Seven Segments (Mono Logical Monologues)

Andrew James Paterson

1.

My courses in Mass and Specialized Communications are available to any student who chooses to access my dispatches electronically. Therefore, I do not limit my affiliations to strictly one learning institution. One might indeed describe me as being a syndicated lecturer. I was one of the first academics to stipulate, as a crucial ingredient of my contract, that traditional lectures in traditional limited-seating lecture halls were redundant and absurdly obsolete. Why not democratize the lecture format by providing access to any student and indeed any hacker who can click on my icon and then take it from there? I can recall all too clearly the tedium of traditional lectures with their obligatory question periods. Luddites and pedagogues and pseudo-humanists bemoan the disappearance of such student/professor "interchanges"; but I say hallelujah! The egalitarianism that they so relentlessly lament was in reality a forum for a few self-important motor-mouths to engage their professors at the expense of the majority of students. It is a logical extension of the traditional concept known as "homework" for committed students to become their own search engines and undertake serious research. I am not an authority figure—I am rather a conduit. Information passes through me to them and the ball is in their courts. It's up to each and every one of my students to then take the ball and run with it.

2.

Our learned professor of Mass and Specialized Communications is incapable of following his own logic to its own conclusion. He can't bring himself to abandon the spoken lecture… even when it is technologically mediated… because he is afraid of surrendering the pretence of authorship. He is afraid that he will not be recognized as his own author if his face and mouth were to become invisible. He wants all his students and indeed all his contemporaries to loosen up and go with the flow but he himself is in a rut. Agoraphobia is only conducive to learning for so long, and conversation can at least occasionally lead to discourse and exchange. Philosophy is circular and so is even mathematics. Very few

structures in life are in fact linear. Communications
certainly aren't linear. I don't know… maybe they are now
that public space has become so rare.

Yes… the more education or communication or whatever one
might want to call it becomes a process of individuals holed
up in their cubicles and surfing from point A to point Q or
whatever the point; the more the distinction between public
and private space will eventually become obsolete. But I love
accidents. Love is all about accidents. I love chance
encounters. And the really bizarre encounters still happen in
public spaces… in uncontrolled environments.

3.

I'm usually wary of crowds. In fact, I'm often downright
scared of them. I fear being trampled – I fear crowd or mob
behaviour – I'm often aware of my utter insignificance when
I'm stuck in a crowd. Especially a crowd in which clusters of
other people form congregations or mini-societies from which
I feel excluded. I can't move – I can't negotiate – these are
all strangers whom I cannot speak to let alone beg from. And
yet…sometimes I love being in crowds. I remember walking down
Wall Street once almost thirty years ago. Everybody was
walking the same direction – to the bank or to their
financial institution. This was of course analogue and pre-
digital exchange culture yet I felt millions of people were
on the same page which thrilled me and worried me. Feeling
part of a uniform throng can be comfortable, especially when
one usually feels alienated by uniform throngs.

But scattered crowds or melting pots can also be fun. I'm
happy when I don't know individuals yet feel that I know the
crowd – meaning I know they're harmless and probably as
isolated as I am. In an anonymous everyday crowd – perhaps at
a moderately scenic location – one can be simultaneously
flamboyant and safely anonymous. One can blend in while
attracting mild attention but without any confrontation or
annoying interruption.

 So many theoreticians and academics fetishize "the everyday"
as some sort of authentic or organic alternative to
Spectacle. However, this naïve assumption presumes that there
is some homogenous entity called "the everyday". Not

everybody's everyday is identical or interchangeable. In fact, most individuals have at least one everyday just as they have at least one identity - even those who automatically eat the same food at the same table at the same time every day.

There is an interesting paradox at work here. By disguising oneself, one can negotiate crowds or "the everyday" with a relative anonymity. By making a minor spectacle of one's self, one can avoid generating a larger and unnecessary spectacle. This desire for anonymity and fluidity of course does not apply to those who consider themselves flaneurs - those who venture outside for the purpose of talking to strangers. And of course there is a fine line between practical disguise and costume - repetition creates costumes and therefore spectacle. Are ritual and spectacle always synonymous?

4.

My duty is to first respect and then preserve public safety in public space. Each and every individual citizen has the constitutional right to exist in public space free from harassment and obstruction. That can and does refer to panhandling, any other form of underground economy, to political manifestos, and indeed to private languages that only confuse and irritate members of the public. In a democracy, the majority rules and the law must respect the majority. God created the Tower of Babel so that conflicting languages would not fight but rather respect their own different separate spaces. Neither public nor private property is any place for eccentric behaviour that does not respect universally-accepted languages of business and commerce. When God created the Tower of Babel he accurately predicted The Internet. Now there's no need for buskers or gadflies or street poets, or prostitutes or drug dealers or others of that ilk. They can talk at and maybe even to each other without interfering with innocent members of the public who have the right to go about their shopping or their errands without having somebody else's lists of Lord Knows What blasted into their ears. Sometimes my job requires that I make a mountain out of a molehill, or "create a crisis." You can't effectively protect public space without making it plain and clear who is the protector.

5.

Here in my car I'm public but I'm very private. I'm not outside—I'm inside or insulated. I'm in a free protection zone in which my only obligation is to maintain that buffer zone. Drivers have freedom along with the responsibility of not violating or jeopardizing that freedom. The driver is the ideal citizen — the driver looks after his or her own business while keeping an eye on the rest of the traffic. The driver is a player who can compete and win without needing to honk the horn, except of course when it is absolutely necessary. Passing ahead of the slowpokes is as easy as ABC, after all. In my car, I can control the climate, the soundtrack, the ambiance, the everything. Driving a car is almost like being in a movie that one can both observe and perform in while maintaining perfect cruise control. It's only when I encounter those who lack control that a crisis exists. And if all serious drivers or committed candidates dedicate themselves to avoiding crises, then traffic and indeed the world is a free zone for the individual to move from point to point without any superfluous restrictions. In society, indeed in life, there are passengers and there are drivers. The choice is crystal clear. Which one are you?

(Here, the performer gets on his knees and begins playing with a toy car. He begins singing a recognizable tune.)

Here in my car, we won't go very far
Because I cannot drive, and neither can you
So there!

6   Man wearing lab coat.

So, *this* is murder city? I always thought *that* was murder city. Whatever. Aren't all cities murderous, although crimes of passion certainly do take place in rural environments and let's never forget the suburbs. Bodies here and bodies there - people getting shot from both sides if you know what I mean. If there are so many bodies, then where are all the ghosts? I cruise this eternal basement in search of my favourite ghosts and I can only detect a few of them. They're both rare and seemingly random. But maybe ghosts have become more subtle. They've learned how to become invisible while

remaining omnipresent. Maybe you can't have physical contact - maybe you can't see or touch them but you can certainly feel them. You don't hear any sounds but their voices never quiet down. The ghosts always block you and rudely interrupt you and stare at you, even when you can't stare back.

Maybe the ghosts have learned how to dodge surveillance systems. If so, that makes them much more advanced than living humans. There are so many overhead and underhanded surveillance gadgets not all obviously visible to the naked eye that humans have no choice but to accept surveillance and even flaunt it. Right. I can't stand being data but I know damn well that's what I am… whether in the eternal basement or in what used to be known as clean fresh air. Ghosts are like molecules and meteors and other extraterrestrial phenomena - one minute you sense them and next minute you can't. And everyone else of course didn't see or hear or smell or taste or collide with anybody or anything, so of course the thing can't possible exist. Right?

Well, surely the surveillance cameras must have picked them up? But then…how reliable are they? How reliable is videotape or any other medium supposedly hosting indexical information? How trustworthy? Well? Videotape, film stock, these are analogue materials that don't preserve well. What you think might be this person might actually be that person, the more unreliable the materials become as they degenerate. And then with digital media - ha! - talk about unreliable. What's to prevent someone with the necessary access code from converting *this* image into *that* image? Nothing. So…, either this makes surveillance systems completely unbelievable or all too believable; depending on whatever agendas might be in play.

And ghosts are by definition fluid… sometimes they look like somebody and then they look like somebody else. Ghosts are by definition unstable images…even the ones that keep returning and returning and returning over and over and over and over again.

7. Cultural Observer/Town Crank

pedestrians who have no concept that somebody might be approaching them from the opposite direction.

idiots who actually believe that the primary purpose of verbal language is to "communicate"

dogs who are so dumb they can't even obey their stupid humans

reformed Marxists who deny the existence of psychology or anything psychological and therefore consider mental illness funny

buskers who haven't yet twigged that knowing how to play over-familiar tunes will not earn them any extra dollars.

drivers who fail to distinguish between residential side-streets and the Indianapolis 500 Speedway.

artists and/or academics who blather on and on about "the community" when actually referring to a small and ultimately insignificant "scene"

curators and/or entrepreneurs who either naively or cynically confuse history with nostalgia.

young men who walk the streets in the middle of summer without a clue that they are in fact incredibly sexy and therefore available

public art that makes such an effort to be inconspicuous that nobody can even find it.

fools who refuse to believe that rich people might also suffer from legitimate forms of depression

people who cannot distinguish between public servants and performance artists.

trust-fund leftists who habitually insist upon accountability while denying that they themselves are populist capitalists.

artists who try so hard to be loved by everybody that they never actually become liked by anybody.

people who try so hard to be winners that they wind becoming
losers.