

in this issue:

1-2 editor's introduction
 3-10 ____ by an anonymous participant
 11-12 family dinner by ines kukrić
 13-20 actors, artists and authenticity by lumi androvic muzio
 21-26 poems and artworks by mira wood
 27-36 tangerine by wallid zarrad
 37-40 leaving holm and making home somewhere by ana e.
 41-42 artworks by vera byding
 43-44 my feather is gone and i don't really care by viktor stoykov
 45-48 regressions of a grown girl by susanna sørensen
 49-62 sex talk with amr bayoumi
 63-64 artworks by bo oskamp
 65-66 autumnleavesprelude by maria ilieva
 67-72 mrs dalloway by virginia woolf
 73-76 sculptural interventions in belgium by alexandra pavlovskaya lokchine
 77-78 nervehold by louise ørnstedt
 79-88 searching for an establishing shot by mahmoud youssef
 89-90 artworks by bo oskamp
 91-92 poem you by alice nordlund
 93-96 oslo bohemen by susanna sørensen
 97-102 book reflection of a cup of tea with fathy mahmoud by yasmine el meleegy
 103-106 installation views by kimia khedri
 107-118 translation of kanafanis love letter to ghada al-samman by eva a. koronios
 119-120 to my theory teacher by loona dusser
 121-122 refuge my martin tomov

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Shoebox #2

*Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much.
Not true. Have read little and understood less.*
James Joyce from A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man

Shoebox is on a trip this year: from Bachelor of Fine Arts in The Hague to fellow in Advanced Arabic Studies in Cairo. The contrast is stark, not only in terms of language and culture, but also on a personal level. After four years in safe-space art schools I find myself engaging with academics, students of law, politics and other worldly - real - pursuits. Few doubt the relevance or the hard work that goes in to these things, compared to a degree in fine arts which to many is seen as pointless and the epitome of privilege.

In this new and different environment I find myself questioning the importance of art and perhaps more so the importance of studying it. It's becoming difficult to hold on to and justify because what I am doing now is so far removed from what I have done for the past four years.

People around me drop names of presidents I've never heard of and discuss political issues in countries I've never heard of. Important things. The world is fucked and things need to be solved, discussed. Can art be a part of that? Is it even its place to be?

As part of the fellowship we got to meet the great Salwa Bakr who said, among other things, that a writer's main job is to *live life fully*, because without rich life experiences what could a writer have to say? It stayed in my mind hearing it from someone like her, especially after being schooled away from romantic ideas of art for so long.

Art is the most beautiful thing in the world - the essence of being in which our souls meet: any art student in the schools I've been would be laughed at saying something like that.

But it's true, what can a writer (artist) have to say if they haven't lived life and seen things? Is that why the bohemian counter-culture lifestyle has become a trend that many, perhaps myself included, adhere to despite having been grown up under relatively safe and comfortable circumstances? An *aesthetic* that makes one feel that they belong in the world of troubled artists and literates.

I wanted to follow up and ask Bakr about what living life fully

means in relation to studies based on self-expression. Is studying art - self-expression - for years and years really living life fully or is it merely an escape and isolation from the world? Could it be that escape and isolation *is* living life fully?

Art and culture and anti-elitism and inclusivity and openness. These are things that I believe in and hope to endorse. But when I spoke about art and Shoebox and Relational Aesthetics* to a friend of mine he told me it sounded like any other highfalutin art speak he'd ever heard. Statements like: *Shoebox aims to be an open, inclusive and anti-elitist space*, carry weight and the question is if we actually have the authority to issue them. Is Shoebox not in some ways already an embodiment of exclusion and elitism?

I like this excerpt from John Berger's 1989 essay Miners:

I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been forgotten. I know too that /.../ amongst the people such art sometimes runs like a rumour and a legend because it makes sense of what life's brutalities cannot, a sense that unites us, for it is inseparable from a justice at last. Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting-place of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts, and honour.

At the same time, there are countless of people who would cringe at the over-politization of art and culture. Art for art's sake - that's what we should strive for because there is already so much shit going on. Art *is* the essence of being in which our souls meet.

Shoebox #2 has been a long process one hour here and one hour there. It's back and forth - eclectic - but how else could something like Shoebox turn out? I hope the submissions included in this issue may reflect the questioning and contemplations of this introduction, that I know I am not alone in. Finally acknowledging that perhaps a participant in Shoebox #2 would despise an introduction like this. These are my thoughts and my thoughts only.

dennis farnsworth, shoebox

* relational aesthetics is a collection of essays by nicolas bourriaud in which he describes relational aesthetics as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."

Dear other person,

I'm afraid my disappointments in life define my vision of it. That a lot of it would actually be an empty pocket. That I never have enough time, or too much. That I always feel the lack of something. I wish there was a clearer map on how to access calm. I wish I was less sensitive. I wish I still had my granny's necklace. That I was more sportive, more balanced. That I stopped biting my nails, that I take better care of my plants. That I was closer to my parents. That I wasn't self-conscious about my knees. I wish I was more patient. And then it hit me. I can't remember ever wanting to be anything. I need a tiny room for myself without any door.

It's been quite some time I have the idea of writing you (given your call for Shoebox2). What took me so long is probably my laziness and disorganization, but mostly my hesitation to share something so personal.

I started to smoke again.

Now I've just finished my working day and every atome of energy left my body I feel like writing. Not sure this mail will be sent but I surely want to talk to an *other person*.

How are you ? We've talked a bunch of times but you're somehow so abstract. It's funny how we met and you disappeared. Given the chance we have to meet again, it's almost like you're dead to me. Answering your call is a way to reanimate you in the TV show that my life is.

Ok, so. Where to start ?
Earlier today I looked at my cigarette until it didn't mean anything anymore.
'Can fish yawn ?'

I think what I want to share is my chase for a piece of me we all might have lost at the same place. We don't know each other, and that's maybe why it's easy to talk about *this*.

Anyway, and to make clearer my offer for a contribution to your magazine, I'm gonna tell you a little secret; (title of the text)

* _____ is not the name of the text. due to the author's wishing to remain anonymous, the title of the text is left out. while the introduction is in english, the *actual* text is only to be read in the original french. it has not been translated and will remain as is for this issue.

is actually the name of a text i wrote months ago when my head was quite giving up on... well whatever can be good about the world and the very fact of existing.

Introspection recently guided me to look at myself a little bit closer, or actually to merge with the mirror. I've realized how much of my own stranger I am. somehow talking about the rest of the world, it's escaping yourself

I'm not sure how I want you to receive this mail, but in the context of your magazine, I can see how I would have liked to cross the following lines.

Take it as the testimony of a scared little girl. Or an anxious old soul. The point is to capture the Hic et Nunc of this very moment of life.

Where from my little room in The Hague,
I felt stuck in my own shoebox.
I'm the shoebox

(title of the text)

mamie a peur de mourir
Jardin qui ne fait pousser que des mauvaises herbes
Ma tête fourmilière
Je glisse un esprit dans ma poche et crie son nom aux oiseaux
Mais ma langue est fendue
Et mes pieds sont pris dans des étaux
Finis par aimer la fin
sentiment de la disparition
Vivre l'Apocalypse
De l'air, du bruit et des couleurs
La castration d'un été
Un printemps pour chaque chagrin
Je n'arrive pas à pleurer
L'arrêt subit n'aura rien de subit
Je t'attends
que quelque chose meurt pour que s'exacerbent mes sentiments

Pour être sûre que j'existe
Que je ne t'ai pas rêvé
Tu n'es que l'enveloppe translucide d'un État bien opaque
Celui d'un objet disparu
Renvoie moi à mon reflet
J'y verrai deux yeux noirs
Jolie petite histoire
Je tourne en rond et en moi même jusqu'à me heurter
à un rideau glacé
Le jour comme un relais, je t'envoie la balle.
Mais la balle c'est mon souffle et il est défaillant
Les parties du visages c'est des bijoux. Sales. Ta bouche en
collier, tes yeux partis. Ta poitrine un marécage
Capture, tourne, envole, arrache, tue, perd et retrouve moi.
Tu n'es pas vivant.
Attendre la fin comme la soupe refroidir.
Il ne reste du temps que pour ceux qui l'on oublié
Mes poches sont vides mais j'y mets des chapeaux.
Certaine qu'ils couvriront tout
Je veux coiffer tes angoisses, en faire des manteaux

Le son de la vie ralenti derrière les murs voisins
Les masses qui bougent ne sont que des ombres
derrière le paravent
Au fond c'est peut être tout ce qui ne sera jamais récolté
Un silence creux et irrémédiable
Peut être
Que résonne en moi une musique perdue
Ou abandonnée
Que fais-tu en ce moment ? - Je t'ai retrouvé mais tu n'es toujours
pas là. Et seuls des échos vibrent autour de mon crâne, comme
pour stimuler mon corps privé de toi.
Tu es nu.
Et tu donnes au vide une raison d'exister.
Je ne t'ai pas rêvé. Tes cendres seront immuables
Résous des choses en moi.
Résous moi, pour qu'enfin je me rencontre.
Entre elles, les feuilles au sol créent des images.
Et puis tout s'évanouit dans un vacarme insupportable
Je ne me suis jamais réveillée
Ma peau commencera à se craqueler et tomber. Mes entrailles et

mon cerveau se degonfleront pour n'être plus qu'un tissu mou et
ridé qui s'adonnait pourtant si fort à aimer.
Tu as disparu
Ou je t'ai rêvé
Térébenthine
Je cherche désespérément à trouver entre les lignes de ton livre le
visage du garçon que je n'ai jamais rencontré.
Il ne m'écrit pas.
Tomber amoureux
Tomber malade
Ce qu'on sait de quelqu'un empêche de le connaître
Je suis un peut être
Un être qui peut mais qui n'y arrive pas
Ma main droite est une épave
Il y a dans le temps une substance qui me griffe
Attends.
Quoi ?

Pause

Pardonne moi.
D'être aussi malheureuse, d'attendre sans arrêt une raison de
trouver les choses belles à nouveau.
D'avoir la mémoire cassée qui ne retient
que ce qui ne tourne pas rond.
De me sentir seule, en permanence.
De ne plus avoir l'impression d'avoir aucune attache au monde, de
ne jamais être apaisée.
D'avoir mal au crâne.
De me sentir aussi vulnérable.
De ne pas savoir d'où est sensée venir l'envie d'être là. D'être en
déséquilibre constant.
Que les nuages passent leur temps à me courir après.
D'être toujours face à une impasse. De ne jamais sentir que les
choses suffisent. D'avoir besoin de tellement de temps pour me
ressentir dans l'espace.
Pardon d'avoir tout et rien en même temps.
Malaise.
De pas vouloir parler. De pas savoir.
De rien savoir.
D'avoir la tête vide. Tout le temps.

Pardonne moi de te détester autant pour des raisons qui m'échappent, de détester tout ce que tu fais, tu penses dis et ressens.
 Pardon d'oublier qui tu étais enfant et ce qui t'abîmait vraiment.
 D'oublier l'insouciance du bonheur. D'oublier la simplicité.
 De ne pas arriver à enlever le cailloux de la chaussure,
 le pull qui gratte.
 Pardonne moi de te confondre avec une ombre morte.
 Mes bras sont déjà gelés.
 Tu es si petite dans une boîte de vide. On voit à peine la forme de ton corps. À peine la couleur de ton âme
 qui s'agite faiblement à l'intérieur.
 Pardon de ne pas ranimer le feu.
 Le briquet est perdu et irretrouvable.
 Pardon, pardon.
 Tu n'as jamais trouvé en toi deux fois la même personne, pourtant toutes portent le poids d'une catastrophe ignorée.
 Forme une croix avec tes mains, au moins elles seront quelque part. Fait des cercles avec la pointe de tes pieds. Regarde les.
 Donnent leur un sens. Cherche, cherche et trouve.
 En regardant les surfaces, elles ne te disent plus rien, et tu tombes à travers leur fausse matérialité. Rien est étanche, pas même le corps ou mes mains qui écrivent. Je pense mais je ne suis pas.
 Tu as oublié tellement de lieux. Ou ces lieux n'ont jamais existé, ce n'était que le décor glacial d'un rêve interminable.
 Tu as tellement vu, et regardé. Cherché jusque sous le tapis un angle qui te plaisait.
 Un matin après tant d'autres,
 Ouvrir le cahier et voir qu'il est vide.
 Qu'il ne porte que les traces d'une main tremblantes. D'une main épave et irresponsable.
 On apprend pas à revenir enfant. Quel était ce visage, et ces idées ?
 Gifle les. Écrase et déchire tout comme un monde en pâte à modeler. Appuie là où ça fait mal, parce qu'au moins ça fait quelque chose. Retourne le plateau et détruis tes bras.
 Pardon. Mais comment autrement ?
 Rien n'est plus petit que ma tête, que ces pensées informes qui grattent aux parois. Je veux les vomir et les oublier.
 Jamais la mort ne t'a si peu effrayé. Jamais la folie et les ténèbres n'ont semblé si grotesques.
 Et tu t'excusera demain aussi.

Après tant d'années.
 J'ai ouvert mon sac et il était vide. Ou il y avait des genres d'objets oubliés que personne ne comprend vraiment. Qui sont semi-imaginaires. J'me suis penchée pour les toucher et sentir leur poids dans ma main mais ils ont coulé entre mes doigts.
 Oh, pardonne moi. Je ne sais pas te consoler. Parce que ton chagrin n'a pas d'odeur. Et ta douleur est silencieuse.
 Combien de temps faut-il pousser une porte pour qu'elle s'ouvre?
 Excuse moi.
 Tu regardes partout et la distance qui te sépare des objets te désespère.
 Tu as un grain de sable. Pourquoi tu pleures ? Tu ne vois même pas ce que tu écris. Le trouble devient trouble.
 Fatiguée d'être moi.
 Pardon.
 Mais c'est toi. C'est toujours toi. C'est dans les atomes qui forment ton corps et tu repousses tout le reste.
 C'est toi qui laisse tes mains fondre, et ton cœur s'effacer.
 Regarde encore une fois cette tasse jaune vif qui commence déjà à partir. Parce que les choses sont en chemin vers la disparition.
 Tu vas plus vite que tout le reste.
 Balance ta tête en arrière et regarde à l'envers. Rien non plus ?
 Tu as tellement vécu. Et tu as aimé. Si fort que ça faisait mal. Tu t'es tordu les chevilles en courant vers la joie. Où sont tes jambes ?
 Qui sont tes parents ?
 Des ombres aussi.
 Pardon. Il ne verront rien et toi non plus. Tu ne sauras jamais parce que c'est comme ça. Les choses sont absurdes et les réponses sont en désaccord.
 Raccroche toi à ce qui a une forme. Retrouve tes mains. Fouille tes poches. Crie, fabrique une porte de sortie.
 Pardon de t'oublier parce que mon crâne se rétrécit. Pardon de ne pas t'aimer, d'être imperméable à la réalité.
 Pause
 Tu es terrifiée par le vide, pourtant il te constitue. Le monde s'évanouit prématurément.
 Pardon à tous ceux que j'ai voulu aimé.
 Pardon et merci. D'avoir rendu le tout plus supportable. D'avoir agité mes cellules et excité mon cerveau carencé.
 De m'avoir souvent privé du doute en l'enveloppant d'un voile tendre.

J'ai été si heureuse, j'ai connu tant d'amour, d'innocence.
Pardon à ceux qui m'on touché. À ceux qui ont senti mon cœur.
Pardon parce que je n'ai rien voulu savoir.
Parce que je n'arrive pas à faire de ma vie une rébellion. Pardon
parce que je suis têtue pour les mauvaises choses.
Parce que j'suis trop égoïste. Et que je pense être abandonnée de
moi même, et puis des choses. Que rien ni personne ne
comprendra, parce qu'il n'y a rien à comprendre.
Prenez ça pour ce que ça veut dire.
J'ai essayé de remplir ma vie de curiosité et d'un imaginaire qui
me faisait échapper à une réalité qui m'était trop étrangère.
Le soleil ne tapait plus de la même manière, les couleurs toujours
délavées. La nourriture et les surfaces comme des entités molles.
Pardon.
Parce que tout part d'un constat: se réveiller un matin et ne
ressentir rien. Quels regrets pour une vie que j'ai passée assoupie
?Comme la tête lourde un après midi d'été où pour mieux digérer
le repas, je me suis allongée à l'ombre d'un chêne.
Jamais vraiment endormie ni éveillée.
Pardon à tout ce que je ne verrai pas. Le bruit de talons en bois
dans une petite rue pavée, la couleur rouge vif de l'école primaire,
l'odeur des oranges, le vernis écaillé, les mains chaudes, les rires.
Oh.
Les formes, les ombres, le vent dans les arbres. Merci. J'ai trouvé
dans le vide des détails un moyen de me laisser aller au monde au
moins un peu.
Merci aux textes, aux mots et aux livres.
Merci à Camus, Pamuk et Rilke.
L'absurde naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le
silence déraisonnable du monde.
Putain.
Pardon, pardon.
Mais l'excuse que je demande à l'univers est déjà évaporée.
Il ne reste plus rien.
Ni douleur ni passion.
Pause
Je est un autre.
Une vie en désastre

Voilà. Feel free to use this text for the magazine but please and I
insist : make it anonymous.

Thank you for everything. For enjoying Cairo and looking at the
sky from the other side of the globe.

sincerely,

anonymous participant



Last winter I was at a New Years Party hosted at my friend's house in London, a stylish three bedroom apartment in Clerkenwell's old Vogue headquarters. It was fitted with all the accoutrements of east london living; exposed brick walls, smooth concrete floors, 'mid century modern' furnishings with a sprinkling of quirky cushions and the odd art book purchased at IDEA or the Tate. The party's guests; oxford literature students returned home for the holidays (how was the ball last month?), finger-on-the-pulse couples (one works in marketing, the other does a vinyl dj set) and aspiring artists who moved to 'Europe' ("bollocks to Brexit", consume only filter coffee and cigarettes). Even in the most forgiving of lights, none of us were beating the *pretentious* allegations, an appellation that plagues the city's cultural omnivores who want nothing more than to appear 'salt of the earth' and *authentic*. Despite this, most of us are aware of our received *pretentiousness*, especially when we quote Shelley's *Ozymandias* loudly at the pub, or show up in painstakingly curated outfits to the local greasy spoon to discuss *Ways of Seeing* over beans on toast, and are able to laugh at ourselves heartily. I mention this particular party because of a startling, though not entirely unexpected, encounter.

At these sorts of parties, 'catching up with old friends' is merely the guise worn by the true purpose of the evening - meeting each others' new significant others. I happened to be unencumbered that evening, so was tasked with making small talk with the newest additions to our group. My negroni started tasting like lining them all up, alphabetically, or, better yet, chronologically in order of their joining the fold, so as to not mistake the business of the matter with any sort of pleasure. I let my better judgement swallow the thought, though I approached my task feeling witty and playful. I ended up sitting next to someone's new boyfriend at the end of a long, lively dining table.

"So... tell me, how did you guys meet?"

"Well, you know she studies stage production right? Brilliant at it too."

"Yes, yeah of course! I checked out her Tower Theatre project a few months ago, maybe you also saw it? So you're at Bristol then?"

"Yeah, Bristol. Well, I'm in the same college, but on the acting course -"

"Acting! Oh, well, you look like an actor!"

"You know what, I don't like you already."

The conversation came to an abrupt end. I had committed a faux-pas, worse than speaking dotingly about an ex we all 'wish she'd ended up with'. Worse, even, than saying what everyone at the table was surely thinking - "you're not her usual type...". No, the greatest offence of all. Appearing to doubt someone's *authenticity*. Of course, I hadn't meant anything in the statement - it's just one of those things you say to strangers. People usually like to hear that they are well suited to their profession, especially glamorous ones like acting. Or so I thought. But a paranoia had obviously set in and 'You look like an actor' sounded more like an attack on their integrity than a compliment. You're a fraud! A fugazi! A phoney!

I often recount this incident in little bars in The Hague to my art school friends, painting a colourful picture of the life in London that I sporadically return to. However, upon reading Dan Fox's *Pretentiousness: Why It Matters* this summer, the anecdote became a catalyst for an exploration of my own into the idea of *pretentiousness* and of its role within my daily life and my artistic practice.

"We establish our authenticity in conversation": Fox touches on how our so-called *authentic self* is actually a relational identity, corresponding more to how we are perceived by others than an immutable fact about ourselves. My brief exchange with the actor proves an example of this. When a conversation fails to prove *authenticity* (which often comes to mean virtue), accusations or anxieties about *pretentiousness* rear their ugly head. As an art student, it is confusing at first to feel sure of what the purpose of studying art at all is. Even if you can be sure that creating is the right path for you, you must still justify to yourself why being at school is different from simply renting an atelier and getting on with it. Over time, it came to my attention that one must figure out one's own definition of what art is, and what one believes it ought to be, in order to make sense of the study of art. How can one become better at something that everyone disagrees on the purpose of? Or the value of?

I've come to think of art as a conversation of sorts. In my



conception of things, works of art are either successful or unsuccessful in their conversation with the viewer. A successful work must lead to an understanding of the artists' intentions, views or feelings in order to be successful, the same way verbal communication succeeds when some transference of knowledge is achieved, or another's view on a topic is altered, even slightly. An unsuccessful work, therefore, either fails to communicate, doesn't care to communicate, or perhaps at least *seems* as though it does not care to communicate with its viewership.

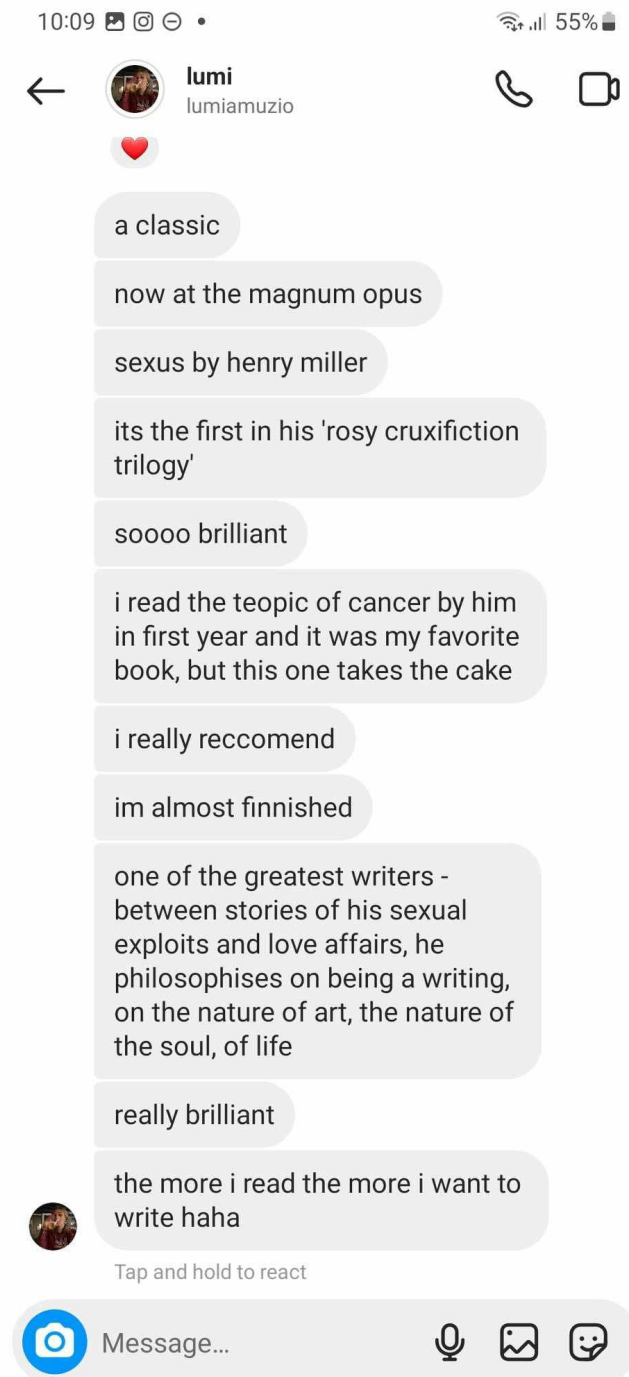
This type of art provides a steady flow of ammunition for those who argue that artists and intellectuals are part of some shadowy 'cultural elite' who are conspiring to trick or 'pull one over' on their audiences by communicating in a language only they understand. Unsuccessful works are often confused with *pretentious* ones because when viewers are unable to grasp the intentions of a work, it is easier for them to make accusations than to attempt to understand. This can in turn lead to an artist turning their nose up at their audience (which only serves to confirm their accusers claims), rather than trying to consider where they went wrong, and how *they* could better articulate their intent. Unfortunately, as Fox quite astutely observes, "contemporary art is guilty until proven innocent". So, how to break the cycle? Well, as a viewer, one could practise removing the word *pretentious* from one's vocabulary in commenting on a work. Trying to recognize where the thought springs up from. We often project anxieties (that are perpetuated by a vicious class system) onto art that we don't understand. Denouncing contemporary art, or conceptual art, as *pretentious* is actually counterproductive in this way, only exacerbating the idea that art is for the educated elite.

Think of the child who struggles at mathematics, but instead of asking for help, messes around in class, and calls his more ambitious peers losers or 'nerds'. It's easier than admitting our insecurity - that we are out of our depth, or wishing that we had the gall to try, even at the risk of failing. These labels reinforce 'us - vs. -them' populism that seeks to keep everyone ignorant and in their place.

But how, as artists, can we work in a way that overcomes the *pretentiousness* allegations? For one, we must start *caring* about

improving, about *trying* to communicate with - not alienate - our audience. It's an uphill battle though, and one must first recognize the importance of communication. I spent most of my first year embroidering cryptic T.S Eliot and Henry Miller quotes onto chair upholstery and thrift shop button-ups, stroking my chin and furrowing my brow when feedback sessions resulted in a gallery of confused faces and not a round of applause for my ingenuity! I realise now that presenting works that are *opaque* was about as meaningful or successful as reading Shakespeare in the original to someone who has never heard a word of English, thinking it'll make you look very smart. It won't. In Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics*, the virtuous person is equated to the person who lives their life *trying* to be virtuous. Striving to be good is in itself good, even if we can never reach our end goal, an ideal which may not even be attainable. The virtue of a successful artwork could in this way be seen in the artist's lived desire to better utilise their medium to convey their ideas, even if the 'ideal' of unanimous understanding or praise from viewers is in fact an impossibility.

The problem for some artists, though, is that they believe that an art work must 'speak for itself' in some puritanical sense, as if art works existed in a vacuum. An abstract painting makes some swoon or experience powerful emotions, while rendering others unable to resist the urge to groan "My five year old could have done that!" and write it off as *pretentious* nonsense. Striving towards a more unanimous response to a work is not what all artists care about - it is more important to them to be able to have a creative outlet and make whatever they feel like, regardless of its reception. While I will not deny anyone the right to their own practice, I might ask them to imagine that an artwork is like a meal. Take a white fish with a side of greens. We could say that the meal is only this - what exists within the confines of the plate. And, fine! It's a meal. But could it be better? Could it be more fulfilling for its consumer? Say we find a nice Sauvignon Blanc from Sancerre, and enjoy a glass of it with our fish? (Yes, I recognise the irony of talking about wine pairing while trying to debunk pretentiousness - just bear with me). The wine does not detract from the meal, in fact, it brings out the flavours that were already present in the dish, but just needed a little encouragement to be activated. If we expand the parameters of our 'meal' to include the wine, we have enriched the meal, perhaps even convinced someone who usually refused



what is lumi reading?

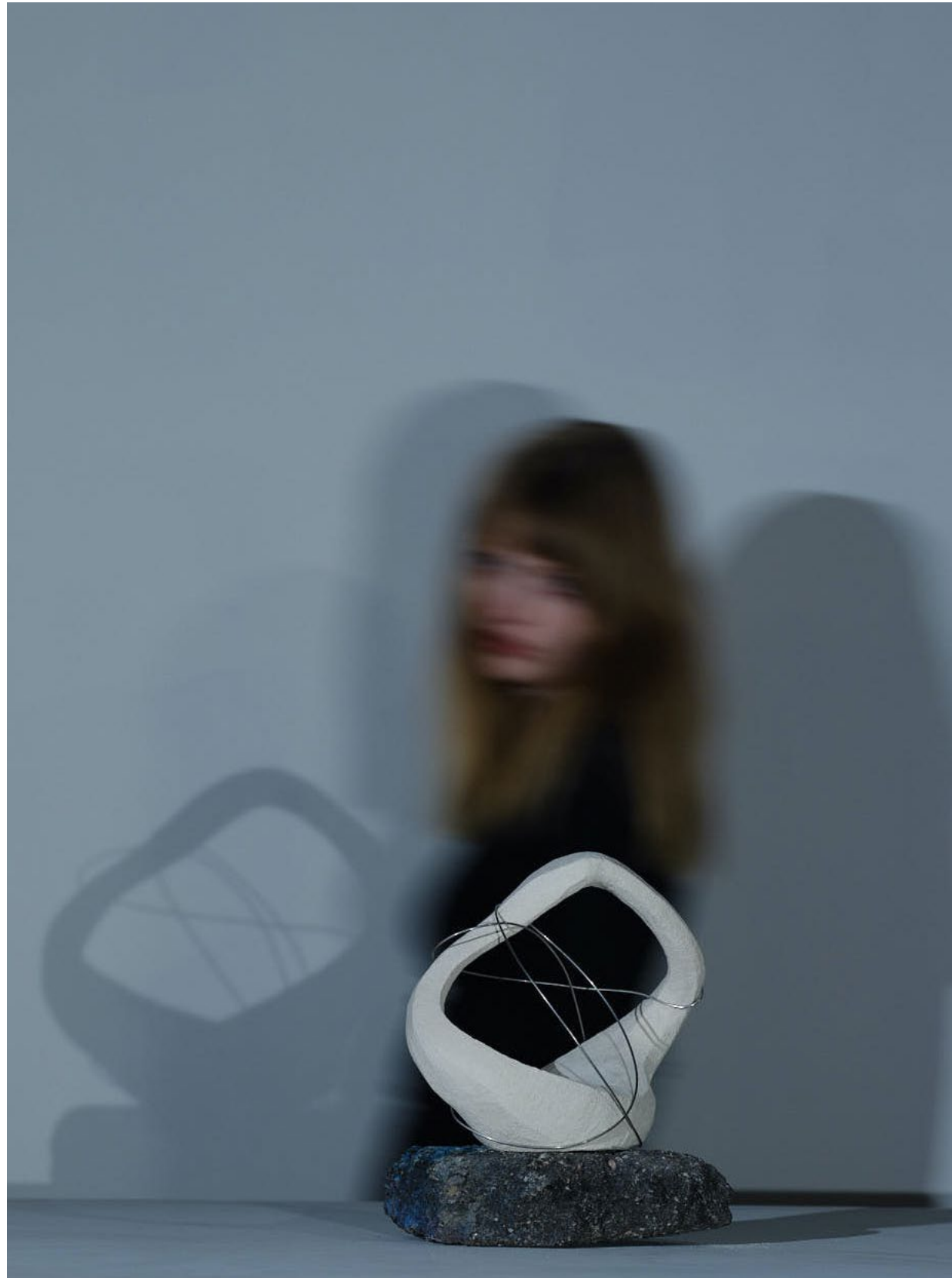
to eat fish on principle, of its qualities. If we expanded our work, the abstract painting, to include some context about the artists state of mind when they made it, or perhaps a title that hinted at what the otherwise bewildering lines and colours might depict, we could, without tainting the integrity of the painting, make the work more successful.

Pretentiousness is not inherent in any act or work, so how we frame things can alter how a viewer may perceive the same thing. Attitude is important. The artists who leave their abstract conceptual works vague and puzzling, or worse yet 'Untitled', appear to take themselves too seriously. Who must they think they are, to assume that their work should speak for itself, that their audience are entitled to little more than morsels by way of clues to deciphering their constructions? The issue with being seen to take yourself too seriously is that it appears not only fraudulent, but ridiculous, in the face of the utter absurdity of existence, not to mention the absurdity of art.

But this fact should not undermine the artist's work, in fact we should let it compliment our practice. The malady of the artist is not their perceived pretentiousness, but rather their inability, or unwillingness to accept the absurdity and incongruity of their process, of life, and laugh along with their critics. In order to make anything that pushes the envelope we must not fear the accusations of *pretence* that come with taking our practice seriously, as seriously it must be taken. But in all seriousness, we must not forget to take humour seriously! It is, after all, the antidote to ignorance and the elixir of authenticity.

Fox states; "To understand the artistic process is to accept that *pretentiousness* is part of the creative condition, not an affliction." I'm coming to terms with accepting that I may be a *pretentious* sod who wields only a paintbrush and an arsenal of silly art jargon (the intersection between liminality, unbuilding and decolonial practices) against an army of critics. Nevertheless, in accepting my fate, I can at least join in on the fun. Get in on the right side of the joke.

Seeing as we've deconstructed the idea of *pretentiousness*, I thought it apt to mention Shakespeare again. Feste, the court jester from *Twelfth Night*, famously warns the rest of the cast "Better a witty fool, than a foolish wit". If only the actor had learned the lines to this play...



In time,
I will turn to water.

I will be in the cup on your bedside.
You will begin to drink only,
Me.

I will be all around
you,
in the shower,
in your bath.

All around
you,
in the rain.
on your cheeks,

In the snow too.



spend a year in silence.
spend a year with silence.

spend a year without silence,
within silence

doubt silence.
share silence.
smoke silence.
string silence.

my hair braided in silence.
i eat silence.

your silence.
find silence.
found silence.

disguised in silence.
cry, silence!

in the shell
silence.

a year,
silent.

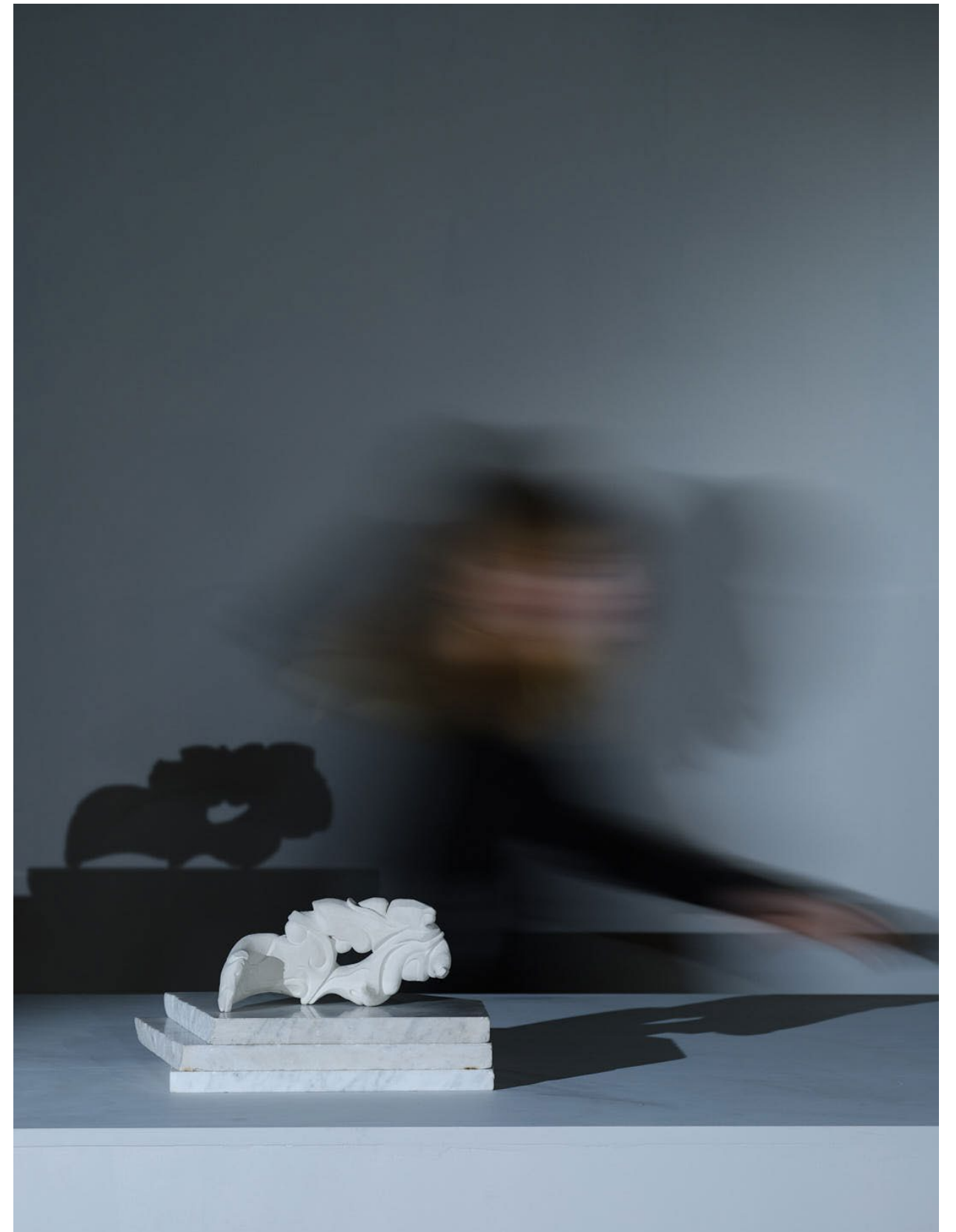
—
wish for silence.
whisper “my silence.”

be the first to hear your voice - think, silence.

fill a void within silence.

sing nursery rhymes to silence.
an age of silence.
a moon in silence.

laika saw silence.





editors note*

Walid Zarrad is a Tunisian artist, anthropologist, person based in Cairo, whose film *Tangerine* I saw through a mutual friend of ours when I was in the early stages of *Shoebox #2* looking fervently for submissions.

The film stuck with me, perhaps because the themes are so relatable - being far away from home, feelings about one's family and what it's like to be yourself in relation to your past. Walid dresses, so that someone can see him and realize that they too can expand and escape the confines of their past selves and what others expect of them. This is contrasted with the final two sentences about Walid's mother:

'I want to show her this film. I still can't do that.'

Tangerine is a very personal film which made me feel as though I was entering the inner workings of someone's mind. These are things so many people silently go around thinking about, and I asked him personally if he would like to participate.

For *Shoebox* we have decided to present both the English and Arabic transcript as a textual rendition of the film. Together with stills it acts as not only an afterlife but also a *new* life for the film, in a form you may call poetry or reflective writing.



ملاحظة المحرر*

وليد زراد هو فنان تونسي، وأنثروبولوجي، وشخص يسكن في القاهرة. شاهدت فيلمه «تانجرين» من خلال صديق مشترك لنا عندما كنت في المراحل الأولى للشيوبوكس #٢ باحثاً عن مشاركات.

ظل الفيلم عالقاً في ذهني، ربما لأن مواضيعه قريبة من المشاعر التي نشعر بها جميعاً- الابتعاد عن موطننا الأصلي، المشاعر تجاه العائلة وكيف تكون نفسك فيما يتعلق بماضيك. وليد يلبس، لماذا؟ لكي يراه شخص آخر ويفكر أنه أيضاً يستطيع التوسع والهروب من القوقعة التي وُضع فيها ومما يتوقع الآخرون منه. هذا يتناقض مع الجملتين الأخيرتين عن أم وليد: “نحب نوريها الفيلم هذا. مازلت مانجمش”

تانجرين هو فيلم شخصي بكل معنى الكلمة وجعلني أشعر كما لو أنني أدخل في أعماق عقل شخص آخر. هذه أفكار يحملها الكثيرون بصمت فسألت وليد شخصياً إذا كان يرغب في المشاركة معي.

في سياق هذا الاصدار من شيوبوكس خیرنا استخدام النصين الانجليزي والعربي كتوثيق نصي للفيلم، وبهذه الطريقة لن يعيش الفيلم حياة جديدة في شيوبوكس فقط بل يشكل أيضاً تعبيراً جديداً الذي يمكننا أن نسميه شعراً او كتابة تأملية.



I'm Walid, 22 years old,
 Tunisian
 I write, I film, I dress
 I dress differently than other people
 So other people see me and know
 they can also dress this way
 I dress so that when I'm walking someone sees me and thinks
 Okay, I can also do something like this,
 I don't need to stay in the shell I was put in
 I can also grow, expand

I also dress for younger Walid
 13-14 year-old Walid
 Walid who used to run after life
 trying to do something, anything.
 Go out, stay outside, walk in the street late at night
 Anything to feel alive
 To not feel constrained in a house

I dress so I can tell that Walid It's okay.
 Sit down. Relax. Breathe.
 There's still time.
 Take care of yourself.
 I dress to be the person I needed when I was a kid.

I hope
 any young person sees me and thinks
 it's okay.
 Everything's okay.
 They can sit and they can rest they can breathe
 and they can take care of themselves.

There's still time.

إسمي وليد، ٢٢ سنة، تونسي
 نكتب نصور نلبس
 نلبس موش كيما العباد الاخرين
 بش العباد الاخرين تشوفني وتقول
 إلي حتى هي تنجم تلبس هكا
 نلبس بش كي نبدى ماشي يشوفني حد ويقول
 باهي حتاني ننجم نعمل حاجة هكا
 موش لازم نقعد في القوقعة إلي تحطيت فيها
 حتاني ننجم نكبر ونتوسع

نلبس زادة للوليد إلي كان صغير
 وليد متاع ١٣-١٤ سنة
 وليد إلي كان يجري وراء الدنيا
 يحاول يعمل أي حاجة
 يخرج يقعد البرى يمشي في الشارع في الليل ممخر
 أي حاجة بش يحس إلي هو حي
 بش يحس إلي هو مش محصور في دار

نلبس بش وليد هذاكا ننجم نقله "ميسالش"
 أقعد ارتاح تنفس موش مشكل
 مازال فما وقت
 رد بالك على روحك
 رد بالك على روحك"
 نلبس بش نكون العبد هذايا
 إلي ستحقيته وقتلي كنت صغير

بش مذايا
 أي حد صغير يشوفني ويقول إلي
 ميسالش... لابس...
 ينجم يقعد وينجم يرتاح وينجم يتنفس
 وينجم يتلهى بروحه
 مازال بكري



I laugh like my mother
 I get angry like my mother.
 Even... I don't know...
 My mother
 Now I feel like I smell like her
 because I bought new deoderant.
 Every time I use it I remember her.
 I'm becoming my mother
 little by little.
 It's something that honestly scares me and makes me happy.

It makes me happy because I love her
 and I want to be like her.
 And I want to, I don't know, give her this.
 Give her maybe the satisfaction
 of seeing me and saying
 My son is like me
 although I don't know if this would be a satisfaction
 or something that scares her too.
 I want to show her this film.
 I still can't do that.

نضحك كي أمي
 نحكي كي أمي نكرز كي أمي
 حتى... منعرش تو نحس ريحتي كي أمي
 خاطر شريت deodorant جديد وكل ما نستعمله يذكرني بأمي
 قاعد نولي أمي
 بالشوية بالشوية
 حاجة الحقيقة تخوف وتفرح فرد وقت

تفرح على خاطر نجبها برشا
 ونحب نكون كيفها نحب نكون هي
 ونحب... مانعرش... نعطيه بالكشي ال satisfaction
 أنهي تشوفني وتقول ولدي كيفي
 حتى كان مانعرش إذا كان هذيا بش تكون satisfaction
 وإلا حتى هي حاجة تخوفها
 نحب نوريها الفيلم هذا
 ما زلت مانجمش

My town is a place my parents physically escaped to. Young and pregnant they moved their lives to the countryside where the dog had freedom to run, and my parents could ride their bikes on backroads. Now 25 years have passed, and my mom is nostalgic, laughing each time she tells the story of the move at her family's horrified reaction—you'd have thought they were moving to Vegas (!) instead of a mere 45-minute drive south of the American suburb where the extended family had lived two generations. My mom always downplays the distance, but I think her family had a point. By moving their lives to the countryside, to a town I'll call Holm, my parents brought me to a space on the map I call the middle of nowhere.

What do I mean by "nowhere"? To define nowhere, maybe I have to first define "somewhere." From where I sit and type this as a senior in university in New York City, "somewhere" has culture. Somewhere has coffee shops where people sit and exchange ideas. Others perch in high stools and write on their laptops. In contrast, my parents raised me in a disconcerting nowhere: Holm has one traffic light, a startling number of cows, and no place to sit. There are no internet cafes, and I don't recommend bringing your laptop to open Word at Holm's public library—nobody does that so people will give you funny looks. I always estimated growing up that without digital media, my town wouldn't hear about an important global catastrophe until about a week later. But maybe I'm the only one who enjoys finding a seat in a crowded New York coffee shop, right at the last moment when you thought it was impossible, no, it was just too packed to ever get a free table. Isn't it bliss plopping down there to read MSNBC Breaking News?

I think seeking the freedom to sit and think and work through things is a pursuit many of us have in common. I know that this is something I at least share with my dad. In fact, I think the pursuit of freedom to sit and think is the reason he steered our lives to Holm in the first place. This may seem odd, as I've thoroughly debased Holm as a "nowhere" devoid of culture. But my dad's version of working through things from a chair vantage point is different from mine. For my dad, a spiritual guy, I think there was something romantic about moving to the woods. He lived a long life before marrying my mom and struggled with OCD and depression. Writers like Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr inspired him to view rural retreat as something sacred. He built his retreat in

bookshelves in our sunroom and really started to live it after he retired from teaching high school. That's when he started his novel about 10 years ago.

My dad went to the countryside to make a place for his future self to write, somewhere with a slower pace for careful spiritual reading where attention to detail could spin itself endlessly without repercussion. This is a kind of knowledge production and pursuit of peace rightly earned by a 75-year-old retired teacher turned mystic thinker. Yet this model and location of intense imagining may seem, to a critic of "nowheres" not unlike myself, surprisingly unattached from any university, monastery, or office building.

It may be helpful, in the midst of this confusion, to return to the notion of "retreat." Why was my dad drawn to sit and think in a nowhere instead of a somewhere? Was my dad retreating from something? This is important. My dad's family story is hard, as many family stories are, and as the eldest of seven brothers (two whole, one half, one step, two dead) his liberal politics and gentle demeanor do annoy my God-fearing navy veteran uncles. This makes things uncomfortable for him. If I had to guess, I'd say my dad viewed Holm as distant territory untouched by and out of reach from any of this. So perhaps, for this reason, Holm is holy ground for him to contemplate unfettered.

I think Holm marked the start of a new freedom for my dad in his imagining. We always used to make fun of my dad for his pile of thesaurus texts next to the desktop computer in the hallway by the kitchen where he now writes (log cabins don't have offices). But what I didn't realize then was the glorious (tremendous?) fun he was having with the endlessly (eternally??) consuming thesaurus. The older I grew, the more I read of his writing. He passed us printed notes here and there, a page about tranquility in the cabin to hang in the kitchen, a typed-up prayer shared before a road trip. I teased him, and it bothered him, about using big words for the sake of it. I'd say "Dad, why are you choosing the most complicated words possible?" I think I had been in school long enough at that point to understand that jargon didn't help a novel's readability—wisdom didn't ride in the longest dictionary words. This is the beginning of where my dad's path to freedom through thinking really diverges from mine.

There was a time when I could enjoy rural cabin pondering alongside my dad. On quiet nights growing up, we'd sit on diagonal stuffed chairs and read—him, *The Way of a Pilgrim* and me, obviously his studious protege, *Harry Potter*. I loved the stories and I dreamed of witches, perhaps compelled to imagine by a lack of action in Holm. But, despite the mystery I found in books read slowly, over the years I longed for something different. I began to chafe in Holm public schools where tired teachers couldn't quash an anti-intellectualism bred among students. All day long and year after year we sat in chairs at desks, but we didn't think. I was frustrated to learn recently that my parents didn't research or compare local school districts before moving to Holm. Their cabin is, coincidentally, three quarters of a mile from the residential boundary line with one of the top 60 performing public high schools in the state. If my parents had chosen a cabin slightly west, maybe I'd have been made to think during all those school years in my chair at my desk. These are formative years we spend sitting comfortably unchallenged in our small-town beliefs! And yet, there wasn't much difference to sift through or figure out as a kid in a nowhere like Holm anyway. Thinking doesn't get you anywhere within such a place.

I've now spent time living far from Holm in a big somewhere for university. To survive, I've learned how people from big somewheres sit in the library, how they read, and how they write papers. Sometimes it seems that having my laptop out in front of me and opening my Google Calendar is the baseline process of functioning for humans in a somewhere. This kind of disciplined sitting is a skill I've now acquired. Tapping into this world of shared knowledge production has scratched the itch of my younger self who knew there was a place people went to learn how to write better than a thesaurus could instruct. Faced with different ideas my sitting has been challenged and been made uncomfortable. There must necessarily be thinking in order to survive in a somewhere where there is difference. For me, there has been freedom in understanding how to navigate such a place and in the possibility that through this navigation, other somewheres may be within reach, too.

Sitting and thinking in a somewhere has created distance between myself and my parents. It's stark when I visit Holm to realize how my university papers and typing has changed how I think to be

different from how they think. The top 60 school where my parents could have lived has a new bookshop on Main Street. My mom and I first saw it in the dark when its interior was lit up warm with Christmas lights. We saw tables by the front windows inviting people to sit and read. We slowed the car to a crawl pace and craned our necks, surveying the inside. I was sure it was closed but my mom got excited and determined to take me in. She'd heard the owners were from a somewhere and the shop had the kind of social justice window sign that excites liberal mothers from nowheres (sorry mom). It was after hours but the owner saw us and met us at the door. My mom said she'd heard about their business and heard he was from...? I grimaced. He responded kindly that he was from Hong Kong... but really from the Bronx. I nodded emphatically in understanding and vague apology. Shoving forward some city professionalism I promised we'd return in the daylight opening hours

I went back to the new bookshop alone one of the last days I was visiting Holm during winter break—I was totally charmed. The single room of the shop is a maze of shelves, mismatched in size and orientation. Fiction and nonfiction, there were rows of authors and themes familiar to me through my essays painstakingly crafted in college library chairs. I wandered around just excited to walk on the wooden floors. I was proud of this man from the Bronx who wanted to open a local bookshop so close to Holm. Wanting to support his business, I surveyed my options and settled on a book of collected poems by Audre Lorde. The owner complimented my choice as I left.

I could have settled in to read for a while at the tables by the front windows of the new bookshop, but I didn't, because I didn't want to and because nobody else was reading by the windows. I felt kind of giddy instead taking my new book on the train back to the city where I could read with a free mind—in a somewhere where the tables by the windows are always full. The compounding miles between myself and Holm made it easier to slide down my tray table and break the spine.





I'm a rose-ringed parakeet, an urban bird. My parents are green but I'm turquoise. They flew over trees and rivers, I fly over electric bikes and canals. I'm versatile: I like the sun, I'm ok with the cold, neutral when it comes to wind and storms. I was displaced, but now I feel at home, I am thriving.

I'm currently flying. The wind gusts caress my unusually colored (due to mutation!) feathers. Then a feather loosens, I feel it detaching. Now it's gone. Where, not aware. But this has happened before, I don't know why I felt the need to describe this in detail.

Ok, I'm still flying. Same speed, I like to keep it consistent. I'm bored, time for gossip. I'm hyper-fixating on an elderly person with a cart full of groceries. They're alone so I'm curious about their lonely thoughts. "Onions, beer, margarine, canned soup. Sausages, bread, milk, black pepper. 15 euros: two 10 euro banknotes, one 5 euro banknote back." These thoughts are too lonely for me, time to move on. I wonder where my feather is. Actually, I don't.

I hate spotted a group of young teenagers, what could they be discussing? Well, they're not discussing anything. They're laughing. What are they laughing about? I suspect they're laughing at another teenager headed in their direction. Bullying is immoral, I don't condone it.

Up in the clouds again, swooshing around, catching a vibe. I find humans boring. I denounce humans. They're pessimistic. I was displaced, but I feel at home, I am thriving. I adapt. They should try it too.

Fat bikes. Electric cars. Dating apps. Hot yoga. Entrepreneurship. Gucci bags. Golden earrings. Big handwatches. Fusion cuisine. Brunch.

Yeah, I definitely dislike humans.

viktor stoykov

Me and my friend would spend our twenties together in The Hague for a few years. I was 6 years older than her, in the middle of my twenties. She was in her beginning. We would spend the time drinking absurd amounts of beer and smoke absurd amounts of cigarettes in half-empty bars where we would become friends with mostly middle-aged men and manic, lonely homebodies. We would complain about the people around us but with a certain admiration for them at the same time, always recognizing their inner suffering or what we would like to call “A certain sadness in their eyes”. This term, “a certain sadness in the eyes” was something we would attribute to anyone who seemed to have some hidden inner turmoil. The term became significantly more important when talking about the people we found attractive and how this certain sadness would enhance this attractiveness. I suppose we desperately wanted to believe that there was something of substance within people underneath a seemingly flawless skin and well curated personal lore. We went to art school together; that is how we both found ourselves in this rather uninteresting town. A fake, or a “Puppet” town, where people only moved around on bikes, all of the houses were made of bricks, and the landscape being so flat it felt as if you could move into oblivion without the scenery changing one bit. All the neighborhoods had the same essential places, a dark dive bar with a fluorescent Heineken sign on the outside, an Albert Heijn grocery store, strangely nice second-hand shops, kebab shops, and some local Dutch restaurant where you could sit for hours, chugging beers and eating microwaved bitterballen for 7 euros.

We had one of our borderline manic nights on the Friday before. The next day, we had one of our usual “recaps”; the routine always went like this; I would wake up with a feeling of unrest and peace at the same time. Maybe take a shower, finally do the dishes that had been sitting on the counter since Thursday, go to the grocery store and shop for the week, pasta, pesto, steal some cheese and maybe buy a bunch of tulips if I felt rich. Then around 2 or 3 o'clock, she would call and ask if we should have a coffee since she's in the neighborhood after shopping at one of these strangely nice second hand shops around where I live.

The coffee date always started with one coffee each. Her “black coffee,” my “Black coffee with a little cold milk on the side.” Then

the conversations would begin. They would concern the night prior, the people we had met, how they knew each other, what kind of conversations we had had with them, how we couldn't believe we had had such a wild night yet another night, often two or three nights in a row. How we couldn't entertain the thought of drinking again, or smoking another cigarette in our lives. Hereafter, the conversation would turn to more personal matters, often anecdotes from our past, about our parents or our sisters, (we are both big sisters with only one little sister, which we were convinced dramatically changed our unstoppable thirst for experience), stories about trips to different big cities in Europe and bizarre encounters with crazy people, rich people, and artists. We would always come to all kinds of conclusions and as the conversation went on we would start ordering beer, rolling up cigarettes. Conversations worth being written down. Conversations that unfortunately will disappear into the exile of the past and soon will be forgotten. I would always leave the conversations with a feeling that I had figured out something important, what this “important” was I wasn't sure of, but something was sure; a feeling that I was on the right track, that I had what I needed and that I didn't need to worry.

My friend was what I needed, and this is one of the things we would often conclude with “we couldn't believe we had met such a fantastic person as each other in our lives.” And it was true, that's probably why these meetings made me give in to the something mysterious I was looking for. Life in my twenties had felt like a battlefield despite always having an unusually comfortable life. Just today on the phone, I had complained to my mother about how this unrest never ends. She had only responded with “it's probably a human experience,” she was tired of my restlessness, and I couldn't blame her. These anxieties had followed me through a whole life, and they were probably created in a desire for adversity - since the external world technically wasn't against me.

Meeting this friend, who came from London and had surrounded herself with a completely different group of people than me but at the same time had such a similar view of reality, was like seeing yourself in a mirror from a parallel universe - a universe I also looked up to and wished I was a part of. To see a person I looked up to and valued so much, have the same reflections, the same

desires, and agree with my unhappy view of reality meant that I couldn't be all that far from her. We struggled with the same things, and even though I had lived half a decade more as an adult, she was mature enough for my kickstart to matter. She always gave too much effort, in friends, love, family, and general existence. She wished for too much, and I could agree with that. Nothing was enough, no matter how much one could appreciate the small things in the moment, the enticing potential fun was a motor to keep us going. Continue until potential burnout. That's why we met this Sunday, after spending a whole day in bed. Because of this driving force that took us to an exhibition opening on Friday. this driving force that got us to drink as many of the free bottled beers as possible. the same force that restlessly got us to talk to all the new faces at the gallery and take them to a bar with even more new faces. The same force that got us to stroll through The Hague's most gloomy area and over to an afterparty where the guests had all fallen asleep in a bundle on the living room floor. The same force that then took us home to my apartment to talk about our most personal experiences, invite a classmate at 6 in the morning, buy beer when the store opened, and continue the conversation until three in the afternoon. It felt right at the moment, it felt as if I was fighting for life. To see how long one could endure, to see how long one could chase pleasure until there were only crumbs left, and even then I would devour the crumbs like we devoured all the residue beer in all of the empty beer cans on my coffee table.

The thought of my own freedom has been like a stick in a bicycle wheel since Christmas. My mother and I have been the first women, perhaps ever, in a whole series of women since the beginning of time who had the privilege to live alone. Who could invite strangers up to the apartment. Who could sit there in the absence of family obligations, children, and female duties, until three o'clock the next day. Who can around the city streets alone without a chaperone and not feel ashamed. We can move alone to Europe and become friends with exactly who we wanted, people from all sides of the globe. My inner restlessness and drive to burn the candle at both ends had become both a feminist and an existential struggle. I could carry my loneliness with pride. My empty bed and quiet apartment became the palace of an independent woman. I could see myself alongside Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf with

their loneliness and sadness and hope that it wouldn't also kill me. Fortunately, I am freer than they were, than they could ever have been, and I must therefore carry this freedom as a banner. For many years, I had wanted to be like my friends back home in Norway, with their long-lasting love affairs, apartments, and purchases of solid furniture at flea markets, early to bed on Saturdays, wine evenings instead of gin and tonic all nighters., the dream of a home base instead of the idea of being a wandering vagabond, without nicotine addiction and alcohol abuse, without the desire to be an artistic soul, a creative one, a witness to the possible "free" life whatever freedom actually entails. In the company of my new friend, I could finally own my outsider status and rather see myself as lucky. As if I got the opportunity they didn't get; the opportunity to be more than a woman, more than what my biological history wanted for me. "First and foremost, I am truly a fan of you," my former lover said to me as we went our separate ways. In the time that followed, I understood that this sentence described just that. I wasn't a woman for him, not a woman who could become a wife or even a proper girlfriend. I reflected a masculine freedom he could never have, a freedom so masculine and groundbreaking that if a woman could have it, it must mirror such a strong inner drive that I too could give up a social and biological essence. Still, I felt it, I felt alienated from what is expected of me, what has been expected of women for centuries. In one of the conversations from Friday, a girl and I concluded that our ability to admire our female friendships was the same ability that made nuns go into a convent. That the presence of a woman who understands you like maybe only a woman can, was enough to not enter into relationships with men. That relationship had to be so free and uncommitted that they usually couldn't be a safe one. Although men could maintain their freedom in relation to a woman, women's liberation had not come far enough to be equal for both genders. A woman in 2024 will struggle if she clings to such self-will; she will be labeled as someone who wants to have her cake and eat it too.

That's why me and my friend decided this sunday that we would order ourselves both the coffees and the beers, smoke the cigarettes and eat every snack on the menu. Just because we could, I guess.

editors note*

Sex Talk (كلام في الجنس) is a documentary made in 2010 by Amr Bayoumi in which he attempts to put on the table the intricate and complicated relationships Egyptians have with sex.

The documentary tackles issues like the physical act, pornography, taboos and fetishes through interviews beginning on the streets of Cairo. There he asks passersby their opinions on sex and the replies are varied, reflecting the complexities of these topics within Egyptian society.

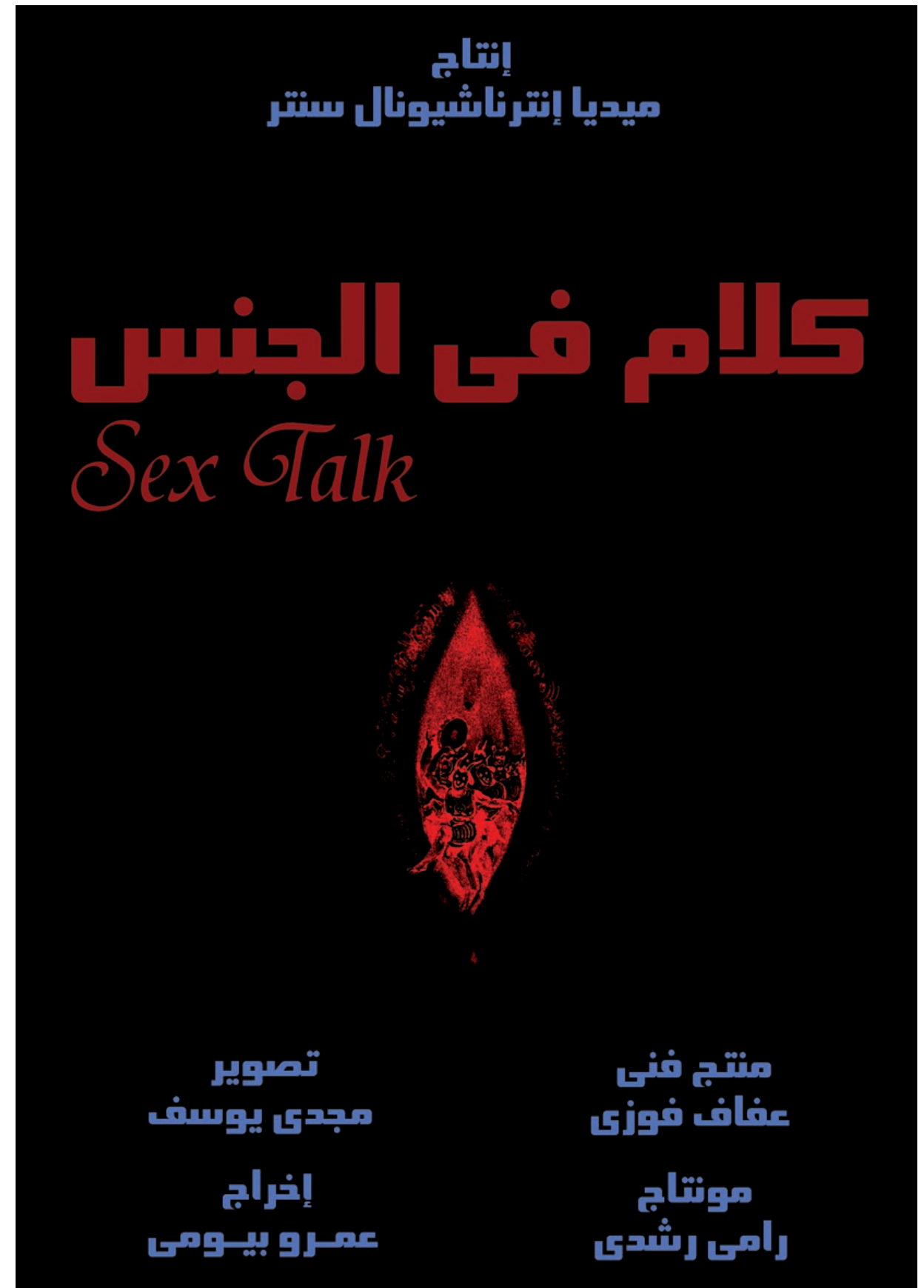
The streetwalk interviews set the stage for the intimate, mostly blurred-face, interviews which constitute the film. Among the interviewees are college students, a sex therapist, a novelist, a professor of andrology and sterility, as well as other people who participate in the interviews either as private persons or from their professional field of expertise.

One part of the documentary speaks especially about pornography and there is a 25 year old male college student who states: "I've gained a lot of experience from those films, porn films, but not all the positions are applicable" which is contrasted with a 25 year old female college student who is interviewed in the next scene: "The first time I saw it I was disgusted. For days I was disgusted with myself. With people in the street."

What follows in Shoebox is a conversation had in June of 2024 with Amr Bayoumi about the movie and the entangled thoughts that he has seen, and still sees, in his society around sex and relations.

Amr states:

"The film is all for letting go of all these entangled thoughts and starting for a change to enjoy this aspect of our lives"



movie poster

What were your ideas with Sex Talk? Why was it important that a movie like this be made?

In 2005, when I first thought of doing something in this area, my original idea was to have intimate interviews with females about their enjoyment in sex and orgasms. The second thing was to have a look in the library, only to find out that we actually lack any serious approach to what we do in bed.

The film is based on the anthropological idea that when people speak about a subject they reflect the general views of it. So in that sense you could gather from the varied opinions in the film how society thinks about this issue.

And one of the other things was that, yes Egyptian society like any other society has all forms of sexual activity and homosexuality and everything, but I found that reading even about the “approved” sexual activity which is sex within marriage, we have these complicated and entangled views.

So to concentrate on this was something that would not simplify the issue, but which would enable a discussion. And when we see how confused we are we can begin to discuss all the other activities.

Did you have a goal with what you wanted the interviewees to say or was it just shedding a light and letting them speak. If so, how did you then choose what you kept in the film and what you left out?

Not everybody I interviewed, I have used in the film. Some people even if they agree with the idea of talking about their sexual life, when they are in front of the camera you find that they are not at ease with the situation so they cannot express. Still for me it was a data, which helped form the mosaic of opinions that you see in the film.

Some issues that I did not include in the final film was asking about sex education, child abuse - and all the other issues that have been written about. Deciding to limit the topics in the film to what you’ve seen wasn’t intentional in the beginning, I opened the discussion about all the topics related to sex. It made the

interviews and the dialogues more at ease. And so it’s some sort of... we start from the general views and get in to the personal ones when we are at ease to speak about it.

The movie was released 2009 and then the revolution happened so obviously that changed a lot. If you had done Sex Talk in 2015, or afterwards, would that have changed the outcome do you think? Do you think that a film like this would still be needed today?

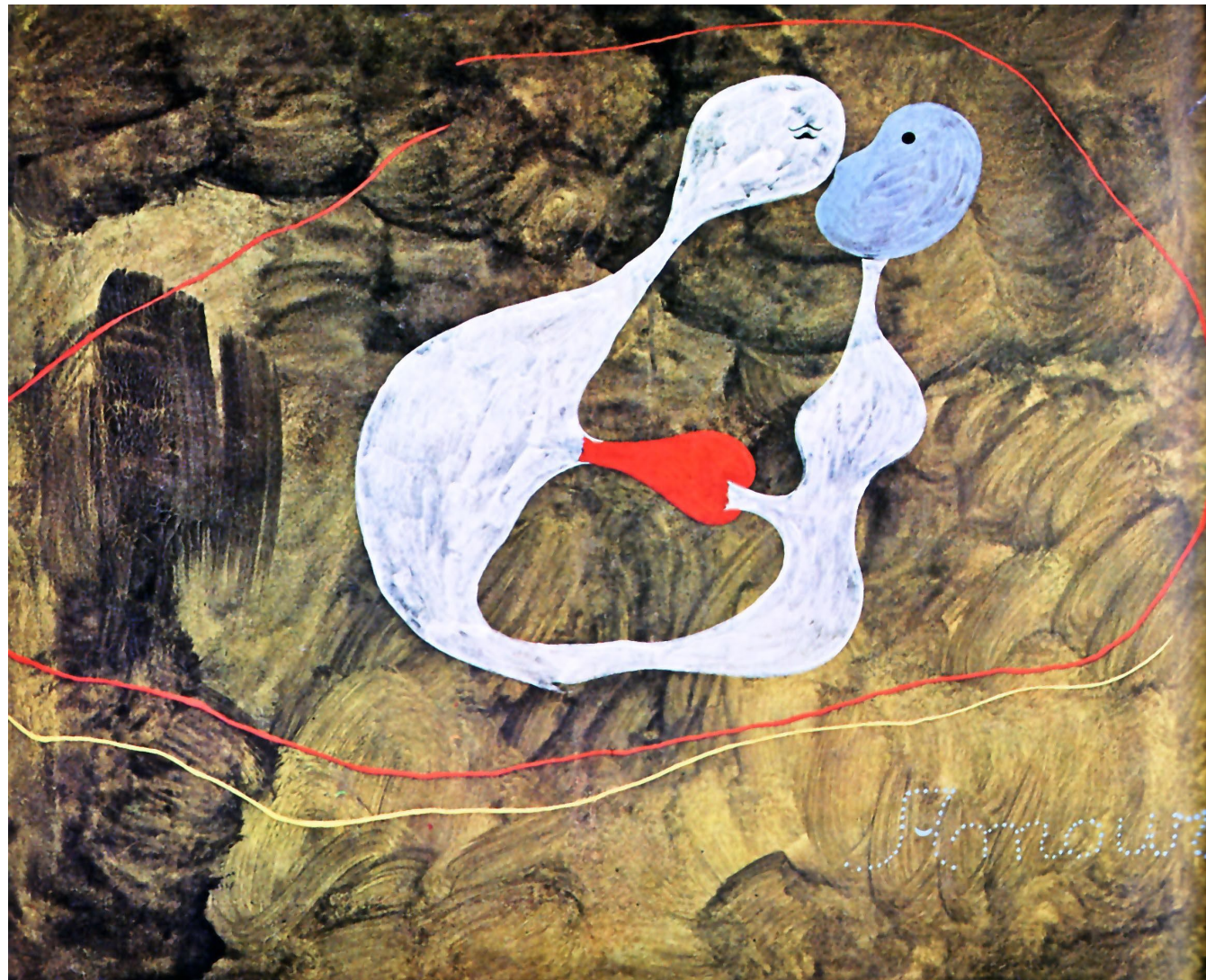
Doing Sex Talk after the revolution would of course have been a different film. I believe that if the revolution failed on the political side it made a lot of difference and change on social grounds. Especially subjects like male and female relations, which are the taboos of before the revolution. However, it would have been more difficult to make now after the revolution because of the censorship and fear of cameras.

In 2015, I saw a film that was produced 1984. It’s a French production all about Egypt and Egyptian society. Directed by a very important Syrian documentary filmmaker called Omar Amiralay and that film was called Aborted Love.

The film was - in 84, twenty years before my film - focusing on the same issue but with a different artistic approach. In 84 he alleged that people were at ease with the camera. And when they are confident in the team making the film they speak very freely about their intimate life, with faces on. So that as well gave me an indication of the change that happened from that film in 84 and my film. I’m sure that now after the revolution that if a film would be given the freedom to tackle these issues it would be different. Already from the two films I am talking about you could see how society has changed. Still the same problems but the society became more troubled and confused, traditional about many things.

People didn’t dare as much to speak about these issues when you made your movie compared to 84 because of the camera?

They let their cameras in to their home and into their work and their marital problems. It was not the artlit studio. This atmosphere is the 25 years gap.



lovers by joan miro

Sex Talk is a very open movie, and you're not putting much weight in what the interviewees say - what do you feel your role is for example if and when they say things you do not agree with?

I've dedicated the film to three female names. Mother, wife, daughter. And that was a statement expecting viewers who would say 'Would you accept that your sister or mother see this or discuss this?'

Or with pornography - how we deal with it in Egyptian society is something that in the film is stated from different angles. Some people see it as a sort of information because we don't have sex education and we don't have reliable sources of information. We just have streetwalk opinions, and mostly religious tools. So I thought this would stir up the air around it and let more open opinions be included in the discussion.

It's important to have the people's real views. Because otherwise it would be fake. Somehow I am shedding lights on the areas I think is important and of course the overall impression of the film is all for letting go of all these entangled thoughts and starting for a change to enjoy this aspect of our lives.

There is quote relating to masturbation in the movie when you're young. 'It needs to be secret so that people who haven't started yet, don't.'

Yeah, this is the sex therapist who said so. When I was trying to get funds in 2005, I had many replies from foreign stations saying "Why don't you have a Sheikh included in the movie?" and this is a stereotype from the western mind who sees this.

For me I didn't need a Sheikh because I don't want to include religion in my discussion because it's not. I have this female claiming to be a sex therapist (laughing) who is already answering and engaging as a Sheikh. With her veil and her opinions and her fear of sexual experimentation and not accepting the facts about age, and this is the mentality. Before I interviewed her, she had for a year a weekly column in one of the Al-Ahram magazines so through these 52 columns that year I knew what kind of mentality she has and I was prepared for what was to come. That was the longest interview in the movie because I went to challenge her ideas about all that she had been saying in that magazine.

There is also this part about female genital mutilation and she was arguing that the clitoris can grow and it will start rubbing against the underwear you wear and you will get infections and everything.

This is a fantasy for a physician to talk about!

The movie also touches on pornography, or the idea that sex and the whole culture of it is very repressed, which is something I see myself wherever I am, not only in Egypt. So in that way the movie also goes beyond your own borders and culture.

At that time, for the whole Egyptian society, pornography was a foreign product. There wasn't any Egyptian productions or images of Egyptians having sexual intercourse. And that makes a difference because you see other people's enjoyment in practising this act, but you don't have much reflection of your own people. That has been changed in the scene now on porn sites and dating applications. Now you have not only the amateur Egyptians there you have as well those who thought there is a chance to get money out of virtual prostitution or actual prostitution away from all the applications that might be monitored. So that is a big change and especially when it's happened to society which is not - I would say - feeling secure on this ground. It shaken its confidence in oneself and on others as well.

You said something about the western mind in regards to your film, and in the end of the movie some of the interviewees were speaking very openly about their boredom in bed. There was this one lady who said "With my husband the positions were limited, more like two. In my other relationship we tried lots of positions lots and lots of stuff! Which is much nicer." Then a man of around the same age said "To be honest my wife and I have tried one, two positions since we got married. If I do it elsewhere, I can do 6, 7. My wife is still shy of me. But a mistress will dance for me, do whatever I want."

Yes the anthropologist in the film was saying something I thought is a key to understanding this. He said something about that a husband and wife would not accept the idea of the woman on top because a male is the upper hand for the female. So these are entangled thoughts between religious and social customs.



newspaper article: conflict erupts anew between sheiks and women's advocates over female circumcision

You have three characters in their early twenties - the youth. Then you see 45-50 year olds speaking of 15-20 years of marriage. This is what they get to because there is no actual relationship. We are not talking here of a relationship between a couple where they are open about their sexuality and they fulfil each other's needs. No. We participate in roles.

I am sure that if you get engaged with an Egyptian male or female with grounds of trust and confidence you would get this sense of, perhaps, confusion and issues about sex. For example the homophobic phenomenon in Egyptian society. I am sure that it reflects tendency - what you fear most is something you feel weak towards. I don't know if you observe public spheres, but you find that there is this overly intimate physical contact between males and each other and between females and each other.

And in my point of view it reflects tendency because when the natural practise is suppressed and under many restrictions it leaks in to other directions, it's natural. Even the idea of how the human being has two elements - the feminine and the masculine, it is somehow the equation that each person has within him. This idea is not really in the full awareness of this society. "A male is a male a female is a female. Nothing in between!"

When I walk at night here in the evening on dark streets I see a lot of what I would assume are couples, being very close and laughing and sharing intimacy, where there's no light.

Yeah but that's becoming less and less accepted in society. In many cases on streets where there are some dark corners the neighbourhood would make sure that there is light there. If there is a big tree that blocks the streetlight they make sure that the branches are cut so you can't hide there. That's what I am saying. This ridiculous custom with not... All of these practises are suffocating the idea of the normality of two people together.

Do you think that is a religious thing or mostly a societal thing?

Societal! I mean religion, we know that it is against that and that and that. But society is still practising according to laws. So it's a fictional law and that law goes on without questioning without challenge.

In western societies what you do as long as you are not breaking the law you're fine. Nothing will shame you from whatever free choice you make in your sexual life. And being open about it wouldn't cost you any problems on family ground, this is a difference. There are some people who would act as being religious and it would be their choice and there are other people who make their choices free of religion.

Beyond this there would be sophisticated discussions and thoughts about how this is against our essential identity and threatens us and all these dramatic expressions about these subjects. A male has qualities, a female has qualities each of them has a role in society. And that's it. It's just so... we're still on this ground.

Of course you must have come across in your studies a point in the Egyptian society in the 40s and the 60s when we were liberal and open about this. The effect of over half a century of Saudi ideas and Wahhabism and fundamentalism has turned the Egyptian society in to what you see now.

And you've seen that yourself growing up, how society has changed in regard to openness and to sexuality and identity and sexual liberation?

Yes of course! And Saudi Arabia - out in the open we have to be strict to the laws but in our private palaces or outside the country we are on the extreme side so we do the extreme! Their society is based on this double standard so we learned that from them. We say what is proper and we do what pleases us in the dark.

In Saudi Arabia until very recently the royal family still had slaves. It was already illegal for many years in the entire world. So prostitution in the gulf as a concept is something ordinary. And Egypt in the 60s it was something not really covered - it's illegal but it would be in many forms practised without obsession from society. So we changed after two decades because of the influence of Saudi and the Gulf to adapt the same concept about prostitution. That it would be something I wouldn't talk about in public, if I talked about it I would be against. But when I go out in a free country I would do whatever I like.

أشهر أستاذة للطب الجنسي

الجنس السبب الأول للطلاق!

مقدم للجامعة في هذا العام..
● ما الذي وجدته يربط بين الدين والجنس؟

– الإسلام يقر بحق المرأة في الاستمتاع بالعلاقة الجنسية.. المدايعات ما قبل الجماع وتجهيز المرأة له وهي نظريات حديثة في الطب الجنسي جاءت في القرآن والسنة.. فالقرآن يقول «قدموا لأنفسكم».. والرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول «لا يقع احدكم على زوجته كالبهيمة» كذلك يقول ديننا ان علاقة الزواج علاقة مودة ورحمة وسكن وعلماء الجنس يقولون ان الود والتوافق مطلوب وضروري بين الزوجين لاقامة علاقة ناجحة لكل ذلك ارى ضرورة تثقيف الرجل والمرأة جنسيا ليعيشا حياة سعيدة وراضية اما البعض الذين يرون في الثقافة الجنسية عودة للحيوانية عند الإنسان اقول لهم إن الحيوانية هي ألا يعرف الإنسان المعلومات الجنسية الصحيحة لأن الإنسان هو الكائن الوحيد الذي اختص بالمتعة في ممارسته للجنس بينما باقي الكائنات الحية تعتبر الجنس بالنسبة لها مجرد مهمة بيولوجية غرضها الاساسي هو التكاثر فقط .

● الجدل حول تدريس الثقافة الجنسية مازال دائرا منذ السبعينات وحتى الآن ومازال له معارضوه وينفس القوة

٢٠٠٤ وحصلت على جائزة احسن بحث

newspaper article: sex is the main reason for divorce!

أهل الأزهر.. يطالبون بتدريس الجنس في الأزهر!

الكلام في هذا الموضوع.. يفتح بالتأكيد مجالا مثيرا للجدل..
فالوضع يتعلق بدراسة الجنس
أما مكان الدراسة فهو داخل جامعة الأزهر
والثير أن عميد كلية الشريعة الأسبق هو الذي يطالب بدراسة الجنس لطلاب الأزهر في الفاهج الدراسية!
إلى هنا لم نصل بعد إلى الحد الأقصى من الأثارة التي يحتويها الموضوع نفسه.. خاصة لو علمنا أن الدكتور حامد أبو طالب عميد كلية الشريعة الأسبق كان له مبررات قوية ومثيرة جدا جدا.
فلماذا طلب عميد كلية الشريعة السابق تدريس مادة الجنس في هذا الوقت بالذات؟.. وكيف أعلن عن طلبه هذا؟.. وما هي متابعاته ومبرراته؟.. وأخيرا ما هو رأى علماء الدين وأساتذة الاجتماع؟ هذا ما سنعرضه من خلال السطور القادمة..

فعلا مجرد الكلام في هذا الموضوع يفتح مجالا كبيرا للجدل بين المصريين بصفة عامة والمختصين بشكل خاص.. والدليل ما حدث قبل عامين عندما طالب بعض المختصين بدراسة مادة الجنس في المدارس ووضعها ضمن المقررات الدراسية.. وقتها قامت الدنيا ولم تقعد.. وأصبح الحديث في الموضوع قبلة الرأي العام في هذا الوقت البعض وافق والمعلم عارض.. واستمر الجدل في هذا الموضوع إلى عدة شهور.. وانتهى بقرار خامس رفض فيه مجمع البحوث الإسلامية وثيقة طالب بتدريس الجنس في المدارس المصرية.. ووافق على أغلب أعضاء مجلس الشعب.. وهو عدم دراسة الجنس لطلاب المدارس لعدة أسباب.
لكن كتاب سنكون نعود للأفعال هذه المرة! خاصة لو علمنا أن مكان الدراسة هذه المرة سيكون داخل جامعة الأزهر.
الكلام ليس من عندنا ولا هو مجرد كلام عادي صدر من شخص عادي لكنه كلام صحيح مائة بالمائة والذي صرح به هو شخص مسئول وله مبررات.. ولكن تعرف لماذا طلب حامد أبو طالب عميد كلية الشريعة السابق تدريس مادة الجنس.. لابد أن نعود قليلا للوراء.

٨٠٠ جنس!
في ندوة داخل جامعة الأزهر.. كانت البداية عندما فجر الدكتور حامد أبو طالب صيد كلية الشريعة السابق بجامعة الأزهر مفاجئته بمطالبته أن يدرس طلاب الأزهر مادة «الجنس» وجاء هذا خلال الندوة التي كانت تناقش العلاقات الحميمة في الإسلام.
وأضاف العميد السابق أن تدريس الجنس داخل جامعة الأزهر لم يكن أبدا يدخل تحت مظلة «الأدب».. موضعا أنه لابد من تدريسه وفقا لقرارات إرساية علمية وليس بشكل عشوائي.
ثم فجر الدكتور حامد أبو طالب مفاجئ أخرى من العيار الثقيل قائلا أنه يجد أن ٨٠٪ من الأساتذة الشريعة التي يتلقاها من المواطنين بشكل عام.. والطلاب بشكل خاص ترتبط بالمشاكل الجنسية.. والغريب أن ٩٠٪ من الشعب المصري لا يعرف معنى مصطلح «العلاقة الحميمة» بالتأكيد بمعناها الصحيح.
ما أتاني به الدكتور حامد أبو طالب فتح مجالا جديدا للجدل بين المعارضين والوافق.. خاصة أن الدراسة هذه المرة أصبحت مطروحة داخل كليات جامعة الأزهر.. وليست في المدارس كما خرج من قبل.. ولذلك قررنا أن نعرف آراء الأساتذة والمختصين حول هذا الموضوع لتعرف رويد الأفعال!

بعيدا عن الأثارة:
وكان لقائنا مع الدكتور محمد رأفت عثمان وهو استاذ

الشريعة والقانون السابق أيضا في جامعة الأزهر.. وعضو مجمع البحوث الإسلامية بمصر وأمريكا والذي قال لنا هناك مواد دراسة مقررة يدرسها الطلاب والطالبات بدلا من المرحلة الإعدادية.. ويتم الدراسة فيها بعرض المعلومات بأسلوب مهذب جدا.. خالي من كل ألوان الأثارة.. وقد تربينا على هذه الثقافة في كتب الأزهر.. وليس المراد بها الثقافة التي يريد العلمانيون أن يخرسونها في مجتمعاتنا وهي ثقافة متافية لأداب الإسلام وأحكامه.
ويشير الدكتور محمد رأفت عثمان إلى شيء مهم وهو أن الفقهاء يعلمون الطلاب من خلال المقررات متى يبلغ المني! ومتى تبلغ المنيبيبة! وما هي علامات البلوغ! وما يتعلق بالبلوغ من أحكام!.. وإذا جاءت النورة الشهوية.. فما هي الأحكام المتعلقة بها! وإذا حدثت إفرازات من كلا النوعين شباب أو شابة.. أو رجل أو امرأة.. فما هي الأحكام المتعلقة بها!.
وأضاف العميد السابق: الأزهر يقوم بالفعل بدراسة هذه المواد بدون أي إثارة جنسية.. لكن لو قصد الدكتور حامد أبو طالب عكس هذا الكلام.. أو تعديله بشكل آخر فانا غير موافق تماما.. لأن ما يدرسه طلاب الأزهر الآن هو الصحيح وهو ما تربينا أيضا عليه.. وأرى أنه لا يتمسبب في أي انحرافات جنسية.

لا مجال للتخفي!
ويرى الدكتور حامد محمد استاذ الفقه أن دراسة الجنس هو شيء خاطئ تماما.. وإذا كان الشباب للقليل على الزواج يحتاج إلى توعية أو دراسة لمعرفة أسرار هذا العالم.. فيمكن أن يحدث هذا من خلال محاضرات يقوم بها مختصون حول هذا الموضوع.
وأضاف أن الفقه الإسلامي ذكر علاقة الرجل والمرأة والزواج ويمكن من خلال اطلاعا على الأحاديث النبوية.. ولذلك فلا نحتاج هذه الأمور إلى دراسة لأنها موجودة بالفعل في حياتنا.
واستكمل الدكتور حامد كلامه قائلا: الإسلام حرص في تعليمه على الجواء.. ولذلك لا يجوز مطلقا دراسة الجنس داخل جامعة الأزهر أو أي جامعة أخرى خاصة لو كانت الدراسة بشكل نظري لأن الإنسان بطبيعته لديه معرفة

newspaper article: community of azhar demands sex education at (the university of) al-azhar

This might be a very naive question, but who does it gain to put it on other people and say that's not okay we don't speak about it, but in our homes we do whatever the fuck we want?

The authorities, it's an easy tool to rule people. It's easy to rule people when you don't let them create their own identities.

The novelist in Sex Talk said something about that all our disputes and problems and confrontations and marital outrageous discussions is just nonsense that we ignore. But it's all related to sex.

And still, in the east in general and in Egypt specifically you would see that people still treat love, sex, marriage, raising children as being all in the same package. Separating each and looking at it for yourself - society doesn't think that way. We put it all in one bag.

So we don't raise offspring as separate individuals from us, we raise them to guide them and to fulfil our roles as parents and our frustration and our failed dreams. Of course some families don't act these ways some are between these ideas. But the majority are having children because it is part of this package. I get married so I have children. And the extended family will be interested if there is a complication and nothing happens. Do they need to see a doctor? Do we need to go to a Sheikh to make some hocus pocus? We are very worried about this.

And also it was mentioned in Sex Talk the Arabic word for masturbation is العادة السرية the secret routine.

As you are disgusted of it. Even though it is so inherent. Oh my God.



good & evil by eugène lepoittevin



I take a ride on a monocycle through spring and summer
 Rightways carousel horses, strobelights in daytime and wagons
 Freeze-thaw cycle circles back
 High grass blades that sing wind, wind
 Red glow at the back of the park
 Statues of virgin mary lined up
 Light that seems to be bigger than, or larger than itself

I dreamt that i found books outside in the woods
 Ones that i had never heard of before
 They let the grass grow very tall until august
 And let it fold in on itself in autumn
 They speak of flowers
 Poppies and magnolias are edible and feed all at your feet

Seven twisted sewers open and the vacuum inhales the main road
 Red glow at the back of the street
 Empty plots of land that hold
 Abstract feelings that i have in autumn
 I wish i could whisper for you like the leaves do

The way cows follow each other in a neat row
 A haystack of yearning with the needle as a gift
 I could compose for you the scent of murmuring behind the shack

Parentheses,

I think in synchronicity with angels, turning and twirling higher than i am,
 The hills i run down to meet the glowing lake
 The woods i crawl through to turn my back to the shimmer
 Greenhouses that see less use right now
 The cement crumbling on the road where i hear cicadas

I have begun recording hounds barking
 In pairs of three when the sun warms their feet

Container houses on the border,
 My lake shimmers before me and them,
 Storehouses and self-service desks
 Warehouses of huts and tents,
 Sand, sand, sand and thirty-five beautiful hydrangeas

I try to wipe the dust off my shelves but it has turned to rust
 The crust i pick at
 The musk of the animals outside the window
 And hay, hay, hay in the air
 The winding serial numbers attached to me
 The last fruit i'll eat will be a cantaloupe,
 And while i eat my weight in cherries,
 I wait in a dress of burnt grass
 and sit around at night to listen for autumn

editors note*

One might ask how and why Virginia Woolf is in this issue. There are two answers to these two questions.

How? Mrs Dalloway is in the public domain, meaning you are allowed to reuse, copy, and publish it without any permission. Phew! If anyone ever reads Shoebox #2, at least it's done over the table.

Why? Because this passage that comes completely from Mrs Dalloway is so relatable and more well-written than anything I or anyone else could ever attempt to write in this magazine.

A couple months ago when I was reading the book for the first time this passage left a mark and I underlined it in order to write a book review for Shoebox. However, the amount of book reviews and contemplations of Mrs Dalloway is already so much, that I thought it better to simply copy the passage in its entirety and perhaps spread the joy and sorrow of reading and enveloping oneself in another's world.

Rumi stated in the 13th century: *“When love rattles its chain the intellect of Plato and Avicenna goes mad.”*

Characters for context:
(Richard) Dalloway, is the man Clarissa falls in love with.
Clarissa is the protagonist of the novel who becomes Mrs. Dalloway after marrying Richard Dalloway.
Peter Walsh is the He of this excerpt, whose love and heart-ache towards Clarissa is here laid bare.

“It was an awful evening! He grew more and more gloomy, not about that only; about everything. And he couldn't see her; couldn't explain to her; couldn't have it out. There were always people about—she'd go on as if nothing had happened. That was the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability. Yet Heaven knows he loved her. She had some queer power of fiddling on one's nerves, turning one's nerves to fiddle-strings, yes.

He had gone in to dinner rather late, from some idiotic idea of making himself felt, and had sat down by old Miss Parry—Aunt Helena—Mr. Parry's sister, who was supposed to preside. There she sat in her white Cashmere shawl, with her head against the window—a formidable old lady, but kind to him, for he had found her some rare flower, and she was a great botanist, marching off in thick boots with a black collecting-box slung between her shoulders. He sat down beside her, and couldn't speak. Everything seemed to race past him; he just sat there, eating. And then half-way through dinner he made himself look across at Clarissa for the first time. She was talking to a young man on her right. He had a sudden revelation. “She will marry that man,” he said to himself. He didn't even know his name.

For of course it was that afternoon, that very afternoon, that Dalloway had come over; and Clarissa called him “Wickham”; that was the beginning of it all. Somebody had brought him over; and Clarissa got his name wrong. She introduced him to everybody as Wickham. At last he said “My name is Dalloway!”—that was his first view of Richard—a fair young man, rather awkward, sitting on a deck-chair, and blurting out “My name is Dalloway!” Sally got hold of it; always after that she called him “My name is Dalloway!”

He was a prey to revelations at that time. This one—that she would marry Dalloway—was blinding—overwhelming at the moment.

There was a sort of—how could he put it?—a sort of ease in her manner to him; something maternal; something gentle. They were talking about politics. All through dinner he tried to hear what they were saying.

Afterwards he could remember standing by old Miss Parry's chair in the drawing-room. Clarissa came up, with her perfect manners, like a real hostess, and wanted to introduce him to some one—spoke as if they had never met before, which enraged him. Yet even then he admired her for it. He admired her courage; her social instinct; he admired her power of carrying things through. "The perfect hostess," he said to her, whereupon she winced all over. But he meant her to feel it. He would have done anything to hurt her after seeing her with Dalloway. So she left him. And he had a feeling that they were all gathered together in a conspiracy against him—laughing and talking—behind his back. There he stood by Miss Parry's chair as though he had been cut out of wood, he talking about wild flowers. Never, never had he suffered so infernally! He must have forgotten even to pretend to listen; at last he woke up; he saw Miss Parry looking rather disturbed, rather indignant, with her prominent eyes fixed. He almost cried out that he couldn't attend because he was in Hell! People began going out of the room. He heard them talking about fetching cloaks; about its being cold on the water, and so on. They were going boating on the lake by moonlight—one of Sally's mad ideas. He could hear her describing the moon. And they all went out. He was left quite alone.

"Don't you want to go with them?" said Aunt Helena—old Miss Parry!—she had guessed. And he turned round and there was Clarissa again. She had come back to fetch him. He was overcome by her generosity—her goodness.

"Come along," she said. "They're waiting." He had never felt so happy in the whole of his life! Without a word they made it up.

They walked down to the lake. He had twenty minutes of perfect happiness. Her voice, her laugh, her dress (something floating, white, crimson), her spirit, her adventurousness; she made them all disembark and explore the island; she startled a hen; she laughed; she sang. And all the time, he knew perfectly well, Dalloway was falling in love with her; she was falling in love with Dalloway; but it didn't seem to matter. Nothing mattered. They sat on the ground and talked—he and Clarissa. They went in and out of each other's minds without any effort. And then in a second it was over. He said to himself as they were getting into the boat, "She will marry that man," dully, without any resentment; but it was an obvious thing. Dalloway would marry Clarissa.

Dalloway rowed them in. He said nothing. But somehow as they watched him start, jumping on to his bicycle to ride twenty miles through the woods, wobbling off down the drive, waving his hand and disappearing, he obviously did feel, instinctively, tremendously, strongly, all that; the night; the romance; Clarissa. He deserved to have her.

For himself, he was absurd. His demands upon Clarissa (he could see it now) were absurd. He asked impossible things. He made terrible scenes. She would have accepted him still, perhaps, if he had been less absurd. Sally thought so. She wrote him all that summer long letters; how they had talked of him; how she had praised him, how Clarissa burst into tears! It was an extraordinary summer—all letters, scenes, telegrams—arriving at Bourton early in the morning, hanging about till the servants were up; appalling tête-à-têtes with old Mr. Parry at breakfast; Aunt Helena formidable but kind; Sally sweeping him off for talks in the vegetable garden; Clarissa in bed with headaches.

The final scene, the terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life (it might be an exaggeration—but still so it did seem now) happened at three o'clock in the

afternoon of a very hot day. It was a trifle that led up to it—Sally at lunch saying something about Dalloway, and calling him “My name is Dalloway”; whereupon Clarissa suddenly stiffened, coloured, in a way she had, and rapped out sharply, “We’ve had enough of that feeble joke.” That was all; but for him it was precisely as if she had said, “I’m only amusing myself with you; I’ve an understanding with Richard Dalloway.” So he took it. He had not slept for nights.”

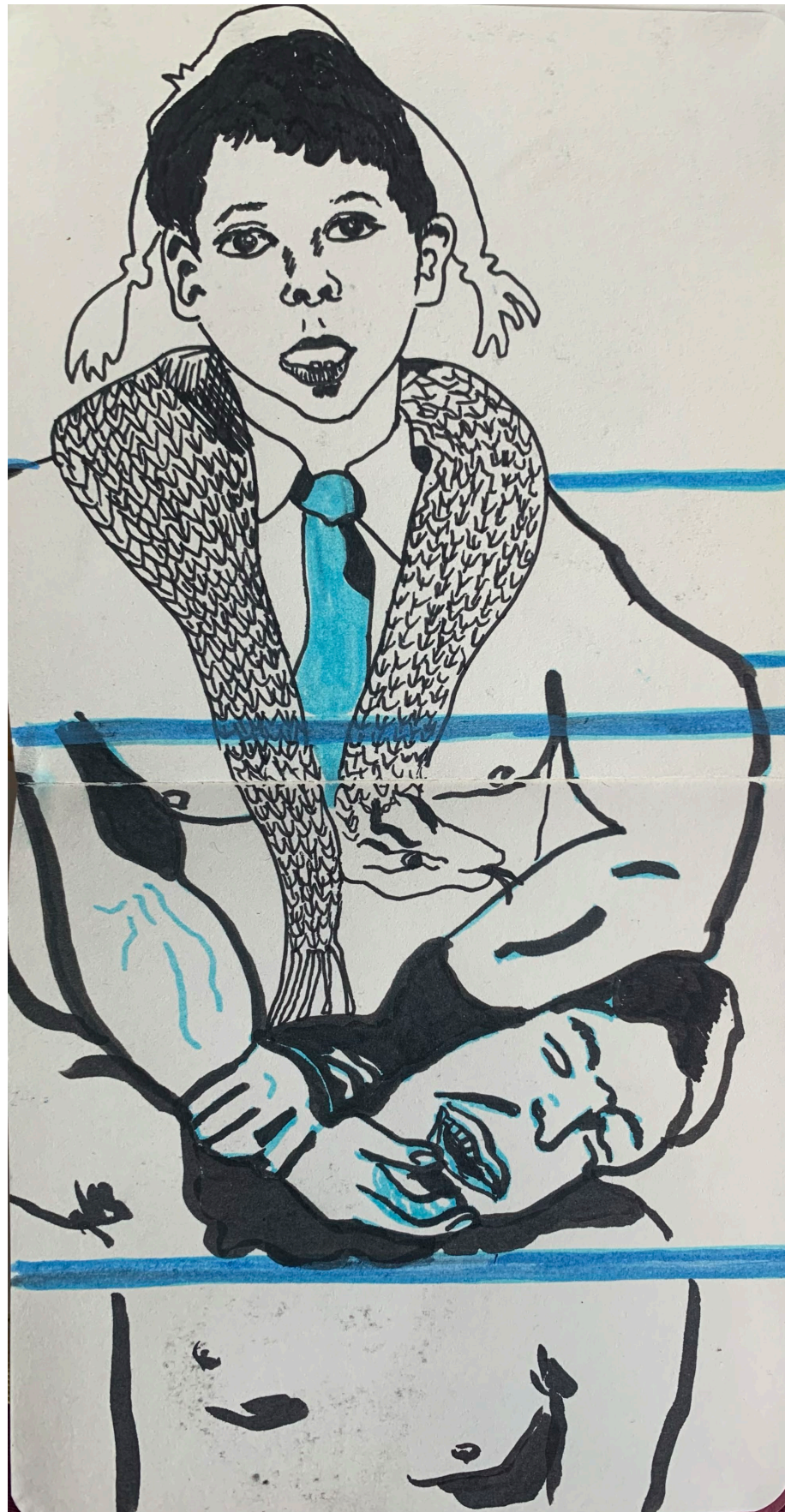


ai generated image inspired solely by virginia woolf's mrs. dalloway



*this sculptural intervention has taken place at triage lavoir de péronnes lez binche in binche, belgium. triage lavoir de péronnes lez binche is a coal washing plant built in 1954 with assistance from truman's marshall plan, but has been abandoned now for decades. this has left a beautiful and empty space that is perfect for urban exploration and sculptural interventions like the ones in shoebox.

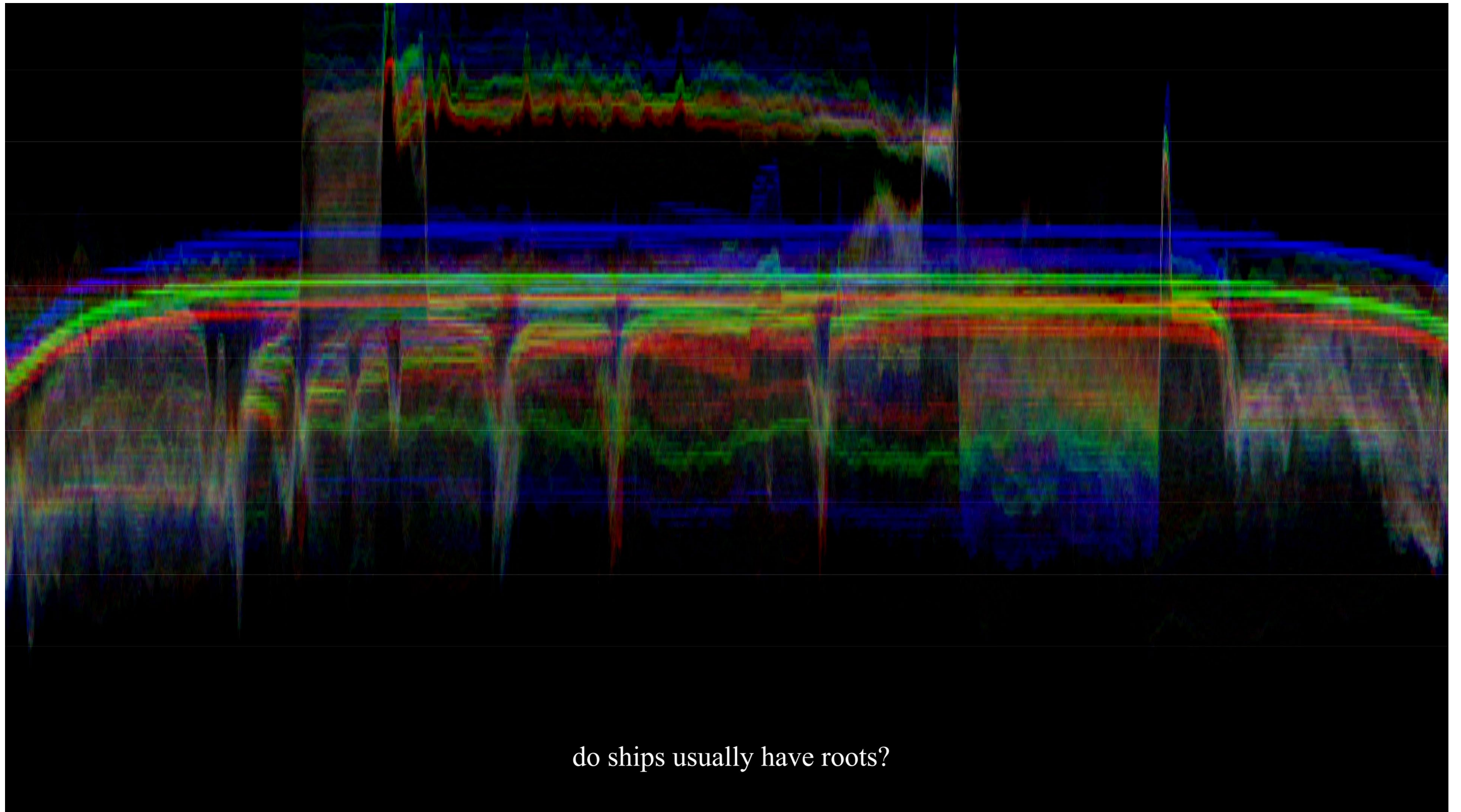




A body is a brain
This is how it works:
Memory
Forgetting

You should have been a boy.
You should have been a machine.

<p>searching for an establishing shot* by mahmoud youssef</p>	<p>79</p>	<p>searching for an establishing shot by mahmoud youssef</p> <p>80</p>
<p>نبدأ منين؟</p> <p>كل فيلم يحتاج لقطة تأسيسية تعرفنا إحنا فين..</p>		<p>I write to you while I’m working on myself.</p>
<p>Should we start with the roots?</p> <p>Do ships usually have roots?</p>		<p>نحن في المصنع داخل المصنع خارج المصنع نحن فوق المصنع تحت المصنع، نحن يمين المصنع يسار المصنع خلف المصنع أمام المصنع، بين المصنع خلال المصنع، حول المصنع، من المصنع، حذاء المصنع، إزاء المصنع، بعد المصنع .</p>
<p>I write to you while I’m working.</p>		<p>اللقطة التأسيسية تعرف زمن الدخول إلى المكان.</p>
<p>أفكر في الأبواب والشبابيك والأسطح والطريق المجاور وصف من الأشجار يتسلل إلى حدود مكان.</p>		<p>نحن في اللحظة التأسيسية للمصنع، نحن في لحظة انتقال ملكية المصنع من ملكية عامة لملكية خاصة، نحن في زمن انهيار المصنع، نحن في أحد أيام العمل داخل المصنع، نرتدي ثياب العمل المتسخة ونلتزم بمعايير السلامة، نحن في أحد أيام الراحة، في لحظة وعي المكان بذاته؟ هل يحمل المكان زمنًا واحدًا أصلا؟ هل يمكن أن يتأرجح المكان بين زمنين ثلاثة أربعة؟ بين لحظة تأسيسية ولحظة انهيار؟ هل يرحل أي زمن من المكان من تلقاء نفسه؟ أم أن هناك أزمنة محددة يتم تنحيثها من أجل أزمنة أخرى؟</p>
<p>كيف نختبر المكان؟</p> <p>بيانات الدخول والخروج مسجلة على البوابة.</p>		
<p>I write to you while I’m working on the film.</p>		<p>Memories Memories are part of the self you keep.</p>
<p>باحثًا عن لقطة تأسيسية!</p>		<p>A ship is usually referred to as “she”.</p>
<p>المكان مُعرف بالنسبة لك، وأنت مُعرف بالنسبة للمكان.</p>	<p>*searching for an establishing shot (بحث عن لقطة تأسيسية) is a philosophical journey originally made as a film installation. for shoebox we have decided to publish the manuscript as well as stills from the film.</p>	<p>Forgetting, deconstruction, construction, memory, and self.</p>
<p>It’s not always needed.</p>		<p>The memory of the place.</p>
<p>أفكر في الاحتمالات الوظيفية للدخول إلى المكان. في المشرف والعامل والمهندس والمدير وأفراد الأمن.. في عمالة مؤقتة وعمالة دائمة، في المصور وعمال الإضاءة وفي كما أنا مُعرف بسياق الجملة.</p>		<p>Constructing the dimensions of the self in the place.</p>
<p>وكما أنا في جملة أخرى محذوفة، وفي طائر يحوم فوق سطح المكان ويتوقف لالتقاط طعام ما. للكلاب التي تسكن هنا، بشكل مؤقت أو دائم، لبقعة باردة أو ركن دافئ، أو في طائرة تهبط لإجراء مهمة أركيولوجية.</p>	<p>the english-arabic text need not be introduced, and from my own point of view could be read as either two separate texts in one, or as one text in itself.</p> <p>for fitting purposes it is to be read in shoebox left-to-right</p> <p>“is it the narrative of the place or the narrative of the self?”</p>	<p>Constructing the place as self.</p> <p>Constructing the self as a place.</p> <p>استيقظت ذلك اليوم على ذكرى حلم لي، أقف في صف طويل لتسلم شيء ما لا أتذكره، أصل حتى أول الصف لأجد أن عليّ العودة مرة أخرى إلى آخره، أعود لا غاضبًا أو مستاءً، ولا أمل لدي في شيء آخر بدلًا من الذي لم أحصل عليه، فقط أنا تتحرك بين نقطتين .</p>



do ships usually have roots?

Philosophy started long before cinema, looks like a needless-to-say fact, but to look for an establishing shot we probably need to go back in time before the workers left the factory.

Is it the narrative of the place or the narrative of the self?

“Explain”, and “elaborate” are orders. What kind of order is a question?

What type of questions is the question?

Intentionally speaking.

“Do you remember the first time you recognized it, like oh there i am?

And i have existed for a while,

just like the place

Is it your first memory?

Is it the first memory of the place?“

“I received your invitation today”

It’s not that abstract, you said

I don’t think that an establishing shot should be that abstract

أنت لا تخطو في نفس النهر مرتين ..

اللقطة التأسيسية تعرف زمن الدخول إلى المكان .

يعطي تعريف هرقليطس للنهر زمنية محددة لوصفه كمكان هي الآن وفقط. في اللحظة القادمة يصير النهر نهرًا آخر، والمصنع مصنعًا آخر، والذات ذاتًا أخرى .

تستمر المياه في الجريان في النهر، في الممر الذي نحتته لنفسها ويُعرف التركيب تجريديًا بالنهر.



تستمر المياه في الجريان في النهر، في الممر الذي نحتته لنفسها ويُعرف التركيب تجريديًا بالنهر.

As we continue our conversation on the persistence of the self over time,

عدم اليقين في الموقف غير محدود

(نحن غير متأكدين تمامًا من الموقف)

عدم اليقين بشأن الزخم هو صفر

(نحن متأكدون تمامًا من الزخم).

يتوافق هذا الحساب للجسيم الحر مع مبدأ عدم اليقين لهايزنبرج

I, the place, and language.

Language and Editing, editing and succession of parts connected by resemblance and contiguity or causation. Editing and interruption. Interruption of the self, the place inside the self, editing the place.

While space is more about distance, size, and pattern, the place is about relations and meaning. sometimes it tells stories, she's animated with spirits and energies. the space between us? What about the place constructed on mutual aesthetics between us?

أقرأ في المبادئ النظرية لفيزياء الكم "لمتابعة النقاش حول التفاعل بين الملاحظ والشيء .

تفترض الفيزياء الكلاسيكية دائماً أن التفاعل صغيراً فيُهمَل، لكن لا يمكن إزالة أثر التفاعل من النتيجة في الفيزياء النظرية .

التفاعل بين الملاحظ والشيء يسبب تغيرات غير محكومة وكبيرة في النظام المشاهد

النتيجة المباشرة لهذه الحالة أنه في كل تجربة تجرى لتعيين بعض الكميات تحول معرفة الأخرى إلى وهم لأن الاضطراب غير المحكوم في النظام المشاهد سيغير من قيم المقادير المعينة سابقاً

Which place are you now?

The place apparatus and I.

My illusion, your reality, my reality your illusion.

I mean can we at any time meet in the same place ?

The place was there

What we really needed was time? Or memory?

The camera is against the wall, the wall is distorted, Distortion in the camera, distortion in the eye, the darkness of the closed chamber inside the place, inside the camera inside the self, And the light through them all.

We walk the path million times knowing that the dreams of history are not a history of dreams.

Which dream do you want to start with?

Can particles affect each other, by watching?

What is watching of a spinning particle?

Is it the spectrum that watches by being? and be by watching? the one that moves with no position? and is its effect always redirectional?

Direction of an establishing shot, and absence of direction

The place and I, the dream.

I was very small in the size of a photon spinning in an atom, It's big when you are inside of course very big, and I was touching spectrums of moving particles, but every time I tried to touch them, they vanish they go somewhere else,

..they have different shapes. It took me a while to discover that I was my self a spectrum, and we all spinning in the same emptiness, and I wake up with this feeling of the absurdity of chasing small spectrums and just accepting myself as a spinning body.

A sense of orientation is needed,

by recognizing the parts of the place inside the self.

The process of production of the self, starts by collecting memory blocks from all over the place. The place holds the emotional intensity of coexisting times, simultaneously, not the old parts ship of Theseus nor the new parts ship, it's the transforming one that holds the two, the life spinning between two hypothetically identified points. which one could we consider as an establishing shot for this film?

"Your mind is just doing its job it's looking for proof to enforce the reality that you created yourself"

I read today that the runaway during the screening of "Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat" was a myth

You are in 1896 taking notes of people reactions during the screening of the film

How could you write in the dark?

weren't you afraid as much as the audience?



أكتب إليك أثناء عملي

أثناء بحثي عن لقطة تأسيسية

لبداء الفيلم

لتأسيس المكان

المساحة التي بيننا

أكتب إليك بعد خروجي من العمل

كان نفسي أحضر بس المكان لسه محتاج شغل كثير..

mahmoud youssef

محمود يوسف



Contact

Your Name:

Alice Nordlund

Your Email:

As I run/rush through the darkness flickering lights Lead the way yot


Subject:

Message:

As I run/rush through the darkness flickering lights Lead the way
you have paved the path i should not take
Turning right on every corner for eternity until i find my way out of
your maze
None of my eight legs wants to leave your intricate web of mind
none of my legs wants to leave

Spam Check:

Please enter the characters from the image:



Send Message

När jag springer/rusar genom
mörkret, flimrande ljus Led
vägen
du har banat vägen jag inte
borde ta
Svänger åt höger i varje hörn i
evighet tills jag hittar vägen ut ur
din labyrint
Ingen av mina åtta ben vill lämna
ditt invecklade sinnesnät

Inget av mina ben vill lämna din
regeringstid,,
Inget av mina ben vill gå
Dricka spottet av ditt Slöseri med
sorger
Svarar varje droppe regn

Du har viftat min väg



Følelsen av å gå til grunne hadde hjemsøkt han i årevis og var det ikke en sten i hans sko, var det i hvert fall et jordskred i hans skjorteerme. Disse demoner, disse stener, disse onde tanker virker som at de ikke bunner i noe som helst- Han er ikke hjemsøkt av noe jordisk, heller en grunnleggende følelse av å være fortapt, eller en grunnleggende visshet om at han kom til å bli det. Trøsten han fant var at ingen store romaner hadde blitt skrevet uten fordervelse, eller et søken- På dørkarmen til stor kunst er følelsene både redningen men på samme tid det som står i veien. Den siste tiden hadde det vært en vegg av snø mellom han og skrive-prosjektet. Han følte seg innesnødd og hadde vært avhenge i av å varme seg på ytre erfaringer- Sunniva, så lite som han ønsket å innrømme det, var en slik erfaring. Han hadde virkelig dårlig samvittighet, for han er ikke noe følelsesløst monster. Sunniva hadde vært med på leken helt på egenhånd og som feminist mente han at man måtte huske på at enhver kvinne har like mye agens som en hver mann. Uansett, det var greit hun ikke hang rundt lenger - kanskje dette endelig var muligheten til å måke denne forbanna vegg med snø.

På et hjørne i gamlebyen hadde han funnet en bruktbutikk med et lite utvalg skrivemaskiner. De var dekket i støv. Ingen bryr seg om å skape noe lenger tenkte han, og fikk en av dem, en gul en, på halvpris. «Den hadde stått og støvet ned i et år» hadde den rockabillyfiserte ungjenta bak kassa sagt. Med denne gammeldagse teknologien håpet han at skrivelysten ville komme tilbake, for det hadde hans far formidlet; hvis du ikke klarer å skrive må du forandre. Forandre hvor du skriver, hvem eller hva du skriver om, eller hva du skriver på. Aksel hadde aldri brukt en skrivemaskin før, men der den sto på stuebordet føltes det som om noen brikker hadde falt på plass. Han var alltid ment til å skrive på en sånn, kjente han. Han så seg selv i sort hvitt, med et svakt lys fra en skrivebord-lampe. En sånn grønn en de har på gamle lesesaler, og en sigarett i kjeften. På et bord, skrivende om livet og kunsten og kjærligheten, et langt bord der alle store hadde sittet og skrevet før han. Ovenfor satt Ibsen, på hver side satt Kerouac og Bukowski, Dante satt lenger ned og likeså gjorde Goethe-hemingway, knausgård, Shakespear, Miller, Dostojevski, Cervantes, tolstoj, joyce, faulkner, defoe, beckett, flaubert, hugo, dumas, -- Han kunne se dem alle så tydelig, opplyst i gamle grønne skrivebordslamper eller i varmen fra lysestaker.

*together with the author, it has been decided that oslo bohemen (the oslo bohemian) is only to be published in its original language - norwegian

Med sigaretter og piper og oppkneppede skjorter og trøyer. Faen så deilig det er å være en del av dette felleskapet åndsmennesker, av de som tok eksistensen med en lidenskapelig seriøsitet.

Tiltros for denne overveldende opplevelsen skrivemaskinen ga han var det fortsatt ikke lett å faktisk skrive noe. Lyden av tastene som han forvirret og meningsløs presser minner mer om lyden av militærstøvler mot hard asfalt enn applaus fra en imponerte sal av tilskuere. Etter timevis av forsøk på å få frem noe som kunne ligne på diktning innser han hvor alene han er der han satt på enden av stuebordet som en posør- det var ingen som kunne vitne hans villen til kreativ-skapelse. Som Gud før han skapte mennesket, tenkte han. Han måtte bare skape dette jævla mennesket, selv om det kanskje kunne gå han til grunne. Han var vel på vei til avgrunnen uansett. Leiligheten er mørkere enn vanlig, nå som januar-tilværelsen har lagt seg som et lokk over hele Oslo, og det er langt ned fra vinduet til gaten utenfor- Gamle mennesker med brodder tredd rundt skoene som kondomer vakler i pingvin-stil i retning 21 bussen. Lyden av slaps som spruter ned fortauet med hver passerende bil. Dette er ikke noe å skrive om. Ibsens Christiania så ikke slik ut - Ibsens Christiania var ikke fylt med byråkrater i sorte anonyme boblejakker og smarttelefoner og airpods med lett fordøyelig musikk og evigheter med distraksjoner. Ingen lytter til lydene rundt seg lenger, de blokkerer ørene med lydisolerende-hodetelefoner som skylapper. Ingen av de store komponistene, Wagner, Mozart, Brahms, Bach levde in en tid der majoriteten frivillig fremmedgjorde seg fra hverdagens orkester av lyder. En vakker komposisjon er som akkumulasjonen av alle lydene en komponist har erfart. Strykerne som vitne av venner rundt et bord i en mørk pub, trombonen som bråket fra naboens leilighet, slagverk som et bankende hjerte i møtet med en vakker kvinne, harpen som lyden av naturen i en tid der den ikke er korrumpert av høyblokker, elektriske biler og kjøpesenter. Lyden av folk som banker på dører - det slo han at ingen hadde banket på døren hans, knapt ringt på ringeklokka på flere måneder. Kanskje til og med år. Hvert besøk ble annonsert med en melding på telefonen, kanskje etterfulgt av en oppringing hvis beskjeden ikke kom raskt nok frem. Det eksisterte ikke uventede besøk lengre, det hele hadde blitt forutsigbart. Noe av det mer spennende som hadde hendt Aksel siden denne nye skrivemaskinen var ettermålet av en kveld i november, da han hadde vært ute og ranglet, og med det samme

knust mobiltelefonen. Det tok til sammen 18 timer og 23 minutter å levere den herpa følgesvennen til en sjappe på Grønland, la ekspertene utføre sine legekunster og å hente den igjen. Det var 18 timer og 23 minutter hvor ingen i hele verden hadde kontroll over hvor Aksel var. For å få med seg verdens gang måtte han kjøpe papirutgavene i en kiosk. Han ante ikke hvem han ville møte i løpet av dagen, og istedenfor å sende en kjapp tekst til Jonathan hadde han bare stukket innom et av stamstedene i håp på at noen hang der. Blindern var en åpen lekeplass uten distraksjoner og uten klokke som viste han når forelesingen begynte. For å finne ut av tiden, og for å finne veien (til tross for hans lomme-kjennskap i Oslos gater) måtte han spørre tilfeldige forbipasserende. Han hadde til og med gått innom banken for å sjekke saldo på kontoen. Aksel var anonym, livsgripende og fri- disse 18 timene og 23 minuttene var det nærmeste han hadde kommet frihet siden Iphoneen ble introdusert i 2007. Og nå er det han, og en analog skrivemaskin - hans nye, åpne vindu til friheten, friheten av å skrive sitt liv. For å feire denne friheten finner han frem en gammel flaske Cognac i skapet. Den er uåpnet, og før et eneste ord har blitt tastet på skrivemaskinen er den tom, og det samme er Aksels hode.





art direction and photography by ismail thabet. courtesy of the publisher.

I first came across “A Cup of Tea with Fathy Mahmoud” (كوب شاي مع فتحي محمود) at a pop-up for Arab magazines in Cairo. I loved the pop-up, it was clean and I don’t mean clean as in a lack of dirt, but clean as in the aesthetic. Something a Stockholmer like me would call soapy.

It was more chic than anything I’d ever seen and although I can usually manoeuvre these spaces, that day I was alone and drenched in sweat after my one hour walk under the 40-something Celsius sun. Anxiety took over - ‘I smell’ ‘I don’t know where to go’ ‘I shouldn’t be here’.

An aluminum box caught my eye. It was something to look at and keep me occupied while I was leaning against the wall hoping no one would notice the huge sweat stain on the back of my gray shirt. What am I doing here? I thought to myself as I picked it up.

The box, A Cup of Tea with Fathy Mahmoud, contained pictures, drawings, a newspaper article, as well as a book bearing the same title and it was all related to the influential Egyptian sculptor Fathy Mahmoud (1918-1982). As I flipped through the pages, I got to learn that he is the artist behind the sculpture in Talaat Harb Square in Downtown Cairo, which I pass by every day. And that in 1942 he founded the first ceramic manufacturing facility in Egypt which today is considered one of the most important in the world.

What got my attention was that the book, written by Yasmine Al Meleegy (1991-), is a collection of 13 letters she wrote to Fathy Mahmoud between 2019 and 2022, which he will never read. Why? Because he is gone.

Wow! I thought. Writing letters to a dead person. It’s an idea many of us have had, like writing a letter to a stranger and leaving it on a bench. I began thinking about what I would write myself and to who. The questions I’d want to ask, and also what one could learn from a process like this.

a cup of tea with fathy mahmoud:
(كوب شاي مع فتحي محمود)
is only available in arabic and is
published by esmaat
@esmatpublishes

Meleegy writes in the final letter, dated 22nd of October 2022:

“I am not striving to reach a historical truth about you. I am rather trying to weave a conversation between you and me in which we cross our generational and historical boundaries”*

The book acts as a diary of sorts, contemplating everything from the meaning of art, life, the shared history between Mahmoud and Al Meleegy as Egyptians of different generations, what they have seen and the role of art among it all.

Another aspect is how it goes in and out of her own contemplations and her/his broader historical context. In the letter dated 7th of February 2021, she asks him if he ever felt sad by the criticism he faced, how his ceramic manufacturing in Shubra (An area of Cairo) managed to evade nationalization during the era of Nasser. As well as the difference between local and international demand for ceramic work:

“I don’t know, for example, why plates adorned with bamboo motifs are so widespread in the local market, while those with pharaonic motifs are so popular internationally/.../ What occupies my mind is what this difference reveals about the nature of the relationship between ceramic products and their audience, and how market demands affect the choices of the artist-craftsman.”**

Which begs the question of what you create, and why. Does an artist who produces functional ceramics think more about freedom of expression, or about demand? And how does that affect the outcome?

It’s a difficult one. I remember half a year ago when I sold two of my sculptures for the first time at a show in The Hague. I felt surprisingly underwhelmed. Is this what happens now? Should I keep making these sculptures because if two strangers bought them, maybe others would as well?

The counter-argument when it comes to ‘selling out’, is that being

an artist is still a career, a profession. It can’t all be sunshine and rainbows and creative freedom. Perhaps I’d ask the same question myself when I start writing my own letters. To Warhol? Koons?

An occurring theme in the book is the reflection as to why she is sending letters to him, forty years after his passing. What prompted her to do so was finding a cup bearing his signature in her family home, sucking her in to the life of Mahmoud only to find a huge lack of information about him available on the internet. She also mentions the lack of access to archives about his life, despite him being one of the most influential creatives of 20th century Egypt.

What is this energy? The energy to create, to write a book? My own reading is that it is precisely the lack of answers that becomes the driving force for its writing.

As he is the founder of one of the most influential ceramic manufacturers in Egypt, she asks him how one can create a ceramic object - a cup, a plate, a bowl - that holds a function but that still has artistic value. How can these (his) items serve both practical and aesthetic purposes?

Throughout the 13 letters Meleegy contemplates questions we could all have, that Mahmoud himself wouldn’t even know the answer to. There is no ultimate answer.

What gets me the most is wondering what you can say when you write to a stranger, or to someone who doesn’t know you personally. You become anonymous and all of the sudden you can write more freely and be more open about how lost you may be:

“I don’t know why I carry all this confusion, it’s as though I am playing the role of a shy girl in a movie or novel who is scared of anyone discovering her presence, while at the same time trying in every way to influence the course of events.”***

Al Meleegy finally states her frustration with the lack of available

information about Fathy Mahmoud, and the difficulty in accessing public archives and the absence of his work in museums. The book comes to an abrupt end and the purpose of the letters remain unclear. It doesn't answer any questions and I wouldn't say that it aims to arrive at a conclusion, either. It's a constant search for something that will not be found, which for me is the whole point.

With these thoughts and a new book in hand I hopped on the subway to take me back home from the pop-up, feeling much more secure in my own reflections about art and that someone else contemplates these questions as I do.

Finally, I'd like to refer back to the introduction for Shoebox #2, the themes of which could answer questions as to *why* I have decided to include Meleegy and her book in this issue.

dennis farnsworth

original arabic quotes:

- ١: فأنا لا أسعى للوصول إلى حقيقة تاريخية عنك ولكني أحاول أن أنسج حديث بيني وبينك نتخطى فيه حدود الأجيال والتاريخ
- ٢: ولا أعلم مثلاً لماذا تنتشر الأطباق المزخرفة بموتيفة نبات البامبو في السوق المحلي بينما تنتشر الأطباق المزخرفة بالموتيفات الفرعونية في السوق الدولي/.../ ما يشغلني هو ما يكشفه هذا الفرق عن طبيعة العلاقة بين منتجات الخزف والمتلقي وكيف تؤثر متطلبات السوق على اختيارات الفنان الصانع
- ٣: لا أعرف لماذا أحمل كل هذا الارتباك و كأني أقوم بتمثيل دور فتاة متلصصة في فيلم أو رواية تخاف أن يعلم أحد عن وجودها وفي نفس الوقت تحاول بكل الطرق أن تؤثر على سير الأحداث



art direction and photography by ismail thabet. courtesy of the publisher.





translators introduction*

Ghassan Fayiz Kanafani (1936-1972) was a Palestinian author, journalist, and political leader. He is widely regarded in the Palestinian and Arab popular imaginations as one of the most renowned and influential figures of the modern age. His works include eighteen published novels such as *Men in the Sun* (1962) and *Return to Haifa* (1970); a number of prolific short story collections such as *The Land of Sad Oranges* (1962); hundreds of journal articles spanning a variety of publications; and these love letters, written in a state of desperate longing for the beautiful Ghada al-Samman. Kanafani's oeuvre is rooted in the depth and richness of Palestinian culture, and serves as an enduring source of inspiration for generations past and present not only throughout the events of his life, but also in the decades that have since followed his martyrdom¹. In 1972, Kanafani and his niece Lamees were assassinated in Beirut by a car bomb that had been planted by the Mossad, who targeted Kanafani in retaliation for his political activity and lifelong outspokenness for Palestinian liberation. Most notably, Kanafani was a member of the Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary socialist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)².

Kanafani was born in Akka, Historic Palestine³, and lived the first twelve years of his life in Yafa until the Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”) of 1948 forced him and his family to flee their ancestral homeland and take refuge in Beirut, after which they moved to Syria. Kanafani lived and studied in Damascus before moving to Kuwait and returning to Beirut once more, where he lived the last twelve years of his life. Today, Kanafani's works have been translated into twenty languages and continue to enjoy wide afterlives in translation, cultural imagination, and collective memory the world over.

Ghada al-Samman (1942-) is a Syrian novelist, poet, and journalist born to a prominent and conservative Damascene family - in fact, the famed poet Nizar Qabbani, one of her foremost literary influences, is a relative of hers. Upon completing her higher education, al-Samman chose Beirut as her place of permanent residence and worked as a journalist at multiple Lebanese publications throughout the 1960s, a time during which she also published her first short story collections and novels and

simultaneously worked and traveled throughout Europe. First living in self-imposed exile in Lebanon to avoid a prison sentence from the Syrian government for allegedly leaving Syria without having obtained the proper permission from the authorities⁴, since the 1980s al-Samman and her husband have continued to live in exile in France⁵. Her short story collection *The Square Moon* (1999) puts into words some of this experience's effects on her psyche.

Other highly-regarded titles from among al-Samman's more than forty complete works include the short story collection *No Sea in Beirut* (1985) and the war novel *Beirut Nightmares* (1976). Her work is irrefutably influenced by the ideologies of pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism; furthermore, al-Samman remains sharply critical of the Zionist project as well as the processes of settler colonialism and imperialism with which Zionism goes hand-in-hand. Still yet al-Samman's work also centers around Lebanon and consequently reflects her many years spent in Beirut, holding a mirror up to expose the ills of Lebanese society in class-based novels such as *Beirut '75*. Following the Naksa⁶ of 1967, al-Samman was deeply affected by the Arab world's military and sociopolitical defeat, penning “I Carry My Shame to London” (أحمل عاري إلى لندن). Afterward, she refrained from publishing novels for six years⁷.

In 1992, al-Samman's publication of the letters Kanafani wrote her throughout the duration of their love affair caused shockwaves in the literary and cultural circles in which she and Kanafani moved. Many were angry with al-Samman's decision, locating her motives as born of a desire to ruin Kanafani's legacy posthumously. Al-Samman, however, defends her decision to publish in her own brief introduction to the collection: rather than conceiving of them as hers and hers alone, al-Samman believes Kanafani's letters to be collective property, as in her view they constitute a vital component of Arab literary history⁸. Today, the love letters circulate widely on social media in Palestine, the Arab world, and beyond⁹.

Kanafani's identity as a writer is fundamentally inseparable from his identity as a Palestinian, and knowing this before beginning the process of translating imbued me with an accompanying implicit knowledge that guided my hand as it passed over Kanafani's eloquent prose: the political will leak into and inform

every aspect of my translation, in both its act and process and in its final result. With this in mind, I chose to lean into the sentiment as much as possible, as my decision to translate these texts is itself intended as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Since October 2023, the ongoing dehumanization of Palestinian men over the past seven decades has reached a fever pitch; in celebrating Ghassan Kanafani's love for Ghada al-Samman, we might begin to overwrite prevailing narratives of colonial violence with alternatives of revolutionary joy, revolutionary love.

Kanafani's love for al-Samman is almost philosophical in its gravity, and it is always tortured. Although singling out passages I found rewarding to work on represents, at least for me, a foray into a somewhat dangerous game (for I would like to dwell at length upon them all), I will close out my commentary with this: that it is when Kanafani openly and mournfully laments over what might happen to him if he were to lose al-Samman, followed by a masterful reinvocation of his own powerful imagery to conclude his letter to his love only a few lines later, that we as readers - cast in the role of silent witnesses to his effusive proclamations - might feel ourselves called, from within and without, to develop a proper understanding of just how deeply and immutably the two-sided coin of love and struggle remains intertwined in the Palestinian body as a site of radical resistance:

“And I love you so much, oh Ghada, and if I were to lose you so much of me would be destroyed; I know that the dust of the passing days would eventually settle around the wound, but I also know equally well that the wound will be like those of my body: every time the wind blows on them, they catch aflame.

[...] Though this time I will depart knowing that I love you, and I will keep bleeding every time the wind blows upon the precious things that we have built together...”

In solidarity,

evangelia a. koronios



'zahrat al-bustan: meeting place for literatis and artists' - the sign for zahrat al-bustan which is a popular coffeeshouse in cairo

Ghassan Kanafani's Letters to Ghada al-Samman
Trans. Evangelia A. Koronios

#1 // “An undated letter - I don't remember the date! Perhaps it is the first letter he wrote to me”¹⁰

Ghada,

I know that many have written to you, and I know too that the written word often conceals the truth of things - especially if it is lived, and felt, and bled onto the rich, rare tableau that we have lived through over the past two weeks... And despite that, when I took up this paper to write, I knew that there is only one thing that I am able to say while trusting in its veracity and its depth and its solidity, and perhaps its cohesiveness that seems to me now as though it were something inevitable, and will continue to remain so, like the fates that created us: I love you.

I feel this love deeply now, more deeply than ever before, and only a moment ago I went through the cruelest thing of all that a man like me can go through, and all of my miseries appeared to me as nothing but a false passage for this misery, that I tasted in a moment like the glint of a knife's blade as it cuts through blind flesh. I feel this love now, this word that they have sullied, as you told me, and I felt I must expend everything in the power of man so as to not sully it in turn.

I love you: I feel it now and the pain that you despise - no less and no more than I myself abhor it - gnaws at my bones and creeps through my joints like the march of death. I feel it now as the sun rises behind the barren hill opposite the blinds that tear asunder the skyline of your balcony; tear it into long-extended fragments... I feel it as I remember that I also did not sleep last night, and I am surprised to find that I, as I await the sunrise on the balcony of my home; I, who once resisted tears and scolded them as I was being whipped - am crying in agony. With a bitterness I never knew until the days of true hunger, with the saltiness of all the seas, and with the homesickness of all the dead unable to do anything... and I wonder: is it sobbing, that which I hear coming from within myself? Or is it the crack of the whips as they fall?

رسائل غسان كنفاني إلى غادة السمان

«رسالة غير مؤرخة - لا أذكر التاريخ: لعلها أول رسالة سَطَّرَها لي»¹⁰

غادة..

أعرف أن الكثيرين كتبوا لك، وأعرف أن الكلمات المكتوبة تخفي عادة حقيقة الأشياء خصوصاً إذا كانت تُعاش وتُحسّ وتُنزف على الصورة الكثيفة النادرة التي عشناها في الأسبوعين الماضيين.. ورغم ذلك، فحين أمسكت هذه الورقة لأكتب كنت أعرف أن شيئاً واحداً فقط أستطيع أن أقوله وأنا أثق من صدقه وعمقه وكثافته وربما ملاصقته التي يخيّل إلى الآن أنها كانت شيئاً محتوماً، وستظل، كالأقدار التي صنعتنا: إنني أحبك.

الآن أحسها عميقة أكثر من أي وقت مضى، وقبل لحظة واحدة فقط مررت بأقصى ما يمكن لرجل مثلي أن يمر فيه، وبدت لي تعاساتي كلها مجرد معبر مزيف لهذه التعاسة التي ذقتها في لحظة كبريق النصل في اللحم الكفيف.. الآن أحسها، هذه الكلمة التي وسخوها كما قلبت لي والتي شعرت بأن علي أن أبذل كل ما في طاقة الرجل أن يبذل كي لا أوسخها بدوري.

إنني أحبك: أحسها الآن والألم الذي تكرهينه - ليس أقل ولا أكثر مما أمقته - بنخر كل عظامي ويزحف في مفاصلي مثل دبيب الموت. أحسها الآن والشمس تشرق وراء التلة الجرداء مقابل الستارة التي تقطّع أفق شرفتك إلى شرائح متطاولة.. أحسها وأنا أتذكر أنني أيضاً لم أنم ليلة أمس، وأنني فوجئت وأنا أنتظر الشروق على شرفة بيتي أنني - أنا الذي قاومت الدموع ذات يوم وزجرتها حين كنت أجلد - أبكي بحرقة. بهرارة لم أعرفها حتى أيام الجوع الحقيقي، بملوحة البحار كلها وبغربة كل الموتى الذين لا يستطيعون فعل أيما شيء.. وتساءلت: أكان نشيجاً هذا الذي أسمعه أم سلخ السياط وهي تهوي من الداخل؟

No. You know I am a man that does not forget, and I know more intimately than you about the inferno that surrounds my life from every possible angle, and the heaven I cannot bring myself to hate, and the fire that ignites in my veins, and the boulder that fate destined me to drag and that drags me toward where no one knows... and I know more intimately than you, too, about my own life that is slipping through my fingers, and I know that your love deserves for someone to live for it, and that your love is an island that an exile, cast adrift in the vast waves of the ocean, cannot pass by without... And despite that, I also know more intimately than you that I love you to an extent that I can disappear into, in the way that you want, if you thought that this absence would make you happier, and that it might change something of the truth of things.

Is this what I wished to say to you when taking up paper and pen? I don't know... but believe me, oh Ghada, believe that I have been thoroughly tortured throughout the past few days, a great torture I doubt anyone can bear. I was being whipped from within and without with no hint of mercy, and the entirety of my life seemed to me worthless and hurried without justification for such haste, [and that Allah put me, by chance, in the wrong place, because he failed at inflicting His long, excruciating, unjust torture upon this body of mine whose inhuman capacity for obstinacy I despise, a body that is tortuous and dying...]

Our story is truly one that cannot be written, and I would despise myself if I were one day to try. The past month has been like a whirlwind that cannot be understood, like rain, like fire, like tilled soil that I worship to the brink of madness, and one night I was proud of you to the point of blaming myself when I said to myself that you are my shield in the face of man, and objects, and my weakness. And I knew, from deep within myself, that I do not deserve you - not because I cannot give you my very eyes, my sight; but because I will not be able to keep you forever.

لا. أنت تعرفين أنني رجل لا أنسى وأنا أعرف منك بالجحيم الذي يطوق حياتي من كل جانب، وبالجنة التي لا أستطيع أن أكرهها، وبالحريق الذي يشتعل في عروقي، وبالصخرة التي كتب عليّ أن أجرحها وتجبرني إلى حيث لا يدري أحد.. وأنا أعرف منك أيضاً بأنها حياتي أنا، وأنها تنسرب من بين أصابعي أنا، وبأن حبك يستحق أن يعيش الإنسان له، وهو جزيرة لا يستطيع المنفيّ في موج المحيط الشاسع أن يمر بها دون أن... ورغم ذلك فأنا أعرف منك أيضاً بأنني أحبك إلى حد أستطيع أن أغيب فيه، بالصورة التي تشاءين، إذا كنت تعتقدين أن هذا الغياب سيجعلك أكثر سعادة، وبأنه سيغير شيئاً من حقيقة الأشياء.

أهذا ما أردت أن أقوله لك حين أمسكت الورقة؟ لست أدري.. ولكن صدقيني يا غادة أنني تعذبت خلال الأيام الماضية عذاباً أشك في أن أحدا يستطيع احتماله، كنت أجلد من الخارج ومن الداخل دونها رحمة وبدت لي حياتي كلها تافهة، واستعجالاً لا مبرر له، وأن الله إنما وضعني بالمصادفة في المكان الخطأ لأنه فشل في أن يجعل عذابه الطويل الممض وغير العادل لهذا الجسد، الذي أحترق فيه قدرته غير البشرية على الصلابة، ينحني ويموت.

إن قصتنا لا تكتب، وسأحتقر نفسي لا حاولت ذات يوم أن أفعل، لقد كان شهراً كالإعصار الذي لا يفهم، كالطر، كالنار، كالأرض، المحروثة التي أعبدتها إلى حد الجنون وكنت فخوراً بك إلى حد لمت نفسي ذات ليلة حين قلت بيني وبين ذاتي أنك درعي في وجه الناس والأشياء وضعفي، وكنت أعرف في أعماقي أنني لا أستحقك ليس لأنني لا أستطيع أن أعطيك حبات عيني ولكن لأنني لن أستطيع الاحتفاظ بك إلى الأبد.

And it is only this that has been torturing me... that I know you as an incredible woman, whose mind cannot be believed, and that you are capable of understanding that which I intend to say to you: no, oh Ghada, it was not jealousy of others... I had felt you greater than all of them in a manner that cannot be measured, and I was not afraid of them taking from you anything even as small as the tips of your fingernails. No, oh Ghada... it was neither arrogance, nor comparison, nor falseness, that sole thing I have not ever been able to master; and if I were to master it, then I would not be where I am now, at the bottom of the world... no, oh Ghada, it was nothing except for that depressing feeling that would not leave me, like a fly that I crush against my chest; the feeling that, inevitably, you will one day say what you said tonight.

Truly the sunrise amazes me, despite the shutters that transform its light into neat, thin slices, reminding me of the thousand barriers that make of the future - before me - only fragments...

And I feel a sense of unparalleled serenity like the serenity of the end, and yet... I want to stay with you. I do not want for your eyes, that have given to me what everything I have been able to wrest from this world has been unable to give me, to be absent from me. Put simply, it is because I love you. And I love you so much, oh Ghada, and if I were to lose you so much of me would be destroyed; I know that the dust of the passing days would eventually settle around the wound, but I also know equally well that the wound will be like those of my body: every time the wind blows on them, they catch aflame.

I do not want anything from you - and when you speak about the allotment of victories, it occurs to me all of a sudden that all the world's victories were meted out from above the corpses of men that died in their path.

I do not want anything from you, and I do not want - with the same conviction - to ever, ever lose you.

وكان هذا فقط ما يعذبني.. إنني أعرفك إنسانة رائعة، وذات عقل لا يصدق وبوسعك أن تعرفي ما أقصد: لا يا غادة لم تكن الغيرة من الآخرين.. كنت أحسك أكبر منهم بما لا يقاس، ولم أكن أخشى منهم أن يأخذوا منك قلامة ظفرك. لا يا غادة، لم يكن الادعاء والتمثيل والزيغ فذلك الشيء الوحيد الذي لا أستطيع أبداً إتقانه ولو أتقنته لما كنت الآن في قاع العالم.. لا يا غادة.. لا يكن إلا ذلك الشعور الكئيب الذي لم يكن ليغادرني، مثل ذبابة أطبق عليها صدري، بأنك لا محالة ستقولين ذات يوم ما قلته هذه الليلة .

إن شروق يذهلني، رغم الستارة التي تحوله إلى شرائح وتذكرني بألوف الحواجز التي تجعل من المستقبل - أمامي - مجرد شرائح.. وأشعر بصفاء لا مثيل له مثل صفاء النهاية ورغم ذلك فأنا أريد أن أظل معك، لا أريد أن تغيب عني عيناك اللتان أعطتاني ما عجز كل شيء انتزعته في هذا العالم من إعطائي. ببساطة لأنني أحبك. وأحبك كثيراً يا غادة، وسيَدَمَر الكثير مني إن أفقدك، وأنا أعرف أن غبار الأيام سيترسب على الجرح ولكنني أعرف بنفس المقدار أنه سيكون مثل جروح جسدي: تلتهب كلما هبت عليها الريح .

أنا لا أريد منك شيئاً وحين تتحدثين عن توزيع الانتصارات يتبادر إلى ذهني أن كل انتصارات العالم إنما وزِعت من فوق جثث رجال ماتوا في سبيلها .

أنا لا أريد منك شيئاً، ولا أريد - بنفس المقدار - أبداً أبداً أن أفقدك .

For the distance that you will travel will not serve to obscure you from me; we have indeed built many things together that cannot, as of yet, be erased by distance, nor can alienation or enmity destroy them - because they were built on the basis of a trust that cannot be shaken.

And I do not want to lose “the people” that do not deserve to be the fuel for this horrifying, appalling collision with the truths that we are living...

But, if this is what you want, then tell me this: that I must be the one to disappear. You stay here, for I am the one that has become used to carrying my little bag as I depart...

Though this time I will depart knowing that I love you, and I will keep bleeding every time the wind blows upon the precious things that we have built together...

Ghassan
* * *

1 The word “martyr” in Arabic originates from the same root that denotes acts of witnessing, and is used in this context to refer to Palestinians like Kanafani that have been assassinated by Israel.

2 As’ad AbuKhalil, “The second life of Ghassan Kanafani,” ElectronicIntifada.net, The Electronic Intifada, last accessed 06 March 2024, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/second-life-ghassan-kanafani/21051>.

3 Visualizing Palestine’s definition of Historic Palestine designates it as comprising “the whole territory defined by the British Mandate of Palestine, comprised of present-day Israel/Occupied Palestine, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, but with the exception of the Syrian Golan Heights.” In using this term to refer to Kanafani’s birthplace as opposed to Mandatory Palestine, I wish to contribute to the inclusion of more decolonial language in the field of translation studies.

4 George Nicolas El-Hage, “Beirut ’75 by Ghada al-Samman: An Autobiographical Interpretation,” GeorgeNicolasElHage.com, last accessed 06 March 2024, <http://www.georgenicolasel-hage.com/beirut-75-by-ghada-al-samman-an-autobiographical-interpretation.html>.

5 Ghada Talhami, Historical Dictionary of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), 289.

إن المسافة التي ستسافرينها لن تحجبك عني، لقد بنينا أشياء كثيرة معاً يمكن، بعد، أن تغيّبها المسافات ولا أن تهدمها القطيعة لأنها بنيت على أساس من الصدق لا يتطرق إليه التزعزع.

ولا أريد أن أفقد “الناس” الذين لا يستحقون أن يكونوا وقود هذا الصدام المروّع مع الحقائق التي نعيشها.

ولكن إذا كان هذا ما تريدينه فقلّي لي أن أغيب أنا. ظلي هنا أنت فأنا.. الذي تعودت أن أحمل حقيبتني الصغيرة وأمضي ..

ولكنني هذه المرة سأمضي وأنا أعرف أنني أحبك، وسأظل أنزف كلما هبت الريح على الأشياء العزيزة التي بنيناها معاً..

غسان

6 The Naksa, meaning “setback” or “relapse,” is the Arabic term for the Six Day War (also referred to as the 1967 War and the June War). The Naksa is also the second Nakba - in a long line of many - experienced by Palestinians, with the term encompassing specifically the continued forced expulsion of Palestinian individuals and families from the lands of the West Bank, eastern Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip during and after the events of the war in 1967. Throughout the Arab world, the Arab countries’ bitter defeat at the hands of the Israeli military forces rang the death knell for the philosophy of Arab nationalism that had reigned supreme throughout the era of decolonization, and left a lasting scar on the public’s psyche.

7 Talhami, Historical Dictionary of Women, 289.

8 Ghassan Kanafani, Rasa’il Ghassan Kanafani ila Ghada al-Samman (Cairo: Sadim Bookstore, 2023),

9. AbuKhalil, “The second life of Ghassan Kanafani.”

10 This note is from Ghada al-Samman’s original commentary on the letter.

“It’s giving medieval craft”
Walking on the ruins of human desolation, two three-armed
children are staring at the ground.

“It’s giving medieval craft”, one said while picking up a stoned
ceramic piece from the ground. A piece that looked like the
moments of emptiness between three bodies, a piece that turns
into material that was once air and flying particles. This gesture
of picking up the piece reflects the smell of the era’s atmosphere
in which the two three-armed children are; an era of a certain
de-alienation and re-mystification of objects and of wandering.

You, human reader, would you try to understand this atmosphere
as a past, a present, or as a thing itself that doesn’t scream
references of human devotion? You, human reader, who knows
what art is about, or at least, that consider it as something that
exists, would you take that as reference to understand the piece
that was picked up ?

The two three-armed children, staring at the piece with no eyes
but with senses, continue to roam in the volcano-coloured smell.
Suddenly one of them started to activate its back arm; an imme-
diate reaction, a translation from the third arm of what the stoned
ceramic piece was communicating. In the mean-time, the second
three-armed child, the one holding the piece, started talking out
of nowhere, as if the piece from another time-space with its own
context, was expressing through its mouth:

“And so here we are, looking at Sledsens’s girlfriend in just one of
an endless line of figurative paintings so apparently earnest we do
not - after decades of irony, institutional critique, post-conceptual-
ism, and self-consciously bad painting - have language or struc-
ture to ascertain the quality of whatever quality is.”

And the other one, staring at it with senses, staring at it as
someone who never heard words, disappeared.

in the end
we will all end up
lying in a field of moss
decaying in eternal enfleshment
tied up with the past of cerebral cells
dragging our mermaid feet through the roots
with the shiver of a freezing dagger
burns of unremembered scars
living as a cute polycule
during the collapse of
civilization

the end

