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**Erich Wollenweber and his brain
Professor Doctor Mirtelbrinft**

written by F. H. Paul
translated by M. J. Dierkes

To my Father.

In gratitude for the names, the stories, the journeys
on which he sent me and the incredible energy I
have inherited from my *Mother* and him.

*To all my Siblings and Friends who are always and
ever there for me.*

– CHAPTER 1 –

Scoring a Try

When I was young, I didn't always feel well. Now I'm in my early 40s and it's the year 2015.

But I didn't always feel like shit either. Maybe that's what life is all about: living enthusiasm hand in hand with dying touches of apathy.

No beautiful melancholy and also no pleasant approach to excitement in life, if you ask me. When I was young, that is, in my mid to early late 20s, I also often imagined myself giving speeches in certain circles on certain occasions; to say something really major, well, at least the truth. Sometimes it was just about communicating something to another person. The situation, the content, the sentences and each word were carefully evaluated and orchestrated in my head. This tinkering could keep me busy for hours and even make me cry.

Yet I did not truly realize a single one of these, my speeches. For whatever reason. They remained intellectual constructs.

Why I like watching movies so much?

Yeah, maybe that's exactly why.

It's about the revision of automated perception that a work of art enforces. This was said by my German studies professor once, but no one ever really listened to him. Maybe that's exactly what I wanted, that people would perceive me differently and come to new conclusions that the old, predetermined image wouldn't have given you.

Anyway, the answers to so many questions - even those I never asked myself - I received in the course of my life and most of them from my - to quote Forrest Gump - best good friend, the honorable and very lovable Professor Dr. Mirtelbrinft.

But even he was not always like that and started - like myself - quite small.

In fact, in a hospital. While my birth was a matter of 20 minutes, his was 48 times longer than mine. He already had a giant head like that back in 1971. Both the midwife and the doctor, who were really still quite 'old school', strictly disapproved of a C-section and stuck to their opinion that a child must be born naturally. This view was shared by his mother, who added that in the wild there wouldn't be anyone to cut open a birthing woman's stomach

either. About 20 years later, the medical community discovered with little notice that this approach was and always will remain complete nonsense.

Of course a child can also be delivered by cesarean section.

Even gladly in times prior to the early seventies of the 20th century.

And so it happened that after half an eternity Mirtelbrinft plumped out of his screaming mother, dark blue and completely slimy, and cracked his skull open on a rusty nail.

Not exactly, unfortunately: he merely slipped out of the midwife's hand and the only thing that could save him from the total destruction that his skull would have suffered if it had hit the tiled floor was the umbilical cord, which had not yet been severed. I always picture this situation like a bungee jump, only in our case the rope (the umbilical cord) was stretched a little too far by the weight of the jumper (his rather heavy skull) causing the jumper to hit the ground (hospital tiles) briefly with his head (Mirtelbrinft with his skull) but not without a good smack.

Otherwise I simply cannot explain the obvious physiological deformation of his head. Sometimes I also think that the literally 'hard nut to crack' should tell me something, but I still don't know what. Perhaps, if nothing else, then at least that underwater births should be tried out more often, if the ultra-sound images show that the child has a gigantic oversized skull.

However, it is not unlikely that I pieced this story together from dreams, jokes and misunderstandings, in order to somehow give a tangible and not supernatural explanation to this Mirtelbrinft phenomenon, which I was supposed to get to know in my early mid-20s. Yes, as you get older, sometimes the truth gets carried away by the stories. Anyway, the cause for his genius as well as his deformed skull had to be from this world and why not from the very beginning of his life? Why should a short but violent collision with rather hard tiles directly after birth not explain the fact that his openly exposed skull bone plates were placed on top of one another and that, in the second step, a resulting mixing of different brain areas and the consequential new linkage of otherwise unfamiliar

areas resulted in an increased ability to think? Confusing neuro-speculations could be the tabloid headline for this. However, I can not think of any other plausible explanation. Nevertheless, it could be that his wisdom was only noticed by me all these years and the supposedly obvious deformation of his giant skull only caught my eye, so that the complications during and shortly after his birth never occurred. I can't really say from today's perspective, but what I can say is that it could very well have been that Mirtelbrinft pulled the bungee jump stunt after his own birth. Crazy enough - genetically speaking - he most certainly was.

The idea of writing a book to simply try to capture and preserve something, be it anything, is almost as old as that of the imaginary speech. If I start it - so I always thought - it should be and had to become a universal work in a way. To be more precise, it had to be perfect. No mere rambling or telling of fiction or fictionally enriched reality. A book in which so many expectations on my part would have had to be fulfilled for it to be worthy in my eyes. Worthy of whatever and as far as the expectations were concerned: I couldn't even name them reasonably

myself... it had a lot to do with the way something was written and therefore how it was spoken, so for me a book was like an imaginary speech that was thought out, weighed, worked out to the last comma and brought to the point. But seen in this light, a book is a whole collection of such dialogues between a narrator and the reader, which makes it a truly complex undertaking that is difficult to follow in terms of imagination and arrangement. Especially if you want it to be perfect in any way. Oh goodness, sometimes there are and will be just too many thoughts. Here is something you don't hear anymore:

"The kid thinks too much." Such a slightly worried expression about a brooding person or even someone who lives a rather introverted life and really keeps things to himself is not often to be heard nowadays. Could this be a sign of the ubiquitous 'yakety-yak' that seems to be in fashion these days and which gradually eradicated all silent thinkers completely? So they receive even less attention and thus slide into oblivion. Too bad, I have always admired people like that, due to their intellectual activity, which did not necessarily have

to point to loss, desperation and loneliness, but could also be an indication of special, beautiful ideas, visions and desires. These people still had a sense for keeping silent about some things and only talking about them in particular situations. Secret ideas, ones dreams, the new or the old. It frequently used to appear to me (as well) that I was reaching my limits. Limits of different kinds. Unfortunately, increased sensitivity is always accompanied by an increasing awareness and self-centredness. Doing so in a rather peculiar, strange way. It is possible, for example, to perceive or discover that friendships or other interpersonal relationships are not sufficiently intense enough to have a satisfying effect on the subject. Or even that love didn't exist the way it was spooking around in my head - that I could have puked because of the way certain things were, that their nature led me to such an unpleasant weariness that I didn't see any way out.

At times this was so bizarre that every time I was struck down by the presents' full intensity, I respired so deeply that I felt like I could start all over again. The cards would be dealt again, everything would

not be as bad as I had previously assumed, a kind of happy optimism that revives the doubter, seemingly without reason, and is able to snatch him out of his sadness.

I hear some bands even sing that you can't turn off a life that is fixated on a certain state of mind.

And yet it seems to have happened somehow. Things don't touch me like they used to.

I don't love anybody anymore. Something that used to be sacred, something I believed in no longer exists. It all became something. The intensity and attraction - to the positive or the negative end of each continuum - that I used to feel is no more. It hasn't given way to indifference, but to life as it is.

The dream is over. We are not living in a fiction of a written story.

Nothing's as special as it used to be. I'm just chasing the past, if I'm honest. I even pant and cry when I do.

A pity, I'm afraid you won't be able to shake the world to its foundations with my help anymore. It's unlikely anyone would have joined in anyway. All I do now is write. Write and write and write until the word loses its meaning. Like everything else

eventually does. I happened to dig up this old text of mine about half an hour ago:

The cigarette fell and the breath lingers.
Absolute silence before the great moment,
only the wind blowing over the heads
of the masses can be heard.
The short moment before the great awakening.
The blink of an eye before the never known.
The holding of a breath before the crowd rises.
The short, tingling moment before an inner
movement that grasps everyone:

The flaming statement rumbles
down from the high, sunlit balcony onto the crowd,
which is carried away as if by a huge,
untameable, raging stream.
The deep truth, the thing longed for by all,
is called and resounds through
land and marrow,
mountain and valley,
across the sea into
the vastness of the earth,
up to the ears of the world.

Each person is captivated by the wild determination
and the absolute urgency of this moment.

United in spirit, the infinite possibilities, the vision
in sight, as if dazed by the idea everyone believes in.

The earth trembles under this madness

under the power of man's will.

Reality and dream seem so close;
they almost lie in each other's arms;
hope tangible in the fresh air.

The bubbling, fiery mass foams and boils;
so powerfully waves the wonderful flags
on this exceptional night ...

It is revolution.

I've always wanted to announce that.

– CHAPTER 2 –

An almost metaphysical promise

"Identify yourself!, it sounded clear and dominant. Identify yourself! I could only babble... It was awful. I knew exactly what he meant and somehow I didn't have to answer, he knew what I was thinking and I knew what he would answer. I only know that I couldn't think of anything specific, and yet I know that there is already something there.

Is that enough?! That's the question... Is that all? Isn't there more identity to it? It doesn't get more differentiated, more profound, more qualitative? Not really individual, what your plans are won't work out. None of it will work out. And I cried and cried and cried, and life went downhill. And then I was awake and I was crazy. The reality seemed the same, but I wasn't the same anymore. I felt a rare coldness and distance from everything and myself... I don't know, but it's slowly getting better...", Erik finally told me about his dream.

I couldn't say much about it and yet I knew exactly about such mad dreams. A dream is the sole product of your own brain. Mirtelbrinft told me this

seemingly banal wisdom very early on and I thought about it a lot. So every dream event - including the contributions of other people, perhaps even those known to us - is completely imagined by oneself, somehow almost appearing to be self-invented.

During the night, these imagined characters appear - as in a theatrical performance - in the head and play the, in this state, very believable piece, the dream. As is widely known, it is difficult for the dreamer to resist the very process of dreaming. It is not imposed from outside, but generated by the individual himself. And here is the interesting link: Everything that is dreamed comes from the dreamer himself, it is, as we know, often cognitive mechanisms of processing everyday experiences, but also going beyond that!

How else could the kid dream such abstract stuff? It speaks directly from his profound fear, despite all the effort and struggle to lead an anonymous life. It's terrible to know that one's own instinct for meaning and substance is so strongly questioned. And this from no one other than oneself.

A dream always provides information about the innermost currents, even if one should not and

cannot directly create a psychogram from it, it says an enormous amount. Even if they are only feelings. Or tendencies. Or the multitude of a continuum. Nowadays and not just recently, we simply talk far too little about our dreams. We don't dare. Because everyone knows how much truth lurks in them.

Mirtelbrinft began early on to explore dreams and made it his main research area. He was interested in everything subconscious and its deeper, intersecting lines in a personality. I sometimes joke about his 'dream interpretation practice', as I call it, but there is a lot of sense and help in recognizing one's own self and resolving possible psychological dissonances in these dream interpretations, as some indigenous peoples in Latin America still practice them today.

But apart from that, I was still sitting on the edge of the bed with my young friend and I could only think of one kind of prayer with which I tried to console him and asked him to repeat after me:

Light the dark

I wish I could see

Give me shelter
for saving my hope
Ban this death
to keep me alive
Walk with me
so that I'm not alone

Have no fear
the Lord will be there
Have no fear
I'm standing right behind him

I repeated the answering verses and also translated them into German for him. They seemed to me the most important thing, the boy needed someone and even against my expectations I realized that I could be that someone.

He's as old as I was when I first met Mirtelbrinft. I just feel in good hands, and in an unspeakable way we have trusted each other since the first time we met.

A little confused I took my hat and coat, put it on and left the house with my head bowed. It was a

lousy night, cold, poor and bitter. I turned up my collar and thought about myself again. It started to rain, the wind blew its icy arrowheads into my face and I instinctively thought of an early text of mine. Rejection to the world was its name, and it allowed someone to be pushed so desperately into oblivion, in the hope of finding peace there and not having to face any of these unholy depths he saw himself facing in this world. The limitation of his liberating experience of another time in another space was obvious to him and yet and precisely because of this he loved unreality even more and even more because he would never get it, since it does not exist.

It ended with the lines “In a rainy sad night someone enters this world again, falls asleep and hopefully never gives up.”

As my grandmother always told me, there are some things that you never forget, some impressions, no matter how isolated, insignificant or magnificent, remain in your memory just as they were. Oh, so many things pass by without me ever being able to grasp them and somehow only the strange things stick to your memory.

I didn't really feel dirty at the time when the text was created one night, and I didn't see any way out other than fleeing and turning away from the world. I felt a deep sympathy, even affinity, for this someone who wrestled so desperately with the world and was happy about the fitting words and the complete rejection. The rain dripped against the windows and I realized a second thing at that time. I always loved the things that couldn't be mine and for that very reason.

I ask myself, how does one come to such a love affair?

There cannot be any shittier way to forced unhappiness.

And yet I never gave up hope.

– Chapter 3 –

A perfect book again

Writing a perfect book is - as already mentioned - a difficult thing. The idea of writing a maybe halfway perfect book about the problem of writing, writing a perfect book, is completely rejectable. I mean, however interesting and tempting it may be for the artist to make the lack of subject matter itself a topic of discussion in order to question the most basic things themselves, to emphasize the complexity of the subject matter and one's own aspirations, and to express one's own confusions and aberrations, in my opinion this is not the way out, let alone an interesting and promising approach to a book.

Books as well as poems, songs and many other things exist to tell stories, to create moods, to let feelings be expressed and not to stand in the centre and say, "I really want to say something, only I don't know what!"

Of course, storylessness is still completely legitimate and in some cases also not without

originality, but the whole thing just seems to lack something.

Therefore I have decided differently.

When I was young, I often had funny ideas, rather fantasies, mind games, a world of imagination, where certain things could happen that I thought up but wouldn't really happen. Well, what you call fantasy.

For example to break out of this miserable and tiring life with the girl of my dreams at the curious first sight of each other in an unexpected moment while thinking the sentence *She did not have to say the words to express what we wanted*. Or perhaps to take down a striker in a football match, who has broken through the defence, attacking, and most likely scoring, at the last second with a nice low tackle, and thus winning the red card as well as the victory of my team.

Give a fiery speech like once Martin Luther King or Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

To live such a special life that it finds its way into a poem or becomes part of a book.

Or live a life without fantasies about life.

My first encounter with Mirtelbrinft was - how shall I put it - an extensive one, perhaps rather meaningless, but nevertheless a very intense one. It began on the first night out at my new home, when our generation of students who had moved into the individual and/or collective accommodation (shared flats) met up to drink for the first time after the introductory teaching sessions.

With my university education I hoped to learn many new and interesting things, to learn living on my own, to shape my own life, to develop in a direction I never anticipated before and of course, like everyone else, to escape the 'duty' of going to work or starting an apprenticeship after graduating from high school and its associated provisional determination to live a probably unexciting and sad life.

It was the first evening of future co-students. Apart from the usual introductions, forgetting-the-names-of-the-others-in-the-excitement-of-the-first-meeting, the short explanations about origins, the typical fears of and anticipations

about studying, the evening also became unstereotypically funny. And that was with the advancing hours.

It would probably be a little bizarre to start with funny drinking games and lively conversations and end the evening with your own name.

Anyway, it went according to the normal social schedule.

Mirtelbrinft happened to be sitting near me with his little glass of martini, his giant skull and the neatly combed side parting on top of it, when they were just about to list the university events that were compulsory. Fortunately I had already been drinking. I did not have to and could not really participate. They all seemed to be quite nice and later on we talked about other things as well.

After the fourth bar change and the third to seventh beer - after three you usually stop counting - everyone was finally well drunk, the mood was cheerful, the seats were no longer binding and I found the courage to address Mirtelbrinft.

His first name is really awful and difficult to pronounce, so I always stuck to calling him what I wanted. Often Mirtelbrinft was the result.

"Jo, I may have forgotten your name again, but we study the same thing. It'll have to do, right?"

"Yeah, well, I don't think so. I'm only here tonight because of my buddy Frank. He's studying the same thing as you. I take psychology."

"Oh boy! I planned to do that too, but then something happened... I can't remember what it was, but I decided against it. Want another beer?"

"No, thanks. I got my martini here."

"Oh, yeah, so I've noticed. Don't you like beer?"

"Not really."

"And what did you do all that time during your childhood," I asked, perhaps to make him laugh, but Mirtelbrinft didn't find it very funny and our conversation died down, I went to the toilet and then sat down somewhere else.

Later that evening we met up again, taking a leak. I asked him what his motivation for studying psychology was and, as I would often experience in my life, Mirtelbrinft never cared about the place or situation in which he said anything. He always said what he wanted to say and that was regardless of space, time or the person he was talking to.

"Ever since I can remember, I have had a burning interest for the processes of the human psyche, why they behave the way they do, what makes a human such an individual being, defensive reactions, actions and behaviours that strengthen the own 'I', processing and compensation of external influences and of course for all kinds of psychological abysses. Why, for example, most men turn toward the can fixed to the wall when taking a leak so that their penis is not visible. After all, the toilet is a designated men's area, it is obvious that everyone has something hanging between their legs."

"Did it ever occur to you that some men are better equipped there than others?"

"So it has something to do with shame. Being naked, especially when it comes to the primary sexual organs, still gives people a great deal of shame, at least people are still very uncomfortable. Not that I wouldn't count myself out, but it's just an interesting area."

"Oy. Being naked is great."

And with that we left the Pissuar and drank another five martinis and three to seven beers together,

until we finally arrived at the following momentous conversation:

"Hey Mirtelbrinft, did you ever think that the guys in the toilet just have fun peeing in from above instead of from the front?"

"No, I ruled out that possibility. Makes no sense. Then they could just turn their penis towards me and do it. But I've never experienced that before."

"Maybe it's because of you that everyone always turns away from you when taking a piss."

"Sure, it could be me. I have not yet designed a suitable test and procedure for this random example, so that the person turning away is standing next to a person reporting back to me every time he takes a piss."

"Oh, God, do you always talk so swollen?"

"Must be from reading all those science books..."

"Yes, I can tell you that much. Do you already know where you want to work?"

"No, but that's not why I'm here," he said, grinning. I laughed and added that I would rather study to find out more about these fields of knowledge than to be trained as a working machine with a brain.

"But you don't speak the way first impressions might lead one to believe."

I had never heard anything like it before and he didn't give me any time to answer.

"But the decisive factor is always the brain, or more precisely, the consciousness. As everyone knows, that's the difference between us and animals. It is the origin and cause of all perception, of your feelings, of the words you speak, of your complexes, of your joys, of your love as well as of your hatred, envy and other dark depths. Absolute individuality and uniqueness of each person is due to their unique way of thinking. Just look at the phenomenon of mind-paths -", I probably looked a bit silly and drunk, "yes, you know that when you think of something and it takes you further and further, from one association to another, all very own thoughts, which suddenly - without you wanting to - lead you to completely different, other thoughts. All this just points to the fact that an immense activity is going on inside the brain. However, the huge storage is not a gigantic hard drive, but very human and forgetful, so that at the end of such a mind-path you would often not find

your way back to the beginning. So, imagine if there were methods or techniques to examine these thought trails more closely, maybe even record them! In any case, one would only have collected individually applicable data, and for what exact purpose one could use this data is still a mystery to me, but imagine it, our individual way of thinking would be comprehensible! Your logical principle, according to which you act, and your affective motives revealed. That would probably be a big step towards even more comprehensive self-reflection, which might also go too far and have unpleasant consequences."

"Definitely interesting. But also dangerous. If you live in your own head too long, you'll never get out of it. Maybe a little shallow, but there's something to that. What always fascinates me is the interaction of all the things you just talked about, our thoughts and then these in relation to their real expressions. So in simple terms, what a person thinks of themselves and the world, how they then act and are and how they are ultimately perceived. Because there are so many inconsistencies and perspectives, and of course also harmonies and

common points of view, people like to talk to others about others. Talking behind their backs is just one form of it."

"That's right," said Mirtelbrinft.

"It is also interesting to imagine someone who really cares about themselves and their environment, who tries to steer their life in a straight line, who sees certain signs as symbols in their life and acts on them. I always admire something like that, there is a touch of destiny in such a life, which I can't necessarily find in mine...", I said.

"Hey, don't worry my friend. Everyone is the master of their own destiny," Mirtelbrinft then threw in to encourage me.

I went on like this:

"Yes, that's it. I can't really see it in me. I wouldn't say that I walk through the world completely emotionless, stupid and aimless, but sometimes it seems to me as if it is all a bit unsubstantial... maybe a prearranged 'Final Destination' would be a bit boring."

"Yeah, just keep doing what you're doing. I've only known you for about five hours, but I feel a power

in you that will probably make many a river swell. And it will keep some of your cronies in eternal loyalty and allegiance." He continued: "One who doesn't seem to have a big goal in mind is also more free to go to shore where he pleases. So don't be sad, we're going dancing now."

And that's what happened. We went dancing and drinking again and danced again and back to the beer and onto the dance floor and didn't think much anymore. It was a nice evening, good party.

On the way home I went through the meeting with Mirtelbrinft again and the famous sentence "And this was the beginning of a wonderful friendship" didn't occur to me at that time. It would have been exaggerated, we had talked a little, that was it. A cool evening, funny conversation, got drunk, danced a lot.

Then, unfortunately, I was overcome by a kind of concern that I did not enjoy. It was the suspicion that I would establish rather distant relationships with all my 'new' friends, which would no longer be based on very honest common ground. You have not known each other for a long time, you don't have any hobbies or preferences in common, but

rather met each other in early adulthood, lived the same life for a few years and then said goodbye without shedding any tears. In the meantime, you meet at parties, rant a bit about studying, science and of course about life, change locations like your taste in music, step in dog shit and live alone.

Uh, yeah, there should be more heart to it. But it was just a concern. I then saved myself - maybe as compensation - into the great end of Dances With Wolves, in which the indigenous friend of Kevin Costner knew how to comment on the white man's departure from the village in a dignified and loud screaming way.

Arriving at the house I made myself a pizza, nodded off, made a second one, tossed it together with its plate on the floor while cutting it, finally enjoying it grudgingly in front of the computer.

This is how a certainty came into my consciousness that I simply could not refute directly.

Some times can never be repeated. I looked at - and I rarely did - the countless photos from home and even the memories of my mood at that time faded. How can I remember someone else like that. Everything that connected us and separated us

forever, just weakening electronic impulses in the brain stem.

Nothing is the way it was and nothing will be the way it was again, because that's the way it has already been. In dark moments like these I really don't feel much like living anymore.

Why was my focus never on stone carvings, but on intellectual frippery and interpersonal impermanence?

Songs without recordings, life without soul, love without echo.

But the desperate attempt to preserve something, to chisel it in stone, I still don't want to leave undone.

– CHAPTER 4 –

Yes, she is just holding my hand

"She stood next to me and just held my hand. That's all. And it was so incredibly beautiful, I almost can't describe it. Love is hard to paint when it's that beautiful. I simply had the absolute, unquestioning certainty that it was just like that. Then I woke up and I was still happy. Well, I mean, even though I figured out it was just a dream. I had to write it down, that's how hard it gripped me."

Dreams can be more intense than reality.

"Did you sweat a lot?", I asked the boy. "No, not tonight", he replied.

Their certainties reach the maximum of credibility. One is the full experience of the event and yet every person has already forgotten thousands of dreams. Sometimes they are completely gone in a fraction of a moment, not to be recovered.

"Beautiful," I put in the gap.

I didn't want to torture him with the unnecessary thought that his dream could also drag him down,

because it wasn't exactly how it appeared to him. He knew it anyway.

You don't always have to unnecessarily verbalize everything.

"I don't know, should I tell her about it?" he asked.
"You mean tell the girl that you had a dream about her?"

"Yeah, what else."

"Unfortunately, doing that always looks so stupid... the phrase somehow seems to be all too attached to the connotation of I-adore-you," I objected.
"Yeah, but I mean, isn't that what it said?" asked Erik.

"Yes, it did. It's stupid when things just sound so corny that you can't use them anymore. Although, if you waited for the right moment."

"Yeah, but when is that?" he asked.

I sighed, not knowing.

"Sometimes you wait your whole life for the right moment. Just grab her, that's it!", I joked, winking at him.

"I also thought of keeping it to myself. As a reminder of a meeting that was so secret that no

one, even she, would know about it. Except for me, my forgetfulness, and the piece of paper it's on," he said.

I would have done it that way, I know that. But the boy didn't lack courage. He had plenty of that, otherwise he would have never made it this far. But fortunately he wouldn't rush it either.

"Wow, everything is so calm and quiet here. I love sitting outside in the evening when everyone's asleep," he said, lighting his cigarette. I joined in and opened two more beers. Sometimes we would sit together at night and talk. Although I didn't really have anything in common with the boy, like a mutual hobby, or that we had spent much time together in the past - how could we when the age difference was almost a quarter of a century - we managed to sit together and drink beer quite well. Sometimes we didn't even speak. Pleasant relationship without the need to babble all the time.

"Here's what I wrote in the end," he said, handing me a piece of paper. I unfolded it and read:

*Blurred
appear the former contrasts.
The image becomes meaningless,
detaches itself from everything;
it dawns, standing in awe before the canvas,
after the art,
withdrawn in the last glow,
the essence.*

*So it seems,
the infinite peace
lies only in **undistorted silence**.*

Then again. And again after that. What did the image see in the bare canvas?

"What does the image see in the bare canvas?", I asked.

"No, the painting just came out. Well, the colors and everything that's painted on there."

"Oh, I see, so it sees a blank canvas", I said.

"Yes, exactly. An unpainted picture. Sort of the new day. It sees the possibilities that are yet to come.

How it can still change its overall image. It's thinking about a new way of painting", he said. "And it's so liberated, so relieved. It seems to be finished and satisfied with the day's work", I replied.

"It's tired. I think it can also be seen this way: the 'image' is not all colors together, but the consciousness of the image. In sinking into the twilight it looks at its own life, its peaks, the smoothness, what it is worth living for and what is ugly. Thus, everything becomes meaningless, without negative or positive aftertaste. It has withdrawn to its core in the undistorted silence..."

"The last glimmer..."

"... Is a cigarette."

I smiled, finding it very appropriate for the last smoke of the day and asked him:

"Hey, do you know 'the evening' by Eichendorff?"

"No idea."

"It fits very well, one of my two favorite poems:

The evening

When people's loud desire falls silent,

*The earth roars as if in dreams,
Wonderful with all the trees,
What the heart scarcely knows.

Old times, mild mourning,
And soft shivers roam,
Weather-glowing through the breast."*

"Please write it down for me," he said.

I did as instructed and gave him the note. He studied it briefly and asked:

"Seven verses, verse two and three and verse five and six rhyme. And then one, four and seven. What do you call a classic poem form like that?" I choked and replied, "Huh, I don't know!"

"For a minute I thought you had studied German." We laughed briefly. "No, really no idea. It's possible that something like that has a name. There is definitely a very aesthetic form to this one. One meter throughout, the rhyming verses have the same number of syllables, and the rhyme scheme also indicates a detailed aestheticized structure. This used to be so common, it was part of the art casting the content in proper formal frameworks."

"Yeah, working on the form is too exhausting for me. I just wrote it down as it came to me." "Yes, that's perfectly fine too. If you have your reasons for that. Look - I know another Eichendorff poem, and this is how it is. The form seems so uncontrolled, untamed, and I can't quite put my finger on why. It almost makes it seem like he didn't write it at all. It's so out of character for him. Somehow I think he was so agitated and moved by it that even the form reflects that:

*Go to sleep, go to sleep.
Nothing but clouds in the sky
Rest softly, rest firmly.
in the unstarred night,
Swing open! Swing open!
dead calm on the white horse
Ride on, ride swiftly.
on the vast plain across the white shore,
Feel deeply, hold on tight.
dashing away to the other edge.
Dream strongly, dream hard.
You will never again look
through her eyes into her soul.*

Now go to sleep. Go to sleep at last.

"But there is a clear structure. With these intermediate verses. Verse by verse... they can be read on their own."

"Yeah, sure, but no meter, no fixed rhyme scheme, and somehow it doesn't fit in with these classic, well-formed poems..."

"Were you ever planning to run away?" he suddenly interrupted.

Sometimes one longs to be asked profound questions. The ones that are meant seriously and are not, as is so often the case due to their original seriousness, only used in jokes or ironically. It shot into my head like cold ice. Mirtelbrinft asked me once, and I answered exuberantly and extravagantly. Ah, sure, the things you think when you're young and spontaneous. But so much has already flown by, it was also this question until this evening. I had never eloped in all those wonderful years. Never, without looking back, run away, leaving everything behind, until at some point I disappeared into the unknown horizon and fell out of the world behind. In the poem it was not really

about eloping - perhaps more about dying love, dream escapes, problems falling asleep - but the boy hit me to the core. It made me feel old as hell. White beaches, dreams, the un-bernated night, the sky cloudy and so far away. No more euphemistic life goal to chase after. My life seemed to have somehow come to an end. Without ever having burned out.

These constant repetitions. Being isn't always easy.

– CHAPTER 5 –

A wild ride on public transport

Sometimes I would like to kill myself right after getting up in the morning.

No reason to live anymore.

But sometimes I get up in the morning and the world is mine. I could tear out trees, as they like to say. The sun is shining into your face with full force, you take a drag from your cigarette and your head is packed with plans. Not only for this day. Wonderful. But somehow sunshine stories don't appeal to people. It doesn't seem as interesting as sick longing, failure and other negative stuff. But that's why the happy ending was invented, so that people only have to see the boring stuff right at the end. And the really good stories have to have a non-positive ending, so to speak. Someone dies, the love is broken or can't work, all the Native Americans die, and everything else, or just the crucial component that was the point all along, goes to pieces. Well, whatever. They are stories and they only have to do with life as far as they are

interpreted. And most of the time they're just bullshit that can't keep up with life at all.

But most of the time they are beautiful. You can get immersed in them so well and, if you believe in them, believe in them.

When I sometimes rummage through my old memories for this book and go through the stories again, organize them and remember as much as possible, I do this so intensively that afterwards the 'now' seems rather plain to me. I sit somewhere, open my eyes again, it's usually very quiet, and I am alone. The whole big chunk between college and now is suddenly gone and I start crying ever so bitterly. Forgetting is the worst brain disease. Definitely super sad. When your life suddenly seems to have evaporated, and your most beautiful moments lie deep in the past, there's nothing left for you but to break down howling like a dog trying to beat the band.

Well, it's actually kind of funny. Occasionally I falter as to whether this book won't eat me up at some point and I'd better keep my hands off it. One begins to doubt it and to drag it completely through the mud because of its lack of everything. The ice

you stand on seems so thin and it thins down with each doubt. But honestly, there has to be a risk involved somewhere, otherwise there wouldn't be any thrill. It is quite a loser's attitude to go at it, to try again and again in a fighting manner, to start anew, always grasping at the last straw with which you can just barely breathe under water, but sometimes you don't have a choice. Whether the work then stands solid as a rock in the surf and stretches its bold tip towards the sunlight in defiance of all the waves remains to be seen. Quite a good blurb. Possibilities...

The only other option for me - to stay financially afloat in the real world - was therefore to take on any number of pointlessly moronic side jobs so that I could pay the rent. For the most part, it was wait staff jobs, but their clients also preferred to employ female temps instead of not necessarily drinking enthusiasm-increasing male waiters. I could only sweeten this dull job to a limited extent by secretly taking smoke breaks and eating leftovers, and, as already mentioned, I wasn't asked too often. So I ended up with my hated and at the same time beloved job in public transport. The name sounds a

bit euphemistic and you can imagine that no value was placed on particular gender affiliation there either. In my case, a job in public transport meant sitting behind a counter in a dirty subway shaft and selling people their single tickets, group tickets, four-way tickets and/or weekly tickets. I think the longest conversation I once managed to have with a customer was the following:

"One ticket, please."

"What'll it be?"

The woman looked at me stupidly and a little scornfully and said nothing in response to my question.

"All right, a single ticket. Have a good trip then."

"Oh" - then after a short pause - "thank you very much, very kind. You know, I'm just going home now, when do you get off here?" she replied and walked away smiling slightly.

I think she was fucking with me. But since I was just starting the lousy late shift, I didn't have the chance to find out more. I never saw her again.

And that's exactly what happens in this business all the time. If there were a training program for ticket sellers, you could call it training to become a

manager of human one-time encounters. Every time a ticket is sold, the same well-rehearsed social interaction takes place. Another person wants a ticket, I have the tickets in front of me, hand one out for cash and we part again without a goodbye and hello and often still without a thank you. The will or idea or even the thought of building a social relationship with the lonely ticket seller didn't exist with exactly none of the people who have ever bought a ticket from me.

Maybe it was just the business idea, which really didn't add up to much more.

Next to me in the cell, sat the stupid aunties from ticket information. That was a great job! At least in comparison to mine. There were dialogues going on and after a few weeks I could have helped most people better than the regular staff. Well, but nobody asked me. That's why I created my own thoughts. I got the ticket-for-cash number down pat after a week, so I could try to mentally distance myself, but it was tough in this uninspiring environment. So I stuck with the people. Where they went, where they came from, what they had done there, what they were up to. The vocabulary

already indicates the suspicion that came over me more and more during this work. Some days I thought about real conspiracy theories, although I never seriously thought or worried about whether I had gone crazy, it was more a kind of game to escape the tristesse for a bit.

People would buy tickets from me out of sheer distraction, for example, while their accomplices were able to slip through the security grid unnoticed to smuggle explosives onto the train and use them to set off fireworks at the main station. I already had the phone in my hand and would have loved to have jumped out of my bunker and struck down the terrorists red-handed, but new customers were already arriving and I had to continue selling.

Still: stay alert. Keep your eyes open, boy. In this dark and sinful city, someone has to keep an eye on things. Who, if not the ticket clerk.

Once I almost stumbled upon a very cunning gang of tricksters. Their leader tried to buy a group ticket for herself and her horde of small-town top terrorists, insisting on the 'children's discount'. My suspicion that this supposed kindergarten field trip was a group of genetically engineered Lilliputian

robots with knives and explosives in their underpants was to prove not so wrong. I heard one of them mumbling unintelligible stuff, which clearly pointed to the defective language board in the little bundle of joy. I then inspected him more closely. I shouted at him that he would not pass, not by me, and that the secret service and the police had already been informed. The little boy immediately started to cry, his leader gave me her death stare and babbled something about, "impudence to treat little children like that" and "I will complain to your superior". And I thought to myself, fine, if she wants to go public with it, then I'll reveal her secret intentions. Plus, it would give me a chance to actually meet my supervisor. Something new.

Those were some days, on others I slept, pretended I only knew Hebrew, put a curse on the tickets, gave out free rides, tried to rip off the clientele with cheap card tricks, hid under the table in my booth, introduced new price offers and - this was always the funniest thing - did exactly the opposite of what was written on the one sheet of work instructions pinned to the wall next to me.

When I received a letter one day that gently tried to tell me that my job had fallen victim to a damned rationalization measure and that a ticket vending machine would now take my place and do the work without human compassion, but with a more cost-effective accuracy, the last shred of illusion evaporated, that anyone would have been interested in my work.

A vending machine. Without a terrorism alarm. Especially not that one.

Mirtelbrinft always liked to listen to the stories from the underworld. He still gave me tips and advice on how I could get even more effective alleged criminals by the scruff. But it was no use and I was glad to be done with this job. Senseless waste of life energy. I think that many people are tormented by the fear of having left behind absolutely nothing that lasts or has more effect than a breeze. No, it is more likely that it depresses many people or has at least crossed the minds of most of them. In that case it is shoved off into the repression camp, where it is systematically forced to be forgotten, and the soul is light once more. It can enjoy itself again, be distracted and have fun. Mirtelbrinft

would have said something like, "this is a completely natural process of self-protection", "unpleasant thoughts that threaten one's own existence, question it, doubt it or whatever are inevitably thrown out by the psyche", "there lies the line between healthy and mentally ill", "you cannot exclude yourself from this."

That's not what I want anyway. But if you look at the situation matter-of-factly, you will inevitably come to the conclusion that all life without continuance will dissolve into nothing and that most human efforts will dry up, much less never actually be realized.

Clearly, there is to say that life is not about the impact postmortem, nor about having somehow changed the world just for the sake of having one's own flat feet appear in the history books. It's about having the time of one's life, in the time of one's life. Doing what makes you happy. Whether it's self-realization or counting matches, it doesn't matter.

Except that somehow I'm missing the big picture... the struggle, the will, the signs, the destiny, the

mission, the urgency. It's too arbitrary, too transparent. It's all over the place.

There must be more.

– CHAPTER 6 –

Rugby and no, not american football

"Well, I don't know how to describe it either. Sometimes - to be quite honest - I'm tormented by a certain paralysis, it goes along with other accompanying symptoms ranging from overtiredness to minor disappointments or even insignificant minutes filled with concrete emptiness, i.e. short moments in which nothing works, the possibilities seem to be exhausted and everything falls back onto a kind of sober pedestal. It seems to me that there is only a constant running back and forth between the magic of the slightly euphoric existence and the creeping daily lethargy that takes over, in which one also develops all kinds of fears whose final consequence of action always means the continuing lethargy."

I was sitting in our place again with the boy and it was pouring out of him, pure, unfiltered, unspoiled. "It's hard to say what exactly is bothering you. Whether it's the eternal grind of self-doubt, the simple ups and downs of life, or really some kind of dark force that seeks to paralyze you," I said.

"If it was just the simple ups and downs, I would accept that. And this diabolical dark force, I don't believe in it. It will probably be the doubt. Born from too much self-reflection. Which yet, with all the self-confidence I think I have, pierces and stabs deep, with a serum of fear. Injecting several fears at once, designed to drive me mad, into the worst of them, despairing lethargy." he spoke accentuatingly, grinning deeply. I looked at him in wonder and concern at the same time and he explained: "I am not completely free of these emotional fluctuations, but I have now found a kind of solution that gathers everything I have experienced so far - in general or just on this particular day - so resolutely and uncompromisingly under itself that I can finally get some air on top, keep an overview and find something like peace for myself. It's a kind of redemption, overcoming inferior conditions.... very relieving."

And I knew what he was talking about. It was the reason why we met in the first place almost a year ago.

It all began on a very rainy Saturday afternoon in the summer. I had to get out of my apartment;

otherwise the ceiling, eaten away by the sultriness, would have fallen on my head. My articles, which I was writing as a freelance journalist for a more or less funny satirical magazine, didn't really want to be written.

I had reached the point where the joke didn't want to strike a spark, I was also missing the flints, I was very, very dissatisfied - as is sometimes the case in journalism - and I was so uninterested in the editorial deadline that it might as well have been called a bicycle chain. I went out the door and always to the left, if a crossroads gave me the opportunity to do so - an old mental exercise or journey of thought to explore human activity in the brain, during this very activity, as Mirtelbrinft once told me - to find out what would really happen. And nothing happened at all. I could have made the trip from the MRI tube as well as from home. I knew the roads, the area, the traffic, the people who were probably standing in their stores, the dirt on the street corner, the position of the sun, the smell in the air.

But let's slow down: Prejudices and supposedly dead-set expectations can already quite influence

the perception of reality and I realized that it was not at all as I thought. The road was different, the area new to me, no traffic, no people, different dirt also, no sun anywhere, a refreshing clarity in the air. And it was raining cats and dogs. It was bucketing down. A downpour, as if the Flood had broken loose up there.

I walked liberated, with my arms stretched up through the warm wetness, remembering a phrase of Mirtelbrinft that he knew from clinical psychology:

"Walk a path that is unknown to you, completely unfamiliar, keep walking on it, have faith in yourself and you will realize that you are going to find your way.... And also the way back again." A much-loved phrase of mine used to be, "I never thought the path would lead me here." Even though nothing groundbreaking had happened to that point, the phrase fit the situation.

I felt new, somehow cleansed, but definitely on a path that had not been charted before. And that was the purpose of it.

It seemed to me like a remote area of the city in which I was wandering, and it wasn't long before I

stepped on the borders of a kind of stadium, in the belly of which an inordinate number of small figures were running around. I approached the field, but still stood far above the ground on a rise, at which point I was able to determine that it was some sort of game. There were certainly more than two dozen men on the field, running together, but also against each other, in - seen from the outside - rather confused, uncoordinated courses, now and then a ball flashed, loud cries rang out, the ball flew with spin through the air, a whole squad of players of one team rushed off, a part of them got through or shattered at the defense.

Clearly, there was no question: I had never seen this before. It was breathtaking.

I had to get closer. And the details of the game and the players became increasingly apparent and in no way lost their sharpness and brutality. It was becoming clearer and clearer, the two teams were not playing a game in this sour weather, yet in clear air, but fighting a relentless battle against each other, in which individually, but also collectively all efforts were made to decide the outcome: Mass versus impact versus speed versus power, ready to

strike, momentum with harshness, out of control - under control. Maximum energy on impact, culmination.

Pain-distorted faces, downed warriors, piles of fighters piled on top of each other, solo runs, rushes, moves, battle cries, exhaustion, grouping, solidarity, help, injuries, uprising, stampede, defeat, madness. Pause. Indescribable. Five minutes. Then once more.

Tears welled up in my eyes. It was all so crystal clear, so uncompromisingly honest, that the whole lying rest of the world was no longer any of my business. At least in those first, unique moments, I would have traded every single hour that I later spent dying in bed, many years from that point on, after my cowardly life, just to be able to stand on that court one time, just one time, and knock my opponent down hard with a single, long leap. He could have broken my bones for that.

It was almost romantic how energetically and decisively the players - and every single one of them - stood up for what they so hotly desired: the opponent on the ground.

After the game, some of them more, some less destroyed, they came stomping off the field, some with red heads, others with wounds on their faces, legs or arms, all of them at the same time dripping wet and heavily dirty, but with such a relieved look in their eyes that some looked downright happy. They had been richly endowed by the fulfillment of their desire for pain, victory and hard struggle. Warrior poets.

After that, there was drinking. I was quickly discovered and integrated. Since then, I've been writing the match reports for their website and am one of the few supporters who go along to away games. It was not a popular sport. Rather for a rare, select elite. That sounds too dramatic and arrogant, but it just means that you had to be born for it.

Erik was new, only a few months in, and the nickname Erik the Terrible would have suited him excellently. Probably too long.

Still, I talked to him late at night, only half in my right mind, and confessed:

"I have the deepest respect for what you are doing. To look fate in the face without fear and struggle and force it to cross-check. You can always succumb

to some influences, you probably do it all the time. One obeys rules, lives as one should, as the currently prevailing economic and cultural-industrial system provides and what it or its leaders suggest as valuable and desirable. Man is what his environment makes of him. Compromises, identity crises, knowledge and the opposite. And yeah, the point is why I'm saying this, um yeah. Mh. No, completely gone. Oh no..."

"When the world sometimes threatens to collapse on you with its weight, or your head is pretty much close to exploding with all the thought processes, you have to somehow free yourself from it, break the chains and know how to. This whole thing is such a fabulous reduction of complexity. Wonderful. It hurts, but that's fine. It's simple, no it's more, it's clear," Erik said.

"And that will give you new courage. You can see that in every movement, in every breath. No more fear, finally. No backing down. Succumbing or giving up, in the face of circumstances," I said, and he concluded:

"Someone famous once said - and this is also the team's Latin motto:

aut viam inveniam aut faciam

which means:

if I can't find a way, I'll make one

Applicable to everything and everyone. To the negative state, self-realizing a change. That's how I want to think forever." Erik concluded.

After that he toppled over.

I found my way home again.

Whether I found myself, I don't know.

Since then, I always have to cry a little when I watch the guys do what they love.

– *English translations in progress* –