





WHENEVER FRIENDS COME TO NEW YORK CITY from other places, they always comment how peculiar it is that a city so developed has a rather rudimentary and crude way of discarding trash. It piles onto the street for collection, undisguised, as generous for the taking as it is unsightly and unhygienic. Too numerous to evade anonymity, our piles of trash amass similarly, although the detritus is perhaps the best quotidian archive of individual lives.

When Tuomas' father, Erkki-Pekka, was alive, he accumulated discarded materials. His studio was comprised of salvaged objects. He made a vacuum form mold machine from an abortion pump. Articles and handouts became xeroxed clippings and ephemera sorted into folders.

The significance of these materials in the context of Pekka's practice became reliant on their second life—a reuse, the possibility for transformation. Only after Pekka's sudden passing in 2001 did the existence of these folders, some of which form the basis of *Mimes*, come to be known.

In the domestic sphere that Tuomas and I share, there are objects Pekka completed that we use and live with—a dining table, silverware, several wall works, the toys he designed. But there are many others, whose form is a becoming, halted short.

The intent—frequently unclear, left to interpretation—has become the work itself. To inherit intent, to inventory this intent along with other passed down objects, this has become the basis of a new practice.

I asked Tuomas if he tends to remember his dreams, which he tells me he does not. I research the symbolism of tornadoes to find that they signify the pervasive and destructive force that worry and anxiety wreck upon the psyche. But there is a more tenuous presence within their potency, something suspended, a slower burn. Tornadoes, in their unyielding advance, are akin to time. Time and its motion, however impersonal, however arbitrary in its measure, is an act of violence. The process of archivization mitigates some of this brutality. We record, clinging to linearity like a horizon line, in hopes that to position the past as a concept outside ourselves might give us some indication of a momentary pause, locating us within a context and trajectory we otherwise cannot grasp.

For something reliant on absence, grief is a very embodied experience. Nonetheless, language fails. In *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, Anne Carson renders the ancient poet's fragments not as a translation, but as a creative act of re-reading. For one specific Ancient Greek adjective, *aithus-somenon*, she finds no equivalent in English, settling upon the hyphenated term "radiant-shaking."¹ She is describing leaves, but in a way, this could just as simply describe grief. Loss is something illustrious, trembling, in motion.





Loss is something that can only be described in words that are not your own.

I recall watching a video piece by Tova Mozard, *Stora Scenen*, in which she is discussing the death, possibly a suicide, I can't remember, of her father and how it changed her childhood. She describes gaining a sensation of significance through mourning, something along the lines of "to have such a thing as important as grief." Grief has changed her—or at least according to the subtitles I was reading. The event and the absence have added weight to what is otherwise an indeterminate amount of time unfolding, which accounts for her life. She is able to keep on living, her presence punctuated by the finality of the figure who is partly responsible for her existence. Grief is not only a lived experience, but an inheritance, productive, fecund.

We prefer to view the archive as a stagnant thing, or rather, a range with fixed points that, while it might expand in the future, is nonetheless separated from now. In order to situate it, we need to offer the past some distinct, albeit false, stability. This provides a frame of reference, setting, and value. But the act of archiving is a creative one, or in the very least, productive. In his meditation on the archive, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida asserts that "archivization produces as much as it records the event."²

I think of Pierre's father, Jean-Louis, on the boat and of their travels from France, to the Canary Islands, to the Western coast of Africa, and ultimately, to southern Florida where they eventually settled. Of this time, Pierre had few memories before discovering his father's journal. Simply the distinct image of looking out of the back of the boat, to the wake of the water—only seeing what had already been left behind.

Translation is not the equivalent of mimicry, although it channels one voice through another. It is an accepted truth that through translation something is inherently lost, but it is a loss which yields: the gaps and slippages emerge as sites for new meaning. When studying literary translation, I was taught to remain faithful to one element, like choosing a lover: syntax, breath, alliteration. Despite this intimacy, despite these ideas of devotion and entanglement, translation, to me, always felt more like a wavering relationship between parent and child. Translation is something akin to giving birth, but it stems from a place deeper than the womb.

For those who translate, it is never and can only ever be our own creation. The original language realizes its bounds through the act of being translated, mitigated by the knowledge that the original itself is also a translation—of thought, emotions, of intent and potential, realized and unrealized by the author. Analyzing Benjamin's seminal writings on translation, Alina Clej wrote that for Benjamin "the task of the translator was not merely linguistic, but reli-



gious, a transfiguration... The original depends on the translation to come into full bloom, and in the process of facilitating this ‘abundant,’ though belated ‘flowering,’ ‘the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well.’”³ When we inherit words, we inherit bodied memories (momentarily), recounted in a voice that is not our own, but brought into the present through ourselves, it is a mutual transformation.

I never heard Pierre’s father’s voice, whether in French or in English, but the translated journal provides a rather clinical, objective account about their journey and family life at sea. His father’s sailor’s mentality is explicit in his succinct, but thorough, narration. The tedium and frustration of being a father, the affection and dedication are present, but more often than not, reserved in tone and implied. These family anecdotes, these memories experienced by Pierre but not recalled, are the most comprehensive archive of a moment in the family’s history, told by the one family member who is no longer present. The subjective perspective becomes a record of truth.

We understand as we read these journals, even in excerpted form, that there is not an explanation for why he ended his life 20 years later with a

single gunshot to the head; only that those around him are left with the inheritance of a perpetual translation: recalling his life in a voice that is not his, choosing which version of him they remain faithful to.

“The dream is central to our evolutionary inheritance,” wrote psychologist Robert J. Lifton.⁴ We know what it is to inherit trauma but what of dreams? We consider ourselves the product or the aftermath of our parents’ dreams: wanting a child, wanting a better version of themselves, wanting a legacy (that is, when we are willingly wanted at all); sometimes such dreams become a burden, an expectation of fulfillment with an origin outside the realm of our control. But what of unknown dreams—can we inherit these as well?

A friend fled her home in Hong Kong due to her mother’s incomprehension of her dreams, her unwavering desire to be an artist; but reflecting upon her childhood she recalled her mother’s ability to draw straight lines with ease, her skill with the camera, as she reminisced over polaroids from her youth, which she had never seen in early life to begin with; was it possible her mother transmitted a dream she didn’t know that she had? One moored too deeply within, now fulfilled by her daughter, and the eventual cause of their rupture. The daughter had inherited the dream that was the downfall of their union; as if for her mother to see it was to face a lost truth she had dispossessed without ever knowing, forcing her daughter to become a stranger as well, in order to preserve her life as she had only ever known it. Although perhaps in this sense, the dream and the trauma are inherently linked, this cycle or passage. Sometimes it is an unrealized loss that marks the impetus of our coming into the world.

On December 7, 1984, Pierre’s father wrote of the difficulties, physical and emotional, of the journey while crossing from the Canary Islands to Dakar, Senegal. Only little Pierre seemed unaffected by the grueling voyage and elements. Jean-Louis noted, “He’s our solace at the moment.”

One afternoon, Tuomas and I are seated on a friend’s couch. It is the first household we have entered since the pandemic started and we are all looking at their month-old baby. Tuomas says, “When I see my father in dreams, it is never his voice. But when it is his voice, it is not his image.” Our friend, the new mother, nods, says she experienced the same, and adds, “I saw my father in a dream, seated next to me. He told me he could come back whenever he wanted. I asked him why death was considered such a big deal then. He told me, ‘It’s not.’” – **SABRINA TAMAR**



Notes

- ¹ *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, by Sappho and Anne Carson, Vintage Books, 2003, p.7.
- ² Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no.2, 1 July 1995, p.17.
- ³ Alina Clej. "Profane Hallucinations: Walter Benjamin and the Surrealists." *High Culture Reflections on Addiction and Modernity*, by Anna Alexander and Mark S. Roberts, State University of New York Press, 2003, p.79.
- ⁴ Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Future of Immortality: And Other Essays for a Nuclear Age*. Basic Books, 1987.

Works

Page 1: *One*, 2021.

Black gesso and vinyl spackling on wood. 5.25 x 13.5 inches (13.335 x 34.29 cm)

Page 2: *One Becoming Two*, 2021.

Black gesso and vinyl spackling on wood. 10 x 13.75 inches (25.4 x 34.925 cm)

Page 4: *Two*, 2021.

Black gesso and vinyl spackling on wood. 17.25 x 18.25 inches (43.815 x 46.355 cm)

Page 5: *Two Becoming Three*, 2021.

Black gesso and vinyl spackling on wood. 18 x 18 inches (45.72 x 45.72 cm)

Page 9: *Three*, 2021.

Black gesso and vinyl spackling on wood. 9 x 14.5 inches (22.86 x 36.83 cm)

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Mimes

August 23, 2021

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