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Art and Commerce.

Sometime in the early Nineties a couple who were friends of mine, former hippies who had struck it rich, made the not-uncommon mistake of thinking they had made enough to run away and live like gypsies for the rest of their lives. They left for Europe on a bicycle tour which was supposed to last forever, but ended after a few months of continuous stress and exposure when they got sick, recalled the advantages of health insurance and a roof over their heads, and returned to the States to resume their professional careers.

Before they left, however, they gave me all their plants, and thus I acquired a small tree, some bamboo-like object, maybe three feet tall, in a large pot. I set it as close to the bedroom window as I could manage (my apartment then as always represented a continuously-evolving solution to a kind of sphere-packing problem)¹ and, though I watered it absently on my way to the bathroom as I meandered sleepwalking through an extended episode of night-shift wage slavery, basically forgot about it. One day I woke up long enough to actually look at it and realized it had grown another couple of feet, in two orthogonal spurts (forming an 'L'): first sideways to the window itself, since the pot didn't fit between the dresser and the bookshelf which had previously established their positions; then up again, once the large green leaves got to the source of solar radiation they were seeking. The effect was startling: it seemed to be thriving, but environmental constraints had completely distorted its development. It was as if it had responded to two forces whose vectors could not simply add, because they were completely incompatible.

At this of course I had to laugh, since I recognized myself.

¹ The famously intractable mathematical conundrum which asks for a general solution to the question of how many (perfect, identical, spherical) grapefruit you can pack into a rectangular crate of given dimensions.