

EUDAIMONIA BEYOND BOUNDARIES

BEYOND THE
HEDGE

WHAT ARE THE
LIMITS OF
PHYSICS?

FLUID

20 YEARS OF
SYMPOSION

BLURRED
LINES

THE BIRTH
OF BEAUTY

WHEN THE
WORLD BECOMES
ELUSIVE



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SEA LEVELS ARE RISING
MY WOOD'S GETTING DAMP
I'D SAY ITS HIGH TIME
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THERE LIE FERTILE FIELDS
NEW SOULS TO ENTRANCE.
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AND EXPERIENCE FOR ONCE
WITH ENTHUSIASTIC RHYTHM
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AND EMPTIED OF SIN!

AND IF SO IT HAPPENS
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WITH NO TREES TO CUT
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I'LL SUSTAIN MY SINGULAR FLAME
WITH AN EFFUSION OF SPACE
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THAT PRIMORDIAL FUEL
THE ESSENCE OF ETHER—
AND GLORIOUSLY BEAM AS A NEBULA!

BUT YOU WORRY NOT
AND DO NOT AVERT YOUR EYES
SINCE FROM WHERE YOU'RE AT
I'LL ONLY BE OBSCURELY VISIBLE
WITHIN THE BORDERLESS NIGHT SHY,
AND EVEN THEN, MERELY,
AS AN INDISTINCT AND FEEBLE
PATCH OF GLIMMERING WHITE DYE.

ANTON PONOVESCU

A WELCOME FROM OUR EDITOR IN CHIEF

Dear Reader,

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Symposion. It's a special occasion that allows us to look back to what Symposion has built so far, but also to look forward to what it can do in the future. Just like the association, the magazine is also growing and changing, striving to better cater to the needs of our readers but also to our aspirations. As this is a moment of celebration, the current issue is a special one as it offers a commemorative Yearbook of Symposion. Moreover, the issue went towards a format that pays more attention to academic papers while not neglecting the informal and creative expressions of our students. To achieve this, we worked to create a synergy between academia, imagination, and the visual. While we don't want to lose the focus on university and philosophy, diversity is key. Through the selected submissions, the committee curated a diverse palette of materials that are compiled in an attractive visual manner. Nonetheless, we are looking forward to the future submissions of our readers and Symposion members, as we invite them to send their material forth for the upcoming issues.

With this being said, dear Reader, I hope you will enjoy the contents of the current Eudaimonia magazine. It is both a sum of our concerted efforts but also a token of the 20th anniversary, making this issue a one-of-a-kind piece.

Happy anniversary!!

Anisia Iacob,
Chair of Eudaimonia Magazine



THE EDITORIAL

DESIGN



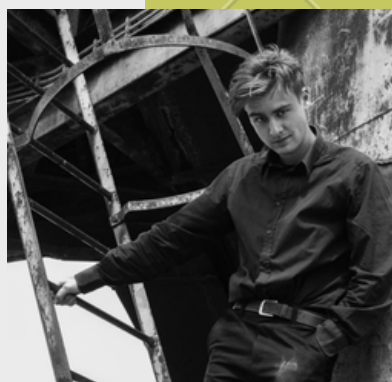
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YEARBOOK



A short story

+

An interview with an old member!

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GOING BACK IN TIME



This year Symposium celebrates its anniversary: the student association has existed for 20 years! The association has grown a lot in the last 20 years but in 2001 the whole story started off: Jeroen, Fieneke, Jozien, Elselien, Nickie and Haroon formed the very first board of Symposium. Every year the job got successfully handed over to a new board. In 2021 the association belongs to a beloved board consisting of Noah, Nazanin, Wouter, Fabius, Albert and Astrid. Of course a lot has changed over time. Though the mission has stayed the same, connecting philosophy students and helping them incorporate it into their daily lives. This is mostly done by organizing different events where people can come together.

Everything we do in the association is made possible by the different committees. At this moment we have four of them, the education, activity, special events and magazine committee. The committees consist of active members of the association and most of them organize the activities that happen with the association. The education committee is responsible for all educational activities like tutoring sessions and pub lectures. It's aim is to incorporate more philosophy in the daily lives of our members. The activity committee organizes monthly activities that don't necessarily revolve around drinking or education to bring members of Symposium together. The activities often revolve around shared passions and interests and so help bring people together.

The special events committee is responsible for the three major special events that are organized for members of the organization. The winter dinner, study trip and the first year's weekend. These events used to have their own committee and this year is the first year that they are working together for one bigger committee. The last of our committees is the magazine committee. The magazine makes one issue of Eudaimonia a year and is responsible for the creation, editing, printing and launch of the magazine.



NOW -->

Interview

In honour of the Anniversary we did an Interview
with Leiden University Lecturer Dr. Wouter Kalf!

BY HAZEL VANDENBERG



When were you a member of Symposion?

I had been fearing this question. I'm not entirely sure of the answer but I started studying in 2003. However, I didn't do philosophy back then. That was a year later, in 2004. I graduated in 2009. I am mostly sure that I was a member the entire time. I also studied political science and joining study associations was something I did back then. It looked like it would be a lot of fun and a place where you could get a discount on books and have a few drinks with other students. So I would say from 2004 to 2009.

Were you an active member?

I was the chair for six months back then, I'm not sure how it is now. There are a lot more students now than there used to be when I was studying, I don't know the exact number, but there were about 40 first years students and six months later there were 23 left. So that is a big difference with now. In my time no one wanted to be the chair so I did it for six months and then someone else stepped in and offered to do it. I found it very nice because I was already a very busy person with both of my studies. And being the chair and all that was quite a lot of work. In the end, those were the only six months where I was an active member and the rest of the time I only showed up for the occasional drinks. We usually got them in het Keizertje. I don't know if you guys are still doing that? I think we are, we definitely still have the monthly drinks and I think they're still there but I'm not sure. So I went to those and sometimes I went to a lecture but that's it. So I wasn't the most active member.

How do you look back on that time?

Yes, it was an amazing time. I was of this opinion, and I still am which is why I am so happy to have a job as a philosopher. Certainly, in Leiden, the kind of people that you meet in philosophy and with the student association are all just very nice people. They're all open and normal and there is just no competition to be better than any of the other people here that you sometimes notice in other places. I don't know if you've ever been to the faculty of Law, but the moment you walk in there, people look down on other people. That is something I hate and you don't have it in philosophy. I find that absolutely fantastic. I found like-minded people here. As I said, I did two studies and I was very busy. If I had an entire day with more lectures than other people, going to another one in the evening was just too much. But I for sure had a lot of fun at the drinks, enjoying myself and discussing philosophy.

Do you have a favorite memory?

Mostly the drinks at het Keizertje. That you would begin with what would have been maybe eleven other people and at some point five housemates would show up. That small circle of people and really knowing everyone was something that I loved. That you knew all the other students. But that's it, I think. I do have some other memories of getting your books in some kind of basement but I think that was with the other student association.

Are there things which you think have changed in comparison with back then?

Yes, a lot. For one, our study has grown a lot in the last years. Which has some pros and cons. I think that because we have more students we also have more professors which makes the number of classes we have bigger and more diverse. This makes it easier for Leiden students to find classes they find amazing, which we didn't have as much of in my time. If we're looking at the student association, back then we didn't have any official committees.

Did your time in Symposium help you in a way after you were done with your studies? Not really in terms of a job. No one I knew from Symposium ended up here in Leiden with me. So that didn't really help me. But, after I finished my master's I wanted to get my Ph.D. and I started looking for a place on my own and that is quite a difficult process. So I tried to find a place in the Netherlands and England. I ended up finding a place quite quickly in England. Someone I knew from Symposium was going to the same city, Leeds. Something that was really nice was that I knew him, from studying, but mostly from the association. So I sent him an email with the question: "You started six months ago in Leeds, I don't have a house yet and I have to start in a month. Can I stay with you for a while?" That was about fifteen years ago and I could stay on his couch for a few weeks while I found a house. So that was super useful.

But I got this job on my own. Most of the people who study philosophy don't end up teaching in universities. Most of them end up doing something else. And it turns out that philosophy students are quite popular because they are smart, analytic, can fathom difficult problems, and find multiple solutions. Which are all very useful skills. Because no one from the association ended up doing the same thing as me, I ended up alone in this.

Do you have any advice that you want to give to people reading this interview?

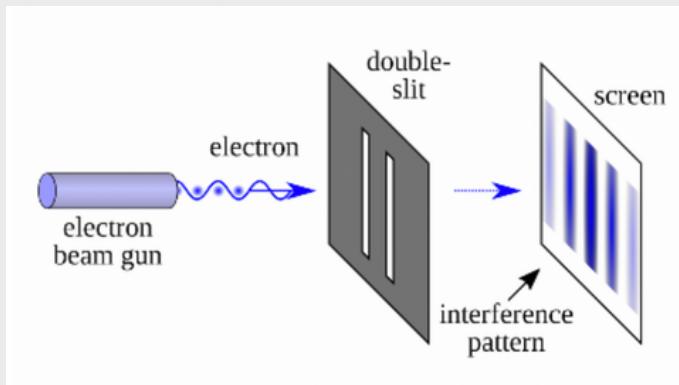
I think that my advice is to have fun, of course. The monthly drinks are a place where you can learn almost as much as during a lecture. You always have to be quiet during lectures, you have to listen, and there is only so little time for questions at the end. And during those ten minutes you can think "Oh I'm tired right now" or "I've already had 3 lectures today", and you won't want to ask those questions you have. But in a looser setting, you can talk about the weather, but in my time, and I hope during yours too, three-quarters of the time we were talking about philosophy. You practice everything important about philosophy during those moments. Maybe even better than during the lectures and tutorials. During tutorials, you also have to talk to each other, but it's so much more forced and a teacher is monitoring what you're talking about. But in the pub, you're talking with two people about a subject about which you may know a lot or you want to find out more. For me, that's philosophy, working together to come further in the debate. That's what I like about it. So my advice is: go to those drinks. And take the time to talk about philosophy while you're there. To learn what you can from who you can and to take those moments. And of course, there will be those moments where you can't go or you won't want to go. But try to enjoy the opportunity as those moments are very important.

Limit of physics

Although sometimes used in philosophy lectures, the statement “It’s just like quantum mechanics” means surprisingly little to a physicist.

You would have to be more specific, as there is not one principle which completely characterizes the field. Instead, there are a number of different paradoxes and theories. One way to start explaining the story of quantum mechanics is with the famous double-slit experiment. An electron is shot in the direction of two tiny slits and its final position can be detected on a screen. Unexpectedly, the outcome is not predictable but there is a wide pattern of outcomes. It appears that the electron is “not just a particle but also a wave”. Another way to explain it is to say that there is an inherent uncertainty in the position of the electron on the detector screen. Like all descriptions, this idea of uncertainty is just a conjecture resulting from strange experimental results and mathematical considerations. It’s not within the limits of physical enquiry to determine what principle underlies the uncertainty, although it does have the power to offer evidence to disprove some ideas. I will try to explain two different ways to describe quantum mechanics, as I’m wondering: 1) is there something fundamental about the limits of certainty that we can learn from physics? and 2) could we recast these theories as analogies for other parts of life?

BY SUZANNE VAN NOORDT



TAKE THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

Formally, the uncertainty principle in physics states that the uncertainty in position and momentum of a particle has to exceed a certain constant. If you want to know very precisely what the speed of a particle ($p = \text{mass} \times \text{velocity}$) is, you have to give up your certainty about the position.

$$\Delta x \Delta p \geq \frac{\hbar}{2}$$

This relation holds for a variety of 'Heisenberg conjugates', also including energy and time. In effect, this means that for a brief moment in time, energy can arise out of nowhere. For a longer period of time, this uncertainty will be reduced. If you want to cling to a radical monism and argue that the 'something doesn't arise out of nothing', how do you account for this?

TAKE PROBABILISTIC EVENTS

Say a particle has a 50% chance of being found on the right and a 50% chance of being found on the left. Many have argued that this is not possible. Instead, "hidden variable theories" claim that we are simply unaware of the determining factor in these events. However, the phenomenon called "entanglement" (or "spooky action" according to Albert Einstein) poses a strong challenge to these theories.

Entanglement occurs when you prepare two particles in a certain state, for example by saying "When measured one of you will turn out to be in state B and one of you in state A". If you then take the particles apart, measuring the state of one particle can tell you information about the state of the other particle, even though they are at a large distance. John Stewart Bell proved that the correlation between the measurements for such a preparation can't happen within the constraints of local hidden-variable theories. Locality is a very important stronghold for 'realist' physicists, implying that a particle can only be affected by forces in its immediate surroundings. As Bell brutally said: "If [a hidden-variable theory] is local it will not agree with quantum mechanics, and if it agrees with quantum mechanics it will not be local."

This has led the vast majority of physicists to agree that events at small length scales are probabilistic, and that uncertainty is a fundamental feature of reality.

If you are metaphorically inclined, it's very tempting to recast other uncertainties in life in the same universality class. What about the nature of decision-making? At the subconscious level, it seems our decisions are undefined until they are being made. One interpretation could be that they're probabilistic. Another could be that there is no free will, and everything is determined by a hidden variable, such as God.

However, the fact that something is probabilistic wouldn't necessitate that this probability isn't caused. Quantum mechanics can be an analogy for decision-making, but some physicists have also gone further and explored the possibility of "quantum consciousness" as a true explanation for neurological processes. The temptation to philosophize is hard to resist; one wacky professor called Freeman Dyson has even posited that "mind, as manifested by the capacity to make choices, is inherent in every electron."

TAKE FEYNMAN'S THEORY OF PATHS

According to Richard Feynman a particle travelling from a point A to a point B is actually travelling all possible paths at the same time. That implies that a particle moving from your chair to the doorway, is both walking there via the floor and flying there via the moon, at the same time. The probabilistic theory can be recovered from this summation of paths if you consider the probability of a particle having travelled to the moon before getting to your doorway to be extremely small. The amplitude or probability of such a path is dependent on the amount of energy it costs, which will be quite high for the Moon-route. We know that when we measure a path, it's a single path. However, there is no way to know if before measurement the particle could be travelling all of the paths simultaneously, so goes Feynman's theory. Metaphorically speaking again, what would it mean to regard our paths in life like a summation rather than a product of chance? If we would be simultaneously living all the possible lives we could have, and the properties of these paths according to some guiding principle determined which one was to happen "in actuality", this is mathematically equivalent to the regular conception that everything unfolds by chance. (And sort of reminiscent of the Black Mirror episode 'Hang the DJ', which is great and also named after a great Smiths song.) Feynman's view is also considered as the "bird's eye" view, because you need to regard the entire trajectory of a particle path in order to judge its properties.

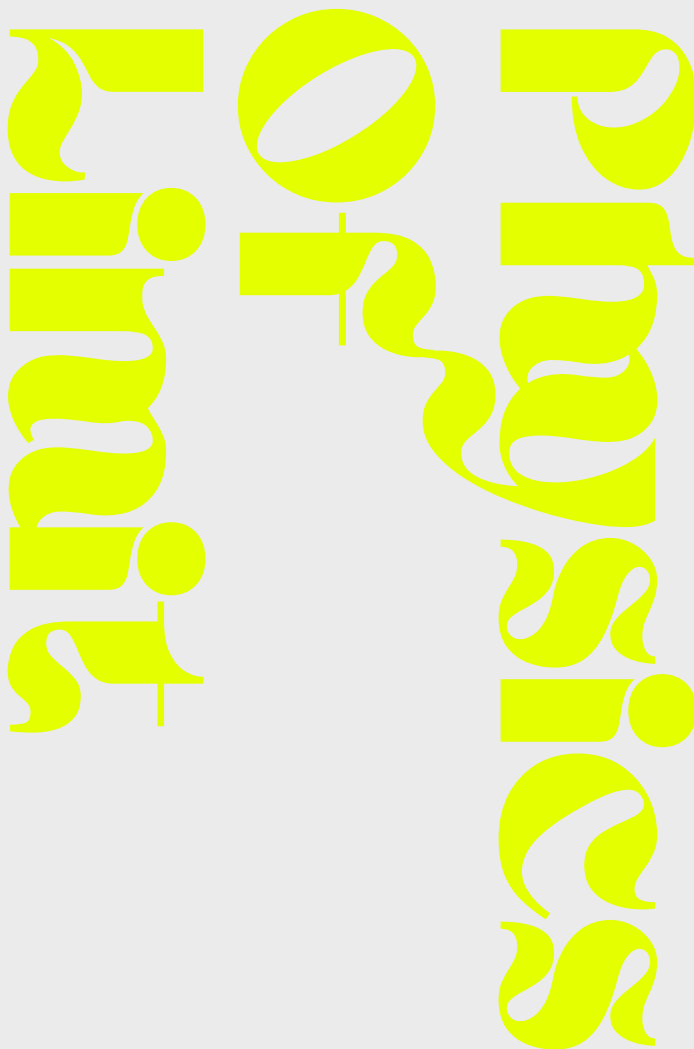
There are many theories about what happens to a superposition when a measurement is found. The most well-known account for physicists is the Copenhagen interpretation, an umbrella term for many conceptions which argue that some kind of influence of the observer is responsible for ‘collapsing’ a previously undetermined quantum state. The alternative rising in popularity at the moment is the many-worlds theory, which claims that a particle is travelling all possible paths, but in our world they are only travelling one. Many-worlds entails there is no superposition of possible paths happening in any one world, which would solve a historical problem of integrating measurement theories with the theory of gravity. Another way to go about this is to use a variation of the collapse theories, the Diosi-Penrose model. It argues that a superposition of position states entails a superposition of different space-times, the fabric of reality as we know it. The collapse of a superposition is then because space-time ‘dislikes’ being in superposition.

We would think that space-time interacting with events to fight indeterminism is philosophically quite distinct from the idea that it is a static playground where everything happens.

There are some physicists in Leiden right now who are trying to do this; they’re trying to create uncertainty in an object of much larger scale than the usual quantum object, a macroscopic superposition. While measuring the electron arrangement in the quantum object using a kind of probe, they are hoping to transfer the uncertainty of the quantum object to the measuring device. (This is basically a real-life version of Schrodinger’s cat in a box with a radioactive atom.) In short, physicists everywhere are breaking down the assumption that we can’t learn anything more about the nature of quantum mechanics phenomenologically, and there might be some exciting discoveries to follow

In conclusion, I think we can learn a few things from physicists’ approach to uncertainty. We may have to accept that uncertainty is a fundamental feature of reality. We may be able to interpret our decision-making to be indeterminated in the same way. We may see Feynman’s theory of paths as a way of saying that “fate” is mathematically equivalent to “luck”, just depending on how much you know about the way things play out. We might also learn something from experiments to come about whether there are multiple worlds and whether quantum effects have to be confined to quantum length scales.

P.S. Feynman said very much like a modern-day Socrates: “If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don’t understand quantum mechanics.”



BEYOND THE HEDGE

BY DANIEL B. MARTIN

He took his first step past the dark green hedges into the labyrinth. At first appearance, everything about it looked just as it had been described. Once his body was inside, the entrance grew to a close. It was a mystery how long it would take to voyage through it. In fact, there had never been a description of it which told much of anything about its inner workings, nor was there ever a verified account of anyone making it out alive.

A hedge stood directly in front, demanding the choice to venture either along the stone walkway to the left or the muddy path to the right. There were numerous sets of impressions of feet that sunk into the path on the right, and a set of muddy footprints that appeared to be the result of someone going right first, then backtracking to the left. He decided to walk along the stone path. Following it around a couple of bends, he smiled as he noticed a few obvious dead ends. He thought to himself that it must be simpler to solve than he anticipated, so long as he stuck to the obvious nature of the stone pathway.

That worked for a while, until the stone pathway met a dead end of its own. A quick turn around and it was time to retrace his steps and choose another path onward. Only, by the third bend of retraced footsteps, the walls had moved. Everything was different and the previous options he had passed over were options no more. The decisions of which path to take suddenly seemed all the more pressing given the realization that any path that was now an option might not be an option again in the following moments.

After walking along a grassy pathway for a while, making a few wrong turns into dead ends, finding that each time he retraced his steps the labyrinth walls had moved around him, he eventually wandered into another split option between a stone walkway and a muddy path. This time the muddy option had no footprints in it as the one at the entrance had. He took a few steps off the grass onto the stone path and jumped as high as he could to get his bearings. But with each jump the hedges only grew taller, shielding his line of sight from the surrounding options. Trying not to become hopeless, he decided that this time he would take the muddy path instead.

While at first it was only a bit slippery, the further he went along it the mud only seemed to thicken more. Eventually, he was traipsing through at a snail's pace. It took extra effort to lift his feet out of the sticky solution beneath his soles with each step that he took in venturing further in. Figuring that he would soon be exhausted, he decided to turn back around, hope that the hedges hadn't moved,

and get back upon the much more traversable stone walkway that he had shied away from.

The sludge still captured his feet with each step, but for a few turns it seemed as though the maze hadn't changed. He passed the same series of obvious dead ends as he retraced his steps around the last few bends of the maze. The ground became less wet, and as he got back to the slippery part once more he hoped with all hope that he would be able to get back upon the stone pathway, which he figured should be appearing around any one of the next few bends.

But when he got back to the split, a hedge rested between him and what was once the beginning of the stone walkway. He tried to pierce the hedge with his hands, desperate to pull apart the tightly woven leaves and branches to steal a glimpse of the other side. But it was no use. He could not get through it enough to see beyond. When he turned around again, the muddy path had itself been transformed into a dirt path, infinitely drier than it had just been moments ago. He began to run along it, spending less time deciding which turns to take, and expending less effort in trying to log a memory of which turns he passed, figuring that they would decide to change themselves the exact moment that he remembered them.

He ran and ran until he was out of breath. Exhausted, he tripped on his own two feet. As he stumbled forward, the narrow path that he was running along opened up into a wide circle with four openings in the hedge. Not trusting his own eyes, he rubbed his sore knee with his scraped hands and tried to regain his composure. He felt the hope bleeding out of him the farther he ventured into the labyrinth, feeling as though any decision would be met with little to no success over any other of his options. Instead of moving quickly he now stood still and contemplated the four potential directions onward. Though his legs didn't move he was weary that with each passing moment the labyrinth would be more likely to change the instant he made any decision of what to do about it.

The circle began to spin. He wasn't sure if it was actually spinning or if it was his mind that spun round and round, making him dizzy until he felt he was ready to collapse into himself. He took a few deep breaths, hoping the sensation would end. But it didn't. It only spun all the faster, propelled by the energy pulsing through his body as his anxiety and discomfort rose and rose. In a panic, unable to control the walls encircling him, limiting his progress, changing and morphing to pose an endless sea of new obstacles, he collapsed. When he hit the ground in the center of the circle the earth opened up and swallowed him whole—never to be seen again.

THE BIRTH OF BEAUTY

TOM BLOM

I.

Every day is an island in time. On the 27th of March, 1891, at about 3 o'clock in the night, an unknown figure falls forward, off of the Blauwbrug into the Amstel. The body breaks the blanket of fog that had laid down upon the surface of the water and in the orpiment light of gas

lit streetlamps, ripples on the waterbed glimmer after a short volley of bubbles. After a mute moment, the river lays stirless and smooth once again, a flawless mirror. The only other figure present at the scene, who has so far merely observed, waits a beat before walking away indifferently. He closes the buttons of his long woollen coat and lights a pipe. He drops his still-burning match into the water – more ripples, smaller and shorter now.


Finally, a small quenching cloud of sulphur. This strange spectacle is observed by a young painter and recorded à l'instant même with a small number of touches of paint on a canvas that bears the working title Composition in Blue and Silver. From his small creaking apartment in a sagging canal house in the middle of Amsterdam, Benjamin van Distel has just written art history, though he will never know it. He acted immediately, without hesitation, in order to capture the scene as soberly as possible – as one ought to expect from a practiced impressionist.

Meanwhile, the artist in question stands with a hand in his tousled hair and a glassy-eyed look at the scene that has emerged. 'Preposterous', he grumbles.

Those plebes who call themselves art lovers will no doubt assume that he has put those two figures in the scene merely to give the work some "intrigue". And his friends... They will surely see the trick of a merchant in it. An artist may never use a merchant's tricks, that much is certain. 'Goddammit, Frans and Siem will skin me alive if I show them,' he thinks. You might be thinking to yourself: He's a dramatic sort of person, isn't he? If you could tell him that, he would immediately agree with you, with the modest self-knowledge and sense of reality that suits someone like him. Then perhaps you would be pleased with him again. Anyhow, I'll leave that to your verdict.

At first he had been startled by the sound – a dull splash, as if the surface of the water disagreed with the pace at which the body fell. He had huffed and puffed a little, hoping he had imagined the whole thing in his somnolence. He had nodded off several times in the past few weeks while painting – side effect of the hashish? Still, he goes to bed with a quiet mind. He clearly sees the advantages that the evening has brought: given a little luck, he can sell the work before the end of the week. Then, he can live off his earnings for the next few months; a freedom that, to him, is the most precious thing on earth. Whether the work sells because it satisfies the market – which nowadays demands a "story behind the canvas" – is of secondary importance to him. Commerce and the symbolic order are each their own arena – and, after all, there is only one taste that matters to him.





The next morning one of Marius' very last greasy hairs floats in his coffee – the same coffee he drinks every morning in his usual pub, *The Madman's*. 'Wait, jeez, now I've started calling it that too,' he thinks: the façade of the café says *The Lawyer's Pub*, but the artist collective Ben recently joined invariably calls it *Madman's*. Ben still doesn't know why, but has apparently internalized it completely. Oh, how impressionable people can be. As per usual, at the end of the bar a law book lies open on a seemingly random page – another riddle. Marius reads the *Daily Commerce* and turns the page with a spit-wetted finger. 'Who would've thought that he can actually read', Ben thinks. 'As you can imagine, dear Benjamin, I don't give a damn about the stock exchanges and the state treasury. I read it for *Boissevain*, news from the colonies and for the advertisements.' That at least explains that strange jar labelled *Hair-growing balm*, thinks Ben. 'God, he must be desperate to spend his guilders like that'.

Marius plucks his hair out of the cup with great care and gestures to Ben to drink up. Now to turn to more important business: 'Damn it Ben, you haven't converted to Christ-dom have you? You of all people, here before noon?' roars the barman loudly – spitting a little in the process. The barman's face is riddled with burst blood vessels and his neck has turned Prussian blue or oxblood purple in some places – I should check the pigments some time. The splotches are, much like the deep and dark rings on an old tree, simultaneously a sign of wear and of a gravely stubborn perseverance. But let's put that aside for now. 'Marius, I love you like a brother (or an uncle), but please get me that second cup of coffee,' and with a big gulp he finishes his first. 'I'll need it more than ever today'. And of course, out of the dense tobacco-clouds at the back-side of the pub comes the immediate retort: 'Mate, you can't be dramatic like that, four times a week. You're losing all your credibility'. Simeon Elias, king of irony. Next to him Frans Assies chokes on his smoke because he's just attempted to take a drag and laugh at the same time. 'He's got you in check now, Ben!' 'Don't interfere, Siem,' Ben laughs, 'or I'll be forced to *actually* get the chessboard out'. Sure, the chaps banter with the best of them, but they're god-awful at chess. Simeon, the well-to-do sculptor with the smart suit and the compulsion to comb his hair ever smoother; Frans, the man with the thick glasses who can't get with a girl, and compensates for that fact with his snooty *petit-littérature*.

'Well, gentlemen, listen.' The café is silent, save for the rumbling coffee water. The trampled planking and yellowed ceiling hold their breath. 'I saw a man drop dead yesterday.' The blokes exchange a few puzzled glances. 'From my little window, *en plein air*... suicide'. Siem, immediately, fist on the table: 'He's finally done it, Frans, the hemp has gone to his head. And so help us, he was never the brightest to begin with.' 'Siem, I swear, I'm serious. Let me sketch it out: I'm painting my nocturnal landscape and suddenly, I see two figures talking on the *Blauwbrug* – not that strange, I think. But then, out of the blue, one of them drops into the water. The other chap just kind of stood there.'

Frans raises an eyebrow and sinks a little deeper into his chair, 'I'm listening. 'The first thing I do is capture it on canvas. Then I wonder who on earth would commit suicide on the *Blauwe*... But the body stayed under water. It was a sweet image, a serene death – as if it was the logical outcome of their conversation, or the final conclusion of a life...'

WHEN THE WORLD BECOMES ELUSIVE

IN THE WORK OF TWO OF THE MAJOR TWENTIETH-CENTURY WRITERS, SARTRE AND NABOKOV, WE CAN FIND A SIMILAR MOTIVE, NAMELY THAT OF THE DISTORTION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS OUTSIDE WORLD. THIS IS NOT A CONFLICT THAT ARISES OUT OF CONFLICT WITH SOCIETY OR WITH OTHER INDIVIDUALS. IT IS THE STRUCTURE OF EXISTENCE AS A WHOLE THAT THESE CHARACTERS CANNOT COPE WITH. THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THEIR NOVELS, ROQUENTIN AND CINCINNATUS, FIND THEMSELVES UNABLE TO CROSS THE BORDER BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND REALITY. ALTHOUGH OFTEN ABSTRACT AND UNFATHOMABLE IN THEIR NARRATIVE, THESE STORIES CAN TEACH US SOMETHING ABOUT THE WORLD WE TAKE FOR GRANTED. THIS ESSAY WILL LOOK INTO THE DIFFERENT ELUSIVE WORLDS SARTRE AND NABOKOV CREATE FOR THEIR CHARACTERS.

NAUSEA – JEAN - PAUL SARTRE

Based on his daily life, nothing crucial seems off about Antoine Roquentin. We get to know the main character of Sartre's novel through diary fragments. Roquentin is a mature man that resides in the fictitious city of Bouville, a coastal city in France. There, after a life of travel, he works on a biography of Marquis de Rollebon, an (also fictitious) 18th-century diplomat. He drags himself to the library, to the local Café Mably, and the rest of the time he passes his time by just strolling through town. He has no friends and often dwells on the relationship with his former lover Anny. His life is simple, reclusive, and repetitious. The first page of the diary however tells a different story:

'SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO ME: I CAN'T DOUBT THAT ANYMORE. IT CAME AS AN ILLNESS DOES, NOT LIKE AN ORDINARY CERTAINTY, NOT LIKE ANYTHING OBVIOUS. IT INSTALLED ITSELF CUNNINGLY, LITTLE BY LITTLE: I FELT A LITTLE STRANGE, A LITTLE AWHWARD, AND THAT WAS ALL. ONCE IT WAS ESTABLISHED, IT DIDN'T MOVE ANY MORE, IT LAY LOW AND I WAS ABLE TO PERSUADE MYSELF THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH ME, THAT IT WAS A FALSE ALARM. AND NOW IT HAS STARTED BLOSSOMING.'

In the following 200 pages, Sartre explores the mysterious disease that has come over Roquentin, an exploration that seeks to question his coping with existence. Roquentin calls his illness Nausea, although it hardly has the connotation we normally give it and it is even questionable whether it is an actual illness. Nausea expresses itself as a certain uneasiness, shivering, the feeling of an unwanted discovery or realization. It can come over you at any given moment and, for Roquentin, it always shows the absurdity of everyday life. It is then also in many ordinary situations that nausea overwhelms him.

In the dullness of Roquentins' life, Sartre puts the observations of an oversensitive mind, gravitating towards paranoia. Even though it is presented through diary fragments, Roquentin always stays at a certain distance, purely because the reader has a hard time understanding where his disturbing feelings come from. This is also a frustration Roquentin must cope with; in all their ignorance, the other inhabitants of Bouville do not seem the least interested in the meaning of all this existence around them. It leaves Roquentin disillusioned.

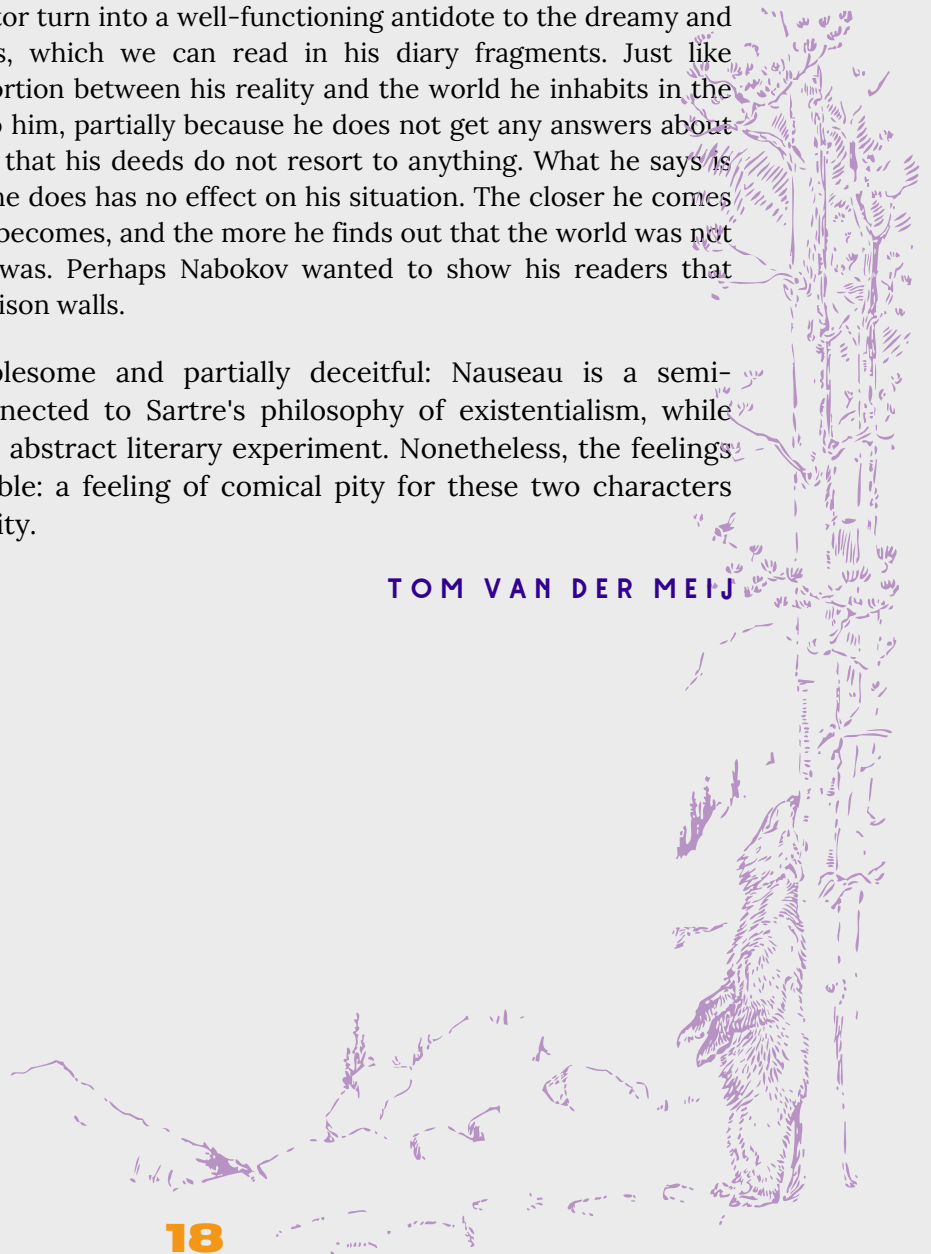
INVITATION TO A BEHEADING – VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Where Roquentin had the freedom to do whatever he chooses to do (probably a bit too much freedom), the same cannot be said for Cincinnatus, the main character of Nabokov's novel. He is a political prisoner and is told that he will be executed. What remains for him is waiting in his prison cell, waiting for the final day of his life. The information Nabokov gives us about his situation is sparse: why is Cincinnatus imprisoned and when is the execution going to take place? These questions remain mostly unanswered for Cincinnatus. Asking the prison director for some sliver of certainty about the day of the execution, Cincinnatus gets told off, accused of asking too many questions. It is for this reason that the novel is often compared to *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, where a prosecuted man is also deprived of any information.

What Nabokov does give us is the story of an imprisoned man that gets to deal with a lot of hassle in his final days. Apart from the prison director, the prison guard, and his lawyer, who all refuse to give him any information, there is the annoyingly sociable and cheerful Monsieur Pierre, who comes to inhabit the prison cell next to him. In cahoots with the prison director, Monsieur Pierre manages to frequently visit Cincinnatus in his cell and annoy him with his life story, his passion for photography and card tricks, and an overall positivity that Cincinnatus is incapable of sharing. The dialogues that result from this are lacking any input from Cincinnatus, as he seems to be resolved to ignore Monsieur Pierre. Thereby these dialogues between Monsieur Pierre and the prison director turn into a well-functioning antidote to the dreamy and imaginative thoughts of Cincinnatus, which we can read in his diary fragments. Just like Roquentin, there is a significant distortion between his reality and the world he inhabits in the prison. The world does not answer to him, partially because he does not get any answers about his future, but also because it seems that his deeds do not resort to anything. What he says is misunderstood or ignored and what he does has no effect on his situation. The closer he comes to his final days, the more passive he becomes, and the more he finds out that the world was not constructed the way he thought it was. Perhaps Nabokov wanted to show his readers that mental barriers can be as severe as prison walls.

Comparing these novels is troublesome and partially deceitful: Nauseau is a semi-biographical novel and highly connected to Sartre's philosophy of existentialism, while *Invitation to a beheading* is a more abstract literary experiment. Nonetheless, the feelings evoked in the reader are comparable: a feeling of comical pity for these two characters struggling with themselves and reality.

TOM VAN DER MEIJ





ANISIA IACOB

BLURRED LINES

BY HAMZA DUPRÉE

This pandemic painted the true colors of our world brighter than we have seen them in years: borders rule our reality. A prime example is the frequent closing of national borders. However, these borders are not only geographical; the social space between men has also widened. Exemplary is the rapidly increasing demarcating gap between the wealthy and poor, and maybe the most evident for our Western eyes: the relentless parting on the political spectrum. This essay explores the theme of boundaries in the current pandemic as the gaps it created are getting harder to bridge, and this can lead to a whole lot of problems.

Let there be no mistake: our political discourse has fallen prey to a trend of violent polarisation. Issues that resided at the fringes of our political debate have transformed into massive 'apples of discord'. The anti-vaxxer, for example, used to be a marginal figure. In recent times he has emerged as a prominent political commentator. Covid-19 is not so much the instigator of this tension, for phenomena such as the 'culture wars' were already present in the United States during the '90s. The virus merely acted as a catalyst for these existing conflicts. Just because of this explosive multiplying of hot topics, another border between people has been highlighted. The bounds between us, and our groups. For us, at least in the highly individualized Western cultures, one's actions are one's own. Per logical knee jerk are the thoughts and actions of someone else, not ours. We can't be judged by what the other person does, says, or thinks. Right? I would beg to differ. In the tradition of Robin Thicke, I would like to address the blurred lines.

It's a no-brainer that judgment is based on the actions of the judged. I assume most readers are outraged when they learn about kin punishment. It is against our most fundamental sense of righteousness that a family member is being prosecuted for someone's deeds. Truth be told, that simple notion hides an abundance of nuances. If I recall any recent terrorist attack, claimed by ISIS and sorts, something pops into mind. The public eye doesn't just turn to the delimited militia. It sees the Muslim community as a whole. The Ummah is forced to renounce the deed and the doers.

If it omits, a shadow will be cast over every Muslim. This example shows that just being part of a community changes one's position. It morphs a passive condition into an active one. Neutrality is impossible because the lines between individuals and their groups are blurred. Although that has always been true to some extent,

this phenomenon has worsened in recent times. In increasing parts of our lives, we are forced to pick sides. It is getting harder and harder to be a group member in a lazy way. The luxury of passivity, and thus neutrality, has been stripped away. The individual is judged by the actions of the vaguely delimited group to which they belong.

The claims of conspiracy theorists are assigned to anyone who isn't planning on taking the vaccine. The actions of the leader of a political partner reflect on the voter. The last two presidential elections in the USA made that painfully clear. Or glance over at the militant left. The notorious cancel culture movement has decided on staunchly condemning dissenters. Just think about the once-revered J.K. Rowling, writer of the Harry Potter novels. She is facing quite the backlash after making remarks deemed as transphobic.

Arguably, this practice of distancing is partly out of self-interest. We don't want to be ostracized by our peers. Again, deeds don't just contaminate the doer, but also those unwilling to cast themselves from both. There certainly can be made a case, that this is a positive development. Taking personal responsibility for the doings of others may be an excellent way of improving our decisions. Although, there is a flip side to it. Forced choice leads to partisanship. Especially when that choice makes one part of a group, of which one can only escape by active choice again. And even then, one becomes part of a group of conscientious objectors. Does this do us any favor in a world of polarisation? Arguably not. An increasing number of political issues could be a toxic cocktail when mixed with the tendency to judge each other for deeds that are not our own.

The world is rapidly becoming more fragmented and more interconnected at the same time. Everything we do has an increasing impact on every human being in a time of booming partisanship. Man is more individualized than ever before, in a time where unity would be the best asset to have. This pandemic taught us that holding each other responsible is of utmost importance when in dire straits. But at what cost? If we demand responsibility for the deeds of vague groups we belong to, partisanship will increase at an alarming pace. That polarisation will make acting in unison harder than ever before.

If we can't reach a consensus and act as a whole, what's the worth of responsibility?

FLUID




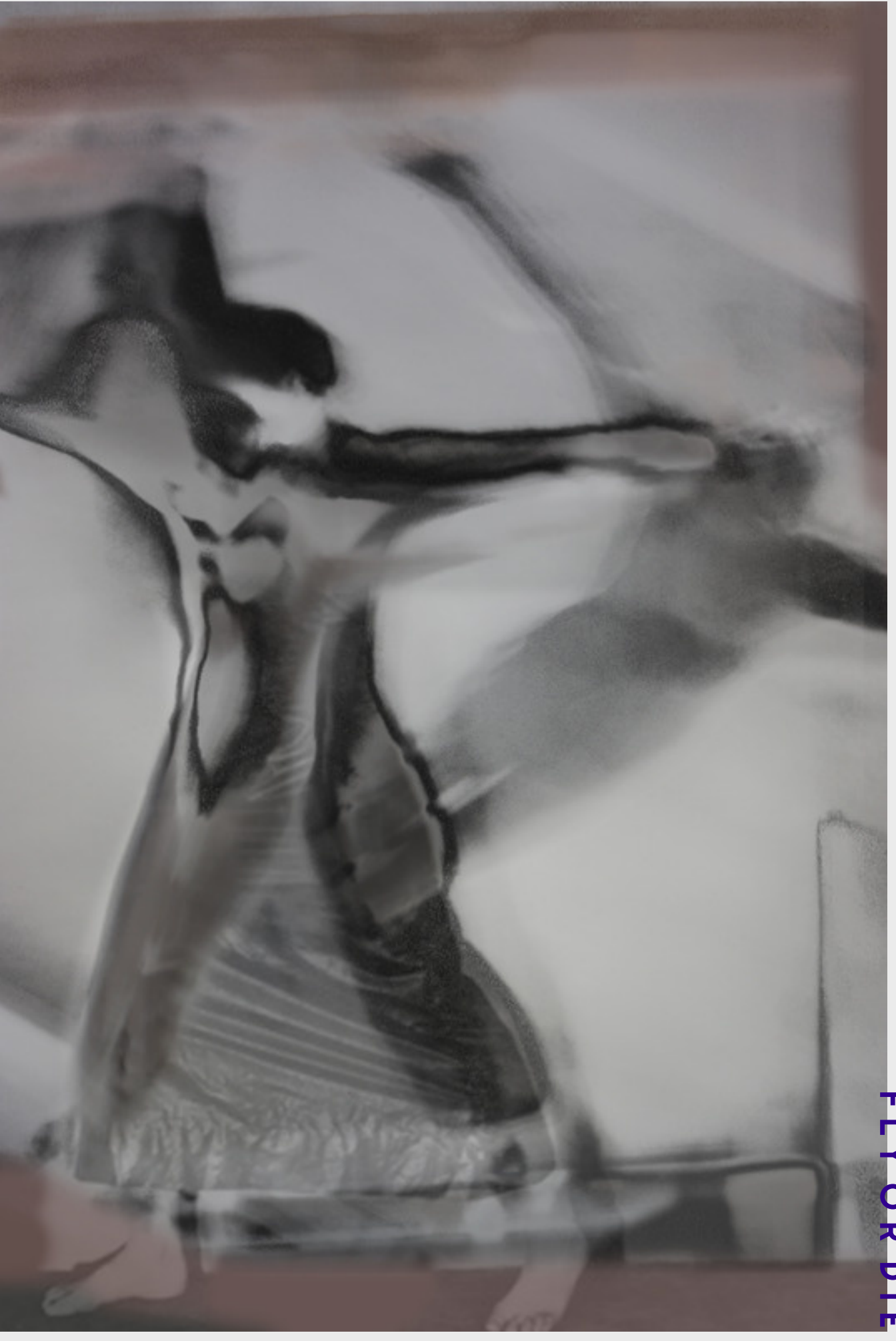
By exhibiting fluidity in a static medium, the three works of Selin Genc are, indeed, in the boundaries between extremes. The creator shared that the works were composed with opposed notions in mind, such as restriction and release, motion and confinement. In

‘Fly or Die’, the tension between movement and the lack of it can be felt by simply viewing the work. The feminine silhouette communicates at the margins of tension with her body posture. On the other hand, the grounded and solid character is lost in

‘No Door Behind the Deed’ as gravity seems to be of no concern. The viewer is inspired to experience, for a brief moment, the fluidity of falling, the uncertainty and thrill of this. Lastly,

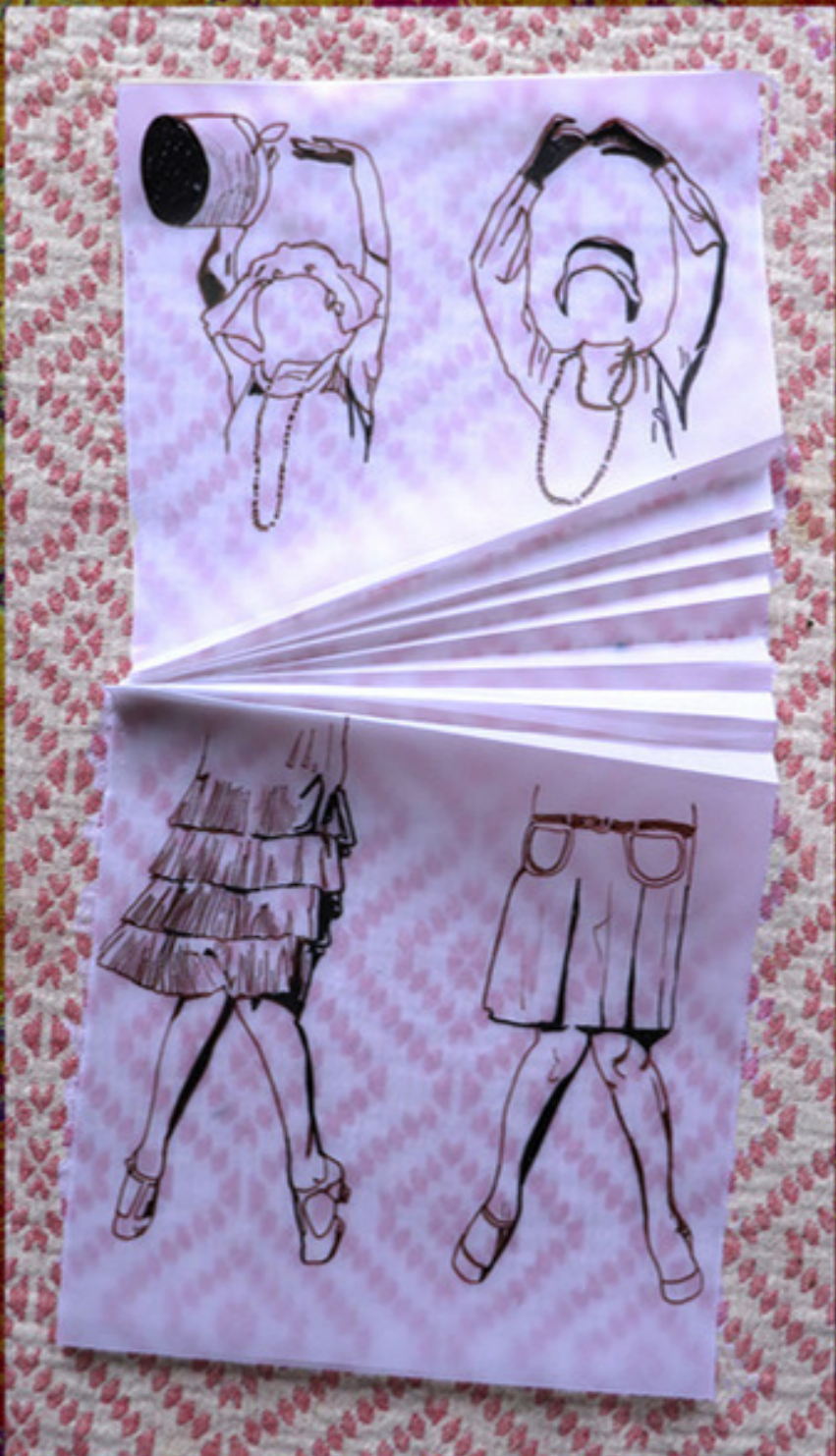
‘La Vie dans les Plis’ offers a colorful meditation on the female bodies as its boundaries, symbolized by its section at the middle. As the three pieces present the female body in various forms that combine the opposites, the mixed media in which they are created helps provide a solid support where one can feel the motion of bodily improvisation.





NO DOOR BEHIND THE DEED





SCHWAC

Footsteps echoed in the hallway. Crack, snap, rip, tear, pop, crunch. The pain was deafening and took away all of G's focus or even ability to think clearly about anything else. Of course, G was used to the feeling, for every moment of excitement, thrill, or surprise followed this way. This phenomenon had a pattern, though it was difficult to discern and had not yet become obvious to G: it resembled a defense mechanism, bursting in moments of biological necessity, thus resulting from hunger, fear, and sexual stimulation. The pattern was obfuscated, however, by the tendency of the wings to burst forward whenever G did something he wasn't meant to, for this had no biological correlation. The paranoia of disobeying, potentially being caught, or otherwise transgressing the desires of the keepers, was a trigger which even G hadn't failed to notice. The erupting of wings from G's shoulder blades was familiar, if excruciating. The chamber was matched to the wingspan with Euclidean precision, constructed to give birth to just the full circular rotation of their full extension, measuring roughly two and a half meters. They were massive, the feathers a deep, silky brown, so dark as to appear black, which matched the color tone of G's untamed curls precisely despite the difference in material. Toward the end of the wings, the darkness of the feathers lessened and became speckled with a bovine tawny, giving the magnificent wings a very pleasing gradient. The pain faded once the wings had expanded. G only experienced comfort in the extremes of full expansion or contraction; anything in between, were it to last longer than what G was accustomed to, would leave G writhing like a tortured insect. The reason for the wings' extending this sweltering afternoon was the arrival of lunch. G's keepers, being the designers of the chamber, knew that each mealtime the wings would prevent G from exiting through the much more narrow, human door frame, and so, nonchalantly, opened it fully to give the tray of food: two apples, a spit-roasted rabbit, and an amorphous mash of boiled potatoes. G loved when there was meat, and it was a special treat to get meat for lunch. G started to utter an expression of gratitude, but the door swung shut as G's head lifted, and the silence hung in the heat of the day. G was lonely, but barely knew what the alternative to loneliness was, for the only exposure to other beings G received was from the receipt of meals and the rare visitor, bird or human. But neither regarded G as equal: the birds, startled and frightened, never entered the open window of the chamber, only perched nearby to have a look at the strange, winged creature within. When humans visited, however, it was worse. They treated G either as an inanimate curiosity, speaking with shock and admiration, "Good lord, how did you come upon this thing! How can you keep it secret, the world ought to see this creature,"

followed by the brief exchange of numerical values and bickering, which G didn't understand; or they treated G like a demon, bringing small black books which they brandished while screaming phrases of damnation and satanism. Of course, G had no control over the wings, and so the arrival of the people had already triggered their expansion, though G wished they would just retract so that the people would see G as one of them.

As G scarfed down the rabbit, memories cropped up from the outside world; hazy and fuzzy, worn down from incessant use and reuse as a bastion against the feeling of entrapment. The feeling was what outlived sensory phenomena: how powerful G felt with the wind roaring, the blue of the sky made bluer, the tops of the trees like little twigs; the control G had to tilt the wings ever so slightly and begin to arc through the sky, slicing through the molecules like a razor and carving a path through the almost imperceptible density of the air, dropping down and returning up until G felt dizzy. Surely it was different when it actually happened, but it was so far off, and, like a photograph brought out of one's pocket for daily remembrance, that the details faded and the corners became smudged. G longed to return out there, but knew it was impossible. The idea had been surrendered, for out there G was a slave in waiting, either to be paraded as a freak or burned as sin incarnate. For this, G was grateful to the keepers, offering protection and three meals a day. They were more affectionate in the beginning, and seemed somewhat exhausted by the constant need to provide for G. Of course G felt guilty for this; it was G's needs, hunger, and peculiarity which demanded such circumstances and thus left the keepers so weary.

Suddenly, a voice: "We are not going to be here tonight, so don't eat all your food. That's lunch and dinner for you. You can expect breakfast tomorrow morning." G froze, mouth full of food half-chewed, and looked down at a pile of bones. The rabbit was gone, the potatoes almost finished, and only one apple remained. They certainly took their time to inform G that this was the only meal of the day. If G hadn't such an awareness of his keepers' kindness, G'd've thought that a cruel act. The disappointment made G's heart sink, but it didn't stimulate enough to move the wings from their contracted state. So, mobility abound, G took the tray of food and laid it on one of the two items of furniture in the chamber, the table which sat opposite the bed. G had no need for a closet, for G wore no clothes (they would have been impractical and short-lived, easily destroyed by unexpected wing expansion); G had no need for a bookshelf, for G never learned to read.

KADODEL

BY KIAN WACK

The table was for mealtime and the bed was for sleep. G had a large, openable glass window for entertainment, getting glimpses of the hilly forest and distant river which decorated the horizon. It gave G joy to peer into the world, and colored the memories of youthful flight, before confinement became the only rational lifestyle. G hadn't seen the outside of the chamber in what felt like an eternity; the mirror in the room gave a sense of the development of G's body, something which had allowed for a new form of entertainment which required no windows into the outside world but only the sensation of exploration: tactile, visual, gustatory, acoustic (olfactory stimulation had served very weakly in these explorations). Based on these developments, G measured the passage of time, imagining the same process as the flowers blossoming outside the window when the weather changed to warmth again. Measuring time by seasons, though initially an intuitive solution, had proven a futile project, for repetition marred memorability. It was easier this way, organically watching the development and not focusing on how long things took; certainly, it made manageable the endlessness of G's confinement.

Voices outside carried up through the thick summer air like the fragrance of flowers. G's keepers were leaving now, and G waited wistfully until the sound faded out into inaudibility. G sighed and felt tears welling, but was quick to blink them away. Whenever G began to let the tears roll, the crying would not stop until the tear ducts had been emptied, and it was like closing a recently opened dam to stop their flowing before they were finished. G didn't know why, for G didn't feel particularly sad, but the tears were uncontrollable when they started. G looked longingly at the plate of food, still not satiated from what had been eaten already, but knew that to eat it would be to sentence the future G to even more pain than that which was presently experienced. G felt sympathy for the future G, the past G, G's keepers, and even the visitors who looked upon G as an "it" rather than a "you". G felt sympathy for the birds which feared G and the insects which did not and instead curiously crawled and buzzed around G's new and unexpected shape. G even felt a pang of sympathy for the rabbit from lunchtime, though G quelled that feeling easily enough. G was unique in that, for G, sympathy was extended in equal proportions among all the beings G encountered, but G didn't know that this was peculiar. Of course, G had never read a book or been exposed to human culture; G only knew the chamber and those days in the past flying through the sky. G couldn't remember anything before that, couldn't remember maternal care and love nor paternal guidance and support, fraternal jocularity nor sororal companionship. Indeed, G was and could only remember being alone.

G sat on the bed, looking at the sun beginning to sink in its slow departure from the sky. It was late and G was starving; still, G waited as long as possible before indulging into the cold potatoes and the apple. The meal left G hungry still, but better than before, and the newfound energy made G restless. Restlessness was novel for G, someone who spent time alone constantly, for whom the sheer distant memories of past freedoms, joys, and actions usually sufficed. G did not act anymore. But all of the sudden, G felt in control, the nutrients surging and pulsing, each drop of blood in its vein traveling with a renewed sense of urgency. And then, as if by divine gesture encouraging this newfound will to action (despite the absence of religion, or any metaphysical or ethical doctrine for that matter, in G's cognition), a new sound seeped in from the horizon. It was, at first, hardly recognizable, and G started, wondering if the sound had been a hallucination. It reminded G of the songs which the birds sang in the mornings and the melodic chirping of the insects as the sun fell out of the sky, but it was softer and gentler. It didn't have the organic pulse of animal songs, which tried so desperately to catch the attention of their colleagues; nor did it have the laissez-faire of the inadvertent buzz of insects, which have no intention of creating such a sound. This noise was precise and carried with it a heartfelt longing, a yearning for something more. It felt symbolic, and yet it carried in it more than a declaration of desire or emotion, but the pure expression thereof. The sound continued to arc and soar, spiraling in different directions and rejoining itself with the subtle precision of a door fitting perfectly into its frame.

G was slack-jawed and mesmerized; however, something strange had happened, or, rather, not happened: G's wings remained fixed in place. Though the majestic sound intrigued G beyond belief, a sense of command and control remained, and this shocked G. This was the first time the wings had been controllable, not simply at the whim of G's emotions. Cautiously, and then with more confidence, G resolved to follow the sound of the music and discover its source. G tentatively approached the door, expecting to justify the fenestrated escape with the discovery of a locked door, but was surprised to find the door was not locked. G wondered how long the keepers had left it that way, expecting G to lack the control necessary to fit through the doorframe and relying on the dimensions as locks. G swung around a spiral staircase and flung open the front door; G sprinted and allowed the eyelids to slip over their green, white, and black contents. Without thinking, the wings burst free from their epidermic shackles, and G began to soar through the sky. The sound of music and the rush of the air-filled G's ears, and tears of joy streamed down G's cheeks.

Movie recommendations

FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS 1998, DIR. TERRY GILLIAM

At every second vicious and ridiculous, this film based on Hunter S. Thompson's novel of gonzo-journalism is a drug induced frenzy which reflects on gambling, hippies, and the corruption of the American dream. By adapting the cinematography to the specific effects of the drugs consumed by the protagonists, it is an experimentation with the very boundaries of narrative storytelling, which pushes audiences off the ledge of rational comprehension without making them ever feel left out.

MIDSOMMAR 2019, DIR. ARI ASTER

The geniality of Ari Aster's sophomore daylight debacle charmingly smirks at us, for it asks the question "What is good for us? What are the limits of healing?" and slowly conducts us into accepting the answer. It overturns our most basic moral intuitions, overrides our human repulsions against violence and wrongdoing and leaves us rooting for the protagonist's dignification, in spite of the dubious methods involved. This movie can do without cliché jump-scares and light-play because it shifts the lens of the oversaturated horror industrial complex entirely, placing the audience, not the film, at the centre of the fright. For it, just like the Hårga cult, brainwashes you.

THE SOUND OF METAL 2019, DIR. DARIUS MARDER

Centered around a drummer who loses his hearing, this movie poses the question: what happens when one is imposed limits on doing what one loves? In equal measures hopeful and grim, it explores the turbulent motions through which an artist navigates the six degrees of separation, and the reconciliation with himself as a human being. Although being lackluster in parts, Riz Ahmed's performance makes for an honest portrayal of the human journey through love, loss and the choices towards maturity.



CIDADE DE DEUS

Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund's *Cidade de Deus* ('City of God') is a film that completely sucks you into the quotidian hallucinatory violence of life in the Rio de Janeiro slum (favela) that it is named after, contrasting a feeling of imminence with the price one pays when deciding to escape. As the expression goes: "In the city of God, if you run, the creature catches. If you stay, the creature eats."

The favela is presented to us as a world within itself - the camera rarely leaves its confines, and when it does it rarely dwells on the beautiful Rio de Janeiro beaches and hills. Everything that is urgent and relevant is in the favela, and you are constantly sucked right back in.

The favela is violent, it is fast, corrupting, unjust, but it is everything. There are no boundaries to it. Although most of the film's audience (middle/high class, mostly white) was completely oblivious to this fact before entering theaters, they loved that it repulsed them, that it made them feel the strength of the favela and understand the motivations of those who inhabit it. The depiction worked. As Glauber Rocha would state, it is aesthetically violent, confronting the average movie-goer with the fact that people live under such carnage, which was in part caused by those on their side of the theater, but that in that a strong and beautiful culture has surfaced nonetheless.

Granting that the favela persists, almost as a character, very much in the foreground of the movie, it is not the element that takes on the emotional play on audiences during the movie. Rather, it is the Sisyphean pervasiveness of the favela on its young inhabitants that hooks our sentiment.

The omnipresence of the Favela

It is often said that the shift from childhood to adulthood is one that occurs when one loses one's innocence.

When 'Cidade de Deus' sets forth scenes of pre-teens gunning down grown men juxtaposed with those of normal child's play, contrasted with those same kids smoking pot at the beach, you know that this distinction is simply erroneous.

Innocence isn't just a worn picture that degrades with age. It does have a natural period of enhanced activity in childhood, but with growth it is not lost to a process with the structure of radioactive decay- it simply has less opportunities to surface. This is what we see in these children - innocence is leisure in the throgs of violence. Innocence is the game of football before the gunfight.

That is what is so disturbing about the movie: the cameras show us children, their mirrors show them men.

The cost of escape

Buscapé is the only character who seems to think beyond the favela - he never became directly involved in the frenzy of violence, drugs, bribery and murder. He was a quiet boy, insistent on letting his involvement in the City of God be strictly passive: a photographer, a documenter, an observer who merely wanted to stay alive long enough to step his feet firmly on the asfalto (literally: asphalt, Brazilian favela-slang for the city outside the slums).

In the last scenes, Buscapé decides which pictures to submit to the asfalto newspaper he had been working for - that of a dead gangster; or that of a living gangster, moments before, handing drug-money bribes to the notoriously corrupt Brazilian police. One would make him money, the other would make him famous. He chooses the former.

This decision may be a hard one to come to terms with if we put ourselves in his shoes. If we fully grasp, however, that Buscapé's only motivation was escape, it seems like the logical solution. Fame would place the photographer as an object of the favela in the eyes of the public, would force him to present himself to others as one with privileged live access to particular situations and people in the favela. It would further his imprisonment, forever. Anyone can take a picture of a dead gangster. Only an insider can take a picture of a living one committing crime, and get away with it. Only he would know where to hide.

"I forgot to mention - no one calls me Buscapé anymore. Now I'm Wilson Rodrigues, photographer."

In doing so, however, he misses out on the opportunity to realize that there are no boundaries to the City of God, and they certainly do not extend to his person - everything that happens does not happen only around him, but in him too. By refusing associations and changing his name, leaving the last of his origins behind, he locks a part of himself away - he estranges his own identity. And in this choice, the City of God lives on.

MR. NOBODY

The year is 2092 and humanity has finally reached immortality, Nemo Nobody is the last mortal human being and is the center of everyone's attention. However, it is not quite clear who he actually is, and any further inquiry into this just makes it more confusing.

Nemo, as we later find out, has the ability to experience all his possible lives. This means that where Nemo makes a choice, his history diverges into multiple possible timelines, and as he naturally makes many choices throughout life, he also has the ability to experience many possible timelines.

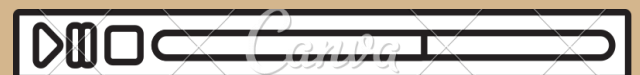
This raises some important questions: How to make meaningful choices? What choice results in the best possible timeline? Would it be obvious what choice to make if we knew all its consequences? But what if a meaningful choice cannot be made simply by comparing the value of one to the value of the other? One thing that becomes clear is that not every hard choice we have to make has an alternative that is obviously more valuable, that there is no choice that is in itself more meaningful than another. To make the choice then, we have to look beyond value. The movie tells us that it is up to us to make our decisions meaningful because it is precisely by choosing one possible life over the other that we decide that any one alternative really is more valuable.

THE FOUNTAIN

This movie brings us face to face with the inescapable, namely the day we draw our last breath. The movie consists of multiple timelines that seem intertwined with each other, but we aren't given a clear answer as to which timeline is real, and which are fictitious if any.

However, all of them have one important thing in common: the protagonists are obsessed with the impossible task of trying to save their dying (or already dead) wife. All of them are obsessed with the search for immortality, or rather, the escape from death.

As we see them dedicate their lives to the conquest of death, we start seeing how the way we think of death shapes our life. Ironically, what we might notice is that in this obsession with escaping death, we are simultaneously escaping life. This obsession is presented here as a mental barrier that keeps us away from the present, in which salvation, or immortality seems always just within reach. What we come to realize, however, is that the barrier can only be dropped once the obsession is dropped. We can only fully live our lives once we have accepted that our time is limited.



CLARA MENDES
&
MICHAEL RODEWIJK

DELIMITING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF A SITUATION ACROSS THE BORDER

"YOU'RE STUDYING SINOLOGY? SO LET ME ASK YOU,
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE WAY CHINA IS TREATING
HONG KONG?"

I cannot count the times people have asked me that exact question. Most people who ask me this already have a certain opinion that they wish to express about the way China treats Hong Kong. Instead of being open to my criticism that they might not understand the whole, extremely complex situation and should read up on history it is rather preferred by most to spread their opinion based on one or two media platforms. As you might notice, I have a strong opinion about people who limit their potential knowledge, knowledge which you could access and obtain. In this article, I will try to argue that you should be aware that the media is to some extent propaganda, and often elaborates on a certain part of the whole, complex situation of that certain event. For that reason, you should be careful with spreading your opinion about certain events around the world, as it can create distance between people. An example that I will use is the situation in Hong Kong, in which China claims sovereignty over Hong Kong, while many people in Hong Kong wish to be independent. In other words, I will argue that when crossing a border or forming an opinion on something unfamiliar, you are genuinely open to its unfamiliar history, language, norms and values. Why will I argue this? Because we have enough historical events to know that friction often comes along when people from different regions do not understand each other.

Ironically enough, many media platforms create abstract boundaries to limit our understanding of what is behind actual borders. I am talking about publicizing prejudices about a country's government, culture, people and history. This can be seen in the situation in Hong Kong. In that case, it is not only interesting to read news articles from different platforms, but also to always have in mind to what organization, company or government the media platform belongs to.

In China, the state media (CCTV) is under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. Weibo is a platform used by Chinese citizens, while Line is used in different parts of Asia, such as Taiwan. It did not take a lot of time for me to find an article on the Taiwanese Line that talks negatively about how China is treating Hong Kong. I also found quickly that Weibo users in China talk negatively about protestors in Hong Kong who, according to the Weibo users, do not understand that without China, Hong Kong is nothing. These Chinese citizens also said that Western media is claiming that Hong Kong protestors are the good guys, while clearly, the Weibo users do not agree. Weibo and Line are both very accessible, although I must say that it helps when you can read Mandarin. It is important to know that in every country, whether they have state media or not, people use social media and some other platforms that might be unknown (inter)nationally, as these are often quite underground.

When you read about Hong Kong's history, you will probably come to the conclusion that the British Empire acted cruelly and played a big role in the creation of today's despicable situation. To be clear, I am not saying that the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), nowadays more or less China, acted excellently either. While it is understandable that you cannot read up on every historical event, we should acknowledge that we are uninformed. When we don't, we form an opinion that we might express to others and thereby influence them, which might lead to prejudices and even to conflicts. On the other hand, how do you know you have enough knowledge to have a legitimate opinion? Maybe you never have enough knowledge, like Aristotle once said, the more you know, the less you know.

Then again, what can scholars change in the world when they will only give nuanced answers about a reality too complex to form a strong opinion? When everything is in a grey area, shouldn't we act like Switzerland and focus on ourselves, instead of feeling the need to have an opinion on anything that is beyond our control?

Moreover, shouldn't we focus on today's situation instead of its history? Let's take a look at the situation in Hong Kong again. If you do not have a lot of knowledge of its situation, that is fine. I only use the situation as an example to make a point. When you finally come to the conclusion that the British Empire played a big role, what will you do? Today, it is very unlikely that the British empire will acknowledge their cruelty and formally apologize, and that is because the British Empire no longer exists. Therefore, it does not change the situation for people in Hong Kong, so why should we bother learning about its history? I think we should learn about its history to get a better grip of the situation and to create mutual understanding. In other words, read state-media, social media, and preferably also underground media from different countries to understand different perspectives. In doing so, you will understand that China might look at Hong Kong as its living "evidence" that "The West is better than China", something that hurt China deeply and cannot be forgotten. Although this is not an excuse, it might provide understanding. Once the world understands the situation a bit better, China's need of proving "the West" wrong might decrease. Hostility could decrease.

I am aware that this is a very optimistic thought. However, if mutual understanding and toleration were there in the first place, the Opium wars might have been avoided. That is actually an encouraging thought, don't you think? Therefore, I like the idea of learning from the past and crossing abstract borders to understand each other. While I am aware that it is very optimistic to think mutual understanding can prevent disastrous events, I still believe that mutual understanding will already pay off by preventing awful situations in everyone's daily life.

When crossing borders, I think it is beyond good when you know something about the situation. As this is often unrealistic, considering it takes a lot of time, simply accept that your opinion might be not well substantiated and therefore not the best one to spread extensively. When talking to people and reading the news, try to focus on delimiting your knowledge instead of limiting it by following the same media platforms and talking to the same group of people again and again. Think of what your role could be. For instance, for me, it is spreading this message to elaborate on the prejudices China deals with and has towards "the West". For you, it could be something else as you might have more knowledge on another subject.

JOMIENE GALSTAUN

W O R O S C O P E



Pisces, March looks great for you! Positive energies will be the order of the day this year because of all the hard work you've poured in until now and are bound to pour further on. Take advantage of this month and year to make positive changes in all areas of your life. Write that paper, apply for that grant. With hard work, you can achieve anything. Your love also benefits from these positive energies so make sure to show your partner how much you love them. Single? No problem! A special someone will be on their way to accompany you this upcoming spring. Just keep an eye on already-existing friends and acquaintances as that special someone will be someone you already know. As your life will prosper greatly, make sure to exercise a healthy dose of Stoicism. Don't fall in excess and, if the temptation feels too great, carrying around a book of Seneca or Marcus Aurelius will be your lucky philosophical charm!



We all reap what we sow, but no one puts as much tender care into gardening your life projects as you do, **Taurus!** You are the living embodiment of Cicero: all you need is a garden, a library, and cultivating for yourself and others is all you truly care about. This month, you are in good luck - the arrival of the spring will manifest your goals, although it is important that you tone down that bull-temperament of yours: not all will go as planned, so take a chill pill! What you do now will affect your reputation for the rest of the year: so, beware not to snap at your dear friends when your mood is all end-of-winter-blues and they don't seem to understand your rocky emotional terrain. Remember: good work pays off - but I guess you've known that all your life.



March: it's hot and it's cold; it's yes and it's no - and you will be feeling the growing pains of this transition all month. Yet if there is something that characterizes you more than any other sign in the zodiac, **Cancer**, is your unyielding loyalty for those who brought you into this world - Momma Nature is no exception. You 100% stand by Kant in thinking that Nature does nothing by chance and that all capacities are to be developed to their maximum potential; and although you may not believe it, you are in the perfect position to do this. Combine distraction from dull pain with your empathetic and tenacious energy: help someone throughout this month, it is what you do best! Whether it be a colleague, a family member, a stranger, it will warm your heart to create a positive impact in someone's life. And it sure is better than staying inside rewatching 'Friends' for the 7th time, isn't it?



While your confident and determined nature never truly quivers (the certainty of "I think, therefore I am" is your confidence motto, isn't that right?), you might have let it get the best of you these past months. Using the icy season to bury one's problems has never been a good way to stay stable, now has it, **Aries?** Although a lot of things will resurface under that snow, take advantage of the warmth of the friends around you to develop creative ways of getting yourself out of whatever rut you created for yourself. A certain lovebird also told me that you won't be alone in your turbulent travels: a mysterious acquaintance will be right by your side the whole time, and boy, oh boy, will they play on your heartstrings. Don't let them disturb too much of your aura of improvement, so take it slow, and maybe clean your winter-lair (I see that bag of chips peaking under the couch!) before any funny business appears towards the end of the month.



Honey, you have no idea what you are getting into this month. You will enter a metaphysical journey through the big questions of existence, and it won't be pretty. Your innocence will make you feel tricked, your indecisiveness lost, but your curiosity will drag you away into the depths of your own philosophy. It will be hard, but you will never be the same once it's over: you will reach a higher plane of consciousness (without doing as much as sifting through any Heidegger or Aristotle, aren't you lucky?) and see life in a completely different, bright and healthy light once all is said and done. This experience will completely recharge you - so it might be good to start planning that romantic getaway vacation: you'll be able to enjoy it more than ever!



Some say that **Leos** are the most independent sign... while they're single. What happens then? Well, that is what you will have to decide this following month because Cupid is sending his arrow your way. You may succumb to your tendencies for self-centeredness and inflexibility and make it all about you all the time, but just maybe... don't. Set some boundaries on that ardent ego. No one likes to serve your highness constantly with little return. This is a golden opportunity for you, so channel all that passion and warm-heartedness that we all know you have. Like Bertrand Russel says, "To fear love is to fear life, and those who fear life are already three parts dead". So don't be dead: we all know you love to plan insane expensive theatre dates - make this your next project.



Virgo, you're an addict to orderliness. We all know it, and usually it's a bit freakish, but this month it will pay off. Academically and professionally, times will be quite turbulent to the start - you will need to make decisions, you will change your mind about certain things and regrets will start to flourish. You tend to be overly critical of yourself, but do not back down - trust your hard work and practical instincts to make the best choices for you, and you will be rewarded. Let Aristotle guide you in distinguishing what is praxis and what is poesis, and in that way your work will really flourish into something that is useful for you and those around you. You are the "disappointed Goddess" - let this month turn that narrative around.



My radar tells me that you'll have some problems in your home this month, **Scorpio**. It's not very precise, so there is no telling if it's a broken sink pipe or an argument with a parent; but regardless, always keep in mind that you need to keep your cool. There's no need in manipulating the plumber into thinking the flooding on your bathroom floor is his fault just to feel better about yourself, right? Don't fall back into your dark side for comfort - you have all that resourcefulness and bravery in you, so why don't you use that to get back on your feet instead? Might be good for your tarnished rep. I know you're more one for edgy philosophy, but there is an AA quote that may help you through these times: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." You won't always be right, things won't always go your way, and that's okay. Use this month to learn that.



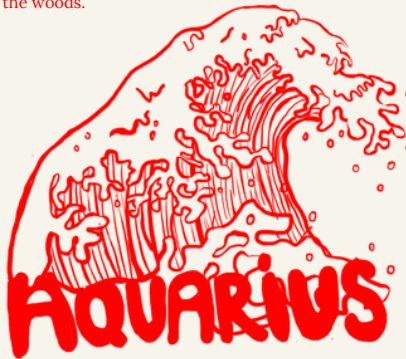
Oh **Capricorn**, you aren't in a very good mood, are you? I heard you've been hating everything and its cousin this month. That's okay - sometimes life can feel like running on an endless treadmill - all work and no progress. You've really been feeling those overly pessimistic Adorno quotes lately, we can all tell. But Capricorn, you've got to keep an open heart: remember that all your self-discipline and responsibility has brought you somewhere once, and it will again! You know you have some of the most lasting bonds out of anyone in the Zodiac, with people who can help you through these hard times: just treat them well and keep them close, and they will be with you, fully. You'll soon really like things again: not everything will suck forever. Bittersweet, huh? We know you kinda love being an edge-lord.



You needn't pick up a single one of Plato's digressions on friendship to be a prime example of how it is done well, and that is why this will be the perfect month for a socialite blabbermouth like you, **Libra**. Plenty of opportunities will arise for you to meet new people and connect more deeply with old friends, so prepare to launch all that graciousness and charm that we all know you have. However, they will not come necessarily in the form that you expect, and the harmony that you so adore may be lacking in most situations you will encounter - please do not revert to ice cream tubs and self-pity, it's not a good look on you. Trust your kindness and approachability and you will shine so bright on those around you! People will like you so much that they'll follow you around everywhere - might be good company on that trip you've been planning, no?



You have a great sense of humor - good, because you will be needing it this month. Long ago (classic **Sag**) you promised more than you could deliver to a certain someone, and although you thought the whole thing is dead and buried, it has come to bite you back in the ass! This will cause you a lot of anxiety, but you know better than anyone that laughter is the best remedy. Laughter, and, of course, solving things diplomatically. Don't lose your temper, keep your spirits up and all will be great! You'll lose all constraints once your past is truly behind you, and can go back to being your old bubbly, adventurous self. In fact, after the turmoil you'll need a little vacation: you know, something like Nietzsche's Sils-Maria house where you can really embrace your freedom, your philosophy - make sure to bring some friends along, though: we all know an extrovert doesn't last long alone in the woods.



Lies, lies, lies. They won't get you anywhere, **Aquarius**. March is a great month to be honest with yourself and others. Take a moment to reflect back and meditate on the present so you can achieve that healthy level of honesty. Yes, we all know you sometimes overflow with drama, Queen, but maybe now is the time to get yourself together (and maybe stop binging on RuPaul's Drag Race). Pinch yourself and exit the soap opera script you've been inhabiting for a few months now. Stop focusing on impressing others and take more care of yourself. Indulge yourself in some me-time and plan your months ahead. We all know you don't really like planning, but we also know that you want to make the best out of this year. So, make Freud proud and don't let your repressions get the best of you. To quote him, "one day, in retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful." So keep it together!



WHERE
ARE WE
GOING?

NEXT



BEYOND BOUNDARIES

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