

STRANGE ORDER of THINGS

Life, Feeling, and the Making of Cultures

ANTONIO DAMASIO

"Damasio undertakes nothing less than a reconstruction of the natural history of the universe...[A] brave and honest book." —The New York Times Rock P. Eventually it seemed possible that you could all attend the same school, after all. The boys could grow into husbands, the girls into wives. For a while you more or less got along like this. In the matter of making babies, however, and then with the question of who exactly was minding the store, disagreements began to occur. Separations. Fights. Now, within only a single lifetime, why did you boys, snarling, all go back down to the basement, and become armed and dangerous? Why did you girls, upstairs in your labcoats, nonetheless continue the research programme, insistently smashing through walls and ceilings?



Lethe

The only time
I discovered my dad
Wrestling my mam to the floor
She was back up in a trice
Strong as an eel
Her wild eyes
Free of constraints

Fleeing out of the front door Onto the street, round the corner Out of sight Gone

As if she was never coming back

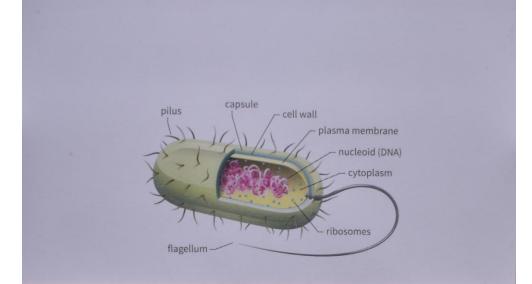
Without even her coat and hat or gloves Just her pinafore

I stood in my muddy football strip (Tea having lost its whereabouts) All the men in the corners of rooms Chastened The streetlights coming on In desperation, my dad driving away, to search

Haunting the porch
In my dressing gown
The door still wide
As those other women
(I didn't know who)
Came quickly, louder, one by one
Out of the shadows
Past the hedges
Their faces glancing at me briefly
Quick-stepping
To a future tune
(I didn't know what)

Until the street was hushed by the moon

I was asleep
When she emerged again
Shivering
From the waters of Lethe
Her fingers
Without a latch-key
Tapping on the shut door
Light as a forgotten bird





In a single lifetime, what began as scarcity must have metastasised into surplus. What was mostly broken could never be fixed, only replaced by a shining new model. For everything. What use do you have any longer for a needle and thread, wire and string, hammer and nail? Even if you have a house to live in, its garage is filled to the brim, the driveway stacked to the edges, the entire catchment violated by the oppressive materiality of nightmares. In this great city, what else could advertisements be for? Business has so little use for bedrooms. For the pillow, the blanket, the single framed pictures of the past. For sleep, even.



Bed

The only time
I built a
Bed
(With my own hands)

Was when the Americans Were landing on the moon

I carried long planks home On my shoulder

That was in Manchester With a view across 24 Football pitches

I followed a plan
In the Reader's Digest Complete Do-ItYourself Manual Book 2
Sheet 27

I sawed & I drilled & I screwed & I varnished &

Next
The Bed was in a room
In a cottage in Cumbria
Built in 1611
Which had a waterfall
In the room below

Next
The Bed lived in a room in Bristol
Above which hot-air balloons flew
(Behind the curtains)
While I was in bed with
Different women

The wood had dried out And I could put my finger Through a knot-hole

Next The Bed was in a back room The castors kept falling off

Next
It went into a container ship
To the other side of the world
All that ocean
Was when Challenger exploded

One (dazzling) morning I photographed my new daughter Leda And her mother Angie On the Bed

The house was wooden And creaked and shuddered In the Wellington winds

Next It became Leda's Bed In another house In Palmerston North While she grew up With a new mattress

She hated banging her legs and feet On the sticking-out bits The headboard had disappeared

When she was 14 I painted a picture of her Holding a black swan (Symbolic) About to fall from the Childhood Bed Into the Adult Garden

Next When I was very very sick Pancreatitis I slept on this Bed For 16 hours a day

On a day a machine landed On a comet I photographed what was left of the Bed

Now I wonder what will become of this

Bed?

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—The New York Times Book Review

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- The Feeling of What Happens (2001)

'TheBrain'sBody-furnished,Body-mindedImind,IsBErvantInfTheIwhole' body"?

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- Descartes' Error 1994

Once endlessly bound to the turning earth, ancestors could only convey the impression that your labour must give back to others. over centuries, what had already been so effortfully and resentfully given. Digging into the dirt, that was the single, relentless task, in exchange for a short, suffering life. Until, that is, work was timed by the clock, waged by the ledger, with everyone coming to expect such better medicines. But why did that only encourage your resentment even more? Within a single lifetime, could there still be no better mantra on offer than 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work'? Was it true, already, that your machines really would be doing all your living for you, wherever it was we came from?



Treasure

The only time
I had a brother
My mother was kind enough
First, to ask me

So that his appearance could be properly arranged A small white bundle, held up high By the nurse on the distant balcony For me to wave at

And use the same arm
To wrap him safe
As we sat together
In Mr Foreman's photographic studio

And for years
In the shared bed
In the back room
With the rattling chimney grate

Until he was big enough
On his own two legs
To run the length of a football pitch
Stride into his Geography classroom
Hike across all manner of maps
And mountain ridges
High tops
Without ever removing
Those selfsame boots
From the wet, heavy, Northumbrian soil
Out of which grew
Broad beans, potatoes, cabbages, couch-grass

Unlike me
Who had flitted for good
To a separate side of the world
Flying my freedom kite
A whole hemisphere apart

Helpless to catch him
As he tumbled, without a sign
Headlong down the fissures
Acute ischemic cerebrovascular syndrome
His vanishing

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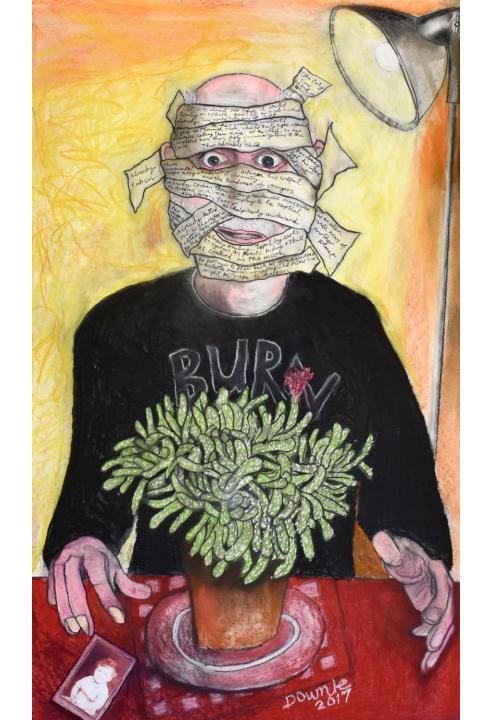
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"Sociality enters the human cultural mind by the hand of affect."

"It is reasonable to say that we live part of our lives in the anticipated future, rather than the present."



Portrait

The only time
He himself put in an appearance
It was almost over
Before it started

Waiting
On a plinth, front-lit
For a role
In which, relatively
Time would take care of itself

He has meanwhile swallowed 81,000 meals Inhabited 38 different addresses Calling them home At the wheel, he has completed More than 50 circumnavigations Of the Earth

This adorable child Has already left His infant footprint!

Already taken those incremental steps Everywhichway Between his wilful chemistry And the kindness of strangers

Already spoken those clumsy sentences More suited to dreams In a voice Attempting to be sceptical, egalitarian, funny As helplessly awkward as an alien With news of another planet

Already kitted out in character-clothes Especially supplied for the interim His innocence-soaked face Already smiling Topped by curls as vigorous as forests Hiding a skull as cratered As the moon

Look how he himself continues to beam back at you Bright-eyed In his little dungarees

Anticipating what it is that best Might still be made to happen

The truth is, once and once only, within a single lifetime, a thousand knives and snares have failed to cut and catch up with you. Within a single lifetime, you have woken up yet again, come back to yourself, and more or less completed the task. Within a single lifetime, you can't have been expected to escape the bad habits of your tribe, nor better inhabit a generous and liberal conscience. Done your best, after all; remaining unremarkably remarkable. And with this reasonable hope of surviving, to the end of another week. Another year. Another century! You, consumer, criminal, citizen, confederate, co-conspirator, can that still be your future lurking there, unable to give itself any other kind of name?

THE ONLY TIME

An autobiography in twelve pictures



JOHN DOWNIE

