

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Raimundas Malašauskas

Dear Editor,

You were absolutely right—one day I would become a person whose life would be worthy of a diary. Long gone are the times when I would not believe a single word you were telling me. Remember, I was constrained by the idea that my life was just a shadow of what other people live? Yes, yes, I was that introspective rat that kept thinking about its experience as too modest and unworthy of a page. Walking home along the canal and observing dancing lights in bar windows I would muse about the polymorphous people inside. They were drinking and chasing marvelous scenarios of the infinite night. Their lives were as colorful as those red lanterns outside: fatalist, inflated and singular. I would never open the doors of those places though: I knew I had to go home and sit at my writing desk. Yet what I was facing at the desk was the same walk that I had just had along the canal. Boring as that canal is, I am not going to call it by name.

You kept encouraging me to believe in my own life regardless of my desire to invent another—to live *la vie fantastique* instead. And this is something I kept doing relentlessly: each day was filled with all kinds of imaginary characters and vicarious tropes.

One of them had just come back from the park and showed a picture of himself “in the stomach of the turtle.” “Just imagine,” he said. “It looked so grainy and gross.” Another one used to collect watches found inside time bombs. “Why time bombs?” I wondered. He burped: “Time explodes.” I still remember his voice: low and manic as if communicating

the truth. Then there was a man who could tell his whole life story in a couple of hours. He would always finish at 5am with his mustache burning due to the speed of his words. An hour later a woman would wake up in her wedding bed and start doing yoga exercises. On the way to her office she would have coffee in a place that had just opened one month ago. "Are your beans fair-trade?" she would ask a waiter and hurry some sugar into her cup before receiving an answer. Two spoons usually, what a sweet tooth! A man across the bar sued her because he was convinced that the woman's character was based on his own life: same amount of sugar, same social concerns, same office. "I will never come back to that body I've left in jail, I am free now and I want you to be free too," he would say. "I am a rabbit and a hat," she would respond. But no one has even come close to a person who thought he was a book written without an author. To complement the existence of this thinker there was a woman who entertained a fantasy of being a writer. She would never write a single line, only stare at me gleefully as if I was jealous of her not writing yet still being a writer. What an insinuator.

I've never been introduced to the man of bad analogy, but I've been told that he was very good at bad analogies. The fellow would always speak with some kind of comparison, choosing the most abstract entity in the room and setting it alongside something more familiar. "Singing in the rain is like singing in the train," he would say. What the hell was that supposed to mean? Heaven only knows. A similarly debilitating character was ardently involved in totalization exercises. "What would happen if all the people who ever died returned back to life today?", "What would be the total hair length of all people living in New York?", "What would be the size of a gate through which all mankind could walk through in one step?" he would not stop asking. When digital visualization tools became available for these sort of nerds, their life reached the full swing. I should not forget to mention that a woman who sang every night in a choir of vocoders had a husband who was ready to pay all of his savings to have sex behind one of the O's of the HOLLYWOOD sign. "With anybody." Everybody waited for this to happen, but no one really wanted to crawl behind the O. "Maybe the W?" a French-speaking neighbor suggested, but the alternative was not discussed further. A tattoo on the neighbor's biceps was mesmerizing enough for me to ask: "Is

this real?" The expression on his face made me understand what a silly question that was. "Of course, it's REAL," he said. Trying to improve the situation I stepped back: "It looks more than real." "No, it is REAL!" he hit a table with his fist.

All these characters usually spoke in one or two sentences, no more. Usually the sentences were of paradoxical nature and generated by a pathological element at the core of the character's identity. At times I was tempted to write from the perspective of these characters. At other times – just from their thoughts but somehow with no subjectivity attached. For example, once I wrote a letter from the perspective of man who thought he was an abstract shape suspended in a flow of circumstances. He could move back and forth, up and down, left and right, but always remained flat—a sort of a two-dimensional contemporary Don Quixote merged with the mill that he approached. This man reminded me of Carl Andre's saying that an artist makes an artwork like a pear tree yields a pear. Or was it an apple tree? Anyhow, I've decided to write a text from his perspective. Not Andre's or the apple tree's—from the perspective of this abstractoid which was a synthesis of the author and his artwork seen from a distance. This synthesis looked like a singular shape.

"It is a space of fantasy," you said. "You should look at the people around you—they are no less polymorphous." The following day you told me to kill all my characters and write a book of their obituaries. "The book that belongs to no one and is not needed by anyone"—according to you. It was a difficult task, but it gave me a good reason to focus.

I have executed the characters one by one. No need to go into curious detail. To cut a long story short the French-speaking neighbor ended behind the letter O and the adulterous husband finished behind the W. "Long live the anagrams," I waved goodbye to them and moved on to work on the book of obituaries. After the book is completed it will be published.

While I was working on the book a bag of seeds arrived by mail. It was the Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa Belladonna*)—an extremely poisonous plant whose berries serve as a basis of atropine that may induce hallucinations (if you don't take too much). Atropine is used in medicine as an antidote to other poisonous substances. One of the most interesting effects induced by atropine is allowing one eye to zoom in

while the other one zooms out. We've tried it with my mother a few times (at least in the moments she looked like my mother). I didn't know what to do with the bag, there was no manual enclosed. One day when I was in Palermo, I took the seeds with me to an old botanical garden. At that time of the year this XVIII century garden stood green and orange, and empty. Among the more curious specimens to be seen in the garden were bottle trees—or false kapok (*Chorisia insignias*)—forming a long avenue, the soap tree (*Sapindus mukorossi*), false cinnamon (*Pimenta acris*), coffee (*Coffea arabica*), sycamore (*Ficus sycamorus*), the delicate *Mimosa spegazzini*, various palm trees, including *Sabal* and *Chamaerops*. The most magnificent specimen was *Ficus magnolioides*—I thought how great it would be to have a concert of a choir of vocoders in it. Indeed, because of the lack of visitors this garden also displayed a range of sounds. Pine cones falling down, birds suddenly squirming the leaves, tangerines rolling across the path: the whole sonic botanical garden.

In the aquarium, turtles were touching the surface of the water from the other side. To be more precise, they were touching the surface of the air, very cautiously as if it was deeper than the pond they were in. There was also a snail I would see in passing every day on the stone by the fountain. One day I thought it must be dead as it always sat in the same position. When I went to check if that was true, the snail was no longer there. I understood this must have been a sign.

Next day you've asked me to show you some signs of a turn of thought. I was always a bit skeptical about the claims that a writer could show how the mind works. To expose the apparatus of drives and contradictions and unresolved elements governing the construction of language was not my task. It happens anyway, especially when one does not think, or thinks too much. No need to apply the findings of cognitive analysis in reverse. Nevertheless, this request prompted me to write a diary.

"My thought, how are you?" was the first thing I said. And then the thought replied: "I am OK, how are you?"

This was the moment when I understood that something had happened. My thoughts don't belong to me anymore. They come from somewhere else, but they also include me. I started to dig deeper. I realized that we can only think about abstract things because we understand

them in terms of concrete spatial experience. Thought itself—conceptualization, interpretation, reasoning—is just such an abstraction, which can only be thought about through metaphor: we imagine our mind as a space within where ideas are created and housed; we imagine it as a conduit through which ideas are conveyed to other people; we imagine ideas as people, plants and turtles, and commodities; we imagine understanding as seeing or grasping. Thought is conceptualized in terms of a number of different concrete spatial metaphors, and we cannot conceive of it without them. We can be conscious of these spatial metaphors, but they also work unconsciously to structure thought.

My whole notion of thinking changed at the moment when I applied a different spatial paradigm: thought is neither an autonomous and monadic entity that has sharp outlines, nor is it a cloud, but it can be found in both of these alternatives. It is sovereign now. Both on the surface and under the water. (Turtles, our worlds are not that separate anymore). Even if I killed all these characters, their lives were part of me. Even if I didn't know that Domenico Modugno was singing *Volare* for Yves Klein, blue was painted on blue: “Nel blu dipinto di blu.”

The next day you asked me to replace the old dried leaves that were used as bookmarks in one of the books in a library, with a leaf of a coffee tree I tore off in Lina Bo Bardi's glass house in Sao Paulo. It was one of my favorite houses ever: calm and infused with volume. There were also a couple of turtles roaming around, supposedly Lina brought them back from Bahia. But perhaps I can skip the turtles this time.

The task of replacing these leaves in the book was obviously futile, but since you didn't tell me which book in the library to look for, it turned into a much more exquisite adventure. While browsing through books in the library in search of a single leaf I found many interesting meanings. To be honest, meanings replaced the leaf, or rather the two kept interchanging continuously. “Seeing all of those leaves spread out on a table, one inevitably wished to animate them, to invent stories in which they turned into synecdochic characters. This temptation, the very mechanism of fantasy, is familiar if we think of childhood games. A little boy plays for days constructing a labyrinth of roads for a toy truck that, though the visible excuse for this elaborate project, is all the time left aside. The object having fulfilled its signifying role is used up, free to disappear.

Surely, a toy truck does not signify a road. And that is precisely the point [...],” said one of the pages of the *Pictures* exhibition catalogue.

Surely, a truck does not signify a road or a toy. It simply follows a train of thought. A truck follows the train, a train is a thought, a thought is a train.

What if it stops here?.....

Let me tell you a few more things that may reshuffle the cards at this very moment when we are ready to get back to where we came from. Maybe it will change your destination?

I did everything you’ve asked me to do. And even more.

I started to collect museums.

I started to collect extended moments of dullness,
not only the magic moments.

I started re-typing articles and changing them in such a way that even their authors would not recognize them. If they recognized them they would give up their authorship.

I started to follow four thoughts at the same time.

I became interested in the time when we were not yet separate from things and words. I vomited when I experienced what it feels like. I will do it again.

I stopped experimenting with radical physical experiences thinking that they would result in another language. I’ve decided to experiment with language thinking it will make another experience possible.

I stopped blindly believing in change. It didn’t *stop* though.

I stopped fetishising broken thoughts, yet I stopped fearing the train has

no destination.

I've decided that I will belong to my personal history regardless of how entangled that history becomes with others.

I became more interested in the path of thought and the body and their movement rather than individual moments in the path.

I became more interested in ways of arriving at an idea, rather than an isolated idea itself. You can reach an idea from the inside of a tangerine or the inside of a turtle and it will be different each time.

I started to avoid the twist at the end.

I started to limp.

Usually this would happen when walking, obviously. Remember how Verbal Kint is limping in *Usual Suspects*? At the end of the film he leaves the police office, walks down the street and slowly his legs find another pattern, a rhythm we haven't seen throughout the whole film. What did you think of it? Did you think it was a moment when Kevin Spacey erased a character? No, not only. I can tell you confidently: it is also a moment when someone is cured!

Limping for hours feverishly through space as if it was a vacuum I turned back suddenly. Behind me a large threshold was looming. A gate in the middle of nowhere, like one of these gates in the desert you only see when you look back—you suddenly notice this portal in the air that you've just passed through. A disconnected architectural structure of Magritian logic seen from Tereshkova's illuminator. It indicated that I've entered another space. A space of four different alternative realities.

"This is your day," you said. "Now you have to write about it." But that day felt too great to have the slightest interest in wasting it at the writing desk. The more my life was becoming worth of a diary, the less I wanted to write about it. I was walking further away from this gate and my legs were finding a straight line, another rhythm, another pattern, another meaning. I've seen the future and it will be. I've seen the future

and it works.

I never told you that I left one of the characters alive.

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