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Final Creative Project

Geo and Me Try to Solve the Universe

On March 14th, 1984, without so much as an angel blowing her trumpet or anyone beyond the immediate family noticing, a boy was born in a hospital in Southern California. He was quiet with intelligent, absorbent, eyes. Never blinking, their dark pupils sponging up his new world. Say hello to my cousin, Geo. His legal name was George, but everyone called him "Geo." This is my attempt to calculate his maddened tragedy and the trajectory of his madness.

Before Geo was walking, his father walked out of his life. He returned home to a village in South East Asia, a place I won't belittle with an Anglicization. He was left with his freckled wasp mother and doting sister. His family lived as tenants in a standard, cream-stuccoed, apartment building; their precarious financial circumstances never disclosed to me. But this did not matter because, suddenly, I had a play-mate for a cousin and we grew close. They moved frequently, each residence permeated with the peculiar scent of a litter-box although I never remember seeing a cat.

My cousin's shy demeanor melted when we took off down the smoldering streets of Los Angeles as we grew close under the ever sun on streets of asphalt. We would talk dirty and play with jack-knives and zippo lighters. Sometimes we threw dusty pebbles into the cement reservoirs that run like dry capillaries through LA; listening forever as they echoed through these man-made canyons. Our shouts reverberating with our teen freedom and echoing up the aqueducts that run into the San Gabriel mountains which limit the viral spread of suburbia. Behind an apartment complex where Geo's family once lived, a train ran regularly. It would shout with steam and might and make us feel small in our beds. Young boys have an ineluctable predilection for trains and scream and wave and watch as it rushes by. Smoggy sunsets framing the train which beheaded our shadows, our decapitated caricatures giggling as the iron rivers flowed by.

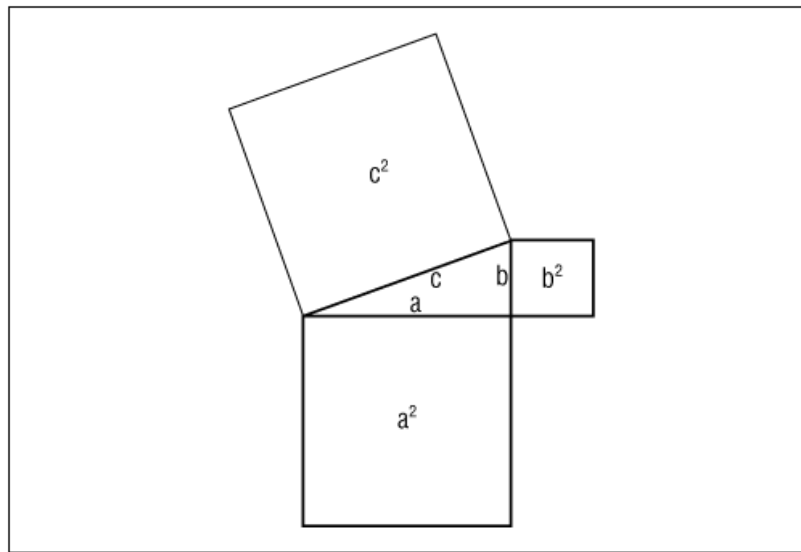
By the time we reached high school we drifted but still loved each other. He took a deep interest in mathematics which would last for the rest of his life. He won prizes and everyone was aware of the brilliance pulsating behind his eyes. Dark hair fell over his eyes and a complected hand constantly brushed it away. We drifted because I spent all day reading novels and fantasizing about what girls were like. He was less mundanely minded. I often heard adults comment on his effortless quietude and concentration. Other kids ignored him, which was fine because he spent delicious hours sitting quietly on his mattress, a flashlight pouring over whatever text he had discovered in the library.

Despite drifting apart we would still occasionally spend time together. He once showed me how 0 is an even number. "It's so simple," he said, "there is an odd number

on either side, therefore, it fits the definition of even.” I nodded, not quite sure how nothing can be defined as partaking in something.

When we were in ninth grade I contracted appendicitis and spent several days in a feverish battle cushioned by opiates (my first but not last encounter with pharmaceuticals). Teenagers use sickness as a vacation, and I spent much of it drugged and watching television. As for my cousin, he spent hours with me, bringing me books and wanting to talk. One night I pretended to sleep and watched him sit completely still, without any stimuli, for several hours. His eyes closed but not sleeping. While the rest of us were teenage somnambulists, he didn’t sleep-walk through the normal wasteland of fast-food and consumer electronics. He didn’t waste his mother’s money on intransigence (though a lack of money might have predetermined this). Instead, he wore unfashionable clothing, I always remember him in a torn Batman t-shirt and old jeans, his dark eyes blind to trends which blinded me.

Geo could be found in the school library, perfecting his trig homework several times before letting me copy it. Our teachers must have known why my homework was impeccable and my test scores abysmal but they never said anything. Once, I made the mistake of asking why the pain (to me) that was geometry was so inviting to him. And although he rarely discussed his inner workings with me, let alone anyone, he gave me an insight into this world. He drew the following on his forearm, although he had a notebook ready, pointed at it, and said. “Always.”



Personally, I never liked the idea of “Always.” By now I was reading Bukowski and Sartre which rattled my cage (angst sharpened by teenage hormones is a slippery slope). It was, and still is, easy and fashionable to hate scholastic sincerity. We diverged more, his tangents and discoveries logarithmic and exponential, my breakthroughs bent on silk and lace. I realize now that teenage boys don’t appreciate the ephemeral innocence and beauty of teenage girls. To Geo, however, calculus was “beautiful”. I called him gay. He stared at me with unblinking eyes and told me it is possible to graph the growth of ferns before they are fertilized. I told him how a girl needs to get wet

before boys try to fertilize them. This is the only time I remember him blushing and looking away in embarrassment, feigning interest in the carpet's patterns.

We went to the same college. I studied English Literature and he won a scholarship to study (obsess over?) Pure Mathematics. His course list intimidating and full of multivariable and discrete nouns, my own math requirement fulfilled by something called Art in Math. Where I encountered an (un)healthy dose of Foucault, he encountered the random and the imaginary. Like many whimsical undergraduates, professors quickly learned to avoid him in hallways. Sometimes, when falling asleep, I picture his zen-patience waiting in anterooms to share an insight with an emergent professor.

Geo experimented with diet but not as a conversation topic. He refused meat and dairy. Subsisting on apples for several months his skin grew hollow and gray. When a freshman girl, a self-described 'Vegan', discovered his Fruitarian lifestyle she became enamored with his dedication and attempted to reach his inner sanctum. But Geo wasn't interested in pot-empowered vapidty or socially-determined girls wearing bangles and leather bracelets. Her interests were soon, and much more accurately, fulfilled by a greasy neo-hippie in the quad playing *Wonderwall* on an acoustic guitar.

When we were juniors, his father was stabbed in the gas station he worked at (he survived). Geo, instead of lamenting tearful ignorance, explained to me in his calm voice how an elaborate chaos theory ruled all of life. He told me "Just by telling you all this, a totally unpredicted series of events will emerge from it, and from that, infinite other phenomena. Each piece of phenomena a puzzle piece in the grand design."

I thought the world was complicated enough without further complicated theories and confusing concepts like 'chaotic determinism.' He sought patterns out, and as it is with all men who seek patterns, he found them. A large, God-shaped, hole came from within his being replacing the slightly smaller, parent-shaped, hole that it emerged from. Unavoidably, this Answer pattern became the purpose of being. His imperative more intangible than even my own as an alleged deconstructionist (there was a short period where I inchoately refused to use spoken language and carried a pretentious black board). And just as anyone who looks hard enough for God, these patterns arranged themselves before his unblinking eyes and pulled him further into the void.

We had a conversation once, on a dam in the Sierra Madre Mountains that we had discovered as teenagers. We called it the Eagle's Nest and from upon it one could see everything from downtown to Santa Monica. The horizon curving toward and away from us, glimmering with that ever-sparkling green sea. All ten million people of the megalopolis below you, unaware, making you feel lonely and removed despite the rush and hum and glow. During the day the freeways are long, inelegant, parking lots and during the night classic cars speed downhill and scream through the canyons: little moons reflected on every dusty windshield.

Geo turned to me and said, "I can see so far but I know it is so little. I want to see everything. If I could only leave my body for the night. If I could only leave forever."

I snorted and kicked a pebble into the abyss, listening to it cascade down the pit before replying, "You are far too narrow-minded to leave your body. Smoke a little of this if you want to open the universe more." Offering him a joint I had lit. "You only worship math. If you want the universe to open to you, you need to open to the universe." I replied sounding like most juniors in college do.

"I'm not only studying math, man, I study everything *with* math. You can't think math is a single minded venture, it's universal. It's like how the universe was programmed."

"But what if what you call 'programming' is just looking to make sense of it all. Listen, every animal has their own programming. It's a combination of evolution and upbringing. That's what makes it look like its programmed rather than just random events and coincidences." I said.

"There is purpose, there is intent in all the patterns around me. Intent implies a creator. That creator is reality itself." He replied.

"I disagree," I said, "Our world is only a small fraction of reality. We are only capable of making small observations and comprehensions of the universe. The overbearing randomness, the crushing infinitude would obliterate and subliminate our consciousness if it were expanded beyond our narrow paradigm."

Geo stared toward the sea where the lack of clouds above LA make a strange sense of parallax as intimacy and distance mix on the horizon. He said, "Then I am going to break this too narrow paradigm with a new one that encompasses the width of reality."

"That is vain! You can't describe anything let alone everything!" I retorted. "The universe doesn't make sense. There is no intent, no objective purpose! Existence is mad! We can only hope to mitigate and make sense of the madness through creativity of self and sentiment." I retorted. At this time I was an unironic and absolute believer in anti-absolute existence. "It's like this," I said, "The body floats on the substance of space-time. Space and time do not exist independent of the observer floating."

"You materialists who only want to personify the body at the expense of the soul in order to justify your lust and carnality. I want to personify the universe! My soul is just only beginning to expand! Just listen to me and you'll begin to understand!"

After this exchange, he refused to speak to me. The smog-filled air hiding the stars, our pride-filled minds blocking out our friendship.

On another excursion a few months later, he told me that he didn't like the use of mathematics as metaphor. It felt too forced and left little room for the impermanence of things under math. He didn't see mathematics as metaphorical for anything because math just *is* rather than as a stand in for something else. "Why build society upon metaphoric language and not the original concrete ideas themselves," he said to me. "Arches support society just fine. In fact, the structures of atoms and galaxies organize and support themselves just fine without referring to another, false, form. They were created that way." He couldn't understand that the metaphor, for the rest of us, stands as a placeholder; a layer that separates chaotic truth and digestible ideas.

"I don't need a placeholder to help me achieve understanding." He told me.

So that was it then, Geo was a worshiper of the universe. A godless deist. I struggle to relate his admiration of the structures of the universe because the world of the believer has language and thought processes that are richer, more fulfilled, than the world of the nonbeliever. The hymns of the humanist can only hope to pay homage to the tones of the theist.

After the metaphor lecture, he attempted to explain to me (once again) the beauty of math by explaining the beauty of infinity. For example: Π , as an infinite

number, includes all numbers and number sequences. Therefore, somewhere in the infinite includes my birthday, my phone number, and the day I will die.

After this conversation, which brought me an uncomfortably close view of his insanity, he began to seek for his 'new worldview.' He started analyzing the mundane in search of the profound. He started searching for the universal within the specific. Formulas poured from his pen. Yesterday's conversations analyzed today. Today's calculations observed and recorded assiduously. Where was the secret pattern? Where was the secret history of self? He forced me to diagram sentences for him and on more than several occasions I saw him in the all night room of the library reading from dusty books and pouring over them with murderous intent. He wasn't afraid of newspapers like the rest of us were at that time. They excited him like girls excited me. (Pretty girls with thin legs stuck like splinters into the fleshier parts of my mind.) He strung clippings and diagrams across his dorm's walls finding repeating phrases and authors, looking for patterns, both existing and non-existing.

This is about the time that his professors started seriously avoiding him. His eyes dark without mascara and his frame thin from living on fruit for months. Teachers who once admired his brilliance ducked him in hallways and he grew sullen and more private. Only I was welcome into his dark, scholarship-funded, dorm. A room without light that wasn't the most pleasant place to be. Thick blue curtains blotted out the sun and formulas scrawled in his handwriting covered the wallpaper. His insomnia grew worse as he looked for an answer that would announce truth upon gilded trumpet. He never ate and refused to attend class dismissing it, albeit in an offhand way, "They don't understand."

Music began to lose its appeal to him, he analyzed the wave forms of songs instead of listening to them. Searching for the pattern of beauty and missing the symphony for the sheet music.

He mapped out all the places he had lived and realized they formed some hard to see pattern. Unfortunately, his superstitions grew, as superstition usually does, intolerant and disagreeable. Interfering with friendship and normalcy. Every time a superstition was realized to be meaningless he replaced it with a new formula, a new belief. From creation to chaos to entropy to equilibrium. Each successive step removing him further from our world. Geo's world grew darker and empty of life. In fact, he began an obsession with equilibrium, and, like a bad metaphor, this is what killed him.

Meanwhile, I too had begun to lose my center. A curious set of coincidences began to surround me and a drug addled, epileptic, neighbor. Too much like Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*. Whatever I did was reflected in grotesque fashion by him. One drunken evening I shaved my head in order to re-discover my creativity after a bad acid trip. I saw him in the parking lot later with a shaved head. I took the bus out of town and so did he. I wasn't insane enough to accept this as my fate, but neither was I sane enough to ignore coincidences as anything more than cruel jokes played from on-high. Perhaps too much time with Geo's theories had broken my own fragile sanity.

Then Geo stopped wearing deodorant or showering. He believed that eating only fruit made him a superior, enlightened being. He would cry when pressed to eat something substantial or take a shower. Though he hadn't had much of a family life before, even his supportive sister began ignoring his calls. His sister told me in tears, "When I look into most people's eyes I see a soul. When I look into his eyes, I see a

bottomless pit.” His mercurial personality and erratic behavior frightened people who are much more comfortable with television and speed-limits.

I became his only remaining, though tenuous, thread to reality. Actually, there was another, stronger, thread which we both shared that connected us. Though he didn’t care much for literature he, and I, cherished the industrial arts. All men have a predilection for hand crafted objects, demonstrations of control and talent. He purchased (stole?) a welding torch and a reciprocating saw. Using these tools he fashioned intricate, geometric patterns blurring art and patterns, and hung them around his room. One rainy afternoon, I realized that he had dismantled his dorm sink and welded it into a matrix of points. The joints, washers, and pipes more important to him as cold representation of some concept than for running water. Anyone else seeing these things would have thought they were decorative and never realized he was worshipping their perfect angles and craftsmanship. Several students from down the hall asked if he was selling the ‘cool’ metallic-mobiles, he just stared at them and closed his door. I half-expected him to carve triangles into his pale forearm with a compass or saw.

Geo taught me about different types of bridges. His favorite, because of the math involved, was a suspension bridge, which, though true suspension bridges use parabolic arches, he loved catenary curves because “they were God’s closed eye-lid.” He went on and on about hyperbolic cosine’s and how Leibniz and Huygens knew about them centuries ago. He forced me to copy this down:

$$y = a \cosh (x/a) = a/2(e^{x/a} + e^{-x/a})$$

saying, “all catenaries are similar, if you change a you get equivalent and uniform scaling. It’s so beautiful that it’s almost holy.”

I asked him to relax a bit on the “beautiful and holy geometry thing,” and return to more calm ideas. I was worried that he would get reported to the Housing Office on campus. Like usual he just stared at me and said, “Great minds stretch the truth, they don’t follow old ideas.”

Every phone call lead to a fight which was resolved only through thoughtful calculation on my part. It was enough to remind him to eat. He would disagree with me, arguments would appear in spite before disappearing in mist. I told him his obsession “reminded me of Ahab or Lear.” But these references were dead to him and he asked me to leave. And once again, the most important relative in his life walked out.

Like I had warned him, the Housing Office was eventually alerted to his “unhealthy lifestyle” and kicked him off campus. I soon heard he was living homeless on Colorado Boulevard. He didn’t panhandle or beg. People walking by must have pitied the weak autistic boy keeping to the dry shadows in the sun-drenched promenade and fed him. There in the ombré-shaded cement patios, the shadows growing long, his mind broke completely. It must have been so sad to see when his whole mind agreed that he’d never see God except through one final, joyful, act of devotion. In that moment of metanoia, he cackled and stared inwards and outwards and went to find God. And in that moment of damascene conversion, Geo realized what he had been ever pulled towards.

Scene: The Climax on Suicide Bridge (The Colorado Street Bridge in Pasadena, CA)

He called me from a pay phone, "It's all fractals, up and down, *όδος άνο κάτω*, it's purity." he said, foaming at the mouth. I didn't understand, how can something be both up and down simultaneously? Literature certainly didn't teach me that. Literature taught me that misery followed misery. Happiness was non-existent and *ex nihilo, nihil fit*. He asked me to meet him at the bridge, in the middle of the chasm, over the highest-low.

This surprised me, because, in searching for a symbolic, though insane, exit he could have at least found a suspension bridge to suspend reality one last time. The Colorado Street Bridge (built before Colorado was made a boulevard) is only a deck-arch bridge and makes use of hyperbolic arches rather than the catenary tension of a suspension bridge. Looking back now, though, I realize that only the height (144 feet) of the bridge mattered rather than its design.

He was thin and I was both taller and stronger. Six feet tall, the measure of all men. I sized him up, looking to tackle him off of the parapet. We had wrestled as kids but not in years. I guessed I might need to tackle him because he was shouting and chanting in Pali.

When confronted with unbalanced people it is easy resort to cliché. "Geo, come home, at the end of the day you won't think like this. This doesn't have to be your fate."

"I hate the phrase," he interrupted, "at the end of the day, it doesn't mean anything! Life exists in a continuum. No one lives in self-defined chapters you social scientific plague! Also, life isn't ruled by chance or fate or whatever you humanists call it. It is ruled by Law."

"There is no law. Law, like the language you use to describe it, is just a construct."

"The Golden Ratio is Law. Natural Law exists eternal!"

"Eternal? Nothing *is* eternal. The universe is finite and any finitude is an inherently closed system! You yourself taught me that equilibrium always returns to a closed system."

"It is eternally following the rules that it prescribed itself. It is self-assigned and therefore, universal."

This seemed tautological, but who was I to argue, "Then why doesn't it satisfy you? Why are you always searching for further truth?"

"It does satisfy me. I can always count on gravity to bring me back to earth."

"Geo! You're never on planet earth. You were barely born on it. Your incoherence is incoherent!" I shouted. "Don't do this! Suicide isn't meaningful and you are the one who wants meaning so badly!"

"Any action is meaningful if you do it with purpose. And all subsequent reactions contain a piece of that purpose, and therefore, are meaningful as well." He said. With this I knew that there would be no winning him back. I didn't even know if I wanted him back.

“Now watch the Law reclaim me. I trust that it will never fail and I know myself as its creation, and I will obey the Law eternal.” With this he jumped onto the bridge’s stone rail, closed his eyes, crossed his arms, and stepped off. In the first second his body fell 16 feet. Each additional second his falling body accelerated at 32 feet per second per second as he descended into the dusty Arroyo. Simultaneously, there was a cheer from the nearby Rose Bowl just as one team kicked a field goal. Perhaps Geo’s falling body displaced air and, in the continuum of chaotic existence, helped them win. But whatever the cause, I never heard the bone crunching thud over the roar from the stadium. It only took his body about three seconds to complete its journey but his body was smashed and left him absurd formless red-Rorschach across the empty cement reservoir. His formless end punctuating his search for form.

When Dante found himself in the Dark Wood, as everyone does many times in life, he refused to let shadow into his heart. As for me, I walked away from that bridge with one intention. To name all the parts of myself and describe each in prose so pure and formless they could not cast shadows. The believer and non-believer, the being in time and the non-being out of time, and then, and there, will be nothing left to dissect, except of course, the infinite phenomena of existence. Through all the understandings and formulas, what Geo never realized was that though his formula might change, the world they describe never changes. He couldn’t conceptualize that his own adoption of pedantic scientific idealism is just as destructive as any other ideology of devotion. In fact, thought often blinds itself when it refuses to blink. The hyper-rational can never see how their actions subvert their intentions just as the irrational cannot see how their intentions subvert their actions. Rationality, like emotionality, is only a puzzle piece of the whole. Mathematics, like poetry, can describe great swaths of reality to us, but neither can understand reality for us.

Now do not look into the void, for chaos emptied and fear frightened, because it truly does exist, and it will swallow you whole.