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Thrifty Cups: Empty and Full, A Path to the Shattering

(Odd Object & Personal Essay)

Sitting in front of me, on my desk, as I type this essay, are two mugs, one on either side of my laptop, guarding me. The one on my left is short, old, and stout with waves of various shades of green- dark green, light green, sandy-green- splashing on its sides. It is made of ceramic, like the mug opposite of it. On the bottom of this mug is a shiny silver sticker with black letters declaring, “Hand Crafted from Japan.” The other mug, on my right, is bigger and fatter, round like the jolly Snowman marching through the Winter Wonderland scene which is painted on the mug’s face. On the mug’s bottom, it reads, “Microwave and Dishwasher safe; Bed, Bath, & Beyond; Made in China.”

I acquired both of these mugs in thrift shops. Thrift shops are kind of like life: old, unwanted, or worn out objects are donated or sold to thrift shops, and after a little bit of time, they become new again, as part of somebody else’s life.

I can hear the older green mug from Japan calling me. It is nice and smooth all over, but on the bottom, it has a rough concave circle to keep it from sliding on the table. Although it is beautiful, glistening speckles of darkish brown, similar to tea stains, jump across its lip and

handle. As I examine the mug, I take a moment to look at my hands which are holding the mug. They are long, thin, and bony with red spots on the joints. Some of my friends tell me that my hands are old-man hands; I am happy to agree with them. My hands, like the Japanese mug, are old. However, my mind and soul are also quite old. My beliefs and outlook on life are ancient and, perhaps, archaic.

I will die, and I am okay with that because I am already every-where and every-when. I am a child of the stars and Earth, forever lost in the Universe. My life is simply a brief pool of matter and energy that will return to its source and be reborn in the lives of others. Similarly, the mug is here, and it can just as easily be broken and dissolve into nothingness, yet reappear elsewhere in another time as art, sand, or a myriad of other things.

Nothingness is not bad; it is merely a state of being. My mind is empty like my mugs and ready to be filled.

In all truthfulness, life is meaningless. I exist now, and later, I will eventually cease to exist. Though, I am never fully gone, for neither energy nor matter can be created nor destroyed. They can only switch between the two forms. The best, perhaps, I can imagine my life will amount to is that of a drop of water creating a ripple in the ocean. I, by myself, am nothing, for nothing means anything unless it exists in connection with other things. To not be connected with others is to have not existed which is why I wish to touch the hearts of others, affect the world, and turn the universe with my life. I hope that some of the things I do will shift the course of events. Major action and minor action are equally important, just how the small old mug is just as useful as the newer taller mug. Every action we take matters which is part of why daily life pains me. I cease to exist when I do my homework, for I am neither taking action nor connecting with others. There are problems in this world that have apparent and obvious

solutions, but the lack of immediate and relevant action (i.e. doing nothing) doesn't just feel bad, it feels wrong and immoral. My life feels immoral, for the true actions I do and true connections I have are only products of my spare time. As things stand right now, my schedule is full and my life is not.

Day in and day out, I live without actually living.

Every morning, I rise to the sound of my alarm clock- a sudden clatter of noise from the radio turning itself on. Mechanical monster! I slap my alarm clock on the top of its head- telling it to shut up. I lay back to bed, and fifteen minutes later, my alarm clock growls at me with an incessant beeping that gets louder and louder the longer I keep it waiting. By the time I concede defeat and wake up, my alarm clock sounds like a fire alarm, and my roommate is about to get pissed.

Every morning and afternoon, I go to classes from nine forty in the morning until three o' clock in the afternoon. Sometimes, the fun doesn't end there. On Wednesdays, my last class ends at five, and on Thursdays, my last class ends at four.

Every afternoon and late into the evening, as the sun is dying, I must keep on going. For every hour of class that I have (sixteen hours), there is about two to four hours of homework to do. This means I spend between thirty-two to sixty-four hours a week doing homework.

Let me do the math for you. In one week, there are seven days, and each day has twenty four hours. Therefore, there are one hundred sixty-eight hours in each week. I need at least six hours of sleep, per day, to be a functional human being. So, six time seven is forty-two. Being over six feet tall, I really need my three meals a day, and each meal lasts about an hour. Three times seven is twenty-one. One hundred sixty-eight minus forty-two, minus twenty-one, and

minus fifteen is ninety. At the low end of the spectrum, we could subtract thirty-two hours and get fifty-eight hours per week as free. At the high end of the spectrum, we could subtract sixty-four and get twenty-six hours per week as free. This averages out to be between four to eight hours per day as free for me to use as I please.

However, that isn't quite the reality of the situation because these calculations ignore the hours of time spent studying, volunteering, editing, revising, rewriting, trying to connect, taking care of myself, napping, working with uncooperative stupid people, maintaining my room, washing my clothes, and struggling with loneliness and depression.

A lot goes unaccounted for, and what little time I ever have left each day is what I have to be real, to be human, and to fill my life.

I need a cup of tea.

Drinking tea is a pastime that I enjoy a lot. It is not only a way to sit back, relax, and objectively look at life, but it is a form of legally acceptable self-medication that is underappreciated by snobby coffee drinkers and the industrial medical community. I refuse to call "modern medicine" as "traditional" or "conventional" because true traditional and conventional medicine is based on the study of one's local flora and fauna.

In times of stress, like right now, I prefer to drink chamomile tea. It eases the nerves but not too much, only enough so that I can stop worrying about everything and focus on what is right before me.

That is one of the perennial problems I come across quite frequently in my "modern" life. I spend too much time worrying about what has happened and what could be that I end up tossing the present out the window.

Aside from the easing of nerves, I find it therapeutic to watch the steam rise from the boiling water as I dip my bag of tea leaves gently into the water that slowly changes color with each dip- deepening itself from the pure clarity of water to a strong brown.

Eventually, like the water in my tea, it becomes full and saturated to the point at which it cannot be “brewed” any stronger. People are like this. I am like this. We become so saturated with ourselves, our thoughts, and the world that we are no longer able to take in new information until we become empty again.

I have been emptying, filling, and dying, or all of the above for quite a long time. I still am. I cannot tell the difference. In complete truthfulness, I really feel like the latter. I feel like I am slowly dissolving into the wind, the earth, and the water.

I lack the fire.

Not completely.

I carry the embers of my passion safe and near to my heart. I wait for the day when I will place my embers onto my firewood and blaze with the warmth and light of the sun! I cannot wait for the day when my life can take the form of my choosing, just like how the crafter of my green Japanese mug gave form to the mug and solidified the mug’s form in the fires of a kiln.

There is a way that I wish to live life- one different, surprising, and unique. However, it defies the norms of society in such a way that almost everyone thinks that people like me are crazy.

Just like how my mugs were acquired quickly, easily, and cheaply on an opportunistic basis, I can and want to live my life from one opportunity and adventure to the next. Power originates from belief and support, and when belief and support is gone, the power is lost. Money, governments, and bullies all work the same way: they exist and have power because people give them power. This is the key to freedom and the key to my future life. My life will be based in solid reality and what I can experience with my senses- tangible things like the mugs right in front of me.

All I need is food, clothing, shelter, and a sense of belonging.

But I also need love.

Familial love is shit, to be completely honest. It is not true love because they have no choice in the matter, and even then, that does not stop or prevent abandonment and neglect. I want true love- a warm fuzzy guy to hug me and keep me close, to have intellectual and meaningful discussions with, to stay with me and love me no matter what happens to me or where I may go.

My tea mugs were formed in two different ways: one in a factory and one in a hand. I feel like I am the former due to my unfortunate timing as the middle child.

However, I do share with the Japanese mug one similarity in growing up- the control and force my parents used to shape me. They pushed me like the artisan pushed the clay into shape to make the Japanese mug, turning, pushing, and prodding me in their hands, shaping me into what they thought would be best.

I have honor because of them. I have dedication because of them. I have drive because of them. However, I also have hate. I have brutal honesty, and I have a similar tendency to control

because of them. Then, there is what I had to learn on my own because they did not teach me: how to love, how to care, and how to live. But most importantly, I was not taught how to be human.

Humans are not mugs. It is simple as that. Clay accepts its shape because it has no choice, but I have a mind and a body of my own. I am no one's anything! Blood means nothing, for it runs thin when let out! I do not accept my shape or form! And into the fires I go!

Another thing that kind of itches me about the two mugs I have; they are polar opposites of each other, and I resonate primarily with only one of them.

The Bed, Bath, & Beyond mug with a Snowman emblazoned on it and coated with glitter to make it shine appeals to consumeristic Western society. Whereas, the Japanese mug embodies simplicity and pragmatism with its gentle sloping waves of green splashing on its body.

I do not conform! I do not supply! I do not support!

Western societal values are the antithesis of my being because the constructs that make up Western society control, exploit, and ultimately waste the lives of millions upon millions of people. For example, in the USA, people spend their good years working at a job they hate so that they can spend their final days in retirement.

I do not think this is really living. Working just for the sake of money is meaningless because money will not mean anything by the time someone dies. While drinking tea and reading books, living lives that are not my own, I have learned that the stories that we make throughout our lives, the connections we make, and the people we love are ultimately the things that will define us in our final moments. I have lived many lives, had many deaths, and seen what each has had to offer. However, in all those lifetimes, I could not find anything that compared with

making a true meaningful connection. Just as one life melds with another, so do tea leaves bond with water.

I will live my life spontaneously and organically, the way my ancestors used to, and when it comes my time to die, I hope to die quickly and violently in a far off dangerous place where people will have trouble bringing my body back home. Perhaps, I will be adventuring in the Amazon Rainforest, macaws and monkeys howling around me, fog and mist rolling through, blanketing the forest, and frogs bellowing their mating calls; then, when I least expect it, the unthinkable happens...

Unlike my mugs which are content to stay where they are, I must move on. To stay or stand still in one place too long is unthinkable. They have a home, and I do not. I have no reason to stay anywhere, and I must constantly be renewed with new friends and fresh environments. I float like a cloud in the air and drift like a current in the sea.

I have no anchor to keep me at shore; no harbor feels safe for long, and the answer is clear: to live and to love or to die and be done.

The green Japanese mug shatters to pieces, after I drop it onto the tiled floor; I look at it and stand there, unsure what to do, as silence fills the void that once contained the old green mug's final cry.

After a minute of shock, I sweep up the mug's fragments and the pieces of my mind that went with it.

I do not know what I will do with the pieces...

There are possibilities.....

Only time, the only thing that ever can, will tell the future:

how I lived and how I died.