

Raja Mohanji

Spl. Project

5th VC : 1988-90

⊗ → Very late seed. in 1992

Hence kept loose at the
end of Bound VCMR-5.

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Special Project

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE
SEMANTICS OF COMMUNICATION**

Guide: Ravi Poovaiah

VCMSR-5

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5th VC Batch: 1988-90.

Raja Mohanty
886126

IDC, IIT Bombay
April 1990

acknowledgements

APPROVAL SHEET

The project entitled
' An investigation into the semantics of communication '
is approved in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Design.

ms

Guide: Ravi Poovaiah

Signature:

acknowledgements

I WISH
TO THANK
MY GUIDE,
RAVI POOVAIAH
FOR GIVING
ME THE
FREEDOM TO
EXPRESS
WHAT I FELT.

Ravi M. Pooviah
APRIL '90.

This project was intended to be an investigation into the semantics of visual and verbal communication. It was intended to be an analysis of different forms of communication, such as prose, poetry, cartooning, illustrations... in order to arrive at what was it that gave each one it's special flavour.

I was first introduced to the word 'semantics' about an year and a half ago, and have felt somewhat uncomfortable in it's presence. Over the months I have tended to view it with a certain amount of suspicion. I hold nothing against it. But then 'meanings' have this knack of deluding you when approached head on.

Done in the 'true' spirit of a project, this report would have contained voluminous chapters on 'data collection', 'analysis', and on the basis of the understanding from such an analysis, a set of solutions.

Unfortunately my cowardice fails me.

However I hope the word 'investigation' in the title of the project, allows me to express, why is it that I wish to refrain from such an analysis.

Man being inherently lazy choses to live his life by symbols. The 'nice' guy. The 'sad' song. The 'lived happily ever after' tale. Endowed with an extremely efficient memory he uses it to record past experiences which enable him to react most effectively to a new stimulus. He is constantly making observations and on the basis of these, certain generalizations. Perhaps this stems from the instinct for survival. This wisdom does ensure that you duck in time to avoid the hard duster that the teacher hurls at you, but it also tells you that you ought not write sentences that are not short, for that would be bad english. It's all very fine till there comes this smart ass... who does exactly the opposite of what he ought to have done, and what's more does it well, and where are you ?

If you go by the book it's unlikely that you will get your fingers burnt twice but it is also unlikely that you will experience the same thrill that you did, when during a freak thunderstorm you found hailstones lashing your face for the first time.

A person who seeks to communicate should in fact dread the idea of forming compartments in his mind to classify things, for it defines the way in which he looks at the world around. The least one can do is not make a conscious effort in this direction. The mind forms generalizations on it's own, but then these are not as rigid as the rules that have been acquired consciously. Now it would be wonderful indeed if one could arrive at a set of rules and use them in order to write a story, or paint a picture. But to understand the creativity of man is certainly much more complex than the task of the six blind men who were trying to describe the elephant.

True, one can pick up a hint here and a hint there. But why try to generalize and form a rule that seeks to define an experience ? Any form of communication that seeks to draw it's strength from a set of rules, from a second hand experience, can seldom have the same power that even a single statement that seeks to express an emotion genuinely felt. Mediocrity perhaps results from trying to say things, when it has nothing to say. If only there is something within you that is driving you mad, and which has to be let out in order that you do not turn into a raving lunatic, if only you see something that's extraordinarily beautiful in the complex patchwork quilt that life is and which you wish to share, or perhaps something so disgustingly ugly that it forces you to puke it out- only in such a case can you hope to give others a glimpse of what you felt.

A strange creature the man of present times. The same person who drives himself crazy trying to figure out how to make his computer faster by a millioneth of a nanosecond, does not know what to do with his Sunday afternoon. He strives for efficiency, for ways of finishing his tasks in a faster, quicker, and better manner, so that he can have more of leisure. And what does he do with his leisure ? He picks up Shakespeare but soon chucks it away, for that old fool, great man no doubt, takes too much time to get to the point.

He wants something new and he wants it fast. Something that's stimulating, tear jerking, and witty at the same time. Something original. To be creative is in. And so armed with a brush he spontaneously pours out paint onto the canvas, does a frenzied dance on it and hangs it up in the gallery, so that the world might see his anguish, and marvel at the depth of his emotions.

If you start off wanting to be different, you'll end up living on borrowed experiences, cliches which can never have the power of convictions. You can never stand up and defend what is not yours. There's a certain truth in cliches, no doubt but truth is not an answer. It is the process of discovering the answer. Perhaps we belong to the concluding chapter of some gigantic play. Instead of seeking to rediscover the beauty that our ancestors have found we are disappointed that it's all been spelt out before, in the preceding chapters. And go on to add to the pile of 'original' trash. Not realizing that it's not the conclusion which matters, but what was it that led to the conclusion.

It takes time to do something new. You cannot start off by being different. Unless you know the grammar you'll most certainly end up talking gibberish. It's only when you are aware of the rules can you hope to break them. And awareness never comes through analysis. Creativity is in a different domain altogether. How can you hope to unlock it's doors through something as ordered as analysis. Flexing the muscles of the mind is not without pitfalls. The traps are deadly. And unless there is perfect clarity of thought you'll end up with the wrong answers. The heart has it's ways. So why upset the natural order of things by asserting the superiority of thought in a mind that can feel, but knows not how to think.

Before I am through with this harangue there's a story that I would like to relate:

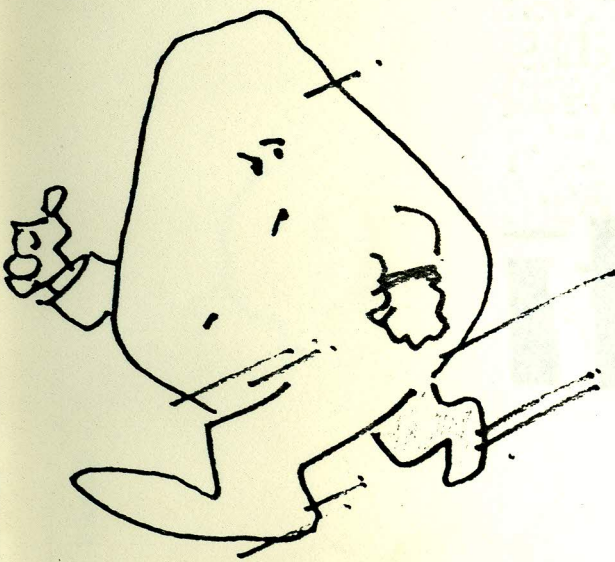
There was a learned professor whose specialization was to lecture on sunsets. What they mean, why are they so beautiful, why should one enjoy them, and all such things. At times he'd been seen gazing at the sun soulfully, and proclaiming " Ah ! if only it would have set slightly to the left and had a little more of crimson, the giant canvas would have been perfectly balanced in appearance." And when he was deeply into his speech, his students would slip away and enjoy the sunset from a quiet rock. There were some however who were convinced that it was beyond them to appreciate sunsets, and went back dejected.

TO TRY AND PROBE LOGICALLY
AND RATIONALLY INTO THINGS
INHERENTLY IRRATIONAL,..
TO YIELD...





...TO THE URGE TO
MEASURE AND QUANTIFY
THOUGH AT TIMES IS USEFUL...



... CAN LEAD TO DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES.

It's tempting no doubt to believe that cold analysis can unravel the mysteries of unknown forces that lurk in the mind of man. Awe struck by the beauty of inspiration, the logical half seeks to exert its authority by methodically breaking down the complex whole into fragments, which it subjects to intense scrutiny. With the hope that it shall reassemble them in a different fashion and arrive at a thousand new masterpieces. Little realizing that the beauty of chaos is incomprehensible to the power of thought. It's our ego which leads us to believe that intellectual prowess is superior to the other faculties with which we are bestowed. I think and therefore I am. Never, I feel and therefore I am.

I think and therefore I am not.

LADIES & GENTLEMEN
MAY I HAVE YOUR
ATTENTION PLEASE

GENTLEMEN
GIVE YOUR
ATTENTION PLEASE

WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

?

FRIENDS
ROMANS &
COUNTRYMEN
LEND
ME YOUR
EARS

WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

Creativity lies in the knack of putting old wine into new bottles.

In the pages that follow, a theme is expressed in different ways. The first one is on 'waiting', the next is on 'mediocrity', and the third talks about 'hope'.

Because of certain irrational hang -ups stated earlier, i hesitate to put down in black and white, what makes each one different from the others.

THE WAITING GAME

One. Two. 3. 4. 5. Six.

That brings me face to face with the wall.

I turn and take ten steps which brings me to the other corner.

Kick the wall in disgust.

Hurt my toes and sink into the corner.

Blow cigarette smoke and stare malevolently at the spider.

The fan won't let me blow rings.

It's always the fan or the wind. Don't know what they have against me.

Given half the chance i'm sure i could blow rings.

In less than a minute i am up. Got to keep moving.

I'll go mad otherwise.

Ten steps, turn. One. Two. 3. 4. 5. Six. Turn.

That's the fourth cigarette i smoked.

Really, i should quit smoking.

I try reading a book. Do you know

Who is John Galt ?

I don't. And i don't give a damn.

Do you like Ayn Rand ?

You do. Nice.

She makes me puke.

Actually she is right.

In a perverse kind of way.

Reminds me of an obnoxious character who

told me that i should get my father to sign

for every nickel that i lend him.

Trust no one. Not even your father.

That kind of statement makes me puke.

Ever tried puking when you are not feeling like it.

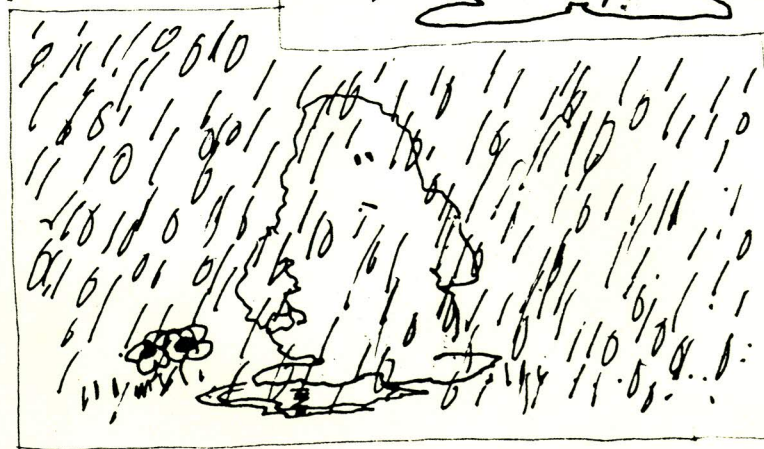
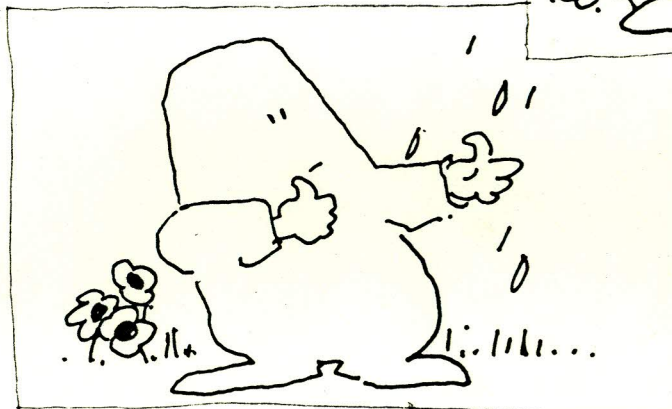
It's quite easy.

Stick your tongue out. Shove two fingers in

till you feel your lungs. That should do it.

I think i tried too hard.
If you try too hard you will never succeed.
Like Boris. He tries too hard.
It's a terrible feeling when you want to puke and you can't.
One. Two. 3. 4. 5. Six.
I wish i could climb walls. Life must be horribly planar
for a flatworm.
Come to think of it i wish i could just take about
20 steps in the fourth dimension.
Then i would know what was holding her up.
It's terrible. This business of waiting.

A knock on the door.
A leap. An apologetic smile.
A kiss on the cheek.
Damn the species. They leave me helpless.
Drive me crazy.



Plague it was in the days of yore,
Till cancer came on the scene,
Clap ? Never mind, it has a cure.
AIDS ???
Good lord ! where have you been ?
The Lord laughed & said
" No doubt it's a pity.
But there's worse my son."
' Worse ? '
said i. ' Worse ? What do you mean ?'
" I mean the curse, it's the curse my son
The curse of medio-crity. "

SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Disgusted. Utterly fed up of being surrounded by a prize set of idiots who twiddled thumbs and scratched backs, when not staring into blank space. In one of his more truthful moments, he'd come close to admitting that even he was one of them. And at such moments he loathed himself and the meekness with which he accepted his condition.

For days, he had been staring at the same page without having progressed beyond the very first line. The only break in this uninterrupted act of staring, would come when the fan creaked. The fan fascinated him.

Everytime he looked at it, his face would light up, and you could see in his eyes a warmth bordering on affection. It was an old fan, and all that remained of the bright green it had once been, was a small patch on one of the two blades (the third had fallen off inexplicably on one hot summer afternoon). What impressed him was the absolute detachment with which the fan went about it's business. Right from ten past nine, when the attendant flicked it on. Without a pause during the break for lunch, till five in the evening. And he'd himself ensure that it was switched off.

If only he had half the perseverance...

And so it went on.

Day after day. Night after night, i'm tempted to say. For that is what it was - an endless monotone. Fortunately the ordeal ended at five. That was when the shift got over. He'd drop the book, stuff his briefcase with papers he had taken out in the morning and depart.

And there would be a skip in his toes. A certain lightness in his steps. And in his heart there would be a song. He was a man on whom a flaming red sun sinking behind majestic blue hills had no effect whatsoever.

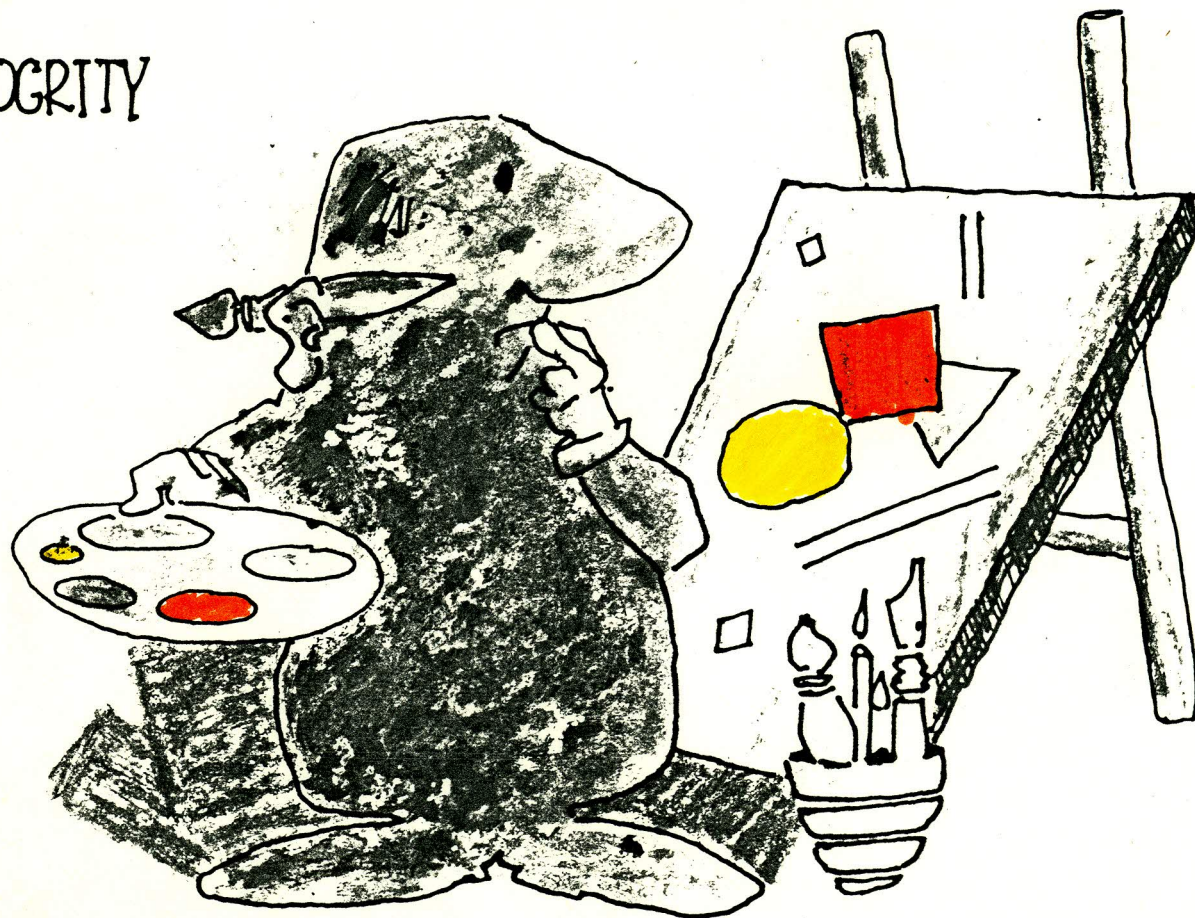
He'd stare at them with the same passive and dumb expression with which he'd stare at an exquisite lump of shit. Yet this man on whom bubbling brooks and gentle zephyrs made no impression, would at five be seized by an extraordinary sense of joy.

This was the moment he really looked forward to all day long. The thrill which he felt at that moment justified those long hours of boredom ...

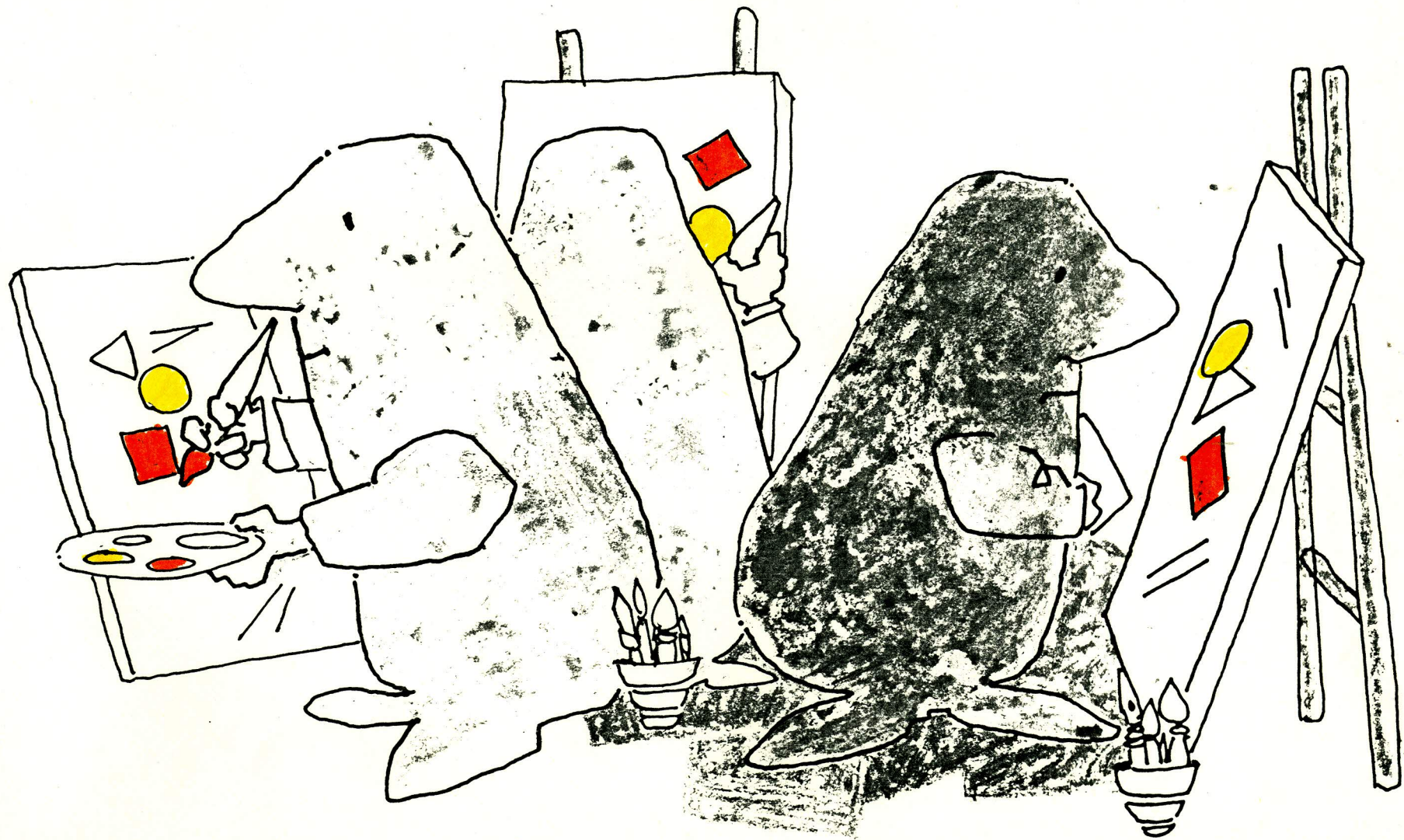
What would he do now ?

Panic seized him, as the first ray of light weaved it's way through the curtains. He rose and dressed hurriedly, caught the first bus to the office, and tore up the neatly typed letter of resignation.
At least he'd have something to do now.
Something to look forward to.

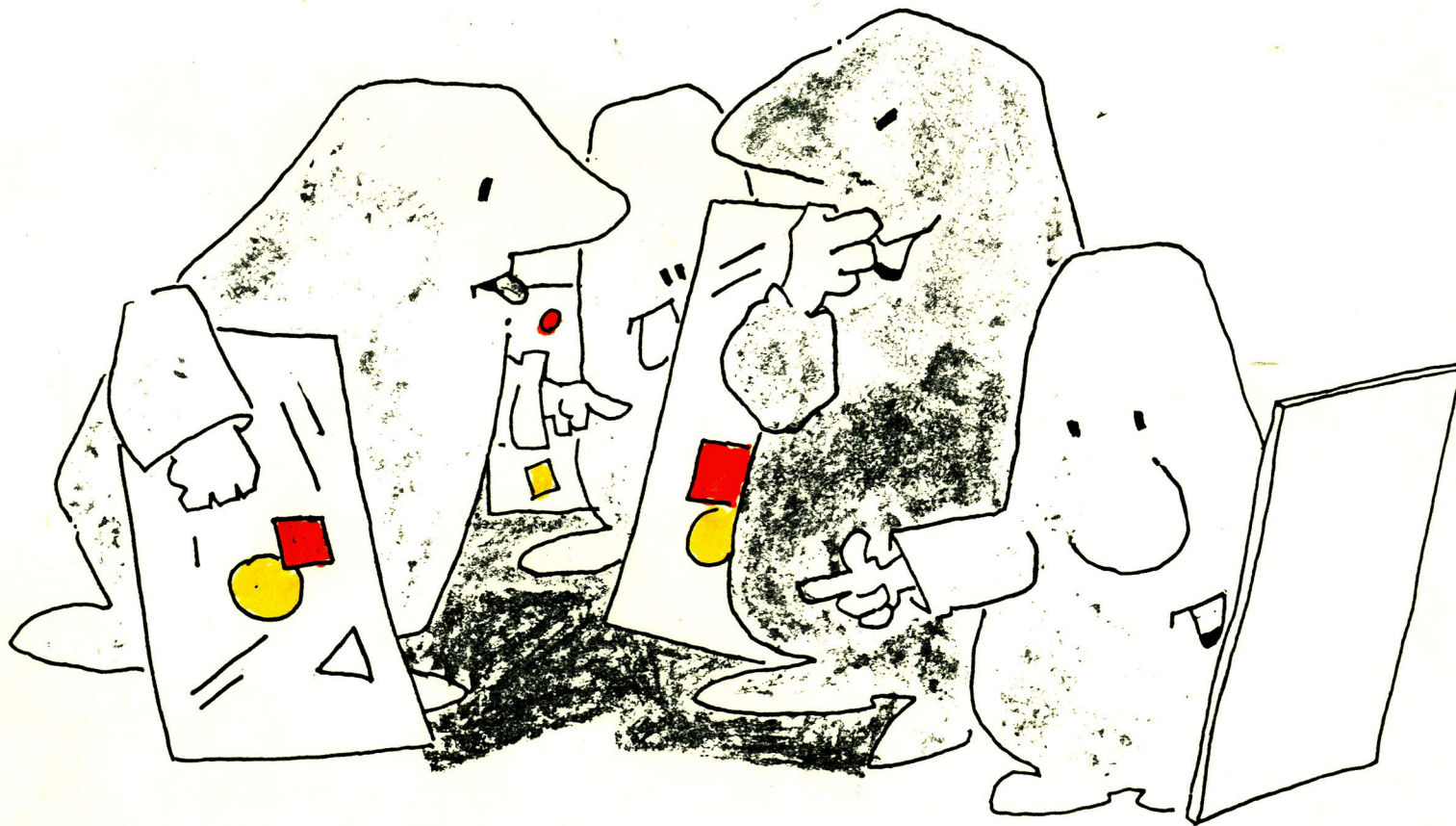
THERE IS
NOTHING AS
DEPRESSING
AS
MEDIOCRITY



...AND NOTHING AS COMMON



THE LEAST
IT CAN
DO IS TO BE
A LITTLE
KINDER
TO ITSELF.



Drowning is not so pitiful
As the attempts to rise
Three times 'tis said a sinking man
Comes up to face the skies,
And then declines forever
To that abhorred abode,
Where hope and he part company-
For he is grasped of God.
The maker's cordial visage,
However good to see,
Is shunned, we must admit it,
Like an adversity.

The madness. The madness.
Rushing feet. Hurtling trains.
Jostling crowds. Screeching planes.
That inhuman possessed look in the eyes that freeze you in your tracks but don't let you pause.
The battered souls that don't care where the wheels take them, as long as they get there fast.
Never mind the bruises. Never mind the battered souls.
Time shall heal everything.
And progress must go on.
In it's triumphant march it engulfs you and makes you a part of it.
What makes you think you have a choice ?

The wheels. The wheels.
They have taken on a life of their own. There is no stopping them now.
Necessity, the mother of the steam engine.
Necessity, the mother of the Bomb.
It would be naive to ask " Why ?"
You got to keep up with the times.
Save your breath and don't ask why.

Rushing feet. Hurtling trains.
Jostling crowds. Screeching planes.
The madness. The madness.

No. I shall have none of it.
But wait. Wait a while. I have another story to tell.
There is a cobbler.
An old man in his fifties. Or maybe sixties.
It doesn't matter.

A tattered shirt. A maroon bag.
Worn slippers. Battered soles.

He sits beneath a mango tree, mending soles. Packs his belongings when
day is done and quietly departs.

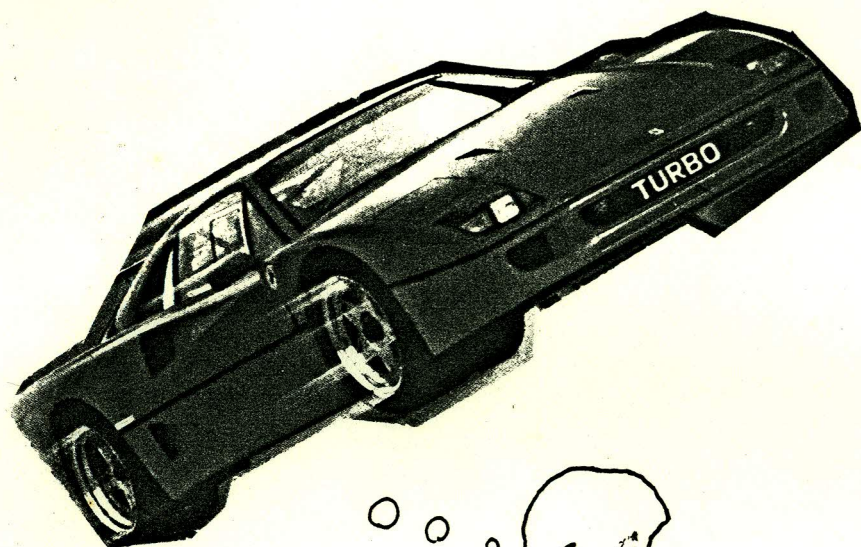
Man doesn't live my bread alone.
And if he doesn't have the means he butters it with hope.

I have tried to discover a flicker of hope in his eyes.
The faintest flicker.
Without any success.

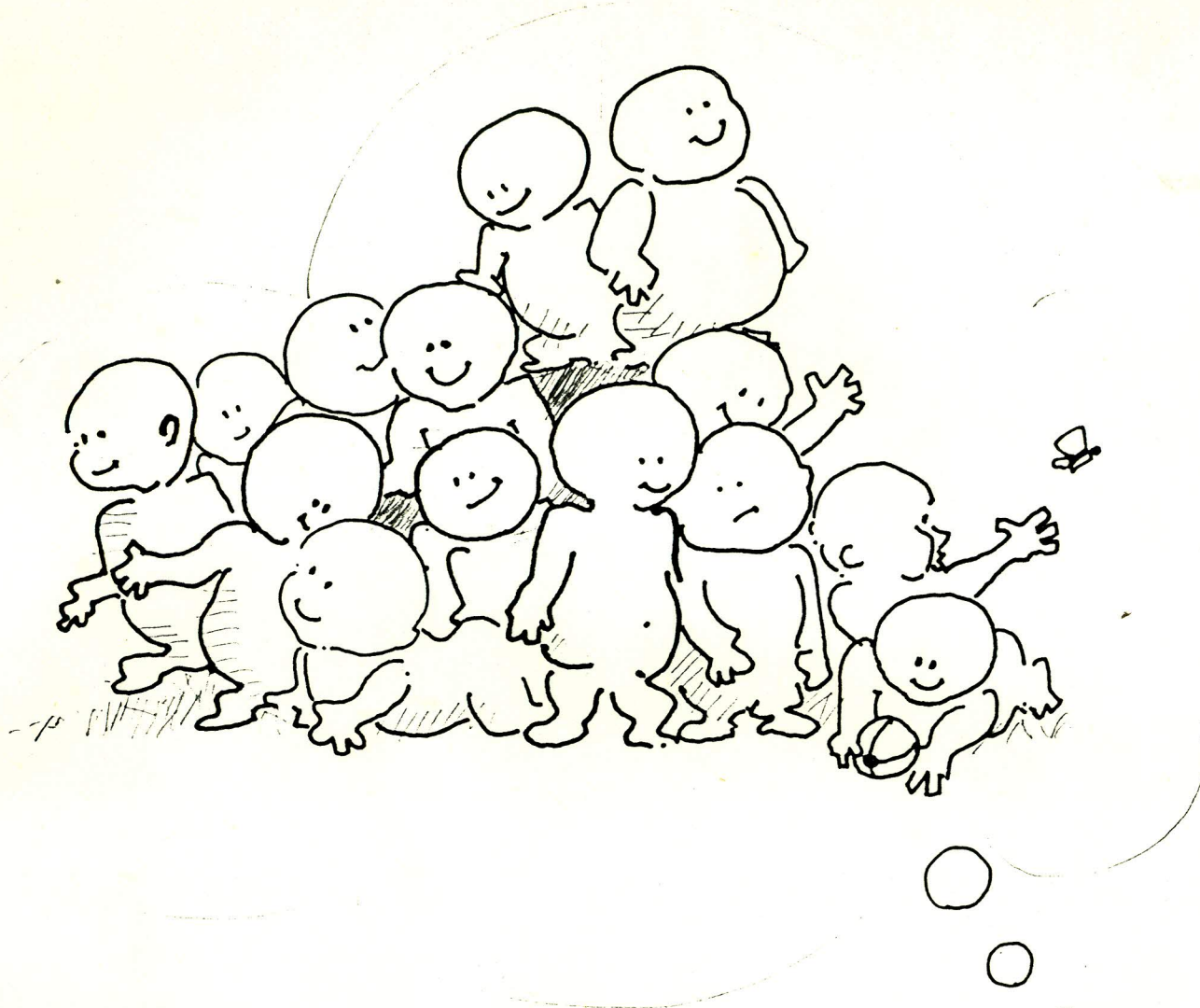
Hope, the mother of all necessities.
Hope, the promising glow in the distance that initiates the pursuit of madness, and recedes
further and further
with every step you take towards it.

'hope to have a nice day.
'hope to have a better tomorrow.
Hope, that vain creature that refuses to accept
the absurdity of human effort.

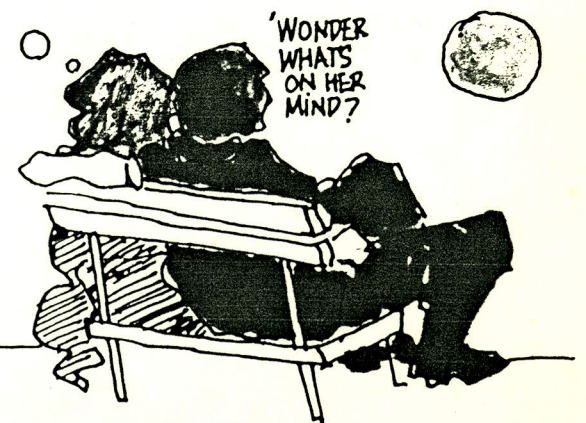
Hope, the mother of madness.
No. I shall have none of it.



CRUEL,
THIS THING
CALLED
HOPE



DANGEROUS THIS THING CALLED HOPE



'WONDER
WHATS
ON HER
MIND?

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