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TAVI GEVINSON'S BLOG

five years

Sunday was the five-year anniversary of this here blob, which I've neglected in the past months in the interest of Rookie, high school, friends, sleep, and other things. Aside from that, I don't feel like I have much to say, or rather, I prefer now to say it in private. My most recent journal is my favorite thing I've ever made, and nobody will ever see it.

I have been thinking a lot lately about what validates an emotion/event/observation, makes me feel like it *really happened* and I *really lived* it, and this seems like the right occasion to word-vomit these ideas. (Plus, I miss having time to keep this thing going, and I do feel an obligation to people who have read my blog for a long time that is not unlike the unspoken understanding you have with your first best friend, the one who watched you like stupid bands and stupid people and embarrass yourself and cry a lot, whose insight into whatever you do from now on is shaped by a unique knowledge of all the ties which bind New You to Old You, and who refrains from bringing up in front of new acquaintances that time you were on the 8th grade hip-hop team in the interest of letting you become more of yourself. In other words, we had a time, but there's so much time ahead, and it is, somehow, at the *same* time, quickly running out.)

I. The school year begins, ending a very special summer. I begin breaking down the different kinds of memories I have:

1. IMAGINED

"The difference between reality and imagination wasn't ever clear to me at all." —David Lynch



I write about things that I like. I'm also the founder and editor-in-chief of Rookie.

ROOK

8tracks
instagram
twitter
i do not have a facebook page or profile.

"Everything you can imagine is real." —Pablo Picasso

I keep a list in the back of one of my journals called "Moments of Strange Magic." It contains events that were either (a) just really, really happy (jumping around to Beyoncé with friends) or (b) aesthetically cohesive and perfect and synesthetic (driving through the desert in a blue convertible to Nancy Sinatra's "Bang Bang" past a bunch of neon-sign motels and trailer parks). Each event is marked with a symbol indicating whether it took place in real life, a movie/TV show/book, or my imagination. Examples of some imagined (b) ones would be: sweaty teens in shiny pastels dancing in unison at a wood-paneled, tinsel-covered community-center room to "Snowqueen of Texas" by the Mamas and the Papas; a view from the side of a guy walking down a school hallway to Frank Ocean's "Forrest Gump," passing lockers painted in the 1970s and a ton of muted, rowdy students; a girl submerging her head into a tub of red hair dye to the chorus of St. Vincent's "Cheerleader."

Where do these episodes come from? A past life? An innate discontentment with everything life already offers, combined with a form of voluntary synesthesia developed from an adolescence of perpetual loneliness manifesting itself in movie marathons and an inconvenient impulse to pay attention to every visual and auditory detail of every situation as an escape from the social interaction at hand?

An argument for the past-life theory might include this anecdote: A drawing I did in my journal of how I remembered the backyard of my boyfriend's house looking on a night that it was snowy and dark included a metal swingset. The next time I went over there, I realized I'd only imagined the swingset, though he later told me that they did have one when he was little. My mom then told me that our family almost bought that same house before I was born, meaning that, in that timeline, I would have known *that* metal swingset, in *that* backyard.

References: Zoltan Torey copes with blindness by reconstructing reality in his head. Wes Anderson called *Moonrise Kingdom* a "memory of a fantasy," and envisioned the whole "These Days" scene from *The Royal Tenenbaums* when he first heard the song, building the rest of the movie around that moment (I have no source for this, a friend told me, I'll choose to believe it's true). I also wrote a bit about this in relation to *The Virgin*

Stylelikeu

BBC

The Colbert Report

New York Times profile

Chicago Tribune profile

Jimmy Fallon

How Was Your Week?

Bullseye with Jesse Thorn

Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!

KCRW's Guest DJ Project

These are some of the things I've written for Rookie:

poetry

being a person is hard

being a person is nice

the rookie road trip diaries

about loneliness

lindsay weir and joan

didion

how to make your room

look like a movie

how to bitchface

pop music

the meaning of power

joni mitchell

These are interviews I've conducted:

Aubrey Plaza

Carrie Brownstein

Chris Ware

Daniel Clowes

David Sedaris

David Wilson

Elle Fanning

Emma Watson

First Aid Kit

Suicides here.

2. DREAMS

Unlike imagined memories, dreams are not witnessed or crafted by the conscious brain (then again, "WHAT'S CONSCIOUS, MAN?" —the tiny stoner living inside me who mocks my every semi-*deep* thought). I account for dreams as real memories, or at least truthful ones, because of the idea that in dreams come truths that are too difficult for the conscious mind to accept.

If a dream is not considered as valid as "real," conscious memory, then I'll still regard it in some corner of the mind as a tiny piece of my history and identity. In Chris Ware's *Building Stories*, one character is able to partially reconcile her life's regret of neglecting to pursue a creative career because she dreams she had written the book she'd always hoped to. The fact that this book could exist even in her subconscious fantasy was enough for her. Just the *notion* of her own potential had her wake up in tears.

References: Agent Cooper's dreams in *Twin Peaks*. Jenny Zhang's wonderful [piece](#) for Rookie. Joseph Cornell's dream diary. Robert Altman's *3 Women*, which came to him in a dream (the casting, the colors, the story, everything) and was shot without a script, with only his memory as a guideline.

3. SECONDHAND

"The world is bound with secret knots." —Athanasius Kircher

Secondhand memories come from storytelling — a movie, a book, a song, or a person recalling an event of their own past.

When I saw Ware give a talk about his book last November, he said that he could remember what he'd visualized as a child listening to his grandmother tell stories about her own life better than he could picture some events that actually happened *to him*. When I interviewed him for Rookie, I asked about the one character's dream, why he included that

Francesca Lia Block
Gloria Steinem
Iris Apfel (*Lula* magazine)
Joss Whedon
Kiernan Shipka
Scott Sternberg
Sky Ferreira
Quvenzhané Wallis

And these are some of the things I've styled/art-directed for Rookie:
it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood
teen witch
daydream nation
strange magic

And this is a thing I wrote for NPR.

For general questions or friendliness, stylerookie@gmail.com. For press inquiries, tavipress@gmail.com. Rookie pitches sent to either of these accounts will be ignored. Unfortunately I cannot help with school projects at this time.

All photos are taken by me using a tripod and self-timer unless noted

Picasso quotation on the inside cover, what convinced him that such memories could have the same effect on a person as real ones. His response:

"Well, really, our memories are all we have, and even those we think of as "real" are made up. Art can condense experience into something greater than reality, and it can also give us permission to do or think certain things that otherwise we've avoided or felt ashamed of. The imagination is where reality lives; it's the instant lie of backwash from the prow of that boat that we think of as cutting the present moment, everything following it becoming less and less "factual" but no less *real* than what we think of as having actually occurred."

When I remember eighth grade, I recall scenes my mind illustrated while reading *Norwegian Wood*, just as well as, and in some cases more vividly than, classmate interactions and walks to school. I spent a lot of freshman year analyzing my close, personal relationships with Rayanne Graff and Laura Palmer. I cried when I had watched *The Virgin Suicides* so many times that I could no longer remember how I'd first visualized the book. I still miss the characters I'd pictured before, and the school, too. Strangely enough, my first mental images of the Lisbons' house came flooding back to me when I set foot inside a neighbor's for a wake a couple years ago. When I walked outside, I saw that across the street was an old brown Cadillac surrounded by bushes and a sunset, mimicking two Corinne Day photos from the set of *The Virgin Suicides* almost exactly.

I don't actually think these events *really happened to me*, but they'll still come to mind when I think back on a time when a secondhand event seemed to hold some kind of truth that reality did not. Example: I felt all weird and drifty at the beginning of last summer, and when I try and revisit that place, I don't literally imagine the view from behind a car windshield and how everything must look to the narrator in Yo La Tengo's "Today Is the Day," but I sure remember the exact sadness that it captured.

References: Ronald Reagan, long before he had Alzheimers, would repeatedly recall some great war story with tears in his eyes. As it turned out, the incident was actually from a 1944 film called *A Wing and a Prayer*. Every other part of the Oliver Sacks essay where I learned this is also amazing and relevant.

otherwise. Most of the photos here were taken with a Canon Powershot A590IS, or a Canon EOS Rebel T3i.

All runway photos are from style.com and vogue.com. If I use a photo of yours and you want it down, let me know via email!

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4. EMBARRASMENTS

These memories worsen with time. The original events often occur in adolescence, are usually social interactions, and, at worst, were intended to be romantic. One remedy is to frequently remind yourself that you won't have to live with your humiliation forever because MORTALITY. Or that our perception of reality is pretty inaccurate no matter what (see: Chris Ware; the tiny stoner I quoted earlier). Or that technically — TECHNICALLY — we have no way of knowing for sure that *any of this is happening AT ALL*. You could also just watch *Freaks and Geeks*.

5. NOSTALGIA

This is when the act of remembering an event becomes more enjoyable than the event itself, conjuring feelings that are warm and fuzzy, but also *painful* in the best way. From what I've gathered, the majority of people feel nostalgia most strongly for:

(a) Adolescence. Not for all the sweaty, horrible stuff mentioned in #4, but for the positive feelings and experiences which are only accentuated by the fact that your developing brain is taking them in for the first time. And even the sweaty, horrible stuff can be kind of great to revel in. Or, in the words of John Hughes, "At that age, it often feels just as good to feel bad as it does to feel good."

(b) Love.

Lolita and *The Virgin Suicides* combine (a) and (b) most perfectly, both being stories of men who spend their entire adult lives trying to hold onto what they once had, or once wanted.

References: Why You Truly Never Leave High School. Paul Feig's guest DJ choices on KCRW. Chuck Klosterman's essay on *Dazed and Confused*, in which he states, "*Dazed and Confused* is not a movie about how things were; *Dazed and Confused* is a movie about how things are remembered." Those fuzzy photograph-looking paintings by Gerhard Richter. Any Rodarte collection that cites California as inspiration. *Eternal Sunshine of the*



- ▼ 2013 (1)
 - ▼ April (1)
 - five years
- ▶ 2012 (17)
- ▶ 2011 (71)
- ▶ 2010 (167)
- ▶ 2009 (237)
- ▶ 2008 (173)

Spotless Mind.

II. My understanding of death deepens. I think I'd always assumed I'd at least get to watch my funeral go down and have a few suspicions confirmed concerning who would write awkward "Happy Birthday! Miss you :(" messages on my Facebook wall long after I'd passed. I thought I'd get to still see how this whole "world" thing turns out: Do we all explode? Do things start to suck less first? Does everyone get sick of technology and start to live like the Amish, inspired by that one episode of *Arthur*? DO PEOPLE STILL WATCH *ARTHUR*?

But a few experiences take me out of all the stupid, floaty thoughts you get alone in your room and it hits me, quite tardily, that death is really the end.

III. I start watching *Six Feet Under*, which helps in some ways ("Why do we have to die?" "To make life important") but feeds my anxiety in others (every episode starts with some really unfortunate freak accident).

Everything is now a matter of life and death. Math homework: NOT A PRIORITY WHEN THE END COULD BE RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER. Cleaning my room: IS THIS REALLY HOW I WANT TO SPEND MY LAST HOURS ON EARTH WHEN I COULD GET HIT BY A CAR TOMORROW? Etc. The habit that blog-keeping instilled in me of compulsively archiving *every single thing* only worsens. If I get behind in my journal, I spend hours wondering where to even start. I can't pay attention in class, only make scattered notes where there should be a timeline of the Industrial Revolution, listing all the details I need to get down properly as soon as I have time: The music we listened to in Claire's room, the old man I saw on my way to school, the view from my boyfriend's car when we sat in a 7-Eleven parking lot watching people walk in and trying to predict their purchases, along with a record of what each person looked like and what they bought. My hands tremble, relaxing only once everything has been sufficiently documented, each memory in my grasp, as if by putting them down on paper, I can make them last forever.

I develop my own form of sacred geometry to find the secret knots among these details and fit them into the rest of my journal. I go through one every two months or so, and for that period of time, coordinate it and all other parts of my life with a specific mood. My handwriting, my doodles, the

clothes I wear, the books I read, the music I listen to, the movies I watch, and the streets I walk down all match up. One goal of this is to create memories that are aesthetically pleasing and cohesive and perfect and synesthetic, each element in place (and never repeated in another journal or memory, making its singular usage especially special) so that the nostalgia will feel *extra* good. The other is to be as many people as possible, until I'm nobody at all.

IV. I listen to the "Bliss" episode of Radiolab, and the reasoning behind my impulses feels confirmed by the segment on snowflakes. So taken with their beauty, a young man in the 1880s named Wilson Bentley spent day after day trying to catch and document them, first through drawing and then photography. He only had about five minutes before one would melt, and had to hold his breath the whole time to keep from giving off any extra heat. Today, physics professor and snowflake expert Kenneth Libbrecht travels worldwide to do the same.

"...All of a sudden they'll get really good, and then I just start out there, frantically trying to collect as many as I can. One of the things I like to think about is, *here I am, with my little piece of cardboard, in the middle of a continent where it's snowing all the time, and so I'm catching some incredibly small number of these things for a brief period, and getting some really cool pictures.* So you kind of wonder, what else is out there? What are you missing? I mean, imagine just all the beautiful little works of art that are just falling down, totally unnoticed, and then they just disappear. Stuff that is far prettier than the pictures I have. 'Cause they're out there, you know they're out there. Statistically, they're out there, so you know, there's just an awful lot of really gorgeous things, that are just totally ephemeral and you'll never see them. And they're falling constantly. You sorta wanna just stop the world and go look at them."

V. I get to the finale of Six Feet Under. One character begins readying a camera until she's told, "You can't take a picture of this. It's already gone."

I talk about hoarding with my neighbor, whose house is very clean and calming, who has no trouble ridding of her two sons' childhood things. "I don't need to keep them, because I have every memory in my heart."

I tell Claire that before, I felt like an event had only really happened once it had been documented, shared, and praised. Then, just documented and

shared. Now, just documented. She reminds me that there are always more moments to come, and that it will be fully experienced once I've let go of those of the past.

I revisit *American Beauty*. This part at the very end leaves me feeling like Alan Ball has, once again, personally slapped me in the face.

"...It's hard to stay mad when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much, my heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst...and then I remember to relax, and stop trying to hold on to it, and then it flows through me like rain and I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life."

VI. My boyfriend and I take a tiny road trip during spring break. We skip stones on the beach, drink Coke out of glass bottles, and watch a pink sunset sky settle into nighttime. We walk along train tracks in the dark and stop to look at an old car behind a restaurant. I ask him to stand in front of it so I can take a Polaroid, the only picture I would have of him.

I retrieve it from my bag once we're on the dull Midwestern highway, leaving for good. The photo got exposed in the streetlight and came out as a mess of brown and blue spots. In a panic, I rapidly replay the day's events in my mind, and jot down a few details to remember. At some point, my notes turn into questions that I just can't shake:

"You can't grasp your legacy when alive, and it makes no difference in death. What if I leave behind no record? What if I let every day vanish? If I don't archive anything, am I free to change?"

The endless gray road with its yellow lights begins to feel less like a stretch of perpetual sameness, and more like an infinite sky filled with stars.

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