

1#

hi there !

*intro / grand old duke of york / half full clip*

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2#

...are you an optimist ...are you a pessimist - is the glass half full or half empty ?

Something about this phrase always irritated me. There are so many ways of responding to that question without necessarily being an optimistic OR a pessimist. Instinctively whenever I've heard people use this cliché, I have tried to pick holes in it, saying well, it's potentially empty, if I drink it, or potentially full, if you pass the bottle over in this direction, or...half full? Where's the rest? that's poor service, that is, if you served that to anyone, they'd send it back .... I always start thinking - empty/ full, optimist/ pessimist ...it's all a bit ...binary isn't it?... a bit dualistic ...I mean it doesn't have to be either.... What about the nihilist ? How would he see a half glass of water? Or she?... What about the proverbial dehydrated man stumbling across a desert? . Is it a mirage? How big is this glass? Where can I get the next one from? How long do I have to wait? ....And then there's the geek worry ' How can I take your word for it that this is exactly half a glass of water without measuring it - How did they measure it' , and so on. And what about Michael Craig Martin - the 70's conceptual artist who put a half full glass of water on a shelf and called it " an oak tree". You'd call him a bit of an optimist wouldn't you? But which bit?

I've always wondered... idly, on seeing pictures of "an oak tree" in Art catalogues, whether Craig Martin had even thought about the optimist or pessimist thing, or realised that the sight of a half full glass of water on a shelf would inevitably remind some people of the half full / half empty thing, or whether he was too wrapped up in the semiotics and the remove between title and object and the poetic qualities of purity and all that to even consider that there might be other potential interpretations of this work that he hadn't quite intended. He's still alive. I suppose someone could ask him,

I mean, if you can hand out a text saying a half full glass of water means one thing - as he did - you equally well hand out a text saying it means another. When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less."

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Anyway, Craig-Martin could have been lying - he put the glass on a shelf really high up on the wall so no one could get at it

: it could have been gin in it.

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I was watching the snooker on TV last night... Ronnie O' Sullivan winning 9-1 In the final of this years UK Masters.

In the post-match interview O' Sullivan said: "I am never normally surprised when I win tournaments" ( the audience laughed at this) " but I am surprised I've won it after eight months out. It's about producing when it matters," He said that - at the age of 40 - he is now " one of the

OAPs of the game" and that he keeps expecting that there will be a new generation of younger players coming along good enough to beat him. But that hasn't happened. Yet. Perhaps 40 is the new 30, he said. In another interview he says : " I'm at that stage where I appreciate every win. I never did before. It's not a good sign, because it shows you're coming to the end. But, in human terms, it *is* a good sign."

Steve Davis, in his autobiography ' Interesting', which isn't, says of keeping on winning titles as you get older " I still flirt with the idea with genuine optimism until it all goes wrong." He never won a title after writing that. .

*accentuate the positive/ eliminate the negative ( andrews)*

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3 #

Right then

My first thought for this program was a kind of shaggy dog story about a man...some guy, in a series of situations, where over the space of a few months everything in his life that *could* go wrong *does go wrong* - it starts off with small annoying things like missing the bus, burning pans, losing the house keys, then it gradually builds up, the things that go wrong get progressively worse and worse... he traps a nerve in his leg and cant walk, he gets sued, he sells something on e bay and ends up losing both the money and the item, his hard drive dies, he gets evicted from his house, his pet dies of a foxbite.... and then of course... the things that go wrong get ever more exaggerated and unlikely....i don't know, he goes on holiday but misses the plane home, he sells all his stuff to buy another ticket, then misses the second plane aswell, then when he eventually gets home his cars been stolen from the airport, it's pissing down with rain, he finds a hotel for the night, the kettle in the room doesn't work, at 3 am he is woken up by some drunken couple because the room has been double booked by a mistake, then when he gets home the next day, his house has been destroyed by a gas explosion or a flash flood or whatever, and so on.... basically a sort of update or rewrite of " limony snickets ' a series of unfortunate events' ", but abit lower rent and structured differently...

...the point being, that every time something new goes wrong, the character, who would not be me, honest, would remain, against all available evidence to the contrary, optimistic.... however much shit the world threw at him, he would still keeping thinking that things would turn out ok, and whereas at the start of the story, his optimism might seem like a sign of resilience in the face of adversity, not letting things get you down, by the end of the of the story, it would be quite obviously delusional; the guy would have no reason for optimism whatsoever but still stubbornly maintain it regardless....and the ending would be.... through some plot mcguffins I didn't work out... the guy gets tricked by some stranger he meets into going down into a cellar, and he goes through a door at the end of the cellar, and it suddenly gets shut and locked behind him, he hears footsteps running away, and he looks around, and he finds that he's standing at the bottom of a deep empty well, with no possibility of escape, and he looks up, and he sees the little circle of sky far above his head, and the programme ends with: ( *yazz and the plastic population "the only way is up BABY for you and me now, the only way is up....* )

But i decided to drop this idea, because, whilst i am not.... *particularly* superstitious, i felt it was asking for trouble, maybe irony would intervene, if i invented all these baroque things that went wrong for this so-called " not me" character, maybe some of them might end happening to me, i

might jinx myself, be careful what you wish for, and all that...so...er.... I abandoned it.

*accentuate the positive/ eliminate the negative ( cliff richards)*

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4#

After a week or so of doing something else, I started wading through the mountain of "positive thinking" rubbish about optimism on the internet, endless half-assed formulations like "confidence looks for evidence, and optimism thumbs its nose at evidence." ( *speech to text*)

I prefer the distinction made by Antonio Gramsci in a letter written from a fascist prison in 1929 :  
" I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will. "

Terry Gilliam said: " I am becoming more pessimistic about optimism" ##

Nelson Mandela said - "I never lose. Either I win, or I learn" .

Everywhere, I read that optimists are said to be healthier people. ( *coughing fit* )

I read this story about Samuel Beckett.... An actor spotted Beckett coming down the steps of his hotel and went over to say hello ... "ah good morning mr beckett " the actor said to him " What a beautiful day. Makes you feel glad to be alive"....Beckett said - " I wouldn't go that far "

I read an article - on David Icke.com - about how the 33 Chilean miners trapped underground a few years back remained optimistic: Amongst other things they, er , sang the national anthem.

Some of the miners reported that during the 69 days underground they managed to stay optimistic about their chances of survival and release mainly because they knew that there was a large team of experts on the surface working round the clock to release them. A psychologist referred to this as 'practical optimism'.

Martin Seligman , " one of the pre-eminent experts on optimism ", it says here, describes himself as a "born pessimist" Seligman says " I think only a pessimist can write and do serious stuff about optimism." He teaches "learned optimism" classes, which he says children are receptive to from about the age of 10. He summarizes his basic message as follows:

"When the cost is small, use the optimism skills. On the other hand, the cost of failure can be very large, such as a pilot, having another drink at a party before a flight. You really don't want optimistic pilots. When the cost of failure is large and catastrophic, you don't want to use optimism skills. "

He goes on; "In learned optimism programs, we teach people first to recognize the catastrophic things they say to themselves..... We teach them first to treat it as if it were said by an external person whose mission in life is to make them miserable. Then, to dispute it in the same way they would argue with an external person. That's the central skill in learned optimism training. "

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4b#

Laurent Berlant's book " Cruel Optimism" is described as "exploring scenes in which subjects desire ....conditions...., that undermine the possibility of their flourishing ." " A relation of cruel

optimism is a double-bind in which your attachment to something sustains you in life at the same time as that object is actually a threat .". She gives as an example, someone who is lonely, who needs another person, but is at the same time driven mad by, as she puts it the " overpresence" of that other person.

Another example she gives is the dismantling of the Welfare State - " the problem of contemporary austerity politics comes from the state saying that the public is itself a problem, too expensive to be borne by the state that represents it."

She says that her preferred take on optimism, is not about saying " i love this" or " i hate that " but more to do with saying " ok this is where we are now what can we do with this situation"

"Then" she says " you start to think of yourself as having a capacity to produce many kinds of patternings and attachments to the world." The problem is " she says " is that.... life is exhausting because you have to make it up all the time."

Is it a choice, optimism, or how your brain's wired?

When my Dad had a stroke he lost the use of one leg for a while. I remember my Mum saying to him one evening "stop moaning - at least you can still use the other one "

is that optimism?

*(alma cogan - accentuate the positive / eeeeeeliminate the negative - )*

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4c#

*"Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."*

*"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."*

*accentuate the positive/ eliminate the negative ( Al Jarreau )*

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5#

The ex-Greek Finance Minister, Yannis Varoufakis, answering the rather dry question : "Can the Euro or European Union be democratised?" has this to say about optimism ,

*(bad greek accent) " If you ask for my prediction, I am very gloomy, pessimistic." ( on second thoughts I'll abandon the bad greek accent) I think the democratisation process has a very small chance of success. In which case we will have disintegration and a bleak future. But the difference when we are talking about society or the weather is the weather doesn't give a damn*

about our predictions, so we can afford to sit back and look at the sky and say I think it will rain because such talk will not influence the probability of rain. But I think with issues of society and politics, we have a moral and political duty to be optimistic and to say okay, of all the options available to us, which is the one least likely to cause catastrophe? For me, that is an attempt to democratise the European Union. Do I believe we will succeed? I don't know, but unless I have hope that we can I can't get out of bed in the morning and go around do stuff. "

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6#

I was wondering about optimism and politics , because of the level of popular support behind Jeremy Corbyn's back to it's socialist roots Labour movement in the UK, and Bernie Saunders' bid for the presidency in the states on a Social Democrat ticket. Both have alot of supporters amongst the young, who have not yet had a belief in Social Justice beaten out of them.

Personally, I don't think that either of them have a cat in hell's chance of becoming president or prime minister, but this programme isn't about who's going to win in November in the US, or in 2020 in the UK, it's supposed to be about optimism - so what I am interested in is that the presence of Corbyn and Saunders on the political scene seems to have got people energised about politics at a grass roots level again - people I know who have been utterly dismissive of politics for the last 30 odd years or abandoned it disillusioned in the 90's have started to show in interest in what's being said again - there's less shrugging and going # there's no point in voting theyre all the same # because for once, maybe, they're not..... ".... the sleepers awake...." - And, I dunno about America, but I haven't sensed this kind of grass roots level optimism in UK politics since the early 1980's - before everything started getting privatised and the financial markets were deregulated and house prices started going nuts and the the US and the UK started their ongoing series of wars in various countries of the middle-east.

It seems like there is a genuine feeling that by lending their support to Corbyn or Saunders, ordinary people might be able to have their voices heard...that someone who appears to be different to the usual smug mouthpieces for vested interests might be at least worth a try...that even if neither man makes leader, maybe an effective opposition can make some kind of difference...

Alasdair Grey, the Scottish writer and painter, wrote in the epigraph to his book ' Lanark' - " Work as if you live in the early days of a Better nation."

On the other hand Laurent Berlant, quoted earlier, said she voted for Obama because " he sucks less bad". The least worst option. When Obama was elected with the slogan - YES WE CAN - many people were definitely optimistic that he would change things for the better, after years of Bush. But then ten years of the same old Wars in the middle-east and Wall Street bailouts back home, and all the rest, have somewhat dampened the publics initial enthusiasm for Obama, I think it would be fair to say...

So, you know, in the unlikely event that Corbyn or Saunders - - (their programs are remarkably similar, even in the small print) - should be elected head of state, would they be like " a good man in an impossible situation" ? ....Does the nature of politics these days mean that their hands will always be tied? .... Is the forward momentum that drives public wealth into private hands by now too great to reverse the flow from trickle up to trickle down?" Would the first flush of victory inevitably give way to real-politik - a slightly more cuddly version of business as usual? Is all

Prime ministers and Presidents can do just... tinkering with details ?

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7#

That's what some people would have you believe. Hilary Clinton, the ' no change ' candidate, being the obvious example.

That, uh, you know, sure, things will have to change SOMETIME in the future, but, not right now, and that, yeah, we all know the national debt can't carrying on doubling forever, but, uh, right now, there's not alot that can be done about that, ..and yeah, sure! some day we're gonna run out of fossil fuel, but , for the time being, natural gas, it's a SAFE BRIDGE, right?..... and that yeah, everyone knows that some day climate change is gonna force us into doing something about, um, climate change.... but, er, that's not gonna happen today, or anytime soon, so, um, the best thing for now is, carry on the way we are, safe pair of hands on the tiller, don't rock the boat.... right?

- ( *Dustbowl wind sound...* )

Right?

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Hilary Clinton is endorsed by - Kanye West, Beyoncé, Pharrell Williams, Katie Perry, Christina Aguilera, Burt Bacharach, Tony Bennett, Jon Bon Jovi, Mariah Carey, Cher, Kelly Clarkson, Ellie Goulding, Ice-T, Ja Rule, Elton John, Quincy Jones, Lady Gaga, Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, Janelle Monae, Morrissey, Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Sting, Barbra Streisand, James Taylor, Usher, will.i.am and Stevie Wonder.

( *Collage / cut - up of Clinton endorsers above - 1min :18 "* )

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8#

hmm... ,maybe i'n getting sucked down a rabbit hole here with all this political stuff, but...

I guess why i started talking about..what politicians do in our name, or rather in the name of whatever country it is that we live in, is partly that, uh, it's like a backdrop to any personal sense of optimism we might permit ourselves.... The conditions under which optimism can take place, as it were.

I'm writing and recording this programme whilst living in a small quiet town in the countryside somewhere in the North of England. Someone living in Syria at the moment would make quite a different prgramme about optimism. Or someone in Australia, or where-ever. And I know that this programme is going to be broadcast in the USA, on WFMU, in New York State. So, you know, this background sense of being optimistic or not about the direction your country seems to be heading - ambient optimism, you could call it - is going to be accented differently over where you are than it is here.

(*accentuate the positive/ eliminate the negative*)perry como

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9#

As I said earlier, I'm putting this programme together this mid January of 2016, so it will be a few months past it's sell by date by the time it gets to you. I've just been watching Sarah Palin's endorsement speech of Donald Trump on TV. After the first minute or so, when the initial OMIGOD of disbelief had had a chance to fade, my attention was distracted by Trump's silent fidgety presence sidestage - not at all at ease out of the limelight and off script - and I was struck by his curiously mobile lizard smile, a strange squirming complicit thing that animated his face in areas you wouldn't quite expect.

But, this is supposed to be a programme about optimism, So I won't say anything else about Trump. His candidacy reminds me of an old Bob Monkhouse Joke - " They laughed at me when I said I was going to be a comedian. Well, who's laughing now? "

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10#

Sarah Palin , an over excited middle aged cheerleader with a perma-smile talking garbage, just looked happy to be in the limelight again, like she couldn't believe her luck. It didn't even matter if her actual words didn't make sense - the point was she looked \*energised\* YO and \*positive\* YEAH. Her only function was to get on stage and be there and be UP. A real life example of mindless optimism.

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11#

All this reminds me of story Oliver Sacks tells about coming into a ward full of patients in a hospital listening to a Speech by President Reagan on TV, who were all laughing at the broadcast. Most of these patients were suffering from " aphasia " the inability to understand verbal language - " they could only respond to the gestures and facial expressions and the emotional sounds of the words - not the sense of the words themselves. So watching Reagan speaking, Sacks writes

"it was the grimaces, the histrionisms, the false gestures and, above all, the false tones and cadences of the voice, which rang false for these wordless but immensely sensitive patients. It was the (for them) most glaring, even grotesque, incongruities and improprieties of vocal nuance - the tone, the rhythm, the cadences, the music, the subtlest modulations, inflections, intonations - that my aphasic patients responded, undeceived and undeceivable by words. This is why they laughed at the President's speech.

Sacks goes on to say that there was a patient on the same ward who was suffering from " aphraxia " - a separate condition, the opposite of aphasia, where she understood none of the emotional content of speech, but heard everything as prose - words put together to communicate sense and meaning. She was equally dubious about Reagan's Speech.

'He is not cogent,' she said. 'He does not speak good prose. His word-use is improper. Either he

is brain-damaged, or he has something to conceal."

Sachs concludes that for the rest of us "deceptive word-use combined with deceptive tone" "aided, doubtless, by our wish to be fooled", is what deceives us into accepting the content of political speeches. "Only the brain-damaged" he observes " remained intact, undeceived.

13#

Looking at it through the other end of the telescope

Music, writing, drawing, films....any kind of making things for me involves a degree of optimism, i can't do anything if I'm in a negative frame of mind, or, if I try out of sheer bloody mindedness, I just end up throwing it away. I never start something with the expectation that it will turn out crap, even this, what would be the point? You put this thing you like with that thing you like, you take it somewhere interesting, they seem to get on OK. You introduce some other elements. You throw a few of them away. There's so many variables you'd think that something is bound to go wrong, but you can't think like that, because if you do think like that it will do...like the old thing about a dancer suddenly becoming conscious of their feet and falling over. You try and render whatever it is you think you are doing to a technical level which even though you might be critical of yourself you hope you have sugared the pill sufficiently for someone else to swallow. Christ you might even hope that people will buy the thing - whatever it is.

And even something that that seems totally fatalist and pessimistic and world weary, like say, a novel by Thomas Bernhard or a play by Beckett, something that is relentlessly alert to the absurd and the grotesque and the pointless and the painful and the tiring, well, the very fact of having bothered to FINISH and PUBLISH the thing in the first place - let alone writing book after book after book of it - strikes me as on some level optimistic.

*( paul mc-fucking -Cartney - accentuate the negative / eliminate the positive)*

JG Ballard , in his Novelised Autobiography " THE Kindness of Women" - - after 300 odd pages describing his varied, focussed, sustained life - the book ends on a description of himself at the age of 61 - at some party in LA, , in a house full coke-snorting models and media hangers on, surrounded by happy chaos and people half his age ... the book ends with him saying - I might be paraphrasing here, probably simplified it in my memory - anyway, it ends with him saying:

I want to know what happens next!

now that's pretty optimistic!

*(sam cook - accentuate the positive).*

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14#------(sinetone 440hz).

*click. Speech to text: "your twenty nine minutes is over. This has been a broadcast for OPTIMIZED on WFMU. Thank you. "*

*(puts mic down noise - sounds of tv in background,voices off : Lia"can i have a cup of tea? " A*



"a glass of wine would be nicer. " Lia " well for you it might be")

vicki : er cough excuse me you havent finished yet'

A - what? ah...oh...haven't I?

vicki "no"

A - wasn't that 29 minutes"

vicki "no"

A ah....I have 3 minutes left...

vicki "yes"

A - and i'm busy wasting them talking to you?

vicki - "yes"

A - you're being very mono-syllabic

vicki - " am I?"

A - well you weren't then, that was bi-syllabic

vicki -"yes" . ( *uncomfortable pause*)

A - well i have some stuff left over... i could use that I suppose

vicki - "sorry"

A - no no I'm sorry... right...er...um...where was I ( *shuffles paper*) oh...yeah...right... er, not that...er, no not that... um...no...wait...

vicki - "okay"

A - Wait !! ....

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15#

outro

(*Doctor John: accentuate the positive...eliminate the negative plays for a while...*) // cut's off at exactly 28" and 56 seconds

*text to speech .your twenty nine minutes is over. This has been a broadcast for OPTIMIZED on*

WFMU. Thank you.

Right, that's it.

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BLURB

"1) Easy pickings for the cultural magpie from the dustbin of contemporary culture?

or

2) A leisurely stroll optimism-spotting on the over-crowded boulevards of celebrity?

or

3) A whistlestop tour down the backstreets of google, negotiating sharp corners requiring abrupt shifts of mental gear on a semi-functioning clutch?

You decide."

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BIO

After a decade of faffing about drawing, running a record shop and shovelling chicken shit, Andrew Sharpley joined UK electronics band Stock Hausen and Walkman which operated for 10 years internationally and made loads of good records. Subsequently drifted around the backwaters of alternative music in Europe whilst working on own stuff below the radar. Currently releasing things online and accepting commissions such as this.