

J o e n

Vedel, Isaac Pool,
Alex Walton, Arrow Mac
Gowan, Andrés Felipe Torres,
Matthew C. Wilson, Margarita
Sánchez, Kaitlynn Redell & Sara Jimenez,
Ilyn Wong, Gavan Blau, Avi Alpert &
Sreshta Rit Premnath, Carlos Labbé,
Andrew Freeman & Heather M. O'Brien,
Maricruz Alarcón, Hernán Rivera, Jessica
Posner, Thom Donovan, Vincent Vulsma,
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“I, myself, alone, have more memories than all mankind since the world began,” he said to me.

And again: “My dreams are like other people’s waking hours.”

Funes The Memorious, Jorge Luis Borges



Edited by Ilyn Wong & Maricruz Alarcón
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Dear I,

You have asked me to speak to the condition of living in a present whose constitutive histories exceed your actual experience. This is the question, of course, of the collective unconscious, and especially for you, I imagine, of collective guilt and trauma. I find myself in the unenviable position –in this, the year of my 100th birthday– that differs somewhat from yours: I have lived through so much that even what I have experienced escapes my ability to make sense of it. You might say this is the experience of the 20th century, but I imagine that this is always what it feels like to be human. I imagine that, 1000 years ago, a woman in a crater of the universe called Jerusalem or Shanghai or Cahokia, felt that the burdens of history and transitoriness of the present forever exceeded her grasp.

But let us not get lost in such speculative histories. What is much realer for me at this moment, and what I might be able to contribute in response to your concerns, is something of what this means for generations to interact, especially in the context of that task to which I have dedicated my life: teaching.

My students and I seem to experience and examine the world in parallax. Our generational separation –a small one in the grand scheme of things– is enough to make a topic of conversation that was once urgent, appear to be quaint. Yet, this parallax is also a relation of reflection. In my students I discern a distant enthusiasm, my own from years past. Of course it is a distortion to see another as oneself, but it is through this misrecognition that each of us time-travels. In my experiences students find the wisdom that I myself have been unable to glean. Likewise the excitement that a student feels restores the hope that experience has taught me to mistrust. Projecting, reflecting and refracting our experiences through each other, we seem to construct a time that is neither of ours. A collective unconscious that exceeds the sum of our collective experiences.

This shared nature of teaching and learning is exemplified by prompting. You have sent me a prompt – you asked me to reflect on a sentence of my dear friend Jorge Luis Borges. (A very curiously translated version, one that evokes ghosts where JLB invoked the sacred, but, then again, what is more sacred than the protection and preservation of our ghosts?) You prompted me to think about the past, and my past, and our past, and how our pasts differ. You know, in fact, I began with another letter, but I scratched it out. It was about memory and ghosts, and it was very postmodern, very “literary,” which feels so outdated these days I couldn’t bear it. To answer you more directly then; to prompt you to continue in our path, I say this: to remember is to violate the sacred right of the past to be past. This is why ghosts scare us, but also remind us that we, as humans, have yet to live as well as we can.

Sincerely yours,
Indira Sylvia Belissop

Dear I,

~~I am honored to have been invited to write for my publication and to elaborate on recollection (or was it remembrance?). As a spectre myself, I feel especially equipped to speak about ghosts. However, as a spectre of the forgotten, I travel along the vast fissures that spread more quickly than the memories they surround. I cannot recall because I have forgotten and I cannot be recalled because I am forgotten. Having misplaced myself I rarely come upon memories, and when I do they seem like islands, self-contained and full of strange denizens.~~

~~Now that I mention it, I realize it is both recollection and remembrance. This is of course what *recordar* means – to record, to remember. *Lo recuerdo*; *Him*, I remember (and oh yes, that most sacred verb, the verb that speaks the dead, but is it not the case that only the dead have the right to speak for themselves? Do I remember Joyce correctly? Does it go, “Besides how could you remember everybody?... Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in every grave...” Gramophone. To write the voice. But this does not seem right, this ghostly act, this recalling the dead, denying them their sacred reward: that the rest be silence.) But to tell the truth, these are idle concerns. I do not remember him anyway.~~

~~I have heard people warn: remember or you will repeat—a broken record perhaps. But as Pierre Menard discovered, repetition is impossible. Each remembrance is an action, each located in its time and place and so each memory more than a displacement or a re-placement of an event. Yet, there are forces at work which make us forget, and along with each memory we lose a muscle. I am an archivist of these dark places, collecting fragments that are yet to cohere—hidden constellations. There is an ethics to remembering. What to force into the light and when.~~

~~Let’s say then that there are two sides to me – two pulls in my soul. One wills me to forget; the other, to remember. With each muscle I lose, I gain a newer, stronger one. When we exercise we kill our muscles, only so that they may reconstellate in more durable forms. And yet, how could I hold these together if I do not—excuse the trick—re-member them. Forgetting makes me grow; remembering keeps me whole. Perhaps, like the two forces that have produced the universe as we know it, remembering and forgetting are simply the conditions of possibility for being human. Then they are no longer opposed. Then the question is, how can I forget so that I remember, and how can I remember so that I forget? But that does not resolve the question of content. What do I remember; what do I forget?~~

~~But these are remote speculations for a bodiless voice. These recollections of being an I. Yet, in order to speak, a source must be imagined, invoked and inscribed. In order to speak (to you) and be heard, other voices must be silenced. Writing forces me into embodiment, and yet I am able to feel another existence. An existence of nonbeing where the remembered and the forgotten congeal into a continuous ocean...~~

Sincerely mine,
I-S Belissop

An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in New York City

Date: 27 January 2014

Time: 12:57pm

Weather: 32 °F. Partly cloudy, passing sunny spells

Location: Zucotti Park, New York City

In the middle of the square on the eastern side, I sit down on a cold granite bench with my back against a cold granite wall

From where I'm sitting I can count 43 benches and seats; all made of granite and all empty. Bus QM11 is passing by on Trinity Pl.

There are 33 trees

The ground is done with a stone paving patterned with lights in milk-white glass. Snow is lying around in piles. Bus X4 is passing by on Broadway

To the left of me is a large sculpture made of bright-red beams (it looks like a giant X). The title is *Joie de Vivre*. The artist's name is Mark de Suvero

Next to the giant X and with his back to the square, a guy is taking a *selfie* with his iPhone

Opposite me there are 4 food trucks: 3 Pyramids, Halal Gyro Express, Ali's Coffee Stand, and Sam's Falafel. In between Halal Gyro Express and 3 Pyramids there is a street vendor selling hats, scarves and gloves (it's that time of year)

In the northern part of the square is a bronze statue of a businessman sifting through his briefcase on a granite bench. The title is *Double Check* and the name of the artist is John Seward Johnson

On the corner of Liberty St. and Trinity Pl. is an elevated surveillance tower from the NYPD, surrounded by a metal fence. There is a cop car parked with one cop inside

A man in a black jacket that says "Harvard" and a hat with a big American flag is cleaning the granite benches with a broom

At the other end of the square a man in an identical jacket is sweeping the ground

A guy with a baseball cap leaves 3 Pyramids with a gyros-sandwich and a bottle of Spring Water, sits down on a granite bench and starts to eat

A police car is passing by on Liberty st.

2 people are standing around a granite table flipping through some paper-documents

Bus X10 is passing by on Broadway

A guy in a bright-green jacket runs diagonally across the square. Another guy in a blue jacket runs in the opposite direction. They pass each other without saying hi

The 2 people flipping through paper-documents at a granite table now leave

A guy in an orange vest carrying three long poster tubes walks diagonally across the square. Bus QM7 is passing by on Trinity Pl.

3 people are queuing at Sam's Falafel. 2 people are queuing at Halal Gyro Express

A construction-worker wearing a bright-yellow jacket and a blue helmet walks diagonally across the square

2 guys are eating hotdogs around a garbage bin at the other end of the square. Bus X12 is passing by on Broadway

There are 2 pigeons in a tree and 6 on the ground. A tourist is taking a picture of the bronze sculpture. And another one of the square

A man in a tie with a cup of coffee passes by. Two tourists with rolling suitcases walks diagonally across the square

Taxis are passing. And private cars. Another police car. A truck from Fedex and one from the United States Postal Service are parked alongside the square

Above the open window at Ali's Coffee Stand, there is an electronic sign with a running

text that says: "S-A-N-D-W-I-C-H- -H-O-T- -T-E-A- -C-O-F-F-E-E- -C-H-O-C-O-L-A-T-E-"

Bus X4 is passing by on Broadway

A woman in fur is standing under the giant X made of bright-red beams. She is taking pictures of the square with her iPhone. No one is sitting on the granite benches. No one are queuing at the food trucks

A man passes by. On his bag it says: "Forever 21"

The pigeons fly in a circle around the square. Some land in the trees, some on the ground, the rest stay in the air circulating. Bus M5 is passing by on Broadway

Bus QM7 is passing by on Trinity Pl. A man in a suit rushes diagonally across the square

A construction-worker in dirty jeans and a bright-yellow vest passes by. His hands are tucked in the pockets of his jacket under the vest.

A woman with lipstick and headphones is walking diagonally across the square

A fire truck is passing by on Trinity Pl. Bus X3 on Broadway

A double-decker tourist bus is passing by on Broadway. There are 2 people queuing at Sam's Falafel

A construction-worker in a bright-yellow jacket and a white helmet is carrying a large tool across his shoulder

7 people are walking diagonally across the square (none of them seems to know each other)

The man that was cleaning the granite benches with a broom is now cleaning his broom in the snow. A group of 6 tourists are walking alongside the square

Bus QM11 is passing by on Trinity Pl.

A red and blue cement mixer is passing by on Broadway. Bus X5 is passing by too

A huge group of pigeons, more than 200, gather in the northern part of the square. Bus X12 is passing by

A guy parks his bike up against a tree and is now eating a muffin on one of the granite benches. A double-decker tourist bus with an advertisement for Super Bowl is passing by on Broadway

A woman is trying a hat at the street vendor; she looks at herself in a small mirror and corrects the hat (she doesn't seem to like it)

There is no queue at Sam's Falafel

A construction-worker in a bright-yellow jacket is sitting down at a granite bench rolling a cigarette. Bus QM7 is passing by on Trinity Pl.

A couple with two kids is walking diagonally across the square. One of the kids is screaming. A construction-worker in a bright-yellow jacket and a blue helmet passes them

A guy in a suit is smoking a cigarette while pacing around in the middle of the square (it looks like he is freezing)

A woman is walking by while speaking into her headset, or into the air

A double-decker tourist bus covered in an advertisement for Pepsi is passing by on Broadway

A guy who is standing next to the sculpture *Joie de Vivre* suddenly shouts: "OOO-CCUU-PYYYYY WAAAAAAL-STREEEET!" He then spreads seeds on the ground and all the pigeons around the square fly towards him

Bus X1 is passing by on Broadway. 7 tourists are taking a group-picture on the granite bench next to *Double Check*

The man shouting now walks to the other end of the square and shouts: "OOO-CCUUU-PYYYYY!" The pigeons are following him

Bus QM7 is passing by on Trinity Pl.

I get up from the cold granite bench and leave

And when u pass

I had never been to New York in 2001
 I had never been to New York in 2009
 Until I had. And so what?

May my bag not touch the turnstile
 Marking me as exiting step
 Purchased second hand
 Leather's like skin and
 The letter or the comment
 Are a satiating bone
 Thrown to temper cadence
 Out blanketing but still cold

Cut out - not an image of health
 But a suggestion of taste
 Say, palette
 You - a dog - smell it on me like ass

While walking or wearing,
 Yours to take out a look
 God made dirt so dirt don't hurt

Am a graphic, am my shirt
 All facts sink - am I right?
 Am a boulder not a rock?
 All hollow thought made heavy now floats

Filling in the same spot:
 A how-to tutorial for sludge
 Or corn starch
 Naturalizing my mood



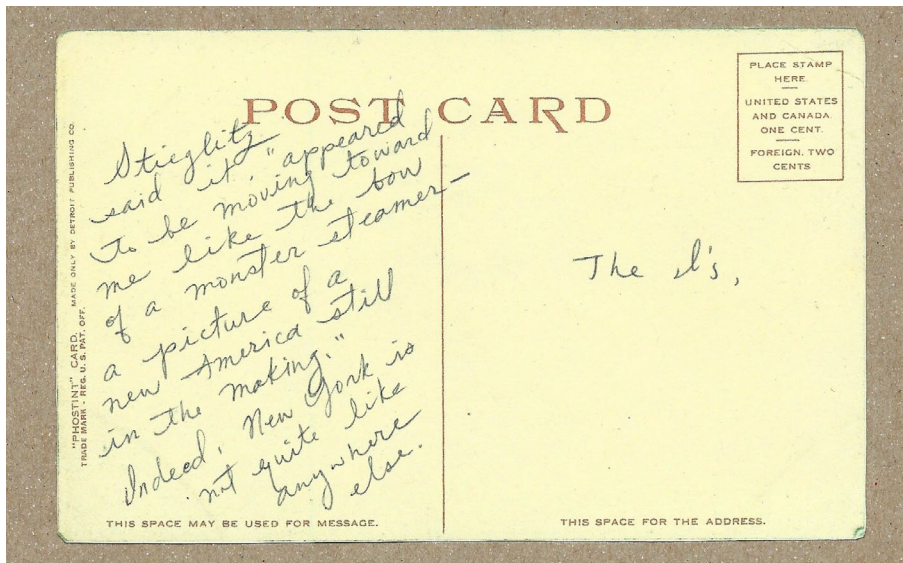
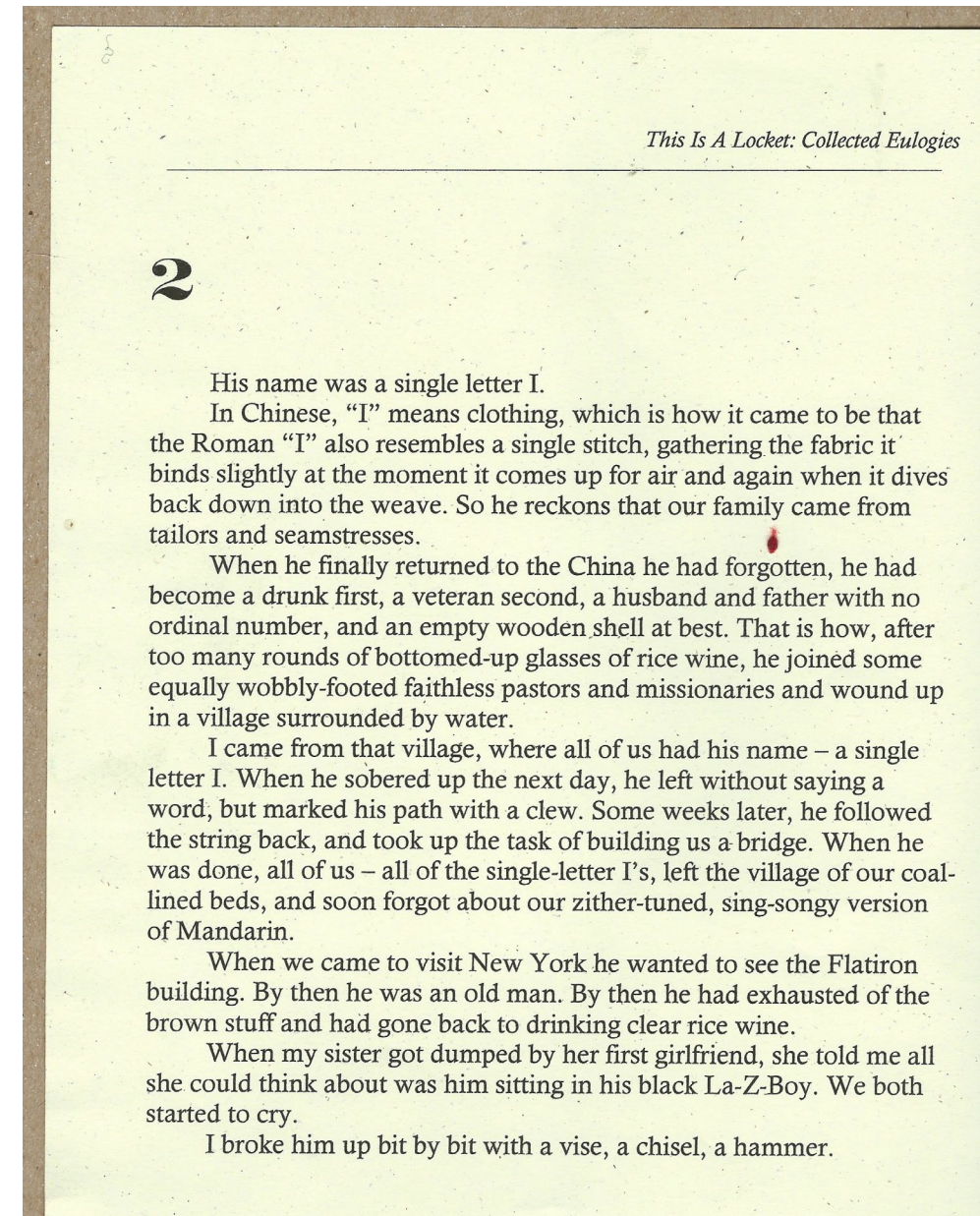


fig. 2 - Back of postcard - a lazy note.



fig. 3 - Front of postcard, a hazy Edward Steichen

fig. 4 -



The Barricades

Over the overturned
 omnibus, stacked, forced, and somehow
 “adjusted, clamped, imbricated, rectilinear, symmetrical, and funereal” at once, offset rows of
 paving-stones turned upright from the street, dreggy casks, fifteen barrels letting lime dust
 out, old shutters missing slats stuck through wrought-iron grates, fleur-de-lys
 in split pallets budded, planks, wedges, rust-spangled undulate tin roofing,
 tools with no handle, tool handles,
 frayed timbers pierced with creaking poles, butchers’ blocks, fungal stumps, “dislocated chains” and
 one smoked-glass door wedged like a stuck kite, merged in
 a mass of man-sized splinters as if the sea of wood were cracking up – these

span the street roughly twelve
 feet tall, sloping up, a “petrified riot” self-sculpting every thing that enters it, men included, swollen
 like a freshet on this and that horse half-live, shocked still
 with a soot boot print on its ribcage, this and that anarchist, this and that peasant starting
 to fall, raise cry, raise vow, sacrifice, stumble, climb – swollen from twelve feet
 nearly to the third story, where the laundry line sways dripping white
 gown into the makeshift scarlet standard (for the people
 still launder, after all). And in the heap from its

swollen end’s burgundy
 stain the popped cork in a parody of gunshot
 singing I FEEL NOTHING, NO NOTHING
 I FEEL NOTHING AT ALL
 the head answering without its man,
 past wrong, past division, not building a wall but
 making a brick, at last, some cause to sign along its line,
 along the ragged border where I did not honestly

know if the hand was quick
 and clutching or if I stood tightening its
 dead tendons through the shingled layer I was
 standing on. I was standing. There wasn’t after all the time
 etcetera, or wish. Is love not improvised love not massed
 on things of detail, detailless things, acting on all impulses at once
 in a gentler elsewhere? Beyond the garden
 an unstaked unpropped

thorny vine and viney
 thorn in mutual aid act each other’s fencepost,
 bound together, to put forth freely a filthy little berry
 of their species, then further on the
 ’tended arms of two waltzers slide through the ball; elsewhere
 the young lady, pregnant and careful, traces with one hand
 the sun-warmed cobble wall as if across the week to some engagement
 forward on the calendar while the other

absently rehearses
 Vinteuil’s phrase, kids wait out ALL FREE imprisoned in a jail they have imagined,
 academicians in an oak perch squabbling over what the future verifiably
 is, the raw twigs a millimeter fresh or rather hanging moss that scribbles groundward; and the
 avant drawer draws, graphite on
 long scrolls rolling up behind and rolling up ahead, of him, submitting
 time’s argument to time, forgetting, not knowing when or who

or how to carry on; offenses for which the scrounging cur is
 beaten down Rue Saint Antoine

with a *Le Monde* rolled up,
 its smeared out date eternally early May 16-17-18-19xx like a combination
 lock at the impasse, positions washed in fire, a fatigued mortar in the space between
 citizens where citizens recruit soldiers to be their soldiers and free
 of the white X’d uniform straps censusing a
 force through interwafted powder, coffee and bacon, another day
 pocking itself pink and white like a bled-on ashed-on
 standard of surrender waved through shot so constant

it’s the silence that does
 the breaking in, a premonition of
 that crystal brick,
 tomorrow afternoon’s Utopia, a cordoned arcade your gaze
 “in its hurry to arrive somewhere” will pass
 straight through and never be detained,
 blocked, chained, swallowed, or touched, or obscured
 except the sun should flare on a smear or flaw

in an unattended
 pane along that route
 taken so frequently I did not cease to marvel:
 “in my hurry to arrive somewhere”
 in “the harmonious working of the individual detachments”
 and “the harmonious working individual detachments”
 “overcoming the concept of progress,”
 “when these French soldiers could no longer see

‘the people’ behind it
 but rebels, agitators, plunderers, levelers”
 they “no longer marched ahead,”
 “they went round through gardens, yards, and houses,”
 clipping the hedge,
 pushing between the hanging laundry,
 sheets and a rippled empty dressing-gown that
 in its outstretched arms made no surrender

dreaming the objects we
 live among loved and
 amassed our purpose, moved paving
 stones clicked out of the street,
 your foot plunged, your mind not set to
 fill the gap but strengthen at its edge the void actively unpaved, rising on
 two questions, one is the momentum past and
 now can you see the monument.

from *Navidad & Matanza*

More than just a family, it doesn't seem presumptuous to state that the Vivars were a group of people bound together by an enduring perplexity, by having in common something more than possessive impulses. The magazine articles that appeared in the months following Bruno and Alicia's disappearance—the first of which I wrote myself (*Revista SEA*, n° 327, February 24th, 1999)—had nothing to do with reality.

Photographs of the family smiling and embracing each other in the warmth of their home were only part of the media campaign orchestrated by Teresa Elena Virditti. It was no coincidence that, following the disappearance of his two children, Juan Francisco Vivar shut himself away in his mansion. I'm talking about pathological individuals; six twisted people taking part in an unpredictable game.

The article in *SEA*, contrary to what the date of publication indicates, wasn't written in response to the events in *Navidad* and *Matanza*, nor did the photograph depicting the Vivars necessarily come from the *Vivar Family Archive*, as the caption states. In the last days of December—less than a month before Bruno and Alicia disappeared—the journal's photographer and I received instructions to “write a human interest piece” on the family of renowned businessman Jose Francisco Vivar. As usual, with a roll of our eyes, we obeyed; in the end our salaries, like all the funds at the journal, came from these people, and they were committed to maintaining an image of homespun happiness. And really it wasn't at all surprising since the fastidious Teresa Elena Virditti (with her unforgettable opera director hairstyle) was, at the time, on *SEA*'s editorial committee. Only after being in that house and hearing the news of the disappearance of those two children—which didn't surprise me—can I explain the shudder I experience when I read that this Chilean family is the moral foundation of our country's ruling class.

The interview was scheduled for a Friday at seven in the evening so the whole family could be there. We arrived—the photographer and I—a little early to their residence in Los Dominicos; we picked it out by the imposing grey wall that surrounded it. We buzzed the intercom and were received and asked to wait by the butler, a man of refined manners whose nose was so small that at first glance he appeared not to have one. This detail is not trivial. Soon the mistress of the house, señora Teresa Elena, whom we'd met previously, arrived. She gave instructions to the butler; she called him Bonito. The first surprise was the nose-less Bonito's response to her instructions; he let out a low laugh, murmuring: I don't believe you, you filthy sow, and off he went, disappearing down the stairs. In that moment, I expected a scene to unfold: the woman firing Bonito, bemoaning the lack of respect, getting all flustered. But nothing happened. The man wasn't just a butler, as I found out later. Señora Terelenita, as her friends called her, was distracted for a moment. Then she shook our hands again and left us alone.

We should've waited, as they requested, in that hallway adorned with oil paintings of English hunting scenes and illustrations of bad golf jokes. But it just so happened that my coworker needed to use the bathroom. His situation was so urgent that, instead of calling the butler for assistance, he decided to go look for it on his own. Meanwhile, I stood looking out at the home's vast estate through the thick glass that served as a wall in the entrance hallway. The house dropped three stories, completely covering the eastern slope of the hill. I noted the care with which the trees had been planted along the other side of the hill to the north, bordering a grassy brown pathway that, from the height where I was standing, I saw intersect another pathway, defined by a variety of grasses in differing shades of green. In the middle of this lushness, I caught sight of two figures. A beautiful young woman, dressed in a bikini, walked out through the trees that concealed the swimming pool. She was short with long hair falling down her back. She held a striped towel in her right hand. In her other hand, she carried another towel (or a robe). It was very white. So white that the reddish, almost black stain on one corner stood out starkly. Every so often she stopped and rubbed her eyes. I thought she was crying. But I was mistaken: later, in the living room, she would repeat this gesture, and her brother, holding her hand, would give her a light slap, saying: Stop it, to which she would respond, yawning: I'm sleepy. And then she would look at me maliciously so that I would stop staring at her. But there, standing in front of that large window, it looked like she was crying. I saw that the stain extended to her body, to her left leg, her left thigh. It must be blood, I thought. Her first period must have come unexpectedly and because of this she was in pain.

The other figure moved through the park from the southeast, along the brown grass pathway. It was difficult to tell who it was. At a glance it looked like a woman, judging by the dress, the jewelry, and the fashionable hairdo. But whoever it was walked in a distinct way, legs wide apart, which made me doubt, correctly, that it was señora Terelenita. Then the figure took off the wig and threw it in the bushes, the dress too, stashing it behind a lavish Georgian dollhouse, another station on that pathway of playthings.

The figure wasn't wearing a bra or panties. He laid down on the grass (it was clearly a man), naked, with a visible erection. It looked like he was carrying some sort of list in one hand. I imagined that it enumerated how many steps away the little girl was. After five steps she still hadn't reached him, no: the garden's sprinklers came on. All at once. The man's naked body was soaked; he closed his eyes and pounded his fists on the grass like an impatient child. His erection shrunk. Soon the girl saw him. She wasn't surprised, nor did she stop, instead she walked over and sat down next to him. The man, dripping wet, sat up and pulled her small body against him. She in a bikini, he naked.

It was hot and the grass was sopping. The scene struck me as sordid, especially witnessed through sheets and sheets of water shooting from sprinklers, like iridescent specters in front of the light. I shut my eyes and turned around. I didn't know what to do: I don't know what I did, but suddenly I felt someone softly blowing on my eyelids. When I opened my eyes, scandalized, I saw that I was one step away from Bonito, the butler or whatever he was. He placed one hand on my shoulder and, with the other, offered me a glass of Coke. Calm down, he whispered. Alarmed, I stammered and pointed out the window, but he'd already disappeared. I brought the glass to my lips. There was no one outside. The girl's towels had been left in a tangle on the grass and a Great Dane was dragging them in its mouth toward an area underneath a birch tree occupied by another dollhouse, this one of Mediterranean style.

Soon my colleague, the photographer, came back, out of breath. He looked anxiously in all directions. You're pale, he said to me. So are you, I replied. It wasn't necessary to ask him anything; immediately he began his confused tale, which he described more than once as “a terrible error.” Looking for the bathroom, he'd come across a room where a hairless boy, lying in bed, was observing a large aquarium, which occupied more than half of one wall. According to the photographer, the “terrible error” had nothing to do with his own impertinence, but with what was inside the aquarium. They weren't fish, though, in a way, they seemed to be: three little girls with long hair swam about without needing to come up for air. The three small sirens came together for a moment behind the glass, staring with curiosity at the unfamiliar man who'd just walked in. The photographer ran out into the hallway without being seen by the boy. Their faces, if you could've seen them. They were horrible. Expressionless, like all beings that live underwater, but they were little girls. Monsters, he'd just said when the butler reappeared in a doorway and said that the family was waiting in the living room. Unsettled as we were, we decided to finish the job as quickly as possible. I should add that I was more intrigued than afraid.

The interview lasted forty-five minutes. My companion took half a roll of photographs before excusing himself, saying he felt ill. He left the house and waited for me in the car. The Vivars were arranged on the couch so that a chimney and chandelier were also in the shot. They were a very affectionate family: Juan Francisco Vivar sat with his wife on his lap; Bruno—his head shaved—placed his right arm on his father's back while holding his mother's hand; Alicia rested her head on Bruno's chest and he patted her lightly on the cheek. To my surprise, Bonito stayed, seated on the arm of the couch, twirling the girl's long locks between his fingers. He even spoke occasionally. Discounting the excessive displays of mutual affection that I'd witnessed, the interview answered many of my questions. Juan Francisco Vivar's hair was gelled, his hands well manicured. At one point, I noticed the sheen of moisture behind his ears: sprinkler water from the garden, I suspected. Although clearly Alicia seemed to be in another world (as adolescents generally are, I should add), she didn't seem particularly unhappy. They even laughed together recounting an anecdote about sledding near the hot springs in Chillán. There was a kind of excessive sincerity in that family: it provoked feelings of anxiety. The mistress of the house gave me a strange look, something like a smile, when she walked me to the door, and recited the names of everyone living in the house: besides her children and husband there was the foreign cook and Violeta, the Great Dane. Bonito, pardon, Boris was also staying with them. The man with the strange nose was her brother.

To rend that body

That body was not easy. We tried several times. Hard bones, like stone.
The head first. You know, we have to take precautions...

Arms off. I was told.

Leave it as it was. There was no time.

You see?

That was enough...

Rigid. Sweat clouded the view.

It wasn't the first one, but a hard one. Headfirst.

The fucking heat. Humid heat!

We tossed it to the river. She will hide it of that I am sure. She eats it all,
Magdalena, unapologetic watercourse. Raw meat on bones. Nothing more.¹

1. I cannot give an account for the other, I am only able to express a fiction that is just the compilation of facts and mental projections of those facts, or should I say fictions? I can only try, even though I despise the word try, the verb try, to articulate what surpasses language, and to disarticulate those discourses that are mere attempts to reassure us this is just a temporary state and to resist or subsist in these conditions is the axiom we need to repeat to ourselves in order to survive. *Survive* in the present tense, survive in the future tense. Survive or better off to surpass mass murders, rapes, displacement, hunger, corruption always with childish illusions of a better future, a future that only seems to exist in a mental landscape. We, or better said I, survive here in a paused state, where what touches me needs to be put aside and what touches the other is something that I avoid. I sidestep, away, from the tragedy of others as well as of my own.

This problem of attempting to construct a factual narrative that is so mediated that it quickly ceases to be an account and shifts into a fiction; an account that constructs or re-constitutes a reality that even as fiction I/we do not want to face. Then, how does fiction aid this failed attempt to make sense of barbarity? And, if it is not sense that needs to be obtained through this writing/reading/re-living exercise, then what is it?

Is it a sense of mourning or is it an enforced melancholia generated by a narration that manipulates an audience perpetually detached from its original context; or is it a stipulation that I/we need to feel? What is the role of the writer of this fiction and the role of this inquisitive researcher of not truths or facts, but of sentiments or better the lack thereof? To stipulate or to manipulate the narration, the retellings, seems an irrelevant question at times. Especially since both to manipulate or to stipulate with -and I split the screen in two- necessary and unnecessary information generates an unpredictable reaction on the viewer/reader. What is the reader left to feel? The next question is irrelevant: feel or be left with what?

This narration can be re-enacted by the reader, re-lived in all its fictional aspects, with the distance that an external narration has, i.e. the story of another. Narration that is only leveled by the distance between the event and the *comfortable* situation of the reader. The reader can choose at any point to stop, to pause, to slow down, to go back and re-read, to revise, and even to annotate. To pause the reading has an effect on the event contained within the text.

However, the problem is more complex. Even if the reader can pause and stop. Does the reader want to see the entire account? Does the reader want to be made a witness? Then, if the reader chooses to keep reading what is the result of this? Does it change anything? The event is now unmovable.

But the distance that is inherent in the medium does not occur for those who actually have lived the trauma, for the telling and retelling of the event is to invoke the actual experience, to *review* the ghastly details that one is constantly trying to forget, to name the perpetrator, the victim and the spectator, to account for one's own actions in the event, to re-live the helplessness, to acknowledge that vehement predetermined condition and to remind oneself that there is nothing to be done now. The now, the present tense, is not interchangeable with that of the past, the present is in direct correlation with that unmovable past. A past forever to be re-lived, reenacted through the narration when one is providing an account. An account that seems unnecessary and superseded at times. A compulsory account. To invoke, to call for the event to reappear, even with the distance of space and time is painful. It becomes real for those who have experienced the violent act on their skin.

Subsequently, how to proceed with the narration of this carnage if the violence is still acting, if it is still occurring? If the fiction is not over? If it is alive? If the story is being rewritten as we read/see? There is no distance between the past and the present and even the near future. They all collapse into one. The past is re-lived, or better said there is no past, present or future, there is only a constant state of trauma that seems to put lives on pause. There are no flashbacks; it is the constant repetition of extreme violence.

Fiction provides the perfect amount of disassociation and engagement with the bloodstained event for those who read. The fiction that is forever in progress will hold a lack in its core; the account is the sum of negotiated details, actions and characters. Then, if the narration is always in progress it can never give a true account because of the mediation of the narration there is a twofold distance. And, to these distances we can sum the vastness of thousands of these re-lived space-time frames.



Se muestra aquí pictóricamente, y también (arriba) en la pantalla de un controlador, una escena simulada de un avión que está volando a una altura demasiado baja, corriendo el peligro de chocar contra uno de los rascacielos de Nueva York. La advertencia "LOW ALT" aparecería sobre el número de vuelo del avión (representado por UA991) y sonaría una campanilla, si la computadora estuviera funcionando correctamente.

1. On Monday 24 February 2014, between the times of 12.12pm and approximately 2.30pm, I attended the United Nations building, New York City. I visited the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, viewed the exhibition, "March of the Living", and visited the United Nations Gift Shop.

2. List of physical objects observed:

- a. Book placed in vitrine, open to page 78, "A Plan for Permanent Peace" with unfolded map, "The Bank of Nations and Coordinated Institutions"
- b. 3 adjacent books, "Dreams From my Father" by Barack Obama, "Half the Sky - Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide" by Nicholas D Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn, "Long Walk to Freedom" by Nelson Mandela
- c. Shrink-wrapped package containing UN notepad, UN Mug and UN Mousepad
- d. 3 adjacent books, "Pandemics - What Everyone Needs to Know" by Peter C Doherty, "Faith of My Fathers" by John McCain, "United Nations Handbook 2013-2014" UN publication

3. My Grandfather was born in the shtetls of the old world. For a period of his life his name was replaced by a number. He later moved to Australia and had a family. He now suffers from Alzheimers disease and has lost nearly all of his memory.

- e. Mug, "Drapeaux des Nations Unites" with pictures of various national flags
- f. UN Bumper Sticker, price tag \$1.50
- g. Illustrated childrens' book "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"
- h. Discounted book, "China Engaged - Integration with the Global Economy", World Bank publication. (Cover image: lady soldering microchip)

In place of seven thousand thirteen, he would say (for example) *Máximo Pérez*; in place of seven thousand fourteen, *The Railroad*; other numbers were *Luis Melián Lafinur*, *Olimar*, *sulphur*, *the reins*, *the whale*, *the gas*, *the caldron*, *Napoleon*, *Agustin de Vedia*. In place of five hundred, he would say *nine*. Each word had a particular sign, a kind of mark; the last in the series were very complicated . . . I tried to explain to him that this rhapsody of incoherent terms was precisely the opposite of a system of numbers.

Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch, would have its own name; Funes once projected an analogous language, but discarded it because it seemed too general to him, too ambiguous.

- j. Book, "Africa Development Indicators 2010. Silent and Lethal - How Quiet Corruption Undermines Africa's Development Efforts." (Cover image: partial submerged iceberg)
- k. Book, "The Empire of Necessity - Slavery, Freedom and Deception in the New World" by Greg Grandin

- o. Book, "Human Rights - A Very Short Introduction" by Andrew Chapham
- p. Book, "World Development Report - Risk and Opportunity - Managing Risk for Development", World Bank publication. (Cover image: four white silhouettes rowing a rowboat in rough seas towards a lighthouse)

6. According to the psychoanalysts there are two types of deaths: "a biological death in which our bodies will fail and eventually disintegrate" and a "Symbolic death, which does not involve the annihilation of our actual bodies, rather it entails the destruction of our Symbolic universe and the extermination of our subject positions."



10. To be between the two deaths is to suffer a living death or a deathly life - in this space one takes the form of either the Monstrous or the Beautiful

11. List of Objects (continued):

- s. Blu Ray DVD, "New York City- Filmed in High Definition"
- t. Puzzle, image of Statue of Liberty
- u. UN tote bag
- v. Lego, model of Empire State Building
- w. Lego model in display vitrine, United Nations Headquarters
- x. Exhibition panel, "Krakow - Isaac Synagogue" photo and text.
- y. Exhibition panel, "Majdanek - Prisoners Shoes at Majdanek" photo and text.
- z. Exhibition panel, "March of the Living - When you listen to a witness you become a witness", photo and text
- aa. Exhibition panel, "Treblinka Memorial" photo and text.
- ab. Exhibition panel, image of woman writing in notebook, seated amongst rocks of memorial site

the 'culturalization' of memory

the culturalization of political

differences

a present that suggests a radical disjunction between the forms of social subjectivity required for something like 'cultural memory' and the social subjects

Out of the darkness, Funes' voice went on talking to me.

- aa. Exhibition panel, "The Death Wall, Auschwitz", photo and text.
- ab. Exhibition photo, gravesite with elderly person, face covered by hands, young person lighting candle
- ac. Exhibition panel, "A World in Upheaval - Deportation and Destruction", image of displaced persons
- ad. Poster, "From Prevention to Protection: the Genocide Convention 65 Years On"
- ae. Exhibition panel, "March of Remembrance and Hope 2003", text by "Muslim participant"
- af. Board games, "Earthopoly", "Monopoly", "NewYorkopoly"

individual subjectivity

process or history

collectivity

social subjects

- ag. Playing cards, "Earthopoly carbon trading credits"
- ah. Paper weights, modelled on UN building
- ai. UN ties
- aj. UN golfballs
- ak. Model of UN building approximately 3 x 3 x 1.5 m
- al. Lego set, UN building model
- am. Wall hanging, UN Convention on Genocide, accompanying text
- an. Exhibition Panel, "Holocaust Survivor", photo and text
- ao. Exhibition Panel, "Krakow- Remuh Jewish Cemetery", photo and text.
- ap. Exhibition Panel, "Death March to March of the Living", photo and text

16. I spoke to him on Skype recently. He was visiting my Aunt as they were experiencing a heatwave. I asked him for some general advice should I require it sometime in the future, to which he quickly responded, "It's better you don't know."

His own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time he saw them.

14. To think is to forget differences, generalise, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence.

LOTIFORM COLUMNS



Middle Kingdom
voices of others the un-
obscure desires, fragments of
acters in boat's my memory
I bumped into Claude Monet.
I explained that I had been
through a door, and... He laughed



Old Kingdom
pained that in his intoxicated
ponds - he had seen in an ab-
the possibility of an abstract
excitement in discovering that

Mastaba of Ptahshepes, 5th Dynasty; Abusir: detail of the capital

Tomb of Khety, 12th Dynasty, Beni Hasan

LOTIFORM COLUMNS



Old Kingdom
could be partially transmuted by
rather than directly imbedded.
cursing the way the subsequent
images had primed peoples per-
forms of abstraction. The
sive manner and proclaimed
ages had become the sheds
a bed of dream-filled sleep.
Fact that art works them selves
converters certificates of
hedge funds as though they
stratagems. He said:



Old Kingdom
illusion of an end-
out how: son, like the lily
could I have known the
of these abstract images would form
money? I'm sorry - I didn't realize what I was doing.

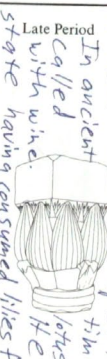
Small ivory column, 1st Dynasty, Helwan

Mastaba of Ptahshepes, 5th Dynasty; Abusir

In a dream, my inner voice - the voice I talk to myself with, the principle sup-
port and central column of myself - shifted from solid to hollow. I
became an "I" shaped door - Every thought that came through it
took its shape and sounded like my voice. I walked through the door
and on the other side there were voices of many different shapes,
a cophonous crowd, seeking to push their way through the door: the
conscious wishes of others, my own
advertisements, words from a by-
gone era, former selves, and the dead.

He asked what I was doing here,
drinking blue lilies, had gone
and told me he used to consume
of them - blue ones imported
In ancient times, he
called lotuses
The
state having consumed lilies from
abstract way, and began to
art. Claude recounted the
the soporific effect of the
lily

LOTIFORM COLUMNS



Late Period
In ancient times, he
called lotuses
The
state having consumed lilies from
abstract way, and began to
art. Claude recounted the
the soporific effect of the
lily

Capital from the palace of Apries, 26th Dynasty (?), Memphis

LOTIFORM COLUMNS



New Kingdom
his paintings - consumed by the
But he quickly fell into languor
proliferation of abstract
leptomas for other
waved
hand
MIS-
abstract
blankets
I listened as Claude loathed
had been abstracted and had
value - filling equity funds
were liens in a lease + for
I sought to supply
less whole of water
experience it self. How
stupor inducing properties
coof tail if mixed with
The lily had made me drunk.



Reconstruction of a column, 12th Dynasty, El-Lahun

Column drum, Tell el-Amarna (Maru Aten), 18th Dynasty

of these abstract images would form such a potent coof tail if mixed with money? I'm sorry - I didn't realize what I was doing.

What did you leave us with?

- AF:** Are those slides from your grandfather's collection?
- H'OB:** Yes, the whole archive is here in my studio. I'm also interested in the meticulous flying records my grandfather made and the pilot manuals he saved. The drawings of the takeoff and landing pads are really beautiful. I suppose I have been asking the question "What does it mean to mine histories of war that we didn't experience ourselves?" This is particularly interesting to me in the present moment here in the U.S. as we live through a different war. I'm fascinated by your recent work and your ability to get to some ideas around air war--was it your father's experience?
- AF:** Yeah, but he was an experimental pilot in the 60s, not a combat pilot. He was somebody who got into planes to see if he could break them--sort of. I suspect this job developed greatly in the wake of WWII. There is a dangerous history from WWII where bomber pilots went out knowing they were going in to get shot down, and they still did it over and over again. That stuff is true. But then there are the mythologies of war and heroism, and that's partly what you address. So, I imagine that part of going through your grandfather's archive is a kind of sleuthing. It's only an archive now, because you've named it that. Before it was just a box of slides. That's the mark of the artist at work. It's your family stuff, but then it becomes an archive when it's a resource for your work and articulated as such. So by calling it an archive you're making a conceptual link. The idea is not passive. I also notice that you just referred to things in your grandfather's flight manuals and personal flight logs as "drawings," which I find interesting. They're certainly not sketches as they're done with rulers, but artists have a tendency to look at them and go, "Wow, look at this drawing." When it's really a very nicely done diagram--and then it all shifts. Once it goes through the mind of somebody who has other ideas for it, the intention shifts. The box of slides becomes an archive. It is a source for thinking through effects.
- H'OB:** That makes me think about usefulness. My grandfather used the manual to get up in the sky. It becomes very different when it's considered as an artifact; something that someone's going to look at and derive information about this time, our time.
- AF:** The difficult thing about your archive is negotiating the personal realm. Once you do something that refers to what a parent did, or in your case a grandparent did, you can feel uncomfortable in terms of paternal authorities. You ask yourself: is this representation unduly honorific in some way? We face certain familial or cultural expectations or categories. It's built into our culture: "respect your elders." Or, it's another version of the psychological, a deep construction of a parent, that's perhaps Freudian or Lacanian. It's about trying to construct your own origin and sometimes it's an origin myth, or maybe it's: "How the fuck did we get here?" What did the parent, or grandparent, participate in and how does it affect me now? And to some degree with somebody like a grandparent, and one who worked as an aviator, a bomber pilot, in WWII, there's also the specter of that somewhat despicable phrase, "Was that the last honest war?"--if you could say such a thing. We've been caught up in so many conflicts and wars since WWII--all of them feel less righteous. There's something complex about the question, "What did you leave us with?"
- H'OB:** That point has come up a lot with this work. When I started working on the project I was super critical of WWII. I was talking about imperialism and other terms like it that were coming up for me in the research I was doing about the current state of war and globalization. I was projecting those feelings onto the slides, for example my thoughts about the war on terror, 9/11, Katrina, Seattle 1999--all the moments I've lived through. I remember Judy Fiskin, while looking at my work said to me, "WWII was a different war." I remember being startled by that comment. I grew up a liberal town in the 90s. I was conditioned to be very suspicious of war. Yet I'm also a daughter to the generation that tends to craft the WWII experience into myth, because, as you said, we feel the need to honor those who came before us. But for me the best history restores complexity to our sense of the past.

- AF:** There are people that will talk about WWII in purely mythological ways. There are many kinds of coping. Kurt Vonnegut wrote beautifully about war. He talks about psychology, and of the blue 88s, the giant blue pills given to people who were battle torn in their minds. They were essentially downers, which soldiers would have to take before being sent back to the frontline. Every war has its barbarisms, and then our perspective shifts with time and it becomes barbaric at a larger cultural scale.
- H'OB:** Do you feel a sense of origin in your work; was there a notion of going into the past to figure out the present? Or was it a different methodology?
- AF:** I was thinking, what part of all this is mine? What does people's participation in giant things, like war, or the military, do to their minds? And what do we not speak about? For me, working on this project was a continuation of looking at what kind of effects the military had on the family. It's a collision between ideology and ideas of expressed patriotism, an individual who has a certain kind of drive. Perhaps there's a difference between laying this all out on the invisible cultural doorstep of,



as you said, imperialism. Those big terms often disenfranchise us. While they are really important to think through, they can sometimes keep us from seeing our own participation, and as soon as we do that we magically let ourselves off the hook. Often times "political art" has a way of seeing itself as self-justified. I have a very serious question about that. Which is not to say that your cynicism about WWII isn't crucial, it's just not born from that. It's born from the collision. It's born of the understanding and recognition--like saying, "wait a minute I'm pretty sure there are a lot of half-truths in here." Some half-truths are self-generated. Some we inherit. Some we adopt through a lack of knowledge.

- H'OB:** Perhaps the personal is a way in which we can think about those big terms and actually get somewhere? If you realize we are all implicated in the larger machine?
- AF:** We're all participating in the meaning-system in one fashion or another. It's our congress, not someone else's, for example. I suppose in both of our projects there is a sense we are the children of our times. Or where did our parents and grandparents lay themselves on our doorstep? I once made a photograph of my father in his



camper, where it looks like he's in the cockpit of an airplane, and he's holding my video camera. This was in 1988 or 89, and it was this great moment where I thought, "Wow I made a photograph of him just like one I saw of him as a pilot." I repeated something visually that I had not intended. So we were trading ways of communicating. I felt uncomfortable.

H'OB: There's a strong relationship between photography and flight. It's a genuine human impulse take a photo from a plane. My grandfather took photographs of the island of Iwo Jima from overhead as well as a bunch of aerials of the Chicago stockyards, where he worked after the war. It made me wonder how his perception, molded by the war, filtered into his life afterwards; what did it do to the family? My Dad said he never spoke about the war when he was growing up. The only reason my father has seen his WWII images is because I decided to take them out of the box.

AF: I can understand that. How could you want your family connected to something that's almost impossible to understand? And how do you see your own self in relationship to the things you've been told? When I was looking at the airplane bone-yard I realized I didn't need to see the whole plane in my photographs, I needed to see ideas. I started getting really close to things that felt were of that era specifically, but they could only be photographed now. I wanted to make a corroded metallic poem. Those images look like they fell out of 1969, but there's no way it could have happened until now. I like that contradiction.

H'OB: Were you also thinking about the contemporary state of war?

AF: Oh sure, and the complete abstraction of it. There have been lots of studies about dematerializing conflict, the lack of physical connection, and that it allows for larger acts of violence. So then there's something really important about the physicality of the archive. It's there in a slide, and in your case you have a slide in the back of your book, you can touch it. It's your 21st century "drawing." It's the real. It's the evidence of your attention, or how it affects you. The archive is a baseline, it's the, "I get this." It doesn't give a shit if you agree or don't agree.

H'OB: Do you feel you got a closer understanding of your father's experience through taking those photographs?

AF: I think I understood it already. Wait, let me rephrase that: I understand my understanding of his experience.

H'OB: (Laughs) Yeah.

AF: That's as good as you're ever going to get. I wasn't as conflicted. But I don't expect any of those photographs to solve a problem. They might engage someone in an experience of standing and looking at prints in a room, which then allows for an ocean of experiences to wash over them. They're not faithful images. They're faithful photographs but they're not faithful representations.

H'OB: I've been thinking about your photographs in terms of aerial perception. Planes distort your field of vision, which is why I find flying so closely related to photography.

AF: You're looking through a little box. You're saying, "I want to look at that," or "I've been told to look at that."

H'OB: An interesting thing happened last November with my slide lecture piece in relation to perception. I performed the piece outside in New York City, on a pier overlooking the Intrepid Air, Sea and Space Museum. It was freezing, so we all had to huddle close together, we were intensely surrounded by the wind and the sea. Here are some of the documentation photographs.

AF: That sounds and looks like it felt really good, and it wasn't a giant number of people. It feels connected to some of the ideas you have about art--delivering something is some way that is performative, but not performative as in "let me perform for you." Rather, it's the notion of, "lets sit and look at something together." The fact that it was cold seems like something that really mattered; there was a time, a space. It looks like you cut a little window out of the night; a new reality made from experiencing something in a communal way. I wish I had been there.

Recalling Her

She always underplayed living during World War II. She liked to be the martyr -Catholic virtue and humility. Perhaps she was telling the truth. During the war she says she rarely felt unsafe. She was afforded certain freedoms because of her class. For a few years, she was able to spend a lot of time with others her age, which is where she met her future husband. I wonder if she was ever scared of the Japanese occupation or if their presence felt like an abrupt interruption.

I don't know how Papa proposed. I know she married for love. He came from a poorer family. She always had these beautiful gowns with traditional butterfly sleeves. Papa must have worn a Barong.

They moved to New York when my father was 9. I cannot imagine him as a young boy with big ears, and a Filipino accent.

She was the diplomat's wife, the one who hosted the events on the Upper East Side. She made sure the house ran smoothly.

She wore a white western style dress at her wedding. Not red. And she was already in her mid-twenties, which at the time was well beyond marrying age; practically a spinster.

The Chinese Embargo Act was still in effect. They had diplomatic visas because Gung Gung worked for the Chinese Consulate in New York.

They were wealthy. They were upper class. They had unheard of access. Gung Gung graduated from West Point and his father was the first Chinese man to graduate from the University of Virginia in 1900. But they were still *foreign*.

Ten years later she moved to Ottawa. Papa got a new job as the first resident Filipino Ambassador to Canada. I am not sure where she preferred to live. I know at one point she mentioned she was a teacher, before Papa got the job. I think she liked teaching. But she was loyal to her husband and wanted him to pursue the opportunities that came before him.

I only go to the Philippines every two years. The last time I saw her, she was 93. I did not know how much longer she had and I realized I had so many unanswered questions. When she died, it felt like a link to an imagined homeland had broken. She was the thread that brought the family back across the globe. Without her presence, the connection was lost. It felt like not only had I lost a grandmother, but I had also lost a symbol of heritage, a relationship that inextricably tied me back to a place that I never fully understood or embodied.

Before she died, I spent hours with her recording her memories, asking her about her life. It was all on camera, saved to my hard drive.

The hard drive is broken now. It has been 2 years since I recorded her and I have not brought myself to repair the archive.

They always planned to go back to China, but too much had changed after the war. In 1949 when the Chinese government fled to Taiwan, they were subject to be deported from the US. They were only allowed to stay because she was pregnant with my mother. My mother has never been to China and says she has no interest in ever going.

I tried to go see the home where she grew up in Beijing. It's a historical building and a men's social club now. As the manager was telling us we couldn't go in because we "didn't have the proper business attire," a middle-aged Caucasian man wearing jeans sauntered into the building.

Sometimes I get confused about what histories and stories I've been told over the years, what I remember of her first hand and what my mind has filled in from photographs.

She was a connection to a history that is a part of my own, but I've always felt a disconnect from; a tangible presence existing as some sort of proof.

A lot of the pieces are missing. I don't know what they look like or why I'm looking for them.

HER¹

wall²
 table³
 bed⁴
 butter⁵
 ouroboros⁶
 arms⁷

alien⁸
 seance⁹
 intimacy¹⁰
 communistic fiction¹¹
 love¹²
 art¹³

-
1. Singular. Used as an object, never as subject; the subjective title belies her position. She's also possessive. Everything here is doing something else: a noun and a verb as an object of action.
 2. NO. Not a chasm, but dividing sharply between us: all. A structure of protection and projection, she buries her nose deep in the fluff of a frenemies tail. She breathes deep before backing away. We collectively exhale.
 3. And suddenly everyone is drinking seltzer! Grown womyn drinking bubble water with ice and garnishes in glass glasses. We are making plenty of decisions, but very few of them are bad any more. The bouncer becomes the bartender and we are home at a reasonable hour. The affairs are over. Spanking becomes sparkling. How much do you tip on water? And what about the masseuse who performs reiki with only implied consent?
 4. I've made and slept in many. The most memorable, however, were the ones I've fucked in that were not mine. It is possible that I've bled or cum on your sheets and you'll never know. It is possible that you don't know me, nor I you.
 5. Once you start paying attention, the smell is really overwhelming. Her texture is extremely sensuous: bodily. As material; it is highly sensitive, popular, and accessible. As metaphor, everyone likes it but the Nazis.
 6. Symbiotic and self-destructive, this inscription is one of desire and being alone. She knows the formula for the philosopher's stone. An image of pleasure.
 7. Hold me with your guns.

-
8. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago. 1958. Appears 84 times.
 9. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago. 1958. Appears once.
 10. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago. 1958. Appears 13 times.
 11. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago. 1958. Appears 8 times.
 12. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago. 1958. Appears 64 times.
 13. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago. 1958. Appears 833 times.

Memory, the object

I found something that implied me
and it. No, it found me,
unwillingly. Found us
in darkness.

Something was found.
Founded? And the finding was
miraculous. We, they, those, us,
implied, *implicated* by the finding:
the lost object. The object that wasn't
lost until found.

Where are all of those objects?
Subsumed into each other, I guess.
The separations into which are imperfect. The rips
and tears form the topographies of the sensible
world. The world that *is sensed*...by its own fingers?
There are no fingers outside of the world.

So this world
is a map: a map
of itself? It must be
to scale, but the depth seems inadequate.
Perhaps sight just falls short. Sight is always,
sometimes, most times blurry. Vacillating
to and from all directions, blindness encroaches,
secedes, occupies in waves, swallowing,
smothering us, itself,
to sleep. To feel the contours,
ourselves. Without sight,
that's all there is.

We have awoken
many times, too many to count.
An attempt would put one
to sleep. Perhaps that is
what has happened
and will.



The ghostly city: encounters with material memory

1

Downtown New York—it's impossible to talk about this place without talking about material memory. It's a place where our past has a personal relationship with every street corner: that is where I met her for the first time, over there I used to sublet an apartment, this block is where my favorite dive bar used to be. Our memory grabs at the edges of objects we encounter here and uses them for hooks: you could only get this over in the old neighborhood, those were the things we used to wear when we went out, this was the coffee I always drank. Our personal history spreads itself through the city's material forms like a stain. But the city's material forms have their own history, too. A longer history. A social history. A past that has shaped the reality that we experience—the buildings we call home, the streets that we walk, the businesses and organizations through which we navigate our sustenance. What battles were fought that made these environments the ones we have known with our bodies? What persons, events, and politics led us to have the choices we have in housing, food, or transportation? What is the relationship of our personal history to those myriad other histories—innumerable, impactful, affective?

The material makes a bridge for us between these two historical scales. Through it we transit between the sensory detail of personal memories to the contextualized and periodized broader histories that we share. These objects, these buildings put us into a relationship with a long stretch of time, interpolating us into the past through memory and matter.

2

I remember seeing Hannah Arendt at the New School for Social Research: she smoked like a movie star; she delivered lectures with power and panache; she talked to adoring students in the hallway; and she battled with colleagues over her new, controversial book on the Eichmann trial. She was charismatic and provocative.

Actually, now that I think about it, it was a few blocks south where I saw her. She was behind the electric-blue round-lettered neon sign of Film Forum, luring the curious, including me. I saw her in a room where the air smelled of popcorn. And, of course, it was not Arendt herself, but a phantasmagoria. Director Margarethe von Trotta had cinematized the philosopher for the biopic *Hannah Arendt* (2013). Arendtian qualities were poured into the body of the actor Barbara Sukowa through the special skills of acting, directing, and all the other magic arts of film.

I saw Hannah, but there was another character I had also gone to see—not Hans Jonas, not Martin Heidegger, and not Eichmann either, but my former place of study, the New School for Social Research. The New School made its filmic entrance dressed smartly in contrasting stripes. As the faceplate of the Joseph Urban-designed building at 66 West 12th Street appeared, the audience clapped. I can't remember if I clapped too. It's possible that I just squeezed the hand of my date. I remember that I smiled and that I experienced an overwhelming feeling of collective effervescence. I remember that I felt so delighted to have seen the film so near to the NSSR, a place where people would clap for this particular building showing up at this particular moment.

Although I came to the New School decades after Arendt taught there, I became part of the community who remembers her doing so. The community continues, not only because the institution continues, but also through a collection of threads of remembrance that tie us together. The film *Hannah Arendt* did not cause me to remember Hannah Arendt so much as it sparked memories of my own time at the New School, and her being there was part of the place—many of my professors admired her, we read her a lot.

After the film, moviegoers pooled into small discussion groups arguing afresh the merits of Arendt as a writer and scholar. The scene recalled many I participated in during my own days at the NSSR. As I walked back to the train, memories rushed by like so many taxis. My memories were aided by the film, the other spectators of the film, by the rush of the city, by the walk through Greenwich Village, by the glance at the New School on 12th Street, and by the stories I was prompted to tell through the confluence of all these things.

3

I have cassettes that say *Steal This Radio*. Some also say 88.7 FM. Or names like DJ Maxx or DJ Fast Forward. Though I listened to the pirate radio station dozens of times, I have perhaps only four or



141 °E, 2010
Plexiglas display case containing one half of a hardwood shield; relief decoration, black, red and white polychromy, Citak tribe, Amásu, Dairam Hitamriver, Sothwestern New Guinea, Papua, Indonesia, date unknown.
230 x 95 x 18 cm.



five of these recordings, tucked away in their TDK and Maxell plastic shells. In the 1990s I would listen to the station in my apartment when the signal was good or at Blackout Books on Avenue B during my volunteer shifts, sometimes recording the shows just because I thought it would be fun to listen to them again. I would hear the voices of friends in their DJ personas coming to me through the speakers, distant in space, yet intimate in that special connection that comes through the senses, talking of the politics and happenings of New York's Lower East Side. I have memories of these broadcasts even without the tapes—a few phrases that I can call up in my mind and hear inside me at will (a DJ “bringing you gutter philosophy from the cockpit of a high-tech cabby” or urging me to go see Emma Goldman's plaque at 208 East 13th Street; snippets of songs, “Hang the Landlord,” “Roforofo Fight”). But with the cassettes, the memories of those times enter my consciousness through my ears and again become bodily. It's not the plastic container, nor even the electromagnetic tape that shapes my material relationship with this past; it is what the tape, played back through a player, makes possible. The tape signals into the speakers, pushing the air past my cochlear nerve endings, and I hear the voice of DJ Maxx, Fast Forward, Chrome, Pirate Jenny, and Argo the Neighborhood Taxi Driver; I find my memory awakened into all the detail of those nights and days, into the politics of time, the fight against gentrification, the legal and physical battles to retain the squats, the legal and physical battles for free assembly in the parks, the legal and physical battles for the right to low-power radio itself. I had made these recordings to remember familiar voices, but now, though the recordings are the same, what it is that I remember shifts in orbit to a different scale—the place and the time of New York City in the 1990s, my relationship to these objects, the tapes, connecting me to time and place, to histories personal and political.

4

Several days after the encampment at Zucotti Park had been “cleared” by the police, the New York Times writer David Carr declared it “inevitable that Occupy Wall Street will eventually become more of an idea than a place.”¹ In the same vein, political scientist David Plotke of New York's New School claimed about a year later that due to the movement's rapid decline and lack of actual staying power, “no one gets to own [Occupy Wall Street] except as a memory.”² Yet, in the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space (MORUS) on the Lower East Side in a small exhibition space dedicated to preserving the history of grassroots activism in the city, Occupy Wall Street manages to be both idea and place, memory and lived experience. Here at 155 Avenue C, OWS is put into relation with a long history of reclaiming urban spaces for public purposes in New York City, while objects tell a story of practices and motivations specific to OWS's unique context and often intriguing blend of anti-greed, anti-capitalist, anarchist, communist, reformist, and revolutionary elements. One object exhibited in the small section on OWS is the bronze-colored, battery-charging Schwinn bike that helped to power the laptops and cell phones of the protesters, replacing the generators that had been forcibly removed from the park by NYC's fire department. I think I never asked the museum staff whether it was permitted to sit on it or not, partly because the exhibition itself did not exactly evoke questions of museum etiquette, and partly because the very structure of its space, in which the visitor descends and disappears into the basement of a narrow tenement building, ensures a feeling of retreat, of remaining unobserved in your engagement with the exhibition. And so I sat on the Schwinn. Perhaps I was in search of that feeling of being part of a community of the like-minded and the not-so-like-minded again, of feeling like an individual at the very moment of appearing in public. My feet made contact with the pedals and I began generating. My bike ride back to 2011 was equally reflective and nostalgic, and reflective nostalgia “loves details, not symbols.”³ The bike rejected being seen simply as a shiny representation of abstract ideas. Back in 2011, I took several New School students from my course “Reframing the Political” to one of the General Assemblies at Zucotti Park (or did they take me?). We had just read several texts by Hannah Arendt and there was no better thinker to think with, and against, to create our own stories of what was happening to us and the city. The bike retells the stuff of those stories eerily well: The fact that politics, pace Arendt, is above all else a matter of spontaneity and ingenuity. The fact that politics, against Arendt, sooner or later also needs to address social questions, matters of the reproduction of life . . . and battery life. And ultimately, the story of the bike's own role as an indicator of its failure, since any notion of self-sufficiency, in Zucotti park or beyond, is doomed to

sooner or later implode. The bike was a symbol after all. But not in a straightforward, restorative-nostalgic sense. Rather, in the reflective-nostalgic sense: embodying challenges, contradictions, multiplicity, and a longing for the future as much as for the past. According to the common expression, we never forget how to ride a bicycle. But we do forget what it feels like to act collectively. The MORUS on Avenue C may be one of those rare spaces in New York that allows us to remember “life in common.” And it is a reminder that struggles over the city are also struggles over whose “memory [and] whose aesthetics . . . are to be prioritized” in the symbolic capital embodied in its built environment.⁴

5

This ghostly city.

Memory here folds like an accordion to zero in on our own life's chapters, our sensory moments. Breathe, see, smell, taste, lick. Loving the details. And then stretches out over the *longue durée* of time. As far back in time as we can remember. As long a history as we know. We are imbricated in the history of this city like a curve in a fractal. It has stained us just as surely as we are staining it.

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1. David Carr, “For a Movement, a Question: What Now?,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2011
 2. David Plotke, “Occupy Wall Street, Flash Movements, and American Politics,” *Dissent*, August 15, 2012
 3. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001), p. XVIII
 4. David Harvey, *Rebel Cities* (Verso, 2012), p. 106

from Left Melancholy

Upon returning from Florence Italy this past July, I found our dog Lucy well taken care of by our friend Eric. Six months previously she was diagnosed with bladder cancer, but she was still with us, hanging on. No doubt because of the many experimental treatments Dottie had tried—a regimen of herbal medicines, alkaline water, and weekly acupuncture treatments. The following day when I awoke, Lucy was whimpering—something she never did in the five years I knew her, unless you stepped on her paw—and could not stand on her hind legs. That day we took a car service to the vet, where she was scheduled for acupuncture. As the driver pulled up to the vet’s office, Lucy growled at me—something she also never did. Cradling her in my arms, we passed through the doors of the office into a lobby, when I felt a warm liquid dripping onto my legs and feet, pooling in my flip-flops. I thought Lucy had peed on me but the liquid was very dark, so then I thought it could be shit. But it didn’t smell like shit, it had a metallic odor. My senses were confused but moments later the vet techs would take her away and I would know she had started to bleed-out. The vet was very kind, and patiently waited until we could get Dottie on the phone to have a conference until making any decisions about Lucy. Dottie was in Florence still and the reception wasn’t good, so it was hard to decide what to do. The vet was very confident that anything we did for Lucy would only cause her pain and not prolong her life significantly. It was clear we would have to put her to sleep. Preparations were made for cremation and I held one of Lucy’s front paws while the vet administered the lethal injection. She was gone in ten seconds, as the vet said she would be. “She had one bad day,” the vet kept repeating, in an attempt to console me.

The following week, my mother called to say that my 99 year-old grandmother, Helene, had contracted shingles and her health was declining fast. This was a person who despite her extreme age had never had a single health problem—only very recently some muscular degeneration. Within a week of that phone call my grandmother was also dead. In hospice at my parents house, which had once been her house, for nearly 30 years, I visited her nightly, keeping vigil and holding her hand. It occurred to me that I should read her poems—the nurses said that she could still hear us even though she was not conscious—but then I remembered that she never really liked the poetry that interested me, including my own. She liked poems to rhyme. The only poem I knew her to have memorized, other than some lines from Shakespeare (“Death where is thy sting?” she used to recite), was a poem with rhyming couplets meant to help you remember the rules for bridge. Instead I just sat with her, reading silently, meditating on her face, which no longer looked like her own. Classical music played on a stereo. My parents hoped the music would comfort her.

I haven’t drawn anything since I was about twelve. And I stopped drawing in high school, which didn’t have art classes, to pursue poetry and academics. When I was young I would copy a lot. From National Geographic and other magazines. Since the death of Lucy and my grandmother I have started drawing again, and tried to draw them specifically. On the one hand it has been like paying tribute to them, a form of ancestor worship. My grandmother, an Aries with a Libra moon, would have appreciated this. But then there is something primal about drawing too, which forms a “transitional space,” in the sense that Object-Oriented psychoanalysts use this term. Drawing as a form of healing, of mourning; of therapy or self-hypnosis. Susan Howe used to imagine the handwriting of Emily Dickinson this way. As an aid to mourning. The sumptuousness of her handwriting that only became more spacious, more concerned seemingly with absence, the creamy expanses of the page. It reminds me of something from an interview with Jean Genet, startling because of its aestheticism, the assertion of writing’s material pleasure and autonomy over its content:

Madeline Gobeil: Did you start writing to escape from solitude?

Jean Genet: No, because I wrote things that made me even more solitary. No, I don’t know why I started writing. What the deeper reasons are, I don’t know. Perhaps this: the first time I became conscious of the power of writing was when I sent a postcard to a German friend who was in America at the time. I didn’t really know what to say to her. The side I was supposed to write on had a sort of white, grainy texture, a little

like snow, and it was this surface that led me to speak of a snow that was of course absent from prison, to speak of Christmas, and instead of just writing anything, I wrote to her about the quality of that thick paper. That was it, the trigger that allowed me to write. This was no doubt not the real motive, but it’s what gave me the first taste of freedom.

We, Left Melancholics, write responding to the grain of the writing surface, the paper, the page. Textual conditions are a provider of content. Dickinson, confined to her house and obligated to perform reproductive labor, writing on all those little scraps (recently on exhibition at The Drawing Center and recollected in Marta Werner’s book, *Emily Dickinson’s Open Folios*). Like a form of permission. A point of entry, entrance. *Often I am permitted to return to a meadow*. Arcadia. Idylls. We write as though to access a muscle memory of previous moments of writing, of thought and feeling. Writing back to an overwhelming maternal presence. *Called back*. Writing before we became separated from the bodies of others—friends, lovers, comrades. Drawing, like writing, brings me closer to you. I am so rusty at it that it surprises me when I make a mark and it actually resembles the photos I am copying, which are of me hugging Lucy’s face close to mine on a bed, and which were taken of my grandmother before she was married, during WWII. There is her standing before what seems like an ice skating park with a girlfriend. Another where she is standing in front of a large piece of machinery in an ammunition factory. Her cheerful expression set in relief from the heavy machinery of late industrial warfare. I want the drawings to resemble them, but I also know this isn’t the most important thing. It is in some way to undergo their image—pencil in hand; pencil to paper. In the 19th century, infant mortality was much more prevalent than it is today, to say the least. Dickinson’s culture was a culture of death. So many of her letters notes of condolence to family members. So many of her poems—epitaphs. At one point I wanted to write about Dickinson’s poetry in relation to 19th century mediumship—but this is maybe all I meant to say. That the poet is a medium for those others who they have lost, who through the hand try to capture the lost rhythms—prosodies—of having been among them. Of me losing a part of me in you (to paraphrase Judith Butler). Of us being carried across time, stamped by a space of community.

through every crevice and every molding
I go baffling parenthetical. I am at a loss for
crossroads - I scarcely.

my most recent death was a knock on distant doors.
I woke up already myself: three walking corpses
learning backwards how to limp. There was talk of
serpents as opposed to snakes, perilous love and ritual.

I sought homage
in the above and let
my blood beneath ten
moons disguised as nine.

disenchanted by my own spectacle I
chose another breath to which I barely
have the right:

I, fumigator of trap doors go
family cresting go sheathing into
the latest of late nights kissed in
dew and crackling flame and I say:

bring me the forests
that wreak of charred oak and
chipped silver. bring me the sun's
nine shadows in the sound of selfing flame.
by the light inside candles I will singe bones and
let these worms seek out their sacred holes.

there is no disaster left for me. my marching on
remains shingle rooftops of the underworld.
I pray with mouths full of mud, prostrate before
the kings of infinite shit piles and
I bask in their parasitic glow
for I alone am (un)scathed
by charlatan reflections.

so implore me visitor!
demand evidence
of psychopomps!

I will show you
smoldering histories
and the wings that
are their kindling.

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