

Commonplace Observations

I'm not drawn to literature because I love stories per se. I find nearly all the moves the traditional novel makes unbelievably predictable, tired, contrived, and essentially purposeless. I can never remember characters' names, plot developments, lines of dialogue, details of setting. It's not clear to me what such narratives are supposedly revealing about the human condition. (David Shields: Reality Hunger. A Manifesto.)

The "personal story" is understructured, slice-of-life portraiture that mistakes verisimilitude for truth. The writer believes that the more precise his observation of day-to-day facts [...] the more truth he tells. But fact, no matter how minutely observed, is truth with a small "t". Big "T" Truth is located behind, beyond, inside, below the surface of things, [...] and cannot be directly observed. Because this writer sees only what is visible and factual, he is blind to the truth of life. (Robert McKee: Story. Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting)

April 27th, 2009

Dear Seminar Participants,

In the hopes of making full use of our sessions together for the seminar "Factitious Fiction," I've put together a plan for our initial sessions. We will read and talk about David Shields' "Reality Hunger" over the first two class meetings, by way of exploring the ethical, ideological, psychological, and aesthetic implications of combining fact and fiction in our own writing.

Best,

Richard Powers

May 3rd, 2009. Time: 13.43

For the Richard Powers assignment, I have selected the following crucial quote:

Living as we perforce do in a manufactured and artificial world, we yearn for the 'real', semblances of the real. We want to pose something nonfictional against all the fabrication - autobiographical frissons or framed or filmed or caught moments which, in their seeming unrehearsedness, possess at least the possibility of breaking through the clutter. More invention, more fabrication isn't going to do this. I doubt very much that I'm the only person who's finding it more and more difficult to want to read or write novels. (Shields)

Personal reaction: I have trouble understanding how this fits in with some of the other arguments Shields puts forth, e.g.: "Art is not truth; art is a lie that enables us to recognize truth." (Aphorism # 178, quoting Picasso). If Shields doesn't beat the argument that art serves to uncover truths that are

hidden from view in our daily lives, then stating that art only seems to add to the artificiality of our world seems to miss the point.

I agree that art *can* create the illusion of life following a straight path (although I would argue that good art does certainly *not* do this). But we can already observe the chaotic mess that life really is by living our lives – to this end, we don't really need art, be it a novel or be it one of Shield's collages.

I believe there is a duality to both life and to our mental processing of it. Chance, chaos, and meaninglessness are one part of the duality, but the other side is the fact that everywhere we look in nature chaotic forces give rise to patterns and order. After all, Shields is right when he states that there's "no invisible boss in the brain" (Aphorism # 288) - but he omits the fact that, nonetheless, the mind's main job is to *create that very illusion*. Without it, there would be no consciousness in the first place.

May 4th, 2009

Invitation

*Dear Mr. Winter,
we would like to inform you that after the conclusion of the preselection procedure and the assessment of your artistic aptitude you have been accepted for the admission examination. To this end, please send in the following by the 22nd of May 2009:*

A portrayal of any kind of personal, true experience - not using the "I" but instead the third-person point of view. If you prefer to use a pseudonym, you may, but the experiences and emotions should be your own. (Max. length: 2 pages with 60 letters per line and 30 lines per page). Furthermore, please submit three titles of films that you feel able to discuss with us.

During the oral admission examination (approx. 1 hour), we will be speaking with you about the film analysis and creative pieces you sent in, as well as an analysis of a short film and a plot you have developed based on a given subject matter. The latter two assignments are to be completed at the film school within 2 hours, prior to the examination.

*With regards,
Prof. T. Schulz
Chairman of the admission committee
HFF „Konrad Wolf“ Potsdam-Babelsberg*

For many stories or genres this is sufficient: An event pitches the protagonist's life out of kilter, arousing a conscious desire for something he feels will set things right, and he goes after it. (McKee)

I want to assert the importance of positioning the writer and reader in an unstable position in relation to each other and to the text. It's crucial, in my formulation, that both the writer and reader not be

certain what the form is, that the work be allowed to go wherever it needs to go to penetrate its subject. (Shields)

May 28th, 2009. Time: 13.23

After discussing my student project with Richard Powers yesterday, it occurred to me that I took up most of the approx. 45 minutes trying to get ideas across instead of listening to his input.

Of course, Powers was very much into the memory-aspect of this project: how accurate is memory? do you hold on to certain memories even if they seem to contradict common sense? etc. Sure, those kinds of questions are interesting, but it feels like they've already been answered. No, memory isn't reliable. Not at all. Get over it. Even though I can't think of any right now, I'm sure there are hundreds of pieces of literature which have exploited this theme (does the movie *Memento* fit this category? I'm not sure.)

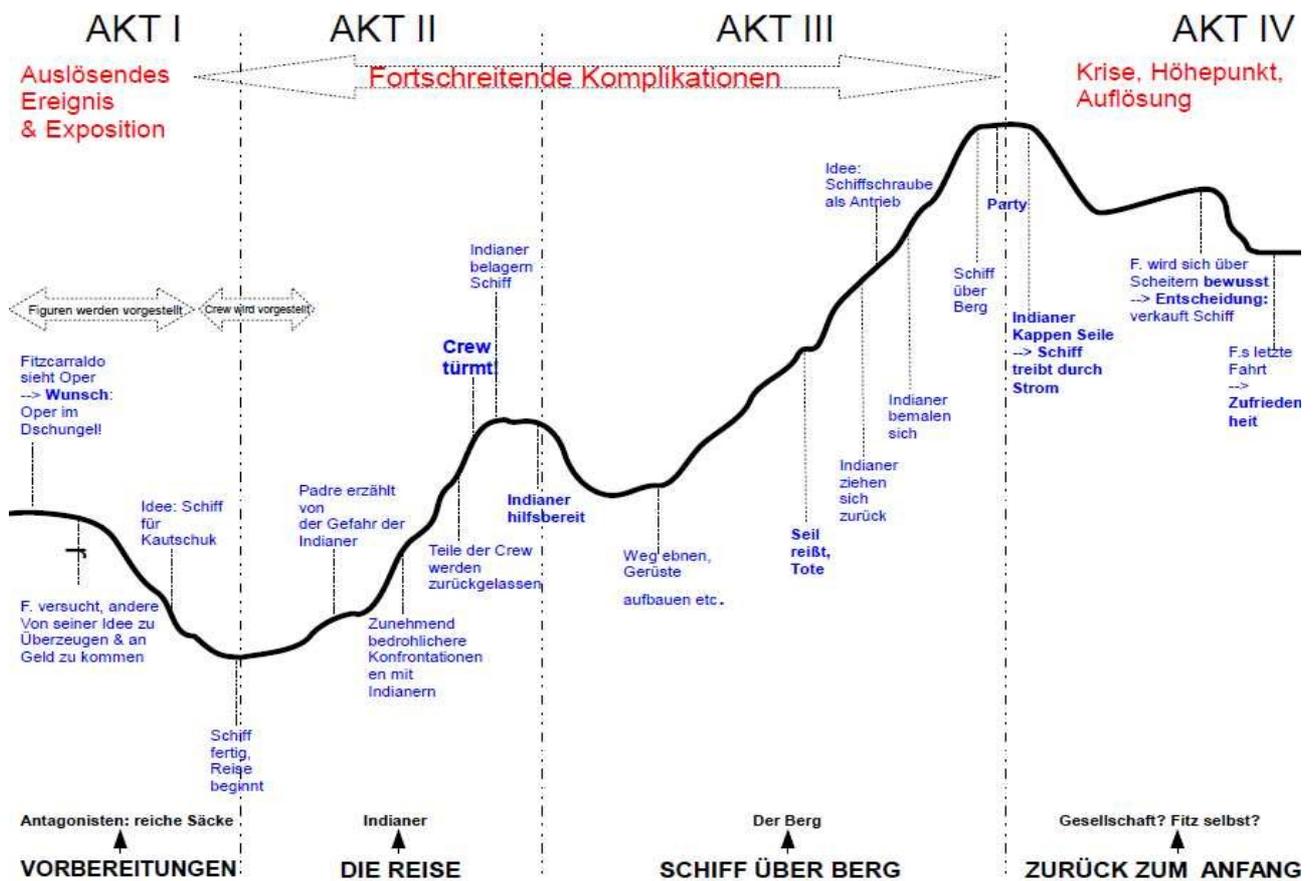
Maybe this is why I felt I had so much explaining to do: I'd much rather like to focus on how my personal experience is converted into a story and possibly if there are better ways of doing this. Right off the bat, I can think of several things I added to the narrative to make the story work "better". What I don't remember is when and exactly how I came up with these ideas: They just popped up in my head, I integrated them into the story while writing the first draft – and on revision left most of them in because they seemed to be working okay: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

As I went on about this, Powers caught on to the idea very quickly – and then somehow seemed to know exactly what I was trying to get at. Two things in particular got stuck in my head:

1) When discussing possible ways of arranging this material, he drew that sine-wave-like plot-curve on the wall with his finger: the one Robert McKee could have printed in the back of his book, similar to the one I created for an analysis of *Fitzcarraldo*. It really would be great if I could get something like this going: the concept of having a "collage" that nonetheless fits the structure of basic dramaturgy seems very attractive. It would be like making Robert McKee and David Shields sit together for dinner. I wonder what they would discuss. And what they would order.

2) While we were leaving Powers' office, still chatting about the project, Powers dropped this line: "Even if it were to turn out there really was none, your genre *needs* a body, doesn't it?" He was referring to the dead "Einstein".

***Fitzcarraldo* Structure Analysis**



I'm drawn instead to literature as a form of thinking, consciousness, wisdom-seeking. I like work that's focused line by line and page by page on what the writer really cares about rather than hoping that what the writer cares about will somehow mysteriously creep through the cracks of narrative, which is the way I experience most stories and novels. Collage works are nearly always "about what they're about". (Shields)

When two friends meet on the street and talk about the weather, don't we know that theirs isn't a conversation about the weather? What's being said is "I'm your friend." [...] The text is not the subtext. What is said and done is not what is thought and felt. The scene is not about what it seems to be about. Screen dialogue, therefore, must have the swing of everyday talk but content well above normal. (McKee)

May 31st 2009

Hello class,

My project for the course requires a bit of explaining:

As an assignment, I had to write a two-page story about a true personal experience, written from the third-person point of view. I came up with a memory from a long time ago. In order to gather what I can remember about the occasion, I first did a sort of brainstorm-text, writing down

everything that came to my mind about the event.

Then, I went on to fit my story into the required format. While working on this, I realized that what I was doing related directly to our course and some of the things Shields doesn't get tired of going on about (Cf. the Frey-chapter, in particular).

In a third step I interviewed my mom, my dad and one of my sisters by phone and transcribed and translated what we spoke about.

I was originally hoping that this would enable me to write another draft of the same story, which would then include some of the additional info I had gathered. But after doing the interviews, it doesn't seem like that's the direction my story wants to go.

As you will notice, the mechanics of memory seem to play a big role in this project. I do like this aspect very much, but I would mainly like to focus on the question of how an experience I lived through is transformed into a story: what and how much does a storyteller need to make up in order to get his idea across? Also: is mere juxtaposition (thrilling) enough?

Brain storming (May 6th, 2009. Time: 9.06 a.m.)

One thing I should start thinking about: Which scene of my life should I work out into the assignment the HFF-Potsdam gave me? So far, there are two contenders in my head:

a) the boxing match

b) the motorbike accident in London

a) would be funnier

b) would (possibly) be of greater depth. One problem would be, however, that my Einstein-complex would be difficult to explain. Also, it would probably make me seem pretty vain –

I will try writing down some impressions for b), whatever pops up in my mind (so as not to disrupt the flow of ideas with too much critical thinking):

what I remember rather reliably about the incident: We are in one of those characteristic red double-decker buses they have in London and we are sitting on the top level, in the very front, so we can see the street well, the way I liked it (then again, it seems this memory has to originate from some other bus ride: if we had really been sitting in the very front, I would have been able to see the traffic jam and maybe even the accident long ahead of time). It is therefore much more likely that we did not sit in the front, even though I would have liked to, but instead that the bus was way too crowded and we were therefore sitting somewhere on the upper level, but farther in the back.

That's why we noticed only after the bus had been standing still for a few minutes that the

hold-up was probably not caused by a traffic light or some kind of other momentary impediment. My parents were gradually noticing that the traffic jam in front of us was not going to clear up quickly. Possibly, some of the Londoner passengers, knowing the area better than we did, were already getting off the bus. I have no memory of flashing blue lights or wailing sirens at this point.

Then the bus driver made an announcement through the speakers. Of course, I couldn't understand what he was saying – but I guess he made it clear that the ride was not to be continued, and that there had been an accident at the intersection in front of us. To mom, this was shocking news. Shocking not because of the accident, as I had suspected, but probably because she had a hunch that it would not be easy to switch means of transport here and get home quickly (was it that late already? Maybe for me it was. Did they want to get me into bed as soon as possible, so that they could have a glass of wine with Shirley?)

In any case, my parents tried to gather information from the other passengers. We got off the bus and walked on down the road with them. The accident had taken place at the next intersection. I saw a heavy motor bike lying right across the street a short distance before it would have headed into the intersection, only a couple of feet from me, surrounded by lots of little bits of broken glass (as if the bigger shards had already been cleared away). We were slowly drawing closer to it. In my memory, we walked right by the motor bike: we walked across the street like one would have done regularly on a green traffic light, i.e., we passed right between the intersection on our right-hand side and the motorbike on our left. (All of which can't really be true.) And one thing that most certainly can't really be true: I am certain that I saw the corpse lying there. It was lying there in black leather clothing, somehow still lying on the bike, so that in the dark one couldn't really tell the parts belonging to the bike from those belonging to the dead body. I believe I saw a helmet, with white hair peeping out from underneath it.

I must have seen something that looked a lot like white hair, because I was convinced that a man had died here, a man who looked like Albert Einstein and who somehow even embodied Einstein to me. During this vacation I had talked a lot about Einstein and outer space with my dad – and this mastermind fascinated me beyond words, because I could not even begin to fathom the things he was saying and even less, how he *came* to have those ideas of his. Without a doubt, he embodied some kind of divine notion to me – with the one added feature that during our talks dad, as parents often do, would hint at the possibility that I could one day come close to his level of cleverness, since I was such an “intelligent young chap“.

I was deeply shocked by what I had seen. My parent did not notice – they were busy finding their way through the chaos. I believe we walked along with the rest of the group, which started splitting up into smaller fractions heading in different directions. That's why a little later on, we

found ourselves in another, smaller group that was going back the way we had come from, only on the other side of the street. (I was afraid that we would walk all the way back to the accident and that I would have to bear seeing the corpse once again.)

I tried talking to my parents and making them understand that the person who had died there was Albert Einstein. But naturally, they hardly listened to me. I do, however, believe that my mom said (I'm not sure whether she was replying to one of my questions or whether I just picked this up from what she told dad), that it wasn't a white-haired man, but a blonde woman. I remember very clearly that I took up this idea in order to calm myself: it was not a white-haired man, it was not Albert Einstein or one of his wise descendants. It was only a blonde woman.

The short story (May 9th, 2009. Time: 2.24 p.m.)

The blue light flashed above the wet streets. It seemed like the only source of light. Having rushed out of the bus, the passengers were now walking down the street, beside a long row of honking cars. To Claudio their foreign voices seemed to dim as they were approaching the intersection. The curious absence of howling sirens. Only the flashing blue light. His mom, using her free hand to hold an edition of the *Evening Standard* over her head, pulled Claudio along: we must keep up with the rest of the group! He almost tripped over something on the street. He looked down upon his sneakers, which had soaked up some water and squeaked with every step. He began counting how many steps he needed to take to equal one of his dad's big steps. Did this, too, have something to do with relativity? --

“Commonplace observations,” dad had said after they had found two free seats on the upper level of the bus. “You see, Einstein was simply riding the bus, just like we are right now, and he looked out the window and observed what he saw. The bus starts moving, but if you're looking out the window just like this, it might just as well be the surroundings that start moving. Am I right? And so Einstein said to himself: 'Oh I see! Motion is relative. It depends on where you're sitting!'”
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Could it really be that simple? No way, thought Claudio. The important thing must be Einstein's conclusions – the incomprehensible conclusions he drew from his commonplace observations. That's why he got to have an imitation of himself standing around at Madame Tussauds.

A creaking sound came from beneath Claudio's shoes: it must have been grit – or maybe tiny bits of broken glass. The bits and pieces formed a track, and his eyes began tracing it. Only a few feet from him, aslant across the street, there was a large black motorbike lying amidst numerous

shards and pieces of metal. Claudio could make out the silhouette of a man dressed in leather clutching the neck of the bike, as if his final decision was to keep from being thrown off, no matter what. Lying there on the wet asphalt, still wearing his helmet, he was lit up by a flash of blue light for a mere split second. And from underneath this helmet a few strands of white hair stood out – all white and scraggy, like the hair of Albert Einstein!

A strong jerk went through Claudio's arm. He had slowed his pace almost to a complete halt and now had to speed up if he didn't want to be dragged across the street.

“Mom, did you see that guy?” But she was busy cursing to herself.

“Shit shit shit.”

“Mom, don't use that word here,” his sister complained. “People here will understand you.”

“Oh come on, it's not like Germans wouldn't understand the word 'shit'.”

“No, but I mean here you should say 'Scheiße' so people don't...”

“God, Sabrina, I'd rather you tell me the way to the next subway station!”

“Hey now, you know the plan,” dad interjected. “These people know exactly where they're going. We'll follow them to the next bus stop, and there we can have a look at the map.”

When they finally arrived at the bus stop, dad fought his way through the crowd, trying to get a glance at the map.

“Guess we have to go into the opposite direction after all,” he said on returning. “From there, the subway'll take us home directly.”

“Meaning - we have to go back?”

“Yup.”

So the same tall row of houses went by them a second time. Claudio tried to count his steps, but kept losing track. The rain had started to subside, and he could now all the more clearly hear the gargling of the rain gutters far above them, from where, sporadically, streams of water splashed onto the street. Einstein is dead! And all we're doing is walking around in circles!

“At least it's not raining any more,” mom said, cramming her newspaper into a passing trash can. “Sabrina...you were right...I should have said 'Sch...’”

“Never mind...”

“Why didn't we just get on that damn bus?!” Claudio asked.

“Because it wasn't headed in the right direction,” mom said.

“But I don't want to go back there, to the corpse!”

“Corpse? What are you talking about, darling?” Mom flashed dad a glance, kneeled down in front of Claudio, laid her hands on his shoulders, and looked into his eyes. “You saw a corpse back there?” “Well sure, sitting on the motor bike, kind of hugging it – I even saw his white hair! Just

like Einstein's!"

"But Claudio, there was no corpse there, I'm telling you! The bike was still there, but everything was already roped off – and...cleaned up." Claudio stared off into the distance, avoiding her gaze.

"And besides," dad added, "the bus driver said it was a young woman."

After a pause dad said: "Come on, let's keep going." Claudio nodded slowly.

It must have been blonde hair. A young woman's blonde hair. Blonde hair in blue light.

The four of them continued walking down the street. Before they got to the intersection where the accident had taken place, they turned left into another street. At the end of it, under bright street lights, they could already make out the red and white *Underground* sign.

It was only a young, blonde woman.

The moment you start to arrange the world in words, you alter its nature. The words themselves begin to suggest patterns and connections that seemed at the time to be absent from the events the words describe. Then the story takes hold. It begins to determine what goes in and what's left out. It has its own logic and it carries the writer along with it. He may well set out to write one story and find that he's writing quite another. [...] The naïve storyteller will burden you with a mass of irrelevancies, which get into the story just because he remembers that they happened to be there; the sophisticated storyteller will fashion his contingencies so that they support and move his story forward. That is fiction-making. (David Shields)

May 16th, 2009. 9.03 a.m.

While putting my desk in order something began to dawn on me concerning the memory of the accident: I certainly did notice that the others, mom especially, were infuriated by something. But I projected my own confusion into them: To me, they were infuriated by the accident itself – because someone had died a pointless death, and not because they didn't know how to get home. Possibly, there's a spark of truth in this childish naivety: the search for a way to continue carrying through one's own pre-designed plan in the face of a tragic event is a common strategy of avoid bothering with real, more existential problems.

Additionally, another story-trick occurred to me: In my memory, of course, there simply is no complete, chronologically ordered version of the event. Rather, there are a bunch of memory-shreds, containing the most vital information, enabling me to conjure up the rest of the experience – but without being able to establish a clear picture in front of my inner eye. In the short story, however, I end up having to fill those gaps out, so as not to alienate the reader all too much – because that would in turn cause the curious design of the story to distract from its content and theme. Still, the flashing blue light could be used as a trick: It could enable me to mimic the

stroboscope-like effect of my memory within the story, or at least to hint at it (unconsciously, I already did that in the first draft. Now that I've become aware of it, I should probably read through the short story focusing on this: does the trick come through to full effect or does it seem amateurish? The same question could be asked of the text as a whole.)

9.40 a.m.

Now I also realized that the scene where mom is kneeling down doesn't work at all. I may know this scene from movies, but my mom doesn't behave that way. Mom has a way of conveying compassion without having to kneel down in front of you. But how should I make that clear to the reader?

9.58 a.m.

Still, it seems like if you want to get a feel for the atmosphere of that night, all I can really do is tell you to listen to Thom Yorke's song *Rabbit in your Headlights*.

Given the choice between trivial material brilliantly told versus profound material badly told, an audience will always choose the trivial told brilliantly. (McKee)

To "tell a story well" is to make what one writes resemble the schemes people are used to – in other words, their ready-made idea of reality. But a work of art, like the world, is a living form. It's in its form that its reality resides. (Shields)

Interview: Sabrina - my sister (May 19th)

C: Ok, so I'll just ask you very briefly. You don't remember anything about riding on the bus and the traffic accident?

S: No.

C: Do you remember, um, whether we were at Madame Tussauds while we were in London?

S: Yes because there's a photograph of you and Einstein.

C: Ah! That's good!

S: I remember that. I don't really remember being there but I know there's this picture of you and Einstein.

C: Ah, okay, that's exactly what I was trying to get at. So there really is this picture, have you... when did you see it the last time?

S: I don't know. It was a very long time ago. I do think that it was somewhere at home. I would almost imagine it hanging somewhere – in your room or something, but I'm not sure about it.

C:: That's interesting. Because I don't remember that. Um, but I also think that this picture does exist and that it must be somewhere, but that it is probably irretrievably lost, I thought. (laughs)

S: Hm...who knows, maybe it's simply in the box of photos we have

[...]

S: ...But now, of course, this may be of relevance after all: because I do remember a corpse, only that I thought that it happened when we were driving on an interstate, and so on...

C: Really? That's good because I just started recording this again a few seconds ago.

S: I do remember thinking 'Oh no, maybe I should have looked the other way' and so on. And the biker was still laying there, I think.

C: Can you briefly explain this more elaborately – what you remember about it. Like, what, what's the starting point?

S: Well I just thought that we were driving by it by car and that there just was this accident ... and that the biker was still lying around and that there was blood I believe and that I thought: 'oh no, I shouldn't have looked directly at this.'

C: Um, and what did you see exactly...

S: ...We were still pretty young back then...I don't know, I remember a motor bike and someone lying there and that it did look pretty horrible, but I can't tell you exactly what it looked like.

C: Um, and, intuitively, you thought it was a man – or a woman?

S: I thought it was a man. But I would have thought a younger man. But I was actually thinking that he was still wearing his helmet. So...I didn't see whoever it was that clearly.

C: Um. Hm. (Pause) And, we were riding a car – what country would this have been in?

S: No idea. I really can't tell you what country.

C: Okay. And was it an interstate, a big street, a small street?

S: Well...no, I can't tell you that either. I would have thought that it was an interstate...

C: Okay. Can you estimate how old you were?

S: Hm...no....well, at least...I was little. I don't know whether I went to school by that time, already.

C: So relatively young. Before going to school? Because that would make you less than 6 years old.

S: Well maybe that's not exactly right. Maybe elementary school, but I would almost say it was still pre-school. When did we go to England?

C: (Laughs) Well, I haven't found out yet. I believe I was already in elementary school, but I'm not sure. I would have guessed that I was around 6 or 7.

S: Mhm.

C: But that shouldn't change the way you remember your own version of the story. Because it really could be the case that we're talking about two different situations here.

S: ...could be.

C: ...because your situation sounds very different from mine...

S: Mhm...

C: Um, what was the weather like and the time of day?

S: It was night, I know that much. But the accident must have been illuminated or something like that, I don't know, maybe headlights or something – just like one sees things when looking out the window of a car, at night.

C: Well, I'm now totally...confused. And it's a good thing that I'm recording this now because...in my case it was the same way: night, rain – then again, that's the circumstances under which most accidents occur...

S: Well, I couldn't really tell you whether it was still raining. No idea.

C: Mhm...and do you remember – well, but, the car crash...well in my case it was like it happened at an intersection. And since you're speaking of an interstate – that would make an intersection impossible.

S: Well yes, but I'm not all that certain about it. It could have been anything, theoretically.

C: Hm. (Pause) OK. (Pause) Hm, now I can't think of any more clever questions that I could use to sort of get a new memory going inside your head...

S: Hm, no idea. I'm not sure whether Renate said not to look at it – or not. I don't know any more...

heartbeat you'd never put that slush on screen. Real conversation is full of awkward pauses, poor word choices and phrasing, non sequiturs, pointless repetitions. (McKee)

Interview: Renate - my mom (May 20th)

M: There's a bit of an echo, but that's okay.

C: Ok, well, I can't get rid of it, sorry.

M: That's okay.

C: Do you remember on one of our trips to London when we were riding a bus and got stuck in traffic and had to get off and go on by foot?

M: Um, no...I don't remember anything concerning a traffic jam...I only remember that we really often, or at least a few times, had to ride down town on a bus, sitting in the top level on one of those double-decker buses, with the twigs of the trees hitting the roof of the bus. And I thought: 'the bus travels this route every day' and wondered why the twigs were still hitting the roof every time. That I remember, but I don't remember getting stuck in traffic and having to walk, no, I don't remember anything like that.

C: You don't remember at all?

M: No.

C: Well because I can remember...(laughs) I was hoping that at least you'd be with me this far...that we were riding through London by bus and that all of a sudden the bus stopped and then later there was an announcement by the bus driver that the ride won't go on at all.

M: Yes...

C: And then we were disoriented because we didn't know how to get home and it was dark already and we wanted to get back to Shirley and we were a little stressed out by the situation and so on...

M: Yes...Yes...

C: You don't remember this at all?

M: Very, very dimly, yes. Very very dimly, now that you're saying it I could imagine...but go on...

C: Okay, well, I'm trying to ask these questions in a way that they won't be suggestive to you, you know, being psychologically correct and all, and that's why I have to ask...but if you don't remember anything at all, I have to sort of give you hints and, well: do you remember why there was a traffic jam?

M: No...no.

C: So...you don't remember there being an accident there.

M: No. No, not at all.

C: Well that's a shame...(laughs) I need some material from you...

M: Really, there was an accident there?

C: Yes.

M: Well what do you remember about it?

C: Okay, well so I'll go on telling you what I remember, shortly, to see if it sort of rings a bell...Well what I remember about it is that we were walking down the street in the rain, well at least the streets were wet. And we were walking with a group of other passengers and of course we were sort of stressed out because we were looking for the right way...okay? To get on home, you know...

M: Yes.

C: And so we went on and got to the intersection where the accident had taken place and we were able to see...well, sort of 'left overs' from the accident...as far as I remember it was a motorcycle accident.

M: Mhm...well yes...now, very vaguely I think it could be that you're right...but I don't have a really clear memory...

C: Hm...so...what are you thinking about now, when you're asking yourself...whether you have a memory of it? You know?

M: Well...I don't have a real, I don't have a real memory...was there something lying around on the street?

C: Aha! (Laughs) And why are you saying that now?

M: I'm asking you, I'm only asking because... it must have left a big impression on you. It must have been something bad...

C: Yes. Um...So I'll go on telling you what I remember.

M: Yes, okay.

C: I remember that we went by that really closely and in my memory we went across the intersection, and the accident happened right before you head into the intersection so that we... so we were crossing the street and to the left of us, there's the motorcycle and like...um, like shards of glass and stuff like that and maybe it's already marked off but it hasn't been cleared up yet and...

M: Yes...

C: ...and now I'm not totally sure but in my memory it's like one could have seen a corpse...

M: Hm...

C: ...but I'm not sure, um, if that's possible, because in my memory it's like I was the only one who really saw it or who really thought about it or was shocked by it because, um, all the grown ups, meaning the other passengers as well, were basically busy trying to find the way home.

M: Hm...well normally they would put a blanket over someone who's lying on the street...they don't let pedestrians walk right by.

C: Yeah, exactly.

M: Yes.

C: Unless it really just happened one moment ago.

M: Right right, of course, clearly...hm...

C: Okay...

M: Hm...well now that you're telling me all of this, I'm imagining it really was that way...but before I really had no memory at all...and now there's pictures turning up in my head...but that's really a shame for you because that's not...

C: Well yes, that makes it difficult now because this, of course, is not directly...

M: Maybe you should ask Sabrina about this as well, she's coming by this evening...

C: Yes, I already have. But she can't really remember anything either, um...

M: Well, maybe everyone looked the other way, not wanting to see it, and you're the only one who looked directly at it...

C: Hm...but...

M: It could really be the case!

C: Hm, well...anyways, it's not really all that important that this is psychologically correct, concerning memory and all that, that's not the main concern of my project...I just wanted to see if there's more to the story that I've written for the Film School in Potsdam...having to describe a true personal experience...So I was only asking you all this so that if you had known more about the story then I would have had more info about it and then maybe I could have written another version of the story which incorporated that new information and then one could have compared how the story changes through that and so on...but back to you: what is it, now that you're saying this did generate images in your mind – what do you see in them now? Do you see exactly what I described or do you see other things as well?

M: Well, I see that we're walking on the left side of the street, on our right is the street, and we're walking on the left side and walking together and...we are looking the other way or we're even telling you to look the other way, that we have to cross the street but that there's an accident there...

C: Mhm...

M: That's what I'm seeing now.

C: Okay, because that's not one of the things I just told you...

M: Everything is pretty grey. Everything is extremely grey. It's like it's not illuminated by the rain

and reflections somehow but rather it's really grey, even we are, when I'm looking at us from behind as a group (I'm not seeing myself)...I see that everything is grey. And, but I don't see you looking at it.

C: And how close would you guess are we getting to the accident?

M: Hm...well I would say that in front of my inner eye it looks like the bike is laying on our side of the street, and that...'figure' as well. But I can't, can't see a face or anything... but rather someone under a cover, like I said before...but maybe...maybe this is actually from other accidents I have seen where people were covered up immediately with a jacket or something like that.

C: That's possible...um, how can you tell it's a body, I mean, is there something sticking out from underneath it or anything?

M: By the...knees that are pulled towards the body, somehow...he's lying there like a foetus, strangely.

C: Hm, and you can see that through the cover...?

M: Around his, around his upper body there's the jacket covering his upper body and his face. Yes and I believe a jacket, yes, certainly a jacket, a grey or maybe even a...maybe the jacket is made of leather but it's possible that I'm just connecting leather and motorbike automatically...but he's not wearing a jacket but it's covering his face. But maybe this originates from the pictures of accidents you see, whenever the police photograph something like that it's always in that posture.

C: Hm...so you can't, you don't see any hair, in particular?

M: Hm, no I don't see any hair.

C: Do you see a helmet or anything?

M: Hm, no.

C: Do you see a motorbike at all, or do you just see...

M: There is a motorcycle lying around, but a little off to the side, away from him, not on top of him, but maybe in a distance of 4 to 5 meters, certainly a little off in the distance in the street. He's lying more to the...well, right where we have to pass, more like he fell with his head on the curb of the side walk or something like that.

C: I see...and do you have any memory of what we did after that?

M: Very, very vaguely that we wanted to... get on a bus but didn't find one at first and we couldn't take the subway because we were too far out already because Shirley...because I remember thinking: 'we'll just go on the subway' but Shirley lives out of reach of the subway-net. And how we actually got home...I believe Richard found a bus that went in the right direction.

C: Mhm...so that's very interesting, you're saying Shirley lives out of reach of the subway-net, we couldn't even have gotten to her by subway.

M: Yes, I know that to be true, because I used to live in her house and you really have to travel the last part of the trip by bus.

C: Okay. And do you have any memory of how we, if we reacted to the accident in any sort of strange way?

M: Um....strangely, no. Maybe I...well we had dinner with Shirley and talked and I was hoping that you guys hadn't really seen anything bad, or – well, I can't remember talking about it – not at all.

[...]

C: Okay. Good. So, um, I wanted to go on asking you whether you know if we went to Madame Tussauds during that vacation.

M: Hm! Yes, I believe we did! Yes and there was even a new...a new wax figure that you guys were interested in in particular...there's a picture of you with Einstein, I know that...

C: Ha! (laughs)

M: Yes, yes. You standing next to Einstein. You must really have been between 7 and 8 years old because it was our last trip to England, because after that we went to the US. And we actually drove

into the city by bus every single day, practically.

C: So you too are saying there's a photo of Einstein and me. Do you think we would still be able to find that amongst...

M: Yes, sure, of course! I will look for it later, right away.

C: There's no hurry, but...it would be very interesting. Because then I would have some visual input, sort of. So, do you know by any chance, whether this was on the same day as the accident?

M: I don't know, really. We did ride into the city by bus, maybe not every day but...but, anyhow, we certainly went downtown around 3 or 4 times during that trip.

C: Do you remember me talking about Einstein a lot, with you?

M: Yes, yes! Because you really wanted to see that wax figure. Richard and I were basically interested in other things, or Madame Tussauds as a whole, but you were really, exclusively fixated on Albert Einstein...

C: (Laughs)

M: And you were really happy to have a picture of him, you standing next to him, almost leaning on him, well not touching him, because that's not allowed – and later on that was a little embarrassing to you, when the picture was still lying around and I told other people about it, you didn't want to...it was a little embarrassing to you.

C: Oh. Very interesting. Okay. Um, so why do you think...so you're saying I was fascinated by Einstein? Or maybe, I don't know, astronomy in general?

M: Well, simply curiosity for, for the world. The curiosity for '*Was die Welt im innersten zusammenhält*', really. You were so curious about these things, how they emerge, how one imagines space and time. And Richard liked talking about it as well. And well, yes, I was simply, I don't know, I was very happy that you were so...interested. But also I was a little sad that you showed no interest in books at all back then and you didn't read any literature for a long time.

C: Hehe. Okay. Um. Okay, so that's all, basically. I have lots of new material now...

M: Great! Well, I probably talked way too much. You don't have to type this all up.

C: I'll have to see. Some parts I can probably take out, but I think I'll use most of it. Okay, so I'll stop the recording now – unless, unless you have anything to add (laughs)

M: Um. No. Well. I think what you're doing is very interesting.

Interview Richard - my dad (May 20th)

C: What this is about now is the time we went to London right after being in Norwich. And in particular, this is about the time...do you remember riding on the bus in London, and then getting stuck in traffic and having to get off the bus?

D: Hm...uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuummm...well now that you're saying it...well, coming from Shirley, we were always on that double-decker bus for a long time going down town, I remember that.

C: Mhm.

D: But getting stuck somewhere, I can't remember that.

C: Mom answered the same way (laughs). Um, so I have to go on telling you a bit about how I remember it, even though that may interfere with your memory of it...

D: Okay.

C: So according to my memory we were sitting in the bus but then it stopped and we already got a bit nervous at that time, and then they said we had to get off the bus. And that, of course, was, particularly for you guys, having to arrange everything and all, bad news. Mom panicked a little bit: 'how are we going to get home now, to Shirley?' and we were in the middle of some area we don't know well and so...you don't have any memory of this?

D: No, well, no.

C: Okay. So then...do you remember witnessing an accident of any kind? In London?

D: In London? Well, one sees a lot of traffic accidents, but in London...no, nothing turns up in my mind.

C: Hm...it's strange that none of you remember this – but that sort of backs up my theory that you guys all ignored it...(laughs)

D: (Laughs) Why should we ignore it?

[...]

D: Well...why don't you ask Katharina or Sabrina?

C: Well, I have asked Sabrina already, and Katharina as well, by e-mail.

D: Mhm.

C: And they can't remember it either. Sabrina remembers...

D: Maybe you dreamed it.

C: No! That's for sure!

D: Mhm.

C: Um, so, since you remember neither the situation nor the accident, it would be pointless, of course, to ask whether you remember what happened after...I mean, how we found our way home, because you don't remember anything about it in the first place, right?

D: Well, obviously, we got home.

C: (laughs) You're right. Okay. Then I have a set of new questions: Do you know whether we went to Madame Tussauds in London? During this trip?

D: Well, we went by it, two or three times, but I believe we didn't go in.

C: So we were not in Madame Tussauds in London?

D: No.

C: And...um...hm...I'd have to check up on that, because to my memory we did go in. Um, do you remember...were you ever inside a Madame Tussauds?

D: No.

C: Can you name any celebrities you can sort of mentally picture having seen as wax figures?

D: Yes, um, The Beatles and the Queen and...they're basically all there.

C: Okay. Um. So to my memory we were in fact in there. And I was mainly fascinated by one figure, namely the one of Albert Einstein.

D: Mhm.

C: So that doesn't ring a bell either?

D: Well now I'm thinking that you were in there with Renate alone and that I refused to go in.

C: Hm. But okay, um, there seems to be a photograph of me with Einstein. Um, and maybe, if mom finds it, once you see the picture some memories will pop up in your head, confirming that we were there, after all.

D: Hhm. Okay.

C: But of course, everyone has his own memory. I don't want to interfere with yours (laughs). In general, you do remember that back then we used to talk about Einstein and the universe a lot?

D: Yes, yes, of course.

C: Okay. During this trip to London as well?

D: (Long pause) Well, I just have to think about it because what I remember very well is the story when we...um, where you were so very much interested in the universe and we went to Darmstadt to listen to this set of lectures and so on...that could have been around that time. I believe...

C: Yes, I remember that very clearly as well.

D: Also, in association with that is the time when we went to the dinosaur museum. In Frankfurt.

C: Oh, I see. Okay. Yes, um, so you have a lot of memories except for the ones concerning what I need (laughs).

D: Yup (laughs).

C: Ok, do you remember when we talked about Einstein for the first time or how the issue came up?

D: (Pause) To my knowledge we had...um, what was the first book? We had the book by that...god, what's his name...?

C: Steven Hawkins.

D: Steven Hawkins. And I think I even read things from it to you guys and so on. And it fascinated all of us. And then....

C: I see. Do you remember any situation where you would have explained any of this to me – theories and the like?

D: I thought...I thought, well all the time, basically, no?

C: Yup.

D: All the time we talked about theories, especially the idea concerning...um...multiple universes and the like.

C: And the theory of relativity?

D: (Pause) Um...that, too. Even though I probably couldn't have explained it.

C: I believe we talked about the example with the trains and all that....

D: Yes, the one with the trains...

C: Do you remember if this was in London?

D: Hm...well, I'm associating it with London right now.

C: Mhm...because to my memory it really is like you explained things like the theory of relativity and things like $E=MC^2$, that you knew about that even before I had really heard about it, and that you explained certain things to me.

D: That's possible, yes. I mean, $E=MC^2$ is more of a simple story...

C: And the theory of relativity, the example with the trains and so on, could it be that...

D: And also the thing concerning um, well I think, um...um, the warping of space, we talked about that a lot.

C: The warping of space, right. But would you describe this as a conversation or more like you explaining it?

D: Well, we worked it out together, I think. I remember very well in this book where someone is falling by a window – isn't that how it was? – and it was...sort of explained very visually.

C: Mhm, okay. So that's interesting. So just to recapitulate: you don't think that my interest in Einstein was initiated by Madame Tussauds, by seeing this wax figure or something like that, that my interest started around this time...

D: I don't think so, because why should you, just by looking at it...I think it's much more likely that you knew Einstein beforehand and admired him, and that's why you were so keen on seeing him. Because he doesn't look that impressive after all...

C: Well, you're right, that does make more sense.

D: So anyway, how are you feeling about the examination for Film School?

C: ...Well...I'll just have to wait and see...

D: What three films did you submit in the end?

C: Um, *Blues Brothers*, of course.

D: Ha!

C: And...let's see...*Ghost Dog*...and *Fitzcarraldo*, because I had to do an assignment on that anyway...

Interview Renate (May 20th)

[right after my interview with dad, mom wanted to get back on the phone]

M: ...Well, it was on the street, but the motorbike was further off in the distance. But the thing I now

know for sure is that it's true. And that we were unbelievably tired and that's part of why we were in such a hurry. Because it took us two hours to drive down town, then we were – either in that wax museum, that day, or, also, we once went to the museum of technology, or of science. I'd have to look it up – in this really big one, we were in there for five, six hours, or let's say four at least, I don't know right now. And we were really horribly tired. And that's why we were pretty stressed out – we were thinking that this is the bus, still, and from the last bus stop we still had to walk a quarter of an hour to get to Shirley's place.

C: Mhm....

M: And we were all very tired.

C: But what's interesting about it is that all of this came back to you just now, the clear memory, at least, that now you're saying: that's certainly the way it was....

M: Yes, it certainly did happen...

C: ...So you thought it through just now?

M: ...Um, well, I always see us – well, often times when I'm thinking of England – I'm seeing us sitting in the bus, but on the trip into town. And the ride back, I guess that was... repressed because it was so unpleasant. It was...we wanted to get home quickly in any case, and then, something that horrible...

C: Mhm.

M: And...besides, I didn't want you guys to see it. But we had to cross the intersection, we couldn't just cross somewhere else, you know? We had to stick with the other people, thinking they probably knew where to go. We couldn't have simply withdrawn from the group.

C: Well, yes, sure. I mean, this is not, you don't have to worry about this now, it's not like this was a traumatizing experience or anything. You don't have to think to yourself: 'my god, he saw something there...'

M: No, no. It would be too late for that, anyways. You don't have to get worried about this, because this is something you can't do anything about, you know? It's not like it was our fault – we didn't run anyone over because we were drunk or anything, rather it was a situation one just can't help getting into once in a while.

C: Yes.

M: And besides, after 20 years, or 15 years, this is nothing one can do anything about.

The second element of the five-part design is *Progressive Complications*: the great sweeping body of story that spans from Inciting Incident to Crisis/Climax of the final act. To complicate means to make life difficult for characters. To complicate progressively means to generate more and more conflict as they face greater and greater forces of antagonism. (McKee)

June 2nd, 2009. 6.28 p.m.

In preparation for the discussion of my project tomorrow, I scribbled a list of questions/ideas into the margins of my notebook:

“- which aspects of the short story are fictional? Are they justified?”

- what role should I, the author, play in this whole ordeal?

- dispute about “shit“: does this work in English?

- things I made up:

- Claudio counting his steps (every child does this at one point in life, but I probably didn't do

it in London)

- the flashing blue lights / continuity in general
- “shit“-dispute (Mom and Sabrina certainly did have this dispute in England, but I'm quite sure that it took place in Norwich. Why did I include it here? Maybe I felt it did a lot to characterize my mom and my sister within only a few sentences...)
- Dad explaining relativity (I'm sure he used the train-example, not the bus)
- newspaper over head
- mom kneeling down
- Visiting Madame Tussauds on the same day as the accident“

You adulterate the truth as you try to write. There isn't any pretense that you try to arrive at the literal truth. And the only consolation when you confess to this flaw is that you are seeking to arrive at poetic truth, which can be reached only through fabrication, imagination, stylization. What I'm striving for is authenticity; none of it is real. (Shields)

June 3rd, 2009. 10.42 a.m.

Hi Claudio,
We spent an entire evening (we had to wait for Majus anyways) looking through old boxes of photographs.
But the famous photo has not turned up.
Ciao
Dad

8.15 p.m.

Some short impressions of the discussion of my project in the Powers-Seminar today:

The project seems to be getting out of (my) hand: Powers' very first question was whether, having been “sucked down into the hall of mirrors of memories within memories and collective recollection“ I had come round to abandoning my initial idea yet – in favor of this whole memory-spectacle. I answered by trying to defend my initial idea, stating that the interviews were all very well but did not seem to have any kind of center to revolve around (or rather, that what they are revolving around is nothing more than a black hole of lost memories).

But none of the other class members seemed to be with me on this. Before I could even really get a word in (e.g. regarding the list of questions/aspects cited above), they started going on about how this is actually a story of one narrator (me) trying to tell a story – and how then all these other narrators (Sabrina, mom, dad) start popping up and begin “pulling the story different ways“

(even though they're trying really hard to help me out). Ansel said that. The only thing we could all agree on was the Einstein-Photograph.

And Ansel is right. That's exactly what's happening. But it wasn't only my family members who were pulling this story away from me. It was Powers and the entire seminar. During the rest of the discussion, everyone seemed to be taking it for granted that I would have to let these "other narrators" take over my project. They were so certain about this that it didn't even occur to me to question this common consensus until after the discussion. Then the logical fallacy suddenly seemed all too plain: if this entire project is pitting me against all those other narrators trying to hijack my story, the next logical step would certainly *not* be to surrender my forces and go along with it, but rather to *fight back* with even more conviction.

19.58

By the way: fighting back should be pretty easy. After all, I, as the story teller, am all-powerful. "I just *have* to have final cut", as David Lynch would say. I just talked to my dad about this on the phone.

He agreed.

June 4th, 2009. 12.47 p.m.

Hey Dad,

Too bad, too bad...so you didn't find any pictures of the trip to London at all? Because that would be interesting by itself, because of the date, you know...

best,

Claudio

7.11. p.m.

Hello Claudio,

up to this point, we have not yet found the box containing the pictures from this trip to London. So there's still hope.

We'll look into it when we get back to Lohr. How was the session with Powers?

Greetings from Wunstdorf,

Dad

June 5th, 2009. 10.43 a.m.

One more interesting idea that came up during the discussion: I realized that what I'm struggling against is life itself. I want it to work out the way I planned. But life is, of course, interfering with my plan (once again: "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans".) Real life is refusing to

make sense. As Shields says: "The novel says: 'this happened because...'. Life says: 'This happened.'" (Where does he say this? I can't seem to find it right now). So now it seems like the meaninglessness of life is the actual antagonist.

The Chinese ideogram for Crisis is two terms: Danger/Opportunity - "danger" in that the wrong decision at this moment will lose forever what we want; "opportunity" in that the right choice will achieve our desire. (McKee)

June 7th, 2009. 11.31 a.m.

There are still a lot of ways to go. All of them could potentially still supply the material I need. Let's try to get them straight. First, I need to find out the exact date, because then I could try to search the London newspapers for accidents that occurred that day (maybe the *Evening Standard*?!). I need that Einstein-Photograph. It should have a date in the back. But that probably still wouldn't be the right date. Maybe I could even try calling up Shirley. But what good would that do? Powers said I could try spotting the site of the accident on a map – but then again, even if I were to find out what line we were on, how would I know where we had to get off? Sure, we were headed for Shirley's house – but that bus probably went all the way through town. Do they have Google Street View in London yet? Let's check ... Yup, they sure do...

22.45 p.m.

I just realized: if, from the start, I had actually wanted my project to be about analyzing the process of writing a story, then why the hell did I decide that asking my family members for more information would be the next thing to do? Sure, I was hoping that additional information would open up the possibility of writing a third version of the story – but what would that have said about my creative decisions themselves? Nothing, because including additional info that came from the outside is not a creative decision! Coming up with ways of including new info into the story would probably have required a creative effort – but how would these creative decisions have revealed anything about the creative decisions I made the first time around?!

So, in the end it appears, I was, unconsciously or whatever, fooling myself. I was not after revealing anything about the creative process. But what was I after, then? I was after Einstein, I guess. I wanted to hear a confirmation that this corpse either did or did not look like Einstein. At least part of me did.

So, what does this mean? Do I, on top of all the others, now have myself to struggle against?

Is this even possible – how on earth can one *not* be ones own side? --

The climax of the last act is your great imaginative leap. Without it, you have no story. Until you have it, your characters wait like suffering patients praying for a cure. (McKee)

The lyric essay doesn't expound, is suggestive rather than exhaustive, depends on gaps, may merely mention. [...] It may meander, making use of other genres when they serve its purpose, sampling the techniques of fiction, drama, journalism, song, and film. The stories it tells may be no more than metaphors. Or, storyless, it may spiral in on itself, circling the core of a single image or idea, without climax, without a paraphrasable theme. (Shields)

June 11th, 2009. 12.50 p.m.

D: Hello?

C: Hello, it's me!

D: Hey!

C: I was on the subway just now, that's why you didn't get through, but I just listened to the mailbox message you left me and so I of course had to call back right away!

D: Yeah, it looks like a real moment of achievement, doesn't it!

C: Come again?

D: A moment of achievement!

C: Yes, exactly. A turn. A turning-point!

D: A turning-point in the great masterpiece! (laughs)

C: (Laughs) Exactly.

D: It's even a real traditional, um, photo album. A photo album of England.

C: You made an entire album of our trip to England?

D: Yup.

C: That seems a bit out of character, doesn't it? (Laughs) ...So it must have been a real good trip.

D: Yes, of course! Back in those days Renate was, from time to time, still very, um, tidy.

C: Mhm.

D: Yes. And I don't understand. -

M: Let me talk to him!

D: Yes...but: there really is a picture of me with the Beatles, you know?

C: There is? (Laughs) You see!

D: Yes. And I'm sitting next to Gerard Depardieu, touching his knee. I do now remember dimly feeling stange about that...

C: (Laughs) A strange feeling with Depardieu?

D: Yes, touching his knee like that.

C: (Laughs) So *that* you remember. I see.

D: Well I'm seeing it in front of me *now*. But anyways, I guess I totally repressed it.

C: Seems like it, yes. How many pictures are there?

D: Well, it was our second trip to England. Not the one where we went to Norwich. But instead the next year, where we went to Broadstairs before going to London. 1996.

C: Yeah, you told me the exact date on my mailbox – I'll look that up, and all...Um, so there are a lot of pictures of the wax museum?

D: Yes, yeah. Like I said, two of me, then there's one, well the one with you and Einstein and a chalk board with $E=MC^2$ written on it.

C: Yes, the all-important one.

D: And then there's another one where what's-his-name is touching you head, this um...you know, Germany's biggest show host...the one who hosts....

M: Which one do you mean?

D: [To Mom] No, not him, the one on the left...Gottschalk!

C: Oh. Alright, I didn't know he's famous in England. So this is really cool. I can start research on the date right away. But the question is now how I can get my hands on those pictures – the one with Einstein at least.

D: Well that's no problem...one moment!

M: Yes, Hello Claudio, I just have to say I'm very excited: I normally never paste bus-tickets into a photo album but this time I did because we had so much space left...and it says 4th of September on it – or maybe the 6th ? Look it up once more, Richard...I can't believe it. And we didn't travel downtown too often, so it could be the exact date you've been looking for.

C: Yeah, that's totally insane...

M: Yes!

C: But I thought we travelled downtown many times.

M: Well, I think, since I wasn't too sure – I think we went downtown only once each year because it was quite an ordeal – you know, being there for one week and with Shirley...So, at least, there's a pretty big chance that it really is the right date.

C: But we also went to the park and all that – so that must have been a pretty packed day.

M: Yes, but a year before we were in London for one week as well and so – maybe we're just getting the two mixed up. Anyways, I think there's a more than a 50% chance of this being the right date, because the second time around we might have travelled downtown only once. But I'll hand the phone back over to Richard now.

D: Hi. Did she succeed in confusing you?

C: It's okay. Is there a date printed on the back of the photographs?

D: Um...well, they're glued in, I'm not going to tear them out, you know?

C: Oh, right...Hmm..(laughs)

D: But I think they didn't do that back then – printing dates on the back, I mean.

C: Oh, I see. Alright. Well, don't tear it up, now that for once we actually have a nice photo album.

D: Exactly.

C: But, um, could you scan that one picture in or something?

D: I guess we'll just send the whole album over to you, won't we?

C: Well, yeah, that would be even better, of course! (Laughs)

D: So anyways, mom told me you had a good feeling about your examination of admission yesterday?

C: Well yeah, better than I had thought, at least...They said it could take a while 'till I get a letter, though.



7.50 p.m.

All in all, the exam went better than I thought, but as always, it's the few things that didn't go well that keep nagging inside ones head. On my way back to the S-Bahn I became aware of a mistake I had made. Mr. Schulz (the head of the three examiners who were throwing questions at me) asked me if I had any other texts or projects up my sleeve (probably referring to my being a little young). I replied that the samples were basically a 'best of'. Which is true in a very limited way only, because they're the best 4 pieces of the approx. 8 'real' pieces I have ever gotten close to finishing. So I got a little nervous about concealing this fact and went on to explain some of the ideas I have in the back of my head – and somehow forgot the much more obvious and convincing answer I should have given: that I'm currently working on at least two more projects in the courses I'm taking at the FU-Berlin (the Powers-project plus the 40-page script I'm writing for the other seminar).

So, it could very well be that they did catch on to the fact that I don't really have much experience as a writer. I have no idea, of course, of how much experience they would expect from someone my age – but I guess it should be enough to at least ensure them that (script-)writing isn't just some temporary fad of mine.

What this comes down to is this: if I don't make it in, I know that this mistake will probably be the main reason for it. I'll curse myself for once again having only myself to blame on this point (more than I am now, already).

But I'll also know what to do before I apply there again.

June 12th, 2009. 3.08 p.m.

Notes while researching:

1) WolframAlpha says that on September 4th 1996, it rained only during the morning hours:

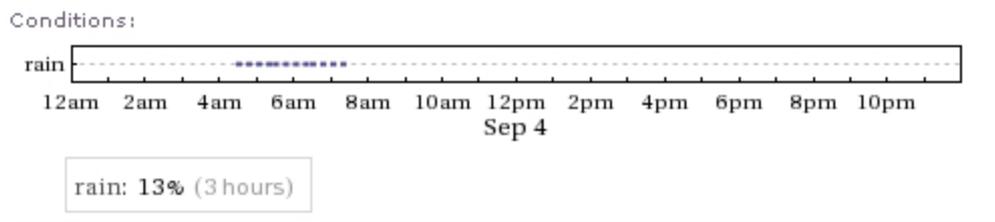
Within a few days prior to and after September 4th, the only ones registering with precipitation in the afternoon are:

August 29th: 6 – 11 p.m.

August 30th: 7 – 9 p.m.

September 2nd: 5.30 – 11 p.m.

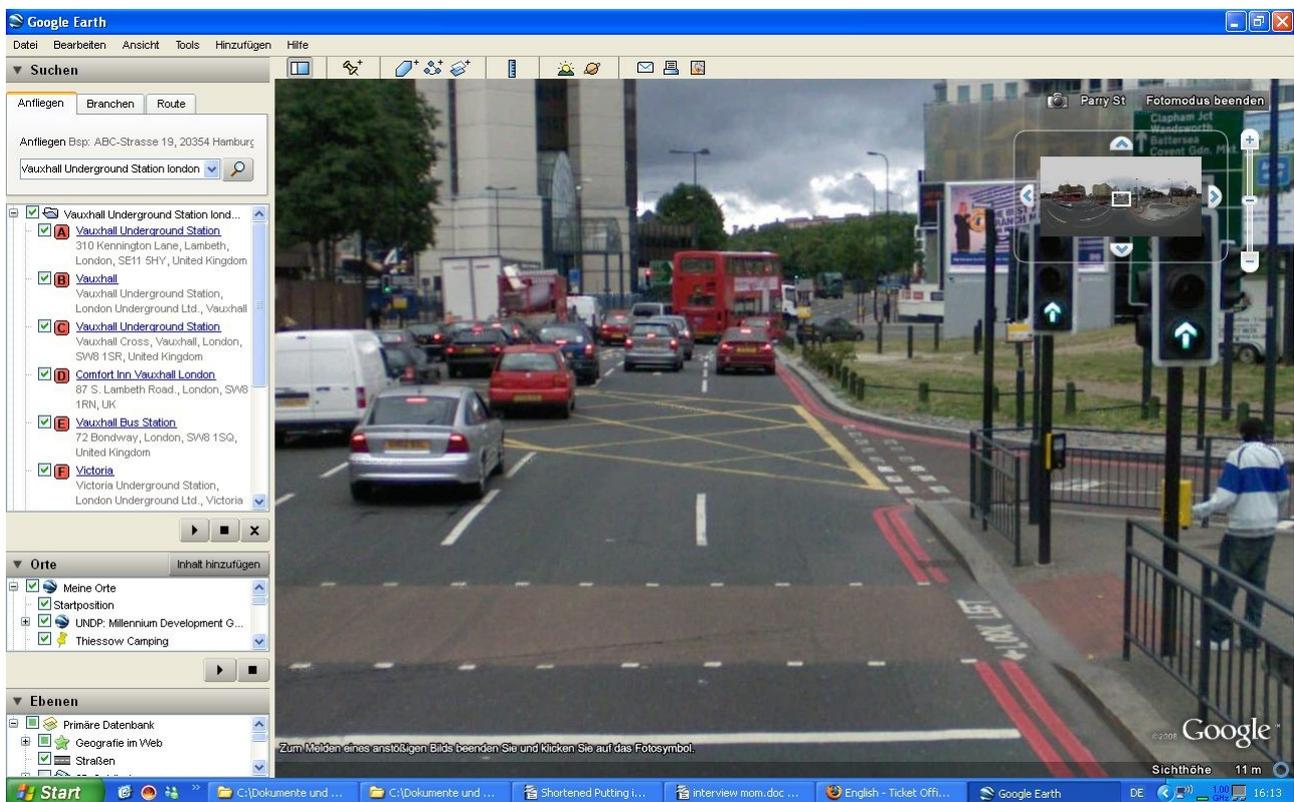
September 10th: 7.30 – 8.30 p.m.



(the sun went down around 7.40 p.m. for these dates)

I searched many of the online archives of daily newspapers (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Evening Standard*, *South London Press* etc.) for traffic accidents for these days. Many of the archives did not date back to 1996. Of those that did, no traffic accidents were registered. My Google searches gained no results either.

Mom said Shirley lives in K.-Str. 39 in Richmond, near Kingston upon Thames. According to the journey planner at www.tfl.gov.uk, (impressive site, BTW) I would nowadays have to take either the Route Bus 281 or the Route Bus 267 to get there. But on Google Street View, the stops along this line look way too suburban. So I'd have to start near Madame Tussauds, assuming that we really did go there on the same date. That leaves me with the Route Bus 87, which would take me as far as the Vauxhall Bus Station. But around there, any larger intersection could pretty much fit the loose requirements my memory supplies me with. Who knows, it might have been around here?



June 16th, 2009.

Admission Notice

Dear Mr. Winter,

I'm glad to inform you that after evaluating the results of the examination of admission, you have been accepted for the course of studies in "script writing / dramaturgy" at the HFF-Potsdam. The winter semester will begin on October 5th, 2009.

June 18th, 2009. 7.03 p.m.

So getting into Film School is apparently easier than finding my way through the „hall of mirrors“ of my own memory – certainly, this entire collage has become not a way through this hall, but rather just a whole bunch of rooms in it. Or maybe an entire additional hallway. I still have „final cut“ – but I have no idea what the hell to do with it. The very idea of a „final cut“ seems strangely out of place. Sure, I do have the freedom to just make up one final step of the way, trying to tie everything into a neat little knot. No one would ever know the difference. But what would there be to add? And what's more: It isn't hard to lie. It isn't hard to mislead the reader and to leave everything concerning what's true about a story and what's not in the dark.

9.02 p.m.

This may sound trivial, but I wasn't all that excited about receiving that notice of admission. It just seemed like the next logical step. It's true, I did work hard on getting in for more than a year now (on and off), the challenges becoming greater and greater, and all that...I'm glad I made it, but...getting that call from dad, for example, the one where he told me they managed to find that picture of Einstein, seemed, at least for the moment, way more exciting, somehow.

This kind of reaction is a very typical one for me. I've known the feeling ever since Germany won the European Cup. Bierhoff made that goal and it was great, but also, all the excitement ceased within the snap of a finger. The sudden ending somehow instantly revealed the ridiculousness of the whole ordeal of getting so worked up about trying to get that ball past that white chalked line...

Psychologists say we tend to remember things by how they end. That's certainly true – after all, I can't recall anything about the first half of that match. I'm sure that in the case of a soccer match, this is no great loss. But when dealing with stories, the implication is that my memory of them will be distorted in a negative way – because the end of a story, no matter how revelatory

(„Luke, I'm your father“, or even the ending of *Memento*), never quite manages to match up with the excitement of its beginning, when anything still seemed possible. Maybe that's why I tend to get excited when a long-submerged childhood memory pops up: even if they happen formally to have a beginning, middle, and end, they always feel like they're just the beginning of something bigger.

Tell the story of your life that is the most emotionally cathartic; the story you “remember” is covering the “real story” anyway.
(Shields)

Each tale you create says to the audience: “I believe life is like *this*.” Every moment must be filled with your passionate conviction or we smell a phony. [...] Difference for the sake of difference is as empty an achievement as slavishly following the commercial imperative. Write only what you believe. (McKee)

Oktober 3rd, 2006. Untitled, unfinished Story.

The best thing about being down with the cold was the tea light mom put in his bedroom at night. She would fetch her very special blue ceramic vase-like thing which had a little dish on top and a place to put the tea light underneath. She would fill the little dish with water, then add a few drops of eucalyptus oil, then light the tea light and put it in place, put the whole thing on his nightstand, say his prayers with him (*abends wenn ich schlafen geh'*), pat the cover above his chest and wish him good night. On her way out, she closed the door all the way – the light of the candle was bright enough on its own.

The tea light flickered and cast warm shadows across the room. It made him feel like he had his own tiny private fireplace. He knew that the smell of eucalyptus must already be filling the air. He tried breathing in through his nose but it felt like he didn't even have one. He would have to fall asleep breathing through his mouth, which is something he hated. He propped his head up on his hand and looked into the flame. He watched it melt the wax around it and watched the circle of molten wax expand ever so slowly. He thought about how most of the time when you want to witness these kinds of slow developments, you need fast motion like they have on TV. Because normally you don't have the time to watch the bud of a flower blossom out or to watch the moon move across the sky or to watch the sun making shadows long. You look away and when you look back you notice that the shadow has changed, but you weren't patient enough to actually look at it while it was happening.

He stared into the flame until the circle of molten wax had reached the tea light's thin metal edge. He felt tired but wanted to keep watching until all of the wax had turned liquid, and then until the liquid wax slowly disappeared and then until the wick slowly got shorter and shorter and the

flame shrunk and had to fight to stay alive until it finally went out in an instant – he had seen all of those phases before, each on its own, but never how one turned into the other. Most of all, he had never been able to catch the moment when the flame actually goes out.

Problem was, he was too tired by now. Those tea lights keep burning for hours. That's what they're for, basically. Not through the entire night, but very long into it for sure. The flame would go out sometime in the very middle of the night, long after he had fallen asleep. All he could hope for was his cold to wake him up just in the nick of time. Yeah right: what were the odds for that? --

His friend once told him he had solid scientific proof that ghosts existed. He told him he had this stuffed rabbit, Tyler, which he went to bed with every night. He said one night, just like every night, he fell asleep with his arms around Tyler. But when he woke up, the rabbit was gone. He switched on the light on his night stand and then saw it in the far corner of the room, on top of a pile of comic-books, staring back at him.

He swore that he would never even think of putting Tyler there. --

He thought about whether a prayer would do the trick. Up the odds a little bit, at least. It made him think of this comedian on the radio the night before, who said he believes that most people believe in God „just in case“. That made him think of the Simpsons episode where Homer turns into a genius and finds a formula to prove to Flanders that God doesn't exist and Flanders burns the piece of paper so no one will find out.

He decided to fold his hands for a short prayer and explained to God that if he was to wake him up in just the right moment he would accept it as a very personal scientific kind of proof of his existence. He made sure to unfold his hands before he started to think about other things: for example that he was hoping God may be tempted to answer his prayer because it required so little effort on God's part – just wake him from coughing in just the right moment, or something – yet would have such great meaning to him. Plus there would be no witnesses. And he wouldn't tell anyone. It would just be this very personal kind of thing. --

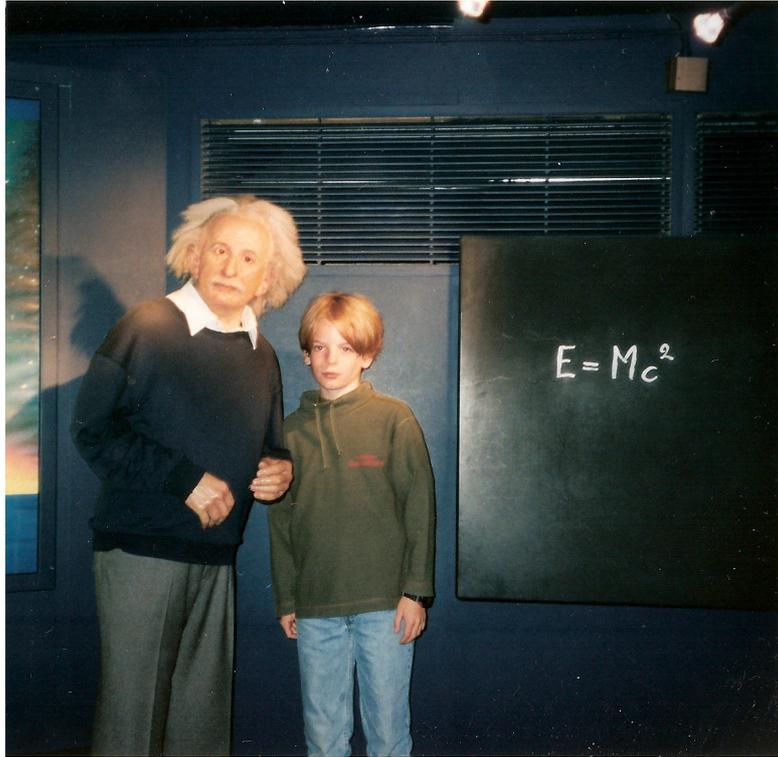
Some kind of Yacht with huge, white sails. The sails turned yellow and then looked like triangle-shaped teeth. One of them faded into the shape of the grey self-knitted lampshade hanging from the ceiling in his bedroom.

Eyes open. Tea light still burning. Too tired and dazed to take a close look though. The strong smell of eucalyptus. Fresh air through both nostrils.

Eyes closed. Pitch black. Eyes open. Pitch black! Blind! Fantic blinking! Eyes open or

closed, it didn't make a bit of difference. Like he had no eyes at all! He pulled the cover over his head. Pitch black. He pulled it back down. Pitch black. God! Iniquity! Punishment!

It was only when the smell of eucalyptus began to fade into the smell of smoke that he realized what had really happened. The tea light had gone out. Simple as that. Only it must have happened in that very split second before he opened his eyes for the second time. Within the blink of an eye.



"At first glance I wasn't sure who looks more like a wax figure - Einstein or you." (Richard Powers)