

UNTWEETED #1

2018

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As per a New Year's resolution, I did not post a single tweet to @MeneerSamyn in 2018. Instead I made offline notes of everything I might have tweeted or otherwise posted on the internet. This is a collection of these notes, organized per topic.

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Reading over these notes, I realize that many of them have been profoundly important for my thinking and acting over the course of the year. I doubt that I would have been aware of this had I exposed them online. In book form and separated from an immediate social context I can rest assured that these notes will barely be read and much less commented on. That way they can remain my own, and continue to be important to me.

Michaël Samyn.
Gent, Belgium, 28 December 2018

ART

After having seen so much ancient Roman remains, Renaissance and Baroque art impress me a lot less. Ancient Roman art was at once more majestic and serene as well as ornate and wild. The Baroque seems tame compared to it. And the Renaissance silly.

Antique sculptors create for the art not themselves. They are more like musicians who interpret a composition in an attempt to show how beautiful it is, not to demonstrate how well they play. The result can still be exuberant but with all focus on the work and its theme, not on the artist's talent or ingenuity. As a result the art creates a more social embracing experience. It becomes a place of contact. An artist needs to serve the art.

The question whether art that objectifies should be tolerated is absurd. The very purpose of art is to objectify. The problem is not the act of objectification but its subject matter. But we also need to learn how to look at art (again). Art is declining as an aspect of regular civil life. As a result miscomprehension and abuse are on the rise.

In a museum for old art most works are sort of good and some are perhaps great. In an exhibition of contemporary art some works may be sort of good while most are terrible. Both the great and the terrible works affect me deeply. If I am to pay more attention to contemporary art I need to learn how to not be affected by the terrible ones, develop callouses on my soul.

It's perfectly logical that our selections contain increasingly better work the further we move back in time. The bad works are forgotten, lost or destroyed. Visiting a contemporary art show is a heroic undertaking. It's guaranteed that 80% of the works are bad. Sometimes there might not even be a single merely good one. Since there is never a great one and even the good ones tend to be rather simplistic, luckily visiting contemporary art shows doesn't take much time.

Contemporary art often requires an explanation to understand. But that explanation also ruins any enjoyment of the piece. Not just because of what that story is but simply because there is one.

This problem is caused by modernism's rejection of traditional conventions. In the case of the latter, the spectator already knows the story and recognizing it in art can be a powerful experience. The desire, or even the requirement, to create personal individual expressions makes for very lonely artworks.

The big exception is the convention of the moment: when artists create propaganda for The Message, the liberal song about injustice and how great we all are for opposing it. None may deviate! No false notes allowed. But propaganda against the authorities is no different than propaganda in favor of them. And consistency scares me. Mobs scare me.

When does art resemble propaganda more? When it praises the authorities or when it criticizes them?

When people reject contemporary art, we flatter ourselves by assuming that the art is simply too new and challenging for their vulgar tastes. But what if the art is actually too banal, boring and conservative to bother with?

Many are quick to consider our times of artistic multiplicity beyond any of the old media, genres or movements. But I think in the future we will look back and see one of the most homogeneous times in all of art history. A time without conflict, without tension and of perfect ideological cohesion.

Much like musical harmony is a physiological fact involving vibrations, there seems to be a basis for aesthetics in our human physiognomy. Despite cultural differences we tend to use the same principles for creating aesthetic effects. But I don't think we have found as clear an explanation yet.

There seems to have occurred a slight yet insignificant shift in contemporary art over the last few decades. While The Clever Trick is still going very strong, being purposely dumb is on the rise. It's refreshing to see pieces that don't have a twist or try to trick the spectator. Just some dumb things meticulously juxtaposed with no thought other than prevailing platitudes. Though often something will be added so dumb that one suspects one's leg is being pulled after all. Is a subtle style!

Carmen Herrera creates the pictures that don't exist yet, the pictures that have to exist. It's not about invention so much as filling the gaps. The obvious holes where exactly one picture fits. A necessary picture.

One wants to appreciate contemporary art. Because one feels an obligation towards one's epoch. But when one isn't moved by the art of one's own time one starts doubting. First the world and then oneself. Doubt is the exact opposite of what a good art experience entails.

So one continues to look, wading through the endless streams of insults, disappointments, boredom and fatigue. Like Diogenes looking for a human. Or Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot. Or one finds better use for a life.

I'm not going to call it old art anymore. It's not old considering our agricultural era is over twelve thousand years old. I will call it fine art.

Contemporary art is like the bad partner who continuously points out what you are doing wrong and how you should change, never getting to a point of comfort, sympathy, let alone love. Fine art is the good partner with whom you can feel good about yourself, who embraces you in patient arms and gently opens up the whole of existence whenever you are ready to face it with them. Contemporary art continuously slams doors in your face. Fine art opens doors that you didn't even know existed.

Why do we say "art world" but "games industry"?
Wouldn't "art industry" be more honest?

Ultimately I have no time for contemporary art. There's just too much bad work and it is too painful to be confronted with it. I encourage the artists to try a little harder, and perhaps produce a little less. And the gallerists and curators to be a little more discerning.

The result of the exposure to it in Art Basel is that now the sight of the slightest contemporary art triggers intense emotions of dread. Dread that more might follow, I think. Before I had developed a healthy indifference that I thought the fair would either dismiss because there's lots of great contemporary art or strengthen by confirming that it is indeed all shit. But I went in open, without defenses and got hurt severely. Now I fear exposure to contemporary art as a vampire to the light.

When I open up to fine art I receive love and warmth and knowledge and a feeling of unity. When I open up to contemporary art it hits me and cuts me and slaps me. None of this happens without opening up. But opening up clearly makes me vulnerable. As such I need to trust whatever I am opening up to.

Maybe my experience of art is just too intense to be able to handle contemporary art.

The panic I feel when opening up to contemporary art is similar to my response to some pop music (that just hits me without any effort of mine, music has that power) and some modern cities (grids, tall glass and steel buildings). It's almost nauseating. A deep feeling of fear. A desire to flee. But where does it come from? What is it?

It may be because other people don't seem to be bothered by it, or worse they seem to enjoy it. As in that movie where everyone was seeing nice things but in fact everything was terrible and oppressive. And I'm the only one who sees the truth. And I wonder, of course, simultaneously if I'm not the one who is crazy. Combined with a feeling that there is no escape, causing claustrophobic sensations.

A photograph never triggers my desire to step into the world it depicts as a painting does. Photographs don't create an illusion. Paintings do. Does this make paintings more realistic?

Contemporary architecture is not built around the human body (as modernist architecture), or around the human spirit (as traditional architecture). It seems to purposely create alien environments, places not built for humans but colonized, appropriated by them. In contemporary architecture, humans appear like invaders, like parasites. And this comes with all the glamor and bravado of conquest. So perhaps contemporary architecture is built around the human ego. It flatters human power by giving them control over alien systems. It's an architecture of invasion. And it may illustrate simultaneously the continuous wars and oppression among humans, and the feeling that we are an unwanted guest on this planet threatening to destroy it.

If you're an artist not from the West you need to make work that addresses the oppression of your culture by the West. That is what the West demands.

If you're an artist from a minority you need to make work that addresses the oppression of your minority by the majority. That is what the majority demands.

For all the greatness that we believe our technology and knowledge possess, we haven't been able to achieve the splendor of even a mediocre painting. We undoubtedly have gained knowledge in certain areas. But equally clearly we have lost some in others.

Ironically the simplicity of protestant design makes their churches look more oppressive.

Artists are usually progressive thinkers while at the same time often more or less radically opposed to the modernism of their day. This need not be a contradiction if we consider modernism to be a form of conservatism, as conformism, as fitting (in with) the present.

As opposed to experiences with fine art it wasn't any particular piece that affected me at Art Basel. In fact I felt rather amused by seeing all the silly things on the fair (or did I suppress the panic?). Some of them were even somewhat pretty or a tiny bit interesting. And it wasn't at the fair that I felt the panic. It was later, at the prospect of seeing fine art and being afraid I wouldn't be able to enjoy it. Maybe feeling reluctant to open up. And then sad about what I would be missing if I didn't. And angry that contemporary art had caused this feelings. I need to go through a cleansing ritual.

This also concludes my new year's resolution to investigate contemporary art. I have. And I'm done.

Perhaps the problem of contemporary art is that it attempts to deal with contemporary society, and its assumed fragmentation, in media and genres that are wholly unsuitable for such purpose. To transcend the level of merely illustrating the problem, and achieve the insight that fine art can offer, one needs to use a technology that can encompass complexity, multiplicity, ambiguity, fluidity, interference, interaction and change. Lucky for us that technology exists! We just need to figure out how to use it outside of the current confines of contemporary art with its white cubes, black boxes and enduring fetishising of the tangible (the sellable?).

It's a comforting thought. But is it a childish conclusion?
Does it explain things far to neatly to be true?

I have made progress in my new year's resolution attempts to appreciate contemporary art. I now think of contemporary art as I think of pop music. Some of it is kind of nice but most of the time I don't care. And I don't care about finding out more. It doesn't affect me very deeply. For that I need the slightly older stuff, both in music and in visual arts. But I can be amused by contemporary art. That's progress from being disgusted by all of it. Though experience tells me to watch out with the dose. Too much and it's back to disgust for me.

Despite my failure to understand contemporary art as actual art, I have developed a curiosity for it. Which is more than I can say for the pop music that I previously had equated contemporary art with. Some contemporary art strikes me as research. Research precisely into finding a way back to art. Laying the groundwork for future generations. Because we can't simply revert back to art. Not without reverting back the society that supported art. So we have to figure out how to make art now that is as good as the art made then, but in a very different context. Precisely because the context has changed, the art must be different too. Hence the requirement of research.

Abstracting an image also abstracts its meaning. Abstraction of figuration, or stylization, makes the scene more distant, easier to ignore, or to simply be amused by, rather than moved or inspired. There's something about naturalistic figuration that draws us in, that compels us to empathize. Not only with the characters portrayed but also with the materials, shapes and objects. Our sense of touch is awakened by figuration. A sense of touch that expands the imagination.

Modern buildings all look like they were designed on a napkin.

I can't look at contemporary art in the same way as I look at pre-modern art. And I like looking in that way. I like the concentration, the exploration, the time spent looking, being in the presence, the relationship developed with an old painting or sculpture. Contemporary art requires a different way of looking that I find unattractive in and of itself, disregarding the particular piece. I don't like who I am when looking at contemporary art.

Then again, didn't I claim that taking risks is essential to art creation?

You know the art is bad when you start asking yourself questions. Contrary to popular belief art does not ask but answer. Only it answers questions that you didn't have, or don't know how to ask.

It is true that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But this is not an passive process. The eye needs to collaborate intensely with the brain and the heart to deliver the beauty to the beholder. At least when it concerns deep aesthetic pleasure. This is not necessarily hard work. One usually only needs to offer time and focus and let go of other things. This is served by the conventional restrictions in theaters and museums: they allow us to surrender, to let go of the other things in our lives that concern us. As with other activities that give us pleasure, one tends to get better at this with experience.

Paintings are similar to music in that the artist tries to get each and every note right. And just like in music, a wrong note once in a while does not ruin the piece and might even make it more enjoyable.

A film used to be referred to as a picture. As if it was a painting. But what happened when linear stories were added to paintings? Oddly it seems like they lost something. They lost their silence, their enigmatic character. They stepped down from art to entertainment. This is of concern to me since I also work in a medium that seems to add properties to old media.

Perhaps art happens in the vain attempt to add sound, motion or story to a painting. That this is technically impossible requires an artful intervention, artifice, an artificial concoction. Art happens where the impossible is attempted?

Perhaps because in the play between suggestion and imagination, the spectator becomes an active participant in the artistic process. People say that this participation is already a given in my medium. They call it interactivity. But often this interactivity is not sufficiently active and often more a matter of submitting to the machine than determining one's own experiences. The way one needs to do to get something out of a book, a concert, a painting or an artistic film.

Modern things now appear very old fashioned to me. And things that are three hundred years old fresh and thriving. I can't tell the difference between modernism now and modernism from one hundred years ago. But three or four hundred years ago so many things happened in much shorter time spans. (And I know so much less about then.) Interesting how those old times come closer and closer the longer modernism remains the same. One hundred years of modernism.

Having seen so much contemporary art discourages me from seeing any art at all. Unless I can continue on this masochistic path where everything disgusts me but I feel admired for being so cultural and modern.

Perhaps encountering old art ruins the pleasure one might get out of contemporary art just as knowing early music makes pop music sound simplistic and trite.

The only pop music I still enjoy is music I already know. And perhaps I only enjoy the memory of enjoying it. Pop music I haven't heard yet sounds dull, repetitive, banal.

Could one make a contemporary work of art that encourages us to ignore money?

Looking at old art saddens me with the question why we cannot create such things anymore. Even if we would try we couldn't.

The trees still look the same as those in paintings made centuries ago.

There's something very poetic about seeing people walk among figurative art works.

The difference between museums of fine art and museums of decorative arts is that the plaques mention the name of the artist before the title of the piece.

Contemporary art is not art that was made now. It is art that happens now. Even if the work was created hundreds of years ago, it can still happen now.

Deliberateness is very important for the aesthetic experience: the feeling that the picture could not be any different. This is a little problematic for realtime arts.

A Flemish primitive like Metsys depicts what things feel like more than what they look like.

Will future archeologists consider our pornography to be fertility symbols?

Baroque art is sincere. And it is confident and comfortable with its own time. Contemporary art always attempts to disguise its fear and discomfort with its own time under a thick layer of humor. As a paradoxical result, contemporary art appears arrogant and oppressive while baroque art is modest and welcoming.

The baroque is often mistaken for a celebration of excess. But it was merely a sincere effort to bring beauty and elegance into this world.

Maybe I also prefer old art because it's more mysterious. I am not as familiar with its context or what kind of people the artists were. While I instantly see right through the tricks of my contemporaries.

The early Renaissance combines the deep spirituality of the middle ages with the sensuality of the antiques. That's probably why it makes me feel so happy. There is also a certain comfort with death that I appreciate.

Most serious things in modernism started as a joke.

I am thoroughly bored with and profoundly sick and tired of irony in art.

Painters like Van Eyck confirm the identity and objecthood of the painting by having the painting speak for itself: "Van Eyck painted me".

Tapestries are the progenitors of digital art. Because every element in them was put there very deliberately. Without the freedom that the hand allows for. But with a gained sense of stability. And of course, superficially, because tapestries are digitized pictures. Like mosaics.

The stability of tapestries also makes them harder to enjoy. They don't speak as directly and immediately as paintings. They require some time and attention to appreciate. But the effort is often greatly rewarded.

The lack of the free hand in tapestries, and other digital art, may seem disconcerting at first. But the stability gained by the purposeness of their creation actually provides for additional fascinating mystery, when given the appropriate attention.

They are not going anywhere. They even resist restoration and the fading of their colors, however regrettable, adds to their solidity, makes them feel even more genuine.

Young Raphael makes for a second rate Perugino. He had no choice but to abandon his master's teachings.

That everybody in the audience apparently liked the show reassures me that I was right to dislike it.

When painters shifted from wood to canvas supports, the paintings shifted from objects to pictures, from parts of reality to pictures of reality.

People who enjoy contemporary art tend to enjoy old art too, in a similar way. But for people who have been touched by the divinity of old art, there is no way back.

Yep. There's high art and there's low art. Deal with it.

Is the shift from objects to pictures in art related to the philosophical focus on man's experience of the world rather than the world as such?

We design ugly environments to give us an excuse to indulge in our smartphones.

MUSIC

I accidentally liked a post on Instagram because I misread it. It said "There isn't only modern music," next to a picture of viols. But I had read "There is only modern music."

Music is always modern. Not just because we live in an era that's already twelve thousand years old so a few centuries ago isn't that old. But simply because when someone plays music, they play it now. They make it modern by playing it now. It doesn't matter when the piece was composed. It is expressed right here, right now, by a living person.

The only music that is old is recorded music. As a result the latest pop hit is older than the baroque tune I play on my viol.

Why would I listen to contemporary pop music when I haven't heard everything that Vivaldi has written? Or Telemann. Or Bach. Not to speak of Corelli and the many composers whose name I haven't even heard. First things first.

I've been there. I've been moved to tears by pop music. But then I heard baroque, really heard it. Perhaps I stopped weeping. And I never went back.

I've had a first private session with my new instrument: a second hand bass viola da gamba. As it is perfectly common to make horrible sounds on bowed string instruments, I'm determined to work hard on my right hand technique. Also because I'm relying on my experience with the guitar for the left hand –though I have already discovered a peculiar coordination difficulty. Between two lessons from Silvia de Maria while staying in Rome and reading Alison Crum's instructions, I figured out how to produce a satisfying sound after a few hours. I obtained the best results by more or less throwing my whole body onto the instrument. Gravity is the essential ingredient. And the right arm needs to be positioned in a way to maximize its impact. Keeping my wrist straight, for instance, means that the bow forms a rather extreme angle with the arm. By pushing the bow into the strings, this angle is corrected to the perpendicular position with a lot of pressure onto the strings. Then by releasing the index finger and pointing it downwards, even if only as preparation, I am able to drop all the weight of my arm onto the strings.

It feels like a wild, almost violent thing to do. To surrender oneself so wholly to an instrument. Quite different from my much more delicate approach to the guitar - though no doubt playing the latter will be affected by my experience with the gamba. The viola da gamba demands that total focused relaxation that is recommended for all music playing by refusing to produce any decent sound without it. It's a difficult state to enter for me –possibly since it involves giving up some control. This openness to the instrument, to sound and music, comes with a sense of vulnerability that is both terrifying and exhilarating. One becomes part of an immense force, much greater than one's own. Perhaps it is simply gravity and playing music is to join the cosmic forces that move the planets.

With the bass viol between my thighs –still figuring out a comfortable position– I was struck by the physical sensation of the

vibration that sound is. Some tones are especially intense. To be able to feel the music physically adds yet another dimension to playing. And encourages even more that certain voracity that produces the best sound.

Perhaps the active relaxation required much more by the viola da gamba than any other instrument that I have tried explains to an extent why especially women excel in it. The fact that, proportionally, many more women play this instrument than the guitar, is, admittedly, one of the things that attracts me to the viol. My experience with the sausage fest that was the guitar festival in Koblenz made me realize once again my preference for the company of women. It's not sexual at all. But I have noticed how otherwise plain looking women suddenly become desirable when they perform music particularly well. The command of the instrument, the authoritative shaping of the sound and the visible joy of immersion in the music transform a person into a semi-divinity. Truly a messenger from the gods, I suppose. Perhaps even an incarnation of a deity. Not that I ever hope or even desire to achieve this state for myself, but I deeply enjoy witnessing it in others.

I'm not abandoning the guitar -though I might evolve towards the lute. In fact, one of the reasons for learning to play the gamba is a desire to improve my general interpretation of music, to be applied on any instrument. The guitar's limitation as a plucked instrument and the complexity of playing make it difficult to develop one's musicality on the instrument. Especially that important relationship between breathing and playing feels more distant on the guitar than on the viol. I have accepted that I will forever be a music amateur if only because I simply started learning earnestly too late in life. But that doesn't mean I don't want to improve, next to technique, my artistic expressiveness. The viol will help me with this, if only by offering no other options.

To be able to think of the past 12,500 years as a single now, as Timothy Morton suggests in *Dark Ecology*, justifies my enjoying baroque music as fully contemporary and not something of the past.

Baroque music, when it's played well, even by a small orchestra, is like the whole band is playing. Next to that any other music just sounds like half of the musicians is sleeping or missing or bored or dead, or their instruments are broken.

I don't even like recorded music anymore. It feels like a reproduction does in comparison to the painting.

Holding a violin makes the body more graceful. Putting a flute to the lips makes the face more handsome. Musicians are cyborgs upgraded by their instruments. We become better people when we play music.

A manual for playing the recorder recommended thinking about opening holes as action while holding fingers on closed holes is their relaxed position. A similar logic might be applied to the viola da gamba if we consider holding the fingers outstretched over the fingerboard, each above a fret, as the tense position while allowing them to drop on the fret is the relaxed stated.

Not practicing music for a day is bad. But not practicing for a week is great.

When I lose a day, my fingers feel awkward. But when I come back to the instrument after a week or more of not practicing, my playing has improved quit noticeably: technique and musicality are much better, at the expense of forgetting

some passages.

Music from the renaissance and baroque eras holds my interest as a player much longer than more recent compositions. While romantic and twentieth century pieces tend to offer a rather quick satisfaction, I tire of them relatively easily. After the many hundreds times playing necessary for my learning, older music continues to fascinate me. Perhaps because it is more difficult to understand. Or perhaps because it tends to be more intricate. I continue to discover new things in it. While my lack of technical proficiency is annoying in both, rehearsing modern music feels like a struggle to achieve a certain result. Learning early music, on the other hand, feels like endless exploration of fascinating landscapes and I wish, to a degree, that I never actually succeed in playing the piece perfectly, because that might end the journey.

Perhaps it is the similarity with games that stimulates musicians to spend many hours practicing: the instrument rewards the player for playing well by producing beautiful music. Much like with games this interaction leads to a compulsive behavior, similar to that involved with an addiction: to keep struggling, to repeat endlessly, to adjust one's schedule, one's diet, one's social relations, one's mental and physical disposition to finally play that one piece well. Supplemented by a deeply satisfying sense of making progress.

One of the things that I enjoy in playing the viola da gamba is the parallels with basic human motions. The arm motions for bowing resemble other repetitive motions of our bodies: breathing, heart beats, sex. The plucking of guitar strings is not as closely related to the body. Also the size of the instrument reminds of a human body that one embraces, touches, moves around while playing.

Maybe playing early music will help me understand what it takes to create an image like those of that time.

The key to musical excellence seems to lie in holding back and being slow. Play as if you are holding back emotions, play silently, but filled with power, as if the music barely surfaces above your breath, or your heart beat. And hold any note until it is almost too late to play the next one, as if you don't want to leave it behind and are reluctant to say goodbye.

Learning to play an instrument is a quest for easiness. Somehow playing this thing needs to become easy. You just have to figure out how. Part of this is certainly practice. But another important part is attitude. Allowing your body to do this easy thing. Finding ways to make it easier. Trying to play with a certain slowness. Enjoying the sound. Observing your playing. Your fingers dancing on the fingerboard, seeking elegance and grace.

When playing music is difficult, it sounds bad. When my playing sounds bad it is almost always caused by too much effort. It is astonishing how difficult it is to prevent effort and allow ease. I suspect this is what practicing is for: to figure out how to let your body do this easy thing.

Baroque music is emotional but not expressive. Its power comes from a modest service to beauty, not from a desire for individual expression. The musician should not try to speak through the music but should allow the music to speak for itself, even to the musician. To achieve the highest beauty the baroque performance should be explorative, searching, filled with curiosity and wonder, not confident or entertaining.

Knowing how to read music doesn't mean that you can actually read music. Teaching somebody how to read music is not teaching them to read music.

Maybe I'm dyslexic for reading music.

WORK

Web design is now in the same situation as videogames: it would be awfully easy to design something different. But nobody would care.

Well, some people would, of course.

And maybe that's enough. We need to kick the habit of wanting to see the world change.

Maybe a better question than "Are videogames art?" is "What kind of art are videogames?"

The pathetic state of the game industry is perfectly illustrated by the fact that Tale of Tales gets more attention for Auriea's gender than for anything even remotely related to the work we have done. All under the trendy flag of feminism while nothing could be more sexist. Of course Auriea's gender has impact on our work. It helps make our work better! But the industry doesn't see that. Let alone the fact that Auriea possesses quite a few other talents than existing on this planet with a vagina between her legs. In the end I have to wonder if our work would be taken more seriously if it had been created exclusively by men. Or would it simply be ignored completely?

Art and videogames cannot merge because one strives for exclusivity while the other craves mass recognition. Success in one means defeat in the other. This tension is in the design process.

If the future of Virtual Reality wasn't dependent on the whims of Facebook, Google and Valve I could get quite lyrical about its artistic potential. Good thing there were no capitalist megacorporations when oil paint was invented.

As a visual artist, I work for other people. It is real work. It takes a lot of time that is not necessarily enjoyed. All effort is aimed at producing an artifact that can be shared. My visual art centers around sharing. Perhaps a personal fascination, question or idea. But more often an invitation to explore something with me. My music, on the other hand, is complete self indulgence. I do this for nobody but myself. And even sharing the music by playing a performance I only do because it helps me improve. I wonder if this is general: visual artists are hard working altruists while musicians are basically junkies getting high on their own supply.

Considering my contempt for contemporary art, it is sad but obvious that my own work is received and perceived as contemporary art. And for all intents and purposes, in reality, it is and cannot be anything other than contemporary art. And I find myself in the art world in a similar position as in the games industry: I consider most of what is produced to be bad and wrong and dumb and my own work struggles to survive going completely against the grain of its context. Perhaps continuously wondering if I shouldn't adapt to it. Because clearly I'm the one who is wrong.

It's attractive to build linear rides in computer simulations such as in virtual reality. Being taken on a ride is a very powerful experience. It can be exhilarating. It takes courage to embrace the non-linearity uniquely inherent in this medium. To build something that just is, that just exists, that isn't going anywhere, and is not taking you anywhere. I'm not sure if I have this courage.

One motivation to create new work is to make sure I don't die being known for having released some videogames that had some local impact. I need to make new creations that eclipse everything I have achieved before. The videogames then turn into extra street credibility.

Digital art is as ephemeral compared to analog art as living creatures are to inanimate objects on planet Earth. My choice as an artist is to create life, even if only for a few seconds, minutes, years, centuries.

It's remarkable how clear the distinction is now between making games and making art, considering how blurry it was when we were making games. We still use computers and mostly the same software. We even work in a similar visual style. But when one of us refers to making a game, we know that is something else. And that shouldn't be surprising. The confusion experienced within games should be.

Intending to express in art is a bad idea. The artist needs to allow the objects and subjects to express themselves. That is the only way to access the mystery. Purposeful expression by the artist of a message or an emotion is closing that access shut. And will always fall short anyway because the result is capped by whatever it hopes to express.

I have doubts about some elements that impose a certain causality and linearity on Cricoterie. I'm doing this under the influence of criticism. People crave logic and resolution. But should art give it to them? Should they not come to such things on their own? Is that not the power of art? Yes, they will say they enjoyed a piece with such attributes. They will in fact enjoy it. I do too. But will it affect them? Will they "change their lives"?

I guess this is the problem with criticism. When making videogames, it was easier to give in because we were making them for other people, for a market, even. But why would I give in now? One reason is that I doubt my own vision. Not the truth of my words but the reasons why I use them. Maybe I'm just reluctant to add causality because it's a lot of work and I'm hiding behind an ideology of open-endedness.

Cricoterie's being theater works as an apology for closure. But I should watch out with this in the future. Basically I should design my work so this desire for causality and closure does not arise. In Cricoterie people do things. And that makes them desire to affect these things and the world they live in. And to have control. Perhaps interactivity truly is the enemy of art.

Then again, maybe causality, linearity and closure are not the enemy of art. Just not native to the computer the way I see it as a medium.

The next time a desire for causality or closure comes up in criticism, I should remove the things that trigger this desire, rather than add new ones in an attempt to please.

Creating on a computer increasingly feels like an illicit activity. Doing something despite all discouragement. Creating without templates. Seizing the means of production. Dangerous.

The freedom in contemporary art is attractive. You can pretty much make anything. All you need is a good idea. It doesn't need to be a lot of work. You don't really need any skills. And if you only think about yourself, you don't worry about the amount of horrifying junk this produces. Junk that supports and perhaps in part causes the desperation and depression that is all too common in contemporary society.

But one cannot change this by refusing to be involved. That is just vanity. Many people are not involved with contemporary art. They haven't made a difference. As an artist one needs to be involved, step into the arena, run the risk of being part of the problem.

The computer is a new medium for art. Perhaps adding causality and linearity is a way to meet an unaccustomed audience half way.

An artist needs to be very cautious when adapting a piece to criticism. Each adaptation mixes an extra color in. But many colors mixed together gives grey. And the art disappears.

The challenge to contemporary artists that will liberate the arts from the cul de sac it has ended up in is twofold: to be absolutely sincere and to embrace the world as it is. The former is difficult enough. But the latter is virtually Herculean.

Dying before I'm done, with plenty of ideas for new projects, would be a great excuse not to finish all of them.

Apparently to Hannah Arendt, quoted by Jane Bennett, causality may not even exist. Is that why it bothers me so much in art: that it's alien?

Allowing your art to be interactive is taking a risk. Taking the risk that people will have fun with it. Even when it is meant to be sincere. It's far easier, and probably wiser, to let the art object remain mute and stoic and mysterious, radiating sincerity, demanding reverence. Interaction offers a feeling of familiarity that may be inappropriate.

Why do I so easily forget how much I love creating things? Why is it so easy to indulge in laziness when work give me so much pleasure?

We should design with time in mind, with the effect of the elements in mind, create objects that increase in beauty as they reunite with nature through wear and tear, accumulation of dust, humidity, and so on. Things that only look good when they are new and clean will look bad during most of their existence.

It is the task of the artist to create an object. A thing in reality. A picture won't do.

It is our task as computer artists to realize the dreams of older artists now that we have the technology to do so. This is a risky affair because much of the power of the old art lies in the inability to really execute the idea and having to rely on the spectator's imagination to complete they art.

All I really want as an artist is to make an Annunciation.

MEDIA

The sad spectacle of social media timelines where we are desperately trying to compete with professionally made advertisements. We don't even have a product to sell. We just want to be liked. Of course we want to be liked. And of course we know the likes online are not real, or at least virtually meaningless. But it's enough to keep us going. Until the next post. Meanwhile we waste all the time that could be used on creating something of value. Or on doing something that makes us happy.

A new year's wish for last year was to rediscover cyberspace. That didn't quite work out as we actually moved further away from the digital. But now that I have sworn off social media timelines, I find myself surfing the web again!

The idea that random strangers can just comment on anything is normal on the internet. But in real life this is -still- considered extremely rude or at least awkward. No wonder this practice leads to all sorts of friction online!

After not doing it for weeks, scrolling down a timeline feels like a really strange thing to do. And it bores me quickly.

When nobody likes your tweet you think they don't care. And maybe they don't. And maybe their refusal to acknowledge your message is an expression of massive indifference. The nothingness is speaking to you loud and clear: "You must change your life."

Just got lectured to by a young man via email about how to communicate with my customers. He felt the need to defend a large corporation against my unfair accusations. I was surprised that such people still existed. But I guess I had successfully isolated myself from the internet. Even more so now. Last year I would have posted this online. I guess chasing some sympathy. Because it's uncanny how upsetting such a knee jerk reaction from a total stranger can be. I'm sure they're "just trying to help". Maybe I was like that at their age too. But I just don't want to know that such people exist. And if possible, someone take their toys away from them.

Without the existence of social media we wouldn't be concerned so much with what others think. We couldn't be. We would just live and judge our own actions. It seems like a more conscious, a more self aware life. Then again, social media make a game out of fishing for compliments. One doesn't simply report on one's activities but one arranges occasions for such reporting. We are working for our social media friends. Because their acknowledgement deeply satisfies us. We perform tricks and wag our tails when we get a cookie. It is the economy of street performers. Except the currency is expressions of sympathy and encouragement. We have become each other's dogs.

Corporations care about your privacy because they want exclusive access to your data.

For every little problem one might have playing the guitar, a solution or discussion can be found on the internet. Not so for the far less popular viola da gamba. It gives one a sense of life before the internet, when you just dealt with your problems on your own, without much information. It almost seems like a mythical time now, a time of sleeping princesses and dark castles. A time in which we knew far less but felt far happier.

A rare random gamergater's tweet in our stream reminded me of how indifferently mean some people can be online. How were we ever able to deal with that on a daily basis. How does anybody else, still. How can people live in such a context? And why would they?

Very few are sufficiently witty to entertain 24/7. Maybe that is why social media timelines are so dreary and pathetic.

Popularity today is popularity in social media. Before you had to hope that somebody notices you and publishes something that makes you famous. Now you have to do it yourself. Ever more time is spent on the sharing of what you do and ever less on actually doing it. Soon nobody we know will do anything. And everything that is done will get done without anybody knowing.

Did social media projects start as data extraction enterprises or did they become that under pressure of economic survival?

Social media timelines have in common with contemporary art that they are mostly awful and invariably trigger anger or sadness or even despair while somehow being almost irresistibly attractive. This must be masochism at its best.

Perhaps what happened with the internet can be seen as a story of colonization. With web 2.0 a foreign people (from offline) invaded the territory and set up infrastructures to support their (offline) way of life, without trying to learn from the newly discovered environment or the culture that was already there.

There's certain words that the Google/Apple spell checkers have trouble with. Words such as God, hell, oppression, and so on, words that they don't want us to worry about. Google/Apple want us to be happy.

I have to stay away from our Twitter timeline. Even though it attracts me once in a while. To kill some time, or to see what's going on with people. But I invariably end up upset. Twitter triggers me. And trigger warnings would make it worse. I need to be wise and calm and know it's bad for me and stay away. I don't want to feel the way Twitter makes me feel. I don't want to have the thoughts that Twitter makes me think.

The effect of Instagram is lighter but similar. Except for my personal account dedicated to music and art. That one is fairly harmless. But still a time sink.

Facebook is easier to avoid because its design is such a mess that it discourages perusal.

Yes, it's the timelines where our friends and colleagues, mostly from games, gather that irritate me. The ones where we follow each other out of mutual respect. The incessant preaching and prancing of fellow liberals makes me lose all appetite for life.

When I occasionally look at our Twitter timeline I see it hasn't changed. This is remarkable because everything changes. Except echo chambers, I guess.

Since there is no way in social media to encounter things outside one's bubble, one stays inside, reflecting on each other, looking more and more similar to each other, and different from those in other bubbles.

The problems are always so urgent that we can never afford to calm down and look at things from a distance. Such thoughts need to be postponed. So we continue to treat symptoms. There is never time to heal the sickness.

The world of The Matrix is already here: users of Facebook, Google, etc have become mini-mines, natural resources from which raw material is extracted. While they dream of a social life with friends and family, or political activity in society, or educating themselves, and so on.

Asking permission to collect information produces data in itself. Even refusing to answer produces data. Data that will be used against us. We do not have the right to remain silent. We are guilty and will never be proven innocent.

The internet: once proclaimed a force to change human life forever has now become a negligible commodity, a fad that can blow over any day.

Identity politics create convenient categories for data tracking.

We scrutinize the list of people who liked our social media post for these are our true friends.

The assumption of social media algorithms that you want to see more of what you've already seen is only correct to some extent.

The internet encourages obsessive exploration of the exception, the extreme. As such it makes the extraordinary seem ordinary, the abnormal more normal, the excessive acceptable. It sounds like the ultimate liberal weapon. But in practice it seems to favor anti-humanist tendencies even more than egalitarian ones. Is it a coincidence that fundamentalism, fascism and terrorism are on the rise in the age of the internet? And is this just the moderate beginning of something even more extreme?

I check my Twitter timeline once in a while to check how badly people treat each other. Then I check Instagram to see how well they treat each other. And I can't decide which frightens me more.

I remember using a computer as an amusing pass-time before the internet. And I wasn't alone. Almost anyone who had a personal computer would enjoy spending many hours on it every night. There was something fascinating about simply interacting with the machine. Even when it was not connected to anything else.

Many of the technologies we enjoy daily were originally designed by the military. Is this why they push us towards aggression, fear and hatred? They were designed for violence. And even if computers, cell phones and the internet don't look like weapons, their provenance destines them towards war.

When internet access is cheap and ubiquitous a lot of discipline is required to pay attention to your environment. Making it prohibitively expensive then is an act of kindness.

Does reading the news making anybody happy? Do they feel pleased to be informed? Does it give them confidence in our leaders? In the economy? I'm sure things happen in the world reading about which would feel encouraging. But such things are not the stuff of news. News is just a nasty entertainment medium.

The entertainment medium called news causes a lot of harm.

It causes more violence than videogames.

News should be banned!

News kills!

We are legitimately concerned about the way in which social media manipulate our view of the world by arranging our timelines. But news does exactly the same thing. Just with a different algorithm.

It's unfair that media show advertisements to me. Unfair to their clients. I'm never going to buy. But they are still charging the advertisers. It's basically theft.

POLITICS

I'm not sure if it was always this way or if I have recently become more sensitive to it. But Wikipedia is such an American propaganda machine. The English text about anything non-American never fails to make a reference to something Americans disapprove of, find ridiculous or fear. And it's not just the internet. I had to stop watching a fairly recent Hollywood entertainment movie set in Rome simple because I could not stand the pedantic patronizing condescending way the American characters treated their foreign hosts. And this is the supposedly liberal side of the US. One wonders how the conservatives talk about the colonies!

Humans are so stupid. When they finally get around to emancipation, they choose to make both genders work rather than both genders stay home.

While we may be free to choose not to consume media, we are not free from those who don't.

Protecting our own privacy does not protect us from the effect of people who don't.

In the age of the individual the mass rules.

Not as an active agent but as the force of control.

Individualism destroys the individual. Individualism renders the individual powerless. Not even amorality can give us power. Even when we have power we are subdued, vassals to the control.

That being said, somebody somewhere makes decisions every day. New laws, new shackles, new manipulations. They too are victims. But perhaps destroying them can lead to salvation. If nobody feeds the monster, surely the monster will simply wither away.

We are always quick to judge people who steal. We want to catch them, punish them for their crimes. We even want to prevent them from ever committing them. But never to the extent where poverty is abolished. We still demand that everybody play the game. Even when some of us need to cheat to get by. The game is god. The game is law. The game is our master.

Hasn't "USA bombs Middle Eastern country" become the news equivalent of "Dog bites man" yet?

Yes, I hate poor people! Just give them money already. It's incredible how many of the world's problems could be solved by simply giving money to those who need or merely want it. Just give them money. Money for everyone!

I haven't seen liberals attack Japanese musicians for playing Beethoven. But I have seen them confused by Muslims using cell phones. Maybe that only means they care about economy and technology more than about art and culture.

I might respect Western accusers of cultural appropriation more if they would respect their own cultural history as much as they demand that foreign cultures do. Because we, Westerners, are considered the dominant culture we tend to assume that whatever we do is right. But we could do a whole lot more and with a lot more sincerity. Disassociated from economy and power, Western culture turns out to be quite threatened. To the Western cultural-appropriation-accuser such words might as well be quoted from Mein Kampf. Maybe we should put a bit more effort in saving all culture world wide rather than reducing it to ethnic boxes. But it is the fate of the Western liberal to focus on ever smaller issues as their power to handle the big ones dwindles day by day.

Security makes the world more dangerous because it removes morality from human behavior. Much like a woman is asking to be raped when she wears a short dress and it's your own fault that you are robbed when you didn't lock your front door, soon an illicit post on your Facebook page or an explosion in your community center will be blamed on your own lack of security.

But it is precisely the security that gives the attacker the justification for his acts. A password is to the hacker, and military control to the terrorist, what long covering clothing is to the rapist: a license for crime when it is lacking. Almost an encouragement. Because it reduces the burden of responsibility: "They made me do it!"

Ironically all these walls and bars and locks are set up in the name of Freedom, our religion, our drug habit.

In our context, democracy is simply a way for the powerful to manipulate the weak.

In the West today we are taught by both sides of the political spectrum that other countries are foreign, strange, other. That other people have different customs that we cannot possibly understand. That we don't have much in common. But this only seems to be true if you let it. In practice we are all quite similar. Both because we are all human and because modernism is all pervasive. If we accept the little differences we can see the big similarities. And learn things from each other.

Cultural diversity is a fable. The left fetishises it and the right attacks it while both refuse to see our species, let alone our planet, as a whole with elements that have very similar needs and desires. The differences between cultures are like the differences between individuals. One is blond, the other wears sneakers or prefers dark chocolate. We should certainly celebrate those traits, and respect others. But basing politics on them is petty. And hypocritical.

In contemporary liberalism nothing is wrong. Except for everything that claims something is wrong. A liberal child does not need to grow up. One day it simply liberates its juvenile interests from the old-fashioned prejudices of the old white men. It's a permanent revolution! A fountain of youth!!

Difference is overrated.

Difference is exaggerated.

Difference is focused on.

To divide us.

To distract us.

Liberals are considered progressive. Neo-liberals are considered conservative.

The main difference between cultures is climate.

American reality, and modern culture, experiences European reality, and traditional culture, how European reality experiences non-culture, or nature: mystifying, perceptible yet incomprehensible, cause of anxiety, object of disgust as well as misplaced admiration.

There's a certain perverse correctness in the way that serving staff tend to be much better dressed than their clientele since they are directly connected with the system that oppresses us.

If politicians are too shy to take the necessary measures to improve our environment they should give the job to the military. They usually get away with anything. And they have huge budgets.

There are no cultures. There is culture and there is lack of culture, and degrees between the two. But the differences between "cultures" are too small to use the plural form.

That authorities are making us aware of the threat to the planet that humanity forms is ironic, cynical and hypocritical. They are trying to make us feel guilty about the pollution. But we never asked for all this shit. They pushed it down our throats as they were force feeding capitalism to us. And even worse is their encouragements to have us change our lives by using less plastic, etcetera. As if we can solve this problem. And as if this absolves them from having to solve it. They are too cowardly to take the necessary steps to improve things. They have the power to close factories, make petrol illegal, and so on. But they're afraid to use it.

The desperation we all share about the inevitability of doom is hilarious considering that we have the means and the power to prevent it and turn things around. We just submit to this manmade abstraction we live under as if in fear of a vengeful God. And somehow we feel that this releases us from our culpability. As if it is not we, the humans, that are destroying life on planet Earth. And not we, the humans, that are refusing to stop our harmful activity and switch to a more harmonious coexistence with other life forms.

Future archeologists will be astounded by the sheer amount of mention of global warming in all sorts of texts when they explore planet Earth's lost population.

People (from different regions) are only different from each other on rather superficial levels. And the reason why this difference can make right wing politics so popular now is that we have lost touch with the deeper levels of existence, the things that art and religion (as opposed to consumerism and fitness) immerse us in.

Perhaps the "clash of cultures" is only intensifying because the West is losing its appreciation for culture as such.

If liberals really want to save the planet they should deny climate change so that conservatives don't have to.

The biggest disillusion in politics today is that Americans are determined to solve their own problems. They will use American ideology to solve problems caused by American ideology. In other words, they will make America great again.

Why do humans always choose the worst when striving for equality? After the conflict between peasants and kings everyone became a peasant. Why couldn't we all be kings? In an effort to create housing for all, we all live in ugly architecture. We eat bad food and wear bad clothing. We all have an ugly car. And if we have privileges, we better lose them instead of giving them to everyone. We could all be kings but we choose to be peasants.

Somehow selfishness had become the pinnacle of freedom.

Freedom is for slaves.
It ruins everybody else.

Nobody seems to actually like democracy. Even its most passionate defenders only do so because it prevents this or that bad thing from happening. Democracy is just a defense against bad things. It has no positive properties of its own. So nobody really likes it. As opposed to other political systems that at least some people are very fond of. Maybe this is why democracy fails to dominate and is always twisted.

The trouble with money is that it creates poverty.

Life on Earth has become post-apocalyptic. There is no expectation of a better future. In fact we all strongly suspect that everything will simply continue to get worse. A certain intellectual madmaxism takes a hold of our thinking. We are battling but there is no war. And each of us is a glorious winner as we collectively slide down. We never felt we got very high. But the difference is already felt. The only uncertainty that remains is how fast we will fall.

The current battle between left and right poles can perhaps be won but if the victor doesn't eliminate the loser the battle will simple continue. The only side ethically capable of such elimination is the right. So the left can't win. The right has already won.

As in so many cases it is better not to seek a direct solution but to change the context so that a problem cannot exist anymore. Direct confrontation really only makes the opponent stronger, and often more popular. It's satisfying to feel like you're fighting something but it is futile and self-defeating.

Also we are killing life on this planet so you really don't have time for this bullshit.

We're concerned with the black people in America, and the seemingly endless racial issues over there. But the really exceptional thing is the sort of conservative stuffy men that that country produces. The rest of the world hasn't seen these since the nineteenfifties. But in the USA it's still very common for cruel coarse authoritarian sexist racists to run things.

Let's distract the liberals with identity politics so they stop nagging about climate change and capitalism.

The left losing elections in times of climate change is hilarious. It's like we designed this system as a suicide device. I guess ultimately every species could have prevented its own extinction and by not doing so actually committed autogenocide.

Do we accept all this abuse just because we have enough to eat?

You won't save the planet by not using plastic. You're only flattering yourself. But you can save the planet by making plastic illegal.

The problem with politics is democracy. The opportunity to gain power through elections changes the sort of political ideas we come up with. And it affects the way we talk about politics. Good ideas are less important than gaining support. And that support very often is of a person.

As the white partner of a black woman I get to feel superior about my non-racism. What a completely absurd emotion to have!

What if what we currently know as the extreme right is actually preventing active fascism from taking over? Simply by occupying the ideological ground that they would stand on. What if these current assholes are actually relatively benign compared to mass slaughtering terror organisations like the Nazi party? The former certainly are rash and ruthless enough to evolve into the latter. This justifies fear and any means to stop them. But what if they don't? What if they are simply unwashed peasants mad with the power that election success gives them but other than wielding a big mouth quite harmless?

What choice would I make if active fascism was torturing our friends and family? Would I still be able to see the big picture: to save the planet from the damage we have done? Or would I support the people who caused that damage because they can get rid of the fascists? (Even though they start wars too and run concentration camps. Just not here, not for us, not for my friends and family.)

The current political conflict is not between ideologies. The left and the right agree on most things ideologically. The conflict is between implementations. The right believes in nationalism, the left in capitalism. When I was young both these forms were considered right wing.

Calls against racism, homophobia and all sorts of discrimination and oppression coming from the culture that is the greatest oppressor in the world are themselves forms of oppression.

I don't approve of taxing the rich more to compensate for state deficits. They just got lucky. And we're punishing them for that. It's like a tax on happiness. "You can take a pay cut since you feel happy."

I admire the attempt at gathering an international progressive movement around Diem25. And I will certainly support it because at least they have a desire to address the problems in a way that has a chance of success. I'm happy that they realize that they need to compete with the far right on the level of propaganda, and on convincing the angry poor. But I'm afraid they don't have what it takes to beat them. They are all too nice, too rational, too young too, and a little awkward and nerdy. How are they supposed to beat the boisterous, loudmouth, gross and jovial, charismatic Santa Clauses that the far right is winning with?

That the far right is racist, violent, homophobic and sexist is not the problem the left needs to address. It is that they are in power and have no plan to save the planet. Even if they would stop being racist, violent, homophobic and sexist, they still wouldn't.

Maybe what we need to save the planet is a populist far right party with an ecological plan. And when they have reformed our economy to a sustainable one we can get back to fighting them on racism, violence, homophobia and sexism.

A toxic combination of the humanist demand for ideal individuals and social media platforms with algorithms that favor the extreme has made us all ashamed of who we are. But we have democracy to take revenge!

Does the far right even make these old fashioned videos anymore? They don't need a logo. Or graphic design. Or fancy videos. Crude tweets suffice. They don't need to share a program or a vision or even present themselves well. They just appear as stupid and gross as many people secretly desire to be. The left is fighting with arguments of rationality and civilization. But people are in full death drive mode now. They hate civilization. They want to be dumb.

What is freedom if it doesn't allow us to be free from knowledge, care, passion, skill, from all the things that take so much work, and that embarrass us when we don't perform as well as the world champion after fifteen minutes of practice? Above all people now want freedom from embarrassment. So they vote for individuals they consider lower than them, people they don't need to look up to, imperfect people, thugs, people they admire for their courage to be unashamedly unrefined, bad mannered, fumbling, stumbling, drunk, ugly. People who make more mistakes than they do.

Will the domestication of humans start a new era on this planet?

A diverse group of white feminists.

I am sad that neither the far right nor the new left opposition express any concern for art and culture. Do they want a world without culture? Or with only popular culture? I find it hard to imagine this utopia that our future leaders dream of when it doesn't have any art in it.

Progressives don't need to convince rational people, do they? So rational propaganda is pointless. They need to find a way to convince the irrational people to vote for them.

Or get rid of this damned form of democracy.

Democracy was put in place to take power from the powerful. But now the intellectual bourgeoisie have become the kings and popes to take power from. So democracy is serving its purpose: take the power away from them.

Apart from some sort of populism, the only chance that the progressives have is in making intellectualism popular or desirable again. I would like to see the ad campaign for that!

The leftists are calling the rightists fascists but the rightists are not calling the leftists communists. Instead they are explaining why they are not fascists. While many leftists proudly refer to themselves communists. So the trick of the far right is to appear to be centrist?

I doubt the racism and misogyny of the nationalists makes a big impression on people who fled death and devastation.

Will the future look at our liberal multiculturalism in the same way as we look at the orientalism of the past?

Google, Facebook and Twitter could change the world by simply changing their policies about what they allow people to say on their platform. That's a funny thought. And a frightening one. But also a sobering one. Conventionally these megacorporations hide behind the concept of freedom and they blame their users for any political ugliness. But their attitudes towards pornography and the design of their data processing algorithms contradict the openness they use to plead innocence. They are censoring and manipulating. So why not for good?

Isn't it mystifying that there is such a widespread public aversion against pouring money into culture? The common argument being that culture should raise its own money. In other words that we only want commercial culture. The undertone of this seems to be a sort of jealousy along the lines of "We have to work for our money. Why should artists get it for free?" As if artists don't work. Or can work without financial support. Perhaps the public does not appreciate the work that artists do. Or the art they create. Or some of it. But there's plenty of professions whose output I don't appreciate either. That doesn't make me demand that they should be disabled.

We appreciate beauty. We appreciate the beauty of the sky, the grass, a tree, birds, butterflies. None of these things are commercially sustained. And we don't mind if the government uses some of its budget to enhance and expand the beauty of nature. Many of us actively want them to do this. So where does the aversion to finance the creation man-made beauty come from?

The victims are always innocent. So everybody wants to be a victim.

Political tension comes mostly from invading areas that are not one's primary concern. If conservatives are put in charge of defense and economy, liberals can take care of society and culture. No elections or competition necessary. Just work together, people!

If immigration were a successful strategy for conquest wouldn't it have been tried before?

We need you to choose A or B. A is the only valid answer and B will lead nowhere. Yet we need you to explicitly select A because we are a free society where citizens have the right to make their own decisions.

Racists will invent new races so they can be more racist.

Both racism and antiracism bother me. But mostly for aesthetic reasons. Ultimately the left-right conflict could be solved to a great extent by simple good taste.

The problem is not the patriarchy but power as such.

The problem is not so much who's in control but that somebody is.

Neoliberal monopolies are realizing capitalism's worst fear: the collectivist nightmare of communism.

Our political activism simply demonstrates the freedoms that the authorities grant us. As such it is entirely impotent if the goal is to counter those authorities. And if not, activism is simply collaboration.

Nothing in the USA can be called independent.

Imagine a future when people find our treatment of animals as despicable as we find people's treatment in the past of Negroes and women.

Ultimate power is the conversion of opposing forces into supporting forces. Every form of resistance is turned into a form of collaboration by the authority's cynical promotion of individual freedom.

But who is this authority? Is it still people? And if so, who are they? How do they benefit? And how much control do they have?

Perhaps our (humanist) ideology is a living creature that uses us as dumb pawns. We are just following orders. Without thinking. But does the ideology think? Does it have a plan? Or are we all, humans and objects, just dancing to the music?

SOCIETY

In the eighties, people, especially young ones, were criticized for having a very short attention span. They got bored with anything after mere minutes. We called them the MTV generation (pop music videoclips were around three minutes long). Thirty years later the attention span of many seems to have flipped into obsessive compulsive dedication to one particular thing, be it fitness, social media, gaming, etc. Our attention spans many years these days.

Breaking conventions has become such a convention that following conventions is now highly attractive to the unconventional. If only because of the challenge in figuring out how it is done.

We're always looking for the exceptional, the original, that which separates us from others, from history. And we wonder why we feel so desperately alone, so strange, so disconnected.

Convention versus conformism: rely on time honored traditions instead of following temporary fashions.

The incessant twittering of birds in suburbia is neither relaxing nor comforting. As in nature, it signifies the lack of human activity. But human presence is everywhere in the suburbs. Even the wealth of trees and lawns only exist thanks to meticulous human care. In such an excessively human context, the twittering can only mean death, human death. That would be alright in a cemetery. But here, where people are supposed to be alive, it's unsettling. Zombie towns.

When it's an animal we call it wild. When it's a human we call it free.

The surprising thing about Bangkok is not so much its contrasts and diversity but how all its ingredients form a harmonious continuum. There's no tension between commerce and spirituality, between elevated art and kitsch, between honest friendliness and manipulative deception, between military authoritarianism and chaos in the streets, between proud individualism and obligatory love for the monarch, between squalor and splendor. Everything holds hands with the other, accepts it, embraces it, loves it. Perhaps this is the most profoundly Buddhist thing about this place.

Neighbors in Bangkok: on the right two men under a rusting roof of corrugated metal and plastic covered with tires, on the left a new Mercedes Benz parked behind a freshly painted locked gate. Not far from where the opulent celebration of Thai culture in Jim Thompson's art collection is only separated from an inner city shanty town by the grey water of the Khlong Saen Saeb.

It's not so much that in the past people acted just as we do now. It's that we act now as they did then.

What bothers me about cities without history is that everything in them seems temporary to me. The buildings seem to have been built yesterday. And they're not very interesting. They don't look like they were made to last. Glass and steel don't express eternity, or longevity. This was built now to serve a current purpose. But it can be torn down at any moment. As a result anything that happens in such a place seems unimportant.

And I think people who live there feel the same. Their behavior seems more lighthearted, purposely shallow, non-invested, distant, ironic, indifferent, formal. There is no passion in cities without history.

Why are we not on vacation most of the time? Why do we only spend a few days per year in Paris, Venice, Istanbul or Bangkok?

There's more appreciation for convention in the South (of Europe), stimulating one to adopt social trends, to adapt to the others, and feel good about being accepted and appreciated. Together we create a harmonious picture. In the North, people are equally conformist but it is generally disapproved of. Here, we appreciate originality over convention. But only really in theory. As a result Northerners are unhappy, caught between the fantasy of uniqueness and the reality of herd behavior.

We judge the right of wild animals to exist by their contribution to the ecosystem. Fruit flies can live because their larvae are good for the soil. But what are humans good for? What is our contribution to the ecosystem? Do we deserve to exist?

It's more pleasant to be allowed and encouraged to conform to convention. To feel at home within centuries of history. To feel supported by ages of customs. More pleasant than being forced to be a unique individual defying all tradition and carving out an admirable life against all odds, figuring out everything on our own. Especially when in practice this is not possible. We all rely on conventions and traditions. We couldn't live without them. Where does this pressure to not conform come from?

There's an interesting analogy between Timothy Morton's observation that we, moderns, attribute more value to raw existence than to the quality of that existence, and Mary Midgley's conclusion that modern science considers the real value of life to be reproduction, no matter what convolutions it ends up in. It's all about the numbers.

I'm often struck by the trouble we go through to save a single human life, after a traffic accident or a fire for instance, while on the other hand we torture people routinely by forcing them to work, pay rent, suffer administration, and so on. We just want to keep people alive but we don't care that they have good lives. Because we believe in Freedom. Or we're actually sadists and we keep them alive so we can hurt them some more.

Isn't it strange that emigration happens primarily from poor to wealthy countries? Average people from wealthy countries could live like kings in the South. But instead poor people travel great distances to find misery in the North.

If people from the past visited us they might be more appalled by the ugliness we produce than impressed by our technology.

The modesty of Belgians is a sort of arrogance. We trivialize our achievements. It's our style. On the one hand this is a form of boasting: "what you think is great is just normal for me." But on the other hand, we end up believing that we're really not that great. And we blame others for not recognizing us. This attitude creates a kind of isolation from the world and makes of Belgium a cultural island.

It's not that we are boring. It's that we present ourselves as boring. Out of arrogance: "if you can't see how great I really am you're not even worth talking to." As a result we become boring. We actually bore other people.

But the isolation is real. The arrogance affects both directions. As we lose interest in other people (since they don't acknowledge our greatness), they lose interest in us (even the Belgians themselves say that there is nothing of interest here). This creates a separation that has made of Belgium a sort of intellectual third world. We don't even realize that we are quite a bit behind almost all other countries (including those in the East and the South that we still look down on with our old Western arrogance).

Data that does not belong in a category is ignored.

What's the point of me trying to achieve something? I would be just another white man who achieves something. One of many. It's easy for us. We have privileges. And since it's easy it doesn't deserve recognition. "White man achieves something" is like "Dog bites man". Who cares?

Western life style is at its most obnoxious where it succeeds, where it solves all problems and provides all comforts. It is much more charming where it fails.

The education of children often entails the destruction of traits that charm the parents and the deliberate breeding of artificial traits that will make the child better suited for survival in society. Naturally, in my experience, humans are weak and honest creatures. But that way they don't stand a chance in the modern world. They need to be tweaked in order to survive.

I have done this to my children and continue to do so now that they are young adults. I don't like doing it. I love my children just as they are, insecure and brutal as that might be, and I hate having to change them. But I need to so they can survive and not be miserable.

I do wonder about a society that is built around how humans naturally are.

"We are not machines. We are animals." Mary Midgeley's exclamation in *Are You An Illusion* strikes me as the ultimate argument for resolving our global problems. We should keep it in mind when thinking about the economy, politics and the environment. We are animals, just like the ones we are killing. We are not machines like that global system that we allow to dictate us. We are animals. We need care, love and attention. And some freedom. And food. We are not machines. But we have machines. They can be machines.

The Americans have found a way to be happy within modernism. But at what expense? Maybe their souls?

We mock the clunkiness of technology from the 1960s but we fail to realize that all we have now is a more elegant design of the same idea. And not a new idea.

Money has enabled one great thing: expansive pornography.

iPod is better than iPhone or iPad. And Windows Phone is better than Android. For the same reasons: they are modest devices that are radically different from our computers and excel at a small amount of tasks. That makes them a pleasure to use. Their interfaces also look and feel much better. The skeuomorphism of the iPod is wonderfully efficient. And the Metro interface of Windows Phone is a very clever and sadly underappreciated solution for the design disaster that the desktop metaphor had become.

Preaching to the choir is fun. But being in the choir being preached to gets tedious. Because the message is not meant for you. You're already convinced and you wish the preachers would move on. But they continue sending out messages that are intended for people who don't want to hear them. And we, the choir, suffer.

Seeing or photographing, one can't do both.

I always regret choosing photographing. Because only through seeing am I moved, and embraced and transported, and do I learn, understand and feel connected. Photographing locks me out of those experiences.

Photographing is like playing the game in videogames. You end up in a metalayer of activity and it doesn't matter anymore where you are or what things are or how they smell. You lock yourself out of the experience by being thoroughly involved in interaction with the machine.

Maybe this is why tourists photograph so much: to establish a layer of protection between themselves and the all too new all too strange environment. No matter where they are, photographing is always the same. And it's comforting.

It must be strange to be a social media designer. To work against your human inclinations and your training and instead of trying to help users, entertain them or make them feel good, figure out how the corporation can benefit optimally instead. This requires a particular kind of numbness, obedience or simple nastiness. I would find it hard to imagine people who are naive enough to believe that their employer is in any way improving the lives of its costumers, or even has that intention. They're just doing their jobs.

The autonomy of computer programs is fascinating. It's quite understandable that there have been many fantasies about the robots taking over, et cetera. But the most disconcerting aspect of machine autonomy is not the dramatic threat of gaining conscience and turning malevolently against its creators but the rigorous application of the rules that we have laid out.

But we don't need computers for that. We have all become the robots that we feared.

In 2018, men shaved their chests but not their faces. Even the ones with no beard or mustache carefully cultivate a permanent stubble. But the chest hair, and likely the pubic hair too, has to go. When men go bald most shave their heads to a stubble too. Combined with fashion lacking variation, in the end men look very similar, as in some collectivist sci-fi scenario.

Women are still allowed and encouraged to have hair on their head (although variation is declining here too, especially among the straight haired). But pretty much nowhere else. Pubic region, legs and arm pits are all absolutely required to be bald (the pressure on women is still much greater than on men). I think arms get a pass but we all pity women who naturally have more than a little arm hair.

Nothing can subvert the contemporary art system. Everything is permitted and absorbed. Any act of rebellion is immediately embraced and included, erasing whatever destructive effect it might have. As such contemporary art resembles global capitalism. There is no outside of this system. It encompasses all. This does not mean that either is indestructible. To a large extent they are destruction, involved in a slow process of decay. Impermeability to disruption does not mean that these systems do not change. Systems that do not allow external input spiral into themselves until they implode. This is rather disconcerting if such systems exist without exterior. Since, logically, they would take everything down with them. After the collapse of contemporary art there will not be art anymore. After the collapse of capitalist society, there will not be a society anymore. Hence our desperate clinging to systems we abhor. With the only hope that they won't collapse before we die.

But of course there is an outside to these human-constructed systems. A very large outside, even. It's just not (exclusively) human. To escape these systems one can simply join that larger world where humans assume an equal position to other objects. It's not a matter of rejecting. It's a matter of accepting. Accepting contemporary art and capitalist society also, as objects, with limited lifespans. Objects next to the very many other objects, some much much bigger. All we really need to do is nothing.

Spell checker algorithms are subtly influencing our thoughts by suggesting safer words than the ones we intended to use, or avoiding the heavy words, like hell and death and sex. Is it unimaginable that at some point we will just be writing down what they say? That we will act like secretaries taking notes?

We are obsessed with understanding. Not only out of childlike curiosity but also politically motivated. We fear and may even hate that which we do not understand. So those among us who wish to tolerate and respect instead voraciously attempt to understand as many things as they can. Because we apparently can't stop discriminating against what we don't understand. From "I think therefore I am" we have derived "I think you therefore you are".

The logging of personal data and its use to predict and manipulate our behavior could actually be quite beneficial if the practice were not in the hands of profitseeking megacorporations above the law. That is ultimately the problem: things being done for personal gain rather than the common good.

A photograph is always a record of the past. Nostalgia is built into the medium. The second after the photo is taken, the moment had been condemned to the past. We can look at the photo just taken and already feel the pangs of nostalgia, of mourning for a moment that is now lost. A photo camera therefore is a time machine: it turns the present into the past. To take many pictures, and look at them, is essentially to live largely in the past. The photographer lives in the past.

Who decides on the priority of spell checker word suggestions? It seems like they're trying to tell me something. They are trying to reassure me. To cheer me up. Everything is fine. Don't worry. Don't think about "dead". Think about "dad" instead. You don't want to worry about "God". Contemplate the word "good" instead. Don't "worry". Say "winner" instead. Be happy! Love life! Have you updated your social media timeline today?

Society does not exist. We are all collections of the same material components. We are connected through these materials. The water in my body relates me to the ocean. Its warmth to the sun. There is no society because we are one. The mammals, the rocks, the grass, the planet. Like unevenly distributed ingredients in a cake.

Sad attempts to make interfaces invisible only make the designer more apparent. And to feel the designer's presence with every touch, every scroll, every click is terror. A designer who is limiting both the user and the object, forcing the latter into a state of embarrassment about its usefulness: I know I can do this but I don't have an interface to give you access to it. Do I look pretty? Not really.

Sad to see these wonderful devices forced to hide themselves, getting thinner with each generation, shyly sinking into the table on which they stand, pretending they are not here. Not here but as some minimalist ornament in an expensive San Francisco flat.

Do we even remember what originality is? The motivation for creation reduced to profit and the methods for generating profit refined, we are left with an endless stream of "what the people want": the same over and over again.

The position of the human has continually risen in Western society. From mere anthropocentrism over equality to the individual as some superbeing.

The masks were lifted, the lies exposed. But there was nothing we could do but continue. Without our innocence. Betrayed. Shadows.

Creating art with dedication and passion makes people beautiful, more than any clothes, make up, body building or tattooing could ever do.

Modernism's rejection of tradition is at the root of its failure. Yearning for liberty it threw away centuries of human experience. And now the lone modernist finds himself shackled once again, to the limitations of his person.

Humans will ruin nature just as they have ruined culture. Through the same system they have established themselves and refuse to abandon like some strange sort of junkies. But it is important to resist, to speak out, to think and act against this trend of complacency and aggression. To leave a record and reminder of what was worth saving, of the potential for nobility that exists in our species.

Maybe men only pretend to enjoy looking at naked women to make them feel better about how they enjoy looking at pictures of naked women.

Touch screen spell checkers are robots working for the authorities to keep your thoughts in line.

I find myself proofreading the iPad spell checker. That thing is like a mischievous secretary. Often I cannot read texts written earlier because the spell checker changed the words. Spell checkers prefer correctly spelled wrong words over misspelled correct words. That's a problem.

Friendly people warmly wish each other happy Christmas in the midst of the war zone of Instagram advertisements.

Modernism is the mistaken belief that man and nature do not form a harmonious whole. Or, more malevolently, the willful destruction of that harmony.

I feel comfortable in places with a palpable history. It doesn't help that I find contemporary urban aesthetics horrendous. I wonder if I could live in a beautiful place without history. An alien place perhaps. Hard to imagine. To some extent the modern is ugly per definition. Beauty is almost per definition traditional and conventional. So this imaginary place would have to be contemporary in a non-modern way. Traditional or conventional without history. Not entirely unthinkable. Perhaps even an interesting design challenge. Can we design a contemporary city based on tradition and convention? Since tradition and convention are rooted in our physical existence, this would not even need to be any particular culture's tradition or convention. They are more or less the same.

We are all heroes for surviving the terror of capitalism with at least some of our humanity intact.

If organisms are superior to matter, then machines must be too.

I need to get back to Italy where beauty is not a matter of opinion.

A non-western person cannot complain about cultural appropriation because they would be culturally appropriating the western concept of cultural appropriation.

We could treat immigrants as wise people who come to teach us about the world outside of our prison.

We let everybody define and criticize western culture because we think we're in control and will remain dominant. We don't even care to define ourselves. As a result we don't even know ourselves. And might even agree with the criticism without consideration. We don't know ourselves. That is our greatest arrogance.

Things that are a bit broken or show wear remind us of human presence. They remind of how people organize their lives, get things done, spend time on this planet interacting with its many aspects. Fully functional cleanliness reminds of the invisible all powerful uncaring machine that runs our lives beyond our control. Only clean on the outside.

It is as problematic to dismiss of colonialism as it is to dismiss of the Roman empire, or any of the other empires that formed us. Problematic and hypocritical. Our world is a hybrid one. If only we would put as much energy in a happy future as we do in a sad past.

In pornography, the model gets the biggest credit. In art, the photographer. The model is traditionally a woman, the photographer often a man.

People who know what they want are boring.

Conservatism is an invention. Before the obsession with progress there was no such thing. And we misinterpret the motivations of our forefathers because of this misconception.

Class is easy to determine by listening to the sound people produce: the louder the lower.

Living in Belgium is like living a decade or so in the past. Which makes it very hard to understand what's going on, why things are the way they are.

We emancipate the underprivileged so that we can continue to feel superior.

We live in an age where having tattoos is a conformist gesture.

Did Bataille warn us against this?

We update the operating system of our iPads dutifully until the iPad becomes too slow. Then we buy a new iPad.

Pornography is problematic for fathers of daughters. At some point, the models and actresses that arouse them are the same age as their daughters. And that's disturbing on many levels. As the daughters grow older, however, their ages exceed the age of models and actresses, and fathers can peacefully browse through porn again.

Home is not a city, or a country or a climate. Home is not a geographic region where you feel good. Home is a place, a box, a box that accommodates your life. A place where things are that help you to live. Not necessarily filled with deep delights or titillations. But very much a place of comfort. Where you can live. Privately. Where no one hears you. Where you hear no one. Where you can be alone without feeling lonely.

Men and women enjoy sex in different ways. And those ways are the exact opposite of what is assumed as common knowledge. Women are satisfied best by short sex directed towards (their) orgasm(s). Men get the most out of hours of gentle love play with no or only their partner's orgasm. I have a feeling that not many men realize this. Or I am wrong, or projecting. Or maybe we all just want what we can't have. Also, this relative incompatibility may explain the importance of love in a sexual relationship.

Perhaps sexism is caused by our inclination to converse with people of our own sex. If so, to fight sexism one needs to unite the sexes, not separate them more.

Maybe we are all dyslexic and gluten intolerant!

SPIRITUALITY

The intolerance towards mystery of a certain approach to science. While we may experience a craving for mystery, a desire for simply accepting something as real and existing without any possibility of proof. A desire for authority, no doubt, for submission, for embrace, for being embraced, connected, home.

Faith as a form of defiance. A castle impenetrable by reason, utility or commerce.

You will more easily convince me of something by showing your faith in it than by producing scientific evidence. In fact, your need of scientific evidence casts doubt on your case in my eyes.

When a certain train of thought asks for skepticism concerning the absolute power of science, we tend to throw a few free compliments in the direction of science in an attempt to appease the aggression of its rabid fans. But because this is necessary, the risk exists that science is never criticized. That science, in other words, is not treated in a scientific way, with all the objective skepticism this requires.

We now quote Darwin rather than the Bible to prove a point. And it seems that both can be used to prove just about anything.

We obsess over the intricacies of evolution as biblical scholars over the nature of the Divine. A proper understanding of Darwin will tell us the truth. Scientific mistakes are caused by miscomprehension of Darwin and can be dispelled by consulting His words.

It seems to have been the goal of science to remove all dignity from humanity. To reduce us to animals and then to genes or even molecules. Conveniently justifying the selfish freedom that our liberal and neoliberal credos demand. I have no dignity therefore I am free. The new cogito ergo sum. In social context easily extrapolated to you have no dignity therefore I am free.

The eternity of religion and art gives me a kind of certainty that renders futile philosophy concerned with the future.

Christianity is often criticized for being a death cult. But I find the omnipresence of death in Christian stories and iconography one of its most attractive features. I admire death. I am impressed by death. Death is the one thing that silences everything. The one thing we cannot laugh away. The one thing we cannot ignore or run away from. At the end of the day there is death. Death is as close to God we can get in this life.

We tend to save and admire the reliquaries but we forget about the relics.

Scientists seem as incapable now of conceiving of a non-materialistic world as their predecessors were imagining one without God.

Perhaps cyberspace was rejected because of a disgust with religion, and the related veneration of the material. Which is rather ironic in an age when money has become as immaterial as it is pivotal. Perhaps the immateriality of money has replaced the spirituality of the Divine. We are still mystics. We have faith. Perhaps it was ever thus: we only pray to Gods of whom we believe they bring us material well-being. The virtuality of money is our spirituality.

Christianity is a religion of the oppressed. Many of its images and stories deal with people who are being mocked, abused, tortured and killed. I wonder how much of its philosophy was influenced by starting in an occupied land. And then by being persecuted for centuries. A religion for victims of oppression. And don't we all like to think of ourselves as one?

For those who believe in an all knowing God philosophy must feel like tedious guesswork. Why bother trying to figure it out if somebody already knows everything?

To take religious language and imagery for factual is as pointless as deriving scientific knowledge from poetry. Religious ideas and poetry can make us learn or feel or know something in a way that we cannot explain. Like communicating directly to intuition, to instinct, to all those properties that we know we possess but that science cannot account for. Which doesn't mean they are supernatural or divine. Unless we stop taking those words so literally too. Which sounds like a good idea.

The sound of bells on Sunday in Catholic countries helps us imagine that we are in the eternal city.

The first c in science is pronounced chm.

In my mind to say one doesn't believe in the soul, or in God, is like saying one doesn't believe in the color red or in the beauty of a flower. All of these things exist, in some form. They are not for you to believe in. They are for you to contemplate, to derive pleasure from, to help explore existence while you have consciousnesses.

A Gothic cathedral is a transportation device. From the outside it looks solid, static, sometimes foreboding. But inside, with the sunlight streaming through the stained glass, you realize that you have been transported. Instead of the human world, now outside of the cathedral lies the heavenly garden. You cannot see it but you know it's there and the cathedral is the vessel that took you there. Dying is the only way to leave the vessel and enter the garden. Because when you leave it while alive, you will be transported back to earth immediately.

In a church one is reminded that the outside world, the splendor of which you suddenly see through the stained glass, is also part of the kingdom of God and you are invited to treat it as such when you leave the cathedral.

We've overcome dualism between the material and the spiritual simply by removing the spiritual.

PHILOSOPHY

As the airplane rises, the world below increasingly resembles a map, triggering the compulsory desire for knowledge, possession and control. Or at least the nagging question whether I should be gaining some insight into existence by observing this abstracted model. I used to live in that miniature world where small people have little lives. The abstract nature of the view distracts from the very physical presence of our bodies hurling through the sky in a heavy metal box.

What happens to our soul when we cannot imagine a better life for ourselves?

Instead of always trying to fix what is wrong, maybe we should study to understand better what is right.

I'm so used to being unhappy that being unhappy doesn't make me unhappy.

Isn't the necessity of good fortune a sign of an unjust society?

I have more respect for people who passionately believe something I consider to be wrong than for people who indifferently accept anything presented to them as truth. And respect is more important than truth. Love and beauty are more important than truth. Not only because they are real, but because they provide a platform for a peaceful planet.

Growing wise may be the increasing capacity to understand ever fewer things as exceptional, odd or new. To form a holistic conception of existence in which everything has its place.

Protest against the oppression one suffers under comes swift and easily. Not many questions are needed. Something is wrong and will be corrected. But once the oppression is lifted, it becomes much harder to know how to live, what ideals to strive for, where to find peace. And what we once held as noble truths may turn into oppressive lies in turn.

Perhaps humans are built or conditioned to solve problems. So we continuously look for trouble because we don't know what to do or think without it. To a large extent, we consider conflict a condition for thinking. Most of our acting is reacting. And not thinking or not acting is not considered a valid way to live. (And this is how I create a new problem to resolve. My mind got the better of me: the problem is that there are problems!)

Since we often don't know what effects our actions can have, perhaps we should find a way to live with the problems we are trying to solve, lest we create more problems.

I should not be suspicious of things that are easy to do.

My mind is already post-apocalyptic. The worst has already happened. My mind is in heaven or in hell. Nothing can unsettle me.

For all our thinking, we only come up with theories about life that soothe us in some way. Or support our political and social views. We're continuously looking for comfort and confirmation. Our science is pulp fiction.

When we lose touch with beauty and spirituality, we lose touch with each other.

Free will pertains to our actions: we choose what we do. But what about our thoughts? How deliberate are those? And our emotions? Do we have any direct control over them at all?

Schopenhauer is right that we cannot choose what we want. But to want or not and the intensity with which to want is something we need to learn. We are not born wanting. We need to learn that there is such a thing and that we have the right to do it.

Computers are efficient at a particular kind of calculation. If human intelligence would be replaced with machine intelligence, the world would inevitably become a lot more narrow. There's a lot of things that computers can't think. But narrowness has always been a side effect of efficiency. And we have already passed the equilibrium point between efficient organisation and quality of life.

It used to be that life improves when things are fixed. But now life improves when things are broken.

The brevity of life makes one do stupid things.

I can never believe in explanations of reality, philosophical or scientific, that are conveniently neat, simple and elegant. I think in such cases, the thinker has been led by the ancient belief of a mystical force behind all existence, a force that is always assumed to be orderly. And while I do not reject the idea of such a force, I would be very disappointed if it wasn't grand enough to remain hidden and inexplicable.

We, humans, find systems irresistible. So when we discover a system that seems to explain reality, our thoughts move into that system and away from reality. I guess it provides comfort through control.

The difference between the student and the master is that the student can make progress while the master stagnates. There's masters at many levels. But to reach a higher level, the master needs to become a student. Mastery is comfortable. Being a student is humbling.

Freedom is quite horrible. To decide what to do all by yourself without any external reason? All the time? It's exhausting! It's heroic! That's probably why people want it. Bring it on. We all think we're heroes. But we're not. And we are much happier when we are not free. When there's external reasons for doing things. When we don't need to make decisions all the time.

The conviction that everything will simply to continue to worsen is strangely reassuring.

Most problems are caused by solutions.

We're so lazy. When they give us the freedom to develop ourselves how we want, we choose to not develop ourselves. When they give us the freedom of religion, we choose to stop believing. Every freedom goes by unused. The ultimate purpose of freedom is to enable us not to act, not to think, not to feel.

This is a logical result of the negative definition of freedom. The ultimate freedom is obviously the freedom from everything. Which is nothing.

Leren is moeilijk. Maar kunnen is gemakkelijk.
(To learn is difficult. But to be able to is easy.)

Many problems have beneficial side effects. When such problems are solved, those side effects also disappear.

End of November. Cold. Dark. I want it to be Christmas already. And New Year's. And Spring.

If a fly does indeed live and perceive much faster than a human, do we appear to it as a stone or a chair does to us?

Boredom is often contrasted with playfulness. But in my experience nothing is more boring and sterile and empty than a game.

Why would a compliment on our talents be more flattering than a compliment on our hard work? Hard work sounds like you didn't have enough talent for what you wanted to achieve. We glorify effortlessness. But talent is something we are simply born with. And that perhaps was nurtured in a privileged upbringing. Talent is not something we can take much credit for.

Tradition resembles religion because it requires faith. You have to believe in the way something has been done for ages without proof. This is quite unacceptable to the modernist.

Data analysis always exaggerates. Since working with the actual information would be useless as it would only return an exact replica of the world, it needs to create clusters of data pushing things into categories even if they are slightly above or below the norm. The norm remains, however. So whenever you consult the data analysis with a particular piece of data, you will find the norm. Even though, quantitatively speaking, the norm is the exception.

History only became fascinating when modernism gave us an acute sense of time. Suddenly things that had been with us forever seemed incredibly old.

Maybe we can do everything. And learning just involves removing the barriers that prevent us from accessing our abilities.

We are like the sculptures that Michelangelo sees in a block of marble. All we need to do is chisel away the parts that hide our beauty.

You can only really survive today's horror of corporate exploitation by not caring about anything anymore. Perhaps that lack of attachment is ultimately good. But it's annoying when you enjoy being enthusiastic about things.

Emotions are subjective. Reason is objective. Why?

Death is both more severe and less severe than how we usually handle it.

Look at a cat the way a cat looks at you.

Imagine having a conversation with an exact copy of yourself.

The modern criticism that elegance would be hypocritical is absurd. Of course it is. The entire point is to present oneself in a way that pleases one's fellow man. That to behave honestly like a jerk might be more truthful simply illustrates that we ought to value truth a lot lower than we do.

We construct history so that our own time gainfully contrasts with the past. But in so doing we cut ties that would help us feel more grounded. When we seek to establish similarities we usually cynically project our current morals and attitudes onto the past. In our quest for feeling unique and special, we rarely acknowledge the ways in which we behave the same as people have been behaving for hundreds of years. While it would be rather useful to learn from such similarities.

