

Spectacle #1

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“Well, as on a darkly moonless night the sensible course
may be to become a part of the darkness;
so here we may learn to conceive Nothing from nothing.
Proceeding gropingly upwards, then,
against a frozen night-cliff of twelfth- and thirteenth-century words,
we must ascend many dark chimneys to attain the greater darkness...”
William T. Vollmann, *The ice-shirt*

BACKWARDS BACKWARDS BACKWARDS

Let's walk backwards, backwards, backwards. When you walk like that things become smaller and smaller, they lose importance and definition. Or, let's go inside, inside, inside. For example inside a cavity, a hole, a mouth. There is dark, humid and indefinite too. Or let's talk before, before, before. It is a regression, an infinite regression: finding the minimum terms, a language that is minimum and first or even zero. Where should we start then? The space, the body, the object, the word, the movement to begin with. With the presumption of starting from nothing. Presumption, pretension.

She: "We are in the same space -if this makes any sense to you-. Imagine there are no limits: the space is open and everything is a continuous. You can experience the co-ordinates of your exact position in relation to everything else for example a place like home or even a person. Where is your bed? Where is she? Where is the North? Now that you know where you are, we can start."

She says this looking at you. Her voice is soft but high pitched, sharp. Her intonation is slow and swinging as if she was thinking about something else at the same time. She is Greek and also Portuguese.

She: “We are on a surface without limits. Imagine that you can experience your exact position in relation to anything else. Now that you know where you are, we can start.”

He: “It is impossible to talk about the present as it is impossible to be in the present.” He is tall and thin, with a long beard and thick hair. “When we talk we are just assuming, confirming that we are but there is nothing more than that. It is purposeless. Senseless. We are not going anywhere. We are here.” He wears glasses, medium thick glasses. He must have passed long hours before computers, a long time before science fiction books and homework. As a matter of fact his private library contains the most interesting collection of 80s American science fiction literature, experimental film essays as much as electronic and statistics manuals. He is Flemish and Portuguese as well.

She is exceptionally tall and being used to stand next to regular size adults, she developed a postural hump from bending her knees and keeping her shoulders shrunk towards the front. Her figure is elegant and crooked, her movement full of grace and alienating. Her arms are particularly long. “We are ready for the first movement, first move of tonight, imagine it as the very first move. Imagine that there was nothing before that. We are going to show you a step. To put it simple a step forward, which means the heel is the first to touch the ground -for stability I guess- and then the rest of the foot while the other is suspended behind. And so forth. *Walking is constantly falling: a risk that we take in order to move or be moved by what we will find over there and by what we don't have here.*”

He: “The mechanics of the movement are quite complex but we rarely pay attention to it. The knees and the hips are involved in a mysterious way.”

As the conversation becomes uninteresting, you focus on your tongue and try to relax.

They both execute some steps without secrets or charm. Crossing each other in order to travel the room. You can see everybody and everybody can see you. There is someone you know. There is someone you like and someone you rather not see now. There is someone you would like to sleep with.

They move everywhere hence everybody else moves. Some don't want to move and they tend to keep at least one foot on the same spot, rather pivoting around it.

He: “In order to continue -I mean nothing more than that because this is written in the script- we proceed to explain how we will go backwards. We reverse the idea of progress, we imagine we can travel through time but most of all we are very concentrated on the mechanics of this reversed imbalance. Toes first, heels last. We feel or maybe we imagine a wind in the back, from the back.”

You become scared of where this is going to go: you foresee a complicated movement phrase originally created forward and lately performed in reverse and you become lazy from the thought of having to reconstruct it in your mind. You start to remember that once you heard a song in reverse: one sound gradually fading in and then suddenly changing abruptly, coming from nowhere, uptempo. You think of how easily you can reverse a tape for music or film, even rewind it with a wooden pencil or spin a record in reverse.

She strikes you for the way she shortcuts your skepticism; your skepticism about the possibility of actually walking backwards-backwards. There is no roundabout. She actually can do it. She is showing it to you and it is very simple. The way she is just walking backwards is sharp and analytical. There is a fade in and then a sudden stop, at every behind. You don't know how much she is actually aware of that.

He continues: "Because we are constantly asked to project: to draw a point in front of us and if I say -before us- it can be confusing. This point represents our focus, at least for a while, and supposedly allows us to act straightforward and efficient. This point is our end. This point is like a promise or a spell. It is like a prediction. And some predictions cause themselves to actually happen, due to the positive feedback between belief and behaviour as in a self-fulfilling prophecy. But we cannot see the future. It is because of the existence of time and laws of physics that we tend to consider the future inevitable."

You think about something you have read somewhere you don't remember where: *animals can live in the savanna without the anxieties we would have because they consider neither past nor future.*

He continues: "What we want to do today: we want to be here with you. We will try not to go towards the end but to start from the end and then go backwards and then by reversing backwards again we can go forward without thinking about the end but *being deeply in the present.*"

The people around you seem puzzled and intrigued. It sounds like a rebus but he seems to know what he is talking about. You believe him because he is absolutely believable.

She presents the movement while doing it. You feel the duration not the end of it. Even if the artificiality of it is obvious, it is not at all deceptive, on the contrary. He starts traveling in the same virtual way.

You find yourself inside this movement and because you are inside it feels all around; coming from everywhere and circular, even if it is produced by those making straight lines and the other people around adjusting and changing the space constantly.

There is no story, like with music.

You surprise yourself thinking something like: *There is a moment when you can actually drift away because of the accuracy of the things happening before you. Someone would call it truth.* You simply allow yourself to be here and not be here. The experience you are having is at the same time one of lightness versus gravity and of being grounded versus floating.

So you find yourself walking backwards-backwards together with other people walking backwards-backwards or even backwards-backwards-backwards or not walking. The whole scene looks like a reunion of moon-walkers, night-walkers. You start thinking about the difference between walking backwards as in “going back, looking forward” and reverse walking, as in reverse writing of the words POLICE or AMBULANCE.

There is complicity in that particular constellation of people, passing a period of time of doing nothing particular but trying particularly hard even knowing that the achievement is not rewarding or just useless - point. Un-doing. Un-thing. Pointless, ridiculous. Even comic.

It is difficult to grab nothingness like this, by approximation.

When you understand how you have to go backwards in order to go forward. When you realise how you have to look at a mirror to pretend you can be somewhere else. And you nearly understand but don't. *At the end you don't know whether it's pretence or not.*

Alternating and breathing only at the end of each sentence,
they say:

“This is where you run as fast as you can to keep in the same
place.

This is when you realise that you have been here but you don’t
know how or when.

This is where you have the memory of what is still to come.
This is where you catch the train in the opposite direction.
This is how you see with someone else’s eyes and the colours are
different.

This is when you find yourself speaking a language you don’t
know.

This is emptying the bottle before opening it.
This is how words seem to decide for themselves.
This is when you realise that your parents are children.

This is by chance.

This is when you fall in love and your life has already changed.
This is a puzzle piece under the carpet for years.

This is the sphinx.

This is where everybody calls you with another name.”

You like the possibilities of disappearing, withdrawing. You are figuring out that that is what you are most secretly and most often looking for. Withdrawal. Withdrawing. Withdrawal which is not surrender. Rather allowing things to happen independently from you. Learning that even your experience is not you. Distance and distraction. But then who are you? You are not just your name and certainly not just what you do. Even a fish is not just a fish. It's like when you listen back to a recording and you hear sounds that you didn't hear the first time, but they are exactly those sounds that allowed you to hear what you heard in the first place.

“In order for anything to happen,
there has to be an object in the vicinity
that has nothing to do
with the happening in question.”
Timothy Morton (2013)

Distance and distraction. Your thoughts are entities that are not you. This level of disengagement is ok. You are not responsible. This withdrawal doesn't have negative symptoms and doesn't aim to be self-indulgent. It is more like opening a box inside a box but where is the limit as the inside box is deeper than the outside one?

To withdraw like a snail or a turtle is to retire into a small dark chamber into which it is difficult to see. The shell suggests a space, a dimension which may be behind or beyond or inside the visible. To withdraw is like entering back, in a past towards the future.

/you are going to have forgotten/

/she will have retreated/

/you will have left/

/he is going to have reversed and you will have moved out
by the time it becomes something/

INSIDE INSIDE INSIDE

He: “Things disappear when you are inside what you are doing”.

She is emerging from the group because of her exceptional profile again. The unusual proportions of her legs and body make any movement complicated and elegant. Slower. Her reaching back reminds you of one of the warrior yoga positions from the manual. She moves in the past. She moves for exceptionally long periods. Slow moves, slow motions. She loses herself, in this time, she is lost. But then, when you wouldn't expect it anymore, she turns as if she was hearing someone calling her or better as if she reminded herself of something she forgot. Her body changes tension and is vibrant again, indecisive. She stretches her long arms behind her, while her pelvis is arching towards you in preparation for something still to come. Pictorial. She twists like a sock, she found something on the ground. She holds a microphone. She studies the object as if she has never seen it before. She gives it to you as if you knew better.

His movements are smaller and brisker. His hips rather tight compared to hers but his limbs are as much long and overreaching. Faster, he moves in a series of still positions, like flashes. He is in the future. His arms reaching front and his back back, in an opposite way to hers.

An invisible force is pulling him from behind but he is resisting. His shoes seem to stick on the ground: every step is a march pulling up the knee in a string-like momentum. Balletic. His body is full of corners. He is talking but nobody can hear his voice or maybe he is not producing any sound at all.

It seems as if the lights are dimming and the room is becoming darker and darker. It becomes more difficult to distinguish between people. The room feels colder too. The actual movements around you rarefy and hers and his are the only ones perceivable. One in the past, the other towards the future, they create a void, a hole. It is as if they are going into a cavity. It is as if all of you are going into a cavity. The level of humidity raises. You know that everybody else is feeling the same and everybody in the same way feels as if only SHE and HE were there. They are walking inside, inside, inside. Retreating. Retracting. You follow them. You are stepping into a pitch black floor as thin as a line. It is wet. You imagine that on the other side of the line there is the same upside down image as here but irresistible and irreversible. The world above being essentially oil black, invisible as in not visible, it might be the same as this but exactly upside down. Reversed. *Verso* as the flip-side, the inside out, the back. *Verso* is a line of poetry, the left page, the back side of a flat object. *Versus* is having been turned, having been changed.

You are stepping into a pitch black floor as thin as a line. It is wet. On the other side of the line there is the same upside down image as here. You know it is just your imagination of course. Nothing of this is really happening but visually, visually the illusion can be so strong and so real. Pictorial, balletic, iridescent.

She:

“Here is how you feel the weight of gravity falling extremely vertical.

Please stay still wherever you are with your hands touching your skin or your clothes.

Here is how we go inside and the inside feels much bigger, deeper. Further inside. *Insider, insider, insider.*

Here is how you see that the inside is voluminous. That the volume is negative. That there are doors and holes.

Here is where you are hungrier and hungrier. It never stops.

Now you can virtually measure the flow of your blood as you breathe.

Here is when you want to move again -as a matter of fact it is impossible to be still-.”

He:

“Here is how you can be focused and distracted at the same time.
You can walk around. Take a pose. Look somewhere else.

Here is how you take it apart from within.

Here is how you feel extreme closeness and worship distance too.

Here is how you are not thinking about what was promised to
you.

Here is where you look at the looking without losing it.

Here is how to end from within.

Here is how to start, later.”

§

The room is full of blankets and pillows in shades of green, grey and black. You are comfortable and even a bit drowsy. The sound of their voices and the absence of spectacular movements made the situation until now rather soporific. There are other listeners around you and you catch someone sleeping. You exchange a look of acknowledgment with a person that looks familiar but whose name you don't recall.

She looks for his eyes and he looks back. Without gestures, they move towards the same direction. They pick up a blanket, one corner for each hand. They knew in advance which blanket they were going to choose. They don't stretch the blanket, they pull it open and exchange one corner. She unfolds her side while he steps back. They seem to pull one another in disagreement over where to go. The blanket is completely unfolded and becomes a flat surface, a rectangular screen, a colour floating on top of your head or covering the visual field in front of you or becoming a background for others. In a domestic impulse of folding the fabric, they come closer and exchange both corners. In a very concentrated manner and slowing down the rhythm, they unfold the blanket creating a series of ruffles because the outside comes from the inside. They don't need to look at each other: their blanket is a device and a key. It is an intrigue. They move in the space without direction, while repeating and reshuffling their movements and their intentions. There is definitely no sense in what they are doing but the action is perfectly recognisable. They are very concentrated and looking at the blanket but not at what they are doing. They stretch their arms diagonally down and leave each corner of the blanket on the floor.

They pick up a small stack of papers from which they will read a text out loud and walk back towards the blanket.

She and he stand still on top of the blanket. One ear very close to the mouth of the other, they pronounce every word together without waiting for each other. Unison, like a choir or an instrument, they say: “It turns itself inside out to avoid predators. Both squid and octopus. Literally *from hell*: fleshy spines, suckers, velvety black, gelatinous mollusk with disproportionate globular eyes. A vampire that doesn't feed on blood. It produces disorienting flashes of light that can be modulated in intensity and size. His habitat is a minimum oxygen zone where other metabolisms can't be. A cold and lightless depth. If disturbed, it curls its arms up and outwards, wrapping them around its body, exposing the inside out. Its tissues change density matching the surroundings. It can eject a dazing cloud of mucus to disappear without having to move very far away, like a magician”.

They are still standing in one point of the room but the temperature of the room, the relation between things and things, is irreversibly altered. You think about ecology. The text makes you dizzy or -you think- *becomes dizzy*. The fact of listening to it and not reading it by yourself, not visualising it, makes everything blurry. Together with other people in the same room you are trapped in the same viscosity.

They:

“It is like an inner-body experience not an outer-body experience. Going inside the inside and forgetting the body. Imagine being penetrated in order to make space for a new information in your memory. It’s not even penetration, rather an injection: it’s like entering the skin of the other, until you leave marks. You are marked by the other. Think of radically changing the software but softly, like mollusks; secreting pigments, changing the colour code; having tentacles.

You surface is permeable, perforated, full of holes. You are a place, a point of view but not a point. There are lines that are curves: the encounter of perpendiculars and tangents in constant variations. Concavity and convexity. Tentacles.”

You begin to recognise a visceral feeling you sometimes experience in cinema. Some directors are very keen on wanting the camera very close to the skin. The movement of the camera is touching and is violent. The framing and edits are both disorienting and unsettling.

They continue vertiginously:

“Every object is insidious. Even written language distorts the thoughts expressed in it with its grammatical rules. Or maybe it is the contrary. What we refuse is the liberty of words and their need to change.”

They move away from the blanket going different directions.

They stop in front of two blackboards that hang opposite but
symmetrically on the walls.

Looking into their papers, they both copy a part of the text
as if
they continue reading together,
unison.

They write from left to right but he is left-handed:

“Words hate being useful; they hate making money;
they hate being lectured about in public.
In short, they hate anything that stamps them
with one meaning or confines them to one attitude,
for it is their nature to change.”
Words fail me, Virginia Woolf

As soon as they’ve
stopped writing and are no longer
worried whether you’ve had the time to read it
at all, they erase the text they’ve just written with a sponge.

BEFORE BEFORE BEFORE

“What do you get when you cross an insomniac, an unwilling agnostic and a dyslexic? You get somebody who stays up all night torturing himself mentally over the question of whether or not there’s a dog.”

Infinite Jest, D. F. Wallace

They go out of the room. You have the impression that they are not finished yet. Some people exchange signs of doubts, others seem to like to not know. A microphone is being turned on and you realise that two speakers were hidden under some of the textile. You can hear them still holding their papers. From the sound, the room next door seems small but open. It must be a security exit or a staircase. It could be dark.

She: “What is *before* if you have amnesia?”

Nothing.

He: “Did you know that a jest is the act of performing a joke?”

She: “Is a jest a gesture?”

Nothing.

She: "Let's face it: the future is later."

He: "The future is behind my ears where I don't have eyes. It is flowing into the back of my head. If I walk backwards the future is becoming the past as it stretches out in front of me. I have to look in front of me to see the past and play with it. And at the same time I walk backwards to get to know the future. It is a movement in both directions. Both later and before are constructions and in the middle of it is hole, a box in a box."

He begins to digress like he usually does:

"Before is a reconstruction. For example when I have trouble retrieving old information, I repeat the last information together with the new one. In my memory, I go back a tiny bit and add. I literally bring the "before" with me, always going a little bit back. Sometimes I even use a mirror and reverse the direction of time. I look back in the mirror making some space between my eyes and what is in front of me, the past, what I know. I like the idea of using a mirror to create a double, to make a specular reflection of something. The two images need some space in between to be visible, to be seen. Like in everything that is stereo: two sources, for example two images or two sounds, need to be almost the same but offset to give an illusion of space and depth. It's a double that is both flat and deep, same and different and that needs to be read back, need to be seen again. It needs interpretation."

She:

I always wanted to use words as objects, or even better as movements like your digressions. I like to pick words, fold them in two, read them three times or more until they become something revolting, obnoxious.

Or to use words that have no sense like

REVIVER

He:

or MADAM

She:

and REIFIER

(the one who makes an abstract idea concrete)

ROTA

ATOR

RACE

ECAR

DEG

GED

*(d-e-g-g-e-d as in “to water a plant” or “dickhead”)

RAID

DAR

MIN

VIM

*(a musical note having half the duration of a full note)

REF

FER

SEX

KES

DEE

BED

*(a river in Armenia and Georgia)

STA

ATS

*(short for statistics)

SAC

GAS

DE

ED

NO

ON

PE

EP

SE

ES

DA

AD

DI

DD

EV

VE

EN

YE

GA

AG

GI

IG

MC

DM

PC

OP

so

OS

WVO

OW

A



*(which is the type of lava having a rough surface (pron. a'a'))

She:

“These words are like systems closed into themselves. They smell melancholic. They are self-reflective objects. They are stuck in a loop. I always wonder when does feedback escape itself? What I wanted was to forget more than to remember: to go before.”

He:

“Before, before?”

She:

“BEFORE

BEFORE

BEFORE”

He: “I see”.

She:

“Before talking. Before I even remember I could move. Before I knew what words meant. *For every object is insidious.* We cannot decide if the veins of marble are living caught in the matter or sketches of statues not yet finished.

Even written language distorts the thoughts expressed in it with its grammatical rules.”

THE GLITCH OF THE SPHINX IN THE HINGE OF HER FRINGE

it involves as it evolves

THE HINGE IS THE GLITCH IN THE FRINGE OF THE SPHINX

it folds when it unfolds

THE SPHINX AS THE GLITCH ON THE HINGE WITH NO FRINGE

it relates to a horizon of multiple and less different

THE FRINGE IS THE HINGE OF THE SPHINX'S GLITCH

a cave in a cave in a sponge

Snowflakes.

Broccoli.

The perimeter of an island.

Again Paolo Uccello. Double C. Double L.

UCCELLO UCCELLO UCCELLO

And a continuous that is folded infinitely.

Folds, pleated skirt, accordion.

Origami.

This is the beginning of a movement.

END

“The
ice is like a
mean dog. He always
waits for you to stop watching
him and then he tries to get you”.
Wainwright Eskimo, ca. 1964 from
William T. Vollmann,
The ice-shirt

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What Alice Found There.*

“Alas”, said the mouse, “the whole world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I am running into.”

“You only need to change your direction,” said the cat, and ate it up.”

A Little Fable, Franz Kafka

