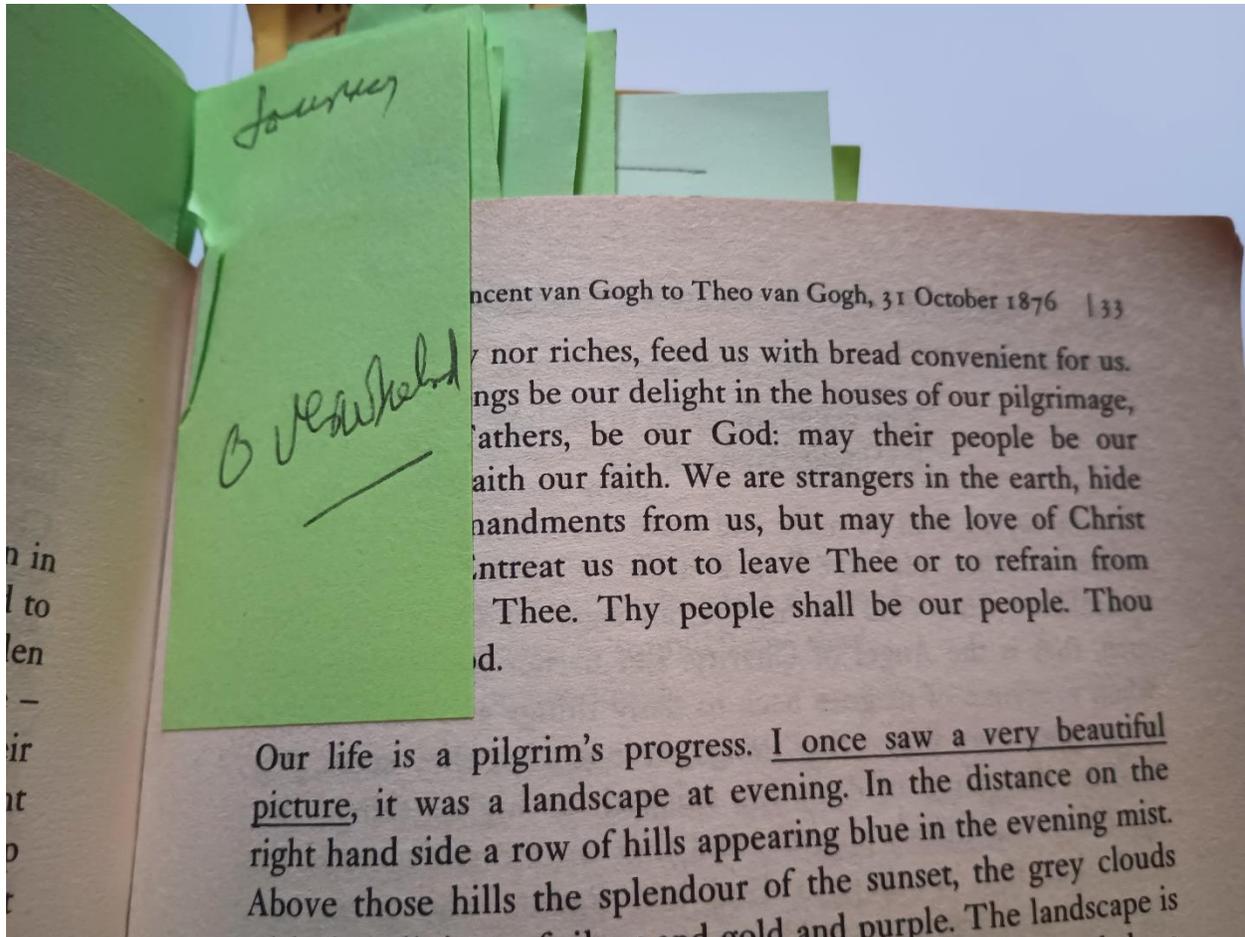


When a Conversation is a Map: Following JZ

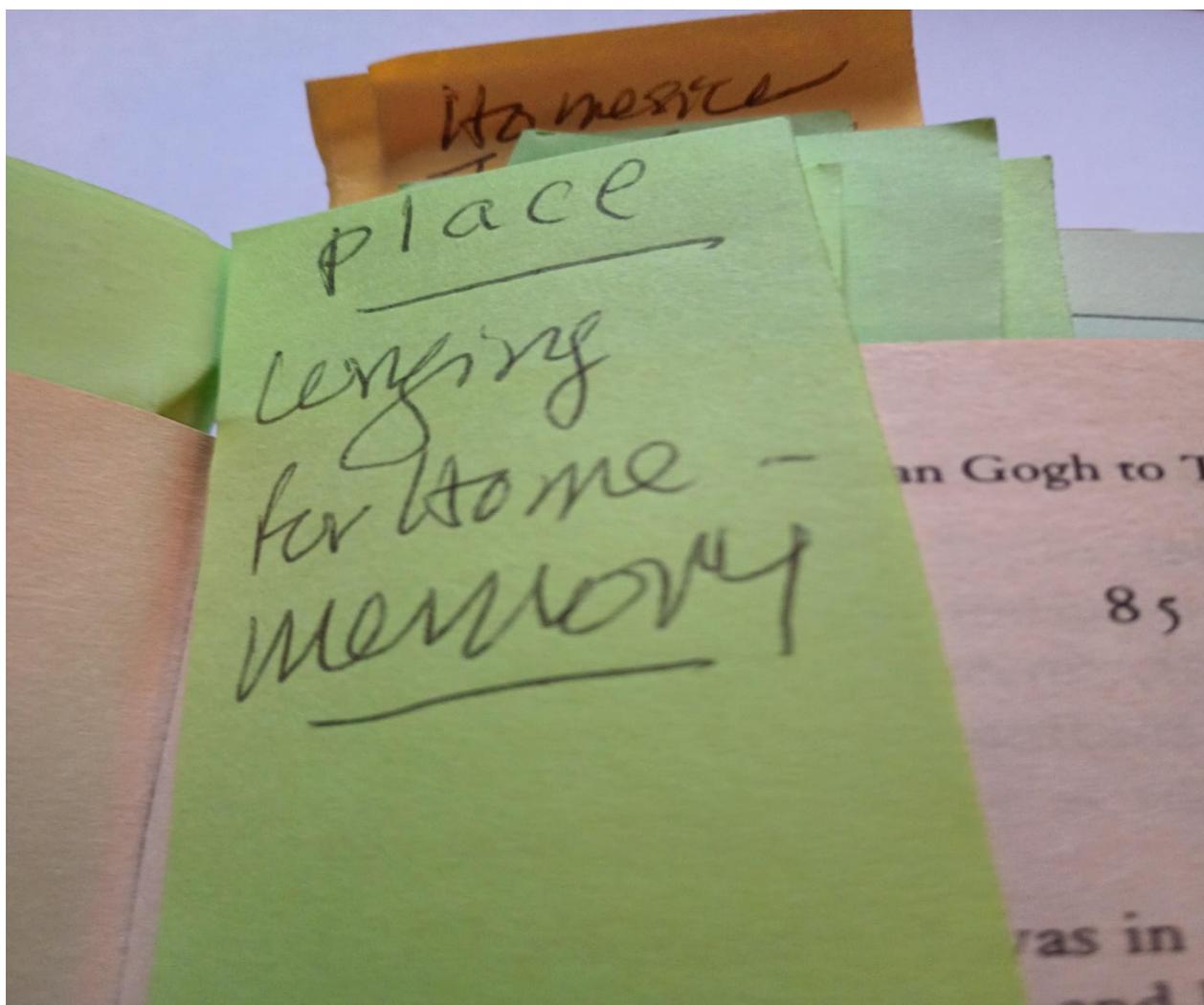
Morgan Young



Notes by Jerry Zaslove in his copy of *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. Photo by the author.

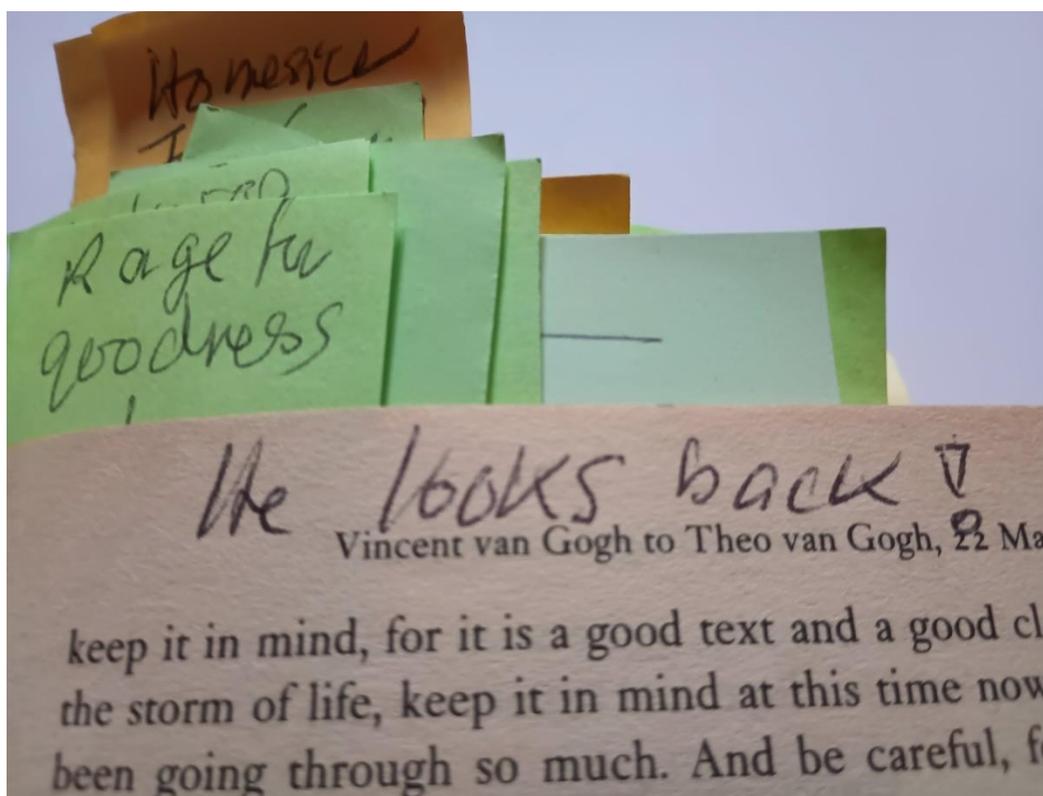
It took me half a lifetime to find Jerry. There was a part of my own mind that did not fully emerge until the day I walked into his classroom—an eclectic class on Nietzsche and Van Gogh, Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, and the experience of loss—and felt what I can only describe as a sense of recognition, that I had been waiting a very long time to hear exactly what this person had to say. When I did find him, it was during a difficult period, where I was unsure of what was happening to me and generally unsure of myself. He changed the direction of my life. For the better part of a

decade, he was a touchstone, offering guidance, support, jokes, and free access to the immeasurable world of his knowledge. More often than not, he knew where I was going before I knew myself, and patiently waited for me to figure it out, leaving the most precious treasures for me to find along the way, friendly crumbs on the floor of a tangled forest. He told me that he could see the path I was working in, and that in the forest the leaves fall too. Now, in this turn toward winter, I look through bared branches at a clouded sky, alone but with unencumbered sightlines, and get an inkling of his aerial view.



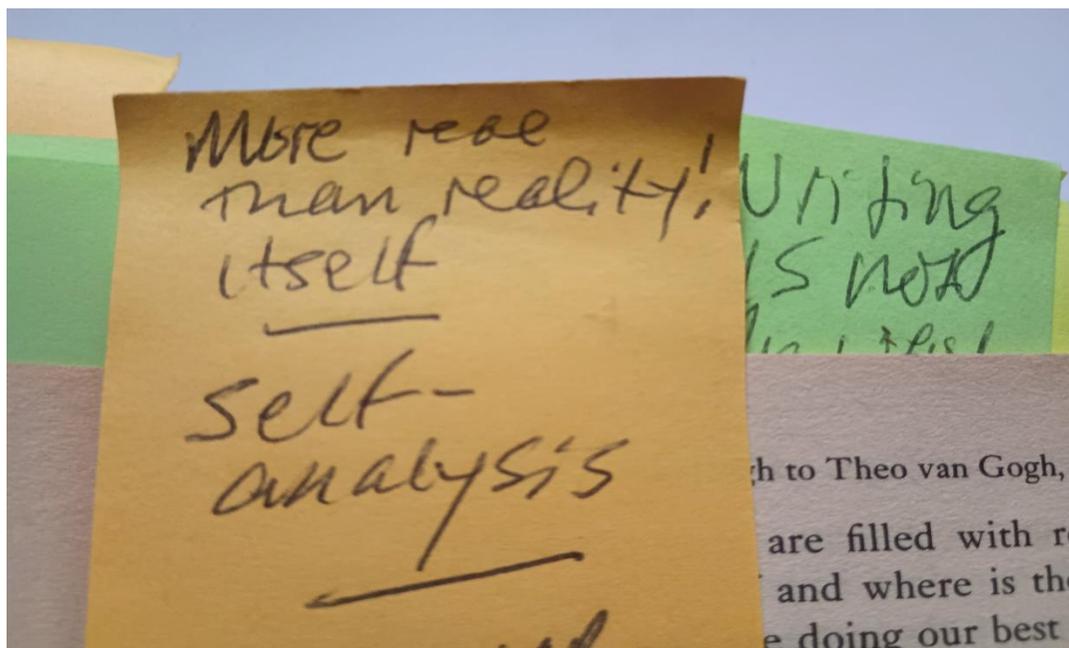
Notes by JZ in his copy of *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. Photo by the author.

Jerry was an intellectual radical of a kind that I'm not sure we'll see again. He was brilliant, funny, quick, kind, and generous. When I say brilliant, I'm describing his intellect, and the quality of brightness in Jerry that fused his intelligence with curiosity, warmth, and joy, a tireless excitement about ideas, or more accurately, about the sharing of ideas. Jerry often gathered these ideas as fragments, bits and pieces that he deposited in the margins of books, on sticky notes, in pages of partially or fully handwritten notes. This is how his thoughts often looked on the page: to the outside observer, as unruly. The enormity and complexity of Jerry's understanding could not be contained in a straightforward way, and these snippets were his maps and outlines for communication. Because more than anything else, that is how Jerry, as an extraordinary thinker and theorist, shared his knowledge: in dialogue with others. That leaves those of us who learned from and with him, students, colleagues, and friends alike, as caretakers of this knowledge.



Notes by JZ in his copy of *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. Photo by the author.

Losing Jerry is like losing both a library and a language. Each of his statements was saturated with meaning, vibrant and multifaceted, and he could speak like that almost endlessly. I remember one of his guest lectures for our humanities MA class, on Thomas Mann—we decided to wrap up after 6 hours, and only then because it was getting so late. We would all gladly have kept going. I've filled many a notebook trying desperately to catch his words, never ever able write fast enough to match the speed of his thinking or grasp the connections he would make in the moment, and he would tug at the threads until I could see the warp and weft of it. I remember the talks we would have in his office in Harbour Centre, meandering exchanges on theory and art mixed in with personal struggles (mostly mine) and insights. He showed a genuine concern for my well-being, and always helped me to reorient my thoughts toward the most human interpretation. He had no illusions about the world, but he understood the dream, and helped me make sense of the panorama of my own. I know I was only ever able to loosely understand what Jerry tried to share, but perhaps more than with anyone else, I felt understood.



Notes by JZ in his copy of *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh*. Photo by the author.

There was simply no one else like Jerry. He is irreplaceable, and his loss is inexpressibly profound. Jerry was loved and is missed. The number of people who are heartbroken, and the gaping hole left in his absence, speaks to the formative influence he has had on this community, and in our individual lives. We describe it as a hole in the world because that's how the grief feels, but in truth, that is not what he's left us. He left a glimmer of his brightness in each of us to help illuminate the growing dark. That makes us caretakers of Jerry's brightness too.

Waving to you on the other shore, my friend.

Morgan Young is a writer and editor living in Fort Langley, BC. She has an interdisciplinary background, mostly in music, literature, anthropology, and philosophy, and earned a Master of Arts in the Humanities at Simon Fraser University. She is interested in the utopian dimension of the Frankfurt School and the romantic critique of capitalism. Her thesis (with Jerry Zaslove and Samir Gandesha as advisors) focused on developing a critical theory of fantasy as a part of a broader category of theory for radical speculative fiction. She is managing editor of *Contours*, the journal of the Institute for the Humanities at SFU, and the *Journal of Adorno Studies*.