

An Indiscreet Lagging of the Absolute

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If falling in love is a reclamation of liberty, actualizing a forbidden love is an atomic implosion of that liberty. It is an ideological freedom as well as a sensational one. In a confession to his brother, Unk makes this ideology clear. His brother tells him that since he joined the army he has become more aware that he is “*a part of a bigger thing. We all know it’s true, but forget it too often*”. Unk replies: “*When we were in high school, I used to imagine myself inside your body. Thinking inside your body, experiencing the world. I used to jerk off imagining that I was you, fucking your girlfriend from inside your body. It used to turn me on.*” This then is his conspiracy: To dress up in someone’s skin, to find ecstasy in a mask, his myth, his liberty.

It is easy to wonder if Shamriz did the same, an Israeli expatriate making a Korean film. Indeed it is not that simple, for what he preserves is a certain sanctity, a sanctity which lives in the face of the other, the foreign. This can be seen in the film’s architectural excursions, absent of people, for a naked city is the right of the imposter. It can be seen in the faces, resonating in the dissonance of stillness at the edge of motion, like statues, icons-faces like empty rooms. In the words of Emmanuel Levinas:

[A]ccess to the face is straightaway ethical. . . . There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with a decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill¹.

Not speaking the language, Shamriz communicates, a foreigner, in his icons - the icons of globalization, the myth speaking out through Unk’s phone and TV, a myth of early Judaism, of the feudal intuition of man, as Unk says of his lover, ‘*He was so rich, and I was so poor*’, it produces a double-bind of exile, a monument to feudal capitalism, to lose

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* p.85-86

oneself at the vanishing point, and set a wrecking ball to that monument, to reconcile the irreconcilable in death - an iconography, as the radioactive skin of language.

The predicament is simple. As nationals, failure to abide by normative legal behavior leads to direct consequences, visible, actual, open for manipulation - one can lose everything. As an expat, the smallest acts of disobedience could lead to deportation, but otherwise one can gain everything. This difference exists just as much in a single place, despite the options of leaving and staying behind, and it is the consequence of globalization, which places the expat in their own land.

Exile is the process with which a body, born in endless wealth, is deformed and deprived of its myths. This occurs by regulating and predetermining the individual within a rigid stratification of class and inflicting them with the skewed materialism of an unconquerable poverty. They are thus subjugated to the helplessness of a bureaucracy notated in blood, driven to the paranoia of surveillance and censorship, and made docile at the fragility of their survival. This spurs a crisis of the intuition. The crisis of intuition is caused by the illusion of irrevocability in institutional frameworks. It is when a system exists solely to maintain its own invulnerability by actively assaulting and eradicating all outliers of change in its community. Since intuition is a reactionary, reflective element that is nourished by the auspices of change, it withers in the absence of transformation, unpracticed and numb.

If time is always changing, and changing all else with it, and asking for nothing more, it is then indeed the nourishment of intuition. Our subterranean selves, our seismic interiority is all we have left when we are oppressed. When refugees and prisoners, the spatially oppressed, need escape impossible confines, and haven't the means to do so, having been forced to relinquish control over mobility and space- it is through meditation on their becoming in time that their surrounding walls become multiple, become as limitless as their ability to perceive them. It is the same when exiles experience the abuse of racism: this meditation boils all excess to its essence, and those in exile are capable of momentarily estranging themselves from their own flesh, to see beyond themselves, and find that they, in their locked exteriority and unbound interiority, are infinitely more free than their oppressors, locked either way.