

It was the last few days of university and for the first time, I was going to actually be free. My goal was to live some days without an outline...no schedule, not know what was going to happen when I woke up.

But for now I had to answer the screaming alarm, get up and out of the dad-cave and meet Julia. Sometimes it's odd having a dad who's an architect. We live in the oldest house built right into the rock at the bottom of Grouse Mountain in Vancouver. Now there's plenty but when I was a kid in school I was the caveman. We have windows on the front and a nice view of the harbour down below but this place is a sheer face, the house is inside the mountain, not on top of it.

Mom's an artist, and I grew up messing with her paint, drawing on dad's pads. Now I play some music.

Grabbing a bite as I spin through the kitchen I fall onto my bike seat and start pedaling. Our bike railways around here are famous. It's just a 3 foot pipe that you can pedal a prone bike on a rail inside, but the places it goes! We have a branch that comes right into the den so I park my bike right there and take off from inside my home each morning. Airlock on the way out keeps things warm.

The part we're famous for winds though the treetops, with windows cut out so you can see. Just took one chase scene in a hollywood action adventure to get that on people's radar. Mostly it's a subway though as I drive down the hill under Capilano meeting up with marine drive and some traffic ahead of me.

On our railway everything is single file. You come up behind another bike and magnets link you up creating a metavehicle. On real school days, not the loose time we're in now, you'd get a train with 100 people linked up heading out to UBC. Singing rowing songs.

It drops underwater a couple clicks east of the Lions Gate Bridge. This part always gets in the chase scenes too. The pipe goes underneath the harbour, heading to downtown, with lots of plexi windows to look out and see fish and stuff. Pretty swank.

Julia was in the observatory underwater when I got there watching the feeding. There's a big place to stop, car tunnel stops too...and you can walk around in the big glass bubble and watch under sea life on the outside. Every morning scuba divers do a feeding, and they attract seals and mudsharks to grab a bite. Once a killer whale showed up and another time a grey whale swam by...It's a tourist trick really. Probably not a good way to interact with wildlife. Still I'm proud to be from a place where people feed dogfish with rubber gloves that reach through thick glass on the way to work...

Julia's a biologist. She like this kind of thing. Myself I study anthropology, I want to be the next Wade Davis.

We got on our bikes and pretty soon we linked up with the big wagon trains of cyclists on broadway heading out to UBC. Were there some people who didn't peddle but just read a book? Yes. Were there some people who used it as a workout and peddled hard enough for 3? Yes.

Really I din't know if 2 weeks was going to be enough to truly move beyond 20 years of structured learning time. Julia and I were on our way to India. We were going to start in Calcutta and work our way down the east coast to Madras. Trichy, and then up the west coast Mysore, Bangalore, Bombay, Rajistan, ending up in Nepal. It was all booked ahead though, preordained. there was only these 14 days without a format.

Freedom.

So the day went by pretty normally. Marsten taught his final anthro 328 lecture in the native long house at the museum of anthropology. Cultural relativism and the dangers of ethnocentricity. I ran into Lenny while crossing the campus and he had some tickets he was giving away to hear the Rot a band from san francisco. I grabbed them and gave Julia a ring telling her about the free tickets for that night.

It seemed like only a moment later when we were grabbing some sushi before the concert downtown. Julia had a rash. Something had blown up on the news.

The band was pretty average really, good bass player, drummer was a machine, no feel I thought. There are 2 kinds of drummer. The ones that play a melody and the ones who play a groove. There is no true groove without melody.

I smoked a joint in the lane with some musician friends I know. "There's a party at the Nose" said Anton, a buddy of mine with a scratchy voice.

Julia and I showed up for the anthropology. The Nose was a warehouse building in the old/gentrifying warehouse district on the east side of downtown near the docks. For decades a hangout of artists and punks in Van. You could step out of the all night parties and buy Chow Sue in the chinese groceries to ease your munchies.

It was in the mouldy basement where I met Cortez. One time I went to a party here where there had been a flood and the whole crowd was standing in three inches of water listening to a band. The band was on pallettes so the amps and other electric gear was kept 3 inches above the water, but I was just seeing the whole crowd frying. Cortez was a good friend of some of my friends who hung there and we got along great. Turned out he was a refugee from Ecuador living in Van on asylum. Mushrooms were consumed. Things I don't remember took place.

In the morning Julia woke me up on a cargo plane. She said I'd been getting all Wade Davis on people at the party and Cortez was flying us into the amazon to do some ololiuqui.,.

"Jeez it's amazing how often I meet rich bohemians at the nose"

"Ya we got flown down to Quito on a plane he owns.."

"Alternagencia" I said.

"Revolution after cocktails." Julia said.

There is a runway in the missionary station where we land.

In the village we sat in a dark hut on a hardened mud floor. It was surprisingly cool in there, compared to the hot and buggy world outside. There was a large ceramic bowl full of cool water too, and as we drank a few bowls of this kava-like potion we drank water to ease the incredible dehydration it caused.

I don't know where you stand on the existence other dimensions. That day, and it was still daylight, I experienced alternate reality with a clarity and precision that's difficult to describe.

I was on another planet I think. All sci fi and chrome but with moss. Julia was there too. We were on some kind of a mission to buy peanut butter. These natives hadn't really got into eating mashed root crops on bread so we were failing.

"They probably don't like how it sticks to the roof of their mouth," said Julia and her audio had a digital delay on it and a flanger.

That was when things got weird. I mean alien peanut butter shops was one thing but the street just kind of opened up and a huge purple and red vine came out of it. We fell down the hole and started floating in thin air.

"Defying gravity" I said. "This is a 3rd stage hallucination"

"Lucid self reference" said Julia "that's 4th stage isn't it?"

I couldn't remember Julia studying the anthropology and psyche texts I read but on this trip she was a colleague.

There was a man there.

"You were sent by Cortez" he said.

"Are you ololiuqui?" I asked.

"The root remembers all" he said.

"You will not. I am the guardian"

I was sent cruelly on a tangent rifling through the notes I'd taken on ancestral memory, morphic resonance, objects that learn.

"wo you spaced out in a hallucination!" said Julia from echo land.

"nested dreams.."

when I looked up the guardian was gone. Everything after that is beyond my recollection.

It was an interesting experience seeing Cortez again back in van. We were out listening to jazz when we ran into him.

“San Cristobel? He said looking at me strangely.

“Lo siento” an involuntary voice that came out of my mouth said.

“so you met the guardian..” Cortez said.

This was new to me. It was like speaking in tongues. I was fairly sure that the man I met was the guardian. Random hallucinations are one thing but repeatable mental structures inhabited by characters that ...I suppose that is what myth is. Most cultures have stories that bind them, things that tie them together. Lies they all believe. Did Cortez and I form a culture that fast?

Who was that talking through me?

“It's real shit.” He said.

“Not magic. The natives have been meeting the same man and then entering the cloud for hundreds of years. You don't remember what happened after the guardian but if you could, you'd be amazed. Your journey probably lasted a few weeks, and took you to far off places.”

“So the goal becomes learning how to remember....”

“How not to forget,” said Cortez...

The next time I was with Cortez down in Seattle. There was this amazon indian had a little farm north of the city. He looked funny in a cowboy hat and blue jeans.

It wasn't the same plant we swallowed. It gave a different journey.

“You think you know form you think you know matter.” this thing was made out of some kind of liquid or gas. It seethed and rippled.

“I am aware that this is a hallucination brought on by a plant extract, an ancient potion from the Incans, saved by the tribesmen of the amazon,” I spoke with respect.

“This is well after the guardian”, said seething guy “I dont think it would be categorized as a hallucination. For example when you prick your finger, do you not bleed?”

I closed my eyes. The scene needed to go away

“ It is the nature of several spirit beings that they will try to convince you that you are in the real world.”I had read.

Then it was steel and wheels. Instantly.

..Am I by the highway? Neon and LCD's, fog and a drum beat.

“These aren't tribal images, this is the modern world..”I said out loud, half expecting someone to answer. Now I was on the sidewalk and the steam was coming from a manhole cover, the lcd's from a clock store on the corner.

“Hello?is there any kind of guide in this?”

Silence.

I looked up at a billboard on top of the nearby building.

“Try Jiffy!” it said.

I wondered if this was a message...

I walked down the darkened street and I could hear my shoes clicking against the pavement. I had been barefoot when we'd gone to the indian's basement, now I wore city shoes, hard heeled and shining.

“So before the visuals were designed by others, this seems to be coming from me.” I said out loud

I was in that place for about a week. People couldn't talk but I did see some zombie-like humans walking around. I stole a car and drove around for a few days. It's not really stealing when nobody can say anything. It's peaceful.

And then I came to a clearing in Montana. I'd been checking out yellowstone for a day or two...so I was close-by.

“All walls will come down”. It was a little message written on a board lying in the clearing.

Walls? I thought of Jung and symbols and how this one had been used in dozens of cultures. I thought of pink floyd and “all we are is just another piece in the wall.” I thought of the fourth wall in theatre which stands between the actor and the audience.

“Your proposing direct communication, between yourself and the author, my creator, who animates us both with these words.”
Nothing came as an answer. I somehow just knew that this structure would crumble, that the world I was standing in would disappear.

It's not like there are any rules. I just write and try to keep going in a line. Tell a story. This one's gone a little funky because I'm a character in it now. Hello world. For some reason this voice echos a bit...
The wall separating fiction from objective reality has been shattered. If this is a story, I am living it. My camera just got lost in a fedex mixup. There are snowbanks on my lawn. Too vivid as robbins would say, too close to the bone.

I wrote a paper on recursion in literature while at university. To me this was when an author would show up in the story...philip roth in the 60's I think, and chaucer in the middle ages.Vonnegut, and Robbins...
The use of the first person narrator, is taboo for much of literature. It's bad style in essay writing to say 'I think x' .But in modernism and early playfull work like chaucer we find the author sneaking into his text.
Hear an echo though...

I had to stop doing weird potions from the amazon, at least for a few months.Julia and I went to a street festival on commercial drive and I bought a sombrero.. It's not like I was prickling with electricity but I almost expected it when we ran into Cortez. The belt of coincidence runs deep at such times. We went and sat in a park and ate some falafals we'd got on the street.

“I think he talked to god” said Julia to Cortez nodding at me.

“The creator.The one who tells our story..”

Julia studies the branch of biology called ecology. I study cultural anthropology, as opposed to physical. As an ecologist she tends to see patterns and groups in populations that I miss. I tend to see culture and its effect on economies, food, art... On the plane she told me the story of wolves in Yellowstone. When they were gone the elk got brave and overgrazed a valley. When the wolves came back, the elk were too scared to graze out in the open. Plants got a chance.

She notices things that build up and things that run down and how that affects the whole system. . Maybe that's how she could see a run down look in my eyes...

"You're done with the shaman for a while?" really she was good about not lordling over me. I just let this one slide. I wasn't following the plant path from the Amazon these days. Hell it had only been 6 days since we graduated and I'd already spent weeks of subjective time off in la la land. Time to use my objective time in my own objective way.

We were on a flight with an 18 hour layover in Bangkok. I just got to taste some lemon grass soup, some galanga root, and we were gone. That sweet and sour! On to heavier curries. Calcutta was calling.

This story is called 'no outline' not 'no rules'. There were supposed to be 14 days before the trip to India. In fact that was the whole idea, how this kid with 2 weeks of freedom goes off on a spectacular journey that appears to take months. The longest 2 weeks of his life... You just got lazy and went on the earth trip too early. It's easy to spend some time remembering India. Shit and magic. Lhasis and Momu's. Cop out. Too lazy to visualize the intricate journey that Steve went on that final time with the Amazon. The hallways and Incan pyramids to climb. The howler monkey on the crumbling rock. The jungle growing through the gates of the city. The long journey across drylands in a land rover. The melting clock and the Salvador Dali room. The city of

Lemurs, wearing suits and ties and fancy dresses. The hilarious joke the shaman told you. Things too weird to describe involving shrimp.

Time clearly has a crimp because this is day 7 after uni as I write. There has been a volcanic eruption down in Ecuador. Since Cortez appears to fly free I go with him to check out things down there. Crumbled buildings. Dirty water.

After 3 days in quito we head for another small village he knows in the amazon. This one seems to be in Brazil, but whatever. The shaman wears a t-shirt that says “Dallas Cowboys” and his wife has a blond wig. This could get weird.

“ You have to understand the guide was a shared character that we could all meet. Under Huascatha we will share architecture. Streets and valleys.”

“Who does the design?”

“It comes from us. ”

And so we spend days in some kind of shared hallucination. Cortez clearly has read a lot of science fiction. I clearly have read a lot of anthropology. Our world is not star trek, with cheesy tribals, but more detailed, textural than that. We are there for about a month of perceived time.

It was the last few days of my 2 week freeform period. My goal was to live some days without an outline...no schedule, not know what was going to happen when I woke up.

Julia and I were highschool sweethearts. Skin mates really, we were bonded at the hip in those days. Now we both slept in our parents basements. Self contained suites really, not so bad, and cheap rent!

On the day in question she was more playful than usual, perhaps because she knew I had a care package from cortez in my bike pouch.

We rode the hill down to the water, and we stopped at the observatory under the harbour. There was an area of track that was sort of roped off, that's where we sat and chewed the potion.

To share architecture with Julia was so beautiful. First I saw the small cabin we would start in then things got more ornate..more elaborate. We walked down the hallways of a house where children were playing(ours?), we walked through a place where some kind of biological knowledge of Julia's was meeting with my smattering of architectural knowledge to make some kind of living home, walls that breathed and grew.

And then we walked past our deaths into some kind of profound and indescribable place. Julia and I have known we are soulmates for a long time. This just confirmed it to me.

Of course looking out the windows at the creatures under water was fun. We used to smoke a joint and hang in the aquarium when we were teenagers. This was similar.

“wild journey huh?” I said...

“I don't know what you see, but maybe I kind of do...”

We got on our bikes and pretty soon we linked up with the big wagon trains of cyclists on Broadway heading out to UBC. Just another day in van.