

## 15. Guilty Pleasures

Off the top of his head Al could rattle a dozen attractions bicycling offered that motoring didn't. Half were simple sensory inputs. He toured by bike to feel better, see sights, smell roses, and taste treats. Even fulfilled was a 6th sense of a psychic oneness with nature, an emotion eagerly sought by animists and pagans but not irreconcilable with most orthodox doctrines. St. Francis was a friend of fur and feather, a tree hugger, and witness to God's presence in HIS creation, practically a panpsychist. Namesake city San Francisco collected a bunch of like-minded souls, including bicycling comedian Robin Williams, who joked of a frisky pine making a nice date. The sense taken more for granted than any other, hearing's more a source of complaint than joy by those besieged by noise, muffled purposefully within mo-ves, poorly represented in print by onomatopoeia. Bicyclists abhor horn blasts from SUVs and screams from rescue vehicles, intermittent hate crimes or health hazards both likely to cause cumulative hearing loss. Bicyclists usually know motorists are behind, no need to warn. Horns and sirens only serve vacuum-packed motorists.

Someone once asked him what bicycling sounds like. Below beat of dm-dm-dms sealed inside cars speeding by with roaring zzi-zushzzzz of a Doppler pitch shift trailed by tread hiss, motor whrrs, powered chain saw and garden tool yaas, whoops and yells of children and older folks yet exuberant, wonderful bedlam of people doing their thing and exercising emancipation beyond your rule, it's pretty quiet. If you're patiently attentive you're likely to hear: Bike tires slightly rrrr varying by road surface and type then chkk, crunch, spish, sposh over debris, glass and wet. Brakes screech or shhh. Chains di-dink over bumps. Derailleurs agreeably tink or discouragingly chunk tripping over gears. Fireworks crackle as tree seeds snap beneath tires in late Summer. Freewheels whirl. Levers click. Parts crick or squeak more or less by how tightly they're joined. Tiny eeks emit from chains that need lubing. As days cool, a nylon jacket thwhip-thwhip-thwhips. But mostly you hear the main article, the *th* of *the* as air passes your ears.

In scholarly concordances of literature where they count words, *the* is most frequently used, sort of a stutter between actions and things. Among articles, how lazy are *a* and *an*, and how over-worked is *the*? This sustained article of sound, *thhh*, as if waiting for the other shoe to drop, lulls like the rustle of distant oaks before

the Fall, old and wistful, ready for a season of rest. Its echoes fade like many disembodied voices just out of recognition, naming places and people while murmuring hushed hints of boundless wisdom never attained alive. *Tb* underscores rhythmic thumps of rushing blood and rasps of lungs drawing and exhaling air in your own Doppler shift struggling against supposed silence. These are the ever-present whispers bicycling makes, quiet enough to sneak up on nature unawares but not silent. Listening not only anticipates danger, cars around bends and beyond crests, it reveals a dreamscape and verges on intimacy. For those not otherwise preoccupied, sound may be the most memorable part of bicycling, the real turn-on, another sensual joy to suppress among society's innumerable hang ups.

Disturbances of distant trains or trucks resonate in beams and understructures of his home barely perceived through floorboards and furniture. His desk where keyboard rested when not in his lap was never static, but in constant motion, vibrating just as he, sometimes seemingly inert, but mentally racing, always. Sound was everywhere, often far off, but occasionally alarmingly close, vociferous commotion of loud strangers passing by in street just feet from his window. Sound triggers a fear response better than any other sense. Leaves that rustle, twigs that snap, mean danger's close, fight or flight. Sounds map your fearscape. They say death and outer space are silent, probably not. People who prefer quiet only like the volume really low. Can't tolerate any confused clamor, furious fracas, madhouse bedlam or riotous uproar, all indicators of passionate pandemonium out there somewhere. Someone may be having fun, and when they are they're surely loud.

Oddly, some listen to repetitive noise and ascribe a beat and rhythm, parcel it out in 4/4 time, when, after all, it's but a repeating clack-clack racket, fan flutter, gear squeak, or tire hum. The World is full of music that inattentive people generally ignore. Composing con man John Cage stumbled onto a brilliant truth, "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating." Who hasn't snuggled close to thrill to a baby's or lover's belly noise and heartbeats? Buzz and whir of machinery are so hypnotic, employers have to go to extreme measures to protect workers, most of whom get seduced into out-of-this-prison reveries and cause damage, get killed or maimed, or misuse equipment. Federal regulations become so stifling, companies offshore livelihoods to wherever life is cheap and there's no oversight, when they could more easily hire deaf workers here who are immune and can read instructions given in a

common language, which is not to say challenged individuals should accept slave wages, rather they aren't offered as many opportunities as they're entitled.

At least pure sound didn't befoul one's mind as car exhaust scarred lungs, dust and pollen irritated eyes and plugged nose, and mosquitoes introduced vectors of disease. Yet you can't enclose yourself in a bubble and shut everything out. Sensations seldom hurt, and when they do you can back away. You can take in even more, if you dare. Motorcycling comes close, but then uncontrolled speed creates intolerable hazards. Anyway, choppers are a transportation aberration, akin to airboats or wienermobiles, or worse, expensive toys amusing only for their impracticality. Or you can bicycle and become reunited with a wider World, but not without burning under sun, collecting bugs in your teeth, getting spattered by mud, mussing you hair, sporting greasy chain marks on your calf and clothes, and tanning unevenly. A saddle sojourn is like sex, messy no matter how neatly you proceed, but still worth doing. It's likely to lead to enjoyment, wild abandon even. Afterwards, flowing water and sudsy soap are fine curatives, as long as you didn't communicate or receive disease. You can't live scared you might get dirty and thus avoid everything; even in death Nature crawls into you despite airtight coffins. You weren't born shrink wrapped and tight-assed. Your body is an open-ended hourglass through which matter over time flows.

Or maybe not, according to those who value human touch less than white furniture under clear plastic slipcovers. 2-dimensional, predictable people come with varied mindsets easily categorized by predominant proclivities. Some are bean counting philomaths, others are gregarious party types, or motherly enablers, or problem solving whizzes, or reclusive loners. Anyone could be a bit of each but seems to have gravitated toward one, which defines careers they pursue, friends they attract, how much money they make, how they live. Society rewards its playboys, examples of how they'd like to be themselves, but never the rest. Persistent personalities spend a lot of time in the limelight chattering about practically nothing except themselves, enchanting with triteness, never discussing important issues. Issues are relegated to ratings sink holes on Sunday mornings. Talk show hosts were a new low on an evolutionary chain. Whenever callers get the least bit artistic, logical, religious or sincere, hosts vilify them or viewers switch channel, since they only tuned in to be mollified by another human's voice from their island of isolation called modern alienation. What didn't matter were calculated opinions and never ceasing commercials.

What did matter was doing work that needs to be done. Talk is noise. Doing is everything.

Humans privately adore the food taster, gatherer, go-between, hunter, way paver. Lately this denotes a detail explainer or technology tryer, anyone who does the heavy lifting or mental labor so they don't have to. Experts are like ferrymen at a river crossing. At its source, you can easily cross yourself, flow is shallow, and wading is child's play. At delta, flow has gathered so strong and wide the only way across is a permanent bridge. Consultants, ferrymen, go-betweens, middlemen, all gladly assist crossings upstream. The question becomes how much toll they'll charge. But people aren't going to tell experts they treasure them, because that would mean they'd have to compensate them for what they're worth. People hate a banality badger, chronic complainer, nit picker, those who asks questions like, "What are these shoes doing here?" when they know damn well you're just about to move them, but, of course, not fast enough to please. Etiquette is not putting shoes on a bed spread or where someone might trip over them. Polite people don't hang shoes so they might cause a ruckus, like draped by laces over telephone wires over road intersections. Under any other circumstances, what difference does it make? Why complain and argue over trivialities? Etiquette is a refined sense of knowing when your own actions may be annoying or harmful, preventing someone else's discomfort, and tactfully dissuading others from the same. It's not harping on character flaws based on your narrow sense of ethics or otherwise limited intellect. You can demand decency, and people will affirm religiosity, born again as if born once weren't enough. But where do they stand on people starving or suffering from want? Are they willing to lay down dollars to assist? Do they really care? If dealing with issues is too much for them to take, you know they really don't.

If you're not paying attention to what's actually happening around you, what you hear while riding are ad jingles, sitcom themes or some specific song repeating in your mind. Some cyclists attempt to blot them out through discipline, mantras and meditation. Society will do anything to run away from actually thinking. Why was applying your brain, concentrating, so painful to most people. Why did he have an incessant internal dialog? It never shuts up, more a child asking why, why, why than a broken adult quietly accepting and avoiding confrontation. A few plug into a cosmic switchboard while the rest remain blissfully ignorant, only to wind up dead or maimed or mess up carefully laid plans of doers and dreamers. Incompetents cause trouble for everyone.

For a few minutes centered around 9:15 on an October morning, he was treated to an curious visual phenomenon. Sunlight through venetian blinds flickered across his monitor interrupted by branches waving in the wind; its effect was like bicycling while a landscape rushes past at edges of peripheral vision, all jiggle amorphyously flashing by. Reminded him of sex, naturally, as did most everything to a healthy male, of a curvaceous woman on a previous day walking briskly past his pickup truck. She was wearing a clingy one-piece knit and he chivalrously let her cross. Chivalry aside, it was exciting to watch everything suspended yet moving inefficiently in tiny arcs misaligned to her businesslike stride, "bicycle gasoline" pumped deliriously as if at coitus. "I saw her passing as the wind/Was rising in the air/She rode upon a red bicycle/And she had red hair," seemed his resident Margarita. Beat even the bevy of nearly bare coeds jogging before him up a long hill one afternoon. Too bad natural phenomena don't offer stop and replay. You're left with only inexact erogenous memories.

Women can be cuddlesome creatures, plush toys, one of their finer attributes, soft padding in attractive places accentuated by cashmere. When they lifted weights or worked out excessively, it just made them seem hard edged with bony elbows and knees, less attractive to him, but not perhaps to others with hardbody orientations. What you make of yourself determines who you'll attract. However you build, you can only keep it up with through a tyranny of more of the same, which consumes far too much of your life. Female bicyclists sometimes became handsomely lean with shapely legs. Not politically correct? What did he care if fairies and lesbians found his opinions infuriating? Wasn't he also entitled to opinions? Let them get in line behind all those intolerant asses who unfurled their hatred upon him daily. Yet, these days, women in media, especially on BET, CWT and MTV, spent all their time exposing plush curves and jiggling with undue allure, trying to attract wealthy male patrons by whatever means. Why dance if not to seduce? Why wear miniskirts and push-up bras if not to advertise and titillate? Jewel did it as a parody, and press roundly jeered her; seems nobody wants such behavior exposed for what it is, another form of ideological violence. What's so wrong with private caresses between eager intimates? Alluring public displays attract all types, 99.999999% of whom you don't want to know. It may be delightful to some but seemed more demeaning to him. Why not denounce the misogyny of, "What I'm going to do when I get my hands on you," in so many song lyrics?

On the other hand, there's as much wrong with a society that condemns sexual liberation as one that elevates innocence into a cult of perfection. One must question such motives. Wells wrote, "To ride a bicycle properly is very like a love affair; chiefly it is a matter of faith. Believe you do it and the thing is done; doubt, and, for the life of you, you cannot," or so "a bloomin' dook" might think. Victorian civilized manners and courtly love were loaded with double standards. Putting dainty young things on a pedestal only turns them into monsters and predators or was used by men to seduce then abandon or wrap up women as chattel. The innocent are simply easier to dupe—corporately, governmentally, and religiously—and therefore profit from. Real money is being made independently in drugs and porn, the main reason they're damned. Not to forget the facts that underage girls are coerced or tricked into it and sick patrons enjoy seeing them brutalized and choked, there are good reasons to detest sexploitation. Just because they smile doesn't mean their engaged in something they'd rather be doing. Many didn't know what they were getting into, were high at the time, or were so economically strapped they felt they had no choice. Dirty capitalism strikes again.

Believed he preferred artists of either sex who concentrate on developing talents and unique integrity than their physical appearance, and put sex appeal on the back burner, where it belonged, simmering but not forgotten. Perhaps that was because his own face was never so much to behold, conceivably once when young but then only to a few. He considered any rare encounters as *getting lucky*. In retrospect, he ignored many overt signals from attractive women while looking for something ideal, then was denied and frustrated by those he focused upon. Bird and lizard females look to breed with males with the best genes by how well they display or fight. Human females calculate in a potential for wealth, but often settle for some intangible of personality, like a sense of humor. Isn't beauty and relations a paradox, seeing something special where others don't and vice versa, because physical aspects are fleeting, even from day to day? Ruskin homoerotically reminded, "The most beautiful things are the most useless, peacocks, lilies." Might as well include women, since flawed, imperfect ones are usually more passionate. Unlike this dandy muckraker, he actually enjoyed womanly forms, as it sometimes led to strong relations at appropriate times with the right partner, imagining beforehand spearing a brit or filching a jewel and later getting more easily aroused. Yet comely lasses can be overexposed, let it all hang out, always in a big hurry, always watching to see if you're at all interested, anxious and

insecure that they might be yesterday's attraction, silly really. Mostly, a partner's immediate allure was all he needed before, during and after, so he didn't much value pointless teases or vicarious thrills. Yet Amelita Baltar sings in Astor Piazzolla's Polka/Tango piece, "The White Bicycle", "Wining in not in reaching but in following." A perpetual tease supposedly exceeds release, and that may be true when sex grows stale through redundant monogamy. Passionless coitus can have the same effect as a cold shower, keep you off saddle for weeks or months. With clinging jealousies and endless recriminations, human sexuality is way too complicated.

If you survey songs for concordances, as he did, to find some directly related to bicycling and coming up with the most comprehensive list to date [see appendix], you quickly realize pop songs mostly concern sexual relations. Only 1 song in 1,000 concern art, politics, or science. Abstract concepts are cold and sterile. People want to be touched and touch viscerally. Throughout the 20th Century, the phrase, "a bicycle (built) for two", was widely understood as a euphemism for physical relations between man and woman, what went on "When Riding Out with Nellie on My Bike" in Harry LeRoy's song from 1897. This no longer triggers the same response in a postmodern world of frank heterosexual and homosexual discussions. Teens might again simply think you're talking about a tandem bicycle. Rap group The Pack go right into blatantly explicit lyrics in "Ride My Bike". Kelis has a stanza in "Bossy" that graphically reinstates that comparison: "Touchdown, hold my foot up like a pole / I ride the beat like a bicycle. I'm icicle." "Bossy" actually focuses on the competition between females for male affections, a sort of reverse misogyny. Can't get enough, got to fight each other over prime specimens. This enthusiasm for physicality is what makes bicycling such an apt metaphor.

He never before realized that when he had sex it was with all of humanity, not just a few degrees of separation and games without frontiers, but everyone collectively paying for his indiscretions. Offspring were determined to emerge from nothing but lust, but where were the resources to sustain them? Just bicycling by itself affects all lives in a positive way. But enhanced health and libido introduces chance. A roll in the hay was a roll of the dice. House almost always wins and humanity usually loses.

Mere penetration is animal. Penetration of souls is love. Lovers gazing into each other's unadorned faces and seeing God, that's prayer, a revelation everyone should be so lucky to experience at least once in a lifetime. Total connection with God suffuse though

all creation, alive and inanimate, that's transcendence, something you never get to without mastering lesser forms of affection. Contemporary Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina chose St. Francis's "Canticle of the Sun" to show respect for the natural world as a manifestation of God. You just don't claim to realize it, it realizes you after you halt, listen, and pay very close attention, and only if you're fortunate. It's the one thing from which nobody can profit, yet should be the sole objective of living, despite what you hear in poems and songs. It requires patience, something in short supply amidst fast paced hubbub and greedy tumult. Helps if you believe in reincarnation, because a single lifetime seems too short for it to happen. Consumers try drugs to taste a coarse, quick approximation. If endorphins, LSD or mescaline cause visions of God, what does that say about religious doctrines? Based on lunatic bedlam? Or have those who've indulged kicked open doors to truth?

All music stemmed originally from religion, ritual dances, sacred liturgies. Modern people tend to secularize this element because it's so closely associated with fertility, frenzy and sex. Primitives bounce to beats during mass wedding ceremonies. Repetitive beats can cause ecstatic trances, even seizures, just like stroboscopic lights bring on epilepsy. Churches commissioned more music than any other group including brothels and courts. Music is integral to every rite of passage, even death, particularly funerals in New Orleans. All institutions impart core facts through singsong repetition. Music melts hearts and minds as if a universal lubricant or solvent. Society absolves dissidents who sing rather than speak their complaints. Powerful stuff, music, in many ways better than fornication or petrolatum.

Music also needs time to unfold; there's no rush. 2 minutes hardly constituted foreplay. Only the most exceptional tunes skip that boringly similar 8 bar intro and go right into their unique content. Many songs that aroused him were well over 5 minutes, although derivative or repetitive songs should be short enough to ignore, rather than clogging airwaves. In opera, arias arrive after long emotional buildups between bristly stout men and plump divas, neither of whom would turn a head in a crowd unless they choose to clear their magnificent pipes to entice all within earshot.

Even quiet has merit. But at what point does minimalism lose any value whatever? Clean emptiness may be better than chaotic clutter, but somewhere upscale on that continuum seems preferable. Minimalism doesn't stick with you. There's no melody, no toe tapping tune to whistle later. Perhaps it serves in another way, unplugs you from pop prewiring and leave you in a disconnected

state for long enough to reset. Or perhaps it has no value at all, except to merit a small paragraph among big ones. Ambient music expresses itself as a form of minimalism. Ambient has to run long to develop its effect on you. It relies on reverb, that sustain which floats notes along slight echoes, creates an illusion of space, as if riding through quiet natural or urban man-made canyons. Such recordings sometimes connect to deserts and rain forests in an offhand way, as if remote were superior to proximate, as if a bustling city barely heard through thick walls weren't ambience enough. Deserts are sterile, and so can this music be, a death wish, a desire to be alone, apart, clean, untouched. Escape from bad to worse? Again, some people like their furniture shrink-wrapped in polyvinyl. He was just as likely to go around barefoot and put feet on coffee table in his own living room, bacteria be damned, as be cleanly respectful in someone else's.

Classical music long created a broad range of mental landscapes, some intended by composers, others baggage dragged in by listeners. Lewis Thomas spoke of composer Gustav Mahler's *9th Symphony* and its association, personally ascribed, to a Cold War arms buildup on verge of annihilation, "If I were 16 or 17 years old and had to listen to that, or read things like that, I would want to give up listening and reading. I would begin thinking up new kinds of sounds, different from any music heard before, and I would be twisting and turning to rid myself of human language." Surely utterances can be sonic weapons in themselves, or develop into prisons of constraint, or sources of your downfall. How you're perceived in a moment of lapsed discipline might affect not only your future, but the entire future of mankind. Just how responsible must you remain in every minute of the 40 million you're given with a typical life expectancy? A great deal of 20th Century orchestral music approaches cacophony and remains obscure, dismissed by corporate and religious bigots. Even the most catholic of composers, such as Olivier Messiaen, used dissonance and instruments not likely to be heard in church services. Even so, he'd listen to organ blasts of "La Nativité du Seigneur" every December. Death metal, grunge, punk, rap fill airwaves. Body counts in action films and violent games are so prevalent you'd think they far outnumber actual victims of car-nage, disease and war, but don't compared to widespread doom of ethnic cleansings, holocausts, pogroms, turn-pike speed and undeniable evidence of man's evil. Beauty today seems a thin embalmer's veneer over a putrid corpse of failures. Beauty is nearly a forgotten virtue.

He was amazed to hear that in 1952, the very year he was born, prolific modern composer Stockhausen set in motion a long range plan for 21 full scale piano pieces, and completed 14 after 34 years. Talk about follow-through. As a consequence of this creativity, Stockhausen says, "...he becomes aware that this music trains a new kind of human being, who he has not yet become and who has not yet existed on this planet: a human being who can not only experience music which is similar to heartbeats and breathing and walking and running and hammering and sawing and swimming and bicycle riding and dancing and sexing, but who can participate in the spatial and temporal differences, leaps, curves, changes of direction in involuntary melodies, rhythms, dynamics which, up to now, would have been considered 'superhuman?'" Indeed, *Musicophilia* author Oliver Sachs, both a cyclist and leading neurologist, documented cyclists who fix a rhythmic tune, specific for each, in their mind to improve performances during time trials. What impresses you about fluid compositions as *Mantra* is how aligned western classical can be to Indian raga or Japanese Noh or ubiquitous pop, born out of the same curiosity, small sounds analyzed, dissected, manipulated, and set into motion to see what they can do in restricted combinations, as if an alchemist exploring their chemical or psychological properties. It has been dismissed as composing around gimmicks, but hasn't all late century artforms been concentrated on newfangled changes at content's expense? In that poignant 3rd movement of Mahler's *A Minor 6th Symphony*, celebrating its centennial, acknowledged as Gustav's most intimate, filled with dark murmurs of remorse and distant blues, there's a cowbell clanging offhandedly outside the beat, a distraction from youth that once led Gustav to dream, and later retains the same effect, as if a posthypnotic suggestion. Once heard, all else that goes on during a performance doesn't seem to matter. A mere handful of diligent listeners, such as later composers, ever notice.

Classically trained techno-pop pioneer Ralf Hütter mused, "The bicycle is already a musical instrument on its own. The noise of the bicycle chain, the pedal and gear mechanism, for example, the breathing of the cyclist, we have incorporated all this in the Kraftwerk sound [for their *Tour de France* soundtrack], including injecting the natural sounds into the computers in the studio." During early 60's, a then 20-year-old Frank Zappa went on Steve Allen's Show to "blow bike", just as if an instrument, using hollow handlebars as trombone, saddle as a snare drum, and spokes as strings. Only 11 years old at the time, he had some dim late night recollection of Zappa's bike concerto, orchestrated mayhem.

Another installment in this whimsical found-sound franchise was PDQ Bach's "Symphony/Pervertimento for Bagpipes, Bicycle and Balloons", which features blown handlebars, a bike siren run off spinning rear wheel, and clack of a card slapping against spokes as they rotate past. Richard Lerman's 1970's performance art piece, "Travelon Gamelon", amplifies sounds of people riding and orchestrates them into something resembling Southeast Asian music. Scores of artists link rhythms of pedaling with glitch beats. It's obvious that sounds even outside music, such as babbling brooks and tinkling fountains, amuse and stimulate people just as much as sight or touch whether or not they realize it.

Hadn't Isao Tomita, Vangelis and Walter/Wendy Carlos pioneered computerized music 30 years earlier? Even before them, people experimented with manual turntable turnings, then audio-tape loops. Even he owned such recordings around 1965. Pierres Henry and Schaeffer cofounded Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète. Schaeffer issued its manifesto *The Search for a Concrete Music* in 1952 in opposition to *Musique Abstraite*, what western audiences generally think of as music, composed abstractly then arranged for an orchestra to play afterward. An occasional anvil clang, canon blast or nontraditional percussive sound might be throw in, as in Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" or Verdi's "Anvil Chorus". In concrete music, existing sounds are heard, recorded, then samples of them are woven into a song's fabric; these sounds are what they are, selected rather than modulated, and by themselves suggest beats, harmonies, melodies. This method resulted out of inventions and widespread use of microphones, tape decks, and transistors. In *Traité des objets musicaux*, Schaeffer sorted sounds into 7 categories: dynamic, gain, harmonic timbre, inflection, mass, mass profile, and melodic profile. From Otto Luening's *Tape Music*, "A Poem in Cycles & Bells, Gargoyles for Violin & Synthesized Sound", classical music got its 1st expressions of tape editing and synthesizer. B-movie music during Cold War of the 1950's evoked mystery by featuring the ethereal Theremin, 1st electronic instrument, ironically invented in Russia right after their revolution, a communist crowd pleaser from the 1920's. Next came the similar ondes martenot much favored by Messiaen. Classical undercurrents have always been a rich source for pop composers, and vice versa. The earliest mass popularization of concrete music pops up in Pink Floyd song "Bike" from their 1st album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, clunking between verses and dominating its finale of orange clockwork. He attended a Led Zeppelin concert in the '70's where Jimmy Page played Theremin in "Whole Lotta Love" to exciting

sexual effect while Bonzo Bonham riffed along on cymbals. Concrete classicist Pierre Broulet covered Frank Zappa. Zappa's last album, *Civilization Phase III*, published posthumously in 1994, was primarily concrete. In 2002 Benoît Charest cleverly applied these principles while scoring folky Europop for *The Triplets of Belleville*.

You can write all the poetry and music you want if you arouse an audience's lust for you. Hot young rock stars need only scribble what vexes them, usually want of sex, scream about it, then flesh and money deluge them. Poetry pretends to plumb the depths of truth. An apt phrase or good lyric is like a magnifying glass: captures essence, delights, focuses, intensifies. Yet truth is hardly marketable unless in the process you fan ardor. Artists eventually tire of being lusted after, then slip from scene. Drugs, music and sex rock on to snare the next wannabe. In the end, Nasty Schaeffer from Nancy, roundly renounced by conservative critics, recanted his lifelong exploration of concrete sound, 40 years of, "...Struggling to find a way through in the far north. There is no way... the way through is behind us." But later explorers had better sno-cats: beat boxes, computers and synthesizers. If someone more experienced charts facts and exposes evil, nobody's interested, that is unless there's an overt porno prospect. If so ingrained in all aspects of human intercourse, isn't sensuality in all its forms something worth candid, rational discussion? Would that spoil the fun of finding out? Or disarm its manipulators and merchants? Mix in all those hormones and it quickly turns too emotional, messy responses rising up from lizard remnants of primitive limbic system.

The sound of music can be an extraordinarily sensuous pleasure given a transcendent recording artist on the cutting edge. Björk Gudmundsdottir has established herself as its paragon. Beyond redefining what music can be—no longer just base, drums and guitar, but any sound at all that bubbles up from the depth of being or harnesses surrounding rhythms—she posts an incredible resume. From child prodigy, to punk rocker, dance house pleaser, brilliant collaborator, touring pro, prolific songwriter, jazz master, Grammy winning pop singer, music video diva, Golden Globe, Oscar nominated and Palme d'Or winning best actress, living sculpture, transcultural multi-gender icon, and devoted mother, Björk is a phenomenon of nature. Her intense lust for life is as frighteningly fascinating as a lightning storm or raging tornado or rushing lava flow. While any one of these is an entire career for most mortals, proud to remake themselves just once or twice, one gets the feeling she has only just begun a chain of stunning incarnations. Turning 41 on 21 November 2006 completed her 30th year in

a business that chews up its toilers quicker than most. A Scorpio flower child, yet disavowing hippiedom or any philosophical or religious devotion whatever, as customary among Iceland's lukewarm 280,000 registered Lutherans who make up 90% of its population, born amidst that short-lived fad and raised in a communal household, she obviously carried away a healthy disregard for force-fed doctrine, an inexorable resolve to never let poets lie to her, and an inexplicable infatuation with musicals. Who doesn't enjoy them? Good music, goofy fun, loads of drama, which so typifies her oeuvre. Her mastery of every number from *The Sound of Music* is what got her discovered at age 10. Forget Hammerstein, the hills are alive with the sound of her!

Björk—pronounced Byerk, rhymes tellingly with *work*, impossible to say without puckering up, Icelandic for “birch”, thus all her references to branches and trees—remains volcano hot not for being nipped, tucked or unnaturally dolled up, but, conversely, for sometimes presenting herself in unflattering ways: clumsiness, freckles, inappropriate makeup, slightly crooked teeth, and unplucked luxuriant eyebrows, frailties which only add to her very real appeal. Sure, sex sells, but half the time she seems as plain as housewife next door, barrettes and dozens of bobby pins taming unruly hair, then turns into an exotic hottie, yet neither a commercial billboard nor fatuous fashion model, ever changing, never quite the same, pleasingly too difficult to classify. Birch bark, by the way, is well known as a firestarter, quick to flash from flint. She's all about elementals: air, fire, metal, stone, wood, water. Thoughtless observers imagine her as Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking, a fearless, magical, self-sufficient orphan who needs nothing from them, when not maddeningly depicting her as a mischievous elf or pixie. Instead, she serenely projects grace and optimism blended with intense Icelandic integrity tattooed by a conspicuous Norse compass on her left bicep, as if an ancient warrior princess. No need to endorse airlines, cars or soft drinks, she has become what she wants to be, a consummate musician and self-sufficient woman, deprived only by impracticality or undo hassle.

She defies expectations: more than equal, neither doormat nor feminist, someone you'd wouldn't think you'd have anything in common yet at once somehow a total insider, familiar as a contemptible gum-snapping chum. She can be as cute as a button, placid as peanut brittle, Shirley Temple cheeriness, then suddenly megatons of unstoppable thrust blasting off to a great beyond with a force that awes and humbles. How she achieves this marriage of extremes is part of her alarming allure and completely charming,

unexpected. This definitely makes gorgeous female contemporaries look dowdy and trite. Despite her sometimes girlish facade, Björk isn't some toddler easily put off; she's *everywoman*, an expressive and infinitely changeable face from any cherubic choir or mob, more a banshee or inexorable wail in the night demanding to be fed, a seductive succubus steadily gathering strength and absorbing everything around like a singularity. Resisting is pointless, like trying to swim out of the whirlpool Charybdis; succumb to her swirling melodic waves. "Dare to drown."

If she were any less, you'd have never been treated to *Medulla*. *Medulla* is a miracle, the unthinkable taking you by surprise. People who don't believe in miracles better reconsider. Do they have any idea what it takes to get a record deal? Talent, to be sure, but primarily significant sales numbers, something she cares nothing about compared to music itself. Typical record execs would have tried to dissuade her, had she not long since snubbed them for an avant garde label. Her disdain for mass appeal and 25 million records sold—*Debut* went platinum, *Post*, gold—defies conventional business logic that panders to mass taste. Fans who've had it with commercialism worship her for this. Customers are never right, often stick with what's familiar. Despite his reproachable music education, he knew what he liked: honest talent, real musicality, uncompromising originality. She's just as pragmatic, in light of burgeoning downloads of hits and declining compact disc sales, therefore produces albums brimming with beautifully crafted showstoppers and haunting experiments, but absolutely no repetitive filler. Why waste anybody's time?

In USA during 2006, sales of 10-track albums were down 10% while sales of individual songs in Q1 2007 were up 16% because of CD burners, I-pods, and *Mix and Burn* kiosks at music stores. Consumers are well aware that artists put fillers on CDs that either sound like tepid versions of their hits or took too little effort to produce and sound like it. Used to be that deep cuts were well worth seeking out versus a radio single. Now there are so many artists (hundreds of thousands) aired over so many channels, who has time to bother? Such overkill from 8 notes and 3 chords. Björk, in reply, fills every CD with tempting, unique tracks. Unlike other artists who pump out an album of remixes in a day to capitalize on momentary fame, Björk takes years to carefully construct an integrated, thematic event with so much depth and diversity that even its chips and sparks are interesting, as singles and sources to explore. *Family Tree* and *Live Box* have wonderful variations, not to mention "Generous Palmstroke", "So Broken" and other tracks

unavailable elsewhere. *Surrounded* thoughtfully offers up all CD tracks and videos in 5.1 Surround Sound, a great convenience to new admirers who didn't previously buy all her studio albums.

Awards, fame, riches, worldwide publicity at 2004 Olympics didn't much matter to her. What does are fearlessly going it alone with naked a cappella and magnanimously sharing spotlight with whomever she considered also talented, however unsung, as if this was somehow typical behavior. Miraculous madness! She generously gives unknowns a once-in-a-lifetime chance to explore alongside her in Utopian communion. Recognizing a need for an army of mini-björks to mimic on tour her own multi-tracked background vocals, she raided Greenland, personally auditioned, and selected the most unspoiled Inuit voices. Everyone should get so much done on a vacation to a place advertised as the "Great Silence". Why? Partly to tempt fate, partly to watch them blossom, and unquestionably to do what's never been done and relive a personal journey. To add substance to her self-described "wooden melodies", she latched onto and brought along Matmos, an obscure pair of virtuoso computer beat geeks, and Zeena Parkins, a nonacademic otherworldly harpist. Straight? Ha! Unexpected? Definitely! Her example speaks volumes. If inhumanity is to be conquered, everyone of whatever divergence deserves a chance; others have something to contribute; unity matters.

Takes a phenomenal mind to collaborate with equanimity and suppress a stubborn ego. Music has always been about a celebrity soloist with anonymous accompaniment, Chairman Frankie and a crisp band chosen by studio execs, master and slaves. In a business all about "me", she is totally the opposite: a gracious hostess as curious about her invited coconspirators as they are her, as much a treat for guests as one who spends countless hours composing in private as she does, mutual admiration and respect devoid of prejudice against sources of sound—from ancient instruments to computerized cutting edge—showcase for emerging talents. This could be what World has been missing, that which occupies the center of trust, an ability to express faith in each other, flourish together, and meld diversity despite differences. Bring back the jam session! Such elective dependency is beautifully inspirational.

Already a national treasure with no need to leave her homeland (she still lives there off and on) a wider World beckoned. As a starting point, Iceland makes as good a place as any, certainly better than some, clean air, critical population mass. Island isolation forms a fine filter out of which oozes unique essence, in her case collecting waves of Western cultural relics, from classical pomp to

inane pop, and expressing it all in one incredible intergalactic take. Totally awake and engaged globally, not just consumerist America, hers is music for an Internet Age, where combinations of anything from anywhere seem not only possible but probable. It's World Music with a global following, vibrations from a connected humanity, which celebrates common ground rather than contrasts discord. If they were capable of thinking it through, reactionaries would surely consider this subversive.

During last Ice Age, Iceland may have been a crucial bit of land bridge for the Salutrains, a stepping stone between Europe and North America, which probably helped populate World. Geologically Earth's newest land, Iceland has long been prophesied as the source of mankind's salvation. She herself is a bridge, opening your eyes to what you've been missing right in front of you by somehow realigning your senses. Lesser artists suddenly sound better. This is bound to cost you. Spin-off listening to collaborators and influences—such as admirable percussionist Evelyn Glennie, computer DJs Aphex Twin, Autechre, 808 State, and LFO, edge probers Peter Gabriel and Pink Floyd, vocal pioneers Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, and Robert Wyatt, and whimsical songsmith Kate Bush, among other experimenters—doubled his CD collection, not to mention seeing films of Chris Cunningham, Lars von Triers, and Matthew Barney. She pulls together and popularizes heady concepts from 20th Century classicists Benjamin Britten, Harry Partch, Hamrahlid Choir, John Cage, John Tavener, Stockhausen, Morton Feldman, Robert Ashley, and Steve Reich. She's made what's on her mind clearly known. Her colors come from a rich palette, to be sure, vibrations used to paint many different pictures, none alike, all unique. Great art elevates all art.

Those who discover her begin to wonder about her background (classical, punk rebellion, Kukl, Sugarcubes, London's hip-hop underground), roots (purely Icelandic), whether she's part Inuit (categorically denied), and what she listens to (anything she wants, mostly whatever's on the cutting edge). With crossover facial features, a bit of a china doll who'd equally pass for Caucasian Russian, eastern European, or properly English, she's hard to place. Fans who get close suddenly act abnormal, don't let her be, and try to reach out to touch her. It's transference, how patients shift inappropriate attachments from mommy to their shrinks. They speak of crying, dreaming, hearing, seeing, or smelling as if for the 1st time. "She is a dream to dwell upon," as Debussy once said. No wonder she attracts a fringe cult; too easy to obsess over her, let her get between yourself and significant others, as if raising the bar of

how you'd like to be treated, emotionally engaged, never detached. Send her no more ardent letters or letter bombs; all mail's prescreened anyway. Don't offer to be her designated driver, do her laundry, or pick her up at airports. Unless you invite pain, never ask to babysit for this fiercely protective she-bear. No! Be satisfied with her unilateral outpouring, grow old together, snuggle in her auditory warmth.

Saboteurs bomb bridges to stifle exchange, any connection or expansion or tolerance. She's an antidote, like antimatter that negates, more like the Dalai Lama than she even realizes. Once she's worked her witchcraft on you, why not try this? Forget this image of an amorous, sanguine, swirling fountain of generosity. Think of her as a sturdy stone span, hardly noticed in a landscape bypassed by interstate highways, yet one that stands eternally to be crossed on a slow scenic route between centuries. Cram your ridicule. Her singing begs such metaphors. Listen for yourself. Surely, she *should* be arrested, silly girl. Or simply do as she's always asked, treat her as an equal, another being to respect as you would yourself. Can you, after being beaten senseless by incessant belittlement and shaming ridicule?

You'll never encounter anyone else quite like her. Björk turns childlike wonder into aural ecstasy. Hers is one of the freshest approaches to music since harmony was invented, almost a primordial strain just now realized. It's better described as a galactic fusion of all musical forms, notably but not in the least limited to blues, chant, concertos, flamenco, house, jazz (oh so much so), medieval madrigals, opera, rap, and requiems—from mechanized clunking to tribal thumping. Bits of assorted flotsam found from guilt ridden monomania are puzzled over then built upon. Each album is a collection of beautiful shells or stones or weathered glass gathered on lonesome walks along seashores set as trophies on a bright windowsill. Shades of Tolkien, she creates her own little world, one of complete liberation, which casts the *biggest* of nets to snare admirers from the widest orientations: athletic, blue collar, gay, kinky, liberal, naïve, pagan, republican, spiritual, straight. A motley assortment of concert attendees includes ages from 18 to 80, each equally stirred by her universal appeal. How could it not be so? She makes narrow minded bigots in every camp realize they are, in fact, emotionally connected with same dreams and hopes.

Such an alert mind suffers no lack of inspiration, every click and rustle that surrounds. She's unashamed to crack, croak, crow, giggle, growl, grunt, hiccup, rumble, snort, spit, tremble, twitter, whistle and willfully expose herself as totally turned on, nerve

endings bared for stimulation. Literally, her voice has facets unlike any other, honed by years of bicycling and swimming. When asked what's her favorite instrument, she says, "Breath." With expanded lung capacity beyond confines of beat, some phrases are voiced long before her breath continues its satisfied exhale, while the next is sometimes announced with a raspy snorkle-like inhale, even a prefix warble, normally a suffix. Other times there's almost a metallic angularity, shiny as a buffed fender, and definitely extra harmonics that makes it stand out in any crowd. In "Pagan Poetry", her solo in a stanza sung without accompaniment, electronic embellishment or multiple tracks, simultaneously tickles every frequency band on a graphic equalizer. Who else does that? Entire orchestra don't always do that. So she stays in perfect pitch relative to any song, all pitches at once. What she doesn't do much is stretch a syllable over several notes as if an arpeggio, a technique called melisma, possibly of middle eastern origin, muezzins adhaning to fard salat, made popular by Mariah Carrey and now a staple of American Idol hopefuls. Rather, she tends to voice syllables straight up, as done in contemporary rap, or in pairs of notes, akin to ancient kennings, as if respecting lyrics, or held trios, all of which enhance diction and clarity to get her locutions across better. Unlike rap, it's almost ceremonial, deliberate, deliciously luxuriant, reverential singing. Her accompaniment is what seems to hurry, just like surrounding world, an ingenious trick of relativity, particularly in "Army of Me" and "Big Time Sensuality". Defiance of beat is so important, she uses an oversized light-based metronome during concerts. When she monotones rather than sings lines, it renders the singing all the more remarkable, not that this is so unusual, just that you really notice the contrast. A single note sustained or slightly arched with layers of harmonics is like anti-melisma, uncommon, possibly unique, seemingly well thought out, as opposed to some natural urge that's generally ascribed. Conversely, her nonsense verses and scats gleefully mimic not only instrumental solos but life's incessant hubbub. Breathy hesitations in surprisingly deep bass registers contrast with a scratchy falsettos, or smooth bubbles floating beyond reach, then slap as if a whip lash. While she slams with her tessitura wheelhouse, when she extends her voice to its edges, like a gale whistling through the rafters of your mind, you simply have to embrace her. Collectively, her work seems a scrapbook of everything a singer ought to know and master, yet magical moments might emerge out of mundane passages, which confuses critics who don't listen long enough at adequate resolution and volume and jump to judgment.

Listening to her made him wonder why he thought music was finite, played out, and would never again offer anything unique. How could it be, any more than living or writing? American airways appeal to myopic musical tastes. She was his reproach for not getting out and listening more, uncovering what's obscured by greed. Björk not only applies acid-, anthem-, deep-, goa- techno-trance beats and fancy new sounds out of clubs and raves, but also creates something new out of them. Nobody sits still to listen, but rather bounces and sings along, and has every right to do so. Music will always be participatory in every sense. What turned him off were copycats, and lure of easy instruments, like guitar whose chords have already been banged out in every conceivable combination. There just isn't anyone else intellectually curious enough to include so many interdisciplinary influences and sounds. After composing nearly 200 songs in so many genres, where else could she go? Exactly where he hoped all his life that someone would, hip chamber ensemble without instruments, pure voice, a resurrection of sacred chant—directly from the origin of all music—around her own sense of natural piety and system of all-or-nothing artistry, as if any casual listener could fathom what all that means. Talk about unplugged! Rather plugged into mixing console of a collective unconscious. Mér líka fletta. Ég myndi vilja meira!

Overwrought harmonies with multiple layers, typical of most choral compositions, while they can raise hair on an unshaven neck, can't be clearly discriminated by human ears. Tavener noted that, "...in music, complexity has always been equated with evil." Messiaen, whose entire life's work focused on religious mysteries yet was more preoccupied with redemption than sin, judged the merit of a composition by 3 criteria: must be *beautiful*, *interesting*, and soulfully *touching*. By whomever's criteria, Björk's satisfy. Slightly spare compositions, as in *Medulla*, betray her spiritual curiosity, seem more wholesome, and work better. Every cut is life affirming, oddly blessed, precise amounts of painstakingly sought embellishment, skillfully devised and sublimely performed. It has to do with harmonizing divergent, unique voices; you can listen to composite blend or each separately, and constantly spin out another set of mental associations, yet all spell diversity in consensus. Every cut is an original experiment into which was poured an enormous amount of work to achieve an elegant simplicity that happens to meet Messiaen's criteria. He'd be disappointed every time "Triumph of a Heart" started, because it was the last in order, CD too soon over despite its length, then play it all again.

He hadn't been so compelled since his twenties—almost always ejected CDs by others before they finished.

*Medulla* directly proceeds from *Vespertine* and earlier collections, in which she turns increasingly inward, discards popular trends, and finds truths in what she herself feels with her immense emotional intelligence. If *Debut* was a before snapshot of having just arrived as a soloist, hoping something—anything—would happen, *Post* is an after shot of having hunted down artists similarly bent, nosy about everyone and everything—take any drink, partner, pill. *Telegram*, off-the-wall remixes of *Post* tunes, churns this pot to see what comes out; at once ground breaking and maddening for minimizing her wonderful voice, it does defy parochial attitudes toward beat boxes and then innovative experiments with remixes, subdues intensity of original cuts, and so is quite listenable, while certain cuts are actually magnificent and unique departures from originals. Her solo albums up to *Telegram* are not thematic, more typical of any in that regard. *Homogenic*, *Vespertine*, *Medulla*, then *Volta* are each like a small musical in their own way, included songs composed to thematically compliment each other, just as *Selmasongs* and *Drawing Restraint 9* are actual movie soundtracks, a direction in which he hoped she'd continue.

In *Homogenic*, all melds into seeking commitment, redefines what “home” means in connection to people interlinked by endless needs. *Homogenic* has hard edge of industrial rock and hushed crackle of glacial melt, yet remains anchored in her joyous Icelandic optimism. It pits her primordial nature against man-made synthetics, motherly soft edged sympathy against steely technological cruelty. Nature can be even crueler, eat or be eaten, freezing to death should fuel run short when weather's wroth against you. Human nature can be cruelest of all. This cuts right to the very core of what it means to be alive. Angst over the intricacies of sexual intercourse is typical lyric fodder, but she transforms it, after having been burnt by it first hand and retreating to familiar ground. Newcomers will appreciate her *Family Tree* (tunes she selected) or *Greatest Hits* (democratically selected by an Internet poll) as an introduction to this self-consistent lifework, although they give an impression of impossible diversity taken out of context. While each captures fantastic remixes and soaring numbers not otherwise available, it overlooks scores of even better tracks for which you have to dig into albums. There's no cheap way out. He bought them all.

In ardently intimate, totally seductive *Vespertine*, she luxuriates in the many relationships she so carefully nurtured, like settling

into a lounge chair at dusk after a long day of hard work, dues she's surely paid; she's been known to reorchestrate the same tune as many as 500 times to get it right by her own ideals of sufficiency. Her trash is better than most artists' keepers. *Vespertine*, so beautifully human, was guided by angels over ground even they fear to tread. It's about seeking shelter, staying indoors, submitting, yet having discovered a true love, and the fear and longing and madness that brings... "I love him! I love him! I love him!" Each track addresses monogamy and how it affects stunned lovers. Her "Hidden Place" is the womb, where we'd all like to curl up and be safe again, and not have to deal with such strong emotions, which are "Not up to You". "An Echo, A Stain" atones for indiscretions that might dissuade an immaculate union. In the end, two souls blend in "Unison" into one, a compromise yet complete. *Vespertine* means dusk, a time of cusp between opposites: a blending, an interface, a pas de deux. What comes of these passions?

*Medulla* enters her inner sanctum, as if opening panels of some fantastic galactic machine and tinkering with its gearworks. While editing, she kept jettisoning whatever didn't seem to belong until only the best remained... practically nothing but pure voice. She complained of having "O[ver] D[ose]'d on instruments" during *Vespertine*, which did have lush orchestrations including a complete symphonic ensemble: accordion, celesta, choir, computerized remixings, custom made single-use music boxes, experimental devices, and traditional harp, too much to carry on tour. Then again, if you start with something so pure, why embellish? *Medulla* pulls no punches, features just about everything a human instrument can do, including beat boxing, clapping, chest thumping, *voxique*, whistling, yodeling and all manner of unique vocalizations. Calling it "the best a cappella ever" diminishes its artistry.

*Medulla* is totally about motherhood. "Mouth's Cradle" references breastfeeding. "Where is the Line" concerns supporting children. Who can't imagine mom gushing, "The Pleasure is All Mine?" Do you still not know, "Who is it?" who never lets you down? Will she "complete the mystery" of her flesh? Theme records? This progression definitely tracks autobiographically. As a teenager decided to be guided by intuitions, precedent compositions, and tarot flows. She went with what's obvious to an illuminated mind... beauty, curiosity, grace, innate talent, perseverance despite opposition, and self integrity, definitely a plan more should adopt. The rest is coincidental and/or fated. Goes way beyond a private voyage of discovery, or a well planned life, into an archetype of all life sprung from the depths of Mother "Oceania".

Suddenly stumbling upon this treasure trove was, for him, akin to Carter's discovery of King Tut's tomb. Dumbfounded after peering through a crack, to companions who asked, "Can you see anything," Carter, transfixed, could barely breathe, "Yes, wonderful things." Experiencing Björk is like unexpectedly discovering an overlooked continent, a mythic Atlantis, where they've developed beliefs, culture, languages, and science all unique, not trying to be different, not an artist seeking the next big thing, but really different, an alien planet. Pity the unsuspecting fool who cracks open *Surrounded*, a box set of these recordings and their accompanying videos, but not even blissfully transcendent and luminous cuts like devotional "A Prayer of the Heart", early 808 State tune "Oops!", Monk's memorial "Gotham Lullaby", or protohuman "Amphibian", none of which have yet found their way into her collections. He'd delight in her notebooks (if he could read Icelandic) which describe motivations and influences behind each cut, although, as she said, some were simply conceived—"All is Full of Love" on a beautiful Spring day—while others filled chapters with heady introspection. He later read a slim biography which supposedly explained, but it didn't get into any "emotional landscapes", which, by her own admissions, provided foundations for each. For someone with her heart on her sleeve, there seems another whole cast of characters still waiting in the wings to be introduced, easy to meet but difficult to wrap your mind around.

For far longer than many readers of this have been alive, Björk wrung herself inside out both emotionally and vocally with wild abandon on stage and in studio, fondling notes to brutal excess matching the brutal honesty of her lyrics, all the while improving with maturity, verifying of what her instrument was capable. This progression has been captured on DVD in 3 successive concerts, shot at alternative music venue Shepherd's Bush Empire, conservative campus of Cambridge University, and London's stalwart Royal Opera House, the first pop artist ever allowed to perform in this hallowed hall. They evidence her transition from mere popularity to goddess stature. Her heroic live renditions, arranged to suit target venues, are unlike those recorded in studios, although for each the seed is faithfully preserved. It's worth listening to both with and without studio effects, polished and raw, trying to decide which is which. Yet he hid her DVDs in a cupboard because few around him would understand the adult themes and dark ground they covered. Not for kids.

Forget moon-june-spoon rhymes; instead, she has something almost too clever in mind. Certain words act out their meanings by

how they are articulated. “Un cer tain ty” breaks up into indefinite syllables, never hinting if they’ll arrive at any finality. “Definitely” is repeated thrice to reinforce, as if listener might not believe. Obsessive triads of “Hyperballad” are sung with falling pitch to match a plummeting lyric. “Sen su al i ty” comes at you in waves, as if caresses, far too intimate, getting ever closer, in the end whispered right into your ear, somehow recalling come-hither suggestions of Polynesian hula; at each chorus, except 1st and last [in the video mix], there’s her “gentle” whisper so appropriately underlying “hardcore” growling, something of which you’re hardly aware until the umpteenth listening. Does she actually project like a spinning Leslie speaker here, or is it an electronic trick? Either way, it’s brilliant. This stanza seems designed to build up to this effect. It’s a banshee wail, or a tongue wagging lament with which Islamic women send their men off to war. In “Unison”, left and right channels slightly out of phase chant, “I never thought I would compromise”, then meld into a single voice, “Let’s unite tonight.” Totally introspective construct supports its own poetry. The word “waiting” takes on her trademark angry grrrrr of punk impatience, meter ticking, motor running, remarkably, since there’s no *r* in waiting. “It’s Not Up To You” ends with her tinkling words as if to mimic tines in accompanying music box as it winds down. Certain studio recordings feature triple harmonies of just her, among his favorites, “Aurora” and “Undo”, both stunningly plush arias you can crawl inside and hardly turn up loud enough. Nonsense phrases are often elevated with her finest colorations, punctuated precisely by howls and screeches as if to say illogic can never be denied, rather it’s logic itself that should be held suspect. Numbers bristle with puckish humor, such as an added static track, as if playing a worn LP, even a repetitive skip added as a souvenir to those who spun cherished vinyls until they did wear out. In “Aurora”, she vocalizes the all-important word “mouth” in such a way to open a portal into infinity, reminiscent of the self repeating images of mirrors facing each other, *Ummagumma* recursion. Both the slow buildup and spare use of chorus lead to this otherworldly phenomenon. Fluttering tremolo is generally suited to soft singing, not such powerful output. Then, what remains diffuses its powerful effect, a cool down, swirling harmonies shimmering, like Northern lights, to caress a mind that glimpsed eternity. Its ending is positively totemic, a totally divergent trio of one voice wrapping around itself. This is genius at work.

Spirits of e e cummings, Eluard, and Walt Whitman hover like vultures casting disconcerting shadows. Endless instances of sheer

creativity blow your mind. Did verses once rhyme? Hers intuit that repeated phrasing has the same effect as same sounding syllables. She'll even mark rhyme effects with wordless breaths. Musicality ambushes you from every angle. One probably shouldn't listen to this mischief daily any more than popping mescaline buds, smoking opium, or snorting coke, all inferior rushes by comparison, and never to be done together, unless racing headlong into dementia. He'd put these CDs and DVDs aside to detoxify, only to be enchanted all the more and hear effects hitherto unnoticed.

*Medulla* is Björk's masterwork, one of the deepest divulgence of an artist's core as yet recorded. It hunts down dangerous mysteries from the jungle of subconscious to capture and cage creatures the like of which you many never see again. She believes that age and experience will only add depth to her work, if that's possible, perhaps a masterwork in her own eyes by age 55? And yet, "Who is it" seems to pass a torch, "handing it over, handing it over". Will *Medulla* become a benchmark? An impossible measure? Weak imitators, who think what she did can easily be copied, overlook her quarter century of formulating a plan, downloading mpegs, experimenting and sampling both in studio and on stage to achieve what it is she meant to. As with the outrageous films of great director Terry Gilliam, attuned minds will enjoy the sum of *Medulla's* collaborations as well as its parts. Imagine Björk and Gilliam working together?! How remarkably do storyline of *Good Omens* and sentiments of *Medulla* mesh?! Filmmakers relate to her storytelling and have used her work in not only award winning *Dancer in the Dark*, but other films including *Being John Malkovich*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Ready to Wear*, *Tank Girl* and *Young Americans*. No gamble there, they cozily fit, founded on musical theater influences. What takes courage is to admit being startled by a superior sprite of a girl, Sally Salt made flesh, Wordsworth's Phantom of Delight, uncannily capable of making important decisions for herself at wicked play or work.

For lyrics, *Medulla* lays it all out, brilliance of achievement, good battling evil, fears and hopes of all mankind, magical majesty of motherhood, perspectives that challenge conventions, noble gestures versus petty concerns. There's a central theme of how people do or don't relate to one another, with novel suggestions to improve the exchange. Not to pass judgment, she merely observes or participates on her own terms, well aware that nature is full of surprises. If her poetry is obscure to you—yet far more transparent than most, intentionally unambiguous—it's at least articulate, unlike what passes for lyrics lately, even when she purposefully

spouts gibberish or retreats understandably, though rarely, into Icelandic, her native tongue and obvious preference. Some people link her unintelligible phrases with supernatural *glossolalia*, speaking in tongues, something that could be related to excess emotionality or hysteria. But it's really just a practical way to expand physicality of producing something unique in homage to Billy Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and other jazz greats. It's also freedom from words written on pages. She painstakingly reaches you on an interpersonal level, subtracts or supplies new strophes during live performances depending upon crowd moods. This satisfies anyone who's spent a lifetime trying to master English who'd rather puzzle over what she meant not what words she used. Her instrument has never displayed better diction and pitch, probably driven to surpass even herself while huddling with such talent as she gathered for these sessions. Each stanza raises dialogue rather than ignores listeners. She draws a line, calls your bluff, dares you to cross, and expects participation should you choose to. Of course this demands! Don't expect to hear her anytime soon on *easy listening* radio.

Björk's singing is a body slam of aural intimacy, platonic foreplay without touching, voice obscuring lines between intonation and heavy breathing, especially over quality headphones, a private and revealing way to listen. In an overpopulated World of hunger, infectious diseases and resource depletion, it's how strangers should behave, "possibly, maybe". Every cut is interesting, if unlike anything to which you've ever exposed, nothing short of what you'd expect on another's greatest hits compilation, scary, testament to her incredible craftsmanship. Repeated hearings with attenuated ears reveal previously unnoticed eddies that wash into dusty recesses, growling practically below detection, or snap segues plugged into fading echoes which immediately lodge in your brainstem. She even momentarily turns echoes into duets with herself. Disorienting. Surround Sound? It's like invisible aliens emerge from speakers, levitate you, massage your soul, and nudge you through a 5th dimensional portal. Recalls Jerry Garcia's admission that Grateful Dead tunes were mixed to enhance their *trips*, that is to say, heighten their psychic effect on stoned listeners by swirling stereo shifts and wavelike effects. Couldn't think of anyone including the Dead who pulls this off so effectively.

Fans argue over which song affects them most. Listen to *Medulla's* choral backups. Ethereal throats fool the ear to hear organ pipes or synthesizer oscillations where there are only humans. In "Where is the Line" phase shifting makes her chant seem rubbery, snappy, almost grabs your tailbone and shakes it. "Wake up!" It begs

a rude World to be half as generous. In “Triumph of a Heart”, background vocals mimic jazz instruments, human trombone and snare drum as well as scats on synthesizer sounds, a send up of her own past reliance on synth. “Mouth’s Cradle” and “Who is it?” bounce easily through mindscapes few have ever imagined, never mind visit, or live in. In “Submarine” her voice surfaces slowly from the plaintive chorus chants as if struggling to be heard. Lamentations of “Desired Constellation” recall the selfless compassion of Selma dancing in near-blind darkness toward undeserved execution; link fatal indignities, past pain, unraveled sleeves. Even the blind can see its essential poignancy.

*Medulla* mostly turns off reverb and electronic enhancements. Björk doesn’t need her weirding module anymore; like a Bene Gesserit priestess, her voice by itself irresistibly compels. Who else can get you to listen to a ballad in an unknown tongue, “Vökuro”, and totally groove on its surprising consonant pairs? Who starts off with a precisely harmonized trio of herself? Who thinks of such things? “Oceania” sends shivers down your spine, as if an imprudent dip in icy waves which lap epic shorelines upon each stanza. Initially, you won’t think much of it, almost too mundane, but its beauty is purposefully submerged, gradually deepening, expanding, just like an ocean, like a mind, with a chorus that shimmers and ripples unlike anything you’ve ever heard. Timeless, a handshake between ancient myth and contemporary evolutionary theory, it suitably opened the historic 2004 Athens Olympics, reminding forty million viewers of their shared humanity while her 30,000 yards of costume fabric unfurled covering all those within reach in blue unity, truly couture designed for one wearing. Who but Björk? “Mais la mer, c’est la vivante/Hormis elle rien n’existe” [“But the Sea is alive/except for her nothing exists” from *Night on the Sea*, by Henk Badings]. It’s as if “Tales of Brave Ulysses” were written for her by Cream, “She drowns you in her body/carving deep blue ripples in the tissues of your mind.” This deep sea creature, water nymph with fierce eyes the color of North Atlantic, wants to take you with her to the hard land of the winter then drop her anchor chain into the depths of your soul. Are you still not getting this?

As with every album of hers, *Volta* brings something new while she explores how she’s feeling in the moment. “Wanderlust” is incredibly clever. The back beat is low thump of a ship’s engines, thus supporting its lyrics about her floating house on a nomadic sea and her “relentless restlessness”. It deconstructs into horns tapping mid-pitch Morse Code, as did mariners for a century after Marconi, and she challenges listeners to “spot a pattern”, the song’s title dah-

dit-dit'ed as if pagan poetry pulsating over rolling waves. Throughout she models her vocals around accompanying brass, which in turn mimic the foghorns and ship blasts reaching out sonically to greet other vessels groping blindly and mapping unseen shorelines. "Dull Flame of Desire" was purposefully composed to "diva it up" with Hegerty, show off virtuosity of both in a separately respectful duet, her as bass, as was Cher's below Sonny's at times, then as a soprano flitting, Madam Butterfly, around Antony's; its Russian poem by Fyodor Tychev about sexual undercurrents and unrequited intimacy, taken from Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* from the 1970's, is hammered repetitively with every conceivable vocal technique. Meanwhile, Brian Chippendale's bass drumming urges it along while it builds and builds into a crescendo, suddenly depleted, in which solo drumming, remarkable in its own right, takes over. Then suddenly bursts "Innocence", with its visceral grunt of raw sexuality in reply, followed by "I See Who You Are", which feminizes the sentiment of that old Browning poem, "His Coy Mistress". "Vertebrae" probes human's instinctual likeness to animals and resets 12 month clock to menstrual flow 13 times a year, not a number men, once in charge, should fear so much as to skip 13th floor or digits thus divisible on a door. "Pneumonia" completes this set, all urging you to open your heart and unlock your love. Behrman spoke of Copenhagen's porn trade as an international experiment which might one day push people past base urgings into true communion. All these songs seem to puzzle over such potential. "Hope" naturally follows, with African beats and curious panic over terrorism. Like "Pluto" from *Homogenic*, during subsequent *Volta* tour, "Declare Independence" was quickly adopted as an encore closer, as it abandons delicate tone control and demands all out screaming, always a voice strain best left to end. Conversely, savoring "My Juvenile", beyond any other song she's ever recorded, seems exactly like being in her intimate presence; she's right there with you, along with simple company of 17th century clavichord, hushed rustling, and snapping music sheets. This description of hesitantly fledging her son into the world ends with heartfelt regret and real separation anxiety, which just leaves you craving more.

No pop musician takes on this intense level of detail; it's drenched in integrity but may provide too subtle a message for small minds. Reviewers found it frustratingly opaque, more like roaring back at loud loops of ocean breakers and outmoded brass. So much depends on what mutual dependencies are met, as in any relationship. You must also understand how *Volta* bares her girlhood history growing up on a busy harbor amidst life's harmonious

rhythms. As always, you can listen repeatedly and each time hear a new, unexpected sound that unlocks another association. You have to realign your mind to fully appreciate. That, in itself, should be enough to define greatness.

Those who dote on opera have long understood that when lyrics don't hold humor or meaning for them personally, they can still revel in sonorities of coloratura, lyric phrasing, unusual counterpoint, verbal breathing, as with a harmonica, and vocal percussion, typified by *Medulla's* "Ancestors" and "Komid". Lyrics, while adding a poetic epistle, don't always matter, nor even a libretto. "Amphibian" (her own song) and Monk's "Gotham Lullaby" (one of her few covers) are both throughout wordless vocalise accompanied by harp or piano. Mezzo sopranos as Björk are the sensual equivalent of dark chocolate or freshly roasted coffee: bitter, complex, strong, and oh so very delicious, if not as prized by the rabble as blonde soprano spotlight stealers, starring roles not at all to be underestimated. Those who do deprive themselves of something sublime. Anyway, sultry brunettes are just sexier.

When you primarily sing, you can't offer a lot of music on an album—too physically demanding. Many 10-track or less, vocally rich CDs can be found, including extended plays and singles. In contrast, computer music can be generously long, such as Autechre's *Incanabula*, which runs practically the entire 80 minutes or 800 mbytes a CD allows. Glitch beats can loop several times and you'd never think of it as out of place; adds to its trance enhancing effect. Techno artists, Black Dog, have no lyrics, but their initial, critically acclaimed *Bytes* album has one frenetic number that urges, "Woo, we, wi, woo, tink, tink, ti, tink, ti, ti tink, dum, dum, dum; Woo, tink, we, tink, dum, ti, wi, tink, dum ti, woo, ti, tink, dum; Woo dum tink, dum, we, tink, ti, wi, dum, tink, dum, ti, woo, dum, ti, tink; Woo, we, wi, woo," and so on, one of their simpler beats. Practically lifts you from your chair into dance or, at least, gets you to percolate in place. After all, instruments speak no lyrics, yet they do universally communicate, as anyone who's ever heard Carlos Santana play can attest. Adding another chorus to a vocal means you have to compose additional lyrics, risk annoying listener, then wind up with an opus you have to remember next time you perform live. To remain faithful to what worked on a recording, you must remember well and repeatedly rehearse. Complex music requires sheet music and teleprompters. Simple is easier.

Classical composer Tavener, who could write for any voice yet intentionally chose Björk's, called it "a raw, primordial sound, quite wonderful... nothing of a western-trained voice... wasn't trained at

all, why I liked it so much, a save quality, an untamed quality... the simplicity of her, the spontaneity..." Her versatile instrument, it's true, is not as artfully tuned as most opera soloists, despite her bizarrely broad range, elephant rumblings to frequencies that make dogs howl. It reminds you of soprano Maria Callas, who'd break down from the passion she brought into a role. Björk repeatedly crosses that line, into a shadowy pit of emotional intensity, what she calls her "starting point", a boundary almost everyone else on this planet cringes from, never mind crosses. Great opera arias are the most pained ones: betrayal, grief, vengeance. In Björk, there's none of that, instead, the pains of anticipation, devotion, joy, rapture, surprise, or wonder. "The bravest thing you can do in the world today is be happy." All her songs are tingling, tumescent, vital. Something in her tone is so angelic and soothing that, no matter how high you crank volume, it never hurts your ears. Only Sarah Vaughn and not one opera diva he'd ever heard had that quality. It's a paradox. Why should anyone choose an unstudied performer over one who's learned from the best and mastered finesse? It can't just be her compositional skills, sincerity, and stage presence. There's something utterly magical about this entire package. You asked God for a sign, and He sent an angel. What more can you ask?

If Björk were only a haunting voice singing thoughtful lyrics with digital backup, she'd equal the Eurythmics, the duo who set England's all time record for album sales, 75 million. She surpasses by pushing limits of sound in every area, using Foley tricks such as shuffling a deck of cards or feet in a pan of rock salt, tapping in time on microphones. She'll have conspirators elicit oddly unintended jangle from instruments, such as bending or wiggling a pickup probe against harp strings as if gliding a bottleneck against unfretted guitar strings weren't enough. There's so much uniquely interesting stuff going on it bears repeated listening. It's a music lesson just identifying instruments, whether acoustic or electronic. Easier to attribute it to some hazy history and just surrender. Trying to listen to it as soft background noise doesn't work at all. You miss too much at normal levels. Not just a voice—one Bonose compared to "an ice pick through concrete"—it's more like a bat probing with echoes to locate subterranean obstacles. Could be she'd be more at home with cetaceans, connecting with a pod across great distances by clicks and moans perceived in waves. It's her shameful obsession with sound, impatient finger drumming during interviews, that expands space and freezes time. Twisted ambient artists push this to its limits. If only this, she'd be just as

obscure. If she wrote lyrics that only meant something to her or a tight cadre of admirers, she'd be another Kate Bush or Tori Amos. Kronos Quartet featured Mongolian throat singing in 1992's *Night Prayers*. No, besides Björk the courageous leader, deep well of inspiration, fluxus visionary, music video revolutionary, ultimate dadaist, and visible feast, there's, most importantly, a flawed human almost like everyone else who somehow makes high art accessible, an ultimate goes-into. You plug in through her.

Personal visual references intentionally pepper her videos. A Coca Cola truck (she used to work in a bottling plant) drifts past during "Big Time Sensuality". In "Army of Me", only letters that remain in broken MUseuM sign after bombing are "MU M", name of an ethereal band of her "mates". Selma lies on a cord of birch logs and pours out her soul. Pays to look closely with an open mind. Anyone who'd seen her short video regarding mysteries of television technology will recognize why subliminal suggestion might appeal to her insatiable curiosity. She has grown far beyond the "random revolutions of individual aberration" postulated by KUKL, into a archetype of unique lifestyle, a socket from which those beaten into submission can recharge.

These mysteries unexpectedly rub off. Her currents draw in fans as if species of small furry animals gathering in a cave to groove on a pict. A cappella singing goes back to origins, huddled underground, listening to each other's comforting sonorities. Humans gain awareness of the World from vibrations of a mother's voice while still in the womb. If it's possible to recreate this from an adult's perspective, she does it better than anyone ever has.

Björk assembling a group to execute as equals is a little like instigating a fist fight and pulling out a fusion phase cannon, not that she'd use her weapons for harm. If not for her generosity, croaky voices would have no chance but to quietly, reverently listen. Because she's always breaking new ground, concert attendees, except in Italy and Spain, sit very still so as not to miss a note or nuance, more typical of classical audiences than pop, while she tries to get you to pay attention to her extraordinary accompaniments, which you'd probably never notice without her. It's as if she's a point person for an army of otherworldly entities. When she assists others to achieve brilliance, this is indeed a religious ritual.

What more can you ask? As avant garde as Pink Floyd, crisp as Mozart, evocative as Van Gogh, introspective as Dali, inventive as Da Vinci, poetic as Dylan—only prolific Dylan could have drawn more Oscar votes than her—representative of Reykjavik as Piaf was of Paris, sonically obsessed as Hendrix, with phrasing and virtuosity

of Miles and Satchmo—yeah, Björk is definitely in that category, singular uncompromising genius. For this a lame British popularity poll and mainstream critics dismiss her as eccentric, Queen of Quirk. Wait 10 more years, buffoons! They’ve yet to comprehend how much she will impact all of music.

Having broken through to another side, she asks herself, “Will my eyes be closed or open?” Preferred poet Eluard has her answer, “To open eyes at the final moment/She has every willingness.” Rising above doubt headlong into a vast unknown, she wavers, her dark hazel eyes—like Earth seen from orbit—widen, then belts out a defining phrase, stamping a foot and snapping a hand as if a karate chop (she’s nearly a black belt) as if to intimidate night into submission, and succeeds! As petite as she first appears, she shines as steadily as the midnight sun, stands as defiantly as an arctic vessel’s figurehead, as eternally as an Egyptian pyramid. Listening to her speak, magically melodic, so fitting for Iceland’s eon-old tradition of saga-rap, is almost as enthralling as hearing her sing.

Despite your impulse to console and protect, she needs no help, no sanctuary. You need her; she makes you think, like a mythological muse. If Björk’s English sounds alarmingly childlike for the obvious eroticism of what’s expressed, in her own tongue she’s all woman, Aphrodite’s first daughter, unbearably desirable. With no explicit lyrics, she’s easily the most erotic songstress ever. Careful! Goddesses are always extraordinarily demanding, notoriously capricious, and seldom satisfied, drama that might explain her brief affairs and inquisitive experiments in lust. Oh, those Scorpios! “Electric shocks, I love them, with you, duuhhuzen a day... but after a while I wonder, ‘Where is that love you promised me?’” “Swirling black lilies totally ripe... But he makes me want to hand, myself, over.” “When I awoke in his arms, gorgeousness, he’s still inside me!” “His wicked sense of humor suggests exciting sex!” “I feel you trickling down my shoulder from our love.” These and many other lines are not about electroshock therapy, florists shops, white slavery, coma care wards, Comedy Central, or incontinence, respectively. They’re all about orgasms with a chosen partner. Butterflies and oysters, lilies and snakes: How do they go together? Metaphors for what? What will you ever learn of “ancient nature”? Will you never “complete the mystery of your flesh”? Monogamy and sexual release combine to curb AIDs and other STDs, while they make for hang-up free, satisfied intellects who roll their passions confidently into their work. Submitting to a partner’s needs, although fraught with difficulties, is humble, intimate, kind, a path to enlightenment and strength, as well as a way to propagate

the species, although the latter's no longer a priority in an overpopulated world. Celibacy turns people into compassionless control freaks and frustrated, name-calling bigots with no life. After "tasting the forbidden fruit", takes greater strength to be tempted then abstain, than waltz through life smugly untouched.

Exposing herself as a magnet for emotional connection is mostly what grabs fans by the throat. Those who didn't get it bashed Gabriella's imaginatively dark CD's cover art, shiny black font on a dull black field, as if rubbing a fingertip across dust to expose gun steel, or spilling fresh wet ink over age-old dry. When you ignore surface you don't find something dangerous beneath. As astronomers will tell you, dark matter rules the Universe, while Einstein, one of her own heroes, claimed, "Imagination is everything!" Lettering on *Vespertine* cover matches minuscule of its beats. Probably she's too much brain candy for some to digest or a taste not yet acquired by those who've never danced in the dark. For them there's pop tart flavors Aguilera or Spears, more bump and grind than tonal range, more geared to short term unilateral consumerism than lifelong bilateral communication. Brit and Chris make the rounds among infatuated boys. Smitten, you dutifully bring bewitching Björk home to meet your mother, but cleverly neglect to bring up her nipple rings or tattoos or Porsche sportscar, items of which few moms might approve. Immediately, to your horror, the two conspire against you in your best interests. Soon you'll be driving a minivan.

Artists don't relish jealous detractors taking pot shots after baring their gizzards at great emotional expense to provide their best. Morons like Pimple Magazine's Bruno Triviali, commenting on subsequent Oscar ceremonies, said, "There weren't horrendous things like Bjork [sic]... all the girls went safe and classy." A small picture of her in Pejoski's graceful swan outfit accompanied Bruno's brainless jibe. "Classy"? Wouldn't know class even if it clamped canines into an ass cheek. Detracting is easy, lazy, requires neither thought nor commitment. If you don't like what's presented, ignore it, your loss. Reexamination belongs to economics, state policies, and things that attack your pocketbook. Entertainment is your choice. There are artists aplenty to suit your moods or tastes. Takes loud Techno-pop to drown out erratic roadwork racket or industrial bustle, soft jazz to booze away a day's cares. As one of life's great pleasures, why not seek out what you need? He already had, expended considerable effort, and was, for once, rewarded. Found it difficult to find anything that fit him better. With her you can hear the best beats, experiments, harmonies,

orchestrations and vocalizations through cutting edge collaborators ranging from haughty classical to gutter low punk and rap, amazing in depth and scope, a cornucopia of sonic bliss.

Praise is precarious, especially among living artists; you never know how they'll go astray, bring discredit, disappoint once they're too rich to remember what drove them to begin with, and drag down your reputation, too, if any. Psychologists say that praise for children can be bad when focused on personal traits not results. But how would you know something wonderful exists? You probably aren't going to stumble upon it on your own. It's an immense world. Indie stuff is often rare and hard to find. Someone recommends it, and you pick up on it, almost because of the fact that someone whose opinion you respect actually bothered to tell you, found it important enough. Heartfelt praise is a good turn, a selfless act, a way to share. It exactly opposes commercial advertising, foisting useless junk upon you for profit. Demarcation between them has always been murky. Imitation is sincere praise. Those who copy ought to stop making books, CDs, DVDs; instead why not check out ones already done? It's gotten to a point where nobody is paying any attention anymore, rather blurt out whatever occurs to them and try to sell it in a saturated marketplace.

For compassionate, generous Björk, there's no question of continued greatness and infinite promise. Artists can drift too far beyond even a savvy devotee's ability to comprehend. If their visions aren't grounded in phenomena common to everyone's experiences, they gamble losing their grip. The best don't expect anyone to adore anything they do, and are grateful for any recognition they get. They're nevertheless compelled—driven to produce or go nuts—to create a tiny fragment in finite time for fickle, unforgiving fans. If something sublime comes of it, don't they deserve whatever recognition they get? "When in doubt, give." A better question is, "How can the pleasure be *all* yours, when so many gladly receive from you?" It's characteristically generous of her to say so. Since she's given so much, you naturally feel obligated to reciprocate. Only fragility requires a champion. Treat her with respect, unlike those few concert goers who behave badly, point video lights in her face, or scream over music. Don't clap, hoot, or whistle, which hardly seem suitable for someone who has shown you so many ways to express yourself. Among beat artists of her ilk in the old days, snapping fingers would have been appropriate. Is something new needed? Because her prodigious gifts to humanity must never be stifled, he only hoped to broadcast a positive appreciation and express his gratitude, perhaps raise a chuckle, as if

she or rolling thunder would ever need approval. She'd most likely reiterate, "Praise heightens my uneasiness." Phony jerks like to be told that they're clever, good, or smart, even if they're not. Truly superior creatures don't need insincere reassurance, shy away from pedestals and such stratagems of separation. Loud duo Lightning Bolt sets up right amidst audience to become an epicenter of sonic disturbance and mosh pit movement, thereby dangerously reaching out and directly touching.

Hendrix, Lennon, Morrison all had swan songs just before they, well, checked out. Jimi was dabbling with jazz fusion with his Band of Gypsies. John and Yoko were at their most creative and experimental. Lizard Jim's spare poetry in "An American Prayer" rode a crest of purely perverse hedonistic wordspeak far ahead of rap and deeper by miles. Pass a desert car crash: be horrified by scene, confronted by mortality, take in a loose soul. Ask "Indian, what did you die for?" hear in answer, "Nothing at all," along with all who join an unabated sacrifice of automotive slaughter, innocents including Jim, who lived thereafter as if every day would be the last. Every pointless death witnessed haunts forever. Devil doesn't save volunteers, shows no respect, steadily recycles them. Good night, young troubadours; angels carry thee to thy reward.

Pink Floyd's final experiments, just like their 1st, were into found sounds and synth combined with raw electric wails in ambient, alarmingly austere compositions as "Cluster One". Throughout their work, there are snatches of echoing footsteps and ticking clocks in empty spaces, which startle amidst brooding. They finished up in 1994 just after Björk went solo. Must have had some influence. She seemed to complete their abandoned mission: intensely conceived, superbly crafted departures with a psychological edge. While Floyd's soaring vocalise were always relegated to backing chorus, she forced her own into foreground, and made harmonic fascinations her textural context. Her breakthrough abandoned the melancholia of such *Post* numbers as "Cover Me" with an immersion in celebratory verve, spunky defiance, and trip hop bounce of *Homogenic*, which presents a fuller range of emotions. In parallel, she began adroitly arranging songs to cover entire audible frequency band. This is meant to expand boundaries, despite entire oeuvres of other composers tightly wrapped in depressed introspection at a single pitch. Brings to mind autistic but beautiful triads and motets of contemporary classicist Arvo Pärt, discordant screaming strings of plaintive Finn Kaije Saariaho, or Stockhausen's time warping vocalise instrumental "Zwei Paare".

Composers in 20th century were parboiled in strife and reflected their tension in dissonance, fast notes, strident assaults on ancestral instruments, not just while playing them but also preparing them in unusual ways, such as attaching items to piano strings or using ring modulators to distort tones. They were masters at mirroring their world, but not very good at resolving its conflicts, like a horror flick that never ends. Art born out of conflict is supposed to possess superior poignancy, but that's just another myth, or an excuse to perpetuate conflicts profitably. That anyone would be looking for something beyond this plane of painful existence is perfectly normal. When times aren't kind, why not look back to when things weren't so screwed up? Was there ever such a time? Seeking essence, primitive beginnings, or theocentric enlightenment might just be a way to deal with today's bizarre alienation and complexity which no human was designed to handle solitarily. An entourage, inner circle, or small knot of well wishers is not enough of a focus group or think tank to quiz out how to act in an appropriate, timely manner to global events that nowadays affect all lives. Small isolated villages that time forgot are also deprived when resources aren't shared. Nobody notices when nature reclaims them. Among artists themselves there's a renewed interest in soothing traditional music from Africa or Asia, Malian kora master Mamadou Diabate, raga sitarist Ravi Shankar, or Sufi singer Youssou N'Dour. This also extends to Gregorian chant, Harry Partch's studies in Greek scales, or other works closer to origins of Western traditions captured by such avant garde classicists as Kronos Quartet. Art exists to replicate itself in new ways, repurpose existing artifacts. What comes of trying to digest what's indigestible are totally new directions: pass or puke, just resolve never to repeat identically. No, must infuse it with yourself. Just examining modifies anything irrevocably.

A lifetime of producing does push one to look into dusty mental corners for archetypes that preexist culture, possibly find mythological chimeras. One might start overturning every stone, as if a hunter child, like those feral waifs who populate post-apocalyptic Mad Max Thunderdome. Obscurity is flypaper for intellectuals jaded by total exposure. Better to create an entirely new paradigm. Fans on far less input seldom grasp these departures, expect an entertainer to remain frozen in time, pumping out the same few numbers they've always favored. Having weaned on exactly the same artists—he as they happened, she much later when LPs finally made it ashore—he knew exactly what Björk was up to. While expanding her vocal repertoire, she was taking revenge against all

those gratuitous guitar combos and at least one past lover. An artist of any credibility is a shape shifter, a living, growing, becoming organism, not a music box, pull-string Chatty Cathy, reproducible recording, windup toy, something Björk has parodied. "Gotta love me!" Been there, done that, move on. She must stick to her life list. Music is an expanding universe, new combinations for a complex tapestry woven from whatever once warmed your heart. Hope your supporters join you, share your journey, otherwise it's a lonesome compulsion, and one might fall or give up. At least diligent artists who've mapped their own emotions and mind and produced accordingly have a chance to speak for themselves after death. Everyone else is lumped into a statistic or totally forgotten. Be as quirky as you will, because you'll have detractors no matter what you do.

Things that are unknown possess an unusual allure. Everybody knows about common things to which all are offhandedly exposed. Only your pursuit of what's esoteric boosts your ego, feeds your silly pride, gives you an edge, separates you. Individuality can be a defense mechanism. Conventionality is boring, at least it seems. As soon as everyone else knows about it, you have to transform again not to be considered a rube. You need to change sooner than everyone else to feel superior. This is clearly tied to extroverts and storytellers being centers of attention. Strangers broach some esoteric argument to lure you in, peg you, prey upon you. But it makes you instantly jealous that anyone else already knows more about something you've struggled with for years. How things come so easily to others is an ego blow to you. Fluxus artists staged situational events specifically designed to defy classification. To be pegged is to die. So presumably Fluxus was the final solution, since it's endured for 40 years. In itself, a concert or party can be an interesting artform. Instead of producing an artifact, an artist stages an event, which, if you're lucky enough to be there, creates an indelible mental impression. How is this different than viewing an artifact? Those who attended Woodstock understand.

Yet nobody ever totally masters the commonplace. Anthony Burgess said, "For writers, mastery never comes, lifelong we are apprentices, and must die fighting." Scientists haven't yet fathomed details about simple things, fruits and vegetables: alkaloids, enzymes, fragrances, proteins that have untold effects on a body, cancer fighting, mood altering, stress assuaging herbs and seeds. You can study anything and never know everything there is to know about it. Everyone's senses are flawed, underdeveloped, and so too scientists, who rely on them to map reality. With volumes you can stack from here to the moon, there's probably more yet to

learn by factors into infinity. How can anyone ever be bored? Exhausted? Fed up with banality? Yes. Up for new challenges? Yes.

Uniqueness as Björk's is something to cherish while you can. Concerts will cease once vocal chords get too scarred. As he often repeated after Fromm, "The cultivation of our own uniqueness is the most valuable achievement of human culture". But it can make you oddly different. To win hearts and minds, you need to be just a tad better than everyone else. If you're outrageously superior, they'll envy or fear you. Inferior, they'll torment or vilify you. Either way, they reject you. The more you display your ordinariness or similarity to everyone else, the more popular you get. But you can't cling to admirers. Like sand in hand, less can be held as you tighten your grasp. Better keep your chosen path, move forward, never worry about satisfying anything but your own itches.

Beyond artist, Björk stands among the most courageous, honest, inquisitive, intellectual, quintessentially human beings on this planet, more intent on humbly testing possibilities within life's inevitable constraints than achieving super-stardom on some transitory pedestal. People think of strength as grace to conform under pressure. She proves that fearless means creating your own world where conformity is unnecessary. She has achieved the highest state of being, 5th dimensional synthesis, when billions of others never get beyond 1st, sense only 10% of what nature offers. In Plato's allegory of the cave, they see shadows of what's real dancing on a wall; she's outside casting those shadows when she doesn't have something better to do, like doing laundry or washing her hair, things she multitasks while composing. She likes doing 2 things at once, packing as much activity as possible into every second, racing against an internal terminal clock. Always, she's the sensible one, doing what needs to be done, embracing all contradictions, a self complete. Her little ballet pas de deux with her own shadow in a spotlight reminds you not only of Plato's shadows, but how to please yourself first, just as she has so often has, then extend your self-generosity onto everyone else. Her humorous self-deprecation lets her don unusual yet beautiful garments, endure hours of body adornments and hair braiding, invent dance forms, and take thrilling, career-crashing chances. Celebrity chases such people, not the other way around. Full of mirth and optimism, she clearly enjoys making you knowingly smile or scratch your head, something he could hardly remember any performer doing, 99.99% of whom are only interested in making a buck. As she once said, "I probably won't make much money. That's okay. I want to make music." Giving pleasure can be as good as receiving.

Her performances have global artistic precedents—American films, Greek drama, Italian opera, Japanese geisha, native shamanism—all a homage absorbed, condensed, fused, and interpreted into something totally Björk only to be categorized under cosmic. She merits far more words than a few liner notes. Yet singular geniuses themselves dare not say much, lest every word be interpreted and obsessed over. It's up to writers they most affect to explain what they've contributed and why it's important.

He became aware of her through her role as Selma, made by von Triers to look ordinary, unattractive. Normally audiences would hardly care what happens to her, yet, doesn't that question their charitable sincerity? *Dancer in the Dark* wouldn't work with Selma as an exotic enchantress with whom you're expected to sympathize. Neither would many actresses accept such a role. This didn't inspire him to rush out and buy all her CDs and DVDs. He'd seen *Being John Malkovich* but, as usual, missed the closing credits, which are half over before she begins to sing "Amphibian". He'd also seen *Tank Girl*, but had no recollection of how "Army of Me" fit in. No, he happened to notice *Post* in his local library, a CD that forever seems available there, an unpopular wallflower. After listening to it once, he felt slightly annoyed with its arty experiments, which, when it was time to return, had grown on him. He could hardly part with it, and so recorded it on tape, unaware of *Debut*, *life's too good*, *The Eye*, and other prior efforts. Months or years passed and he noticed *Greatest Hits*, as if she had any. It offered no handle upon which to grasp, yet there was something great about it, and it slowly unfolded like a beautiful rose into an expansive network of connections weaving its marvelous web.

Gradually he learned there was not a single Björk, but, literally, a battalion of them, female and male, maybe even feline, certainly one amongst them in which everyone could fall in love, from Lingren's stubborn 5-year-old bike thief Lotta ("I know I can—secretly"), to Lena, curiously blue or yellow about politics and sex, to Lulu, drenched in ennui, to fictional Lily Chou Chou, a Japanese film equivalent over which disaffected contemporary youth obsess on-line. Was it just a coincidence that Björk and little Lotta were both 5 years old in 1970 when Lindgren wrote *Lotta's Bike*? Then there's scary Bataille libertine Simone with whom you should never leave sharp scissors, or Anatole France's Thais, pure source of divine delight for whom judgment is reserved by God. One of his favorites was from TOAH video, a drunken, impatient, self-pitying wife who complains, "The cat... he should loosen up a bit." Hilarious. What a sense of humor!

She says she's not a Buddhist, fascist, feminist, Moslem, pessimist, political, religious in any organized way, theocratic, or totalitarian. Like bicyclists, she's definitely "green", having rallied against despoilment of Iceland's highlands. She espouses individual, raw spirituality, makes use of Tarot symbolism, as did the Grateful Dead. Many an agnostic artist has toyed with totems and vestments, trappings of religion, as motifs to move toward some private rapture of communicating with otherworldly voices. "Cover Me" includes the lines, "I'm hunting down mysteries, I'm going to prove the impossible really exists...". "Hunter" hints, "Left me to complete the mission." You can trace all this back to KUKL's manifesto. There's still so much hate based dissimilarity, political and religious persecution in ethnic cleansings, inquisitions and purges, moreover, capitalistic atheism and cultural evil which worships money and power. The resultant market economy has similarly failed, creating a madness of few masters and legions of slaves. Russians under Communism developed a strong sense of dread, irony and pessimism. These are polar extremes. Icelanders, a nation who represent the World's highest percentage of middleclass, are levelheaded folk who reign in anyone who tilts too far politically. Björk seems to be on a motherly mission to restore balance to the World, not only by declaring independence for Tibet (for uttering "Tibet" twice she's practically banned from China). Relevantly, the ear is the *organ of both balance and listening*. She speaks of seeking a middle ground between artists who only sell 2 copies of their CDs, that she nevertheless finds interesting, and commercially successful bands who spend one month in a studio and 11 months a year promoting their latest offering. For Björk to talk of letting people settle into their own self discovered spirituality and find God their own way is a totally revolutionary idea whose time has come. It's profound, but profound doesn't sell. Institutions who profit from extremes, ignorance, and inertia don't want to hear it.

It's cowardly to expect artists to agree with your philosophies, echo your perspectives, kowtow to your gods. In fact, that's exactly what people who truly appreciate art admire, mind expanding differences and the personal growth they bring. He'd always hate adversity, love diversity. When someone doesn't share your devotion, does your faith crumble, or does this increase your resolve? Giving up at the slightest opposition or provocation would be poor faith indeed. Diversity is not only tolerable but necessary. Not everyone can aspire to the same occupation; round pegs don't fit into square holes. There aren't enough prescribed opportunities to go around. Those on a higher plane carve out their own niche.

Girls might want to be her but few would have wanted to pay dues she paid. Greedily eyeing a harvest, they forget this little red hen's 30 years of plowing, seeding, planting, and nurturing. Amusing to think people actually believe in overnight success. Distressing to know legions of also-rans put in lifetimes trying to make a legacy nobody ever discovers, resulting in sad retrospectives on dead artists, a Chet Baker, or dissolved teams, footnotes, one hit wonders to which you wonder what happened. Sweeping derivatives and wannabes aside, she established herself as the first great recording artist of a new Millennium. Pray it will be kinder to individual deliverance and democracy, which she most assuredly represents, than the last 4 recorded, a litany of wars and woeful failures provoked by power infatuated egotists.

If Björk's outpouring can be described as rigorously pedaling up a long hill, *Medulla* was conceived with crest in sight, cadence of hard breathing throbbing in her ears, a moment with nothing but open space ahead, glimpses of heaven, clicks of shifting gears, and an exhilarating rush of hold-your-breath descent! One could write an entire book on allusions to bicycling in her work—"It's not meant to be a struggle uphill", "Pedaling through the dark currents", "Stubborn trunks of these legs of mine"—not to ignore its role in her films. The pivotal scene where Selma is almost nailed by a speeding 20 ton truck is all too familiar. Why endanger her so? No wonder she swore off acting. One song of hers in particular, "In Our Hands", echoes Doppler shifts as vehicles inhumanely scream past while she drifts along in real time, humanlike. Hendrix would've covered it. Oh, yeah, she's definitely also a cycle chic, Little Bapsi all grown up after drifting around her island nation in 1990 on biwheeled holidays (how much she rode wasn't mentioned; to circle it on permanent shore roads is 1300+ miles or 2100+ km) partaking in folk songs with townsfolk, playing organs in small Lutheran chapels with religious tags yet to be revealed in current songs, long before all her clubbing and vodka binges or conversion to champagne. Back on tour bus with son Sindri, she was never without a bicycle with a child seat. Up bright and early, they'd venture forth, visit local sights, wander until they got lost. Was it wishful thinking or did he really wave to them one morning long before he knew who they were? Who knows?

Allusions to bicycling in all art forms abound, just like automotive references. If not such a onerous chore, he'd do a concordance on motoring music, only to show there was actually less of it than for bicycling. When you study these many references collectively they encompass a broad reach from antiestablishment polemics,

to slowdown pleasure to testosterone fueled competition, but always with a remarkable emphasis on effeminateness, naturally, since films and songs are generally written by arty folk. There really *is* no cycling stereotype any more than there could be a motoring stereotype. About the only difference is how carefree and casual practitioners become when they don't have to drive. On his compiled list, few as are distinctly cycling obsessive as Kraftwerk's "Aero Dynamik" [Kling Klang Radio Mix], which bristles with forward momentum, or "Tour de France", which sketches athletic respiring and synthesized pedaling and lists race stages. Their computers sing "Man/Machine", a blend of applied science and human effort exemplified by bicycling. Yet Buddhists speak of a machine/man, "yantra-manava", to describe Kalki, a perfect spiritual being. Does hint of some cosmic nexus centered on bicycling, no? It wasn't so much the obvious references that interested him, rather obscure, veiled ones, those people hardly wanted you to notice, veiled admission of enjoyment in a deviant pastime fraught with misgivings. To repeat lyrics of a múm song aptly named "Now there's that fear again", "on our bikes/hang onto the steer/float with the noise/float down stream/hang onto bike." Or Sugarcubes, "That girl on that bicycle/showed great interest/in all the motorcrashes in the neighbourhood/she look quite innocent." You buy a bike, fearfully set forth, fly in the face of fear, get marginalized and mistreated, notice everything, suddenly realize how militant you've become for benefit of downtrodden masses.

Bicyclists get where this goes. This is another sound of bicycling, what gets created after glimpsing concrete reality, living repetitive rhythms, and respiring huge volumes of fresh air. Breathe! One could't even begin to imagine what Björk's next climb would be like. Yodeling? Whatever, guaranteed it would astonish, perhaps a true siren's song, which, like brave Ulysses, you'll have to be lashed down with belay and bitt to hear. Be advised: Sirens call to draw close and devour. Then she gives birth to reverential stains of "Bath" on soundtrack for *Drawing Restraint 9*, more like dolphin squeals than human lyrics, submarine sonar that pings unknown entities seeking them out. Never ceases to amaze.

Such temptation—waiting a year for her overdue downtime, promotions of past releases, and slow development process—violently happy fans well understand what she means by "private tortures". They're so totally spoiled. Let them replay CDs and DVDs, buy better equipment to reproduce subtle nuances on those existing. It had been a long time since any recording artist made him anticipate what was to come, inspire hope, prepare in advance.

She grows tracks over several seasons, editing lyrics and exploring scores, exposing them to her inner circle for input, then perfecting by pulling in flourishes from everywhere. She thinks, "I'm lucky people are interested in someone as different as me," too humble to fathom her profound effect. *Medulla* took over a year to produce, preceded by a decade of deep thought, and a lifetime of reading American, British, Danish, French, Icelandic and Russian authors and poets. So restless a mind never hibernates. She's embarrassed to repeat herself, and records few covers; ones that she did as favors to friends, such as that Bond theme, she asked to have trashed, although Joni Mitchell's "Boho Dance" struck a personal chord. Anyway, to repeat experiments is to rudely wring truth from nature. As Madam in Shani Mootoo's novel *He Drown She in the Sea* says, "I am not stepping backward—I cannot go back to the way it used to be. Is time for a fresh start, in truth." She says, "I have lost my origins, and I don't want to find them again." The trouble with miracles is they're impossible to duplicate or surpass. Patience. Give her some time, give her some space, watch what happens.

Her *Volta* persona reminds one of Madam Liberty, Mother of Exiles, symbol of her adopted city, that mighty woman with a torch, whose flame is imprisoned lightning. There's much in *Volta* that probes American consumerism, energy waste, and global promise unrequited. Flaming graphics bring to mind Shlain's quote of a Chinese maxim, "Let us draw closer to the fire to see better what we are saying," which exalts goddess traits of holistic perception and inherent honesty of animated hands, one of her conspicuous traits. A libretto and torch are definitely something to grip while looking out to sea with a welcoming gaze and guarding the Hudson all the way to Sneden Landing below her Palisades home.

Much is made of her collaborations, as if she was unable to do it all herself, but they came after songs were already written. She always writes 80% of each number, then lets hand picked virtuosos dabble with its orchestrations, almost as if she feels her own incredible gifts were not enough to carry off each, whereas many performers falsely possess self-confidence when they aren't a small fraction as talented. Hers is the best of both worlds: Control your emotional vision yet be expanded, surprised, uplifted by gifted contributors. This is a new kind of group, one brought together for a single album, song or tour then disbanded, a temporary partnership, more like life, after all. He remained awestruck by this twisted birch starkly radiant against a dark tree line of mundane conventionality. Stephen Crane mused wistfully, "I have heard the sunset song of the birches, A white melody in the silence." Poet Laureate

Frost enthused, "Earth's the right place for love: I don't know where it's likely to go better. I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree, And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk Toward heaven,... One could do worse than be a swinger of birches."

Her venue choices have sometimes been playlist specific, picking opera houses or small theatres based upon how well songs will be reproduced, not upon how big an crowd she could draw, although she relents to some arena appearances, honored to introduce Olympics, for example. Greed draws the wrong crowd. She decides a concert's brevity, how she exposes herself, really more like a party among friends and people that delight her than a public performance. Why not? There's no obligation to offer everyone access to you, reach everyone, spread yourself thin. Tickets can be hard to come by. If an appearance sells out instantly, so what? Fans consider themselves lucky to have glimpsed her once. None lose interest. It's a way to preserve sanity in a business that devours people. As in all art, rarity escalates value, and her live performances are events you either catch once or go without forever.

Her success at gaining a following through mammalian magnetism drawing devotees in somnambulistic procession raises a host of worries. Who wants a following that includes wankers who want to hurt you? Why dare them to take you on? Who can handle so much adulation? As much as love surrounds, so does anger, danger, jealousy, mania. Restraining orders don't protect you. She's been impulsively intimate with her fans. One must never reveal vacation plans to an entire World. He feared for her. Even she squeaks out a few pained lines on finding it hard to cope and being overwhelmed by pressures of anticipation. After all she'd done, he adored every cut, particularly torch songs sometimes overlooked—"Come to Me", "Immature", "I Play Dead", "So Broken"—was never satisfied, wanted more. He could play her all day, always discovering another detail—her joyful trepidation at performing a new composition for the 1st time, high on a state of emergence, her endearingly odd habits of curtseying and pinching dress front during performances—but then he wouldn't get anything else done. Songs are just little vignettes of life, not life itself. Life is full, hopelessly intricate, an unfathomable, unsung struggle. For everyday people, days are often dull, spent at actual assembly plants and canneries. Do you want to know this whole novel? Do all its words matter? Must only the most adventuresome biographies be told? No. Peaceful lives are also worth examining; how did they remain placid amidst chaos and stagnation, yet remain engaged and hopeful? Feng Shui and power of positive thinking proponents claim your

future depends upon your current attitude. Good thoughts bring good results. Tell that to tsunami victims. Observant open mindedness without prejudice and willingness to act responsibly upon what you see: Now that's a plan that'll positively affect your future.

He pulled together her micro-biography simply by experiencing, listening, remembering, rather than consulting other sources, only to discover he was mostly correct and needed only to clean up a few details. It was clear reviewers all perceive her somewhat differently, dragging in their own baggage and superimposing their unsophisticated tastes. One scruffy Italian was totally dismissive. He could see how that can happen, especially if you don't pay close attention. Critics don't matter and seldom changed his opinion. He generally shunned source materials anyway, usually not to be trusted. Didn't mean this disrespectfully. Much more satisfying to experience a phenomenon directly: go somewhere, meet a person, really communicate. This is seldom possible, perhaps a good thing when people mesh poorly; it might become nothing more than one taking advantage of another, turn ugly. None of his brushes with celebrities went well, writers Asimov and Burgess, presidential candidates Humphrey and Kennedy, assorted public personages from captains of industry to mayors or senators. To cash in on fame, authors rush to tell celebrity life stories way before stars stop being stars. Who knows what twists and turns a career might take? "Starness" is solely a focal point in some movement already afloat, tip of an iceberg, and, in general, people thus elevated are merely one practitioner who inefficiently represents many in obscurity for a time. The concept that you can do anything consciously to become a star, like appear in a contest and parrot some previous act, is totally absurd and laughable. Granted, you can showcase your talents, but you cannot snatch a gold ring which doesn't exist. Stars are made by fans, who gravitate toward talent properly exposed. Most fans don't seek, though, rather consume what's presented, pick up whatever floats ashore. Great talent often goes unnoticed.

Quiet strength is the duct tape that holds society together. Takes until you're 40 just to absorb enough information in any area to be on top of what's happening. Those of his era had long since dropped out, so things were left to a generation of total incompetents, GenX'ers, posers, slackers, who gave up before they started. Complexity shuts you out. Simplicity appeals, but there's hardly any way to achieve it in a complex World. In his view, she was the first to break this generation's mold, put what she had into gear, set scientific advancements to spiritual use. Electronic gimmickry has side-effects, some bad, some good, some just attention grabbing.

Just because it's new, you shouldn't forget it's already part of your landscape. Like voice mail: You get to listen to other people darkly bumbling about in one-sided conversations. You get to listen to yourself, a little too weird. He sounded exactly like he felt, burnt out and dangerously deranged. Complexity deranges. Life didn't treat him all that badly, neither in so much misery that he deeply felt pain, nor so distant he could ignore it. With grief for his own buried loved ones, was acutely aware of another's grief. But you cannot spend all your time in cemeteries in tears. Must forge forward. The sheer volume of new input for ever greater challenges was a crushing weight few are willing to shoulder, but, if you're bored, it's only because you yourself are boring.

Strangest is to find an artist so on his own emotional wavelength in his timeframe. All passionate affairs must survive transitory disgust and repulsion. Only a soulmate could share his utter contempt for being ignored, objectified, and reduced to a statistic. Can ideal lovers reincarnate to meet in another life? Must incarnations coincide? Is it possible to recognize a partner 20 or 30 years your junior? For anyone under 30, this begets issue of pedophilia, but once someone gets to 50, there's no longer such developmental distance between them and a 30 year old. Ideal mates may be out of sync, fated to be maneuvered into liaisons they wouldn't have picked given all possibilities. They settle for whomever they meet in their 20's who's willing. No wonder there's so much divorce. Meeting someone ideal amidst seven billion others would be wonderful luck indeed. This impossibility is why humans have a huge capacity to open their hearts to practically everyone, gladly fall for whoever returns affection. Must be a survival adaptation. This makes them vulnerable to predators, who, in turn, leave them bitter and distrustful. A soulmate isn't necessarily someone you'd want to spend much time with anyway; you'd mix so furiously, like fire and fuel, and rage uncontrollably until totally spent, as in the outward hostility but implicit passion of adagio dancers—"Feuille Mortes". Are you quite prepared to go out in a blazing fireball of all-consuming ardor? "Dazed and confused for so long it's not true, wanted a woman, never bargained for you." He'd have to settle for that mad distant admiration of Syd Barrett's "Bike" lyrics, "You're the kind of girl who fits in my world/I'll give you anything, everything if you want things/I know a room of musical tunes/some rhyme, some ching, most of them are clockwork." Much later Björk would record "Frosti" and "Pagan Poetry", masterpieces with actual music boxes carrying their melodies. Real influence or surreal coincidence? Or what happens when people hunt down similar

mysteries? Opposite traits tend to add complexity, mystery and puzzlement to a pairing, drag out relationships for a decent interval, sometimes a lifetime. You might live to regret not having an impulsive fling. Compatibility requires communal work that strokes primitive needs, but foremost work. Being alike quickly leads to contempt, harsh words, trouble in paradise, as it did for gentle spirits in that Russian novella.

Russian novella? A novel notion in itself, since Rusksies always have so much to say, thousands of pages at a clip. Saying a lot comes from great injustice and too little agreement. People house-broken by a worthwhile vision practically work telepathically; small gestures and looks suffice. You only have to use words to expand beyond that which no longer satisfies, to feather your nest, to wonder about something unknown. Once all humans were tribe members and worshipped only their inbred tribe's totems. Then strife forced tribes together. Members had to expand mentally to adapt to new organizations: blend incoming rituals, choose the best stone tool methods, try new things. As nations and populations grew, traditions got increasingly complex. Empires formed, and enforced their imperial conventions. In immediate reaction and later institutionally sanctioned to restrain, an Age of Belief commenced. In postmodern times, hollow pomp and superstitious ritual had all but been exposed. Individuals had revolted and regained many rights. They allowed themselves to mull over many words unguided, then began to choose nature worship or symbolic totems again, except for religious recidivists, who simply gave up thinking and meekly returned to the fold as if slumbering sheep. Directionless, left to their own devices, people accept whatever immediately surrounds, become incredibly docile and simplistic, contribute nothing at all to community, forage furtively, hardly distinguish themselves from domestic livestock or great apes. Physical posturing of rap and rock performers more often resembles simians than something human. Existence of religion and science is practically the only evidence there's any difference between them, since language recognition has been proven among chimpanzees and dolphins.

Do you ever sing while alone? People are embarrassed to in public; it looks queer or theatrical for someone to break out in dance or song for no apparent reason; it attracts immediate attention, which can be put to use. Singing aloud controls breathing, clears sinuses, enhances memory, fights melancholy, humbles, uplifts mentally, much like bicycling, dance, religious ceremonies, sex, and yoga. The sheer physicality of performing music can keep

you fit, unless you spend all your time composing on computers. Everyone should sing, not just in church while muffled by a chorus or in shower when nobody's around, and dance often or just tap a foot, or hum or whistle. Otherwise the only music you get while bicycling are memories, since wearing headphones would multiply danger for both rider and those encountered. Bicyclists are moths dancing around a light at night, determined to do something inef-fable if unnoticed. What is it people seek that isn't already in front of them, that limms and nips at the purflings of consciousness? All these rivers of blood are full of psychic piranhas.

With a unique viewpoint and shoulder length hair, people may have once called him a hippie, although he preferred beatnik, a tide for which he was about 10 years too late, but that didn't deter him. Moved from place to place in city. Crashed around flats or in his Volkswagen. Read volumes on floors of bookstores, Barth, Herbert, London, Kerouac, Rousseau, Stapeldon, Thoreau, Tolkien, Vonnegut. Worked odd jobs, drove a cab for a while, even hung 10 on local surfing circuit. Ever camp overnight in a tractor trailer cab? Wake up with surf roaring at your feet? He was one of a few real exponents of a mythical Woodstock Nation, utopian ideals, Walden in practice, only there wasn't any pond in his despoiled city to live alongside and festivals were full of make-believe altruists living on trust funds or predators looking for fresh meat. False assumptions were a fad then, and fighting them off an occupation. Besides, he saw all those acts live in smaller venues up close, the Band, Chicago, Cream, Doors, Dylan, Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, Led Zeppelin, Springstein, the Who, even the retro Beach Boys. Played in a band—harmonica, bass, and rhythm guitar—a little piano and violin, as well, in his high school orchestra. Was keen to make the scene in Los Angeles or San Francisco, but only got to New York's Greenwich Village, St Mark's Place in Winter of 1968, when it had already become all head shops and psychedelic graffiti, and Dylan was already famous and had gone upstate.

These intervening 40 years represent a lifetime, more than many readers of this have been alive. You can't imagine how he felt amidst conflict in Viet Nam, Cuban Missile Crisis, Kent State massacre, and threats of nuclear annihilation, not that world is so much safer today. Why do you think he went to Grateful Dead concerts and Woodstock? Tuned out and turned on after becoming discontent with just about every institution, frustrated with civil and fiscal injustice and way people of color were being treated? He'd been bashed by reactionaries for being different, beaten by batons, bruised by rubber bullets, and sprayed by water cannons.

John and Yoko were staging peace happenings for a reason. War-mongers still wage battles that nobody wants. None of the underlying issues have changed, merely a phony veneer of freedom. Really, with all these laws, aren't you only free to do what's responsible?

After Altamont, the power of music for peace seemed derailed forever. Having gotten pretty good, he practically gave up on it through those dark day of banal pop, derivatives, disco, hair bands, inarticulate rap, metal, urban angst, only to occasionally reassess scene and find a few carrying on: Grateful Dead, Kate Bush, Neil Young, Peter Gabriel, Pink Floyd, and always returning to touchstone Jimi Hendrix, who died so young. As a messenger for peace and understanding, Björk outdoes them all. Because she floats above a virtual sea of pop artists, oceans of artists in other categories, she deserves something like a Nobel Prize, only those who they give those things to lately are beneath her, even if she'd rather sink her pirate ship to the bottom hugging her anchor.

Was known for taking off on road trips with strangers. One frigid Winter evening, fearlessly or foolishly, took back roads to visit freak friends in the Delaware Valley. Air cooled bugs weren't famous for their climate control. Had to stop frequently for coffee in backwater diners full of hunters with shotguns. Frightful comments and real threats were made. Always felt he had to actually try things to comprehend what was necessary to excel at it, whether hard living on road, music, sports, or working in factories where you had to brave low-lives and OSHA violations. Anyone with an average intellect and willingness to take chances and detailed notes could become famous in those days explaining counter-culture or exposing corruption. Stars are those who emerge out of a total immersion in what's happening, not those who escape in fear and take up residence in isolated boonies.

Was very much into art of all types. Did many drawings, painted a few landscapes and portraits, some of which sold, but mostly took photographs. Eccentrically, he managed to drag around a small darkroom and develop his own b/w pictures in darkened bathrooms at night. Showed them at galleries and special library events. Eventually took over 25,000 photographs, most of which were published in limited printings, some in national magazines, some on-line. There was nothing much special about his technique, except it was clean, informative, and, people often said, oddly candid, just like his writing. Made people look like they really did, not how they'd wished they'd look, so never made much money. People are vain. His emotional x-rays were generally cherished more by daughters, sons or spouses, who intimately knew dark

sides his snapshots revealed. Preferred natural still-life and odd scenes he'd come across, light reflected in peculiar ways, strong compositional or thematic elements including entropic decay, x-rays of small realities. Did a whole series on roadkill in advanced dissolution, reduced to flatness, like a 2D print. "Trampled Underfoot", Led Zep's theme for cagers, seemed an ideal choice for a multimedia presentation of them. In those days all images had subtext, before boring industrial photography took over with group shots of coworkers and dignitaries at honoree luncheons. Served him right; most artists dismiss subtext, often have no idea what guides their creativity, just relent to mirror whatever's happening.

Once looked at and intently examined all and everyone as a possible model, disrobed women with his eyes, but it became a drudgery to be avoided. People don't know how repulsive things can get, how a sloppy mess is offensive to someone actually studying, in itself incentive to stay in shape or straighten up after yourself. As an amateur horticulturist, planted his small yard with over 100 species for sensual amusement of family, friends and passersby alike: flowers, fragrances, shadows and textures. People should think not in terms of simply pleasing themselves, but how an entire neighborhood is brightened by annuals in window boxes, generous lawns, meadows, shrubs, small borders, stately lines of trees, or well kept farm stands along country lanes that greet you with a promise of colorful fruit and naïve sociability. In films and photographs, you can capture beauty or mess, lay it bare, get people to take action. Despite known manmade effects and potential for misinterpretation, seeing is believing. Lens is a tool of forensic science and public policy. Caught on tape is solid evidence; someone's say-so could be lies, and often is. After he did a series on dumps and industrial abuses, a friend used it in an award winning multimedia production. Subversive? Rust never rests, and to ignore it is to let all decay and die. Acts that increase beauty and strength are to be emulated and spread.

The ability to create—art, dance, music and texts, among other things—has been exponentially increased by inherent expert systems within computer based tools: communication channels, libraries, sound clips, support groups, vast plethora of examples. When painters had to mix their own colors from scratch, that is, collect albumen, oils, oxidation, rust, soot and really mix paints based on the advice of someone they had to journey months to visit, who had time to actually paint? They got very little done over a lifetime. Give artists inspiration, incentive, make it easy, and, of course, more will be produced. Details deepen abyss of what's

unfathomable. An artist makes ever greater demands on admirers. Stockhausen created one piece which suggests believers spend 4 days beforehand fasting without sleep to truly appreciate. A work-week of sleep deprivation? Wouldn't anything sound good then? Brilliant, but too extreme for his tastes. What's there to gain? Obsessive writers include too much, produce indigestible works. Performers don't know when to get off. Where's it all heading?

Should musicians be less interested in making a difficult instrument do what they want it to, demonstrating virtuosity that separates them further from audience, than composing songs that psychologically reach listeners, creating harmony? Musicianship exists in progressive tiers: master, perform, solo, orchestrate, compose. A gifted few push this envelope, compose for instruments newly developed, as the clarinet in Mozart's case and Reactable synthesizer in Björk's, in such a way it seemed this instrument was invented to play one's compositions, not the other way around. Along with Meredith Monk, Björk has expanded what works in vocalizations while joining Matmos and múm and others who use a vast array of sounds found or invented. "What happens if I rattle chunks of metal in a porcelain tub?" Creaky floors, computer glitch beats, dripping fluids, liposuction, lockset actions, ripped paper, sonorities of a nonnative language all become sources to consider. No longer interesting for just existing, computer music virtuosos have emerged to dominate this practically limitless frontier. Someone said that in one song from album *I care because you do*, Aphex Twin represented that high pitch squeal asthmatics hear if overdosed on bronchodilators, or perhaps tweakers hear when too intoxicated. This approach certainly obscures border between art and biology, living and science. Isn't listening to the tumult of everyday existence as if music just like embracing life?

Carving a small individual niche, Björk has never been out to monopolize your time, although she did so very effectively on him. She represents everything musical above ground that he had missed wasting time working for a living in his underground bunker. At least here was someone exemplary he could turn to, even if not all threads were worth investigating. He himself witnessed a pot stoned Woodstock nation, then coke snorted Disco delinquents. Pervy London nightlife and raves on Ecstasy weren't unique. But currents in synthetic sound—techno, trance—and a revival of folk in the form of emo had taken him by surprise, and she was a terrific signpost, a veritable expressway with many exits nicely laid out.

As an avocation, music has enormous appeal. Just settle in, shoot out anything at all, and validate none of your actions.

Nobody expects you not to cause loss, pain, suffering or even be good at what you do. Screeching weasels sell CDs and sit back. Consequences are few. Schedules are all self imposed. People who make durable goods envy this autonomy. But those who succeed are found in about a 1:1,000,000 ratio. There are that many wannabes, and at least a quarter of a million bands already under contract. To be truly special amongst that throng is all the more impressive. As the Rolling Stones realized, you can't always be partying and rocking, sometimes have to get serious, sing a heartfelt ballad, or you miss chances to expand your markets. Must claw up charts, compete for every record and ticket buyer, endure bad deals. It's a jungle, but not a battlefield, only as intense as you make it.

You can't be caring, sensitive, or somehow into art, beauty, or truth without having your masculinity questioned. Sure, he enjoyed arias from certain operas, arts of every type, baseball, documentaries, exceptional ballet, football, gardening, museums; too bad idiots think they're only treats for twinkle toes. He wore spandex, and would always support people's rights to do whatever they like as long as they didn't drag him down with them. Just because you walk discretely on wild side once and awhile doesn't make you a burden to society, degenerate, misguided loser holding back progress. Everyone is born curious. With a surname like Labann, got teased with its similarity to female genitalia, and often got called a pussy. At his best he was broad shouldered, lean, tall and trim, yet never really muscular, never a cultivated 6-pack set of abs and rocky sinuosity, but lately it had all become toneless blob. Funny how mind denies dysmorphia. Yet he was decidedly and resolutely hetero, no interests otherwise, not that he wasn't offered dozens of opportunities. One must recognize that for everyone there exists an emotional fullness that's all inclusive. If you're at all attractive, you get hit on, even if you don't know how to dance. Men are hairy, have parts that don't match, tabs instead of slots, and smell bad. What in the answer, "No," didn't they get? Attitudes in the gay community had always been to increase participation through publicity and treat sex with you as a right. Everywhere else individuals are allowed to pick their own partners, not have sexual acts forced upon them, rape. Back off. Promiscuity is an end run.

The arts attract gays because it's an occupation where they don't bother judging fairies and frauds because income is marginal, unless, however unlikely, they become massive stars. They'll practically crucify a famous, rich pedophile, like pop star Micky Jerkson. Please! What were these parents thinking to let kids slumber party with Jerkso, great box office draw but World's worst babysitter?

Big payday down the road? Takes two to tango? Creativity, independence, perversion and subversion cross paths with historic threads back to Baudelaire, de Sade, Sappho and others forced to deal with conventionalists, dictators, enforcers and enslavers. An idiotic website lists allegedly gay recording artists in hopes of exposing this conspiracy of trying to turn all youth gay by listening to their songs. Did webmaster ever stop to consider this only promotes this music all the more? Just a few years ago, getting a book banned in Boston was best way to increase sales.

Homophobes want to bundle lesbos and queers into a category to be ignored or subdued, but will buy rock music by groups populated by gays based not on sexual preference but sound. Otherwise, they brand artists as malcontents, expel with them with extreme prejudice, let them drown in their own puke, or starve. There's a glut of art, so much, in fact, that consumers of it can be extremely selective, become hypercritical, exclude or latch onto any of countless others at will. That is, until an artist comes across with such sublime sensitivity to totally connect with whatever following she gathers. Björk reminded him of the phrase, "the Eternal Feminine draws us heavenward," from Mahler's 8th, "Symphony of a Thousand", a work literally scored for that many—a chorus of eight hundred fifty including three hundred fifty children, an orchestra of one hundred seventy-five musicians, an organist, and sundry soloists—remarkable for its dignity and humanity. Like Alma Mahler, she's a muse the likes of which only come along once in an age. Playful cherubs transcend eroticism or sexual orientation.

It's a logical fallacy to discount an idea based on character of whoever expressed it. Oscar Wilde had a lot of genius things to say, although he was an unabashed fairy. Da Vinci was indicted for homosexuality, although acquitted, and he invented automobile. Imagine, America's vibrant economy owes a debt to a suspected gay. They whisper about Cassady and Kerouac, on the road, at 20¢ a gallon, expanding an automotive empire through wanderlust on multiples levels. Homo sex can be clever or cowardly. Hetero is always risky, pregnancy and all, but not strictly feminine on masculine, rainbow of latent tendencies included. With Bi, danger surrounds, like Def-con 5, red alert; nobody but brainless or truly brave boys and girls can deal with it. Pansexual? Who cares? Stereotypes are stupid. He camped out, did construction work, drove tractor trailers, fished, fixed cars, hunted, played hockey, raced around, ran chainsaws, replaced engines, rumbled in tussles, was as macho as they come, Mr. Brook&Field. But that doesn't mean he couldn't be thrilled by painting exhibitions, get mushy over

Swan Lake, talk for hours about great Van Gogh or nobody Karl Neumann (brought up gratuitously since he owned a Neumann seascape), or sculptor pal Gerola, if there was anyone to listen. Being a beast of burden while wife shopped showed dignified self discipline. Offering hints on what underwear she should buy could be erogenous foreplay. Where's the mantropy in that? Why can't heterosexual men enjoy each others' company or products of labors or, for that matter, works of homosexuals or women? Sexual bigotry? Clearly, many bible thumpers without gaydar enjoy certain performers without knowing their bedtime stories, such as sermons delivered by some unexposed pedophile.

Some gals or girlishly handsome men, *metrosexuals* is the politically correct term, don't like it when he-brutes congregate and agree, because when men work together they can be cruel, powerful, smart and strong. Men never felt threatened by women huddling and scheming, because, no matter what, they presumed they could handle whatever ladies dream up, pay bills, or put their foot down. This was before Madonna made more money than God. "Real" men, Nietzsche's uebermensch, are garbage carriers, gardeners, handymen, mechanics or warriors who do heavy lifting, fix cars, kill spiders, muck out royal stables, or together build empires. Like Nietzsche, they never wonder why they lust for power. Identifying such motivations as inadequate is never enough, you must also recommend a viable alternative. Men often chew on silence, kill time, talk for hours among themselves about nothing, but so can anyone. Silent aloof martyrs is a role society expects of men, as if a pressure valve. Who wants that role? What if they can't always agree? A few men fit into a new category, uebersexuals, those who are so comfortable with their masculinity they can freely engage in hitherto female roles, house husbands, and pastimes, handiwork, without shame. Cooking, knitting, sewing, and so forth are asexual activities. Some of the best chefs are men. Fisherman constantly sew nets. Automation puts men and women alongside one another on assembly lines.

Those who accuse and protest the most are usually themselves latent homophiles. Get over it. Good Book says, "Judge not that you be judged." Does orientation matter? Can it be chosen or is it biologically innate? Al looked for uniqueness in people, who broke their shackles of conformity, did whatever they're capable of, as an artist or whatever they're into. A forthright industrialist, successful artist, or tidy housekeeper are all roles to admire equally. Avocations and limitations are points of departure, beginning rules in a game called life that you make up as you go along. Unique people

make up new games in which you can either pass or play. If you always pass, you lose. Be thankful a few do take chances, because they're the cutting edge, driving force, forward impulse behind all progress and prosperity. A few pass into 5th dimensionality, but the masses seldom recognize such departures and tend to either reject or simply eradicate unconventionality.

Considered staying in a hippie commune once, but never did. Got diverted by an invisible signpost that read "Dead End". A commune, or collective, as they now seemed to be called, does provide a good vantage point to learn how to behave in a microcosm, and, once mastered, works in cities, throughout countries, wherever you are around globe—well, not so much their drugs and nudity. Communists used to send people to a commune or kibbutz, where those in high places were knocked down several rungs on social ladder to learn a little humility and what simple folks did as a daily routine. Iceland's Prime Minister waits in shopping lines with everyone else. Then, again, what of Jonestown and Waco? Isolation among extreme believers can be just as dangerous as hanging with gangsters. People need both contact and privacy, to limit others intruding on either, yet welcome others to interact gracefully. Some people should never be seen naked, too revolting, yet everyone must stand naked sometimes.

Humans are social mammals, and put great stock on how other humans play their games. They make snap judgements based on etiquette, when the worst offenders sometimes make the finest gestures. The devil incarnate has wonderful manners, it's said. Instead of watching for how someone holds a door or a teacup, read body language and faces, search for carefree openness. Honest faces instantly show disappointment or elation. Honest suckers are easy to bilk. Beware of tells, as in poker, that betray anxiety and craving. Find out their track record for humanitarian acts. Since doing so constitutes extra effort and doesn't lead to definitive results, a simpler strategy is to avoid people altogether, hermit style, which is what most people do, unfortunately. For social creatures to do so totally is impractical, though, so some furious effort is unavoidable. One might argue that putting in this effort acquires skill for it, leads to success, and is therefore worth it. Conversely, it makes enemies and puts you in harm's way. He preferred honesty, the best way to crush ice, lessen distance, and lose bigotry. Only in a microcosm can you control factors that affect safety. He was reconsidering that commune idea. But being plunged into vortex of unknown, although stressful, sometimes thrills.

You can't handle it; you can't hide from it. You can only hang onto a balance that works for you.

A commune need not be totally separate from society, although typical examples were remote farms with few amenities, thus self-inflicting stress which predestines failure from the get-go. Self-subsistence was doctrinaire, being off any grid, growing your own organic food and such, not relying on anything adulterated by society. Instead he dreamt of an stone frat house that attracted artists, writers, thinkers, all looking for inspiration and opportunities to bounce ideas off gifted others, some communal halfway home with a package store and supermarket nearby. In this heaven on earth, chances for direct contact with the best and brightest were elevated but not guaranteed. It would be anarchy. What would happen is one aggressive nerd with nothing new to say would dominate, approval would flow in that direction, build into an untenable trend, and innocents would be slaughtered, as usual. Isolation can be an idea factory, but living in society potentially spreads good will quicker. Wouldn't it be wise to isolate that one dictator, nerd, other failure, or sex offender who spreads bad will? Prisons are already full. Separating whiny losers from hard working achievers would keep motivation among the successful high or, conceivably, burn them out faster. Society could use organized camps where refugees from trying to make it under cruelty of workaday oppression could drop out yet not die. If you didn't like life in the fast lane, you could retreat to a farm. Simplicity appeals, surely. Well meaning attempts have already proven to turn into havens for drug addicts and gangsters. Government subsidizes Indian reservations, just jails without walls. Society doesn't offer this choice, does levy taxes on everyone despite their ability to pay, so despair and urban blight spread. Welfare dole could be replaced with tax relief, but isn't. Nothing, it's said, can inhibit man's longing to commune with God. Powerless, man searches for it in nature, in which divinity seems manifest, but only as an echo. Communion with God can only be found by embracing humanity with all its flaws, not by running away.

Count how many successful city dwellers grew up on farms and never went back. Clean air, physicality and straightforward thinking steadies mind to handle with aplomb complexities of government, industry, science, or urbanity. City kids only learn to avoid drive-by shootings, dope pushers, and prostitutes, if they're lucky, manage barely to hang on, neurotically become excessively fearful, then can't wait to get out. What an ironic crossover! Gentle folks would escape into country rather than brave confrontation

with teeming urban masses. World is becoming far too congested for running away. There's nowhere left to run. People are seldom satisfied with places anyway, seem compelled to change locations lest resources deplete and toxins build, a hugger instinct, a useless vestige considering everywhere is now polluted. Clean up where you are. You can hardly go anywhere and not run into some frightened resident who's ready to lash out. Someone bad has preceded you, spoilt any chance of graceful transaction. To avoid backlash you can only be honest, placid, respectful and hope for the best. People can no longer choose to withdraw to outskirts, as did Thoreau. Instead, labels separate everyone: conservative, feminist, homosexual, iconoclast, ways to slide into antisocial cocoons or plastic bubbles within which individuals don't have to interrelate, get along or serve. What a cop-out!

He concocted an elaborate fantasy about partners with affairs that connect and collapse naturally. It's terribly difficult to maintain steady relationships. The species could use some sophisticated attitudes about how to stay together. Monogamy is good for physical health, but it sure puts a strain on mental health. Partners need advice on how to tolerate each other up close, when all cosmetics and glows have worn off and neither is in the mood. Problem is women ration out sex as a reward for exclusive relations and particular financial or material performance, otherwise known as *sexual bargaining*. A male's sex drive is so strong that women succeed in this transparent game. Males evolved by choice from caveman to emo because of it. Seems women would prefer female lovers for their sensitivity, but tolerate brutes who can evict spiders and fix plumbing. Then there's their curiosity over a certain erector crane they lack that rectors only use with boys. Do men respect women who have a genuine lust for sex? Generally, no. Researchers identify only about 17% of females in this category, although true nymphomania is relatively rare. Birth control and contraceptives took a lot of horror out of meeting new people and satisfying urges. Occasional ejaculation is a necessity for male prostrate health. They've also come to realize that pregnancy helps avoid ovarian cancer later in life. Until recently, women had to be terribly careful to avoid unwanted pregnancy and its anatomical, emotional, and fiscal risks, as well as societal stigma of conceiving out of wedlock. Bono sang, "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle, when tryin' to throw your arms around the world." Heartless men have it easier, can simply walk away, stick women with consequences if they can evade paternity suits, ever harder with blood typing and DNA profiling. Through communication and practice, both parties can

learn to pleasure each other and reach orgasm without the prerequisite seminal exchange.

Touch is a fine sense, how you perceived before all other senses, what you relied on as an infant. It brings relief, dispels doubts, fortifies observations, proves things are as advertised, as Saint Thomas could afterward attest. They say, "Seeing is believing," but any conjurer can fool your sense of sight. Some tactile experiences are more sensational than almost anything else can be. It's unquestionably as Peter Gabriel bellows, "Nothing seems to please/I need contact." Björk once sang, "Humans are the only drug." A human basically connects to anyone; exclusivity with a matchless mate is a high ideal rarely realized, and how would you know without trying lesser comforts? Those who act without assistance are incompetent. You can't create or procreate alone. Nobody is totally self sufficient. Everyone must rely on others—such as dentists, doctors and specialists—to fulfill needs you can't yourself. Only those who work together with amenable coconspirators accomplish anything. Said Stockhausen, "Ponder the fact that a microscopic element, an incorporeal sperm, is able to fertilize another human being, to generate a new complex being who contains a plentiful genetic inheritance. This mystery is also valid for the musical genetics." Collaborating well is a artform in itself.

Nothing's as sexy as suggestion. It can be totally hot. Smear lipstick around a pouty mouth makes you wonder what that mouth has been doing. Flirtation where both parties are intensely eager wonderfully qualifies. During one of his long parking lot waits saw a short show revue. Long legs in tight shorts, she bent in half to get something from back of car. Took too many moments moving all that junk in her trunk around, as if on purpose, just self-conscious enough to quit after drawing a lot of stares. Erections, whether clitoris, nipples or penis, are mostly psychological, it seems. While you squirm in titillation, you should consider just how many more mouths must be fed if people don't curb their cravings. Mankind gleefully heeded biblical advice to be fruitful and multiply, so much so there's nowhere left on Earth that isn't already being depleted, fished out, struggling to sustain man's needs. Anyway, sex is an overrated experience driven by hormones and fraught with consequences, more appealing when denied than after being gratified. You can listen to weird sirens and depressed revulsion may dehornify you, but there'll always be clear, supple skin on a few nearly ideal physiques, women with slim waists and trim glutes yet pendulous breasts, men with contoured biceps, pie-shaped torsos, and rippling abs, to excite whoever is attracted by such twisted

balloons of flesh as clowns make to amuse juveniles. Bigger boobs attract from a distance, but small bosoms amply please when close enough to touch.

Sex for hire is about what you pay for a smattering of performances by an artist on CD or DVD. Only with the later you can dissect another's ephemeral mental state over and over: far better than a momentary squirt. He did a lot of work wired to music, but this approach fell apart and productivity lapsed when what was available became too boring. Good music distracts from important tasks too much. Ordinary music focuses mind for steady output and makes onerous tasks less burdensome. Does such music make for a society built to be destroyed? Is it an intrinsic pattern on an auditory fabric, or just a stain? Like medicine, music can heal or kill. A CD should cost more, considering its impact, but distributors get what market will bear. Books are even cheaper, and web pages practically free. Puts a physical moment much higher than an emotional or intellectual one on most people's value scale.

People desire to stroke, tingle, vibrate; savor a flush, rush, transcendence; stand their hair on end. He'd had a bellyful of those kicks. Men ought to be more in control of themselves, and women more modest. Both would be better off doing what's culturally correct than seeking instinctual, momentary, touchy-feely conquests. Of course, creating civilization is impossible without a huge approval network, so intimacy serves as a pleasant diversion, may even lead to a union of minds. A shapely butt on a saddle ahead is pleasurable and sexy during a long, featureless stretch. Soon scenery teases your eye away from that which you can't have anyway.

Is body piercing a way to feel minimally closer to this World or reach metaphysically beyond confines of body? It's been used both ways, the former by skin popping junkies, latter by pre-Colombian Americans. One might debate whether only the most piously humble would allow someone to pinch and pierce steel through flesh and skin to inflict pain that bring visions, or it's simply reactivating a neglected sense of touch in sadomasochistic delight? With a church just a few miles from home, he'd sometimes dress with spandex under his suit, drive to church, then go home, strip outer layer, nicely fold, jump on bike and race to ride start. Felt sensuous and somewhat sacrilegious, as if wearing latex or leather underwear. Similarly, some women wore string bikinis and thongs suggestively visible under modest Sunday attire. They're not just praying to meet mates but promoting themselves, as well.

During 19th Century, German nobles prided themselves in manly facial scars earned while fencing in ritualistic affairs

of honor. For the most part, people body-wax, clip, dye, implant, pluck, shave, snip, sew and tattoo without the least thought of piety. Unless piercing is performed in a context of ceremony, humiliation or submission, it merely serves ego. You'd have to question a religion that expects its congregation to undergo such torture. Road rash and tattoos are different, yet both reasons to brag. Recreational piercing and tattooing are for people with more than enough time on their hands, not enough grace to think beyond themselves, and remorse over both. Women with major tattoos do seem hotter, pervier, and way more dangerous. They make you wonder just how stoned they must've gotten to act that spontaneously, and how impulsive they might get with you whether or not you're ready for it. Battle scars imply hardened strength.

His own sincere disfigurements were earned while ensuring the health and shelter of familiars. He wasn't looking for injuries, and neat, practically painless piercing proved nothing. A bullet hole, flap of skin ripped by a machine, hand pierced by nail, lance into your side, lip lump and whatnot healed over: these are the sort of body adornments you know weren't elective, rather endured out of enthusiasm, love or sacrifice. Yet few out of revulsion would caress or kiss such honorable wounds. Not all scars are external either, as this text attests. If you don't learn to accept natural shortcomings, you miss too many chances to be a part of what's happening. Broken backs and embattled minds are normal, lack thereof abnormal. Bright and healthy are practically freakish.

The sun crawled up, screen became flooded with obscuring glare, and this epiphany had past. He closed the blinds, and turned from writing copy into a reverie.

The archetype of all beauty is a smiling mother feeding and pampering you when you're most vulnerable. Nothing comes close to matching that connection with an external agent creating sheer contentment and joy and when you need it most. Spirituality is right brain and, thus, sought best through women. People endlessly seek substitutes, cajoling, perverting whatever or whomever they need to. Capitalism is exactly about apple pie and mom, Oedipally. Careers and marriages that fulfill this urge fail, because you can never retrieve feeling of being cherished, rather you yourself have to learn to cherish, not things, but being, life in all its forms. The lonelier people are, the more likely they'll look in odd places for momentary bliss, natural beauty, numinous enlightenment. They'll scale mountains or travel forever, but they'll never find it, as he could attest, having fled 50 different jobs, scuttled along ocean floor, stood on mountaintops, and visited 2 continents. They look

outward for something that only exists inward. Those who suffer don't want commiseration, they want to stop suffering. Seeking inspiration, justification or relationships doesn't offer relief. You must find answers within, as beliefs or myths internalized, not look elsewhere. It's spiritual to ask why World is how it is, dare to question mysteries, find your own answers. It's your primary duty to yourself, above your obligations to humanity. You can neither deny your curious doubts nor stifle your finest talents. "To shut yourself up would be the hugest crime of them all."

This starts a spark to find answers alone, as if a slim sliver of intellect was enough to answer what all of mankind could never collectively do. They repeat, "We are smarter together." But all advances in art, ethics, science, and technology began with sole individuals who reacted to or rose above the turmoil of billions of other erroneous earthlings. They found a secret by attenuating their mind to something beyond mere earning and spending, eating and pooping, enjoying holidays by the sea, and riding roller coasters only to be splashed in their faces by someone else's germy vomit, a complete sensational riot but not very pleasant. Great interactions between movers and shakers are peak experiences. Some people are on a permanent holiday, but those few who make change never relax. Their inner dialogue drives and hounds them always.

Light sparkles meaningfully on lakes, distant tinsel guarded by reflections of a sable treeline. Light waves get perceived first. Sound lags, then, in order, touch, smell, taste. Each pulse of sensation arrives in waves: ebbs and flows, shudders of ecstasy, throbs of pain. People know their world through signs and symbols rather than words. Casual observations become harbingers and portents, something worth examining if, in fact, they've already drawn your attention. Your spirit always tries to guide your alert mind. Pain and pleasure are equally interesting, for some inseparable. Surrounded by potential impulses, many choose to ignore them, to escape on apathy or chemical ecstasy, to project an assumed strength in insensitivity, to stifle any emotions they evoke, when the real courage is to endure each sensation despite its intensity, yield to sensuality to suffer its consequences. If not to use, why should humans have senses anyway? Athletes build muscles, why not refine perceptual skills?

What you let in means so much. Instead of strengthening, excessive stimulation numbs, sometimes permanently. Repeated exposure to noise over 100 decibels causes cumulative irreparable hearing loss. Gluttony spoils taste. Cesspool men grow immune to the smell. Enduring bright flashes, reading small print, or staring

directly at sun causes blindness. Perverts need pain to feel anything. Like pumping iron, there's an optimal amount of perceptual exercise. Volumes can be loud if the quality of the music is very good and pure; conversely, you can sit still and listen for distant or soft sounds. You can closely observe the effects of colors on people's psyche or your own. You can eat reverently, slowly, smell before and taste every bite. You build through gentler repetition, not lifting huge weights all at once.

Heightening senses is quite easy through any of several psychotropic drugs, but he meant to do so naturally by simply using them—by really hearing, looking, smelling, touching—form clear, distinct impressions, not settle for some drug dimmed memory. Doctors prescribe this as a treatment for Alzheimers. You can become extremely philosophical in last 25 miles of your century ride, honestly respect and really notice your environment. Endorphins speak to you. But then it's time to take a break.

You'll see the flash that ends all life well before you hear or feel it. When you hear thunder, you know you yet live, have time to react, hold a chance to redeem yourself, that is, if you can figure out what frames a redemptive act. Sound can be a friend, a savior, a tonic. Much of what's in a *heart* is *heard*. Sight may be the prominent sense, but it all becomes a fog, even the most fantastic vignettes. Scenery excites when new, dulls when familiar. He sought something novel each time past fixed points: another angle of roofline, a different gargoyle on a church, a unique perspective. Going somewhere new brought sights in a rapid trickle of shapes at varying distances later forgotten or partially recalled. Odors and vibrations persist long after sketches and visions disappear.

Smells and tastes of atrocity are never a comfort, ashes and creosote of burnt offerings. Singer/songsmith Bono compared the best lyrics not to poems but smells of deep, life changing events, intensely pure, like a newborn baby's head. Aromas of food pegged themselves culturally by cuisine, Chinese stir fry, English muffins, French pastry, Italian olive oil, and often brought back longings to be again with lost loved ones, chicken soup simmering, gravy or stuffed peppers stewing, roasting fowl. Sometimes this evoked distinct memories, often painful. Pine tar recalled lonely walks on wooded trails in oppressive Summer heat. Leaves gave off a crisp acidity, papery, like composition folios forced upon him after lively pungency of fishing for black chain pickerel and German carp along musky banks, and roving through bogs of skunk cabbages on humid vacation days. Smells arrived stealthily, and crawled into consciousness. Ketones of spoiling fruits fermenting in early Fall

might come from farms or orchards tucked just out of sight, far enough from interstates to stay lush and viable. Tastes were muddled by similar foods being equally palatable but differing in effect once ingested, some causing heartburn or stomachaches or worse. Taste was deadened by mouth stuffing and smoking, why cooks seek ever spicier recipes to stimulate jaded nerve endings. Sound was to be trusted, but sight, smell, taste and touch were not. Asked to compare iris blooms with another scent, he couldn't connect it with concord grapes, the correct answer. There's a dysfunctional blind spot in everyone's eyes where macular lutea accepts color input instead of shape; because of this you have to shift your eyes to scan letters while reading, whereas a robotic eye simply takes in entire page at once. People neglect their training of more primitive senses because that involves intimacy, getting close to sources. Nobody wants to expose themselves to so much danger.

Smell was a useful sense, though. Surely, if fish smells at all of ammonia it's not to be eaten. Consider anyone a genius who can feel a piece of fruit, smell it, and tell it's delectable before peeling. Almost everyone buys fruit by its unblemished, unripe skin, no indication of its delectability. There are cling peaches as hard as nectarines and tart as unripe cherries. Then there are freestone Georgians exquisitely ripe yielding demurely to a touch. Bananas go along with bicyclists; for some, their firmness and shape remind them of hidden gratification. Routes they take are strewn with peels. Considering you're supposed to eat 5 servings of fruit a day, you'd think people would take courses on fruit, insist it be taught in schools. Nobody wants to study something so practical, get closely acquainted with earthy phenomena. A ripe pear at room temperature dripping with juice down to your elbow was also a tactile pleasure. Butchering goats and sheep stinks of gore. He could identify farm or zoo animals by their scat: bear, chicken, cow, dog, elephant, horse, pig, each distinctly different. Cow pastures were neither kennels nor sties. Happily, billions do not know the stench of burnt flesh and spilled guts, yet. Warfare today is conducted by mercenaries and proxies or by presses on buttons leagues out of reach by enemies. Any healthy adult not sexually satisfied should not be left in charge of nuclear triggers. Robots probe outer space. Machines do a man's duty. Automatic is usually merciless.

If you love how your date still smells after sweaty and tired, repeat. Or if they're as interesting to talk to as have sex with, cling. If you're lucky enough to find someone real, someone who makes you sparkle, it's permissible to obsess over her/him, but keep it to yourself. These are friendships worth diving into, sensory spring-

boards into pools of delight, although it could all be fiction, men who take pheromones to increase a woman's lust. Pedaling through with nostrils clear from heavy breathing, he could often pick up a runner's scent, a wake of fishy privates, musty armpits, spicy vegetables, soapy perfumes. Nothing yet so pleased him; worried some day one might and screw up his life. Concealing your true scent might deny you true happiness. Then again, not doing so might dredge up your worst nightmares. Ken Kesey suggested there was "no past tense of love". Yet he'd fallen out of love (or was it lust?) dozens of times with both intimates and otherworldly entities who just smelled wrong.

Anticipation delights. The sizzle of steak pleases. Having is always a let down. All achievement as an adult was bittersweet, tinged with regret and yearning. Conquests are paid for by death and pain. Could there be another way? Why do birds sing? To allure, for sure, amidst the ultimate opulence of clean open space, nothing: a blank ruleless tablet to worship, boundless vistas, neutral portent of the value zero, vanishing point on a distant horizon. It's why madmen are drawn to deserts, lifeless tracts of barren waste, with scant hope of sanctuary. This is why sober minds are seduced by Montana's big sky over land stretching beyond perception, edging infinity, which separates them from God. Despite cold, hunger, predators, rain, birds sing in the dawn because free, unfettered, exploration is endless, potential limitless. Their cheerful chorus, as day brightens, attracts and gladdens all who hear it.

Possibilities are a cause to rejoice, joyful noise of anticipation, hungry for accomplishment, love, or supper. Who knows what a blank page brings? Disrupt all traditions? Plot insurrection? Realign patterns of thinking? Speak heresies to be thrown on a fire? Humans dance and sing for sustenance, grumble and rest when satiated. Having done something, everyone hopes to do more. Yet past is immutable, future unwritten. Arrange each day's activities and just do them. Some call this time management, structuring moments to be most effective, which implies seeking goals. But how do you know where you're headed? What you suppose is effective usually turns out not so after all. A better approach is to strive to be simply alert, mind open to possibilities, probing with your appetites, senses and skill set. Someone tells all adolescents of 3 monkeys who hear, see, and speak no evil. It's nothing more than a ploy to close their minds and mouths, corrupt advice with a lifelong detriment. Souls are lost not from what they hear, say or see, but by what lies they envelop and examples they foully repeat.

Odd alarms on computers give your body a shock, and who needs shocks? Turn them off. Pop-ups suffice to show what's required. Must life endure claxtons, emergency sirens, and other literally deafening wails that demand you obey without dissent or step aside? Certain songs are written to abruptly jump from piano to fortissimo, so they suddenly create discomfort, even pain on headphones. Some noises do need to be avoided. He couldn't be reached by recorded phone messages, since he invariably hung up on them or let answering machine screen out. If you can't respond, why devote even 1 second to a one-way conversation. Why read? Almost preferred telemarketers, who he'd simply tell, "Not interested." Just made him laugh when they'd persist, "Aren't you a little interested?" Even if they began, "You've won...", didn't believe them anyway. The only things they give away have strings attached. A beach vacation? You'd have to pay for flight, hotel reservations could only be made off season when you didn't want to be there, or some such hitch. He didn't need a vacation, but welcomed worthwhile work to do. Such solicitations are wasted on accomplished people out of any average demographic which looks for something for nothing because they've been addicted to acquisition.

Instead of always ignoring or renouncing what you don't appreciate, you should seek to understand why you don't, which leads to self-awareness, originates new activities, and probes potential. Someone, maybe Shaw, once said, "For success, steer in the direction of your fears." But not just fears, rather towards what repulses, unless what repulses will surely cause you harm: alcoholism, blinding light, damaging noise, drugs, fire, speed. Excessive writers like George Bataille, while an innovator of mayhem and outrage as an art form, were not mainstream precisely because sex shouldn't hurt or maim, not if you're doing it right, although you can be stroked to a point of exquisite tears. Sometimes, though, you do need near sensory deprivation to concentrate long enough to produce something precise amidst so many distractions.

Songs are heard with the ear. Poems are heard with the mind. Poetry is everywhere, even in silence. The alliterative hard *C* of Pynchon's line, "A screaming comes across the sky," is heard and intuitively understood as its underlying horror, "kill, kill, kill," while missiles rained down on London. He considered this a modern perversion of Swift's rocket, satire, which exploded only to rain down sparks of moral reminders, bumps on your noggin. Dancing, playing, singing should be beneficial behaviors that temporarily deter violence, a practical substitute for hurting and scarring that could exert a long term improvement in mental wellness through

emotional and physical release. That society still needs constant release with hundreds of thousands of musicians producing billions in music sales annually proves people's collective goals are wrong. Most music reflects violence rather than reduces it, and so exerts a net neutral effect. A mind breathes meaning beyond what's obvious, drags in associations unrelated to simple existence, interprets instead of just listens. Poets at play in your brain carry a bucket of cacophonous consonants like sand to scatter for traction on a slippery sidewalk of sibilants. This mythopoeic mindset makes one crazy. It's two minds in conflict, an impulse to flee stifled by a prison warden of restraint. Therein lies all art. Creativity consists of Just Doing It, to hell with restraints, yet making it fly through craftsmanship despite all interference. Creativity, like life, is a balancing act, a day's bicycling.

Even sculpture can sing in examples by Hawkinson, Monahan, Remus, and Trimpin, although only Trimpin's actually play musical compositions, programmed harmonies of spheres, real acoustics controlled by computers. Neo-Baroque painter Edward Knippers, remarkable for an unlikely focus on tortured religious themes, chastised fellow artists, "My generation thinks that they can't be creative without unlimited freedom, but they're just experiencing a poverty of ideas." Knippers quoted cubist George Braque from a century earlier, "I find my greatest creativity in my greatest limitation." To be sure, artists push boundaries, so constraints are their canvas. It is delightful when, given only 2 or 3 choices, an artist picks one and surprises everyone anyway. But if, from among billions of choices, someone synthesizes something universal, this is magical, may even advance a new art form or technology for others to develop. Such success equals what they give Nobel Prizes for. Production out of a limited formula to exacting principles is a bore, nothing more than a big book of words. Superfluous input constrained only by internal logic yields highly original results.

Because phrasing means so much, poets chose words that sound well together, fine as rhetoric, but don't usually mean what's actually being said. You can see why Björk admires Cummings, who probed reality in language and showed none exists. Journalists, novelists and publicists rather toy with people's emotions. They take advantage of previously built modes of perception arising out of other art forms, and use them to provoke and startle, or persuade for the highest bidder. No longer news you can use, it's either advertising or a pastime that distracts. Television programs are just bait between ads. Reading for recreation is a relatively new phenomenon, after orating, painting, sculpture, stained glass and

tapestry. Masses had only just learned to read on a historic timescale, but not all, and not in any uniform language. After countless attempts, a perfectly satisfying book has never been written, and probably never will. Humans chafe under constraints of any type, and language is no exception. They coin catch phrases, invent new words, pervert existing meanings.

Wordsmiths knew their business, though. Every 5 seconds another snappy commercial, a miniature art form, is sprung upon unsuspecting consumers. If conventional cues align, a consumer reacts, spends, tormented by a jingle echoing subliminally serving its master. Even public service announcements are aimed at convincing citizens they needed to adapt instinctive behaviors for the master's benefit. They seek submission, not dialog.

He labored over spoken English with peculiar variations in pronunciation, whether foreign or regional. His own wasn't enviable, a blend of Brooklyn and Bangor; indeed there was a wide range of styles. Seems people "ah" their a's, as if leaning on Italian or Spanish. Or drop h's, make a silent h of herb, "erb", probably carried over from Norman in which they slur borders between articles or prepositions that end in consonants and nouns or verbs that begin in vowels, an overly cute "tis" for "it is".

Contemporary French actually get angry over bad pronunciation of their language, mangled by tourists. Yet they actively campaigned to spread their language Worldwide, like a lexical pandemic, so why should they be so prissy about it? Fictional Henry Higgins sought oral purity. Foreigners sometimes had a foolish attitude that they had some idea at all just how complex a language English is. Among millions of words and tricky syntax, it's debased by acronyms, Ebonics, gutter slang, jargon, techese, and vulgarity. There can never be any literal implantation of language, more an assimilation by locals, who've morphed throat and mouth parts to announce their own, clenched teeth hisses, guttural German, implosive clicks, nasal French, rolled r's from romance remnants, and such niceties nearly impossible to mimic unless born into. All hold dear the sound of their own tongue as they've always heard it from pre-infancy. Deviations either amuse or repulse but are definitely noticed. Heard foreign rock stars, trying earnestly to be serious in English, grumble exactly like cartoon character Elmer Fudd. He harbored no such attitude toward another language, found all worshipfully steeped in customs unappreciated, delightful to study, impossible to master.

Other cultures were disappearing; Asians sadly began to forget millennia of silken heritage drugged on contemporary promises of

industrial enterprise. Age-old Third World refinements didn't satisfy anymore after western luxuries were introduced. Is it so easy to toss aside millennia of beliefs and traditions for mere materialism? What will you lose? Missionaries drilled all natural totem and sensible taboo out of microcultures, when these communal societies, conversely, had much to offer among city dwellers who no longer understood how to act appropriately in small effective teams. Institutions have taken over. The only thing that matters to them is aligning your opinion to theirs. "Resistance is futile; you will be assimilated." They had to take everything of value, take up your essence, style, time, ways of communicating. In return you get another day chained to a grindstone, a bad deal. "There's more to life than this!" Since the '60's, baby boomers seemed to hold most dear any chance of escaping society—communes, deserts, ecotourism—anything at all to get away from confines of conventionality. Not him. Aware that crime per capita didn't vary by location, fewer in country only because there were fewer people, he immersed in inner city intensity. Yet deep within a Romantic idea of becoming one with nature glowed dimly. Glorious sunsets over naturally occurring canyons still beat urban neon strips built on greed, where dupes cling to bling and inanely kill each other over it. As steel grinding Gerola said, "Nature is the best sculptor," yet he had to talk to hundreds of thousands to find one who recognized this simple truth. Alone, away, you can experience it but not share.

All this might seem terribly obvious to most readers, but desperately needed to be carefully spelled out for straightlaced establishment types, who waste their entire life in sensory deprivation, fearful they might learn something dreadfully different. Conductor Kent Nagano once said, "Live music approached with an open mind is the opposite of cynicism." That's right, go, find an angle, listen and shake your bones; it'll do you good, give you hope. Studies show that youth nurtured on conservatism are mentally stunted, can't make positive decisions affecting their future, and have little appreciation for art or music. Is this yet another gross exaggeration based on stereotypes? Whenever true, you'd have to pity and try to help such sufferers. Religions resist, determined to debunk psychoanalytic cures, keen to claim family runts, social misfits and those who can't carry a tune in their congregations. Dogs bark and donkeys bray in a most annoying way. Rote rituals seldom delight. "When the music's over, turn out the light."

Giving without expectation to whoever most appreciates it is joy. How does that sound? Crazy? Truth is beautifully strange, spiritually uplifting. Those who do nothing but take from those

who give simply adore how this sounds—easy money, freebies. Where's the partnership? Among those deserving, one must always be charitable to offer, nonplussed when ignored, and respectful enough to receive. Palms at work face down in sharing; palms up accept in gratitude. Expecting others to pay your bills is wrong, as are feeling rejected, getting bent out of shape by trivialities, taking innocent actions as insults, or yelling back to intimidate whoever harasses you and thinking that might work. Reserve your fights for bigger issues, but never be afraid to ask for what you need, speak up and be heard, to stongly protest wrongs, possibly the ultimate application of sound.

The World's full of gross injustices. CEOs that make 100 times the least paid employee should not only be ashamed but imprisoned. Leaders who only serve their own interests should be deposed or impeached. Those guilty of glutting themselves on excess and power ought to cultivate a taste for simple pleasures like a newborn resting peacefully, instead of whimpering off from starvation for which they were ultimately responsible. Those who succeed in a flawed paradigm never feel guilty; after all, they did what society expected, victims of their lawful compliance. But in an eternal war between the haves and have-nots, you must agree, it's a lot easier for them to give than those who struggle to survive. By commission or omission, they ultimately dictate crimes against humanity, genocide, slavery and torture. You don't like how this severest of condemnations sounds? Straighten up, \_\_\_\_\_ [an expletive so bad it need not be said to be imagined which represents what you personally find most offensive; fill in the silent blank with your burnt stank].

