

In the dawn, there is a wasteland and in the wasteland, a city and in the city, a ghetto and in the ghetto, a prison and in the prison, a cell and in the cell, a mother and in the mother, a child and in the child, a heart and in the heart, a heartbeat: the

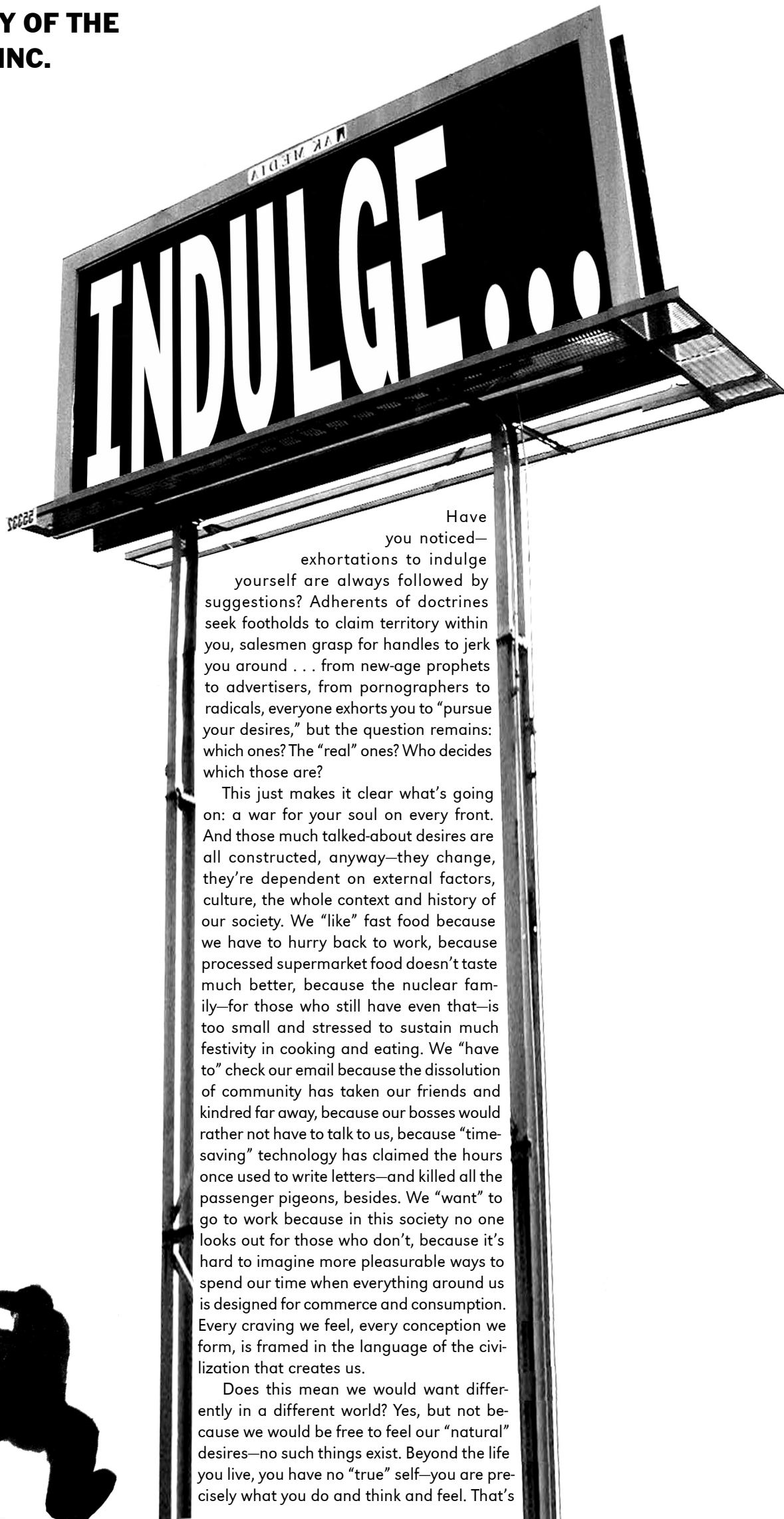
HARBINGER

of a new dawn.

FREE
as the air in your lungs and
the song on your tongue
surface-to-air missile
to the new generation
4TH COMMUNIQUÉ

A RANSOM NOTE REGARDING YOUR LIFE

COURTESY OF THE
CRIMETHINC.
SECRET
SERVICE



Have you noticed—exhortations to indulge yourself are always followed by suggestions? Adherents of doctrines seek footholds to claim territory within you, salesmen grasp for handles to jerk you around . . . from new-age prophets to advertisers, from pornographers to radicals, everyone exhorts you to “pursue your desires,” but the question remains: which ones? The “real” ones? Who decides which those are?

This just makes it clear what’s going on: a war for your soul on every front. And those much talked-about desires are all constructed, anyway—they change, they’re dependent on external factors, culture, the whole context and history of our society. We “like” fast food because we have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn’t taste much better, because the nuclear family—for those who still have even that—is too small and stressed to sustain much festivity in cooking and eating. We “have to” check our email because the dissolution of community has taken our friends and kindred far away, because our bosses would rather not have to talk to us, because “time-saving” technology has claimed the hours once used to write letters—and killed all the passenger pigeons, besides. We “want” to go to work because in this society no one looks out for those who don’t, because it’s hard to imagine more pleasurable ways to spend our time when everything around us is designed for commerce and consumption. Every craving we feel, every conception we form, is framed in the language of the civilization that creates us.

Does this mean we would want differently in a different world? Yes, but not because we would be free to feel our “natural” desires—no such things exist. Beyond the life you live, you have no “true” self—you are precisely what you do and think and feel. That’s

...AND UNDERMINE.

the real tragedy about the life of the man who spends it talking on his cell phone and attending business seminars and fidgeting with the remote control: it’s not that he denies himself his dreams, necessarily, but that he makes them answer to reality rather than attempting the opposite. The accountant regarded with such pity by runaway teenage lovers may in fact be “happy”—but it is a different happiness than the one they experience on the lam.

If our desires are constructs, if we are indeed the products of our environment, then our freedom is measured by how much control of these environments we have. It’s nonsense to say a woman is free to feel however she wants about her body when she grows up surrounded by diet advertisements and posters of anorexic models. It’s nonsense to say a man is free when everything he needs to do to get food, shelter, success, and companionship is already established by his society, and all that remains is for him to choose between established options (bureaucrat or technician? bourgeois or bohemian? Democrat or Republican?). We must make our freedom by cutting holes in the fabric of this reality, by forging new realities which will, in turn, fashion us. Putting yourself in new situations constantly is the only way to ensure that you make your decisions unencumbered by the inertia of habit, custom, law, or prejudice—and it is up to you to create these situations. Freedom only exists in the moment of revolution.

And those moments are not as rare as you think. Change, revolutionary change, is going on constantly and everywhere—and everyone plays a part in it, consciously or not. “To be radical is

simply to keep abreast of reality,” in the words of the old expatriate. The question is simply whether you take responsibility for your part in the ongoing transformation of the cosmos, acting deliberately and with a sense of your own power—or frame your actions as reactions, participating in unfolding events accidentally, randomly, involuntarily, as if you were purely a victim of circumstance.

If, as idealists like us insist, we can indeed create whatever world we want, then perhaps it’s true that we can adapt to any world, too. But the former is infinitely preferable. Choosing to spend your life in reaction and adaptation, hurrying to catch up to whatever is already happening, means being perpetually at the mercy of everything. That’s no way to go about pursuing your desires, whichever ones you choose.

So forget about whether “the” revolution will ever happen—the best reason to be a revolutionary is simply that it is a better way to live. It offers you a chance to lead a life that matters, gives you a relationship to injustice so you don’t have to deny your own grief and outrage, keeps you conscious of the give and take always going on between individual and institution, self and community, one and all. No institution can offer you freedom—but you can experience it in challenging and reinventing institutions. When school children make up their own words to the songs they are taught, when people show up by the tens of thousands to interfere with a closed-door meeting of expert economists discussing their lives, that’s what they’re up to: rediscovering that self-determination, like power, belongs only to the ones who exercise it.

Shout it over the rooftops: *Culture can belong to us.* We can make our own music, mythology, science, technology, tradition, psychology, literature, history, ethics, political power. Until we do, we’re stuck buying mass produced movies and compact discs made by corporate mercenaries, sitting faceless and immobilized at arena rock performances and sports events, struggling with other people’s inventions and programs and theories that make less sense to us than sorcery did to our ancestors, shamefacedly accepting the judgments of priests and agony columnists and radio talk show hosts, berating ourselves for not living up to the standards set by college entrance exams and glamour magazines, listening to parents and counselors and psychiatrists and managers tell us *we* are the ones with the problems, buying our whole lives from the same specialists and entrepreneurs we sell them to and gnashing our teeth in secret fury as they cut down the last trees and heroes with the cash and authority *we* give them. These things aren’t inevitable, inescapable tragedies—they’re consequences of the passivity to which we have relegated ourselves. In the checkout lines of supermarkets, on the dialing and receiving ends of 900 numbers, in the locker rooms before gym classes and cafeteria shifts, we long to be protagonists in our

own epics, masters of our own fate.

If we are to transform ourselves, we must transform the world—but to begin reconstructing the world, we must reconstruct ourselves. Today all of us are *occupied territory*. Our appetites and attitudes and roles have all been molded by this world that turns us against ourselves and each other. How can we take and share control of our lives, and neither fear nor falter, when we’ve spent those lives being conditioned to do the opposite?

Whatever you do, don’t blame yourself for the fragments of the old order that remain within you. You can’t sever yourself from the chain of cause and effect that produced you—not with any amount of willpower. The trick is to find ways to indulge your programming that simultaneously subvert it—that create, in the process of satisfying those desires, conditions which foster new ones. If you need to follow leaders, find leaders who will depose themselves from the thrones in your head; if you need to “lead” others, find equals who will help you dethrone yourself; if you have to fight against others, find wars you can wage for *everyone’s* benefit. When it comes to dodging the imperatives of your conditioning, you’ll find that *indulge and undermine* is a far more effective program than the

old heritage of “renounce and struggle” passed down from a humorless Christianity.

To return, finally, to the original question—yes, we too are *making suggestions* about which desires you pursue. We would be scoundrels to deny that! But we would be scoundrels *not* to make these suggestions, not to extol freedom and self-determination in a world that discourages them. Exhorting others to “think for themselves” is ironic—but today, refusing to oppose the propaganda of the missionaries and entrepreneurs and politicians simply means abandoning our society and species to their control. There’s no purity in silence. And liberty does not simply exist in the absence of control—it is something we have to make together. Taking responsibility for our part in the ongoing metamorphoses of the world means not being afraid to take part in the *making* of our society, influencing and being influenced as we do.

We make suggestions, we spread this *propaganda of desire*, because we hope by doing so to indulge our own programmed passion for propaganda in a way that undermines an order that discourages all of us from *playing* with our passions—and so to enter a world of total liberty and diversity, where propaganda and power struggles alike are obsolete. See you on the other side.

Until our most fantastic demands are met, fantasy will always be at war with reality.

It hijacks history classes and funerals, waylays secretaries on the way to the coffee machine, turns rails into slides and shopping malls to playgrounds—it sends lives spinning out of control. Movie directors endeavor to harness it, travel agents to peddle it, political parties to enlist it; but fantasy, like the one who pursues it in earnest, can serve no employer.

Now that every continent has been conquered and every countryside explored, nothing is more precious than passages to new worlds. Mass-manufactured faiths are haunted by a thousand dreams of escape—and fancy weaves better wings for flighty youth than pragmatism ever fashioned our forebears.

As revolutionaries, of course we are fighting for our daydreams! When we cannot stomach another hour of this, we side with those moments we surprise ourselves, flashes in which anything feels possible, peak experiences that may last only instants—and therefore with every inhibited impulse, forbidden pleasure, unexploded dream, all the stifled songs which, unleashed, could create an upheaval like no one has ever seen. And when the dust settles afterwards, we will side with them again.

Call this escapist—perhaps it is; but what class of people is most disturbed by the idea of escape? Jailers. Right or wrong, selfless or selfish, possible or impossible, we’re getting out of here.

They were shooting off fireworks through the tear gas down on the waterfront, the sky exploding in grenades of color. Whatever it is that pulls the pin, that hurls you past the boundaries of your own life into a brief and total beauty, it is enough.



“You can see the whole wide world from up here.”
“Yes—and others, as well.”

The invitation to a new world may take a lifetime or more to extend; self-imposed outcast status may be established in order to receive the transmissions, to give the seeds soil in which to grow. The one who does this is not jettisoning herself from “life” after all, but providing its first port of entry—metabolizing, invisibly, the garbage of the old world into the new one, just as other “parasites” do.

The old man lives in a city filled with factories. The factories roar away morning, noon, and night; it is well nigh impossible to hear anything over them. The people of the city must shout at the tops of their lungs when they speak to each other, and even when they are alone making grocery lists or reflecting on the lost afternoons of childhood. They blast their music, which is necessarily cacophonous and overbearing, at the maximum volume their stereo speakers can deliver; they buy alarm clocks louder than bombs. There is not a single space or moment free from the incessant ear splitting din.

Only the old man, who was a young boy before the factories were built, can remember what it was to walk, think, linger in silence. He tries to tell the others about it, but they cannot hear his soft voice. He tries to ponder what to do about the noise, but cannot clear his throbbing head to begin. He stuffs his ears with cotton and wax, presses pillows over his head—nothing helps. Finally, driven mad by the constant bangings and clangings of the machines, the wails of sirens, honks of horns, screams and guffaws and whistles of his neighbors, he grabs a sledgehammer and sets out for the center of the city, where the greatest of the factories thunders. He clambers over the barbed wire fence, shredding his fingers and thighs, and charges through the stockyard to a back door. It is unlocked, and he enters; but security guards spy him, and hurry after.

He finds himself in the entrails of the machinery. The blows of its hammer rhythm are deafening. Pounded by shockwaves, almost overwhelmed, he struggles forward to a vulnerable pipe and raises his weapon to deliver a crippling blow. At that moment the security guards, horrible in their matching uniforms and ear protection, overtake him and drag him away.

He is sent to a prison. The halls there echo all day and night with the hoots and yells of prisoners, the ringing of bells, the slamming of doors and the jingling of keys, but for once he is not disturbed by the clamor: the moments he spent in the factory have deafened him.

In this new found peace, he writes a manifesto of silence that will be read by millions and whispered from ear to ear.

She lives in a world of absolutely regulated time. In the boarding school, every moment is strictly regimented: rise at six o'clock, wash until ten after, dress by twenty after, breakfast at six thirty, and so on; likewise Tuesday night is laundry night, Thursday is soccer day, and every other Saturday evening, a movie at ten on the dot. The nuns meet every morning at five thirty to synchronize their watches by the great tolling belltower. They teach that time is ordained by God: He has created it in all its precision to show that He is universal, that His creation is flawless and uniform, that there are no exceptions. Bells ring to announce every movement of students and faculty. Clocks and watches tick tick tick tick in unison in every room. Every semester includes exactly 1200 hours of sleep, 100 hours of mathematics homework, and 10 hours of visiting time.

The young student is secretly terrified by this timekeeping mania. She lies awake in bed when everyone is supposed to be asleep, counting down the seconds to her death. It seems to her it is lunacy to calibrate life this way—as if subdividing time made *more* of it!—but whatever it could be she would prefer, she cannot imagine. She comes up with a plan. The next day, she and a few rebellious students are ten minutes late to each class; she has calculated that they can gain a few minutes more free time this way, in relation to the detention time their tardiness will occasion. It is strange and new to have these few minutes to do with what they please; but they still have to keep an eye on the clock, for arriving at class more than ten minutes late draws much longer periods of detention.

After a couple days, she is the only one still playing this game; the others are already in too much trouble with the administration for their tastes. *That's it for your little insurrection*, she thinks bitterly to herself—and then, possessed by frustration and defiance at being abandoned by her classmates, *no, it's not*. She tears off her watch, tosses it away, and stomps into the forest.

There, everything is wholly different. Time, as she has known it, stops completely; in its place is a profound and beautiful stillness, like nothing she has felt before. Here, there is no need to fear death, for she can linger in the eternity of the moment, absorbing and savoring it. The birds twitter overhead, the sun moves slowly across the sky; eventually the moon ascends, the darkness thickens, and she reluctantly concedes to herself that she must go back, since she is not yet ready to live alone in the woods.

Upon her return, she is immediately apprehended by a stern hall monitor, who seizes her arm and drags her to the office of Mother Superior. She receives her talking-to in stoic silence, and doesn't flinch when the woman threatens severe punishment. The next morning before dawn she rises and advances on the great belltower with a book of matches. She knows her freedom depends on whether she can wrest everyone from the rhythm of the bells.

The Sultan is omnipotent in his desert empire because he controls the water supply. He rations it strictly: for women, a teaspoon a day; for great, stout men, a tablespoon; for infants and elders, a thimble full. No one dares protest, for to drink any less would be fatal. Priests baptize babies with spit from their droughted mouths; wives collect the sweat off their husbands' brows to bathe in. The subjects make do as best they can, and take great pains not to displease their ruler.

One day, an incredibly beautiful maiden appears from far away. She is the Sultan's new wife, fresh from the monsoon country. Her long, black hair flows and ripples like a river; her voice is the song of a laughing brook; looking into her dark eyes, one finds oneself floating in a summer sea. The very air around her drips nectar.

The Sultan's stable boy falls in love with her. He languishes for months, living only for the rustle of her skirts, the glimpse of her moist skin. Unbeknownst to him, she too is watching him—she likes his faraway air, his shy seriousness, the depth of feeling in his knitted brow. One morning, while the Sultan and his henchmen are away on business, the stable boy sneaks into her chamber. She is bathing in a magnificent pool.

The poor boy stands mute before her. All he has longed for his whole life, the years of parched throat, cracked lips, arid isolation, is personified in her—and he is a simple stable boy, intruding upon her. In the recklessness of desperation, he opens his mouth: a torrent of adoration pours out. It becomes a deluge; then, a psalm. She is moved; it has been a long time since anyone has spoken to her honestly, let alone beautifully, in this barren land. She tells him to come to her after sundown.

That night, after everyone else is asleep and the moon is high in the clear sky, the stable boy leaves his tent and creeps to the tower in which the Sultan keeps his wife. The door is locked, and soldiers stand guard inside, so the boy scales the dry brick of the wall to her window. She opens it and helps him in. Hours later, the Sultan is awakened by sounds of passion from his young wife's bedchamber.

His soldiers stamp up the stairs, but it is too late. From their lovemaking flows a river so deep and so wide that all the Sultan's horses and men are unable to cross it to punish the enraptured couple. In a rage, the Sultan orders that a mountain of dust be piled up so that his subjects will not see the new body of water. It is done, and none of them do; but the hot sun shines over head, and soon the gypsies in the countryside are crooning a new folk song: *you can outlaw the rain, they sing, but we all see the clouds are gathering*.

The brother and sister have grown up together; everything they are, they have become as a pair. They have survived the same challenges, heartaches, illnesses; they have treasured the same meanings in songs and poems and chilly sunrises. If one prefers the crusts of bread, it is because the other favors the soft core. Whenever one feels, suffers, triumphs, it is for them both.

A day comes when they decide to part and seek their separate fortunes; between the two of them, they reason, they can chart the world, and share it when they meet again. The sister sets out with a simple pack on her back, and doesn't stop to sleep until she is many leagues from their childhood home. She continues this way for many weeks, entering regions vastly different from their homeland. There, she encounters wondrous animals, witnesses new cultures, strange customs, exotic religions and value systems. She learns to charm cobras, to dance flamenco, to speak a few of the infinite languages in which the grandeur of the cosmos is written.

Years later, as agreed, she returns home to meet her sibling. The two embrace, and sit down before a warm fire. The sister relates all her adventures, all the wonders she has experienced, one by one. Her brother listens pensively, hesitates, finally speaks.

He explains that all the marvels she has seen are little better than illusions: that there is only one thing in the world worthy of contemplation. He relates how he, too, set out from home, and stopped the first night at a monastery. When the monks inquired about the purpose of his journey, he told them of how he and his sister had pledged to chart the corners of creation together. The abbot informed him that they could assist in his quest, and brought out their holy book: a book which, the elderly man declared, held the truth about everything in the world, down to the last blade of grass.

The brother recounts how he spent the following years deep in study with the monks, and found that the whole of the world, all that can be felt or known or pondered, was indeed contained in this book. It became clear to him that further traveling was unnecessary; instead, he isolated himself entirely and spent every waking instant poring over the book, memorizing every word, learning to fit every detail of life, even the ones that seemed not to fit, into the system it contained.

Her brother concludes his story and implores his sibling to return with him to the monastery. But she politely takes her leave, and sets out again across the earth. She will find the single unaccounted-for blade of grass, the irreplaceable note from a french horn, the one recalcitrant turtledove that will break the book's grip on her brother, so he will again be free to recognize the universe in all its diverse splendors—to perceive that the world is too big and too beautiful to fit in one million such books.

"All this is like a dream, and I never dream."

"Like the king who never had any dreams until the wizard made him sleep in a pigsty."

Scarcity, propriety, cruelty, routine—these things seem like laws of nature, until you experience otherwise. You can't blame those who cannot imagine more—only show them it exists.

And so our charge is to be alchemists. Just as the alchemists of bygone days strove to change lead into gold, we must make fortune from misfortune and magic of the mundane. *Alchemy* is the art of reinventing the world, of rearranging existing elements to create new possibilities. The alchemist understands it is the forces that count, the relationships, not the materials, not the things in the world. Any situation, every situation, can be revolutionized—you simply have to enter knowing your life is at stake.

Our contest is with gravity, with the weight of inertia. It is up to us to shake it off—or turn it to our advantage. For the slothful man, gravity is a force to be feared, a hated master; he finds in it an argument against motion, action, life itself. But for the dancer, gravity is indispensable, beloved even. Without it, she would have nothing to play against, no counterpoint for her strength and skill. She flies all the more gracefully for being born without wings.

We must dance with our apprehensions, our agonies, our histories, or be paralyzed by them. With lightness of foot, we can transform our centuries-long history of destruction and disappointment into a mere prologue, the tragic overture before a beautiful symphony—justifying and absolving ourselves, and the world we know, in the process.

If there is anyone foolish enough to want this world the way it is, then let him have it—let him have it!!—and perish with it. For the rest of us, alchemy is our only hope.

She takes my hand and leads me breathless from the ruins. "Life is not retrospective," she confides. "Let's not be, either."