

Domestic Detail

Contents

- 1. Preface**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. Autobiographical Notes: Part 1**
- 4. Notes on Creativity: Part 1**
- 5. (Possible) Titles for Painting Series**
- 6. Comments on Reproductions**
- 7. Autobiographical Notes: Part 2**
- 8. Notes on Creativity: Part 2**
- 9. (Possible) Titles for Painting Series**
- 10. Notes on Creativity: Part 3**
- 11. The Evolution of Insight**
- 12. A Brief Anthology of Quotations**

1. Preface

This document consists of a compilation of autobiographical ‘notes’ I’ve written over the past few years, and is intended to augment the information posted in the *About* tab on my website. Having more or less exhausted all the possibilities for self-interrogation inside the process of making visual art, I have recently turned to ‘writing’ as a source of potential insight. With a shout-out to the concept of ‘The Weak Novel’ proposed by writer Lucy Ives, I would say that the various texts in this document combine into something like a ‘weak memoir’—meaning that the ‘parts and pieces’ concern my life but do not add up to any type of linear narrative or coherent story. What I’m presenting here—in a form I consider to be a ‘digital chapbook’—is a patchwork of reminiscences about my life, supported by micro-essays about my development as a painter. Keep in mind that this document is a continuous project altered almost daily. The first version was posted on June 1, 2025. *The last revision was made on December 20, 2025.*

Will Buttner
Portland, Oregon
willbuttner.com

2. Introduction

At the end, we all become edited copy.

—Richard Powers

Reading—Writing—Taking Notes: At this stage of my life, I have become more or less a bookworm. Reading is now a lifeblood for me and a platonic ‘social network.’ If there is such a thing as human unity, I experience it primarily through reading.

I didn’t start reading fiction for personal enjoyment until I was in my mid-twenties when I was already out of college and living and working in Minneapolis. Before that, reading meant only one thing to me: studying to pass exams. And I didn’t start reading nonfiction books for ‘enjoyment’ and insight until after I had moved to the West Coast when I was in my late-thirties.

I hadn’t kept a single sentence of personal notes I’d taken over the years until I began reading books and essays on critical theory and on psychology and psychoanalytic theory around 1986. At that time, I started to save my reading notes, and then study my notes for additional insight. This practice—a method of learning—totally changed my outlook on how to ‘think about thinking.’ I became a compulsive note taker.

For nonfiction, I am currently reading Judith Butler’s latest book, from 2024, *Who’s Afraid Of Gender?*; Ross Benjamin’s 2023 translation of Franz Kafka’s

Diaries; and *Conversations about Sculpture* by Richard Serra and Hal Foster which was published in 2018 by Yale University Press; I am also rereading a very challenging book titled *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* by Madan Sarup.

A few years ago I decided that it was finally time for me to read some Proust; for some reason I had just never gotten around to it. And being a big fan of author Lydia Davis, I focused in on her translation of *Swann's Way* published by Penguin Classics. In a 444-page book full of gassy and frilly prose, I found just one sentence that I liked, where Proust states, '*None of us constitutes a material whole, identical for everyone . . . our social personality is a creation of the minds of others.*'

I mention the Proust because I just recently started reading Davis's translation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, also in the Penguin Classics series. This work of fiction has been acknowledged by many as one of the first masterpieces of what has been called 'obsessive realism.' Page after page, this book lives up to its reputation.

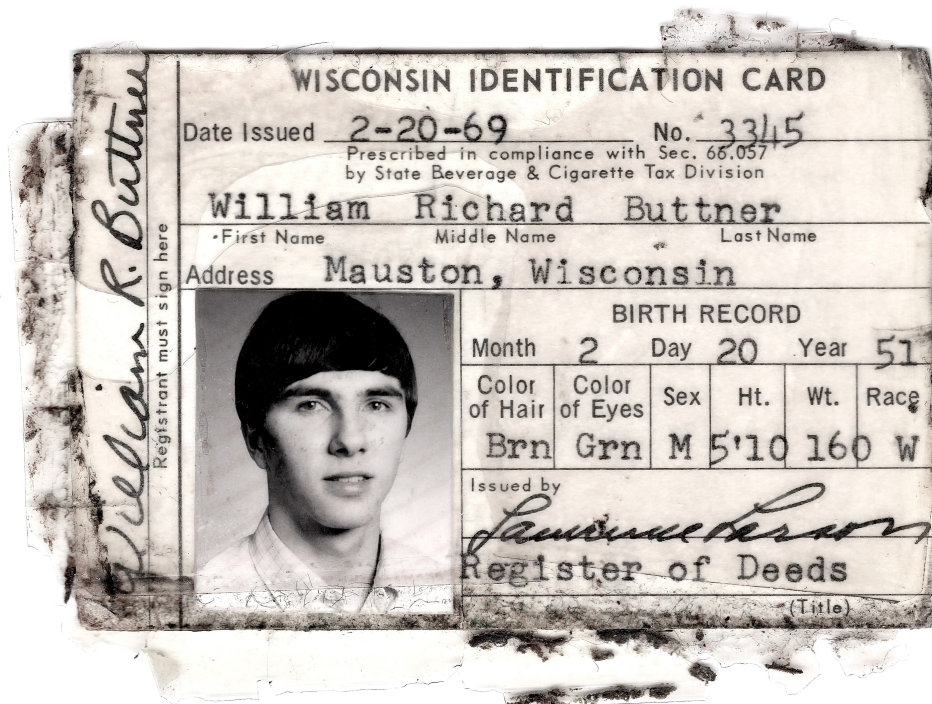
And—although I came to the party late—I am trudging my way through the six-volume autobiographical series called *My Struggle* by the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard.

3. Autobiographical Notes: Part 1



The first step of independence: The first time in my life I was on my own and responsible for myself was the day when I walked *alone* from my parent's house in the small town where I grew up to the nearby elementary school for my first day in kindergarten. This walk would have entailed about a one-quarter-mile round trip from the house to the school and back. The day would have occurred in early September 1956 when I was five-and-a-half years old. *Until that day I had never been out of the sight of one of my family members before.* On this day, my father would have been 60 miles away driving truck for the Badger Ordnance Works. My mother would have been at home—four months pregnant with her fourth child—doing housework and tending to my four-year-old brother and my two-year-old sister. I image that my mother would have experienced some small relief as the result of having one less child to deal with at home for a few hours. At the school, in the classroom, I was with a teacher and 21 other

students who—on this first day—*were all total strangers to me*. I was a ‘slow learner,’ but I liked being at school and mixing it up with the other kids. I adapted and then thrived. In the 5 x 8 inch, black-and-white photo of my kindergarten class—taken by a professional photographer—I am standing in the back row next to the teacher in our classroom at West Side Elementary School in Mauston, Wisconsin. I am apparently the ‘teacher’s pet.’ In my right hand, I am holding up to the camera a tail feather from a Pheasant. The feather is very long and extends up between my face and the teacher’s shoulder. Of the 22 students pictured in the photo—ten girls and twelve boys—I am the only child who has brought a ‘prop’ to school for picture day. The feather seems to signify some type of vanity on my part—am I a bit of a show-off, or maybe a little queer? A sign taped on the wall indicates that the date is March 13, 1957. The teacher’s name is Mrs. Wells. In the photo, I am one of only four students who is posing with a toothy, open-mouthed ‘happy’ smile presented to the camera. I look like I am incredibly glad to be in this classroom, with this teacher, and with my fellow classmates. Only one other student, a girl whose name I don’t remember, looks as happy to be in school on this day as I do. We both have looks on our faces of unadulterated innocence *and* joy. Until my first day of kindergarten, I had lived exclusively inside the clannish and insular world of my family. After this first ‘journey’ of walking a quarter-of-a mile on my own to school, and spending a few hours alone with strangers, it seems a whole world opened up to me.



2-20-69: This is a digital scan of one of my most valued 'souvenirs'—the original Wisconsin ID card that was issued to me on my 18th birthday in 1969. The card itself measures $2 \frac{1}{2} \times 3 \frac{3}{4}$ inches and is laminated in plastic; the small portrait photo glued to the surface of the card measures $1 \frac{3}{8} \times 1 \frac{1}{8}$ inches. The last name is derived from a German occupational name meaning 'cask maker.' He is named after his father, but he is not a 'junior.' The father and the son have different middle names. The young man in the photo has a slightly constipated look on his face that is understandable since he shares one bathroom in the small house where he lives with his parents and his five younger siblings. You wouldn't know it from this photo, but he plays bass and sings lead in a teenage rock band; this activity makes him popular with his peers, but

estranges him from his family. He appears to be wearing a black stocking cap, but this is just an illusion of the high contrast of the photo. In fact, he is sporting a very fashionable and popular version of “Beatle bangs.’ His father is the real musician, a genuine folk artist. This young man is not a musician—he just loves music; playing in a rock band is the beginning of his ‘career’ as an artist-imposter. I like it very much that the number 0 has encroached on the designation W in the ‘Race’ box on the ID card. I like the poetic resonance suggested here that perhaps my real ‘race’ is not ‘white’ but ‘zero white.’ For many years, from the late 1980s through the 1990s, I had a recurring bad dream that I had ‘murdered’ someone and buried them in an unmarked grave ‘a little ways out of town.’ I started having this dream after I had moved from the Midwest to the West Coast with the idea of redefining my identity. In the dream I was always stumbling around the area where I thought the grave was located, terrified that I would be ‘found out’ and then prosecuted. Of course this is a version of the classic ‘burying your child on the trail story.’ It took me a very long time to figure out that what my recurring dream was ‘telling me’ was that the person I had ‘killed’ was the young man in the photo.

4. Notes On Creativity: Part 1

To it put very directly, I paint to confirm difference. And I learned early on—when I first started to paint in the late 70s—that I could not explore my own sense of ‘difference’ by trying to *illustrate* reality. I discovered early that I had a very strong aversion to illusionism, especially styles of hyper-realism. I am not against illusionism in general *for others*; but, as an aesthetic style, the approach seriously does not work for me. This aversion I believe has determined my entire approach to creativity, especially painting. I discovered that I was personally repulsed by trying to ‘pull-off’ the technical ‘tricks’ of pictorial realism like modeling and shading. And trying to draw a figure or a realistic scene on a flat surface ‘in perspective’ made me feel like a phony—as if I were trying to tell a story and the story was all lies. I experienced a palpable feeling of *nausea* when I tried to utilize any of the ‘tricks’ of illusionism to make an image. So I gave up this ‘style’ early on, and had to find a different approach to painting. I believe this problem started when I was a child: I have always had a gut-loathing for anything claiming to be ‘magical.’ I don’t know what this says about me. What kind of artist doesn’t like to fool people and play tricks on the audience?

5. *(Possible) Titles for Painting Series*

old shed fell down

people are funny

no one likes a barking dog

you can't get there from here

it's good we're talking again

your name here

what if we were both wrong

man betrayed by emotional support animal

I do not think I can be of any further help

cowboys for \$4.99

the talking cure

turpentine burn

untitled, undated, unsigned

live removal

I said no

6. Comments on Reproductions

On a casual, surface level, I like a good photograph as much as the next person—but I get *no lasting satisfaction* from photography. To accentuate the point: Although I have thousands of photos stored on my computer for archival purposes, I do not have a single, photo-based image hanging in my home. To me, photography traps reality in a lie.

As Susan Sontag stated, ‘Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph.’

Because there are perhaps those who don’t think about things like this, I want to point out and *emphasize* something regarding the approximately 230 images I have posted on my website: all of the images are digital, photographic copies that ‘exist’ only in virtual reality. The sources of the copies, the artworks themselves, are handmade, physical things—paintings, collages, and drawings—that exist in real space. And again, the obvious—and bluntly: in browsing the images on my website, the viewer is *consuming reproductions* of image-edited, digital photographs—*not works of art*. In other words, the viewer/user is having another experience with the ubiquitous device screen not the arts.

In terms of the politics of representation, the reproductions on my website are what are critically known as ‘poor images.’ The images are corrupted copies of copies—with the implication that the originals are the

‘rich images.’ The originals are ‘high born,’ independent, standoffish, smug, elitist; the reproductions are ‘low born,’ and participate in the pop-culture practice of sharing tricked-out images for online, hygienic consumption.

For better or worse, the viewer’s private response to *the experience of scrolling and clicking through reproductions on the internet* is the ‘meaning’ of my website. Again—to state the obvious: the artworks, the physically real objects, have a content that is totally separate and independent from the online experience. There is a ‘live content’ in my work, but it can only be accessed by direct, in-person contact with the actual, physical object—in *the room*, so to speak. Here, the object and the viewer interact in real time and space where physical things ‘touch’ each other. The viewer gives something and the painting ‘gives’ something in the exchange. The content—the meaning—is the pleasure and/or the trauma that results from the ‘live’ interaction. The content is a glimpse of human connectedness via intersubjectivity—whether the experience be enjoyable or painful or both. Objectivity is for the atoms.

All this talk about the ‘poverty’ of the photographic reproduction might beg the question: *why* would I go through all the trouble in the first place to produce and maintain a personal website, if all it contains is a collection of ‘poor’ copies of my work trying to compete in the loud, hyper-toxic, attention economy? Good question.

7. Autobiographical Notes: Part 2

Unplanned/Inconsolable: Born in February 1951, I was conceived by accident in May 1950 by two love-struck, small-town teenagers. I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in a working-class family in a conservative, rural community in Juneau County, Wisconsin. I am of northern European heritage: roughly 9/16 British, 6/16 German, and 1/16 Norwegian. My four grandparents and their families were farmers, laborers, homemakers, carpenters, and soldiers—their ancestors were predominantly colonists and settlers. I come from people who sat down at the table with dirt, shit, and blood on their hands.

My parents were salt-of-the-earth, working-class heroes. They lived their lives with minimal planning, and they were very good at living the unexamined life. They created six humans without thinking about the consequences. They made-do; they had no larger aspirations. They just lived day-to-day and made decisions the way their parents and grandparents had lived and made decisions. Life was ready-made for them. Free thinking was never an option. Life was lived with dogmatic certainty. They submitted and obeyed. Education meant reading, writing, and arithmetic. Culture meant Sunday Mass, the Packers, fishing and hunting, jokes and gossip. Family meant children and grandchildren. Death meant heaven or hell.

My maternal grandparents were casual Protestants who

attended church just for special occasions; my paternal grandparents were devout Catholics. My mother, who had been raised Lutheran, converted to Catholicism when she married my father. I was raised Catholic. However, by the time I was seventeen, inspired by the open-minded and promiscuous vitality of my peers, I rejected the Church's rigid and punishing version of spirituality. Over the years, as an adult, I gradually washed superstition off my life like it was a toxic, temporary tattoo.

And considering the topic of formal education: of my two parents, and my four grandparents, only my maternal grandmother and my father graduated from high school—two of six. I attended a Catholic grade school, and a public high school. As far as I can tell from doing extensive family-history research, I am the first in my entire family tree to attend a four-year college and *graduate with a bachelor's degree*. My parents were not against higher education; they just had no precedents in their lives for people 'going off to college.' And they were just too burdened by the problems of daily life to think about the future. There was very little encouragement or financial support. So it is one of the great mysteries of my life why I broke with my working-class origins and went off to college in the 'big city' after graduating from high school in 1969. Inside my family culture, this decision was a *radical* break with tradition. And it was not a 'clean break.' The decision to leave my hometown, move to Madison, and seek 'higher education' resulted in a lifetime

of awkward estrangement from my family. I made myself into an outsider by opting for an open outcome.

The 50s and 60s: While I was growing up in a blue-collar family in a small town in Wisconsin, the idea and practice of ‘art’ was never talked about. The subject wasn’t taboo or banned, it was just that no one in my family knew anything about art or had anything to do with art. Popular music—yes, but art—no. I don’t blame my parents for not knowing about art—how could I blame them for not knowing about a cultural and social phenomenon they never had any contact with? When I was in high school I might have been vaguely aware that ‘art classes’ were available to students, but I never considered for a second enrolling in any of these classes. I didn’t think they had anything to do with me. I knew that a few of my classmates participated in high school ‘plays,’ but I never attended any of the high school theater productions. I was interested in sports, rock music, and girls—very normal concerns for a heterosexual, teenage boy growing up in a blue-collar family in the rural Midwest in the 1960s.

The 70s: I came to art late. It wasn’t until 1973 when I was already 22 years old that I ‘accidentally’ discovered the art world. At the time I was living in Madison and attending the University of Wisconsin. During a trip I took with a friend to visit his sister in Chicago, I was exposed to some of the best art in the world at the Art Institute of Chicago. I was taken on a tour of the museum one afternoon in the summer of 1973, and the experience changed the course

of my life. The paintings I saw at the Art Institute of Chicago that day made a deep and lasting impression on me. Beginning in the fall of 1973 I started to visit the Elvehjem Art Museum on the campus at the UW to look at paintings on my own. And then for the winter semester of 1974, I signed up for my first art history class—Art History 101. The decision to take art history classes launched me into another major stage of my life. As I was working towards getting a bachelors degree in business administration, I took a few more art history classes and changed my ‘career’ emphasis to ‘arts administration.’ By the time I graduated in the spring of 1975, I had made up my mind that I was going to get a job working in an art museum. Another major shift occurred during the summer of 1975 when I was still living in Madison: I decided to move to Minneapolis and enroll in studio art classes at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and look for a job. Apparently, I went from wanting to work in an art museum to also wanting to make art myself—but how I came to this decision I’ll never know.

The Collage Process: I failed miserably at painting when I first started to make art in the late 70s. Although I was very enthusiastic about painting as a medium, I had no idea how to actually *make* a convincing painting myself. I had a very strong feeling for the sensibility of painting, but I had little of the craft skill that was required to make a painting. I wanted badly however to be part of the world of cultural producers who made works of art. That’s where

the collage process came to my rescue. Sometime in 1977 I had a personal breakthrough that I would describe simply as a *recognition* of an alternative technique that could be used for creating an image: the medium of collage. On the wall across from my desk in the business office at Walker Art Center hung six prints by Robert Motherwell from his 1973 series of lithographs called ‘Summer Light Series.’ The prints could be called ‘hybrid’ since they combined traditional lithographic printing techniques with collage elements that were ‘glued’ to the surface of each image. I was ‘knocked out’ by these prints, and was overwhelmed by a desire to try to make collages myself. From my experience of looking closely at these Motherwell prints, and looking at collages made by other artists, and exploring the collage process in general, I discovered that I could use the collage aesthetic to *build* an image rather than illustrate subject matter. I had also developed a strong affinity for paper from my experience of taking a few printmaking classes at the University of Minnesota. Trying to conjure an illusionistic image on a flat surface seemed like an impossible task—at least for me—that required ‘magic talent’ with paint brushes and paint. I had discovered that this skill—this ‘magic’—was beyond my reach in the late 1970s. I found however that I was much more comfortable with arranging and pasting pieces of paper on a support to construct an image.

Into the Woodshed: Around the mid-to-late 1990s, I experienced a bit of a crisis about my identity as a artist,

so I decided to withdraw from showing my work in the 'gallery and museum system.' The crisis I experienced had two main aspects related to the feeling I had of being a kind of imposter. The first realization I had was that, not only was my work at the time highly imitative, but some of the work I was making was down-right kitschy. (I got caught up for a time making assemblages of wood and found metal, and this endeavor took me down a very bad road creatively.) The second factor that led to my 'chill' was that I was forced to face the fact that I was not skilled at either drawing or painting. Some artists get by on 'personality,' some are highly skilled, and some artists have both skill and charisma. *I had neither.* Generally speaking though, I was 'liked' for being a 'nice guy' by other artists and people in the art world, but the clincher was that I knew I wasn't respected as a 'maker of art' by other artists. I could see it in their eyes. My work just didn't cut it on a professional level. So around 1997 I made the decision to stop showing my work publicly and try to reassess my situation, my 'career prospects.' For starters, I went 'into the woodshed'—as the jazz musicians say—to teach myself how to draw. And then I stopped trying so hard to be a 'nice guy.' I became 'difficult.' About thirty years ago I went 'into the woodshed' to 're-evaluate things' and I haven't come out.

8. Notes on Creativity: Part 2

In the mid-1990s, after trying to make paintings in utter futility for over 20 years, it finally dawned on me what the problem was: *I did not know how to draw*. It just had never occurred to me before that the *skill* of drawing might have something to do with the practice of painting. I was really *that* naive. So I set about teaching myself how to draw. I bore down on this project very enthusiastically. This was the point where I withdrew from the art world so I could reassess my identity as an artist. And drawing really changed everything for me. For several years in the late-1990s, I devoted all my art-making time to drawing. I explored as many ways of making marks on a surface as I could imagine, employing a wide variety of materials and tools. Drawing can be brutal in exposing one's faults and weaknesses as an artist. As Richard Serra said, "Drawing is a way of seeing into your own nature." In other words, drawing can be like an x-ray of one's creative drives and life forces. So, over time, inside the process of drawing, I discovered the source of my personal drive to make visual art: *I needed to express impermanence*. Before I started drawing, my work tended towards the static and the emblematic. After I immersed myself in the process of drawing, I became more and more interested in expressing gesture, flux, and the transitory. Strangely though, because of the awkwardness of my life, it took another twenty years of searching and stumbling—until the late 2010s—for me to take what I had discovered from the process of drawing and apply it to the medium of painting.

9. (Possible) Titles for Painting Series

bad bad narrative

sorry not sorry

before and after pictures

she made me then she went away

not a talkable topic

20 first cousins

screw comes loose

repetition compulsion

green is not one color

emoji gushing & other stories

dogs at work (and other perks)

I'm not feeling like myself

the end of wholeness

play it for laughs

liar, faker

no, never

10. Notes on Creativity: Part 3

It would seem rather quaint in our times to speak of the details of how an artist applies paint to a support. Nowadays, what viewers and critics alike are more concerned with is the *subject* not the object and its formal characteristics. We want to know: what are the *politics* of the subject matter being depicted? Is the artist expressing resistance or compliance?

In my case—for better or worse—the ongoing ‘problem’ of my practice has been the haptics of paint handling, not subject matter, not size, not the demands of presentation and promotion, not commercial viability, not political relevance. The problem has been *the physicality of the paint itself* and how best to apply it to a surface for expressive purposes.

I have never liked the way a paint brush *feels* in my hand when I apply paint to a support. Something *always* seemed wrong and it took me a very long time to *accept* what the problem was: the touch and feel of the brush was way too precious, or too refined for me personally as I tried to carry out the various impulses of my creative drive. I was never able to get my hand and the brush ‘in sync’ when it comes to painting. I believe this problem of being uncomfortable with the haptics of paint handling has been the main reason why I was not been able to sustain any consistency in making paintings over the years. This is very embarrassing for me to admit, but it took me forty years

of attempting to make paintings to face the problem. *Finally* I realized I needed to make a drastic change in my approach to painting or stop working altogether. So in late 2017, I made the decision to stop using brushes, and take a more direct approach to applying paint to a surface. The ‘tools’ I use now are rags, sponges, palette knives, various types of squeegees, and my hands. The *Slabtown* series of paintings, which I began in December 2017, and is on-going, is a direct result of the decision to not use brushes when I paint. The outcome: I no longer feel anxiety and dread when I work. I now paint with a feeling of pleasure and confidence.

11. The Evolution of Insight

Writing this at the age of 74 in 2025, I now have a broad perspective on my life that can be divided into two distinct periods: the first 37 years or so when I was totally unaware that I possessed an ‘inner life’ or, what is called, the ‘life of the mind’; and then the last 37 years or so—since the late 1980s—when I have lived in acute and painful awareness that life *can be* more than the fulfillment of biological needs augmented by noise and decoration. For the first half of my life I was not consciously aware of the ‘inner life’ of human desires, drives, and motives—the unconscious and the subconscious. I was totally devoid of reflexivity. I was just living on instinct like a feral animal. I have spent the entire second part of my life in an ongoing practice of self-scrutiny and critical thinking,

attempting to ‘cure’ myself of small-mindedness, shallowness, and naiveté. I have used the study of art, aesthetics, critical theory and psychology, and the *process of making* visual art as vital aspects of this self-analysis. And since late 2016, I have used my personal website as part of this process of self-excavation and self-assessment.

There are people, places and things that I truly love, but I don’t ‘love’ art. I have never tried to elevate art above other aspects of life. There *is something* art does for me, but it has never been about the romantic idea of giving or receiving love. For this reason I imagine that I am viewed as an imposter. I’ve never learned how to give people what they want when it comes to ‘being an artist.’ I’m just not good at playing the public role. The only thing I’ve been particularly good at in my adult life is the ‘art’ of domesticity—that is, practical, household management. Other than that, I’m not *exceptionally* skilled at anything. I’m certainly not skilled at making art or talking about art. An artist must have *passion* about art, and then the *skill* to translate that passion into some form of product or service that can satisfy the *appetite* of the public. When it comes to making art, I don’t possess either of these personal attributes—passion and skill. The feeling, or insight, I have now is that I am viewed as a clumsy poser, as someone who does not ‘pass’ as an artist. But I will keep making drawings and paintings—enjoying *the process of creativity as a thing-in-itself*. At this point in my life, I can honestly say, to paraphrase Karl Ove Knausgaard, *I am happy now because I am no longer an artist*.

12. A Brief Anthology of Quotations

[Homage to S. S.]

*Saying the whole truth is materially impossible;
words fail.*

—Jacques Lacan

The dog growls. He too knows his lines.

—Elizabeth Hardwick, *Sleepless Nights*

*What can art be in the face of a technology of death
and extinction?*

—Briony Fer

*Nothing, after all, is more superfluous than
civilization itself.*

—Adam Gopnik

*We are survival machines—robot vehicles blindly
programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known
as genes.*

—Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*

*Culture and refinement may be admirable qualities,
but not in advertising.*

—Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for
Your Mind*

*When you invent the ship you also invent the
shipwreck.*

—Paul Virilio

A concrete act makes language irrelevant.

—Rachel Cusk, *Coventry*

To put it generally: art (and art-making) is a form of consciousness; the materials of art are a variety of the forms of consciousness. By no aesthetic principle can this notion of materials of art be construed as excluding even the extreme forms of consciousness that transcend social personality or psychological individuality.

—Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*

He had a good vocabulary except when he was talking to someone.

—Don DeLillo, *Point Omega*

You press the button, we do the rest.

—sales pitch for the first Kodak camera in 1888

(quoted by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*)

One of the tasks art has assumed is making forays into the taking up of positions on the frontiers of consciousness . . . and reporting back what's there. . . . It's well known that when people venture into the far reaches of consciousness, they do so at the peril of their sanity, that is, of their humanity.

—Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*

Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want.

—Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens*

and life goes on within you and without you

—George Harrison

So it was the world, the world in its entirety, I had to tackle. But world is resistant, it lives turned away from us, in blithe communion with itself. World won't let me in.

—John Manville, *Blue Guitar*

My work deals with myself as a fictional character.

—Juliana Huxtable

A photograph is a secret about a secret—the more it tells you the less you know.

—Diane Arbus

Anyone making a reproduction of my art is making art just as valid as if I had made it.

—Lawrence Weiner

The increasingly synonymity between economic 'progress' and extinction has become hard to ignore.

—Jonathan Dee

Photography has, or will eventually, negate much painting—for which the painter should be grateful.

—Edward Weston

The world doesn't care but it clings to me anyway.

—Tom Waits

Only the shallow know themselves.

—Oscar Wilde

I've never been particularly fond of religion, or on the whole anything spiritual. But if either of you would like to sell me a tom-cat, I would consider it a good turn, and it can be as wild as it likes.

—Halldór Laxness, *Independent People*

I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed.

—Garry Winogrand

She has gone to the other side but she cannot say of what.

—Annie Ernaux, *The Years*

You observe a lot by watching.

—Yogi Berra

As soon as man acquired consciousness of himself, he broke away from the natural world and made himself another world inside himself . . . vast, ever-moving throng, constantly breeding, intoxicated with itself.

—Octavio Paz

In the world of the jungle it is safer to be wrong and quick than to be right and slow.

—Freeman Dyson

I have no friends, and you're one of them.

—Agnes Martin

By nightfall the headlines would be reporting devastation.

—Shirley Hazzard

A picture which is really alive should make the spectator feel ill.

—Renè Magritte

It's hard to know where you leave off and the camera begins.

—Minolta advertisement, 1976 (quoted by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*)

Man, the sick animal, bears within him an appetite which can drive him mad.

—Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*

Silence calls out, as do the kinds of voices that can be heard only when silence is present.

—Joy Harjo

I would rather think that organic life is an illness peculiar to our unlovely planet. It would be intolerable to believe that throughout the infinite universe there was nothing but eating and being eaten.

—Anatole France

For a little while I kept my mouth open so that the agitation would leave me through my mouth.

—Franz Kafka, *The Diaries*

We lived in our bodies as in a constant state of emergency. We wore them out trying to satisfy them.

—Rachel Cusk

Because I am not silent, the poems are bad.

—George Oppen

Making art, being art—it all feels like too much to bear.

—Helen Shaw

We may say that there is a universality of man; but it is not given, it is perpetually being made.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

Knowledge is so slender and hard won, and ignorance so vast and dangerous.

—Rachel Cusk

The mainstream thrust of anti-intellectualism today, characterizes thinking itself as an elitist activity.

—Maggie Nelson

Being convinced that we have a moral ownership of the earth is the best way to make it uninhabitable.

—Jacqueline Rose

Nothing is more exhilarating than philistine vulgarity.

—Vladimir Nabokov

The first rule of the world is that everything vanishes forever. To the extent that you refuse to accept that then you are living in a fantasy.

—Cormac McCarthy

The root function of is to control the universe by describing it.

—James Baldwin

Whiteness is a fantasy impossible for anyone to possess, a stupid beauty that takes its authority for granted and mistakenly assumes the body it inhabits is natural and complete.

—Langdon Hammer

The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any.

—Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.

—U. S. Congress, Northwest Ordinance of 1787

All the images will disappear. . . . Everything will be erased in a second. The dictionary of words amassed between cradle and deathbed, eliminated. All there will be is silence and no words to say it. Nothing will come out of the open mouth, neither I nor me In conversation around a holiday table, we will be nothing but a first name, increasingly faceless, until we vanish into the vast anonymity of a distant generation.

—Annie Ernaux, *The Years*

Addendum:

There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera.

Photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal.

Today everything exists to end up in a photograph.

Time eventually positions most photographs, even the most amateurish, at the level of art.

Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph.

In the fairy tale of photography the magic box insures veracity and banishes error, compensates for inexperience and rewards innocence.

The painter constructs, the photographer discloses.

In America, the photographer is not simply the person who records the past but the one who invents it.

The news that the camera could lie made getting photographed much more popular.

*Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality . . .
One can't possess reality, one can possess images—
one can't possess the present but one can possess
the past.*

—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*