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Ecce Yoyo (1969)

One November night in the late Sixties, about three in the morning, a couple of my friends and I were on our way to the nearest all-night grocery — probably a Ralph's, and if you picture Jeff Lebowsky making a run for Half and Half to complete a pitcher of White Russians, you are not far off¹ — when we were pulled over by the Pasadena cops.

It developed that parties unknown (though unquestionably Militant) had raided a local police armory and absconded with a sizable chunk of their arsenal — probably enough weapons to invade a Third World country; as a carload of hippies we were, naturally, under suspicion, and the gendarmes wanted to search the vehicle.

The magnitude of the problem this was going to present, however, only became apparent when one poked his head into the back of our ancient battered Ford sedan and shone his flashlight around.

He blanched visibly, even in the freeway nightlight, when he discovered that there was no real back seat, rather a heap of trash three feet deep that no one had ever even thought about cleaning out. The trunk, of course — and this was an old Ford sedan, with a trunk that could have served as a spare bedroom — was even worse. A serious search could take hours, if not days.

¹ The most perfect cinematic recreation of the ambience of the Los Angeles all-night grocery in this era, however, is Elliot Gould's 3 a.m. expedition to buy cat food in Altman's *The Long Goodbye* [1973]; this always brings back the look and feel of the period to me.

So after conferring with one another they decided to put off dealing with this dilemma, hauled us out of the car, separated us on the sidewalk, and proceeded to pat us all down.

With which all drama evaporated, because they cracked up immediately. — One said, “Well, this one’s got a squirt gun and some marbles.” — The other said, “Yeah, this guy’s packing a yoyo. I think we’re dealing with some desperate characters here.”

So they let us go. We wished them luck.

And were absorbed again into the cosmic flux of the freeways, the bloodstream of the megalopolis,. — Just another lost angel in the City of Night, said Morrison. And who would have known better? (— Night and silence and — who is there?)

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So though I feel as though I should be trying to make sense of all this, I have no idea how. — “The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* of space and time,” says Wittgenstein. — No shit, Ludwig.

You might expect this would be a document of high drama and philosophic depth — if a specimen of autobiography, then something like Nietzsche: I should explain why I am so wise, why I am so clever, why I write such good books, why I am a destiny.

Instead it’s just another episode in my ongoing endeavor to write the world’s longest fart joke. I have to explain instead why what was supposed to be an uncompromising quest to fathom the foundations of logic and the nature of the physical world turned into a tiresome pursuit of the next dead-end job and a series of increasingly desperate attempts to avoid eviction. — How

instead of striding triumphantly from one triumph to another I ended up lurching from one catastrophe to the next. — As if anyone needed more Notes from the fucking Underground.

My only defense — the satisfaction I take — is that mediocrity was always what I feared most, and I decided very early on that I must be either a spectacular success or a spectacular failure. — And guess how that turned out.

So this isn't *Ecce Homo*, nor even *Ecce Dudo*. What I am going to end up explaining is why I am not wise, why I am not clever, why I write such silly bullshit, why I am doomed to failure: *Ecce Yoyo*.

But I owe you an explanation nonetheless. Let's begin at the beginning.