

Enclosure, Take it Personally



by Carl Nelson

"Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member." – Groucho Marx

My first introduction to a parallel world was after I'd quit medical school and was endeavoring to make a living sketching portraits. My plan was that quick portraits would supply the money to feed my further artistic ambitions. I imagined a studio somewhere bordering a public thoroughfare (like the Seattle waterfront boardwalk) where I would paint seriously in the mornings, then open the garage doors to begin capturing the tourist trade mid-afternoons. It was a lovely pipe dream, quashed immediately after my conversation regarding a collaboration with Ivar, local business impresario and waterfront restaurant icon. A purposefully somewhat-ludicrous, but loved public character, he was a rather brusque fellow in

person (but with a very pleasant and classy older secretary). I argued that a portrait studio included in his current renovation might provide an additional attraction. He retorted that the matter was already settled. "What? Do you think I'm lying to you?" He waved, as I followed him into the construction area.

Anyway, I ended up doing portraits in the malls, while improving my skills at life drawing sessions in empty union hall rooms and art school vacant areas evenings, where other collected sketchers and daubers could work off the model for three dollars a session. Practicing anything, while staring at naked women (mostly) isn't ever a bad time – especially for a young, single guy – and an excellent way for the secluded artist to get out and socialize.

The effect of all this was to sweep me into a parallel artistic universe of working folk-artists of sorts, performing and selling their works in shopping malls, and along outdoor arcades such as the Pike's Street Public Market or at the Seattle Center (where Space Needle suicides dropped with a thud! into the flowerbeds nearby).

They celebrated making money rather like a tinkerer pitching his wares. (The Fine Art community who frequented the sophisticated downtown galleries sniffed at that attitude.) These small business people also worshipped at the feet of different masters, people of whom I'd never heard. They admired realism in native scenes and personalities. Sergei Bongart, a practitioner of Russian Impressionism was the reigning sage at the time. He had studied in Kiev under "Pitor Ivanovich Kotov (1889-1953), who had been a student of Nicolai Fechin (1881-1955) before he fled to the west." Sergei held workshops and retreats in the former studio of Fechin's in Rustic Canyon, nearby to Santa Monica, and summer times in Rexburg, Idaho. Prominent students of his (including Del Gish, who I spent an afternoon with at his studio outside Cheney, Washington one pre-Christmas) in turn conducted painting

retreats. And it was these latter retreats to which the most serious of my found artistic crowd attended. It was around all these scattered shadow-luminaries that names were dropped, and exhibitions courted. The world of Art Forum might as well have been the far-off planet, Venus, in an evening sky.

As life has progressed, I've found parallel worlds flourish best wherever the air is being sold. My goodness, this is most true of the art world, where pretense and fantasy are coins of the realm. Among garbage collectors, for example, parallel worlds haven't made much of an inroad I'd guess. Few give off the airs of antique dealers. Nevertheless parallel worlds, such as social circles describe, abound in near all aspects of life. And they work very much like the Enclosure Laws enacted in an earlier Britain, which carved what was once a freely roamed and utilized countryside into metaphorical circles of sorts. Inside of the ownership circles was what was theirs, the boundaries of which marked what was no longer ours.

In English social and economic history, enclosure was the process that ended traditional rights on common land formerly held in the open field system. Once enclosed, these land uses were restricted to the owner, and the land ceased to be for the use of commoners. – Wikipedia

I would guess that as soon as humans begin to perambulate, they are looking for their crowd, their circle of friends, and begin their enclosures. Then as they hit middle school, the circles tighten; there're entry requirements, gate keepers, exclusions, expulsions, coup d'états. Eventually maturity will bring censoring, cancelling with hatreds, violence, war, genocides... (Watch for it coming to a neighborhood near you.) You can fill in those colors. But circles also spawn community, allies, brotherhoods, and lots of other good things. Just like life, we're a mixed bag (of nuts).

However, even the most 'embracing' of organizations enforce an Overton Window. Professional groups usually spell it right

out. Though as corruption pollutes the membership, their mission statement is something compulsively parroted in public while gradually turned absolutely around in practice. (Something along the lines of “these vaccines are completely safe.”) I remember, as a medical student, how seriously I took the professional dictums; how badly I felt for many years about abandoning the profession, as if I had dropped the cross on Jesus’ foot. I have a bitter laugh nowadays at my innocence, following Covid-19, after witnessing doctors being silent at the atrocities practiced both through forced immunization and the banning of cheap, effective medicines – all to protect their positions, accreditations, and salaries. What a chump I’d been (authorial full-disclosure).

I found this wonderful exposé of the professional journalists’ pack behavior from a name dropped in a [substack by Robert Birnbaum](#):

The author interviewed Alston Chase, who had written a book on the Ted Kaczynski, the “Unabomber.” In his research, when he attempted to reserve a gallery spot – months in advance – to observe the trial, he was told by the judicial powers:

“We have turned it over to this press consortium.” Which was all the big boys, and I contacted them and they said there was no space left and besides you have to pay five thousand dollars and you have to have insurance...”

So he was forced to join a small contingent of court watchers who began lining up at the courthouse at 3AM, in order to grab the five free seats allowed. What he found was:

“The courthouse doors opened at eight. So they were essentially living there and I found these people fascinating. They were the people who really understood the trial and they had read the transcript thoroughly, everyday. They were trial buffs. One was a Ph.D. from a junior college near by. Another was a reporter for the Court Recorder

magazine and the others were aging ex-activists. I learned a heck of a lot from them. They proved helpful over the course of my writing the book. But it was like night and day to talk to these people and then go up to the media room where the journalists were with their laptops. First of all, one becomes aware of entering into a little subculture, like a circus. These people may be in Sacramento this week and then they were in LA covering OJ Simpson and then in Oklahoma City. And they all know each other and have become friends, and an awful lot of the stories get written over the coffee machine. And because they are all thrown together and basically strangers in the town, they tend to only talk to each other or talk to each other a lot more than they talk to anybody else. So the result is the stories all come out of the same cookie cutter. That struck me as just—it seemed to confirm one of the things that Kaczynski complained about. That is, that they are part of the system and its reporting of the news tends to encourage this kind of conformity.” – Alston Chase

Perhaps we can't change, but I do believe I can learn. About halfway through life, like a voice in my head, common sense spoke to me: "It's all about audience."

Clarity ensued. By ourselves, we have a miniscule amount of power. To have an effect, to be able to accomplish near anything in a great amount, you must have an audience – and from thence to create a following which both enables and supports your efforts.

'It's all about audience,' I realized. Knowledge just knows things. Audience, however, is power. How is it that the growing adolescent implicitly recognizes this? Certainly, I am not the first to gain such understanding. The fight for audience nowadays is fierce. Most my peers began to understand this by middle school.

The ladder of success seems more like a chain of circles, with prominence in the former being entry into the latter. Do well in high school and you'll get into the better college. Do well in college and you'll reap the better job, the better appointment. Get into and among those best appointed and you might soon be running things. Start running things in your first start-up, and you may get the chance to run things in a larger. Pass through enough circles and you might eventually run the world! There's the fantasy – which should be possible.

It's been said that we are removed from others world-wide by only "seven degrees of separation." That's a quite low (and also a lucky) number.

Of course, difficulties and complications must arise. Who would doubt it? Otherwise, we'd have several billion leaders.

There's a fly in this ointment, for sure. But that would entail a lot of buzz I'll save for elsewhere.

I'm on to another matter.

The basic problem with social circles is that – they are circular.

By entering one you gain immediate recognition, and so then, perhaps achieve preferment, perhaps even add the people there to your entourage. But you have also been captured. A circle is, as I've alluded, an enclosure, (and eventually, an uroboros). No matter how large your following, they will follow you everywhere, except perhaps, outside of the enclosure. To retain your personal authenticity, you must sometimes bud off, like an amoeba. Think of Dylan going electric.

Smuggling ourselves between and among circles would seem the only path possible for the contemporary authentic soul, as the modernized media's social enclosure binds us ever tighter and restricts the freedom of the wandering soul.

One must first have an independent thought in order to want to wander outside of the enclosure, something which will also require a robust psychology. (Again, think Dylan.) With recollection, I recognize the unconscious mentoring I took from an unrecognized (at the time) like-minded teacher from years past. (He would probably be surprised to find this quiet, class non-entity, to be the one confessing.)

The senior year of college, pre-meds generally passed under the gaze of Professor Herbert Eastlick, who taught Embryology. His recommendation weighed very influential in determining whether a student would be admitted to medical school. He was a throwback to a rougher, tougher era that had fought for its education, got up early, milked cows, worked for it, passed up pleasures for it – so that their education wasn't just something given, but rather something they had sacrificed for, and a part of their character. When he lectured Dr. Eastlick was often wont to insert some of his own recollection into the material. Some bit of factual matter might remind him of occurrence he'd had either back on the farm or recently in the dentist's chair. Sort of like a CSI sifting a crime scene. Such as one day, he happened to break mid-lecture for a bit of reminiscence about a construction site he had been walking past coming to work that morning. There was a worker there scrabbling among some bricks in a doorway of sorts, and the professor stopped to question him a bit, as he was interested in what was to be built there. He asked the fellow what he was doing? "What are you building here?"

"He didn't know!" Dr. Eastlick answered. And the more he inquired, the less information he could acquire. "Good God, man! Don't you have any curiosity? You're just doing what you are doing here without any curiosity about what is being built or why?" Ol' Herbert regaled us rhetorically.

Apparently so. And the fellow didn't have a problem with that – probably wondered why the old fellow was so interested.

Professor Eastlick shook his red face. Then he picked up the big book which held the material we read for our class. "You must take a personal interest in what you do in this life. When you read a book, you don't just open it to the first chapter and start absorbing what it has to offer, as if the rest were the wrapping for a candy bar. Books have prefaces. They have introductions. They are there to be read! This is the author speaking to you. He is telling you why he wrote the book. What this material means to him. What he says is there to help you evaluate all of the rest of the material, how the meat of the meal was prepared for this nourishment. It will give it an emotional shape and resonance, so that it in turn can shape your own outlook. It will tell you why you should be reading it rather than watching TV. The author is trying to give you a taste of its personal importance. This book was an interesting man. Pay attention!"

Professor Eastlick was the same way with his lectures, and his advisory. Ironically, he did not mimic like the evolutionary biology he taught. He did not recapitulate the program. He was invested. He was not captured by professional circles nor lecture protocol. He denied enclosure and wandered between where he would. The material and himself were in a hard-won relationship – which he fully intended to harbor and share.

About embryology, I remember little but the maxim: "Ontology recapitulates phylogeny," glibly condensed to the acronym: "ORP." (This means that the stages of an embryo's development are reflective of its taxonomic position in the evolutionary diaspora.)

But about the class! Most of what has stood me through life has been those digressive maxims from a sometimes red-faced, exasperated, Professor Herbert Eastlick. (RIP) Listening to a lecture by him was being a zoological rambler on a walking path tour such as they are rumored to have in Olde England – led by the Wilde Beast.

Currently, it is generally accepted by the small circle I inhabit that the United States and First World is being controlled and run largely by a very small circle of the Elite Class. Who they might be is widely discussed (IMF, WHO, CCP... Obama?), but this feeling among the common citizen that we are circling a drain is prevalent. Something up there is eating its tail. What is to be done? A lot of different corrective measures and cures are suggested. My guess, however, is that one of the first requirements will be that we all must take what is happening to us very personally. We're going to have to go "old school."

This contradicts the training I received as a Metro bus driver in Seattle. A Metro police officer came down from management to discuss how bus drivers should better handle conflict with the passengers. The thrust of his message was that we should remember "not to take it personally." If a passenger misbehaves in a small way (such as cursing us, not paying, being disruptive, etc.), we were to say to ourselves that "this person is probably just having a bad day," and to let it go. For more threatening behavior, we were not to engage them ourselves, but to call in for help.

I wanted to ask the officer if that was what a standing police officer would do, when a citizen spit on him – just say to himself that the person "was having a bad day" and smile? Or perhaps "call it in?"

This was some twenty years ago, but it seems to be the policy of law enforcement adopted in the large blue cities recently. And how is that working out for them?

For myself, I found I simply could not keep my morale up without taking my job personally. I piloted the ship; I was responsible for that ship, I would be called to account for whatever happened, and so I saw myself as the captain of that ship. So to sidestep the crash-dummy position management placed the drivers in, I had to come up with ways to establish

discipline among my customers that never involved notifying management at all.

For example, if a group of adolescents were causing havoc in the rear – I'd stop the bus, open all the doors, and then direct them over the bus' public address system to all stay in their seats, "I'm calling the cops."

They would all run off the bus, of course. Then I would shut the doors and drive on.

If I had a major confrontation with someone, I'd stop the bus, open the doors, and tell the passengers loudly over the PA that "for safety reasons this bus cannot proceed" while that certain passenger remains disruptive. This worked particularly well in the tougher neighborhoods where the tired riders just wanted to get home after working a hard shift.

Watching by the inside coach mirror, I got a ringside seat to just how things were handled where the rubber met this road. Usually, it wasn't long before someone would yell at the troublemaker, "Hey! Sit the hell down. We've got places to be." It was generally understood that to break the stoic, silence by speaking up in a rough neighborhood, meant that violence was on the table.

People who wouldn't pay chronically, got left behind later. But I'd generally take a stab first at intimidating them.

For example, there was a commuter college where I picked up a number of students. One day a rather arrogant one came on and walked right past without paying. "Hey!" I yelled back. "You need to pay." He made his way back up front after a bit of to-do. The conversation went back and forth a bit, with first this claim and then that. Clearly he felt himself to hold the intellectual advantage and intended to wield it. His final retort was, "You mean to say, that if I don't pay the fare" – his jaw was left slack at the effrontery of it – "you're going to make me leave the bus!"

“That’s it!” I said. “Hold onto that thought.”

He stared at me a moment, then strode to the back of the bus and caged the fare from a friend.

The old Chinese women were tougher nuts.

I had this one who would walk on and pay in small denomination coins so that they would make an uncountable pile on the coin plated, so that, like as not, I wouldn’t bother and would flip the change plate and let her pass. But one day, I decided to call her on it. I could count the money on the change plate and it wasn’t enough. “That’s only 67 cents,” I said. “The fare is a dollar twenty-five.”

She returned my stare.

“A dollar twenty-five too much,” she said.

I sighed, admitting defeat.

‘What the hell,’ I thought. ‘It’s not the winning necessarily, but taking things personally which makes the day interesting,’ I ruminated later.

In fact, it made the job and my life more interesting.

So hey! How about those truckers who won’t deliver into New York City.? Is that taking our currently government and its corrupt courts personal, or what? I think they are on to something. It certainly is invigorating.