

Hummingbirds fly upwards

by David Mollin and Salomé Voegelin

This text is a thinking through, after the event, of the work made from the recordings produced in Guardia Sanframondi, Southern Italy, during the Liminaria/Transitions residency in Summer 2018. It tries to make sense of and narrate the method devised to approach a town that represents a boundary and limit to what we know and yet is home and entirely familiar to those who live in it. Thus this text writes around the attempt of seeing the place rather than its otherness. And it describes the traversing of the unfamiliar, that is ours rather than the town's, without being distracted by the dichotomy of belonging and what we think we know to see. It does so by closing one's eyes and taking the experience into one's hands, into the knuckles and fingertips, that the work records, tapping and scraping along walls that assume a boundary that is however blurred in the bright light of the midday sun. These sounds make a map that does not represent the place but hears and feels it. Thus it connects the interior to the exterior without a centre, in favour of a different imaginary, pressed against the skin and against architecture that dissolves into its experience.

Down again in circles,

the dull drum of surface give and hollowed out cavity

Torn

When children ask me, "How does one make a film?" I always say that you have to have freedom to make a film, and to have freedom, you need confidence. I tell them

to close their eyes, to look at the stars, and look into their hearts, and then to open their eyes and see if the film they want to make is there, in front of their eyes.¹

I don't open my eyes. I see the distant stars. And I see (and look into) my heart. But I don't open my eyes. Instead, I study the cells floating in the liquid of my intraocular fluid made by the ciliary body, the circular structure whose muscle controls visual definition. Looking at the deep red of closed eyelids these cells are connecting me with the throb and rush of a primeval time at the beginning of the earth's history. They are part and product of this history and of the earth itself. My eyes closed I stay with this connection and remain free of the external forces that literally pull visual definition this way and that. Free to see a different territory and narrative plane.

I have not forgotten to open my eyes. It is a conscious decision to leave them shut because of this unwelcome pull that imparts stress and a splitting headache as I attempt to resist that which is being demanded of my eyes to rest upon, and the paths they are expected to follow. I impose a self-regulation not to open them.² Motivated by the desire for a different vista and motivated also by the defenceless and relative randomness of what my sight perceives through its rods and cones³ and its consequent susceptibility to be manipulated by forces unwelcome, the imprint of social circumstances perhaps, a perception through the capitalist imprint of a sense of having rather than a sense of touch.⁴

Djibril Diop Mambéty's instructions to close your eyes to make a film surprise the potential optical control exerted by society and the capitalist regime. They catch it off guard and filter it in a nanosecond through the experienced relationship with the interior world, the stars, the heart, the cells, the blood, ancient time itself, and possibly the sensation of heat upon the skin and the eyelids. They perform an attempted autonomy of the interior with only the most

¹ *The Hyena's Last Laugh* a conversation with Djibril Diop Mambéty by N. Frank Ukadike, from Transition 78. <http://newsreel.org/articles/mambety.htm> Accessed 14/7/19

² This notion of self-regulation is developed in reference to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's chapter 'Self-regulation as a Natural Characteristic', in *History and Obstinacy*, New York: Zone Books, 2014, pp. 98 – 117.

³ Kluge and Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, 2014, p. 110.

⁴ 'When the sense of having takes hold of the eyes they actually see value instead of concrete objects.' (Ibid., p 109-110).

distant electric flashes and eruptions of re-wiring - technologies' colonisation - flickering blue in the internal cosmos.

But with this flickering one is reminded also of one's interconnectedness with an outside. Of the stars seen on the inside, as interconnected planets, affected by exterior movements stretching from planet to planet, rebuilt by us for convenience, but fragile and prey to outside forces. Thus even while keeping one's eyes closed, these electric flashes remind of the outside that has the earth at its origin and on its side.

This inhabitation of the external within the internal, our witnessing of the stresses of power and society on internal bridges built between distant stars as interconnected planets and the electrics of our pre-ordained but yet uncreated selves, creates the story. It opens our eyes to a sonic plane, and awakens and utilises the aural tradition of the spoken to see a different possibility unfold. This possibility is a product of history, but it is not the historical necessity of its realisation.

It remains unwritten, the sound, the touch. The touch upon the eyeball. The closest we can get to a moment of pre-manipulation and body. This unwritten mapping of our own destination hand in hand with yours, writes the plot in an unseen shape that is in front of our eyes but not seen by its perceptual mechanism. Instead it is felt and sounded, spoken but not written down. And if I do write it down I am writing 'in blue ink, so as to remember that all words, not just some, are written in water.'⁵

This looking without an optical mechanism trained outside, but from a different imagination, trained on the inside, is a doing of geography as a practice of sound and touch and with a watery pen that writes with the liquid of the ciliary body a map that is ancient but fluid, that is contingent and sees the inside. It writes and maps undulations of the unseen. However, its land is not defined in opposition to a concrete, visible territory, but as its lived expanse, as its slow dilation, as a measure of time rather than things. It is what else we could see if we kept

⁵ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*, US: Wave Books, 2009 p. 92.

our eyes shut to the mechanisms that blind us, and instead trained an inner vision expanding the outside rather than looking for it. But unlike the supernova, the surging of a new bright star, the luminosity of this unseen land does not decrease but increases over time, which really is its vastness rather than its temporality: it is a land of a durational space within my mind's eye, which creates the infinity of geography but not its annihilation. Instead, it generates the continuation of the real in 'unseen lands' as 'unknown lands'⁶ and produces a physical imprint and a fleshly sense of boundaries and their dissolution.

These geographies are not mapped through logic and economics, or the imprint of a digital code, but are narrated, walked through, ridden across on horseback, sailed on and moved between in future machines of our own imagination. They hold the potential to avoid existing narratives of space and place, belonging and exclusion. And are able to escape the algorithms that focus the eye on questions that can only be answered inside, in the unseen but felt and heard.

The possibility of such unseen lands is detailed in the geographies of Ursula K. Le Guin, whose stories include descriptions of worlds and planets never seen, and a future not yet experienced but without a future tense. Instead, they make us consider what else might be here, present now, that our cartographic language bars access to and our chronological thinking shields us from. Le Guin's worlds are not mapped but narrated in moves between stars and interconnected planets in the future machines called NAFAL ships and via Churten Theory: through the 'displacing of the virtualfield in order to realize relational coherence in terms of transilient experientiality'⁷ which confounds the map through a plural simultaneity and creates the uncertainty of a spatial time, from inside language and the mind, rather than from the outside, measured. Thus she allows us to revisit capitalist and patriarchal norms and realities from the fiction of a future mode that defines an inner possibility, seen under the

⁶ Nigel Thrift 'Performance and Performativity: A Geography of Unknown Lands', in *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein (eds), London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 121.

⁷ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The UNREAL & The REAL, Selected Stories Volume 2 Outer Space, Inner Lands*, London: Orion, 2015, p. 78.

eyelid, in the fluid mode of ancient water and electrolytes, rather than through the geometry of a distant actuality.

And so I don't open my eyes. Not yet⁸. Instead I absorb into the space the cosmos, the planets the internal network. The social bodies within me, celestial gravitational pulls, the surging of black holes incandescent and opposite. I stare, closed eyed, at the Grandville-like planets and moons within me, connected through the iron bridges of an industrial age, developed now into internal systems, plans and maps, apparently virtual but a vast physical network stretching from here to there, below buildings and poles, and under the surface too.⁹ However, these inner vistas are 'ready to be torn apart at any moment'¹⁰ by those forces originating from outside, beyond my eyelids. These are the economic and societal forces that interconnect and move the planets in relation to each other but with complete disregard for our bridges, our convenience and correlation. Powered by the historical precedence that determines the direction in which we are ushered to go, and grounded in the enveloping technological colonisation of the interior. Creating anxiety in all of us, manipulated by the fear of chance and the danger of meteorites behind our horizons. Spreading cosmic anxiety, which Boris Groys explains as the specifically modern 'anxiety of being a part of the cosmos – and of not being able to control it.'¹¹

Our frail bridges. Our fragile social and economic connections, reach deeply into this very cosmos that I sense but cannot see while resting in its depth with my eyes closed. This depth is the 'dimension of the hidden'. It is the place of my looking which I am too close to

⁸ Because, I get a headache looking at what I am ushered to look at and what I am asked to want and where to go.

⁹ The allusion here is to J.J. Grandville's drawing of planets connected by iron bridges, creating 'Un Autre Monde' (Paris: H. Fournier, 1844, p. 139). They show 'un pont dont l'oeil humain ne pouvait embrasser à la fois les deux extrémités, et dont les piles principales s'appuyaient sur des planètes, conduisait d'un monde à l'autre sur un asphalte parfaitement polit.' (ibid. p. 138 '...a bridge of which the human eye could not see both ends at once, and whose principle pylons leant on the planets, leading from one world to another on perfectly polished tarmac.' our translation)

¹⁰ 'At stake here is not a linear narrative, but rather a CONSTELLATION.' Since, 'if revolving bodies such as real moons and planets were actually connected together by an iron construction, as they are referred to in this drawing, each end of the imposing bridge linking the earth with other celestial bodies would be torn apart at any moment.' (Kluge and Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, 2014, p.93).

¹¹ Boris Groys, *Cosmic Anxiety and Russian Case*, e-flux, <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/cosmic-anxiety-the-russian-case/> accessed 12.05.19

see but exist in coincidence with, invisible to myself.¹² This simultaneity creates a confounded place and time, where I live in my blindspot, eyes closed but touching: hands off the value of the eye in favour of the social connections created by touching and listening. Thus the blind coincidence of my vision with itself, once acknowledged, enables the mapping of social justice and equal distribution on an aural plane of connecting, between toucher and touched. Creating the potential plot for the film I see when I eventually open my eyes, not as a capitalist imprint but a fluid blue of a different earth. These connections determine how energy is used and technology employed. However, economical forces inverse the flow of this unseen geography. They seek to colonise this hidden dimension as they inevitably enter my nervous system and inform my soul through the necessity of their algorithms, putting it under threat. Creating the visual imprint left within me of plans and maps that corral me within anxiety and fear.

Against this tide, I use these fragile iron bridges to cross the other planets, to any other planet. To plot out alternative paths that disregard the given maps and the visual schemata. Instead, I am moved by the cosmic forces that in turn move me from where I am to the next room, via knuckles and fingertips, scraping, dragging and knocking along walls, iron railings and wooden planks, to get a baring in the place of my imagination.

The hand that grasps the hand rail, that touches the surface. The fingertips that move along the iron bar, leaving their prints behind to witness the existence of the contact. These fingerprints were according to Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt developed through the clinging to our parents' fur for safety, to be carried by their physical force.¹³ And still these fingerprints guide me out of the dangers that are mapped out for me by those I am supposed to trust. Those who usher me for their benefit, generalised and economic, in the direction of

¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 219.

¹³ 'It was presumably not labour that spurred hands, the brain, and "the optical capacity for manoeuvring" to develop. Rather, those early living beings that eventually became human initially clawed their way into their parents fur when faced with danger. Their parents would then carry them on their backs to safety. The mark of this tender grasp is present in the distinguishing prints they bear on our fingertips.' (Kluge and Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, 2014, p.94-95)

their certainty. While I perform 'Absolute nonlogic. Proof of the indefinite. Categories of disbelief. Withdrawing fingerprints from the corners of accuracy,' to 'overcome my certainty where spaces zoom by and time repositions itself'.¹⁴

Because the mapping ingrained upon my fingerprints points to a different route, that of the tactile and of connecting. They leave a trace that invisibly shows the simultaneity of positions and the overlaps of time and space. And guide my way by tapping walls and doors, mapped by scraping and touching. To find my map that was once written but is now imprinted and can no longer be felt in its impression on my eyeballs, but has to be revived at the end of my fingertips and the bones of my knuckles. Tapping, touching, feeling for a different direction. Because, fingerprints are at once universal and utterly individual, both inscribed and led by the stars and my autonomous relation to them, by the celestial forces of the social¹⁵, by touch and touching, rather than the sight of maps and certain forms. They are pre-algorithm, and are now in danger of being erased, smoothed, left glass-like. But at this very moment they are still influencing my movement; still influencing these hands and fingers that feel their way blind from this room to that, from this surface to the next with the occasional thumping crash as a currency falls to the floor.

What would be seen if I opened my eyes now? A glass city, smoothed, a totally transparent network, wholly designed by a few and endorsed by my every activity. A glass city is the same as being without sight, just brighter, and without the help of one's fingertips or one's inner vision. Every surface the same for everyone - smooth, erased. A designed world where there is no outside and no inside. But that is open to the threat of comets, pulled this way and that by the gravity of the planets or, in some cases, even by the stars that so far had held on to the imagination of the touch.

¹⁴ Aisha Arnaout, 'Orbits', in *The Poetry of Arab Women*, edited by Nathalie Handal, trans Mona Fayad, Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing, 2015, pp.81-82.

¹⁵ Here Kluge and Negt are 'comparing social relations to gravitational processes' the falling down, the clinging on, the bridges and its principle pillars which we are expanding into a zone beyond the map. (2014, p.93)

Its surfaces are determined by cosmic energies. Energies of currency flows that are attributed to an unseen and unknown outside. Blind 'visions of asteroids coming from black cosmic space and destroying the Earth.'¹⁶ These asteroids can only be measured as the restframe, i.e. how they would look if they were standing next to the supernova, since in themselves they have no shape but hold the form of what they destroyed.

Touch your way. Perform a re-mapping. Make a new beaten track¹⁷ through the time unfolding in the destructive impulses of the small group invested elsewhere and not in our timespace. Their self-made moons pulling at our bridge as we hold onto the handrail with our fingers, our prints being defined further as we move slowly over the bridge under the influence, under the sway that we try to resist as it well-near capsizes. What is this desire to recreate the potential power of the cosmos? The beaten track needs to be imprinted on the rubble of our internal universe, following the stars not trusting our eyes, not trusting the maps but going with the flow of tear ducts behind closed lids.

Not now. Kluge and Negt might say to the boy with his eyes closed on his celebration day.¹⁸ This is an important moment and that is why my eyes are closed. And it leads to the beaten track that we ourselves make. Short cuts, Ockham's Razor, over rubble of destructive forces. The destructive forces that are embedded in the vision of every land we live in, still there to the touch, not visible if you care to open your eyes. The fingers need to lead the way. One's fingerprints need to activate their long-term relationship with the complexity of one's own individuality, imprinted in the act of being led to safety on a beaten track that 'in one way [will] restore the old relations of pathways that existed before the destruction, while at the same time ... mark out manifestly new shortcuts and detours... a picture of the city's

¹⁶ Boris Groys, Cosmic Anxiety and Russian Case, e-flux, <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/cosmic-anxiety-the-russian-case/> accessed 12.05.19

¹⁷ 'Shortly after the destruction of a city, beaten tracks extend out over the ruins. In a certain way they restore the old relationships of pathways that existed before the destruction, while at the same time they mark out manifestly new shortcuts and detours. If one were at work like an archaeologist, these tracks could be interpreted as a picture of the city's prehistory'. (Kluge and Negt, 2014, p.111 – 113).

¹⁸ Kluge and Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, 2014, p.101 (Caption to a photograph of a boy with flowers in his hands, eyes shut).

pre-history.¹⁹ We follow this pre-history, into the interior of humans, the pathways along which inner and outer impressions are processed that never lead from A to B but follow hidden streams and simultaneous tracks. Touching, allowing their plurality to sense the tips. The pre-histories where we find the power to defend and taste the sodden earth that we touch, smooth surfaces, hollow surfaces, rubble, tracks and layers, one page after another.

Can you hear it

Possibilities

Plain words

Sixteen forty-eight

the row of indistinguishable keys.

Unyielding in their row, returned to the organic form from which they came. The letters the keys the words. Tap the keys and spell out nothing. Hear the spring of the mechanism.

I have done all I can. I have closed my eyes and looked at the stars and followed my heart. I have asked in this glossy blackness with my fingers and knuckles. I have asked to what extent are we within these surfaces, and to what extent are we on these surfaces. And to what extent can these surfaces be felt, mapped, understood. Through tapping and touching. Emotionally, and at what cost? Many questions, but the answer is simply not there. It is not visible. If you could see the answer then it would not be an answer but simply part of the question. The question is glancing off the surface. And thus perhaps instead we need to walk on these surfaces, on tip-toes, gently as well as with a firm tread. Moving carefully and stamping, jumping, trudging, making ourselves known to be there, at least to ourselves. Does this change the surface? Does it wear out the surface or make it new? And what about many feet pressing down rhythmically with an aim, with determination?

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 111 – 113.

Or the wet bedraggled reluctant rhythm of a few? On the same surface leaving traces that betray us. Leading to walls and areas prohibited, and with things placed in the way that direct us. Maybe we should be wearing blue plastic over-shoes, surgical slip-ons, those worn in swimming pools and by forensic experts? This way we would avoid detection. No trace would be left. The inside could remain inside, the outside outside.

While criminal scientists interpret this trace evidence in a particular way and for a particular purpose: verifying an identity and substantiating a conviction. In the unseen of closed eyes it conjures up a more fluid world of give and take. This world of passing exchanges is not mapped and named in relation to the certainty of material existence but through the moment of contact, the giving and taking of bits and pieces that define us as of each other rather than as what we are separately and as named identities. Instead, the trace evidence describes reality as a narrative of meetings: coincidental, planned, undesired, fatal, feared and wished for. It requires microscopes, laboratory equipment, amplification devices and efforts of reconstruction to build an image that ultimately does not show subjects and objects but the how and consequence of their meeting, unseen, passing.

So far we have been walking through a series of directed routes and on beaten tracks forged by ourselves, individually with our fingertips and leaving multiple footprints of simultaneous journeys in the hidden dimension. The ground is a network, with invisible lines superimposed and an occasional surge of five meters a time.

What when we get to the sea?

On the ocean in the dark, where we leave no trace and find no certainty beyond its experience on the body as a material among things. Its watery textures and rhythms can't be measured and drawn on a flat surface as maps. Instead it has a history that like the liquid of my interocular fluid has a primeval time at the beginning of the earth. Where we tread outside without a footprint, without detection.

Is that the freedom Mambéty suggests lies in our mind's eyes? Is it to be found on the water, whose distance cannot be breached by shouts but only through the commitment of one's body to the waves and to the dreams of its expanse, eyes closed and breathing. And whose

watery terrain cannot be inhabited but only transited in a precarious fashion without leaving any prints but by creating interconnections between planets, travelling in vessels that get their guidance from the stars. 'Shapeless, the waves rise towards their elements, where the foam of time swell within the cells. We will not need bridges. In the dream the bridges move. Our own liquids augment the surfaces of streams, moving into chaos.'²⁰

And what about the ceiling. Low. Dreamless. The hummingbird smacked its head upon its fibreglass tiles.

What about that?

What is inside the knuckle head that is the current will?

What if you rep your knuckle on your forehead. Can you hear it?

Can you hear the paid ones? Can you hear the pressing of feet of those that have no clue?

Falling, I tripped up. I land. On land. On concrete. Half on tarmac. Half on grass, turf, sod, blood. Will the sound be heard off the wall over there? What is behind that wall, what is

within that wall. Power. Conversation. Decisions. Silence. What of the walls that are constructed in the crystal city of radical transparency²¹ where all surfaces sound the same.

Where surfaces are invisible too. And no one is able to hide and be private for good or bad.

Inside or out. Where encryption is needed simply to get from A to B. Where lies are required in order to survive.

Groys asks, in relation to whether design could change the world, is there a dark outside where we look outwards into the blackness beyond our encrypted and shining transparent ways. The answer was no.²²

References

²⁰ Aisha Arnaout, 'Orbits', in *The Poetry of Arab Women*, 2015, pp.81-82.

²¹ Boris Groys 'Can Design change Society?' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqMRtDqF014>
Boris Groys discussing an essay by Alfred Loos, entitled 'Ornament and Crime', published in 1913, in relation to the radical transparency of the internet, and whether there is 'an outside' in relation to our designed world.

²² Ibid.

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