

Inked characters fast fading on the frayed breaking paper ⁽¹⁾
by Tiago de Abreu Pinto

(Throughout this scene, the images are marked by a black-and-white contrast⁽²⁾).

From the void, only to return to it⁽³⁾. Homesickness. Jupiler beer cans were, in the corner, almost unnoticed, as if people finished drinking, leaving them as discreetly as possible; trying to hide them in plain sight. He looked down and noticed a book under them, taking it out while putting the cans aside, lifting it up just before it hid his eyes. It had a dark orange tone, and three black circles on the cover, as if they were marked by the crumpled metallic beer containers, the thin line of a square as a background in relief, and the title *Merz-gebiete. Kurt Schwitters und seine Freunde*.

- Hey! How are you? — a hand appears in the frame touching his back.
- I'm fine, and you? — turning back, leaving the book on the floor, and smiling pleasantly.
- Not bad — lighting up a cigarette, looking down in his direction.
- Listen, do you know when it starts? — lifting himself up, looking at a Daumier portrait, which was hanging on the wall.
- Soon, I think — taking a puff of his cigarette.
- Good! I've been here for a while — he said while cleaning the black paint off his hands on a dirty piece of crumpled cotton.
- I thought you were in The Hague — whispering huskily.

- No, I stayed because of this — pointing to the screen—. I really want to see it.
- Me too. What are you reading? — looking at the book on the ground, blowing out the smoke.
- Oh, it's a book on Schwitters, but it's in German.
- This Merz thing is really crazy — finishing up the sentence already with the cigarette between his lips, inhaling a mass of smoke and breathing it out gently.
- Yes, do you know where it comes from? — gazing into the void, Duchamp's inner voice saying: *quand la fumée de tabac sent aussi de la bouche qui l'exhale, les deux odeurs s'épousent par infra-mince*⁽⁴⁾.
- What? — with a miscreant look.
- The word — looking back at him.
- No. I know he titled his works *Merz*, the collages... — with an almost finished cigarette between the fingers.
- Yes, the word doesn't mean anything in German. Did you know that? — gushingly interpellating him.
- No, I don't know where it comes from — inhaling once more, leaving a little trickle of blue-pale smoke behind.
- It seems he found it in a newspaper. Actually, he found the word *Kommerz*, and cut it off.
- Ah, ok — extinguishing it on the ashtray, full of cigarette-butts, immediately lighting a new one, pulling out a lighter from one of his pockets that is filled with coins, keys and other, less distinguishable, debris. It gleams through the caliginosity, unveiling several forgotten objects in the room.
- But, I think the beauty of it lies in the similarity of its sound to März, the first month of spring.
- Yes — letting the smoke flow out profusely.
- It's kind of abstract. I don't know how to put it, it's as if he wanted to do something totally new, you know? But it comes from something that already exists. An abstract,

- nonexistent word that at the same time refers to other things, like spring.
- Yeah — he murmurs.
- I photographed these pages with my apparatus — showing him blurry pages of *Le Sentiment National*, a text written by Schwitters.
- Let me see — looking closely at the images on his apparatus.

In the meantime, he shifted focus, with his hands crossed behind his back and his eyes sunken in the movement of people in front of the bookshelf. Some of them casually flipping through the images, others inspecting specific fragments of the books carefully, while the rest was reading seated on a bench, which extended parallelly to the bookshelf. He noticed a man sleeping.¹

¹: (Throughout this scene, in the head of the sleeping person, the images are like an Albert Serra film). In the rosy emptiness of the evening, at the library there is a small island with a tiny book called *Hjertøya*. On the last page of this book, a tiny bag with the following scription: *The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library. Please do not remove cards from this pocket*. This card was missing. It was forgotten, not destroyed, behind a bookshelf. The card knew that we accept only by forgetting all these things, only by accepting disappearance of the not so relevant objects. Although, its body was sleeping, withdrawal, and the disappearance of its presence at reality, in the time it was possibly covering many stories, may also be inevitable. Its absence covered up the stories about all its readers, the near ones and the ones it had known in the most isolated past place. It would come up when the historians would need some words to fill the blank spaces in their writings; probably for the unfolding moments of a story they didn't know. That space was empty. What could be said thereupon? It is common belief that the appeal of stories is based on duration, or what turns the reels of time. Tediousness and desolation hold its reels back. It was certain that it had to separate itself to be able to feel the emptiness of Hades (5). Emptiness is a cul-de-sac, that leaves

your feet suspended in the void of time; asphyxiating us with its matter that crushes our beings. Speechless, tongue-tied, nonvocal, silentious emptiness. Nothing, unyielding, adamantine beyond measure, to the point where no one could withstand it. Nullifying space, time, beings all etched in my memory, like a blind man trying to recall the memory of colors. The black-and-white film passing through the film-maker's hands, the chemistry of montage.

- It's something I really like about Schwitters' collages, how different notions that are clear and recognizable lose their meaning when placed in a different context. I think it's similar to what he does in the text *Le Sentiment National*.
- Yeah, I agree. It's a blurred notion — looking away.
- Do you remember Daumier's words? — looking at his portrait on the wall.
- My memory is not so good as yours — shadows entwining the line of his eyes.
- If I remember well, probably I'm missing something, he says: "We're smothered by words, images, sounds that come from the void, only to return to it. Of anyone truly worth the name we should ask nothing except for this act of faith: to learn silence".
- Yeah, the silence — lighting up a fresh cigarette, going towards the book shelf and sliding a volume out—. Like Wabi-sabi.
- I'm sorry, what's that?
- Wabi-sabi relies on two principles: wabi (solitude, simplicity, melancholia, nature, sadness, dissymmetry,..) and sabi (alterations by time, decay of ageing things, patina of objects, taste for old things, for soil..) So it's fullness and modesty in front of natural phenomenons doubled by feelings in things where we can see the work of time and men.

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He sat and opened the book about the craft of intervening (DEDALUS, S.. *To pass in repose the hours intervening between Thursday (proper) and Friday (normal)*. Dublin: Ithaca, 1953. [6]) where he could read the following words:

- So, all my endeavor, in part, is connected with a childhood memory, which is really dear to me. It sheds light on the reason why I work. It's not the reason why I started, but it relates with what I'm doing at the moment.
- Could you share with me this recollection?
- Sure, why not. Long time ago, I read a comic strip, on the back of a magazine.
- How old were you?
- I think nine or so.
- I see, go on.
- And, it showed how to photocopy your hand. Or, your ass, your head, or you know — laughing — things that a child would do.
- Yes, that we see so often in films — smiling.

- Yeah. And, in the comic, at the end, the users of the photocopier were very angry because of blotches, stains, spots of dirt, fat traces of hands, and stripes going through the documents that they want to photocopy.
- That's funny! — laughing in amusement.
- I really liked that!
- What did you like in it specially?
- I guess, I like the idea of manually intervening in standardized processes of reproduction.
- And, this connects with what you do, right?
- Yes, because I come up with techniques, materials, procedures that are very physical, and I use those to intervene in the presentation of texts and images.
- In other words, interfering, going in between, interrupting the flux, the streams of images and texts that flow around us, to ground them into physical reality.
- Yes. I use certain qualities of offset printing, lithography, I use the frame as an object, or a restoration technique for burned paper.
- So, different connections with an existing printing technique. And, as I saw, they allude to some kind of temporality.
- Yeah, and always a flat surface, it can exist in space, but never as a volume.
- Like with your wet scenes.
- Yeah. It has a specific kind of materiality. I really like this moment when you spill a liquid and it's a meaningless form. So, I thought about stylizing these meaningless shapes into letters, to make a moment central in the work when matter turns into meaning.
- Of course, it began with a shapeless, meaningless form to meaningful traces, which would be a letter.
- Yes. I was quite interested in this borderline. When

something issues form, matter or meaning. That's how I started writing in water.

- I always thought you were a kind of alchemist.
- You know, my texts evaporate during the day.
- Someone always has to feed it, right?
- Yes. It's always susceptible to the context. The state of the text is determined by where it is, by whom takes care of it, and the attention it gets, also.
- Where do you find them?
- What?
- Your texts.
- It comes from encounters that happen with an article, or a book, in philosophy, or sociology, or anthropology. Any discipline or subject that resonates with what I'm thinking about at that moment.
- What are you thinking about at the moment?
- About two lovers only connected by telephone.

His face wrinkled by this sentence; thinking about the lovers. The absence, the presence. Like the imprint of our phone or keys on our pants; their traces. Never being one, always separated and mediated. Never in each other's touch. Absence. Distance. All the water that is separating us. Individual feelings, shared sentiments. Mine, yours, ours. Difficult decisions. Difficult decisions. Life's full of confusion already.

- There are images hidden under the paper. Did you notice?
- Oh, yeah. As in newspapers, the quotidian. We use them to shield our heads from the sun, to fan ourselves from the heat, to lamely wave to someone far away to call their attention — as he reminded himself of Fellini.

- Deeply held beliefs — closing the book, murmuring just after looking again at the man sleeping². He had seen that sleeping man there before. He laughed to himself thinking that he would come to the library to read in his dreams. How many books he had read dreaming²⁵ He thought about how it would have been to talk with him⁴

². (Throughout this scene, during the dream of a dreamer) Yves Klein exhibiting the *Void*, in 1958, at Iris Clert gallery, in Paris. Diffusing words, people drinking, nothingness; or almost. Some keys, coins, and notes can be seen forgotten in the pocket of someone. If these papers could read we would see written: *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée (Le Vide)*. The exhibition space was completely emptied and its interior walls painted white and, in that vacuum, Klein pumped stabilized pictorial sensitivity. Julia Robinson's voice could be heard saying [7]: In the broadest perspective of this historical moment, Clert's exhibition has two crucial aspects: the idea of a global white monochrome, painting as a gallery space - that is, a painting that can be entered (a stabilized pictorial sensibility) - and the intervention of Klein to create a space like this: the elimination of the outer window of the gallery, covering it with paint. If we place it in the context of the contemporary transformations of the commercial gallery (around 1957-1962), we will see how two structures, the artist's gesture and the changing frame that frames it, are synchronized again. During the opening, the audience finds a space absent from objects, where they serve *Klein Blue pigment cocktails (IKB)*, which are intended to impregnate everyone in two ways: an intangible (with the aesthetic sensibility of the artist) and a tangible (they would turn visible when the audience urinates). Both of these ideas were connected with the life of that dreamer through the concept of atavism, understood, through the words of Antoine-Nicolas Duchesne, as *forefather*, which is different from heredity, since it's an influence of a more distant ancestor. Or, as he was thinking, on how everything he had read, heard, seen, felt was part of him, even though, in many instances, the experience was forgotten by him, but, paradoxically, the essence of it was still in his body's memory. Such a significant term that people such as J.J. O'Molloy, would use it in the context of a trial, e.g. *there have been cases of shipwreck and somnambulism in my client's family. If the accused could speak he could*

a tale unfold one of the strangest that have ever been narrated between the covers of a book.

⁵. Many, that would be the answer. He had read many books during his sleep, but it was difficult to be precise since even he didn't know the precise number. All these readings are connected with Inemuri, the Japanese practice of sleeping while being present. Mostly napping at work, but it applies also when napping in the train or subway while going to or coming back from work. To not leave you, reader of dreams, with empty hands, some of them are: E.C. LARGE – Asleep in the afternoon; William Wilkie Collins – A Journey in Search of Nothing; Nuccio Ordine – L'utilità dell'inutile; Robert Louis Stevenson – An apology for idlers; Pierre Sansot – Du bon usage de la lenteur; Haruki Murakami – Nemuri; Herman Melville – Bartleby the scrivener; Denis Grozdanovitch – L'art difficile de ne presque rien faire; Georges Perec – Un homme qui dort; Hermann Hesse – Die Kunst des Müßiggangs; Thierry Paquot – L'art de la sieste; Dominique Petitgand – Sommeil Léger; Bertrand Russel – In praise of idleness; Thomas Carl Wall – Radical Passivity; Levinas, Blanchot, and Agamben; Anna Della Subin – Not dead but sleeping; Martin Kohout – Sleep Cures Sleepiness; Denis Grozdanovitch – Petit éloge du temps comme il va; Xavier de Maistre – Voyage autour de ma chambre; Ivan Gontcharov – Oblomov; Maurizio Lazzarato – Marcel Duchamp et le refus du travail; Italo Calvino – Palomar; Giuseppe Rensi – Contro il lavoro; Vestoj Issue Five – On Slowness; Tom Hodgkinson & Dan Kieran – The book of idle pleasures; Tom McDonough – Boredom; Jonathan Crary – 24/7 – Late capitalism and the ends of sleep; Bonniers Kunsthalle – Insomnia– Sleeplessness as a Cultural Symptom.

⁴. He was thinking that he wanted, since the beginning, to break people's expectations. The first thing to break it with is the void, the emptiness. Empty books, empty frames. All these possibilities are there. Like an empty room as a sculpture, as the main character, as the main theme. The empty white cube. The known elements, that are always around us, always present, they are the emptiness of our quotidien. Dust, small nails, drops of paint, a used hammer, crumpled beer cans, staid stools. The beauty around us. No one notices what constitutes the space of a white room, of a white page. But, then, it became more connected with the things that surrounded him. His personal stories stored in his phone and many slim A6 ruled 無印良品 notebooks. All the good times

they spent together. All the stories behind the curtains, that people don't see. Personal elements that people wouldn't see in a space. He always wanted to remake something that already exists. He gives them another voice, another importance. We see it, pass around it, we think it's nothing but then we realize afterward it's important, and relevant. You are aware of your body in the space, of architecture, of the choices you make in a space. How do your eyes float on this page? What do you expect from this text? Would you like a floorplan of this page to navigate it? It's just a text, and nobody really cares about it, but the energy inside of it. The exchange from it. Like a personal story. His mother, used to paint. He was really young. She used to clean her brushes with a piece of textile, that was really dear to him. These pieces of textiles were everywhere during his life, that's why he has them near him today. What to add after all the history that is surrounding us?

- Remember how books were made before?
- Not really.
- They were made letter by letter manually, word by word. Line by line. Page by page. Making up a page was a very physical act. They'd be creating the white spaces in between as well. You would create the page physically, and then print it. Not that far from the ancient carved clay tablets, imagine typesetting large clay tablets, water flowing over them. Imagine pushing text into clay, imagine erosion.
- Or, when someone throws a written page into the fire, and, even though, it stays readable, it is reduced to ashes.
- Beautiful. Integration and disintegration, like our nation, our continent. What are we going to see, by the way?
- They said that they would show eighty-nine characters on a wall.
- What a great spectacle!
- Come on! Let's get started! — shouting, waving in the direction of the projection booth.

- Finishing up here — looking up from his newspaper, while removing his glasses.
- Give me a cigarette — looking at the screen while extending his hand toward him.
- It's how they say, *la cigarette n'a pas le même goût au soleil* — handing him a cigarette, in silhouette, obfuscated by the intense brightness of the screen.

From the void, only to return to it. He finally sees it, letting dark byzantium smoke flow out of his nostrils, with his eyes snapped shut.

- (1) JOYCE, James. *Ulysses*. London: Wordsworth Editions. 2010. P. 81.
- (2) Line taken from the first page of Fellinis' 8 ½ film script.
- (3) GREGORY, Mary Efrosini, *Diderot and the Metamorphosis of Species*. New York: Routledge. 2007. P. 88.
- (4) ADCOCK, Craig Elmo. *Marcel Duchamp's Notes for La Mariée Mise À Nu Par Ses Célibataires, Mème: an N-dimensional Prospectus for a Life's Work*. 1981. P. 158
- (5) SKULSKY, Harold. *Metamorphosis: The Mind in Exile*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1981. P. 43.
- (6) JOYCE, James. *idem*. P. 600.
- (7) ROBINSON, Julia. *Antes de que las actitudes se hicieran forma, en Nuevos realismos: 1957- 1962. Estrategias del objeto, entre el readymade y el espectáculo*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2010. P. 30.
- (8) JOYCE, James. *idem*. P. 413