



Sexual personae; cultural trauma; designer ethics; non-thinking #13

How do we respond to change?

Hi, I'm Alex Staniforth; Artist, Coach, Trader. In these bi-monthly letters I'm exploring how our species makes meaning and takes action in the context of an ever evolving dynamic world. I write this as a place to share and collect thoughts as we explore these topics. I hope this blend of information serves to raise some interesting dialogues.

We have a couple of events coming up in June:



Free Online Meditation Circle on Monday/Wednesday/Friday/Sunday. You can see the timings [here](#).



If you haven't yet visited our website, you can visit [here](#).

A wider perspective



“It is commonly thought that morality applies universally to all human beings as moral targets, and our general moral obligations to people will not, as a rule, be affected by their views. I propose and explore an alternative normative moral theory, ‘Designer Ethics’, according to which our views are pro tanto crucial determinants of how, morally, we ought to be treated. For example, since utilitarians are more sympathetic to the idea that human beings may be sacrificed for the greater good, perhaps it is sometimes permissible to give them ‘priority’ as potential victims. This idea has drawbacks but I claim that it has substantial advantages, that it has some affinities to more commonly accepted moral positions, and that it deserves a significant role in our ethical thinking”. [Saul Smilansky on designer ethics](#).



Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. In her [article](#), Angela Onwuachi-Willig exposes the impacts and lessons on cultural trauma from the Emmett Till verdict in 1955. I'm reminded of [Amin Maalouf's work](#) on identity as I read this - with a particular curiosity surrounding one's response to trauma: aligning more tightly with a single identity when in fear.

🔥 The latest CO2 concentration (ppm) measurement (as of June 30th, 2020): 415.47 ppm; June, 2019: 414.5 ppm, 25 years ago: 360 ppm.

Closer to home

🎭 In her book, Sexual Personae, Paglia offers provocative views of literature, art history, psychology, and religion. She discusses sex and nature as brutal daemonic forces, and she criticises feminists for sentimentality or wishful thinking about the causes of rape, violence, and poor relations between the sexes. She stresses the biologic basis of sex differences and sees the mother as an overwhelming force who condemns men to lifelong sexual anxiety, from which they escape through rationalism and physical achievement. I've found the force of her expression a useful point of contact in our age of sometimes sterile over-censorship on social topics.

🌱 What is a relationship with self? What do we mean when we begin a statement with “I think”? Do we know what we mean by “I” and “think”, as if one gives rise to the other? The nature of thought, while assumed an apparently crisp representation of reality, is better understood as the reflection of a mirror. Thought is a byproduct of relationship. We might refer to relationship as essence, or ‘reality’. To be in contact with essence, zen practice focuses on the being before thinking. If thinking is the reflection in the mirror, essence is the way that a mirror is always prior to what it shows even at the moment of showing it. We are always the context of whatever content arises. Being before thinking offers contact with subtleties - allowing a being deep insight into the present moment. There is immense peace and power found in contact with this place. Some practice.

Notes on compassion

👩 We are evolutionarily primed to react more intensely to fear than joy. How this turns up in relation to our species capabilities for complex cognitive processing is a deviation to negative automatic thoughts (NATs). NATs begin when we sense something, construct a thought around that sense and then begin stress-testing that sense against worst-case scenarios. While these worst case scenarios may not sometimes seem like much, they arise out of our biological drive to live and so carry with them a lot of intensity. Zazen meditation is a useful way to detach from and observe one's experience - which in turn allows for a more developmental relationship with self opposed to a continuing downward spiral of destructive, anxiety inducing thoughts.

Artistic expression

THAT'S JUST MY OPINION BY ASAF HANUKA



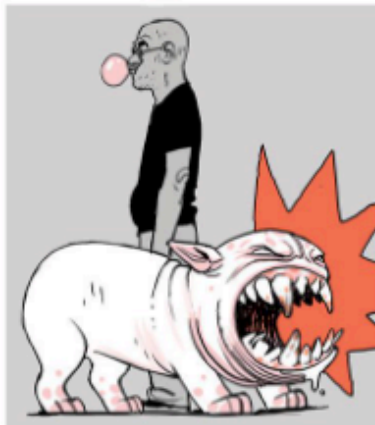
PEOPLE LOVE THEIR OPINIONS. THEY'RE ATTACHED TO THEIR OPINIONS. THEIR OPINIONS ARE LIKE SOME CUTE CREATURE THEY'VE DECIDED TO ADOPT.



NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, THEY'LL NEVER ABANDON THEIR OPINIONS. THEIR OPINIONS WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF THE FAMILY.



THE YEARS GO BY. THEY GROW OLDER AND THEIR OPINIONS GROW OLDER WITH THEM.



SOMETIMES THEIR OPINIONS GET INTO FIGHTS WITH OTHER OPINIONS. AN OPINION YOU'VE HELD FOR YEARS IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU CAN CONTROL WITH A "DOWN, BOY."



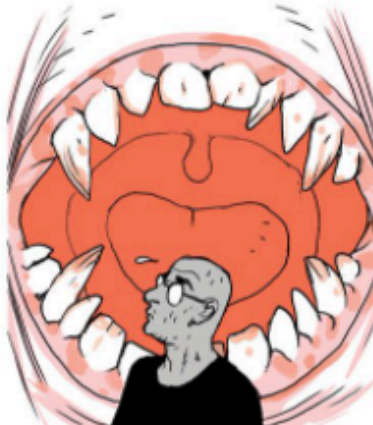
SO THEY TRY TO HANG OUT WITH PEOPLE WITH SIMILAR OPINIONS. THEY GROW TOGETHER, SAFE FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE.



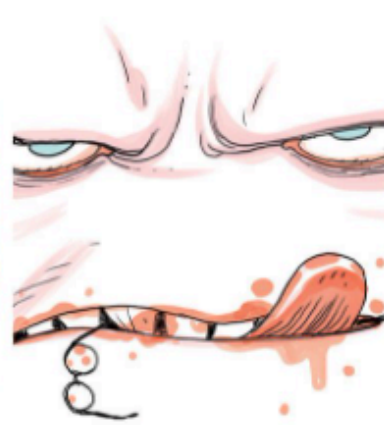
ALL IN ALL, ON A DAILY BASIS, MAINTAINING AN OPINION IS EASY. A LITTLE INTERNET, A LITTLE TELEVISION. PEOPLE KNOW WHERE TO FIND WHAT THEIR OPINIONS LIKE BEST.



YOU JUST HAVE TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO FEED THEM TOO MUCH. THEY CAN GET EVEN BIGGER THAN THEIR OWNERS.



AND THERE HAVE BEEN CASES WHEN OPINIONS GOT SO HUNGRY THAT THEY ENDED UP EATING THE PEOPLE THAT HAVE RAISED THEM.



AND IF THERE'S ONE THING ALL THESE PEOPLE-EATING OPINIONS HAVE IN COMMON, IT'S THAT THEY ARE ALWAYS RIGHT.

Poetry Corner

 Clouds by Rupert Brooke

Down the blue night the unending columns press
In noiseless tumult, break and wave and flow,
Now tread the far South, or lift rounds of snow
Up to the white moon's hidden loveliness.

Some pause in their grave wandering comradeless,
And turn with profound gesture vague and slow,
As who would pray good for the world, but know
Their benediction empty as they bless.

They say that the Dead die not, but remain
Near to the rich heirs of their grief and mirth.
I think they ride the calm mid-heaven, as these,
In wise majestic melancholy train,
And watch the moon, and the still-raging seas,
And men, coming and going on the earth.

Things & Stuff

 Thinking about not thinking

 Rodrigo: Fantasía para un gentleman - III. Danza de las hachas

Invitation: Meditation is a useful practice that can bring you closer to greater connection and meaning in your everyday living. It helps you develop your ability to self-reflect, to not get tangled in NATs and to sharpen your mind. If you'd like to give meditation a go, I guide several sessions throughout the week ranging from 15mins to 1.5 hours. They're run freely with an option to donate. No experience necessary - [here's a link.](#)

If you've found anything here stimulating and want to chat, then get in touch via my email: aostaniforth@gmail.com.

Stay well,

Alex