

# Endless, Ceaseless, Boundless Joy

by Chris Okum



## **The Sheer Drop**

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Franz Kafka: "The masses are rushing, running, charging through the age. They think they are advancing, but they are simply running on the spot and falling into the void, that is all."

### **You Don't Understand The First Thing About Art**

*Dangerously Close* was a 1986 action thriller directed by Albert Pyun. The film was noted at its time of release for being part of a wave of teen vigilante films in the 1980s exploring the United States right wing jingoism that was gaining popularity. At an elite school, a group of students who call themselves The Sentinels begin terrorizing their socially undesirable classmates. Soon, one of their targets ends up brutally murdered. An editor of the high school paper begins to investigate and The Sentinels become even more ruthless in their behavior. *Dangerously Close* received a wide release in North America on May 9, 1986 grossing \$1,180,506 its first week, falling to \$474,260 in its second week. The film features music from The Smithereens, who sang the film's theme song, "Blood and Roses," Depeche Mode, Black Uhuru, Green on Red, TSOL, Lords of the New Church, Lost Pilots, and Michael McCarty. Said Roger Ebert in 1986: "This is a technical exercise, a classroom film designed to show that the maker can manipulate the tools of his trade to his own satisfaction. It is arrogant in its indifference to the audience. There is no evidence that *Dangerously Close* was intended to communicate anything to anybody." Nina Darnton of The New York Times wrote, "Shooting parts of the film like an MTV video, with flash forwards, odd camera angles and long shots and using a driving loud score, the director creates a completely adolescent world where adults either don't matter or exert malevolent influences...But unfortunately, the adolescent world created within the film extends to its conception." Starring John Stockwell, J. Eddie Peck, Bradford Bancroft, Don Michael Paul, Thom Matthews, and Carey Lowell.

### **Operation**

He was told to cover his ears. He was told that he was not gonna like what he was gonna hear. But he wanted to listen to what it sounded like, this tool they were using, this machine, which they called "The Destroyer." And so he did not do as he was told. Subsequently, he did not like what he heard. The Destroyer, it made a sound, one sound, and it sounded like this: "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha."

### **Decorative Cunts**

She says, "I'm feeling very emotional."

She says, "I'm just gonna probably cry."

She says, "I'm mostly quite happy, and in real life, I'm very light."

She says, "I have this look of a nice, wholesome girl, but then my willingness to go dark places is unlike other people's willingness."

She says, "I feel so moved and touched. I have to continue to be shameless in my self-promotion."

She says, "I like to be transgressive and amoral in public so that I can live an normal and ethical life in private."

She says, "It feels like the truest way for it to be born into the world."

She says, "My mom is a psychoanalyst."

She says, "I was very encouraged to get to know myself on a deep level, and I took that really seriously."

She says, "My dad's a big crier."

She says, "I think it's important to be supportive but also not lose yourself."

She says, "I want to explore something completely different."

She says, "I'm really excited about it. And scared."

### **Have You Seen The Other Side Of The Sky?**

Representatives from the Department of Employment paid him and his family a visit on the occasion of his eldest daughter's 18th

birthday. They explained to him that there was a finite amount of jobs to go around, and due to a recent contraction in the workforce as well as the GDP, he would have to decide whether to keep his job or give it to his daughter. "You won't be working much longer anyway," said the representatives. "Life expectancy has declined, and frankly, who knows how much longer you will be alive." He nodded in agreement and then signed the papers of transference. His daughter thrived at his job and soon found herself moving up the ranks of society while he and his wife lived in penury, the government assistance scraps not even enough for three squares a day or to keep the heat on during the winter. A year before his wife died the representatives contacted him and asked if he would agree to appear in a Public Service Announcement extolling the current administration and its agenda, how they had furthered the cause of inclusion throughout society, and how it was possible to better your station in life despite being born into dire circumstances. He agreed, of course, and soon found himself sitting in a chair in front of a brick wall while being filmed by a crew of eight people, all of them wearing the sanctioned state mufti, as well as sunglasses. He was told not to speak, just to be, as later in in post-production a narration would be overlaid over the eight minute close-up of his face, narration confirming the great strides the country had made under the dear leader, and how his daughter managed to correct the abject mistake that was her parents' lives. When he asked what the PSA was going to be called he was told, *The Gift of Failure*.

### **Look Alive Jive**

This story is not an allegory about AIDS. It can be if you want it to be, if you need it to be, but that's only because you need this to be about something, anything, because that's what stories have to be, or, at least that's what you've been told. But what if this is not a story about AIDS, or the environment, or New Age beliefs, or female hysteria? What if this is a story about nothing? Because there is no explanation for why what is happening is happening. Yes, reasons

will be given explicitly, and then they will be hinted at, and finally, they will be lightly insinuated, but nothing explains anything in this story, which could be about nothing, or everything, and finally, maybe, that's what this story is about, which is ambiguity itself, or, the introduction of ambiguity into a formerly transparent life, or, the sign of ambiguity, and how it reads to those who don't accept ambiguity, who find ambiguity to be an evil presence, or, in the case of this story, a stain, a smear of the wrong color on a carefully composed canvas. You like to tell yourself that you like to tell yourself stories in order to explain yourself to yourself, in order "to live" (as they say, not as you say), but what if the stories you tell actually tell you nothing about yourself? This is one of those stories. This is a story about how stories don't work, how at the center of each story is some wobbly, hidden anomaly that makes no sense, which stands in for the story, a figure which cannot be accounted for, a remainder that cannot be excised. And this is not the first story to tell this story, about how at a fundamental level stories don't work. But what's different about this story is that it does not provide you with another story explaining why stories like this don't work, which sometimes other stories do, and which can be cold comfort, better than no comfort, like this story provides you with, no comfort at all, nothing to sit on or lie on, no place where you can rest and relax in the knowledge that even if this is a story about how stories don't work, at the very least it's a story about why stories like this don't work, another kind of lullaby that says, don't work, rest easy, we know why this story doesn't work, the implication being that one day there will a story that will. But not this story. No. This story leaves you with nothing, i.e., you don't know what to say, which is to say, there is everything to say. At the end of this story there is only yourself, floating in space, paralyzed in a web of language you don't understand, you're neither here nor there, and this is what this story is about: nothing, everything, and how you live inside these two states, or, maybe, how you don't.

## **Magnetic Resonance**

From *The Information Bomb*, by Paul Virilio, Verso Books, 1995:  
"After the first bomb, the atom bomb, which was capable of using the energy of radioactivity to smash matter, the spectre of a second bomb is looming at the end of the millennium. This is the information bomb, capable of using the interactivity of information to wreck the peace between nations."

### **Enter The Mirror**

There's not much difference between those who uphold the rule of law and those who break it. As a matter of fact, if you squint real hard, both look exactly the same. Both follow a code, a hard set of rules which keeps chaos at bay. After all, they've got a job to do. They've got a name and they've got number, right? Isn't that how the song goes? Cops are deranged cokeheads who can't bother to be either good husbands or good fathers and the crooks are solid family men, loyal spouses, and stand-up dudes who do the right thing, always, except when they're doing the wrong thing, like robbing banks, which, come on, isn't that big of a wrong, because no one likes the banks, no one trusts them, except, of course, those suckers who still go inside of the banks to deposit their hard-earned money and say a silent prayer to themselves that the place won't be held up while they're inside and, then, when they're walking out of the bank, saying another silent prayer to the Gods of Money that the banks don't fail and take their lifesavings with them as they collapse like a house of cards in a hurricane. But let's forget about the common citizen, the type of sad bastard who gets caught by a stray bullet from the AR-15 of the so-called "bad guys" with their \$300 haircuts and long-suffering squeezes with great golden glittery asses. But do we have to forget about the sad bastards, really? What if the story stopped, for a just a few moments, and focused on one of these sad bastards, an innocent bystander who gets killed during another cinematic shootout, what if we followed their lifeless corpse as it's identified by one of their family members, and then we followed the

family member home as they sat with their grief and shock, and then continued to stay with them as they tried to live their life, day after day, in the wake of the sudden, compact trauma of having their wife or husband or mother or father or son or daughter randomly erased from this mortal coil? What? No? We can't do that? You're right, and you know why? Because it's not interesting. You know what is interesting? The sartorial habits of a sociopath, the cut of their jib, the make of their car, the way the wet streets reflect their steely visage as they traverse the landscape to the squelching synthesizer sounds of the trendiest new band, the square footage of their beach home, their principles, man, because while these dead-eyed stoics (and we're still talking about both sides of the law, am I right?) might destroy the very fabric of civil society through their actions, they don't kill underage prostitutes, okay? That's the baseline they won't dive beneath. And for that you should be thankful. The bottom line is this: the city is their playground, their chessboard, and the night and the day belong to them, not to you. You're either a cop who bucks the system or a robber who's trying to make the system work for them, or you're no one, you're just some schmuck who buys a ticket to the show, who watches this Theater of Men Behaving Cruelly Towards Each Other. And here's another bottom line (because there is always more lines at the bottom): the good guys and the bad guys, they secretly like each other, have respect for what the other does, because at least the other guy is doing something, unlike everyone else, all those extras who just stand around and do nothing, who can't even avoid hot, wayward rounds of ammunition. Who knows, maybe one day the law and its antithesis will see that they have more in common than they don't and join forces to rule the world. Wouldn't that be a bite? Because, really, what's the difference? Remember what the man said. And what did he say? "It doesn't really matter which one you choose: it'll all come out in the wash." Unless the machine doesn't work. Unless the machine was stolen. In that case, who do you call? Beats me.

### **Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow**

As it turns out, she never went to Disney World. Her parents lied to her. They just locked her in a room while they got drunk and spooned. It was her cousin who went to Florida, her cousin who died of cystic fibrosis, her cousin who died when she was four years old, when she was four years old, too. Her parents did not know that she knew she was being lied to. She let them continue telling her about the time she visited Mexico, Norway, China, Germany, Italy, United States, Japan, Morocco, France, United Kingdom and Canada, all in one day. She pretended to remember the faux-memories of her dead cousin. Her parents would tell her she got scared in Morocco and she would say she didn't. She would ask her parents if she liked Germany and her parents would say she didn't and she would say she did. She was ashamed of her role in perpetuating the fiction her parents had created for her, but she didn't know how to go beyond it. It was a story that seemed to give her parents an infinite amount of endless, ceaseless, boundless joy, enabled them to believe that had lead a life they hadn't, and wash away the sins that hovered at the event horizon of their conscience. Who was she to tell them otherwise. Who was she.

### **See Without Being Seen**

They met at a Les Rallizes Denudes concert held at Kyoto University in 1972. He was working for the PSIA (Public Security Intelligence Agency), and she was an actress who had been working steadily in Pink Films. He was there to keep tabs on the burgeoning Marxist movement within Japan, and she was there to simply have a good time. He asked her what she doing after the show and she said nothing. They went to a sake bar, where she drank too much and he drank almost nothing at all. He offered to walk her home and then strangled her two blocks from her apartment using a wire encased in his watch. He made sure to carve the hammer and sickle logo associated with the Japanese Red Army into her chest, furthering the narrative that there was a serial killer on the loose, and one



connected with dubious political goals. It was the ninth woman he had killed on behalf of the Liberal Democratic Party, and now that he had helped establish the homicidal tactics of the socialists trying to destroy the Land of the Rising Sun, he was being bumped up the ladder into less messy position. It was over. Finally. He had spent the last few years doing a job he never felt suited to, but he had done the job to the best of his abilities. He should have felt a sense of relief, and he did, but what he mostly felt was sad. To have a purpose, and then to have that purpose taken away from you, it made you want to cry into your beer, even if you could never tell anyone why.

