




Panoramic Decelerator

Jim Hobbs

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It is seven years since he and I were in Port Townsend, Washington together. "City of Dreams", New Year, holed up with fellow artists in the warm heart of an American forest. It may be seven years to the day since we both got up before dawn, as we both still do today – now to walk dogs, then to make work. As I willed the sun to rise through a dawn vigil, he watched smoke rise, billow and break – smoke caused by paper-making; the smoke and mirrors of the creation of the tabula rasa. I was trying to forge the gold; he was watching its apparition sublimate and dissipate before his eyes. He is an observer, but like smoke, he turns the solid, the concrete, into ambiguity, the ungraspable – with much warmth and while maintaining its material essence - be it film blackened by sunlight or time itself evidenced more obliquely. Intimate(d), shifting what is known into what can only be glimpsed in half-light. And then from the half light comes the darkness, that makes the smoke heavy, and invisible. Or perhaps the smoke is darkness itself.

Morning and mourning. Separated thinly by that 'U', the 'U' in *'cruche'* that Ponge depicts, that makes the vessel what it is – "more hollow than hollowness... a hollow surrounded by a fragile earth; rough and easily cracked"¹. The morning horizon becomes the ultimate hollow through its missing you. You that is me, reflected back into the void as the sun fails to strike through the saturated skies. Narcissus falls into the melancholy of a lost image, that is before image, before the mirror, that place where wholeness and darkness meet. And so to mourn our beginning in darkness, to wish that the light which sustains us was darkness itself, a black sun². That when the cold light of day does break, it breaks not as a gift but as a void, scalding cold, or as the iris itself, drinking in image to transmute energy into gelatinous matter³, light into dark as an exposed film. It would take eight and half minutes for the sun's last rays to reach earth before blackout. That his sun is twice that long allows that final light to reflect off the fragile earth and dissipate back to whence it came. Oh but what a parting party life is, for an old soul.



Diderot wrote to Sophie in darkness, not being able to see his own hand. "Wherever there will be nothing," he wrote "read that I love you."⁷

But no, like *Melancholia*⁴ lets turn away from the light and stay in the half-lit dawn, a landscape, where the sun is still hidden from view, and shadow is form. Muddied waters rather than still pools, black mirrors shape life into stopped down strata of silver. The whiskey is still heavy in the back of the head, drawing bloated time through its wake. The black dog would disappear as is often his want when walking. The known him becomes another shadow, referent lost. (How to draw an object in space when that object doesn't project a shadow, but is shadow?) The dogs play, and yin and yang each other, one dark, one light, twirling throughout the night. Here, the hills become fire blankets of comfort, folds of felt protecting us from dawn. Smoke becomes cloud cover, and any light is scattered like rippling silk. The harshness of detail, of memory, is lost, burnt in and fogged over. Undefined, a landscape becomes the landscape, the earth, resting on shifting ground. Landscape made by suns, winds, tectonic plates. Wars, fag butts and whiskey bottles. Beetles, and rabbits with mexamytois⁵. Everyday, and yet a mythic other. M-other (earth). She, who is born with all her potential (nothing more possible) and weighed down with time cannot, in the end, lift the lead sheet and transmute it into gold. She was an old soul. Walking that ungraspable horizon, the lead darkness of protection is silently corrosive. Concertinaed darkness grows in the marrow of an old soul, carrying the weight of the earth, not on the shoulders, but horizontal behind the eyes and over the gut. A knowing not-knowing. Meanwhile the organs gone, still ring out 'Hallelujah', or our latest hymn "I think the stars are just the neon lights, shinin' through the dance floor of heaven, on a Saturday night..."⁶

Notes

1. From Francis Ponge, 'La Cruche', translated in *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, Peter Schwenger, 2006.
2. See *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (European Perspectives)*, Julia Kristeva, 1992.
3. Eyeballs and silver gelatin.
4. See Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia*, an engraving, 1514.
5. Mexamytois is mentioned in reference to *I Remember*, Georges Perec, 2014.
6. *Hammer Down*, from the album *What Comes After the Blues*, Magnolia Electric Co., 2005.
7. This letter, written in 1759, is quoted in *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins (Parti-Pris)*, Jacques Derrida, 1993.

Images: Jim Hobbs.

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