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Walking the Ridge of the Whorl

by

David Naimon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing

Thesis Committee:
Leni Zumas, Chair
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Abstract

In 2010, my wife and I were harmed in a bombing while traveling in India. Over a thousand people were attending the outdoor Hindu ceremony along the Ganges in Varanasi but when I woke up in the rubble no one was there. I searched for my wife amidst the concrete debris, found her unconscious, roused her, and we fled. This thesis is an examination of that gap in my experience, that unlived and unknown lapse of time—between the moment I was blown off my feet by the blast wind until I stood up again—and how it has reshaped my life.

Circling that gap, a gap now filled with surrogate memories (e.g. others’ accounts of the stampede after the explosion, photos of the destruction that we never saw first-hand), this thesis looks at the history that my wife and I unwittingly stumbled into, of the Babri Mosque and the Hindu-Muslim cycle of violence surrounding its existence, its destruction and the destruction’s aftermath. Mainly, however it is about the marriage of two bombing victims, two bombing victims who have nearly the same physical injuries and thus for years have fooled themselves into believing they understand what the other is going through. It circles not only the unlived bombing “experience” but also the unspoken differences between how they’ve both been affected by the trauma. Blast wind physics, ear anatomy and physiology (the main site of their injuries), trauma research, and Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist history and comsology are all used in service of this investigation.
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but since I am near her
I can see the whole
ridge of the whorl
of her right ear
and the shadow
at the root of it
--Franz Kafka “On the Tram”
Dramatis personae


Lucie Bonvalet: 41 year-old French national. Teacher at the Alliance Française of Portland. Author of *Oneiric and Fictional: Djuna Barnes, Anaïs Nin, Jean Rhys*. Writer, visual artist, shell-constructor

Dr. Sean McMenomey: Head of Otolaryngology at Oregon Health Sciences University. Tinnitus sufferer; performer of tympanoplasties, cholesteatoma lookout

Shahnawaz Alam: Indian national from Azamgargh, Uttar Pradesh, living in Pakistan. Expert in improvised explosive devices (IEDs), founding member of the Indian Mujahideen

Adel Hamad: Sudanese, former hospital administrator. lover of ping pong, Guantanamo detainee

Babur: the first emperor of India’s Mughal dynasty, builder of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya
Rama: the seventh avatar of Vishnu, a divine human or mortal god born in Ayodhya and later the ruler of Ayodhya

Buddha: a prince by birth, a renouncer of his privilege. First sermon, on compassionate listening, given in the town of Sarnath, India
walking the ridge of the whorl

It is not a thing but an absence, the thing I can’t get out of my mind, the thing I can’t remember.

It is a thick insistent wind against my calves, the last memory, the one that anchors me to my life before the gap.

(                       )

On the other side of it I see my wife, curled up as if in a deep sleep, lying perfectly still, in rubble. I know I am standing again though I do not remember falling or standing up. I sense, though I am not sure, that I am someplace else, that I have been blown to this new place. This is my first memory of my second life, post-gap.

The gap is a black hole, pulling everything into it—images, sounds, stories, conclusions—each briefly masquerading as primary experience, as true memory, before disappearing themselves into its empty center, before adding themselves to its infinite density.

It has been four years since the bombing and it is clear now that my life does not move forward, away from what I cannot know, but curls and bends toward, is curled and bent by this absence.
More surprising is how my pre-gap life, once a straight, uninterrupted chain of memory, how it too has been reshaped, after the fact, by this black hole, how life already lived has spooled itself around my life’s new center.

I have circled this thing, this absence, for four years. Life is no longer a forward moving arc but a two-tailed whorl. Now that it has this new trajectory I wonder (and I wonder this only through the traveling of it) if I walk the ridge of the whorl not to learn how to fill it, nor to try to understand it, nor to remember, for there is nothing to remember, but to learn how to live with this absent-thing.
Where to begin
Where to step in
To something circular?

Do I start pre-gap and tell it forward
With dates in their proper places
On a straight line of time?
   When we met (1992),
   When we were bombed (2010),
   When I started this book (2014)?

Do I mention the gap
Before the gap
The eleven years between
The time we met
And the time we saw each other again (1993-2004)?

Do I talk of the bomb (2010)
The reasons behind the bomb (1992)
The sense of coiling, of tightening
Of ticking in the marriage
Of two bombing victims(2014)?

Or do I talk of the injuries that can be talked about
Of ears, their auricles and labyrinths,
Their hammers and drums?

Every place on a whorl is a port
Of entry, a beginning and an ending
A spot to step in, to circle, to whirl.
Before this book

There was another book.

Not the Koran.

Not the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Not the Ramayana.

Not the book of my people,

The People of the Book.

Yes, these books too.

But at the end of the eleven-year gap

That precedes the gap in my life

The eleven years when I knew Lucie

Only through her letters

She mailed me her book

The master’s thesis she had written

During the gap before the gap.

A book about dreams in fiction.
At the beginning of it she writes:

*David, this is the map;*

*it is old and has not been updated,*

*but you are already familiar with most of the streets.*

*I suggest you start*

*with *The Economy of Loss,*

*Then you go to *Fragments,*

*Then *Shadows,*

*Then *The Body as Text,*

*simply because it seems to me*

*it is the road we chose together.*

I wonder now if this book is indeed a map
Back to the Lucie before the bombing
The Lucie I no longer see in her
The one I understand now for the first time
The one I understand much better
Than the one here before me
As if that Lucie has not been lost
To me but blown instead inside
me
Imagine I am walking the ridge of the whorl, not of a black hole, but of an ear
That I circle the grooves of its auricle, ever more inward
Toward the shadow, the hole, the wound at the root of it.

“Motion is a part of listening,” Anne Carson says.

I walk the ridge of this wound alone. I’m swept along the ridge of the whorl alone.

Lucie is becoming still.

If one were to ask her the reasons behind the bombing
She would not know them even now.
Nor the name or story of the bomber.
Nor the significance of the Hindu festival that was bombed.
Lucie is building a shell, a shield of incuriousness.

Lucie is becoming still.
The story we stumbled into together—blind to its history—was one of motion,

—of Lord Rama, after vanquishing the ten-headed demon-king of Sri Lanka, circling back to Ayodhya to assume the throne in the place of his birth
—of the young Babur, after sneaking into India on a fact-finding mission disguised as a Sufi mystic, returning to Ayodhya as the first Mughal Emperor to build the Babri Mosque

The sanskrit word ‘ayodhya’ means ‘not to be fought” and for many hundreds of years Ayodhya was both the site of Rama’s birth and the site of a remarkable mosque.

Hindus and Muslims have also long shared the tradition of circling,

—Hindu pilgrims come to Ayodyha to perform parikrama, a ritual circumambulation of the city, dipping first into the river Saryu, along which Rama was born, the same river, where Rama himself dipped, at the end of his life, to return to his divine form as an avatar of Vishnu
—In the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism, ascetics perform a ceremony of circling and whirling called Sama. Sama means “to listen to the ear of the heart” and this circling, this turning, is considered a form of devotional listening.
There is no linear evolution
There is only a circumambulation of the self

—Carl Jung
As you circumambulate and move closer to the Ka’aba, you feel like a small stream merging with a big river. As you approach the center, the pressure of the crowd squeezes you so hard that you are given a new life. You are now a part of the people.

—Ali Shariati
The Babri mosque too was built with the ear in mind. For hundreds of years architects have written about the mosque’s unique acoustical qualities, the remarkable distances across which a whisper could be heard. The type of stone and the placement of resonant recesses within the walls have been speculated as the features responsible for this devotional hearing.
This structure will astonish the visitor. The sandstone otoliths, helical vestibules, canals recessed, large and small half-circular--its hammer helical vestibules, canals half-circular--its hammer
Deploys the near-sound of drums, oblique
Whispers across the beat of the deep
Courtyard’s central arterial atrium.
Breath. Two voluted nests of a
Hundred meters, minhrab to maze, twists to
Minbar, heard as if auris burrows deep down
to orison. To silence.
For the longest time multiple truths have lived side by side.

Many sites have co-existed as the very place where Rama was born many millennia ago.

In more recent times some have claimed that a Hindu temple was destroyed to build the Babri Mosque, and that that temple was built on the very spot where Rama was actually born.

Those same people, Hindu ethnonationalists mainly, might point out that Muslims circle in the counterclockwise direction, Hindus in the clockwise. That the only time Hindus reverse the direction is when they are circling a dead body, performing a funereal ritual.

Those same people might point out that the word ayodhya comes from the root word *yudh* “to wage war.”
You could say our relationship began in anger, began with a declaration of difference, with a shot fired across the bow between us, across the eleven years of absence since we first met. We had written once or twice a year since that brief encounter and if I knew Lucie at all it was through these letters. Eleven years of anger-less letters.

It was 1992 when a chain-smoking teenage foreign exchange student from France began frequenting the café, the Brillig café in Boulder, Colorado, where I worked as a barista.

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves/did gyre and gimble in the wabe begins Carroll’s ‘nonsense’ poem “Jaberwocky.” This poem is found within a dream, Alice’s dream, within a book within this dream, a book of mirror-writing, a book left for her in her dreamscape. Its ‘non-sense’ is only legible with the aid of a mirror’s reflective reversal.

There was no sense in me working at the Brillig again, not for a second time, this time post-graduation. It was a step sideways at best, a backwards move, a reversal. If I looked back upon my adult life, brief as it was, I felt a vertigo from what seemed like a long sequence of reversals. I had just left a year-long job, a perfect job on paper, funded by National Geographic and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, three months early. Given my own jeep and boat I was measuring methane from the lakes and flooded forests in the Orinoco river floodplain of Venezuela for the global greenhouse gas model. Trapping gases amidst floating fields of blooming water hyacinths, I was
often followed by pink water dolphins as I collected my samples. Yet I was miserable and desperate to escape.

I talked to myself, to the mosquitoes with the white striped legs, to the rats in the biology lab kitchen, to the giant cockroaches in my room. I developed elaborate superstitious rituals. I believed that whenever a certain song by the Pet Shop Boys was played on the radio it was played particularly for me. I learned to lucid dream.

In the year I met Lucie, 1992, Canadian peacekeeping forces were deployed in Somalia, a country in the midst of both civil war and famine. In 1993 Shidane Abukar Arone was found hiding in a portable toilet by Canadian peacekeepers. He claimed to be looking for a lost child. They suspected him of planning to steal supplies, something the Canadian base had been battling since their arrival. The peacekeepers imprisoned Arone and stripped him naked. They waterboarded him, kicked him repeatedly, punched him in the jaw, sodomized him with a broomstick and burnt his penis. Between fifteen and eighty Canadian soldiers either observed the beating or could hear the “long drawn out howl” and did nothing. After several more hours of beatings with both ration packs and a baton he fell unconscious and died. His last screamed words were “Canada! Canada! Canada!”

In 1991 Venezuela the anti-malaria drug, mefloquine, did not yet have a black box warning for the frequency of psychiatric side effects from its use. Side effects that could be long-standing and irreversible. Anxiety and depression, nightmares and hallucinations, heart rhythm abnormalities and seizures. That the soldiers convicted of
the most egregious crimes against Arone had received experimental injections of mefloquine was a factor in their trial. Dangerous psychiatric effects had been reported in previous mefloquine experiments on soldiers.

“The Canadian military seems to have blind confidence in mefloquine, even though it carries warnings that those with judgment jobs, like neurosurgeons or airline pilots, shouldn't use it. But it is apparently safe for young men with loaded weapons. Does that make sense?”—journalist Peter Worthington

Becoming a biology technician was already a response to a failure of a dream. I left Venezuela because of the perhaps medication-induced unbearable loneliness, yet I had gone there for the solitude. A solitude needed after a summer gone haywire volunteering in a rural Kenyan hospital, a summer spent holding down patients in case they woke up from the inadequate doses of anesthesia during surgery, a summer that derailed my plans to become a doctor. I’d come home with malaria, the symptoms not manifesting until I was airborne. Landing in the states and rushed to the hospital, I was on so much chloroquine I literally couldn’t see straight, my eyes would not focus for days. I needed to be away from people, to do something away from them, malaria seemed to be saying to me. I needed to be around people again to find some sort of meaningful connection with them, the psychiatric side effects of anti-malarial medication seemed to be saying a couple years later.
My life had stopped making sense and it was in this non-sense of my return to the Brillig as a barista that I met Lucie. We sat together during my breaks, our knees touching beneath the table. She was nothing like the people I knew—brighter, deeper, indecipherable, hieroglyphic—and more beautiful because of it. But she wanted to leap from the relationship that had brought her across the world, a failed relationship she still moved within, the only relationship she’d had in her life, into one with me. She took the leap. She declared her love—for my hands, for my neck, for knowing my past, the stories of my ancestors—and I pushed her away. I couldn’t be her world, her everything in a city where she knew no one. My world was wobbling on its axis. She was too young and I was leaving town. We rarely spoke those final few months we lived in the same city.

But almost immediately after she returned to France we began to write. After I moved to Portland to become a different sort of doctor, one who used plant medicines and food more than pharmaceuticals, after Lucie moved to Strasbourg to study English literature, to write her book on the oneiric and the fictional, after she moved to England, to Ireland, to Japan to teach French, and now as she was leaving Japan after two years, leaving her Japanese boyfriend, returning to France, on a boat from Hokkaido to Vladivostok, on the TransSiberian railroad to Moscow, on this train and that, back to her childhood home, with no direction forward, a backward move or a sideways one, a return to her past. A circling back, perhaps a reversal.
I too was circling back. Back to Africa, to visit a friend who had moved to Ethiopia, who worked for an NGO, who lived in a leper colony in Addis Ababa. I would visit hospitals, ones hopefully like the one that had derailed me, return to something like the original trauma, to hopefully write about it. During my time there I wrote group emails to my friends and family. A general correspondence not written for any one person but which included Lucie.

My letters during that eleven years between Boulder and Ethiopia, were, I suspect, predictable, informative. But Lucie’s, they were strange, mysterious, somehow both intimate and impenetrable. (At the end of reading one I never knew more about her life, more about what she was doing or with whom, but somehow I knew something, something oblique, deep, beneath.) They’d arrive on blue airmail paper, the blue fountain ink of her cursive, immediately recognizable, the curiously simple address “Le Pigeonnier” written below her name. No matter if I were single or in a long-term relationship, content or dissatisfied with my life, there was always a thrill in receiving these hermetic messages, meant just for me.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, aka Lewis Carroll invented a personal letter register to keep track of the letters he wrote and received. Ninety eight thousand seven hundred twenty one letters according to his invention. Because of his love of letter writing he also wrote advice on how to write the most satisfying letters. Entitled “Eight or Nine Wise Words About Letter-Writing” I suspect, if he lived now, it would’ve included the advice not to send group emails or general correspondence to people you have particular, idiosyncratic,
and especially peculiar relationships with. Or at least not solely this sort of correspondence.

*And as in uffish thought he stood,*

*The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,*

*Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,*

*And burbled as it came!*
Dear David,

It took me two hours this morning to sit down to my desk to write to you…two hours to gather all my thoughts, my memories, the picture of the Dnieper river, the postcard of St. Sophia’s paintings, the Siberian cigarettes…and also something happened:

I found an old folder in my bedroom containing all my work in the Naropa Institute. A collection of writings. Inside there was a short letter to you I want to send now, since I read it as a foretelling; and another text about the act of writing…first it is puzzling to realize I have not changed and second I believe your need to write is very different from mine, so I want to share the contradiction with you.

Yes, I followed you through your collective messages on the net…our two parallel travels…in Moscou, in Kiev, in Budapest, in Vienna, in Strasbourg…in each town a new message but I could not feel close to you. I felt in you the will to catch, to grasp what is foreign to you, to reduce it to something familiar—and when you failed in the process it was a disquieting experience for you—and then the need to share what you saw with many people, through the same words, at the same time. No. I disagree. When I travel most of what surrounds me I cannot see well because I do not have the cultural keys—the houses, the paintings, people’s faces, the landscapes are like unknown words of a foreign language…you hear them for the first time you cannot understand the meaning though you hear them clearly and sometimes you can remember them well. But why be afraid of
that void? Cherish it. I remember you wrote at some point “…my life felt wrong…” because you witnessed around you something, some life that you could not reconcile with your life. Did I understand well? And reading you I felt very angry. But first I could not analyze my anger. Now I believe I was angry at you because I sensed that will of yours to embrace, to name, to explain, to master with reason. It is not humble…what if you let go? in a completely passive way you let the alien surroundings embrace you, name you, change you…?

I always want to travel in the same way I used to love you as a teenager: a teenage passion—something aimless, endless gnawing at your soul, changing you, structuring you and eventually bringing you closer to the truth.

This is a very strange letter and it is not at all what I wanted to write at first. Today is Sainte Lucie, and my mother offered me a candle. In Kiev, in a church I lit up a candle and I dedicated that day to you and your ancestors, take care of yourself,

Lucie
What if I’m circling
not to know
how to live
with an absent-thing,
not to fill in
a gap
to fool myself
into ‘knowing’ it,

but rather because i fear it,
i fear the shadow at the root of it.
What if i’m circling the ridge not to live
with this absence
but rather to stay as far back
as possible, to avoid
being sucked in, to avoid it altogether

why haven’t i told you ‘what happened’?
Like on any other night, this night.

Tuesday, December 7th 2010 just after sunset, around 6:30pm, between two thousand and five thousand people sat, stood, sang and clapped to the Ganga aarti, the nightly Hindu ritual along the river Ganges in Varanasi, India, the holiest of Hindu cities, the one where people came to die.

If you died there, died and your ashes were mixed in the river, you would find moksha, liberation from the ever-circling wheel of suffering, from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Hindu families, young and old, babies, parents and grandparents. Ascetics, pilgrims, holy men, fortune tellers and tourists. Animals, goats mainly, fowl, even monkeys. They were all assembled for the the daily sunset rites—the dances with lamps of fire along the river in honor of the goddess Shakti, the female principle of divine energy.

The blast was small, of medium impact, was so powerful that giant boulders on the stairs of the Shitala Ghat were thrown many meters away.

The bomb had been placed in a milk container, in a metal canister, no it had been hidden within a cavity beneath the steps to the Shitala Temple, home of the goddess who cured ghouls, sores, poxes, and pustules with a short broom, a fan and a pot of cool water.
The smell of mehndi (henna) at the blast site confounded forensic experts. It had been brushed into the ether from a shop selling it. It had been part of the bomb itself.

Up to fifteen hundred feet away buildings shuddered
Up to two hundred feet away stone walls were damaged
Even the banners of the Shitala Temple itself had been blown away
Bodies below struggle among pulled apart limbs
Ruddy debris tossed far along the embankment

Just after the blast, in the ensuing panic, a railing collapsed prompting a stampede of thousands. Many were injured by it.

I experienced none of this. I woke alone.
I stand up
from my side
unfamiliar somewhere
before unseen

There are not thousands
of people, not hundreds, not
small handfuls
If there are others
at all I do
not see them
at all

Something is wrong with my vision
I’m watching a film
through a periscope

There are no edges, no corners
The edges and corners are rolled inward
The edges and corners are not clear
Not in focus

I see Lucie’s body curled up on its side
I see it clearly
As if asleep or asleep
It glows white
Against the wreckage

It hovers before the half-seen rubble
It lies nested within the half-seen rubble

I am the actor

Her body is motionless peaceful
I move to disturb it
I go to move but it is slow
As I run with great effort

How far do I run
How long do I run
Her image is before my face
Almost too close to see it
Whole

Forever: how long it takes
to get there

There is no time for the fear

of what happens or fails to

when I touch

her when I yell

her name

I yell her name

It does not leave my head

It is not a thought unsaid

but a shout

The sounds are shouted and fill

my head thick like foam

that we are running

that she is standing

that she is speaking

that she is no longer

sleeping

No time for relief
We are running in a dreamscape
We are fleeing
Everything is sped up but us
We run against the fast current
We are slow against its thickness
We are underwater

I speak out loud
inside my head
She speaks, her words won’t
enter my head
Only the sounds of them

No one runs with us
We are alone together
in this movie

The dancers with the incense
and the lamps of fire
the dancers on the platforms along the Ganges
the dancers who dance the nightly invocation of Shakti
are still dancing, are finishing their rites
their limbs are long and limber and light

ours heavy

We run past them on the bottom
of the ocean we look back and look
back
Is this some mistake?
Is what we run from something else
a firework or blown speaker?
Could a dancer keep dancing…

The extras run toward us
run past us
scores of them
run toward the sound that is no longer
resounding

the one we never heard but know
what was spoken

We run against them
they are fast
we are slow
questions pull them past
questions weigh us
down
…I sank, weighted down with a millstone’s torpor, to the bottom of silence, below the fish, who only at times pucker their mouths into a discreet Oh, which is inaudible.

Rilke, to Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, January 14, 1913
The word ‘gap’ comes from Old Norse, from a mythological region called *Ginnunga-gap*, or the ‘yawning void.’ *I am writing a book about a gap in my memory* is my elevator answer to the ‘about’ question. But this is not true. There is nothing to remember. I was asleep in the yawning void.

If it is a gap at all it is the notion of gap that arises in Middle English in the 14th century, *a breach in a wall or hedge by violence or natural decay*. Think of the wall as continuity, the gap an absence not in memory but in experience, a narrative breach, not from suppression but absence. Questions are the only thing that travel across the breach of the wall. How long were we asleep, why was no one else there when we awoke, where were the police, why did nobody try to help us, to wake us? These questions are born in the yawning void. They are the ‘wide-mouthed outcry’ of Ginnunga-gap’s alternate translation.

I can speak from experience, from sense-experience and otherwise, that fleeing a yawning void, an event one was absent from (yet one where I was literally one of only two people still sleeping at its center) is not like fleeing a breach in a wall or a hedge. When one emerges from the Ginnunga-gap, one’s flight bears the mark of what one flees, one’s flight itself is gapped.

When the English philosopher John Locke (who argued that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience) said in 1690: “In all the visible corporeal World, we see no
Chasms, or Gaps, the descent is by easie steps, and a continued series of Things” we can presume he never woke in or fled from a yawning void. To be fair, it wasn’t for another hundred years that the idea of a Ginnunga-gap surfaced among scientists, philosophers, and mathematicians.

“A black hole is a place exiled from the rest of the universe,” says science writer Michael Finkel. Whatever is inside a black hole, even light itself, cannot escape it. And because of the strange effects of its extreme gravity it is impossible to peer in. No one ever has or ever will see one. But at the same time these ‘holes’ are at the center of nearly every galaxy. We know this by witnessing, not them, but their effects.

Like in a dream, a black hole creates a spatialization of time. Because of its extreme gravity, because a black hole is so grave, a minute spent near its event horizon (the border of no return if you were to cross it), a minute of one’s life spent there, would be the passage of hundreds, even thousands of years back on Earth. Even if one came back from that, there would be no coming back.

Neuroscientists now believe vision is largely not seen but constructed, not perceived by the eye but built selectively by the brain. The back of the brain receives input from the eye, yes, but not as a formed visual experience. The brain is not only frequently suppressing input from the eye in order to maintain our sense of a stable and coherent image, but it also holds input in reserve prior to creating that experience. Sensory input (sight, sound, touch), even if created at the same time, arrives at different speeds, and our
brains, in order to (re)create the experience of simultaneity, will hold a more quickly arrived input until its slower sensory counterparts have joined it in the brain. In this regard we are always ‘living’ in the past.

I wonder if fleeing the event horizon of a yawning void messes with the brain’s ability to orchestrate the experience, if, because of the extraordinary gravity of the event, one is able to see the gaps, the gaps that are always there in every moment but usually hidden from us by our brains, if it is perhaps like a film that isn’t yet moving fast enough and one sees that there really is no motion forward. Just discrete shots gapped.

Dreams where difficulty moving forward, where one’s limbs are heavy and stuck, where traveling across a space is slow and labored, are particularly common, even across disparate cultures. Neuroscientists suspect one reason this is so is that our brains are constructing experiences as if we were awake, that we are actually trying, and failing, to move our bodies which have been taken off-line for the night.

And yet,

I was awake when I ran so slowly and so far across such a small distance, awake when running weighed down, as if underwater at the bottom of an ocean.

What does it mean to awaken not from but into a dream?
In Lucie’s book, *Oneiric and Fictional: Djuna Barnes, Anaïs Nin, Jean Rhys*, loss orders itself following three main axes: the temporal, the spatial and the divine. The dream marks the nodal point of the loss’ order. The dream is the black hole from which whorls a world of loss.

But what does it mean to awaken into a dream?
The Economy of Loss

It was night, and I made a careless movement inside the dream. I turned too brusquely the corner and I bruised myself against my madness—Anais Nin, *House of Incest*

I woke up and still it was going on; it went down into the dark earth of my waking…—Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*
Nighttime, the moment of surrender into sleep, used to be Lucie’s favorite time. We joked, half-seriously, that she became a sea creature at night. That she lost form, that she found pleasure in losing form. A frond of seaweed, a sea anemone, a barnacle, a limpet, she drifted, was pulled by the will of another. There was relief in this, joy even. She’d attach to me and often declare “this is my favorite time of day.”

The last time I remember this feeling with her was standing beside her gurney. As they found and punctured her vein, as they threaded it with a beveled needle, as they administered the anesthesia, as her words began to slur and her eyes rolled back, she squeezed my hand and said, “This feels so good.”

For the last several months—years out now from that moment—we’ve been sleeping in separate beds. I’ve been sleeping downstairs in the ‘guest’ room. Lucie remains upstairs in ‘our’ bed. This happened gradually, intermittently and then regularly. Her insomnias have grown so intense that no matter how exhausted she is, or I am, the night is one of torment and the bed is electrified by dread. Eventually to function I descended.

Lucie’s days used to be like her nights of old. She loved to wander. She was aimless and craved to be so. She never wanted a home or a garden or a child. She attended to transient, momentary things, to absences, nourished them, and wrote about them. Sometimes drops of tea or rain blurred a word or phrase in her letters into a watercolor, blue and shapeless, but always announcing something unnameable that my life did not have. Something unnameable she was making space for.
“David, I am inside a very old train. The train has stopped somewhere. I think in Libourne. The neon lights in the corridor are old, they flicker and they buzz endlessly. I don’t know the time. I have your voice coming in my head saying: “Lucie I want you to impede on my freedom.” The train will be late because something happened somewhere on the rails. I sneeze. I shiver.”
Lucie used to say she was the Queen of the Night
and I Sarastro, the High Priest of the Sun.
While reading Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain*, Lucie sent me a letter under its spell. In it she writes: *Settembrini: talkative male, from the West, brings “sudden clarity”; Chauchat: silent sick female from the East* and the words: “*Through the power of the Word the mind rules again, the body submits. Timelessness is linked with illness, the body, the body ruling the mind, the night, obscurity.*”

*the immaterial—>the material*

*the inorganic—>the organic*

*the rational—>the dream*

*the “vector,” the arrow is fever, is love*

*vector: a quantity that has both magnitude and direction; an organism that transmits disease; a pollinator*

I look at Lucie now, today, and I don’t recognize the Lucie who wrote this letter. The wanderer, the dreamer, the Queen of the Night. The vectors have reversed in her. Her nights are alert with pain. Her days are regimented, solid and airless. I used to think I walked the ridge of the whorl alone for these four years because Lucie already knew the life of fragmentation, of gaps, that she already lived in the in-between spaces between words and their meanings, that she both did not need to piece this experience together nor study what it meant to have it in pieces.
I used to believe this.

The bomb helps me understand Lucie better. The way she moves in the world. I want to share this understanding with her. I have walked the whorl in the hopes of catching up to her. But I don’t see her here anymore. I don’t know where she is. Or who. She has filled all her gaps. She has shined a light into the night. She has built something new, coiled, inward and labyrinthine. A shell or a monument. I don’t know what it is.
I am like the little anemone I once saw in the garden in Rome: it had opened so wide during the day that it could no longer close at night. It was terrifying to see it in the dark meadow, wide open, still taking everything in, into its calyx, which seemed as if it had been furiously torn back, with the much too vast night above it. And alongside, all its prudent sisters, each one closed around its small measure of profusion.

—Rilke to Lou Andreas-Salomé, June 26, 1914
Lucie and I met in the same year—1992—that the Babri Mosque was torn down—by spade, by rope, by clawed ethno-nationalist fingers.

Giacometti said he sculpted by “taking the fat off of space.”

Yourcenar said, “On the day when a statue is finished, its life, in a certain sense, begins…

...Through alternating phases of adoration, admiration, love, hatred, and indifference it will return to the unformed mineral mass out of which its sculptor had taken it.”

Ever since the destruction of the mosque was finished a dream-mosque (and an adversary dream-temple) has been constructed, brick by brick, year by year, in the minds of dreamers, in the dreams of their minds.

Ever since the destruction of the mosque was finished Lucie and I, letter by letter, built ourselves for the other in language.

You are still everywhere, but it is not the same; for I am nowhere. Not in the tea I am drinking. Not in the old and tired clothes I am wearing. Not in the cigarette she is smoking, nor inside the blue pain of the bar. Only in your head. Only inside you.
Sometime during those eleven years—maybe seven or eight years in—we switched places, our vectors flipped. I began to wonder actively about seeing Lucie again. Her letters—elliptic, erudite, potent, tactile—called forth something in me that nothing, that no one else in my life had done. Each letter on its own was a reminder of the ways my life, my imagination were delimited. And as the letters amassed, an urge gathered, to follow the words back to the writer of them.

Several more years pass before Lucie returns to France (a life reversal that reminds of my return to Boulder when we first met) not knowing what to do next. It was then, in 2003, when it looked like we would see each other (in early 2004) for the first time in eleven years, Lucie sent me her thesis on dreams. She also returned to our letters and to her writings from eleven years previously. She sent me some of her work from a class she took at Naropa in 1992 which included a dream about me:

_In my dreams, you were phoning me from New Orleans. But I was not home. You were asking me to phone back to eleven different avenues. Eleven...Eleven? In eleven years it will be the year 2004. I will be 29 and you 34. I hope I will see you again before that. I wish I had learned to say “good bye” but it is beyond my strength. I am still like a child._

It’s too improbable to be true, that she would break up with her Japanese boyfriend, take a boat to Vladivostok and the train, the transSiberian, to Moscow, that she would travel through the towns of my ancestors in the Ukraine, and eventually back to her childhood
home, lost and unsure of her next move, that I would push to see her again, that this idea would take life without my knowledge of this dream, that our lives would fulfill it unbeknownst to either of us…

It’s now eleven years into our marriage, a marriage in separate beds.

The bomb feels like another dream, another part of our dream, another unsent letter, now uncovered and delivered.
1992

Angela Carter, Francis Bacon, John Cage, Albert King and Satyajit Ray die

The European Union is founded and EuroDisney is built

Compact discs outsell audiocassettes for the first time

Sonic Youth, Primus, Mudhoney, and Pavement play together at the Red Rocks Amphitheater (David notices Lucie, the French girl who comes into the cafe where he is a barista, over the sea of heads. He will mention this the next time she comes in and orders an espresso with chocolate cake)

AT&T releases a video-telephone at a list price of $1,499

Jury selection for trial of L.A. cops caught on video beating Rodney King begins

George H.W. Bush pardons six national security officials implicated in the Iran-Contra affair and vomits in the lap of the Japanese prime minister
General H. Norman Schwarzkopf’s *It Doesn’t Take a Hero* tops the nonfiction bestseller lists just ahead of *How to Satisfy a Woman Every Time*

350,000 people rally in Berlin to protest violence against immigrants

A 16-year old Japanese exchange student knocks on the wrong door for a party and is shot dead in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The shooter is acquitted.

The U.S. begins the deportation of 14,000 Haitian refugees

The world’s largest mall is constructed on 78 acres in Minnesota

South Africa votes to end Apartheid

Canadian peacekeeping forces land in Somalia

Riots in L.A. erupt when the cops are acquitted for the beating of Rodney King.

The Ulysses spacecraft passes Jupiter

Pope John Paul II issues an apology and lifts the edict of the Inquisition against Galileo Galilei
The U.S. refuses to sign the UN convention on Climate Change and Biological Diversity in Rio De Janeiro

Extremist Hindu nationalists demolish the Babri Masjid, a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya, India. Nearly 1500 people die in the subsequent riots

*Honey, I Blew Up the Kids* is one of the largest-grossing films of the year
The nurses and doctors had never seen anything like it, two victims, a couple to boot, two victims with the same injury, to the same ear, getting the same surgery, one after the other, by the same doctor.

The ear, Robert Frost said, is the way to the heart. And it was easy to get caught up in the marveling, the symmetry, the romance of it all--me standing by Lucie’s gurney as they prepped her, holding her hand as she went under, watching her get wheeled away and then, before long, lying down on my own gurney, indistinguishable from hers, being prepped by the same marvelers just as I had watched my wife be prepped, being wheeled toward the same room where my unconscious wife had just been wheeled--and we did.

Two eardrumless convalescents, we had spent the last month taking showers with special ear plugs, and we left together, the two of us, with the same bandages, with the same medication, with the same instructions—no sneezing, no straining on the toilet, no blowing one’s nose. We were sent away the same.

“They have the same interests as me,” said synchronized swimmer Bill May when speaking of his desire to one day marry a fellow synchronized swimmer. “Everything I would want to do, they would want to do”
Nobody asks what an individual synchronized swimmer is thinking, their interiority subsumed by the marvel of seeming to be moved by some collective but unseen animating force. Moving as one meant being as one. We, Lucie and I, were in a synchronized dance, a spell cast over us, a spell we fell under.

We wore the same bandaged customs as people visited us together at home. We believed we were having the same experience. And so did they.
“The ear is uncanny. Uncanny is what it is; double is what it can become; large or small is what it can make or let happen (as in laisser-faire, since the ear is the most tendered and most open organ, the one that, as Freud reminds us, the infant cannot close); large or small as well the manner in which one may offer or lend an ear.” —Derrida

We had thought of ourselves as doubles for years, blown into the same mold since the bomb. We had the same surgery—the harvesting of cartilage from our outer right ears, the removal of our outer ears, the grafting of this cartilage to serve as a new eardrum in our middle ears, the outer ear reattached. But we did not have the same injuries. Not exactly.

The physical differences seemed inconsequential at the time. Lucie’s left eardrum intact, mine seventy percent gone, my scar itched, hers didn’t, my ears squealed when I chewed on a tough piece of meat or bread, hers rang nearly all the time. We were the same—

recovering victims of a bomb.

Lucie sought therapy for the first time in her life. But she didn’t want to talk. Or at least didn’t want to seek healing through speech. She sought someone who had a somatic approach to trauma, who believed that when animals can’t flee (or fight) they play dead. But this immobilization response is time-sensitive and the animal ultimately shakes it off. “…in the scar of a wounded animal will be seen the shudder of its recovery,” writes
Djuna Barnes in Nightwood. But in trauma this resolution, this shudder of recovery, never occurs. Or so goes the theory.

Unlike Lucie I needed language. I started writing almost immediately. Writing and worrying.

“Here you are…a memory of me,” Van Gogh said to the woman he gifted his ear, before she fainted.
I wrote an essay on the bombing entitled “Third Ear.” A magazine was interested in publishing it if I’d consider certain editorial changes. “Why is there so little of the wife in the essay?” they asked. “Why does the narrator not show more concern for her possible deafness?” I showed the essay to my writing group along with the magazine’s editorial suggestions. The group agreed with the magazine. One member described the piece as ‘narcissistic’ in its current form.

Originally I was hesitant to veer from my own experience of the bombing out of respect for my wife, not wanting to give words, surely false words, to her experience. The only authority I had, even with my gaps in memory/experience, was over my own story. But now I wonder if there is a solipsism in being bombed. When one has no eardrums the only sound produced is from the direct vibration of the bones of the inner ear and through the mastoid bone of the skull. Every sound you feel/hear occurs as if produced and trapped within one’s own head. The world had been blown inside mine by the blast wind. In the end, the published version of “Third Ear” has much more of Lucie in it. It is better for it, a better story because of it.

My wife grew up in France but after finishing her studies she left for good. She lived in London, Cork, Tokyo, and Kyoto prior to moving to Portland, where after a decade of rootlessness she has rooted down. She has a piano now and a cat and a house and a garden. Part of what makes her wanderer’s spirit able to remain here are these very
things, yes. But more so it’s due to our frequent trips. If she does not have one to look forward to she quickly gets cagey, like a cat pacing the length of glass at the zoo.

One of the things my wife was particularly sad about after the bombing was the loss of our vacation. That we flew for thirty six hours, and had only three days in India prior to flying back again hospital-bound. Readers of my essay didn’t want to hear about such a mundane feeling in the face of the gravity of the event. But knowing that we would spend the three-plus weeks not in Varanasi, Orccha, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, and Agra but in Portland in anticipation of our surgeries, and in Portland in recovery from them, only to start another semester of teaching with no vacation in sight, this weighed heavily on Lucie and by extension on me. This colored our days. But this aspect of our story did not make a good story.

I wrote a story, “Let’s Feel The Pain Together,” about our first vacation after our surgeries. The story uses certain details of our actual lives, namely it is about a French wife and American husband in San Patricio, Mexico post-bombing. But nothing about the story is true, not the personalities, activities, conflicts, or events that occur. Yet everyone thinks it is us. No, my wife did not have sex with me imagining I was a leprechaun.

During our convalescence people brought us food and made short social visits. Our friend and neighbor, a renowned graphic novelist, drew a get-well-soon picture of us still
sporting matching bandages over our ears. With my wild hair, maniacal eyes and gap-toothed mouth, I looked very comical. Like a cartoon version of a terrorist.
When my dad had a heart attack I flew to Colorado to be with him, arriving before he awoke from his triple bypass surgery. But before I did I looked up the risk involved in the procedure, one that miraculously cracks open one’s father, employs machines to breathe for him, machines to pump his blood while they build a new vasculature for his 90% blocked heart. It was a one in sixty chance he would die during this miracle. A one in fifty chance he would have a stroke. A one in five chance that he would suffer major depression after the surgery. I did not tell my mom or my sister or my dad these odds. But I needed to know them, to worry over them.

When I was in medical school I sat in the back of the classroom against the back wall. Despite sitting far from the pathology and microbiology professor, an ex-military man, far from his macho bravado and his grotesque slides of syphilitic chancres, I convinced myself I had whatever disease we were learning. My lips tingled or stung from herpes simplex, I found and repeatedly fondled the painless rubbery node of Hodgkin’s lymphoma in my neck or along my clavicle. The floaters in my eyes were an unheeded warning that my retina was about to detach. My inability to urinate if my professor entered the bathroom, whistling as he swaggered up to the urinal beside me, was, I could only hope, merely an enlarged but noncancerous prostate.

The primary difference between ruminant mammals and nonruminants is the four-compartment stomach. An elk will eat up to fifteen pounds of grass, ferment it in the first
stomach, regurgitate it, rechew it, and swallow it again. This process of rechewing is called rumination, from the Latin *ruminare* “to chew over again.”

Studies show that habitual ruminators are more likely to become depressed. Rumination is also linked with anxiety, post-traumatic stress, eating disorders, binge-drinking and self-harm. Freud’s term for rumination was “obsessional brooding.”

German physician Marcus Banzer, author of the *Disputatio de audizione laesa*, wrote the first account of an attempt to repair a perforated ear drum. In 1640 he created a tube made of elk hoof and connected it to a pig’s bladder to be used as a prosthetic ear drum. Two hundred years later there still were no effective surgical treatments for perforated eardrums. Petroleum jelly, glycerine, water and saliva were used as adhesives to affix any number of substances—India rubber, lint, tin, silver foil and the vitelline membrane of an egg—to the ruptured drum.

During our weeks of eardrumlessness, waiting for our matching husband-wife tympanoplasties, my wife convalesced while her husband, unbeknownst to her, investigated the things that could go awry as a result of the surgeries. Hearing loss (3%), tinnitus, vertigo/dizziness (5%), taste alteration (10%), and facial nerve dysfunction. Alone he chewed over these risks.

And the far rarer ones, cerebral spinal fluid leakage, stroke and death? He chewed over these too.
We cowered in the damp ear of the night

sucking at the finger-root of uncertainty

—Safiya Sinclair, *After the Last Astronauts Had Left Us, I*
I keep my fears to myself. I don’t share them with Lucie, my fears about Lucie’s ear. My fears about Lucie’s state of mind. Or maybe those aren’t my fears at all. Maybe I’m investing my fears of my own ears onto Lucie’s, fears of my own state of mind onto hers. That’s not my experience of it, that of fearing for myself. My fears seem to point outward. And all of these fears (or fearful avoidances) find themselves cathected into one fear: cholesteatomas.

Freud says *besetzung*. We say cathexis. *Besetzung* suggests being charged (by electricity) or occupied (by troops). In psychology a cathected object is one that has been occupied or charged with a person’s mental or psychic energies.

They seem harmless enough. Once called “tumeurs perlées” or pearly tumors, and later cholesteatomas (cholesterol+fat+tumor), they are not tumors at all. Just everyday epithelial cells that find themselves where they aren’t supposed to be, in the middle or inner ear. But these commonplace cells, when they occupy their new home, establish a blood supply and grow. If left untreated they can destroy the ossicles, the bones of the middle ear (with subsequent deafness and vertigo), and the enzymes they produce can eat through the skull and invade the brain.

In “Cathexis,” the thirteenth episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*, Commander Chakotay is found brain dead when recovered from his shuttlecraft and Chief of Security Tuvok unconscious after an exploration of a nearby dark matter nebula. Various crew members
start doing things out of character, changing the ship’s course or shutting down the engines, but deny having done so. Several more fall unconscious or into comas until it is discovered that they are each in turn occupied by a noncorporeal alien species called the Komar. The Komar would like to draw the Voyager and its inhabitants into the nebula to feed upon the energy produced by the neural pathways in human brains.

The military in their studies of the effect of blast winds on the ears of soldiers has concluded that the more severe the damage to the tympanic membrane the higher the incidence of cholesteatoma. If you have the most severe form, subtotal perforation, like we did, you have a 20% chance of cholesteatoma development. Even worse, one usually doesn’t know one has a cholesteatoma until they are dangerously large and about to invade nearby structures, often years after they have started growing. One is monitored for them, but the signs, such as a “semolina discharge” and “wax over the attic” are hard to spot even by the best ear specialists.

Was I cathecting cholesteatomas with my fears? Were cholesteatomas my cathected object? Or was the cholesteatoma occupying-invading me, my alien invader, my Komar, with me cathected by it?

Worse than cholesteatomas are the treatments for cholesteatomas. The dual aim of surgery, to remove the cholesteatoma and to preserve the normal functions of the ear and temporal bone, are at odds, making the surgery extremely challenging. “Canal wall up” surgery preserves the architecture of the ear but has a high rate of cholesteatoma
recurrence. “Canal wall down” surgery is far more successful but often involves removal of the posterior ear canal wall, the mastoid bone, even the ossicles. Living after a canal wall down procedure involves a lifelong “aural toilet,” water exposure limits, vertigo when cold air or water enters the cavity, a cosmetically unpleasing appearance, and difficulties in fitting hearing aids.

Cathexis are a cosmopolitan family of longhorn beetles, also known as longicorns. To be beetle-browed is to have eyebrows that project and overhang threateningly. To beetle is to make one’s way with short quick steps. Longicorns do not have eyebrows, threatening or otherwise, nor do they ruminate on the 20% chance of blast wind victims with subtotal tympanic membrane perforations developing cholesteatomas. Instead they are occupied and charged with beetling.
For Lucie mornings used to be the time for anger. They always came too soon, too brightly. When we first met she’d even greet them with curses, with profanity, before her eyes had even opened. Another day, more demands to find form, to assume the form of the world’s demands in the unsparing light of it all.

Long before the insomnias, back when each new thing seemed good, helpful, Lucie began to wake up early. In addition to therapy she began to focus more on her body. She had started learning Pilates, and the early mornings became a time when she would practice her routine, her form, on her yoga mat by the top of the stairs, beneath the window, of the attic bedroom we still shared.

Joseph Pilates, a German boxer, self-defense instructor and circus performer in England, was interred by the British, along with other German civilians, first in Lancaster castle and then in an abandoned hospital on the Isle of Man. There he noticed how listless and dispirited his fellow captives were compared to the cats, cats who seemed so active and spry. He noticed how they often spent their quiet moments stretching. From there, Joseph Pilates began to develop his method, a method he he called “contrology,” whose principles he explained in his book Return to Life with Contrology.

Without fail Lucie would now set her alarm hours before her day needed to start, even on a work day. She wanted to construct her mornings—time to perform her Pilates exercises, time to make a pot of tea and time for a slow quiet breakfast. This became a
fixed part of her day since the bombing, as did her time at home after work. Shortly after
dinner she would prepare for bed. We rarely went out any more—deterred by noisy
restaurants where we could not hear each other across the table—so the evenings began
to look predictably similar. Her showers now happened at night shortly after dinner and
lasted longer than ever before. She’d want to be in bed early so she could wake up for
her contrology

It seemed constructive.

It was constructive.
Could something be lost in the building of something up? The building of a mosque. The building of an ear. The building of a self-care routine.

Eleven was our number now. But I have another secret number. Secret only because I am alone in circling the ridge of the whorl, of looking for language, for words, for what has happened to me, to us. I am not hiding it from her. There is so much she is not curious about now.

The ear seems like a defended organ, or at least a hermetic one. The swirl of the auricle leading to the shadow at the root of it reveals nothing of its intricate interior. The hammer-defended drum, the bony labyrinth with its spiral-shaped shell, the cochlea there within. The construction of the cochlea takes 2.5 months to form. And oddly the cochlea turns 2.5 times around it axis to create its shell.

In September of 2010 the Special Full Bench of the High Court of Allahabad ruled that the disputed land in Ayodhya where the Babri mosque had stood for 500 years would be split in three. Two-thirds would go to the Hindu plaintiffs and one third to the Sunni Muslim Waqf Board. This prompted the Indian Mujahideen to begin to plan the bombing of the Hindu ceremony on the shores of the Ganges in Varanasi on our third day in India in December. That planning—from ruling to detonation— took place over the course of 2.5 months.
Dubravka Ugrešić, an exiled writer from a country that no longer exists, one that has split into six different ones, once said: “The average person’s blood vessels are said to be about 60,000 miles in length, meaning that the veins, arteries, and capillaries of a human being—if they were tied end to end in a single long thread, and if we imagine our planet as a spool—could be wrapped roughly two and a half times around the earth.”

2.5 months to spool a shell, 2.5 months to unspool it. Was there something to this number? The heart and the ear share the word “auricle.” Perhaps the chamber of the heart, the “auricle” was the inner heart of the ear. Perhaps the shell of Lucie I saw now, was produced by an inner Lucie that was spooling inside, spooling and turning and whirling and walking the ridge of an inner whorl, inside an oblique canal, within a deep bony labyrinth, constructing a spiraled shell.
Deep Zoo author Rikki Ducornet says that it is from within the forest, the natural world, the non-human world, where human dreams arise. The paradox of the real for humans, she says, is that a thing must be dreamed before it can be real.

Deep inside our ears is a bony labyrinth. Within that labyrinth sits a spiral-shaped shell, a shell which twists two and a half times around its axis over the two and a half months of its fetal development. Deep within this spiral shell, sits a spiral organ, a miniature wonder of form composed of bundles of cellular hairs.

All vertebrate animals use hair cell bundles to sense their environments. Sea anemones use hair cells on their tentacles as radar. When prey activate a tentacular hair cell bundle the sea anemone releases, in one of the fastest actions known to us, five million times faster than the rate of gravity’s acceleration, a poisoned dart. Their hair cell bundles often get damaged in the tussle. But they have an unrivaled ability to repair them and fast.

Sea anemone hair cell bundles, despite being on the outside of their tentacles, look remarkably like human hair cell bundles, bundles that do not repair so easily once damaged. Sea anemones have such an ability to repair them that when they reproduce, by tearing themselves in two, the extensive damage that occurs is quickly restored to
anemonic wholeness, hair cell bundles and all. Perhaps sharing this kindred appearance, dreamed the scientists, the sea anemone hair cell can help the human one.

It is the mucus that they secrete, that coats them, that they swim within, that scientists have harvested to experiment with. Blind cave fish hair cell bundle repair, when exposed to the protein-rich sea anemone mucus, took only an hour instead of nine days. Damaged mouse cochleas steeped in sea anemone mucus proteins regained their normal structure just as quickly.

Scientists had to remove the cochleas from the mice ears to do this experiment. How to administer this protein-rich mucus to an intact human cochlea, given its interior, protected and nested position within the human ear, has no obvious solution. Meanwhile sea anemone hair cell bundle damage and repair goes on unabated.
The middle space in the ear was constructed by sea creatures. By sea creatures who wanted to come up on land. The middle ear is amphibian in origin, a way to create a mechanism, an architecture, to hear sound conducted through air in addition to water.

“A whisper from the Babri Masjid Mihrab could be heard clearly at the other end, 200 feet away and through the length and breadth of the central court,” according to nineteenth century architect Graham Pickford.

But the ear was not simply or even primarily a receptacle. The middle ear’s role was as equalizer, as mediator between the resistance of air and the resistance of the labyrinthine waters, a balance between internal pressures and external ones. Derrida talks about the paradoxical nature of the ear’s hammer. Resting on the internal surface of the ear drum “its role is mediation and communication, transmitting sonic vibrations to the chain of small bones and then to the inner ear. But it also protects the tympanic membrane while acting upon it. Without it the tympanic membrane would be affected painfully by vibrations from too powerful sounds. The hammer weakens the blows before they reach the ear.”

“My prison cell my fortress” said Kafka of the Judengassen, the labyrinthine warren of streets that made up Prague’s Jewish ghetto.
The Babri Mosque too was divided in two, and served a dual purpose. After clashes between Hindus and Muslims over the site a boundary wall was erected that divided the grounds into two spaces, an inner courtyard where the Muslims prayed and a raised platform in the outer courtyard where the Hindus did.

The word “tympan,” according to Derrida, comes from an archaic French verb “tympaniser” meaning to criticize or to ridicule publicly. The hammer protects the tympan while acting upon it. The partition wall of the Babri mosque did not have a hammer to weaken the blows.
The unceasing, repetitive sound of moving water, ocean swells and river eddies, silences Lucie’s tinnitus, gives her the closest proxy to silence, produces the deepest sleep if she sleeps near that sound. Dr. McMenomey, our surgeon, our watcher for cholesteatomas, a tinnitus sufferer himself, recommends a white noise machine in the bedroom, the drone of which would soften the unceasing whirr in Lucie’s ear. She refuses this technology, this palliation, but at night, particularly if her ending day has been stressful, at night when the world quiets, her ear becomes a seashell held against an ear. It becomes an ocean, a whirlwind, a torment.

Drones are erroneously thought to be named for their droning sound but they get their name from bees, from male non-worker bees. These drones, hatched from an unfertilized egg, serve one purpose: to impregnate the queen. Seemingly mindless in their single-mindedness they inspired the namers of their unmanned mechanical cousins. Drones themselves, however, drone bees that is, were indeed named for their droning sound, the word drone coming from the Old English *dræn*, which depending upon whether the vowel was an á or an a (a point of, if not contention, then confusion), either comes from an older Old English word, *drane*: a monotonous hum or buzz, or an older Old High German word, *treno*: to resound or to boom.
Human drones both hum and buzz, *and* resound and boom. These drones will hover for days over a village unseen, known only by the unceasing repetitive drone they are known for. There is no escape from the sound, either inside one’s home or out in the world. Not even when one is asleep. The inexorable buzzing hum promises an eventual resounding boom, but no one knows when, where or who will be hit with the hellfire of the drone. Parents keep their children home from school, they avoid religious services, they skip funerals, they shun congregations of more than two men at a time, and try to remain fifty feet from strangers to avoid being killed by shrapnel in case the strangers are suspects of this unseen mindless drone. Whatever they do, they cannot escape the sound.

Bombs create waves: blast, stress, shock and sheer waves. Stress and shock waves are, like sound waves, longitudinal pressure waves, but faster than sound and with greater amplitude. Areas of the body with pressure differentials, areas that contain gas (the middle and inner ear, the lung, the bowel) are particularly vulnerable to the stress and shock of such waves. Amphibians were the first to develop a tympanic membrane, to create an air-filled interior space, to hear air-conducted sound. A rupture of this space by a wave, makes a human more like a fish, as if one were not hearing the unceasing sound of water, but hearing under it.
In some ways, I feel like we have switched places, that the blast wind has flipped the ones in the number eleven, that I am now circling myself, but not as myself. And the one circled is not me now but the me before the bombing. That Lucie has become that me, the constructor, and I have become Lucie, not the Lucie I see before me (who is now the 'before-Me’) but the Lucie of before, the whorl walker.

Everything feels surrogate now.

Scientists say that the reason trauma victims often can’t remember details right before the traumatic event is that memories take time to consolidate and fix themselves in the brain. An intense trauma will prevent memories just preceding it from consolidating. But I remember the details quite vividly of right before the bomb. It is right after—awake, alert— that I didn’t see, that my brain triaged away as I looked for Lucie. When I pull up some of the few photos of the aftermath of the bombing I both recognize them and I don’t. I know I never saw these images in real time, never experienced the scene these photos portray as anything but pictures on a computer screen. But like early memories of being a toddler, memories that could just as easily be surrogate memories of photos or movies of oneself at that age, these images of the ghat post-bombing flirt with primacy—even though I know they are merely loitering in a gap, a surrogate.
Even more unnerving is if I place these same photos alongside the first essay, “Third Ear,” that I published about the bombing, an essay written in media res, in the absence of a retrospective voice, shortly upon our return. In “Third Ear” I describe the photos I see on the computer screen just hours after the detonation: “An exploded staircase, an obliterated blue railing twisted beyond recognition. The ground splattered with spilled blood, littered with debris: an empty sandal, a green plastic bag, orange fruit spilling from it, a water bottle, a metallic bowl, chunks of cement.” On the computer I can find where each of these words arose from, and yet the relationship seems unstable between language and image. The photos, whatever color they have, are actually not colorful but drab, spectral, and bloodless (if not in content, in tone). And the assembly of these phenomena from multiple images into a unity, a coherence, a phonemic instance—I see now the things I had to suppress in those photos to make that language. The policemen, for instance, milling about these images, who arrived after we fled, standing there inert in the detritus, as I looked at their photos not long after making it to our guesthouse—were they still there, standing in that bloodless blood, as their reproductions showed up on the nearby guesthouse’s computer screen not long after we found shelter?

What is primary?

Has Lucie ever sought out these photos? If I were to place them before her would she recognize something in them? Perhaps more interesting would be to ask why I haven’t done so. Maybe whatever she is erecting is a temple to the primary, to the unrepresented, to the absent-thing—even if all I can see is an absent-Lucie.
Her unceasing tinnitus is the symptom that most divides our experiences. I wonder if that is what has led to her mute incuriousness. Or is it simply silence? Is there a difference? Perhaps the unrelenting noise in her ear sends her looking mutely for silence. It wasn’t until we watched a movie, years after the bombing, a movie with a bomb and the evocation of its effect on the protagonist’s ears, and Lucie paused the film and said “That is what it sounds like” that I had any idea what she was experiencing. A high-pitched whine, that felt like a drill bit whirling through metal. I was shocked, not by the violence on screen, but by the violence of that sound. I had forever assumed, presumed, something else entirely: the rumbling of a row of overfilled washing machines like that month I lived without eardrums. What kind of spell of incuriousness had we fallen under?
Because there is, of course, always the desire, the hope, that they are not two separate worlds, sound and silence, but that they become each other, that only our hearing fails—

Jorie Graham, *Some Notes on Silence*
In Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona*, the stage actress Elisabet is hospitalized when she has a mental collapse and stops speaking. Her nurse Alma reads to her from a letter from her husband and Elisabet tears up the photograph of her son that came with it. The movie opens with a dream-sequence that includes footage of the self-immolation of a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, the scene which again disturbs Elisabet when she sees it on the television screen in the hospital. The doctors suggest she might do better with her recovery at the coast and Alma is sent there with her. One of the only words Elisabet says in the film is the word “nothing.”

Susan Sontag says of Bergman’s film: “In *Persona*, muteness is first of all a fact with a certain psychic and moral weight, a fact which initiates its own kind of causality upon an ‘other.’”…“What is emotionally darkest in Bergman’s film is connected particularly with a sub-theme of the main theme of doubling: the contrast between hiding or concealing and showing forth.” Some interpretations of this film suggest that Elisabet and Alma are not different people but contradictory aspects of the same one.

A year post-surgeries we went for our hearing tests. Lucie’s hearing had unexpectedly worsened. They needed to rule out a growth—a tumor called an acoustic neuroma. They schedule an MRI. We are both anxious in anticipation of it, of the possible results but also of the procedure itself. The need to be confined in a narrow tube with loud noises. But when Lucie returns to the waiting room she says she loved being in the machine, being held and squeezed inside that tight space.
Blast wave researcher Dr. Iboja “Ibi” Cernak told the New York Times that “the blast covers the entire body…It has a squeezing effect. Ask soldiers what they felt: The first thing they say is that their ears were popped out, they were gasping for air, like some huge fist is squeezing them. The entire body is involved in that interaction”

“As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him,” said David Halberstam, one of the few journalists who witnessed Thích Quảng Đức’s self-immolation.

Bergman, speaking of the time in his life when he made Persona, said it was a “sort of truth-crisis that made me feel suddenly that I had to take a stand. What is truth and when does one tell the truth? It became so difficult that I thought the only form of truth is silence. And in the end, going a step further, I discovered that it, too, was a kind of mask. The need is to find a step beyond.”

If I’m honest, perhaps I’m the mute one. I’m writing about the bombing, looking into its causes, pulling up photos of it, worrying about cholesteatomas and investigating the different ways our brains and bodies may have been affected by all of this. But I haven’t been sharing what I’ve learned. We aren’t sitting around comparing notes. I’m not asking Lucie how her experience is different than mine. Up until the last several months, prior to her sleep architecture collapsing, we were managing the day to day. Living the
life of two recovered bombing victims with lots of tenderness and lots of sharing and lots of concern about everything in our lives but this.

Ingmar Bergman and the playwright August Strindberg could be considered doubles. Many of Bergman’s films find inspiration or pay homage to works by Strindberg. As such Bergman called Strindberg his “companion through life.” Strindberg’s one-act play “The Stronger” contains two women, both actors, Mrs. X and Miss Y. The entire play is a ‘conversation’ between the two, but only Mrs. X speaks. Miss Y is quiet throughout. In comparing “The Strongest” to Persona Sontag says, “The one who talks, who spills her soul, turns out to be weaker than the one who keeps silent. Language is presented as an instrument of fraud and cruelty.”

Maybe we were both actors, acting out our pre-gap personas, the masks that we knew each other as prior to the bomb? And now our masks had finally cracked.

While living in Japan Lucie once wrote: “I want to give you one Kanji I like: it reads ‘sora’ and it means sky or emptiness. It reads ‘shizuka’ and it means silence but it is made of two parts ‘blue’ and ‘to fight.’
Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded, there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, ‘This is he’ or ‘This is she.’—Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
The words we did not shout, the tears unshed, the curse we swallowed, the phrase we shortened, the love we killed, turned into magnetic iron ore, into tourmaline, into pyrate agate, blood congealed into cinnabar, blood calcinated, leadened into galena, oxidized, aluminized sulphated, calcinated, the mineral glow of dead meteors and exhausted suns in the forest of dead trees and dead desires—Anaïs Nin, *House of Incest*
I want to tell the whole truth, but I cannot tell the whole truth because I would have to write four pages at once, like four columns simultaneously, four pages to the present one and so I do not write at all. I would have to write backwards, retrace my steps constantly to catch the echoes and the overtones — *House of Incest*, Anaïs Nin

The partition for two hands is a bit difficult for me because you need big hands, and mine are very small. I wanted to record for you the way I played it because it is broken and arrhythmic because of my small hands and then you would have understood what I meant—Lucie Bonvalet

The fragment is an autobiography of the incurable.—Camelia Elias
During the eleven year gap, Lucie was asked to star in a silent film. Her role was that of a *foudroyée*, a woman struck by lightning.

A man working the night shift in a dilapidated hotel finds the fragment of a map. Meanwhile a woman becomes a *foudroyée* and falls into a river.

The man leaves his job, follows the landmarks on this map fragment and comes to a riverbank where he discovers a woman washed up on the shore.

Half-naked the *foudroyée* is wrapped in a woolen blanket. But as the blanket slips off her shoulder it reveals a torturous scar left by the lightning bolt, an intricate landscape of dark swollen tissue.

The movie ends as the man holds up his fragment to her back and realizes that together it completes the map.

Dubravka Ugrešić, writing about the Russian novelist Boris Pilnyak: “If Pilnyak’s story didn’t bear the blueprint of the fairy tale there is little doubt that it would be so believable.”

This dream-logic silent movie with a struck-down mute protagonist found and lifted up by the wound-map she herself provides is too improbable in its perfection to be believed, to be put in a book like this.
When I look into Lucie’s ear now I can no longer orient myself. I pull the auricle upward and backward as I do with all of my patients, insert the speculum in the canal and look for the typical landmarks to know where I am. But I cannot see the handle of the hammer, nor the light reflex known as the “cone of light,” nor distinguish the two general regions—the pars flaccida and the pars tensa—of a natural drum. I’m lost in whorls of reds and marbled yellows without a map to guide me.

The consequence of being adrift in this ear is that when Lucie feels a fullness in it (beyond the fullness we both feel from having these thick surrogate drums in them) I cannot rule out an ear infection, and we go to the surgeon. So far it is only false alarms.

The longest time elapsed between trauma and cholesteatoma formation is twenty-four years. I do not share this with Lucie. I read about more cases despite knowing better not to.

“A 51-year-old male first presented to the office 12 years ago with a recurrent left sided cholesteatoma for which he had previously undergone 5 separate surgeries for. By the time he was first seen in our office, he had a left sided complete facial paralysis…and a severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss. Over the subsequent 10 years, he underwent 3 different skull base surgeries …His facial movement never returned…”

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“For every knot my brain makes there is a disappearing, a sinking or a crash,” Lucie once wrote to me. “I want you to be the guardian of the knots in my brain. The protector of my nights.”

I don’t know where I am when I look into her ear.
primum non nocere

My first patient as a “primary” in the teaching clinic was an elderly man with prostate cancer. As the prescription from his conventional doctor had been ‘watchful waiting,’ he was an ideal patient for natural medicine. Nevertheless I was terrified to perform my first procedure. It didn’t help that the “secondary” observing me was my on-again off-again girlfriend Ginger, nor that the supervising doctor was a moody, intimidating man who wore a bolo tie and crocodile-skin boots. I didn’t believe in the food allergy test he wanted to perform, not only because of his lack of transparency around it but also because everyone always received, if not the same allergens, the same number of them. I was to take a tiny drop of blood from the patient’s earlobe with a small lancet and place it on a circular piece of blotting paper that the doctor would then perform some sort of opaque assessment upon. Yet when I pricked his ear it did not produce a drop of blood. Instead it leaked a river of red, streaking and branching down his perfectly white buttoned-down shirt. I froze in horror. The world froze with me, watching, waiting.

As a naive nineteen year-old pre-med student, I spent a summer working in a rural Kenyan hospital near the Ugandan border. One day a little girl came to the clinic with something stuck in her ear. The doctor wanted to irrigate the ear canal with water to wash the object out. Yet he did not explain this to the girl. Instead he appeared in the courtyard wearing his surgical mask and scrubs, wielding a formidable metallic syringe that surely looked to her like the world’s largest needle, not a glorified squirt gun. In utter panic, she was held down on a concrete bench while the doctor tried to irrigate her
ear canal. They could not hold her still enough to succeed. A sedative was administered by injection and she seemed to still. That is, until the tip of the metallic syringe touched the cartilage of her outer ear—then her body would suddenly flail in protest. A deeper stillness followed a second sedative injected. But the same spasmodic flinching returned when syringe met ear. A third sedative and a firmer grip steadied the girl’s head. The masked doctor switched to forceps and dug deep into her ear canal now. Blood rose out of it and pooled around the instrument as he did. The little girl lost her hearing in that ear, but he did retrieve the bean.
Once there was a Henry Shrapnel and a Henry Shrapnell. Twice there were Henrys, Shrapnel and Shrapnell. Both were British and both lived in England at the very same time.

Lieutenant General Henry Shrapnel was a British army officer and was the inventor of the anti-personnel weapon known as the shrapnel shell. His name has endured to now refer to any bomb or shell fragments thrown out by an explosion.

Henry Shrapnel’s contemporary, Henry Jones Shrapnell, was an anatomist most known for his discoveries in otology, the study of the ear. He was the first to accurately describe the tympanic membrane—the pars tensa and the pars flaccida in particular. The flaccid part of ear drum is also known as “Shrapnell’s membrane.”

The verb *foudroyer* can also mean to cease being, to be obliterated, to be blasted. Similar to the archaic French verb *tympaniser*, another connotation is “to stigmatize or shoot daggers at,” like lightning from one’s eyes. Shrapnel or other flying debris, like flying daggers, or bolts of lightning, are often the most lethal part of the explosion. Whether one is hit by shrapnel or not, when one is blasted (a “foudroyée”) one’s Shrapnell’s membrane often ceases to be.
Lucie and I both laugh at bombs in movies since the bombing. “He can’t hear now,” Lucie will say as our hero stands back up, clearly unharmed and able to hear. The effect of film bombs is purely visual, to blow a character off his feet so he can stand up again. There is no aftermath, aural or otherwise, to his body. It is a certain kind of movie car crash, instead, that causes our bodies to lurch, creating a sensorial dysequilibrium from which we need time to recover. If a character is driving straight forward, and a car outside the visual frame (ours and his) hits him from the side, unseen, if we witness him being hit without warning, without seeing the car that hit him, we have to stop the movie.

One theory why shell shock arose during World War I and not before is because, for the first time, artillery fire was coming from a remote location, unseen. Soldiers had nothing to do but hunch down in the trenches and wait. It was thought that this loss of agency, this loss of control, was behind the rise of shell shock, that and what shells did to the the human body. Being killed by a bullet had more dignity, as one’s body remained intact, recognizable, whole. Some victims of shell shock, thought to be cowards or sufferers of male hysteria, were executed by firing squad.

Virginia Woolf knew several poets, Siegfried Sassoon and her brother-in-law Philip among them, who suffered shell shock during the war. “I can imagine that he is puzzled why he doesn’t feel more,” she said upon seeing Philip shortly after he was wounded by the shell that killed his brother Cecil. Modernist writers, breakers of the novel’s
conventions, fragmenters of time’s linearity, were drawn to the shellshocked veteran as modernity’s avatar. The shellshocked poet in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith, had temporary paralysis. The birds spoke to him in Greek. He was both on fire and numb. He saw madness everywhere he looked. In the end he leapt after it, into it, through it, and to his death, out a window.

Some ancient coffins have been found to contain hundreds and hundreds of shells, shells buried along with their human bodies head to foot, the shell an allegory for a grave from which one will one day awaken, resurrection shells. Both the inner and outer ear, the cochlea and the auricle, are spiraled like shells, a shell nested within a shell, one the heart and/or coffin of the other. I did not hear the bomb nor did I see it explode. It was outside my visual frame, to my right. There was no warning but for the blast wind on my pant leg and an interior whisper, a pop-puff, when the shock wave vaporized my ear drum. Some time later, I stood up again. Just like in the movies.
Blast waves that occur in an “ideal free field,” that is, in air and in open space, will follow the Friedlander waveform equation, which describes the pressure of the blast wave as a function of time

\[ P(t) = P_s e^{-\frac{t}{t^*}} \left( 1 - \frac{t}{t^*} \right) \]

The consequence of the blast wave’s direct interaction with the human body is called a primary blast injury. Gas-containing body cavities—the ear, lung, and bowel—are the prime victims of primary blast wave injuries. Blast lung, intestinal hemorrhage, tympanic membrane rupture, if they occur in unenclosed spaces, in an ideal free field, one that allows the shockwave to follow the Friedlander waveform equation in an ideal free field, tend to be confined to the epicenter of the blast.

As sufferers of primary blast injuries we likely were standing in an ideal free field near the epicenter of the blast.

Bombs in an enclosed space— a bus, a subway, a pub—create complicated shock waves of longer duration and augment the total blast load. The incidence of death from a bomb in an enclosed space is many times higher than in an open space. Injuries are also more
severe. Primary blast wave injuries, secondary blast wave injuries (projectiles from the bomb or energized from its blast wave) and tertiary blast wind injuries (the displacement of body parts from the collapse of walls or buildings).

The Italian who lost limbs suffered tertiary injuries. The girl, hit and killed by flying concrete while sitting in her mother’s lap, suffered secondary ones.

If the bomb had been bigger we would be…
If there had been a wave-complicating wall on the other side of us…
If the bomb had been indoors…

We had stood in an ideal free field

We were lucky

but we wouldn’t have needed it if not for me.
Ideal free field

The morning before the bombing we were standing in a different sort of ideal free field. A field in Sarnath, the town where the Buddha, after achieving Enlightenment, gave his first sermon. A sermon on right living.

Pilgrims and tourists alike come to the dome-shaped Buddhist shrine, the *stupa*, carved of stone in that open, furrowed field in Sarnath. Japanese Buddhists were praying there when we arrived, circumambulating the stupa in a clockwise fashion, taking their pictures in front of it. And I wanted to take Lucie’s in front of it as well.

*I’m not comfortable taking pictures here, not while they are praying*

But they are themselves!

*It just doesn’t seem right*

I’ll make sure I do it when they are circling the backside of the stupa.

*No*

I pushed. *And pushed.* She relented. She stood before this holy relic but as the embodiment of fury. The irony didn’t escape me that we marched around this field for
much of the afternoon separate from each other, fighting from a distance, on the very site where the Buddha taught The Middle Way, the Eight-Fold Path, on the sacred land where this shrine had been erected to compassionate listening.

Later that afternoon Lucie was taking a nap. I was anxious to walk the shores of the Ganges, to see the nightly Hindu puja ceremony, one we hadn’t seen yet, this being only our third day in the country. I cajoled her with the same pushy energy as I had pushed her that morning. And we went that day and not another. The date, unbeknownst to us, that the Hindus had destroyed the Babri mosque. The day Muslims would retaliate at a Hindu ceremony.

Again, I pressured Lucie, this time with no less absurdity, to go to a ceremony in honor of Shakti, the divine feminine. I had pressured Lucie and toyed with too many gods in the process.

The Friedlander waveform equation describes this pressure as a function of time:

\[ P(t) = P_s e^{-\frac{t}{t^*}} \left(1 - \frac{t}{t^*}\right) \]
Buddhists claim that the Babri Mosque was built not on the ruins of a Hindu temple but a Buddhist one. Even so, Buddhists seem to be to the side of this battle between Hindu and Muslim for this consecrated land. Sarnath, the Buddhist pilgrimage city, sits quietly and distinctly apart from all that makes nearby Varanasi, the Hindu holy city, Varanasi. People come to Varanasi to cleanse themselves in the Ganges, a river that despite the industrial effluent, trash, dead cows and human corpses floating through its waters, is pure and purifying. But people also come to Varanasi to die. If we had died and been cremated there, we would’ve achieved moksha, release from the karmic wheel of death and rebirth. Because of this possibility, ailing and elderly Hindu pilgrims wait out their final days near the open-air human corpse pyres along the banks of the river, while others remove the purified rib cages of men, the purified pelvises of women from the embers to drop them in the pure and purifying waters of the river.

In the sleepy and peaceful town of nearby Sarnath, when we weren’t marching across its grounds in anger, we were marveling upon the remarkably long and pendulous ears of the Buddha in the town’s temples. Even when the Buddha was reclined he often had his hand near his ear as if listening. The size of his ears demonstrates his ability to hear the world’s suffering and respond compassionately to it, it shows his capacity for compassion. But his ears also symbolize a past of material wealth, of wearing heavy jewels that stretched his lobes, his now unadorned ears a sign of his renunciation of material possessions.
Back in Varanasi the bodies are cremated at the very ghat where the Goddess Parvati hid her earrings from her partner, the transformer and destroyer, Lord Shiva. Frustrated with him for always being with his devotees, she hid the earrings and asked him to find them. Legend has it that every time a body is cremated, Lord Shiva asks the soul whether it has seen Parvati’s earrings.

Buddhism offers no such linear set of actions—dying in a specific place and being cremated there—to break from the wheel of life and death. In fact, much of what one does to try to avoid a reincarnation happens after one is dead, in the the intermediate state between two of one’s lives, in the “bardo.” There is only one portal into this otherworldly battle for liberation, one portal into the bardo: the human ear.
The high heavens were full of little shrunken deaf ears instead of stars

—Charles Simic

And in the porches of my ears did pour

The leperous distilment

—the Ghost to Hamlet, Act I Scene
Tibetan Buddhists believe hearing is the last sense to go, that after the heart stops, the hammers in the ear are still beating. Tibetan lamas will, once a person stops breathing, shout instructions into the ear every day for forty nine days (the length of time one’s consciousness lingers in the gap—the bardo—between lives). These instructions are often referred to, inaccurately in English, as the Tibetan Book of the Dead. A better translation would be “The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo” or “The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State” or “The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Gap.”

These instructions are read to the already dead because the principal experience of being between lives is not being sure of one’s ground, of living without a map.

“It is nearly one o’clock in the morning I think. But I am not sure because I lost my watch in the bus weeks ago. I lost my keys too that very day. I guess I wanted another kind of time and another kind of place very badly. Those things happen when you don’t want to be where you are and do the things you do,” Lucie once wrote.

The biggest challenge for the disembodied soul is to recognize that all that one sees, all that one encounters, that every way in which one tries to orient oneself in the bardo, and that all the deities encountered there, are merely projections of one’s mind. If one doesn’t recognize this, the mind will become more and more solid and enter a new form, and the peaceful deities there will become wrathful, sprouting eyes and heads and arms,
drinking from skulls full of blood, roaring like thunder. The first sound in the bardo is “a thousand thunders roaring simultaneously.”

“I dug a very deep hole inside my head and buried myself into it. And what is left of me in this hotel room is a broken puppet, with a heartache and the headache is the most human thing about her. For the rest she only uses monosyllabic answers and never asks questions and never asserts anything. She is busy dematerializing herself but so far has failed. She can’t even sleep. She can’t even cry properly. And all her other bodily functions have been altered. She is busy anticipating the fact that she is going to go apple picking soon for money and she thinks it is an appropriate desire for a puppet, such a mechanical action,” Lucie’s body once wrote.

On the fourth day of the bardo one will encounter the Creator of Sound, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who represents the sound of emptiness. The sound of emptiness is the source of all words.
I wonder if the original difference, the first crack in our shared experience, a hairline split now grown into a chasm, is this: my first memory of waking up was one of not knowing, of scanning the rubble for Lucie, of seeing her body curled up on its side, of running in slow motion toward that body, of yelling the body’s name, of not knowing until I shook that body whether it was just a body or something more. And that Lucie’s first memory was that of waking up to a familiar face, a living face, a face calling a word she knew, her name, of a hand, a known hand, lifting her up, of a known hand guiding her out.

The sound of emptiness is the source of all words.

If Lucie had been dead the Tibetan Buddhists believe she would’ve still heard my calls, the hammers in her ears still beating her name in the Bardo. If Lucie had been a Tibetan Buddhist butter, oil, sugar and various grains would’ve been offered along with her body into a fire. Her belongings would have been auctioned off to the inhabitants of her village. Her ashes would’ve been carried up the mountain by her family to be left for the gods. This would all have been done before the end of the 49 days of the Bardo. The chanting of the Bardo would continue even after the body was no longer there. On the final day of chanting the family would gather and pray for a fortunate birth.

The sound of emptiness is the source of all words.
I imagine that Lucie woke to a more coherent world than I did. I took care of the logistics of our exodus from Varanasi—of getting friends to alert the hospital in Portland of our arrival, to have someone pick us up when we landed and take us straight to the doctors—while Lucie slept. I emailed my family, our cat sitter, confirmed our meeting with the head of otolaryngology at Oregon Health Sciences University, during our interminable layover in Amsterdam while Lucie slept curled up on her side among our luggage in the same gesture of death she had assumed in the rubble less than a day before.

The sound of emptiness is the source of all words.

Perhaps Lucie never woke up. Perhaps this is when she began to construct her shell, as mine lay in pieces. The wood-block text of the Bardo, if carefully wrapped, is also kept in pieces, as unbound pages between two boards. Lucie used to write strange wondrous fragmentary texts. I fell in love with Lucie first through her words, wondering all the same, whether one could, whether when I saw her again after eleven years, I would love the writer of them, or discover I had conjured a ghost. But she does not write now. She is no longer the writer of these letters. The letters whose unbound pages I gathered together to sort through, these tossed bread crumbs back to the Lucie I knew before.

(The sound of emptiness is the source of all words.)
“You know what none of us know until we have died. You were dead in the beginning.”
—Djuna Barnes, Nightwood

Memories are formed in the gap, in the mapless space, the bardo between two neurons.
This is called a synapse. A synapse is both a structure and a gap, an absence and a thing.

Lucie used to live in a mapless gap. She never wanted to be oriented in space. When she lived in Japan, she loved not being able to read the signs, to drift through an indecipherable cityscape from one not-knowing to another.

“I can tell there is nearly no ink left in my pen. I am hungry. I remember the letters you used to write to me many years ago on rainy foggy Portland afternoons in cafes….Later on back home I made some licorice and mint herbal tea, and I am cooking apples with honey. The smell is soothing and like a friendly presence. Also I am listening to an Arabic radio, so as to make sure that for now my idiocy is preserved. I want to check the movies schedule….This evening I have chosen not to go out and finish my letter to you, though it is never-ending. But it scares me to have to confront your absence in such a way. Your absence, my void.”

I wonder—I suspect—that this desire to preserve idiocy is why she was offended by my emails from Ethiopia. Not only because she was addressed as part of a group, in a group email, that my words were not chosen, specified, for her, but that whenever I encountered
a gap in my understanding, an inexplicable thing or encounter, I would try to fill it with meaning.

“There is a Russian saying: “the idiot did not know it was impossible, so he did it.” I think when we met I had that idiotic quality. I did not know it was impossible to love you. So I loved you. But you were wise.”

This idiocy does not just create a mapless space, a synaptic indwelling, an unmoored wandering within the bardo, but a relationship to time much like that in dreams. In her dream book Lucie says that time is spatialized in dreams. That the boundary between time and space, past and present is collapsed in dreams. “Loss in fiction orders itself following three main axes: temporal, divine, spatial. The dream marks the nodal point of the loss’ order. The child, the mystic, the exile present the three faces of loss,” Lucie also says.

I wonder if the preservation of idiocy and the benefits that come with it, an elongated present moment of hungers and sensations, the falling away of past and future, or the collapsing of both into an attended to present moment, is why Lucie has always had trouble with memory. That whatever she feels in a given moment she feels as if she has always felt it. That she can’t also, at the same time, hold the memory of how often she has had this feeling previously, when she has felt it last, or what she has felt in between. The present feeling erases all that.
We used to believe that explosive blasts affected the brain the same way concussions do, that a victim of explosive blasts was concussed, that like concussion survivors, blast wind victim injuries can lead to chronic traumatic encephalopathy and ultimately dementia. Dementia is a class of diseases leading to an inability to think or remember. To be demented is to be literally “out of one’s mind.”

The brains of blast victims are not concussed and do not lead to the same sequelae as concussions. There is not a build-up of protein in the brain but a dust-like scarring. This brown dust-like pattern is unique to the brains of blast victims. And this pattern appears in the part of the brain most associated with sleep and cognition. This scar of dust, this dust scar, runs along a border between matters: gray matter with its neurons and their synaptic gaps, and white matter with its bundles that connect and send messages to various parts of the brain.

The Japanese have a concept called “Ma” that is difficult to translate into English, that resists fully being comprehended with words. Some translate it as ‘gap’ or ‘pause,’ others as ‘place’ or ‘negative space.’ Ma exists not within structural elements but between them. Ma requires the subjective experience of one present to the place or moment, it is a felt presence. Ma is/occurs in this space-pause. This space-pause is substantial. It is a substance.
“The dual relation of ma to space and time is not simply semantic. It reflects the fact that all experience of space is a time-structured process, and all experience of time is a space-structured process.”—Gunter Nitschke

Lucie was a cultivator and seeker of ma, of what Isaac Stern called "the silence between the notes which make the music.” Is it the tinnitus, the eradicator of silence that has led Lucie to create a ma-less space post-bombing?

The sound of emptiness is the source of all words.

When I think of synapses and gaps and ma, I think paradoxically of Emily Dickinson, of the ways she filled the gaps between words with meaning. Of Dickinson’s dashes. Only recently have we been able to read her the way she wrote. Her idiosyncracies—unconventional capitalization, lineation and punctuation, the way she wrote within the confines of various shapes she created from envelopes, and most notably her dashes—were often edited to conform to conventional syntax. Even her dashes were not really dashes, they were longer than the standard em dash and functioned differently than them. Perhaps they represented the substance of space.

Then—close the valves of her attention—like stone
When orchestra is dumb—And Ear—and Heaven—numb—
I know that even the memory has weight. Once in the war I saw a dead horse that had been lying long against the ground. Time and the birds, and its own last concentration had removed the body a great way from the head. As I looked upon that head, my memory weighed for the lost body; and because of that missing quantity even heavier hung that head along the ground. So love, when it has gone, taking time with it, leaves a memory of its weight.

—Djuna Barnes, Nightwood
When Lucie was still in France, waiting to come here, she drew a map in colored pencils for us, of us, a map we still have framed by our bed today. It has no straight lines other than the river of sleep and recognition that divides the map in two. Otherwise it is fluid and wave-like, a watery map of the shore. In fact, the sun on this map is called “the ocean-sun.” It is crowned by a star and is accompanied by smaller globes mysteriously labeled “the shapes that replaced the sun.”

Much of the map is an anti-map, a map of things without names: “an extinct volcano without name,” “the green bare anger tree and its unique fruit of wisdom from an unknown species,” “a small island full of light and sloths yet to be discovered and named.” And the map has a legend that orients one not only to space (N,S,E,W) but also to time (moving up the map one moves away from yesterday and toward tomorrow).

In Lucie’s book the spatialization of time is one of the key components of oneiric fiction, the fiction of dreams. She quotes Jean Rhys about her own work written like a dream: “the story never told straight, time and place abolished, past and present the same.” And Helene Cixous: “A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending; there’s no closure, it doesn’t stop…A feminine text starts on all sides, all at once, starts twenty times, thirty times, over.” And Anais Nin from House of Incest: “I want to tell the whole truth, but I cannot tell the whole truth because I would have to write four pages at once, like four columns simultaneously, four pages to the
present one and so I do not write at all. I would have to write backwards, retrace my steps constantly to catch the echoes and the overtones.”

There is endless movement and possibility on Lucie’s map, many trails and rivers and seas. But the left side of the map is decidedly darker than the right. Its landmarks include Mount Despair, the “swamps of what has been forgotten,” “the green bare anger tree” and most notably, the longest serpentine path on the entire map “the angoisse trail” which begins at the “southern frozen lake called desire” and is interrupted at a “broken bridge baptized ‘eleven’” along the banks of the unswerving river of sleep and recognition. On the other side of this unfordable river are all sorts of delights, most notably the “Lucid Opened Voluble Exceptional Express Flying Bikes Highway” and “La Fôret des Lucioles”, the forest of fireflies, a grove of trees seen from above, an alluring yellow glow filling the gaps in the canopy from below. It is by moving up or down the map, not left to right or right to left, that moves one through time, thus these darker and brighter landmarks/space-time marks occur simultaneously in time no matter where you are.

“O god, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams”—Hamlet

The river of sleep and recognition spills down the map from the future to the past, coming forth from the usurped ocean-sun. The river serves as a horizon of sorts, a horizon brought from the margins to the center of our landscape-timescape. At any given
time one could be at Mount Despair or a small island full of light and sloths, trudging through the swamps of what has been forgotten or in a red boat on the inviting swell of the spoon-sea. But how did one get from one to the other, when the bridge over the horizon is broken, when by definition a horizon, no matter how central, is always just out of reach?

In physics an event horizon is the boundary at which the gravity of something massively dense prevents all escape. It is a shell composed of points of no return. To an observer, someone approaching this shell, this horizon, appears to slow down as he approaches it, slows down and never reaches it. Yet he does reach it, this grave place that slows time, this place of sleep and recognition, to the edge of a broken bridge over a horizon. And if he breaks through this shell there is no going back, there is no going back from the pull of the black hole, the pull of an absent-thing. Not even light, not even the light of a forest full of fireflies can escape it.

I have maps. The map of how to read her book, the dark tortured half-map of a foudroyéé, and a space-time map of us beside our bed. 2.5 maps. But what am I oriented to? A map that hopscotches through a book, a half-map of swollen skin rivers, and a map that spatializes time?

Perhaps the ear is the shell of no return, the maps dream maps based on dream-logic, but not just dream maps, but maps of otherness, based not on logic, dream-logic or otherwise, but on an anti-order of otherness, and that listening to the other, was the way not past the
shell, the gap, but the way, not forward or backward, but the way to spiral-circle on the wave-like meandering path.
Oracular Physics

The Trumpet Place
by Paul Celan

deep in the glowing
empty-text
at torch-height,
in the time-hole:

listen in
with the mouth.
A big misconception is that a black hole is made of matter that has just been compacted to a very small size. That’s not true. A black hole is made from warped space and time

—Kip Thorne
When finally she switched brushes and painted a drop of blood at the hollow center of the sun on my wrist, there was a first explosion

Two girls. Street girls. The younger girl, perhaps six years old, offered to paint designs on Lucie’s hands. Undeterred by our “no thank yous” she opened a box of tiny glass bottles full of colored ointments. She quickly dipped a small metallic instrument in a purple dye, and then, before we could move on, pressed it upon the back of Lucie’s hand creating a stylized circle. Lucie looked up, met my eyes, and smiled a helpless but happy smile.

The girl dipped another instrument in a silver ointment and began to create a radial pattern, like a flower or a sun, but she was soon pushed aside by a taller girl. “She’s my sister,” the older one said as she continued the interrupted pattern on my wife’s hand, a pattern she would never finish.

One dead. Thirty-Eight Injured. A small bomb. A small bombing event. Small enough, common enough, not to make the news or newspapers in the states. A bomb though—enough of a ripple in the everyday to make it online, in passing, in the U.S.

We fled. We weren’t one of the dead or one of the thirty eight. We fled unreported.
Our guest house was full of fleeing others, some physically injured, others traumatized witnesses, none of whom were one of the thirty eight.

The stone staircase of the ghat rose up from the river shore to my right, above and behind me. Several steps up stood a sadhu—a religious ascetic who has renounced the world in pursuit of moksha, release from it—and several goats. Above all of us were throngs of migratory birds from Central Asia’s Pamir mountains being fed by the river’s boatmen. Under the steps was a bomb. The staircase upon which the sadhu stood no longer exists. The sadhu is not one of the reported dead. He is not the girl sitting in her mother’s lap struck my flying concrete debris.

Our taxi driver the next morning who drove us and two other uncounted hearing impaired travelers to the airport to flee, also could not hear properly in one ear since the blast the day before. He was not one of the thirty eight.

A couple attending the ganga aarti by the river with their young daughter used the bombing and the mayhem that ensued as an opportunity to abandon their child there. Days later they were found elsewhere and arrested. The daughter was not counted among the thirty eight wounded that day.

And the street girls? Were they two of the thirty eight? Or did they run? Or did they die and their deaths, as homeless parentless children, not merit reporting?
And those who saw, from boats in the river, or from windows in temple walls, and those who knew the wounded and live with them now, or those who pulled people from the rubble or from beneath the feet of a stampede of the panicked, those whose bodies are intact, entire....

What formula would account for the immense effect of a small bomb. Should 38 be 76, 380, 760? How much should we extend our concern?
What formula would account for the immense effect of a small bomb. Should 38 be 76, 380, 760, 3800, 7600? How much should we extend our concern?

And just how exceptional is being a bomb victim, how lucky were we that this was so novel, so exceptional for us?
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A black hole can only be observed by its effects.
Shadows

A man is whole only when he takes into account his shadow as well as himself—and what is a man’s shadow but his upright astonishment?—Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

That night is only the background of our selves,/Supremely true each to its separate self,/In the pale light that each upon the other throws.
—Wallace Stevens, from *Re-statement of Romance*
The long shadows of the trees, like skeletons, and others like spiders, and others like octopuses.

—Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*
Everything was reversed. After visiting each other overseas in Portland and in Paris a handful of times it eventually became clear we needed to get married to be able to date, to be able to see if this was going to work out. Lucie couldn’t find someone to sponsor her for a work visa and I was tied to a long-standing medical practice in Portland. She had no sentiment toward the institution of marriage and so for her it seemed like the obvious thing to do. But doing this went against my very nature.

In the meantime, each of Lucie’s visits was becoming more fraught. It was during the Iraq war, a war France had vocally opposed. It was the time of French fries renamed as “freedom fries,” of the History Channel advertising a show on the French Revolution with the slogan “You Can Stand the French for Just One Hour.” With each subsequent time Lucie came to visit, it raised more suspicions about why she was coming. She’d be pulled aside to wait in a windowless clockless room where they’d interrogate her motives and activities, who she knew and how. The visiting became increasingly untenable.

Not until I was faced with this, with the prospect of not seeing what was or wasn’t there with Lucie if we didn’t get married, did I realize I’d been living according to a love plan. Yes, I always dreamed of a wedding, of a meeting of clans, of a public ceremony witnessed by family and friends from both sides. But my love plan saturated all of my life-long love decisions. I’d had three relationships of three or more years and yet never lived with a girlfriend, always feeling that the relationship had to prove something of itself, that it was solid, that it was sturdy, that it was safe, that it had a future, before I’d
take the next step. Living with someone was never just living with someone. Something that could be fun, preferred, pleasurable, part of the exploration, an experiment.

I thought at least it would be simple—if not emotionally, then logistically—when we got engaged. But our lives took a sharp turn into the surreal, as my fiancée was now a prospective immigrant. She could only visit for brief periods if she could prove she had a job or property in France that compelled her to return there. She had neither. I researched on the internet and realized there was no uniform answer to how long this would take. If our petition wasn’t rejected we would be together again sometime between six and eighteen months later.

During our separation the bizarre became the norm. Are you a Nazi? Have you ever been a member of the Communist party? Have you prostituted yourself? Are you a spy? (Surely a question that catches a large number of spies). Lucie was asked all of these questions as part of our appeal for her to become a ‘conditional permanent resident alien.’

During almost a year of separation we navigated a labyrinthine immigration bureaucracy that seemed designed to defeat you. The INS was now under the new post-9/11 Department of Homeland Security and they hadn’t updated their forms. Only at the website could you learn that the fees were different than what the forms stated. And the website had conflicting fees itself. Our application, a veritable bureaucratic tome of multiple copies of everything—forms, passports, photos, birth certificates, certified translations, money orders and letters—the letters we had written over the past eleven
years—came back unprocessed. We had paid the wrong amount. If we had paid twenty
dollars less we could’ve saved ourselves three weeks.

“Chariman, allow me to interrupt you with a question,” said K,
“did you mention a control agency?”…

“Only a stranger could ask such a question. Are there control
agencies? There are only control agencies. Of course they aren’t meant to
find errors, in the vulgar sense of that term, since no errors occur, and
even if an error does occur, as in your case, who can finally say that it is
an error.”

Every form had, if not errors, unanswerable questions. When applying for “advance
parole” (permission for Lucie to visit her family in Europe if and when she was accepted
as a conditional resident alien) the website and the forms again contradicted each other.
And these contradictions oddly were ear-specific. Were we to use photographs that were
a three-fourths view of the right ear—our as-of-yet unbombed right ear—fully exposed
(\textit{fully exposed} a detail emphasized strongly in the instructions) or were we to do a “full-
frontal” view of the face as suggested by the website only in the last two weeks? We
stumbled upon internet communities meticulously studying every form, every ambiguity.
Post a question about 47A part II on the I-485 supplement and the same day learn that
Lucie is a c-9 not an a-6 alien.
We both were fluent in English, well-educated, could manage the mounting fees, had navigated plenty of bureaucracies in our lifetimes and yet the simplest questions became riddles. We heard horror stories about people who were denied because they answered ‘none’ instead of ‘not applicable.’ A request as seemingly straightforward as ‘please list your previous spouses’ was a question of great anxiety. None? Or not applicable? How did people who weren’t white or from Europe, who didn’t have computer access or enough money, who couldn’t speak English well enough to parse the nuances of these errorless forms, how did they navigate this?
…and the auricle of a large ear seems to be listening for its sounds.

—Walter Benjamin, on Kafka’s childhood portrait
Everything is reversed. Both the Federal government and state government love us. They check in on us, unprompted—how are you doing? how are you feeling?—and answer questions promptly and with little to no ambiguity. Two American (one ‘natural,’ one ‘naturalized’) bombing victims, we were victims of the terrible other, we were family, and family takes care of one’s own.

The biggest uncertainty is who will pay, the state or the Feds, both willing and eager, for our emergency flights home, our surgeries, our follow-up care, our therapy. ‘Don’t worry, we’ll figure it out between us’ they say. ‘Don’t sweat the details.’

The only significant inquiry they did was to verify that we had indeed been in a bombing and that that bombing qualified as terrorism. They sent two FBI agents to our home, two men who looked like boys in FBI costumes, the same blazers and reflective glasses the Feds wear on TV, but this time with agents struggling mightily to produce facial hair to cover their acne.

I wondered if I had an FBI file. I’d had a lifetime of activism: anti-apartheid, WTO & IMF protests, Jewish organizing against the occupation, and most recently a collaboration with the Federal public defenders office who were representing several Guantanamo detainees. These prisoners were detained indefinitely, with no promise of a trial, speedy or otherwise, and most notably no right to see the evidence against them, despite the constitutional guarantees of anyone held by the U.S. government. With no recourses left,
one of these lawyers had decided something had to happen outside the box, outside the
defined acceptable behavior of a lawyer. He went to Guantanamo and recorded a video
appeal directly to the public about the situation. He uploaded it to a new video-sharing
site called You Tube and it went viral and became the news.

With two other writers I set up a meeting with the public defenders, and learned that they
were a bit flummoxed about the next step, given how all the typical options of a lawyer in
a world that wasn’t turned inside out had been legally or illegally withheld. It turned out
we’d have much more leeway as citizens to collaborate with them, using the information
they had gathered but disseminating it and promoting it as a separate group. Project
Hamad was born to highlight the violations of habeas corpus under Bush, by telling the
story of the Sudanese Guantanamo inmate Adel Hamad, a hospital administrator, a lover
of ping pong, a father who had missed the birth of a daughter and the death of another
while in prison.

These were the same public defenders who defended Brandon Mayfield, a lawyer in
Portland, Oregon, and a Muslim, who was accused of the terrorist bombing in Madrid.
Despite Mayfield having never been to Spain, the FBI claimed they had a “bullseye
match” with his fingerprint. It was an incontrovertible truth until it wasn’t, until it was
analyzed by Spanish authorities. As we sat with our two boyish FBI agents I wondered if
it would’ve been better to be interviewed by Kafka himself. One of two token Jews
employed at the Workman’s Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in
Prague, Kafka was tasked with reducing the rate of industrial accidents. Kafka was personally responsible for saving hundreds of lives.
Primum Non Nocere

Everything was reversed. Lucie and I were bombed by a doctor. Dr. Shahnawaz Alam who practiced medicine in a private hospital in Lucknow was the one who planted the bomb under the stairwell in Varanasi. Just after the detonation Dr. Alam sent an email, claiming responsibility, with his prescription in the subject line:

“Let’s Feel the Pain Together.”

Dr. Shahnawaz Alam, one of the most wanted of the Indian Mujahideen, now lives in Pakistan or Nepal or Dubai or Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia. Dr. Alam is also charged with involvement in the bomb blasts in Varanasi in 2005, Mumbai in 2006 and Delhi in 2008.

Some describe Dr. Alam as an Unani doctor. Unani medicine, like Western medicine, traces its roots to Greece and the medical philosophy of Hippocrates. It evolved into a Perso-Arabic traditional system widely practiced in the world of medieval Islam, and across Pakistan and India today. Introduced into India in the 13th century it rose to ascendancy under Emperor Babur who invited many Unani doctors to India, and paid the salaries of twenty-nine Unani physicians himself.

One can still see Unani’s Greek roots in that it is based on Hippocrates’ system of four humors. Thus our prescribing physician would be a practitioner of Humorism, of the
balancing of phlegm, blood, yellow bile and black bile. Excess in yellow bile is believed to cause aggression, excess in black bile depression. “Black bile” comes from the Greek “melaina kholé” from which the word melancholy derives.
Maybe *everything* is reversed. Maybe it is not Lucie in denial, still asleep, but me.

Maybe this book is an elaborate lie.

Maybe I am not circling an absent-thing to learn how to live with it. Maybe I am circling Lucie to not have to look at an absent-thing. Maybe I am circling Lucie to avoid looking at myself. Maybe my concern for her is a way to run away from something that resisted meaning, that is a no-thing. Maybe I am the incurious shell-constructor and Lucie no different than ever before.

Maybe this book is the labor of that lie.

Lucie has always seemed hermetic, encrypted, out-of-time. This was the source of my attraction. And my exasperation. This was her genius and her wound. Whenever she expressed her feelings she rarely referenced her past, our past, our collective histories. She had to be reminded of them. To encounter them anew. She did not shape the present but assumed the shape of it. The present erased the past, or was lived as if ever-present, was lived as if it would always be present, in a dream-space abstracted from time and geography. There was a way in which she inhabited this ever-presence where I’d sometimes feel erased, the security of a history together would feel erased when I was asked to be her memory rather than being myself remembered. But this was Lucie’s glory too. Her fierce unmoored glory of sensorial surrender. This produced the language that I fell in love with in letters. Letters which created feeling that resisted meaning.
And maybe this is where the lie begins. That Lucie sits now silently in the fractured unnameable meaning-resistant now of a life post-bombing because there are no words for it. But why be afraid of that void? Cherish it, she once wrote to me. And maybe there is the rub. That I simply cannot understand her comfort in such a world. Perhaps I am continuing to name and she is continuing to be bewildered and the only thing that has changed since the bomb is me fooling myself that it has reversed.
“I always want to travel in the same way I used to love you as a teenager: a teenage passion—something aimless, endless gnawing at your soul, changing you, structuring you and eventually bringing you closer to the truth.”
Now I believe I was angry at you because I sensed that will of yours to embrace, to name, to explain, to master with reason. It is not humble…what if you let go? in a completely passive way you let the alien surroundings embrace you, name you, change you…?
I do have my own ear symptoms—a pressure, a thickness, a sense of deep-in-the-head wrongness. I do have moments of dread and melancholy wash over me every day since the bombing. I do relive the long indeterminate instant I thought Lucie might’ve been dead, that last attenuated moment when my hand and my voice would answer my question one way or the other. I do feel out of step with the world, experience an alienation, a physical ache, when we sit across from each other at a restaurant and cannot hear each other’s words. But I keep these things to myself. This isn’t new. This isn’t a post-bombing characteristic of mine. None of this is as bad as what I imagine Lucie’s symptoms are but even if they were worse I’d still focus on her pain. I always have been this way. Front and center is my desire for her to not have to suffer tinnitus, the daily assault of it. If I could take it from her, if I could suffer it, suffer it and not speak of it, I would.

I don’t think of this as noble or selfless—it wasn’t, it isn’t—but rather as something in me that is broken.

Growing up my in Boulder, Colorado my surroundings were alien and they had named me and changed me as Lucie had later asked of me in her letter, but to let that happen, to invite it to in “a completely passive way,” to let the “alien surroundings embrace me,” would’ve felt like suicide. The originating moment, if not temporally, than psychically, involved our neighbors from West Virginia. One of my classmates from that house would walk behind me on the way to elementary school, kick me every couple steps and
call me a dirty Jew. Eventually, my father made me go with him to their house, to confront him and his mother. His mother was not distressed by this revelation about her son. Quite the contrary. It was logically impossible that her son could have done this act, because, as she put it, “he doesn’t even know what a Jew is.”

Ten cul de sacs formed a dead-end horseshoe, spilling students into an elongated oval of green space, an intermediate emergent place from which we all walked to elementary school. Soccer practice happened there, pick-up games of Nerf football too. But mainly it was a place of uncertainty—who would appear, when and from where?—a space to get through, to survive. Kids often waited for me after school to ambush me. They hid behind grassy mounds or rocky outcrops for I was a choice target to be beaten up or ‘white washed,’ head jammed face first into the snow, snow stuffed down the back of my shirt and pants.

Going to and from school, by foot or on my Big Wheel, terrified me. I’d often rush home so unnerved, so out of sorts, that I couldn’t open the front door to my own house, not quick enough to avoid, on my very own doorstep, just moments away from privacy and dignity, peeing my pants. I was cursed by this public confession of my body. Wetting my bed long after it was normal, having accidents with regularity in school, remaining forever cross-legged on the carpet after story time, not wanting to reveal the wet bulls-eye I sat square in the middle of.
Was I targeted because I was a Jew or because of my awkwardness and shame? I couldn’t separate the two. They were one and the same. When one of the few other Jews at school, one even more maladapted than me, was caught in the green space by a bully who force fed him dandelion heads until he puked, it might as well have been me. If I had emerged from my block into the park at the wrong time instead of him it would’ve been.

I never asked myself if the reason my house was egged, or covered in toilet paper, the reason an older kid on my block cornered me on the side of his house, pulled my genitals out of my pants and cinched my belt tight across them, was because I was a Jew or a pants wetter. Yes. Yes.

I was too visible. The house of my kindergarten teacher, a teacher I loved, was just next to the park, and she would walk me to school for the first several years of elementary. The safety of her by my side was also my doom, the target now bigger and brighter on my back. I was too visible, asked to give the yearly presentation at school about Hanukkah, to bring a menorah and dreidels and gelt to teach my enemies about what a Jew is. I was too visible and couldn’t conceive of making friends by being myself, by expressing myself, by exposing myself. My way to fit in, my way to make friends was to listen to their problems, to listen to their desires, to take them on, to be useful, to be helpful. I think of how I am now both a doctor and a radio interviewer, how both are so other-focused, where my job in each, if done well, is to draw out the other, to decenter the self. That I’ve created a self from this technique, from this hiding.
I was often the last person to go home when school was over. I could rarely wait long enough to be escorted by my former kindergarten teacher, but I could hope I could wait long enough that my enemies would get bored in their hideouts and go home themselves. I tried different techniques each time my return home was interrupted. Once when cornered by a gang itching to beat me up I lay on the ground, on my back, and said ‘go ahead.’ They demanded I stand up first but I wouldn’t. Another time when a kid told me Hitler was right I punched him in the mouth full of new braces. I still remember the joy of seeing his face flush red. But mostly I hid inside and bid my time.

By Junior High I was commuting by bicycle down a long path that paralleled a creek for several miles to school. I was the only one forced to wear a helmet. I was the only one I knew who would be stopped by a gauntlet of boys on the path to be harassed and humiliated. If the words spoken were not “dirty Jew,” and they weren’t, I felt like I wore a Jew helmet, that my missteps at finding ‘cool’ clothes—a velour sweater, a rugby shirt—were Jew missteps. I was too visible.

In high school some of my friends called me “The Heeb.” My best friend on the cross country team, a Spanish foreign-exchange student, told me matter-of-factly, with no malice, as if this were pretty obvious, that the expulsion of Jews from Spain was Spain’s greatest moment. My college roommate from Iowa, an economics major, came to my parents’ house for dinner and told them how much he admired our people’s business connections. My German herbology professor stood in front of the class and laughed at
the big fuss people made about the swastika as a symbol, an ancient one symbolizing prosperity and good luck. A good friend of mine had my wife and I over for dinner recently with another couple we had never met. My friend asked me to explain the stock market since we Jews have all the money. No one spoke up on my behalf. Nor did I. Mostly, I have remained silent.

\[ r_s = \frac{2Gm}{c^2} \]

When your self collapses enough to create a gravitational pull, the Schwartzchild radius marks the point of no return, when you can no longer escape the false self you’ve created to find the true one.
Everything is reversed. It isn’t a thinking thing now. It’s reflexive. When someone is hurt in the movies I grab or clench that body part, much as I gagged at the news of the dandelion force feeding of my fellow member of the tribe. I’d rather feel the pain for them, I’d rather take it and deal with it on my own. I want to take it away from the other who, by feeling it, makes me feel it too.

The idea of a scapegoat comes from Judaism, from the Yom Kippur ritual, back before the time of rabbis, when Jewish religious life centered around one temple, The Temple, whose rituals were conducted by priests. This day, Yom Kippur, the day of atonement was also the day of scapegoating.

*And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for Azazel.—Leviticus 16:8*

After sacrificing a bull to atone for his sins, The High Priest, the Cohen Gadol, would present two goats before the door to the Holy of Holies. This space within the temple, the place where the Ark of the Covenant resided, the space where the indwelling divine feminine, the Shekhinah, lived was only entered once a year, on this one day, and only by one person, him. One goat would be sacrificed for YHWH, its blood brought behind the sacred veil of the Holy of Holies to be sprinkled upon the lid of the ark. The other goat, the escape goat, would have the sins of the people of Israel placed upon its head and then it and the community’s wrong doings were driven out into the desert.
To be a scapegoat in my case was not to escape but to be cornered and tagged. To be visible and othered while held within the community. I wanted to be the other goat, the sacrificial one, the one not cathected with the projected sins of others, the one who escaped by doing its duty, by being good, through an offering up.

But perhaps I wasn’t doing that at all. Perhaps I was placing my fears, anxieties and experiences upon Lucie’s head, casting them out and othering her. In the study of family system dysfunctions, the child unconsciously chosen to act out the family conflict, to be the symptom-bearer, the problem, the scapegoat, is called “the identified patient.” Perhaps it wasn’t a doctorly concern for my wife’s troubles post-bombing. Perhaps it is me who never woke up, who sleepwalks through a survival strategy long past its due date.

Maybe I am not responding to the bombing at all but doing what I’ve always done. And by doing what I’ve always done, by avoiding the bomb, I’m creating a book that is a circling of myself while looking away from the black hole at my center, something I’ve always done.
And yet, Lucie’s words

from ten years before
are they bread crumbs back to her
or outdated fragments?

“It is quite difficult for me to explain and I was hoping you…I was hoping you would…I don’t know…understand, I guess, even without understanding.”

“I’ve always known it was you. I’ve known it far before we met. It seems that each side of you I’ve gotten to know since then, since the beginning, was familiar to me. I didn’t discover them with surprise, but much more rediscovered them. As if you were some other myself.”

“I wish you would tell me more about you. I wish you would tell me more about me, too, if it’s alright.”

“I want you to be the guardian of the knots in my brain. The protector of my nights.”

“I am asking you to give me shelter in your life…even only for ten days
because
I have reached a point where I cannot stand alone anymore. I cannot fight back. I have
I wonder if there is a Lucie now, today, inside this new carapace still saying these words, still writing those final three with her shaky left hand, still asking for me, for me to attend to her—if the words are trapped in her head, if the words are spoken but I cannot hear them, but they are being spoken.

I think of Mann’s *Magic Mountain*, of me as Settembrini, “the talkative male” and Lucie as Madame Chauchat, “the silent sick female”

of me the quintessential interviewer no longer asking the questions.

“Timelessness is linked with illness, the body, the body ruling the mind, the night, obscurity,” Lucie once wrote. And she has always loved to be sick, to be taken out of time, wishing to be taken up the mountain to the sanatorium like Hans Castorp whose
words Lucie once sent to me: *And my fever? Where does it come from?...nothing but my love for you, yes, the love that overwhelmed me the instant I laid eyes on you, or better, the love that I acknowledge once I recognized you—and it is that love, obviously, that has led me to this place.*

And Lucie’s words:

*I am feverish, empty, grateful.*

*Your absence is like a headache or a fever.*

*Tokyo is always throbbing and pulsing like a headache or a lovesickness*

*Yesterday I learned that Saint Petersbourg (Petrograd) had been built on dried-up tides and that the people living there were always sick because of the water in the air and the insane climate (freezing winters and struggling hot summers). And this is why all the murders in Dostoyevsky’s books happen in Petrograd. I want to go there.*

Do I not recognize her because she is no longer ill or because she can no longer call out to me?

Or because I am ill, and because I will not speak it?
the immaterial—>the material
the inorganic—>the organic
the rational—>the dream

Whatever we are, the same or reversed—one of us, both of us, neither of us—it seems like we are in this dance, as ourselves, as the other, together

the vector, the arrow, has magnitude and direction
the vector, the arrow pollinates and transmits disease

the vector, the arrow, is fever, is love
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