

## The Old Man

The old man sat by the road on the hillside, his robes wrapped close against the chill morning air and his hat protecting his eyes from the sun, risen across the valley. He was arranged, balanced, and deliberate; looking down at a small, polished shell, bowl. Nothing man inspired moved for several hours.

In his peripheral vision the sun rose, birds took flight, and a huge beetle defied the impossible with whirring wings and wing cases. Sounds of snow melt filled his ears, descending, seeping through crevices, then gathering to splash in larger masses. Trees and other living things scented the air.

He did not move, to abstain from action was better than to indulge in pointless action; and he could think more clearly that way, for that was his practice.

The old lady steadily mounted the path to the road. The sun, which had been up as long as she had was growing strong and warming the whole hillside. Soft boots and experienced feet made no noise, but the old man's nose predicted her coming as warmed air lifted, and her scent preceded her.

She carried the lunch-box her man carried through the city for forty years. There, where even the pavements are inhabited, he carried it past strangers every day.

Here, where most hillsides and some valleys held a habitation, she knew of the stranger. His business had been discussed and she toiled up-hill to feed him. There would be the satisfaction of a hunger fed and a climb on a fresh morning, and feeding the worthy brings merit.

She listened to him talk as he ate, together they devoured the brief crystallising of ideas.

"Consider instruction, the purpose is implicit. If the purpose is not achieved, by definition, it is not instruction. There must be something, for which I do not know the name. I know its nature, a failed attempt at instruction. But ideas are mutable, failure attends success".

"Look what they did with wheels."

She replied, gesturing towards the road

He wondered if she had caught the point?

"Yes," she replied, "the name and the use are related. A woman wielding a rolling pin does not hold a pin for rolling, she holds a weapon, the function is in the name. Sometimes things are inadequate to their purpose, a flimsy pin may be inadequate to fulfilling her intention of instruction, but the principle may be adapted to the poker."

She related ideas to the everyday material world around her; it aided her understanding, for that was her practice.

When the food was eaten the old woman left and the old man sat and thought.

In the afternoon he drew a box from under his robe, took out the means to create a scroll, and, in the even, afternoon light, wrote.

Inscription was one act in a series of events, all were essential, most were transient. The writing would remain after the act, it might be read, he could not tell by whom, their intention, or interpretation.

Sun, warmth, and food had an effect, he sat, motionless in the shade; relaxed and un-hurried as he considered his readers and his message. The reader must gain from the script, but is not an empty vessel to be filled. The message must convey meaning, yet leave room for speculation and personal introspection; unconsciously his body position reflected his mind.

Habits deliberately established in the mind invade consciousness with order. Interactions create reflections, glancing off in all directions

These things may advance, or inhibit.

Attitude and mind were in harmony, his natural, balanced, mental and physical state, in observation, consideration, and inscription.

In the evening, by firelight, he indulged himself in the beauty of the three ornate words on the scroll.

“Less is more.”

Then his eyes became tired and he considered the many relationships; between reader and writer, perception and purpose, and between the initial idea and messages, transmitted and received; reflecting on the interactions and refractions.

Sometimes more can overwhelm and become less as systems shut down, or less is more because implication does not set the limits of the explicit.

Exposition and elaboration can follow to aid memory and assist emphasis, but he did not need that yet; “less is more” began well.

Comparison, seeing parallels in unique events, is the human trick since a man first threw a stone. Comparing post- and pre- inscription reality he remembered the morning.

Crystals do not achieve the clarity of mountain air, such comparisons are deceptive.

To appreciate the blinding nature of unmodified sunlight requires no illumination.

The type of shell was immaterial to the use as a bowl, precluding other shells a limit on imagination?

Observation showed objects disassociating themselves from the zeitgeist and crossing the vision at varied velocities, for that is their practice. Perception shows everything moves, always, in random directions and at varied speeds, for that is it's practice.

There had been continuous sound, an audible Mandlebrot of air and water rhythms played on the background of the base rock.

The scents of animals and trees were simple. The scent of the woman who carried rice told she also kept goats, chopped fresh, green, onions and sometimes washed. The distinctions between the many layers permeating her past were indistinguishable.

Visible, audible, and kinaesthetic; tangible and intangible; had touched his consciousness. So much nothing had happened it almost overwhelmed his undistracted self.

The moment of writing had significance, transmitting his intent beyond his presence bore consideration, but he had been relaxed and ready to make decisions.

There was still much to say, tomorrow he might think how to phrase it, for now he considered content.

Intellect recognises relevance, cogitation achieves understanding, knowledge and experience cross disciplinary boundaries, however, sometimes ignorance cannot recognise itself. When the tools needed to make good judgement are those required to recognise good judgement new learning may be needed. He was ready to travel far, but recognised he may face difficulties and limitations.

The old man sat by the road on the hillside, his robes wrapped close against the chill morning air, his hat protecting his eyes from the sun, risen across the valley.

The world warmed, winds wound round rocks, liquids found their level, living things sought comfort and sustenance. Same shit, different day.

He sat on an outcrop, an almost level platform of the base rock; a single piece with the hill, the higher hills, and the steep, high places, where men had not been.

It was smoothed by the moods of time, and a few feet below him lay a mass of rocks, stones and earth that had been swept from it by storms, rolled away under hooves and feet, or inched downward by ants, dews and drizzle.

The loose stuff veneered the surface to the verge, a skim changed wondrously. Battered, broken, washed, and weathered the rock had become absorbent, and contained elements drawn in from the light and air.

He was considering infection, fever he had known first hand, he was aware of life's invasion of the seas, the rivers, and then, the land, both physical infections.

Life had arrived on the moraine in the order it had first evolved. The primitives, single cells, lichens, and then moss came first, followed by liverworts and ferns, and, finally the conifers, grasses, and angiosperms. Each preparing the ground for the next, thus they infect the earth, for that is their practice.

Infection is a complex concept.

The moods of men can be infected by fantastical ideas, minds that thought themselves made can be altered by infection.

Actions can be infectious, he thought of yawning; asserted conscious control, and breathed steadily. The many styles, tricks and social habits affected by the young are infection by action.

Moods encourage men to slackness or vigilance, and the moods of the individual reflect that of the age. The very zeitgeist is infectious. Although individuals, including himself, were unimportant when considering such an overall view, minutia gain interest through context. The context, in its turn, gains point supporting the minutia. Life occurred where it was possible and took all the forms available to it, optimising chances, bound by necessity. Flora fauna and scree were inextricably bound in the long curve to the bottom of the valley, then the river, and the sea.

In the afternoon he considered his observations, writers offer infectious draughts, for that is their practice. Their work is written to be read, to affect and infect. A man who wished to remain apart could have nothing to do with writing in the normal way of things, he would have to fall silently in the forest, having written all he read and shown it to no-one.

Each man writes a different text, but each text may be read by many. The reader has reason to read, the writer reason to write, the writer's action invokes reaction and should be the result of deliberation, the reader's action is passive, and should result in deliberation. The writer has intent and purpose, and should be conscious of it and know with what he is trying to infect.

Infection is similar to enthrallment in some respects, it is an effect the writing has had on the reader, but on its own enthrallment will not produce infection, a man may wake from enthrallment to return to an everyday world. The infected man will carry something with him wherever he goes. At times the writer may only become aware of the underlying reasons for his composition as he writes. In such cases it may pay him to give them form before his final edit.

This required perspective, he had learned to focus on the detail and the overall separately. On occasion he would adjust his vision to maximise the range and compare the two. That which is afar, in distance, time or kind, can be observed closely, that which is close may be viewed as a strange and distant object.

Basic plans must be prepared. He had seen the rock in relation to the hill, the hill in relation to the mountain. Observing the underlying dimensions gave perspective.

The old man practised switching his view from the overall to the minutia at leisure, that he might command the ability in necessity. There was also the matter of the focussed and the peripheral, but that he was long practiced at.