

reading and writing --- Skálanes ---

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Dong Ting Lake

To the Tune of Nian Nü Jiao

Zhang Xiaoxiang 1132–1170, Southern Song Dynasty

At Dong Ting, the glasslike grasses
seem an extension of the lake. There isn't a trace of wind
on the Moon Festival, everything keeps
to itself. The lake water burnished
like a giant mirror and the boundless rice fields ripening
into maroon gemstones, and among them I ride on a wood raft,
like a leaf crossing the quiet color of the moon,
and beside which, the bright galaxy that pours
a torrent from the sky, irrigates the lake stars. My heart
seems to be made of that lucid water,
a clarity inside me which words cannot display.
Thinking about my youthful years working in the remote
areas of Ling Nan, alone with the same moonlight
that had filled my lungs and liver with frosted ice.
Now that I'm old with shaved hair and thin clothing, I feel
a vastness inside of me. Let me pour empty
the River West as wine, use the Big Dipper as ladle
and invite all worldly things as my guests.
The world is but a passing guest of my mind. Alone I strum
my zither and sing, forgetting what year it is,
while time keeps passing through my body, so time lives.

Sing in the Desert

Cricket

To the Tune of Man Ting Fang

Zhang Zi, 1153–1221, Southern Song Dynasty

Outside the Attic of Golden Hairpin—tall sycamore trees,
moon-washed, grasses ignited in silver, rounded
with dew—autumn deepens. Where the lichen slouches,
glowworms plunge to the corner of a stone wall.
The coarse screech of crickets, night's maudlin tautology,
has the glissando of my mother's sewing machine,
which once urged her repeating hands to keep
repeating—my childhood—I remember—with lantern
in my hands and a jug of clear water—I remember—following
the cricket's song, tiptoeing through the dankest mud—
I remember—despite the dense shadows of flowers
weighing down my slim shoulders, all night I kept chasing
their voices till morning—morning I brought their thin,
trembling bodies for fights at the marketplace,
where the cricket boxes, so delicate, gilded like little pavilions
strapped around the boys' waists. Now that I am sick
and dying, alone in this dilapidated cottage,
the crickets come to sing under my bed frame—
frigid hours, sustained by the cricket's song—I start singing.

I am going to describe a ritual

Retirer anba dlo means “retire beneath the waters.” It is a Vodou ceremony that some friends told me about while I was staying in Haiti for a couple of weeks a year ago. The ceremony is held a year and a day after a person’s death. For the first few days after the death—from a week to ten days—the *ti bon ange*, or spirit of the dead person, which quickly leaves the body, remains close by. The waters are the ancestral residence of the *loas*, the spirits. During the *anba dlo* ceremony, the *gros bon ange*, the life force shared by all humans, moves from the ancestral waters to a *govi*, a vessel, which is placed on the altar in the peristyle. The *loa Met Tet* is also freed. This is the *loa* closest to the person: literally, the “master of the head.” In order to move the *gros bon ange*, the *loas*, the Invisible Ones, the mysteries, are invoked through rituals involving music, dance, and *langaj*, and through an act of possession the *loas* communicate directly with the ceremony’s participants.

The objects and materials used in the ritual are everyday things—bottles, flour, fire, sequins, satiny fabrics, rum, water. They are all poor materials. But the way they are treated, the attention to the form of the ritual, the rhythms, and the movements lead to a transformation of consciousness and perception. The *loas* occupy the same time and space as the living by inhabiting the body of a *chwal* (*cheval*, or horse). It is said at that point that the *loa* “mounts” the person possessed.

The state of possession has been described in many ways. It is a difficult, exhausting process for the person possessed. During the possession, the *loa* completely takes over the body of the *chwal*. The ceremony leads the *serviteurs* into different kinds of trance; not all lead to the state of possession. The trance may be pleasurable or inspirational, or it may be a *trance-errant*, a voyage to another place, or it may be a door opening to the *ginen* mysteries, mystical aspects of Vodou, what are called *nan domi*, waking dreams that enable

states of consciousness and deep thought related to the metaphysics of Vodou. Possession, the particular state of trance in which a *loa* takes over a human body, is not the only possibility.

The ceremony is a grand *travay* (from travail, meaning “a work”) which opens the door between the worlds of the visible and the invisible.

The ritual creates and occurs in a sacred time and space, an exceptional time and space in which attention and perception are transformed. There is not just one position, but many, from which a person may take part in a ritual: there are *serviteurs*, who alternate between states of lucidity and possession, abandon and support; there are novices, children, and visitors; there are those who carry out concrete actions while in a lucid state—killing a goat or drawing a *vevé* on the peristyle; there are the sick and there are visionaries, who occupy yet other positions and may themselves be powerful figures. These positions are fluid and interchangeable. When the ritual is practiced communally and as part of everyday life, it is not a static repetition of forms; it is in constant transformation. The *loas* multiply, new aspects are born each day, the form and practice are transformed and their metaphysical aspects expand.

The spectator is present, too, but as a marginal figure. The spectator may come to know the meaning of the forms, times, and greetings, and even become something of an expert, but there will always be other aspects, perhaps the most important ones, that will forever be inaccessible to him: knowledge of the states of trance and possession, the sense of commonality in the group's action, the alteration of the perception of time, the sensory intensification that emerges out of the repetition of rhythms, the attention to the sacred space and sacred objects, the group's energy. Rituals bring us closer to other states of consciousness, so that we can perceive what we are unable to perceive in everyday space and time, so that we can identify with the “other,” and so that many other things can happen.

We take part in many rituals every day: the act of sitting down at a table to eat has ritual aspects that transform a physical necessity into a communal, shared, sometimes emotionally fraught event. But I use the specific example of Vodou because it has something in common with the practice of art: the transformation of states of consciousness and perception through our bodies' physical senses and the forms and materials of daily life. Art is a practice that aspires to transform states of consciousness through the sensorium in its entirety.

Ritual also shares with art the possibility of multiple positions from which to perceive the experience. In ritual, this multiplicity is evident. But the experience of art has been turned so violently toward the experience of the spectator that we seldom talk about the aspects of artistic practice that are perceived from other positions. Seen from the position from which art is made, its processes intensify states of perception and the relationship between the form and new states of consciousness. Both ritual and art are constructed on the materiality and metaphysicality of every kind of object, whether everyday or exceptional.

When we look at the practice of art through a lens of ritual, we can open art to positions beyond that of the spectator. What about the transformation of the subject, the *poiesis*, the hyper-sensory states that allow leaps of thought? In ritual, one can be a lucid expert, a visionary madman, a child, a master of objects and form, or a person possessed. From what position can we describe all of this, analyze it, and theorize about it? How are we to open it, how are we to think about the possible transformation of the subject, or the communal transformation?

If, for example, we talk about film as ritual, about the camera as a ritual object, about the time and space of making film as the time and space of ritual, and about the processes of art as processes that transform perception and consciousness, just as ritual does, where do we direct our attention? Not just to the presentation and the spectator's perception anymore. What happens when we think about possession, about the state of acute perception, individual or

common, about the implicit learning in the event (children are not given Vodou classes; they witness the ritual), about the expert, the novice, the madman, and the sick person?

Jean Rouch had the following to say about film as ritual:

When I filmed the second ritual, I myself was in a sort of trance that I call the “cine-trance,” the creative state, which allowed me to follow very closely the person who was about to be initiated. The camera played the role of ritual object. The camera becomes a magic object that can unleash or accelerate the phenomena of possession because it leads the filmer into paths he would never have dared to take if he did not have it in front of him, guiding him to something that we scarcely understand: cinematographic creativity...It seemed to me in particular that the individual observer who confronted the phenomena of possession, of magic and sorcery, merited critical examination himself...

In this universe of fragile mirrors, next to men or women who can with one clumsy motion unleash or stop the trance, the presence of the observer cannot be neutral. Whether he wants to or not, he himself is integrated into the general movement, and his slightest actions are interpreted with reference to this particular system of thought. All the people I film today are familiar with the camera and know what it is capable of seeing and hearing. They have also seen successive screenings of the films in the course of their editing. In fact, they react to this art of visual and sound reflection in the same way they react during the public art of possession or the private art of magic and sorcery.¹

We might choose other analogies: a hallucinogenic trip, the mechanism of the psychoanalytic cure, a political demonstration, or musical improvisation. The states of attention and perception, of thought, during musical improvisation are very well known in the Caribbean. This is the part of artistic practice that I am interested in thinking about. All of these practices allow us to see the form of

the processes and recognize experiences from a variety of positions. They have some aspects of ritual, and ritual contains these aspects.

1. Time collapsed; the ritual object

Paso del Indio—Indian pass, or passage—is the name of an alluvial plain in Vega Alta, in northern Puerto Rico. In 1992, the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works (the DTOP, its initials in Spanish) decided to build a highway extension to the town of Arecibo. All the archaeologists that knew Puerto Rico knew that if the highway was going through a place called Paso del Indio, there were going to be archaeological finds. One day, a backhoe excavating the roadway picked up an entire skeleton, as though it were the Taino deity Atabey holding a body up in the palm of her hand. At that point, the law required the government to halt the project while an archaeological investigation of the site was carried out. The DTOP put out a call for bids, a contract was set, and an archaeological team took over the project for several years. Two hundred residents of Río Abajo, a community located on limestone cliffs rising out of the plain, were employed on the archaeological dig. Twenty years later, I spoke with the archaeologist in charge. That day in his office, several stories were mixed together, or maybe they were all a single story.

This is what he told me:

Hundreds of complete skeletons were removed. Some 200 people from the neighboring area, paid minimum wage, worked in groups of eight or ten, spread out in a grid across the site. Each group had its designated leader, who was given a helmet of a different color, making him more powerful than the others. These hierarchies create discipline and order on the worksite. We taught them to photograph and draw the objects and bones in order to show size and condition. One of the skeletons was that of a woman giving birth—the skeleton of the fetus was still trying to come out of her body. One day, two or three men arrived dressed, symbolically, as Taínos, and they went into the project office. They objected to the exhumation of

their ancestors and said the project was a transgression against a sacred place. But we offered them jobs and in a couple of days they'd changed their uniforms. All those skeletons are now in the University of Puerto Rico's laboratory of forensic anthropology. With respect to the objects and fragments found, the initial archaeological proposal included identification, cataloging, and storage, but the government didn't want to comply with the contract. They canceled it as we were entering the third phase, which was preservation. The excavation had paralyzed the highway project too long. There were allegations, totally unfounded, of corruption, and rumors were spread about the employees from Río Abajo stealing money. It destroyed my career. A technical-studies firm took over the project and completed it forthwith—that was why they'd been hired.

He told me (I quote again from memory):

The hallucinations produced by cohoba are geometric and mosaiclike.² Look at this reproduction of a *cemí* upside-down, right-side up, and from the side. Imagine it superimposed on the hills around (the sacred Taíno ceremonial site of) Caguana. I'll tell you a story about the hallucinations. It was in the early seventies. Some friends of mine had cleared a piece of land in the country for planting and for several years they'd been working diligently, planting fruit trees and coffee trees in the shade. One day, they all drank some tea made from angel trumpet flowers, which in Puerto Rico is known as *té de campana*, "bell tea," because of the shape of the flowers. At first they didn't think they were particularly affected, but later on, the trees started talking to them. The trees said they were at war. That they'd been at war for hundreds of years. "They attacked us," my friend said. "So we fought them. When we came down from the trip, we'd destroyed every tree on the farm."

In his office with its fluorescent lighting and air conditioning, the archaeologist talked to me about the transmutation and migration of indigenous mythology from the Southern Cone to the Arctic. When I went back to Paso del Indio, I sought out other stories in the current geography and physical panorama. Which cave, I wondered,

was Cacibajagua, the black cave from which all life emerges? Which one was the cave of death, the mythological anus of the world; which one does the god of disorder and chaos live in, and which one belongs to the god that gathers and shares ancestral knowledge? I visited once a week, and I would stand with my camera under the bridge; I would watch out for twin figures, as in the story of the divine—syphilitic twins. I would seek out dark places, nocturnal creatures like the Quequerequé. I would wonder which back the first sea turtle had crawled out of, what kind of supernatural power the androgynous person has. I would also walk through the houses of Río Abajo, interviewing people for a purpose I was uncertain of. I found several men who had worked at the archaeological site, digging up some of those skeletons and objects 20 years ago. One of them had worn the leader's helmet. After working with the archaeologist, he had been an assistant on several other similar projects. He was 45 years old, his name was Julio, and I asked him to walk down with me to the area under the bridge so he could show me where he himself had excavated. He stuck a pistol in the waistband of his pants and walked down to talk to me for a while. His mother watched from the window of their house. The house had no porch or balcony, and hardly any windows. It had been built by Julio. Down under the bridge there were televisions, conch shells, cans of pink paint. Julio had learned to draw at that project, and he'd worked at other archaeological projects as an assistant. Thousands of years ago, human bodies had been buried, and now cars and dogs were being buried. No one knows where the objects from the Paso del Indio wound up. For a while they were in plastic bags in a basement room of the Tren Urbano offices on Piñero Avenue. Now, nobody can find them.

One afternoon, out of the weeds and underbrush there appeared two teenagers, 13 and 14 years old. They asked me what I was doing there and they told me they were looking for a horse of theirs that had run off. I explained the history of the place. They already knew it, though they hadn't been born in 1992. They'd heard the history as horror stories people tell to children. For Heniel and Keniel, they

were stories about skeletons, Indians with rotten teeth, the burial of a woman with a fetus between her legs. Their fathers, uncles, brothers, or teachers had worked at the excavation. From that day on, every Saturday I would go to Paso del Indio and stand under the highway across from the house that Heniel and Keniel lived in. They would come down. They weren't ordinary boys. They both had an unusual masculine tenderness and the solidarity of children raised with freedom. I told what I knew; they, what they knew. They would act; I would film. We would watch the filmed sequences and start again.

The future and past is superstition, and all these things have equal weight: bureaucratic hassles, the hallucinogenic tea made from *Brugmansia versicolor*, the pistol in the pants, the indigenous people's cosmology, air conditioning turned up full blast, reproductions, the bureaucratic straitjacket, the beautiful drugged visions of the humanist archaeologists who were young in 1969, and the beautiful visions of drugged first people who are young in our reconstructed memory. All these things live together, we drink them all down in a single swallow, they exist not in one past or another, but all in the same present and memory.

I carry all this with me along with a camera to walk with a man who learned to draw by exhuming skeletons and who now carries a pistol to walk under the bridge. I walk behind him, a woman with a camera, standing every Saturday for two months under a bridge. The lookouts on the corner say they protect me, and from a distance the boss man oversees the car theft around the corner. When Heniel and Keniel arrive, we take everything apart and put it back together again. Sometimes Heniel gives the orders, sometimes I do. The three of us improvise. We don't talk to each other as teacher-student or mother-son. The relationship is strange, undefined.

I have a camera in my hands; I am carrying the ritual object. What do we call everything that happens before an image appears? What discipline is this? Who is the person possessed?

2. The landholder's domain; the maroon forest

The forest of the maroon [from cimarrón: runaway slave] was thus the first obstacle the slave opposed to the transparency of the planter. There is no clear path, no way forward in this density.

—Édouard Glissant, “The Known, The Uncertain”

This is a brief story about seeing and not-seeing. Before being able to create an image, we have to be able to see. We have not always been able to see. The landholder sees the land as a space of dominion, as his *domain*; the maroon, or runaway slave, sees a thick forest that offers freedom or danger. Darkness, opacity, noise as opposed to clarity, brightness, control.

The aerial view is the preferred representational mode of the US Navy, which for 60 years bombed the island of Vieques, just off Puerto Rico and belonging to it. Over those 60 years, the Navy produced hundreds of aerial images, and blocked the public's view from other places on the island.

If language is not to be believed but rather to impose an order, then the visible, like language, establishes an order, determines what it is possible to think and feel about the present and future. The United States Navy's photography department produced images of daily life on the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base and Vieques, aerial images of the entire eastern coast of Vieques, and other images that, rather than portraying a group of persons or a geography, portrayed the ideology of rational domination of the Caribbean and demonstrated a series of technologies of the visible, the “seeable.” Training us to see our geography through that lens is also part of our preparation for war. This visual order organizes what it is possible to think about our territory; it puts us in the category of military ruin, when it might otherwise be coast, secret society, cave, or a thousand other forms and ideas. The camera, the lens, the position of the subject, the darkness or brightness of an image, its depth of field—all these things are part of the grammar, the order. When we confront that order, whose most representative construction today might be the

camera-drone, we need something more than analysis, description, or interpretation. The task requires us to generate a postmilitary practice that breaks with this visual order, that structures not just what can or cannot be seen, but the positions from which the practice is carried out, who and what undergoes it, how observations are made, and with what.

The name the Navy gave this archive is 1975 Drone. Roosevelt Roads had an R&D program for drones as early as the 1940s, when the base was inaugurated. Not long ago I learned to develop film manually. It took me a couple of hours to shoot, rewind three times, and develop my three-minute film. The military photographers would climb into small planes, film with infrared film, develop it, and project it, all within an almost incredibly short time. This allowed them to calculate their bombing targets. I won't say the activity was wholesome, but those guys were good at what they did. Military photography developed its methods from the air. Journalism remained at ground level until after the Vietnam War. The Navy enjoyed its aerial viewpoint so much that it used it for everything, even for commemorating the troops. On the base at Ceiba, the best place for observing footage of the bombardments was at the bar in the general's house, with a whiskey in your hand; it was the most private entertainment space.

In 2000, during the civil disobedience and occupation of the Vieques bombing ranges, Governor Rosselló created a special commission to assess the environmental damage and violations of human rights on Vieques. The admiral in charge of Roosevelt Roads offered to take the Commission on a helicopter ride to inspect the firing range. Riding in this helicopter were Archbishop González Nieves, then-Secretary of State Norma Burgos, a couple of other people, and a news cameraman. As they were flying over the firing range and the admiral's self-assured voice was explaining what they were seeing, the cameraman was filming Norma and the archbishop looking out the window at the range.



Drone, archival image from the US Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, 1975

The admiral looks at the firing range from the position he has always looked at it. *Nothing new, here I am above the bombing range; you see, it's the same as always.* The archbishop and secretary of state are visibly affected by a landscape and a point of view that had until now been kept hidden from them. For the first time, they can look out the window of the helicopter and see what the Navy has seen for 60 years. The camera watches them; it's there to document that first moment of seeing. The archbishop and secretary of state are aware that they're being looked at while looking. The admiral is busy narrating the scene. The camera catches the moment when, despite the admiral's steady voice, the archbishop and Norma begin to weep.

The military view, and the reproduction of this view in its transparency, from the air, is a view of domination. Against this view we have the forest, those new forests of gumbo-limbo trees, African tulip trees, vines, ornamental ferns, and coconut palms that grow on top of toxic spills and are inhabited by iguanas, frogs, packs of abandoned dogs, and screeching crickets and cicadas. The transparency is the master's. The forest is the maroon's. To see the future of the place, rather than the ruin of the military past, one must look from ground level, let the forest grow back, block the



Vieques Riot, archival image, Camp García, US Naval Base in Vieques, Puerto Rico, 2001

transparency, collapse, misunderstand, constantly change position, listen to the noise without trying to hear the signal.

This is a photograph taken by the Navy in Vieques. The name the Navy gave this archive is “Vieques Riot.” It’s an image taken from the ground with an automatic camera. Taking pictures from the ground forces the photographer to stand before, look straight at, the demonstrators. From down here, they dominate neither the terrain nor the bodies that pass jubilantly before their cameras, posing, their very presence a threat. When the military view is forced to come down to ground level, its response is always to cut all the trees’ heads off. The image is horizontal, the scale is human. One thing is clear from this image: here, there is no domination.

3. Almost-film

One of the best-known stories of almost-films is about the one Maya Deren began filming in Haiti on the movement and ritual dance of Vodou. It’s a fable about failure as the only ethical possibility. Although she eventually filmed hundreds of rolls of 16 mm film, she never edited the result. Deren’s proposal to the Guggenheim

Foundation involved, among other things, a film about the formal relationship between ritual dance in Vodou and the structure of children's games. She had learned something about Haitian culture from an affair she'd had with Gregory Bateson. Bateson, a well-known anthropologist who had done ethnographic work on ritual dance in Bali, was married. The fellowship granted, the two of them planned to go to Haiti together, but the day before their flight, Bateson backed out and broke off the relationship with Deren.

She went alone. She perceived the Vodou rituals as a total mythological and aesthetic system—it was impossible, she believed, to separate dance from belief, trance and possession from objects and/or rhythm without doing violence to them when represented. All this led to her abandoning the idea of making the film. Several years later, in New York, she wrote a book, *Divine Horsemen*, explaining her reasons, and she narrated in detail her experience as an initiate in Vodou.

She explains the transformation of her idea about the project in this way:

It was this order of awareness which made it impossible for me to execute the artwork I had intended. It became clear to me that Haitian dancing was not, in itself, a dance form, but part of a larger form, the mythological ritual. And the respect for formal integrity that makes it impossible for me to consider Cezanne's apple as an apple rather than as a Cezanne made it equally impossible, in Haiti, to ignore the total integrity of cultural form...³

Deren identifies with the practitioners of the dance, with their level of attention to the objects, the movements, the possibilities for transformation, the therapeutic value, the metaphysical thought in the form of the ritual, the *loas*, and the trance. It is the narrative of a new initiate and, I think, it's also the narrative of a lover.

A statement of principles

By Maya Deren

First published in *Film Culture* 22/23 (1961): 161–162. Maya Deren wrote this text as a retrospective statement on her body of work, which became highly influential for filmmakers and film theorists throughout the 1960s and 70s.



Maya Deren (still), *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943)

My films are for everyone.¹

I include myself, for I believe that I am a part of, not apart from humanity; that nothing I may feel, think, perceive, experience, despise, desire, or despair of is really unknowable to any other human.

I speak of human as a principle, not in the singular nor in the plural.

I reject the accountant mentality which could dismember such a complete

miracle in order to apply to it the simple arithmetic of statistics—which would reduce this principle to parts, to power pluralities and status singularities, as if human were an animal or a machine whose meaning was either a function of human's size and number—or as if human were a collector's item prized for its singular rarity—I reject also that inversion of democracy which is detachment, that detachment which is expressed in the formula of equal but separate opinions—the vicious snobbery which tolerates and even welcomes the distinctions and divisions of differences, the superficial equality which stalemates and arrests the discovery and development of unity.

I believe that, in every person, there is an area which speaks and hears in the poetic idiom ... something in every person which can still sing in the desert when the throat is almost too dry for speaking.

To insist on this capacity in all people, to address my films to this—that, to me, is the true democracy...

I feel that no one has the right to deny this within themselves, nor does anyone have the right to accept such self-debasement in another under the guise of democratic privilege.

My films might be called metaphysical, referring to their thematic content. It has required millenniums of torturous evolution for nature to produce the intricate miracle which is human's mind. It is this which distinguishes human from all other living creatures, for human not only reacts to matter but can mediate upon its meaning. This metaphysical action of the mind has as much reality and importance as the material and physical activities of human body. My films are concerned with meanings—ideas and concepts—not with matter.

My films might be called poetic, referring to the attitude towards these meanings. If philosophy is concerned with understanding the meaning of reality, then poetry—and art in general—is a celebration, a singing of values and meanings. I refer also to the structure of the films—a logic of ideas and qualities, rather than causes and events.

My films might be called choreographic, referring to the design and stylization of movement which confers ritual dimension upon functional motion—just as simple speech is made into song when affirmation of intensification on a higher level is intended.

My films might be called experimental, referring to the use of the medium itself.

In these films, the camera is not an observant, recording eye in the customary fashion. The full dynamics and expressive potentials of the total medium are

ardently dedicated to creating the most accurate metaphor for the meaning.

In setting out to communicate principles, rather than to relay particulars, and in creating a metaphor that is true to the idea rather than to the history of experience of any one of several individuals, I am addressing myself not to any particular group but to a special area and definite faculty in every person—to that part of us which creates myths, invents divinities, and ponders, for no practical purpose whatsoever, on the nature of things.

But humans have many aspects—people are many-faceted beings—not monotonous, one-dimensional creatures. They have many possibilities, many truths. The question is not, or should not be, whether a person is tough or tender, but which truth is important at any given time.

This afternoon, in the supermarket, the important truth was the practical one; in the subway the important truth was, perhaps, toughness; while later, with the children, it was tenderness.

Tonight the important truth is the poetic one.

This is an area where few people spend much time, and in which no one can spend all of their time. But it is this, which is the area of art, which makes us human, and without which, we are, at best, intelligent beasts.

I am not greedy. I do not seek to possess the major portion of your days.

I am content if, on those rare occasions whose truth can be stated only by poetry, you will, perhaps, recall an image, even only the aura of my films.

And what more could I possibly ask, as an artist, than that your most precious visions, however rare, assume, sometimes, the forms of my images.

BLACK-BLANC-BEUR

October 10, 2006 / World Cup

Script for Situation video created in collaboration with John Lucas

BLACK-BLANC-BEUR

Something is there before us that is neither the living person himself nor any sort of reality, neither the same as the one who is alive, nor another.

What is there is the absolute calm of what has found its place. (Maurice Blanchot)



Every day I think about where I came from and I am still proud to be who I am ... (Zinedine Zidane)

Big Algerian shit, dirty terrorist, nigger. (Accounts of lip readers responding to the transcript of the World Cup.)

Perhaps the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word. (Ralph Ellison)



The Algerian men, for their part, are a target of criticism for their European comrades.

Arise directly to the level of tragedy.

Notice too, illustrations of this kind of racial prejudice can be multiplied indefinitely.

Clearly, the Algerians who, in view of the intensity of the repression and the frenzied character of the oppression, thought they could answer the blows received without any serious problem of conscience. (Frantz Fanon)

BLACK-BLANC-BEUR



And there is no (Black) who has not felt, briefly or for long periods, with anguish sharp or dull, in varying degrees and to varying effect, simple, naked, and unanswerable hatred; who has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter in a day, to violate, out of motives of the cruelest vengeance ... to break the bodies of all white people and bring them low, as low as the dust into which he himself has been and is being trampled; no black who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment ... yet the adjustment must be made—rather it must be attempted. (James Baldwin)



Do you think two minutes from the end of a World Cup final, two minutes from the end of my career, I wanted to do that? (Zinedine Zidane)

Each decision gave rise to the same hesitations, produced the same despair.

No one is free.

For all that he is, people will say he remains for us an Arab. “You can’t get away from nature.” (Frantz Fanon)

BLACK-BLANC-BEUR

Big Algerian shit, dirty terrorist. (Accounts of lip readers responding to the transcript of the World Cup.)

Let him do his spite: My services which I have done ... Shall out-tongue his complaints. (William Shakespeare)



When such things happen, he must grit his teeth, walk away a few steps, elude the passerby who draws attention to him, who gives other passersby the desire either to follow the example or to come to his defense. (Franz Fanon)

Big Algerian shit, dirty terrorist, nigger. (Accounts of lip readers responding to the transcript of the World Cup.)

That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of human cruelty that rages to destroy it, knows ... something about himself and human life that no school on earth—and indeed, no church—can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable.

This is because, in order to save his life, he is forced to look beneath appearances, to take nothing for granted, to hear the meaning behind the words.

We hear, then we remember. (James Baldwin)

The state of emergency is also always a state of emergence. (Homi Bhabha)



BLACK-BLANC-BEUR

But at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution ... (Frederick Douglass)



What we have here is not the bringing to light of a character known and frequented a thousand times in the imagination or in stories.

It is the White Man who creates the black man. But it is the black man who creates.

This thing was there, we grasped it in the living motion. (Maurice Blanchot)

What he said "touched the deepest part of me." (Zinedine Zidane)



The rebuttal assumes an original form.

This endless struggle to achieve and reveal and confirm a human identity, human authority, contains, for all its horror, something very beautiful. (James Baldwin)



AGAINST ORDINARY LANGUAGE: THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY

Kathy Acker

Preface Diary

I have now been bodybuilding for ten years, seriously for almost five years.

During the past few years, I have been trying to write about bodybuilding.

Having failed time and time again, upon being offered the opportunity to write this essay, I made the following plan: I would attend the gym as usual. Immediately after each workout, I would describe all I had just experienced, thought and done. Such diary descriptions would provide the raw material.

After each workout, I forgot to write. Repeatedly. I...some part of me... the part of the 'I' who bodybuilds... was rejecting language, any verbal description of the processes of bodybuilding.

I shall begin describing, writing about bodybuilding in the only way that I can: I shall begin by analyzing this rejection of ordinary or verbal

language. What is the picture of the antagonism between bodybuilding and verbal language?

A Language Which is Speechless

Imagine that you are in a foreign country. Since you are going to be in this place for some time, you are trying to learn the language. At the point of commencing to learn the new language, just before having started to understand anything, you begin forgetting your own. Within strangeness, you find yourself without a language.

It is here, in this geography of no language, this negative space, that I can start to describe bodybuilding. For I am describing that which rejects language.

Elias Canetti, who grew up within a multitude of spoken languages, began his autobiography by recounting a memory. In this, his earliest remembrance, the loss of language is threatened: "My earliest memory is dipped in red. I come out of a door on the arm of a maid, the door in front of me is red, and to the left a staircase goes down, equally red..." A smiling man walks up to the child; the child, upon request, sticks out his tongue whereupon the man flips open a jackknife and holds the sharp blade against the red tongue.

"...He says: 'Now we'll cut off his tongue.'"

At the last moment, the man pulls the knife back.

According to memory, this sequence happens every day. "That's how the day starts," Canetti adds, "and it happens very often."¹

I am in the gym every three out of four days. What happens there? What does language in that place look like?

According to cliché, athletes are stupid. Meaning: they are inarticulate. The spoken language of bodybuilders makes this cliché real. The verbal language in the gym is minimal and almost senseless, reduced to numbers and a few nouns. "Sets", "squats", "reps",... The only verbs are "do" or "fail" adjectives and adverbs no longer exist; sentences, if they are at all, are simple.

This spoken language is kin to the "language games" Wittgenstein proposes in his *The Brown Book*.²

In a gym, verbal language or language whose purpose is meaning occurs, if at all, only at the edge of its becoming lost.

But when I am in the gym, my experience is that I am immersed in a complex and rich world.

What actually takes place when I bodybuild?

The crossing of the threshold from the world defined by verbal language into the gym in which the outside world is not allowed (and all of its languages) (in this sense, the gym is sacred) takes several minutes. What happens during these minutes is that I forget. Masses of swirling thought, verbalized insofar as I am conscious of them, disappear as mind or thought begins to focus.

In order to analyze this focusing, I must first describe bodybuilding in terms of intentionality.

Bodybuilding is a process, perhaps a sport, by which a person shapes her or his own body. This shaping is always related to the growth of muscular mass.

During aerobic and circuit training, the heart and lungs are exercised. But muscles will grow only if they are, not exercised or moved, but actually broken down. The general law behind bodybuilding is that muscle, if broken down in a controlled fashion and then provided with the proper growth factors such as nutrients and rest, will grow back larger than before.

In order to break down specific areas of muscles, whatever areas one wants to enlarge, it is necessary to work these areas in isolation up to failure.

Bodybuilding can be seen to be about nothing but *failure*. A bodybuilder is always working around failure. Either I work an isolated muscle mass, for instance one of the tricep heads, up to failure. In order to do this, I exert the muscle group almost until the point that it can no longer move.

But if I work the same muscle group to the point that it can no longer move, I must move it through failure. I am then doing what are named "negative reps", working the muscle group beyond its power to move. Here is the second method of working with failure.

Whatever way I chose, I always want to work my muscle, muscular group, until it can no longer move: I want to fail. As soon as I can accomplish a certain task, so much weight for so many reps during a certain time span, I must always increase one aspect of this equation, weights reps or intensity, so that I can again come to failure.

I want to break muscle so that it can grow back larger, but I do not want to destroy muscle so that growth is prevented. In order to avoid injury, I

first warm up the muscular group, then carefully bring it up to failure. I do this by working the muscular group through a calculated number of sets during a calculated time span. If I tried immediately to bring a muscle group up to failure by lifting the heaviest weight I could handle, I might injure myself.

I want to shock my body into growth; I do not want to hurt it.

Therefore, in bodybuilding, *failure* is always connected to counting. I calculate which weight to use; I then count off how many times I lift that weight and the seconds between each lift. This is how I control the intensity of my workout.

Intensity times movement of maximum weight equals muscular destruction (muscular growth).

Is the equation between destruction and growth also a formula for art?

Bodybuilding is about failure because bodybuilding, body growth and shaping, occurs in the face of the material, of the body's inexorable movement toward its final failure, toward death.

To break down a muscle group, I want to make that group work up to, even beyond, capacity. To do this, it helps and even is necessary to visualize the part of the body that is involved. Mind or thought, then, while bodybuilding, is always focused on number or counting and often on precise visualizations.

Certain bodybuilders have said that bodybuilding is a form of meditation.

What do I do when I bodybuild? I visualize and I count. I estimate weight; I count sets; I count repetitions; I count seconds between repetitions; I count time, seconds or minutes, between sets: From the beginning to the end of each workout, in order to maintain intensity, I must continually count.

For this reason, a bodybuilder's language is reduced to a minimal, even a closed, set of nouns and to numerical repetition, to one of the simplest of language games.

Let us name this language game, *the language of the body*.

The Richness Of The Language Of The Body

In order to examine such a language, a language game which resists ordinary language, through the lens of ordinary language or language

whose tendency is to generate syntax or to make meanings proliferate, I must use an indirect route.

In another of his books, Elias Canetti begins talking from and about that geography that is without verbal language:

A marvelously luminous, viscid substance is left behind in me, defying words...

A dream: a man who unlearns the world's languages until nowhere on earth does he understand what people are saying.³

Being in Marrakesh is Canetti's dream made actual. There are languages here, he says, but I understand none of them. The closer I am moving toward foreignness, into strangeness, toward understanding foreignness and strangeness, the more I am losing my own language. The small loss of language occurs when I journey to and into my own body. Is my body a foreign land to me? What is this picture of "my body" and "I"? For years, I said in the beginning of this essay, I have wanted to describe bodybuilding; whenever I tried to do so, ordinary language fled from me.

"Man," Heidegger says, "is the strangest."⁴ Why? Because everywhere he or she belongs to being or to strangeness or chaos, and yet everywhere he or she attempts to carve a path through chaos:

Everywhere man makes himself a path; he ventures into all realms of the essent, of the overpowering power, and in so doing he is flung out of all paths.⁵

The physical or material, that which is, is constantly and unpredictably changing: it is chaotic. This chaos twines around death. For it is death that rejects all of our paths, all of our meanings.

Whenever anyone bodybuilds, he or she is always trying to understand and control the physical in the face of this death. No wonder bodybuilding is centered around failure.

The antithesis between meaning and essence has often been noted. Wittgenstein at the end of the *Tractatus*:

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen—in it no values exist, and if they did, they'd have no value.

For all that happens and is the case is accidental.⁶

If ordinary language or meanings lie outside essence, what is the position of that language game which I have named *the language of the body*? For bodybuilding (a language of the body) rejects ordinary language and yet itself constitutes a language, a method for understanding and controlling the physical which in this case is also the self.

I can now directly talk about bodybuilding. (As if speech is ever direct.)

The language game named *the language of the body* is not arbitrary. When a bodybuilder is counting, he or she is counting his or her own breath.

Canetti speaks of the beggars of Marrakesh who possess a similar and even simpler language game: they repeat the name of God.

In ordinary language, meaning is contextual. Whereas the cry of the beggar means nothing other than what it is; in the cry of the beggar, the impossible (as the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and Heidegger see it) occurs in that meaning and breath become one.

Here is the language of the body; here, perhaps, is the reason why bodybuilders experience bodybuilding as a form of meditation.

"I understood the seduction there is in a life that reduces everything to the simplest kind of repetition,"⁷ Canetti says. A life in which meaning and essence no longer oppose each other. A life of meditation.

"I understood what those blind beggars really are: the saints of repetition..."⁸

The Repetition Of The One: The Glimpse Into Chaos Or Essence

I am in the gym. I am beginning to work out. I either say the name "bench press", then walk over to it, or simply walk over to it. Then, I might picture the number of my first weight; I probably, since I usually begin with the same warm-up weight, just place the appropriate weights on the bar. Lifting this bar off its rests, then down to my lower chest, I count "1". I am visualizing this bar, making sure it touches my chest at the right spot, placing it back on its rests. "2". I repeat the same exact motions. "3"... After twelve repetitions, I count off thirty seconds while increasing my weights. "1".. The identical process begins again only this time I finish at "10"... All these repetitions end only when I finish my work-out.

On counting: Each number equals one inhalation and one exhalation. If I stop my counting or in any other way lose focus, I risk dropping or otherwise mishandling a weight and so damaging my body.

In this world of the continual repetition of a minimal number of elements, in this aural labyrinth, it is easy to lose one's way. When all is repetition rather than the production of meaning, every path resembles every other path.

Every day, in the gym, I repeat the same controlled gestures with the same weights, the same reps,... The same breath patterns. But now and then, wandering within the labyrinths of my body, I come upon something. Something I can know because knowledge depends on difference. An unexpected event. For though I am only repeating certain gestures during certain time spans, my body, being material, is never the same; my body is controlled by change and by chance.

For instance, yesterday, I worked chest. Usually I easily benchpress the bar plus sixty pounds for six reps. Yesterday, unexpectedly, I barely managed to lift this weight at the sixth rep. I looked for a reason. Sleep? Diet? Both were usual. Emotional or work stress? No more than usual. The weather? Not good enough. My unexpected failure at the sixth rep was allowing me to see, as if through a window, not to any outside, but inside my own body, to its workings. I was being permitted to glimpse the laws that control my body, those of change or chance, laws that are barely, if at all, knowable.

By trying to control, to shape, my body through the calculated tools and methods of bodybuilding, and time and again, in following these methods, failing to do so, I am able to meet that which cannot be finally controlled and known: the body.

In this meeting lies the fascination, if not the purpose, of bodybuilding. To come face to face with chaos, with my own failure or a form of death.

Canetti describes the architecture of a typical house in the geographical labyrinth of Marrakesh. The house's insides are cool, dark. Few, if any, windows look out into the street. For the entire construction of this house, windows, etc., is directed inward, to the central courtyard where only openness to the sun exists.

Such an architecture is a mirror of the body: When I reduce verbal language to minimal meaning, to repetition, I close the body's outer windows. Meaning approaches breath as I bodybuild, as I begin to move

through the body's labyrinths, to meet, if only for a second, that which my consciousness ordinarily cannot see. Heidegger: "The being-there of historical man means: to be posited as the breach into which the preponderant power of being bursts in its appearing, in order that this breach itself should shatter against being."⁹

In our culture, we simultaneously fetishize and disdain the athlete, a worker in the body. For we still live under the sign of Descartes. This sign is also the sign of patriarchy. As long as we continue to regard the body, that which is subject to change, chance, and death, as disgusting and inimical, so long shall we continue to regard our own selves as dangerous others.

Notes

1. Elias Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1979, p.5.
2. Here and throughout the rest of this article, whenever I use the phrase "language game", I am referring to Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of language games in *The Brown Book*, (Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960).
3. Elias Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1978, p.23.
4. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. 125. By "man", Heidegger means "human".
5. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972, p. 145.
7. Canetti, *The Voices of Marrakesh*, p. 25.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
9. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 137.

Life Programming

Florin Flueraş

(2018)

Some of Sura's lines are based on Alina Popa's notes.

Meeting 1

Or: Ok, here we are, good. This should be a short meeting. We finished the practical stuff. We didn't really decide if it's *Life Programming* or *Skete*. *Skete* implies a minimal community, and we will be one, an indirect one because we're isolated, developing individually our own practices and concepts about how to live, our own religions in a way— we're all experimenting with forms of life, so this is the indirect connection between us. But yes, I know, some of you don't like these religious associations. We can stay with *Life Programming* for now.

Sura: I'm wondering if our new names that are based on this *Skete* idea, will really help us to depart from ourselves, and if this is desirable. If we return to our names when this is over anyway, why not work on our existing identities rather than creating new ones?

Xoius: You don't change your identity that easily, anyway, but I would like to use the new names, Sura.

Adonia: Mee too, Xoius.

O: Probably it doesn't matter that much, but the new ones are fun for a while, and we do all this also because we're bored with ourselves.

X: You three can speak Romanian when you want, I don't have to understand everything.

O: No, it's ok, this will be published in English, so...

A: The recording is annoying, but yeah, I know, we need it for the text. Someone will have to correct our English.

O: I prefer to keep our bad English. Let's start this. You have your tents and cabins locations... Sura, you're the only one that has some signal at your place. Don't forget to send your friend everyday a message about your situation.

A: This is madness. We should abandon everything and take care of her. I really don't like this, someone should stay with you, Sura, I can do it. Actually I'm not sure why you're here, you should be in medical care.

S: I'm here because I'm fed up with people that are telling me what I should do. You don't know better than me where I should be. Last time when we went together to the hospital, I barely escaped, more dead than alive.

A: Sorry but this attitude seems a bit irrational, medieval.

S: If there is no medical solution for my problem, but there are some people that "miraculously" healed doing "crazy" things, like what we want to do here, changing their forms of life, going for "big medicine". If people

healed in these ways, but not on the path that you, my benevolent friends, aggressively push me on, what's rational then? In this situation, rational is to go "crazy" on these paths, and it's totally irrational to go to another doctor, to hear again how hopeless my situation is. The irrational enforcing of a medical perspective is difficult to recognize. It seems like normality, common sense – she is sick, she should go to doctors, they know better. But this is not how the people in my situation healed. They healed by activating an inner feeling, a faith, a trust in their intuition and their process. I already told you, a research on radical remissions shows that "taking control of your health" and "following your intuition" are fundamental for "miraculous" healing, and this meant usually that the patients were running away from doctors, or the doctors abandoned them.

O: There are many cases of terminally ill people who just solved something psychologically (or spiritually) and they "miraculously" healed from something incurable. Epigenetics and psychoneuroimmunology are two new sciences that start to explore this, how the mental and emotional structures influence the immune system, determining things at cellular level. Of course this is no news for non western medicine. In the non western perspectives the symptoms and diseases are not just meaningless biochemical problems that can be solved chemically (drugs), not just unfortunate random accidents to get rid of, but they are lifestyle-related, they have a sense, and they can be seen as part of a healing that happens on many levels. Life programming and healing could be the same thing. From this perspective allopathic medicine is an aberration, disconnected from the current science, and from all the healing traditions.

A: Ok, I know that you three have these radical views. I hope you don't plan to use this project to force them on me, or even worse, on the world. Sura, you do whatever you want, of course. But I think you should really consider a treatment.

S: This is an indirect way to constantly tell me that my focus is wrong, that what I'm doing is not "treatment", that I must do something else. Unfortunately almost daily I have an inquisition about treatments and doctors that diminishes the possible, induces panic and distrust in myself, and sadness, because nobody understands. Stop this please, don't shit on my wings!

A: Wow, ok, but sorry, I cannot work on anything thinking that you're dying and I'm doing *Life Programming* in some woods near you. I just want to help, to stay with you.

S: I don't want people to mourn me already. This is exactly the attitude that I ran from. And the project makes sense therapeutically, from my experience and research, I'm convinced that my disease, and in general chronic diseases, are lifestyle related. So here I am, a form of life that has to be reconstructed.

X: This is enough. Sura, you don't have to justify yourself. Let's go find our places, before it gets dark.

O: Good, we meet here every Sunday, 4pm. Don't forget to bring your shopping lists.

X: I don't need anything, there are mushrooms, berries, beech nuts and plenty of other plants you can eat in the forest.

O: Sorry that we're laughing. Well, this is part of your process, I hope you don't feel that we are just on vacation compared to you.

X: Too bad that you don't use this opportunity, this stuff is great, and very healthy.

A: I prefer to have a better use of my time than foraging all day.

O: Ok, let's go. There are no tourists here, and the foresters are unlikely to pass by, but anyway they know about the project. Nobody will bother us, apart from ourselves.

Meeting 2

Xoius: I propose more silence for these meetings. The idea is to sit quietly, in meditation, or something like that, in the body, and talk only when we really feel a desire to say something, and more as sharing from our experience than as replying to others. Otherwise in discussions we lose our bodies, everything becomes mind games of defense and attack.

Sura: I have a new silence in me from these woods, I wouldn't like to spoil it with antagonistic discussions. Let's try the silence.

Or: Ok, let's start, silence!

(silence)

O: I restarted my *Second Body* practice this week. It's

about adding a second attention, a sensibility to the body, while doing whatever you're doing. For example, now my focus is on our talk, but I have a second layer of attention, a sensitivity to my movements, postures, forms. Sometimes it happens to get high just by doing this. It activates a sensitivity for other forms and bodies, for implicit levels of communication. It has nothing to do with those methods of reading or interpreting the body language. It's more like an affective immersion in the body and its sensitivity, than a rationalization of the body.

It is somehow similar to the prayer of the heart – the continuous praying of some monks, in their hearts, while doing their daily routines. Recently I also read about an experiment they made in which half of some hotel maids were encouraged to see their usual work as healthy exercising and the other half were let to do their work as usual. Just by changing the perspective, the meaning of what they did, the first ones got fitter and healthier.

(silence)

X: I try to radically change what I'm doing. I'm introducing more and more silence, fasting and a strict schedule. I really feel that I need this kind of discipline, otherwise I'm just lost in a dull complacency and I have an unbearable sensation of losing time in the worst possible way.

It's not easy to rule yourself, it's much easier to let you be framed by others. Yes, everybody hates rules, bosses, but somehow it's easier that way. When you lack these exterior constraints you automatically go for the

easiest, lowest activities. A constant effort is needed to escape this implicit tendency of melting your time and yourself. But it would be hypocritical to complain too much about the opportunity of disposing of your time and space. A better aim than freedom is the possibility and capacity of constructing your own frames and enabling constraints.

It is a lot of hubris to think that you are so strong that you don't need this. As the old saints were saying, you will be eaten alive by the devils quite fast if you put your hopes in yourself and your strength. It's better to cut that bullshit from the root. And try to let something else work, something exterior, like rules, programs.

(silence)

S: In performance, if you judge too much, are too fearful and try to correct every step, the quality of your presence drops, the flow, the process stops. When you insist you get tensed and some poor quality stuff is forced into existence, a heaviness and a too familiar creativity is put in charge – full of self and too little unself. The alternative is to behave like you intentionally want what happens, to enjoy your situation. If you follow your body and let things work by themselves new possibilities appear, and a strange sensitivity and coherence. You're doing the right thing at the right time in the right environment, like you're constantly lucky. You're in a flow, in flying mode.

The body really dislikes rules, discipline, anything imposed on it. When I correct my "incorrect back posture", a bigger stiffness appears and things get worse,

while if I accept, or even exaggerate my stiffness, a relaxation and a self adjusting of posture appear by itself. This is the same with every pain and symptom, with illness, negative states, bad moods and everything. I started to perform like I intend the unpleasant sensations and feelings. When I am agitated during the night, I am pretending this uncontrollable state is my will. I perform my states, I get out of bed and I let the restlessness take over. I am punching the air, I am raging like a wild animal.

(silence)

X: Illnesses are processes, states and situations of the body. The health problems are amplified because these processes are blocked, through drugs and other symptom oriented interventions and especially through diagnosis and fears. You assume that you and your doctor are smarter than your body and you start to judge it, interfere, correct, fix it.

(silence)

S: That's a bit too radical maybe. But indeed, I realized that I have never trusted my body and its responses. We are taught so by education. Fever needs to be kept at bay, symptoms have to be read by specialists, you don't own your body, it is like a stranger's coat you have to take care of and beware of it, look for signs, gather evidence. You are outside of your body, you analyse it scientifically but what does this means? It means you are placing it in the scripts written by strangers who are afraid of the wonder of reality and want to restrict its vastness to a few predictable scenarios.

(silence)

O: Compared to you, our life programming is just a meaningless game. I understand now why for Amazonian Wari, healthy people don't have a soul. For them the soul is instability, a power to metamorphose that you can have only by being forced by a disease or a similar event. We are lucky to have you around, it gives importance, dynamism and urgency to what we do. And lifestyle being so central in the new medicine, my life-forms research, alone in the forest, in my tent, can have healing potential, medical importance.

(silence)

O: In the first days I was trying to do a very minimal schedule, some light rules, a bit of discipline. I quickly realized that I cannot maintain the program, and I don't want to, it feels like a job. I lose the desire and the pleasure for doing what I do. And then, in a twisted way the program appears to be even more necessary, because, with the pleasure of doing things gone, discipline seems the only way. I keep saying that some constraints, some sort of a program are necessary, but I don't really like them when I try them, it feels disciplinary and auto-exploitative.

Ok, maybe without a schedule and some sort of discipline, I lose my time, or even myself. But how can I be so sure that this is the case, how can I know what is good or bad for me? I would not trust my judgements so much in these matters. Quite on the contrary, I can see them as the problem, because they institute a disciplinary judgemental environment, based on

preconceptions. A program diminishes the unknown. I'm in a process of unplanning. I went from planning my day to just intuitively doing practices. The perfect practice could be what you already do. You just have to be aware of that. And eventually from this acceptance the next practice appears naturally. This acceptance is a form of love.

I always had systems to guide myself. And I think everybody has, but they are usually implicit and transparent. The fact that we are all "programmed" was a revelation at some point in high-school. Since then I tried to consciously program myself. Those programs functioned as some sort of guides against which my decisions and actions were evaluated. Now with this practice-based approach the things are a bit reversed, there are just intentions, and practices that are growing around them, no master plan. I hope this unruling will work better because in the past I disturbed the implicit "programs" without managing to replace them with better explicit ones.

(silence)

Adonia: I tried to activate certain religious practices that can work in this frame. They are very important and precious to me, not just practices, I have doubts about bringing them here. An implicit equality between practices is suggested, but this is so not the case. The religious practices and traditions have a lot of accumulated wisdom. I'm not sure that in a short artistic project you can "create" smarter and more effective practices than those shaped in thousands of years. Art is superficial when it comes to this. Little jokes, a bit

of critique, cool, distant, cynical, uninvolved attitudes, nothing of substance. I'm quite annoyed by the project's intrusion in these zones. Art has nothing to say, it cannot even start to touch them.

(silence)

S: You can never live after the scripture if you are giving freedom to experience to be what it wants. Religion is scripted mysticism. Once it becomes rule – not metaphor, not allegory, not metonymy – but words with stable meaning, religion admonishes experience. When there is certainty about what is good to experience, repression proliferates, the psyche is diseased.

(silence)

S: I studied the so-called “miraculous healings”. And one thing that they had in common was a courage and boldness to go off track, to invent or bring something that was not admitted or tested as a cure before. This leap of faith seems to be essential, the courage of singularization. In true healing, as in art, you feel that you have to find your own practices and forms, your ways, new paths. If you take the challenge, the healing processes are like the good artistic ones – complex, paradoxical, counterintuitive and they often require leaps into the unknown. But they are more intense because you operate on your life.

(silence)

O: Without individualized practices you cannot think, you're trapped in the known, recycling old thoughts,

of your own or others. You need experiences that force you to think, and a good environment. In the past the mediums for these experiential explorations were philosophy and mysticism, today it's very difficult, but art seems to be the closest. Probably the old mystics and philosophers would be artists now. In the past philosophers had practices, they embodied their thinking, Diogenes lived in a barrel..., and there were the crazy saints, the stylites, the shaman tricksters and other very performative mystics. They were not inscribed in some structures, repeating some practices, they formed new structures and practices – a spirituality not as repetition of tradition but as exploration, formation, creation. Now artists are the ones that can invent practices and forms of life, even if they rarely do. But for us, being interested in creating and exploring our own practices, frames and perspectives, contemporary art can be a meta-perspective where perspectives are created and tested, a meta-home for all this exploration. At least this we want to simulate with all these *Artworlds* that we do, the *Clinic*, *Black Hyperbox*, *Unsorcery* and this *Life Programing* now.

(silence)

S: Yes, practice is crucial. My former disembodied thinking doesn't help now, it's a trap. Without a sort of embodiment and acting in the world, you're locked in your own mind with the sensation that you're already one with your thoughts. Daring minds and daring hearts could be two completely different things. The most daring minds can be completely conventional in terms of actions and behaviors. But when an awful event comes, you cannot separate your thinking from

your life anymore. Nor your art, if you keep doing it.
The heart is the only thing I have.

(silence)

Meeting 3

(silence)

Sura: I understood that my disease is not just a random biological catastrophe. It's a physiological actualization of emotional and behavioral patterns and complexes. It's like my body gives me a tangible reason for all my anxiety, worry, gloom and doom. A deep distrust in myself and a habit of pleasing, by hiding any negative feeling, in order to be accepted and "loved", are one of my patterns from childhood. And I have this negativity, the worst case scenario becomes an inevitable reality first in my mind and then, unfortunately, in my body and outside of it. Sometimes my entire being is pulled in a deep darkness. The fact that I know all this doesn't really help, these things act on a deeper level than my understanding. I hope I can do something before the disease finishes its thing. I don't say that I will heal on this path, this is very unlikely, a miracle is needed. What I am saying is that from what I read and what I feel, on this path at least I have a very slim chance, and I live as I like, and this is very important. I'm an artist, and I want to create my own path with all this.

(silence)

S: But, on the other hand, it's very possible that it doesn't matter what I'm doing. Everybody tells me that I have

to be strong, responsible, to fight. This is a fear based attitude and a lot of self-obsession. I don't have to anything. I'm fed up with this "fighting for my life". Maybe this is the problem, too much striving. Maybe I should just let go, ignore. But this is impossible, the self-preservation obsession kicks in from somewhere deeper than my access.

(silence)

Xoious: I went more radical with the rules, I want more control. The mystical obsession of surpassing or getting rid of the self is right, you need to get out of your own way if you really want to go somewhere. Otherwise you're trapped in yourself, your own prisoner. The enemy is yourself, and you cannot get out of yourself by yourself. This continuous submission to an external rule is a very effective form of alienation, of surpassing your own preferences, tastes... I even stopped to eat based on my desires.

(silence)

X: There is something strange that happened, twice. I had these crises in which something darkened my mind, I got crazy. Once I destroyed my tent and everything, I smashed, screamed, cried. The other time I wanted to leave the place, the project. I walked randomly, I met a shepherd and I drank with him until I lost consciousness. Anyways, after these crises things calmed down for a while, and I had new surges of energy for keeping my discipline and even to push it further. Maybe the crises are because I'm ungrounding myself in a bad way and I'm too rigid with these rules. On the other hand

it can be just that I'm too weak and too resistant to transformation.

(silence)

O: Maybe you can break the project's rules a bit, and come visit one of us, if this continues. Or just relax and break some of your rules. This is what I'm doing, I continue to unprogram myself. Rules are still yourself, you create or choose them, they're just another way to stay in your way, as you said. All this discipline is a strong ego intervention. My solution is to admit the impossibility and the futility of getting rid of myself. To embrace the self even more. The question is which self. The one that dreams, the unknown, the unself. We're already other, alien, we just have to tap into that.

(silence)

O: It's difficult to not know, to suspend the automatism of always knowing and correcting things, to eat from the tree of unknowledge. The mind automatically tries to solve the "problems" that are mainly its own creation. I started to develop a sort of trick. I formulate a clear intention and I admit that I don't know how to solve it. So I let something else act, I become a spectator to my "own" doing. I transfer my agency to the intention, and I trust it. It is a soft, indirect influence, from the background. In this suspension something unavailable to you can appear, something beyond your possibilities, something unknown. And the future intentions appear spontaneously from what you're doing, no program or rules needed. You never know what will be your path on that day.

You can access processes that are normally outside your reach. For instance, a couple of times I formulated the intention of having a near death experience and I followed, without intervening, how my vital processes, outside of my normal control, were slowing down. It's exciting and scary, it's very important to clearly formulate a NDE intention and not a death experience. But you can have this unknowing + intention approach with anything – sleeping, eating, walking...

(silence)

Adonia: I think it's difficult and sad to do these things alone. We're social, we advance much more together. This is not really a community. The things that we are after here happen in churches and temples where people come together... Or, yes, they happened also in ascetic environments, deserts, caves, in isolation. Anyway these things are really mysterious, not just the results of practices or some crazy disciplines but, as I said, an accumulation of many factors and a fine tuning that some established religions have come to have in thousands of years. So I still don't see the point in being "creative" with this. I just became very alienated in this project. It's a pointlessly harsh environment. Apart from frustration, and these not so interesting thoughts, all this just raised my anxiety. You listen to your bodies, your dreams, your intuitions, you all have these "processes". How do you know that they are not random or even delusional? I cannot trust any of these. Probably you delude yourself believing this stuff.

(silence)

S: Well, that's my problem too. I cannot fully trust my intuitions, dreams, body symptoms. It's almost impossible in our society. When simple people have a strong dream or intuition they think that God sent them a message and they follow it with passion. They believe, and they are right, because it works. That's why they can have miraculous healings. But we are too smart for this, and actually too stupid. Without working with belief, nothing can be moved, and I do not mean mountains. You become like a stone without any power of metamorphosis, without a soul.

(silence)

S: I had a long narrative visualisation in which I was constantly convinced by some friends that I'm a sheep, like them, even if I felt like a wolf. People tell me that they are afraid for me, but they are afraid for them too, that their perspectives are exposed and questioned, when someone leaves them behind. Some shamans speak about the necessity of creating fog around ourselves, because the perspectives of others reduce and fix us. That's why I'm here, I ran away. But maybe not far enough.

(silence)

X: I read about someone that treated her cancer in India with herbs and certain somatic practices. She came back and the people around were skeptical, and didn't consider "treatment" what she did. A deep doubt was affectively transmitted and the tumors reappeared. She had a near death experience and miraculously healed, and during the experience she understood how

1

a commonly shared perspective in your close environment can kill you. The predominant perspective in an environment acts at the cellular level, as epigenetics and psychoneuroimmunology shows.

We all have deep beliefs that are implicit in actions and decisions. Physicalism, materialism, scientism, skepticism, rationalism and “medicine is the Western religion”, I recently read somewhere. I know that some of you, at a declarative level, “believe” in something else. But I’m interested in the implicit beliefs that are reflected in what you do, or advise others to do, in difficult situations, when it matters.

(silence)

S: I realized that in my situation it happens that I need to stay as much as I can on the spiritual plane and navigate reality from there. And in this world, there are not so many people staying on this plane. For many, and for many of my friends, this is not the ground (a lofty ground!) and then conflict arises. Because perspectives can cut wings and you end up with a terrible diagnosis and going down. It’s important to discuss this because it is not easy to navigate from the only ground, the lofty ground, that can give you wings, hope and the power to live and overcome the physical trouble every day. All the world around, the general perspective, cuts any hope for me. This is the process, the knowledge to stay where my soul needs to, so that I can be more powerful than a bleak prognosis. But this seems more and more impossible among humans. And with the doctors even more so, I hate when they nullify the poetry of my body. “At first, I used to like people. Now I only like jaguars” hahaha...

(silence)

S: The body is real but what we think about it is fiction. Medical views are the fiction imposed on us by modernity and capitalism. This is a consensus fiction. How you regard the body, how you name, determines how you act upon it and also how it acts back. We are free, and the body actually calls for individual fictions, or for fictions that give it trust and freedom. Perspective creates reality. To change the standard perspective is almost impossible. It cannot be done mentally, it needs different practices – to practice ways to interact with the world that give back reality its multiplicity. We actually don't truly interact with the world anymore. That is because we know too well the practices that are possible, and so they will give back the same outcomes. The body is as alien as the world. And we have to embrace its strangeness. Especially when we need reality to be crazy, when we are ill with no chance at survival from the standard perspective. I don't want my reality normal. I need it off the hook.

(silence)

O: I read some new theories about perception. We are far from perceiving an objective reality, our seeing is more like an identification and confirmation of our semantic descriptions of what we believe is out there. There are no perceptions without abstract narratives in the background. An implicit encompassing description has to work at any time for a world to appear. A world is built around an implicit investment of faith. All reality is hyperstitional, the strange beliefs of Avila people are working in their everyday life as

our scientism-permeated reality works for us. When fictions are lived they become real.

Often when you're frustrated with how things are functioning and blame yourself or some circumstances, there is a problem with the abstractions that are framing what is possible to do and think. What's possible for you is determined by your beliefs. You cannot just change yourself or others because you cannot just change your beliefs. You need the right practices for this. But the practices that work for you are dependent on your beliefs. The best are at the edge of them. That means also that you cannot just pass your practices to others, because they should be based on their beliefs, not yours.

We cannot consciously believe in something anymore, everything is deconstructed, we are full of cynicism and critical thinking. What we can have maybe is a meta-faith, a belief in belief, in the power of faith, and in the necessity of this sort of investment.

(silence)

A: Sorry, maybe I'm ignorant, but it's very difficult for me to see how this is an art project. I mean concretely, how all this will be presented, what form it will take. We will have to have a sort of result, an exhibition in the end. I have no idea if I will be able to make something. I don't know how to begin, in my mind this is totally dissociated from art, it's more like the opposite. I know that these are not religious or spiritual practices, but they are pretty close, and my impression, at least it was, that for artists this is a no-go territory, they

cannot believe or accept something like this, because of intellectual and aesthetic reasons. An eventual interest in these things is just anthropological, or for making fun. Critical thinking did some damage in art, it trapped some people in a very negative, cynical, dry, impotent and sad place. And from there they see this kind of project as metaphysical in the sense of dubious, solipsistic, apolitical. I'm wondering why we are doing this in an artistic context. Why do we want this to be art?

(silence)

S: Nobody knows how art should be. You can have many ideas inside an artistic paradigm but the important artistic gestures seem to be those that push art in non art territories, extending what art is and could be through works that initially don't look, don't feel and don't behave like art. Art is like the jungle, it grows out of its own negation, Smithson said. One of the specifics of contemporary art is to transcend its specifics. So it's supposed to be suitable for someone with transcending impulses like us here. Yes we seem totally lost outside art, but this is good. It doesn't mean that we will do some revolutionary work, but at least some conditions are here.

(silence)

O: We're too serious and well meaning, art should be more twisted, performative, I would say if I start to judge, but these judgements are mostly coming from an implicit idea about how art should be, from the known, and we don't want that. A lot of times you can find

value exactly in what you judge as bad, if you insist on the "wrong".

And I prefer not to be concerned with the results, as I said, I just let the artistic intentions somewhere in the background. I don't know what form this process will take, but to do things that are already solved and packageable from the beginning would be very sad. It's exactly like Sura does with her disease, we have to trust the process. I know from experience that towards the end the process will find its form. The artwork is usually just a small trace of the art process. "My paintings are only the ashes of my art", Yves Klein said.

(silence)

X: A lot of performances that I see in museums are completely preprogrammed, formalized, mechanical, without much liveness left. Bodies become objects in these frames to conform to the image- and object-based tradition. I'm interested in the opposite, we as solidified patterns, beliefs, attitudes, habits, we as objects to become forms of life – from body as image, as representation, to body as affect – love body.

(silence)

S: What we do here is not art yet maybe, but it can become if I insert somewhere in the artworld some of the practices and behaviors that we develop here. In an art context they will interact with some implicit behaviors and conventions of art events, so this could be an interesting operation. But I agree that it's not so interesting to be too preoccupied with the end result,

the same with my disease.

(silence)

O: Performance is a myth-making medium, so just the simple gesture of doing this project produces something in the people's minds and in the world. Our idea in the Artworlds is that entities like *Life Programming*, can become "artworks as artworlds".

(silence)

S: Enough with the art talk, I want to go to my cabin to continue my jungle. I grew a jungle on my body to handle my symptoms. I am delegating the care for my body to an imaginary world. I have a volcano in my leg, a raging wild animal rising from the void in my lung, a rainforest amplifying my short breath, a wolf in my consciousness, a wild pig scuffing out the root node in my chest, a sloth calming the restlessness of my heart, a jaguar spirit coming to get me, to make me a free spirit, and I am flying over reality, jungled up, towards life or maybe towards death.

(silence)

Meeting 4

A: She's already a half hour late, I'm worried.

X: Maybe she's sleeping or she lost track of time, it happens to me sometimes here.

A: Who knows, with her disease anything can happen.
This project is crazy.

O: Or maybe she left. Let's go to her cabin.

The Uses of the Erotic

The Erotic as Power

AUDRE LORDE

Audre Lorde died in November, 1992. Audre Lorde was author of more than a dozen books of poetry and prose, recipient of national and international awards, and a founding member of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Her most recent poetry includes *Undersongs: Chosen Poems Old and New* (1992) and *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986); in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) she writes her own bio-mythography, and her recent essays and speeches can be found in *A Burst of Light* (1988) and *Sister Outsider* (1984), which includes the chapter reprinted here. Anti-ascetic in her demands that desire be made conscious and sensuality affirmed, Lorde responds in this 1978 essay to Second Wave Feminists' debates over whether or not pornography creates and maintains sexual oppression. By disentangling women's eroticism from its cultural misuse and calling

for a realization of the erotic as the most self-responsible source of women's power, Lorde, locating that power in women's acknowledgment of desire, blurs the boundaries between the erotic, on the one hand, and political, creative, and everyday activities, on the other. And in issuing her call to all women, regardless of their sexual identity, Lorde erases erotic differences between straight, bisexual, and lesbian desire in order to promote such desire as a creative force for revolutionary change.

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy

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for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within Western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence.

It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power.

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibility of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters.

But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our

strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.

It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society is to encourage excellence. But giving in to the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies.

This internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process. For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors brings us closest to that fullness.

The aim of each thing which we do is to make our lives and the lives of our children richer and more possible. Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision—a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.

Of course, women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex. And the lack of concern for the erotic root and satisfactions of our work is felt in our disaffection from so much of what we do. For instance, how often do we truly love our work even at its most difficult?

The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic

and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love. But this is tantamount to blinding a painter and then telling her to improve her work, and to enjoy the act of painting. It is not only next to impossible, it is also profoundly cruel.

As women, we need to examine the ways in which our world can be truly different. I am speaking here of the necessity for reassessing the quality of all the aspects of our lives and of our work, and of how we move toward and through them.

The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

There are frequent attempts to equate pornography and eroticism, two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual. Because of these attempts, it has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. “What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a meditating gunrunner?” In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation.

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an

incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic—the sensual—those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, “It feels right to me,” acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea.

That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*.

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin

to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constricted pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience.

We have been raised to fear the *yes* within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women.

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from

within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.

And yes, there is a hierarchy. There is a difference between painting a back fence and writing a poem, but only one of quantity. And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love.

This brings me to the last consideration of the erotic. To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a Kleenex. When we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse.

In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized. The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the European-American tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed erotic comings-together. These occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away, a pretense of calling them something else, whether a religion, a fit, mob violence, or even

playing doctor. And this misnaming of the need and the deed give rise to that distortion which results in pornography and obscenity—the abuse of feeling.

When we look away from the importance of the erotic in the development and sustenance of our power, or when we look away from ourselves as we satisfy our erotic needs in concert with others, we use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connection with our similarities and our differences. To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd.

The erotic cannot be felt secondhand. As a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has

often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.

But this erotic charge is not easily shared by women who continue to operate under an exclusively European-American male tradition. I know it was not available to me when I was trying to adapt my consciousness to this mode of living and sensation.

Only now, I find more and more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange. Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.

Am I OK with dying?

Willow in Snow

To the Tune of Yong Yu Le

Li Qingzhao 1084–ca.1155, Song Dynasty

The sunset, an incinerated scrap of gold,
the clouds darken as iron gates shut the moon behind.

You, who survived the war and disasters,
where are you? The fog rises, smudging the deep green

of willows, and the plum petals drop
like touchable notes flying off a flute. Do you still remember

how to be happy in springtime?
It's the Lantern Festival, the weather falsely pleasant—

perhaps we need a storm to snatch
us back into reality. Friends came with wine and poetry

in their splendid carriages, inviting me
to a banquet. I thanked them and chose to stay home.

I think of the time in Zhong Zhou,
during the Lantern Festival, girls wearing emerald circlets,

or the sumptuous headdresses braided with gold threads
called Willow in Snow. Now that I've aged

with face ravaged like this languished nation,
battered by the wind. My hair a strand of autumn frost.

I'm afraid to go to the night markets,
where the lanterns invent a dawn. It's better to hide

behind those heavy curtains, and listen
intently to strangers laughing, talking away the night.

Irekle Qoştar

Abstract: In a decaying post-digital world on the brink of ecological collapse somewhere in Northern Asia, a disillusioned sound designer embarks on a mysterious assignment to maintain speaker stations playing artificial bird sounds.

This was a *bad* neighborhood.

It smelled of damp plaster and stained mattresses—the acrid stench in nostrils that never really goes away. Samir cleared his throat and looked around. Breaking through the heavy, leaden clouds, the feeble light of early dawn exposed a cluster of run-down, dilapidated houses and narrow pavements strewn with varied trash and discarded bottles.

“Is there actually someone living there?” Samir stopped, habitually attuned to what seemed like absolute, almost tangible silence. It should have been a densely populated area, with maybe five or even *ten* souls scattered around every square kilometer. Somewhere in the rear of this ugly architectural maze, dishes rattled. “Of course, it’s just too early,” the listening apparatus wasn’t betraying him, at least for the moment—a brief respite. Samir sighed and continued his journey through the shadows; a scarcely audible cough echoed from somewhere above. A light flickered on in one of the nearby apartments: the remnants of what had once been a piece of noble ancient architecture were now vomiting a hideous structure made of artificial wood and metal, clinging, like the rest of the dwellings, to the building’s eroding facade.

Centuries ago (*or was it even earlier, before the GLOW?*), this district had been a city center. Perhaps the company’s extensive library held polyvinyl chloride discs (PVCs) with recordings made of its bustling streets, or even some silverprints that could showcase this neighborhood in its pre-decay glory. In his younger, more zealous days, Samir would surely have conducted proper ex-situ research before undertaking an assignment.

It didn’t really matter now.

The pungent smell slithered into his nasal cavity, through the nasopharynx, until Samir could practically taste its repulsive essence on the tip of his tongue. A tumbler of gin and tonic could’ve been handy now to wash the stench away, or at least a

beer. "But drinking at 8 a.m., on duty?" It took some effort to shove these thoughts aside. Samir reached for his backpack, unzipped it, and started searching for a water flask. In one clumsy movement, the contents spilled out: his working badge, a standard pack of replacement PVCs, a couple of transistors, a bunch of smaller radio-electronic components, a meticulously drawn map marked with a linear curve pattern formed by a dozen bold red dots, and, lastly, a corporate flask made from fine stainless steel.

Distracted, Samir picked up his badge and stared at it blankly. In his hand lay a square piece of thick cardboard, stamped with the company's name, IREKLE QOŞTAR LTD, at the top, and his name at the bottom: SAMIR FIRÜZÄ-ULI. A then-handsome young lad with lively, piercing black eyes and a cheeky smile gazed at him from a faded silverprint stapled to the center of the card. Shifting his eyes to his reflection on the shiny surface of the flask, Samir beheld a weary, aged human being with a few visible scars shining through his hairy chin—a battered, heavily wrinkled face that could really benefit from a few extra hours of sleep. He tried to replicate the smile from the silverprint, but the best result he got from this endeavor was a hideous, sarcastic grin. It felt as if this cheerful fella on the badge was somehow mocking Samir, serving as a reminder of the fact that his best days were long gone.

Samir despised this face, this badge, and this job. If there were still remnants of the pure awe he felt the moment he landed his *dream profession*, they were now buried deep beneath layers of exhaustion and self-loathing, seasoned with liters of cheap alcohol. (*TRY OUR LATEST OFFERING—EXQUISITE MELODIES OF ANCIENT NIGHTINGALES METICULOUSLY CRAFTED BY OUR TOP-TIER BIOPHONIC DESIGNERS, TAILORED EXPRESSLY FOR YOUR LIVING SPACE. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THESE ENCHANTING SOUNDS, A DELIGHTFUL REMEDY TO ALLEVIATE STRESS AND ANXIETY!*)

Back then, the *badge* version of Samir simply couldn't resist boasting to everyone about how working as a biophonic designer at the world's most innovative company in the field wasn't just amazing but also significant. If only the distorted reflection on stainless steel could retroactively enlighten this idealistic little brat to the fact that he would end up sculpting useless sandcastles for wealthy jerks while the world crumbled around them, crafting some grotesque decorations to stroke their egos. "Sugarcoating the bitter pill," as a person, once very important to him, had politely dubbed it.

It was another painful recollection—throughout all these years, he still felt like an abandoned child. Professor Aygöl Şamsiâ-kızı... a name familiar to every biophonic designer, and a true pioneer in the field. Decades ago, she had led a small group

of researchers who recreated the voices of over one hundred extinct bird species. This marked a foundational moment for the company, now a classic in the İREKLE QOŞTAR (IQ) catalog and an unattainable goal for Samir and his colleagues. Professor Şamsiâ-kızı was a living legend, whose influence extended far beyond both the academic realm and the company she co-founded. But she was also his mentor, guiding Samir through the intricacies of the profession, and perhaps even a friend—at least, that's what he thought back then. It goes without saying that the company lost a *valuable asset* when she decided to quit nearly two decades ago, seemingly without any proper reason, just vanishing from the radar. Samir knew the reason, though. There simply wasn't enough sugar in this world to mask its bitterness.



The company name, once draped in romanticism and nobility, now also seemed ludicrous: “Free Birds... Like if there were any real birds left...”

Samir had been just a little baby when the last of the insects met their demise. Before that, mammals and invertebrates were the lone survivors on this forsaken planet. It's not like humanity was *all* that mournful over the insects' vanishing act. In a radiocast Samir once tuned into, the host spun spine-chilling tales of colossal mosquito swarms assaulting humans nearly three centuries ago—just as the last of the birds took their final bow.

The feathered creatures were the initial departures, leaving an unfillable void in the planet's biosphere. Over the next couple of centuries, it was deserted by fish, followed by amphibians and reptiles. Of course, none of them vanished in the blink of an eye—they just lost the ability to reproduce at some point, and eventually, there just weren't any left.

Mammals, the last frontier of living species, were supposed to be next in line. A century ago, those attributing the decline in birth rates to species extinction were deemed radical thinkers. Now, it was just common knowledge. And it was hardly a drama—this world was simply exhausted, and now, at last, it was finally settling into its eternal sleep. The best humanity could manage was to play pretend, ignoring the inevitable, so the work of those like Samir was still considered valuable.

There were also other signs of impending doom. When the feathered ones had flown away forever, the first minor ITEMAs were officially recorded. Short for Intra-Terrestrial Electromagnetic Anomaly, it was a term the scientists of the past had used to describe a sequence of ephemeral yet intensely potent electromagnetic radiations of a then-unknown nature. Initially confined to rather small territories, no larger than a single square kilometer, these bursts of energy wreaked havoc on devices employing magnets in their construction: headphones, refrigerators, electric toothbrushes, credit cards, you name it. As the world hesitated with responses, the anomalies grew more powerful, expanding their sphere of influence until the arrival of GLOW, *the Global Wipeout*. The last and most formidable of anomalies—a sudden erasure of all digital data, rendering every storage unit and microprocessor useless. A brilliant, fleeting flash that annihilated centuries of knowledge acquisition, of what we, humans, arrogantly deemed *progress*. On the day of the GLOW our collective mind finally became spotless, and we were forced to embrace its eternal sunshine.

Taking a good gulp, Samir capped the flask and started cramming everything back into his backpack. He let his gaze rest on the map.

The assignment had felt a bit *off* from the get-go. There was an unmistakable tension in the voice and posture of the department director during the briefing. "Samir, this is our *special* client; don't you dare to mess it up," he said, nearly hissing, beads of sweat rolling down his face. When the director used the word "special," he usually meant obnoxiously rich, but this time, it didn't quite feel that way.

The job itself was undoubtedly weird: Samir was tasked with the full maintenance of twelve standalone speaker stations, arranged in a curved line spanning about five kilometers. The line of stations extended from what had once been, it seemed,

chestnut grove, through the city's slums, to its center. It looked like a path, or something leading the way, but for whom? Each speaker station he encountered appeared to be custom-built for this very specific use, maybe a decade ago. For starters, these boxes used bizarre radio components he had only seen in old books—nothing like the usual combo of two sine wave oscillators, a cheap resonant filter, and a ring modulator the company used to mimic the songs of robins, warblers, wood geons, and, of course, nightingales for the IQ standard package. (*ENHANCE YOUR OFFICE SPACE WITH OUR NEW BIRDSONG PACKAGE! WHEN INTEGRATED INTO OUR WORKING PLACES, THESE SOOTHING TONES WILL ENCOURAGE A BOOST IN DOPAMINE PRODUCTION, KYROCKETING YOUR EMPLOYEES' PRODUCTIVITY!*)

These* boxes utilized relays and tube transistors that he had never seen before, accompanied by something resembling Brownian noise generator. It was a delightful mélange of wires, solder, and radio components; pure chaos, orchestrated by someone's skillful hand. A bundle of PVCs wallowed in Samir's backpack, unopened: none of these weird boxes used standardized polyvinyl chloride disc player. In an instant, Samir recalled his university days when Professor Şamsiâ-zî had amused her audience with the tale of the technology's emergence, a story she presented as a testament to how our species was both obnoxiously arrogant and adorably sentimental. Unlike most pre-GLOW technologies, irretrievably lost because, evidently, the people of the past believed digitizing everything as a *brilliant* idea, the prototype of the modern PVC player lurked in the hands of a lesser-known media archaeologist in a half-abandoned museum somewhere in the Far West, the outskirts of civilization. It came along with a colossal collection of ancient electronic music. Surely, the person who curated his entire collection was considered an oddball among their contemporaries, who must have thought, "Why cling to these polyvinyl chloride discs when we digitized everything ages ago?"

For most IQ installations, maintenance was a breeze. Open the box, check the hardware, replace the disc, close until it clicks, voilà! On the contrary, these speaker stations required not only special attention but also a dash of patience. More importantly, their outcome wasn't anywhere near a *soothing tone*. It was a sharp shriek, followed by a sequence of muffled tapping and chirps—a desperate, piercing signal shot into the gray, indifferent skies. From old books on biophonic design, Samir vaguely recalled that this type of sound had something to do with flight calls, but he wasn't certain. Did it aid these majestic ancient creatures in migration or maintaining their flock? Was it a form of communication at all?

Who built these, and why?

The cold drizzle kicked in out of nowhere. Miniature droplets,

like secret agents, stealthily infiltrated the unfolded map, morphing its surface into a landscape of tiny lakes and rivers. The sickening stench intensified, clinging to the air. A few bold liquid invaders breached Samir's defenses, creeping down the nape of his neck, causing an involuntary shudder. "Definitely not just a beer. But only after the job's done." The last red mark lingered on the map, untouched, somewhere right there, in the center of this dampened labyrinth.

From the darkness of the alley, a sound emerged, so faint that only a trained ear would catch it. "This has to be the last one," Samir mumbled, moving toward the source.

There was something eerie in this part of the district, with only a handful of abandoned buildings scattered among heaps of refuse, fractured stone pathways, and murky puddles. Some of the pathways led to fenced-off areas, adorned with bent and rusted metal bars sticking out from the ground. This uncanny architecture evoked images of ancient penitentiaries, relics Samir had briefly seen in a book chronicling a long-gone world. Could they have encaged wrongdoers in the heart of the city, exposed for all to see? To a modern man like Samir, it seemed inconceivable, yet he had learned much about the cruelty of bygone societies from a handful of historical documents that endured into his time. However, not everything around seemed to adopt the same barbaric approach; there was something else. Beyond the fences, a number of structures displayed ancient moldings and mosaics, with most teetering on the brink of crumbling and barely recognizable, yet still beautiful. Most of them were symmetrical, featuring convoluted patterns of curling branches, depictions of various animals, both real and mythical, and, occasionally, inscriptions in an extinct language. Samir couldn't pinpoint the exact language, a fusion of Greek and Latin characters, and most inscriptions were too damaged for thorough analysis. Some of the depicted mythical creatures were quite amusing, especially those resembling oversized shorthair cats sporting grand wigs. As Samir navigated through, he encountered these wigged cats here and there; there was even a remarkably preserved monument featuring one of them, its lush mane adorned with a crown. This creature seemed to symbolize something important, yet the thought slipped away in the morning haze.

The source of the sound grew increasingly louder.

It was truly a testament to the skill of whoever crafted this speaker station. Even from a distance, it resembled a masterful orchestra performing a rhythmic medley of various whistles, clicks, and cascading melodies. Samir, no longer walking slowly, was almost sprinting toward the source, guided like a child eagerly led by his parents to a long-awaited moving silverprints session. The beautiful symphony emanated from a semi-ruined pavilion, its facade barely holding onto a weathered sign with

only three characters left: the first resembling an arc, possibly a mathematical symbol or a Greek letter, the second a Latin "T," and the third a mirror image of an "N." A distinct birdsong now echoed from within.

Samir pushed aside what remained of the door and entered. The room was dark, and the sole ray of light shining through a hole in the roof illuminated a small patch to the left of its center. There, atop a mound of moss and stones, rested a peculiar artefact, a structure made of twigs, grass, and other natural materials. Resembling a straw hat flipped backward by someone's will, the artefact, like the scene in general, defied belief. Perched on the edge of this structure was the source of the captivating sound—a tiny living creature that could fit in the palm of his hand. Its lively, shiny eyes resembled two drops of black resin, and below them, an oblong anatomical structure caused the term *beak* to flash in Samir's mind. The creature's head moved quickly from side to side, displaying more curiosity than fear. Covered in multicolored plumage, predominantly varying shades of brown with a bright patch of blue feathers below *the beak*, its small body was supported by two fragile-looking legs. Another creature, similar but lacking the blue collar, emerged from behind, pausing briefly before joining the first at the edge of the straw construction. Observing a third character, likely the youngest, nestled within the structure, Samir discerned the artefact's purpose—a cozy sanctuary for its tiny inhabitants, two proud parents and their fledgling... How was that even possible?

To Samir's left, a standard IQ speaker box was mounted on the wall. Trying to be as discreet as possible, he unlocked it with a soft click. It was a decoy without any wires or radio components, housing only a small jar containing a few dozen oval-shaped capsules, seemingly organic. A note attached to the box read, "IF it happens, give them two capsules per week. The stuff is really nutritious, and they will know how to share it. Good luck, A.Ş."

The trio of feathers resumed their singing. They performed one piece after another with mastery, pausing briefly only to erupt into a new series of sounds. It was the new music of the waking world—vigorous and enchanting, something unheard by any living human yet. It was a source of pure joy.

Samir stood there, unable to move, listening intently. His fatigued face illuminated with a bright, genuine smile, finally resembling the young lad depicted on the badge. The rain ceased, and a spring breeze carried the scent of fresh grass, dispelling the sour stench of the slums. The clouds slowly parted, making way for the ascending sun.

A new day was dawning.

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BIO

Stas Shārifulla, aka HMOT, is a Basel-based musician, researcher and artist working with sound and decoloniality. Born in East Siberia, with Bashqort roots, Stas is studying the political potential of various musical and listening practices through live performances, lectures, interventions and sound installations focused on the issues of extractivism, collective memory and identity-based oppression.



Wild Papers editor: Ingo Niemann

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Winter Journal by Paul Auster pages 1-16

You think it will never happen to you, that it cannot happen to you, that you are the only person in the world to whom none of these things will ever happen, and then, one by one, they all begin to happen to you, in the same way they happen to everyone else.

Your bare feet on the cold floor as you climb out of bed and walk to the window. You are six years old. Outside, snow is falling, and the branches of the trees in the backyard are turning white.

Speak now before it is too late, and then hope to go on speaking until there is nothing more to be said. Time is running out, after all. Perhaps it is just as well to put aside your stories for now and try to examine what it has felt like to live inside this body from the first day you can remember being alive until this one. A catalogue of sensory data. What one might call a *phenomenology of breathing*.

You are ten years old, and the midsummer air is warm, oppressively warm, so humid and uncomfortable that even as you sit in the shade of the trees in the backyard, sweat is gathering on your forehead.

It is an incontestable fact that you are no longer young. One month from today, you will be turning sixty-four, and although that is not excessively old, not what anyone would consider to be an advanced old age, you cannot stop yourself from thinking about all the others who never managed to get as far as you have. This is one example of the various things that could never happen, but which, in fact, have happened.

The wind in your face during last week's blizzard. The awful

sting of the cold, and you out there in the empty streets wondering what possessed you to leave the house in such a pounding storm, and yet, even as you struggled to keep your balance, there was the exhilaration of that wind, the joy of seeing the familiar streets turned into a blur of white, whirling snow.

Physical pleasures and physical pains. Sexual pleasures first and foremost, but also the pleasures of food and drink, of lying naked in a hot bath, of scratching an itch, of sneezing and farting, of spending an extra hour in bed, of turning your face toward the sun on a mild afternoon in late spring or early summer and feeling the warmth settle upon your skin. Innumerable instances, not a day gone by without some moment or moments of physical pleasure, and yet pains are no doubt more persistent and intractable, and at one time or another nearly every part of your body has been subjected to assault.

Eyes and ears, head and neck, shoulders and back, arms and legs, throat and stomach, ankles and feet, not to mention the enormous boil that once sprouted on the left cheek of your ass, referred to by the doctor as a wen, which to your ears sounded like some medieval affliction and prevented you from sitting in chairs for a week.

The proximity of your small body to the ground, the body that belonged to you when you were three and four years old, that is to say, the shortness of the distance between your feet and head, and how the things you no longer notice were once a constant presence and preoccupation for you: the little world of crawling ants and lost coins, of fallen twigs and dented bottle caps, of dandelions and clover. But especially the ants. They are what you remember best. Armies of ants traveling in and out of their powdery hills.

You are five years old, crouched over an anthill in the backyard, attentively studying the comings and goings of your

tiny six-legged friends. Unseen and unheard, your threeyear-old neighbor creeps up behind you and strikes you on the head with a toy rake. The prongs pierce your scalp, blood flows into your hair and down the back of your neck, and you run screaming into the house, where your grandmother tends to your wounds.

Your grandmother's words to your mother: "Your father would be such a wonderful man—if only he were different."

This morning, waking in the dimness of another January dawn, a scumbled, grayish light seeping into the bedroom, and there is your wife's face turned toward your face, her eyes closed, still fast asleep, the covers pulled all the way up to her neck, her head the only part of her that is visible, and you marvel at how beautiful she looks, how young she looks, even now, thirty years after you first slept with her, after thirty years of living together under the same roof and sharing the same bed.

More snow falling today, and as you climb out of bed and walk to the window, the branches of the trees in the back garden are turning white. You are sixty-three years old. It occurs to you that there has rarely been a moment during the long journey from boyhood to now when you have not been in love. Thirty years of marriage, yes, but in the thirty years before that, how many infatuations and crushes, how many ardors and pursuits, how many deliriums and mad surges of desire? From the very start of your conscious life, you have been a willing slave of Eros. The girls you loved as a boy, the women you loved as a man, each one different from the others, some round and some lean, some short and some tall, some bookish and some athletic, some moody and some outgoing, some white and some black and some Asian, nothing on the surface ever mattered to you, it was all about the inner light you would detect in her, the spark of singularity, the blaze of revealed selfhood, and that light would make her

beautiful to you, even if others were blind to the beauty you saw, and then you would burn to be with her, to be near her, for feminine beauty is something you have never been able to resist. All the way back to your first days of school, the kindergarten class in which you fell for the girl with the long blonde ponytail, and how often were you punished by Miss Sandquist for sneaking off with the little girl you had fallen for, the two of you together in a corner somewhere making mischief, but those punishments meant nothing to you, for you were in love, and you were a fool for love then, just as you are a fool for love now.

The inventory of your scars, in particular the ones on your face, which are visible to you each morning when you look into the bathroom mirror to shave or comb your hair. You seldom think about them, but whenever you do, you understand that they are marks of life, that the assorted jagged lines etched into the skin of your face are letters from the secret alphabet that tells the story of who you are, for each scar is the trace of a healed wound, and each wound was caused by an unexpected collision with the world—that is to say, an accident, or something that need not have happened, since by definition an accident is something that need not happen. Contingent facts as opposed to necessary facts, and the realization as you look into the mirror this morning that all life is contingent, except for the one necessary fact that sooner or later it will come to an end.

You are three and a half, and your twenty-five-year-old pregnant mother has taken you along with her on a shopping expedition to a department store in downtown Newark. She is accompanied by a friend of hers, the mother of a boy who is three and a half as well. At some point, you and your little comrade break away from your mothers and begin running through the store. It is an enormous open space, no doubt the largest room you have ever set foot in, and there is a palpable

thrill in being able to run wild through this gargantuan indoor arena. Eventually, you and the boy begin belly-flopping onto the floor and sliding along the smooth surface, sledding without sleds, as it were, and this game proves to be so enjoyable, so ecstatic in the pleasure it produces, that you become more and more reckless, more and more daring in what you are willing to attempt. You reach a part of the store where construction work or repair work is under way, and without bothering to take notice of what obstacles might lie ahead, you belly-flop onto the floor again and sail along the glasslike surface until you find yourself speeding straight toward a wooden carpenter's bench. With a small twist of your small body, you think you can avoid crashing into the leg of the table that is looming before you, but what you do not realize in the split second you have to shift course is that a nail is jutting from the leg, a long nail low enough to be at the level of your face, and before you can stop yourself, your left cheek is pierced by the nail as you go flying past it. Half your face is torn apart. Sixty years later, you have no memories of the accident. You remember the running and the belly-flopping, but nothing about the pain, nothing about the blood, and nothing about being rushed to the hospital or the doctor who sewed up your cheek. He did a brilliant job, your mother always said, and since the trauma of seeing her firstborn with half his face ripped off never left her, she said it often: something to do with a subtle double-stitching method that kept the damage to a minimum and prevented you from being disfigured for life. You could have lost your eye, she would say to you—or, even more dramatically, You could have been killed. No doubt she was right. The scar has grown fainter and fainter as the years have passed, but it is still there whenever you look for it, and you will carry that emblem of good fortune (eye intact! not dead!) until you go to your grave.

Split eyebrow scars, one left and one right, almost perfectly symmetrical, the first caused by running full tilt into a brick

wall during a dodgeball game in grade school gym class (the massively swollen black eye you sported for days afterward, which reminded you of a photograph of boxer Gene Fullmer, who had been defeated in a championship bout by Sugar Ray Robinson around the same time) and the second caused in your early twenties when you drove in for a layup during an outdoor basketball game, were fouled from behind, and flew into the metal pole supporting the basket. Another scar on your chin, origin unknown. Most likely from an early childhood spill, a hard fall onto a sidewalk or a stone that split open your flesh and left its mark, which is still visible whenever you shave in the morning. No story accompanies this scar, your mother never talked about it (at least not that you can recall), and you find it odd, if not downright perplexing, that this permanent line was engraved on your chin by what can only be called an invisible hand, that your body is the site of events that have been expunged from history.

It is June 1959. You are twelve years old, and in one week you and your sixth-grade classmates will be graduating from the grammar school you have attended since you were five. It is a splendid day, late spring in its most lustrous incarnation, sunlight pouring down from a cloudless blue sky, warm but not too warm, scant humidity, a soft breeze stirring the air and rippling over your face and neck and bare arms. Once school lets out for the day, you and a gang of your friends repair to Grove Park for a game of pickup baseball. Grove Park is not a park so much as a kind of village green, a large rectangle of well-tended grass flanked by houses on all four sides, a pleasant spot, one of the loveliest public spaces in your small New Jersey town, and you and your friends often go there to play baseball after school, since baseball is the thing you all love most, and you play for hours on end without ever growing weary of it. No adults are present. You establish your own ground rules and settle disagreements among yourselves—most often with words, occasionally with fists.

More than fifty years later, you remember nothing about the game that was played that afternoon, but what you do remember is the following: The game is over, and you are standing alone in the middle of the infield, playing catch with yourself, that is, throwing a ball high into the air and following its ascent and descent until it lands in your glove, at which point you immediately throw the ball into the air again, and each time you throw the ball it travels higher than it did the time before, and after several throws you are reaching unprecedented heights, the ball is hovering in the air for many seconds now, the white ball going up against the clear blue sky, the white ball coming down into your glove, and your entire being is engaged in this witless activity, your concentration is total, nothing exists now except the ball and the sky and your glove, which means that your face is turned upward, that you are looking up as you follow the trajectory of the ball, and therefore you are no longer aware of what is happening on the ground, and what happens on the ground as you are looking up at the sky is that something or someone unexpectedly comes crashing into you, and the impact is so sudden, so violent, so overwhelming in its force that you instantly fall to the ground, feeling as though you have been hit by a tank. The brunt of the blow was aimed at your head, in particular your forehead, but your torso has been battered as well, and as you lie on the ground gasping for breath, stunned and nearly unconscious, you see that blood is flowing from your forehead, no, not flowing, gushing, and so you remove your white T-shirt and press it against the gushing spot, and within seconds the white T-shirt has turned entirely red. The other boys are alarmed. They come rushing toward you to do what they can to help, and it is only then that you find out what happened. It seems that one of your cohort, a gangly, good-hearted lunkhead called B.T. (you remember his name but will not divulge it here, since you do not want to embarrass him—assuming he is still alive), was so impressed by your towering, skyscraper throws that he got it into his

head to take part in the action, and without bothering to tell you that he, too, was going to try to catch one of your throws started running in the direction of the descending ball, head turned upward, of course, and mouth hanging open in that oafish way of his (what person runs with his mouth hanging open?), and when he crashed into you a moment later, running at an all-out gallop, the teeth protruding from his open mouth went straight into your head. Hence the blood now gushing out of you, hence the depth of the gash in the skin above your left eye. Fortunately, the office of your family doctor is just across the way, in one of the houses that line the perimeter of Grove Park. The boys decide to lead you there at once, and so you cross the park holding your bloody T-shirt against your head in the company of your friends, perhaps four of them, perhaps six of them, you no longer remember, and burst en masse into Dr. Kohn's office. (You have not forgotten his name, just as you have not forgotten the name of your kindergarten teacher, Miss Sandquist, or the names of any of the other teachers you had as a boy.) The receptionist tells you and your friends that Dr. Kohn is seeing a patient just now, and before she can get up from her chair to inform the doctor that there is an emergency to attend to, you and your friends march into the consulting room without bothering to knock. You find Dr. Kohn talking to a plump, middle-aged woman who is sitting on the examination table dressed in a bra and slip only. The woman lets out a yelp of surprise, but once Dr. Kohn sees the blood gushing from your forehead, he tells the woman to get dressed and leave, tells your friends to make themselves scarce, and then hastens to the task of sewing up your wound. It is a painful procedure, since there is no time to administer an anesthetic, but you do your best not to howl as he threads the stitches through your skin. The job he does is perhaps not as brilliant as the one executed by the doctor who sewed up your cheek in 1950, but it is effective for all that, since you do not bleed to death and no longer have a hole in your head.

Some days later, you and your sixth-grade classmates take part in your grammar school graduation ceremony. You have been selected to be a flag-bearer, which means that you must carry the American flag down an aisle of the auditorium and plant it in the flag stand on stage. Your head is wrapped in a white gauze bandage, and because blood still seeps occasionally from the spot where you were stitched up, the white gauze has a large red stain on it. After the ceremony, your mother says that when you were walking down the aisle with the flag, you reminded her of a painting of a wounded Revolutionary War hero. You know, she says, just like *The Spirit of 76*.

What presses in on you, what has always pressed in on you: the outside, meaning the air—or, more precisely, your body in the air around you. The soles of your feet anchored to the ground, but all the rest of you exposed to the air, and that is where the story begins, in your body, and everything will end in the body as well. For now, you are thinking about the wind. Later, if time allows for it, you will think about the heat and the cold, the infinite varieties of rain, the fogs you have stumbled through like a man without eyes, the demented, machine-gun tattoo of hailstones clattering against the tile roof of the house in the Var. But it is the wind that claims your attention now, for the air is seldom still, and beyond the barely perceptible breath of nothingness that sometimes surrounds you, there are the breezes and wafting lills, the sudden gusts and squalls, the three-day-long mistrals you lived through in that house with the tile roof, the soaking nor'easters that sweep along the Atlantic coast, the gales and hurricanes, the whirlwinds. And there you are, twenty-one years ago, walking through the streets of Amsterdam on your way to an event that has been canceled without your knowledge, dutifully trying to fulfill the commitment you have made, out in what will later be called the storm of the century, a hurricane of such blistering intensity that within an hour of your stubborn, ill-advised decision to venture outdoors, large

trees will be uprooted in every corner of the city, chimneys will tumble to the ground, and parked cars will be lifted up and go sailing through the air. You walk with your face to the wind, trying to advance along the sidewalk, but in spite of your efforts to get to where you are going, you cannot move. The wind is blasting into you, and for the next minute and a half, you are stuck.

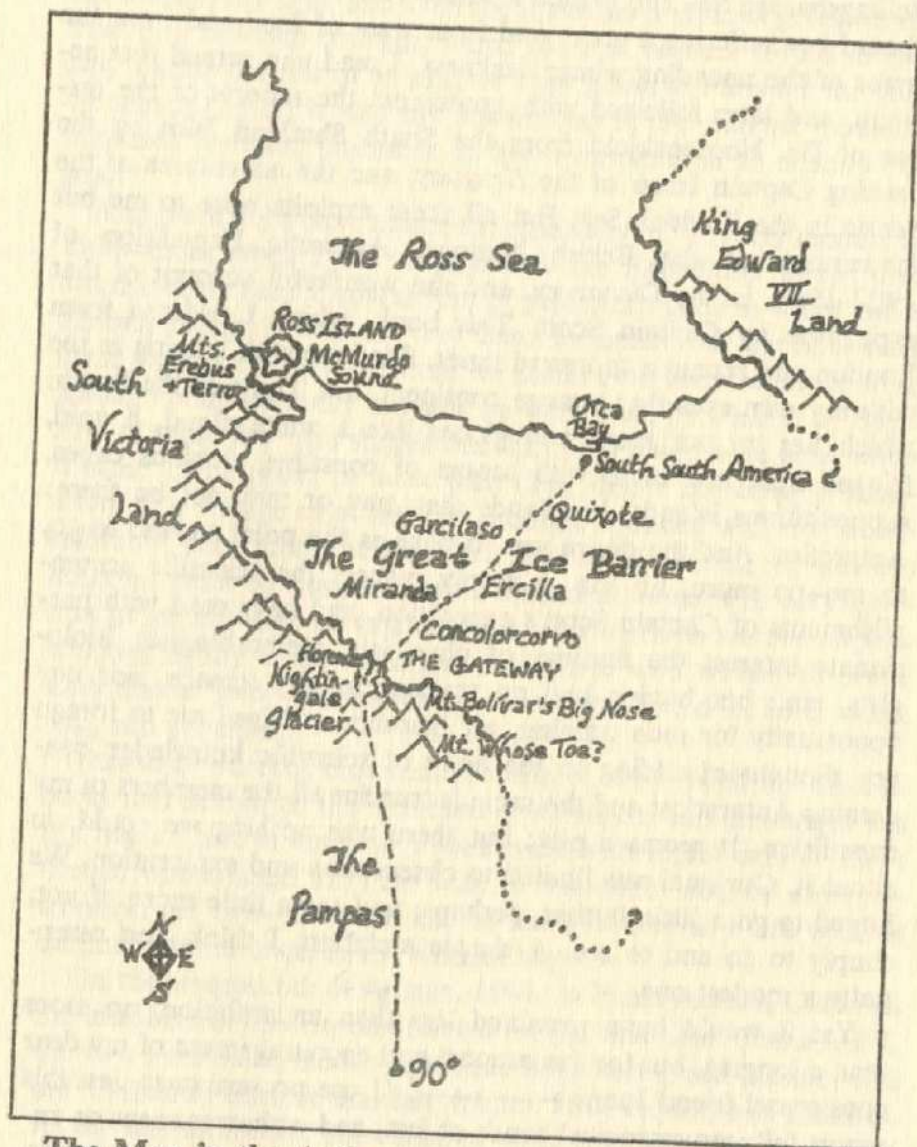
Your hands on the Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin thirteen Januarys ago, the night following another hurricane with hundred-mile-an-hour winds, the final night of the film you have been directing for the past two months, the last scene, the last shot, a simple matter of fixing the camera on the gloved hand of your leading actress as she turns her wrist and lets go of a small stone that will fall into the waters of the Liffey. There is nothing to it, no shot has demanded less effort or ingenuity in the entire film, but there you are in the dank and dark of the windswept night, as exhausted as you have ever been after nine weeks of grueling work on a production fraught with countless problems (budget problems, union problems, location problems, weather problems), fifteen pounds lighter than when you began, and after standing for hours on the bridge with your crew, the clammy, frigid Irish air has infiltrated your bones, and a moment comes just before the final shot when you realize that your hands are frozen, that you cannot move your fingers, that your hands have turned into two blocks of ice. Why aren't you wearing gloves? you ask yourself, but you are unable to answer the question, since the thought of gloves never even occurred to you when you left your hotel for the bridge. You film the last shot one more time, and then you and your producer, along with your actress, your actress's boyfriend, and several members of the crew, go to a nearby pub to thaw out and celebrate the completion of the film. The place is crowded, jammed full, an echo chamber packed with roaring, clamorous people bobbing back and forth in a state of apocalyptic merriment, but

a table has been reserved for you and your friends, so you sit down at the table, and the moment your body makes contact with the chair you understand that you are depleted, drained of all physical energy, all emotional energy, utterly spent in a way you never could have imagined possible, so crushed that you feel you might burst into tears at any moment. You order a whiskey, and when you take hold of the glass and raise it to your lips, you are heartened to notice that your fingers can move again. You order a second whiskey, then a third whiskey, then a fourth whiskey, and suddenly you fall asleep. In spite of the frenzy all around you, you manage to go on sleeping until the good man who is your producer hoists you to your feet and half-drags you, half-carries you back to your hotel.

Yes, you drink too much and smoke too much, you have lost teeth without bothering to replace them, your diet does not conform to the precepts of contemporary nutritional wisdom, but if you shun most vegetables it is simply because you do not like them, and you find it difficult, if not impossible, to eat what you do not like. You know that your wife worries about you, especially about your smoking and drinking, but mercifully, until now, no X-ray has revealed any damage to your lungs, no blood test has revealed any devastation to your liver, and so you forge on with your vile habits, knowing full well that they will ultimately do you grave harm, but the older you become the less likely it seems that you will ever have the will or the courage to abandon your beloved little cigars and frequent glasses of wine, which have given you so much pleasure over the years, and you sometimes think that if you were to cut these things out of your life at this late date, your body would simply fall apart, your system would cease to function. No doubt you are a flawed and wounded person, a man who has carried a wound in him from the very beginning (why else would you have spent the whole of your adult life bleeding words onto a page?), and the benefits you derive from

alcohol and tobacco serve as crutches to keep your crippled self upright and moving through the world. Self-medication, as your wife calls it. Unlike your mother's mother, she does not want you to be different. Your wife tolerates your weaknesses and does not rant or scold, and if she worries, it is only because she wants you to live forever. You count the reasons why you have held her close to you for so many years, and surely this is one of them, one of the bright stars in the vast constellation of enduring love.

Needless to say, you cough, especially at night, when your body is in a horizontal position, and on those nights when the breath tubes are excessively clogged, you climb out of bed, go into another room, and cough on madly until you have hacked up all the gunk. According to your friend Spiegelman (the most ardent smoker you know), whenever someone asks him why he smokes, he inevitably answers: "Because I like to cough."



The Map in the Attic

Sur

A Summary Report of the *Yelcho* Expedition to the Antarctic, 1909-1910

ALTHOUGH I HAVE no intention of publishing this report, I think it would be nice if a grandchild of mine, or somebody's grandchild, happened to find it some day; so I shall keep it in the leather trunk in the attic, along with Rosita's christening dress and Juanito's silver rattle and my wedding shoes and finneskos.

The first requisite for mounting an expedition—money—is normally the hardest to come by. I grieve that even in a report destined for a trunk in the attic of a house in a very quiet suburb of Lima I dare not write the name of the generous benefactor, the great soul without whose unstinting liberality the *Yelcho* Expedition would never have been more than the idlest excursion into daydream. That our equipment was the best and most modern—that our provisions were plentiful and fine—that a ship of the Chilean Government, with her brave officers and gallant crew, was twice sent halfway round the world for our convenience: all this is due to that benefactor whose name, alas! I must not say, but whose happiest debtor I shall be till death.

When I was little more than a child my imagination was caught

by a newspaper account of the voyage of the *Belgica*, which, sailing south from Tierra del Fuego, became beset by ice in the Bellingshausen Sea and drifted a whole year with the floe, the men aboard her suffering a great deal from want of food and from the terror of the unending winter darkness. I read and reread that account, and later followed with excitement the reports of the rescue of Dr. Nordenskjöld from the South Shetland Isles by the dashing Captain Irizar of the *Uruguay*, and the adventures of the *Scotia* in the Weddell Sea. But all these exploits were to me but forerunners of the British National Antarctic Expedition of 1902-1904, in the *Discovery*, and the wonderful account of that expedition by Captain Scott. This book, which I ordered from London and reread a thousand times, filled me with longing to see with my own eyes that strange continent, last Thule of the South, which lies on our maps and globes like a white cloud, a void, fringed here and there with scraps of coastline, dubious capes, supposititious islands, headlands that may or may not be there: Antarctica. And the desire was as pure as the polar snows: to go, to see—no more, no less. I deeply respect the scientific accomplishments of Captain Scott's expedition, and have read with passionate interest the findings of physicists, meteorologists, biologists, etc.; but having had no training in any science, nor any opportunity for such training, my ignorance obliged me to forego any thought of adding to the body of scientific knowledge concerning Antarctica; and the same is true for all the members of my expedition. It seems a pity; but there was nothing we could do about it. Our goal was limited to observation and exploration. We hoped to go a little farther, perhaps, and see a little more; if not, simply to go and to see. A simple ambition, I think, and essentially a modest one.

Yet it would have remained less than an ambition, no more than a longing, but for the support and encouragement of my dear cousin and friend Juana ———. (I use no surnames, lest this report fall into strangers' hands at last, and embarrassment or unpleasant notoriety thus be brought upon unsuspecting husbands, sons, etc.) I had lent Juana my copy of *The Voyage of the Discovery*, and it was she who, as we strolled beneath our parasols across the Plaza de Armas after Mass one Sunday in 1908, said, "Well, if Captain Scott can do it, why can't we?"

It was Juana who proposed that we write Carlota —— in Valparaiso. Through Carlota we met our benefactor, and so obtained our money, our ship, and even the plausible pretext of going on retreat in a Bolivian convent, which some of us were forced to employ (while the rest of us said we were going to Paris for the winter season). And it was my Juana who in the darkest moments remained resolute, unshaken in her determination to achieve our goal.

And there were dark moments, especially in the early months of 1909—times when I did not see how the Expedition would ever become more than a quarter ton of pemmican gone to waste and a lifelong regret. It was so very hard to gather our expeditionary force together! So few of those we asked even knew what we were talking about—so many thought we were mad, or wicked, or both! And of those few who shared our folly, still fewer were able, when it came to the point, to leave their daily duties and commit themselves to a voyage of at least six months, attended with not inconsiderable uncertainty and danger. An ailing parent; an anxious husband beset by business cares; a child at home with only ignorant or incompetent servants to look after it: these are not responsibilities lightly to be set aside. And those who wished to evade such claims were not the companions we wanted in hard work, risk, and privation.

But since success crowned our efforts, why dwell on the setbacks and delays, or the wretched contrivances and downright lies that we all had to employ? I look back with regret only to those friends who wished to come with us but could not, by any contrivance, get free—those we had to leave behind to a life without danger, without uncertainty, without hope.

On the seventeenth of August, 1909, in Punta Arenas, Chile, all the members of the Expedition met for the first time: Juana and I, the two Peruvians; from Argentina, Zoe, Berta, and Teresa; and our Chileans, Carlota and her friends Eva, Pepita, and Dolores. At the last moment I had received word that Maria's husband, in Quito, was ill, and she must stay to nurse him, so we were nine, not ten. Indeed, we had resigned ourselves to being but eight, when, just as night fell, the indomitable Zoe arrived in a tiny pirogue manned by Indians, her yacht having sprung a leak just as it entered the Strait of Magellan.

That night before we sailed we began to get to know one another; and we agreed, as we enjoyed our abominable supper in the abominable seaport inn of Punta Arenas, that if a situation arose of such urgent danger that one voice must be obeyed without present question, the unenviable honor of speaking with that voice should fall first upon myself: if I were incapacitated, upon Carlota: if she, then upon Berta. We three were then toasted as "Supreme Inca," "La Araucana," and "The Third Mate," among a lot of laughter and cheering. As it came out, to my very great pleasure and relief, my qualities as a "leader" were never tested; the nine of us worked things out amongst us from beginning to end without any orders being given by anybody, and only two or three times with recourse to a vote by voice or show of hands. To be sure, we argued a good deal. But then, we had time to argue. And one way or another the arguments always ended up in a decision, upon which action could be taken. Usually at least one person grumbled about the decision, sometimes bitterly. But what is life without grumbling, and the occasional opportunity to say, "I told you so"? How could one bear housework, or looking after babies, let alone the rigors of sledge-hauling in Antarctica, without grumbling? Officers—as we came to understand aboard the *Yelcho*—are forbidden to grumble; but we nine were, and are, by birth and upbringing, unequivocally and irrevocably, all crew.

Though our shortest course to the southern continent, and that originally urged upon us by the captain of our good ship, was to the South Shetlands and the Bellingshausen Sea, or else by the South Orkneys into the Weddell Sea, we planned to sail west to the Ross Sea, which Captain Scott had explored and described, and from which the brave Ernest Shackleton had returned only the previous autumn. More was known about this region than any other portion of the coast of Antarctica, and though that more was not much, yet it served as some insurance of the safety of the ship, which we felt we had no right to imperil. Captain Pardo had fully agreed with us after studying the charts and our planned itinerary; and so it was westward that we took our course out of the Strait next morning.

Our journey half round the globe was attended by fortune. The little *Yelcho* steamed cheerily along through gale and gleam, climbing up and down those seas of the Southern Ocean that run

unbroken round the world. Juana, who had fought bulls and the far more dangerous cows on her family's *estancia*, called the ship "*la vaca valiente*," because she always returned to the charge. Once we got over being seasick we all enjoyed the sea voyage, though oppressed at times by the kindly but officious protectiveness of the captain and his officers, who felt that we were only "safe" when huddled up in the three tiny cabins which they had chivalrously vacated for our use.

We saw our first iceberg much farther south than we had looked for it, and saluted it with Veuve Clicquot at dinner. The next day we entered the ice pack, the belt of floes and bergs, broken loose from the land ice and winter-frozen seas of Antarctica, which drifts northward in the spring. Fortune still smiled on us: our little steamer, incapable, with her unreinforced metal hull, of forcing a way into the ice, picked her way from lane to lane without hesitation, and on the third day we were through the pack, in which ships have sometimes struggled for weeks and been obliged to turn back at last. Ahead of us now lay the dark grey waters of the Ross Sea, and beyond that, on the horizon, the remote glimmer, the cloud-reflected whiteness of the Great Ice Barrier.

Entering the Ross Sea a little east of Longitude West 160°, we came in sight of the Barrier at the place where Captain Scott's party, finding a bight in the vast wall of ice, had gone ashore and sent up their hydrogen-gas balloon for reconnaissance and photography. The towering face of the Barrier, its sheer cliffs and azure and violet water-worn caves, all were as described, but the location had changed: instead of a narrow bight there was a considerable bay, full of the beautiful and terrific orca whales playing and spouting in the sunshine of that brilliant southern spring.

Evidently masses of ice many acres in extent had broken away from the Barrier (which—at least for most of its vast extent—does not rest on land but floats on water) since the *Discovery's* passage in 1902. This put our plan to set up camp on the Barrier itself in a new light; and while we were discussing alternatives, we asked Captain Pardo to take the ship west along the Barrier face towards Ross Island and McMurdo Sound. As the sea was clear of ice and quite calm, he was happy to do so, and, when we sighted the smoke plume of Mount Erebus, to share in our celebration—another half case of Veuve Clicquot.

The *Yelcho* anchored in Arrival Bay, and we went ashore in the ship's boat. I cannot describe my emotions when I set foot on the earth, on that earth, the barren, cold gravel at the foot of the long volcanic slope. I felt elation, impatience, gratitude, awe, familiarity. I felt that I was home at last. Eight Adélie penguins immediately came to greet us with many exclamations of interest not unmixed with disapproval. "Where on earth have you been? What took you so long? The Hut is around this way. Please come this way. Mind the rocks!" They insisted on our going to visit Hut Point, where the large structure built by Captain Scott's party stood, looking just as in the photographs and drawings that illustrate his book. The area about it, however, was disgusting—a kind of graveyard of seal skins, seal bones, penguin bones, and rubbish, presided over by the mad, screaming skua gulls. Our escorts waddled past the slaughterhouse in all tranquillity, and one showed me personally to the door, though it would not go in.

The interior of the hut was less offensive, but very dreary. Boxes of supplies had been stacked up into a kind of room within the room; it did not look as I had imagined it when the *Discovery* party put on their melodramas and minstrel shows in the long winter night. (Much later, we learned that Sir Ernest had rearranged it a good deal when he was there just a year before us.) It was dirty, and had about it a mean disorder. A pound tin of tea was standing open. Empty meat tins lay about; biscuits were spilled on the floor; a lot of dog turds were underfoot—frozen, of course, but not a great deal improved by that. No doubt the last occupants had had to leave in a hurry, perhaps even in a blizzard. All the same, they could have closed the tea tin. But housekeeping, the art of the infinite, is no game for amateurs.

Teresa proposed that we use the hut as our camp. Zoe counterproposed that we set fire to it. We finally shut the door and left it as we had found it. The penguins appeared to approve, and cheered us all the way to the boat.

McMurdo Sound was free of ice, and Captain Pardo now proposed to take us off Ross Island and across to Victoria Land, where we might camp at the foot of the Western Mountains, on dry and solid earth. But those mountains, with their storm-darkened peaks and hanging cirques and glaciers, looked as awful

as Captain Scott had found them on his western journey, and none of us felt much inclined to seek shelter among them.

Aboard the ship that night we decided to go back and set up our base as we had originally planned, on the Barrier itself. For all available reports indicated that the clear way south was across the level Barrier surface until one could ascend one of the confluent glaciers to the high plateau which appears to form the whole interior of the continent. Captain Pardo argued strongly against this plan, asking what would become of us if the Barrier "calved"—if our particular acre of ice broke away and started to drift northward. "Well," said Zoe, "then you won't have to come so far to meet us." But he was so persuasive on this theme that he persuaded himself into leaving one of the *Yelcho's* boats with us when we camped, as a means of escape. We found it useful for fishing, later on.

My first steps on Antarctic soil, my only visit to Ross Island, had not been pleasure unalloyed. I thought of the words of the English poet:

*Though every prospect pleases,
And only Man is vile.*

But then, the backside of heroism is often rather sad; women and servants know that. They know also that the heroism may be no less real for that. But achievement is smaller than men think. What is large is the sky, the earth, the sea, the soul. I looked back as the ship sailed east again that evening. We were well into September now, with ten hours or more of daylight. The spring sunset lingered on the twelve-thousand-foot peak of Erebus and shone rosy gold on her long plume of steam. The steam from our own small funnel faded blue on the twilit water as we crept along under the towering pale wall of ice.

On our return to "Orca Bay"—Sir Ernest, we learned years later, had named it the Bay of Whales—we found a sheltered nook where the Barrier edge was low enough to provide fairly easy access from the ship. The *Yelcho* put out her ice anchor, and the next long, hard days were spent in unloading our supplies and setting up our camp on the ice, a half kilometer in from the edge: a task in which the *Yelcho's* crew lent us invaluable aid and inter-

minable advice. We took all the aid gratefully, and most of the advice with salt.

The weather so far had been extraordinarily mild for spring in this latitude; the temperature had not yet gone below -20° Fahrenheit, and there was only one blizzard while we were setting up camp. But Captain Scott had spoken feelingly of the bitter south winds on the Barrier, and we had planned accordingly. Exposed as our camp was to every wind, we built no rigid structures above ground. We set up tents to shelter in while we dug out a series of cubicles in the ice itself, lined them with hay insulation and pine boarding, and roofed them with canvas over bamboo poles, covered with snow for weight and insulation. The big central room was instantly named Buenos Aires by our Argentineans, to whom the center, wherever one is, is always Buenos Aires. The heating and cooking stove was in Buenos Aires. The storage tunnels and the privy (called Punta Arenas) got some back heat from the stove. The sleeping cubicles opened off Buenos Aires, and were very small, mere tubes into which one crawled feet first; they were lined deeply with hay and soon warmed by one's body warmth. The sailors called them "coffins" and "wormholes," and looked with horror on our burrows in the ice. But our little warren or prairie-dog village served us well, permitting us as much warmth and privacy as one could reasonably expect under the circumstances. If the *Yelcho* was unable to get through the ice in February, and we had to spend the winter in Antarctica, we certainly could do so, though on very limited rations. For this coming summer, our base—Sudamérica del Sur, South South America, but we generally called it the Base—was intended merely as a place to sleep, to store our provisions, and to give shelter from blizzards.

To Berta and Eva, however, it was more than that. They were its chief architect-designers, its most ingenious builder-excavators, and its most diligent and contented occupants, forever inventing an improvement in ventilation, or learning how to make skylights, or revealing to us a new addition to our suite of rooms, dug in the living ice. It was thanks to them that our stores were stowed so handily, that our stove drew and heated so efficiently, and that Buenos Aires, where nine people cooked, ate, worked, conversed, argued, grumbled, painted, played the guitar and banjo, and kept the Expedition's library of books and maps, was a marvel of com-

fort and convenience. We lived there in real amity; and if you simply had to be alone for a while, you crawled into your sleeping hole head first.

Berta went a little farther. When she had done all she could to make South South America livable, she dug out one more cell just under the ice surface, leaving a nearly transparent sheet of ice like a greenhouse roof; and there, alone, she worked at sculptures. They were beautiful forms, some like a blending of the reclining human figure with the subtle curves and volumes of the Weddell seal, others like the fantastic shapes of ice cornices and ice caves. Perhaps they are there still, under the snow, in the bubble in the Great Barrier. There where she made them they might last as long as stone. But she could not bring them north. That is the penalty for carving in water.

Captain Pardo was reluctant to leave us, but his orders did not permit him to hang about the Ross Sea indefinitely, and so at last, with many earnest injunctions to us to stay put—make no journeys—take no risks—beware of frostbite—don't use edge tools—look out for cracks in the ice—and a heartfelt promise to return to Orca Bay on the twentieth of February, or as near that date as wind and ice would permit, the good man bade us farewell, and his crew shouted us a great goodbye cheer as they weighed anchor. That evening, in the long orange twilight of October, we saw the topmast of the *Yelcho* go down the north horizon, over the edge of the world, leaving us to ice, and silence, and the Pole.

That night we began to plan the Southern Journey.

The ensuing month passed in short practice trips and depot-laying. The life we had led at home, though in its own way strenuous, had not fitted any of us for the kind of strain met with in sledge-hauling at ten or twenty degrees below freezing. We all needed as much working-out as possible before we dared undertake a long haul.

My longest exploratory trip, made with Dolores and Carlota, was southwest towards Mount Markham, and it was a nightmare—blizzards and pressure ice all the way out, crevasses and no view of the mountains when we got there, and white weather and sas-trugi all the way back. The trip was useful, however, in that we could begin to estimate our capacities; and also in that we had started out with a very heavy load of provisions, which we de-

poted at 100 and 130 miles SSW of Base. Thereafter other parties pushed on farther, till we had a line of snow cairns and depots right down to Latitude $83^{\circ} 43'$, where Juana and Zoe, on an exploring trip, had found a kind of stone gateway opening on a great glacier leading south. We established these depots to avoid, if possible, the hunger that had bedevilled Captain Scott's Southern Party, and the consequent misery and weakness. And we also established to our own satisfaction—intense satisfaction—that we were sledgehaulers at least as good as Captain Scott's husky dogs. Of course we could not have expected to pull as much or as fast as his men. That we did so was because we were favored by much better weather than Captain Scott's party ever met on the Barrier; and also the quantity and quality of our food made a very considerable difference. I am sure that the fifteen percent of dried fruits in our pemmican helped prevent scurvy; and the potatoes, frozen and dried according to an ancient Andean Indian method, were very nourishing yet very light and compact—perfect sledging rations. In any case, it was with considerable confidence in our capacities that we made ready at last for the Southern Journey.

The Southern Party consisted of two sledge teams: Juana, Dolores, and myself; Carlota, Pepita, and Zoe. The support team of Berta, Eva, and Teresa set out before us with a heavy load of supplies, going right up onto the glacier to prospect routes and leave depots of supplies for our return journey. We followed five days behind them, and met them returning between Depot Ercilla and Depot Miranda (see map). That "night"—of course there was no real darkness—we were all nine together in the heart of the level plain of ice. It was the fifteenth of November, Dolores's birthday. We celebrated by putting eight ounces of pisco in the hot chocolate, and became very merry. We sang. It is strange now to remember how thin our voices sounded in that great silence. It was overcast, white weather, without shadows and without visible horizon or any feature to break the level; there was nothing to see at all. We had come to that white place on the map, that void, and there we flew and sang like sparrows.

After sleep and a good breakfast the Base Party continued north, and the Southern Party sledged on. The sky cleared presently. High up, thin clouds passed over very rapidly from southwest to northeast, but down on the Barrier it was calm and just

cold enough, five or ten degrees below freezing, to give a firm surface for hauling.

On the level ice we never pulled less than eleven miles, seventeen kilometers, a day, and generally fifteen or sixteen miles, twenty-five kilometers. (Our instruments, being British made, were calibrated in feet, miles, degrees Fahrenheit, etc., but we often converted miles to kilometers because the larger numbers sounded more encouraging.) At the time we left South America, we knew only that Mr. Shackleton had mounted another expedition to the Antarctic in 1908, had tried to attain the Pole but failed, and had returned to England in June of the current year, 1909. No coherent report of his explorations had yet reached South America when we left; we did not know what route he had gone, or how far he had got. But we were not altogether taken by surprise when, far across the featureless white plain, tiny beneath the mountain peaks and the strange silent flight of the rainbow-fringed cloud wisps, we saw a fluttering dot of black. We turned west from our course to visit it: a snow heap nearly buried by the winter's storms—a flag on a bamboo pole, a mere shred of threadbare cloth—an empty oilcan—and a few footprints standing some inches above the ice. In some conditions of weather the snow compressed under one's weight remains when the surrounding soft snow melts or is scoured away by the wind; and so these reversed footprints had been left standing all these months, like rows of cobbler's lasts—a queer sight.

We met no other such traces on our way. In general I believe our course was somewhat east of Mr. Shackleton's. Juana, our surveyor, had trained herself well and was faithful and methodical in her sightings and readings, but our equipment was minimal—a theodolite on tripod legs, a sextant with artificial horizon, two compasses, and chronometers. We had only the wheel meter on the sledge to give distance actually travelled.

In any case, it was the day after passing Mr. Shackleton's way-mark that I first saw clearly the great glacier among the mountains to the southwest, which was to give us a pathway from the sea level of the Barrier up to the altiplano, ten thousand feet above. The approach was magnificent: a gateway formed by immense vertical domes and pillars of rock. Zoe and Juana had called the vast ice river that flowed through that gateway the Florence Night-

ingale Glacier, wishing to honor the British, who had been the inspiration and guide of our expedition; that very brave and very peculiar lady seemed to represent so much that is best, and strangest, in the island race. On maps, of course, this glacier bears the name Mr. Shackleton gave it, the Beardmore.

The ascent of the Nightingale was not easy. The way was open at first, and well marked by our support party, but after some days we came among terrible crevasses, a maze of hidden cracks, from a foot to thirty feet wide and from thirty to a thousand feet deep. Step by step we went, and step by step, and the way always upward now. We were fifteen days on the glacier. At first the weather was hot, up to 20° F., and the hot nights without darkness were wretchedly uncomfortable in our small tents. And all of us suffered more or less from snowblindness just at the time when we wanted clear eyesight to pick our way among the ridges and crevasses of the tortured ice, and to see the wonders about and before us. For at every day's advance more great, nameless peaks came into view in the west and southwest, summit beyond summit, range beyond range, stark rock and snow in the unending noon.

We gave names to these peaks, not very seriously, since we did not expect our discoveries to come to the attention of geographers. Zoe had a gift for naming, and it is thanks to her that certain sketch maps in various suburban South American attics bear such curious features as "Bolívar's Big Nose," "I Am General Rosas," "The Cloudmaker," "Whose Toe?" and "Throne of Our Lady of the Southern Cross." And when at last we got up onto the altiplano, the great interior plateau, it was Zoe who called it the pampa, and maintained that we walked there among vast herds of invisible cattle, transparent cattle pastured on the spindrift snow, their gauchos the restless, merciless winds. We were by then all a little crazy with exhaustion and the great altitude—twelve thousand feet—and the cold and the wind blowing and the luminous circles and crosses surrounding the suns, for often there were three or four suns in the sky, up there.

That is not a place where people have any business to be. We should have turned back; but since we had worked so hard to get there, it seemed that we should go on, at least for a while.

A blizzard came with very low temperatures, so we had to stay in the tents, in our sleeping bags, for thirty hours, a rest we all

needed; though it was warmth we needed most, and there was no warmth on that terrible plain anywhere at all but in our veins. We huddled close together all that time. The ice we lay on is two miles thick.

It cleared suddenly and became, for the plateau, good weather: twelve below zero and the wind not very strong. We three crawled out of our tent and met the others crawling out of theirs. Carlota told us then that her group wished to turn back. Pepita had been feeling very ill; even after the rest during the blizzard, her temperature would not rise above 94° . Carlota was having trouble breathing. Zoe was perfectly fit, but much preferred staying with her friends and lending them a hand in difficulties to pushing on towards the Pole. So we put the four ounces of pisco which we had been keeping for Christmas into the breakfast cocoa, and dug out our tents, and loaded our sledges, and parted there in the white daylight on the bitter plain.

Our sledge was fairly light by now. We pulled on to the south. Juana calculated our position daily. On the twenty-second of December, 1909, we reached the South Pole. The weather was, as always, very cruel. Nothing of any kind marked the dreary whiteness. We discussed leaving some kind of mark or monument, a snow cairn, a tent pole and flag; but there seemed no particular reason to do so. Anything we could do, anything we were, was insignificant, in that awful place. We put up the tent for shelter for an hour and made a cup of tea, and then struck " 90° Camp." Dolores, standing patient as ever in her sledging harness, looked at the snow; it was so hard frozen that it showed no trace of our footprints coming, and she said, "Which way?"

"North," said Juana.

It was a joke, because at that particular place there is no other direction. But we did not laugh. Our lips were cracked with frost-bite and hurt too much to let us laugh. So we started back, and the wind at our backs pushed us along, and dulled the knife edges of the waves of frozen snow.

All that week the blizzard wind pursued us like a pack of mad dogs. I cannot describe it. Wished we had not gone to the Pole. I think I wish it even now. But I was glad even then that we had left no sign there, for some man longing to be first might come some

day, and find it, and know then what a fool he had been, and break his heart.

We talked, when we could talk, of catching up to Carlota's party, since they might be going slower than we. In fact they had used their tent as a sail to catch the following wind and had got far ahead of us. But in many places they had built snow cairns or left some sign for us; once Zoe had written on the lee side of a ten-foot sastruga, just as children write on the sand of the beach at Miraflores, "This Way Out!" The wind blowing over the frozen ridge had left the words perfectly distinct.

In the very hour that we began to descend the glacier, the weather turned warmer, and the mad dogs were left to howl forever tethered to the Pole. The distance that had taken us fifteen days going up we covered in only eight days going down. But the good weather that had aided us descending the Nightingale became a curse down on the Barrier ice, where we had looked forward to a kind of royal progress from depot to depot, eating our fill and taking our time for the last three hundred-odd miles. In a tight place on the glacier I lost my goggles—I was swinging from my harness at the time in a crevasse—and then Juana had broken hers when we had to do some rock climbing coming down to the Gateway. After two days in bright sunlight with only one pair of snow goggles to pass amongst us, we were all suffering badly from snowblindness. It became acutely painful to keep lookout for landmarks or depot flags, to take sightings, even to study the compass, which had to be laid down on the snow to steady the needle. At Concolorcorvo Depot, where there was a particularly good supply of food and fuel, we gave up, crawled into our sleeping bags with bandaged eyes, and slowly boiled alive like lobsters in the tent exposed to the relentless sun. The voices of Berta and Zoe were the sweetest sound I ever heard. A little concerned about us, they had skied south to meet us. They led us home to Base.

We recovered quite swiftly, but the altiplano left its mark. When she was very little, Rosita asked if a dog "had bitten Mama's toes." I told her Yes, a great, white, mad dog named Blizzard! My Rosita and my Juanito heard many stories when they were little, about that fearful dog and how it howled, and the transparent cattle of the invisible gauchos, and a river of ice eight thousand feet high called Nightingale, and how Cousin Juana

drank a cup of tea standing on the bottom of the world under seven suns, and other fairy tales.

We were in for one severe shock when we reached Base at last. Teresa was pregnant. I must admit that my first response to the poor girl's big belly and sheepish look was anger—rage—fury. That one of us should have concealed anything, and such a thing, from the others! But Teresa had done nothing of the sort. Only those who had concealed from her what she most needed to know were to blame. Brought up by servants, with four years' schooling in a convent, and married at sixteen, the poor girl was still so ignorant at twenty years of age that she had thought it was "the cold weather" that made her miss her periods. Even this was not entirely stupid, for all of us on the Southern Journey had seen our periods change or stop altogether as we experienced increasing cold, hunger, and fatigue. Teresa's appetite had begun to draw general attention; and then she had begun, as she said pathetically, "to get fat." The others were worried at the thought of all the sledge-hauling she had done, but she flourished, and the only problem was her positively insatiable appetite. As well as could be determined from her shy references to her last night on the hacienda with her husband, the baby was due at just about the same time as the *Yelcho*, the twentieth of February. But we had not been back from the Southern Journey two weeks when, on February 14, she went into labor.

Several of us had borne children and had helped with deliveries, and anyhow most of what needs to be done is fairly self-evident; but a first labor can be long and trying, and we were all anxious, while Teresa was frightened out of her wits. She kept calling for her José till she was as hoarse as a skua. Zoe lost all patience at last and said, "By God, Teresa, if you say 'José!' once more I hope you have a penguin!" But what she had, after twenty long hours, was a pretty little red-faced girl.

Many were the suggestions for that child's name from her eight proud midwife-aunts: Polita, Penguina, McMurdo, Victoria. . . . But Teresa announced, after she had had a good sleep and a large serving of pemmican, "I shall name her Rosa—Rosa del Sur," Rose of the South. That night we drank the last two bottles of Veuve Clicquot (having finished the pisco at 88° 30' South) in toasts to our little Rose.

The Compass Rose

On the nineteenth of February, a day early, my Juana came down into Buenos Aires in a hurry. "The ship," she said, "the ship has come," and she burst into tears—she who had never wept in all our weeks of pain and weariness on the long haul.

Of the return voyage there is nothing to tell. We came back safe.

In 1912 all the world learned that the brave Norwegian Amundsen had reached the South Pole; and then, much later, came the accounts of how Captain Scott and his men had come there after him, but did not come home again.

Just this year, Juana and I wrote to the captain of the *Yelcho*, for the newspapers have been full of the story of his gallant dash to rescue Sir Ernest Shackleton's men from Elephant Island, and we wished to congratulate him, and once more to thank him. Never one word has he breathed of our secret. He is a man of honor, Luis Pardo.

I add this last note in 1929. Over the years we have lost touch with one another. It is very difficult for women to meet, when they live so far apart as we do. Since Juana died, I have seen none of my old sledge-mates, though sometimes we write. Our little Rosa del Sur died of the scarlet fever when she was five years old. Teresa had many other children. Carlota took the veil in Santiago ten years ago. We are old women now, with old husbands, and grown children, and grandchildren who might some day like to read about the Expedition. Even if they are rather ashamed of having such a crazy grandmother, they may enjoy sharing in the secret. But they must not let Mr. Amundsen know! He would be terribly embarrassed and disappointed. There is no need for him or anyone else outside the family to know. We left no footprints, even.

Ode To Kanye West In Two Parts, Ending In A Chain Of Mothers Rising From The River

by Hanif Willis-Abdurraqib

I wake up the morning after another award show and I hear

the calls surging over the mountains again

I hear 'em

saying

hey

boy

you know we ain't

rupture this country's spine and unearth all its gold for you people to cocoon

your teeth in it

let your mouths spill all over our sacred trophies get fingerprints on the gilded

bark

of crowns

our men earn and set in the fire until they melt down into the bright and flesh of

another woman who will never cup your face

in her hands

and sing into your ear while the certain darkness of night turns chicago to a

muted child

you ain't getting that again 'til heaven calls for your body

after it been tied to a truck in east texas

by another diamond drowned jesus chain

and dragged through that jagged metal holy land so you can meet god dean

open and split

just give us your neck and we will carry you back to the sound of your

mama's voice

•

when I say I wanted the boy who cursed my dead mother's name to become a ghost, I mean I wanted the bones of him to rattle on his father's nightstand. I wanted another man to wake up haunted as the men who christened every morning screaming into the shell of whatever buried love still lived in the wood of the only home they could afford and isn't that also another language for grief? there are only so many ways to dream about a corpse before you find new things to call *sleep*, or a new thing worth closing your eyes for the woman pulling you to the warmth of her living mouth or Nina Simone's voice laid tight and naked over something your boys can rap to until there is enough money to move out the hood and into somewhere not creased with songs of the lifeless. Somewhere with food for everyone, even if it ain't the fish our mothers cooked on Sundays, the smell of it crawling in under our bedroom doors and folding us in its

arms. When I say I wanted the boy who cursed my dead mother's name to become a ghost I mean I wanted the bones of uncooked fish to rattle in his throat while everyone he loved watched with their hands pressed underneath their chairs. I think I'm better now. I still watch a couple dance with their smiling children in a park and I want to tell them how easy it is for all of us to wake up next to someone who never will again. I am like you. I still want to feast on the happiest moments of strangers. I don't know what this makes men like us except bound to our loneliness, crawling on our hands and knees again through the southern mud that women we loved once pushed between their black toes, until we reach the river. press our lips to the bank. whisper their names into the delicate brown earth and pray the water parts this time. Every mother we gave over to death, walking from its cool mouth. A wet and thrashing catfish in their arms. They will ask

have you eaten,

child? you closed

your eyes

during another one of my sweet

songs and I thought you would

never

wake

III.

TO THE TUNE OF ME TUNING MY GUITAR

Such minds, when they give themselves up to the uncontrolled ferment of [the divine] substance, imagine that, by drawing a veil over self-consciousness and surrendering understanding, they become beloved of God, to whom He gives wisdom in sleep...

- HEGEL, TR. A.V. MILLER, *THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT* (TEXTED TO ME BY EZEKIEL, LAST WEEK)

When we did come home she would certainly be home, too, enjoying the evening, for so she described her habit of sitting in the kitchen in the dark. She seemed to dislike the disequilibrium of counterpoising a roomful of light against a worldful of darkness. Sylvie in a house was more or less like a mermaid in a ship's cabin. She preferred it sunk in the very element it was meant to exclude.

- MARILYNNE ROBINSON, *HOUSEKEEPING*

One night a mermaid went to consult the sea witch, who, splayed on a divan built from the bones of shipwrecked men, offered to make the impossible true: 'I will brew a decoction which you must drink on dry land, before dawn. After you swallow the last drop, your tail will split in two and shrivel into the shape of human legs. And you will feel such pain, as if a blade were passing through you; but the queen will proclaim you the most beautiful woman in her court. At every step you will feel as if you were walking on sharp knives, but her courtiers will praise your poise. If the

prince asks for your hand before the full moon, you will grow old and die a woman; but if he does not, you will fade into sea foam.'

Her coherence depended on the power rooted and perpetuated in the desire of a prince, which is to say: according to the equation of this fable, the future of her magical form could be ensured only by the articulation of his desire in marital form; the magic of the sea witch transformed the mermaid, but replicated the imperial function of desire. A spell is a brief and local refutation of the crush of precedent. Or simply a systems test. To place the mermaid like a canary inside the palace: and for what? So that wandering among mortal men and women, gleanings, gathering flickers of herself from their glances (her very own vial of fireflies!) she obtained nothing more than the experience of appearing to experience pleasure; nothing more than the pleasure of seeming. And the pleasure of seeming is like the reflection of a pink primrose in a mirror. It has no fragrance. The mermaid had made a compromise. She was attempting to perform the equation. The mermaid did not want the prince. What the mermaid wanted was to rectify the element of her experience. Water was like slow drowning; she required air. Air because the mermaid wanted to risk love. The Christ was a flightless bird. The mermaid wanted to risk love. And the only way to risk love was to be recognized as a woman. To refuse the crush of precedent. To externalize herself. Like a hypercube unfolding into a cross.

Hans Christian Andersen sent a draft of *The Little Mermaid* as a love letter to Edvard Collin in 1832, when he was twenty-seven years old. Edvard was the son of Hans' patron and was seeking a wife. The two became close. Hans was infatuated. He wrote, "My sentiments for you are those of a woman." He wrote, "I long for you as though you were a beautiful Calabrian girl." He wrote, "The femininity of my nature and our friendship must remain a mystery."

Desire makes a woman of us both, ma chérie! In the glow of my bedroom, among the maidenhair ferns and the crushed crystal skins which Old Milk leaves to haunt my corners and alcoves, rising from the multicolored gauzes which you slip one by one from your shoulders, for the arc of a gesture, for the length of a glance and the depth of a single word, desire hovers and churns around us like a presence, as faint and undeniable

as vapor. So I catch it in my butterfly net; I bottle it up in Venetian milk-glass vials labelled 'Fairy Fossil' and/or 'Disintegrating Primrose Archive' and/or 'Daughter of Pearl,' which will one day clutter the shelf of an antique shop collecting dust until another wayfaring fairy, some summer afternoon, chances to sniff it and knows. Knows or, sensing some give or fray in the fabric of time, receives the transmission of my minor oracle. Antique objects suggest the possibility of another lineage; not of blood, but of perfume. *For now we see as through a glass, darkly.*

Ezekiel wasn't a man when I met him, and I was not a woman. We shared what could be called a gender, but what I like to call an atmosphere, whipped up slowly as we rowed the air, gesturing, glossolaling, the palms of our hands rising and falling as firm and graceful as oars.

To put it simply, we were both fairies.

My favorite genre of literature is gossip. My second favorite is prayer. But sometimes those are one and the same. I don't know who needs to hear this, but windchimes are actually a device for ghosts to send messages to flowers. My favorite goddess and dear friend Aphroditos called me on my pink conch shell to soliloquize about a species of sentient crystals on a distant planet who make love by refracting light into one another's faceted chambers. I was standing in the corner store looking at soda and suddenly remembered a song that has never been written: "When I first saw her, she was drinking a Fanta, with smudged mascara, strawberry flavor."

That was yesterday. Today I'm letting my broken fingers rest, nursing one long joint while blue smoke rolls and drifts around me like some kind of meaning. Smoke is what my thoughts look like when I'm not thinking them. When I'm alone, when there's no camera immortalizing my pussy, I don't really know what it means to desire me. Or I worry that at your touch I will be disenchanted, the bubble of my beauty will burst. Why do girls keep crying into my breasts on the second date?

When, in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, which is maybe best understood as a story about Joel, an implausibly selfnarratorial Fabergé egg who falls in love with her own near-future mirror, i.e. a manic white egirl two years into h.r.t.♥, Clementine née Kate Winslet says, "I'm not a concept, I'm just a fucked-up girl looking for her own peace of mind," I heard *piece*

of mind. I was thirteen and had never seen it in print. So I read it how I felt it. Because, without much of a choice in the matter, I was always somewhere else. Unable to decrypt the transmissions, inarticulate but insistent, pulsing from my father's rustling, quicksilver remove; unable to predict the seasons of his errant and erratic seeking, or anticipate the heft of emptiness in the fore of our sudden exits, when, every two or three years, with the promise that this room, this bed, would be the last, I moved towns or cities with my family—I was becoming, by plane and minivan and habit of mind, one of the Highway Kind. In each house and every room I was beginning and beginning, but ultimately failing to texture, to collage or accumulate, through the fixed point of a single window♥ (within the narrow, stabilized scene of a single view, that memorial surfeit and kaleidoscopic depth of uncountable seasons), the palimpsestic clock by which a mind apprehends the slow breathing—warmth surging, then retreating; flowers unfolding, then expiring—of a planet in vast and inexplicable thrall to the sun. I wanted some proof of my presence in the world. I wanted my movements to mean something. So I began searching, instead, for *pieces of mind*. This was the name by which I first dimly intimated the possibility of an enchanted relation binding certain objects, sensations or turns of phrase; symbols, scents and limpwristed gestures whose breezy arcs belied the infrared distortions which—rippling out unseen, unheard—disturbed the magnetic field, at times as fine and tensile as a spider's web, at others as intricate and suffocating as the fabric of the Technicolor Dreamcoat, of which the world formed the warp and my phantasmagorical intuition formed the weft. At first I presumed them to be delimited, enumerable, prefigured by divine force—presumed them to be waiting for me somewhere in the world—but I came to recognize these *pieces* as unpredictable and miraculously sudden, I mean *suddenly emergent*, produced by the abrasion of the brief and irreducible grain of the silicone angel I named Aurora against irrevocable times and places. I came to recognize the way each of these *pieces* grazed and snagged my gaze, pulling a stitch loose from the shivering tinsel weave of my obsessivecompulsive consciousness, revealing the seam of my senses, exerting a Fold in space and time where instants pool and confect and are

metabolized into the primary matter—which I call by many names, ‘starfluid’ and ‘subatomic lyre’ and ‘angel eyes’ and ‘magnetized topaz’—from which true myths are formed.

♥ i.e. a tgirl with a freshlawn persona, who ironically calls herself an elder on Twitter, whose handle (@blue_ruin) is the same as the name of her hair dye, who for the first time feels the skintight immanence of sex appeal and, claiming thereby a divine mandate for recklessness, indiscriminately unleashes her unprocessed trauma responses on friends and lovers as if they were burning curlicues flaring from the mind of an eclectic, blamelessly fey spitfire—that is, a tgirl as leggy and unbalanced as a placentaslick colt, whose insomniac rites of lipstick and oil and weeping have only just organized themselves enough to pass for a liturgy, barely speakable but spoken anyway, profusely and mistakenly selfcanonized, gesture by gesture, cataclysm by cataclysm, in bars, bedrooms and websites...an archetype I can only describe so adroitly because I am still shadowboxing my own insufferable isomer of the manic pixie impulse, i.e. the Ptolemaic cosmology of pain, where I conspire to place you in my orbit, or as if this were an act of unprecedented selflessness rather than a tautological feint, to place myself in yours, instead of ceding the center to that atmosphere in which opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly, writes Glissant, one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components.

♥ One year I watched the pinkly erupting blossoms of a desert willow, scattered and drifting like miniature swans across the placid surface of a pool as artificial and irresistible as a blue raspberry lagoon; soon after I saw the rim of a California canyon wherein coyotes, kindled to restlessness by gusts of citrus zest from clusters of orange or lemon trees, roamed and howled in the dusk; and later, the silhouettes of skyscrapers floating as abstract as the monoliths of Stonehenge in a smog so silver I couldn't see the street three hundred feet below, or any trace of flora or fauna save for the intermittent blur of a sparrow smacking into my window.

Sometimes it grows so weighted and swollen from the suppuration of seconds that—like the unassuming rind of that deadly puffball fungus called ‘Destroying Angel’—the Fold, wounded by its own excess, rips and bursts open, suffocating the air in a fog of spores; this is what I call infatuation. ♥ Surgery is, after all, only possible by wounding. The sutures cannot hold. Dehiscence is an acute expression of entropy; that is, of energy transfer—the opening of an infinitesimal heat vent. Where all life begins. The mermaid became a magnificent woman, who became sea foam.

♥ I think I'm falling in love again. Or maybe all I mean is that I want to keep vigil over your irreducibilities, not as if they were Sibylline Oracles, but as if they were butterflies. Take shade beneath my lashes. Listen, baby, because it's too early to tell you to your face, so I'm telling the future instead: I want to wrap a dimension around us, like the wings of a satellite—gold, metallic and

rustling with innumerable microscopic facets. I want to be your anesthesia, one cubic block of shimmering. So you will see me how I saw me in the mirror when I thought of you.

*

Meaning is not produced by the divination and description of essences, by the form of the curio cabinet, or the desires of its pseudoscientific collector; refuses to proliferate, desiccates wherever relations have been forced, hierarchically, into a stabilization; is substituted with something else, something which imitates meaning, whose facsimile of meaning is pumped full of artificial sweetener, just as formaldehyde replaces blood in the course of an embalming. ‘Essences’ are extractions. The colonial urge as perpetrated by Empire is that wherein colonizers, lacking their own life force, attempt to absorb, to assimilate, that is, to vampirize, time, attention, every possible labor, leisure, lineage, silence, desire, dreaming, prayer, memory, pleasure, infolding, interdimensional exhalation, spiritual ambit, signal fire, perishable and nonperishable nourishment, prophetic and instantaneous daydream, subterranean reservoir and mesh of myth from those they seek to ‘represent,’ because the colonizer is the vampire of universality, singing: “It’s a small world, after all...”

Offering a dim, hermetically sealed diorama, a prairie of broken glass, in which every leaf of grass is in fact an infinitesimal blade, Empire scrawls, in rainbow marquee lights, around the marble arch that forms its entrance, *Welcome to Eden*. Empire offers me forms, the most fundamental of which is the police report. All others are only its variations. The novel of trauma and final triumph, in which a marginalized speaker briefly holds the title of victim, that is, exemplary sufferer, clicks into place on the liberal bookshelf and becomes an alibi for Progressivism, history as a benevolent curve. Believing it to be their perfected form, Empire’s agents collect and collage such stories as though they were lost fragments of itself. Every click in representation follows a shift in Empire’s calculation of how to restabilize relations, how to absorb or reabsorb an error, a wound, a loose stitch without evidence of its ever having torn, without a scar, without a past.

Empire offers a perpetual déjà vu. It speaks through poets as much as politicians, it speaks in a tuneless recursive monologue that I hear as I write to you. Sometimes I'm halfway through a sentence before I realize that I'm transcribing another one of its traps. The form of Empire is always the same, but its content is a seasonal harvest of lurid molecules plucked and stolen from our visions, denatured, milked and—its rigs and engines having extracted our dreammatter in order to combust its hallucinogenic residue—sold back to us, atom by parched atom, as Doses of Paradise. The phantasmagoria of Empire's cultural production reflects our visions from its carnival mirrors: what I absorb is as reminiscent and uncanny as a photograph of some future Madame Tussauds, wherein wax likenesses of fairies and faggots are posed extravagantly in the tinselly strobelit diorama of a gay bar, directing into the camera a host of blank, rapturous gazes within which some corrupted consciousness shimmers in and out of existence. I have no doubt that if in fifteen or twenty years the sun still shines and Hollywood still produces films we will see the first transsexual superhero-object twirl and soar and embed herself in the monologue of the silver screen: for each object under its glare, Empire repeats a single story. Repeating a single story is taxonomy disguised as an act of witness.

Possibility, which when it unsettles us we call 'uncertainty,' is the precondition of meaning, which can be described, in turn, as the perpetual, unhurried astral weaving of nodal specks, *pieces of mind*, irrespective of distance in space and time. Meaning is a mode of changing and being changed; not a reconstitution of essence, because what Empire mistakenly calls essence, each point of a constellation, is simply a form of density, a web of gravitational attractions collecting: a star is the result of disparate elements meeting in intimacy, inflamed. A knot of light.

Fantasy is not, in itself, ethical, but it is the means by which an ethics is made. Dreaming is not fractal but kaleidoscopic, the way of approaching meaning by excess and collage, passion and permutation: I say passion because dreaming is never boring. Boredom is the only state from which a dreamer is exempt. Dreams are a confluence of life fragments, swelling and dissolving in waves, perpetually on the verge of meanings. What in Physics

is called ‘potential energy,’ I refer to as ‘potential meaning,’ the maximum of which is dreaming.

At Jay Street, as the doors prepared to close, I looked up. For less than a second I thought I saw him on the F train. It was some other fairy in a web of torn silver silks. Infinitesimal iridescent spiders swung and wove their threads around her skin. Her acrylics were transparent and dreamsicle orange, painted with clouds and tiny glitter icons of saints. Masks make everyone reminiscent. The train vanished. I flipped open my pocket mirror to check my mascara, then dabbed my lashes with a tissue. Suddenly I felt like a Hollywood starlet, which made the moment bearable. I thought to myself: ‘You are a beautiful woman with a mysterious past. You are a beautiful woman remembering bluebonnets and morning mist. You are a pieta but without holding anyone. You are a pieta but daydreaming.’

So let me tell you this:

If you saw me only in the present moment of my face (if we had spent our whole lives not knowing one another and then you walked up to me at Mood Ring in 2019 and touched my forearm and said, ‘I’m Ezekiel,’ and if I turned to face you smelling like strawberry smoke and some memory of horses in a field, smiling languorously, saying, ‘Honey...’) by which I mean if you weren’t studying my face like a palimpsestic scrap of parchment for any trace of a boy you once knew—well then without a doubt you would see a BRUNETTE BOMBSHELL WITH BUXOM BREASTS. I became my own mirage, the one which emanated first from objects exerting their sudden warmth, suggesting if not a soul then an opaque clarity like the silver ring of a tuning fork, a sort of alarm, a luminous refusal to offer me anything but allure: I was archetypal in the sense that I stole lipsticks and swayed my hips; I was mythical in the sense that I imagined myself strolling through ancient forests in sheer silver gauze—to the applause of butterfly wings!

But by saying this much I have already trespassed the vows of Womanhood; I have made my beauty speak when Beauty is made to be unspeakable. Beauty is a relationship between subject and object where the object, fulfilled already by its form, needs nothing and so expresses nothing. To save it from so much as the suggestion of indelicacy, the object is separated from language like cream from milk. Beauty is as silent as a

block of butter. So forget that I said BRUNETTE BOMBSHELL, otherwise you'll stop reading and seek instead the photograph of me reclining among silver pillows, my breasts full and nestled in the gauze of a light chiffon robe which floats around my limbs like a cloud of pink powder. At my left hand, a skyblue 1963 Princess 300 typewriter; and in my right, a hammer.

Because the pleasure of a wound is sudden and total. As if I had been still (suspended in an electromagnetic mist, the perpetual vaporization of faith into panic, insofar as faith is understood not as belief in proving but as belief in meaning, in what feels aloft, in what would express a yearning for being beautiful together) while the world was spinning, which had felt, in turn, as if the world were still while I was spinning, one night last year a blade—in which reality was, with the force of a cresting wave, for one instant collecting itself into a point—met and, tracing the curve of my right eye socket, sank into my skin, just as a needle lowers into a record along one of its grooves, so the world began to spin at the same speed as my soul, and almost simultaneously I felt opening from my fresh wound in a single, circumferent ripple – *invisible, as Music – but positive, as Sound* – a clear and bright stillness, a kind of serene attention which (as when, staring into a lover's eyes after so much doubt and uncertainty, I feel for the first time my irreducibilities confecting effortlessly with theirs, surrounding us both like wings of sugarglass) is the inverse of panic, of dissociation and relentless suspense; which is, in short, belief itself.

Ezekiel and I did not know one another as subject and object, it wasn't so clean, do you hear? From my account so far, it might seem that for him, he was the subject, and the object was some little fleck of topaz he kept in a drawer in his mind, but that's because I was only allowing myself to sing a Townes Van Zandt song, because my favorite way to think of Ezekiel is also the way he hurts me most. A man like a stalk of wheat. Tall and thin like that, nodding in the breeze as if the wind were the only song a man needed: too preoccupied with some theological proposition to remember breakfast and lunch, and by dinner wanting a beer and a smoke before even considering the possibility of oatmeal—but satisfied by the sight of a blueberry, willing to declare the beauty of a blueberry! Plucking a blueberry

from the bowl, making it some sort of symbol for his idea of paradise: 'I need more time with the blueberries, baby.'

Dancing on a table in his cowboy boots and a pair of strapon angel's wings: a man who knows how to love you from a doorway. But in a bed he knows only how to leave you; pulling on yesterday's jeans, his cock still wet with your spit. And that's romance to you. That's all you're given to make a poem from. So you remember him at dusk or dawn because he belongs to the haze of those hours, lit from behind by a slit in the blinds; most of him shadow except that belt buckle struck pink and phosphorescent as he turned toward the door. But he was already gone, long before then; he was gone as soon as he said hello:

“[REDACTED]”♥

♥ redacted quotation: verse one, lines six through eight from “Flyin’ Shoes” by Townes Van Zandt, confessing that he will be tying them on soon.

That was Townes, and so was this:

“[REDACTED]”♥

♥ redacted quotation: verse one, lines three and four from “I’ll Be Here in the Morning” by Townes Van Zandt, about how pleasant it is to glance back toward a town as you’re leaving it.

But that was Ezekiel, too; turning one last time to look at me. Eyes like he’d stolen the soul of a horse. If I had decided to be a fairy, if I hadn’t decided to become a transsexual, then I would have wanted to be like him. But I never dared to look a blueberry in the face.

*

Six years old, with the same eyes but an unblemished brain (a brain absorbing the images which would slowly be ground to powder, pulverized beneath the weight of my life, no longer even memory itself but the very air

and atmosphere of all remembering), I lived in a prefabricated neighborhood, that is, a sudden, ahistorical event, appearing 'as if from thin air,' all at once—which, precisely because of this temporal rift, and in order to assert a sort of generalized, frantic lineage, had realized itself as a phantasmagorical, unpredictable collage of French Chateau, English Victorian, Italian Renaissance and Spanish Revival-style McMansions. Behind my house, through a small pecan wood and across a creek called White Rock, was open farmland. This was Plano, Texas, at the turn of the millennium. I was living at the fringe of Empire's dream of itself, and so felt, half-consciously, the destabilization of that dream: the dream of 'controlled nature,' of the endless city—in a word, civilization.

Day after day I disappeared into the forest. I knew the creek; knew its chalk banks and swirling caramel waters and the clearing on the far side, where a rusted electric-blue Frigidaire rose up from the earth. Loose bones rested inside—a pelvis, a femur; I knew those, too. I had stood here with my siblings, making stories about the bones, listening to the faroff stamping of horses. We had searched until dusk for more evidence, but found nothing: only the dead fridge casting no shadow in the shadow of the pecan trees. But this time I was alone, and frightened of the bones. The bones knew what hands had held them, had placed them in that fridge. I feared that if I held the bones, their keeper might sense me. Where does the allegiance of an object lie? The clearing was silent. The sky wasn't watching. But mesmerized by the sound of hooves, I passed further into the dank pecans. Soon I reached a collapsed barbwire fence. This fence marked the tree line, the end of the suffocation of the forest: beyond it lay a prairie in whose reddish twilight distances a translucent tractor and nearimmaterial barn flickered like halfremembered bygones, as if built not from steel or wood but from lurid particles of dream and sundown, destined to vanish with the last breaths of the man who had stranded them in those dry Texas grasses, whose failing eyes projected them even now from some cool unseen porch. But I hardly noticed barn or tractor because nearer yet were clouds of luminous almost purplish dust from which emerged, here and there, the high speckled heads of Andalusian mares and Appaloosa stallions among whose sinewy spectral forms I wandered until the sky dimmed and

cicadas commenced their shrill and surging murmurs, seeming almost to waft me home on swells of sound as I floated senselessly among pecan trees in a daze from which I have never fully woken.

And Ezekiel sensed it somehow, sniffed it on me the night we met at a halfdead party where I knew no one and walked into a dank kitchen looking for vodka, sweetly stoned on adder-all and a bowl of Blue Dream, glitter mascara flashing from my lashes like a pledge of allegiance to Deathless Aphrodite of the Spangled Mind—and he came to me, Ezekiel:

“Piglet is androgynous,” he said, smiling dangerously, leering sideways, disappearing through a door for another drink; then returning, approaching me silently, placing his hands on the small of my back, looking into my eyes, his eyes glinting with coy wildness like a pixie. He kissed me. He took my hand quietly, leading me away from the music and the twinkling fairy lights, out a side door, to a flower bed. My point is that there’s more to him than what I’ve told you. My point is that we were in love soon. Or we were like two mermaids in a cove, condemned to dissolve because we didn’t know how to make sense. Pleasure and panic were so near. The taste of those months was cum; the scent was sweat. Trains rattled and whistled somewhere beyond the window; sparrows hopped from branch to branch. Seafoam pooled in the bathtub. I left my book on the bedside table, unread.

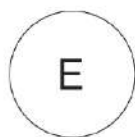
But it went along like that sleight of cinema, the so-called dolly zoom: the nearer I drew to him, the further our future seemed to slide toward the horizon, until it was so indistinct it could hardly be said to exist with any more force than a fleck of blue. He was most untouchable when I lay beside him at night. He was unreachable when I looked him in the eye. He was still heartbroken over another boy, sickened by heartbreak, struck down by the breathlessness of the revelation that despite so many Sundays of unslaked perdition, despite escaping briefly the blank hells proliferating in every direction from his gaze, when at last and after so many years alone and forsaken in West Texas he had felt heat in his heart like a Spring gust of annunciation, his lover could not, despite a suffocated yet corresponding passion, despite the unprecedented romance and candor of Ezekiel’s gestures, rise to the occasion. Because that boy did not want to be what his love would make him. Ezekiel might put it otherwise; my interpretation is

influenced, without a doubt, by my own troubles with love, but that final notion—of rising, or being unable to rise, to the occasion—has come to define how he diagrams our own interrupted ascension to the paradise of loving. At the time, however, I took his heartbreak as a sign of some fatal lack in my soul, as if my spell were not eloquent enough to wake him from his swoon. My amorous Mediterranean shrank to the size of a fetid pond, until I was not a feathery chanteuse in snakeskin heels, but a horsefly perched on a lotus petal, because I did not understand that for Ezekiel, already beset by seasons of static and centuries of undead instants, to fall in love again was already a miracle as unlikely as the Virgin Birth. And he had fallen in love, god he had fallen in love with me, because of me he was making the first gestures of a second offering of love... and I mistook it for selfishness, a halflove, not understanding that it was more than he had ever given a fairy, not understanding that I myself was also only giving halflove, because far too often I was surrendering to the corrosive intrusion of a paranoia, which attached itself to, pierced and rooted itself in, my love; which was every day attempting to crush my love (as if it were a golden fist) within an illusion of gnostic insight. Paranoia is a presence felt but not seen, a haunting which refuses to reveal its original form except in glimpses of endless depth, which shapeshifts faster already than my dreamworld (whirlpool of moony omens), and so much faster than the writing of these sentences. The speed of paranoia is the limit of my mental laws, as light is the limit of the universal; there is no way to solve its riddles or to transform them into knowledge, because it proliferates like a Hydra at the site of any uncertainty. But when I can ignore its seductive doom—when I do not agree to its terms, when, despite the terror of fascination, I turn my head, then it recedes into its cave. Rather than a rebuke of paranoia, loving is a form of attunement.

I will never remember that fatal scent, the barnyard musk upon his skin, the straw and the stable. I will never remember because a scent is immediate and unrememberable, because I know the only way to smell him is to kiss him, to feel the heat of his breath, earthy and sweet, or to bury my whole face in the soft musk of his ass. I can only love him that way in time with the instant. But there are other ways to love. Because we knew each

other with phrases, too; because when I said neither of us wrote a single word, I meant Ezekiel wrote no poems and I wrote no stories; I didn't mean that we were silent. When we withdrew, when I retreated into leaves and branches and sunless rooms, broadcasting my song from a portable radio, and when Ezekiel replied in rapturous telegrams that lapped at my feet like seafoam—the present swelled around me like the curl of a wave. Instants surged forward, folding upon themselves, out of time...

One afternoon, as I was shelving copies of Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* at the bookstore, Ezekiel wrote me from his bedroom. He was reading the opening pages of the fourth volume of Proust; I was hiding among piles of books...



Ezekiel

Today 4:30 PM

Tomorrow I will drizzle honey
on your cock and suck it off

My cock in your mouth: the
land of milk and honey

Where you shall rest your
weary head

And for dessert?

We'll write a strongly-worded
letter to the Pope, who is
rumored to own a sacramental
spacecraft

...along whose gold-plated
flank glints a pontifical
honorific, Nuntius Dei, in
cursive loops of ruby inlay

Dear Sir: we write to you from
the Land of Milk and Honey.
Please help us become the first
boyfriends in outer space.

Many years later someone will
append a section titled 'Gay
Space Voyage' to each of our
Wikipedia pages

"Ezekiel devoted himself to the
composition of eighteen novels,
each dedicated to one of the
rings of Saturn."

"The novels were launched
from Johnson Space Center in
unmanned rockets. No surviving
Earthbound copies remain"

"After that fateful, fitful voyage, all references to flowers, previously the most marked feature of his metaphoric repertoire, disappear from Aurora's verse. His couplets become not just arid, but airless."

"... not merely an efflorescence of his silence, but, in fact, the final evidence of his suffocation."

"'With everything at my disposal,' he writes, 'how can i describe nothing? Nothing but my own eyes, seeking some form, some recognizable shape, in the cold blank dark; nothing but my own eyes reflected in the glass window of the craft.'"

This needs to be used somewhere...

Well, baby: what can I say, the time has come. We expended ourselves in thousands of texts, chased each other through brief fables about windmills or ghosts or galaxies, breathless with inspiration, our phrases spilling down the screen like water struck from a rock; different than a photograph or a video because our words—ludic, horny, numinous—breaking open, crosspollinating, flooding that digital hothouse with spores and strands of musical code which mutated at the tips of our tapping fingers, stained with bits of yellow dust, into a dialect that belonged to no one, *a little language such as lovers use*, were not discrete, and despite reproducing grammatical duration, swore no fealty to time. Within the endless, ostensibly artless pages of our so-called text thread, sensitized in every shivering letter of our speech, pricking each other with sibilant splinters as seductive as Sappho's fragments, bursting our skins with sweet juices, gushing and fainting from spasms of nonsensical rhyme, we precipitated, profusely, as a residue of our love, a timeless, inadvertent book. Our visions were not smooth and separate; nor were they, despite their obvious affinities, complementary. On a microscopic scale they vibrated perpetually, their infinitesimal surfaces rubbing, chafing, shapeshifting at one thousand points, in search not of symmetry but of frictional, selfobliterative bliss; as long as we met each other there, in the blue glow of that neutral plane, that secret garden—we found our own form, we *melted into each other with phrases*. Only in the world, where the forms of beauty were so fixed, where I believed I could never be beautiful for him, only there did our love fail. Only in the world did he walk away.

As for you, I do not know who you are. I know only that you are likely everyone except Ezekiel, and yet right now I hope you are no one but Ezekiel, or if you must be notEzekiel, then I hope

(and now I am again briefly addressing Ezekiel as Leonard Cohen addressed the crowd of onlookers standing or seated on blankets in the meadows of the Isle of Wight in the year nineteen seventy at three in the morning as he prepared to sing *So Long, Marianne*—which is to say I am addressing Ezekiel as Leonard Cohen addressed the possibility of Marianne in a blurry early morning mass of strangers:

‘This one’s for Marianne,’ he said in a sleepy amorous Barbiturate-inflected daze, ‘Maybe she’s here, I hope she’s here...I hope she’s here, Marianne...’ and then he began strumming; so if you are here, Ezekiel, this next song is for you:)

I am sprouting in the sunless furrows of the Brain, petal by petal I am transmitting a graft of my abject Eden to one of the dull wet wordless folds of your occipital lobe. What a pleasure. To be here with you. And somehow I’m sparkling to you, somehow my sentences are haunted by a sparkling. Because I have made a secret of the alphabet (I’m calling my story a ‘secret of the alphabet’) but it is a secret that reveals itself only to those who—well, let me say that one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. But there is a sparkling nonetheless, so let’s pray for both our sakes that today you find treasure. May I be extravagant with you? I swear they always misread my kitsch. I tell a story about a feather boa, and they applaud my courage. To them I’m always unintentional—caught in the act of my own candor. Once I spent a night in a stranger’s arms, in an apartment crowded by ferns and old love letters and wooden reliquaries of ketamine or dehydrated oranges. He fingered me while I sipped vodka and talked about the feminine abandon of Tony Soprano’s windblown bathrobe. The next morning I went to see my therapist, who asked me, at the end of our session, whether I knew my nipples were visible through the gauze of my sheer sequined blouse. She said she was *genuinely worried* I was unaware. As if I hadn’t turned the head of every man on the sidewalk. And more than a few women, too. When I’m writing to you, truth be told, I remember that I am a ‘transsexual.’ I feel antiseptic. My love is cold, so cold—stuck like an echo in a series of caverns. It has been five years since I loved Ezekiel like I was inventing love. Now I have nothing left but dry retches. Pass me the lipstick and I’ll write it all down, my beauty so useless and a Siren song. Let me forget about you in the dazzle of bright lights, and I’ll rip open another dimension where angels fall forever.

The story I am about to tell you, the story of how I was visited by Saint Catherine of Siena, that story is not in two dimensions. But until you read me it is as hard to prove as a kaleidoscope turning in the dark. You are a slant of light: illuminate me.

As we pick the plants we love

Dim Scent

Jiang Kui, 1155–1221, Southern Song Dynasty

Aged moonlight, how many times

have you shone on me, beside the plum blossoms?

Listening to the sound of flute.

Wake up, love—despite the air being cold

like washed jade, we climbed

to pluck the newest buds. Now,

as I've aged, my oblivious brushstrokes too weak

to recite the Spring wind, the sparse,

rose-colored dapples beyond the bamboo forest

sending a sharp fragrance.

....

The water provinces, desolate.

I want to send you this sprig of plum blossoms

tonight. Tonight, snow piles

for ten thousand miles. The emerald wine glass
weeps against the damp petals.

Remember where we held hands, the moment
when a thousand trees suddenly

bent crimson beside a lake.

Then piece by piece, taken by the wind.

These assembled past ... when, again, will I see?

Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin

By Jumana Manna

Lockdown

I came back home in spring to shoot a film about foraging wild food. At its heart, it is a chase film between the Israeli Nature Patrol and elderly Palestinians who gather plants listed as protected species, particularly the wild-growing, artichoke-like tumble thistle ‘akkoub, aka “green gold.” Still in the making, this film is ultimately concerned with what is made extinct and what gets to live on; who gets to decide the fate of herb-picking cultures, and the options that remain for those who don’t. Food manifests as a container for family and community histories tied to land — traditions that face suppression encoded into the legal dynamic of nature protection. The shoot has been cancelled due to the Covid-19 lockdown, and instead I find myself quarantined with my parents in Shu’fat, East Jerusalem.

My daily activities are like that of a preteen or pensioner. They feature small adventures like foraging, collecting miscellaneous objects around the neighborhood, home-improvement projects, reading, drawing, watching films, and writing. Having slowly accepted the serendipitous gifts offered by the virus, I begin enjoying my exilic nostalgia, a new-old way of being present in Jerusalem after having lived abroad for over a decade. In years past, I remember lamenting not spending enough time here, popping in for a few weeks at a time to shoot and gather my cultural caché, only to exit before the weight of this place could get to me. Lingering fears of having become a cultural tourist in my hometown are now, thankfully, relieved.

I go walking in the neighborhood every day. I cross paths with animals, plants, and piles of scrap. I look at the neighbors looking at me, and get déjà vu of lethargic summer days, when school was out and there was time—lots of time. Helicopters watch us from above, and soundscapes from construction sites continue despite the strict curfew measures. As expected, Israel responds to the virus with a militarization of medical discourse. It fills the streets with the army, police, and border control, and it bypasses a Knesset vote and authorizes Shin Bet (1) tracking technologies to enforce social distancing. In one joint private-public effort, an Israeli tech company samples the voices of coronavirus patients, searching for clues about the illness in a person’s voice and breathing patterns. A dataset of people gasping for breath (2).

While picking wild edibles under quarantine, I’ve been thinking about the paradoxes inherent in the act of preservation—the politics behind the civilizational mask of a settler-colonial context. Red-listing nonhuman life to shield it from human damage on the one hand, and protecting populations from the nonhuman threat of an illness

on the other, are not quite comparable activities. Yet the pandemic has highlighted varying governance structures and the intertwined politics of care all over the world. Within the immediate surroundings to which I have been confined, walking and writing have become the mediums through which to think about the militarization of biological survival, as it gets pitted against other sociopolitical rights. This text, and eventually the film, are exercises in imagining alternative, affirmative care structures that remain, within and beyond the current reality, aligned towards plant and human life alike.

Shu'fat

I grew up in Shu'fat, a Palestinian neighborhood located on the historic Jerusalem-Ramallah road, about three kilometers north of the Old City of Jerusalem. Throughout the Ottoman Empire, it was one of many villages in Liwa al-Quds (the district of Jerusalem) that grew to be an extension of the city from the first half of the twentieth century onwards. At the time of East Jerusalem's annexation by Israel in 1967, Shu'fat had some three thousand inhabitants. By the time my parents built a house there in the early 1990s, that number had grown to fifteen thousand. Today, Shu'fat has about thirty-five thousand residents (3). In the 1970s and '80s, few other Arab villages and neighborhoods around Jerusalem, including Beit Hanina and Beit Safafa, still had available and affordable land. This availability and proximity weaved a new urban fabric made of growing Jerusalemite families, and early waves of Palestinian citizens of Israel arriving to the city from their villages for study and work (4).



Goats and sheep in the valley, Shu'fat, East Jerusalem. Courtesy of the author.

The heart of old Shu'fat maintains certain traditional architectural characteristics: domed roofs, thick one-to-two-story stone buildings, gardens with fruit trees, and sanasel— stone walls demarcating cultivated lands. These charming rural qualities did not always emerge out of the residing families' desire or choice, but rather out of a sustained strategy encoded into Israeli zoning laws. The strategy consisted in limiting the construction volume within a plot of land, in order to restrict Palestinian residents and manage the Arab “demographic time bomb.” This racist phrase is often used to refer to the growing Arab population under Israeli jurisdiction, particularly in Jerusalem, where all means are deployed to maintain a Jewish majority (5).

On the eastern side of the neighborhood is Shu'fat refugee camp, the only Palestinian camp located inside Jerusalem's municipal borders. As a teenager, I spent a few summers training in the local pool there. It was a concrete hole with water so brown that it was impossible to see further than a meter through our Swedish goggles. Today my parents buy their fruits and vegetables there. The camp is frequently referenced in the media as a pocket of lawlessness, with high rates of hard drug use and trafficking. The Israeli settlements that surround our neighborhood and the camp are many, and are all built on expropriated land to ensure that there is no territorial and social continuity between the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem . Instead, marginalized communities encircle the separation wall with unstable, rapidly built high-rises that house families desperately trying to hold onto their Jerusalem residence status (6).

To the west of us is Shu'fat Ridge, a hillside that runs along the highway exiting the city. The hill used to be a planted pine forest, and up until the 1990s it was marked as a public green space to improve the air and quality of life for nearby residents. My brothers and I used to play there as kids. But as former Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek confessed after this area was “unfrozen” and earmarked for the construction of the Ramat Shlomo settlement in the early nineties, the primary purpose of defining Shu'fat Ridge as a green area was in fact to prevent Arabs from building there, until it was time to build a new Jewish neighborhood (7).

Today all that separates Shu'fat from Ramat Shlomo is a two-lane road, beneath which our sewage flows in unison.

The Valley

I step outside my parents' house and walk westwards to the sahel (flat plane), through the old village, towards what remains of the olive groves that run beneath the bridges and alongside the highways exiting the city. Here, at the edges of the neighborhood, I become acquainted with a valley that kept me close to the magic of spring and allowed me to live through what I could not film. I look at the limestone rocks peppered across the hills. They are inhabited by various growths, and marked by signs of former

lives. Two palm-sized depressions are carved into a bed of limestone—ancient basins to collect rainwater for animals. There are rocks that indicate cave openings. Some contain signs of an oil or wine press, while others serve as habitats for plants, snails, the pods of microorganisms, and suntanning beds for lizards. To my surprise, gazelles regularly visit this valley, leaving little excretion pellets behind on their paths. We often meet and stop to exchange looks. I move closer; they run away.

A multitude of edible plants grow in this valley, as in much of the hilly landscape of Palestine/Israel. My parents, who forage frequently, both rave and complain about how quickly the fridge gets filled with greens that they have to wash, chop, and cook—before even going to the market. Between the months of February and May, they collect the following plants: khubeizeh (mallow), shomar (fennel), za'tar (thyme), 'elt or hindbeh (dandelion), hummeid (bitter dock), loof (black calla), wara' zquqiah or tutu (ivy-leaved cyclamen), halayoon (wild asparagus), and the much-celebrated 'akkoub (gundelia). It is indeed possible to live off of these wild leaves and vegetables in the springtime and only go to the grocer for a bag of onions, salt, olive oil, and perhaps some grains. This novelty is particularly poignant in times like these, where supermarket racks and trollies are not only potential virus transmitters, but also a symbol of the world's agricultural and ecological imbalance.



Asim Abu Shakra, *Cactus*, 1986. Gouache on paper. 15 × 15 cm. Courtesy of Gallery One.



A construction site in Shu'fat. Courtesy of the author.

Many of the plants that grow in the region, once known as the Fertile Crescent, are wild relatives of the cultivated legumes that are sold in supermarkets today. The seasonal foraging practices here, as elsewhere, predate the rhythms of agricultural cultivation and state-imposed commercial and sovereign interests. Collecting wild-growing food was the backbone of human survival for millennia, and continued to be a daily practice alongside agriculture for just as long. In recent years, foraging has seen a resurgence of popularity across much of the world: for some it's a leisurely weekend activity, a way of being close to nature, and for others, a means of survival—a safety net in precarious times. Inheriting knowledge about plants from my mother brought little moments of happiness, accompanied by the joy of witnessing the transformations of spring, the growths and disappearances of flowers, smells and changes in light quality from week to week. I felt so fortunate to live this magic again. Throughout the quarantine, foraging became a hybrid performance of food sovereignty as well as culinary delight; it is for me an intimate practice that strengthened my sense of belonging and connection to the landscape.

Out of this plethora of forageable food growing in Palestine/Israel, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) has listed three varieties as protected species: 'akkoub (*Gundelia tournefortii*), za'atar (*Majorana syriaca*), and miramiyyeh (*Salvia*

tribola). These are considered hard to find, as they grow in limited microclimates and are indeed often over-foraged. On my daily walks in the valley, I have made a new acquaintance, a shepherd named Abu Said. He has shared his knowledge of the area with me—a veritable embodied map of what edible food grows where. Most importantly, he's pointed me to where 'akkoub grows in large quantities, and so my mother and I equip ourselves with thick gloves, knives, and bags, and get ready for our excursion.

'Akkoub tastes like a cross between asparagus and artichoke. It is a culinary obsession for many Palestinians, the utmost delicacy. For those who did not grow up eating it, however, it is simply an irrelevant thistle. Botanists have recorded the wide-ranging uses of this plant, and judging from its traces found at Neolithic sites in the region, its consumption dates back at least ten thousand years (8). They say that 'akkoub was mainly cooked like a vegetable, very much like we eat it today (9). It is very rarely cultivated, and grows wildly on open limestone slopes and in reddish soil, from early February to early May, depending on elevation and rain patterns. It does not like turned-over soil, and wherever there are spills from construction sites or marks from screeching jeep tires, 'akkoub is nowhere to be found. It is known for its wide range of health benefits: it can treat diabetes, liver diseases, chest pain, heart problems, stroke, gastric pain, diarrhea, and bronchitis. It is antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and anticarcinogenic. By the summer, the 'akkoub dries and tumbles through the hills, spreading its seeds, and only goats are left chewing through its parched leaves.

On our 'akkoub hunt, my mother and I clip the thistle at its base, slightly below soil level. We strip away the thorny leaves, and once we make it home, we meticulously shave off the remaining spikes before cooking. Our fingers turn black during this process of getting to the edible heart of the plant. The heart, along with the thicker stems, gets sautéed with onions and olive oil, or cooked with pieces of meat, sometimes covered with a yogurt sauce. For me, 'akkoub foraging and peeling is a Corona activity: a prickly passing of the time.

For as long as I can remember, we would get 'akkoub from my aunts in the Upper Galilee. They would have already generously done the hard labor of cleaning the plant of its thorns, and we would prepare it for cooking. My aunts still live within the routines and time-space of rural life, wherein picking and peeling 'akkoub is not considered time wasted. The plant also happens to be much more plentiful in the north, in Nablus, the Galilee, and most of all in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. Only as an adult did I understand that my aunts, now in their seventies and eighties, are perpetual scofflaws. Picking 'akkoub has been deemed illegal by the Israeli authorities since 2005, and if you ask Palestinians why that is, many would say that it is “because Arabs like it very much.”

Za'atar, the most widely used herb in any Palestinian (or Levantine) kitchen, was the first edible plant to be red-listed in Israeli law books. It was 1977 when Israel's then minister of agriculture, Ariel Sharon, declared it a protected species, effectively placing a total ban on the tradition of collection, punishable by hefty fines and up to three years in prison. There were no official scientific studies published to legitimize the ban; rather, it was presented as a "gut" decision. Rumor has it that Sharon caught onto the symbolic value of za'atar after the 1976 siege of Tel al-Za'atar, Arabic for "thyme hill."⁽¹⁰⁾ This Palestinian refugee camp, established north of Beirut in 1948, suffered one of the worst massacres of the Lebanese Civil War in a battle fought between the armed factions of the PLO and the Christian Lebanese Militia—the very same phalangist militia with whom Sharon would form an alliance in the 1982 massacre of Sabra and Shatila. Soon after the za'atar ban, a kibbutz in the Galilee started cultivating the herb and selling it en masse back to Palestinians, as well as exporting it to Arab countries, disguised by its packaging as a Palestinian product. The initiators of this project were the former governor of agriculture in the West Bank, Ze'ev Ben Herut, and his son, Yoram Ben Herut. Through extensive time spent with Palestinians, Ze'ev was able to gather the best recipes for za'atar mixes (various quantities of thyme, sumac, sesame seeds, and salt) from his Arab friends, catering to their tastes and market demands. This early example of food appropriation, a well-publicized and widespread strategy today (humus, falafel, etc.), is one of many reminders of the occupation as an investment project, a military and technologically driven testing ground that services Israel's multilayered economies of extraction. extraction.

Nearly three decades after the za'atar ban, miramiyyeh, a sage variety primarily used for tea, and 'akkoub were also added to the list of protected species. This law amendment was supported by science, in the form of a 1995 research paper by Didi Kaplan, Israeli botanist and employee of the INPA. Kaplan and his colleagues' research showed that over-foraging of 'akkoub causes dwindling growth in the wild, as it has a negative effect on the flowering and rejuvenation of the plant. Kaplan, however, was against a total ban, recommending "to restrict harvesting for domestic purposes only," and was adamant about preventing commercial exports to neighboring countries⁽¹¹⁾. Yet, due to the difficulty of enforcement and the slippage of scientific authority into the legal-political complex, the Ministry of Environment ended up passing a total ban instead of adopting a more nuanced approach. A common argument that INPA employees voiced to me during my field research was: "How can we know whether these ten women in the valley all work for one man who goes to sell them in the market, or whether they are just picking a basket to feed their family?" Since Kaplan's paper, there has not been a single study following up on the impacts of the protection law on the plant's status in the wild⁽¹²⁾. And yet hundreds of people—exclusively Arabs—have been fined and gone to trial over the collection of



The valley, Shu'fat, and the Ramat Shlomo settlement straight ahead. Courtesy Aline Khoory.

‘akkoub and za’atar (13). These preservation laws constitute a thin ecological veil for racist legislation designed to further alienate Palestinians and Syrians in the occupied Golan Heights from their lands (14). This is land that, in many cases, has been expropriated by the Israeli state and administered as Jewish towns, settlements, nature reserves, military training areas, and other forms of “state land.”

Preservation under Zionism

Preservation measures have always been a double-edged sword. As our quarantine experience reminds us, every act of protection is accompanied by an erasure of another kind. The key question is often not whether to safeguard, but how and at what cost. In colonial contexts in particular, preservation laws have come as top-down decisions, imposed by the colonizer, armed with a claim to scientific expertise, and restricting the “destructive tendencies” of the “ignorant natives.” This dynamic has been particularly consistent in the national Zionist project, which has worked against the potential of a reciprocal exchange with the enemy other. Zionism has developed into an apartheid apparatus, a world cut in two, where the sovereign is in antagonism and vertical superiority vis-à-vis the Palestinian Arabs. Frantz Fanon likened master-subject relations in such colonial worlds to animal life where relations never lead to an affective community or common realm (15). The master relegates his subjects to the category of lesser-than-human, thereby remaining forever untouched by their speech and subjecthood. In this symbolic structure, Palestinians are always on the receiving end, subjected to the law rather than subjects of its making. This sort of preservation impulse is particularly ironic in the case of the ‘akkoub ban, where a plant which is essential to northern Palestinian cuisine, and unheard of by most Israelis, is

protected from the threat of Palestinians. Yet again, Israeli officials have forgotten to ask us what we think.

To restore a site or an object to its assumed and ultimately imagined original state often entails a preservation effort that severs the thing from its living environment. National Zionism constitutes a restoration event, a Judeo-Christian messianic effort to selectively return what is believed to be the original, or “natural,” state of the land to Jewish hands, excluding others’, through the idealized modern configuration of being-in-common: the nation-state. In this ever-extending frontier—literally and conceptually, and along the lines of modernity at large—history-making has been a secularized version of messianic time (16). Zionism did not stop at uncovering an archaeological site, locating the travelling sound waves of the music of the Second Temple, or speculating about the mentioning of ‘akkoub and za’atar in the Old Testament. This teleological construct of a state has historically used preservation and protection measures to further legitimize its claims to the land and reinforce its self-image by all means and in all fields, not least through conceptions of “nature.”

The best-known example of a nationalized landscape—a reconfigured landscape designed to mirror the state’s image—is the extensive monocultural planting of pine trees funded by the Jewish National Fund (JNF). This practice grew commonplace when Palestine/Israel gradually became the homeland of Ashkenazi Jews, and Europe the object of nostalgia. “Making the desert bloom” was not a mere metaphor for the Zionist



A sack full of foraged ‘akkoub in the Golan Heights. This quantity can take up to two hours for one person to collect. Once the thorns are cleaned, it will make a meal for a small family. Courtesy of the author.

project; rather, by planting hundreds of man-made forests, Ashkenazis could imagine being back in Leipzig while living in Jerusalem (17). The majority of afforestation projects were intended not only to make the “primitive,” semi-arid hills of Palestine look more “civilized” according to European eyes, but also to erase the traces of the over four hundred Palestinian villages that were destroyed during the Nakba of 1948, after their inhabitants were forced into exile.

With the rise of environmentalism in the 1990s, the JNF realized that it was not just the Palestinians who were erased; much of the flora and fauna of these lands was decimated along with them (18). The intrusive acidity of the pine trees prevented other vegetation from growing back, and the over-prevalence of the pines increased the frequency and force of wildfires. This echoes disasters in Australia, North and South America, Portugal, and elsewhere. In California in particular, the erasure of indigenous American traditions of managed burning has caused an overgrowth of shrubbery, which, along with the spiking rates of global warming, has resulted in chronically uncontrollable fires. Today, Native American communities have partnered with the US Forest Service to steward land for traditional values and wildfire management (19). In a similarly revisionist vein, environmentalists realized that draining the swamplands of Hula, in Galilee, in the 1950s damaged the migration routes of millions of birds flying between Europe and Africa. So in the mid-nineties it was partially re-flooded in an effort to bring them back. The past century has seen many examples of this kind of “misjudgment” and attempted repair: from desertification in the south—the Naqab/Negev—due to the depletion of ground water resulting from the displacement of Bedouin populations, to grazing limitations that have affected Arab herders. Yet unlike other settler-colonial contexts such as the United States, Canada, or Australia, when the paradigmatic shift towards the politics of sustainability began to take root in Israel, it was not accompanied by an official apology or acknowledgement of historical crimes committed. As slim and ineffectual as these utterances have been in the West, Israel has not yet admitted that the displacement of a people went hand in hand with violence committed against the land. Instead, the new “green” measures since the nineties have been co-opted into the historical rhetoric of protection, where the binary relations of power continue to be reinforced to this day.

Despite the above-mentioned environmental “mistakes,” there is some ecological basis to the fear that ‘akkoub, miramiyyeh, and za’atar may be going extinct in the wild, well beyond the specifics of Israel/Palestine. Elderly people throughout the country and in neighboring Jordan and Lebanon attest that these plants are much harder to find than they used to be. This new scarcity is also felt throughout Iran’s Isfahani province, where it has already become common to intentionally plant ‘akkoub because the market demand is higher than what wild growth can provide (20). Yet like most looming extinctions of biological life, the driving factors are damage to habitat, population growth, urbanization, and climate change. When it comes to plant foraging,

increased demand and unsustainable overharvesting are contributing factors, but are rarely primary causes. Professor Nativ Dudai, a botanist who has researched za'atar, confirms this in an interview:

No one talks about the fact that we, the Jewish [Israelis], destroy much more za'atar than the Arabs pick. Do you know how many great za'atar populations were uprooted by bulldozers? In Har Adar or Elyaqim interchange—locations with beautiful amounts of za'atar, and all of it is now gone. But the Arab? He picks five kilograms and gets a fine (21).

Negotiating the politics of plant extinction with an occupier is always complicated, especially in the context of Palestine, where over the past seventy years Palestinians themselves have been treated as an invasive species in urgent need of elimination and control. The protection of one form of life—nonhuman life—has been used as an extra tool to suffocate a people who have survived attempts at cultural erasure and ethnic cleansing.

This is an ontological paradox: the same state that creates security lists, kill lists, terrorist lists, and other databases to “identify humans who risk to threaten” also establishes lists of nonhumans identified as threatened species, elevated to the political status of being in need of rescue (22). The necropolitical state of Israel builds illusions of freedom and democracy through enmity and destruction, through a will to kill, while simultaneously adopting environmental rhetoric that claims to protect nature as virgin land, conveniently failing to recognize Palestinians’ right to the land and self-determination. Instead, ancient Palestinian land practices are framed as an inherent threat to nature, and thus the right of Palestinians to access that nature is revoked. In the contested landscape of Palestine/Israel, then, the continued collection of ‘akkoub and za'atar in the wild, despite and in spite of the ban, is an act of both survival and anti-colonial resistance. Foraging these plants is part of a bid to hold on to forms of memory and know-how that are fast eroding.

Court Battles

An Israeli preservation law called the “National Parks, Natural Reserves, and National and Memorial Sites Law of 1998” has been more like a pharmakon: a remedy and a poison at once. Many foragers claim that the law itself acts to propel commercial foraging. At times, in their haste and fear of being caught, foragers, especially those less familiar with the tradition, uproot the plant rather than cutting it at its base, thus depriving it of the possibility of regrowth. Others get a kick out of the illicit trade and enjoy putting up a defiant middle finger to Israel’s unjust laws.

Over the past decade, Adalah, a legal center for Arab rights in Israel, has

demanded the decriminalization of collecting za'atar, 'akkoub, and miramiyyeh. The attorney and scholar Rabea Eghbarieh has been at the forefront of both Arab and Hebrew media campaigns, contributing to debates and publications on the topic. In a letter he wrote to Israel's state attorney and minister of environmental protection, Eghbarieh argued that "the prohibition on gathering these herbal plants is not based on a reliable factual basis, does not serve the purpose of the law, and disproportionately harms the Arab population that has used these herbs for hundreds of years, particularly for cooking needs." Eghbarieh has often highlighted the gap in logic and rhetoric that arises during trials. The state representatives and judges perpetuate the expertise of the INPA and its scientific community, as well as the supposedly destructive tendencies of the Arabs. Meanwhile, the accused often state that they are simply out collecting food as they have done for generations. Moreover, indigenous knowledge and care around foraging practices is often dismissed: clipping the tops of za'atar and miramiyyeh stems in fact encourages fresh growth, and 'akkoub will regrow the following year and sometimes within the same season, so long as it is clipped at its base. The judicial system willfully ignores this expertise, the status of the plant as food, as well as the socioeconomic needs of those accused. Many who forage generally need to feed large families and can't always make ends meet. Instead they are met with exorbitant fines, which, if not paid, result in jail sentences.

Adalah's persistence yielded results in late February 2020, when the INPA announced that enforcement measures would be softened. For a trial period of two years, everyone is now permitted to collect up to five kilograms of 'akkoub for



My mother, Aziza, sorting her foraged goods. Courtesy of the author.

personal consumption. It is unclear whether the trial period is a commitment towards a lasting change of the law, or just a way to momentarily deflate what has become a topic of great sensitivity in the Arab sector inside Israel—and dodge Adalah’s threat to petition the Higher Court.

Since February, nature patrollers have expressed their continued struggle to detect whether the collection is indeed only for personal consumption, or is rather for commercial sale in local markets. With a fast-growing, increasingly urbanized population, many want to eat ‘akkoub but few are willing to go out and put in the hard work. In response, the prevalent model has become so-called commercial foraging, where a small group picks between thirty and a hundred kilograms a day to sell their harvest in the local market.

The real difficulty in enforcement clarifies the core of the problem: approaching conservation and preservation through criminalization, supported by a bureaucratic system of law enforcement, is a strategy bound to fail. Criminalization reinforces oppressive power relations, which, as with most societal challenges, rarely succeeds as a tool for structural and sustainable change. It is a monoculture and a mono-technology, a techno-fix—like pesticides, like antibacterial vaccines, like seeking a vaccine for Covid-19 while simultaneously leaving intact the faulty health structures, food industries, and globalized markets of the world. A new pandemic will only be a matter of time.

A Pause for Cat Orgasms

My mother and I walk eastwards this time, towards a wild hillside, hidden beneath a bridge that separates Shu’fat the neighborhood and the camp from another settlement. On our way, a kid asks my mother and me if we’re looking for someone. I say yes, the valley. This valley, too, is full of birds, stones, plants, and bushy trees. We assume it is expropriated land, given the massive concrete bridge that runs through it. But when we look below us, traces of plowing suggest that the original landowners seasonally come back to collect what is left of their fruit trees. The hill on the Shu’fat side is full of wild edibles and other kinds of native spring plants. The hill on the settlement side, however, is bland, covered mostly by grasses, with upturned soil to create a clean and orderly slope. Needless to say, there is nothing edible here. Back on our side of the hill, behind an old dilapidated metal fence, we find so many za’atar “homes” that we can barely believe our eyes. By the look of it, no one has foraged here for years. So we do. Indulging in the process, we find another kind of thyme, one that is not illegal to pick: za’atar al-bisas, literally “cat za’atar” (its Latin name is *Nepeta curviflora*). This type of thyme is also known as “Syrian catnip” because of the pleasure cats get from licking it. Adorned with a substance that mimics their feline sexual pheromones, cats gets high



Aziza smelling Syrian catnip. Courtesy of the author.

and euphoric from za'atar al-bisas. In effect, it gives them an orgasm. The cat begins licking the plant and then leaps around in it and purrs loudly. This lasts for a few minutes before the cat loses interest, potentially to return two hours later for another go (23).

Throughout the months of lockdown, my mother and I have returned frequently for new batches of 'akkoub and za'atar, feeling like defiant mavericks, stealing moments of pleasure as we pick the plants that we love.

Decolonizing Extinction Listings

When studying anthropogenic extinction, climate-justice researchers essentially seek to answer two central questions:

Which forms of human life are driving processes of catastrophic loss? And what are the diverse ways in which humans and nonhumans have resisted this loss? The challenge is to move away from failed policing tactics to create a life-affirming culture of preservation and sustainability. What's sorely needed is an epistemological change that decolonizes extinction and fundamentally reorients our relation towards each other and our surroundings. According to scholar Juno Salazar Parreñas, this decolonization must be "oriented towards process and experimentation and not toward foregone conclusion, except for the need to care enough about others, including and in particular, non-human others"(24).

Unfortunately, most people today—and Palestinians are no exception—do not lead a life guided by cross-species care. Palestinian society at large is now detached from its historical intimacy with the land, which only two or three generations ago was a central part of Palestinian life. A seldom-discussed transformation caused by the Nakba of 1947–49—along with the massive expropriation of land that continued well afterwards—was the process of turning peasants (that is, historically speaking, the overwhelming majority of Palestinian society) into unskilled construction workers.

This intentional and systemic transformation of an entire society is manifest



Tell el-Ful, overlooking East Jerusalem and the West Bank neighborhoods of Shu'fat, Beit Hanina, Bir Nabal, Nabi Samuil, Al-Jib, and Qalandia, and the settlements of Ramot and Giva't Ze'ev. Courtesy of the author.

today. One only has drive through the West Bank to see the mutations of architecture and landscape brought about by private owners and the Palestinian Authority alike. My grandfather, who was illiterate and who himself ended up a construction worker, learned lessons the hard way and repeatedly told my father to get a good education. “They can take your land and house away from you, but knowledge is yours to keep.”

The disregard for agrarian life was underway well before 1948. It began in the final decades of the dying Ottoman Empire, and it continued to spread under the British Mandate and the implantation of capitalist ideals of modern life that we have come to call “progress.” This “progress” slowly transformed land from something embedded in the sociopolitical fabric of a community, into an extractable commodity. These ideals are still hard at work across an increasingly decaying planet. Foraging, meanwhile, is an ancient method for recognizing and learning about the abundance of one’s surroundings. Since 9500–8000 BC, farmers have been selecting seeds from their favorite wild plants, planting them, and repeating the process until both seeds and humans were thoroughly domesticated. Over millennia, this grooming gradually changed the genetic makeup of both partners into the tastes, shapes, and faces that are familiar to us today. The wild relatives, or “weeds,” that live near fields where their cultivated descendants grow play time-travel games. Genetically speaking, these

relatives are many thousands of years apart. We need to foster an imaginary that understands the depths of time embodied in these plants, an imaginary that is outside the logic of origins and the oppressive boundaries of the state. This imaginary would include a multitude of approaches to biodiversity: rewilding alongside “zoning,” with the aim of educating, building agency, and encouraging responsible—and joyful—foraging (25).

We know that abolishing the police frees up massive amounts of public funding for implementing real structural change and building community strength through education, rehabilitation, and social support. In a similar vein, reallocating funds from law-enforcement bureaucracies and military forces towards education and biodiversity can support the changes necessary to disseminate plant-related knowledge and practices. This reallocation can also contribute to cross-border conservation strategies in regions where certain species are native. After all, seeds have always defied modern ideas of order, law, and borders.

This is one path towards a planetary democracy, or a democracy of the species—a possibility for freedom that breaks from slavery and colonialism in all their historical and contemporary forms. In this process, ecologies must be rebuilt and re-symbolized, so they are geared towards mutuality and affirmation, not exclusion. Only with this profound shift can preservation measures translate into a real attempt to protect life, rather than preserving the necropolitical regime already in place.

X

Jumana Manna is a visual artist working primarily with film and sculpture. Her work explores how power is articulated through relationships, often focusing on the body and on materiality in relation to narratives of nationalism and histories of place.

- 1 Israel's domestic intelligence agency.
- 2 This sentence is paraphrased from a comment Amal Issa wrote on my Facebook wall, March 25, 2020.
- 3 This number does not include the refugee camp, which is inhabited by at least another thirty thousand.
- 4 Primarily from towns and villages of the Galilee, also referred to as *a-shamaal*, or "the north."
- 5 After the occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem, the municipality passed a law limiting construction volume within a plot of land known as the "floor area ratio" (FAR) to merely 25 percent. By comparison, Jewish neighborhoods were built with high-rises, in order to exhaust the maximum capacity of the building area and to overlook the Arab neighborhoods. As the decades passed, the FAR increased in East Jerusalem as the Israeli state realized that Arabs had run out of land. For further reading: Eyal Weizman, "Jerusalem: Petrifying the Holy City," chap. 1 in *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (Verso Books, 2007), 25–57.
- 6 At the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, Israeli authorities threatened to shut the checkpoint and wall off the residents entirely, in a vague attempt to protect Jerusalemites from each other.
- 7 Sarah Kaminker, "For Arabs Only: Building Restrictions in East Jerusalem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 4 (1997): 15.
- 8 Nicholas Hind, "Gundelia Tournfortii; Compositae," *Curtis Botanical Magazine* 30, no. 2 (July 2013): 114–38.
- 9 A lone German man travelling through the Levant is the first known Westerner to have illustrated and described the 'akkoub, scientifically known as *Gundelia tournfortii*. In November 1573, Leonhart Rauwolf (*lion heart, rough wolf*) left Bavaria to begin his search for herbal medicine supplies in Tripoli, modern-day Lebanon. He continued from there to the "mighty city" of Aleppo, then to Baghdad and Mosul, before ending with a trip to Jerusalem. Rauwolf, relying on a description by the ancient Greek physician Dioscorides, mistook the *Gundelia* for milk thistle. A forgivable mistake really, as even locals today who eat 'akkoub but aren't involved in its collection commonly confuse it with other similar-looking thistles. Prussian and other European botanists built on Rauwolf's *Algenteiliche Beschreibung der Reise in die Morgenländerien* (A true account of a voyage to the Levant). They noted how in the old Baghdad markets, the mature and hardened heads were eaten like nuts, and in some parts of Turkey and Iraq were used as a source of oil and gum.
- 10 Rabea Eghbarieh, *Limatha Takhsha Israel al-za'atar w'al-'akkoub?* (Why does Israel fear 'akkoub and za'atar?), *Fusha*, May 8, 2017 <https://www.arab48.com/%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%A9/%D9%89%D8%B1%D9%82/%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1/2017/08/05/%D9%84%D8%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%B4%D8%89-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%8A%D8%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%83%D8%88%D8%A8-%D8%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1>.
- 11 Didi Kaplan, Dror Pevzner, Moshe Galilee, and Mario Gutman, "Traditional Selective Harvesting Effects on Occurrence and Reproductive Growth of *Gundelia Tournfortii* in Israel Grasslands," *Israel Journal of Plant Sciences*, no. 43 (1995).
- 12 As Kaplan told me in an interview in March 2019.
- 13 Very few cases have been tried for the collecting of miramiyyeh, which is used mainly as an herb and not as food, and is therefore collected in lesser quantities.
- 14 'Akkoub is bountiful in many parts of the Golan Heights—Galileans forage most of their 'akkoub from this region.
- 15 Achille Mbembe, "Fanon's Pharmacy," chap. 5 in *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), esp. 153.
- 16 For more on the critique of techno-optimistic efforts enmeshed in Western end-time thinking, see Deborah Bird Rose, "Reflections on the Zone of the Incomplete," in *Cryopreservation*, ed. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (MIT press, 2017).
- 17 Paraphrased from Carol Bardenstein, "Threads of Memory in Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges and Prickly Pear Cactus in Palestine/Israel," *Edebiyat: A Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures* 8, no. 1 (1998). Bardenstein is quoted in Iru Braverman, "Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine," *Natural Resources Journal* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 343.
- 18 Natalia Gutkowski, "Governing through Timescape: Israeli Sustainable Agriculture Policy and the Palestinian-Arab Citizens," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 3 (2018).
- 19 Laren Sommer, "To Manage Wildfire, California Looks To What Tribes Have Known All Along," *NPR*, August 24, 2020 <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/24/899422710/to-manage-wildfire-california-looks-to-what-tribes-have-known-all-along>.
- 20 Habib Yazdanehshnas, Ali Tavili, Hossein Arzani, and Hossein Azamivand, "Traditional *Gundelia tournfortii* Usage and its Habitat Destruction in Tiran va Karvan District in Iran's Isfahan Province," *Science Alert*, June 15, 2016 <https://scialert.net/fulltext/mobile/?doi=ecologia.2016.19.25>.
- 21 Quoted in Rabea Eghbarieh, "The Struggle for Za'atar and 'Akkoub: Israeli Nature Protection Laws and the Criminalization of Palestinian Herb-Picking culture," Oxford Food Symposium on Food and Cookery 2020, forthcoming.
- 22 Iru Braverman, "The Regulatory Life of Threatened Species Lists," in *Animals, Biopolitics, Law: Lively Legalities*, ed. I. Braverman (Routledge, 2016), 20.
- 23 At the end of the spring, this plant blossoms with "inverted" blue flowers. The leaves are heart-shaped and their scent is incredibly beautiful. Locally, it is traditionally used to calm nerves and as a pain relief for toothaches. It also repels cockroaches and mosquitoes.
- 24 Juno Salazar Parreñas, *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation* (Duke University Press, 2018).
- 25 Restricting how much of certain plants can be foraged is both difficult to monitor and arbitrary, as the number of foragers visiting particular sites varies greatly. A more effective approach might be to designate certain areas for foraging for limited periods—say, one to five years—while closing off others to allow plants to rejuvenate and multiply. This is rewilding alongside zoning.

9

Everything Is in Everything

If living is breathing, it is because our relation to the world is not one of being thrown or being in the world, and not even one of mastery—that of a subject over an object that lies before it: no, being in the world means experiencing transcendental immersion. Immersion—and breath is only its originary dynamic—defines itself as inherence or reciprocal imbrication. We are in something with the same intensity and same force as that something is in us. It is the reciprocity of inherence that makes breath an inescapable condition: it is impossible to liberate oneself from the environment in which one is immersed, and it is impossible to purify this environment of our presence.

To inhale is to allow the world to come into us—the world is in us—and to exhale is to project ourselves into the world that we are. To be in the world is not simply to find oneself *in* a final horizon containing everything that we are and will be able to perceive, live, or dream. From the moment we start to live, think, perceive, dream, breathe, the world in its infinite details is in us,

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materially and spiritually penetrating our body and our soul [*âme*], giving form, consistency, and reality to everything that we are. The world is not a place; it is a state of immersion of each thing in all other things, the mixture that instantaneously reverses the relation of topological inherence.

Anaxagoras was the first to give a rigorous definition of mixture as the form that characterizes the world: everything is in everything (*pan en panti*). Immersion is not the temporary condition of a body in another body. Nor is it a relation between two bodies. In order for immersion to be possible, *everything needs to be in everything*. On the one hand, as we have seen, to be immersed in something is to experience being in something that is, in turn, in us. On the other hand, according to Anaxagoras, this absolute, reciprocal mixture that seems to make everything the site of everything else is not a condition limited in space and time, but the form of the world and of all being in the world. For there to be a world, the particular and the universal, the singular and the whole have to interpenetrate, mutually and completely: the world is the space of a universal mixture in which each thing contains and is contained by *all* other things. On the other hand, interiority (being in something, *inesse*) is the relation that ties each thing to *all* other things, the relation that defines the being of *worldly* things.¹

To say that everything is in everything, and thus that immersion is the eternal form and the condition of possibility of the world, means first of all to assert that every physical event is produced as immersion and from the starting point of immersion. In this way, the light that allows me to see the page I write is the sea in which I

bathe. It is, in turn, in the switch, in the cable that ties it to the fixture, and—embryonically—in my hand, which activates it. And the hand that flicks the switch is contained in the light that now illuminates it. Everything is in everything. This mixture makes the world and space into the reality of a universal transmissibility and translatability of forms. But what we call transmission is only the echo of this reciprocal inherence of all things in all other things: the world is a perpetual contagion.

If everything is in everything, it is because, in the world, everything must be able to circulate, transmit itself, translate itself. The impenetrability we have often imagined as the paradigmatic form of space is an illusion: wherever there is an obstacle to transmission and interpenetration, a new plane is produced that allows bodies to reverse the inherence from one to the other, in a reciprocal interpenetration. Everything in the world both produces mixture and is produced by mixture. Everything enters and exits from everywhere: the world is an opening, an absolute freedom of circulation—not side by side with, but *through* bodies and others. To live, to experience, or to be in the world also means to let oneself be traversed by all things. To get out of oneself always means to enter into something else, into its forms and its aura; to return to oneself always means to prepare oneself to encounter all sorts of forms, objects, images—the very ones that Augustine was surprised to find in his memory, generator of mixture and splendid evidence of this total compenetration.²

Science and philosophy have made every effort to classify and define the essence of things and of the living, their forms and their activity; but they remain blind when it comes to their *worldliness*, that is, to their

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nature, which consists in their capacity to enter into any other thing and be traversed by it.

The same goes for matter: it is not what separates and distinguishes things, but rather what makes possible their encounter and mixture. It is not simply reducible to the space of a form's inherence in the world. It is rather the case that, through it, everything is in everything, nothing can separate itself from the fate of the rest, and everything lets itself be traversed by the world and therefore can traverse it.

To make of the world the reality of this perpetual reversal of the inherence of everything in everything means to make space not only the name of a generalized exteriority, but that of a universal interiority: to have within itself everything that contains us. Extension—corporeality—is not the space in which being is external to all other things (*partes extra partes*), with an intensity that coincides with its *conatus sese conservandi* [impulse toward self-preservation]; space is, on the contrary, an experience in which everything exposes itself to being traversed by all other things and strives to traverse the world in all its forms, consistencies, colors, and smells. Hence space and extension are forces that allow all things to breathe, to expand, and to intermingle within breath: to breathe is to let oneself be penetrated by the world in order to make, from the world, something that is *also* made from our breath. Everything breathes and everything is breath because all things interpenetrate.

Therefore a new geometry must be thought out; for the cosmos does not draw either a sphere or a plan. Cosmos as nature is not a horizon that contains in itself all other beings (the sphere), nor is it the totality of things (*ta panta*) or a totality that transcends its elements (the

One, or God). But denying its transcendence in order to make it into an originary power, a *foundation*, or a *root* (ground, *Grund*), as imagined by a tradition that culminated in German idealism, is not enough—just as it is not enough to think of this foundation as *collapsed* [effondré] (an *Ungrund* [“unground”]).³ To affirm that *everything is in everything* (*pan en panti*) does not mean simply to imagine the existence of everything in a single substrate. The cosmos—that is, *nature*—is not the foundation of things, it is their mixture, their breathing, the movement that animates their interpenetration. Put otherwise, the concept of immanence is not enough for us either to think of the existence of the world or to radicalize this existence by making God coincide with world—as pantheism did—by imagining the inherence of all things in God (and by thinking of their coincidence only through God). True immanence is what makes anything exist inside anything else: that everything is in everything means that everything is immanent in everything. Immanence is no longer the relation between one thing and the world, it is the relation that ties things to one another. It is this relation itself that constitutes the world.

In this manner, the totality defines a relationship of radical and absolute interiority, which nullifies any distinction between container and contained. Because, if everything is everything, not only does each thing contain all other things, but a thing has to find itself within no matter what other thing—what is more, in the things it contains. The fact of *being contained in something* coexists with the fact of containing this same thing. The container is also the content of what it contains. This identity is not logical, it is topological and dynamic.

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Every object is a site for every other object and, conversely, to be a place is to find one's world in every other thing. In a certain sense, any thing is a world—where the world is no longer the ultimate, unreachable horizon given only at the end of time and at the farthest extension of space, but the intensional identity with any of its objects. Being in the world no longer means finding oneself in an infinite space that contains everything else; it means being no longer able to experience being in a place without finding this place in yourself, and thus becoming the place of your place. The world is the force that reverses any inherence into its opposite, transforms any ingredient into a place, and any place into an element of the same compound.

Thus the cosmology of mixture is founded on a different ontology from the one traditionally taught. For all action is interaction, or rather interpenetration and reciprocal influence. Physics—the science of nature—should then be completely rewritten. If the world is in all its beings, this means that every being is capable of radically transforming the world. Universal mixture embodies the fact that the world is constantly exposed to the transformation brought about by its components. One need not wait for the Anthropocene to encounter this paradox: it was the plants that, millions of years ago, transformed the world by producing the conditions of possibility of animal life. The “phytocene”⁴ is the clearest proof that the world is mixture and that every being of the world [*mondain*] is in the world with the same intensity with which the world is in it. In this universal mixture, the effect is always capable of modifying its cause, which always resides in the effect. In this sense, immersion is the destruction of the one-way process that

puts totality before the individual, the “before” before the “after.” Causality in mixture is always bidirectional: mixture is always a *hysteron proteron*. Retroaction, which we have considered a property of life, is only the rhythm specific to breathing, the breath of mixture. It is for this reason, too, that the notions of environment and ambient world should be rejected: the living being is an environment for the world in the same way in which the remaining things of the world are the environment of the living individual. Influence always goes in both directions. Retroaction is an effect of immersion, and immersion is a cosmic fact: it constitutes the form and the condition of possibility of the cosmos, not the effect of some *human* actions. The notion of Anthropocene transforms what defines the very existence of the world into a single action, historical and negative: it makes nature a cultural exception⁵ and makes the human being an extranatural cause. Above all, it neglects the fact that the world is always the reality of the living beings’ breath.

From this angle, cosmology is a pneumatology—or, better, it is its higher form. To know the world is to breathe it, because each breath is a production of the world: what appears to be separate comes together in a dynamic unity. To breathe is to taste the world. And, for each living being and each object, the world is that which is given through and thanks to breath. The world has the taste of breath. If every mind [*esprit*] makes the world, this is because each act of breath is not just the simple survival of the animal in us, but the form and consistency of the world of which we are the pulse.

There is nothing metaphorical or arbitrary about this coincidence between pneumatology and cosmology. To

Everything Is in Everything

interrogate the world—its form, its limits, and its consistency with the breath that allows us to know it and to adhere to it—permits us to find evidence that classical cosmology will never be able to obtain. In the immanence of breath, the world appears to be something closer and extremely different from what we imagined. It is the unseen face that plants allow us to contemplate.

Walid Sadek

A Room With a Conversation in the Middle

We each harbour a story about corridors. A story about those functional components of domestic architecture we customarily walk and casually forget. Corridors, which may in a child's imagination expand into expansive 'neverlandish' fields unchecked within the father's home. But such a moment is usually short lived, trampled by the pressing demands of a life managed in the efficiency of kitchens, reproductivity of bedrooms, chatter of dining rooms and stupor of TV rooms. Such corridors, and the stories that lie in them like dusty moths dead on the reflective plate behind the glow of a halogen light, are usually of the past. Unless a war happens to visit your city, encroach upon your front yard, intimidate your windows shut and send you scurrying into those corridors again on all fours like the child you once were.

War can hurl us back unprepared into the spaces of childhood, into those secondary spaces, the in-between spaces of parental distraction and patience.

There we may find ourselves again crouching close to details forgotten by architect and mother alike: the chipped wainscot, the over-stuffed medicine cabinet, the coat-hanger straining under the weight of derelict sweaters, the perfect geometry of unnoticed hairballs and the mess of electric cables dangling from the paint-splattered fuse box. It is there, crammed in corridors, that we gradually learn to recognise the architectural end point of war; a corridor packed shut into a room, wishfully a shelter, where the pretences of architecture regress to join the fragility of human flesh.

War can hurl us back into the spaces of our childhood. It can pack a family into a box-like semblance of security with little else to do except listen for sounds and hear too many. The irony lies in the realisation that to listen and hear is an indication that one is alive still. Survival, it seems, is nothing other than hearing much and knowing very little. And yet it is in such corridors, when surviving at the architectural end point of war, that we discover the desire for speech. First, it bursts sporadically, disjointed, words heavy with meaning even if without the couch of proper syntax. Words of a rare ambiguity, more like captions to faces we thought familiar, now crumpled in fear, almost primitive. Then it picks up, longer sentences, words connecting into a speculation, a probable guess. The corridor grows slightly more spacious, almost a room with a conversation in the middle. Granted, this is unlikely to last. For language, no matter how it may thicken, is nevertheless easily deadened by the blasts of bombs. Yet, given the briefest lull, words come around once again, gather into inarticulate lumps then slowly fall into formation like a steady and tireless bacterial activity.

This is not reminiscing about the war, our Lebanese civil war. Much more, it is an attempt to locate a structure and a libidinal drive able to provoke and warrant the making of a place of conversation, one that we can perhaps call an art school. This introduction to the issue of a school of art is obviously in avoidance of the conventional language with which such an issue is usually framed. More importantly, it follows a decision to think critically at the limits of the possible. For clearly neither the premises of a liberal education nor the conditions of the market have either successfully promoted or discouraged art or its teaching. And although artists live and work amongst us and a few art courses are available at universities and other like institutions, the fundamental question of 'why an art school' is yet to be answered. We often hear related questions such as 'why art?' and 'what kind of artist?' But as for art schools, the issue seems less imperious. After all, art happens in galleries and an artist is most probably born as one. To ask 'why an art school?' represents primarily a shift of emphasis from the artist as the subject of conversation to the school as a place of conversation. But to do so, one must think outside the well-rehearsed categories of the academy, the so-called foundation courses and vertical studios. In other words, one must postpone discussion of the ascending and accumulative structure of an art curriculum and consider instead the art school as a place we congregate in rather than a pedagogical structure from which we graduate. Such an approach might allow us to suspend those polemical distinctions between artist and art teacher, between artist and designer, between the paths of the vocation and the demands of the market and face instead what is once more a fundamental question: Why an art school?

Clearly, one answer is almost always at hand. An answer that is as redundant as it has become axiomatic in its obedient repetition by artists,

educators and audiences alike: art schools are a cultural necessity. And so we continue to teach art mostly as an added value, a cultural topping. We also continue to hold on to the few art courses offered at universities out of an antiquated moral imperative, a vague suspicion that art must be significant.

It seems to me that this cultural necessity, this moral imperative, promoted within art schools derives primarily from an unquestioned loyalty to the figure of the artist. For if pressed to explain why an art school is culturally necessary, we most often answer that it is so because artists are great. Accordingly, art schools gain legitimacy by claiming a role within the larger world of great artists.¹ In this sense an art school remains a parasitical institution, a worldly temple for the adoration of renowned artists, of patron saints, so to speak. And at the heart of every art school there lies a wish for death and resurrection: that one day a student will transgress and exceed the curriculum, join the gallery of those patron saints and thus provide a renewed reason for the continuance of the art school.² In other words, an art school claims its own justification in the figure of the transgressive and singular artist.

To approach an alternative, one needs to insist that an art school need not be concerned with the making of artists. If successful, such an insistence can provide a shift that will not only set us outside the artist's biography as a paradigm for the annunciation and flowering of great art, but will also lead us into theorising a project specific to an art school. A project that will possibly found the school as a place of conversation unburdened by loyalty to the ascendant teleology that structures the genre of artists' biographies. A place of conversation that is not foreclosed by the figure of the artist as a prophecy fulfilled.³ And so to propose a structure recollected from the time of war, when one is besieged by a present without a future and when the rushing pulse of poor bodies turns deafening, is not mere exercising. Rather, it is a search for a structure outside the bounds of the figure of the artist, in what is probably a shared experience, a recognisable phenomenological situation, by which we can begin to understand the making of language and the desire that motivates it. It is an invitation to think and reflect at the limit, where an act is usually decisive. And what is this structure we find wherein desire is reared in the midst of a ruined landscape? It is that of a room with a conversation in the middle.

By way of further elaboration, let us assess a situation historically specific to art schools, and one that seems comparable in structure. In her book titled *Hikayatou Jasad* (Story of a Body), Nadia Annamar offers a series of interviews conducted with Lebanese artists and sculptors, all of whom taught or studied at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) and later at the School of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University.⁴ What these artists had in common is a model, a nude woman in the centre of their shared atelier. Her name is Mariam Kheiro. We are told that she worked for some time as the private model for the painter Kaisar Al-Gemayel before acting full time as the first professional nude model at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts when Al-Gemayel was its head. Although unevenly articulated, Annamar's book seeks nevertheless to unearth a hitherto unwritten story about a woman's body repeatedly pictured. Mariam Kheiro's voice, it seems, is yet to be heard. In the interview with the model with which the book opens, Kheiro appears as an elderly and ailing woman, still temperamental, with strong opinions and a marked generosity in remembering

the artists of the first and second generation whom she accompanied during the early years of the Académie. Her nostalgia is poignant. Obviously, she is an ageing and forgotten woman who was once at the centre of a nascent art school and whose image was multiplied over the papers and canvases of a growing community of artists. She was once the centre that gave structure to that famed room at the Académie, while the artists had a room with a model at the centre. That is the gist of Annamar's book. It is also possibly a concise description of that pivotal moment in our local history of modernism, namely the founding of ALBA; a moment when the grammar of pictorial arts was presumably set and rehearsed in a room with a model at the centre. Accordingly, the nude body of Mariam Kheiro is proffered as a measure, a standard by which art students are evaluated and towards which they all must tend. Concomitantly, what is usually named style, or in other words, the personal pictorial idiom of each student, is but the visible evidence of a young artist's shortcomings, exasperation, partial solutions and latent desires for that model at the centre of the room. In all of this, the body of Mariam Kheiro remains inexhaustible, a cipher for unrequited approaches, a fixed object of desire on whose shores a million pictures lie awash. 'This ass is not my ass,' she says. Stunned, the student attempts a defence: 'It is not my fault if you are like this.' Mariam replies: 'You are incapable of seeing beauty, this thing is not for you, this ass inspired good artists and by drawing it they all learned art.'⁵

Perhaps this is no more than an anecdote. It tells nothing of that stunned young art student, very little of the interviewee Nkoula Annamar and not enough of Mariam Kheiro. Yet it does provide an image of the insuperable hierarchy on which art schools are founded. Rather than a room with a model at the centre, art schools are in fact structured as a hierarchy, the pinnacle of which is occupied by the conflation of the model with a primer of fixed pictorial grammar. To exceed the pinnacle is to force a miracle and become a singular artist. Yet what the hierarchy provides is the preface to every transgression. And although the hierarchy professes a yearning for the singular artist as liberator, it nevertheless maintains the art school as a solid basic necessity.

In following the logic of this assessment, an art school appears to be ideologically produced. It performs an inversion of relations. It proffers the singular artist as an unbounded subject, a fountain of creativity, vital because transgressive. It does so by positing itself and its curriculum as the contrary, namely an incomplete proposition, a structure that points at 'genius' but can only provide lessons in the pictorial grammar of yesterday. For the primer of pictorial grammar becomes more antiquated with every transgression of every singular artist. This is an ideological production because it inverts and masks the function of the artist. For is the artist, that singular individual with a proper name, simply and purely a tireless and expansive emitter of ideas? Is the artist truly and simply the other of institutions, the renegade of discourses, a puzzling innovator? Or is the artist a guarantee against the proliferation of signification, what is ironically termed the 'peril which threatens the world'?⁶ In his essay titled, 'What is an Author?', Michel Foucault argues that the author, the proper name—for us it is the artist—fulfils a functional principle by which 'one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and re-composition of fiction'.⁷ Accordingly, one can argue that the author/artist is the figure through which we avoid the often daunting task of looking at an image, of reading a text and assuming the responsibility of interpretation. And so rather than engage with the making of signification, the weaving of fictions, we relegate unto the artist/author, unto that proper name, all the risks involved.

If I choose to deploy Foucault's insight, it is in the hope of questioning the way art schools are dragged into complicity with a project aiming at the containment of signification. And so if we are to imagine an art school without a model at the centre and independent of the figure of the artist, who stands outside it and antecedes it, then we must face and respond to this incumbent fear of the proliferation of meaning. We must search for a reason, or rather a libidinal drive that makes the proliferation of meaning an utter necessity and not a threat. My argument is that if an art school cannot avoid institutionalisation, it is then necessary that it be constantly an institution in crisis: a besieged room with a conversation in the middle. For it is in such a situation of chronic crisis that the proliferation of signification is never a threat. Rather, it is a libidinal drive to disperse the one thing we are probably still capable of, namely the enunciation of words. In such a situation, words are evidence that we are still able to propose otherwise. Words are evidence of our survival and of our likely deaths. For words, when extinguished, leave behind a noticeable emptiness, a dubious silence. An art school with a conversation in the middle is a place for the dispersion of language, for weaving sentences; it is a place for the making of fictions. Its evidence lies in its ability to make the gradual prevalence of silence noticeable and questionable.

Notes:

1. The figure of the 'visiting artist' is a case in point. Especially prevalent in graduate art programmes, the 'visiting artist' is a successful and famous practicing artist whose visit to the studios of graduate students is almost the one event in the calendar that makes a graduate programme worth enrolling in. This is certainly true in my experience at the Claremont Graduate

School of Art (1990–92). Although universities in Lebanon do not offer graduate studies in art, the issue is even more relevant there precisely because it is exacerbated. Undergraduate students are often left but with the hope of emigrating to continue their studies abroad and so partake in the calendar of a graduate programme abroad.

2. Howard Singerman develops this idea at length. He writes: 'Yet it is Art, a genuine

discovery, and the student is an artist, only through excess and difference [...]', in *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 123.

3. In his often-cited *Lives of the Artists*, Giorgio Vasari (1550–68) lays down a typology of artists' biographies. His chapter on the Florentine painter Giotto is exemplary for his description of a miraculous beginning in Italian painting. For an elaboration of the function of the miracle in an artist's biography see also Kris Ernst and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

4. Nadia Annamar, *Hikayatou Jasad*

(Beirut: Dar Annahar, 2001). The Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts, most often known under the acronym ALBA, was founded in 1943. Instruction began in the academic year 1944–45 with Alexis Boutros as the first dean.

The School of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University was founded in 1964. Nkoula Annamar, a former student at ALBA (1944–49), became the second dean, following architect Antoine Nahhas.

5. Ibid., p. 45.

6. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

7. Ibid., p. 119.



In Praise of Idleness
Bertrand Russell

Like most of my generation, I was brought up on the saying: 'Satan finds some mischief for idle hands to do.' Being a highly virtuous child, I believed all that I was told, and acquired a conscience which has kept me working hard down to the present moment. But although my conscience has controlled my actions, my opinions have undergone a revolution. I think that there is far too much work done in the world, that immense harm is caused by the belief that work is virtuous, and that what needs to be preached in modern industrial countries is quite different from what always has been preached. Everyone knows the story of the traveler in Naples who saw twelve beggars lying in the sun (it was before the days of Mussolini), and offered a lira to the laziest of them. Eleven of them jumped up to claim it, so he gave it to the twelfth. This traveler was on the right lines. But in countries which do not enjoy Mediterranean sunshine idleness is more difficult, and a great public propaganda will be required to inaugurate it. I hope that, after reading the following pages, the leaders of the YMCA will start a campaign to induce good young men to do nothing. If so, I shall not have lived in vain.

Before advancing my own arguments for laziness, I must dispose of one which I cannot accept. Whenever a person who already has enough to live on proposes to engage in some everyday kind of job, such as school-teaching or typing, he or she is told that such conduct takes the bread out of other people's mouths, and is therefore wicked. If this argument were valid, it would only be necessary for us all to be idle in order that we should all have our mouths full of bread. What

people who say such things forget is that what a man earns he usually spends, and in spending he gives employment. As long as a man spends his income, he puts just as much bread into people's mouths in spending as he takes out of other people's mouths in earning. The real villain, from this point of view, is the man who saves. If he merely puts his savings in a stocking, like the proverbial French peasant, it is obvious that they do not give employment. If he invests his savings, the matter is less obvious, and different cases arise.

One of the commonest things to do with savings is to lend them to some Government. In view of the fact that the bulk of the public expenditure of most civilized Governments consists in payment for past wars or preparation for future wars, the man who lends his money to a Government is in the same position as the bad men in Shakespeare who hire murderers. The net result of the man's economical habits is to increase the armed forces of the State to which he lends his savings. Obviously it would be better if he spent the money, even if he spent it in drink or gambling.

But, I shall be told, the case is quite different when savings are invested in industrial enterprises. When such enterprises succeed, and produce something useful, this may be conceded. In these days, however, no one will deny that most enterprises fail. That means that a large amount of human labor, which might have been devoted to producing something that could be enjoyed, was expended on producing machines which, when produced, lay idle and did no good to anyone. The man who invests his savings in a concern that goes bankrupt is therefore injuring others as well as himself. If he spent his money, say, in giving parties for his friends, they (we may hope) would get pleasure, and so would all those upon whom he spent money, such as the butcher, the baker, and the bootlegger. But if he spends it (let us say) upon laying down rails for surface cars in some place where surface cars turn out not to be wanted, he has diverted a mass of labor into channels where it gives pleasure to no one. Nevertheless, when he becomes poor through failure of his investment he will be regarded as a victim of undeserved misfortune, whereas the gay spendthrift, who has spent his money philanthropically, will be despised as a fool and a frivolous person.

All this is only preliminary. I want to say, in all seriousness, that a great deal of harm is being done in the modern world by belief in the virtuousness of work, and that the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organized diminution of work.

First of all: what is work? Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid. The second kind is capable of indefinite extension: there are not only those who give orders, but those who give advice as to what orders should be given. Usually two opposite kinds of advice are given simultaneously by two organized bodies of men; this is called politics. The skill required for this kind of work is not knowledge of the subjects as to which advice is given, but knowledge of the art of persuasive speaking and writing, i.e. of advertising.

Throughout Europe, though not in America, there is a third class of men, more respected than either of the classes of workers. There are men who, through ownership of land, are able to make others pay for the privilege of being allowed to exist and to work. These landowners are idle, and I might therefore be expected to praise them. Unfortunately, their idleness is only rendered possible by the industry of others; indeed their desire for comfortable idleness is historically the source of the whole gospel of work. The last thing they have ever wished is that others should follow their example.

From the beginning of civilization until the Industrial Revolution, a man could, as a rule, produce by hard work little more than was required for the subsistence of himself and his family, although his wife worked at least as hard as he did, and his children added their labor as soon as they were old enough to do so. The small surplus above bare necessities was not left to those who produced it, but was appropriated by warriors and priests. In times of famine there was no surplus; the warriors and priests, however, still secured as much as at other times, with the result that many of the workers died of hunger. This system persisted in Russia until 1917 [1], and still persists in the East; in England, in spite of the Industrial Revolution, it remained in full force throughout the Napoleonic wars, and until a hundred years ago, when the new class of manufacturers acquired power. In America, the system came to an end with the Revolution, except in the South, where it persisted until the Civil War. A system which lasted so long and ended so recently has naturally left a profound impress upon men's thoughts and opinions. Much that we take for granted about the desirability of work is derived from this system, and, being pre-industrial, is not adapted to the modern world. Modern technique has made it possible for leisure, within limits, to be not the prerogative of small privileged classes, but a right evenly distributed throughout the

community. The morality of work is the morality of slaves, and the modern world has no need of slavery.

It is obvious that, in primitive communities, peasants, left to themselves, would not have parted with the slender surplus upon which the warriors and priests subsisted, but would have either produced less or consumed more. At first, sheer force compelled them to produce and part with the surplus. Gradually, however, it was found possible to induce many of them to accept an ethic according to which it was their duty to work hard, although part of their work went to support others in idleness. By this means the amount of compulsion required was lessened, and the expenses of government were diminished. To this day, 99 per cent of British wage-earners would be genuinely shocked if it were proposed that the King should not have a larger income than a working man. The conception of duty, speaking historically, has been a means used by the holders of power to induce others to live for the interests of their masters rather than for their own. Of course the holders of power conceal this fact from themselves by managing to believe that their interests are identical with the larger interests of humanity. Sometimes this is true; Athenian slave-owners, for instance, employed part of their leisure in making a permanent contribution to civilization which would have been impossible under a just economic system. Leisure is essential to civilization, and in former times leisure for the few was only rendered possible by the labors of the many. But their labors were valuable, not because work is good, but because leisure is good. And with modern technique it would be possible to distribute leisure justly without injury to civilization.

Modern technique has made it possible to diminish enormously the amount of labor required to secure the necessities of life for everyone. This was made obvious during the war. At that time all the men in the armed forces, and all the men and women engaged in the production of munitions, all the men and women engaged in spying, war propaganda, or Government offices connected with the war, were withdrawn from productive occupations. In spite of this, the general level of well-being among unskilled wage-earners on the side of the Allies was higher than before or since. The significance of this fact was concealed by finance: borrowing made it appear as if the future was nourishing the present. But that, of course, would have been impossible; a man cannot eat a loaf of bread that does not yet exist. The war showed conclusively that, by the scientific organization of production, it is possible to keep modern populations in fair comfort on a small part of the working capacity of the modern world. If, at the

end of the war, the scientific organization, which had been created in order to liberate men for fighting and munition work, had been preserved, and the hours of the week had been cut down to four, all would have been well. Instead of that the old chaos was restored, those whose work was demanded were made to work long hours, and the rest were left to starve as unemployed. Why? Because work is a duty, and a man should not receive wages in proportion to what he has produced, but in proportion to his virtue as exemplified by his industry.

This is the morality of the Slave State, applied in circumstances totally unlike those in which it arose. No wonder the result has been disastrous. Let us take an illustration. Suppose that, at a given moment, a certain number of people are engaged in the manufacture of pins. They make as many pins as the world needs, working (say) eight hours a day. Someone makes an invention by which the same number of men can make twice as many pins: pins are already so cheap that hardly any more will be bought at a lower price. In a sensible world, everybody concerned in the manufacturing of pins would take to working four hours instead of eight, and everything else would go on as before. But in the actual world this would be thought demoralizing. The men still work eight hours, there are too many pins, some employers go bankrupt, and half the men previously concerned in making pins are thrown out of work. There is, in the end, just as much leisure as on the other plan, but half the men are totally idle while half are still overworked. In this way, it is insured that the unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness. Can anything more insane be imagined?

The idea that the poor should have leisure has always been shocking to the rich. In England, in the early nineteenth century, fifteen hours was the ordinary day's work for a man; children sometimes did as much, and very commonly did twelve hours a day. When meddlesome busybodies suggested that perhaps these hours were rather long, they were told that work kept adults from drink and children from mischief. When I was a child, shortly after urban working men had acquired the vote, certain public holidays were established by law, to the great indignation of the upper classes. I remember hearing an old Duchess say: 'What do the poor want with holidays? They ought to work.' People nowadays are less frank, but the sentiment persists, and is the source of much of our economic confusion.

Let us, for a moment, consider the ethics of work frankly, without superstition. Every human being, of necessity, consumes, in the course of his life, a certain amount of the produce of human labor. Assuming, as we may, that labor is on the whole disagreeable, it is unjust that a man should consume more than he produces. Of course he may provide services rather than commodities, like a medical man, for example; but he should provide something in return for his board and lodging. to this extent, the duty of work must be admitted, but to this extent only.

I shall not dwell upon the fact that, in all modern societies outside the USSR, many people escape even this minimum amount of work, namely all those who inherit money and all those who marry money. I do not think the fact that these people are allowed to be idle is nearly so harmful as the fact that wage-earners are expected to overwork or starve.

If the ordinary wage-earner worked four hours a day, there would be enough for everybody and no unemployment -- assuming a certain very moderate amount of sensible organization. This idea shocks the well-to-do, because they are convinced that the poor would not know how to use so much leisure. In America men often work long hours even when they are well off; such men, naturally, are indignant at the idea of leisure for wage-earners, except as the grim punishment of unemployment; in fact, they dislike leisure even for their sons. Oddly enough, while they wish their sons to work so hard as to have no time to be civilized, they do not mind their wives and daughters having no work at all. the snobbish admiration of uselessness, which, in an aristocratic society, extends to both sexes, is, under a plutocracy, confined to women; this, however, does not make it any more in agreement with common sense.

The wise use of leisure, it must be conceded, is a product of civilization and education. A man who has worked long hours all his life will become bored if he becomes suddenly idle. But without a considerable amount of leisure a man is cut off from many of the best things. There is no longer any reason why the bulk of the population should suffer this deprivation; only a foolish asceticism, usually vicarious, makes us continue to insist on work in excessive quantities now that the need no longer exists.

In the new creed which controls the government of Russia, while there is much that is very different from the traditional teaching of the West, there are some things that are quite unchanged. The attitude of the governing classes, and especially of those who conduct educational propaganda, on the subject of the dignity of labor, is almost exactly that which the governing classes of the world have always preached to what were called the 'honest poor'. Industry, sobriety, willingness to work long hours for distant advantages, even submissiveness to authority, all these reappear; moreover authority still represents the will of the Ruler of the Universe, Who, however, is now called by a new name, Dialectical Materialism.

The victory of the proletariat in Russia has some points in common with the victory of the feminists in some other countries. For ages, men had conceded the superior saintliness of women, and had consoled women for their inferiority by maintaining that saintliness is more desirable than power. At last the feminists decided that they would have both, since the pioneers among them believed all that the men had told them about the desirability of virtue, but not what they had told them about the worthlessness of political power. A similar thing has happened in Russia as regards manual work. For ages, the rich and their sycophants have written in praise of 'honest toil', have praised the simple life, have professed a religion which teaches that the poor are much more likely to go to heaven than the rich, and in general have tried to make manual workers believe that there is some special nobility about altering the position of matter in space, just as men tried to make women believe that they derived some special nobility from their sexual enslavement. In Russia, all this teaching about the excellence of manual work has been taken seriously, with the result that the manual worker is more honored than anyone else. What are, in essence, revivalist appeals are made, but not for the old purposes: they are made to secure shock workers for special tasks. Manual work is the ideal which is held before the young, and is the basis of all ethical teaching.

For the present, possibly, this is all to the good. A large country, full of natural resources, awaits development, and has to be developed with very little use of credit. In these circumstances, hard work is necessary, and is likely to bring a great reward. But what will happen when the point has been reached where everybody could be comfortable without working long hours?

In the West, we have various ways of dealing with this problem. We have no attempt at economic justice, so that a large proportion of the total produce goes to a small minority of the population, many of whom do no work at all. Owing to the absence of any central control over production, we produce hosts of things that are not wanted. We keep a large percentage of the working population idle, because we can dispense with their labor by making the others overwork. When all these methods prove inadequate, we have a war: we cause a number of people to manufacture high explosives, and a number of others to explode them, as if we were children who had just discovered fireworks. By a combination of all these devices we manage, though with difficulty, to keep alive the notion that a great deal of severe manual work must be the lot of the average man.

In Russia, owing to more economic justice and central control over production, the problem will have to be differently solved. the rational solution would be, as soon as the necessities and elementary comforts can be provided for all, to reduce the hours of labor gradually, allowing a popular vote to decide, at each stage, whether more leisure or more goods were to be preferred. But, having taught the supreme virtue of hard work, it is difficult to see how the authorities can aim at a paradise in which there will be much leisure and little work. It seems more likely that they will find continually fresh schemes, by which present leisure is to be sacrificed to future productivity. I read recently of an ingenious plan put forward by Russian engineers, for making the White Sea and the northern coasts of Siberia warm, by putting a dam across the Kara Sea. An admirable project, but liable to postpone proletarian comfort for a generation, while the nobility of toil is being displayed amid the ice-fields and snowstorms of the Arctic Ocean. This sort of thing, if it happens, will be the result of regarding the virtue of hard work as an end in itself, rather than as a means to a state of affairs in which it is no longer needed.

The fact is that moving matter about, while a certain amount of it is necessary to our existence, is emphatically not one of the ends of human life. If it were, we should have to consider every navvy superior to Shakespeare. We have been misled in this matter by two causes. One is the necessity of keeping the poor contented, which has led the rich, for thousands of years, to preach the dignity of labor, while taking care themselves to remain undignified in this respect. The other is the new pleasure in mechanism, which makes us delight in the astonishingly clever changes that we can produce on the earth's surface. Neither of these motives makes any great appeal to the actual

worker. If you ask him what he thinks the best part of his life, he is not likely to say: 'I enjoy manual work because it makes me feel that I am fulfilling man's noblest task, and because I like to think how much man can transform his planet. It is true that my body demands periods of rest, which I have to fill in as best I may, but I am never so happy as when the morning comes and I can return to the toil from which my contentment springs.' I have never heard working men say this sort of thing. They consider work, as it should be considered, a necessary means to a livelihood, and it is from their leisure that they derive whatever happiness they may enjoy.

It will be said that, while a little leisure is pleasant, men would not know how to fill their days if they had only four hours of work out of the twenty-four. In so far as this is true in the modern world, it is a condemnation of our civilization; it would not have been true at any earlier period. There was formerly a capacity for light-heartedness and play which has been to some extent inhibited by the cult of efficiency. The modern man thinks that everything ought to be done for the sake of something else, and never for its own sake. Serious-minded persons, for example, are continually condemning the habit of going to the cinema, and telling us that it leads the young into crime. But all the work that goes to producing a cinema is respectable, because it is work, and because it brings a money profit. The notion that the desirable activities are those that bring a profit has made everything topsy-turvy. The butcher who provides you with meat and the baker who provides you with bread are praiseworthy, because they are making money; but when you enjoy the food they have provided, you are merely frivolous, unless you eat only to get strength for your work. Broadly speaking, it is held that getting money is good and spending money is bad. Seeing that they are two sides of one transaction, this is absurd; one might as well maintain that keys are good, but keyholes are bad. Whatever merit there may be in the production of goods must be entirely derivative from the advantage to be obtained by consuming them. The individual, in our society, works for profit; but the social purpose of his work lies in the consumption of what he produces. It is this divorce between the individual and the social purpose of production that makes it so difficult for men to think clearly in a world in which profit-making is the incentive to industry. We think too much of production, and too little of consumption. One result is that we attach too little importance to enjoyment and simple happiness, and that we do not judge production by the pleasure that it gives to the consumer.

When I suggest that working hours should be reduced to four, I am not meaning to imply that all the remaining time should necessarily be spent in pure frivolity. I mean that four hours' work a day should entitle a man to the necessities and elementary comforts of life, and that the rest of his time should be his to use as he might see fit. It is an essential part of any such social system that education should be carried further than it usually is at present, and should aim, in part, at providing tastes which would enable a man to use leisure intelligently. I am not thinking mainly of the sort of things that would be considered 'highbrow'. Peasant dances have died out except in remote rural areas, but the impulses which caused them to be cultivated must still exist in human nature. The pleasures of urban populations have become mainly passive: seeing cinemas, watching football matches, listening to the radio, and so on. This results from the fact that their active energies are fully taken up with work; if they had more leisure, they would again enjoy pleasures in which they took an active part.

In the past, there was a small leisure class and a larger working class. The leisure class enjoyed advantages for which there was no basis in social justice; this necessarily made it oppressive, limited its sympathies, and caused it to invent theories by which to justify its privileges. These facts greatly diminished its excellence, but in spite of this drawback it contributed nearly the whole of what we call civilization. It cultivated the arts and discovered the sciences; it wrote the books, invented the philosophies, and refined social relations. Even the liberation of the oppressed has usually been inaugurated from above. Without the leisure class, mankind would never have emerged from barbarism.

The method of a leisure class without duties was, however, extraordinarily wasteful. None of the members of the class had to be taught to be industrious, and the class as a whole was not exceptionally intelligent. The class might produce one Darwin, but against him had to be set tens of thousands of country gentlemen who never thought of anything more intelligent than fox-hunting and punishing poachers. At present, the universities are supposed to provide, in a more systematic way, what the leisure class provided accidentally and as a by-product. This is a great improvement, but it has certain drawbacks. University life is so different from life in the world at large that men who live in academic milieu tend to be unaware of the preoccupations and problems of ordinary men and women; moreover their ways of expressing themselves are usually such as to rob their opinions of the influence that they ought to have

upon the general public. Another disadvantage is that in universities studies are organized, and the man who thinks of some original line of research is likely to be discouraged. Academic institutions, therefore, useful as they are, are not adequate guardians of the interests of civilization in a world where everyone outside their walls is too busy for unutilitarian pursuits.

In a world where no one is compelled to work more than four hours a day, every person possessed of scientific curiosity will be able to indulge it, and every painter will be able to paint without starving, however excellent his pictures may be. Young writers will not be obliged to draw attention to themselves by sensational pot-boilers, with a view to acquiring the economic independence needed for monumental works, for which, when the time at last comes, they will have lost the taste and capacity. Men who, in their professional work, have become interested in some phase of economics or government, will be able to develop their ideas without the academic detachment that makes the work of university economists often seem lacking in reality. Medical men will have the time to learn about the progress of medicine, teachers will not be exasperatedly struggling to teach by routine methods things which they learnt in their youth, which may, in the interval, have been proved to be untrue.

Above all, there will be happiness and joy of life, instead of frayed nerves, weariness, and dyspepsia. The work exacted will be enough to make leisure delightful, but not enough to produce exhaustion. Since men will not be tired in their spare time, they will not demand only such amusements as are passive and vapid. At least one per cent will probably devote the time not spent in professional work to pursuits of some public importance, and, since they will not depend upon these pursuits for their livelihood, their originality will be unhampered, and there will be no need to conform to the standards set by elderly pundits. But it is not only in these exceptional cases that the advantages of leisure will appear. Ordinary men and women, having the opportunity of a happy life, will become more kindly and less persecuting and less inclined to view others with suspicion. The taste for war will die out, partly for this reason, and partly because it will involve long and severe work for all. Good nature is, of all moral qualities, the one that the world needs most, and good nature is the result of ease and security, not of a life of arduous struggle. Modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all; we have chosen, instead, to have overwork for some and starvation for others. Hitherto we have continued to be as

energetic as we were before there were machines; in this we have been foolish, but there is no reason to go on being foolish forever.

[1] Since then, members of the Communist Party have succeeded to this privilege of the warriors and priests.



REST

AND

DIGEST