





## *Memories of the Star*

*If the snow will fall, I will fall on you  
dedicated to longing which is a Star*

<i>Candice Lin and Elena Narbutaitė,</i> <i>introduced by Candice Lin</i>	5-24 & 33-35
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*The Elena encounter has bred little feral babies. Not this one, this human pig corp pre-existed her and no, it's not really satirical, though maybe there is a future for Orwellian Animal Farm porn. But she writes to me so much of men and of women and of horses that I think sometimes she is my wife and we are married but then today I just got an email from her that it is all ending and I am devastated. She tells me to wait until the fall for the final question or answer and I feel a blanket of lead. I had even thought I enjoyed writing pornographic emails so much that I could have a financial future. A small niche one, for sure, but a future, no less. And now it is all crumbling.*

*I'm sorry, Wednesday is dramatic because it has been all full of black walnuts, and Lucinda Williams, and Gillian Welch, and their soft country ways. I got your pdf and its mysterious blank space. I'm happy to be in that ether with you.*



*What do you do?*

*Do you have a car?*

*What kind of car?*

*Where do you live?*

*What is the difference between letters and books?*

*Are you married?*

*So, Anna (let's say you are Anna) can I call you Anna?*

Dear Candice, how are you?

I am thrilled to write you. I once asked Raimundas if he knew someone who I didn't, for a short interview I had in mind, and he shared your email. For that reason of you being 'unknown', I am so happy that we never met! My name is Elena Narbutaite.

Some time ago I overheard a conversation and wrote some of it down. Since then, I am dying to hear the answers to it. If you are interested to answer those questions? I would be enormously happy to read them.

I must tell you, that I know you through two beautiful and sharp texts. One read by Doa Aly and the other one called *Moles and Mice* (which I misread the first time and thought it was called *Males and Mice*!) I like to read or listen to them from time to time, in this way *Males* become more like *Moles* and many more very interesting things happen.

I would love to print this interview, if we make it, as part of a small publication, which might come out this summer. More like a brochure, or a notebook.

But if this blind conversation doesn't interest you, it's also alright, not a problem at all. I hope to get to meet you one day either way!

sending my best wishes from Vilnius

*Hello dear Elena,*

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*My apologies for my slow reply, I've been very busy lately.*

*I think it would be fun to write each other, but tell me, why did this eavesdropped conversation so pique your interest? It seems so banal, no? But maybe the banality was what was so interesting to you... for the ways it might generate whole other worlds? Tell me more please.*

*xxx,*

*candice*

Thank you for writing back to me, giving your time and asking a good question. This letter might get long – there is no rush in answering and I will try to explain myself better.

I guess this simple conversation interested me for exactly the reason you mention – its banal simplicity and where it could lead to.

I understood and recognised the nature of those questions; usually a conversation between two or three people, who have just met and are trying to get information about each other, brutally, urgently, quickly.

It might seem that such conversations are not revealing anything useful. But suddenly I found the opposite. I saw them as a knife that can quickly cut through each other's lives, social status, etc. You know? Let's say a man meets another man or a woman and they need something from each other, but know nothing about each other and only this basic information will inform the next steps and next series of doubts or agreements between them.

I saw such a conversation as a quick measuring device, especially in the case of a blind date.

And so I myself became suddenly curious to experience this simple situation with someone. A conversation like that is actually a situation that almost doesn't happen anymore, it used to when I was 16 years old, I think.

And then I thought it could be interesting to re-experience it with someone whom I don't really know. Now I start to think that it works. When I read your answer, I felt a bit lost at first and then happy, for it became obvious that this was not going to be all easy; just following my silly questions straight away.

I could say it's more complicated than all that, but the reasons are quite simple, though there are many. Well, especially the fact that these questions are born out of established, sometimes even conservative, values within societies, that's what really interested me and made me curious about the answers. Because the answers might tear those establishments apart and change them. Let's say a question about cars.

*I am really curious if you have a car? And then I am curious to know what you think about it or if you think about it at all?*

*I didn't actually overhear this conversation in a real life, though it might be easy in bars and parks. Instead, I took the conversation from this movie *All the Vermeers in New York*. There is a scene where two young women meet up with a man at a bar and have a conversation.*

*Maybe you know this movie?*

*It could be so interesting to try out our conversation and I could start with just a single question: where do you live?*

*Maybe by talking, we'll invent something new*

*sending my best!*

*elena*

If, for example, I were in such a way that you slowly understood that I was not a woman, brutally, urgently, quickly, through unwomanly gestures, I wonder if you would continue to write to me. [My contractor had an avatar self that was a 30-something lesbian who alternately wore full metal armor and a furry suit. 'No one suspects who I really am', he claimed, but he did not seem to question the possibility that the women he had sex with online were also women just like himself.]

I was going to send you my Human Pig Corporation. But it is so disgusting and foul I thought you would find out too soon, too brutally, too quickly, although perhaps with shared urgency. It did have a banality that made its violence effective I believe. But your stranger hood makes me both shy and bold. There is nothing to lose, but no trust established. A strange openness to any possibility.

In my car I sometimes imagine I'm in the car that's in a book (— a failure of a book, many might say but I have defended its populist bent) (I could pretend this happened in my car, as you pretended to overhear the conversation that was actually a movie, but I'll be more straightforward with you to speed things along. So... this didn't happen in my car but in a book that described a car ride)—here's a passage that stayed with me. About animal husbandry. The writer overhears people sharing an Uber ride as they discuss their jobs masturbating the horses and helping to guide the ones with the penises into the right holes. 'Do they need that kind of assistance?' the writer asks in shock and then is instantly shamed at their heteronormative assumptions, they themselves, the biggest career queer ever, perhaps. 'You'd be surprised how often it ends up in the ass,' explains the worker, 'and there's all this waste.'

I live in Los Angeles in Altadena, which is east of east LA and north of Pasadena. It's pretty here although perhaps not in the way you might expect and there are flocks of green parrots that come whenever the mornings are overcast and they wake me

*with their loud squawking outside my window. But lately it has  
not been overcast.*

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*Yours,  
Candice*

Thank you. If it becomes clear, I will continue writing to you, even if I feel afraid of myself as well as of you. Strange fright will be my driver.

Your passage from the car stayed with me; (I danced for hours in an empty jewelry box). Going home I suddenly wondered 'what would need to happen in order to shake me very strongly?' Without time to think, the image of a horse appeared in my mind. I had to ride it. Inside my mind, I imagined a scene where the horse was speeding up and becoming wild. I don't know how to ride a horse. Do you know how?

The task was, to embrace the state of shaking and stay on it. Only later do I realise, where the horse image came from.

Much later, that evening I ended the passage of a book I was reading with these words 'They were erect; the horses were twitching their flanks.' It is by the end of a scene where a man and a woman almost make love. It stays unclear if they do.

Some people would say that horses and cars, are a logical sequence, but I see it another way. Workers' conversations are splashed with a strong sensation of smell. Imagined only. I wonder maybe the writer was in shock about himself?

Did you notice that facts rarely shock, but compositions of things are the ones that make a difference? It's probably obvious. In this case I imagine four men in one new car and horses in the air. I can vaguely hear the motors and other sounds and imagine that it's evening. But I can't make any resolution other than, despite being in the same car, everyone's going their own way.

I am sending you an image of how I picture you all of a sudden. You, pointing at your kingdoms. I found this picture in a drawer at my mum's home after reading your answer, which made parts of me feel brighter than the daylight, in an electrical kind of way. What is Human Pig Corporation? Maybe you could tell me in a few words?

Even though I don't recall memories often, you made me feel 15 years old for the moment I opened your letter. When I was that age, I

remember thinking that men or women seemed to be like liquid ponds, holding colors of paint mixed in them, moved not by clear definitions, but by the wind, and wind always gave me a thrill. Now I think that was the way by which you came in, by the wind. How else could I explain it?

Is it often windy in Los Angeles in Altadena, where you live?  
I wonder what you do, if you are married or not?



warmly,  
e

I will always picture you as a horse now until you replace that image with a human form in the flesh. I have many horse histories, some kingdoms were made of BPA-free plastic and others that were washed in the sea, in Brazil, and came running up to me as if to run me down, but then, stopped short and snorted in my face. Another one entered a church from the 1500s that had a tree growing over it and, I kid you not, he had an enormous hard on. I think he was into my beard. I have the documentation to prove it.

The smell of a worker would be a good perfume that an artist can wear. The artist is always so torn, so romantic, so over-washed in their concerns for the worker. I say my writing to you is unworking, but then, if you make a little booklet and it makes its way into the world, is it working too? Coat it in the smell.

I like to talk about men, and that was one thing that struck me about your emails. It's funny that you wrote me about liquid ponds because I was just writing someone about Ran-Ma, a cartoon she would watch, where the characters – a father and son – get transformed into a panda and a well-endowed little girl by falling in pools of water – cursed water from China. My juice, in other words (possibly has the power to change your species or gender).

When I was little and I began masturbating by drawing while laying on my bed and humping my pillow (still my preferred method), I told a repetitive story about Shirley Temple, wolves, diamond mountains, Swiss Family Robinson, and a witch. In this story, there was (among many other aspects) a witch who turned men into wolves by putting fiddlesticks and other ingredients in her vagina and having sex with them. Her liquid pools ran deep and had similar transformative powers as the wind on your water. But does wind disturb beyond the surface? It's magnetic pull that creates waves, no? Not wind I think. Sometimes they say the Santa Ana winds blow across my neighborhood so hard that you can't put up a fence that doesn't have holes in it. So in my neighborhood there are only fences with holes, which seems

self-defeating in some ways, although it works in others. Otherwise a solid fence would create too much air resistance and would become weaponised in its uprooting, and might hurt someone down the street at 100rpm. (That's not the correct speed.) How far does your wind move you? Tell me about Vilnius please.

Funny that you ask if I am married. I just had a long sad talk with Ran-Ma-(non)-friend and we decided we can no longer do 'this' because I am ostensibly 'married'. I don't agree on the direction this conversation went. It might be more about a callous around my heart, an ability to distance myself from my feelings, than a state of common law marriage that is not recognised in the state of California anyways.



*And you? Are you attached? In what way?*

xx,

c

Something just happened. Someone came to sit for a second at this cafe where I came to write to you (I ran out of coffee at home.) Here, I joined a long table, it still feels like morning, sunny! While I was typing about something still unclear to you, a man came and sat in front of me to have his coffee. I hadn't even looked up at him, but suddenly felt something strong flowing in my knees, hands, neck and lips. At some point I leaned on my elbow, a bit closer to him – as he was holding his cup his hand was very close to my face. You know when each hair on your face vibrates in miniature ways? It felt so pleasurable – the state of being locked in this dizziness lasted for maybe three minutes. I looked at him briefly; he had turtle nose and big ring on one of his fingers, the ring was the closest thing to my eyes. A ring is an attractive thing and it's the first time in my life that I became aware of this so clearly.

So, at this moment I was trying to re-read your answer, and I was at the part where a horse came running, stopped short and snorted in your face. I loved this situation. You know why? It contains so much joy. In this and the following scene you and the horse both seem to me like such ancient beings, experiencing things that come along. Both relaxed by time. The horse that loses his memory and you, who made memory much less troublesome. There is the sound of laughter. Some history here became fresh. You know what else stands out? Your hands. They make me think of water and soap. Thanks for the second idea about the smell.

It's amazing, I must read you at least five times and only then am I able to understand the small things and the bridges between my questions and your answers. That's probably why I take time to write back, even though I'd like to reply much quicker. Must be my English too. And your speed and age. I think you are around 1500 years old, but come out fresh like every new day, every single day. I would like to imagine what it feels like. Talking to you gives me at least a little hint. Its unworking feels very young, or how else could I describe it?

*I would love to see it in a small booklet.*

*I am sending you this part without an ending and the second part will come in soon.*

*Thank you!*

*elena*

about here:

It's snowing now, through my window I can see water and snowflakes dripping and flying to the right at high speed. The wind started yesterday, while it was warm and sunny, it was kind of maddening, dry with dust and with the mood of a rake. Today it turned into this tale of April. It falls on young leaves and melts as soon as it touches the ground. I see in the distance one tree glowing in the light of street lamp, like magic. Makes me want to go out with an umbrella and smoke a cigarette, but there is also resistance to do so. It often happens in Vilnius, especially at this time of the year, when early summery weather one night becomes beating wind, rain, and even snow, like tonight.

Snowflakes in spring are special, they are different from winter snow. They are light and fragile, much fluffier, big and shapeless. When you look at them, you see they are not real anymore. They soon melt and become water and then become muddy water, because Vilnius has a lot of dark mud on the ground. It's a city where your nails get dirty in half a day.

A friend, with whom I often meet, just texted a lovely portrait of me, although we didn't meet today: 'Yes, like a herring, tummy shimmers in the dark, eyes spark and blink' fish evening. I have never been married, but have been interested in marriage, since a young age. It triggered my curiosity, made me cry sometimes. Others' lives produced feelings inside my heart – as a child, I would stare at married people's lives.

Relationships feel so delicate to me, that sometimes I think I forget to take part in them and continue staring. It's exiting, scary and unclear at the same time, flattering to see someone spin almost freely.

You made me realise that I haven't experienced deep sadness around my heart for some time now, when you used the word 'sad'. And when you wrote about Ran-Ma, I could suddenly imagine you in your house. Interesting – it suddenly made space for everything.

*Another friend just wrote now, that it would be nice to create free space. Your space feels free now, there is a character in your writing probably in you as well that enjoys time. That makes me think about the ending of our conversation Part 1. Just to give time a chance. Would you be up for continuing Part 2 sometime, towards the autumn? I think I already know where it could go.*

*And now, which questions have I still left from the very beginning? Anna already came in. Your speed is surprising!*

*Ach, there is one more, the last: What is the difference between letters and books?*



*Vilnius yesterday  
with Vilnius love,  
e.*

I am so surprised and saddened by the quick end to our intimacy. I suppose it began to disintegrate when we started to reveal our attachments to other beings – horses, fish, rings in coffee shops. You see, I had started to think that you were my wife. So quick, I know, to fall into the fantasy. But perhaps I am domestic at heart and non-monogamy only works under the illusion of singularity. I want to argue it's not an illusion but points isolated in space. If we are quanta, why is it so hard to resist comparing? You are not like my husband, not like my lover, and yet stranger I am also picturing you with your silver belly, flopping in the mud. Have you read about herring in Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*? How they lived and died, how their bodies piled up following a description – implied – of the Holocaust, and how science clipped little rings into their noses that went on to tag their movements which could no longer be lost in the vastness of the sea. It is almost too literal to show you the picture from his book. But tragedy makes me direct and plain.

A ring to me could never be a beautiful thing.

You are not a book like *Little Women* or even a story, *The Woman Who Rode Away* that I can return to at my leisure, curled up on the couch. I cannot half-forget you and then return to enjoy the description of your dark 'primitive' eyes, your inscrutable language. You choose or choose not to reply.

You say, wait until the fall for my return.

I may or may not. I probably will.

But my waiting will not be like a book on a shelf.

I am picturing your dirty nails as you chew on them abstractedly. Is that you in the picture with the hair blowing in your face, like a young version of the woman in *La Jetée*? Or are you turned away? You two are like explorers, looking at the setting sun, looking at the wrapped river like a Christo present when all the water runs dry.

I didn't mean to sadden you, but felt it could happen. I actually sadden myself just the same. Once I had sent you the letter I thought, wow – I was under the illusion that we had been talking for years. I have the strange feeling of long passages of time in you. Maybe it's something that, as one of my friends says, lives behind peoples' backs? Something about your back radiates, without being conscious of it – that back affected me so much.

So, this sadness was something tempting...and it's probably like your revenge to say I am chewing on my nails, I think I never do. but I know how it feels on the tooth.

I probably decided that it's about time to start ending, or suspending our letters, for it felt like pouring rain, so intense. In such a short time, I suddenly experienced a metallic, yet very warm journey with you. Things of men woman and horses were pulled from unknown places. They are much brighter and part of life since meeting you.

And later, I will write to you again, without the expectation to find the same Candice – you are not a book. Although I'd love to read the book written by you.

Must go out now, time's so short these days and writing to you is one of my favorite almost illegal activities.

I will come back soon, to touch on herring and few more things inside that photo.

Almost raining outside x soon

No, I haven't read Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*, I will, in June, when this book will be out.

It will be the perfect time to feel something spinning free.

Just now I saw that you called me Elen at the beginning of your letter. Some of my close family used to call me by that name without the ending when I would do something wrong.

There was also a friend, who used to constantly repeat this line from a fairy tale;

'Elen Elen, look, let's go to swim, one river flows in milk, another boils in blood' ... Suddenly I read your entrance into the letter and remembered all this!

It's like the song of spring, when everything is ahead and imperfect for a moment.

I took that picture myself of my sister, my cousin (probably the one that looks like a young version of the woman from *La Jetée*) and two friends Dalia and Ieva. We went on an expedition by foot to a small Georgian restaurant, far outside the city centre. It was so windy. I think I wrote back to you one night after that. It was the last warm day till now.

And 'non-monogamy only works under the illusion of singularity', that's probably how it is. In my case it's probably reversed, singularity only works under the illusion of non-monogamy. I feel, that the mind as a transparent membrane is often able to isolate things one from each other and keep illusions so real even if aware (maybe I never thought it was an illusion, it might be real). I think that it's attention as well, which makes things appear, which separates and connects them, like loves and journeys. But they sometimes don't connect and then I am gonna miss your letters.

You are right, we reached some place which beats back as too known.

Till sometime soon

Yours

e



*A liquid thing was coming out of me.*

*Memories of a man.*

*It's nice to walk in the city at night when it's already morning. Today you said that you were flipping through the news with your fingers while sitting in a café in Vienna. Someone didn't take you seriously. But on the journey back home you remembered windows. The bus was passing the night of old people. This thought alone danced in your mind. It was the mind you liked because it only saw and observed and that hadn't been happening for a long time till now.*

*Imagine green waters. Just close your eyes and press your eyelashes with your fingers, think of something green in rough surfaces, about a million details, dots and curves moving in green water. Green turns to blue. Do you see that? Is there a feeling of a red world within blue? Yellow, then and light blue anew and emerald green and yellowish green transparent, violet and black and grey.*

*While I am thinking about these things the air is curving in my room. Echoing sounds of a piano recording play out of an old computer box and then, I zoom in on you; you sit at a table somewhere far away from me. Let me think...it is in Los Angeles. And from there, where you are, my fairy tale of you travels. I am not sure; your legs might be like animals, your breakfasts might be like your neighbours. The neighbours are no longer important. They are living very different lives and are on a completely different planet.*

*I do not only zoom in on you, but also your time. You are putting your hands over your eyes and sleep is somewhere close by. Just a second ago you said how nice it is to walk the city at night when it is already morning. The sea was on your mind. You didn't know, but the distance helps me to see you there and there multiple times over. But times for you are all in one. You never say the word multiple, because you just don't think this way. What was happening is also happening now as well. You never separated times and you also never thought that you had memories. Memory did not become memory, just like some*

dead people never die and it is impossible to reach them anywhere else except within the real lives we live. Because you always kept it alive.

And I remember something. These days it was occasionally coming back – the memory of remembering things. You are fourteen years old and you remember the space of time and experiences, which has no limit. Amount and length extends, it only extends and never shrinks. There is a field; no it's a sea. The sea, like something you see, but you don't see the end. It is inspiring like sky. Sky you said, I remember that you were thinking about the sky and its complete freedom. I turn my head down at this moment, to see what people are doing and what is happening outside my window on the ground. People think a lot. There are engineers and mothers and artists. I once thought about this for a second – about artists. I could not understand a thing. But a voice from the past called and asked me to imagine the same day a hundred years ago, to go to the garden and smell the flowers, smell the air of falling leaves, smell the street in a busy town and recall it all just as it was a hundred years ago but just as alive, happening now. When this voice from the past called it was transparent and didn't hide in its wish to be present, it said this right away and in that way was more like a wide open window. Actually it was looking through something.

*Living like a saint, laying like a leaf, I tasted some pills from Indonesia, that my friend had given me. Feeling calm, light and happy.*

*Living like a saint, laying like a green leaf of aloe, tasting same Indonesian pills, again this evening. Actually what they also do is effective getting rid of additional gas and indigestion. Feeling calm, light and happy.*

Again, so nice to reach you. Each windy day I hear this conversation, I just need to type it in. You just came back and are already leaving for the next journey very soon, maybe even tomorrow. Nevertheless there is one table, to which you in my mind sit. I know by now your name or origin, by nature. You are a donkey. But no one ever sees this, because the donkey only reveals itself back at your apartment when your shoes are off and the feet are no longer human but hooves instead. Each time I hear something knocking I throw down my things and

take my pen, my keyboard, my paper, my iPod (many think it is in fact a very elegant phone since it is so thin – maybe I could call only you with it?). Listen, a long time ago there was a man whose memories were all the memories of the world, but his knowledge about those was revealed only to the ears of his children. When the children grew up, he met things he knew. Why do I remember this tonight? It should depend on the things you saw on your journey. Tell me, I am looking for the logic here, I sometimes think you are my child, everyone and no one in particular, although the idea and thought that particularities transcend through all the types of people, which sometime you meet, excites me and keeps me company.

my love,

i wrote it as a drunk man,  
who's just arrived at home... for no reason,  
automatic association —  
dealing with the past, as usual.

there was a dick,  
if i can remember it well,  
there was a scent of  
pornography in those dreams,  
images  
that were so graphic  
as if they had been sharply  
imprinted in my mind

in the dark room—a doggy & greasy slum—,  
the light shone  
through the gaps  
between the humid woods, smelly woods,  
reaching our bodies,  
revealing the unexpected blood that came  
out of that gland

guilt and illness  
dirt and prejudice  
pleasure and pain, unfolding

my hopeless imagination giving shape  
to fears

the night dissolving into the cum  
lots of cum,  
warm and sticky  
as tasteful as prophetic





the daring voice announced the arrival of  
a stranger body,  
a welcoming warrior,  
a slut triggering my slimy imagination

fruitful dreams on man,  
who absorb pain and milk  
like no one else,

fulfilling the unannounced  
sexual drive of a simpleton,  
tired and sleepy,  
as a moon,  
hiding its obscure purposes.

and in the aftermath of my relentless pain,  
right at that moment  
when life feels like a vacuum,  
a blind spot,  
an empty ass hole,  
the voices kept dwelling,  
spreading a sense of urgency over  
my bed, over my dreams,

— enjoy the the day!  
— what a fuck?/  
— give me a break,  
do society a favor and drop dead!

all yours,  
lucky, bear

How strange to find this letter you wrote (I would say, to me, if I were brave) in 2013. This often happens where a loop in time becomes creased. It is my back you see, sitting at the table, radiating history. We have already established the animality of my legs. Sometimes my neighbour, who collects metal junk for a living, throws it between trucks beds in the morning when I'm eating my breakfast and the ringing, vibratory, clanging sounds of metal and his instructive voice are pieces of what I'm eating. Like gravel in the eggs. He used to have shouted conversations with me whenever he saw me at the kitchen window, washing the dishes. I had to tell him, 'good neighbours sometimes look the other way.' He was deeply offended and muttered to himself, 'I don't agree, I don't agree' but I noticed as he muttered, he looked away.

When I read the first volume of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* in high school, I remembered not the crack of light that came friendly under the door, but instead these three black men who replaced my Proustian mother. They would sing to me in soft voices and with small, stringed instruments like the mandolin and I learned later that they were tied to my past through some kind of memory from a Brazilian plantation. I saw the tree in shadow that crawled with the shadows of people and animals buried inside it. I saw the colonial balustrade that they launched their bodies over rather than be caught and punished, bodies that went splat on the concrete like the ripe mangoes that fell outside my window. I dreamed them as a child in Portland, Oregon, but I met them again and understood their location in history when I was on the island of horses that I already spoke to you about.

In my last email, I called you a, not Elen. Elen was in the parenthetical so that a could be A for Alpha as in the Alpha-Omega that is spelled out in sugared biscuits in a Dutch still life painting: the edible, sweet-passing representation of a life from its beginning to its end. And A for Anna, who I have begun to think is the other woman, who whispers to the speaking woman and is supposedly translated into audible sound waves by her. But it's equally possible that the

speaking woman only pretends to listen to the softly laughing Anna, and then says whatever she would like to the man, who bends slightly in rapturous anticipation.

But I like the song your friend would sing you, and I wonder which river you would swim in, the one of milk or the one of boiling blood?

How strange that in 2013 you knew that sea would be on my mind now. Earlier this month, in planning a show for later this fall, the curator asked me, 'why the liquid, the piss?' (the proposal involves a sprinkler system of distilled urine and river water that hydrates a room made of unfired porcelain). And I wrote her back this email, which now seems strangely to be a response to the one you wrote in 2013. I send it to you here because it seems we write to each other even when we are writing to others. Speaking through Anna. Or of her.

I guess you are, in that way at least, mediated, like a book, even if it's one I can't return (to).

Wow.

You blow my mind. *Ach*, so many things are on my mind now! Anna is here today.

Thank you for letting me read your letter 'why piss'. I was asking another person, if he had ever written about salty waters, but it's you who is inside there. You could sense it.

I attach another kind, Proust's search for comfort maybe? But not at all completely naive, maybe just curled in words, his text *The Sea*. There are such opposite things in yours and his words, but they seem like brothers too for all the mistakes and truths inside things. *The Sea* will enter the book as well, just to swing the reader. It swings me.

Which river would I swim in? I think both rivers might be deceptive, blood might be less tricky. If I stopped believing I would stop swimming.

In the story, milk meant that my nine brothers were alive, blood meant that they were dead. I think they are separated only to fool the sister.

I imagined that if I stepped inside the milk, blood might mix in. Which could be beautiful and too similar to life, they just make each other brighter? Not only that I guess.

At the end of my story, you came out like a donkey, I will show you soon how the whole thing looks.

Walking with your liquid trips in head.

Till the fall from this side.

Yours,

ae



## THE STRANGER

DOMINIQUE was sitting in front of the dying fire waiting for his guests to arrive. Every evening he invited some great nobleman to sup with him in the company of men of wit, and as he was well-born, rich and charming, he was never alone. The candles had not been lighted and in the room the day was sadly dying. All at once he heard a voice saying, a far-away and intimate voice saying: "Dominique," and only to hear the way it uttered, uttered from so far away and yet so close, "Dominique," froze him with fear. Never had he heard that voice, and yet he recognized it perfectly; his remorse recognized perfectly the voice of a victim, of a noble victim sacrificed by him. He tried to recall some former crime he had committed and could remember none. Yet the tone of that voice, which was certainly reproaching him for a crime, a crime he had committed, no doubt unconsciously, but for which he was responsible, betrayed its sadness and anxiety. He raised his eyes and saw standing before him, very grave and familiar, a stranger with a vague and striking air. Dominique acknowledged in a few respectful words his evident and melancholy authority.

"Dominique, am I to be the only one not invited to your supper?"

"But I do invite you to my supper," said Dominique with a grave warmth that surprised him.

"Thank you," said the stranger.

No crest was inscribed on his signet ring, nor had wit frosted his speech with its sparkling needles, but the gratitude that shone in his firm and fraternal gaze thrilled Dominique with a novel happiness.

"But if you wish me to stay, you must send the other guests away."

Dominique could hear them knocking on the door.

The candles were not yet lighted, the room was in total darkness.

"I cannot send them away," replied Dominique. "I cannot bear to be alone."

"It is true," said the stranger sadly, "with me you would be alone. Yet, for all that, you should let me stay with you. There are old wrongs you have done me, wrongs you should repair. I love you more than they do, those others who, when you are old, will come to you no longer."

"I cannot," said Dominique.

And at the same moment he felt that he had sacrificed a noble happiness for a tyrannical and vulgar habit and one, besides, which, in return for his obedience, had no more pleasures to offer him.

"Choose quickly," said the stranger beseechingly, proudly.

Dominique went to open the door for his guests, at the same time asking the stranger, without daring to turn his head, "But who are you?"

And the stranger-the stranger who had already disappeared-replied, "Habit, to which you sacrifice me this evening, tomorrow, nourished by the blood of the wounds you have inflicted on me, will be stronger than ever. Each day more exigent for having been obeyed again, it will lead you a little farther from me, force you to make me suffer even more. Soon you will have killed me. You will never see me again. Yet you owe more to me than to the others, who will soon desert you. I am within you, yet I am now very far away; I hardly exist any longer. I am your soul, I am yourself."

The guests had entered. They all went to the dining room and Dominique tried to tell them of his interview with the vanished stranger. But Girolomo, observing the general boredom of the guests and his host's difficulty in recalling an almost forgotten dream, to the great satisfaction of everybody including Dominique himself interrupted him, drawing the following conclusion: "One should never remain alone. Solitude begets melancholy."

Then they all began drinking again. Dominique chatted gaily but without joy, flattered by the brilliance of the company.

## INNER SUNSET

INTELLIGENCE, like nature, has its spectacles. Neither sunsets nor moonlight, which have how often thrilled me to tears, can ever surpass for me in passionate tenderness that vast melancholy conflagration which, during my walks at the end of the day, colors more mighty floods in my soul than the sun in setting kindles in the sea. Then we hurry our steps in the night. More intoxicated and giddy than a horseman with the ever increasing speed of his adored mount, trembling with joy and confidence, we abandon ourselves to our tumultuous thoughts, and the more we control and direct them the more irresistibly we feel ourselves to be possessed by them. With a tender emotion we wander through the dark countryside and greet the nightdark oaks like the solemn field, like the epic witnesses of the soaring ardor that makes us drunk and sweeps us headlong. Lifting our eyes to the sky, we cannot help feeling an exaltation on recognizing in the openings between the clouds, still aglow with the sun's farewell, the mysterious reflection of our own thoughts; we plunge faster and faster into the darkness and the dog that follows us, the horse that bears us, or the friend who has fallen silent at our side (less perhaps when no other living creature is near us), the flower in our buttonhole, or the cane we twirl

joyously with feverish hand, receives from our looks  
and from our tears the melancholy tribute of our  
delirium.

## THE SEA

THE SEA will always fascinate those who have known the disgust of life and the lure of mystery even before their first sorrows, like a presentiment of the inadequacy of reality to satisfy them. Those who feel the need of rest, even before they have experienced fatigue, the sea will console and vaguely exhilarate. Unlike the earth, it bears no traces of men's toil and of their lives. There, nothing remains, nothing passes save in flight, and how quickly vanish the tracks of the ships sailing over it. Hence that perfect purity of the sea unknown to the things of the earth. And this virgin water is much more delicate than the hardened earth, which it takes a pick to dent. A child's footstep, with a tinkling sound, will cut a deep furrow in the water and for a moment the blending shades are broken up; then all trace is obliterated and the sea becomes calm again as in the first days of creation. The man who is weary of the paths of the earth or who divines, even before he has tried them, how bitter and vulgar they are, will be enchanted by the pale highroads of the sea, more dangerous and lovelier, more dubious and lonelier. There everything is more mysterious, even those great cloud shadows that sometimes float peacefully over the bare fields of the sea without houses and without shade—those celestial hamlets, those unsubstantial tenuous boughs.

The sea has the charm of things that do not fall silent at night, that, in the midst of our unquiet lives, give us the right to sleep, the assurance that everything will not be annihilated, like the night-light which makes little children feel less alone when it is shining. It is not separated from the sky like the earth, is always in harmony with the sky's colors, is affected by its most delicate shadings. It beams in the sunlight and every evening seems to die at the same hour. And after the sun has disappeared the sea seems to pine for it still and to preserve its luminous remembrance in the face of the uniformly somber earth. It is at this moment when it glows with such melancholy and sweet reflections that, contemplating it, our hearts melt. When night has almost fallen, when the sky is dark over a blackened earth, it goes on gleaming faintly, who knows by what unknown miracle, by what bright remnant of the day buried beneath its waves?

It refreshes our imagination because it does not remind us of the life of men, but it rejoices the soul because like the soul it is infinite and ineffectual aspiration, striving, forever broken by a fall, eternal and sweet lamentation. It enchants us like music, which, unlike language, bears no trace of material things, which never speaks to us of men, but imitates the movements of our soul. Our heart leaps up with its waves, falls back with them, forgetting thus its

own falterings, and consoles itself in a secret harmony between its own sadness and that of the sea, which confounds its destiny with that of all things.

September, 1892



I don't think I have learned all I could from zits, though lately they come only in dribs and drabs, often repeating themselves and saying nothing new. A few weeks ago a dermatologist's assistant – a solid Finnish woman with what my father would have called a *democratic* accent, i.e. equal emphasis on each vowel – whistled in admiration at my back when I took my polo shirt off, as if she had heard my war record and had now seen the scars to prove it. I said 'backne is the only link to my youth' and she laughed. There is, is there not, something fraudulent about dermatology, the pretense of taking a close look at a nondescript brown spot – I had found one and was worried – and declaring it harmless, the self-aggrandising insistence in calling skin an 'organ', the claim to ownership of venereal diseases as if rashes were the most important thing about syphilis. But never mind: she reassured me, I believed her; she declared me a riot and sent me on my way.

In retrospect what I find most surprising about zits is their modishness. Mine behaved like well-heeled Europeans in search of a summer home, colonising then discarding one region after another. They bought a square inch of, say, my shoulder blade for a song, did it up, sold it, made a bundle and moved on. Neglecting a few early outliers, about which more later, they started with the Périgord in the middle of my back: mild hilly relief, good access and temperate climate, still popular after all these years. It all started, predictably,

at college. The holiday villa of carbuncles followed a set pattern: rapid appearance and ripening, easy to pop, only moderate pain involved. At any given point three or four building sites could be seen from the air. The fun was to forget about them for a few days, then suddenly discover them in numbers and pop them like bubble wrap. I still remember the carnage on my eighteenth birthday (I went to college early), my hand moving expertly under a chambray shirt, the popped bits collecting on my palm.

It was then that I began to discern the true importance of zits. Without them my mental image of skin would have remained almost blank, an expanse of slightly damp Italian *nappa* leather the color of an artificial limb, as featureless as a Michelin map of the Algerian Sahara read at arm's length. Zits, however, are exploratory wells that reveal a rich geology. Skin turns out to be made of invisible regions, each with a different affect. Let us start with the self-evident, the midline region. About an inch wide, it runs as a long strip down the spine and feels thick and slightly numb. If I have to imagine how this came to be in embryo, I see an Oklahoma-type rush of nerves setting out in both directions from the sternum. I see them going hell for leather along the ribs, rounding the corner and discovering the vast expanse of the back, at length exhaustively meeting in the midline, wheeling round and leaving a sort of DMZ between them to avoid conflicts, what the Carolingians would have called a *mark*, a border region between two territories.

*Midmark* then, as revealed by zits, feels like

a different me, one I aspire to resemble. I am notably thin-skinned in daily life, quick to take offense, but sadly slower in finding the right retort. The skin in the middle of my back is, well, thick-skinned as if from long experience, feels pain less keenly, folds into a solid, manly roll under thumb and index. It speaks of competence, of calm, of the sort of authority kittens instinctively submit to when we pretend to be in charge and pick them up by their midmark. The southern end of the midmark, incidentally, the triangle of skin covering the sacrum, takes this stolid indifference too far and has none of the manly strength of the northern regions. It is merely brutishly numb. Zits in that region feel as if they are happening to someone else.

I mention this aspirational quality of skin regions because some are definitely places I would like to get away from, though I don't see how this is going to be possible since I live there. There is for example a narrow, isosceles triangle of skin just below and in front of the shoulder blade. Zits in that region cause pain to a completely different character, a pale, thin, hypersensitive, highly strung being, the sort that would be writing a complaint note to the management from his vast bed in a Cannes seafront hotel, asking them to do something, anything, about the zit on the Croisette. Zits in that region even look different, small and shy, and tend to produce white stuff. The pain they cause is of the eye-watering variety that medics call exquisite while licking their chops. Pains, different pains, endlessly different pains: any serious student of the problem is soon forced to conclude that there is, in

addition to the broad regions, some of which I have already discussed, a microgeography of the skin that must surely be individual and is therefore the realm of poetic, rather than scientific metaphor.

Not long ago I flew back from South Africa on the upper deck of a 747 – SAA steerage uses both decks – and spent much of the 12-hour flight observing a surpassingly handsome rugby-player type in his middle age being absurdly nice to his demanding wife while maintaining a hangdog expression of Elie Wiesel sadness in his eyes. Upon arrival I discovered that the long proximity to the seat back had fomented a never-before seen zit roughly at the geographic centre of my right shoulder blade. I say discovered, but what actually happened was that I took my shirt off and my children ran screaming. In an unseemly hurry I got rid of the zit the way one would swat a spider only to discover that I had flattened a very rare, possibly unrepeatably novel species. It briefly felt, both under the hand and from inside, like a different thing altogether. I can only describe it by reference to what a normal shoulder blade zit would have felt like only millimeters away: if the reference is a solid color, this was a houndstooth, an eccentric, refined creature alas now dead.

A parameter of zit pain which I believe would be of interest to philosophers of mind if they weren't such cosy creatures, is the accuracy with which we can figure out its location. Curiously enough, exquisite pain has a diffuse character. I once followed a Jewish girlfriend of mine to Israel where she worked on

a kibbutz picking unripe pears in searing sunlight. By the time I got there she had found another guy and I was stranded in a hot, strange land. Not being in uniform, I was of little relevance to local girls or car drivers and found it impossibly hard to start a conversation or hitch a ride. The fickleness I mentioned earlier then caused my zits to desert Périgord and move to the damp, shaded Fertile Crescent of my groin. The first one caught me by surprise in a rustic shower and hurt so much in a diffuse way I remember looking around me rather than on me for the cause. At length I figured it out and popped it with tears in my eyes. When I left Israel, the exqui-zits desisted and never came back.

This brings me to the moral teachings of zits, the different types of suffering they engender in response to our rash or judicious actions. But let me first dispose of the notion that they are best left alone. A zit left to its own devices goes on forever, chiefly because it has nowhere to go: unable to expel the offending stuff unaided, unable to resorb it, it dries up eventually like uncollected roadkill and in the meantime causes discomfort and embarrassment. No, they must be hunted down and disposed of. But this requires patience and knowledge. To be fair, most zits especially in solid, reasonable skin regions like the midmark or the bum, only manifest themselves when ready to be popped. Others, particularly on the face, are perverse creatures egging you on to squeeze them in full knowledge that if you do so, you will make things much worse. I remember one on my nose that turned

out to be the visible end of some sort of zitfield below, it would not come out even when I squeezed my nose flat, and eventually burst with a small pop, sending one of those slow-flying plugs of stuff into the mirror from which, as you know, they are impossible to clean.

Timing is therefore everything if you want to get things over quickly. But let us not jump to conclusions, sometimes the quickest way is not the best way. There is a type of zit which can only be dealt with in several stages, sometimes two, occasionally three, very rarely four. Each stage brings pain and pleasure. First stage: painful, and ripe looking with *punctum* in centre. Squeeze, something white pops out, done and dusted. But no: twelve hours later, the thing is back and this time it has spread inwards, dug in and fortified its position. Squeezing ineffectual but painful, whole thing now angry, the size of a quarter. Stage three, the important one: ignore considerable pain, squeeze hard and pristine white thing pops out unsullied by surrounding blood and stuff. Now you've got it. It is questionable whether there is a better strategy. This one, like angling, nets the fish with some play involved. Waiting for perfect ripeness would be unnatural. I nearly forgot the fourth stage, when the remaining poison is rounded up by the immune system and brought meekly to the surface a couple of days later, with the skin already healing itchily.

My wife has just read the above and advises me that it is disgusting and not fit to print. But in the interest of facing things squarely and in full disclosure, I must go on. I will not linger, however. I just want to

end on a happy note about zit perfection and its dangers. The boundary between a zit and something more serious, like an abscess requiring medical attention, is hard to discern but ever close. Scriabin died of a zit on his upper lip, which turned into septicemia. The zit was thought by fellow composer Cyril Scott to have been sent by the 'powers of darkness' who 'walked in awe of this mortal'. So beware and don't mess with zits between the eye and the mouth. I forget why (something to do with drainage), but those can kill you.

I have kept the best for the end. I have mentioned the audible pop some zits can make when they give up the ghost. This muffled sound is unquestionably satisfying in a small way. But hear this. I once had a zit in the roof of my right ear canal. Thing started out a modest affair, a mere annoyance only felt when I poked a finger in my ear, which is to say not often. But with time it seemed to grow and become more painful. I tried to squeeze it the conventional pinching way, but it was not accessible and rewarded me with more pain. Then one day I felt a lymph node under my right ear and decided the zit must go. This was late at night and I was sleeping alone on a mattress in the living room, having argued to the no-speaking point with my girlfriend. I started once again various pinching motions, but no luck.

Then I had an epiphany: since the zit was between skin and bone surely it could be squeezed by pushing up against the bone. I tried it, and after a brief, painful resistance it burst inside my ear. That was, so to speak, a ringside seat at the big fight. There was a loud pop,

followed by a rushing sound of the stuff coming out. I ran to the bathroom and immediately upgraded the thing to a proper abscess, considering how much paper was needed to mop things up. I was glad my girlfriend was fast asleep, next door, I feared this might have been the last straw. A few minutes later I pressed again with my thumb and more loud stuff came out followed by blood. The huge thing was dead. I sometimes think about it when I walk around, and you can tell when I do so because I say 'Ha!'.



Luca Turin is one of my favorite writers. His reviews of perfume spill language, perception and chemical knowledge into a condensed drift that one can start one's day with, a sort of witty haiku. It draws on the compositionist understanding of the world: one thing is here due to another thing, and together they make something else. Then there is Luca Turin, the chemist, although it would be hard to say that he is one of my favourite scientists – the rules of the game of science and humanities are different (as you will notice shortly very clearly). But why not – of course, Luca Turin is one of my favourite scientists: I am fascinated by the vibrational theory of smell he's been exploring and developing. It is a controversial one, drawing on the divide between those who believe that it is the shape of molecules that defines what we smell, and those who say that it is the vibration of molecules that define the smell: occasionally two molecules of the same shape may have rather different smells. And maybe this is how the figure of Luca Turin as a writer and a scientist comes about – as a powerful vibration of unpredictability or non-alignment, to say the least. Here is an example.

In 2012 while working on dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, I proposed to my colleagues to invite Luca Turin to contribute one of the 100 notebooks: small publications capturing a wide range of artists, writers, and a few scientists. I was thrilled with the

possibility of Luca writing, or maybe pulling out some never-published-before material with chemical formulas or psychedelic observations. Chus Martinez was nodding in agreement with all the synesthetic sharpness of her *Lipstick Rose*; a perfume. The official editorial invitation letter was sent. After a while an answer in the form of an essay arrived. The editors were wondering if this was 'the true' Luca Turin we had the email address of. I checked: it was the 'real one.' I read the essay and it left me disarmed and puzzled. It was not at all what we imagined his text to be, and perhaps the worst part was that it was not at all what the 'notebook series' wanted to be itself. Luca's text appeared as an anomaly in the company of statements sharing their relevance, importance or some art world / academic validity. His text was an eruption of anarchy, and perhaps it is about anarchy, including the corporeal one.

From our exchange about it:

Hi Raimundas

Thank you for your kind email. I am touched and flattered that you should care about including some of my writing in the notebooks. You are absolutely correct, the text I presented did not fit the spirit of the series. The problem, as I realised in an exchange of emails with Bettina, is that I am completely incapable of writing something that fits.

As Bettina pointed out, my stuff was too much in the first person, etc. I am glad you like my writing about smell and would like some more, but consider the following: I have never written about smell in general, not even much about smell per se but almost always about perfumes. Why? Because perfumes are artistic creations made by artists, and when I smell one I am reading a message in a bottle, not a smell.

The moment I start to generalise, I feel I am oozing the intellectual equivalent of margarine: it spreads easily, has no taste and leaves a greasy stain. Let me, if I may, illustrate this with an example, and please forgive me for being direct. I have not seen your exhibitions, but the factual description, for example, of your hypnosis show makes it sound like something I would like to see. That is art, and that's great. Now let me take the following statement [by its curator,

apparently] about the show: it is 'a temporary social structure for engaging into creative cognitive acts through shared practices of art and hypnosis.'

That statement is, of course, total crap or, as Wolfgang Pauli would say 'not even wrong'. Most academic writing about art is similarly oleaginous and spreadable and I have an aversion to it that borders on hatred. The fact that people, including some of the big shots who are writing for Documenta, have careers, professorships, adoring students and PhD theses built on such nonsense is something we should be ashamed of, and I am confident that one day we will. Please forgive me, I cannot bring myself to think like a humanities academic.

all the best

Luca



Elena Narbutaitė  
*Memories of the Star*

The book accompanies  
Elena Narbutaitė's exhibition *Prosperity*,  
16 June – 13 August, 2017  
at the Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius

Group exhibition *Unanimous Night*  
curated by Bernardo José de Souza that  
took place at the Contemporary Art  
Centre at the same time is a guest inside  
the book

Texts by Candice Lin, Elena Narbutaitė,  
Marcel Proust, Bernardo José de Souza,  
Luca Turin, Raimundas Malašauskas

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Look the other way



