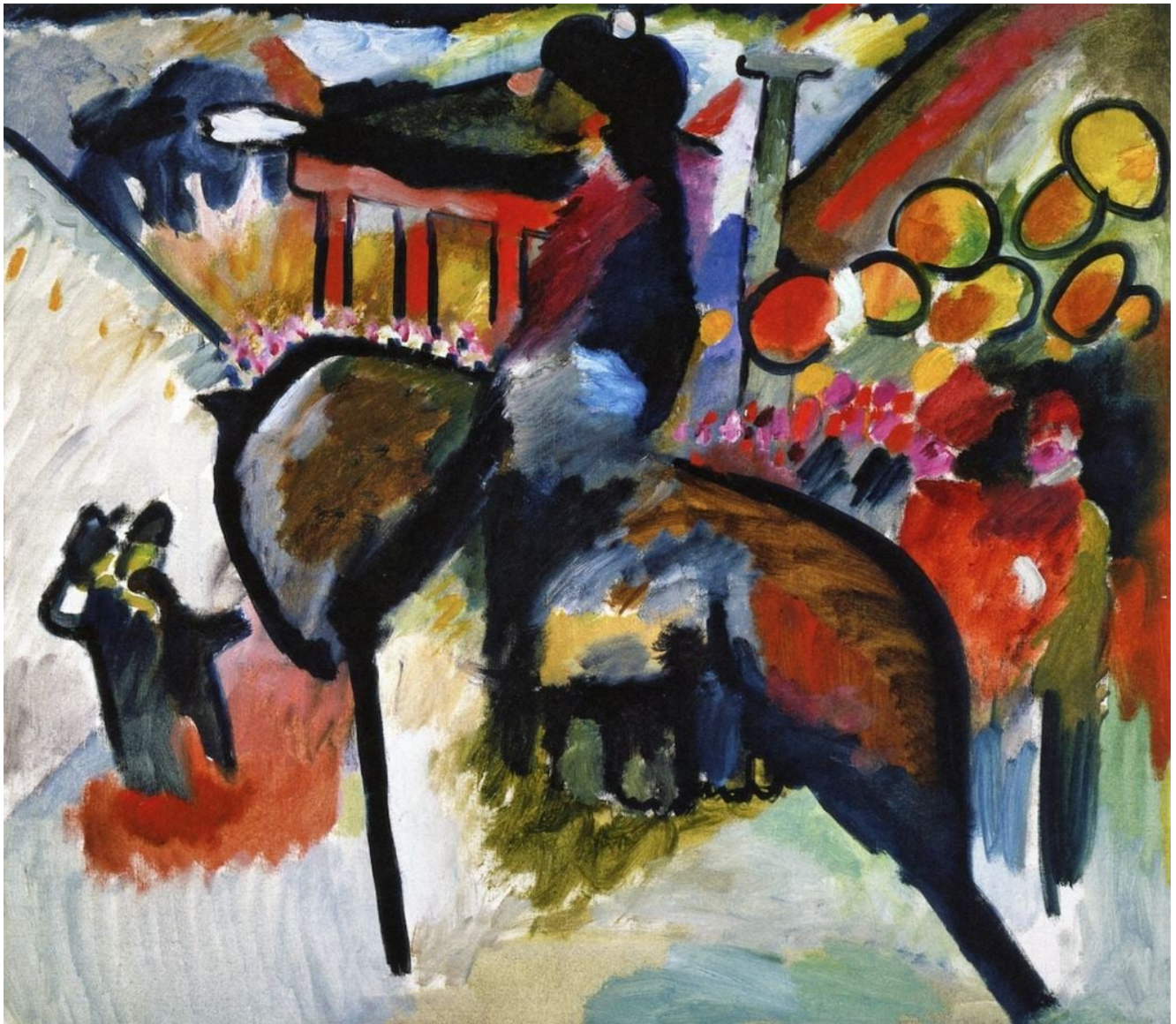


Breaking Point

by [Armando Simón](#) (February 2021)



Impression IV (Gendarme), Wassily Kandinsky, 1911

It was obvious that the two masked policemen did not want to be there, at Gordon's Gym, in order to give the owner of the gym the citation, but they continued to do their duty in depriving a man out of his livelihood.

“Sir, you’ve been warned before to remain closed and you’ve been issued citations before,” one of them reasoned with the owner.

“I’m wearing a stupid mask,” Gordon Freeman pointed out. “He’s wearing a mask,” he pointed to Elijah, his fitness instructor. “Customers are required to wear masks,” he pointed to the other men. “And we’ve sanitized the equipment.”

The gym’s patrons were looking on, scowling. They all appeared to be strong and not intimidated by the police presence.

“Yes, sir, but the governor has not designated gyms as essential businesses that can stay open during the pandemic.”

“Oh, but the pet shop next to us is ‘an essential business’?” an equally angry Elijah asked. “And Walmart across the street? And the liquor store down the street? These are all ‘essential businesses’?”

“According to Governor Shkurkin, yes. You should take it up with him.”

“I will, next time that we get together for a beer,” Gordon replied in a decidedly sarcastic tone. “But, tell me, are either of you clowns going to pay my rent for the gym? Or my apartment? You gonna pay for my electric bill? Are you gonna put food on my table?”

“Sir, we’re just following orders.”

“They’re ‘just following orders.’ Now, where have we heard that before?” Gordon addressed his customers. If the officers recognized what he was alluding to, their faces did not show it.

His customers were equally angry and some of them now showered the police with abuse while others tried to reason with them. Altogether, it was an angry babel. Regardless,

neither tactic would have deterred the enforcers.

Finally, the two policemen told Gordon to close up shop or else they would come back and issue another \$2,000 citation and, on top of that, arrest him. Then they left, amid further insults. Like the governor, the police continued receiving a steady salary.

“Well, that’s it, then,” Gordon admitted. “They won. They broke me. I’m not going to reopen.”

The remaining patrons alternated between expressing indignation and condolences. Some of them had not interrupted their monthly payments to the gym during the shuttered periods, as a gesture of support. Eventually, they slowly dispersed.

Gordon began to close the gym.

“Hold on,” he said at one point to this fitness instructor. He went into the office and returned with a check, which he gave to Elijah. “Here you go. It’s good. It won’t bounce.”

“Gordon, I wish I could say I can’t take it, but I’m hurting, too.”

“Hey! No! I know! Don’t feel bad. In fact, I appreciate your taking a cut in pay. It was supposed to be temporary, but it looks like now it’s permanent.” They shook hands.

“I’m so sorry, man.” He turned and left the gym, leaving Gordon alone to close. It would be hard to say which man was closest to crying, so the quick departure was mutually appreciated.

Once Elijah left, Gordon looked around at his now empty gym. He had been so proud of it. The first year is when most businesses go under and Gordon had struggled to keep it

afloat, subsisting on cans of beans and dry noodles and sleeping in the gym after closing hours. The gym had survived the first year and slowly built up a clientele in the next two years. He was able to get an apartment and began to eat normally.

And then, the new, revolutionary Trump administration had reversed the country's steady decline, a result of years of systematic destruction of the once thriving American economy by both Democratic and Republican presidents. The result had been a miracle. The moribund economy jumped to life. For three years, the economy ran at a white heat and people at every level of society had excess money to spend, to spend on things that they had long craved for, but had had to do without. They were even able to save money—a lot of money.

Gordon's Gym, as with every other business in America, big or small, had prospered. The gym was full. Every day. Every hour. He now even had savings in the bank.

And then, the Wuhan virus emerged from America's political and economic enemy, unleashed at an unsuspecting world. Millions and millions and millions and millions of fatalities in the United States were predicted. Though many people did, indeed, die, the millions and millions and millions and millions of fatalities failed to live up to expectation. Then, another strain of the virus was found and millions and millions and millions and millions of fatalities in the United States were again predicted. This time it was going to be the real thing. For real. It would be like the Black Death. Really.

Democratic party politicians welcomed the virus as a great excuse to execute their deepest desire: criminalizing freedom. Entire states were put under house arrest—"lockdown" it was called. Freedom of assembly was criminalized. Freedom of religion was criminalized. Freedom of education was criminalized. Freedom of speech was at times criminalized, but

more often it was suppressed via proxies. All of it for the public's good, of course. The people that had risen up in arms over a tax on tea now accepted their loss of freedom with meekness and obedience.

But, a lot of people also became angry.

One of these people was Gordon. His business was now gone. His savings were gone. His food was gone.

And now, his sadness was gone.

All he had left was anger.

Returning to his apartment, he took a Valium. The medication had been prescribed by his doctor a month ago and he only took it whenever he was under stress. Like at present.

He was sitting and thinking, thinking hard. He was thinking over a little fantasy that he had toyed with in his mind, on and off, something that we all do, along the lines of, Somebody ought to-

And he decided that the fantasy did not have to remain a fantasy.

A few nights later, after obtaining information and making preparations, he drove to a nice neighborhood. Since he lived in the state capital, it made things easier.

Gordon drove around the Chez Niom Restaurant, a fancy, high priced restaurant catering to the state's elites. It should have been closed because of the "lockdown," but Governor Shkurkin had requested for it to be opened (again) for a birthday party, his wife's.

He found a spot and parked his car. There were no nearby lampposts with their lights on, but at the same time it was not very dark.

There was still time to back out, he felt rather than thought as he sat in his car. But he stopped himself from talking himself out of it. The Valium helped to steady his nerves.

Gordon put on his large face mask, his gloves and hat and strode to the restaurant, his heart pounding along the way. He entered and was greeted by the hostess.

“Can I help you?”

“The governor’s party, I’m expected. Oh, there they are!” He was wearing his best casual dress clothes, so he fit in.

“Ah, yes, go right in.”

Gordon walked halfway into the restaurant where the politician was seated at a large table with his family, friends, minions and sycophants. Other tables also had diners, probably an overflow of the guests and various colorfully wrapped presents were scattered among the guests. They were happy and laughing and looked up to him, unsuspecting, expecting him to be a late arrival, unrecognizable because of the mask.

Gordon pulled his gun out from the coat that he was wearing and shot half of Governor Shkurkin’s head off, splattering blood and flesh to the sides, walls, presents, wife and adjoining guests. Two women instantly shrieked, terrified and were joined by others. Two men quickly stood up to attack him, and were shot dead for their efforts.

Gordon pulled out another gun, holding both at arms’ length. “Get on the floor! Nobody else’s gonna get hurt, unless you try something!” he shouted. He could hardly be heard over the hysterical women’s cries, as they and some men ran to the back of the restaurant, but some got obediently on the floor, since the shooter was backing out towards the door

and did not seem to intend to continue shooting.

At the door, the terrified hostess whimpered, "Please don't kill me."

Gordon felt offended at her words. "Why on earth would I want to shoot you? Now, get on the floor!"

She did and he exited. He put away his guns and did not exactly run or walk, but more like trotted to his car. As he drove off, he looked in the mirror and saw that, wisely, nobody had followed him.

It took an enormous act of will to drive away without speeding, but it was accomplished. Gordon drove to a place he had picked out earlier, a wooded area of undeveloped land, parked, and turned off the car. There, he undressed and carefully put every stitch of clothing he had worn inside a large plastic trash bag. Then he dressed in shoes and clothes he had placed in the back seat. He put on plastic gloves, got out of the car. He carefully lifted the floor mat on his side and put it in the plastic bag. Then, he reached behind his seat, pulled out a rag which he wet with the bleach that he had brought inside a small bottle. He wiped the steering wheel and the door handle. Away from the car, he dropped the rag and poured the rest of the bleach on it.

Gordon returned to the trunk and opened it. He took out a screwdriver and removed the license plate that he had stolen and screwed his real one back on. He then put the stranger's license plate inside another plastic bag, put the gloves inside it, and sealed it. It was unlikely that the license plate had been detected by anyone or by a camera, but just in case . . .

He drove home. He forgot a little detail which he corrected. He removed the fake diamond stud earrings that he had worn at the restaurant and threw them out the window.

Once inside his apartment, he brought in the bag with all the clothes, opened it, and stuffed everything in a large bucket that he had placed earlier in the bathtub. He poured bleach on the bucket until everything was covered.

The chemical smell was overpowering, so he quickly turned on the air vent and closed the door behind him. He thoroughly washed his hands on the kitchen sink in order to remove any trace of gunpowder.

Gordon stashed away the gun that had not been fired, then went over everything that had happened and what yet needed to be done. It really unnerved him that everything had gone smoothly, with not a hitch.

The bleach would eliminate the clothes' colors and some fibers, destroy his DNA, and chemically alter any other tell trace signs. By morning, the destruction would be complete and he would pour out the bleach down the drain. He would take the rags and dump them in a wooded spot that some uncaring people used as a dumping place for unwanted, trashy furniture and worthless car tires. The stolen license plates could simply be left anywhere.

The gun, of course, was crucial. Ballistics would determine that it was the gun used in the killings. He had to get rid of it, simply by throwing it down one of the many storm drains that pervaded the city, by just walking down the street and dropping it in.

His train of thought was interrupted by something highly unusual. Suddenly, Gordon's right arm started shaking uncontrollably. He looked at it, fascinated, as it continued its shaking. As sudden as was the onset was its cessation.

He wondered if the Valium had worn off and decided to take another one, which he did.

He leaned against the kitchen counter. He knew that

the real work of the authorities would start in the morning and, the governor being the governor, their investigations would be thorough. That investigation would include every single person that had been affected by the “lockdown” and by those who had fulminated against the loss of freedoms.

And if, by some chance, they would come for him, either to ask questions or to arrest him, he would not talk, would not answer questions, would not cooperate, would not confess.

Gordon was decidedly in an odd state of mind. Yes, he worried over the details, yes, he was worried that he had unknowingly left a clue behind, yes, he was worried that their forensics experts would get a lead on him, yes, his arm had shaken uncontrollably to what he attributed as an adrenalin rush, and yes, he had been nervous, very nervous, during the shooting and afterwards—understandably, since he had done nothing similar to this crime and he had always internalized and obeyed the law. Yet . . . he was not afraid. The worries he had were similar to what would have been those of a brand-new engineer who has put together his first complicated project.

But, personally, he was not afraid. He, himself, was suddenly aware of that.

Gordon plopped down on his favorite chair. *The thing of it is*, he thought to himself with a certain satisfaction, *when you take everything that a man has, then what has he got to lose?*

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Armando Simón is a retired forensic psychologist. This story is one in his latest collection of short stories, *Pandemic or No Pandemic I'm Getting Married!!* It can be obtained at Barnes & Noble or Amazon—for now.

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