

# Finding Mememo

A new novel by James R. Hugunin

8 ½ x 11 inches, hardcover, full color images, 672 pgs.

Special collectors edition of 100, signed, \$75

Make check out to "U-Turn" and send to:

James Hugunin

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## Biblio File

*Blue around the Edges. ... James R. Hugunin* writes to say, “[I] finally got my shipment of *Finding Mememo!* Four

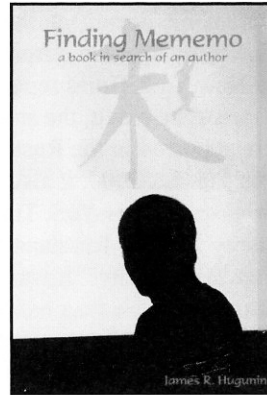
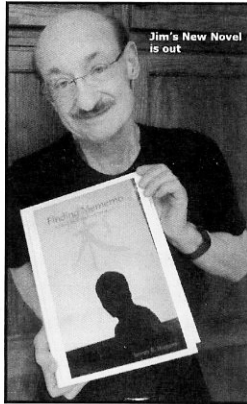
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years in the making. The book weighs 5.5 pounds and is 1 7/8 inches thick!! The post office is going to make a nice profit on shipping this tome. (See

Literary Latest, Page 6). ...

Adam Selzer, Suzanne Slade, Ruth Spiro, Patricia Sutton, Natasha Tarpley, Glennette Tilley Turner, Keir Graf, Kate Hannigan,



### COLORFUL STORY

*Finding Mememo: A Book in Search of an Author* (March 15, 2019) is **James R. Hugunin's** latest book.

Hugunin writes to say: “The novel was inspired by my photographer friend (Ichio Honne in the story) and I (Hy “Mememo” Grader) witnessing a traumatic event. We were just entering Chicago’s famous Art Institute Museum when a wild cry was heard from above us, like a two-year old having a “melt-down.”

“Suddenly, a young black man leapt the railing on the floor above us and projected himself out into space, falling on the museum floor about 20 feet from us! He hit hard, blood leaking around his head. It was surreal. Even made more so, as we were herded by guards into the James Ensor exhibition then on view, with its plethora skulls, etc.

“The event was hushed up, no mention on TV news, and a glamorous reception for a photography show just opening was held in the same space that evening, people unaware of what had taken place that morning.

“This event became section three in the book. Like a stone tossed into a lake, that central trauma radiated out, evolving into a story about an ageing part-time academic becoming obsessed with collecting images of people jumping or falling. Not long after, this academic falls (or is

## Literary Latest

Continued from Page 6

pushed, or has jumped) from the balcony of the Cliff Dwellers during a faculty fete there. The story relates how his three friends (Jym, Ichio, and Dallas, a private detective/mystery writer) try to solve the case.



**James R. Hugunin**

“ ‘Jym’ attempts to redact Hy’s fragments of his unfinished novel into a semblance of coherence, adding editorial gloss throughout. This metatext is a mash-up of sci-fi (quantum and string theory and

time/dimension travel), mystery genre, and academic theory.”

SMA member **Eckhardt Gerdes** writes to say, “When Hy (‘Mememo’) Grader jumped or was pushed off the balcony of the famous art and literary club known as The Cliff Dwellers (founded 1907 as The Attic Club), a terrible event occurring on the same date (September 8) as Hy’s father’s death seven years earlier, it also recalled the mysterious death-fall by New York artist Ana Mendieta in 1985, and a bizarre suicide attempt witnessed by Hy and his friend Ichio at Chicago’s famed Art Institute Museum five months previous.

“This novel investigates the downfall of Mememo in a colorful story told in richly illustrated four-color documents. Those already familiar with Hugunin’s amazements will love this novel, his biggest and boldest yet. Those who are not yet familiar with his work need to, well, um, take the plunge.”

## Press clipping

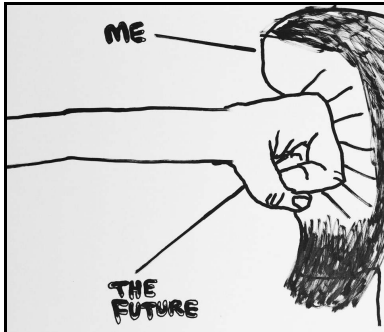
concerning Jim’s  
new novel  
*Finding Mememo*

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# Preface to the Second Edition

*Venice is indeed the surpassing-all-other embodiment of that 'absolute ambiguity' which is radiant life containing certain death.*

—*Venice Desired*, Tony Tanner



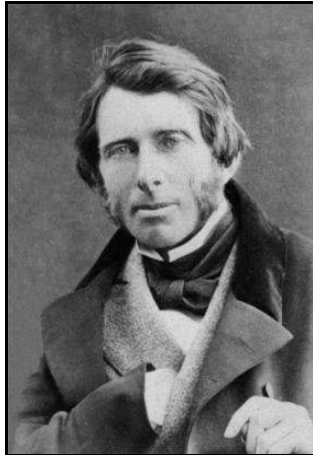
This drawing selected by Hy Grader supports his contention that "I am a ruin among ruins." It may have inspired the photo below (or vice-versa). It could even be seen as figuring Venice's quite dubious future. John Ruskin exercised an historical triadism (beginning, middle, end) in writing about Venice: Hy, adoring Ruskin and seeing much of Ruskin in himself, also meditated on such a threesome as applied to his own life's journey.

Hy "Mememo" Grader would welcome this second edition of *Finding Mememo*. It proves what he always believed in: "The liquid uncertainty of temporal knowledge," and "whatever roughness rage, some exquisite sea(see)-thing will always surface to save" (in Hy's story this entity is Wishwer Watt's mini-sub and his vision of D-travel, see page 260). What has surfaced since the first edition of my editing of Grader's writings is due to Dallas Johnson's persistence in tracking down the seeming sea-tracklessness of new and revised .wpd files of Hy's text. The land-locked flash-drive from which I culled Hy's text (see page xxv) for the first edition has now been supplemented. Dal cracked Hy's arcane password, "Doge-Fos1423\$" (date of Doge Foscari's accession to power in Venice) to a Drop Box in The Cloud. I worked these new files into this new edition, taking the opportunity to correct typos and improve my own glosses.



Hy "Meme" Grader's photo of a floating hand fragment, Venice, Italy. I feel this image "Meme-izes" Venice, just as J. M. W. Turner's paintings of that city "Turner-izes" it, or Ruskin's writings thereon "Ruskin-izes" Venice.

Hy's constant revisions recall to mind something he said to me once concerning his approach to writing: "Trust in sea-tracklessness." As the reader will soon discover, Hy — let me call him "Meme" — had this "thing" for the sea, for ships, for submarines in particular. His writings are suffused with references to such. One notebook entry of his reads: "Enveloped by the waters of Lake Michigan, my body feels unusually agile, free of pain; speeding up my legs and arms, I cut through the waves, wounding them, the waters softened." The best thing his wife, Dorinda, did for him (according to Hy) was to get him to honeymoon in Venice (despite Meme's fear of the odious smell of the canals), get him on vaporetos, gondolas, out on the water. "I do not say *Venice*, by chance," he told me

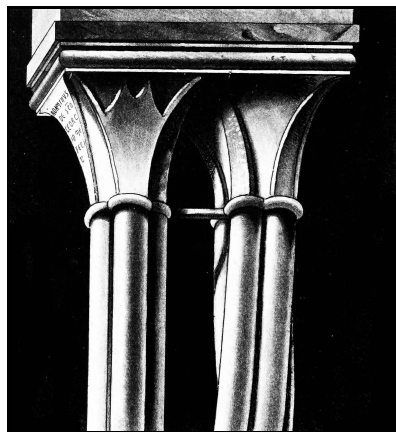


John Ruskin framed portrait sitting on Hy Grader's desk.

once, adding that, like the poet Byron, he saw from his approaching motorboat "Venice's structures rise as the stroke of the Enchanter's wand, a pomp of pile in towering evidence of a dreamed of utopia" arising before him. And, ominously in Meme's case, a sign of a sharp sense of loss, of a world irrecoverably changing, and port of *farewell*. There Meme indulged his passion for 1) the sea, for islands (118 such fragments make up Venice; he often spoke of everything disintegrating into parts, and those parts into more parts); 2) for exquisite seafood; and 3) Ruskin's, Turner's, Pound's, and Sartre's response to the city's mysteries. I think that *water* (especially surrounding Venice) was for Meme a trope signifying both the realm of the real *and* the false, Being *and* Nothingness. Venice's topos made those realizations more vivid, to him.

If, for Ruskin, Venice was "fragments disguised by restoration," so could one aptly describe Meme's writing (for that matter, my redaction of his writing). The mysterious and multiple significations of that romantic sea-city — Melville's "reefs of palaces" — mimic Meme's own writing where he coaxes value from his own decline and often explores the present form of his past. Venice, as dreamed by Ruskin and Henry James, figures in Meme's imagination (see page 548). He was drawn to Ruskin for his sense of separateness, his art criticism, and his politics contra a nation despising literature, science, art, and nature, despising compassion, and concentrating its soul on Money. Meme told me once, "I read *Fors Clavigera*

[Ruskin's series of letters starting in the 1870s addressed to British workmen] — and saw that author's 'aleatory' approach to writing allowed him free reign to make random associations and digressions. I realized that approach informs my own modest scribbles."



Straight and twisted columns (Basilica of San Zeno, Verona) as noted John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851 -53) that inspired Hy.

Meme, at times, would (I think unconsciously) put his right hand inside his coat, mimicking Ruskin in a photo that sat prominently on his writing desk. In a notebook entry, Meme notes Ruskin's noting a peculiar pairing of a straight column and a twisted one found in Verona's San Zeno Basilica. Meme took inspiration and jots: "The perfect figure for my writing: take something straight, appropriate it, but twist it. Ruskin again inspires me. Fools 'Ruskin' were angels fear to tread." And writing was,

for Ruskin, a sacred duty of self, which Hy certainly agreed with; concerning the author's personal vision, Ruskin wrote in "Of King's Treasures": . . . the piece of true knowledge, or sight, which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down for ever; engrave it on rock, if he could: saying, 'This the best of me; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved, and hated, like another: my life was as vapor, and is not; but this I saw and knew; this, if anything of mine, worth your memory.'" Under Ruskin's influence Ezra Pound celebrated the author's right to challenge the reader's attention, so as to let a book "be a ball of light" in the reader's experience. Let these Ruskin/Pound musings bespeak Meme's bright intentions.



Joliet Prison, panopticon cellblock as featured in the 1948 film *Calling Northside 777*.

Besides this nod to Ruskin's influence on Meme, as editor, I wish to thank two people: 1) tenacious private investigator and mystery writer Dallas Johnson for his sleuthing, his tracking down clues into Meme's demise; he's just started a new cycle of mysteries featuring a new PI character, Jack "Jump" McFall — suggested by the theme of *falling* as per Hy's novel and an appreciation to journalist Jack McPhall (1904 -1983) who rescued a man from a wrongful murder conviction with his probing articles for the *Chicago Tribune* that inspired

the 1948 movie starring James Stewart as McPhall, *Calling Northside 777* (a film adored by both Hy and Dal for its interior shot of the famous *panopticon* cellblock at Illinois's Joliet Prison).



Glock 17 (Austrian)

In his first Trump-Era adventure, *Enfantillage*, PI McFall is described physically as "turning corners in a manner mimicking actor Martin Clunes's straightlaced character in the British TV series *Doc Martin*," so as to, as Dal put it, "make indistinguishable work and the workman"; moreover, each mystery will be, said Dallas, "based on the investigation reaching a critical turning of a corner." In this initial outing, sited in a Paris besieged by "Yellow Vests," PI McFall, takes on the American ex-pat crime lord whose flesh has a cadaverous glow of boiled pork: *Yeux Glauques* ("Glaucous Eyes," who was given this homonymic cognomen because he repeatedly uses the expression "You Glock!" as a put down to his underlings, especially if they are Austrian, or even just speak German); and 2) my publisher Eckhard Gerdes for undertaking the additional effort needed to realize this more fully realized redaction of Hy "Mememo" Grader's experiences and thought.

Hy's wife, Dorinda, wants me to tell you that her husband's practice of "schizo-writing" had, in the past, enabled him "get through the wall (the reality principle) and keep on truckin'." But after having witnessing a young man attempt suicide by jumping from a balcony inside Chicago's famed Art Institute Museum (see Prologue page xv), he began his morbid "Jump Shots" collection (see next page) and fled home, right into the



From Hy "Mememo" Grader's "Jump Shots" collection

bad influence of one Wish Watt (see Frontispiece section on him). Dorinda, who's gone from birds-atwitter moments with her husband to suffering the sudden sorrow of widowhood, wants to thank you, Dear Reader, for your patience (you will need it) in engaging with her beloved deceased's odd, meta-leveling genre, the *ludicakadroman* — of which a hostile reviewer of the first edition wrote: "What surer sign is there that the creative aquifers are running dry than a writer creating a writer-character" — what with its unstoppable footnotes, mosaic structure, editorial glosses, and "Meme-ization" of content. It is, indeed, a text best read one shard at a time, over time, so as to *not* run overtime, inducing the reader's brain to time-out.

— James R. Hugunin, Santa Fe, NM

# Hy "Mememo" Grader



*Man and Language* (portrait of Hy Grader, 2010) photo by Ichi Honne

*How can we read his [Hy Grader's] theory of writing in order to read him when we would already have to understand it in order to understand it? But he cannot, or will not, say; he can only quote. I had to open five different dictionaries in my browser, scribble extensive notes, to get at deeper themes in his writing.*

— Vera Wisdom, "Ach! The Ludicakadroman," in *Das Ding Dong*

*The progress of any writer is marked by those moments when he [sic] manages to outwit his [sic] own inner police system.*

— Ted Hughes

*How does one fashion a book of resistance, a book of truth in an empire of falsehood, or a book of rectitude in an empire of vicious lies?*

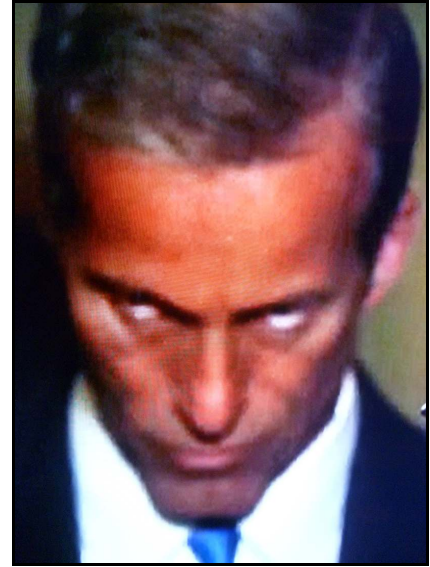
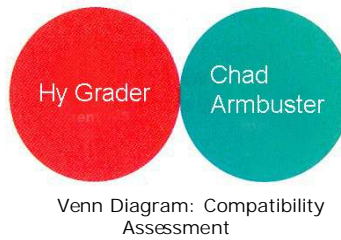
— Interview with Philip K. Dick, 1974 from *Only Apparently Real*

# Chad Armbuster

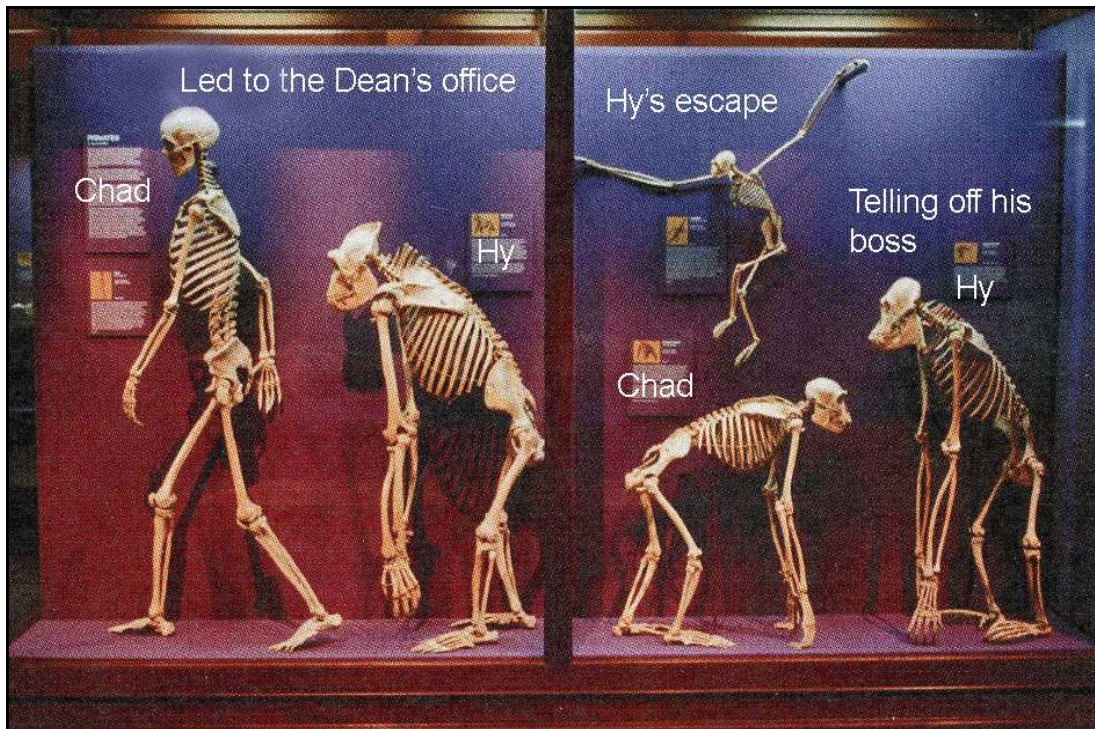
Hy "Mememo" Grader's departmental chairman and his favorite author, William Hazlitt who wrote that, "I have only to defend a common sense feeling against the refinement of false philosophy."



William Hazlitt (d. London, 1830)



Chad Armbuster (b. Chicago, 1981)



Hy Grader's Dream: The Natural History of Hy Grader and Chad Armbuster's Relationship



# Putting a Hole in my Sunny Sails



Poster hanging in Chad Armbuster's office

*Scene: Chad Armbuster's Liberal Studies Department office at a "McUniversity" in Chicago, in the Milky Way moving in excess of cosmic expansion toward the constellation Hydra. Gravity in the room is a smidgen stronger than earth-normal and a whiff of sulphur is smelled. A face-off with this Chairan — a Magister Bombardarum, lurking in the Hall of the Mountain King, a towering mass of sounds, a nervy, never-smiling man of affirmation and negation, a bell-tower jangling out of time, harsh, a fount of evil power now dolled up in Shakespearean garb — is in the offing. He believes academia is a battle where he can only win by destroying the other guys, make them lick the royal rim of the royal toilet. At the same time, he still needs them just a bit, someone has to recognize his power. And that power is increasing as the Dean just has approved Armbuster's plan to add the neo-*

*liberal tool of Digital Humanities studies to his department [ed., a policy that I heard Hy Grader call: "A splinter 'round which everything festers, throbs, and boils"]. Chad uses the word "connect" as believers use the word "Jesus," often standing in contrapposto, lifting his right arm, and raising his index finger in the ad locutio (orator's) pose, volume on DROWN OUT ALL OTHERS.*

*The play is started a half an hour late; actors disguised as audience members loudly express indignation at the delay. When the curtain does rise, the Chairman sits motionless in his wooden chair, holding up a THERE WILL BE NUMBERS T-shirt he got at a Computational Literary Studies conference. His head is turned right at a forty-five degree angle giving the audience a view of a physiognomy of a person of stern nature tinctured with enthusiasm. On either side of his desk, a disordered stack of books, the spine of one reads, Journal of Cultural Analytics. The man gazes up and left at a large poster with bold red type on his wall with no expression of human weakness, his glance as pitiless as a flash of lightning. His phone rings. He talks gibberish, making exaggerated vain gestures with his free hand.*

*Loud knocks on his office door. He slams the phone, turns toward the door. More knocks, louder, violent such that the door's wooden panel trembles. The door is finally opened from without and two contingent faculty burst in: Hy Grader (in French sailor pants and a white T-shirt advertizing Bruce High Quality University) and Wyoming Mann (a.k.a., Wyoh, a "rad" of indocile thoughts in a white cowboy hat, chaps, bolo tie, and carrying Ivan Illich's diatribe, Deschooling). They fiercely glance at that large poster hailing the economic advantages of distance learning, neoliberal economics at work within their university. On the wall opposite the poster is a gold-framed portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson with a quote from him running beneath: "Man is a stupendous antagonist." On a third wall hangs a poster of Théodore Géricault's The Raft of the Medusa. Some wit has felt-tip penned CONTINGENT FACULTY over the raft's miserable, gesticulating occupants. A man dressed as a courtier enters from stage left and reads from a scroll, announcing via a megaphone: "Behold a cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant!"*

*CHAD: [He rises, circles the room for advantage; a deep well of sarcasm and mockery hides behind his snapping eyes, eyes that look like strange sins, as he scans his opponents; in an aside he speaks to the audience in a crumbly, orange voice.] I, the Strutt N. Crowe Professor of Literature, am the Black Hand of the Black Death. I sink darts into the ears of men, put them in fear, I, who believe thinking sustains momentum, momentum identifies targets, and targets bring in money. Even the four-footed stand on two legs when I arrive.*

WYOMING (a.k.a., Wyoh): *[To the audience.]* The man hath no music in himself. *[To Chad]* Prithee, know we're the Red Peril of the Red Plague, the lymphangioliomyomatosis growing in your lungs, the dot under the question mark. There's a time for reciting poems and a time for fists. *[Louder]* We say, 'do deschool society,' let the autodidact reign free of guards and gaol. *[Aside in lower tones]* Our Dean seeketh dialogue on our demands, but which, that adminoninny made clear before, are non-negotiable. Small ideas scamper and scrabble, seeking power.

HY: Chad, pride sits you well you Ubu Roi dum drum of suppurating treachery; strut, colossal bird, your cave-mouth full of stink. You think me a man of gingerbread to be molded to your liking? Prithee, I assign thee to *Malebolge*, *[points downward]* the ditches of evil, you hemorrhoid-licking . . .! *[Aside, Hy and Chad cackle between shit talk and ferocious laughter.]*

CHAD: I feel a draft *[pulls out a small whisk broom and brushes his shoulder.]* Devil, do you dare approach me *[lips thrust out, eyes hot-wired and roving, as if lightning was trapped in eyeballs]?* Do not thee fear fierce vengeance o' my fist wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insects! Or rather, stay, so I may trample you to dust. Or just go blow your nose you self-forgetting wilders! Your pedagogical acts be cracked, your coxcomb fallen. *[Then whispered aside to the audience]:* Or maybe I should make them full professors; that'll get 'em off my back.

Your bauble, your slide-projector, I confiscate. Your blackboard stripped classroom hath now been mediatized. Toll the bell, for slides, they are no more! Nay! Soon thy classroom will be obsolete. A field full of empty chairs. A desert. Thy admin will be up your butt hairs! You and your fools will soon be singing WYOH, WYOH me as we infantilize you more and more and keel-haul any miscreants. Fie! Go write a Beckett play on your own time.

HY: In struth, I mark our noble faculty be in decay. Our contingent kingdom suffers being broken up, so every don is now his own fool and our world be cheerless. I prithee, Sir Armbuster, go back to your lord, the Dean, and tell that this Merry Jack Pudding, along with his fellow basement-based zannies, will joust with your neoliberal black arts *[lower jaw relaxes moronically, like a Muppet's, then he grabowerates Chad and grabacks him down to the floor].*

CHAD: Avaunt, unwise contingents *[struggling, uttered between clenched teeth]!* Thou hast no portion in me. *[A whispered aside]:* And I thought a barking dog never bites. When's the last time you recall being on top of one single human situation, instead of it being on top of you? I now bustle to the Admin-Lair to rub smooth my cares, where the Dean will agree to fund my trip to deliver my paper "Problems of Cultural Distortion in Translating Expletives in the Work of Cortazar, Baudelaire, and Flaubert." *[Yoking ten oxen to his voice.]* So away, you starvelings *[hot, reddened eyes]*, you elf-skins, you dried meat's-tongues, bull's-pizzles, you stock-fish! I am sick when I do look upon thee! More of your twaddle would infect my brain. I go to work — O blessed curse of Adam's posterity, healthful toil, all hail! *[Freeing himself, he marches off singing an ancient drinking song by Anacreon to the tune of "Where did you get that hat?"]*  
*Exeunt. [Offstage, maniacal laughter like oft heard echoing down a mental institution's corridor.]*

Author's note: Chad Armbuster is a typical Admin-type in that he displays systemic alteration of networks in the thalamic intralaminar nuclei and the prefrontal-parietal associative loop; hyperactivation of the neural correlates of rationalization is found present. This type of mind can watch the rest of its brain make its decisions cheerfully, blithely, even as it brings down disaster upon contingent faculty.

# Four Amigos Minus One

JYM

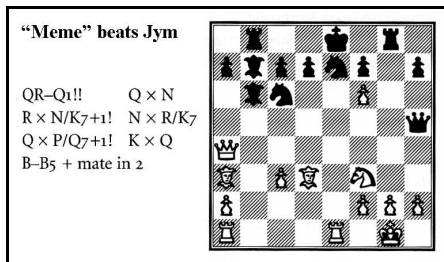


Jym, shot staged by Dallas Johnson

Calling Dorinda Grader that fateful night, PI Dallas Johnson cited Charlie Chan telling his wife: “Events break suddenly like firecrackers in the face of innocent passersby.” Innocent passersby certainly saw Hy “Meme-mo” Grader splatter on a Chicago sidewalk.

In my nightmares I still see that unstable dreamer’s face, bloodied by that fatal 22-story dive. This is a recurring horror us amigos hope to purge by looking into the mysterious death of our friend. For over 22 years, Hy, a Precarious Knowledge Worker (PKW), taught Lit- and Art-related courses on the themes of utopia/dystopia at a loopy Chicago Loop U. at which, in all his years of climbing and descending the steps from lobby to elevator floor, he never got the same count up as down. Hy wrote fiction “as a remedy against the corruption of my consciousness and the age I live in.” He took his duties seriously within a mediocre context.

Around the time Margaret Thatcher was doing a “T.I.N.A.” on Britain’s economy, Hy was tasked to team teach “Art and Incarceration,” a Liberal Studies class cross-listed with both Art History and the Criminal Justice Department. While preparing for that class, Hy met with me and one Dallas Johnson, a private investigator — a Colt .45 (the gun) and a Colt 45 (the malt liquor) are painted on his office door — whose also

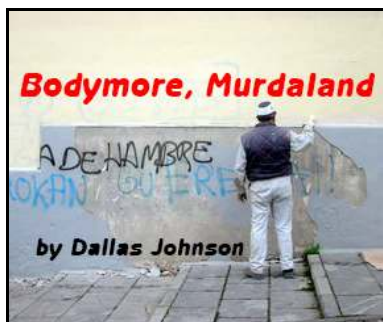


Last game between Mememo and Jym before “Meme’s” death

a mystery writer and former parole officer. He once gave a talk at Hy’s college. I’d just published a 500-page *magnum opus* on the representation of prisons and prisoners in photography, film and video; my academic job at a world-class art school put me a few blocks north of Hy’s school. Dallas’s first mystery novel, *Looking for the Ptyx*, was out and he’d moved his PI biz from Berwyn to Chicago’s South Loop. That novel was soon followed by a novelette *Bodymore*, *Murdaland* which, he claimed, influenced the notable TV series “The Wire”.

So we amigos were all only blocks apart. It was a fortuitous conjuncture. A veritable data-sponge, Hy absorbed our suggestions during regular meetings of what we eventually dubbed The Eclectic Society at the Fine Arts Building’s

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*Bodymore, Murdaland*, a novelette mystery story by Dallas Johnson where Blurt Wildbraine tracks the notorious Ace of Cakes.

Artist's Café on Mich Ave next to Hy's school. At first, it was all business, Hy buying us lunch in exchange for info for his class. Soon, though, we were sharing our interests in social justice and a mutual delight in sci-fi and murder mysteries — Moto, Charlie Chan, Sherlock Holmes, Isaac Asimov's sci-fi-mystery "The Billiard Ball," and 1940s' scantily-clad *gedankenexperiments* — and, oddly, in gems, especially lapis lazuli. Hy was fascinated with that gem's intense deep blue color and that it was (he liked the double entendre here ) a *metamorphic* rock prized since

antiquity. His wife, Dorinda, "muchly preferred" gentian blue on gents, so that color showed up often in her husband's couture.

In contrast to us pedantic pedagogues at war with all jejune philistines of little learning, Dallas is a man of the street and bars (both prison and drinking venues). Time has enlarged him in an organic, mineral way, like a tree trunk. His brew is warm piss and skepticism. He can amp up a speech by refusing the prim protocols of "proper" English and charm us with his "grain" of voice. Hy's Japanese émigré buddy, Ichi Honne, described it best: "Dallas-san Sumo wrestle his mother tongue." Dal, oft clad in a mustard-colored turtleneck, rivets us with detective lore — both RL and not — rooted in his day job, where he must think his way into other existences, alert to the unreality of established facts. "I enjoy bein' pulled into a game," he admits, "in which the levels of readin' shift between fiction 'n the true, mystery 'n sci-fi," stuff that fortuitously jives with your readin' habits, *kemo sabe*." Dal then draws an overlapping Venn diagram.

Envious of "the waltz of obviousness and obscurity" in Dallas' mysteries and his use of Charlie Chan aphorisms, Hy had to try his hand too. Hy and I had this mutual "thing" for chess; then Dallas got into it, kibitzing with an encounter between language and body that kept us rocking with laughter like gin spilling from glasses. Despite the solidity of our weekly triumvirate, Hy never let us get too close, implementing a Protestant proxemics. We were not yet his *intimate* friends, reserving such to a select few, like his buddy, Ichi, whom he praised as "a man who sees his shadow projected on the sky." Those privileged to call Hy "Mememo," were a minority. (Dal once said, "That's not a name, it's the beginning of a sentence!") Hy believed the price of *broheimship* is the suppression of too much otherness, except when it came to Ichi, despite their 150-mile separation. Ichi had the privilege to call him simply "Meme". They shared Leftist politics, a love of slapstick teaching where language is always on the edge of fumbling, and a mutual marked preference for the absurd.

## Finding Mememo

### 3



Perfect weather a minute ago. But weather writes and rewrites itself. Yet you still can't expect me to believe that a dead man, a suicide, has the power over meteorology in this part of the world.

We'd just finished seeing a James Ensor exhibition, then "post-Internet" Dutch artist Harm van den Dorpel's thematically cohesive installation, "Just-in-Time," focusing on the digital world's visual vocabulary and how the space between the images it produces can be warped. I particularly liked one work titled "Macro Intimacy" (2015): muted close-up shots printed on heat-shrink foil, showing a cluttered room corner.

Sunny, clouds clean as if squeezed from a tube, so we decided to munch-a-lunch in the Art Institute of Chicago's courtyard restaurant. Suddenly, Ichi yells, "*Shuuchugou!*," a severe localized downpour with hail, putting us in harm's way. Reminded me of Rachel Rose's video *A Minute Ago* (2014), where she used a YouTube video showing the moment when a day of summer leisure lunching on the banks of a Siberian river — probably involving sipping *shchi*, sour cabbage soup — is suddenly disrupted by a violent hailstorm. As the bathers madly dash for cover, the thoughts of the amateur cameraman narrating the havoc turn to their mortality: "If we die, know that I love you."

I had said the same thing to my red-headed wife — gripping her hand, its calm persistent skin, too firmly — when an engine on our Lufthansa Airbus A320 took a lightning strike minutes after take-off from Vienna en route to Abu Dhabi. Minutes before. In the airport waiting to board our plane. A hot, deceitful day. Outside, the air weighed heavily. Colors started to dim. We noticed dark clouds with jagged edges ranging over the far landscape. Dire expectation hung in the pallid atmosphere. Shreds of tattered clouds growing blacker and blacker. Several coalesced into just one cloud, super black and implacable, moving our way. The sun had ceased being functional. "A huge, blustery, thunderstorm's on its way," Dory, my wife, rhetorically observed.

Our flight was delayed an hour. But such storms can still be a lightning threat even when miles away. In the air, at around 10,000 feet as our plane banked right, the dipping wing revealing a hole in the sky, the light of all hells cracked like steel into aluminum. Number two engine took a direct thunderbolt. As flames blitzed past my C26 window seat, the thought of death occurred, not fear, but a wallowing in the thought of plummeting like a bird through space, and I heard "The Airborne Symphony" by composer Marc Blitzstein [*ed., premiered April 1946*] and simultaneously saw, in a powerful Proustian flashback, Poussin's famous painting *The Funeral of Phocion* (1648) [*ed., the body of a goodly Athenian politician falsely accused of treason and forced to down hem-*

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*The Funeral of Phocion (o/c, 1648) Poussin*

*lock]* is being carried on a stretcher away from what is otherwise a peaceful village, a classicizing painting of political violence and death in a pastoral landscape. Poussin, an exile in Rome, found in this tale a lesson and an inspiration, which led to the creation of two of his greatest works. I saw that painting once, hanging in architect Philip Johnson's Glass House as I peeked in through those massive windows, fighting the play of reflections, shadows, and glares.

Although we were helpless subjects of the sky and earth, the skilled pilot managed to suppress the flames and hastily U-turn-it back to the airport where we fanny-slid down exit chutes into firemen's arms. Had to change planes. Baggage reloaded. Half a day later, at our destination and dining with her son's family, my psychoanalyst wife offered that my odd involuntary memory at that moment of crisis was probably due to my feeling fragile as glass, sensing death eminent, the engine flared among the reflections careening off my window. Life hurls us like a stone, and we sail through the air; sometimes we almost fall, sometimes we actually do. This brings me to a five dot ellipsis . . . . .

Memory, with which my mind knows itself, is in the first place the *memory of the capacity-to-remember*, but I haven't fully exercised that capacity, having almost forgotten to mention that museum visit's most momentous event.

My photographer-friend-confidant and fellow Ozu fan, Ichi Honne, drove his dark green Subaru down from "Mad City" (as locals call it) where he is a part-

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time lecturer (“an errand boy for art,” he calls it) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s art department. The horoscope of our meeting was surely ruled by auspicious conjunctions. A mutual friend of a friend’s friend had linked us up when he found out I was moving my pedagogical-self from Los Angeles to Chicago, to within 120 miles of a man who practices the *D* (Tao, The Way) of Photography with a *bushid* loyalty to his medium (he got interested in photography when he was a child hand-model in toy ads). He, in turn, was impressed with my *gambari* (workaholic ethos). As a boy, like *moi*, he showed a talent for geometry and numbers. Quotes from *Hanzai Japan* (a book of fantastical, futurist mysteries) and notes that “highest of Japanese rights is to scurry through life unmolested by someone else’s emotion.”

When does knowing a person begin? At our first meeting, he began with, “Beauty, geometric, is my irreparable,” a good solid opening gambit, like White’s first move in the formidable Ruy Lopez chess opening. “It seems,” he said, “we communicate via *ishin denshin*, Japanese for telepathy. Like we play *kage fumi*, Japanese kid-game where we step on each other’s shadows. It’s a game expressing intimacy,” as he explained, “There is an ancient expression, *Sanjyaku sagatte shi no kage wo fumazu*, which means ‘Keep about ninety centimeters from one’s master in order not to step on his shadow’.”

I was taken with this admission of closeness between us coming from someone socialized to be more reserved with their feelings. But, as one Japanese saying goes, “A clever hawk conceals its talons,” so I was cautious at first about our new relationship. That was 30 years ago. We still take turns suffering interminable road construction and expensive tickets for violating the 45 m.p.h. speed limit zones as we shuttle between Chicago and Madison to visit each other every other month or so. The trips get monotonous. To jar us back into creative mode, we begin our visit with a craft-brew or a puff of weed. This is often followed by Ichi performing an it-always-cracks-me-up exaggerated Japanese pronunciation of an English phrase like “Roos rips shrink shrips” (“Loose lips sink ships”). That was a warning found on WWII posters, one of which he included in a photo made years ago in New York. Within the context of our teaching jobs, that phrase (like convict lingo) becomes code for “Be discrete around fellow academics.” Relations between oneself and one’s departmental chairman or dean, between artist and museum curator, and so forth, we code as “*Go-on to h k*,” which translates as “obligation and service,” like that of vassal to lord, but is heard in English only as a command to travel. When Ichi tells me he is “Going on to *h k*,” I know he’s going to try to hawk his photographic wares to some collector or museum, domestic or foreign.

So you see, besides the laughs and the Wisconsin micro-brews he brings me, I’ve learned much about Japanese culture, like that they have a Respect for

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Hy's deceased friend, Kevin (1973)

the Aged Day, *Keir* . In the States we've junked all that as sentimental schlock celebrating, instead, Respect for the Consumer Day (i.e., "Black Friday") a frenzied day of storm-shopping that leaves abandoned kids urinating in the aisles the day after gorging on slaughtered fowl.

We found we had much in common: *Keizoku wa chikara nari* (Perseverance is power), admiration for Arata Isozaki's 1962 proposal "City in the Air," and photographer Takuma Nakahira's

complex photo series *For a Language to Come*, of which I later saw excerpts in a 1972 issue of *Asahi Camera*. The latter was an artist who, like me, also wrote criticism. I had perused that very issue thanks to another photo-freak buddy of mine, Kevin — dead now 30 years — who had a subscription. Kev and I would sit side-by-side, page through each new issue like teenagers looking at *Playboy*. Prowling the streets in our Che Guevara T-shirts, we carried our Nikons strapped across our breasts like bandoliers. And we did think, naively, we were revolutionaries in the practice of our medium. Kevin later moved to Japan, he and his Nikon haunting Shinjuku.

For Ichi everything is equal — the natural and the artificial — something that binds our postmodern friendship. He said he looks at a tree and face, a poster and a smile in exactly the same way: "Everything I see is for me the merely visible. I see, I see more and more, I reconstruct by seeing." He seems to notice everything as if for the first time, not to have learned to attach pre-determined meanings to all things. *To photograph* — he is that Verb eternally generated and incarnate in Time. Ichi loves magnifying glasses — more than cameras — and has a vast collection of them. Says they magnify flaws. Perfect hobby for a guy who demands perfection; the magnifying glass suggests the scrutiny necessary to achieve it, judiciously scanning his negs with it.

And this time, he and I were entering Renzo Piano's new Modern Wing of the A. I. C. I flashed my plastic rectangular faculty badge with its bad portrayal of *moi* (factoid: a student once pasted a photo of an ape's face on his badge and no one noticed) telling the teller a fib that my companion should be covered as a family member. The young brunette gave me that middle-of-day-of-the-vernal-equinoctial look of suspicion, as she glanced at my Anglo face and overly snappy attire, then to Ichi's Asian visage and his careless dress that isn't entirely careless, and then back to me, then down to my I.D. badge and back to Ichi . In a certain uncertain way I could see she was waffling on her decision so I exercised my natural Tellurism until her face relaxed. She let us pass, "Uhhhhh, okay," raising her fisted left hand upward, opening it, letting out an irregular wad



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of fisted air, while handing us the tickets with her right. We were seeking a magical and silent colloquy between art and viewer — not to happen.

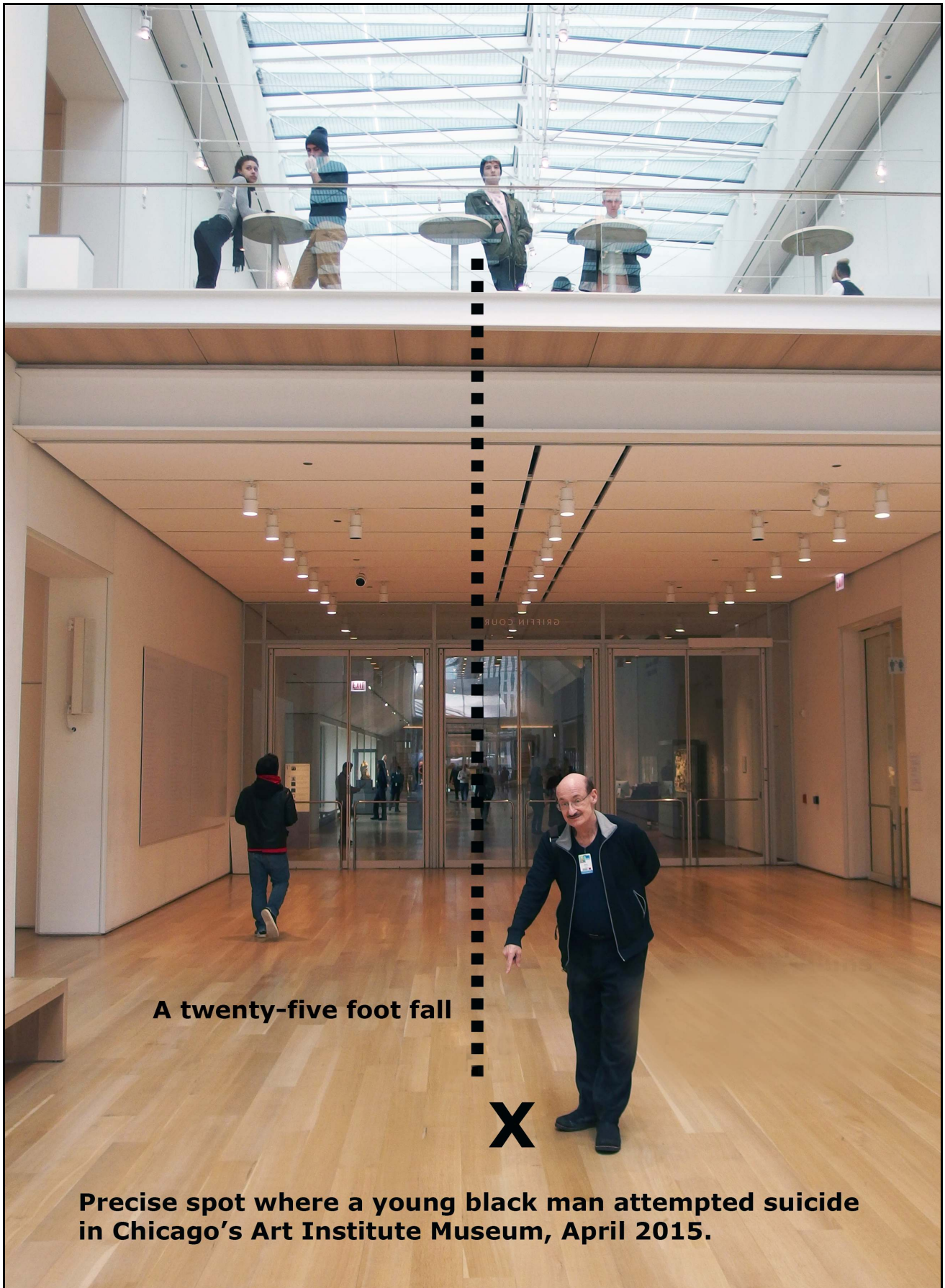
We had just got the tickets in our eager mitts when a huge racket on the second floor balcony drew everyone's attention. People pointing upward like they do in Superman movies. A dashing handsome young black man, flawless brutal power in struggle between two overwhelmed guards, screamed like a two-year old in melt-down, while bucking as if doing the Sassy Bump. We looked up, our eyesight an arrowhead parting the air, to see the hot elegance of a terrified thoroughbred attempting to be hot-walked between two trainers. He then gave out an animal wailing like a horse being gutted by a mountain lion.



Suddenly, racket turned into a racquet-ball, a racquet-ball that then became a *rocketing* rock that tossed itself over the cliff, jumping the balcony's railing in a wide trajectory to fall 25 feet at 32.2 ft/sec/sec to burst with a thud into a pool of hot blood, into death that attracted him like moth to flame. The head, a pricked yolk, spurted. A long cosmically held breath of generalized dread. A silence the size of a lunar sea in which some witnesses contemplated how close the falling black body had missed a child milling about below; some looked around as if they might find the walls splashed with brains and a red rainbow. Husbands, slipping into standard gender role, comforted screaming wives. Children clung to parents like they do when they see a Rottweiler coming down the sidewalk toward them. I heard one parent tell a child, "If all your friends jumped off a cliff, would you?" But most just made sounds in trills and scales impossible for a mouth to conjugate into nouns and verbs. My heart pounded. I couldn't catch my breath. A scene from Chris Marker's film *La Jetté* right before my eyes. But the dying jumper's last thought might've been: *Yo, what do you 'ave to complain of? You only 'ad to watch. I'm IT.*

Not sure who suffered more: the suicide; the nicely polished, expensive wooden museum floor (where eight hours later a fancy-schmancy art opening had elegant people, smirking, shaking hands as if nothing had happened); or the shaken witnesses of a surprising, unanticipated event that for several minutes united us all as a special group in which the following phrases might be shared:

The Early Warning Ground Proximity Indicator is still flashing.  
Will the restoration of the floor be flawless?  
Presents itself as a secret we share.  
There is an inhuman beauty to it.  
The shrinks will try to explain it.  
I close my eyes and still hear it.



**A twenty-five foot fall**

**Precise spot where a young black man attempted suicide  
in Chicago's Art Institute Museum, April 2015.**

Actual traumatic event witnessed by author and his friend (see section three in text).

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The sound is almost painful.  
I can't believe it happened!  
O strange new final music!  
A life was last seen living.  
The lonely devastation.

*This message will be repeated.*

All the stunned not-thinking-but-looking witnesses, adults and kids, stared with horror as the fallen body seeped dark red, like in the movies. Then our after-burners cut in: some searched for uniformed staff; some pulled out cell-phones to dial 911; some paced back and forth nervously. Ichi once told me "I'm the size of what I see, and not the size of my stature." Taking him at his word, I wondered what his stature was *now*. Certainly he was too shaken to snap a newsie,; no visitor ran out to take a "selfie" before the corpse either. Were we waiting for a coach from the abyss to pull up and remove the body? I had to yell "Moshi-moshi" to get Ichi 's attention so he could get a shot, but he froze. Only his molars inside his mouth were moving, grinding together so hard you could smell the hot metal of his fillings.



Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void*

There's always been a thin sheet of glass between me and life — being born premature and spending weeks staring at the world *à la* incubator — on which is projected what I take for Real Life, presentations appearing to me as *re*-presentations, even my inner presentations. Life, literature, and cinema coalesce for me, so no surprise I flashed on the three fatal falls staged in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* as well as on artist Yves Klein's famous *Leap into the Void*. Was what we witnessed today a *re-enactment* of such? Re-enactment's a popular aesthetic strategy these days, but it sure *wasn't* a re-enactment of that ho-hum-so-what response seen in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Land-scape with the Fall of Icarus*. No — guards appeared with deputized looks as they listened to commands over their walkie-talkies, then barked orders: "Exit through that door." Taking one last glance back, the total immobility of the scene, its freedom from time, struck me. Then we were lead down a narrow hall, our shadows falling on walls like those of sleuths in 1930s detective films as we were guided to an adjoining gallery in a newly hung blockbuster exhibition of Belgian artist James Ensor's disturbing major works. Imagine having witnessed what we just witnessed, then shuffling by that maniac Ensor's disturbing visions! We, uninvited guests with "the horror, the horror" mirrored on our faces, zombie-

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*Skeleton Musicians*  
(drawing, 1888) James  
Ensor

walked among the other gallery visitors whose innocent visages showed placid gazes so perfect they seemed *trompe-l'oeil* illusions expertly painted on closed eyelids.

The media, shaking knowing hands with museum administrators, muffled any association of this unpleasantness with that world-class museum. The fix was in. The shocking event was under-reported, never made it to nightly news. One paper spoke in hushed tones of a “mental collapse,” an electro-magnetic mental storm propelling a suicide *in potentia* to, in that awful instant, wave bye-bye to his past, actualizing his potential for self-murder. In academic terms, in a phenomenological frame

of reference, our very “special group” had witnessed the “not-now” become the “now,” that “now” becoming a “now-point” receding into our memories to lodge there our whole lives. Amazingly, given the injuries we saw, the paper’s post-trauma reports were: “He is not dead, just critically injured. In a comma, on life-support. . . . People are praying for the family during this difficult moment. . . . He’s not a terrorist. . . . Museum operations went on normally after. . . . Visitors were largely unaware of . . .” That was it. Nothing is simple, nothing straightforward.

I wondered what bizarre set of events and thoughts sent a man to try and kill himself inside a museum. He obviously had something very fragile or explosive to carry about his person and was all the time aware of it.

- Did he seek the hush of that institution to better hear voices emerging from the air, not from throats?
- Did he think: *Everything wearies me, including what doesn't weary me. My happiness as painful as my pain.*
- Did he seem normal when buying his entry from the gracious ticket agent? If not, why sell him a ticket instead of calling the cops?
- Was he a reverse Iconoclast: instead of destroying art, he destroyed himself?
- Was it a disturbing artwork seen that set him off, something in the Ensor show?
- Was it Happy Dust turned sad. Or medication gone awry?
- Was he an art student who got a severe end of semester crit?
- Was he, like Tung Chien in Philip K. Dick’s “Faith of Our Fathers,” trying to jump to his death after seeing the God of Good and Evil (Abraxas) face-to-face?

All these questions went unanswered. There was something unexpected and original enough in his decision and act to be altogether incomprehensible.

Sure, from a galactic perspective, this actualization of inner human turmoil was a mere speck on a pale blue mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. But