

“(8) in some sort of conceptual limbo,”

I like to go on long runs around Boston – no phone, no keys, no route, no plans, no time constraints. How many turns do I need to make in order to get away from where I’ve been? To feel lost, I cannot know exactly when I’ll return to what is familiar. Project this idea into conceptual space. How do I facilitate the shedding of the conceptual shell that I’ve been living under? How do I get out of my intellectual comfort zone? If my worldview determines what I can perceive in conceptual space, how do I create the conditions for orienting to a view that I’ve never seen before?

Let me babble as an experiment, and then I’ll investigate the babbling. I’m not even sure how to begin. Where am I? where do I stand? without rules, without structure, without clearly defined outcomes — what should I do? The not-yet-oriented, the not-yet-articulated — what is this space just before the concept is formed?

I don’t know exactly what day it is. I know that it’s 2022. I know that I am 24. I know that my heart is beating. I see colors and objects in my visual field. I am aware that thoughts are bubbling up into my awareness. It is an ordinary mid-morning. I am comfortably sitting in my apartment, staring into space as usual. The life expectancy in the United States is 76 years. It is reasonable to anticipate another handful of decades. Right now, my only responsibility is feeding myself and my only deadline is my death. I feel pure open space and maximum freedom. Will I ever feel this free again? My plans, hopes, and expectations have all been cast aside. Will I ever feel this lost again? I cannot risk breaking this tension as I fear never being able to get it back.

dear solitude,

it’s now just you and me. There is a blank piece of paper in front of us. What are you made of? show me my tendencies as I tinker with my mind’s eye — alone, paradigm-less, and institution-less. If individual cells can learn, let me be an individual cell. Allow me to reconnect with my autonomy and to see the possibilities of what could emerge. Allow me the time to find orientation and a sense of place in the conceptual landscape itself.

dear conscience,

remind me that there’s only death waiting for me on the other side and that now is the time to explore! such freedom! such excitement! such uncertainty! sit with me in this tension if exploring this landscape is all we will ever do. I’ve learned to trust you almost completely and that has taken time. this exchange that is occurring, right now, between selves and across time; this is precious to me. fill me daily with a playful lightness and the weight of the hourglass.

dear freedom,

where are you within the molecules of life? As I search for you, remind me of the absurdity of reciting my next line instead of taking in the view. Remind me to let it all go and to let myself feel. Place me in-between moments, on the cusp of whatever is unfolding. This one right here.

This one. And this one that is arriving. Suspend me just above the flow of thoughts and feelings. On this bridge between episodes of experience, there is freedom from expectation; there is mindfulness and memorylessness.

dear sensitivity,

are you my villain or my guiding star? forgive my ignorance and capacity constraints. I am not entirely these thoughts nor these feelings, and yes, these are all that I am and what I can primarily influence. By creating episodes in memory, I can nudge the weights of my thoughts and feelings. I will amount to nothing more than a finite set of mnemonics, and that's okay. In a world as complex as this one, perhaps my sensitivity to uncertainty is something almost close to a strength.

dear nature,

remind me that you are not only composed of black and of white. catch me as I fall, so I can sink into each and every pocket of your color. catch me as I fall, so we can fall together a thousand times over – coupled to a consistent sun, indifferent to the fluctuating seasons, absorbed in the ordinary tensions of a living, breathing entity. my creator, i could sit with you on this bridge to anywhere for all of time. why do i feel closest to you when i'm in the solitude of memorizing, reading, and writing? you've kissed my neck with an expiration date; keep my eyes open as you predictably kill me with each passing year. nurture me when I am hurting, iteratively and with care, so I can tend to you with each and every ounce of my life force.

dear reality,

I am certain that I don't want to live in a deluded fantasy. Let me stand beside you and on their shoulders, so I can gaze deeper into your eyes. There doesn't need to be anything mythological imposed upon nature; nature's beauty lies in the fact that she's real, pulsing in all that is visible and invisible. Gaze deeper into me as I gaze deeper into you. Is that actually what has always been pushing and pulling me, horizon-after-horizon? If so, I am a terrified, powerless idiot. Would that be okay? Reality? Dunk me in the coldest water until you are all that I can see.

dear keystones,

It seems like science people choose to allow it even though it remains frustratingly imprecise. It seems like art people choose to allow it even though it doesn't make total sense. When did it actually begin? Is it ending now or just beginning? It seems like I won't be able to know except in hindsight. What is emerging now? I can't be sure. Remind me to choose to allow it despite its lack of rigor. We can all die together, complicit in the crime of incompleteness.

dear governor of my worldview,

it's now just you and me. Is that you over there on the horizon? There is a vast open space between us, but I feel closer to you now more than ever before. How do you integrate over the episodes of experiences? Let me perturb your fabric with a finite set of episodes and watch as you reconcile, affecting me in the ensuing days, months, and years. Go ahead and change my mind as you synthesize and discern. Go ahead and expose me to new realms within the landscape. I am as available as ever to new ideas and perspectives as well as to non-new ones.

dear self,

Is it you that is regulating my inner models of all that I've encountered? At the boundary between fast and slow processing, perhaps mnemonics could guide me to where you are and where you are not. Am I updating the upper rungs of my bioelectric control system? Surely, I will not grow another limb from memorizing sets of ideas. But what is at the source of counterfactual thought? What is at the root of the plans and the narratives? That narrative-making, that through-line searching – is it you that attempts to connect the dots? There you are, deciding what I will decide, controlling from a distance how I will behave.

dear nervousness,

position me where you will so I can tend to you. You owe me nothing. I am your embodiment. I am your servant. Of course, I will get you more ketchup. It is you who has mediated every second of my entire experience. I am a consequence of what you've been exposed to and something more. What is the tension present during an expanding worldview? Every few weeks it seems I am back on this bridge, in an alert uncertainty, plotting what to explore next. How do you convert impinging episodes of experience into behavior and expressions of nervousness?

dear moderator,

How do you maintain alignment? How are you so consistent and attentive? I am an individual cell within a collective body that embodies Life itself. Keep me consistently aligned with this reality. To turn the head of the dog! To create a stimulus that triggers a coordinated action across the organism! To exert top-down control upon a collective of cells! To impinge one's self with a finite set of mnemonics is to impinge one's self with a finite set of ideas, concepts, and impressions that influences subsequent behavior. What are maps between the set of episodes that the organism has absorbed and the range of what it can express?

dear ambition,

What is your craving for certainty and coherence? I have a desire to isolate the phenomenon that does the isolating, to investigate the phenomenon that does the investigating. What is it that integrates and discerns across distinct impressions? You, over there on the horizon, brought me into this conceptual limbo – somewhere in-between mind, brain, and behavior. Can I suspend you above the flow, just for a second, to disentangle you from the beautiful complexity? This is just an epistemic activity. I am now moving on to my next imperfect project.

dear novelty,

We are sitting across from each other. There is one pen and there is a blank page in front of us. It's this moment that I was initially trying to describe... it's... it's I'm not sure... Keep me vigilant in this liminal space: tending to your every shift like a kitten exploring the outdoors for the first time. hold me still so i can listen to the messages from the past and present. I am here to integrate, to discern, to absorb, and to express.

dear scientist,

To understand what you have understood, discretize your worldview and then transfer it to me – tidbit-by-tidbit – so I can learn to make inferences like you can. To understand what has never been understood, I cannot trust you completely. I don't trust any of you completely. Place me into the unknown, over and over again, for research purposes, of course. From your view, standing on the hard-earned paradigms of the present, tell me: How do living things process information? How do they know so much from so little?

dear artist,

To feel what you have felt, chunk your worldview and then share it with me – piece-by-piece – so I can learn to express myself like you can. I want to hear you completely. To see what is unfolding in front of us, to feel what is unfolding inside of us — these are functions of the past iterations plus something else. Watch as your ideas reach back in time, processing the present in terms of what they've already seen, plus some additional freedom, plus some additional resource. There is no innocent eye.

dear vigilance,

Watch me flail as I attempt to stay afloat by grasping at what's within reach. When I begin to drown, tend to my emptiness, so I can stay afloat and swim back to land. Spoil me with inner strength and naïveté. Addict me to the feeling of overwhelming wholeness. Shake me awake, in the middle of the night, at even the slightest slither of superstition. Promise me you'll scream at me if I seem to be putting too much weight on an illusion, on a falsity, on a speck of self-importance.

dear status,

I am tired of this uncertainty. I want to know where I stand. With respect to what? I want to feel a sense of security, even if it's mostly false. I am tired of feeling alone in limbo. The solitude is weighing on me. Remind me to embrace. When I feel impatient, remind me to embrace. When I desire more structure, remind me to embrace. Take me to the moment just after exertion, to the space where water tastes sweet. I like the moments when water tastes sweet. Stretch me gradually into a more resilient form with an embrace as my only tool, weapon, and insight.

dear ignorance,

You are a collaborator in your own construction. What can you grow into? What can we grow into? You are living in the shell of your current worldview. If you eat this and chew on that, can you grow another conceptual shell? If you can alter your own worldview, then you can alter your future action sequences. If you can alter your future thoughts, then you can alter your future emotional states, and vice versa. Let yourself walk in limbo, attentive and available, and let the paths change beneath your feet. You are here to take it all in, with prudence, as it arrives, and at your own pace.

dear happiness,

remember there are others just like you, embodied with the same gift from Life. remind me to open my eyes and look at them – at each and every table, in each and every chair – they are crossing their own bridges, traversing their own liminal spaces. In this late and overly crowded

metro car, there are entire histories and futures unfolding from one episode to the next. you are not alone here – they are also absorbing and expressing in their own way and in their own local environments within the shared landscape. Together but separately, we are exploring this liminal space together.

dear fragility,

You are safe on this bridge. You are privileged to have nothing threatening you – only the natural limitations of your identity and the weights of choice. Allow the details to emerge from mutual listening, and even more mutual listening, between selves and across time and space. You are not meant to exist on firm footing. You are meant to explore, to discover, to be a little different. You were made to go after undefined things in uncharted territories with a curious humility and a ridiculous fervor.

dear isolation,

You belong in this time and space. For as long as there is an episode to experience, you belong in that episode of experience. From one moment to the next, remind yourself that you belong on that bridge between episodes of experience. you belong in the fog, in the pockets of uncertainty, in the spaces between what we know and don't know. You belong in the spaces between existing areas of the conceptual landscape, in the hunt for delicate re-framings and in the conceptual limbo beforehand.

dear grief,

You are afraid of losing the ability to feel surprise. You fear that you won't be able to go back to crawling if you begin to walk, babbling if you begin to talk. But there are infinitely liminal spaces left to explore! Lifetimes of them. Generations of them. You can savor this moment and then sink right into the next one. The process doesn't have to end here. There will be grief, but there is grief research to catch you every time.

dear restlessness,

What is your urge to go somewhere else? What is that itch to move from one place to another? Put it down in order to pick it back up. Can you begin anew by looking even more inward? What is your tendency to close the loop? To rush to an answer? To cling to a narrative? Do not rush! And overflow with nervousness! Let the paths continue to reveal themselves. You have this moment you're in and this arriving one to fall into — what else do you really need?

dear despair,

The pen is currently in your hand, and the feeling of the pen being in your hand is not an illusion. Your agency is not make-believe. Your ability to choose is the gift of Life. If it has narrowed, control what you give your attention to in order to broaden it again. This gift is embedded somewhere behind your eyes, in-between your ears, within your lips. It's somewhere between the bounds of your fingertips, the top of your head, the bottoms of your feet. It's within your waist and your knees and your elbows. It's somewhere within each of your cells and between their interactions.

dear contrarian,

That was my one window of time and space – and with yours? What will you do and not do? What will you say and not say? Give and not give? Show and not show? Allow and not allow? I've tried to assist, but don't let your memory be a burden. Burn all of your notes! Forget all of your lines! This is your time to improvise! What do you have with you in your moment of creation? I want you to get lost and then get even more lost! Or don't. Turn away from the familiar, over and over again, by turning directly into it and not into it. Or don't. It's entirely up to you and not up to you.

dear critic,

my heart pounded until it stopped. my mind thought until it stopped pulsing with blood. Here are my mnemonics. Here is my worldview. take it – mnemonic-by-mnemonic – if you so desire it. I lived within this shell and within these shoes. If you look at my assumptions, you will see that they were babbles. It was the best I could do at the time. It wasn't only me that babbled and the alternative was sending you nothing.

dear continuity,

I feel continuity. I looked into the space behind my eye sockets: that finite space that connected me to the rest of the universe — from fingertip to fingertip, from head to toe. I dug into the interval that I was placed in. I savored it. I pushed into it. I let go into it. There was only so much I could see. there was only so much i could feel. I babbled, aware that I was babbling, and willing to babble nonetheless.

dear coquet,

There were already too many topics to read before I got there. It was so short. It was so rushed. I tried to synthesize what I could, to leave the information slightly more consolidated than how I received it. If only I could keep it all in memory at the same time, perhaps a through-line would've appeared. you won't be able to tease all of it out, some of it is going to remain frustratingly out of reach, teasing you back, over and over again.

dear land,

remind me of this space just before! expand it, open it, let me explore its freshness. Expand this moment until it's the size of a landmass, let me feel all of its nuance. Expand this next moment as well. How did we get from one moment to the next? What is the structure that is preserved between episodes? What are the mappings between episodes of experience?

dear future self,

you are probably somewhere in the middle of – you don't know exactly. And that's okay. you don't have to understand the mechanism. Say thank you for the gift. And now it's your turn to nurture. For the love of life, these cells are all we are, we were, and ever will be. Flesh! Organic material! You are alive! Imagine! Create! Drink the fresh water of reality! We are sitting across from each other – you and me – and there are two pens. There is a blank page in front of us and it's... it's... I'm not even sure how to begin...