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# **The necessary unpleasantness**

narrative of attempts to make money  
report with insights picked up in the process

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# INTRODUCTION

This collection is part of a series covering specific themes. The material includes notes and essays. Some of the pieces were written for an audience years before I published them, and other pieces were originally only written as reminders to myself.

Available titles, in both digital and printed formats, include: *In the grip of heretics – or, The Christian; Not a table, a dog or a pencil; The real, or non-real purpose of our existence; As long as you remain standing; The necessary unpleasantness; The adult life; On writing and the writer; Exile; Thirteen minutes on a Saturday night; Time doesn't really fly.*

More information is available from [ASSORTEDNOTES.COM](http://ASSORTEDNOTES.COM).

## **Who is the writer?**

Born on 29 June 1971 in Pretoria, in the Republic of South Africa.

Went to South Korea in June 1996 to work as an English teacher.

Worked in Johannesburg for six months in 1998.

Departed for Kaohsiung, in southern Taiwan, in January 1999.

## **What is this collection of notes about?**

Part narrative of a roughly 20-year period when I grappled with what I regarded as the “necessary unpleasantness” of trying to make money, and partly a report with insights I picked up along the way.



\* \* \*

On Sunday, 7 December 2014, I wrote:

*A strange thought recently occurred to me: to position myself as someone who gives advice on the subject of making money from home. I even thought of building up, like hundreds of other so-called internet marketers, a mailing list of people to contact every time I write a new piece on the subject, or when a new product comes on the market that might be useful to my readers.*

*Why shouldn't I do it? Because it is a tainted subject? Because some sellers of information on how to make money from home are common criminals?*

*Okay, it's not really a complex matter. If someone had asked me ten years ago if I would like to one day be in a position to give practical advice to people on how to make a little extra money, I would have delivered a monologue in the living room without a moment's delay on how much better the world would be as a result.*

*I don't even have to make money with it – 99% of the time it can just be my contribution to helping other people. I mean, don't I already have many years of personal experience? Have I not gained a truckload of knowledge, enough to do something like this? Why should I stand on the sideline if I can provide advice to people on this topic – or warn them what not to do, or serve as an example of how to not go about doing things?*

\* \* \*

The first piece dates from May 1996 when I was waiting in my older sister's apartment in Arcadia, Pretoria, to go to South Korea. I was desperate for the opportunity in Korea to work out: I needed to earn money, and I needed my life to go in a certain direction.

The second piece was written in March 1998, after almost two years in Korea. Shortly after I had noted another opinion in April, I returned to South Africa.

The following pieces of text date from the eight months that I mostly spent in Johannesburg in 1998, before I came to Taiwan.

The rest of the material was written in Taiwan between 1999 and 2017.

## **Basically a tramp**

Monday, 27 May 1996

I have now been living the life of a drifter for thirteen and a half months: little money, no income, creditors who try to pick up my scent, no home of my own, belongings in different places around the country, and no satisfactory answer to the difficult questions at social events.

“What,” an interested person may ask, “have you learned from the life you’ve lived these last thirteen and a half months?”

The answer is simple – money. Without money, you have nothing, and you are no one. Without money, you cannot conform your life to the style and standards of the community; consequently, you are not taken seriously. Without money, you are depended on and left to the grace and mercy of others; therefore, you have to adapt your lifestyle and your personality (or curtail your lifestyle and personality) in order not to upset your protector and provider.

The world is not made for people with no money. Magazine articles are not written for people with no money. Without money, your dreams remain ... just that. Without money, you can’t really improve yourself. You can’t register for a course in interior design or gourmet cooking because you can’t pay for it, you don’t have an address, and you don’t have any facilities.

Without money, you are basically ... a tramp.

## One single factor

Tuesday, 24 March 1998

Everything I've always said about freedom, financial debt, my own ideals, my aspirations, my dreams, achieving my potential, living as I'd like to live, crystallise around a single, essential prerequisite. I have seen enough, experienced enough, and read and heard enough to understand how important power is: The power to make choices and act on those choices. "Kto kgo?" asked Lenin. "Who (masters) whom?"

If you don't want to play the role of the servant, the debtor, the person in self-imposed economic exile, for the rest of your life, stop running and start working, purposefully, effectively, with a single goal in mind: to acquire what will make you free – from creditors, bailiffs, poverty, and an insignificant existence, and free of economic masters who want to rule your life.

If I want to survive, in the first place, and then be able to get more out of life than mere survival, and to have the ability to exercise my choices, I'd have to work on obtaining the one resource that will make these things possible for me: financial prosperity. That's all that remains.

Easier said than done? Not if it has taken your entire life so far, years of poverty, shame, embarrassment, and frustration to get to the point where you realise that this is the primary means to so much you hope to achieve.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sunday, 19 April 1998

What I have learned is that money is more important than many other things in life. The more you have, the better. In the world I inhabit it is every person for himself. There is little mercy for the poor guy, and many rewards for the rich man or woman.

I'm not interested in the illusion of security promised by companies and corporations. People build their homes on foundations that are provided by, or are on loan from other people or businesses, only to find out one day to their shock and grief, and that of their families, that the foundations could crumble overnight. Why should I commit myself to such a world if I already have this knowledge, and have already experienced the shock, grief and humiliation?

\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, 27 May 1998

It's my fourth week back in South Africa. [...] What I found out so far confirms what I suspected. In fact, if you are serious about making money – what I figure most people are not, there are more than enough books available about everything you need to know.

In short, if you believe money gives you power, and you're desperate enough to get this power, the road you have to take is not some secret, known only to a blissful minority, over-grown footpath. It's a well-traced route, but one I believe most people – who have the potential to take it – don't opt for, for one reason or another.

One problem is getting a project going and developing it to such a point where it makes money you need at least a few months. [...]

Fact is, you can't go into a kitchen and think you're going to cook up a masterpiece just because you're hungry. Even the best chefs need certain things: the right ingredients (money), a good recipe (methods, concrete plans or specific projects), and time – if the chef doesn't have enough time, the final result will either be raw, or it will simply fall apart.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Disillusionment and new plans

Sunday, 8 November 1998

What a year ...

Four and a bit months in Johannesburg. What have I done so far? I have taken chances. I have done things, and am still doing things that I said I would never do. I moved to Johannesburg to do an office job. I took my boss/friend up on his offer to stay in the servant's quarters on his property. I do sales ... And what do I have? Nothing.

I keep myself busy "productively" – that's all I can say. I read. I write. I can't afford to go to a restaurant. Even if movies were free, I wouldn't be able to get there. Even if there were a hundred women who posed possibilities for a man, it would only be of academic value because if they don't live within easy walking distance of my house, I can't meet up with them. And even if I had a car, I don't have any money. I live in a backyard room like a student. I don't even have a proper radio!

Does it sound like I just complain, while so many people are worse off than me? Fuck that. I have my own agenda. If I were happy with what I have simply because so many people are worse off than me, it would be an insult to those people because even they want a better life, not to mention that they would think I was an idiot if I didn't want something better for myself!

I need money. I need a car. I need a computer. I need a decent place to live. All of these things are beyond my immediate reach in South Africa at this stage. Maybe in five years' time ... That's it, I'm going to Taiwan. And I'm not coming back to South Africa until I can properly take care of myself.

-----

[Explanation: The South African guy who had met me at the airport in Seoul with the Korean man more than two years previously was in Taiwan by this time. We had exchanged a few e-mails. He had told me about his life in Taiwan, and I had told him about my situation in Johannesburg. By late October, he had offered to lend me money for a plane ticket to Kaohsiung – an offer I initially refused.]



\* \* \* \* \*

Wednesday, 2 December 1998

One [option for someone with my background – middle class, tertiary education] is Foreign English Teaching: one-year contracts; good cash flow; you don't need to live on debt and credit; relatively good living conditions; you don't need a car; you don't need to have a good credit record to get to a telephone; you live in a foreign country with a different culture than your own; life experience of a different kind; and finally, financial empowerment.

A perfect life? No. In more ways than you can count on one hand, it's a rotten life. But it is a life in which you can empower yourself – in more than one area.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Workers from ancient times

In the Middle Ages and antiquity, how did the powers of the day retain the labourers who worked their land?

Slavery was one way. Feudalism entailed a relationship between the landowner and the ones who worked the soil where the latter were forced to work in exchange for the landowner's protection. There was also indentured servitude. With all these systems the labourers were tied to the land where their labour was required by laws that favoured the landowner, and by measures such as tax, which kept the tillers of the land poor and dependent on their masters.

How are people today bound to the "land" where their labour or service is required? By amongst other things cheap credit and long-term pay-back options: monthly income minus payments on products that are already in use – like a new living room set, or a car, that leaves the average citizen with insufficient money to "get away".

Of course, many do get away, and many never fall in. There are drop-outs, criminals, and people who wander around in other countries for years earning money in any way they can. As long as a certain percentage of the population can be bound to the "land", though, the rest can be written off – or used at a later stage, like the drop-out who becomes a musician or a writer and who then provides entertainment or comfort for those in bondage.

It is important to note that this situation is fluid. People make their own choices at the end of the day. So I'm not implying large-scale manipulation, or sinister behind-closed-doors planning ... no wait, manipulation does occur. As many people as possible have to be reached, and "turned" ...

~ From the Purple Notebook

## Exile nine

Tuesday, 20 November 2001

Six years have passed since I learned that it matters more that you *have* money than how you *make* money. This brilliant insight struck me about a week after a chain letter landed in my mailbox, which, in theory, could have delivered X amount of money each month into my bank account if I had followed the instructions. It dawned on me like a blessing that I didn't have to be in a salaried situation to pay my monthly rent, and to buy a new pair of jeans from time to time.

This idea corresponded well with my lack of enthusiasm to fit into the conventional course of business where you go to university, after graduation send out your resume hoping that you can soon start your life as an adult, and then after a year or three marry the person with whom you're sleeping at that point. I wanted to continue with the type of life of which my so-called student days were but a foretaste – a life filled with acquiring knowledge, sleeping late, going to the library, spending afternoons in second-hand bookstores, and most importantly, the freedom to grow my beard no matter how bad it looked.

I was 24 when I decided to come to Asia. I knew it would give me the right to inform anyone who wanted to know that I am an “English teacher in Korea”. I also knew it meant that I could delay a little longer the possibly inevitable point when I would have to trade my freedom for a more conventional life, and a clean-shaven face.

So I continued my search for an answer to the Big Question: What is it that this guy wants to do with his life?

Over the course of the next two years I came up with a few ideas. I wanted to live in England or Germany for a few months, or a year. I wanted to return, like a McArthur of the Philippines with trumpets blaring, to the lovely university town of Stellenbosch. And I wanted to write.

Shortly before the end of my time in Korea (May 1998), I added a few ideas to the list. Two of these was that I wanted to commit myself to something or someone, and I wanted to belong somewhere. Other ideas that were eventually added included that you need one thing to focus on, and that half of everyone's life is about the discovery of this one thing; that my position in society was by default that of a homeless man; that middle-class suburbia would not swallow me whole if I accidentally lost my footing for a moment; and that power is the difference between people who ultimately make it, and those who fall by the wayside.

Back in South Africa – where I was supposed to commit and belong – I considered the whole concept of a career. I discovered, in not the first brilliant insight of my life, that I did not necessarily have a problem with the idea of a career. The problem was that the profession had to be such that I could utterly and completely devote myself to it.

Shortly afterwards I bought some books on writing at a Hospice Shop for R1 each, and I took my writing ambitions and my fresh insight to new heights by declaring that this would be my career – I would be a writer! More than that, writing would be my business. I would combine my writing ambitions with business acumen. I wouldn't just write what I wanted to write. I would identify a market, and then produce the type of material publications like magazines needed to fill their pages.

Five and a half months later I was standing on a street corner in a city in the south of Taiwan, contemplating the concepts of freedom and independence. Since the ability to think amazingly clear did not catch me offside anymore, I wasn't surprised when I came to the realisation after only a few minutes that freedom and independence were, for me, empty ambitions. I realised the attraction of these two concepts had fundamentally to do with my desire not to have any debt – to not be obliged anymore to drag a financial burden behind me like a rotting carcass. (And of course it was also related to the old desire to grow a beard, even if I looked

like a tramp.) The attraction started to lose its lustre when I realised that perfect freedom and independence would imply that you have nobody to care about, or for whose life you are responsible. This, I knew, was at odds with my true ambitions. I wanted to love people, and I wanted to one day be part of an intimate group of people for whom I would accept co-responsibility.

Thus it came that long cherished ideals bit the dust.

It was in my 24th year on this planet when I had the insight that I mentioned at the beginning of this ninth part of what was never supposed to be such a long “exile” series. I am now thirty years old. It’s 20 November 2001, 25 minutes past 6 in the morning. The sun has already dropped its first rays over the cold winter landscape of Fengshan City. A puppy is warming up my right foot, and a cigarette is burning out in a new ashtray. The people at the local McDonald’s are getting ready to chuck the first cholesterol-laden breakfast foods into fryers sizzling with fresh oil as I type these words, and I have to work in a second round of sleep so I can look intelligent enough for my 21-year-old Chinese teacher at one-thirty this afternoon.

I am friends these days with people from exotic places like Krugersdorp, Kimberley, Vereeniging and Stellenbosch. I work fourteen hours a week at three different schools, and I earn a few thousand Taiwan dollars extra each month by writing short pieces for a local publisher of ESL magazines. I have completed two book projects this year. I can play Battle Hymn of the Republic on my keyboard, and at least six or seven chords on my two guitars. And if I have to, I can also play a tune on the recorder or on one of my two harmonicas.

The question that hangs in the air like a bad smell on a windless winter morning is, however, still the same: What do I do with my life?

\* \* \*

A lovely morning of rest – filled with feverish dreams of murder, and kisses on blood-red lips of girlfriends who were never called back – has, as usual, brought new insight. I already knew that I wanted to write. The real question is thus not what I want to do, but what type of writing I want to produce.

A secondary question has to do with something I touched on in Exile Number 8, which is that being a writer is sometimes similar to the profession or vocation of being a missionary. The missionary, who believes he or she is called to preach a particular message cannot be a full-time bank manager and exercise the calling of being a missionary on a full-time basis. The missionary needs a trade, something with which they can earn money while they spend most of their time, and focus most of their attention on the sometimes time-consuming activities related to their mission. Whatever the missionary's trade – early church leader Paul was a tentmaker, for instance, it will always just be a practical measure to ensure that they and their families don't go hungry, and that they have gas in their car most of the time. (If they are supported by a wealthy suburban congregation, their situation will naturally be slightly different.) The same can be said of the political activist whose first priority is his or her political activities, but who might do something else to put food on the table. (Except, once again, if this person is kept alive with money from Norway or Sweden ... did I choose the wrong calling?)

The first question I must therefore answer is about the genre in which I want to write, and also what issues I want to address. The second question, which for the sake of successful pursuit of my calling has to be carefully considered, is what I want to do on a daily, but part-time basis to ensure that I have a regular income.

\* \* \*

A thing that has become increasingly clear is that not all professions have the same value in the labour market. And if certain work or certain skills are not in demand, chances are that you will not be well compensated for whatever you are doing in this area. It also does not necessarily provide the person in this profession a status in the community with which he or she is content.

So, if after years of observation of your unique personality, and careful consideration of the available career opportunities you come to the point where you have no choice but to accept that what you want to do is not in high demand, you need to decide what other, related options might be acceptable to you. You also need to carefully consider your idea of a proper income, and how important status in the community is for you.

The alternative is reducing to hobby status (for lack of a better word) the interest or aptitude or skill you would have liked to focus on as a professional (or even as a calling). You would also have to be satisfied devoting most of your time and attention – indeed your daily life – to a profession that was not your first choice from the start; a profession you would probably never be able to practice with passion or commitment.

### **Question one**

To make a long story simple, I want to write what I want to write. I mean, I'm not in the process of becoming a bank manager or a school inspector. The simple reason is because I am pursuing a life in which I give expression to my creativity on a daily basis, without making apologies or asking permission to do so. What value would it have if I spent all my time producing the kind of material that is in demand, or for which I know there is a market, and limited my creativity in the process in terms of vocabulary and in the construction of sentences that had already been laid out ahead of time like recipes?

That being said, to write articles and other material I would not have written if I didn't know I would get paid for it is still better than to earn that hundred or a thousand rand in a profession that doesn't require any creativity. So I'm still willing to write material according to set guidelines because the business that will buy the material wants it that way, but I'm not prepared after all this time to primarily focus on this type of writing.

To write what I want to write ... the whole theory of the middle class ... isn't it time again to go to bed?

\* \* \*

I want to write about life, about people, relationships, history, religion, society, politics, culture, and about how we manage to get out of bed every morning and eat the exact same cereal as the previous day, and hundreds of days before that. I don't want to be bound to a specific theme and style because the taste of the consumer who can afford to buy books and other reading materials dictates it thus at the present time.

I want to write what I believe has to be written, even if I am the only one to think so. I want to give my honest opinion on issues that emerge in my own life – issues that many other people will certainly recognise. I want to be so presumptuous as to think I have things to say that nobody else is saying, or perhaps not saying in the way I am saying it. I want to share my insights with other people, even though I won't be the first, last, or only writer who has these specific insights. I want to write, and write, and write even more, and keep writing until someone says, "Have you read what this guy has written?" And then I want to write some more ...

Writers write poems, short stories, essays, novels, sermons, speeches, plays, scripts, songs ... or a bit of everything. Writers write about things that have happened, things that are currently underway, and things that might happen (if no one takes their writing seriously). Writers write fiction and non-fiction. They write to their friends, family,



acquaintances, to their enemies, and even to strangers. They write for adults, and they write for children. They write for people they met yesterday, and for people they will never meet even if they become famous. They sometimes only write for people in their inner circles, and sometimes they write for people in countries they will never visit.

I don't want to limit myself to any genres or markets. But if I am forced to be more specific, I would say that I will mainly write in Afrikaans, for now, for my peers in South Africa, but also in countries like Taiwan and England, and France and America.

I want to express my ideas about life and about how I think things are and how I think they're supposed to be in pieces that people will read for various reasons. Maybe they'll read it because they're looking for something to pass the time, or because they want to learn something, or because they are looking for inspiration or because they want to consider alternative views on a specific matter.

It is however important for me to write for more than just other people's entertainment. I want to appoint myself as a voice of reason, even if it takes twenty years to convince other people to listen.

## **Second question**

To want to write is not a simple ambition like wanting to become a doctor. With the latter, you go to university, memorise so many things over a period of six years that your mind becomes wobbly, and then you can make good money and everyone will respect you and call you "Doctor". To be successful as a writer takes a lot more time and more mental and emotional instability (at least in some cases). It also requires a part-time job that can keep your cash-flow going while you gather some followers who think what you have to say has its place in the Annals of Ideas and Opinions (and perhaps also a place on bookshelves stacked with short stories and poetry).

Life is not perfect. (Would a perfect life be in full colour? Black and white is so much neater.) A perfect life would surely mean that each of us would have two or three versions of our lives to be able to do everything we want to do. All of us would also need our own personal time machine, so that if we learn some important lessons, or – can you imagine this? – if we inadvertently commit a tiny blunder, we can go back and try again. Truth is, not even rich people’s lives are perfect. (Can Bill Gates, for example, suddenly become a hippie and grow his beard?) We all make mistakes. We miss opportunities. We mess up. We make decisions and we do things that make other people shake their heads and ask each other, “What the heck does this guy think he’s doing with his life?” And most of the time we’re too embarrassed to answer, or we simply don’t feel like explaining.

By this time I have certainly driven home the point that I need an income that can keep me alive while I write, so I don’t need to write for money.

Since I completed my tertiary studies, I have only had two jobs: One was to be a glorified secretary and seller of subscriptions for a friend’s environmental journal; the other was to teach children, and every now and then an adult in North East Asia to speak English.

The latter is not a job over which I’m terribly excited. Sometimes I’m embarrassed when I’m standing in a classroom thinking how ridiculous I must look when I swing my arms, or when I say the word “name” for the fifteenth time while pressing my lips together to show your mouth should be closed when pronouncing the “m”. It’s not a job that offers much security, and there is no housing subsidy or pension. Being an expat English teacher in Taiwan or elsewhere in Asia also does not give you status comparable to what engineers or journalists or successful business people enjoy. However, teaching a few English classes every week does generate an income. You either earn enough money to buy ...

[... a new printer? A wig? A bus ticket out of town? As if I were suddenly overcome by sleep or boredom, yet another attempt at writing an essay bit the dust.]

## What I see

Friday, 4 July 2003

I always believe everybody has dreams that extend beyond the life they currently live. And I reckon that one or two hundred thousand rand would go a long way to realise these dreams. I further believe that one or two years in a place like Taiwan is the ideal way to muster that type of capital.

What I tend to forget is that the life of an expat is often rootless, and that many people prefer a different kind of life. These people have homes – spaces they have customised and equipped over many years to be exactly how they want it. They have friends and maybe family that live in the same city, or in a neighbouring town. They have pets. They have pension funds they've been working on for years. And they dream of having kids – if they haven't already started a family, and to have these children grow up in an environment familiar to them, the parents. It is a life about which these people often complain, but it's also a life in which they feel safe. It is a life they reckon they can sustain, and which they hope they can continue living until they hit 60 or 65 and that pension starts paying out.

The fact is not everyone knows what they would do with a hundred or two hundred thousand rand between when they return from a place like Taiwan and when they reach retirement age. People tend to choose what they know – even if it means you have to punch your timecard, the same time every morning, for forty years.

\* \* \* \* \*

Friday, 18 July 2003

The past few weeks I've said a lot about the so-called adult world and how I view myself as immature in this world (or have done so, until now). I want to change this to the "world of money". I am by far mature enough to take my place as an adult in this so-called adult world.

The real problem has always been my ignorance, and consequent fear of the world of money. My fate, until now, was sealed because I didn't want to take the "easy" way of just getting a job somewhere – or at least trying to find one. However, it is non-negotiable that one needs money. But what to do when you don't want a regular job or a formal career, and you don't know how to make money in any other way in South Africa? Ignorance, fear, Korea, then Taiwan ...

What I've realised the past three weeks though is that the dreaded World of Money can be investigated, studied and mastered. In the end, it's like most things that make you nervous – if ignorance is replaced by knowledge, fear disappears.

Two words:

FREELANCE  
ENTREPRENEUR

\* \* \* \* \*

## Take responsibility for yourself in 2018

Thursday, 31 July 2003

The desire to maintain my creative independence is what I've held up in recent years as the reason (or excuse) why I should stay in Taiwan. "In South Africa," so I always recite the line to myself, "one must be prepared to give up your creative independence if you accept a job at the average institution or corporation." This is how it works most of the time and, I have always believed, how it will work in my case as well, if I wanted to make sure I lay my hands on a sufficient monthly quota of survival coupons.

In the past few weeks I have come to realise that it is precisely this need for creative independence, and above all, the ideal to be master of my own time, that would make me not only capable of earning enough struggle coupons every month, but indeed ... roll the drums, crack the whip ... to become rich.

To get rich, it is first and foremost important that you want to be rich, that you must know why you want to be rich, and that you need to know what the alternative is to financial well-being. Then a creative nature that will enable you to come up with ideas, and a stubborn belief that you can, shall and must succeed, are essential characteristics. Lastly, if you are the master of your own time, seven days a week, there is only one thing standing in your way to becoming financially independent – you.

If I am financially independent a year from now, or three years or five years from now, it would be the result of a series of images that had formed in my head, decisions I had made on how to turn the images into reality, and steps I had carried out at the right time and in the right ways. If I am not financially independent in a year's time or in three years' time or even five years from now, it would be because I did not

follow up the images in my head with the right decisions and the right actions.

I, now, am responsible for my success one year and three years and five years from now. Just like I have to hold myself from one and three and five years ago accountable for the good and bad results of what I currently call my life.

The Universe is on my side? I think that might just be possible. The time is now. I am the father of my children three or five years from now. I am the son of a father and a mother who will benefit from my success. I am the brother of two sisters who will also reap value. I am a man from whose success many other people, who are now not even aware of my existence, will benefit.

I must take responsibility right now for my success one and three and fifteen years from now.

## Creative, fulltime

Monday, 4 August 2003

Why were the Beatles “larger than life”? Because they did what they liked and what they believed in. And because they spent most of their productive time on it, their abilities were exponentially sharpened.

The fact that their creations – their particular type of music – was in demand at the time certainly helped. But the fact remains that they engaged themselves, on a full-time basis, with that which they felt most strongly about, that in which they truly believed. As a result, they reached a level of artistic ability any talented, creative person can achieve if he or she busy themselves with what they like most, for the greater part of what is considered a normal workday.

Proper marketing and the talents of other people also played a pivotal role in their commercial success. But if the individual members of the group had to put in eight hours a day at some factory in Liverpool and then work on their music in the evenings – after dinner and a little TV, not even the best wizards of marketing would have been able to sell their necessarily more mediocre work to the masses.

The Beatles were thus as extraordinary as they had become because they succeeded in an ideal synthesis – creative excellence and commercial success.

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[For readers who insist on technical accuracy it should again be emphasised that the Beatles’ story worked as well as it did because what they had spent most of their time on with such passion and enthusiasm had commercial value.

Unfortunately, it doesn’t work for everyone to spend the biggest part of a “working day” on that for which we save our greatest passion and conviction because we still need money.



And if what we spend most of our time on – masterpiece or no masterpiece – cannot occasionally be traded for cash, we still need to do something else for the sake of physical survival.]

## **Money and art**

Saturday, 20 September 2003

I have no problem exchanging art for money. If an artist earns a million rand with his art, good for him. It's much better than having to earn that money by spending a lifetime making permanent butt impressions on office chairs.

I also have no problem with having my own writing published. My point is simply that I don't want to be dictated by so-called market forces what and how I write – which certainly is a departure from my earlier attitude of think like a businessman, create like an artist.

What this means is that I'd rather not be dependent on my writing for food and rent money. If I do finally manage to produce something that a magazine deems fit to publish, fair and well; then I won't have to sell so many of my hours to some business that month. However, what I produce from the anguish and ecstasy of my reality experience is too important for me to see it become just another product to be weighed on the scale of the Great Industrial Machine, like fruit or firewood or souvenirs at a tourist spot.

## **The (real) value of money**

Monday, 22 September 2003

Many people want to be rich for the comfort and security it provides. Many people also want to be rich because they think it will make them feel important, and appear more important to others.

Financial wealth is also conducive to the average person, whose life is anchored in the ever-changing cultural quagmire of the socio-economic middle class, being more confident of his or her identity. Money enables a person to acquire the badges the individual needs in order to appear to the world in a certain way. In this way, the individual can tell other people: “This is who I (think I) am, who I want to be, and how I would like to be seen. Here is the visible evidence.”

Wealth is thus seen (perhaps unknowingly) as an easy way to define identity, and continually confirm it – especially by people who do not have a lot of money, and who spend a significant amount of time in environments where money plays a prominent role in the development and display of identity.

### **... and an academic note**

The above is what can be called an “answer” in the way I described a few pieces back. In this case, the initial questions would be: Why do so many people want to be rich? Is it just about the security of knowing you will have enough to eat today, and tomorrow, and possibly even next month? Or are we also driven by other instincts or motivations?

Most of my so-called answers are nothing more than personal theories. My method is also not terribly scientific. For example, I’ll think: “It appears to me that [Person X] is still not convinced of her own identity.”

Then, in the specified case, I'll continue dusting or wiping away stains on the floor until the next thought enters my mind: "Strange, she's always been overly attracted to money."

Then, as I'm standing there with a cleaning cloth and a bottle of lighter fluid in one hand and a lit cigarette in the other, the moment of insight strikes: "Is the one thing possibly connected to the other?"

With the latter, I'll have formulated a QUESTION. Upon identifying the most reasonable and likely ANSWER, I can formulate a THEORY.

Then I will sit down at the dressing table, open my notebook and write something like: "Many people want to be rich for the comfort and security it provides. Many people also want to be rich because they think it will make them feel important ..."

## Not desperate enough to be rich

Tuesday, 28 October 2003

I am not desperate enough to get rich. And I don't mean to say that this desired state should arrive right about at the moment I withdraw the last small change from my inner pocket. No, this desperation should arrive on a plate filled to the brim with actions one could take, items one could purchase, and improvements one could only manifest with some real hard currency.

There can be no doubt that this is the time to *be* rich. If you're not a terrorist, you can enjoy almost unrestricted travel anywhere in the world. The well-to-do man or woman can also embark on endless shopping sprees, accumulating a range of consumer products to indulge their every fancy. They can naturally also attract members of the opposite gender, or whatever gender they prefer.

It's fair to say I don't follow fashion, and I'm no devoted addict of consumerism. But in case sudden wealth befell me, I would purchase myself some shirts and maybe a new pair of trousers (my best pair is adorned with multi-coloured splashes of paint). I would also buy myself a new computer, and a new bicycle. And then I would fly to Japan, economy class, despite the fact that I'd be able to afford a place in a more elevated hierarchy. Going on a vacation like that would also mean that I will indeed have reached a degree of freedom of movement hitherto only imagined in afternoon naps. I could also fly home for a week to stock up on decent toilet paper, Steers garlic sauce, and some magazines where I don't need to consult two English-Chinese dictionaries just to understand the title.

This is not only the time to be rich, it is also the time to *become* rich. Technology previously beyond the reach of common people is, in a lot of cases at least, now as easily obtainable as a new shirt, and not necessarily more expensive.

It has become a mantra that I dutifully recite to all within earshot that it is now more unnecessary than ever to submit your labour to the highest bidder, and to submit your freedom of dress, speech, thought and movement to corporate authorisation. Information on specific methods, skills and tricks are widely available to the corporate serf who is planning an entrepreneurial breakout, or the odd rebel who has so far been untouched by the fascist claws of corporate institutions.

To seek out and find this information is one thing, though. The virgin entrepreneur also needs to re-educate themselves. They would need to carefully analyse, reconsider and change where necessary their ways of thinking about things. They need to understand that doing “free creative work under one’s own control” requires self-discipline, ambition, and confidence in one’s own abilities and talents – and an honest appreciation of one’s weaknesses. It requires of the would-be successful entrepreneur to work long, hard hours – almost like in a corporate job, but hopefully at home, in clothes ten times more comfortable than a suit, with music of their choice filling airwaves previously ravaged by the screams and whines of corporate authority figures.

All of these useful little titbits are not what I intended to state in this particular piece. I merely wanted to create a platform to express my opinion that I am not yet desperate enough to be rich. I am adequately aware of weaknesses and strengths I could have as an entrepreneur. I am also very stoic – in case that comes in handy (I eat cereal even when I have canned tuna in my food box), and the fact that I’m reluctant to socialise with people doesn’t mean I can’t call it self-discipline.

What I need though, is the desire that burns inside a man returning to city life after years in the desert, knowing that he can have anything and everything he’s been missing if he could just lay his hands on some local currency. That – is what I need.

## Money is important

Sunday, 3 November 2003

To say money is important is the same as to say “It’s cold” when you’re standing stark naked in two feet of snow in sub-zero temperatures. Both are absurd understatements that disregards the severity of the actual situation.

The importance of money cannot and should never be underestimated. But to stop at the realisation of the importance of money would be to only acknowledge half the truth. To remain caught up in the singular pursuit of money when you’re not engaged anymore in a daily struggle for survival is to be an ignorant former serf, too recently released from his servitude to know any better.

I can go one step further. Being in a position to afford more noble and/or creative pursuits in terms of both time and money, and to *not* pursue them, is indeed to be the most pathetic class of serf imaginable – one in seemingly perpetual mental servitude. And this applies not only to “those rich folks up on the hill”. It is equally valid for the average citizen who wastes his or her life while *in actual fact* being capable of a life worthy of being called human.

## Money and creative freedom

Wednesday, 14 January 2004

Money for free, creative writing? This literary project as part of the commercial marketplace?

My position can be summed up in two phrases: The Creative End Product and the Creative Process.

If commercial acceptability is the primary motivation during the creative process, the end product is not free expression. It's a different matter altogether if commercial acceptability of the end product is not even considered during the creative process, but the end product still seems to have some commercial value.

If you as a writer are known to be critical of corporations, shameless profiteering, and the surrender of creative freedom at a "reasonable" price, what are you if you then turn around and submit your creative work to a corporation primarily interested in financial gain? Even more so when you submit it to an agent of this corporation who claims the right to make changes to your work in order to bring it more in line with the values of the corporate "sponsor", and to make the product more enjoyable in their estimation, and therefore a potentially more profitable product.

It is ultimately about honesty. It's about honouring the reputation you have established for yourself, in both word and deed.

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[Note: There are publishers – businesses that have to keep an eye on the bottom line for their survival – that regard certain literary material as more than just marketable products. It may be that these publishers serve a certain political agenda, and changes they suggest would simply make the final product more digestible to the potential reader; changes that would



enhance the literary quality of the end product rather than water down the content or message in order to sell more copies. A case, thus, where the agenda of the publishing company is compatible with that of the writer for whom creative integrity is more important than financial success.]

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On Friday morning, 23 April 2004 at 11:26 in the morning, I once again contemplated the possibility of fully rehabilitating my person as a member of the suburban middle class in South Africa. Alas, I thought, my only hope would be to sneak into a middle-class suburb under cover of darkness, to appear to the community the next morning in full camouflage as one of them.

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# **Money, the labour market, and how you function**

Wednesday, 30 June 2004

If I had money this past decade, or if I had money more often, and in greater quantities ... if I could have been in a position during the last decade of my life where a steady income would have been unnecessary, it would have radically influenced my process of self-discovery and self-definition.

One possibility: If my family were wealthy, and my parents made it clear early on in my teenage years that I will receive a substantial sum of money every year, starting from my eighteenth birthday, just because I am so lucky to have been born as their son, I would probably have focused much less of my attention starting from my late teens on obtaining a position in the labour market within the next five to seven years. I'm not saying I would necessarily have been an unproductive oxygen thief, but if I did not need to prepare my person for the labour market or the business world, I would not have been the person now typing these words.

Another possibility: If I, as the son of working middle-class parents, won a massive fortune in a lottery at the age of eighteen, with a guaranteed monthly dividend paid into my bank account until the end of my physical existence, my subsequent process of self-definition would also not, among other things, have included the annoyance of having to appear in a satisfactory fashion to the labour market in order to provide in my own daily needs.

A third possibility would be if I had designed a product in my late twenties that would have earned me millions in royalties since then. In such a case, the character that would have crawled out at the other end of the process tunnel would have been one who – because of initial experiences in my adult life – would have known how it feels to modify personal

appearances for the purpose of generating an income, and who would also know how it feels to not have to do this anymore.

Simple conclusion: If you have access to sufficient funds to make it unnecessary to have to earn an income to keep yourself alive, you do not function in the same way as people who have to toil every day to ensure there's enough food on the table, and a roof over their heads. And since you have less need to function in a way that is to a large extent prescribed or highly recommended, you have more room to discover other possibilities for your personal development and to define your person in other ways.

Read more ...

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