

\*



MOCK-UP JUNE 2020

*Once upon a time—but whether in the time past or time to come is a matter of little or no moment—this wide world had become so overburdened with an accumulation of worn-out trumpery, that the inhabitants determined to rid themselves of it by a general bonfire.*

—Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Earth's Holocaust*



a.

inoculated against any sense of his immense mediocrity by family-money, he quietly accepted the life laid-out for him, and nevertheless had no better grasp of that which he was bereft than if he'd taken paths more open to criticism;

from the start, his investment-in commitment vanquished intimacy, passion rationalized as a fleeting gesture he might, on-occasion, reach for like either a mallet or baguette, until all he wanted was one thing:

MORE!—

but then what?—you accrued, accumulated, amassed, acquired, added, multiplied, increased, grew and in the end it

didn't amount to much, didn't mean a whole hell-of-a-lot;

he decided the important thing was to never enjoy the weekend, to never take vacations; whatever pleasure presence in the present presented didn't matter: results mattered; to show some delight in your work equated to not working; satisfaction went hand-in-hand with being miserable (he registered a frightened look whenever he caught-glimpse of a world not intended solely for business);

communicating through consumption, his pursuit of knowledge reduced each object of its pursuit to possession; this vulnerability heralded the linked series of deceptions, exploitations and impulses that gave a temporal order to the apparent incoherence of his personal history;

he did his best to construe each lie as vital—unfortunately, their vital necessity didn't quite hold-up to scrutiny;

\*

and so he surmised economics wasn't a science but religion—the most monotheistic of all—where the word *debt* replaced the words for *guilt* and *penance*—*poverty/damnation—profits/prophets*—: neither religion nor economics being (now that finance managed to flourish without the generative intervention of material goods and human labor) anything but acts of language, pure enunciation;

he felt obligated to sacrifice a calm, pleasant life and stake his peace of mind to the upheavals of the market; an endless thirst for growth and prosperity led him to deny the organic limits of existence, which,

being undeniable,

led to concealment, which led (being equally unconcealable) to sheer loathing for corporeal entropy;

advertising encouraged the delusion that he didn't have to age by conjuring products and purchases, and succeeded because he'd never considered time to be anything but the prospect of acquisition and accrual;

the future wasn't a promise but a threat;

continuously weaseling aimlessly about, fleeing from one image to the next—driven simultaneously in countless directions—desire was diverted from physical interactions and invested in a frigid orgy of disembodied seductions; exchangeability more so than purpose informed his search;

needless to say, events deterritorialized quickly, proliferating on the side of the fallacious and phony (he waved his finger through the air and sliced in half a mango, coconut and kiwi);

caught-up in the manipulative linguistics the economy shared with psychosis, he mimicked acts of panic, irrationality, stimulus and depression, egotistically feigning ignorance of self-interest;

seity was forgotten, erased; speech contradicted belief (he wasn't going to just come out and say what he was thinking); he told himself it had to be so, *Success is never wrong, if you don't affect the grammar of deceit no one will listen*; it's not like he had any faith to lose (termites had long since lined a counterfeit smile); ethics distanced itself from the viable;

was it impossible to say no?—no;

but it was irrelevant;

\*

wandering these stations of routine, obsessing obsessively about finance, he bought in bulk reason's bins of rotten fruit—

did he only dream in his sleep?—;

money was spent in the most reckless, trivial fashion, but should you propose some go to research or charity!—suddenly it was scarce and dwindling, kept under lock and key, as though you'd suggested he throw it in the ocean—

his inability to see accurately stemmed as-much from a lack of principles as from the fact that he accorded too much respect to affluence: truth wasn't an attribute of honest minds but an asset of birth;

in cursing others it became-clear he expressed jealousy

even-more than contempt; he could no longer endure his tedium  
(but didn't want to take the time requisite to change);—:

what was it he lacked?—;

alas, it wasn't necessity but luxury that presented the  
fundamental despair; accustomed to the ideas of growth, gains  
and dividends, he refused-to recognize that a series of profitable  
investments ultimately resulted in nothing but the option to  
squander those profits lavishly,

without return—

that privilege, attuned to its own interests, bore no  
destiny beyond useless consumption and waste, and that, in this  
way, the quest for wealth yielded to giving, even giving away;

the benefits in no way corresponded with his intent (all  
that seemed authoritative was merely guilt!?)—so he made waste  
itself an object of attainment, drowning in order to escape the  
rain;

\*

and sure enough the world-round was filled with filth,  
multifaceted and diffuse, of every age and temperament, piling-  
up in corners, blowing through the streets—so-much-more than  
he could hope to fathom—:

could anything compete—

in the vast annals of man's longings to leave his mark  
on this Earth—

with trash?—:

it'd infiltrated the soil, turned oceans to plastic,  
suffused the very placenta with-which a mother feeds her  
unborn child:

a giant nest for the future built from the excrement of  
civilization—;

it boggled the mind, the thought-alone of all-that  
garbage just spread-out from him like an oil-spill;

he decided to go for a walk on the beach;

entering along a trail in the shoreline reeds, he  
stepped-over and around paint-buckets, tires, bricks, bleach-

bottles, bushel-baskets, condoms, beer-cans, busted taillights  
and shotgun-shell casings;

at times no more than 50-yds from the water, cars sped  
madly along the parkway;

he trudged up over a dune strewn with blue barrels  
and rusted segments of a sunken bridge, and then out onto  
the beach; gulls squawked overhead, punctured continuously  
by the roar of airport departures; before him a concrete pipe  
3-ft across extended into the bay where it sucked-in sand from  
an offshore-barge so that another network of pipes and hoses  
could apply it to the eroded expanses of sand;

he wandered-out to the edge of the tide;

the waves arrived almost silently; behind him a tattered  
band of orange-netting ran across the length of dunes, the  
grasses and brush ornately festooned with a bewildering array  
of debris;

peering-down at his feet, having been here once before  
and watched two horseshoe crabs spawn in the back of a jeep  
submerged in the surf (though he didn't remember that, hadn't  
understood what was happening), he noticed a strange object,  
glistening, albescent and smooth; unlike much of this wreckage,  
he had no idea what it comprised or where it'd come from (the  
coast being, obviously, a special refuge for refuse, home to all  
the enigmatic drift caught-up in a fruitless litigation between  
land and sea)—and this alone—at least briefly—attracted him,  
because he couldn't say what of it belonged to nature and  
what to human-craft, couldn't say whether it typified trash or  
treasure, an old bowling-pin or a Brancusi;

though soon enough, befuddled, bested by the object's  
inscrutable use, he threw it back into the bay, feeling himself but  
a plaything tossed between desire and detritus,

as though to be discussed was to be discussed as any-  
old other thing that would ever exist—

waste being everything, give or take a little time;

\*

that night he dreamt of crates of expensive sneakers toppling from cargo-ships and out into the ocean, their constellation of dismal and incessant commerce carried to and fro, raised, lowered, seized, lost and seized again—an exchange as persistent as it was inert, sad witness to the indifference afforded even luxury,

and awoke the next morning envying the standards for posterity established by nuclear waste;

so of course the question then-became: how could he pit this trash against itself and make it work for him (would an optimist think-otherwise?)?—

didn't anyone understand that in the final deposition, garbage would not-only have more to say about the genuine nature of mankind than all our precious monuments and memorials, but that it would number those monuments amongst its own?—why not name and honor, linger a little while over every last glop of gunk and grime, find some way to market-it:

like: you could worry that the air embodied some noxious conglomerate of pulverized plastic and industrial-waste, or you could describe it as *Custom-built, Man-made* and in so doing attach a price, charge a little-bit for each breath; why not re-imagine the info-sphere as a space whereby garbage emerged-as the predominant vehicle of articulation, re-brand crud as that inexhaustible underclass of objects that'd fallen afoul-of acceptance: the indifferent, ugly, lost, wayward, leaking, abject, execrable and unwanted (who couldn't relate!), that would, in the end, undoubtedly conquer—

good God!—:

the earth was filled-to-bursting with pollution, just ready for everything to come tumbling out like candy from a piñata—was he the only-one prepared to grab-hold of this opportunity?—

why couldn't people realize: time and the environment (whatever that might come to mean) were going to devour everything that wasn't artificial: eternal life belonged-to the contaminants, if you wanted to back a winner, the choice was obvious;

\*

so he began to study the garbage-trucks more closely, watched as they went up and down the streets, utterly flabbergasted by the responsibility assigned these ungainly contraptions, and, at the same time, enthralled by the cumbersome pace with-which they moved so freely across an otherwise frenzied city;

one evening as he left the office, out of curiosity, he walked down into the subway and stood on the platform of the trains; he stared down into the fetid puddles of liquid miscellany, the grisly mingling of so-much indecipherable waste;

the conventions of city-life discouraged engaging the other humans gathered there, but down-along the tracks the vortex of garbage offered an alternate-idea of assembly, everything fusing indiscriminately, unafraid, dispersing en-masse transformed into vile clandestine clouds of toxicity;

*Might be worth emulating*, he mused;

up-above the air seemed breathable, some trees managed to stay green; at the very least the squirrels looked happy; back-inside, standing before his bedroom window, he spotted a plastic-bag coiled round the spindly branches of a tree—the next day it was still there; and the day-after; and the day-after that;

through weeks of wind and rain it clung to its perch, establishing itself as part of the neighborhood; true, it was obviously trash, but it wasn't going away like trash was supposed to; he admired this refusal to enter the endlessly transient ranks of waste, its urge to have a home, to break bounds and create its own flight and vector;

and then one day it was gone;

\*

it was this residual attachment to all-things supposedly disposable he hoped to exploit; enmeshed in the expansive remnants of a decadently mediated life, most simply weren't sophisticated enough curators to distinguish between the

precious and putrescent, and so, in the daily process of accruing desire, they rendered themselves helpless;

he pictured all-those slumped-down on a sofa, tethered to some device, no-sooner engaged than engulfed, all the tabs, pages, feeds and streams piling-up like traffic-accidents in an endless fog, an incessant cascade of micro-commands relentlessly refreshed, updated and introduced wherein the distinction between necessity and debris was disconcertingly obscure, complicating an already strained understanding of what merited interest and attention;

people weren't only incapable of distinguishing between news, lies, jokes, gossip, sarcasm and propaganda but untroubled by their inability to do so,

like on some fundamental level they understood their own lives were the real junkyards, the true sites of pollution, where each morning their jobs placed them squarely-back in the filth, doing work they'd prefer disown, so that, in discarding garbage higgledy-piggledy and turning a blind-eye to the consequences associated with doing-so, it was their own lives they were hoping to dismiss and dispose of;

and all the litter swirling in the wind?—

the scattered cries for help of so many sublimated suicides;

\*

and though he told himself otherwise (as most were wont to do), his life was no different; visions of the future always entailed ever purer shades of white, ever sleeker, smudge-free surfaces, the eradication of dust, mildew and mold, cleanliness as a prerequisite of progress—as though our dreams of leaving this landfill previously known as Earth behind and blasting our bloated bodies off-into the cosmos were fueled less by ambition and scientific-curiosity than a moral-panic regarding our own filthiness, the tedious self-recrimination (or laborious repression thereof) of inhabiting a planet suffocating beneath its struggle to assimilate not-only so many human byproducts,

but so many humans themselves;

still, he was willing to bet that even after we'd hacked every last facet of the human genome, subjugated artificial-intelligence to our whimsical-bids, developed light-speed spacecraft and fled the solar-system tail-tucked between the legs, deep-down we'd remain enamored of the blood, dander and flatulence that would, somehow, eternally signify humanity, semaphores of a stubborn resistance to the unfettered-order advanced society was purportedly, and perpetually, shepherding us toward;

and the sooner we came to accept this the better, not-solely because outer-space was already cluttered with exploded satellites, rusting carcasses of obsolete spacestations, burnt-out remnants of intergalactic war-games and graveyards (not to mention the errant nuts and bolts tumbling through the silent-reaches at thousands of miles-per-hour), but because already visible on the horizon was a future-time—maybe a century away, perhaps arriving tomorrow—when, if we weren't careful, humans themselves would-be the clunky, unwanted vestiges of a world sick and tired of being mired in grimy inefficiency;

\*

riveted to the allure of an imagination effervescing with images of rotting cities, airport slums, abandoned byways and decrepit factories, romantic attraction affirmed it not-only could persist, but might actually flourish, beyond any belief in the present and its corresponding connection to a future;

this posture permitted him to look at the world and believe that it was closer to death than he would ever-be, and in-so-doing granted him access to all sorts of highminded-thoughts concerning the picturesque, time and empire: a withdrawal into the self that foreclosed any possibility of seeking new measures or different behaviors, and as these thoughts sputtered and flickered in the instantaneous fatigue that accompanied even a self-flattering bout of mental exertion, they nevertheless left him free to go on defiling as he strode defiantly across the face

of the earth;

in-fact, far from forcing some sort of confrontation with the implausibility inherent in his worldview, or some sort of reevaluation of his lifestyle, his contemplation of apocalypse was easily bracketed in consciousness by the pursuit of money: ruin cast its shadow, and he collected the light, committed with renewed vigor to jerry-rigging some prop for the decaying facades and fallacies of significance;

for he knew no other way forward;

\*

drowning sentiment and thoughts-of-joy in the frigid waters of egotistical calculation, he doubled-down on assessing whatever passed before him in strictly monetary terms; the results were obvious: a brutal, profoundly unprofound state of affairs he rationalized as not-only reality but ideal;

of course fetishizing finance shouldn't be confused with a belief-system; on the contrary: it dismantled any such notions, re-installing some version of such occasionally on an interim or ad-hoc basis so that his quote-unquote *needs* could be defined and redefined as necessary, constructing along the way some monstrous, infinitely plastic mock-morality capable of metabolizing anything with-which it came in contact—finance as less a profession than a pervasive, amorphous atmosphere;

\*

if as a young man he'd learned-how to absorb and reflect a wide variety of outside energies and influences, he now—having convinced himself with all-too-much ease he could dictate the terms of externality—had to contend with the opposite struggle, how to function in the absence of opposition;

he told anyone who'd listen that he'd stripped himself of illusion and seen the world for what it was: a war of all-against-all, where it was either exploit or be exploited, and that to play by the rules was to render oneself irrelevant;

to be a realist was to confront this head-on, to accept that there were only winners and losers and that the bulk were clearly losers; but why bother explain himself, it was plain as day that everything within society should be treated and run like a business;

within this pitchblack and hyperbolic insistence on cruelty, betrayal and self-serving savagery, there wasn't enough light left to cast shadows—malevolence relegated to a mere forensic banality, a proliferation of corruption so rampant and widespread it not-only quelled any possible outrage, but all interest in its existence as well;

nevertheless, no matter what he told himself, finance, at its most-basic level, consisted of a naïve and desperate-bid to find faith—a faith that money, far from being just some fiction run venomously amok, a plague-like fantasy, was, in-fact, an objective imprint of worth, an extension of biology;

somewhere within he must've understood money was a meaningless token, lacking any claim to intrinsic value, but he behaved as though it were divine law, or,

short of that:

as if it grew on trees;

\*

possessed by control—not-only in possessing it, but in being possessed by it, possessed by its pursuit, its influence over him—he convinced himself he was the engine-room through which reality was orchestrated, implementing initiatives wherein actuality factored only in-so-far-as it might register in marketing as consumable, casually obliterating whatever couldn't be turned to profit, the prospect of growth and revenue his sole bond to the planet, anything else being-seen as bad for business;

work and life were inseparable; finance even followed him through his sleep; time ceased to appear linear, broke-down, ruptured; production and distribution restructured his nervous system; to function effectively he needed to respond