



AUTOPOTRAIT

Edouard Levé



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also by Edouard Levé in English translation

Suicide

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translated by Lorin Stein

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When I was young, I thought *Life A User's Manual* would teach me how to live and *Suicide A User's Manual* how to die. I have spent three years and three months abroad. I prefer to look to my left. I have a friend who gets off on betrayal. The end of a trip leaves me with a sad aftertaste, the same as the end of a novel. I forget things I don't like. I may have spoken, without knowing it, to someone who killed someone. I look down dead-end streets. I am not afraid of what comes at the end of life. I don't really listen to what people are saying. I am surprised when someone gives me a nickname and we hardly know each other. I am slow to notice when someone mistreats me, it's always so surprising: evil is somehow unreal. I archive. I spoke to Salvador Dalí when I was two. Competition does not drive me. To describe my life precisely would take longer than to live it. I wonder if I will turn reactionary with age. When I sit with bare legs on vinyl, my skin doesn't slide, it squeaks. I have cheated on two women, I told them, one didn't care, one did. I joke about death. I do not love myself. I do not hate myself. I do not forget to forget. I do not believe in the existence of Satan. My rap sheet is clean. I wish a season lasted a week. I would rather be bored alone than with someone else. I wander empty places and eat in deserted restaurants. When it comes to food, I prefer the savory to the sweet, the raw to the cooked, the hard to the soft, the cold to the hot, the aromatic to the odorless. I cannot sit still and write unless there is food in the refrigerator. I can easily go without drinking or smoking. In a foreign country, I hesitate to laugh when my interlocutor burps while we are talking. I notice gray hair on people too young to have it. It's better for me not to read medical textbooks, especially passages describing the symptoms of some illness: no sooner do I find out one exists than I detect it in myself. War seems so unreal to me I have trouble believing my father was in one. I have seen a man who expressed one thing with the left side of his face and something else with the right. I am not sure I love New York. I do not say "A is better than B" but "I prefer A to B." I never stop comparing. When I am coming back from a trip, the best part isn't going through the airport or getting home, but the taxi ride in between: you're still traveling, but not really. I sing badly, so I don't sing. Because I am funny people think I'm happy. I want never to find an ear in a meadow. I am no fonder of words than of a hammer or a vise. I do not know the green boys. In the store windows of English-speaking countries, I read the word *sale* (dirty) in French. I cannot sleep beside someone who moves around, snores, breathes heavily, or steals the covers. I can sleep with my arms around

someone who doesn't move. I had an idea for a Dream Museum. I have a tendency, because it's easier, to call people "friends" who aren't, I can't think of another word for people whom I know and like but with whom I have no special connection. On the train, facing backward, I don't see things coming, only going. I am not saving for my retirement. I consider the best part of the sock to be the hole. I do not keep track of how much money is in my bank account. My bank account is rarely in the red. *Shoah*, *Numéro zéro*, *Mobutu King of Zaïre*, *E.R.*, *Titicut Follies*, and *La Conquete de Clichy* have affected me more than the best works of fiction. The ready-made films of Jean-Marc Chapoulie have made me laugh harder than the best comedies. I have attempted suicide once, I've been tempted four times to attempt it. The distant sound of a lawn mower in summer brings back happy childhood memories. I am bad at throwing. There was a compulsive collector in my family, at her death they found a shoebox labeled in painstaking calligraphy: "Little bits of string that have no use." I do not believe the wisdom of the sages will be lost. I once tried to make a book-museum of vernacular writing, it reproduced handwritten messages from unknown people, classed by type: flyers about lost animals, justifications left on windshields for parking cops so as to avoid putting money in the meter, desperate appeals for witnesses, announcements of a change in management, office messages, home messages, messages to oneself. I have thought, listening to an old man tell me his life story, "This man is a museum of himself." I have thought, listening to the son of an American black radical talk, "This man is a ready-made." I have thought, seeing a man who had wasted away, "This man is a ghost of himself." My parents went to the movies every Friday night until they got a TV. I like the straightforward sound of a paper bag but not of a plastic bag, which fidgets. I have heard but never seen fruit fall from the branch. Proper names fascinate me because I don't know what they mean. I have a friend who, when he has people over for dinner, never sets out serving dishes but arranges the food on plates like a restaurant, so there's no way to have seconds. I have lived for several years without insurance. I sometimes feel uneasier around a nice person than a mean one. My worst memories of traveling are funnier in the telling than my good ones. It disconcerts me that a child should address me as "monsieur." A swingers' club was the first place I ever saw people make love in front of me. I have not masturbated in front of a woman. I masturbate less to pictures than to memories. I have never regretted saying what I really thought. Love stories bore me. I never tell my own. I don't talk much about women I go out with, but I like hearing my friends talk about the women they go out with. A woman came to meet me in a distant country after a month and a half apart, I hadn't missed her, within seconds I realized I didn't love her anymore. In India, I traveled in a train compartment with a Swiss man whom I didn't know, we were crossing the plains of Kerala, I told him more about myself in several hours than I had told my best friends in several years, I knew I would never see him again, he was an ear without repercussions. I have sometimes been suspicious. Looking at old photos leads me to believe that the body evolves. I reproach others for what they reproach in me. I am not stingy, I admire money well spent. I like certain uniforms not as symbols, but for their functional sobriety. I will sometimes announce good news, concerning myself, to someone I like and be shocked to realize that he's jealous. I would not like to have famous parents. I am not handsome. I am not ugly. From certain angles, tanned and wearing a black shirt, I can find myself handsome. I find myself ugly more often

than handsome. The times I find myself handsome are not the times I'd like to be. I find myself uglier in profile than straight on. I like my eyes, my hands, my forehead, my ass, my arms, my skin, I do not like my thighs, my elbows, my chin, my ears, the curve at the back of my neck, my nostrils from below, I have no opinion about my dick. My face is asymmetrical. The left side of my face looks nothing like the right. I like my voice after a night out or when I have a cold. I don't need anything. I am not looking to seduce a wearer of Birkenstocks. I do not like the big toe. I wish I had no nails. I wish I had no beard to shave. I have no interest in awards, I have no respect for distinctions, I don't care what I'm paid. I am drawn to strange people. I feel sympathy for the unlucky. I do not like paternalism. I feel more at ease with the old than with the young. I can ask endless questions of people I think I will never see again. Some day I will wear black cowboy boots with a purple velvet suit. To me the smell of manure recalls a bygone era, whereas the smell of wet earth evokes no particular time. I can't remember the name of a person I've just met. I'm not ashamed of my family, but I do not invite them to my openings. I have often been in love. I love myself less than I have been loved. I am surprised when someone loves me. I do not consider myself handsome just because a woman thinks so. My intelligence is uneven. My amorous states resemble each other, and those of other people, more than my works resemble each other, or those of other people. I find something pleasant in the pain of a fading love. I have never had a shared bank account. A friend once remarked that I seem glad when guests show up at my house but also when they leave. I begin more than I finish. I show up at people's houses more easily than I leave. I do not know how to interrupt an interlocutor who bores me. I will gorge on an all-you-can-eat buffet to the point of nausea. I have good digestion. I love summer rain. Other people's failures make me sadder than my own. I do not rejoice in my enemies' failures. I have trouble understanding why people give stupid presents. Presents make me feel awkward, whether I am the giver or the receiver, unless they are the right ones, which is rare. Love has given me great pleasure but takes up too much time. As the surgeon's scalpel reveals my organs, love introduces other versions of myself, whose obscene novelty disgusts me. I am not ill. I go to the doctor no more than once a year. I am nearsighted and slightly astigmatic. I have never kissed a lover in front of my parents. In Corsica some friends took me to a beginners' class in underwater diving, a teacher led me down six meters in a few seconds, my left ear popped, back on the surface I had lost my sense of balance, since then whenever I'm in an airplane I feel a needle pricking my inner ear until, all at once, the air rushes out of my ear drum. I do not know the names of flowers. I recognize the chestnut tree, the lime tree, the poplar, the willow, the weeping willow, the oak, the chestnut, the pine, the fir, the beech, the sycamore, the hazelnut, the apple, the cherry, the lilac, the plum, the pear, the fig, the cedar, the sequoia, the baobab, the palm tree, the coconut, the live oak, the maple, the olive. I can name, but do not recognize, the ash, the aspen, the spindle tree, the strawberry tree, the bougainvillea, the catalpa. I have kept guppies, Sumatran brill, neons, a fish striped yellow and black and shaped like a snake, and other aquarium fish whose names I have forgotten. I had a female hamster called Pirouette because she loved her turquoise plastic wheel and ran so fast in it that it would spin her all the way round. A woman friend whose English isn't good heard *C'est quelque chose* for "Set in your shoes" in the song "Let's Groove." At times I have run down dark paths. An uncle

would play Scorlipochon One Two Three Four Five Six Seven Eight Nine Ten with me, I had to say Scorlipochon one two three four five six seven eight nine ten while he was tickling me. One of my uncles had a taste for scandal and pranks, he'd shoplift just for fun, he would buy *Hara-Kiri* magazine and let me read it, he would pretend to be retarded at the beach, he would pounce yelling and drooling on a sunbathing woman, he'd ask questions using nonexistent words of the farmer's wife who lived down the road, he would call strangers on the phone and pretend they had a snake waiting to be picked up at Orly Airport, he went to the casino until he was definitively and cheerfully banned, he tried to win back the leases of nightclubs that his father had won at poker and he ended up getting drunk when the mafioso landlords plied him with champagne. I wonder how I would behave under torture. At a museum I look at people with the eyes of an artist, in the street with my own. I know four names for God. A friend told me that to yawn four times was the equivalent of fifteen minutes' sleep, I've often tried this without noting any benefits. I have known climates that went from twenty-five below to over forty-five degrees Celsius. I have met Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Amish, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists. I have seen earth, mountains, and sea. I have seen lakes, rivers, creeks, brooks, torrents, waterfalls. I have seen volcanoes. I have seen estuaries, coasts, islands, continents. I have seen caves, canyons, fairy hats. I have seen deserts, beaches, dunes. I have seen the sun and the moon. I have seen stars, comets, an eclipse. I have seen the Milky Way. I am no longer ten years old. I have never believed that you could see a dahu. I wonder if there are blasphemers of Satan, and if to blaspheme against him is a sin, from his point of view but also from God's. Monsters interest me. When I see the words "code PIN OK" on French bank machines, I read it as "code Pinoquet." Solitude helps me be consistent. A friend of my parents was fifty before she learned that there is no such thing as elbow grease. I did not know how to answer when a grown-up asked, "Is that lie really true?" I forced myself to smile when a grown-up said, "Go see if I'm over there." My father is funny. My mother loves me without smothering me. I discovered "dirty pictures" in a little blue pamphlet which described certain sins and which a priest had given me before my first confession to help me remember the ones I might have committed. I attended a school that employed several pedophiles, but I was not among their victims. One of my schoolmates, at age twelve, was followed by an old man into a stairwell, where he dragged him into a basement to have his way with him. The dog belonging to a friend of mine disfigured his best friend when my friend was fourteen. I have never missed a flight that then exploded in mid-air. I almost killed three passengers in my car by looking for a cassette in the glove compartment while I was going one-eighty on the highway from Paris to Reims. My father walked in on me making love to a woman, when he knocked I said without thinking, "Come in," blushing, he quickly backed out and closed the door, when my girlfriend tried to slip away, he went up to her and said, "Come back whenever you like, mademoiselle." Like most people, I have no idea where the city I live in got its name. One of my uncles died of AIDS soon after the art gallery in which he'd invested all his money went out of business. One of my uncles met the love of his life while driving his red convertible slowly through the streets of Paris, the man in question, a Hungarian immigrant, was in despair, wandering aimlessly and about to kill himself, my uncle pulled up next to him and asked where

he was headed, they never parted until death came between them. My uncle's friend taught me to laugh at things I saw on TV that were not, on the face of it, funny, for example Bobby Ewing's hairstyle on *Dallas*. I have not signed a manifesto. If I turn around while looking in the mirror, there comes a moment when I no longer see myself. Raymond Poulidor is one of the least sexy names I know. I like salad mainly for the crunch and the vinaigrette. I do not like to hear people quote bons mots, especially those of Sacha Guitry. I delight in the wrapping paper before acceding to the object. Visiting churches bores me, I wonder whether, apart from a few specialists, anybody enjoys it very much. I do not know the names of the stars. I often plan to learn long texts by heart in order to boost my memory. I see fantastical beings in the clouds. I have never seen a geyser, an atoll, an undersea trench. I have never done time in prison. I like dim lights. I have never filed a complaint with the police. I have never been burgled. When I was twelve, I took the metro with three classmates, a stranger my age bent my arm behind my back, another about fifteen years old kicked me in the face, I fell down, when I got up he was about to give me another kick, so I pretended to be in more pain than I was, grabbing my face with both hands and screaming as if he'd smashed it in, the attackers got scared and ran away, at which point my three "friends," who'd been standing there three meters away, ran up to me, I noticed the face of one had gone white with cowardice. My parents do not ask me enough questions. I once went into a prison where I was taking pictures of the inmates, in Rome, New York, a guard stopped me, he took me to the assistant warden, my film was confiscated, it also included photos of Jehovah's Witnesses taken in Paris, New York. I have sold works to collectors from France, Austria, Spain, Germany, Italy, America, and possibly other countries. If over time a woman I'm seeing starts to use the expressions I do, I may begin to pity her. I wish there were regions where every day was the same day of the week, I could decide to go spend five Mondays in one city and eight Saturdays in another. I wish there was a city where everyone was named Jean or Jeanne, it would be called Jeanville. Names draw me to places, but bodies draw me to people. I forget that certain names of objects refer to actions, for example "watch." I wonder whether anyone besides old people like riot police. I fetishize handwriting. When I choose postcards from a place, I am tempted to vary the pictures, rather than picking several with the best picture, which is absurd, since they're all going to different addressees. When I write several postcards on the same day, I force myself not to describe the same events, as if the addressees might one day realize that I had written the same postcard several times over. I have taken a ride through the ravines of the Golden Triangle on the back of a blind elephant who found his way by feeling around with his feet. My brother builds. I mistakenly studied difficult subjects that were no use to me when I might have studied the arts for pleasure, which would have smoothed my path. I am happy to be happy, I am sad to be sad, but I can also be happy to be sad and sad to be happy. Lack of sleep bothers me less on a sunny day than when it rains. I find someone beautiful regardless of the moment, but I don't always find myself handsome, therefore I am not. I sometimes talk to my dick, addressing it by its first name. I appreciate the mowed-hay smell of Levi's 501s. I do not tell stories because I forget the people's names, I report the events out of order and do not set up the punch line. On trips I surprise myself, for example I decide at a moment I did not expect that the trip is over. With a Dictaphone I write easily while

thinking of something else. I have written several love letters but no breakup letters, I saved that job for my voice. I would rather paint chewing gum up close than Versailles from far away. I touch white for luck. I do not have a weekend place because I don't like to open and then close a whole lot of shutters over the course of two days. I would pay someone to air out, heat, and clean a country house before I came to stay, so I could have the feeling that someone lived there. Although I am self-employed, I observe the weekend. My surname is ridiculous, but I am fond of it, I even teach it to people who don't know it. I pack my luggage by making a list of all the things I will take, and since I always take the same things I keep the list in a file on my computer. I reuse grocery bags as trash bags. I separate my recycling, more or less. Drinking puts me to sleep. In Hong Kong I knew someone who went out three nights a week, no more, no less. I believe that democracy is spreading in the world. The modern man I sing. I feel better lying down than standing up and better standing than seated. I admire the person who thought up the title *The Last House on the Left*. A friend told me about the "Red Man of the Tuileries," I don't remember what he did but the name still gives me shivers. The pediatrician my mother took me to humiliated generations of children, including me, with this riddle: "If Vincent leaves a donkey in one meadow and goes into another meadow, how many donkeys are there?" all said in a measured voice, and then he'd say, "There's only one donkey—you" to any child, that is, every child, who didn't answer "One." I want to write sentences that begin "Ultimately." I can understand "It's the end," "It's the beginning of the end," "It's the beginning of the end of the beginning," but once we get to "It's the beginning of the end of the beginning of the end of the beginning," all I hear is a bunch of words. I have sometimes annoyed an interlocutor by systematically repeating the last word he said. I never get tired of saying *La fille à son pépère* (grandfather's darling). One of my friends earns the admiration of some and the indifference of others by knowing the name and number of every département in France. My cousin Véronique is amazing. I sometimes think of the witty thing to say an hour later. At the table, I excused myself for splashing food on the spotless shirt of a friend by telling him: "You got in the way of my juice." I take no pleasure in others' misfortunes. I do not bow down before a metal idol. I am not horrified by my heritage. I do not till the earth. I do not expect to discover new marvels in classical music, but I'm sure of taking pleasure until I die in the ones I already know. I do not know whether one can improve on the music of Bach, but one can certainly improve on the music of several others who shall remain nameless. I admit to being wrong. I do not fight. I have never punched anyone. I have noticed that, on the keypads of Parisian front doors, the 1 wears out the fastest. I have sometimes turned my interlocutors against me by an excess of argumentation. I do not listen to jazz, I listen to Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Chet Baker, Billie Holiday. I sometimes feel like an impostor without knowing why, as if a shadow falls over me and I can't make it go away. If I travel with someone, I see half as much of the country as if I traveled by myself. One of my friends likes to travel in certain Middle Eastern countries where there is nothing to see but airports, deserts, and roads. I have never regretted traveling by myself, but I have sometimes regretted traveling with someone else. I read the Bible out of order. I do not read Faulkner, because of the translation. I made a series of pictures based on things that came out of my body or grew on it: whiskers, hair, nails, semen, urine, shit, saliva, mucus, tears, sweat, pus, blood. TV

interests me more without the sound. Among friends I can laugh hard at certain unfunny TV programs that depress me when I'm alone. I never quite hear what people say who bore me. To me a simple "No" is pleasantly brief and upsettingly harsh. The noise level when it's turned up too high in a restaurant ruins my meal. If I had to emigrate I would choose Italy or America, but I don't. When I'm in a foreign country, I dream of having a house in Provence, a project I forget when I get back. I rarely regret a decision and always regret not having made one. I think back on the pain of affairs that never took place. The highway bores me, there's no life on the side of the road. On the highway the view is too far away for my imagination to bring it to life. I do not see what I lack. I have less desire to change things than to change my perception of them. I take pictures because I have no real desire to change things. I have no desire to change things because I am the youngest in my family. I like meeting new people when I travel: these brief and inconsequential encounters have the thrill of beginnings and the sadness of separations. I wanted to write a book entitled *In the Car*, made up of remarks recorded while driving. To take pictures at random goes against my nature, but since I like doing things that go against my nature, I have had to make up excuses to take pictures at random, for example, to spend three months in the United States traveling only to cities that share a name with a city in another country: Berlin, Florence, Oxford, Canton, Jericho, Stockholm, Rio, Delhi, Amsterdam, Paris, Rome, Mexico, Syracuse, Lima, Versailles, Calcutta, Baghdad. When I decide to take a picture of someone I see in the street, I have ten seconds to notice the person, decide to take the picture, and go ask, if I wait it's too late. I wear glasses. In my mouth, time moves slowly for candy. I have deeper to dig in myself. I see art where others see things. Between the solitude of the womb and the solitude of the tomb I will have hung out with lots of people. While driving a car past some meadows these words came to me: a tractor chicken and an elephant tent. I wish treatises were article- not book-length. In the United States I came across a village called Seneca Falls, which I mistranslated *Les Chutes de Seneque* (Seneca's Falls). I have seen an ad for a vegetarian vehicle. I would like to see movies accompanied by inappropriate music, a comedy with goth rock, a children's movie with music from a funeral, a romance with a brass band, a political film with a musical-comedy sound track, a war movie with acid rock, porn with a choir. I make fewer and fewer excuses. After I lick an envelope I spit. I don't want to die suddenly but to see death slowly coming. I do not think I will end up in hell. It takes five minutes for my nose to forget a smell, even a very bad one, this doesn't go for what I perceive with my other senses. I have weapons in my brain. I have read this sentence by Kerouac: "The war must have been getting in my bones." Although I have always translated *Deer Hunter* as *Chasseur de cerf*, I still hear the echo of the mistranslation *cher chasseur* (dear hunter). I remember what people tell me better than what I said. I expect to die at the age of eighty-five. To drive at night through rolling hills by moonlight in summertime can make me shudder with pleasure. I look more closely at old photographs than contemporary ones, they are smaller, and their details are more precise. If not for religion and sex, I could live like a monk. My last and first names mean nothing to me. If I look in the mirror for long enough, a moment comes when my face stops meaning anything. I can stand around in several dozen different ways. I have carried women in my arms, I have not been carried by them. I have not hugged a male friend tight. I have not walked hand in hand with a

male friend. I have not worn a friend's clothing. I have not seen the dead body of a friend. I have seen the dead bodies of my grandmother and my uncle. I have not kissed a boy. I used to have sex with women my own age, but as I got older they got younger. I do not buy used shoes. I had an idea for an Amish punk band. Only once was I the first occupant of an apartment. I got into a motorcycle accident that could have cost me my life, but I don't have any bad memories of it. The present interests me more than the past, and less than the future. I have nothing to confess. I have trouble believing that France will go to war in my lifetime. I like to say thank you. I cannot perceive the delay in mirrors. I don't like narrative movies any more than I like the novel. "I do not like the novel" doesn't mean I do not like literature, "I don't like narrative movies" doesn't mean I don't like movies. Art that unfolds over time gives me less pleasure than art that stops it. The second time I walk the same route, I pay less attention to the view and walk faster. I let the phone ring until the answering machine screens the call. I spend two hours talking to one friend, but it only takes five minutes to end my conversation with another. When I'm on the phone, I don't make any effort with my face. If I put off a phone call where something is at stake, the wait becomes more difficult than the call. I am impatient when waiting for a phone call but not when I have to make one. I have more good memories than bad ones. When I'm sure I like an article of clothing I buy a few of the same one. I do not wish to shine. At sixteen I bought a varsity jacket, it was aquamarine with beige leather sleeves, I only wore it twice, I felt, wrongly, that everyone was looking at me. I have read *The Critique of Judgment*. I used to make the stretchers for the canvases I painted. I have let several friends copy from me in class. When I was thirteen, in the Galleries Lafayette, I stole several records, I put them under my arm, I strolled nonchalantly down the lingerie aisle where I slipped them into my bag, as I left the store someone grabbed my scarf from behind, I turned around, it was a fifty-year-old security guard, she took me into a fluorescent-lit office, she threatened to call the police, I made myself cry, I said my parents were unemployed and about to get a divorce, which was untrue, she let me go, she seemed embarrassed, almost guilty, since then I have stolen books once and once some paperclips, without really knowing why. I get excited by the idea of reading the biography of an author I love, then when I actually do it I lose steam. I have read only four biographies all the way through: *Raymond Roussel*, by François Caradec, *Blue Monk*, by Jacques Ponzio and François Postif, *La Vie douloureuse de Charles Baudelaire*, by François Porché, and *Kerouac: A Biography*, by Ann Charters. I spend a lot of time reading, but I do not consider myself a "big reader." I reread. On my shelves I count as many books read as unfinished. Counting up the books I have read, I cheat by counting the ones I didn't finish. I will never know how many books I have read. Raymond Roussel, Charles Baudelaire, Marcel Proust, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Antonio Tabucchi, André Breton, Olivier Cadiot, Jorge Luis Borges, Andy Warhol, Gertrude Stein, Ghérasim Luca, Georges Perec, Jacques Roubaud, Joe Brainard, Roberto Juarroz, Guy Debord, Fernando Pessoa, Jack Kerouac, La Rochefoucauld, Baltasar Gracian, Roland Barthes, Walt Whitman, Nathalie Quintane, the Bible, and Bret Easton Ellis all matter to me. I have read less of the Bible than of Marcel Proust. I prefer Nathalie Quintane to Baltasar Gracian. Guy Debord matters more to me than Roland Barthes. Roberto Juarroz makes me laugh more than Andy Warhol. Jack Kerouac makes me want to live more than Charles

Baudelaire. La Rochefoucauld depresses me less than Bret Easton Ellis. Olivier Cadiot cheers me up more than André Breton. Joe Brainard is less affirmative than Walt Whitman. Raymond Roussel surprises me more than Baltasar Gracian, but Baltasar Gracian makes me more intelligent. Gertrude Stein writes texts more nonsensical than those of Jorge Luis Borges. I read Bret Easton Ellis more easily on the train than Raymond Roussel. I know Jacques Roubaud less well than Georges Perec. Ghérasim Luca is the most full of despair. I don't see the connection between Alain Robbe-Grillet and Antonio Tabucchi. When I make lists of names, I dread the ones I forget. I read for half an hour before I turn out the light. I read more in the morning and evening than in the afternoon. I do not use glasses for reading. I read from thirty centimeters away. I start to really read after minute five. I read better without shoes or pants. Nights with a full moon I feel euphoric for no reason. I do not read at the beach. At the beach I start off bored, then I get used to it, then I hate to leave. At the beach girls arouse me less than in the library. I like museums, mainly because they tire me out. I make no predictions. I like, in order of preference, swimming in the sea, in a lake, in a creek, in a pool. I have swum in the canyon of Gardon, near Collias, flat smooth rocks line the stream that flows softly at a pleasant temperature, I climbed over three hundred meters to its source and came back without the slightest effort, as in a dream, the sun cast an orange sheen on the surface of the rocks, my eyes could see far into the distance and my words echoed. I don't think about going to the movies. I have made love standing on the roof of the chateau de Tarascon during the opening of a show of André-Pierre Arnal. I have made love on the roof of the thirtieth floor of a building in Hong Kong. I have made love in the daytime in a public garden in Hong Kong. I have made love in the toilet of the Paris-Lyon TGV. I have made love in front of some friends at the end of a very drunken dinner. I have made love in a staircase on the avenue Georges-Mandel. I have made love to a girl at a party at six in the morning, five minutes after asking, without any preamble, if she wanted to. I have made love standing up, sitting down, lying down, on my knees, stretched out on one side or the other. I have made love to one person at a time, to two, to three, to more. I have smoked hashish and opium, I have done poppers, I have snorted cocaine. I find fresh air more intoxicating than drugs. I smoked my first joint at age fourteen in Segovia, a friend and I had bought some "chocolate" from a guard in the military police, I couldn't stop laughing and I ate the leaves of an olive tree. I smoked several joints on the grounds of my Catholic grammar school, le collège Stanislas, at the age of fifteen. At seventeen in Paris I drove my parents' car without a license to take the girl home who had just spent part of the night with me. The girl whom I loved the most left me. I wear black shirts. At ten I cut my finger in a flour mill. At six I broke my nose getting hit by a car. At fifteen I skinned my hip and elbow by falling off a moped, I thought I would defy the street, riding with no hands, looking backward. I broke my thumb skiing, after flying ten meters and landing on my head, I got up and saw, as in a cartoon, circles of birthday candles turning in the air, and then I fainted. I have not made love to the wife of a friend. On the Internet I become telepathic. I do not love the sound of a family on the train. I am uneasy in rooms with small windows. I wonder how the obese make love. I feel good the moment I reach the top of a skyscraper. I could not live on a ground floor or in a basement. The higher the floor number, the better I feel. Sometimes I realize that what I'm in the middle of saying is boring, so I

just stop talking. I used to think I worked better at night than in daytime until one day I bought black curtains. I use the shell of the first mussel to spoon out the rest. I can do without TV. I love saying *pupull* instead of *pull*. I don't know which disturbs me more, an actor who goes into politics, Ronald Reagan, or a politician who takes up acting, Bernard Tapie. I had an idea for a gallery-hanging that would begin four days after the opening, during which the people who came would have their pictures taken, and be the subject of the exhibition. When I've slept badly, my breathing is shallow. I believe the people who make the world are the ones who do not believe in reality, for example, for centuries, the Christians. Not wanting to change things doesn't mean I am conservative, I like for things to change, just not having to be the one who does it. I can't tell whether my fantasies match my capacities. I have spent two summers in a red van. Virtuosity annoys me, it confuses art with prowess. I have thought simultaneously: "I really should learn the trombone" and "there's a dead ant." If I get up early the day feels longer than if I get up late, even if I spend the same amount of time awake. Smoking takes too long. Drinking helps me sleep but keeps me from sleeping through the night. Drinking gives me a headache the morning after. I prefer movies with costumes from the future to ones with costumes from the past. My ideas are more my style than my words are. In a car I look at things through the windshield as if they were in a tracking shot. Maybe I'm writing this book so I won't have to talk anymore. I've bought an apartment from a smiling crook. I do not explain. I do not excuse. I do not classify. I go fast. I do not name the people I talk about to someone who doesn't know them, I use, despite the trouble of it, abstract descriptions like "that friend whose parachute got tangled up with another parachute the time he jumped." In the morning I spend half an hour lying in the dark before the alarm goes off. I prefer going to bed to getting up, but I prefer living to dying. I do not respond to unpleasant remarks, but I do not forget them. Certain people wear me out in seconds because I can tell they are going to bore me. In Versailles, New York, I photographed a seventy-five-year-old man who wore black glasses, a cap, a stained white T-shirt under a Dickies-brand chambray shirt with the sleeves rolled up, beat up jeans, and black work boots, he was sad and handsome, I found out his name was Edward Lee, almost like mine. Driving once I thought I saw a road sign that said "Cheese Clinic," I wondered whether they took care of cheese there or of people, using cheese. On the road I can be boxed in, or tailed, by the shadows of clouds. I watch the asphalt markings disappear under the hood of the car like strings of licorice. I find thin people make me feel young. Contemporary music generally seems aggressive to me, not because it's contemporary but because it's full of aggression. Certain non-aggressive music by Ligeti, Cage, Messiaen, Lutoslawski, Penderecki, Adams agrees with me. I like conversations you can interrupt without being rude: phone conversations, conversations with neighbors over the fence, conversations with the regulars at bistros, conversations with strangers. My grandmother was introduced to my grandfather because they both liked gusts of wind. One of my uncles answered an advertisement placed by a South African planter, seeking an orange-grower, as follows: "I know nothing about agriculture but am a quick study" and got the job. In South Africa one of my aunts had a servant named Coca-Cola and another named Shell. In the mornings one of my cousins and I used to play squirrels in a big bed, we'd hide under the covers, he would say "A touino touine, touine, touine, touine, a touino touine,

touinoldin,” and cluck his tongue. In la Creuse one of my cousins and I used to play farmer and little lamb, the lamb would roll around in his underpants in a trough made out of a mud puddle, the farmer would watch him and play around vaguely with a stick, mostly he was the lamb, I was the farmer. In Corsica I used to play “girlwatcher.” In Normandy I used to play with Action Men. I have changed at least one tire. I have had a white R5, a gray Fiat Uno, a gray BMW 316, a gray Volkswagen Polo Movie, a red Volkswagen Transporter. When I ride a motorcycle I wear a thick black leather Vanson jacket, even in summer. In Paris I ride a bike. I do not fall down in roller skates. I have a double chin. I do not wear black socks with shorts. I do not wear a wool sweater if my neck is damp. I will sign up for a paragliding course. I forget to watch TV. I do not have a favorite tree, a favorite singer, a favorite friend, a favorite pair of pants, a favorite dessert. I wear the clothes of a manual laborer. If I lean off a balcony with the desire to kill myself, vertigo saves me. I like watching anything shot on Super 8, even though this is in such predictable good taste. I have no inclinations toward pedophilia. Urine does not excite me, neither do dogs. I breathe well with my mouth open. If it didn’t make me look stupid I would keep my mouth open a lot of the time. Aviation does not interest me. My brother thought his turtle had run away, it dried up under a radiator. I have trouble remembering any truly happy moments. I would like to have myself hypnotized by my wife, but I’m not married. Contradicting myself brings two kinds of pleasure: betraying myself and having a new opinion. I do things better for pleasure and without trying. When I urinate in a public toilet I breathe through my mouth, not my nose, even though it’s closer than my nostrils to the source of the smell. At a public urinal the presence of a neighbor delays my micturition. Into the sitting room of my parents’ country house walked my godmother, her three children, and the girlfriend of one of her sons, whose beauty so overwhelmed me that I forgot to say hello to my godmother, and when she pointed out the omission, I walked over and shook her hand instead of giving her a kiss. I love the crackle of a parquet floor. I have flat feet. The cold of floorboards travels through my bare feet up to my shins, which get goose bumps. I can take seafood or leave it. Everything interests me a priori, but not a posteriori. I do not think the dead are malevolent, since they are old people squared, and the old are less malevolent than the non-old. Virtuosity also bores me when it comes to roads: the highway is perfect and perfectly boring. If, driving fast, I don’t use windshield wipers, the size of the raindrops shrinks by evaporation. I could find an imprint for perversely themed guidebooks on the following subjects: McMansions, dangerous traffic lights, so-called museums, places where there’s nothing much to see, places where an archbishop may have slept. Driving alone over a bridge mounted with sky-blue rails I cried out with pointless joy and shouted nonsensical words. Listening to cheerful music is like spending time with people not like me. I have never attended a nudist funeral. I accept progress. I desire an object less if it was bought on sale. I am wary of shortcuts, which call the normal route into question. A hand that greets me by crushing my hand bodes no better than a hand that is soft or moist. When I laugh I use fewer facial muscles than when I don’t, to rest my face I have to laugh. In a car, perfume makes me sick. When I am hungry I feel thin. I liked Jimmy Carter. I wonder whether I admire faith or just people who have it. On the highway if several cars are speeding, I follow them to divide up the risk of getting stopped. I have left a woman because she scolded me for

not having picked up groceries. In a foreign country the words missing from my pocket dictionary acquire an aura that doesn't fade when I learn their ostensible meanings. I am more excited by a woman's face than by her breasts than by her pussy than by her ass than by her legs. Obesity fascinates me because it effaces sex and age. I stand up straighter when I walk with a knapsack than when I don't. My torso is too long for me to be comfortable in a car. I am afraid of doing worse by trying to do better. The dry look is an inexhaustible source of amusement, even when I'm alone. I have a feeling children of my own would bore me less than other people's. I do not sleep on satin sheets. I wonder how I can just suddenly come out with: "Oh la la!" The problem with amusement parks is the crowds: empty I find them beautiful. I have smoked so much I felt sick. I am able to admire people who admire me. I do not embellish things or make them ugly either. I like serial music until the moment when, suddenly, I can't stand it. Listening to music in the car is a way of passing the time, thus shortening my life. My cars have always drifted to the right. Bad news makes me unhappy but satisfies my paranoia. I can see a lot of my body. My mother saved my life by giving me life. When I have finished with a thing I don't throw it down, I put it down. A Louis-Philippe tart makes me hungrier than a bouillabaisse which costs more than a quartz watch which is more use than a book of jokes which makes me laugh less than my cousin Cyrille. I do not love the accordion, but I love the bandoneón. I prefer the cello to the violin. I am a meticulous packer. I go months without reading the paper. I make regular trips to galleries. I can't handle too much art at once. I do not enjoy contemporary art fairs. I leave an art fair the way I leave a book fair: disabused. I have too great a sense of the absurd to do the accent when I speak a foreign language. To make it through the afternoon I turn it into a cold night: blinds closed, curtains drawn. I write in bed. In a pool by the side of the road, I have turned the sound of the cars into waves. It seems I do not snore. Having goose bumps reminds me that I was an animal, generations ago. I will not lose my eyesight, I will not lose my hearing, I will not wet myself, I will not forget who I am, I will die first. I wipe the table before and after eating. I do not remember having been punished by my parents. I taught myself to type. I taught myself everything I know about computers. I enjoy playing anything on the piano as long as no one is listening. I do not say "Double or nothing," "I dare you," or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." For several years I wore Pour Monsieur by Chanel, then White by Comme des Garçons, then Philosykos by Diptyque. I am against stucco. I do not like exposed stone any better than exposed beams. In company, I am less guilty when I transgress. I have not predicted that Mick Jagger will die of prostate cancer. I have a weakness for negative formulations, counter-formulations, reformulations, and deformations. When I expect to achieve nothing, ideas come. When I hear the English word "god," I think both of God and of a dildo (*godemiché*). When I want to make a friend laugh, I say apropos of nothing: "How immoral." During a comic movie, the anticipatory laughter of the other viewers leaves me unable to laugh. At a dinner party, a girlfriend kissed me, took off her clothes, and ruined everything for half the guests, including three old lovers of mine. Playing ping-pong, the sound of the ball helps me more than its color. I like living in a house that is freighted with the pasts of other people, I also like sleeping in anonymous hotels. I have left a woman because I didn't love her anymore and didn't like the way I was around her. I feel apprehensive before conversations that have a

fixed duration: lunches, dinners, interviews. With more than six people at the table, I get lost in all the conversation. I prefer conversations for two. I would rather have dinner with one person than with several. Swimming is like a kind of sleep: I go easily from a bed to a lake. If I swim for half an hour in the morning, I feel good all day. When I relax completely in a pool, I always end up in the same position, back to the sky, body bent at forty-five degrees, head underwater, arms stretched out in front as if to grab the void. I have never gone to a strip club. I have gone to bed with roughly fifteen prostitutes, of various extractions: French, Indian, African, Romanian, Arab, Italian, Albanian. Louis de Funès depresses me. I have a collection of about twenty pairs of blue jeans. I have a collection of pairs of black leather oxfords. I have a collection of black shirts. I have a collection of black leather jackets. I have a collection of black socks. I have a collection of black underpants. I have a collection of jean jackets. People who don't know me well think I am always wearing the same shirt and jeans. I have never considered sleeping with a nun. When a machine stops humming is when I notice it's been getting on my nerves. I am not planning to take revenge. I always keep a tissue in one pocket and keys in the other. I'm not sure I can be psychoanalyzed. Buying clothes is a trial, wearing them a pleasure. I am in favor of same-sex marriage. I like doing things twice but the third time makes me sad. I sniff the book I'm reading. I sneeze three times in a row. I do not take out my dick in public. I look at the real estate ads in windows without any intention of buying. When I look out a window, I also look at the reflections. I would rather look at objects behind glass than on a shelf. I would rather look at a piece of clothing folded on a shelf than hanging on a rack. I press my finger against soft putty. Bruno Gibert and Cyril Casmèze are the people who make me laugh the most. I do not chew chewing gum. I am as taken with new clothes as with a new identity. I regret not having been a radical in my youth. I could become politically engaged in the cause of an environmentalist party. When I was young, Nazism seemed to belong to another era, but the older I get the closer this era seems to be. I have trouble explaining why we have five digits. After too long in the bath my fingers wrinkle up. I perceive only my bones that ache. My favorite composers are Bach and Debussy. I do not whistle while I work. When I whistle, I become winded. Hearing someone whistle annoys me, especially with vibrato. I feel uneasy hearing someone sing a capella while looking me in the eyes, which luckily happens only on TV. I don't know what to say to test an echo so I say "Ooooooh." To me, air conditioned air seems perfumed with dust and microbes. I feel no nostalgia for my childhood, my youth, or what came next. I am tempted to make exhaustive lists, and stop myself in the middle. I am not lyrical. I like to travel in order to stop in another place. Life seems interminable to me like a Sunday afternoon to a child. Thursday is the best night. There is no "best" week. I have no memories of being hurt by women, only by men. When she is bored, one of my friends gets dressed and made up as if she were going out, and doesn't. When he is in a foreign country, one of my friends follows nice-looking strangers in the street to find a party. I say everything. I have never made much money, but this hasn't bothered me. I own my apartment. I may prefer one of my parents to the other, but I would rather not think about it. I can do without music, art, architecture, dance, theater, movies, I have trouble doing without photography, I cannot do without literature. Digging a hole makes me feel good. The sound of water bothers me. I have few regrets. I do not seek

novelty, but rightness. I wept reading *Perfecto*, by Thierry Fourreau. All of the music by Daniel Darc, The Durutti Column, Portishead, The Doors, and Dominique A agrees with me. I have a fantasy of eavesdropping on what gets said in the office of a notary for a week. I do not have the fantasy of doing the same in an analyst's office. For the sake of taking a walk, I park my motorcycle at some distance from a rendezvous. When I'm abroad, everything is more or less unreal, which sometimes makes me want to live there, except I would still have to change countries since it would no longer be "abroad." I regret having spoken but not having kept quiet. I make lots of little works instead of undertaking a big one. I do not wear T-shirts with images or text. I feel good if I work well, but I can work well without feeling good. I can't get no satisfaction. Walking helps me get ready to work. When I walk I have no ideas, I get ready to have some when I sit down. I made myself laugh out loud with an idea for a book to be entitled: *My Conspiracy Theories*. I think Carine Charaire is right to be so utterly herself. I have sixty pairs of pants, forty shirts, eighteen jackets or sport coats, and twenty-five pairs of socks, which makes one million eighty thousand outfits. I do not like whimsy (*fantaisie*) or the word *fantaisie*. I am hostile to the concept of the aperitif. One of my friends does not like women who like men. I use the word "girls" for women I find attractive regardless of age. When I am tired, I feel physically unwell in my feet, in my lower and upper back, at the back of my neck, and in my temples. I don't mind the cold. I am unacquainted with hunger. I was never in the army. I have never pulled a knife on anyone. I have never used a machine gun. I have fired a revolver. I have fired a rifle. I have shot an arrow. I have netted butterflies. I have observed rabbits. I have eaten pheasants. I recognize the scent of a tiger. I have touched the dry head of a tortoise and an elephant's hard skin. I have caught sight of a herd of wild boar in a forest in Normandy. I ride. I do not always find beautiful women exciting, or the women who excite me beautiful. I rest only against my will. I have no guide and am a guide to no one. I help myself at the table until there's nothing left. At border crossings I feel as good as if I were nowhere. I sleep in the middle of the bed. I think of objects in terms of their edges. I use soft bags more often than hard suitcases. I would rather live in a port town. I do not have fantasies of living on a desert island. Removing a splinter brings a sharp pleasure. When I remove a Band-Aid I get excited at the moment of truth: will the scab come off? The faster I remove a Band-Aid, the less it pulls my hair. I encounter very little opposition. I wish I smiled less. I hope some day my friends might come and sit under my vine and my fig tree. I am pitiless toward the wicked. I am against the death penalty. I am surprised there is no word for a mistaken sense of déjà vu. I have been locked in a cellar. I was not beaten. I was not insulted. No one abused me. I sometimes read things back to front. I will never be done with literature. I do not use idiomatic expressions. I do not do public impressions. I ought to invent calisthenics to do in bed. I hope to be buried in a crypt of my own in Montparnasse. I hope to ask an aide to the Minister of Culture to construct my future crypt as a work of art, bearing my date of birth and a projected date of death, December 31, 2050. I no longer remember the exact number of countries on Earth, I think there are a few more than two hundred. I sharpen knives. I wash the dishes. I clear the table. I vacuum. I do windows. I scrub enameled surfaces. My ideal temperatures are twenty degrees outside, twenty-four inside. When it starts to rain, I smell things better. The hum of machinery puts me to sleep. When a machine

stops humming it sometimes wakes me up. I've tried to rewrite my will when I wanted to kill myself, but I stopped myself partway through. I am a good listener. I do not think things were better before or will get better later on. One of my male friends has died. None of my female friends has died. Marc-Ernest Fourneau has seen me do what few men have seen me do. I have "sung" under the direction of Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux and Guy Scarpetta. I have designed the set for a runway show by Gaspard Yurkievich. I jump for joy but I do not sink down in sadness. I eschew unusual words. For me going back to a place after twenty years is stranger than smoking hashish. In public places music bothers me. I am drawn to the brevity of English, shorter than French. I had the idea for a book whose chapters would be anagrams of my name: *L'ode au verde, Rêve de l'ado U, Élève au Drod, Rue de Lovade, Ed roule Dave* (The Ode to Verde, Dream of Teen U, Pupil at the Drod, Rue de Lovade, Ed Rolls Dave). With my glasses off, if I stretch out my arms I can't make out my fingers. At the table, ice or bubbles make water less boring, but I like water boring. I have trouble believing men who say they have never gone to bed with a prostitute. Wine poisons me, cigarettes kill me, drugs bore me. I cannot name one hundredth of the components of my body. My nails grow for no reason. The pressure of the chair in summer on the skin of my back hurts in a nice way. To Joyce, who writes about banal things in extraordinary language, I prefer Raymond Roussel, who writes unrealistic things in everyday words. When I want to see theater, I go to Mass. I love the unpredictability of blue jeans: how, after you wash them, they shrink, age, fade. I am against reverence. When I was a child, I looked at rugs the same way, as a grown-up, I look at an abstract painting. When I was a child, the only group games I liked were ones that took place outdoors, without equipment, and without keeping score: tag and eeny meeny miney mo. I wasted time trying to be good at math. I am in favor of simplified spelling. I taught myself the things that mattered to me most: to write and to take pictures. Reasoning doesn't convince me, but it reassures me. I hope that at my death no religious ceremony will be observed. In my mouth what's hard turns soft and what's soft, liquid. I have fainted three times, during skiing or motorcycle accidents. I feel put off by a man who talks too close, and follows me when I back away. Putting two things together that are unrelated gives me an idea. Close to the ground my memories of childhood come back. I play squash and ping-pong. When I lie down after drinking water, my stomach makes noises like a water bed. I cross certain streets not breathing through my nose to avoid pollution. I am not for or against painting, that would be like being for or against the brush. When I am happy I'm afraid of dying, when I'm unhappy I am afraid of not dying. If I don't like what I see, I close my eyes, but if what I hear bothers me, I am unable to close my ears. I cannot predict my headaches. I empty my memory. Squeezing a sponge is fun like chewing gum. Sometimes I will spend the day thinking about a phrase that came to me out of nowhere and that I don't understand, such as: "The last time it was yesterday." If I think of it as a performance, packing a suitcase becomes a joy. I make modified recordings of Wagner where I keep only the parts that suit me, slow, sad, and without voices. I often have trouble sleeping. I stopped having nightmares during adolescence, or rather: I still dream about terrifying things, without being terrorized. I write less and less with a pen, more and more on a computer. I bought more records at twenty than I buy at forty. I have worn Levi's 501s since I was fourteen, I got the idea when I was ten at my grandmother's

reading a comic strip about a cowboy, but I had to wait four years to find jeans like that. It was very hard for me to tell my mother that I loved her, it took me until I was thirty-five. My mother told me she loved me when I was thirty-nine, or else she told me before and I forgot. I told my father that I loved him when I was depressed, at thirty-five, I was thinking of killing myself, I thought it would be a shame to die without telling him. I haven't told my brother that I loved him. I did not tell my grandmother that I loved her. I have told five women that I loved them, which in four cases was true. I have sometimes made love to one woman while thinking of another. I speak French fluently, I speak English well, I speak Spanish badly, I can vaguely understand a little bit of Italian. I learned Latin at school, what I remember is one declension. I see no point in holding on to my old toothbrushes. My favorite months are September and April, September for the resumption of social activity, April for the arrival of spring and the progressive denudification of women. I am not an expert in anything. I have subjects of conversation besides myself. I form very few hard and fast judgments about politics, the economy, and international affairs. I do not like bananas. International news, even dramatic news, leaves me pretty much indifferent, I feel guilty about that. I do not remember the first time I saw a character die in a movie or a book, but I remember the first time I saw a dead man, more precisely, I saw a man's leg sticking out of the trunk of a black car on the boulevard Berthier, I remember this detail: he was missing a shoe, and his sock was purple. My feet are always hot, sandals would help, but they're too ugly. I rarely wear hiking socks, they're too hot and make your feet stink. I would suggest that the authorities replace gun shops with swingers' clubs. The American accent both fascinates and repels me: the comedy of swallowed syllables, my fear of the dominant mode of speech. I prefer French as spoken by Italians to Italian as spoken by the French. I like to imitate the accent of a German of Vietnamese origins forcing himself to speak English. A Russian accent sends shivers down my spine. A Cantonese accent has less charm for me than an Indian accent. An Anglo-Indian accent inspires immediate sympathy in me. My mother stopped making family photo albums when I became an adolescent. I don't make photo albums. I take very few pictures of my friends. I have taken more pictures of myself than of my friends. I have almost realized a photo project that I described in *Œuvres* entitled *Facial Year*, in which I would take a photo of my face every day and make a film of the three hundred sixty-five images, I say "almost" since the film comprises two hundred photographs taken over a year and a half. I started a photo project in which I would photograph the forty-one places where Charles Baudelaire lived in Paris, but four years later I still hadn't finished, each time I think of going back to it, I'm discouraged by the idea that I would have to start at the beginning to make the pictures go together. One day I decided to classify the "unclassified" photographs I had taken over the last fifteen years, only to discover that they included at least ten categories, among them: friends, girlfriends, family, passersby, walls, shop windows, objects, windows, doors, I thought it would take me days to come up with these classifications, in three hours it was done. I stopped taking tourist photos when I realized that I looked at them only once, on the way back from the lab, just to confirm that they had no interest beyond what they were: travel pictures. When traveling I am always tempted, despite what I think of tourist photos, to take pictures of the beautiful landscapes, the strangers in the streets, or the unlikely things I notice in store windows, I don't give in