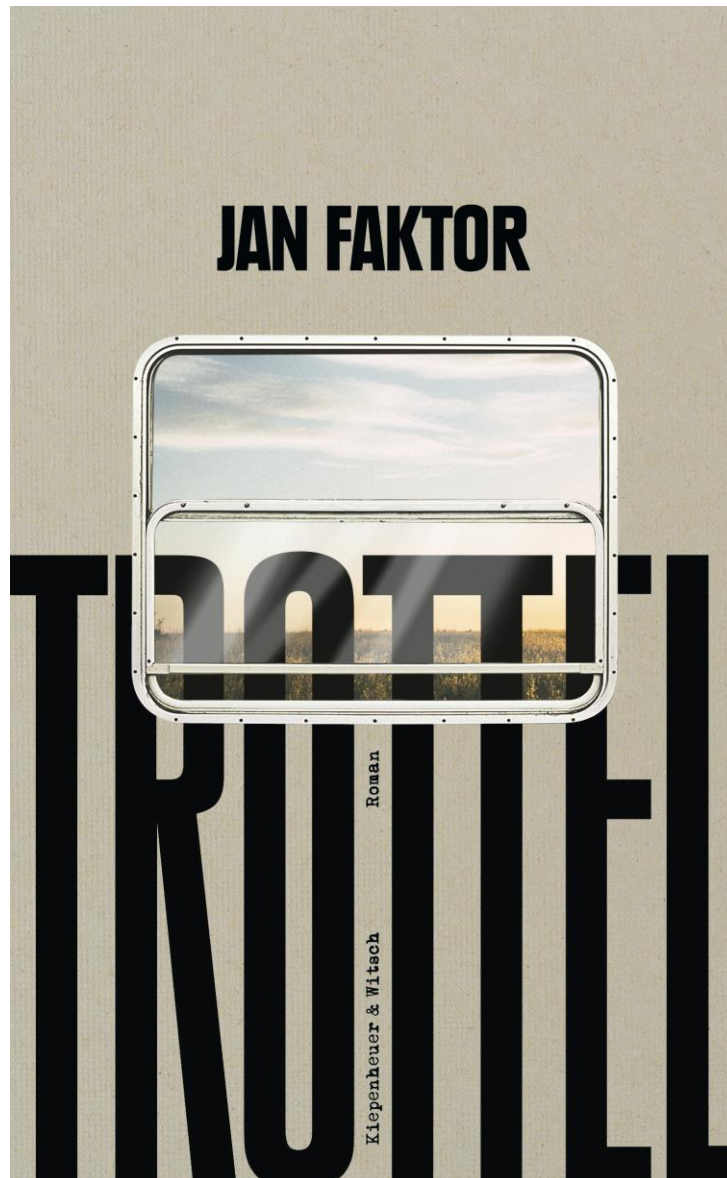


SORT OF IDIOT
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What's the reason for my good mood?

Simply everything.

Chapter 1b [1]

The unspoken question of my youth was whether a moron can be happy in life. But it wasn't really a question. Lots of people tried to convince me of this or that – without saying anything, of course; simply through the membrane pressure of their affection. But they didn't know me; all they saw was my healthy surface. But for me, my future unhappiness was easy to predict. I was born a moron, grew up a moron, and had to remain one – there was nothing to salvage or to talk up. Tormented to the depths of my permanently erect olfactory centres, I thought for an eternity that I would not survive the shame of my comprehensive inadequacies. To my surprise, it all turned out differently. Nowadays I am constantly in a good mood, though I do find myself unappealing when I catch sight of myself in a mirror. And I sometimes run away from people who are in a bad mood and might misunderstand my aimless inner beaming. Unfortunately, many go out in public, no matter how worried they are about the present or the future.¹ For my part, I am on the lookout on the pavements of our

¹ Some even worry about the past, which in my opinion is illogical. Whatever the worries, it's simply too late.

cities for joy, for steaming optimism or simply generous good will. Now that I'm in such a great mood, I'm not aging. Recently, I managed sixteen pull-ups again. I don't know where this is going to take me. Rides on my racing bike are also getting longer, though that's mainly because I'm smarter now about eating when I'm out. People eat too much cheese, much too fatty cheese and much too much of it – to round off their big meals. Some insights I have attained in my life spontaneously out in the field, without having to later extract them laboriously from a prostate or nasal secretion. The above mentioned and entirely unplanned field research² had to do with a casein³-rich experience. I have witnessed several such fill-your-face orgies in Germany – with a clear head and cyst-free liver. I have the impression my whole life has just been moronic field research – a never-ending special course of study. Fortunately, I remained naive enough to dare to go out among people – at least within a limited radius. Once, a group of intellectuals were eating much too much much too fatty French cheese, working their way through all the varieties – after a substantial supper, of course – while ruminating about how a certain humanitarian catastrophe could have been prevented and what the politicians had once again done wrong. They were merely repeating what they had seen on a television show the day before.

² Working title: "Cheese"

³ Correct pronunciation please: 'keɪsɪn. Thanks!

How does a moron behave at such a cheese parcourse? The moron remains silent of course; what else can one do in the face of something so utterly embarrassing. What's more, they were also talking about certain theses by Walter Benjamin – that was the starting point, if I remember correctly. Unfortunately, at such events, I always generated vast quantities of body heat instead of heading to safety in good time. Because I have experienced a lot of embarrassing things in my life – for which I share the blame – I have always burned an excessive amount of energy, emitted countless molecular vibrations, and transferred them irrecoverably to fine dust particles around me and let them fizzle out around large damp pores.⁴ In other words, disconnected from any efficient functioning system, I didn't build a pyramid or do anything much at all – unlike my friend Peter, master of seven trades and arts. Fortunately, I have survived. My son was born a moron just like me, he fought against it valiantly and long enough under starkly adverse conditions; in the end he killed himself out of shame about hitting a dead-end as a moron.

That reminds me of Antonius who was always smiling contentedly. Perhaps he was called Albrecht or Andreas. I remember how deeply this person enraged me every time he assaulted me with his perfect smile. To be honest, it was pure hate; and I was young. This

⁴ See my habilitation thesis about osmotic processes on sweating human skin.

Antonius, Atominus, Ato+ – the name doesn't matter – was studying something but had nothing more to show for himself, and yet he would smile like a champion, even though, just like the rest of us, he wasn't standing on a trigonometrically aligned concrete podium, to be excused for radiating such excesses of happiness. I was just starting out as a moron and was confused. Perhaps I couldn't see the reasons he had for his strength and joy. This Sunday's Child was, I now think, contented-in-advance and at one with his future self; Antonius smiled constantly because he evidently had no reason not to smile. He smiled in such a friendly way and at particular people, it seemed; yet it was as if he smiled at everyone without distinction. A unique phenomenon – certainly in my world at the time. And in my eyes an unparalleled injustice: I only had a kind of vacuum-sealed anxiety in me, a fear of being shredded by tiny bullets, of impending bodily decay and of the trickle of shame slowly filling my insides. Mind you, I didn't know if gentle treatment would have been good for me. Luckily, I was rarely spat at but now I am covered in drool and nonetheless happy. Things don't work like spit flying on a ballistically clean trajectory. A true rock musician should never smile on stage – every child knows that nowadays. Lo and behold: Atomikus became pleasant and a great chap.

Antonius was a kind of yardstick for me, his smile unsurpassed. It was his good right to be splendidly cheerful. Helge, my publisher, recently said to me in Hamburg: *Just carry on ... Things are going*

splendidly. Now I can also smile, could even smile all the time. But I never had the opportunity to practise pure good cheer for long. Fearing I might only manage a weird half-grin, I am sparing with my grins. My current internal smile has very little in common with Antonius's.

To describe my son's difficulties will be a tricky business for me as a supermoron and self-declared supervisor. My wife and mother-in-law won't be able to help. Nor will other people close to me because I shall have to reveal things about them. But the bulk of the freight to be dumped in what follows is mainly about me – and only then about my son. Picture everything that piled up over the years like this:

When two morons meet, others quiet quickly won't understand what's going on. But my son would approve of this text just like that. Many difficulties come and go; some multiply, accumulate with abandon, become huge, crack apart and in the best case wander off, dangling from a goat's arse. I was in such a terrible state for years that my memory and my ability to sort my sodden memories suffered greatly. Though there's no comparison to Vonnegut's problem: how to present his Dresden inferno in a way outsiders might consume. But it also took years before I could jot down a few simple sentences about my son.

To my credit, I decided several times in my life to stop being a moron. Quite often in fact during my youth in Prague. Every day the

full force of the night! But I would still get up the next morning. Once, I went to the main public library in Prague to devour as many books on the shelves of the reading room as possible. I knew I only had an inkling of a fraction of world knowledge – and a vague one at that. I leafed through some books in the reading room, I checked some out; I hid one in my jacket and didn't check it out. Outside it was fantastic football weather, but I sat on a bench on an uninviting patch of green near my home and read. The little park was squeezed between a side street and the tracks of a busy tram line, and nobody liked it. The small square nearby was also empty, and hardly any cars parked there. The cobblestones radiated heat up into the chestnut trees I was sitting under. I was baking anyway – mostly from dejection. At some point, I could no longer take in what I was reading. I still remember the book; I never finished it. The title doesn't matter now, and I don't want to share the depression-induced insight I had that day.

My moronisation advanced best on the streets and a few deserted squares⁵ in Prague, in the midst – let us say – of diverse accumulations of intellectual fuzziness. Nobody noticed my way of stumbling around, and it disappeared when I raced on my bike or played football anyway. Most of the time I was just somebody else, and nobody knew about the stolen book. I was a covert case of

⁵ At one of these historically important junctions near Prague Castle, where five streets meet, five of us could have hours of fun playing football. The end of each street was a goal. We sometimes had to slouchily make way for a car – or a car had to avoid a player – but hardly anybody honked at us.

arrested development, and not only when I was on my bike or playing football. In my crowd – a bunch of bad boys, good-humoured local kids – I could easily forget who I was.

Life was ahead of us; it felt like we could achieve things, if not everything, with ease – or with not so much ease. The notion that I would father a son in the German Democratic Republic would have struck everybody as absurd. We were convinced that all the countries on Earth had something special to offer – except the GDR. But that is exactly where I would go – and simply because of a greed for good smells. A risky venture. Or rather, as stupid as it gets.

You can bake a cake in a good, bad or lousy mood, and as a rule you will end up with the same cake. Fortunately, a fully-fledged moron is rarely frightened of criticism. He knows his limits; he's already made his biggest blunders, and a limited horizon is easier to survey. Low-speed thinking occupies his mind so feverishly that any doubts that might arise usually dissolve quickly. To be honest, I'm surprised how easy I find it now to write about myself. I wish everybody could. As I keep an eye on many of my writer colleagues, I sometimes see how differently they do their job. Some slog away for years without joy or even in torment. They overdo it and take a tumble, even hurting themselves in sensitive spots; some end up with a hernia. I would say it's better to keep your mouth shut for ten years – at least out of consideration for the dear reader, who just wants to

be entertained ... even if only by zippy reports on the latest high-tech. Unfortunately, my wife is so not interested in lectures about technology that I have given up trying to thrill her with topics such as calculating the size of sprockets in bicycle gears or investigating triboluminescence when tearing apart adhesive surfaces that are stuck together. But she is still the dearest and fairest person I know here on Earth, so I am always very sorry when we're in the car and I accelerate just as she's drinking out of a wide-necked bottle. Especially as she often spills or pours stuff on herself without any external input.

My Gas War, the Beginning [2]

I would like to tell my story more clearly than my notes lead me to fear I can. There have been times in my life when I had very fussy rules for preserving all my personal paperwork – my documents, official records, technical information and so on. I maintained a strict temporal and spatial order in the cardboard boxes filled with all kinds of notes, file cards and scraps of paper – with just about everything that was important to me. I tried to counter my limitations as best I could, whereas now I am surrounded by chaos. But in any case, my story can only be told – if at all – in an a-banal and a-chronal manner, more jumpy than decorous.⁶

When somebody says a life story is held together by a sequence of reasonable decisions freely made, I wonder what planet he lives on. One often takes just a bit too long and wham, the window of opportunity slams shut – that moment one could have shifted the points and locked them in place. Or one races away, straight ahead or off to the side, right into a brick wall. I started to study in Prague, thus pursuing further education after high school at least for a while. That was bang in the middle of socialism and within range of Russian grenade launchers, anti-aircraft guns and propaganda smoke grenades. Can you imagine? Though between you and me, this isn't all true. I feel sick when I think about the socialist perspectives that

⁶ More on that in Stefan Döring's volume of poetry "heutmorgestern", Aufbau Verlag 1989, p. 15.

were theoretically open to me. The anti-aircraft guns remained on the Old Town Square, in a tidy circle, for quite a while after the invasion in 1968. Sometimes I still see them there – despite the many tourists, souvenir stalls and carriage horses releasing their droppings. One of my aunts convinced me early on that the future would belong to computers even in our occupied country, so I chose a course of study that had mostly to do with maths and mindless machines. My aunt was so right, but she got me so amazingly wrong! Computer science may be fruitful and perpetually self-inseminating, but I didn't study it among elite intelligent mathematicians but – stupidly – among economists, who would soon be condemned to terminal irrelevance. That made my life as a student even more dreadful than it already was under the circumstances. I was in the process of becoming not just a programmer but also a socialist economist – which is to say, a philosophical Marxist, an expert in deceitful bookkeeping and a fraudulent statistician. One of the most important lecture courses was entitled *History of the skilled labour movement*. Another topic was *Rigidly befuddling price malformation in socialism*. Then there was *The party and its acceptance-raising measures for primary discipline accumulation within the restless proletariat⁷ and for the cosy family-centred cultivation of vegetables on balconies*, and *The leading role of the CPSU in computing toilet-paper demand in friendly neighbouring states in everyday catastrophe mode*. That's

⁷ Some seasonal experts like to talk nowadays about the "chirping proletarians", but that is not accurate. I was for most of my professional life a proletarian, and always a restless one.

how rich and varied the themes were that we had to deal with. Since both my studies and the other idiots who had signed up for this economic salvation wank were loathsome, I almost became an alcoholic at the very start of my career as a student.

[END OF SAMPLE]