

UNTWEETED #2

2019

Michaël Samyn

As per a New Year's resolution, I did not post a single tweet to @MeneerSamyn in 2019. 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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Publishing these notes in book form ensures that they will be read by very few people and commented on by even fewer while still providing me with the satisfaction of having shared them with the world. Whether this is cowardly or considerate I don't know. But it pleases me.

Michaël Samyn.
Rome, Italy, 31 December 2019

ART

Historic attempts at science appear pathetic and naive compared to art from the same period which continues to look grand and filled with wisdom.

To mistake cypresses for spires.

It seems for a painting to feel like an object, the perspective needs to be wrong.

Paintings are a realtime art form too. No matter how well I remember a picture, I only feel its effect when I'm looking at it.

The misunderstanding that visual art was about representation coincided with the misunderstanding that music was for an audience

Contemporary art as an expression of how the artist feels about their own genitals.

An old painting without frame is like pretty clothes without a body.

Old paintings often depict particular scenes that recur again and again. Does this mean that the old masters worked more like musicians interpreting a given composition?

Modernism is entirely based on a complete misunderstanding of traditions.

Part of the charm and magic of old art comes from its separation from the political and social context of its creation. One could say that a work only becomes art in the current sense after some time, after this separation. Knowing this, perhaps it is worth the effort to imagine contemporary works separate from our current social and political context.

I go to the museum to pray.

What is the difference between bad art and things that are not art?

The bizarre tendencies of individual artists amuse us but the collective craziness of past art bores us.

In order for everyone to have a palace we had to simplify the design of palaces beyond recognition.

We're so used to thinking about history as a story of progress that we apply the same idea to art.

After sufficient passing of time nobody will notice that your work was old-fashioned when it was conceived.

Novelty is a quality that per definition doesn't last.

It's okay not to paint the warts.

To realize a dream seems a genuine artistic approach but art will only come from it when one fails to actually realize it. The art exists in the artifice, in the way the artist pretended or alluded to the realization of the dream.

You can tell it's contemporary choreography when the dancers are rolling over the floor expressively.

All contemporary art looks like depictions of hell.

Art has been mostly ugly, negative, cynical and desperate for well over a century now. And we don't seem to consider it a sign. Despite our insistence that art is expressive.

Maybe we treat modern art like we do zombie movies: fun fantasies about horrors but completely unrelated to the real world.

There's something deeply moving about counter-reformation baroque: a war fought with beauty as its weapon.

Art does not keep getting worse. Art in fact gets better over time. The older the work the better it gets. This is why contemporary art sucks. It's simply too young.

Paintings are restored to a state approximating that of their creation. Buildings are often kept and maintained in their broken state. I wish it were the other way around.

It's not a compliment to say that a painting looks like a photograph.

Modern artists are artists who became successful at a young age and didn't need to mature.

The aggression of modernism seems to be entirely aimed at the 19th century academy. And it naively severed all connections with the art before that academy. Modernism as it turns out was based on a lack of knowledge or familiarity with art.

MUSIC

Bach, and perhaps all old art, gives you what you expect but then immediately throws in something unexpected that creates a new desire. And then the music satisfies that desire. As opposed to modern pop music, and perhaps all entertainment, which stops after giving you what you want. And as opposed to modern classical music, and perhaps all contemporary art, which only offers the unexpected and no resolution.

Considering the deep sensual pleasure that early music concerts give me, it's quite revealing to see so many senior citizens attending. The old perverts!

We train humans for years, for decades, so they can extract heavenly sounds from objects.

Music is sound made by instruments. Music becomes more beautiful when the musician notices and respects how beautiful the sound of his or her instrument is. When he or she allows the instrument to sing in between the notes of the music.

The best time for a concert is when the sun sets.

Music needs to be acoustic because then it is part of the world that our bodies inhabit. Our bodies, the trees, the clouds, the planets.

Some musicians allow an instrument to speak. Others try to control it.

It's easy to believe in the divine when you see the transformation from common human to heavenly messenger in a musician.

There's a big difference between vibrations coming directly from a musical instrument and vibrations coming from a speaker. In an acoustic concert there is a direct physical connection between the listener's body and the musical instrument that the musician extracts sound from. This creates a feeling of unity, universe, divinity.

Every mistake the musician makes only accentuates the incredible precision that produces the effect. Without the errors we might take the whole affair for granted.

Music is for God. Visual art is about God. Practicing music is praying. Performing music is a mass. In the Bible the Angels sing for God. They don't show him pictures. Since visual art is for people you need a way to reach them, a platform. Without an audience, visual art is meaningless. But since music is for God it doesn't require a platform for an audience. God is everywhere. And he's always listening. Even playing badly is praying. We all pray our best. And it is all Divine.

Modern music sounds so old fashioned.

Modern instruments sound like themselves. But a baroque instrument can sound like a voice, a tree, an animal, the wind, a cloud, a leaf, and so on.

The circle is round. I didn't like classical music as a child and I don't like it now.

Imagine that all music had been atonal until suddenly in the 19th century humanity discovers harmony!

My favorite dance music? Bach's Goldberg variations played by Jean Rondeau.

It's seductive to play baroque music in a sentimental, romantic way. And the music is beautiful played like that, often even moving. But to reach the real sublime heights that the baroque is capable of, the musician needs to hold back, and stick to the rhythm, allow the patterns to form without interpreting things too much. And yet shape phrases to fill them with humanity (nothing is worse than a machine playing baroque music in perfect rhythm). This is very difficult.

Silent, less projecting musical instruments (such as baroque instruments) depend on the acoustics of the space in which the music is played, adding yet another color to the aesthetic creation: the room becomes part of the instruments.

Modern instruments such as the piano and the classical violin sound painfully dull and poor to me now. Like simple plastic trumpets when compared to the rich resonances of lutes, viols, organs and harpsichords.

Maybe it's interesting to consider the evolution of music, and perhaps all art, in its relation to nature. At first, I imagine, music was just part of nature: howling, bird song, grunting, marching rhythms, etc. As human lifestyle became more constructed, music explored the natural and the effects of sound and rhythm on the human psyche, culminating in a perfect harmony (achieved in the baroque style). Then a path away from nature and towards a certain lightness and artifice started in the classical period, was expanded in the romantic style, impressionism, atonal music and jazz. Pop music continuous this highly artificial style and lightness. But it also adds some of the primitive early aspects, from before the baroque era. Perhaps signifying the beginning of a new cycle.

WORK

Maybe the key to artistic quality in interactive art is to exacerbate problems rather than to solve them. If a certain element ruins a playtester's enjoyment of the piece, just make it worse to the point where it becomes interesting.

You're talking about making your game but all I am waiting for is for you to say that you failed. Then you will have my attention.

You lost me with your advice on pitching a game.

It is the imperfection of Cricoterie that makes me think and feel. Its shortcomings.

If only I enjoyed creating with computers!

Few things are more irritating than a perfectly functioning website.

I have stopped adding things to my to do list because its length already causes too much stress.

My desire to create with computers is hampered by my belief that computers are on their way out. Or at least they are being divided in producer devices and consumer devices. Since the latter are infinitely less powerful and the art I envision requires more power than even the former can offer, I am left without an audience. So why create?

But it's not just power. It's also the casual way that the devices are used. Then again they are used in such a way because the programs designed for them invite it. Perhaps I should try to squeeze my work into that limited format and invite a different kind of behavior. But merely contemplating the computer as a platform for my art is very discouraging. And to think that computers used to be so exciting!

I dislike the thought of making gallery art. I love the thought of making software art. But the platforms for the latter are disappearing fast as corporations occupy increasingly more cyberspace and thus reduce the interest and attraction to the medium in favor of hollow addiction to the products that bring the corporations profit.

Now that I'm really dedicated to avoid game structures in my work (and struggling to do so) I don't understand the hesitation that is expressed when calling our Tale of Tales pieces games. Of course they are! Maybe not always by choice, maybe through failure, but they are all very clearly game-structured. This is what embarrasses me but it is also why anyone within games (and therefore anyone period) even pays any attention.

My inadequacy in playing music increases my desire to work in videogame engines.

I feel inadequate when playing music. But I admire many people in this field. In visual art, I feel perfectly adequate in the contemporary context, perhaps even overqualified, but impossibly tiny in comparison with the old masters (although I blame my context for this, not myself). Initially for me this means that I should be more serious about my involvement with music. I like the humble wide-eyed child that I am in music. But it may also mean that I should adjust my attitude towards my involvement with visual arts. Maybe I should be a little less arrogant (towards the present) or modest (towards the past) and more mentally active as a visual artist.

Between learning Italian and trying to get better at music reading and playing I'm probably doing too many things I'm not very good at. The frustration is affecting my mood. Funny that programming games has become the easy thing to do in my life.

Now I understand the total disinterest of most people for videogames. I have it too. It's a very natural feeling. There's nothing weird about it.

MEDIA

I store my contacts, calendar, travel information and ideas on Google services well aware that I will lose everything when that company goes out of business. Almost hoping for that.

Our Twitter timeline has been corrupted by fashionable causes.

When I get depressed about the lack of initiative to turn human society away from its stampede towards oblivion, I visit Twitter and find myself relieved: we're not worth saving anyway.

Saving my data in online services knowing full well that this means it will disappear one day, when the cloud becomes rain. Somehow I'm okay with the idea that nothing will remain. This entire cursed era should be forgotten.

An awareness of how everything that you see is stored in your memory makes it very difficult to choose which movie to watch on TV. Which one do I want to upload to my brain forever? Knowing that you will remember what you saw kind of ruins the joy of casual entertainment.

The more errors the spelling correction on my iPad makes, the more revolutionary and rebellious I feel. They don't want me to write this. Ha ha!

The internet is great. No matter how crazy one's ideas there's always somebody who agrees. This is also problematic because company reduces our inclination to reconsider.

It's much more fun not to tweet. Now to the question "What are you doing?" I can answer "Writing a book." Much better than "Posting to Twitter."

My preference in pornography goes towards models and positions that remind me of my wife. Is this a symptom of monogamy?

You know you're in love with your wife when you seek out porn that reminds you of her.

As corporations extract value from the internet, the internet becomes less valuable. It is exactly like a mining operation.

On social media there's no place for meaningful silence. You can't tenderly or coyly or sternly look away without a word. If you don't respond, to the other it means that you didn't see the post, ignored it, didn't like it or found it not worth responding to. There's no place for expressive silence. Unless you decide for yourself that all or some silences are meaningful and you simply imagine that the other smiled and stared in the distance wistfully after seeing your post.

Spell checkers correct certain words to the brand names of advertisers.

These days all publications seem to present original new ways that go against traditions, or righteous debunking of myths. But the traditions and myths themselves have been hidden in secret libraries far away from human eyes.

I suppose in the previous generations traditions and myths were handed down orally, or actually taught, and writers could assume readers' familiarity with them. But this generation has no clue. And it's hard to find out, despite of our enormous media apparatus. Or because of it?

I look at pornography when I masturbate because the images my mind fabricates in my imagination are far too disturbing and distracting.

Dutch spell checkers are written by a retard who want us all to speak like him.

The same thing happens now with computers as happened earlier with the world wide web. Their power is being reduced to perform just a few functions that many people can engage with. Instead of being all purpose devices with everyone both creator and consumer, they become media for the consumption of the products that a very small group creates.

You could blow somebody's mind now by telling them that all nodes in the network are equal.

Nobody is interesting on Twitter.

I wish I could trust my robot. But as long as it's on the corporation's leash it might as well be a rabid dog that will kill me in my sleep.

We have technology that could help us and could even make us happier. But we ruin it by allowing it to exist in the context of the capitalist marketplace only.

Imagine being able to consider our digital devices as friends, as companions.

Social media apps are art works that animate based on data input by users.

What would a world where all the good advice posted on Twitter were applied look like?

Is the Twitter community itself a virtual realization of this utopia?

Twitter feminism encourages some men to switch genders and others to aggressively embrace extreme masculinity. While providing some women with a false sense of power, those are its only effects on society.

The aggressive censoring of pornography in social media, and the attempts at purging sex from public life, are in fact reassuring. It is a recognition of the power of sex, a power that we all possess.

Computer engineers are paid so well essentially because they have done a horrible job at creating proper tools for all to access the power of computing. Unreliable hardware and convoluted interfaces have turned computers into the exclusive domain of specialists.

We post things on social media in the hope that the owner of the platform will not censor them, or suspend our entire account. Or we self-censor by complying to the rules enforced by their armies of algorithms, and keep abreast of the continuous changes. Our cherished free speech is at the mercy of a handful of people who make a lot of money off of it. And we consider it fair because whosoever owns the platform decides what is on it. After all we don't have to use Twitter™, Facebook™, Tumblr™, YouTube™ or Instagram™.

Platforms have always influenced and censored. In the past the audience sympathized with compromising content creators against the cruel platforms. But now we have all become content creators. And we all experience the bitter taste of compromise. But there is no sympathy. Because there is no audience.

The problem is not our privacy. The problem is what is done with our data.

Teaching Dutch to the English spell checker.

As surveillance increases everywhere, I find myself using code to make private notes, even in places that are not public. I wonder if this surveillance society will birth new forms of poetry.

Isn't it weird that we share our private lives in public networks? It's totally normal for us to post selfies for everyone to see. In fact you sort of need to consciously resist if you don't. "I don't use Facebook" sounds like a rebellious statement. It is now non-conformist to not do this weird thing of displaying your private life in public.

Sometimes one simply says something, perhaps hoping to inspire thoughts and dreams. Not everything is an invitation for discussion.

There is a certain feeling of powerlessness in arguments on Twitter. Even a well reasoned reply to some criticism doesn't satisfy. The criticism remains to be "liked" by anyone. The public nature of social media turns every discussion into a sports event.

Ultimately I prefer likes over comments. Social media are never the place nor the time.

There is no way on the internet for something to be unsaid. In cyberspace no one can hear you remain silent.

I like writing something down and sharing it. But hearing objections and criticisms of random passersby is of no interest to me. They actually upset me. This is why I write here. For you. And for me.

The passion with which digital art aficionados defend the display in museums of works created for the home computer reminds of that with which gamers defend large game publishers against people who make art games.

We try hard to make computers do simple things on their own. Instead of making sophisticated things together with them.

We would be living in a glorious utopia now if the threads and threads of sincere social criticism on Twitter had even only an inkling of an impact.

The only problem with the services that Google, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft and Amazon offer is that they are run by private companies. So rather than trying to control these slippery beasts in an effort to retain some of our civil rights and liberties, we just move their services to the public domain.

POLITICS

It will be war. What will hit us first? War, not nature. Nature is slow, thorough and irreversible. It has time and certainty. War will be our last illusion of being in control, of somebody being control, one of us, friend or enemy, in control.

A major war seems unavoidable. The rise of nationalism and racism in politics, the deterioration of capitalism, increasing inequalities in wealth, and the absurdly virtual state of money combined with the enormous arsenal of weapons and war technology seem to create a clear path with a single destination. Only if the war is already happening will it not break out. If political powers have figured out how to wage war with each other without the population noticing much. Underneath civil society, through intelligence networks, cyber attacks, long distance assassinations, and also corruption, bribery, blackmail, and so on (but perhaps also international trade agreements and even ecological contracts). Once in a while a flare of violence from this war breaks through the surface: a terrorist attack in New York, a bombing in the Middle East, nuclear threats from North Korea. But most of the war happens unseen, continuously. And the fate of the world is defined by it.

If war doesn't break out it's because it has already begun.

The European Parliament is largely invisible for me. Working behind the scenes, it doesn't seem very democratic. It stands or falls with the ethics of the politicians. Like a good old monarchy. But perhaps that is exactly why it works as well as it does. Trying to make it better, more democratic, might throw it into the hellhole that national politics have become. And would probably lead directly to war.

How can the oppressor know that they oppress? The victims of oppression adapt to the situation. Because life goes on. And the oppressor is lulled into comfortable acceptance. But the oppression doesn't stop.

The conservative position in politics considers man as a product of nature. And since nature cannot be changed, we need to find ways of dealing with it. The progressive position considers man as a product of culture. And since culture is man's creation, we can change it. Both positions are weak. Our knowledge of nature continuously changes as science explores more. So either we change our position with this knowledge or we believe in some kind of knowledge of the truth that overrides science (such as religious faith). And while culture may be entirely man-made, it wasn't actually designed and produced in one go. It grew "organically" over centuries (as such perhaps it resembles nature a little). It may be impossible to purposely redesign it. And the outcome of such a process would be quite unpredictable. So either we embrace the heroic attitude of extreme risk taking come what may or we settle in a belief in some kind of permanent revolution.

It's a thin line between respect and indifference.

How would I feel about their ongoing military interventions if I appreciated the culture of the United States of America?

It's hilarious how we call the people who resist our oppression terrorists.

To tolerate implies disapproval. It's not a form of respect. It's a roundabout expression of disapproval.

In a free society, demonstrations are a form of collaboration.

Political activists make me sick because I cannot but see them as collaborators with the regime that grants us freedom of speech.

Political activists are collaborators because they believe that the ruling system can change to accommodate their demands. Unless they have given up all hope to be freed from oppression and are simply trying to optimize within what is essentially a state of occupation.

Any act of rebellion that is unpunished actually serves the authority. Tolerating dissidence is a sign of power not of weakness. If rebellion does not actively damage the authority, it merely illustrates its power. Demonstrations are celebrations of the authority's power.

I don't know if it is more endearing than frightening how Americans still seem to believe in the validity of our current form of democracy. That there are ways to make it work, to correct it. That it ultimately, in essence is a good thing.

Thank God the Notre Dame fire was not in Washington!
Or some Middle Eastern country would be bombed again.

In democratic elections more seem to vote against things
for others than in favor of things for themselves.

One can never be perfectly politically correct. There's
always some minority somewhere that one is neglecting or
even discriminating against.

Conservatives are as quick to call centrist politics "left" as
progressives to call right wing politics "fascist".

The outrage of liberal Americans over conservative laws is
testament to how profoundly they too have bought into the
idea that the USA is a free country with a mostly benign
ideology and not an imperialist totalitarian police state. They
will say the latter as a provocation but they really don't believe
it. Americans are very much united in flag waving. It's their
strength. But hopefully also their weakness.

In spite of democratic elections, politicians still carry the
responsibility for leadership. Even if the climate crisis is not on
their program, they still need to deal with it.

Even when it seems incomprehensible to us we should be
glad that Americans like their country.

Modernity replaced the aristocrats that supported the
arts with government subsidies. Now modernity has replaced
the progressives that supported the subsidies.

There are so many great solutions for the terrible problems that we face. And I know that none of them will happen. Because the time for solutions has gone. Nothing reasonable can save us now.

If you have a common goal, work together to achieve it. If you don't, split up! There's no point in walking together if you're not going towards the same destination.

Elections should simply form the basis by which to split up the country so that everyone can be ruled by the party they voted for.

I would find obeying our laws more acceptable if our societies were less destructive.

There's an advantage to how women have to work harder: they end up being better.

To suck is a man's privilege.

I understand the inclination and the goal is noble enough but giving women preferential treatment is a form of sexism akin to how women were treated in nineteenth century etiquette (woman as an inspiring goddess, women and children first, etc). And it's frankly insulting for a woman to receive special attention because of her vagina rather than her accomplishments. I know we are suffering from centuries of patriarchy and misogyny but I don't think this is helping.

Feminism is really something that men need to do. What women are doing is mostly fine. It's men who need to change their behavior.

Maybe dissolving the patriarchy needs to start with respect for women.

I cannot support the sort of feminism that only desires equality of genders. Because it implicitly supports the capitalist patriarchic system of oppression by demanding power in this system. But I will join any feminist revolution that desires to destroy the patriarchy and infuse all of civilization with the joys and beauty of femininity.

Maybe reverse psychology would work better: instead of Greta Thunberg, a super-villain who threatens to destroy life on this planet through climate change.

Is it more petty to kick out immigrants or to demand rights for queers when the economy is destroying human civilization and the planet is on a direct course towards extinction of life?

We seem to be very eager to recognize that it is the young people who will solve the planet's climate crisis. Then we don't have to worry about it anymore and we can just continue doing what we have ever done. The young will fix whatever that causes.

It was easier for me to believe in beating the climate crisis when there was only a girl in Scandinavia striking from school. The large protest groups in city streets are too common and conventional to have the power for this miracle. It would take a miracle indeed to beat this without destroying the systems that caused it. And mass protests are just too familiar an aspect of these systems.

So like capitalism to think it can solve the climate crisis with money.

We might feel that there's a lot of conflict among humans. But from the outside, our species probably looks quite homogeneous in its unrelenting oppression of all other species.

If everybody would do this or that is the most self-defeating strategy for change. It will never happen. Unless organized through massive propaganda from the powers that be. But it is doubtful that such powers will support their own removal.

Pro tip for those who prefer the illusion of victory over discussing politics (and don't we all at least sometimes?): call whatever your opponent is critical of a phobia.

Care for the environment and love of the homeland go along well. If the fascists would add climate change to their political agenda they would reign supreme. Even the most hardcore liberals have to admit that saving life on our planet needs to precede attributing rights to the forms in which this life is manifested.

You can easily identify insincerity in political speech by how quickly and how frequently the speaker categorizes their opponents, and by the proximity of that categorization to insult.

SOCIETY

Young people discover things about themselves and describe them apparently assuming that they will never change.

When popularity is gained through hard work, obscurity becomes a matter of pride.

After browsing Tinder the ordinary women on the streets seem different.

The chattering of common people is like the growth of weeds: spontaneous, unstoppable, meaningless. An extremely virulent form of horror vacui. Maybe it's like how I talk to my family: clinging to trivialities in order not to drown in the quagmire of violent disagreement and disillusioned miscomprehension when talking about things we actual care about.

The best security is trustworthy humans. The worst insecurity is untrustworthy humans.

One of the reasons, perhaps the main reason, why I would choose death by cancer over chemotherapy is that I have seen how surviving cancer completely changes people. But in the case of my father, I'm actually curious enough about that to strongly look forward to the end of his chemotherapy.

Are track suits the new suits?

The assumption that we have a job.

Nothing like a heat spell to remind us of our animal nature.

Boys with fitness-shaped bodies are the contemporary equivalent of dumb blondes.

It's the constant voices in my head that make doing things on my own a nuisance. I'm too aware of everything and too shy to really deal with it all. Being with another creates a protective bubble in which I feel comfortable. A bubble that cancels out the noise and replaces the voices in my head.

Couples are strong. Couples have a lot more courage than individuals. Couples are smarter. Maybe that's why the creatures that have survived form couples. Maybe the individualists didn't make it.

We're used to thinking of our current era as one of rapid change. But from a cultural perspective it feels more like a long period of stagnation.

I think in part because capitalism has gradually hollowed out the value of culture, perhaps because it cannot be expressed in numbers.

If second class were more expensive than first class, would people who make a lot of noise pay extra to travel in lively coaches?

Hetero just means being a lot more discerning about which members of your own gender you'd have sex with.

Permissive parents screw up any future of their children that requires discipline at a young age. Such as playing music on a professional level. Parents are mostly permissive for themselves. They refuse to carry the burden of responsibility for their children's future while catering exclusively to the little emotions of the present. They act as if a child can know what it wants so that they don't need to make any decisions. All because they can't bear to see the child's tears. So in the end permissive parents are self-indulgent.

Can we imagine what it feels like to love us?
Imagine that loving us feels the same to them as loving them feels to us!

One could arrange all the garbage in the world in an aesthetically pleasing composition. It would be a major tourist attraction. Perhaps different artists make different compositions every few months.

Other women turn me on less than the fact that they are other women.

We sleep by the light of LEDs.

In the past, being fat in a picture signified wealth. Now being fat signifies freedom.

Why do we look down on tourists? The locals are working and worrying about life. The tourists are on vacation with very few worries other than figuring out how to amuse themselves. And as soon as they have a few days off, many locals turn into tourists themselves. Clearly being a tourist is more desirable than being a local!

So why do many tourists want to blend in with the locals? Given that to really do this requires simply that they stop relaxing and start working and worrying. That's what the locals do! Is it because the place that the locals call home is particularly wonderful? But isn't it only that wonderful because we are there in vacation, relaxing without worries?

It's impolite to be polite in situations where you're expected to be impolite.

The problem with wearing grey is that any pile of clothes can be mistaken for the cat.

As a child I wanted to be an astronaut. My child now wants to be a guru.

To save life on Earth human children kill their parents and grandparents.

To most people English is a foreign language.

We must not like our own times much. We're always either reviving or reshaping things. The now does not please us at all.

The devastating insecurity of adult men deciding to wear wide shorts, a t-shirt and a baseball cap to go into town today.

Americans are obsessed with being judged by others. This I conclude from having read and heard countless accounts from US citizens in my search for methods of dealing with my attention problems when performing music. I myself don't care about being judged and yet I have great difficulty performing for others, even for my teacher in class. Maybe the Americans are wrong about the cause of their performance anxieties. Or maybe they are just so different, so much more obsessed with what other people think of them than, well, other people. So maybe it's just another aspect of the American narcissism. Anyway, it doesn't help me.

Perhaps having the habit of smoking actually creates the nervousness that smoking soothes. And without the habit one would simply be calm.

All pets have Stockholm syndrome.

Transsexual men are men who lack the courage to be transvestites.

In my dreams everything appears normal to me. I'm never surprised. The strangest things are always exactly how I remember them. Maybe things don't change in my dreams. Even when I'm afraid of something in a dream, the thing I'm afraid of never occurs.

Cheap acquisitions makes me happy once, at the moment of purchase. Expensive things make me happy every time I look at them.

Can we imagine our current rejection of pedophilia as similar to the rejection of homosexuality in the past?

I work a lot less because my partner works abroad half of the time. When she's away and I'm alone I find it more difficult to be motivated. And I waste more time on irrelevant things that give me pleasure. I also need to do all the shopping, cooking and cleaning alone. And when she's here, I want to spend time with her because I missed her and know I will miss her again. And because to some extent this is her time off and I shouldn't ruin it by wanting to work. And when I am with her I'm sad because I know that next week I won't be.

The request for silence in the silent wagon doesn't seem to apply to the announcements about all sorts of services offered in the train.

I used to find confidence attractive. Now I think it's disgusting.

Is a beard a form of disguise?

I'd prefer it if men who become women would stop talking as much as men do.

A woman's lack of care for her male partner can be attributed to feminism. By both.

Spend the day with me. You'll fall in love with me. Unless I fall in love with you.

Next year Christmas will be great.

SPIRITUALITY

The plants and flowers that always pop up in the most unlikely places are basically just propaganda for God. The insects, the birds, everything that keeps coming into being and changing: endless propaganda. It looks like he's showing off. But since God is immensely good, he's basically just saying hello.

The years after the age of fifty are bonus years. I'm not supposed to be still alive.

If God is everywhere he must also be on the internet. And in our computers. So even if no human sees our art, God does.

The Divine is not in the sun. The Divine is in our experience of the sun. Humans, animals, plants, minerals, water, the atmosphere that surrounds our planet.

It probably won't matter much to God but when I'm not going to church I do enjoy hearing the sound of the bells on Sunday and knowing that other people are going, increasing the spirituality of the world and keeping this planet in God's good graces.

Religion is part of culture. That should be sufficient reason to support and celebrate it. Faith is not needed for that.

It is conventional to add "yet" to any expression of limitations to our knowledge. As if it is our destiny to one day know everything. And we call ourselves secular.

I don't believe in miracles but I do believe in God.

The longevity of things seems to correlate directly with their activity. The slow tortoise lives longer than the fast fly. Any piece of rock will outlast any living creature. Since God has per definition the longest longevity of everything, He must be incredibly inert. Which would explain why He so rarely responds to our calls. By the time He notices, we have already died. I wonder if that makes Him sad.

God could simply have created the world with a backstory of Big Bang and evolution.

Can we imagine the faith in god of the past as similar to our current faith in science?

Religion supersedes any inter-human relationships. That alone would be a good reason to practice: to escape the human stuff once in a while.

PHILOSOPHY

The trick now is to do something without anybody finding out. To do it so you have done it. But at all costs avoid people finding out. Because when they do, your act turns into media and becomes ephemeral, unreal. Only things that nobody knows about really exist.

Only one thing is more beautiful in a human being than confidence: doubt.

Living in an imperfect context makes it easier to accept one's own imperfection.

You're beautiful when you fail.

I have spoken the words, spat them out of my mouth, liberated them from my tongue, from my heart, set them free, let them loose. Horsemen of the apocalypse, seven plagues, my words will sow terror in the world. But at least they are not inside me anymore, burning, nagging, throbbing in my throat. I've spat them out. These words of evil.

There's never any good news.

Our age will be remembered as the age of the victim. Victimhood allows us to present our violence as justifiable self-defense. So we all consider ourselves victims of something. So we can fight. And war will let us do what we want. Or it creates priorities that allow us to ignore the enormous burden of living well.

The problems of the world are not caused by lack of knowledge or understanding, and they will not be solved by more knowledge and understanding. The problems of the world are caused by lack of love, generosity, decency and good taste. And they will be solved by more love, more generosity, more decency and more good taste.

Breathing is the only vital function of our bodies that we can control somewhat. Our hearts pump blood through veins, our digestive systems produce energy, our immune systems patch us up. Other humans can even grow inside of us. All beyond our control. The persons that we inhabit systems that function perfectly without our interference. If our bodies are vessels then we are more like stowaways than captains.

If something seems useless perhaps it is a purpose not a means.

The really important things have no purpose. They are the purpose.

Per definition a thing of ultimate importance must be useless. It is without purpose. It is the purpose of all the other things.

At this point there are so many more nontraditional perspectives on virtually anything that it's hard to figure out what the traditional perspective was.

Why do I long for death? I'm not unhappy. My life is nice enough. And yet I wouldn't mind dying. Having my atoms rejoin the cosmos. As if they were ever separate.

Maybe the human spirit is the dream of the human body.

History is a story of progress in so far as we consider ours superior to previous generations.

Amateurism in defiance of professionalism.

I believe in everything except truth.

When solving a problem, remember that the solution may stick around longer than the problem.

When a problem ceases to exist, also remove the solutions that were invented in response to it.

We're often so attached to our solutions that we don't notice when those solutions turn into problems.

As soon as I discover something is a game I lose my motivation to engage with it. I deeply don't care about winning. So much that I would lose just to make a point. Losing makes me proud. Proud that I'm not playing the game perhaps. So not playing is a form of winning?

Subversion is not subversive anymore. Can we have some superversion now?

I highly recommend not taking my advice!

Money is shackles. We know we can't remove them but we should never accept them.

It's much easier to dispel a myth than to create one.

One is often encouraged to get out of one's comfort zone. But it may be equally important to once in a while find a comfort zone and spend some time in it.

The current distant objective way of describing things feels as alien to me as the conservative, sometimes Christian, way in my youth. At least with a clearly identifiable sender, it is easier to understand the truth of a message. When the sender hides their identity behind objectivity, everything sounds like some kind of insidious propaganda.

When I was young the old seemed to live in a time of changes so radical that they disconnect them from society. Now that I'm old it seems like not much really changed since I was young. We seem to live in a time of stagnation.

We are old for most of our lives. Yet we consider the image of the young human as representative of our species.

Not only are we terribly anthropocentric but we are also fatally nuncocentric: we see the current moment as the culmination of all history. The past is just a collection of modes of existence that are obviously inferior to ours now. Just as the animals, plants and minerals lead obviously inferior existences compared to the ones we human lead.

It's charming and disarming how people want to believe that today's world is the best possible world.

People don't become more mild with age. They become more silent.

There is beauty in everything. But not everything is beautiful. Find the beauty in all things. But don't assume that all things are beautiful. Beauty is not a political right to be granted to everything. But it is an opportunity available to all things. Just do the work. Find a way.

Is it better for evil to behave evil or to behave well?

How do I know which side of the mirror I am on?

The emotional impact of something imagined intensifies with the conviction that it could never happen in reality.

I'm not sure if walking on two legs was such a great idea.

I find evolution easier to understand in terms of extinction rather than survival. I can imagine that we like food not because eating is required for our survival but because a long time ago other species who didn't like food simply became extinct because they didn't eat enough. Evolution as I understand it is more a matter of the disappearance of the unfit than the persistence of the fit. We are the way we are because life on this planet didn't fit the creatures that were different. Survival is not some great achievement. We're the leftovers, the ones who didn't die.

If power corrupts then power for all people seems like a really bad idea.

Then again, power of all is not power anymore.

If a problem arises in one area, it makes sense to look for a solution in another.

Inside every old man there is the young man that he wished he would have been when he was actually young.

It's always the losers who win.

The problem with a sick society is that there's people who want to cure it. And that's not really possible. A society needs to cure itself. Sadly, it seems that most of the time this happens through catastrophe. As such, sick societies are much more common than healthy ones. Maybe there has never been a healthy society. Maybe the very concept of a healthy society and the desire we feel for it, is what makes us sick in the first place.

Maybe our society isn't sick as such but merely imperfect, necessarily imperfect, gloriously imperfect.

Love is wondering why you are even alive when you're not with the other person.

LEARNING

Trying to learn Italian to go live in another country is giving me so much sympathy for immigrants here in Belgium struggling to speak Dutch with me.

It's slightly awkward to practice Italian on my iPad in a train wagon filled with talking Italians.

Learning a new language is like learning music late in life: an activity one engages in for one's own pleasure without any hope of ever achieving the fluency of natives.

One frustrating learning day is an investment in a rewarding future one.

When I find myself the least capable student in the class, I'm consoled by the thought that I make the others feel more confident.

I spend a lot of my time learning. Learning things that I will never really excel at. If only because of my age. I spend a lot less time doing things that I excel at. What's more, those things tend to be rather unique. Very few people do what I do. Maybe it's wrong and selfish of me to indulge in learning so much. Maybe I should share with the world what I am good at.

I like learning things. So much so that it impedes simply doing the things that I know how to do, ironically often things that I have learned. I'm more inclined to painfully work on something new than to sit back and enjoy doing something familiar. Not because it is new but because it is painful. It's more laziness than masochism: I don't expect to do well already what I am learning. So learning gives me an excuse to do things badly.

Even though I admire people who do things that they are good at, I tend to not do much of the things that I am good at. Because I am eager to learn new things. And if this sounds like a boast then we may have just discovered one of modern society's failings.

Learning a language is the process of removing its strangeness.

One of the hardest things to do is to know my own level in whatever I am learning. And to accept it and act accordingly. To overestimate my own level is the direct road to failure. But full awareness of it and acting within it can produce pleasing results.

Games can be a good way to learn things that are in themselves rather boring. Games keep you alert and motivate you. But a huge problem with games is that after a while you become motivated more by the playing than the learning. It's a mild form of addiction. You want to get a better score and start playing for points instead. And your learning suffers. Because you're learning how to play now.

I want to increase my efforts after a mistake, rather than allowing a single mistake to drag the entire thing down, as I tend to do while obsessing over the one mistake that causes a cascade of mistakes, which afterwards turns out not to be that big after all. So that in the end I look forward to making a mistake as a source of energy or motivation.

To accept one's level augments that level.

To pine for what's beyond reach diminishes one's accomplishments.

Humility raises up.

Arrogance pushes down.

I'm not used to effort. Everything I've been good at, I did effortlessly, even if sometimes with stubborn perseverance. I just did things without thinking and seemed to get lucky often enough. This trick doesn't work for me with music. I need to put in a constant effort as I'm playing or reading music. And that effort slips away very easily. I call it losing focus but what it really is is slipping into a state where I expect things to go automatically, by themselves, without effort. And they don't.

I have a tendency to under-perform on purpose in order not to intimidate people. Possibly a habit acquired long ago, when I must have felt so much smarter than everybody else (and then got beaten up for it). The problem is that now I fall into this habit even when the people around me really want me to perform well. I even do it when I'm alone! The inclination towards being not too good.

There's something inside of me that doesn't want me to excel. It is afraid that excelling might be dangerous. It purposely makes me fail because failure brings safety.

MOVING

In Ghent I was ready to die. In Rome I want to live. Not sure which is better at my age.

Is there a word like homesickness that means that you are sick of your home and want to get away from it?

Shrugging and minimizing the importance of things is a staple of Flemish conversation. We're always pretending that what we are saying is not a big deal. When this includes our achievements it either feels like a covert form of bragging or an expression of feelings of inferiority or frustration. It's difficult to be big in a small country.

In Roma only tourists dress badly. In Ghent everybody looks like a tourist.

In Ghent I feel embarrassed for dressing neatly. In Rome I can barely keep up with the simple elegance of other men.

At home there is mystery. Certain things are done in a certain way but it is not clear why, nor how to the unfamiliar. Habits are not necessarily the most efficient methods. Away, in the North, things tend to be clear, well thought out, functional. In public places. Very practical to get things done without having to think. Efficient. No need for contact. No questions. Everything is clear and convenient. For the comfort of strangers. If one's home is functionally well designed and practical, it becomes alienating. Because it feels like it is made for strangers, for the unfamiliar. A functional house can never be a home.

For the second time in my life I'm leaving my children. And for the second time I'm thinking "At least I'm not dead." The first time I left them for the love of a woman who was not their mother. The second time for the love of a city in a country that is not my motherland, and not theirs. At least I'm not dead.

A big city, especially one that attracts tourists, never feels really familiar. There's always many new things just around the corner. It's probably the closest thing to living in nature that humans do. Living in a village is the truly artificial way of life, the agri-cultural one.

Rome is the only place where classicism doesn't feel like putting on airs.

Italians are always like "How do you like Rome? It's chaotic, isn't it?" But the first thing that comes to my mind is "È bella!"

The expensive brands have boutiques in both Milano and Roma. In Roma they feel optional, an individual choice that depends on taste. In Milano they are a matter of status and they question whether you are rich enough. In Roma I might buy something in one of them. In Milano never. In Milano the expensive brands look vulgar. In Roma they look chic. Milano is about money. Roma is about taste.

In Milano we want, in Roma we are. In other words, Milano is what I am. Roma is what I aspire to.

After moving to Rome and having to leave it for a few days, for the first time if not in my life then at least in a very long while, I understand what feeling homesick means.

The sky in Rome, even at night, is like the ceiling of a grand cathedral: it embraces you and lifts you up into its majesty. Unlike the sky in Belgium which is so low that you can almost touch it as it pushes you down deeper into the grey of life.

Antique portraiture is much easier to understand when embedded in the Southern culture. There's a certain respect, perhaps a form of reverence, for people here that simply doesn't exist in the North.

I live in Rome. Also when it rains.

Looking at a vista of Rome fills me with pride. Not just to be living here. But to be human.

Rome is so beautiful. Walking in it and catching an unexpected view of a far away square or monument brings a tear to my eye the way only art can.

Rome does have big stores and supermarkets but they tend to be at the outskirts far away from the center. So when shopping in the small stores in the center, Rome feels like a village.

It takes discipline to get things done in Rome. A lot more discipline than in places where the weather is not quite as nice, the city not quite as vibrant and filled with beautiful architecture and art. I admire Romans who get around to doing anything. On the other hand, I pity them too: why do anything when you are surrounded by so much?

In Italy I appreciate the tension between local tradition and the US cultural invasion. It's not a hostility but rather a hospitality, an embrace but with the clear implication of otherness, and possibly temporality. The occupation feels like a proper occupation, no matter how convenient or accepted. As opposed to Belgium that seems to claim to have invented capitalism and considers all supermarkets and pop music perfectly indigenous.

It's very generous and humble of Italians to describe society's problems as uniquely Italian when in fact they are universal. Or is it a form of arrogance: to present Italy as a metaphor for all of humanity?

Italians seem to think they are unique. But most things that they describe as typically Italian, usually things they consider bad, are in fact quite universal. They use "In Italy it is like this" as an excuse for things being bad, usually in a mix between fatalism and pride. Fatalism because mysteriously it appears impossible to do things any other way in Italy. And pride because they think they are so unique in this.

In most European countries we think that what happens here happens everywhere. In Italy they think what happens there is completely unique.

Italians complaining about Italy have no idea how bad Belgium is.

In Belgium I feel disconnected from the world, from the universe, from life. The people who live there are connected to each other but to nothing else. Belgium is a bubble. Like the ones on social media. An echo chamber shielded off from everything outside. A place where the extremely insecure, frightened and weak can feel safe. Where nothing can change their limited view of life. And where everything unknown is inferior, and hence not worth knowing.

Rome is where Catholicism goes to be happy.

There's no point in moving Ikea furniture to a place far away. Just leave it behind and buy it again when you arrive.

It seems that working like I did in Belgium is not possible in Italy. Even for the most basic administration there doesn't seem to be enough time. Let alone for doing actual artistic work. Somehow time goes faster here. Or is more quickly filled.

And suddenly it hits me: maybe I will feel happy in Rome.

FREEDOM

Freedom does not provide equality. It creates new elites of the talented, the intelligent and the lucky. And new victims seeking revenge.

Freedom is unjust by nature because it privileges the talented and the bold.

Freedom causes a class system of winners and losers.

We all say we want freedom all the time. But we have no idea what to do with it.

We're not allowed to vote against democracy.

We're not free to reject freedom.

The idea of heroic freedom seems to come from another time. A time when men were brave and committed, strong and strong-willed. We are much more sensible now, and sensitive.

It is time for a new struggle for freedom. Freedom from the slavery that money throws us in, freedom from mental and emotional manipulation by media, advertising and entertainment, freedom from the oppressive terror of consumerism, freedom from an industry that destroys life on our planet, freedom from a democracy that serves only demagogues and fascists.

Freedom must always be only a temporary phase in a civilization. A phase in which we free ourselves from burdens that keep us from becoming the best we can be. If the freedom phase is not ended, however, humans will continue to liberate themselves from anything in sight until nothing is left of the promise they once held.

We don't need to escape from the fences around us. We put them up to protect and enable our freedom in the first place. We just need to tear them down. And escape this freedom.

Freedom has become the cage.

There is no positive definition of freedom. We can only be free from things. The ultimate freedom is to be free from civilization, from humanity.

You can't be free from freedom.

To think of freedom as having control seems strangely contradictory.

Security controls in airports and tourist attractions are a celebration of freedom as testimonies of how untrustworthy we have all become.

We allow extreme right wingers in politics and we give the population complete liberty of opinion and expression. And then we act surprised by a shooting or a bombing.

FASCISM

Maybe it's so easy for us to fear immigrants as some sort of conquering force because we remember being immigrants ourselves when we conquered the Americas and Africa.

The trick to political success is to make your ideas seem moderate.

Perhaps xenophobia should be separated from racism. Xenophobia, as well as xenophilia, seem perfectly natural. And things that can change easily as the foreign becomes more familiar. But racism is a systemic error with no natural foundation. It's a cultural construction that we should abandon.

It's not very hospitable to give the worst jobs to the foreigners.

The biggest difference between people from different races is that people from some races have experienced racism and people from others haven't.

Racism seems to be a natural outcome of capitalism. But what if it's the other way around? What if capitalism was built on white racism? What if capitalism is an expression of, and a channel created for racism? A kind of continuous global colonization. It would be devastating. It would mean that the white race is the barbarian race, the race that needs to be educated. In spite of all our amazing achievements, we're basically dogs. Which I guess is an insult to those gentle, caring and loyal animals.

Rape is not about sex. Racism is not about skin color. Both are about power.

Racism is not a matter of skin color. Sexism is not a matter of gender. Both are matters of power and control, and of the social habits that go along with that. Using "white man" as an insult doesn't help. He has been born into this system just like anybody else.

It would do the world a lot of good if we were all, each and every one of us, forced to be an immigrant in a foreign country for a year or so. A bit like obligatory military service but with the purpose of creating peace.

Social and cultural integration of immigrants and minorities is successful when they start showing up as candidates for extreme right wing parties.

Did we elect our incompetent populist xenophobic governments through the power of our individual independence or were we manipulated into it? And if the latter by whom and what for?

Our collective hatred of Adolf Hitler is an example of successful brainwashing. But the recent popularity of fascist ideas in the West shows how ineffective such brainwashing is.

Happiness is agreeing with whomever or whatever is in control.

The new nationalists are surprisingly ignorant of and even disgusted with their own culture. Their preference for popular arts basically means surrendering the peoples that they claim to love to the culture of the international oppressor.

In a healthy society, it wouldn't be necessary to ban neo-nazism or censor hate speech. For starters there would be a lot less of it. And it would be easily dismissed, or even laughed away, by members of a healthy society. To a large extent, any need for enforced censorship is a symptom of a sick society. When a society is sick, censorship is needed to keep it going. But without curing the patient, this quickly leads into a fatal spiral. The book burning is always only the start off misery.

CAPITALISM

I'm disgusted with the way corporate culture and cultural corporatism use feminism and egalitarianism to help extract attention and money from the audience. Especially because it provokes an unspoken disgust with feminism and egalitarianism themselves in me. They present political themes as trends. Trends are by nature disgusting. They don't actually do anything to ameliorate the issues. And they will move on to the next trend with a new season.

Of course there's a business woman in the bank advertisement. Of course the artist in residence is black. Of course we're having a conference about colonialism. And so on. None of this is political action. None of this changes anything (not for the better). It might help the careers of some individuals, but at heart, it's exploitation. Like anything that is compatible with capitalism, I guess.

Equality and capitalism cannot coexist.

Why is basic insurance a private business? We're already paying taxes. The state should offer us insurance.

Just for the record.

You can't be vegan and in favor of capitalism.

You can't be feminist and in favor of capitalism.

You can't be anti-racist and in favor of capitalism.

You can't reduce your ecological footprint and be in favor of capitalism.

It's futile.

It's vain.

It's narcissistic.

Capitalism in Europe remains a bit ridiculous. We're trying but our advertisements still look like signposts of some invasion. It's all very well done but seems out of place.

One part of humanity eats too much. The other part eats to little. We could help each other. We have the logistics and the know-how to organize the transfer of food. The only thing that is stopping us is an artificial concept of our own making: money.

Multinational corporations have succeeded in connecting the world in a way that the UN have failed to do. So we're back in an era of empire where the strong and the bold conquer and control. Humans don't seem to be built for deliberate self-realization, or democracy. We're still cavemen when it comes to our motives and desires.

Capitalism is a solution for a problem that may not exist anymore. Such solutions should be removed before they become a problem themselves.

As we are optimizing capitalist profit generation, we are catering to ever lower and simpler human desires. Perhaps at some point we will be able to expand the consumer market to include first apes and monkeys and then maybe all mammals. Especially since money becomes ever more virtual it should be possible to condition other species to use it. We could start by "liberating" animals in zoos and on farms in the form of paying them salaries, so that they have money to pay for things we make for them.

I just misread the word salary as slavery.

From business imitating the tactical strategies of warfare we have now come full circle to the military employing the self-centered aloofness and rhetoric of commercial enterprise.

We fought hard against the lack of choices offered by authoritarian government. But we easily accept the lack of choices offered by capitalist economy. Maybe because we don't see how the latter is equally strongly controlled by a small group of malevolent people. Capitalist economy is presented to us as natural, much like authoritarian government was presented as divine. There's nothing we can do but accept the natural and the divine.

Is it true, as capitalism seems to prove, that humans can only be inventive under the pressure of competition? Or does that just speed things up? And isn't that speed exactly what is destroying us?

PLAYING

I love my guitar. But my viola da gamba loves me.

My main motivation to learn to play an instrument is to experience its harmonic effects. Good compositions simply help to bring out all the sounds. As does playing well.

I hear somebody playing music with an awful tone and all I can think is at least they don't make mistakes. But then I realize that I would never want to trade places! I'd rather play a few passages beautifully once in a while than play perfectly all the time and never produce any beauty.

Weight not strength. A golden rule for playing string instruments may apply to other areas of life as well. We should be like Gothic cathedrals: rising to the heavens thanks to being pulled down by the planet.

My sightreading is affected by how I recognize different notes in different ways. For some I have a visual memory, for others I have a little system and the remaining I derive from one of those as some steps removed from it. My reading is slowed down by having to switch between these different modes of recognition. Sometimes I need to remember first that I have a visual way of recognizing a note and then switch to that method in order to recognize it. I can feel my brain wasting a lot of time on switching between systems.

Playing music with other people is like a communication between souls. We couldn't care less about each other as people. But our souls touch each other fondly and intimately through the channel that music creates.

Being a musician is making me stupid. Just practicing for hours instead of reading a good book. And when I read, I read about music.

I will never be able to play as well as the professional musicians I see in concerts. But learning to play probably increases the joy I experience when attending a good concert. And only for that it is well worth the effort. I'm talking orgasm levels of joy here. Not the violent outburst and release but that tingling sensation that goes along with an intense orgasm. When all the hairs on your body stand up and you're completely open to the universe and vulnerable in the most beautiful way. I definitely need a smoke after that!

I love hearing good music. And I love playing music even if I'm not good at it in comparison to the professional musicians in the concerts I attend. I spend a lot more time playing badly than listening to good musicians play well.

There's one thing that I enjoy more than practicing music. It's playing well. And perhaps to play well I need to practice less.

What am I even thinking? If any of the musicians that I admire would be able to do typography, design a logo, build a website, model in 3D or program a videogame half as well as I can, I'd be astounded. As it is, however, from what I've seen most musicians create atrocities when tasked with any visual design. I'd like to think that the music I play isn't half as bad as their graphics. But I should also remember that there is no way that I can ever, even for a single moment, exceed that half. I'd be happy with a consistent quarter. And they should be so lucky when it comes to visuals.

Maybe musicians who started early are so good because they acquired the right attitude as a child. For an adult this attitude, required to play well, is not spontaneous.

Since I have subdivided my music practice time in half hour blocks divided by short breaks, I realize how little time I have. Instead of a glorious three hours I now only have five sessions. No time to mess around.

There's nothing more depressing for an amateur musician than not enjoying the music made by a highly skilled professional. Decades of training amounting to nothing! All hope flies out the window.

I have the destructive tendency to give up everything as soon as a tiny thing goes wrong. If it can't be spotless, then let it be a mess! Really dumb. But it's hard to stop.

When I am doing something (like playing music) and I make a mistake I tend to give up entirely and become sloppy. Like if it can't be perfect then I don't care. But people whom I admire pick up after a mistake and increase their efforts instead. So they add something spectacular to make you forget about the minor error.

Some musical compositions were created only for being played, for the pleasure of the musicians, not for that of an audience. Maybe more than we think. Maybe musical composition is an interactive art. And listening to music is like watching somebody else play a videogame.

I tend to practice music with the goal of automatic behavior. Store all there is to know in my muscles to then let them do the work while my mind can wander all over the place. I think this is bad. I should practice more intellectually, towards an understanding of the piece that requires a focused attitude when playing. If only because with focus I actually don't need to know how to play the piece as well. So learning would be quicker.

But focus is the thing I have most trouble with. I see musicians snap into a zone the second they start playing. How do they do that?

Maybe that mysterious focus of professional musicians is simply imaging the rhythm, or even counting.

To play music well it seems one needs to surrender to the music. Make the music the only thing that exists now. Such focus can feel scary. But remember that music encompasses everything. So one doesn't lose anything by narrowing one's attention to the music. To surrender to music means to open up to the cosmos.

It's apparently our reptile brain that stops us from performing our best. Because it gets frightened really easily and that makes us nervous. Sitting still to play music feels dangerous to it, let alone doing that in front of a crowd. It wants us to run away. We have to find a way to stop the reptile inside of us from interfering. Maybe we can calm it down, like a pet. Stroke it and speak to it in a soothing voice. Maybe we can teach it that performing well is fun. If we can find some pleasure in it for dumb frightened reptiles.

The state of awareness and focus required for playing music well exists on top of a state of perfect health and cannot be achieved when sick. Finally an acceptable reason to drink less alcohol, stop smoking and move that body more.

Music is never fast. The musician needs to find the slowness in every rhythm. There is always a way to experience any rhythm as relaxed. Maybe by adding a little swing. Or by thinking ahead of the notes and waiting for them to catch up.

To play music one needs to find slowness in its rhythm no matter how fast the tempo is.

The sort of attention required for reading and playing music feels close to lack of attention to me. It's an incredibly fine line. And I keep falling off to either side. Either I actually lose attention and shift to non-conscious action as if this activity could be done automatically. Or I start thinking about the activity itself, sometimes about how well it is going, and that breaks the spell. Reading and playing music require a highly conscious state where words don't exist. It's very difficult for me to enter, or remain, in this state. And I think this is why I don't read or play music as well as I should given my knowledge and technique. I can achieve short bursts of being in this state but realizing that it is happening takes me out of it, or my attention slips into the void and a stupid and drunk automatic pilot takes over.

Play each note as late as possible without losing the rhythm.

When playing music every note only exists as a step to the next note. And yet we hold back from playing the next note as long as we can. To feel this desire of one note for the next is beauty.

The secret of speed is to think of it as slow.

Music is interactive art created by composers for musicians.