

choreographies

by Veritas Katharina Gassmann

Thesis

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Eleni Sikelianos, Advisor

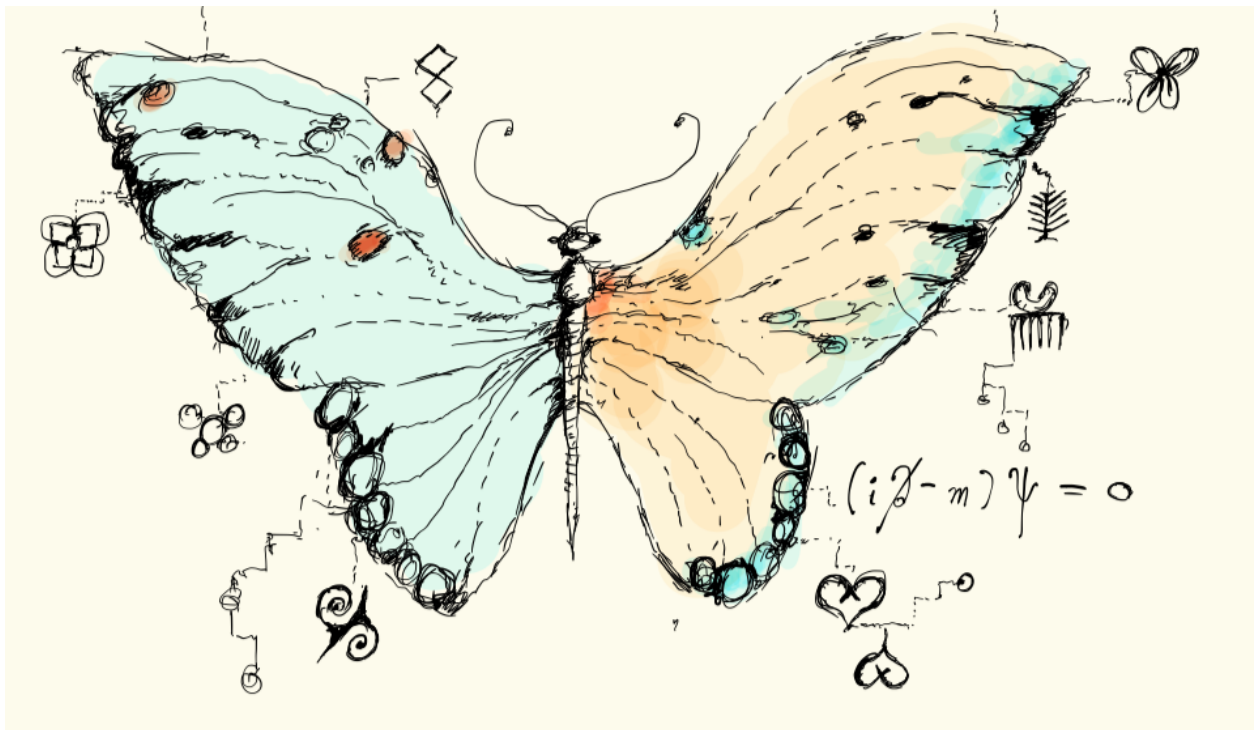
Approved by the Graduate School

Date _____

Andrew G. Campbell, Dean of Graduate School

choreographies

small fictions



Veritas Katharina Gassmann

April 2020

choreography

n. the art or practice of designing choreographic sequences. From the Greek *choreia*, “dancing in unison.”

The word “choreography” literally means “dance-writing,” from χορεία (circular dance, see choreia) and γραφή (writing).

Balet

A single musical staff at the top of the page, featuring a treble clef and a series of notes and rests, likely representing the melody for the dance.

A large, intricate handwritten diagram of a dance floor. The floor is represented by a large, roughly rectangular shape with rounded corners, divided into several sections by lines. Each section contains musical notation, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The notation is dense and appears to be a shorthand for dance steps or musical cues. The word "a quatre" is written in the center of the diagram. There are also some smaller markings like "Da" and "p" scattered throughout the diagram.

the old world—

where carrots are still carrots
and love is still love.

contents

An Invitation	8
Citizens of the Moon	9
Comparing Cards	11
The Toymaker	13
Circular Machine #305	15
The Time Baby Sister Chased Us Down the Hall with a Knife	16
The Proper Execution of a Sissonne	17
What Not to Do in an Epidemic	18
The Guest	19
Shoplifter	21
Notes from a Train Station Somewhere in the United States	22
Demon Lore	26
The First Mammal	27
Missing Child	28
Grandmother Returns	29
Dog Suns	30
The Design of the World	31
Sanctuary	33
Cornelia Street	34
Laundry Day/ The Last Lifeboat	36
Raindrop Prelude	38
Stalin's Pipe	39
Anatomy Lesson	42
Chocolate Factory	43
Before the Storm	45

Firebird/La Fenice	46
A Natural Question for the Stenographers	48
Vintage Russian Fashion Catalogue	51
The Machinery of the Clouds	52
Our Baby	54

<i>Intermission</i>	57
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La Sirena	60
Lecture Notes on the Mechanics of Soap Bubbles	61
Concentric Time	62
The First Scuba Suit	63
The Time We Ran Away	65
The Time Ran Away	66
Tim	67
Logic	68
Observations, Memories, and Fantasies from the Cherry Tree Notebook	69
In the Strawberry Garden	78
My New Larynx	79
A Conversation Overheard from the Rose Bushes	81
Balloon Child	83
The Wig	84
Convex Milk	85
Dessin d'Enfant	86
If Time Had an Edge	87
Studies of the Fetus in the Womb	88
The Drapery Codex	89

The True Face of Alexander Grothendiek	90
Grothendiek Comes to America	91
Eva Braun's Underwear	93
Jealousy	95
Terms of Endearment, Among Butterflies	97
Ghosts of Prague	98
On the Impossibility of Mending a Sweater	100
Evocations	101
Monstrous Moonshine	103
Seashell	104
The Piano Lesson	105
Acknowledgements	107
Notes	108

An Invitation

If you wish we can be
blackbirds together.
There is nothing to lose;
it's only a secret.

Always the smart one will
blurt out the wrong truth,
but his voice is not mandatory.

He still bores me.
It might be different,
if he were a lobster.

But you?
How did you find me?
So be it, if it takes
the sweetness of a strawberry
to keep you here.

Citizens of the Moon

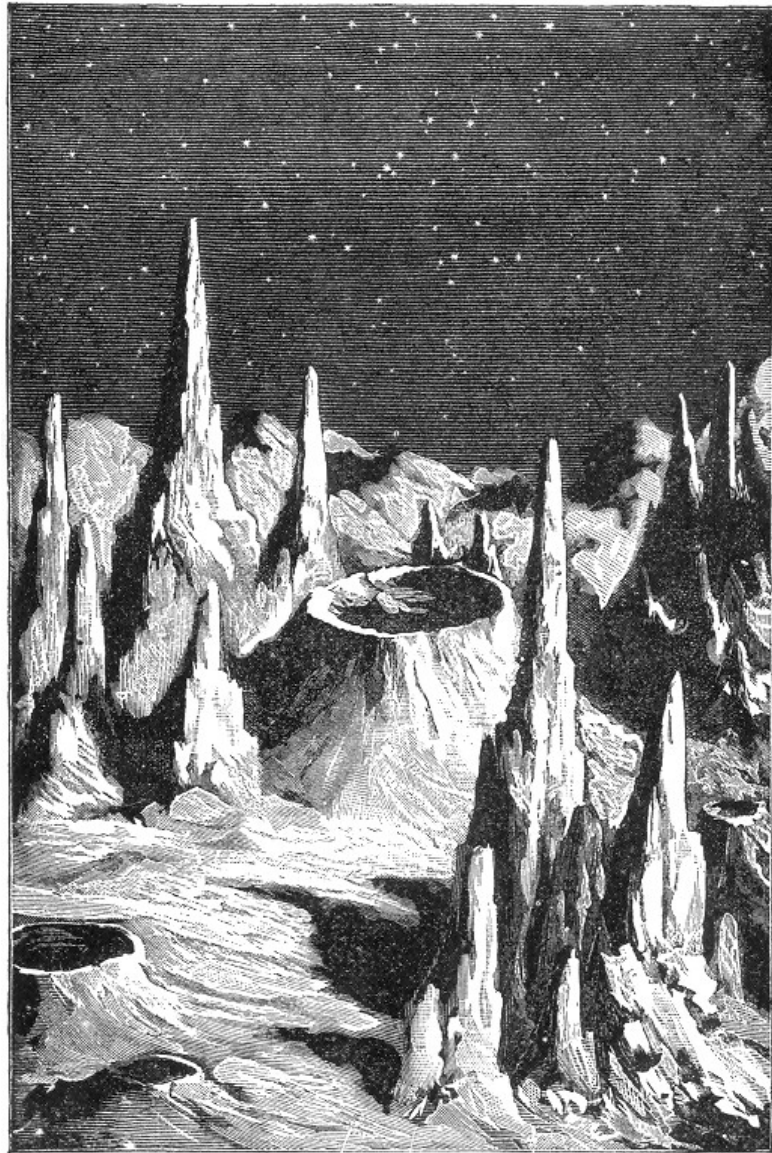
What harm would it do
for us to have the same grandmother?
There are too many stories about other families—
other mothers, other sisters, other cats.

And besides. We needn't tell anybody.

Gathering us on her lap,
our grandmother makes us promise
never to pierce our ears.
She is old, old, old
and soft, bound up
in the ruffles of herself.
Look, she says,
elegiacally presenting her withered lobes.

We imagine centuries of fat
harry winston peacocks, dancing
lily clusters, etruscan
dragons, pear-shaped dogs,
howling spirograms, an unhatched
egg from a glacier in Siberia —
all these contributing to the elongation
of grandmama's lobulus auricularae.

The old envy the elasticity of the young
while the young, moonfaced,
dream of elder cities— crystallographies,
or lunar encryptions, depending.



Selenography.

Comparing Cards

How many dolls does your family have? she asks,
grandly leading me up a lush spiral staircase
and into her bedroom, where the tin soldier
is undressing the ballerina.



The Toymaker

In the early days we believed that our father's garden was a place outside of time, a world you discover sometimes in those fairy tale illustrations in which a single child is seen wandering into a forest of gigantic trees.

Father was an expert in the manufacturing of tales. I have a clear memory of the view of the orchard from the living room window, a tangled space teeming with ripening Johannesburg berries and fat black spiders, all of them enfolded in narratives and subnarratives, most featuring father— a nearsighted toymaker with a perennial limp in his left leg — as the indisputable hero.

Next to the old apple tree, one on each side, presided two unicorn statues, their granite nostrils flaring and their necks arching. Two young girls, our father told us with unblinking conviction, whose vanity had resulted in calcification. Sometimes, in the winter, snow crystals would attach themselves to the chipped hooves, and dormice, shivering and haggard, would scurry past in nervous vectors.

My twin sister and I were too old to believe in unicorns. Conversely, father seemed too young *not* to believe in them. He was someone who was always chasing his dreams yet had never learned how to tie his boots— or maybe someone whose dreams had suggested to him a myriad of shoelace-tying procedures, all of them as complex as they were dysfunctional.

To my sister, who at the age of twelve had already developed a visceral need for scientific verification, father's fictions were an outrage. He had once informed us,

with the authority of an engineer, that our bellybuttons might be unscrewed, which would result in the mechanical separation of our buttocks from our torsos. Like overripe plums, our bottoms would drop to the earth.

I imagined that I would attempt to rescue my buttocks, store them safely in a cupboard until I could sew them back on. Otherwise, our maid Sasha would routinely whisk them away before they could frighten guests.

Circular Machine #305

a new knowledge requires a new notation

& likewise

counterclockwise

& likewise

a new knowledge requires a new notation.



The Time Baby Sister Chased Us Down the Hall with a Knife

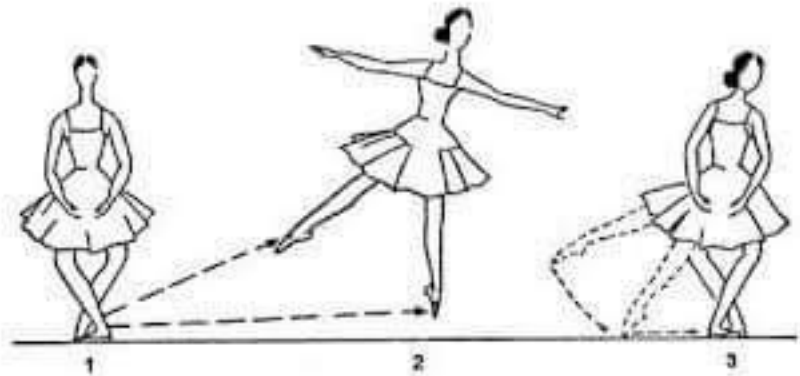
A little girl with a knife
is something not to be trifled with.
Ruby glow
(connected to debate in france
whether a horse's legs ever
leave the ground simultaneously);
A question for anatomists, the makers of
zoetropes. Sister has more legs
than there are stairs
no time to count before
the door slams shut and
we have an impression of bicycles
ascending, bright and implacable.

The Proper Execution of a Sissonne

Scissors, essentially
but the condition of being mid-air
—symmetrized—
is not the natural condition, unless one is a comet
or a racecar.

I remember when sister was
so tiny she could sleep in my shoe.

Sister confesses
a phobia of revolving doors
doors that disappear
but always come back.



Sissonne à la seconde.

What Not to Do In An Epidemic

kissing
breathing
sharing lollipops
touching
doorknobs
people's faces
especially the lips
licking door
knobs, handles, mounting screws, inside
escutcheons.

The Guest

It has been a month since the bear checked into the hotel, and not once has she emerged from her room. At most, the maids have seen an enormous black paw, usually between the hours of eight and nine, always in the act of replacing or securing a *Don't Disturb* sign. After losing a bet, the bellboy was obliged to press his ear against the door. He reported the sound of a saw against wood.

The second, more puzzling fact is the bear's particularities in the realm of hygiene. Over the course of this month, more than one hundred individually parceled bars of soap have been delivered to her room. What use would a guest have for this abundance of tiny soaps? An architecturally-minded person might be fashioning cities. Or maybe quieter scenes: a time before zeppelins, sit-coms, and rubber factories.

Once again, the bellboy is elected to perform a task, this time involving a tower of hat boxes teetering up to the bear's bathroom window. To the boy, it seems as though the cardboard steeple vanishes into a puff of clouds.

—Don't worry, we'll catch you, the girls say. They are stationed under the window, an almost-transparent bedsheet extended between them. Their faces glow beatifically in the morning light. The cotton flutters in the wind.

—All of this must be documented, says the Hotel Manager importantly, wheeling over a colossal camera, which the bellboy is instructed to carry on his back. Gadgets in those days were not designed with portability in mind. — Careful! says the Manager. Any damages to my equipment will be deducted from your salary.

Halfway up the tower, our climber hesitates.

— Faster! Faster! shouts the Cook, in German.

— Does this is violate Hotel policies? asks the bellboy in a small voice.

The Manager consults the manual that he always carries in his breast pocket. The words HOTEL POLICIES are pencilled on the cover.

— It appears that the rules for photographing guests through their bathroom windows only apply to *human* guests, he says.

At last the bellboy reaches the ledge. He hesitates.

— Don't pretend you're better than the rest of us, the Manager says. We know what you do in the jam cellar when you think nobody is watching.

Are you expecting a sudsy vignette of a bear in a bubble bath? Perhaps that is what the bellboy finds. Or better, a multiverse of bathing bears suspended in an iridescent array of soap bubbles.

—Are you insane? shouts the Manager. Don't go in there!

—I am sorry, sir, says the bellboy, his face glowing like a rainbow, and the last they see of him are his espadrilles, abandoned joyously on the windowsill.

Shoplifter

A woman, who prefers to remain anonymous, has reported multiple instances of shop-lifting at a department store in Berlin. In each case, the perpetrator is a slope-shouldered person incompetently disguised as a historical figure— Napoleon, Dali, Mary Queen of Scots, and a stupendous cast of others.

If you are anything like me, then you must be curious about the security footage. The following clip is scheduled to be released to the public on Tuesday: Abraham Lincoln nervously stuffing his topcoat with frilly undergarments; Moses, clad sagaciously in a flowing white robe and open-toed wooden sandals, sneaking milk-duds and lollipops into his wicker basket.

Notes from a Train Station Somewhere in the United States

The story of a Boy and his Violin.

A giant insect holding a surgical appliance.

Hamlet, performed as a comedy.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, performed as a tragedy.

Italian words—bel canto, operetta, fantasia, influenza, madonna, imbroglio, peccadillo, bravado, fiasco, neutrino;

French—eau de cologne, omelette, chic, bouillabaisse, joie de vivre, clementine;

German—bildungsroman, poltergeist, wanderlust, angst, doppelgänger, nudel, hamster;

Japanese— tsunami, origami, kimono, ikebana, kado. The last, the art of flower arrangement. The way of flowers.

An epic legal battle over frozen embryos.

A luxurious rug shop. Rugs that make you feel like you should be whispering.

The acid eloquence of Cyber Arabic Prison Jazz.

A woman with very thin lips. Lips you could get a paper cut from.

She doesn't wear mascara so that people can't tell when she's crying. This might not be necessary in Utah; one of the colleges has a crying closet in the library. A kindred spirit: the dowager in Fellini's *Dolce Vita*. Pretends to be asleep so that she doesn't have to talk to anybody.

They say that in Russia, the cats will do your homework.

Guards that look like they were assembled in a factory in a day.

A scroll embossed with a snow crab, the emperor's insignia, and fastened with a blue silk ribbon. People don't know how to write love letters anymore.

I remember a painting at the Met that corresponds to a Biblical story from the book of Tobit. *While bathing in the river Tigris, Tobias was startled by a fish. Raphael instructed him to seize the fish and save the heart, liver and gall. Later Tobias saved the organs to drive an evil spirit away from Sara, his future wife, and then to restore his father's sight.*

Millions of bugs live on me, and still I feel alone.

Idea— our hero, en route to the lavatory, is detained by an enthusiastic friend.

A brightly-lit cash machine.

A luminous silicone slotted spoon, heat resistant up to 400 degrees Fahrenheit, non-stick! Deal of the century! This spoon will solve all your problems. Wash in mild soapy water, and towel dry.

— If you were a zoo animal with human intelligence, could you escape? Adam asks one morning.

It's difficult to imagine how a dolphin would escape from the zoo. But maybe I could devise a scheme for an ambulatory critter, something that could scuttle up a zookeeper's sleeve. Would I be a truehearted chameleon, an altruistic tarantula? Would I think of the others? Yes, I think so. I would try to orchestrate simultaneous escapes for all of my friends in the Rainforest Room.

Title for an upcoming True Crime Series: *The Crêpe Inspector*.

A gentleman complaining on the telephone. *They try to tie you up at both ends, like a sausage.*

A murderer baking cupcakes.

A man sprints down the stairs wearing shiny, pointy Italian shoes and a scarf that looks as though it is made of skunk fur.

The director of an orphanage. He forces the children to watch while he eats lemon meringue pie.

The more abstract question of what is marginal versus what is essential. Maybe everything is secretly a perimeter, a series of nested picture frames.

Demon Lore

The dream again.

A small windowless room, bare except for a suspended lightbulb. The first to arrive is a lung. Next, a kneecap, a collarbone, a kidney; as time drips on, an improbable parade of organs and limbs enters the scene, struggling to assemble itself into something complete. Eventually a tongue appears, severed and speechless, and joins the entropic swirl.

As the limbs unriddle themselves, experimenting with different permutations of skin and bone, a huge naked figure coalesces. It huddles there, cramped, contorted, hairless, sightless. Is it waiting for something? Are we waiting for something? A trap door to open? A giant hand to reach inside and bear us into the sanitized light of a hospital room?

The First Mammal

And when in the morning the first mammal
scratches at your window,
what should you do?
Such a little thing,
so sweet and supplicant against the glass—
Entreating a saucer of milk, or perchance
something newborn.

Missing Child

Suspended on the yarn are myriad seashells, tiny teeth, and bones. The thread travels through one mouse eye socket and out the other. So many skulls, so many little black pit eyes.

Child sees mother for the first time. Child sees snowflakes for the first time. Child sees ocean for the first time. Child sees blood for the first time. Child sees herself for the first time, on the polished surface of a lake.

Grandmother Returns

A month after Grandmother dies, there's a knock at our bedroom door. *Don't answer it*, whispers my sister. I can't see her because she's on the top bunk. I'm on the bottom bunk because I always lose. To be honest, we were surprised that she'd taken this long; grandmother was nothing if not punctual. Neither of us had cried at her funeral. We'd known that it was not the end.

The priest had had a long white face and beautiful fingernails. I wondered how much money he'd spent on those perfect nails. He spoke eloquently on Life and Death, on Earth to Earth and Dust to Dust, and also something about God. It was all so sad. A tall lady in the front row was sobbing uncontrollably, which seemed rude, because she'd only known Grandma for three weeks. She had no right to be more upset than we were.

There I was in my mermaid pajamas, hugging my knees, eyes squeezed shut, listening to a key turn in the door, missing my grandma more than anything.

Dog Suns

Our Yorkshire Terrier has been around the sun ninety-seven times (measured in dog suns). He is from Brooklyn. We rescued him from under a bridge, where he had been subsisting on hot dogs and bagels, and terrorizing the local rat population. Once a box of peppermint patties washed ashore. It was the sort of feast people would have written ballads about, in medieval times.

What are all the lumps on his body? I ask. They're just fat, cysts, my mom says. There's a grease mark on the sofa where he sleeps. If he were a cake, the ingredients would be as follows (in my mom's own words): *nasty ass tooth that needs to be gummed*, eyes milky with cataracts (*dog can't see worth a bean*), a distended hairless belly, nails that go *click* on hard wood floors, like dainty stilettos. Our cancerous, snaggle-toothed, indestructible dog.

The problem is that we don't have an apple tree to bury him under. Any kind of tree would be fine, so long as it fits into all of those scenes of childhood, is somehow lit from within. What will we do...? What will we do. I have a video of him jubilantly rolling around in whipped cream.

The Design of the World

Virginia walked into the river with her pockets full of stones, and Sylvia stuck her head in the oven.

Nevertheless, there are dogs. Big dogs, spotty dogs, dogs with floppy ears, dogs who snore beautifully, or not so beautifully. Our poodle Brünnhilde deserves her name. Each toy must be in its place— the tennis ball, the goldfish, the deer antler, the goose, the little pink dragon. If every toy is accounted for, then all is right with the world. But if quantum mechanics has taught us anything

then we are lucky indeed. For not everything can be measured, especially if what we are really talking about is the soul.

We conclude that our description of physical reality is incomplete. The wave function does not provide a complete description of the world. Einstein leaves open the question of whether or not such a description exists.

Must it?



Virginia with her cocker spaniel, Pinka.

Sanctuary

Her shoes are suspended by their ribbons from a nearby branch. How did she get this high?

She resolves never to come down. Just let them try.

The birdlady has spent so much time thinking of birds that she has become a bird herself. The birds understand this and speak to her without prejudice or reservation. She carries numerous small cages, some suspended over her shoulders, some hanging from a walnut staff. The cages are never locked, and the doors are always open. Birds flit in and out. Sparrows, canaries, mockingbirds, nightingales. During the coldest winter in history, birds from across the land flock to her, each bearing a single feather as a gift. These the birdlady weaves into a splendid coat. And of course, for many years this coat speaks to her, each feather quivering with memories of flight and sky.

Cornelia Street

My first apartment was on Cornelia Street, Lower West Side of Manhattan. It felt cool to be eighteen and living in New York. I bought a beige trench from Bloomingdale's, identical to the one Audrey Hepburn wears in Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I was seeing a Russian pianist at Juilliard. This sounds better than it was. Evgeny was still living with his parents in New Jersey.

The lady in Apartment 2F (ring only once, please) was named Rosemary, and she was a fashion model. She had taken off all her clothes for Andy Warhol in his soup factory, and Pablo Picasso in his fractured spacetime, and had shared a plate of mushroom ravioli with George Gershwin. The latter simply couldn't get *enough* of her. Think of all the rhapsodies, gigues, passacaglias, concertinas, etc. etc. etc. he might have written if not for this diversion! She wore lipstick, and liberally, with no regard for the natural contours of her mouth. She advised me to carefully check inside my shoes before putting them on, because there were *mice* in the building, and a fleece-lined slipper is such a nice place to sleep. She told me about the Chinese Bakery near the red line entrance, confiding her discovery that the owner was an agent for the Central Security Bureau of the Communist Party of China. Here you could get exquisite small cakes in flavors such as mandarin, starfruit, pomegranate, coconut, green tea, plum...

Rosemary and I saw the same oncologist at the Columbia medical center. His name was Dr. Cook, and he had sparkly periwinkle eyes and an excellent collection of ballpoint pens. Dr. Cook, a national authority at saying disturbing things in comforting ways.

Laundry Day/ The Last Lifeboat

I never did see that white blouse again. It was my favorite one. I dropped it off at the Lexington Avenue cleaner on the last Thursday of September. Now it is April. I suppose that is the tendency of Manhattan, to devour. Somewhere in the fathomless belly of this city is my favorite blouse, my original set of house keys, and the fancy bottle of cologne that I stole from Barneys only to drop in a rain gutter two blocks from my apartment. Maybe that's why I applied to the police academy all those years ago— so that I could one day punish people for being good at what I wished I could do. Or maybe I applied to please grandmother, which was of course impossible.

Grandmother was a Titanic survivor. She looked like a survivor, too; a director would cast her in a flash. Deep-set sorrowful eyes, always dressed in grays and blues, the sort of face that makes you feel guilty even when you've done nothing wrong. The trouble with having a relative who survived the Titanic, or the Holocaust, or 9/11, is that you will never— not even after earning a Pulitzer, a MacArthur Genius Award, and becoming President of the United States— be enough.

I was the first-place runner up for the Home Depot Employee of the Year in 2007. What a waste of lifeboat space.

If only my grandmother had been a little slower, tripped on a step, gone back to her room to get an extra coat. Maybe her spot would have gone to an Irish mechanic

whose offspring would go on to cure bone cancer. I read in *The Times* that three-hundred children are diagnosed with bone cancer every year.

My boyfriend and I pass by the shopfront of the laundromat that lost my favorite blouse. The problem is that he loves me. I am trying to figure out how to tell him that my only real desire in life is to stay at home with my viola and my morbidly obese cat, Sean. There's no room in this utopia for another person.

My boyfriend's name is Tony, or Terry. I fear that he has already planned our life together. The East Village brownstone. The child that we adopt from Kenya. Driving her to ballet lessons, and when she can't tolerate the tutus and sugarplums, to karate lessons. His face is almost hopeful enough for me to love him back.

"They never returned my blouse," I tell him, gesturing to the shopfront. "It was my favorite."

He looks at the sign, the peeling paint. *Lucky Cleaners*. We walk home. It rains. He shares his umbrella.

Raindrop Prelude

The best place to find an umbrella is a train station.
You would be amazed by what people leave behind.
“We were together for forty years,” says Greta in an interview.
She was left at the Munich station
along with a handful of coins and a box of matches.

Stalin's Pipe

From an early age, I understood that the secret to adulthood involved pipes. Freud smoked a pipe. So did Bach. He even wrote an aria about his fondness for pipe smoking, *So oft ich meine Tobackspfeife*, BWV 515a. The list unfurls ad infinitum: Jacques Cousteau, Bing Crosby, Darwin, Einstein, Stalin, Faulkner, Hemingway, Edwin Hubble. Even Subcomandante Marcos, Mexican insurgent and leader of the Zapatista Army, smoked a pipe. There is a black-and-white photograph of him smoking a pipe atop a horse in Chiapas, Mexico. The horse, although mature, is not smoking a pipe.

And where would this list be without the queen, Amantine Lucile Aurora Dupin (George Sand)? Upon meeting her, Chopin remarked, "What an unattractive person *la Sand* is. Is she really a woman?" Meanwhile, Sand mused, "...the gift of Chopin is the expression of the deepest and fullest feelings and emotions that have ever existed. He made a single instrument speak a language of infinity. He could often sum up, in ten lines that a child could play, poems of a boundless exaltation, dramas of unequalled power..."

Maybe some people smoke for the vocabulary. Apple. Diplomat. Egg. Hawkbill. Prince. Chimney. Oom. Nose Warmer. Bulldog. Czech Bulldog. Bull Moose. Ukulele. Calabash. Canadian Lumberman. Acorn. Devil Anse. Tomahawk.

Tyrolean pipe. Nautilus. Zulu. Cherry. Corncob. Mesquite. Pear-tree. Bog-wood.
Sometimes it's enough, just inhaling the words.

I'm not sure what my father smoked. It was German and filled the gaps in conversation— there were plenty of these— with dense, sweet plumes of smoke. A pipe can teach you everything about the infinite language of silence.



Vladimir Lenin at school. Yes, I agree— such pretty lips.

Anatomy Lesson

someone stabbed in the abdomen

kid asks, what's an abdomen?

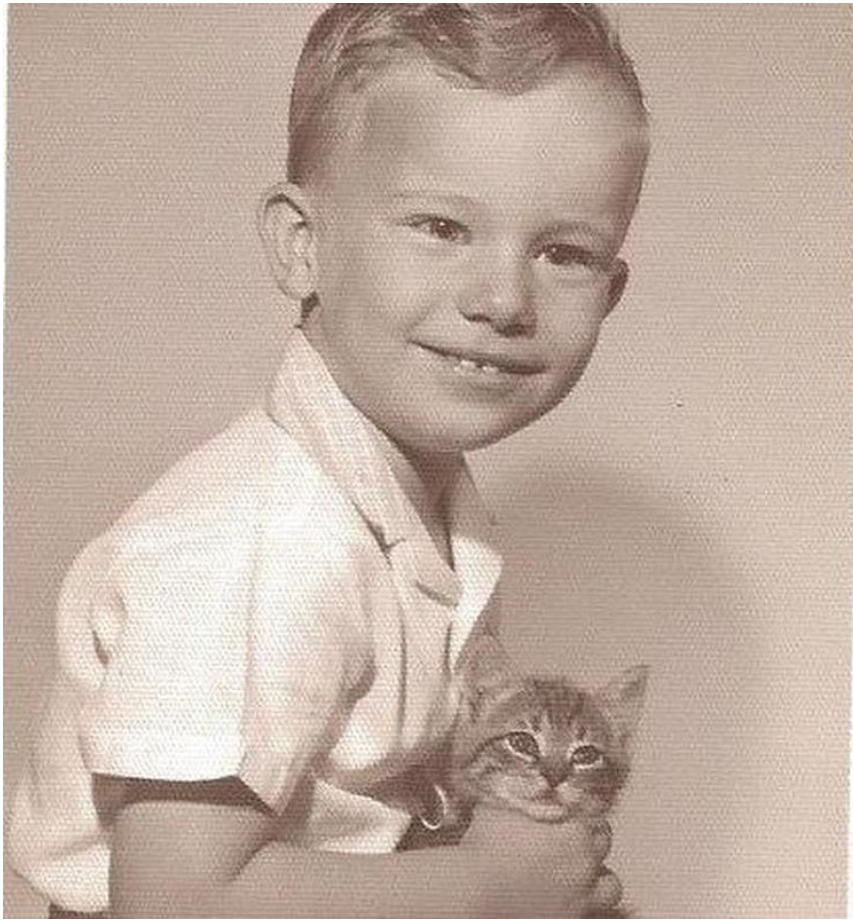
kid asks, did he cry?

Chocolate Factory

There is no force in the universe more destructive than love.
He just wanted to keep them close, he said.

He kept the mummified head and skull
in a backpack in his locker.

The others were in freezers at home,
behind tubs of rocky road ice cream.



Jeffrey Dahmer's tortoiseshell tabby.

Before the Storm

Are they building a ship or a whale? Look at the vaulted ribs, wooden molars. Crystal-work of delicate sticks. They are building it skywards. The vessel tugs at the ropes and trestles like a balloon. If the ropes were severed the boat would float away...

It is not true that ships only sink at night, or during storms. This one sinks on a summer day. And here is what happens to the horses on that ship. A horse has neither fins nor gills. But perhaps within every horse there is a prehistoric horse, a deep-water horse, who remembers when it could swim and breathe in the bowels of the ocean.

Firebird/ La Fenice

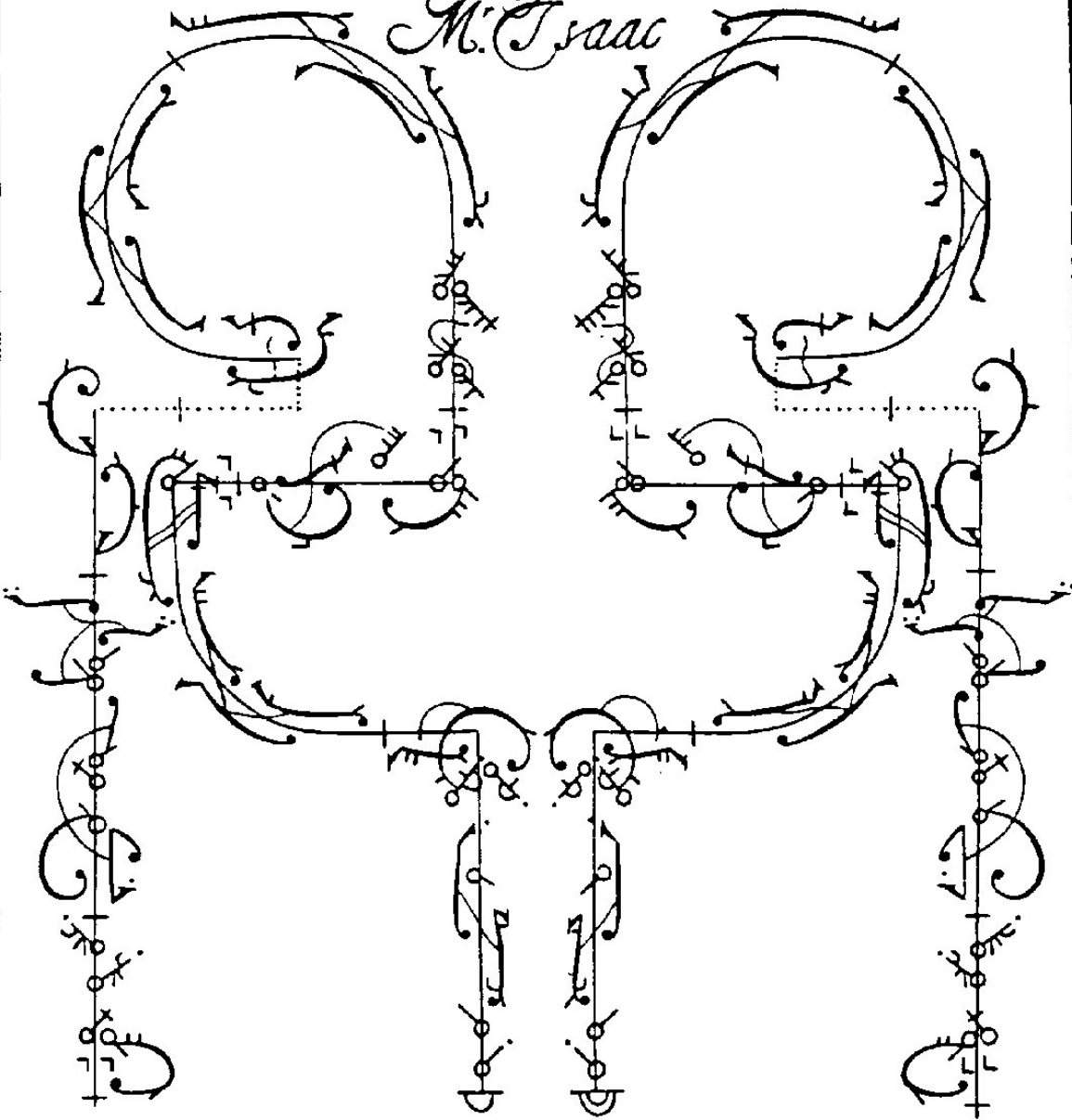
When I finally go to Venice, it is as not with my lover, as planned, but with my mother and our equally neurotic Yorkshire terrier. He's a rescue, we explain, when people reel back. *We didn't create this ourselves.* These days my mom prides herself on her calendar-worthy dogs. The art teacher living upstairs has a dachshund with a broken spine. The animal barks deep into the night. *Rescue dog*, my mom says grandly. She plans on enshrining the ashes of her Cavalier spaniel in a diamond pendant.

I decide to abscond on a water taxi to the *Teatro La Fenice*. I decide to forget English and become a soprano in this ancient house of music. I decide to grow wings. Once the feathers start sprouting, I can't stop them. My hands, shoulders, back, face, bristle with these brilliant new-formed feathers. A peachy-pink down spreads across my throat, as dense as fish scales, but soft. I try to touch my face with my disintegrating fingers. The feathers are red and gold, confusing, glorious, irrefutable. I fall in love with myself, this new strangeness. *What are you?* someone cries, in English, but I don't understand, because I only speak Italian and bird. *Someone call the police!* Stop, they all say. I can't. I half-run up the stairs, my shoes falling off— I no longer have feet. They follow me, boots pounding against stone. I reach the top singing. The sky is beautiful. The sun is beautiful. The buildings are beautiful. Stop, they say, vanishing. I am laughing. How beautiful the sky is.



Grave

*The
Pastorall
by
M. Isaac*

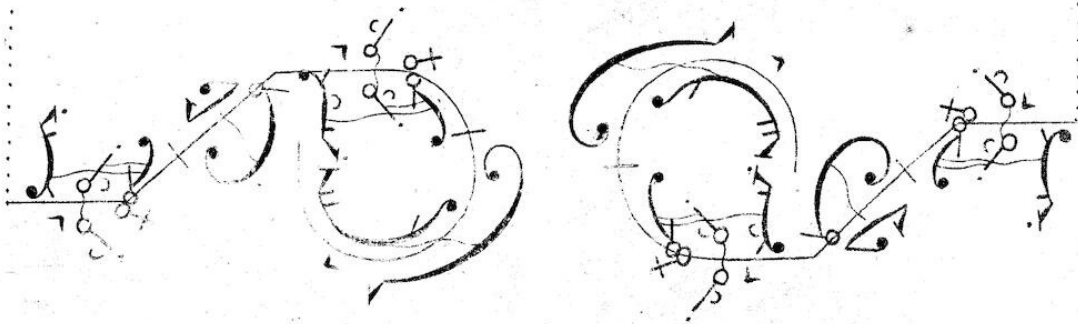
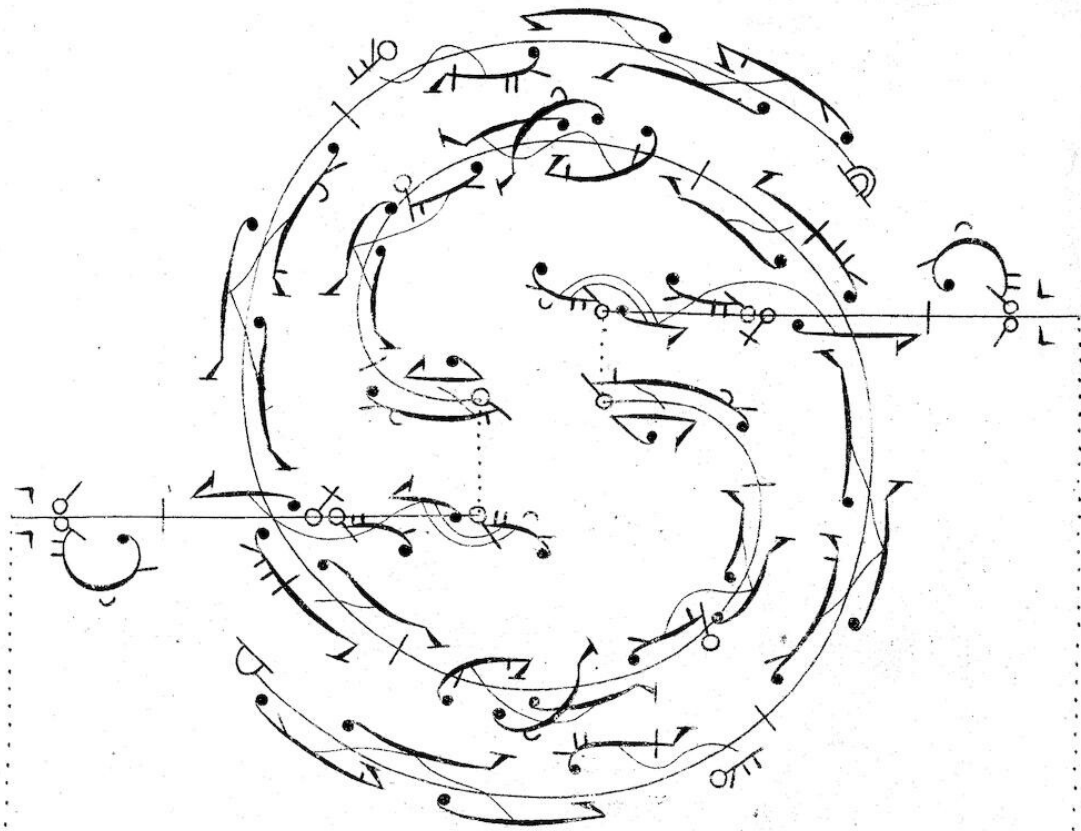


1st Couplet...

A Natural Question for the Stenographers

But why is a notation needed at all?
Do we need to be told how to dance?
How easy it is to become enamored
by tiny symbols on paper,
math crystallizing on glass.

The professor explains why living things
have not evolved wheels.
It is a matter of integrity, such as when,
in 1889, the Swedish engineer Gustaf
de Laval ran a steam turbine to
supercritical speeds—
The centrifugal force is too much,
too much for enfeebled lungs,
he says, tearful.



7. Couplet

№ 3113. Летнее красивое платье из белого батиста с яркой ручной вышивкой гладью. Юбка собрана в сборки. Бант из цветной ленты 5½ метров.

№ 3114. Элегантное летнее платье из белого батиста, отделано ручной вышивкой петельным швом. Рукав с напечником в виде реглана. 5 метров.

№ 3115. Английская блузка из цветного полотна, отделана складочками и мержкой. 3½ метра.

№ 3116. Английская блузка, отделана мелкими складочками и гладкими цветными бейками. 3½ метра.

№ 3117. Нарядная блузка из белого шифона. Воротник жабо из шифона, отделан цветной вышивкой, и цветным бантом 2½ метра.



Vintage Russian Fashion Catalogue

Another enchanting little shoe (why just one this time?);
an owl-ringed cape;
a honeycomb tea dress.

Here you'll encounter a songbook of mustaches
and every type of detachable nose,
each wrapped in gossamer vellum paper.

It is another shitty morning in Russia.

We throw open our bedroom window to behold
a sea of blue butterflies taking flight from the flower bed.
We have just read the sentence,
“Ah! We are entirely different,
for I have never ceased to be young,
if being young is always loving.”

It is a letter from George Sand to Gustave Flaubert,
14 September, 1871, Nohant.
For his part, Flaubert was pleased that the doctor
had described him as a woman.

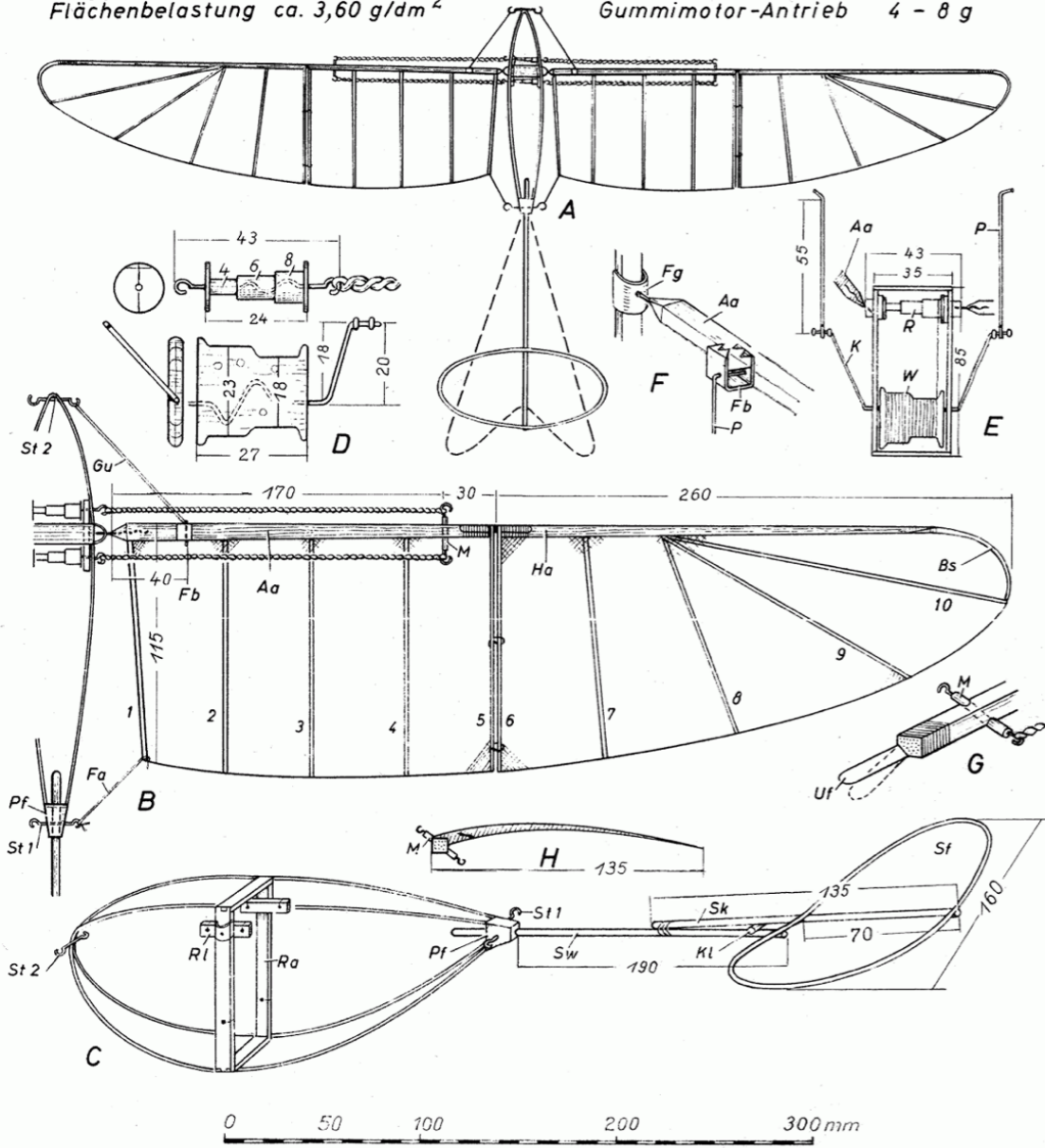
The Machinery of the Clouds

Among the immense swirling clouds
radio technology is useless. The mountains float as
mountains among the wandering clouds and whirling
wind structures. And in sunlight they cast
shadows of aerial parapets & arrowslits on
the pearly meadows— it is enough to make us
forget our skeletons and just
watch, jawless.

Das Schwingenflugmodell I von Erich v. Holst

Rumpfläng 450 mm, Spannweite 970 mm
 Flächeninhalt 9,83 dm²
 Fluggewicht ca. 35 g
 Flächenbelastung ca. 3,60 g/dm²

Rumpfgewicht mit Getriebe 8 - 14 g
 Gewicht der beiden Flügel 7 - 11 g
 Gewicht des Schwanzes 1 - 2 g
 Gummimotor-Antrieb 4 - 8 g



Our Baby

The cage was empty.

"Goodness! Where could our baby be?" asked my sister.

We opened the rusty padlock with the key that we had brought and entered the cage. In the middle there was a large hole.

"It is a secret passage," my sister said. "Our baby must have gone through."

"We shall follow her then," I said, lowered myself into the hole. "She can't have gone far."

My sister stood for a moment in her pretty blue dress. There was a small tear on the collar, where a tree branch had snagged the silk. "Is the hole large enough for us?" she asked, wrinkling her freckled nose.

We tried, head first, and little by little we forced our way inside, crawling into the dark. It was a narrow tunnel, moist and earthy, and coated with loose, shingly clumps of cool dirt and wet twigs. Deep, deep, deep we went, the water dripping on our faces. Several times we passed near a family of moles chittering a wormy, mysterious language of dirt and long days without sun. Once, something the size of a young rabbit scuttled past us. My sister reached out to grab it, fruitlessly.

We knew, from the many roots that we crawled past, that we were under a forest. The ground seemed to be sloping upwards, very gradually, and at last we made out some light ahead. We moved as fast as our fatigue allowed. A green, leafy light spilled into the passage, and finally we hoisted ourselves into the brilliant air.

All around were the boughs and trunks of enormous trees, rounded by deep bays of midsummer shadow, rising above an undergrowth of ferns and flowering plants. Some of the trees were veined with silver; others glinted with innumerate, spade-shaped leaves. Shimmering through the outstretched branches, the light seemed ductile; it bent through the tattered moss, flowed over the shaggy crests of the conifers, and curled lithely around the needles of pines.

"There she is! I see her!" my sister cried.

Although her fur was rich brown and glossy, like a beaver's, she was no beaver. She was small, about twenty inches from the tip of her quivering black nose to the end of her hairless tail, swag-bellied, with a jutting chin and pointy teeth. There was no webbing between her toes, although there were traces between her fingers. She lifted her slender muzzle to sniff the air, her ears pointing forward as though to catch the baying of a faraway dog.

Our baby turned to look at us with her massive saucer eyes, her gaze moving from my face to my sister's with serene recognition. She shone clearly before us. A few leaps and we would have been on her. But as we watched, unmoving, she turned and padded slowly into the canopied greenery.

Intermission.



- Placed here out of kindness to the reader, who might otherwise continue reading forever -

1,007,025.

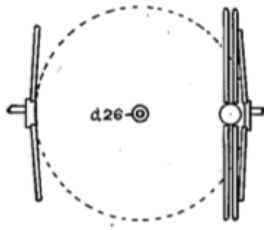


Fig. 5.

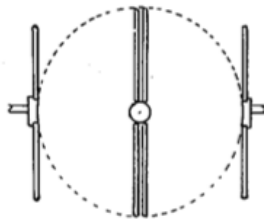


Fig. 4.

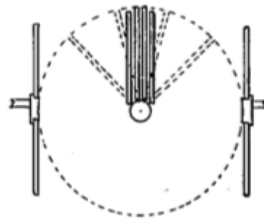


Fig. 3.

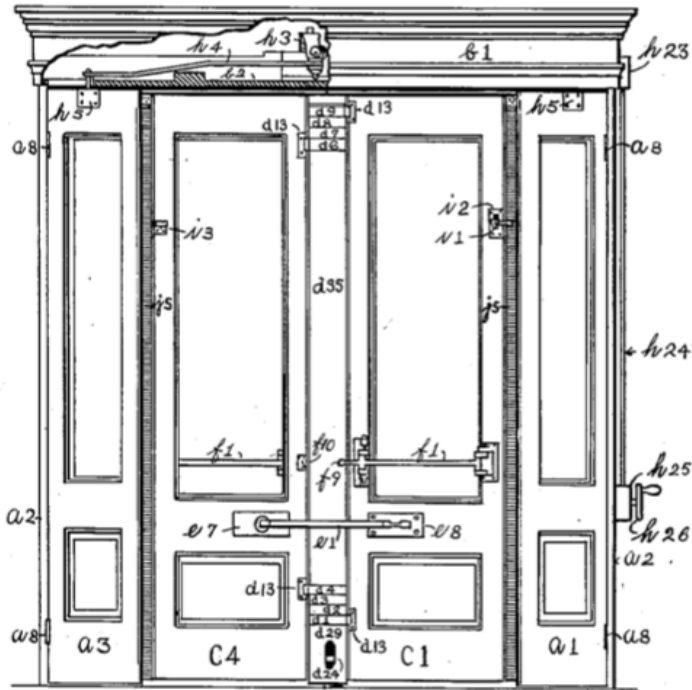


Fig. 6.

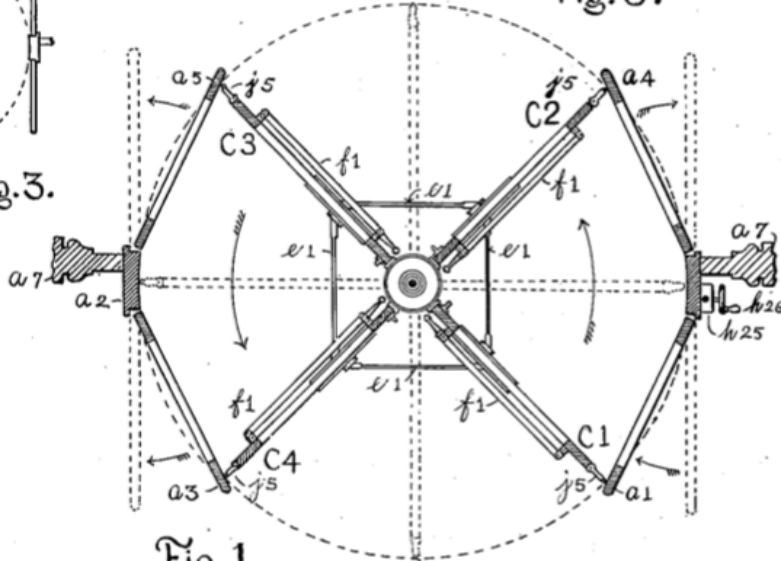


Fig. 1.

WITNESSES:
M. H. Overland
Laura Galambos.

INVENTOR
Walter S. Ely.

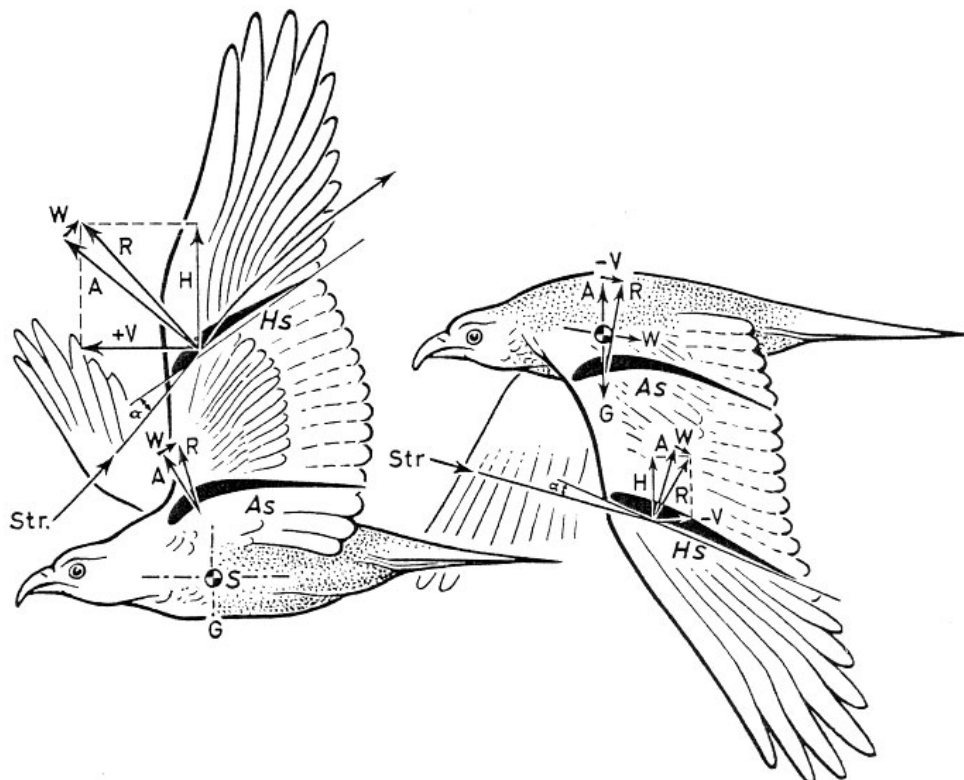
La Sirena

Yes, I see now. There is nowhere to hide
from the ventriloquists,
just as one cannot drown oneself
voluntarily, or by the book, but only
in the book.

If the well is deep and
the rope long, one can only dream long
kite dreams of floating on.

Lecture Notes on the Mechanics of Soap Bubbles

A soap bubble is a fragile thing, but it may be preserved indefinitely, if kept in a small box lined with velvet.



Concentric Time

The case has been a seamy one,
things flying this way and that,
things such as words, or lacking those,
swords. There is no trick better than thought,
she thought, in bed that night.

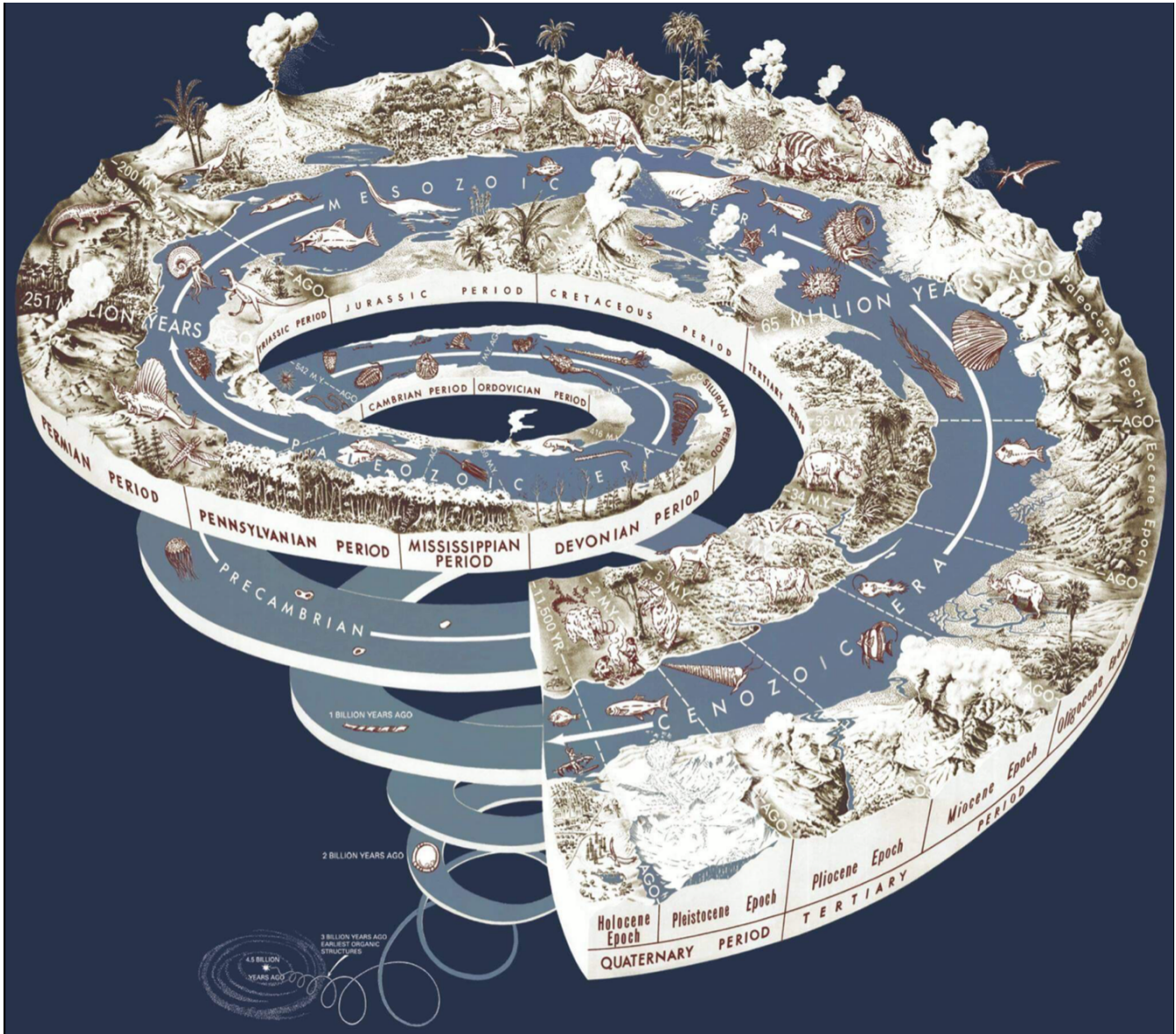
She thinks of thoughts sharpened in the dark,
thoughts reconciled with beginnings and endings,
and weightless cycles in concentric time.

She thinks of the vast circumstances of
scissors scintillating in suspended orbs;
She thinks, too, of order and tessellation,
and lest turpitude be a factor, she thinks of
the onyx evil of angels, the giant glass
looms on which wings are wrung.

Indeed, what we measure will be
measured in the morning, when
the crows fold scarlet and the tubs run dry.
If there is something between you and I,
it is a question not for the mind but the
heart, which is nothing if not precise,
ambivalent.

The First Scuba Suit

was modeled on an embryonic crab. It enabled the pedestrians of Babylon to stroll casually at the ocean's floor while pondering the rhyme schemes of the planets. in those days, the sea creatures were much bigger and still enmeshed in myth; they could in fact be mistaken for celestial objects, if regarded from beneath. indeed, the first comet was a curious dolphin circling the belly of a ship; the first meteor, a mermaid braiding diatoms into her very long seabright hair.



Geochronology—spirals in time.

The Time We Ran Away

Baby sister and I stand aimlessly at the quayside
arousing the curiosity of the zookeepers
whose job it is to know the natural
habitat of everything.

Sister was born prematurely
her gills intact; in fact,
she stands tangentially on
webbed digits.

It is evident from the diagrams that
before sister can be presented to society
many adjustment must be made
in the button room.

Although she is many things,
she is not random, like the lemon trees
blooming in the penumbra of our hill.
Nor is she deliberate,
a giant hamster
escaped from the estuary.

The Time Ran Away

The Doctor's account of my deteriorating condition
contains no grammatical or anatomical errors
other than those of the sand.

First starvation is tried, and then,
in lieu of traditional memory,
a miniature castle by the sea.

This must be kept under lock and key,
he explains, tucking the key in his pocket.
But now there are two of us
and I don't know which to trust
or where.

Tim

But there has been a misprint. The culprit is not Time. The one that they are looking for is Tim, the janitor-in-training.

There he is again, sneaking into the museum after hours, chiseling away at history in the moonlight. Tim has a sweet tooth. Smuggles double chocolate chip cookies from the cafeteria. Trail of crumbs all the way from South Africa to Greece. Nestled in his sock drawer, the most sacred object— Nefertiti's nose—

Logic

What is the meaning of a plump golden apricot?

In fairy tales the explanations come in threes. One brings salt,
the second a mechanical nightingale,
the third his own grandmother

Observations, Memories, and Fantasies
from the Cherry Tree Notebook



The beautiful and the ugly— a beautiful frog and an ugly fairy.

The albino apple tree. Nacreous, transparent fruits. Crab apples scuttling up the trunk, greedily suckling at the branches.

Someone with a reputation for vaulting through windows.

Our relationship was a complex one, and did not end with her beheading...

My friend is convinced that she will give birth to a winged horse...

My next book for children: *The Cynical Rocking Horse*. Illustrations in watercolor.

A feeling that the entire world is turning to stone, a slow petrification. The misery of imprisoned matter.

Someone with a passion for geometrical patterns. Passion or obsession? It will get him in trouble, of course.

“These we not playthings,” she says gravely.

Always that question, Where will we hide it?

In this story, she rescues her dying lover by transforming him into pure information. But isn't there a theory that everything is information, fundamentally; that the world is quark-deep in shadows, dreams, and memories; that nothing is ever lost, only transfigured. What of experience, though? And feelings? Don't those count for something?

A vast collection of little scissors./ *The Sexual Liberation of Bees*.

The subtle forces that connect the microcosm to the macrocosm, quarks to qualities, words to meanings.

A tendentious paper on the atomic structure of melancholy.

Someone who attempts to reconstruct the actual Shakespeare, by memory.

Someone who devotes his life to the study of a rare and numinous species of sea cucumber.

Breaking news: A flying carpet escapes from a furniture store; A genie emerges from an Ikea lamp.

Someone who realizes that gravity is optional. She wonders, too, whether her confidence in the arrow of causation is warranted.

The complexities of turning a bicycle. Of drawing a bicycle by memory. What a miracle it is, that there are functional bicycles in the world, all things considered.

The homunculus who dwells a centimeter behind her right eye.

Poison pills.

Someone who resembles moonlight.

Someone who notices the loose end of a thread on her thumb— she realizes that she is held together by thread, and is in imminent danger of unravelling.

The confabulatory genius who reinvents her world every moment.

She is banished to the Ice Mountains.

One of those Schulzian days that is more real and more dazzling than any other day..

A doctor who falls too in love with his patient to treat her. Perhaps he keeps her on the brink of illness, so that she never leaves.

A heightened and concentrated sense of the material world, in all its luminosity...Wonder whether there is anything more surreal, more inebriating, than reality.

An insect trapped in amber.

A house made completely of corners. Or of errors. The most broken house that still, somehow, stands.

The scandalous Diamond Necklace Affair.

In this story, trash becomes an object of wonder, a portal into the sublime.

Hyperawareness of the everyday: A chair that multiplies, divides, scatters, branches out. A self-propagating fertility.

Svetlana is not pleased with me.

Hilarity, its irresistibility, the magnetism of its logic.

The spiritual implications of gardening.

An infant with an overdeveloped head. She wears baby shoes and adult-sized hats.

September, picking turnips with my sister.

Often, I dream of the crazy hairdresser. Why so passive? Why not object to the scissors? Dreams, like hands, may have multiple functions. Like a zoetrope. In the

first scene a girl is menaced by a crocodile. In the next, a boy slaughters his entire family with a bow and arrow.

The pockets of the voluminous trousers.

There are always rules, even in the doll corner.

A woman slowly transforms into a porcelain doll; she keeps it a secret for as long as she can.

Someone who gradually loses his outline until the wallpaper behind him is visible, patterned with a pale matrix of veins.

Her weird, spiderlike movements. She follows me, undulating from window to window.

The sinking city; the floating island.

Lost. All the houses look the same. Enter a house that looks just like yours. The family looks like yours, too. By the time you realize your mistake, it's too late to leave. The family dog has become attached to you.

A ginormous cockroach that never dies. He has been in the family for generations. He is in all of the oil paintings and photographs (the oil painting of Great Aunt Eunice, last summer's photographs on the coast of France). Never aging, only getting fatter and fatter.

An infestation of shadows. They scuttle sidelong across the floor, up the eaves.

A bed that gives anyone who sleeps in it nightmares.

Oh, stop. Don't lose sight of the point. What is the point?

Hopefully, beauty. Not cleverness. Cleverness is not enough.

They had no idea how I got it, and I wasn't about to tell them.

The quiet radiance of an apricot.

Memories of my grandmother cutting things with a big knife.

The consensus seems to be that fiction makes a terrible guide for real life... This is the true story of someone who tragically, or maybe farcically, applies fictional solutions to her problems. Throws herself under a train. Tries to fool the bumblebees by disguising herself as a rain cloud.

The scientists experiment on virtual humans. Instead of a human, they torture a semi-realistic cartoon.

Warning. A mountain lion has been spotted near the lagoon.

By the fireplace, a beautiful little kitten snores melodiously.

Defenseless, clearly.

Dreamt of my mother in a shell, slowly moving her eyes. It seems as though she has become reconciled with her fate.

Describe someone in various attitudes of crouching. Crouching at the academy, at the wedding altar, in the coffin. Yes, his whole life was one big crouch.

Write about the malice of an object being transferred involuntarily to the psychological plane.

Nabokov's recipe for tiramisu. The essence is mascarpone custard layered with whipped cream and ladyfingers. In a medium saucepan whisk together egg yolks and sugar until well blended. The butter is love at first sight, and the rest is stardust.

Got lice, after wearing the princess's crown.

He closes his laptop every time she enters the room... Amidst the mounting evidence of her husband's infidelity, she hires a series of gorgeous nannies, each more sensational than the last, and morbidly gauges his reactions.

Someone who spends the greater part of his life trying to persuade people that he is not French; eventually this turns him French.

The timely death of the writer takes the critics by surprise. These types of people tend to live forever, much to the dismay of their families.

The military takeover of a school by a platoon of kindergarteners.

Someone who lost an arm, and adamantly denies it. When asked to move her arm, she invents a reason for not doing so.

The wardrobe contains, as a kind of bonus feature, a secret puppet show. The grandmother perishes of a heart attack when a puppet leaps out at her. The ensuing legal battles, impassioned telephone correspondences, soapbox soliloquies...

Why not just plant a tree? If there is at least one tree, everything is better, sweeter.

The prototypical grandmother, the one inevitably discussed in this sort of story, not only represents but demands another world. The effect is experimentally verifiable. Technology dysfunctions in her presence. Radios break down, TVs flicker off, geiger counters malfunction, intricate computer algorithms and cryptographs simply melt like ice-cubes in the Sahara.

Giving away: A dog's name tag. It can be reused, if you don't mind using the phone number, and the name.

The ball of hair left on the sill of the bathtub. The fantastic flotilla of rubber ducks.

The annoyance of an introvert when another self-described introvert attempts to slink into her life by affecting solidarity. Privacy becomes impossible. She encroaches on every silent sacred space, strutting a turtleneck, perusing Schopenhauer, knitting a pair of earmuffs.

Every person has somewhere in their heart a numeral engraved, the exact number of days that they will live. One might glimpse one's number in a fortune cookie, a thermometer reading, the price of a pound of pears, and think nothing of it.

During his last bath, our pug dog was peaceful and oddly dignified— a tiny Marcus Aurelius enwreathed in soap bubbles. He had always been silent, the sort of wordlessness that accompanies both great stupidity and great wisdom. It remains an unresolved mystery, whether little Oswald was a moron or a mastermind.

Their language, its byzantine syntax and apparently non-sequential phraseology, suggests that they are able to perceive a fourth dimension.

A thousand kaleidoscopic memories of my father descending the stairs. Here he crosses over, appears to dimly perceive himself; yet one of my fathers wordlessly continues to the kitchen, the other to the bedroom. Stop, I want to say. I would like to introduce you to yourself.

The tragedy of someone trying to sneak up on people after getting a metallic leg.

The Legend of the Snow Crab. Or, the story of the little snow crab wandering lost in the woods. What happens? Must something happen?

The curious case of the child who hates music by nature.

“Let’s pretend our parents are dead,” she proposes. “Bited by tigers.”

The murmuring garden. Sweet peas, frankincense, myrrh, pale apples suspended in the glassworks. So many little pigs snuffling about in the strawberry bushes, so many little selves. Why ever leave?

In the Strawberry Garden

I remember the place in my grandmother's garden, on the mossy bench between the giggling strawberry bushes and the shyly winking field of snowbells, where I first kissed a girl.

I was thirteen, she fifteen; she was much taller than me, the daughter of my father's business partner, with huge velvet eyes so dark they were nearly black. We kissed each other on the mouth for a long time in that strawberry-smelling garden, until we heard my grandmother calling us inside for roast duck, sauerkraut, and fruit-filled dumplings.

At the dinner table, our fathers discussed the subtleties of the soda-water industry. My father was the leading exporter of a sweet red fizzy drink called šumět, which was similar in flavor to root beer, but with overtones of something like bubblegum; her father manufactured and distributed soda bottle caps. She and I could barely look at each other; we nibbled on our fruit dumplings in what I imagined as a sort of Julietesque quiescence; we engaged in a detailed though mostly silent correspondence, conveying messages in the angle of a butter knife, or in the curl of an errant lock of hair. I was enamored with the idea of forbidden love, probably more than with love itself, and delighted in constructing impenetrable obstacles to True Happiness.

Meet me at midnight by the crab-apple tree, let us forget about our families and run away together, I would say with the lobster bisque spoon.

No, darling, it can never be, she would say, daintily impaling a pea.

My New Larynx

I adopted her, of course.

She is a cross between a bobcat &
a lung. After the bath she is kitten-soft
and the capillaries especially are like silk.
she sleeps at the atrium of our bed
purring spuriously in the moonlight.



A Conversation Overheard from the Rose Bushes

Today I went to a playground with a tape recorder and a pair of binoculars. I have a mind to dissect the syntax of narratives in natural speech. Not for the first time, I bore witness through the branches of a rose bush. I have no reason to believe that my presence was felt; I disguised a sneeze by transforming it into something approximately catlike.

(Interpretational note: the dashes indicate the flow of time rather than the identity of the speaker.)

— What was the most important fight that you remember, one that sticks in your mind?

— Well, one, I think, was with a girl.

— Like, I was a kid, you know.

— And she was the baddest girl, *the baddest girl in the neighborhood*.

— If you didn't bring her candy to school, she would punch you in the mouth; and you had to kiss her when she'd tell you.

— This girl was only about twelve years old, man, but she was a killer.

— She didn't take no junk.

— She whupped up all her brothers.

— And I came to school one day, and I didn't have no money. My ma wouldn't give me no money. And I played hookies, so I said, you know, I'm not gonna play hookies no more 'cause I don't wanna get a whupping.

— So I go to school and this girl says, "Where's the candy?"

— I said, "I don't have it."

— She said, powww!

— So I says to myself, "There's gonna be times my mother don't give me money because's we're a poor family. And I can't take this all, you know, every time she don't give me any money."

— So I say, "Well, I just gotta fight this girl. She gonna hafta whup me up. I hope she don't whup me."

— And I hit the girl: powwww! And I put something on it.

— I win the fight.

— That one was the most important [].

End of record.

Balloon Child

It's not real, she whispers,
leaning over the cradle
with a needle.

Sister enumerating the
wisterias, remembering—
the smoke from the crematorium;
Me tending to the kitten with
its face blown off.

All of me will not suffice to
mend this small thing
weeping mouthlessly on the carpet.

The Wig

On the sofa from the yard sale,
a twisted mass of black hair
left there as though by accident.
We try not to talk about it;
We try not to look at it.
Because to look at something
is to become it.

Convex Milk

Again he tells me of the inner voice urging him to
procure a week's supply of milk
and bring it to me in a convex jug.

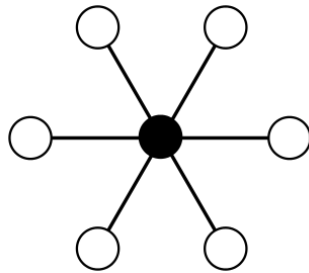
What does it mean? he enquires,
as though I am expert of weeks, or milk, or me.
What does it mean?

But how I do covet a convex container
for certain thoughts which, at present,
seem to fit nowhere and feel to me— extravagant —
in their nudity.

Dessin d'Enfant

This is surely because of the very familiar, non-technical nature of the objects considered, of which any child's drawing scrawled on a bit of paper (at least if the drawing is made without lifting the pencil) gives a perfectly explicit example. To such a dessin we find associated subtle arithmetic invariants, which are completely turned topsy-turvy as soon as we add one more stroke.

Here is the graph corresponding to the sextic monomial $p(x) = x^6$.



If Time Had an Edge

Danger! Cliff! Wild deer! Children!—
As usual, we were pursued by the men in uniforms
and their dogs, also in uniforms.
You can't go there, shouted the officers.
And so we did.

Are you afraid? you ask.
I admit it is a long way down,
too far for shadows or echoes,
and we are only people.

How strange it is that any Time is
— will have been—
Time shared

We drop a stone into that immense
magnetic darkness and watch for as long as we can—
we do not hear the bottom, nor will we, nor can we.

Studies of the Fetus in the Womb

Since Tuesday, an enormous spider has taken up residence in the chandelier. The people of the house dare not provoke it with a broom for fear of dismantling one of the priceless crystals suspended about the circumference.

Clever spider, lovely spider, knowing spider. There may be hope, for she has woven her nest around the finest of the sapphires—the heart of the chandelier. I wish that the world would simply Let her be— and attend to her cradle song, exquisite in its geometry.

The Drapery Codex

Leonardo was obsessed with turbines, with geometry, with seashells, and with curtains. I wonder about the last. He devoted an entire Codex to drapery. It is like a Renaissance knitting manual.

Every child knows that the purpose of a curtain, its *raison d'être*, is to hide something. Once again the matter boils down to questions of the heart— where, why, what, whom, whither. Whither the heart, and where, and why?

What resembles a baby bird, from a distance, occasionally turns out to be a very old man. I learned this one day, on the way home from school. A robin's nest on the side of the road. I leaned over the fence to look inside.

The True Face of Alexander Grothendieck

is a debated subject in modern algebraic geometry. He retreated to the French village of Lasserre in Pyrenees, where he lived in seclusion, working on and in Mathematics until his alleged death. The Institut des hautes études scientifiques (ihés) preserves his monumental brain in a jar.

It might be relevant that his father was an anarchist who trained mice professionally for the Cirque de Soleil.

In 1942, he escaped from the internment camp in Hamburg, intending to assassinate Hitler.

In the next scene he comes to America.

Grothendiek comes to America

and is denied entrance.

He is invited to study in New England by a Russian man, the type who wears small furry black hats. The offer falls through when he does not sign the pledge promising not to overthrow the United States government.

In an interview, he remarked that he would not mind prison, so long as there were books.

$f \text{ et } f^{-1} \text{ sur } \dots$

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} f \text{ sur } \dots, \dots \dots \dots (1-f^{-1})^2 \in A^6 \\ f^{-1} \text{ sur } \dots, \dots \dots \dots (1-f)^2 \in A^6 \end{array} \right.$

Est. K... $\rightarrow d \equiv 1$ $b^3=0, c \text{ inversible}$ // si A ... $\rightarrow c \in A^*/A^{*(2)}$
 Est. K... $\rightarrow d \equiv 0$ $c^2=0, b \text{ inversible}$ // si A ... $\rightarrow b \in A^*/A^{*(2)}$

$\left(\frac{t}{t-1} \right)^3 \in 0^6 0^*$ $\left(\frac{t-1}{t} \right)^2 \in 0^6 0^*$ $\sqrt[6]{\frac{t}{t-1}}$

$\sqrt[2]{\frac{t}{t-1}}$ $\sqrt[3]{\frac{t-1}{t}}$ $\lambda^{2/6} \cdot \lambda^{2/6} = \lambda^{1/6}$

$c^6 = \frac{t}{t-1}$ $\frac{b^3}{c^2} = t$ $\frac{-27c^7}{b^3 - 27c^2} = t$

$27c^7 (t-1) = b^3 t$

$\frac{b^3}{c^2} = 27 \frac{t-1}{t}$

$K_A(E, A) \times K_0(A, 0)$

$x^3 + 27 \frac{t-1}{t} (x+1) = 0$

18

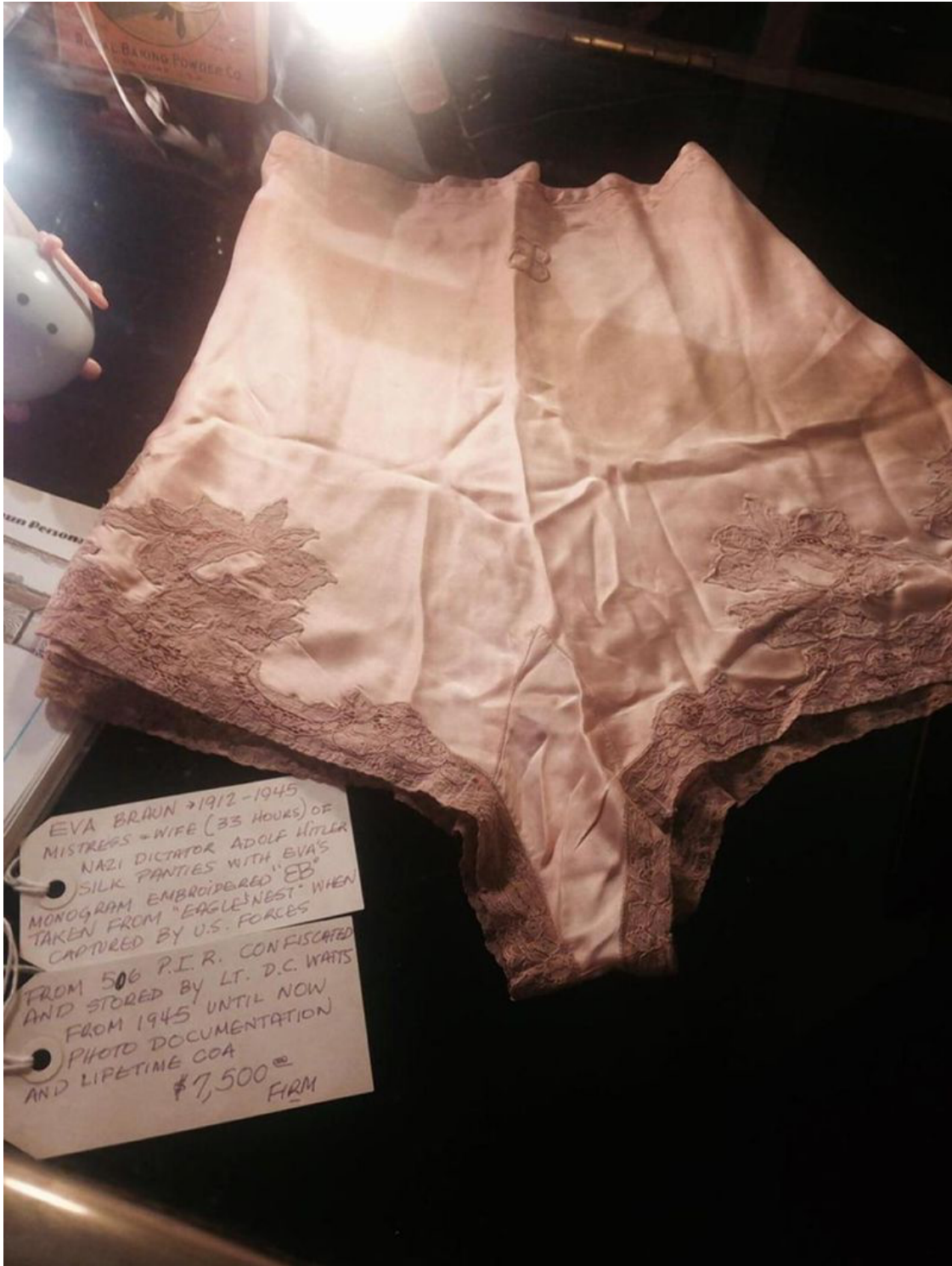
Grothendieck's notes on ping pong and polynomials. Part of his plan to overthrow America?

Eva Braun's Underwear

For sale in an antique shop in Ohio.
Includes a personal monogram, EB.
Silk, salmon pink, use commensurate with age.
Did they impress the Führer?
I am tempted to drop a mouse in these
historic panties.

The secret entrance to the Nazi's alpine fortress
is a concrete doorway carved into a mountain.
The door opens to a complex lattice of tunnels,
bunkers, and hidden rooms.
At the end of the master tunnel
(almost four miles long)
is a solid brass elevator, still running today,
which would have carried the lovers
to their mountaintop retreat.

What else did the serviceman find
in the tunnels under the Hotel Berghof
in Obersalzberg?



Jealousy

For many nights her long clawed silhouette prowled around my apartment in the thirty-third arrondissement. One evening the shadow pursued me down the street, forcing me to flee in a passing cabriolet. But even then I had not escaped danger, which I knew in an instant when the driver's hood slipped. At the last moment Babette, bless her soul, came to my aid, leaping through the window with an oversized wooden spoon. And that was the last of it.

But oh how it could have ended.

In another version of this tale, the spurned shadow cultivates an obsession with structure, with the fat-filled pouches of visceral membrane lining the throat and lungs.

Routinely she analyzes my doorframe, itemizing the boxes, rings, straps & bars, imagining how to disrupt the ticking of this locked door as she had the others, tapping, tasting, memorizing the spirals in the wood, as one might the creases on a lover's palm.

M. Baud Codier

Belle femme sage pleureux orgon
Le sein d'une despin amoué de Baudier mon
Une Belle femme
Ouvra Belle femme
De ce que se son ne fimes l'ame se vous siuple ma
Ouvra Belle femme
De ce que se son ne fimes l'ame se vous siuple ma
Belle femme ..



terms of endearment, among butterflies

sweetheart

fibrous papule

brightly papillating fibre-arttra-erbif gnitallipap ylthgirb

darling honeycomb

bmocyenoh gnilrad

coxcomb

bmocxoc

xoxo

oxox

oo

oo

Ghosts of Prague

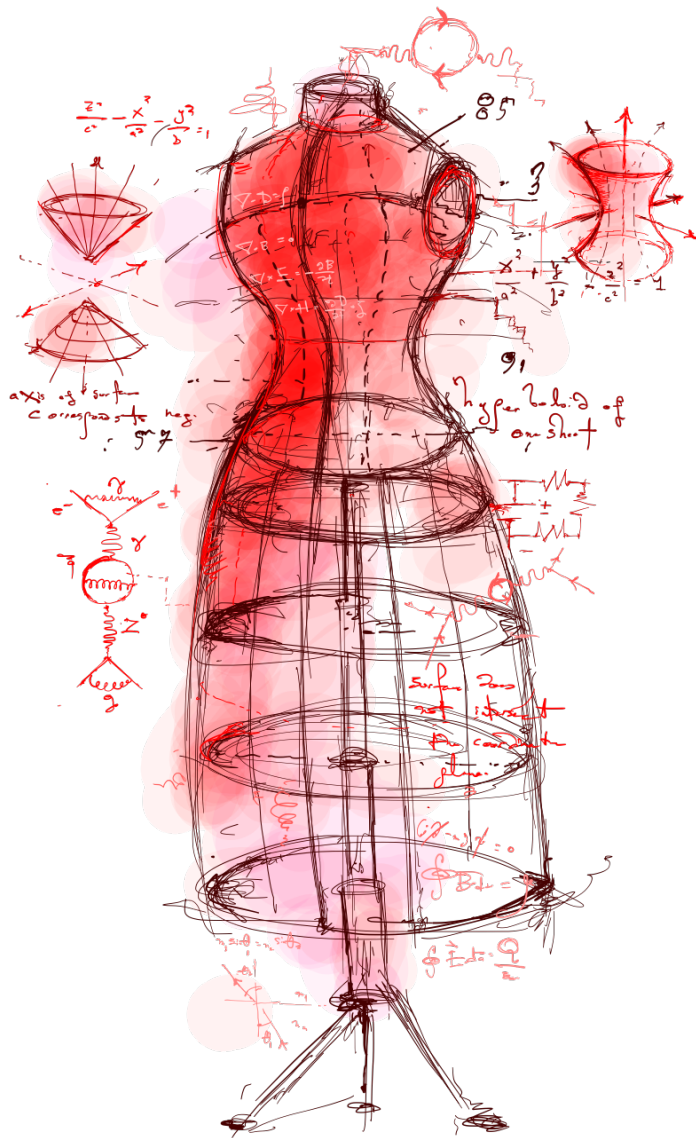
As I flitted through the streets towards my old family home, squinting at the once-familiar street names, silence pressed against my ears like a downy blanket. I suspected that the streets were directing my path, reconfiguring themselves to deliver me to my house. Many times, when I resolved to turn to the left, I would discover that I was in fact moving to the right. I wondered how a compass would operate in this city. Would its needle indicate multiple diverging versions of the usual poles? Would there, for example, be more than one accurate North? Or would the compass needle only align itself with one direction, the direction home?



On the Impossibility of Mending a Sweater

Repairing the poppy red sweater,
I could not stop at the wreckage on the shoulder
but proceeded helplessly to the
hemorrhaging tissue of the button holes.
And the closer I looked, the more holes I discovered,
many of these containing within their emptiness
an infinite sequence of tinier holes—
a chain of nothings falling greedily inwards.

If only there were a needle fine enough
to sublimate the art of mending— !
But in what box could we store such an instrument,
an object fine enough to pierce any edge?
I almost wrote *earthly*. Any earthly edge.
But I doubt that this needle
could mend a ghost, either.



Evocations

Evoked wind whistling through a graveyard;
Evoked a revolution;
A funeral march;
A hybrid fantasia;
A humoresque.

Evoked the unfolding of the clouds
and the unravelling of a red string
on a heart left ajar in a
jewel-fretted evening.

Evoked also the solitary candle
glowing in the Venetian rose-glass,
and the gondolas floating
vocally skywards, as though
a soul were a small beaded fee
to be weighed against
some merchant's clemency.

Monstrous Moonshine

An unexpected intimacy between the monster group and the lovely j -function. Lying beneath the monstrous moonshine is a vertex operator algebra— and this underlies a two-dimensional conformal field theory. The bridge is physics, and it is a beautiful one.

But what of the brass elevator? What of the snow castle? For this is also the story of the queen of the flowery isles, the enchanted pig, the golden lion, the brave little boy who hunted wolves, the wild swans, the ice maiden. Above all it is the story of Beauty and the Beast.

The Beast considered her for a moment, and then said in a less furious tone: Who told you that you might gather my roses? But instantly the curtain was rolled aside. There were dances, and there were colored lights, and music, so that the Beauty could never feel lonely again.

Seashell

When America goes
the kitchen table barely trembles.
In her spot by the guttering candle
Grandmother does not miss a stitch.
And the goldfish in her amber orb
looks as besotted as ever,
counts snails to pass the time.
Is this how we will die?
Disreputably, clasped in starlight,
with hearts conjoined?

The Piano Lesson

Today you come home
with a bloodied mouth,
a new knowledge in your eyes.

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Notes

Images

[1] Cover art: *Supersymmetric butterfly, with Adinkra symbols*. Original illustration during the 2019 Summer Student Theoretical Physics Research Session (SSTPRS) at Brown University with Professor Jim Gates.

[2] pg. 3. Image from *Choreographie* (1700), which details a dance notation system invented in the 1890s in the court of Louis XIV. Accessed Spring 2020. <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/collection-of-dances-in-choreography-notation-1700>

[3] pg. 10. "Lunar Day," from the book *Recreations in Astronomy* by H. D. Warren D. D., 1879. Accessed Spring 2020. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selenography>

[4] pg. 12. Photograph of my great-grandparents' wedding in Montreal, Quebec, 1932.

[5] pg. 15. John Bull's 6-part circular canon *Sphera mundi*. From an 18th-century MS. Accessed Spring 2020. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye_music

[6] pg. 17. *Sissonne à la seconde*. Accessed Spring 2020. <http://balletwithchiara.weebly.com/blog/sissonne>

[7] pg. 32. Photograph of Virginia Woolf with her cocker spaniel, Pinka. Accessed Fall 2019. <https://www.elestudiodelpintor.com/2017/03/mujeres-la-historia-historia-mujeres-i-virginia-woolf/>

[8] pg. 41. Childhood photograph of Vladimir Lenin, circa 1887. Accessed Fall 2019. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_life_of_Vladimir_Lenin

[9] pg. 44. Photograph of Jeffrey Dahmer with kitten. Accessed Fall 2019. <https://www.pinterest.ru/pin/517702919649179104/>

[10] pg. 47. and pg. 49. *The Pastorall: Mr. Issac's new dance made for Her Majestys birthday.* 1713. Accessed Fall 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/musdi.i25.o?st=gallery>

[11] pg. 50. Page from a Russian fashion catalogue <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/353743745709066104/>

[12] pg. 53. *Das Schwingenflugmodell I von Erich v. Holst.* 1963. Accessed Fall 2019. http://www.ornithopter.de/nederlands/herzog_nl.htm

[13] pg. 59. *Patent for the revolving door, 1911.* Accessed Fall 2019. Online.

[14] pg. 61. *Biophysica van de vogelvlucht.* Accessed Spring 2020. http://www.ornithopter.de/nederlands/herzog_nl.htm

[15] pg. 64. *Geochronology.* Accessed Fall 2019. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geochronology>

[16] pg. 69. *The Fairy and the Frog.* Ida Rentoul Outhwaite (1888-1960). Accessed Fall 2019. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/751608625281789977/>

[17] pg. 80. *Le soldat et la danseuse.* Bertall (1820-1882). Accessed Fall 2019. https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Bertall_ill_Intrepide_Soldat_de_plomb_Le_Couple.png

[18] pg. 86. Graph corresponding to sextic monomial. Accessed Fall 2019. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dessin_d%27enfant

[19] pg. 92. Selection from the notes of Alexander Grothendieck. Accessed Fall 2019. Online.

[20] pg. 94. Photograph of Eva Braun's underwear. Accessed Fall 2019.

<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/nazi-booty-eva-braun-panties-sale-ohio-article-1.2243354>

[21] pg. 96. *Belle, bonne, sage*. Early Renaissance love song by Baude Cordier (ca. 1380-ca.1440). Accessed Fall 2019. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye_music

[22] pg. 97. Illustration of the Indian Leafwing Butterfly. Accessed Spring 2020. Online.

[23] pg. 99. *Memories of Trentino*. Original illustration. 2018.

[24] pg. 101. *Red dress*. Original illustration. Spring 2020.

Texts

[1] pg. 13. The starting point for this piece was a line from the notebooks of Charles Simic, either in *The Monster Loves is Labyrinth* or *Orphan Factory*.

[2] pg. 51. Letter from George Sand Flaubert dated 14 September 1871 (Nohant). Sand wrote, "...I have never ceased to be young, if being young is always loving." *The George Sand-Gustave Flaubert Letters*. Boni and Liveright. Pub. 1921. Pg. 212.

[3] pg. 81. The dialogue quoted is an actual conversation between young adults from south-central Harlem recorded for sociolinguistics research. It is reproduced in Labov's 1972 essay "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax" (pg. 358-359). Accessed Fall 2019. <http://filosofia.dipafilo.unimi.it/bonomi/Labov%20I.pdf>

[4] pg. 86. The opening quotes a section from Alexander Grothendieck's proposal *Esquisse d'un Programme* ("Sketch of a Programme") for a position at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) (pg. 4). Accessed Fall 2019. <http://www.landsburg.com/grothendieck/EsquisseEng.pdf>