

ANTONI

Preface

I met Antoni during some meeting concerning local cultural and social animation, as it seems we both are concerned about taking part in some interesting groups that work for the good of our communities. I found that there must be something to discover about him, because he seemed to tell much less he could, therefore I asked him to take part in the interview I am carrying out for the current Narrative Care project.

I arrived in his district, which is in the center of B city and struggled to find any parking space left and it took me some extra time to arrive at his place. I entered an old tenement house with scraped and uneven walls that remember well over a century of its inhabitants' lives I suppose. The staircase made me think of some Russian artistic cinema, a perfect setting for discussing existential problems I thought!

When I arrived to the top floor of the building, Antoni was waiting at the door and let me in. He offered me to sit and have a tea. I looked around the big room he lives in and observed some old furniture, new furniture, some woodworking materials, meaning wood boards and wood processing tools including table saw, a basket of fruits, boxes, containing mostly books which he took with himself when he moved to the B city from Warsaw.

Self-presentation

Although I imagine as a person my age I should have stated my narrative a long time and have been living by it since, I still don't feel competent enough to start writing the following autobiographical piece. It seemed utterly ironic to me to take part in the event because I have not lived enough of my own life, it was all boilerplate, a computer programmer might say. Giving it a second thought, I realized that the meetings are actually held for an autotherapeutic goal among others. Another factor was being notified late so I had only a few days to reflect on the text and write the first few pages at least.

I will sometimes not stick to the chronological order because the themes organically interweave and most of the realizations come at a distant time after some events described. So the introduction of an objective time-line would only scatter events and recollections in some meaningless collage.

Childhood

I was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1987 to a family of a medical doctor – my mother and an electronics engineer – my father. My mother was the second Warsaw-born person out of my immediate ancestors after her older brother. My father moved here from city he was born in, and the other part of family found their place after WW II which particularly reshaped the boundaries of the state but also of the people.

In fact, the flight did not end here, we never have been settled in one place. Even if we finally lived together in one new flat for over 16 years. To begin with, my parents rented a small flat, and then another, and then they were housekeeping an aunt's house in the suburbs. I have no personal recollection of all those, so the order is random. As the family memories point out, I must have been influenced by the farmyard settings, because I reportedly used to climb chicken shed roof and mention little turkeys as a metaphor to sleeping children. The former seems unusual for me, one could argue. The next place which I remember in a very sketchy way was (as I have found out later) the only surviving house in this area of German-set Ghetto.

The first glimpse of my memory was... Actually I don't know the order, so I will be random, albeit probable. The first thing I remember was a dream of an comic book style section of an Egyptian pyramid with a naked woman breastfeeding her baby. She was an Egyptian art like figure, not moving but representing a situation indeed. As for 2022 it would make an interesting crayion.ai prompt, but my visual memories are so vivid I don't seek spoiling them with technological overkill. Not less picturesque was an imprint of a moment I perceived as night since it was completely dark. I have

been walking home with mom from the nursery looking at the stars and then window-shopping in a toy-and-paper shop, which was a kind of shop which I enjoyed the most in the early 90's. The second of that kind was "the blue booth", where I used to buy school utensils and Chinese rubber dinosaur toys.

Probably the first interpersonal situation dilemma I found myself in was looking at my and my brother's (he was one at the time?) Saint Nicholas day gifts. I remember finding it questionable that I was checking if I had to envy him for something. Were the gifts "fair" and "even". Another one was play-arguing with my father joke that we will both ride a toy car I had. I strongly stated that it was a single person car. A few years later I was told about an indentation on an old fridge that was made by me bumping into it with the car I was "driving" even at home.

The next place that was supposed to be home was in a new district which was deemed a "bedroom for Warsaw". A sea of concrete buildings in the sea of mud. There was no infrastructure at the time apart of things needed when raising children. They even did landscaping to cover the formerly flat appearance of fields and for young mothers' comfort had to put slip-ways, ramps, stairs and things everywhere. Imaginative yet not the best allocation of complexity and work. The schools and similar facilities were probably the best investment in the future they could've made. Later on, I had a classes during the studies with one of the architects of the districts and, after the fall of the great central-planned projects, a new housing development in a area I lived in at the time. This was an wonderful shared insight into what the design turns into when faced with a harsh reality of time of changes.

The early time of us living in the new district not having even a stationary phone at home illustrated what people in the West might have imagined living in Poland. But for me it was just the normal way people live in general, which was not particularly a problem. The photos of me at the time are even in my opinion rather likeable. Playing brick, sticking with friends and my brother in a ball room (meaning tunnels, meshes, slides and pools of plastic balls held in a basement of a regular housing unit). The other ones present me literally drooling at a microscope looking forward to watching poorly prepared samples of leaves and things or at the computer accompanied by my father's electronic equipment.

It comes as no surprise that I represented the "doing together" or rather "doing something" pattern of interests and interactions with the World. No matter what, I took part and seemed to fit in seamlessly, at least it was my perspective. At the time there was enough social proof, however mainly negative, meaning lack of worrying feedback from peers, their parents and carers. The only longing I felt was being a part of a club or something of that kind. Actually a colleague of mine has founded something

like “explorers club” which was probably the first example of storytelling I felt into. The whole play was about appointing boys as members of the club, and periodically drawing kinds of tattoos or badges on their hands as a proof of their rank.

As for the records of family relations at the time I didn't notice anything wrong, although I was an idiosyncratic patchwork of fierce interests, including dinosaurs and being socially withdrawn, which was in fact the usual way of preschool children relating to the others, I thought. I carry on this belief, however the more particular fact about me was sticking to almost any adults present – my grandparents' friends who were retired professors, engineers, especially those who had some popular science magazines including my Holy Grail – a National Geographic issue solely about dinosaurs. Apart from this kind of the strongest visual stimuli available at the time, I tended to fish for biology-related books at those persons' and families' houses. In rare cases I felt abandoned, it was more me being book-smart and leaving the adults talk about their (somewhat nerdy in fact) social matters, which were outside my frame of reference, but build a background for me how an usual family life looks, and should look like. I have no issues with what I have experienced and integrated to my world view. Now I think the example of my granddad from D city is what – no exaggeration – saved me in a lot of ways.

No mention of my parents yet? Nothing unusual for me, but it is significant absence. Good for me in fact, despite no clear red flags yet. I have never had a proper parent-children type relationship with them. They were busy with their work and careers. Mom, who must have been very intelligent at least, but not “parentally” adept, kept the straight upward trajectory which began with a practice in a major hospital in Warsaw, where she has been admitted with help of a family's friends recommendation to working in a local ambulatories earning a few zlotys more each year. The public medical services were underestimated in every way possible in the policies and particularly the financial side. Until my father has lost his job for a major technological corporation, she was derided of being stupid taking the medical profession. That the sole choice is inherently stupid because of the income. This kind of verbal aggression faded away only when my father went unemployed years later, which I only noticed after further few years. What I mean, was that we were struggling financially, which is not unusual for a young family with two children who have just bought a flat in the capital city. For my parents it was probably one of the major triggers for overwhelming stress at the time, but for them – not nearly as dangerous as the time of the German occupation, Soviet camps and terror they survived. Not overdramatizing they helped my parents in every possible way, my grandma from Warsaw took care of us when we couldn't stay at school common room, let's name it. The grandfather from grandparents' city even brought pieces of woodboards and tools by train and probably my uncle's small FIAT car to furnish our kitchen. This memory leads to the direction which

was a leitmotif of my at the intersection of practice and theory (I suppose those are subject to the two wings metaphor), which means bustling around with everything to repair and progressively enhance the living and built environment. The other fact from the time, which one of two people who used to be conceptualized as “those who really know me” remembered for the further 18 years was me urging to repair toy cars (usual toy cars, as opposed to the one I could “drive”) and any toys, things and hardware in the preschool room. This was, however crippled by the Damoclean sword, the ever growing dark cloud above me of fixing the relationship part of me. And here we return to the thought introduced in this section.

In fact, those of two mentioned grandparents served to me as a parental figure, a bypass around my parents as individual and their virtually non-existent relationship. The grandparents were married at very different epoch, the country destroyed by the war, they all migrated, completed their education in whole new setting. Those grandparents didn't seem to lack anything in their marriages and judging by this impression I wouldn't expect my family of origin could be a continuation of those. Well, on both sides it was different.

My mom's mom, the grandmother from Warsaw was born in a city that is no longer in Poland was probably the only one of some noble origin. The practice turned out to be quite opposite. She was a stay at home mother, with a short career of preschool career. She was not busy with the household on the other hand, but the flat was not as big or “representative” so she could pose as a high-society woman. She provided instructions on being well-behaved for me, was an “arbitra elegantiarum”. In fact, she cared about her appearance and style in a subtle way, that is not histrionic at all, but is pleasant for people, sometimes despite the hardships the person might experience. I even took most of her decorative pieces, which is the ultimate proof I still share her taste towards style and “higher” aesthetics, which makes her only person I relate so directly with. She took me to walks to beautiful parks and interesting museums. Fun fact – before I became, maybe for compensatory reasons, I deduced that “ethnology” must be about volcanoes as supposedly referring to Etna. Yes, at the time I was more about geographical and paleoreptilian things, but my grandma opened me to the world of the physical art, body, and which was the most exciting for me at the time – “dacha”, a personal recreational plot of land in a village which was a disaster by itself, as build by some crazy architect for my “nonphysical” grandpa (we'll talk about this later). But the most important parts were contact with the nature, bonfires, picking up mushrooms, meeting her retired friends having dachas nearby and their offspring, some of whom I particularly liked. It was her scout's legacy that radiated throughout the stays at the “crazy man's dacha”. I know that my granddad has built it for his grandchildren having no technical insight. The bathroom was situated below the ground, so it literally limited the capacity of the sewage collection tank and caused very smelly floods in the bathroom

from time to time. This cuckoo's egg was later sold by my cousin who inherited it on her own as a complete ruin. On the other hand, it was my first hands-on contact with building techniques, real village and things. It was the Acquinas's book of nature, the scripture were new books for young scouts and DIY magazines, brochures and books from the era of scarcity during the past few decades. The more technical part was provided to me from the grandpa from the other side. One of the memories-impressions I had from staying at my grandmothers kitchen as a child was conceptualizing the mechanisms of reproduction and inheritance. To how much extent is a child ready in the womb of the mother as a future egg cell, and how long into the history of the family could one trace the impacts on it that shape the child. Another mental image was the possibility of "a family matrioshka", how much of a mother is in a daughter and so on. As my grandparents were more into the TV I enjoyed watching culture and nature documentaries with grandma and talk about the customs, behaviors, beauty of the subjects, whatever species.

Her husband, my grandfather (still the mother's side) came from a small village where he had to walk 5 kilometers to school in every season (mainly in winter, as the school time schedule originates from the times most kids used to work in the summer) and his only source of readings he liked was a dump site, which he searched for newspapers which were his window to the world. The distance to his heart was more than 5 kilometers however. As the newly formed elite in the "People's Poland" he was working as a lawyer until his medical condition enabled him to do so. He was an intellectual hoarder, he had some special interests about some periods of history of Europe and Poland. I remember him as the aloof person glued to his typewriter (the most advanced technology he used alongside with a car and a TV; at some point he thought an ink jet printer would be a contemporary update of this device or bought a video player not to seem to lag behind when someone offered to lend him a video cassette). But there was probably some down-to-earth part of him. He was frankly in love with Spanish language and culture and loved to visit the country with his family. This was distant past, but the one thing that was interlaced into his career was working as a voluntary for peasants (in Polish culture "people's" is close in meaning to "peasant's" due to the elongated feudal history). I could chase hens from time to time in return for his services that would cost fortune in real life, but being not aware of this was the guarantee for me having fun visiting the sheds and households. When I attempted to start a conversation about apparently shared interests, he would point out my uncareful pronunciation and pick on some minor shades of "czszchchzhy" sounds in Spanish, Italian names and term or in Polish words which was a major communication barrier not allowing getting to the point I looked forward to discuss. The only topic I remember him starting discussing were some aspects and judgements about the political scene, but despite those were one of my interests since I was a child, I couldn't so vividly engage in the discussion as I had more playful outlook on the topics. The only

moment of the unspoken pact was interpreting on a current issue of some political newspaper cover picturing two identical dogs getting ready to fight each other. This was a representation of the political opponent – so similar they pursue a titanic effort to bark out the differences. It was the last few words we exchanged which makes the general memory of him much more uplifting for me than it would be without this minor corrective experience.

My grandparents, the father's parents, were to an extent whole different story. There was no misalliance of the type – “simpleton” woman and a “highest” educated man. They didn't try to fit any personas, the life just went on. They actually could make a home at their apartment. This was actually the home my father still clings to which is due to his self-reported “not having his place on Earth despite all the effort he made”. All major family celebrations took part in their city, they would, but my grandparents are over 90 and they are less capable of handling day-to-day life not to mention bigger events. In fact, my grandma didn't easily surrender her kitchen fortress. Around 10 years ago she started to hire a Silesian-style (due to location I would inscribe it to the local cultural background) “family party room” with ordered menu prepared and served by the venue staff supported by cheesy “schlagry” music players for additional fee. Last, but not least, a few years ago grandma let me serve and heat Christmas Eve supper food. This was totally her style. No words. Just appearing... or rather being extremely tired so she couldn't act as a control freak she always used to be.

This also dates back to the early after-war situation. Her father died in train repair plant, where an axle of a train car fell over him and only thing he did afterward was moving his hand to keep his hat in place. Since then, my grandma was the only provider for her two younger siblings, her mother and soon two sons, including my father. The situation, it appears, made her stay in post-war survival mode to an enormous extent. She still keeps past-expiration term food and an additional big freezer full of food. In 2012 I had an episode of “a rescuer” throwing away some moth-infested bags of food and old cans of beans and other things my grandma doesn't actually use. My brother had the same urge few years later but I explained him, that it makes no sense to leave any empty storage space to fill with other supplies. He was more verbal with grandma, and she even provided an answer that she keeps those spoiled food “in case someone might need it”. This was somewhat contradictory for me – grandma kept a lot of garbage food using up space, money and the observers senses and on the other hand meticulously prepared pierogi and a few things she mastered. I would say – few – but in a loving home it is just enough. The only thing still miraculous to me is her strict food habits (dislike for some major food groups I like) and unusual experiments like adding marinated ginger to chicken broth which resembled me of the taste I remember from her soup gone acidic due to not being refrigerated in Summer.

This is deeply symbolic, my family still re-live untold-of traumas and war-time situations, which manifests on so many levels and fields of life. Being a housewife for the whole life and not using a fridge as if it was 40's... The even more symptomatic thing was her going near-deaf from the 90's. Since I remember, I used to be misunderstood by her or given a smile or a nod as a fake confirmation of the message being understood. For me, she represents the archetypic figure of soviet-like propaganda "Polish Mother" – the omnipotent "new female" who could provide for her children on her own while hand-washing their cloths and riding a tractor. No need to speak, because she knows everything (at least at survival tactics level) and needs no input. She is the ultimate giver, provider, carer, but only exclusively the biological more-or-less survival making the offspring not more spiritually and emotionally complex than a plant in her garden. Realizing all of that, I understand and accept what made my father be like my father. No justification, just explanation. She was a rare case of person that made me cry at the scene. I didn't want her to buy 6 year old me a religiously-themed colouring book or something deeming it childish and – foremost – waste of money, however little it costed. Another situation of the disagreement of resource allocation at similar time was me denied being given a pen to draw something because "I should play with my toys".

A bittersweet aspect of my relationship with grandma was spending time together at her friend's or with a distant relatives in different cities. Visiting new cities was always enjoyable for me, but the company was far from well-suited for my needs. As an 7/8 year old I remember not being taken to the Skull Chapel I wanted to visit (I didn't see any photos, no Internet back then) because it was supposed too scary for me (as opposed to the relations about Russian "special operations" in Chechnya on the TV). Since then a vision of moss and lichen covered building made of skulls (which I would later refer to as Beksiński style) standing in a dark field and other alternative history and geographical fantasies. When I finally got there ten years later, the place (which I already knew from the Internet) looked not nearly as scary as my imaginations. That is one among the anticipatory anxieties I experience at every field that is being taken care for the supposed my well-being in an over-protective way which doesn't let the child to confront the World and form healthy and adaptative modes of such interactions.

My favorite grandparent was my father's father, who, as I now could summarize was the only fatherly figure I related to. Despite his difficult history he managed to stay somewhat naive, but in the sense of sanity and openness towards the reality. He is always supportive, calm and cheerful. Although enjoying his time alone, he could also spend it with his, then retired, friends from work and others who he had met along the way, including his cohabitants. This was not a busy social life, but authentic, long-lasting relations, which appeared to like ideally-family-like... Apart from the fact in real families it turns out not to work this easy.

After the war he finished what was the predecessor of electronics studies. After being given a “order to work” in Opole, my family slowly but steadily settled there. He showed me a tiny window of a cellar room which was like 4 pieces of glass 1 square foot each and the roof seemed to fit only a small and dark room. He used to live there for the first few months in the city. As he told later, buying a leather bag costed him almost whole monthly salary at the time.

His acquired knowledge of communication technology (in a serendipitous liking to getting together well with people) was only a small part of the picture. He could handle anything that could appear in a contemporary household, he only started missing out at proliferation on PCs, but still was able to repair washing machines, radios, mechanical devices and so on. The only moment I was really not sure about the reality of his abilities was when grandma has been visiting someone for a week and grandpa cooked a soup, which I didn't witness him to do earlier or later. It was at least not worse than soups grandma cooked, so I asked if grandma has dropped by for a moment to prepare it.

Primary school

I remember the beginning of primary school as a first major consciously experienced breaking change in my life. At the very first moment I felt lost in the crowd of new pupils gathered at once in the cloakroom that was incomparably bigger than the one in the kindergarten. Finally the teachers holding class letters came and we went to our classrooms. As a matter of fact, I don't remember much of the early years apart of a few moments where my misconceptions about reality came to light. Those were for example me using a slightly inaccurate heuristic for newly opened underground travel time, the issue daylight saving time, me not hearing accurately a word which made me confused and lost in different situations.

I was not aware of that, but apart of being the “nicely drawing child”, which was my main mask at the time, I was considered a particularly talented boy, which, looking backwards makes some sense, but for me was only a label that fueled my perfectionism and frustration with me, supposedly a genius, not learning things immediately, even before hearing of them. Now I realize, how identifying as an “old soul” might be trauma-driven characteristics. Quite unusual for a child, but fortunately I was not “too much of a genius”, which saved some traces of normality in me. The point I want to make, is that being labeled as “gifted”, might be used in a positive sense, including praising and appreciation or manipulations “If you are so wise, how can't you...”.

To get things straight, this obscure introduction is trying to get to the leitmotif of this autobiography, which is the search for my group and identity. I always felt like I'm only an observer in my life, not an actor, that there is a collection of things that I should, but I never know what it takes to be accepted. Strangely, the thing that triggered my suicidal philosophy, then ideations, visions and plans were

simple math equations (that could explain my failure to just learn some mathematical topics and desperate struggling to do so). When my father wished to 'help me' do some extra-school math exercises, he found out that I cannot do the calculation he expected me to do and suddenly got furious. I don't remember the exact wording, but it was shouting that he or my mother should have killed me for being so stupid. I don't even remember if he used the second person at least, later he would tell to me in third person to my mother ("he should...", "tell him to do..."), even in my physical presence. It was in fact only physical, at the time I think I got used to dissociating in "those" situations. The other example was me breaking a plate which my father has heard and couldn't do other than overreacting, to say it in the most subtle way.

This is when I started doing self-harm and ask mom to finally do to me what my father was telling in his word salad. As a doctor, I think she must have been desensitized for such a symptoms of mental problems, disorders or even illnesses (considering me and my dad), but I felt she is the only person I can talk to. Since "even she" didn't even care about my change in behavior, from a vivid in a nerdy way biology-obsessed kid (yes, the bees and birds things for the most part) who didn't shut his mouth telling what I found out about frogs, human procreation, dinosaurs etc. to a mentally beaten up boy asking to end his suffering by the ultimate solution.

But I still had my friends (I think this was the level of friendship possible at the age) in school and this kept my surface normal image. There were scratches on it, in fact. It was plotting to take revenge on my brother's "enemies", whom he must have provoked just like me, me acting out in front of the teacher, seeking validation from peers for being so witty a comedian and others.

Despite me being sometimes concerned about my physical dexterity in sports and games I was still liked because people knew me for the other sides. Now I realize, I could be perceived as retarded judging by the weaknesses, and therefore I was too self-conscious about other pupils seeing me during my classes physical education hours. It got even worse when we had joined activities, in example ball games with other classes. On the other hand, I had some activities that I liked, for example mini hockey games and indoor football, which are games in more 2-dimensional space and require different kinds of physical coordination... and most of all less people like them and care about excelling in the mini-games. The other kind of physical activity I practiced were more anarchic in their nature. Those were "cock fights", "carmageddon" and other ideas me and my friends on alternative uses of the classrooms and their equipment during the school breaks.

As the teachers were kind of wise and my class liked or admired me, being at school was quite peaceful, which was the peak of my dreams. I didn't even consider anyone to in fact like me. Sometimes colleagues told me, I'm good in something, but I took it literally and renounced this thought, not even considering talking to them, making friends or any regular people's stuff. At the

time I think I didn't appear haughty and reserved, because my behavior was very expressive, maybe over-expressive, but that was considered by others, including some teachers just a symptom of being a gifted, sociable, kind of rock star student. This could have been true, but the picture-perfect performance in school was just me escaping from the inner problems I have been developing for the past few years.

Gymnasium

During the holidays I was growing my toe nail. In fact, after returning home from the school graduation ceremony I sat into an armchair and fell asleep for a moment. When suddenly waking up I kicked the other armchair that way, my nail started to come apart from the toe. The other thing I remember is seeing someone surprisingly alike my school friend (a girl that I liked) at the seaside. It must have been her and her family, but I was so shocked, I couldn't utter a word and probably till lately put the experience into ever-growing stash of stuff to handle later or never. The other thing I remember is getting some more self-inflicted scissor cuts on my hands and getting burned by my brother with a shovel that was left by a fireplace by my brother. He later told, he didn't realize it was so hot. That was a case that was one of the introductory case studies for the "trolley problem" fascination that I would later develop. For him, as a pragmatist, the result mattered, for me it was the most hurting, he just indulged aggression towards me for some kind of provocation, acting out, whatever.

I didn't in fact know what to expect from the gimnazjum level school. Introduction of this in the national legislation sounded like bad idea to me, as I really liked my primary school, the friends and colleagues. That is probably why I have put those rather detached relations to start the topic. I have chosen a "language profile class" for the new type of school, as I thought it would fit my interests and maybe find like-minded colleagues. It couldn't turn out further from this!

During the first days of school I was very anxious and I couldn't anyhow relate to the new people or make new friends. I was actually clinging to the people I knew from my primary school, including my best friend at the time. Trying to mask my anxiety and confusion with self-deprecating humor and different strange behaviors didn't help. The thing that made my image among the colleagues was my "crippledness", meaning poor movement coordination during games on the physical education lessons. I will not hint, why it was, but I had no clue at the time. That was my main concern during gymnasium, the other subjects posed no problem for me and I had to learn little and didn't care to do homework, usually doing it during school breaks (to fill in the inconvenient time meant for socializing or stuff I didn't know about) or even at the beginning of the lessons.

I remember saying to my best friend that all my life in the first two weeks of gymnasium turned into waking up, going to school and going to sleep, nothing apart of this. It looked actually clinical depression like, looking at the whole picture. He told, he did experience the school change the same, but it probably was not so deep a problem. Not to over-exaggerate my problems, I didn't even have any framework to classify what I was experiencing. The only objective measure of my psychical state was losing like 7 kilograms of my physical form over the three initial weeks of school.

I was the classes scapegoat of a kind as being slowpoke, clumsy or in any other way strange. This was partly familiar to me from my role at home, but now the situation was inescapable, overwhelming, as if it was the only fate meant for me.

In fact, I was not the ultimate victim of my colleagues, but the more prone to the behaviors the more time I endured. The first one was a young German teacher whose first job included trying to teach the boys of my class. I don't even remember, what they did, but she ended up crying during the so called classes and after a month left the job. This was not any direct violence and verbose mocking, but the disturbing, ignoring and disordered behavior of those few people.

After a year a new colleague joined my class, at least theoretically. He soon became my only male friend in the class as we both seemed weird (including poor movement coordination, clumsiness and other physical education stuff) and this automatically drew us together. Michael was unexpectedly intelligent and I would say, mature for our age, but it was due to him being fatherless, I suppose. Moreover his mother was a mental health specialist, which according to some commonplaces made her prone to some problems, which they are supposed to solve in others, themselves. This could be something of that kind in this case, but the overtly dysfunctional relations he lived in and told me about made us connect at some deeper level, although I was not able to verbalize it. Unfortunately, Michael was rarely attending school (which I could have done to save my remains of mental health; he could get promoted anyway, so...), but I often visited him to surf the internet together (I have never had internet at home at the time), mainly some humor content, like classic Weird al Yankovic videos and more home-made satirical mp3 sketches.

The thing I most admire about Michael was his ability to subtly express his criticism or just hints for me how to handle life without involving any conflict, bad words, humiliation, which were inevitable in those situation according to the patterns programmed into my subconscious. He could tell frankly clever observations dressing them up in some stories about his other colleagues or in more abstract way, that I found useful and totally understood why he told them to me. Unfortunately, apart for not attending the school, Michael moved to the other class, which was of course due to the atmosphere in the I have left still in.

As I said before, I didn't have any proper male friends in the class, some of them could be called my colleagues at times when we were alone and they had no motivation to try to play their games in front of others. But I had some female colleagues, that I even talked to, which was unusual for the other boys. This is one of the first symptoms of me being a caretaker of emotionally dead mother and her substitute partner to some extent. It was much more easy for me to relate to women from an early age. This was not of any improper kind, but I particularly liked one of the caretakers in the kindergarten. I even visited her with my mother at her new job when she left the one with kids. Apart of having just girl colleagues, I was getting into an unusual friendship with Carla, who seemed to be at least legal drinking age based on her appearance, but intellectually she was like a perfect complement to me. It's not the opposites attract thing, I actually was concerned with her dyscalculia and other things that made her act silly despite her adult looks. We were spending more and more time together, riding bike, eating dinner at her home, I was helping her do homework, we went out a few times to theater plays.

One day I came to the conclusion, I am strongly attracted to her but couldn't name the kind of attraction. When we were going back from school, I told her I have something to say. I stuttered in utter stress and told her I think I'm in love with her, and she replied, she thought something of that kind could happen. I knew that this is not a viable relation to maintain, but I still acted as if this could be true, at least teachers and other unsuspecting people would assume so. That is not true actually, one teacher was aware what was going on, because her son, 5 years older than us, was her boyfriend. My behavior relating to Carla was so theatrical at moments, I didn't expect anyone to treat it serious, including Carla, who was aware on what is going on probably more than me and she still enjoyed our relation. I was not intending to show off, but casually being met by my neighbors with an model like girl gained me some respect in them, they even started to greet me first each time.

When working on this autobiography I have finally learned the word for this state. It must have been limerence. The contradictory longing for an overtly imperfect person to fill in a gap in my life, but due to a lot of factors, circumstances and conditions it was not only impossible but extremely stupid idea. But that is what makes limerence work so well. Knowing it makes no sense prevents from acting to pursue a supposed goal but doesn't break the otherwise mutually enjoyable relationship. The state was an expression of my overall existential situations, being lost in time and space, trying to play games that presumably have some rules, but they are being randomly imposed on the unaware mankind. In fact, this is not enough to tell about our friendship as I frankly liked Carla's family, including her mother and particularly grandmother who was into arts, history and things I like and could have a tea with them. The final thing, was that Carla was sincere and not beating around the bush when talking about her life, thoughts, feelings even if someone would disapprove of them.

High school

As I said in the previous section, I didn't even care in what high school I will go to. My gymnasium school-leaving exams results were quite good, but my physical education poor grade made it impossible for me to get into any renowned school. If I thought ahead, I would get an exemption from physical education classes to avoid both toxic behaviors of others and the whole stress of escaping the problem and get my best possible art classes grade taken instead for recruitment. But, as I said, it was totally outside my myopic, obscure, depressive perspective.

And so I started attending the local school just across the street, which was not as one would expect judging "objectively" by my potential and talents. But let's leave objectivity, my inner positive perspectives were non-existent. The first things I remember, were colleagues noticing that I have some fresh cuts on my wrists and even one offered to talk about it. But I was literally non-verbal at the time, at least non-verbal about the serious things, I could still perform at school quite good which took no effort and even made me seem like a hardworking student, even concerned only on learning and stuff. But how on earth could I end up in this shitty school, if it was true?

To put things short – I didn't make any friends in high school. I was probably looking like a mute ghost walking across the school lost during the school breaks because they are risk of unwanted, uncomfortable and risky social contacts that I avoided. I didn't know why, but I knew something must be so strongly wrong about me, no one would be interesting in other things than maybe doing homework for them or something of that kind.

The physical education was not a problem at the time, because there was a group of us, me, heavy metal fans, otaku and manga freaks that spent the time of the classes together in the basement or library using the Internet. This was a win-win solution, because the "non-disabled" folks had more space to play their games, and worked out well because the teachers graded the classes by some tests like pull ups, push-ups etc. a few times each semester. At the time my "sports anxiety" got quiet because I started developing and going deeper and deeper into other problems. But I think, until very recently, a thought that I will be asked to play games as a mandatory part of socializing held me back from even trying to get into and enjoy social situations.

At the time, my parents have bought a new apartment and started arranging it, which is still not done after 20 years of them living there, but now it's fortunately not my problem. Finding their "perfect place" was on the curriculum for years, since they started to save some decent money and we have visited a few potential homes. This was, contrary to what healthy people might expect, find a reasonably priced and reasonably sized apartment in a good location for soon to be students and... adults, meaning me and my brother. The previous attempts have always ended with my father calling

my mother names for not being active enough, not supportive, discouraging him from buying a supposedly better apartment.

But we ended up in this huge, but strangely shaped flat, which was not incidentally left unsold for a few years since being built. Despite wanting to become an architect, I didn't engage in this too much, which was, contrary to my feeling of guilt, the best I could do. Those would be futile deeds and possible hurting my father's fragile ego either by being slowpoke, an idiot, clumsy etc.

Studies

The choices of schools and class profiles and their connections to the reality seemed to be so random and botched by the circumstances. Choosing language class in gymnasium I ended up having no English lessons due to lack to some administration problem and most of my Mathematics and Computer class in high school ended up taking... history or other social science studies. This repeats the refrain of the song of my life, not being able to find actually my peer group, despite promising labels, names, classifications. Studies were going to be a breaking change to this self-repeating history. If I have always been "different" the architectural studies might end up being the place where the other "different" gather.

I have prepared for the entrance exam for a year apart from previous drawing classes. I have taken a specialized course that prepared to the exam in every possible way, which was the only solution due to enormous number of candidates. The complexity of the exam made sense however, because it was the sole criterion on admission. It comprised of knowledge test, architectural drawing, geometry drawing and a surprise model task.

In fact, the one I got was not that surprising, however this was the part of the examination that got me into trouble as I scored poorly on making my spaghetti bridge. This lack of creativity on the intersection of architecture and food (I was thin at the time, hence the very inside joke) made my total score just a percent of score to the list of the "elite", meaning free of cost studies. Therefore I asked the examiners to check my input again if I could get a few more points on some task, but they didn't find any reason to dispute it. This of course started my father complaining about my choice of studies and having to pay for them. Fortunately I have made to the unpaid studies due to my good results and getting a prize at an international competition as a representation of my University, but the aggression still intensified.

Despite I liked the studies and had no problems with any classes, my lack of taking decisions, let it be designs or my life direction, was unsettling not only for me and my family. I think my friends were also perceiving me as an "imposter", usually in a somewhat positive sense, but this only further contributed to building my feeling of isolation and being "from the outgroup". I still didn't know, if

I am a good architect material, but I continued the studies, however didn't take any effort to find a job. Of course, it could be blamed on my parents, because when trying to talk to them about looking for a job and how to get one, I was told that it makes no sense for me to take low-paid entry-level job since it will not even cover the loss of tax exemptions my parents get for having studying only children. Not encouraging at all, quite the opposite. But my habit was not to make noise and I gave in the effortless scenario. What is more, probably based on his study colleagues experience, my father told me not to do anything apart of studying before graduation. Don't get me wrong, this was actually about doing anything but the studies and of course, the unwritten contract, being available for him with my whole time and concerned about his labile emotions. This came first, even when colliding with my doing my studying at home or with my colleagues on the site or at the university faculty.

USA

The one thing my father encouraged me to spend his money on was going on a student exchange programme my university had with an university in the US. I was struggling with the idea of extra spending and was a bit passive about it, but that was a good decision to go, however it might have not been my decision and this is kind of red flag.

A group of American students came to Poland in the first semester of the exchange. This was cultural exchange as well, the highlight of which was the difference in attitude towards alcohol. Poles are used to drinking, even heavy drinking, usually since their high school years and the law-obedient Americans do not really drinking until they are 21. And, by chance, the Americans were just 21 and this was the way they enjoyed their freedom here, often getting totally drunk even just after their classes. At the time I was trying to reach alcohol consumption that would cut off my intruding thoughts and bad memories, but I found out alcohol makes me a only a bit cognitively myopic and less physically coherent (blurred speech, not being sure about my body position), but doesn't help me relax. On the other hand, going out with other students involves using substances, so I complied to the norms not to stand out.

What could have been useful for the Polish students, was the American professor introducing the more real-life, business-oriented perspective. He tried to convince us about the seemingly unusual (in Polish academic setting) view, that to be an architect the most important thing is to get a job, not perfection in drawing, technical skills or even fancy and creative designs. You could predict that It was not easy to even talk to the Americans. I have learned English so long and had so good grades... But I lacked the insight into what they are all up to. At the time I even started to make a bit self-deprecating remarks about me having some language certification, being interested with some funny British phraseology, but not being able to comfortably and fluently talk about day to day things. There were at least two problems with the situation. In short term, my affect must not have matched the

intentions and people seemed that I was not joking, but self-delighted and praise my supposed special abilities which led to my further pessimism towards really communicating with people and made me behave in either ironical, contrarian and theatrical way to distance myself from situations I cannot handle and desperately keep control over at least something. On the other hand, this only made me dig deeper into the abys of my self-distancing, resulting in social isolation, and supposed protection from revealing to people too much, but in the result I felt only more and more lonely.

I didn't socialize with the Americans in fact. I was ashamed with the lack of any interactions apart the ones forced by the exchange programme but I think it was more of the self-imposed and external expectations that have bugged me, but at the time I couldn't find any balance between being socially selective and keeping my energy for people I like to involve in any contacts with. Those two are, which I have found a decade after, two pieces of how I work. Being a people pleaser for many makes no sense, especially if I'm not good at it and the play is enjoyable for neither side because I think I cannot mask being inauthentic and acting under some artificial compulsion.

The good thing about the American way of studying was encouraging each student to reach out to some business and talk about a project they could do together, of course involving some architectural construction. Being very verbatim I actually went to some of the best restaurants wearing my olive-colored suit, which was surprisingly suiting me which was confirmed by some international observer. I just felt good in the play which was both challenging as going out of my comfort zone, but also proved I can have just meet a restaurant manager and talk at ease about some imaginary restaurant project. This was a mask of a professional, but not being harsh on myself too much, it was more of me hoping find some meaningful connections and take it seriously finally.

And so began my travel to the USA (that studies thing is just an excuse, one could say, but one the best ways of learning about architecture is visiting it and learning the way people live, which usually involves omnipresent architecture and urban planning which is the subject of, in this case, effortless studies). I went there with my two not-so-social female colleagues, while the rest have been there since two weeks on a hundred miles long road trip across the USA, which I regret taking part in, but at the time I didn't dare to spend some of my savings for a possible trip of my life.

When we arrived there, the empty old dorm room seemed to me very abstract, but still disturbing. I even started to run my old counting down to the end of the supposedly fun holiday to end and return to the chaotic, yet predictable in the lack of point of taking any effort home atmosphere. This happened each time I went or rather was sent to some school or holiday camps, which I wished ended abruptly right now or were canceled in the last moment. But at some points, like primary school I started actually enjoy them when they were about to finish, as if I were never in the right place in the right time and prone to life-long nostalgia.

Being with a group of eleven and a Polish tutor was quite a good occasion to study human behaviors. I have been observing a lot about people of different cultures and origins, despite we had out Polish safe-space, which extended virtually all over continent due to the language barrier. We could gossip and comment on the others, sometimes unusual for us behaviors not being understood, but maybe considered looking in some strange Slavic or just judging was. For me it was also observation of the group dynamics and the reactions to my being among them. But at the time I was unaware of even shaping my own fate and randomly acting and later being surprised by quite predictable reactions. I just have never felt I am somewhere here and now and described only others behavior, words, not taking into the account my own actions and impact on the situation.

After the semester abroad I returned to my usual life in Warsaw and studies. Since then the stay at the US university was the adventure of my life I would talk with the colleagues who I have been there with for the following years and a to go impressive story about myself I would tell when introducing myself to someone.

Graduation

My master's degree diploma topic was so broad, as if a group of people of different professions would put their part and would like to feel important and noticed during this work. All of the threads I came up with fitted my interests and, since having no work experience in the architectural area, I wanted to make my diploma a statement to prove my worth, which is not what this is meant for. I realize, that it was kind of auto sabotage, putting unusual workload with no actual sense only to prove myself that failing to make something unusual I am a total failure as I have been told by my father. The bonus was not having to worry about finding a job or starting something in my life of my own. I felt it will be the battle I will not win and only become compromised in the professional society because of sending stupid-sounding cover letters, an unimpressive portfolio and to make matters even worse, an rookie CV. It took me extra semesters to finish the diploma project and work. I frankly don't know, what I have been doing apart of pretending to be working on my diploma. I remember my father complaining to my mother that I am reading some books and looking up something on the Internet. This proves I was, as usual, more concerned what someone will think and tell about me than actually doing something and maybe find some more accepting and benign environment.

After finally finishing my studies I wasn't actually looking forward to starting my career as an architect. I was so brainwashed and out of touch with the reality I didn't even consider myself good enough to get any job. I tried to send my CV and cover letters anywhere I thought about, but objectively judging, they were not very convincing if I am even close to being a serious candidate. After a few months of those unsuccessful attempts I decided to register as unemployed, but I didn't get any help apart of getting social insurance. I still lived with my parents, if it needs to be reminded.

My first work

When I finally started my full-time job in the construction industry I had very polarized feelings about it. I knew, I should kill myself because not making the amount of money a programmer or whatever my father wanted me to be would, but I liked the job and “magically” started waking up early and starting work at 7AM every day. It was a perfect way of escaping home for most of the time and gaining professional experience in what I liked, but I couldn't enjoy it and treat it as an entry into a career or so.

I have learned a lot about the organization of construction works and most of all, working with other people. As a construction supervision, I had to make to people easier and more effective to do their job. It was a straightforward situation – a new floor of the buildings was built each two weeks which was quite fast given the scale and techniques. I liked being a part of a team and work toward common goal. I especially admired my direct supervisor, who was doing his best in learning the younger peers about having good relations, atmosphere at the workplace and also keep being effective and resilient to any situations that can occur in this complex work place.

After a few months I felt I have learned everything I could at the place, but still didn't think of any further plan for my life, and moreover I needed this work experience to a certification I was going to later make. My father has attacked me for not doing some “clever” job and not being at home to take care of his problems that he is at ease with inventing in any given situation. There however some positive changes to my behavior, meaning riding bicycle regularly (mostly to work), not sleeping till the noon, which I would probably do not having this job and just going out to the real world, that turned to exist in parallel to my mental prison.

Leaving the job I felt empowered because it turned out I can perform well as a construction supervisor and people actually liked me and admired the professional attitude. The problem was however, I couldn't find a job probably because being afraid to... succeed at starting my own life? I don't know it it would be the case, because my almost life-long depression made me look very unacceptable in any place, that was at least my impression when looking in the mirror. I ended up with no job and unsuccessful at finding new one.

At the time my parents told me to take up another studies, which were the kind my father regretted not have taken. I know, that it was my attitude that made me blindly follow his “orders”, but that was the only thing I knew to do at the time, whether it was the conflict-avoiding option or other way of seeking comfort. Moreover the studies were free of charge and my father told me that after I gain his dream profession, I will make up for the past error. He even expected me either to hire him or move to the UK and pursue career there and finally invite my parents to live with me there.

This was so much extreme in both direction – either a total disaster or a genius who will save my parents and make their life “perfect” finally. I pretended to care about the others, event to the impossible extent but didn’t know how to care about myself, whatever it would mean.

Therapy

I applied for the studies my father told me to and I was accepted. It was really strange situation to start studies at my age and situation, I felt ashamed of me blindly following some sick man’s orders, I even was amazed how the university staff cannot seem it is all fake and I’m not eager to do anything here on my own at all.

Since I had a solid knowledge in the field of the studies, first I performed quite good, apart for my mental state. I was more and more exhausted and developed different physical symptoms. My self-harm also increased again and meant “punishing myself for failing my parents”.

When I started to fail pursuing my parents’ dreams, at least it became very harmful to me and helped me develop some, as my mother would say, the things young people have, meaning a battery of civilization and stress-induced illnesses. This prevented me to perform at the studies I took a year before that my parents told me to and that was the worrisome thing in the situation, not my well-being which was a concept not available to me. Of course I kept on asking my mom for some euthanasia, but I decided to go to a psychiatrist to try some treatment.

The vision and opening to the possibility of the therapy was quite new, but it came from often exposing myself to psychological readings, lectures especially the easily-consumable Internet content. Starting to read about some random psychological stuff like MBTI, I soon stuck to the autism-related topics. This would easily explain a lot of my “weird” characteristics and I started looking to the autism-oriented support in my therapy and treatment, but was not well understood by the supposed professionals. I struggled a lot with communicating with the doctors and therapists and could not find common ground and get comfortable even in this space meant to be therapeutic. And soon I found “my tribe”, which not as easy to handle too.

I googled “autism” alongside with “how to commit suicide”, past suicide histories, healing from narcissistic abuse, MBTI, Jung, Freud and different psychological topics. I was determined to narrow down my diagnosis myself if the professionals were not able to.

Foundation

In the beginning of 2019 when I was well into my therapy, I came across a Foundation (from this point abbreviated to ‘F’) which was said to take care of violence victims, especially on the autism spectrum. The self-described weirdo image of the Foundation president, A, was not a barrier to me

for the deeper message and goals, which I thought I could read between the lines. Their talks were really inspiring to me, as at the time the only kind of communication which I found appealing were archetypal stories, myths, legends etc. that I found to be a proof of F being like-minded and I was looking forward to getting to know them. Actually, my first more visible interaction was transferring them some money for relieving the freezing cold in their house.

I began volunteering for the foundation online for a year, which was of course made in total conspiracy and secret to my “normal” acquaintances and even the family I lived with. This was maybe symptomatic, as there were some concerns about the foundation, for example the president not keeping any longer relations with people, who, were all, according to her words, all mentally ill, f-ed up and dysfunctional. A lot of people found it easy to believe, as it matched their own life experience.

On the other hand the president turned out to be projecting her and her partners issues to the external “normie” world. This whole “anti-violence” and autism-friendliness was just a bait for people trusting to the seemingly only Polish-speaking activist on the internet who could actually understand their way of thinking, feeling and being lost in the reality.

Finally, it made me motivated to move out from the city where I couldn't feel at home due to all my memories, not keeping any friendships, feeling even more alone with my emotionally dead and non-present parents, that didn't even noticed me packing up my things (including my small library) to cardboard boxes (that was what they would call furniture, I guess).

And finally last summer I was ready to go to my support group. I arrived at the foundation house at the event that was meant to be a house renovation so that they could live there and not freeze any more. I soon found it was being degraded even more and totally not suitable to live and invite guests, like us, the volunteers. I was so disappointed by the wasting of resources (material and first of all financial and labor support from the online friends) that I pointed everything out precisely.

I suppose no one before did react so directly, because they could keep making things I will not describe here for sake of brevity and your comfort for even a year following my leaving. Shortly speaking, now the territory turned to be “enemy's ground” and I had to safely follow the rest of my plan. This was however unusual to me, compared to the previous stages of my life, that I knew what I was going to do and it was not ideating about suicide, self-harm, or even killing myself to make the house owners some problems. If I was in such a pressure a year before... I wouldn't handle it. The president and her partner actually used me as a free keeper of their poor animals while they were sifting through a pile of rags to find valuable items so they could get some money. Of course the transportation costs (of course mainly outsourced to volunteers) and storage rental made this

“negatively profitable”. The clothes ended up rotting, but in their own pile and I was accused of ruining their fungi-infested “home” with no roof and other strange things.

My own Life

When I stayed at the Foundation house alone with no contact from the “anti-violence activists”, I finally came to the conclusion it is time to move on, and leave their business to them. I looked up some new offers of apartment rental in the city I planned to move to for last year, and perused all my bookmarks relating to the new region. I called a few phone numbers found and when the owner of the apartment that later turned out to be my place, something “just clicked”. The woman sounded friendly and even was not suspicious about my plans to ruin the building when hearing the Fs’ dog; what is more, she asked me to pet the “doggy” which sounded not that well describing the traumatized animal. But finally, the decision was made, at least by me despite not having seen the flat yet apart of a photo of a part of the only room. Then I called the house administration to finish settling things down, but my attitude was seemingly go-getter, which was really a leap of faith at the time. I haven’t actually seen the main parts of the city, but I knew only thing I needed is to leave the F village.

I soon started to make here a home, actually for the first time in my life living on my own. Taking the burden of providing someone the explanations for all their misfortunes. Slowly, but surely I gain the feeling of agency in my life and even build real life friendship and engage in a few local communities. I’m not sure about the future, but I let things happen and most things I learn about myself are not terrifying at all as I would earlier assume. I continue my psychiatric pharmacotherapy, but finally I consider it just a part of a process that is heading towards regaining my true self.

Afterword

Frankly speaking, I was a bit concerned with what Antoni told me. The first impression was a vivid, interesting and kind of charismatic person, which I believe is the truth about him, but I was even not eager to believe what internal conflict still rule his life. I don't want to judge him after this meetings of opening towards each other, but I was surprised how much he still thinks about his parents and the not so pleasant past.

On the other hand I know I takes time to get to know what we truly want and desire, and this is especially true for Adult Children of Dysfunctional families or Alcoholics. Being gaslighted and otherwise manipulated for the whole life takes its toll and apart of helping people develop unusual knowledge, abilities and strong character it is still wound, that in Antonis case is still unhealed.

If not the project and our meetings, I wouldn't expect what situation he is still in. I see him as someone that has hidden into his cave and doesn't often peek out of it to share his resources with other people, which he could and maybe should do.

My overall impression is that he is still seeking the approval and love everyone born to this Earth deserves unconditionally, but certain people don't get it and must go the hard way to get some of their basic needs met. I think it must be not what they desire, but in my eyes they might bring some interesting observations how we as individuals and society live our lives not being consciously about our true feelings, needs, desires and the overall emotional life.

Last but not least, I think I met you at a particularly important moment of change and I hope this auto reflection on the past life will help you build your own future full of joy and authenticity. Thanks Anthony for the experience of meeting you and I hope you keep your way towards your true being which I have been privileged to be a companion to you at this time.