



avantgarde

Elemental improvisation

The text of an early, unpolished attempt at “*Elemental*” by Jack Daw, as it emerged essentially 5 August 2019. No typos were touched, and note that the changed layout broke one joke at the bottom of page 4.

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Jack woke up dreaming of a parking meter casting a yellow shadow into the snow. Somehow that seemed familiar and he started putting the first letters of this paragraph into a line. And gave up.

First thing he had to remember is not to try to be too original or otherwise funny. That’s what naive first time writers always get wrong. And be consistent with time, not mix up past and present. But that is actually already quite a bit into this story, time varies.

Cynthia was still there, as she almost always was, except maybe that week each month, which still surprised him each time. Maybe he should simply write it down, can’t be that hard. But no, when she was not there, he did not feel like writing it down, when she was back, such things did not matter.

Let me tell you a secret: Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made sculpture *Fountain* was at first simply an April Fools’ prank. He was just fooling around with his friends, as usual in the Bohème, when they came up with the idea to submit an urinal to an art fair that said it would accept everything. As always, the Bourgeoisie failed once more gloriously at deciphering.

That was in April 1917, rooted also in Dada. Dada is a children’s word for hobbyhorse and also means hobby in today’s usual sense. Now, by laying the urinal down, it resembled more a bidet (hence *Fountain*), which originally is the name of a French horse race of relatively small horses. The French nursery rhyme “à dada sur mon bidet” means “to play gee-gees”. Anyways, this was the start of a billion dollar business of modern art, using rather found items instead of made ones. And, considering how far this joke has gone, there is no stopping it.

But wait. This book is not going to be so superficial. Modern art, especially if to a large degree found and not made, really does have a great effect on the mind. More so than most carefully crafted oil paintings. Why this is so, is, of course, a difficult question, which will only be gradually answered here between the lines. Or maybe not, a lot is usually in between.

By now you are maybe wondering what this is all about. Where is this book going? What is this all about? Should I read on?

Yes. I think you should. Definitely.

This book is about new ways of seeing the world that go beyond the world views that have emerged in the late 18th century. Since then there are many different views that seem to be fundamentally incompatible with each other, like, for example, astronomy and astrology. Astonishingly, they would all go together quite nicely without requiring any new physics. It is just a matter of looking at things from the right angles. Almost anybody can profit from that.

But back to the story, back to Jack and Cynthia.

“Dawy, wake up.” purred Cynthia.

Jack started to move and scrubbed his eyes, which proves that he is a real human being, not just a character made up by some writer.

“Jackiee, do you have your notes on the elements ready?” he heard.

“Well, sort of, but it is all just preliminary. Nothing is conclusive, yet.”

“Show me.”

It should be noted that in my “encounters” with Cynthia things were seldom quite like that in reality. She was usually quite ambivalent, often all possibilities made sense to her, to a point, which is quite wise and natural. But sometimes she had quite a decisive opinion, which I usually did not dig. It took a while usually, with a lot of back and forth, until I usually realized that she was right. But who wants to read all that in detail, over and over again? So I created a more streamlined Cynthia who always knew from the start and a Jack that would often just listen. More Hollywood style. Not quite like this paragraph.

Jack showed her. Of course.

“It starts with Kant and his early chapters about space and time in *The Critique of pure Reason*. The most interesting part is that he essentially bases his reasoning on immediate subjective perception of the world. You open your eyes, and you see. There is you and an outside world that you can see, and you can see more than one thing. That is space, in its most immediate definition.

Then you quickly notice that some things move and others do not, both inside and outside. That is time, again in its most immediate definition of moving or being at rest.

Thus there are a priori 4 different kinds of things: What moves outside, what rests outside, what moves inside, and what rests inside. I simply call them *elements* and name them as follows:

emo	m oves	o utside
ero	r ests	o utside
emi	m oves	i nside
eri	r ests	i nside

So emo would be short for ‘element that moves outside’, and so on.”

“Nice, but isn’t that a bit abstract for the average reader? Can you explain it so that everybody understands?”

“Not really, I guess, I have been trying for almost 20 years now and nobody seems to grasp any of it. But maybe you can make the concept stick?”

Cynthia lifted her shirt and showed her boobs, still in a bra. Nothing moved for the moment.

“Stop looking at my eyes and focus on my boobs. OK, now close your eyes. What do you see?”

“Still your boobs, but just after I closed my eyes, the boobs started to move, as I started to think about all kinds of other things.”

Cynthia sighted, far from amused.

"Open your eyes again, focus, close your eyes and stay focussed, what do you see?"

"Your boobs, just as outside, but now inside."

"Good, that is the first step. Now imagine them whirling and then open your eyes again."

Jack did, and, yes, when he opened his eyes, her boobs were actually also whirling outside, convincing him finally that his mind had the power to do it. This would come handy at some point in his life.

"You are drifting away again, Jackyboy. Now, explain inside and outside and what this has to do with space. You know, in science space is three dimensions and only exists outside in the real world, not in the mind. Hardboiled egghead scientists are impossible to convince, anyways, but you can pretend."

"Maybe I could make a drawing?"

"In words, Jack. People are not that stupid. They can imagine simple things if you explain them carefully step by step."

"But maybe they will just be polite and pretend they did."

"In words, Jack, now."

"OK. Let me see. How do you define space. First you need 'things', at least two 'things', if only, say, a surface that is half black and half white. So you can distinguish between them. Space is difference maybe?"

"Yes, it is."

"Even if you open your eyes and just see an entirely black surface there is a difference between you the observer who opened your eyes and the black surface outside. So space again. And, of course, a black surface can also be imagined inside the mind with the eyes closed, so that there is again a difference between you and the inner black surface. All in all, that is fundamentally what space is."

"Yes, a bit oversimplified, but this should do for the moment. Maybe even for this book."

"Now time?"

"Yes, please."

"Yeah, but... ", Jack hesitated. "You know I have now been considering ways how to tackle all what would now come into this book for more than a year and did not get to any conclusion. And now, one day, out of the blue, this book starts to write itself. Not what I had planned. Isn't your role in this degrading, you just show your boobs in scene one?"

"Did you force me to show anything?"

"No."

"I was still wearing my bra and could the reader see my boobs in the bra?"

"No, they could imagine, but I guess they also could if you had not taken your skirt off."

"Some would, and worse. And now the most important question: From an artistic point of view, did doing it this way help people reading this book to make this crucial part of the book something they will remember for the rest of their lives?"

"Possibly some. Maybe even many. You are right. I guess to be remembered, something must be surreal. Thus convincing with such a theatrical effect and art come hand in hand."

"Boob in boob. Now what about time? Seems easy, rest and move. But how about the view in science with time as a separate dimension?"

"Nobody has ever made a photo of time. What can be observed is that what one sees changes. Say, a black surface outside that starts to become gray and then white, and then maybe green, or only parts of the surface that change color. If now colors change such that, say, a white full circle on a black surface is first at some spot, and just a tiny moment later there is a full white circle a bit to the left, then one usually interprets that as an object that has moved, maybe a golf ball. But in any case, motion is change, is time in its most immediate definition. Objects and then velocities as space crossed per time are secondary, abstract concepts on top of immediate perception."

"OK. Shall we have dinner? Relax a bit?"

"But I just got up. Even if I cannot afford a continuity supervisor, such a basic error should not occur."

"But morning and evening are more romantic, so lets skip the day and go right to dinner."

"If only Galileo had waited until after dinner before asking the cardinals to look through his telescope at the moons of Jupiter, just like his house keeper suggested in Brecht's play."

Cynthia smiled knowingly, apparently having been there, done that. "Now that we have had dinner, lets cosily lay down together and discuss things further."

2

This time Jack woke up without memory of any dream, which puzzled him. Usually he remembered them. As if one could possess dreams anyways.

Cynthia was not there. So Jack sat on his table. Sorry, on the chair, at his table, which was also his. The chair not the table. But the table was also his. He started to paint. Something like a lion maybe, as an ancient guardian of time.

If there are four elements, can they change into each other? Yes, of course. Imagine a scene were everything rests, say you are lying in the grass in summer and looking at a large apple tree, or maybe a cherry tree, but let's assume George Washington as a kid was not around.

So practically everything rests, at some moments there is maybe even no motion outside. Then there is some wind, some leaves move, maybe even smaller branches, and maybe some birds and insects fly. So part of the outside world has gone from resting to moving. In other words, some ero apparently transformed to emo, and also back to ero again.

"Did you start without me?" Cynthia had brought some baguette, wearing a horizontally striped shirt and a beret. Jack was not sure if all of that was for breakfast or if she wanted to illustrate something with these items. US stereotypes of France? He sort of felt like she was secretly trying to teach him something, but was not sure what.

Maybe not to let just a few words of a paragraph slide over to a new page? How is that called again in typography? Something demeaning to women, as far as I remember, or to unlucky children.

“Daw-daw, come on, you are deviating again, and above all, all of this about the elements is still too abstract for people at this moment. Let me reboot, with a completely different approach to the world. Something that people can really relate to from everyday life. But don't make it too simple, they have to feel their power to understand.

Now break a piece off the baguette without looking too gay or too French, or even a lusty female, and start telling readers the basic idea; how life evolves into more complex collective life forms.”

“Still a large topic.”

“Remember last night?”

“Yes, that was beautiful.”

“Want this night to be as beautiful?”

“It is not sure how exactly life started out on earth, but at some point relatively early there were individual cells. Each cell had its own bubble, was its own independently living organism. Each cell had some DNA-like structures inside and some internal organs for producing molecules based on that genetic information. Cells could divide into two cells.

But at some point, maybe first because some cells accidentally stuck together, cells started to form larger collective organisms consisting of several cells. At first all cells were probably the same, like in volvox algae. But then some cells started to specialize. In complex organisms like the human body, cells are highly specialized, like in the brain, in muscles, in bones, in the liver, even the fat cells of your asses.”

“You cannot insult the readers like this. They will resent this and put the book away. You just called them implicitly asses and especially the women implicitly fat. Excuse yourself and make it good.”

“OK, sorry readers. The fat tissue in various parts of the body is also... Wait a second, that could be taken the wrong way again. Fat cells store extra energy in your body. Should you ever need them in extreme situations, like in a war or after a plane crash in the Himalaya, you know where to find it.”

“That was lame. And you know it.”

“Yes, but also fun. But seriously, the ladies cannot be fully satisfied. Should I tell them that the fat that makes them look beautiful, almost independently of the total amount, as long as it is roughly distributed in Venus proportions, that this fat is alive, part of their bodies, or should I actually lie to them?”

Cynthia made some strange expressions with her face, and maybe also with her body, maybe a bit like the dictator in that over the top of the top novel by some expressionist painter or rather drawer. Anyways, after apparently having considered and lived through everything my words had evoked in her, she smiled. Not entirely without a threat, but essentially satisfied.

Jack smiled, too, which may have been a mistake.

“Well, Jack, Jack, Jack. Why don't you just go on telling people what they are made of.”

Jack had completely lost track but continued.

“Individual cells in a human body are like individual people in collective beings.”

“As simple as that?”

“Well, maybe not. But hard to judge. How would a single, forced to be simple minded, cell in the human body be able to even perceive the body as

a whole, yet be able to understand what the whole body is all about, what it feels, wants, thinks, believes? No chance. Similarly, individual people cannot fully grasp all of that potential complexity that they are part of.”

“So speaking of collective beings made of several or many people is purely hypothetical? Cannot be proven at all?”

“I see what you mean. Well, individual people are still a bit more intelligent than individual cells, and the compounds they form may not be all that intelligent, or sometimes even just quite primitive beings. So, yes, I think this might still be amenable to individual people to a point.”

“Just more hypotheses.” she made it clear with her face that the question was purely hypothetical. Jack hoped she would suggest dinner. But not today.

“Jacksy, are you still there? Let’s go out, the sun is shining, and, as you can see, we are in sunny Paris, France. What a neat morning.”

Jack wondered who had replaced Cynthia with a robot alien 50s housewife.

It really was a beautiful morning. But Jack woke up again. This time he was not sure if time had just slipped either way, or if he had just dreamed all of this. But Cynthia was still there or again, in a horizontally striped shirt and with a beret, but no baguette, so they skipped breakfast and went out of the apartment.

It still was a beautiful morning.

