In Proximity of One's Own States

A Fifteen-Week Syllabus for State-Dependent Capacity

Prepared for independent use over fifteen weeks. The only standing requirements are the three constants described in Section IV. Everything else is invitation.

Preface: To the Reader, Before Anything Else

This syllabus begins from a wager. You have been told, and have partly come to believe, that something is wrong with how you work: projects begin in one state of mind and are abandoned when the state changes, and the abandonment is counted as failure, yours. The wager of these fifteen weeks is different. It holds that your states are not an obstacle standing between you and finished work; they are the *medium* in which your work happens. What has been failing is not you but a model of work — the single project, begun in a fit and pushed in a straight line to completion — that was never built for a person whose capacities move with his states.

The reading that carries these weeks is Matthew Goulish's *39 Microlectures: In Proximity of Performance* (2000), a book that announces its own method in its opening pages.

> "A series of accidents has brought you this book." … He then asks you to treat the book not as a book but as a library, an elevator, an amateur performance in a nearby theatre; to open the table of contents, turn to the page that sounds most interesting, read a sentence or two, and repeat. He adds, simply: "Read this book as a creative act, and feel encouraged" (Goulish 2000).

A disclosure, offered in the book's own spirit: Goulish is a friend and co-author of the person who wrote this syllabus. The two wrote *Pitch and Revelation* together (2022), the first book-length study of the poet Jay Wright's work, premised on joy as a foundational philosophical concept (Daddario and Goulish 2022). That book's method — patient, joyful, fragmentary reading — is also this syllabus's model.

That is the entire spirit of this syllabus. You will read his thirty-nine microlectures in your own order, at your own states' discretion, and you will build something alongside them: a corpus of your own fragments, gathered week by week according to the state you find yourself in. You will not be asked to finish anything linear. You will be asked to *gather*, and then, near the end, to *arrange* — because arrangement, as you will see, is a different act from completion, and one your states have been training you for all along.

I. The Dialectic of the Abandoned Project

It is worth being precise about the argument, because you are intelligent enough to have internalized the wrong version of it, and unlearning requires seeing its logic.

The model you have been failing is the old model of the sovereign subject: a self continuous across time, master of itself, whose projects unfold from intention to completion along a path the intention drew in

advance. This is the Enlightenment's working self-portrait, and it is the *thesis*. Under its terms, a change of state can only appear as interruption, and interruption as failure — a debt owed to the person who started the project, a person who, by the time you come to repay, no longer exists.

The mood changes, then, function as *negation*: they refute, empirically and repeatedly, the claim that you are a continuous subject in that sense. What has made this painful is that the negation has been filed as private deficiency — a defect in you measured against a norm — rather than read as it actually operates: as the non-identical insisting against a concept that cannot contain it. Adorno's negative dialectics exists precisely for this move. What resists the concept is not noise to be explained away; it is the object saying what the concept refused to hear (Adorno 1973). The state that ended the project *knows something the project's plan did not*.

The *sublation* — neither the continuous subject restored nor the self dissolved into random weather — is this: the oscillation itself, taken as the compositional principle. You do not manage state-dependence out of existence. You compose with it, the way a composer composes *with* the resonances of a hall rather than pretending to write for empty air. This syllabus is the scaffolding for that composition.

II. Historical Ground: The Fragment as a Four-Hundred-Year Method

Do not mistake what follows for a coping mechanism invented for this course. The fragment is one of the oldest serious answers to the fact that lives are not continuous.

Pascal's *Pensées* survive as fragments, gathered and arranged after his death, and every arrangement since — including the one he himself sketched on loose sheets — is an ordering made by someone who could not make the thoughts continuous. Nietzsche's late philosophy exists as notebooks: aphorisms written in pulses, published as pulses, read ever since as a philosophy because readers stopped demanding that it be a system. Walter Benjamin spent more than a decade on the *Arcades Project* as a set of *Konvolutes* — folders of excerpts, notes, and reflections that he worked across non-linearly, moving between them as energy, circumstance, and attention allowed, and never reduced to a single linear draft before his death. The work's form is the folder; its order was never the point. And Theodor Adorno wrote *Minima Moralia* in exile as short reflections on "damaged life" — the fragmentary form was not a stylistic preference but an honesty about conditions: a life broken into pieces could not truthfully be written as if it flowed (Adorno 1974).

Goulish's book belongs to this lineage and to its recent performance-theory wing. He was a founding member of the Chicago performance group Goat Island, and the microlecture — a few minutes of spoken thought, precise and contingent — refuses the grand lecture's pretense of systematic coverage. His thirty-nine pieces concern reading, writing, art, collaboration, performance, memory, life, and death, and they deliberately blur the line between poem and criticism (Goulish 2000).

The point, stated plainly: the fragment is not what you are left with when you fail. It is what serious people produced when they refused to pretend their lives were continuous. You are joining a tradition, not entering remediation.

III. The Architecture: Four Convolutes

For the fifteen weeks you will maintain **four convolutes** — the word is Benjamin's, for his folders. A convolute is not a project. It has no deadline, no required length, and no completion condition. It is a place where fragments of a certain kind accumulate.

Each convolute is keyed to a **class of state** — and keyed by what the state *can do*, never by what it lacks. You will name your states in your own words, in your own taxonomy, before the course's second week. The sketch below is an example architecture to be rewritten entirely by you:

Convolute A — the expansive state. Generative work: drafting, inventing, beginning. This state's gift is raw material and its characteristic risk is the infinite first draft. Its convolute collects beginnings — which, you will discover, are the scarcest resource you produce. Every later assembly will be made from what A produced.

Convolute B — the analytic state. Structuring, editing, ordering, refuting, refining. Its work is to take a fragment from A and make it *more precise* — to fold, cut, and rearrange. B never starts things; B works on what already exists, which is why a mood that once "killed" projects now has a workshop of its own.

Convolute C — the restless state. Work for a mind that cannot sit still: collecting, transcribing, walking with one question, making lists of everything noticed, copying quotations by hand. C uses the body. Its fragments are observations, harvests, raw material for B to refine and A to ignite.

Convolute D — the depleted state. The floor of the whole practice. In D you do the minimal gesture: one sentence, one copied line, one rereading, five minutes. This is not a lesser tier. D's job is continuity of contact — proof that the practice survives the state — and its fragments are frequently the truest in the portfolio.

Three rules govern the architecture:

1. **Dispatch, not discipline.** When you sit down to work, the first question is never "why haven't I finished X?" It is: "which convolute does my present state serve?" Then you go there. A change of mood mid-week is a *routing signal*, not a defeat.
2. **Nothing is behind.** The convolutes have no schedule. A convolute untouched for three weeks has not failed; it has been waiting for its state, which is guaranteed to return.
3. **The state log.** One line, dated, after any working session: the state you were in, the convolute you touched, one sentence of what happened. This log is the syllabus's spine, its data set, and — by week fifteen — its central text.

IV. The Weekly Practice: Three Constants and One Seed

The practice has three constants, totaling under thirty minutes on the heaviest week, and one seed. The constants are the only standing requirements of the course.

The state check (thirty seconds, daily or whenever you think of it): What state am I in? Naming it is already the log.

The harvest (five minutes, at least once a week): one sentence added to each convolute you touched, and one line in the state log. A week in which the harvest says "nothing this week" is a fully successful week — the log

records the truth of the state, which is the course's actual product.

The reading (at your discretion): the week's microlectures, in any order, at any sitting, in any state. If a lecture does not speak to you, write one sentence in C about why not, and move on. There is no quiz.

The seed (one per week, small): a single prompt that produces a fragment for one convolute. Seeds are listed in the week-by-week outline below. If a seed does not fit your state, skip it and note that in the log. Seeds are invitations.

The no-failure clause. Missed weeks are data, not debt. The log records them. There is no catch-up, because there is nothing to catch up to: the convolutes are not on a schedule, and the course's only cumulative artifact is the log plus whatever the convolutes gathered, which is never nothing.

V. The Fifteen Weeks

The reading plan for the thirty-nine microlectures is simple: three per week for weeks one through thirteen (3 × 13 = 39), then weeks fourteen and fifteen are for rereading in your own chosen order. Within each week, read the three in whatever order you like, whenever you like. The clusters below are invitations, not itineraries — and if Goulish's table of contents pulls you somewhere else one week, follow it and record the detour in the log. That is not breaking the syllabus. That *is* the syllabus.

Week 1 — Accidents. Read: any three microlectures; begin, as Goulish instructs, with whatever page sounds most interesting. Work: build your state taxonomy — name your states in your own words, not clinical ones, and give each one what it does. Name your four convolutes. Seed: record one accidental arrival this week (something that came to you unsought) in C.

Week 2 — Libraries and elevators. Read: three more. Work: set up the four convolutes — folders, notebooks, or a digital structure; give each a name you will not be embarrassed by in month three. Open the state log. Seed: write the first fragment into A — anything started.

Week 3 — Beginnings. Read: three more, seeking out Goulish's lectures on beginnings if you can find them. Work: one fragment in Convolute A. Seed: one page titled "Accidents" — what brought you to this course, told without explanation.

Week 4 — Memory and modes. Read: three more. Work: add to Convolute B — take one fragment from A and restate it more precisely, or cut it in half, or fold it against another fragment. Seed: copy one sentence from anywhere this week, by hand, into C.

Week 5 — Interlude: Adorno in exile. Read: any ten fragments of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, in any order, plus this week's three microlectures. Work: copy the sentence that most disturbed you into C, with a line on why. Notice the historical fact: Adorno wrote these in pieces, in exile, because the form was honest about the conditions. Your states are your exile, whatever their cause. The form is the honesty.

Week 6 — Collaboration and audience. Read: three more. Work: show one fragment to one person — your therapist, a friend — and watch what the fragment does outside your head. Record the encounter in B. Seed: a fragment addressed to that one person.

Week 7 — Interlude: Benjamin's folders. Read: three more, plus a few pages from Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (the convolutes, or even the exposé), skimmed as a *form* rather than read as content. Work: reread everything

your convolutes now hold; move at least one fragment to a different convolute, and note why. This is the first act of arrangement, done early and lightly.

Week 8 — The turn. Read: three more. Work: reread your state log from week one. Write one paragraph: *what has the oscillation produced?* This is the course's dialectical checkpoint. Eight weeks ago the negation was filed as failure. What has it actually been? File this paragraph in B and reread it in week fifteen.

Week 9 — Restlessness as material. Read: three more. Work: make a C-fragment *deliberately* on a restless day: a walk with one question, or a list of everything noticed in ten minutes. The restlessness is not the obstacle to the work; it is the instrument. Seed: a list of things overheard this week.

Week 10 — Lightness. Read: three more. Work: the minimal gesture, practiced on purpose in D: one sentence, then stop, on purpose. Notice that the sentence exists. Seed: a fragment about something heavy, written as lightly as you can.

Week 11 — Life, death, and the comic. Read: three more, seeking Goulish's darker lectures — on death, on grief, on the comic. Work: a fragment in A or D on a serious thing said lightly. Seed: record one thing that was funny this week in a way that mattered.

Week 12 — The essay as form. Read: three more; skim Adorno's "The Essay as Form" (1958), or read a summary of it, as this week's theory interlude. Work: *the first assembly*. Read everything in every convolute. Choose the fragments that seem to want each other. Lay them in a sequence. Notice two things: the sequence is chosen, not owed; and no state in which you chose it needs to survive the choosing.

Week 13 — The order begins. Read: the last three of the thirty-nine. Work: assemble the portfolio's spine — a title, an opening fragment, a working arrangement of your own microlectures. (You have been writing them all along: roughly one per week in the seeds and harvests, plus whatever your states produced unbidden. Fifteen to thirty fragments is the expected range; more is fine; fewer means the log did the work and the log is also admissible.)

Week 14 — Rereading as composition. Read: the thirty-nine again, now in an order *you* choose, for reasons *you* articulate. Work: rearrange your portfolio in light of your reading order; write your preface — one page, addressed to a reader, explaining nothing and inviting everything.

Week 15 — An amateur performance in a nearby theatre. Work: read your portfolio aloud, once, to one person, or to the room alone — Goulish's genre was always the spoken miniature. Then answer, in the log, the course's final questions: *What did the states produce?* and *What would you build next — and how many convolutes would it need?*

VI. What Counts as Finished

The course has no completed project at its end, and this is not a consolation prize. Its artifacts are three: **the portfolio** of your own microlectures, arranged in your order; **the state log**, which is a fifteen-week empirical record of your states as a compositional force; and **the week-eight paragraph**, reread at the end, which will show you what you believed about yourself before the course and what you believe now.

"Finished" in this course does not mean completed; it means *shown* — read aloud, once, to someone or to the room. This is Goulish's own terminus: the microlecture is a performed form, and the performance is the work.

A shown fragment is a finished fragment. You have been finishing things all fifteen weeks.

VII. A Note for the Therapist (Not for the Reader)

A few implementation notes. The state taxonomy in week one should be built *with* the client in session, using his own vocabulary; DSM categories will corrupt the log's honesty. Check the convolutes against risk: a depleted-state convolute must remain genuinely minimal — five minutes, one sentence — because D can otherwise become a rumination station, and a depressive state's "gift" framing must never be pushed so hard that D's truthfulness collapses. Reassess the architecture at weeks five and ten.

The no-failure clause is doing clinical work: it converts abandonment — the presenting complaint — into data, which is a reframing the client can verify against his own log rather than accept on authority. The main countertransference risk is the client turning this syllabus itself into a linear perfectionist project. The countermeasure is Section IV: if the seeds and reading clusters become obligations, collapse the course to the three constants and let the convolutes wait.

The course succeeds if, at week fifteen, he believes the oscillation was the method. It also succeeds, partially and honestly, if the log simply shows what his states do — which is knowledge he does not currently have.

One personal note, to share if the client asks: the author of the course reading is a friend and co-author. *Pitch and Revelation* (2022), written with Matthew Goulish, is the first book-length study of the poet Jay Wright's work and takes joy as a foundational philosophical concept. Naming this lands well if the client takes to the book: it shows him that the course's method is a living practice between working writers, not a curriculum downloaded from a shelf.

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