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The City of the Others

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Assaf's City by Lucy Fricke

He zigzags through the city, dragging me along behind. I always lose my sense of direction on the Berlin metro. But with Assaf, it's quite the opposite: the public transport map has etched itself onto him. He likes cruising around Berlin, being on the move. His earliest memories of the city are of the suburbs.

We take the S1 towards Wannsee, exit at Zehlendorf, then walk down Teltower Damm for a quarter of an hour. I've been living in Berlin for seventeen years, yet I've never been to Zehlendorf. This is where well-to-do families live—a section of the population I'm unfamiliar with—and this is exactly where Assaf was taken by bus two years ago: the bus he climbed aboard after waiting for twenty hours at LaGeSo, Berlin's central office for asylum seekers. A bus ride through unknown Berlin, through a vast foreignness, which for Assaf came to an end at a gym.

On the way there we pass a small park. They used to sit here on a bench in the evenings, drinking, smoking and singing. That sounds nice if you don't realise that it was between November and January. At that time of year, it's fucking freezing on a park

bench, and alcohol doesn't warm you up either; you just don't care that you're slowly freezing. On the other side of the street he shows me a restaurant, one with WiFi. It's one of those places where you go not to eat but to surf. Where you press up against the wall to get coverage on your phone. No one is here today: the park bench is empty; everyone has long since moved on.

Even the fence that used to separate the gym from the schoolyard has disappeared. The refugees were fenced in or the schoolchildren were fenced in, depending from which side you looked at it: the fact was, everyone was living behind a fence. In this school in Zehlendorf, a border was drawn between two worlds—and now everything is being renovated. There are a few workmen squatting in the gym, renovating the floor. A year of renovation.

Hundreds of people were housed here, hundreds of single people: families were put in another hall. A toilet for a hundred people, two toilets for the security staff.

We stand in front of locked doors and press our noses flat against the glass until someone lets us in.

His bed was at the back left, in the middle. Assaf gestures into the emptiness.

At 11pm, the lights went out, and he would carry on reading with a torch—a Haruki Murakami novel: *Kafka on the Shore*, of all things.

Assaf doesn't want to leave the hall. Here on the right was the kitchen, and over there, the TV. He stares and stares, and says nothing else.

Homesick? I ask.

Yes.

From time to time he meets the others. They have barbecues together—in some park in the winter. When else? They're all winter freaks. Why do Arabs barbecue in winter? It sounds like the beginning of a joke, but it isn't. The worst jokes are the plain truth, like having a barbecue just before Christmas in Görli Park. I can imagine nothing worse than a barbecue in a park on a winter's night. I'm just not crazy enough. I'm a Kraut.

Outside we smoke another cigarette on his bench. Still his same old unrenovated bench: red, right behind the gym, overlooking

Teltower Damm. Back then, the children had no gym lessons for months, he says. Believe me, you did them a favour, I say. But Assaf doesn't believe me. It's strange sitting in a deserted smoking area. I've never been here before. I've never been a refugee, though I've sometimes felt like one. But there's a world of difference between a feeling and an official status, so the comparison doesn't count. One thing I *have* gone through, though: I have been back to a place where everything and everyone I knew had disappeared. A few months or years later and nothing is how it used to be, even if it still looks exactly the same. We sit on the ruins of Assaf's memories and smoke. Our photographer takes a picture of the bench. Memory is a project and life is art, because otherwise everything would be lost.

We all had a dream of a better future, he says. I think: maybe he and his friends never felt as close as when they were sleeping on the floor of a gym. But in the end, that's just kitsch. There was a huge fight over who was the biggest victim, Assaf says. Anyone who has ever experienced the horror of group therapy knows this: the question of which person has gone through the worst

shit. You try and trump the others with suffering, injuries, pain and trauma. Whoever wins can't be helped in this life. Assaf didn't win.

He didn't come here via the Balkan route; he came by aeroplane, with the invitation to a festival, including a visa and the decision not to return. He could have stayed with his German publisher, but decided to go to the gym in Zehlendorf. You could call it research, or real, rotten life. Everyone knows that the lines between the two are a grey zone.

After his stay in the hall, he went straight to the Literarisches Colloquium Berlin on a scholarship for several months. 'I live in a castle now,' he cried when he visited his first and already oldest friends in Berlin. Nobody believed him; nobody wanted to see it either.

We take the bus to Oskar-Helene-Heim station and walk through the deserted streets until the first signposts to the university appear. He used to walk this route every day, carrying a heavy rucksack of food, drinks and his computer on his back.

Ten hours in the campus library, day in, day out. Three floors, a bright new building, which already looks dilapidated just a few years after opening. That's where he read, wrote and was alone. All alone in the boonies in Dahlem.

Assaf shows me a small, outdated collection of Arabic literature that he has read almost to the end. Beggars can't be choosers, even if that means you have to read the classics and poetry.

He asked them whether he could take the books home. Of course, they said, you can borrow any books with a green sticker. There wasn't a single book with a green sticker. Assaf likes the library, likes the smell of the books, even the smell of the carpet, the silence and the solitude. If you're looking for solitude, Berlin is the right place for you.

Then back on the bus, tram, metro; back to the city. Assaf travels by rail and I follow him. He shows me *Arab Street*. The Syrian restaurants, the bakeries, the electrical device shops, the mobile phone joints. When I walk alongside him, I only see Syrians: here on the street, which is so familiar to me, which I've known for such a long time—the lower end of Sonnenallee. Opposite

Karstadt on Hermannplatz. My uncle used to work there: he was department manager of the household goods department, before he drank himself to death. *Arab Street*. If only he knew. I can almost hear him turning in his grave. That's what uncle was like, see.

The first port of call for Arabs, at least for those lucky enough to be writers, is Weserstraße. This is where the translator lives, and they've all been to see her. Sandra's sofa in Berlin is probably the best known in Syrian literary circles. First the texts arrive, then the authors.

A few doors down is Bar Kuschlowski. It is just like it sounds. In the corner there is a wood-burning stove, which is lit in winter. You can gaze at the fire for hours on end, which I find much more civil than sitting on park benches in winter. But Assaf loves park benches; Assaf even loves winter. Sometimes I think he dreams of a life as a bum. The romantic ideal of a bum: truly free, sleeping in the open air, having enough beer and something warm to wear. He slept a few nights by the East Side Gallery,

nicely located between the Wall and the Spree, simply because he wanted to. What a nutcase, I think. You can do things like these as long as you have no connection to the city, no fixed relationships, no big memories: as long as you're drifting freely, lost in time and space. It can be pleasant for exactly the length of time that you can stand the loneliness or can't stand yourself any more.

(Translated from German by Lucy Jones)



Against the Storm by Assaf Alassaf

في وجه العاصفة

استقيظت مبكراً اليوم، هكذا أصبحت عادتي أيام السبت خلال الشهرين الماضيين، منذ أن بدأت حركة الاحتجاج المحلية ضد عملية بيع صالة السوق القديم. نظم الأهالي مع بعض النشطاء أنفسهم في حركة شعبية للوقوف في وجه عملية البيع هذه، كانت وقفات السبت إحدى هذه النشاطات التي وجدت نفسي منخرطة بها بشكل تام. لا أستطيع القول إنني متفائلة كثيراً بنجاح هذه الحركة أو مؤمنة كلياً بجدوى الوقوف في وجه هذا التسونامي الكبير الذي يطمح لابتلاع المدينة وتحويلها إلى مراكز تسوق ومقارٍ للشركات الكبرى. لكنني مثل الكثيرين هنا، مصممة على المضي قدماً حتى آخر لحظة للحفاظ على هذا السوق، على قرميده الأحمر البني القديم وبوابتيه وهوائه الساكن الرطب.

في وقفة الأسبوع الماضي طلب مني أحد الأصدقاء أن أشارك بكلمة صغيرة ألقها خلال التجمع، لم أعرف ماذا سأقول عن هذا المكان، فأنا حديثة العهد نسبياً بمعرفته، إذ أسكن هنا في الشارع خلف هذا السوق منذ سنوات قليلة فقط وهي لا تشكل شيئاً مقارنةً ببعض الذين يسكن هنا منذ عشرين أو ثلاثين سنة، ثم أنني لست خبيرة بكتابة خطابات مباشرة للجمهور، فكيف بقراءتها أمامهم أيضاً؟

ظننته الاستسلام لنسمة تشرين الباردة اللذيذة ما جعلني أعزف عن سلوك الطريق المختصر إلى محطة غورليتزر بانهوف القريبة

شجرة ضخمة تبدو مع جذورها الصغيرة القصيرة المقتلعة من الأرض كنبطة فطر مقلوبة. بالتأكيد أنها وقعت حديثاً من جراء العاصفة الأخيرة ولم تلحق بها بعد مناشير عمال البلدية لتقصها وتزيحها عن المكان.

أخرج علبة البيرة المعدنية التي أخذتها من ثلاجة صديقتي التي كنت في زيارتها قبل قليل وأجلس على الدرجة السفلى محاولة مسح المكان المظلم من حولي بعيني، لا مشاة ولا سيارات تعبر المكان أو تركز فيه. هل أنا حقاً في كرويتزبيرغ؟ في وسط المدينة؟ المكان خالٍ تماماً حتى من مروجي المخدرات، وهم المنتشرون في كل شبر من هذه المنطقة.

ما قصة هذا الشارع ولما هو كذلك؟ أعرف بيوتا مسكونة وقصوراً ملعونة لكن ليس شوارع، وأين؟ في قلب المدينة الذي يضج بالناس والسهارى والبارات والمقاهي.

أتى الصوت من الخلف ومن الأعلى كصخرة صماء تتدحرج وترتطم بمؤخرة رأسي ليوفظ حواسي كلها دفعة واحدة.

حزين أنا على هذه الشجرة، تمنيت لو كان بإمكانني مساعدتها أثناء العاصفة، أن اسندها بكتفي ويدي كيلا تقع ولكن ما حدث قد حدث. لو أن لها جذوراً أقوى ربما كانت صمدت بوجه العاصفة. لماذا لم تمتلك جذوراً أطول و أعمق؟ أعرف أشجاراً تمتد جذورها لعشرات

الأمطار وهي تبحث عما يقيم عودها. هل لأن الماء قريب منها نسيت أن تفعل ذلك؟ ألم تكن تعرف أن العواصف قادمة؟ وأنها ستحتاج هذي الجذور لتبقى واقفة؟ أم أن ما كان يشغلها هو العناية بما هو فوق الأرض، أغصانها وأوراقها، الجزء الذي يعطي حياتها السبب والمعنى؟ يبدو أن آخر ما تكثر له الأشجار هو أن تموت واقفة..

واختيار طريق آخر. سأمشي قليلاً، أقول لنفسي. منذ انتقلت للعيش وحيدة في شقتي الجديدة القريبة من هنا، أصبح المشي إحدى عاداتي اليومية، لا أحب المشي بين الجموع أو في الحدائق الكبيرة التي تزدحم بالرواد والناس، أفضل المشي في أماكن وأوقات كهذه بأقل عدد ممكن من الناس، لا أدري منذ متى أصبحت ميالة أكثر للعزلة، هذا ما أحبه في برلين عموماً، خطوة واحدة لليمين وتكون وحيداً منعزلاً تماماً وأخرى لليساار لتكون وسط الناس والصخب والحياة. تيامنث تاركة طريق المحطة ممدداً كجثة على اليسار، ودلفت بخطاي نحو الشارع التالي يساراً. الشارع يفتح على شارع أوسع، لا أبنية ولا أضواء في المكان، رصيفان يلاحقان انحناءة الاسفلت الواصل بينهما و درج قديم مهمل، أراه من بعيد مغطى كلياً بشجيرات كثيفة قبل أن أصل إليه حتى. بدأ الخوف بالتسرب إلى دواخلي فهذه أول مرة أمشي هذا الطريق على قدمي ليلاً، كنت هنا أكثر من مرة لكن كان ذلك في النهار وعلى دراجتي الهوائية. هل أعود أدراجي ويا دار ما دخلك شر؟ ليت هذا كان متاحاً هذه اللحظة، من يمشي الآن ليس أنا، هو الطريق، كما لو أنه بساط متحرك يمشي بسرعة و باتجاه واحد ولا فكاك منه إلا بالوصول.

هذه الانحناءة اللعينة التي تحتضن الحديقة المجاورة دون أن تمسها تماماً تولد شعوراً مغوياً أن تمضي في المشي حتى النهاية. أصلُ الدرج القديم الذي يعلو باتجاه مدخل إلى الحديقة، إهمال واضح يعترني هذا المدخل، شجيرات غير مشذبة وأوراق متساقطة بكثافة وأغصان نائنة نافرة لم يمسسها مقص حدائقي منذ سنين كأنه مدخل قصر قديم ملعون هجره أصحابه منذ زمن وبالقرب منه تتمدد

فنجان قهوة، أريد أن أجلس على كرسي واشرب فنجاناً يخلصني من هذا الصداغ، دعاني صديقي لندخل الى السوق ونجلس هناك ورغم ازدحام المكان بالبائعين والمحلات الصغيرة التي تبيع كل شيء من خضار وفواكه محلية ولحوم وأسماك وحلويات، إلا أننا لم نعدم فرصة لنجد زاوية هادئة نسبياً ونشرب قهوتنا، كان هذا الفنجان كحبة أسبرين أو باراسيتامول، وإلى الآن، كلما شعرت بضيق ما آتي إلى هنا وأمشي في ازدحام السوق الأليف أو أشرب فنجان قهوة أو كأس شاي في زاوية من زواياه.

أعرف القيمة التاريخية والأثرية للمكان وأحترم عمره الذي يزيد الآن عن مئة عام لكني لا أريد لأحد أن يأخذ حبة اسبريني مني ولذلك أريد أن يحافظ هذا المكان على هويته.

محاولة جيدة، تستحقين مقابلها دعوة مجانية للإفطار على حسابنا في ماكدونالدز الذي افتتح قريباً من هنا.. يقول أصدقائي مع ضحكة وغمزة بعد أن سمعوا خطابي القصير هذا.

لم يكن الأمر انتقالاً بين منطقة وأخرى أو بين شارع وآخر حتى اعتبره أمراً عادياً يحصل ألف مرة كل يوم، كان بداية جديدة بكل ما تعنيه هذه الكلمة من معنى. بدايةً تطلبت أن تصبح حقبة سفري منزلي المتنقل الذي سأسكنه وأحمله معي سنة كاملة وأنا انتقل بين نيويورك ولوس انجلوس والقاهرة وطوكيو قبل أن أعود إلى برلين مرة أخرى ويحط بي الرحال جنوب شارع سكاليتزر، هذا الشارع الطويل الذي تظله سكة القطار التي تمتد على طوله، نادراً ما عبرت هذا الشارع إلى صفته الأخرى إلى عالمي القديم. ما عشته هناك تركته هناك..

هل انتهيت من بيرتك؟ هل لي أن آخذ العلبة الفارغة؟ يوقظني سؤاله من ذهولي وأومئ بالإيجاب دون كلام، يختفي العجوز بلحظة كما ظهر حاملاً جائزته وأسماله البالية، أمشي مسرعةً إلى نهاية الطريق دون أن أنظر خلفي حتى. أريد فقط أن أصل البيت وأنسى هذا الشارع وما جرى فيه.

عدت للمكان بعد شهر من تلك الحادثة مدفوعةً بنداء خفي، عدت ومشيت كما في تلك المرة على نفس خطواتي السابقة، توقفت عند الدرج مترددةً خائفة قليلاً. كان الطريق على حاله خالياً موحشاً ينزّ الخوف والرعب من جنباته، فيما عدا الشجرة التي اختفت من المكان، كان كل شيء في مكانه، الدرج والأغصان المهملة وورق الخريف الأصفر وعلبة البيرة الفارغة أيضاً..

وصلتُ ظهراً قادمةً من مدينتي الصغيرة، كانت أول مرة أرى فيها برلين، نزلت من القطار وخرجت من المحطة المزدحمة أبحث عن سيارة أجرة توصلني للعنوان المكتوب في الورقة التي أحملها معي (كرويتزبيرغ \ شارع ايسن بان \ عند باب السوق القديم). استغرق الأمر دقيقة أو اثنتين من السائق ليفتح خريطة الورقية ويؤكد معرفته بالعنوان المطلوب. لم يكن نظام تحديد المواقع متداولاً للعامّة في ذلك الوقت. لا أنكر أنني كنت متشوقة ومتلهفة جداً لرؤية المدينة والمشى في شوارعها لكن الشعور الأول الذي انتابني حال وصولي هو الصداغ، ازدحام الناس والمحلات والمطاعم والمقاهي والشوارع والسيارات كل هذا أصابني بالدوار والصداغ، أريد فقط أن أصل إلى العنوان الذي معي لملاقة صديقي والذهاب معه إلى الشقة التي سنشاركها معاً، وجدت صديقي بانتظاري كما اتفقنا وطلبت منه

معتقداً بأنك ستحيط علماً بها وبأسرارها حتى تجرك أكثر وأكثر لتغرق في رمالها المتحركة.
لا شيء في برلين لا يصلح أن يكون مكان لحدث ما، يحدث أن تقرأ إعلاناً لقراءة شعرية في محطة قطار أو حفلة موسيقية صغيرة على درج بناء قديم أو معرضاً فنياً في ورشة صناعية عدا عن عشرات النشاطات الاعتيادية المختلفة هنا وهناك في المسارح والصالات. كم عمراً يحتاج المرء ليقول إنه يعرف برلين وتعرفه..؟

اليوم موعد حفل التعارف في بنايتنا، ليس حفلاً بالمعنى التقليدي للكلمة إنما هو لقاء وسهرة تجمع سكان المبنى بالإضافة لأصحاب الكشك والمقهى الواقعين أسفل المبنى، هذا اللقاء أصبح عادةً سنوية يعده السكان للتعرف على بعضهم البعض وعلى السكان الجدد، السنة الماضية كانت المرة الأولى لنا معهم أنا وصديقي، وهي فرصة أيضاً للتداول في بعض شؤون المبنى وحل المشكلات التي لا تأخذ أكثر من نصف ساعة من النقاش قبل أن يتحول اللقاء إلى سهرة مشروب حميمة قد تمتد الليل بطوله.

جيراننا يعرفون بعضهم بشكل معقول على اختلافاتهم وتنوعهم، عشر سنوات قضيتها بينهم تجعلني أقول بضمير مرتاح أنهم كونوا مجتمعاً صغيراً يتشاركون ما هو أكثر من عنوانهم المفترض (برلين ١ كرويتزبيرغ ١ شارع الملك 45 \ بعد المدرسة الابتدائية أو على زاوية الكنيسة فيما لو دخلت الشارع من جهته الأخرى).

في سكني الجديد جنوب شارع سكاليتزر لدي عنوان مختصر يتألف من سبع أو ثمان حروف هي اسم الشارع ورقمه، وجار واحد فقط

أحياناً أجلس على ضفة نهر شبيري الغربية وأراقب قطار الأوبان 1 وهو يعبر جسر أوبرباوم بين الشرق والغرب ذهاباً وإياباً وأفكر أن هذا العبور احتاج لانهايار عالم قديم كامل ليتم بهذا الشكل الروتيني البسيط الذي أراه أمامي الآن. أنا في حالة معكوسة الآن، أعول على شارع سكاليتزر أن يكون جداري الخاص الذي يمنع قطار الماضي من العبور إلى حياتي الحاضرة.

لكن علي أولاً بناء عالم جديد هنا. أعدت اكتشاف هذا الجزء من كرويتزبيرغ والذي نادراً ما زرته سابقاً، كان أكواريوماً ضخماً من المقاهي والمطاعم والبارات التي تكاد تشبه بعضها بعضاً لمن ينظر إليها من خارجها. جربت الكثير منها حتى استقر اختياري على مقهى وبار واحد ارتادهما باستمرار بترحيب دافئ دائماً من أصحابهما والعاملين الذين باتوا يعرفونني ويعرفون دون أن أتكلم ما أحب وما لا أحب. امتدت رحلاتي الاستكشافية لتصل أطراف نيوكولن القريبة وهناك قادتني الصدفة لأقع على صالة سينما صغيرة متخفية في شارع جانبي من دون إعلانات ضخمة تبرز حضورها في المكان، كانت هذه الصالة بكافيتيريتها الصغيرة ومقاعد المحدودة مكاني المفضل حين اشتاق لعنمة السينما. أصبح لي في هذا الجزء من كرويتزبيرغ حضور وأناس وعناوين أعرفها وتعرفني بين المقهى والمكتبة الصغيرة التي حفظت ما على رفوفها من كتب. جربت في فترة سابقة أن لا انتمي لمكان واحد في برلين وأن أكون حاضرة ما استطعت في كل نشاط فني أو ثقافي يجري في صالات برلين مقاهيها وبيوتها الثقافية، كان الأمر فوق استطاعتي وربما فوق استطاعة الجميع، فبرلين لا تتوقف ابداً عن اجتراح أنشطة جديدة في أماكن جديدة كل يوم، وكلما ذهبت أكثر خلفها

أعرفه من سكان البناء .لا أدري إن كان هذا خيار شخصي يتعلق بي ،كوني بت أفضل العزلة أكثر أو أنها سمة عامة استولت على حياة الناس كلهم،منذ أن قررنا أن نستعين بقمر صناعي لنزور صديقاً يسكن على بعد عشر دقائق منا مشياً؟ بتنا ننكمش أكثر فأكثر نحو ذواتنا وفرديتنا مكتفين بما تقدمه لنا تطبيقات الفيسبوك وتويتر وغيرها من وجبات التواصل السريعة،لست من هواة نظرية الزمن الجميل والتغني بالزمن الجميل والحنين والتحسر والنوستالوجيا للزمن الجميل ،فكل الأزمنة جميلة أو كلها سيئة لا فرق، لكن ما يحدث الان غريب وصادم وسريع وغامر بطريقة فظيعة، ماذا لو تحولت العناوين بعد فترة إلى أرقام مجردة ؟ إلى كودات مشفرة؟ العناوين والأماكن،الأسماء والوجوه .. ماذا سيبقى لنا لنتشاركه مع الآخرين؟ خطوط الطول والعرض؟ حسناً، صباح الخير يا سكان خط العرض 52 وخط الطول 13,30.

عساف العساف



I Can't See Anything at All by Maren Kames

VISIT TO THE ZOO—ZINGANO/SEWCZ/KAMES, SATURDAY, 7

OCTOBER 2017

3 DAYS AFTER CANCELLATION OF PLANNED ZOO VISIT DUE TO
CYCLONE XAVIER

I can't see anything at all, just smart phones on the ends of arms
inside waterproof jackets; then a whingeing, uneven woman's voice
says:

Oh, it's the wolfs' feedin' at last

They're 'aving chi'kin today

bu'—

the Hasian black bear, 'ees 'aving bread rolls

Really likes them, 'e does.

I don't know whether I'm laughing because of the mental overload of
so many species in one sentence—or because I'm imagining the
difference in size between an Asian black bear and a bread roll. Or
maybe it's just the accent.

Then the woman says:

*'Course, s'not all 'e gets, but that way, 'e doesn't always have to
hang around doin' nuffin'—we've gottim usta gettin' summin.*

I still can't see anything.

Yeah, an' like, today it's chi'kin, sometimes it's rabbit,

wiv a few little chi'kins frown in too.

Or beef chops sum days, so a very vaaarried diet.

*They loooooove rabbit. Don't always look so nice when they rip it
apart, but*

giv'in 'em the 'ole hanimal is reeeally important for our wolfs.

She says: *The 'ole hanimal.*

I nod.

The woman says:

Don't sound so tasty,

*but it's the guts of 'erbivores, that's what, which makes it so 'ealthy
for the wolfs. Fur and feathers, it all gets eaten, most of it anyway,
s'all important.*

I think: All the animals in cages at the zoo are fed animals that are
not in cages at the zoo. All the animals that are fed to animals in
cages at the zoo are German, or at least native to Germany. German
animals or animals native to Germany are so boring.

A wolf's life is aaaallll about its position in the pack—says the woman, and I think, there's no need for me to see anything here: the zoo tells stories about itself; I can just write down what it says.

I still can't see anything,
then I see a bear.

I think: How come a bear? just as Maria says: That's not a wolf.

And I laugh: obviously both of us have already forgotten about the bear from the beginning of the story, despite *bread rolls* and *Hasian* in among all the *chi'kins* and rabbits and *'ole hanimal*.

The woman tells us about the survival of the best gene pool and the strongest males in litters of new wolves. She says: *We, as keepers, we ain't in the pack, we wouldn't wanna be, otherwise we'd 'ave to join in fights over rank—not our thing. Artur here, she says, is four years old, from the last litter we 'ad, the others have all gone to other zoos, Artur's the only one oo's stayed.* We continue.

In the next bush we see a toddler in a red coat. One cage further, the voice of the woman is still there—I can't pinpoint her, I can't see her—and I wonder if it is simply the bodiless, omnipresent, droning voice of the zoo. This voice has gone from the wolves' feeding to the feeding of hyenas, which at first I find beautiful, but then on closer

inspection, I realise they are indescribable—indescribably ugly. But what's that supposed to mean anyway? And how defamatory is it to call something ugly, just because, in the eyes of one human, none of this animal's body parts go together? It has the trunk of a wiry dog, the head of an enlarged bat, ears that look like colossal leather dice-shakers, and the coat of a spotted cat. Diversity, I think, body positivity, but I can't find them beautiful any more. The droning zookeeper's description of the hyenas' unfriendly nature is superimposed onto my attempt to see their physiognomy as friendly. Because of these traits, as the woman calls them—hyenas have a bite force of one ton per square centimetre, and I wonder how any creature with these kinds of jaws can be made in any way responsible for their own disposition—so, because of their 'vicious character', says the woman, the keepers are in the habit of sprinkling 'nice' powder on their food (she actually says 'nice') to put them in a more mellow mood, almost friendly, you could say.

People, all I can see are people, I think disparagingly, and then I think about the way people design zoos, with a good deal of local flavour from their native countries, and talk about the animals as if they were their own naughty offspring; I think about people and the

animals they select and buy and exhibit, and the way they study their food and social behaviour so that they can feed them and look after them in the appropriate way; about the way they stare at animals, as they sit on stools in front of an animal enclosure; the way they draw animals or say “psssst psst” to animals behind thick glass, or say ‘awww, look how cute, what a sweet little guy’, as they photograph animals; the way they write info boards about animals, etc. Then I think: In the zoo, you hardly ever have any original thoughts. It always ends up in some existential mourning over the strange behaviour of humans, mixed with some joy over parallels or similarities between animals and humans, because these similarities make people seem somehow warmer, more comprehensible—or, they would make them seem that way if people didn’t do these strange things, like designing animal enclosures with local flavour, selecting animals, studying animals’ food and social behaviour so that they can look after them in the appropriate way and bring them closer to their own fellow humans, who stare at animals in cages made by humans, sit on stools in front of animals and say ‘psssst psst’—

Next to me in front of the monkey enclosure a very small child falls to the ground and says ‘upsidaisy’.

How naff, I think, that people in zoos always have such sentimental thoughts about anthropology; well, I do, at least. And I wonder whether the ultimate role of a zoo, at least to a considerable extent, is to set you off reflecting about life. But these reflections don’t go very far. Unfortunately, you always end up at the Anthropocene. No matter how many animals surround them on a rainy afternoon in the zoo, people remain anthropocentric. You always arrive at the ‘animal in humans’, and the human in monkeys, and that the human soul is perhaps just as vulnerable as the blind-looking, ultra-round, disproportionately huge, wide-open eyes of nocturnal small animals and rodents in the night animal house. But it’s just that they don’t have any eyelids. The human soul might just as well be armoured like the breast-plate skin of the ancient, sad rhino right at the entrance. We trot docilely past the giraffes’ habitat, and the zebras’ Central African compound complete with mock church, on to the bamboo-filled pavilions of the new arrivals, panda bears Jiao Quing and Meng Meng, who come directly from the Chinese state and have been brought to Europe as a pair. They are now the only living panda bears

on the European continent, and, according to the keeper's report, they can't be arsed to copulate or do public feedings, but quite often get on each other's nerves instead and so loll in separate sections of the inner glass cage on their new furniture, and are obviously pretty depressed about their transfer to the new continent. With Meng Meng, says the keeper, *'s'like, let's just say, we're 'aving a difficult phase an', well this is abou' the sikf or sevenf time she's 'ad bamboo today, an' each time, we try out a differen' kind on 'er, and try all kinds of uvver stuff too but she's a real little madam, let's just say, she don't know wot she wants and is just fed up with 'erself and the 'ole world, so she ain't making it easy for 'erself or us to please 'er. That's why we've closed the partition now.* We walk away from the grumpy cubs to a kind of exhibition hall with wide, colourful info tables on the history of the zoo, which takes us, full pelt, back to humans. For example:

List

Civilians buried in the zoo:

25.06.1945

1 woman: Krokett Hill

1 man: light railway

Signed: the shop steward

Entry of the same date:

List

Russian soldiers buried in the zoo:

1 Russian: construction yard

1 Russian: pheasant enclosure

1 Russian: light railway

1 Russian: pump basement entrance to the temple

1 Russian: lion open-air enclosure

1 Russian: promenade at the fallow deer

In addition:

List

German soldiers buried in the zoo:

25 men: entrance to Budapest Street

1 man: triangle in front of the aquarium

1 man: rear of the game enclosure

2 men: rodent house

1 man: eagle aviary

1 man: restaurant terrace

1 man: light railway

1 man: small predators' house
5 men: pheasants' lawn
1 man: antelope house / on the side of the chicken house
1 man: red deer enclosure
1 man: antelope house entrance
1 man: Waldschenken Street
1 man: triangle of Waldschenken/Budapester Street.
5 men: animal hospital lawn
4 men: garden banks on the pump house lawn
1 man: opposite the garden nursery
1 man: Budapester Street 6
1 man: bird waders' house
1 man: Bridge of Love
Signed: the shop steward
In addition:
From April 22 to May 3, 1945, the premises of Berlin Zoo were a
battleground where any orderly operation was impossible.
And:

Until 1952 at least 25 different tribes of people were exhibited in
Berlin Zoo; it attracted record numbers of visitors, even outside the
main season.

I don't have to tell stories about the zoo: the zoo tells stories about
itself; I can just write them down.

In the monkey house, the melancholy of our trio culminates in hard,
crystal-clear sadness at the sight of the last animal just before the
exit: a gorilla, like the farewell figurehead of the zoo, twice as tall and
broad as a man, sitting motionless and cross-legged on a tiny tree
stump, and doing nothing for the fifteen minutes that we are
standing in front of him, nothing, nothing at all, and was presumably
doing nothing before and will do nothing afterwards, except for
raising a single, infinitely slow arm, putting it towards his head
without it landing there, and, just before it becomes a meaningful
gesture, like scratching or waving, lowering it again with the same,
infinitely resigned slowness, and continues to do nothing, nothing at
all, except—and this becomes obvious to me in those fifteen
minutes—that his gaze reverses the power between the observed
and the observers, the way he stoically and wearily stares back, for
fifteen long minutes, and he probably stared before and will stare

afterwards, and in doing so, he transfers the sadness of his gigantic, motionless limbs onto the ever-changing huddles of people with smartphones in front of his window. I think, anthropocentrically. Bury me in the antelope house / on the side of the chicken house; bury the heart of this gorilla on the Bridge of Love.

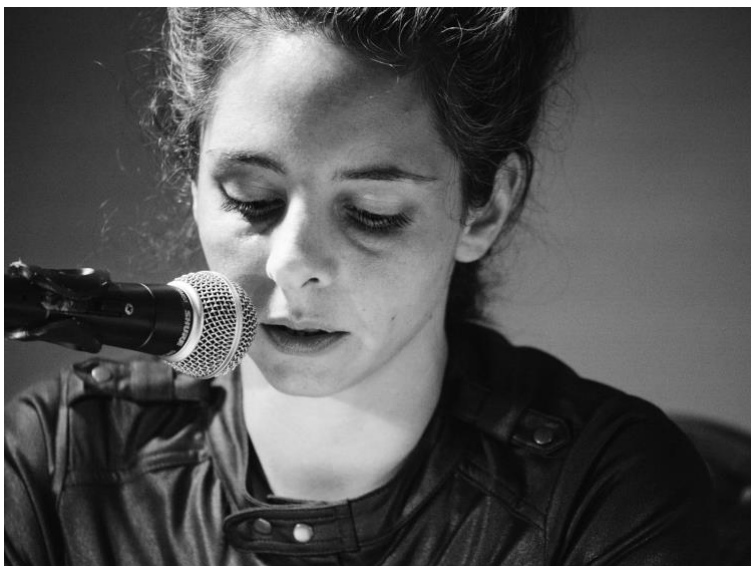
Érica says, let's go. Érica says, come on, let's go on, it's enough for now, a visit to this place and the place itself is infinite, there's no end to it; it's a start, it will go on, just as our friendship during this project is not a one-off thing, but will also go on.

The last of the last animals before the exit are a family of sixty-two graceful—in comparison to the apes—soothingly salmon-pink shimmering flamingos. Flamingos are very sensitive animals. Usually they need several days' preparation to be relocated from outdoors to indoors. The hearts of the other eighteen flamingos that were part of the zoo perished a week ago, killed either by the cyclone or their own sensitivity, and are probably buried below the mammoth tree trunk that is still lying crossways over the flamingo pond.

A week later, as I'm running through the rain on Potsdamer Street, late for my first concert at the Berlin Philharmonie, where the 79-year-old patron of my publisher is waiting —or is perhaps no longer

waiting— for me, with two season tickets, I am amazed at the kind of life I've started to lead over the past three years in Berlin, now that I'm attending a concert with a very rich art collector, in an ankle-length black loden coat that I nearly trip up on as I run because it's almost as long as I am; and then I see Erica's flamingo-coloured leather coat, and Érica inside it, waving in front of the Arsenal cinema. And maybe we both think as we laugh: Yes, infinitely, infinite meetings, it's a beginning and it will go on, another time, later, but for now, *subito*, off to the orchestra.

(Translated from German by Lucy Jones)



qd nós vamos chegar

em 28 de julho de 2061? by Érica Zíngano

*"Il ne faut pas chercher de rapports entre le livre 'La Doublure'
et le conte 'Chiquenaude'; il n'y en a aucun."*

Raymond Roussel, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*

o problema é q
eu posso do nada começar a contar
só q não é exatamente contar
mas se parece mto com contar
obedece a alguma lógica
q eu acho q é matemática
mas eu não sei
eu tbm não sei se esse fenômeno
eu chamei de fenômeno
se ele tem um nome científico e tal
mas eu reconheço q é tipo
uma perturbação/ uma onda/
uma transferência de energia

qd a gente tá conversando
é como se meu cérebro se dividisse
e por cima do q vc tá me contando
é uma outra camada

é mto perturbador
qd isso acontece pq
é como se eu tivesse
presente e ausente
ao mesmo tempo
eu tô dentro
mas eu já tô fora
eu tô te ouvindo
eu ainda tô te ouvindo
mas eu tô te ouvindo
de outro lugar
é claro q há uma distância real
entre nós
mas é como se ela de repente
ficasse gigante

uma distância daqui até o japão

eu não sei se vc percebeu
ou se vai chegar a perceber
eu não sei q tipo de cara eu faço
q tipo de cara eu fiz
como é minha expressão
se é algo q é transparente
visível do lado de fora
até hoje ninguém nunca
falou nada ninguém nunca
reclamou eu tbm não sei
se faz alguma diferença pra vc
vc ficar sabendo disso agora
mas em todo caso
se isso acontecer de novo
vc não vai poder dizer
q eu não avisei

eu vou tentar explicar

com um exemplo
um exemplo concreto
pq senão fica mto abstrato
esse papo fenômeno

na semana passada
eu fui prum encontro tinder
mtas vezes pra mim um encontro tinder
é como um encontro tandem
só q numa língua só
a língua do outro
pq raras foram as vezes
em q conseguimos
eu e meu encontro tinder
sair do campo da linguagem tandem
e entrar no corpo da sexualidade thunder
mas isso já é outro problema
eu não queria agora entrar nesse problema
pq a sexualidade thunder envolve mtas coisas
mto complexas inclusive

o não uso de desodorantes
como algo fundamental
pro processo de revolução continuum
A SOVAQUEIRA REVOLUCIONÁRIA
NA LUTA CONTRA O CAPITALISMO

mas então
o meu problema tandem
na semana passada
eu fui prum encontro tinder
depois de mais de 2h
de conversa vai
depois de mais de 2 cervejas
de conversa vem
a gente tava conversando em alemão
e aí do nada
totalmente do além
meu encontro tandem
começou a usar a palavra halle
em todas as frases q ele falava

ele usava a palavra halle
eu acho q ele nem tava ligado
q tava rolando isso
eu só sei q ele tava suando mto
e aquele cheiro forte
de desodorante
ia ficando cada vez mais forte
daí eu comecei a ficar mto enjoada
mto enjoada mesmo
com o cheiro do desodorante
e a porra da palavra halle
em todas as frases q ele usava
ele continuava usando a palavra halle
daí eu percebi q eu já tava contando
eu já tava contando fazia era tempo
e se eu não tava exatamente contando
pq no final das contas se vc me perguntar
eu não sei qts vezes ele usou a palavra halle
eu tava entendendo q ele não parava
nunca mais de usar a palavra halle

foi horrível
pq daí eu saquei q eu não ia mais conseguir
aquele encontro tandem
nunca seria um encontro thunder

nunca saberemos de fato
se o problema foi a palavra halle
ela mesma um problema
se foi a mistura da halle
com o cheiro forte do desodorante
se foi só o desodorante masculino
ele mesmo um problema
q já vale por 10
nunca saberemos

o fato é q agora
nós temos toda uma allee
pra percorrer
em busca da palavra halle

eu perguntei pra várias pessoas
me perguntaram se não era hall
me perguntaram se não era hals
me perguntaram se não era halt
mas eu tinha mesmo ouvido halle

em alemão a palavra halle
eu conheço do voleibol
pq é na turnhalle
onde eu jogo voleibol
há mais de 2 anos
por quase 2h
todas as 4^{as} feiras
quase todas as 4^{as} feiras
qdo não tem pausas
ou férias escolares
com a turma da VHS
a maioria é de alemães
eu falo alemão
o meu vocabulário alemão

q eu uso na halle
do voleibol
é um vocabulário do voleibol
lá eu escuto frases
q eu considero mto poéticas
mas q são apenas frases
de comando/ de instrução
tipo der ball muss immer
in der luft stehen
ou ela disse bleiben?
de qualquer maneira
a bola não pode cair
ela tem q ficar no ar
e a coisa dela ficar no ar
é mto louca
pq por mais q o verbo ficar
sugira algo estático
ligado a uma posição fixa
a um ponto preciso
num determinado espaço-tempo

a única forma da bola ficar no ar
é em movimento

a halle a turnhalle
onde eu jogo voleibol
fica aqui em mehringdamm
no nº 59 ou seja
é nesse prédio aqui atrás
aqui do lado do lettrétage
onde a gente tá agora
eu sempre achei uma coincidência
esses 2 lugares tão importantes
pra mim em berlim
serem vizinhos

é nessa turnhalle
q eu venho exercitando
a presença
e ao exercitar a presença
eu exercito a linguagem

eu exercito a presença
no corpo da linguagem
os objetivos da minha aula
de voleibol
tão no programa da minha aula
de voleibol
rhythmische sportgymnastik
nach musik/ übungen zu den grund-
techniken (pritschen/ baggern/ aufschlag/
angriffsschlag und -sicherung/ block und
-sicherung)/ stellungsspiel
es folgt spiel mit spaß und einsatz

no último treino
eu até fiz um lema de motivação
um grito de guerra
pro nosso time não desanimar tanto
pq a gente tava perdendo feio
wir arbeiten zusammen
wir verbessern deutschland!

eu achei q era OK
puxar esse grito de motivação
depois q no vestiário
a gente já tinha até conversado
sobre a acensão da AfD
nas últimas eleições
e eu falei da campanha publicitária
da easyJET
q eu vi gigante na hermannplatz
ALTERNATIVE FÜR EUROPA
eu acho q é OK
aqui na alemanha
misturar exercícios físicos e política
até pq no dia das eleições
tava todo mundo correndo
na maratona
e quem não tava correndo
como eu
tava vendo os outros correrem

meu encontro tandem
não usou a palavra halle
no sentido sagrado de halleluja
nem no sentido profano de halloween
ele tbm não usou no sentido de halle
de turnhalle de voleibol
e não tinha nada a ver com rola
eu nem pensei nisso na hora
na hora eu pensei mais em ralé
mas eu só fui entender q era rolê
qd eu tava pegando o metrô
pra voltar pra casa

rolê é uma gíria em port.
q surgiu no sudeste do brasil
em sampaulo
mas em outras regiões
tbm se pode ouvir rolé
na música dos novos baianos

“dê um rolê” (1971)

regravada ano passado pela pitty

rolê reafirma seu sentido

ligado à noção de movimento

pq ele realmente é usado

no sentido de dar uma volta

um passeio

mas a partir desse 1º significado

surgiram outros derivados

tipo parada/ lance/ algo mto

trabalhoso/ difícil

depois de junho 2013

qd milhares de manifestações sociais

explodiram em todo o país

tb por causa do aumento da passagem

de ônibus em sampaulo

o tal dos 20 centavos

o termo rolêzinho

começou a ser usado pra explicar

um outro tipo de rolê

um rolê q envolve

questões de classe etc.

um rolê mto mais complicado

q não poderemos discutir agora

pq este poema já passa

dos 10.000 caracteres de prosa

q podem ser pagos pra tradução

se fosse o caso de tentar traduzir halle

pro espanhol mas a verdade é q

eu quase nunca traduzo pro espanhol

pq eu não falo um espanhol autêntico

mas pela minha experiência prática

eu até poderia pensar em rollo

pq rollo assim como pollo

tão em mtas expressões coloquiais

se fosse o caso de tentar traduzir halle

pro francês q é uma língua

q eu até tenho mais intimidade

eu tenderia a pensar em relais
mas nem por isso
vejamos este exemplo simples
q eu achei no site da [amazon.de](https://www.amazon.de)

des morts ont parlé
d'excellents médiums
ont rapporté leurs paroles
ce livre prend leur relais

eu traduzi esse relais
q tá nessa descrição do livro
da nathalie quintane
descente de médiums (2014)
por lugar/ posição
pensando em revezamento
mas eu não tô totalmente segura
pq depois q o antoine hummel
me explicou q nesse livro
ela trata das thoughtographs

uma técnica japonesa
de fazer fotos/ imprimir fotos
através de meios físicos
tipo imagens fotográficas/ fotografias
físicas feitas pela mente
como se fossem retratos
do pensamento
feitos pela força
do pensamento
retratando o próprio pensamento
na hora de pensar/ e de fazer a foto
eu fiquei confusa

pq eu acho q esse relais
da nathalie
desse livro q eu ainda nem li
mas só pela descrição
já dá pra sentir o clima
ele pode se relacionar com vários outros
sentidos trazidos pelo larousse online

a saber
neurologia/ eletricidade/ cibernética/
e até telecomunicações
e a meu ver
todos esses sentidos são possíveis

se fosse o caso de tentar traduzir halle
pro inglês ao invés de dizer rally ou rallye
essa coisa de competição de esportes
ou de manifestações políticas
talvez eu dissesse halley
do cometa halley
o cometa mais famoso da história
da humanidade
um cometa digamos fundador
e como tudo na vida
até os cometas carregam sua cruz
seja ela de plástico ou de madeira
ou literalmente
sua própria cabeleira

pq a palavra cometa
é originada do latim comēta
ou comētēs q por sua vez
vem da palavra grega κομήτης
wearing long hair
o dicionário inglês oxford
segundo a wikipedia
nota q o termo ἄσστηρ/ κομήτης
deriva do termo κομᾶν
to wear the hair long
q por sua vez deriva do termo κόμη
the hair of the head
q sempre foi usado pra falar sobre
the tail of a comet
foi aristóteles quem usou
pela 1ª vez a derivação komētēs
pra descrever cometas
como estrelas com cabeleira
e atualmente o símbolo
astronômico dos cometas

é ✂ em unicode U+2604

a small disc with three

hairlike extensions

a última vez q o cometa halley

cruzou a órbita da terra

eu tinha 5 anos e meu pai

usava uma camiseta

com o nome do cometa halley

eu me lembro da camiseta

mas do resto eu não lembro direito

era bem na época em q

a maria luíza assumiu o mandato

a maria luíza do pt

a 1ª prefeita mulher

de fortaleza

a 1ª mulher prefeita

de uma capital estadual brasileira

antes mesmo da luiza erundina

meu pai votou nela

minha mãe não votou nela

o tancredo já tinha morrido

ele morreu no mesmo dia

do tiradentes

só q quase 200 anos depois

e o cometa halley apareceu de novo

foram as 1^{as} eleições municipais

após a ditadura militar

e ninguém tava esperando

q ela ganhasse

nem mesmo o pt

é o q a wikipédia conta

fontes mto antigas

como os ossos oraculares

ox scapulae dos chineses

uma técnica de adivinhação

ligada à piromancia

já tinham registrado a passagem

do cometa halley pela terra

mas a verdade é q no séc. XVI

os cometas eram considerados
um mau presságio geralmente
associados a mortes de reis ou nobres
a anúncios de catástrofes vindouras
ou a ataques de seres celestiais
contra nós parece q plínio
o velho acreditava q os cometas
se relacionavam com certas agitações
políticas e com a morte
mas eu preciso checar isso direito

qd eu fico um pouco desanimada
pelo andar da carruagem
eu penso no cometa halley
e na sua cabeleira
eu converso com ela
eu peço energia pra ela
eu peço q ela nos ajude a entender
o q diabos tá acontecendo
e intimamente eu pergunto pra ela

qd nós vamos finalmente chegar
em 28 de julho de 2061?

de todos os modos eu sei q
qd a maren e a maria
minhas colegas neste projeto
die stadt der anderen/
the city of the others
tavam conversando em alemão
durante o nosso rolê
sobre o rolê do assaf e da lucy
por mais q o assaf tbm goste
de jogar voleibol
assim como eu eu tbm gosto
de jogar voleibol
a halle da conversa delas era outra
até pq a maren começou a rir
qd eu perguntei
eles tavam jogando voleibol?

nessa halle específica
do assaf e da lucy e de mtos outros
todos esses sentidos
talvez não façam o menor sentido
podendo inclusive a pergunta
q ouvi no zoológico benutzen die affen
ein deo am hafen, wenn sie es rafften?
ser entendida como racista
se for colocada no lugar errado
assim como aquela dancinha
da vitória da última copa do mundo
de futebol foi e se não foi
nós temos um problema



The City of Others by Jane Flett

In the City of Others, history falls faster than any place I've ever been. It gets *everywhere*. Tangled between cobblestones, snuck into flower beds, hiding behind a chilled Club Mate in the Turkish spätkauf. Brand new history oozes out of drains and into the streets every day. Of course it does. The City of Others is built on a swamp. We are trying to walk through the City of Others, but this constant gush of history makes it hard to find our feet. The ground keeps shifting. We shuffle past a metaphysical sinkhole, duck beneath a pipeline of the present. Then a kerbstone of the future whizzes between my ankles and sends me stumbling to the ground.

As he helps me up, Tilman tells me we ought to find a place where the past is at a standstill. Just for a moment, until I can catch my breath. He has a point. These streets are snakes eating their own tails and I am just the type to be swallowed. I pick some shards of new history out of the wet meat of my knee, and I tell him he is right. There ought to be some place in the whole city which is just the past and nothing else.

So we head deeper into the City of Others, looking for a spot where history isn't moving any more.

We begin our traipse down the hill, towards the Place of Roses. On the way, huge cranes peck and stammer at the asphalt, breaking open the surface so the new city can hatch. I catch a glimpse of what lies beneath: tangled cables and city guts.

In the Place of Roses, Tilman tells me, the townspeople are gathered to protest what is happening to the theatre. A new man has been put in charge and the people are squatting the building to make sure the plays stay the same as they have always been. After all, they say those who do not remember the past will be condemned to repeat it, and what better way to remember the past than by making it happen again? It is a good and honourable thing, this fight to stop the future oozing everywhere. We smile at the bubble makers on the grass, applaud the townspeople peering from the windows.

A protest against change—what better place to find the past stood still than this? We show up with eager hearts, but it is already too late. The police are already inside, pulling the protestors down the stairs and out into the bright blinking sunshine.

We feel the ground wriggle and twitch beneath us. There will be new plays, they say. New histories. The future will blanket the townspeople in a soft white coat like snow.

Well, what about the marketplace, says Tilman. If ever there was somewhere we will find our connection to the past, surely it will be through the belly—that ancient beast. Besides, the day is getting on in the City of Others. Our thoughts have run to sausages, the way they do of an afternoon. So we head there, our eyes peeled wide for signs of the past stood still.

When we reach the marketplace, we are convinced this is the one. There is baked bread and cured meat, a woman in a white dress playing piano on the cobblestones. Her eyes are closed and her music is the soundtrack to a canal boat on late summer water. Her music comes from a time that is not our own.

We close our own eyes, bite down on charred meat, and let the sunlight beat upon our lids. For a moment we almost believe it is true. But then—a scream, a hubbub, new histories sneak in like the Pied Piper and play the children from this town. As we watch, before

our very eyes, this fake past begins to crumble. The cobblestones shake and separate; roof tiles fall from the sky like apocalyptic hail. The wall, says Tilman. We should go to the wall. The wall itself may be gone but the gash through the City of Others remains. Now *there* is a place where the past will prevail.

So we flee the marketplace, bellies warm with sausages, before any more of the present can play out.

We walk on through the City of Others. On the way, we pass the street of the chestnut trees, we pass the place where the townspeople used to publicly wash the sins from their skin. Now the small metal bathtubs are no more and we worry for the townspeople, how they'll ever get clean.

When we arrive at the wall, there are indeed markings of the past. Bronze spills into a channel in the concrete, marking a forever-divide between the side that believed in the past and that which promised the future. There is a plaque too for where someone jumped, trying one last time to bridge the gap.

We are ready to be silent for a moment to honour this place, but then we realise we are not alone. We are being watched over by the

two laughing women of the dancing emporium. They are advertising a new kind of entertainment—a new temptation that promises a thing it may not quite deliver. Their teeth are very, very white. The enamel catches in the dying sunlight and tells us we won't find what we're looking for here.

As they do, the ground beneath us begins to shake, a huge creature waking up beneath the concrete. From the towering buildings above us, guttering shakes loose and writhes Medusa-like in the air.

Let's get out of here, yells Tilman. He is shouting now, to be heard above the shearing concrete. Just before the ground bursts open and a new history births out, we take our leave.

As we walk back across the City of Others, clambering over debris and shattered foundations, we are weary. Our feet have foundered far across the city—we have stumbled many times. And now, it turns out there is no place where the past is still. All the city is a hot morass of movement; everything is change.

Perhaps it is fine, Tilman says, as we pass by an emporium stacked high with cookie dough. After all, the future is sweet. We have no truck with the future. If it must be that we live in flux, then so it must

be. Perhaps some day we will find a nugget of the past with no future slathered upon it, but that does not need to be now.

I feel a little defeated, but agree all the same. Why *not* let myself be swallowed? It might not be so bad there, deep in the belly of the snake. Of the streets.

But then, as we turn the corner, Tilman stops in his tracks. He stops so fast I think his foot must have become tangled in a hot cable of the future.

There, look! he says.

Where Tilman is pointing to is not really a place, not as such. It is the bit between two places, a non-space, a gap like a missing tooth.

A void, says Tilman, and he steps inside.

I have heard of the voids. Like dead air on the radio when the DJ's forgotten the next song to be played, the voids are said to be quiet. The voids are the wrong shape to be built upon, so they say, and so the voids have never been built upon. They have no histories. They are the one place in the city where the past is still.

Well, for all that it is nothing, the void is beautiful.

I follow Tilman into the void, and we find a man squatting on the ground. He is making something: a beautiful new chair out of the

broken floorboards of old buildings. His hands are worn; the wood is soft and smooth. The thing he is making has the past tucked inside the future, a Matryoshka doll of time. Somehow, though, it is sturdy. It is solid upon its feet.

The man welcomes us as if we are friends who have been lost a long time. He hands us each a beer and tells us to sit, stay a while. The void is a quiet, still place and it will provide us with everything we need.

So we do sit, here in the place between places. Surrounded by walls. On the one, there is ivy snaking its way ever-upwards, turning a ripe blood orange in the beams of the setting sun. As we drift backwards and forwards, I catch my breath. There is stillness. We rest here, and I feel a small thrill in the pit of my stomach. The City of Others is still out there, just past this wall, forever shifting and writhing and hocking up something new.

I have no idea what will happen next, but still. I show my teeth to the sun, and prepare for the next history to appear.



The Big Picture by Tilman Rammstedt

Shortly before I reach street corners, I always realise that I'm walking much too fast. At the last few metres, I slow down and hope that no one's noticed. After all, we mustn't hurry at any cost. After all, we're not just here for the fun of it; we're off for a stroll. This is an official holiday and we want to coast along, or at least pretend that we're coasting along. The weather is just what we ordered—if we'd thought about ordering weather—and we have no destination, except to have no destination, and we mustn't arrive too early. Strolling is a complex activity. If you don't pay attention for just one second, then you're back to walking normally; and then you're back to hurrying. And then you don't gaze around the way you're supposed to while strolling—in other words indiscriminately and attentively. You have to let your gaze wander, otherwise it doesn't count, but I forget this again and again until the street corners remind me. Because on street corners you always have to make a decision: there's always left or right or straight on, and today it's always Neukölln and it's always the afternoon, this long, drawn-out afternoon. And then Jane says, because she's the one who knows her

way around today: 'Shall we go that way?', and she points left or right or straight on, and I say: 'Yes,' because anything else would be the wrong answer.

We're on holiday. Only for a few hours, but holidays don't care about these kinds of things. We're on holiday because I told Jane that in Neukölln, I always felt like I was on holiday. That's what I said yesterday, as we were taking a stroll through my life, when I was the one who knew his way around, and knew it all too well, and nothing felt like a holiday, quite the opposite in fact: everything felt too familiar, so familiar that I kept having to blink several times to see anything at all. All the places have been long since rubbed away by my years of looking at them; they have been worn shiny from being looked at, and it seems insanely unnecessary that Prenzlauer Berg is still standing, that it hasn't been dismantled, put in moth balls and laid out on a bier long ago. It also seemed insanely unnecessary to show it to anyone—a complete waste of time. Everything looked dusty and tired, and of course I knew that, in truth, it was me who was probably dusty and tired. I knew that in truth I no longer saw houses, roads, or parks; just symptoms—dusty, worn-out symptoms.

In truth. But the truth could go to hell: I really needed a short break from the truth.

A holiday, in other words. Neukölln, in other words. Both are very close. A few stations on the underground and you're already in a place you never go, where nothing is worn out. I only know individual spots, small sections, with many white gaps in between: terra incognita. That's where lions live; or at least lions might live there, and when it comes to lions, it's better not to blink. For one afternoon, I can walk through a life that's not my life. For one afternoon, there should be a whole bunch of new impressions rather than memories of memories of memories. For one afternoon, it shouldn't matter if you go left or right or straight on, because everything is the same distance from the familiar.

And the day is trying hard; it's really putting its heart into it. It's screaming 'Autumn!' The sun is shining milkily, the leaves have on way too much make-up, and everything seems fake to the point of being grotesque. Syrians really are playing table tennis and laughing in a front yard lovingly planted with flowers; someone really is riding a unicycle while a Turkish child really does blow soap bubbles through the shot; there really are a huge amount of incredibly young

and incredibly beautiful people sitting on the river bank and talking animatedly in all the languages of the world and certainly a few more. I can't hear what they are saying, but I'm sure one of them is asking: 'Tell me, are you living the best life imaginable?' And the others are surely nodding over and over again and saying: 'Yes, we really are,' before making a toast with their beer that glistens in the afternoon sun like precious treasure—and maybe it really is, too. 'Nice here,' I say to Jane, and Jane nods very nonchalantly, because she's already known that for ages: everyone knows, especially today. And it really is nice here. It is improbably nice, unconvincingly nice. An elaborately staged promotional video for Neukölln, produced by a local start-up that has already won heaps of awards for its trendsetting combination of innovation and sustainability. And I'm a little offended that I'm apparently expected to fall for this ad, for this relaxed toing-and-froing, this realism taken too seriously, the glossy brochure diversity, this new beginning on display. At any moment, everyone could start dancing and singing some anthem to Neukölln, naturally with rap inserts and a pompous, spectacularly choreographed finale, and I'd be the only one who didn't know the lyrics, not to mention the dance steps. I'd be the only one who'd be

totally out of place, and the director would tap me on the shoulder and smile and say that it didn't matter, quite the opposite in fact: this imperfection would stand for Neukölln, but I wouldn't believe him. And maybe that's why I'm failing to go for a walk today. Perhaps I really don't want to be a tourist. Perhaps what I want to do, maybe only for the promo video, is to pretend that this is my everyday life; not the city of others, but my city, my everyday life, my life—because it's so close, so possible. And I think, while I keep forgetting not to hurry, about the fact that maybe that's why holidays, even if they're only in Neukölln, are always so exhausting. Because the questions don't go on holiday. Quite the opposite in fact: holidays are the high season for questions. I always wonder what it would be like to live wherever I happen to be on holiday. Every café could be my regular hang-out; in every one-euro shop I could regularly buy Sellotape or confetti or whatever else costs a euro. And, of course, I'm sure that in this other life I would need confetti on a weekly basis—on a daily basis. On every bench, I see myself sitting in the sun reading a book and, out of the corner of my eye, I try to see if I look happier, more attractive, healthier, more in tune with myself; I try to spot whether I

read more sophisticated books, but I always go blurry at the crucial moment.

The whole of Neukölln looks blurry. That park really should be in Paris. This district really should be in 19th-century Bohemia. There are an incredible number of shops selling incredibly colourful dresses, and neither the shops nor the dresses should be here. There are cafés that really should be in Prenzlauer Berg. There is a swimming pool that really should be open. There is hustle and bustle, there is art, there are Internet cafés, because apparently there are still Internet cafes; there are kids, there are headscarves, there are man buns, there is pizzadönersushivietnamesecurrywurstpelmeni-grünkohlsmoothieschultheissginandtonic. Everything is exactly as it should be, and I don't pay attention to detail, although I know, of course, that you should pay attention to detail while strolling, otherwise there's no point in doing it, but I overlook the detail and notice the way I begin to despise detail, to despise the concept of 'detail'. 'If detail is as important as everyone claims,' I say to Jane, 'then it would be bigger and more eye-catching. It would have eon warning signs,' and if Jane is surprised, she doesn't show it. She even agrees with me. 'Fuck detail,' she says, raising her fist, 'it's all about

the big picture', and she likes saying it because it sounds good, and I nod, because it sounds good, and then there's another street corner, and this time it's the last; this time there's no left or right or straight on, but only back. But I don't want to go back yet, not straight away; at a stretch of the imagination, it's still the afternoon, and of course I know that everything here is just a symptom too, that I haven't seen another district and certainly not another life, only symptoms, but even they go very well with autumn. And of course, I know that here, like everywhere, there's drizzle and endless, wasted afternoons, that there's boredom—plenty of boredom—and that here everything quickly gets dusty and tired; of course, I know it's never just down to the place. But if I don't blink, I can still pretend that I don't know that. So, we drink another beer by the canal; we have invited other people and other lives, and we all sit there and watch swans, because the lions are running late. Slowly, we start to freeze. That's the way it should be. And we talk about life; that too is how it should be. It's not very big, and it's not really the picture, but it's enough not to be a detail.

(Translated from German by Lucy Jones)





Assaf Alassaf (* 1975, Syria), author, physician and journalist, his texts are available on Facebook and at mikrotext: "Abu Jürgen. Mein Leben mit dem deutschen Botschafter" (2015).

Jane Flett (* 1984, Scotland) is an author and musician. Her writing features in over seventy anthologies and literary magazines, and she is part of the riot grrrl band *Razor Cunts*.

Lucy Fricke (* 1974), author and festival organizer, most recently published her novel "Takeshis Haut" (2014, Rowohlt Verlag), in 2018 her fourth novel "Töchter" will be released by Rowohlt Verlag.

Maren Kames (* 1984), poet, her well-received debut "Halb Taube Halb Pfau" was published by Secession Verlag in 2016.

Tilman Rammstedt (* 1975), author, columnist and musician. Most recently he published the novel "Morgen mehr" (Hanser Verlag, 2016), which had been developed publicly as a serial novel online.

Maria Sewcz (* 1960), has won multiple awards for her photographs, numerous solo exhibitions, most recently with photographs and videos in Haus am Kleistpark ("Jetzt, Berlin", 2016).

Erica Zingano (* 1980, Brazil), transdisciplinary poet, numerous publications, most recently "eine Sache für die andere" (bulky news press, 2017).

