

So Much More Than Monkeys

Quelle surprise: instead of focussing on what he should be doing, this month Alex Denton has had a revelation instead.

Memories and feelings: the memories of feelings - is there anything at all that defines the human condition more precisely? I mean, what else is there? Perhaps our art: our poetry, songs and paintings; the words we write and the music we make. And perhaps we could include those electric thoughts that come to us unbidden: that deep intuition, borne of some fundamental collective consciousness that rushes to our tongues in conversation without our even thinking. All of these define the human condition, but aren't all of them really just ways of describing and recalling the condition, things that remind us of our uniqueness? I mean, surely we are more than the books in our library and all the songs on the internet - itself, nothing but another brush with which to paint the condition?

I mention this, dear reader, as a typical means to a classic ADP (Alex Denton Procrastination). Over the months of this missive, observant readers will have noticed that procrastination is one of the key definitions of my human condition: I am a ditherer of the highest order, and my inactivity is assured, right up to the very last minute that something has to be done. It is not that I am putting things off so much as I am very easily distracted - and that there are so many things to be distracted by. When giving up smoking for example (and I know you remember

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that), it was not just a case of ridding my system of nicotine - there was much more to consider than that. So, I thought - and spoke, and wrote - about giving up smoking for a year before actually doing so. And then I fretted (and spoke and wrote) about having done so. It is just that so many things occur to me when I'm supposed to be concentrating on just one.

And so it is to be again this month. (Was, actually - this column was written before the event I am about to describe, but is published after: now do you see how easy it is for me to become distracted?) I have (had) a speech to write and give. I am (was) to be best man at my brother's wedding and, putting the absolute - but general, not specific - terror I suffer (suffered) about public speaking aside, the simple process of writing the thing was enough to send me into a frenzy of protracted procrastination.

There is just so much to consider: how long do I have and who must I mention - to whom must I address the address and to whom must I give thanks? How much of the material that I hold over my brother can I realistically relay to the



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crowd, and still expect to be allowed to leave the room unharmed?

It was this last that led me to the initial procrastination of this column. All the rest can be gleaned from the internet and in conversation with other best men. But when it came to thinking about the meat of the speech, about the stories I would tell - and those I would merely threaten with - that I realised what I was really thinking about was our relationship - our shared history: everything we have ever done together; everything we have ever spoken or argued about and every thought we have ever had in the context of the other. Our relationship, I realised, was made up of all the memories we retain about every feeling the other has generated in us.

It was mind-boggling to conceive, and even more so when I realised that the same is true for every relationship we have ever had. And I don't just mean those to whom we have ever become close, but to everyone that has ever had any bearing on our lives at all. That guy jumping the lights this morning; the memory of the frustration you felt defines your relationship to him, adding to your understanding of the human condition - the doctor that delivered your first child; ditto, but hopefully more positively so.

And it never ends. Simply by existing in the world we are forever inundated with new definitions of our humanity. And in finding ways to express or describe it - the words we write, the music we make - we are building more relationships to those that read and hear them. In short, dear reader, this month I have realised that we are so much more than monkeys in that our humanity is an infinity of variables that I simply cannot comprehend as existing in any other creature on earth.

And I have not written a single word of that speech - again ■

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