

FOLKLORE U.S.

You know how to be cool? First off you don't *be* cool, you *seem* cool. The way you seem cool is to get all quiet and self-assured and apparently at peace with yourself. Not mean, not cold; those are signs of weakness. Just keep your mouth shut, mostly. Another thing, when you *do* say something, say the opposite of what someone else just said, just reverse it. Example: *When we heard they were tossing out all the rules, someone said it would be total anarchy, but my friend said, "No, that's when the Real Rules begin."* It sounds smart, even though it doesn't mean anything. But then you think about it and you start to realize, maybe it does mean something after all.

There's actually a book, a hidden best seller, that tells you dried-up bread crusts how to *seem*. It's basically just rules. Like if someone is like, "What do you think of the new Darkthrone album, it kind of sucks," and you never heard of Darkthrone, you say, "To be honest, and I know this is not a popular opinion, I think it's the best work they've ever done." Just head that shit off at the pass. You flip it, thus planting the seed of uncertainty. When they inquire further you need not explain yourself, you simply go mum, as if explanation—conversation itself—is beneath consideration. Think of it like how you have to cheat to get an actual good haircut: it'll be the coolest, tangled, pushed-back flop-volume, but when you actually comb it straight out it's crap, all ill-cut and raggedy with random strands jagg-ing out. But who cares if you look dorky when you get out of the shower? Actually, on second thought you should say, "I think it's *among* the best work Darkthrone's ever done." Since I know you people hate to be firm or conclusive, even



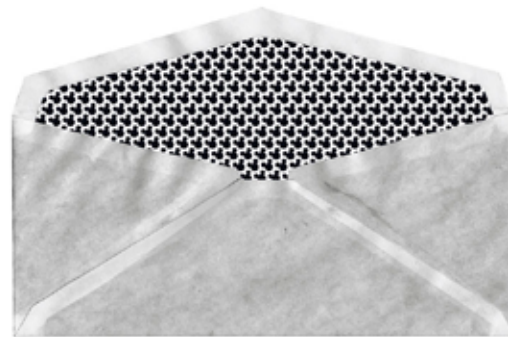
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about a bullshit sound bite about shit you don't know shit about.

In summary, if you think about it, all you have to do is flip the common sense. Whatever people typically say or think probably gets interesting if you invert it. If you make a "bad" video, it will probably be more interesting than this pathetic circling around some neurotically formulated concept of what a "good" video could be. If you dress "badly," it will at least be interesting. People on the street will be scoping you out like, "Hmm, that must be the new shit, guess I just don't understand it yet. Sigh." So our line of advice, our *best practices*, would be: "Redundancy, Waste, Perversion, Excess, Don't Try Too Hard, and Do the Bad." But if you want the short version, usually it's enough to simply not make sense.

Understood. My advice is also about words. To pass as an adult you essentially need to master the language used in the medical and legal pro-worlds. Not *master*, really, it's chiefly about attitude, an attitude of mastery and ownership, *seeming*, as you say. But after you get the hang of the basic tonus you're able to attend to the playful and endless matter of manipulating words. For example, in adult world, when someone with that authoritative demeanor scrapes a bit of skin off your forehead with a sharp stick and makes off with it, that's a "biopsy." You got "biopsied." You say, "They did the biopsy; we're waiting for lab results on the blood work." What'd you say your name was? Bopsy? And a guy swiped some ooze off that boo-boo? And now he's in the other room, scratching his head?

Anyway, at a certain point, when you get the hang of this, you can ease into making shit up. A driveway might be a "road approach," or, taking it from the other side of things, a "car approach," or I guess even a "house approach." For example, "Is the property oriented in such a way that there's a good road approach?" Just work it in there as you hash out the deal, no one



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blinks. Or, "We happen to have three cars, does the property have a car approach on the north side also?" Or, "The house approach is paved with crushed seashells to yield, upon arrival, a pleasantly cranky maritime soupçon." See how authoritative and professional that sounds, like your mind is composed of sharp, interlocking polyhedrons. In fact, I just made that shit up, no one ever heard it before. But it could be some of that new-new. That's how professional lingo gets lab-engineered and virused around.

Alternately, you could maintain that it's a sort of pro-world poetry, that it's pure invention arising from the fundamental need to play, and thus an expression of hope. It's the choice to put your plants in arid soil where good words normally won't grow. And by the way, forget writers who think it's interesting to simply list names of trees and plants, when few readers can be expected to call up images befitting these lovely names: "She stood among swamp oaks, soft maples, tamarack, butternut." Fuck it, that's either poetry or it's a sequential list of entries in a botanist's catalogue. Either way, please leave it alone, craft it right back out of that "pared-to-the-bone" short story.

On the other hand, to get the feeling of reality you do need abundant, senseless detail, which could simply mean lovely words denoting little, i.e., pure evocative sound, i.e., something approaching poetry. And let's face it, most of life consists of standing anxiously in a clearing surrounded by encroaching thickets of shit you don't understand. Like, if you were really standing amongst those particular trees you just mentioned, they don't mean nothing, it would be just more trees. Though if you were ignorant of the names of absolutely *everything* around you, you'd qualify as certifiably insane, and thus incapable of convincing everyone that you're in fact sane. As they drag you off.

It's like how with slang sometimes it's better to just not go there. You're not sure what to say,



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you get all insecure: Yeah, man, we did some *blow*? We were doing *lines*? We blew some *yayo*? Powder? Charlie? Snow? What you do is just say, "Some cocaine." As if you don't even give a fuck enough to complete your. "Some cocaine was consumed." The passive voice. "Heavy cocaine usage last night." Understated, clinical. Everyone respects the hands-off approach with the low-pro glow. Or ditch slang entirely: "Some sex occurred last night." "I'm stepping out; one must needs urinate." Shit flirt with funny. Why? Who know.

Like a marketing exec who pitches a down-market sweetened alcoholic beverage called, say, Tiané. Sounds about right. "If we're lucky, in about two years we'll see a lot of babies named Tiané born to lower-class urban moms." "Right, right. But maybe we should name it, like, Liazé. *L* sounds are trending on the street. Nearly as much as *z* sounds." "But if it's all about *z*, why not Ziazé?" "Right. Or we just go with Zzzzz." Now that's how you spread influence. Enough influence that you have parents naming kids after your product. And I ain't just talking down-market, neither...I mean, if you could actually meet Bob Marley or Bob Dylan, what would you say to them? Like me, you'd probably be curious to know how they feel about their Christian names being slapped on a few thousand male babies. "When we get there tonight, don't forget to ask if Marley and Dylan got into Gifted & Talented." On the one hand, a pre-tarnished skull ring; on the other, a Tribeca-flavored edible undergarment. You people just consume and consume and consume, and then you're sick and must stop and vomit it all up for the next meal.

But I don't agree. Because that's actually how a person makes stuff. It's not from some position of withdrawal or purity, rather the opposite. What do we like? Josef Frank textiles, Nathalie Du Pasquier jewelry, clothes by Paul Harnden, Zen Buddhism but not mainstream Buddhism, anything by Bach, anything by Kafka. I could go on. As for the pre-tarnished-jewelry metaphor,



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do you honestly feel that “back in the eighties” men were still men, women were women, the mainstream was the mainstream, and the underground was the underground? That all the barriers were still in place, *but in a productive way*, and now we’re tossing out all the rules? I mean to say, is it genuinely the fault of the nineties? The truth is that just because you lived through a period or listened to its music when it was new or wore the styles of that age, this means precious little. You possess no claim to any of it, no more than we who come later to heft it and put it under a light and study these artifacts with disinterest. It may be better to approach everything as a researcher. You wore dolman-sleeved jackets? You liked Run-DMC in 1983 and Royal Trux in 1993? Who gives a shit? You moved on and rejected it, or it rejected you. I choose it consciously, I own it more than you ever did. Because we take these inconsequential leavings and background noise and fuck them into weapons. We’ll take the wretched loop playing while you’re on hold with your bank and stutter it into a sensation. We like things broken down and infirm. The more amateur the better. Although it’s not that they are “broken,” it’s that they never worked properly in the first place. We once set out to spray a Mercedes sign on the wall but mistakenly made a peace sign. The spray paint was applied too thickly and kind of dripped down to fill in the missing line segment; it happened after we’d already left the scene. And fuck mid-century modernism, shit’s boring. We like the thirties for furniture. Also the nineties. We appreciate Memphis, of course, but now that house is too crowded. Whoever was building furniture when the towers fell, seek out that person and sink your investment. We “kind of hate” Apple, but we use it anyway. Look, by the time you’re seven you basically know what your limits are: you’re not Italian, but you *are* tall and lovely; you’re not Tom Cruise—who’s tiny and anxious-making—but who cares, these days no one cares about celebrities. How many freaking movie stars we down to now, Will Smith? Fucking ghost town over there. Ditch that twentieth-



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century shit, we rather make micro-hallucinations and jury-rigged imitation. Drop your interest in film, photography, montage, collage, fragments, heterogeneity, speed—in a word, *modernity*, plus the hysterical love of modernity you've daubed with prefixes like *post-* and *super-* and *hyper-*. Film as a metaphor is done, along with all those artworks and experimental fictions that used film as a structuring or narrative device, or that allude to jump cuts, establishing shots, montage, zooms and pans, frames per second, deep focus, seething grain. Or later, starting in the eighties, all those people who got excited about video as metaphor: test patterns, cathode rays lighting up the dark, vertical holds and densities of broadcast snow, horizontal scan lines stacked like noir window blinds, everyone living in a realm flickering, unstable, and staticky, close to the edit, in the video-store aisles, in the erotic insertion of a tape into a hole in a unit. Whether on film or on video, movies are essentially a boring, short-lived historical flash, just signal to noise.

The twist is that cinema has a twin, born and raised right alongside: the Story. In your fixation on moving images you're like those fiction writers clinging to this corny-ass idea of literature as human interest: uhhh, it is sweeping, even as it is a collection of lapidary "set pieces," it surveys modern history as well as our little moment, it addresses individual psychology plus the swamp of family, it respects passion and feeling, and it is fundamentally humorous, since we see humor as a vital means of bringing people together, of easing the common burden of our "humanity," plus an absurdist bite in reality's squat neck. But just because you suck doesn't mean you're a vampire. To all you out there crafting set pieces about people who love and fight, our struggles and hopes, how petty and silly and human we are with our *frailty*, a quality we worship, disdain, coddle, and above all *leverage*: well, we don't feel much like laughing or crying, particularly.

In that case, you need to ditch all those dreams that snuck in uninvited, smuggled in the crack



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between movies and stories. Example: there is a dream specific to the twentieth century, and it is peddled by movies and books and advertisements, and it describes the lovely little town that conceals evil or chaos “beneath its placid surface.” Establishing shot: a panoramic, sweeping pan of an LA Valley scene, low dry hills lined with ranch houses, kids on bikes tracing lazy loop-de-loops; or, alternately, a calm and steady zoom high over leafy East Coast suburbs in autumn, a maroon station wagon slowing to round a corner and pass from sight, Victorian wood-frame houses under maples rustling in the wind: winter’s coming. Which we already know, because it’s a twentieth-century picture, it’s thoroughly uptight about the “what lies beneath” thing. Which petered out some time in the nineties. And what replaced it? That’s the question of today.

What? You talking about the nineties? Furniture is one thing, but what about all those guys who follow an aesthetic credo that has them looking one step from homelessness, or grad school at least: frayed button-downs, mussed hair, scuffed non-Black Person sneakers, and no logos at all, unless they’re total non sequiturs (e.g., a tee announcing “Vidal Sassoon,” admittedly an amusing name). Dried-up bread crusts from the indie-rock era. Fine, but you’re in your forties or fifties now! Get some effing dignity, man. That’s the thing about men’s fashion, it’s chiefly about dignity. Women can play the coquette, but for men, straight or gay, the chief thing is dignity. You understand that, you can make a pile of money.

Right, but thing about decades. You’re still fairly young. When you first learn about decades as a structuring idea you’re quite small, and ten years seems like a long time. The problem is that this casual understanding of decades stays with you far longer than it has any right to. By the time you’re poised at what the ancients called “the midpoint of life”—i.e., your thirties—your experience of time has matured, and you should have



come to understand that ten years is nothing, that this division of the century into decades is silliness, that the endless shambolic sliding of trends, historical moments, and cultural eras resembles only the behavior of ungainly amounts of refuse as a container is tipped over to send its contents slithering and slipping over and around themselves and into the next container, leaving greasy muck everywhere.

Yes, but occasionally you have to take out the garbage. What do I really know about life after World War II? I mean, I'll tell you what. Okay, "Postwar Era." Everyone says everything changed. What really changed is that in the fifties people had pretty tight haircuts. Shit was tight and slicked out. But kind of naive? I don't know if that was coming out of the Great Depression, some kind of scarcity/rationalism issue, or more from the militarization of a whole society or whole generation, i.e., an uptight optic. Or what. Because most guys had longer hair than that, even just thirty or forty years earlier. History's so schizo. But by the end of the sixties everyone had just went completely the other way, crazy-long hair, just "stop cutting, stop cutting," but also stop combing, stop grooming, stop using soap. Probably because more people had color TV, and the movies were into kids all of a sudden, and that whole discovery of older people having short hair, you know, it was a rejection of uptightness that was actually itself mad uptight. Do you know what I mean? So by the end of the seventies hair got a little less shaggy and long, or at least less long, but they were still into the natural vibe; even if it wasn't quite as long, it got, like, super-styled, you were taking a long time to make it look like your hair was natural and had no product or anything, but it was all puffed out and kind of dry, kind of blow-dried, because if it was *really* natural it would get all ratty, and all nasty with sebum, and you didn't want that. Then in the eighties they *really* discovered product, or maybe the dudes who make product had some serious brainstorms to, like, rescue us from that fifties slicked-



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out thing. Because eighties haircuts got crazy severe, kind of like fifties haircuts that finally got fuck-you blood, like they saw their dad knifed, by their mom, and they got sent to a foster home, and learned to, you know, keep a lookout. No, I'm just playing. But really, if you were an art school girl in the eighties, you were definitely thinking about the fifties, you had a little leather biker jacket and cat-eye glasses and suede creepers. Which would all live in the back of the closet until well after your first baby. And then in the nineties people go back to kind of more scruffed-out styles, like dudes in bands getting back into long hair and the ratty look, but now they had that serious product lust in their blood, and there is just absolutely no putting that genie back in the bottle. And in the two-thousands people started getting creative, like: now that we found gel, what are we going to do about it? Suddenly you could wake up to the reality of bangs. My personal gripe is that so many dudes with long hair have the same retarded non-style, which apparently arises from a belief that long hair means granting every strand an equal opportunity to reach its full potential. It's thick, it's shapeless, it's falling to the shoulders, and there it gets chopped. It looks like a supposedly urban-minimal throw rug that, through factory error, was woven from polar fleece. Memo to guys: there's a reason women have a culture of salons, stylists, and products: we have to deal with all this hair! Get it together, guys, get it taken care of professionally. Come on. How many products in your hair, motherfucker? You should have three: a leave-in candy, a pomade, and a silk groom. Plus that stuff on your scalp for the dandruff, sebum, whatever it is.

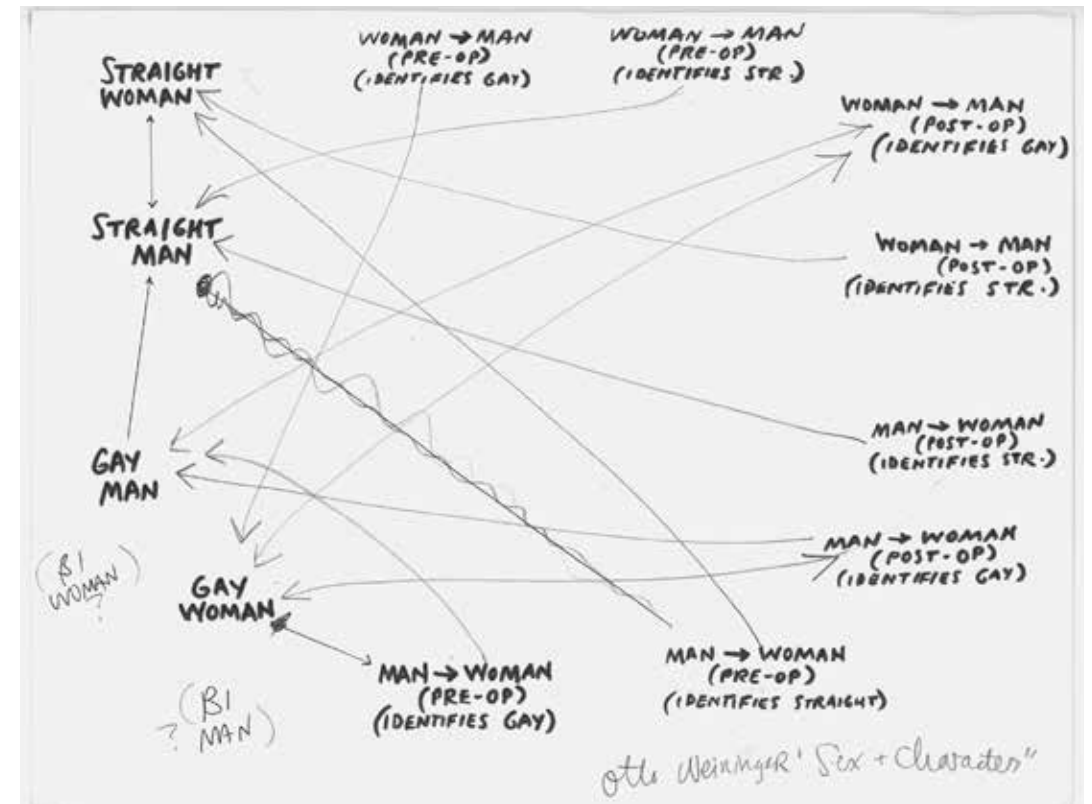
But you young adults are often slightly out of focus, as if your accumulated lack of consideration for or ignorance of all the lives open to you has clouded your mien. Dim little stars, glimpsed only from the side. All u earnest people who decry the transformations money has wrought on this town (a city changing before our eyes, developers remaking us in the image of health



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and safety, guard the memory of all that is lost!) have no understanding of what's been gained, and not in the positivist terms developers and politicians use, but in terms of all the oddball approaches to life that real people rustle up in the face of massive body blows. To their lifestyles. Get used to it, it's here, by all means organize to combat the next onslaught, but stop pining for what you've lost, it demeans all the things that we down here have wrested from the wreckage.

Yes, but to take that urban-gentrification image to the next level, what you're talking about is exactly the situation of being a young person today, poking your head out of the muck and getting a sack of muck in the face. That's right. Motherfucker, it's all about the youth. You hate the young, and it's only because they will die long after you, it's obvious. Experience only makes people duller and more depleted and more tired, not wiser. As we slowly morph into those who make a virtue of failure by calling it a sign of resistance.

So, in closing, here's a little game we play. You just add "if you're young" to any clichéd lyric or advertising tagline, and thereby derive the true, hidden sense.

Night time is the right time (if you're young)
Life is a bowl of cherries (if you're young)
Just do it (if you're young)
Be all you can be (if you're young)

I see your humor. And I raise you one. For we prefer to play another, related game.

Life is a highway (unless you're old)
Think different (unless you're old)
A diamond is forever (unless you're old)
A mind is a terrible thing to waste (unless you're old)

Oh yeah, that be so funny, that be totally working!



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Yeah, it be like something I could sell to a real stand-up guy! I mean, a stand-up comedy guy.

No, aiming higher, maybe: something to sell to late-night talk-show host?

Yeah, well, speaking of time. We're writing a book called either *The Day Before Tomorrow* or *The Day After Yesterday*. We can't decide which.

Oh, that's so funny, because our new book is called just *Today*.



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