

## CARRIED AWAY

1. “Carried away.” In my view the most beautiful book in the world is not the greatest, it’s not even technically good in many people’s eyes. It’s Roland Barthes’ *Lover’s Discourse*. It’s beautiful (to me) because you can’t read it, you can only feel it. Each section, and there are 80 sections (there are two short introductory sections), has a title with a kind of etymological description beneath it of some word or a phrase that applies to a moment in the breaking of a heart. This is not about happy love. Barthes is getting older, his lovers are guys, most of them younger, he’s French. If ever there was a book about time, it’s this one. If ever there is a good theory about time, it’s about the time you spend in life enduring the pain of joy, unfair since the joys of love are by definition instants. To sustain joy is possible, we’ve all done it to some degree. But, the rule is that the lover is by definition a melancholic, and a friend of mine has a theory that the lover always wants to be the beloved but the beloved always wants to be a rock star. I write lying sideways on a couch in a nice room with a good view of trees, a mountain, and the western sky even though the morning rays of the sun come in through a window facing south. In front of me are three images that, over the years, have been trying to tell me a kind of puzzle story. They are all about ceilings. One is *Blind Man’s Buff*, an engraving from Sir David Wilkie’s 1811 painting that belongs to the Tate. The queen once owned this, I think, which makes me think she gave up on the puzzle. Below this framed print is a small photograph I got from my sister-in-law, who travels a lot in the Yucatan. In a rare example of care, this Mexican state which was once only a



territory, built a wooden shelter over a particularly sacred piece of antiquity. The pole rafters holding the ceiling up carry the eye away to a point on a horizon in the middle, about one-fifth of the width from the left edge. The vanishing point on *Blind Man’s Buff* is, funny coincidence, at the same middle and one-fifth location, and the ceiling is also wooden rafters, but higher up.

2. There is another image next to the Mayan ruin. It’s Otto van Veen’s commissioned engraving of the *mons delectus* in his book, *Teatro Vida Moral*, I think, but the book of Veen’s that has a better title page is his book on emblems of love, that has a kind of globe pierced by arrows at the compass points. Can we come back to this? The globe is dust pulling itself together by mutual gravity to form a sphere, just something dust would want to do, and the arrows — one of them going from NE to SW seems uppermost — makes the point (arrows *would* “make a point,” hah hah) that take the interests of the heart (*cardo*) low and deep crossing the east-west main street, the line of the rising and setting sun (*decumanus*). Low to high, a vertical darkness with promised light if you break through the cloud ceiling is the theme of Venius’s moral emblem of the mountain of choices, the blind man sets up his game within a horizontal darkness randomized by the positions of the frozen players (catalepsis, the blind man’s blindness and mobility “steals” motion and life from the others). Barthes told the story in 80 parables, 40 the number of quarantine, one for you, one for me, which seems excessive, even for good friends. Maybe the first 40 is for the way up, the second for the way down, dust to dust.

3. Another friend is writing about dust and we talked a bit about how dust is composed mainly of the dried remnants of human flesh. This part sounds a bit voodoo. If you think about it, we are a vortex in a flow of dust (recommended reading: Lucretius) that “ties a knot,” a very specific kind of knot, in a dust cloud that, after we die, will be untied. Dying will be the same as undoing the knot to figure out if

it was a real knot or just a tangle. My guess is that it will be a kind of mix between the two, like the Borromean knot where three rings lie on top of each other, but there's a Möbius band detail that has the "last" right go underneath the first one, but of course there is no last or first, they all are last and first. Anyway, figure this out and the knot is undone, you're dead! Dust off! Dust, by the way is a contronym. It means both to clear dust off something and to scatter dust *on* something, like a dusting of snow. Reversal is built in to dust, and the vortex of dust is very very extraordinary. It's the sphere in the amorous emblem, dust holding itself together, dust holding hands beneath the table, two I's touching at the hips while sitting next to each other, II as "V." IVI is two couples at a movie and the man of one couple is secretly touching the hand or arm of the woman of the other couple. It's a notation system, a calculus. Calculus is about secrets, two kinds, one where a value is hidden within things trying to find a value, the other is about the rate of something changing, gravity. We don't fall without calculus, we can't pull off a successful suicide if we don't take it into account. Then we find a value, a secret value, what mathematicians call an Eigenvalue or Eigenform, and this is the arrow shooting through the dustball marked by the diagonal connecting the tropics, NE to SW.

4. When you're in the Yucatan, thanks to insufficient government funding, you can go to almost any ruin and crawl all over it without an admissions fee. Neglect is sometimes good. Things are just there, in astounding brazen courage against the forces of time and erosion. The sacred aura is still there, the more and more the dressed stones turn into a trash-pile, go back to stone dust. You'll know my metaphor here if you ever took up pottery, because clay is what happens to mountains when they lose their youthful stature and are carried by water down to some flat field where they settle into fragipans. The best clay is kaolin, so I was told when I once wanted to be a potter, because it retains elasticity. It's the mountain that just doesn't take it lying down, it still wants to be a mountain, and when you work it you have to respect this resistance of the vertical mountain to ending up as horizontal mud. When you throw a pot on to a wheel you really learn something about the magic mountain. You can feel the elasticity, because it helps you raise the dead from the lump, once you find the vector that doesn't spin but allows the others to spin: the vortex. So all this crap about the vortex and New Age healing is not so far off the mark.
5. The vanishing point on two of my lying-down-to-write images pull down and to the left of me, the right of them, but ashes to ashes, dust to dust, this won't matter because dust is a contronym. The third image of the mountain shows me the ceiling where the contronym takes place. It's the cloud layer beneath which the mountain is a labyrinth, above which is a temple. This is an important architectural lesson, that the clouds are a "reversed ceiling diagram," the way the ceiling looks from above if the ceiling, like the cloud, was semi-transparent. It shows you life below with a diagram of heaven's perfection pointing out the mistakes you made, the opportunities you missed, your lucky guesses, your unlucky misses. It was all guessing, below, and not all of it missed because here you are, standing up looking down. You are in the same position that Scipio, the famous dreamer of antiquity, found himself when his deceased uncle gave him a surprise tour of heaven. Looking down, he realized that living people are really just "dust that doesn't know they're dust," but in heaven you get your spectral body, the soul-body, which is really the Eigenform of your dust.
6. Macrobius's book on the *Dream of Scipio* is one of those you can always find in the library, unchecked out. But, when I found my copy this way, there was still a library card in the back, and the funny thing I noticed was that the only people who had checked out this book were all in the English department, and they were all of the Big Names. This was their secret book, because no one ever talks about it. It's like a source book where you read it, believe it, but can't talk about it without having people think you're crazy. Macrobius believes in the Eigenform of dust and writes about it. He has also discovered that Plato, who tells about dying and coming back to life in "The Myth of Er" knows about it. And Cicero knows about it, and there must be others, but the key point is that, from Plato and before to the library card, all the people who know about it are a part of a heavenly band like the one that "around

me stands” to bear me away on your snowy wings to my eternal home — a song from the Appalachians where I grew up. If only certain people know something that can’t be shared easily with regular people, it’s a kind of insider secret, and the sharing is more important than what the secret is or what it means when you try to translate it, you belong to a club because you realize there’s a club. An angel band. Come and a round me stand. I will be wearing a blindfold and you will have given your motion to me and stand in stately order. I will look blind to you but I have traded blindness for invisibility. You won’t see me because I am a part of the invisible order that is in us but more than us, silent like a secret and also unseen.

7. Invisible me ... the one who takes the photo is not in the photo but, from the other side of the visibility frame is present. I steal motion from “them” because I am invisible. I *take* their *picture*, the picture in them is what I take, the Eigenform. I can frame it in cheap plastic and hang it, a bit crooked or not, on my wall. Seems unfair, given that “about those things we cannot speak we should remain silent” (Wittgenstein). My privation (I took something away) turns out to be a prohibition, something about which I shouldn’t speak. A secret dimension, an Eigenform. OK, I get it! There’s a lot hanging on this, on this wall that is. Literally, litter-ly, letterly. This brings me to James Joyce, and his story, “The Dead.” John Ford, a member of the angel band, clearly, had a problem filming the epiphany moment of the story where Greta, the POV character Gabriel’s wife, is on her way out, coming down to get her coat from the house maid (with whom Gabriel has flirted on his way in, setting off a chain of social missteps; so when she gets her coat the two women will exchange “one of those looks” that women give each other when it’s the guy who’s a problem). It’s not in the book because Joyce can handle the scene with exposition and narrative framing, but Ford realizes it won’t work to stage it the same way, the point of the scene will be lost. A famous tenor has been at the party but resisted requests to sing because he has a cold, but just as he’s getting ready to leave, the aged sisters and their niece persuade him to do just one song, and he sings the same song, coincidentally, that Greta’s boyfriend had sung. This was Michael Fury, a boy whose family was down a couple of rungs from Greta’s, had wanted her to stay the year but she had to go back to Dublin. He stood in the rain outside of her window and sang “The Lass of Aughrim.” Ford has to stage it so that the song comes from an indefinite location above, with Greta midway, on the stair’s landing. For us, this is the “cloud position” that allows Greta to see a reflected ceiling diagram, an Eigenform projected down over the top of her past, her dust-pile.
8. Like the arrow on van Veen’s book cover, the song goes from upper right to lower left, but it’s also a kind of “north by northwest” that Hamlet says is the wind that drives you mad. Anyway, it’s a meridian wind, that goes straight to the heart. It freezes you, freezes Greta, Michael Fury is now blind, now invisible, but the song shoots back to make this moment an epiphany. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1CP5Lz2iHE> if you’re interested. Michael was standing in the rain just like the singing character, caught pneumonia, and that’s why he never married Greta. But here’s the case that Barthes would have really sucked up, that it’s absence of the Other that pulls the arrow through the heart when it just meant to prick it a little.
9. When you speak a foreign language, even very poorly, it’s important to sound as if you feel at home. The words have to fit into your mouth like you would fit into a coat (a shoe would be asking too much), maybe its baggy or a bit tight, but it will keep you warm for a bit. The body manages this at-home feeling, with facial expressions and hand gestures whose *timing* is key. You can’t rush the meaning by gesturing and then struggling to find the words, the gesture or expression has to be simultaneous with the word that you, a foreigner, are going to fail, more or less, to pronounce correctly. The brain then does a magic trick, it makes you feel French, or Spanish, or Italian or even German or Dutch if you can pull off this trick-yourself. I’ve had dreams where I’ve been speaking French with someone, completely aware that I am working beyond my limits, doing better than expected. The weird thing is that, in my dream, I *hear* French and understand only a part of it, so the question is, what is happening to the other part that my brain is manufacturing as “not to be

understood.” The even weirder thing is that the French person in the dream corrects my French when I make a mistake. Go figure that one out. That ball with the arrows is perhaps a real globe and possibly the arrows mean that everyone/anyone can “dial up” a persona in another language, that somewhere, like the accidental twins in *The Double Life of Véronique*, there is a shadow double speaking another language, that you have the paradox of a “one” that is duplicitous in a radical way, one who “doesn’t speak the language” of the other.

10. Frankly, this seems to me to be an obvious and plain description of the unconscious. The dreamer encounters this other, speaking another language that he/she can try to speak but with mistakes and gaps. This Other will be in the position to correct the foreigner. The Other we dream is “like a subject” but is actually subject-less, more of a machine set up to correct our bad French? Where else would demons be, if not inside our heads? Like strangers, they don’t belong, but they bring this don’t-belongedness into our heads by playing the parts of foreigners whose languages we try but fail to speak correctly.
11. The dust-ball is also the trash-pile that is pure contingency. You can’t get more contingent than dust floating in the air, settling on your books, your coffee table, your indoor plants. Even shit has more form than dust, so the thought that dust could organize itself by the sheer force of gravity is amazing, but we would grant that, if this magic act can be pulled off, the contingency of dust is going to result in a sphere that is perfect beyond anything we’ve seen before. Since each dust particle really doesn’t care about anything, the only thing it has going for it is the tiny bit of gravity that allows it to settle when the wind dies down, is going to pull it along a *perfect line* into kinship with other dust bits. This is the point where we realize that there is a special physics for dust. It’s a physics of tiny things, a “particle” physics that is so particular that even an atom is too big because dust will lack even the charge/energy or velocity that makes the particles of particle physics behave according to laws. This is a particle physics for particles that just don’t care.
12. When you don’t care as a subject you become a pre-subjective human (again?), like the “Musselman” Primo Levi described in his book about concentration camps. This is the prisoner who has lost all hope, who is no longer recognizable in any social sense, someone who has ceased to live but forgotten that he should die. Dust is in this condition. It’s a *caput mortuum*, a “death’s head” literally, but the term comes from alchemy to indicate the stuff left over *after* a chemical reaction. It’s the dirty dishes and empty wine bottles you have to clear up after the party on the morning after. OK, we tried to make gold, it didn’t work, but we got some interesting results and after the explosion there was this left-over stuff in the bottom of the chamber. Dust is the *caput mortuum* of the world, where God tried to make the perfect alchemical couple, Adam and Eve, but it didn’t work, as we all know, and the wilderness that the failed couple was forced to wander was very very dusty. The dust reminded the couple of the failure of Amor Perfecto. The dust’s inability to care made it the perfect “indifference” machine, the perfect thing for the equal sign that identifies something with itself, A=A, because, basically, it “just doesn’t care.”
13. Not caring makes a sphere, but a sphere that is wounded by love, love that is precisely hurtful when it identifies with the meridians, the points of the compass, that allow it to pierce the dust-sphere “just so.” There is a cipher, a kind of decoder-ring effect, concealed in this emblem of the arrows through the sphere. It goes to the idea that Tim Noble and Sue Webster’s piles of trash carefully constructed so that a light beam can “find” a profile to project on a nearby wall, could be even more perfectly constructed so that more light beams — set up at compass points? — could project a set of profiles on a cylindrical “diorama” wall. This diorama would be a die-o-rama (death as the realm of shadows) as well as a place where shadows are cast like dice. *Un coup de dés jamais n’oublira le hasard*. Day/jamay, ra/ard. The sounds of the internal rhyme tell you a lot about Mallarmé’s design for this famous poem, that inside echoes will draw out then send back all the forces to equalize, neutralize, and stabilize this poem, just as the typography establishes a sandy beach out of the ebb and flow of the *edges* of the type set. He

draws a picture with edges the same way the shadows are profiles, silhouettes. The two dimensional shadow resembles the flat fairies in a Swedish fairy tale I heard about (but cannot find to cite properly) who disappear simply by turning sideways.

14. Spinning the shadows by finding meridians in the trash piles, the same deal as the arrows through the sphere of dust brought together by indifference and gravity, perfect indifference producing a perfect sphere, the shape “is to itself what it is to others” — the same (circular) profile no matter what point of view you take — an *eigenform*. This makes it possible to consider that the sphere has other forms, as if to say that perfection can take up “a job on the side” and this job is the vortex. Inside this V-form, you have the advantage of showing how perpetual motion can maintain, at the same time, entrapment and freedom. The ideal vortex would let you go anywhere, but you would always be guided by invisible strings pulling you to a central axis. In order to draw it however, you have to employ some of the traits of the sphere: circling motion, constant facing-towards, the stuff of spirals. The advantage of the vortex is that you can address the matter of falling, which the sphere can’t show any more because it’s already fallen into itself. If the sphere is indifferent, the vortex is still caring — over-caring, defined by care — and this caring lifts it up and pulls it down. This is the means of translating dust into a dynamic model where gravity is still “in process.”



15. We go back to those images on the wall beyond my feet. In *Blind Man's Buff* and the photo of the Mayan altar, the vanishing point operates like the axis of a vortex pulling visibility into invisibility — the point of having a “*vanishing point*” after all. This is the theory behind photography. The photographer becomes invisible in order to steal motion from whatever is in front of the lens. In an extension of this metaphor, we could say that the light settles like dust on to the photosensitive chemicals that laminate the plastic film surface. Once the lens is in place — the lens is *both* spherical

and transparent — the vortex is inevitable. We can't have a sphere like the one described as Amor Perfecto by Aristophanes, a bit drunk at the banquet (*setisis*) on love where Socrates talks about Diotima. The lens sucks out motility just as the blind man in the game is the only moving thing. Eros has “loosened the limbs” literally in the other players, just as Hesiod described. They are dust, they have to come together as perfect spheres pierced by love, by arrows, Eros. C'est la vie!