

I WANT TO BELIEVE THERE IS A GIRL HERE UNDER THE TABLE

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Abstract

Written in non-linear fragments, my thesis is what Audre Lorde in her novel *Zami* calls a “biomythography” – the weaving together of myth, history and biography in epic narrative form, a style of composition that represents all the ways in which we perceive the world. Using repetition and shifting memories, I draw from my bicultural upbringing in Offenbach, a city in Germany populated mostly by migrants, as well as my experience of working in art and culture internationally, travelling and living in different countries. Interrogating objects, buildings, family photographs, books and movies, and listening to the silences of the unvoiced, I upset and play with experiences of othering, assumptions and expectations about identity and ask questions about home, belonging and migration, mother tongue and translation. I draw inspiration from Korean American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's use of texts, documents and images to explore dislocation and memory, as well as authors who engage language, translation and belonging such as Mikhail Shishkin, Yoko Tawada, Gloria Anzaldúa and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine.

Working the 4 o'clock morning shift at Frankfurt airport. I'm not sure if my sleepy state of mind or the sunrise made me feel like in the movie *Blade Runner*: the wide air over the runway, watching the reflection of lights in the large glass panes while I listened to the building waking up.

Inflight magazines are airport travel guides, assuming the traveller has found a new interest in aircraft technology, the airline's fleet and flight routes, airport data, architecture and its runways. Travel always seemed inspired by a boyish interest in technical details.

Notice the way upholstery is worn down in places of work. A bus driver's or a pilot's seat, the check-in counters' or supermarket cashiers' seats show different areas of wear and tear. Workers' repetitive movements increase as corporates push for more streamlined processes.

I once saw a pigeon trapped in Casablanca airport.

Time slows down in airports and shifts attention to the sense of passing time, standing in queues, time spent waiting for passports and security checks, time to wait for boarding – a bottleneck before being thrown into a trajectory around the earth which our senses can't appreciate.

It takes a long time to master the best strategy for choosing a seat in the airport waiting area. Next to the departures panel and in the least crowded spot, close to the corridor which leads to the boarding gates. A power socket within reach.

The new check-in terminal for no-frills airlines at Vienna airport is located opposite the main terminal. Away from the runway, facing the parking lot. Still, the large backlit surface behind the check-in counters appears as a frosted window with the shadow of an airplane wing cast by an artificial sun.

When my dad returned from his trips to Saudi Arabia in the 70s and 80s, he showed us Super 8 films of empty desert space alternating with views of the sea. The window of the car is dusty. Focus shifts between the reflecting glass and an endless red blur interspersed by blue and white. Low houses, then back to the rhythm of telephone poles. The car slows down, a flock of sheep cross the street, the driver in the front seat turns around to say something. They arrive at a port with old fishing boats, large dhows from another time that seem to sink endlessly. I keep rewatching this four-second segment to find out if the slight countermovement between sea and boat is caused by a change of light, the sinking, or the surge of the waves.

Airports are containers of experiences, similar to railway stations and bus terminals. But it is a magic space and not many people know that. The reason runways are off limits is that gravitation fluctuates there, synchronised with the starting and landing of planes.

My dad met my mum at the airport of the US forces in Libya, where he worked in 1958. She had just arrived from Germany, to work as a foreign language secretary. He was sent to pick her up and never left her.

When reading a book, I wish it would never end, hoping that the writer has more and more pages for me to follow the story as long as possible. I become apprehensive on the last pages of a book knowing that it will end as I don't want to part from the experiences it houses. As a child, surfacing from reading felt like waking up from a dream. The daylight would be gone and it was not possible to read anymore. I'd look around, listen to the noises of the house and the sudden silence. Sometimes I found myself alone, all my family gone, and I wandered around in the house as if it was a new space, an extension of the book, wondering what comes next.

I should have posted the letter a while ago. It's just not ready yet.

On the approach to the airport, brightly lit advertising signs line the highways in yellow, red, blue. I see them clearly during the descent at night. Street lights, porches, house entrances and car lights smudge in the slipstream behind the jet engine.

My dad met a young man from Austria on the ferry from Sicily to Libya who planned to travel via Northern Africa back to Vienna. He told him to visit my family in Beirut, and gave him a silver cigarette case to take to my aunt as a pretext. He returned for several visits. My aunt once remarked something about him *en passant*. She remained without a partner her whole life while he eventually married a woman from Austria.

Passports come mostly in shades of blue, green or red. Passengers carry their documents differently, squashed in the back pocket, between stacks of papers, or neatly sorted in transparent plastic folders. Handling them with reverence.

The first time I travelled to the US in the late 1980s on a Pan Am flight, I expected food to be served. They only offered peanuts. I survived the flight on peanuts and cold drinks.

The fire department was across the road from our house and when the alarm sounded, my brothers and I jumped on our bicycles to see the trucks depart. Returning home, we'd tell everyone about the type and sequence of trucks. Once a year the department presented spectacular exercises on how to extinguish fires, how boiling oil explodes in contact with water, even demonstrating how a car blows up when set alight.

When my dad went to pick up visitors we'd join him on the journey to the airport to spot planes, learning the logos of airlines and the most common planes – the “small jumbo”, Boeing 727 and the 747-400. Until today, I expect to catch at least a quick glance of the runway next to an airport. I feel uncomfortable arriving without seeing airplanes.

Our family holidays in Beirut every summer were affordable because my dad worked for the Middle East Airlines. Happiness was simple routines, such as packing small red cardboard suitcases with the most necessary things. On board, we would each get a roll and spread it with butter and sugar.

In airports, the sun of advertisements is up 24/7. There's a Carlito Brigante in all of us, transfixed by the Caribbean sunset billboard *Escape to Paradise*.

After the war started in Lebanon, my father stopped working for the Middle East Airlines. Previously, we had visited family in Beirut each summer. Now we'd find our holiday locations on TV. Different, but closer. The most iconic image was the top floor of the unfinished Holiday Inn hotel, a terrace where a restaurant had been planned, now used by snipers. For years, it dominated the news, shot from a distance – it wasn't clear if the hot Mediterranean sun was blurring the air or the long lens of the camera shaking. Suddenly smoke rises, then a sound, a shot, then an explosion. At the height of the fighting, the dividing line between Muslim West Beirut and Phalangist East Beirut, called the Green Line, was reinforced by two, three or even four overseas containers stacked up to the sixth or seventh floor. Shooting across the street. Buildings threatened to collapse. As cameramen were fitted with bulletproof vests, we watched on from far, with other exiles, in front of TV screens.

My four elder brothers mainly watched sports broadcast on TV, and while waiting for the news to finish we'd play an asking game which went like this: mute the TV, ask any question and turn on the sound to listen to what the news anchor is about to say. Another game when we'd get bored reading Grimm fairy tales was to replace each noun by another, for instance "skull", so that the story would now go: At the edge of a great skull, there once lived a poor skull with his skull and two skulls. The little skull was called Hansel, and the skull's name was Gretel. There was never much to eat in the skull, and once, during a skull, the skull could no longer put skulls on the skull. At night, he lay in skull worrying, tossing and turning in his skull. He sighed and said to his skull: What will become of us? How can we provide for our poor skulls when we don't even have enough for ourselves?

We'd often visit friends of my dad's. They would talk in Arabic, endlessly drink coffee. Most of my father's friends had sugar-coated almonds, in pink or white, dusty and stale, in a glass jar in front of the TV. There was Emile, a butcher who sold us his light blue Opel station wagon with a worn out suspension and a terrible smell like a floating cloud of milk gone

sour. I refused to imagine the cause of the smell. I had seen the meat and sausages in his shop, the scoured floor tiles and the shiny stainless steel cutting machines.

During the Lebanese war, radio anchor Sharif el Akhawi would announce, in a daily broadcast which later became known as Salkih Amnih, which roads and passages were secure to pass between East and West Beirut. People would call in with questions or requests, or to share knowledge about water, electricity or bread. Others would ask about disappeared family members or send news of their safe arrival. Until today, the phrase salkih amnih resonates for Beirutis. In her research, Lebanese artist Nadine Touma listened for hours to recorded broadcast and found that snipers would mostly shoot at people carrying bread and water, as they were on their way back home.

My parents often chose our travel plans on the morning of the holiday. One Easter morning, as my brothers and I gathered on their bed, they asked if we'd like to make a trip to visit my aunt who lived in Lyon. I had looked forward to staying at home and doing nothing. Without thinking I dropped the car keys behind the cupboard at the entrance then went to pack my things. Soon, I heard them searching for the keys and lied that I hadn't seen them, feeling triumphant at first. After half an hour I realised they'd keep on searching, or might find a way to get a duplicate key. Pretending to join the search, I shouted I had found the keys, but I think my brothers suspected it was a set-up.

Before self-boarding gates were introduced, check-in agents had to check and rip off more than 400 ticket stubs to board a full Boeing 747. Colleagues remembered a time when five ground personnel handled one international flight. After I started working there in 2000, crews were reduced to two plus one flight manager who only dropped by for the last phase of boarding. The pressure to close the flight on time did not keep us though from trying to confuse colleagues counting tickets so as to distract them and force them to start all over again.

In her *Exile* installation, Iranian artist Farnaz Jafarian uses mirrors to create the experience of immigration time. Thin, stiff mannequins stand in long corridors casting shadows. Waiting as limbo and anxiety, hope and despair.

The cockpit of a Boeing 747-400 reminds me of images of WWII war planes: the seat covers of rugged black leather torn at the edges and the steering column painted in military olive green.

One night while I was working at Frankfurt airport, a flight to Rio was forced to wait for two missing passengers whose luggage was loaded already. We called German border control police who said they interviewed two tourists from Latin America who had exceeded their visa stay. I asked to release them so as to allow us to close the flight. Otherwise their luggage would have to be offloaded and departure delayed. They were issued a fine and still did not make it in time for the flight.

A 747-400 aircraft has an empty operating weight of 178,800 kg. With a maximum fuel capacity of 216,840 litres plus a load of 44,600 kg, the overall maximum take-off weight is around 396,890 kg.

After the war started, all that was left from our summer vacations in Beirut were Super 8 movies, with brothers and cousins splashing in swimming pools and racing toddlers in prams up and down the long aisles of a restaurant – always engaged in frantic running and chasing actions. Those images seemed far away from the ruins and explosions and bullet-ridden house fronts on TV news.

Depleted uranium used as a counterweight in aircrafts is seen as hazardous in accidents. The cargo flight El Al 1862 crashed into the high-rise apartment complexes of Amsterdam Bijlmermeer on the 4th of October 1992. The Boeing 747-258F carried 282 kilograms of uranium in the tail to reduce high-speed flutter. After the crash, residents were diagnosed with symptoms similar to Gulf War Syndrome, where depleted uranium ammunition was used. It is believed that the actual number of victims in the tragedy was higher because undocumented occupants were not counted among the dead.

My brother died in a plane crash too.

While watching family holiday films my mum would repeat the same narrative:

That's the Mirador in Beirut with your cousins. And this is the restaurant in Zahle with Uncle and Aunt So-and-so and the boys pram-racing down the aisle.

At this beach your sleeping brother was swept away by the waves and then you came running saying he went to swim.

This is Ceylon, it must have been '76, with our travel guide.

The waves of the Indian Ocean were too high to go swimming, and there you see the fishermen on poles.

All of you took turns sitting on the elephant, except for the youngest – you were too small.

Your dad bought precious stones from this mine and traded them later.

When we visited temples you had to take your shoes off, see the beautiful eyes of the statues in the dark.

Airports are awake. Every moment and movement is recorded. I once saw 400 Euros lying on the floor at O. R. Tambo just in the second when a security guard picked it up. A tiny entry in a long chain of security footage and people looking for things lost.

Not sure if I sat or walked more while working as a check-in agent. I know that my shoes tore in places they never did before. The company provided a suit that looked 20 years out of fashion. Tailored from flame resistant material, it seemed suitable for firefighters and was easy to clean. A wipe with a wet rag and even shiny patches from overuse were gone.

I keep a draft of a letter since his accident.

After a *Documenta 12* magazines panel discussion which I had organised in Beirut in 2006, I was asked by the curator of the show to take him to Sfeir Semler gallery, newly established in an industrial area in the outskirts of Beirut. I hailed a cab and the driver seemed to know where we wanted to go. But after an hour of searching he still hadn't found the gallery. After circling the same place for the third time, we decided to exit the vehicle at a building we were told was nearby. It was night and we walked the short distance towards its lit company logo. Under a bridge, the curator grabbed at my arm as he suddenly plummeted into an uncovered manhole.

Foreign journalists reporting on the war in Beirut made use of taxi drivers who'd shout out their destinations: check points or the locations of current fighting. The media people stayed in the Hotel Cavalier which has since been demolished.

I've torn my jacket many, many times rushing upstairs. The handrailing is slightly bent, the chrome end catching my pocket, where I keep the paper, two times folded. I suspect the railing reaches for it to slow me down. I know it reads the palms of people's hands gliding up and down, then grows a membrane over each one, a memory of those who pass. At night, the handrail encrusts these layers, turns inwards and sheds the skin by abscission, scattering traces of people like cut fingernails. A building digests people, gobbles them up and excretes them out of doors with exit signs.

Since I started working here, I've been listening to the building's stories. It keeps talking, about the opening ceremony, how it operates the same doors, opening and closing, over and over again. I listen to its voice in the sounds of the doors, sucking in and breathing out air – the building's ventricles, its breathing tubes and vocal chords. A sleeping dragon. The sliding doors, some of which stop working only to resume again later. The sounds of magnets clicking and closing, mechanisms of swiping and tapping, a space interface. Doors which never open, others which never close. I have seen empty corridors where the light is always on, rails on the wall guiding trolleys. Never used, nobody ever enters, only the staff know why. Empty shafts waiting for moments not even the architects had planned for.

I sense the awareness of the building, its sounds at night. Doors appear and disappear, the glass opening a view of the baggage area, the viewer's terrace. I can see across a glass border sealed off against a contamination of people. My brother had recorded their stories.

Formica tables in the meeting room surround a hovering grey carpet square. It swallows the light trickling from fluorescent tubes, interrupted only by reflections of passing vehicles flashing against the styrofoam ceiling. Orange moulded chairs with corroded metal frames. A large glass pane overlooks the runway, the yellowing fibre blinds, broken, a beaded string dangling above the fridge next to a shelf with folders. Only personnel responsible for international travel have access here. I wonder how it is possible that no two of the vertical blinds face the same direction.

As a child I'd sniff the type bars of my father's typewriter, a smell which reminded me of airport elevators: a mix of oil, kerosene and rubber. Escalators secrete a similar scent, faintly only. I first smelled it at airports. Same with the rubber belts at check-in counters. The smell merges rubber belts and moving walkways and conveyor belts forming an endless tape, a treadmill of moving parts, a sewing machine which stitches together traveller's lives.

The building once showed me, at night, its inner organs, how liquid rubber rises from its inner core, lava-like, up the elevator shafts, trickling first then flowing down over conveyor belts into deep furrowed gutters where it is sucked in again, pounded to a malleable dough, flattened and spewed out to strap people into their seats, to carry baggage on conveyor belts, to hoist elevator cabins up and down, up and down. It took me deep down to the restricted area of the baggage sorting area as it explained this mechanism was not to transport people or things but to connect lives and to tear them apart again, constantly moving them, a perpetuum mobile, sucking in people's goodbye tears and happy welcome-back shouts. It speaks to me, this gigantic organism which hovers over lives, draws them in and processes them, feeding on people, funnelling them into airplanes and spying on them as they pass, scanning them, weighing them and picking up their smells. In my line of work, people think about air travel and security when they surrender their baggage. But I know it impregnates suitcases and turns them to eggs, travelling bags and trunks glued onto conveyor belts like utricles, hard shells compacting invisible fertilised eggs which will dehisce

at the slightest touch at destination. People think they carry what they need on their travels, but these are bladder sacs enclosing the airport's seeds. They pour their possessions into scanners where their belongings are sniffed and sorted for the airport to decide who matches whom. So it's no coincidence when shuttles accelerate or escalators and elevators slow down, or leaking roofs interrupt a passage: it is the airport, arranging for people to bump into each other as if by accident. Having matched them, it waits for the offspring which it will accept as its own. It watches over us as we pass and probes for signs of happiness or fear, detects scents of distress and takes care we arrive safe. My parents were a match made by an airport, as their baggage was sorted. It knew how long to delay the boom gate of the pick-up to ensure they would end up in the same car.

In the empty night a lonely bag circles a carousel, a sports bag, made of black nylon closed by a zipper. Just like the one I have, large enough to carry a few things, a towel maybe, swimming goggles and a change of clothes. It sits on the tiles around a swimming pool. The ground under my feet feels cold and a draft sends waves across. The blue of the water looks solid. I open the bag. In it is a brain, pulsating like a heart. A trickle of blood runs onto the tiles. Blue veins run across the grey of the brain. It is still now, listening.

I wrote the letter thirteen years ago, the yellowing paper frays in the folds. Its corners smudged and worn.

Dear brother. I don't know how I would ever be able to ask you, but I need to ask you, why did you not check the altitude of the Piper flying in low visibility conditions? You are my eldest brother and always did everything first, drove a motorbike, had a girlfriend, got a driver's licence, had another girlfriend, went to study, got a job. You knew what you were doing. People said you were an excellent lawyer. So, why did you not check? I can't imagine you didn't know, you had enough experience flying small planes. You took me in this rickety Cessna to Weimar on my birthday. Over Thuringia you pointed to the K120 ski jumping hill built for the 1964 Winter Olympics in Federal Republic of Germany, and explained cloud formations. You always took me to places, to Frankfurt book fair where you got me a pirated copy of my then-favourite novel. How could you just sneak away like that? You were not yet 45 years old. That's no age to depart. Why did you not check the altitude? It's a basic rule of

flying, isn't it? A friend said the function of altimeters in small planes might be disturbed by extreme weather conditions. And that it's a normal reaction for an inexperienced pilot to fly as low as possible to see landmarks, highways, railways, rivers. You were not inexperienced. You had 221 hours of flying experience with 214 touchdowns, and you were about to take the blind flying exam. So what happened? Were you distracted? Talking to your friend whom you had promised to take to Basel and back on a Monday morning at the beginning of carnival? And why did he have a business meeting there of all places? It's one of the capitals of the Alemanni carnival. Why did you travel this route which took you across the northern parts of the Black Forest? The reconstructed itinerary shows that you performed as required three looping manoeuvres to gain orientation in low visibility conditions just above the freeway interchange Karlsruhe Pforzheim after the air traffic controller suggested you should deviate from your route and land at Karlsruhe Baden airport. You always knew best what to do. On our way back to Offenbach the petrol was low and you said we could fill up at the American Airbase petrol station – you never made foolish errors. You are my eldest brother, you're the lawyer, you were always doing the right thing. Why not on this March 3rd, why did you fly low? You once told me "You need to grow up to piss with the big dogs," which I never understood, and I am afraid I will never piss with the big dogs. Still today I need a closed cubicle to pee. There's no flow standing next to other guys at the urinal. So what did you mean? I mean, you opened up worlds for me with books, and I witnessed your changing girlfriends and once found a letter you wrote from the US saying the shit had hit the fan and she was pregnant. It was the first time I read this expression and imagined you in San Francisco looking anxiously at her. You told us she poured mineral water over your head one morning. And your girlfriend left you for a guy named "Vogel" and mine too, and she too had an abortion. These are no coincidences. The whole thing of low flying is so not you. Crashing a Piper PA-28-181 Archer II into the Mahlberg? Well, yes, I ruined the engine of your crimson red Mercedes 200 diesel going to Paris and back. Maybe I drove too fast? You did not blame me though. You represented refugees and asylum seekers hoping to obtain a permit to stay in Germany. When you were paid in deep-frozen Falafel you bought a deep fryer. The last time I saw you was in hospital. You were checked for Morbus Crohn and kept joking. Over coffee you asked me to listen to recordings of interviews you made with clients. A week later you crashed into this mountain. Nobody could explain why you didn't follow the recommended route over the low lying River Rhine, a bit more west, and instead went

for a route crossing the Black Forest. And this 2.5 second gap in the radio traffic recording after the air traffic controller announces low visibility in GAFOR 61. Did he warn you? Did you tell him why you went this route? You must have known about the mountains. What was going on? Did you follow up on our time travel experiments? But the parameters don't fit, the Mahlberg is only 612.5 metres high, and it's the highest elevation in the northern Black Forest at 48° 50' 9" N, 8° 22' 37" E. So, what pattern did you want to follow up in this location? I fail to see how this relates to the memorial of two soldiers killed on the 10th of April 1945 not a month before the end of Nazi Germany on the same spot. What am I missing? In my mind you sit on the couch playing the guitar. Something doesn't fit.

Arriving in Beirut at our grandmother's house. The smell of mothballs, the heavy beds which all five of us brothers shared, the paper boxes with sugar-dusted nougat tickled my nose.

One day in the 70s, dad brought home two rectangular hot-beverage galley containers from the airline, made of shiny aluminium, the lid balanced on a thick black rubber seal and clipped down on either side like a suitcase handle. The nozzle was fastened by a round red plastic screw and had a grey plastic lever. In summer, mum would serve iced banana milkshakes in the container, which started to smell if we failed to clean it.

The dreamlike camera of the six-minute video *La construction du ciel*, by Austrian artist Josh Müller, moves slowly through snow covered airplanes on a foggy runway, making the viewer forget to observe that neither planes nor cars are moving. Slowed down to a frozen movement, the images seem real and the viewer only questions them when conflating the memory of giant airplanes and buildings with the filmed sequences of a miniature world.

Working the endless check-in queue at Frankfurt airport in 2000, one of my colleagues kept loudly complaining about the increased work load and the unfair changes in employment contracts, especially regulating leave. Passengers looked away awkwardly and pretended not to notice.

Tarkovsky's movie *Solaris*, an adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's novel from 1961, has scientists and cosmonauts hovering for decades over the planet Solaris, studying its surface. After

applying aggressive tests, the psychoactive planet taps the crew's painful memories and materialises human simulacra on board the spaceship. The revenants re-enact traumatic events and a psychologist is sent to investigate. Returning to what he thinks is earth, he enters his home which he left at the beginning of the film. From outside, we see that it's raining inside the house.

I must have been eight or nine years old when I found myself lost at Frankfurt airport. I thought that all my family had decided to leave me. Suddenly, all gone. I looked around but could not find them. It was hard to miss them as my four brothers usually made a ruckus, organising races with baggage trolleys or using baggage belts as workout machines. I was not sure if I should panic and cry or just wait. The feeling was so new and I was torn between two emotions, to a) feel frightened because my family was always around and now gone or b) to allow myself to experience a new way of looking at the world without the familiar shell surrounding me a bit longer. There was so much to see and hear, different from being part of my crowd. But, as quick as they disappeared they were back. I didn't notice them coming and yet it was already over.

After the screening of the movie *Par un jour de violence ordinaire, mon ami Michel Seurat . . .* (*On a Day of Ordinary Violence, my Friend Michel Seurat . . .*) by Omar Amiralay, from 1996, at the Homeworks IV festival in Beirut, the audience voiced their deep concern about the lack of information on how the French sociologist died and where he was buried. In an exchange with the director, people shared their experiences of living in uncertainty regarding the fate of missing family members. They pointed out that the kidnappers and murderers of Michel Seurat had become the sole vessels of the knowledge of the fate of the disappeared. They had appropriated the story of someone else's life via his death. They kept the family members in an eternal suspense of not-knowing. How can husbands, wives, children and parents continue their life or resume normality? Conscientised, the audience proposed organising a march and appealing to people involved in the kidnappings to volunteer any information regarding the whereabouts of missing family members.

Some airports have moved beyond being points of embarkation and departure, and provide travel experiences that anticipate high-tech travel. Masking the unnerving fact of being

propelled through the air in a pressurised metal cylinder at Mach 0.85–0.855, Zurich airport shuttle surprises with songs, cowbells and animated movies outside its windows, while the rickety Newark airport shuttle runs on rails overgrown with grass.

A French cartographer analyses the shop structures at airports. He says that the forced passage through shopping areas makes people purchase things they did not intend to buy just to avoid the feeling of guilt when passing the cashier.

The extended wing of an airplane is an empty sheet of paper, its end curled up into the sky.

When a flooded area in Frankfurt airport was cordoned off it seemed passengers did not notice it.

Whenever I left New York from JFK the airport shops were closed.

In the 80s, I would go for piano lessons and while waiting for my turn, I enjoyed leafing through German news magazines like *Stern*. I was fascinated by the enlarged duotone black and white photographs of airplane hijackings shown in the German news because the bearded men looked like family.

Most of the airline workers I know have partners from other countries. I wonder what was first, their wish to travel or their desire to meet a partner from a different place.

Sunlight shining through the wide airport windows seems more intense. The runway frames the wind, and the large expanse of air projects like a lens, channelling light waves into the building. Brighter even on foggy days.

In the office of the Middle East Airlines there was a huge green enamel Telex machine, sucking in and spitting out strips of punched paper. Feeding greedily and punching.

The grey squares in the centre of the tables start to hover in a floating movement, to sizzle and undulate, and carpet tiles move apart. In the reflection of the chrome table legs, my

eyes catch flashes of light as the carpet mutates into a vortex and an airflow creeps up my legs to the hissing smell of elevators.

The night shift team just left, covering the São Paulo flight. Colleagues continue their aimless talk.

The mortgage of my house swallows up my income and this car breaks down constantly.

It's difficult.

Public transport fares going to raise again.

We're in trouble.

Expanding the airport and still no new parking for staff.

Ja.

And with the new departure control system, we will need to process more travellers than before.

Time of leisure is over.

I hear the CUTE system connecting voice prints to holographic traveller data is offline again.

Water condenses at the edges of the windows. The white plastic frame shines, reflects carpet and part of the tables. It has been replaced by caulk where the insulation has been ripped out. Windows don't open to the runway's international air, but its kerosene, rubber and dust seep through the door.

Colleagues banter about sexual encounters in airport elevators which mimic the ever-moving stairs of escalators and Duchamp's chocolate grinder in the rhythm of the bachelors' litany: slow life, onanism, horizontal, to the abattoir and back, cheap construction, and

something else. The shift has been going on endlessly. I wonder if the building will come take me for a tour again. The airport is old. It's been rebuilt and expanded on the remnants of earlier airports. I imagine a basilica of first airports with low windows, flickering bulbs, and people crouching on wooden benches waiting for transport, wearing eye masks, ears plugged. Sharing a blanket across a row of knees and an electrical cord running along their feet.

I check my pockets for painkillers. No, I left them in the other bag. The filtered air in the building seems to prepare passengers for the pressurised chamber. A slip of paper sticks to the pocket fluff. Something has slipped my attention. Just before I had followed another thought. Something crossed my mind as something else came up. A competing thought. It feels like I'm standing on the fork of a path, knowing that if I choose to follow one, the other will disappear. Over time, I learned to memorise a clue about the one I did not choose so I could later reconstruct it.

Wait, something is wrong. On the video monitor the janitor is rushing back and forth calling to cleaners, screaming and waving his arms, shouting, swearing and threatening employees. Water gushes at his feet as he wades upstream.

During the separation of Berlin, the Spree River had spiked underwater barriers. Airports are built on an invisible border where even airflows are controlled. An imagined frontier, its inside keeps people out. Some of the spaces are known only to the building itself though. It hides its wiring, plumbing, ventilation ducts and systems which connect and open and close passages, its pulsating arteries and veins. The border does not stop and detain water, sewage, electrical currents, or air, but what about tiles and metal girders and concrete slabs? How does a building negotiate a border? Resembling electrical-wire insulation, it encases the real and imagined current of passing through a frontier. It needs to be thicker for stronger currents. Until today, structural engineers stay silent about some manuals and guidelines which are circulated underhand. They are said to contain information about additional measures employed in airports and other buildings straddling borders. They recommend reinforced building materials for those parts which stretch across the border. Architects make sure to cover the steel of reinforced concrete with an additional anti-corrosive layer. Like in nuclear power plants. Electric wiring corrodes faster and oil clots in sewage pipes crossing over. Electricians won't install neon tubes across the border as these would need to

be replaced more often. While these secret manuals don't link the increase in attrition of building elements to intensified border searches and security measures, reports about accelerated decay in border buildings appeared at the same time as aircraft hijackings increased suddenly from one to five in 1969 and seven in 1970. More than twenty years later, photographers in Palestine documented the spread of cracks in checkpoint buildings in the occupied territories.

Over time, buildings gain their own consciousness and only trained janitors know how to communicate with them. Some of them disappear during their training. There are stories about hidden doors that lead nowhere which nobody ever enters, in the hours before dawn before doors open. Left alone, space is busy regenerating. After the last departure, the building dreams in what looks to us like the arbitrary clicking of lights, whirring of generators, sudden boosts of air conditioning and irregular humming. The noises of buildings indicate when it's not a good idea to enter the toilets, which tend to get flooded at night. Borders weaken the immune system of the building and corrode its nervous system. Its spaces react to the stress. It answers to nobody, though. Buildings which house borders were there from the beginning, when people named territories, outlined borders, stationed guards. Their memory is old and they know the ways of humans.

An airport's brain is located in the luggage conveyer belt system, the limbo of no man's land where remote controlled conveyor belts and doors are sealed after completion. Not even maintenance teams can enter. It opens and closes trap doors of its own volition. People disappear. Sometimes luggage appears from nowhere, flotsam and jetsam from another time, another place.

Once, a person without documents was found wandering near the luggage conveyer belt system in Frankfurt airport. He had survived a supersonic transcontinental flight by hiding in the landing gear. A stowaway sneaked behind a ferry's main ventilation propeller and survived the scalding pipes of the engine's furnace. Exposed to the radiation of the shuttle's time warp drive, where C-beams glitter in the dark, he lost memory and speech. He was found wandering listlessly at the port of arrival.

A librarian at the University in Bologna, one of Europe's oldest libraries, claimed that the blueprint of the first border building of Europe's imperial expansion was hidden among medieval manuscripts, and that the library's main reading room was part of a global network of border buildings. Once, she witnessed shelves moving, creating an opening to an unknown room. Nobody believed her and administration claimed they had known about the presence of the reading room all along. Another section shrunk to half its size overnight. At the same time, catalogue index cards went missing, and after taking stock the librarian found that the first digits of the missing calling numbers matched the serial number of the faulty Diebold Election System machines during George W. Bush's election in 2000 in Volusia, Florida. In interviews, surviving relatives of former librarians claim they had gathered further irregularities, such as disappearing staircases, splitting of rooms, bricking up of windows. Once, a temporary area which was set aside for reshelving disappeared completely. From outside, these changes were never visible. Others said the reading room which kept the blueprints of border buildings disappeared entirely. The room is mentioned in Erasmus' foreword of the first publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*, which was published in 1516 in Leuven. He commends it for setting up borders against the savages, and substantiates that a New World requires demarcation and naming of territory. Those who did not adhere to the written laws of settlers had to be expelled beyond a geographical demarcation line, which, as a frontier, demarcates and maintains knowledge. Around the same time, buildings were designed exclusively for people to pass borders, housing spaces where travellers could be scanned and their details processed. As gathered data needed to be stored, the border became key in generating knowledge – and turned into University, Library, Passport Office. Those early records are lost. Over time, this foundational knowledge became naturalised and obscure. Only recently, sources were found which mention oral records by gatekeepers and janitors that prove that buildings gradually gained consciousness. These days, janitors meticulously note down irregularities: regular floodings, bursts of heating pipes, collapses of roofs, shifting of walls, the sudden dysfunctions of locks, handles or gates. Researchers who investigate conscientised buildings claim that handrails are the conduits of the building's neurological system.

Using the airline hot drink container at home, I liked to imagine we were astronauts in a space station orbiting in earth.

Vangelis composed the soundtrack of *Blade Runner* in collaboration with director Ridley Scott in 1982. Many TV series of that time have a theme music which is based on synthesisers, like Karel Svoboda's soundtrack for the Czech Sci-Fi children's series, *The Visitors*, or Christian Bruhn's for *The Legend of Tim Tyler*. Echoes and soaring tunes take the listener into infinite spaces, the alienated space of the future, drawing from a nostalgia of loss and endless possibility of technology – all emphasised by the futuristic architecture of the set.

In my last year of elementary school, I used to come home with a classmate and we would go to the roof to make out. Kissing and holding, imagining how it would be to be grown up. Her family took summer holidays in a caravan. I was surprised to see her dad wearing jeans because my dad always wore a suit.

Sleek surfaces, aluminium, glass and flowing structures have become the material of space associated with travel, mobility and a lifestyle free from restrictions and needs.

Airport companies have teams of cleaning staff on standby for urgent situations, in case passengers bleed, vomit or spill food or drinks.

I found a series of photographs documenting a test subject's exposure to a high velocity air current in a wind tunnel in my eldest brother's copy of *Best of Time Life Photography*. A mask protected the man's eyes, and his cheeks were pressed apart, exposing his teeth as the air speed increased. They could have been taken from Chris Marker's movie *La Jetée*.

Our family dentist had grey silvery hair and the decisive grip of an alpinist when cutting out rotten teeth. The fillings were made of metal alloy which tasted bitter. Another doctor recommended removing all the metal fillings as they contained mercury and I experienced chronic stomach problems. The main character in the movie *Twelve Monkeys* rips out a tooth to avoid being tracked by the research team which sent him on time travel.

When travellers push their luggage in trolleys, they don't notice the airport building interfering with their sense of space by providing slow rising and descending slopes instead of stairs.

Alitalia's laminated security instructions show a sad-looking man in water blowing a whistle.

Harun Farocki's work *An Image* documents a four-day photoshoot for a *Playboy* centrefold in 1983, how the model has to repeatedly change her position until the desired image is achieved. The director speaks about the naked female body as the "sun around which a system revolves: of culture, of business, of living." Not able to look directly at the sun, we can't make out how it is constructed. Learning to see the unnoticed, architects, building owners and interior designers in *The Creators of Shopping Worlds* discuss how to furnish a supermarket to respond to the shoppers' intuitive movements.

The artificial air of airports, seeping through millions of filters, mixes with food served in planes, rendering it sterile and placeless.

I haven't masturbated in an airplane or an airport. Libraries though...

At check-in, I learned to wrest poetic moments from repetitive labour. The first year was working upstream, against the flow of travellers, unnerved by questions and requests, fighting with jammed ticket and baggage tag printers, each transaction concluded by the button which sent suitcases clunking down the baggage drain. Only later, check-in agents and the endless queue of high season travellers mutated into a machine fuelled by time, churning out countless departures.

Once, I was called to the airport clinic – a man who did not speak German and without documentation collapsed. An Ethiopian priest had managed to communicate with him and I wrote down all the details before the police arrived. Ignoring our findings, they treated him as if he was pretending. They finally admitted a doctor who attested that he had suffered a stroke and was not able to speak German or English.

At check-in, it is easy to know which travellers carry too much luggage. It's in their eyes and their voices. And their surprise when their baggage is accepted without being asked for extra payment.

Two engineers checked in ten containers of heavy tools, destination Algiers. I thought they looked like the main characters of Camus' novel *The Stranger*, one wearing a trench coat and the other short and thick-set, with a nose like a boxer's and dressed sprucely.

Arriving in Rome in a flight from Algeria in 2006, a man in the seat in front of me turns around as police enter the airplane and points to his passport, pleading with me to remember his name.

A former girlfriend worked as a flight attendant for a few years. She showed me a photo she took of herself in a hotel mirror, telling me that was when she knew she would leave this job. She continued studying philosophy and ended up translating the book of an US American language philosopher into German.

When I was studying in Vienna, I would spend the 730km car trip listening to music, eating and recording memories on a tape recorder.

In 1993 I travelled to Palestine to visit my dad's family. It was winter and it wasn't really cold but not warm either. Sleeping under heavy woollen blankets felt like being buried in a tomb. My dad's cousin showed me the title deed of land my granny owned, pointing out the line saying the Israeli government had impounded the land in 1952. He told me that it's against the law to take official documents out of the country. I thought about how to get it across the border and put it between the pages of an Arabic dictionary. Then I changed my mind, and hid it behind the book's orange dust jacket.

My relatives said the security check could take a while so they dropped me at the airport early. I thought I'd encounter problems because they gave me a box containing olive oil and Zaatar. But when they took me to a room to search my suitcase they were not interested in that. Two agents went through my belongings. They asked me about the Arabic and Hebrew text books I carried and then leafed through my diary. There, they found a photo which

shows a woman with a baby on her lap. Most people who look at this image only see the pretty woman and the cute baby. They say Oh, how sweet when they see the milk bottle in her hand and overlook the Kalashnikov the baby sits on. But the security guy took only a split second to ask Where's this taken? Who's that in the photograph? How did you get it? and I said Sorry don't know, a friend of mine sent it from Columbia. I did not say that he had told me she was guarding a meeting of guerrilla fighters. The agent moved on to check the Arabic dictionary. I even caught a glimpse of the document behind the orange dust jacket. In the meantime, the other had started searching my toiletry kit and to my surprise retrieved a handful of bullet cartridges. As he asks me, What's this? I forget about the document and curse myself, How could I have forgotten about the casings? I had collected them at New Year. Palestinians use live ammunition as firecrackers and one of my cousins had given me his gun, a Walther PPK. It wasn't the first time I held a gun. My dad has one and I used to take it out from under his bed to aim and make firing noises. But this one was heavy and as I pointed it in the air, it spat red sparks with each explosion. I pulled the trigger two, three, four, five times, feeling a strange attraction to the handgun, as the casings clinked on the asphalt and bullets hailed on the roofs of surrounding houses. I felt a sizzling surge in my spine – and, suddenly scared that a bullet could ricochet or fall straight on our heads, ducked. I heard myself tell the agent I had no idea where the casings came from. I said, I have never seen them before. I was laughing nervously. I kept repeating those words, afraid that if I told the agent the real story, it might implicate my cousin. They took me to the police station where I waited for another hour before another security guy took charge of me and led me by my arm through all the security and passport checks directly to the door of the airplane. It closed behind me as he said, Have a good trip and Sorry for the delay. At home, I retrieved my grandmother's land register from behind the orange dust jacket of the Arabic dictionary.

Once an airplane is airborne and cabin pressure is stable at travelling height, the edges of newspaper sheets bend because of the decreasing air humidity.

The first time I encountered porn was my brother's stash, the book *Emmanuelle*. On the cover, a blonde with a pony tail kisses a backwards-bent woman whose eyes are closed, her dark hair bound by a white rubber band with a black visor attached to it. One hand deep in

her pants and with the other exposing her breasts. I had always thought the blonde was a woman. Reading the book, I learnt to scan the content to quickly find sex scenes. In my mind I changed the location of the scene when they fuck on the plane, maybe because of the boy watching nearby. Identifying with him, I moved it to an enclosed cabin of a train with drawn curtains.

When I arrived in Beirut with my girlfriend, she was asked about her profession and replied, Artist, to which the border officer said, We have special regulations for that. Later, a friend told us that sex workers who come to Lebanon for work apply for artist's visa.

I doze off, my head sidewise on the book on the table, undigested food creating a vacuum in my oesophagus. I swallow to get rid of the empty throat, wipe the drool from the side of my mouth. What does this matchmaker want from me? The typewriter smell stronger now but the ground looks solid. Pain killers might have new side effects. I see pocket fluff dangling from the blister pack of Co-codamol in my left hand. The door is open, all the others gone.

Walking to the door, I check to make sure I don't forget anything.

Who is supposed to get the voice data of the late arrival?

I need to add the refugees' statements to the collection my brother had started just before his accident. I can't shake the feeling that he was onto something and that the navigation system of the Piper had been tampered with.

I don't want to close the door yet because I don't have clearance to open it from outside. I prop the door open with my foot, looking around outside, then inside. Is someone watching me? Maybe I'll check the arrivals on the terminal. The screen flickers green LED symbols and shows that departing and arriving flights that day have been processed.

After completing an assignment in Belgium, it must have been in 2006, I travelled on to another project in Algiers. The plane was taxiing on the runway and I suddenly felt lost, not knowing where I was or where I was going to. Encroaching panic, I took out my notebook

and began to write down all that I knew, starting with the date, time, and, glancing at my boarding pass, flight number and destination.

And this was what I wrote.

I've been unpacking boxes for hours now, moving through things I haven't seen in a long time. Summer heats up Vienna well into the night. Staying here for a month to ghostwrite a book in return for an urgently needed payment. Time also to collect things I left with a neighbour for storage when I moved to South Africa seven years ago. She had told me she wasn't sure if she'd keep the place.

Addresses in Vienna are a combination of house and apartment number. I had lost the key for her cellar compartment. First I broke the wrong lock – my mind had switched 23/22 to 22/23. I moved on to 22. Moving through cobwebs, dust, mould. No idea what I'd find. Then stand at the recycling bin like a tree shedding leaves of linguistic theory and Arabic studies papers in fall. It took seven years to learn that this was not how I wanted to learn. Take the bicycle for a spin and wrap it up for transport again. Take the boxes to a new storage.

I should have made a list of the digital cassettes so as to reconcile the new voice data.

Releasing punched papers from lever arch files, ring tips ajar, mimicking university afternoon yawns. Sometimes, corrosion keeps paper from fast-roping into the bin. When I grab the paper, stack by stack, body memories are released.

Folders materialise as swiftly as they disappear, unlike boxes, which stay and accumulate. A steady flow of punched A4 papers touching down for a short stopover between marbled grey cardboards.

Levers of files have a strange attraction since I discovered their squeaks in my dad's office. Moving it slower prolonged the sound but it was hard to sustain because unlike music instruments, a folder doesn't provide much of a resonating chamber. I tried to accelerate a bit before imperceptibly slowing down to get a smooth transition as I changed the direction of the lever – which worked well when contrasted by quick moves which articulate sharp

squeals. Pacing it with beats from the compressor bar sounded most satisfying with a thick paper stack for short firm beats.

In Josef Dabernig's film *WARS*, the waiters and kitchen staff of a Polish restaurant car stand around smoking and waiting. No guest turns up. Outside, trees and houses race past while they arrange nuts, crisps, chewing gum. When the final stop is announced, they speed up, cleaning and polishing the compartment, and calculating additions.

When I moved to Vienna twenty years earlier, I visited a friend who taught English in a small town north of Prague. Hannah had started Slavonic Studies in Berlin a few years after the Berlin Wall fell and went to Prague so as to improve her Czech. She stayed in a high rise apartment complex, the bathroom a seamless plastic cubicle with moulds for basin, shower, toilet, soap dish like the packaging of a technical gadget. One morning I trashed the red plastic lampshade in the bedroom, flailing my arms around as I put on a sweater. Returning home at night we saw workers riding bicycles to their shift, the smell of soup stock in the air. The local pub served steak with ham and egg and a pint of beer for breakfast. There was a phone booth next to the entrance. It rang on our way out one day, the screeching noise of a fax machine in the receiver when I picked up.

The stack of papers in my hand is too large to pass the ring binding, an out-of-body feeling overwhelms me. I know it since childhood. The world turns inwards and I turn inside out; heartbeats echo in my ears. Jolted backwards, the future in my back, the present speeds past left and right, discernible only when too far to grasp. A reversing movie camera zooming in.

Hannah told me that many artists who were critical of the government turned to producing children's books or TV series as they were less strictly censored. I remember the Czech children's series screened in the 80s, *Návštěvníci* (*The Visitors*) by Jindřich Polák. It's about a team of scientists travelling back in time to retrieve the diary of child genius Adam Bernau which holds a formula needed to change an asteroid's flight path heading straight for earth.

After walking away, it occurred to me that I had heard the sound from the phone booth's receiver before: the time travellers find a musical score in Bernau's notebook. Not unlike the sounds of electronic devices, it looked more like Brian Eno's 1978 piece *Music for Airports* – a star chart, a sequence of trill, whistle, chatter and squeak noises.

Forming fans in white, cream and brown, papers flow into the bin. Bonded paper, recycled paper, deteriorating paper form patterns of overlapping A4 shapes.

Only the photocopier's bright light has swiftly scanned the letters. The same patterns, when captured by eyes, excite brain regions. Constellations like stars in the night sky: Orion, or Al Jabbar, "the giant" – some still carry their Arab names: Betelgeuse, Yad Al Jauzaa' "Hand of Gemini." Rows of consecutive letters, "l-o-v-e", "p-a-i-n" sparking up brightly in recognition. Picking them up, again and again, their waves' echoes span distances of water spiders stirring a lake's surface.

The sound of recurring events. Rebounding. Occurring on the same date. A carrier signal forms in my mind which pierces through the folds of time. Following a seemingly random path, the swishing of a boomerang. In a Geiger counter way, it sets off ticks, whirrs and squeaks, each time it collides with an event at the same date – a chatter of sparking stars.

There's the list I had compiled of events which happened on the third of March. I don't remember reading many of these papers.

When I press a book or a journal against the glass of a photocopier, I turn my head from the flashing light which fades like a shooting star. Handling a book has become a ritual for me, more than learning. I lift and measure its weight, run my fingers along the text block to feel its smooth texture, the slight rounding of its fore edge, a hint about its binding, appreciate the straight trajectory of its head and bottom edge before I undress its dust jacket to feel the binding material, caress the coarse linen or smooth surface of printed cardboard, trace embossed words, then with closed eyes feel up its spine, following cracks and folds, to find the soft surprise of its headband as my fingers move around to the top edge; then to lift the front cover, listening to the crackle of gauze as the back cleft opens revealing the hidden

raised bands which, like the straps of a brassiere, keep the block together. The drag of the hinge speaks about its use and the grit and fluff in the gutter about where it's been.

On 3 March 1974, Turkish Airlines Flight 981 crashed, travelling from Istanbul Yesilköy Airport to London Heathrow Airport. The McDonnell Douglas DC-10, registration TC-JAV took off from a scheduled stopover at Paris Orly Airport at 12.32pm, shortly after 12.40pm the rear left cargo door blew off and 77 seconds later crashed into Ermenonville forest outside Paris, killing all 346 people on board.

From Prague I continued to Vienna in a red Datsun Cherry, across snow covered roads which blended into fields and mountains, road marks hardly visible. Trucks slipped off the road left and right. I wasn't sure how the summer tyres kept the car on track. The dictaphone in my hand, I reflected on what was ahead.

On 3 March 2007, the head of the Mortgage Department, Daniel Sparks, who oversaw Goldman Sachs' collateralized debt obligations and residential mortgage-backed securities noted in an email "Things we need to do ... Get out of everything."

A neighbour walks by, looks at the pile of boxes and the rising paper level in the recycling bin. It seems people in Vienna don't throw things away easily. The word for scavenging in dust bins in Austrian German is "gründeln", the term originally stands for ducks feeding from the bottom of a pond. The word "ground" in German also means reason, cause, basis, base, foundation, justification, to get to the bottom of things.

In the afternoon of 3 March 2009, the six-storey building which housed the historical archive of the city of Cologne collapsed. It held 30 kilometre shelves with records from the city's history. The oldest documents in the archive date back to 922 AD and the oldest inventory of its manuscripts is dated around 1408. A water leak had occurred during construction work for the underground railway and the ground gave way, pulling two neighbouring apartment buildings into the abyss. Around 95 per cent of the archive could be rescued, the director of the archive refused to confirm rumours that the missing 5 per cent included documentation about early border buildings in northern Europe.

We were ten years old, or so. The last year of elementary school. After class with my girlfriend on the roof of the house. We stand close to the ledge to feel time pass. A kiss of lips touching only, eyes open, too close to see anything but a fuzzy glare in the eye. Something flies by. A slight flow of breath on the upper lip. Nose touching nose. Breathing, not moving, breathing feeling. In the corner of my eye, the drop of the house. A gust of wind from the east. Nose hair tickled, not to sneeze, not to fall. All now.

The kiss lasted as long as it lasted, time stopped, reversed. Breathing a movement that was rhythm. Touching lips didn't move. We were sure this was the way a kiss was done. Keeping lips pressed against each other, a steady breath not to betray the excitement. Unclosed eyes, blinking only in the presence of a butterfly touching and going. Time moving in planes, closing up and enclosing, lifting and taking off.

Laura rang my parents' house twenty years or so later, on New Year's Eve. I felt weird listening to my mother mention it. I told her not to give out my number. Maybe I should have called back, she might have been having a hard time.

On 3 March 1991, United Airlines Flight 585 from Denver to Colorado Springs, a Boeing 737-291, registration N999UA, carrying 20 passengers and 5 crew members on board, rolled over into an uncontrolled dive on its approach to runway 35 at Colorado Springs Municipal Airport, and crashed. There were no survivors. On the same day, Rodney King was beaten up by Los Angeles police officers. About a year later, on 29 April 1992, the four policemen were found innocent by an all-white jury. The judgement sparked six days of riots across the Los Angeles metropolitan area, 55 people were killed and more than 2000 injured.

My home moves with each girl I date, to wherever she lives. Squatting in their spaces, working and travelling with them. Over the years, I renovated four flats, scratching old wallpapers, filling cracks and painting the walls, sanding down and sealing wooden floors, tiling and refurbishing. It was part of a relationship, as was moving out when we split. The first time someone moved in with me was Mariza and her daughter coming to live in Vienna.

On the way to school, we sang nursery rhymes. They keep coming up every now and then: Old Mother Shuttle lived in a coal-scuttle along with her dog and her cat; what they ate I can't tell, but 'tis known very well that not one of the party was fat.

In fall each year, we'd attend the silent film festival in Bologna. A smell of hydrochloric acid exuded from the marble floors of the bed and breakfast, wooden profiles reaching high up to the ceilings spoke of a former bourgeois family home. It faced the central city road and we woke up to the sound of passing cars and speeding motorcycles. Sarah liked to munch a cream brioche for breakfast at the café downstairs, jumping on one gold-sandalled foot while telling never-ending stories. In the evening, we walked the cobblestones to Roxy Bar to wait for the late evening projection.

In the four years we lived together I worked at a bookshop and Mariza at the Austrian Film Archive. They were bequeathed a cellar compartment full of celluloid and cellulose nitrate film material just when she started working there. Among WWII Nazi propaganda, they found rare hand-coloured nitrate copies of Georges Méliès' *Voyage dans la lune* (1902) and *Le plus beau Jardin du Luxembourg* (1912). It was part of a war cinema stationed in Osiec. Mariza studied early European film and the discovery came just in time for her Master's thesis. But the director appointed a friend of his who specialised in projection technology of early film as her supervisor, even though my girlfriend had a higher qualification. After half a year of sexual harassment she complained to the worker's council, who recommended she resign. When my employer, the Austrian Communist Party, closed down the bookshop where I had worked since 94, we had to return to Frankfurt.

I transcribed artists' interviews for an art institution then, too. Digital tapes sorted and labelled in my carrier bag, extra batteries for the microphone and in case the power adapter stopped working. I still use a Sony DAT Walkman TCD-D8 recorder with a 90-minute cassette up to 96 kHz at 16 bits, about ten times the telephone PCM sampling amplitude of 8000 analogue samples per second. Transcribing the talks, I notice the building's ventilation fluctuate. The audience's attention shifts as chairs and feet scrape. I hear their irregular breathing and suppressed yawns.

Kodwo Eshun writes in his book *More Brilliant Than the Sun* that in the 1970s Jamaican reggae producer, composer, songwriter, and architect of dub reggae, Lee Perry, explored

space in his studio recordings: “I dub from inner to outer space.” Pulling sounds of space in between the beats “until it convulses, buckles, folds up into fists of solid air”. I take to exploring the tension of spaces which attract expected sounds, while others oppress unwanted sounds and the complicity of the alert ear. First, I extract the voices and listen to the space and its echoes in the recordings. Next, I extrapolate absent sonic spaces – remembered and missed, desired or feared.

A few years earlier, I had travelled by train from Frankfurt to Vienna and started wondering if I was on the same train car when I woke after what I thought was a brief sleep. On long distance travels some trains are split up and take a new number, and I was quite sure it changed. I always try to take the car which will continue to my destination. Once, the last few cars were left behind because of low passenger turnout. Remaining passengers were asked to move a few cars up as a clonking sound announced the uncoupling and another the coupling. I thought that maybe this time they missed me. Maybe I had ended up on a siding. How can I know if I had skipped a full day and since then live in a different time?

A faint sound remained after extraction in the recordings – different and unrelated situations, art talks, border interrogations, witness testimonies, personal memories – not audible at first. I first assumed it was caused by a technical glitch, an unresolved conflict in the digital encoding. Not unlike sonication waves, and after speeding up recurring patterns emerged which appear also in fax machines establishing a connection.

I work well on trains, preferably long distance travels. Studying for seven years in Vienna so as to be far away from my family, I often was eight or nine hours alone in a cabin. Silence settles on my mind, the feeling of not being able to leave. A time capsule. I walk through the cars, open the connecting doors, watch tracks race past. Order a soup in the bistro wagon. I struggle to focus in other places, except for libraries. Working at home I can only focus at night when the restless buzz of the city dies, or on weekends.

On the way to the new storage space, a chirp from the back of the car catches my ear. Must be from one of the brown cardboard boxes. A few times only and rather faint. It must have sounded for a while because I got used to it just enough to notice it. In the slow city traffic it

changes between interrupted bursts and the continuous high-pitched sound of old TV sets. Before unloading, I cut the brown tape sealing the box and the sound grows louder. Carefully I remove book by book expecting to find a cricket, like the one I recorded in the University library of the Witwatersrand once. I was working on a text then and couldn't locate where the insect was hiding. I felt the sound right next to me, surrounding me, but I could not locate it. When I went to pick up a book from one of the shelves I turned my head to locate the sound. It seemed everywhere the same. I sat down again to read. I needed to wrap up writing the text I was busy on but the sound formed a new layer on top of it, repelling sense from the sentences. With effort I moved from word to word but they would not form meaning because the short spaces in between were filled with an insistent noise: Professors squee rarely teeeee speak chirrr of irrr the tikktikktikk place teeee of eeee eros chirrr or teee the eeee erotic chirrr in irrrr our irrrr classrooms. Looking up I felt frustrated and went on a hunt, pretending I searched for a book. But I failed to find it. Expecting the same elusive noise, I move with care, slowly so as not to miss anything. The sound becomes clearer as I reach the middle level of the books stacked in the box. Carefully, I lift a notebook and the sound suddenly breaks off. I stop. Then put it slowly back into its position and wait. There, a slight squeak. Followed by another one, like sparks from a nearly empty car battery. After two or three minutes the first clear chirp resumes its earlier rhythm. I continue to remove the books surrounding the notebook. Undisturbed, the chirring continues. A stack of maybe six paperbacks and, on top, two notebooks. I remember the stationery shop where I bought them, bound in grey marbled cardboard. Slowly, I pick up both notebooks, pressed tightly together. The chirping grows faster, as if confirming that I have found it. No sign of an insect. With my free hand, I remove the remaining books and place the notebooks in the middle of the box. Laid bare, the sound pattern grows more complex, alternating between short bursts and long stretched tones.

I'm quite sure that I experienced *VALIS* in those train compartments – the Vast Active Living Intelligence System Philip K. Dick speaks of in the book of the same title. It channels information through a pink laser beam. It's a vague feeling. We don't notice it at first and give it names like inspiration or intuition. It slips past the grid, but ports are closing down now. It appeared on the radar and got blocked. But it's up to us, what we do about it.

It's also in the smells. Butter and bread, sausage, cheese, spilled coffee, beer, fuel and grease. The draught when doors don't close properly. The rattling platforms between the wagons, racing rails underneath, shiny black rubber seals. With a thud you're enclosed in the next wagon. Different, depending on season, time of day, route. Wet leather shoes drying on the side aluminium grille. In summer curtains flapping in the open window. Voices at the border stop at night.

I hold the two notebooks to my ear to try and locate the source of the sound. A slight vibration of a bee trapped in a beer can. Maybe it's the two notebooks touching? An article from the *New York Times* in January 1934, "His Ears a Receiving Set, Ukrainian Seeks Relief," reports about a resident of the state of Paraná in Brazil, south of São Paulo, who sought medical help in Curitiba. He claimed that his ears registered radio-like sounds. Specialists said that it was possible for a metal alloy filling of a cavity to react with saliva to become a semiconductor receiving AM frequencies.

In elementary school, the janitor used to knock his huge key ring on my head when I was too loud or ran around. At that time, I did not ask the reason I was targeted.

I imagine my mountaineering childhood dentist working covertly for an espionage agency. If he's able to implant AM transmitters, why not time travel trackers as well?

From an open window the sound of someone practising piano, stumbling in the same passage. A chronic mistake emerges from the repetition of the same section again and again. Over time, new forms of slippages appear, unfolding into variations and form a new music piece.

The notebooks sound louder, reverberate between the walls. Bending them slightly. The vibrations ensonify the surrounding space. Spreading a shimmer over the air made of kerosene. Bathed in a smudged jet stream. The change spreads. They exude an aggressive air, now, like well fed dogs. They seem to have grown. In one, my unhappy fucks and failed relationships are listed. I used an accounting ledger. Guess I wanted to see if good and bad experiences balance out. They don't. I step into the box. I feel the drone under my feet,

straddling the trembling journals. I feel like crouching down and closing the lid. I used to hide and watch the world through holes in the cardboard. Away from the others. The walls of the box now at my hips, it seems; I'm sinking, or shrinking. Soon I'll be the size of Michael Keaton in *Beetlejuice*. Suddenly, a dark place. The rough texture and smell of long-stored paper surrounds me, a low ceiling overhead. The hum now more remote, as if a hatch has shut down over my ears. I look around, a horizontal slit of light at the far end. It moves away. I start to walk, treading on soft ground. Eyes adjusting, I make out openings and shifting levels. A rectangle opens into stairs. I walk down, passing floors made of paper, a grey expanse of muffled hum in between. I continue to walk. I don't know what to expect, maybe a story will flicker up. A tableau of wordless post-coital hostility. The woman I was crazily in love with, she pointed at the wrinkles in the small end of my fist, You will have four big loves in your life. And then? I thought. A 360 degree panoramic view of awkwardness felt in social events, lit in cold blue light. The moments of saying no, turning around and leaving. I move more carefully now, don't want to stumble across a groove carved by the ballpoint pen. Or plummet into a full stop. But this level seems blank. One more down, I spot some specks on the ground in the distance. Maybe pencil shavings, eraser crumbs or dandruff. Closing in, they look more like scattered notes. Wrong colour, though, these are banknotes.

I stand in the aisle of the train, in front of the compartment doors, leaning at the open window, eating an apple. A woman passes by, gives me a look and enters the compartment. We don't talk. We kiss and make out and fall asleep. In the morning, she disembarks a few stops before mine. When she asks if I'll stay for a day or so I reply that people expect me. Later, I regretted it and spend the summer alone in my flat taking a series of photographs of the phone that does not ring. I even travelled to the city she had told me she lived in to look for her.

The night I spent with two girls before starting a relation with another.

The road trip from San Francisco to San Diego, sleeping with a girl in a tent on a parking space next to a National Park. At night, a dog or hog came rummaging around. I stayed still not to wake her up. On the way back, we slept on the beach and started making out. I was horny and very excited and she was on top of me, all wet and open and suddenly I felt the

sand between my toes and lost my erection. I looked sideways and was unable to move or say a word, just waited. She settled on my side and hugged me until we fell asleep.

In an underpass at the Vienna opera, I speak to a friend from a phone booth. It's Saturday night and I am wearing red jeans. A guy in the next booth opens his wallet and starts counting paper money as I gesture, No, sorry I don't have any change, just as his rounded hand moves next to his open mouth, tongue half out, back and forth. Only then do I realise he wants to pay me to give him a blow job.

A girl I had a crush on in high school sat next to me in religion class. As the teacher spoke about contraception methods, divination practices, ways of stimulating the anus to orgasm, the girl offered her freshly shaven leg for me to touch. She was wealthy and tanned from playing tennis and I was very attracted to her smooth legs.

I would not try to seduce an airport but I know how to woo a library. I usually stake it out first. I go to study the catalogue section, with intent, leaf through index cards. Pencil and paper at hand, I pull out drawers at different sections of the alphabet and earnestly search for book titles. I don't hold back my delight when I recognise something rare, the work of an author I've been looking for. I pay attention to other sections as well. I do not focus too obsessively on one subject or author but appreciate the different catalogues – when walking the rows of shelves, I move a bit closer here and look a bit closer there, allow myself to be drawn in by random book covers before moving on. I prefer general libraries to specialist ones, which often seem distanced and official. Libraries require attention to be seduced. Look at aisles with reference works and popular novels, self-help books, or big volumes of photography. You must go there and show serious interest if you want to score. Then, and only then, can you move on to places where words stimulate you, shady aisles of poetry and rare novellas. After a first admiring tour of what they hold, find a space to sit and take a pile of books to read, listening to the creaking wood of the shelves and watching the dust settle in the sunlight. And without rushing it, follow the scent of unopened paper in those less frequented sections. Allow your fingers to move along the backs of the book rows, knowing but also searching, just to stop and to take out a book where you'll be rewarded with the fragrance of one which has not been lifted for a while. Letters will glow as your eyes pick up

each of them one by one. Be careful not to proceed too fast. Gently open it here and there, and remain attentive. Don't simply go for the first page or table of contents, rather take in the front cover first, turn the volume and study the text on the back and the flaps, feel the cover texture and close it again. Appreciate its heft, run your hand around the text block, scrutinise the binding; opening it, marvel at the movement of paper with the grain, smoothly and settling in an even curve. Listen to the glue and thread crackle as it opens, if sewn through the fold it will open flat. Don't zero in on your favourite author, focus on the surrounding books at first, even if you are not really interested in them. Don't overdo it though, faking interest is a turn-off. There has to be some genuine engagement, avoid repetitive movements or going through a check list.

I feel drawn to libraries which hold books in different languages, different typography, layout and binding. Walking through an aisle, I feel the rays books emit – they don't follow the Dewey system or other systems of categorisation. What I am certain of is that books in a certain language pulsate differently from others. Maybe the prosodic morphophonology of language propagates a distinct kind of force – like gravitation – which seeps through pages onto shelves and reverberates in the air to even form crop circles on the carpet. It's rare to catch those fields and one must not mistake it with interferences of books of similar subject matter, resulting in overtone harmonies of resonating key words. If I masturbate in a library it's not so much because of its content, but to introduce disturbances in monolingual sections which have existed so long that it has become unquestioned for a single language to cover all that there is to think about. It requires training to introduce a disturbance in libraries, injecting semen as a hardly noticeable olfactory intervention that upsets the artificial monolingual harmony.

The first time I had sex with a library, I was sixteen years old. I stayed in hospital for a surgery on my sprained ankle. With a temporary cast, I walked on crutches to the hospital library which was somewhat hidden away. Not many people used it. I found books by Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin and some of the standard erotica which are populated by languid women and fierce men with titles such as consul or attaché, who drive expensive cars to parties and back to lush houses mostly in an exotic setting for extra stimulation. Exciting the reader in a predictable way to build up towards a sex scene. The German translation's subtitle of *Emmanuelle* was *Schule der Lust* (School of Desire) and, accordingly, I learned

about mutual stimulation and reciprocating orgasms. They also had *Les Onze Mille Verges* by Guillaume Apollinaire, from 1907, which was reprinted by Pauvert in Paris with a preface by Michel Décaudin in 1979, and in translation first published as *The Debauched Hospodar* by Holloway House, Los Angeles in 1967, then as *Les Onze Mille Verges, or The Amorous Adventures of Prince Mony Vibescu*, translated by Nina Rootes and published by Taplinger, New York in 1979, with more excessive language and out of control characters engaging in outrageous acts of mutual stimulation and pleasure. Gripping the tip of my penis through my pocket I wanked; I looked left and right and back and front but nobody moved in the stale air of the library with its yellow fluorescent tube light spreading a static in the air from the plastic covering ceiling modules down to the hairs of the felt carpet. A trolley with books as witness.

Waking up on a train, I felt the urgent need to write a letter to the woman who was beaten up in Camus' novel *The Stranger*. Telling her that I would be there in case she needed a witness: I will testify that Raymond Sintès beat you up and that Meursault didn't interfere and refused to call the police when you were violently attacked. He also committed perjury when he wrote the letter for Sintès. I think that you were right to call him a pimp. Anyway, if Meursault had been an Arab there wouldn't have been a long trial. In the end, the book is about his mother issues. Like, his problems have problems. I mean, he killed a man, and it wasn't self-defence. Did you know the victim? Was it your brother or a friend? I address it: To The Woman Who Got Beaten Up By Raymond Sintès, Algiers, Algeria.

My parents bought a rug in the late 1950s in Tripoli, Libya. A geometric floral design in dark red, blue, white and light brown. A visiting friend complimented it, saying it was handmade with natural dye. The telltale sign of a handmade rug, he says, is that the pattern changes towards the end of the weaving process. It keeps the memory of its making as it narrows down on the far end as the loom ran out.

In old wagons, sliding windows were fastened by crafted metal pieces, brass screws, and they had dark red vinyl seats. Sliding them down turned a cabin into a square bed.

People in Germany were eager to become friends with my family. They kept Alsatian dogs and their children had old German names and were trained to shoot rifles and guns. Their names were linked by a “von” to hint at aristocracy and German pride. They said they’d be happy to help us if we ran into trouble without saying what kind of trouble. That was when I decided to keep distance from Germans who sided with Palestinians against Israel.

Green moss growing in the condensing water on windows.

I was fourteen and on my way to a piano lesson when the Communist Youth in Offenbach stopped me in the pedestrian zone and said they fought imperialism and supported socialist and communist movements in the Third World. I sympathised and filled out the red membership form. Later, I told a friend at school and he pointed to the monthly membership fee in red which I could not afford. I asked him to go back with me to tell them that I wanted to withdraw.

In modern carriages, some elements continue to produce known sounds, like the click of the aluminium waste-container lid, muffled by the noise of the air conditioner and the moving train.

After elementary school, I was sent to a health resort on an island in northern Germany. The overnight train ride seemed endless. As the wagon waited to be towed onto the ferry I woke up. Only the hum of the generator and a yellow light on the side of the red bunk bed. I opened the fogged up windows as the compartment breathed out its warm humid air. Only the lapping sea and the cry of seagulls and the creaking tracks and the sloshing boats in the blue of a 4am summer night sky.

The first time I had a glass of sparkling water with a slice of lemon was in an Italian railway station.

In summer 1980 a bomb exploded in the Bologna train station, killing more than 85 people. We were in Italy for summer holidays at that time, my mum lied and told us that a train had

derailed. I found out later a neo-fascist organisation had planted a bomb and felt uneasy whenever I travelled to Bologna.

The wail of Italian police cars felt more alarming than the sirens I knew from Germany.

The seismic event of a glacier calving turns cracks in space into sound.

Time passes differently on trains. High-speed trains reaching maximal velocity eliminate space, all that remains is time. Tooth fillings taste like singing metal rails.

Outside, smoke rises, the sound of police cars, stun grenades and shots.

In the 80s, the walls of official buildings, phone booths and announcement boards in Germany were populated by faces of wanted people, accompanied by warnings and framed by a bright red border. It looked like my family album, my brother resembled Christian Klaar, a member of the Red Army Faction (RAF). The police stopped and frisked him many times. With a group of friends, we converted an office space in the early 90s to an autonomous students' space, named Café Müller, the logo showed an axe rammed in a coffee table. We scavenged building materials from construction site skips, where we found disposed urinals, discarded planks from concrete formwork or adjustable vertical props. Once a week, we'd organise film screenings, readings, music and other events. We invited supporters of the imprisoned RAF members who were on hunger strike for a discussion. They did not hide their contempt for bourgeois kids. They spoke in cold voices about a bomb that killed the director of the Deutsche Bank.

After a party, all of us slept over at a friend's house. At night I heard a couple getting it on next to me and, wanting part of it, I stretched out my hand to meet their paired hands. They did not invite me over so only my hand joined in.

There was another Café Müller in Frankfurt, where the owner asked me to leave because I didn't order anything. I had no money and my friend had ordered a hot chocolate only. The owner insisted I should leave even after my friend ordered a piece of cake for me.

A child, looking out of the back window of a car in the movie adaptation of Bernward Vesper's book *The Journey*. Based on the life of RAF member Gudrun Ensslin, it tells the fictional story of her partner kidnapping their son after the group takes up violence. While father and son flee from the police, some of the group members leave for Lebanon to get trained in guerrilla warfare by Palestinian Feddayin.

The Morse code of passing telephone poles against the backdrop of a grey sky.

I think my mother could have become a Gudrun Ensslin if she'd been born a bit later. I imagine the stir her tall blonde appearance must have caused when she arrived at the Tripoli US Air Force base.

My eldest brother had married a German woman whose brother was a pilot in the German air force, blond and blue eyes. At the wedding he impressed me with his technical knowledge of fighter jets. He told me that pilots are thrown forward with a force of 9 times the earth's gravitational force during take-off. They wear compression suits to keep them from fainting. I wondered if they looked like the man from the wind tunnel photo, cheeks pressed back, exposing their teeth. I was surprised when he approached me at my brother's funeral. He pulled me aside and told me he had acquired details of the crash from military records. He took a map out his jacket pocket which showed the trail of the beacon the Piper automatically set off. I listened distantly at first, thinking everyone had a different way to cope with their grief. After a lengthy explanation how large passenger planes automatically broadcast their full flight details, such as altitude, speed, the principal axes, pitch, roll and yaw in certain control areas and how different authorities have access to different data, he engaged in a lengthy speculation on my brother's motivations for choosing this flight route which had low visibility, and reviewed, in detail, the report by the air traffic controller. I was about to cut in to leave on a pretext when he moved closer, looking left and right and remarked, as if in passing, that there were 2.5 seconds radio silence. Before the signal was cut off, though, he had noticed half a second of high-pitched crackling noise he couldn't account for. It caught his attention as it sounded similar to frequency shift keying which is used for the digital transmission over voice phone lines. His clearance did not allow him to access the original recording but he was trying to get hold of it. Just as he was about to

derail on another lengthy explanation of security access levels, he mentioned, in a matter of fact way, that he also noticed that the Piper was equipped with a surveillance device used to scan the ground surface, guessing that it had been installed for training purposes by the nearby geological research centre.

The after-image of a yellow mailbox cuts over to the half-open car window of plain-clothes policemen surveilling the sister of an imprisoned RAF terrorist at 01:07:13 in Margarethe von Trotta's movie *Bleierne Zeit / Marianne & Juliane*.

If I get my hand on this recording, I will analyse the voices and the echoes from the surrounding space to find out whatever I can – what did my brother expect to hear? was there fear in his voice? did the silences of the controller express more than he could say? – and if it's not possible to identify who gave the green light for his flight path, then where was it given? At least. Also, I will use audio recordings to test the software. Use emotions so as to calibrate it more finely.

There was the import-export business my dad ran with a former colleague from the airline. The man had married a German woman who couldn't pronounce his name. His son Patrick crashed a car against a skip on a highway rest area and died at nineteen.

The vertigo when I see old train wagons used in Germany. Large rusty iron parts of the chassis like dinosaur's limbs, shock-absorbers flaking. Were these used to transport Jewish people from all over Europe to concentration camps? Heavy iron handles on rusty red painted wooden frames. The half-round roof framed by steel.

The faded photo of 400 cases of books stacked on the platform of a railway station in an album documenting the history of the Offenbach Archival Depot – one of the largest collection points in the American sector where Nazi loot was sorted and returned to its owners. Within four years, more than 2.5 million stolen books and cultural objects were returned to their rightful owners – or their relatives.

I remember a news headline from the 90s saying that former Russian prisoners of war recognised the barracks where they worked and where they were housed in Frankfurt, which was part of the former US American military base and became accessible after the troops left. Their headquarters were in the former head office building of IG Farben company in Frankfurt. The American Forces radio station “From AP, UPI and the major American networks, the news next on AFM, daa da dii didada daaa” brought music from the United States: R&B, Funk and Hip Hop came to Frankfurt through US soldiers partying at the Funkadelic night club. It was also played in Offenbach clubs by foreign – Ausländer – workers’ children.

The patterns formed by deep red lead oxide primer and grey gun gum exhaust repair paste on the back of my green M-65 jacket.

I bought car parts in Offenbach’s scrapyard on the other side of the rails. A bit further along were the social housing projects known as Marioth, a company selling low-priced land. In Nazi Germany, homeless and poor were banned from the city and relocated to discarded railway wagons. WWII refugees joined them as it turned into a slum without sanitation. In the sixties, the city added an extensive social housing project to relocate the homeless from the air-raid shelters where they squatted in the city centre. Later named Lohwald, it remained a ghetto isolated from the centre without shops or social services, where children died of hunger and cold. Social exclusion continued as buildings were extended to provide more social housing for migrants. Attempts by social workers to build a football pitch and playground failed. It kept flooding and crime increased. While I was working as a paramedic, we were called there when someone was bleeding profusely after jumping through a window onto the balcony.

Mark Medlock, winner of the 2006 German *Idols* reality TV series grew up in Lohwald township. Child of an African American father born in Georgia and a German mother. In an interview, he spoke of Offenbach as a ghetto and a trauriges Städtchen – a sad little town.

At the Club Voltaire in Frankfurt I met a girl and was taken in by her green eyes. I felt attracted to her, but when she said her parents were Muslim I stopped pursuing her.

More than half of the students in my high school were not from Germany, their parents came from Greece, Romania, Italy, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Poland or Egypt. German girls mocked scarf-wearing Muslim girls, asking if they had head injuries. The recruitment of migrant labour from other countries was not part of the curriculum. Sixteen years earlier, the millionth migrant from Portugal was welcomed with flowers and a motorcycle as a present.

On Sundays, before hiking in the woods, dad would start a barbecue next to the parked car. Moulding kebabs from minced meat mixed with spices, onions and chives. Strangers passing were offered a flat bread kebab wrap. When I was afraid we would get lost on our hikes, my father would say, Look, if a Bedouin gets lost they know to read the stars to guide them back to where they came from, and I was content. He could not read the stars though and once we walked in the rain until we hit a road where he hitched a ride from a passing motorist back to our car.

Born in 1931, my mum joined the League of German Girls, also known as the Band of German Maidens. She would sing Nazi youth songs on our hikes, about Stukas and the flag swaying in the wind and comrades who won't be defeated as long they remain friends. At the time, my brothers and I didn't grasp the significance of these songs. Later I noticed that our children's drawings often depicted concentration camps, surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers, with an abbreviation my brother said he had invented to be used as a copyright symbol: "NS". These things went unquestioned then.

Other weekends, my parents would take us to museums where I learned to stay quiet while gazing at things behind glass or suspended from the ceiling. No touching. We also visited the Dachau concentration camp memorial.

I had sprained my ankle on my first visit to Vienna. Running down the stairs, I landed on the wrong angle of my foot. The ankle grew to the size of a tennis ball but I continued to walk through the city, visiting friends, dragging my injured leg. It was summer and I cooled it in the Karlsplatz fountain, in front of the huge iced cake building called Karlskirche. Built in layers of biscuit, butter cream, chocolate cream, and again biscuit, butter cream, chocolate cream, and again another biscuit, butter cream, chocolate cream, all the way to the top. Some blue icing in vertical passages of the baroque architecture, red shadows in the many

and intricate arches of the building, the rest cream white lemon icing. In the middle of the fountain, a sculpture which looked like a Henry Moore in dark brown bronze, reminding me of the small sculpture near the playground next to our house in Offenbach, two fighting bears, or wrestling bears, or hugging bears, depending how you looked at them. They were placed on a concrete pedestal and easy to climb. The interlocked arms formed a good base for the foot, all the way up standing on both heads with each foot. The playground had a train made of elliptical hollow sewage pipes in different colours – blue, red, yellow. Spaces in-between and sand on the ground, zigzagging in chase. Cooling my swollen ankle, I thought that the Henry Moore sculpture resembled my ankle with torn tendons, twisted ligaments and sprained muscles and how I never fell down from the two fighting bears, but then misstepped as I ran down the white marble steps of the old apartment block in Hetzgasse in the third district of Vienna.

The stairs go down half a circle and then run straight on black and white chequered tiles where apartment doors loom, silently talking about people's lives. Doors which were knocked at first and then hammered on and then kicked in at 2am or 3am or 4am or 5am by Gestapo searching floor by floor, room by room for Jewish dwellers, rushing them to gather their belongings. At the same time, at the opposite door an anonymous single eye lingers behind a glass speculum. To slide its brass orb cover to the side, the owner uses a tiny round button to shift it left or right, depending on preference. Face pressed against the door, cheek on cold brown shiny paint smelling slightly of aged wood where it has splintered off and with the one open eye peering through the round pane of glass inside the door, which would mist up slightly due to the wetness of the eye and the rise of the suppressed breath, using the back of the hand to quickly swipe it to clear the view of children parents grandparents dragged by their collars, clutching half-closed suitcases and bags and satchels, pushed out of the flat one by one, and the last Gestapo man in a black leather coat rushing through each of the rooms where henchmen are positioned, interrupting their looting and rummaging and joking to shout that they have searched everything, the black leather coat emerging a last time while the last occupant, sleepily and badly clad, silently begs the guard at the door to be allowed to go back in for another personal item but is pushed away again and again with two outstretched arms, first hitting flexed palms then closed fists against the breast of the beseeching individual until the leather-coated arm gives the figure a last shove to tumble down the stairs. An exhalation behind the glass, alternating ears against the cold paint to

hear details of the altercation, another rub of the palm to wipe away hair and ear grease. Calling out for wife, son, daughter, lover to bring over the warm gown because it is cold. Waiting a bit, listening, after the door closed and the noise in the staircase died down. The doors remember, they carry outside marks of steel-reinforced leather boots, leather gloves, batons, crowbars, blunt instruments to force them open, and on the inside sweaty streaks of breath against brown paint, ears and eyes sucking in through their orifices sounds and sights, palms and the nightly sweat of hair and beard brushing back and forth; a bit lower down, faint and treacherous cowardly hearts hammering through the mist of nightgowns, a faint echo of the bangs on the other door – bang bang, boom boom, bang bang bang, boom boom boom – a dialogue of fear and suspicion, the rhythm of a train rumbling towards the east, the dark milk of the morning, echoing complicated staccatos of bangboom, bangbangboom, bangboombang, boombangbang, boom. House doors open and close, apartment doors open and close, house doors open and close, car doors open and close, car doors open and close, train wagon doors open and close, train wagon doors open and close, concentration camp doors open and close. And only closing and closing and closing after that, a deadly rhythm of doors and hearts and shots and hearts and sighs.

On one of those staircase platforms, my right shoe positioned itself in a split second at an angle which was unfavourable to my tendons; which side to move, to roll onto the flat foot or twist around the foot and land on the outer side of the ankle? The foot rolled onto the outer side and my full body weight followed, tearing the outer tendon just far enough for it to be surgically reattached. I was running down, taking two, three or four stairs, sometimes jumping half a flight and sliding with my hand down the smooth handrails. The steps are hollowed out towards the middle, handrails slanted from the weight of nodding consent. Those are not forgiving, they remember, they don't tolerate running and jumping and shouting. Bodily movement of dwellers is to be performed in an orderly fashion, step by step and grip by grip. Steps and handrail approve of continuous orderly moves which won't disturb their daily work. There and then, not on one of the sloped steps but on the very even and black and white chequered tiles of the landing, the house had tilted slightly for my foot to land in a way to rupture the tendon. Adjusting illicit movement. Knowing I was to enter another building where the ankle was fixed by a big bellied smiling assistant applying a cast, which was cut in the middle to allow for the swelling to increase or decrease.

In the 90s, artist Gunter Demnig began a series of commemorative projects which would catch the attention of pedestrians. The artist placed 10 x 10cm cubes in the pavement in front of houses where deported Jews lived, engraving in the brass plaque "Here lived..." followed by the name and known dates of deportation and place of death. The work is titled *Stolpersteine* (stumbling blocks) as the cubes jut out from the pavement.

While working a nine-to-five job in contemporary art institutions, I think of the girl in an Agnes Varda movie, I forget the title, working in a factory assembling TV parts after running away from an orphanage, attaching tubes and transistors to a TV set, unrelated to what is projected on its screen.

A train slowing down for a hairpin bend in the mountains or for an irregular stop doesn't bother me but at borders I tense up, expecting controls and people without tickets to be caught and those without papers to be arrested.

In 93, German Special Forces intercepted RAF member Birgit Hogefeld and killed Wolfgang Grams during his arrest proceedings at the railway station Bad Kleinen.

Crossing the border from Romania to Austria policemen disassemble the roof and side walls at the far end of the train wagon, send in dogs and shine their torches to check for people hiding.

Lebanese artist Mazen Kerbaj recorded a live performance for trumpet and Israeli Air Force bombs from his balcony in Beirut on the night of the 15th/16th July 2006.

The muted colours in old train wagons.

After three weeks on the bicycle and sleeping outside with no roof, I felt claustrophobic in the train compartment on the way back home.

When the air hits me in the face, as power poles zip by, hanging my head out of the window.

Sometimes, I'd leave the train just before crossing the border to check if the vibrations of the rails still carry to the other side. Even if it's only a short stop for customs and border police to enter the train, I sneak off and listen for an oncoming train. Mostly, I am relieved to find that they are still audible from the other side. Rumour is that at some borders the rail vibrations are cut off to block secret messages.

I tried the coordinates 48° 50' 9" N, 8° 22' 37" E as a phone number, with the +48 country code for Poland; the number +48 509 82237 connected to the voicemail of a carpet cleaning company. Seems I need to try again another time.

It was after my first sexual encounter that I started setting up boxes. Each girlfriend has a box with letters, papers, and photos – I wonder how other people handle theirs? A standard policy seems to be burning but to do that I'd need to locate them. Apart from lovers, there's a box with Jonathan's letters from Norway – he later told me these were his diary. And there's my cousin who went ahead and had children with someone from East Beirut in the middle of the civil war, much to the shock of both families.

At six minutes past one in the afternoon of 3 March 2003 my brother informed Frankfurt air control that cloud clearance had dropped below 1500m and 8000m and visual meteorological conditions did not apply. The air traffic controller's report reads that two minutes later the contact broke off with a "crashing background noise" during a position report. Alerted police dispatched a helicopter but the search was aborted because of low visibility. A hiker informed the search team about the location of a Piper flying in dense fog and they found the crashed plane at 10am the next morning. At the funeral the coffin was closed.

A year later, my family met at the site to commemorate. I walk a bit down the hill to be alone stumbling across something. The broken control stick of the Piper, with a red button for radio traffic. Inside of the hollowed grip I found a message on a rolled up scrap of paper. "Swim where the time flows."

3

The attacks started soon after.

Scaffolding collapsed during renovation work in the entrance area of the new site of the Kölner Kunstverein and a large piece of sheetrock narrowly missed my head. It looked like an accident to me.

The newly-appointed director had encouraged me to apply for the job. She was overseeing the move of the art institution to the former home of the British Council in central Cologne. Situated at the East-West axis which was a parade and drill ground in Nazi Germany, it was redesigned by German architect Wilhelm Riphahn who was commissioned with urban reconstruction in 1945. Now, an Austrian architect was carefully removing later additions. The ceiling of the narrow 50-metre-long reading room seems to float, covered by large glass panes on both sides, hence its name: Bridge. Because of the neighbouring US embassy, the windows were covered with plastic sheeting in the 70s to prevent shattering in case of attack.

In a single week, a pile of cans collapsed in a supermarket the moment I passed, a ceiling impulse fan in the Frankfurt airport parking garage system nearly crashed on my car because the mounting bracket had shifted, and a car passed through a red light just as I crossed the intersection on a bicycle.

While we were setting up the first group exhibition late at night, the curator decided to change a large section of the show at midnight. The construction team was exhausted and a worker misjudged the drill's torque and it spun from his hand, missing my shoulder by an inch.

Driving the last 50km from Vienna to Frankfurt in winter, the highway frozen over, I noticed a white Mercedes passing in the fast lane beginning to fishtail as its wheels lost traction. It

started spinning less than twenty metres away. I steered straight ahead and let in the clutch so as to pass the car which rotated like a turnstile.

As I was cycling to work, the front tyre suddenly got stuck and I was catapulted up in the air, luckily only scratching the inside of my right hand and arm, grazing right shoulder and hip on impact. A spoke had broken and had snapped the wheel into an irregular ellipsoid.

Late night phone calls followed. A voice cursed incessantly after I picked up the phone. When I stayed silent the other end also went mute and I heard hard breathing. I requested the phone company block the number but was told I needed to lay charges first. After I unplugged the phone at night, the calls moved to daytime. I ended up disconnecting the line.

On the highway from Frankfurt to Cologne, a truck suddenly swerved as I passed. Seeing, from the corner of my eye, its trailer turn and accelerate in a scorpion's tail move, lashing out a steel girder sideways as if to skewer my car, I found myself doing a peremptory turn to the left and, by the skin of my teeth, kept away from the crash barrier. I felt like a steel ball on a pinball table as I shot straight past the collapsing truck. In the rear-view mirror I watched it going up in a cloud of glass and bursting metal.

To keep track of the incidents, I mapped them with news reports I suspected could be related.

A pensioner was found dead in the north of Scotland with a return ticket to London in his pocket, recalling the anonymous dead from Derek Raymond's novel *He Died with His Eyes Open*.

In the movie *Duel* by Steven Spielberg, a driver of a huge trailer truck chases a travelling salesman who had pulled ahead of it on a narrow highway.

The British Ministry of Defence confirmed that a team from the Combined Services Caving Association were trapped in the Cuetzalan cave system in Mexico after rising waters made a U-bend impassable. Refusing help from a Mexican rescue team, the cavers waited for a week

to be rescued by Royal Navy divers and were then deported for entering the country on tourist visas.

A man in Romania was caught withdrawing the old-age support of his deceased mother. For years, he went in disguise to claim the pension at the post office.

Researchers in early cinematography found that only 12 to 20 per cent of documentary footage from the First World War was real and that most of it had been re-enacted later. Few camera operators had filmed in the trenches of 1914; instead filmmakers had merged original material with propaganda footage, especially of spectacular air battles, fights in the trenches and explosions. Scientists used original photographs to reconstruct the position of film cameras and lip-reading to determine when and where the footage was shot.

My uncle approaches me at my brother's funeral about his travel videos. He wants to convert them to DVD. In my mind, he's always been bald and anxious. Growing up just after the Second World War, he smuggled petrol from a duty free zone at the Swiss border and stored it in unregistered cars, sold liquor, cigarettes – anything that brought profit. He once filled the water tank of his RV with rum, and a mattress with cigarettes and did not get caught at the border. When I needed a roadworthy test for my car, I would take it to Munich where he'd bribe the inspectors. But isn't your son working with computers? I ask. He might know how to do that. But he says that they are not on speaking terms. Only then does he add that he has lost a memory card containing photos from their trip to Australia. Fidgeting with his fingers, he looks at me with big old eyes and opens his notebook. They had visited friends at their farm and travelled across the country. As I listen, I wonder what I am hearing – memories from the trip, from capturing moments on camera, or from diary writing. He takes notes every day, down to the very last detail. My mum once told me that towards the end of the Second World War, she was twelve and he nine years old, they walked home on a road between open fields and fighter jets flew low over their heads, opening fire to shoot at them. They jumped from the road and hid. Later, he worked as a driver for the US Army, selling wares he got from the soldiers: Hershey's chocolate, coffee, cigarettes, you name it. He gets more agitated as he tries to backtrack his steps, and says he might need my help. We order coffee. In my mind I follow him as he enters a shop in the city centre, inserts the

memory card, selects what to print on the screen. A passing tramway reflects in staccato the autumn sunlight. On the screen, images from Australia. Their faces in the midday sun, half-shadowed by wide hats in front of a blue RV. Her yellow dress stands out against the red of the endless desert.

My uncle points at entry no 346 from 30 October 2001. They are having steak and fries under the striped marquee of a motel. The setting sun casts long shadows. A low line of mountains in the background. Close up, my aunt's face does not disclose the harrowing experiences of her childhood. She now relates, in her heavy Bavarian accent, how they met. He was delivering milk to the house where she worked as a maid for an American family. It was love at first sight. She calmly turns her head as he interrupts to complete the story. At the yellow Kodak machine in Munich city centre, his eyes scan the lines of the notebook as he selects which memories to print. The grey band of a desert road. A tree stands out against the blue sky. In the next, a truck passes. It stops in the following photo. It seems someone was dropped off.

I wonder who shot the photos where both are seen. The shop closes in half an hour and he gets anxious.

After the truck leaves, I cross the road and approach them. In no 364 they recognise me. My steps whirl up fine red dust and I feel rocks under my shoes. They shout hello as they recognise me in the midday sun.

Another flicker of reflection from outside. He leaves with the prints in his hand. She is waiting in the car. The memory card still in the machine, photos continue to flicker on the screen.

A sequence where we hug, their surprised look, asking how I got to Australia. We laugh and talk, they inquire about my parents. He shows me around inside the RV and starts the engine. My aunt in the front turns and smiles. I open a tap and find it's rum instead of water.

I cross a street in Los Angeles. A car stops as I reach the other side and the driver gestures for me to come closer as the window winds down. I approach thinking he might ask for directions. He turns to look straight at me, his left arm resting on the steering wheel. He says Police Station. I reply, I am visiting only and, Sorry I can't help you. He repeats Police Station and I tell myself that I needn't be surprised to meet someone who acts strangely because a) this is Hollywood and he might be re-enacting a movie – he didn't look like a Cosplayer, but

on second glance he resembles the T1000 model in *Terminator 2*, or b) he might be delusional and need help, really – he might suffer from managerial burnout. Or c) my English is so miserable and he didn't understand what I said – or his body language would have let on if he had an hearing impairment. So, as I repeat what I said my eyes catch a freshly dry-cleaned police uniform, wrapped in transparent plastic in the back of the car. Is he a police officer for real? I look at him questioningly, shrugging my shoulders. Jaywalking is forbidden in the US, he scoffs. I continue to look at him with a blank expression as I have no idea what jaywalking is and ask, Did I do anything wrong? As the automatic window winds up I hear something about crossing streets at traffic lights only and the car speeds off.

Secret wars come to light. Plane spotters document aircrafts as they approach Frankfurt airport over the A5 highway every day with telescopes and binoculars. Their amateur knowledge helps to track unmarked planes moving detainees in the War Against Terror.

During our stay in LA we have an old BMW. Before returning to Vienna, we put up a FOR SALE sign in the back window and an elderly woman in a 20s style cap approaches us asking, What year? Well, I think, I know how it is to wake up disoriented, and hey, it's easy to lose track of time in the movie industry. Or, who knows, she travelled time? Cautiously, I reply that it's 2004 and that it's summer, only to hear a harsh Where from? Now, I think anyone in Hollywood would recognise a German accent because of memorable movies lines, so I reply politely: We're from Austria and Germany, but the car is a German make. She turns and says, I know people are silly but this is outright stupid, and walks away.

Orbicules start to appear – mysterious round spheres of about ten millimetres diameter, made of rubber or plastic, coloured half-black, half-teal. Nobody can tell me where these balls come from. At first, I think they might be a child's toy, from a board game, or paintball ammunition, or part of something larger. They keep turning up along my way. Attracted by the colour, I pick one up and continue jogging. On my next lap, I notice one in the same spot. Thinking, I missed it the first time, I pick this one up too, just to run into it again in exactly the same place. I stop. I look around, what am I missing? I memorise the spot. For seven or eight laps I pick up one after the other orbicule – no idea how these materialise, out of nowhere.

Battlefields wherever I go. Looking for a plunger in a do-it-yourself superstore, I am caught unawares by staple guns that suddenly fire salvos across the aisle against an approaching cohort of power tools, slowed down by trenches cut by angle grinders in the concrete floor. Overhead, burning flasks with combustible thinner fly across the shelf as a shopping trolley equipped with spray cans-turned-flamethrowers speeds by, scorching its path across nail-spiked barriers to crash into a hastily erected barricade of bath tubs, sinks and doors at the opposite wall. A skirmish breaks out in the plumbing section where chisels and sharpened screwdrivers whizz across pipes-turned-periscopes lining the frontline. Fertiliser pours from cement mixers into lined-up threaded pipes which are locked by frantically whizzing impact wrenches as vertically arranged spades and shovels form lines of defence.

More orbicules appear, in different sizes and colours this time, speckled white, yellow and orange, ellipsoid with a cotton-like surface and twelve raised ridges spanning them longitudinally.

I go to an art supply store to buy a notebook as the shop goes up in flames and carving tools whizz through the air, piercing art magazines and books on drawing. I flee for cover to an aisle with less harmful products only to find play dough, glitter and gypsum explode in my face. With tearing eyes and fogged view, I stumble to the next row where I am showered by fountains of oil and acrylic colour. As I turn to run away, trestles and tripods extend their legs to trip me on the way to the exit. Other customers seem not to notice.

I am prepared for similar attacks as I enter a bookshop, then a drugstore and a locksmith, but nothing extraordinary happens. Then, at a greengrocer, a bunch of coconuts falls from the ceiling, crashing on the concrete floor, and transparent milk sloshes all over me while spiked cactus fruits pelt down, interspersed by tomatoes, apples and pears. I take cover behind a pile of potato sacks. From this position, I fail to notice the approach of a large freezer which rolls over my right foot, but do manage to dodge a hailstorm of pecans, hazel- and walnuts. On my way out I dive into a counter top with lettuce, parsley and other soft greens absorbing the shock of my fall.

For a while my dad and two of my brothers owned Mercedes Benz models W114/115, also known as the *Stroke 8* – for 1968. Each had one in a different colour – my dad had a yellow petrol-powered model, my second-eldest brother a white 220 diesel, and my eldest brother a crimson-red diesel.

Taking the state roads to avoid toll charges, I drove the crimson-red Mercedes to Paris and back and found a cassette containing interviews with refugees seeking asylum in Germany. Listening to it again, I notice the B-side has a series of news reports.

On the 9th of September 2000 between 12:45 and 14:45 two men entered the freight compartment of a mobile flower stall parked at Liegnitzer Street at the outskirts of Nuremberg. One of the men shot the 38-year-old florist with a Česká 83 six times in the head at close range and the other fired three shots from a Bruni 315 revolver after the victim fell to the ground. They took photos, closed the doors of the van and left. The man had arrived in Germany from Turkey in 1985 and first worked in a factory, then started a successful wholesale trade of flowers. On the 13th of June 2001 a 49-year-old Siemens worker was shot dead in a tailor shop in the city of Nuremberg where he worked part-time; on the 27th of June 2001 a 31-year-old man was shot dead in his grocery store in Hamburg; on the 29th of August 2001 a 38-year-old man was shot dead in his grocery store in the city of Munich; on the 24th of February 2004 a man was shot dead in a fast-food shop in the city of Rostock; on the 9th of June 2005 a 50-year-old man was shot dead at his fast-food shop in the city of Nuremberg; on the 25th of June 2005 a 41-year-old locksmith was shot dead in his shop in the city of Munich; on the 4th of April 2006 a 21-year-old man was shot dead in his internet shop in Kassel; on the 6th of April 2006 a 39-year-old man was shot dead in his kiosk in Dortmund. All men were of Turkish or other foreign origin and were shot with a Česká CZ 83 Caliber 7.65 mm. On the 25th of April 2007 a 22-year-old police-officer was shot dead while on duty in the city of Heilbronn. On the 19th of January 2001 a bomb exploded in a grocery store in Cologne and on the 10th of June 2004 a nail bomb which was attached to a bicycle parked in front of a hairdresser shop in Keupstreet in Cologne exploded, injuring more than 24 pedestrians and visitors.

Police suspected drug-related crime or a feud between Turkish shop owners until, in 2011, a right-wing group was exposed after a botched bank robbery. Over the course of the years, four parliamentary committees of enquiry researched the police investigation and, with the involvement of undercover police, the prosecution gathered more than 600 witnesses, 50 lawyers, 488 pages of criminal charges and 280,000 pages of interrogation records. Still, the trial against accomplices in the racist murders committed by the National Socialist Underground drags on slowly. It turned out that documents and recordings kept by government authorities were deleted just after the two main suspects were exposed and found dead.

Audio surveillance of right-wing extremists, discovered by chance in 2012, has been kept at the German Federal Criminal Office since May 2009 without being consulted for this case. Criminologists attribute the failure of police and investigators to follow up on other witnesses' statements to "subliminal ethnic profiling". In 2006, a witness recognised the man who had left the bicycle carrying the nail bomb in Cologne in the footage of a surveillance camera from the 2005 Nuremberg killing. Songs praising the killings were distributed on CD in right-wing paramilitary meetings. According to local informants, traditionalists meet in places which they considered of importance in German history, one of which is the peak of the Mahlberg.

What did my brother mean by "Swim where the time flows"? To crack this code, I write down the corresponding numbers. The first two letters appear in reverse order in the end: 19-23-9-13 23-8-5-18-5 20-8-5 20-9-13-5 6-12-15-23-19

Why pack a box and store it for a long time? As if sending a parcel to my future self. But during storage, I never missed the things stored in those boxes. In the end, opening up the box, I don't recognise the content or remember why I had kept it in the first place.

A box from Vienna, which I don't remember packing, arrives. It contains forgotten notebooks and a self-help *Repair Your Mercedes 200* book wedged in a plastic bag between starter cables, spark plugs, contact breakers, light bulbs, fuses, a can of Wynns' fluid, and cable binders.

The shock of unpacking a box is different from accessing memories. As if they live in a different emotional expansion, another spatial dimension and direction of movement.

Driving a car for a long time, I become part of its body. The clutch transmits my movements; brake and accelerator are extensions of my limbs. I become a centaur on four wheels, my eyes turn into the gyroscopic horizon of the vehicle, my mouth gobbling up middle lines in an endless feed. The handbrake at my side a glowing red lever of an ejector seat. I sense the tyre tread touching the street surface, grinding the grit as it rolls, its side walls, made of a different rubber blend, flexes its connecting shoulders just as the grip of my shoe soles scrape a bend as I run.

To cope with the distance between packing and remembering, I learned to move in circles, in a frequency suitable to refresh memories just as they mutate. Furthermore, rehearsing this on several occasions, I feel an intuition develop for the right emotional angle and a well-timed batting of the eyelid so as not to see too much of the content when unpacking. I master a technique to allow for an unpremeditated flash of vision, which fills the gap of a missing or changed memory.

Repairing cars gives me peace of mind. To know how to repair a car is part of male bonding. Usually I speak a lot but when it comes to car repairing I know to keep quiet and just do. Called to assist my father-in-law, I know which tools to hand and when to counter his torque on the opposite side of a CV joint. Working wordlessly to show you know how to get something done, change a flat tyre, jump start a car.

I imagine that I might learn how to move my memories about the contents of stored boxes in the same way the trajectory of air travel is planned. Throwing a plane at the right angle between the passengers' expectations, proclivities and emotional tensions and the airline's schedule and conjecture, across space. Then, memories might open up like oysters under the eye of the sun. There are memories, though, which have become compacted by long-trodden thoughts. They wear the imprints of revisiting them frequently. Those will require a more patient approach for unravelling. They need to be followed cautiously just as the spool

of wool in the Minotaur's labyrinth. Notice that unravelling is different from unpacking, where a sudden movement coincides with recognition while the former involves encounters made while following the thread.

At seventeen, I worked a holiday job at a leather manufacturing company to pay for my driver's license. Treating freshly bruised furs along tanning stations, soaking the skins in alum, aldehyde, quinone, tannic acid, some in full-oil chamois and others in single-bath chrome tanning. Then graining, boarding and milling them. I did not wear protective gear as I lathered furs and washed them.

Delivering newspapers in the neighbourhood brought less money. A girl in front of an apartment complex kept me from accessing the mail boxes once. When her brother knocked over my bicycle and sent leaflets flying over the pavement, I cried and dumped the rest in the recycling bin.

I found a 1967 VW Beetle for sale near the Offenbach scrapyard. One with the small back window, receding front lights and chrome bumpers. The windows in the back were missing and it was flooded, upholstery gone. It went for 140 German Marks and a friend helped me tow it home. I welded a new rocker panel assembly, replaced the brake cylinder, cleaned the carburettor and adjusted the valve clearance. My eldest brother showed me how to use a laser strobe to adjust the ignition point. Friends who came over to help or see the progress watched jealously as girls polished the chrome bumpers.

It took a while for me to move with the car as one body, carving bends, cutting lanes, calculating distance, acceleration, brake reaction time and braking distance, and anticipating the response of the suspension to sudden changes of direction. I learned the sound of the crash barrier during high speed travel, the sound of the changing surface, and how to predict sudden movements of other drivers.

Chrome parts in cars communicate speed and sex in car design, the reflection of light sculpts the smooth curves to transmit a visceral response to the passing flash of form as if it comes from another world.

It's always the 13mm spanner which goes missing, or the 15mm. I know their size, weight and feel from using them repeatedly. I tried to keep them in reach, though sometimes I can't tell them apart. It's difficult to guess the difference in the medium sizes. Not so the 10mm spanner which I know without checking, same with the 17mm. But when it comes to the 13 or 15mm, I have to test which one fits or hold it up to read the oil smudged number. Others, like the 14mm or 11mm or 16mm, I hardly use so they stay clean at the bottom of the tool box. The smaller ones I lose easily, especially sizes between 6mm and 9mm, which I keep in another pouch for bicycle repairs. The sizes above 17mm transmit a confident feel of heaviness, first cold and warming up with use. I imagine holding a large penis feels similar. I think I could guess a 17mm spanner without looking. I like the combination spanners, open on one side and ending in a ring on the other, ideal for tackling a stubborn nut with torn edges. I feel they could be used for other things. I keep an adjustable wrench in case a nut is worn. In tough cases I move on to use the effective but more damaging vice grip to loosen a stuck bolt and chuck it when it's smashed. Weight and size show if a spanner is of good quality. I've worn out several wrenches made of cheap steel and open on both sides. A good quality combination of a 13mm and 15mm can last a long time. I developed a feel for size when I started repairing bicycles with a 15mm nut size for wheels and 13mm for brakes, handlebar or the saddle. Nuts between 8mm and 10mm for luggage rack, brake and gear cables and so on. Later, I started screwing cars. Stalking abandoned cars without number plates on the streets, which carry stickers before they will be towed. One day before the due date we pushed a VW beetle to a friends' yard, removed the engine and moved the car back.

My VW Beetle did not start when I took it for a roadworthy test. I could not afford a new battery so I used to push start it. The inspector laughed and asked what I was going to do if he passed the car and it didn't start.

The first time in the UK, I was surprised to recognise the ringing signal in the receiver. A cold night in a phone booth and suddenly the sound from a song, "Time to go, time to go".

A scrapyard is a good place to learn. Like in an anatomy lesson, car parts are spread out in different stages of wreckage, engines gaping open for study.

The break-up song that helped me get over Mariza plays in a liquor store and catapults me back in time. I took leave from my job and travelled to visit a friend in Zürich. On the way, I bought an expensive jacket as if to assert my independence.

The person photocopying the book was not careful – some fingertips got in. At the margin a thumb and index finger with varnished nails and frayed cuticles. And, on some pages, greasy imprints. I know someone who fell in love with a person merely seeing their fingerprints.

Air rushes through my fingers as I stretch my hand out of the car window. Feeling time pass as distance is covered.

The route over the Alps is not visible when approaching on the highway. Sun lights up the mountains and clouds float on lower regions. The road continues along a river bed and passes the mountain on the side. I imagine that a mountain must feel hurt by passing cars which make its peak appear to be moving like the hand of a clock.

Moving from place to place, I pack and unpack boxes again and again. It's a form of time travel: time unfolds while emptying a box. Repeating the same action over and over again, my time starts to move in circles. To find the right direction, I first try out a left spin and then a right spin until I feel which way allows me to unwrap memories.

I must have been seven or eight when I fell from a two-metre high terrace. I landed headfirst on the stone floor. My dad immediately rushed me to hospital and held me while steering the car with the other hand. Blood spread on his white shirt as street lamps zipped by overhead. He stayed quiet.

Visiting friends, I would bum a ride from drivers who transport newspapers from a printing house in Frankfurt to neighbouring countries, Madrid, Paris, Milan. Arriving at the railway station at 5am. People warm their hands on burning oil drum fires.

I met an artist from former Eastern Germany in Beirut whose dad was Palestinian and mum German. We exchanged stories about growing up with a bicultural background. I said it reminds of an engine assembly plan with a twin carburettor which produces more vaporised fuel to power the engine. Or the twin camshaft engine with two parallel shafts per cylinder bank operating the intake and exhaust valves of an engine; or the dual-fuel engine, the twin choke, the dual tyre or the duo servo brake. All sign of excess or of better quality: two times vaporised fuel and two times braking power are marketing relevant upgrades. There are no special words for models with one carburettor chamber only, one camshaft, one valve, one choke, one tyre or one brake. They could carry similar fancy prefixes like mono-, uno-, one-, or solitary, communicating a feel of trusted continuation, of the classic and accustomed, of the tested and reliable, or the settled and traditional. What about having several languages, several cultural identities? Here, “dual” is not seen as an improvement but as a lack. A lack of place, lack of location, a lack of rooting and of identity, which extends into a lack of reliability and of trustworthiness.

It was difficult for me to understand her because she grew up in the Federal Republic of Germany. She said that her dad could not stay because Palestine was a “non-friendly associate state”. He had to leave the FRG after completing his studies and her mum couldn’t join him, even though she was pregnant. So he went and started a new family and that was that.

As I watched Germaine Dulac’s 1928 movie *La Coquille et le clergyman* (*The Seashell and the Clergyman*) at an exhibition, time started to bifurcate. It was projected on two screens at a 90-degree angle. One projection was delayed by 21 seconds. Switching between the two screens to find out what happened next, I lost track of what happened before. I kept feeling I had missed the middle.

On an empty street, I keep the car between the lanes in the dark. In the headlights, street marks run directly towards the middle of the car and I feel like I am steering an aircraft on the runway. It keeps me from falling asleep. Focussed on the regular strobe, I can go on driving for hours. Every now and then tiny specks of moonlight or short flashes of light in the periphery of my eye. Suddenly the road markings end and I lose sense of direction. The crash barrier disappears too. I can’t see or hear the hard shoulder either. Slowing down, to hear

the oncoming traffic, I find the highway has turned to an endless area of asphalt surface. Opening the window, all I see is mist rising from the asphalt. It is still hot and smells of tar.

The car comes to a standstill. There's no sound or light and I wonder if I missed a sign of an off-ramp and have come to the highway's end. The surface is inclined ever so slightly and the car starts to move slowly as I let go of the brake, the tyres squeak on the wet tar as in a parking garage. A dim light appears, hovering in the distance, tiny and pulsating like a star. Growing slightly, it's surrounded by a halo of mist. It doesn't look like an approaching car and seems to be standing perfectly still. A foghorn rips through the silence and I stop yet again. There is nothing but mist rising, a moonless sky, not one star visible and absolute silence apart from the cracking sound of the radiator and the random sigh of settling shock absorbers. The light remains my point of orientation. Its pulsating frequency resembles a lighthouse now. Another blast from a large tanker's foghorn fills the empty plane.

I decide to check out the source of the light, as it seems the only discernible point and the car keeps rolling towards it anyway. I start the car and, leaning out of the open window, try to focus on the ground ahead. A gust of wind from the back sends exhaust fumes to the front. I release the brake and feel the tyres' ploughing friction negotiate the slanted level. A parking garage, or an empty stage as in Lars von Trier's movie *Dogville*. Time seems to be suspended, I listen to the engine sound as I slowly accelerate, I won't go faster than 50km/h. Every now and then seams of the fresh asphalt run diagonally across, causing the car to shift slightly. Apart from irregular gusts, there's no wind and the smell still lingers in the air.

The ground flits past in a shimmering black reflection. Slowly, the light grows.

I lose the feeling of time as I watch for changes in the road ahead and suddenly the light clearly emerges from the fog. It is a street lamp, coated in grey varnish, lampshade on a chain dangling in the wind, similar to old workplace lights.

A man wearing a trench coat stands half in the shadow. He is perfectly still. As if frozen. A coat lapel moves, then the other one. A strand of hair flits in the wind and gradually the

stillness of the photograph gives way to the still frame of a movie, his body swinging slightly and the play of light patches in full swing.

Eventually I realise, it's my eldest brother.

I recognise his posture from a photo his girlfriend had taken when he visited her in France. He's waiting at the railway station, a burgundy red suitcase at his foot, wearing Ray Ban aviators. The line of his right arm continues to his pocket, pushing aside the coat. The other leg is slightly flexed and angled. Sun specks play with the surface of his curly hair. As in a hologram, his posture contains a never-ending moment between arrival and welcome.

Not sure how to approach him, afraid he'll disappear if I move too quickly, I wait. Suppress my desire to embrace and kiss him.

As he starts to speak, something seems off. He says I must be surprised to see him.

A long pause. It looks as if he is thinking. He continues, I must trust him and I need to remember what he is going to tell me, even if it sounds implausible. The sound of his voice does not match his mouth movements, as in an unsynchronised movie. He is caught in a moment of hesitation, then explains that he had recorded this message a long time ago and he might be dead by now and I must not be scared. He adds that he won't be able to answer my questions.

I look at him a bit closer. From the side he seems rather flat. He now rattles on about how leaving places and storing packed boxes splits the soul and tells me that I need to learn to continue living in places which I left, wherever I am, keep in contact with friends and not to cling to boxes. I need to also continue writing those stories I left because I felt not loved. Continue to revisit earlier spaces. To activate them through writing. Spaces will come to haunt when left abruptly, he adds.

His voice changes as he touches on the recorded interviews. After he had managed to extract the sound of spaces from the interviews, he found more than he had expected –

apart from negative he also found positive space echoes. He believes that those reflections of the spaces they hoped to reach were already present in the refugees' voices. It sounds implausible, really, he added, but the findings were supported by even stronger evidence that spaces they fled were present too. He had found conclusive evidence from extrapolating voice data pointing to this possibility. But he was sure that the range of space in voices was more complex than imagined.

He looks left and right, lowers his voice, and continues that he found borders in the language of people – other than the refugees he had represented. When he experimented with popular culture and education material he found the same, but on his search for an explanation only met silence. He adds that he can't say more now.

Then he laughs out loud and says that he started his investigation after an experiment we did with a group of friends way back in 1989. We had extended the day to 27 hours over the holidays by turning the clock back to midnight at 3am. The first day did not feel much different but after four days we were already 12 hours behind the regular time. Then, we got up at 10pm and went to a lunchtime/midnight film screening. This discrepancy made us aware of things outside of everyday perception. That was when he started extracting the sounds in recorded speech.

I realise now, Laura had called my parents' house then, too.

We had thought we'd continue living as before. But the experiment had caused an imperceptible shift because we skipped a full day. He said that now was the time to take up his research and revisit spaces I had left. He also said I should listen to the sound of space in my own voice recordings. It would be painful but necessary.

I recall that he had started the interviews to help refugees and asylum seekers coming to Germany to remember what they went through. Often, they would only have had access to a fragmented account of what happened. Authorities would focus on any inconsistency during interrogation. But memories needed to be triggered by empathy and emotions evoked by accounts of other refugees telling stories. In the interrogation rooms, however,

borders were re-created. Most of the interrogators lacked training and were locked in their sense of a stable home and their fixed sense of where they came from. During their training they might have learnt that accounts of a car accident or a robbery would differ, but they regarded this as something else.

He tells me about a device he kept in his office, which he had built after Wyatt and Langdon's 1939 studies, which proved that workers' production increased when music was played in the work environment. They found that music alleviated stress and increased focus and productivity and Muzak came to ease the shoppers' anxiety about piling up debts.

Research by Tulving and Thomson from 1973 about *Encoding Specificity and Retrieval Processes in Episodic Memory* was another source he used. He says that by using the language from the time of recall, more memories become accessible.

As he continues, a flicker moves across the apparition and his voice turns into a crackling noise. I can catch a few words only: to continue research but revisit basic assumptions. He appears desperate as if he notices that the signal starts breaking up. Something about sex and identity ... another flicker ... it was us, not the refugees who needed help ... and he's gone. Awesome, I think, he made it, he sent messages across time and space.

At his office, I find a helmet hanging on the coat stand of his law practice. It has padded earpieces and blinders on both sides and looks like an old pilot's leather cap but for the middle ridge, studded with wires and electrodes. I sit down behind his former desk and put it on. Listen and follow your focus, was his instruction. I flick the switch. Darkness and silence. A faint crackle. Images flash up of people huddled next to me on a bench, wearing masks and earplugs, sharing a blanket over their knees. Music and voices hover in a large expanse, as if I was sitting alone in a dark cinema. Next thing I hear voices speaking about lost places' borders, and about losing everything and about moving on and moving on.

Grey snow fills my vision.

A person who looks like my driving school instructor slowly appears on the other side of the desk. He had not given many instructions during the lessons. He had his ways of letting me know what I was doing wrong. He was rather large and whenever I pressed the brake abruptly, his whole body would shift to the front and seesaw back as it came to a halt. I learned to use the movement of his heavy figure as a gauge to adjust my brake pressure: slight at first as his body moves towards the front. Not too much, just a little. As the car decelerates steadily, I aim for the point where it should stop to slowly release the brake so as to allow his body to smoothly sink back in his seat. The first time it worked he smiled broadly.

He wears a white coat now, and the desk is wired with blinking instruments and jittering dials. He points up where a fan moves slowly counter-clockwise. Then he puts his finger on his lips. Okay, I won't talk, but I can't move either. I can't even see my body. Strange, everything is black and white. The light is a bit too bright. I take a deep breath to try to relax. He points to his head and I notice that I am floating backwards now, speeding up past time and space, and I close my eyes as I drift in a placelessness.

Next, I hear the rasping sound from a radio receiver changing stations, interrupted by the crackles of skipping across radio channels. Slowing down, it turns into a hum, the oscillating low sound of a refrigerator, accompanied by a steady middle tone. In the grey space a voice emerges from the fog and I open my eyes to see him talk.

He welcomes me to the experiment and asks if I am ready to continue. I nod, feeling my brain slush back and forth in the cavity of my skull.

To prepare me for unsettling experiences, and because I think too much, he will distract my mind so it will allow things to unravel.

Reality is a psychological process, he explains. Compare it to driving a car. Your eyes focus on the optimal level between points in immediate proximity – for example a car in the next lane – and the furthest visible point of the street. In between these two points, the mind reduces attention. To understand this better, try to focus on the entire field of vision while driving.

At the same time, we experience time according to our daily routines. A time span of, say, five minutes, fifty minutes or five hours is experienced differently. Working in a check-in queue or at the cash register of a supermarket, five minutes might seem long but fifty minutes won't seem longer, but endless. Working on interconnected tasks integrated in one's life, however, time spans appear more differentiated.

This is where the orbicules I had noticed come in, he continues. They open up access points to parallel realities and can be accessed from the future. They are used as coordinates in the time-space continuum, time buoys which link a certain future to a possible past. It would not change a thing if the past would be changed, as the future has already happened.

Hallucinate again?

What did he mean about learning to leave a story where my feelings don't count?

Swim where the time flows?

Next I see neon green blocks scattered on the ground, far into the distance. No larger than the height of the seat of a chair, each a square form with slightly rounded edges. They are squishy and covered with nylon fabric. A hazy violet light, hardly more than a dark glow in the backdrop, sheds a shade over the scene. The empty space is filled by the sound of the squares, somewhere between a hum and a squishing frizzle. Foam rubbing on nylon, breathing out when sat on, causing a slight static crackle. They breathe the discomfort of underarm sweat-patches on acrylic jumpers, the damp feeling of badly dried clothes. The blocks crease at the corners like a fitted sheet stretched across a mattress. Skin searching for skin. Contours become visible under the thin layer of cloth, a dick bulging here and a nipple protruding there. Straining sweaty crotches pressing against zippers and tin buttons.

One night, I ignored a sex worker in Los Angeles who mumbled that the car would be towed if I parked in that parking space.

The foam squares hiss as I sit down: a sigh of pulling acrylic socks over dry feet.

Red velvet curtains open to the vertical curtain of an old opera house. It slowly moves up, nothing but darkness behind. A flicker appears as the 2010 movie *Aïta* by José María de Orbe is projected on the flaking paint of the back stage.

I first pleased a girl orally when I was sixteen. I went down on her, feeling her soft skin and touching her penny size birthmarks. She smelled of body – at that time we'd use only water and no soap. I fell in love with her smile during a hike through the Black Forest. Her hair, a tangle of brown blonde. She was three years older, went to University, and was part of the Catholic youth group. At a youth hostel we started snogging and my nose followed her body scent, from the neck down under the violet scarf she constantly wore. Moving on to her hips under the green and far-too-large army jacket. Staying on the hipbone to see her belly move as she breathed. Continuing up to reach the underside of her breasts under the torn T-Shirt. Kicking off too-large black boots, we shared the bed that night. Her dad hated me at first sight – he was a conservative Italian – but her German mum kept quiet when I stayed over. She wore the most incredible pair of jeans, worn out but still rough, with a button fly. The gap between her waist and jeans wide enough for my hand to reach down to stroke her ass and her sides. Kissing her I felt like inhaling her body. Clinging our mouths together we breathed each other in and out until there was no oxygen left. She did not touch me, though. When I asked why, she enquired in an amused tone if I wanted her to make me come. I pressed my open mouth against her jeans to breathe against her pubic bone and while she writhed, I tried to avoid getting a tooth knocked out by a steel button. Her movements were swift and strong as I held her bum in both hands. The folds of her vagina unfolded on the creases of her jeans, which spoke to me in movements unknown, mouthing to open button by button to find her white underwear. I licked away the smell of urine under yellow curls, tangled and more stubborn around her wet inner parts, every now and then returning to her mouth which was cold and fresh from breathing, to kiss and curl tongue tips. I felt my head explode being so close to her inside which I had only touched with my fingers before. Her lips cracked open while stroking, a ripe fruit under the slightest pressure, releasing a wet and soft space. I was there, with mouth nose eyes to smell taste see her.

Entering the inner labia with my tongue, I tried to wank myself while licking, but my concentration shifted and my movements became automatic, so I focussed until she came.

During the ten months of my alternate civil service I was with a girl who I met during construction work at the Café Müller. She wore safety pins in her ears and military boots, and her head was shaved. She was a cutter, arms marked by suicide attempts, and kept calling on nights when I was on duty at the Red Cross, saying that she felt the urge to cut to get rid of the pain, to induce pain, to get rid of what her dad did to her, to cut away at herself and gradually chisel out the pain from the pain. I would listen and try to stay calm and say that everything was going to be alright, I would come to see her when my shift ended at 6am, I'd hold her and we'd listen to her favourite LPs by Siouxsie and the Banshees, Enya, Sinead O'Connor and Nico, and spend the day in bed doing nothing. I asked how her rat was doing and if she had written anything new. The nights would pass in a nightmare between emergency calls followed by the strobe of the blue light projecting still images of frozen trees on the way. The suction machine clogged from vomited cereal. Not able to hold in food – asphyxiation. Did you call the doctor? We can't do anything here. A girlfriend waited just a few minutes too long before realising he had overdosed. We could not declare death so had to resuscitate for two hours until the doctor arrived. Washing the equipment back at the station and rushing to the phone, Is everything okay? The next day we stayed in bed and planned our vacation.

We left for Normandy though it was fall and rather cold. A foam mattress in the back of the VW Beetle unfolded on the front seats. In the morning the windows fogged and the beach was an endless empty grey waiting for a walk and skipping stones. A baguette with butter and a large bowl of milk coffee. Not thinking and not talking much, passing time taking long walks in front of the large horizon.

On the last day, I ran a fever and could not drive. I slept most of the time as she drove and only took the car across the border, as she didn't have a driver's licence. Later, she said that she had spotted white rabbits on the highway throughout the drive and spent the entire trip trying to avoid hitting them.

A camera eye in the red curtain opens up jerkily to the interior of a richly decorated church. White marble steps and columns frame the altar clad in heavy red velvet, and golden

spiralling columns left and right reach up to the ceiling which disappears in a blueish haze of incense. Three priests in dark red robes in front of the altar, hoods drawn over their faces and protruding metal beaks. They swing in rhythm to the hymn left and right while altar boys dressed in translucent gowns approach, one carrying a jar of peanut butter, another vegetable oil and another fresh livers. They are followed by a group of smaller altar boys dressed in transparent gowns, swinging copper thuribles, and a group of boys throwing glitter and blowing streamers left and right. A litany reverberates from the gallery choir pacing each step they take:

stroke ratio

charging stroke

plunging joint

reaction member

double wishbone suspension

wraparound

throttle body injection

ball thrust bearing.

The hooded priests reply to each stanza in baritone as, from the back, a procession of young boys approach, dressed in transparent plastic raincoats studded with large eyelets:

pushrod

slip angle

piston slap

pumping loop

gulp valve

rubbing strip.

As the procession arrives at the altar one priest moves to the front to open a large hymn book and proclaims in a high solo voice:

glad hand

belt slip

finger

overdrive

rim pull

ram pipe supercharging

suspension roll.

In response, the procession of boys replies to each of his enunciations:

angle of lock

connecting rod bearings

nibbling skid plate

passive restraint

idling shaft

bottom gear

primary couple.

As the last stanza ends and the music fades out, three figures in tight golden jumpsuits approach on winged shoes, each carrying a red velvet cushion with a golden metal tool embedded on it: a 17mm combination wrench, a pry bar and a ratchet spanner. Each of the priests takes one of the tools and takes turns to dip them slowly first into the jar with peanut butter, then vegetable oil and lastly in the fresh cut livers, before drawing a triangle across the chest of the first of the boys, enunciating at each turn:

squish lip

double-acting

cogged belt.

Moving in three rows, the initiated male figures bow after they have been touched and leave the proscenium left and right.

The first time I saw a porn movie was at the house of a friend I used to visit to repair cars. The garage next to his father's house had an inspection pit. We bought a torque wrench to disassemble engines and spent days there, checking and fixing. One summer, we decided to visit a friend in Italy. He went to pack his things and waiting in his living room, I switched on the video player. A grainy film of a penis penetrating a woman's vagina. I felt the same rush, more a form of shock, that I felt when seeing pictures of naked women for the first time.

The penis plunged in again and again and the woman's buttocks moved up and down in a counter movement. I let the video run and went out to see if the car was loaded. On the way to Italy, I stopped at a garage to buy a porn magazine. It disappeared along the way. We took small roads just for the fun of not driving on the highway and, as we got lost, stopped to ask directions from an old man standing on the roadside with a bicycle. He had a porn magazine in his hand which he hid behind his back as he told us the way.

I was dating an artist for a while. She and her friend spent the budget of an art project to hire sex workers and exhibited video recordings of us having sex with them. They also showed a photo series where they had breakfast with sperm on their faces. I had met both artists at an exhibition and I could not keep from looking at her friend's large breasts. Later she took me home and sucked me until I came. We broke up after a year as she was jealous of me watching porn.

After we split up, we tried to go for a holiday together on an island. I was not sure why. The idea made me feel uncomfortable from the beginning. But there I was, no train or bus to leave. Driving around, we reached the end of the island very soon. We visited night clubs during the day, shabby and deserted, littered with ripped placards and strewn flyers. It turned into a travel guide for day visitors of clubbing sites, appreciating their location, the arrangement of the parking lot and the outside appearance of the building.

Every time I wanted to sleep with her, she insisted that our relationship had to change. She felt that since we were together, she didn't enjoy being alone and that she wanted us to be separate to be able to be together again. Friends visited us and we smoked weed on the beach and watched horror movies all night. They left and we were alone again. Every morning we heard shouts and happy cries from dance animators in the Club Med across the bay. Others would keep silently thrashing away on the tennis courts. Most of the people working in restaurants and bars were students on summer jobs. She ended up sleeping with a guy she met at a concert and we separated for good.

On the way from Bologna to Milan, a friend, sitting on the back seats, suddenly starts to masturbate. I pretend not to notice as he rubs away and groans loudly and eventually comes. Afterwards he explained that this had been very important for him.

In the lower right corner of my eye, a small rectangular window appears, showing the same church scene with the congregation moving out as the choir continues a litany:

month bottom

truth diet

writing disruption

goal exposure

face income

failure bridge

night fault

wish disk

regret energy.

Before we left for the summer holidays, I had repaired the engine of the red Datsun Cherry. The gasket leaked more and more oil. Remove the push rod cover held by ten or twelve nuts. Have the cylinder head sanded down. Take apart the valve train. Release the push rods from the rocker arm. Disassemble the valve spring. Apply a grinding paste to each valve and rotate the valve stem to sand down the valve seat until it neatly closes. Clean up and assemble the valve train. Check the tappet adjustment and valve clearance. Tighten the cylinder with a torque wrench. The engine started fine but the increased pressure pushed oil

past worn out compression rings and the engine overheated. As we drove through Calabria, the water cooler started boiling over. I stopped the car at a narrow parking strip, engine steaming. A gallantly dressed Carabinieri approached, offering a cigarette lighter, laughing: do you need a light? We stayed in a small village at the beach, not moving because of the heat. Day and night and air and water were indistinguishable interrupted only by the search for a tampon lost inside her.

Not many people know how to read porn magazines. The process of taking the photos of naked women is inscribed in their posture, the location furniture and the draping. Seemingly accidental details speak of a long and elaborate process. There is a secret language in these images which tweaks human bodies into elongated inclines and counter slopes, arranging light and background, applying shades to receding skin texture, and foregrounding the light on protruding parts. Women exposing their bodies as men fix up the tech.

Calabria is a narrow strip of land in the south of Italy. With the Mediterranean Sea on both sides of it, I thought it would be a good idea to take a bit of the seawater on its east, travel to the west coast, and pour it out there.

Once a week, I used to go to a place in a side road next to the large river. Greenish water running in concrete water beds. It was built to avoid floods. Trees, in a bare row, that had shed most of their leaves, some yellow ones left in sharp contrast to the brown-grey façade. Stacked boxes and fridges on the balconies, a leafless plant in an oversized pot like an exclamation mark of a long autumn. Locking the bicycle outside, I wasn't sure if I should cover the saddle as the plastic bag on the carrier rack was wet. But rain would drench the saddle much more and it would take days to dry. A slightly damp saddle or a possibly rain-soaked saddle. I shook the bag and clipped it to my backpack. It would dry inside so I could use it later in case it rained. At the door, yellowing Perspex bell plates with names and apartment numbers. I press the buzzer as the line "Flow my tears the policeman said," comes to my mind. The door clicks and I push open the door. The yellow roughcast of the narrow corridor slowly turns brown. I wonder how this line came to my mind. I feel I've been in this situation before. But different. A door screeches and a car outside hoots. Shouts behind a door. I move the fold grille of the elevator aside and enter. Maybe it was the clay

pots in the novel that made me remember this line. The woman helped the main character to hide from the police. There was something about the pots she made, they spoke to me, I saw them in front of me. She said she did not know if they were any good. They gave her a calm presence.

A movement on the way upwards, people talking in the staircase. I press the button at the wooden door with translucent glass panels. A movement behind. I feel weird to be too early and too late, both don't seem right. I don't want to see people leaving or waiting.

Whenever I sit in front of a psychotherapist I feel like a fraud, that I'm going to tell another version of a made-up story. In one practice, I saw books about Islamic cultures and Arab countries on the shelf. The therapist seemed too eager to have me as a client and I never returned. I also never returned to the first therapist I saw. I told him about my brother's schizophrenia and the images of naked women I consumed and he asked if I enjoyed watching women being penetrated. I felt confused and left. Only once, a therapist came to work with my family. He quickly figured out that my mum was the decision maker in the family. When he started mimicking her behaviour she got angry and threw him out.

We sit across from each other in comfortable chairs. I take a sip of water, sweating now from the bicycle ride. I never know how to cool down. I sweat a lot during sex too. Outside, my clothes felt just warm enough, not in here though. I wonder if the sound of my swallowing is louder than usual. There is a pause. I look into an alert and expecting face. And so I start.

My mother wanted to be an artist, but my dad wanted six children. So she turned us into her art. We were trained to sit through concerts, visit museums and appreciate all kinds of art, to be interested in anything that was unrelated to popular culture or everyday life. Watching things behind glass and listening to people performing rehearsed movements.

The first porn I bought was a *Penthouse* magazine. I remember the photo of a woman bending down as if to pick up something, high heels making the legs seem even longer. In

the photo filter her ass and the gap between her thighs appear fuzzy and warm. The first time I saw my mum's genitals, I asked why she had an udder between her legs.

My insides feel like they are made of cupboards and drawers, cabinets and boxes, with different handles or knobs, some with locks or latches. Open shelves, hutches, glass vitrines, some locked or painted over, slapped shut with wallpaper. I knock to listen what's in there and some sound hollow. When pulling out a drawer, I hear it rattle though it looks empty. Then it jams. It slides backwards though, into the rectangular shaft. There must be a double back, and from the other side you'd see what's in it. But there's no way out of here to find out.

I don't remember much about the blackouts when I lived with the girlfriend who I had first time sex with. We were attracted to each other mostly because I was okay that she was not interested in sex. She was sixteen when she did it for the first time and her boyfriend was eighteen and did not treat her well, did not care if she came or not. I was the first boy she dated since. The first time we met we talked all night until 6am. We agreed not to have sex at all. A few months later, after a night of making out, I just slipped inside her and it felt as if she enjoyed it. We stayed together, making each other come.

The walls are covered with doors, drawer fronts, styrofoam lids, slabs of concrete or glass. Every time I turn, it seems there's a shift and change. I'd suddenly find a grey steel door with a safe-like combination lock where before there was a wooden door with multiple layers of paint; an ornate inlaid cabinet door instead of plain Formica. There are miniature doors low on the floor with tiny handles, and large painted chests that bulge out of the uneven surface.

Sometimes I feel like I am outside of myself during sex, feeling funny about the awkward situation and repetitive movements, like doing something else, fixing cars or mopping floors. When my mind detaches, I freak at the feeling of losing reality. My brother had persecution paranoia and I found him at the top of the staircase of my grandmother's house in Munich, standing on the handrail, scratching flaking paint from the walls with a knife. He needed to watch out for who was following us, he said. Once, he made his way to the roof of our house and the fire brigade was called and opened an inflatable jump cushion. After hours he

agreed to come down. I closed the roof hatch with a padlock and chain after that. Until today I feel I betrayed him.

None of the doors or drawers seems to lead to a way out. I find a door with cast iron hinges which opens to a pantry. A sliding door reveals a bricked-up doorframe. A square wooden door opens up to a long, narrow shaft, a crenel-like opening to the outside. Moving left and right I search the sky, but can see no ground. I only manage to squeeze my body half way in and can't reach the opening with outstretched arm.

Making out with a guy from the Catholic youth group. He had not shaved and I did not like his smell. He had hooked up with the girl I had a crush on, so he said the three of us should have an open relationship. I was the third wheel, doing accessory work while they got it on, so I called it off.

Sometimes I smell spring air outside, listen to the sound of the sea, or catch a leaf flying by. Day and night pass. Inside, the room flooded in the same light. The floor is bare except for sealed trapdoors in the long floor panels, without handles.

I went to a party, standing on the side, as usual, as a guy dressed in women's clothes enters. When he spots me, he walks straight up, and starts to kiss and fondle me. I feel turned on but panic and run away.

Some cupboards are empty, others hold a few things only, while some are densely stuffed. At first glance, a pattern of mixed colours, shapes and materials. There's a red metal lampshade pressed against a yellow rubber ball and a bicycle pump. Strands of a blue washing line mingle with red cloth, a grey electric cord, computer cables and the case of a broken disc player.

When I look at pictures of naked women, I know what I like and what not. The shapes and textures, the curve of a woman's hips, the outward counter movement of the leg muscles against the inward line moving from the belly to the pubic bone. Hip bones and pubic bones. I come when I see the line of a belly moving towards the pubic bone.

I rummage inside a box to learn what else it holds. Packed away, these things lost their function and I don't know when I'm going to ever use them. Touching a girl turns me on much more than looking at pictures or videos.

For a long time, I thought I was addicted to pornography. But what does it mean to be addicted? When images of naked women give me this rush like blowing my head away, when I feel outside of myself, outside of space and time? I watch pornographic videos online, couples having sex, and I know how body parts look in action. Women in porn movies talk to me. They look through the camera lens directly at me, tell me if they enjoy it or not, beckon to me, look, I enjoy this, you could too, but don't come too close, take this and take that, see this and see that, I am desired and I enjoy this a lot, and you can touch yourself, imagine how wet I am, see how I feel deep inside when he enters me, but no, it's not you, but you can watch and listen to my sounds and smell how I smell, but see, you are there and not here, and that's fine with me, I don't need to tell you off because you can't satisfy me anyway, I want someone hard and strong, really, but take your time to watch and desire me, you can watch and see how my eyes look at you and see you in your shame and depravity, yanking fervently at your dick trying to come but you know that I am far away and it is good this way, else you would feel my contempt for you, so keep on touching and stroking and feel how you get a hard on, but don't try it in reality, because all those out there put you to the test and you will fail this, you can't handle my body, so stay away, but feel free to get yourself off, so this way you will be quiet and nice and won't cause anyone any harm, see how many women's hearts you broke and how much trouble you caused, your desire is adding to the pain so just stay where you are, watch me see you and I see your shame and it's okay because we both know we are in it but you are a bit more ashamed because you won't dare to do this on camera, will you? so, just leave it to me, I'll handle this, you're pathetic but I won't say anything about it and I and all the others do forgive you and all the men who watch, see, you'll see we'll get along just fine – I spot my reflection in the computer screen mouthing the words.

Learning is difficult for me. When thinking about something new, I become so excited that I need to touch myself immediately to douse the feeling of going off my head. I masturbate to

keep myself from learning new feelings which I don't know and scare me. Porn calms me down. There was always something at hand. My eldest brother had an anthology of Japanese erotica, the other one collected porn magazines. Most of the men I know use porn regularly but we don't speak about it.

I keep thinking being homosexual would make things easier. With most of my heterosexual relations failing. I can't have sex without an emotional connection. It's not easy for me to connect the first time sleeping with someone and I can't easily keep an erection. Keeping a job becomes difficult because I don't want to commit when it comes to being paid for spending time behind an office desk.

Silence. A bird hops on the window sill, looks left and right and flies away. The sky is a grey wall without clouds.

I think I loved her.

What did you do about it?

Tried to make her love me.

And, did she love you?

How will I know?

And then?

We never saw each other again.

How come?

She said she didn't want to see me anymore.

And you?

Left.

So, you left.

I waited.

And?

What can I do?

It's your love.

But I want to be loved back.

Does that matter?

Isn't that what this is all about?

It's not for you to decide.

A buzzing fly makes it difficult to follow the last sentence. I watch it banging against the window, rustling through the dry ends of the palm tree which looks like it has been standing without sun so long it had forgotten what it was and started assimilating the form of local shrubbery. Structures seep in and out. The day I came to this city, the houses seemed higher than elsewhere. I kept counting steps and found I spent an enormous amount of time just passing one building. Monumental architecture makes me feel small. People live in boxes here.

In fifth grade I'd stroke the leg of the boy sitting next to me in class and he'd stroke mine. Getting turned on under the table. In the performance video *Untertone* from 1972, Vito

Acconci takes a seat at the far end of a black table, facing the camera, his upper body leans on the table, both arms disappear underneath. He wears a black shirt, hair short on top and bulging on the sides, foregrounding the oval of his white face. As he begins to speak he rocks back and forth which is mirrored by his reflection in the polished table and shadow on the white ball behind. We can't see where he moves his hands; it appears as if he is rubbing his legs or his genitals, his shoulders follow the rhythm. He sets off with downcast eyes:

I want to believe

I want to believe there is a girl here under the table

I want to believe there is a girl here under the table

He repeats the repetitive rubbing as if masturbating.

Additive-treated lubricant may relieve the injection pressure of screw-in nozzle lubrication to level the actuating force of moving engines parts while increasing the scuffing load-carrying capacity.

Wynn's fluid feels good on my hands and makes it easier to feel the screws, nuts and bolts I can't see.

Watching porn and masturbating more or less regularly, I am not used to speaking when I get horny, to turn language into pleasure, or use words to turn someone on. It's about watching, and not touching. Women acting in porn puncture my retina. They return my gaze but are distant. As if they ask for eye contact but keep their pupils shielded behind the flickering liquid crystals of the screen. A copy of their bodies burns into my retina and excites my nerve cell endings directly, connects to the electric current of the screen stroking my dick. In female masturbation scenes no intruding genitals interfere, but when penetration occurs, I watch the frantic intercourse as if my penis extends into the screen. I start thinking the actors must regularly clean their bowel tracts to perform anal sex, then apply balm to reduce the friction, to lubricate the penetration and heal the repeated ruptures criss-crossing their rectum. I imagine that injuries must increase with online viewing requests. A contemporary Lascaux, they form a texture of graffiti sucking in eyeballs to enter deep inside

the vagina and rectum, searching for hidden treasures. I contribute as my online activity is counted. More views trigger more frantic penetrations. In turn, I offer my anal region to balance out the increased hire of actors in video productions. To write over the text of my logged views, I insert blunt instruments at first, or small writing implements, whatever I find. I try to ignore the pain of the ruptures as I move on to larger implements. Tearing my anal region in complex and changing patterns, to keep up with the proliferation of the growing market. To counterbalance, I keep the injuries sore until they fester. Grace Jones said men need to be penetrated and experience the receiving end of prodding. I move to larger plugs, up to the average size of an artificial penis. It presses against my sphincter, first slowly widening the passage, then cracking open the tiny hole, ripping up fissures even wider. I imagine the passage in the other direction for the muscles to relax. Seeping pus as the pain subsides. Now, I plunge my hand in, the fingers first, then the wrist and continue to the lower and then upper arm, all the way up to the shoulder. Rummaging in the heavy bag of remembrance, studying the detailed bulletins in the meanders of my colon, fondling the forming cerebrum.

I try to achieve an equivalent friction to that enacted in porn videos. Counting the strokes as I try to fulfil the target count. In the grip of a maelstrom of pus, the proctologist hospitalises me. My bowels are cleaned out and the colonoscopy confirms anal fistula but no concomitant illnesses. The surgeon removes rectal tissue and I choose epidural to be able to experience the process. I can't feel anything but sense jerks of movements and hear the clanging of stainless steel instruments. Afterwards I write letters to porn stars and attach images of my self-inflicted injuries and detailed balance sheets. In one row I rate the pleasure felt and how often I came, and in the other the duration of self-inflicted pain and severity of injury. Before closing my letters, I inquire about the possibility of exchanging knowledge about anal region ointments and choice lubricant products to alleviate pain. I never receive a reply but do notice the porn stars start to look differently at me now.

I think I have a small penis and so maybe I watch porn to admire large penises at work, just as people watch athletes run, jump, swim, throw or wrestle. Watching other bodies writhing, writing over a text impacted deep inside as movements, change, to reach with the tip of my fountain pen the treasure within.

After breaking up with the artist, I started to make out with my neighbour in Vienna. Somehow we did not fall for each other; just touching, kissing and holding was good enough.

Some large form wraps around my body and holds me. There is a slight friction and it feels good. Neon cubes appear and undulate and I try to move but I can't. Then the Luis Trenker dentist pokes around in my mouth angrily: We are going to have to control your tongue, he curses as drool trickles slowly down my cheek, I've never seen something as stubborn. I keep pushing away the wads of cotton and the trickle reaches my collar. It occurs to me that time travel might require teeth removal.

Lie down on your back on the floor. Close your eyes. Feel your body settle on the floor. Sense the areas where your body connects, and feel the floor extend around you. Feel the floor support your weight, feel your body connecting deep into the earth. Observe the movement of your breath moving in and out. Feel your body rising and falling with your breath. Feel your breath slowing down. Start to breathe more consciously. Put your hand on your belly, breathe deep into your belly. Then, breathing out, feel the emptying motion spreading through your whole body, breathe in again, feel your abdomen fill up deep into your lower belly. Now breathe out slowly and relax. Breathe in again, this time more consciously and slowly, feel how air fills your body up all the way deep down, like water slowly filling a bag. Feel how the breath spreads into your body, all the way to your head, and down your hands and feet. And feel the tension go from your whole body as you breathe out, slowly. Breathe in and feel your cells nourished by the air, breathe in slowly, and feel each of your cells relax as they are filled with air. The cells relax a bit more each time you breathe out, slowly. Now, listen to the sound of your breath and count as you inhale, slowly, one, two, three, and as you exhale, even slower, one, two, three, four. And now take a deeper breath, feel how it spreads throughout your body, one, two, three, and breathe out even slower, one, two, three, four, five, six. Keep breathing. You now are here with all your senses. Your attention is only in the present, in the here and now. You can take note of your thoughts and what goes on in your mind, but don't follow them. Just observe your mind, allow it to wander, but keep listening to the slight hissing sound at the back of your throat, as the air passes in, one, two, three, and breathe out, and relax, one, two, three, four, five, six. Now you only notice that you are breathing. Allow your mind to move back.

You are breathing consciously. Your breath anchors you in the here and now. Your body becomes heavier and every time you are breathing out, your body connects deeper to the earth. Keep breathing. Focus your closed eyes on a spot between your eyebrows, don't let your wandering mind distract you, things you need to do, things which require attention, all the matters which you brought here. They exist for now only in your mind. The here and now belongs to you and your breath, feel your thoughts recede, dissolve into light. Focus now, how your breath spreads in your body and how your body gets heavier as you relax each time you breathe out, allowing your body to rest a bit closer on the ground. The ground is holding you, it is safe and you can trust the ground, it is anchored deep inside the earth and you can let go now. Keep breathing. Slowly move your focus to your left leg. Notice that your left leg is lying on the ground, it is relaxed. Feel how with each breath energy streams into your leg and out of your leg. Keep breathing. Prepare your leg to be moved, become aware that it will be moved. Now lift your left leg, one, stretch it out, two, flex it, three, and let go and breathe out, one, two, three, four, five, six. There. Now, focus on your right leg. It is relaxed. Now, lift your right leg, one, stretch it and extend it as long as possible, two, then flex it, three, and let go and breathe out, one, two, three, four, five, six. Keep breathing and watch your breath. Watch your body in each movement, follow the movements your body likes, do not try hard and let go if it starts to hurt. And keep breathing through the movement. Relax with each movement and focus your mind on the full movement and how your body changes, how the rest of the body feels which is perfectly relaxed. Feel the air moving into your body as you move and how the air moves out as you relax. Keep breathing. Now, press your lower back to the ground. Lift both arms and flex your muscles, one, two, three and let go and breathe out. Pull your shoulders to your ears gently and let go and breathe out. Feel your body become heavy, and relax. Don't try to keep your mind from wandering, but keep watching, don't follow where it goes. Keep breathing, feel your left little toe, feel it getting heavy and let go, feel the second small toe of your left foot and let go. Feel the third little toe and let go. Feel the second toe, feel it getting heavy and let it go, now, feel the large toe getting warm and heavy and let it go. Now feel your left foot, all the way down to the tips of each toe and to the sole and the outside of your foot, getting heavy, and let it go. It is relaxed. Feel the inside of your left foot to your ankle, it is getting warm and heavy, let it go. Keep breathing. Feel your right little toe, breathe into it and let go, one, two, three, four, five, six. Feel your second little toe, feel it getting heavy and let it go, feel

how heavy your third toe is and let it go, feel the second toe and let it go, feel your large toe getting heavy and let it go, it is relaxed. Feel your right foot, it is relaxed. Feel the outside of your right foot, all the way to your sole getting heavy and relaxed. Now feel your left calf muscle relax, and at the same time your right calf muscle, then your left knee, and your right knee. Feel your left thigh, first the upper side then the back, and now feel your right thigh, feel the whole left leg with all its muscles relax and feel your whole right leg. All the muscles of your legs are relaxed. Feel the air spreading into your legs all the way down to the tips of your toes, and breathe out and feel the air move out of your legs. Your legs are relaxed. Now, feel your bum pressed against the floor and feel the left hip and then the right hip, they are relaxed and heavy. Keep breathing. Feel the air moving to your hips, feel how you let go of the muscles as your hips sink into the floor. Feel your crotch, it is hot and heavy and feel how heavy it is. Feel how your breath moves down between your legs and spreads there. Now, slowly move back from your crotch and find your rectum, which is heavy and relaxed. Feel the weight of your rectum and how it relaxes and becomes more heavy. Now move slowly closer and feel the opening, feel the inside and stay there and relax, feel how the warmth spreads as you breathe. You are relaxed and your rectum is a root which spreads all the way through your body. It connects your inside and outside and you are like a tree, with a solid trunk moving up, forming limbs to unfold in a beautiful crown, reaching up to the sky. Keep breathing, feel how the tree trunk reaches deep inside the earth, unfolds into roots just as your skin congeals around your rectum to move deep inside of yourself. Now, breathe in as you slowly move up your rectum, deep inside your bowels, follow the long winded passage, your colon relaxes as you breathe out and it feels heavy. Continue to move on past your kidneys to find liver, spleen and stomach, slowly. Keep breathing, feel your way up along your oesophagus, up between your lungs which breathe in, one, two, three, and out, one, two, three, four, five, six, and feel your lungs let go, they are relaxed. Now, find your heart, feel it beat and pump your blood, the blood soaked in the air you breathe and moving spent air from your body to the lungs. Feel how you breathe out used air. Now, feel your way up under your breastbone, slowly along the fine tissue under your collar bone and up your throat. Your throat is relaxed. Feel the blood throbbing in the carotid artery, on the left side and right side in perfect simultaneous rhythm, feel the blood move up to your brain and down to your lungs again. Now move on to the back of your throat, connect to your spinal cord and to the base of your skull and the pituitary gland and feel your brain matter

spreading left and right, like the crown of a tree, like an opening flower, feel your brain breathing and pulsating from the blood which comes all the way from your crotch, feel the brain mass quiver and breathe as you notice it, feel it oscillate between left and right, feel how your brain receives signals from your eyes, your ears, your tongue, your nose, the touch of your hand and your skin, feel how it receives pain, and how it receives pleasure from your genitalia, listen how your heart and your belly and your soul connect to your brain, how your body connects to your mind and how a feeling arises from the agreement of your mind and your body, like a river connects a wellspring and the sea. Feel the words in your brain, feel them rest now, feel as they lie there and feel them light up when a thought comes up. Feel your body expand and contract when a word touches your body. Feel your body expand and contract with spoken words or unacknowledged words or suppressed words or funny words or hilarious words or scary words, feel each word locked tight to a receptacle in your mind and feel that whenever a word is spoken it connects to your body, it releases a response directly in your hormonal system, a scary thought and your body is soaked in adrenaline; feel how words make you horny and immediately release fluids into your blood stream, increase your heartbeat, enlarge your pupils, release sweat in your palms and on your back, interrupt your speech, flood the sponge tissue of your penis with blood. The same blood runs through your veins and eyes and ears and tongue and nose and heart.

Your body moves even when it is still.

Your car is parked outside.

There is a border.

On the other side, there is an egg.

The grass grows slowly, and unnoticeably, fear grows too.

Feel your body rotate as you lie on your back. You turn until you stand on your head. In your mind, open your eyes and see the earth become the sky and the sky become the earth. Feel how roots reach out from your anus high up into the sky, and how roots spread from your

brain to burrow deep into the soil. You are a beautiful tree. Deep down your mind takes up water and minerals while your colon reaches with its branches into the sunlight.

Into the sky.

You feel an opening.

You hear the voice of your sister.

Stillborn at night.

Swim where the time flows. I see my brother smiling as he fades away. The streetlamp swings in the wind, shadows move back and forth, like an indecisive hand on the face of a clock. A foghorn rips through the air. It tries to make me aware of something, an alarm clock of sorts. On the third strike, I feel the sky open up into a grey opaque surface. Rubbing my eyes, I find I have fallen asleep in the car which is parked in a rest area.

The car windows fog up. I feel cold. I switch on the ventilation and open the window. The rest area is covered in mist, no sky. The grass on the slope down to the fence a strange bright green.

Wheels and mudguards of a truck appear on the frosted x-ray screens of the left side of the car. Parts of a life-sized cut-out toy.

From outside a whiff of burnt engine oil on the concrete slabs mixes with oil colours of the paintings in the back of the car.

I had hardly noticed the first 500km when I felt tired all of a sudden. Often, I managed to drive late into the night. Always, it was on the last stretch that I nearly fell asleep. Nodding off in the extended curves of the long stretch through the Wienerwald for about half a second. Waking just as I was about to touch the crash barrier. This time, I decide not to take a risk. I have more travel ahead, setting up the exhibition in Germany and then back to South Africa.

The doctor's letter on the passenger's seat in an envelope.

The test result confirms a high CCRP level, pointing towards an auto-immune disease affecting the brain tissue. The MRI imaging is not conclusive and although the bone structure does not show any fissure, the cerebrum exhibits a cavity, spherical in shape. The entrance opening slightly smaller, its exit larger, likely caused by low velocity penetration by a blunt instrument.

He said that I was lucky that medication today slows down rapidly dividing cells which attack my body.

I need to pee, and throw off the sleeping bag with its musty cellar storage smell. Warm and damp, in need of a wash. I had bought it for a three-week bicycle trip through Denmark when the old navy green sleeping bag kept me freezing through the night. Good quality, the salesperson had said, the hollow fibre keeps warm down to minus degrees and it's waterproof. The top pocket still contains the same two condoms from, what, twenty years ago or so? I had imagined running away, with a waterproof jacket only and the sleeping bag on the back of my bicycle. Riding wherever the roads carried me. Away from home, following the road.

Winding up the window, I prepare to leave the warmth. The frosted glass now a streak of rivulets. A sketch of the engine burnt into bonnet dew. Water drops aim for my neck after a wet handshake with the rear hatch handle. While searching for toilet paper, I find the pirated copy of Albert Camus' *The Stranger* my brother gave to me when I was fourteen. He was twenty-four, then. He had taken me to the Frankfurt Book Fair in his grey VW beetle with a friend of his, Barclays James Harvest, *I'm a Child of the Universe* playing on the car radio tape deck. I pocket the violet book and toilet paper, slam the boot shut, turn towards the side of the rest area.

Spilled oil paints rainbow colours on the ground. The space between the concrete slabs overgrown with moss – not many people walk here. Deep green, it reaches down into the ground. Its spongy surface takes me back to raking furrows between paved stones in the yard of my parents' house, leaving deep cavities.

Cars whizz past behind, releasing gusts of air in an irregular rhythm. Blown against the curb, a mix of soggy leaves, plastic bottles, brown paper bags, shiny empty crisps packets. The sad mimicry of rest areas – road markings and pavements from urban spaces are out of place here. An endless waiting loop, a space of empty time. Offering no rest or respite from nerves chained to the endless band of asphalt. A lull maybe, a capsule of sluggish time, a waiting room to find rest.

Six-pack rings dance in the wind, dew sparkling on transparent plastic.

The wet grass where benches and tables wait for travellers is studded by molehills. Further down, the fringe of mown grass, between a faint smell of food and garbage. Too soon, the first wetness reaches the tip of my toes.

The grass grows higher now and turns into shrubbery. Carefully, down the slope towards the border. Not only do plants appear to grow slower here, organic processes seem drawn out in the vicinity of high-speed travel, slowing down decay.

At the military grade fence which surrounds the area, my shoes are soaking wet. On the other side, the forest seems unreachable. The fence in the narrow rectangular checkers of exercise books offers no hold for foot or hand. A bit further down, a gate which is open, to my surprise. The dark green-grey forest opens as my feet enjoy bouncing on fir needles. I marvel as a sudden ray of sun lights up the mist and the forest in a diagonal pattern.

I wonder how I got used to peeing against something. In snow you can draw. I find a tree, urine splashes left and right from the trunk. Step aside as it flows towards my shoes.

I look around. It's easy to get lost in a forest, as in language. I think of German fairy tales as I button up and follow the path winding between low-hanging branches. No sound from my steps or from the highway.

Sunshine seeps through the branches as I approach a clearing. Clouds give way to the sky stretched into the sound of an approaching airplane. Where does it go, to Karlsruhe Baden airport? In the children's fairy tale *The Cold Heart* by Wilhelm Hauff, a collier who wants to rather be a glass-blower summons a Black Forest spirit by reciting a verse. I don't remember the whole story, only that he was granted three wishes because he was born on a Sunday.

What would I wish for if I had three wishes? A perfectly round clearing with a power pole in the middle. There's a large tree trunk next to the path, orange fungi form semicircles on the dark brown bark. I sit down and close my eyes to let patches of sunshine float by. Which way to reach the Mahlberg?

In the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale, *The Seven Ravens*, seven brothers don't listen to their father's order to fetch water when their youngest sister was born. He curses them, they turn into ravens and subsequently she has to cut off a finger to open a mountain of glass to release them.

Something digs into my side. The book was reduced by the photocopier, but not enough. I take it out.

A torn piece of paper sticks out between the pages. My brother's handwriting:

You're doing well. You're still up to something. Time to slow down now.

Short time after you were born, our mother had a miscarriage. It would have been a girl, dad had named her Layla, after Leila Khaled. Mum was told not to try for another child, too much strain.

Remember *Blade Runner*? It took Deckard more than 100 questions before Rachel slipped up.

And Tyrell explaining that he had gifted replicants with a past? A "cushion for their emotions", he said. To control them better.

And Deckard's reply: Memories ... you are talking about memories?

You're done now. Keep your memories, they're a present.

Maybe you understand now, you are our little sister.

Try to take a step. Now you know. And another.

I look up, the sun stronger now as fewer clouds drift across the sky.

Another plane passes. It seems to be the new airway route for Frankfurt airport, possibly to keep noise away from inhabited areas.

In the distance, the forest rises in different shades of green.

I get up, maybe I'll find a sign and if it's not far I can make my way to the Mahlberg.

I take a step.

Lift the left leg and flex the knee as the lower leg moves up. The heel rises slowly as the foot rolls onto the toes. As its contact breaks, the lower leg swings forward, and in a smooth parallel action body weight shifts. The body now caught in a precarious moment between two places. Here and there. Leaving stability for an in-between. A passage towards the next location. As the foot reconnects with the ground the body weight follows and the step is done.

A step straddles a distance, a yard, a pace, a garden. My back to where I was, to let it go. An open space. In my back. I turn around.

A shout.

My voice moves through the air in ripples.

I had stumbled walking backwards.

I stop.

I inch sideways, slowly, like a crab. I watch the surrounding forest, the clearing in my back.

I move in a circle, the fringe of the forest an endless band in front of my eyes.

Don't forget to breathe.

It could be sexually acquired reactive arthritis, the doctor had said. A hole in my brain.

Continue to breathe.

They say it will heal.

After the funeral, my niece had observed that I kept picking my cuticles. My brother's habit.

Moving slowly, my thoughts follow.

A workshop six years ago. We experimented with language and movement. In a body-mind centring exercise we took turns; one stood in the middle and told a story. The others listened, then asked questions and slowly began to change the storyteller's posture. Slightly at first. Tried out different angles of her arm. Turned the hand, adjusted the other arm, shifted the weight to the other leg, turned her head. Eventually, we lifted her up. As the body left the ground, moved through the air, sideways, upside down or floating, her speech changed slightly, as if in a trance-like stance. Replies became less coherent, detached and more honest. Each of us experienced it differently, but the pattern was the same. We all had difficulties recollecting what had happened during this phase, as if in hypnosis.

I don't have a story, my life is a chain of people meeting, and of moving from place to place.

My Palestinian grandmother was born a daughter of farmers. Her mother was known for her fiery temper, throwing stones against intruders and thieves. After my grandfather passed she worked as a seamstress tailoring wedding gowns. My dad was two years old at the time. My German great-grandmother was born in Frankfurt at the River Oder, the eldest daughter of six. Her brothers worked as engineers and the youngest was a flautist in the orchestra of the Prussian court. She fell for a confectioner in Radegast who read to her in the evenings from books. After they married, she dreamed of opening a fancy café in Berlin, where he would offer his special mocha cake. But she realised he was not cut out for a life in the big city. He had returned from the First World War an 18-year-old with a burst eardrum.

The note closed: Learn to swim where time flows. Your brother.

There, a noise in the undergrowth. I look around ... nothing.

A reflection of sunlight undulates where the path continues to the forest. I set off walking, my hips freed after the exercise. Maybe I can spot the Mahlberg.

How did he manage to sneak the note into the book? It couldn't have been there since he bought it for me, could it?

Something else doesn't add up. Why would my brother send a voice message to the future first and then leave the note? He knew how to intercept me both times, sleeping at the rest area – and just now, before I took the book from the boot.

And, how did the sentence “where time flows” change?

Another scenario forms in my mind. My brother might have tried to contact me in one possible future which for some reason I received late. So he went again, that's why it's different from the first message ... Where *the* time flows.

Or is something wrong with my recall, was it the same?

Maybe, I am caught in a paradoxical time loop due to some irregularity which I don't yet understand, or am unable to grasp.

I have lost track where I am going, and look around.

The narrow forest path continues between fir trees. For at least an hour nothing had changed.

A car passing, not the sound of a highway, but a national road. Further on, the path broadens towards a muddy parking area, like the one we used for family picnics, next to the road. A few cars and small trucks are parked carelessly.

From an open car window, the faint sound of a song. From the 1981 movie *Umrao Jaan*; Rekha as Amiran who is kidnapped and sold to become a courtesan and Asha Bhosle sings “Yeh Kya Jagah Hai Doston”:

What place is this, friends?

What kind of world is this?

Where, as far as the eye can see, there are only dust storms

To what realm has life brought me?

One of the trucks has a trailer carrying a square white metal structure. It looks like an airport staircase. It doesn't have wheels, or an airline logo, or advertising signs. Strangely, it is painted perfectly white, without any scratch or dent. There's a railing on top. Moving in closer, it looks more like the upper part of a ship, or a ferry, tilted at an angle.

At the back of the trailer the structure is close to the ground. A suspended chain closes the entrance to a staircase which runs down, black handrails on either side. Looks like a portable subway entrance.

I climb across the chain and the steel hull echoes from my steps. Down the stairs, a dark opening oozes cold air. At the bottom, a puddle of water. An unlit passage extends into humid air.

The song faintly audible now, I step into the opening, allow my eyes to adjust. The outside lights fade away.

I enter the tunnel and start walking. I walk for a long time, listening to my footsteps.

The glistening walls of the passage reflect just enough light to follow its turns. It is cold, I listen to the rhythmic squelch of my shoes.

A light appears at the far end. Another set of stairs. Made of stone, they lead upwards to a low passage. Neon light from a strip suspended ceiling shines on square grey and white marble tiles on the floor. A marble column ahead, two low plastic buckets on each side.

The shops of the metrorail passage are closed by metal folding grilles. A sign in an irregular blue script on a white ground reads *Billiard Paradise*. On both sides a blue advertisement

sign, a yellow slice of lemonade with text in red: *Rouiba – c'est si bon!* Next to it: *Boutique De Luxe. Vetements Pour Femmes.*

Street sounds from the left where art-nouveau iron gates cast a slanted shadow on the tiles. Sun lights up a square opening which leads to a flight of stairs.

I climb upstairs into the hot sunlight.

What took you so long, I've been waiting for you! She shouts from the other side of the street. I cross four lanes of passing cars.

I follow her as she continues on the pavement, doing my best to keep up with her navigating the crowd. A news stand, plastered with front pages *NEW ATTACKS*.

She emerges from behind the kiosk and turns under a sign pointing to *La Grande Poste*. Moving in closer, I see that her face is bruised on one side, she gestures for me to follow.

This doesn't look like Paris. What am I doing here, jumping into the middle of a movie I don't know?

She disappears around a corner. Between a flight of houses a narrow staircase, a narrow strip of sunlit sea at the horizon. I see her figure descending quickly and I try to follow. Wrought iron balcony balustrades on the left and right, shaded by long drapes of cloth. French petit bourgeoisie.

A stream of taxis and motorcycles cuts through the stairs, a sudden opening of noise and air crosses the breakneck descent of steps. I won't lose her now and run diagonally to not get caught by the wide body of a speeding Citroën DS, shark-like snatching at my heels.

As I grip a lamp post to turn into the next part of the canyon, I nearly sweep an old lady off her feet who clings to the handrail for dear life, and shouting, Pardon, I bounce across the stairs to catch hold of the right rail with my left hand buffering my speed by rolling my shoulders along the wall of the house, my other arm sending a pot plant crashing down from a nearby windowsill in an attempt to keep my head from banging on the balustrade while straightening up and at the same digging my heel into the upper step to launch my body downstairs again, taking three, four, five stairs at once, rubber soles skidding on the white stone polished by the careful steps of many before.

I catch her sight as she disappears into the entrance of the building on the left side of the street, the upper floor's richly decorated horseshoe arches framed by blue-and white tiles, on top a small wooden roof supported by corbels, and the roof terrace's parapet crenelated in neo-Moorish style. The walls are covered in scaffolding, ripped plastic sheets streaked in dust and grind flapping against the empty window openings.

The sun lights up the layers of dust on the glass door of the entrance, the horizontal chrome door handle covered in handprints under the *Poussez* sign. Inside, the floor littered with rubble, pipes, stacks of wood and broken glass. Fast steps reverberate in the wide hall, three storeys carried by yellow and white painted columns, ending in octagonal carved flower capitals. The Rub al Hizb of small skylight roof windows surround large octagonal glass domes, covered in ornamented frosted glass squares. I catch her shadow as she rushes along the geometric patterns of the carved wooden balustrades.

Now I remember. I came here in 2005. The construction site of the National Contemporary and Modern Art Museum of Algiers, the former Galeries de France department store, built by a French architect around the turn of the century. My friend had said the two atria were copied from local architecture and iron girders used in the Eiffel Tower's structural design were used to span the wide, pillarless floors.

On the way to the stairs I pass a spiralled iron chute which was used to send wares downstairs, a plaque reads *A Durafour & Cie, Ingenieur Hussein-Dey Paris*. Imagine how the French petite bourgeoisie enjoyed the Oriental flair.

I remember thinking that the open view of the department store is a perfect space for a gallery.

Shouts of an angry altercation somewhere above. A scream, and I see her running towards the elevator, which connects the levels on the opposite side. She bangs the door shut and I see figures in pursuit rushing to the stairs. The distance from the elevator to the street exit is maybe ten metres, I hide behind a column and signal her as the door opens. On the top

floor, at the far end, two men hustle towards the stairs, trying to find a way through the debris, swearing and shouting.

She stops and looks at me with an angry spark in her black eyes. As she flicks a lock of her ungovernable hair and blows another from the corner of her mouth she slaps my chest with a flat hand. One of them has beaten me up. He had asked me to walk the streets. I refused. Would he do the same with his white girlfriend? Her voice louder now. He beat and threatened me. The police came just in time for me to run away. Now they are after me.

Side-eyeing, she checks the progress of two men tumbling down the stairs.

You said you'd help me. He's working here. He's an engineer. Think of something!

She turns and swiftly runs away as they reach the ground floor.

From my hiding place, I watch them pass. A short and thick-set guy, dressed sprucely with a boxer's nose, and a suit. Through the glass door they seem to have lost her.

They stand at the bus station on the other side of the street. I pretend to look at a tobacconist's shop. A blonde woman joins, carrying an oilcloth beach bag. They point in my direction. I look past them.

The bus departs and I walk slowly down the wide street towards the sea, turn left along the high embankment around the industrial harbour. It's going to be a hot day. I know the bus route, it follows the road along the sea, past the Grande Mosque, to Bab El Oued. A stop behind the European cemetery. Nice beach there. Just under an hour walk if I take the Casbah shortcut. Skirting the quarry, I reach the plateau of yellow pebbles and wild lilies. The sun stronger now, I feel the sea air in my face. Across, the beach, white against the blue sky. The soft ground leads down to the sand of the beach.

The beach is empty. In the distance, I see three men moving slowly along the water's edge. The sand is glowingly hot, the sun vertical above my head. I start to walk.

Out of nowhere, the group appears. Two of them stop and wait. The boxer type continues to walk towards me. Preparing to headbutt him, I lower my eyes. He's faster though and his punch catches me in the face. Blood trickles from my eyebrow. As he turns to his friends, laughs and shouts something, I grip the knife in hand, lash out. Two strokes cut him in the arm and face. One rushes forward to help him, I move back, slowly, slowly. I keep my eyes trained on them all the time, knife raised. As soon as the distance is safe, I turn and run away, my blue dungarees flapping in the wind. At the end of the beach I clean up my face in a cold stream of clear water which runs down behind a rock. I rest in the shadow.

A few hours later I watch as they approach in the afternoon sun. Two only this time. They notice me. They stop and stick their heads together. Unmoving, I pretend not to watch, but focus on them with half-closed eyes. A spark of light flashes as shiny metal changes hands. I get up to hide behind the rock.

The heat of the sun spreads its red glare over the sea and the beach, small waves lap in orange ripples at the sand. I watch from behind the rock as they walk back towards the bungalows. I lie down back at the stream. The water is cold and its sound mixes with the waves. The salty air of the sea in my nose. I wait, and wonder what they are up to.

"Swim where time flows" – what did my brother mean?

I undress to take a swim, the water is warm and the salt water carries me easily.

From far out, the shore is lit in the glowing red of the sun. Houses and roads form a dancing pattern interrupted by flashes of reflections. A loud bang from a backfiring car. Birds cross the wide expanse of a metal sky.

The salt of the sea water leaves traces on my skin as I dry. I wonder if pebbles on the beach take on this shape because they want to be tossed by people.

My head in the shade, behind my rock, I watch the waves, thinking where she might be now.
Do something?

A lone figure approaches. The guy in the suit. What does he want, it's none of his business.
He hesitates as he realises that I watch him. He looks towards the stream which runs across
the beach to the sea. His head moves back and forth between the stream and myself.

I raise my knees and prop my back up on the elbows, watching him. I don't know what I
prepare for, get up and run if necessary. Shifting weight to the left arm, slide my hand in the
pocket – you never know. He tenses, nervously fidgeting with something in his coat pocket.
Slowly, I sink back a little, not taking my eyes off him.

He takes a few steps towards the stream, undecided, and pauses. What does he want?

He takes another step. A reflection of sunlight from my knife crosses his forehead.

I get up, to face him.

Silence.

Red sparks spit from his pocket, as a shot rings out. I feel warm as the lights fade into four
more shots.

Acknowledgements

Page 82: "up to the shoulder... the heavy bag of remembrance"

From: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 208, fn. 33. The author references a passage from: F. O. Matthiessen, Kenneth B. Murdock (eds.) (1981) *The Notebooks of Henry James*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 318.

