

A black and white close-up photograph of a man with curly hair, wearing a dark beanie. He is looking down and to the left with a slight smile. The text "Things I've Learned" is overlaid in the upper left, and "Benjamin Blohoweak" is overlaid in the lower right.

Things I've Learned

Benjamin Blohoweak

when the child was just a child
it did not know what it was
like a child it had no habits
no opinion about anything

maybe i will get a job
get a job as a waitress
maybe waiting tables in a diner
in some remote city down the highway

after all that we've been through
i know we'll make it after the wait
the question is a truth
there is nothing we can't do
i'll see you along the way baby
the stillness is the move

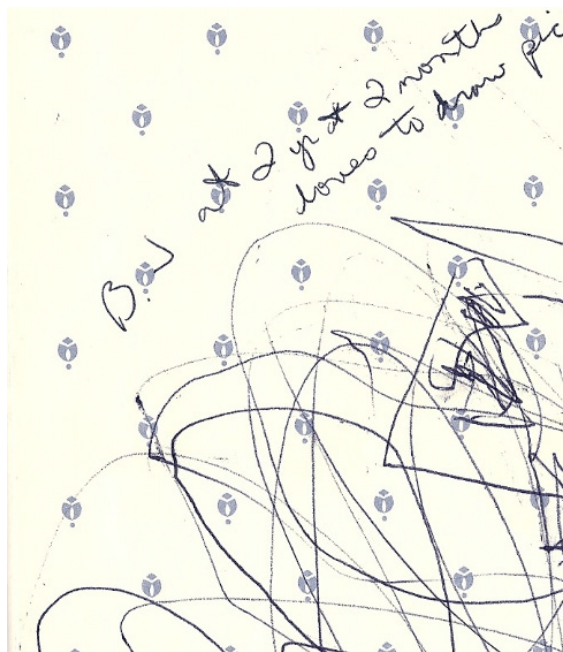
on top of every mountain
there was a great longing
for another even higher mountain
in each city longing for a bigger city

after all that we've been through
i know that i will always love you
from now until forever baby
i can't imagine anything better

after all that we've been through
i know we'll make it after the wait
the question is a truth
there is nothing we can't do
i'll see you along the way baby
the stillness is the move

isn't life under the sun just a crazy dream?
isn't life just a mirage of the world before the world?
why am i here and not over there?
where did time begin
where does space end
where do you and i begin?

—dirty projectors



As I write this, the author ("me" or "I") is alive. As you read this, and thus after I write it, the author is dead. The author as the creative force no longer exist, all is left is his words. His signifiers are left to signify on their own, alone in a desert to find their way to meaning or to dry up like a petunia in the Atacama. What follows is an account of how I came to be. The account is flawed, biased, and has consciously excluded many "facts" and examples that could counter some of the claims I make. For my thinking life has never been linear, but rather characterized by multiple strands interweaving and making jumps and connections between them. Some strands continue while others terminate. My actions are necessary to find a single thread that connects disparate experiences that are barely connected, if at all.

To weave is to create.

What am I writing about? I am writing about me, and about that which I have come from. What has occurred from the preceding scribbles from when I was three years old to now, that enables me to write in prose with lexical palette of thousands of words? Obviously it is not only time and physical growth and maturation. Many forces have shaped and formed me into what I am today. What am I today? It is easy to define myself by the past. It would not only take to long to discuss every factor and nauseum that has led to my current being, but would lack meaning in its nebulousness. For that reason, I will focus on my direct/formal and adjunct educational experiences.

Formal education has been part of Ben's life for 6 out of every 7 years of his existence. It started when he was three years old with Sunday School (which he was involved with nearly as long as required education) and the first year of two years of head start.

July 12 - B.J. sure is talking
 alot. His new sentence is
 "I NOT KNOW" when you ask him
 something he doesn't know.

Journal entries by subject's mother, 1990.

Nov. 15, 1990
 B.J. said his first sentence. And it is so cute.
 "I ^(think) hink I can" We got the
 book The engine that could, from the
 library. We read it for months. Maria + B.J.

Shown before the start of this writing are some my first scribbles – made by the same hand that, nearly twenty years later, would later type these words. In the same diary, kept by my mother, is recorded Ben's first words ("Mama", etc.) and first sentence ("I [t]hink I can" – repeated from Ben's mother reading *The Little Engine That Could*). First forays into the Symbolic. Thus it is established that from the beginning of Ben's life a strong relationship with books. Paired with this is possibly that scion of Ben's uncertainty with his multiple recorded iterations of "I not know." Ben's mother loved to read from the beginning, and Ben's identified reading as something important, whether or not he knew why. He wanted to write a book titled "How To Be Smart" that would have inside it "read books" as the only instruction.

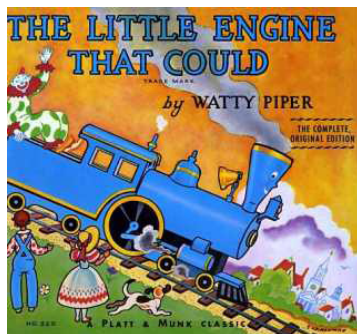
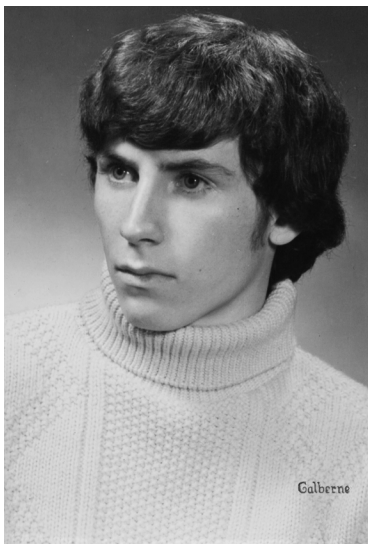




Photo of subject's mother taken by subject.

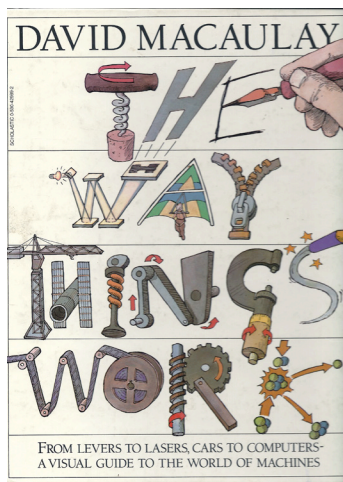


Senior photo of subject's father.



Outside grandfather's house: subject and sister, kindergarten.

In the first grade, Ben had his first experience of being physically separated from a portion of the class for reading groups. He knew he was smarter than the rest of the class, or at least the majority of it. The same year he was taken to get tested for ADHD, and was pre-



scribed Adderall which he continued taking for the rest of his educational career. These actions led Ben to see himself as somehow different from the larger group.

At home, Ben was supplied with books and magazines and videos, often centered around science, that fostered his thinking and implanted the equation of reading and knowledge as good. The third and fourth grade again saw Ben separated from a portion of the class part of the time. He tested out of subjects and was at time removed from class to engage in more advance projects. This reinforced his difference from the group.

In the sixth grade Ben was now physically separated in a different math class. Achieving first place in the Geography Bee against eight hundred other students made him think that not only that he was gifted, but that taking in information and reading was essential to success. He later used it to empirically test the density of certain rock surfaces. Ben learned and believed that learning was inherently good through rewards and reinforcement on behalf of teachers and family.

Tracking continued in high school where he was allowed pick his own classes, but was urged by the school and parents to pick a path that would lead to post-secondary education. He applied for the more advanced social studies, humanities, and math tracks.

While it was old news that Ben was somehow different than his peers, to what extent was not as tangible as the events in his

Sophomore year of college. Indeed, what I see as one of the most profound moments of his education was an incident that involved him almost being expunged from the very system he very much identified with up to this point. Ben was threatened with expulsion from the high school on account of him creating a website contained nearly three semesters worth of computer science class homework and programming problem answers. Ben saw no contradiction with making public his own work publicly accessible while his teacher would freely give other student's completed assignments (without their knowledge or permission) out as guidance for students having difficulties. Ben learned that the education system was internally flawed and contradictory. He no longer fully and contently identified with it. His identification with almost always being correct and in the right clashed with the accusation that he had done something very wrong.

Additionally, this experience taught him that what the family taught was more important than what the school taught, even though he had earlier thought his parents could no longer help him with schoolwork due to his parents being relatively uneducated. His father did not chastise him, other than questioning Ben's ability to not get caught at something that could be seen as deviant, but supported Ben's reasoning and actions. Upon the school dropping any and all charges, Ben was taught the secondary lesson that one can challenge a seemingly monolithic system and get away with it. It reinforced that his way of thinking was somehow more correct than many others, included those who were supposed to be of more authority.

That episode put a bitter taste in Ben's education mouth.

It made him reconsider what he wanted to aspire to, for he could no longer tolerate computer programming. What I consider Ben's most important developmental moment has this event as the beginning of a confluence of many different semi-concurrent experiences. In the middle of his high school career, Ben went through numerous experiences that would dramatically alter the way he saw himself within the education system and also in the way he thought of himself.



Roughly around the same time, Ben began reading literature that paid more attention to the human side of things, things began to fray at the edges. He invested more time in activities outside of school, by enrolling in technical college courses and engaging in self-directed hobbies. His focus from analytical topics gave way to more qualitative topics of inquiry. Encapsulating this transformation was his nearly all-consuming hobby of bowmaking that fused history, ethnography, and his mechanical-analytical skills all in one. His relative social isolation (lack of close friends other than short-lived romantic relationships) in High School reinforced his separateness and enabled flexibility in thinking.

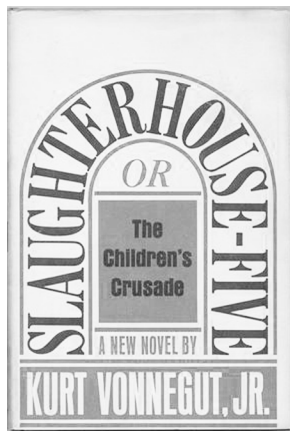
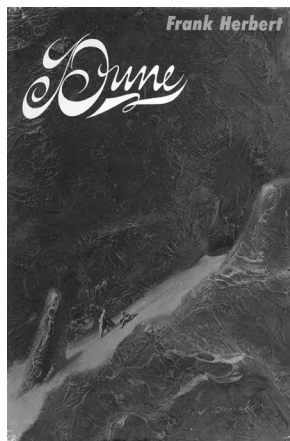
His perception of himself as someone as above average, and his corresponding curriculum made him feel as somewhat estranged from his family. His father had always been rather taciturn in addition to being invested two jobs. His mother moving out of the house, followed by his sister leaving for college the same year had dramatic consequences. Ben began to dabble with marijuana and began homebrewing (the internet, and peers, provided much of Ben's education on these topics). The altered states he experienced led to acknowledgement of different perspectives. Not too much later he would take psychedelic drugs that would cement the nascent notions

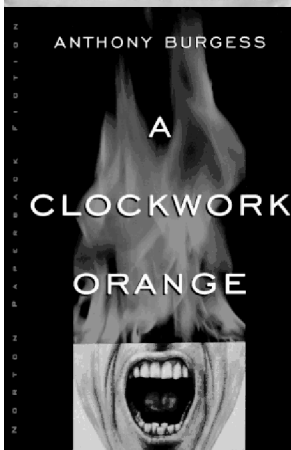


of different perceptions. The “degradation” of Ben’s family life also gave him more free time to focus on his new interests: reading, music, along with drugs and alcohol and simultaneously making him (feel) more independent. Disillusionment channeled into motivation. He decided he had never been pushed much to read (more human-centric texts) or write creatively, and he’d take it upon himself to change that.

He began a regiment of reading consisting of many dystopian, sci-fi, and inherently critical novels. By the time he was a senior in high school, his criticality had been cemented. He saw himself as a recognizer of social problems with corresponding changes that needed to be made. Wanting to affect change, he became the president of the environmental club of his high school and wanted to do his part to change the destructive practices (and the ideas that caused them) of many people. Instead of identifying with scientists, he now identified with literary characters like Sal Paradise. Ben transformed from being a liberal humanist to a critical humanist(-activist). Belief in unquestioned progress was dispelled while the new criticality was installed. He saw his place not in a drafting room or programming studio, but in academia, studying the human condition.

The new path of Ben’s was not smooth. His new ideas of literature, of thinking, truth, existence, etc. came face to face with the prevailing bourgeois norm in his AP English class. Prompted to write an essay with the theme of “This is Believe” he wrote an essay that essentially described





the Nietzschean idea of truth (He didn't know who was Nietzsche other than the "God is Dead" quote). Ironically, he made fun of the kind of nerdy kid in that class who occasionally wore a Nietzsche t-shirt. Faced with prompts that sought a desired response, Ben replied with logical, yet supposedly "incorrect" answers. He failed his AP English class. This was the first time he had ever gotten below a "B" grade. This strengthened his conception his thinking as something separable and exterior to his formal institutions of education.

Multiple new literary and psychedelic experiences drew even greater focus to the problems Ben perceived and he wanted to change them. Ben also wanted to create his own world. After having many of his notions of reality dispelled in his life, starting with demythologizing Santa Clause, he wanted to remythologize his day-to-day experience. In retrospect, I see that I did create my own little pocket of thought and being. However, now I have the hindsight to see that some of its causes and to see that it was not entirely self-created as Ben thought it was.

Almost getting rejected after initial acceptance from UW-Madison, Ben received an "unadmission" letter that asked Ben to explain his "marked decline in academic performance" to which Ben replied (basically decanting many of the things above dealing with his mid-high school life disruptions/transformations). He never heard another word from the university on the matter.

Education brought Ben to another city to attend the university. There, through sharing common interest in art, music, and thinking Ben capitalized on things that used to set Ben apart. Those things now brought Ben into belonging in Madison. However, this sense of belonging felt somewhat discordant with Ben's sense of self. He had never really felt comfortable and content, and now that he was on the verge of feeling so, he was suspect and at unease.

Being introduced to the concepts of "post-modern science" in a class titled "Plants and Man" introduced revolutionary topics to Ben and parsed some of the theories he previously had floating around in his head. The apogee of Ben's unquestioned criticality was now over. The modes of observation and theorizing that he used to know were attacked and discredited. In addition, free from any confines of family or constantly observing school administration, Ben was free to pick his influences, his audience, and his peers.

Now, more than ever, am not so sure that I know what I think I know.

I am more aware of all the forces that are acting and that have acted upon me. This has been accomplished through my uptake of many theories, concepts, etc. learned especially in my last few semesters. Combined with my innate skepticism this has forced me into a prolonged pause and reconsideration. I am not able to decide what I want to do with any certainty. I am aware of my vast unknowing, and given my past that is very unsettling. Education has weakened my identity and goals. I do not mind this caution. I am aware of the frailty of identity and lack of free will. Marxist theory, especially with Althusser's "Ideology State Apparatus" has placed my conception of self in multiple systems, where demands and expectations are made of me (like in the example of my near expulsion) and giving me explanation for educational/social position that I inhabit.

Though in my senior year of high school I felt there were and are multiple ways to see truth in the world, it was not until many theories in anthropology, along with multiple theories in English (Nietzschean, Post-Modern, etc.) that I could authoritatively use such ideas.

A major thing that education has forced me to grapple with is creativity and uniqueness. While I had long thought of myself as creative

and unique, with self-made concepts and individual tastes, recent education has pretty much abolished such thinking. I have been taught that creativity has to be given to certain influences and people. Interestingly, in the past I have also been told the opposite, that there are unique individuals who are active agents in change, etc. (a very American ideology).

In the past, I have resisted unnecessarily entering language, I feel there is no feasible alternative. I am coalescing to the idea that all ideas are foreign to "me", though I am still very suspicious of them. Through making fun of dominant form of language and using it in self-prescribed ways (although perhaps it is a learned activity) I still resist incorporating it wholesale from others, preferring a more organic way of incorporation. I suppose this is influenced in part by Nietzschean ideas of the necessity of having to enter into such a foreign system, while still being conscious of it and its mechanisms. You can still immerse yourself in the system without compromising yourself, as long as you are cognizant of the act.

While calling my mother to inquire upon some aspects of my early education, she asked me (after reading one of my papers for this semester) how I learned all the vocabulary that I use. It was somewhat of a jarring experience as I take for granted that I have a much larger command of the language than my mother, and perhaps this is a sign of my participation in some type of ideology that I am not aware of. I have, as Lacan referred to it, participated in the "unconscious discourse of the other." Lacan has parsed what I have (at least intuitively, whatever credence that has in the educational system) thought:

"Entry into language, writing is kind of death because it is a submission to something that is alien. You should accept your lack of uniqueness by entering a foreign system by naming yourself within that system."

If that recent exchange with my mother has any lesson to be extracted, there has been multiple (unexpected) movings from the imaginary into the symbolic, into language in my development, and I suspect there will be more.

I have moved beyond mere criticalness. I can not freely re-mythologize be-

cause I know from where and from what my language for defining new myths originates. My Facebook "about me" is the only writing I have on my profile besides my name, my email, my network, groups, and friends. It pithily posits to my present place and position in this world. As it appears, it may suggest that I think ignorance is bliss. However, this is not nearly the case. There is basically a hidden romanticizing in the statement (it could read "romanticizing dollar store romanticizing") for I know that I can not romanticize, given my knowledge of such an act. Dollar stores are, of course, synonomous with people of "lower SES," (a new left euphemism for proletariat?). I wish that I could be unaware of not knowing the root causes of my social position, as many dollar store patrons likely do not. My knowledge of my situation is burdensome at times, and I realize that given what I know I cannot sink into an blissful ignorance. I romanticize believing in myth. I romanticize romanticization. This puts my self in discord as I see how living in the imaginary provides solace, peace, clear cut/definitive answers, etc that are comforting to the human mind. However, I seek not such explanations, for I would rather live in senseless world in which people and things are unknowingly exploited.

If I were to make a grand myth regarding my education (of thinking), it would include three major segments, split or punctuated by two transformations. It is possible to label these segments liberal humanism, critical humanism, and post humanism, though I do not yet feel comfortable using this label. In the mature portion of the two earlier segments, my beliefs, ideas, and knowledge would be thoroughly codified and concretized. At the end of those, I experienced a jarring, transformative experience that ushered in the next. Of course, they were not clear breaks – I "revert" or fall back to the old manner of thinking, understanding, comprehending, etc. In my current state, I exist in the inchoate third segment, which I am hesitant to label because of the nascent character of it. I am in another state of tutelage, of holding concepts more intuitively. In time, with further education, I suppose I could and will. Having such a clear understanding of the way things work in my previous mode of being, it is frustrating being in a mental world cognizant of my misunderstandings.

I fully appreciate the adage "the more you know, the more you don't know." If there is anything my education has definitively taught me it is how much I do not know.



Trying to find the Real, but finding the Imaginary
on top of it: My solo 7,000 mile journey. West
Coast & SW 2009.