

LIVE A LITTLE BETTER | DANIEL NOHEJL

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THE PHYSIOCRATS
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*A person as a process, anything as a process, that everything
processes, emerges from processes, disappears into processes
loudly mutely, loudly from within to without, mutely
from without, loudly-mutely from within-without, in-out.*

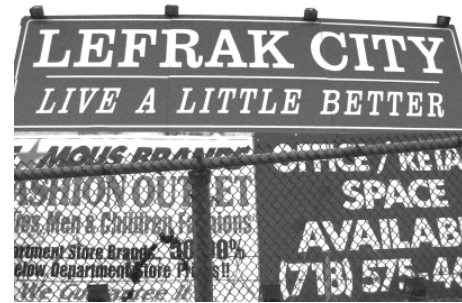
Live a Little Better

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YOU CAN'T DRIVE OR BE DRIVEN east or west on the Long Island Expressway through Queens without passing Lefrak City and you can't pass Lefrak City without passing two signs.

This one



and this one



We've been driving and being driven past these signs our whole lives without doing much more than listening to someone say *live a little better* in their best Queens accent, without thinking much more than *what a dumb thing for a sign to say*. After all, when it comes to anything, let alone living, shouldn't we do it a lot better? Isn't life solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short? Shouldn't we use whatever means and materials we have to do whatever we can to live a lot better?

Lefrak City's been standing for almost fifty years, too long for it to be as naïve about living as its slogan suggests, so let's assume Lefrak City is trying to tell us one or two of two things:

1. Lefrak City is modest: it knows it isn't great, knows it's only so good, only so much better than where you already live, but a little better is better than no better and a little better is faithful to the working- and middle-class families Lefrak was built to house, to their presumed desire for moderate change, moderate improvement, nothing ostentatious, no bragging: "I used to live in Rego Park, but now I live in Lefrak and life's a little better" as opposed to "Now I'm sitting in a tub of butter on Fifth Avenue and life's a lot better."
2. Lefrak City is philosophical: it knows no one knows how to live a lot better, knows no one knows if they're supposed to rebel, revolt, fight from the margins, wait for a godly, natural, human catastrophe, become a primitivist, incrementally struggle in everyday life, write a book of essays, just accept all is inevitable, all is for the best, because if it weren't all would already be otherwise and since Lefrak City knows it's one of no one and you are one of no one,

it knows better than to promise you'll live a lot better in Lefrak City.

Mostly it doesn't matter whether Lefrak City is saying one of these two things or two of these two things because both of these things say Lefrak's saying the same thing: *live a little better now, and sort out the rest later, in your afterlife*.

Why is Lefrak City doing this to us?

Because Lefrak City knows no matter how modest, how uncertain, how unostentatious, how perplexed we are, we all want to *live a lot better*, knows we don't want to wait until we die because no one knows if heaven lets us lodge complaints against earth or if in heaven our *little better* lives are made *a lot better*, knows it's impossible to all of a sudden *live a lot better* on earth, knows we have to *live a little better* before we can *live a lot better*, knows the only place we can *live a little better* is Lefrak City which can only house 14,000 people, 130,000 fewer than some millennialists say will *live a lot better* come an apocalypse, so no matter how much we want to *live a little better* all but 14,000 of us will have to stay where we are, narrowed by grocery stores, fruit vendors, fabric wholesalers, wireless retailers, pizza parlors, lunch specials, bus exhaust, dollar stores, subway grates, traffic lights, window boxes, spreadsheets, when all we want to do is *live a lot better* and the only place we can *live a little better* is full.

LET'S CALL LEFRAK CITY'S PHILOSOPHY *live-a-little-better-ism* and include in it every tactic, strategy, technique from religion to revolution, from guerilla gardening to armed uprising, from blocking traffic with bicycles to mass suicide, from communism to liberal democracy to utopianism, that tries to make life *a little better* and succeeds, or tries to make life *a lot better* and in failing makes life *a little better* where *better* is defined as a qualitative-quantitative improvement in how one lives one's life or how we live our lives compared to before one or we implemented these tactics, strategies, and techniques and they succeeded and failed.

Religions and revolutions and everything else have been discussed, analyzed, and argued by everyone for as long as there's been an everyone and a religion and a revolution and an everything else, and everyone knows the excesses, successes, limitations, and failures of religions, revolutions, and everything else. What haven't been discussed, analyzed, and argued by everyone for as long as there's been an everyone and a religion and a revolution and an everything else are the individual insistences everyone insists when insisting on living *a little* and *a lot better* under the rubric of *live-a-little-better-ism*.

For example, let's say:

after years upon troubling years of seeing apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores, after years upon troubling years of seeing apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores and wondering where their trees are, were, went, after years upon troubling years of seeing

apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores and wondering if these apples are actual apples from actual trees, after years upon years of seeing apples piled in apple bins in grocery stores and realizing apples have lost themselves forever and you've lost apples forever, you cry out:

Apples are weeping in their bins!

or

Apples are weeping in their bins and I, too, am weeping!

or

An apple falls inside of me!

If you notice apples weeping in their bins, if as apples are weeping in their bins you, too, are weeping, if an apple falls inside of you, you probably want to make sure neither you nor apples need to weep anymore.

But what can you do?

Let's say you do these things:

1. Let's say you scour the woods of upstate New York for heirloom apple trees and you find a long-forgotten species of apple.
2. Let's also say you bring it home with you and plant some seeds.
3. Let's also also say it grows some apples.

4. Let's also also say in growing apples from rescued reclaimed seeds, you'll never lose apples again.
5. Finally, apples will no longer weep in apple bins in grocery stores.
6. Finally, you will no longer weep as apples weep in apple bins in grocery stores.
7. Finally, apples might not fall inside of you anymore.

And you'll be able to say: an apple almost never falls inside of me, only sometimes, only in grocery stores because in my ____ no apple falls inside of me.

In the blank between *my* and *no apple* is everything we need to know about anyone regarding apples.

In the blank is a question of where you take, what you do with your apples.

If you say: *in my orchard no apple falls inside of me*, you're an agriculturalist, a farmer, a capitalist, you grow apples for apple money and you've lost apples once again and for good. You've grown desolation apples and desolation apples are abiotic, and abiotic apples will always fall inside of you.

Maybe you didn't decide an orchard right away and tasted and ate your apples, so unlike weeping apples in grocery store bins, in joy, no perplexity. But their taste and your brain were mismatched. You dreamt bushels and bushels and bushels, surplus. If you'd actually eaten and tasted apples, you'd know apples have no need of surplus, markets, millions. You decided many apples, many to eat many

apples, you created an apple market and no market is a market but an anti-market, and any anti-market is anti what it markets: you've grown desolation apples and desolation apples are abiotic and abiotic apples will always fall inside of you.

If you say: *in my geodesic greenhouse no apples fall inside of me*, you might be an environmentalist, an ecologist, you might no longer be a capitalist, but if you can afford a geodesic greenhouse you definitely were a capitalist and you've lost apples once again and probably for good. Even though you're growing fewer apples than orchards, you're still commanding apples, and commanded apples, a.k.a. command-apples aren't apples, they're anti-biotic apples and anti-biotic apples kill bacteria in your gut, a bacteria-less gut can't digest, if your gut can't digest, apples can't nutrify you, if apples can't nutrify you, nothing can nutrify you, if nothing can nutrify you, you'll die. You've grown anti-apples and anti-apples will always fall inside of you.

If you say: *in my permaculture garden no apples fall inside of me*, you've rejected orchards and geodesic greenhouses, but your permaculture garden is your garden: your, garden and you've lost apples again but not necessarily for good. You don't live with your apples, your apples don't live with you, they're your, apples, in, your, permaculture garden and they live at the first or second layer of the seven-layer garden you decreed and you've grown decree-apples which are too close to command-apples for them to be apples and decree-command-apples will always fall inside of you.

If you say: *I'm an ibu, I believe in bolo' bolo and in my bolo no apples fall inside of me*, you've come very close to never losing apples, maybe as close as you'll ever come to never losing apples, but even in your *bolo* you haven't come all the way. You're an *ibu* and

your *bolo* is self-sustaining and/or only trades with other *bolo' bolo*. You're not part of a state, you're not part of a state economy, you're escaping the Planetary Work Machine. No one in *bolo' bolo* agricultures for money because there aren't any stores. Everyone horticultures for sustenance, everyone gardens for pleasure and sustenance and while horticulture is still culture, and gardeners don't garden, horticulture isn't agriculture and gardening for pleasure and sustenance is only once removed from foraging for survival, so you're coming very close to never losing apples, maybe as close as you'll ever come, but an apple still falls inside of you because your apple is a cultivar. Even if you didn't create a cultivar, you're using a cultivar because where else did you get an apple to plant in your *bolo* but from a grocery store, farm stand, greenmarket, orchard, before your *bolo* existed, so even if your *bolo* lasts forever, even if an apple grown in your *bolo* only ever comes from an apple you brought in to your *bolo* the day it opened and this apple is *the* original apple as far as your *bolo* thinks of it, you'll never find an apple that doesn't fall inside of you and no apples fall inside of.

These are all such big undertakings you'd have to change so much of your life to even begin undertaking and not everyone has time or inclination to change so much of their lives, especially or at least not for apples. Let's say you don't want to grow apples. Growing apples is for other people and you're not one of those people. You'd rather write apples so apples no longer weep in apple bins in grocery stores, so you no longer weep as apples weep in apple bins, so apples are no longer lost to you, so apples no longer fall inside of you.

If you say: *in my poem no apples fall inside of me*, the problem is bigger, smaller. Not a lot of people read poems so most people won't know what you do with apples in your poems. You can say *apples fall upwards inside of me, stems back to branch* and no one will know

you're lying. But your apples are not apples, they're poem-apples and poem-apples wish they were real apples and real apples are cultivars stuck in an epistemological-agricultural system and apples will always fall inside of you and your poems.

The only way you can tell if apples' relation to apples has been remediated is if you hear an apple say *no apples fall inside of me*.

Even if everything you do is for apples, you don't have apple ears, you don't speak apple, you can't get inside an apple as an apple and you'll never know if apples' relation to apples has been remediated and apples *live a lot better* or if you failed apples and apples only *live a little better*.

Every human can get inside a human as a human, every human knows you gave up your spreadsheet for apples, you moved from your apartment to the country for apples, you're your own boss answerable only to you, only to apples, only apples and the apple market you created, every human knows you only *live a little better*.

EACH OF THE PRECEDING ATTEMPTS attempted to *live a little better* to eventually *live a lot better* through accumulated instances of *living a little better* by doing something with apples and developing the right disposition toward apples by doing something to free apples from us and us from apples, from apples falling inside of us forever. But if doing something and developing the right disposition toward something to free it and us from it falling inside of us forever was all we needed to do, at least one of the preceding attempts would have stopped apples from falling inside of us.

What are we missing?

Sometimes it's better to speak about what you're going to do before you do it, so let's say that part of trying to *live a little better* so we can eventually learn to *live a lot better* through accumulated instances of *living a little better* is learning how to *speak a little better*. Let's move the question of apples falling or not falling inside of you into the realm of language.

Let's ask:

How are you, how are we, how am I, how are all of us talking about apples?

Does your apple tree:

Grow?

Bear fruit?

Come to fruition?

Fruit?

Apple?

Tree?

If we must speak a language, and we must, let's at least *speak a little better*, let's say of an apple tree:

An apple tree (,) apples (,) trees

or

An apple tree (,) trees (,) apples

or

An apple tree is a tree (,) a tree (,) trees

Let's see if these ways of saying are any more accurate than any other ways of saying and let's listen to what Paul Valéry says about a tree in "In Praise of Water":

Consider a plant, regard a mighty tree, and you will discern that it is no other than an upright river pouring into the air of the sky. By the tree WATER climbs to meet light.

Is Valéry right?

We shouldn't assume he is just because he's Paul Valéry but common sense says he's right: anything carrying water from one place to another is a river: a pipe is a river, an aqueduct is a river, a tear duct is a river, a throat is a river, a urethra is a river, a cup is a river, a bottle is a river, cupped hands are a river, a canteen is a river, a bladder is a river because a river is what moves water from place to place: trees move water, earth to roots to leaves to air to light, so a tree is an upright river pouring into the air of the sky.

How did a river get to be a river?

A river is a river because someone noticed some water and more water and probably more water and said "all water being moved like this and this and this water is being moved by a river. A river rivers water."

From here, rivers solidified, received identities, each became a particular river, an East River, say, because an East River is a river rivering water and it's east of something and inside a river, a particular river, an East River, so much happens:

algae algae, water waters, fish fish, water waters, water waters algae, algae algae, algae algae water, water waters, water waters fish, fish fish fish, fish fish water.

But something's missing.

A cup isn't a river, a bottle isn't a river, cupped hands aren't a river, a canteen isn't a river, a bladder isn't a river because a river isn't water being carried from place to place but water flowing from place to place.

Something else is missing.

A pipe isn't a river, an aqueduct isn't a river, a tear duct isn't a river, a throat isn't a river, a urethra isn't a river. A river isn't what water flows through, it's water flowing.

Therefore, a river isn't made of water, a river doesn't water. If a river doesn't water, a river isn't a thing, a noun, a substantive, a river doesn't water, a river doesn't river.

Water, waters, water always waters, water sometimes rivers just like it sometimes oceans, sodas, taps, brooks, springs, streams, minerals, rivulets, beads, mists, dews, condenses, aquifers, rains.

All are water, all are water watering one way another way another way.

If a river isn't made of water, if a river doesn't water, if a river doesn't river but water waters, what is a river?

Strike *a*, strike *the* and you'll know:

River is a way of water watering.

River is how to say what water sometimes does, what water can do, water watering thus and thus and thus rivers, is rivering.

How can you separate the water from the river? Easy, just say what water does.

When he says a river rivers, a river waters, a tree rivers water to meet light, Valéry unwaters water by trying to make a river water.

When he says a tree is how WATER meets light, Valéry untrees a tree by trying to make a tree a river.

What kind of tree does Valéry mean?

A tree classified thus and thus and thus and thus is still a tree.

Just as an apple tree doesn't apple, tree,

A weeping willow doesn't weep, willow,

A douglas fir doesn't douglas, fir.

Each trees, each tree, trees.

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SOMEONE WHO READ A DRAFT OF that part said "this part reminds me of what Thomas Nagel says in 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'" and while it might seem so, it isn't so, for we're not asserting what Thomas Nagel was asserting in "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" because Nagel was very specifically asserting that there must be some subjective or "subjectivish" aspects of what it's like to be a bat that are absolutely abjectly unavailable to anything not a bat and probably if not definitely but not abjectly unavailable even to a bat itself.

We're not asserting *what it's like to be an apple, what it's like to be a water*, that there are *qualia* of an apple, *qualia* of water, that an apple is, water is, only, for now, that apples, apple, water, waters.

Someone else might as easily say:

Oh, you mean *das Ding an sich*, the thing-in-itself.

They'd add "the thing-in-itself" to clarify because most people who'd say *das Ding an sich* would assume you didn't know what they meant.

Either way, this isn't about the thing-in-itself either. For the moment, this is about what something can do, what it does, the processes it catalyzes, the processes it enters into, the processes it stays away from, not how far or not it objectively or subjectively exists apart from or inside us.

WHEN THINKING ABOUT HOW TO *live a little better* to eventually *live a lot better* through accumulated instances of *living a little better* in combination with what something can do, what it does, the processes it catalyzes, the processes it enters into, the processes it stays away from, it's hard not to think of Buckminster Fuller who we think was trying to think something like what we're thinking about apples, trees, rivers, water, in terms of people and *living a lot better*, or at least in terms of himself, but since he's a person, let's allow the extrapolation outwards to people, when he says, in an oft-quoted paragraph:

I live on Earth at present, and I don't know what I am. I know that I am not a category, I am not a thing—a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process—an integral function of the universe.

It sounds just right: he's not a category because he's an integral function of the universe, he's not a thing, a noun, he's not static, he *seems to be* a verb, a process. He's even more not static than a noun, than a verb not a thing, a process, he's not just a verb, not a thing, a process, he's an integral function of the universe.

A person as a process, anything as a process, that everything processes, emerges from processes, disappears into processes loudly mutely, loudly from within to without, mutely from without, loudly-mutely from within-without, in-out.

But if Buckminster Fuller is *a verb, a process*, why does it take eight verbs for him to say so? Look:

I live

I don't know

I am

I know

I am not

I am not

I seem

to be

Of forty-three words, eight are verbs, too many verbs for someone who says, more or less: *I am a verb, a process*.

But a process sounds right. What does a process do but verb and what does a verb do but process: a process, processes, a process verbs, a verb, verbs, a verb processes. But let's not mix verbs and processes, at least not yet.

Let's think, rather, of names.

If Buckminster Fuller is a verb, a process, why isn't he named Buckminstering Fullering? Sure, it sounds silly, maybe Buckminster Fullering sounds better but it's not accurate because in his particularity, isn't Buckminstering Fullering always Buckminstering, Fullering?

Buckminsters, Fullers or Buckminstering, Fullering?

Buckminsters Fullers, the present tense, because as a process processes it processes.

Buckminstering Fullering, the continuous tense, because as a process processes it's processing.

When asked what Buckminster Fuller does, we should say of Buckminster Fuller: he Buckminsters, Fullers.

When asked what Buckminster Fuller is doing, we should say of Buckminster Fuller: he's Buckminstering, Fullering.

Same goes for water:

What does water do?

Water, waters.

What is water doing?

Water, watering.

And for trees:

What does a tree do?

A tree, trees.

What is a tree doing?

A tree, treeing.

But it doesn't go for a river:

What's that? A river?

No, it's water rivering.

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