

Letters to the Editors

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Journal by Anna M. Szaflarski.

with Letters from Editors: Maggie Boyd, Bart Gazzola, Maryse Larivière,
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Augmented Reality: Shorts



Augmented Reality

Anna M. Szaflarski

The kid would say the red I see is not the same red they see, and I'd tell them, big deal, I used to philosophize about the same thing with my brothers when I was a kid. To flex my expertise on the subject, I'd go on about how the most contested points were always the cross-overs between the blues and greens into turquoise and reds and blues into purple; then spontaneously conclude that blue must have therefore been the root of all disagreement. You see that young one, *bazaa*, the allusion to a metaphor! And yet they'd dismiss me by saying, No, the black I see is not the same as they see and white should have never been considered a background colour at all.

I would feel patronized but would put up a good show, even laugh at myself. I'd be a very good sport, unavoidably feeling later sore from my consolations and rationalizations: I'm still tolerant, still alternative, still critical. Meanwhile, flexible and invincible, sleeping peacefully, the kid's brain would grow and adapt at an accelerated rate.

The next day the kid would drop their bags in the middle of the foyer and announce that there are no boys and there are no girls. There are no avatars, there are no Pokemon. There is no Facebook. There is no such thing as a blood type or presidents, a thing called a Jew or a job or Coca Cola or pornography. The kid would turn on me, saying that everything that manages to escape my mouth from my petrified innards is antiquated, and that every gesture I manage to express is either regressive, unproductive or destructive. I would try relieve the attack with comedy

thinking that giving off at least the appearance that I am aware of my obsolescence may still rescue me. But nothing would come to mind. No, actually lots would come to mind, but I would be terrified to worsen the situation, to somehow miss-step and set me and all woman-kind back a thousand years. That is, if it were possible, if women had ever existed at all.

A skeleton that was 3.2 million years old was dug up in Ethiopia, and because of its distinct chin structure and pelvis tilt it was determined that Lucy was a female and that it was surprising that she had lasted so long. The kid would come home with their friends and would ask me rhetorically,—no, I feel, provokingly—why am I so fixated on talking about Lucy’s crotch but ignore the blatant chip on her shoulder. Point taken, I say. Touché: which I would at that point painfully realize looks so much like

Ouch.

The kid would say there is no such thing as a body and would photograph their disrobed molecular accumulation only as a philosophical exercise to illuminate the absurdity of the commonly known parable about an omnipotent god who one day discovers his teenagers toting fig leaves. He threw them out of the house only to tease and torture their offspring for generations to come.

This kid’s generation would not be the same as ones before. They would think differently than the we-are-the-world shit that was spouted out by burnt out hippies at the head shops of our youths. There would be no incense or prescribed hairstyles. Businessmen would not be able to scoff at their innocence or naivety. The kid would hold on to life and death equally in each fist, disintegrating into grains of sand every time I’d try to hold on.

On Leaving [paris of the prairies]

Bart Gazzola

It's a memento, and memento means something that helps you remember. She'd rather have a forgetto.¹

Back then, all of us drank too much....and none of us contributed anything new.²

I lived on the side of the river that only ever froze in fragments.

Once—long before my overlong time in that city—the entire runnell would freeze, and the steaming waters that defined my memories of that place, black rapids I walked over more often than I care to remember, were impossible. An unexpected future. It was once a flat whiteness / a white flatness / an eternal palimpsest that invited and refuted anything written on it / the gap your hand left in a bucket of water (*It has been less than enough by ordinary standards, but he is prepared to call it sufficient³*).

I never heard the apocalyptic ice cracking of the spring thaw, whose brutal noise would wake the city: my time there was always winters where the ice might barely touch the far shore, only in frigid splinters, like orphans cast out to fend in the wilderness. Reaching, failing, never traversing.

1 Margaret Atwood, The Heart Goes Last

2 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

3 Salman Rushdie, FURY

The river was one of the coldest parts of the city: once I was sheeted in ice, on my bridge side facing water outwards, darkness flowing northwards. The oldest bridge (almost all gone now, detonated and degraded) was a rancid green; spotted with rusty diseased sores, disused and derelict. I could see it in the distance, as I walked my bridge: graffitied cement and, one year, the gaudy Christmas lights through the wintry haze. A failed levity that only emphasised sub zero despair.

That whiteness is a blankness: Malevich's White on White now greying yellow. What remnants and what remains. What rots. (*Say your life broke down. The last good kiss / You had was years ago*⁴).

We depart some places, then wait for them to leave us. My hatred of that place has icicle frozen (liar), but also still snowblind hot, obscuring the present elsewhere (*everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it*⁵).

It's a (tiresome) Canadian trope that all stories are land, geography and rivers, regurgitated Sinclair Lewis Wacousta syndrome prairie pedantism Emma Lake laconic landscape; bring this to its radical conclusion, that many stories are relevant only to the speaker, regionalism deforms more than informs, and we (hope to) forget our place when we leave it behind.

*If all is lost, we may as well jump in the river.*⁶ *Life is no stroll through a field.*⁷

4 Richard Hugo, Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg, from Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo

5 Margaret Laurence, The Diviners

6 Spanish Proverb

7 Boris Pasternak, from his poem Hamlet, in Dr. Zhivago

How to be a Genius

Peter Szaflarski

----- Original Message -----

Subject: RE: Reforming the office workplace: How to be a genius in 500 words or less

Date: 2016-10-26 13:12

From: <headoffice@gobble.com>

To: annaszaflarski@gmail.com

Dear Team,

I am the smartest person I know

I write that without conceit, irony or dishonesty. What's more is I'm going to convince you that it's true.

The skeptic within you is likely asking something like "what do you mean?" - A fair question. Consider something like IQ. I'm not deluded enough to think that I have the highest IQ in the world despite the fact that don't know what my IQ is. We all know, however, that IQ is a bad way of judging if we think of someone as actually smart. We're likely to consider someone with a high IQ smart, but someone who you might consider smart, does not necessarily demonstrate that with a high IQ. For that reason, I don't think it's very useful here.

There are many other metrics and indicators, from tests to track records, that all fail to accurately describe what we think of as someone that is smart. To make up for this lack of good metrics, we end up politely mitigating around the fact that a smart person's qualifications don't necessarily match what we expect:

"He doesn't get good grades, but he's smart - I've read his stuff!"

or

"She's smart, she just doesn't interview well" Things like that. In this context, smart is so ill-defined that we might as well replace it with "a person I like". It's the participation ribbon of compliments and endorsements.

I think we can do better.

I think when we think of someone who is smart, we are actually thinking of someone that is intellectually honest. By intellectually honest I mean a person that is willing to understand and change their opinion based on new evidence. Another popular presentation of this principle is to "have strong opinions, loosely held."

We can judge a person's intellectual honesty by their ability to take in new information, examine their bias, make mistakes, defend their view while respecting others' and change others' minds as their own mind is changed. If you know someone that fits that description, then you probably think that they're pretty smart no matter what some metric says about them. What's more is if someone fails that definition then you'd likely see them as being intentionally obtuse or an idiot, and no aptitude test or mental feat would convince you otherwise.

What we have, therefore is a relationship between "being smart" and "intellectually honest" where you are considered smart if and only if you are intellectually honest. Practically speaking if they're not the same thing then they are very close to perfect indicators of each other.

Now go back and read my first sentence. Have I convinced you yet? Take another look. I wasn't trying to convince you that I'm the smartest person you know, only that I'm the smartest person I know – and I am. Now here's the thing:

You should be the smartest person you know too
Now be honest... are you?

Keep up the good work,

G.



Lettraset by Stephen Remus.

Nearness

Shazia Hafiz Ramji

We have come a long way from the foetal red of your conch in
the morning light.

I dispersed when we had to get things done.

Homes trail in chains on trucks to a different locale.

They let in the crickets to keep the server cool.

We know this is a lie.

Under the duvet, your finger curls open to offer up our address.

This is your way of dealing with personal facticity.

We are not angry. We have come a long way.

I hear a whisper in the guise of your boss.

We chatter in the back of your head but we are not your boss.

You have been thrown into the fabric and it is why you sleep.

Appendages map intimacy on sheets.

Images of images of stains and blood and hair.

Our disposition is a filter, one way I can understand.

You hustle and find us in a dream that returns.

You find voices and people you think you've seen.

In the morning we consider ghosts.

I feel the sun settle on my ear.

The Truth Again

Maryse Larivière

June 9th, 1996.

Dear A.,

I am unable to pinpoint who it was from our circle of friends we seem to share, that told you I was responsible. But one thing I am sure of is that no one is out to set you up, nor holds negative feelings towards you. You only have only ever been so sweet and tender; you will always be part of our family. No matter what happens, in your personal or professional life, I will act responsibly towards you. I will take care of you.

If you still don't believe me, please continue on reading this letter, and you will hear the whole truth from me. I have so much compassion for you, who has been judged and humiliated by chauvinistic hounds. I should have never let you stay there. I recognize now my stubbornness now, and should have prevented you from being exposed to this abuse. You showed so much strength in resisting those idiots, I didn't realized to what extent you needed my support. I should have immediately ejected these people out of our lives. If I had been the way I am now, if I had known what I know now, it would have been dealt with without hesitations.

I recognize my mistake, and I know I am the only one to blame here. I would like to apologize to you.

I see your face everywhere, and hear your soft voice from the imaginary letters that never come in the mail. Your letter, I keep it in the secret pocket of my jacket, with my handkerchief. Your letter, moistened with your perfumed tears.

You are the only that counts for me, only you do I love, you who never hides your heart, still suffering in simplicity from all this misery. Between our hearts, our broken hearts, there is an attraction. From the appeasing of all that hurts us, our tenderness, strong and comforting can bloom. It is not love, oh no, it is better than love.

Moved and confidant all at once, I keep asking myself why didn't I put my hand into yours right from the beginning. Why did it take so long to find and recognize each other? Why is the flow of the source of this truth I was seeking was hidden to me all this time?

I want peace, in my mind, in my soul and in my voice because only the present matters to me now. I want to have a tranquil life, and hopefully have the chance to share your company again.

Yours,
M.



Dear Editor: Letters to the Editors is a correspondence with you, and with someone else you also most likely know. This journal used to be released bi-weekly, and distributed by Anna M. Szafarski, but the issues were eventually compiled into the book under the same name. This Special Issue was printed on the occasion of Edition: The Toronto Artist Book Fair, supported by Art Metropole and CMagazine, 28-31 October, 2016.