

Geoffrey Day's noted the way most of the male residents of Ennet House have special little cognomens for their genitals. E.g. 'Bruno,' 'Jake,' 'Fang' (Minty), 'The One-Eyed Monk,' 'Fritzie,' 'Russell the Love Muscle.' He speculates this could be a class thing: neither he nor Ewell nor Ken Erdedy have named their Units. Like Ewell, Day enters a certain amount of comparative-class data in his journal. Doony Glynn called his penis 'Poor Richard'; Chandler Foss confessed to the moniker 'Bam-Bam.' Lenz had referred to his own Unit as 'the Frightful Hog.' Day would die before admitting he missed either Lenz or his soliloquies about the Hog, which had been frequent. The penis in question had been that curious two or three shades darker than the rest of Lenz that people's penises sometimes are. Lenz had brandished it at his roommates whenever he wished to emphasize a point. It had been short and thick and blunt, and Lenz described the Hog as a primo example of what he called the Polish Curse, viz. undistinguished length but sobering circumference: 'Easy on the bottom but tears hell out of the sides, brother.' This had been his description of the Polish Curse. A surprising amount of Day's Recovery Journal is filled with quotations from R. Lenz. Lenz's discharge had moved the tax-attorney Tiny Ewell up into the 3-Man room with Day. Ewell was the one man here with whom a conversation of anything remotely approaching depth could be held, so Day was nonplussed when he found himself, after a couple long nights, almost missing Lenz, his obsession with time, his patter, his way of leaning up against the wall upside-down in his briefs, or brandishing the Hog.

And re Ennet House resident Kate Gompert and this depression issue: Some psychiatric patients — plus a certain percentage of people who've gotten so dependent on chemicals for feelings of well-being that when the chemicals have to be abandoned they undergo a loss-trauma that reaches way down deep into the soul's core systems — these persons know firsthand that there's more than one kind of so-called 'depression.' One kind is low-grade and sometimes gets called *anhedonia*²⁸⁰ or *simple melancholy*. It's a kind of spiritual torpor in which one loses the ability to feel pleasure or attachment to things formerly important. The avid bowler drops out of his league and stays home at night staring dully at kick-boxing cartridges. The gourmand is off his feed. The sensualist finds his beloved Unit all of a sudden to be so much feelingless gristle, just hanging there. The devoted wife and mother finds the thought of her family about as moving, all of a sudden, as a theorem of Euclid. It's a kind of emotional novocaine, this form of

depression, and while it's not overtly painful its deadness is disconcerting and . . . well, depressing. Kate Gompert's always thought of this anhedonic state as a kind of radical abstracting of everything, a hollowing out of stuff that used to have affective content. Terms the undepressed toss around and take for granted as full and fleshy — *happiness, joie de vivre, preference, love* — are stripped to their skeletons and reduced to abstract ideas. They have, as it were, denotation but not connotation. The anhedonic can still speak about happiness and meaning et al., but she has become incapable of feeling anything in them, of understanding anything about them, of hoping anything about them, or of believing them to exist as anything more than concepts. Everything becomes an outline of the thing. Objects become schemata. The world becomes a map of the world. An anhedonic can navigate, but has no location. I.e. the anhedonic becomes, in the lingo of Boston AA, Unable To Identify.

It's worth noting that, among younger E.T.A.s, the standard take on Dr. J. O. Incandenza's suicide attributes his putting his head in the microwave to this kind of anhedonia. This is maybe because anhedonia's often associated with the crises that afflict extremely goal-oriented people who reach a certain age having achieved all or more than all than they'd hoped for. The what-does-it-all-mean-type crisis of middle-aged Americans. In fact this is in fact not what killed Incandenza at all. In fact the presumption that he'd achieved all his goals and found that the achievement didn't confer meaning or joy on his existence says more about the students at E.T.A. than it says about Orin's and Hal's father: still under the influence of the deLint-like carrot-and-stick philosophies of their hometown coaches rather than the more paradoxical Schtitt/Incandenza/Lyle school, younger athletes who can't help gauging their whole worth by their place in an ordinal ranking use the idea that achieving their goals and finding the gnawing sense of worthlessness still there in their own gut as a kind of psychic bogey, something that they can use to justify stopping on their way down to dawn drills to smell flowers along the E.T.A. paths. The idea that achievement doesn't automatically confer interior worth is, to them, still, at this age, an abstraction, rather like the prospect of their own death — 'Caius Is Mortal' and so on. Deep down, they all still view the competitive carrot as the grail. They're mostly going through the motions when they invoke anhedonia. They're mostly small children, keep in mind. Listen to any sort of sub-16 exchange you hear in the bathroom or food line: 'Hey there, how are you?' 'Number eight this week, is how I am.' They all still worship the carrot. With the possible exception of the tormented LaMont Chu, they all still subscribe to the delusive idea that the continent's second-ranked fourteen-year-old feels exactly twice as worthwhile as the continent's #4.

Deluded or not, it's still a lucky way to live. Even though it's temporary. It may well be that the lower-ranked little kids at E.T.A. are proportionally

happier than the higher-ranked kids, since we (who are mostly not small children) know it's more invigorating to *want* than to *have*, it seems. Though maybe this is just the inverse of the same delusion.

Hal Incandenza, though he has no idea yet of why his father really put his head in a specially-dickied microwave in the Year of the Trial-Size Dove Bar, is pretty sure that it wasn't because of standard U.S. anhedonia. Hal himself hasn't had a bona fide intensity-of-interior-life-type emotion since he was tiny; he finds terms like *joie* and *value* to be like so many variables in rarified equations, and he can manipulate them well enough to satisfy everyone but himself that he's in there, inside his own hull, as a human being — but in fact he's far more robotic than John Wayne. One of his troubles with his Moms is the fact that Avril Incandenza believes she knows him inside and out as a human being, and an internally worthy one at that, when in fact inside Hal there's pretty much nothing at all, he knows. His Moms Avril hears her own echoes inside him and thinks what she hears is him, and this makes Hal feel the one thing he feels to the limit, lately: he is lonely.

It's of some interest that the lively arts of the millennial U.S.A. treat anhedonia and internal emptiness as hip and cool. It's maybe the vestiges of the Romantic glorification of *Weltschmerz*, which means world-weariness or hip ennui. Maybe it's the fact that most of the arts here are produced by world-weary and sophisticated older people and then consumed by younger people who not only consume art but study it for clues on how to be cool, hip — and keep in mind that, for kids and younger people, to be hip and cool is the same as to be admired and accepted and included and so Unalone. Forget so-called peer-pressure. It's more like peer-*hunger*. No? We enter a spiritual puberty where we snap to the fact that the great transcendent horror is loneliness, excluded encagement in the self. Once we've hit this age, we will now give or take anything, wear any mask, to fit, be part-of, not be Alone, we young. The U.S. arts are our guide to inclusion. A how-to. We are shown how to fashion masks of ennui and jaded irony at a young age where the face is fictile enough to assume the shape of whatever it wears. And then it's stuck there, the weary cynicism that saves us from gooey sentiment and unsophisticated naïveté. Sentiment equals naïveté on this continent (at least since the Reconfiguration). One of the things sophisticated viewers have always liked about J. O. Incandenza's *The American Century as Seen Through a Brick* is its unsubtle thesis that naïveté is the last true terrible sin in the theology of millennial America. And since sin is the sort of thing that can be talked about only figuratively, it's natural that Himself's dark little cartridge was mostly about a myth, viz. that queerly persistent U.S. myth that cynicism and naïveté are mutually exclusive. Hal, who's empty but not dumb, theorizes privately that what passes for hip cynical transcendence of sentiment is really some kind of fear

of being really human, since to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic, is to be in some basic interior way forever infantile, some sort of not-quite-right-looking infant dragging itself anacritically around the map, with big wet eyes and froggy-soft skin, huge skull, gooey drool. One of the really American things about Hal, probably, is the way he despises what it is he's really lonely for: this hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need, that pules and writhes just under the hip empty mask, anhedonia.²⁸¹

The American Century as Seen Through a Brick's main and famous key-image is of a piano-string vibrating — a high D, it looks like — vibrating, and making a very sweet unadorned solo sound indeed, and then a little thumb comes into the frame, a blunt moist pale and yet dingy thumb, with disreputable stuff crusted in one of the nail-corners, small and unlined, clearly an infantile thumb, and as it touches the piano string the high sweet sound immediately dies. And the silence that follows is excruciating. Later in the film, after much mordant and didactic panoramic brick-following, we're back at the piano-string, and the thumb is removed, and the high sweet sound recommences, extremely pure and solo, and yet now somehow, as the volume increases, now with something rotten about it underneath, there's something sick-sweet and overripe and potentially putrid about the one clear high D as its volume increases and increases, the sound getting purer and louder and more dysphoric until after a surprisingly few seconds we find ourselves right in the middle of the pure undampened sound longing and even maybe praying for the return of the natal thumb, to shut it up.

Hal isn't old enough yet to know that this is because numb emptiness isn't the worst kind of depression. That dead-eyed anhedonia is but a remora on the ventral flank of the true predator, the Great White Shark of pain. Authorities term this condition *clinical depression* or *involutional depression* or *unipolar dysphoria*. Instead of just an incapacity for feeling, a deadening of soul, the predator-grade depression Kate Gompert always feels as she Withdraws from secret marijuana is *itself* a feeling. It goes by many names — *anguish*, *despair*, *torment*, or q.v. Burton's *melancholia* or Yev-tuschenko's more authoritative *psychotic depression* — but Kate Gompert, down in the trenches with the thing itself, knows it simply as *It*.

It is a level of psychic pain wholly incompatible with human life as we know it. *It* is a sense of radical and thoroughgoing evil not just as a feature but as the essence of conscious existence. *It* is a sense of poisoning that pervades the self at the self's most elementary levels. *It* is a nausea of the cells and soul. *It* is an unnumb intuition in which the world is fully rich and animate and un-map-like and also thoroughly painful and malignant and antagonistic to the self, which depressed self *It* billows on and coagulates around and wraps in *Its* black folds and absorbs into *Itself*, so that an

almost mystical unity is achieved with a world every constituent of which means painful harm to the self. *Its* emotional character, the feeling Gompert describes *It* as, is probably mostly indescribable except as a sort of double bind in which any/all of the alternatives we associate with human agency — sitting or standing, doing or resting, speaking or keeping silent, living or dying — are not just unpleasant but literally horrible.

It is also lonely on a level that cannot be conveyed. There is no way Kate Gompert could ever even begin to make someone else understand what clinical depression feels like, not even another person who is herself clinically depressed, because a person in such a state is incapable of empathy with any other living thing. This anhedonic Inability To Identify is also an integral part of *It*. If a person in physical pain has a hard time attending to anything except that pain,²⁸² a clinically depressed person cannot even perceive any other person or thing as independent of the universal pain that is digesting her cell by cell. Everything is part of the problem, and there is no solution. It is a hell for one.

The authoritative term *psychotic depression* makes Kate Gompert feel especially lonely. Specifically the *psychotic* part. Think of it this way. Two people are screaming in pain. One of them is being tortured with electric current. The other is not. The screamer who's being tortured with electric current is not psychotic: her screams are circumstantially appropriate. The screaming person who's not being tortured, however, is psychotic, since the outside parties making the diagnoses can see no electrodes or measurable amperage. One of the least pleasant things about being psychotically depressed on a ward full of psychotically depressed patients is coming to see that none of them is really psychotic, that their screams are entirely appropriate to certain circumstances part of whose special charm is that they are undetectable by any outside party. Thus the loneliness: it's a closed circuit: the current is both applied and received from within.

The so-called 'psychotically depressed' person who tries to kill herself doesn't do so out of quote 'hopelessness' or any abstract conviction that life's assets and debits do not square. And surely not because death seems suddenly appealing. The person in whom *Its* invisible agony reaches a certain unendurable level will kill herself the same way a trapped person will eventually jump from the window of a burning high-rise. Make no mistake about people who leap from burning windows. Their terror of falling from a great height is still just as great as it would be for you or me standing speculatively at the same window just checking out the view; i.e. the fear of falling remains a constant. The variable here is the other terror, the fire's flames: when the flames get close enough, falling to death becomes the slightly less terrible of two terrors. It's not desiring the fall; it's terror of the flames. And yet nobody down on the sidewalk, looking up and yelling 'Don't!' and 'Hang on!', can understand the jump. Not really. You'd have

to have personally been trapped and-felt flames to really understand a terror way beyond falling.

But and so the idea of a person in the grip of *It* being bound by a 'Suicide Contract' some well-meaning Substance-abuse halfway house makes her sign is simply absurd. Because such a contract will constrain such a person only until the exact psychic circumstances that made the contract necessary in the first place assert themselves, invisibly and indescribably. That the well-meaning halfway-house Staff does not understand *Its* overriding terror will only make the depressed resident feel more alone.

One fellow psychotically depressed patient Kate Gompert came to know at Newton-Wellesley Hospital in Newton two years ago was a man in his fifties. He was a civil engineer whose hobby was model trains — like from Lionel Trains Inc., etc. — for which he erected incredibly intricate systems of switching and track that filled his basement recreation room. His wife brought photographs of the trains and networks of trellis and track into the locked ward, to help remind him. The man said he had been suffering from psychotic depression for seventeen straight years, and Kate Gompert had had no reason to disbelieve him. He was stocky and swart with thinning hair and hands that he held very still in his lap as he sat. Twenty years ago he had slipped on a patch of 3-In-1-brand oil from his model-train tracks and bonked his head on the cement floor of his basement rec room in Wellesley Hills, and when he woke up in the E.R. he was depressed beyond all human endurance, and stayed that way. He'd never once tried suicide, though he confessed that he yearned for unconsciousness without end. His wife was very devoted and loving. She went to Catholic Mass every day. She was very devout. The psychotically depressed man, too, went to daily Mass when he was not institutionalized. He prayed for relief. He still had his job and his hobby. He went to work regularly, taking medical leaves only when the invisible torment got too bad for him to trust himself, or when there was some radical new treatment the psychiatrists wanted him to try. They'd tried Tricyclics, M.A.O.I.s, insulin-comas, Selective-Serotonin-Reuptake Inhibitors,²⁸³ the new and side-effect-laden Quadracyclics. They'd scanned his lobes and affective matrices for lesions and scars. Nothing worked. Not even high-amperage E.C.T. relieved *It*. This happens sometimes. Some cases of depression are beyond human aid. The man's case gave Kate Gompert the howling fantods. The idea of this man going to work and to Mass and building miniaturized railroad networks day after day after day while feeling anything like what Kate Gompert felt in that ward was simply beyond her ability to imagine. The rationo-spiritual part of her knew this man and his wife must be possessed of a courage way off any sort of known courage-chart. But in her toxified soul Kate Gompert felt only a paralyzing horror at the idea of the squat dead-eyed man laying toy track slowly and carefully in the silence of his wood-panelled rec room, the silence total except for the

sounds of the track being oiled and snapped together and laid into place, the man's head full of poison and worms and every cell in his body screaming for relief from flames no one else could help with or even feel.

The permanently psychotically depressed man was finally transferred to a place on Long Island to be evaluated for a radical new type of psychosurgery where they supposedly went in and yanked out your whole limbic system, which is the part of the brain that causes all sentiment and feeling. The man's fondest dream was anhedonia, complete psychic numbing. I.e. death in life. The prospect of radical psychosurgery was the dangled carrot that Kate guessed still gave the man's life enough meaning for him to hang onto the windowsill by his fingernails, which were probably black and gnarled from the flames. That and his wife: he seemed genuinely to love his wife, and she him. He went to bed every night at home holding her, weeping for it to be over, while she prayed or did that devout thing with beads.

The couple had gotten Kate Gompert's mother's address and had sent Kate an Xmas card the last two years, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Feaster of Wellesley Hills MA, stating that she was in their prayers and wishing her all available joy. Kate Gompert doesn't know whether Mr. Ernest Feaster's limbic system got yanked out or not. Whether he achieved anhedonia. The Xmas cards had had excruciating little watercolor pictures of locomotives on them. She could barely stand to think about them, even at the best of times, which the present was not.

14 NOVEMBER
YEAR OF THE DEPEND ADULT UNDERGARMENT

Ms. Ruth van Cleve's first day off new residents' three-day House Restriction. Allowed now to hit meetings outside Enfield if accompanied by some more senior resident the Staff judges safe. Ruth van Cleve in spike heels walking alongside a psychotically depressed Kate Gompert on Prospect just south of Indian Square, Cambridge, a little after 2200h., yammering nonstop.

Ruth van Cleve is shaping up to be excruciating for Kate Gompert to be around. Ruth van Cleve hails from Braintree on the South Shore, is many kilos underweight, wears brass-colored lipstick, and has dry hair teased out in the big-hair fashion of decades past. Her face has the late-stage Ice²⁸⁴-addict's concave long-jawed insectile look. Her hair is a dry tangled cloud, with tiny little eyes and bones and projecting beak underneath. Joelle v.D.'d said it almost looked like Ruth van Cleve's hair grew her head instead of the other way around. Kate Gompert's hair is butcher-block cut and has recognizable color, at least.

Kate Gompert hasn't slept in four nights, and her slumped progress up