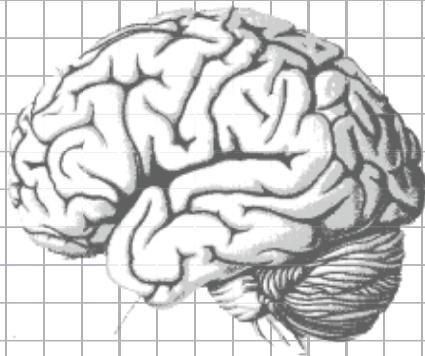


Regarding William Rodney Goldman (1947-
2006), the Sometimes Confusingly Located
Seats of Consciousness, Fish Floppery and
Hip Hop Hopped Up Foppery, the Uncanny
Valley, Among Other Issues

David Shernoff



Regarding William Rodney Goldman (1947-2006), the Sometimes Confusingly Located Seats of Consciousness, Fish Floppery and Hip Hop Hopped Up Foppery, the Uncanny Valley, Among Other Issues © 2011 David Shernoff

valeveil polemics
info@valeveil.se
www.valeveil.se

editor: j. s. davis
design / layout: j. s. davis & Thomas Granström

valeveil polemics is a project aspiring to collect, archive and disperse concise works expressing a specific position: empathic concerns, discreet arguments, provocative essays, personal commentary, coy observations—rare phenomena ranging from the askew to the contempo. The subject matter *typically* engages in investigations in-and-of America and/or Scandinavia (though, this is not a prerequisite). *valeveil* polemics exist as gratis, downloadable .pdfs.

*My uncle said if you gonna ball,
Gotta keep a nice whip, whip.
Gotta keep a thick bitch.
Shine like you DO sell bricks.*

—Das Racist, “Luv it Mayne” (Featuring Fat Tony & Bo P)
in “Sit Down, Man,” *Greedhead/Mad Decent Records* (2010)

Well, my uncle Bill told me some other level shit, some over-there-is-where-the-air-is shit. He offered me varied advice—qualitatively better, more extensive, covering a wider range of subjects, topics, issues, personal dilemmas, spiritual questions, sex, relating to family, not dying needlessly, having a reasonably good time (meaning a good time, but a reasonable one which won’t lead you to a needless death)—than anyone else I’ve known to date. I doubt I will locate another fount of wisdom to sip or guzzle with a muzzle from that is as persistently Gatorade-is-thirst-aid-for-that-deep-down-body-thirst-quenching as the still flowing through me fount that was the Mount Olympian Bill.

Uncle Bill drove a cab in the late sixties, was a genius, dropped some acid that haunted him forever, then got a psych doctorate and taught that—was a shrink for the rest of his life. In June a few years ago, he hanged himself with his signature blend of courtesy, efficiency, and rational concern for those in his life who would be affected by his unannounced departure—including his landlady. He placed a neat note in his front pocket, positioned himself to be seen publicly within a few hours by choosing to drop and snap-his-neck-back from the fire escape.

I believe his hands were bound behind his back. Suicidality, as is well known, breaks down strikingly along gender lines: women make more attempts, including those which fail, while men make fewer attempts, but succeed something like 80 percent of the time. Like many other men in this terminal position, Bill didn’t fuck around one l’il bit: he made sure he did it right, thoroughly, properly. And conscientiously, of course, always with grace, sincere concern for others, almost an apologetic oversensitivity to their needs and the complications potentially stemming from his personal choices, actions and (in this case: final) decisions. His Norfolk, VA landlady of around 20 years (this professor and esteemed Dr. Bill was scandalously living in a flat more properly occupied by twenty-somethings or transient student types. He liked it just fine. He could have easily bought a fucking house, but basically didn’t care or want to move his thousands upon thousands of books) remarked, “Even now, he was the most considerate tenant I’ve ever had.”

See, Bill knew he’d stink up the place or not be found for a while if he did it indoors. He made what was, for him, a typically sound decision. He made his self-termination public, neat, no fuss or muss besides the shit / urine / intestinal bleeding blood (it ain’t just shit which gets voided as a person dies, but the contents of the intestines as a totality) I assume was draining from his pant legs onto the pavement below.

Everyone in the world needs to go to the Mütter Museum, which is part of Jefferson Medical School in Philly. I learned there what I already believed to be true based on intuition: that in instances of hanging, the

intestinal voiding doesn't only occur post-mortem. It happens often as the body goes on autopilot and tries, straining against all reason and chance, to preserve itself. Even fish flopping around asphyxiating in the wide, open, blue-skied air on a nice day fishing in a fishing boat when you snag 'em, when they get royally fucked. Dearest reader, have you ever heard a pig screaming hysterically as it's being led to slaughter? Have you ever seen a pig as its actual slaughter is initiated and transacted, or witnessed said pig's ferocious resistance during the brief moments, often just a few seconds, as it exits life and is ripped apart while still aware, sensing, feeling, and alive? It is dying prematurely, unnaturally, not at its preordained death point. Trivial examples among too many to count, perhaps, but you get the fucking point.

The fucking point? That sounds like a place teenagers go to canoodle. Noodles? Bill can't eat any, but I like sesame. Street? Supposedly taught me to read at 2½, but I think I was just gay hankering for some of that sweet, sweet back power-bottom action Bert was getting on the daily, and not just from E-Diddy. Sesame Street reminds me of my pasts and my futures, you see. I'm soon to move to the Middle East to do some out of hand adventurous shit with an Iraqi whose dad produced the Iraqi edition of Sesame Street for 20 years. 20 reasonably good years living under a nightmare monster dictator—still better than being forcibly displaced and watching your neighborhood, city, friends, and family members sometimes literally exploded.

Anyway, I am convinced that all living things know, to greater or lesser degrees (degrees depending on level of health, incapacitation, remaining ability to think, feel and sense as was standard during the bulk of the life course), when the end is nigh. Bringing it on back to Bill and Bill's trapped rat snapped back, and his body in the throes of death, I assume remaining continent was a lower priority for his autonomous biological self as he briefly swung, struggling, from his intelligently improvised and self-appointed / anointed gallows. Knowing Bill, though, it wouldn't surprise me if he'd worn an adult diaper under his pants. He was just that nice.

His body and handsome, actually, gorgeous face were touched up beautifully for his memorial. He had an open casket. I held his hand, felt the dead weight. Just held it for a few moments. It was probably heavier with the embalming fluid and remaining bodily fluids solidifying or coagulating. It felt like holding a freezing cold, heavy hand of a Japanese, uncanny valley style humanoid robot with synthetic skin. This robot was switched off, no resistance in the hand holding-holding of his hand. Just a dead leaden freezing cold-from-the-inside heavy heavy weight. He was fucking gone.

He was my father from another mother, my brother from another mother who was his sister inconveniently. My wannabe dad, in that I wanna'd him to be mah dad. He might have wanted this a bit, too. He vacillated between taking an active, even supervisory or interventionist role in my development, and withdrawing, respecting his proper place as an uncle, not my father, not part of the nuke family which was bound to explode in someways anyhow. By and large, his fatherly role is probably a fantasy that I embraced certainly before his death, but with more fervor afterwards. Bill was, above all, a reasonable man, a "right" person.

His daughter, who hates him in death, still concedes that even if he was a bastard or a drunk or a prick, he was a person who, at the end of the day, almost always made the right call, the correct judgment, the apt observation, the accurate prediction of the behavior of others, and of himself. He used to bet his little bro and my mamma dukes that he'd go to the grave first. I don't think he was rigging the betting yet; I'm pretty sure now that his death was preventable. He lost his mind in the last three years of his life but was sharp enough to hide his altered self from others. He was also an authority figure, in my family, at his medical school, with his friends and colleagues: if Bill wasn't around, or was doing something unexpected, nobody questioned or challenged him.

Not good to deify anyone, is it? God always dies or remains dead. He makes mistakes, belches in the cosmos, gives us butterflies as well as stomachs which sometimes get tied up in knotty butterflies flying high up away. Butterflies. In our stomachs. Anxiety.

Anxiety. Evolutionarily-oriented theories of psychological development make decent sense of it, from what I can tell. Of fear, of anxiety, of anticipatory nervousness, or everything grouped in the healthy bucket of rational self-preserving self-interested instinctively guided concern, as well as everything dropped into the slop bucket of shitty fear: paranoia, panic disorders, night terrors, anxiety massive attacks, incredibly over the top fear reactions in everyday life. Evolutionarily minded folks posit these unpleasant-to-the-person-experiencing-them phenomena as triggers which keep getting pulled even after the shootout is done, as a gun which is firing preemptively all the time as a brain or a mind—increasingly these days, the brain is blithely conflated with the mind, the brain-mind being the true seat of consciousness, of course. Who on Earth would question such an obvious linkage? The ancient Egyptians, for one, as Bill always reminded me on visits to New York.

He loved to retell the tale of the ancient Egyptians, to expound and expand upon their conviction that the heart, the literal heart beating in your chest pumping blood, was the seat of conscious thought, of all mentation, all emotionality, and all else collectively and conventionally understood by them to be the essence, or soul, of man. Take-away message: we mistake the 21st century arrogant conception of and conflation of the brain-mind and are not terribly different from those Jew-enslaving ancient Egyptians and their indisputable belief in the heart as soul / seat of consciousness and all that jazz.

My belief, following Bill's cues and lead, is that we know less about the brain today than, perhaps, the Egyptians did back then about the functioning of the heart and the circulatory system. I know a few neuroscientists who are convinced that our grasp of the brain's structure, layout, functional regions and functional mapping, development, physiology, and the epiphenomena / ephemera we regard as "ourselves" or "our feelings" or "our thoughts" or "our identities"—myself, Bill, and some supposed experts (who are trustworthy only insofar as they openly acknowledge the limits of their knowledge even while displaying a remarkable grasp of the state of the art in neuroanatomy / biology / science)—we are convinced that our grasp of the brain-mind is as primitive as, to again take one simple example among countless choices, the medieval theory of the four humors.

This now ceases. Abruptly. Maybe spasmodically if you're an involved reader, a physical reader. Like Bill's life as perceived from the outside, by insider outsiders, by myself. I will never stop mourning him or talking to him, consulting with him. He remains permanently lodged as a lead in the cast of characters which make up the social and familial communities all of us inhabit and are partially constitutive of.

Everyone else is a dream to the dreamer, waking or asleep, dead or alive.