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### To Stand on Solid Ground

I do not need to believe in happiness, because I know that it exists. There cannot, however, be happiness without the knowledge necessary to recognize what one's actual requirements are for reaching that happiness, that plenitude, and flourishing. At the very base of self is desire but before that can be seen, one must go through the webs strung and hung aloft the rafters of the haphazardly and selfishly constructed "self" left there by those that have surrounded them since birth. In short, the societies, cultures, and peoples that one has encountered and lived by. To root around in the darkness of a sutured, mismatching, and material mental attic in search of the warm light of fulfillment is to stand in the middle of a staircase with your eyes closed, shaded from the sun by the umbrella given to you from behind and yet still held tight in one's hand as it has become the familiar. In order to chase plenitude, you must first seek to know what it is that you truly need to be full in the first place.

The ignorant may be happy, as it is a state of being that can come to be so long as one feels that all their needs and desires have been met. But even then, one should dig deeper-- what is it that truly makes one full? Is it the rush of glee that rises from being accepted by your peers for following the common sense that we are all expected to not only understand implicitly the whole of, but also to upkeep and reproduce? Or is it the hope that blossoms from dipping your head above the water and witnessing all the limpness floating on the surface and still catching

sight of those waving in the distance, livelier and brighter than the murky, crowded waters below?

Post-structuralism challenges these notions of “common sense” where success is one set of things to check off of a list, where being wealthy means holding the keys to a spotless car or a penthouse, wherein this modernity the notion of fulfillment is in the completion of one’s collection of limited edition clothing line so that one can then post a glam shot of their wardrobe on Instagram for clicks and clout. This reproduction of the hegemonic way of thinking, to step above others and to check to see how to act when you are below another, is the exact thing that literary theory hopes to counteract. The numbness that comes from standing on stalagmites and not even glancing at the others below in the depths of the dark blindspots appears from one’s intent gaze on the stalactites of that ascribed “success” above. This is the opposite of the Plateau so seemingly far away, where one stands on the solid ground looking neither down nor up, so unlike the trodden pillars of a man-made cave which we call society, although that very society is also in part made by the people standing within it.

The colder and harder the world has been on you, the harder it is then to still be kind through and in spite of the blanket of numbness that has been prescribed to us by the very systems that cause the prickling on our skin. To the notion of numbness and the other, and to the notion of kindness and the self, they are not parallel lines but rather intersecting ones that come out on the other sides of their very same coins. This plateau is not someplace far away, but rather right where you are, but forms only on the condition of one’s conscious actions, something that cannot come without the knowledge required to recognize its presence in the air around you. Whether you decide to hold out your arms so that those around you may hold on tight to your

hands and link close like a quilt knit tightly by conviction, or if you decide to cross your arms and hug yourself instead, holding only yourself close so that no one else could make you fall is what determines ultimately how connected you can be to someone else-- an “other”.

When one gets angry at the woman taking a while to count exact change at the front of the line in your local grocery store or the annoyance that rises habitually when someone brings out a coupon that doesn't scan but desperately tries to get it to work anyway, they give in to the practiced idea of self and the only way to fight this familiar, unconscious crossing of the arms is to consciously step down and give kindness in the form of respect and consideration. After all, how could you expect to feel whole when a key part of being full is human connection? To have the conviction to not only open your arms but to hold them out is to be able to shake off that heavy wool. But this is not an easy feat, the difficulty made natural thanks to the hypercompetitive environment of our modern American society and made even harder the rougher and rockier one's upbringing. And so, when you find yourself angry or annoyed at the stranger in line, or when you feel the numbness you let wash over yourself when the scraggly man enters with a raspy voice on your daily commute to ask for change, all that I ask from and for those seeking happiness or even just hope is to stop yourself to open up and simply *consider*. Let there be the possibility of a plateau by looking not up nor down but into the eyes of what is right in front of you.