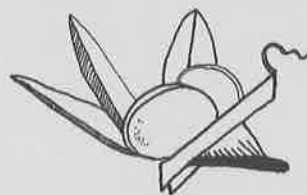
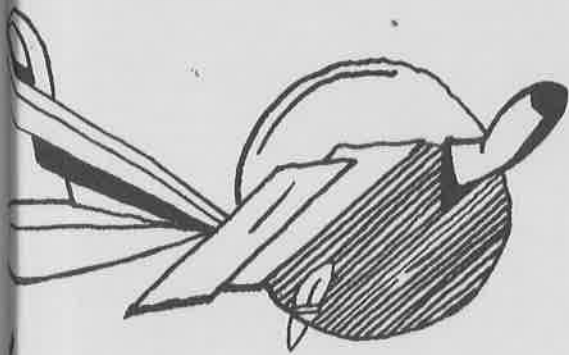


ANN COTTEN



Lather in Heaven



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Ann Cotten

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The Bored Combo or How to Write Well

Nothing can be compared to the exquisite impression made by a bored combo.

The young flautist in Nicaragua will not leave my mind, his sullen boredom, in the blood, without luxury, his blond, heavy appearance, tanned by alcohol, his sensitivity. The boredom was the retainer for the spring of his soul, which was ready to fly up, one could easily see. It was there I first noticed the specific interest of long, shrill harmony notes.

It would be childish and ignorant to count boredom, stretched intentionally to where it borders on pain, among the phenomena of decadent modernism, isolated for the first time by Lord Chandos, propagated by the silent wing of Lautréamont's beast. Throughout the ages, boredom, i.e. mindless expanse, has always been the common ground of work and religion. And so, bride and groom must kneel for twenty minutes in total motionlessness in tremendous costumes, like clouds, while the priest, showing them his posterior, murmurs sutras; and so the day proceeds which is covered by alienated work, and so does the night in which one recovers from the work, one's own mirror image.

On the CD I am playing, while lying still in bed, my thoughts already almost touching my work – while the sun's fingers slip off the edge of the bookshelf – the "Sextet of Orchestra U.S.A." plays songs by Kurt Weill, and here I observe the effect of the bored combo in the purest manifestation I have heard yet. After the first ten minutes of the first piece, an adaptation of the *Alabama Song*, the merry, cool atmosphere, the goal of the jazz, seems to be used up, giving way to a sluggish readiness to perform the necessary notes to reach the end of the number of repeats of the theme fixed in the contract.

The exquisite linelike mood only really begins with Eric Dolphy's saxophone solo, in which it fully and clearly unfolds. After that the piece is over. In the next, the musicians are refreshed enough for the mud – if we accept the image of a tidal flat that has spread itself out in my head – to be somewhat bouncy, mostly thanks to the bass player. The general mood, however, is given.

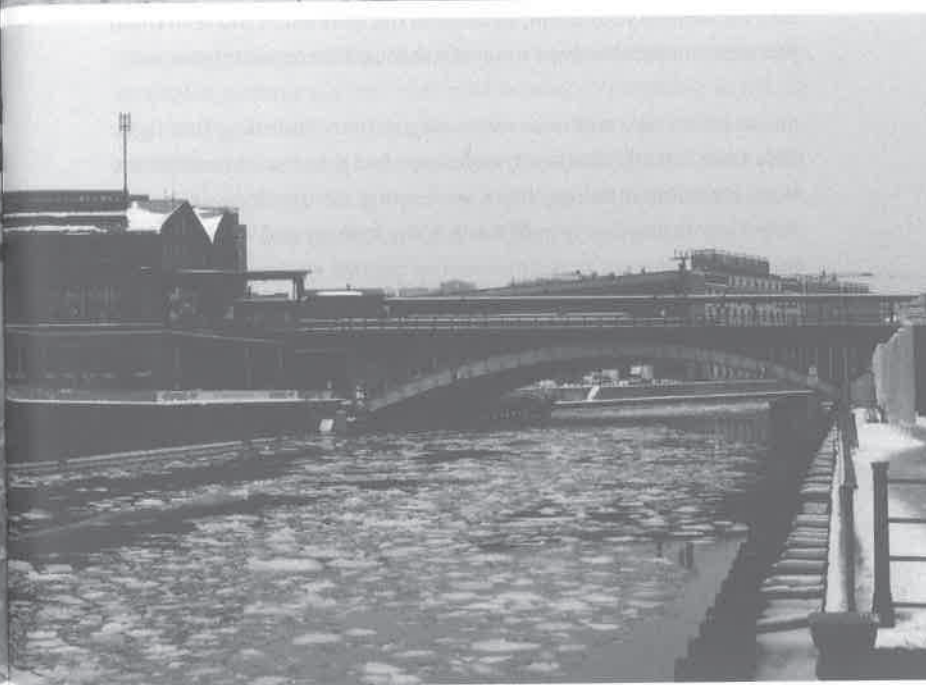
One feels oneself laying down his soul, I would like to continue, thinking of several concise little pieces by Musil that I was reading the other day in the state library, where I was supposed to be doing something else. Musil's idle pieces precisely matched my mood. Just as they had once struck the author, I suppose, again and again they struck me with some brilliant little image that offered itself into the faculty of imagination like a good tool falls into the hand. They set me in a mental state of awareness such as can sometimes be triggered by a sudden reflection of light from a building across the street, a startling sound like the voice of one's lover one thinks one heard on the other side of a bookshelf, or being almost run over.

Musil writes a very well-mannered style on the whole, even if one can sense a certain self-conscious array of doubts, like cement blocks in the very centre of the literature, while inexcusably the author thinks he is keeping himself out of the picture. They are the doubts of a young man of obstinate character whose fine and soft material has been well shaped by some ten or fifteen years of adulthood. Who is used to being physically very massively there, while his mind is quite unguessed at. Heimito von Doderer, on the contrary, lets himself go on and on with what I am tempted to call female humour, and puts himself under no constraints concerning the construction of his sentences; his images dangle, pluster, swing around like the huge breasts of a large woman who knows that lust are the – I mean, is the most important thing in life. In view of these two Austrian idols, I ask myself with some consternation – sitting, a tiny person, among hundreds, busy with their laptops and books, who all seem to have found guidelines for their work, and I tousle my hair, which can only be seen by anyone who looks up – how, I ask myself, in all the world does one come up with the zeal to really write well? And how does one apply it?

This is where the combo comes in. Its dozy gaze, directed towards an invisible horizon – what! *creating* with the lower edge of the upper eyelid its own soft horizon-rim, like a conveyor belt, and above it a black, close realm – meets my soul eye to eye, and she lays her head and shoulders down on it, as in a boring lesson at school. This is the effect of the combo.

They are not, however, playing a sine wave, but a reliable melody, in a manner that makes no secret of their reliability. While I wait in senseless exhaustion for the exhaustion to conclude, this melody pours knowledge into me that is, in a comical, I must however assume deeply trustworthy way, abstract and concrete at the same time. A relation of notes, spread in time; the reduced content of a novel the way Stendhal or Jakob Michael Reinhard Lenz might sketch it. Language possesses this calm intelligence, even when it remains unused. And just as one can say in the case of a man or woman with whom one sleeps at some distance from love (meaning all his limbs, bones and head) that it is good that he is like this and is here – unlike in the case of love, where any mental confusion is raised to impossible heights by hydraulic emotions so that one doesn't know how to live on, since every cell of the body one has chosen to cherish is boundlessly beautiful, endlessly endearing and infinitely desirable and one would have time for nothing else if one were to act right – one can leave the body of linguistic competence alone in a languid, commonsensical fashion, and think well of it, and, when it is time for this to be allowed, lay it down on a bed, under a feather comforter covered with a cotton sheath, that one pulls up over one's shoulders enough not to let in the draught of a doubt, and, content with the results of the good and reasonable work completed, take up the unknown, mystic and yet so healthy work of unconsciousness.

Let us – as the combo still plays from the CD, docile as ever – return to the aspect of the lover out of common sense, before he gets lost. He is still fresh in memory now. (Can one tell by the chains of arguments, flung so fancifully over the different levels, that I find myself in a hangover? It is as if, on an old system, a telephone agent had fallen asleep over work and vodka, without clearing off her board. The connections, if they hadn't been crossed by new ones, all remained as they were. In the morning, the cables show me a true image of the world the night before. Just like a cellist of my acquaintance writes out all possible fingerings for a new piece in the evening and in the morning knows which is the best to play – only a bit different. For me, the moment, which in her case is very brief, takes a much longer time, as I reap the effects of the combination work



Theory of Beauty

What beauty theories do you know?

At first try, I got stuck when I was flooded by the conviction that one must know all the literature on a topic one intends to write about. In other words, I didn't want to be alone.

The word Schiller flapped about in my head like a flag whose emblem I couldn't decipher, on a flagpole.

The gradual production of thoughts – where? how? – then into the bathtub. There they would be fired, like in a kiln.

I stopped there, I knew no theories of beauty. All the while in the back of my head waited patiently the conviction that it is better to follow your heart and only after getting where that takes you to compare your path with the theories of the others. Even so, your theory will only reluctantly carve itself out of your sloth. And you actually have read and forgotten some theories that have nevertheless sunk into the flesh of your mind, because at the time when you read them you were not yet able even to say if you found them accurate or not.

So I approach the task once more. August, early morning, first light. This time, I really don't care anymore what theories of beauty have been formulated before. Prätz is sleeping on the floor under the sofa. I am sitting at a spindly table in the hallway and writing for my life, for my honour. In such cases one cannot apply some prefabricated product. Last night, we each took $\frac{1}{4}$ card of LSD. We stole a role of tablecloth paper and rolled it out in the long dark park and shook a sea of waves out of it until it broke. We lay on the ground until we were chilly; then rode our bikes through the city. Nothing happened, we remained separate and cooperative, commented

a _____ a _____ a

The horror of absent vehemence is hard to grasp, but I can't sleep.

The trip – this thin veil of a trip – interests me because of a triadic principle of perception I seemed to notice, particularly while cycling. Normally perception doesn't appear this rhythmic. A dutiful realism drags one along, full of remorse and dread, and if one has some extra energy, one may adorn the deadening chaos with some fantastical surplus. Now, one shock after the next arrived, reality and thought as one, coming neither automatically nor wilfully, but somehow delightful like an instruction one finally follows, and it works at last: *Here I am!* (some joy over the well-known street) – check: am I not rolling into a car? – the answer: no; back to the thought from before... Shock: *Here I am!* – etc. Though at first sight this seems to be merely a retardation of processes that normally consciousness deals with at lightning speed – and maybe in a bit of a scramble – it tempts me to see something more in it, a relation of qualities of reality, a natural law of pause and fall, as if the prosody of consciousness, and not what we call content or principle, were the most reliable thing to define. As if molecules, atoms and thoughts were all of one common material: rhythm. Time disturbed in characteristic ways.

The translation of reality, that turns up as shocks, into pragmatic strategies perhaps survives the most hardily a crumbling mind, as one can see in drug zombies. But it too is only a step in the dance, no different from the step back into thought. The fall back into pragmatism continues in one line, leading to unpragmatism, what is abstract or dreamt, exaggerated – it doesn't exactly surprise me, but – that its music can be so beautiful! As if crystals were being formed. Crystals like those Stendhal writes about, thoughts that alight on a body like birds on a glue-smear branch, a branch that formed itself following the logic of sprouting and growth, held into a salt mine with crystallization in the air. The ideas are drawn out of the air and the difference of the twig makes them become concrete and they crystallize, mixing their abstract rules with this irregular basis.

And then come uniform spaces, pure expanses that we cleave to longingly as long as they last. We suck the milk of these pauses until they expire and we must go on.

But it is also a music of work (like all music, hums a background chorus of ethnologists), a triad like when one person throws a brick to another who catches it and inserts it in the wall where a third person has been spreading mortar. How the consciousness moves from the brick that falls into the hand to the idea of a wall, and in between keeps checking: before the brick hits the hand, the hand is already full of the idea of the brick.

But now to beauty. What is beauty. What is joy?

I will now blow up the concept of beauty, exaggerate its dimensions. Because I believe there is enough in it to understand art. And because beauty can make us better – but if not, what then? – but it can: If one believes in nothing else, it is beauty that is able to convince one. Only beauty is a strong enough force to rival fear, greed, conformism. In this function it will have to take the place of ideology and moral rules. It may even coax one back to religion if one doesn't watch out, even if it be merely the religion of photo technology, o you ageing flower voyeurs. Beauty needs only to be liberated from the consumerist habits it is often married to in the regions of capitalist illness of mind.

And then, and then? In all the suffering, the addictions to particular graces, the labyrinths of preferences and inexplicable insults (as beauty will not pay the dues one might be used to in a pseudo-meritocracy) the essential is never to fall back into the weakness of clinging to any leftover fragments of moralist dogma.

How do we recognize beauty? By our reaction. How is it?

Option 1 – Cry when beauty appears. The emphasis is on appears, that is why we cry. There is space for our tears. But there is no way to pass into the other, cross the canvas, enter the beauty.

1A: I cry for joy, because I am moved, or out of yearning. This wetness spews out of my eyes, out from behind the somewhat mobile line between eyeball and eyelids; notices itself. Stops half the way out, in doubt: it might be mistaken. In the face I am facing, the same doubts can be seen as a sudden dimming of the expression.

All that is over there blurs, seeming to confirm the evil premonition that beauty might not be stronger than the nonsense one brings with one, but might disappear at the first mistake or if one doesn't know how to continue.

How swiftly all this sensitivity arises and hurries to greet its expected echo, the approaching answer, like the sonic waves of a bat's orientation. How swiftly it falls back, disheartened by the mere possibility that disenheartenment could play an equally strong role as joy in the effective interpretation of the world.

1B: I cry out of self-pity: I, being outside of the beauty, can *only look at it*. All my perceptions just glance off the beauty and create eddies of emotion in myself only. Always everything is only applied to myself and comes out of myself and is assigned to myself, a hell of boredom: me, me, me.

Caught inside am I, and can do nothing with the beauty, separated from me by a glass wall, and am supposed to somehow agree to this situation. How? Why?

So I wish to answer the beauty. But how? This is the reason why art is so contagious.

For example, Option 2 – To write when confronted with beauty. In order not to cry, write. Like in music, while I excrete the black fluid of ineffectual fury against the situation, I can shape this outpour with fanciful grace. I am a bit consoled by my ability to do so, the result and the activity; I forget myself, like when skiing; I like myself, for I am no different than the elegance of any black ink in the world.

2A: To write, by the way, is to look away. No one can stand the expectant look that carries hopes up to beauties. It is an unbearable situation for the hopeful as well as for the hoped-at. A question has been asked, an answer is awaited. If no answer appears for longer than a split second, nothing will come of it. So, if the hope is not accepted immediately, as from the hand of the postwoman a letter sent to the right address, if the addressee does not immediately read his name on the envelope and accept, yes, this is for me – then I turn aside, write "I understand of course." Never must I want something that beauty would be forced to deny, for whatever reason, apathy,

anxiety, the problems it may be prone to. Never must I make beauty feel its limits. This caution is stilting, depressing. Knowing, too, that one's own hopes address beauty perhaps only following some capricious notion, certainly without any right to do so. One sets one's hopes on beauty because one likes to see it, and since one has to set one's hopes on something, why not set them on something one likes to see again and again?

So, rather than live the full disappointment, write a labyrinth. Call it style and civilization. This is why a painted picture is worth more than its model, because the artist has bent her grief into a trick, an emblem to hold against the inevitable disappointment of life: the superjoke.

To write a labyrinth of theory, then, to gain time against the perhaps inevitable moment when the wish will be turned down: the wish for a reciprocal spark of life out of the cosm (the beauty). As the wish need not fully show itself until the moment it is declined or fulfilled, it is a sane speculation to filibuster in labyrinthine theory against time.

2B: When one lacks the strength to maintain the labyrinth, when a shock throws the cogwheels out of line, or one just simply loses patience, one may commit brutalities, prematurely disconsolate: chop the piano to pieces. Brutality answers impossibility. Creation already is a kind of brutality, it is never quite delicate enough. One can see that perception is more delicate than creation by the fact that one cannot speak.

On tiptoe I circle my chair and throw the slightest of glances on the light shoulders, the shiny cheekbones of Prätz sleeping under the sofa. On tiptoe I return to my place, carefully lift the chair and set it down again, no scraping, carefully lower myself onto it, not a sound, only the one click from the lid of my pen.

I need sleep, I can't sleep. I must sleep, I can't sleep. I don't want to be alone, I am alone. No! *Lie straight!* Enough of the pitiful lobster-foetus position! *Style!* Communication, communion by style!

Beauty = possibility

Beauty is not – even if the beautiful think so and flail about in protest – something one can determine and then wrap up in cellophane. I would even say beauty is broken if I can't do anything with it other than look at it. If a beauty is broken, it breaks me in the same measure, if I have set any hopes in it. Perhaps hopes for some intrinsic, unknown wisdom, hints about the construction plans of a world that would appeal to me, being like this beauty.

– Odalisque: he is looking at me! –

No, it was only a sleep-sigh, an illusion.

Before me lies the black expanse of the decorative table. I peck at it once with the lid of my pen, quietly, then twice more. I remember woodpeckers, their musicality when they are in a good mood.

I suddenly have a valiant little idea: Decisiveness, I think, is necessary to create or attract beauty, I mean to say, it is necessary for things from now on to *be* what they are. They are no longer required to denote or function or pretend to be something else, fulfill the demands of a name, or any of those tasks – only then can they be beautiful. Beautiful would be, for example: single meanings, dedication, concentration, forgetfulness of self, movement.

Or – beware of yourself! – extrapolate from the shady side: Everything that is uncomfortable would not be beautiful: conflicts, stupidity of course, doubts, helpless oscillating.

Can't those things be beautiful as well? A Siamese fighting fish being eaten, its throes? How it is transparent for the life of theories that transcend it without helping it survive?

Let it go, you wax ideologic.

I stare out of the window. Potted plants are standing around in my range of vision.

There remains the hope that beauty could *communicate* with me. It is not about its intentions, but I need beauty to be able to tell me things I wouldn't think of on my own.

While conversely, all methods and instructions on how to *deal with* beauty – this phenomenon that seduces one into the world

without the slightest promise that one won't remain alone and impossible, without the slightest implication that one will be able to *do* anything with the beauty – are nothing for me. The idea of making oneself less painfully hopeful, for example, by working on oneself, fabricating some kind of resignation, some logic of suffering and reward, has not the slightest interest for me. These notions are not bearable enough to allow me to lie down and sleep with them in my head. I don't want to live without beauty, without its utopia: this possibility that it could be true, that there might be a spark of life common to me and beauty. But that is precisely the deception: The spark is already here; there is nothing more than this.

I don't want to resign myself to some work to be done alone on myself, work with the goal of making me resign to the idea that the only thing I really wish is impossible.

The shape of your wish is wrong, they say, meaning to console me. I am to continue working on myself: Style your wish so that it can be fulfilled.

But I learned the wish from the shape of things, I retort, sadly rubbing my scalp.

I must sleep, I can't sleep. I want to sleep, but sleep won't take me. I must remain here above the tiles, must sit here in the hall. I must accept it, I cannot accept it. If I could only sleep without disappearing, if only I could lay myself in the hands of beauty.

Sleep is avoiding me, though I am so tired. I sit in all the light and don't see it.

Beauty is the other.

This I write with particularly noble letters. I am not one of those people who consider themselves beautiful and the others spectators! If I want beauty to be the other, I must assign him a subjectivity, a wishing, a possible point of view. I must hear him – and indeed I want to – must consider him and give him space to formulate his being. He may want to hide from me, protect himself from my eye, in order to unfold in the necessary self-forgetfulness. Self-forgetfulness, isn't it what we all want? And if I use the beauty of someone else to forget

myself, the situation cannot hold for very long, if the other doesn't happen to be a very pronounced narcissist.

If he utters a taboo, I must have come too close with my way of being and storming everything with words. He draws a chalk circle around himself because he is afraid – and turns me into a demon by doing so.

And yet he has stayed here, sought me, only to show me the limits, again and again. Me, the dog with the eyes as big as saucers, who has forgotten to be itself. – Now I can choose, when tomorrow begins, to withdraw into the shadows, or to turn to dust. O if I only knew how to do the latter! – Quiet – wait – it is not yet certain if all this is really so. Listen:

How does beauty speak?

Like plants, by changing.

If we take gradual change as a kind of talk, and put a subjectivity behind it, we would have movement, perhaps a language. A subjectivity that remains identically itself, on the one hand, and on the other uses itself as means of expression. That is not what I mean. I mean more like in plants: in a being's physical changes, we have something that completely modifies its existence and identity, through and through, be it purposefully or by accident, self-consciously or self-forgetfully – and this change tells me something. Beauty cannot lie, not without using its complete existence.

And then of course you could say that the beauty of lying is that it changes your complete existence.

A man, for example, gets older and the traits around his mouth tell me what he never could, or would: something about life and his attitude towards it; I watch these traits slowly develop and transform themselves, deepen. And since I like the man, I find myself agreeing, allowing myself to be convinced that the relation the line suggests between the man, the world and my view on it all might be acceptable, might even be loveable.

No! I cut new curves into this face, fresh curves, untouched by life!

Yes, but does he feel as sweetly designated by them as he would if I were to simply trace the lines that are there and allow a senseless little lamp of love to go on, making warmth and leading him to believe that a thought or some way of being that emanates from him, or perhaps his shape itself, however unwittingly and unwillingly conferred upon him, makes me love him by the force of logic, and though he wouldn't know how exactly it worked, the fact that it worked, which would be indicated by the little lamp, would help him make his peace with the world? No!

My new curves through his face do not tell him he is good – except as material for more. They merely offer him the opportunity to leave himself. Such brutality can be intoxicating. Ask him yourself if he actually wanted to go that way and didn't dare, or if he kept taking the knife out of my hand because he really didn't want these possibilities. I don't know.

In sudden worry that he could hear these reminiscences, or read them, I jump up and have another look at the sleeping Prätz. His arms hang out of the sleeping bag into the room.

What counts as beauty?

Before answering this question, I lick my lips, gaze over the rows of beauties that come to mind, a row of shapes stretching beyond the horizon, like Kaiser Friedrich scrutinized his freshly kidnapped recruits. I choose one. I know I like to hear his voice –

But that is not a part of beauty, I can in no way regard this liking from the outside. Perhaps the notion of beauty is created by my attempt at a cool, disengaged perspective and as a relation, exactly what Prätz the beautiful is trying to eschew.

But I always called beautiful any object that caught my attention. It was always just the way it was, and *I* changed until I found it beautiful.

More interesting: Is similarity a part of beauty? (For example, sometimes he looks like a wilful big girl.) I think beauty could consist of similarities, like molecules consist of relations. Between the relations, of course, lie elements, some of which are of the same

kind, some of which are different. What is really relevant is the arrangement, the constellation of the elements, characteristic even in relativity and with other content. This holds my world together, the recognition of constellations in all the materials of the world: sound, woods, people, patterns, movements, thoughts, twigs, paths, proportions. They are like spoken verse that weave the universe, shine their light on it along the lines of their cuts and similes. Universe that without all this telling and seeing would lie loosely beside itself, folded in on itself, black mass of all.

But not everything is beautiful. But everything resembles everything else in countless ways, we know. Beauty, then would be similarity plus selection? Evil.

The room is full of books! Deuce, what a concentration of folly!

And where do the lust and the power come from to judge beauty? This must be strictly reviewed. Who considers something beautiful for the wrong reasons, the beautiful or the ugly? (The subject's own convictions count.)

The beauty is self-conscious. He knows he is speaking about himself when he talks about beauty. A) He can be glad and happily feel the descriptions of beauty run down his sun-tanned body like cool water. B) He refuses his luck, either using a compensation theory and counting up the bad traits he has "instead" or mentioning the many dangers for one's character that being beautiful entails, or with a compensatory promise for the future: He vows to be particularly nice. Runs to be with the ugly. Makes himself ugly. Often the really beautiful beauties do that, the ones that were given not only a pretty face but a pretty soul to match.

The ugly can A) declare beauty to be something otherworldly, something of nature (herself being culture), something surreal, fake, something divine, or B) use a compensation theory: beauty versus intellect, beauty versus moral integrity. She will not see beauty as normality, and will consider the beautiful to be people that cannot escape the stamp of being special – if only through the attentions of the ugly.

F) What about the sublime? The elephant woman is the most beautiful of all, because the perception of her beauty requires and creates the most movement in the viewer.

C) Both can, as always, analyse everything and divide into ever smaller categories, until the concepts fall apart.

The real question is what status morality has. Is it supposed to have things under control in our mind? Then we would have to live in fictions. We would live with compensation theories and subordinate our thought to a kind of moral economy. Nemesis divina would guarantee a natural balance, like we admire in natural history books. Or else, morality bustles around alongside rapture and sensitivity and physical phenomena, shone on by the sun of beauty, whom all parties recognize as the inexplicably potent divinity.

I have come down now pretty much. Things are glowing grey, like sleeping eyes. Sleep now. Tomorrow, late in the morning, I will admit everything, I will see everyone's point of view. Morality, let it wash my feet like a sea I need not enter if it is too wet.





Manatees of Art

Near the old tanning mill, where the water of the canal chops its wavelets together with those of the connecting waterway to the sluice, campfires glow in the halfnight, while high up on the houses, the firewalls reflect the last of the day. Black swans pass by, unnoticed. There follow some home-made pleasure boats, trailing lights. The Indie hits from five years ago waft across the water. We are delighted to be sitting here still, after so many hours of golden afternoon and through the whole dusk. Now it is almost night. We shiver a little, catching a whiff of beauty from out of the bushes. But are we capable of facing beauty, any better than Beavis and Butthead? Much is possible, we know beyond doubt, but we cannot think of what it could be. We sit around and ask ourselves silently what is missing. From time to time a dog passes by with a person, farther back, invisible in the dark. Two DJs, conversing quietly. Phoque, whose birthday it is, has spread out a splendid meal for us and brought wine in plenty. Larino brought a generic Italian herbal liqueur and tiny shot glasses out of plastic. There has been hardly any conversation up to now. We haven't seen one another for a long time; we are absent-minded and don't touch each other. "And how long have *you* been missing your father?" "I can't afford to hang out with people over a certain age, or with family. Their pitiful little pleasures, their morally suggestive lifestyle, in all its blandness, contagious or just repelling – it makes me go totally *evil* –" "Absolutely! If I have to participate in it, I start to hate it. So I prefer to stay away." "Even if it's a bit lonely." Enough! I bang my emptied shot glass onto the picnic blanket and rise to speak. I will tell you about Mayumi, listen my friends.

To study wild animals one must go where they live. Consider the manatee as the bubble of substance that unfolds its characteristics in art, and one can quasi-see it in bars. There, one will not learn anything about the inner life of the manatee, but about the turbulences they make as they pass underneath and around each other, floating, searching. And thus one will have improved one's knowledge and be more familiar with the water and the lettuce that also floats about in it.

I must, however, stray a bit from the straight path, bear with me my friends. I tell you it will be worth it. Mayumi is a machine for thinking about art, and that is our profession, right? I personally couldn't do without the idea of Mayumi ever since I came across her.

1st - SAU-MAU'S BARBECUE

When I first met Sau-Mau and Yunni, Sau-Mau invited me to her barbecue that was scheduled for two months later. From then on she spoke of it every time we met. Finally, the day of the barbecue arrived, a rainy Sunday in southwestern Honshu.

Sau-Mau was a tiny woman whose face was powdered to a startling white, determined and open. When talking with foreigners, whose company she sought, she made nasal sounds and said "I see." It sounded terrible, too loud and quite insincere. I would have preferred her to pepper her listening like other people with "Eeee?", "Mmn!" and "So so so so so", at any pitch for all I cared. If I had been male, I surely would have tried to make love to her and draw her out of her shell and hold her in my arms. The way it was, I sat across from her and idly, shyly peered behind her liquid foundation. Let her nasal "oh really" flow over me and disregarded it. Who was she? Who can one be when one spends eight hours at work and four in one's car on the way there and back? Her feelings took the form of preferences, her likeness to plaster and pure energy. I call that civilization. It cannot be good, though I admired Sau-Mau. Decisive and tough. Did she want out? Yes.

Sau-Mau's barbecue took place at a show farm on the outskirts of the city. All day it rained incessantly and I decided to use the rain poncho that I had found in the shoe cupboard. So drivers saw a mysterious figure in a poncho walking away from the train station along the side of the road, keeping a close lookout for a show farm and hitting the wet grass from time to time to hide her embarrassment. Another crazy foreigner to add to all the crazy Japanese. I had long given up worrying about how I looked doing the things I did, or at least decided not to try to base my decisions on it. The last four months I had spent cruising about residential areas, checking out hard rock bars and museums on a small sky blue ladies' bike, apart from longer tours where I followed regulated brooks beyond

the city limits, passing through kilometres of rice fields and truck stops, ending up spooked in a strange-smelling bamboo patch or at the gate of a deserted university. I thought up guidelines and tried to stick to them until corrections became necessary.

After a small tunnel and a sharp turn, the show farm announced itself to me with a very large cow made out of plywood standing in the driveway. Plastic grids protected me from the mud and led me around several buildings to a large white festive tent protecting eight square concrete grills and several groups of guests sitting on concrete stools. Some guests were already drinking beer, others were having conversations with one another. Sau-Mau told me they were all engineers from her company. At the beginning, the members of the groups around the different grills kept glancing over to the other groups, but soon after they forgot about each other. Employees of the show farm approached the picnic parties with baskets full of raw, sliced food, as it had been ordered. The engineers and Yunni laid mushrooms, carrots, sweet potatoes, pepper, thin slices of pork and beef, chicken spits and minisausages onto the grill. I list everything, because it is a complete list: nothing was missing, there was not more. Thick teriyaki sauce was there to dunk things in. For dessert, some people had brought little packages of biscuits.

Sau-Mau introduced me to Wolfgang, a long, obstinate Englishman who spoke Japanese whenever he possibly could, and to Joseph Mostrich. Joseph was a small American, puffy, soft and dexterous, without allowing himself the tricks of a European. He spoke with only one-half of his face because he had suffered a stroke, as I was later told. Or was it hepatitis, I can't remember for sure, or was he just one of these unpleasant, artificially composed people whose face resembles a pillow and suggests limitless brutality in some corner of their character? I fortunately had no occasion to find out whether the third, occult theory was unjust or not. Joseph had the chance to show a glimpse of his brutal side; but all I really smelt of it was his willingness to become sentimental about kitschy movies.

How it came to four of us dancing the madison beside the grill, I cannot say exactly. The madison seemed to fit the tent, we traced square after square. Wolfgang, the long Englishman, Moori, the fat engineer who was to travel to Russia on business in a few weeks,

Dame, a twisty, jovial schoolboy of an engineer who was taking English lessons with Sau-Mau without any noticeable success, and myself. When we were done, we sat down on the stools and waited to see what would happen next. One conversation after the other was taken up again, beer opened, and the last charred things on the grill were consumed by shy men and women who would not allow themselves to desire other guests more than leftovers. The rain fell and fell, and not the slightest change of the light made any hint of dusk. Dame leaned in to me a bit more with every sip of beer, as if he had difficulty understanding my English. Wolfgang's pride melted, Sau-Mau made him laugh. Joseph Mostrich began – with reticent dignity, in view of his foe Wolfgang – to unpack his virtues, seeing that he would have to explain what he did to awaken any of my interest in his chubby fifty-year-old self. By speaking quietly to his own chest, he gathered a round of heads that banned the weak white light from his environs, though it had penetrated the rain and the shade of the tent. Only Wolfgang's horsey laugh floated over, regularly excited by the good Sau-Mau, who glanced over to us while he laughed.

When I was briefed on Joseph's scientific specialty area and had acknowledged the fact that he knew about 20 000 Kanji characters, I went around the building to smoke with Yunni. It wasn't exactly that Joseph had been boasting, he was just communicating facts. The things he had talked about filled his days.

How calm Yunni was, but full of realistic dreams and real experiences. We began to get used to the place, the pale light above the ashtray, the little bit of wall between us, the plastic grids, memories of America. Then we all tidied up the fireplace and set off to meet again at Shooter's for the Swing night.

TRANSIT

Each of us walked a bit slantedly, influenced by the rain and the beer and the conversations. Now I was riding the subway with Wolfgang. He said nobody wanted to speak Japanese with him, while he had enjoyed great popularity as long as he spoke English. He explained this pragmatically, I reexplained it in terms of abstract psychology. He explained to me the phases of spending decades in Japan. I admitted that I still liked everything a lot. The subway swayed gently,

the pale green velvet of the seats caressed our shins as well as the shins in tights of the Japanese women beside us. All catapulted out of the life outside into the subway. Outside, twilight had finally arrived; the light was golden as it penetrated the rain and entered into the subway car, touching the hair, the sweat-heavy skin, the shining napes of the Japanese, like a gentle, laughing love that everyone saw, but that only those answered who had no regular job.

2ND – SHOOTER'S

In the dismal white cube that formed the entrance to the pub on the first floor, we all met up again and stormed up the stairs. From one square to the next! Wolfgang and Joseph withdrew into a corner to quietly water their mutual hate and lure information out of each other. They formed the eye of a hurricane of Irish hockey players, who had nothing of the refinement I had hoped for thinking for a moment of ice hockey. But I didn't care really. Dame and I found the bar, and after ordering, we each found a small bucket of crushed ice full of Gin Tonic at nose level on the bar: the output of a happy hour whose position in the day was more and more unclear, and then the Swing lesson began. Dame and I were paired with a young music teacher and her mother. The music teacher was a limp girl with sweaty hands, the mother a clever woman, but both remained impervious to the beautiful mystery of twice four steps fitting three two-quarter measures. In fact, and that was actually the problem, they did not quite realize there *was* a mystery. Because it was such a relevant mystery. An eternally shifting difference, always ending up resolved, but unforgetten and productive, the great American joke of the sexes. But the two women were used to resignation and seemed to mind much less than I that they were never with the music. The question of the relation of a rule to something like emotionally experienced natural mathematics did not interest them, nor that they were being asked to use their bodies, with a kind of humouristic precision and overview over several beats, to bear out the inequality that was only distressing if one focussed on a single measure. Swing, the dance of the kitchen assistant, is not a dance for subjects – not for those conscious of their subjugation. Swing is a dance for people who take injustice in a sportive way and are proud

of that. For people willing to balance the injustice with their bodies. So maybe it is a dance for Japanese women after all. Dame, the engineer, was at any rate used to such rhythms, and set off with gusto, flying through the room in groups of five, six, even seven and eight. Easily his waist spun into and out of my arm. When the organized part of the lesson was over, we let fly, like slides for beats leading all through the room, my arm around him like the string of a windup top, then I dived through under his bent elbow like a train through a tunnel, as two rhinoceri we twirled each other horn on horn, and soon his long neck was wound around mine in order to decorate the bar with a bouquet of poppy-like french kisses. One can still admire the group photograph of swing night at Shooter's on their website, in the top right hand corner one can see Dame and me, tongues in necks. But shortly afterward I declined to join him under the staircase in the dingy white cube of the stairwell. He had become so very much the flowing movement of a snake, and I was not inclined towards even more world-forgetful manoeuvres, or maybe I was scared to go too far, in any case we shook hands, he set off towards the subway and I returned to the bar. At the door I met – serious and no longer laughing – Wolfgang and Joseph. They seemed to be just leaving. The young woman doing the entry formalities needed to be anointed with enough small-talk to call her a friend henceforth. At the same time, the basic loneliness of every foreigner made such trouble easy. During the interaction she stamped the 10+1 bonus cards and assigned me a fresh one. Then we were free and following Joseph's suggestion we walked around the corner to Rost's Ranch.

3RD – ROST'S RANCH

Wolfgang said goodbye at the door, but Joseph and I were already inside. Rost greeted us with warm wet towels, Joseph injected us into a round of acquaintances who continued to discuss the problems of an elderly painter with his visa after we had been introduced and ordered whiskey. The painter had a close-cropped white beard and piercing blue eyes and was wearing a multicoloured tropical shirt. His professional method was to bike around the countryside and paint the portraits of old houses close to self-demolition. His paintings were full of detail. They consisted of myriad tiny coloured areas,

framed in colourful frames in frames. It looked as if he painted with those coloured pencils with six-fold coloured leads. No melancholy, no evil could find a crack to nest in. That was how he was and he could not understand that his visa was simply discontinued for no reason. Originally from New Jersey, he had not lived there since he was twenty; if they expelled him from here, he would have no home and die soon, was the general opinion. On the edge of tears, he played endlessly with his keychain. The conversation circled.

Suddenly the whole room started clapping, a couple had climbed the stage, which was built out of whole logs. They began to sing duets by Johnny Cash and around them their own living room arose. Rost tried to chime in on his banjo, but gave up soon and procured the tambourine from the wall, which he passed on to a young drinker. Then he returned to the bar to prepare fresh draft beers for the singers. For several decades Rost Ranger had kept a bar for circus artists in Paris. Then his mother had become ill, and he had returned to his home town to take care of her. The fact that foreigners felt at home in his bar was Rost's pride. He fulfilled the expectations of Japanese service without seeming subordinate or impressionable like most proprietors of cafés and bars. For this reason the foreigners trusted him, and this helped him love the foreigners more.

Now a young woman appeared on the stage whom I had already noticed at Shooter's: the square in person! A handsome head balanced above the TV-shaped body, looking a bit surprised. When she sang, it was as if a tube monitor had a soul. Strange case of a mechanical apparition that provides its own power to escape into the nonmechanical through the poetry of absolute presence. She looked like a puppet theatre when she moved her head. When puppets impersonate serious matters, one's breath catches – she sang...

What a strange dream this was – or what aggregate state of a dream? The log-hewn stage, the whiskey, the music, the loneliness, the faces – it was no dream, it was real, it was realer than real, like coal is real wood. Artfully densified reality, pushed together by a concert of random forces. No longer the tiniest bit dynamic, the dream was material, it was lived, a thick version, given an incarnation in a person who was there to perform fate. Is this the case with every bar?

Like a worm in the wood, Joseph Mostrich sat with his back to the wall, surrounded by his rotating friends, and began to be even more interested in me. The more he questioned me and admired the answers, so that I felt like a clever horse, the more the Nottingham Nietzschean sitting at the other side of the table belittled them. He gathered his brows together like a bull in a cubistic composition and listed the poets who had meant a lot to him: Keats, Wordsworth and Tennyson. O strange Japan! Hold-up tank for sensitive, disciplined workers for whom the rest of the world is not good enough! For the 2,5 metre man at the end of the table closest to the door with the tiny boy's face under a wreath of angelic ringlets, mechanic and motorcycle artist, arrogance was the sonic boom of the shock of his own beauty that he was processing slowly. At the moment the effect was a moody tendency to say little and the ability to leave swiftly and without hesitation, which he did. And yet, when he held open the door for somebody, one could discern an inner humility whose proper area of application was not yet quite clear to the motorcycle artist. But he would change, after all, he was in Japan. Once he got used to the incredible coincidence that he was so tall, so beautiful, so intelligent and diligent enough to learn Japanese. Joseph noticed my study and insisted on leaving the bar.

4TH – SKY BAR

After several uncertain steps on the newly found sidewalk, Joseph Mostrich suggested we go to a bar on the 62nd floor of a well-known skyscraper. As it was a tourist attraction, I could, according to my principles of curiosity, not say no. And I could hardly be afraid of the small, soft Joseph Mostrich, would slip out of his grip elegantly and soon forget the worry of having insulted him. And I was so sick of moralistically tearing myself to bits for loving the night, the air and the furniture more than the people. As long as it all kept going on.

In the elevator the well known sudden silence of elevators, the sound of a vacuum abyss that hits the ear like a humidity. We look at each other. He has recognized my category long ago, human, girl, monk; I regard the man who was no beauty, surely, even in youth, but intelligent, mobile, and clever and gentle with age. But he thinks in categories. The wishes have gathered in his face like little creases.

With a certain expression, a crease appears in the middle of his forehead, a wish. What kind of wish? I look away, and yet have seen the naked wish. I see the white, bunched nape of discontent that discontent pushes into the world when being obstinate with self-pity. A pale, rounded academic back, hung with gentle fat. Wants to be hit or desired, attract annoyance if nothing else, so very gently, by uttering the wish, whether it be welcome or not. But Joseph doesn't go that far. He has a film in mind that he would like to use as a bridge between himself and me, but I haven't seen it, it is a piece of US-American kitsch, I only know the title and the aura and have always hated it without any further inspection. And so we sit, in this generous, narrow, black bathtub of a bar, with drinks and peanuts, and my gaze starts ambling over the city lights that are slowly rotating.

I think of my friend Quarthild and the other valiant Johannas of the academies whose wishes are as hard to find as their glance is, because they have taught themselves to love their work and their dignity, that grows on their work as on moist cotton wool. The sun being reduced by their work to nothing more than an idea, same place as always, without any real hope, since the hope has been consumed by reality. No!

I remained motionless for some time, sat like a lightless silence in the lightless silence and listened to the miniscule Mozart symphony escape from the slits of the sofas like a little spaceship flying away from a black hole. Why did I feel nothing for Joseph Mostrich, why? Why was I able to order the white wine, accompany with my finger the drop of condensation down the side of the glass and the stem until it was sucked into the red napkin where the narrow hand of an incredibly elegant waitress had set it, but not feel what it looked like, what it felt like to be a young woman sitting with Joseph Mostrich in a bar high above the city, and not ordering a cola? He wanted nothing but romance; but this was it, romance, robe of embarrassment, basic humor of all human existence, the sovereignty over one's own style. That was what estranged me in my rain poncho of gourmet attitude in relation to emotion. But they say I had money and youth and some beauty, and so I blundered on and got away once more. To our left and right sat Japanese couples. In exactly the same silence. They whispered few words to each other, and our

silence, my inability to understand made them sparkle in brilliant resolution. No doubt they were just as estranged as I. How invisible it is whether or not someone feels what they are doing. Or can one see it on me? I became polite and laid my hand gently on Joseph Mostrich's soft hand while I answered no when he asked me if we should go to a Love Hotel. What an outrageous, what an insulting idea, in the guise of policy. Here in this minute I felt something, the wide range of possible reactions: I could cut myself in half alive, could search for some feeling for the fellow, like searching for one's portemonnaie in one's handbag on the street; I could let myself fall in to this with the existentialist method and perhaps really be unexpectedly consoled by the attentions of this soft man. That would begin with somehow getting in some way apprehensive or excited on the way to the Love Hotel, forgetting his sad US style, the resignation and focus on the pragmatic that seeped from every one of his pores – or say goodbye with friendly feelings, as I now proceeded to do. Committed to a logical illusion of logic, rather than to a person. Why you could be my father, I said, and politely tapped the soft hand, as if anything were answered with that.

I sat, soaking my fingertips in the condensation – always white wine in cocktail bars, on a red paper napkin that seems to emanate quiet reproaches, and white wine in pubs, on a Christmas napkin that indicates when the bottle was last taken out of the refrigerator. And Joseph and I, sitting on our asses on an island of discretion that seems to indicate when each of us had sex the last time. And my distaste for having the slightest thing in common with Joseph, a US man – i.e., *a guy* – who does everything gently and whom I can't stand, if for no other reason than that he has got used to himself.

I was absent for a while, was in my office at the little university with its industrial aesthetics, saw its lighter view over the little campus and the whole smog-pale city Nagoya. *A pretty boy passing on a bicycle*. Without fear I regarded Joseph's blue eyes and said, I think, with my gaze, clearly and sanely, that for not terribly interesting reasons I declined to slide into a romantic situation with him. When we said goodbye down on the street and he melted into my shoulder and passed a few tears, I was laughing silently, though full of possible pity, possible friendliness – what is friendliness without

friendship as behaviour in time and space? It is then only an empty promise, given uninformedly, impossible to keep. I laughed the laugh of one certain to get away. My soul knows it wouldn't carry the burden of someone so pitifully pining for love for so long, even if I had decided to, for moralistic reasons, as Joseph was wordlessly suggesting – and so I can say no more about Joseph Mostrich, whom I eshewed.

5TH – 500-YEN-BAR

No sooner had Joseph's round back disappeared into the subway entrance than I turned on my heel and set off toward the 500-Yen-Bar, a small asylum where one could occasionally meet young English teachers. Why do you spend time in bars, you ask, if you are so unkeen on meeting people? But I tell you, there is no good reason to enter bars, the reasons are like the balloons hung up to celebrate new takeovers, disjunct, unnecessary, somehow their own reason, a childish habit, providing a moment to soften and be vulnerable and sentimental. Men hanging up balloons in bars want to be a bit more accessible than otherwise. Quite apparently it is a detour that most people one finds looking for something in bars don't take. They are more serious and want to travel, without having to laugh, on the highway of one single pathos from their serious work, which their clothes still demonstrate, to the more holy seriousness of a deep-rooted romance. This leads with unfettered hormonal power to births and households, and thus the seriousness of work and the seriousness of deep love are augmented by everything the child has reason to be annoyed with, all the ridiculousness of parents who never took the time to find themselves silly when they were still free to do so, time they spent, however, frantically searching for the interstate highway of the love of their life. So, down into the damned butterfly pot 500-Yen-Bar.

Just in front of the 500-Yen-Bar, Mushislav Duckhose came walking.

Mushislav Duckhose is the leader of several bands of which he is the namesake, wears glittery gymnastic suits and high hairdos when performing, mimes sexual intercourse with the microphone stand and walks up and down on the stage thrashing his beautifully

feminine hips. He teaches English at secondary schools and has a number of delightful English accents that make him sound like the prince of Manchester or a furry Welsh octopus. I don't know exactly why but I was incredibly happy to see him. We gathered momentum on the pavement and came up and gave each other greyhoundish kisses on the cheek, using our best phrases in each of our *fake English accents*, knocking each other's hats off each others' heads, then he introduced his friend to me, a shy potter dressed all in felt, cut so subtly that one only noticed when one put one's arm around him.

6TH – NEW LOGIC

Mushisav and the potter locked arms with me left and right – probably noticing I had already experienced some of the evening by the shameless length of my gaze on their profiles left and right of mine – and we walked to the New Logic. This was a bar with many single compartments and rooms. Brightly coloured drinks decorated our hands as soon as we had passed the door, and we had trouble getting rid of them, unsure if they were a good thing to drink. Little dishes of luminous konnyaku, egg, algae and carrot strips reflected the idleness of our chopsticks. I set the dishes in a row on the sill of a blind paper window that screened a neon lamp, while Mushislav and I exchanged information about our lives in a whisper. The information would have been more interesting if we had not been sitting so close. Our hands, tangled in the scene, began to trace elegant curves over the bodies of the rest and play complicated methods with knuckles on the table as a xylophone. I soon was in the belief that Mushislav's body was a slot car racetrack, the potter the green felt lawn surrounding it. After several rounds I noticed that I was only covering the felt. The potter had retreated into a corner, where he squatted naked on top of a stack of pillows. That was too distant for my compass.

I closed my eyes to the potter and concentrated my attentions on Mushislav's flittery curves. This highway divided, as if an earthquake was splitting the earth, and a white breastbone appeared. It was his own. I was able to continue driving, oddly I had no fear but shifted to third. Suddenly a flesh-coloured barrier materialized from behind the glittery asphalt's zipper. Toll gate – underworld, I recog-

nized at once. I had not opened this tunnel, it had opened itself, so I could rejoice without restraint. I stroked the bar, specially appreciating and upholding its cylindrical, not completely cylindrical form. Shortly after that, the earth reared up and laid me down on latex-covered pillows. Mushislav's long and pointed tongue spoke mantras at my edge, which I did not completely, however partly did understand. Everything we did was, remarkably, completely symmetrical, for which I felt intensely thankful towards Mushislav Duckhose. The members to the right of our collective body axis assumed the same positions, whether they belonged to him or to me, the same intentions guided them on the left and on the right. Even above and below and in the feelings, a symmetrical mood organized us happily.

How long? How else? Why did I like it with my head like a good language lesson? I sprang up and threw Mushislav to the ground. At once he was up again, and threw me to the ground. I up and threw him. Where is the barrier when one seeks it? He me again, I staggered on purpose and fell, landed, laughing, on the pillows and motioned with my hands that he should approach with his barrier of which the end knew more than I believed before I knew, and also so that I could with full hands reach around his hips to hold the soft cheeks of his ass.

But he didn't want to kiss. That was fine with me. If we had kissed, I would have had to close up the back side of my mouth inside my head and grab his nape instead, which would have shrunk my heart. In all this movement each of us protected their lack of readiness to love as an exit toward freedom and entrance for it; that freedom that it was so pleasant to deal with protected the world from being flooded by too narrow affections. Neither of us, meanwhile, wanted to admit to being here for no particular reason. So one drifted easily away. Into this undulating landscape of naugahyde whose shininess seemed to swell and wander, and from there into an odd, cloud-concealed sun one once saw in Wittenberg, a sun whose reticent neigh now seemed to come out from under the armpit of the other, whereupon one had to open one's eyes again to see what kind of hair grew there, a pleasantly feasible task a bit like searching up a certain quote in a known place in the bookshelf beside one. Desire surprised us again every five minutes, desire that

sprang up like a quite unexpected idea, time after time, us being so stupid in comparison. We were also surprised by the love that each of us had for the beauty of the other alone, not for the whole person, whom we didn't know after all, but warm and massive, like any love. Thus we remained free.

At the end of one turn that brought us side by side, banned by symmetry, we suddenly stared at the potter who had fallen asleep in his corner. Then looked at each other, and I saw Mushislav's humourist, womanly mouth quivering at the brink of laughter, the endlessly beautiful velvet eyes in their almond-cases, of the brown of great kindness, but black like the night around a temple, far and near, constant and flighty, cool and warm, old, gentle, proud – don't get lost! We looked at the potter again. His semen had flowed down the whole stack of rubber pillows like the artificial waterfall in the Viktoriapark in my home town. I considered telling Mushislav about this delicious simile with selected words and extensive gestures, but refrained. We covered the potter with his loden and left the bar arm in arm. With exaggerated enthusiasm we gave each other the extravagantly arching goodbye kisses of birds of paradise and pranced away in opposite directions, each dragging a long peacock tail of loud internal laughing; so many merry, shining, night-tired eyes like a string of tin cans for the way home from marrying oneself, once again. I walked through the rain-mist, it was growing light, the birds were budding and saying things I could not have expressed any better. I know no more.

When I woke up I remembered something, it is what I forgot to tell you about just now.

7TH – NARRATIVE FRAME

Larino, please laugh now, throw your hands up in the air, be unable to contain your mirth over how "wonderfully impossible" I am to hold up the whole party for two hours telling all about this afternoon and evening in Nagoya, but completely forget to mention what I actually wanted to tell you about: Mayumi! What about Mayumi? Laugh, laugh! Is it not almost more fun to talk about laughter than to actually do it? Not? Well. "Almost" is a thorn, a goad, hard, tangible when it is there, as well as when it is not there.

Mayumi, then. Mayumi is round as a beach ball, has short hair dyed orange and a way of speaking English as if she were pressing sticky rice balls into one's hands. Mayumi is the absolute artist of absolute art. It is her I want to talk about really. Mayumi, universal genius of her own life, fashion and art photographer, author of a film script and a book and, as it turned out, the former lover of the 2,5 metre motorcycle man whose beauty drove her to insanity, her, whose intelligence, obstinacy, sheer power equalled her self-forgetfulness and self-reflection.

Mayumi, centre of the cosm, unique planet, gravitational focus, yea black hole of humour, Mayumi. Of all my emotionless aberrations, she was perhaps the only direct hit, who knows? I can say almost nothing – in view of Mayumi, the factors I otherwise adjust my opinion around all appear distorted. Since I met her, she has assumed the role of an abstract god of art come to reform the regime of my judgement, all because her seriousness is 100% congruent with her humour. How can that be? No one has ever experienced this, unless you have met Mayumi.

Only, how to portray this? Larino, you must promise to throw up your hands in the air after every example I give, and almost fall over backward laughing and be unable to contain yourself about how hilarious it is. You can do this, I know, and it is not so crucial what I talk about.

8TH – BACK IN BERLIN

Ever since our encounter in Rost's Ranch, which I forgot to mention, Mayumi has been sending me about one to five emails every day. One day I will get the first mail, let us say, at 9:30, with a photo of a Caffè Latte with ice cream and a pretty piece of candy. Half an hour later I get a dark tour of Mayumi's apartment and a second mail with the cover of a CD, front and back. At 14:30 it's dinner time: soba and tea, or, another time, toast impressed with a smileyface flower by a special amusement toaster, alongside water with ice cubes and coloured floating deco, on a pastel place mat with European silverware. After dinner, blurry photographs of pages of a fashion magazine. "I will go to NY" she wrote beside them. The next day she sends me a drawing. She has decorated a white sheet of paper with small

flowers, using coloured pencils. "I love you" is the caption. Finally I receive a manuscript page from her film script, in which Saturn is a planet inhabited by cats. They are in danger. Food, the apartment, a CD cover, more magazine pages and a self portrait in a full body mirror – the caption for this, concise as always, is: "Rainy day". Once I even get real paper mail from her, a photo, the first of her photos that I actually find attractive, a home-made print, black and white. Clothes thrown over a line or something, blurred again, close.

And a short time ago – after I had finally heard nothing more from her for a while – hortensias. "I still love you", she had written in the subject line.

The plan is that she will some day work as an apprentice for Karl Lagerfeld, then make her way into the world of fashion photography. She is about thirty-five, her English, as I mentioned, resembles sweaty rice balls, even in her film script, and she is one of the ugliest creatures on earth. Why? I believe it is because of the drugs she is prescribed. Without being an expert on these things, with merely the side glance of a disinterested layperson on beauty and ugliness, the kind of glance that so often hits the mark without trying, foretelling marriages and divorces, I suppose that this kind of drug shifts the place of compromise between mind and reality, always necessary for survival, from the mind to the body, which becomes ugly, left alone with this task, caged in by the mind's comfort zone. The mind of people who, somewhere inside, of their own free will or with no alternative, decide to say goodbye to the pragmatic reign of sense, lies open, freer than the mind of any sensible person, a beast unencumbered by the chains of the mind, in the chains of the drugged body. As long as one can avoid the quandaries that drive one into the arms of such help, with whatever aesthetic contortions as prove necessary, one will use one's body as an amplifier of that secret unreal world of the mind and if one is lucky, can attract what one dreams of so that one's life accumulates whatever dances to that music. At least one can believe in the process until one dies, and continue hoping and luring fate and coaxing beautiful things out of it by aesthetic means. But if one is too intelligent for fate, hurries to meet approaching concrete walls, changes course before one gets there and shakes off style, it can happen that one is given these

drugs that take the burden of staying down-to-earth off the mind and assign it to the body. Then one doesn't get anywhere very fast, one loses that crazy glow, the beauty that draws others along to do unheard of things, as they sense the potential in the strange glitter one brings. And in the undertow of sadness, one's logical shadow, sleeps an unguided worry that will awake when the drugs have removed all the spooky furniture of the soul, and find itself alone, with no excuse whatsoever for being there, and begin to worry about plastic bags.

So that was Mayumi. Odd, I thought. A pity, I thought. I answered her mails sometimes with a few friendly words. Then she came to Berlin.

You probably thought my initial extemporation on art was a bag of wind, maybe some arrogant kind of joke that didn't quite work out. But really Mayumi's mail deeply bothered my sense of art. She is as normal as anyone could be, and yet completely bonkers. Because she reproduces and advertises her normality, she is bonkers? No. She differs from people one accepts as artists, although many of them do more or less the same thing as she, in her terse style, her freedom of bullshit, of deceptive movements, effective pathos. Particularly she fails to imitate superficial attributes of art like most art does to make sure it is recognized as art. Mayumi is pure content, bluntly she shows aspects of her life. Longings she possesses in raw mass, longings that attack directly: I love you. I love Jeff. I will become fashion photographer. She knows no fear, no shyness. The surroundings have no interest for her, not the problems, not the probabilities. Conditional phrases probably get on her nerves. She represents in the purest form everything the individualist society demands, and what I too agree with: originality, directness, radicality. She is unbearably disturbing in her common sense.

So she writes me that she will be landing in Berlin-Tegel in two days, and asks if she can stay with me for two weeks. Sitting at my computer, my heart drops to knee level. Then I start giggling – a bit of a hangover is cradling me, and I envision a whole new kind of excitement, past girlish hopes of being swept along with someone greater; with a secure option on very bizarre situations. My dislikes will come out, or some new kind of sovereignty. At any rate, Mayumi's

visit will not remain without consequences. I write yes and await the consequences.

The purpose of her visit are the Berlinale film weeks, she has press tickets. When she wrote me that, I didn't believe a word, but she actually does. Her visit is little trouble. Every evening she pulls her black mini dress with fringes over her spheric belly and adds her short white jeans jacket, dabs kohl about her eyes and travels to the red carpet to photograph celebrities. Sometimes I come along. She gets lost in cocktail parties, giving everyone her card after having told them, in brief, to-the-point conversations, that her name is Mayumi, she is a fashion designer and photographer, but also the author of a film script in which cats are the inhabitants of Saturn, and that she soon will be moving to New York to live with her friend Jeff and start a career with Karl Lagerfeld. I stand in the corner and watch the milling legs. They accept her, it is short and painless, she collects the contacts of the most famous actresses and film directors and whoever pays heed to her realizes at some point during the short conversation that Mayumi is off her rocker, although her content is exactly like everyone else's.

Only once we followed my own paths when going out. After watching Mayumi at an after-party for a while, I called Xandi and asked if he could be found at his current usual haunt, and he said yes, so we set off there.

In the underground, Mayumi explained to me how the fringe of her dress always sticks to her thighs. She had photographed it so many times, she said. And indeed I remembered a photo that was explained by the information. Today she was wearing thin, sharp, black shoes instead of her usual plastic foot containers. It had taken this long, she said, for the swelling from the flight to go down. I was still unsure how she had got her feet into the shoes. "Medicine makes me gain weight," she uttered what I had been guessing, and for the first time I hear something, like sadness in her voice. Since when had she been taking it? Since 1998.

Something clicks, like the lid and body of the little fountain pen in my pocket. With humanistic fist I punch down the panic that Mayumi triggers in me, with little success. Small difference there is between us, and I pour myself swiftly in her direction when I rub

and scratch at the crusty bark of social interaction. Will the tree of desire wilt and die. Behold the other friends that are like Mayumi! Logic, irony in person, not submissive, having overcome fear, without force and without childish defiance, having overcome pragmatism – and then been given drugs that make one forget what one had against pragmatism. Something falls into place, the lid falls off the pen in my pocket, ink tidily drenches my leg and I fumble, I am in the subway, beside Mayumi, blinking from a second's sleep, Mayumi is telling me something. She confides in me, often she speaks for a long time, like a brook she tells me things, tells me, tells me, and everything is completely incomprehensible, because there is nothing to understand. It is all true. A waterfall of sentences with truth value. In one variational melodic tone. Above it hangs, like weather, her facial expression, mostly a slight furrow in the brow expressing consternation, but as if she had forgotten why. Then surprise, slight confusion: What is this feeling doing here?

A few paces from the bar, Xandi comes toward us, accompanied by the spitting image of Mayumi.

I am unable to contain my laughter, maybe for the worst reasons, because I am tired of my Mayumi and enjoy him having one too, and because the multiplicability of Mayumi is precisely the reason why I can't stand her any longer. We introduce one another, I say, pointing to Mayumi's doppelganger: "This is Sandra If, author and translator from the Catalan," but Xandi corrects me: "No, it is Katharina Frank!" "Daughter of F.J. Frank!" Katharina adds, in a resigned and helpful voice. "I'm terribly sorry," I say, but the explored identity can hardly touch my commotion at the visual similarity. I am equally afraid of Katharina Frank, Sandra If, Mayumi and endless mirrors. Entities that have gone through an essential dissolution of their obligatory connection to the world and then opted for a pragmatic, logic-motivated life are like ex-alcoholics. Why are they so terrible? They trample into one's soul with their logic and in 30 seconds one has become a raisin of apologetics. Defiance and all attempts at flight have melted and one is unable even to admit that the situation is uncomfortable. Katharina however is a bit more dangerous even, because she knows the mechanisms and excuses herself in advance. She is also very sensitive to one's shyness, strokes

one, consoles one while sitting on one's lap, an arm around one's neck, her gaze boring into one's pupils. She is a needle and reduces me to a voodoo doll of myself. Her eye is the space between my fingers while I pinch myself to keep awake as she sits on me with her awful drastic emotional truth. This all happened, but it was a different night.

I hung my head and just stood there without answering, beside the two or three fat women with short hair dyed red. To them, something I am not even conscious of is very important. What is it, sleep, flowers, the chemistry of the human body? Poor resolute, unmasked by their own courage, which was, fatally, greater than most, confused irrevocably in a life, furnished with motivation, swelled with longing and lust by other people's evasions, like mine, that creates winds of desire, lost in the labyrinths of logical barracks of a collectively imagined, never completely understood moral system.

9TH - THE LAST BAR

In the bar I quickly found my seat beside Xandi, hoping that the two red-haired monsters would start a conversation with each other. In fact they did, and Xandi, behind the screen of our Hefeweizen, explained to me that Katharina had invited herself to live with him for a week. And then they came around. Katharina sat by my side and told me how she was feeling, and Mayumi dumped her usual number on Xandi. He and I shrank more and more under the table, parallel to the sea level of our beers, until we not only no longer wished to speak, but no longer could. 'Welcome us, Orkus!' I was scrawling slowly onto the table top with a ball point pen, when suddenly the door opened and in came Jacqueline. Tilted as always, lady as always, this time bringing with her a handsome, intellectually challenged looking middle-aged man with a large chin. She brought him to our table and said it was a Swiss art critic. They had just come from a concert in the performance space for New Music, Radialsystem, and his name was Andreas. Andreas nodded and shook everybody's hands, but forgot one person.

As soon as Andreas had wood under his bottom, he began to talk about Neue Musik in clichés and a Swiss idiom that made me seasick. I explained to Mayumi, who didn't understand, and then to

Jacqueline, who seemed half interested, that the Swiss speech melody of this art critic put us in a boat that was too small among the high waves of reality and Neue Musik.

Jacqueline twitched her shoulders without unfriendliness, as she often does when she is not angry but is not going to change anything, continued to listen to the art critic and stare at his chin. There was nothing left for Xandi and me but to flee helter-skelter into the bosoms of our red-haired friends. And yet we kept seeing Jacqueline's eyes, that finally began to plead for help from under the steep chin of the ineffable Swiss rowboat. Eyes large and watery like a sunken fox. I wavered before going under again. But I felt sorry and was worried that Jacqueline might, as sometimes happened, become so shipwrecked that she simply went home. She stayed. The wreck, then, must be even worse.

After half an hour we looked up again, and Jacqueline had slid under the table with almost the whole of her body. Only her head still was standing next to her wine glass, emptied long ago, demonstrating Jacqueline's way of drinking. "Only, when my head", she said when she saw that we saw her predicament, "is where normally would be my coccyx, I feel capacitated to participate in this conversation." We saw well, for a moment. The art critic, upon whom the alcohol had no effect except to increase the mass of his discourse, was leaning in on her, full of intellectual energy, talking about a media opera with an exhibition that he had organized in Zurich. It was difficult to find money for such projects, he said. Beside my left ear, Katharina recontinued her explanations of her feelings, saying literature and borderline syndrome have many things in common. Mayumi was explaining to the back of the art critic the plot of her film treatment, where cats inhabit Saturn, and that she wished to become an assistant to Karl Lagerfeld. Saturn would later be bombed by a meteorite, she said.

I actually realized something at that moment. I noticed that the problem was that I was no good at asking what I really wanted to know. Thus I wasn't able to escape the false assumptions about life to which doctors had guided these psycho-kiddies in their numb distress, advice which one must never follow in order not to become like them. I hadn't enough life of my own in here.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw something like rescue approaching. A lank man around fifty in white three-quarter-length shorts was coming toward our table. After some initial difficulties he reached the head of the table and sat down on the empty chair. "I've pissed me pants," he announced. Six tired heads lifted themselves and listened dreamily. I explained to Mayumi, gesticulating wildly for a while just for fun: "彼は自分自身に腹を立てていました" "My name is Friedrich," he said, stood up and shook hands with everyone around the table. "And as how you know it always is with women, I have poured too many gooseberry incense behind my ears. Tonight. Well, there." Friedrich sat down again, aligned his chair properly until his chest was touching the edge of the table, and stood up again, tipping the whole table. Everyone was drenched with all the beer and red wine.

Then the bar's manager came, a heavy blonde who otherwise sat incognito among the slot machines, and insinuated unmistakably that we should pay and leave. "She is skilled in unmistakable insinuation," I remarked to Jacqueline. "じょうずですね," I remarked, being diligent, to Mayumi. We all went out the door and fell on our faces in front of the bar one after another without the innkeeper having to lift a finger.

The head beside mine on the damp asphalt moved. It belonged to Xandi and said – no, in fact, I don't remember what he said.

"And what, now, is the point of all this?" Larino asks.
I have to think hard for a while. "I now approach art and people warily, ready to flee at any moment. And also no longer trust alcohol."
"And, does it help?"
"No, it doesn't. But things take longer."

* Kare wa jibun jishin ni hara o tatete imasu.



Deciduous Shrub

Somewhere in the north of Britain live some feral dachshunds, my faithful Acrylimide said to me recently, but I wasn't really listening because I was writing this poem:

Goodbye to the telephone

O holy fire & smoke full of fumes of benzene,
smoke away to the sands of bombay my flowery trouble
that I must see a certain reluctant face yet today.
As I stood in a bower of scented bushes

I heard that ringtone toll
and the pain of following the schemes of a wobbling schoolboy
has me nearly bent double. Two text messages flung at the wall
and I'll ride the city to find some clean sand,
to bury my mobile.

The following story is interesting because it deals with the ruthlessness of youth that has firmly vowed to make their lives, and with the decided mobility of someone who from the beginning knew there is nothing to be hoped for there, that only far off from that track would she find some moments to her liking. Who surrounds herself with the harmless because she is always falling. One could call it "Marriage with Playground".

She bent and stepped into the archway cut out of a flowering bush of English dogwood. It was the border between the park and a generously designed playground full of pale sand. The ground under the arch was covered with sawed off branches whose flowers and leaves were still fresh. The light was beginning to fall; throughout the city people were watching the UEFA-Cup; and without knowing what she was doing she pressed the button to redial the number where he was not answering. It shocked her to do this, but as she otherwise never did anything of the sort and had the impression that the life of others that one was supposed to resemble consisted mostly of things she never did because she did not understand how they worked, it seemed the right thing to her, a great

leaning out of the window. And since the flowers were so fresh, and of a mild and pure sort, what she was doing could not be bad, could not be heavy or difficult. As easily as she called, he didn't answer. Thus is the stuff of deception.

She met a friend, they sat on a bench in front of a convenience store, drinking beer and chatting. Acquaintances of the friend passed by like figures in a rare mechanical puppet clock: Greeks, Irish, Turkish and USA people. The latter stuck. All in a row, finally, they leant against the barrier that kept drunk people from wandering off into the street, which was lined with bicycles: a couple from a Boston commune, their nerdy attachment and his little dog, one grinning and one ugly Icelander, two Scandinavian girls with painful lipstick in huge Scandinavian sweaters with digital patterns, the friend and herself, a dark pain in her heart. She said goodbye and cycled off home. Halfway, she turned and stopped and reread, astride her bike, a message she had received at some point during the many hours they had been sitting in front of the convenience store. He had written that he was home, but had things to do.

She turned and rode back with a resolve that wobbled, but never fell. As if she had taken a passenger on the back of her bike. And her apparently idiotic, thoughtless idea filled her with pride, with a desire for action, with a sense of poetry and certainty of gesture. It was merely a trifle, but it had to be. The *flatus poeticus* consisted in the following action: At the side of an industrial road near his building, she saw again the babyish wink of that pure, white and simple flowering bush with its fresh petals. But she couldn't reach it behind the high fence – at least not without stepping off her bike – and so instead of the dogwood she picked two white roses from a large bramble beside it. The fine thorns left their pelt in her hands, making them feel like tongues. With the roses between her fingers, she rattled over the cobblestones, found the wide street, the corner she remembered, the supermarket, the house he lived in. His window was aglow. She locked her bike and pressed the doorbell.

God has situations appear quite differently to the various people involved, in order that they may be disturbed as he likes them to be. Now that I am telling this story, the strangest differences appear. Coming to the flat could be called somewhat drastic and

would have to be coupled with authentic desparation of love to be justified. She did it flippantly, and her strongest argument for doing it was that she might equally well not. Thus she kept her equanimity, but what does that mean for others? She was easily contented – roses or the other flowers, both beautiful; to ride or to sleep, both pleasant. She only avoided what she considered cowardice or cautiousness, she was afraid of that, and had good reason to be, she could be cowardly and cautious if she wasn't careful.

A stuttering in the doorway voice box, a staring at the polished brass doorbell plate, and on the first floor a long blond boy, and behind him Fritz, both in boxer shorts and ribbed white undershirts. They were watching a movie. She handed over the roses. She apologized for the roses. She left, banged through the stairwell and rode away over the cobblestones, highly startled.

The Lisp of the Prettiest

How hangs the rocket in the sky?
How hangs the old man in the lion's eye?
How does his paw rip the soul of Kate,
while the rain rains all around?
And is no one the wiser for it.

A primrose for an idea,
a lily for a palinodia.
How the dead loves lie around in the way!
How tourists celebrate round-numbered birthdays!
And no one is the wiser for it.

