

FINDING PLACES TO MAKE PLACES

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complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

Placed in the context of ongoing moral disaster, *Finding Places to Make Places* is a discussion of language and poetic usefulness, specifically how collective discourse survives the unimaginable through personal recourse. It examines the ideology of cultural superiority and intellectual migration in public squares and private homes. With skepticism and love, this poetry and poetics attempts to explain the failure and potential at the heart of revolutions: the impulse to launch the experience of an individual into a communal existence across time. It is meant to speak, with many voices, beyond these known failures and into our many futures. It is a defense of the art of poetry as a means to evoke the necessary accommodations human beings can make to survive what is unsurvivable. The organizing principle for the poetries has been divided into a curious binary that works to mirror both the similarities and differences in the concepts of each section. These political and/or personal poems demonstrate the culture-bound logistics and flourishings and shortcomings of certain poetic voices during the Cuban Revolution of 1953-59, the Cultural Revolution in China of 1966-79, the Civil War of Lebanon of 1975-90 and the Arab Spring in the MENA region of 2010-11, as well as ongoing revolutions in the lands currently known as the United States and Canada. The poems center around healing these wounded places in the often more ambitiously universal interiors of the psyche.

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INTRODUCTION



Finding Places to Make Places

Alexei Perry Cox

*for Isla and Ilham:
the future revolves around you and your future revolutions*

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*Anybody who thinks that they can understand how terrible the terror has been,
without understanding how beautiful the beauty has been
against the grain of the terror, is wrong.*

- Fred Moten

REVOLUTION

RE:EVOLUTION

REVOLUTION

**Quien quiere hacer encuentra soluciones,
quien no quiere hacer encontrará justificación. – Raúl**

We all feel a morbid attraction to terror and at the same time, all terror consumes us in a parallel likeness, though its external manifestations may be, or seem, different.

tr. Who wants to find solutions, who doesn't find excuses.

**No nos engañamos creyendo que en lo adelante todo será fácil.
Quizás en lo adelante todo sea más difícil. – Fidel**

That's what I've felt, while many people throw themselves into the sea, crazed by the flattened death in which "it doesn't matter," or in the long wait for a life they dreamed.

tr. Let's not deceive ourselves believing that from now on everything will be easy. Perhaps everything from now on will be more difficult.

Mujer es revolución. – Baracoa

For that abuse of fate, I interjected the word's refuge into the construction of spaces of relation, between the mother I once was and the daughter I'll be. If I revisit that instant, it's because it gives me the possibility of building a sketch confining the subject to a question of why. Everything is prior and subsequent.

tr. A woman is a revolution.

Gigante moral que crece cada día más. – Baracoa

The day I complete the book, I arrive at its beginning. With your birth, it comes back to life. Nothing about this happens by chance. We don't choose. We just tilt the re-encounter a little more toward a particular position in space and time.

tr. A moral giant who is getting bigger every day.

La revolución pujante y victoriosa sigue adelante. – Radio Esmeralda

In culture there's a reversability to biological time: the future determines the present much more than the past does. It's true – the scientists say – that the entropy in an open system diminishes. I know nothing of exact sciences, just intuit the system open to creation and time's mobility in multiple directions toward.

tr. The vigorous and victorious revolution forges ahead.

Fue una estrella quien te puso aqui y te hizo de este. – Che

I wanted to give you advice about something but held off. Advise you or lie to you about what? So I set aside everything I had compiled and gave preference instead to spelling out what was taking shape in the here and now, in my cerebration. It appeared as far away as the eye of the cockroach looking at me, a genre I still can't comprehend, at which maybe I'll arrive: the cockroach understands me.

tr. It was a star that put you here and made you one of these people.

Todo cubano debe saber tirar y tirar bien. – Castro

There's only a form of energy badly translated by the words, then corrected by the keyboard's drive, by the system's drive. So first I wrote by hand in very small lettering, the better to adjust the mind's voyage to the paper, if that's not a trap as well. Or a trap that you must've set for yourself so that you can get out of it when you want to.

tr. Every Cuban must know how to shoot and how to shoot well.

tr. La batalla de ideas continua.

But a newly born is here (like Vilma Espín, like Celia Sanchez, Haydée Sanatamaria and so many others). Because the incessant process of insertion is determined more by what will happen than what has already happened. The future prevails, arranges and improves the model. And this investment in individuality is the result not of a conscious will but a mixture between a program, undetermined acts, and nature. I think too, because you exist, that the passage of time is always creative, never – in spite of superficial acts that seek to demonstrate the contrary – destructive.

The battle of ideas continues. – Marx

RE: EVOLUTION

I'd abandoned myself to some imperfect sense of the *escritora's* meaning

of my life:

of each word

of authenticity

of communication

Of translations

of translation

of one's audience.

because language relies on our individual experience

in order to convey meanings

if there were a perfect form

language would not be it.

there can be the initial failures

magnified and furthered by gaps in the experience

with my own life:

with language

with the conceit:

with the loss

with her own translations

with child.

The *escritora* pored laboriously over a text trying to equate it

in trying to answer my own questions, I have been preoccupied

not more so than usual, which is always, but differently than usual

I lost *mi abuela cubana* and

I lost her songs, her Spanish lullabies,

and, at the same time of the loss, I discovered myself to be

by virtue
by its universality.
by heart
by Madonna
by memory
by my own concession
by verse (or *verso*):

The *escritora* thinks that a successful song lyricist is as exploitative as she is inventive
of knowing one's audience
I know my *lengua materna*
but it is *La Isla Bonita*
that hums through my blood
despite my knowing the pale comparison of the pop song to lullaby
as I wonder how I will impart my lost "mother tongue"

The *escritora* learns that the aeolian (*eólico*) is most often used in the death motifs of funeral hymns to underline the ubiquitous anguish of remembering.

In *La Isla Bonita*, she learns, the familiar song thus operates from a place that is living with grief internalized to familiarize the persistence of longing.

Como puede ser verdad (How can it be true) has a slightly irregular pause before *verdad* to underscore the question of truth itself:

Twinning lamentation and dream while longing for conditions beyond the given to elucidate the paroxysm of living insufficiently with death while life must go on.

The song is dominated by the interval of a fourth, a *leitmotiv*, to draw into association the desire to live, to *be* elsewhere.

The associations of grief, in both *lingua*, commiserate the relentless succession of moments to bring the permutations of every mortal being's lifelong relationship with knowing the brevity of our own lives.

The unequivocal *razón de ser*, according to the *escritora*, comes in the chorus

and is a lullaby.

and is a consolation:

and ‘This is where I long to be.’

and is a journey.

and ‘rings’ the ears presently.

and ‘stings’ the eyes now.

and is its own time.

and *there* is wherever we are.

It makes use of emphasis on the incantatory present participle

‘Tropical the island breeze’

Time is portrayed as malleable

‘The samba played’ in the past

‘The sun would set so high’

A lullaby operates on its own terms

We are taken *there*, to this *isla bonita*,

of my daughter's life

of *mi abuela's* life:

of no distance

of being in between

of near and far

of translation

of ebb and flow

of an echo's reverberation.

This form of consolation

is not an evolution

it comes in waves

and the *escritora* believes me to be the indeterminate period

- aware of the depth changes

that can be the initial failures

but the strength here, for me, is the conceit

to show the circular and inventive rhythms

Home

Exile

“HOME” LIVES BEHIND REVOLUTIONARY VOICES

OUR (UN)ATLAS COLOURING BOOK

We begin because the world before ours ended and what is this country
but the drawing of a line.

I draw thick black lines around my eyes and they are a country
by what belongs to me.

When we, you and I, talk about geography I ask if you think a nation is made
by its founding fathers.

Let oceans close back up my eyes when you respond with your father tongue
我们要学的事情挺多!¹

I have learned that my love of you has made me not want to die in this nation
and you teach me 就睁开了一只眼睛.²

Wind to the sails on the night sea while you are sleeping like the child you are
and I know I will be murdered by your father.

I leave a final note on your drawing table: *Everywhere is a foreign land.*
*In death finally there is no home to try to go back to.*³

¹ 我们要学的事情挺多 tr. We still have so much to learn. (from Gu Cheng's poem “杨树” or “Poplar”)

² 就睁开了一只眼睛. tr. I open wide an eye. (from Gu Cheng's poem “人儿” or “Little People”)

³ Translated from a letter by Xie Ye to their son Sam

MY GRANDMOTHER REMEMBERS
“A CRITICISM OF (IM)PURE REASON” AS SONG⁴

Abuela sings. She sings on the terrace of the house with the shutters
where her father will be assassinated.

*Un día mi cabello será blanco*⁵, she sings, when she is only a daughter still.
Her heart full of health, cheeks full, lungs warm.

Her hair white, she tells me: I can never cry all the tears in my body
since his death, *entiendes?*

Abuela sings. In the sky of Matanzas a gigantic balloon full of green spiders
passes by like *un pavo real blanco pasa*.⁶

Abre la puerta de su casa y entra / como un desconocido, she sings in aeolian,
como si penetrara en el mundo / por la puerta de atrás.

Open the door of your house and enter / as a stranger,
as if it penetrated by the world / by the back door.⁷

The house with the shutters will long remember the bomb that cracked the façade
where later she'll put plastic flowers.

for mi abuela and Cuban revolutionary Leticia Artola Miranda.

⁴ English title of Belkis Cuza Malé's poem "Crítica a la razón impure"

⁵ *Un día mi cabello será blanco* tr. One day my hair will be white. (from "Crítica a la razón impure")

⁶ *Un pavo real blanco pasa* tr. A white peacock passes by. (a line from Rubén Darío used by revolutionaries to forewarn of danger)

⁷ translated lines of the preceding stanza (from "Crítica a la razón impure")

MY [YOUR] HOME MOVIE

Of the films you never made during *les années des plomb*⁸
my favourite is *Territoire de L'instant* (Land of the Moment).

After your funeral, I use the video camera you used to document my dance recitals
to film a horizon cracked in two.

The opening scene is so revealing that I ask Emma Ramadan
to translate the *sous-titres* from your Arabic to my French to English:

*My blue sky between two eclipses of swallows tells of war all the tall volcanoes of long ago.
In the lava recklessly we forged fantastic lives in which we weren't prisoners.*⁹

In the film underneath my film of your film, I am a tap dance unleashed
and you can be heard to laugh with your wife my mother [off screen].

I realize my act of erasure (of me) has thus becomes a source of the imaginative act
of regeneration [of you].

لغ ياب معنى واجهت واجه ته ك لما غ ياب ي عن و ساءل تني¹⁰ you tell me
as if for a moment, an instant, the land can bend and open up you to me.

⁸ *les années des plomb* tr. The Years of Lead (a period in Morocco of government inflicted violence following 1956 Independence)

⁹ Emma Ramadan's translation from Ahmed Bouanani's *Photograms* (about the political poet prisoners in Casablanca)

¹⁰ ل غ ياب معنى واجهت واجه ته ك لما غ ياب ي عن و ساءل تني¹⁰ tr. Whenever I face it, I face a new meaning for absence (from Touda Bouanani's collection of her father's unpublished script for *Territoire de L'instant*)

MY HOME AND NATIVE (UNCEDED) BODY

I guess you can say my mother had a type: haunted men / dead men /
men marked to die.

I guess you can say my mother was a type: haunted woman / dead woman /
woman marked to die.

Maybe it is too easy to blame mortality on our capacity for love:
the slow death that is putting your breath in another's body.

After all without my not-yet mother's nutmeg calves finding love for the night
I could not have been born.

My adoption papers mark me equally *Odanak Abenaki* and blue eyed and taken
because *back home no place for a blonde baby, bush lady*.¹¹

I guess you can say my body, like the land, was up for grabs:¹² *kwai kwai*,
*Niwaskowôgan, can you take me instead!*¹³

I guess you can say my body had a blood type: haunted / dead /
marked to die.

¹¹ lyric from Alanis Obowsawin's song "Bush Lady" about children of mixed heritage being taken from the Abenaki reserve

¹² reference to a line by Billy Ray Belcourt (from "Boyfriend Poems")

¹³ *kwai kwai Niwaskowôgan* tr. from the Abenaki: Welcome, Great Spirit.

IN A VICE GRIP WITH MY LOVER (IN EXILE)

As time went by, my lover was gradually overtaken by an urgent desire whose futility exceeded all measures but the circumference of the universe itself:

A desire to grasp the secret of the present, to penetrate the eternal unity of life and see a system's undulating veil.

In the universe of our civil war,¹⁴ systems had the insubstantiality of hummingbird's song and the iridescence of its plumage, while their manifestations were immutable.

Told that my love for my lover was a vice, that loving another woman wasn't womanly of me, that *our* civil war, as being "against ourselves," wasn't the same as *their* civil war, as being against us.¹⁵

My lover believed there had to be a point at which reality, perfect incongruence, would get through to humankind.

In exile in Paris and Sausalito, *I want you to touch me here and here. I want it to be warm for me for you. I want to love systems that are woman so that you can enter them by being one too.*

"Vice," my lover said between each long dreamy sigh, "has no limits. And there are so many vices!¹⁶ The longer I live, the less I understand how life can suffice to give an idea of how many vices there are!"

¹⁴ The Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990

¹⁵ The accusations of crime made against poet and artist/activists Etel Adnan and Simone Fattal for homosexuality

¹⁶ reference to an interview with Adnan regarding the publication of *العرب في العالم نهاية* (tr. *The Arab Apocalypse*) and her delight in the limitlessness of "vices"

THE BALCONY OF HAZAMA HABAYEB COLLAPSES

Utilu ka shurfati baytin 'ala ma 'urid transliterates
Hazama Habayeb's Mahmoud Darwish: *Like a house's balcony,*
*I overlook what I desire*¹⁷

Not under a balcony
Or on a balcony
But like a balcony

My existence exacerbates my sense of obligation
raising inevitable questions: How are we to live, et cetera
since we can't avoid the void, et cetera:

I am immersed in the outside, although part of the inside
I myself provide a view of the world from a certain perspective
My perspective leads to the construction of certain desires

The world is exposed in an explicit way before the eye that observes
This observed world is transformed by the narrator-poet's inner eye
Over and over at the closest furthest distance of the self

Hazama is on the balcony with Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's¹⁸ eyes
القمر عنهام ي نأى راح رش ف تان ع ي ناك *becoming two balconies*
from which the moonlight recedes when it collapses

Likewise worried about wars and translations

¹⁷ From Hazama Habayeb's transliteration of Mahmoud Darwish's "I see my ghost coming from afar"

¹⁸ From Hazama Habayeb's translation of Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's "Hymn to Rain"

she reminds the nation's children that pick her up:
*If I die, leave the balcony open (Si muero dejad el balcón abierto*¹⁹)

Her laughter seems like a solitary echo swallowed up by a vast desert
It has a hysterical edge: Can one die doing what one does best
if what one does best is “suspending thought”²⁰?

¹⁹ From Federico Lorca's "Farewell" (translated by W.S. Gerwin)

²⁰ From Mona Zaki's translation of Hazama Habayeb's "One Afternoon"

DISCUSSIONS OF HOMELANDS FROM PARK BENCHES

Má vlast

A mirror of swans, a gesture of regret, car tires rippling in the Vltava,
your face strewn with childhood:

We were looking for we found .
Her name appears in a column of names.

We find her bordering a ditch near one of the places where Žižek
thinks Hitler could have been stopped.

The hourly figures struck each other.
They knew the time was passing in which we are now suspended.

As long as it takes snow to slip from the coal piles,
a memory barely retrieved from a fire is (the past) hiding in its place.

You remind me of Smetana's symphonic poems in six movements
and I think of how she was conceived as an individual work.

Má vlast meaning "My homeland" in the Czech language

من ميهن

In a museum park in the middle of Tehran, a family of peacocks walks about freely.

The majesty of the much-admired father peacock is suddenly disturbed when one of the park visitors opens a bag of birdseed.

Shahin Parhami, my friend, has been writing a screenplay in exile using the words of, amongst others, Sohrab Sepehri.

SOHRAB

You know, the relationship between me
and my environment was mostly a fragile one.
Even in Tehran when I sat in my writing room
sometimes all of a sudden I would panic.
Some strange feeling would grab my confidence
and run out the door.
But is anywhere the right place? A place
that only belongs to me, I don't think so.
That is a false expectation. One should be able
to write poetry on park benches.

In the margins, I write "And what of the much-overlooked mother peacock?
Could she resemble Forough Farokhzaad?"

As one who, keeping still, can suggest translated lines such as
"This is a map drawn from memory of the specular itinerary of exile."

من مین meaning "My homeland" in the Farsi language

ନ ନ ଢ ଶ ଶ

Ghassan Salhab's mother said, "I thought for a time if we died we might escape the sovereignty of the accidental."

When she showed up in Dakar with a huge suitcase, she was there by accident.

The burning heat in her eyes was also in her belly – it contrasted whatever fragility marked her personality.

Her smallish figure was in stark opposition to the size of her luggage but silently this, too, was being changed.

She sat on L'Indépendance park bench until the pregnancy was too hot to sit in the heat.

Later, Ghassan asked his mother what it meant to become his mother in exile:

"I learned that Amadou Bamba theorized that all babies are a welcome accident."

ନ ନ ଢ ଶ ଶ meaning "My homeland" (or "Memory Country") in the Wolof language

□□□□□□□□□□

I am in the groove made by a golf car wheel in The People's Square
and Park in Yangon.

An erasure of everything destroyed yet left intact, while the insatiable
cameras of untalented people collect.

You tell me what □□□ (yan) and □□□□ (koun) mean respectively: "enemies"
and "run out of."

On the landing of disbelief, you stood, as if the colonists were translucent
behind us.

A guy with three mobile phones like three cocks reacts to a remark
you make in English:

"This place specifically is playing chess with us" and he enacts a gunslinger
as if to say *because right now he's having a good time, so you're lucky.*

□□□□□□□□□□ meaning "My homeland" in the Burmese language

שלי המוצא ארץ

I went there, to the Landwer Coffee Chain in Mamilla cemetery near the future Museum of Tolerance, invited by Moshe Levin one spring day shortly after noon.

After a series of forceful knocks on the door and some silent communication with the dog tied to its doghouse next door a wooden gate opened.

Moshe, with a bleary look, invited me in, as if he didn't recognize me at all, saying he "didn't know it was a cemetery. It's always been a park for me" and did I want some beer and fried halloumi cheese.

I was soon told how tired he was from meditating in the dark of this windowless room – specially built for just this purpose – in the attic of this café.

On a wooden secretary, dozens of labels were glued with various maxims, imperatives, and simple advice for living, as if he had lived there forever, carefully spaced yet somewhat limiting the use of the desk.

They were arranged in compartments – a regular structure of *neurotic order*. The labels were supposed to repeatedly remind Moshe of the strict differences

BETWEEN THE DESIRABLE AND THE UNDESIRABLE
AS IF SOME AUTHORITY BEFORE HIM HAD ENGRAVED THEM INTO WORDS.
AND THUS MADE THEM ETERNAL IN THESE VERY FORMULATIONS.

שלי המוצא ארץ meaning "My homeland" in the Hebrew language

CULTURED

CULTURE

CULTURED

Breathe out the old, let in the new. I know I'm going to lose myself.
The ants climb our legs and a certain change of light tells us so.
The air that would come and go beneath my skirt no longer presses against
our pants. In this moment, the countries beyond our country can vanish.
It's just the people and me, us.

Before all thought, desire:

吐故纳新²¹

²¹ *Breathe out the old, let in the new* (吐故纳新 Tu gu na xin) is a four-character phrase first used by the philosopher Zhuangzi in 4th century and subsequently used by many authors including Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), who was admired by Mao.

Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman. We undress and enter.
Knowing we'll find something, and that the boats – which seem suspended
on the horizon, seem to have slipped their limits, motionless and painted
there – are also ours, his. We'll swim out to them, his.

Making our revolution depends on his thought:

大海航行靠舵手
干革命靠毛泽东思想²²

²² *Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman, making revolution depends on Mao Zedong Thought* (大海航行靠舵手, 干革命靠毛泽东思想 Dahai hangxing kao duoshou, gan geming kao Mao Zedong sixiang) is from the revolutionary song 'Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman', 1964, with music by Wang Shuangyin 王双印, lyrics by Li Yuwen 李郁文, edited by Zhou Enlai 周恩来. Lin Biao's calligraphic inscription of these lines, combined with the revolutionary song, made this one of the famous phrases of the Cultural Revolution. It is often found in the front pages of *Quotations from Mao Zedong* and *Newest Directives of Mao Zedong*.

A single spark can start a prairie fire. When I met we and you met we
it was still May and we were strange and different and would be for a long
time after - though sometimes we shaped a sort of formless impression:
something strange and indefinable divided the outline of our body
from the space around us, but without making a human form and in our eyes
the spark of sunlight revolved as if turned like a bicycle's spoked wheel,
carried along, collecting together.

One point amid the infinite comes into view:

星星之火可以燎原²³

²³ *A single spark can start a prairie fire* (星星之火可以燎原 Xingxing zhi huo keyi liaoyuan; 星火燎原 Xing huo liaoyuan) is the title of an essay by Mao (1933), in *Selected Works*, vol. 1.

Achieve new things for the people. We're in geography class.
We like this class. The world just barely fits in our heads.
The map hangs before us with its spokes and points, Himalayas and Yangtzes.

Someone made that all up, just to make us think we belong:

为人民立新功²⁴

²⁴ *Achieve new things for the people* (为人民立新功 *Wei renmin li xin gong*) is the title of a small book containing two speeches by Jiang Qing, published in 1967.

The people, alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.
The beginnings of everything that seem to be reality, but isn't,
because we're not outside but inside the globe, that huge globe so stubborn
in its sufficiency, and even far from the classroom nothing's different:
there's just the refined and cultured idea of that opaque and transparent
globe that is our image of the world, always turning, imperfect and constant
inside us. We like the maps and the stability
of the geography that situates places in our heads. We like using graph paper
to plot the latitudes and longitudes we can't measure without human
inferences:

人民只有人民才是创造世界历史的动力²⁵

²⁵ *The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history* (人民只有人民才是创造世界历史的动力 Renmin zhi you renmin cai shi chuanguao shijie lishi de dongle) is from Mao's 'On Coalition Government', in *Quotations*, ch. 11.

The foolish old man who moved the mountains. We like
the geography professor, the helmsman, whose eyes we must constantly avoid
in order not to drown ourselves in my self. He doesn't know that while he
carries on, in many ways parting the seas, I draw fish in my notebook
to throw into the river:

愚翁移山²⁶

²⁶ *The foolish old man who moved the mountains* (愚翁移山 Yu weng yi shan) is the title of an essay by Mao (1945), and one of the Three Constantly Read Articles. The story tells of an old man who set out to move two mountains, manually digging and shifting the earth. With persistence, he eventually achieved his aim.

Let a hundred flowers bloom. Whatever one does the others all follow,
watching from the corners of their irises. That's why I'm going to fold
the page away from his gaze and draw a true map where he won't find me,
Alone at my desk in the middle of the world I
let a hundred thoughts contend:

白花齐放
百家争鸣²⁷

²⁷ Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred thoughts contend (白花齐放, 百家争鸣 Bai hua qifang, bai jia zhengming) is associated with Mao's quotes of the 1950s about smashing or eliminating the old and letting the past serve the present or foreign cultures serve China.

Seek truth from facts. At the centre, the landscape appears and disappears. When I take the oars you want to teach me how to row over the edge. You try to teach me: you take my hands – he’s behind and above me. My fingers are lost in the middle of the boat. We try to steer but go nowhere. He explains the roundness of the earth; the sharpened tip of the compass needle, like a bicycle spoke, always precise, marking contours, lines, limits. The shadow and the truth of our body in this cultural landscape: appearance and disappearances when we try to comprehend the possible across great distances, long marches, the symmetry, forgetfulness or incarnation in other beings: animals, plants, other women. You taught us, me, all this, but I’m not a map and I hold still. I abandon my self and our selves and the dread of nearing the end:

实事求是²⁸

²⁸ *Seek truth from the facts* (实事求是 Shí shì qiú shì) is an ancient Chinese philosophical concept. The phrase was deployed by Mao, in the 1930s, so the new leadership could reuse it and claim legitimacy toward the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命).

CULTURE

As you run around the statue of these women
in a perfect triangle – sisters and their mother or lovers and an other,
touching it, asking me if there's anyone inside – with your square-toed
sneakers and red pack on your back – trying to reach some bird on the
branch of a tree with a single cherry blossom, I've seen you years before,
and years after, with a sensation of being nowhere at all – you're trying
to pick up the fruit, which will fall from that singular flower onto the
bird's beak.²⁹

²⁹ This is an imagined correspondence between the literary works of Lin Bai's 一個人的戰爭 *Yigern de zhanzheng* (tr. *A Self at War*) and Chen Ran's 私生活 *Siren Shenghuo* (tr. *Private Life*), both of which are written largely against former Maoist doctrines and from lesbian perspectives which equally criticize the impossibility of producing or adopting – as homosexuals – even a male child during China's one child policy period

So when I'm no longer around, and maybe you'll have captured your inconclusive bird, you may read this letter as if I were there with you on the sweet June morning that will always belong to us.

I don't know what this square is called in the night
when the silhouette blurs the woman I once was while you caressed me.
It's only in these moments of lost awareness absolutely outside this space
that I can feel life fresh against my tongue. This is my obsession:
not being able to overtake this sensation, or erase any idea prior to the
spasm of being here, now, confronting my human limitation:
I cannot have one son with you without an other.
Sometimes you get annoyed and I turn emotional
to show you that I'm human, your own flesh.

Lin Bai
林白

I don't know what myth gave rise to these statues embracing in their perfect triangle. Look for another piece of chalk to draw the lines of a more modern myth over the happy triangle; to know you believe that something will not blur - at least, on this corner, between the helmsman and the sea - where today we play at escaping ruination for a second.

That second in which we've survived the whole scenario (flowers blooming, long marches, cultures revolving) satisfies me in its eternity. We - you and I - were never a billion people knocking each other over to get somewhere. I - like you - adore trajectories, not the endpoint. If you point me toward a final objective, I lose the crossing in the shock of non-arrival, anywhere but at the thing I've found - something unique and unattainable. Take your innocence and breathe life not into petri-dishes that culture new life but into caves long ago, and now here with us, at the base of the tree with the bird and the flower, at the center of the white fountain, this morning, when I decide to make myself resemble the statue and see you in profile one more time. When you finish writing and stand up, I will have finished my letter too . . .

And he, our one son – with the sulfurous odor of crematories still on his skin as freshly unodorous as genetic matter spawned of a clinic – will from this chalk drawing we've made receive the power necessary to overcome fear, and to save himself, and to save ourselves from obliteration. I know it's not enough for us to be happy for one moment in order for our one son to hold out, but we'll give it a try. That which is imperishable is not a particular kind of metaphysics, nor a belief that sustains us within some system of faith of nonfaith, but the attainment of myself, of you, of us inside us . . . The probable trajectory of the flower – perhaps already red – along the bird's beak, when you might come back at night to be, once more, the woman I caressed.

Chen Ran
陈染

Auditorium

Moratorium

AUDITORIUM

Of Metrical Composition

-- yes,
an almost impenetrable natural barrier
that's what all the historians and travelers said
yet

at the same time, one could follow
another invented, winding direction
marked by a bold dashed line
as an upward path on the ribs of the Atlas
excavating those inaccessible lands --

that's that
the versification professor says
a heavy-set man
takes off his jacket
rolls up his sleeves
lights up a cigar

his squint eye
switches from presence to absence
in a dialectical shift
with the drive of someone in a continuous monologue
with himself --

I think that ... we ...
tries to visualize the words
puffs out smoke,
clears his throat,
we can't not be part of ... the movement --

waqifuuhum innahum mas'uuluun

The laser spot appears
disappears flickers
leaps from place to place
skips
beams in short
quick blinks
returns to its point of departure
suddenly calms down
almost sweeps across the illuminated surface
to the right
where it rests
the tip of the long
thin plastic pointer stops for a second quivers
in the dust that slowly turns into a half shadow
then caught by a sudden fever –
a growing dancing tongue of flame –
it blazes from one side of the map to the other
withdraws all at once
then moves forward again as if exploring something
now more hesitant
cautious
it seems that it disappears
but it reappears
flies like an arsonist setting fire to a field
or like erupting gunfire
explores the void
the shadow
or more precisely –
the light layer of the shadow;

the woman stands at the podium plays
with the pointing stick with one hand, while she leans
against the table with the other, rests her body, her torso
outlined in the half dark, her widely opened collar shows
yellow alabaster skin where soon a bead of sweat
would appear, the muscles of her neck and throat,
taut with tension, strains then relaxes, reaches up
to the restless chin and its complex working machine;
“Here. This is one of the ways things are done differently
in Poetry From the Arab World.”
a kind of subtlety in its sharpness, it bends the medium,
expose the sullen, hermetic amphitheater to something
jolting, something disturbing for a moment; but without
lessening its vehemence, it suddenly stops; an unexpected
caesura, while the echo was still reverberates in the distance;

* *waqifuuhum innahum mas'uuluun*
tr. *But stop them, for they must be asked*

百姓

We were required to follow the analysis
for several years, one or two hours per week
happiness, according to us
creation and its forms – thought and space
the happiness, *hic et nunc*, that which every
Westerner also will refer to
We, the scholars, sat in the dark cell partly
illuminated by the light coming from the
narrow window

Our head bowed, thoughtful,
while the winding staircase next to us spiraled
up, as we continued our meditation

heading to new places, the screen would turn
into a mental stage that widened
as we learned how to connect, moving beyond
all the axioms, pieces of evidence, proofs
conclusions, in order to enter another world
completely different from the one that we had
entered when we heard, for the first time
the east is red in the labyrinth *siheyuan* of
Beijing

牌

and there was still the end of history, after
which everything returned to the beginning, a
kind of recorded fairy tale, which every living
person would read, and the events?

They were more or less colourful incidents
colouring it with contemporary hues

a system of sound traversing through the city
- the endless, continuous process that had its
own course and that had undergone a gradual
inflection, a thesis, an antithesis
that had been repeated in the previous
century, then again by the many of us, had
drowned already; as we were collecting
our papers, the unopened books that we had
produced from our worn satchels, rare, heavy
books that made an impression, as would a
hermetic sentence made collective

as soon as the noise erupted, the almost
invisible door
at the front, to the right
would open and the custodian in his white
coat would appear

白日依山尽
黄河入海流

white sun against mountain leans
yellow river into sea flows
The world is not "world" but "the earthly"
(天下, literally "under the sky"). One seldom
hears people talk about "citizens" in China
because we are "hundreds of names" (百姓).

*百姓 tr. *hundreds of names*

*siheyuan – tr. *the architecture of the hutong districts of ancient China*

*verse by Wang Zhi Huan: Bai ri yi shan jin , 白日依山尽 White sun leans on the mountain, Huang He ru hai liu 。 黄河入海流。 Yellow River into the sea flows.

As noted: Language is Migrant

I had written down

The
surprising evolution of the Spanish word *querer*
reflects very well the nature of this quest; *querer*
comes from the Latin *quarere* (to search, to inquire)
but in Spanish the meaning soon changed, and
the word came to mean *desire, to love*. *Querer*
: a passionate, amorous quest. A quest
whose goal lies neither in the future nor in the past,
but at that point of convergence that is
simultaneously the beginning and the end
of all time: the time before the beginning and after the end.

I was beside
the dynamic young woman next to me
who was either busier with her notes

When Cecilia Vicuña describes her experience of asking passersby
the repeated question of “What is poetry to you?”
while in exile in Bogotá in 1980
she reveals that her favourite answer was “Que prosiga,”
“That it may go on.”

or would occasionally glance up
from beneath her eyelashes
as if somewhat indifferent
while her loose hair
and armpits diffused in the air
conquering

Aleppo, 1979

Act One or One Act:

It had taken us out of ourselves, changed

In a foreigned language *تغيير* made sense to us
when the speaker
asked us to *Act it out*

we could all head to another place just like this one
but slightly different
and so were making loud decisions

as we said It

[the banging fist,

... by the Ministry of Education...

ineffectively, the Chair
calling for order

the same banging again]

* *تغيير* tr. *change*

the revolution was dislodging stones
passions were spilling over
blossoming:

one word putting an end to the chewing of watered-
down words

Beirut 1982

تغيير

on It
captivated we clapped and smoked
spellbound by the new word that belonged to no one to
no one side!
you got up from your seat, stood up and it was
yours for a second
the second you said it
and we, like strikers, were the actors of history who were
called to change life
with It

[the Chair was now inviting
the last presenter of the panel,
whose works were familiar to
everyone]

weighing It
as it were, what was time?
he held the watch in his palm, it was gold, no, it was
nothing!
nothing, but sand, nonexistence, and there were things
that never passed
things that were eternal, everlasting, he scratched
his beard
still protected from the semidarkness
smoothed It

*so ... you are this panel's last
presenter*
[gesturing with his right

hand -]

shall we start?

Paris 1968

[Following a Tough Act]

Ce n'est pas facile
his voice
a sudden rise, now he tries to make a joke
as if it were necessary
to bring some sort of merriment to the atmosphere
It's a tough act to follow this: I would like to,
comment dit-on, change the . . . direction

[effectively making use
of the staged directions]

Alors

*let me remind you all: one has to maintain the seriousness the
circumstances of the material and place, avoiding at the same
time the boredom that such materials, such analyses might
cause, proceeding as traditional narratives do, long winding,
weaving into each other, as if the same mood had been
recurring in different forms and voices from the beginning of
civilization*

[laughter erupts, interrupts]

exhausted, crumpled, reforming sentence

*L'imagination prend le pouvoir. Bon, Allons-y . . . Mais . . . Ce
n'est pas la première fois. That is all I am saying. Remember: it
was hung in the square. Art is dead, ideas are dead, and death
is counter-revolutionary.*

Really, why should one die? Idiots. Keep walking, non?

[mass exodus]

** L'imagination prend le pouvoir tr. Imagination takes over
power - Pierre Alechinsky*

Bishkek 2005

[

we then descended, hung on to the other
the noise, the laughter, the slogan of the day
rose from the front rows, beamed, split into factions like
pigeons excreting on everything
bounced off the screens, to the streets, to the square

- tying a tie, fixing a *keffiyeh*, rolling a cigarette -

the us rumbled, thundered
the coils of smoke
everywhere, ascended, infiltrated
the air a thick misty dome
while the Chair, purpled, raged - as reported in the press
- tried to institute silence, so his colleagues could speak
one of them had Mao's Little Red Book in his hand
another held Lenin's tract: *put an END to civilization!*
SOON, SOON, the flames will materialize THE FUTURE!
and another with Camus earmarked at *Every act*
of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal
to the essence of being

and we wanted to live, we wanted to unlearn
everything that we had learned, the green or red or blue
or black night, while the mezzanine gradually emptied
out, everyone descended from the top rows joined
people in the front, coughed, wanted to speak to piss,
the hall soon empty and the square too

the footsteps died out, dust, the smell of cigarettes soon
everything in ruins, and so everything is a question of
language

]

MORATORIUM

To tell stories

An austere and coldhearted woman she was
to never smile.

Had the hardness of her heart spread
to her womb

Turned
to stony ground

In which no seed could take
to root

Or had her heart turned
to stone from grief over the absence of offspring?

Amina wondered as she stood before the fire
to flatten the loaves.

قمر الة قصة اخ برذى
“Tell me the story, Amar.”

Amar used to hide lumps of sugar in his pocket
to give to the children.

Amar -
cut off like a tree limb, fatherless, motherless, wifeless, childless -
and, yet for all that,
to spread as the branches of jasmine spreads

Over the walls of the houses
to tell the children his stories.

Amina remembered what it was like
to be a child.

قمر ال قصة اخ برني
“Tell me the story, Amar.”

The story of the frog who married two gazelles.
The story of the box in which the tarantula collected stars.
The story of the sun and the moon.

Amar told her the story
to make Amina quiet.

Amina clutched the hem of his *jilbaab*
to keep him from leaving her.

“I must return
to my palace, Amina.”

“I’ll let you go if you promise
to tell me another story.”

أمينة قصة ت حكي
“You tell the story, Amina.”

“The absence of children
to harden a heart

Or the hardening of a child
to make a womb a stone,”

Murmured Amina as she tended
to her baking.

To wait for the news

Amina is afraid of the sea,
to her mind she pretends otherwise:

to begin before the rooster
to come before the tide comes
to the beach
to the port and inquires,

"Any news?"

"No news."

الرَّحِيمِ الرَّحْمَنِ اللَّهُ بِسْمِ

to the hill
to the high house
to the women's quarters
to the process of sifting,

"Any news?"

"No news."

الرَّحِيمِ الرَّحْمَنِ اللَّهُ بِسْمِ

to afternoon prayer
to her dress and headscarf
to whisper another prayer
to the port again and inquires,

"Any news?"

"No news."

الرَّحِيمِ الرَّحْمَنِ اللَّهُ بِسْمِ

to go to sea:

to go and come back
to go and not come back
to wait for them
to wait for news of them,

"Any news?"

"No news."

الرَّحِيمِ الرَّحْمَنِ اللَّهُ بِسْمِ

*

Umm Latif did not bear
to wait any longer:

to hear what she had heard
to announce in a voice she tried
to keep to a whisper
to ring like a bell,

"Tomorrow the queen of the English

language is coming to the island."

bismillah-arahman-arahim

Amina is afraid to foresee,
that the sea is generous:

to know for certain
to rend garments
to wail with cries that split the air
to cleave it in two as the executioner's blade cleaves

the living head

from the body.

In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate

To go on living with difficulty

As someone who has stepped onto a dangerous ledge
and drawn back from a head-spinning precipice

a numbness or stupefaction that would allow my mind to err
to wander aimlessly from one image to the other

involuntarily jumping from one scene to the next
the more I focused the more I exhausted myself

falling into utter helplessness
it seemed as if I were taking refuge behind a neutral invisible screen

the more or less fragmented segments of reality passed
along with the inevitable voids that separated them

I was half reclining
my legs stretched underneath the chair in front of me

perplexed
having lost the sense of place and time

was I searching for something that wasn't there
but that seemed to be there nonetheless?

my writing journal on my lap top top was still on my knees
open to taking notes

the first page was marred with ink
even a few sentences amateurishly scribbled on it

Ответы на смерть до его запроса
Death is answering before it is asked

Not in exile,
Mayakovksy wrote:

Our planet is poorly equipped for delight.
One must snatch gladness from the days that are.

In this life it's not difficult to die.
To make life is more difficult by far.

They had been speaking for a while in dull monotonous tones
despite the diversity of languages and people with thunderous names

I woke from my doze and was fleeing the auditorium
when I found myself gratefully in a cemetery

I crossed the paths between the graves
thinking about going out the other exit

to make it
home

* *Ответы на смерть до его запроса* - *Otvety na smert' do yego zaprosa*
tr. *Death is answering before it is asked* (A Russian Proverb)

* from Mayakovksy's *To Sergei Esenin*

TO MY UNBORN ISLAND

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------|---------------|---|------------------------------|
| I grew and | / | / | / | / | |
| | / | / | / | | my rift grew |
| Inside of | it: | / | you live | | before |
| belonging | / | you belong | to no one | | country [same] |
| you belong | to no one | language | / | | [<i>revisa mi lengua</i> ♥] |
| you belong | to no one | in the way | you have | | never left me |
| I thought I'd | be older | before | starting | | to ask |
| what if I | die | what happens | to everything | | you haven't |
| yet | / | / | / | | said |
| look I'm | a sad girl | from | a long line | | of sad girls |
| doesn't mean | I can talk | / | to you | | that way |
| you understand/my problem | | | | | |

you are inside me and your eyes are my darlings
they make me forget the living still beside/s me

♥ *revisa mi lengua* = check my tongue

TO A CERTAIN LOGIC FOR DIS/APPEARING

You cannot live the same life as you imagine. You must live a smaller life, a more compact life. The life you imagine is too capacious, you will lose your balance. Driving home, I think this.

from "VERSO 24" *The Blue Clerk*, Dionne Brand

A door opens on an eye
the eye opens on a line
the line of eyes looking into a coffin
carrying the body to the river
and into a vision.

You know your conscience cannot forgive
what left you long ago: washed away by summer floods
like a human body loosened from a grip
into something death made transformative:
You cannot live the same life as you imagine. You must live.

There is a word
the word never makes
it breaks against
the inner walls of one's teeth
until it flattens into fizz.

The word is as the moon's eclipse is
the distance between my eye and my hand as a highway
with no hope of ever reaching its end or where I begin
to celebrate the choice that answers my life like a quiz:
a smaller life, a more compact life. The life you imagine is.

Only the dead are alive
nowadays anyways
even as a new you moves about the womb
like he moved about the country like a sword
or like a bull dog in a china room.
Your world is smaller than the center of your eye
but my eye opens the page to a new line:
The "I" is the miracle of the "You" I divine.
This insignificant interval between a death and to die:
too capacious, you will lose your balance. Driving home, I.

A book without room
for the world would be
no book.
It would lack the most beautiful pages (the ones left)
in which even the smallest pebble is reflect.
The present is the time of writing, both obsessed with
and cut-off from an out-of-time brimming with life:
Fabulous a wing unfolding in the paltry field of things
while night finds no consolation in night but in its eclipse:
think this

MATTERS

MATTER

MATTERS

Wherever one lives on this planet it's ridiculous to try to escape.

I refer only to matters that make up certain more subtle forms of logic, which deconstruct ourselves through concrete actions against our bodies, or our souls, which are our lands. I'm speaking about the fissures through which we've come to understand what's at stake inside me too, and you, and what's lying in wait for us.

at stake / land matters / unceded / unseeded.

The fissures of this hellish geometry, with virulent blisters, whose pain has already metastasized: they say they'll give compensation later in another language.

It wasn't only that the intensity of light and space shrank that shrank.

The buildings of their theories keep falling down and from the other side of the facades, the whole has revealed to me, with greater force, the reach of my unreality and the fissure of the symbolic. We have to unmake our reality under the influence of other scenes and a different syntax. Maybe we have to remake them with the simplest thing: with what the remains and with the remainder of ourselves.

capacity to survive / capacity to act

During the first fifteen days, time dilated - it seemed that lengthy years must have passed - as if it had drained off toward the narrowest section of the tunnel, or better said, the pipeline through our lifelines.

Everyone oppresses the space you have for memories.

And the space becomes a region in colour, a mental space I kept trying to possess while simultaneously surrendering impossible things. The anguish came with little details of survival - the way urgency is rustic - and the dynamics of my freedom as our freedom shrank to a minimum. As if the return were occurring in a different time, with a different velocity.

they observe it / then destroy it

I had crossed over with the attitude and the latitude that they wouldn't take it away from me. I could clearly see the waste from futile events, as we misused pleasure. We made commentaries and gestures against the inertia and disillusionment and apathy of our times. The greatest disaster wasn't merely psychological but was psychological.

Awareness grew like the vertigo from their rhetoric.

My friends (the most intelligent ones) had wagered their lives on the land under observation through a vulgar microscope, where they made minimal evolutions and revolutions in their capacity to survive. The zones of possibility were getting blocked or cut off before any birth ~ or victory - in place of reason they substituted certain logics for getting through the short term at all costs; the easiest route was escape, indifference.

fight / flight / right / rights

Then, sordid traces of personality and ego appear, strengthened in the fight to get to a place that doesn't exist for them, one they have no right to get to.

The speed with which we assemble things destroys reality.

At that point I had to adapt as if it were something normal, though acquired in circumstances of not being normal, like other subterfuges that drained my energy. I hadn't only lost the center, but the vision - the one that used to allow me to find relations from a certain distance with intervals of deep understanding, the flame.

constituted / measured / elemental comparison

What have we done with our existence: it's understanding that a cerebation has been produced for which there is no aesthetic place.

There is still no aesthetic which could relate the thing conceived to its immediate materialization.

That lack of coordination extends the feeling of relativity and guilt, confusing us more. Now I'm indifferent to the pain that provokes my understanding. I allow for it, coldly and so impersonally that it strips me - not of the actions on which I no longer count for myself, everything happens - but of an absurd passion for its materialization in the here and now. So what can I do?

a form of allowance / an exertion of force

I try to establish spaces for my gestures without constricting them, without making them conditional, keeping them alive for their small incomplete form(s) of intensity.

Make them know me without trying to make them understand me.

So there, a bit more free.

without reason / without possession

I know I've written of these matters in regions of language you won't understand. But I think that like those blind men, when you put your hand onto the writing, thawing it, you'll feel the unique emotion from the writing inside which I tried to simplify this agony, tried to say: what has happened here! what has happened here?

MATTER

and going back.

and the void.

and not persecution.

and not here either.

and in transit.

and now left divided.

and its representation.

Me too here, detained between losing it all

This constant horror between bleeding it out

What word can replace anguish

*If they come for us*³⁰ I'm not there

I know the worst of abysses:

I fled from consciousness of myself

That duality: to be something resembling you

³⁰ reference to Fatimah Ashgar's *If They Come for Us*

and another woman.

and other **girls like us.**

and is inside the human brain.

and the more the brain can live out its myth.

and it can understand.

and I hear your voice in my ear.

and you tell me “no more.”

The force that pushes **me too** to be “a remainder”

Who permits me to believe myself a “self”

My *holy wild*³¹ daughter, the thing destroyed is not outside

The more effort it makes

As if there were truth

There is only diaspora

Your small warm hand on my breast empty of milk

³¹ reference to Gwen Benaway's *Holy Wild*

and don't get anywhere.

and not of finality.

and between its shadows, the moon.

and makes its way home.

and illuminates.

and it can't change.

and the plains

Girls like us idle no more

We're beings of transit, of trajectories, of processes

Night goes on falling

Like a wild animal

Moves out from behind fear

Illuminates my illusion of being lost in the nothingness of my impoverished imaginary

*Whereas*³² my daughter can conceive of a more modern angle on the pain

to make room in the mouth / for grassesgrassesgrasses.

³² reference to Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas*, from which "make room in the mouth / for grassesgrassesgrasses" is taken

and go.

The doves complain as they move in circles **idly no more**: they come

and you look as though you were taken from the wild.

I sit down to see how you've grown

and arid as its desolation.

From a grassland green

and you throw your hair back to observe not the limits but the sky.

Standing tall **standing with standing rocks**

and was not.

I love you in beauty I imagined

and pass my hand over the place where another detail has grown.

Knowing that I won't be here later

and its fabula (squeezing myself more tightly).

I open the structure between a noun (*citizen*³³)

and move in circles against my body.

You struggle free

³³ references Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*

and I surrender.

Your life devours mine

and resurrection.

Reduced again to the form of urban species that provokes no other form of ending

and move forward

How can we transcend this infinite black space above our heads

and the planet we created collapses back.

before they knock on the door, wolves in sheeps' clothing,

and the space is the blackness of and between your movements.

You, ready, leap into **black matter** that is **spatial matter**

and know your **life's matters**.

You, already, *call a wolf a wolf*³⁴

and possible it is here.

Oh, my daughter, how horrible

³⁴ references Kaveh Akbar's *Calling a Wolf a Wolf*

and without my possession of it.

and among objects.

and it can't be a life!

and on the inside matters too.

and its worth nothing either.

and causes me to lift my gaze.

and I go back to thinking about you.

What does the object become without its place

I feel horror at being so alone

Exploitation of all this horror

The landscape outside eats away at me

I assemble a discourse³⁵ (another justification)

A white priest passes by in his black cassock

There he is, as obsolete as I am,

³⁵ references this project of *Finding Places to Make Places*

Public

Private

POEMS OF PUBLIC RECORD AND DISCOURSE

Rhetoric for a *Universal We*

You
Sometimes look at me
Sometimes look at a cloud

In the face of things
My fragility is no different
You and I have nothing. *Together*

我们要学的事情挺多
We have so much to learn

I think
You are far when you look at me
You are close when you look at a cloud

Our death is a minor experience
Just a small excision of life
Without leaving even a scar. *Together*

就睁开了一只眼睛
We open wide an eye

The moment
You leave me
Death has come for me

You and I are quite alike
In some ways not alike
You seem to have more life than I. *Together*

生命的美，千变万化
却终为灰烬
The beauty of life is constantly becoming
becoming in the end ashes

Gu Cheng

我们
Us/We

Xie Yu

"Al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam"
The People Want the Fall.*

It is a mistake to focus excessively
on the specifics.

One is struck by ubiquity
wherever Arabic is spoken.

The greatest sower of unrest in the region
is neighbor against neighbor.

My people?
My people wouldn't do such a thing.

الله ب اسم ّيح س³⁶
There is no "people."

كاف³⁷
I am not pan-Arab
and I am not embarrassed.

خي³⁸
I will sail past the shorelines of the two seas of my unrest
through the nations of my neighbors
to rest my conscience in your lands.

روح³⁹
I did not sail,
Your people took my unstamped passport,
stopped me at the passing.

* Rendered into English one of the most central slogans used during the Arab Spring

³⁶ *I praise your name Allah*, [incredulously]

³⁷ *Infidel or Unbeliever*, [incitefully]

³⁸ *My brother*, [without love]

³⁹ *My soul*, [without soul]

Slavoj Žižek

Hishem ElJokh

A Place for Change تَغْيِير (or Revolution)

Rights + Principles

* م بَادئُهَا + * ح قَوْق

حُلْمٌ؟ أَذَلِكَ؟

Torn apart by doubt in confusion and darkness وَظِلَامٌ حَيْرَةٌ فِي الشَّكِّ مُدْبِئَةٌ تَمَرَّقُهُ

What about the genius of the moon hiding then appearing? الغمام وراء أناة العبقري القمر عن

Illuminated in flicker the way to every distant right decision (or dream) القَرَارُ بَعِيدٌ حُلْمٌ كُلُّهُ إِلَى الطَّرِيقِ يَضِيءُ

The principle (or wish) to appear and disappear فِي تَخْتِ أَنْ يَبْدُو

To reveal a place for change (or revolution) * تَغْيِير

(Ghalya Saadawi)

Najiba Ahmad

* ح قَوْق renders into English as either rights or dreams

* م بَادئُهَا renders in to English as either principles or wishing

* تَغْيِير renders into English as either change or revolution

Measures of *Historia*

AA: You need to fix the world in some way
necesita arreglar el mundo de algún modo
as if everything was measurable.

VE: I was surprised my new body
was more necessary than the woman
trying to measure it to the man measured.

AA: I look at your face *como un desconocido*
as a stranger before our fingers begin
the work of love as a futile crime.

VE: I was surprised as a woman
when he didn't lie to me
como si estuviera delante de un jurado as if in front of a jury.

AA: Perhaps a mouth begins to open
then closes on your left breast
where the bullet spoke its one clipped syllable.

VE: I was surprised my body fit so cleanly
into the sea *en las paredes navega el barco*
on the waves of ships the sails.

AA: I watch you die too early to see
what you have done *arreglar el mundo de algún modo*
to fix the world in some way.

VE: I was surprised I was him looking at the ocean. Inside the head I've placed above his torso, one thought turns
over and over and won't go away, the wave curling indifferently a precise distance from the gun on the table
a ruler carved into its surface, inch by inch, as if everything was measurable: death, time, intent, *excepto amor*.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ tr. with the exception of love

The Climate of Living With/in Limits
El Clime de Vivir con/dentro el Limite

Ella empieza a escribir:

She starts writing:

*I must stagger under
the cruelty of the presence
of that punishment
beneath the sun.*

Ella es la muchacha
que ustedes necesitan destruir
para sentirse más firmes.

She is the woman
who you need to destroy
to feel more firmly.

*(Snow never comes
to console us
in the tropics.)*

Entre ella y yo
hay un montón de contradicciones
que se juntan

She and I are separated
by a heap of contradictions
which come together:

*Galvanizing all my being.
Sweat starts from my brow,
Now I am building us
against them.*

Eliseo Diego

Nancy Morejón

POEMS OF PRIVATE RECORD AND DIARY

[Night 3]

[٣ ضوء]

The narration washes up there where you unravel, الجهات تموت. الجهات تموت المكان هذا ف وق هنا
the autobiographical account is an imposture, أكاذيبه أطفأنتني الذي ل لشد تاء رجفة إلى شحيح ونزوع
(as if you didn't know that already): you are unable – سقطت معنى تعلمت المكان هذا ف وق هنا -
- to unwind the nonexistent spool of a film that was never shot, الوهم إلى افتقاراً أفاصي وجلست
fragments of moments superimpose each other, cancel each other out, تهوي المشاهد رأيت
there are only erasures, in your memory, everything has dispersed, يا أسي غير أرى مما صدق ال
under the spectrum of what became of you: يكفه الذي المكان هذا ف وق هنا
could you even render a cubist portrait, الشوارع ملء، أ صد فر وهنالك، هنا أراه
an allusive portrait, a portrait in fragments, الطريفة كوجه يكفه الذي المكان هذا ف وق
no, not even. Indecipherable, وحيداً المغيب ظلال من شرفة على خلفتي ب عدما⁴¹

⁴¹ The narration washes up there where you unravel, *here in this place the directions die*
the autobiographical account is an imposture, *ever a yearning for a shiver of a winter whose lies exhaust me*
(as if you didn't know that already): you are unable – *from this height I've learned the meaning of falling*
- to unwind the nonexistent spool of a film that was never shot, *sitting here longing for illusion*
fragments of moments superimpose each other, cancel each other out, *I've watched scenes collapse*
there are only erasures, in your memory, everything has dispersed, *I trust nothing but my despair*
under the spectrum of what became of you: *Here in this darkening place, the directions lie down and die*
could you even render a cubist portrait, *I see it everywhere, yellow, filling the streets, between homes*
an allusive portrait, a portrait in fragments, *the directions die here in this place that darkens like the face of prey*
no, not even. Indecipherable. *After it left me alone in dying light*

الفضاء فيستقيقُ سريعاً، السهلَ تعبرُ رأيتها كلماتٌ،
or construct to manage to capture، بكاءً فيع تريه مروراً، الواهي بالشجر تمرُ كلماتٌ،
والأشلاءُ الفلولُ وذن ضاعتُ، ال تي البلادُ، هي
a figure pierced with ellipses، نجاؤ هناك ف ما وغدونا، مقفراتٍ، بنا أمست بلاداً، يا
and the enigma that you become، ت بكي ونسميها، نقولها بلاداً، يا
in the space and light of memory، الأصداءُ بسمعها وتودي الرخو، الزمن في تدوخُ
you struggle with this impossible memory، قليلاً؟ فينا الزمانُ أضحى كيف
you cannot recount. Tenderness devastates you، الصفراءُ ظللته تزدرينا
and here is the core of your powerlessness: صوب كل في الدهول، إلا ليس
you had more desire. And when it comes to that، وإذ رياء فالدروبُ سرت، وإذ

⁴² what machine, what fiction must you invent *These words, I saw them quickly across the field and the space awakened*
or construct to manage to capture *These words, when they pass the frail trees the trees become heavy with tears*
what would only be an abstract figure, *They are the lost homeland and we, the rubble and remains*
a figure pierced with ellipses, *Homeland has become desolate with us, we set out before light but found no way*
and the enigma that you become *Homeland we speak it and we name it and the words and names weep*
in the space and light of memory, *spin in a limp age deafened by echoes*
you struggle with this impossible memory, *How did time becomes so small?*
you cannot recount, *Tenderness devastates you, its yellow shadows despise us.*
and here is the core of your powerlessness: *There is nothing but astonishment in every direction*
you had more desire. And when it comes to that, *And, if you walk, the roads deceive*

there is no way you can resort to the half-ironic, فِ بِهَا نُقِيمُ كَلِمَاتٍ،
half-moral perspective that allows for that narration, أَرْجَاءُ وَأُطَبِّقَتْ مَقَامٌ، عَزَّ إِذَا
this aloof point of view that outlines and pins down, الدِّيَارُ هِيَ كَلِمَاتٌ،
that immobilizes the memory under the lamp, وَالسَّمَاءُ لَنَا، الْأَرْضُ هِيَ
or under the tongue, and, methodically, like a scalpel, وَالْأَشْيَاءُ
observes and describes it. Autopsy. A cold narration, لَا يَنْهَضُ شَيْءٌ لَّا
consistent with desire. You cannot recount, ... الْكَلَامُ حَتَّى ...
and the reason is visible in the traces that remain, التُّرَاهُتُ تَرْقُصُ هُنَا
in that partially electric haunt of phosphorescent signals، غِيَابِي عَنِ وَسَاءِ لِي تَنِي
that you rifle through dust, in search of clues، لِي لَعْنَةُ مَعْنَى وَاجْهَتِ وَاجْهَتِ لَمَّا
as to the genesis, forgotten like all the rest، أَلَا حَيَاةٌ أَقْصَرُ مَا
of a word that you conceived of at that time. ⁴³أَهْذِي وَمِي اطْوَلُ وَمَا

⁴³ there is no way you can resort to the half-ironic, *Words, we live in when there's nowhere to settle*
half-moral perspective that allows for that narration. *And the directions themselves close down*
This aloof point of view that outlines and pins down, *Words, they are home*
that immobilizes the memory under the lamp, *the land and the sky to us*
or under the tongue, and, methodically, like a scalpel, *And everything in between*
observes and describes it. Autopsy. A cold narration, *Nothing rises*
consistent with desire, You cannot recount, *Not even words*
and the reason is visible in the traces that remain, *Here vanities dance*
in that partially electric haunt of phosphorescent signals, *Whenever I face it*
that you rifle through dust, in search of clues, *I face a new meaning for absence*
as to the genesis, forgotten like all the rest, *Oh how short life is*
of a word that you conceived of at that time. *And how long this day of mine*

The instant and memory

Acute Dialectic

Definition of beauty:

Articulation

Makes its limits known to me

*

我所渴望的美, 是永恒与生命

生命的美, 千变万化,

却终为灰烬⁴⁴

Movement and immobility

Poiesis:

Makes indeterminacy

Visibility

Of vanished overshadows

*

I must first reject

Ah, I see now,

my own bargains with the wall

to battle my fears out in the world.⁴⁵

Contingency and Circumstance

Over and over

A woman and a dog roll

She is indistinct

But every hair curling

*

You are a little dog

often groaning at the door

of my conscience.

Tonight, in the long silence

*again I am thinking of you.*⁴⁶

⁴⁴ In 美 Mei (Beauty), Gu Cheng writes:

(tr. Li Xia) "The beauty I thirst for, is perpetual if compared to life; [...] the beauty of life, is constantly changing, /but in the end it becomes ashes"

⁴⁵ Shu Ting's 牆 Qiang (The Wall)

translated by Gordon T. Osing and De-An Wu Swihart

⁴⁶ Ha Jin's translation of her own poem

"Again, These Days I Have Been Thinking of You"

Pathos

Hours

What night will open
Onto our prisons with stars
Dies the morning light

*

难道飞翔的灵魂

将终身临禁在自由的门槛⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In 黑色地图 (Black Map), Wang Xiano writes: (tr. Han Xia) "Will the fluttering soul / Really be imprisoned forever on the threshold of freedom"

Perception

Over

At the horizon
Children are carried away
Across the threshold

*

不要哭了, 孩子

当你有一天想变成为:

一朵云⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In 致大海 (To the Ocean), Shu Ting writes: (tr. Richard King) "Don't cry, my child / But one day, when you will want to change into: / a cloud"

Affect, Emotion

Lasts

Blood still pools a death
Its silence hides it out loud
In the red gutters

*

仿佛 永远分离

却又终身相依

这才是伟大的爱情

坚贞就在这里

也爱你的坚持的位置⁴⁹

⁴⁹ In 三月來 (March Comes) Fei Ye writes: (tr. Wade-Giles) We may seem forever severed / But are life-long companions. This is the greatest of death; / constancy; / I love also the ground you hold"

Personal Leave / Licencia Personal

I know this delirium I'm telling you about:

No puedo mirar con estos ojos dilatados.

tr. I can't see through these dilated eyes.

It blocks language and makes it difficult for you:

Una poesía exclusivamente de la boca como la saliva:

Flor de calentura, flor de cera, flor de la Y.

tr. A poetry completely of the mouth, like saliva:

milkweed, wax flower, moon flower.

Accumulated things can't be dismantled easily:

La eterna miseria que es el acto de recordar.

tr. The eternal misery of memory.

I am completely inside the whole:

Si no pensara que el agua me rodea como un cáncer

hubiera podido dormir a pierna suelta.

tr. If I didn't think that water encircled me like a cancer

I'd sleep in peace.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Virgilio Piñera's lines from *La Isla en Peso*, a book-length poem which explores "the curse of being completely surrounded by water..." and the difficulty many Cubans felt in being - and being considered - "an island unto themselves" during the Revolution 1953-59, with translation by Mark Weiss.

REPRODUCTION

RE:PRODUCTION

RE:PRODUCTION

“It seems undignified,” says Jamal, **“to accept congratulations for the past**

as if the context of that past, not worth remembering is totally irrelevant. This isn't a criticism of heroism, but a criticism of the need to hang your heroism out for adulation, as if every heroic act is equal. You can't just equate an act of socially defined heroism with an act of highly individual – and therefore socially indefinable – heroism. Where is the boundary between the social need for heroes and the accidental hero, a partaker in a heroic deed, who doesn't feel the need for a social proclamation of his heroism?” Jamal is the hero of an invisible terror. Every opportunity for rebellion is punished. And because each rebellion is already punished while in a state of potentiality, it's never able to reach actuality in any other way but wounded. This is true for all Jamal's relationships, which never have happy endings. We're talking about the hidden side of Jamal, something one-sided, which is by definition already invisible, because it's in the shadow of our hero. What occurs in the shadow can only be seen from inside the shadow – which means that we only learn about it when the shadow begins to speak. And then it's necessary to differentiate what the shadow says from the fact that it's being said by a shadow.

“Character isn’t built on the soft horizon of a sob,” says Imam, based on

his beliefs, which he forces into my head by simply rejecting all of my objections. And this forces me to start up my defense mechanisms, so that *inward screams*, piled one on top of the other, gradually prevent my exterior from having its own face, a face that might reveal the character of my interior. This is how the need arises to compare one’s inner state with the exterior world of this or that environment. Errors posed as truth command the truth. Is a proof of belief confirmed by intransigence? And then there are all those unexplored areas of an incorrectly posed question. Standardized obsessions that fit the scheme of some *ism*, or others gulping down their breath in attacks of clairvoyance. The stirring tensions between the two brings up a third type of obsession, the search for and discovery of order in chaos, which it shatters by following a single line of thought toward one final outcome.

To reveal one's colour to others means to multiply the contrast, to bestow

sweaty T-shirts to the back of generations that will silently tag us as our own perpetrators. A circle is always one-sided and that side always depends on the direction of its spin. Spinning it faster means, in practice, that a glimpse of its end naturally blends with the beginning of its beginning. To push oneself off from any point on a circle is possible, though it never happens entirely at random. Transformation of form through content is not a linguistic game. It has to do with the inevitability of sustaining form and thus displaying its content. As in music, here it's not about thought, but about the permanent tension caused by the need to think, about belonging to this or that content to the point of accepting it in the form of parasitism. Because the scalpel of intellect isn't able to adequately discern between operation and autopsy, the object of its incision is abstract at first and only during the act itself does it emerge from the fog of unconsciousness into the sphere of understanding to gradually acquire the face of a conscious reality. A reality whose essence is deadened by autopsy, but is not actually dead, because it still exists.

But let's get back to Jamal. Jamal is a sort of terrorist without cause.

He's a hundred times brighter than most mortals, yet still missing that *something* which would make him wise. He's like a lion with caged eyes, beaming his stare into eyes that are equally caged. This system of cages upon cages is a manifold product of his own caged brain. It is the language he opens with every word, so he can repeatedly lock it down into one and the same thought. Jamal shaped his *little woman* in his own image "to have her gain value," but then she still wanted to *breed* and so she left and she married a construction worker. Yes, anyone seeing the situation wondered if anyone can comfortably experience democracy. And soon other sequential questions stem from these, in which one can ask oneself and immediately answer, understanding now why most citizens of small, meaningless countries, under occupation, that one finds writers who naturally think of themselves as "reproducers of reality," but why this reality needs to be amplified in their writing, they don't say. If we claim - and we *do* claim precisely this - that such reality must be *produced* in an artistic way, not simply *re-produced*, then we need to separate the *work of art* from *art*. Yes, people sense what other people are feeling and act toward them accordingly. They can be malicious that way. And in this sense, those of us whose destinies are to struggle in the waters of our own restlessness will always find ourselves at a disadvantage. Jamal introduced me, one by one, to all of his hostages.

Meanwhile, my father, who simply thinks that Greater Syria should never

have been divided, nor Israel created, tells some anonymous person in a political discussion on the Internet what a wonderful person I am. My father, the most wonderful of all people, who for years has based his beliefs exclusively on his *exertions* within the need for their own *implementation*. That is the definition of a man of action, though how could such a term ever be defined when the result of an action is precisely a change of definition? Unless it's the other way around: actions taken precisely to *prevent* some other action and thus sustaining the original definition (such as the political unit called The Middle East). But if ideals are abstract, the actions corresponding to such ideals must be equally abstract. Thus, any previously defined words, around which the aforementioned process of recycling an action revolves, must gradually turn into memes, and thus lose their definitional substance. What's left are dead-end streets, those snakes of well-meant, calculated reality, which always, for whatever reason, unseen by the scientist's eye, manage to defy calculation. Yes, we all want to be oh-so understood! And yet we know very well that some of the things we try to understand are simply incomprehensible, and this precisely because of their essence. Why do we so stubbornly look for locks to every door - even the ones that are already open?

This is also one of the questions regarding Buñuel and *The Exterminating*

Angel. Mightn't the existence of a lock on an opened door change the status of its openness? And so on. To create a culture necessarily means in most cases to be *acultural*. For why should a creator need to know what others create, for the purposes of her own creation? A widespread and blind groping about is sufficient for a creator, since as she knows very well that no groping can be without limits or else it would spill into something else. The role of the creator is to sustain the spill within one's own character, preventing it from ever spilling into something else. As such, we're dealing with the permanent maintenance of the desired flow, which for this reason becomes a flow of thought in the sense of a tautology - that is indisputable. A flow of thought in the sense of a realization of the act of thought, the flow of what's being thought continually melting into the flow of thinking. This isn't philosophy; just the gradual process of a creative undertaking - with jackhammer in hand. A creator is always more of a construction worker than an intellectual. A man forced to observe is learning to observe; a circle inside a circle, repeatedly burst like a bubble. The lure of traps - traps that even traps fall into.

“I say: only people who are perverse in their body and soul can perform

great deeds!” claims František Drtikol in one of his letters, adding: “But it must be pure, beautiful, original, free-spirited perversion, bubbling up from the man’s own depth! It may not be a plagiarism, an imitated thing” . . . One thing has a name, another thing is looking for a name. And it’s discovered that the name doesn’t belong to the named, but to the designation. The leap into the identity of that name, which is legitimate, because it’s already legitimized. The leap into the illusion of a break – for it is an illusory break – it never ceases appearing as a fault-line. Like a thought that isn’t thinking about itself, but about what it doesn’t want to think about, and from which it tries to separate itself. The mental process of the unfinished intention of desire. Shouts of an unknown nature. The claustrophobia of concerning oneself with them as a certain type of limit. Is this a sense of humour about the humourless? But jokes must come with humour, no?

I'm sitting on a bench, a little before midnight, thinking, I settle down.

And suddenly a pregnant woman sits next to me. I think intensely of lighting a cigarette and in the end I actually do it. The tension between us didn't last long. I wanted to give her a chance, but she was impatient. She leaped up in a rage (I only then noticed her delicate nose and glasses with elegantly thin rims). But I survived it. And a day later she appeared again in the form of a different pregnant woman. An equally intemperate intellectual with tortoise-shell glasses and good skin. After a few days of getting to know each other, she informs me by cell phone that I need someone more refined. Laughter, like a dog barking, is reply, an outburst, a response to my feeling for her; let's call that feeling "resignation." Response as a designation, a marking. Response - Narcissus's echo to the silent companion of his doubled desire. My relationship to other women is monomaniacal. To enter every situation unprepared, as though in the remnants of a dream. Building up the vibrations of what's already been lived through, the tension generated by the possibility of survival. To find a window of a moment. To fail a test, an indicative sentence of contradiction. A human gets a taste for another human - cannibal. Images of fertility, geysers exorcizing ghosts. The sun winding through empty deposits of anxiety. A cohort of useless resolutions meeting behind enemy lines. The order-loving movement of a tumor of the spirit toward healing, away from one's own body. And from every pain a question mark jumps out: Is this pain the right one? Defocusing the invisible toward greater and greater visibility. An escape manipulation, the coordinates of a spiderweb thrown into space.

To what degree must we provoke change in a human being while they are

already being changed? To bring out feelings as if internally hiding something. Controlled denial of wanting, which isn't based on anything, nor is it justified by anything. The emptiness (of self), which frightens us immediately, is barred by the structure of the net and breathing it in. Empty cans of what's been drunk rattle through a street recently restored. The looks of tourist children, tourists because their own villages have been bombed beyond restoration, their chirping cell phone cameras capture what was here, angels included, and transform it into other materials. I wonder about them and what they will do with our futures. Time shifts between expectations and disappointments - unsteady and almost invisible. This is an annihilation of the sun and other such hermits. This is a tautology of every moment, as if every moment was necessarily a tautology.

What do Jamal and Imam have in common? Nothing and much.

Jamal thinks of himself as a gourmet of life, to the point of having the need to lecture others about how to live. Jamal still hasn't lost *entirely* his belief in reproduction, although preferring to constantly produce new things himself. Imam doesn't talk about reproduction yet, but he's also an author almost *entirely* unproductive. Despite that, one can feel in him the need to change this state of affairs. Imam is insured against obvious loneliness through a paper marriage. The illusory security of this status is primarily intended to hide something. But even Imam doesn't believe in the irreversibility of his fate – and yet his actions, which all seem to haunt him, don't support this confidence. We might point to the fact that he's the younger of the two by a bit, because even Jamal, when he was Imam's age, perceived things similarly. Jamal ran away from a childless marriage, stating that he was good enough to deserve other women. Imam probably thinks the same. At a certain stage of their lives, both could be seen walking around Ramallah in long black coats, cloaking the solidity of their pose even when walking. One flirted with artistic inclinations, the other only theorized over them. They both like cats, but neither knew why. Both carefully maintained their daily bachelor rituals during relationships. One is convinced that women are supposed to tyrannize him; the other believes the opposite; a belief he practices fearlessly in private. They each have rock-hard reasoning behind their conviction, as demonstrated when push comes to shove. At that moment, they pay attention, focus their senses and, giving out the refined screams of intellectuals, recklessly disown themselves as well as anyone close. For every secret is generated by the revelation of something similar. Is there an urge to create the similar? But the similar thing is always equidistant to its original. It is the movement of illusion that displays the patterns to images, by which they are perceived. This is overstepping the boundary of necessity to return to the form, which the noise of contrast shed of its colour.

REPRODUCTION

and by now the sound of gunfire had vanished.

It was a beautiful Spring day

and it seemed to be growing very straight to me.

Where my mother was buried in Askar was a *zaatar* plant

and went along always with my head to the ground.

But in fact I knew I was not a plant

I was asked “Is it true that the nearer we come to our paroxysm of violence”
and I answered “the more we become ourselves.”

and only a mother who comes to the point of childbirth can tell.

Time can only tell

and encumbers us.

and we are safe from knowing what is coming next.

and I know this might be to your death.

and I could stop it from happening.

and that's why he became a philosopher."

and you kick me in my ribs.

and then I remember: a gardener.

Everything which blocks the horizon

We can't see out or the smoke hasn't cleared or the dust settled

All my blood does is run headlong into life

When it is someone else's pain

"Wittgenstein was afraid of going mad

I have these conversations with you

I don't remember what he'd wanted to be in the first place

and my mother had been the horizon on the sea I can no longer see. **To really love things is the most complex a person can be**

and bought seed packets for tomatoes, *zaatar* and radishes. When the funeral was over I went to the market

and I didn't know whether to become one. My mother was gone

and I liked my heart beating faster. I leaned out the window as far as I liked

and I never had to return her phone calls again. Was this what it was meant to be free

and immediately planted the seeds. I wondered if I could persuade my body to jump out the window

and that's the most humane way anyway.

and so I tried.

and I could do it for hours.

and looked down with a kind of resignation.

and saying "otherwise she wouldn't have planted the seeds."
I can already see people whispering that somebody had pushed me

Humans live out of curiosity

I was curious to see if I could harvest life

There is something hypnotic about touching soil

I returned to the window

and the radishes were the first to sprout.

and the tiny leaves were as soft as a new-born baby's hair.

and found out that one day you would also be a daughter.

and I relaxed as I leaned out the window.

I was coming to my own conclusions

Followed by the lettuce then finally the *zaatar*

I watered them before I went to the hospital

It's not easy to get rid of unwanted things

and I was mistaking thrown stones for birds.

Autumn was on its way

and yet I know that sometimes a bird is a stone.

Najiba Ahmad believes that *A bird is not a stone*

and I knew it would not be possible for the rest of one's life.

Teaching Philosophy in Gaza was like leaning out a window

and actually wanted to be an aeronautical engineer.

I read in another book that Wittgenstein didn't really want to be a gardener

and looked down again with a kind of resignation.

The answers were becoming less clear

and I've kept it.

and you bring me into a long night.

and not imagination.

and there is a great distance between the two.

and giving birth to you there.

and I can answer that I have become more ourselves.

I'd made a promise to my mother to go back to the beginning

I cannot resolve the subject or answer the question

What you require of me is truth

Now I am remembering and not imagining

Right now I am leaning out the window's edge

At the moment of supreme violence

End Notes

REVOLUTION

The various slogans used in these works are collected from the facades of painted murals in present-day Havana, during a research period in 2018. I wanted to use revolutionary campaigns that Cubans continue to face, either bolstering or disillusioning the ideologies that persist from that era.

RE:EVOLUTION

The rather saccharine pop ditty that I use to examine how versed language creates and recreates its strange circumventions and evolutions in contrast to the lullabies sung by my revolutionary Cuban grandmother is indeed *La Isla Bonita* by Madonna. Leonard, Patrick and Madonna. "La Isla Bonita." *True Blue*. LP. Sire - Warner Bros. 1987.

HOME

In contrast to the poems in Exile, the companion pieces of MY (UN)HOMELANDS" are meant to recount private discourse in the more personal spheres inhabited by some of the writers and artists working during these periods of war and revolution.

EXILE

The series entitled "DISCUSSIONS OF HOMELANDS FROM MEMORIAL PARK BENCHES" feature revolutionary voices of great thinkers and makers regarding their destroyed former homes while seated at benches in the commemoration sites that have been built since their demolishing.

CULTURED

Similarly to the REVOLUTION section, this series uses revolutionary slogans and also Maoist dictums from the Cultural Revolution and upends their intended meanings by contrast to real life experiences and features some of the writers known as the Misty Era poets, working in the same period with great bravery.

CULTURE

The correspondence here is meant to force examination of gender roles and sexuality, as well as biological reproduction and other methods of child-rearing (adoption or infertilization) in a country where even presently lovers can be outlaws of the state just by virtue of whom they love.

AUDITORIUM

The poems in this series discuss language and revolution in the amphitheatres and drama theatres of collected experience, in various sites of dissent and calamity.

MORATORIUM

Using the imperative tense, these works take discourse out of the auditoriums, the classrooms, lecture halls or public theatres and squares of the previous section, and instead allow them to take place on the ever shifting terrains of shorelines, cemetery grounds, and wombs.

MATTERS

Much of this material investigates land matters and matters of land on these unceded lands known as North America but which should be known as many other things and in the many other ways of knowing those places.

MATTER

These pieces center around what is sometimes derogatively referred to as “laptop activism” or “hashtag movement” from the last decade. Each piece uses an iteration from a movement and also a book title from one of the many female/black/trans/indigenous poets that included their voices in the struggles and revolutions, many of which are ongoing.

PUBLIC

In Poems OF PUBLIC RECORD AND DISCOURSE translations (mine and others listed below) are used to create conversation between thinkers and writers at uneasy times. Rhetoric for a *Universal We* features translated lines from Gu Cheng’s poem “Far and Close” or “就睁开了一只眼睛” by Fang Dai, Dennis Ding, & Edward Morin in conversation with Xie Yu’s poem “Accomplices” or “同谋”. Rhetoric for a *Universal They* features translated lines from Shu Ting’s poem “The Cry of a Generation” or “一代人的呐喊” in conversation with Wang Xiano’s poem “Black Map 黑色地图. *Al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam* / The People Want the Fall features translated lines from an interview with Slavoj Žižek and Gaddafi by Hamid Dabashi in “Living In the Old World” in conversation with Hishem El-Jokh’s poem “The Visa” or “ال تأشيرة”. A Place for Change تغيير (or Revolution) features translated lines from Najiba Ahmad’s poem “Rights + Principles” or “مبادئها + حقوق” in conversations of its translation with Ghalya Saadawi. Measures of *Historia* features translated lines from Antón Arrufat’s poem “*Tempo I*” in conversation with testimony from Vilma Espín’s “History Will Absolve Me” or “*La historia me absolverá*” which features a Cuz line. The Climate of Living With/in Limitations or *El Clime de Vivir con/dentro el Limite* features translated lines from Eliseo Diego’s poem “Make my testament” or “*Hacer mi testamento*” in conversation with Nancy Morejón’s poem “Disillusionment in the Tropics” or “*Una desilusión en los trópicos*”

PRIVATE

The series “POEMS OF PRIVATE RECORD AND DIARY” record more personal musings and narrations, as if notes to the self. The binary in [Night 3] [٣ ضوء] are not individual translations but rather different ways of continuing the same threads of thought in both languages. The haiku sections take their titles from Roland Barthes’ lecture sessions on the qualities and elements that he determined to be present in Chinese and Japanese poetics.

REPRODUCTION

The reproduction of works or the production of new texts by writers in Palestine (Gaza) are discussed, amongst other things. One of the characters here is a bisexual female who encounters biological reproduction occurring at the same time in the pregnant women she meets on a bench.

RE:PRODUCTION

The choice of biological reproduction during a time of great shelling in Gaza is considered by the speaker, who herself was the pregnant woman or women from the series preceding.

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