

ART JOURNAL 04

June 2008
Published by MUSEION
Museum of modern and
contemporary art
Bozen/Bolzano

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www.museion.it

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May 24 was an extremely intense day, very festive and moving, with the inauguration of the new Museion – the bridges, the museum, its architecture and its opening exhibition, the façade, the library, the plaza and café, the bookshop... And the following day (the event could hardly be contained in the space of a single day), thousands of more people came to continue the inauguration. In all, a total of more than 10,000 visitors came from all over Alto Adige and from around the world, moved by a tremendous desire to be there and to see, and they made of this opening an exceptional moment.

Museion is a museum-laboratory project that, in addition to its central task of enhancing its collection as a common heritage, conceives of itself as a place for exploring and presenting a variety of contemporary art processes, continually interwoven with the social, economic, and historical fabric in which it is built. Museion is an instrument of production, of residence, of research, of discussion, and of dissemination that is meant to be active and flexible. So it was only logical to see its journal pursuing the work begun since the first issue. From now on, the *Journal* will be two-monthly: it will be available at newsstands as a supplement to *Alto Adige* and *Dolomiten* and for downloading (along with back issues) in German, Italian, and English at www.museion.it.

Corinne Diserens

ALL LIT UP

Maxi Obexer Berlin

Translated from the German

Could it be that some days are more unreal than others? And that some days are most especially unreal? Might it even, perhaps, make sense to talk about the shifting conditions of the real and unreal in much the same way that we talk about the weather? “The sun was out for a good deal of time today, much longer than yesterday, and tomorrow will shine even longer.” And thus, “Everybody’s saying that the coming week will be very unreal.” “I’ve heard that too, but toward the middle of the week it should once again be very real.”

Can it be that the level of unreality in daily life has sharply risen? And that unreality, just like the ozone hole, is destined ever further to expand? And that we’ll ever more frequently see that what we take for fake is reality, and what we take for reality is fake? In front of my apartment here in Kreuzberg, in Skalitzer Strasse, right in the curve preceding the Schlesian Gate, a truck stood straddled on an angle across both lanes. A long, bright silver tanker truck, with a cabin that towered all the way up the girders that support the elevated train, and surrounded by a host of firemen, dressed in those uniforms that always look a bit too new, as though worn for the very first time, or like theater costumes at a dress rehearsal, still without creases or wrinkles. The curious too were out in force, gently cordoned back by men in orange and yellow vests. A thick, black tube ran into the center of the tank, draining it of its contents, slurping and burbling like a greedy snake. Everything was all lit up. And as always on the set where a film is being made, you could feel a kind of high-strung boredom, even while simply walking by. The people involved in the making of it could surely never imagine that ever in their lives they would see it reach its end. I climbed the steps to the elevated train and cast another glance at this gigantic silver animal. Was there a stuntman somewhere on the scene, even maybe several? And what about doubles? Maybe somewhere catching a nap? I was on my way to the hospital, to visit a friend. Half of one of his lungs had collapsed, or somehow detached, simply from top to bottom, down into the cavity of his body, and finally sprawled across his liver, or perhaps some other organ. And now it had to be sewn back into place.

I hadn’t asked for the clinic’s address, and didn’t, in fact, even know its name. Perhaps I hadn’t wanted to leave my friend unnecessarily gasping for air. But surely it had to be the clinic I had in mind, a clinic specialized in lung ailments, a lung clinic, located in the very same area where my friend’s apartment lies, and I excluded the possibility of there being another specialized lung clinic in the same part of town. I got off the train and practically found the clinic standing there before my nose. Without hesitation, I entered the hall and asked for my friend’s room number. The people behind the counter looked at me rather oddly, but then waved me through, saying that I should simply go up to the lung ward, on the fourth floor. How strange, I thought, briefly wondering why a lung clinic should have a lung ward. But I got into an elevator and pushed the button for the fourth floor, and once having reached that floor, asked again where I would find my friend. Three men in white smocks rushed right past me, much as might be expected from men in white smocks. So I asked a man in a green smock. “That could be the young man in room 34.” “Many thanks,” I said, and continued along my way. The ward was strangely empty. And all lit up. Yes, the typical neon lights that are always found in hospitals, but I also seemed to catch a shimmer of something else, some silky shimmer of glamour over hard, cold floodlight. No matter.

Through a door that stood ajar, I looked into a room. No suffering humanity inside it, but a floor half covered with Tetrapacks. Yes, Tetrapacks! It must, I thought, be a place where hospital staff can make themselves a cup of coffee, and then as well I saw a number of tripods. Tripods? Whatever for? But of course! For phlebos. The place was full of phlebo stands.

I reached the room, and found a young man in a bed. But not the young man I was looking for, a different young man. As well, he was surrounded by numerous visitors, one of whom was a young woman who nervously patted his face with a dry sponge. “Who are you looking for?” “A friend of mine. I expected to find him here.” I gave his name. “Is he part of the crew?” “A part of what? No, he’s a patient.” “A patient? Hmmm.” “One of his lungs collapsed.” She looked at me very strangely. Then her face creased up into a grin. The others followed suit, all of them with grins on their faces.

“This is a film clinic. Maybe that’s something you don’t know.” “You’re in the wrong film, so to speak. Ha ha ha.” “A film clinic?” “A film clinic.” “Oh. What’s a film clinic?” “A place where films are made.” I looked at them. “And all of your people? Who are you?” I suddenly had the feeling of standing in the midst of countless fictions. How was I to believe what they were saying? “There’s in fact another clinic only a couple of blocks from here. It’s still real.”

“What do you mean by *still*?” “This one too was once a real clinic, but they couldn’t continue to support it. It was sold to a film company, and since that time has been running perfectly. People in the film business are always looking for authentic places. And since real hospitals are getting harder and harder to finance, whereas film clinics are ever more in demand... you see what I mean. I have heard that the other clinic is also in trouble, and may soon be up for sale.” I left the film clinic and set out to find the real one. I found it, and also found my friend in it. He held up an x-ray before my nose, expecting me to be able to make out his collapsed or detached lung. All I could see was a white triangle in the midst of a number of horizontal bars. Could this abstract, transparent thing have been responsible for so much distress, outbursts of sweat, shortness of breath, and first of all for so much desperation, almost to the point of despair?

My friend nodded palely. A few hours later, I was back at the Schlesian Gate. It was dark. Street lamps were lit, and—now what am I seeing?—hundreds, thousands, millions of soap bubbles were raining down on the damp, black street and danced about in the wake of every passing car. Once again, a crowd of curious observers had gathered to watch the delightful play of the bubbles.

“It smells like everything’s just been washed.” “It has been. The whole street.” “That truck this morning, the one that turned over, was full of liquid soap.” “It just flipped over, just like that. It couldn’t handle the curve and just flipped over.” “Some of that liquid soap must have spilled.” “And then it rained.” “Was that the film they were making this morning?” “Film? What film?” “It wasn’t a film? It was all for real?” “What else could it have been, young lady? Look at all those soap bubbles!”

PLACE AND PRACTICE OF EVENTUALITY

POLITICS OF REVOLT AT THE FORECOURT OF TEHRAN UNIVERSITY

From *Eventual Spaces*

Babak Afrassiabi (Pages)

www.pagesmagazine.net
Rotterdam
Tehran

During one of Tehran's warm nights in May 2007, a number of us gathered together in a friend's apartment on the eleventh floor of a residential tower to talk about the condition of the "art space" in present-day Iran. It was no coincidence that the discussion immediately started with reference to the friction between public and private life in Iran: this – over-identified – split that has effected even the artistic practices. Like many other cultural practices in Iran that are not fully in line with state ideology, a lot of artistic and intellectual work is caught between pursuit of a minimum political agency and its possible closure. When wanting to look into the state of affairs regarding the spatiality of practice and presentation of art in Iran, one inevitably has to start with this friction. *Hamed Yousefi*¹ began by remarking: "The question of the space of artistic practice in Iran goes hand in hand with the twofold issue of the public and private domains. Over the last twenty-odd years we have had the experience that the public domain does not belong to us. In a ten to fifteen-year period, intellectuals and artists of the preceding generation were quite disinterested in the public domain and totally denied it because its tendencies and ideals had nothing to do with their own..." [A great part of the intellectual community, having leftist tendencies, felt obviously estranged from the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and how it came to define, represent and regulate the public space.] He then went on to say "...since the 1990s, there is however a kind of desperation (...)" "That is, if in the 1980s everybody ignored the public, today some take an opposing position. Because it is tiresome to see that the public spaces are closed either by the government or by custom for so much of the time. But the interesting point is that the private domain plays the role of public space for us now. We have private domains that we share with others and convert them into public spaces with controlled access. Such spaces are mobile or open-door private domains. The spaces of some galleries are in fact private homes, and it is expected that only a few people will enter them."

What we can see from Yousefi's account is a form of artistic and intellectual practice and presence that is always spatially displaced and postponed. Here practice is defined by a spatial configuration that finds itself short-circuited between approximate publicness and privacy. Clearly retained through this spatial ambivalence – of secrecy and exposure – is the possibility of practice. But more so it is the potentiality and eventuality of the unfolding of this practice into public space that is preserved; in other words, the inevitability of public practice and presence itself.

Eventuality is the coming about of things inevitably as a consequence in an indefinite future. Eventuality is also a disposition of awareness regarding the inevitable unfolding of an event. Finally eventuality is potentiality on the verge of its actualization.

Within a context like that of Iran, eventuality, as a condition of either artistic or any other practice, becomes a political disposition. Which is to say it escapes biased designations and control by the dominating power in the way that it always is concerned with the knowledge of how to act in regard to the particularity of its surrounding condition and as such is constantly reassuring the inevitability of its full actualization.

There are also *practices of eventuality* that find their arena out there in the city. The forecourt of Tehran University, located at the heart of the city, is a place for such practice. Historically the forecourt has been the site of political confrontation between the students and the state, and until today is being continuously re-claimed in the course of students' protests for change. What is interesting is that the forecourt, by virtue of its ambiguous urban position, becomes the stage for acts of revolt that are defined by the ambivalence of their spatial *mise-en-scene* in the city. Retained in this ambivalence is the eventuality or contingency of what is desired in revolt.

What follows is a reading of Tehran University's forecourt as a site of revolt with a particular spatial disposition. With this I aim to propose an open analogy with the political in the space of artistic practice in Iran.

The *student*, already by virtue of his/her transitory social state, retains a disposition, which makes it under autocratic rule, a political one. In the case of Tehran, the university,



Tehran 1940. Development of Shahreza Square and Avenue with the Teheran University Campus in the background. *Archive of Architecture of Changing Times*, Tehran, Iran.

more than being a place for producing knowledge, has become the permanent site of power and its ideological re-establishment. As a result, the students' demonstrations and manifestations of dissatisfaction often eventuate elsewhere, in the vicinity of the university where it almost becomes the city, namely the forecourt. The forecourt of Tehran University in many ways has come to facilitate critical presences in the city. As a location it not only bore witness to the uprisings of the revolution of 1979, but is to this day the quintessential place of political exchange, negotiation and confrontation.

The forecourt is located in the center of Tehran, facing one of the city's main streets. It is an inlet off the sidewalk, on the same level, continuing all the way into the university compound. On the one hand, the forecourt can be characterized as a spatial retreat from the main road, making it a semi-public space, and as a part of the university's territory. But on the other hand, it has no clear demarcation that separates it from the sidewalk, which extends it all the way to the edge of the main road.

The geographically ambiguous layout of the forecourt typifies a locus that in time has become politically and spatially the symptom of an irresolute relationship between the city and the state. The symptomatic nature of this place is not only connected to the recent history of this university but also links back to the advent of modernity in Iran, with the cultural and political complexities that followed.

With Reza-Shah coming to power in 1925 after the Constitutional Revolution, the will to modernize the country assumed an unprecedented speed. Tehran, the capital, was to undergo a process of immediate urbanization. Inspired by new concepts of urban planning in Europe, traditional parts of the town were demolished to make way for *avenues*, which themselves were a symbol of modernity. (It is interesting to note that the very first master plan for the city's development in 1930 was called literary the 'Avenue plan.') Soon new public buildings and squares were introduced to replace what is known as the Tehran Style of Architecture ('Sabke-e Tehran') with the 'International Style.' And of course the university was a part of this modernization plan.

The Minister of Culture of the period (Ali-Asghar Hekmat) writes in his memoirs, "It was during one of the auspicious nights of early 1933, in one of the state council's meeting at the Shah's presence. In the midst of talk about how prosperous Tehran had become with all its beautiful buildings and edifices, I remarked that of course there could be no doubt about the magnificence of our Capital, but that still there was a deficiency. The city still lacked a *university*, and it was a shame that our modern city should lag behind all the greatest cities of the world in this matter. After a moment of contemplation, the Shah replied decisively: 'All right, build it!'"

All existing colleges (each with different social and ideological convictions) had to be brought under one roof. There were however different actors on the political and cultural scene of the time, each with their own preferences. A supervising assembly was formed with representatives of all sides: from nationalists to advocates of the Islamic heritage, those with western linkages having studied in Europe, and representatives from the government with radical anti-traditionalist views. The design of the university was equally affected by different desires and degrees of modernity. A montage in design and history would in that period come to define the city as a whole and the university was no exception. A French architect, who had already been working in Iran for years was appointed as the supervising architect for the university. Finally the students who had been sent by the government to Europe to study in 1828 were re-assembled to help establish the university.

Although the plot of land chosen for the university in the early 1930s lay outside the center of the city, the rapid urban development of Tehran soon placed it at the heart of the metropolis as an integral part of its busy urban setting. The main avenue connecting the eastern and western parts of the city – called Shah Reza Avenue up until 1979, when it came to be renamed Enghelab or "Revolution" Avenue – passes directly in front of its entrance. The university inevitably became involved with all events of sociopolitical unrest, often harbored them, and this has remained the case throughout its history

During the *coup d'état* of 1953, engineered by the CIA, the university assumed the role, at ten years after its official opening, of a stage for political struggle and negotiation. The siege of the university by the army and the death of three students on the 7th of December 1953 marked Iran's "Day of the Student," which is celebrated every year. Now, some forty years later, the annual celebrations of the Day of the Student have become a pretext for the government or the students to express their dislike of one another, to put it only mildly.

The students' demonstration in 1970 against the Shah himself prepared the ground for continuous demonstrations and arrests up until the revolution of 1979. The university was one of the principal bastions for fighting the army and pursuing the revolution. There are many analyses with different perspectives on the Iranian revolution, on why it happened and how. Some seek its cause more in social and economic factors, and others in ideological or political ones. But they all share the view that it was an urban revolution against the Shah's authoritarian program of economic and cultural modernization.

The late Shah and his father had in fact been relentless in their dedication to every possible semblance of modernity at all levels: economically, politically, socially, industrially, militarily, no more than in culture, the arts, and architecture. There was simply no space left or allowed for questioning any of this. By the 1970s, at the peak of the Shah's authoritarian rule, all institutional channels for any expression of discontent had been suppressed. The population became increasingly alienated from the state. It is no wonder that the core of the revolutionary slogans – against an already bankrupt decor of modernity – were anti-imperialistic, third-worldist, nationalistic, and finally colored by a religious discourse.

The first Friday prayers in the university took place immediately after the victory of the revolution, and this ceremony is still held there every week. The siege of the American embassy and, shortly afterwards, the students' taking of hostages, was also a decisive event in defining the place of students and the university in the revolutionary discourse.

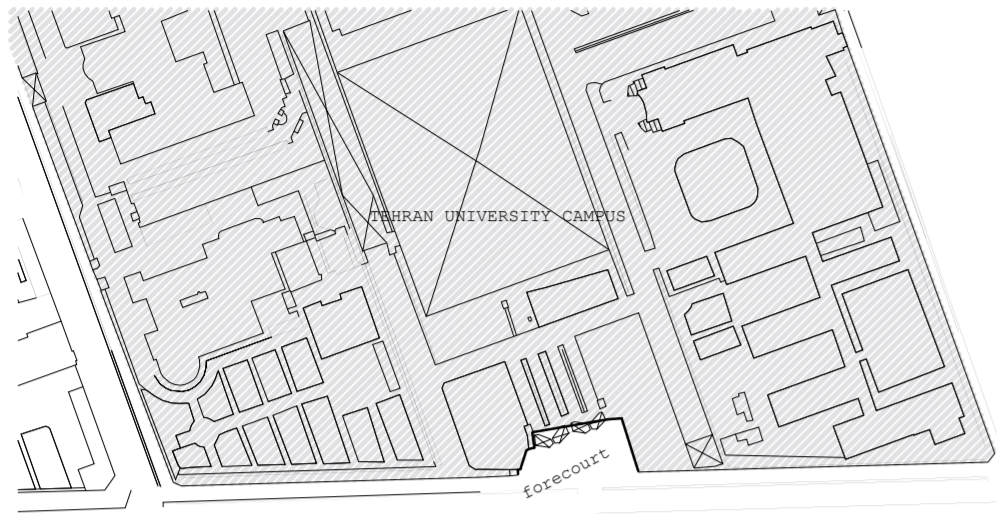
Only slightly later, the universities were closed for three years in the name of cultural revolution. This was to cleanse the university of anything foreign – of all western elements – and to establish an Islamic-Revolutionary curriculum. The immediately following decades were marked by the extreme restriction of any space for active, public presence that might be perceived as out of line with the revolutionary discourse, and this did not leave the university unaffected.

From 1997 to 2004, during the moderate Khatami presidency, the students regained some ground for the expression of desires for reform, and they to some degree established the possibility of a critical voice within the university. Confrontation, however, remained unavoidable. The siege and arrest of three hundred students in 1999 and the looting and burning of their dormitory during their demonstrations against the banning of newspapers, was a huge disappointment for the students, and arrests and clashes have continued up until today.

In recent years it is not only students who protest in the forecourt. Other groups also tend to use the forecourt for their manifestations of discontent. Participation in students' demonstrations on the part of protestors from outside the university is particularly undesired by the state. Often students are either pushed back into the university compound behind the gates, or kept outside the university. But when non-student groups are among them, the situation becomes more complicated for the security guards. That is why during such occasions we see that the guards often try to keep students and outside demonstrators separated on two sides of the fence.

In short, the forecourt has remained a site of continuous spatial advancement and retreat into/from the university or from/into the street. It is against the background of such a history that the forecourt of the university holds its place in the city. The forecourt is at times an occasion for offense, at other times for defense, rarely for reconciliation. It

1 Hamed Yousefi is a social and cultural critic who lives and works in Tehran.



Ground plan of the Tehran University Campus.

was only for a short while immediately after the 1979 revolution that the forecourt was a place for the gatherings and manifestations of a variety of political groups that felt themselves to share the victory and responsibilities of the revolution. It was only during the year after the revolution that the space in front of the University was a place for distributing political pamphlets, publications and cassettes of various parties. And this was only possible because the politics of the city were still undecided, undesignated, and open, but also vulnerable.

The years following the revolution, especially during the period of the Iran/Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, were the years of the elaboration of the revolutionary discourse. The aim was to make the revolution a part of the everyday life of the nation. The Islamic Revolution had to be kept alive and prolonged on the levels both of discourse and of practice. It thus became an endless endeavor in people's lives. The revolution was no longer seen as serving the nation; instead every citizen was there to serve the Revolution, and the city was to be the stage of its representations and symbolisms.

The problem is that such representations cannot last long because cities change. When prolonged, such representations soon become stereotypes of themselves, in contrast with a city that knows other desires and fantasies. New generations of citizens who have not experienced the revolution have parameters of identification that differ from those which the revolution offers.

When revolt becomes revolutionary—a persuasion coupled with ideology—it is bound to fall into an exhaustive circle of its own representations. The city is initially where such representations unfold, with a view to subduing it to the new order. During the years after the victory of the revolution in Iran, the city's principal spaces, such as squares and avenues, were repeatedly used for religious and revolutionary ceremonies. This accelerated with the Iran/Iraq wars, which was known as “the Sacred Defense.” With each return of the martyrs from the battlefields, crowds were mobilized to carry the bodies through the city. The use of the city as a stage for *revolutionary presence* brought public spaces into close relationship with power.

The potential of revolt dies out in the moment in which it finds its realization in the symbolism of revolution. When revolt acquires such a mode of realization, it is finally the desire in revolt that finds itself suppressed. In this sense, the devoted revolutionary is always an impostor, and a traitor to what is essential in revolt, which is desire.

The agency of the subject in revolt on the other hand, lies precisely in the eventuality and not the realization of what he or she desires in her or his act of revolt. Because the moment desires are realized they are bound to be displaced and re-appropriated into the realm of symbolism, which only entails even further acts of revolt, and this is what is happening in the forecourt. There is therefore never a place for the economy of desire in the revolutionary discourse. The endless, tireless and prolonged striving for the realization of what is desired in revolt is the way revolt bears witness to its objectives not as mere notions but as *real* eventualities. The consistency of the sovereign power is undermined by the eventualities constantly implied in the act of revolt, which forces it to recognize them as such. And this is why, in turn, the citizen who is truly in revolt is the enemy of revolutionary discourse.

Like any other act, revolt needs a stage. When institutional settings like that of the university in Tehran do not offer space for criticality, people, like the students of Tehran, advance and/or resort to ‘other’ spaces. The spatial identification in revolt lies always in the ‘otherness’ of place, in its becoming different – the desired place. But why does this inlief off the sidewalk lend itself to such desires in acts of revolt? The forecourt is the ‘unbuilt’ segment of the seized city, eluding its spatial and symbolic appropriation into the city. Being an ambivalent space—neither truly a part of the university compound, nor of the street—it is at the same time a metonymy or a condensed piece of both the street and the university, in their reclamation of a different life. And it is this geographical ambivalence that spatially supports unbound and subversive presences in public that denounces the symbolism of both the university and the street.

It is not enough for an act of revolt merely to take place: it should also bear witness to the acts it follows as well as to those it precedes, so that it can secure its potentiality and eventuality, even when it is not taking place. Locations bear witness to the events they facilitate by being turned into memorials. But only a few bear witness to their potentialities. The forecourt can never be appropriated into a monument or a memorial because of its spatiopolitical ambivalence. It is in its very undecidedness that the forecourt, this unappointed remainder of the city, bears witness to the potentiality and the eventuality of the acts it stages, both in their postponement and inevitability. And here lies the spatial agency of the subject in revolt even in his or her absence.

By now, the forecourt can hardly be dissociated from the events that have taken place in and around Tehran University since its establishment in 1933. In time, the forecourt has come to be the embodiment of the events that have taken place within it. The place of the forecourt is a kind of political blind spot of the city, which if recognized might enable the city eventually to be reconciled with its other self.

The forecourt was of course never intended to function as an agent of political signification, and it was not included in the original designs for university, as draughted in the 1930s.. Interestingly enough, it was proposed only some thirty years later by the architect who had designed the portal for the university: he intended it to offer sufficient space for viewers to see the portal from a distance and to get an overall view. The forecourt was created by pushing back (some twenty-five meters) the fence that had originally surrounded the university, and which had advanced all the way to the sidewalk. In other words, the forecourt was created by converting or de-producing it from its initial earlier demarcations.

Obviously, cities do not contain specially designed spaces for critical presence and revolt. Public spaces are originally designed for the peaceful practices of everyday life. Places like the forecourt of Tehran University are spaces that have been altered by the subject in revolt, and their availability to such alteration also depends on their initial geographical ambiguity and political vulnerability with respect to the city at large. But the equivocal and equally vulnerable spaces of intellectual and artistic practice referred to earlier are also obtained by way of spatial conversion. We know that their equivocality—which is the only possible condition in which such spaces can continue to exist in circumstances like those that prevail in Iran—always entails a loss or postponement of a concrete presence in the city. But this loss is endured by repeatedly enacting the reclamation of practice. And this is the true agency of eventuality, one that is obtained in one's choice for sacrifice and tireless persuasion.

The analogy of the forecourt is helpful in the sense that it reminds us why the *space* of art and its practice need to be integrated into the condition that surrounds them, even to the extent of becoming vulnerable to its unpredictability. States in which cities are ruled despotically tend to repudiate the potentiality of such spaces in order to secure the ideological appropriation of the city. Therefore these evasive, *abject* spaces need to be increasingly re-inserted back into cities like Tehran, so that they can engender active and participatory presences in the eventuality, or inevitable coming, of the desiring city.

THE SONG TREE AND THE AMAZONIAN OPERA

Laymert Garcia dos Santos
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Brazil

Translated from the French

On the initiative of the Goethe Institute in São Paulo, a multimedia opera is being produced on Amazonia for the Munich Opera Biennial in 2010, although the public in Germany will already have a foretaste of the production in May of 2009.

European and Brazilian artists and intellectuals (the author of this text included) are working together on this project as are a number of institutions in the Old and New World, such as ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie/Center for Art and Media), Cenpes (Petrobrás Research Center) and the Hutukara Yanomami Association, amongst others. The challenge is to portray the complexity of modern Amazonia in such a way that the audience experiences what is happening in one of the most sensitive regions on the planet. To do so, the Amazonian “spirit” had to be captured in aesthetic terms. Since we were using the operatic form, it was obvious that we had to start by discussing the relationship between multimedia opera and Orpheus – that is to say, between what we were planning to do and what myth, Greek classical drama, and Monteverdi had already done. These discussions took place during a preliminary meeting at the Center for Art and Media ZKM, in Karlsruhe, in November 2006.

That day, after having listened to several participants in the project, Peter Sloterdijk noted that all the speakers seemed to express an “Amazonian pain,” the pain of a loss or the imminence of a loss, as if we were all searching for an Amazonian Orpheus trying to sing, but whose music would be in danger; and he suggested that we begin with an *Argument* capable of forging and sketching a hero, maybe the forest itself as a heroic chorus. The philosopher added that danger had to be posited as a starting point in the search for the immanence of this loss and observed that it would be possible to make the reality of this situation emerge if a dense enough phonotopical frame was created.

As time went by, Sloterdijk's intuition proved to be extremely pertinent, for the main question in Amazonia has always been and always will be the forest. That is why it warrants the central role in an opera. That being said, it is clear from the outset that the tropical rainforest is in an extreme situation, caught in a process that seems to be pushing it towards death, jeopardized in a very risky game, the planetary implications of which are

no longer contested, not even by the scientists who are discussing the different scenarios. So why then talk about a game rather than a destiny? Because in the collective imagination, everyone is still hoping that the forest will remain inexhaustible, and that, in time, we will find a solution to the devastation. But one must admit that, ultimately, there will be no winner and that the Amazonian rainforest is the main protagonist of a game we will all lose.

Thus the audience has to be “plunged” into a borderline situation, involved in all the dimensions and levels of meaning that the forest comprises. The spectators must become a type of interface, where all these dimensions resound in the form of images, sounds and utterances (said or sung), in order for them to realize *what is being lost and the precipitous speed of the loss*.

At the start, they should encounter the excessiveness of the water-forest complex: the biggest river and the biggest tropical forest in the world, which are *still* engaged in a positive interaction, though we do not know for how long. We can move from this environmental dimension to the archeological and social level, for what we see in Amazonia was produced not by nature alone, but by a socio-environmental complex, since the region has been inhabited for millennia. Here, it is important to understand that the forest was *produced*, and to perceive it as an environment where people and animals evolve – that is to say, the meeting point of sociodiversity and the largest biodiversity in the world. Which means that the forest is, at the same time, a climatic “machine,” a human society, and an animal and plant world. And everything would be fine in this huge life-producing factory if it weren't for the extreme deforestation process that has been imposed on it from the outside in recent decades.

For modern science and technology, the rainforest is primarily a source of information, and it is no accident that biologists and ecologists speak of it as a great library that is disappearing, irremediably, even before the “books” of nature have been read and deciphered. Now, if we consider this perspective, we can see a paradoxical situation: on one hand, it is clear that technoscientific knowledge of the rainforest hasn't the force to decisively impact the course of the predatory development undertaken by the civilized world; on the other, the traditional knowledge of the Indian people reveals itself to be efficacious

in guaranteeing a positive relationship between nature and culture... but it seems that the “White Man” is incapable of listening to what these people have to say. Therefore, at the center of the opera, whose main protagonist is the forest, the tragedy that emerges is the impossibility of listening and being listened to. It is at this point that the Yanomami appear on stage. For they have been tirelessly repeating for at least two decades that the forest is in mortal danger and that it cannot and must not die.

The Yanomami are one of the most traditional people of Amazonia and of the world. Their leader, the shaman Davi Kopenawa had this to say to the anthropologist Bruce Albert, who has devoted the last thirty years to the study, comprehension, and defense of this ethnic group: “We want to tell all this to the White Men, but they do not listen. They are other people, they do not understand. I think they don't want to pay attention. They think: ‘these people are lying’. That's what they think. But we do not tell lies. They don't know anything about all this. That's why they think that way...”

The Yanomami are the ones who endure and express the “Amazonian pain” Peter Sloterdijk was talking about. But they are not listened to! Listening to what they have to say about the forest is precisely listening to what the forest itself has to say, for they have the means, in other words, the knowledge and the techniques needed to listen to what the chorus of the Amazon rainforest sings and transmit it. Indeed, it is from the forest that the Yanomami's songs are born, as we can read in a story of great mythical force where Davi Kopenawa tells Bruce Albert how the auxiliary spirits, the *xapiripê*, pick them off the *amoahiki* trees to reveal them to the shamans.

“The *xapiripê* songs are truly countless. They never end, for the *xapiripê* gather them from the *amoahiki* trees. *Omama* created these Song Trees so that the *xapiripê* could come and collect their words. Thus, when they come from very far away, the *xapiripê* pass by them to take the songs before their presentation dance. Everyone who so desires, stops by an *amoaohiki* tree to collect its infinite words. They unceasingly fill hemstitched and wickerwork baskets with them. They never stop accumulating them. (...) They are tall trees covered with moving lips, one on top of the other, letting out magnificent melodies. (...) Barely has a song ended that, very quickly, another

one begins. (...) Do not think that shamans sing alone, without any reason. They sing what their spirits sing. These songs come to their ears one after the other, as my voice to this microphone. (...) Everywhere we live, where there is earth and there are rivers, manifold *xapiripê*, each possessing different songs, descend. (...) But there are also Song Trees right in the boundaries of the land of the White Men. Without them, your singers would have melodies too short. Only the *amoaohiki* trees give beautiful lyrics. They are the ones that introduce them into our language and our thoughts, but also into the memories of the White Man” (Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, “les ancêtres animaux”, in *Yanomami l'esprit de la forêt*, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris: Actes Sud, 2003).

The forest sings. Moreover: the knowledge acquired by the Yanomami and their shamans has its sound womb in the songs of trees. Living nature is precious, both as earth-forest *and* as visual and sound image. In short, as human and non-human *opera*. This is what nobody seems to want to hear. Whereas the Amazonian rainforest is the opera's main character, the Yanomami are the vehicle that enables us to reach the spirit of the forest. This is why they are the ones to raise the alarm at the end. The threat of the irreparable loss for the Indians and the Whites, suggested by Sloterdijk, arouses the agony of the Yanomami who do everything they can to save the forest. But what they are saying is that the forest's death throes are also our own.

HISTORIAN OF DOUBT 7

Vincent Labaume Clichy, France

13 May 2008

*Poetry will no longer
take its rhythm
from action:
it will be ahead of it.*
Arthur Rimbaud

Translated from the French

Four mornings a week, I get up exactly at 7.15 am to get to work at 9.30 on the dot. Jumping out of bed, I first of all pull on my house clothes laid out at the foot of my bed in the order of putting them on, put my cell phone, which I use as an alarm clock, back on the edge of my desk next to my bag prepared the night before, then go downstairs to make my breakfast. I first of all switch on the electric coffee-maker, then insert into the toaster two slices of bread about the length of a hand, cut from the slightly stale baguette bought one or two days before. Before pushing down the lever, I estimate the cooking time setting the slices need depending on the hardness of the bread so that the toasting is always even and doesn't burn around the edges. I then set my tray with a coffee bowl, a desert bowl that I garnish with two varieties of cereal accompanied with cold milk, half a glass of "fresh" red fruit juice, a few lumps of sugar in a saucer, butter and a ripe unpasteurized cheese.

Whilst the coffee filters and the toast toasts, I take the opportunity to go and empty my bladder in the WC, a moment during which I like to let my eyes follow the uneven contours of a map of the world on the wall to my right, in general the jagged lands of the Canadian grand North and Alaska, not because this region is more evocative than any other part of the globe, but because the American continent happens to be placed straight above the toilet bowl and because, when I stand urinating, the rest of the world is behind me.

Given, for that matter, the quite low position of the map, I save perusing the more southern regions of America and the other continents for when I'm in the position for defecating.

At about 7.25 am, I put my tray on the sitting room table and turn the radio on at the frequency of the general-interest public station which announces the day's weather bulletin at 7.29. Like every night, I have preventatively put my folding umbrella by my bag so that I only have to pop it in when it's time to leave if the meteorological report announces wet weather. In order to also avoid a brusque and last minute adjustment to my work clothes, I'm careful always to prepare two sorts that can be put on indiscriminately: an outfit for cool weather and another for more clement temperatures.

Between 7.30 and 7.50 am, I have my breakfast whilst listening, when the frequency isn't too scrambled by the peripheral transmitters that swamp my neighbourhood, to the news on the cultural station where the rhythm of the voices is slower and more pleasant than on the general-interest one. I drink my fresh fruit juice first, then eat my bowl of cereals, chewing slowly, mouth shut, in order, as far as possible, to avoid drowning out the crackling sound of the radio with my mastication. Finally, I generously butter my two slices of toast that I

then garnish with thin slices of cheese disposed, out of geometric spirit, width-ways and at a slant, then dip them in my black coffee before eating them.

At 7.55, my tray is taken back to the kitchen and the dirty crockery stacked in the dish-washer. I promptly go back upstairs to shower, dry myself, shave, brush my teeth after gargling an oral preparation for a few minutes, then, without any soul-searching, put on my clothes chosen for the day. At about 8.20 am, I check the time on my mobile phone, put on my glasses, do or don't grab my umbrella and proceed to make an ultimate check of the principal contents of my bag: wallet, money, credit card, keys, travel pass, notepad and pen; if I'm slightly ahead of time, I might also check its secondary contents: book, documentation and various letters, sunglasses and paper tissues. It takes me a few more minutes to give my shoes a quick shine, slip them on, put on my coat or jacket depending on the season and to go round the house checking that all the lights are off; then I double lock my door turning the key twice.

Between 8.23 and 8.27 am, I reach the bottom of my building where I have about 9 to 12 minutes to walk at a steady, but not excessively hurried pace to the station, or more precisely the stop, where I go to catch my train. During this digestive, slightly forced walk in which I enter the Capital in the most physical manner there is, by crossing *underneath* the deafening ring-road motorway that encircles it tightly, I notably walk past the headquarters of a major international cosmetics brand, various office buildings with tinted windows, an average, brand-new tourist-class hotel with a considerable capacity of accommodation, a modern gymnasium all in chrome steel bordered by a more or less well-tended lawn ornamented with a patch of stunted conifers, a huge Soviet-looking school building, stretching round in a semi-circle and bearing the name of a well-known national writer; then, after crossing, often ignoring the lights much to the annoyance of the car drivers, several boulevards and crossroads, and again walking along the exaggeratedly rounded façade of an international assistance company, I brusquely accelerate the cadence of my step and disappear down into the underground station, not without glancing at the outside clock as I pass nor anxiously throwing a look at the traffic display screens hanging in the entrance.

Even though I every day endeavour to, while at the same time making it a point of honour not to modify my morning ritual in the slightest, it is highly rare that I catch the 8.34 train, which I regularly miss by a matter of seconds, despite a frantic race down the escalators as the door closure signal rings out. Nonetheless, I cannot stop myself from trying to arrest this fateful stopwatch by frenetically plunging myself downstairs, always hoping to beat my sprint record or that some small unforeseen incident affecting the train's departure will at last reward the constancy of my efforts. The descent to the platform being executed in two successive stages, the first corresponding to the junction with the metro, I recently noticed that if on the lower-level escalator I pass passengers already coming up from the platform on their way to the exit, I can stop my race then and there and kiss goodbye to the 8.34 train! Even sprinting like a record holder, I would never have the time to reach the automatic entrance barriers, jam my ticket into the slot, go through the turnstile and security door, then dash down the fifty or so steps still separating me from the platform before the doors of the train inexorably shut. But if, by miracle, I manage to catch the 8.34 train, a certain pride colours a good part of my morning with an optimistic tone. Of course, this euphoric sensation will be temporarily countered by the fact that, having jumped without really

having chosen my carriage into one of those stopping immediately at the foot of the stairs, I will find myself compressed in the mass of passengers crammed near the doors, preparing their imminent descent at the next station. The 8.34 train being considerably more frequented than the following one, not only will I have to elbow my way to reach the upstairs compartment – never do I go and sit in the downstairs one because, situated practically at platform level, it is almost impossible, unless you quite literally twist your neck, to see the very highly placed station nameplates as you pass – but it isn't even certain that I will immediately find a seat. Of course, the train partially emptying at the next stop, I will hardly remain standing for long, and will frankly be able to settle comfortably at the next station, where the little world of workers from the north-eastern quarter of the greater urban ring appear to give each other rendezvous every morning at about 8.40 am. I will thus have the whole of a four-, six-, or even eight-person seat to install myself, and maybe right until my destination will also be the sole "survivor" of my compartment, exalted with the intoxicating sense of being a kind of public transport "billionaire"... As is infallibly the case with my usual substitute 8.41 train! On that one, in practically the first minutes of my embarkation, I can put my bag down on the empty seat opposite me, take off my coat or more if the heat induced by my rush requires it, and plonk it all in a heap on the seat next to me; I can also undo the top button of my trousers without fearing mocking glances, and, above all, take out my notepad and pen to note down everything that goes through my head without being at all bothered by the indiscretion of other passengers or jolted by the jogging train... All things that are strictly impossible in the metro, and particularly on the line that serves my home where, whatever time of day it is, a herd of suburbanites and youth hostel tourists, modest employees and students, poor people and social outcasts, fills every last space of each compartment to saturation point.

During the first years of my move to this adjacent suburb, the exclusive usage of this metro line that I believed alone fit to take me to work and whose station was just a few hundred metres from my home nearly drove me mad. Even though, thanks to the incomparably greater frequency of its trains, I could set my alarm nearly half an hour later, both the alarming promiscuity and heat reigning in permanence in the compartment, and the multiple snubs of the signals or uncivil passengers prompting prolonged stops in the obscurity of the tunnels, conferred on my journeys an air of desolate fatality where the stress of unforeseen incidents mingled with the resigned constriction in the impedimenta of the toiling classes. The discovery, then definitive adoption, of this railway line, even though much farther and with such intermittent traffic, contributed to a significant improvement in my condition as an employee, favouring a relative flourishing in my physical and psychic state before starting work.

One question nonetheless remains in abeyance: why, in these conditions, persist come what may in wanting to catch the 8.34 train if the 8.41 one appears fully to satisfy all my desires?

To be continued...



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Topsy-Turvy*, Paris, 22 April 2005

THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL

Jalal Toufic
Istanbul
Turkey

Given the many unjust and humiliating conditions that are the daily experience of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, what is the moment that suddenly felt unbearable for one or more Palestinians, that stopped the interior monologue, that broke the sensory-motor link?¹ From June 2002, he, a Palestinian living in the West Bank, followed with apprehension the news about the construction by the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon of a “Security Fence” ostensibly to block terrorist attacks. He saw the “Security Fence” progress day after day, discovering that it was actually an 8-meter-tall wall with razor-fringed fencing, watchtowers every few hundred meters, and buffer zones on either side, and that it encroached on substantial areas of the West Bank. Remembering Nietzsche’s characterization of Jesus of Nazareth as “the peaceful preacher of the mount, the sea-shore and the fields, who appears like a new Buddha on a soil very unlike India’s...” (*The Antichrist*), he wondered whether one could be a Taoist on a soil very unlike China’s, namely the West Bank;² and whether, as in Taoism, where “the movements of the painter’s brush must be interrupted [without interruption of the breath that is animating them]” (Li Jih-Hua),³ a Palestinian could maintain the *chi* (vital breath/original energy) without a break despite some 700 checkpoints operational in the West Bank and Gaza in December 2003, which often closed for good for weeks, and which even when open often took hours to cross—and now despite the Wall of Separation. For a period of several weeks, he was obsessed by Borges’ “The Wall and the Books”: “I read, a few days ago, that the man who ordered the building of the almost infinite Chinese Wall was that first Emperor, Shih Huang Ti, who also decreed the burning of all the books that had been written before his time.”⁴ That these two vast undertakings—the five or six hundred leagues of stone against the barbarians, and the rigorous abolition of history, that is, of the past—were the work of the same person and were, in a sense, his attributes, inexplicably satisfied and, at the same time, disturbed me.... Herbert Allen Giles recounts that anyone who concealed books was... condemned to work on the endless wall until the day of his death.”⁵ He thought that one could paraphrase Borges’ words thus within the context of Israeli politics: the man who ordered the building of the Wall of Separation was that Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, who also decreed the burning of all the books relating to the Palestinians: during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, when Sharon was Israel’s defense minister, the Israeli army seized and possibly destroyed the archives of the Palestine Research Center in Beirut, and during the Israeli reoccupation of the Gaza strip beginning in late March 2002, Israeli military forces destroyed or seized the computers, books, audio recordings, videos, institutional archives and records housed in many Palestinian cultural resources. That these two vast undertakings—the 788 kilometers of stone against “the barbarians,” and the rigorous abolition of history, that is, of the past of the Palestinian people—were the work of the same person and were, in a sense, his attributes inexplicably satisfied and, at the same time, disturbed him. He thought that sooner or later the destruction of books in an Israel that was turning increasingly right-wing, militaristic, and chauvinistic, and whose initial racism was becoming even more exacerbated, would apply not only to those that refer to and/or document the Palestinian past but also to those, archaeological or otherwise, that contradict the Bible, and then to all books other than the Bible, its orthodox interpretation(“s”) and the scientific and technological publications presenting the latest advances in certain cutting edge fields where Israeli scientists are making a significant contribution, for example nanotechnology.⁶ At that point any Israeli who concealed books other than the aforementioned allowed ones would be condemned to work, until the day of his or her death, on the Wall of Separation, which would be constantly in need of repair since repeatedly sabotaged at various points by its victims, the Palestinians. Elsewhere in the same text, Borges writes: “Perhaps Shih Huang Ti condemned those who adored the past to a work as vast as the past, as stupid and as useless.”⁷ Similarly, perhaps Ariel Sharon is unwittingly condemning those in Israel who adore the past,

namely the settlers in the Occupied Territories, who base their territorial claims on the Bible, to “a work as vast as the past, as stupid and as useless.” He wondered whether, as with the Great Wall of China (aka 10,000 Li Long Wall), which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987, the Security Wall (aka the Security Fence) will, if completed, be added one day to the same list. It may in the short term become a wailing wall for the Palestinians, but it is likely in the long term to become another Wailing Wall for the Israeli Jews, coming to rival and possibly to supplant the 50 meters long Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem (aka the Western Wall), the only remains of the Second Temple destroyed in 70, and which dates back to about the 2nd century BC (its upper sections were added later). On 23 February 2004, as the International Court of Justice in The Hague began hearings on the legality of Israel’s Wall of Separation, he along with thousands of other Palestinians as well as international peace activists marched in protest against this Wall of Separation in various towns and villages in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁸ In rare cases, one’s disconnecting of the Wall of Separation from the mendacious justifications for its construction leads to the disconnection of the sensory functions from the motor ones in a breakdown of the sensory-motor link; more frequently, it is the breakdown of the sensory-motor link that leads to a concomitant disconnection of the Wall of Separation from not only the mendacious and mystifying justifications for its construction, but also from all the real reasons for its presence (encroaching on Palestinian territories; contributing toward rendering a viable Palestinian state on the Occupied Territories impossible; minimizing terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians; gaining political votes, since, according to many polls, over 70% of Israelis are in favor of the Wall of Separation, etc.). The Wall of Separation was so unbearable to him that it broke his sensory-motor link,⁹ i.e. disconnected the sensory functions from the motor ones, and suspended his interior monologue, with voices and hallucinations coming to insert themselves in the gap between the sensory functions and the motor ones. Indeed, one not so fine day, while going to visit a friend, something anomalous obstructed his vision. It seemed to have suddenly appeared from one day to the next. He approached it with much trepidation. Was it a wall (for certainly it was not a fence)? Yes! It seemed never to end! Did it reach China and envelope its Great Wall? Did it circle the Earth? Was he losing his mind and hallucinating it? Or was he still sleeping and dreaming it? And if he was dreaming even when he thought he was awake, then how to wake up? He thought that this could be achieved only by death, for didn’t the prophet Muhammad say: “People are asleep, and when they die, they awake”? A few days later, like others before him, he recorded a video testimony¹⁰—the task in the prerecorded video testimony of the one soon to embark on a bombing operation is to tell or intimate to his or her addressees what he or she has seen. Later that day, he blew himself up in a crowded bus, killing along with himself a number of Israelis (did the scene of the horrifying carnage in turn produce a breakdown of the sensory-motor link of some Israeli who happened to be passing there?).¹¹ It is both incumbent upon, and relevant for an Arab to condemn in no uncertain terms the indiscriminate killing by Palestinian suicide bombers of Israeli civilians living within Israel’s 1967 borders (as well as both the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians and the targeted mass killings of Shi’ites in Iraq by suicide bombers from other Arab countries, many of whom are Wahhábís)¹² as long as these bombings are still *reactions*, whether political or revengeful or mimetic, or all of these conjointly. It is irrelevant to condemn such bombings—but not the unbearable conditions that give rise to them in the case of the Palestinians—when they are no longer reactions but an unpredictable by-product of the breakdown of the sensory-motor link, since while one can prevent a reaction, one cannot prevent an event.

Jalal Toufic, *‘Áshūrā’: This Blood Spilled in My Veins* (Beirut, Lebanon: Forthcoming Books, 2005), pp. 64-68

¹ On the break of the sensory-motor link, see Chapter 1 of Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

² The one really beautiful shot in Mel Gibson’s excruciating *The Passion of the Christ*, 2004, occurs in the film’s last scene: suddenly, the crucified Christ is filmed from a heavenly perspective, with the sort of detachment, colors, rocks, haze, and, most importantly, (“third fullness, two-thirds”) emptiness that one encounters most characteristically in traditional Chinese painting, so that we move from a Semitic to a Chinese atmosphere and culture. It would seem that high up, there is no God but a sort of Taoist Way of Heaven.

³ François Cheng, *Empty and Full: The Language of Chinese Painting*, trans. Michael H. Kohn (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), pp. 76-77.

⁴ Actually in 213 BC, in the China of Shih huang-ti, “all books not dealing with agriculture, medicine, or prognostication were burned, except historical records of Ch’in and books in the imperial library” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger; trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine and Eliot Weinberger (London; New York: Penguin, 2001), pp. 344-345.

⁶ “A functional electronic nano-device has been manufactured using biological self-assembly for the first time.... A team of Israeli scientists [at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology] harnessed the construction capabilities of DNA and the electronic properties of carbon nanotubes to create the self-assembling nano-transistor.” *New Scientist*, 20 November 2003.

⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, p. 345.

⁸ I encourage the readers of this book to sign the online petition “Stop the Wall Immediately” initiated by French philosopher Etienne Balibar: <http://www.petitiononline.com/stw/petition.html>

⁹ The unbearable can be borne by a Muslim not by committing a veiled suicide, which is prohibited in Islam and which anyway will lead him or her to death, where one has piercing sight, but by reaching a stage of *faná’* (obliteration in God), in which it is God who is “his sight through which he sees,” and God, Who created the universe in which such a thing can occur, can certainly bear it.

It is only God (the Father) Who, in his infinite compassion, magnanimity, etc., can withstand to be insulted, tortured and then crucified (in the person of the Son). A (great) human should not be able to withstand that this should happen to God. The ordeal on the cross could have lasted much longer, indeed until the end of the world, had not Jesus of Nazareth succumbed, and he succumbed so quickly not because of the torture he suffered and the flagellation and the crucifixion, but from not being able to tolerate that (the Son of) God, who had incarnated in him, should be treated thus by low-lives (it is reported that on viewing an advanced screening of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* [2004], the Pope said: “It is as it was”; I would like to believe that he meant by that not that Gibson’s film shows the events as they happened then, but that the film itself is a reenactment, by a low-life, of the torture and crucifixion of Christ). It is with the resurrection that Jesus partook of God. Had they tried to crucify the resurrected body of Jesus Christ, then he would not have succumbed until the end of the world. So along with being the becoming human of God (Jesus Christ), Christianity could not but be the becoming God of men and women so that they would not perish from considering what happened to God on the cross.

In films dealing with monotheistic religions, the filmmaker has no right, unless he wants to assume the status of God, to film the events from an “objective” point of view, but has to show the events from the subjective points of view of various “historical” witnesses, with the consequence that he will end up showing only certain parts of what happened, a fragmentary rendering. For a filmmaker to narrate his film’s events from a perspective that is both omnipresent (through parallel montage) and omniscient is to implicitly assume the point of view of God. We see this explicitly and naively in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* in a symptomatic shot in the scene of the crucifixion: when Jesus gives up his spirit, the scene is suddenly filmed from a heavenly perspective, from God’s view. A filmmaker can legitimately do so only if he has progressed so far on the spiritual path as to

have attained the mystical station of obliteration in God (the Súfis’*faná’*), for then his camera shows events from the perspective of God not because the filmmaker knows what God is seeing but because he is absent and God has become “his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees” (“My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks” [a *hadith qudsi*]).

¹⁰ The statement “I am the *shahíd(a)* [martyr] (name of speaker),” with which, starting with the Lebanese Saná’ Yüsif Muhaydli, a number of guerrilla fighters introduced their prerecorded video testimonies, is paradoxical whether said by a secular person or by a Muslim. For when a secular resistance fighter, for instance a communist, says it, he or she is telling us that he or she is dead! (See my essay “I Am the Martyr Saná’ Yüsif Muhaydli” in the revised and expanded edition of my book (*Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* [Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2003]). And when a Muslim resistance fighter says it, he or she is telling us that past the bombing operation in which he or she died physically he or she is a living witness!

¹¹ If martyrdom, whether secular or Islamic, is related to death, it is because being a witness, the primary sense of both *martyr* and *shahíd*, is related to death: Islamic martyrdom is related to death because it is through death that one has piercing sight; and secular martyrdom is related to death because it is through some sort of breakdown of the sensory-motor link that one has a visionary view of reality, which vision may in unfortunate cases be so unbearable that the one who undergoes it attempts or at least entertains suicide.

¹² In the first half of 2005, at least 213 suicide attacks—172 by vehicle and 41 by bombers on foot—took place in Iraq, according to an Associated Press count. It is estimated that less than 10% of the more than 500 suicide attacks that have taken place in Iraq since 2003 have been carried out by Iraqis.

Pages 12/13, Sandra Boeschenstein

acute eyes II

left:

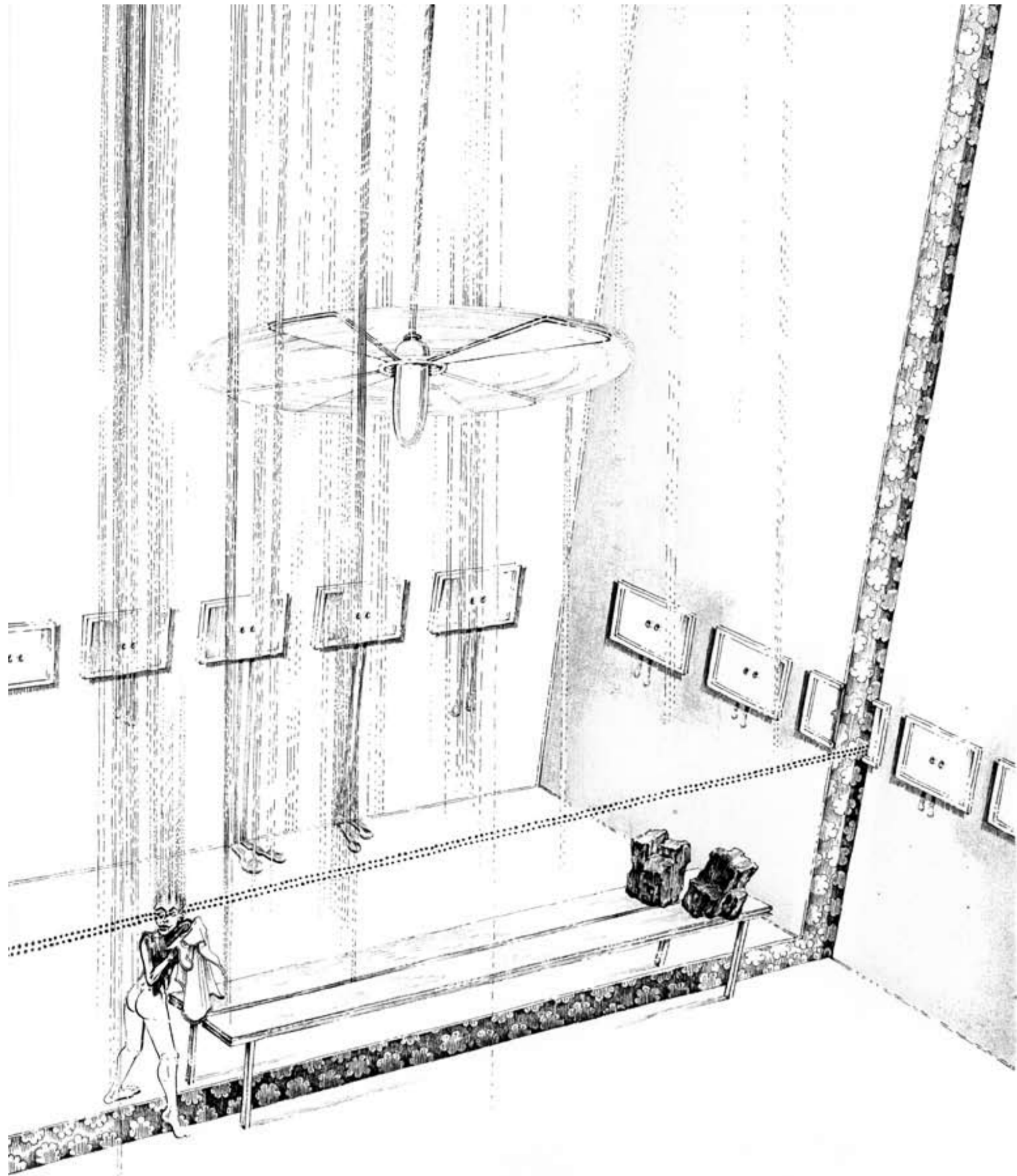
at the attempted live transmission of the stone the groundwater meets the eye

right:

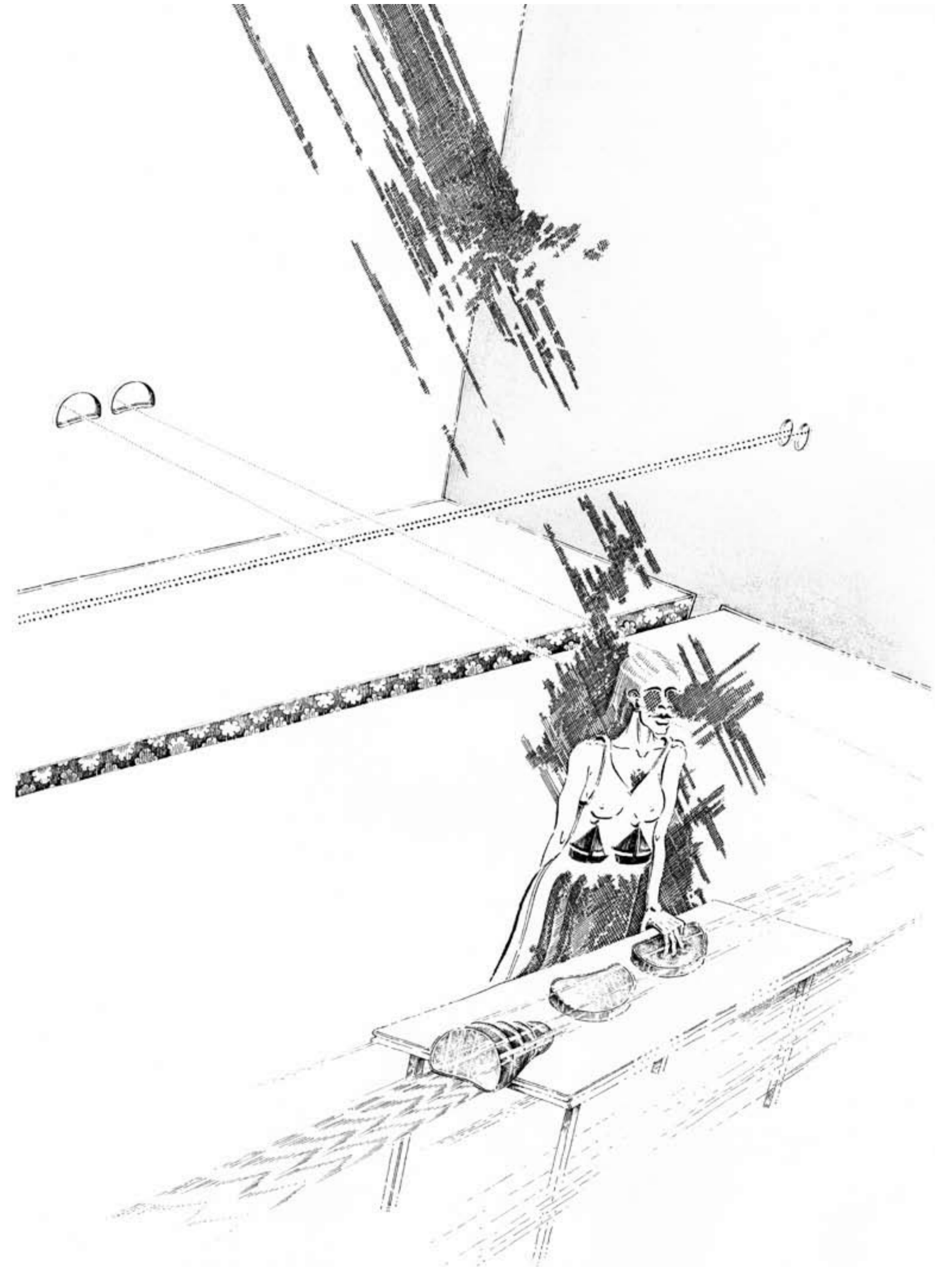
at increasing speed do eyes stay eyes longer than boats boats, bread bread, flowers flowers?

at what speed are they turning into a projectile?

2008, Indian Ink on Paper



at the attempted live transmission of stone the groundwater meets the eye



at increasing speed do eyes stay eyes longer than boats boats, bread bread, flowers flowers
at what speed are they turning into a projectile

EIFFEL TOWER

Fabrizio Gallanti
Milan

Translated from the Italian

A crowd of people stands at the base of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Most of them are tourists and visitors patiently making their way toward one of the elevators, which lie encased in its huge, slanting feet. The four great pillars bear the names of the cardinal points of the compass: the North, the East, and the West hold elevators which rise obliquely through the metal structures up to the first and second levels of the tower. The elevators look like diving bells, yellow, with two cabins, one above the other. The area directly beneath the tower—the square defined by the four foundations in pale stone that carry the networked structure in puddled iron, a malleable steel obtained from wrought iron—is covered with asphalt. The approaches to the elevators consist of a system of fixed railings made of iron tubes, painted green. They channel the flow of visitors through a series of parallel lanes, similar to what one finds in many places where large crowds must be controlled. Since they look quite old—not being made of the usual aluminum poles with pull-out nylon ribbons, like the systems found in airports and large post offices—they remind me of the tracks that guide the passage of animals in slaughter houses, or in corrals where they're shaved for wool. But here at the Eiffel Tower, these corridors for crowd control aren't ample enough for the masses of people who want to get to the top of it, so the asphalt square sees the spontaneous generation of lengthy serpentine of potential visitors who slowly advance towards the approaches to the elevators, moving along a series of irregular diagonals across the asphalt. Occasionally, when the size of the crowd is excessive, additional barriers are erected, the usual kind with vertical bars, in an attempt to establish order. In fact, as one looks at the tower while approaching it on foot, what in fact is a choreography of small steps, progressively forward, seems instead to be a chaotic mass, made of so many molecules in suspension that wander along, attracted or repelled by agglutinated clusters of persons. It's only after entering the square that one sees the existence of an uncertain hierarchy, that, first of all, one sees the tourists to stand in lines. Before that moment they might be confused with processional caterpillars. more or less numerous groupings that follow one another, jerkily moving and changing their shapes and configurations, which stretch and contract as their collective movement requires. But rather than such caterpillars, which get into line in orderly single file, one right after the other, the waiting tourists more resemble the cyclists in a bicycle race, as we see them in films shot from above. When the line advances, the groups within it thin and lengthen, so that at least one of their members is in contact with the last member of the group before it. When the line halts, the groups, as seen from above, grow thicker, since conversations again pick up: an effective way of killing time.

Time is in any case cadenced by the digital panels that stand above the ticket counters and announce the average waiting time: two hours, one hour, two hours. The red letters that appear on the screen also inform the visitors as to whether or not it's possible to go up to level three, which is opened or closed according to the density of traffic. The rhythm of the updates creates a kind of dust cloud around the lines (at times so long as to result in interlacing spirals, with unexpected effects). Every now and then, in fact, there are groups or individuals that detach themselves from the lines, having decided to postpone the visit they so intensely desire, or shifting into other lines which they imagine move more speedily. After fervid discussions that calculate the lesser waiting time and the undeniable saving in monetary terms, some courageous tourists decide to scale the tower on foot. The gaps created by the various defections are rapidly filled by the persons immediately next in line. The faces of such "successors" gleam for a moment with restrained happiness. In other cases, when the immediate successors are caught up in conversation, and not entirely attentive to the gap that suddenly opens up before them, others are quick to fill it. Some adopt a technique of progressive, converging approaches, covered by an air of innocent distraction and ready if upbraided to excuse themselves with a claim of misunderstanding the geometries of the waiting lines. Others are more straightforward, simply charging into the gap and moving ahead with never a backward glance, fully unconcerned with whatever may be happening behind their backs. It's only occasionally that one notes expressions of irritation on the part of people who have been leap-frogged.

The lines and the little groups of people who join or leave them are surrounded by various others as well: lost tourists trying to find the other members of their groups or families, scanning the crowd for familiar faces; members of lined-up groups who wait by turns, with various persons taking a break or returning to relieve some few of the others; people standing motionless, surveying and appraising the situation, studying the crowds and the digital displays and excitedly discussing what to do, toward which of the feet of the tower to move, to stay or to leave, whether or not to buy a bottle of water and a sandwich.

Strange, unrecognizable languages are also heard, and one glimpses cosmopolitan faces. Yet if not for a few details (the scarves on the heads of the Muslim women, some of the kinds of jewels) the style of dress seems common to all: casual travel clothes. The whole world comes together in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, just as in Venice, at the Prado, at the entrance to the Colosseum, at Niagara Falls. And the whole world seems to buy its clothes in the very same stores, variations nicely articulated according to age. It's been years, I think, since I've seen any elderly people dressed in the clothes my grandmother wore. She was dressed in mourning for a decade, and I went with her to buy her clothes in stores that specialized in such attire. Here the clothing categories are only three: children, teens (sixteen to twenty), and adults (twenty or more).

Two-piece suits, ties, and elegant dresses are sported only by those who rapidly direct their steps toward the South Tower, where they board the elevator that takes them directly to the gourmet restaurant at level two.

Every now and then, the geometry of the lines and the satellites they at times attract, at times repel, is interrupted by compact formations in the wake of a vanguard explorer who usually holds up a sign, an umbrella, a pennant: little battalions that wearily drag their feet toward a bus that awaits them with its motor running. Around their necks, the members of these groups wear little plastic envelopes displaying symbols or texts that identify them: the Japanese are the most orderly, the Germans the least fatigued, the Latin Americans the most extravagant. The groups move by starts and turns, since every fifteen feet or so the guide halts and looks around, standing on his toes and stretching his neck in the attempt to see the group's rear guard and to make himself more visible. This pretty much describes the group of people who enter the tower. A complementary system is made up of other persons, as follows.

Les flics: the police and *gendarmes*.

Playmobiles: male and female paramilitaries, dressed in uniforms hardened by plastic shields and ballistic fiber breastplates, amphibious shoes in black leather, military helmets, and assault rifles slung around their necks.

Technicians: people wearing jackets and T-shirts with symbols of public offices or private firms and who stride about the square with an air of having things to do. Five such men are attempting, unsuccessfully, to regulate a system of telescoping poles that rise up through the ground and withdraw back down beneath it, functioning as a gate that keeps motorized vehicles from entering the square.

Vendors of Eiffel Tower keyrings: a little bronze tower with a metal ring. The rings are strung onto the vendors' middle and index fingers. The towers are of different sizes, and prices vary accordingly. The vendors are mainly Senegalese, or from Pakistan (or India, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka).

Panhandlers: mainly French, no longer young, often drunk, making bilious remarks about foreigners (you can't make out if such complaints concern the vendors or the tourists).

Little bands of thieves: easily identifiable, they mainly consist of groups of gypsy women who accost and encircle people who are standing alone. Their movements resemble those of certain predators that hunt the savanna, waiting to find some weaker member of a herd (a calf or an older, decrepit animal) alone, and then to attack it.

Suddenly, several lines of *flics* move off in unison, from the southern side of the square that lies towards the Seine. A dragnet operation. And in fact the crowd thins. The vendors withdraw, uttering some sort of cry (perhaps a signal to the others) and progressively exit from the other side of the square. It might be a moment in a bicycle race, as the number of the fugitives grows. The crowd is ever larger, swelling as it gathers up other vendors. Their pace increases, they break into a run, they cross the bridge toward Trocadero. The *flics* pursue them at a somewhat more moderate pace, some on foot, others in their squad cars. Once having crossed the bridge, the vendors take up hiding behind a two-level playground structure with a vaguely nineteenth-century air, and covered with elegantly dressed children, mainly blonde (from the sixteenth arrondissement? maybe Russian?)...

One of the vendors posts himself as a sentinel. A few minutes pass, the coast is clear, and they once again set out towards the tower.

This match between the fleet-footed immigrants and the sluggish police seems to have become a new Europe-wide urban sport. An updated version of cops and robber. Except that the vendors can't be described as robbers. What could they be said to steal?

David Goldblatt

Xhosa man and VN Zote's children, Flagstaff, Transkei, Eastern Cape. 9 October 1975

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David Goldblatt
The road from Nqondwana to Port St John's. 6 May 2007
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