

I, ME, MYSELF

Who are you, what do you believe, what do you care about ...

Assignment #1

- *To be nobody but yourself -in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else- means to fight the hardest battle any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.* (E. E. Cummings)
Describe yourself. Now describe yourself as you think others see you. How do the two descriptions compare?

Assignment #2

After our in-class discussion about the topic below ...

Choose one topic from each of the 14 headers below and write a brief descriptive page about each. We will be sharing our thoughts with each other upon completing the assignment.

1. Tell me more about you...

- I am the one who...
- I admit ...
- To be or not to be: what have you chosen?
- In what areas are you a record breaker?
- When I check inside, I find ...
- *We are going to check with our conscience. It's right there, in that trunk, covered with dust. One can see we don't use it that often.* (Alfred Jarry) What about you? What does your conscience tell you?
- I believe in ...
- In what ways do you feel wise?
- *Belief gets in the way of learning.* (Robert Heinlein). What beliefs do you hold onto that get in the way of your learning?
- I want to be remembered for ...
- What are you still learning?
- *I will never be happy on this earth. I'm far too stupid.* (Raymond Queneau) What about you?
- Tell your story from someone else's point of view.
- What sets you apart from the crowd?
- *... the still point of the turning world...* (T.S.Eliot) What's the still point of your turning world?
- For Ally McBeal fans : what is your theme song?
- *If I am not for myself, who will be?* (Pirke Avot)
- What songs do you sing in the shower?
- ... has been a constant in my life.
- Things that are *right* around me...
- How old would you be if you didn't know how old you are?
- Do you pay attention to the signs in your life?
- If you were to be a greek deity, which one would you be?
- When in your life do you feel that you were most yourself?
- If you consider your life to be like a yo-yo, what do you do with/about the knots that inevitably show up in the string?

2. Looking backwards

- *None of us has lived the life we intended.* (Joseph Campbell). So... what is the life you intended? and what is the life you are living?
- What are the last tears you cried? *The true paradises are the ones we lost.* (Marcel Proust) What paradises have you lost?
- What day would you like to relive, over and over?
- The hardest thing I ever had to do was...
- I will never forget ...
- What one actual incident or, most accurately, accident, self- or other-imposed, in your life changed you forever?
- What would your sixteen-years-old self tell your present self?
- Did you fulfill your promise, developing the talent you were born with?
- The most awful place I ever been
- What call did you answer?
- Why do roads go apart?
- *Those were the best years of my life* (Brian Adams). What were the best days of *your* life?
- Write your autobiography in five minutes.
- Did you speak out and tell the truth?
- This is where I am now...
- Have you ever considered the new beginnings as another beginning's end? When?

3. Times and seasons

- How do you measure time?
- Write about the time of day you are writing.
- Looking backwards / looking forwards.
- Freewrite: sundays.
- When does the future begin? Or the past end?
- What do your mornings, afternoons, evenings look like (in an attempt to help new diarists find TIME to write)?
- Give me this moment.
- One thing I really like about living today but which is different from when I grew up is...
- Sunday's sounds are...
- Can you see yourself reflected in the seasons?
- In the spring; what hour of my life would you gladly lose from memory as you move the clock forward ?
- In the fall; what hour of my life would you most like to relive as you turn the clock backward ?
- The year is 2099. You are a historian researching life at the turn of the millennium. The room you are in now is an exhibit in the Museum of History. What does it tell you about life from the period 2002 -2010?
- How will you be "mad" this spring?
- List 100 things I want to do in the summer
- Summer means...
- What do you want to do this autumn? What are your own autumn goodies?
- With what rituals do you mark the passages of seasons?

4. Places

- What do you see from your window?
- Write about your home, which there is "no place like".
- One place that draws me back time and time again is...
- Where are the places you go when you're not home?
- Reveal a "hiding place".
- Freewrite: home.
- *Where everything is order and beauty, luxury, calm and pleasure.* (Bad translation of a poem from Baudelaire) What would this place be for you?
- Where are your places of being *glued together*?
- What places will you haunt?
- Write about where you are when you're writing.

5. Today

- What would I need to redo to make today perfect?
- What do you want to be today?
- Minds, like parachutes, only function when they are open. Is your parachute open, today?
- What color is (was) today?
- What is the smell of your day?
- What is your life today, a drama, comedy or tragedy?
- What do I want to remember about today ...
- *I was not so much running an errand as I was answering a calling.* Which are you doing today?
- Things you learned today.
- What is at the middle of your life today?
- What I did today that I've never done before in my life.
- Today, I will ...
- What feels new in your life?
- Last night, I...

6. When you write

- I am not writing about ... because ...
- I would call my autobiography ...
- What words are written in the margins of your books?
- When I think about writing a journal, I ...
- Three things I don't have to write about are ...
- Three things I want to write about are ...
- I write because I am...
- What am I afraid of when I journal?
- What do you want to be when you're writing?
- What do you feel when you re-read your journal?
- A word that describes my journal is ...
- Writing is ...
- What is intimate in your journal?
- What is your list of journal writing do's and don'ts?
- *Words ought to be a little wild for they are the assault of thoughts on the unthinking.* (John Maynard Keynes) What are your wild words?

- Freewrite: wishing I could find my way back to poetry.

7. Close to nature

- Today I am like ... [something in nature] because...
- Freewrite : tropical.
- Watch the sunrise today -even if you have to get up early in the morning! Write about this experience. How was it?
- Imbolc, or Candlemas, is a pagan celebration of light. Traditionally, people used to put a lit candle in front of each window of their house to celebration the return of sunlight in their lives. Tonight, try to light a candle instead of turning the lights on when the sun sets. Try to experience what night was all about in the ancient days. Then, Freewrite about light.
- How does the moon influences you?
- Freewrite : lilacs.
- How do you keep your wilderness alive inside you? What does it look like?
- If I could be a flower, I would be
- Freewrite about something in nature that inspires your passion. What metaphor, image, sensation, sound "captures" that natural entity?
- Make a 100 item rainy day list... things you'd like to do on a rainy day, things rainy days make you think of, rainy day songs, other rainy days you remember, etc.
- Write about the sea. What are you inner waves? When did you see the ocean for the last time?
- Write about the current weather conditions.
- Write about yourself in relation to the four elements -air, earth, fire, water.
- In Norway, people used to celebrate the Midnight Sun, which marked the beginning to ten weeks without darkness. What about you? What sun illuminates your nights?
- "Everyone wants to understand painting, why is there no attempt to understand the song of birds?" (Picasso)

8. Shadows and secrets

- List all the things you just don't want to think about.
- Tell a story from the (your) underworld.
- What are you scared of?
- Freewrite: darkness.
- "What does "not being anything" mean?
- What are your personal superstitions?
- What do you see when your eyes are closed?
- *The heart has more rooms than a whore's hotel.* (Gabriel Garcia Marquez) What rooms are hidden in yours?
- Confess a sin.
- Freewrite: nightmares.
- I gladly make the sacrifice of fear. What would we do if we weren't afraid? What are we afraid of? What is fear?
- Hell is...
- After seeing *The Silence of the Lambs* again, yesterday. Who/what are your lambs? What are they afraid of?
- *I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones.* (John Cage)
What old ideas do you have that frighten you?
- The scariest thing I could write about is ...
- Are you scared of emptiness?

- It is said that on Michaelmas, an old celebration inspired from pagan feasts, Satan fell from the sky and landed in a bush of blackberries; that's why it is believed to be bad luck to eat blackberries on Michaelmas day. What about you; what was your own fall? How was it cushioned?
- What would you let die in your life?
- Where did you see your shadow self today?
- If there is life after death... What death did you experience in order to reach this life today?

9. Holidays and rituals

- What gift will you give yourself this year?
- Freewrite: laughs.
- In China, new year's day is celebrated the day of the second new moon after winter solstice. What about you? Beside the traditional January 1st date, when does your new year start?
- What are doing when you're not working? What do your holidays look like?
- What is one of the simple joys of Christmas that you like to savor to the fullest?
- Everyone has a favorite Christmas story or experience that he/she loves to share... what's yours?
- What do you traditionally do the day after Christmas?
- Freewrite : silent night.
- The celebrations around Christmas find their origin in the Roman Saturnials, a festival that celebrated the return of the light marked by the winter solstice. Traditionnally, all the social roles were reversed: the masters were slaves, and the slaves were kings. What would you do if everything in your life could be reversed?
- Freewrite: anniversaries.
- How would you fill your *own* Easter basket, with comforting, nurturing goodies...?
- Write about ritual in your life.

10. Anywhere out of this world

- Describe your dream god - if God could be anything you wanted, what qualities would he/she have?
- Define "spiritual experience". Write about a spiritual experience you have had outside of a church setting.
- Traditionally, on St. Mark's eve, people thought that the one who was enough a fool to spend the entire night on a church's porch would see the ghosts of the year's deceased. Today, freewrite: ghosts.
- In the old days, people believed that during the famous Walpurgis night, witches gathered in a huge sabbat and spent the entire night flying in the sky on their brooms. Is there a witch or a warlock in you? If there was, what would you do?
- Traditionnaly, on Halloween's eve, people wore all kind of costumes to fool the spirits of the dead who were coming back into this world, the gates between our world and the land of the dead being open for this one night. What disguise are you going to wear to fool the evil spirits? What spirits are those?

11. Things to hold on to

- If my ... could talk.
- If you were to place one single possession of yours on a spaceship to be blasted to other galaxies, what would you send so that other intelligences would sense who you are?
- During the week of the Kermesse, in Germany, a sacred object that remained buried into the ground all year was dug up. All week long, celebrations took place around this object, which was to be buried again at the end of the feasts. What object would you like to disappear all year long?
- An old legend says there is a pot of gold at the feet of rainbows. What would you like to find at the foot of your rainbow?
- Describe a material object that you lost and its impact on your life.
- You're a houseplant, what would you say about the humans in your house?

12. Childhood

- Tell a bedtime story.
- The thing I can remember clearly about being five years old is ...
- What were some of your "secrets of childhood"?
- I remember when I was a kid ...
- When is childhood over?
- Kids things I love.
- When did you stop believing in Santa Claus?
- What fairies watch over you?
- Write a diary entry as if you were a teenager, or write one with crayons.
- Tell me (I mean your notebook) about tasting snowflakes for the first time.

13. Family and relationship writing

- What have you inherited? What will you pass (or have you passed) on to your own children and grandchildren?
- Freewrite: loving.
- I will never forgive ...
- How is your life impacting others?
- Like the little mermaid sacrificed her voice for her prince, what would you sacrifice for yours?
- Family gatherings : do they remind you of who you are or who you're not... (or a bit of both)?
- The one person in the world that I admire more than anyone else is ...
- Who are you when you're all alone? What masks do you wear with others?
- I feel close to ...
- Freewrite: solitude.
- What prevents me from feeling close to others.
- I have a hard time listening
- Freewrite: family.
- "We shall never understand one another until we reduce the language to seven words." (Kahlil Gibran)
What would those seven words be?

14. What if...

- I have a dream...
 - What would have happened if you hadn't left the house this morning?
 - What would you like to let "die" in your life? And what would you like to fill the void?
 - What would you do if you had wings?
 - If you could have five other lives/careers, what would they be?
 - Name one (or more) thing you've never done.
 - Freewrite: starting over.
 - What would you do if you didn't have to be moral or honest for a day?
 - What does the smallest part of you want to do?
 - What if...
 - The twenty most important things to do with my life.
 - What do I need to clear from my path?
 - When I think about really getting my life in order, I ...
 - *When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.* (Helen Keller) What closed door do you keep staring at?
 - More than anything else in the world, I hope that ...
 - Is a dream a lie, if it don't come true, or is it something worse?
 - If I could live my life over again, I would ...
 - What did you dream about last night?
 - What's one thing you'd like to do more than anything in the world? Convince yourself that you can do it. What problems does this raise? How can you solve them?
 - When we ignore true dreams, what dies?
 - *We are ready for an unforeseen event that may or may not occur.* (Former U.S. Vice-President Dan Quayle) What are you ready for?
 - What would you like to have in your life if it were only for one day?
 - What I'd really like...
-