

# SOGLITUDES

notes on thresholds



Che farò senza Euridice?



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Die Zeitschrift SOGLITUDES fördert den freien Austausch zwischen den Forschungsbereichen und ermöglicht die Verbreitung von aktuellen Entdeckungen auf Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch sowie auf Italienisch..

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# To fit into something that does not fit us

First, I wanted to write about the individual and the organization, the single person, the one single self in the institution. Where you become a tool, a function or a role within an organism that you dedicate yourself to. You share space with many other selves who are not individuals or persons within that institution but actors that engage in activities directed toward a greater good, some goal that does not involve them personally although it takes all day of every day of the week to pursue, and asks for your complete and focused attention.

Each segment of your day is reserved to special occupations, and there is a separation between work life and home life. The now typical work time frame between 9 and 5 is when you deal with work things and the other time you sleep and eat and take care of personal business. The person you are when you work for the organization is a tailored persona, it is not completely foreign to who you are when you relax, but it is meant to be a potentiated self that is more aware, more focused, more efficient, one that puts forward all the wonderful qualities that you emphasized on your résumé.

When you start bringing your work home and your home to work, you know that you are caught up in your job, so much so that terms like “office wives” and more recently “office husbands” emerge to name the people you spend more time with than with your “home husband” or your “home wife”.



Those blurred boundaries have led to a shift in consideration for the home life itself: it must be supportive of the other life, the work life that seems more important when you are at home, whereas the home life is praised and idealized while you are at work. But those attitudes become also blurred and overlap, especially when you don't work for an organization and don't have a guaranteed income every month. If you are your own boss it might overlap into the most human of your interactions and your moments of relaxation and the moments you consider yourself true to who you really are might become so rare that they don't even exist.

White Collar

In a society where work is not only the thing that keeps you alive but also the thing that keeps you from home, it is not surprising that love has been swept away from its original dwelling place and has been replaced by ambition. Not surprising really, also because to have a really beautiful, cozy, warm, free, loving, peaceful and creative home where everyone feels they have their place is probably one of the most challenging things to achieve. A place to rest, a place to create, a place to thrive and a place to feel safe and happy.

Organization  
Man

I was really going to write about the shift in focus of the individual before Troi took one of my books about the subject to Quebec with him when he was here after his escapade to Philadelphia and Atlantic City. I was left with *Lonely Crowd* (D. Riesman, N. Glazer, R. Denney, 1950) and *The Organization Man* (W.Y. Whyte, Jr., 1956), but the third book, the one that Troi took with him, *White Collar*, is essential for the understanding of the evolution of American society in the 1950s. When the percentage of entrepreneurs went down and the goal became to climb a social ladder, to move to bigger cities, to be the boss of more people, to achieve a better place within a group called a corporation. The goal had become to fit in somewhere, to "get a job" and if possible, a better job than the neighbor, the brother or the best friend from school. A better job, a better life.

Lonely Crowd

In *White Collar* (C. Wright Mills, 1951), the author describes the white-collar man as a clerk, a little man. Immediately there is a judgment, and not a flattering one, of the position that the white collar is in. It is described as something inferior, and this kind of judgment comes with hierarchy where necessarily one wants to be better than the next guy if he gets more money, has a prettier house or a prettier wife, or a more expensive car. But in fact, the white collar is



inferior in a more profound sense. He left his true self behind, he gave it up for exterior goals and thereby lost the ability to achieve true happiness. This phenomenon is described beautifully in Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt*, and that novel is from the 1920s. The competition comes with the lack of respect for yourself and the somewhat indulgent attitude toward the actual emptiness within. Wonderful portraits of that phenomenon can be found in the movies *Happiness* (1989) and *American Beauty* (1999).

## Happiness

From the 1920s until the 1990s we all seem to have become “happy” about becoming “normal” and to fit into something that does not fit us. We have come to adore our uneasiness with things and have become so proud of our accomplishment when we have reached a place within this society that dictates where we should be. If you have a wife and a house and a kid in Harvard Day Care, you’ve made it. Luca Salza describes the obsession about being normal from a French-Italian point of view, mixing movies and literature to extract truth out of the artifice.

The ideals seem to have shifted from what is within, a talent or desire at our core, to a more exterior goal of prestige and ambition, a mold we need to fit, a normal job, a good job where skills are standardized. With the weight of importance lying on the outside world, what is within, our true desire, seems to be left-over like another commodity. It shifted from being at the beginning of everything to something we barely dare wish for.

With the emergence of big institutions and corporate companies came the need to fit a prefabricated mold, to fit the job description, because to create your own is not what is expected of you.

It is with corporations that comes big money and with big money comes the hope for easy money and with that the slot machines in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. One aspect of this modern world is a big casino where everything is about gambling, winning and losing. Van Troi Tran talks about his disappointing trip to a different time that was not there anymore. Paint peels off the luster of the glory days of the emergence of money as a god. Perhaps, Troi has traveled a little back to his own work about 19th century Paris when he walked along the boardwalk in Atlantic City and thought about the Atlantic from the other side, the European side, when, at the beginning of the emergence of consumer culture, the World's Fairs started promoting a new and exciting style of a world of luxury, inventions and commercial success.

Have we lost sight of what is within us and replaced it with exterior goals? Did we become slaves to paper gods and societal pressures without even noticing, treating esoteric things like humbug when we still marvel at operas and plays, sit weeping in movie theatres and read books with teary eyes, because the arts somehow still retain what we have lost in our daily lives?

Apart from the reflections on normality and money, there is a text about Magic in Everyday Life and the next chapter of the next volume of the planet Alas-K. The Kitchen Giraffe and the Appropriate Horse ask themselves and each other deep metaphysical questions and make the parallel worlds shake again

Enjoy and welcome the thresholds. Always look behind you, but don't turn around! Orpheus would have been better off sensing her presence behind him instead of actually leaving his direction.





# Enchanting the everyday

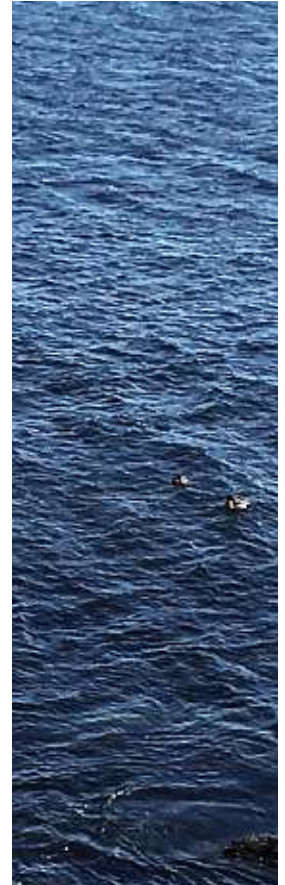
When you feel like you have to lie about something you do, what do you think you are doing?

You probably think you spare somebody else's feelings. You probably think that what you did is horrible, unacceptable, makes you less loveable. You might hold yourself responsible for your previous choices that you probably also made without listening to what the other person actually said to you, just assuming you know what they need and feel and what they expect you to do. And now that something else happens, you are sure it would hurt that person's feelings if they knew, so you prefer to keep it from them, and pretend it doesn't matter. Better to keep life as it is.

When one person is cheating or lying, it usually means that this person has someone he lies to and cheats on, because otherwise, why would anyone say that person is a liar or a cheat? And yet, it is much more complicated than that. First, you feel unhappy, trapped, dissatisfied and then you are afraid to change things about that. The terrible thing is that even a divorce or a separation is not an escape from the original feelings of dissatisfaction, the separation only adds feelings of failure, guilt and shame to the original sadness.

Think again. You are not responsible for another person, and how they feel or react to your actions. You are responsible for what you want, love, feel, choose. And even if a new choice cancels a previous one. The interaction with the other starts then. You don't protect, spare or preserve someone or something when you go behind their back, because you can't cheat on anyone else, you only cheat on yourself. And then you find excuses for yourself and you feel sorry for yourself. This is the best way to craziness and fakeness.

When you find yourself at a loss knowing what's right for you, what is your true heart's desire and what circumstances are forcing upon you, when you are clueless about the power you have on your choices, you need to take a step inward.





There is no other way. You need to breathe and focus on your body, no matter how annoyed or angry you are with yourself or with the whole world. You need to regain power over your own power, just a little, just a small baby step. When you close your eyes and focus on your body, when you drop your thoughts into a river of light that flows from the crown of your head to the earth, then you start disentangling the cobweb that you are caught in.

Open communication. Difficult. It starts with knowing yourself, it starts with allowing yourself to be exactly who you are. I don't know why modern societies have turned everything around. Religion, education, corporation, medication, any kind of authority that is allowed power over us makes us weak and whiny, incapable of knowing what we need and want.

No escape in  
separation

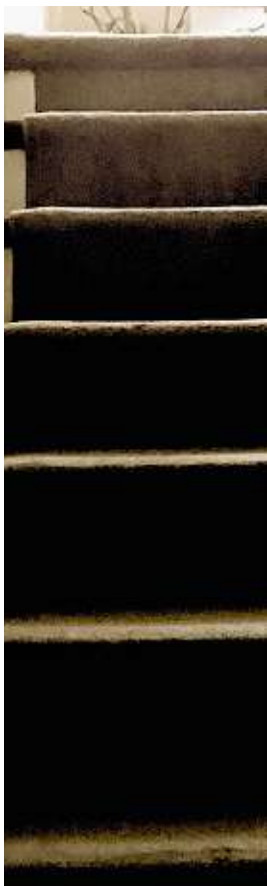
But there is another thing that seems even more scary, the glorification of suffering. I watch this in my immediate surroundings, and it has some subtle nuances. Somehow in our subconscious mind there seems to be a dysfunction that says we are only allowed pleasure if we go through a certain amount of pain. And if there is something purely wonderful happening, pure joy, pure love – then we throw some pain at it, some distrust, some shaming, some abandonment, some heart-freezing ignorance. Because this wonderful thing simply CANNOT be real.

No gain, no pain? Per aspera ad astra? To the stars through hardship? Everything worth having demands sacrifice?

What do these phrases even mean?

You deserve it? No. We don't deserve a piece of pie after a workout and we don't deserve a magnificent lover when we put up with a plain person the rest of the time. No.

We deserve to be ourselves in every moment of our lives. And the “hardship” we have to go through is not a mind-numbing job or a relationship that bores us out of our minds, the hardship is in the process of discovering who we are. And going against the idiotic opinions that stand in our way.



Because there is indeed a sacrifice and a hard road to walk on. But it is not outside, it is not torture that comes from incapacity to choose the things we want because we think we are not supposed to feel love or joy or absolute desire for someone, because we have learnt that all these positive feelings are actually bad! This is the shocking news I need to share with you.

I know someone that I love above everything. He is my true joy and my heart jumps every time I see him and even when I think I will see him. When we are together he is filled with love, desire, joy and calm and peace – but then very quickly there is something that drags him away from our pure happiness. Something that he calls real life or obligations. He has to go, always, he always has to go somewhere.

I tell him he does not. Because when we find happiness this is where we need to stay, this is where life happens because this is where we belong.

Happiness is not easy to find and most of all not easy to enjoy, cherish and keep. We are conditioned to question it and to push it away, to tone it down, even try to destroy it. Yet, it feels very banal, very obvious, very “duh!” when it happens. But it is actually what asks the most work from each of us. Before we find it, we first need to be in a state that allows us to be ready to receive it, to recognize it, to allow it and then - to take it in. Into reality, into every corner or our being where there used to be trauma or suffering or a twisted perception of how things really are. In order to allow joy and happiness into your whole being and to create life through it and with it, you first need to drive trauma and suffering out of every corner of your body.

The absolute happiness, the true self, the discovery of the core of life seems like a sin to most of us. Especially Italians. They believe that a cake would taste even sweeter if it were a sin to eat it. That says it all.

And this is where the work really starts. It all comes from giving up authority to someone else. In everything. When we feel pain we go see a doctor, when we have a conflict with someone we call a lawyer, when we don't know what to do we call 911. Every aspect of our life has been taken over by some authority that knows better. Even beauty is taken over by fashion

models that show us, not how beautiful things are but seemingly how ugly we are when we are not like them.

Most of life's apprenticeship is through imitation. When we see our parents talk on the phone, we imitate them, we watch and learn to hold a fork, to walk, to swim. But there is a point when we need to make all these things our own, the walking, the talking and the swimming. We need to use our own muscles, we need to find our own words, putting the art in the craft.

Sometimes we don't know what causes what and then there are absurd behaviors. I remember one of my professors lecturing about everything in his seminar when he spoke about a tribe that did not know what caused childbirth, they had not made the connection back to the event of sex. This is something to ponder. Now with the medical medium Anthony William, I learn a lot of new connections, different causes, that chicken is actually a high fat meat and not lean, that dairy and eggs feed viruses, but these things are not as important as regaining authority over your actions.

The idea that you should not pronounce the divine – another misconception. This is one of the major causes of horror. You should actually always pronounce the divine-meaning you should always address the thing you love most with words and deeds and touch. Kiss it and tell it and hug it – flowers, vegetables, your house and the person you love most.

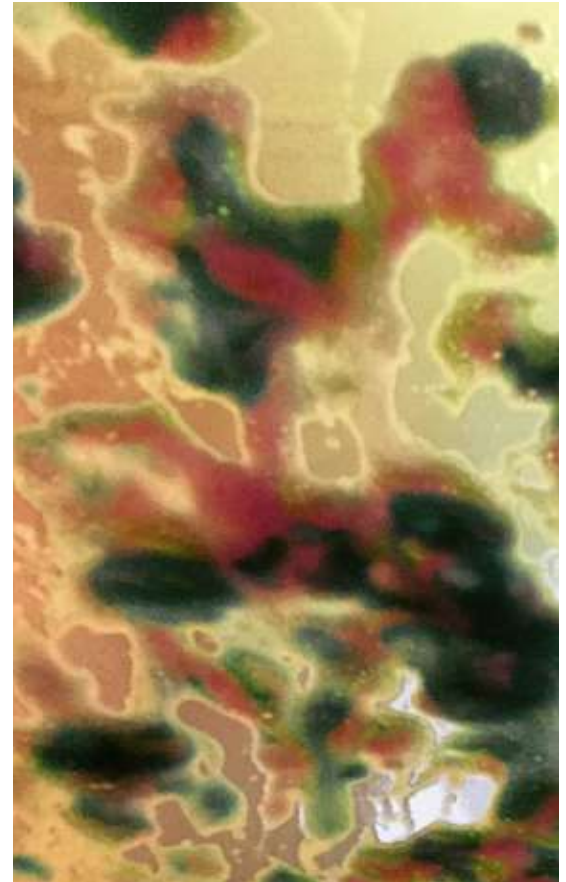


# Chè farò senza Euridice?

In meinem Lebensweg bin ich an eine esoterische Gruppe gestoßen, oder besser, ich bin zu ihr gestoßen, weil ich Hilfe brauche, genau dort, weil ich mich besser kennen will, so gut es geht jedenfalls, und daher meinen Weg verfolgen, die Lügen erkennen, rasch wissen was zu tun ist, was in jedem Moment die beste Entscheidung ist. Vieles hat mir schon dieser magische Zugang gebracht, viel Selbsterkenntnis, viel Freude daran, meine Welt hat mehr Farben, ist bunter und lebenswerter geworden, weniger verbleibt im Schatten. Doch was mich erstaunt ist, dass diese Gruppe den Film „*Matrix*“ als einen Dokumentarfilm beschreibt wie Keanu Reeves selbst in einem Interview gesagt haben soll. Das bedeutet, es wäre wahr, dass unsere Realität von anderen, höheren Wesen gestaltet wird. Und ich habe gedacht, es sei doch genau das Gegenteil der Fall und wir müssen zu unserer eigenen Verantwortung und Kraft finden und den Mut entwickeln, das fühlen zu dürfen, was wir tatsächlich fühlen und uns keine absurden Hindernisse in den Weg legen, die letztendlich nur uns selbst schaden.

Ehrlich verfolgen, was ich will und liebe und daher mehr Kraft in mir selbst finden, um die Welt um mich so zu erschaffen wie ich sie wirklich will.

Das ist natürlich ein volles Programm und nicht immer so glücklich machend wie es klingt. Doch ich mache Fortschritte, oder gar keine. Vielleicht ganz, ganz kleine. Ein bisschen mehr innere Stärke, ganz bisschen mehr Verständnis für andere, ein bisschen Dehnung des Herzens, ein bisschen mich auch sein lassen wie ich bin, und nicht selbst gegen mich sein.



Es braucht so viel Mut und Scharfsinn, sich wirklich zu mögen und fühlen zu lassen. Und das können wir nur, wenn wir uns so gut kennen wie möglich. So wenig unbewusst oder unterdrückt oder weggeschoben lassen und zu einem Symptom machen, denn Krankheiten kommen nur dadurch zustande. Man bildet ein Bild von sich, das nicht entspricht und das ist meistens, weil es mangelhaft ist. Wie Dorian Gray. Ein Bild im Dachgeschoß mit all den schrecklichen Sachen, die wir angestellt haben – damit unser tägliches Gesicht schön bleibt. So ein Blödsinn. Wir machen alles, Schönes und Grässliches, oder einfach nur das was wir können. Was wir verbannen, kommt zurück als Monster, als Angst, als Ausschlag, als Herzinfarkt, als Gehirnschlag, als Krebs.

Wenn wir alle eines Tages Menschen werden wollen und nichts als monströs bezeichnen, sondern uns alles erlauben zu fühlen, Lust und Wut, Hass und unendliches Glück, dann verschwinden wohl die Krankheiten auch, die Ärzte und die Symptome mit ihnen, die Autorität, die wir fürchten, und selbst der Arztbesuch, denn wir sind dann verantwortlich, das gute Essen zu essen und die guten Gedanken zu haben – was nicht heißt nur gute Gedanken – sondern, dass wir so fühlen und denken wie wir eben fühlen und denken.

Dass wir das Leben mit diesem intensiven Gefühl leben müssen, und es einfach so annehmen wie es in uns stattfindet und uns selbst erlauben, alles zu fühlen. Ohne Wutanfall, Nervenzusammenbruch oder sonst irgendeinem Drama, denn so ist der Mensch, sanft und lieb, und eifersüchtig und neidisch, lustvoll und voll der Liebe, und unkonzentriert und untreu, alles auf einmal.

Unsere Kindheit ist vorbei. Warum ist sie denn doch noch so präsent und steht der großen Liebe im Weg? Es geht dieser Weg ganz gerade an den schönen blühenden Pfaden, an der ganzen Welt vorbei, die nur schön ist wenn Papageno seine Papagena gefunden hat.





Dove  
andrò?

In der Literatur werden Geschichten immer im Zeitraffer geschrieben. In der gelebten Realität gibt es Hindernisse und viel Zeit, und es hilft nicht viel, im Theater zu sitzen und wissend zu nicken oder zu schluchzen, denn es ist genau so einfach und genauso schwer wie es sich anfühlt. Es geht nicht ohne es zu wollen, es erleben zu lassen, es zu erlauben. Und dann muss man noch ganz oft in die Unterwelt reisen ohne sich umzudrehen.

Ich gehe langsam Schritt für Schritt in das Dunkle unter mir, und ich habe keine Ahnung warum, denn Orpheus ging doch von unten nach oben, mit Eurydike hinter ihm. Ich darf mich nicht umsehen, nicht zur Seite schauen, und Orpheus durfte sich nicht umdrehen. Vielleicht wenn ich unten angekommen bin und meine Liebe dort gerettet habe, vielleicht darf ich dann wieder hinauf zum Licht. Ich bin noch nicht einmal in der Unterwelt angekommen und rede groß von der Liebe. Ich habe sie nur kurz erblickt, an der Schwelle, durchs Fenster vielleicht, beim Vorbeigehen.

Und das war schon für mich ein Wunder. Die Schöpfung ist der erste Schritt – aber dann ist noch der ganze Weg zu gehen.

Eigentlich darf ich gar nicht hinunter gehen. Ich bin im Licht schon ganz alleine und ich muss warten, dass er zu mir kommt. Und was mache ich dann? Oh, mich freuen? Oder wieder bangen, dass es nicht der richtige Moment war, der Moment, wo uns beiden gleichzeitig wie eine Erleuchtung ganz klar wird, dass nur das Jetzt zählt. Dass, wenn es noch irgendetwas anderes in diesem Leben gibt, dann nur weil es das gibt, weil es uns gibt und weil dieses Wunder alles andere erschaffen wird.

Aber das würde bedeuten, unsere Herzen seien ganz offen für einander, ganz frei und froh, nur ganz einfach da um den anderen hinein zu nehmen.

Wie soll ich mich denn jemals in dieser Welt zurecht finden, wo alles in die umgekehrte Richtung läuft? Wo Liebe Kummer schafft, weil sie abgelehnt wird und ihr alles andere in den Weg gelegt wird? Doch alles andere gibt es doch nur, weil es die Liebe gibt. Manchmal denke ich, es ist nur eine Frage der Semantik.

Oder eher eine Frage der Systematik? Alle schönen Dinge im Leben werden aus der Liebe erschaffen, weil das Leben selbst aus der Liebe erschaffen wird.

Warum sind die Menschen so sehr damit beschäftigt, die schöne aufregende wundervolle Liebe dort zu zerstören, wo sie passiert, und sie zu verletzen? Das wahre Wunder ist es, die große Liebe in der täglichen Welt leben zu lassen und alles verzaubern zu lassen. Die große Liebe ist dafür da, das Leben lebenswert zu machen und alles Banale zauberhaft zu machen. Die große Liebe ist nicht kostbar, nicht geheim, sie ist offen, sie ist frei, sie ist einzig und sie ist allumfassend. Sie ist nicht ganz selten, fast nicht wahrnehmbar, schamvoll, sondern immer, jeden Tag! Und vor allem erträgt sie weder Untreue noch dumme Ausreden noch Feigheit.

Man liest es doch und hört es oft, alle suchen die Liebe. Wollen alle die Liebe, so sollten doch alle an der Furcht davor beginnen und dort ansetzen, denn diese Furcht geht nur dann weg, wenn sie ganz gefühlt wird, ganz frontal, ganz überall. Jeder Mensch sehnt sich gleichzeitig nach der alles verzaubernden Liebe und schreckt sich so davor, wenn er sie trifft, dass er sie verneint, verteufelt, versteckt.

Denn genauso wie er sie wünscht, hat er auch davor Angst. Das macht nichts. Es ist nur schrecklich und wird zur totalen Zeit- verschwendung, wenn diese Angst nicht gefühlt wird, sondern als Ausrede gilt um eine kleine Liebe zu wählen, als ob man lügen könnte. Mich erinnert das an Kant und seine moralischen Theorien. Wir wissen immer ganz genau was richtig ist, wir wissen was wir tun sollen, was wir tun müssen – jedoch finden wir es so unterhaltsam, uns selbst ständig zum Narren zu halten.

Wenn wir Sachen der Liebe in den Weg stellen, und alle Sachen trotzdem machen: Arbeit, Familie, Kinder, Hund und Ferien, nur ohne inneres Feuer, ohne natürlichen selbstverständlichen Antrieb,



ganz einfach ganz aus dem Innersten heraus, weil gar nichts anderes Sinn ergibt, sondern um dem anderen zu gefallen oder weil das alle tun, oder weil man irgendetwas tun muss, wenn man diese Sachen macht ohne sie aus der Liebe heraus entstehen zu lassen, ist es oft schwierig, den Unterschied festzustellen, da es zum Verwechseln ähnlich aussieht.

Es geht darum, die Vergangenheit in uns zu integrieren, sie in uns leben zu lassen, dann wird sie ein Teil von uns, der uns nicht mehr beschränkt, sondern uns frei sein lässt. Denn mit der Vergangenheit hat der Liebespartner nichts zu tun, die muss jeder für sich kennen, integrieren und fühlen, es geht nicht darum, mit ihr fertig zu werden oder sie zu verarbeiten, es geht nicht darum, Sachen zu ertragen oder die Zähne zusammen zu beißen. Ich weiß, das klingt absurd, irre, in einer Welt der Autoritäten, der Schmerzmittel und der Zahnextraktionen. Wir leben in einer Welt aus Irrsinn, in einer Welt, wo alles was weh tut, alles was uns belastet von einer anderen Person übernommen wird oder eine Pille alles wegwischen soll. Aber eben daraus kommen die Krankheiten, die Konflikte, selbst die meisten griechischen Tragödien.

Zurück zum richtigen Fühlen und den Körper kennen lernen mit den Meditationsübungen, in denen man lernt, Spannungen zu orten, sie zu nennen, Farbe und Textur zu erkennen, ihnen zu folgen bis sie zu uns sprechen und sich verabschieden. Viele Jahre habe ich gedacht, es sei sinnvoll zu denken, zu schreiben und zu sprechen, weil Kindheit und Jugend so viele Schmerzen mit sich bringen. Doch es sind nicht die Schmerzen das Problem, es ist die Abwehr der Schmerzen, das auf Morgen vertrösten, das Unter-den-Tisch kehren und ich meine nicht beim Familientisch, sondern in uns. Wenn sich jeder fühlen lässt wie er sich fühlt, wenn der Vater über sie drüber fährt als wüsste er alles, wenn die Mutter die idiotischen Geschichten aus ihrer Kindheit endlos aufischt als hätte sie sie für uns aufgehoben, dann geht es nur darum, zu orten, wo diese Erlebnisse stecken bleiben, wo im Körper sie sich festsetzen. Die Eltern haben nur diese Verantwortung, das Kind absolut so fühlen und denken zu lassen wie es fühlt und denkt, denn dann braucht niemand mehr einen Psychiater oder einen Arzt. Es geht nicht darum, ein ausgezeichnete Vater zu sein, es geht nicht einmal um eine good enough mother wie sie der Psychologe Winnicott genannt hat, es geht nur darum, sich selbst wirklich zu kennen – und daher sich selbst leben zu lassen, sich selbst nicht zu beurteilen, sondern alles was wir fühlen, erkennen, erleben genauso in uns zuzulassen wie es stattfindet. Denn die Erlebnisse sind nun





eben so wie sie sind, nicht perfekt, nicht immer so wie wir sie wollen. Wenigstens so lange nicht so lange wir nicht der Meister unseres Lebens sind.

Und das sind wir noch nicht als Kind. Daher ist es die Aufgabe der Eltern, uns zu erlauben, zu sein wer wir sind. Doch es fängt schon beim ersten Schrei an. Sie sagen Shhhh, sie versuchen alles um uns endlich zum Schweigen zu bringen, weil es so unerträglich ist, ein Kind schreien oder weinen zu hören. Und warum ist es so unerträglich? Weil das Baby genau das ausdrückt, was wir als Erwachsene in unseren Körpern aufgestaut haben. Ich möchte mein Baby haben und dass es nicht weinen muss, jedenfalls nicht unerträglich laut oder lang, nur weil es eben ein großer Schock ist? Aber vielleicht wird mein Baby nur vollkommen froh sein, weil ich es geschafft haben werde, es ins Paradies zu gebären, wo alles seinen richtigen Platz hat und das neue Baby so glücklich ist, dass es selbstverständlich in jedem Moment weiß, was es tun soll und es ganz froh frei und befreit wählen kann und atmen. Und es genau das ist, was dort dann sein soll.

Bisher hatte ich immer das Gefühl, jemanden zu suchen, der ähnlich ist, der ähnliches erlebt hat, die ähnliche Musik liebt oder Freizeitgestaltung, vielleicht gar ähnliche Ausbildung hat oder denselben Beruf – alle diese Elemente sind Veränderlichkeiten, die uns nur zeitweise begleiten, aber nicht fundamental definieren. Ich weiß, dass die meisten Leute das Leben so einfach gestaltet haben und dass, wenn jemand auftaucht, der diesen Kriterien entspricht doch das Glück gleich mitbringen wird. Warum ist es denn nicht so?

Glückseligkeit entspricht keinen sozialen Normen und kann nur unter größter Schwierigkeit dort gefunden werden, denn das kann man nirgends lernen. Jeder muss den Partner dafür finden und dann dieses Leben fassen, greifen und erleben. Nichts anderes hat auf dieser Welt irgendeine Bedeutung. Denn alle Bedeutung kommt nur daher.

Wenn ich um das Universum besser Bescheid wüsste, dann würde ich es wahrscheinlich nicht so formulieren. Denn alles fügt sich immer so zusammen wie es geht, da alles immer auf alles einwirkt und alles sich ständig anpasst an alles andere, kommen die Sachen, die vorkommen, nur so vor wie sie vorkommen, in der besten Weise. Das Beste ist hier keine Wertschätzung sondern eine Art das Potenzierter zu formulieren, so gut es geht, denn es geht nicht anders.



# I went to Atlantic City

Van Troi Tran

It's been a long November, by far the worst in recent memory. An onslaught of rain and sleet and snow and hail, hovered over the Northeast for about three weeks. Winter came early this year, it won't leave anytime soon, and as usual it will colonize mundane conversations in Quebec City for the months to come.

So I went to Atlantic City on a three-day vacation on the last week of November. "Atlantic City in the winter!?" asked the captain of my hockey team. Yes, I replied, one of the most affordable destinations during the Thanksgiving week-end. And, as one colleague once said, aren't anthropologists trained to feel comfortable in any context? Comfort and ethnography actually don't sit well together. A field trip isn't really worthwhile if it is not exhausting, wearying, eventful and unpredictable. And eventful and unpredictable the trip was, I don't remember such a travel experience where every single segment was consistently off schedule. A train uncoupling, connections missed, buses cancelled, more buses cancelled. If Being is revealed through malfunctions, these traveling misfortunes clearly have a broader story to tell about American life in the 21st century.

So what is Atlantic City, NJ, if not a malfunction in itself? If Las Vegas "was never more than the largest light bulb in the world" according to J.G. Ballard, then Atlantic City is a flickering neon frame around a blank billboard exposed to the salty mist of the oceanic breeze. You see the picture as you stroll along the Boardwalk: empty piers, crumbling plaster, peeling paint, tones of grey, beige, white wash and seashell. The heydays are long gone and they won't return. AC doesn't even pretend to pretend to be a pale copy of what it once was.

As the Swedish sociologist Orvar Lögren has remarked in his history of vacationing, it is the fate of resorts to go out of style, as the tourism industry is now constantly on the look-out for new trends. Destinations are caught in a global never-ending struggle to differentiate themselves in the economy of attention, and some of them fall into the dustbin of modernity.



But as we know, notions of decay and progress, crisis and growth are culturally embedded. They tell stories that are easy to relate to and make sense of. They can serve as a convenient narrative for those who rejoice in being on the right side of Culture, Civilization, the Economy, or History, and they provide alibis for the melancholic souls who relish in moaning and find delight in conspicuous pessimism. Yes, Atlantic City has plenty of storytelling attractions with apparently no stories left to tell and no public left to attract.

This is not, however, a story I want to tell. The only thing more boring than boredom itself is a so-called sophisticated outlook on the shallowness of life in postindustrial consumer societies.

Now consider an Atlantic City Casino. Any one of them. Caesars, Tropicana, Resorts, any one. They are all unique in their themes, features, restaurants, decoration, outlandish architecture as well as their chosen cultural and historical references, but they are all almost exactly the same in their design, befuddling spatial structure and lack of windows, the similarity of their drink menus and the games they offer. They could be all interchangeable, but at the same time each appears to be singular. They have to be, in a market where the only thing on sale is the experience of handling money. The gambling industry is an economy of pure information, and in order to have value, an information must be both different and legible, standardized and singular.

The public doesn't have to be mystified. No one mistakes a blue ceiling for an open sky, and no one is actually expecting anything remotely tropical, exotic or adventurous at the Tropicana. One should not be mistaking wonders for signs. The same could be said about the players. All sitting in front their slot machine, sporting



*Photos: Van Troi Tran*



what seems like the same inexpressive stare at the screen and repeating the small gesture of pressing the spin button until the credits run dry. But at the same time, they all have a different story to tell, different life trajectories, as well as different myths and superstitions they half-believe in but nevertheless cling to as they provide a sense of wholeness and continuity in a microverse of pure luck. Quite interestingly, in Natasha Dow Schüll's ethnography of machine playing Las Vegas, her informants confided that their main motivation for playing on the slot machines was not financial gain, but continuation. You play in order to continue playing, to sustain the relationship you develop with the machine.

And hasn't the slot machine become the best metaphor of the New Economy? Charles Péguy claimed a century ago in his essay on money that with the advent of modernity, "those who do not gamble lose all the time, even more assuredly than those who do." This might certainly be the case with the financialization of the global economy, as populations experience vicariously the repercussions of the ebbs and flows in the circulation of capital. But in a more mundane, prosaic way, the slot machines themselves reflect how our consumption has become both standardized and singularized. The minute spatial organization of playing rooms, the ergonomics of the chairs, the disposition of buttons, the sound effects, all are designed to optimize the time spent by gamblers in front of the spinning reels, and convey a sense of familiarity. With the swift development of new digital technologies and our growing habits of handling screens in our everyday activities, the slot machines have become more complex, more opaque, perhaps more algorithmic. But at the same time, on the surface, every machine is different, with its specific themes: Wheel of Fortune, African animals, Sex in the City, Mexican food, Playboy, even Bears. In the economy of attention, goods have to compete for the capture of everyone's time and awareness, especially in an environment of stimulation overload, as noise and signals blur in the midst of smoke and drinks.

So what does Atlantic City tell us? The city is past its prime, the gamblers don't even pretend to be excited, the hotel clerks don't even fake a smile. But why should they?

Dreams are for those who sleep, old haunts are for forgotten ghosts, fond memories are for those who have time.

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on amazon.com!**



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### **The Mystery of the Planet Alas-K**

On the planet Alas-K, the most wonderful teddy bears are created by wishes.

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In Hugh's toy store, furious customers complain about the bears' shape that has changed overnight. The bears can't nuzzle anymore.

Will President Old Teddy Bear finally admit that not only bears make the world happy?

#### **About the author**

Tatjana Barazon is a philosopher from Vienna who has lived in Paris, Quebec and Watertown. She publishes the quarterly magazine SOGLITUDES. This is her first book for children of all ages.

#### **About the artist**

Van Troi Tran is an anthropologist who draws bears. He has published a book on food at the Paris World's Fairs *Manger et boire aux Expositions Universelles, Paris 1889, 1900*, PUR (2012). He works at Université Laval in Quebec.



## Essere normali in società

Luca Salza

OVRA  
Organizzazione  
di Vigilanza e  
Repressione  
dell'Antifascismo

- “Che effetto ti fa lavorare per l’OVRA?”
- “Mi dà la sensazione di essere finalmente rientrato in quella normalità di cui ti parlavo... Com’è un uomo normale, secondo te?”
- “Un uomo normale! Ehm... Per me, l’uomo normale è quello che si volta per la strada per guardare il sedere di una bella donna che passa e scopre di non essere il solo ad essersi voltato. Ce ne sono almeno cinque o sei. Ed è contento se scopre gente uguale a lui. I suoi simili. Perciò gli piacciono le spiagge affollate, le partite di football, i bar del centro...”
- “...le adunate oceaniche a Piazza Venezia”.

– “Ama quelli che sono come lui. E diffida di quelli che sente... diversi. Per questo l'uomo normale è un vero fratello, un vero cittadino, un vero patriota, un vero...”.

– “Un vero fascista”.

Dialogo fra Marcello Clerici (interpretato da Jean-Louis Trintignant) e il suo amico Italo Montanari (interpretato da José Quaglio) nel film *Il conformista*, diretto da Bernardo Bertolucci, uscito al cinema nel 1970).

*Voyage au bout de la nuit*. C'è un inizio folgorante. Una parola antica infrange la porta del romanzo borghese. È la voce di un mondo antico, che è restata muta per secoli – « Moi, j'avais jamais rien dit. Rien » –; è la parola di una plebe che viene da lontano, da tempi lontani e da lande lontane, meticcias, bastarda: «ce grand ramassis de miteux dans mon genre, chassieux, puceux, transis, qui ont échoué ici poursuivis par la faim, la peste, les tumeurs et le froid, venus vaincus des quatre coins du monde». Questa parola si insinua, vuole insinuarsi in una “tradizione” che non è la sua. Il protagonista, Ferdinand Bardamu, rivendica la sua differenza, linguistica e politica (che è lo stesso), rispetto alla società del suo tempo. È un anarchico, non è un caso. Su una bella terrazza di un bar della place de Clichy – «assis, ravis, à regarder les dames du café» – in una calda giornata di estate, l'estate del 1914, lui e il suo amico, Arthur Ganate, hanno persino l'ardire di denunciare la posta in gioco reale della guerra imminente:

«On est en bas dans les cales à souffler de la gueule, puants, suintants des rouspignolles, et puis voilà! En haut sur le pont, au frais, il y a les maîtres et qui s'en font pas, avec des belles femmes roses et gonflées de parfums sur les genoux. On nous fait monter sur le pont. Alors, ils mettent leurs chapeaux haut de forme et puis ils nous en mettent un bon coup de gueule comme ça: “Bandes de charognes, c'est la guerre! qu'ils font. On va les aborder, les saligauds qui sont sur la patrie n°2 et on va leur faire sauter la caisse! Allez! Allez! Y a de tout ce qu'il faut à bord! Tous en cœur! Gueulez voir d'abord un bon coup et que ça tremble: Vive la Patrie n° 1! Qu'on vous entende de loin! Celui qui gueulera le plus fort, il aura la médaille et la dragée du bon Jésus! Nom de Dieu! Et puis ceux qui ne voudront pas crever sur mer, ils pourront toujours aller crever sur terre où c'est fait bien plus vite encore qu'ici!”».



I dannati e i forzati del lavoro, i miserabili di sempre, sono chiamati fuori dalla stiva della nave quando gli squilli di trombe e i rulli di cannone iniziano a intonare i loro suoni, quando, cioè, i padroni di sempre, i dirigenti delle patrie n° 1, 2 o 3, hanno bisogno della loro forza di distruzione. È chiaro che l'emergenza della voce plebea nel romanzo si spiega allo stesso modo. Senza la guerra non ci sarebbero stata l'altra lingua, l'altro stile di Céline. E, in effetti, la descrizione della guerra, della Prima Guerra Mondiale, o meglio la sua trasformazione in sogno, in incubo, in immagine fantastica, occupa la prima parte del lungo viaggio - «dans l'hiver et la Nuit», «de l'autre côté de la vie» - di Bardamu. Fermiamoci un momento. Sembra davvero strano tutto ciò. Perché Bardamu fa la guerra dopo aver espresso parole tanto inequivocabili sul suo significato reale? Su quella stessa terrazza della place de Clichy, mentre sta criticando la guerra col suo amico, vede passare un reggimento, si alza dal tavolino, entusiasta, e grida:

«J'vais voir si c'est ainsi! (...) et me voici parti à m'engager, et au pas de course encore.

T'es rien c.. Ferdinand! Qu'il me crie, lui Arthur en retour, vexé sans aucun doute par l'effet de mon héroïsme sur tout le monde qui nous regardait».

Molti testimoni, diversi commentatori hanno messo in luce questa apparente discrepanza. I giovani che partono in guerra “la fleur au fusil” nell'agosto 1914 sono gli stessi che, fino al luglio dello stesso anno, manifestavano per la pace. L'immagine prodotta da Céline non è, cioè, affatto irrealistica. Tra le parole in libertà pacifiste e l'inizio veritiero della guerra c'è stato l'ordine di mobilitazione. E all'ordine di mobilitazione non si sfugge, soprattutto in una guerra



nuova, cioè tecnologica e estremamente burocratizzata, come la Prima Guerra Mondiale, la prima guerra della modernità. Lo Stato, le diverse Patrie, n° 1, 2 o 3, necessitano dello sforzo di tutti, uomini, in particolare giovani e forti, ma anche donne, vecchi e bambini saranno inseriti, in modi diversi, nella macchina da guerra. È questo il senso del concetto di “mobilitazione totale”, pensato soprattutto da Ernst Jünger. In un’epoca di guerra nessun individuo può sottrarsi agli ordini della società. Eroismo non è più uno slancio individuale per segnalare la propria individualità, ma la capacità di inserirsi nella massa. Si è coinvolti in una sorta di abbraccio generale, si è eroi perché si fa come gli altri. Per questo Arthur Ganaste è offeso dal gesto dell’amico che, per il solo fatto di alzarsi e di seguire il corteo militare, diventa un eroe per gli altri clienti del bar. Eroe, infatti, non è più colui che si distingue sul campo di battaglia (si pensi al modello omerico) per la sua forza, il suo coraggio, la sua intelligenza. Eroe è, al contrario, proprio colui che estingue totalmente la propria singolarità: l’eroe della Grande Guerra è il milite ignoto.

In altri termini, mentre nelle guerre del passato l’eroe, nel combattimento, esaltava la sua umanità, nelle guerre moderne l’eroe si confonde con la massa, non c’è più, perde la sua umanità per far parte di un gregge. *Le grand troupeau* è uno dei romanzi più belli scritti da un testimone di quell’antica guerra. Jean Giono insiste precisamente in questo suo lavoro sulla perdita di umanità dei soldati nel momento in cui aderiscono, per obbligo o per scelta, a quello che vuole la società.

Ferdinand Bardamu si aggrega anch’egli al corteo in festa che va in guerra. Ma la festa si fa meno lieta man mano che i soldati marciano: le musiche si affievoliscono, le donne non inneggiano più ai giovani che partono in guerra, e alla fine non c’è più nessuno che segue il corteo:

«La musique s’est arrêtée... “En résumé, que je me suis dit alors, quand j’ai vu comment ça tournait, c’est plus drôle! C’est tout à recommencer!” J’allais m’en aller. Mais trop tard! Ils avaient refermé la porte en douce derrière nous les civils. On était faits, comme des rats».

Di nuovo la metafora dell’animalizzazione a segnalare la completa sussunzione dell’uomo nei meccanismi della società. A partire da Aristotele sappiamo che la più specifica determinazione dell’uomo è la natura politica, cioè socievole, dell’uomo stesso. L’uomo sarebbe un animale politico. Questa “politicalità” fa problema, soprattutto in alcuni momenti storici, perché l’animalità



dell'uomo non gli consente di contravvenire alla volontà assunte dalla società, anche quando quest'ultima fa delle scelte scellerate. La natura umana, docile e gregaria, quindi pericolosa, si rivelerebbe nella sua luce più autentica proprio in quei momenti in cui la società domanda l'adesione di tutti: durante, cioè, l'esplosione di una guerra e ovviamente anche durante la costruzione di regimi totalitari. Eichmann è un onesto lavoratore, come tutti cerca una promozione e vuole rispettare le leggi in vigore. Il suo processo a Gerusalemme rivelerà alla Arendt la banalità del male, cioè il fatto che si possono accettare e commettere i crimini più atroci semplicemente per fare come gli altri, per continuare ad essere normali. In una pagina di *Se questo è un uomo*, Primo Levi ricorda le impiegate del laboratorio di chimica all'interno del campo di concentramento in cui ha avuto la fortuna di essere impiegato nell'ultimo anno di prigionia:

«Queste ragazze cantano, come cantano tutte le ragazze di tutti i laboratori del mondo, e questo ci rende profondamente infelici. Discorrono fra loro: parlano del tesseramento, dei loro fidanzati, delle loro case, delle feste prossime...

– Domenica vai a casa? Io no: è così scomodo viaggiare!

– Io andrò a Natale. Due settimane soltanto, e poi sarà ancora Natale: non sembra vero, quest'anno è passato così presto».

Nella casa dell'orrore più grande, laddove milioni di uomini e di donne sono massacrati di lavoro, uccisi, annichiliti fino a farne disperdere le tracce, delle ragazze si comportano normalmente, pensano alle vacanze, ad altre banalità, ai fidanzati e alla rapidità dello scorrere del tempo. Un altro anno è passato... È trascorso normalmente anche per chi ogni giorno varca, per un lavoro banale, i confini del campo della morte industriale. Affiancare la soluzione finale è un lavoro come un altro, e le ragazze di Auschwitz si comportano come le ragazze che lavorano in un altro posto.

A far paura è la normalità. La voglia di fare come gli altri, di non distinguersi. Il grande problema della filosofia politica moderna, dopo Aristotele, non è proprio quello, semplice, ma



lancinante, di sapere “Perché si obbedisce?”. Perché si resta nel gregge, quando il gregge spara in guerra, quando il gregge disintegra un popolo?

Nelle situazioni estreme, una guerra o un regime totalitario, è difficile, se non impossibile, non obbedire. Ma si obbedisce anche quando non si è apparentemente costretti, come hanno dimostrato gli esperimenti di Stanley Milgram. L'obbedienza è la virtù di cui deve vestirsi il singolo per vivere in società.

Nessuna opera come *Il Castello* di Kafka ha descritto la forza, l'ostinazione proprio, con cui l'uomo cerca di integrarsi in una società, pure se deve oltrepassare mille ostacoli, pure se un Castello lo scaccia e lo schiaccia. «“Non posso andar via”, disse K., “sono venuto qui per restarci, e ci resterò”. E con una contraddizione che non si diede la pena di spiegare, soggiunse quasi parlando a se stesso: “Che cosa avrebbe potuto attirarmi in questo paese così tetro se non il desiderio di rimanervi?”». Rimanere dentro i confini, anche in un paese tetro, è la ragione d'essere dell'uomo moderno. Virgilio nelle *Georgiche* aveva già considerato come fuori dalla storia ogni tentativo di isolarsi dalla società. Ma, se nel passato, forme di (auto)esclusione dalla società sono state tollerate, oggi diventa vieppiù impossibile. Kafka insegna che l'uomo, in quanto meccanismo della società, fa parte della macchina, anche quando smette di essere meccanismo. Le società moderne non hanno più alcun “fuori”. Il cosiddetto progresso è l'integrazione di ogni differenza, o se si vuole la distruzione di ogni differenza. Per questo ci battiamo per restare dentro i confini. Quali sono questi confini entro cui sentiamo di essere normali? Chi li traccia? Non tanto un misterioso potere. Forse le mille “relazioni di potere” che intessono la vita di oggi. Quelle contro cui Kafka uomo non ha smesso di scontrarsi. Un lavoro gratificante, una casetta col giardino, la macchina nuova, un buon matrimonio, un viaggio d'affari o una vacanza. Quelle che danno un senso a parole più grandi, e ancora più pericolose, come ad esempio religione, patria o gruppo etnico. Siamo tutti K. perché sappiamo che sono queste relazioni di potere che ci costruiscono, che ci permettono di vivere in società. Anche quando cerchiamo di resistere ai Castelli, non facciamo che una mimesis di un'opposizione, perché sappiamo che non possiamo stare soli, e allora cerchiamo il riconoscimento del potere di turno. Cerchiamo di integrarci. Cerchiamo di essere normali.



## Why are we here?

‘There must be something outside this universe’, the Giraffe said, more to herself than to anyone else, but immediately, the Appropriate Horse felt he needed to reply to that.

“Outside this universe? What are you saying? What is a universe?” The Horse asked.

“I believe a universe is something that contains many worlds,” the Giraffe reflected.

“We have been to different worlds already, indeed: the Imagination, the Clearing in the Wood of the Same Name, and now we are here, on this planet Alas-K. But we were never really on Earth, were we? Where the humans live and create us.”

“Yes, Appropriate Horse, you are right. I don’t think we have been on Earth. It seems to me that all the worlds we have visited were parts of the Imagination. We have visited different dimensions, but I think there is something else, something we don’t know, we don’t see, we don’t comprehend. Something outside of it.”

“Like the things here on Alas-K?”

“Yes, Horse, in a way. But it feels more like something we came from, something we can return to?”

“Like the Imagination, perhaps?”



*Van Troi Tran*

“Maybe. But the Imagination is like a chaotic realm of half beings, threshold beings, wishes that are between something and nothing. But something must move our world.”

“Move it? Weeheehee!” the Appropriate Horse shook his mane. He was actually wondering what moved him. In the beginning, he had been wished for so dearly and so intently, but since he had arrived, the Knight of the Round Ear had not even paid attention to his Horse. “I’d certainly like to know what moves the wishes. They might get completely outdated once they arrive.” He felt happy and free, although he thought he should feel abandoned and without a purpose. “Maybe it is just because I am not a bear.”

“What do you mean?” The Giraffe considered leaving her deep thoughts and listen to her friend the Appropriate Horse with whom she had shared many many connecting moments. They were probably both on the planet of the bears because of the Knight of the Round Ear and his chaotic wishes. “I am not a bear, either.”

“Yes, but see, Giraffe, whatever we do here is always in a way adjusting to what the bears want, or going against it. We are somehow in each and every move defined by bears.”

The Giraffe thought about what the Knight of the Round Ear had said a long time ago, as it



now seemed. When she last saw him they were strolling around in the Bear Park. Nanuk had said she was finally someone now, because she was going out with a bear, and the Knight had said that she was her own perfect wonderful self with or without a bear by her side. Then she thought how wonderful that day had been and how thoroughly the Knight had disappeared again since then and how busy he had been with all kinds



of things that did not involve her at all. So, she thought, maybe the Horse had a point. If she were a bear, the Knight would possibly be more committed to her.

“I am going to stop you right there,” the Horse said. “That has nothing to do with you being a Giraffe. I am a Horse – so you see...” and then the Horse had to stop himself right there in his own thoughts. He suddenly thought that if he were a bear, perhaps the Knight would not have ignored him so thoroughly either.

The Giraffe started giggling. They both could read each other’s thoughts and they had not noticed that before.

“I think this happens because we were created together at the same time.”

“Do you think we are both aspects of the Knight’s unconscious mind?”

“That might be. Some kind of ideal he has in another world. But in what he calls ‘reality’, we have no place.” She felt tears welling up but then she remembered what that did to their world the last time.

“I thought you two had created love on the planet?”

“Yes, but it was only then and there. It was a moment in time. Not a continuum.”

“Oh my. He has such power over things.”

“Yes, and he uses it in such a terrible, terrible way. There should be something to set his priorities right.”

“Yes, he thinks only about his immediate self. This is most detrimental to our world.”

“Or maybe this is just the way it has to be.” She remembered that this wonderful planet had the Magic Potion of obliviousness infused in every moment, so she won’t be sad for too long.

“Does this mean the Knight wants something else than what he is immediately – and always – concerned with and wishes for them, and when they come true, he doesn’t know what to do with them?”

“Yes, unfortunately, my dear Horse, this seems to be the case. But he has the ability to enjoy moments nevertheless. We are somehow ‘moment beings.’”

“ Weeheehee, but we live continuously, also when he does not pay attention to us!”

“I know,” said the Giraffe. “I am struggling with constant abandonment. He is a split being and we are his creations.”

“There must be a way to be in his real world!”

“Yes there is, but not for us. We are fundamentally different from his real world. We are his wishes.”

“But on this planet nothing is real ANYWAY.” The Horse started getting really agitated.

“That doesn’t matter. There are things he does and he has always done. Like training for the Nuzzle competition. And wearing his armor...”

“Oh, yes. His armor. It opened. It had revealed his true self.”

“Oh my, Horse, you should really allow the forgetfulness to do its job, it helps a lot not to remember things. It keeps you from crying.”

“Weehee. That is a good thing, I guess, your tears are very powerful. But perhaps it is also good to cry, it is important to cry when you are sad. Otherwise, you laugh and everything becomes confused.”

“You are absolutely right, Appropriate Horse. What we feel is the most genuine thing and this will guide us to the truth.”

“Yes. Let’s cry together and see what happens. I am very sad that the Knight of the Round Ear ignores me.”

“I am too, I am too.”

And both of the Knight’s creations started crying at the same time and with such fervent sentiment, that a tremor shook the worlds.

At his workshop, the Knight dropped his sword.

“Oh my, what have I done” he thought and ran toward the clearing.

SOGLITUDES behandelt Themen, die den Übergang von einem Zustand in einen anderen beschreiben. Von „soglia“, italienisch für Schwelle, und solitude, französisch für Einsamkeit, denn an der Schwelle ist niemand einsam.

SOGLITUDES is about in-between things, things people love and do and pursue and often don't know what they are doing, but feel very strongly that it is what they have to do. If they don't they get very sad. The word soglitudes is created from soglia, Italian for threshold. The g is silent but there is no loneliness because with the threshold there is always a companion.

SOGLITUDES est une revue qui encourage l'échange entre la création et la vie professionnelle. A travers la passion de chacun, les seuils se manifestent dans ce que nous faisons et ce que nous aimons faire. Soglitudes vient de « soglia », le mot italien pour seuil et s'introduit dans la solitude pour lui tenir compagnie.

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