

After the Fall: An Inverse Apotheosis

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Abstract: Memories of the fall of the Twin Towers on 9/11 stimulate the pressing nature of a variety of other twins. In 2001 the attack produced a number of stirrings in the twin arenas of the macro environment and the individual soul. Years later, in present time, other twins—love & work, author & spouse, and love & mercy—promise hope.

Keywords: World Trade Center, 9/11

AFTERmath

Within a year after the Fall, my wife Judi and I drove the 150 miles to ground zero to peer as witness-tourists down into the hole. That a single hole stared back at us disturbed me because I had expected two holes, one for each tower; a pair of footprints 100 floors deep, a fitting depth of absence to mark what was once—i.e. twice—the towers' presence. Our trip served but a single purpose: to see for ourselves that the tele-images, real in themselves, I guess, had marked a real event. Without those footprints, certain doubt that they had ever actually existed crept in, for what we saw instead was not like a tooth gone missing and leaving its ghost behind to invite a new tooth in its place, but rather a brown hole where perhaps once had stood an urban mall or a neighborhood, or two dozen football fields. No Twins/No trace/No Truce! But I had been there before.

In 1976 I co-chaperoned a New York City trip with a group of teens from the residential treatment center where I had worked at the time, one year before the start of my college teaching career. That evening we went up the Towers, ascending to the Observation Deck via two elevators, each one an esophagus, each one of us a mere bone-in-the-throat, each one of us trapped until spit-out to the enclosed deck. All four walls surrounding the deck had etched on the glass the shapes and names of various sights and sites. "There's Liberty! Oh, there's Broadway, The Chrysler Building, Empire State, two rivers, East Orange!" The disparity in size of the Twin versus all those other buildings outside suggested that the Twin was more than a building, more than its distant cousins out and below who beyond the glass appeared as some urban zoo, a diorama in a museum, old worn out species in comparison to its twin-keepers.

Decades passed and eventually 2001 arrived to find me alone in my college office, awaiting advisees on a Tuesday morning.

On the day after the Fall, the campus stood in turmoil. Many students placed special significance at the thought that one of the four planes had quite possibly flown over Albany en route, that our dorms and classrooms had shared their airspace with terror, and that a casual look-up to the sky had witnessed in flight what had not yet happened. They reminded me of 1976 when the dark sky of New York introduced planes close to that Deck, each one blinking—in retrospect winking—at us a warning, 25 years in advance. Meanwhile I'm still looking for that twin abyss and the depths of Self and Other.

AFTER FALL

“Cities are distinguished by the forms of catastrophe they have assumed New York is King Kong, or the blackout... the Towering Inferno” (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 198). Unlike Chomsky (2008) or Sontag (Nunez, 2011, p. C5.) who maintained that 9/11 occurred because we had it coming to us due to the Evil that was U.S. foreign policy, Baudrillard asserts that the attack represented the endgame of a postmodern urban fate. After all, events do reframe the city within which they have occurred (e.g., Hiroshima and Dresden both dripping with WWII annihilation). The remake of King Kong had the beast see in the Twin Towers a reminiscence of the twin hills of Skull Island, thus merging the twin events, fictional and real, that define NYC. Likewise, when Crocodile Dundee said he wants to stay in order “to broaden my horizons,” he looked to the Twins. For Kong and Dundee, the Twins’ 4-directional gaze marks the horizon where the known and unknown meet. Likewise, the Event represents the edge of the Countdown decade, come a year too late than forecast by the Y2K event that never happened. That we looked “forward” to the new century by counting down, not up, suggests we had already abandoned progress, providence, and history with a millenarianism that saw no tomorrow (Baudrillard, 2000, pp. 34-35). Some pundits point to warnings of the attack—a smaller WTC bombing, the USS Cole, Somalia—but warnings draw attention away from wishes. The new century had already been a bust. No Y2K, no clear-cut winner of the presidential election, Di not yet dead! At some subconscious level, we crave the event and the redefinition of meaning it promises. We crave that mixture of jubilation and terror that might interrupt or replace the banality of everyday life, a “perfectly sacrilegious desire for the eruption of Evil ... [that] restores the balance of the forces of Good and Evil” (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 129). We often do not wish to awaken from such nightmares, not simply because they often offer more “life” but also because “we would be disappointed to be awoken from it, for it will have shown us how to think the irreplaceable, a truth or a meaning that consciousness might hide from us on waking ... (Derrida, 2005, p. 167).

In short, deep down, we harbor The Injunction of the Event—no longer a will to power or to death but to the spectacle. We come to it not as voyeurs but as those caught up in longing, the imperative of Desire. Tautologically speaking, mobile homes cause tornadoes, and wishing makes it so. THIS event stands emblematic of Baudrillard’s claim (2005) that we have reduced Good to Happiness and Evil to Misfortune so that bad events are reduced to mere accidents (p. 139). Such events whet and sate our millennial hunger for the “new victim order” whereby we become the hated other due to our wretchedness, which has replaced sin as grist for confession, reflected in a “necrological mirror” of recycled catastrophe and a search for repentance (Horrocks, 1999, pp. 56-57). Derrida (2002) notes of tele-events that in watching the spectacles, we, too, are being watched (p. 122), a reversal of subject/object and a reminder that The Twins is us! The Twins is New York! Their verticality mirrors Americans’ ever upward climb. Sky’s the limit. The Twins mark the spot where two rivers and ocean meet, the modern Fertile Crescent gone postmod in an era where information and globalization spell the end of the center of the earth. Baudrillard & Nouvelle (2002) remark that the Twins represent the city itself and its end; the Towers, clones of each other, (p. 38) remind us that their “excess of visibility” gives rise, not to the end of history, but to the “dilution of history as events” (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 277). In the way that pornographic sex is more real than real, Terrorism is worse than real; it is symbolic

(Baudrillard, 2003, p. 29). Like the bombers themselves, the Twins committed suicide, one after the other in a pact of implosion that enacts a primal scene (p. 43). Their trace suggests twin lingering images: one of two spare holes extending 100+ stories down—the inverse apotheosis, the other suggested by Baudrillard (2009) of the grin of Cheshire Cat hovering after the rest of him has vanished. “Or like the Judgment of God: God disappears, but he leaves behind his Judgment... but the grin without the cat is even more terrifying” (p. 25).

AFTER ALL

“To claim to speak of death, or the world’s woes, or anything else ‘objectively’ is an illusion, for language is always more real than what it speaks about” (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 43).

“A thought is beautiful only if it is naked beneath language. In other words, violent. Each sentence is the spark of a will to power” (p. 82).

A Leap of Faith / Freefalling Through Impulse

Calcium litenight/ the shiffplitter blues/ cotton mouth/ warts on a perfect nose/ Uncas/ details in the descant/ walk a mile in my water moccasins/ a speck of reason/ Panamanian dawn/my soul as white and clean as an eggshell newmoon/ Yoda in chainmail/ angels in sweats: saints in suits ya/ yonder Tokyo, west of East Orange/ shards of Phillip Glass/ pardon my skinlessness/ Not tonight, Oedipus/ the bastard blame of the bossa nova/ painless windows past my gaze/ Here it is/ When I look in your eyes I see the man that you wish that I was/ healing Tropic of Cancer/ Wingman for Pegasus/ the reification of deification: the deification of reification/ the missing chord/ placentas wagging a rhapsody in plaid/ hubcaps & hepcats/ OK so far/ rain2rust2rest/ Nemo resurfacing/ Come, Morpheus/ the fiction of friction: The friction of fiction/ idealusts/ “O’er a perfumed sea”/ Turn and face the camera/ Here it is/ the comfort of coolness on flesh/ 4 green fields/ two in the bush/ blank stares of Easter Island/ morning coffee creaming up my throat into my grateful mouth/ breathment/ “That’s her last ziti before she died”/ witness projection/ rethink impossible/ Hasidim in madras chromosomes/ almost gone almost gone almost gone/ dirty jokes whispered in convents/ Orpheus under the El/ This callow fate/ Here it is/ Just want to see his face, cool as clay at the heat of the day/ the future of renewables; the renewable of futures/ the brokendown Beemer blues/ All saviors are zombies but not all zombies are saviors/ As seen on TV; not sold in stores/ Oh merciful Heaven’s Wind, lift me now/ What-a-dump!/ Hell’s ice crystallizing under my toenails/ I swear my morning cereal said “Snap, Crackle, and Fuckyou!”/ deep weep/ mysteries of satanic mechanics. The boredom of regret: the regret of boredom/ Call me Telemachus/ face to face with Lotus Eaters/ “Say my name is called Disturbance”/ purrrrr-gatory on my mind/ What’s for lunch/ (nevermind)/ Here it is/ The Laffer curveball/ Groundhogs leave their holes to find food and seek sex (that’s a fact)/ my personal vanities and double standards/ roasted nuts & rusted guts/ What’s that smell/ a river choked with sentiment/ maqua/ catch me (if you can)/ and the white wind drove me mad/ the thrill of spinechill/ ash-lite mudpack/ OK so far/ the impossible exchange/ the teeth of red dogs wagging three heads/ Starbuck horizon/ why hast thou forsaken me, Walt Whitman/ lung cancer advocate/ swampscents/ the time of cicada dropping to bloodroot/ “a certain fertile sadness”/ roadkill resurrected on St. Christin’s Day/ that with no counterpart in nature/ quaking

aspens at Mossrise/ French letters opened but unread/ froth on my saddle/ Here it is/ Salesbury Plain/ Til Damascus/ Hold me/ nuns in neckties/ "Breathtaking in its expansive scope"/ the endless striving of the Faust/ defrocked gynecologists/ the mysterium tremendum/ a re-gifting of the Secret/ my soul caught in the gesture of remembering/ shedding my skin & secreting my Self/ in the wake of the vigil of the wake/ bloated by grace/ gaping promises/ Stan Getz it/ would that I had loved more/ my Sharona/ how's my hair/ red corpuscles gone blue heart to heart/ greenflash of absinthe/ who did put the ram in the rama lama dingdong/ this is my body which I have given up for you/ whitecaps today, darling/ but wait; there's more (or less)/ an empty kindness; a kind of emptiness/ ice fishing for repentance/ "My little town blues are melting away, NY NY"/ There's that rhythm again/ stay hungry/ the pink eyes of spring rabbits and Edgar Winter/ The Elvis forecast—2 below Tupelo/ going bareback gone/ roll tide/ my own private Calcutta/ pondice/ on my knees—arid below; moist above/ solo mapleseed spinning in freefall/ a paper diamond rising like the miracle of bloodrush/ a spoonful of smack boiling at my fingertips/ As a matter of fact, I DO want fries with this/ used scars/ morning mouth at my ear/ whoa Bethlehem/ Triple bypass, two to go/ head first/ compass point/ 9th floor already/ just like you/ horseflesh/ traction at the tenderloin/ Just one more rung on Jacob's ladder/ Holsteins gone dry/ Tuesday's ruby sky wrapped all around me/ Washing me down (hold me)/ terminal velocity terminal/ Here it is/ the party you have reached is not .../ daydreaming cottonwood/ the comfort of loneliness/ All my children widows now/ the erratic dramatic/ Dew in the desert; a solitary drop on the rippled back of a scorpion/ "love minus Zero/no Limit"/ White striped sheets on a creekbed/ fiddleheads bowed in sympathy/ Here it is: the murmur of pavement/ The Joy in your heart/ the rivers of march/ Momma! Mercy! Merde!

"It is from the perspective of death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility" (Derrida, 2008, p. 42)

AFTERWORD

Indeed, the ability to think, to think in other terms
is challenged by the shrinking of a horizon
diminished by an absence of meaning,
a breaking of ties,
and a dictatorship of the market—
and this all aggravated by the phenomenon of terrorism.
(Chérif, 2008, p. 5)

(pause)
(cough)
(clear throat)

EPILOGUE (After THIS Fall)

Mention of spouse, Judi, opened this essay. Together since high school, our fiftieth wedding anniversary but months away, we, too, are twins. Not identical, mind you; not joined at the hip.

A twosome but not a gruesome twosome, one hopes. But Twins, Unfallen! Then again, we-as-couple represent one half of another twinning. Mention of work also opened this essay, first in social work, second in higher education. (Did I mention that Judi has a Ph.D. and taught high school for over thirty years?) Freud pointed out this second twin-ship when asked the meaning of life. He replied, “To love and to work.”

Freud named the twins that drive us, not just during catastrophe but day to day. These twins stood abreast in this essay as un-named protagonists. The academic section on terror, “After Fall,” wreaked of Work, with its quotations and citations, its saying the unsayable, its challenges and invitations, its intellect “at work,” its head spinning and its heavy lifting. In contrast, the italicized “Leap... Falling...” offers up head-swirling Love with its stream of consciousness, its pulsations, its rational irrationalities, and its heavy breathing. And its central refrain, “Here it is,” a reminder of love’s often unseen, overlooked presence and demands, along with love’s immediacy, on one hand, and its promise(s), on the other. Which brings me back to the twin in my bed....

Judi knows that for me work has taken on the character of paramour. Judi also knows that I am about to kiss this lover goodbye forever. Looking ahead to this fall semester, my forty-first, I see work beckoning as always but now with a wicked smile—no, a wicked smirk—aimed not at my eager eyes but right between them. That smirk mocks the tortured farewell that Fall promises, come December when winter begins and announces my retirement with the season’s cold and snowbound early darkening. But as they say, “I’ve got my love to keep me warm.”

The End at Last

In the summer of 2016, I went on a kick. Between semesters, with much time on my hands, I read six novels in a row by Jack Kerouac. Why? My research on poet Alan Ginsberg reminded me of unfinished business—in this case un-started business. How could I NOT have read a single word by J. K., and after all these years?! One of the six, Maggie Cassidy, nailed teenage love as experienced by a boy; this boy. One line stuck out for me, and it provides the bolded spine in the poem below, not on love and work but rather on yet another universal pair of twins—love and death.

The poem, as yet untitled, promises Hope throughout, but in two places especially. The first is “waters of March,” a phrase that ends the stream of consciousness poem above and appears below in the final stanza. Both “Marches” promise renewal with their waters streaming from winter’s freezings. The second promise stands embedded within the six “Welcomes” below, each a welcoming to the verdant, though unknown, future, nurtured by those waters. Maybe endings aren’t so bad.

“That the ONLY love

A purity breaks out

from torrents of

anticipations,

moistening palms seeking same

can only be

yearning for fingerfood
feeding
widemouth wild and lyrical
supping, upping, cupping
diamond orbs of nocturnal angels
(who knew?!)
taking curves a tad too
fast for gracemaking;
nightfall full from Coppertone eruptions.
Dharma dawn arises at the wait:
Rocking hard and rolling Holy
toward
Drake's Devil Cakes. . . .

the FIRST love,

the only death

the LAST,

Only a cubist God/could have invented quaking aspen,/ Each leaf asparkle, a-faceted alive/with
the gift of AllNature—/GRATITUDE!/Unspoken as Argos dusk/voiceless as Bhuddha Dipankara
dawn/There all the same/though not all the while/cloven by the Diamondcutter/of Mercy and the
waters of March-mama,/merde,/merge,/mourning,/doves at sun's set sutra.

Breathe! Open! Suck! (welcome)

Breathe! Render! Gasp! (welcome)

Breathe! Recall! Give! (welcome)

Breathe! See all! Choke! (welcome)

Breathe! Soften! Clot! (welcome)

Breathe! FORGIVE! Sigh! (welcome)

"This is my body which is given up for you."

Ah, Alas, At last...

All a-quaking toward

Angelfood!

the only LIFE within...."*

Greg Gross

***from Kerouac, J. (1959/2009). MAGGIE CASSIDY. New York: Penguin Group. p. 26.**

p. s.: Just re-watched the 2014 film on Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys. Great flick. And that title: "Love and Mercy"! More twins! (Don't get me started!)

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