

Relaxation after a great fatigue

Ross Weldon

1.

Wake up in a warm single bed in my mother's house, drink thick instant coffee. Walk the cliffs in Howth with my mother. My two dogs run amok. They just run and swim. The earth is damp like a sponge and the air smells of saltwater and wild garlic, beautiful, wake you up, whole cliff side covered in sunshine, looks like the West, stone walls and cattle in the fields, the orange grouse bushes tearing at the ends of my jeans. We talk about the family. No one's heard from my aunt since she beat up my granny and left a Russell Watson CD on the bed with a note that read "I Love You." Her daughter has moved in with a fellow recovering heroin addict in Finglas with their pit-bull terrier and new child, I think they gave it a stripper's name like Crystal. I could watch the sea all day, whipping the rocks.

Had a beer with my father. He speaks in stories. Paddy Donnelly had been singing the only song he knows in the front bar again, long wiry beard and a large bottle of stout for a microphone:

My boy lollipop,
You make my heart go giddyup,
You are as sweet as candy,
You're my sugar daddy.

A man was playing "Smoke on Water" by Jethro Tull on an electric guitar in the background.

2.

I am reading a large, illustrated book about the life and work of Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz. Witkiewicz's father wrote him in a letter: *My lad, above all be an absolutely good man and then do something good – paint wonderful pictures, deliver bread in Zakopane, or scatter manure in the fields – but always keep a sublime soul because this is what constitutes the essential wisdom of living.*

Growing up I wished my father were the type of man who would write a letter like this.

3.

I came across the website of Maria Winter, an Irish artist. Her bio featured a small history with an emphasis placed on the fact that her mother was a fashion designer and her father a writer of sorts. This

has given her “a deeper insight into human behaviour, which [she has], over the years, translated onto canvas.” Some artists remind me of Lords and Ladies proudly bestowed with the gift of artistic ability and destined to carry on the family’s proud tradition.

My father is a man who filled his nightclub on the northside of Dublin full of two tons of sand one weekend by himself with a wheelbarrow and a shovel to simulate a beach party. He still works seventy-hour weeks. Only now, now that I have grown up, do I appreciate having my father as my father.

4.

Witkiewicz once wrote: *Yet it is better to be gone in delightful madness than in grey dull tedium and torpor.* On one occasion Witkiewicz ordered a veal cutlet in a restaurant, when it was served to him he put it in his wallet and walked out.

5.

The other day at work, we had three hours of mandatory training called Improving Personal Effectiveness. It was given by a woman who controversially earned €800,000 from the HSE in 2009 for HR consultancy. The room was full of overweight, bubbly women in their thirties. We split into groups to discuss how to improve lines of communication within the organisation. One of the women was on a sponsored silence for a children’s charity in India; she just sat there

with a silly smile holding a piece of paper upon which she had written “I’m on a sponsored silence for India” and drawn a smiley face in green marker. Her title is Early Childcare Networks Coordinator. I suspect this means nothing to anyone but her.

I had a meeting with my managing director later that day. In her office there is a picture of five red-headed children in the arms of a man dressed as a giant bunny rabbit. I said nothing during the meeting. The new intern spoke constantly. She’s one of those horsey types. She has begun to turn into a horse. She has a long face, thick neck, stumpy fingers and bigger arms than mine.

6.

I stood at the DART station waiting for a train into town. A drunk, panting teenager looked at the flashing red clock and asked me if I had the time. Half nine it’s on the yoke, I said. She spent the next ten minutes putting on makeup. On the DART a group of teenage girls drinking cans were accosting an older man. They sat beside him and blew smoke in his face. He seemed to be enjoying it and had a huge smile on his big red face. I moved carriage to one filled with the noise and smell of a fat Spanish girl in a tank top. At Howth Junction a man stood beside the steps shouting at a younger man. He got onto the train. There were only four people in the carriage but I knew he would sit across from me and he did. He looked like a down-on-his-luck heavyweight boxer. I was reading about Witkiewicz.

Fact or fiction? the man across from me asked.

Fact.

Russian?

Polish.

Give us a look.

He grabbed it out of my hand, kicked his shoes off and lay lengthways on the seat. He had bleeding scabs on the knuckles of both hands. He leafed through the book. I could do better, he said. Two DART security men ran up and down the platform; one spotted the man reading my book and jumped on.

Where's your ticket? the security man asked him

I took the book back. The man picked up his Tesco bag and the security guards dragged him off.

At Harmonstown an elderly disabled man wagged his finger at an illuminated advert-less advertising board. At Raheny the girls in the carriage I had first got onto beat the shite out of two lads that had called them "fucking slutbags." A middle-aged woman sitting a few seats away rang her friend and said: "Jesus, Mary, I don't think I'll ever make it home to Dun Laoghaire alive."

7.

A cousin of mine told me he spent the whole weekend watching rom-coms and they have taught him what love is and that he is not in love with his girlfriend at all. He is in fact in hate with her. I tried to

explain to him that rom-coms are not necessarily the purest representation of love but I stopped mid-way through the conversation as I am in no position to criticize. I have told three people I love them and never meant it once. Each time I got a sickly feeling in my stomach, an awkward nervousness which I confused for something else, and goose bumps on the back of my arms, and I couldn't hold their gaze and my conscience would ask "really?" and I would ignore it and play along for a few years in all cases. Most recently it took two months in Asia for me for to realise that the only reason I was with a woman was because the six lads I lived with thought she was good-looking. I drew confidence from this. We fought everyday and slept in separate beds where possible. I took a Valium every afternoon for the last two weeks of our relationship.

8.

In Aldi I stood staring at the shelves with the cleaning products looking for something new. A man in his fifties wearing a football jersey walked past talking to his wife:

Mary, where did you buy those oranges yesterday?

Dunnes, I think, his wife said.

They were fuckin' horrible.

I go to Aldi everyday at lunchtime, not out of necessity, just out of habit. If I don't need food, I buy toiletries or cleaning products, back-up toothbrushes, back-up toothpaste, disposable razors, floor polish.

Today I bought a packet of toilet blocks. As soon as I got home I dropped one in the cistern. I started brushing my teeth and flushed. I stood back and watched the blue water gush from under the rim. I became annoyed at myself for not having bought them before. Blue, blue, electric blue; I never leave the lid up but made a point of doing so to show off the blue glow. It reminded me of the Grotta Azzura on the island of Capri, which I visited as a child, where the sunlight passes through an underwater cavity and through the seawater, creating a beautiful blue glow that floods the cave.

9.

There is never any sellotape in my office. Everyone gives out about it and accuses the other office of stealing it. I am the one who steals it. I give it all to Reggie, the security man, to hang Fianna na hEireann recruitment posters up around Parnell Street. I don't necessarily support Fianna na hEireann or any other sectarian movement but I would rather see the sellotape used for that than for the women in my office to stick up memos and meeting reminders all over the walls.

10.

The Irish Writers' Centre is around the corner from my office. They recently held a discussion entitled "Modern Ireland Has Nothing to Inspire Modern Writing."

11.

Parisians gobble up art like Americans gobble food at an all-you-can-eat Las Vegas buffet. I visited the Museum of Modern Art, which featured an exhibition of the works of Dutch artist Kees van Dongen. I have never seen such frenzied, frantic, velvet-clad art appreciation. I usually find myself at art galleries when I am hung over and often prefer to sit down and people watch. I regularly rant to whomever will listen about the toxicity of television and its position as the ultimate societal distraction. For the sake of consistency I feel I must also take the view that art galleries are the distraction of choice for people like me who feel too intelligent for television.

The van Dongen exhibition was extremely impressive as were the neat-haired visitors with classical music for ring tones. I noticed an abundance of Moleskin notebooks. I consider these to be the greatest marketing success of all time. People seem oblivious to the mediocre quality of the paper and more focused on them as status symbols – as the notebook of choice for the aspiring writer/artist. Hemingway never had one. The company was founded in 1998 when Hemingway and Matisse and Van Gogh were all a long time dead. I read a small article about Moleskins on stuffwhitepeoplelike.com: "This particular type of notebook is very expensive and was quite popular with writers and artists in the olden days. Needless to say, these are two properties that are highly coveted in the white community. In fact, it's a good rule of thumb to know that white people like anything that

old writers and artists liked: typewriters, journals, suicide, heroin, and trains are just a few examples.”

I prefer Leuchtturm 1917 notebooks as they feature a superior quality of paper.

As I don't visit art galleries that often, my distraction of choice is photographs of Samuel Beckett. I often type his name into Google Images and stare like a vegetable at the crevices in his face. John Minihan took the most famous images of Beckett in Paris in 1985. They each sell for about €1,000, and I need to own one. I want to buy one and get it blown up to the size of my bedroom wall and have a 3D model constructed from the image so I can stick my fingers in the gaps between the wrinkles. John Calder, Beckett's publisher, credited Minihan with capturing “the introspective, infinitely sad gaze of a man looking into the abyss of the world's woes.”

Myself and herself went to the Palais du Tokyo next door to the Museum of Modern Art. We spent twenty minutes looking at angular furniture and Man Ray photographs of women masturbating, an awkward blowjob and a tit wank that neither models seemed to be enjoying, and a few hours in the restaurant drinking. I felt sophisticated to be drinking in an art gallery but unsophisticated for being drunk in an art gallery. We left and wandered around until six in the morning, drinking cans of Kronenburg on the street, sitting outside cafés.

12.

We had another meeting in work. I spoke for two minutes at the beginning, then watched two pigeons having sex on the roof of the next building. We got a skip put outside the office. Reggie and his nephew filled it with files, boxes and office furniture. There were soon scores of locals running down from the flats to inspect the contents. A car pulled up beside it, a woman jumped out, opened the back door and started throwing the old folders into the back seat. Reggie got rid of her. An hour or so later I looked down from my second-floor window to see a junkie with a can in his hand wriggling around on his back in the skip with the folders of luminous pink and blue and green covering his arms and flapping around him.

13.

My cousin, the one who had a few days earlier told me he was in hate with his girlfriend, went to her house to break up with her. Before he could broach the subject, she told him she was pregnant. When he told me, I consoled him like it was a death. I have spoken to him three times a day everyday since. I'm handling it extremely well and giving what is, in my opinion, extremely high-grade advice such as: I know she's mental but at the end of the day you'll have a child to raise together and you're going to have to put your differences aside for the sake of something more important. I have one eye on being godfather. It is the ultimate symbol of the appreciation of a friendship

and one that I never thought I would crave. Witkiewicz kept a formal list of his friends in order of importance. In the event that a friend irritated him or pleased him in some way he/she would be demoted/promoted on the list as applicable. Witkiewicz would then send the person a letter indicating their new position. Occasionally he would publish the list in a local newspaper. I am putting in the hard yards to be considered number one in nine months' time.

My cousin mentioned abortion as soon as she told him. The next day they googled what size the foetus would be, the size of a grain of rice. She got drunk and screamed at him: "You fucking bastard, how dare you suggest we abort our grain of rice." A psychic is texting her, telling her this child is the best thing that will ever happen to her and her boyfriend. I feel terrible that my cousin is in this situation, but it is really making my life more interesting by extension. I dash out of bars leaving half-full pints of stout on the bar saying I have an important call to take.

14.

A work colleague of mine died. I didn't know him that well but he was an extremely nice man from what I saw. I used to feign interest in sport for something to talk about while we waited for the kettle to boil. I heard someone in the office say on the phone: "Oh God, poor Leslie." I knew he was sick, so I walked out of the office to wait for all the chatting to die down. I sat on the toilet and rehearsed how I

would react. I settled for a moderately surprised yet solemn face and: "God, that's terrible, poor Leslie." I've never felt anything other than awkwardness when someone dies. I feel awkward thinking about how I'm supposed to react: have I pretended to be sad enough? I rarely overdo it; maybe I've perfected the understated death reaction. I know I am not alone in this. I find it very difficult to care. I don't know what to care about. It has occurred to me that I don't deal with deaths or births particularly well.

15.

Witkiewicz's pessimism about the future of humanity in Poland led him to suicide. On September 18, on hearing the news that the Red Army had crossed the Polish border Witkiewicz along with his girlfriend Czeslawa Korzeniowska went to a forest in the small village of Jeziory. Czeslawa took a large dose of Veronal while Witkiewicz cut his wrists. They were found a few hours later by friends, Witkiewicz lying in a pool of his own blood and Czeslawa crawling around on the forest floor in great distress. Czeslawa later described what she saw when she woke: *On his face there was a look of relief. A relaxing after great fatigue.*

16.

At a concert I heard a girl turn to her boyfriend and describe the performer as "like some kind of fairy from another Universe."

17.

Welcome, O Life!...

18

Witkiewicz began to develop a deep resentment for humanity, “that hideous gang.” *...where we are going now, where we are being dragged by blind social forces, that is towards ultimate mechanization and stupefaction – there is nothing in front of us.*

Ross Weldon lives in Dublin