Invisible Homes
Without Here and there Where never will come near and go away from anything, all the steps of the earth
I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use -- silence, exile, and cunning.

— James Joyce
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Photo from Boeing 737 above Tehran
A long never-ending night road slips beneath us and disappears under the car. The ground of Tehran is escaping my grasp and as we get closer to the airport there is less and less of it left.

- ‘I must hold the record of most trips to Imam Khomeini airport without actually having left Iran. Well, apart from the airport Taxi drivers that is, but they’re doing their job, it’s different’

This was Amirhossein’s way of lightening the weighing gloom that had occupied the car. We laughed and then immediately remembered those who had gone down this road and those who will soon make this trip.

Many are strapped to containers. They have swum the cold dark waters of the English Channel to sneak into ferries and climb trucks disguised in reflective aluminum foil. While drinking cheap liquor to warm up and most possibly braven up before their final swim, they go over their rehearsals and check once again the route. Laid out in front of them drawn in pen and pencil is a map of the Calais ferry terminal that they have configured through careful daily inspections. It is exciting, as if an action film is about to unfold. But once they start swimming through the chilled wet night in their life jackets it is clumsy, dangerous, frightening, almost doomed. Whether they make it to the other side or not they will still be one of the non-existent list of the unregistered many who escape statistics and documentation; the uncounted. They endure so much for the Promised Land¹. Perhaps my plight wanes in the heavy shadows of their exile.

Whatever the reasons and motives might be, whatever their impact on what is abandoned and left behind, regardless of the place the immigrant, the refugee, the expatriate comes into, ‘a man is running from the worse towards the better. The truth of the matter is that from
a tyranny one can only be exiled to a democracy. For good old exile ain’t what it used to be. It isn’t leaving civilized Rome for savage Sarmatia anymore.

That seemingly simple escape from the worse towards the better simultaneously holds within itself, the desire to find a place where desire will no longer be, and the longing for one’s roots. ‘Someplace where there isn’t any trouble. Do you suppose there is such a place Toto? There must be’, says Dorothy to her dog.

‘What is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both.’ Here lies the violence of banishment and solitude ‘a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur’. Exile is a strong word. Exile is ‘terminal loss’. It refers to many states of being or rather states of displaced being. Its violence moves beyond the violent act of removal onto the tension of the countervailing desires of leaving versus belonging. The exile can appreciate and detect advantages of the new place because of her previous experiences, but because of the very same experiences cannot find a meaningful place or role there. She is insignificant and irrelevant, being measured ‘against human Infinity: it is about as bad as an inhuman one’.

In this piece I try to embrace that insignificance to be the needle in a haystack, but attempt to attach myself to what is overwhelmingly bigger than life, in a dare to take something from it, however small it might be. ‘A small project might as well embrace the earth’, the second half of the title ‘Without Here and There, where never will come near and go away from anything, all the steps of the earth’, is borrowed from a project by Pascal Schoning, a construction that is ‘holding the universe onto the earth’; modestly engaging in pursuit of something of life. Pascal was my tutor and he indeed inspires life.

This text is a rag quilt that will cover all the steps of the earth or will simply explore how to go about making it. I sow rags, ‘I shall appropriate no formulations, purloin no valuables. But the rags, the refuse, fragments of text, film, and spaces will be put together to create perhaps a whole, or even an incomplete composition, but still a story that will confront in its form and description the violence in
exile—understatedly through the fragile and vulnerable act of writing: ‘Proof that inadequate, even childish measures, may serve to rescue one from peril’\textsuperscript{10}. I collect material sources sampled from many steps of the earth, to which I anchor the story. I intend for them not to stand as evidence, but instead to become embedded texture inside the architecture of the writing. They stand in as form, and reflect perhaps a different meaning—my reading, my story—to become an inseparable part of the arrangement and mise en scene of the quilt.

***

I remember a long distance phone conversation with Amirhossein months after I had left, he was telling me about a dinner with whoever and whoever...

‘Well dear it's like a field hospital here, you have to make do with the person lying in the next bed’.

He wrote to me that he would write a novel with that title.
Photo from Boeing 737 London Heathrow
Notes

3 Victor Fleming, 1939, Wizard of Oz
5 Julia Kristeva, 1991, Stranger to Ourselves, New York, Columbia Press, pp.1
8 Pascal Schoning, in explanation of his project Without Here and there, where never will come near and go away from anything, all the steps of the earth, that refers to Beckett’s remark and the impossibility of defining space and time simultaneously, [Pascal Schoning, 2006, Manifesto for a Cinematic Architecture, London, AA Publications, pp.25]
Live in the house — and the house will stand.
I will call up any century,
Go into it and build myself a house.

__Arseniy Tarkovsky__
Hossein comes down the stairs of an earthquake-ridden house, one of the few still standing and sits to wear his shoes; he wipes them before putting them on. He looks incongruously pristine; there is rubble everywhere and people are covered in dust, bandages and tearstains: An arresting juxtaposition, so real yet almost out of place, reveals without being indifferent to the catastrophe, not the significance of destruction and death but rather the significance of what remains. Life and Nothing More\(^1\) opens with radio announcements that tell us of the magnitude of the 1990 earthquake in the north of Iran where tens of thousands of people died. A filmmaker and his son travel to the area. They are trying to find the Ahmadpour brothers who had acted in the filmmaker’s previous film, Where is the Friend’s House? They don’t know if the brothers have survived. The filmmaker engages Hossein in conversation.

-You look as if you just got married.

-Yes.

-How long has it been?

-Five days.

-Five days or five months?

-Five days!

-You mean the night of the earthquake?

-No the day after.
There can’t have been many losses in your family for you to get married the day after.

- No, there were many, cousins, aunts, uncles... in total 65 dead... But if I were to leave it to the elders, one would have wanted us to wait until the third day of mourning, another the seventh, another would say the fortieth, or even a whole year till the anniversary! If we’d listened to them, we would have had to wait for god knows how long. So I decided to collect my bride and bring her over, and now it’s a done deal.

- You brought her here?

- Yes... No, not here...We’ve been here the last three days. At first, we were under the palastic.

- What? palastic? You mean plastic?

- ‘I had bought twenty meters of palastic for the rice fields, but instead I brought it here. I made four props, fixed them in the ground, pulled the palastic over and we went underneath’

- And that was your wedding chamber?

- Yes.

- What did you do after? For food?

- For food? Well, we didn’t have any plates or things left. I thought we’d go and look at the place where we used to live to see if I could find any. I looked through the rubble and I found a pot, a plate and a couple of spoons. We washed them...and brought them back to our palastic. Then I went to the bazaar, to see if I could find something to eat. I saw two trucks from the emergency services parked alongside the highway. One was giving out tents and the other tomatoes. We got there too late for the tents, but we managed to get a few tomatoes. We washed them. I made skewers out of sticks and cooked them on fire.

- As your wedding banquet?

- Yes.

[De-struction]

The earthquake that destroyed Koker, that night did something to our house in Tehran too. I cannot exactly pinpoint what it did or whether
the house was moving. The Earthquake is curious; its limited short-lived life has a very strong presence. You wake up with the feeling that surely something significant is happening, your mind in a blank state, baffled you gasp at it; meanwhile the chandelier sways almost hitting the ceiling. Only after it’s over you realise that nothing will ever be the same; space changes—of course there is destruction but even time is transformed, all broken into stretches of discontinuity, the suspended devastation, the fast clearing, the long stretches of night, ...

Under a sheet of palastic home simply continues; when I am standing in the ruins, home leaves behind the physical bounds of the house, and stands stronger in their absence. Home is not a house but what still continues where house is lost, possession is lost, even family is lost; when every materiality associated with home is interrupted. Earthquake builds home through loss and with that which is not visible to eye; invisible homes.

Before the credits of the film there is a reference made not to the earthquake but to the solidity of concrete structures. However, through the film what we encounter image after image, village after village is destruction. Earthquake has undone wooden columns, beams and roofs; it has undone mud and brick walls into rubble, if not the concrete structures. The earthquake de-structs. As a result, what has opened up amid all ruin is space; a space where the invisible qualities of home are disclosed. The strength of revelation within the ruins lies in their invisible condition and category of literal openness. As much as ruins have materiality, they are remains and leftovers of material, they are useless remnants. They are discontinuous; therefore excluded and considered outside the category of material and material continuity.

Within the discontinuity of de-struction there remains continuity and much potential. Calvino wonders whether the ruins of Armilla are because it is unfinished or because it has been demolished, for it has no walls, no floors, no ceilings. Regardless life unfolds, ‘at any hour, raising your eyes among the pipes, you are likely to glimpse a young woman, or many young women, slender, not tall of stature, luxuriating in bathtubs or arching their backs under the showers suspended in the void...’

8
Where are my white socks Tahereh?

Look where your clothes are.

I already looked. They're not there.

Maybe on the shelf?

They're not there either. I don't know what you do with my things!

You must have put them in your shoes then.

In my shoes? I don’t think so. But if you say so, fine. I’ll go and look, Okay...

Oh! They are in my shoes!

Everyday life is one of the remains if not a refuse of de-struction, and home continues in its very enactment. Hossein has misplaced his white socks, tomatoes are cooked on fire, clothes are washed, water is fetched, people have to piss. The little boy pisses in the beginning of the film, the father also stops to take a leak later on and on their winding way they run into a man carrying a toilet stone. They give him a lift and put the stone on the roof. The man’s hand reaches through the window to hold on to the stone at each turn of the road. In a high angle shot of the car moving along with the toilet stone on it's roof, we hear a conversation in the car:

-You bought this on such a day?

-The dead are dead. The living need this precious stone

Home is where everyday life happens. Like home, we all know everyday life for it is of the material of anecdotes and "brings things near to us spatially, lets them enter our life"\(^3\), it resonates, registers and builds in invisibility, freeing us from the need to have an understanding of the abstract. "We don’t displace our being into theirs; they step into our life"\(^4\). Kublai Khan objects to Marco Polo, that on his return from foreign lands—unlike other ambassadors who have reported on conspiracies or newly discovered mines, prices of damascened blades in equally distant places—all he has to recount are the thoughts that come to a man who
sits on his doorstep at the evening to enjoy the cool air. ‘What is the use then of all your traveling?’ Marco Polo simply replies, ‘It is evening. We are seated on the steps of your palace. There is a slight breeze.’

[Exteriority]

-Where is your house?
-It’s that second tent there
-No no I mean your original house
-Our house, there, next to the Cypress

Once home is detached from the materiality and structure of the house I can recognise that interiority is not an inherent condition of home but that on the contrary home extends and continues to the outside. A woman rocks a hammock that holds her baby, she has gathered wood for a fire that heats a kettle balancing a teapot on top, she sings a lullaby or is she mourning? Home is rebuilt from the openness of what is left over and the landscape that has become prominent. People sleep under the stars in tents or with a roof of palastic. Through the film, interiority is avoided. The standing remains of a window frames the olive trees swaying in the wind. Interiority is voided.

A few days after the earthquake a man installs a television antenna while everybody else is preparing to watch the World Cup together out on the fields with the hills and skies hanging above. Outside further extends, and a yet further outside is disclosed.

Home continues in exteriority, turned towards the landscape, turned towards the outside world, turned towards the screens that like windows open to the outside for you to look out. Outside is where life goes on.

[Time]

Inherent in both extended exteriority and everyday life is that they unfold in time. At the core of what makes home strengthened by loss and stripped bare is simply continuity in time. The meaning of home
exists regardless of events. Indeed home has another kind of meaning, produced in itself, in our action, for life moves on and time moves on. Home is not a thing, an object, or a place, but something that goes on and remains unseizable other than in its passing, a quality that Jean Luc Nancy attributes to life, and by extension I will attribute to home.

Therefore while house, village, valley, mountains expand, home shifts from what initially seemed a spatial category to a temporal one, in the sense that the idea of home becomes of the substance of time rather than space. This is apparent in its continuation entangled with life and also in its loss and longing for what seemed to be a better time. ‘There is no doubt that sooner or later I shall set sail from that dock’ Marco says ‘but I shall not come back to tell you about it. The city exists and it has a simple secret: it knows only departures, not returns.’ Marco Polo has always already left, there cannot be a return, for this is the secret of all cities, all homes, all times. But what is there to be found, seized in its passing, in the present? ‘Journeys to relieve your past?’ was the Khan’s question at this point, a question, which could have been better formulated as: ‘Journeys to recover your future?’

The car window becomes the frame that opens onto the space of outside, a looking device that moves through the film and the landscape. The car is an in-between space that creates distance on different levels; we either look out through it onto the world, or in extreme longshot onto it from outside, weaving through the mountainous paths. The car captivates us, we are only eyes, our gaze is exteriorized. All passes before us in fluidity without a particular thought or direction; extreme close ups are thrown against heaps of stone, wrecks and rubble, traffic, workers, people passing, the interruption of a bend or the unsteady hard shoulder and suddenly, openness.

Motion is essential to the ‘automobile’; in its passage we appreciate the continuity of what unfolds before us. The car almost becomes the main object in the film or even more so the subject of it. Its yellow box and its poor motor is referred to many times ‘with this car you will not make it, there are a lot of steep hairpin bends’. The car leads space and opens space,
constantly clearing its way; it finds its route, stops, backs up, gathers speed, and climbs. 'It moves itself ahead and out of itself.' It carries what may come by, a gas cylinder, the toilet stone and passengers. It connects all that is on the road\ref{note10}. In the finale of the film, the tired car attempts to start up twice and just when we think it has given up, the allegro (Vivaldi's *Concerto For Two Horns*) picks up—one of the few moments of music in the film—and the car speeds into the frame and victoriously climbs the steep bend. The music continues at the same distance (level) as the car slowly disappears in long shot through the landscape to where life continues, leaving the film, and us behind. We have observed remains, de-struction and continuation of what is, what happens and what continues to happen. We behold life.

You advance always with your head turned back?' or 'is it you always see behind you?'\footnote{11} I'm sitting in my seat, the titles are running and the allegro plays on. I realise they never found out what became of the Ahmadpour brothers, still it seemed like a perfect ending to the film. I think of what Proust says about the car 'since one can stop and alight where one chooses, there can scarcely be said to be any point of arrival.'\footnote{12} After the end, once (or if) he arrives to Koker where the Ahmadpour brothers live, there will still be no end point, no arrival point, for time will move on and he will move on. The third in the trilogy, *Under the Olive Trees* is yet to come.

I find the passage where Proust is recounting his train trip to Balbec. The train, unlike the car, makes the departure and arrival intense and, 'intact, as it existed in our mind when imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the very heart of a place we longed to see, in a single sweep which seemed miraculous to us not so much because it covered a certain distance as because it united two distinct individualities of the world, took us from one name to another name'.\footnote{13} The aeroplane must be of the same category even more intact and intense; from one name on the board to another, from one time zone to another. 'He contrasted African time to European time, and also to Asian time. He said that in the 19th century mankind had come to
terms with space, and that the great question of the 20th was the coexistence of different concepts of time.'


I leave my seat and walk down the aisle; I need to pee. Row after row I see blank faces, loose, droopy limbs, half open eyes, bodies almost suspended upright, I imagine everybody is in some hypersleep, some state of stasis or even dead perhaps. Somebody is wearing a blindfold and I remember the bra paddings in Chris Marker's *La Jetee*. Is this a time capsule moving to the future or the past perhaps?

Back at my seat, through the oval windows the view is vast, with no intervals or breaks, even the clouds look like they are resting upon the ground. Everything is on the same plane, incredibly flat, almost in standstill in an extreme, extreme long shot. Tehran blends into the continent that grows, until it shrinks.... slowly an Island appears.

Looking out I am separated, removed, distanced. Suspended in space time feels suspended too. Continuity is triggered in my mind's eye. In the space of the aeroplane above the clouds, home appears. As if once you gain altitude, memory and place become, and only can be retrieved there. Destruction can occur by other less dramatic means such as traversing space—for home is let behind, for home almost did not exist before it was left behind. All is set in motion; the passing of the past, and the non-present present, continuing.

'What he sought was always something lying ahead, and even if it was a matter of the past it was a past that changed gradually as he advanced on his journey, because the traveler's past changes according to the route he has followed'15

Home is not simple. Home is not of the substance of material, and not a location either; its substance and place is of continuation and complexity. It is not a whole; in simultaneity it continues, or rather home continues to discontinue, inseparably from life. 'A traversal without attributable borders' as Jean Luc Nancy points out, in his
discussion of *Life and Nothing More*, is however different from a path or a journey. Distances here are not measurable, things constantly change scale and almost disappear at times. 'The more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there; and he retraced the stages of his journeys, and he came to know the port from which he had set sail, and the familiar places of his youth, and the surroundings of home, and a little square of Venice where he gamboled as a child.'

'Every time I describe a city, I am saying something about Venice.'
Notes 1

2 Italo Calvino, 1974, Invisible Cities, United States of America, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp.49
5 Italo Calvino, 1974, Invisible Cities, United States of America, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp.27
7 Italo Calvino, 1974, Invisible Cities, United States of America, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp.55-56
8 Italo Calvino, 1974, Invisible Cities, United States of America, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp.29
11 Italo Calvino, 1974, Invisible Cities, United States of America, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp.28
14 Chris Marker, 1979, Sans Soleil
15 Italo Calvino, 1974, Invisible Cities, United States of America, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp.28

... Zarathustra merely shakes his head in disappointment and continues his wandering home.

—Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra
_Homes_

The essence of home takes an extreme form in relation to and tension with exile, not that they are opposites, nor that they negate one another or even delineate the limits of each other. 'It is suicide to be abroad but what is it to be at home? (...) A lingering dissolution'¹. Home and exile both work towards an impossible impasse, side by side—outside by outside.

In the formation of home through this mutual relation, the space and time of the border are essential. Where is this border, this margin that expands and thickens in time and space? How far stretched is the continuity that shapes home with no attributable borders to be measured?

*When you set out for Ithaka
Ask that your way be long,
full of adventure, full of instruction.*²

Cavafy directly addresses Odysseus the epic hero, or me; the reader, the exile. He must have himself been a seasoned exile:

'I am from Constantinople by descent, but I was born in Alexandria—at a house on Seriph Street; I left very young, and spent much of my childhood in England. Subsequently I visited this country as an adult, but for a short period of time. I have also lived in France. During my adolescence I lived over two years in Constantinople. It has been many years since I last visited Greece.'³

*The way is as significant as Ithaka, if not more so; for not being Ithaka, and for the length of its space where lies the instructions to home. The traveller, 'liked the fragility of those moments suspended in time, those memories whose only function had been to leave behind nothing but
memories’. She was mindful of the stretch of time and space accumulation that gradually formed; the border.

[Immeasurable Distances]

‘The traveller has seen the far distant, but has lost the belief in distance’. Her loss of belief is a realisation brought about by an acquired familiarity, for to her distance is no longer definite. It cannot be measured but is relative to time and how one can relate to the place of either outside. ‘When we relate ourselves to things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves. We do not represent distance merely in our mind. Thinking gets through, and persists through the distance to that location’.

‘…I recognised at first glance all the monuments and all the places, down to the little courtyard where I lived in a room of the Convent of the Holy Saviour. Never did a traveller undergo such an arduous trial; I could not have expected that Jerusalem and Athens would be transformed to Paris in order to convince me of the truth or illusion’. Truth and illusion are interchangeable and both are realities in their own right.

[Every-night Life]

Through the still length of the night, the border stretches and expands —the pause of suspense unfolds. I open a window.

‘In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars will be laughing when you look at the sky at night... You will want to laugh with me. And you will sometimes open your window, so, for that pleasure…’

‘Everything near becomes far’. Goethe refers to the evening twilight. It is true at nightfall, the things closest move away from my eyes and instead the furthest stars are in my grasp. Created by night, where the visible world has moved away from my eyes, perhaps forever, there is space for the invisible.
Perhaps that is why the physical void of the dark space of the cinema theatre displaces us so boldly, or why Shahrzad⁹ chooses the night to recount her one thousand and one stories her life depends on—they still linger so near, those stories of storytellers telling their stories of other storytellers and other stories drawing out the depth of the night long.

Near is within my grasp but can I hold it?

[Holding on]

_The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops_,
_Angry Poseidon —do not fear them:_

Half-men, half-giants will devour you, one-eyed Monsters will capture you, angry gods will plot and conspire against you. The sufferings of the act of residing the border, of crossing it, of finding home, are many and violent but Cavafy counsels not to fear them. And yet contained in the phrase 'do not fear them' is an acknowledgement that indeed you do fear them. Regardless you are to continue.

At the end of September 1940 despite his heart condition Benjamin climbs across the Pyrenees to the French-Spanish border. Lisa Fitkko who helped Benjamin pass the border recalls that near passport control she had tried to stop him drinking from a greenish, slimy puddle; he was insistent. 'But don’t you see, the worst that could happen is that I die of typhus...AFTER crossing the border. The Gestapo won’t be able to get me, and the manuscript will be safe. I do apologize'¹⁰. He drank.

At the Spanish border the authorities informed Benjamin, that he would be returned to France. The crossing had exhausted him and he didn’t believe he could do it again. He took his life. In his remoteness what counted was the manuscript¹¹, which had made an impossible journey possible. Without the manuscript, without Stalkers’ cloth rope and rocks, or Odysseus’ fathom of chain and handful of wax; no exile, no traveller can traverse the border, where near and far cross.
such as these you will never find
as long as your thought is lofty, as long as a rare emotion touch your spirit and your body.

The lofty thought and rare emotion, the experience of thrill provoked by life is the same ‘innocent elation’ that shields Odysseus in his encounter with the Sirens. The look of bliss on the face of Ulysses, who was thinking of nothing but his wax and his chains made them forget their singing. The Sirens literally vanished before his resolution; at the very moment when they were nearest to him, he knew of them no longer. Suddenly everything is reversed. The Sirens no longer want to allure him. All they want is ‘to hold as long as they could the radiance that fell from Ulysses’ great eyes’. Kafka here tells his own version of the encounter of Odysseus and the Sirens, where Odysseus stands at the margin, holding on, and daring life; he wants to take a breath of life, steal a piece of it, and in his resolution appears so strong that the Sirens envy him. Such is the guile, the weapon or rather the armour that can protect Odysseus, the exile, from the goddess of fate; the obstacles.

'I won't take one more step... enough'. Stalker can’t go on, he is going on.

Holding on is hardly easy or pleasant, not that it promises to be either. Of course Odysseus the mythical hero makes it look easy, but in real life even Stalker’s faith falters—despite having understood how to draw strength from his weakness: ‘May they believe in themselves and become as helpless as children, because weakness is a great thing, and strength is nothing’. Stalker defends weakness in his monologue because it is the true hope of life and he has nothing to offer but hope, ‘When a man is just born, he is weak and flexible, when he dies he is hard and intensive. When a tree is growing, it is tender and pliant, but when it’s dry and hard it dies. Hardness and strength are death’s companions. Pliancy and weakness are expressions of freshness and being, because what has hardened will never win’.

Through an argument that he has with his wife we learn that Stalker cannot or does not want to pragmatically approach life, he has been arrested and fined for his repeated trips to the zone. Instead he engages in a dare childishly; his apparent weakness makes him a ‘louse’, an
outsider, and he is aware of it. In this remoteness he is liberated, he
thrives on his weakness. He is a better person in the zone or indeed
because of the zone. In his vocation he has encountered ‘place and
displace’ and the ‘the virtue of being yourself in place, and the vice of
looking at yourself somewhere else’ He has in his childish ways sought
in displacement ‘a freedom of self apart from place, a freedom he
(feels) so strongly’17. He holds on with his ropes and his stones and
persists through the zone that has no yellow brick road, where there is
no straight path, and two hundred meters is immeasurable.

He lies in his devastated zone in despair but he knows how to float; he
will not sink. The nature of his strength, as Walter Benjamin once wrote
about his own weakness, is ‘patience, conquerable by nothing’18. He lies
in its ruins and the zone embraces him with the water, with the ground,
with a stray dog, with whispered words, just as he had embraced the
zone on arrival in its meadows where colour first met the film. The dog
follows Stalker back to the bar, where everything is the same, the
fluorescent light still flickering, the bar man disheveled, but with him
Stalker carries a trace of the zone, a proof that the zone is more than
just a place.

‘... and you never wanted to use the room’?
'I'm fine as it is', replies Stalker.

The writer realises at the threshold that if he were to step into 'the
room' and his inner most wish were granted, if he was convinced of
being a genius, if there was a place where he did not have to wish any
more, if he could reach that possible state of 'home', then he would no
longer have a reason to carry on. There would no longer be a reason to
write for he wrote to assure himself and others of his worth, or even
more so he wrote because he was tormented and because he had
doubts. No, he won't step in either.

The work of Stalker is like that of a poet; he reaches into the abyss and
points at the traces, he restores not faith then, but the trace of the faith.
Stalker / Andrey Tarkovsky
[Displacement]

The exiled, the inhabitants of the thick expanded border can subvert their displaced state of being into a device that can find home. Where near and far are not tied to location, or the removal from it, what is at stake is an idea of displacement that goes beyond being a mere state of being. Displacement becomes tied to the craft of detecting traces of things in their continuous changing and in their form. The only way the exile ‘can cope with the heavy baggage of culture is to subject it to certain kinds of displacement, which lightens its burdensome weight. (...) In this effort (...) the exiled is engaged in a work akin to that of the modern artist whose energies have in the last century, been marshalled not so much to represent objects as to displace them’19. In the course of this displacement, what is not to be taken lightly is playfulness.

[Plural homes]

*Ithaka* gave you the splendid journey.
*Without her you would not have set out.*
*She hasn’t anything else to give you.*
*And if you find her poor, Ithaka has not deceived you.*

Here Cavafy draws my attention to the generosity of Ithaka, a generosity that is two-fold and hints at his magnificent pessimism. One should therefore thank Ithaka twice. Firstly for disclosing bare home once it was left behind, hence setting you off on the search for home and speculations on desires for roots. Secondly for having cultivated the desire to leave in the first place; in search of a place over the rainbow *where the dreams you dare dream really do come true.* For the one thing that can never be made good, Benjamin says, is having neglected to runaway from home. That is all there is of course, for Ithaka will doubtlessly only further disappoint.

*So wise you have become, of such experience,*
*That already you will have understood what these Ithakas mean.*

In the final line Cavafy reveals the ultimate lesson learnt in the search for home. This lesson is hidden in a single letter in the poem: The plural
s of Ithakas. Look close! Cavafy draws our attention to how Odysseus through the Odyssey is constantly appropriating home, suggesting that home is not decisive, ‘not a physical place but a mobile need, always to be found elsewhere’\textsuperscript{20}.

As the life of Russian Herzen unfolds in England ‘the sunless land, (…) the home he needs changes from snow to sun’; the act of displacing home. ‘…O Rome, how I love to return to your deception, how eagerly I run over day by day the time when I was intoxicated with you!’\textsuperscript{21} Herzen understands displacement here, not as something gone wrong, but as a process that endures, and as such has its own form and possibilities.

Home in its temporality and plurality can of course be set up and displaced into a non-place, onto an action or pre-occupation in its continuity and transformation. ‘In his text, the writer sets up a house. Just as he trundles papers, books, pencils, documents untidily from room to room, he creates the same disorder in his thoughts. They become pieces of furniture he sinks into, content or irritable. He strokes them affectively, wears them out, mixes them up, re-arranges, ruins them. For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live … In the end the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing.’\textsuperscript{22} Nothing ever lasts no matter how strong.
Notes 2

3 Constantine P Cavafy, 1924, biographical note, Nea Techni (New Art) magazine
4 Chris Marker, 1979, *San Soleil*
9 *One Thousand and One Nights* is the story of a Shahrzad and the Persian king who on discovering his wife's infidelity has her executed and in his bitterness and grief decides to marry a succession of virgins only to execute each one the next morning, before she has a chance to dishonour him. Eventually it is Shahrzad's turn. On the night of their marriage, she begins to tell the king a tale that does not end.

14 Andrey Tarkovsky, 1979, *Stalker*

15 Andrey Tarkovsky, 1979, *Stalker*

16 Andrey Tarkovsky, 1979, *Stalker*


Because I know that time is always time
and place is always and only place...
__T.S. Eliot, Ash-Wednesday
Without Here and There

Once I have left, there is no return just constant departing from departure, from the past. What is left is a trace; the trace left in material and in space, that of arrangement; something of use and occupation; mise en scene.

The trace is neither like Proust’s madeleine that conceals within it the past, nor the memory resurrected by it. I am not referring to memory or involuntary memory triggered by chance encounter, but considering an active projection onto the leftovers, and refuse of action or occupation. The trace is the visual register in material arrangement that remains in time; ‘the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. (...) In the trace, we gain possession of the thing’¹. This is where the power in the ruin lies.

The trace in its form and arrangement can produce memories; future memories involving the future as well as a past, anticipating what will have been. These new memories become, build and then rebuild one’s own (hi)story.

The displacement the exile dared me to attempt, is a technique to forego physical displacement. I have to persist through the clues that had been dispersed. The displacement was to be detected in the arrangement of events, objects, remains; the trace.

For, ‘the man who hasn’t signed anything, who left no picture, / who was not there, who said nothing:/How can they catch him? /Erase the traces’². But I was there, and there is always a trace. My acute exile-equipped detective eye set out on the first of three rendezvous to practice my techniques of displacement:
First rendezvous:

I walk across Waterloo Bridge and into Somerset House. There she is, at the bar, staring straight at me. I remember what Sandor Krasna had written in one of his letters ‘frankly, have you ever heard of anything stupider than to say to people as they teach in film schools, not to look at the camera?’ He always welcomes that accidental straight on honest glance, that Manet has so masterfully captured. In her expression I see her as if suspended in the in between moment of leaving a thought. That moment isolates her from the noise—I am pulled in through the mirror. The mirror opens up a vast almost arched space so full of people that it inevitably surrounds me. The Bar at Folies Bergere, in real life or in real life painted by Manet, is like how Sennett had described it to me, ‘a place of sensual license’, ‘filled with noisy crowds drinking, and flirting’, and ‘the air perfumed by cigars, coffee and cheap Beaujolais’. Suzon is just about to tear herself away from that suspending seemingly sad moment of thought, to attend to her next customer; is that me?

As Champa says with good sense, ‘the Bar looks right before it looks wrong, and the later sensation never completely subverts the former’. One further look into the mirror and I realise that Suzon is in fact leaning forward and talking to a gentleman in a top hat. Is that me? But surely in can’t be, how can I look into the mirror and see someone else? I feel displaced. Searchingly I think perhaps what I’m seeing is an earlier encounter or one yet to come, but that idea is just as unsettling.

One closer look and it occurs to me that actually I am Suzon. Her frontal pose, and her honest empty gaze caught up somewhere in misery suggest that familiar moment when one looks into the mirror at oneself, almost consolingly, searchingly. Yes, the Suzon we first encounter, in frontal view, could be her reflection in the mirror, and the other Suzon with her back to us, is her in everyday life seeming rounder, happier and engaged as everybody else sees her.

I am engaged in the drama that has unfolded and there is no leaving it. My eye spots other displaced objects; the edge of the marble bar counter, bottles, the gaslights and their reflection. Then suddenly those things that haven’t transformed in the mirror in some way seem oddly
solid. It seems the solidity of the ‘undiplaced selves, which have not experienced displacement’ is actually the illusion.

In the Folies, Manet composes a decomposition that detaches it from anything representational. It unravels and discloses the inevitability and perhaps even value of time, duration and transformation. The clues are to be discovered in the displacement, and therefore lie in the arrangement and mise en scene of things including my presence; the painting now feels inseparable from me, the viewer.

[Mise en scene]

The production of future memories is dependent on form and can be explored through the concept of mise en scene. When Hossien stands in the earthquake ruins in his wedding suit, a displacement in that arrangement becomes apparent. Something banal becomes central, as does the barmaid or the toilet stone. A withering loose bunch of flowers, or the chairs left behind after a rendezvous at Jardin du Luxembourg are similar incidents outside a work of art. Incidents that the exile should look out for and seek practice; ‘after circling the globe’ Krasna writes, ‘only banality still interests me. On this trip I’ve tracked it with the relentlessness of a bounty hunter’.

‘Mise en scene is a design made up of the disposition of the actors in relation to each other and to the setting. In real life we can be struck by the way an episode takes on a mise en scene, which makes for the utmost expressiveness. What is it that we find so arresting? The incongruity of the ‘composition’ in relation to what is happening. It is in fact the absurdity of the mise en scene that catches our imagination; but this absurdity is only apparent. It covers something of great significance, which gives the mise en scene that quality of absolute conviction, which makes us believe in the event.’

I recognise the incongruity that Tarkovsky talks about, in the earthquake ruins, or in the displacements in the Manet painting where visual gestures trouble the eye and suggest a story which might even take place outside the frame of the painting. Displacement holds a story.
Michael Wesley, Year Long exposure
In 'the finale of Dostoievsky’s *The Idiot*, when Prince Myshkin comes into the room with Rogozhin, and through the doorway the murdered Nastasya is lying and, as Rogozhin says, already stinking. The two sit facing each other on chairs in the middle of the enormous room, so close that their knees are touching. When you picture this it's frightening. They astound us by the combination of an outwardly absurd and senseless mise en scene with the perfect veracity of their own inner state. The refusal to weigh the scene down with obtrusive thoughts is what makes it as compelling as life itself. There is a disturbance, a displacement and enough space and openness for projection. Projection onto a mise en scene will gain me possession, a possession of a past and a future too.

Mise en scene as such is about form; it is not about meaning and definitely not a subtext to the event that would simplify it for the viewer. As Tarkovsky would say 'it is not a cliché or a metaphor like the many barriers that run between lovers in so many films’ but that of form, something indispensible to event. In the mise en scene of life, sets and props are less temporary; they transform each to a different degree. Some remain further in time, for objects de-struct at different paces; walls, furniture, us; for we ourselves must die.

In the trace and in its setting, the rapport between form and content is disrupted; meaning and content disappear and create openness, as Barthes says: 'undecidability and polysemy replace refrentiality and meaning'. Composition becomes a process of decomposition, of going beyond meaning to the very power of arrangement and form.

In this displacement a critical distance is created and allows for a fresh encounter that calls for a narrative. The narrative of displacement is about what will have been. What remains is a space for speculation, for projection of what will have been: The future perfect tense expresses expected completion of an event in the future; the future points back in time and is speculated to be completed.
-But what about the visitation? What do you think about the visitation?

-(...) Imagine a picnic

-What did you say?

-A picnic. Picture a forest, a country road, a meadow. A car drives off the country road into the meadow, a group of young people get out of the car carrying bottles, baskets of food, transistor radios, and cameras. They light fires, pitch tents, turn on the music. In the morning they leave. The animals, birds and insects (...) creep out from their hiding places. And what do they see? Gas and oil spilled on the grass. Old spark plugs and old filters strewn around. Rags, burnt out bulbs, and a monkey wrench left behind. Oil sticks on the pond. And of course, the usual mess-apple cores, candy wrappers, charred remains of campfire, cans. Bottles, somebody's handkerchief, somebody's penknife, torn newspaper, coins, and faded flowers picked in another meadow.

-I see a roadside picnic.

-Precisely. A roadside picnic, on some road in the cosmos. And you ask if they will come back

(…)

-But your picnic doesn't explain the mysterious activity in the ruins of the factory

-Why doesn't it? One of the girls could have forgotten her favourite wind-up teddy bear in the meadow.⁹

Mise en scene applies to objects in a set, chairs in the Jardin du Luxembourg, or the composition of a painting, but can also extend to the spatial arrangement of a text, narrative, the story, since it is of the category of form and can be detected on many levels.

We first learn of Odysseus when the Gods convene to discuss his future. We learn further when Athena disguised as Mentes visits Telemachus, Odysseus' son, in Ithaca, and advises him to visit his father's friends in search of news. Telemachus visits Nestor, King of Pylos, followed by the King of Sparta, Menelaus, and his wife Helen who tell him/us stories of the return of Greeks and his father's exploits at Troy and that he is alive. At a further council we learn that Calypso releases Odysseus, but it isn’t until the eighth book that Odysseus' tears at the songs of Demodocus,
retelling stories of Odysseus’ past, gives him away; his identity is revealed to the Phaeachians and also to us.

We finally get to meet Odysseus; until that point we do not know if he is real or myth, dead or alive, God or mortal. We learn of him through different narratives told by different narrators, reflecting a collection of personas for him—not chronological in time but seemingly always in the present. We are offered a very real and rounded idea of Odysseus. He is the ‘the man of many turns’, ‘the most complete character in literature’ as Joyce would say.

‘What do you mean by a complete man? For example if a sculptor makes a figure of a man then that man is all-round, three-dimensional, but not necessarily complete in the sense of being ideal. All human bodies are imperfect, limited in some way, human beings too. Now your Ulysses…

He is both said Joyce.

I see him from all sides, and therefore he is all-round in the sense of your sculptor’s figure. But he is a complete man as well—a good man. At any rate, that is what I intend that he shall be.10

He is complete because of the mise en scene that includes the many sides of narrative that build him, because of the many flaws and contrasts, and not despite them. Displacing home to detect the trace and to leave ones trace to tell ones story, to build ones story; such is the fate and revelation of Odysseus.

[Mise en abyme]

Encountering Demodocus is a critical moment in the Odyssey not only for encountering Odysseus for the first time, but because we are witness to Odysseus weeping at his own story. Odysseus weeps on hearing Homer’s magnificent masterpiece recited; the character of the book sheds tears for the tender lines of his creator.

This self reflexive twist in the mise en scene of the text, is not about retrieving memories either, but rather about simultaneous mise en scenes that would build futures of the pasts; mise en abyme. It is literally a casting into the abyss, a visual experience of being between
Chairs, Jardin du Luxembourg 5 pm
two mirrors—the infinite reproduction of image. Gide first used this expression to explain an idea of self-reflexivity in the arts.

Second rendezvous:
Before I knock on the door I wait to catch my breath, the staircase was steep but mostly I evaluate it as excitement, it just can’t be true. The door is already ajar, I step inside, it takes a few seconds for my eyes to adjust, the windows have been covered to black out the daylight. Seven or eight television screens light the room; one receives satellite broadcast from Korea, another China; a third is hooked up to French cable. Above the sounds of the televisions, ambient jungle noises are playing. My host greets me, he is friendly and polite, talks fast and thinks fast. By the time I get my wits together there is no point in continuing the conversation for a programme about parrots starts on the Animal Channel. The room is immaculately tidy, crammed with books, tapes, and mementos of a lifetime of travel and friendship. Chris Marker spends much of his time taping television broadcasts and writing audio-visual archives of the future. He sits and sleeps with his legs folded up in an armchair, like an elderly monkey who has no use for a bed. I guess he is happiest to be by himself, creating his own worlds by recording and reflecting upon the images of this one. 11

‘Contrary to what people say, using the first person in films tends to be a sign of humility: All I have to offer is myself’ says Marker. I see there in that room the traveller, Krasna, who takes footage and writes letters, the lovely voice who receives them and reads them out, and the genius mind collecting, recreating and repeating, collapsed all in one. What we encounter is Marker in first person, through split narratives which create a critical distance between him, us and the work. Layers of narrative or rather multi-layers of a multi-narrative take the traveller-viewer on a journey from Africa to Japan, ‘two extreme poles of survival’.12 On the way we pass rural Iceland, Ille de France the Bijago Islands and San Francisco. He make references to different times, different places and different pieces; Tarkovsky’s Zone, La Jetée and of course Vertigo, making them part of the present and transforming them into his story. These layers distance the author from the piece, making him a writer/reader/viewer/traveller and yet aware that he is a writer/reader/viewer/traveller, aware that he is aware that he is
aware, and so on indefinitely to the extent of seemingly being the 'other', or you —extremely intimate yet ‘extraterrestrial’.

San Soleil is the film (about the film) that Krasna/Marker will never make. The first image of the film with its long black leader; the image of happiness, is the image he had tried several times to link to other images but never succeeded. He had decided that one day he’d have to ‘put it all alone at the beginning of a film with a long piece of black leader; if they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they'll see the black.’ The image in the mirror at The Bar at Folies-Bergere is not a mere repetition or duplication of an image or event, the reflection is a recreation not only since the context of each recurrence would transform it from the original, but because of the act of displacement recuring. A mise en abyme not only reflects the past but also anticipates the future, and sometimes both simultaneously. It is ‘retro-prospect’ and gives us a perspective of what will follow: Every letter written in the past in Sans Soleil is already at the place in the present while it is being read out. It is clear that what will happen in the film, has already happened. The viewer is displaced, pulled back and forth suspended between possible past(s) and future(s).

I try to persist through the mise en abyme of Sans Soleil—the more I penetrate the more vertiginious it becomes. 'The vertigo the film deals with isn’t to do with space and falling’ but with the vertigo of time, the doubling spiral between past and future. Linear progression is scrapped, ordinary chronology is disrupted and reflected within the reflection in simultaneous repetition, to create what Kristeva called ‘multiplicity of instants, the convergence of the past, present and future in a new, other temporal mode’; future past. Any reference to the past is always confronted with a future situation and therefore escapes either nostalgia or amnesia. To remember is to project.

Third rendezvous:
I get out of the metro at Luxemburg. I’m early. Maybe I’ll have a café at Dalloyau while I’m waiting for my last rendezvous. I’m a bit anxious and I spend the rest of the remaining half an hour looking at people pass by and smoking two cigarettes. Finally it is 10 o’clock. He must be there by now; he always goes for his morning walk around this time. I cross the road and
walk into the Jardin du Luxembourg—what a beautiful sky it has, just like a dome. I spot two chairs sat next to each other and facing the pond, one of them is closer to the edge of the pond—that will have been where I was sitting with my feet raised, impatiently waiting for my father to break the silence. I guess he really never did, or perhaps the things he wanted to say weren't that interesting to me. I imagine being less stubborn and asking him questions … around me are other chairs in twos, threes, single chairs, a couple facing each other completely, I remember the knees touching … Funny that both Odysseus and Kris of Solaris should at the end of their story meet their fathers at some garden —It’s too late. I have to go.
My Father, Jardin du Luxembourg
Notes 3

3 Chris Marker, 1979, *Sans Soleil*
4 Suzon was a young woman who worked at the Folies-Bergère as a barmaid and modeled for Manet for this painting.
6 Chris Marker, 1979, *Sans Soleil*
8 Andrey Tarkovsky, 1986, *Sculpting in Time*, Austin, University of Texas Press, pp.74
12 Chris Marker, 1979, *Sans Soleil*
13 A nickname Alain Resnais had given Chris Marker
Think you’re escaping and run into yourself.
Longest way round is the shortest way home.
—James Joyce

UNE PENSEE
QUI FORME
UNE FORME
QUI PENSEE
—Jean Luc Godard
Postlude_ Where never will come near and go away
from anything, all the steps of the earth

I have gone ‘the longest way round’, to identify the material of home. The house that we recognise as home in combination with the act of destruction was my starting point. For the essence of a thing has a relation to its destruction; ‘the essence of a pair of pants (if there is such a thing) is not that crisp, well-pressed object to be found on the department store racks, rather, that clump of fabric on the floor, negligently dropped there when the boy stepped out of them careless, lazy, indifferent.’

And so home sheds it’s crisp well-pressed being of materiality and interiority. Home stripped bare, resurfaces as something continuous and temporal, something of openness and exteriority.

And a realisation that one should without despair acknowledge the inescapable passing and disappearance of homes, a constant effacement that is not an erasure; there is no such thing as tabula rasa.

There is always the trace, the refuse, the excess, the leftover. Their accumulation and arrangement moves away from meaning, for their place is outside the category of the things themselves —not that they become unrecognisable but that in their ever changing displaced place they loose meaning; they become nonsense, non-meaning, useless, irrelevant, disturbing the order of things. A form to project upon emerges; a form that generates.
The form, in its simultaneous multiple mise en scenes and their reflection, repetition and effacement, is generative without seeking to produce anything. It determines what will have been; possibilities without finality.

The mise en scene, in its continuities, therefore generates space(s) open enough to make your own. The trace—its detachment, its displacement, its meaninglessness and exteriority are arranged and as such form the building material of space. It is a matter of attitude; we could build up a different kind of house anew.

What can that mean for architecture? What kind of an architecture does that anticipate? How can we shake the presumption of architecture as the forever lasting art of material? Can the architect be a composer of decomposition; of refuse, of non-use, non-function, of openness? Can the architect be the arranger of the trace? How can we change that illusion of solidity? Is it possible to escape the role of architect as the facilitator of optimisation? Would it be possible to replace the unstoppable production of material environment, with the interruption of it? Can the architect generate a way of occupation and use that could in turn destruct and disclose? What would an architecture that is a process in time present? Can architecture avoid finality? Can architecture extend beyond its attributable borders? What is an architecture situated at the border? Can there be a vulnerable architecture? Can there be a weak architecture? Can the question of architecture be rearranged? What is the question of architecture? What is the problem that architecture should respond to? Can architecture be obsolete? Can architecture be more, or rather less than just an object?

‘Much more is possible than one thinks’²
Notes 4
