

AUDIO

alone tyranny of the theoretical

Text by Myron Helfgott



Alone, (Pause) not exactly alone, I have my work, many friends, numerous acquaintances, along with my fears and fantasies, and of course – I have you. My friends are close without intruding, we each have our private lives and friendship – is a social, rather than intimate relationship. Because my friends are so very important to me, I rarely burden them with my most personal thoughts; I speak with them about philosophical issues and mundane problems, but not my fears and fantasies and desires. My fears and desires cling to me like some yet undiscovered appendage, fears about my intellectual life, fears about my aging body, fears that you will think this work shallow or derivative or possibly clever. That wonderful comment of Thomas Mann's in *The Magic Mountain* is never far from my thoughts, "Stupid—well, there are so many kinds of stupidity, and cleverness is one of the worst." You might disagree and find cleverness in others entertaining and feel a certain joy when you think yourself clever. (Pause) I've grown accustomed to being alone; when my work is going well I hate the intrusion of the other. When the work is not going well my thoughts wander and my world shrinks. For me wisdom has so far been elusive. I'm afraid that my desire to do more or be more will end with that same patronizing refrain, "very nice...very nice." Is not desire a form of striving and is not striving essential, that condition of always becoming and never being? Becoming implies potential, a work in progress and everything is still possible, if not everything, than many things are still possible. If one is not striving are we merely marking time on our way to eternal bliss, that slow decent toward oblivion? Do you think there is a purpose to this life or are we merely the captain of our myopic, unrewarded egos? (Pause) Curiosity may be another form of striving, an implied dissatisfaction with the present...a will to change, to do other or be other, "what would happen if I...," and once again in the back of my mind that same refrain, "very nice...very nice." Maybe God did us a favor when he expelled us from the garden. An assessment of one's fears and desires is essential for the examined life...but not essential in the garden. Do you think that when one gets older everything becomes moderated, fears more bearable, joys less joyful, and passions more nuanced? Pleasures are rare and carnal delights even rarer. Odd, now when there is less time we seem to have more patience. Maybe we just find pleasure in simpler settings, a cool breeze, a good book, or worthwhile work. (Pause) You're not buying that either are you...it may be that we desire more passion but have less opportunity. It may be that because our virility is abandoning us we want to squeeze as much life out of our waning powers as possible. May I have it now... please? As we retreat into the world of the mind some of us assume the role of the voyeur, we walk and we think and we look and we dream. I've become a flaneur; I view, unnoticed, your delights, now becoming our delights. Is this habit some personal flaw or an attempt to understand better those around me, or is being a voyeur much like watching a film or reading a book...this vignette a potential work of art that has not yet been fully formed and where there is yet no conclusion and no resolution? Do you have any such habits? Do you envy them and want to be, like them, young again...I doubt it. The pleasures of the mind I find more satisfying than the transient carnal delights of my youth. Guido was asked in Fellini's *8½* a question I've asked myself many times "Can you remain true to any one thing?" Guido found his answer; I'm still looking for mine...although I am confident that I can be true to my friends, I am much less confident that I can be true to a lover. Maybe it's easier with my friends, I'm much less demanding of them than I am a lover. I need more from a lover, more than they can possibly offer. Have you had similar apprehensions? You and I talk about many things, but talk is just so many words. God used words to create the universe and everything in it. All creation and rules governing

humankind were formulated with words, "Let there be light," "Honor thy father and thy mother," etc. Did God have thoughts such that words were an inadequate means of creation? That we'll never know. We do know that man is flawed and therefore our use of language is flawed. Language has its own structure and gives rise to meanings that may only be true within the stricture of language. Logic in linguistics is different than other forms of logic because its rules are different. These too are just words that I am now using; they too are subject to the limitations aforementioned, they've grown old and weary and have lost much of their meaning...Flaubert once said that writing is little more than artful whoredom. It's as if the terms we use are melodies fit for making bears dance while we're trying to move the stars to pity. Later Pound echoes this sentiment and says that Paradise lay beyond words...the language of the wind is Paradise...or I might add the language of the Tango is Paradise. The Tango may be the most sexual, the most combative, and the most intimate of all human invention. The language is in the movement and relationship of the bodies. The Tango is about physical interaction unencumbered by thought; words can only destroy the moment. But that's just me talking again, what is it you think? Can one properly communicate their thoughts with words? Often we use words to test our thoughts; we need the words to exit our mouths before we understand their meaning, or to possibly see the flaw in the concept. If we chose different words to describe something or someone, would we see qualities not noticed before? If one has a more extensive vocabulary, would they in turn have a more complex grasp of the issue? Will a Frenchman or an Italian using a romance language have a different perspective on a subject than those of us that use English... an Anglo Saxon, Latinate, Norse, and Germanic language? For that matter, do males and females use language differently? Given that the genders have cultural and physiological differences, do the genders respond differently to the issue of social intercourse and in particular striving? It seems that Alberto Giacometti thought so; in his sculptures it is only the males that are striding, the females stand erect, are mute and motionless, they seem to be waiting for something to happen...waiting for something or someone to activate them, to give them a direction, a purpose. These works were done at a different time in our social history...women then had a different role in society. There are those that believe that when God created Eve from Adam's rib he separated into two that that was originally one, and in as much as God created man in his own image, God is actually the unification of the genders. I've spoken of the intellectual component of intimacy but have ignored an even more important, complex factor... that of affection and more importantly touch, the physicality of the intimate. Is not the freedom to touch another person, to fondle, to caress, to use a language that only your hands know, to leave your intellect behind, to touch and be touched not an integral part of any intimate relationship? To be able to get so close to someone that you only know them by their scent, the texture of their skin, and the taste of their body? With age, is this need to touch lessened and at the very end of our lives, that time when our useful days are past and death has not yet come to call us home, this sweet, melancholy period, do we still not need the touch of a loved one? Do we want to leave this world holding the hand of our beloved, or be polite, leave making as few demands as possible on those we love so much? As Saul Bellow said "Love is a force of nature and death nullifies even that." Once we accept the fact that we like our parents before us and their parents before them will one day die and sink into oblivion, we think about and possibly plan our departure. I don't believe that anyone wants to die alone but that comedy of ourselves and how we want others to remember us, we that are slowly decaying in our graves, that are

now part of the eternal, assume we will somehow feel better knowing that others think fondly of us. Have you made your plans yet? Why am I speaking of death when I still don't know what I'm going to do when I grow up. This is not my last will and testament...it's an examination of who I am and the belief that I am free, but free to do what? Free to do as I would want when I want? Free to vote for one of two unacceptable political candidates? Free to waste my time any way I damn well please? I want but am not sure what it is I want. Do you know what you want? The limitation of my imagination is my biggest obstacle; I want to be or do something different than that I am now doing. I am now sitting in an atelier in the center of Paris with a panoramic view of the city writing this text...and still not satisfied. What will it take to satisfy us? Wisdom has been elusive; I've had many experiences but seem to lack insight. I've sold shoes, poured concrete, dug ditches, worked in a packaging plant, a furniture manufacturing plant, a cardboard box factory, a wholesale grocery warehouse, a grocery store, worked as an installment collector, a draftsman, a designer, I've distributed leaflets, and have been fired from more jobs than I can count. Presently, I'm not wanting for encouragement but am eager for change...the need to change indicates to me that I'm still striving and in no hurry to get to the point of not striving. I'm still more interested in becoming than in being. There doesn't seem to be a place I want to be except in a state of flux. But that is just how I feel, have you had similar thoughts? Is happiness a fiction reserved only for the other, or do I find looking more satisfying than finding? I feel that the work I want to do is nearly in my grasp; I reach for it but am quite unable to capture it. I'm so close and at the same time an eternity away...I want it and I want it now...please. But what would happen if I ever realized my wish and made that work that I know I'm capable of making, would I be satisfied or would I want again to change course and look for something else, something even more elusive? Like my idealized lover, if I'm ever lucky enough to have such a thing, if I found her would I then want someone else? What is the problem; can one not be satisfied with what one has, or are we corrupted by the notion that there is something better just over the horizon...something I can nearly see, something I can nearly touch? Is the concept of an existential nature just a fiction? Must we always want more... maybe not more, maybe just something else? Is this my ego talking or am I prisoner of some inherited nature. My horoscope said, "If September 1st is your birthday you are perceptive, creative, can be domineering and you are also an original thinker, sensual and an innovator. You are willing to take a chance on your own abilities and are capable of pioneering a project. Members of the opposite sex find you attractive, puzzling at times and almost always a challenge. You'll travel during September, you'll be more popular and your vitality will make a comeback." None of us take horoscopes seriously but maybe there is some validity to them and our course is charted from the moment of our birth. It might be that I'm just another link in the long continuum that forces me to do that that is counterproductive. I want to be better but I just can't help myself. Is there a problem of responsibility here? There is obviously a problem and I'm not responsible...can I blame it on my genes, my circumstances, or the community of art apparatchiks that, as H. L. Mencken put it when referring to an *egoist* as someone *more interested in themselves than in me*. This dilemma, this continual dissatisfaction with where I am, is this the reason I am alone? Or am I alone because I want to be alone or am I alone because I'm spoiled, selfish... not wanting to share...always wanting to have it my way, to see things my way. (Pause) Get with the program sweetheart; it's my way or the highway, (Pause) and once again...alone. "Darling, I want to be alone."