Coffee with Dietrich Ernst and Macon Reinhart: A Dialogue on the Psychology of Creativity

By Emily Voletsky

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“If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?”

~Alice in Wonderland
# Table of Contents

Chapter One: On Creativity… 1
~ Defining Creativity

Chapter Two: On Where We Were… 3
~ Past Research
~ Out-of-the-Box Models
~ Inside-the-Box Models

Chapter Three: On Art… 12
~ Creativity in Art
~ Umberto Boccioni
~ Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot
~ Jean Frédéric Bazille

Chapter Four: On Literature… 27
~ Creativity in Literature
~ A. S. Byatt
~ Italo Calvino
~ Milan Kundera
~ Annie Dillard
~ Franz Kafka

Appendix… 62

References… 67
You will meet two friends, an artist and a writer. Both have enjoyed success in their respective fields and their work has thrived from it. The friends are notorious for their bickering; like a happy married couple squabbling over trivial things, these two enjoyed pondering where they’ve come from in their professional field and where they are headed next. It is fair to say, their topic of interest was themselves, but also, how they fit into the greater category of their creative art. Nothing pleased the two more than to understand theirs and others’ creative processes, how they could use their minds in the most effective ways, and both had the magnificent idea that one day they would change their field forever. This handbook is an exploration of the psychology of creativity revealed through the minds of these two friends. Now, down the rabbit hole we go...
Chapter One: On Creativity…

A tortured street of broken cobblestones and antique brick, the epicenter of artistic minds, fitted with an old bookstore, a local’s preferred coffee shop, and a paint-splattered sidewalk. All writers and painters would one day walk this street, whether out of desperation and in need of a place to sleep, or to relive the memories of struggles once had, but no longer suffered.

“Here it is, the review I was talking about,” said Macon Reinhart, a painter of 32. “Reinhart has opened a gateway for art of this generation with his mastery of his craft. I expect more greatness from this young man,” read Macon from the daily newspaper. “I was just called a pioneer. A pioneer in my field,” Macon said excitedly.

“That’s fantastic,” replied his long-time friend Dietrich Ernst, a young writer of 31.

“Can you believe that?” responded Macon. “It’s just like when your recent collection of essays were considered some of the greatest literature of our time. I cannot believe that we actually did it. We are opening doors for other artists like ourselves. We are moving the creative world itself!” Macon exclaimed, clearly ecstatic over his gallery article.

“Ah, here we go again! I feel like our last discussion on creativity just ended,” Dietrich said with an eager look on his face.

“Well, why should it end? It is an ongoing process, one we must dissect from its very beginning.”

“Do you mean its origin? As in where creative minds had come from and what doors they opened?”

“Precisely,” Macon said smiling, knowing this will lead somewhere interesting, (quite a change of pace for a day that started out so plainly).

“Well, how would you define creativity? If we are going to talk about this at length, we may as well determine a proper meaning for the term in question,” Dietrich said, egging Macon on.
“Well, technically, it means using one’s imagination or original ideas to produce something new. At least, that is what Merriam Webster had to say on the matter.”

“There is nothing creative about Merriam-Webster. What about Csikszentmihalyi? He said that ‘creativity is not an attribute of individuals but of social systems making judgments about individuals,’ now doesn’t that feel a little more close to home? We are constantly scrutinized over our work, awaiting the day we are told it is nothing more than white noise,” Dietrich said.

“Csikszentmihalyi certainly has a point, but so does our old friend Weisberg. Didn’t he say that a creative solution to a problem must meet two criteria: it must be novel and it must solve the problem in question?” Macon asked.

“Yes, he did write that.”

“I feel that is an apt way of looking at things. If it is novel, original, and solves a question,” Macon attempted to conclude.

“But, I feel that it must also be functional. There should be some sort of use for the product if it is creative,” Dietrich added.

“So, ultimately, we have decided to utilize the main characteristics of Stokes’ definition saying that ‘creativity happens when someone does something new that is also useful or generative or influential’ and will add functional to the list.

“I’m on board with that. Okay, so in this talk, we will say that creativity is something novel, or generative, or influential, or functional in some way. Yes?”

“Yes.”

Now that the two had come to a conclusive definition of creativity, they could begin their talk. But, not before finding a seat in their local café. The two found their usual spots; cushions still imprinted with their backside, and ordered some coffee.
Chapter Two: On Where We Were...

Having finally settled on a definition of creativity, the two friends could now explore the history of creative thought within the scope of psychology. Now, Dietrich had a feeling that their discussion would turn to quandaries surrounding this particular topic, and pulled out some old journal articles from his briefcase.

“You came prepared,” Macon said laughing.

“Of course. Whenever we grab a drink, I tell myself to get prepared for an argument, thus, I bring my supporting documents,” Dietrich said with a low chuckle. “You know, there are some people who used to think that people like us are complete nut-jobs? Kay Redfield Jamison, while dispelling the idea that all geniuses are madmen, did say that those who are more artistically inclined and creative tended to suffer from mood disorders more so than the general population, usually manic depression or bipolar disorder. She thought that the constant fluctuation of mood, emotions, and thought processes would lead to an ability to shape and transcend their own ideas in order to alleviate stress which could then help in one’s artistic endeavors. I mean she basically said that when you’re depressed you’ll see everything through a dark glass and be uncommonly profound and thus creative, or when manic would see the world as if through a kaleidoscope also generating creative thoughts. It’s absurd.”

“Ah, is that so?” Macon responded half laughing, and half choking on his coffee. “Well, I’m not surprised people thought that way, I mean, reading Poe makes me shudder. Now, HE had problems. But, despite poor Edgar, you would think scientists would find a better way to research this. I know Jamison, and her study had numerous flaws. She worked alone, had an enormous personal bias, no control group, and had no statistical evidence to back up her claims. In my opinion, she is not a researcher with a valid theory.”

“Yes, I agree,” said Dietrich pulling out his next paper. And what’s your opinion on Judith Schlesinger’s study ‘Creative Mythconceptions: A Close Look at the Evidence for the ‘Mad Genius’ Hypothesis?’

“Now, she had the right idea. Delve into the material, look at the hard evidence with no bias and explain it to the public. Schlesinger writes that there was one study done by Nancy Andreasen, and from that, generalizations were made
about the entire creative community. This study said that writers experience a high rate of affective illness, especially bipolar, was generalized to the entire population of creative individuals. This study was immensely flawed with too few people, having gender and age as a limitation, poorly documented familial history, and a lack of definitive results, all should point scientists in the direction of inconclusive results, not a definitive case study. And Schlesinger wrote similarly for Jamison. These are two studies that had too many important scientific errors that should not be considered hard evidence for the case that creative individuals are generally mentally unstable.”

“Agreed. I have been asked too many times, ‘Oh, you’re a writer? Is there, like, something wrong with you? You must have had a hard childhood…’ It’s completely obnoxious, Dietrich said, clearly showing Macon hit a nerve. “Well, enough of those past researchers. Where do you think a creative idea comes from? I always found Koestler’s bisociation model and interesting place to start.”

“Bisociation model? I’m not familiar with that,” Macon said, leaning towards his friend, pupils dilated, indicating his interest.

“Well, well, something I can finally explain to you,” Dietrich said, leaning back in his chair, obviously taking a moment to gloat. “Bisociation is the process whereby previously unrelated ideas are brought together and combined. Association refers to previously established connections among ideas, but bisociation involves making connections where none existed before. With me so far?”

“Yes, of course,” said Macon, realizing Dietrich is having a little fun patronizing him, and so played along.

“Have you ever had a problem that you needed to solve, so for you it would a color to paint a particular object, or the layout of your next work, and once you start to analyze the problem, you being to notice things that are helpful to your situation in other areas of your life?” Dietrich asked.

“Actually, yes, all the time. I always found that rather amusing. I would be working on a piece one day and get stuck, and the next day take a walk and realize all of these different compositions that had never occurred to me before, yet are there now. It felt like a joke life was playing on me, it was too coincidental, but this is interesting…please continue,” spoke Macon excitedly.

“Koestler believed that ideas existed in interrelated sets and matrices, and that bisociation could lead to creative processes. He assumed that the appearance of a creative idea depended on the unconscious combining of ideas in such a way that conscious thinking could not possibly be responsible, and, you know where
I’m going with this...he placed the emphasis on dreams. He felt that while
dreaming, we are continuously bisociating in passive ways, and that anything
could become connected to any other thought in a dream state. Isn’t that
credible?” Dietrich asked with intrigue.

“Fascinating. I’m surprised I have never heard of this before. It reminds me
slightly of Wallas’ Model, the one in four steps.”

“Is that the model with preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification?”
Dietrich asked with a squint in his eyes, hoping he wasn’t incorrect.

“Yes! It is in his incubation phase that Koestler reminds me of. Preparation
involves a long period of intense work, after that comes incubation; next
illumination which he said was a sudden insight into the solution of a problem,
and finally verification which was the accuracy of But do you remember what he
wrote about incubation?”

“Not entirely, no,” Dietrich said.

“Incubation referred to a period of time when the individual is not consciously
thinking about a problem, but is supposedly unconsciously working on it. Let’s
say you work a 9-5 job and you’re given a task. You work for a week on this
project and only come up with a few ideas. Then, you have your one-week
vacation with your family to Rome. You are away from your desk and immerse
yourself in the beautiful Italian lifestyle. Then, Monday rolls around and you sit
at your desk, and BAM: illumination. You see? Incubation is happening while
you aren’t consciously solving the problem. Taking the must needed break is
entirely restorative, and increases one’s ability to think,” Macon said, now very
consciously on a caffeine rush.

Wallas’ 4-Step Model:

1. Preparation = long period of intense work
2. Incubation = when problem not consciously thought of
   a. Existence of this phase proven by illumination
   b. Period of time when person is not consciously thinking of
      problem, but is unconsciously attempting to solve the problem
3. Illumination = sudden insight into solution of the problem
4. Verification = accuracy of the insight
“So, the key to being creative is to forget the problem? That’s interesting, but I am not sure that encompasses all creative thought. There must be more to it,” said Dietrich with interest and speculation. “I mean, do you think that creativity can be measured?”

“Well, there are people who do. Psychometric models assume that specific aspects of creativity can be measured. For example, J.P. Guilford, one of the pioneers of divergent thinking, assumed that individuals possess traits and that some of these are related to creative capacity. Some individuals differ in their sensitivity to problems, and others differ in the ease with which they produce ideas. With divergent thinking, there is an emphasis on fluency and flexibility. Fluency means the number of ideas you can come up with or use, and fluency meaning if you have the ideas in different categories. Divergent thinking requires fluency, flexibility, and originality to produce many ideas. Some call this lateral thinking,” Macon explained. “And then we get to Osborn. Remember the brainstorming guy?”

“How could I forget? He feels that everyone possesses the creative capacity for thought and production, and one accesses them by brainstorming. He had his four rules for brainstorming: criticism must be ruled out, freewheeling is welcome, quantity is a must, and combinations and improvement must be sought by those involved. For Osborn, creative thinking depends on the free flow of ideas and a focus on quantity. But, this does not work. The idea of having no judgment at all is very hard, and premature judgment may interfere even if trying to subdue initial responses. Brainstorming is not the way to do it,” Macon concluded. He sat back in his chair, took a deep breath and finished his coffee in satisfaction.

“I think you need a refill. Let me flag down the waitress,” said Dietrich with a laugh.

The two ordered another round of coffee and their daily soup and sandwich lunch deal. A good meal for five dollars is a beautiful rarity in this city of starving artists. Their food arrived promptly, and the two began to eat, however, there is nothing that will cease their conversation.

“I wonder,” Dietrich said picking a piece of lettuce from his tooth, “could creativity be an inherited personality trait? So many things are tied to our genes and I wonder if this is more nature based than nurture. I know that there are personality models which assume that specific characteristics are associated with creativity. For example, Garlick wrote on neural plasticity which means that neural connections develop and change in response to environmental
stimulation. It’s like our brains are malleable and can advance over time,” Dietrich said taking another bite of his sandwich.

“Yes, he said that neural connections are critical for the meaningful processing of information, and the pattern of activation through a network of neurons is shaped by changing the connections between neurons. The environment plays a strong role in determining the arrangement of neural connections in a child, however, it may be incorrect to say that neural plasticity is present or absent. Some brains adapt better than others, and there could be individual differences in the process itself, however, I suppose the capacity to adapt are most likely inherited,” said Macon.

“Well, Csikszentmihalyi and Abuhamadeh wrote about something that will definitely interest you Macon, especially after your review just came out,” said Dietrich, sliding an article entitled, ‘The Artistic Personality, A Systems Perspective,’ across the table.

Macon’s eyes widened. You could see his thoughts racing, and then a brightness swept across his face signifying an understanding and embracement of this paper. Now, I will show you what he read:

Csikszentmihalyi and Abuhamadeh wrote that only when the field of art recognizes an artist’s work, could artists be considered creative. To be granted praise, acceptance and encouragement from the field aids in the generating of new material. Art will be accepted when it provides meaningful extensions to the catalogue past of artistic achievements (the grand narrative) or art. The art world has a continual need for novelty. Since aesthetic preferences change constantly, the artist must be fully aware of the trends, the needs, and desires for those involved in the field. There are two important implications for artistic personalities as well. One, there will be a constellation of personality traits that are optimally suited to create the kind of art the field deems significant (the nature of these traits are determined by the nature of the domain). Second, the artistic personality is not a stable, timeless personality type; as the field’s taste for art changes so too will the personalities. Csikszentmihalyi and Abuhamadeh believe that the art and the field are an ever-changing, progressing, and fast-paced domain complete with personalities that are tailored to the needs of the domain itself at that time. This idea thoroughly resonated with Macon. He had been scrutinized, harassed, and worse of all, his work called unoriginal and mundane. He began to tailor his craft, refine his techniques and start over. After years of work, he finally was accepted as a talent in the field. However, through this process, he began to examine the kind of criteria that seem to define all of those involved in this domain, and saw how one review would destroy an artists’ life. Csikszentmihalyi and Abuhamadeh’s exploration of the field of art
and its field, explained scientifically and psychologically exactly how Macon had felt for the majority of his career as an artist.

With a slight shake in his hand, he handed the article back to Dietrich and excused himself from the table. He went outside, and for the first time in years pulled the cigarette from behind his left ear, lit the end, and took a deep breath. For a moment he felt as if someone had peered into his soul and laid it out on the page. At first slightly startled, he soon calmed, heart rate slowed, and the tear that was once in the corner of his eye had diminished. Throwing his cigarette onto the ground, he stepped on the edge, and walked back inside.

“Are you okay, Macon?” Dietrich asked with a concerned look on his face.

“I’m absolutely wonderful,” Macon replied with a cool calmness. “So, where were we?”

“We were on Cskiszentmihalyi and Abuhmadeh,” said Dietrich.

“Right! Cskiszentmihalyi, what an interesting theory he has, especially his systems-model,” said Macon.

“Yes, his interactive theory is definitely persuasive. He created a dynamic model for creativity and the results of interactions of the three subsystems.” Dietrich took out a pen and scribbled a diagram on the back of one of the articles. “The domain is what transmits information to the person,” he said pointing to the top of the image. “The person produces a variation which may or may not be selected by the field, and the field will pass the selected variation to the domain. All of the subsystems influence each other and no act or product that claims to be creative can exist without input from each of the subsystems. For Cskiszentmihalyi, the creative process takes place outside of the person in the interaction between these three subsystems. You see? Every part of this has an influence on the other,” finished Dietrich.

Image of Cskiszentmihalyi’s dynamic systems model
Macon inspected Dietrich’s diagram and then asked, “but what if the domain has never been established? Like a new sport?”

“Well, then the diagram may look something like this,” said Dietrich, quickly scribbling a new image. “Here,” he said, showing Macon. “The domain would be the various set of rules, vocabulary, and grammar for the different variations of the sport. The field would be composed of the participants who know these rules, and they would assess if the sport would meet the domain criteria, think of referees. Next, the person is the one who will assimilate to the various moves of the domain, and attempt to convince those in the field that the variations he or she made are actually an original extension on the previous display of the sport itself,” he said, pointing to each segment of the diagram. This is a problem-solving model because it produces variations:”

“Problem solving models…that’s a very interesting idea,” said Macon. “It is just like Weisberg’s incremental model for problem solving.”

“Exactly,” said Dietrich.

“Weisberg defined the term incremental as assuming that all creative acts are firmly grounded in the works of other individuals as well as the work of the individual in question. The creative product would come as a result of modification and elaboration of early work. He then devised the difference between well-defined problems and ill-defined problems. Well-defined problems are phrased with all the characteristics of the solution known and specified at the beginning, so that the problem solver knows the criteria the solution must meet. For example, remember those fun coloring books for kids where number 1 would
be red, number 2 is blue, and number 3 is yellow, and then you color in those areas the color required? That is exactly what a well-structured problem is,” Macon explained.

“Yes, and he said that an ill-defined problem as one where the solution is not clearly defined, the detailed specification of a goal is not part of the problem itself. So there is no ‘aha’ moment, the solution is constructed step by step and creativity is possible at all of the steps involved,” continued Dietrich. “Reitman defined the end product as a constraint. This says what the end product should be, and exactly what limitations will be set in order to accomplish the goal. As more constraints are added, the problem solvers’ toolbox of ideas begins to weed itself out. Then there is the opposite of a constraint, which Reitman aptly calls an open constraint, where there is no fixed limit on the number or sources of the transformational equations which the problem solver may consult, the goal is loosely defined.”

“This brings us to Stokes’ constraint model,” said Macon, excited he can join in the discussion again. “She wrote that a problem space is how a solver represents or structures a problem. At the beginning of the problem, is the initial state, so either what the domain currently is, or what has happened in the past. Then there is the goal state, which is elements of the solution path and defines the goal. Now, what happens in between the initial and goal states is the most fascinating. There are sets of operators, specifically referred to as subject and task constraints, written in the form of if...then statements. What these operators detail are the changes that the individual or movement has made to the respective initial state to end up at the goal state. The constraints in Stokes’ model aid in structuring the problem space by precluding (or limiting) the search in some parts of the search-space and promoting (or directing) the search in other parts of the search-space. Think of it like this, preclude is what the domain did before, and promote is it has been changed to. For example, in art it could be Picasso precluded the realistic to promote the abstract,” said Macon.

“Stokes also has defined the constraints you just mentioned. She wrote that domain constraints are based the criteria of goal, task, and subject constraints. A subject constraint involves content. Task constraints are concerned with the materials and their usage, and goal constraints specify the style,” said Dietrich.

“Yes, isn’t this the diagram she uses in her book?” asked Macon, making a rough sketch of the image, “I will just draw a basic one:”
“Yes, that’s what they are modeled like. It is to help outline the steps taken in order to reach the novel idea that changes the initial state into the goal state. I think we can both agree that it is with this model we look to in order to understand the methodology and psychology behind creativity. Despite reading this material, I have yet to truly look into this via the domain of art. I have done a thorough investigation of the creativity constraints in literature, however, I never felt versed enough in the world of art to apply it appropriately,” said Dietrich with a disappointed sigh.

“You’ve explored Stokes’ creativity constraints in literature?” Macon asked.

“Of course I have, I’m a writer.”

“That’s wonderful! You have to explain it to me! I have only explored Stokes’ model in regards to creativity constraints in art, and have been yearning for a lesson in literature. I show you, you show me?” Macon posed hoping for an agreement.

“Deal. But, I think it will only work if you can explain this to me while we are looking at the paintings. I have trouble visualizing all of the illustrations in my head, and probably won’t be familiar with many of the images you will describe.”

“Well, that is a good point, so I will use some of the more well known images as examples. Still, it would be significantly more effective if the paintings were in front of us…let’s go to the museum. It’s only a ten minute ride away,” said Macon excitedly.

“Perfect. I’ll just grab the check.”
Dietrich and Macon arrived at the museum 10 minutes later. With a quick pace, they hurried their way up the stairs and purchased two tickets.

“Follow me,” Macon said taking the lead. They walked to the stairs, down a few long hallways and arrived in a large room with famous paintings covering all four walls. “Now, stand here,” Macon said pointing to the center of the room, “and look around and tell me what painting pulls you in. It can be any painting in here.”

Dietrich scanned the room, and not a minute later did his eyes latch onto one of the larger paintings on the far left wall. “That one,” Dietrich said, walking quickly towards the painting.

“Ah, so you like the futurists. This is Umberto Boccioni’s ‘Dynamism of a Soccer Player.’ Take a good look at the painting, and then I’ll show you some of his other works, and we can begin to dissect his creative process.”
Dietrich observed the impressive colors, the large canvas, the unique shapes, from near and far. After five minutes of intense observation, Dietrich said, “Okay, I’m ready to see his other work.”

They walked to a room not far from where they were, and Macon began to explain Boccioni’s history. “Umberto Boccioni was born in 1882, in Reggio Calabria, Italy. He studied art at the Scuola Libera del Nudo at Academia di Belle Arti, and after he established his skills by studying the classics through Impressionism, he and another painter, Severini, became students of Giacomo Balla. Balla set his main focus on the modern divisionist technique, where paint was divided rather than mixed, and the paint was broken on the surface into a field of dots and stripes. In 1906, Boccioni moved to Paris to study Impressionist and Post-Impressionist styles. When he moved back to Italy in 1907 he met Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, and the two became friends. Both men soon became futurists, and Boccioni became the main theorist of the futurist artistic movement. You know Picasso and Duchamp? Well, some say that the futurists helped inspire their art. Boccioni began painting portraits and landscapes, and then over time he began to enter the domain of futurism. Look here,” Macon said pointing to Boccioni’s ‘The Morning, 1909.’ “There is perspective, beautiful warm hues in reds and oranges, and it is a landscape. It is standard for the time.”

“I see,” said Dietrich scanning the image, taking it all in.
“Now look at this one,” Macon said pointing to Boccioni’s ‘The Women, 1910.’ “Again, this is a generally standard composition: proper perspective, bright hues reminiscent of the Impressionists, and a focus on light,” said Macon.

“Yes, yes, I can see the brightness of their dresses. It’s very beautiful,” Dietrich said.

“But now, look over here. This was painted later that same year!” Macon said excitedly pointing to Boccioni’s ‘The City Rises, 1910.’ “You can already begin to see some transition! Look at the movement, the loose composition, the vibrant colors!”
“Wait, I can actually see that...there,” Dietrich pointed, “I can feel the movement in the images. It is an incredibly different feel than ‘The Women,’ so much more powerful and emotional...”

“Yes, that’s it! Now, even more so here...look at the changes. It is more segmented, more abstract, even brighter colors,” Macon said pointing to Boccioni’s ‘The Laugh, 1911.’
Macon continued, “And the next year, he goes on to paint ‘Elasticity, 1912,’ an even more abstract, geometric, grid-like and dynamic image. This is one year before he painted ‘Dynamism of a Soccer Player.’ Boccioni had to go through the fields of divisionism and impressionism in order to fully understand the techniques, and place them into the toolbox of skills he had established. The futurists’ goals were not to paint in a realistic manner like traditional artists such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (I will show you one of his works later), and rather wanted to paint abstractly and the energy of objects. Let’s go back and look at ‘Dynamism of a Soccer Player’ once more…”

“Maybe a diagram will help you visualize his process a little better?” Macon asked.

“Yes, let’s make one. I understand the basics, but let’s utilize Stokes’ preclude→promote diagrams to show the breakdown,” Dietrich said pulling out a sheet of paper from his briefcase. The two spent some time on this diagram, and finally at the end, put some finishing touches on it. This is what they constructed:
"So, let’s review,” Macon said to Dietrich. “Boccioni wanted to preclude a static image by promoting movement within the image, just like you can see in ‘The Women’ versus ‘Dynamism of a Soccer Player.’ He wanted to preclude a muted color palette by promoting a bold and vibrant color palette. As we said before, he wanted to preclude realism to promote abstraction. By precluding controlled and hesitant brushstrokes, he could promote dynamic and broad brushstrokes which aided in his promotion of movement. All the techniques he promoted were aimed at the goal state, to paint an object’s energy and movement. When you look at Boccioni’s painting, you can feel the heat and the energy. It is an entirely different approach to painting,” concluded Macon. “Did you follow that? Can you see it?” he asked.

“Yes, I can see it; however, I think it will be very helpful if you show me some more art. You mentioned Corot earlier, and you said he paints in a traditional style. Can you show me what that is and maybe compare it to another movement? I want to make sure that I am able to apply this theory properly when I am at a museum next without you,” said Dietrich chuckling.
“Of course. Let’s go take a look at Corot’s ‘Lady in Blue, 1874.’”
Dietrich and Macon walked along the decorated hallway to a massive room filled with equally as impressive canvases.

“Let’s see, it should be somewhere over…ah, here! This is it,” said Macon. Clearly, he was a regular at the museum. “Now, before I have you truly observe this work in particular, let me explain to you what I mean by a traditional painting. I will start by asking you a question. Close your eyes and think of a standard painting, nothing by an Impressionist or someone like Boccioni, but a traditional illustration, what would you say the painting would look like?” Macon posed.

“Well, I guess I would think of a landscape, something with people walking around, maybe some nice flowers? Or, maybe a still life...honestly, I would think of portraits, with men in tailored suits and a hat, a woman with a corset and big skirt sitting under a tree having tea...” Dietrich responded with an air of confusion.

“That’s great!” So, would this painting follow proper perspective and would the individuals have their anatomy drawn accurately?”

“Yes,” Dietrich responded.

“Would there be vibrant colors, dark colors, hesitant brushstrokes?” Macon asked getting increasingly excited.

“Well, not vibrant colors per se. I guess it would be neutral, following the idea of painting ‘as-is,’ and the brushstrokes would not be seen clearly...like the canvas would look smooth to me. Everything would look extremely realistic. There would be nothing flashy, intensely colorful, no distortions of the human form, plain brushstrokes, oil paint, and a very large canvas,” Dietrich concluded.

“Look around you,” Macon said staring at Dietrich to make sure he would not miss a single facial expression.

“Oh...my...I did not even realize,” said Dietrich, mouth open, eyes widened, and with a shaky voice.

Now, what you don’t see here is that Macon had led Dietrich into a room of the museum filled with portraits of upper class men and women dressed to the nines, fitted onto massive canvases with highly ornate frames. There were landscapes of women and men drinking tea underneath a beautiful tree on a hot summer day, all of them highly stylized and painted as accurately as one can. The image in front of Dietrich was this, ‘Lady in Blue:’
“Now, let me tell you a little bit about Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. He was born in Paris in 1796. He began as a landscape painter and printmaker in etching. Over time, he became a pivotal figure in landscape painting referencing the neoclassical tradition he anticipated the ‘plein-air’ innovations of impressionism (plein-air means painting outside, using the natural light of the day). He worked on figure studies and used pale colors,” Macon explained and gestured to the highlighted areas of the canvas, emphasizing the figures’ pale skin and light blue hues of her dress folds. “He started with images like this, ‘Venise, La Piazetta, 1835,’” Macon said, leading Dietrich to a painting in the corner.
“Everything follows perspective, there are pale colors, and it’s a landscape. The colors are blended, the brushstrokes unseen, and it is static. He also painted landscapes like ‘The Bridge at Nami, 1826.’ It shows hills and a valley, a bridge, and mountains in the background. Again, despite the fact there is water, it looks static. It has brown and tan hues with an emphasis on greens, the color is all mixed together, and it looks, as you said, as-is:”

“Do you understand everything so far?” Macon asked.
“Yes, I’m following you so far. Now tell me how Impressionism came after this,” Dietrich responded.

“Well, the Impressionist movement began in the 19th century, and many famous artists such as Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Degas, Manet, and Bazille were involved. These painters desired to focus on something that they felt had been overlooked by previous painters: light. The impressionists were fascinated by how light would break over objects and people, how the sensation of light would make you feel, and how to mix and paint with hues, and with a technique, that would accurately represent the way light moved through spaces. It’s absolutely incredible, isn’t it?” Macon said, delighted to share his knowledge.

“So, they hoped to take away the focus from the object itself or from the individual being painted, and focus on the color, and how the light changes the color, and breaks on people and objects?” Dietrich asked.

“Precisely. Let me show you one of my favorite pieces by Jean Frédéric Bazille and I can show you with examples to make it clearer,” Macon said, quickening his pace as the moved to a room three doorways down. “Here, it is called ‘Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1867.’ Take a look at the canvas and I’ll tell you a little about him. Bazille was born in Montpellier, France in 1841, and was inspired to become a painter after seeing the works of Eugène Delacroix. After some encounters with Alfred Sisley and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, he was drawn to Impressionism and soon became close friends of Monet and Manet. He embraced the idea of focusing on light and lighting, experimented with various poses for his models, and soon became a respected member of the Impressionist painters group. He started with paintings like this, ‘Le Petit Jardinière (The Little Gardener), 1866-67,’ where you can see him begin to understand the idea of a movement in the light, a less static image, one that is bright and painted outside:”
“Then he painted images like this, ‘The Pink Dress (View of Castelnau-le-Lez, Herault), 1864.’ Look at the pale pink hue in her gown, the brightness and the movement in the sky. It is almost like you can smell the summer day, like you can feel the slight breeze gently moving the tops of the trees. Do you see it?” Macon asked Dietrich.

“Yes, actually I can. It has such an incredibly different feel than the ‘Lady in Blue’ by Corot does,” Dietrich said, an eyebrow raised, finding this kind of observation immensely fascinating.

“Bazille also painted landscapes like ‘Pasage au bord du Lez, 1870,’ of trees, grasses and a hill in the background. Take a look,” Macon said, pointing to an illustration next to the previous one:
“Isn’t this beautiful?! Do you remember the landscape by Corot, ‘The Bridge at Nami?’ It does not even compare to this! The colors are vibrant, they are not fully mixed, the clouds are accented with light, the lighting feels incredibly more realistic than the other traditional paintings. This has to do with the use of natural lighting by painting outside. It helps to give you a keener perspective. Now, let me show you my favorite Bazille. I feel that after this, you will understand Impressionism much better, and then we can make one of those charts you love so dearly,” Macon said teasing Dietrich, as Dietrich smiled back. “Here it is, Bazille’s ‘Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1867.’ Now, just take your time, and look.”

Dietrich moved closer to this small canvas in the corner of this large room. He observed the layered colors, the thickness of the paint, the surprising pose of the gentleman and said, “wow, I think I see it.”
“Isn’t his position incredible? I always was drawn to this painting because of this. When you walk around a museum and look at the images from this period, you can see someone reclining in a way, but never so blatantly relaxed and unaware of his surroundings. Look at the space above his head. If you look closely you can see the layers upon layers of paint strategically placed to emulate how light moved through the room and highlights his hair and face. There is an emphasis on color, light, sensation and exactly what you see the light doing,” concluded Macon.

“I think I’m ready to make a chart now,” Dietrich said turning the piece of paper over.

The two spent some time collaborating on the chart, however, Macon decided to let Dietrich take the lead. Macon enjoyed watching as his friend began to piece apart the fantastic techniques and style that comprise the Impressionist painters. This is what they drew:
Initial State: Current domain goal criterion: traditional mode of art; focus on object; lack of emphasis on light sources

Subject and Task Constraint Pairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preclude</th>
<th>Promote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Patches of hue on object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark color palette</td>
<td>Vibrant color palette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled brushstrokes</td>
<td>Quick, thin brushstrokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of emphasis on light</td>
<td>Emphasis on light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict composition</td>
<td>Open composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint object as “know”</td>
<td>Paint object’s hues as “seen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed blend of color</td>
<td>Rapidly applied, unmixed color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional poses</td>
<td>Relaxed poses (model)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use light only for shadows/depth</td>
<td>How light breaks up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark hues brown/black/green</td>
<td>Bright hues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard edges</td>
<td>Softer edges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-layered paint</td>
<td>Layered Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Movement (through use of light break up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint in studio</td>
<td>Paint outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Canvas</td>
<td>Small Canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portraiture of upper bourgeoisie</td>
<td>Snapshots of modern life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlighting particular object/person</td>
<td>Highlight wherever light falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylized/frozen</td>
<td>Free</td>
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</tbody>
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Goal State: New goal criterion: paint what you see; focus on color; sensations

Macon was able to show to Dietrich the basics of understanding art through creativity constraints established in the field of psychology. Dietrich was now able to look at paintings by the same artist, and begin to see the progression of
style, technique, and composition, isolate what the artist was precluding and promoting, and could assess initial and goal states. While Dietrich was definitely no art scholar nor was he a painter himself, he began to appreciate art at a significantly deeper level. He began to feel a greater connection to the artists, and he had an immense desire to spend more time in museums.

After the time spent in the museum, Dietrich was so pleased with the outcome of the day that he could not wait to repay the favor to Macon by explaining to him the wonders of literature and the creative constraints in some of his and Macon’s favorite works by A.S. Byatt, Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Annie Dillard, and the crème de la crème, Franz Kafka.
Macon and Dietrich left the museum silently. They walked towards a bench outside, took a seat, and stared off into the distance. After some time had passed, Dietrich looked at Macon and thanked him for opening his eyes to this entirely different world of thought. Macon breathed a sigh of relief and then slowly turned his head with a smile saying, “so, is it my turn now?”

Dietrich laughed to himself and said, “sure, I just need to make a stop at the library to pick up a couple things, and then we can head back to the café, I really need an espresso.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Macon said quickly getting to his feet, heading towards the subway. “Let’s go.”

Now, while the two friends make their way to library and back to the coffee shop, I will take the time to explain a couple of things to you just to make sure we are all on the same page. Since this chapter is dedicated to literature, I see it perfectly fitting to take a moment and define some basic terms and explain literary ideas as best I can so that it becomes easier to follow the two fellows.

You will come across a myriad of technical terms all describing techniques and literary devices used by authors in order to evoke emotion, express an idea, or simply make their prose more aesthetically pleasing to their respective audiences. These terms will be mentioned numerous times and it is imperative that you understand all of them fully:
Allegory: a description of one thing under the name of another; a story in which people, things, and happenings have a hidden or symbolic meaning.

Chronologic Displacement: following a non-chronological order or sequence of events in relation to time.

Condensation: abridging or shortening a sentence or thought in order to progress the plot.

Echo: repetition of certain sounds, syllables, words, or themes; imitation.

Ellipsis: indicating an intentional omission of words or letters or an abrupt change of thought, lapse of time, incomplete statement etc.

Fine Prose: style of writing utilizing complex sentence structure, usage of many punctuation symbols and adjectives; typically long sentences.

Imagery: mental images as produced through memory; descriptions and figures of speech that create a mental picture in your head.

Juxtaposition: the act of putting two or more things side by side or close together.

Memoir: a report or record of an important event or events based on the writer’s personal observation, special knowledge, or experience.

Metaphor: a figure of speech containing an implied comparison in which a word or phrase ordinarily and primarily used of one thing is applied to another.

Mimesis: imitation or representation, as of human speech or behavior.

Patterning: the repetition of a theme or object throughout a work.

Plain Prose: style of writing utilizing simple sentence structure, few to no adjectives and basic punctuation usage.

Polyphony: an aspect of a narrative that includes a variety of voices and viewpoints; rhythmical form of prose employing characteristic devices of verse other than a strict metric form.

Repetition: repeating of a word or theme in a sentence, poetical line, or novel.

Theme: a recurring topic, subject, or motif which unifies a novel, play, or poem.

In order to understand creativity constraints in literature, one must first understand memory. The reason this is crucial is because many of the writer that Dietrich and Macon adore (not including Kafka) wrote memoirs. To truly grasp the concept of a memoir via the vein of psychology, comprehending the components of memory are where we ought to begin.

Dietrich and Macon have been utilizing Stokes’ constraint model, and will continue to do so with their literature discussion. All writers will share a very general set of task constraints such as audience, grammar, and sentence construction, however, each do so by means of their own writing style, most
commonly known as the author’s voice. A typical work is constructed in a linear fashion, with chapters and sections, a protagonist and various character set, prose paragraphs, and following the five stages of novel development: introduction concluding in the inciting moment, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. This is what will be referred to as a traditional novel.

Memoirs are an interesting concept when combining the fields of psychology and literature, and it is in psychology that we look to if we are to understand where these stories come from. In order to write a memoir, you must first have memories; a memoir is, after all, a report or record of an important event or events based on the writer’s personal observation. When we form memories in our brains, we simultaneously are establishing associations between that memory, past memories, and new people, ideas, and objects. For example, looking at a cup of hot coffee will trigger associations such as hot, steamed milk, mug, caffeine, or types of coffee like espresso, cappuccino’s, latte’s, and Starbucks. From this it will then trigger associations such as breakfast, final exams in college, early morning commuting, first sip of coffee as a child, or commercialism. The areas of the brain that think of these characteristics are all triggered when thinking about coffee.

Memory is the process of recalling or bringing up something like the term ‘coffee,’ and this kind of memory is known as semantic. Semantic memory stores factual information about the world. There is also procedural memory, which is memory used to store certain performance behaviors such as the ability to turn a door handle or button your shirt; when you button your shirt you aren’t thinking about how to do it, it’s automatic. The last kind of memory is episodic memory, and this is what you will find Dietrich and Macon referencing. Episodic memory is used for storing personal events, a collection of past experiences that occurred at one time or another and can be recalled and stated. Because this kind of memory is based on personal experience, it is riddled with inaccurate information, and is the least checkable in terms of accuracy. Let’s say you attend a carnival, and something ridiculous happens with one of the trainers and the carnival’s elephant. Over time, you will find that the story changes, whether it be the name, time, place, where you exactly were, people’s reactions; the story begins to blend in your memory store, and soon it is hard to separate what the original story was from the most current version. Hence, memory is both reliable and unreliable.

As said before, Dietrich and Macon have a passion for reading memoirs and will therefore be entering into the world of episodic memory. In this particular situation, the subject constraint is memoir writing, and what techniques are employed by the authors to write their memoirs are all different, and constitute the task constraints. Every writer has a different way of convincing the audience that what they are writing is what had actually happened at one point in time. In
Stokes’ model, there are three basic constraints in memoir writing: the subject constraint, the sincerity of the text, and the materials used. The memoir will preclude autobiography by promoting a singular moment or event, rather than a lifetime of experiences. Sincerity of the text refers to the notion that what the author is writing is in fact based on episodic memory and is possibly inaccurate, so it is the degree that the author reconstructs the story. The materials used, in simple terms refers to the actual words used. It is here that the terms listed a couple pages earlier will prove their usefulness. Utilizing methods such as metaphor, mimesis, and imagery will change how the story is represented to the author and will either expose the truth directly or reveal indirect truths.

What you will find below is a memoir written by a woman who is reminiscing on a specific period of time in her childhood. Throughout the remainder of the handbook, you will find this memoir transformed into a variety of forms utilizing the different mentioned author’s constraints. Notice the changes in words, sentences, sentence structure, yet the message remains the same. Here is her memoir, written without any specific constraints (except for being a memoir), written with her voice alone:

_Memoir._

_Snapshots. A blur. Only the faintest images of my childhood remain in my memory. Time passes so quickly, and I have trouble remembering all that I have experienced. Rarely can I recall an event from when I was very young. However, there is one moment I cannot, and will not forget. At five years old I was one of those rambunctious and adventurous types. Playing with our family dog, Eli, and coloring were two activities I particularly liked. At this time, my parents and I lived in an apartment in SoHo, yet, because they wanted me to grow up with a lawn and wide-open spaces to play in, we had recently moved upstate to Monroe, New York. It was a stunning Victorian home painted white, complete with a wrap around porch and five acres for me to explore. While I do not remember walking around the house in any detail, I do remember entering what we soon after named the living room, and there it was: the most magnificent looking object I had ever seen. I ran back to my mom, pulling on her shirt, and begged her to tell me what it was. My mom and dad walked me back to it, and told me that it was not just a piano: it was my piano._

Even though I did not know how to play, the idea that his beautiful, cherry wood instrument was mine ignited an instantaneous attachment to it. My parents brought out the piano bench from the car, placed it in front of the keys, and I, using all of my strength, pulled my body onto the seat. My feet dangled above the floor and I tried desperately to reach the three golden pedals at its base. I felt the cold bronze metal against my toes and the softness of the wood on the tips of my fingers. I opened the piano cover and there they were, ivory keys intermingled with striking black ones. I remember thinking they looked like they were holding hands with each other, linking their fingers together up and down the instrument. I raised my right hand, and with an outstretched index finger, pressed a white key. The most extraordinary sound reverberated from the piano’s inner workings, shot down my spine and entered the depths of my soul. I did not realize at the time, but this was the moment that
birthed my intense passion for music. As I pressed all of the different keys, listening to every sound, I completely gave myself in to the reverberations. My fingers playfully danced along the keys tickling the high notes. With each motion, even more phenomenal sounds filled the air. The awe, the rapture, the thrill, I had never experienced anything like it.

As my fingers slowed their movements, I pressed the last key, and my cadence had ended. I closed the cover and ran my hands along the wooded side of the piano. I explored its curvature, the smoothness, and breathed deeply. At this age, I did not know why I felt different; I only knew that I did. I left the living room, clutching onto my favorite bear, completely astonished, and unknowingly changed for life.

All of this will soon become clearer, but now, let’s meet up with our two friends, they should be settled in the café by now…

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“Have you gathered all of your books?” Macon asked Dietrich with an elbow nudge.

“Yes, yes, I know I am a book hoarder, but you must look at the texts in order to understand everything better. I know you’ve read these stories, but reading specific lines and passages significantly helps in solidifying your knowledge of creativity constraints for the authors. It would be like you trying to explain Boccioni to me without having me look at the actual images, you know?” Dietrich responded.

“You’re right, it does make sense, and it will definitely help me follow you better. So, where do we start?” Macon inquired excitedly.

“Overall, we will talk about writers who have written memoirs, mainly because I know you’ve read many of these authors. But, because you know I am primarily interested in Kafka, we can talk about him at the end. So, right now let’s start with A.S. Byatt, I know we both thoroughly enjoy her work.”

“Great! Which story will we look at?”

“I think if we discuss one of her short stories it will be enough to help understand how to read a text with the idea of precluding and promoting task constraints in mind. How about starting with ‘Rose-Colored Teacups?’” Dietrich asked.

“Wonderful.”
“So, A.S. Byatt has written about her own writing style, particularly in ‘Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings.’ In this work, she mentions a number of writers, some of whom she admires and looks to when she’s writing, and some she dislikes. For example, Byatt adores Henry James. She writes that she loves his ‘vividness and exactness of description’ (7). If you have read any James, for example, The Portrait of a Lady, every piece of furniture, each crevice of a mansion, all of the flowers in a garden are described with a precise nature, and accurate detail. In ‘Rose-Colored Teacups,’ you may recall, that everything Byatt writes is with the same precise pen. She describes everything in such detail that you can actually see it in your head. Do you understand?”

“Well, I think a little, but can you find an example? I can’t remember off of the top of my head…”

“Let me see…hm…ah, okay, right here. She is talking about women in a room: ‘there were three women in the room, two sitting in low, oval-backed armchairs, and one on the end of a bed, her pale head lit by a summer window, her face slightly shadowed…’ (33), each character is in a specific place and described in detail. It is like you can see the women in your head,” Dietrich said.

“Yes, I can see the similarity, although I haven’t read much James…”

“Well, I know you have read Annie Dillard, who is very interested in exposing the exactness of a scenario. Byatt was also drawn to Dillard’s work because she describes everything clearly, and quickly. In one of Dillard’s pieces, one we will actually look more closely at later, is written like so: ‘…men left in a rush: they flung on coats, they slid kisses at everybody’s cheeks, they slammed car doors; they ground their car starters till the motors caught with a jump;’ Byatt writes similarly in her story, ‘Jane inhabited a mechanical world. She walked the pavements with a pendant black box, she lived amongst a festoon of electricity, hi-fi, hairdryer, tape-deck, curling tongs, crimper…’ (35). Everything is described, almost in a list like form. She is interested in the exactness of description.”

“I’ve got it now. That makes more sense,” Macon said.

“Now, when you’ve read ‘Rose-Colored Teacups,’ you will find that the goal constraint is that roses and teacups are to stand for everything, relationships, past memories, emotions etc. This is an example of a metaphor. She is using one term, roses, as a comparison and to stand in for different ideas. For example, the roses are a metaphor for her mother’s constraints for being a housewife, the teacup as a constraint for acting in the proper way; the teacup is a metaphor for the act of constraining Jane when she was younger, the delicate teacup versus her
mother’s rage. We have already established that the subject constraint for Byatt is a memoir because she is writing on a specific moment in her life, a personal experience. Her task constraints are therefore what we had mentioned before, metaphor. She writes utilizing three main literary devices: metaphor, mimesis, and patterning. With me so far?”

“Yes,” Macon said leaning forward in his chair.

“A metaphor is aimed at showing indirect truths and relationships between things. As I said before, the roses and teacups represent a multitude of different things. Let me read to you: ‘the teacups were given by her mother’s old college friend, to take back a new generation to the college. She had not liked the teacups. She did not like the pink, and the floral shape of the saucers was most unfashionable’ (36). This quote refers to the main character who had received these cups as a gift. The teacups are seen as something disposable and disliked at first. One saucer is missing which signifies something fractured; this could be a representation of a broken relationship with her own mother and sister. It reveals a large generational gap, but also represents a special item given to the main character by her mother. With each action, like the pouring of amber tea into the cups shows a clash of the roses, the hated pink color, and the teapot, all which are reflections of her mother. However, despite initially disliking the teacups, she comes to the conclusion that these cups meant something very special to her, ‘she could never see any further: from there. It always began again, chairs, tablecloth, sunny window, rose teacups, a safe place’ (38). The teacups become a metaphor for her mother, for home, safety, and a familiar place. Even though the teacup set is incomplete, just like the relationship with her mother is not perfect, the partial pieces remain, they are still present, and the love is still there,” Dietrich concluded.

“Well, I can definitely understand metaphor. I am interested to see what you mean by her use of mimesis though,” Macon said.

“Mimesis aims at the truth of things, so think of it as writing very factually, with little room for embellishment on the idea. Byatt writes, ‘she could see the chairs very clearly, one with a pale green linen cover, fitted, and one with a creased chintz, covered with large, floppy roses’ (33). This is a clear description of exactly what is there and what she sees. Byatt also writes, ‘Jane inhabited a mechanical world. She walked the pavements with a pendant black box, she lived amongst a festoon of electricity, hi-fi, hairdryer, tape-deck, curling tongs, crimper…’ (35), which is very mechanical writing and filled with two-syllabled words.”

“Oh, I see now. And patterning? I’m not sure I understand this completely…”
“Well patterning is a method of repeating the same kind of idea over and over again, weaving it into the story. In ‘Rose-Colored Teacups,’ there is a pattern of breaking things: Jane breaks an object at the beginning, and the teacup set is broken. The idea of breaking of objects recurs in her writing and subsequently ties together the generations. Ultimately, Byatt writes with the subject constraint of a memoir and uses task constraints such as metaphor, mimesis, and patterning in order to express her memoir to the audience. Metaphor, for Byatt, helps to create her memories because in the process of writing her memoir, her metaphors are newly and therefore newly experienced, not previously had.”

“Wow, I have never thought of it in this way before: Byatt using constraints in order to express her memories in a freshly formatted way. I did not know that you even could analyze literature in this manner,” said Macon, still relatively puzzled.

“I know this is tough and I can tell it’s hard for you to follow right now, but trust me, with more practice you will be able to analyze literature in this way with significantly more ease. Let’s continue, and I know it will start to settle in your mind,” Dietrich said encouragingly.

“Yes, okay, I will do my best to follow you.”

“If you have any questions just ask. You taught me how to view art in an entirely new fashion, this is the least I can do for you,” Dietrich said.

The two friends sipped their coffee and took a moment to breath. Dietrich began to fish through his briefcase for the next book he wanted to talk about, Italo Calvino’s ‘Invisible Cities.’

While Dietrich is collecting his papers, here is an example of the memoir you already read, however, it attempts to utilize some of Byatt’s constraints in the text:

Memoir.

Snapshots. A blur. Vague images of my childhood are all that remain. I can’t remember all I’ve experienced. One memory has solidified itself…an encounter with an exquisite instrument when I was five years old.

A large white house, a pointed roof, the shadows of the trees on the grass, and my dog Eli chasing his tail. I don’t recall walking around the house. I jump forward in time to being inside the house. I am in an empty room, wood floors, white walls, no pictures hang. Dull, blank, but there, a large object stood alone in the corner. What was it, why was it there? “A piano” my mom said. It was mine.

I walked towards this giant; I strained my neck to try to see the top. I couldn’t. I pulled my body onto the seat. My feet dangled above the floor and I tried to reach the three
golden pedals at its base. The cold bronze against my toes, and the soft wood on my fingertips provided comfort. I opened the piano cover and a series of white and black units stared back at me. The order of them looked funny, and I laughed.

I raised my right hand and timidly pressed an ivory key. The sound was quiet. I tried again, and this time the sound was so loud I jumped. I pressed all of them, listening to every sound. I smiled again as I saw my fingers run themselves up and down the keyboard. Now more sounds filled the air. The awe, the rapture, the thrill, I had never experienced anything like it.

My fingers slowed their movements, and soon my cadence had ended. I closed the cover and ran my hands along the wooded side of the piano. I explored its curvature and took a deep breath. I remember this tingling sensation in my face and wondering why it was there. I felt different, but satisfied. I left the living room clutching my favorite bear, completely astonished. Many years later, I realized my cadence had only begun.

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“I think I will order some dinner. Are you hungry at all?” Dietrich asked Macon.

“Starved. My stomach has been grumbling since we left the museum.”

“Let’s get some food.” Dietrich waved his hand to get the waitresses attention and the two ordered two hefty dishes: one spaghetti primavera and one portabella swiss burger. As the two eagerly awaited their meal, Macon asked Dietrich to continue with the next author. With a grand smile, Dietrich took the papers from his lap and began to talk.

“Now, we will get into some very unique writing. You said you have read ‘Invisible Cities,’ right?”

“Oh yes, I finished it a few months ago actually. It’s incredible. So different from what I am used to reading,” said Macon.

“Have you ever thought about what it is that makes the story different?”

“It was an odd structure, with the here-and-there conversation between Marco Polo and emperor Kublai Khan, and in between, there were these sections of descriptions of cities. It was very unconventional,” said Macon.

“That’s a great place to start. The construction of the novel is incredibly creative, but before we jump into that specifically, Calvino also wrote about his influences and what he hoped to achieve through his writing, so I think it’s best if we
started there. Calvino wrote that ‘there was a visual image at the source of all my stories...a man cut in two halves, each of which went on living independently...a boy who climbs a tree and then makes his way from tree to tree without ever coming down to earth...or an empty suit of armor that moves and speaks as if someone were inside’ (102). His main goal was to create ‘an image charged with meaning’ (102), and in doing so he could bring the reader into a completely fabricated world, but one that felt immensely real, one that would remind you of other places. Calvino gravitated towards authors such as Gogol, Dickens, Turgenev, Kipling, Wells, and of course, Kafka. He stressed the idea that it was not the explanation of an extraordinary event itself but rather the order of things which produces the extraordinary event that is the key to the novel: the pattern, the network,” Dietrich finished as he eyed the kitchen and saw his freshly prepared spaghetti move towards him in an almost comic way. “Oh, the food’s coming,” Dietrich said, moving the napkin to his lap. “Do you want to keep talking over dinner or take a break?”

“Are you kidding? Keep talking. I am loving this,” Macon said, also placing the napkin on his lap.

“Here we go guys, one spaghetti primavera and one burger with swiss and portabella. Can I get you anything else? Refill on water?” the young waitress asked.

“I will have a glass of your house Cabernet Sauvignon...”

“Oh, make that two glasses,” Macon said raising his finger.

“Wonderful. Your drinks will be out in just a moment. Enjoy your meal,” the waitress said as she walked towards the bar.

“So, where were we? Ah, yes, we were just getting to the good part. Calvino is writing a story in which Marco Polo is recounting his explorations to the emperor Khan, and in between having rather existential conversations pertaining to his travels. Marco Polo describes every place he has been with an incredible amount of detail. The extraordinary event in this novel is Marco Polo’s extended visit to China for sixteen years. During this time, he managed to visit many different cities, and as you may remember, Marco Polo’s episodic memory completely takes control of the novel. The central image of this text is Venice, and it turns out that Calvino’s subject constraints are Venice and memory. Everything he writes about is in some way related to Venice. The city itself is like the brain’s associative network interconnected with bridges and streams rather than neural networks. He writes within the area of imaginative literature or fantasia, which implies a detachment or an acceptance of different logic, based on objects and connections other than those of everyday life of the dominant literary
conventions. Still following?” Dietrich said slurping a piece of spaghetti allowing its tail end to flip into the air like a dolphin.

“Ohmmmm mhm,” Macon half-grumbled, half-drooled as he had just taken a large bite of his burger.

Laughing, Dietrich said, “well I will take that as a yes, and keep going?”

Macon nodded quickly, grinning as drops of hamburger juice trickled down his chin.

“There are many different ways to analyze a novel like this one, however, I found it fascinating to look at this novel from a mathematic perspective. The idea of a splintered image and referring to Venice as a crystal got my mind flowing, and I began to read the novel as one fractured through mathematics, just as a crystal is fractured. Even the contents page of the novel composes a sinusoidal wave. Look here,” Dietrich said, passing the book to Macon. “Turn it sideways!”

Macon turned the book sideways and looked along the edges of the section headings. He shook his head in disbelief and handed the book back.

“Just as in math, there are many different ways to come to a conclusion, however the conclusion will remain the same despite the equation used. For example, $2+2=4$, $10-6=4$, $2^2=4$, and $7 + 7 - 10 = 4$. All of these roads lead to 4, just as every city leads to and equals Venice. I found a number of mathematical methods used by Calvino such as mathematical series of repetition, spatial relationships combinations, symmetry/inversions, calculations, and geometry. All of these can be found in the text. Let me show you,” Dietrich said, thumbing through the pages to find some quotes. “Ah, here is one that shows his mathematical explanation of spatial relationships between objects: ‘The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper’s swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen’s nuptial procession...’ (10). He is creating a three dimensional coordinate plane with x, y, z that are all functionally related to each other; you can almost picture a sloping line,” Dietrich said, stopping to take a sip of his wine. “Mm, this is quite good, the wine,” Dietrich said pleasantly surprised. “Cheers,” he said raising his glass to Macon.

“Cheers,” Macon replied.

“Anyway, here is a good example of a series: ‘Zora has the quality of remaining in your memory point by point, in its succession of street, of houses along the streets, and of doors and windows in the houses, though nothing in them
possesses a special beauty or rarity’ (15). Here the images are in relation to one another in mathematical succession. Repetition is key in this novel,” Dietrich reads, “’Thus the city repeats its life, identical, shifting up and down on its empty chessboard. The inhabitants repeat the same scenes, with the actors changed; they repeat the same speeches with variously combined accents; they open alternate mouths in identical yawns. Alone, among all the cities of the empire, Eutropia remains always the same’ (65). Everything for Marco Polo repeats itself, like the repeated lines and angles of a diamond. Calvino even goes so far as to create a formula for his model city when he writes, ‘If such a city is the most improbably, by reducing the number of abnormal elements, we increase the probability that the city really exists. So I have only to subtract exceptions from my model, and in whatever direction I proceed, I will arrive at one of the cities which, always as an exception, exist’ (69). The entire novel is architecturally and systematically based. Remember I mentioned symmetry and inversions? That may sound strange, but look here: ‘The twin cities are not equal, because nothing that happens in Valdera is symmetrical: every face and gesture is answered, from the mirror, by a face and gesture inverted, point by point. The two Valdradas live for each other, their eyes interlocked; but there is no love between them’ (54). Calvino has managed to describe and explicate every location using these basic formulas and rules for mathematics. It’s no wonder architects look to this book for cues when trying to think of new designs,” Dietrich said laughing and shaking his head.

“So what we can understand from Calvino is a novel structured around the formulation of an associative network, the base for that specific network being Venice?” Macon asked.

“Exactly, yes. His goal constraint for thinking in terms of images demanded that he look to using different task constraints for accomplishing this goal. You know what may help make this clearer? One of my charts,” Dietrich said happily. He really did love making these...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial State</strong></td>
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**Subject and Task**

**Constraint Pairs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prelude</th>
<th>Promote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Linear structure</td>
<td>→ Non-linear structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Character at source of story</td>
<td>→ Image at source of story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Everyday experience</td>
<td>→ Visual spectacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 5-Stage Plot Line</td>
<td>→ Collection of dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Traditional Descriptions</td>
<td>→ Mathematical descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Metaphor</td>
<td>→ Paint object’s hues as “seen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Random Collection of images</td>
<td>→ Create network between images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Predominantly literary writing</td>
<td>→ Predominantly visual writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Extraordinary event</td>
<td>→ Sequence of events leading to extraordinary event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goal State**

New goal criterion: new novel scaffolds (memory and images); to think and write in terms of images

“Does this help to explain it in a clearer way?” Dietrich asked, putting a finishing touch on the side.

“Yes, yes, wanting to preclude linear and promote non-linear, promote the visual experiences…I think I’m getting this…” Macon said with a hesitant smile.

“You are! I can see it; it’s like something just clicked,” Dietrich said with a new burst of energy. “This is awesome! Should we continue onto our good friend Milan Kundera?”

“Definitely,” Macon said, wiping the remnants of burger goo off of his face. “Am I good? I feel burger juices still on me…I’m going to go wash my face. Be right back,” Macon said as he headed towards the restroom.
While Macon was absent, Dietrich spent the time thinking over all that he had said, and all that he had learned earlier that day. It was at this moment that he realized he would never look at a piece of art in the same way; he would never read a novel in the same way. His entire life had changed, and his perspective of a field he had once considered himself an expert in completely through him off; it was exhilarating.

I will also take this momentary break to show an example of the memoir you have read a couple times now, utilizing Calvino’s constraints:

Memoir.

After hours pass by, we climb the long and winding road to reach our new house. Like the glistening, white city of Zobeide, this large Victorian home was now ours, bright white façade, trees in full bloom, a pointed ceiling like a castle. At five years old, there was no place in the world more spectacular than this one. I passed through the arched doorways to reach an empty room lit with the warm colors of a freshly waxed wooden floor. I see an object at the end of the room and walked towards it. I touched it, and felt the awe this inspiring instrument instilled in me. It was a gift, my first piano.

The bench parallel to the keys and the belly of the piano exposed. A staggering sequence of strings all placed one next to the other. There are pegs, screws, strings all lined up next to one another, a perfect series. I take my place on my bench, and opening the cover, I see bright colors, like the white peacock spreading its tail in Olivia. The most impressive were the black pieces mixed in with the pearly ones. Eighty eight keys, fifty-two white, thirty-six black, each with its own place within the octave, perfectly ordered like the streets of Dorothea.

I place my finger on a note and hear the sound resonate through the spaces of the house. The most divine music was filling the air, the kind that made me feel as if I were swimming in the blue lagoons of Hypatia. Music wrapped around my body like the warm blue water.

Looking down onto the floor, I could see my face reflected back, the wavy edges of the piano illuminated the wooden panels, and I could not believe how exquisite it all looked. Absolutely phenomenal.

Friend: Well, what happens next? This all seems like fantasy. Did you ever truly live there?

Me: It is all a connection of images; they align themselves next to one another in the manner that I choose. For all I know is the feelings that I had, the colors and the shapes I can still see with my eyes open. But if it is all a reality? Who knows? I just allow the images to dance with each other so that they have space to endure, out of inferno, and in my memory…
“Alright, I’m ready now. Sorry about that, I get way too excited when a delicious meal is in front of me. Honestly, I can’t help but make a mess of myself,” Macon said.

“It’s no problem. My mouth was getting tired of talking anyway, so the break was definitely welcomed on both ends. Oh, and I took the liberty of ordering another glass of wine…”

“I was just going to do the same,” Macon said smiling, clearly loving how similarly their minds work together. “You were going to start talking about Kundera, yes?”

“Yes. We’ve both read ‘Ignorance,’ so I feel this is a better text to use rather than one you haven’t read yet.”

“Sounds good.”

“Milan Kundera also has written often about his own writing style and the writers he deeply admires. One of the people he mentions is Broch, and there is a quote he finds particularly intriguing: ‘the integration of non-novelistic genres into polyphony of the novel’ (75). Kundera was profoundly interested in utilizing the idea of polyphony in his writing, and Broch was one who did this as well. Additionally, Dostoevsky, Kafka, and even the composer Chopin fascinated him. He found the simultaneity and integration of a variety of kinds of novels something incredibly important when writing. Dostoevsky was able to combine the ironic novel with a political and romantic novel into one story…think of The Possessed. Kundera found Kafka’s ‘seamless fusion of dream and reality’ (81) inspiring, and he wanted to tie in this notion to his novel. Chopin inspired him because of his Funeral March which juxtaposes two opposite movements. While this seems farfetched, this idea will become clearer soon. ‘Ignorance’ is about Irena, a Czech citizen living in France, who returns to Czechoslovakia after twenty years. On her way home she meets an old lover Josef and the story explores their relationship as well as the idea of homecoming and exile. The initial state is the same as before, the traditional novel. His goal state he called ‘encompassing the complexity of existence in the modern world’ (72), something we can call novelistic counterpoint. His subject constraints are: the integration of different genres into one entity and polyphony. Lastly, his task constraints are ellipses, condensation, polyphony again, riffs/rhythmic text, and chronologic displacement,” Dietrich concluded. He leaned back in his chair and saw Macon’s
enigmatic look, “don’t worry if it’s overwhelming right now. As I read passages and explain everything, it will not seem as daunting.”

Macon breathed a slow sigh and then said, “phew, okay, please continue.”

“Let’s begin with the basic themes explored in the novel as it will help situate the characters and settings into the text. So far I’ve found seven of them: ignorance, nostalgia, homecoming, love, odyssey, death, and exile. Each character in the novel actually represents some of the different themes. You will find that Irena solidly embodies the themes of ignorance, nostalgia, exile, love and odyssey: ‘She knew that love means giving each other everything. ‘Everything’ that word is fundamental’ (104). Also, see here, ‘Nothing existed for her except the past; to it she wanted to make herself known, wanted to speak and send signals’ (105). For Irena, love is critical and the past, where she has come from weighs heavily on her soul. She can only think about the past rather than realize where she is now and it is painful to endure. She has been exiled from her county, feels nostalgia about returning, goes on an odyssey to return home, but feels separate from everyone. Oh, and another character Josef also represents ignorance, exile, love and nostalgia; Gustaf truly embodies ignorance…”

“What do you mean they embody the theme of ignorance? What are they ignorant of? Everything? Are they entirely clueless?” Macon asked.

“Good question. What I mean with ‘ignorance’ is different for each character. Irena, for example, is completely ignorant of the fact that she is free and not restrained in her current situation: ‘...ignorant of the freedom she really has’ (106). She is completely ignorant of who she really is. She has lost her sense of identity and being a Czech citizen in Paris only enhances the feelings of alienation. Josef is completely ignorant of sensation and sentimentality. Gustaf also embodies ignorance when it comes to Irena’s mother. He is completely unaware of Irena’s feelings of exile despite being in a foreign land, as well as Irena’s mother’s intentions with him. Equally as complex is the fact that he is entirely aware that he is the object of her mother’s affection, but ignorant about why he enjoys being pursued by her so much. It can be said that it is possibly because of his relationship with his own mother. Do you see?”

“Yes, that is clearer now,” Macon said nodding his head.

“There are a number of stylistic means, task constraints, that Kundera employs in order to characterize his themes. Polyphony, as we mentioned before, is one of his techniques. It is a complicated idea, so I will read you some examples. Now remember, polyphony means: an aspect of a narrative that includes a variety of voices and viewpoints; rhythmical form of prose employing characteristic devices of verse other than a strict metric form. So here are some examples:
'Could she see him? ...He enjoyed her encounter, too; she was friendly, charming, and agreeable...' (48). This is polyphony because it is explaining two separate people's stories and subsequently weaves them together. They are united. Rather than one predominate voice in the novel, i.e. a traditional narrative with one protagonist, there are many character’s stories imperative to the flow of the novel itself. It depends on all of the characters,” Dietrich said.

“Oh, that makes sense, but can you find some other examples? I always find that helpful,” Macon said.

“Sure. Here is one,” Dietrich said flipping through the novel with lightning speed, “‘She wants the two love stories to come together, to join, to mingle, to mimic each other so that both will grow greater through their fusion’ (79). She is saying that she wants to stories to meld together. Another great example is this one: ‘And yet Josef changed his mind when his wife’s death became imminent and inevitable. Suddenly the story of the Danish butcher abducted to Iceland seemed not funny but terrifying...The idea of dying when she did had been with him for a long time. It was due not to romantic grandiosity but rather to a rational consideration...’ (114). There is polyphony with death. The theme of death is binding the two characters together. The narratives are weaved and have multiple choruses. All of them have their parts to play. It feels like an orchestral arrangement, each section has a moment to play their theme, and then it gets transferred to the next section (for example: wind instruments like flutes/clarinet/oboe play theme, transfer to violins, who transfer to cellos then to brass); all are united with a theme and for Kundera it is ignorance. Do you understand polyphony better now?” Dietrich asked.

“Yes, I think I’m getting a handle on it now. But, what are some of the other techniques that he uses?” Macon asked.

“Repetition and echo are core mechanisms for him. Early in the novel, Kundera writes, ‘all predictions are wrong’ (13), and at the end of the novel ‘everyone is wrong about the future. Man can only be certain about the present moment’ (143). This idea of future and predicting events is echoed at the end of the novel and is repeated many times through the pages of the text. Kundera also uses the composer Schoenberg in order to tie two ends of the novel together. At first he writes, that Schoenberg is a ‘prologue to a glorious future’ (14), and at the end ‘declares that because of him German music will continue to dominate the world for the next hundred years’ (144). The theme of music is present here now. Irena even think to herself at one point: ‘she seeks out these echoes, these co-responses, these co-resonances that make her feel distance between what was and what is, the temporal dimension...of her life...’ (179), and that she feels ‘sentenced to repetitive conversations and fondlings that led nowhere’ (84).
There are moments like this throughout the entire novel,” Dietrich said with a large smile on his face.

“Yes, I did feel, even without thinking of this, that her life was relatively circular with the events and her emotions,” Macon said in agreement.

“Juxtaposition is also something Kundera utilizes, and in a very dramatic way I must admit. Here he juxtaposes the sentimental and the unsentimental: ‘The fact that today’s boyfriend bears a strange resemblance to yesterday’s makes him even more exceptional, even more original, and she believes that he is mysteriously predestined for her….’ (81), and then in the next chapter right below, ‘No, there is no allusion to politics in the diary’ (81). Also, he juxtaposes the dream with no dream: ‘An enormous pity overtakes her, pity for her beauty that will soon cease to be, pity for the world that will also cease to be, that already does not exist, that is already out of reach, for sleep has come, it is carrying her away, flying off with her, high up, very high, toward that enormous blinding brilliance, toward the blue, brilliantly blue sky, a cloudless firmament, a firmament ablaze’ (109), versus the next scene which reads, ‘when his brother said, ‘you got married over there, I believe,’ he answered ‘Yes’ with no further remark’ (109),” Dietrich said taking another sip of wine.

He continued, “chronologic displacement is also in the novel with the separation of the mother and daughter by dates. Condensation can be found between the abridged space between chapters fifteen and sixteen. Kundera also utilizes punctuation and grammar rules to express his themes as well. Ellipses and comma sequences reveal a stream of consciousness and open ending, which can be found in a number of places. The quote I just read to you is also a good example of this. What is so wonderfully striking about the novel is what he says about nostalgia and memory. In ‘Ignorance,’ nostalgia is a paradox, ‘nostalgia is most powerful in early youth, when the volume of the life gone by is quite small’ (77), and memory is ‘a ratio between the amount of time in the lived life and the amount of time from that life that is stored in memory’ (122-123). He then finished this train of thought by saying, ‘It assumes memory contains no more than a millionth, a hundred-millionth in short an utterly infinitesimal bit of the lived life’ (123). Isn’t that spectacular?” Dietrich finally concluded.

“Wow, I never realized the complexity here,” Macon said to Dietrich.

“So we learn from Kundera that his goal constraint is also to use the novel as a form of expressing language, etymology, and terms. He has a number of task constraints that he employs to accomplish his goal. I’ll make you a chart to help recap everything for you,” Dietrich said, taking out a new piece of paper. “Here we go:”
"Can you follow the chart?" Dietrich asked.

"Actually yes, yes I can. I’m surprised that I can," Macon said chuckling to himself.

"Once you understand the basic concepts it becomes easier to read texts in this way. Well, now I think it’s my turn to have a cigarette. I’ll be back in a few, and then we can discuss Dillard."

"Perfect," Macon replied.

While they take a break, here is the memoir using some of Kundera’s task constraints, and notice how different it becomes:
“What is it, what is it?” Emily asked her mother impatiently, tugging on the folds of her mother’s summer jacket. At five years old, receiving a gift is always the greatest experience in the world, especially when it is enormous in size.

“A piano, dear. It’s yours,” Emily’s mother, Diane, replied smiling. “Have a seat,” Diane said, as she hoisted her daughter onto the bench. Emily stared down at the array of black and white keys that lay before her, completely astonished.

The word inspire was created in the 14th century from the word enspiren meaning to fill the heart or mind, from the French ensiprer, to prompt or induce, and the Latin inspirare, to inflame. To view this instrument filled Emily’s heart, induced a feeling of purpose, and simultaneously burned a hole into her mind all signifying that this is a moment, this is an action that is meant to have meaning. Yes, every definition of the word inspire was applicable at the exact moment of this creative inception. Inspirare gave birth to inspirationem, or what is more commonly known as, inspiration. This word originally was used to define the immediate influence of God and in French mean the act of inhaling and breathing in. Again, yes. This is exactly what was also occurring at this particular moment. A moment of awe and rapture with marvelous sounds did occur, but most importantly was the act of breathing.

Emily took deep breaths with each note she pressed, noticing all of the sounds, the possible combinations, and inhaled the sound as if they were fumes emanating from an incense burner. She had no idea what was happening in her body, she only knew that there was a change.

What had happened was a moment of pure inspiration. Emily was filled with inspiration, induced into an inspiration-coma, and it burned so intensely within her, it will never leave. She became influenced by her piano in such divine ways, the music became her religion, and she lived and breathed the theory of music. She embodied the true notion of what it is to be profoundly inspired.

Macon leaned back in his chair and crossed his right leg over left, so that his right ankle lay casually on his left knee. Elbow on table, glass in hand, he swirled the wine in beautiful circles and watched as the cascading maroon waves crashed into one another, falling into their own vortex. He pondered over all that he had been told during the past few hours, felt a warm sensation enter his body, and noticed goose bumps emerge from his forearm; a complex set of emotions stirred his blood as it flowed in currents throughout his body. “Incredible,” he mumbled.
quietly to himself. Macon passed into the realm of reverie when his old companion came back from his smoking break.

“Well,” Dietrich said with a clap of his hands, “that was perfect, and very much needed I may say,” he said, clearly refreshed and ready to continue. “Macon? Are you feeling okay?” Dietrich asked noticing his friend engaging in his far off dream world.

“Oh, yes, sorry I’m fine. Just getting lost in my thoughts…”

“Thinking of anything particularly intriguing?” Dietrich asked.

“Always,” Macon said with a laugh. “No, but seriously, I was thinking about everything we’ve talked about today, and I am completely stunned by it all. Reading a book will never be the same…I didn’t know I could feel this way. It’s honestly quite remarkable,” Macon replied.

“Well, I’m happy to be a part of this transition. You did the same for me. I will not walk into an art gallery in the same way again. I will not look at art how I used to.”

Macon smiled back at his friend feeling so satisfied and said, “onto Dillard?”

“Onto Dillard,” Dietrich said. “Now Annie Dillard is one whom is very much a supporter of the art of plain prose. I argue this because of her interest in constructing a truly American Novel, her goal state, and she does this by utilizing plain prose. She wrote that she loved the works of Wright Morris, Henry Green, and Eudora Welty, individuals all writers who experimented with narrative forms and writing styles.”

“What is plain prose?” Macon asked.

“I’ll explain. Let’s start with what we call fine prose. Think of it as a complex sentence, with complex sentence structure, grammar, and the use of many adjectives, adverbs, and descriptors. These are long sentences which may contain parallel structures and repetitions, are heavily elaborated and have powerful rhythms. For example, Byatt often wrote in fine prose, as does Kundera and Calvino. But notice that there is a spectrum. Often you will find sentences that do not contain these elements, which is obvious because sometimes there truly is a need for a very simple sentence. This simple sentence format in a novel we call plain prose. This kind of writing is simple in structure, plainer, clean and concise, they are typically short and lack embellishment. Do you follow?”

“Yes, I can understand the fundamental difference in theory.”
“Many writers will utilize both forms of prose in order to convey a thought or idea, however, on the whole, writers tend to lean more closely to one style or the other. Writers like Gustave Flaubert, Chekhov, and Turgenev generally utilize fine prose, however, in the texts, plain prose is used in order to restrict emotion and build the imaginative world with distance and respect. Dillard explains in her novel, ‘Living by Fiction,’ that she writes in plain prose because she feels that ‘sentences are…objects themselves, objects which invite inspection and which flaunt their simplicity’ (117). Plain prose can be used to handle particularly violent or emotional scenes in order to spare the reader the gruesome or painful details. For example, in Dillard’s ‘An American Childhood,’ she writes: ‘…men left in a rush: they flung on coats, they slid kisses at everybody’s cheeks, they slammed car doors; they grounded their car starters till the motors caught with a jump. And the Catholic schoolchildren left in a rush; I saw them from our dining-room windows. They burst into the street buttoning their jackets; they threw dry catalpa pods at the stop sign and at each other. They hugged their brown-and-tan workbooks to them, clumped and parted, and proceeded towards St. Bede’s school almost by accident’ (285). Can you see the quickness of this style? Yes, there are many semicolons but each side of the semicolon is a full sentence that is very short and lacking embellishment. You can see she is explaining exactly how everything is using a minimal amount of words. Ironically, one would think that this form of writing is simple because of a lack of words, but I can assure you, writing as Dillard does is an extremely difficult process.”

“I have a question. You mentioned before she wanted to write an American novel. What do you mean by that? I understand that her title is ‘An American Childhood,’ but what makes her novels distinctly American?”

“That’s a great question, and one I still ask myself today. However, I do have a theory on that particular matter. I feel that she aimed to create a novel that anyone in this country could pick up and say, ‘hey, yeah, I’ve been there, I get that, and I’ve been through this.’ I feel like the stories are general enough where they translate to the population, but specific enough where they are still her own, and hers to tell,” Dietrich said.

“Can you show me what you mean?”

“Of course. There are a couple parts of this story that I truly resonate with. First, she is telling the reader of a fear she had when younger: ‘…I would not go to bed willingly because something came into my room. This was a private matter between me and it. If I spoke of it, it would kill me. Who could breathe as this things searched for me over the very corners of the room? Who could ever breathe freely again? I lay in the dark…I lay alone and was almost asleep when the damned thing entered the room by flattening itself against the open floor and sliding in. It was transparent, luminous oblong…’ (290-291). She continues to
explain this monster to the reader. But, then on the next page she reveals, ‘It was a passing car whose windshield reflected the corner streetlight outside. I figured it out one night’ (292). There isn’t a person in this world who didn’t have some sort of childhood fear that something, whether it be a creature, monster, bug, clown, or something that was in their bedroom at one point, and while thinking this, justified it with intense descriptions of its movements. And, then there is always a moment that occurs when you realize what you were afraid of was actually the mundane sound or movement or shadow of something harmless. This kind of story is relatable, but the description of this incident is entirely Dillard’s own. Each person may have this experience, yet each experience differs greatly in content. Also, there is another part that always got me, right here: ‘We had a puppy, who was shorter than the big snow. Our parents tossed it into the yard for fun and it disappeared, only to pop up somewhere else like a loon in a lake’ (299). Anyone who lived in the suburbs or had access to an area that was covered in snow, and who owned a dog, would watch as their pet would joyfully bounce around in the snow and eventually disappear into the white slush. This is something I always loved in the winter when I lived with my parents upstate. There are many moments like this. At one point Dillard wrote about her experience on a bicycle and how liberating it was when she could meet the local kids down the street. Similarly, anyone who owned a bike, and lived in a residential street in the suburbs as a child, had a very similar experience. I always felt that the relatedness of the text was Dillard’s great strength and how she managed to promote a truly American novel.”

“I see what you’re saying. There were often times where I felt like Dillard was writing about some moments in my life as well. I remember reading some passages and smiling, then having a long thought about my own memory. It was quite interesting what happens when you read her work. So, let’s go over her constraints and constraint pairs? I think I’m getting the hang of this…would you mind if I gave it a go?” Macon asked.

“Not at all!” Dietrich said delighted.

“So, you said earlier that she aimed to write like Morris, Green and Welty, so therefore they would be considered her source constraints, right?”

“Yes,” Dietrich said encouragingly. “And how about her subject constraints?”

“Her subject constraints would then be to preclude autobiography and to promote memoir writing. She writes about singular events, not her entire life.”

“Perfect. Now, tell me her task constraints, and I will put them into a chart,” Dietrich said excitedly. Macon then spoke and Dietrich transcribed everything Macon said. They came up with this chart:
**Description**

**Initial State**  
Current domain goal criterion: Traditional Novel

**Subject and Task**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraint Pairs</th>
<th>Preclude</th>
<th>Promote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fine Prose</td>
<td>→ Plain Prose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English novel</td>
<td>→ American novel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories that create distance</td>
<td>→ Relatable stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No memories triggered memories</td>
<td>→ Triggering reader’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td>→ Mimesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long rhythmic patterns</td>
<td>→ Short, fast paced rhythms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No movement within character/text</td>
<td>→ Text mimics setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embellished thoughts</td>
<td>→ Straightforward memories</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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**Goal State**  
New goal criterion: Completely “American” Novel

“You see, you see? Look at what you did! You’ve got it! You really nailed it right on the head! This is spectacular!” Dietrich said pointing to the chart that Macon created.

“I never thought I’d actually be able to that…I can’t believe it! Ha! Look!” Macon said holding up the piece of paper and showing it to the strangers sitting around them. The other customers gave a confused smile, looked away, and resumed their private conversations. Macon, realizing he was just shouting in the café turned red and looked back at Dietrich. “Ah, well, sometimes I just cannot contain my excitement,” he said taking a last large sip of his cabernet.

“I’m so proud of you. That was really very impressive. So you feel you have a good grasp of creativity in literature?” Dietrich asked Macon.

“Yes. I think it will take me a while to do this entirely on my own, but now I can better understand the process of going about this.”
The two friends ordered a celebratory drink from the waitress. While they chat amongst themselves, here is the last memoir utilizing Dillard’s writing style. At this point in the story, I hope that you will be able to see the transformation of this piece into many styles and utilizing different literary devices:

Memoir.

All of them are snapshots, a blur. Faint images of my childhood remain in my memory. Time passes so quickly and I cannot believe how fast I’ve grown. There are always certain memories you will never forget. I remember picking up my first dog from the farm, riding my bike down to the end of the street to meet up with my friends, and the first time I gave a presentation in front of a classroom. My most vivid memory, however, was when I was given my first instrument. I was a typical five year old, loved to play outside with our dog, Eli, color on the walls, and read. At this time, my parents and I lived in an apartment in SoHo, yet, because they wanted me to grow up with a lawn and wide-open spaces to play in, we had recently moved upstate to Monroe, New York. It was a gorgeous Victorian home painted white, with a wrap around porch and five acres for me to explore. Passing through the rooms, I came to a large, empty space. There it was. The most magnificent looking object I had ever seen. I ran back to my mom, pulled on her shirt, and begged her to tell me what it was. My mom and dad walked me back to it and told me that it was my piano.

I did not know how to play, but the idea that this instrument was mine, was an incredible feeling as a child. My parents brought out the piano bench from the car, placed it in front of the keys. Using all of my strength, I pulled my body onto the seat. My feet dangled above the floor. I tried desperately to reach the three golden pedals at its base. I felt the cold bronze metal against my toes and the softness of the wood on the tips of my fingers. I opened the piano cover and saw ivory keys intermingled with striking black ones. I raised my right index finger and pressed one. The sounds were extraordinary. I fell in love with it. I fell in love with music. My fingers danced along the keys. With each motion, more sounds filled the air. I had never experienced anything like it.

My fingers slowed and I pressed the last key. My cadence had ended. I closed the cover and ran my hands along the wooded side of the piano. I explored its curvature and took a deep breath. At this age, I did not know why I felt different. I only knew that I did. I left the living room, clutching onto my favorite bear, completely astonished, and unknowingly changed for life.
“This is just wonderful. I can’t believe how much I’ve learned about literature. Now Dietrich, I know you love Franz Kafka. Have you ever thought about looking into his creativity constraints?”

“Yes I have. It’s something I have been working on for quite some time now. I’ve read so much on Kafka and so many of his works that I feel that I have come onto something with him. I actually have the notes and charts with me. Would you like me to go through Kafka? It’s really quite fascinating. I know you will easily be able to understand everything now that we have covered the basics with the other authors,” Dietrich said pulling out a stack of papers and a tattered book.

“Of course! I’ve read a decent number of Kafka’s works as well. They are mostly his short stories though. Will that be a problem?”

“Not at all. I began my exploration with one of his short stories, ‘In the Penal Colony,’ it’s my favorite,” Dietrich said.

“Tell me about Kafka. Tell me about what you have found,” Macon said, settling himself into his cushioned chair.

“Well, Kafka was born in Prague, 1883 and died in Kierling, 1924. His family occupied the middle class, and they were Ashkenazi Jews. His father was a businessman and his mother helped maintain the family business. Kafka grew up well-educated, attended vigorous primary and secondary school, and became fluent in German and Czech. When he attended university, he studied law and received a degree of Doctor of Law. While Kafka’s personal life and family history is not essential in understanding his writing, I always feel that it can be of some use when analyzing his works. Kafka has written many works, some or all of which you may be familiar with. These are some of his most famous,” Dietrich said pointing to a list of titles:

~The Metamorphosis (Die Verwandlung), 1915
~The Trial (Der Process), 1925
~The Castle (Das Schloss), 1926
~The Judgment (Das Urteil), 1913
~The Hunger Artist (Ein Hungerkünstler), 1924
~In the Penal Colony, (In der Strafkolonie), 1919

“I decided to look closely at ‘In the Penal Colony,’ however, obviously his other novels and stories are tied into my analysis as well. I was very curious to see what Kafka enjoyed reading; I wanted to know what inspired him or annoyed him. You see, it is critical to understand where the writer drew inspiration from, what the initial state was in the literary field at the time in order to know what
changed and what the goal state is. Unfortunately, Kafka did not write essays about his writing process, but he did write many letters and extensively in diaries. He poured his secrets onto the page, and it was there that I found some truly interesting things. Charles Dickens, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac, and Heinrich von Kleist all influenced Kafka in one-way or another. He adored Dostoevsky, Flaubert and Goethe; actually Kafka was immensely jealous of Goethe and his success that he wrote occasional nasty things about him in his diary, and then two days later would apologize for saying the harsh words. Kafka was drawn to Dostoevsky’s intense psychological prose and impressive character development. Flaubert inspired Kafka due to his incredible talent for descriptive writing, and creating such beautifully vivid images that you could see them in your head. Interestingly, Kafka hated one of the worlds most highly regard English writers, Charles Dickens. In his first collection of diaries, he even wrote, ‘last night, I purposefully made myself dull, went for a walk, read Dickens, then felt a little better and had lost the strength for sorrow’ (77). He found Dickens incredibly drab, boring, and ultimately trite and unoriginal. It was in the works of other writers that Kafka’s mind began to turn. He drew inspiration from some and learned what not to do (in his mind) from others,” Dietrich said with a chuckle. He found reading Kafka’s diaries immensely enjoyable. “Let me read you a passage, it’s so wonderfully eerie and perfectly captures the feeling of Kafka. Do you mind?”

“Not at all!” Macon said with a smile.

“This is the part where ‘the officer,’ is explaining to ‘the explorer’ the Harrow’s function. The Harrow is a machine that you will learn more about as the story progresses. The character known as ‘the commandant’ preceded ‘the officer’ as overseer and creator of this machine:

“Yes, the Harrow,” said the officer, “a good name for it. The needles are set in like the teeth of a harrow and the whole thing works something like a harrow, although its action is limited to one place and contrived with much more artistic skill. Anyhow, you’ll soon understand it. On the Bed here the condemned man is laid – I’m going to describe the apparatus first before I set it in motion. Then you’ll be able to follow the proceedings better. Besides, one of the cogwheels in the Designer is badly worn; it creaks a lot when it’s working; you can hardly hear yourself speak; spare parts, unfortunately, are difficult to get here.– Well, here is the Bed, as I told you. It is completely covered with a layer of cotton wool; you’ll find out why later. On this cotton wool the condemned man is laid, face down, quite naked of course; here are straps for the hands, here for the feet, and here for the neck, to bind him fast. Here at the head of the Bed, where the man, as I said, first lays down his face, is this little gag of felt, which can be easily regulated to go straight into his mouth. It is meant to keep him from screaming and biting his tongue. Of course the man is forced to take the felt into his mouth, for otherwise his neck would be broken by the strap.” “Is that cotton wool?” asked the explorer, bending forward. “Yes,
certainly,” said the officer, with a smile, “feel it for yourself.” He took the explorer’s hand and guided it over the Bed. “It’s specially prepared cotton wool, that’s why it looks so different; I’ll tell you presently what it’s for.” The explorer already felt a dawning interest in the apparatus; he sheltered his eyes from the sun with one hand and gazed up the structure. It was a huge affair. The Bed and the Designer were of the same size and looked like two dark wooden chests. The Designer hung about two meters above the Bed; each of them was bound at the corners with four rods of brass that almost flashed out rats in the sunlight. Between the chests shuttled the Harrow on a ribbon of steel” (142-143).

Dietrich paused and then explained, “the Officer continues to describe the instrument and then we come to this:”

“In any case, I am certainly the best person to explain our procedure, since I have here”—he patted his breast pocket—“the relevant drawings made by our former Commandant.”

“The Commandant’s own drawings?” asked the explorer, “Did he combine everything himself, then? Was he soldier, judge, mechanic, chemist, and draughtsman?”

“Indeed he was,” said the officer, nodding ascent, with a remote, glassy look. Then he inspected his hands critically; they did not seem clean enough to him for touching the drawings; so he went over to the bucket and washed them again. Then he drew out a small leather wallet and said: “Our sentence does not sounds severe. Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. This prisoner, for instance”—the officer indicated the man—“will have written on his body: HONOR THY SUPERIORS!”

The explorer glanced at the man; he stood, as the officer pointed him out, with bent head, apparently listening with all his ears in an effort to catch what was being said. Yet the movement of his blubber lips, closely pressed together, showed clearly that he could not understand a word. Many questions were troubling the explorer, but at the sight of the prisoner he asked only: “Does he know his sentence?” “No,” said the officer, eager to go on with his exposition, but the explorer interrupted him: “He doesn’t know the sentence that has been passed on him?” “No,” said the officer again, pausing a moment as if to let the explorer elaborate his question, and then said: “There would be no point in telling him. He’ll learn it on his body.” The explorer intended to make no answer, but felt the prisoner’s gaze turned on him; it seemed to ask if he approved such goings-on. So he bent forward again, having already leaned back in his chair, and put another question: “But surely he knows that he has been sentenced?” Nor that either,” said the officer, smiling at the explorer as if expecting him to make further surprising remarks. “No,” said the explorer, wiping his forehead, “then he can’t know either whether his defense was effective?” “He has had no chance of putting up a defense,” said the officer, turning his eyes away as if speaking to himself and so sparing the explorer the shame of hearing self-evident matters explained. “But he must have some chance of defending himself,” said the explorer, and rose from his seat.

The officer realized that he was in danger of having his exposition of the apparatus held up for a long time; so he went up to the explorer, took him by the arm, waved a hand toward the condemned man, who was standing very straight now that he had so
obviously become the center of attention – the soldier had also given the chain a jerk – and said: “This is how the matter stands. I have been appointed judge in this penal colony. Despite my youth. For I was the former Commandant’s assistant in all penal matter and know more about the apparatus that anyone. My guiding principle is this: Guilt is never to be doubted” (144-145).

“Oof, chilling,” Macon said with a shudder. “I have always loved Kafka, but even after knowing this story, it still makes my hair stand on edge.”

“That’s exactly what I wanted to explore. There is no other writer like Kafka, and I wanted to know how it came to be,” Dietrich said taking a sip of wine. After some extensive reading I have come up with some general themes in his works: guilt, shame, condemnation, The Law, and transactions. I’ve been working on constructing a chart for some time now, and this is what I’ve come up with:”

| Description |

Initial State | Current domain goal criterion: Traditional Novel

Subject and Task

Constraint Pairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preclude</th>
<th>Promote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary</td>
<td>Ordinary situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious undertones</td>
<td>Banality of existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimesis only</td>
<td>ALL metaphors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illusions</td>
<td>True reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s existence as individual</td>
<td>Man’s existence as shadow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegory</td>
<td>Concrete situations of human life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard notions of logic</td>
<td>A reversal of logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Absurdity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional comedy writing</td>
<td>Cynical and terrifying writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of consequences to hero</td>
<td>Technique of culpabilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional notions of solitude</td>
<td>Notion of violations of solitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegorical heroes</td>
<td>Functionary heroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profoundly antipoetic material of highly bureaucratized society</td>
<td>Myths, epics and poetic beauty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and ordinary story of man and his job

Proustian idea of the self → “Post-Proustian” idea of self

Reality as we know it → Extreme and unrealized possibility of the human world

Oneiric Narrative → Imagination freed from control of Reason and verisimilitude

Hope → Dark beauty

Realism → Surrealism; imagination/imagery

Pluriformity → Uniformity

Certainty → Uncertainty

Separation between social and cosmic orders → Commixture of social and cosmic orders

Perception of order in disorder → Perception of disorder, but ordered

Without mention of vyakta/avyakta → Discuss boundary between them

Symbolism → Extreme Emblemism (image Charged with meaning)

Use of literal and metaphorical as separate from each other → Use of both so they effect each other

Proportionate → Disproportionate

Either open or closed Doors → Doors both opened and closed

The Law → Law’s effect on man

Goal State → New goal criterion: Surreal, Imaginative work, focus on themes, Emblems, Images charged with meaning, functionary heroes that fail in system

“Whoa,” Macon said, with a startled look on his face. “Um, I’m going to need you to explain all of this to me...”
“It’s not as overwhelming as it looks. Honestly, some of the items are standard as you can see, preclude hope to promote a dark beauty in the world, or to preclude realism and promote the surreal, imaginary world. But, there are some items that are contradictory or paradoxical, and then others that I think are the most interesting. For example, take a look at the first two preclude/promote pairs. I wrote, preclude the extraordinary to promote the ordinary first. Now, I know this may seem completely bizarre, but think about it. Never once does Kafka write something to the effect of, ‘how strange this is, look at poor Gregor, he turned into a giant bug.’ Kafka never does this in ‘The Metamorphosis.’ He actually writes very simply, ‘As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect’ (89).

That’s all Kafka says about that. The story is entirely about Gregor’s desire to get to work. He is terrified that he’ll be late and get fired by his boss, completely disregarding the fact he is no longer human. He is creating an extraordinary event in order to emphasize the ordinary nature of human life. And that is called Kafka’s paradox. Right under this set of preclude and promote pair, I have written, that Kafka preclude religious undertones and promote the banality of existence. Typically, in a story involving incredible transformation, there would be some kind of divine intervention, however, for Kafka there is no explanation at all. He truly wants to show the triviality of life, there is no God or puppet master who will come to the rescue; life just is and there is nothing particularly special about it.”

“I never thought of it that way. To be completely honest, I always thought he wanted to talk about the transformation not because he writes to indicate that, but because the event is so strange, you kind of ask yourself, how could one not emphasize this? You know?” Macon said in agreement.

“I completely understand. It’s difficult to see at first, but once you read and re-read, it becomes more evident. The ordinary nature of situations is cleverly explored in the passage from ‘In the Penal Colony.’ Here, the reader is presented with a gruesome torture instrument designed to tattoo onto your body the crime that was supposedly committed, yet in doing so, the machine breaks down onto the body slicing it in two as it ‘tattoos.’ For the officer, this is completely normal. Kafka writes pages of descriptions, and it is said so plainly and precisely that you can recreate the Harrow in your mind. It’s completely strange,” Dietrich said. “I also wrote that he precludes mimesis to promote metaphor. Now, we talked before about a spectrum that writers lay on. Kafka obviously uses mimesis when he writes, however, for Kafka everything is a metaphor. He emphasizes the use of metaphor in order to get his main points across.”

“I follow you so far, but what do you mean by standard logic and reversal of logic here?” Macon asked pointing to the chart.
“I say that Kafka precludes the standard notions of logic in order to promote a reversal of logic. Typically, the characters in a novel know why they are being persecuted. For example, in Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment,’ Raskolnikov commits a crime, feels guilty because of it, and then accepts his punishment. Here the offense seeks the punishment, and that is standard. However, for Kafka, the main characters don’t know why they are being punished. He reveals the absurdity of punishment and it is so unbearable that the accused ends up needing to find justification for his penalty. So often the protagonist will accept his unwarranted fate. The punishment seeks the offense. This is the reversal of logic I was talking about.”

“Oh, I never thought of it in that way, but it makes sense. Gregor never finds out why he is turned into an insect and accepts his fate and curls up in a corner and dies. In ‘Before the Law,’ the main character waits in front of the door to see his fate, yet never has the courage to step through the doorway. Then he accepts his own fate and the doors close in front of him and that is the end. In ‘The Trial,’ Josef K. is charged with an offense when he wakes in the morning, and after furious attempts to understand the charges and settle his situation, he is not able to resolve anything with the courts, and subsequently accepts his fate and is killed by two guards. It makes a lot of sense, this reversal of logic idea…”

“I also have down that he precludes allegorical heroes to promote functionary heroes. An allegory is a description of one thing under the name of another; this individual will have a hidden or symbolic meaning. So an allegorical hero is one that will have a name and be an individual, however, this person will represent something else. It could be love, faith, the law, you name it. There are some Kafka scholars who say that all of Kafka’s characters are an allegory of something else. I argue that they are in fact not allegorical but rather functional. What I mean is that it goes against Kafka’s paradox to say that these characters are more than just characters. They are pieces of a story that are used to move the plot forward. Think about it. There is nothing intellectual about Gregor. He is functionary, meaning that he is just one of the elementary ways of being; he is an employee functioning in the orderly and strict world of obedience.”

“Thinking about it now, I did always think that could be an allegory, but was never quite sure for what. Nothing really fit properly in terms of an allegory for Gregor. I mean you could say they represent something else, but it isn’t exactly an allegory…probably more of a symbol…right?” Macon asked.

“That’s a fantastic point, and it brings me to my next set. I propose that Kafka precludes symbolism and promotes extreme emblemism. This is an odd statement to make, but let me explain. Obviously a symbol is something that represents something else. This is more than just an object representing an idea. For Kafka, everything was already a symbol. He rather wanted to promote
emblems, an image charge with meaning. This is something extremely powerful. You can see every bolt, and screw, picture it in your head, visualize the Harrow in serious extremes, and then you ultimately realize that it IS the Law. The Harrow is an emblem of the law, of condemnation, of punishment, and of absurdity. It is an incredibly charged piece of machinery. Hah, an image charged with meaning...kind of reminds you of Calvino, doesn’t it?” Dietrich said with a smile. He then took another sip of his wine and ordered large piece of aged Gouda. One of his favorite late night snacks was cheese, and nothing goes better with cabernet sauvignon then a piece of perfectly aged Gouda.

“Gouda. A good call,” Macon said, “I’ll have a chunk as well.”

“Nice choice. It’ll be out in a few minutes. Can I get you anything else?” the waitress asked.

“I’m good, are you good?”

“I’m all set,” Macon replied.

“Hm, now where were we...ah, right, emblems. Do you understand what I mean now?” Dietrich asked.

“Completely. I was confused by the term, but considering what I’ve read of Kafka, it makes a lot of sense. Kafka wanted to preclude symbolism and promote emblemism. What about this one?” Macon said pointing to a pair of constraints in the chart.

“Ah, this is one of my favorites. I say that Kafka wanted to preclude giving the perception of order when everything is actually disordered, by promoting the perception of disorder when everything is perfectly ordered.” Dietrich saw Macon’s squinting eyes and the cogwheels turn faster in his head. “Let me clarify. For Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment,’ the structure of the novel is ordered, you have an incident occur, the protagonist is aware of the event, and the novel is spent dealing with the ramifications of the crime. However, when you look more closely at the text, it is complete chaos. The brilliance of Dostoevsky lies in his ability to psychologically breakdown the human psyche when in a period of high emotional disturbance. There are rapid, long streams of consciousness (one may be reminded of Virginia Woolf in this aspect), and his thoughts are muddled. He completely falls apart in the novel, yet it is disguised in an orderly fashion.”

Macon nodded silently in agreement.
“Then we have Kafka. The reader is presented with something that appears initially chaotic. For example, with ‘In the Penal Colony,’ everything is bizarre. There are nameless individuals who are observing a torture device designed to punish and kill people who don’t know their own crime. The officer character is for some reason relatively comical, the topic is incredibly dark, and it borders on the absurd form of literature. However, a closer look at the text reveals the meticulousness of everything; the entire system has a strict set of rules. The Harrow has specific dimensions, the parts needed are exact, the purpose of the mechanism is precise, and everything is coded on the pages of the Commandant’s written notes. Another fascinating example is in Kafka’s ‘The Castle,’ where K. struggles to gain access to the mysterious authorities of a castle who govern the village for unknown reasons. The entire premise is odd and confusing. But, you soon realize that he is walking around the castle forming literal and metaphorical concentric circles. It is perfectly structured. If there is anyone who can perfectly fit Shakespeare’s ‘there’s method in madness,’ it is Franz Kafka,” Dietrich said as the two simultaneously started laughing.

“Well, I could go on talking Kafka for hours, but I think you’re getting the hang of this, so I’m going to tell you the last one I find most interesting.”

“Sounds wonderful,” said Macon, sitting up straight at the sight of the two huge platters of Gouda and fruit.

“Oh, I know that face. Is our food coming?” Dietrich said teasing Macon.

“Yes! It’s right over there. Ever since you said Gouda I’ve been starving.”

“Here we are boys, two Gouda platters. And this one’s on the house, boys,” The waitress said refilling their glasses with a fresh round of cabernet’s. The two friends looked up, smiled, and thanked her graciously. If there is anything else you need just wave. Enjoy,” the waitress said as she walked towards the kitchen.

“This looks incredible. Well, don’t mind if I do…” Macon said cutting a large piece of cheese and dangling it over a small grape. “Perfect, it’s actually perfect,” Macon said licking his fingers. “Please, continue!”

“Mrkay,” Dietrich said after just having taken an equally large bite out of his portion of cheese. “Okay,” Dietrich said chuckling. “So, the last thing I wanted to talk about was Kafka’s desire to preclude a lack of consequences to the hero/protagonist in order to promote the technique of culpabilization. This is something Kundera wrote about and I think it speaks precisely to what the texts are. In a traditional novel, protagonists fight for their own freedoms, they aim to find the source of injustice, and they represent everything someone would want to be. In Kafka’s novels, the protagonists are presented with horrifying realities,
punishments for undisclosed crimes which are possibly not committed, their
torture goes unexplained and they are condemned to suffer or perish (usually
perish). Gregor Samsa never finds out why he becomes a giant insect, he just is
one. He accepts it, attempts to go to work, has uncomfortable encounters with
members of his family and his boss, and then curls up into a corner and dies. In
‘The Trial,’ Josef K. wakes up and is arrested without knowing the crime he has
committed. After so much confusion, going back and forth to the court and
speaking with lawyers, he ends up accepting his fate. He allows the guard to
come and arrest him, and they take him to be executed. Josef K. is killed by
having one guard hold him upright, and the other guard stab him in the stomach
and twist the knife two times. He screams, ‘like a dog!’ (288), and then it ends.
No author would accept this as an ending, Josef K., Gregor, K., the explorer, none
of these characters are heroes, they don’t take charge of their situation, they
accept unnecessary fates, usually die, and that’s it. This is the technique of
culpabilization,” Dietrich concluded.

“Wow, this is incredible. Looking down the chart I am starting to actually
understand this better.”

“It was entirely my pleasure. You opened my eyes to art, and I could only hope
to repay the favor with literature. Well, I think that concludes your lesson for
today,” Dietrich said smiling.

“Thank you so much, Dietrich. This was absolutely incredible.” Macon said
having stopped his ravenous eating process.

He looked at Dietrich and the two had a beautiful moment of clarity. They were
literally and physically eye-to-eye on this topic and in complete harmony. Few of
these moments occur; even with a lover these moments are an extraordinary
rarity. Dietrich and Macon were settled, on the same page mentally, and looked
at each other with the utmost respect for one another.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Dietrich and Macon sat, each holding their respective cabernets and reflecting on
the incredible day they both had. Both were getting lost in their memories, and
the soon the table fell silent.

61
It is a rare thing to be able to sit comfortably in silence with another. Too many feel the need to fill up space with unnecessary words and forced conversation. A true lifelong friendship is one that can be shared in silence without any notion of discomfort or unease. Judgment vanishes, acceptance abounds, and two friends can sit, reminisce, and sip a drink in their favorite café…

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

the end…
For the truly curious, here are more explanations of Kafka’s constraints, the pairs the two friends didn’t discuss...

~ Preclude Illusions → Promote Reality
While Kafka’s stories are hard to understand especially due to his incredible descriptions of absurd situations, the underlying factor in his novels is actually how realistic these scenarios can be. Understanding the notions of the law, the precise text written in multiple volumes tallying over thousands of pages, is very difficult and eventually becomes muddled and the meaning faded. Unless one is versed in the legal jargon of the time, the average person will find himself or herself lost in a serious of confusing statements with an incredible amount of technical words. The meaning behind the law is also blurred, as it may be interpreted in different ways depending on who is reading it and the circumstances it may be used in. The Harrow in ‘In the Penal Colony’ is a representation of the harshness of the punishment dictated by the lawmakers, and the scenario the explorer, the officer, and the prisoner is in, is akin to not understanding what the laws are. He is promoting the reality of the absurdity of law by precluding fantastical illusions. It is actually quite interesting he does this so often given the fact Kafka has a law degree...

~Preclude Man’s Existence as Individual → Promote Man’s Existence as Shadow
The standard conventions of the traditional novel dictate that the protagonist comes to some kind of realization about him or herself. During the course of the novel, the main character should learn to understand him or herself as an individual, and grow from the experiences in the process of the plot. Kafka’s characters do come to realization about themselves, however, not as an individual that should be respected by society. Kafka’s protagonists learn that they are nothing but a piece in a system, part of a rigid, sadistic, and absurd world, and eventually let this notion consume them. They realize that they only exist in shadow, never to be fully recognized as an individual entity.

~Preclude Normal → Promote Absurdity
This should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever read anything by Kafka. Rather than promoting a standard story, one without transformations, strange occurrences, peculiar and unexplainable events, he wanted to promote the absurdity. Kafka aimed to show readers the absurd notions of the law, and how illogical and unjust the law could truly be. Additionally, by adding in
transformations of a human into an insect, like in ‘The Metamorphosis,’ he
successfully creates an absurd world without any explanations of why the
bizarre event happened in the first place.

~ Preclude Traditional Comedy Writing → Promote Cynical, Terrifying Writing

Typically, comedy was used in order to make a situation feel less dramatic
or intense, and effectively lighten the mood. Think of Shakespeare. In his tragedy
Romeo & Juliet, the Nurse is considered the play’s comic relief. Throughout the
course of the plot, the Nurse enters at various times, and successfully juxtaposes
the tragedy with her own comic mannerisms. She is used in order to liven up the
audience and make them feel like there may still be hope for the characters.
Sometimes, Shakespeare even wanted the audience to laugh. Kafka wanted to do
the opposite of this. Rather than using standard comedy writing techniques, he
precluded those in order to promote the cynical and terrifying writing style.
Kafka wanted to deprive his reader of their only hopes for consolation and spin
the audience deeper into the nightmare. This is why reading Kafka is so chilling;
there is never any hope.

~ Preclude Traditional Notions of Solitude → Promote Notion of Violation of Solitude

Being alone is something generally considered antisocial, and not proper
behavior for an individual. Now, in a novel, if the protagonist is alone, typically
that is at the beginning of the work, and the character goes on a journey of self-
exploration and eventually ends up not being antisocial any longer. The notion
of solitude is something that a writer will explore and usually bet against. For
Kafka, this is not so. He rather wanted to promote the notion of violations of
solitude. Kafka’s characters were solitary beings and had their privacy taken
from them. This can be seen in ‘The Metamorphosis,’ ‘The Trial,’ and ‘In the
Penal Colony.’ Gregor has his human form taken from him; his body is no longer
his own, he cannot be himself or by himself. He is trapped inside an insect’s
corporeal structure. In ‘The Trial,’ Josef K. is torn away from his daily life and
arrested for no apparent reason. The violation of privacy within one’s own home
is eminent here. Additionally, the law itself violates an individual’s privacy. In a
Kafkan world, the law can take complete control of a character’s life without any
explanation.

~ Preclude the Profoundly Antipoetic → Promote Myths, Epics, and Poetic Beauty

Instead of writing a novel about the highly bureaucratized society and the
ordinary story of a man and his job, Kafka wanted to created mythic, epic, and
poetic stories for his readers. The prose, the word choices, the sentence structures
are all so perfectly written that it feels like reading an epic poem. The circularity
of the events in his novels points to the mythic quality of it. ‘The Metamorphosis’
is not a basic story of a man in society; it is a mythical story about a man who is
transformed into an insect who attempts to make his way to work. The
descriptions and the breakdown of Gregor’s emotions are poetry. It is quite
beautiful to read despite the nightmarish quality of the content itself. Roberto Calasso explores this theory in incredible detail in his novel, ‘K.’

~Preclude Proustian Idea of Self → Promote “Post-Proustian” Idea of Self

The Proustian way of conceiving of the self is thus: “a man’s interior universe comprises a miracle, an infinity that never ceases to amaze us” (25). Milan Kundera wrote this in his book, ‘The Art of the Novel.’ Kafka did not follow this mentality, but rather, he held fast to the Post-Proustian idea of the self. This notion does not ask what internal motivations determine man’s behavior. The possibilities that remain for man in a world where the external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry weight. Kafka’s characters lose their abilities for self-sufficiency. They are strung along in a story they don’t understand. Their internal desires and impulses are stifled by their inability to remove themselves from these situations.

~Preclude Our Reality → Promote Extreme, Unrealized Possibility of Human World

For this idea stems directly from Kundera, and there is no better way to express his ideas than with an excerpt from his novel ‘The Art of the Novel:’

“Indeed, it’s important to understand what a novel is. A historian tells you about events that have taken place. By contrast, Raskolnikov’s crime never saw the light of day. A novel examines not reality but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he’s capable of. Novelists draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility. But again, to exist means “being-in-the-world.” Thus both the character and his world must be understood as possibilities. In Kafka, all that is clear: the Kafkan world does not resemble any known reality, it is an extreme and unrealized possibility of the human world. It’s true that his possibility shows faintly behind our own real world and seems to prefigure our future. That’s why people speak of Kafka’s prophetic dimension. But even if his novels had nothing prophetic about them, they would not lose their value, because they grasp one possibility of existence (a possibility for man and for his world) and thereby make us see what we are, what we are capable of (42-43).”

~Preclude Oneiric Narrative → Promote Imagination Free of Reason

Oneiric narratives are stories of or relating to dreams. Kafka rather wanted to promote imagination freed from control of reason and verisimilitude. Kafka had the ability to integrate uncontrolled imagination into the novel. Traditionally, there is a keen separation between the dream state and reality. However, for Kafka’s stories, dreaming and reality are fused together in a
seamless way. His eye was able to see the world in this hazy mentality and put his ideas onto the page to create incredibly strange, dream-like stories, but ones that took place in our reality. This kind of writing had never happened before.

~Preclude Pluriformity ➔ Promote Uniformity

Instead of showing the differences in individuals, the phenomenal change in societies, the importance of different ideas and opinions, Kafka highlights the mundane and uniformity of everyone and everything. There is nothing special about anyone, every person is the same, every process is the same. Life is just repetitions of the same events over and over again, and we don’t even realize it. This is what Kafka wants to show his audience.

~Preclude Certainty ➔ Promote Uncertainty

This one has been covered a bit, but it is straightforward. Nothing is certain in Kafka’s novels. While one could argue, what about mystery or crime novels? Well, at the end you know who did it and usually why. In Kafka’s works, we never know the cause for any event and it is entirely on purpose. He promotes a world of uncertainty that makes the characters, and the readers question and second-guess everything.

~Preclude Separation of Cosmic/Social ➔ Promote Mixture of Cosmic/Social

Typically, novels will separate the cosmic world from the social world. Kafka decides to intertwine the two worlds into one. The social order of things becomes superimposed onto the cosmic order. Despite the social world mixing in with the cosmic world, the rules and regulations that apply to the social world do not get lost. This can be seen in ‘The Castle’ most clearly with the character Bürgel. For a truly in depth discussion on this particular notion, Roberto Calasso explains it beautifully in ‘K.’

~Preclude No Vyakta/Avyakta ➔ Promote Boundary Between Vyakta/Avyakta

Vyakta means to cause to appear, display, manifest, or emanate. Avyakta means something non-manifest, and not visible to our limited vision. Kafka brings his reader on to the border between the manifested and non-manifested character of ideas, things, and people. The clearest example is in ‘Before the Law.’ This short piece of prose is about an individual who walks up to a door and asks to go through. The doorkeeper says that it is not up to him, but rather up to the protagonist (the man who asked the question). It goes back and forth between the man walking up to the door and wanting to go through to the other side, but never doing it because he was afraid and felt he needed more time. What remained behind the door was the manifestation of the law itself, it was the law for this gentleman, and he was never able to see or understand it fully because he could not pass through the threshold. This is the boundary between the Vyakta and the Avyakta, something that Kafka was interested in exploring.
~Preclude Use of Literal and Metaphorical Separately ➔ Promote Use of Both Together

This is something Dietrich and Macon touched on, but I’ll explain it a little further. As Dietrich said, for Kafka, everything was a metaphor and sometimes novelists hope to separate the literal from the metaphorical in order to explicate a theme or idea. Kafka felt that combining literal and metaphorical notions would actually enhance the descriptions and push the plot forward. Sometimes it is even hard to separate out what is literal and what is metaphorical for him...

~Preclude the Proportionate ➔ Promote the Disproportionate

Again, this is a relatively basic concept. A writer will generally show the reader what is happening. Typically the punishment fits the crime. However, there is always a disproportionate reaction to a crime. For example, in ‘In the Penal Colony,’ the prisoner has no idea why he is being punished. When the explorer asks what his crime was, the officer says that it does not matter. The prisoner was subjected to the Harrow. In ‘The Metamorphosis,’ Gregor does not know why he is an insect, he just is one. This does not make any sense to the reader and never gets explained. This incredible transformation goes unanswered. In ‘The Trial,’ Josef K. has no idea why he is arrested and does make slight attempts to resolve the matter, however, at the end he is slaughtered. This is also entirely disproportionate.

~Preclude Open or Closed Doors ➔ Promote Both Doors Opened and Closed

This makes the most sense when reading ‘Before the Law.’ When one understands the standard notions of logic for reality, a door will be open, or it will be closed, and then you choose what to do with that. For Kafka, his doors are simultaneously opened and shut. For the protagonist in ‘Before the Law,’ the door is open, yet is shut for the character; he never walks over the threshold to see the other side. However, in the novel, it feels as if going to the other side is not allowed. The contents of the other side are the secrets and manifestation of the Law, something that must always be guarded, and never seen or fully comprehended. Thus the door is literally opened, but metaphorically shut (also think of the use of literal and metaphorical together – see above).

~Preclude Law ➔ Promote Law’s Effect on Man

Many of Kafka’s stories explicate the sufferable quality of the law itself. It shows the cruel and often unwarranted punishments made by the law in conjunction with characters who do not understand, and often do not have the desire to understand, the law. Kafka reveals the law’s harsh and absurd effect on man. This can be seen most clearly in ‘In the Penal Colony.’


Kafka, F. (1977). *Letters to friends, family and editors.* Surrey, United Kingdom: OneWorld Classics LTD.


*Images*


