

WHOLE SERIOUSNESS

The apparent contradiction between the concept of self as the animate essence of individuality and the concept of self as the spirit of responsibility, or soul, dwelling in individual being and making it act with supra-individual reference is a reflection of a false dilemma. There is not real duality of selfhood, only a difference between limited seriousness and whole seriousness of being.

– Laura (Riding) Jackson¹

Did you finish *The Afterlife Revolution* yet?

No, Sweetie. I've got two more chapters. Two more hours, I mean. Maybe you can give me your iPods and I can listen to it while you work.

AirPods?

Your AirPods, yeah. And you can work.

What do you think of it?

Really... I think it makes so much sense, Sweetie. People are skeptics because it didn't happen to them. It didn't happen to them *yet*, that kind of connection with someone they love who dies. Or things get in the way. But once it happens to them—I mean he's not a quack, right? You said he wrote *The Hunger*?

He did, yeah. And *Communion*—that other book I was telling you about, where he's recounting his traumatic encounters with various beings, with "visitors," but deliberately doesn't conclude whether they're aliens or the dead or whatever.

1. Laura (Riding) Jackson, "Introduction for a Broadcast: Continued for *Chelsea*" (1962), in *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*, ed. John Nolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 25.

We're all capable of these connections, I guess. Like what he has with his wife. It's just for whatever reason... ego, or this or that kind of *bullshit*, you know... we don't allow ourselves to let go, in a way, and just listen to these strong emotions. Not emotions but, you know, these strong signs. Like when you got obsessed with that bar of Irish Spring in Tata's room when he was dying. I don't know if most people would get so obsessed, you know?

How could I not have gotten obsessed with it? I hadn't seen or smelled a bar of Irish Spring in over a decade and suddenly one appears in his bathroom at Nicola Lodge the night he's decided he's ready to leave. There's literally no other smell that reminds me more of him and Marti... of every apartment they ever lived in...

That's what I mean, Sweetie. We don't know *where* that bar of soap came from. And you got obsessed, just like you should have. I just don't know how many people would get quite that obsessed.

Enough people, Mom. Enough of them would get obsessed. But I hear you.

I'm glad you hear me, Sweetie. And I'm glad you take these signs so seriously.

What's been so interesting, actually, is how all this kind of... embarrassing literature I've been reading with Trevor recently... about near-death experiences and the so-called afterlife... has turned out to be totally, or like *mostly*, anyway, in alignment with everything I've ever thought or written about whole seriousness. Or even communism, honestly.

I can see that, Sweetie.

Yeah? I'm curious... when someone asks you what I wrote my dissertation about, what do you tell them?

Well, I just say that seriousness has many different undertones and many different meanings, and I guess Andrea's just trying to show how they tie in to somewhat literary, but also beyond literary, kinds of things. That's how I explain it. But automatically they think of

the negative connotation of the word and they raise their eyebrows and go "Ohhh..." And I go "Ohhh' *what?*"

Ha. Yeah.

Automatically they think of sternness or heaviness, or something else negative... you know? Without feeling or laughter or joy.

Yeah, exactly. That's the bad or limited version of seriousness that whole seriousness is up against. That's the white version of seriousness.

Yeah? How would you explain that?

I just mean that there's a kind of seriousness that's historically belonged to whiteness that generally wants to, you know... minimize and control all the other, more expansive kinds of seriousness... in order to better exploit those other kinds of seriousness, really. It wants what it doesn't have, or what it *worries* it doesn't have... and in order to deal with this it works in binaries, like opposites... mind versus body, Man versus Nature, good versus evil... alive versus dead, I guess? Relies on these opposites for everything. But I'm curious what you think.

Of whiteness... or of what, Sweetie?

Sure. Of whiteness.

Well... I think it's this... this sort of... this sort of *false*... but *real*... entitlement?

That's a great definition, actually. A false but real entitlement.

But Sweetie... what I'm thinking you should do, if I may say so... do you have chamomile tea?

Yeah?

You have pouches of chamomile?

Yeah, Mom, I do. But I've tried putting teabags on my eyelids before and I just get hives—

—*really?*

Yes, really. I can't put flowers or plants near my eyes. Or cucumbers. For blepharitis they just recommend hot water, or like, warm compresses. It's so annoying. It's always really bad in the winter . . . once I have to turn the heat on, I guess. Once things get dry.

I'm sorry, Sweetie. Chamomile would be so good. I'm so sorry about your eyes.

My eyes'll be fine. I'm sorry about *your* thing . . . what the fuck is it called again . . . your central sensitization syndrome! God. Are you in as much pain now as this morning?

Sweetie, I'm never without pain.

I know, Mom. I'm so sorry.

Don't be sorry, Sweetie. You know, to me a forest is very serious.

Yeah?

To me it's like . . . it's almost like a teacher . . . you know, like an elderly that—

—like an elder?

Like an elder, who passes down tradition. And wholeness is also closeness, I think. You feel whole if you are capable of feeling a closeness with whatever. With a forest. You feel whole when you can just listen and feel part of it . . . of something bigger than you and your stupid problems. You know what I mean?

I do know what you mean. I mean there's obviously a version of wholeness that's really fucked up, like a new-age version of oneness or interconnectedness that doesn't pay attention to *shit*. To history or politics or whatever.

Like Lulumelon.

Like Lululemon, yes. A thin and watery sell-out version of oneness—but also, like, an actually *dangerous* version of it—that pretends the stupid problems aren't there at all and don't need addressing or whatever. Where oneness becomes a kind of sameness . . . and profits become a big part of it.

That's different from what I mean, yes.

I know it is. You're talking about a different kind of closeness or interconnectedness. Remember there was that night a little while ago, before Tata died, when you and I were falling asleep and talking, and we were talking about how if we had more money we maybe wouldn't be so close?

I do remember, yes.

We were saying how if we had more money, we probably wouldn't be sharing a bed and we probably wouldn't be expressing or sharing pain in the same way . . . that there'd just be, like, *boundaries* between us and the ways we're relating and talking. Like imagine I had a spare bedroom, or a house! Or imagine I could hire someone to help take care of you right now. Or imagine you'd been able to hire someone to help take care of Tata for the last seven years. We'd obviously still be close, but there would be boundaries. There'd be structural limits to the seriousness of our closeness. But because of these conditions . . . or *in part* because of these conditions . . . we get to have this extremely close way of communicating and communing that feels . . . honestly kind of fucked up sometimes! But also very whole-serious.

I think that's what love is, Sweetie.

Totally. Or maybe? Or yes—I guess so. It's one way to experience a very big and true love. To experience and explore together the kind of emotional range, the *everything*, that we do.

Sometimes drugs maybe do it for people . . . sometimes. You know? Magic mushrooms and things.

Definitely, yes. But no matter how it gets experienced, I think that any invocation or understanding of "wholeness" needs to somehow be critical . . . or even more importantly, *self-critical*. It can't ever settle. So I guess what I've been trying to do for so long is figure out a way, a more-than-intuitive way, to tell the difference between good versions of things and bad versions of things . . . whether we're talking about wholeness or seriousness or religiosity or whatever . . . good clowns versus bad clowns . . . so that . . . I don't even fucking know, really . . . so that we stop making up a bunch of new things for no reason or something?

That makes sense, Sweetie. I feel we have enough things too.

It's when we *think* we don't have enough things that we risk erasing, or continuing to erase, what's already there . . . what's already been there forever. So it seems really important, somehow. Like in and of itself a form of improved . . . or *more-whole* . . . listening. To be able to tell the difference. To know you need to tell the difference.

Sweetie . . . will you be very sad when I die?

Jesus Christ, Mom. I'll be so fucked.

I'm sorry, Sweetie.

You don't need to be sorry. But obviously it will be the hardest . . . the most impossible thing. But also . . . I dunno . . . I'll actually be okay? I've had it proven to me enough times now that I can somehow be okay and that the conversation can always continue.

I do need to call that doctor back today.

The neurologist?

Yeah. Dr. Globfsperfield or something.
Dr. Gabfpersladddd.

Well, there's a bit of leftover orange cake if you want some of that now. I'll take Neen for a quick walk and then I'll make us lunch. I have more of those little burritos if you want. And then I really do need to try to work.

I know, Sweetie. I feel terrible it's been so hard for you to work. But you can give me your iPods and I promise I won't bother you at all.