

The Human Slouch Towards Narrative

Brendan Hughes

I went to theater school and you go to school with the brain you have. I think that's what Donald Rumsfeld would have said. I went to theater school and I was gonna make a big difference I was going change the face of theater as we know it, nay entertainment, perhaps the third dimension; but no sooner do you arrive at theater school then you realize I will never have an original thought about theater, because they were all had already, in Russia, in the 1920s, by Vsevolod Meyerhold. Then the theme of the first year becomes I am fraud; and the theme of year two is, my classmates are frauds; and the theme of year three is, theater is fraud. Then you graduate and you think, I could have bought a boat. But instead you march hopefully out into the tundra of American nonprofit arts, which are a gold mine.

So my first day of directing class I show up very eager my Saturn hadn't returned yet, if you know what I mean, and we walk in all the lights are out, extremely dramatic, my professor sits at a desk kind of like this, she's got a pen, she has a pad, a book, half moon glasses and classical music is playing and nothing happens for like five minutes and I was like this is fucking genius. She sits there and then all start to go into, kinda get lulled into a trance and I'm thinking to myself these people already know I'm a fraud I haven't even opened my mouth. And then eventually she was like, "What did you see?" and then the lights come on, really like ahhhhhhhh!, because we're all terrified she says what do you see, my hand shoots up very eager, going to change the third dimension, you were a substitute teacher and were trying figure out the subject for tomorrow and you don't know it very well and she was like, "What did you see?" Another hand shoots up, perhaps mine. You're a doctor and found a disease that's going to wipe out a continent's worth of people and she was like, "What did you see?" I had played right into her hands, I had succumbed to the human slouch towards narrative. I had taken all the visual information and told myself a story to make sense of the whole thing.

Then once I learned this I became obsessed with narrative and it's everywhere it's like carbon, it's in everything. The human slouch toward narrative has five layers and they surround us all the time and they are the lens through which we see the world. Let's go on a tour, shall we? The innermost ring inside of everything is the story you tell yourself about about you; this is your mirror face, I choose to smolder. Birds do not suffer from this. Birds see themselves in the mirror and they're like I fucking hate that guy; many have met their demise were they're like I'm not turning this time you son of a bitch *kplllow*. But how wonderful that they have that lack of self awareness, there just must be such a joy to not be surrounded by the five layers of narrative.

The next layer is the story you tell the world about you; this is how you choose to dress; how you choose to drive; and your photo face. I have a friend who's a Canadian actor, he took me aside when we were at a wedding and with all these picture being taken he like, "Dude, roll the orange." pretend there's an orange under your chin and it gets rid of the waddle; perfect for men in their 30s who like nachos. So that's it, that's the story you tell the world about you; look world I'm the type of guy who loves to eat the tops off of muffins, that's who I am, that's how I do things.

Then there is the story the world tells you about you; this is profoundly insidious; all billboards; all movies you see; and all television shows. In 2004 there was a social scientist who put together a study where he had every single broadcast bit of television in 2004 and watched the whole thing and did a study on like what the

overarching message was, and the overarching message was you are the center of the universe and you're gonna need equipment, like toothpaste.

Then there's the story the world tells itself about you; this is gossip; and your credit score. And then there's a story you tell the world about the world; this is the art you make; your carbon footprint; and good deeds you do that no one ever finds out about. And so I had to graph it out - this is the human slouch toward narrative and it took me two days in Adobe InDesign to get the goddamn text to go in circles. *applause* Thank you, and it's still not perfect, I can only see where I fucked it up!

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