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LITTLE MOVEMENTS AND LITTLE NOISES

By DENNIS TRUDELL

They come and they spend their brief hour of life on the little planet, and then they go. And while there they make little movements and noises, but actually they change nothing. For they cannot, and I think they realize themselves the futility of their efforts. Yet they keep on making the little movements and the little noises. They keep on in spite of the infinite universe which opposes them and finally crushes them... How pitiful is their struggle, those fools, those little people, those dots.

And what little noise—I ask—am I to make here? What noise is there which would not echo back from the far reaches of space to mock me? So futile are any words I could punch out, so meaningless to anyone observing our small doings here on earth. Yet I find myself forced to make the effort, along with the rest—to waste my brief hour shaking a puny fist at the heavens. I must take my turn at wearing the dunce cap, at being the foolish nothing. For what else have we to do?

So I write bravely of life, or the slice of it which I know. I am experiencing many things in this moment in space and time. All disconnected, these experiences, and perhaps insignificant and petty. Worthless, but they are mine if I claim them. I do, for they are all that exist. My noise:

The door closing behind my father, leaving a void in the bedroom, that emptiness present whenever a person leaves. My father being a strong personality, his void is large, but welcome now for I had been having trouble concentrating while he was here. He left a note on the

bed to remind me to turn down the heat before retiring. A strong personality that likes being felt even after departure, he wants to be sure that I am reminded, and yet I feel there is more—he wants to feel that it is he who actually accomplished the turning-down through his directions in the note. This is the nature of my father, who wants to do so many things and must constantly employ others to help him. His instruments really, for he is the real doer.

Ambitious, my father, who must feel as I do the necessity of making even a little effort. His directions, then, shouts in the dark, even as these words are. I'm only just beginning to understand the man, and therefore only starting to love him with a deepness not present in the filial affections of childhood. Things about this being who has given me so much of his strength, and from whom I have inherited so much of myself; things that used to bother me don't anymore as a result of this new affection born of understanding. Like the hymn singing in church.

My father had always insisted on raising his flat monotone as high as he could, claiming it was the effort that counted. I'd always said that it was foolish to ruin a perfectly good song just to show his good intentions, actually, of course, trying to save myself the embarrassment of the dark glances directed toward our pew. Now, seeing in his terrible voice, or rather in his willingness to display it, the vital individuality I want in myself, I no longer try to hush it. Indeed, having reached the conclusion that what anyone else thinks doesn't matter very much, I chimed in this morning with a fairly poor monotone myself. Well anyway, my father is gone and the experience of his absence and all that it may bring to mind, are mine.

What other things here, now, are mine? Sounds. Sounds coming to me, now washing away the void. Birds are chirping outside. Cars swishing past on the street out there. Once in awhile a heavier swish—trucks, doing important things, going to and from important places. A nearer sound, that of a typewriter grinding out ideas, slowly, laboriously. When it pauses for a moment, should the birds and cars pause also? Another sound—silence, heavier, somehow louder than the others. Silence is the sound that is always there; the others can only briefly compete with it. The universe is silent. I wonder where the sounds go after we stop hearing them. I wonder if once a sound is breathed, it can ever be erased. Or did it ever exist? Ah, a new one. A plane overhead, the dull, bored roar of its engines pushing it through the sky. A sound that far outruns the machine,

and stays long after it has disappeared. One whose echo rebounds back and forth in the clouds, belying the smallness of its maker. Now gone, but having left no void because it faded so slowly. To me a neutral sound, that of the airplane, yet how charged with emotion it must have been for Britons some fifteen years ago.

I can make sounds myself if the silence becomes too loud. I can pierce it with shouts, whistles. I can make the verbal noises which have been taught to me, communicate with others of my kind and tell them my thoughts. But what have I to say? What of value? I cannot tell them what they must want to know: what they are doing here, where they are going. I couldn't tell them even if I knew; I feel the answer is not of a nature to be passed around by a series of calculated grunts and groans. Sounds, then, exist, but also apparently without meaning.

Sights. I have them galore in this colorful room. And out the window, a whole world full of them. The walls are full of pennants, mindful of other sights in other places: New York City, the Thousand Islands, Cleveland O., Baseball's Hall of Fame, Bridgewater's Auto Museum, and Wasaga's Beautiful Beach. Cases full of books, stacked neatly there, most of them unread, doomed to be ignored until they are passed on, with recommendations, to the younger brother. A few on the desk, singled out for attention—*Bartlett's Quotations* (for creative inspiration), Schulberg's *The Disenchanted* (for overcast days), Plato's *Dialogues* (unopened; for the cultural touch in the bedroom), and others less interesting, like Bugelski's *Psychology*, and Brinton's *Western Civilizations*. Wallpaper, a Scotch plaid so alive when a shaft of sunlight favors it. Today no sunlight, it is merely wallpaper.

Signs announcing my various loyalties: New York Yankees, I like Ike, Pancho Gonzales Wins Again, Route 69, Fiji's, No Smoking, Carling's Black Label, and Denison University. Pictures of half nude tennis players and entirely nude girls, both in various contortions; and then another picture, my favorite—a portrait of San Francisco and the bay at night. It could be any one of the world's cities which gleam in the dark like so many jewels. Its billion lights cut through the ominous blue, lights even out in the bay, where the boats have too much to do to rest at night. One long thin light that is the Golden Gate Bridge reaching out from town. And at the end of it, another mass of lights, but tiny and almost lost in the haze of darkness. Oakland, another city, another portrait. But these are all cold things, and

not at all why I like the picture. It's the life down there. You can't pick them out but they are there. People are turning on those lights, people are crossing that bridge and sailing those boats. Great numbers of them, alive and powerful, they have built that city and made it grow. Teeming masses fill up those buildings and streets. You can't stop people, that's what I feel when looking at the picture; you just can't stop them. But soon—stop them from what, making foolish noises into space?

Myself, my two hands picking out the right keys to strike, pushing the carriage back across at the end of a line. Hands alive, and eager to please the mind. Unseen, the mind, eager to direct, but so unsure of itself. More sights out the window, but dulled by the clouds which are supposed to be "promising" rain. Everything's indoors today. So many sights, as there are sounds, and smells and tastes, yet all without connection, without unity, without meaning and therefore, without reality.

I have all these and so what? A thing exists, happens, and then disappears, leaving everything unchanged. The earth still moves around the sun, still has the moon revolving around it. What am I to do with the experiences which are my life? If everything we do is merely little movements and little noises, then what is the use of life? Why don't we just give up and forget about the whole thing? Or are we meant just to abide, not question, perhaps to serve only as amusing puppets for a Supreme? Does God, Zeus, Fate, Mother Nature, The Moving Finger, or whatever, mean for us dots to go through the motions, and say that we have lived, and pass on? Can our greatest efforts really be so meaningless; and does the universe mock us? If so, then the movements in this room, and on the street outside, and in San Francisco, and in other places like Hiroshima and Budapest, are all the same and useless. Sounds, too, the chirping of birds, the swishing of cars and trucks, the roars of planes and boats, are all nothing. And the cries of the newborn and those of the dying are one—and useless. Is life then, instead of being full of sound and fury, rather full of microscopic movings and barely audible soundings? signifying nothing?

Perhaps it is, we cannot know. But more important, we must not care. We are able to see our lives objectively, so we must be happy with our worm's-eye view. No matter how tiny or unimportant we are, we are. We exist—this we know, even if for what and because of what remain mysteries. We make our movements, and after

centuries, manage to lift ourselves from the seas. We fight and quarrel and run around in circles, but we are not so futile. For we have life, even if it is all we have, and the warm breath of it as we work and play is our song. And the song is not futile at all—for with it we can feel important, can feel we are something, somebody. That feeling is our being, our reason for existence, no matter how senseless it may be. It is why we build the cities, and when the earthquakes tear them down, we build again. It turns the treadmill into a super-highway that is going someplace; it is the sought-for meaning. And so a hymn sung loudly off-key in one of our buildings becomes a small voice calling out into space challenging the unknown. So very small—but heard.