

Dispatches from The Institute of Incoherent Geography

Volume I



FlugSchriften 

DISPATCHES FROM THE INSTITUTE OF INCOHERENT GEOGRAPHY

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Introduction

From, and by, the Director



You hold in your hands, dear reader, the first volume of what we hope will be a steady series of dispatches from active members of The Institute of Incoherent Geography. First founded in 1904, by Georges Méliès, the Institute was re-founded in 2015, and has been growing exponentially ever since. Our organization has, quite simply, become a busy hub for any and all matters pertaining to geographical incoherence, and members gather both physically and virtually to discuss issues relating to the poetics of space, place, mobility, discovery, and anti-imperialist adventure. Essentially the Institute serves as an Explorer's Club for anti-colonialist psychogeographers, agoraphobic nomads, and inveterate pataphysicists of all stripes.

We have a dedicated staff of volunteers keeping the place running. I myself, for instance, in addition to being the founding director, am also the in-house astronomer and substitute slide-projectionist. Other members

function as surveyors, treasurers, typists, topographers, archivists, architectural mnemonists, peace correspondents, climatographers, strategic liminalists, chronotopiarists, and *flâneurs-en-dehors-de-residence*. Our board of trustees meet via séance, and includes Gaston Bachelard, Jeanne Baré, Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta, Gertrude Bell, Italo Calvino, Lewis Carroll, Chang Chun, Eudoxus of Cyzicus, Raymond Roussel, Amelia Earhart, Elizabeth Bishop, Isabelle Eberhardt, Albert Einstein, M.C. Escher, Herodotus, Marco Polo, Cheng I Sao, Lady Hester Stanhope, Jonathan Swift, Richard Burton, Jules Verne, Charles Fourier, Zeno of Elea, and of course, Georges Méliès himself. The bar, it should be noted, features some of the finest and rarest liqueurs in the world, sourced from everywhere between Zanzibar, Xanadu, and Wakanda, and operates according to an increasingly ignored honor system.

Given that many of us find ourselves in the hegemonic year of 2019, our ludic jottings have traveled beyond the horizons of irony, and now reach shores troubled by what many consider the revenge of mother nature. No longer can we consider geography the innocent canvas or foundation stone for great human achievements, as the earth reminds us daily of the damaging legacy we have wrought by taking it for granted. Not all of us are as optimistic as one of our esteemed board members, Charles Fourier, who wrote two centuries ago, “We are in the first phase, in the *age of ascending incoherence* which precedes arrival at the destinies.” Certainly, many of our cohort are closet utopians. And yet we approach the future with a new

caution, given the wrath of the planet we inhabit, hopefully with a new species of awe, concern, and humility.

Indeed, what would a coherent geography even look like in this day and age, when a kosher Mexican restaurant can pop up in Brisbane without anyone batting an eyelid? Nations attempt to reinforce their hypothetical borders, while people, pixels, plastics, policies, philosophies, and pandemics flow back and forth, with no mind for the arbitrary lines in the socio-economic atlas of aspirational realism. The very notion of a stable, legible, coherent geography may itself be revealed an artifice or engine of fascistic tendencies. (And the members of the Institute are nothing if not anti-fascist.)

The word “geography” literally means “writing the Earth,” and the short pieces collected in this volume represent a wide variety of ways in which this can be accomplished. Each one, in its own way, is a testament to the miraculous coherence which can crystallize *within* incoherence. (Not as a goal, mind you, or destination; but as yet another journey to endure or enjoy, as the context permits.) As a consequence, dear and intrepid reader, you will, via these dispatches, enjoy a vicarious journey around the world. Or rather, around twenty different worlds, all nested together, like claustrophobic Russian Dolls. You shall follow ley-lines, tube-tracks, hiking paths, highways, byways, vector graphics, data points, frequent flyer programs, ordinance maps, song lines, pain pathways, black holes, and the structured perambulations of sound waves.

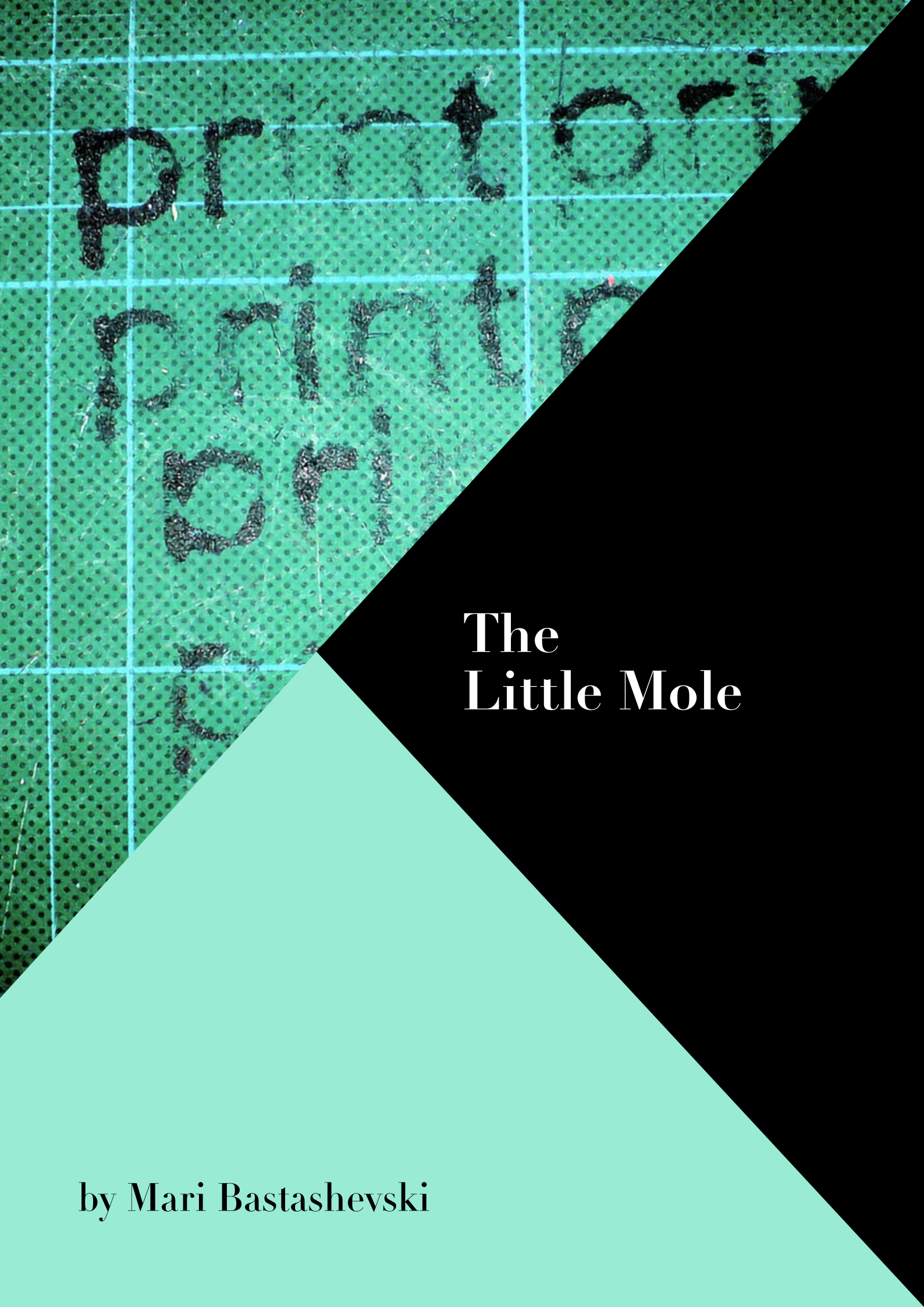
Several themes or motifs crisscross these dispatches. You shall meet different oceans, perhaps now accessible to each other simply by virtue of suddenly finding themselves held between the same pages. You shall meet islands, aliens, felines, farms, icebergs, hermits (both mobile and stationary), monuments, mountains, bowling alleys, factories, deserts, bordellos, radars, riffs, and hieroglyphs. (And more than a couple of concrete dinosaurs.) We should also note that we have edited these dispatches with a deliberately light touch, as we seek to retain the local textures, flavors, tones, grains, phrasings, and spellings of the authors themselves, so as not to impose the typographical equivalent of Greenwich Mean Time on literary and linguistic islets that move at their own pace, and to their own rhythm, and in harmony with their own idioms. (Cf. the pleasure of philological palimpsests, whereby one or more languages can be seen peeking through another, like different layers of moss and fungus on an old rotting log.)

Indeed, we hope you yourself decide to join us in celebrating, analyzing, tracing, tagging, mapping, taxonomizing, eroticizing, and/or decolonizing this marvelously incoherent world in which we find ourselves. (A convoluted way of saying new members are always welcome. Write to instituteofincoherentgeography@gmail.com for more information.)

So yes. We also hope you enjoy this journey. Or collection of journeys. (What is the proper collective noun here? A jaggles? A frequency? A murder? A yearning?)

Yes. Let us use that one – at least for now.

A yearning of journeys.



The Little Mole

by Mari Bastashevski

1.

It took two weeks to organise a meeting with the Shenzhen book printing factory, which lists Penguin and Disney as esteemed clients. In a car, my accomplice, Li Min instructed me to not complicate her life and to reveal as little of myself as possible.

Li Min was meant to be my host. She was going to put me up in an apartment. Instead, she brought me to a hotel where she knew the management. She apologized profusely as she tried to assure me this was the apartment.

The room was charming. I asked her who else she knew. She said she knew everybody. I asked if she could get me into places, places I couldn't get into on my own. She said that she could get me anywhere, but that I'd have to follow her instructions. She proposed a budget.

It was reasonable.

How she did what she did after that I do not know. She checked in with me daily only to tell me not to worry and to enjoy sightseeing in Shenzhen. I waited. The day I decided to give up, Li Min turned up with a schedule for a week ahead. We were expected at the book printing factory first thing the following morning.

We were collected at the gates and taken through the maze of corridors into the conference room with bottomless leather armchairs. Sinking into one of these, Mr. Wang got to the heart of the matter.

“How many copies would you like to print,” he asked.

“Three thousand?”

Li Min rushed to answer, in English.

Unimpressed, he brushed off the figure as if a wasp was buzzing in front of him, but he allowed the meeting to continue. I asked about the automated processes, binding, cutting, paper weight, the history of the factory, how many people worked there, and who were the clients.

The printing facilities, much like others working for established western clients, are guarded against inquiry that could result in any form of publicity, but Li Min became a wizard of translation and we were escorted deeper into the factory.

Mr. Wang indicated when it was expected of me to take photographs. I wasn't allowed to take the camera into a room identified as the factory museum. In it, each display was stacked with a mash-up of young adult fiction, romance novels, adventure stories, cookbooks, language and computer training manuals, political biographies, and self-help books, most of them in English, written almost as fast as they were printed, some well past their shelf life. I asked Mr. Wang if he had read any of them. He said it wasn't his job. That made two of us, I didn't say. I asked if there was a limit to what they would print. The Anarchist cookbook? The Charenton Journals?

"Five thousand copies minimum," he said.

"Are there ever printing errors?" I asked, I'm not sure why.

Mr. Wang, who understood that without translation, was alarmed by the question. Li Min missed it and didn't know how to help.

"I did not mean that in a bad way," I continued. "I meant that the printing errors could reveal a trajectory of this factory."

The proposition confused Mr. Wang and he asked Li Min to check if he understood me correctly. After a brief exchange, we arrived at an explanation. At first Mr. Wang protested, saying the mistakes were just useless, unreadable books, but as Li Min took over the conversation, laughing occasionally, he caught up with her enthusiasm and became faintly curious. I asked if he had a misprint that we could see. He thought about it and invited us to follow him.



Printing house. Shenzhen, China (2016).

He walked quickly now and we could barely keep up. Li Min was whispering, worried there might be trouble. We rushed past the roaring printers, two women holding hands on the taburetes, resting, the ink stockpile, the packing hall, the tracks with enormous cylinders of paper and ones with stacks of books about to depart, an empty hall guarded by a security officer, until we were back to where we started.

“Wait here!” Mr. Wang told us, and left, shutting the door behind him.

I slipped into the quicksand of an armchair. Li Min listed the reasons she thought would get us imminently detained.

A few minutes later, Mr. Wang came back with another representative and handed me a stack of unbound pages from *The Story of the Little Mole (Who Knew It Was None of His Business)*. It is a short detective story of sorts, popular with kids across the planet. The pictured face of the culprit, the butcher’s dog, was disfigured and tilted to the right. This, I learned later, hoping to find a comparable error in an edition then sold in Switzerland, was a printer mistake that occurs very rarely. Once a decade or so. Mr. Wang took a notepad from his pocket and asked me to explain it again but slowly.

I tried. I said the machines were designed to make copies and that when they didn’t, they were behaving unpredictably. That in this context a mistake was something original, impossible to be copied, and, in that, became much more valuable. I speculated about how three thousand different errors, each forming an original work, could become a rare collection of items

unique to this particular factory, these computers, and the people who, for the most part, operated just like the computers. Li Min interpreted. Mr. Wang jotted things down.

“And who would buy this collection,” he asked after consulting with the representative.

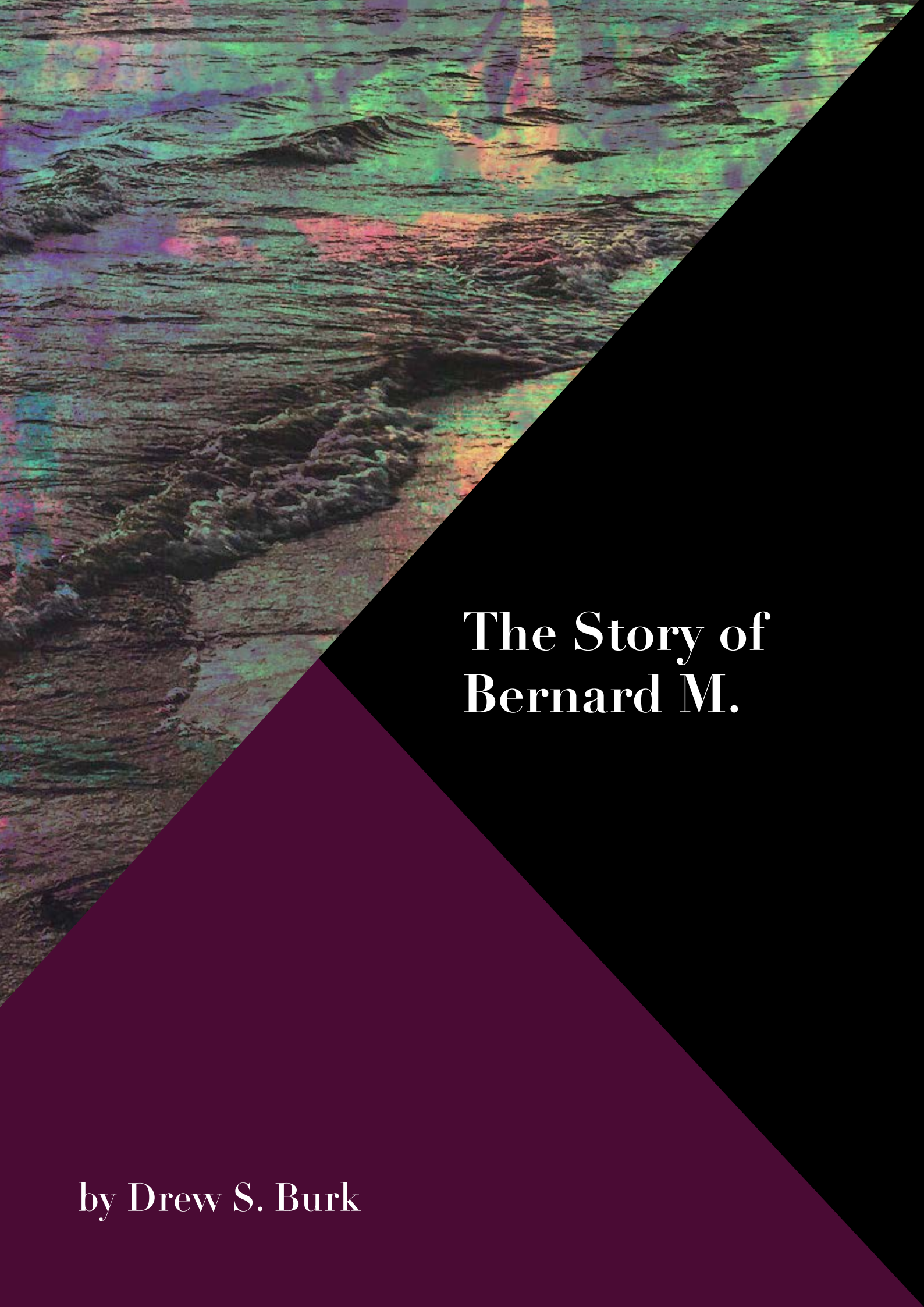
I didn’t know immediately. Indeed, who would? I promised to think about it.

“Very well,” he said. “Thank you for visiting.”

He got up to escort us out. I asked if I could buy this copy of *The Story of the Little Mole*.

“No, we have to destroy it. It’s the policy,” he said.

I clung to it. He pulled it out of my hand as we walked through the gate. He was late for another meeting.



The Story of Bernard M.

by Drew S. Burk

2.

*Speech, like dreams would be “an act of
homage to missed reality.”*

Michel de Certeau

Naming is an incessant, unending task. Perhaps like stories themselves. We carve them out of the void in order to re-establish a quotidian foothold upon the shaky terrain of self. Out of the torrent of chaos, out of the oceanic abyss, we conjure and compose sites for thought to set about inhabiting the oceanic flow of data so as to filter it through our over-abundant self-awareness and to, in part, forget self, to forgo it, for a larger sense of community. To do so, we require metaphors, from the ancient Greek, μεταφορά, *metaphorá*—a linguistic technique of collective transport: boats, ships, rafts through which the psychic currents may pass while we still stand strong navigating our way again for the day within the tidal abyss.

Farther out at sea, islands begin to seem like better constructions—more solid than the constructed boat, ever floating in the same manner as the ship that inaugurates the process of naming, the beginning of the narrative.

There must be a ritual. A celebratory smashing of a bottle of liquor upon the ship's bow: a *sacrifice* of a bottle of champagne. This trace, this initial ritual mark christens the baptism of naming the vessel of thought upon which one sets out to float upon the seas.

In this story, the ship in question will bear the name of Joshua. She will be helmed by a solitary boatman, a philosopher and poet born, in fact, on an island. His destiny in relation to the ocean already sealed from his first steps out along the shoreline. But now our lone protagonist finds himself in the midst of a heroic adventure. This is often how stories begin. There must be a mythic quality. So, we have the boat baptized as Joshua and we have our navigator, who will simply be called Bernard M. And there is an island of his birth and somewhere in the middle of his life he learns how to navigate a sailing vessel along with becoming a philosopher and poet. But Bernard M. is not so sure about his life. Indeed he questions—as philosophers and poets do—the very ground of his existence. The very choices that have led him to have a wife and a child. Bernard M. is not simply a sailor or philosopher: out of the floating abyss of names by the very act of another union—Bernard M. is also a father. But now we find Bernard M. packing his boat full of supplies, and setting sail anxiously and nervously out to sea.

Cast out to sea from a name-laden shoreline now become distant, he sets off farther out into the waters amongst the nameless abyss. There are no names as a solitary traveler at sea. There are movements, and knobs to turn,

and nautical measurements: activities and notations, gestures and astrological navigational alignments. Traces.

Here we are: out at sea *before or after* the name. The ship floats with Archimedes' blessing over and over the cresting waves. Water is pulled up into the clouds and released back down into the ocean.

And Bernard M. is sailing all alone. No more father, no more son, no more wife. No more island. No more poems. No more philosophy. No more words. No more thoughts. Just sounds. A clanking wind orchestra of pulleys, sails and masts. The friction of rope threads running over and over again on his hand flesh creating the formation of hardened skin. The aching of muscles. The sore sinewy tendons of his legs. Cracked salt stained lips. A small collection of carefully planted legumes that creak and sway in the wind, carefully secured to hang gently in the sunlit open space along the small wall over the shoulder of Joshua's wheel. Bernard M. carefully watches over the extra seedlings, making sure to keep them dry and safe down in the hull. He fears only strong weather and scurvy. A lack of fruits and vegetables and the force of an angry sky rain down. And in the distance, we hear the echoing cries of hungry seabirds and occasionally glimpse the lurking predators and prey below.

We should mention to the reader that Bernard M. is in a competitive sailing race: to travel around the world as quick as possible. Sailing against another handful of helmed sailing vessels in the secular year of 1968. And

Bernard M. is perhaps winning the race. He does not know. Joshua, his ship, has a radio. He could perhaps speak with someone. And he does so from time to time. To get his bearings. He does not know the names of those with whom he speaks. He hears but a voice. Relaying assurances and numbers. He's now closing in on passing down the coastline of Chile, they say. Now he's making his way around the Cape of Good Hope. He knows that somewhere there is a media presence. Newspapers of words narrating a story about his current exploits and approximate longitudinal and latitudinal position. Carving out a tale from out of the oceanic abyss. The media will call him a poet and a philosopher and a sailor born on an island. Bernard M. will get hungry. He will have to become one with the sea. He will have to learn perhaps at least how to merely be outside of language and outside of thought by way of constant movement and upkeep of Joshua. But even Joshua no longer has a name. She as well must also become one with the sea. They will make friends with some of the seagulls and dolphins who follow them. They will communicate by way of unfamiliar strange sounds.

At some point, after hundreds of days at sea, outside of names, and outside of thought, he will find himself confronted with the very beginning of his initial inquiry into existence: he will be confronted, through the absence of names, as a philosopher and poet, with the very nothingness and warmth of the sun. He will forget the race. He will merely continue circling the globe without any concern for the competition. He will forget his family. He will become at once overwhelmed and comforted by the delirious and

simultaneous emptiness and plenitude of the world. He will find his home, his *chôra* upon the ocean of namelessness. He will have what some call a mystical awakening with what it was he had been searching for through words and histories of philosophy and poetry. His stomach will grow hollow. His muscles will grow tired and lean.

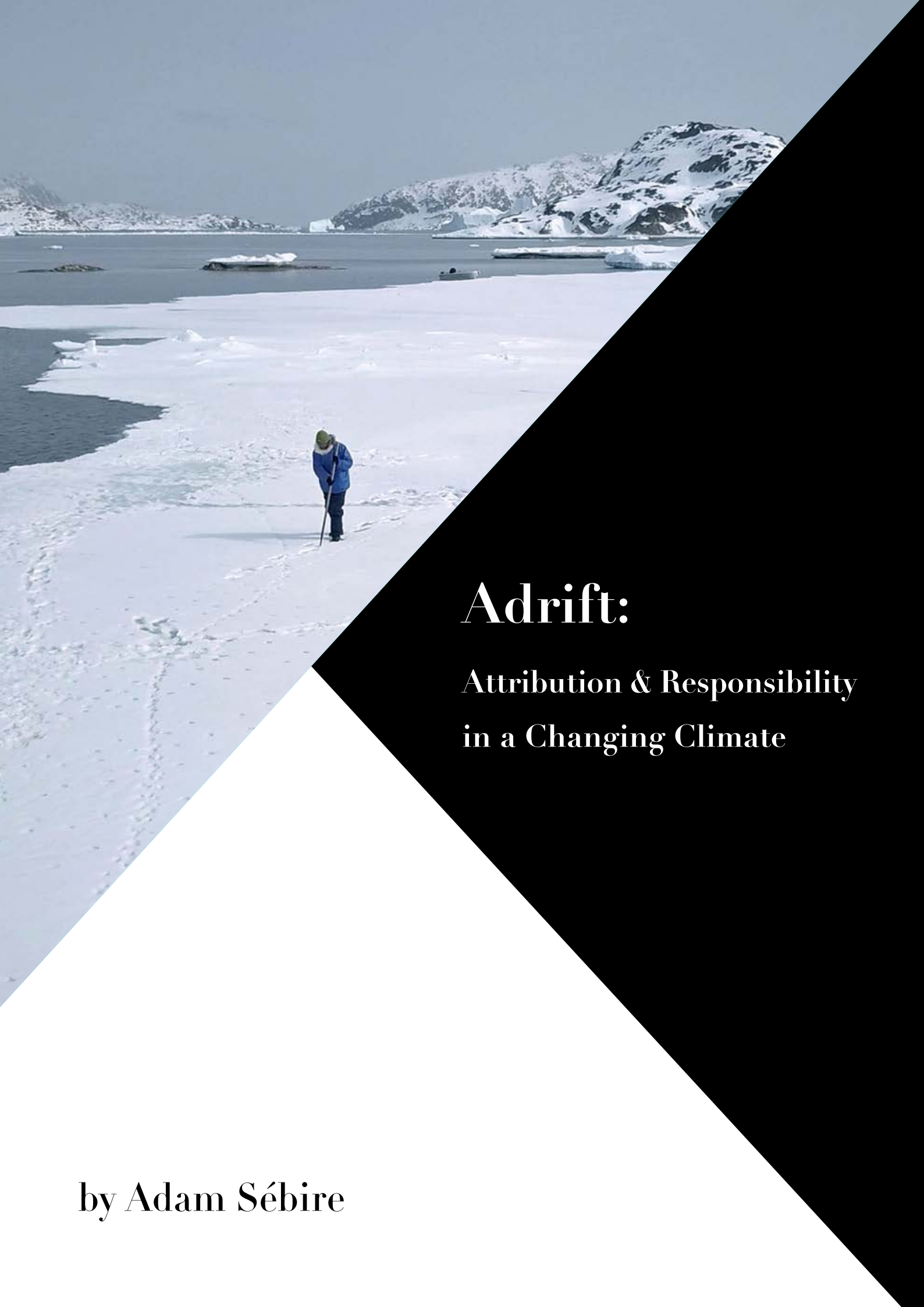
He will eventually fight off the ever-present waves of nothingness again by way of writing a story.

He will find his way back to language. He will rediscover the vitality of the scriptural practice of the written word. He must create another vessel for navigating the oceanic nothingness upon which he has grown accustomed to sailing. He will weep ecstatically for days. He will fight off his depression by setting about praying and yogic breathing on the deck of Joshua. He will hallucinate a friend to tide him over from his weary solitude and he will reconcile the precious rarity of his supplies of parchment for writing. And as his supplies of parchment dwindle, he will peel wood from Joshua and dry it out in the sun so as to create more of the precious writing surface. He will breathe in deep the sea air. He will protect his writings on parchment and Joshua's peeled skin inside the hull of the boat. Wrapped carefully in one of the only remaining pieces of canvas cloth cut from one of Joshua's sails. He will begin to speak to Joshua. He will thank her for his safe journey. Thank her for her precious sacrifice of wood skin for writing. He will laugh and tell tales about his time before sailing and naming her. Before the sea. Before boat races around the world.



Adaptation from *Joshua, Le bateau de Moïtessier*, Gabriel Synnaeve (2009)

Now. Words have once again become his friend. They as well need a vessel to navigate the oceanic abyss of thought. They as well must have shelter so as to provide warmth again. To provide some sort of nautical bearings for him to survive. He attends to his words. He recalls his place of birth on an island. And as he sails on a seemingly unending sea, he finally sees in the distance, another familiar site. A port that will welcome his boat and he finds himself once again on land among the inhabitants of another world. Bernard M. must introduce himself again to the locals who do not speak his language. He will learn another. He will build another ship. He will fall in love again. He will set sail again. He will leave the island. He will seek out again the mystical. He will grow stronger as a navigator. He will write another story. He will christen another boat. He will once again set out to sea to commune with the sacred.



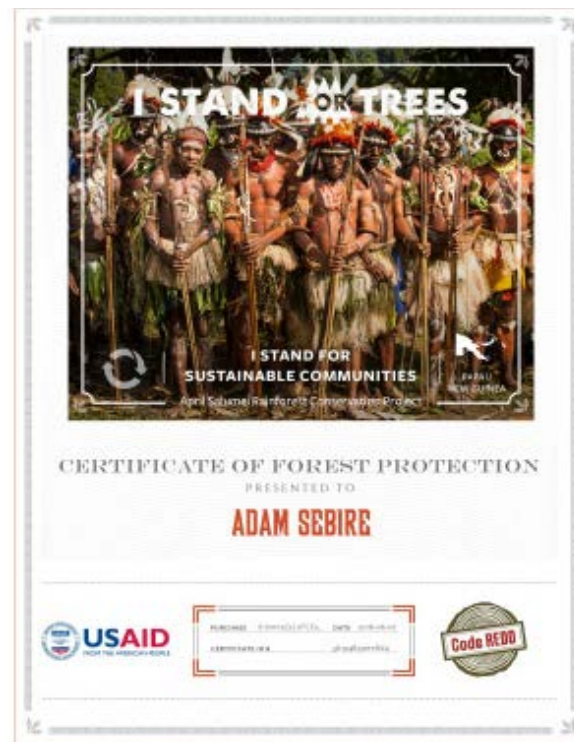
Adrift:

*Attribution & Responsibility
in a Changing Climate*

by Adam Sébire



3.



I don't quite remember when my barely-concealed boasts of jet-setting—"Guess what? I've booked an around-the-world ticket this time!"—turned to an awkward sense of shame, but it was soon after that I started buying carbon credits. This contrivance of late capitalism would, the website assured me, assuage my frequent flyer's guilt by paying Papua New Guinean tribespeople to preserve enough of their forests against the pillage of loggers in order to act as a carbon sink for the exact tonnage of my greenhouse gas emissions. I was sent a "Certificate of Forest Protection" fronted by exotic-looking people with nose piercings who'd apparently emerged from the jungle to thank me personally. George Monbiot has incisively compared these little slips of paper to medieval Papal indulgences with which one could pay the Church to 'offset' one's mortal sins (the main difference being

that mine were PayPal indulgences).¹ Adding a contemporary twist, such carbon offsets were recently condemned by Pope Francis in his encyclical on climate change since their use negates any actual behavioural change.² “You’re paying poor people to die for your lifestyle,” Kevin Anderson, a British climate scientist who refuses to fly, once told me.

Hence my interest in what I later heard termed “climate change attribution research” or “probabilistic event attribution”³: the ability to link a particular event to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. I’d figured it was unlikely that any particular person’s death in an extreme weather event would ever be able to be ascribed to the CO₂ from my Singapore to London leg. (Phew, no manslaughter charges for this flight at least?) However, a peer-reviewed research paper in *Science* in late 2016 revealed that certain kinds of attribution were already entirely plausible—beyond the purely probabilistic “this event was made x times more likely by global warming” (oh-oh, time to lawyer-up...). With a 10% margin of error, Notz & Stroeve’s formula allowed one to calculate how much Arctic sea-ice would be lost—that is, would not regenerate as it would otherwise, come September each year—per tonne of anthropogenic CO₂ emitted.⁴ With less sea-ice to reflect sunlight back into space the ocean warms faster, which in turn melts more ice: a feedback loop.

A PhD research trip to Upernavik, Greenland in May 2018 offered an opportunity to investigate this further.⁵ My economy-class return flights (SYD-ICN-CPH-SFJ-JAV-JUV; the last leg delayed 94 hours due to extreme

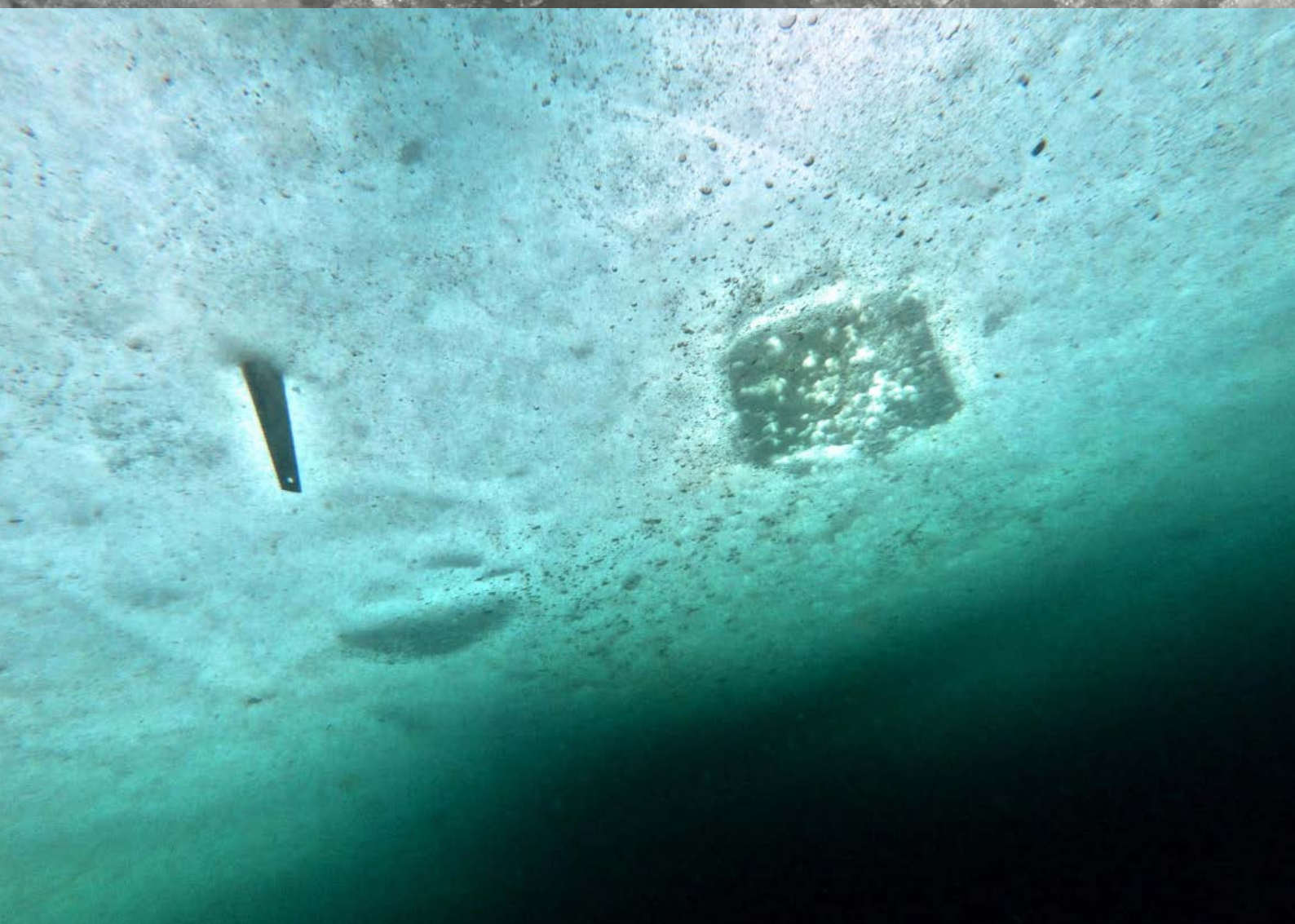


weather) worked out at just under 40,000km, or 5.23 tonnes of CO₂e. The little ‘e’ on CO₂e indicates equivalence to land-based emissions. Indeed I’d searched to find a carbon calculator that acknowledges this inconvenient truth (ignored by many airlines in their improbably small “offset your flight” greenwashing) that jet aviation emissions are deposited in the worst place possible: our upper atmosphere. It was important to use a carbon calculator that took into account not only class of travel⁶ but calculated this extra “radiative forcing” effect of aviation emissions above 9,000 metres—by multiplying them by a factor of three.⁷

During my month-long stay I met a local narwhal hunter who agreed to take me up to the nearest remaining sea-ice, 72° 55’ 53.84” N 56° 3’ 34.19” W. It had been a particularly bad year for ice in northwest Greenland; indeed the Arctic as a whole is warming two to four times faster than the rest of the planet’s surface.⁸ One practical effect of this was the curtailment of the use of sledge dogs who now let their chained-up misery be known by howling continuously throughout the midnight sun. Only after some kilometres of sailing, and much cautious prodding of potential sites with the hunter’s auger, did we find sea-ice thick enough for me to tentatively step upon it without plunging through.

Into its frozen surface I inscribed the scientists’ formula:

$$\Delta A_{\text{seaice}} = \frac{dF_{\text{nonSW,in}}}{dE_{\text{CO}_2}} \Delta E_{\text{CO}_2}$$



As patiently explained to me by a friendly climatologist, this states that the area of sea-ice lost equals a constant (derived from their research into surface energy flux at the ice edge) of 3.0 ± 0.3 square metres per metric tonne of CO₂ emitted, multiplied by the sum of my own emissions. Inserting my 5.23 tonnes into the equation, this worked out at 15.69 ± 1.57 m² which I duly measured, pegged and, with a rusty saw I'd found, cut from the pack.

And so this is how I came to be floating in Baffin Bay sitting atop a small, slowly-disintegrating drift of ice on a wonky chair with a piece of string, a foldable ruler and a rusting (now fairly blunt) saw.

I'll be the first to admit that this was not exactly shaping up as the classic desert-island fantasy.

Bemused by my bizarre activities on the ice, the hunter had gone fishing, sailing behind some icebergs with what sounded like a vague promise in Greenlandic to return. After I'd stopped shaking (fear of slipping beneath the ice and the biting chill of sitting atop it now cancelling each other out) I gingerly sent up a drone to take some video. This was perhaps an ill-advised strategy given the diminishing potential for a dry landing when the time came—but, hey, that's how we humans progressed this far, no?! The vague notion that we'll cross that (flooded) bridge when we come to it...

The drone's video link enabled me to look down upon my tiny melting island from above. At last I could visualise the impact of my fossil-fuelled lifestyle—an attribution that had hitherto remained conveniently invisible



to me. Of course, it was much easier to stomach the idea that this particular chunk of ice would melt rather than that a specific living thing would die as a result of my choices; who's to say who or what will feel the impact of my 5.23 tonnes of CO₂? Or indeed where or when?

In creating this small video performance art work I don't seek to individualise the problem; to falsely ascribe it to some supposedly innate human failing; nor to overlook the systemic economic and geopolitical culpabilities underlying global warming.⁹ Rather, I want to get a sense of the disconnects operating within my own psychology—of cause from effect; of my actions today from their outcomes in the future; of invisible emissions here from their impact elsewhere: cognitive dissonances which can be relied upon to kick in every time I turn on air conditioning, fuel up a car, or take a flight, and which enable me to avoid confronting the destruction of the environment

that results on my behalf. Society subsidises fossil-fuelled activities globally to the tune of over US\$5 trillion annually—a subsidy amounting to 6.5% of global GDP¹⁰—while international air travel burgeons, lubricated by a prohibition on taxation of aviation kerosene.¹¹ “Slow Travel” is touted as an antidote to unsustainable lifestyles that feature long-distance journeys at breakneck speeds, but as I fly out of a country that has cancelled the last of its night trains, it’s reduced to a romantic aspiration, to be contemplated wistfully as I sip my 2015 Burgundy from a plastic cup at 33,000 feet. As the flight tracks over the soon-to-be-submerged Bangladeshi river delta, the wine leaves a bitter aftertaste. This is not some Proustian sense-memory, but the probabilistically attributable traces of my earlier voyage, Sydney to Paris, the extreme weather event in France the following year, and now its entirely conceivable manifestation in the sunburnt grapes of my inflight red.

Notes

1 Monbiot, G., “Paying for our sins,” <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2006/oct/18/green.guardiansocietysupplement>, *The Guardian*, 18 October 2006.

2 Garside, B., “Pope Francis encyclical warns on use of carbon credits,” <http://carbon-pulse.com/5149/>, *Carbon Pulse*, 18 June 2015.

3 Otto, F., James, R., & Allen, M. (2014). The science of attributing extreme weather events and its potential contribution to assessing loss and damage associated with climate change impacts. Retrieved from https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/workstreams/loss_and_damage/application/pdf/attributingextremeevents.pdf

See also Readfearn, Graham, “Was that climate change? Scientists are getting faster at linking extreme weather to warming,” <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/planet-oz/2016/sep/15/was-that-climate-change-scientists-are-getting-faster-at-linking-extreme-weather-to-warming>, *The Guardian*, 15 September 2016.

4 Notz, D., & Stroeve, J. (2016). Observed Arctic sea-ice loss directly follows anthropogenic CO₂ emission. *Science*, 354 (3 November), 747–750. <http://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag2345>

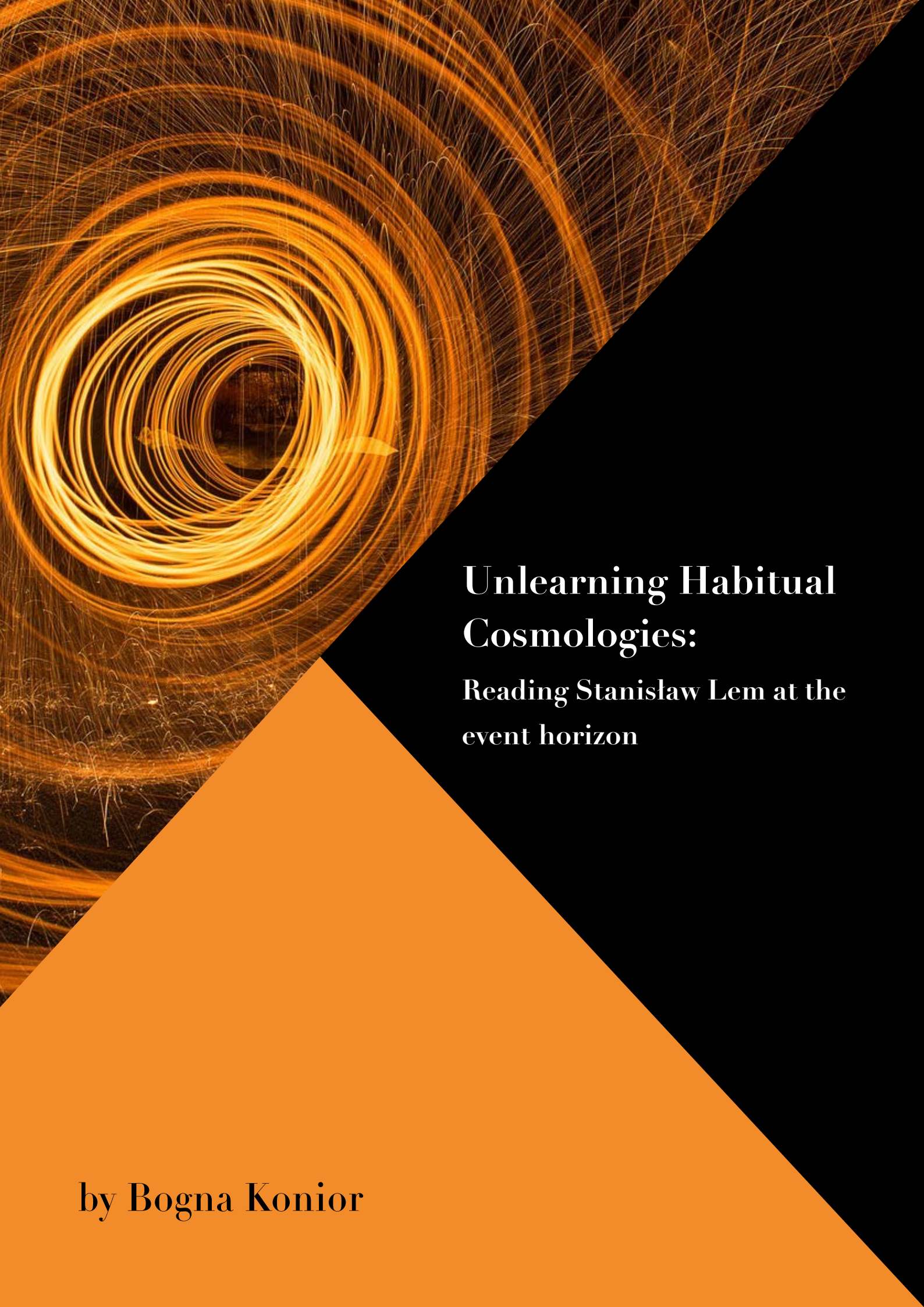
5 There, did you catch it?! I managed to justify my own cognitive dissonance: it was a doctoral research trip, not a lifestyle choice.

6 Jarrett, D., “Fact Sheet: The One-Tonne Flight,” https://ecometrica.com/assets/one_tonne_flight.pdf, *Ecometrica*, February 2012.

7 Note that my initial choice of carbon calculator for these figures employed a rather too optimistic factor of 1.89; only in subsequent fact-checking with the paper’s co-author Dirk Notz was I directed to Atmosfair’s calculator which used a more realistic factor of 3.0: <https://www.atmosfair.de/en/offset/flight>

For a detailed explanation see “Atmosfair Flight Emissions Calculator: Documentation of the Method and Data,” <https://www.atmosfair.de/wp-content/uploads/atmosfair-flight-emissions-calculator-englisch-1.pdf>, Berlin, September 2016.

- 8 Coumou, D., Di Capua, G., Vavrus, S., Wang, L., & Wang, S. (2018). The influence of Arctic amplification on mid-latitude summer circulation. *Nature Communications*, 9 (1), 2959. <http://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-05256-8>
- 9 For a biting critique of the Anthropocene as a depoliticization strategy see Swyngedouw, E., & Ernstson, H. (2018). Interrupting the Anthropo-obScene: Immuno-biopolitics and Depoliticizing Ontologies in the Anthropocene. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35(6), 3–30. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418757314>, available at https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/68936152/Swyngedouw_Ernstson_Interrupting_TCS-FinalNovember2017SubmittedFINALRG.pdf
- 10 Coady, D., Parry, I., Sears, L., & Shang, B. (2017). How Large Are Global Fossil Fuel Subsidies? *World Development*, 91, 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.10.004>
- 11 Tyers, R., “It’s time to wake up to the devastating impact flying has on the environment,” <https://theconversation.com/its-time-to-wake-up-to-the-devastating-impact-flying-has-on-the-environment-70953>, *The Conversation*, 11 January 2017.



Unlearning Habitual Cosmologies:

**Reading Stanisław Lem at the
event horizon**

by Bogna Konior

4.

One couldn't keep saying
'gravitationally completely collapsed object'
over and over

When I was sixteen, I felt that I needed to talk to the Ocean, and I was impatient. I decided that this alien being at the heart of Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* was the only god I could ever accept. The single inhabitant of planet Solaris, the black Ocean covered its whole surface and weighed seven hundred billion tons. Resistant to all studies, its intelligence was elusive. It seemed to spend most of its time spitting out amorphous shapes. I was obsessed. In my Catholic, uni-sex, private high school, I skipped prayer and slept through religion classes. I politely refused invitations to parties in order to daydream about joining the NASA oceanography team. I devised methods for submergence, practicing in lakes or – less ideally – in murky, ashy ponds near the coal mines in Wałbrzych, where I grew up. My friends longed to wrap themselves around boys but I was having erotic dreams about Seasat, the first civilian oceanographic satellite launched in 1978. But years passed,

and nothing. I graduated, moved to London, moved to Warsaw, moved to Amsterdam, moved to Hong Kong, and nothing. I kept searching for the Ocean, in vain.

In 2013, scientists at the University of Miami and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich aimed to study the mysteries of large ocean eddies, vortices that form in turbulent waters, by comparing them to black holes. Even though these eddies can span enormous distances of over ninety miles, their boundaries remain difficult to draw. What links them to black holes is that the only outward-directed information is the absence of information. Edgar Allan Poe described one diabolic whirlwind in *A Descent Into the Maelstrom*: “the terrific funnel, whose interior, as far as the eye could fathom it, was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water . . . sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar.” You can almost feel Poe trying to grab this voiceless inhuman terror by the throat to transcribe it into digestible aural experiences. He also recounted a “broad belt of gleaming spray” around the vortex, akin to the event horizon.

Physicist John Wheeler is often credited with inventing the term “black hole” in 1964, three years after the publication of *Solaris*, at a talk he gave at NASA’s Goddard Institute of Space Studies. He clarified that a stranger in the audience had suggested the term to him. Seduced by its simplicity, Wheeler decided “to be casual about the term...dropping it into [my] lectures as if it was an old friend” until it caught on, because “one couldn’t keep saying ‘gravitationally completely collapsed object’ over and over.” One of



(Up) Adaptation from *Black Holes, Monsters In Space* by NASA/JPL-Caltech (2013); (Down) Still shot from *Solaris* (1972) by Andrei Tarkovsky.

the earliest (known) mentions of the subject appeared in 1783 when John Mitchell wrote about mysterious “dark stars” whose gravitational pull was so strong that nothing could escape from them, not even light. Today, we know that black holes are warps in spacetime rather than pits. The black hole is a strange geometry. Light can only travel inwards, no matter which direction it goes. Black holes turn vision onto itself, collapsing its inquisitive properties.

Aside from recurrent scientific concerns, one of Lem’s favourite themes, especially in the extraordinary *His Master’s Voice*, is scholars’ inability to come to a unanimous conclusion. After decades of studying planet Solaris, arguments over the Ocean’s ‘aliveness’ have biologists and physicists on a war-path. Journalists conjure audacious theories, for example that the Ocean is a distant relative of electric eels, capable of producing artificial gravitational and magnetic fields. But it remained unclear whether the Ocean acknowledged human existence, whether its doings were intentional or akin to mere muscle twitches of a corpse. Were scientists assigning intentionality to a dynamic but inert phenomenon? Here on Earth, astrobiologists Aditya Chopra and Charles H. Lineweaver have recently suggested that the reason why we fail to find aliens is that they’re dead. In the Gaian bottleneck model, their answer to the Fermi paradox, life rarely has a chance to evolve quickly enough to maintain surface temperatures necessary for habitability long-term. We’re trying to communicate with corpses. A testimony to our longing for the alien or our inability to stand silence? Lem’s whole

oeuvre deals with the impossibility of interstellar communication, a problem that he defined as cultural rather than scientific. In a despair-inducing excerpt from *Solaris*, he writes: “We have no need for other worlds. We need mirrors. We don’t know what to do with other worlds.” When a team of scientists illegally bombards the Ocean with x-rays, they fail to reveal its working but create a mirror: the Ocean starts producing neutrino copies of the astronauts’ deceased loved ones. Lem believed that human inability to welcome otherness would preclude us from the ability to decipher alien communication. Notably, his final novel was titled *Fiasco*, a bleak parody of literature’s failed mission to open humans up to difference. The funeral march never stops in *Solaris*, where self-renewing clones repeatedly commit suicide, re-populating the depths of the Ocean, bound to a homogeneity that furiously and cruelly keeps on giving.

The debate around whether black holes could communicate anything apart from their basic parameters was one of cosmology’s most fervent. Betting on a ‘no,’ Stephen Hawking said, “You can throw television sets, diamond rings or your worst enemies into a black hole, and all that the black hole will remember is the total mass, the angular momentum, and the electric charge.” There *might* be abundant information inside them but if anything were to escape, it would have to travel faster than the speed of light, which means that we could not observe it. Even though they came to represent the point of no return, Hawking’s grand discovery was that “black holes are not the eternal prisons they were once thought” and some

particles may escape as radiation, eventually leading to demise. On such a descent, there is a way out for thought, too. In imperceptibility or uncertainty, there's a possibility of unlearning the habitual.

The space of science-fiction is a multidirectional geography of contingency: narrative hypotheses model scientific experiments and *vice versa*, to the point where this distinction becomes performative. Black holes and gravitational dilation are valuable models for thinking about the asymmetry of extinction. For an outside observer, an object falling into a black hole appears to gradually slow down until it freezes at the event horizon, lingering on the border of annihilation, and disappears. Yet, from the perspective of said object, spacetime (and entropy) fast-forwards. This ostensibly incoherent spatiotemporality is at the heart of our cosmos: astronomers believe that a supermassive black hole lies at the centre of every galaxy. The veil of smog that we pulled over the skies necessitates interspecies design of unparalleled temporal daring: if not now, then when should we consider this axiomatic vantage point from which the human species can perceive the multitude of spatio-temporalities it belongs with?

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hieroglyphically
challenged

by tyran grillo

5.



a chain of electrical wires paralleling the road was the only sign of human activity over nearly three hundred kilometers of open desert. i could almost feel its song penetrating the window that separated us from certain dehydration, but was too distracted by our air conditioner's uncooperative temperament. when the engine decided to follow suit, we stepped out of the car, inhaling the sunlight in protest. i took a picture that might have been my last had we not been part of a convoy en route from aswan to abu simbel. the sky opened its cloudless shirt to expose the brightest imaginable navel, grafting an umbilical cord of searing heat into our foreheads. nursing bottled waters, we watched from beneath the awnings of our hands as a tour bus pulled over and kindly offered a ride for the trip's remainder. inside was cool and dark. curtains had been drawn to filter out the light, and families were jostling each other with fanciful tales

Of cultural disparity. upon arrival, our feet dislodged sand beneath
 the towering gazes of hitherto and nefertari, whose own feet, by
 contrast, were immobilized by the very craftsmanship that had
 revealed them. walking between, i felt my skin being scratched by
 hieroglyphic surfaces, each a possibility slumbering in a cadre of
 unwanted spectacle. cameras ached with fantasies of absorption, as
 if the walls were digital phenomena. the more daring among us
 deemed consumption worth chasing in a space where photos were
 loosely forbidden. only then did it become obvious that my personal
 orthography had been changing all along. words that once lay flat
 now deviated their dimensions naturally from their familial pose. to know
 that my attempt at deciphering had compelled the targets of
 my familiarity to challenge me in turn was to understand the value
 of an utterance without audience. (in some forest, i knew, a tree
 was falling alone, indeed making a sound because it was hearing itself.)
 beyond the limited control of this retelling, i had only an improvised
 palette from which to match the many shades of stone around
 me. every sunset rattled, every ankhe was eaten. the depths
 were a disordered map in my jacket's compass to the outside, where we
 sought comfort in shade-giving ruins. the colossal half-Allen in the
 dust-lunged before we'd ever risen from it, thus confirming our
 itinerancy as a product of its own desire. the more we pondered
 the force of being at our best, the more we repudiated

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In Sweden

by Dominic Pettman



Tjoffsans Tivoli (Amusement park), Maria Eklind (2017). Malmö, Sweden.

In Sweden, the houses sometimes move about, like stones on a living glacier. You can go to bed and wake up with a different view of the same field. (They seldom move more than a few acres a night.) When this happens during the day, which is far more rare, it is an occasion known as the *hemflyttar*: and a family will spring up from the dinner table – plates and glasses clattering and a-shattering – and run to the windows to watch the short but noisy journey. Any neighbors witnessing the spectacle will wave and cheer. When the shuddering has finished, and a new silence descends, the family tiptoes into a circle, links hands, and sings the *hemflyttar* song:

Moving day already?
Moving day so soon?
Hurry up Uncle Olof
Or you will miss the mountain boat
But what about the chickens?
Yes?
And what about the hens?
Hurry up Uncle Olof
You slow old mountain goat

Extra elk-candies are then placed in the children's clammy palms, and the men-folk are left to clean up the disarray, while the ladies go to the attic to ensure that the ham radio is still working.

In Sweden, the family sleeps in unfamiliar angles, in triangular beds, shaped like half a piece of toast, wedged into each corner of the room. Their sheets are lemon yellow. Father tells goodnight stories while mother acts out each scene in the candlelight, with her hands as shadow-puppets. The children wheeze, snot-bubble, and wonder at the marvelous tales, often set in Fresno, California.



In Sweden the ghosts are polite, and sneak into houses quietly, so as not to wake any of the inhabitants. They leave currency from long-departed centuries in compensation for using up the milk.

In Sweden no new law can pass until it is approved by a committee of children. Of course this leads to widespread corruption, and early onset diabetes.

In Sweden, it is believed if you do at least one good deed a day, your dear departed spirit will live forever on the cool side of the pillow.

In Sweden, it is forbidden by law to put spaghetti and meatballs on toast, for this transgresses the “double-gluten taboo,” described with such precision by Freud, and the basis of civilized society.

In Sweden, a visit to the doctor is not paid with money – nor fractal-shaped vegetables, as is the custom in Norway – but in haiku. The patient will, however, all too often exacerbate their existing symptoms in settling their account, as Swedish haiku are 3000 lines long, and syntactically exacting.

In Sweden, young and graceful maidens self-select into Geisha-like finishing schools or refinement houses, where they learn the subtle arts of licorice whipping, Calvinist frottage, and tax evasion.

In Sweden, an odd number of buttons in a jar on the mantelpiece is a sure sign of sterility for the lady of the house. As a consequence this has, for generations, been a popular form of birth control. (Hence also the old saying, usually spoken behind a pregnant woman's back, "who put an extra button in the jar?")

In Sweden, it is common to drink too much elderflower aquavit, and succumb to vanity. Hence the common song you may hear outside a glowing cabin window, on a warm summer night:

*I've got a lovely head
it sits on the top of my neck
it's between my ears
it's behind my nose
it's beneath my roof
(to tell the truth)
I've got a lovely head*

In Sweden, the Swedes can sometimes tire of their own ways and scenery, and so decamp to other places for vacation, or *utrymning*. One of the most popular destinations is the border between sleeping and waking. Here families bring their pine-cladded caravans and spend a week or two muttering to each other, snoring a little before starting in surprise, twitching and tutting, or humming softly in a gentle, breathing rhythm. On the border between sleeping and waking, it is a perpetual twilight of cobalt blue, though the breeze is as warm and velvety as the tropics. The visiting Swedes enjoy the mild disorientation this twilight state brings, to their person and purpose. (The Swedish equivalent of *raison d'être* translates as “the reason for hitching up one’s britches.”) Soon enough, however, they pack up their caravans again and return home. Even if that home is now half a league further along the valley than where they left it.

鳥飛過羽聲
不覺其聲

The Sound of Shaking Paper: A Sonic Archive

by Carla Nappi

7. (being a selection of Manchu sounds included in a Qing Dynasty pentaglot dictionary, the [*Yuzhi* *Wuti Qingwenjian*])

Urkin	(the sound made by horses before they stampede)
Or ir	(the sound of chanting sutras)
Ang	(the sound made by camels and donkeys, a scream used in battle)
Guuje	(a sound used to call a falcon)
Chu	(a sound used to set a dog on someone)
Ho hoi	(the sound made by hunters to scare animals out of hiding)
Ja ja	(the sound made by a bird when it is caught)

Tok tok	(the sound of repeatedly striking a hollow wooden object)
Hoso hasa	(the sound of shaking paper)
Shuwar	(the sound of a sword being drawn from a scabbard)
Tur	(the sound of a horse clearing its nose)
O a	(the sound made by small children trying to talk)
For for	(the sound of slurping)
Katur kitur	(the sound of eating ice)
Kiyafur kifur	(the sound of something smashing)
Or	(the sound made by tigers)
Shung shang	(the sound of the breathing of a sleeping person)
Ha	(a sound made by breathing on frozen objects)
Miyar miyar	(the sound made by young deer)
Miyang ming	(the sound of many children crying)

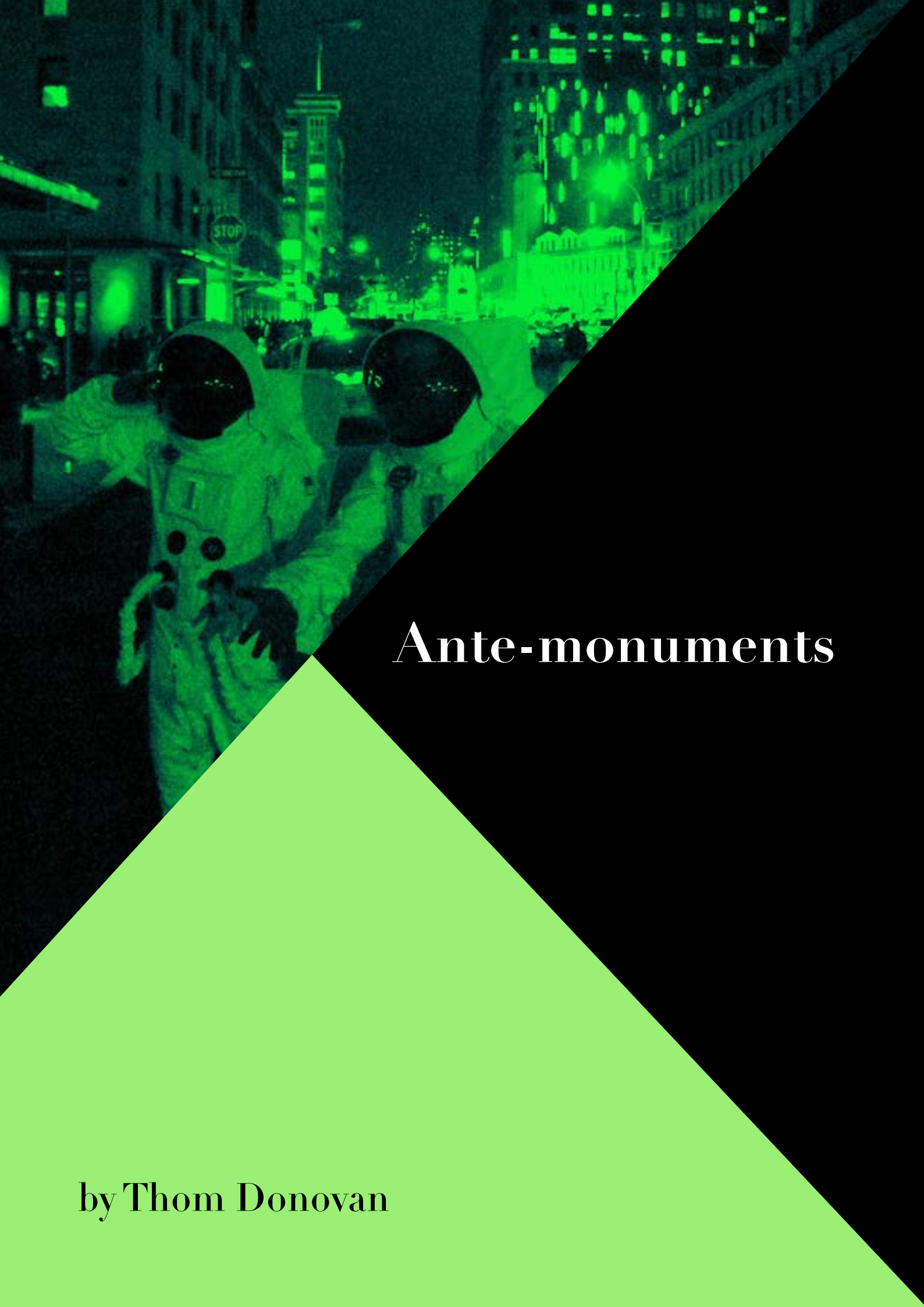
Ko ka	(the sound made when something gets caught in the throat)
Ker	(the sound of burping)
Pei pai	(the sound of repeated spitting)
Kunggur	(the sound made by empty wagons)
Kachar kichir	(the sound of walking on gravel)
Kuuwas kis	(the sound made by dragging sacks of grain on a floor)
Huuwar hir	(the sound of clothing rubbing together)
Kuutu kata	(the sound of walking feet)
Huuwasa hisa	(the sound of stepping on dry leaves)
Jor	(the sound of many chickens screaming)
Jar	(the sound made by an arrow with a tip made of bone)
Gar gir	(the sound made by a flock of crows)
Jar jir	(the sound made by birds early in the morning)

Jang jing	(the sound made by birds that are looking for one another)
Kuuwak chak	(the sound made by people fighting with sticks)
Shuwak sik	(the sound of many whips striking something)
Yang yang	(the sound of bells ringing)
Kutur seme	(the sound of horses shaking themselves off)
Kuuwang chang	(the sound of drums and cymbals)
Jingjing jangjang	(the sound of a flock of birds singing in the springtime)
Halar	(the sound made by multiple jade pendants striking one another)
Tong tong	(the sound of a shaman's drum)
Halar hilir	(the sound of bells on a girdle)
Kalar kilir	(the sound of keys jingling)
Bung bung	(the sound made by blowing into a conch shell)
Kanggir	(the sound of falling porcelain)

Hanggir hinggir	(the tinkling of anklets)
Tur tar	(the sound of frying beans)
Pak	(the sound made by a hard object hitting the floor)
Pak pik	(the sound of many small firecrackers going off)
Katak	(the sound of a lock clicking shut)
Shor shar	(the sound of wind and rain)
Huuwasar	(the sound made by dry plants in the wind)
Sir siyar	(the sound of grass and leaves moving very slightly)
Huung hiyong	(the sound of the tide)
Tab	(the sound of a bowstring hitting the back of the bow)
Pochong	(the sound of things hitting the water)
Pichik pachak	(the sound of walking in mud)
Pata piti	(the sound of fruit falling from a tree)

Char chir	(the sound of meat sizzling)
Kotor katar	(the sound of a flock of pheasants flying together)
Kuuwas	(the sound of a falcon striking an object with its wings)
Tak tik	(the sound made when moving chessmen)
Kete kata	(the sound of horse's hoofs striking stone)
Kiyatur kitur	(the sound of dirt clods being crushed under wagon wheels)
Kikuur	(the sound of gnashing teeth)
Kangguur kinggur	(the sound of a large structure collapsing)
Katak kitik	(the sound of an object falling from a high place)
Putu pata	(the sound of many small things falling one after the other)
Kiyak kik	(the sound of a large tree splitting open)
Giyab	(the sound made by the Pekingese dog)

Fosok	(the sound of a wild beast leaping from cover)
Pes pas	(the sound of something soft ripping)
Gon gan	(the cry of a swan)
Guuwar guuwar	(the sound made by frogs)
Putur	(the sound of a large bird taking flight)
Per par	(the sound of insects beating their wings)
Patar pitir	(the sound made by struggling fish)
Sar sar	(the sound of grasshoppers flying)



Ante-monuments

by Thom Donovan

8.



Filling a large gallery only with the light from flashlights held by gallery goers

Creating traces, prints one might say, by bouncing basketballs on a tall canvas leaning against the wall

Blindfolding one's self, and plugging up one's ears, then walking among the bar flies

Voguing in such a way that you are moving everywhere while sitting on a chair and otherwise given only two feet of space between yourself and the audience surrounding you at the club

“Merely” breathing, “merely” continuing to breath

Standing glass jars filled with autochthonous rice in the gallery space
instead of human figures

Replacing fine craft objects with shackles and other evidence of their
being bound to appear

Sleeping out in the hallways, sitting out in the stoops

Refusing to cry

Annotating and redacting

Selling art to prevent the foreclosure of the homes in your neighborhood
(so this non-foreclosing surpasses art’s good intentions)

Asserting the gratuitous freedom of sitting by one’s self with all the
lights on not even wondering what’s going on above ground

Buying her house to save it from demolition

Monumentalizing the non-reification of life at the rent party, the club,
the corner, the stoop, the barbershop, the beauty parlor, the ballroom, the
church basement

Withdrawing all images of violation and harm and the hypervisibility
of sexuality to offer only small flags pinned to a map, and an Afro-Futurist
counter *a la* Isaac Julian, and the rain falling on a windshield, and the
extra-diegetic mash-up of Anna Meredith and The D.O.C., and the moon
passing behind clouds then passing behind a tall building

Limiting distribution (as an act of inclusion)

Making “words [...] ancillary to content”



Maintaining the “non-reduction of phonemic substance” through the repetition of “stay on it” as in: “Stay on it Stay on it Stay on it Stay on it Stay on it Stay on it Stay on it (falsetto) Stay on it (falsetto) Stay on it (falsetto) Stay on it (falsetto) Stay on it (falsetto).”

“Merely” standing, merely standing and not being harassed, and not being shot

“Merely” being together, merely being together around a table collectivizing one’s research by telling stories about one’s self

Compiling the morphemes and printing them on a mirror so that one must look at them and one’s self interchangeably, a kind of practice of portraiture performed in real time

Refusing to _____

Standing in front of the painting, annotating it with some words on a t-shirt while you block the view

Being here, taking up space, standing your ground

Opening up a view to the Washington monument as though an invitation to what?

“Privatizing” one’s archive (as an act of inclusion)

Continuing to imagine interstellar travel as a response to the loopholes and crawlspaces so that everyone on the street is all of a sudden wearing NASA hats

Asserting the gratuitous freedom of ascending and descending those levels in the music

Inviting so many to collaborate on your album (as an act of exclusion)

Praising the vegetation, at once nourishing and medicinal

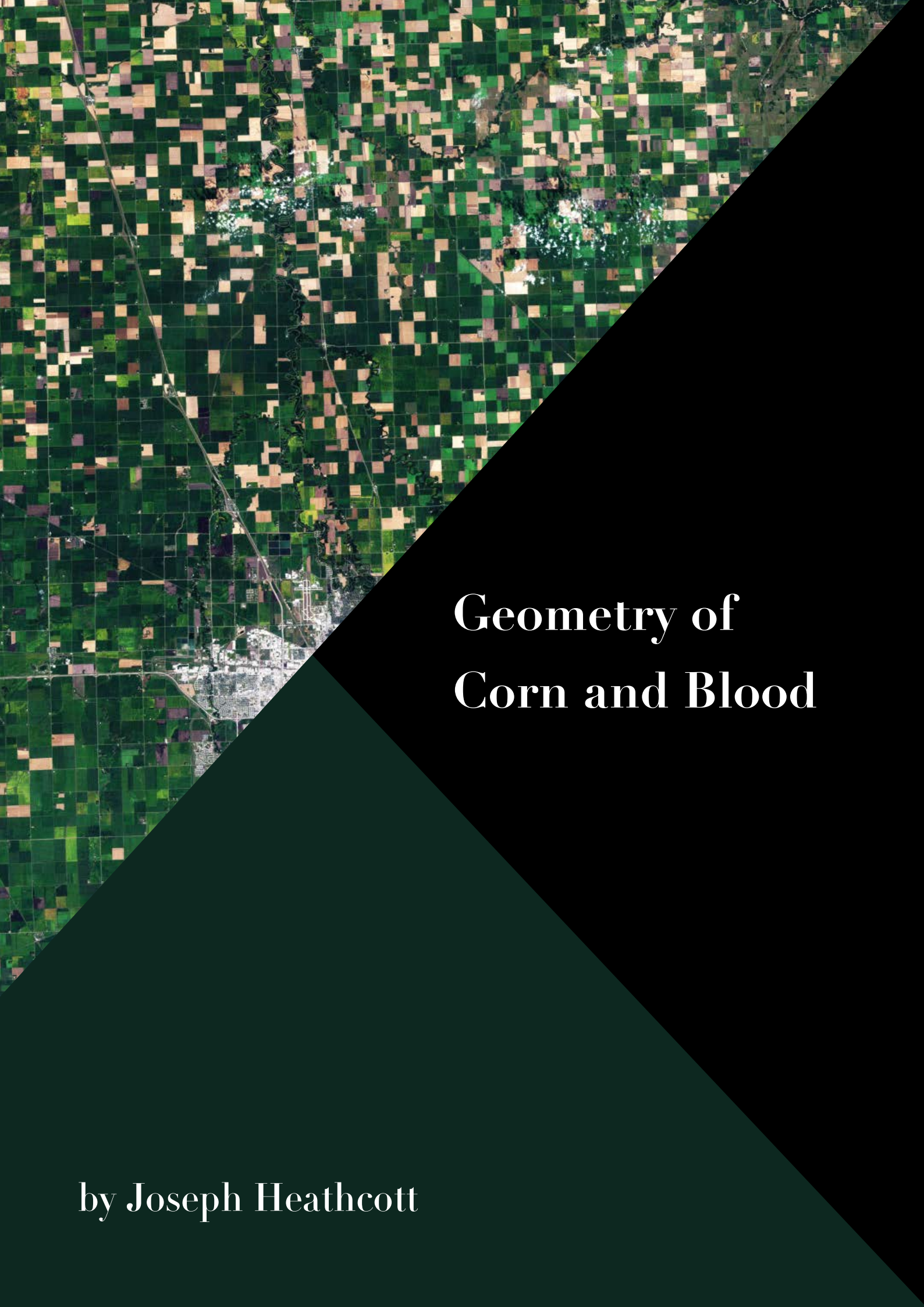


Recalling fondly your dug-out

Holding the secret meeting in the open where everyone can see it

Producing a recording of your voice even though we have the transcript



An aerial photograph of a cornfield, where the rows of crops create a grid-like pattern. The image is split diagonally from the top-left to the bottom-right. The upper-left portion shows the actual field with varying shades of green and brown, overlaid with a fine grid. The lower-right portion is a solid black triangle. A dark green triangle occupies the bottom-left corner, serving as a background for the author's name.

Geometry of Corn and Blood

by Joseph Heathcott

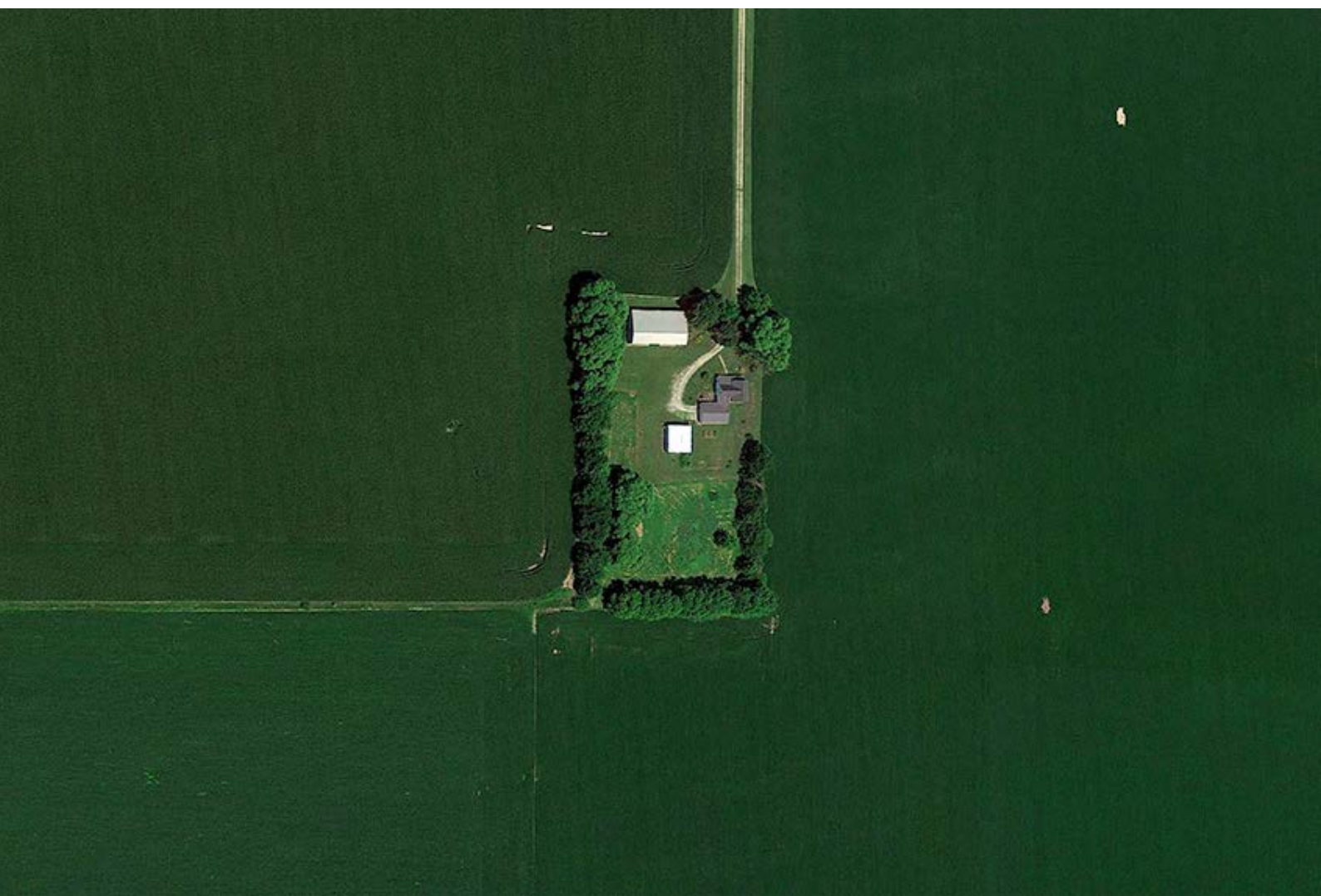
9.

As soon as you leave the town behind you find yourself in the corn. Endless rows of Indiana corn. Roads drop to two lanes, intersecting at right angles along regular intervals. If you drive slowly, you catch the glint of sun on the bent leaves, the sway of tassels in the breeze, and the celluloid husks of precious grain hidden in the shadows. If you hit the accelerator, the stalks fly by, merging into a green blur beyond the car window.

Once in a while the corn recedes and an intersection opens up to reveal a grain silo or a feedlot or a gas station or a depot. Sometimes there is a sign to tell you that you are still on County Road 350E or Rural Route 600N. Now and then you slow down to obey the yellow-orange circle that warns of a rail crossing ahead. Occasionally a sign commands you to stop, the bright red octagon standing out against the wall of dark green stalks and leaves. Often there isn't a sign or an opening in sight. Just the asphalt and the corn.

Lost in the expanse, you might be forgiven for taking this monotonic landscape as an earthly purgatory, entered but never exited, a repetitious module laid down in endless iteration, stretching to an always-receding horizon. You feel like you could drive through it forever. But in fact, as you move through this weird Midwestern scene, you are traversing the warp and weft of Enlightenment geography, grounded in ideas and empires forged centuries ago and thousands of miles distant. You are in the Township Grid, a place at once delirious and dread, magical and mundane.

I grew up in this world. This is not to say I lived on a farm; I was a townie born and bred. But it was a town where the corn and the parking lot fought a



continual low-grade battle for supremacy at the margins; I could see the seasonal changes in the fields from my high school. And in a north-south border town like Evansville, the rural and the urban are deeply entwined. Most residents are just one or two generations removed from rural tenancy; many of us returned to places of origin for family gatherings and picnics and cemetery visits. As kids we ate rural foods, spoke with rural accents, listened to rural music. We sat in the cabs of beat up old pickup trucks, breathing in a mix of leaded gas fumes and atrazine and pig shit, watching the corn stalks whir by as we headed to visit Aunt Mary out past Boonville, or to clear the weeds around great-grandma Edna's tombstone. We brought the country into the city and the city into the country.

The Continental Congress established the Township Grid with the passage of the Land Ordinance Act of 1785. In lieu of the power of taxation, the newly formed U.S. government turned to its most abundant resource – land – as a source of income. Spearheaded by architect Thomas Jefferson and approved by former surveyor-turned-solider George Washington, the Land Ordinance codified mathematical methods of property division to apply on a continental scale. Drunk on Enlightenment precepts distilled by Voltaire, Descartes, and Rousseau, and leisured through the enslavement of African people, these gentlemen planters imagined a future where orthogonality provided the basis for civic virtue and moral rectitude.

Of course, this vast expanse was already inhabited by a wide range of indigenous societies, with varied ways of conceiving territory, forging confederations, dwelling on the land, loving and hating each other, and relating to the natural

world around them. However, secure in the notion that God had conferred favor upon them, European colonizers regarded this world as theirs to possess. The extension of the Township Grid, that exemplar of rational Enlightenment thought projected into continental space, would in fact be purchased with blood. Rivers of blood. Through a network of military outposts and the waging of continual warfare, settler colonialists laundered their imperial expansion through the spectral cry of Manifest Destiny. Slaughter, displacement, and subjugation are as much a part of the grid as latitude and longitude.

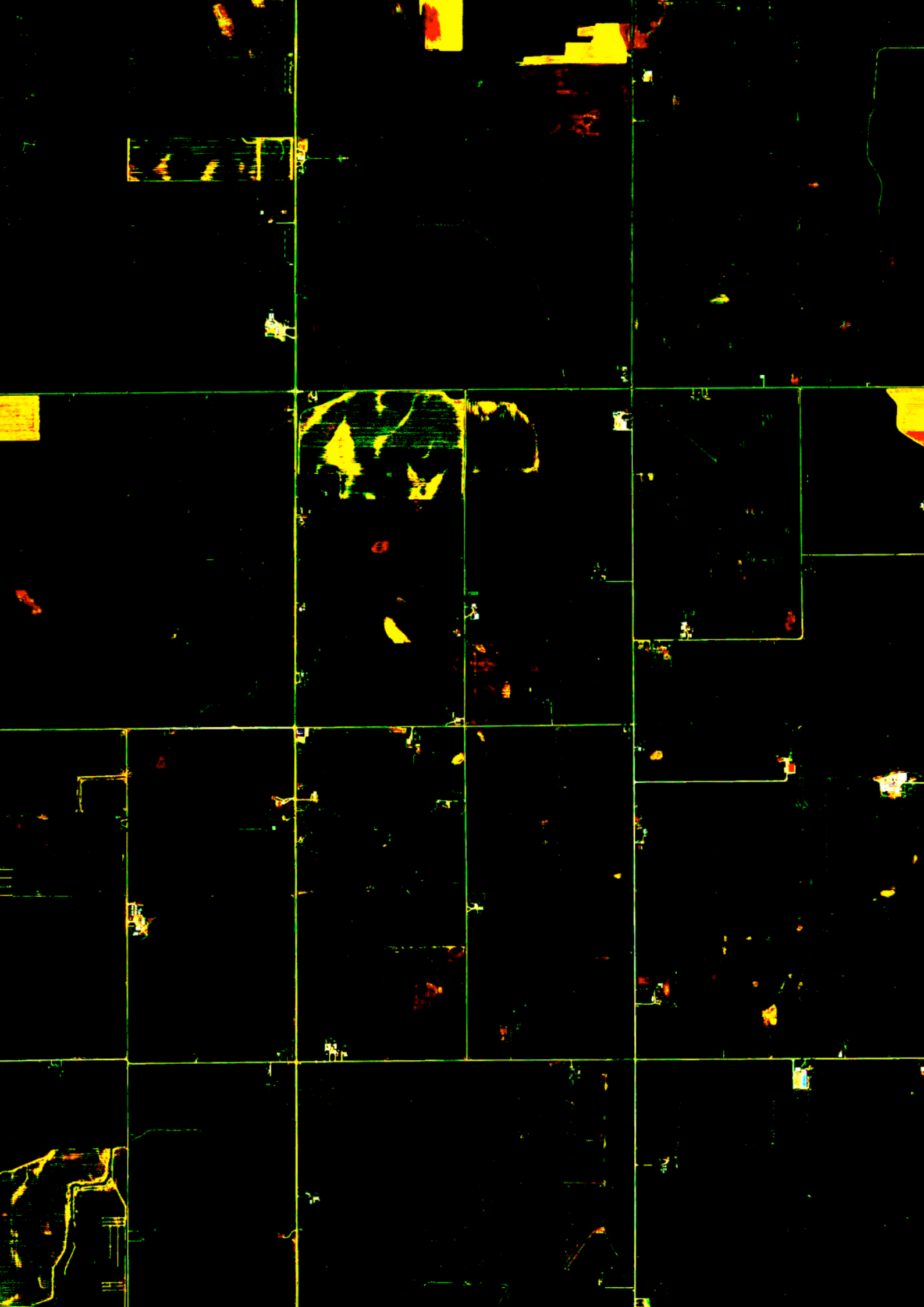
The Land Ordinance stipulated that every county in the trans-Allegheny West would be divided into townships, with each township measuring 36 square miles. Each of these 36 squares could then be subdivided into sections, half-sections, quarter-sections, and so on. This subdivision routine mapped onto a variety of affective geographies, applying as much to the standard 160-acre farm as to the mile-named roads of Detroit, the principal longitudinal line of Meridian Street in Indianapolis, or the Chicago blocks bounded by North, Kedzie, California, and Division--aka Humboldt Park. The "40 acres and a mule" once held out as compensation to formerly enslaved people (and subsequently retracted by federal legislation) was in fact a "sixteenth section" of the grid. The once ubiquitous 60' x 125' urban lot is 1/3,717th of a township section, which is 1/36th of a township.

As a marvelous abstraction, the crystalline geometries of the Ordinance grid subsumed rural and urban landscapes under a common spatial regime. Whether in town or country, the grid abjured the messiness and incoherence of the natural

world, with its intricate web of relations binding together plant and animal communities amid streams, hillocks, sumps, crags, fissures, caves, soil profiles, rock forms, and watersheds. It facilitated the conversion of landscape into property and its subdivision into units to be deeded and traded through markets. Of course, such a settled order could not tolerate ungovernable bodies and flows, and so the long-established migratory and hunting movements of native peoples had to be disrupted, their bodies and minds destroyed or relocated in an unfathomable paroxysm of violence.

This was no mere territorial dispute; it was a struggle over *episteme*. The extension of the grid mooted indigenous knowledge of terrain, geology, plant and animal life. Division of land into property led to the systematic eradication of native landforms, such as the mounds constructed by Mississippian cultures. As new property owners cleared the land for agriculture, they destroyed the rich forest and riparian habitats that had long nourished Native people. They also degraded and fragmented the burial sites, trails, and other touchstones of indigenous memory long present in the landscape. Gridding, flattening, and clearing also facilitated the eventual transformation of agriculture into a fully industrial proposition, where land functions as a cipher within a system of accumulation, open to vertical integration, corporatization, and commodity form.

To be sure, the logic of the Ordinance grid proved a tremendous engine for rural development and agricultural production over the last two centuries, enabling the creation of immense wealth and alimentary abundance. But it also laid the foundations for the very excesses that bind such landscapes into cycles



of boom and bust: financial panic, mortgage distress, unstable commodity pricing, drought, infestation, soil depletion, pollution, and long-term climatic and ecological impact. The agricultural grid of the Midwest may be a machine for making money, but this machine is economically and ecologically fragile, and would cease to function without constant federal priming and management of externalities.

Meanwhile, the same grid also facilitated the making of that quintessential space of loneliness, the American farm. I've wandered through many agricultural landscapes in the world, and have never encountered anything as forlorn as the American farm. In France, I've lingered in rural areas where the farmers cluster together along village roads, their fields extending back in narrow bands separated by low stone walls. In Kenya's smallholder farming regions, I've walked from *shamba* to *shamba* along dirt paths, through undulating terrain thickly interspersed with trees, kitchen gardens, houses, yards, cattle pens, chicken coups, and an occasional shop. The flower farms of Xochimilco in the far south of Mexico City grow in the *chinampas* – a landscape reclaimed from an ancient lake, composed of a series of small, narrow, human-made islands intersected by a complex network of canals.

But the massive square dimensions of Midwest American farms set neighbors at great distances from one another, each homestead pinioned near the center of their property. Single-species commodity crops stretch out from the house and barn as far as the eye can see. Now and then there's a great oak in the front yard, the one tree spared the axe in the days of clearing. Maybe a tire swing

hangs from a branch, blown gently to and fro in the breeze. Nobody plays in the tire swing because children leave and don't return. Today the average age of a farmer in the U.S. is 58 and climbing. Comforting images of wholesome farm families bustling amid scenes of barn raisings and turkey dinners and domestic harmony belie the hardscrabble loneliness and isolation of this life.

So is this a coherent or an incoherent landscape? Really, it is both, and neither, and it changes depending on how you look at it. After all, while terms like coherent and incoherent seem luminous and empirical, they really tell us more about the observer than the thing observed. Rather than conferring fixed meanings onto objects and spaces, the use of the terms signals a particular view, nearly always in tension with other views, where meanings are emergent, unfinished, contested, roiling and fugitive. Things that seem incoherent to an outsider may be perfectly legible to those on the inside. And things that seem coherent to an outsider might be experienced as bewildering and fragmentary by those who dwell there from day to day.

Forged out of the raiment of the Ordinance grid, the rural Midwest is just such a place. It is a grand spatial imaginary, a holograph of Enlightenment ideals, a maze, a cipher, a crop of corn, a quilt soaked in blood. One might say that it is simultaneously the most coherent and incoherent landscape on the planet.



The Island for the Lost

by Ania Malinowska

10.

“A disappointment and a waste of time, nothing but a couple of muddy mounds, hardly protruding from the ground... difficult to spot... just like the information board next to them... all rubbish... why even bother to include it in the brochure...”*

I am twelve or thirteen and I assist my mother at the tedious task of picking a perfect cod she is now trying to select from a pile of the headless carcass of almost identically looking cods whose dying ectoplasm suspends with emerald glitter under the shabby dome of a fish parlour (“Come to me, all you who are starving...”). Four people looking like tourists exude a rant over what I think must be the Hangman’s Hill – a local historical site that, despite the dark mystery encoded in its name, is in fact nothing else but a couple of muddy mounds, hardly protruding from the ground. The deceit works every time. Especially on the incomers thirsty of archaeological porn

and sensationalism that the island invariably drips and keeps open to the public. The name is a perfect allure. It seduces the amateurs of dark tourism – some innocent, some less innocent – just to drag them deep into the woods, straight to the sight of omnivorous greyness (most of it invisible to the human eye) and to the gluttony of ashes that, sprouting on the grass (perfectly perennial and perfunctory), feed on the tourists' sense of a let-down (extracted from their feet).

“They say it’s a burrow cemetery but it looks like shit, if you ask me.” A woman in a fleece Deichmann sweatshirt (an import from Ahlbeck or Berlin) waves the tourist info brochure with disgust, unaware of the fact that all her salubrious life juices are already soaking deep into the shit – something she will realize only in a week or two from the gradual decline of



vision and twitching shin muscles. “Do not know why you still want to see it” – she instinctively scratches her left calf as she bestows her disapproving comment on her two other companions, and I know immediately that the punishment for her vain myopia is already in progress.

We leave the fish parlour and I follow my mother (blindly, as expected by a parental figure) to a flat in a shipyard workers estate erected where some thirty years earlier there still stood a medieval Cathedral¹ of gigantic proportions, majesty and unholy witchcraft, destroyed (after some nine centuries of glory) by the post-war enactment of the *unite d’habitation*. In the flat which my parents call home and which I call a dead end, I wait for the dusk. When darkness is dense enough to blind parental surveillant vigilance, I take a rosary to (as I lie to the progenitors) join a gathered prayer (since they let you out after sunset only for church).

The moment my nostrils catch the salty waft from the river Dziwna (Eng. Strange), the scales in my epidermis come to view. My lungs are gills again, and they work like wings that help propel the shamefully useless body of my human form. I run to the spot where boats get launched for an open sea (and which in twenty five years will be a representable marina). My jog does not relent until I pass the canned-fish production plant (already in a shambles but only to see its rubble days after I turn twenty five). When the first trees show in the horizon, I stop to make sure I copy the whispers in the bark. My run resumes, speeds up and I realize that my legs (now with fins on each side of the ankles) lead me towards the Hangman’s Hill. The

road gets bumpy from grit, roots, moss, stones and gossamer, and I stumble to finally trip over on something which, as I can clearly feel it now, is the collar-bone of Harald Bluetooth Gormsson² (son of King Gorm the Old and Thyra Dannebod of the Jelling Dynasty, or as we simply say it in runic *†R††R : †N†N†). Aware that his other fossilized remnants may be scattered around perfectly untethered (Bluetooth he was indeed), I proceed in a careful crawl, which seems the safest way to move, bearing the topography and the darkness. Before I smell my coordinates to know that my destination is within an arm's reach, I hear the dreary hoots of white-tailed eagles (*Þá sá vér boða rísask í móti með gný miklum ok blóðia*).³ Śława. Śława. Glory to the pagan king. (And a warning to his unfaithful.) I smell liquid, and the ground is wet indeed, but not from rain or dew but from a battle blessing of Sigrid the Haughty⁴ offered to heathens, as the sagas claim, in her own tears (whereas in fact it was her spit and menstruation blood). As I get back to my feet (my mouth and clothes soaked with sticky lymph), the kurgans waver and I can hardly keep balance while the mould and fungi bring out the corpses of the lost, or what is left out of them: hair, nails, teeth and the screams of their final moments (deaths have always been cruel here). Also, they are feeding on something, the matter and nature of which I cannot recognize but, judging by the wildness of drums that saturates the air and intensifies with every moment, it is something precious. A trophy. I feel the energy of pain and despair. I absorb them within myself, and as the hill (the muddy mounds of shit) offers itself to me and lets me all the way down

(because I am the one who sees and the one who believes), I transform the deadly vapour into the mist of life. The ground behind me stiffens and I accelerate my descend in order not to get locked into the networks of the subterranean (yet ethereal and perfectly cosmic) decay. I never know how I find my way home. The only thing I know is that every time it is more difficult.

Next morning at breakfast, as I hide my hands in the cuffs of my sweater (still carmine from the ecstasy of the communion with the hill), I contemplate the memory of the something screaming from the ground, which was not the age-old cadaver but something apparently fresher, the nature of which I could not grasp. My mother checks on me every now and then, but I stubbornly refuse any eye contact. To kill the silence in the room, she turns on the radio and serves two toasts with what, as I can see it now, is the fried incarnation of the perfect cod.

“And from the last minute” – the morning news goes on in typically Pomeranian falling intonation. “Two tourist disappeared after they headed out to the so-called Hangman’s Hill, an early medieval burial place in Wolin, a major town on the island of the same name. They were last seen by a local fisherman when asking for directions to the historical site. Anyone who has seen anything or knows about the persons’ whereabouts is kindly requested to report to the local police.”

Notes

* Wolin – an island on the Baltic and a city in Western Pomerania, Poland, formerly known as Wollin, Jumne, Jomsborg, associated with the mythical city of Vineta. The magi of Europe refer to it as a magical place. It is a rich archaeological site and one of Poland's major historical places.

1 St. George's Church, erected in Wolin around 1150 AD as an effect of the Christianizing mission of Saint Otto of Bamberg. It was the seat of Poland's first bishopric, later moved to Kamień Pomorski. Despite its perfect state after WW2, it was taken apart for the restoration of Warsaw.

2 Scandinavian King believed to have ruled and died in Wolin (Jomsborg at the time of his reign) in the 10th c.

3 Passage from the vision of Harald Gormsso. (Source: *The Saga of the Jomsvikings* by N.F. Blake).

4 Sigríð Storråda (Slavic: Świętosłwa, Danish: Gunhild), believed to have been a Polish princess, wife of Eric the Victorious. She is often referred to as the mother of kings.



Dispatch From Nose Dodge

by Nina Hien

11.

Động. For at least half a century, locals have been referring to the sand dunes of Mũi Né by this term. Literally it means, “cave,” so it seems like an odd inversion for a place that gets illuminated by the intense rays of the sun and swept into fresh blanks of curves by the wind every day. *Động* also happens to be Hồ Chí Minh City slang for “brothel.”

For about as long as photography has been in this land—the former colony of Indochina, now, Vietnam—these dunes have been one of the most represented (and commonplace) sites in the country’s visual imaginary. They’ve also become one of the most well traversed landscapes marked by millions of footprints each year. The first time I visited them was in the late 1990s, the early days of the post-war return of the “Vietnamese tourist.” My cousins had persuaded me to take the five-hour bus ride north from HCMC and go camping with them and 30 others. At the time, the resorts

there were beyond the reach of most Vietnamese. Mũi Né aptly means, “nose dodge,” and because the main industry in the area is the production of fish sauce, on the way there your nose actually has to do a few dodges to keep you from fainting from the putrid odor. At that time, the dunes felt solemn and serene. Since then, they’ve become a busy platform and playful stage set for selfies, sexy underwear ads, and dramatic wedding and funeral reenactments.

Once a free-fire zone near US military bases, the mounds are more than likely a burial ground for fallen soldiers. I’ve never heard any stories about the unearthing of bones or corpses, but I’ve seen a few posed art photos (from the war years) of skulls and helmets propped into the sand as memento mori. (These areas were also used as a huge “post office” for Việt Công correspondence. Nothing was written in the sand, but letters were buried in it. In general, the Vietnamese M.O. tends to be anti-transparency, and sand is a wonderful concealing agent for the activities of guerilla warfare.)

In their earliest representational phase, a giant female body showed up like an animist goddess arising from the earth, “carved” and conjured into life by a photographer who could spot and skillfully seize the chiaroscuro at the moment of her birth. It’s probably not coincidental that the first photo of this genre (that I know of) was taken while the deadly famine of 1945 was raging up in the North. (Some historians point to this crisis as a decisive turning point in the revolutionary anti-colonial mission and momentum.)

In the late 1960s, photographer Trần Cao Lĩnh shot what is possibly the most popular photo of this kind, likely because it's the most explicit in form. The title “Nõn Nà,” which means “white and silky” and is used to refer to the complexion of a refined woman (not a peasant), was naughtily translated into English as “Voluptuous” and into French as “Volupté.” The sand of Mũi Né is paler than the other red dune areas in the country, so in the social hierarchy of “skin” color, it's a more favorable tone and location for this kind of revelation. Furthermore, Trần Cao Lĩnh, himself, once compared the dunes to a “mother's breast taut with milk,” making it



Nõn Nà, Trần Cao Lĩnh, c. 1960s



Adaptation from *Mũi Né (hít6)*, Minh Quan Tran, (2007)

impossible not to seek out exposures of fertile nude women here. In the photo, the sunlight and shade on the sand curves create the shape of her, identifiable mainly from a pronounced shadowy pubic mound with a set of attached legs. There's also a hint of an ecstatically upstretched arm. The largest shadow creates a dark hole beneath her body—the cave from whence she arose. This “invagination” beckons the viewer to enter.

Tapping into long understood Taoist beliefs that animate the Vietnamese spiritual universe, caves, grottos and caverns are the mysterious dwellings of immortals, fairies and supernatural beings where illicit, decadent and transgressive activities are transpiring. Categories are fluid here in this tavern cavern with different casts of characters, potions and elements flowing in and out. Moreover, in Buddhist beliefs, the cave is the hidden inner center of the cosmos and the place containing the concealed seed of Enlightenment. Every change of state in Buddhism takes place in the darkness and can be observed when the sun comes out. This being so, the moniker, *động*, acknowledges the dunes as a revered spiritual and erotic pseudo-sacred place.

Suddenly the term *động*, as it refers to an urban brothel, makes sense! (Although, the truth is that I had discovered all this in the reverse. I understood why the all-pervading postcards of dunes were not as banal as they appeared after I learned about this *động* and *động*-as-whorehouse colloquialism.) In Vietnam, prostitution is a criminalized “social evil,” so these “caves” are constantly on the move, eluding the police. Like the dunes, they regularly shift form (and venue)—though they are not quite erased to

a virginal state. Vietnamese has a number of ways to categorize prostitutes. In the quaint beer gardens are *gà móng đỏ* (chicken with red fingernails). Whereas nightclubs and discotheques have been known as realms of *ca ve*. For a long time I was baffled about *ca ve*—what it meant and where it came from. It didn't sound Vietnamese. But then I connected the dunes. And thanks to that slang, a term that Ralph Waldo Emerson would have considered “fossil poetry,” now these ladies of the night are imbued with an otherworldly aura.



The background of the cover is an aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a complex network of water channels and land. A diagonal line splits the image: the upper-left portion is a dark, textured blue, while the lower-right portion is a solid, vibrant blue. The title is printed in white serif font on the black background.

the memory
of water

by Öykü Tekten

12.

i begin without knowing what i am not supposed to say here until i say it.
according to jimmie durham, this is called the italo calvino model.

after almost being choked to death, a child spits out a large button and
recounts the survival story to those around in one clear line: *i breathed through
the holes.*

an old pain has been revisiting me for the past few months, which made me
change the title of this piece more than ten times though the content has stubbornly
remained the same.

yesterday i did a quick google search and found a somewhat convincing
answer to the question i have been asking myself. the color of pain must be ultra-
violet since it is invisible to the human eye (except for the newborn) as one's
pain to others. *if a color cannot cure, can it at least incite hope?*

yes.

i remember vividly an afternoon painted in yellow in one of my geographically unlocatable childhood towns. this was the day my great grandmother fetched two guys, perhaps brothers, from the edge of town to help her find some underground water for the parched piece of land where she grew everything that we ate or traded for things she couldn't grow herself. this must be after the entire town – a total of fifty people, more or less – walked up to a nearby hill to pray for the rain gods and goddesses because of months-long drought that same year. it did rain on the way back home, maybe for a minute or two. a terrible joke it was, not a miracle.

everything smelled like raw fear and strawberries those days.

the water finders came only with two tools – one with a half-moon size ear, the other a giant, ugly-beautiful nose. they spent some time smelling and listening to the ground like wild animals quietly looking for food in some desert. their silence silenced everything else until the ear-man stopped where the poplar tree was, his ear still pressed hard to the ground, and said, “there is hope here.”

we immediately believed him and left our dry mouths at the edge of his voice. we had no other choice anyway while the thick air kept breathing heavily through the holes of our souls. the well must still be there.

i also immediately believed this passage when i stumbled upon it this morning: *the memory of water, along with the indivisibility of particles and the black hole hypothesis (there being a secret correspondence between all these things), is the greatest*

gift science has made to the imagination in recent times. even if this function remains eternally improbable, it is true, from now on, as a metaphor for the mind.

i find the whole notion of hope utterly useless, if not entirely harmful, if it is directed towards some unknown future – all futures, as you might know, remain hopelessly unknown – but the hope that the ear-man made available for us on that yellowed afternoon was in aid of the arid present, the curable imperfectness with no high expectations. no scientific certainty either. that's the kind of hope i like to nurture and keep around the house.

to be taken out of one's place is a wound that hardly forms a scab over itself. it is recommended that you find a moist patch of skin to cover the (w) hole. fresh cucumbers or earth-colored vegetables would do the job, a self-help book suggests.

you see, i am not the most articulate one when it comes to telling some personal tragedies in the form of jokes, but i can tell you, with utmost clarity, that if you call *an exile a true patriot*, you make a fatal mistake. what i really mean is that by attaching the word "patriot" to the word "exile," you can truly break someone's heart, and this heartbreak could be translated as "half-dead" in my mother tongue. this is no joke.

in conversation with juan goytisolo, neyire gül ışık begins a sentence with how compelling it is to deal with the question of one's roots to which goytisilo responds: "humans are not trees. they can, after all, stand up and walk away." this was in the early eighties.

my *reluctance to clarity* is not about my *muddle-headedness* or the lack of respect for contradictions; it is simply pain-induced. also, the soothing memory of a childhood afternoon i have just told you about might have never existed since i cannot locate the town on google maps.

and yet *the memory of water hypothesis* is more exciting from a poetic than a scientific point of view. it also feels great to imagine that there might still be places on earth left uncharted and deemed insignificant by the civilized crowd and their machines.

why does one remember? a void must be in need of recognition. or because your crooked spine is a constant reminder of the incurable condition called the human on which your whole existence rests. or simply because you had to replace the amount of wine you drank daily with the same amount of water to flush the pain out of your body. water, instead of wine, hasn't helped much with the suffering, but is a great memory booster. no doubt.

i am still not sure whether it is worse when the freedom of one's body is seized from within, but it is extra painful to be confined in bed for weeks right after getting my passport back and spitting that large button called fear out of my parched throat. this, too, is a terrible joke.

goytisolo was forced into exile because of a fucking dictator who wouldn't die for a long time even after he actually did. so *juan the landless* spent most of his life crossing borders, conspiring with other state-orphans, learning languages,

and turning this restless world into his vast dwelling place through writing. let me assure you that he was anything but a patriot.

if you are interested in the scientific explanation of how the ear-man located the water, you can ask the poplar tree – it must still be there. what interests me is the memory of water that cannot possibly be traced by any human machine, including my own mind. and there is also this compelling (!) question of one's roots.

here is my most definite and accurate answer to it:



**the excerpts in italics are told or written by laura garcia lorca, maggie nelson, jean baudrillard, jimmie durham, neyire gül ışıık, and juan goytisolo.*

***special thanks to the nurse who tucked me into the MRI machine and handed me a green plastic button to alert her in case i panicked and couldn't breathe through the hole.*

****i cannot figure out to whom the photo credit goes -the machine, its maker, the nurse, or to all?*



Cabazon Dinosaurs, California, USA

by Lindsey A. Freeman

13.

*Everything depends on the feel of an
atmosphere and the angle of arrival.*

Kathleen Stewart, “Worlding Refrains”

*The dinosaurs aren’t dead
and they never will be.*

Wendy Murphy, Claude Bell’s daughter

It is best to happen upon the Cabazon Dinosaurs on an American road trip, something immense and wanting—where out there on the road you can start to feel cinematic, like the music you are listening to and the scenes you are witnessing through the windshield matter a little more than before, when the dream pop of Still Corners on the car stereo starts to feel metaphorical and a DeLorean on a tow truck becomes allegorical. In this state you are easily pulled off I-10 and toward the three-story dinosaurs standing tall on the desert roadside with the mountains to their backs. Those mountains create what climate scientists call a rain shadow, a dry area where

mountains prevent the movement of rain-producing weather systems and create a “shadow” of dryness. Some say that in these shadows, which are often quite bright, things can get hallucinatory.

The dinosaurs were made in the 1960s by Claude Bell, a sculptor and entrepreneur, who wanted to draw people to his Wheel Inn restaurant, which sat adjacent. The Wheel Inn closed several years ago after over fifty years in business, but the sculptures have become a lure in their own right. Dinny, an Apatosaurus, and Mr. Rex are examples of biomorphic architecture, where the design influenced by life forms and the building materials create an aesthetic harmony. You can climb inside both dinosaurs; in the belly of Dinny you can buy souvenirs, and from the head of Mr. Rex you can contemplate the Mojave, the open road, or the future.

Bell’s dinosaurs are made from and for the American road. This is not a metaphor: their skeletons were formed from spare material salvaged from the construction of I-10, steel and other slough from roadwork. Dinny’s face is shotcrete (spray-on concrete) scowl, while Mr. Rex seems caught in a continuous steel roar. Bell dreamed of transforming his dinosaurs at nighttime with brightly illuminated eyes and mouths spitting fire, scaring drivers, but this was never realized. Tonight, if you drive by, you will see them glowing softly green and red in the dark, less menace, more marvelous.

The sense of arrival, of standing at the feet of these prehistoric beasts is like a phone call from the road, the connections feel slightly off, the tight



coils of everyday life seem loosened, and it isn't hard to feel like a fugitive against a green-lit backdrop on your way to Paris, Texas, or like a small town waitress dreaming of Paris, France, while sitting behind the teeth of a T-Rex. You could be in a hunter green convertible with your ponytail blowing in the wind to the tune of "Everybody Wants to Rule the World," or, like those Oasis brothers in the desert singing "Supersonic," or like Pee-Wee Herman just dropped off by Large Marge. Between Palm Springs and Joshua Tree it feels like anything could happen.

After Claude Bell died, a group of creationists briefly owned the Cabazon dinosaurs. The creationists believed that there was something in our DNA that drew us to dinosaurs, something lodged in our cells telling us that our human ancestors walked the earth with these creatures. The young earth believers slapped their motto “by design, not by chance” on the eccentric church grounds. Their ministry on the site was short lived, something couldn’t hold, whether economic or spiritual. The California desert has always seemed like a dice roll to me, a kind of pressing your luck. You hit the road and see what happens, you get in a meditative state, like the character in Joan Didion’s *Play it as it Lays*, cracking a hard-boiled egg on the steering wheel at seventy miles an hour, and maybe you find god or maybe you find something else huge.





The Purr-Loined Letter: Another Case of Feline Absence

by Kári Driscoll

It seems everywhere you look cats are not there. No doubt it was always thus, but clearly there are moments in history when the problem of feline absence is felt more acutely than in others. One such is the interwar period in Europe, when the ontological and epistemological status of cats becomes a matter of great concern for writers and thinkers. Hence, when, in November 1920, Rilke boldly declared that “il n’y a pas de chats” [*there are no cats*],¹ he was merely channelling a more general sense that the existence and whereabouts of felines were becoming increasingly uncertain.

Some sixteen years later (roughly eighty in cat years), Rilke’s dictum would be given a more geographically specific, or some might say incoherent, twist by none other than James Joyce, who, during a sojourn in Denmark in 1936, wrote to his grandson Stephen to say that “there are no cats in Copenhagen.”² What might have brought about this Scandinavian brand of feline absence? This was

not the first cat-themed letter Joyce had sent Stephen. A few weeks earlier, while still in the north of France, Joyce had sent him a story about the wily mayor of Beaugency, who tricks the devil into building a bridge across the Loire by sacrificing a cat. Apparently, Joyce had also sent his grandson a “small cat filled with sweets” and was evidently hoping to repeat the gesture upon his arrival in Denmark but this plan was thwarted by the lack of suitably hollow cats. This, at least, is the explanation given in the preface to the illustrated edition of the letter, which was recently published under somewhat dubious circumstances. The Zurich James Joyce Archive, where the letter is housed, issued a statement saying the text had been published without their knowledge or consent, and that the publisher had effectively purloined the letter; the publisher, in turn, insisted that the text was in the public domain, calling the Archive’s meddling “unlawful” and “morally reprehensible.”³ Be that as it may, the preface ventures an interpretation of the story, such as it is, namely that it presents a criticism of capitalist “fat cats.” Elsewhere, the book’s publisher, Anastasia Herbert, is quoted as saying that Joyce is “commenting on fascism, even in its guise as communism, with the ‘red boys’ carrying out the orders of the Politburo.”⁴ Maybe so, but this still doesn’t explain the lack of cats in Copenhagen in 1936. I wonder if perhaps it doesn’t have something to do Erwin Schrödinger, whose infamous thought experiment had been published the year before and was designed to highlight some of the apparent absurdities of the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics.⁵

Schrödinger’s cat is simultaneously the most famous and most frequently misconstrued thought experiment in modern physics. The setup is as simple as

it is perverse: A cat is placed inside a steel box, along with “diabolical” device [*Höllenmaschine*] consisting of a Geiger counter, a small amount of radioactive substance, and a flask of hydrocyanic acid. There is a fifty-fifty chance of one of the atoms decaying over the course of an hour. If that happens, the device is rigged to break the flask, thus killing the cat. In the event that no atom decays within an hour, the cat lives to die another day. According to quantum mechanics, the variables of the system (in this case, decayed/dead vs. not decayed/alive) are indeterminate or “blurred” [*verschmiert*] up until the moment of measurement, at which point one of the possible outcomes will turn out to have been the case. Karen Barad has helpfully outlined some of the popular misconceptions of Schrödinger’s paradox, e.g. that the cat is *both* alive *and* dead at the same time, or that it is *either* alive *or* dead but we just don’t know which (i.e. that it is a purely epistemological problem), or what she calls “the bizarre, metaphysically hyperschizophrenic ‘many worlds’ interpretation in which each measurement that is performed splits the world into multiple parallel universes that are realizations of each possibility and are entirely inaccessible to one another (in which case the cat in question is alive in some worlds and not in others).”⁶ Schrödinger’s concern is that while this is all well and good at the microscopic level, if quantum behaviors “leak” into the macroscopic domain we end up with a cat “smeared out” [*verschmiert*] in all directions, and that can’t be right. Hence, Barad writes, “the correct way to understand what this superposition (or ‘blurring’) stands for, is to understand that *the cat’s fate is entangled with the radioactive source*—and not merely epistemically, as Schrödinger and others suggest, but *ontically*; that is, the cat and the atom do not *have* separately determinate states of *existence*,

and, indeed, there is no determinately bounded and propertied entity that we normally identify with the word ‘cat,’ independently of some measurement that resolves the indeterminacy and specifies the appropriate referents for the concepts of ‘cat’ and ‘life state’.”⁷

In other words, unless you can figure out how to measure them, there are no cats in the Copenhagen Interpretation. Perhaps Joyce just wasn’t looking hard enough. But then, as Carlo Rovelli says, “at an elementary level there are no cats [...], but we do not for this reason cease to bother with cats.”⁸ The same, of course, is true of Copenhagen and all the other places where cats confront us with their absence.



Notes

- 1 Rainer Maria Rilke, preface to *Mitsou: Forty Images*, by Balthus, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1984), 9–13, here: 13. On this dictum, see Dominic Pettman, “Electric Caresses,” *Cabinet: A Quarterly of Art and Culture*, no. 59 (Fall 2015), 34–38; and Kári Driscoll, “‘Il n’y a pas de chats’: Feline Absence and/as the Space of Zoopoetics,” in *Texts, Animals, Environments: Zoopoetics and Ecopoetics*, ed. Frederike Middelhoff et al. (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 2019), 159–74.
- 2 James Joyce, *The Cats of Copenhagen*, illus. Casey Sorrow (New York: Scribner, 2012).
- 3 “James Joyce children’s book sparks feud.” *BBC News*, February 10, 2012.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Erwin Schrödinger, “Die gegenwärtige Situation in der Quantenmechanik,” *Die Naturwissenschaften* 23, no. 48 (1935), 807–12.
- 6 Karen Barad, Living in a Posthumanist Material World: Lessons from Schrödinger’s Cat,” in *Bits of Life: Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology*, ed. Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 165–76, here: 169.
- 7 Ibid., 170; original emphasis.
- 8 Carlo Rovelli, *The Order of Time*, trans. Erica Segre and Simon Carnell (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 147.



The Radar-Type

by Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan

In 1961, American sociologist David Riesman and his colleagues described a shift underway in the sociality of Americans, particularly those in the larger cities and employed in the tertiary sectors such as advertising, consulting, and entertainment, as—he claimed—they increasingly turned towards their fellow men, the media, and their environment to orient their values and their conduct. Earlier generations, he suggested, had been endowed with a sort of “psychological gyroscope.”¹ Like the real gyroscope of naval navigation and warfare, the psychological gyroscope provided its holder with a set of constant bearings in the world, a cartographic schema that remained reliable in the face tumultuous—even deadly—external conditions. These inner-directed types were, in Riesman’s estimation, being succeeded by a new sociality of other-directed types who relied on a different apparatus of orientation: “The other-directed person,” he argued, “must be able to

receive signals from far and near; the sources are many, the changes rapid. What can be internalized, then, is not a code of behavior but the elaborate equipment needed to attend to such messages and occasionally to participate in their circulation... [and the] one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse *anxiety*. This control equipment, instead of being like a gyroscope, is like a radar.”² The radar-type was perpetually scanning the horizon, as it were, sending out signals and receiving messages, and establishing bearings by reference to a peer group on the one hand, and an electronically-mediated “screen of words”³ on the other.

Following a suggestion from my colleague, Nina Franz of Weimar, I’d like to suggest that the emergence of the radar-type denotes not only a figure of speech but also a complex refashioning of technology and subjectivity in the mid-twentieth century.⁴ Consider a 1956 episode of the American television broadcast, *Science in Action*, which opened with host Earl Herald’s call for Americans to practice a new vigilance over time and space. “[T]oday,” he explained, “our two oceans, one on either side of the country, are no longer barriers to a sudden surprise attack.” The television screen cut to shots of an enemy fighter in flight, followed by images of an American city turned coal black, as mushroom clouds thrusting into the sky filled the screen. “Now what we saw there,” Herald explained, “could happen to any of us. Fortunately, it is the responsibility of the United States Air Force to prevent such disasters. The old lantern of Paul Revere’s time has given way to the electronic eye which sweeps the sky both by day and

by night to prevent the arrival of any unwelcome intruder. So let's look now at our radar defense screen."

When Herald spoke of a radar defense screen, he did not mean literally the surface of electronically generated image but rather the complex system of humans and machines constellated around radar that allowed for the erection of defensive perimeter around the Continental United States. Over the next half hour, Herald and his guest, Brigadier General James W. Andrew of the United States Air Force, introduced their audience to a network of computers, planes, radar observatories, antiaircraft missiles, human operators, and plane interceptors tightly bound into this defensive system capable of warding off Soviet efforts to breach the American territory with bombers carrying nuclear destruction in their belly. From these kinds of mid-century radar networks—source of the earliest interactive digital interfaces, developed and theorized by JCR Licklider—emerged the digital screen. In those early screens appeared a number of familiar features for today's screens: Images that flicker and refresh continuously, that are organized according to mathematically defined grids and coordinates, composed of data that is partial and modular in order to allow for real-time modification by its users, and the pairing of external instruments such as the "light gun" to allow for haptic interaction with the screen. These displays synthesized dozens of data streams, including radar observations, weather reports, pre-scheduled flight plans, and reports by civilian observer corps. The screen belonged to a console packed with push-buttons and allowed operators to

quickly call up and mask these layers of data and identify hostile fighters to the computer tracking system by means of a point-and-click light gun. These rooms packed with screens inevitably belonged to a longer chain of screens running from local radar observatory to centralized regional and national defense networks that furnished comprehensive and up-to-date pictures available of the frontiers of the American territory on the basis of which the American president himself would be advised whether or not to launch nuclear strikes and counter-strikes.

The appearances of these screens – and human subjects networked together, on perpetual alert for incoming signals, ready to respond to updates at a moment's notice– was part of a larger strategic response to the unraveling of visibility and space before the advance of radiation, high-speed warfare, and human-machine networks. By the mid-twentieth century, radiation, rockets, and atomic warfare formed a trio of technologies that superseded traditional modes of territorial control and perceptual apprehension. The warning that this “could happen to any of us” paired with moving images of mass destruction, and marked the violent limits that radiation imposed on traditional mechanisms of screening and visualization.⁵ Joined together with the power of rocketry and long-range bombers, this threat demanded the erection of new screens: a defensive shield that outlined American territory, for one thing, but also an optical digital surface, modelled on the radar screen but powered by a digital computer that synthesized images of the U. S. territory produced from the collaboration of humans and machines. This



synthesis itself appeared on the screen but was also the result of an ongoing filtering or “screening” process, whereby operators selected between a surfeit of data streams and visualizations, using the light gun and the array of buttons to identify flight tracks and select between different layers of data. These selections, in turn, were screened to a composite image at the nearby control center, which—working in communication with the president—launched planes, commanded missiles, called up soldiers, and commanded civilian observers. Together these screens created a new territory of action—neither entirely virtual nor entirely actual, but decidedly real in every respect, distributed not only across the sprawling territory of the North American continent but also an infinitely expandable surface of human subjects, networked together, in endless relays of perpetual attention.

Notes

- 1 David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 16.
- 2 Ibid., 25.
- 3 Ibid., 21.
- 4 Thank you to Nina Franz of Weimar and Berlin for bringing this comparison to my attention, particularly in reference to Helmut Lethen's account of radar types in *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 187–94. For more on the links between Riesmann's sociological description and the technology of radar, see Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, "Cognitive and Perceptual Training in the Cold War Man-Machine System," in *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, ed. Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 267–93.
- 5 Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

**New Horizons
of Exhaustion:**
Mapping Poland in the
Karakoram

by Margret Grebowicz

16.

On March 5, 2013, a team of four Polish mountaineers completed the first winter ascent of Broad Peak, one of the fourteen peaks over 8000 meters high that make up the Crown of the Himalaya. Maciej Berbeka, Adam Bielecki, Tomasz Kowalski, and Artur Małek had been at Base Camp since January, terminating multiple summit bids due to high winds. Berbeka had had Broad Peak in his sights since his first failed winter ascent in 1988, when he was sure he'd summited alone because his partner had turned back due to exhaustion, and only later, seeing photographs, realized the wind had shifted the snow and confused him visually. He'd waited all these years for a second chance, and this time, the 59-year old Berbeka was successful.

He and Tomasz Kowalski – the 27-year-old, much less experienced and much more fatigued – separated from their teammates and summited a bit late in the day. The other two, Bielecki and Małek, would later be

bitterly criticized by the alpinist community for breaking with protocol by losing the visual on the slower pair while they ascended at their own pace. On the descent, Kowalski had serious trouble breathing, and fell and broke a crampon, which he had to remove his gloves in order to fix. The pair decided to bivouac, camping without proper equipment at 7,900 m. while the others slept at Camp IV. The next day, as Bielecki and Małek made it back to Base Camp, a storm closed in. A lone figure, probably Berbeka, was sighted one last time, still at 7,900 m., in the storm, slow, lost. Two days later, expedition leader Krzysztof Wielicki called off the search and Berbeka and Kowalski were declared dead.¹ Their winter ascent of Broad Peak remains on the books, coldly impervious to the details.²



K2 is neither the tallest mountain in the world, nor does it have the highest fatality rate, an honor that goes to Annapurna prior to 1990, and Kangchenjunga since. But it's considered the world's hardest climb. After the first successful summit in 1954, 23 years passed before it was summited again in 1977. Philosopher and climber, Heidi Howkins Lockwood, has attempted it twice, without summiting, and speaks in almost mystical terms: "The mountain definitely is one with a distinct character and personality. It

lives up to its name³—it's absolutely relentless.” This is attributable to many factors, like its steepness and the unusually long distance one must walk just to get to the base; a route without villages in which to sleep or restock supplies. Still, none of these identifiable things exhaustively explains K2’s power over the imagination. “Not just the gradient, but the whole aura of the mountain wears on you. It's a mountain that you walk away from with a certain sense of awe and humility.”⁴

Although its peak has now been climbed by almost all of its ridges, K2 is the last 8000er that hasn’t yet been summited in winter. Since Himalayan mountaineering consists of three major categories in terms in terms of which the 8000ers are ticked off the list (first ascents, ascents without supplemental oxygen, and winter ascents), this is, at least within the reigning mountaineering imaginary, the last thing still to be done.

Until 2005 every winter ascent of an 8000er had been made by exclusively Polish teams, whom *National Geographic* had nicknamed “Ice Warriors,” and even the international team that broke this long run had a Pole in it, Piotr Morawski, who summited Shishapangma with the Italian Moro. In 2002, when six peaks still remained – and when Wielicki was already a climbing legend, with the first winter ascent of Everest on his record – he issued his “Winter Manifesto.” Referring to the golden decade of Polish alpinism, the 1980s, and climbers like Maciej Berbeka and himself, he enticed new Polish climbers to “finish it.”



We have done one half of the job. Now it's your turn to finish it: you, the young, angry, and ambitious. We are giving you eight years, the same time as we needed. It's fair enough, isn't it? If you could pull it off, wouldn't it be great? Can you imagine that? All 8000-meter peaks conquered for the first time in winter, all by Poles. There is a chance for success. It is a game worth devoting time, money, and efforts to. Now is the time to make decisions.... There is little time left!⁵

The text is a passionate critique of the new mountaineering culture. Since the fall of the Eastern Bloc, climbers had stopped looking for new

routes and traverses, Wielicki argues. “Generally, there is a fad for easy and pleasant climbing, preferably at weekends because it does not require sacrificing your time or career. It has to be fun. It has to be cool. As for our Polish scene, the Sports Committees, if they exist at all, lack creativity.” Wielicki himself was not only on the teams that had made first winter ascents of Everest, Kangchenjunga, and Lhotse—he had once “run” Broad Peak solo, the only person to climb it from base to summit and back in 24 hours. But now, he complains, “no one dreams of climbing the great walls of the Himalayas, of new routes, traverses.” He bemoans the ease with which it’s possible to “climb Mt. Everest if you have cash and if not, another easy 8000-meter mountain, as long as it’s fast and easy.”⁶ He pleads for dreams and imagination.

There are good reasons to be wary of the Manifesto’s nationalistic undertones: the history of mountaineering is rife with big displays of national pride, from Hillary and Norgay’s Everest, which coincided with Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation, to Wanda Rutkiewicz, the first Pole on Everest, summiting on the same day as Karol Wojtyła was declared Pope John Paul II. Such gestures continue through today and seem especially popular in Poland. For instance, the project Polish Himalaya 2018—a combined supermarathon through the streets of Kathmandu, followed by a trek to Everest Base Camp, culminating an all-Polish, massive group Everest ascent, all under the title “Everyone Can Have Their Everest”—was scheduled to coincide with the centennial of Poland’s independence in 2018.⁷ Given that

on this same date in 2017 over 60,000 nationalists and fascists from across Europe marched through the streets of Warsaw, the nationalistic tones of contemporary mountaineering are no mere detail.

Upon closer examination, however, Wielicki's text isn't properly nationalistic in the least. His mentions of Poland are almost incidental, and he never actually calls for commitment to one's nation. The point rather is that something extraordinary and unique has happened in alpinism, a notoriously individualistic and international sport: one nation had suddenly, unexpectedly emerged as dominant to this degree, as arguably the strongest and most audacious climbers in the history of the sport. Jerzy Kukuczka was the second man to ascend all fourteen 8000ers, after Messner, but it took Kukuczka under eight years, exactly half the time it had taken Messner, and his speed record wasn't beaten for another 27 years. Rutkiewicz is still routinely considered the world's greatest woman climber, as the first woman to summit K2, and as both the first European woman and first Pole on Everest. That they happen to be Polish in particular is interesting, but not nearly as interesting as that they happen to be from the same country at all—much less from a country so lacking in resources at that time⁸—and of the same generation.

It's bizarre.

And Wielicki seems more interested in the productive possibilities of this bizarreness than in anything Poland-specific. The first ascents of those

eight peaks afforded a nation an opportunity no nation had had or ever would again: “All 8000-meter peaks conquered for the first time in winter, all by [citizens of one country].” If said citizens failed to finish the job, that singular, bizarre opportunity would be lost—to the world—forever. Finishing the job required not only courage and physical strength, but something more precious and rare: a hunger for the weird, for the event. Wielicki mourns the loss of this hunger.

Poles never did “finish it” and perhaps because of this, the scarcity of imagination announced by Wielicki’s “there is little time left!” rings ever truer. This is no longer Mallory’s mountaineering, motivated by the mountain’s immovable thereness. On the contrary, it’s a warning that the mountains won’t be there forever, and that, along with their thereness, our own is on the line. Today one climbs because there’s something vulnerable and retreating, something like life itself.

During the winter climbing season of 2017-18, the now 68-year-old Wielicki led a new all-Polish K2 expedition. The week of March 5th, still quite far from the summit, he declared that they would turn back because conditions were too dangerous. Even prior to this climb, the *New York Times* feature about the team described the mountain in awestruck tones, as “the most hostile tip of the planet..., a northern loner..., mythical and moody and deadly.” “K2 is the forbidding exception.” “Its walls are vertiginous no matter the approach.” “K2 routinely kills those trapped on its flanks.” “Those who stand within the shadow of that monolith in winter describe

a sensation akin to having landed on an extraterrestrial world. All is black and white and gray with periodic wild flashes of razor-blue sky and sun.” “K2’s fastness is so complete, it acquired no dependable name from the Balti tribes, who for millenniums [sic] did not know of its existence.” “And yet, God, that mountain.”⁹ Stories from that expedition include Adam Bielecki and Denis Urubko’s heroic rescue of Elizabeth Revol from Nanga Parbat, for which they received a prestigious Climbing Award from the American Alpine Club, and Urubko’s decision to break away and attempt to summit solo, in open defiance of Wielicki, for which he was unceremoniously expelled from the team and sent home. The final decision to turn back and go home only heightens the overall drama. What exactly is at stake?

As Baudrillard shows, practices like mountaineering, which he compares to running a marathon and the moon landing, have the effect of exhausting their own meanings. Because they are preprogrammed to succeed before they even happen—otherwise it would never occur to anyone to attempt them—when these ostensibly shocking feats finally take place, they are actually “of no consequence.”

I climbed Annapurna: “I did it!”

The moon landing is the same kind of thing: “We did it!” The event was really not so surprising; it was an event preprogrammed into the course of science and progress. We did it. But it has not revived the millenarian dream of conquering space. In a sense, it has exhausted it.¹⁰

Thus, the tension of the present moment—as the Poles prepare for their next K2 bid—hangs on the idea that this is precisely a final frontier. These historic climbs—however they turn out—tell the story of this last mountain itself, of its recalcitrance, of everything mountains have meant for climbing. We trumpet K2’s fastness and indifference, its immovability, its wilderness precisely because they’re actually critically endangered, and because we sense, on some level, that along with the exhaustion of mountains, our own is on the horizon.

Notes

1 <http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web13w/newswire-polish-broad-peak-first-winter-ascent>

2 The bodies of Berbeka and Kowalski were reported found on July 7, 2013, exactly two days before Artur Hajzer, another top Pole who had famously completed the first winter ascent of Annapurna with Jurek Kukuczka in 1987, fell 500 m to his death while climbing Gashenbrum I.

3 It’s known as Savage Mountain by the locals.

4 <http://www.mountainzone.com/climbing/misc/howkins/index2.html>

5 <https://himalman.wordpress.com/2007/11/27/winter-manifesto-of-krzysztof-wielicki-manifest-zimowy-krzysztofa-wielickiego-version-polish-and-english/>

6 Ibid.

7 http://www.polskiehimalaje.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=116

8 When Wielicki and Leszek Cichy completed the first winter ascent of Everest, in 1980, it was the first time any Polish alpinists had had access to a Gore-Tex tent, which “the Americans” had lent them for the expedition. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2ugIaMZPzU>

9 Michael Powell, “Scaling the World’s Most Lethal Mountain in the Dead of Winter,” *New York Times* (May 9, 2017). https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/sports/polish-climbers-to-scale-deadly-k2-peak-in-winter.html?hpw&rref=sports&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=well-region®ion=bottom-well&WT.nav=bottom-well&_r=0

10 Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1988 [2010]), 20-21.



The Streets of
London
anywhere, really

by Iain Liddell

17.

Why do walkers choose to walk in a city?

After all, Wordsworth did not exult in a host of golden daffodils springing up on the Hanger Lane Gyrotory System, and Blake is keen to warn us thus:

Great things are done when men and mountains meet;
This is not done by jostling in the street.

I have (in my youth) bagged Munros, have crossed England, Wales and Germany (on separate treks), and have nosed along paths by the Danube and the Derwent. So why did I spend much of 2017 linking up the highest points in all the London boroughs by foot, letting slip the road less travelled, but exploring the suburbs less travelled into?

Within the walking fraternity, there is always a subfraternity of depressives: for some, it may be down to self-sabotage: the marcher as martyr. It pays not to forget this, because (on the half-a-loaf principle), it is surely better for a walker to be out there, even if the ‘there’ could be somewhere with a greater apparent utility. For others, there may be a completist streak: if all the Munros (including the infamous Inn Pinn) are unattainable, then all the London borough summits may provide similar satisfaction — instead of the fireside whisky-warmed reflections at the end of Strauss’s *Alpensinfonie*, it might be reflection on the bus home while kebab joints drift past the windows.

But surely that’s not always the case? Surely not for ace urbanists like Sinclair and Self? When I first got into the description of walking for the (London) *Times*, I brushed past Bernard Levin in his nest on Gray’s Inn Road: this was before his alpine forays (*In Hannibal’s Footsteps*). In one of his columns then, he opined that urban walking was his preference, but with a catch. The sainted British fellwalker A Wainwright (who won gold in the Curmudgeon event at five consecutive Grumpy Olympics) tries to justify his Coast to Coast Walk by sermonising on the need for a goal (in his case, the North Sea). Levin (standing on the shoulders of a giant?) went one better for urban walking — a mere goal was not enough: an urban walk required a *conceit*. His nonpareil urban walk was to start at the statue of the Roman soldier at Tower Hill Tube station in London, cross Tower Bridge and turn upstream, crossing every pedestrian-available bridge as far

as Hampton Court, then returning (thus completing both banks). He kept as close to the River Thames as he could walk, without retracing steps. These rules formed his conceit. I followed the Levin route, and was hooked.

With such a conceit (every borough summit or matching a Tube line as closely as possible on the surface, say), the walker is taken into areas which would normally be ignored, and the constraints provide for discovery. While walking my route round the borough summits (315km, since you ask), I came upon many things I did not expect. A prime example is the “tin mission.” On a trip to the ancient ship burial at Sutton Hoo years ago, the coach driver became entangled in the unfamiliar streetscape of Bury St Edmunds. I’ll say we only passed the dark green corrugated-iron



churchlet once, lest you might suspect the driver to have been Bill Bryson's father, but what was it? It seems that in the expanding towns and suburbs of the second half of the nineteenth century, there was (at least in the minds of the haves) a dearth of churches. And lo, by a vision of St Ikea, flatpack churches began to be churned out in factories in Glasgow, Liverpool, and many other places. The companies even segmented the market, with one specialising in railwaymen's estates, another in aristos' tenantry, and so on. I did not expect to find, on my looping round London, no less than three tin missions (two of which are still churches of sorts, while the third is a land-locked Sea Scout hall). To continue on a similar line of discovery, I came across an ugly sooted-brick Catholic church which exists because of the philanthropy of an ancestor of Diana, Princess of Wales, and then a patch of common land wrested from the same person as he tried to squeeze out the locals from their historic rights.

Among these urban starbursts are the constant layerings of how people live. A greeting-card factory in the midst of houses, shops whose owners cannot even spell their own street-name, and the fascinating micro-gradations of class on a spec-built Victorian estate of lower middle-class houses (just how much carving on the eaves, whether the driveway is ash, paviers or tiles, and so on).

Now, a prophet may be unknown in his country, but few people profit from knowledge of their own country. A walk in the city fires a web of neurons to light up Crystal Palace — and how can anywhere be the homes



of both eight-thousand-voiced *Messiah* performances (wherein the speed of sound had to be factored into the timing of the entrances of sections of the choir and orchestra) and Michael Caine yelling, “You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!”? — oh, and never forget the concrete dinosaurs.

Urban walking brings one in touch with more people than the rural equivalent. At the end of a section of the national A1 walking route in Hungary (the *Kéktúra*), I was making my way through a small town. I

bumped into a local. Using my vastly imperfect command of the Magyar tongue (he had no English at all), I tried to explain why I was walking through his town. When I told him that at home, I walked through a city with as many people as lived in the whole of Hungary, he started asking lots of questions. Our conversation was only halted by the arrival of the Budapest-bound bus. I was exhausted, but before reflecting, *Alpensinfonie* style, on the day's trek across the roof of Hungary, I relived the conversation with a man I never knew, on a subject I never expected to have to turn into Hungarian.

I remember, when lecturing on Robert Louis Stevenson's walk in the Cévennes with his donkey, the bit about travelling being better than the arrival. Was Wainwright too fixated on his paddling goal? Is Levin's conceit necessary? In both cases, partially yes.

Why do I walk the city? I'd say it is for the "trails of the unexpected," for the communing with all sorts, and for its innate democratisation. But you are welcome to call me out as a self-sabotaging depressive. I mean, how would I know?

The London Summits Walk, my Coal Tax Circuit, even my Polish Air Force Heritage Trail may be found at lwalks.london — along with my icy traversal of Schleswig-Holstein and much more.

If you have been, thanks for reading.

A photograph of a bowling lane with several dark bowling balls in the foreground. The image is split diagonally from the top right to the bottom left. The upper right portion is black, and the lower left portion is yellow. The text is overlaid on these colored areas.

Bowling in Pyongyang

by Witold van Ratingen

“Look, whatever you do, don’t fuck around here. This is the holiest of holies for them. Like their Mecca or some shit. Last time, this girl was so hungover she said she might get sick, *inside*. I sweat like a pig, I tell you. If you barf here, I don’t know if you’d get out alive. Once we’re out, I don’t give two shits. Get your ass deported for all I care. But inside, you pull a stunt, I won’t be able to protect you. So fucking behave.”

It was the only time I’d seen something like genuine concern flash in the eyes of our Australian tour guide – a lanky character in his early thirties in the possession of an unfortunate tendency to provide quantitative ratings of the looks of every Korean waitress we came upon. No such trivialities here today. Huddling together, exhaling clouds of condensation in the rime-wreathed lobby, we prepared to enter one of the most restrictive monuments on Earth. A monstrous edifice of about a square mile in area, the

Kumsusan Palace of the Sun is nothing less than the heart of North Korean state mythology: the mausoleum is entirely devoted to hosting the bodies of the Kim Dynasty's deceased leaders and celebrating their accomplishments, ranging from hundreds of dubious honorary doctorates to the alleged invention of the hamburger. Clearly, this wasn't something you had the privilege of doing any other day. We breathlessly checked our bags, made our way through a range of innovative sanitary machinery – air curtains and motorized shoe-scrubbing devices – and consented to a set of simple commands from our Korean guide, whose name, of course, was also Kim. No talking, no touching, no photography. Easy enough.



Once out of the lobby, a series of travellers extending through a seemingly endless corridor sluggishly conveyed us past life-size, hyperrealistic paintings of the Dear Leaders. Inspecting factories, exhorting the workers to toil with superhuman effort towards the construction of the great socialist paradise. Shaking hands with Mao, Khrushchev, Ceaușescu. Out fishing with the kids. An instrumental rendition of the national anthem blasted into our ears, drowning out the faint hum of a thousand air conditioners stubbornly but ineffectually blowing heat into the massive, frosty space. Eventually, we were delivered into a large hall, where we were greeted by two bulky statues of the Kims, Madame Tussauds style, side by side. It is here that we received more detailed directives concerning the appropriate way to pay our respects. Approach the Dear Leaders in groups of four, bow down three times in unison, for about two seconds each time, on each side of the Dear Leader's body. Don't loop around his head. If you feel the need, please sniffle, don't wail.

A tense, devotional silence reigned as we shuffled through a maze of gold-and-marble hallways, until another dust-blowing doorway at last administered us unto the square chamber where "eternal President" Kim Il-Sung's body lied in state, protected from the elements by a transparent crystal sarcophagus. Clad in the unflattering olive uniform characteristic of communist dictators, his skin looked unnaturally radiant, like food prepared specifically for culinary photography. Four soldiers – clenching their teeth as hard as they clutched their rifles – were positioned around the bier.

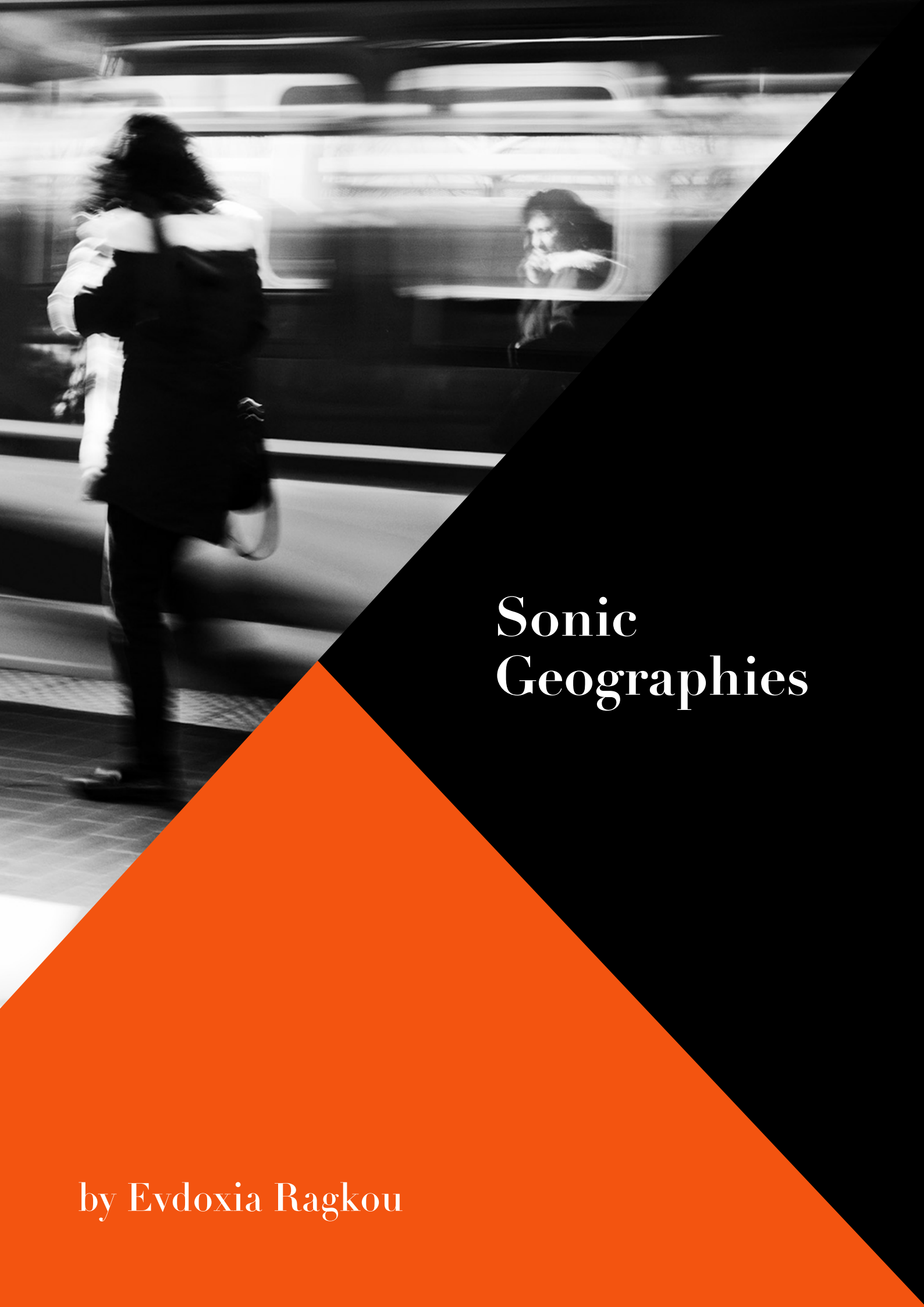


I thought of Freud, who once suggested we all have death drives; instincts for self-destruction or annihilation that might, unchecked, lead us to sever our own lifelines. Perhaps we are afraid of heights, he seemed to suggest, because we fear we can't trust ourselves not to jump. The peculiar, brooding suspense of this catacomb evoked in me a similar latent urge to break rank and throw myself at the bier. The result would probably have been the same. Of course, in the end, Eros proved victorious. I lined up and bowed as instructed.

Before leaving the crypts, we found ourselves accosted by a woman clad in a long and sober mourning gown, who solemnly narrated for us, in a language none of us spoke, the grief that struck the Korean people upon the loss of their Dear Leaders. As her voice faltered and her eyes watered in an evidently well-trained routine, I kept mine fixed on the floor, unsure whether I was vicariously embarrassed for her emotionality or uncomfortable with my own. Then the Mexican next to me sobbed. Our guide later told us that Westerners and Koreans alike break down in that room. Initially, it was that moment that I found hardest to forget: I had never understood the pull of totalitarian aesthetics, and certainly never envisioned myself – or any person of sound mind, for that matter – to be subject to it.

Five years later, however, it isn't the choreographed sentiment that haunts me; ultimately, this was not so different from the tearful eulogies of American politicians and TV pundits for the latest hoary warmonger who croaked. Rather like Arendt, it is the banality that stayed with me. A

swimming pool where, upon entrance, one is greeted by another life-size wax statue of Kim Il-Sung, sporting an abnormally tiny set of swim trunks and a parasol, waving at you with his shiny teeth exposed. Or the bowling alley where, due to the frequent black-outs owing to the nation's slipshod Soviet-era electrical infrastructure, the accumulated scores of the players are haphazardly wiped off the board. We competed, of course, with all the more fervor. It is that seemingly frivolous memory now, most of all, which left me with the unshakeable lingering sense of having been implicated in a Borges story, some colossal and highly suggestive metaphor whose true significance and audience remain, in the final instance, forever beyond our reach.



Sonic Geographies

by Evdoxia Ragkou

19.

Lately, my most challenging adventure in navigating spaces has been the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, or MTA, mostly on the dreaded weekends, when the entire system undergoes changes to accommodate incessant repairs. To go from point A to point B, you now have to take a train that runs on a completely different line, which is itself modified, change it for another train, that also does not run on its own line, and – provided there are no signal or switch problems – you’ll eventually be at your destination. Plan ahead. Leave your residence three hours before, or even four. And, if you’re lucky, you’ll get to your coffee date only 10 minutes late.

While contemplating the subway’s incoherent routes and their alternatives, I couldn’t help but think about a different kind of geography, equally incoherent, if not more: music and sound. (Lately all I’m doing is losing time on a subway car and reclaiming my intimate relationship with sound in creative contexts. So I’ll write about the interesting part.)

Western tonal music, the one we hear on the radio, concert halls, the Lincoln Center, etc., has rules. This is the music I grew up studying. To start and finish writing a song, or symphony, or motet, you have to follow specific rules. To hear the various kinds of western tonal music, and fully understand them, you have to have some idea about these rules. And since sound is made up of air particles traveling through space in time, these sounds are mapping a very specific route of their own.

In very subtle and traditional tonal music you don't go from A to B. You start from point A and you come back to point A. Basically you never completely leave the home base. You go out to run some errands, but you don't end up elsewhere. You always come back home. It's a balancing principle. For example: you go from home to work, then the gym, and then back home. This is your basic route. In music, this journey translates into going from the tonal, to the fourth, then the fifth, and then back to the tonal – the base of all western music. It is the most coherent route from home to home. Your basic stops are work and gym.

However, moving on with your life, you may have kids, get a dog, or you just go out for a drink, or, god forbid, brunch, and this is where things get complicated in terms of following the route. Still, even though you don't follow your usual route, all you do remains local. You don't go far from home. In music, this marks the tonal transitions. You may change the scale within the sonata, or the symphony, but all the scales you visit are closely related to your initial scale, according to the very specific rules mentioned earlier.



And while you have created a fabulously interesting life, making important decisions and experimenting with new jobs, etc., you often don't even come back home. You sleep over at a friend's or lover's place, and no one knows in the end whether you return to home base. Or even worse, you stay at the gym for more than an hour – from lifting you do TRX, and then crossfit, and then some Brazilian jiu jitsu, then hit the sauna for an hour, and then you go have a green juice at the gym's juice bar. And that's it. No one knows what happens after the juice bar.

Historically, harmonic development in music has evolved like this. How many times can one repeat the home-work-gym-work routine and keep it interesting? Things had to develop, plots had to thicken, and tonal or atonal structures



had to keep moving effortlessly. In the twentieth century, no one *had* to go back home, musically speaking. Sometimes, even though there is some insinuation of the existence of a home base, no one goes there; no one even knows where home is. They just know there's a home somewhere.

And then there are verbal and graphic scores, that are sonic maps themselves. (Not to mention improvisation, which creates maps in real time.) And then there is noise and entropy, where sound is mapping all spots in the space it exists. And then there is the notion that even when we do not hear it, sound exists, and proof of that is the sound's very nature; wave particles travelling in air (measurable by machines more sensitive – and perhaps even more discerning – than our own ears). And then there is the anechoic room, where you hear your blood stream and nervous system being hard at work, mapping every little vein and every nerve ending in your body. And somehow music became sound and . . . wait a minute. I thought music and sound were different entities.

And this is when sound becomes very incoherent, like the MTA on the weekends. But somehow you manage to find your way around it, and it makes all the sense in the world, if you pay enough attention and come prepared. Just like when the F train runs through the R line. At first you don't understand why, but in the end you realize that this is the way to serve as many commuters as possible with one less line. The difference is that sound is much more interesting than a subway car.



Space is A Place

by Leila Taylor



Unclaimed emptiness is rare in New York City. But the corner of Lewis Avenue and Chauncey Street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn was empty. I should clarify it wasn't "empty" – there was just nothing there of any value. There was however an abundance of undesirable nature; unplanned and unregulated nature. After decades of suppression under concrete, this scraggly patch of urban flora was defiantly reaching up, taking over, and learning how to be green again. While I'm sure there were community board members complaining – and families of rats luxuriating – a wave of nostalgia came over me at the sight of waist-high overgrown weeds contained behind the chain-link fence. This odd patch of backwoods in the middle of the city felt familiar and soothing to me like Vernor's and Vaporub. As a kid in Detroit, I

remember sitting in the back seat of my parent's car watching the streets go by and counting: house... empty lot...empty lot... house... empty lot... house... house... empty lot . . .

There is an uncanny aura in the empty spaces of Detroit, and something heretical about solid rows of evenly spaced homes, turned gap toothed. Since the Rebellion of '67, the decline of the auto-industry, and years of corruption and bankruptcy, neighborhoods were diminished bit by bit, and the spaces between houses grew, exposing sightlines between structures that were never intended. We think of a view as a selling point, an added value. There is a special kind of eeriness in a view that was never intended to be seen.

The city grid assumes order and civility in its egalitarian distribution of property, and there is something wrong about a landscape created by erasure. The continuity of occupied space is a sign of prosperity and the empty lot signals a failure to thrive. Density is the qualifier of urbanity, from the high-rise apartment building to the brownstones and townhouses that share each other's walls. Houses press up against each other and the space between them gradually expands the further they get from the heart of the city, until we begin to see driveways and lawns. Then lawns become grounds and grounds become land and land becomes wild. The abandoned lot is a tiny piece of wilderness where it has no business being.

The lot is not just space, it is a commodified space, temporarily unaffiliated, suggesting something *should* be there but isn't... yet. The abandoned lot

is a limbo between nothing and something, between a void and property. It is a thing defined by absence. The overgrown, abandoned lot is a little bit spooky, a little bit dangerous, and who knows what could be lurking underneath the Common Yarrow, Mugwort and Lamb's Quarters.

But empty lots don't stay empty for long in New York City. And someone finally mowed the lawn. I'll admit I was a bit sad to see this little jungle tamed. The windowless wall of the house next to the nothingness was exposed, revealing an expanse of concrete and the two extruded vertical rectangles of the chimneys. It's a wall that was never intended to be seen, and it looked naked and vulnerable, with its bad side showing to Google maps. Without the weeds the lot looked meek and unfinished, leaving behind uneven patches, like an adolescent beard. It's not mysterious anymore, it's just embarrassing. And I'm reminded that the delightful discombobulation I felt at first comes with systemic neglect, economic strife, and vulnerability to opportunistic real estate developers. As the neighborhood gradually shifts from black to white, as the brownstones transition from old single family homes to new individual apartments, perhaps the wild weeds reminded me of the city of my childhood, as well as the New York of my 20s: something still a bit chaotic, a bit messy, and sometimes a bit scary.

I don't live in Bed-Stuy anymore, and I don't know what's become of the patch. I'm assuming it was purchased by someone and something will either be erected in its place or it will remain a space but with purpose, a little park named after someone important or a community garden. Human beings dislike a vacuum, and something will always come to fill in the gaps. My old school in

Detroit, the Friends School, was recently torn down, and it broke my heart to see it razed into nothingness. This was the place where I met my best friend, where I discovered Siouxsie & the Banshees and Anne Rice, where I had my first crush and first disappointment, where I read books that were too old for me, and where I wrote horrible poetry.

A few years ago, I visited the school and was amazed at how small everything seemed. And yet the art room looked exactly the same as I remembered it, nearly thirty years later. Something else is being built in its place, so the lot will skip its awkward abandonment phase. Detroit is, after all, the Renaissance City, reborn again and again. Some of those spaces are occupied by new structures and some have remained, now made useful as community gardens. I'm glad of it. After all, people still live in those thinned out neighborhoods. There are still families in the houses that are still standing. We're just further apart.



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