

Michael Angelo Tata

from *Scattering Brightly*

To: Exultation

I have never been entirely sure whether the events of my life transpire or if I only think that they come to pass. I often feel as if I am on a moving sidewalk getting pulled across space and time by forces beyond my agency or comprehension. Or that I am outside myself, watching myself perform certain behaviors which, I guess, I am, although I feel very much as if there is some fundamental scission between the me acting and the me watching, reflecting: such has been the nature of my experiences in the world.

Even now, I cannot discern whether these beautiful things have transpired or if I have only dreamt them: am I parading across a screen? How would an oscilloscope read my delta waves? Am I a butterfly dreaming about being a hominid, or a hominid dreaming about being a butterfly? Many of my dreams are so very real that I cannot ever decide whether they are dreams or extensions of reality into zones of possibility which, on entering into my consciousness, assume concrete form. Either way, I am always in some state of unreality, given that my waking life comes off as little more than the buzzing of tangled wires. Reality TV has only made matters worse.

What doesn't change is the feeling that I have undergone a change, that some mathematical operation has been performed upon me. Squared, cubed, boiled down to a square root: plugged into a trigonometric function, I exit the equation shiny and revitalized. I am not sure what exactly has transmogrified—I just know that something deep down inside me is different—that is, assuming I am an archaeological site, that my consciousness takes the form of geological layers. It is equally probable that I am the vanishing point of all psychic dimensionality, that no gradient whatsoever separates one battery cell from another. Whatever the alteration in question is, the resulting change has been slight, yet has incited unimaginable ramifications, like dropping a very small pebble into the sea and reading later in a newspaper that a tidal wave has engulfed Tokyo, or nudging a Monarch butterfly gently in one direction with the slightest angel's kiss and discovering that Saturn's rings have completely disbanded.

Whatever has changed is as ineffable as what existed prior to that change—I have access to neither. My experiences are a totality of effects, a constellation of projections. Every time I set my foot down, the ground beneath me sinks, dragging me toward the earth's iron core. Who I

was is as distant as who I am. It may even be that no revision has taken place. Only the truth of photographs reveals my wholes—pity I never carry a camera.

I am not sure why at all I should feel that I have in any way been transformed either qualitatively or quantitatively. Certain occurrences—a sunburn, for example—bring pain or pleasure only after a critical time period has elapsed. Perhaps I need to wait for the searing spasms to take hold of me.

Although I did, at the time, feel that something quite unbelievable was taking place, and that I was expanding into an entity at odds with my preceding existence, I could not experience the complete sensation of newness until I awoke some time later, maybe a day, maybe a month, maybe light years. Now I am entirely new: strange, since I do not recall ever having felt old. The past is a reverse projection of the present; novelty produces the sense of crushed bone; today gives birth to yesterday retroactively. I would say that I believed in the future were I not aware of its eventual recession into the opacity of the past, which, like enameled Venetian glass, lets in only enough light to titillate the retina without granting a view of anything. My obverse reads “Made in Murano,” although it was, to tell the truth, manufactured in Jersey City, shipped to the Venetian Hotel and Casino, and sold to obese kindergarten teachers on holiday.

My present is hardly opaque, yet in its immanence it connects with nothing but more immanence—and of course the immediate cannot speak because the instantaneous has no time for a voice. To some degree, I suppose, it eludes me—perhaps as regards the inaccessibility of the origins of my newfound self. Otherwise, all is clear. New thoughts—ideas I never would have dreamed I could possess—come to mind and I duly record them all. My image of myself is as a mass of hummingbirds flying out of what physicists call a white hole. I dream of fabulous inventions, the flags of nonexistent countries, fantastical smoothies made from wild fruit pairings. An umbrella porks a sewing machine on a plastic surgeon’s butcher block: it is clear to me that I have carried the dream out of surrealism and into super-realism. My eye is met by surface after surface and I rejoice in the play of textures, knowing that beneath reality lies nothing and that the imagination is an autoerotic, autocratic silver balloon which floats to the ceiling and tries to pose as a cloud. The gap separating my eye eye from my mind’s eye is no longer a gap, but the presence of gerbera daisies with platinum incisors.

Ads for weight loss programs, rhinoplastic procedures and the removal of pockets of adipose interposing themselves between the slats in the hot pink flesh of an abdominal field come to mind, curious contrapositions of an imperfect past belonging to a specter of human misery and a lurid future burning up with the incandescence of bodily mastery show themselves as alternate views of a temporal and material clump, connected to one another through the permanence of a life at the same time that they fly away from each other at speeds producing a sonic boom which only I, in my state of heightened egotism, can hear. The two meet nowhere, yet converge on a

lump of bone and blood which somehow connotes the persistence of social wholes. "I did it!" an image from the far side of gumption exclaims, flushing a prior self to which it has lost all physical and psychological connection down the drain of a gleaming white toilet bowl whose porcelain knows no alteration, only the continued resplendence of its polished surfaces.

Spectacles of rehab flood my mind, torn pages of supermarket tabloids spotlighting the heart-warming tales of teen starlets turning their lives around under the public's watchful eye, its lenses refracting their angles into angel cake, a treat devoured at mass beheadings and the like. Am I like these girls, go-carting around Santa Monica raceways, high on the pleasures of daily existence, trading kilos of Columbian magic for the banal safety of frothy pink diet lemonade sold by the can in gas stations and chicken shacks across the nation? I could be the younger wasted brother of a star entertainer, stumbling and bumbling my way through the mean streets of Hollywood until that one special day the television cameras arrive to document the trials and tribulations I will encounter as I forsake chemical stimulation for the subtle joys of crossword puzzles and Scientology. I could be Branwell Brontë, holed up in a Victorian cupola with tinctures of laudanum lighting an escape path, Thomas de Quincey, his head exploding with opera notes and blooming poppies, or Danny Bonaduce, stubbly red pubes failing at concealing a cock shriveled from decades of steroid abuse: all types of *Imitatio Christi* are equally probable. The novelty of my experience stuns me, and I ransack the back alleys and smarmy corridors of contemporary mediascapes to find some desperate analogue to my own metempsychosis, that bizarre and largely unknowable process whose procedures and mathematical functions have brought me to a present moment radically detached from any past time and infinitesimally full of future instants all bearing the impress of the marvelous manifestation I have become. As with an eminent Freudian schizo, I discover a world teeming with miracles and give myself over to the pleasures of fabulous organ interchanges, spontaneous combustion and the invasion of my cerebellum by choirs of cherubim whose only repertoire is comprised of fractured power ballads.

Overly grandiose, I feel myself swell into the jellied ocular pillow of Odilon Redon's *Eye Balloon*, wafting high above unknown cities and wild seas where waves crash violently against one another in a brash display of narcissism not untouched by narratives more meteorological in nature, even cosmological, as in a solar emission of radiation and an ensuing solar wind blowing spare moons out of a solar system: buh-bye. The laws of physics are not unknown to me, and I consequently understand that, at some limit of verticality, I should experience the disequilibrium of outer and inner air pressures, then pop and plummet to earth in a freefalling heterogeneous puddle of aqueous and vitreous humors, yet as I continue to ascend to ever greater levels of atmosphere, stratosphere and whatever other spheres are up there, I know intuitively that there is no chance I will ever explode, that in no short time I will exceed the limits of sublunary gravity and embark upon an exploration of the cosmos which will leave my hair kinky with the action of loose gamma rays.

For what is change? What can it mean that a past persona from which I have pinched off entirely finds itself stammering in the face of a new creation speaking an entirely private language in which every part of speech is an adjective and all verbs have been eradicated by grumpy grammatologists burning midnight oil in their devotion to fabricating a luminescent set of rules governing the transparency of divine utterance? I feel so good—so good. Like a Parisian party child spinning himself silly in the trippy corner of an Ibiza foam party, like a vertiginous innocent riding an Atlantic City Wonder Wheel around and around its charmed circumference above a boardwalk where cotton candy and the hairstyles of the geriatric are indiscernible, like a blithe poet seeking an impossible simile based upon the correspondence of an excitable mental state to a sex machine or some other piece of equipment which might produce an effect of inebriation bordering on annihilation: as with these fellow travelers, I find myself jetting toward an uncertain yet utterly delirious tomorrow which transcends any design Walt Disney may have had for the housing and mobilization of earthly bliss. My statues sing, too, only their lyrics have nothing to do with modes of shrinking the distance between clusters of people inhabiting disjointed chunks of Pangaea, nor are they aimed at clarifying the dimensions of knowable space: rather than sing endless choruses of “It’s a Small World After All,” my homunculi find relief in Gangsta Rap, sugared-up cereal jingles, and the music of the spheres.

Philosophy has so long tormented itself with expressing once and for all what it means to evolve, what it signifies to experience a metamorphosis, that it is no small matter to determine whether or not the fact of change obviates the persistence of an underlying principle of continuity according to which an indestructible substance willingly dons costumes of various eras and styles in a vivid display of pageantry. Clearly, all of them are right: I have stayed the same at the same time that I have left aspects of myself behind in a meat-stuffed dumpster at the back of a suburban Denny’s, inches away from homeless junkies smoking a mixture of herb and dirt, slurping orange Fanta from a dented can, and jangling coin and teeth in a Styrofoam cup once containing the delicately sweetened broth of an iced tea. Heraclitus and Parmenides I love you, but must here part company with your silly squabbles.

The depths philosophy has been unable to plumb with any definition or definitiveness have been explored with grace and ease by natural history. The finches of Darwin fly splendidly above frigid Pacific seas, scanning the waters for whatever sushi comes their way, their durable beaks telling a particularly vicious tale of the triumphs and travails of a mechanism of selection which has forced change on their population without alerting any birds as to impending doom. Magazines, too, comprehend implicitly that a B-movie diva who balloons to proportions not befitting an odalisque is connected to yet different from that same princess 200 pounds lighter: they share no common lexicon, either verbally or corporally. Even she takes part in destroying her past, jumping through a life-size photograph of herself on daytime talk programs with an angry leap that is the condensation of years of ridicule and despondence, or, if her B-movie status has sunk even lower, sweating through the ordeals of weight loss on a televised farm

nebu[lab] 2010

housing the bloated remains of child stars and game show whiz kids who have eaten themselves into an oblivion of supersized massiveness supermorbid in its unstoppable expansion. Yet how wonderful it is, an elastic waist band. There really is nothing more comforting.

I take leave. I accelerate. I part company from the very bones and sinews I know intimately as my own, their meat waiting for the maggots to move on in. The glories of demolition are mine, giddy orgasmic gasps of dissolution and satyriasis. I am fresh, renewed, reinvigorated, clad entirely in white mesh as I skyrocket toward a bull's eye in the twilight archery practice of a gang of thieves seeking to ravage the world and drain it of the greed of crass commercialism.

Still, outside of the occasional glance in the mirror, sauce pot or glazed pupil of a love object, I forget that I exist, so fully automatized that thoughts detach from my cerebrum each moment, assuming the lives of a gaggle of Athenas sent scuttering into an obscure and fuzzy distance as each is born from a neuron abuzz with nervous energy. How I remember to breathe astounds me, and I lay utterly rapt in the mysteries of my autonomic nervous system, as it guides my fluids into proper channels, making the general hydraulics of personality and beast alike function independently of one another, yet mutually in sync. I do not want to breathe, but I am breathing. I have no concept of oxygen or carbon dioxide, but I am breathing. I cannot hem my existence into any pocket of flesh, but I am breathing, these odd lungs I have never once seen yet know to cause my chest to heave in and out each minute of each day disconnecting from any free will or principle of voluntarism, chugging along without any interest in the idle thoughts flooding my mind this precise moment of aggrandizement.

I do not know who I am, yet take with me pieces of who I was, brightly colored carnival masks, discordant quatrains, hunks of rose quartz hewn from mines no map can plot. Perhaps I will assemble these in a mosaic, perhaps I will wait for a thunderstorm to scatter them in a vortex of cherry red Ford pick-up trucks and plastic pink flamingoes who have taken to the sky, their feathers the colors of clams they have never ingested, their being plastic, and all. Even as I write these words, even as I struggle to express in some sort of language of which others may partake and to which they might point, I vanish as quickly as I manifest myself, lost to nocturnal vapors rising from the swamps of a ghost bayou. In fact, I write solely to survive in the minds of others, vainly searching for a degraded immortality which might stand by the side of cave-paintings and televised confessions alike, testament to the fact that, at some unfortunate moment in history, something approximating an I has undertaken various acts and espoused multifarious attitudes as an ambitious experiment in waste.

If only I suffered exquisitely under the dominion of multiple personalities, if only my behavior could be neatly packaged and parceled out into neat little receptacles with names like Cherry Blossom and Bruce. True, online communities do provide some outlet for my unslakable desire to transform into caricatures with tragic flaws and predictable peccadilloes, virtual rooms with

sugar walls perfectly containing the confines I have chosen to set for whatever self is currently at stake. It is refreshing to become a teenage slag named Harriet, spreading HPV across the pond, just as it brings a smile to my lips when the thoughtful blip heralding the arrival of an Instant Message lets FISTYFIST09 know that somewhere across the country an otherwise polite and mousy office worker has finally amassed enough courage to beg for an administration of pain dispelling decades of repressed fantasy.

I am flying. Either the rods and cones within my own fovea are mis-firing, or colors in motion strike them with the force and conviction of fact, leaving the impression that my body sails above the planet in a sardine tin which has, through the miracle of divine intervention, sprouted a propeller. I'm not completely convinced, but I think I'm flying. I fade in and out, on the fringes of a vibrating moment which refuses to release its grip and give in to the next moment in the sequence, a moment of bravado and vibrato quite literally bringing me outside myself, spinning whimsically on a rapidly rotating blade of renaissance and rejuvenation. The whirr of a motor rushes through my ears, as the precious osteoliths bouncing around my ear canals assume the form of Bingo balls in an air chamber, doing little to assist me in the project of orientation in space or time. Finally, rumors of universal expansion make sense to me: I can honestly report feeling the stretch and burn of space's vacuum giving way to the pull of particulate wanderlust. Off I go, shooting through the heavens with disarticulated satellites and clamoring comets, zooming toward an uncertain future which can only bring the coldness of separation and the heat of unbounded motion into conflict. "Bingo!" I holler, my card marked with erratic stamps of squid ink, excited to see what my numbers have earned me, yet with the practical sense that only a package of Twinkies and box of plastic mauve hair rollers await me. This despite the fact that my hair curls of its own accord, a Brillo Pad in Miami heat.

What lies beneath my feet? If I am moving, and the tin of *foie gras* sailing through the sky is moving, then the probability that earth lies within reach diminishes infinitely. A sudden misgiving brings to my consciousness the thought that the surface meeting my foot rests on no surface itself, that underneath, all is raw movement. Small bits of glass and Splenda inside my mouth almost insinuate a hint as to the curiousness of this ever thickening moment, yet in the end are not able to suggest any more than the utter foreignness of the sensations of which they are author. True, I know the taste of imitation sugar, and can differentiate the insipidness of Sweet'N Low from the more purified saccharin edge of Equal, yet how my tongue has come to encounter any granules of fake sweetener escape me without exception. Aspartame? No—too much of an aftertaste. Besides, I have no memory of eating lowfat yogurt. SomerSweet? No—Suzanne Somers is not responsible for the taste at the tips of my gum, although my thighs are unequivocally of her making. Splenda, yes. Suzanne Somers, no. But how has this surprising sucrescence entered my mouth? Has someone laced an iced beverage with the fragments of a beveled Art Deco mirror tossed over the balcony of a penthouse in a fit of erotic fury mingled with the pains of rejection? Oh, snap: it could be my lucky day! Perhaps the Splenda was

tainted, and I will be the recipient of the millions of dollars due those who stumble into the occasional harmful situation, emerging with an altered physique, yet buckets of money they will never enjoy more than their missing leg or once healthy pharynx.

Because of the glass, there is naturally some blood, little globs of hemoglobin releasing iron molecules for the satisfaction of my taste buds. I taste just like lamb. The Splenda could come from so many sources, everything from cupcakes to the fake melon of an iced summer lattè, yet the presence of glass ties to no situations to which my memory can appeal, my having never consumed the material before, not even accidentally (and I am so accident prone). Has there been a motorcrash? Have I bobbed for apples at a Halloween party and selected the very one a creep hellbent on infanticide has loaded with shards and set loose upon the waves of tap water filling a barrel? Scanning my own history yields nothing. The glass has arrived *ex nihilo*, cutting the corner of my mouth and a portion of my tongue. Whatever has happened, I am not mad. I may very well have deserved this recompense. Not all of my actions are beneficent.

Mysteries deepen—could be I am growing more conscious of my surroundings, or that I am dreaming within my own dream, like a drowning scuba diver who, disoriented, swims faster and faster toward the ocean floor, convinced that each swipe of a fin brings him closer to the surface and that any second now he will be gulping wholesome air rather than drinking in a toxic brine as his eyes fill with nitrogen bubbles. From the corner of my eye, I see red and black tongues which can only be the flames of a fire burning beyond any point of decorum. Clearly I am situated higher than these angry sprays of fire, since they recede slightly into the distance as I continue to move forward, away from the action. Motion parallaxes are more helpful than I ever imagine them to be. Who or what is burning I have no way of knowing, nor do I have any way of determining the fire's origin. Could be anything from an out-of-control birthday cake to the evildoings of a garden variety arsonist with no goal other than to liven up an otherwise blah and uneventful afternoon with a good, old-fashioned incineration. Books banned by papal bull might be turning to ash, as could the flayed torso of a dullard turned martyr. The Symbionese Liberation Army might be out to play, or a misdirected missile *en route* to a rebel power could have taken an erroneous path and completely destroyed a country hamlet, its citizens pulling taffy and contorting dough into salty pretzels without any awareness that their number is about to be up. *Carnival of Death*, as the papers would read.

But there is no time to trace the flames back to match, accelerant, or the frayed wire of a killer toaster. I suddenly realize something even more crucial than the jagged presence of sweet silicon dioxide or the fading vista of an afternoon blaze: I suddenly grasp that, although I have been speculating as if in a vacuum, I am not alone. Another is here, in this strange container transporting my purged and purified remains to a place more suitable for their transfigured rebirth. Together, we journey toward a blurry horizon, speeding off to a land outside time. As I sit outside myself and ponder the unforeseeable changes I have undergone, another also regards

my envelope, watches me out of the corner of an eye with motives I cannot at this juncture ascertain or surmise. Who can be here with me, wherever here is, whoever I am? I am perplexed. This could be an alien abduction, my probed and prodded body racing toward a lab where extracted sperm will be employed in the service of repopulating a planet on whose surface sulfur rains incessantly in hot drops of battery acid on a *demos* of ethereal trianguloid shapes communicating with disembodied electrical blips. How interesting that would be, fathering interspecies hybrid monsters, then returning to earth with no recollection of turkey basters or test tubes, only clued in to the space hijinks by a vague sense that the time my watch has recorded and the time the world has released differ in quantity from one another. Missing time: how marvy. I, too, have been an object of curiosity.

Despite my enthusiasm for this scenario, I know I am not a space alien, nor am I baby daddy to an interplanetary welfare love child choking on blocks of plutonium and brie as it cries itself to sleep in a collapsing crib. But other facts remain fact. *I* am flying, leaving behind an old self like the molted scales of a python on the jungle floor before the designer boot industry arrives to co-opt his abandoned skin, and I am *flying*: some technological invention has been applied to my body and mind, carting the two off to wherever it is they are destined to go. I am also on fire, and witnessing a fire, there being the slim paranormal chance that I have lit the world ablaze with my charm and creativity, and of course the crafty employment of lighter fluid. And I am not alone: whichever buoyant here has absorbed me, it is filled with more flesh than merely mine. Other muscle is here, fresh epidermal cells flake off onto a lap, lungs not housed by my own skin flutter efficiently in the work of supporting an existence. Someone guides this vessel, someone mandates my presence, someone is pleased with whoever it is I have become. Whatever reason there is for glass and the chemical performance of sucrose to coat my tongue, the dried platelets of a piquant wound calm me, returning me to certain inevitabilities of my physical existence.

I'm off—if only I were wearing python loafers from an Italian boutique nestled near the Spanish Steps of Il Corso, or that my own molted exterior lured pirates acting in the name of fashion to violate the orders of an Endangered Species list precious enough to have included me. If only the hands of Zegna or Armani zipped me up in a chalk-striped cocoon: I never seem to dress appropriately for special occasions, and what could be more special than social death? Although, to tell the truth, denim is an acceptable fabric almost anywhere, from the red carpet of a ceremony for the parceling out of superfluous awards to the hermetically sealed cabin of Air Force One, and nobody outside of a bordello expects you to wear once-slithering reptile, anyway.

Despite one fabulous head of hair inherited from generations of Mediterranean do-nothings, I am not Monica Lewinsky, but there seems to be some imported substance on the outside of my pants, an odd, nearly transparent smudge still too wet to flake off. My nipple is also sore, a crystal-studded cross dangling from it and exerting just enough pressure to give rise to a faint

sensation of discomfort—faint enough to inspire a desire for more acute suffering, yet discomfiting enough to cause me to fidget awkwardly in my seat in an effort to shake my chest and dislodge the object in question. Wanting to know more, I slip my hand into my shirt, from which one or two mangled buttons dangle on fragile threads which, if memory serves me, have met their end with a set of teeth bearing down upon them not in hunger, but in some desire far more passionate and all-encompassing. I reach for my nipple, and encounter grooves that can only be one thing: a bite mark. If there is more blood, I will find it in good time. For now, other existential and historical quandaries beckon.

There is no way to tell where I am going, yet I continue along this path which another has laid out for me. I spit out a small piece of the sweetest glass I have ever tasted, then, exhausted by the thoughts which have coursed through the trephined grooves of my skull for a period of time no number line could nail down, close my eyes for either the first or the last time. Lug nuts twirl about effortlessly, carrying me into the heavens on gossamer threads lovingly released from the onyx thorax of a predatorial arachnid. This is it. My left tit, still wet from an oral attack, seeps something even wetter than saliva through the fabric of my shirt, but I do not have the fortitude to make any investigation as to its composition. Eyes welded shut, head rested against a pane of glass, I drift.

A hand moves onto mine, rubbing it with a firm yet gentle motion, then unzips the one barrier preventing my gametes from frolicking in the light of day and commences a species of frottage bordering on prayer. This might end well after all: such an unpredictable end, such a masterfully orchestrated flow of fingers and propeller blades and flashes of Pentecost flame shot forth from the blowhole of blubbering grounded whales flashing their baleens in the interest of mammalian portraiture. This is it. And I am the real thing.