

## Count from Zero to One Hundred

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to One Hundred  
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## INTRODUCTION

*Count from Zero to One Hundred* is a personal declaration of bodily liberty and a reflection on the power of language and imagination to establish such liberty over and within the body. When I started writing what was to become *Count from Zero to One Hundred*, in 2010, I had yet to see any connection between what I understood it to be and the work of Kenzaburō Ōe regarding his relationship with his – as he terms him in *Rouse Up O Young Men of the New Age!* – ‘handicapped son.’<sup>1</sup> I had two objectives in mind when I started.

First, I was half way through another still unfinished book, a novel laden with psychological complexity and a certain type of linguistic strictness, an historical novel that was becoming a bane upon my mental health. I found that I had stopped writing, and realized I needed both a break and a kick-start. Secondly, and as a result of a number of real life events, I realized that I was in desperate need of establishing some kind of psychologically healthy relationship with my body. Inspired, initially, by watching the film *Chungking Express*, (and by later finding out that the director, Wong Kar-wai, had shot the film very quickly and instinctively in response to his own difficulties during the editing of an historical epic, *Ashes of Time*), I decided to start writing every day about myself and my body in a contemporary and much more instantaneous and instinctive style.

It was only half way through the writing process of this new work that I was reminded of the work of Ōe by a friend. Sometime after this I then chanced upon a copy of *Rouse Up* in a second hand

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<sup>1</sup> *Rouse Up O Young Men of the New Age*, Kenzaburō Ōe, Atlantic Books, London, 2002 (translated by John Nathan). All quotes from *Rouse Up* are from this edition.

bookstore in Berlin. Upon reading it I found that there were many similarities in theme. One section, in particular, affected me greatly.

Halfway through the book Ōe writes of how his wife turns to him one day and, having finished preparations concerning their handicapped son going to a job training center for the first time, says, 'I think I'll put Mr. F's pamphlet on the constitution in Eeyore's smock packet — that's sort of what he asked us to do.'

Returning to his study to find this pamphlet, Ōe is reminded of this Mr. F, an Okinawan native. He recalls a dinner at his own house where Mr. F refused to let Ōe's wife fall into depression and despair when considering the situation of her son. During the dinner, Ōe recalls, Mr. F abruptly said to her, 'Your boy's handicap doesn't seem that serious; if this were Okinawa, you could put him in a regular class.' In response to her saying that she and the other parents of handicapped children had only one thing in mind where ever they happened to be — 'living even one day longer than their child so they would always be there to care for them' — Mr. F then declared:

'Mrs! You mustn't think that way! That's defeatism! In the society we must create, your boy would carry this pamphlet in his shirt pocket, and whenever he had a problem he'd hold it up and say 'Look Here!' and the problem would go away! Anything less than that goal is defeatism!'

Ōe blends memories of Mr. F and the pamphlet with reflection on his unfinished goal of creating a 'collection of definitions for handicapped children relating to our world, society, and mankind, a project that was to include a retelling of the constitution in my own words for Eeyore's sake.' As *Rouse Up* progresses, however, the character of

Ōe realises that his goal is somewhat misguided and that in fact his son has as much to teach him as he can teach through any poetic re-telling of the Japanese Constitution. He writes

‘Until now, it had been my goal to provide definitions of things and people for Eeyore’s sake; but at this moment it was Eeyore, presenting me with a stanza from Blake’s *Milton* as a lucid vision, who was creating a definition for his father:

*Then first I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star  
Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift  
And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enter’d there.’*

Reading *Rouse Up*, I began to view the work I was engaged in as, in addition to its original purpose, a re-imagining of the poetic constitution that Ōe – as fictional father/narrator – considers writing. As Ōe writes about being inspired by William Blake and his *America, A Prophecy* (itself a poetic expression of the philosophy and principles of the U.S. Declaration of Independence), so I came to be inspired by Ōe and his thoughts of forming his own poetic take on the post-war Japanese Constitution.

The Constitution, enacted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1947, famously contains an article – Article 9 – that actively renounces the right of the state to wage war; it is also notable for Article 13 which states:

‘All of the people shall be respected as individuals. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness shall, to the extent that it does not interfere with the public welfare, be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs.’

The Constitution was of particular importance to Okinawans, Okinawa having been placed under U.S. military jurisdiction for a period of 27 years after the end of World War II (there are still numerous U.S. military bases situated in the prefecture). During this time many Okinawans pointed to the new Japanese Constitution as a justification for complete Okinawan repatriation.

There is something else of note, however, which has led me to think that all the events occurring throughout the development of the work were, in some strange way, serendipitous. In 1981, in the no longer existent journal *Shin Okinawa Bungaku*, an anonymously written document was published, the author being identifiable only by the letter 'F'. This 'Unofficial Constitution of the Republic of the Ryukyus' was no doubt a reaction to the continued U.S. military presence on Okinawan land and inspired by the Ryukyuan independence movement (the Ryukyu islands are a chain of islands that include Okinawa). Two things stuck out upon reading the document (and thanks here must be given to John Purves, who provides an English translation of this document on his website <http://www.niraikanai.wwma.net/index2.html>). First, Article 1 states that 'The Republic of the Ryukyus is a democratic republic based on the foundations of love and labour. Sovereignty resides with the people in whom love and labour are born. The people of the Republic of the Ryukyus will exercise all powers of sovereignty according to the Constitution'. Second, the unofficial Constitution also includes an article renouncing war of any form.

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*Count from Zero to One Hundred* is not directly connected with actual

political issues or aspirations. However, in my shout out of pride, in my dismissal of the limits that have been set, without distinction, by nature upon us all, I find one can isolate a core set of principles that act as a basis for any poetic constitution for the self, and, by extension, any society of selves. I also find that they reflect, in a way, certain principles set out in both the Japanese post-war Constitution and the unofficial Constitution of the Republic of the Ryukyus, the first beloved by Mr. F, the second, perhaps, even written by him.

They are, I believe, the following: love, a certain type of love, not love as it is commonly understood, but, rather, as I adapt from Zweig in *Beware of Pity*, love as something 'unsentimental but creative. It knows its own mind, and is determined to stand by the sufferer, patiently suffering too, to the last if its strength and even beyond'; struggle – or work/labour; and, finally, the renunciation of war in favour of a personal combativeness, a struggle with oneself.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is, in the main, the thought of the personal reactions of the mysterious Mr. F to difference – perhaps we can indeed imagine him as the same 'F' who was the author of the unofficial Constitution – that inspired me to consider this work as a constitution of its own kind, an *Okinawan* Constitution, a declaration to myself concerning my relationship to the world. I hope it is read in the same spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> *Beware of Pity*, Stefan Zweig, Pushkin Press, London, 2011 (translated by Anthea Bell).



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The reference to the composer and the street cleaner in section 53 is based upon a tale recounted by conductor Arvo Pärt in an interview with *The Guardian* on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2011, 'Composer Arvo Pärt: Behind the beard.' Section 81 was inspired and influenced by a TMZ.com interview with Charlie Sheen on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011.



## DISCLAIMER

This is somewhat a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination, somewhat, or are used somewhat fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is perhaps entirely coincidental, but then again, perhaps it is not.



Count from Zero  
to One Hundred



# 1

I was in Ireland and all I can remember thinking about was... I was in London and all I can remember thinking about was... I was in Berlin and all I was thinking about was... I was in a woman's bed and all I was thinking about was what I wanted.

I wanted anonymity, easily available through ignorance of language. What I really wanted — what that anonymity in fact was — was something more powerful, more destructive. I wanted erasure of my self, I wanted the result of choosing either to not remember or not learn the words with which we can communicate.

I wanted to cease to exist.



What had caused this desire to take hold of me? Well, many things, over the course of many years. And the gradual accumulation of those years into something called a life had hewn a sad strength out of me, had allowed me to forget about wanting to conclude an unfinished event.

But in that woman's bed, something happened, or I believed something to have happened. I'm not sure. Whether it happened or not doesn't matter. The act — seen, unseen, imagined, unimagined — brought that forgotten desire to the surface of my mind, and I thought again about what I had always wanted.

I wanted to cease to exist, to shout, to curse, to rage, to stop doing what I was doing and run out on to the streets and bang my head against the windows of the cars, to scream, cry, to do many, many other ridiculous and necessary things.

She had looked at me.

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I had been looking too, of course. In Ireland. In London. In Berlin. In many other places. But the observation I had been engaged in was of a strange kind, quite unlike her act. It was a constant looking, not a looking at. It was driven by an indifference to response; by, perhaps, a reluctance for such a thing to happen.

I hadn't been looking at all.

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Here is a bad day, but I do not want pity, please. I'm too strong for that now. I present it only as an indication of how far I have gone wrong. It is an attack on myself. You will surely think I am mad.

Imagine a gun, and imagine wanting to feel it against your head. You are not sure what will happen next. You only want the sensation, initially, the promise of a possible end to things. You are too vain, too lucky in other respects, to continue. But imagine that gun, and imagine wanting it at your head.

Before that, you feel like your head is going to explode, but you have no words for what you feel. You gesture and roam about your house, your apartment, the streets, you are tense, your arms move, you slap them together, you punch a fist into the palm of your other hand, or something like that, you feel shame, you want to leave, you wonder why you do these things to yourself, your body repels, you repel your body, you close your eyes, you grimace, you want to stop and ignore all existence, you tense your body in an attempt to reject, disappear, change the molecules, atoms, particles that surround you.

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Let us try it another way. She told me she had looked at me. My head was lying in the space between her shoulder and her jaw, my lips touching her neck. My eyes were closed. I was soon glad they were closed. I was soon glad she couldn't see my face. She said, without moving,

“You know, I only really saw your other hand for the first time yesterday.”

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She was used to being looked at, and looking at others. She was what you might call ‘good looking’. She dressed well. She had a good, wholesome body. She was a performance poet, she was a musician, she was an artist, she was an intelligent woman, she was stupid, she was Irish, she was Australian, she was confident, she did not

understand.

This was in 2009. This was in Berlin. A world of my own making had collapsed, and so I had gone back.