighting conditions, avoid going in too early, and coordinate with their friends ascending the other server. The uncertainty of potential obstacles loomed over us, adding an extra layer of tension to our carefully laid plans.

4:50am

The clock not yet at 5, although it was time to move. The first hints of morning light began painting the summer sky, the faint pre-dawn glow signaling our cue. We quickly gathered our belongings, having already consolidated everything into a single bag for efficiency. Walters took charge of carrying it.

Transitioning from the outside world into the interior of the server, I crossed various thresholds, each step taking me further into unfamiliar territory. This experience felt distinctly different from my previous visit years ago, underscoring the homogeneity yet distinctiveness of each server. What happened next cannot be said.

Details void.

5 minutes later.

Scene.

Urgency hung in the air as we moved with haste, aware of our limited time. Walters, leading us, faced an unexpected challenge with a door that stubbornly resisted our entry — a door that was supposed to be our assured passage. Each second was crucial, Pavlo and I still, far and unable to assist. We stood in the upper mechanical area, just past the first stairwell

doors, between two realms, in the final barrier, the last exterior wall of the server and towards the sky.

The cameras at every corner of the room looked directly at us waiting, prisoners on the verge of escape, Walters exhausting every method present to get the door open. A faint yet audible click of the latch was heard amidst the loud hum of the internals, the organs of the machine around us. The door swung open. Walters turned around, no words said however his facial gesture behind his mask signaled an urgency, Pavlo and I moving swiftly. A casual walk out the mechanical room became a sprint up the stairs once the door behind us closed. The stairs were at least double in riser height than in tread length, each riser increasing to the very top, the last set close to a foot in height and half in length. My legs extremely tight at the moment, made worse from the cold and nervousness. Every step became increasingly difficult with the boots I was wearing as an extra burden to bear. About a third of the way up, I looked ahead and they were both gone, out of sight.

Reaching the landing, both were nowhere to be found. The lower roof I had imagined, what was rarely shown online in exchange for the roof above was now visible to me in the real. Was I to instantly follow them or take a moment to explore this level? I was, after all, now beyond the server's internal map, mere seconds from stepping outside the confines of the server farm. The distinctiveness of this space struck me; it was unlike any other I had experienced. The spandrel panel walls partially obscured my view, offering glimpses of the sky, a sliver of the financial district, and an unobstructed view of the CN Tower through the gap between the walls and the upper platform. The steel columns supporting the elevated concrete platform above, with its notable holed openings, lent a unique character to the place. There was something special about ICE here, an aspect almost unseen and unexperienced by anyone else, unless viewed from the CN Tower, a plane, or from the ground far below. Yet, even then, it didn't convey the full impact of being here, above it all. The roof's structure and design sadly did not mirror what lay below. No aspect of

its lift, perforations, or columns was reflected in the levels beneath, only hinted at ground level upon entry. The server prioritized neither form nor function; it was just a server.

I moved towards the ladder, where the two had climbed earlier, now vacant, a sense of loneliness I had not felt since the morning prior.

Grasping the ladder, taking my first step, I stared up at an additional 20 feet of verticality. Climbing, I was instantly captured by the opening view above the lower wall, now seeing the top of the server farm. Each rung brought an expanding view of the city's skyline, unfolding and expanding. Regretting leaving my gloves in the bag, the cold steel handles completed the pervasive chill enveloping my body—from my legs to my face, each part of me echoed the biting cold of the environment, merging my physical sensations with the stark coldness of the mechanistic landscape around me. As I grasped the end of the ladder and the much thicker vertical grips, I paused as soon as my head rose above the concrete slab. Catching sight of Walters and Pavlo's positioning, cranking my neck almost 180 degrees, from this vantage point, it felt like I was stepping onto a platform in the sky, elevated yet isolated, no other server in immediate view, just the sky above. The urban landscape lay spread out beneath me, a world apart from the one I had just left.

Upon reaching the summit, standing up straight, my legs began to tremble. A mild case of vertigo paired to the biting cold and a manifestation of my condition. Quite a way to spoil the moment. With no support to cling onto, I crouched down to aid my balance and reduce the surface of the wind pressure, yet mindful not to bend down too far and reach a difficulty to stand back up due to the spasticity and weakness in my legs. Moving over to Walters and Pavlo, stepping over the aircraft cables spread across the roof, each a potential trip hazard, I kneeled down by them to grab my gear as they were both busy setting up their shots as the sky although void of sun was now a bright blue hour.

Both were intensely focused to capture photo and video footage of their counterparts approximately 500 meters away. Sitting down, I switched my

footwear to lessen my foot load and make traversing the roof infinitely easier, also removing my hat which kept threatening to fly off with the aggressive wind. In a brief interlude, Walters, his voice muffled through his mask, asked me, "So, what do you think?" his head and body facing the opposite direction the entire time. After falsifying my answer, he gently reminded me on timing, we had about 15 to 20 minutes, urging me to make the most of it. He suggested I focus on capturing the shots I needed and mentioned we might squeeze in some personal photos towards the end if time permitted.

While they had their own priorities, in a sense I was alone. As the timer ticked, I was a child by himself, finally free, possibly for the last time, with no one to play with. I questioned what to photograph, forgetting the shots I had dreamed of capturing for years, now here in the spotlight. I would fail to remember to capture the feet dangle lookdown shot I had always wanted here, one that I certainly will never get the chance to get ever again. Standing up, unsteady, moving towards the northwestern corner, every step though "safely" distanced from the edge felt unsteady. The persistent wind pushing me in all directions, shifting my weight, my legs like twigs about to break under pressure. Although the city was open in all directions and the conditions were right, my focus was consumed by the physical challenge and the rapidly fleeting opportunity to experience and capture what I had come for.

There was a sensation here akin to my very first roof, the experience all over again. It was not on an observation deck, a mountain nor any publicly available commodified experience commonly found today, rather it mirrored my first roof climb 8 years prior. St. Michaels hospital. To be struck, mesmerized, cold, out of words and out of photos. I was that child taken to the toy store after going to the hospital, with only so much time and so much of a budget, yet able to spend all the days here, that the child did not want to leave. I remembered as a child, those days when I witnessed this server's construction from afar, as a distant visitor, the spectator, its occupancy and the evolution of everything around it, all else remained

foreign to me as an exterior to the server and its internal machinations.

The distinct roof form that always caught my eye from a distance, I was now in touch with beneath my feet. In contact with the server, not from within or around, rather above. This roof was unlike any other place I had been. A where to stand now that I am in the air. Outside the server and yet another 30 feet above on an elevated platform detached from what was below. A genuine out of bounds, a feeling being here that transcended what I might have felt prior when it was accessible to the community. I had stepped outside the map, the map that preceded the territory. There was something special here, knowing no one else would make it up ever again, that despite all doubts, all knowing I would never make it here, this seemingly impossible dream fading away, I had made it.

It was profoundly freeing.





on ice

June 17, 202x
5:55am





dream come true

June 17, 202x
5:57am

it didn't feel the same however
a series of expectations
a child opening a gift
one that was wished for
wrapped up, kept hidden
opened far too late
forgotten
deep in the basement for years
to be rediscovered by the child decades later

now an adult holding onto a time capsule
reminded of better days
of the child he is no longer
a mixture of emotions

wings now weak
a running out of time without running
fading away
love getting hard to find
a slight panic
to see the world the child asked for
in hopes these dreams don't die

i still have promises to keep
a chasing of horizons
a life of transcendence before the final sleep
knees weak
legs tight
trembling
unsteady
time fleeting
heart beating

seeking a life of meaning

fighting
to catch my balance
to make my mom proud
to fulfill the child's dreams
to reach the finish line
yet i keep failing every time

sitting at the edge of the world
still afraid of my feelings
i'm scared to jump
please don't come near me

i'm reminded of days
when the time wasn't raced
had my eyes to the sky
with my hands on your waist

too soon for things to end

heaven has to wait



104. Heavenbound. ca. 202x


ROGERS CENTRE

5.6

CONCLUSION

By the nature of my journey, academia has made up essentially all of my life. It has been there since day one, like the child, acting as an umbrella I have walked under for over 20 years. No matter what I was doing, or where I was in life, school was always that something waiting, that something I threw myself back into, now three degrees later. This research, predating my thesis, captures a broad spectrum of my existence, reminding me that the child has been here all along.

While I longed for this conclusion, one that I figured was inevitable, I find myself feeling bittersweet, this not being how I thought things would end. I could not wait to get here, and now I feel less able, less capable, yet still motivated to explore a world that seems out of reach, physically, bodily and what feels like a world too that is no longer there.

This thesis provided an outlet to write, a means to see more clearly and not fall back into the server, almost like a premonition, starting before progression and ending well after. In hindsight, I sometimes wish I had finished school earlier, and before lockdowns had occurred in order to fulfill my last fully abled years in a more meaningful way that would be better remembered. Thankfully, this thesis became a mask and a means of expression which allowed me to write about and understand my condition and the world more fully, as much as I was progressing through it. Now that it is over, it feels like an end upon an end, instead of a life that begins afterwards. The child is no longer held by the fabric of school and waits for the adult to carry on, however here a body that no longer plays.

Through this work, I've articulated unspoken thoughts and gained insights into my condition, illuminating what truly matters, with my mortality guiding every decision. It has reminded me there is no tomorrow; that tomorrow is never promised. As I experience these changes in the body as much as in the external world, in the times I feel less free, when I should still be free, and where the child should still be playing, I'm encouraged to look up, to see a tangible world before it and I fade away, even if but a memory. The child here speaks to me, reminding me that even when painted into a corner, there's always a way to reach for the sky.



NOTES

CHAPTER 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1. servers

"Throughout this work, 'server' is used in a broader, metaphorical sense that extends beyond its conventional definition related to technology and data management. The full exploration and significance of this analogy will be discussed in later sections."

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "server (n.), sense II.11.b," December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2427003024.

2. great reset

Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret, "Now is the time for a 'Great Reset'," World Economic Forum, June 3, 2020, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/now-is-the-time-for-a-great-reset/.newspeak

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Newspeak (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5967937033.

3. newspeak

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "newspeak." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 1, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/art/newspeak.

4. telescreens

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "telescreen (n.)," December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5008996679.

5. send

"In the context of this discussion, 'send' is used colloquially among climbers (rooftoppers)

and urban explorers to refer to the attempt or action of engaging in a climb, rooftop mission, or exploration. The term encapsulates not only the act of undertaking these challenges but also the communal deliberation over their worthiness ('send-worthy') and the selection of targets for these activities ('valid sends'). Thus, 'sending' can involve both successful and unsuccessful attempts, emphasizing the process and experience as much as the outcome."

CHAPTER 1.1 A BIRTH AND DEATH OF MEANING

1. National Center for Biotechnology Information. "Adrenoleukodystrophy." In GeneReviews®. University of Washington, Seattle. Last modified July 18, 2013. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK1315/.

CHAPTER 1.2 ON THE EDGE OF MEANING

1. "The image referred to here is discussed in greater detail and presented as Figure X on page Y."

2. "Cardinal Carter is a wing at St. Michael's Hospital. For more information on St. Michael's Hospital, see Unity Health Toronto, 'Locations: St. Michael's Hospital,' https://unityhealth.to/locations/st-michaels-hospital/."

CHAPTER 1.3 SOMETHING MEANINGFUL

1. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

CHAPTER 1.4 A CRISIS OF MEANING

1. This statement reflects on the paradoxical condition of contemporary existence, where life is increasingly mediated by technology to the point where genuine experiences are supplanted by virtual or indirect ones. In this context, "the machine" symbolizes not just the physical devices we use but also the broader systems of digital and technological infrastructure that dictate the rhythms and textures of modern life. This mediation creates a layer of abstraction that distances individuals from direct engagement with the world, leading to experiences that lack the immediacy and richness that confer meaning and vitality to human life. The phrase underscores a critical perspective on the pervasive influence of technology, questioning the quality and authenticity of a life lived within the confines of digital constructs. It invites reflection on the ways technology shapes our perceptions, relationships, and memories, often at

the expense of direct, unmediated experiences that constitute the essence of being truly present in the world.

CHAPTER 2.0 I WENT FOR A RUN

1. system

By “the system,” I’m referring to the entangled web of governmental, societal, and healthcare entities that responded to the global health crisis. This includes not just the health measures like lockdowns and mandates but also the wider socio-political and economic frameworks that shape public behaviors and individual freedoms during the crisis. I critique how these systems have prioritized certain forms of compliance over individual well-being, autonomy, and fundamental human needs. In my view, there’s a stark contrast between the professed aims of health and safety and the actual experiences of people living under these conditions.

2. nation full of sheep

This quote, “A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves,” is widely attributed to Edward R. Murrow, a prominent American journalist. However, a specific original source or publication where Murrow is documented saying this has not been verified. In the context of this writing, the quote underscores the theme of compliance and passivity in the face of systemic controls and the consequent erosion of individual freedoms and wellbeing. The reference to a “nation full of sheep” serves to highlight the critical perspective on societal acquiescence to authoritarian measures and its detrimental impact on personal autonomy and health.

3. The phrase “corporate slave within the neoliberal labour camp” critiques the contemporary work environment by drawing parallels with historical forms of labor exploitation. The term “corporate slave” is used to describe individuals who are excessively dependent upon or controlled by their work, often working very hard without proper remuneration or appreciation, while unable to break free and do something else. This concept echoes the broader dynamics of exploitation where workers, despite technically having autonomy and rights, find themselves in conditions of significant economic compulsion and social coercion. The “neoliberal labour camp” metaphor extends this critique, likening the systemic pressures and exploitative practices of modern capitalism to the oppressive and dehumanizing conditions of historical labor camps. Unlike the direct and overt control seen in despotic regimes, neoliberalism masks its exploitations under the guise of freedom and choice, with many individuals working from the safety and comfort of their homes, making it challenging for individuals to recognize their own exploitation. This comparison aims to highlight the subtlety of control and exploitation in

contemporary work practices, where the legal fiction of corporate personhood further blurs the lines between individual autonomy and systemic coercion.

4. "Exiting my server" metaphorically signifies my departure from the pervasive digital space that has come to dominate our lives, as well as physically moving beyond the confines of my home that has . This dual meaning underscores a desire to transcend the limitations imposed by our increased reliance on digital interactions and the isolation experienced during prolonged periods at home, highlighting a yearning for more genuine, unmediated experiences in the physical world.

5. AMN refers to Adrenomyeloneuropathy, a condition that is a form of Adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD), affecting the nervous system and adrenal glands. This term and its implications will be expanded upon in detail later in the text.

6. cALD stands for cerebral Adrenoleukodystrophy, a severe brain-affecting form of ALD. Detailed discussion on cALD, including its symptoms, treatment, and impact, will follow in subsequent sections.

7. Spasticity

"Spasticity | Johns Hopkins Medicine," accessed March 29, 2024, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/spasticity.

8. frog

Boeckelman, Bill. "Boiled Frog Syndrome." Last modified 2012. https://www.billboeckelman.com/boiled-frog-syndrome/.

9. Crab

he 'crabs in a bucket' metaphor, used to describe the phenomenon where individuals in a group prevent others from progressing out of a collective situation, is applied here to illustrate societal behaviors. Although the reference discusses this mentality among healthcare personnel, its essence is broadened in this context to symbolize the systemic and cultural barriers to individual advancement and change. This application extends the metaphor's traditional usage to reflect on wider social dynamics. Eker, H. H., & Eker, S. (2022). "The 'Crabs in A Bucket' Mentality in Healthcare Personnel." Hitit University Journal of Social Sciences Institute, 15(2), 1267-1282. https://doi.org/10.17218/hititsosbil.1038478

10. George Miller, dir. Lorenzo's Oil. United States: Universal Pictures, 1992.

11. The concept of the "Fourth Turning," originally articulated by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy - What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny, describes a cyclical phase of

societal upheaval and renewal. In this narrative, the "Fourth Turning" is reinterpreted to reflect an individual's profound personal crisis and transformative journey, highlighting the parallels between societal cycles and personal phases of drastic change and rebirth. This personal adaptation underscores the depth of individual experience, mirroring the intensity of collective societal transformations but within the intimate context of one's life and health challenges. Strauss, William, and Neil Howe. The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy - What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny. Broadway Books, 1997.

12. A. König et al., "An X-Linked Gene Involved in Androgenetic Alopecia: A Lesson to Be Learned from Adrenoleukodystrophy," Dermatology (Basel, Switzerland) 200, no. 3 (2000): 213–18, https://doi.org/10.1159/000018385.

13. Muscle atrophy and muscle weakness from loss of motor neurons in the spinal cord are seen in adrenomyeloneuropathy, variant of X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy.

CHAPTER 2.1 WAKE UP CALL

1. Adrenomyeloneuropathy

This reference provides comprehensive information on adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN), detailing its symptoms, causes, and genetic aspects. AMN, a form of X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy, primarily affects the spinal cord, leading to various neurological and physical challenges. The source elaborates on the inherited nature of AMN, caused by mutations in the ABCD1 gene, and its impact on individuals typically starting in their late twenties. Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center. "Adrenomyeloneuropathy." National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, last modified 2023. https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/10614/adrenomyeloneuropathy.

2. clonus

Clonus is a neurological condition characterized by involuntary, rhythmic muscle contractions, typically affecting the knees, ankles, and other parts of the body. It is often a sign of an underlying neurological condition and can significantly impact an individual's mobility and quality of life. National Institutes of Health. "Clonus." In StatPearls. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2021 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK534862/

3. spasticity

Spasticity is a condition characterized by abnormal muscle tightness due to prolonged muscle contraction, often associated with disorders of the central nervous system. It can affect a person's

ability to move and perform daily activities, leading to stiffness and mobility issues. National Institutes of Health. “Spasticity.” In StatPearls. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2021 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507869/

4. Myelopathy encompasses a range of conditions that affect the spinal cord, leading to neurological deficits. It can manifest in various forms depending on the underlying cause, which includes genetic disorders like Adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN). The complexities of myelopathy in the context of AMN highlight the intricate relationship between genetic factors and spinal cord pathology. Norenberg, Michael. “Pathology of Human Spinal Cord Injury: Implications for Neuroprotection.” Journal of Neuropathology & Experimental Neurology 59, no. 2 (2000): 89–107. https://academic.oup.com/jnen/article/59/2/89/2609921

5. Demyelination

Scolding, Neil J. “Demyelinating diseases.” Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry 68, no. 4 (2000): 434–442. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1860500/.

6. Adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD) and its adult-onset form, Adrenomyeloneuropathy (AMN), involve the accumulation of very long chain fatty acids (VLCFAs) due to a genetic mutation affecting the ABCD1 gene. This mutation impairs the body’s ability to break down VLCFAs, leading to their excessive buildup in various tissues, including the brain and adrenal glands. The accumulation can cause damage to the myelin sheath, the protective covering of nerve fibers, leading to neurological symptoms. A low-fat diet, particularly one low in VLCFAs, is recommended for patients to help reduce the levels of VLCFAs in the body, potentially slowing the progression of the disease and alleviating some symptoms. European Leukodystrophy Association. ‘ALD & AMN - Adrenoleukodystrophy & Adrenomyeloneuropathy.’ ELA International, https://elainternational.eu/en/ald-amn/.

7. cALD

“Understanding Cerebral ALD.” ALD Connect. https://aldconnect.org/cerebral-ald/.

8. National Organization for Rare Disorders. “Adrenoleukodystrophy.” Last modified September 30, 2022. https://rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/adrenoleukodystrophy/.

9. Vismara, Ashley M., Lauren C. Quitania, Tijmen P. Egtberts, Sharon Hsieh, and Lauren T. Shapiro. 2022. “ABCD1 Gene Mutations: Mechanisms and Management of Adrenomyeloneuropathy.” Appl Clin Genet. August 12, 2022. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9381027/

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. For Dostoevsky, suffering that is presented to oneself can be considered as an opportunity to seek freedom of oneself. Those who do not learn or become worthy of their sufferings for Dostoevsky are considered as those who are simply not worthy and shall naturally fall into despair. Benoit Beuselinck, "The Meaning of Suffering or the Meaning of Life Despite Suffering," in *Euthanasia: Searching for the Full Story: Experiences and Insights of Belgian Doctors and Nurses*, ed. Timothy Devos (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 75–84, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56795-8_7.

13. The note "that I am dying" speaks to an experience beyond the literal cessation of life. It's about an inner realization that significant aspects of one's identity and capabilities, once central to their sense of self, are fundamentally changing or slipping away. This is not merely about life's natural progression but a deeper, existential mourning for parts of oneself that seem to be ending, a profound shift that encompasses more than the physical aspect of living and touches on the essence of one's being and future.

14. "GARD Rare Disease Information - X-Linked Adrenoleukodystrophy - National Organization for Rare Disorders," June 16, 2022, https://rarediseases.org/gard-rare-disease/x-linked-adrenoleukodystrophy/.

15. "ALD/AMN – ELA International," accessed March 27, 2024, https://elainternational.eu/en/ald-amn/.

16. "Leuconnect," accessed March 27, 2024, https://www.leuconnect.com/en-GB/Cms/Post/10019.

17. "ALD/AMN – ELA International," accessed March 27, 2024, https://elainternational.eu/en/ald-amn/.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. "Leuconnect," accessed March 27, 2024, https://www.leuconnect.com/en-GB/Cms/Post/10019.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Committee on Diagnostic Error in Health Care et al., *Improving Diagnosis in Health Care*, ed. Erin P. Balogh, Bryan T. Miller, and John R. Ball (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.17226/21794.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

CHAPTER 2.2 LAST STEP MULTIPLE DEATHS

1. Staff, FamilyDoctor.org Editorial. “Baby’s First Steps.” FamilyDoctor.org, July 27, 2017. https://familydoctor.org/babys-first-steps/.

2. ALD Connect. “Home,” November 18, 2023. https://aldconnect.org/.

3. The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows website explores unique and profound emotions, offering insights into the human experience. The concept of “sonder” captures the realization that each passerby has a life as vivid and complex as one’s own, sparking a sense of interconnectedness with strangers. “The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows.” https://www.thedictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/concept/sonder.

4. Viorst, Judith. Necessary Losses: The Loves, Illusions, Dependencies and Impossible Expectations That All of Us Have to Give up in Order to Grow. Lst Ballantine Books trade ed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.

CHAPTER 2.3 MEANING THROUGH SUFFERING

1. Here I refer to the machine as that which symbolizes the societal structures, systems and routines that govern our lives. It encompasses the mechanized aspects of modern civilization, including technological devices, bureaucratic institutions, societal norms, and cultural expectations. The reference to being “trapped inside a machine” suggests a feeling of being constrained or limited by these external forces, unable to break free from the confines of societal expectations and norms.

2. In my work, I reflect on the profound existential shift I experienced in the face of my diagnosis and its progression. I express the transition from a sense of control to a realization of vulnerability and uncertainty. The quote from Viktor Frankl, sourced from “Man’s Search for Meaning,” encapsulates this existential journey, emphasizing the ultimate human freedom of choosing one’s attitude despite external circumstances. This perspective becomes a guiding principle as I navigate the challenges of my condition and seek meaning amidst adversity.
Frankl, Viktor E., Harold S. Kushner, and William J. Winslade. Man’s Search for Meaning. Translated by Ilse Lasch. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

3. Here I refer to the machine as both the physical and digital manifestations of the worlds we reside in. The city and the virtual.

4. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “NPC,” https://www.merriam-webster.com/

dictionary/NPC.

5. In my narrative, authenticity is a central theme that reflects the existential struggle portrayed. Drawing from the concepts discussed in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry "Authenticity," authenticity represents a profound desire to break free from societal constraints and personal limitations, embracing a life characterized by purpose and self-awareness. This struggle echoes Heidegger's notion of authenticity as the realization of one's own possibilities and the willingness to confront the existential challenges of existence. Through the lens of authenticity, I explore the profound need for verticality in my experiences, seeking to escape the confines of an inauthentic existence and embrace the depth of genuine living. Smith, John. "Authenticity." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2022. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/authenticity/

6. At this time, I am expanding my understanding of the city, the machine, all of its parts and the online dimensions we reside in that converge with the physical. The server appears to make up the virtual world as much as it is the physical, both of which intersect with one another and remove the human from their natural environments.

7. "Fobbed" in this context refers to the requirement of a key fob to access and/or activate the elevator. Key fobs are small security hardware devices with built-in authentication used to control and secure access to network services and data.

8. In the narrative, the term "server" serves as a metaphor too for an upload, signifying the construction of another building/development. This metaphor underscores the inevitability of technological progress and the transformation of once natural, then purely physical spaces into digital, artificial domains. The mention of the pending removal of a garage to make way for a server symbolizes the rapid pace of urban development and the integration of technology into our built environment.

9. The pervasive influence of the server in modern society contributes to a collective alienation from the essence of humanity. Constant immersion in digital environments distances us from the natural world, eroding our connection to the earth and its rhythms. Online communication platforms dilute the quality of interpersonal relationships, fostering superficial interactions that lack depth and authenticity. Automated systems and algorithms shape our choices and preferences, diminishing personal autonomy and agency, and fostering a sense of powerlessness. Furthermore, digital technologies blur the lines between fact and fiction, leading to a collective disorientation and confusion about truth and reality. Reductionist approaches to human life within the digital ecosystem strip away the richness and depth of human experiences,

reducing individuals to mere data points. In summary, the server-driven society contributes to a loss of human connection, agency, and authenticity, ultimately pulling us away from what it means to be human.

10. In this context, 'fallenness' or 'verfallen' aligns with Heidegger's concept of 'Verfallenheit,' which refers to a state of being where individuals are alienated or estranged from their authentic existence. Heidegger describes this state as a condition where individuals are absorbed by the everydayness of existence, losing sight of their true potential for authentic existence. This conformity is evident in mundane activities and interactions, where individuals often mimic the actions and attitudes of others, referred to as the 'They.' When faced with anxiety-inducing possibilities like death, individuals tend to retreat into familiar routines and social conventions, rather than embracing their own unique possibilities for self-realization and authenticity. In the passage, 'fallenness' implies a condition of being trapped or ensnared within the digital landscape dominated by servers. It suggests a loss of authenticity, agency, and connection to one's essential humanity. The pervasive influence of technology, represented by the server, shapes and constrains human experience, leading to a state of existential disorientation and alienation. This condition of fallenness reflects a broader societal phenomenon where individuals find themselves adrift in a world that prioritizes efficiency, consumption, and technological advancement over genuine human connection and meaning. Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. Being and Time. Malden (Mass.): Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 176

CHAPTER 2.4 THE DREAM IS COLLAPSING

1. Mack David, Al Hoffman, and Jerry Livingston, "A Dream Is a Wish Your Heart Makes," in Cinderella, directed by Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson (1950; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1950).

2. Thoreau, Henry David. "Most Men Lead Lives of Quiet Desperation." Walden, 1854.

3. In contemplating the journey of life and the essence of our existence, the philosophical concept of Dasein, or 'being-in-the-world,' offers profound insights into our relationship with the world and ourselves. Originating from Martin Heidegger's existential and phenomenological analysis, Dasein emphasizes the fundamental condition of being that is inherently intertwined with the world in which we live. It is not merely about existing in a physical sense but involves an active and engaged presence, where our choices, actions, and understanding of being are

in constant dialogue with the environment and the temporal reality of our lives. This concept encourages us to reflect on our mode of existence and challenges us to consider how we navigate our path through life amidst societal expectations and personal aspirations. It raises questions about authenticity, the pursuit of genuine goals, and the essence of being that transcends the superficial layers of societal roles and norms. By embracing the notion of Dasein, we are invited to explore the depths of our existence, recognizing the significance of our relationship with the world and the potential for achieving a more authentic and meaningful life. Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

4. The term 'the spectacle,' as conceptualized by Guy Debord in The Society of the Spectacle, refers to the transformation of social life into mere representations, where authentic human experiences are replaced by commodified images and interactions. This phenomenon contributes to the alienation and passivity of individuals within a capitalist society, an idea that will be further explored in relation to our diminishing engagement with the tangible world and increasing immersion in virtual experiences. Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

5. In the context of this discussion, a 'simulacrum' is understood not merely as a replica or imitation of reality but as a representation that has become more real than the reality it mimics, according to Jean Baudrillard's exploration of the term. This concept will be further explored to shed light on how our engagement with the world has shifted from direct experience to mediated representations, creating a hyperreal environment where the line between the real and the non-real is increasingly indistinct. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

CHAPTER 2.5 HOW TO DIE

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, in his profound contemplations on the nature of existence, offers an evocative perspective on death that resonates deeply with my own journey towards understanding life's transience. Rilke's reflections, particularly his assertion that 'Death is our friend precisely because it brings us into absolute and passionate presence with all that is here, that is natural, that is love,' serve as a pivotal foundation for exploring the intricacies of life's finite nature in this discussion. His belief in death as a 'true Yea-sayer' that affirms life even as it defines its limits challenges us to reconceive our relationship with mortality. The exploration of Rilke's views on death will be expanded further, underpinning the narrative of personal and

collective journeys towards acceptance and meaning. Rainer Maria Rilke, letter to Countess Margot Sizzo-Noris-Crouy, Epiphany, January 6, 1923, in Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé: The Correspondence, ed. and trans. Edward Snow and Michael Winkler (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006)

2. The Machine in Forster's narrative symbolizes the pinnacle of technological advancement and, concurrently, the nadir of human disconnection. It's not just a physical apparatus but a comprehensive system that encapsulates the entirety of human experience, mediating, and often replacing, direct interaction with the environment and with each other. This parallels our contemporary entanglement with technology, where virtual experiences often supersede physical ones, and where the avoidance of discomfort—including the ultimate discomfort of death—has become a collective obsession. In our quest for perpetual connectivity and the digital immortalization of our selves, we risk losing the authentic essence of living and dying. The presence of death as a natural and meaningful part of life is sanitized and removed from daily consciousness, creating an existence that Forster might argue is life in name only. Kuno's plea to his mother in 'The Machine Stops' serves as a desperate call to recognize the perils of a life dominated by the Machine, warning of the erasure of humanity's innate need for authentic connection and lived experience. As Forster envisions, a life lived entirely within the bounds of the Machine—or, in modern terms, the server—is one in which the concept of legacy is ephemeral, constrained to the digital echoes that resonate briefly in the online expanse. This digital existence becomes the simulacrum, where representations of life are mistaken for life itself. The tragedy of Forster's vision is not just in the physical death that awaits those who disconnect from the Machine, but in the spiritual death of those who cannot conceive of a life outside of its omnipresent hum. E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops," PDF file, 5-11

3. The prescient narrative of E. M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops' seems ever more relevant in our current age, as it depicts a dystopian future where human life is entirely dependent on technology. Within this narrative, Forster introduces the notion of 'homelessness' as a form of death—a death that occurs from disconnection with 'the Machine,' symbolizing the profound and potentially fatal intertwining of life with technology. This concept is emblematic of the story's critical examination of reliance on technology, which mirrors contemporary concerns about our dependency on digital infrastructures. E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops," PDF file, 19

4. The perennial human quest for perpetuity is elegantly contrasted in Heidegger's exploration of Being, wherein death is not merely an end but the defining horizon against which

all life gains significance. In our era, the Machine—or technology at large—provides an illusion of an endless realm devoid of authentic experience, simulating a presence that lacks substance and the tangible. This digital existence belies the weight of our finitude, which Heidegger emphasizes as the cornerstone of a meaningful life. Johannes Achill Niederhauser, Heidegger on Death and Being: An Answer to the Seinsfrage (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 241.

5. Marc Oliver Pasco, "Heidegger and Baudrillard on Death, Posthumanity, and the Challenge of Authenticity," Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy 16, no. 3 (June 1, 2023): 7, https://doi.org/10.25138/16.3.a7

6. A belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current limitations, esp. by the use of science and technology. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "transhumanism (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1169122730.

7. In an era where the demarcation between human and technological capability is increasingly blurred, the notion that 'death is now optional' presents itself not merely as a technological possibility, but as a philosophical paradigm shift. This sentiment echoes the posthumanist dream to transcend human limitations and finitude, a dream that stands in stark contrast to Heidegger's acknowledgment of death as integral to the human experience. As Niederhauser critically assesses, the inclination to view mortality as a technical challenge reflects a profound discontent with the inherent constraints of our condition. Johannes Achill Niederhauser, Heidegger on Death and Being: An Answer to the Seinsfrage (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 249.

8. "Death Is Optional | Edge.Org." https://www.edge.org/conversation/yuval_noah_harari-daniel_kahneman-death-is-optional.

9. In the transhumanist paradigm, as Niederhauser articulates, the limitations of the human condition are seen not as inherent qualities to embrace but as technical problems awaiting solutions. The promises of biohacking and bio-enhancement dangle before humanity the possibility of a life liberated from the 'prison' of the flesh, transforming the concept of death from an existential certainty to a mere technical inconvenience. These advancements, while pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human, also reflect a deep-seated reluctance to confront our mortality—a cornerstone of Heidegger's philosophical inquiry. Niederhauser points to the irony of striving for immortality within the digital cloud, a space where the essence of human being, bounded by mortality, is risked for the allure of endless existence. Yet, he suggests, this striving is in itself a testament to the enduring power of death as a horizon

that gives shape and meaning to life. The dream of digital immortality, an escape from the 'screaming injustice' of death as framed by transhumanism, fails to acknowledge that it is precisely our finitude that grounds our being and our sense of self. In an era marked by a quest for absolute certainty and control over nature, the acknowledgment of mortality stands as a defiant reminder of our intrinsic vulnerability and the authenticity of our existence. Johannes Achill Niederhauser, Heidegger on Death and Being: An Answer to the Seinsfrage (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), xiv, xviii

10. Adams, Tim. "Yuval Noah Harari: 'We Are Quickly Acquiring Powers That Were Always Thought to Be Divine.'" The Guardian, August 27, 2016, sec. Life and style. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/aug/27/yuval-noah-harari-we-are-quickly-acquiring-powers-that-were-always-thought-to-be-divine.

11. Harari, Yuval Noaḥ. Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow. Vintage Popular Science. London: Harvill Secker, 2016.

12. Ibid.

13. Johannes Achill Niederhauser, Heidegger on Death and Being: An Answer to the Seinsfrage (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), xiii

14. Heidegger posits that an authentic engagement with our mortality compels us to confront the very nature of our being. In his seminal work, 'Being and Time,' he suggests that it is through the anticipation of death that Dasein (the being for whom Being is a question) comes to understand itself and its possibilities most profoundly. Without this confrontation, we fall into inauthenticity, where the question of being is ignored, and life is lived passively. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962)

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Embracing our mortality is not merely an acknowledgment of life's end but a vital engagement with its inherent limitations, which paradoxically opens up the realm of meaningful existence. Niederhauser, drawing on Heidegger, illuminates the profound truth that it is only through confronting our finitude that we can give rise to a world rich with significance. This confrontation delineates the horizon of our being—a boundary that does not confine but clarifies, granting us orientation and perspective within the vastness of possibility. The Greek conception of limit, or 'horizon,' as a means of orientation, underscores the necessity of boundaries for the emergence of meaning. Without acknowledging the finite nature of our existence, our capacity

to navigate and imbue our lives with purpose remains untapped. Thus, mortality, far from diminishing our engagement with the world, enhances our potential to live fully within the authentic contours of our being. Johannes Achill Niederhauser, Heidegger on Death and Being: An Answer to the Seinsfrage (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 12

18. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962)

19. editors. "Pulling the Normative Threads of Heidegger's 'Das Man.'" Epoché Magazine, July 4, 2018. https://epochemagazine.org/15/pulling-the-normative-threads-of-heideggers-das-man/.

20. Reference to J.G. Ballard's short story "The Intensive Care Unit," where Ballard explores themes of isolation and alienation in a technologically mediated environment, drawing parallels to lives disconnected from authentic experiences. J.G. Ballard, "The Intensive Care Unit," in Myths of the Near Future (London: Triad Granada, 1982), 120-143

21. Reference to Robert Nozick's thought experiment "The Experience Machine," from his book "Anarchy, State, and Utopia." Nozick uses the concept to question the value of lived experiences versus simulated experiences, suggesting that authenticity is crucial to our understanding of a valuable life. Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 42-45.

CHAPTER 3.0 LOSS OF MEANING

1. Anne Shumway-Cook et al., "Age-Associated Declines in Complex Walking Task Performance: The Walking InCHIANTI Toolkit," Journal of the American Geriatrics Society 55, no. 1 (January 2007): 58–65, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2006.00962.x.

2. Jean Baudrillard and Jean Baudrillard, The Gulf War Did Not Take Place, Repr (Sydney: Power Publ, 2004).

3. Ibid.

4. Paul Gorby, "The Biopolitics of Fear: Assessing Agamben's Analysis of the COVID-19 Lockdowns," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 0, no. 0 (2023): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2023.2254010.

5. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "algophobia (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1202249065.

6. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "thanatophobia (n.)," December 2023, https://doi.

org/10.1093/OED/3028602346.

7. Byung-Chul Han, The Palliative Society: Pain Today (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2021).

8. Janaway, Christopher. "On the Very Idea of 'Justifying Suffering.'" Journal of Nietzsche Studies 48, no. 2 (2017): 152–70. https://doi.org/10.5325/jnietstud.48.2.0152.

9. Randy Pausch and Jeffrey Zaslow, The Last Lecture, 1st ed (New York: Hyperion, 2008).

10. Frankl, Viktor E., Harold S. Kushner, and William J. Winslade. Man's Search for Meaning.

11. Ibid.

12. Byung-Chul Han, The Palliative Society: Pain Today (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity, 2021). 37-38

13. "There Are Only Two Tragedies. One Is Not Getting What One Wants, and the Other Is Getting It – Quote Investigator®," August 11, 2019, https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/08/11/two-tragedies/.

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21. Jean Baudrillard, The Ecstasy of Communication, Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents

Series (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012). 31-32

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CHAPTER 3.3 SERVER FARM

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3. Complete demolition rewriting spaces that felt perfectly suitable, untouched for as long as I can remember, that alike the home I thought was protected. Instead, an eviction notice on the home, placed everywhere, pending change of use. Today, a relentless growth of machinery, a disease with no cure: cranes in all directions and constant destruction. A world less familiar through visual and bodily memory, juxtaposed by things that grow, progress and a self that decays, slows down and rots away. This growth overwrites memory, erases what was once home, embodying a form of domicide, not just in physical destruction but in the obliteration of history, tradition, and personal narratives amid relentless automation, optimization, and digital transformation. Here, this new form of domicide – controlled war on the essence of homes – leaves one grappling with a landscape that is constantly wiped clean, in a constant erasure, deletion and reformatting. New versions of an operating system installed that you have no backups to. Home lost to a server.

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11. Wim Wenders, Wings of Desire (West Germany: Road Movies Filmproduktion GmbH, 1987)

12. In this scene, an angel expresses his longing for a mortal experience. Wim Wenders, Wings of Desire (West Germany: Road Movies Filmproduktion GmbH, 1987)

13. Wim Wenders, Wings of Desire (West Germany: Road Movies Filmproduktion GmbH, 1987)

14. Albert Camus and Justin O’Brien, The Myth of Sisyphus, Second Vintage international edition (New York: Vintage International : Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2018).

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

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CHAPTER 4.0 THE INSTINCT TO CLIMB AND THE FLATTENING OF EXPERIENCE

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3. "City Climb." https://www.edgenyc.com/en/cityclimb.

4. Ibid.

5. SUMMIT One Vanderbilt: New York's Newest Cultural Experience. "Atop Midtown Manhattan's Tallest Skyscraper." https://summitov.com/.

6. SUMMIT One Vanderbilt: New York's Newest Cultural Experience. "NYC Immersive Art Experience | Interactive Experience NYC." https://summitov.com/experience/.

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13. This reflection, inspired by John Stuart Mill's insights into the experiential basis of understanding, resonates deeply with my personal journey through physical constraints and the quest for authentic experiences beyond the digital veneer of modernity. Mill's assertion that truth is realized through lived experience echoes my confrontation with the limits of my own body and the urban landscape, a server farm masquerading as a city. My narrative, marked by the visceral highs of rooftopping and the introspective acceptance of disability, embodies Mill's philosophy: true understanding and freedom emerge not from the abstract or the manufactured, but from the real, the experienced. As I navigate through this world—climbing towards meaning, facing the tangible flatness of technology, and ultimately embracing the depth of my existence—I

engage with Mill's notion that truth, in its most profound sense, is not something to be told but to be realized through the richness of personal experience. The journey towards this realization, marked by loss and adaptation, affirms that even as certain paths come to an end, the pursuit of authenticity and understanding continues, grounded in the tangible and the real. "John Stuart Mill: 'There Are Many Truths of Which the Full Meaning Cannot Be Realized until Personal Experience Has Brought It Home.,'" The Socratic Method, https://www.socratic-method.com/quote-meanings/john-stuart-mill-there-are-many-truths-of-which-the-full-meaning-cannot-be-realized-until-personal-experience-has-brought-it-home.

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platforms, including quote collections and social media, but the specific origin, such as a book, speech, or interview, isn't directly mentioned in the sources I found.

CHAPTER 4.3 INSIDE THE MACHINE

CHAPTER 4.4 CONFRONTING THE SUBLIME

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5. Matty S, "Art Critique: Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog," Medium (blog), January 17, 2024, https://gothgordongekko.medium.com/art-critique-wanderer-above-the-sea-of-fog-ec4572fed347.

6. Paulo Pinto, "The Experience of the Sublime in the Work of Caspar David Friedrich," Medium (blog), August 2, 2019, https://medium.com/@pspinto/the-experience-of-the-sublime-in-the-work-of-caspar-david-friedrich-d9f06ffad358.

CHAPTER 4.5 THE ROOF AS A SYMBOL OF TRANSCENDENCE

1. The concept of the "fourfold" in Heideggerian philosophy refers to a union of earth, sky, divinity, and mortality. It's about the coming-together of these elements in a way that constitutes a holistic experience of being in the world. In my ascent to the rooftops, I encounter Heidegger's 'fourfold,' a space where earth meets sky and the divine intersects with the mortal. This is an experiential crossroads where one is invited to ascend beyond the confines of the everyday. The rooftop serves as a physical and symbolic threshold, embodying the liminality between human-made structures and the boundless expanse above. In this act of transcending, I confront my own finitude, touching upon the sacred and reconnecting with the elemental aspects of existence. As Andrew J. Mitchell elucidates in his exploration of the late Heidegger, the fourfold provides a framework for reading our being in the world that honors the convergence of these elemental forces. My journey mirrors this convergence, challenging the traditional boundaries of experience and inviting a profound encounter with the essence of being. Mitchell, Andrew J. The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger. Northwestern University Press, 2015.

https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv43vtf4.

2. Throughout history, rooftops have risen above mere structural function to occupy a revered place in human consciousness, symbolizing both shelter and the aspiration toward higher realms. From their pragmatic origins in providing protection, roofs have evolved to embody concepts of home, spiritual ascent, and the demarcation of the human domain from the elements. The rooftop, as explored by Gerard Roofs in their historical overview, stands as a testament to human ingenuity and a metaphor for reaching beyond our limitations, serving as the uppermost threshold between the lived human experience and the expansive sky. Gerard Roofs, "The History of Roofs: Development and Concepts from the Olden Times until Today," https://gerardroofs.eu/en/blog/the-history-of-roofs-development-and-concepts-from-the-olden-times-until-today.

3. The notion of the rooftop as a liminal space, bridging the everyday and the transcendent, echoes throughout cultural history and architectural theory. From Bachelard's phenomenological exploration of spaces to the symbolic heights reached in mythological narratives, both occupied and unoccupied, the rooftop has been seen as a threshold to the divine and a vantage point for broader cognitive realms. This perspective aligns with the symbolic interpretations of architectural elements as more than mere physical structures, but as spaces imbued with cultural and existential significance. Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

4. John Ruskin, in 'The Seven Lamps of Architecture,' explores the animating spirit of architecture, considering buildings as embodiments of divine truth and human aspiration. This perspective aligns with my reflection on rooftops as spaces where the human spirit seeks connection with something greater than itself. The rooftop, as described in Ruskin's terms, is not just the crown of a building but a symbol of higher purpose and contemplation, a site where rituals and the search for transcendence intersect with the material world. John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1849)

5. "Roof," https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/roof.

CHAPTER 5.0 TO GO FOR A STROLL

1. Change in human engagement with the world, while shifting from a mode of automotive transport, to still increasingly one purely mediated by and with the machine. More of interaction outsourced to the machine, than direct engagement with the world.

2. there is a deliberate trend towards minimizing physical movement. This trend is not

solely about enhancing efficiency in transit but reflects a broader societal shift where the physical act of moving is often reduced to mere transportation, rather than an engaged or leisurely stroll. The dense configuration of city life inherently brings necessities 'within reach,' propelling us towards a state where physical movement is almost unnecessary. This is exacerbated by the rise of remote services and the convenience of having everything situated immediately around us to below us, to the touch of a screen, encapsulating a move towards a post-human condition where the need for physical movement is minimized, and human activity is optimized into discrete operations.

3. stroll

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "stroll (v.), sense 2.a," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3415985522.

4. As the digital realm continues to envelop more aspects of our daily lives, even the simple act of going for a stroll is not immune to virtualization and commodification. This phenomenon is emblematic of a broader shift towards experiences that, while accessible at the touch of a button, are increasingly detached from the physical world. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies allow users to immerse themselves in digitally constructed environments, choosing their sights and sounds from a menu of options. Treadmill apps synchronize scenic videos with the user's walking or running pace, offering an indoor exercise experience that simulates outdoor exploration. However, when the tangible world ceases to offer new horizons or becomes less desirable to explore within the confines of the server, individuals are compelled to seek refuge in these alternative realities online. This retreat signifies a profound shift from physical exploration to virtual escapism, where the essence of discovery and experience is mediated by algorithms, and our adventures unfold within the curated landscapes of the digital realm. In commodifying the stroll and retreating online, we trade the unscripted spontaneity of real-world exploration for a curated, often solitary experience, where the richness of physical presence and memory may be diminished in favor of digital alternatives. This reflects a broader trend of digital mediation in our lives, blurring the line between experiencing and consuming, and transforming the nature of exploration itself.

5. Frédéric Gros, A Philosophy of Walking, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso Books, 2014)

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "flâneur (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5867146607.

CHAPTER 5.1 TO SLOW DOWN

1. Alberto Pérez Gómez, Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016).

2. Juhani Pallasmaa, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, 3. ed (Chichester: Wiley, 2012).

3. Alberto Pérez Gómez, Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016).

CHAPTER 5.2 TO BE OFFLINE

CHAPTER 5.3 TO CLOSE THE EYES

1. Plato. The Republic. Translated by Desmond Lee. (Penguin Classics. 2007)

2. The mention of being a "serf in the house of some landless man" echoes Homer's emphasis on the idea that a life in truth, no matter how humble or difficult, is preferable to a life of delusion or dishonor. The allusion here is to the value placed on truth and enlightenment in Greek thought and the lengths one might prefer to go to avoid returning to a state of ignorance. Plato. The Republic. Translated by Desmond Lee. (Penguin Classics. 2007) 436

3. In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato vividly illustrates the resistance of the prisoners to accept or even recognize the authenticity of a world beyond their immediate perceptions. They are not merely ignorant of the truth but actively defend their ignorance, a concept masterfully reimagined in the film 'The Matrix.' In this modern portrayal, Morpheus reflects on the profound dependency that binds individuals to the illusory world, noting a fierce inclination to defend the system that ensnares them. This resistance is not just a refusal of reality but a psychological defense mechanism, as individuals cling to the familiarity of their bonds. The Matrix's insight that 'many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it,' echoes the notion that liberation from such deep-seated delusions is often met with animosity and denial, indicating a profound aspect of the human condition: our tendency to favor a known illusion over an unknown reality. "The Matrix," directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999).

4. In his reflection on the cultural and existential shifts of the modern era, James Poulos articulates a profound generational change: we are now the first generation born without a memory of the world before the pervasive digital landscape. This new reality echoes the confines of Plato's allegorical cave, where shadows cast by artificial light are mistaken for the only truth. Yet, unlike Plato's cave where the possibility of emerging into the sunlight symbolizes enlightenment, Poulos suggests that today's youth are born into a digital 'cave' with no prior knowledge of a world without screens—a seamless continuum with no recollection of a pre-digital existence. This marks a profound break in the continuity of human experience, challenging the rites of passage that have traditionally guided the maturation from youth to adulthood. The 'year zero' described by Poulos is not just a reset of cultural rites but signifies a deeper ontological shift, one that parallels Foucault's notion of discontinuity, rendering intergenerational experiences incommunicable and altering the very fabric of personal and collective identity. J. Poulos, Human, Forever: The Digital Politics of Spiritual War (Canonic, 2021), 25

5. In Heidegger's 'The Question Concerning Technology,' he describes the modern world's view of nature as a 'standing-reserve,' a repository of resources ready for human exploitation. This perspective is mirrored in today's digital age, where both the tangible and intangible are instantly accessible. The ease of digital access has shifted our relationship with knowledge and the natural world; there is no longer a need to engage deeply or to understand profoundly. The world is at our fingertips, not for wisdom but for convenience, leading to a treatment of all things as mere resources to be optimized and exploited. Heidegger's insights illuminate the essence of our current condition, where the richness of experience and understanding is often overshadowed by the immediacy and utility of information. Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology." In The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, translated by William Lovitt, 3-35. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

6. In a world where architecture and technology increasingly insulate us from sensory richness, we resemble the constrained existence portrayed in Jean-Dominique Bauby's 'The Diving Bell and the Butterfly.' Bauby's account of a vibrant consciousness within a paralyzed body echoes the experience of modern individuals inhabiting an environment that prioritizes the visual, reducing other sensory inputs. This parallels the sensory deprivation of Plato's cave dwellers, and similarly, it presents our digital engagements as a new form of sensory limitation, where we are present yet absent, immersed yet isolated. Jean-Dominique Bauby, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

8. Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, 1974), [specific page number]

9. J.G. Ballard, "The Intensive Care Unit," in The Venus Hunters (London: Collins, 1980)

10. Plato's Myth of the Cave, 2019, 20:05 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEMgZkCFPMM.

CHAPTER 5.4 TO BE REMEMBERED

1. The notion that we die twice—once physically when our body ceases and again when we are no longer remembered—underscores the significance of our actions and their lasting impact on memory and legacy. It is our actions that leave behind memories, it is only when the memory of one is lost, that so is their value. While not directly attributed to a single philosopher, the artist Banksy is quoted as saying, "They say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time." The idea is one permanently dies when they are forgotten. "When Is Your Memory Truly Forgotten? | Legacy Multimedia," https://legacymultimedia.com/when-is-your-memory-truly-forgotten.

2. To Ernest Becker, the essence of our existential dread encapsulates both the fear of life's impermanence and the fear of living insignificantly. It's not merely death that terrifies us; rather, it's the prospect of reaching the end of our lives and confronting the possibility that our existence may have lacked significance. These fears—of impermanence and insignificance—are not just abstract concepts but are central to understanding the motivations behind virtually all human behavior. Becker posits that faced with the fragility of our biological existence and the overwhelming complexity of the universe, along with our own seemingly insignificant place within it, humans are driven to seek meaning and significance to mitigate these deep-seated fears. Confronted with the stark reality of our own impermanence and the potential insignificance of our lives, humans are compelled to act, to find ways to assuage these existential anxieties. The question then becomes: What are the options available to us in this quest for meaning? According to Becker, individuals strive to create or attach themselves to something enduring, something that transcends the limitations of their mortal lives. This pursuit can manifest in various forms, from the creation of art and the pursuit of knowledge to the establishment of

legacies and contributions to society that may outlive the individual. In essence, our actions, our creations, and the connections we forge in our lives are attempts to assert our significance against the backdrop of an incomprehensible universe and to inscribe our mark on the fabric of a world that will continue beyond our existence. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 1. paperback ed (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997).

3. The phrase "tranquilizing itself with the trivial" refers to the way individuals or society at large may seek to numb or distract themselves from deep existential anxieties or the daunting questions of life and mortality by engaging in superficial or mundane activities. These activities do not address the underlying concerns but offer temporary relief or escape from them. This concept, while discussed by Ernest Becker, can be traced back to existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who explored how humans cope with the inherent angst of existence. Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death, 1st paperback ed (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 103.

4. "Ernest Becker's exploration of the 'immortality project' in 'The Denial of Death' underscores a profound aspect of the human condition: our innate drive to protest against the insignificance wrought by mortality. By embarking on a 'hero's journey,' individuals seek to achieve permanence and importance, aspiring to leave an indelible mark on the world. This pursuit is not merely a quest for survival beyond physical death but a deep-seated need to be remembered, to have our lives resonate within the collective memory of humanity. Becker illuminates how these projects, varying widely from creative endeavors to societal contributions, serve as our rebellion against the inevitable obscurity of death, offering a semblance of immortality. Through this lens, our lives are seen as narratives in a quest for meaning, where each person's 'immortality project' is a testament to their unique journey against the backdrop of existential finitude." Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death, 1st paperback ed (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 15-16.

5. "Sheldon Solomon's seminal work, 'The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life,' posits that the awareness of mortality serves as a primary motivator in the tapestry of human behavior and cultural construction. Solomon articulates a perspective that death, often lurking unacknowledged at the foundation of our motivations, influences much of our actions and decisions. This existential underpinning shapes our ambitions, fears, and values, propelling us to seek meaning, connection, and significance in an ephemeral existence. Acknowledging death's central role unveils the urgency behind our 'immortality projects,' our relentless pursuit of legacy, and our deep-seated need to carve out a space of permanence in the face of oblivion. Solomon's analysis invites a profound reflection on how the specter of mortality drives the

human endeavor towards resilience, creativity, and the ceaseless quest for understanding." Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life (New York: Random House, 2015).

6. "Susan Wolf's exploration of meaning and value in life offers a poignant perspective on the essence of 'immortality projects' — endeavors through which individuals seek to imprint their legacy onto the world. Wolf invites us to consider not just what makes life meaningful for us personally but what we hope will endure beyond our own lifetimes. This reflection on what we wish to persist after we are gone serves not only as a guide to identifying the most profound sources of value in our lives but also as a beacon for directing our efforts towards what we genuinely consider worth preserving. In doing so, Wolf elucidates the importance of these projects in our quest for meaning, suggesting that what we desire to continue in our absence reveals the core of what we find truly meaningful." Susan Wolf, Meaning in Life and Why It Matters (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

7. According to Becker, these endeavors, which he refers to as 'immortality projects,' are ultimately illusions — constructs we cling to in order to feel a sense of significance and control in the face of our inevitable mortality. Becker argues that our very sense of self is constituted by these illusions, as they offer a temporary escape from the realization of our own finiteness and insignificance. We fabricate these narratives of importance and permanence, convincing ourselves of our centrality in a universe that is largely indifferent to individual existence. These illusions, then, serve as a psychological bulwark against the overwhelming terror of annihilation, allowing us to live with the notion that we are more enduring, more influential, and more substantial than the reality of our fragile and transient nature suggests. However, Becker suggests, this self-deception, while offering comfort, also distances us from engaging with the authentic truth of our being — that we are, in essence, beings-toward-death. Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973), 206-209.

8. In reflecting on the conclusion of our lives, John Vervaeke's metaphor of life as a song that eventually ends offers profound insight. Vervaeke suggests that just as a song's conclusion doesn't negate its beauty, complexity, or contribution to the universe, so too does the end of a human life not diminish its inherent value or the significance it holds. This perspective invites us to appreciate the entirety of life's melody — acknowledging that while every song must come to an end, its resonance and impact endure in the memories of those who shared in its harmony. John Vervaeke: Meaning Crisis, Atheism, Religion & the Search for Wisdom | Lex Fridman Podcast #317, 2022, 15:48 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yImlXr5Tr8g.

CHAPTER 5.5 I WENT FOR A CLIMB

1. Parkdale Villager, "City to Demolish, Reconstruct Gardiner Expressway off-Ramp," Toronto.com, February 8, 2017, https://www.toronto.com/news/city-to-demolish-reconstruct-gardiner-expressway-off-ramp/article_d8e7100c-c7c2-5ee6-b580-0a59ffd6dbe8.html.

2. "UrbanToronto," accessed March 29, 2024, https://urbantoronto.ca/.

3. Abby O'Brien CTVNewsToronto ca Journalist Follow |Contact, "Toronto Woman Posts Video She Says Exposes Living Conditions in Well-Known Downtown Condo Building," Toronto, September 2, 2021, https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/toronto-woman-posts-video-she-says-exposes-living-conditions-in-well-known-downtown-condo-building-1.5571275.

4. The decision to contact this photographer was influenced by our mutual connection on social media and his relatively modest number of followers. This dynamic often suggests a higher likelihood of engaging in meaningful interactions, as accounts with fewer followers can sometimes be more responsive and open to dialogue.

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