HERE
notes from the present

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The news items in the right column were taken from "The New York Times"

Cover by Sebastiano Buonamico

“Here-notes from the present” is written so that it can be read “as a novel”: from the beginning to the end in sequence. This is **an invitation and an exhortation** to the reader: many diary pages make little sense if not read immediately after the previous ones and before those that follow.

This is the final issue of “Here - Notes from the Present”. In January 2012 it will become fully available free of charge online, like all the previous issues (at www.quihere.eu). **For back issues** in print (€10 each), please write to Massimo Parizzi, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy, phone/fax +39 02-57406574, email: massimoparizzi@alice.it.

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This Is the Last Issue of "Here"

by Massimo Parizzi

In October 2009, this magazine halted publication. Not enough money (i.e., subscriptions), too much work (i.e., no one to help with the more executive tasks: from proofreading and layout, to printing labels and stuffing envelopes); and last but not least, an increasing sense that the process of conception and composition, which I had overseen by myself for ten years, needed to involve other people. These, in short, were the reasons for the interruption. Which I thought—which I feared—would be definitive. Instead, in January 2011, "Here" resumed publication. Promising four issues a year instead of the former three. With this issue, even though it is coming out late, the review is keeping that promise, but at the same time, it is shutting down. Definitively. What happened?

Over the course of 2010, in my search for a publisher who could help solve at least the problems in the "too much work" department, I came into contact with a publishing cooperative. The relationship, at first, seemed promising. So much so that I announced to subscribers, readers, and friends that indeed, "Here" would be resuming publication; that I raised funds, asking many people to make a special contribution; that I collected thousands of addresses of potential subscribers to whom I could present the review.

The relationship with this cooperative came to an

end when I realized it would not be able to solve the magazine's problems, not even the ones related to "too much work". But in the meantime, many people had responded to the request for financial assistance, providing funds that I expected to last almost a year (and this turned out to be true). In addition, the vast number of email addresses I collected—of individuals, volunteer associations, CSA groups, fair trade shops, and ecotourism agencies—made me hope that the number of subscribers would grow, at least enough to continue publication. This did not turn out to be true.

A brief digression. I'm telling a story that to some degree is a personal one: of a magazine that grew out of one person's initiative, with no funding except from other individuals, mostly in the form of subscriptions. There are quite a few magazines, and cultural initiatives in general, that exist in these conditions; and for almost all of them, finding the means and the funds to continue is quite a struggle. The story of "Here" thus becomes a bit less "personal". As one case among many, it reflects the conditions that facilitate or obstruct the circulation of "cultural products". The conditions that facilitate it are, essentially, money and advertising. If they are lacking, that's a big obstacle.
Some people, looking at this situation, think that culture ought to be funded "publicly", a vague term that generally means "by the government or similar institutions". Which can definitely be useful: moreover, many cultural initiatives are. People sometimes say that the government, i.e., the political sphere, which unlike the market is expected to work in the collective interest, has a duty to do this, and that may be true. Nevertheless, I feel more than a little dubious, for one reason in

particular. “Government”, as we know, is not synonymous with “public”, nor is “public” the opposite of “private”. Public is synonymous with the collective context, which is the context of our life as a whole. Demanding that the political sphere protect it means not making the same demand of the market, which has a far deeper impact. It means telling the market to do as it pleases. And it does.

By demanding that culture be government-funded, in short, we turn a blind eye to the question—leaving it untouched, evading it, not even raising it—of the excessive power of money, and thus of structural mechanisms, in the circulation of cultural products, but above all, by demanding an unjustified privilege for culture, we avoid the underlying problem: the excessive power of money, and thus of structural mechanisms, on our public life, and thus on our life as a whole. On work, for example, and on the political sphere itself (where the structural mechanisms are called major parties). The problem is excessive power. (“Here” has always been aware of this, hence its choice to highlight the life stories of individuals in its pages.)

Some people, looking at this situation, think instead that a magazine, like any other product, whether cultural or not, must stand the test of the market. If it doesn’t sell, that means there’s no “demand” for it. I am more than just dubious about this idea. It overlooks—among many other aspects—advertising. I don’t just mean advertising in the narrow sense, like television commercials and billboards, but the goal of advertising and the methods advertising uses to achieve it. Both are increasingly preponderant wherever words are spoken or written and images are shown.

Not that the goal and methods of advertising have monopolized all communication between people, fortunately—perhaps they never will—but their unpleasant presence can increasingly be felt, not just on television and in the newspapers, where it is rampant, and in political communication, where demagogy is merely a form of advertising and a charismatic leader is just a celebrity spokesperson. It can also be found in many films, novels, and essays; even in the language of volunteer associations; even in private conversation.

The goal of advertising is to sell something: a commodity, an idea, a cause, or a political party. And it pursues this aim by trying to convince someone, thus turning that person into a potential "customer". The term and act of "convincing", "persuading", unlike forcing or bribing, have a respectable history, of course. They have contributed to the transition, when it has occurred, from violence to reason, from weapons to words. But they contain a dangerous implication that betrays that history, reverses it. As is more and more often the case. The aim of convincing someone leads to a kind of communication in which the other person is only asked to react or respond (buying, joining), not to take action or pose questions on their own. The freedom that is offered is only the paltry freedom of saying "yes" or "no" to something already laid out. Not saying something different. One can easily imagine what a society becomes and what becomes of its members when this kind of communication is preponderant.

The aim of convincing someone leads to a functional kind of communication, whose goal—unlike a good poem, a good novel, a good essay, a good conversation—is laid out in advance. You're

trying to get somewhere. And so it becomes "natural" that to get there, you use the methods that seem most efficient, no matter what harm they cause along the way. That is why advertising, in the narrow sense, has been given certain rules: for harm reduction. But aside from the fact that they are constantly broken, these rules do not get to the core of the problem. Advertising is still advertising: it lies (in the strict sense of the word or by omission), it flirts, it strives for sensationalism, for sound bites (like politicians on TV), it plays on the emotions, trying to elicit laughter, tears or indignation (like so many humanitarian campaigns), it's morbid, titillating, etc., etc. What friend, or acquaintance, or stranger would we allow to treat us that way?

I can confidently say that "Here", has never treated its readers that way; in fact, it has always tried to do the opposite: to stir their intelligence and sensitivity. So it will lead them wherever they want to go. Since only they should decide their own goals. This was the "demand" that the review's "supply" hoped to encounter on the "market". And so it could never have adopted the methods and goal of advertising in the broader sense, let alone rely on it in the narrow sense.

(Of course, it may be that none of this has anything to do with why "Here" did not manage to find enough readers to keep it going. It may be that the review simply was not good enough, not interesting enough. It's not for me to say, I'm too closely involved. But even if "advertising" had nothing to do with the problems of "Here", and of many other magazines and cultural initiatives, it has something to do with all of us. It may not have harmed "Here", but it harms all of us, every day, which is much more important.)

Back to the point. I thus found myself, this year, dealing with all the problems that had led to the magazine's suspension the year before, still unresolved. There are still not enough subscribers to cover expenses; above all, considering the efforts that have already been made to increase them, it is unlikely that this situation will change in the short run. And without any prospect of breaking even within a reasonable span of time, one can't keep asking friends and subscribers for "special" donations.

The editorial work needed to make the review come out in a decent form has continued to weigh entirely on my shoulders. It is true that "Here" has been able to rely, almost from the beginning, on skilled, generous translators; some of them, despite working for free and obviously being entitled to a free copy, even decided to support it by subscribing or giving away subscriptions. It has been able to rely, almost from the beginning, on a very talented graphic designer who created all its covers. It was able to rely, for a while, on an editorial panel who met monthly to contribute their ideas, suggestions, critiques. But despite these invaluable forms of assistance, it has never found anyone with both the time and the technical skills needed to help me shoulder, unpaid, all the other tasks involved in publishing the review.

As for the need, after ten years, for other people to become involved in conceiving and composing the magazine, over the course of 2010 and 2011 "Here" has forged many new ties. Some people have written things especially for it, or sent in diary entries. These have been important contributions, and often wonderful human encounters, but none of these relationships has grown into an actual collaboration that turned conceiving and

composing the magazine into a shared task. Moreover, that never happened with the members of the editorial panel, even though they have been friends of "Here" and personal friends of mine for much longer. Could it be that the review never managed to get past its original framing as an individual, rather than group, initiative? Perhaps.

That's the situation. I don't know, however, if it would have sufficed to make me say "enough", to shut down "Here", had it not been for another factor. And I don't know whether this other factor regards just me or the review itself. That's impossible to say, at least for now. It is the sense, which had already made itself felt when "Here" stopped coming out two years ago, and which has grown deeper and more definite over the course of this year, that whatever the review (or I?) could do and wanted to do, it had done. That there is now a need (or I have a need?) for something else. What, I don't know. But as far as I'm concerned, it can only be something in which the "political" concern, for our present and our future, is accompanied by a gaze steadily trained on everything that is often wrongly deemed "unpolitical", that transcends the "here and now".
Such as art and poetry (in a note I jotted down while "Here" was suspended and I was exploring other things, I find a phrase by Mario Luzi: "Poetry is simply life in search of itself"). And thought. And beauty. There's a diary entry by Laila El-Haddad from Gaza (in issue 14 of "Here") that has always lingered in my mind; on March 31, 2006, she wrote, "I heard that phrase a lot, paradise. Of people describing their homes, their gardens, their razed orchards. They don't see the war and the destruction and the lawlessness and all

of the ugliness of occupation and anarchy. They see beauty".

This review has always tried to keep its gaze steadily trained on what transcends the "here and now". That might seem like a contradiction, given its title. But it isn't. Not at all. Because the "here", the "present", is something it has always tried to transcend. Not only by bringing diary entries and poems and stories and essays into dialogue with each other (for instance, by intertwining terrible accounts of the Israeli invasion of Gaza in December 2008, in issue 22, with a passage from Elio Vittorini's *Conversations in Sicily* about "The Pain of the Wronged World"). Not only that. Even before that. In its "form".

I've always been amazed, in reading diary and blog entries and selecting pages, tearing them out of their context and arranging them to compose another one, the context of "Here", to see them become somehow transfigured, almost turning into musical phrases (from the very beginning, in conceiving and then making this review, I've found myself thinking of music, of the succession and collision of themes and tempos, andante, allegretto, maestoso…). I have always been amazed, in short, to see them "become formalized". (Have the readers seen that too? It doesn't matter. What matters is whether they have "sensed" it, and from comments that have come in, I know that at least some have, that it could be sensed.)

In 1965, Franco Fortini wrote, "Might not the literary use of language, its formalization […] be a metaphor for a mode of human existence? […] Restoring mankind to itself, the capacity, in short—both individual and collective—to become increasingly oneself, to define oneself, to form the past, present and future. […] The "formalization"

of life is the victory over the merely praxic use of it, to which we are subjected in alienated labor. […] The literary use of language is homologous with the formal use of life that is the aim and end of communism".[1]

Once I agreed with these words, each and every one. Now I have to leave out the last one: "communism". But they taught me that the "form" always foreshadows, always prefigures something—a completion, a harmony, a happiness, a freedom, an emancipation—that it may be impossible to fully achieve in life, but that it is disastrous not to aspire to. The form incarnates an aspiration. "Swann found in himself, in the memory of the [musical] phrase that he had heard," writes Proust[2], "the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe, but to which, as though the music had had upon the moral barrenness from which he was suffering a sort of recreative influence, he was conscious once again of a desire, almost, indeed, of the power to consecrate his life."

Thank you all, and I hope you enjoy this issue.

[1] Franco Fortini, *Verifica dei poteri*, Garzanti, Milan, 1974, pp. 182-190.

[2] *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, *Swann's Way*, transl. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Wordsworth, Ware, 2006, p. 210.

Diaries from April to June 2011

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Cheryle Rose Ala-Jeon

Uijeongbu, South Korea, April 6, 2011

The recent tragedy (earthquake, tsunami, and radiation leak) in Japan is causing me a lot of worries and it's making my husband worry more than

I do. We both agree that if it was just the two of us maybe we could take things lightly, but now that we have little Zach we can't just sit around and wait for things to get worse. Our son is our reason to panic. We've been talking a lot about the future situation of Korea in relation to Japan's radiation problem. My husband is even thinking of relocating the family to the Philippines or any other country that will prove to be safer than Korea. He's very concerned about the possible water shortage and contamination. […] So, during last night's grocery trip my husband suddenly insisted on buying packs of bottled water and a couple of kilos of salt (salt comes from seawater and if Korea's seawater gets contaminated by radioactive materials then the salt supply of Korea will also get affected). He argued that we should at least have a couple of day's supply for the sake of little Zach. It's not just my husband who is on the verge of panic. During our grocery trip I also witnessed Korean moms rushing to buy rain gear (raincoats, rain boots, and umbrellas) for their kids (tomorrow is going to be a rainy day, but unlike any other rainy day, there's a possibility that it's going to be radioactive rain) and I also witnessed a lot of people buying salt and bottled water. Even the supermarket clerks are constantly refilling the shelves with salt and bottled water. People in Korea are starting to worry, and the lack of information from the government on this matter is giving the people a reason to panic. […]

April 1. Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. Stirred up by angry mullahs who urged them to avenge the burning by Terry Jones of a Koran at a Florida church, thousands of protesters overran the compound of the United Nations, killing at least 12 people. Terry Jones of Gainesville, Fla., said he was "saddened" and "moved" by the deaths in Afghanistan, but given the chance, he would burn the Koran all over again.

April 1. Syria. Antigovernment protesters, unsatisfied with yet more vague promises of reform from President Bashar al-Assad, marched by the thousands in numerous cities, only to be met with gunfire and other violence that killed at least 10 people.

Kawagoe, Japan, April 8, 2011 **Cocomino**

Children in school have been able to play outside for about two weeks now. I think that most of the people around Tokyo understand that the

amount of radiation has decreased. Of course it is very stressful for children to be restricted from going out. In nursery school, the minimum area for a child is determined to be about three square meters as dictated by the law. It is a very small area. When children go outside at school, they are free to wear a mask and a hat or not. That is to say, it is up to their parents. I also took my children to a nearby park last weekend. I think that we don't need to wear masks. However, my wife strongly opposed my opinion. So our children had to wear a mask and a hat each although they didn't like them. (Most of the other children don't wear masks.) It's natural for children to want to play outdoors rather than indoors. No matter how dirty they become or how many times they fall down, they don't mind. My daughters returned home with many acorns as souvenirs.

April 3. Casablanca, Morocco. About 4,000 people demonstrated to demand more democracy and reform. Demonstrators chanted "No to corruption", "End social injustice", and "The people want an end to authoritarianism".

April 4. Tokyo. The company that runs crippled nuclear power plant announced that the levels of radioactive material in the seawater near the plant were measured at several million times the legal limit.

San Salvador, April 10, 2011

From an email by Maria Ofelia Zuniga to Massimo Parizzi

It is with much joy that I am writing to you. […] I am well and starting a new project at work. The last one, which was an investigation into the relationship between high-risk behaviors and HIV infection in users of a drug called "crack," is already finished. The good news is that now we are starting intervention work stemming from the results of that investigation and that gives us the possibility to move from data knowledge (investigation) to action (preventative intervention). I am very happy about this. I think there will be many people who will benefit from this effort and we are going to work with people who certainly have a lot to offer from their personal experiences.
Recently beautiful things have happened, such as the birth of my nephew, Javier, in January and at

April 4. Taiz, Yemen. Security forces and government supporters opened fire from rooftops and the street on tens of thousands of protesters. At least 20 people were killed.

April 6. More than 250 people, including women and children, were missing after their boat capsized off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa.

present, there is a new "Baby Boom" around me. I have a lot of pregnant friends and it seems this year will be recorded as the year of fertility, just as 2007 was… When there are so many signs of hopelessness and death around, it is difficult to describe the faith in life that assumes the arrival of new beings who incredibly, from their smallness, convey the hope for new and better days. I am very happy, Massimo, because life prevails over death. […]

In addition, I want to share that I have been working for a while (voluntarily…) with a group of friends in a concerted effort to bring about the restoration of rights of children who have lived "life in the streets." We have united with the intention to spur various courses of action that are necessary as part of the journey through which we hope children, who for various reasons have found the streets to be their only life refuge, can find another possible path where their fundamental rights are more than just words on paper and become reality for them.

At this time we have all of our energy focused on a "Home" which has been given the name "Housing Friends Forever." Right now fourteen children between the ages of eleven and eighteen years live there. They all lived an average of six to eight years in the streets, on fate and with the rules of the street. They have undergone a process of "accompanying" in the street until they came of their own volition to live in the "Housing Friends Forever" where my friends and I intend to create the best living conditions for them and restore their human, social and basic (!) rights, such as love, education, food, housing, health, clothing, vision for the future, etc.

April 9. Cairo. Egypt's security forces shot and killed at least two protesters and wounded dozens before dawn in an attempt to disperse peaceful demonstrators spending the night in Tahrir Square.

April 12. Tokyo. Japan has decided to raise its assessment of the accident at the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant to the worst rating on an international scale, putting the disaster on par with the 1986 Chernobyl explosion.

For all of this, as you can imagine, we are not relying on money but rather on all of the goodwill and determination of the world and we are mobilizing ourselves a lot in order to be able to obtain the financing and sponsorships that might permit us to move forward to the point where these children can take control of their lives as adults. I personally think that independently of the decisions they might make in their adult lives, it is important to know that we are offering them the opportunity, at the very least, to not go back to being *a child of the streets ever again*, because it is not fair for a 6, 7, 10 or 12 year-old child to be left with the responsibility of making decisions that will affect his existence forever…

April 14. Gaza. A radical Islamic group, known as Tawhid and Jihad, kidnapped and killed Vittorio Arrigoni, 36, an Italian peace activist. Vittorio was a familiar face in Gaza. He arrived in the summer of 2008 on the first boat of activists that sailed here to protest a blockade imposed by Israel.

I often listen to adults saying with regards to these children who live using drugs and cleaning car windshields at traffic lights that "it is their fault for having left their homes." In those moments I am disappointed to think that as adults we are at times so incapable of seeing past the end of our nose and that this is why the reality that not all childhoods or families are equal and the reality of not having been born with the fortune of having a loving father and mother all too often renders worthless the fundamental rights we consider boys and girls have to be cared for and educated.

Juba, Sudan. More than 800 people have died in south Sudan violence since January and almost 94,000 people fled their homes. The nation in waiting has seen an upsurge in bloody clashes since January's largely peaceful referendum, in which southerners voted almost unanimously to split with the north. There have been clashes between rebel groups and the southern army, and between rival ethnic groups over resources such as land and cattle.

I've known about the reality of children in the streets for many years and I admit that until a while ago, it was never more than a subject that touched me emotionally but did not move me to action. Perhaps I was a bit lost in the midst of the question that usually arises when I'm confronted with situations that compromise my thinking and my movement. This question is, "And what can *I* do?" I don't know if this journey upon which my friends

and I are embarking will be the only one nor the right one, but we hope that all of our efforts will result in the promise of a future for these children who already have more stories from their past (most of those very sad) than perhaps I will ever manage to accumulate over the rest of my life. Faced with the uncertainty of the decisions that we must make, we put our trust in (and trust the children to) the light of the energy that moves the universe and we walk on…

Kinshasa, Congo. Child Witches

by Maria Patrizia Salatiello

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Kinshasa, April 17, 2011

The Ethiopian Airlines plane is landing at Kinshasa airport. We've been waiting for this moment for a long time. Over two years have gone by since we started studying the strange, disturbing phenomenon of children accused of witchcraft. Not only disturbing but new, as it is only since the mid-'90s that, amongst the tens of thousands of street children that crowd the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, many have started to be blamed for all family misfortunes. After months and months of bibliographical research, discussions and hypotheses, at last we can see this reality with our own eyes.

We leave the cosy cool temperature of air-conditioning behind and we're lashed by the unexpected heat of Equatorial Africa. I'm used to the heat back home in Sicily, where temperatures

reach and rise above 40 degrees Celsius when the south-easterly wind blows. But it's different here as it's the rainy season, and humidity reaches its highest levels. We walk towards the terminal building which smells like a dirty, run-down shack. We wait endlessly for our luggage and for police checks, and we feel hotter and hotter. We come out under a dazzling sky and are welcomed by Francesco, a co-operator of CISS, the non-governmental organization that has allowed us to carry out our research, and Eugène, the Congolese driver. We stop to smoke a cigarette and a military police officer starts going mad: he starts striking around blindly with a knotted rope. Eugène shouts: "À la voiture, à la voiture".

We move away quickly and head our jeep towards the city. A never-ending road only roughly asphalted and full of potholes: dust lifting, hundreds of smashed cars and blue and yellow mini-buses, unbelievably packed with passengers. On both sides of the road are run-down shanties, masses of people walking towards who knows what, and stalls selling the most unimaginable goods: a few packets of paper tissues, fruit, mostly overripe bananas, maize flour and manioc. So this is Kinshasa, a megalopolis of nine million people, the great majority living, or rather surviving, in indescribable poverty. We read a lot about it and should have expected it, but what lies before our eyes goes beyond any imagination.

We reach our hotel and to our relief we find out that there's air conditioning. However, one of the many, countless negotiations we will have to witness is just about to start. These have nothing of the cheerful haggling in Arab souks or in markets in the historic centre of my hometown, Palermo.

We start seeing for ourselves what we had already guessed during our long months' studying: in the eyes of Congolese people we're still colonizers, those who still want to rob them, and indeed they are right; therefore they react and try to swindle us, and we, the whites, like good colonizers, try to prevail on them. Which is the best room, or the agreed price is not right, and so on. At last we manage to get into our rooms. We'll meet Francesco again at dinner in a comfortable restaurant.

Kinshasa, April 18, 2011

At nine on the dot Francesco and Eugène came and picked us up. We drove back along the same road we took yesterday. At the end of Lumumba Boulevard there's a monstrous, reinforced concrete tower which is still under construction. It's worth millions of euros and is supposed to exhibit the greatness of Congo, while it is in fact an insult to poverty. Finally, we reach the University, where we meet the head of the Anthropology Department, Professor Lapika, his team and a psychologist. They have all been studying child witches for a long time.

They show us into the meeting room, where we're welcomed by an old worn-out rectangular wooden table and some electric-blue plastic armchairs. Bruno Lapika is small, very very dark and always cheerful. The psychologist, who—as we already know—is convinced kids are really witches, is a tall man with a gloomy face. The confrontation starts. Bruno Lapika says little more than what I've already read about his research. He stresses the extreme poverty and breaking up of family ties in Congolese society. I take the floor and, in a few minutes, try to summarise two years of bibliographical research, hypotheses we have made,

things we want to verify in our meetings with the children, which will be the core of our research.
The articles I've read are mainly anthropological and written in French; I found very little, if any, psychology in them. For example, we found a lot about the transformations of witchcraft all over Africa, not only in Congo; in general, many authors ascribe such transformations to political, social and economic changes in recent decades. While it is true that witchcraft has always served as an explanation for incomprehensible phenomena—a role played by all religions too—it is even more so now that Congolese people feel they are living a totally alienated reality. This is for sure one of the reasons why there's so much talking about witches again, but exactly why, all of a sudden, this flood of witchcraft accusations has involved children remains a mystery.
I ask Lapika if he agrees on these analyses and he says he does. I then add that I agree with him when he speaks of a breakdown in family ties, that is, a collapse of fatherly and motherly functions. The conversation livens up and many of the things we had assumed become clearer. It's as if the basic structures of society and family have collapsed. Traditionally, the elders, not only those within the family, but also those within the clan, played a crucial role; clan structures represented the basis and support for family ones. The head of the clan, usually an elder, acted as an intermediary between the deity, the ancestors and people, and he also played the role of a regulator of conflicts within the family or the clan. Following an extremely fast urbanization process, a very long war that caused millions of deaths, extreme poverty and a social and political void, these crucial

figures have disappeared. Lapika confirms that also maternal uncle, in the matrilineal line, has lost his extremely important function. However, I keep asking myself: all this can explain the street children, but what about the witchcraft accusations?

Finally, the psychologist joins in: "I first met Francesco on 18 February and it's now 18 April, which should make us think: this really is witchcraft, a phenomenon that really exists". He's obviously challenging us, but we nod convincingly and it all falls on deaf ears. Then he tells us he's very interested in prenatal psychology and for years he's been studying pregnant women's dreams, from which many things about children can be inferred. I really can't understand his views, but I don't really feel like delving into them.

We keep talking for a long time, until, after midday, we take our leave. When we get to the main exit of the Anthropology Department we have to stop. A violent storm has suddenly broken out and rain is pouring down. Finally, we set off towards Matete and a small restaurant-café. We sit down under a pergola and a stunning black woman with long curly hair comes to take our order. She doesn't seem at all pleased to see us or serve us; she does so peevishly, like someone who can't avoid a thankless task.

It is early afternoon when we finally reach one of the reception centres for street children run by Guanellian priests. I must confess that up to that point I'd heard nothing at all about Father Luigi Guanella, who must have been one of those clergymen with a strong commitment to social problems. We're welcomed by Adriano, one of the many Europeans who've fallen for Africa; he's

come to Congo many times and now, after his degree, he's doing his international community service here. I met him in Palermo and have often watched the beautiful video on child witches he shot during the past months. Soon after, Father Mauro turns up and I—a convinced atheist—am very happy to discover a wonderful person.
He informs us about the organization of the centres. They have four of them and we're going to work in the Matete one. He tells us that the first contact with children is made through "équipes mobiles", that is, ambulances where a nurse, an educator and a former street child work; the latter is absolutely necessary in order to overcome the children's initial suspicion. The children are offered medical aid and the team tries to persuade them to come to the centre, where they can have a hot meal, a bed for the night and a shower, and are also offered various activities, including learning to read and write. However, it's an open centre: when the children feel the call from the street is too strong, they can get out if they want. Father Mauro offers us his total collaboration. He advises us to meet Antoine, called Antò, who's been in charge of the centre for a good fifteen years, and the educators.

Kinshasa, April 19, 2011
More than one hour: that's how long it took us from our hotel to the Matete district: an endless time, made of heat, thirst, potholes, dust and exhaust fumes from thousands of cars. We left Boulevard Lumumba and ventured into a maze of dirty alleys. A cloying smell surrounded us: a smell of rotten stuff, open sewers, overripe fruit and vegetables displayed on dozens and dozens of meagre stalls.

Eugène, quiet and hieratic as usual, kept driving until he stopped in front of a big gate. A swarm of street children doped up with glue, Rohypnol and Valium surrounded our car yelling at us: "What have you come to Congo for? Go away!" Such a horrible welcome troubled me a lot. I spent many years in Gaza, with CISS, and always found an atmosphere of collaboration and people's participation: they never made me feel like a stranger; here instead I feel I'm received as an enemy.

The gate, where a former street child is keeping watch, opens. We get out of the car and tens of buzzing children of all ages, including a little one who can't be more than three, surround us. They stretch out their hands to touch us, especially our hair. It will take me some time to understand why our hair makes them so curious: all the little girls and boys have frizzy hair and are completely different from us. They ask us our names and introduce themselves to us. Some are barefoot; others have just one shoe on. They're wearing torn t-shirts; later I will understand that if the centre gave them better clothes, they would run out and sell them on the market at once. Some girls, who can't be more than twelve, are walking around like queens. The educators will tell us later that one of them is pregnant. I already knew very well that, to earn a handful of francs, girls walk the streets from a very early age; but the most terrible thing is the sexual assault on them carried out by policemen, who should instead protect them, and not even little boys are exempt from such violence. There's almost nothing in the small courtyard: not a game, a swing or a slide, just a few old tables and some benches. They offer us some blue plastic chairs.

We wait patiently for Antò to arrive. And finally he arrives; he is a formidably big man, very tall

with a baritone voice. We talk and talk about the children, their families, and their endless poverty, about how one can really witness family dissolution. Many of the things we say match what came out during the meeting at the university. Also, Antò tells us about the war, about the disastrous economic situation, about a city of a few hundred inhabitants turning into a megalopolis, or rather a shantytown, of about 9 million people. That's when everything collapsed, starting from the ties between parents and their children, no longer regarded as little ones to look after and protect, but as monstrous beings to fear, to drive away from home or take into very strange churches which have totally replaced the Catholic Church. They are called "awakening churches" and their pastors don't follow any specific studies, but just stand in as priests, that's all, and subject children accused of witchcraft to terrible practices, called deliverance practices, which are real tortures.

We have a short break for lunch and then go back to Matete to talk to the two educators who will help us with our work: Guillain and Albert. Together we decide which children we're going to meet, and here I notice that facts diverge greatly from all the information we found in literature: the number of children accused of witchcraft is less than ten out of a total of sixty or seventy. Could it be that statistical studies overemphasize the problem? And if so, why?

The afternoon hours went by quickly. And finally we got back to the hotel. In the evening we went to a place where they cook roast chicken and French fries. The chicken is particularly good, but our dinner was afflicted by two young men who work for an NGO that takes care of international

adoptions. They are very young. Carlo arrived only fifteen days ago and looks scared: everything about Kinshasa terrifies him, and he's experiencing the city as a hostile and dangerous place. Mauro arrived a bit earlier and hides his fears behind a very, very fake show of efficiency.
He tells us they arranged for an Italian family to adopt a fifteen-year-old Congolese boy. That's when I become really nasty. I start a disquisition about adoptions in general, about the very often selfish motivations of adoptive parents, who sometimes decide to adopt a child in order to try and heal the terrible narcissistic wound of their sterility, and then I run wild about international adoptions. I get really wicked, but the idea that a teenage child is eradicated from his land and culture, and is catapulted into a strange country drives me mad. I think about the children from Matete, about all the work carried out there to make them go back to their families, even extended ones, about the great sense of solidarity that existed in Congo within the clan. That's where one has to work. Poor Mauro falls silent.

Kinshasa, April 20, 2011
I slept little and badly, assailed as I was with thousands of doubts about the work I'm going to start, the task for which I've been preparing for two long years: my work with the children. I've brought along my "tools of the trade": a box with toys, crayons, Plasticine and all the things I use during counselling in child psychiatry and psychotherapy. My decision is based on a sort of challenge: I'm betting on the idea that, in any case, children are always children all over the world, at any latitude, whatever their experiences are, however terrible they might have been. "Challenge" is not a very

scientific term, I know, but the fact is that we haven't found anything psychological, psychiatric, or even sociological in literature. I know nothing about these children, about their mental structures, or about the way they work through experiences and conflict. This is the first time I've faced a culture so little studied from the perspective of my profession and I keep asking myself lots of questions. How will the children react? Will they want to be with me? Will they communicate their anguish, their terrible stories to me?

Finally, here I am, sitting in the meeting room of the Matete centre. Piero will translate from Italian into French for me and Guillain, the educator, will translate into Lingala, one of the many Bantu languages.

The first boy, Exaucee, comes in. He could be 12, but you can't really tell. He keeps his head lowered and looks uneasy. I say to him: "I work with children, and children tell me their stories, and stories can be told through words, games or drawing". Exaucee doesn't hesitate one second. "I'll tell you my story" he says to me. Then he starts speaking and never stops. He uses coloured wooden bricks to stage the characters in his family. The story he tells is terrible. After his parents' divorce he was moved from one place to another: first he went to stay with his grandparents, then with his mother and finally with his father in Brazzaville. It was when his paternal grandmother died, immediately after the funeral that the terrible accusations started: a pastor from one of the "awakening churches" pointed him out as the one to blame for that death, as an "enfant sorcier".

That's how his odyssey started. They took him to a church where, for days on end, he was subjected

to “deliverance” practices, which are not to be mistaken for exorcisms. The Catholic Church resorts to the latter when someone is thought to be possessed by the Devil, and their aim is to drive him out of the possessed person’s body. Being a witch, on the other hand, doesn’t mean being possessed, having an entity inside oneself, but rather to have a kind of power, the instrument of witchcraft, and it is from this power that the person must be freed. “The pastor lit some candles and poured boiling candle wax all over the boy’s body; then he prepared a watery solution to pour into his eyes and also cut his hair. Finally, he prepared another solution and forced the boy to swallow it. The boy vomited a lot, and the pastor said he was vomiting the human flesh he’d eaten. Then, some time later, he phoned the boy’s father and told him that the witchcraft was over. The father came to pick up the boy and they left for Brazzaville together.”

Exaucee speaks without stopping a second. I’m absolutely shocked by the monotonous tone of his voice, by the fact that he speaks about himself in the third person, as if he were a character in a story that doesn’t belong to him, and by the drama of what he’s recounting. I think he’s carrying out a complex operation. It’s as if, in order to be able to tell his story, he needed to put a distance between the story and himself.

After the boy went back to Brazzaville with his father, one of his paternal uncles died. He was accused of this second death too and taken back to the pastor, who started abusing him again, while his mother prepared food for him, though it was very strange food. Since he didn’t admit to being a witch, the pastor beat him, until, shortly after,

the boy couldn't bear all that anymore and ran away from the church. That's how he ended up on the street, and then in the Matete centre. There, one day he fell ill and was taken to hospital. An educator asked if anyone in his family would come and stay with him, but no one wanted to, so the centre educators took turns to look after him until he gets better.

Exaucee ends his tale and I say nothing. I can't find words for him. I've been working as a psychiatrist and psychologist for decades now, I've faced innumerable anguished children, and for all of them I found something to say; this is the first time I haven't found any words. I've spent the rest of the day thinking, pondering. I know very well, as I have studied it in depth, that a trauma has an effect even on the professionals who are working on the trauma itself, and that it can cause mental blocks, though this is poor consolation. We had a chat with Guillain. He confirmed that when Exaucee was in hospital, the centre asked in vain for his family to come and look after him and, confronted with their unwavering refusal, the educators themselves took turns in looking after him. At that point, I observed that Exaucee did not admit to being a witch; on the contrary, in order not to "confess" he ran away from the church. In our studies, on the other hand, we found evidence of children describing their witchcraft acts in the greatest detail. And I quoted by heart the first article we had read, by anthropologist de Boeck.

By chance in 1994 de Boeck came into possession of a video which reawakened his interest in child witches. It showed three Congolese children, between eight and twelve years old, being questioned all together by some Congolese adults and

two Belgians, all belonging to a Pentecostal prayer group which was very active in the Congolese diaspora in Brussels. The three children had moved from Kinshasa to Belgium and, in that video, the adults carrying out the interrogation accused them of the deaths of various members in their families left behind in Kinshasa, including the mother of one of them. During the interrogation, at times very violent—of which the video showed only an hour-long summary—the three children admitted to having actually "eaten" a certain number of people in Kinshasa, describing in detail how they'd got out of their bodies to "fly" to Zaire on a helicopter they'd built from a matchstick. In Kinshasa they'd been helped by older witches and by some night mates, in particular by the grandmother of one of them. Finally, all three of them described how they'd killed their victims and chopped them up, thus distributing the pieces to their witch friends so that the pieces could "be eaten" during a nocturnal party which the grandmother had taken part in, dancing all naked around the victims' houses.
I observed that children giving such testimony—received, presumably, inside churches—probably did so in order to put an end to the tortures inflicted on them by the pastors. Guillain agreed, but told us that in his long experience, he met only one child who claimed he was a witch, and he was very likely to be doing so in order to gain respect on the streets.
We still have about an hour's time and so we meet little Tabitha, the only girl amongst the eight children we expect to meet. She must be about nine and is very minute; she listens to me with her head down and then whispers in Lingala that she would like to draw. Guillain gives her some paper

and crayons: she takes the black one and starts drawing lines as if she were holding a brush. She draws a car very slowly and carefully, and her stroke is heavy and very precise. She starts from the driver, the seats and the interior, then she adds some passengers and, with great difficulty, I manage to make her tell me something. She tells me that in the car there are some men and women who are going to buy some goods in order to then sell them on the market in Matete. Then she adds a woman outside the car: she's a grandmother, she says, and she's good. The educator whispers to us that in fact it was her very grandmother who accused her of being a witch and kicked her out of the house. At that point, Tabitha draws a child next to the grandmother, and then she sits down and puts her crayon down. The boy's name is Germé and he's one of her little brothers who live at home with her mother. I tell her she must be very upset and angry because he lives at home while she's on the streets. With her head down, Tabitha whispers a "yes". Then she says she's tired and wants to leave. I reply that, if she wants, we can meet again; and she seems to be very happy about this.

We're really tired, of course not because we've worked a lot, but because of the hard work. To be with these children is a very painful and tiring test. For lunch, we go back to the restaurant-café we went to yesterday and Adriano joins us. He tells us about the new project he's preparing with his most loyal Papì, an educator he's known for years. He's started getting in touch with groups of street children who play music. In the evening they get together inside an uninhabited house in Matete. Before that, however, they steal a dog from some

fat cat's villa, kill it, roast it and eat it in order to absorb its strength, speed and skill, and then they play music until late at night. Adriano would like to organize a sort of music contest, giving them a little money and filming everything, including the rather gruesome part of the ritual meal.

Kinshasa, April 21, 2011

Every morning, for days and days now, I've found a squalid Nescafé waiting for me, but today I looked at it with particular suspicion. A not very pleasant thought came to my mind: surely they don't make it with mineral water, but with running water which comes from the Congo River, one of the most polluted in the world. Piero and Palma tried to reassure me: come on, they must boil the water for a long time, don't worry. Then Piero stopped talking, stood up suddenly and ran to his bedroom. After a while he was back, all hot and clammy. He had a temperature, almost 39°C, and a gippy tummy. And yet, he wouldn't listen to reason, he still wanted to come to Matete. We filled him up with Bimixin and Dissenten and set off.

Our entrance at the centre has become quieter. The kids no longer surround us out of curiosity; sure, they come to say hello, and are happy to see us, but it's as if we had become part of their everyday life, which makes me happy. Today we're meeting three children, a slog, but I'll only tell about one of them, Gavanda Glodi.

He willingly accepts our invitation to tell us his story. He doesn't talk about himself, but instead starts telling us fables, full of elements obviously belonging to him, but recalling Africa's oral traditions, which he may know nothing about; he's very likely to have heard them at home from his

parents or grandparents. The first story is extremely long and its main theme is the investiture as village chief of a very brave boy, who must be himself.

The second story is a long, intricate tale of a boy who loses his father, grows up, and finds a job and a wife. His mother has grown old, and has a burn scar on her face, which she got in order to protect her newborn boy. Many days go by, his mother has grown even older, and comes back to her son, but her daughter-in-law tells her never to come back again because she's ever older and dirtier. So his mother complains, calls her daughter-in-law and tells her: "If you really are my son's wife, you can't turn me out of your house". More days go by and his mother is veeery old. The son, fomented by his wife, slowly repudiates his mother, but his terrible punishment will be his death.

The third story is about a boy who manages to heal his older brother's blindness with a potion made of a herb he picks in the forest, the lumba lumba herb, which he finds with the help of a lion. It's very interesting because it shows that in his imagination the boy is not an evil witch, but a healer, the bearer of positive, white magic.

There's something that all the children we've met share; it's as if, although repudiated and turned out of their houses by parents, grandparents or uncles, they had preserved an idea of affectionate family relationships, of a father and a mother that do everything to look after their children: some positive imprinting which hasn't been destroyed by the dramatic events they have been through. The fact that the extremely hard work will have to be done with the families appears to

be more and more obvious to us, but how can one reconstruct a functioning family within a context of total disruption? However, it is very likely that this will have to be one of the most important tasks for the non-governmental organizations, at least for those like CISS, which follow proper procedures.

When we get back to the hotel, we're tired but really pleased. On our never-ending way back we stop at a supermarket and I feel more and more troubled: it looks exactly like the one down the road from my home. The same products, the same wares. Some pot-bellied Congolese are doing their shopping; they must be the ones that get rich with the diamond trade, or some government executives, or men from the political apparatus. We look at the prices in dismay. They are extremely high for us, let alone for the majority of the population here. We only buy a packet of biscuits.

At the hotel bar we have some tea, still keeping our fingers crossed, and eat some cookies. I would happily avoid going out in the evening, but Francesco has organized a night out in Bon Marché. So I unwillingly go too, but will regret it. Bon Marché is a highly-populated area, full of people, deafening music and crammed outdoor tables. You can eat roast chicken and goat meat, fried bananas, onions and chikwanga. Everything is served wrapped up in paper that looks very much like the kind used by greengrocers back home in Palermo. You eat with your hands and drink from bottles, but this is not what bothers me. On the contrary, I can't stand the terrible racket and these young people that have joined us: they're worse, much worse, than the aid workers interested in international adoptions.

One of them comes and sits down next to me. I

believe he may have worked for CISS in Palermo; I seem to know him a bit. I think his name's Antonio and when he finds out I'm a psychoanalyst and Piero and Palma are psychologists, he goes into raptures. He starts telling me he works with raped women—in Congo there are still vast areas of atrocious guerrilla warfare—and, much to my dismay, he adds that in order to offer those women psychological support, people only get three days of training! At that point the noise becomes my ally and, signalling that I can't hear him, I interrupt the conversation. The end of our dinner is a torture. They bring us the bill and another aid worker starts an endless argument: he wants to prove at all costs that the waiter's made a mistake and that he's stupid, and I'm sure it is not for the sake of a few hundred francs—i.e., one or two dollars—but in order to humiliate him. I really can't stand it any longer. Francesco's about to call Egle, the huge black man who takes us around in his taxi in the evening, but the others lead us towards their car. Piero, Palma and I are flabbergasted: it's a brand new jeep and they tell us it costs forty thousand dollars.

At the hotel I stop to chat with my friends a little. They are shocked by these aid workers too; the three of us all find that such a waste of money on a jeep is a real affront to the poverty of this land. That money might as well be used in a different way. Also, what's really aberrant is their way of relating to others: we keep on being colonizers, behaving in a boorish way and humiliating these people. We are thinking back to a discussion we had with Francesco. He complains that he can't have a decent relationship with anyone, not even with Eugène, with whom he spends whole days,

from morning to evening; he says Congolese people are not to be trusted, and they always want to cheat him, or obtain something from him. I keep thinking that it may even be true, but it's absolutely understandable, and on the other hand we've established a lovely relationship with Guillain. He's very happy to work with us and has also been very generous; he's done some research on children who attended the Matete centre in 2010, obtaining interesting data about what drives kids to the streets, and even wanted to share his results with us.

Kinshasa, April 24, 2011

Yesterday we argued for hours on end to no avail. Francesco and Eugène were inflexible: we are not going to Matete today. The road we take every day to get to the centre runs quite near the stadium where there's going to be an opposition demonstration and serious riots are expected (there should be presidential elections in November). We tried to persuade Francesco, while Eugène, as usual, listened hieratically. It's true that most of the conversation took place in Italian, but every now and then Piero and Palma spoke French. "The UN has declared Matete a red zone", Francesco concluded firmly, and we could do nothing but bow before the UN.

So now we are all packed inside the jeep and for the very first time we are driving along a very wide four-lane asphalted avenue. I'm really amazed, and then I understand: we're in the neighbourhood of the embassies and the most luxurious diplomats' villas. We then take a beautiful coastal road: we're getting closer to President Kabila's fortified villa. Joseph Kabila is the son of Laurent Désiré Kabila, who put an end to Mobutu's lengthy dictatorship and was then murdered in 2001. We get

off the asphalted road and start advancing along what is little more than an unsurfaced downhill trail. The bumps and potholes come one after another, but the vegetation is lush. More shanties peep out again, but they have an air of cheerful, dignified lives; they may belong to fishermen's families who do not suffer from hunger so much.
Finally, the Congo River appears in all its majesty and incredible width: one can't even see the opposite bank. We get out and I lean over the iron banister; boys and girls in their swimsuits are swimming happily. The steps down are too steep for me, so I stay there looking while Piero and Palma venture down towards the shore. Piero starts taking pictures, when a policeman approaches him and I fear there will be some trouble. Later he'll tell me that in fact the man wanted money and in the end he settled for a beer. It's common for policemen to ask for money and for the most trivial of all reasons: they hardly ever get a salary.
I forgot to say that along the main road, Boulevard du 30 Juin, there's an uninhabited four-storey building. A group of policemen have squatted in it and have made a prison out of the first two floors, and homes for their families on the other two.

Kinshasa, April 26, 2011
Today the long rough road leading to Matete seemed short. It's our last day working with the children and we're all very sad. We enter the centre. There aren't many children around; they've just finished lunch and this is when they prefer to go back to the streets. I know that for many people the sickly lure of the streets appears to be incomprehensible, but it is something that anyone working with street children all over the world, from Casablanca to Rio de Janeiro or New Delhi,

is very familiar with. Instead, Tabitha and Exaucee are waiting for us. I'd asked the educators to tell them I wanted to meet them again, and they stayed willingly.

So, after days and days, Exaucee is in front of me again with his sad eyes, and this time I manage to find words for him. I tell him I've thought about him and his story a lot; I say it's a really sad story and I'm sure he's filled with grief because his family don't want him anymore, but he's also filled with anger. He whispers to me that yes, that's exactly the way it is. Again, I ask him if he wants to be with me a little longer and he's happy about it. So he starts narrating again, and his tale is the same as the one on our first meeting: his tragic odyssey. However, the beginning is different, since, still talking in the third person, he imagines his mother and father meeting for the first time, then their engagement, their wedding and his own happy birth. Despite being totally devastated, this boy has maintained the notion that a family, affections and cherished children can exist. But then the memory of his suffering prevails. Like all traumatized children, he can't forget.

And so we've come to the end of it. I'd like to be Palma's age, as she's just turned thirty and has tears in her eyes but is not ashamed of showing her sadness. Outside the door, about fifteen children are waiting for us; they want to tell me their stories, but I have no time left. We leave Guillain our playing material, that's the least we can do. He's very happy about it, and tells us that he's always used drawing in his work; this was the first time he'd had an experience with toys and wants to try and carry on with it. He hands out a piece of Plasticine to each child, and they all start

moulding something skillfully. In the end we leave. We must say goodbye to Brother Mauro, and that will be another leave-taking. We spend a long time with him, more than an hour, and tell him all we've done over these ten days; then we leave him too.

Palermo, June 16, 2011, postscript

One and a half months, almost two, have gone by since we came back from Kinshasa, and only this morning did Piero, Palma and I manage to sit down around the table in my living room with our computers. We opened the files about our meetings with the children and started reading them out and talking about them. The first week after we came back was complete chaos: Lapika came to Italy with us and we had to organize his conference, at which I spoke too, having prepared only a quick draft. Then we met him almost every day to carry on our conversations and exchanges of views. However, we have never really made any serious reflection on our research up to today. Actually, for days and days we've been in a sort of daze, our bodies here in Palermo, but our minds in Matete with the children. And there's no room for reflection in that frame of mind. Of course I know very well from my job that one necessarily has to do a sort of difficult tightrope walking between the need for total participation in the patient's emotions—and for me the children in Matete were not the subjects of some detached research, but many little patients—and the ability to find that distance which is indispensable for thought to emerge. It is this very distance I've struggled so much to regain. Now, finally, the time and scope have come for reflection.

Persian Lullaby

by Chandra Livia Candiani

From *La nave di nebbia, Ninnannanne per il mondo*, La biblioteca di Vivarium, Milan, 2005.

Sleep now my honey babouche
sleep now my marzipan dove
there are deep paths to walk
within sleep
sew your garment of nettles
and set off, beneath your turban
is a paper dream and warbling there
a golden nightingale
it longs for the freedom of dusk
it longs to cross the border
cut through the dreams and brambles
and come out into the open,
mark a path for it now
with breadcrumbs
cooked in milk and wild
almonds. There's a voice
calling all children
around the well all
the ones under
eleven years old, run
and listen, there's a story being told
of honey babouches
and marzipan doves
and nettle garments
and golden nightingales
and borders made of brambles
and breadcrumbs
a story that you can
forget.

Moscow, April 17, 2011 **Veronica Khokhlova**

The ongoing Russian Orthodox Church luxury scandal has reminded me of Marta's concern for Jesus and his family after she had played a Christmas Baby Jesus game: "They are so poor, they live in a barn," she told me sadly, then added hopefully, "Did they become better off later?"

April 22. Syria. Security forces met thousands of demonstrators with fusillades of live ammunition after noon prayers, killing at least 81 people.

Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, April 25, 2011 **Claudia Peña Claros**

A couple of days later he wanted to talk to me again about all of that and he called me. It was to correct his answer. I had asked him about his childhood in his father's estate, about the menial workers and how he got along with them. He had told me things, but had wanted to correct them; one in particular.

I remember him in the rocking chair next to the telephone in his room looking at me and I was sitting on the edge of his bed. It was in the afternoon.

They were treating me differently, he told me. They called me "patroncito," or "little boss." That word, seemingly endearing, but also commanding, made everything clear as day; perhaps closer to reality than that of his childhood memories.

At that time my father was just a couple of years short of entering old age. In those days I was nothing. I was barely the strange daughter he tried so hard to accept.

I've done a lot of thinking about that: my father's past as landlord and how that inheritance came to me and even to my children and how we coexist with the inconvenient inheritance from our parents. But that afternoon, my father, nearly old,

April 25. Nouakchott, Mauritania. Anti-riot police broke up a "Day of Anger" rally by Mauritanian youths demanding the ouster of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, detaining about 20 protesters.

April 25. Nigeria. More than 500 people died after presidential elections earlier this month. Rioting broke out when it emerged that Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian, had defeated a Muslim candidate from the mostly Islamic north.

said that to me, looking straight at me with dry eyes. "Patroncito." He had been but a child and in that moment I was nothing more than a little girl.

Kampala, Uganda, April 29, 2011

Rosebell Kagumire

Today, the day when the world was glued to TVs watching a royal wedding in Britain, Uganda went up in flames. Uganda has been in flames for three weeks now, but today the protests/riots spread across the capital Kampala. The news of the protests found me in the office before the protest finally reached the neighbourhood. I wasn't dressed right to venture out to see all the mayhem, but the gunfire was very loud in my office and we had to duck under tables a couple of times, for only stray bullets kill people here according to our government.

The protests started in Kiseka Market after it was rumoured that Uganda's opposition leader, Dr. Kiiza Besigye, had died. […] I called someone close to Besigye's case to figure out what Besigye's health was like. Halfway through the discussion his daughter, who I believe is no more than seven years old, entered his office. I stayed on the line as they greeted each other. He asked how the day had gone and the young girl said, "Daddy, there was teargas and bombs near our school." The father asked what she had done when she heard the loud noise. The girl said, "Our teacher told us to lie down and hold our bags close." The last question was, "Were you scared?" and the girl replied, "No, Daddy, I wasn't." […]

Reports say about four people died today, over 100 were injured and over 300 were arrested. Since the election campaigns and the North African

The Ugandan leading opposition figure, Kiiza Besigye, was arrested and charged with inciting violence, as a third day of street demonstrations ended in shrouds of tear gas and rubber bullets. The protests are a campaign against spiraling fuel and food prices.

April 25. Syria. The Army stormed the restive city of Dara'a with tanks and soldiers. At least 25 people have been killed.

"This is how it is, these are our customs. If there is something to eat, we will eat it together. If there is nothing to eat, we will have nothing together." Abdallah Awaye, a Tunisian who has taken in Libyan refugees. ("The New York Times", April 28, "Quotation of the day")

protests, the government here has grown intolerant to criticism. […] Most youth who are suffering from the current high cost of living amidst high unemployment levels have never seen war. But following today's events Miss Aloikin on Twitter said: "My grandparents always used to say we the children of the '86 regime will never see any war… how wrong (they were)!" While Ugandans in Northern, Northeastern and a few parts of Western Uganda have seen the devastation of war for decades, many of us have been shielded from violence. With the kind of brutality shown by the police and military in the last two weeks, many young people see that the future ahead will be all about struggle.

April 30. Tripoli. Muammar el-Qaddafi survived an airstrike that killed one of his sons, Seif al-Arab Muammar el-Qaddafi, 29, and three grandchildren, all said to be younger than 12.

Raleigh, North Carolina, May 4, 2011

Omar Abdi

I was putting my shoes on when I heard my mom say, "He's now in heaven" as my sister nodded approvingly. I looked back to see what my mom was referring to. It was an image of Osama bin Laden on the television, then I realized. Naturally, I had my own reaction to the announcement of this man's death. Everyone does, even those who believe it is all a hoax. "Even if he is responsible for the deaths of many Muslims?" I asked my mom. She should know this because she was in Nairobi the day the US embassy was bombed there. Many Muslims were killed that day (of the twelve Americans killed, one was a Muslim-American). And in Dar es Salaam, all the eleven people killed were Muslims. When bin Laden was asked why he killed those Muslims, he responded by saying that "good Muslims should be at the mosque on Friday."

April 30. Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. About a thousand demonstrators descended on a central square to demand the departure of President Blaise Compaoré, who has held power for 24 years.

May 1. Osama bin Laden was killed by United States forces in Pakistan.

So how does someone who not only kills innocent people in general, but also fellow Muslims, get sympathy from my apolitical mom? It is very strange indeed to see very rational, and quite well-informed, people become emotionally sympathetic to such a fellow. We are taught, from an early age, not to say bad things about the dead, but does that mean we forget and praise people whose very identity as we know is about killing lots of people? Conversely, it is horrifying to see people so jubilantly celebrate the taking of a human life regardless of how evil or accused of evil the person was (which is a sad reflection on humanity, to say the least). For all we know, bin Laden could have been a great father, husband, brother, son, uncle, and friend. Only those who knew him would have the benefit of knowing that. But his identity to the world was as the leader and chief financier of Al Qaeda, whose bombings have killed countless innocent people, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

May 3. Washington. Osama bin Laden was not carrying a weapon when he was killed in Pakistan, the White House said, as it revised its initial account.

May 3.Tunisia. Thousands of ethnic Berbers from Libya have fled into Tunisia. The latest arrivals bring the number of people to have fled fighting in Libya's Western Mountains region to almost 40,000 in the past month.

Yet, as he has portrayed himself as the "defender" of Muslims, by also killing many Muslims along the way, bin Laden has managed to create a political identity that many have come to sympathize with even as they recognize his undoubtedly horrible acts of violence and destruction that killed thousands of people, in addition to his cancerous ideology that will survive long after most people forget his image. He did of course defend his fellow Muslims earlier in his career—fighting and defeating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. But does that justify such sympathy after the many more innocent people he killed since creating Al Qaeda?

May 8. Cairo. A night of street fighting between hundreds of Muslims and Christians left at least 12 people dead and two churches in flames in the latest outbreak of sectarian tensions in the three months since the revolution that ousted President Mubarak.

May 8. Tokyo. Japan remains committed to nuclear power despite the crisis at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, Prime Minister Naoto Kan indicated.

It still amazes me how many people I come across that believe bin Laden was a religious leader. Of

course he was not, despite his followers calling him Sheikh Osama. He was a political figure, who has single-handedly changed geopolitics forever. It is a grave mistake, then, to see his death as anything but a martyr.

The Lightness of War

by Gianluca Giachery

HERE
notes from the present

It has happened once, and could all happen again.
Primo Levi

1. When he was invited to Harvard University in 1984 as Charles Eliot Norton Poetry lecturer for the 1985-86 academic year, Italo Calvino wrote five lectures that would be published after his death with the famous title *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. As we know, Calvino died on September 19, 1985, so his lectures were never delivered. The themes they address seem startlingly topical, however. The first of the lectures in particular, titled *Lightnes*s, forces the reader to come to terms with an existential impoverishment that upon careful examination, leads us far away from what is normally meant by the term, revealing instead the pervasive depth of a fascination that crops up throughout the history of culture, from Ovid all the way to Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Montale, Henry James and Kundera. More than just a guidebook, it is a voyage across the turbid yet initiatory sea of the Gorgons.
Lightness explains, in part, the irony and weight

of our time, the "short century" that Hobsbawm has described, but whose economic, political and cultural dynamics have not been well understood.
Lightness, moreover, fits in perfectly with the existential solitude of our habits, the inexplicable, narcissistic discontent of our societies, the disappearance from our horizon of a future, which at this point has been subsumed by the administrated present of our lives.
Indeed, if there is an aspect that lightness does not tolerate it is the impatience with which we transfer our needs, in a nonsense whose explicit measure was provided by Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*.
Lightness/heaviness: "Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness," Calvino writes,[1] "I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don't mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification. The images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future…"
Built around the pairing and opposition of lightness/heaviness is the discourse of impatience. An impatient person is someone who cannot wait, who wants to be ahead of his times, who is anchored to the idea of achieving immediate results, which are often futile and disappointing. One could say that our era, so fraught with inhibitions, is characterized to an impressive degree by the heaviness of impatience. This is where the lack of a future takes root. This is where memory is overwhelmed and erased, because the past, in its dimension of transferral, loses its negative value and is utterly doomed to oblivion.

[1] I. Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, transl. P. Creagh, Vintage, New York, 1993, p. 7.

In reference to Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Calvino writes, "For Kundera the weight of living consists chiefly in constriction, in the dense net of public and private constrictions that enfolds us more and more closely. […] Perhaps only the liveliness and mobility of the intelligence escape this sentence: the very qualities with which this novel is written, and which belong to a world quite different from the one we live in."[2]

[2] *Ibidem.*

2. Our perception is that we stand at the crossroads of history. But this is only a perception. As we are told by Rémy, the protagonist of *The Barbarian Invasions* (a Denis Arcand film from 2003), history has always been a theater of massacres, and this should not surprise us: from the conquest of the Americas, by way of the Inquisition, to the World Wars of the 20th century (to name just a few pivotal junctions), mankind has done nothing but demonstrate the calculating rationality of a destructive irrationality. If destructiveness can be considered irrational.

Nevertheless, without getting into theoretical discussions, the key to explaining this historical processuality can be found—as Horkheimer believed, and after him, Foucault—in the fact that contrary to Hegel's belief, history has no goals, no revelatory telos, and above all, does not serve to attain any kind of earthly paradise.

According to Hegel, history is a revelation of the absolute spirit, i.e., the revelation of a self-consciousness that, in its realizations, is incarnated in certain figures who manifest the spirit of their times. History, in short, is the attainment of freedom. "For freedom in itself," Hegel writes, "carries

with it the infinite necessity of attaining consciousness—for freedom, by definition, is self-knowledge—and hence of realizing itself: it is itself the end of its own operations and the sole end of the spirit."[3]

What freedom are we talking about? Without letting ourselves be carried away by Hegel's construction, one need only quote Marx's words in *The German Ideology*: "The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life."[4]

What we are talking about, then, is this: the freedom to which Hegel refers, which manifests the power of the absolute spirit, is the culmination of a materiality that has produced servants, slaves and masters, but which, on the other hand, has also produced the aporias of a history which one would have us believe is always peaceably linear. The "lives of infamous men" constantly remind us of this, but through a curious form of amnesia, the purity of the West has always erased them, fearing the end of a history that achieves its perverse expectations precisely through its lack of purpose.

And so the idea of progress and civilization that is at the heart of modern Western democracies also loses its foundation.

"The concept of the progress of the human race in history," writes Benjamin,[5] "is not to be separated from the concept of its progression through an homogenous and empty time. The critique of the concept of this progress must ground the basis of its critique on the concept of progress itself."

[3] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, transl. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K., 1985, p. 55.

[4] K. Marx, F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, N.Y., 1998, p. 47.

[5] W. Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, Classic Books America, New York, 2009, p. 16.

This is the only way to clear the field of the useless, moralistic preaching of those who think that history justifies the means used to achieve one's ends. If it is true that the contemporary world reveals the fissures in the continuum that one would have us believe is inexorable, then the only explanation of this idea is that history is always written by the victors. And, as in every era, they hide behind the veil of justice, of danger, of morality, of democracy, always pointing—every time, because this is a necessary relationship—to a different enemy.

3. Indeed, it is impossible to fathom the powerful ideological device of wars unless one understands the mechanisms underlying the creation of the public enemy. Here again, everything revolves around a strategic opposition and a paradox, the enemy/friend distinction. The effectiveness of this contrast lies in the way it demonstrates the power of the coalition: when there is an enemy to face, coalitions are created that immediately manifest their alignment, their strength and their strategy of prevarication.

A key author, in this regard, who despite his past, had grasped the longing for constant conquest inherent in the development of Western societies, is Carl Schmitt. It is interesting to note how this figure, who under Nazism was the true inspiration behind some of the Third Reich's most drastic laws, silently inspired the expansionist policy of the liberal democratic West through certain concepts, simple in their essence and effective in their implementation, of geopolitical strategy: "greater space" and "living space" on the one hand, and friend/enemy on the other. Essentially, says

Schmitt—who after the defeat of Germany and the end of World War II already saw the United States as the future arbiter of world controversies—to ensure their survival, states must constantly expand their "greater space" (*Grossraum*) in order to maintain the principle of "living space" (*Lebensraum*) needed to guarantee the *sic imperat* of a vast military, economic and political power.

Indeed, Schmitt writes,[6] "man is not a creature wholly conditioned by his environment. Through history, he has the ability to get the better of his existence and his consciousness. He is aware not only of the act of birth, but also of the possibility of a rebirth. […] The scope for his abilities and for action on history is vast. Man can choose, and at certain moments in his history, he may even go so far, through a gesture peculiar to him, as to change himself into a new form of his historical existence, in virtue of which he readjusts and reorganizes himself." In this sense, one could say that Schmitt is a perfect student of Hegel, since by highlighting the absolute spirit through the actions and works performed by man, he elevates freedom to an essential concept, though corrupted by the conquering power of brute strength.

The other distinction, closely tied to the previous one, is the one between enemy and friend. "A declaration of war," Schmitt emphasizes, "is always a declaration of an enemy."[7]

The flight towards and fascination with universal history always conceals violence, which in both Hegel and Schmitt is never explicitly declared but always taken for granted. War generates a necessary violence; in fact, upon closer examination, every human relationship, from the Hegelian perspective of recognition, is simply the constant

[6] C. Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, transl. S. Draghici, Plutarch Press, Washington, DC, 1997.

[7] C. Schmitt, *Theory of the partisan: intermediate commentary on the concept of the political*, transl. G.L. Ulmen, Telos Press, New York, 2007, p. 85.

evolution of one individual's supremacy over another. For this reason, Schmitt emphasizes, performing any act of violence means taking a risk. Whether this risk can be legally tolerated or not does not matter in this case, because what is significant is the almost implicit necessity that the individual or individuals who perform the action incur a substantial share of danger to their lives or those of others.

"The word *risky* also has a precise meaning, namely, that risky actions are treated at their own risk, and the worst consequences of their success or failure are taken for granted, so that there can be no question of injustice when the severest consequences ensue."[8]

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 28.

From this perspective, the Schmittian need for a distinction between friend and enemy becomes even clearer: "In the theory of war," he writes, "it is always the distinction of enmity that gives war its meaning and character."[9] Far from remaining vague, war demands that one identify an object with opposing interests, while defining a field of exclusion and inclusion that establishes the spheres of affiliation. This is where the term *coalition* takes on significance and it is precisely in this perspective that it establishes the rules for differentiating between those who are *friends* and those who are *enemies*. Specific, stringent rules that nonetheless can be modified in accordance with shifted scenarios and the expansion or restriction of military, political, or economic interests.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 89.

"Every attempt to bracket or limit war must have in view that, in relation to concept of war, enmity is the primary concept, and that the distinction among different types of war presupposes a distinction among different types of enmity."[9]

[9] *Ibidem.*

4. On August 2, 1990, nearly a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall (which took place on November 9, 1989), Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. On January 17, 1991, the United States, with the authorization of the UN and bolstered by a coalition of 35 countries, attacked and invaded Iraq, launching Operation Desert Storm. One can argue that this military operation, so strongly desired by George H.W. Bush, radically modified the global geopolitical configuration that had taken shape at the end of World War II.

If Schmitt's aforementioned ideas about the need for an enemy and the construction of "living space" have any significance, they must be linked to that event and to the current configuration of the wars underway.

In 1995 NATO intervened in Bosnia; in 2001 the International Security Assistance Force (guided by the USA) invaded Afghanistan; on March 20, 2003, the Second Gulf War began, spearheaded by George W. Bush; on March 19, 2011 a contingent of French, US and British forces (which shortly thereafter, and not without controversy, passed under NATO control) attacked Libya.

Now, to pose a question that exactly twenty years ago, at the beginning of the First Gulf War, attracted the attention of intellectuals, philosophers and international jurists, is there such a thing as a "just war"?

In a much-debated booklet published in March 1991 under the title *Una guerra giusta? Sul conflitto del Golfo* ["A Just War? Thoughts on the Gulf Conflict"], which gathered together articles by one of the 20th century's most authoritative philosophers and intellectuals, Norberto Bobbio

not only examined questions of a legal and formal nature, but distinguished, in the pacifist ranks, between utopists, the acritical, and theorists of nonviolence.

"The fact that a war can be considered legitimate does not mean that it is also obligatory. A legitimate war is simply a war that is not prohibited, that is an exception to a prohibition. An obligatory war is a war that not only is not prohibited but is required. The distinction between a non-prohibited war and a required war lies at the heart of the difference between just war and holy war."[10]

Despite Bobbio's emphasis on the tragic nature of war and the need, nevertheless, to make choices, he circumscribed the nature of the military intervention as related to international law: "A war must not only be just, but effective and useful, if it is to be a means suited to the end, which is to mend the breach of law. In other words, it must be successful, and limited in time and space." Those in power, the philosopher continued, must "obey the ethics of responsibility, weighing the consequences of their actions. And to be prepared to renounce them, if those actions risk producing an evil worse that the one they are trying to fight. The reparation of a wrong must not turn into a massacre."[11]

First Gulf War claimed some 100,000 civilian victims, along with 20,000 to 30,000 Iraqi soldiers and approximately 350 coalition soldiers who died in combat.

So is there such a thing as "just war"? Let's go back to the observations of Rémy, the character in *The Barbarian Invasions*: history seems to be an enormous slaughterhouse (as we are reminded by

[10] N. Bobbio, *Una guerra giusta? Sul conflitto del Golfo*, Marsilio, Venice, 1991, p. 14, *passim*.

[11] *Ibid*, p. 43, *passim*.

Kurt Vonnegut's visionary masterpiece of 1965, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade*[12]), in which enlightened reason, the *Aufklärung* that Kant hoped for, has no voice in the matter.

[12] Chelsea House, New York, 2007.

5. If Bobbio's appeal to an ethical sense of responsibility can create a realm of incomprehensibility (a war can be "just" to the degree that the forces deciding that war have the legal power to justify it: a principle, moreover, at the foundation of Schmitt's justificationalist notions) then we are faced with an obvious paradox. Trying to turn the question around, this writer believes that the contrast between just and unjust is tragically misleading, because, though founded on Kantian principles of morality, it risks overlooking three fundamental factors: power, ideology and necessity.
The *power* is the impressively superior military power of the West, the *ideology* is the obsessive search for an enemy to fight or an ally to praise; the *necessity* lies in the authority of the international law (the UN) that sanctions the rules of inclusion and exclusion.
Only an in-depth critical grasp of the problems and scenarios at work can allow a lucid understanding of what is by now an age-old conflict between culture and barbarism. Slipping into barbarism means stifling critical thought.
So let's get back to Calvino. "Were I to choose an auspicious image for the new millennium, I would choose that one: the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing that with all his gravity he has the secret of lightness, and that what many consider to be the vitality of the times—

noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring—belongs to the realm of death, like a cemetery for rusty old cars."[13]

And so, in this cemetery for rusty cars, war seems to be an ironic, cynical and tragic theater spotlighting the uselessness of existence.

[13] I. Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, cit., p. 12.

Tokyo, May 11, 2011

Lea Jacobson

"I amfinethankyou." So reads the first line of a text message I just received from a twelve-year-old girl. She is certainly trying very hard to be "finethankyou". It is hard enough to be in the seventh grade, let alone to do so while living in a sports stadium-turned-shelter for who knows how much longer. Still she smiles all of the time. She is on the basketball team at her new school and also enjoys painting her toenails.

May 9. Lampedusa, Italy. Italian coast guards and local fisherman saved 528 refugees on a boat from Libya after their vessel hit rocks off the island of Lampedusa in an operation a rescuer described as a "miracle". Among the refugees who had thrown themselves into the water at night were 24 pregnant women.

Until two months ago her home was in Minamisoma, a city within the evacuation zone around the Fukushima Daiichi plant, but we never talk about that. Instead we shoot inflatable beach balls into a hula hoop that is secured high upon the wall with duct tape, and it is harder than it looks.

Last Sunday night I returned to Tokyo from two weeks of volunteer work with children from one to fifteen years old, who have evacuated to a safer part of Fukushima Prefecture.

May 10. Egypt. A large number of women participated in a march entitled "No to sectarian strife" to stress the values of citizenship and tolerance and to prevent the strife that has been witnessed in many different places in Egypt after the revolution.

Going to Fukushima by myself—as the only foreign volunteer within an otherwise all-Japanese organization—was not easy. And in retrospect, I am enormously grateful for the courage to have taken this leap of faith. Before March 11, I could never see myself taking time off work to go join a group of volunteers—all of whom were complete

strangers—in an unfamiliar city. But the natural disaster really changed me. It changed a lot of us. […]

As volunteers, our job there was to create spaces for children where they could play normally. The goal was to play with them and cheer them up, helping them to forget their difficult circumstances for the duration of one game of freeze tag or hide-and-seek. In many cases, however, it was the children who cheered us up instead. Kids, I think, naturally have a certain amount of happy energy that almost nothing can take from them, and when they give it away it only multiplies.

May 11. Almost everyone on an overcrowded ship carrying about 600 African migrants to Europe is believed to have died when the vessel broke apart within sight of the Libyan capital.

And multiply it did. It feels strange to write this, but I truly had a great time up in Fukushima. In fact, I probably laughed more in the past two weeks than I have so far all year. […]

Palermo, Italy, May 12, 2011

Claudia Ricchiari

Eleonora. I chose this name for you because I liked its sound, in honour of Saint Eleanor Queen of England, but first of all because of its etymology: grown up in the light, or gift from the sun. I could not imagine, before you were born, how true this would be. When I found out about your existence, a little flame of light against a dark background, I already knew about grandma's, my mother's, disease, and for nine months I kept repeating that only you, so small, could save me from the despair of that death sentence. Then, when you were born, I remember saying it seemed you had given me life rather than the contrary. Again, I could not imagine how true these words would turn out to be. I didn't know. I didn't know that, six months later, I would find out that I was also

ill. I didn't know that I would undergo a long and complicated surgical operation, that I would no longer be able to have children, that I would have to leave you with a baby-sitter every day to receive chemo and radiation therapy, that our lives would change so radically and deeply. I didn't know, I couldn't, that hearing your next vaccination would be in four years, in a not-too-hidden corner of my mind I would think "Will I be there with you?" I've tried to protect you from all of this, wondering at the same time if it was right to do so. Only your joy, your serenity, day after day have given me the subtle certainty that, right or wrong, the balance we've been able to keep in spite of everything has allowed you to live these early months of your life in the best possible way. After my mother's death I no longer know what the word hope means. I know you are here, and know that this is maybe the same as saying hope. I know there are abstract notions and commonplaces which, once you experience them personally at skin and soul level, stop being so and turn into profound and almost unspeakable truths. Only now that I see you growing, so tender and vulnerable, do I "honestly" wonder how one can ever harm a child. How one can ever exploit, abandon, let him or her starve without feeling personally responsible. Without feeling guilty. I look at you, and think of all the times I've felt the weariness of life before life itself forced me to love and want it so eagerly. What a huge burden for such a small child: keeping her own mother alive. But for you, so prodigal of smiles, it must not be that hard, after all. You don't know what a paradox is yet. Or maybe you do. Maybe I am the one who still has to learn everything. And when we walk hand in

May 13. The number of refugees in 10 countries in Eastern Africa has risen to nearly 1.4 million. The majority of the new asylum-seekers travelled to Kenya and Ethiopia. The majority of the refugees going to the two countries were Somalis fleeing drought and conflict in their homeland.

May 13. London. The Home Secretary Theresa May stressed that Britain would not accept migrants fleeing Libya and Tunisia as divisions opened within the European Union yesterday over how to respond to the crisis of refugees from North Africa.

hand, who is the one leading, really? I, the creature of shade, or you, grown up in the light?

Bologna, May 14, 2011

Marina Girardi

Jasmine—also known as Rachele—is nine years old. While her mother is begging, seated cross-legged in the middle of Via Oberdan, she sits on a doorstep clutching her doll. Just as I finish setting up my easel and attaching my drawings to the wall with adhesive tape, I hear a small voice behind me: "Do you know how to draw a rabbit?" Jasmine-Rachele asks me to draw her a rabbit watching a fish swimming in its bowl. Then she gets me to add a red heart, because they love each other, and lots of names scattered over the page. "Are these the names of your classmates?" I ask her. "No, they're my friends. I don't go to school." She has big brown eyes, Jasmine-Rachele, with long eyelashes and a clear gaze, and she looks happy to have found a way to banish boredom. She looks at the drawing I've done for her and declares it beautiful. When an young African man comes up to us and asks for a coin, she remarks: "There are so many poor people. We're poor too, there's never any money."
Paolo comes by to ask me first for a cigarette and then if he can make a call on my mobile phone: "I need a shower, gotta call this friend of mine, but those fucking gypsies stuff the public phones with toilet paper and then they go and swipe the coins." Paolo used to be a social worker and also worked with homeless people. Then he became homeless himself, with a bad case of depression and a guitar he sometimes mistreats, playing for coins a few metres from me.

May 14. New York. The managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, was taken off an Air France plane at Kennedy International Airport minutes before it was to depart for Paris, in connection with the sexual attack of a maid at a Midtown Manhattan hotel.

Later in the afternoon Alfio arrives too. After spreading out the paintings his 90-year-old mother has done over the last few sleepless nights, he lights a cigarette and shouts to me: "Where are you off to this summer? I want to go away from Bologna—but for good!"
When evening comes, the sounds of the three-voice choir of Mariadele and her friends reach us from down at the bookshop corner. They are singing *Ederlezi*, that sad folk song Goran Bregović arranged for the soundtrack of Kusturica's film *Time of the Gypsies*. Jasmine-Rachele, who has come back to sit beside me, this time suggesting that I draw a bride holding a flower, gets up and runs off. Then she comes back, panting: "It's a song in my language, in Romany. It says: this is our holiday, Daddy, the spring holiday!" "Where is your dad?" I ask. "He went away, he's not coming back. Now we're on our own, me and my mum, we live at my auntie's." Then Jasmine-Rachele runs off again, this time to ask her mother for a coin to throw into the guitar case belonging to Mariadele and her friends.

Children in Huaro, Peru

by Silvano Roi

HERE
notes from the present

Cuzco, 23 June 2011
I left for Cuzco on 21 June. I had 12 hours to spend in Madrid before the connecting flight. Stefano had driven me to Milan airport in my car and I had left it with him. I hope he'll use it: his own

car is old and shabby now. Stefano is a real friend. One of the very few people I can have a deep conversation with. We are quite different, but in common we have the same way of looking at the world with our hearts. Even if we may not see eye to eye on everything, there is a point where our opinions converge. That's why we are friends.
I really love Madrid. I was there two months ago with Alessandra. When I think about my daughters I realize what a lucky man I am. How many 25-year-olds would go on holiday with their fathers for a week, without ever getting bored, talking at length about themselves and their own lives and asking about me and my life? Two months before that I had taken Giulia to Barcelona, enjoying the conversations typical of an 18-year-old, our relationship just as intense.
So, I found myself walking along the same streets and visiting the same places as two months earlier. The impressive Palacio Real with its rather mediocre cathedral. I felt as if I was still with Alessandra, who was trying to get me to see things that I, a former art historian, hadn't been able to. My daughter, a photographer, teaches me to see and to stop looking at the things I already know. Coming out of the cathedral I stood for a while examining the three great bronze doors: the one on the right of the portal made me shudder. On it are depicted so many South American Indios, with their hands pressed together, on their knees, gazing up towards heaven. The glory of Catholic Spain, converted to the one Faith, civilized. Exterminated by the thousand, their monuments, their culture and their traditions all destroyed, A few hours later I would be on my way to Lima, and from there to Cuzco, the ancient Inca capital.

I'm not a tourist or a seasoned traveller. I'm a private practitioner and one of my main interests is helping children with learning difficulties. In this guise I am leaving for two and a half months to do volunteer work in a centre for disabled children. […]

Cuzco is a city 3300 metres above sea level, surrounded by mountains, which at the end of June, with their dry green colour tinged with yellow, remind me of the Nebrodi mountains in Sicily. […] I ask myself what I've come here for. I'm not a missionary and I haven't come here specifically to do good, even though I have no doubt that I will. I've not even come here to find myself, because I don't feel lost. "Te non invenis sed creas" says the tattoo my daughter has had done on her hip. I too want to continue to forge, to create myself […].
In my practices in Italy and Switzerland I receive many children. Their parents, generally their mothers, bring them in for me to set them right. They think that they need adjusting because they aren't working properly. They're not getting good marks at school, or they're forever restless. They are causing so much concern that their parents are becoming sick with worry. They are the ones who feel sick. They feel sick "because they love them" and they can't bear the difficulties they have. […]
Mum and Dad are two roles, not two essences. And first of all comes the essential Being. Most people who come to see me don't know that they incarnate a Being. They are people who are fighting for their daily lives, which in Milan is not the same thing as in Cuzco. In both cases, however, their interest is in material things. Even looking

after the children, making them work well at school and fit homework in with sport, music, English etc. is a material commitment. […] The fathers rarely come to see me, and the wives talk about their husbands as their "eldest son" or "the one who brings the money home". […]

At times I feel frustrated when I return home from my consulting room. The child is reading better, makes fewer mistakes, but… there are still so many things that aren't going right. The parents are rarely on the child's side really, because they don't see the Being. More often than not they are on the side of their own anxieties, because nobody knows how to listen to them, not even they do. They simply let these anxieties take possession. Then they come back after three weeks and say to me: "We have a confession to make, we haven't done what you told us to do." But they come back, because it's important to do something for your own children.

Generally though, good results are obtained in spite of everything. Most of the children "improve". But there's something wrong in all this. I don't accept the view of a child as a thing that needs adjusting. Not because he or she is a child, but because is a Being. A Human Being needs loving relationships and if there is no love, at least a relationship. I believe that Love is inborn, but I think that if you don't actively work to make it grow, you suffocate it. […] I have seen how Love can develop and grow, moulding a child's personality, when it is manifested, into an attitude of openness. I have also seen how a lack of manifestation of Love moulds a child towards closedness. This is a kind of anaesthetic, a shield, which makes a Being impenetrable to itself. […].

We are emotionally illiterate. There is no Culture of Love. […] I've chosen to leave for another place, not because Love is elsewhere, but to detoxify. I too am sick. I'm finding it harder and harder to work with an open heart, because my own stress and the stress of the people who come to consult me, out of a necessity to survive, often lead me to distance myself from the real me. I have to respect timetables, take care of what I earn, how I dress, I have to go into the city centre, become intoxicated with the stress of the people, the noises, the dirty air, the celebration of ignorance photographed in every advert. The people who come to see me with their children are totally locked in this dimension and are not prepared to take on the responsibility of changing their way of being, thinking, speaking, behaving and living.

I don't care much for Machu Picchu or pre-Inca archeology. I feel different from the European "gringos" wandering around Cuzco with their cameras, holding in their hands the travel guides with all their featured tourist routes. The Plaza de Armas is unquestionably very beautiful and I have no difficulty believing the guidebook when it describes it as the most beautiful square in South America. But I can see unwashed and poorly-dressed little boys wearing the typical Andean sandals without socks, and the little girls, just as dirty in their traditional costumes, wandering about the city trying to sell popcorn and candy-floss to the tourists. Young girls at every corner offer me various types of massage, from the therapeutic to the "Inca" variety.

I knew that the country I was coming to was poor,

but I hadn't anticipated the physical sensations: the smell, above all. A woman holding a child by the hand comes up to me to ask me to buy something just when, sitting on the steps in front of the cathedral, I am cutting a piece of cheese with my Swiss penknife. I tell her I don't want to buy anything, while instinctively I hold out my hand to offer her the piece of cheese I have just cut. She is surprised at first, then she takes it and sits down to eat it a little way off. Ashamed of myself, I regret giving it to her. Her smell is unbearable. […]

Huaro, 10 July 2011

I'm now in Huaro, a village forty kilometres from Cuzco. Here it's winter, but not a winter like ours, because in Italy it's impossible to live 3300 metres up in winter. There's no snow, the snow is higher up, and during the day, when the sun shines, you are fine. When there's no sun it's cold and you can't do your washing because it won't dry. Sun or no sun, after four in the afternoon it goes cold. I have to cover up really warm. […] After a few days you get used to it.

I'm living in a centre for disabled children set up by a small non-religious Italian NPO. […] During the day there are about twenty children at the moment; at night some eight stay on. They are children with various degrees of mental retardation, autism, Down's syndrome. Some, instead, don't present any disabilities, but live in extreme conditions of material and human misery; like three little children—two brothers and a sister—who are happier now that their mother has committed suicide because before she used to maltreat them. And they aren't the worst ones off. Jona-

than, for example, arrived at the centre because he couldn't eat properly. He would eat straight from the plate with his mouth and gulp things down like an animal. Nobody had ever taught him the right way.

Here disabled children are a cause for shame: their parents think it's God's punishment. The conditions these people live in are those of ignorance and degradation. Alcoholism, violence, abuse. None of these children can sleep in a bed of their own at home. Either they have to share one with others, or they sleep on the ground. In many houses there is no water, no bathroom, no kitchen. Living side by side with sheep and hens is the norm.

The centre where I work is little short of paradise to them, with its kitchen, hot meals, refectory, dormitory, bathrooms, showers, workshops, school support, theatre. From Monday to Friday. Friday evening the children return home. It is a coherent and responsible choice made by Irene, the young psychologist who runs the centre. Now that these small disabled children have learned to wash and feed themselves, to sleep in a bed, clean their teeth and comb their hair, they have to teach this to their parents. They have to "do the Huarito": taking the way of life of the Huaro centre into their family homes. Can anyone think of a better way to educate these people and persuade them to face the responsibility of looking after their own children? […]

The staff here at the centre is excellent, they are people who put their hearts into their work. Perhaps they don't have the most up-to-date professional training, but they have warm hearts and treat these children with respect and love. I don't think that the same can be said for the staff at the school

for the disabled. But that's another story. […]
The day goes by in this fashion: the eight children sleeping in here at the moment are woken up at six. It takes about an hour to get them washed and dressed. Then they go to the canteen for breakfast. After cleaning their teeth, the ones who can do go to the regular school, where they are followed by a support teacher, who then organizes activities for them in the afternoon at the centre. Those who can't go to school wait until 8.30, which is when the school for disabled pupils begins: run by other people with different members of staff, who leave at 1 pm.
Lunch is at 1.30. The children who have been to the regular school come back with their support teacher. The daytime "guests" arrive as well. A total of about twenty children at the moment. At 2 pm they clean their teeth and then are free to play until 3 pm. At three the workshop activities start, which vary according to the age of the children (the older vs the younger ones) and to what day it is. Pedagogical support for school, craftwork, theatre, music, physical education, gardening. At 6.30 the "day" pupils go home. Then they have showers, which takes quite a long time. Dinner is at 8 pm and it's bedtime at 9 pm. This timetable has a certain margin of flexibility and the management have to allow for the fact that now and again some autistic child may run away and hide under a bed, or someone else may go to the toilet and stay there for an hour, and so on. The staff members, small in number, bend over backwards to cope and they do it with passion. […]
During the day I see the children individually, for about an hour each, and I give them Kinesthetic

learning treatment. For now I'm almost exclusively working on the integration of perinatal reflexes. All the children are understimulated, deeply uncoordinated, without a proper awareness of their own bodies. Programming the sessions is not simple. My Swiss rigidness clashes with Peruvian disorganization. I do my best to fit in, but I insist that the teacher responsible for each child should be present during my consultation and learn how to continue my work. This system is working well, the teachers are showing their interest and ask me for individual consultations in order to deal with their specific problems. I've chosen to give precedence to them rather than to the children, because I want them to be able to take over from me when I leave mid-September. They've asked me to treat their own children too.

I'm also beginning to treat children from other realities. Irene is organizing sessions for me with a few children from a school where she is the visiting psychologist. The woman who looks after the centre at the weekend asked me to examine her four-year-old son because he was off his food. He had fallen some time before and hit his head. I explain to her that I'm not a doctor, but she insists. I have him lie down on the kitchen table, check his cranial rhythm, which is fine, look at his tongue, do a few kinesiology tests and a bit of abracadabra. The diagnosis is easy: intestinal parasites. I advise her to have some tests done. After a few days she informs me that they have indeed found parasites and her son has begun to take tablets. I explain that the whole family has to follow the treatment, wash their hands frequently and scrub their nails with a nailbrush and that she must

adjust the treatment for his little brother, who can't walk yet, but is off his food too. The doctor hadn't told her that.
Next week I'm starting a course of Brain Gym training. It will be every Friday until I leave. A few of the teachers at the school in Cuzco are beginning to show some interest, but they can't get to Huaro during the week, so there's talk of maybe doing a parallel course on Saturdays in Cuzco. For the moment there are so many idle moments during my day and I have great problems filling them because of the cold. I would like to study, to meditate, but the cold stops me from concentrating. […]

Huaro, August 2011
I've been here for over a month. The time has flown, yet it also seems like an eternity. I've got another month and a half to go. My work has now decidedly got off the ground and has taken on a definite and stable form. Money is always needed and so, apart from the job here in Huaro, three times a week I go and work in Cuzco, in a junior high school. The pay is little more than a token and it's all donated to the children in Huaro.
Monday mornings the alarm clock goes off at six. At eight I'm at the Colegio Pukllasunchis in Cuzco. I see seven children, until 3 pm. At 5 pm I'm back at the centre in Huaro and I see another three people. I finish at 8. Tuesdays and Wednesdays I work all day with the children and teachers in Huaro. Individual consultations and group work. We have begun to introduce Brain Gym in the workshops. It's incredible how many children are really sensitive to this technique.
Thursdays are like Mondays: I'm at Cuzco until 3 pm, while from 5 to 8 I see another three people

in Huaro. Friday mornings at 8 I receive one person and at 9.30 there is the Brain Gym course for the teachers of the centre and a few other schools in the area. Seventeen people in all. All the staff members of the centre participate with enthusiasm, including the cook and the caretaker. The course ends at 5 pm. From 5.30 to 6.30 I see another person. After dinner I often have another consultation. As from Saturday 13th I'll be starting a new Brain Gym training course in Cuzco. They will be paying me for it and this money will go to Huaro as well. The work gives me a lot of satisfaction and the people are happy.

My rigid outlook and principles are beginning to gradually soften up. I have to do most of the individual treatment on my own, even though I would have preferred the people on the course to get some practical experience with me, but there's not enough staff. We do what we can. The children are sweet and affectionate, enthusiastic about having an hour entirely dedicated to them, individually. I think that, for all of them, feeling that they are at the centre of attention of an adult for such a long time is an unusual opportunity. Not everyone understands what we are doing.

There are different levels of disability. In some cases I feel I'm just clutching at straws, in others there is a perfect understanding Apart from the work, it's not easy to live in constant contact with these children, As the days go by I begin to better understand the dynamics and behaviour patterns. Some try to seduce me, others use me to play, yet others attack me. Jonathan is the oldest, he can't talk, he's aggressive and a bit intimidating. Whenever he comes up to me he provokes me, he gets

his hands on me, grabs hold of my ears and twists my fingers. More than once I've pushed him to the ground and sat heavily on him, to make him submit, like in an animal relationship. When he calms down I release him, I hug him, but that's no use because then he pounces on me, squeezes me tight and starts to kiss me, manifesting a strong sexual impulse.

Alexandra is a "seriously autistic" child. She can't talk, makes little noises, isolates herself but is always trying to attract attention. She often puts her hands between her legs, then smells her fingers and as soon as you are near enough she shoves them in your face. Juan Carlos can't talk, is constantly repeating a sharp screech, followed by a coarse laugh. Yesterday I went up to him to play and he spat at me, laughing. Thais has Down's syndrome, she runs up to me, hugs me and wants me to play with her. When Xiomara and Ana creep up close and want me to make them jump (it's their favourite game when I'm there), Thais turns on them and chases them away, saying that I'm hers.

Diego sees me, hugs me tight and immediately walks away. He knows that I haven't got enough time to spend with him. In that hourly session every week, when I meet him to work with him, his eyes shine. Diego is a "normal" child. He's here with his brother and sister because during the day there's nobody to look after them. I had mentioned before that his mother had committed suicide, but now I've heard that she was an alcoholic and died of cirrhosis. The children say they are better off now. Brizaida can't talk, she has a severe mental retardation. I sit at a table next to her and Rossimary, who is autistic. Rossy eats a

bit from my plate and a bit from hers, while Brizaida clings onto my arm, her hands dirty with soup.

Every day it's like that. All these children, whatever their degree of ability, look for a form of contact, but only within certain limits. They have developed a system of emotional survival. They know that deep down they are basically on their own, however lovingly they are being looked after and respected. At 9 pm, after having a shower and cleaning their teeth, they all go to bed. None of them know what a goodnight kiss is. Nobody reads them a story before they go to sleep. The lights are turned off and they all go straight to sleep. To wake up again at 6 am.

I'm amazed by the amount of food they get through: plates heaped full of rice, pasta, quinoa, maize. This is basic food. Nobody makes a fuss. They all eat up what they get on their plates. Once a week there's fish: a type of mackerel, fried in breadcrumbs and unboned with the skin left on, served with just plain rice. All, without exception, eat it with their hands, picking the fishbones out of their mouths. Children with autism, Down's syndrome, mental retardation. None of our children in Italy would be able to do it. And they smile, they're always smiling. It's rare to see them quarrelling, and when it does happen it's over in half a minute. They have developed a capacity for self-management, as individuals and in a group—it's so impressive. It's something they have developed all by themselves.

Veronica, nine years old, arrived the other day. She comes from Andahuaylillas, the neighbouring village, and was invited here by the support

teacher, who works with us in the afternoons, for an evaluation of her learning disabilities. Irene, who was supposed to evaluate her, had been held up at the Cuzco school. Phone conversation: "Shall we send her back or what?" "No, let Silvano see her."

My study is the physiotherapy room, a nice, large room with a few pieces of equipment, an examination couch and a hydrotherapy pool, which the children enjoy using, although its motor is not powerful enough to heat the water, due to a manufacturing fault. We should have it dismantled, which would cost more than a thousand euros, but there are other priorities.

Veronica is wearing the typical Peruvian sandals without socks and a light top and shorts. I ask her if she's cold and she answers she is, smiling, and I realize how stupid my question was. She is accompanied by her father and by Haide, the support teacher. Her father, who is also wearing Andean sandals with no socks and a wool cap on his head, has a bundle in his hands. He asks me if we can speak in Quechua. I tell him I'm still not at ease with Castilian and I can't understand Quechua at all. Haide translates for us.

Talking with Veronica is not a problem, she speaks Spanish well. After exchanging a few words I ask her if I can touch her and, still smiling, she says yes. My hands feel a very strong tension in her neck and back muscles. In kinesiology we call this hyperactive tendon guard reflex. I feel fear in the body of this smiling child. And it's not me that she's afraid of. As I have her lie down on the couch and start re-education treatment of those muscles, which I know will be totally useless, I ask her father

to tell me about the child's living conditions.
Since she was seven, Veronica has lived in a sort of orphanage, a "home" for abandoned children. She used to live in a village four hours from here. There is no school there, the father says, and he wants her to be educated. When he first took her to Andahuaylillas Veronica only spoke Quechua and had never heard a single word of Spanish. She goes to school in the morning and then spends the afternoon and night at the orphanage. About once a month she goes back to her home for the weekend. […]
I start explaining to her father the difference between a child and an animal, but I immediately realize it would be useless, and in any case I can't understand the translation. But I think hearing my words does Veronica some good. Before the consultation is over, even if it is not my responsibility, I follow my sixth sense and, holding a small torch, I ask her to open her mouth. All of her teeth are decayed. Irene decides to start the bureaucratic procedure to have the child taken into the Huaro centre and asks her father to sign the required documents. The next day Veronica starts coming here and will be staying from 3.00 to 6.00 pm for the moment, until all her documents are in order.
On Friday evening, after the Brain Gym course, we decide to go and see where she lives. It's 6.30 pm and it's dark, with a starlit sky the likes of which we don't often see at home in Italy. It's cold, we drive along a dark, dirt track. There is no bell so I knock. Several children come to the door, it's dark inside. The oldest girl is holding a candle. There is no electricity in the house. Fourteen children aged between five and thirteen, in a

dark house lit by only one candle.
"We've come to see Veronica and to get to know you, can we come in?" The oldest girl hesitates a little before fully opening the door, then Veronica comes out and hugs me, hugs Irene and Layne, the drama teacher who's come with us, then comes back to me and hugs me tight again. "Where is the woman who's supposed to be looking after you?" "She's not here." "What do you mean, not here? Are you alone?" "Yes." "And when is she coming back?" "We don't know, maybe later." "Can we come in? We're Veronica's friends."
Irene and Layne go in. Veronica hugs me, in the dark, stands still on the threshold and won't let me in. With her body she is telling me "Take me away, don't take me back in." All I can do is pick her up in my arms and go in, my heart in pieces. She gives in, she knows this is how it goes and soon hides herself in her shell again.
Irene asks for the candle, introduces herself and us, then asks the children to introduce themselves, lighting up everyone's face in turn. The youngest boy is five years old, there is no hot water, they have a cold shower on Saturdays. A dirty kitchen, two cooking pots with the leftovers of a maize soup, two dormitories crowded with bunk beds, a hall with a table and two mattresses on the floor. On a bench, a machete at least fifty centimetres long. Hanging on the wall there is a large poster with multiplication tables and, next to it, the inscription "Voting is your right." A picture of Keiko Fujimori and one of Ollanta, the two candidates for President of the Republic. (The President is now Ollanta, apparently the less corrupt of the two).
Hidden in the dark I can't hold back my tears. On

the entrance door there is a plaque stating this is a NGO institution. So there must be money. Who's stealing it, leaving these children in this situation? Before leaving, Irene promises the children we will come again to see them, and that sometimes we will let them come and play in Huaro. Veronica and I exchange a tight hug. Today is Friday; we will meet again in Huaro on Monday afternoon.

I can't say a word and feel ashamed for crying. Irene tries to comfort me by saying she understands my being upset but I should also consider that, compared to many others, these children are fine. Listening to a story is not like living it. I am a man, an Italian volunteer in Peru, a kinesiologist, but now I am a father most of all. Three hours before leaving to see Veronica I got a text message from my daughter Giulia: "Dad, don't worry, Ali and I are fine. A few hours ago there was a terrorist attack here in Oslo. Forty people died." The next day I hear the death toll has risen to 90, all of them teenagers.

Managing these emotions is not easy. At night I find myself alone, in my cold room. I am watching a DVD on my PC. Irene has lent it to me, it is the story of Frida Kahlo, the Mexican painter from the first half of the last century. The film arouses strong emotions and makes me think of my two daughters, who have both embarked on artistic careers. Then the film finishes and I realize I am here. In another world.

The other day, as I was going to Cuzco, I met a car carrying a coffin on the roof rack. A little bit further on, a pig tied to a rope was grazing in front of a house. Farmers work the fields using a wooden plough drawn by two oxen. Here public transport is

peculiar: old buses laden with people. I once tried to get on one and immediately got off because I could not bear the smell. Illegal taxis offer urban and extra-urban services for a few cents. They stop when you wave your hand. They take as many people as can physically get into the car. One evening I returned from Cuzco in a car's boot, surrounded by packages and bags. […]

In the Huaro centre there is an atmosphere I am not used to. After more than one month I see things that, had I been aware of them when I first came here, I would have found difficult to accept. Although they are all good people, nobody takes any responsibility for doing more than what it strictly necessary. When the gas cylinder is empty, the caretaker goes out to buy another, but there is never a spare one available. If there are only a few onions left, the cook does not take the trouble to say so, and when there are none left, there are simply none left. Under the kitchen sink, within easy reach, a small bottle that used to contain water is now filled with bleach, and repeating that this is very dangerous for the children is just no use.

Cauliflowers have disappeared from the garden. Somebody has been stealing them. Yes, somebody here, in this centre, has taken the children's cauliflowers. Every Monday morning food supplies are bought at the Cuzco market, then they are "checked" here in Huaro. At first I could not understand what this checking was about. The food is put on a scale to see if its weight corresponds to the one stated in the receipt. Then everything is locked up. Irene told me to always lock my room. Somebody had even stolen her toothbrush. This is an absurd situation, created by a culture of poverty.

How can you ever steal cauliflowers from a garden? There must have been six of them…
At the beginning I had come to be on very friendly terms with the caretaker. I don't know how much he earns, but I reckon his salary probably corresponds to less than 150 euros. I have sometimes invited him for dinner and have always paid for drinks and snacks. One day I asked him to replace my toilet board with a new one. The existing one did not suit my criteria. He told me he had fixed it and asked me to pay him 12 soles for it, the equivalent of 3 euros. When I went to the toilet I saw the replaced board was not new, but used and dirty by my standards. Does he think I'm stupid? How could he believe I would not notice? He must have taken the board from his own toilet and mounted it on mine to "earn" 12 soles. I made him remove it and for an entire day I could not speak to him.
Then, the following day, I could no longer feel offended. Something had changed within me, without my realizing it. I had held this imaginary dialogue in my mind: "My family can eat for one day with 12 soles. Our relationship has nothing to do with it. I like you and I like talking with you. I have a chance to get 12 soles and I'm giving you a toilet board which is better than the one you have. What's wrong with that? Have you seen toilets around here yet? How could you even think of changing your own toilet board? You're such a strange guy. I've never known anyone who must sit on 12 soles to defecate."
Yes, another way of thinking is possible. I no longer invite him for dinner, but I speak to him nicely and he nicely replies. I let him attend my

Brain Gym course, which he follows with so much passion and interest that his wife tells him he must have gone crazy. I answer his questions politely and respect him for his willingness to help the children. He is the one who takes the boys for a shower every evening, changes Juan Carlos' diaper, obtains Jonathan's respect without having to knock him down as I do. This is another world, and I am slowly entering it. Whoever stole the cauliflowers is not like the ones who keep the children in Veronica's "home" in poverty. There are poor people and there are bad people.

Every morning I see the children at the school for the disabled here in Huaro left to their own devices from 8:30 am to 1 pm. Every so often some teacher comes to fish them out of our yard and take them back to the classroom. She keeps them there for ten minutes with a sheet of paper, some paint, some beads… No real pedagogical program, no real interaction. The kid gets bored and goes back outside. "He won't collaborate, what am I supposed to do?" I don't know, but I do know that you're being paid a salary for a job you're no good at, while over here we need qualified personnel and don't have the money to pay them. It's been going on like this for years.

Back when she was struggling to defend the rights of the children at this center to have a place to stay in the afternoons and at night, Irene received three anonymous text messages. In the first they called her a bitch, in the second they threatened to carve up her face, and in the last to kill her. She never let that stop her, and she's managed to get three audiences with the deputy minister in Lima. Now she's trying to figure out how to bring the other

thirteen children from Andahuaylillas here as well. Where will we find the money to pay two more teachers, to feed them, etc.? At the same time, she has to take care of running the center, make sure there's cooking gas, onions, detergent, bleach under the sink, and check the shopping on Monday. People here don't show much willingness to throw their heart into things, and those who do don't get help.

Many people have asked me to come back, and some have joked that they'd like to confiscate my passport. I have a little over a month left and I think I'll be back again, even though I got a fungal infection after the first examination without gloves, and there are over 40 flea bites on my body.

I miss my house, with its gorgeous view of Lake Maggiore and its mountains, the grotto where I eat polenta with mushrooms and venison, my kayak, which will be full of cobwebs by now, my ironed shirts, my Mercedes. I miss my daughters Alessandra and Giulia, who amazingly are the ones who have shown me the most support. Time and again, in the course of our lives, I've told them, "I'm proud of you. I'm proud of you, but that's not why I love you. I love you just because you exist". I never imagined that one day those words would come back to me. They repeat them in every email and text they send. I feel like the luckiest man in the world, and am revved up to stay until mid-September and then come back again.

September 2011

Sitting on the balcony of a bar in Cuzco's Plaza de Armas, in front of the cathedral, I feel very sad. In five hours I'll be catching a plane to Lima, then Madrid, and finally Milan. I don't want to go, I

don't want to stay. I feel like my life has changed more in these two and a half months than in the last 55 years. My frames of reference have changed and I feel apprehensive, wondering how I'll fit into Italian society again. The devil inside me grins, reminding me that I never did fit in…

I worked until yesterday evening. I'm exhausted. I've never worked so hard before for such a long stretch. In a week I'll be reopening my practices in Italy and Switzerland. I already know that the contrast will be very harsh. This time I was good and documented my months of work with hundred of photographs and many hours of video footage. The training courses were a success: about 30 people took the basic Brain Gym classes and about ten did the next level. All of them were pleased and immediately began applying their new skills, even while they were still training. Aside from one parent, they are all teachers or therapists. Their new working method immediately gave promising results: they've collected stories from children, drawings, writings that show a clear change for the better. The kids' attention, concentration, participation, mood and cooperativeness are all improving.

The individual sessions have also led to excellent results, particularly with the youngsters from Colegio Pukllasunchis in Cuzco. Sofia now actively participates in class, working by herself without the teacher's constant attention. She can finally sleep over at her cousins' house. That was something she longed to do, but she was afraid, and at night she'd ask them to take her home. Alberto has stopped hiding behind the diagnosis of attention deficit disorder and now takes part in class work without causing a disturbance. For the last two

sessions he decided to bring along his classmate Israel, his partner in "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder", to do the Brain Gym exercises together. At home he's well-behaved and his parents say they barely recognize him. Alberto calls me "el brujo blanco", the white witch doctor.

Gonzalo, a fourteen-year-old with moderate mental retardation, is finally starting to express himself properly. Jeferson, a five-year-old boy, has developed an awareness of his body and now draws complete, well-proportioned human figures. Two months ago he would make a circle for the head and add four lines. Almost all the kids who followed individual programs have achieved good results. In Huaro the situation is the same only for the "regular" kids. Diego, Cristian, Mijael, Bill Michael, Xiomara, Ana, and Helen are generally better coordinated and have an easier time achieving their scholastic goals. Every afternoon, before starting the workshops, all the kids, without exception, do Brain Gym exercises in the garden for about twenty minutes. For other children, with bigger problems, things take longer, and who knows when and if they'll ever make it. With Jonathan, however, things are changing. He's no longer so aggressive and hard to handle. I no longer have to throw him down and sit on him. Now he manages to hug me normally. Or maybe I'm the one who's changed.

The expressions of gratitude and demonstrations of affection have made me feel more fulfilled than ever before. With Irene and Layne, I've shared profound growing experiences that have created a bond of friendship, love and solidarity I never imagined. The air is changing, spring is on the way.

The month of August is dedicated to offering gifts to Mother Earth, Pachamama. The "ofrenda a la Pachamama" or "pago a la Tierra" is an intense time of pagan spirituality. Of course, there are the performances for tourists, with people in traditional costume, the Inca and the Priest, and the "gringos" taking photos and making comments. But outside the city center, ordinary people offer wine or maize juice to Mother Earth by pouring it on the grass; they light small earthenware braziers to burn palosanto, an aromatic wood that is used here as incense; they organize ceremonies with *curanderos*, who prepare the offering of llama fat, flowers, seeds, coca leaves, and other gifts that we receive from the Earth and that are given back to her this month.

Doris, a few years younger then me, is a *curandera*. She has adopted her grandson, who was abandoned by her daughter a few years ago. Little Illaq is now eight. She brought him to see me because of his lack of interest in school, his attention problems and because he had visions and drew pictures of monsters and demons. After our first meeting, Illaq brought me a drawing that showed him with two spirit guides, bathed in golden light. It depicts our experience of that encounter. A very strong bond of love was forged between us.

One evening I went to visit him at home to help overcome his water phobia. He hated to wash himself, and it was a real feat for Doris to keep him clean. When he was very small, still living with his parents, his father punished him for wetting his pants by throwing him, fully clothed, under a cold shower. With just one EFT (emotional freedom technique) treatment, I managed to get him into the shower, and saw him happily shouting:

"Hurray, hurray, I'm free, I'd stay under here for weeks". I love this little boy.

A few weeks ago, in our theater room at the Huaro center, Doris prepared the ceremony for the Pachamama offering. With the air a bit smoky from the burning palosanto, she delicately laid out two dried starfish, kernels of various kinds of maize, and flowers on the table, while another daughter modelled two llama figurines out of llama fat. Illaq was there too, and along with the other children he selected the nicest coca leaves to adorn the offering and to offer kintu, a personal thanksgiving. The children and adults chewed leaves of coca, the holy plant. Doris did not need special vestments or solemn poses to show her authority. Her presence illuminated the room and her power lay in gentleness. As she continued to arrange the offering, she talked to the children, explaining that the offering was a cake for Mother Earth. When it was ready, each of us would dip a few coca leaves into the different liquids given to us by the Earth, wine, juice, and spirits, and would make an offering, blowing on our own kintus and thanking her. We wouldn't ask the Earth for anything, we would just thank her. Then, when we had all done this, we would dig a hole, where we would place our offering in the dark to burn it, so that Pachamama, and the good spirits who live inside her, could eat.

The children watched Doris, helping her, and listened with interest as she talked about the Sun Father and the Apus, the spirits who live in the mountains and protect us; as she taught them that in every element of nature there is a spirit with whom we can communicate; as she talked about stones, plants, and animals. These weren't metaphors; it was obvious to everyone that what she was saying

was true. It was the clearest, most vivid, most concrete way to feel that God is in everything. Here, spirituality is in the Earth. Doris guided our thoughts to hospitals, to prisons, to places where people are suffering, so that the children would not forget this. The ceremony dragged on a bit, and while the adults were gathered around the small fire where the offering burned, the children started running around in the dark and playing on the swing.

Through the window of the airplane that is carrying me to Lima, I look at a stretch of the Andes. It looks like nothing we know in Europe. It's not better or worse, it's just different. I speak to the Apus who live there, asking them about Veronica. Veronica doesn't come to Huaro anymore. She came for two weeks, only in the afternoon, while we waited for her documents to come through. I saw her take part in the theater workshop, make carrot cake in the kitchen, have a hot shower in the girls' area, washing her hair with shampoo and not with dish soap anymore. She told me her tooth ached and I got the dentist to put in a filling. She doesn't come anymore. They told us she's happier at her orphanage, and that her father says he only made the request for his daughter to be accepted here because we forced him. On the Internet one can find the website of a Spanish NGO that raises funds for various projects around the world. Veronica's orphanage is one of them. A fat gentleman has his picture taken, smiling, as he receives an award from UNICEF for the good deeds he does around the world.

Last night I was talking to Irene about the fate of the children in Huaro. We can't come up with clear answers about what to do. We don't want to

uproot these kids from the environment of their families. That's where they come from and that's what they'll return to. Homes without water, without toilets, without hygiene or privacy, with promiscuity, violence, abuse, alcoholism. Alcoholics coupling with the mentally retarded and having children. Medical ethics are against sterilization, but when doctors have experiments to do, they don't hesitate to go to the villages and tie women's tubes in exchange for a kilo of rice. The discrepancy between the center in Huaro and their homes is an enormous one. On Fridays they all go home. Over the weekend they don't wash, they don't always eat, the children with neurological problems forget to take their meds and when they come back we deal with their convulsions. Why not keep them here all the time? To keep bolstering their emotional immune system. They belong to that impoverished world, and although here they may come in contact with different things, they'll be going back to their own environment. Cynicism? There's no guarantee that we'll have the funds to reopen next year.

We're about to land in Lima. I can see the ocean, which I hadn't seen in several months. The kids I met in Huaro have never seen it, and who knows if they ever will.

Riyadh, May 15, 2011 **Eman Al Nafjan**

During the time I was away, I took a little trip to Holland. While I was there I paid a visit to Anne Frank's house. Anne was a German Jewish teenager at the time of the Holocaust. Her family left Germany and hid in the upper levels of a house in Amsterdam for two years. Her family was betrayed and she died in a concentration camp at the

age of fifteen after witnessing her only sister die.

Anne wrote a diary during the time she was in hiding with her family in Amsterdam, originally for herself, but later to document what it was like for a Jewish person during World War Two. I have always felt for people who suffered in the Holocaust, and it's not difficult to understand the motivation behind the creation of the State of Israel, coming from such a terrible and tragic history. Anne Frank however humanized it even more for me. But how I feel doesn't really matter in this equation. What matters today is how the Holocaust is used to persecute Palestinians. […]

Anne Frank touched me deeply and I wanted to get an Arabic translation of her diary so that I could share it with other Saudis. […] It's important that we see where both of us are coming from so that we can move forward. Right now to young Arabs, Israelis are not descendents of Holocaust survivors but a genocidal, racist and occupying army. And I bet to young Israelis, Palestinians are not the natives of the lands they've taken but irrational fundamentalist terrorists. A Palestinian from Nazareth, Khaled Mahameed, is trying to change that by educating Palestinians about the Holocaust and educating Israelis about Palestinian suffering.

Although the difficulties of being a Saudi woman seem like heaven compared to being a Jewish woman in Nazi Germany, I couldn't help but understand a little bit about how it must have been like when I saw the star that they had to wear to mark them as Jews, and this quote from Anne's diary that was highlighted by the museum: "Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees. Jews were required to wear a

May 15. At the Lebanese border, Israeli troops shot at hundreds of Palestinians trying to force their way across. Ten protesters were killed and more than 100 were wounded. In the Golan Heights, about 100 Palestinians living in Syria breached a border fence and crowded into the village of Majdal Shams, waving Palestinian flags. Troops fired on the crowd, killing four people. In the West Bank, about 1,000 protesters carrying Palestinian flags and throwing stones and occasional firecrackers and gasoline bombs fought with Israeli riot troops near the military checkpoint between Ramallah and Israel. Scores were injured. In Gaza, when marchers crossed a security zone near the border, Israeli troops fired into the crowd, wounding dozens.

yellow star. Jews were required to turn in their bicycles. Jews were forbidden to use trams. Jews were forbidden to use swimming pools, tennis courts, hockey fields or any other athletic fields. Jews were forbidden to visit Christians in their homes. Jews were required to attend Jewish schools. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that." (June 20, 1942)

Social media has been credited (and blamed) for many things. However, the best thing that social media has done is enable us to realize our common humanity. Instead of being some silent, burqa-clad woman on your TV screen, I'm now talking to you directly. And from the heart of the most conservative Islamic region in the world, I'm telling you that we can't move forward towards global peace until the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is resolved.

Anne's father and the only surviving member of her family: "We cannot change what happened anymore. The only thing we can do is to learn from the past and to realize what discrimination and persecution of innocent people means. I believe that it's everyone's responsibility to fight prejudice." (Otto Frank, 1970)

If God Loses Consciousness

by Marosia Castaldi

In Abraham Yehoshua's novel *The Lover* (1977) the story is seen from different points of view, so it constantly turns on itself and winds around

details or a single episode recounted twice by two or more characters. The narration proceeds like a game of snakes and ladders, moving forward and turning back, creating a temporal mirror game like the spatial mirror game in the Velázquez painting *Las Meninas*. Here too the author peeps out from between the lines, in the form of a man using a typewriter who remains unidentified throughout the novel. Dafi sees him from her window.

The story twines around a beard, which is the symbol of being recognised as Israeli Orthodox Jews, around feet (the feet of his beloved wife Asya and then the feet of Dafi, loved by the Palestinan boy Na'im), and around a blue Morris. The entire story seems to be devoted to Adam's search for the blue Morris. It is the only trace of the lover, and the betrayed husband goes in search of it spasmodically after his disappearance—more than the wife herself would do—because he needs to have another human being under his control. First it is Gabriel, the lover, then the Palestinian boy Na'im, and then Tali, his daughter's fifteen-year-old girlfriend with whom he takes up almost incestuously. The fact is that all the characters are profoundly uprooted. The two opposing viewpoints—those of the Jewish Israelis and the Palestinian Israelis—are manifestations of the same uprootedness and the same lack of belief in their role and in God, so the Jewish Gabriel, found at last after having been at the front and hiding among the Orthodox Jews in the old city, will cast off the black clothes the Orthodox Jews wear. Asya cuts off his side curls and Na'im flees, returning to his home town. Interwoven with all this are dreams and love affairs (between Jewish Dafi

and Palestinian Na'im, between youthful Tali and the older Adam, between Gabriel Arditi and Asya). Standing in their midst is the figure of an old woman who represents the spirit of the old Israel: Veducha. She falls into a coma, and as soon as she does this, war breaks out. She loses consciousness and when it returns and she comes out of the coma, she realises it is God who has lost consciousness. Chaos reappears to rule the world. When Veducha emerges from the coma her speech becomes fluent and easily understood, but now she can no longer find meaning for herself in a world she doesn't recognise, in a country she doesn't recognise, and she lets her soul leave her body. The war is continually in the background and continually senseless because the author sees it through the eyes of a new generation of non-practising Jews (Adam's family) and also through the eyes of the Palestinians (Na'im). In day-to-day reality Jews and Palestinians mix: there are Palestinians working in Adam's car repair workshop, Jewish Dafi falls in love with Palestinian Na'im, who says "we are Israelis too", but the war—the reason for which nobody understands—divides them and Na'im is driven to return to his home filled with the hope of emerging from this spiral, from the story continually turning back on itself, and rediscovering consciousness.

"At the time of the siege of Old Jerusalem, just two years after the cursed World War, I realised that God had lost consciousness. […] 'He is unconscious,' and they thought I meant the child, or his father, but I said, 'No, up there,' and they would look up, searching and not understanding, and I said, 'Don't seek Him, He isn't there.' And the people cursed me, for to lose Him at such a

time was the last thing they wanted. […] I said to myself, perhaps it's a good thing that He is still lying there unconscious, if He wakes up then the troubles will begin. Please, good people, speak softly, don't wake Him. But I began to yearn and my yearning was so great that in the end I lost my wits."*

Veducha will wake up, but only to die again. She lost her soul, now she loses everything; her body grows cold and stiff, just as the shining apparitions of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* in their stateliness and their affectations are immobile, paralysed, turned to stone.

* Abraham Yehoshua, *The Lover*, transl. Philip Simpson, Harcourt Brace, San Diego, 1993, pp. 207-208.

Tokyo, May 19, 2011

Lea Jacobson

Yesterday afternoon, my four-year-old student (of English) spontaneously decides that his blue blanket is a giant wave. The wave then soars and crashes around his playroom, uprooting every stuffed animal, action figure and Lego in its path. "What happened to all of our friends?" I inquire about the toys, trying to solicit a past-tense verb. "It's aalll destrooooyed!" He practically shouts, "Everything is destrooooyed!!"

While I applaud his use of sophisticated vocabulary, my heart sinks into my stomach. Maybe on some level he knows that a wave was the reason his preschool's production of "The Hungry Caterpillar"—for which he had been cast in the lead role—had to be cancelled back in March, even though he had already made his costume and had memorized all of his lines (and everyone else's too!) flawlessly.

Luckily for all his toys, it is not long before the boy morphs into an alien spider monkey (I am not

May 20. Syria. Thousands of Syrians took to the streets in virtually every region of the country. Security forces killed at least 26 people and wounded hundreds.

May 22. Saudi Arabia. The government moved to stop a budding protest movement that seeks to lift the ban on female drivers in the only country where they are prohibited.

making this up) and zaps the wave into oblivion with his laser beam.

"Ok, the end!" I say "Let's play something else…" "No!" he shouts defiantly, "Again!" I should have known better. When a four-year-old thinks up a good game, it is never, ever satisfactory to play it just once. Before I know it, the evil blanket wave is already in motion again.

"Oh where, oh where is alien spider monkey when we need him the most?" I remember reading somewhere, just after the earthquake, that it is important not to stop children from playing "earthquake" or "tsunami" re-enactment games, because kids work out their trauma through play in a manner similar to the way adults work through their issues in dreams.

From what I saw during my time at the shelters in Fukushima, however, "tsunami" has yet to become so popular a game. I suppose it is hard to work through a trauma that is very much still going on. Nobody wants to play "earthquake" when the real thing is still happening on a daily basis. It just feels stupid and boring. Balloon popping, on the other hand, is a very good game, especially when there is a giant box in the corner of the playroom of partially deflated rabbits, dachshunds, giraffes, flowers and swords. […]

I had a group made up entirely of girls, ages two to twelve. […] "Raise your hand if you like the balloon popping game!" calls out one day an eight-year-old. "Haaaai!" "Now raise your hand if you want to pop more!" Everyone raises her hand except the oldest, an eighth-grader who complains that the game is very *mottai nai*, wasteful, and nobody wants to be wasteful these days.

May 23. Eighteen months after fleeing across the riverine border separating the two Congos, some 120,000 refugees seem to have little prospect of returning home soon. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) had scheduled an organised repatriation from the Likouala region (Republic of Congo) to the Equateur Province (Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC) in late April, but this was indefinitely postponed because of logistical and financial issues. The exodus from DRC took place in late 2009 following conflicts over natural resources, such as fish ponds, between the Enyele and Munyaza communities.

May 23. Almost 4,000 Chadians, including 310 women and children, who have returned home from strife-torn Libya via Niger are in a critical situation in the border town of Zouarke, with limited food, no water and transport to make their journey south.

And then there are the two brothers, aged about five and eleven, who are not paying any attention. They keep mostly to themselves in another corner, reading manga and playing with dinosaurs. Perhaps they are somewhat intimidated by a playroom overrun by hyperactive girls.

The boys, I had learned from another volunteer the day before, are originally from Fukushima but had been living in a shelter in Saitama, further south. Unfortunately, these boys were teased at their school in Saitama—for being "radioactive", even while they have certificates to certify that they have not been exposed to radiation—and so the family has returned to Fukushima as a result.

I join the boys in the corner, with a box of stickers, some writing utensils and bunch of pre-stapled blank books. The five-year-old makes a book about dinosaurs, because he is obsessed with them. His older brother, to his own gradually overflowing amusement, authors a darling little book he has entitled "kyoufu no hon," or "book of horrors." "Book of Horrors," as it happens, contains the most terrifying images that an eleven-year-old boy can imagine within the confines of a pen, paper and a box of stickers. If it were up to me, "Book of Horrors" would become an instant classic. I am not an expert or anything, but I think that creativity can be a good way of reasserting control over at least some aspects of our environment. […]

May 24. Tripoli. More than 20 airstrikes in less than a half-hour shook the Libyan capital, with most of the strikes concentrated near the compound of Muammar el-Qaddafi.

May 26. Ratko Mladic, the former Bosnian Serb general held responsible for the massacre of some 8,000 Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in 1995, was arrested.

Moscow, May 19, 2011

Veronica Khokhlova

On the way back home tonight, Marta and I ended up taking a cab, after having spent at least twenty minutes at a shitty bus stop, waiting for a trolleybus that never came. The car was some sort of a

Lada, I guess. The driver appeared to be either a Caucasus or a Central Asia native, rather young. I offered him 200 rubles, he asked softly to please make it 300, and Marta and I were too tired for me to engage in bargaining.

The car's windows were tinted to such an extent that I almost fell asleep as soon as I got in, but Marta kept talking, so that saved me from embarrassing myself (what if I snored, right?) At one point, she praised the car loudly, calling it "stylish," and I noticed that the driver began to smile.

She also did quite a lot of reading of the largest logos along the way: Hitachi was one, and I explained that it was a Japanese company, and we discussed *hiragana* and *kanji* a little, and then she saw Rosgosstrakh [the largest insurance company in Russia] written in really huge letters, unpronounceable and incomprehensible nevertheless, and she couldn't read it herself, of course, and I did my best to explain the basics of the insurance business to her, using Iowa and tornadoes as the example, for some reason, and Marta asked if it was possible for a tree to insure itself against a storm.

Since everything Marta and I talked about was funny in a cute way, I don't remember at which point the driver turned around, laughing, and asked how old Marta was [five years and few months].

When we got to our neighborhood, it turned out I only had a 500-ruble bill, and the driver, of course, didn't have any change, so he stopped by the kiosk and went to buy himself something and thus obtain 200 rubles for me. We sat in the car, waiting for him, listening to the 10PM newscast, with Marta commenting sadly on the sad news of a collapsed building somewhere in Vladimir. Then

June 3. Sana'a, Yemen. The president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, narrowly survived an attack on the presidential palace when an explosion wounded him and a half-dozen government officials.

June 3. Tikrit, Iraq. A suicide bomber attacked at a mosque, and then several hours later another suicide bomber attacked the hospital where the wounded were being treated. Nineteen people died in the attacks.

June 4. The bodies of 150 African refugees fleeing turmoil in Libya have been recovered off the Tunisian coast after vessels carrying them to Italy got into difficulty. Tunisian coastguard vessels aided by the military rescued 570 people, but many others went into the water when a stampede to get off the small fishing boats caused some of the vessels to capsize.

the driver came back, handed me the change—and presented Marta with a small pack of apple juice with a straw! We were totally delighted.
I asked him where he was from—Tajikistan—and I said "rakhmat," thanking him, and Marta repeated after me, because she is by now used to thanking cab drivers in their native languages. I do love Moscow sometimes.

Havana, June 11, 2011

Yoani Sánchez

The branches give under the weight and children try to knock down the fruit by throwing stones or climbing the branches to shake them. It's mango season. Just as in a cycle of life that transcends crises, hardships and failed agricultural plans, the mangos, Bizcochuelos and Filipinos return. We are right at the moment in which the most humble courtyard in a small lost town can hold its own with the best attended garden in Miramar. All it takes is for the old mango tree that the grandparents sowed to bear fruit and the whole family begins to surround her.
Right now, as I cut some mangos Agustín gave us, I think about how my life is marked by memories associated with this odor and texture; those small and syrupy ones that I ate during my vacations in the small town of Rodas, the green and acid ones we threw salt on in the schools in the country and the others we used to steal, spurred by hunger, from the grounds of the Experimental Farm in the town of Guira during the dark years of the Special Period. I remember the little threads that got stuck between my teeth after just one bite, the drop of juice running down my chin and covering my clothes, the seed sucked down to its whiteness

June 5. Israeli forces fired at pro-Palestinian protesters on the Syrian frontier as they tried to breach the border for the second time in three weeks. Twenty-two protesters were killed and more than 350 wounded.

June 6. Mogadishu, Violence in Somalia's capital has driven the number of child casualties to a new high, the United Nations World Health Organisation (WHO) said, noting that the main cause of children's deaths were burns, chest injuries and internal haemorrhage resulting from blasts, shrapnel and bullets. Of the 1,590 reported weapon-related injuries in May alone, 735 cases were suffered by children under the age of five.

and the peel that, thrown on the ground, was as dangerous as a banana peel.

Mangos evoke in me all the stages of my existence, each one of the periods through which this Island has ultimately passed. They remind me of that free market known as Centro, during the years of Soviet aid, where I first tasted Taoro brand juices. Afterwards came the process of "rectification of errors and negative tendencies," with which the remnants of the petite bourgeoisie were swept away and Taoro took ten years to reappear, but then resurfaced sold only in convertible currency.

This fruit has the merit of having proven its incredible resistance to the state-owned farms, to the madness that overtook thousands of hectares of land like the Ten Million Ton Sugar Harvest, to the plan to cultivate micro-jet bananas and even to the unwanted advance of the marabou. And now the stubborn mango continues to mark our lives with its flavor, transforming any poor courtyard into a bastion of prosperity, at least for the duration of the summer.

June 7. Equatorial Guinea has built a multimillion-pound deluxe "city" to host African leaders while the majority of its people live in dire poverty. Sipopo boasts 52 luxury presidential villas, a conference hall, artificial beach, luxury hotel and the county's first 18-hole golf course. It was built over two years to host an African Union (AU) summit that will last just a week.

At Five O'Clock the Cicada Stops

by Marina Massenz

HERE
notes from the present

At five o'clock the cicada stops
the frenzied fiddler hangs up her bow
frazzled breathless from too much
rasping at her lyre too much sun.

Teeth broken perhaps by the bit of
the nag that refused to move forward
with all the clinging flies a huge
burden full saddlebags. And water?

Not much, always drop by drop like
a pipette never never a true flow
a gush a downpour a cascade
a true thirst-quenching ablution

no, man grasps and holds, fingering
coins in his pocket he does not know
the freedom of flinging things without
weight, of grazing them lightly, he falls,

he does not know how the water makes its way
a coolstrong shadow through the boulders of the
abundant untrammelled river
and how the stones change

shape at its passage leavened dough
how they let themselves be kneaded now
that the insidious bow has ceased its
monotonous routine and the fallen man

sharpens his nails in the earth and then
suddenly stops, rests his head on the ground.
He lifts it up, looks around, gathers stones
small, white, round.

Kawagoe, Japan, June 18, 2011

Cocomino

My youngest daughter has ten pillbugs as pets. She is keen on gathering insects such as pillbugs, ants and ladybugs. She and her friends, who are three years old, walk around a river bed gathering them during daycare. I don't like insects, but she often brings them home in a plastic bag. She feeds them some leaves and keeps them on the table.

"We wanted this child to have everything. That's why we worked this hard. That's why we poisoned ourselves at this factory. Now it turns out the child is poisoned too. I have no words to describe how I

The pillbugs move and make sounds in the plastic bag when I'm alone late at night. I'm afraid that they will get out of the bag and walk around our room during the night. The sound of their walking is similar to cockroaches and it scares me, but I can't take them away. I hope she'll forget them soon and I can let them go back to their home in the soil and the leaves.

feel." Han Zongyuan, on learning that his 3-year-old daughter had suffered brain damage because of lead pollution from a factory in his village in China. ("The New York Times", June 15, "Quotation of the day")

Belvedere, Zubiena, Italy, June 20, 2011 **Marco Novarese**

They are there, after the bend, before the uphill stretch of the road I take every day on my walk; it's a short flat section where the grass slopes down alongside the road and then rises again, creating a small valley. Often at this time of year, in the evening, the dragonflies are there: lots of them, light and swift. Watching them flying against the sky it's almost impossible to distinguish them from birds in the distance. Knowing they're close, it makes you feel giddy!

San Salvador, June 20, 2011 **Roberto Valencía**

It's a strange pride, difficult to explain, perhaps impossible. At least I doubt that I will manage to explain it in this page written under the very demands of this situation. This Monday morning already largely passed, my daughter Alejandra is now sitting on her little yellow plastic chair, strangely hypnotized by the images that appear on the portable computer. Alejandra is not even a year and a half old, but there is a series called *JimJam and Sunny* which captivates her and this didn't start today; it has been months, since January when she learned in the Basque Country of those large-headed and yellowish big dolls who teach colors,

shapes, the parts of the body, etc. through songs. "Pacum," Alejandra says when JimJam teaches shoes ("zapatos"). A "pacum" is a shoe, obviously, but in another context it can also mean "duck." She knows.

Alejandra continues to sit. She is transported through two episodes of more than 20 minutes each under my gaze. She has barely gotten up but to drink water or tell me about something that happened with the large-headed dolls. "Tín," she repeated to me when Sunny grabbed a sock ("calcetín"). "Tín" obviously means "sock." Alejandra now gets up to dance and to balance herself on her strong little legs. And it's when she is like this, stopped and in movement, that the dozens of red dots are most visible; the dots which have overtaken her neck from a strange reaction that is already under treatment with ointments and all of that. This is what permits me to enjoy my daughter this morning.

Now she looks at me and kills me. She kills me. She has gotten off the little chair which is so light that she grabs it and moves it as if it were a napkin. I want to bite her. She first looks at me with those big dark eyes as if she were expecting me to scold her. She is so pretty… She stands up. It seems *JimJam and Sunny*'s effect is starting to wear off. I'm going to try something. I'm going to sit on the floor a few meters from her and ask her to give me a little hug. I'll let you know what happens. […] Like I said, it's a strange pride, difficult to explain. Impossible.

Kabul, June 29, 2011 **Fatima**

I am fourteen and I go to a private school in Kabul. It is divided into two parts, the Girl's School and

the Boy's School. The Girl's School is bigger than the Boy's School. I take nine different classes at school.

My physics teacher is very boring. Although his level of knowledge about physics is high, he isn't a good teacher. He gives us notes, speaks unclearly, and rarely lets anyone else participate in class. Sometimes I think coming to physics class is just wasting my time!

My mathematics teacher is serious and all of the students are afraid of him if they don't do the assignment. He is good in math, but he gets angry if you don't understand what he is teaching. He isn't kind and always wants us to be geniuses. He likes to compare us female students with his intelligent male students. He makes us crazy sometimes!

My Dari teacher never says interesting things and just yaks and yaks. He gives us many assignments and never checks them. He looks kind and tries hard to improve our Dari but his method is strange. Sometimes he gives us credit for useless activities and sometimes he doesn't give even one point for good work!

My history teacher is fine. She teaches well, but when she gets angry she says whatever she wants. She makes history interesting and the lessons are easy to learn, but she makes them very long. All of us like her.

Ahhh, my Pashtu teacher is a very strange teacher! She is sometimes angry and sometimes happy. You can never predict her moods. She never gives you a score even if you kill yourself trying. She never appreciates extra work we do for her class. And she looks like Dracula. She is always shouting, "Be quiet!" She says useless things and wants

us to be robots in her classes—calm and intelligent.
My chemistry teacher is nice and teaches well, but he gets angry and impatient if you ask him complicated questions. He is interesting, but he is also confusing because in one breath he will say "please say the explanation with me," and in the next breath he'll say "don't make any noise."
My biology teacher is not bad, but I cannot understand what she teaches. She teaches outside of our planned lessons and she doesn't teach the main point of a lesson. She is not an expert in biology, although she wants us to be the best.
Ohhh… my psychology teacher makes me crazy. He never accepts the answers whether they are right or wrong. Actually there are no answers to his questions! He always makes others feel that he is the only one who knows the answers. We are always wrong. He is my put-down teacher.
But my geography teacher is nice. Maybe too nice. He lets the students get away with a lot of misbehavior.
Generally I don't like my school or my teachers!

Belvedere, Zubiena, Italy, June 30, 2011 **Marco Novarese**

One of the reasons I started writing a few diary pages, years ago, was the need to make a note of particular moments: situations, encounters and sensations perhaps experienced on a walk in the countryside. Sometimes they are images—scenes I'm not capable of representing in a painting or a photo; I'm not a painter, or a photographer, so words become indispensable for noting down a memory. With writing, though, there's a risk of changing the perception, because it leads us to

examine situations we experience unconsciously, to bring awareness to them and to give them meaning. The challenge is to preserve the initial sensations, and only later look for meaning in them. When we are able to do this, it becomes possible to share emotions and discover that others have had similar experiences.

Last night I was walking, reading and thinking. I found myself, almost without realising it, in the midst of a flock of swallows; they were flying low, circling round their nests built against a house that was set below street level. Maybe it was a slight dizziness. Maybe it was the reflection of the sun on the wing of a plane up there, and the memory that image evokes: a particular flight, when I found myself high in the sky, among the clouds. Maybe it was that strange weather passing through: storm, wind and heat. Maybe it was the flight of the swallows with those sudden changes of direction, or their wings holding them still in the sky. I can't explain the reason. I know I had the sensation of flying, a swallow among the swallows.

Contributors and translators

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Last issues

Number 19 (June 2008), "borders" **- back cover**: The Ortigara frontier; Cuba's boundaries; the border between Iraq and Syria; the frontier between Serbs and Albanians in Goraždevac, Kosovo; the frontier between Sunnites and Shiites at Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia; the boundary of SOS Central Station, in Milan; the Rafah border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt; borders in the Schengen Area; the border between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. - "Our homeland is the whole world / our law is freedom / and a thought…" (Italian anarchist song, 1904) - "Crossing frontiers; loving them, too, since they define a reality, thus rescuing it from vagueness" (Claudio Magris) - "On the map - a place's exposed / … / The land is split - a pole ax / Is the border pole." (Marina Tsvetaeva) - **contents**: diary pages from Cuba, El Salvador, Syria, Gaza, Ukraine, Kosovo, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Italy, France, China, Russia, Palestine; *Borders*, by Laura Zanetti; *Departures I*, and *Departures II***,** by Yannis Ritsos; *The stranger*, by Marco Saya; *Always on the other side as well*, by Claudio Magris; *If the air was free…*, by Mario Rigoni Stern; *False directions*, by Giorgio Caproni; *Rafah*, by Laila El-Haddad; *On the map - a place's exposed*, by Marina Tsvetaeva; *The world of yesterday*, by Stefan Zweig; *To cross the border*, by Ryszard Kapuscinski.

Number 20 (November 2008), "memories" **- contents**: *Memories*, by Massimo Parizzi; *Tangiers, my birthplace*, by Jihane Bouziane; *The house where I was born*, by Maria Granati; *Progress and memory*, by Jacques Revel; *The fullness of memory*, by Giorgio Morale; *The art of oblivion*, by Andrea Inglese; *As autumn falls,* by Giovanni Quessep; *Palestinian ruins*, by Jonathan Boyarin; *Remembering our Nakba*, by Rana Qumsiyeh; *War is a state if mind*, by Uri Avnery; *Let's keep an eye on our humanity*, by Massimo Parizzi; *From Palermo to Milan*, by Attilio Mangano; *My first disappointment*, by Renata Borghi; *Light and shadows*, by Marina Massenz; *History begins in reverse*, by Marco Saya; *November 4, 1966*, by Laura Zanetti; *I was twenty*, by Nives Fedrigotti; *The personal sense of history*, by Oksana Kis; *My yesterdays*, by Maria Ofelia Zuniga; *Addirittura*, by Johanna Bishop; *But with my camera…*, by Veronica Khokhlova; *Old memories*, by Hao Wu; *The memory of contemporaneity*, by Roberto Bordiga.

Number 21 (March 2009), "human fellowship" **- back cover**: "At the end of the battle, / and the combatant dead, a man came toward him / and said: 'Don't die; I love you so much!' / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Two approached him and repeated: / 'Don't leave us! Be brave! Return to life!' / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Twenty, a hundred, a thousand, five hundred thousand, came up to him, / crying out, 'So much love and no power against death!' / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Millions of persons surrounded him, / with a common plea: 'Do not leave us, brother!' / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Then, all the inhabitants of the earth / surrounded him; the corpse looked at them sadly, moved; / he sat up slowly, / embraced the first man; started to walk…" (César Vallejo). - **contents**: diary pages from Gaza, China, Israel, Cuba, Italy, Ukraine and Russia, The United States, Great Britain; poems by Giacomo Leopardi, Marco Saya, T.S. Eliot, Jaime Gil de Biedma, César Vallejo, Ennio Abate; excerpts from "The New York Times", "CNN International", "La Repubblica"; *Notes* by Massimo Parizzi; a passage from a letter by Etty Hillesum.

Number 22 (June 2009), "from Gaza on" **- back cover**: "…anti-politics is this wholesale slaughter of the defenceless…" (Lidia Campagnano, Rome, December 29, 2008) - ***Contents***: diary pages from the United States, Italy, El Salvador, Iraq, Israel, Kosovo, Ecuador, Palestine, Cuba, Gaza, Jerusalem, China; *The Pain of the Wronged World*, by Elio Vittorini; *325*, by Sebastiano Buonamico; *On the Shema and the Prophet Martyr*, by Marc H. Ellis; *Spring 1938*, by Bertolt Brecht; from *War*, by Franco Buffoni; *La chéursa*, by Raffaello Baldini; *With the Shepherds*, by Laura Zanetti; *Polyphony of Nostalgia. Stories from Ecuadorian Migrants*, by Carla Badillo Coronado.

Number 23 (January 2011), "innocence" **- back cover**: "In order to discover a livable world, how much rotteness must be swept away!" (Joan Miró, 1939) - ***Contents***: diary pages from El Salvador, Israel, Cuba, Italy, Canada, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Iraq, China, Gaza, United Kingdom; *Innocence?*, by Massimo Parizzi; *Living Means Being in Infraction*, a poem by Roberto Juarroz; a page from *The Earthly Paradise*, by Elsa Morante; *Child*, a poem by Sylvia Plath; *The Lost Blush*, by Alfredo Tamisari; *The Extraordinary*, a poem by Robinson Quintero.

Number 24 (April 2011), "caregivers" **- back cover**: "Long Live the Kababayans, New Heros of the Philippines" - **contents**: diary pages from the Philippines, Canada, the United States, Afghanistan, Italy, Singapore, Israel, Jerusalem, South Korea, Iraq, China, Russia; *Caregivers*, by Massimo Parizzi; *Toiling Far From Home for Philippine Dreams*, from "The New York Times"; *From a Maid's Diary*, by Jazeann; *An Advertisement*: "the biggest original Filipino musical"; *Persons/Non-Persons. Reflections on an Ethical and Pedagogical Dilemma*, an essay by Gianluca Giachery; *Refuge*, a poem by Chandra Livia Candiani; *On Filipino Dreams and Middle Eastern Routes*, an essay by Claudia Liebelt; *Foreign*, a poem by Ingrid Coman.

Number 25 (July 2011), "in revolt" **- back cover**: "I no longer feel alienated from society. I now walk the streets of Cairo and smile…" (Mona Seif, Egyptian, 24 years old) - ***Contents***: diary pages from the United States, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Italy, Canada, Singapore, Palestine, Cuba, Gaza, Egypt, Israel; *The Butterfly and the Boiling Point*, an essay by Rebecca Solnit on the uprisings in the Arab world; *Mona Seif, Egyptian, 24 years old* and *Gigi Ibrahim, Egyptian, 24 years old*, two voices from Tahrir Square, Cairo; *Letter to My Children and Grandchildren*, by Valentina Tamburro; *Globalization*, a poem by Marco Saya; *Hammangi*, by Daniele Comberiati: a "mission" in Tripoli; *Who's who in the new Egypt,* by Jacob Høigilt.

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