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Written by **Martin Stanton**

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MAKING SENSE

The Future Perfect Trilogy
by Martin Stanton

Making Sense
Still Life
Timeout

MAKING SENSE

Martin Stanton



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For Sarah

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more;

Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea!

—William Butler Yeats

DISCLAIMER

The author has made full use of artistic licence throughout this work. Where 'real life' events and characters intrude, they become part of the rich tapestry of the author's rollercoaster narrative to live a separate existence within these pages which clearly diverges from the lived reality outside.

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Martin Stanton
Caux-et-Sauzens

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Stanton is a writer, teacher, and psychoanalyst. He studied at Dartford Grammar School, St Antony's College, Oxford, the University of Sussex, and the École normale supérieure in Paris. He founded the first Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Kent in 1980. He has been a visiting professor at the New School for Social Research in New York City and an associate research fellow at the University of Cambridge. He founded and directed the Staff Counselling and Mediation Service at University College London in 2000, and has held senior clinical posts as a psychotherapist, counsellor, and mediator within the NHS. He has published numerous books and articles including *Outside the Dream* (which was reissued in 2014), *Sandor Ferenczi*, and *Out of Order*. A review of his life and work is available on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Stanton).

SEATBELT SIGN

We jump on board for a rollercoaster ride. There are the first moments of great expectation, when we climb vertically upwards. A brief pause when we reach the summit and take in the surrounding landscape. Then the sublime thrill—the rapture mixed with terror—when we plunge down towards the abyss. In the course of this short journey, we cross vast contrasting emotions. We rocket between despair and jubilation. We always know in the back of our mind that this is a constructed ride, and that an engineer has built in all the necessary health and safety regulations. We are certain that we will come to no harm in the end. Meanwhile we go right to the wire. We anticipate the thrill we will experience when we finally arrive at the edge of the precipice; and imagine the glorious sense of relief when we all survive.

The rollercoaster ride analogy encapsulates perfectly the way we use technology to make sense of the open-endedness, instability, and unpredictability of our life. We separate out the overwhelming experiences—the hairpin bends, the repetitive loops, and sheer drops when our thinking simply blacks out—then we engineer them into some short self-contained ride where we can confront all our rapture and terror in the security of advance knowledge. We can still shiver with involuntary thrill, but feel certain always that we will come out safely at the other end, with our feet back firmly on the ground.

But we notice that the rollercoaster always carries its statutory Fasten-Your-Seatbelt sign. We are warned in advance that the grim side of reality always underlies the pleasure of the ride. We are told not to lean out too far from the carriage; not to lose ourselves in the thrill side of life. We can fall over the precipice if we do not constantly reality-check, click ourselves comfortably into the observer seat, and plant our feet back firmly on the ground.

We must always remain firmly focused on the end in sight, and only unbuckle the seat belt when the sign says it is all right. The official Hollywood voiceover then warns us that too many repeat rides can seriously undermine our mental health. We are told that rollercoaster junkies lose their sense of balance in life—the sense of an outside objective 'reality' that runs alongside. They become addicted to cheap thrills. Alternatively, their ride ceases to carry any impact at all. It makes no more sense to them. They come out terminally bored. They are diagnosed as depressed and lose their independent sense of mind.

On the rollercoaster of life, all cross-overs between reality and fantasy are tightly technologically managed. The contraflow, clash, crash and annihilation are first hyped then engineered to disappear in the nick of time. Science is always seen to triumph in the end. We are left only with the memory of the seat belt and the official warning sign. The 'crisis' of inner reality—the shock, the terror, the thrill—is resolved by a structured return to an outside world where gravity reigns forever. The rollercoaster ride of life is designed only to last for a short while. If we stay too long or return too often, then the primal inner fantasy is progressively undermined. The live sense of thrill is blunted and closed down by the imposed objective reality of the whole exercise. All we have to realise is that the ride is only designed for amusement. It is a pastime. It always remains intentionally make-believe and unreal.

So this book will journey us through the analogy of life as a rollercoaster ride. It never flatlines into a straightforward trip to a clear and obvious destination called Normality. It does not provide us with a neat set of assembly instructions, or a complete service manual with every component perfectly exploded and tagged with its appropriate explanatory line. Life never makes sense like that.

This book sets out to provide whatever helps us make sense on every section of the ride. Part travel-guide, part documentary, part self-help manual, part novel, part drama, part photograph album, part work of art, this book transmogrifies our sense-making exercise from joyful celebration of life

at the peak, to soulful lament when thinking collapses on its sharp downward incline. The book does whatever it can to provoke us to (re)think and (re)locate exactly where we stand when faced with such uncontrollable rollercoaster feelings. It stalls us, stirs us up, and grinds us to a halt. It loses all sense of logic. It baulks at the crossed path. We even begin to suspect that there might be a basic design fault in the whole thinking process. Thoughts do not help us recover or bounce back. They do not reset us back on the right track. So we consult the local therapist Sphinx on-site to bring fresh insight, to restore the basic compass setting, and to relaunch us on a new start. She advises us first to check our baggage, then to pan out across the horizon to sense where we are on the incoming tide. She says we must prepare for the ultimate life-class when the rollercoaster rolls back to base on time.

But there is no room for education in this godforsaken place. Knowledge at this juncture in our life story promotes no sense of return adventure. We have all become too paranoid. We are all too defensive. We cannot pan ourselves right out of here; or incorporate large sections of the population in an inner dialogue. We cannot even distinguish the ancient signs that point us straight back to Paradise. We see no more sense in any onward or backward journey. There is no clear exit or conclusive ending. So making sense here provides neither 'cure' nor 'enlightenment'. It indicates not therapy, not philosophy, not religion. The journey remains always simply an odyssey. It makes sense anew every day in its own improvised inspirational way. It does not rely on any archive or exhaustive catalogue of knowledge. It refuses point-blank to reconfigure itself into the ongoing history of a mistaken identity. It travels light, without quotes, free and easy, wherever inspiration may lead. It calls it a day when the music stops, the thinking stalls, or feeling runs out of steam.

It climbs back once more into the rollercoaster analogy. It fastens its seat belt. It leans back for an instant to contemplate the swallows as they swoop and shriek to pick up a sense of skyway. The rollercoaster carriage leaps back to life. It jerks and creaks exaggeratedly as it (re)starts.