This is an Essay

We are all just a stroke or a lesion away from tasting music.

I have taken three English classes in my college career. I have initially hated every single one of them. All three of them are some of my favorite classes I have ever taken at the University. They are a complete mind-f\*\*k for me. The sciences are constant, unchanging, memorization. Basic to clinical and applied. That’s why I used to love them. They were black and white and always had an answer, like me. Now, I’m realizing they don’t know nearly as much as I once thought they did. Did you know the speed of light is no longer the fastest speed in the universe? There is no longer a foundation for physics.

I am obsessed with aging and Alzheimer’s disease. I am a healthy, young, fairly physically fit twenty year old. I am not afraid of dying . I am terrified of aging. All aspects of it. You can’t do s\*\*t about it either. You just fall apart. Your body works day in and day out every second every day of your life and then it just can’t do it anymore and you die. You. What the hell is that? A collection of cells and neurons that allow you to have thoughts and feelings and emotions? Thoughts. It’s crazy. Electrical impulses zipping around my head allow me to form thoughts. Do my neurons know that I’m thinking about them? That I’m on to their case? They can’t hide from me. I am them. They are me.

This reminds me of a typical Tuesday in my sophomore English class. I didn’t like the class by default. It was English. I was a science major. I had better things to do. So we were talking about identity. My GSI was pacing in front of the room like a caged leopard (descriptive of both her walking and her clothing) talking about all of this heavily philosophical, abstract stuff. I was trying really hard to listen because I liked her as a GSI and she deserved someone to be paying attention to her. Clearly, she was on the edge of a breakthrough that she wanted my classroom full of hungover 19 year olds to come to but instead she would have to spoon feed it to us. On the chalkboard she drew a bunch of circles. On one side was a big circle with a bunch of little circles in side of it. On the other side was a bunch, maybe 40 circles, all juxtaposed over one another. “Which one makes up your identity?” she posed a question I wasn’t expecting. She explained.

My search for authenticity.

World/Nation

Education

Myself

My Cells

None of it is.

Have you ever heard of synesthesia? It is a condition where your senses cross. People report “seeing colors.” I wouldn’t believe them if I wasn’t such a science minded person. But there’s a neurological background for that phenomenon. It is not a miracle. These people can be quite the savants in their respective crafts because they can do/see/smell/taste what the normal people can’t.

I’ve always had a great respect for people who can do what I can’t. Like believe in something. I really respect evangelicals in a weird, studied animal kind of way. That kind of deep, unquestioning faith in something has always eluded me. Their absolute committal to some deity or God, in every sense of the word, amazes me. Their blind faith is what anchors them and what they build themselves up around. I met a guy my freshman year of college who was one of those born-again type. I’ll admit that they also kind of scare me so I tend to shy away from them because I’m afraid they will sense my paganism (I wasn’t even baptized-not out of like an anti-religion way, it just never happened) and try to convert me. He wasn’t the type of guy to push his views on you, until one day we were studying at the library for our intro biology class together. It was the token evolution lecture. Honestly, I was not entirely vested in the material, I was just memorizing it for the exam. We were half-heartedly quizzing each other, when he said, “If that were true…” after looking at the phylogenic tree of life that traced all living organisms back to a single organism that no one actually knows what it is. My guard went up. Here we go. He waited intently for my reaction, the make or break values inquiry to see if our friendship would remain platonic. It would. I believe in evolution, I mean, evolution happened. Nothing to believe. I said this and that was about the last thing I said because this guy was crazier than anyone I had ever met in my life. He believed thinking lustful thoughts were sinful, everyone was born a sinner, everyone will betray you, and that at the core, no one is good. Babies are sinners? No. He was clearly bat sh\*t crazy. Despite how appalled I was at his beliefs, I was again oddly captivated by how intensely he believed this crazy sh\*t. I was actually kind of jealous of how sure of his beliefs he was. I mean it definitely sucked he could never like girls because he couldn’t think lustful thoughts, but damn, I admired his commitment.

I had a church stint. When I was in kindergarten up through about second grade, I attended The First Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale. It’s one of the crazier denominations if I’m not mistaken. At any rate, I loved the whole Sunday School thing and everyone seemed so nice and you got to shake hands with people in the pews when the pastor said to and there were always really good cookies afterwards. Then there was a scandal about the pastor embezzling money and the youth pastor was a child molester and I never went to church again. The allegations were true on both counts and I saw the ugly, political side of faith. Or at least of the church institution.

So, without faith to root myself in, I turned to the opposite side of the spectrum, education and academia, particularly the sciences. When I went to college, I decided to major in kinesiology, the study of human movement. It was great. I felt like I was learning tons. Parkinsons’s disease, Huntington’s disease, how the muscles contract, I memorized every muscle name, origin, insertion, and bone in the body.