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Why working together with an inner Voice

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Josef Strau

These days i started thinking i would like to try to give some thought about how i got into the sometimes quite painful addiction to write something down, which mostly is not of any value to probably anyone. And worse than that, as in so many addictions one spends most the time not in doing it, but more in just thinking of it or even hoping for the next moment when one is getting into it again. These long daily periods of waiting and focusing on nothing worthy or real, just some slowing down of thoughts, are actually the most destructive part of the addiction and, as so many know, they are the reason for the decline of life which usually affects anyone who has been addicted. Although the decline helps that all anxieties about any social position cease to weigh upon one's self, but unfortunately as well giving up attending to matters of practical importance, and one might have lost all desire to do so. So, in that respect the otherwise so true sentence, you are only a writer when you write, seems to completely miss the point.

Of course, one could start really writing down anything, but that is not the question. The question is, that one wants to write something down which is exciting in some obscure way and only conceivable to the writer himself. I am really not here to romanticize any addictive behavior, quite the contrary, even if it is about writing. But i cannot really condemn it either. I am just making a testimony, in some moments even a concealed confession. If addictive behavior starts surfacing in later periods of someone's lifetime, it is maybe helpful to believe the behavior is at least indirectly rooted in very early experiences. I thought a lot about this and came to very different but always very trivial-sounding results. These multiple-issue events were in some way as coincidental as some great soccer game moment, but for anyone involved they are an expression of the purest magic. Although i am a big admirer of grand explanations i am absolutely adverse to them when it comes to writing. Writing should be left for the truth.

This morning i wasted away, as with so many mornings feeling pure procrastination like wearing an old pancake on your head and then waiting for the big moment to come out of it. Slowly, at least slowly, the afternoon came over our neighborhood and i still followed the thoughts in the middle of blankness, walking along, observing what it was about them, until finally "something" is going on with these thin strings in the vast empty space ahead

of me. Not much, but it was as if i arrived in some slightly denser region of my introspective journey. But it was just the voice of the landlord in his backyard garden below my window. It reminded me of last summer, when i, lazy as possible from the endless heat, used to listen to his endless monologues, which seemed as vast as the great new york blue sky. It was really intense sometimes, in the best and most impressive way, and sometimes the heat in the street was terrible too, all worked painfully on already overwrought nerves. And here it was again this year, the blueness, the heat and for me at least the completely untranslatable string of stories, jokes and kind of craziness surfing through my empty inner space. But what made me this afternoon so attentive to my thoughts was that i realized how much this incredible combination brought me to the beginnings of my addictive behavior and to the Polish voices i heard when i grew up. My parents used to have quite puritan ways of life, but sometimes this was dramatically interrupted for instance by a group of polish friends my mother for some reasons used to have. Particularly the women were quite glamorous and it seemed to me as if in all these long days of their visit the men in the group were almost intimidated by the incredible energy and the humor of these ladies. Maybe the analogy of the polish sound of language from childhood reappearing in the backyard in summer was the treasure to be found in the search for the early roots of an obsessive behavior to write something down even if there is nothing much about it worth to communicate. Maybe there is. But that would be too long to explain. Sometimes these voices dating back from so long ago actually turned into understandable narratives. And these narratives maybe laid some fundament for wanting to say something, to give testimony of something.

Like one of the visitors long ago, sometimes spoke polish too. He came by each winter and he would say, the germans, they killed and they killed. He told more about what happened before he ended up in Auschwitz, then actually about it. He said to us, they put many people together in the square, and he was one of them, and the nazis asked the doctors and teachers to get separated from the rest and go over to the other part of the square, and one of the teachers said, i knew it, they will need us, and so they stood together and the germans killed them. It took them some time, they killed more and then the rest were taken away to the camp. He often looked at me particularly, more then at the others in my family, and now i start to understand, what it might have meant to him, exactly because i was the youngest there, still a child, and he wanted that particularly i hear him and know what happened, and that i will tell it later. That way he looked at me and explained that they killed everywhere and anywhere, they came to every new town, they just killed and killed that way. They asked first for the people who were at the university, the intelligent people as he called it, who thought each time they were asked for because the germans would need them, but shortly later they were all dead and killed. Some years later we visited another older man in slovenia and stayed there the whole summer. It was the same thing. It heated up under the big blue umbrella and voices spoke and i did not understand. But in the evenings

we had dinner. Everything seemed to be much more exciting than anywhere else before. The older man telling again and again how he joined the partisan fighters in the woods. What a great team they were and they did not fear anything. They chased the germans and austrians, who had been killing anyone. So they started killing them. But slowly. Slowly they were trying to find them and slowly they waited for the moment to come. And then he described with great excitement how they were successful and how he was killing them one by one with anything he had in his hand. I probably stared at him with big eyes and he turned to me, the youngest particularly, and more and more i started joining him during the days, when he walked through the fields and towards the forests in the heat, now alone with him to ask with the almost the same excitement to tell me all the details again. And there were more of these kinds of temporary acquaintances, and always the same pattern. The old men who told these stories did it in long and in different ways than how anyone else would speak. It was like leaving some place, opening the door and suddenly standing outside in some wilderness, but something real. Not only for the story's content, but also for the voice and the ways it went ahead with it. It was a voice, as i learned, typical for older men, telling things too long, too much stretched, monologued and often not coming quickly to a point, maybe afraid of missing some detail which might be later important for the testimonial listener, in some ways kind of unproductive, but these voices and stories of these old men suddenly still meandered in my head this afternoon, but i still did not know if i should tell it, when society does not exist any more, when after many years i am living suddenly in this country-like environment again and often the idea chases me to write anything down, in the best case just unproductively what happens in this environment, down on the street, in the sweet backyards or in the park below, what happens under the little symbolic fences almost, under the blossomed trees and between the wild american squirrels instead of what happened in all these years since then.

L is a guy from like new jersey, where he grew up. Now he lives in brooklyn. Today he had to go out to meet another guy just to have drinks with him. Actually that was the first time since quite a long time that he went out to meet someone and almost the only direction of this meeting was to have drinks. Plus but today the stupid thing is, L did not think about this before the drinks, while he walked along the long park, as one might say following his own steps down to the bar on the corner, he did not think and even worse he did not remember that if you meet someone without any reason than just having drinks and to accept that as a kind of, let's say, as a bright beautiful possibility of really meeting someone, in that case he was experienced enough to remember that in that case, the direction is clear enough that it will end in disaster. And it did. But the beautiful thing is, it was good that way, just like as everything is good and just like everything or actually everyone ends in disaster. In complete disaster better to say. I know this all it sounds stupid or something but i know but it is not the question, stupid or not, it is that

i get up and i have these voices and they tell me to write that down. So i do it, although i actually, i resist quite some time sometimes hours sometimes weeks and months until things happen that i just know, ok, i really better write it down now. Because it is better for everyone. And if i don't write it down strange things start happening to me, which of course are good things in some ways, but still, once i know i better write it down and no strange things happen any more, which is good. But i would not want to miss the strange things as well, for they seem to be good as well. Like both are good, the strange things that follow resistance are good, more good for me and the writing of things down are good for everybody while not so much good for me maybe. Maybe. But i don't know actually. Anyways, i should say. Yesterday strange things happened too, which was like having disastrous drinks. It is with writing, no, i am telling my most stupid truth now i am confessing that writing is like you cannot ride if you have no horse, you cannot write if you have no horse. And that is the whole thing about the voices.

Walking that way i saw the squirrel, the small one again, and it made me remember how many times i named myself a squirrel, or a broom, a kitchensink, an accursed damned kitchensink, for now i cannot repair this or this, and not even have the money to get it done, and a loser and even more so a rabbit too, and a whole list that contains a disproportionate amount of disparaging words, and now i am going for drinks and try to talk about poetry, and now i am trying to talk in poetrylike lists of the insults that are hurled at me i could not remember how often, and it was here again the squirrel in the park walking next to me, and i even forgot i saw this real squirrel, not the analogy in the self accusation, which was instead this wild and strong and active and successful squirrel in my backyard, my american squirrel, as i named it, so i did forget the backyard squirrel when i walked to the disaster bar as much as i forgot that there is no hope believing in meeting someone just for drinks, and forgetting that it can become disastrous any time you forget. But still you forget when walking. There is not a future and no past either sometimes, it's just disaster, end of the day. Today was no winter any more, no more cold not cold above us in the whole sky, quite the opposite. It was very warm and it felt very warm above us, and even felt like it was warm above in the whole sky and even light everywhere above although it was night when L went out in front of the door to smoke the first cigarette after quite some margaritas and some . . . he used in between to fill up the margaritas a bit to give them some taste, as he called it.