

# An Emotionalist Manifesto

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**I**

Death is an emotion. We do not fear death; we fear emotion. We do not suffer mental illness; we fear mental stillness. We are not insane; we are dispossessed, repressed, suppressed. But we cannot arrest the sea of emotion we tread in and channel in ways that are frightening, incomprehensible. This is the ultimate challenge to all those focused and speculating on the wrong thing—the myth of the beyond—instead of the reality of what is.

**II**

Death is a myth, not a state. It is the antithesis, an anti-state, an antidote against confrontation with hardcore human reality: what we feel and what we fear feeling. Death is an emotion and emotion does not die. We may flee emotion or we may try to, but it stalks us, haunts us, tracks us down and forces itself through the pores of our existence.

Emotion asserts its hegemony and claims its sovereignty over our heads, hearts and behaviors. Controlled or not, mediated or not, it manifests itself whether we like it or not. It will not be ignored, cannot be killed and will not die.

In this way, we fear the emotion of death, not the unknowable death itself. Fear of this one emotion is disingenuous, a distraction from the true fear of emotion itself, the fear of presence not absence, fullness not void, existence not nonexistence.

Everything is emotion, is all about emotion. Emotion brings and gives meaning to existence. Emotion is all that matters because it is existence: ours, human. A product of the biochemical soup that comprises the body, it is all we know of existence and so cannot be ignored or escaped.

Emotion is the lens we see with, filter we breathe through, nourishment we thrive on—the very stuff of dreams, as well as life. And however brief or enduring the electric moment may seem, it centers around this one thing consistently: the variation and inflation of emotion—the wellspring of what we know of, know as, existence.

Stars and planets coalesce, heat, mellow, and enter a chill state, seething all the way. Plants strive heliotropically and flinch detectably when wired and then threatened with a cut. Sentient creatures—massive, tiny or in between—feel pain. All feel the trickle and flow of cascading secretions and molecular reactivity that power the electricity of the body and establish the presence of emotion and, through it, reality.

### III

Death is not the ultimate escape, nonparticipation, avoidance, unawareness or absence of emotion. Death is not an empty, static, permanent state—it is a dynamic emotion. Death is the ultimate emotion, the ultimate expression of emotion, the ultimate confrontation with emotion. Yet history asserts that the artist's struggle embodies the human confrontation with the void of death.

The artist who creates things of lasting beauty does not challenge death by achieving greatness or cheat death by defeating impermanence. The artist is not a magician, a trickster, or a mythic hero who transcends time and space—and certainly no god. All this is a lie, for no mark is more indelible than another in the eyes of Fate. The concept of infinity, of endless reality, defeats all attempts, subsumes everything into transience, and renders any measure of permanence irrelevant.

Existence evolves, and with it the fate of everything. Potentiality fills the interval and change—like the artistic mind—is propelled by an engine of unimaginable scale and unknowable origin. There is no salvation from confronting and dealing headlong with life itself, in all its brutality and splendor. So, it is hardly news that nothing lasts and there's no meaning in the sublime, nor that everything is everlasting and significance divine. Nihilism and religion are coequal in this regard.

#### **IV**

Dread, the supposed response to death, like anger, is junk littering the surface of emotion, debris that constitutes a mask concealing truth. Emotional truth occupies the interstice opened by the human penchant to oscillate between binary interpretive poles of reality.

Anger or joy, dread or epiphany, death or life, nothing or being, good or evil, meaninglessness or significance: all these are dialectical products of the twin-halved mind mirroring itself and getting it backward, with a consequent propensity to anthropomorphize.

A mind that bifurcates everything is appropriative. Reprocesses everything into its own inverted image. Then projects, rejects and ejects the result into a landfill over the emotions. Thus burying them beneath the anesthetic effect and compartmentalization of intellectualism and faith.

Rationalization and irrational belief are both systematic diversions, distractions to be sifted through. They are insidious entertainments that dwell at one end of psycho-physiological operation and give rise to cosmology, theology, philosophy, ideology, religiosity, fanaticism and dogma.

It is not enough for the artist to join ranks with the single-minded and intellectually death-obsessed. It is not enough for the artist to stop at the edge of an abstract,

theoretical or liturgical abyss and say: “This is the line death draws. I will not, cannot cross.” There is no line. It is a crippling fiction.

**V**

True artists cast themselves headlong into the awesome ephemera of human emotion—life-begetting, life-giving, life-defining emotion. They enter, go deep into any single emotion, wade through any sector of emotion. Or they pause at the brink of all emotion and withstand the onslaught to observe adroitly the content, dynamics, implications and manifestations of emotion. Then they render this for us to consume visually, viscerally, verbally, aurally.

Emotionalism is the unbridled accessing, channeling, and expressing of emotion to drive artistic process and its ultimate conveyance in works of art. The raw work of emotion that seethes truth, reaches out irresistibly, and is taken in involuntarily is the pinnacle of Emotionalism. The artistic revelation of some fundamental truth, previously unnoticed or unseen, fresh and somehow clean, aesthetically trumps all and is Emotionalism.

Emotion is the abyss, both chasm and cove: vast, dark, mysterious, and unexplored enough for every artist to confront it endlessly. It is at once the familiar and forgotten country of eternity, a glorious, tumultuous universe to explore tirelessly.

It is not death but rather potentiality that the artist confronts. Infinite possibility is what horrifies in existence. The enormity of choice drives the vast majority of humanity to passivity. They sleepwalk through a life of muted feeling, dulled senses, without emotion.

## **VI**

It is both necessary and sufficient for the artist to confront emotion, to evoke the wonder and awe of the infinite and universal—and to provoke response. For the Emotionalist, artistic purpose is to forcibly illuminate rather than entertain, educate or indoctrinate. The job is to intensify and re-inject feeling into the life of the somnambulant, to make the sea of humanity feel the flood of its life whether it likes it or not.

The role of the artist is to ride the unrelenting tides of evolutionary change and master navigating the relentless waves of emotion that break on the beach of consciousness. The true artist brings in that catch with gifted nets of perception and rendering.

The artist who deviates from emotion, from life, reality and existence, is thrust into lightless denial. This pseudo-artist drinks a kind of popular narcotic and in essence embraces the obsessive cults of religion and ideological fanaticism. This is the ultimate denial of life, emotion and therefore art.

Emotionalism is life enhancing, affirming. It does not feed on the corpse of the afterlife but on the energy of the everyday. The Emotionalist rears art like a child. The work is never done but eventually must be freed to take on a life of its own.

## **VII**

Obsession with death is a distraction from the range and brute force of pure human emotion. So much mental illness stems from this. To stare at death is to ignore and deny not life but the fullness of human reality, which embraces and embodies everything, including death—as part of life. True artistry is emotionally inclusive, not exclusive, and inclusiveness is a font of artistic controversy.

Subjects of psychotherapy can attest to the depth of introspection it entails and provokes, to the endlessness of the emotions they find, and the self-knowledge it unearths and manifests. The psychotherapeutic process is meant to deliver relief from mental illness, but what subjects confront is their flight from mental stillness—from dwelling in the discomfort of the truth, from the avoidance of their emotions. There is insight into artistic process here.

Fear of emotion deceives us into thinking that emotions can kill, will kill, will bring death to the objects of those emotions, and thus gives rise to obsession over an impossible death. This obsessing is an engine that can and does turn on itself to drive the creative process of re/building a stable psyche. The obsessive process,

which either introduces or amplifies penetrating introspection, characterizes the steadfast confrontation with emotion.

It is a process that mirrors the artist's own. The domain of the true artist is the realm of the emotions. Emotions are the poetry of artistry—the language and imagery scratched, stroked, scribbled, sculpted, spoken, shuffled, sung or scribed. The artist investigates, confronts, experiences, processes, regurgitates and re-articulates an exceptional range and depth of experience channeled through empathy or antipathy towards an object: the subject, the provocative stimulus, the imagined audience, the expectant crowd.

## **VIII**

The greatest art is Emotionalist and the first principle of Emotionalism is emotional access. Artistic achievements, therefore, unfold as breakthroughs in the revelation or articulation of emotion. To aspire to technical mastery alone is to aspire to craft not art.

Emotionalist art is judged two ways: primarily, on its ability to manifest emotional truth that is accessible to audiences regardless of their degree of sophistication; and secondarily, on its introduction of a unique rendering technique that enhances emotional representation.

The primacy of manifesting emotional truth demands that all artists enter their careers focused on achieving emotional revelation—that is, a potency of content and immediacy in its expression.

Thus, the spontaneous outburst of the novice that consistently seizes attention and rivets an audience has as much aesthetic authority as the refined work of the master. The exquisite and exceptional output by artists that produce only a single, or singly memorable, piece demonstrates that this is the artist's first order of aesthetic attention.

What distinguishes Emotionalist artists is their unique style of emotional expression. Advancement in technique may come by sheer accident or brute persistence. But what matters is the intention of capturing emotion and the success in uniquely and compellingly rendering it. This takes precedence over the mastery of media.

## **IX**

The Emotionalist poet dwells in emotion, sits still, and withstands the discomfort of the surface feelings and impressions long enough for the moment of expression to arise. This may come in a blinding flash, under the force of stress, or after arduous introspection. It may be inspired by a random encounter or careful analysis. Where it comes from and how it arrives does not matter. That it arrives and finds its form does.

Instantaneity is the guiding creative principle of Emotionalism. The speed and immediacy of the capture and expression of emotions are crucial to the integrity and authenticity of their representation. The word must hit the page with the intensity of the lived experience—of the feeling. The words may need polishing or not; but even in their rawest form, their electricity is the scribe of the emotions.

Once they arise, emotions will move like rhythmic pulses of lightning and take the poet to unexpected destinations. The flash of insight, the horror of realization, the stab of pain, the soar of elation may seem to contradict the writer's thinking intent. This is the intuitive intrusion of the preconscious mind asserting itself. The creative force of Emotionalism is the invisible operation of the mind that judges the truth so well in each of us, but that we have such a hard time hearing.

In Emotionalist poetry, the preconscious blasts through the polarizations of the conscious mind. It is the grand unifier of perception and reality, the ruthless slayer of bicameral illusion, and the ultimate orator of the truth. This is equally true of painting, song, dance, performance, design and multimedia.

## **X**

Emotion prevails in art and beyond because emotion, not death, defines existence. Death is part of life, not a threat to it and not the terminus of it. Rather death is an adjustment; for every life tries on death more than once: vicariously

through others, personally through varieties of devastation, and with the brush of accident—all of it in and through the emotions. This is not simply like life, this is life.

The myth of death reigns in the culture, but is sovereign over neither life nor emotion. The prevalence of this mythology neither sways nor deters the Emotionalist cause and method. We are taught to fear death the same way we are taught to express fear in prejudice and projection. We unlearn these biases and defenses by dwelling with and in their source: the emotions.

The task is not simple. We are indoctrinated by sanitizing institutions that are pervasive, entrenched and proselytize avoidance. Yet even in the face of this onslaught, emotions can swamp the myths they peddle. Emotion dilutes the craving for fantastic oblivion, subsuming the death wish onto the palette of lived experience. There, death returns to its rightful place in the blend of the emotions, where by nature, as with light, we do not consciously perceive everything present on the spectrum.

## **XI**

We often need guides to penetrate remote but profound ranges of emotion that had not been visible to us before. Some of these teachers we know as shamans, others as shrinks, still others as artists, the best of which are Emotionalist. Their roles are one: masters and channelers of emotion. They know what death is. So

they turn us to face it. They show us fresh, new, hard emotion, make us confront it, and then show us that we can recognize and embrace death through emotion, not without it.

Understanding death as the climactic human emotion, the grandest gasp of life, the Emotionalist cries: "Death to the myth of dread!" This is the Emotionalist way: to purge the myth of the afterlife by plunging into living emotion. The Emotionalist basks in it, bathes in it, breathes it in, re-blends it with the pulsating mix that inhabits and circulates within the body. This is where and how the Emotionalist thrives: living in, with and through emotion. Vive emotion!