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Delphine Chapuis Schmitz

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Martinez

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Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. h. c.
Friedrich Schlegel
Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft

Collection
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2013

Delon
Champs
Schmitt

and
Martinez

Edition
Scheffers

A FEW
WORDS
I WANT
TO
SHOW
YOU¹

100

Poetry
as the
ultimate
uncontrolled
space

Choose your own
adventure, chase
your own narrative.

A game is being
played which requires
deciphering.*

Start making sense.
It all takes time.

1. My interest in art has never been about abstraction—it has always been about experience. My pieces are meant to be considered experientially.

1.1. A few years ago, when I was painting,² it seemed that paintings would look one way in one place and another way in another place, because of lighting and other things. It was the same object but a different work of art. Then I made paintings that incorporated the wall on which they were hung. And finally I gave up painting for the wire installations. Eventually, the wire became so thin that it was virtually invisible. It was at this time that I discarded the idea that art is necessarily something to look at. Although this poses problems, it also presents endless possibilities.

1.2. I am interested for the most part in that area between events which could be called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and void regions or settings that we never look at.

1.2.1. Negativer Raum bedeutet für mich, dass ich über die Unterseite und die Rückseite von Dingen nachdenke.

2. There is a certain amount of fiction in my work. It's something I'm interested in and it is something that I manage to deal with because I'm making art which is not about "the real." It's about unveiling the potentials it entails... or so I keep telling myself.

3.1. In 1969, the conceptual artist Douglas Huebler wrote, "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more." I've come to embrace Huebler's ideas, though it might be retooled as, "The world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more than necessary."

3.1.1. Most of the texts are stolen anyway.

3.2. I have always asked myself: "Why are all these artists continuing to produce objects? And why put stuff on the wall, why put stuff on the floor? Why place anything at all in a room, in a space, in an area?"

4. I would prefer not to.

With words by
(in order of appearance):

Bethan Huws,
Fred Sandback,
Robert Smithson,
Bruce Nauman,
Ryan Gander,
Kenneth Goldsmith,
myself,
Jean-Yves Jouannais,
Herman Melville.

Stellen Sie sich

I have been wondering what it could sound like, mulling the whole thing over in my mind. Originally, I wanted to write in French. I figured it would be easy for you to understand. You would be able to read through the words, and into your own language. You would not quite understand everything for sure, but you would nonetheless have an idea of what it is all about. After a while, you would get more confident, you would get used to deciphering, and also know better how misleading resemblances between one language and another can sometimes be. I was thinking French would have for you the same kind of illusory transparency that Italian has for me, for instance. Actually, another reason why I intended to write in French at first is that it is my mother tongue—a weird expression when you think about it: “mother tongue.” → a

Do you get surprised in your own tongue? Mine has been trained in French pronunciation from the very beginning but somehow I now have difficulty expressing myself in French. Or rather, it is difficult for me to say certain kinds of things in French. It is too close, and too loaded somehow. It leaves little space to move in, little space in which to stretch my legs and feel my way, in which not to fall prey to expectations I’m not even aware of, in which to make mistakes, start anew, start from scratch, and arrive somewhere else, in an

a. A big red tongue comes before my eyes, contracting and moving as if it had its own existence. The fleshy counterpart of language’s ethereal existence.

Remarkably enough, we don’t have a matching word for “tongue” in French. For sure, we do have «langue», but it means “language” as well as “tongue,” the two being equally embedded in the same word. So for us, the fleshy appendage doesn’t exist independently from the meaningful words this muscle is capable of expressing.

And it is also the case, *komischerweise*, that «langue» is first and

unknown and unexpected place. I have to admit that I can even get pretty bored in French, knowing the tricks and stumbling over the same old patterns again. It is like a path I've gone on a thousand times, every nook and cranny of which I know by heart. And I go like: Ok, ok, I know, I know. — And this is not very stimulating.

Well, if I am completely honest, there are also days when my mother tongue feels like a good old coat, warm and large, in which I can wrap myself and rest from the world, smelling blackberry jam and grilled toast in the morning. But the point remains essentially the same: as a means of expression, it belongs to the past. For some years now my daily life has been unfolding in a language which is not originally mine. I read, talk, dream, eat, and all the rest in the foreign language of the foreign country I live in. And the funny thing is that with time, being far away from the one I come from has become who I am. So maybe another way to formulate the whole thing would be: I do not know how to speak French anymore so that it would make sense to me here and now. I would have to reinvent the language, find a new way to deal with it so that it becomes my own again, for the present.

I hope you understand.

Stellen

foremost associated with «language» — at least when uttered out of the blue. So in a nutshell, although both denote the same thing, you don't have the same kind of image on your mind with *langue maternelle* as you do with "mother tongue."

In German they say „Muttersprache“. **Pretty much** the same as in French. Except that „Sprache“ means both «language» and «langue» — but *langue* only in the sense of "language," and not in the **concrete** organic sense, which would be „Zunge“. „Mutterzunge“ would thus be the literal translation of "mother tongue." Which does not really work.

Je voudrais
encore
préciser
une chose
avant de
commencer :¹

Je me demande souvent pourquoi le silence si dense de Marcel Duchamp mérite d'être entendu.

Est-ce en raison de cet état flottant dans lequel coexistent, à côté de l'œuvre réalisée, toutes les œuvres possibles, toutes les variantes qui n'ont jamais vu et ne verront jamais le jour?

J'aime à penser que la réalité comprend, outre ce qui a effectivement lieu, l'ensemble des potentiels passés et futurs, ainsi que ceux qui ne sont pas, n'ont pas été et ne seront pas actualisés dans le monde réel.

Dérouler les lignes de monde non actualisées, s'immiscer dans les interstices du donné pour en faire émerger les mondes possibles qui auraient pu s'en dégager, et les donner à percevoir en tant que tels, c'est peut-être cela au fond qui m'intéresse.

On pourrait ainsi imaginer un art où le réalisé et le non-réalisé se confondraient, où les contingences de la réalité seraient tout à fait minimales, un art instantanément réel et sans fantasmes.

Et d'ailleurs, il se peut qu'il existe déjà: il pourrait bien s'agir de la littérature.

Ou d'une quelconque forme d'écriture.

Non seulement l'écriture se fond dans tout, mais tout se fond dans l'écriture, et face à l'immense quantité de texte qui nous entoure, le problème n'est pas d'en rajouter, mais d'apprendre à négocier ce qui existe déjà.

D'un autre côté, de tout temps, écrire n'a toujours impliqué que lecture et réécriture^{3.1.1}, et par là même, la décision d'écrire peut être depuis toujours, et à chaque instant, questionnée quant à sa nécessité^{3.1}.

Au fond, si on est tout à fait honnête, écrire devrait être aussi facile que faire la vaisselle, et tout aussi intéressant.

Par exemple:

je n'ai rien à dire
je n'ai rien à raconter
je n'ai rien à montrer
je n'ai rien à donner
je n'ai rien à cacher
je n'ai rien à perdre
je n'ai rien à offrir
je n'ai rien à envier
je n'ai rien à prouver → b

c. Note that the contradiction arises only when you read the sentences as being asserted, that is, when you read them as statements. Which means reading the projection as an act of asserting.

b. The sentences are projected in a loop on one of the bottom corners of a white wall. They appear in a rather small size, at knee height. The letters are bright and without a visible frame. After a couple of seconds, they fade and give way to the next sentence. The fact that the projection of the sentences stands in contradiction to their plain linguistic content is what interests me most. ← c This is not a direct contradiction of the form “a and not a,” but this is what I consider a productive one, insofar as it does not end in a dead end but makes visible instead that there is more to the meaning of a statement than its linguistically devised content. In a way, it calls for a new kind of understanding of what is asserted, maybe intuitive rather than rational. Furthermore, your understanding of the statements is affected by each new assertion and each new occurrence of an assertion. The play with words thus becomes a play with language (*Sprachspiel*). Something appearing very plain and simple at an object level opens up a whole range of possibilities at a meta-level. → d I guess it is in this sense that I consider this piece as still representative of what I am aiming at.

d. The distinction between object and meta-level can be useful when handled carefully: it is not a question of fact but a theoretical tool to better understand specific practices. It involves taking a step back from the scene and analyzing it at arm's length, in other words, abstracting components which are essentially entangled in the practice itself: thinking not only goes with words and concepts, it can also occur in and through experiencing and trying out different material configurations. In a similar way, experiencing does not necessarily go without reflection^e—except that the reflexivity at play is different from that which characterizes the production of theoretical discourse. It is embodied, incorporated, and, as such, not explicit, which means that it cannot be abstracted from the particular gestures and practices it takes place in without being distorted, to a certain extent.

e. A possible name for this kind of embodied reflexivity would be *aesthetic reflexivity*. It is an essential element in the practice of the artist and in the reception of the art-work. In both cases,

a form of aesthetic reflexivity occurs, taking place in and through the experiencing of singular contents.

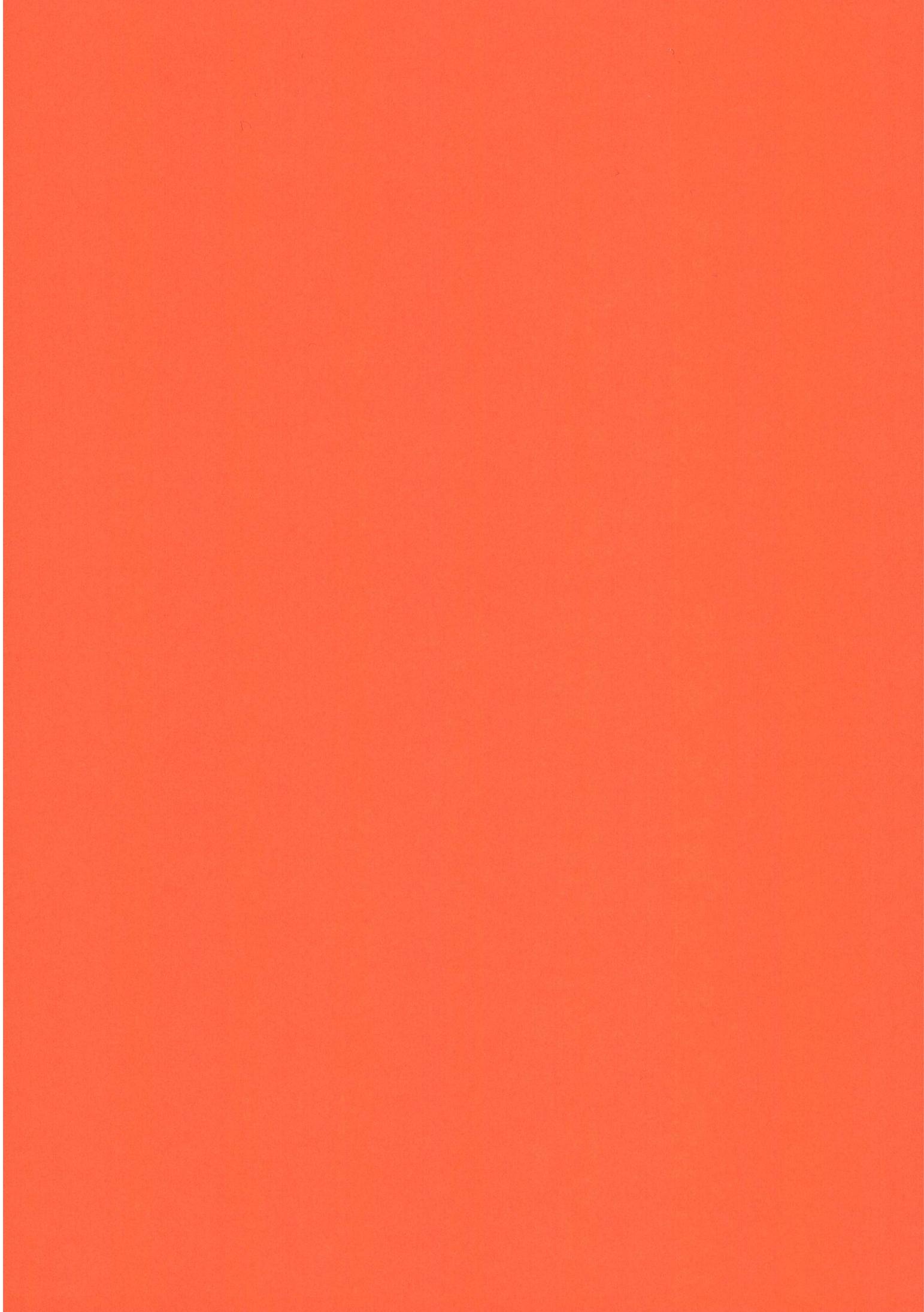
J'avais
juste envie
de savoir
quel effet
ça fait

d'écrire ces mots-là

*hot chutney
on a violet plate*

*une petite
cuillère en inox
dans un bol
en pyrex*

*an orange
oscillating
between my*



Not
Yet
Titled
(excerpts)

1 ■ We met regularly from the very beginning. Every two or three weeks you would drive downtown, park beneath my window, and wait until I was ready to show up. You never got impatient. I remember hearing your old truck from far down the street and knowing you would be waiting for me without having to take a look. Margaret did lift an eye when she happened to be around and glanced at me with comprehension. She knew I had to go and meet you. There were times when I would quickly pack my things and hurry up, but more often than not I would stay seated for a while, fastening my thoughts, preventing them from escaping and dissolving in every corner of the room, before reaching out to the truck.

Sie stellen

2. I recognized you the very first time I saw you. You matched exactly the picture I had made of you based on the description they gave me. I still ask myself whether this is the reason why it was so difficult to get close to each other without falling into the old traps. But I have no answer to this. We were cautious not to tell each other too much, and it was not clear to either of us what the alternative could have been. Though we had a wide range of experience in many things, we lacked training in this particular domain.

Most of the time, we would drive carefully to the diner located a couple of blocks from my place. We would sit there and rehearse the plan, adding some details here and there, changing others, and trying not to attract attention.

When Robbie was on duty, he simply acted as if we weren't there. There were also times when we would meet at your place in the trailer. It was more comfortable in a way: we could display all the pieces full scale, trying to find a common pattern. We would run through all of them over and over again, starting from scratch for the thousandth time after we'd reached another dead end, playing every step back and trying out different combinations. You used to say that ideas may set off in unexpected directions, but each idea must necessarily be completed in the mind before the next one is formed. This is pretty much what we tried to do.

It usually lasted until late at night. Cans of beer accumulated on the floor, the whole place slowly becoming a mess, the air getting stuffed, and we inevitably ended up more puzzled than when we started. But it made no difference. I guess we even got used to it in some way. Another outcome would have been surprising. And in retrospect I would say that despite it all, we were not quite ready when it started to happen for good. Things have to come to a certain point before you can look at them in the eye—this is the kind of general principle I firmly believe in, albeit not too seriously—and this time, things had not got mature enough when it all started.

3 ■ We had been sitting there all afternoon, undecided as to whether we should tell them or not. You had kept silent most of the time, looking tired and skeptical. I was focusing on the clattering plates, with no better choice. No one else seemed to pay attention: big mouths, absent looks, large faces, and sparse conversations, the smoke of cigarettes floating up from ashtrays, a TV screen in every corner, each showing a different program, loud enough so that you could lie down and relax without having to follow much. Like this I could concentrate on my own train of thought and not get disturbed. Which was good in a way.

The waitress didn't lose time. Every time I waved to her, no matter how faintly, she immediately arrived and poured some more coffee into the large mug. It was barely warm and had to be drunk quickly if at all, but it was comforting nonetheless. I wasn't asking for more.

A neon sign keeps flickering outside.

Then at some point—it was just before the car incident—you straightened up and gave me a nudge. Not that it was necessary: I had already noticed it myself. But we exchanged a look anyway and both carefully turned around to make sure, even though we both knew the case was clear—we could have recognized it under water. His tone of voice was just the way we had always known it, the same mix of deep and low tones, carefully articulated. This was him, no doubt about it.

“It is not like it would be a movie or something—I just cannot think of anything else.” These are the exact words he uttered after having taken a deep breath reaching at the bottom of his stomach. This was exactly what we had been waiting for the whole time.

4. We had not heard him at first because of the late afternoon traffic. The city was getting more and more crowded these days, people were coming from all over the country to settle down. True, most of them only stayed for a couple of days before going farther south. They quickly realized it would be more difficult than expected. And they were right.

Another time I guess I would have been really upset and left the scene. But I could hardly recognize myself these last few days. It's not that I really cared though—it's just that I had seen too much of it and was starting to get tired of the whole thing. But I decided to brace myself and know better. Which I did. This was the only way I could keep calm and stick to the plan.

The moon had not yet shown at this point.

5. He was sitting at the table behind us, holding a cup of black coffee between his two hands, tight. And this is really what we had been looking for the whole time—even though, to be honest, it was also the last thing we could have expected. But here he was, and you dropped your skeptical look, and acted more concerned. I don't know why, but it is at that very moment that I started to get worried, and this time for good.

The sign outside keeps flickering, blue, red, blue, red, blue, etc.

He took another breath and repeated what he had just said. The exact same words. "It is not like it would be a movie or something—I just cannot think of anything else." We both knew the time had come. I slowly got to my feet. I was ready. My heart was pounding, the clock on the wall started to tick louder, and I knew I had to move fast. Without giving it another thought, I took my coat off the rack and went outside. You stayed behind as planned.

Outside the neon sign had been shut down.

eine Stelle

6 ■ You were living in a trailer home. The park was located a few miles away from the city border, where the sky opens up and the horizon starts getting out of reach. You were among the few to like it, and you never quite understood why everyone kept their surroundings so cluttered. Space wasn't exactly lacking. The ground unfolded in the distance as if it had never been conquered. And yet, old tires were scattered all around; old mattresses competed with empty bottles and yellowing books no one had ever read; forgotten pieces of furniture and torn pages of magazines, the colors of which had been washed up by the rain and rendered undecipherable, remained as evidence of lapsed time. Nobody seemed bothered by it, though. I am not even sure anyone noticed, except you.

You once told me you ended up in this place by chance. You said you had arrived one morning and it had been obvious from the very beginning—because of the warmth in the early hours, because of the dust, or the suspension of light, you never could explain, even to yourself. Getting a trailer wasn't a problem. There were a couple of vacant ones, so that you even got a chance to choose among them. The one you picked was comfortable enough, with all the usual appliances, no big arrangements needed. You didn't need much anyway.

It didn't take you long to get used to living there. You got up in the early morning and smoked your first cigarette on the doorstep. You caught yourself looking at the sun slowly reaching above the horizon. Fortunately enough, you were on your own at this time of day—it was still the crack of dawn. The neighbors were sobering up from last night, dreaming out the beer and the routine. It was all calm and quiet. As if the world was on pause, and for a while you could really enjoy looking at it and simply being there. It is such moments that kept you staying there I guess, although it is not something you would ever have admitted.

Another reason might have been the electric fields. You could see their silhouette in the distance when the air was clear and there was no wind to disturb the dust.

7. Pretty soon you started noticing him every morning. He would appear on his old bike, as precise as a Swiss clock, in the middle of his rounds, as he told you later on. He turned his face towards the half-opened door behind you and after a few times you were not afraid to wave back to him anymore. He had dark eyes and curly hair.

No one could reach out to you the way they reached out to others, which is probably why you remained an outsider in their eyes. This was your strength in a way. But with him it was different. Little by little you started to greet each other when you would meet in town, by chance or so it seemed. At the beginning, you recognized each other only when you happened to be standing side-by-side—the first time it happened at the bar, I remember that Jack was drying some freshly washed glasses, and he raised his eyebrows when he noticed it. It was unusual, to say the least, to greet strangers here, and even more surprising that he greeted you. But after a while, you started to give each other a sign from one end of the counter to the other, and finally ended up waving across the room. The whole process took several weeks.

You never seemed to be fully aware of the awkwardness of it. It is not until he ended up talking to you that you reported it to me, incidentally, one afternoon. You mentioned it like you would have told me about the yellow dog following you when you went for a walk at dusk, or the old lady looking behind her lace curtains. For my part, I have come to believe that your being a stranger may have been the very reason why he felt he could open up to you. You did not have much prejudice, or did not seem to at least. You usually would listen carefully without asking too many questions.

I still wonder whether it was the best strategy. But I guess you did not have much of a choice in the end.

Stellen Sie sich vor

8 ■ On afternoons when the sun was shining bright, Margaret would go to the lake and take a swim. At least that's what she kept telling everyone. And everyone believed her, even though no one ever saw her, which might have been better this way. Not that she was ugly, she just had no real shape. Her body seemed to know no boundaries, she was all fat, extended by loose sweaters and a black hoodie. No one ever saw her dressed otherwise.

She had been my neighbor from the very beginning, and although I could not picture her in a bathing suit, I could tell a lot about her habits and whereabouts. For instance, when she picked up the newspaper on her doormat in the morning, you could hear her groan while bending down, and then groan again while straightening up. She also had pieces of clothing hanging on the porch for weeks, and then one day, when you expected it the least, she would replace them, changing the colors—from dark to lighter ones, and the other way around next time.

When she went for a walk, she carried a pack of cigarettes with her, usually half empty, but never had a lighter. She had to ask people around her, and that's probably how everybody got to know her in town. Except for the kids—they did not seem to notice her but they were the only ones.

The last time I saw her in town, it was on the parking lot next to the grocery store. She was far enough away so that I didn't have to say hello. Which was fortunate, since it would have been embarrassing after what had happened the night before. She was pulling an empty trolley and I don't think she saw me, but still, I heard her sniff deeply and disappear.

It was just after you had decided to go up north.

Of course, things never went back to where they were before, so I guess it will be impossible to know what really went through her mind. I never had the chance to ask her myself. Things being as they were, I was not able to see her alone in the weeks to follow. There were always people around, it was all crowded and busy, they were trying to take care of everyone, checking on us and not letting anyone go. But even if I had had a chance, the probability is high she wouldn't have told me the truth anyway. It was only years later that we emerged again and only then would it have been possible to reconnect, that is, if the memories had not been erased.

die

*snow dancing

behind the door
underneath the carpet
on the table
next to the—
around the corner

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

noch nicht

entdeckt

Un autre jour peut-être

through the window
above the sofa
at the bottom of a glass
beside the shelves
close to an end

Hier bin ich. Finally. Ehrlich gesagt, wäre ich lieber in der alten Stadt geblieben. Dort, wo alles gewachsen ist. Im Laufe der Zeit. Schritt für Schritt. Weniger präventiv. Weniger aufgeblasen. Weniger fake und glänzend. Weniger geplant.

Hier hat man mit einer gewollten Zukunft zu tun. Eine schwebende Zukunft, ohne Wurzeln, ohne jede Substanz, die sie verankern würde, die sie sinnvoll machen würde — oder zumindest nachvollziehbar. Eine Zukunft ohne Gegenwart — und ich rede gar nicht von der Vergangenheit: Das Wort hat hier seine Bedeutung verloren.

Aber hier bin ich, endlich. Auf diesen Moment habe ich gewartet. Ich habe mich gefreut, als es nur noch eine Idee war. Bin jedoch nicht sofort gegangen. Habe den Ausflug von einem Tag auf den anderen verschoben. Je näher der Moment, desto mehr habe ich es verschoben. Vielleicht habe ich sie schon geahnt: die Enttäuschung. Ich wäre lieber bei der Vorstellung geblieben.

Gestern aus dem Bus habe ich die Männer gesehen, die die Lichterketten an den Bäumen aufgehängt haben. In der ganzen Stadt wird ein ähnliches Spiel gespielt. Nur hier scheint es inszeniert zu sein: Nicht für die Freude an der Jahreszeit hängt man Lichterketten auf, sondern weil es so sein sollte, aus irgendeinem Grund, den man gar nicht wissen will. Es werden Regeln von anderswo aufgenommen und befolgt, zu denen aber die Umgebung nicht mehr passt.

Die Gebäude sind zu schnell gewachsen — als es noch keine Menschen gab, die hineinpassen würden. Sie sind vor dem Leben, das sie animieren würde, das sie verlangen würde, entstanden. Eine merkwürdige Situation.

Draussen auf der Strasse, die keine Strasse ist, musste ich an DeLillo denken. *Falling Man*. Auf dem Platz wusste ich nicht, wie ich mich verhalten sollte. Ist es wirklich chic und seriös, oder sieht es nur so aus? Drinnen bei der Rezeption habe ich den Dialekt der Receptionistin nicht verstanden. In dem Lift haben zwei junge Männer gelächelt, aufgeregter vor dem Abenteurer, ohne es zeigen zu wollen.

Und in jeder Ecke ein Kunstwerk. Es ist kaum auszuhalten.

re, on ira voir la mer.