Pieces

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want to begin, sincerely, by admitting that the prospect of talking about my own book makes me feel uneasy. We say things about work we had written and find that in further thought, what we say it *is*, it is not; or we find what we speak of, and are frustrated to find little of anything else. So I will not talk about *they day daze*, it is what it is (which I am certain, and also hope, as with any poetic text, differs for each of us that reads it). What I want to do instead is to remember encounters, chance meetings, associations—which somewhat led to the making of *they day daze*. All of which it is not.

"I have tried to keep context from claiming you." – Keith Waldrop

I quote these lines not from Keith Waldrop's *Transcendental Studies*, but from the website of the National Book Foundation where, in 2009, I first read them. Before that, I had not really engaged with Keith Waldrop's work. I was more familiar with, and preferred the work of his wife, Rosmarie Waldrop, whose sentence-swerves, in *Lawn of Excluded Middle* (a reference to Wittgenstein's Law of the Excluded Middle) I found more exciting then. But I felt something in my sensibility change as I read Keith Waldrop:

"Balancing. Austere. Lifeless. I have tried to keep context from claiming you."

There is something in these lines which distills many of the hopes and failures that a poet goes through in his writing practice. I have a vague memory of someone asking me: "Can we still speak of essences?" I take it that he asks not out of nostalgia for essentialist thought, but out of a frustration with prevailing modes of thinking and writing, in the social, linguistic, postmodern turn. Alain Badiou says of postmodern and analytic thought, and I paraphrase, that they reflect the physiognomy of the world too much, that they are too compatible with the world to sustain the rupture that thought requires.

Also from Keith Waldrop:

"Now there is a door and whoever very beautiful and very very strange. Near you a table.

Laughing. Singing. Calling to one another, the crack of whips. Cloud to cloud in ricochet.

Music of hooves and wheels. The heavenly Jerusalem from shards of Babylon destroyed. Now a door.

Where thinking ends, house and temple echo, possible objects of admiration. Will you go?"

And whoever/very beautiful and very/very strange.

On my last night in Paris, I decided to leave my camera in the apartment, to not take pictures with my phone. I felt that I wanted to just take a walk. This was on May 6, 2011. On the second floor of Shakespeare and Co., a woman with a yellow, feather scarf wrapped around her neck approached me and asked, "Are you Vietnamese?"

"No, I'm Filipino," I said.

"Filipino! My Uncle's wife is Filipina. I am a Dane, do you know any Danes?"

This was before I started taking serious interest in the sport of badminton. I will learn, a few months later, of the many top-ranked Danish badminton players at the international level. So I said, "Inger Christensen?"

"Yes," she said, adding "There are only two Danes you need to know. Inger Christensen and *Khir-kegar*."

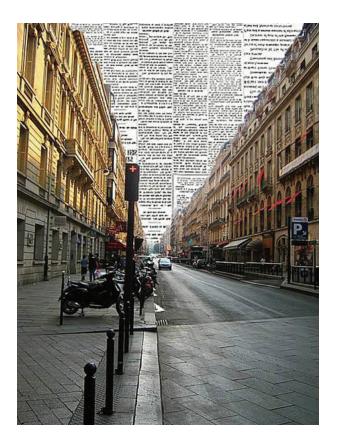
"Khir-kegar?" I asked.

"Yes, Khirkegar."

"Oh, you mean Soren? Soren Khir-kegar." I copied her pronunciation.

"Yes, Kierkegaard," then she walked towards her companion—a bearded man wearing a top hat—who I imagined to be a French New Wave director, then they left.

I happened upon a side-street I have never seen before. There were shops selling potato chips and beignet. There were women dressed in miniskirts, and wearing bunny-ear headbands. There was a bar with a ceiling fan, with underwear hung on its fan-blades and the fan-blades turned. Then I saw again the Dane and her companion, who I recall carried with her—on the right hand a cane, on the left hand what seems to be a director's chair.



This is the only digital collage in *they day daze*. I took the picture of a street, which I don't remember if in Strasbourg or in Paris, *a street/familiar for its street-like quality*. But I remember that the sky is a googled image of the French newspaper "Le Monde." Le Monde—the world. When Derrida said "Il n'ya pas de hors-texte," I no longer imagine an inescapable language-world, a sky even, with nothing but language, but something which relates to the beauty of contexts. When I see things, when one sees objects as language, it is a language where something, out of traces, can emerge. One attempts to lift pieces from context, *to try to keep context from claiming* a "you," but the pieces carry with them traces, and the traces, glowing at the cut edge, the torn edges in a collage, become different pieces. I think that one can also replace pieces with an *I*, or a *he*, or a *she*, or with *we*.



If I remember things right, the image of the floating Buddha is from a leaflet from Starbucks, something that has to do with teas. The yellow tape from the crime scene is from the front-page of the *Philippine Star*. To form the scene of the crime, I cut out one of the happily playing girls. The girls do not notice Godzilla. I didn't get Godzilla from stills of the movie, but from an invitation to one of the artist-collagists, Dina Gadia's shows.

I think that I wanted some of my collage pieces to produce sentences. Sentence: The girls happily on a tree cannot act upon the violence beside and behind it.



I am sure that I remember this right—the elephant, the handcuffed hands, and the magician's hat are from a book on the life of Harry Houdini. The textual elephant is a from a page which describes Harry Houdini's death—"collapsed offstage." Sentence: An elephant is made of ideas, text, rococo; while all we know of birds is that while they are made of colors, some are from a magician's hat.

When Derrida said "Il n'ya pas de hors-texte," I think of Gertrude Stein's Room, a room, a world even, where *Europe and Asia and being overbearing*, a sky from which we find *a light in the moon*:

"A light in the moon the only light is on Sunday. What was the sensible decision. The sensible decision was that notwithstanding many declarations and more music, not even notwithstanding the choice and a torch and a collection, notwithstanding the celebrating hat and a vacation and even more noise than cutting, notwithstanding Europe and Asia and being overbearing, not even notwithstanding an elephant and a strict occasion, not even withstanding more cultivation and some seasoning, not even with drowning and with the ocean being encircling, not even with more likeness and any cloud, not even with terrific sacrifice of pedestrianism and a special resolution, not even more likely to be pleasing. The care with which the rain is wrong and the green is wrong and the white is wrong, the care with which there is a chair and plenty of breathing. The care with which there is incredible justice and likeness, all this makes a magnificent asparagus, and also a fountain."

And also, surprise. "Surprise, the only surprise has no occasion. It is an ingredient and the section the whole section is one season," writes Stein.



If I remember right, I was thinking about the idea of surprise, and the possibility of a parenthetical surprise. Is it possible to be surprised by a parenthesis? Sentence: I was thinking about the idea of surprise when it struck me that although the horse was surprised to come across parentheses (what then is a parenthetical surprise?) no one was worried of the swimmer rending the horse apart in the green blaze.

"These days shall be my poems" - John Wieners



I am certain that I got the sudoku background from a Kris Kringle in the office. I am too lazy to solve puzzles, so I go straight to the last pages to cut out the answers.

"These days shall be my poems" comes from John Wiener's notebook published as *The Journal of John Wieners is to be called 707 Scott Street for Billie Holiday*. But I quote this from an issue of the literary journal *Conjunctions* where I first read excerpts from Wiener's notebook. There is a fascinating story behind his notebook's publication: One day, visiting Wiener's apartment, Lewis Warsh sees a trunk filled with notebooks and thinking out loud, says "I'd love to read them some day." Wieners got one of the notebooks, seemingly at random, and handed it to Warsh.

I go back to the issue of *Conjunctions* to read excerpts from 707 *Scott Street*. Then I read that it was not only Lewis Warsh who visited John Wieners on that day. "In 1972, William Corbett and I visited John in his apartment at 44 Joy Street in Boston with the hope of getting poems from him for our magazine," Warsh writes of the event. So I remembered only two persons in a room where there should have been three.

I once met someone who told me she has been to Moscow all by herself, who told me she explored Moscow, with no Russian, while toting with her a Russian-to-French dictionary. If my memory serves me right, her name was Mirana, originally from Madagascar, who one day in the office (though I completely forget the context) was telling me "ca-hi-yey," who said, "how to say...?" who asked her boss, Philippe, "Philippe, what's ca-hi-yey."

"Notebook," Phillipe says.

Oh, "cahier," I say it back.

There are people you meet only once in your life. There is a beautiful short story by Lydia Davis titled The Walk, where a translator and a critic meet at a Proust conference. It ends with the critic bidding goodbye to the translator with something like, "We will probably not meet again." There are people like Mirana, and Philippe whom I know I will probably not meet again.

In an attempt to remember encounters—people, pieces, a piece of day, a foreign word, et cetera—one finds that as in Jack Spicer, "Things do not connect; they correspond." Spicer who supposedly on his deathbed said, "My vocabulary did this to me."

The last fragment I would like to talk about is of the poet Kokoy Guevara. Who I first met some months after the publication of *they day daze*; who I met only two other times before he passed away, but with whom I have had some deeply engaged conversations on poetry with—conversations, which at one point, he described in an email as "belligerent." Kokoy, who I mistakenly remember reading Cesar Vallejo's "I know a man mutilated," when I first met him at a reading. And who, in an email later on corrects me: "I didn't read Vallejo. What was the title or line/s you remembered? I read Lacaba, Crane, Dickinson, Spicer, Hopkins and Berrigan."

But I vividly remember him giving a line-perfect reading of Spicer's "Thing Language:"

This ocean, humiliating in its disguises
Tougher than anything.
No one listens to poetry. The ocean
Does not mean to be listened to. A drop
Or crash of water. It means
Nothing.
It
Is bread and butter
Pepper and salt. The death
That young men hope for. Aimlessly
It pounds the shore. White and aimless signals. No

One listens to poetry.

In memory of Kokoy, I would like to end this piece with silence. "[S] o silence is pictorial/when silence is real" says Barbara Guest. So I will end with collage. I don't remember the sources of most of the pieces in this collage, but the musical notations are from a hardcopy of a score of John Cage's 4'33". One should notice that there are no notes on the staff, only whole rests, if one looks a little closely.

Sentence: From the phonograph, a waterfall, dragonflies now, folded flowers, now a chair—all these come crashing at 4'33" where one hears, now, the uneasy twitching of a nose in the string section.



