

Me, You, Art & Trout

[***excerpt***]

by Mark Anderson

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The title of this piece, this monologue, this event, is ***me, you, art and trout*** – and at some point that might all make sense.

It made enough sense to me not too long ago to give it that name – actually, to change the name to ***me, you, art and trout*** from what it had been up until that point, which is ***To resume ...*** which had also made sense to me, before, but that felt a bit too ... what's the word ... dull – maybe even boring – and so a new title was devised – by my wife, actually; she came up with the name ***me, you, art and trout***.

When it was called ***To resume ...***, I had something specific in mind: I was thinking about the fact that I hadn't done this kind of full-length piece in more than 15 years, and so, it was as if I'd been interrupted, or distracted, had stepped away, digressed, lost the thread – and now I'm returning to that place, as if to say, “where was I?” or “as I was saying...” or ... *To resume* – as if I were going to pick up where I'd left off, and in a way, that is sort of the case.

Did you hear that? “In a way” and “sort of” – it sounded like a declarative statement, but ... it really wasn't ...

(*as if self-critical*) These rhetorical loopholes, escape routes ... hedging ... I think I picked up in college.

I should probably work on that. Maybe I will!

So, let's say that **is** the case, I'm picking up where I'd left off. I'm carrying on.
*To resume ... we were discussing the fact that I sometimes don't know
what to wear when I go out –*

a statement I made back then ... more or less – and which is reasonably true today, as well.

I mean, it's still pointless and insipid, but there it is.

And the point then – and now – is about how the clothes make the man – or woman: that we express a considerable amount of information about ourselves through the clothes we choose to wear, or how we decorate ourselves: hairstyle, tattoos, sunglasses, flip-flops, bowtie, ripped stockings, logos, etc.

My choice of jeans, these shoes, this loose shirt all declares something about me: that I like to see myself as being casual ... still youngish,

still attached to my college days;

and my earring – not one in right now, but I've got a hole and I'm prepared to use it ... don't take that out of context, please ... my earring potential says ... I don't know what, exactly.

I had it done in 1976, while in college, on that study-abroad program in London, amidst loads of men with earrings, and I thought that looked cool, and I wanted to look cool ... I guess I needed that ... and so, much to my parents' chagrin, my earlobe was pierced by Lee Ann Degrazia – where is she today? Doesn't matter – I'm sure she's fine right where she is, doesn't need to be brought into this.

Okay, so I've mentioned college four times already. Despite that period of my life being thirty-five years in the past. Hmmmm....

And the **ring** – new since the last long monologue, twelve years now;

that was quite a new thing for me, first time, but later than most.

I remember the feeling of getting used to it.

I remember writing about the feeling of getting used to it ... writing that my left hand has taken on a new identity since the addition of a Ring to the, um, number three finger.

It's called a Wedding Ring – although I'd say there's a bit more to it than just the wedding, because the wedding is over.

It happened one day in August, 2000.

It's not happening anymore.

So maybe “wedding ring” means that I've *had* a wedding.

And of course, I *have* had a wedding, and so maybe I should just shut up and let it be called a Wedding Ring, but I'm sorry; this is the way that I am, and we all just have to accept that.

So maybe it should be called a Marriage Ring,

or merit badge,

or a harness, a collar – a *brand*?

It's a message, a signal, a protective shield ...

It's gold and it glints, catching my eye by surprise as my left hand performs some otherwise innocuous chore, such as holding one end of the ribbon of toilet paper as the right hand folds it over in anticipation of a basic nose wipe.

The right hand – up to this point – was the alpha,

poking and pointing with ease,

doing the math,

confident in its ability to land the dart reasonably near the bullseye.

The right hand had its day.

And this is not to say that the right hand will now be retired – No.

I expect the right hand will continue to perform as capably as it has all along.

At the same time, we now have the left hand coming into its own, and there's room for both. There has to be. This town *is* big enough for the two of them.

However, a shift is definitely underway. No longer will the lone genius dominate, but rather power will be shared; there will be cooperation, collaboration; a coalition government.

The strength of the right will be balanced by the compassion of the left.

No longer just smart, now smart and kind;

sharp and soft;

piercing and soothing;

throwing and catching.

I wrote that, oh, eight years ago? – finally found a spot for it here. And now.

Why here? Why now? Why am I here? Why are you here?

(these lines flow out; stop, catch yourself, settle down) We'll figure it out.

This ... evening, this monologue, this piece, is about three things:

art, **me**, of course ... uh, **you**, I suppose [*afterthought*]

--- so maybe four things --- and **Trout Fishing in America** – which might sound a little strange, if you've never encountered those words, together, before.

It was also maybe going to be about another thing, Desolation Row – that's a song by Bob Dylan.

It might still be about that, because right now, May 2, 2012, I'm only at the beginning of this process, and by the time I'm in the same room with you, talking, as I am now, this ... talking time – let's call it – might be about a load of different things.

But right now, thinking ahead, I'd like it to be about **me** – **you** – **art** and **Trout Fishing in America** --- and maybe about Desolation Row.

Both of which could fall under the heading of **art**, of course, so maybe, in the end, it will be about three things.

I'm reminded of two things – Arlo Guthrie, and The Spanish Inquisition.

As I began typing “The Spanish Inquisition” I hit the wrong key, and for a moment I was being reminded of The Spandex Inquisition, which is a pair of words that might possibly have never been put together before.

“The Spanish Inquisition” refers to a Monty Python skit, wherein a scene of daily life is suddenly interrupted when one of the characters says, “I didn't expect a kind of Spanish Inquisition” and three nasty priests in red satin burst through the doors, saying, *Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!* and they go on to say “*our chief weapon is ... surprise, and fear... our **two** weapons are surprise and fear ... and ruthless efficiency ... our **three** weapons ... etc.*

And Arlo Guthrie because this sort of friendly nattering I'm presently uttering is not unlike Arlo Guthrie's playful introduction to Alice's Restaurant – another set of words you may or may not have heard before.

So, so far I've mentioned three phrases, **Trout Fishing in America**, Desolation Row, and Alice's Restaurant ... and The Spanish Inquisition – *four* phrases – that may or may not be familiar to you. I've also mentioned the name Arlo Guthrie.

And so, that's about **you**, and about **me**, and about **art**. So far.

It's about art because those are all titles of artworks from the 1970s. Well, not exactly. Desolation Row was recorded in 1965. Arlo Guthrie recorded Alice's Restaurant in 1967. Trout Fishing in America, a novel by Richard Brautigan, was also released in 1967, although it was written in 1961. But for me, these are from the **seventies**, because the **sixties** didn't really happen for me until the **seventies**, when I came of age.

I say "came of age" to refer to my awakening to the counter-culture, which happened when I went to college.

Not that I was unaware of "the counter-culture" while it was happening – by which I mean the **sixties** – but I was in my early teens while all that was bubbling, and although I had been exposed to the key elements – the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, Hippies – through the news and so on, I didn't really have much contact with the substance of it all until the **seventies** got underway, and my brother went to college in **Madison** and became, more or less, an anti-war hippie type who brought his counter-culture music and ideas back home during holidays and school vacations.

So, I'd had some exposure, I'd had some sympathy for the causes, but I was still pretty naïve.
I'm still pretty naïve, in a way.

But ... let's talk about art.

To be an artist, one must – at times – have a sufficient amount of ego, or ... not sure what ... confidence? brio? nerve? chutzpah? "moxie"? – to be able to assert oneself, to venture forth, to utter – that which has heretofore not been, not existed. It is to make something from nothing, or – and perhaps this is different – to transform something into something else.

Marcel Duchamp transformed a urinal into an art object, and thereby, transformed our ideas about what art can be, and what can be art. **Mary Shelley** created Victor Frankenstein, who transformed dead matter into a living creature. Also in the realm of fiction, or fantasy, the alchemist transforms essential substance into a completely different essential substance.

Footnote: **Marcel Duchamp**, an artist – although he preferred playing chess-
– was born in France, moved to the U.S., split his time between Paris and New York, but he remained a sort-of ultimate European kind of guy --
- and the urinal, as I mentioned, was in fact a urinal
[mime the shape of it]
which he signed and placed on its back, on a pedestal,
titled it “fountain,” and entered it into an art competition in 1917 --- and in a way, that was like a thunderclap in a canyon, and the echoes and reverberations are still felt in the art world a century later – in terms of subject matter, materials, concept --- in all media: sculpture, drawing, printmaking, film, video, performance – you name it.

He said, *this is art* – and ... that made it “art.” ... **poof!**

And – footnote number 2 – **Mary Shelley**, well-known as the author of *Frankenstein*, lived and wrote in the first half of the 19th century.

As a young girl, Mary fell in love with the radical and married poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and she ran off with him,

and one dark and stormy night, by the shore of Lake Geneva – the one in Switzerland, not Wisconsin – the 18 year old girl conceived her dark and stormy tale about a scientist who brought dead flesh to life, -- ... **poof!**

and that story grew into a gothic, romantic, science fiction novel – published at first anonymously – that ... lives on.

We all know something about that work of art.

Four years later, her husband, 29 year old Percy Shelley, died at sea, he who wrote the poem, *Ozymandias*:

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

I wish I'd written that.

Then I might have named this monologue, "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

Catchy.

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