

SPEAKER

Kunsthalle Basel

MOYRA
DAVEY

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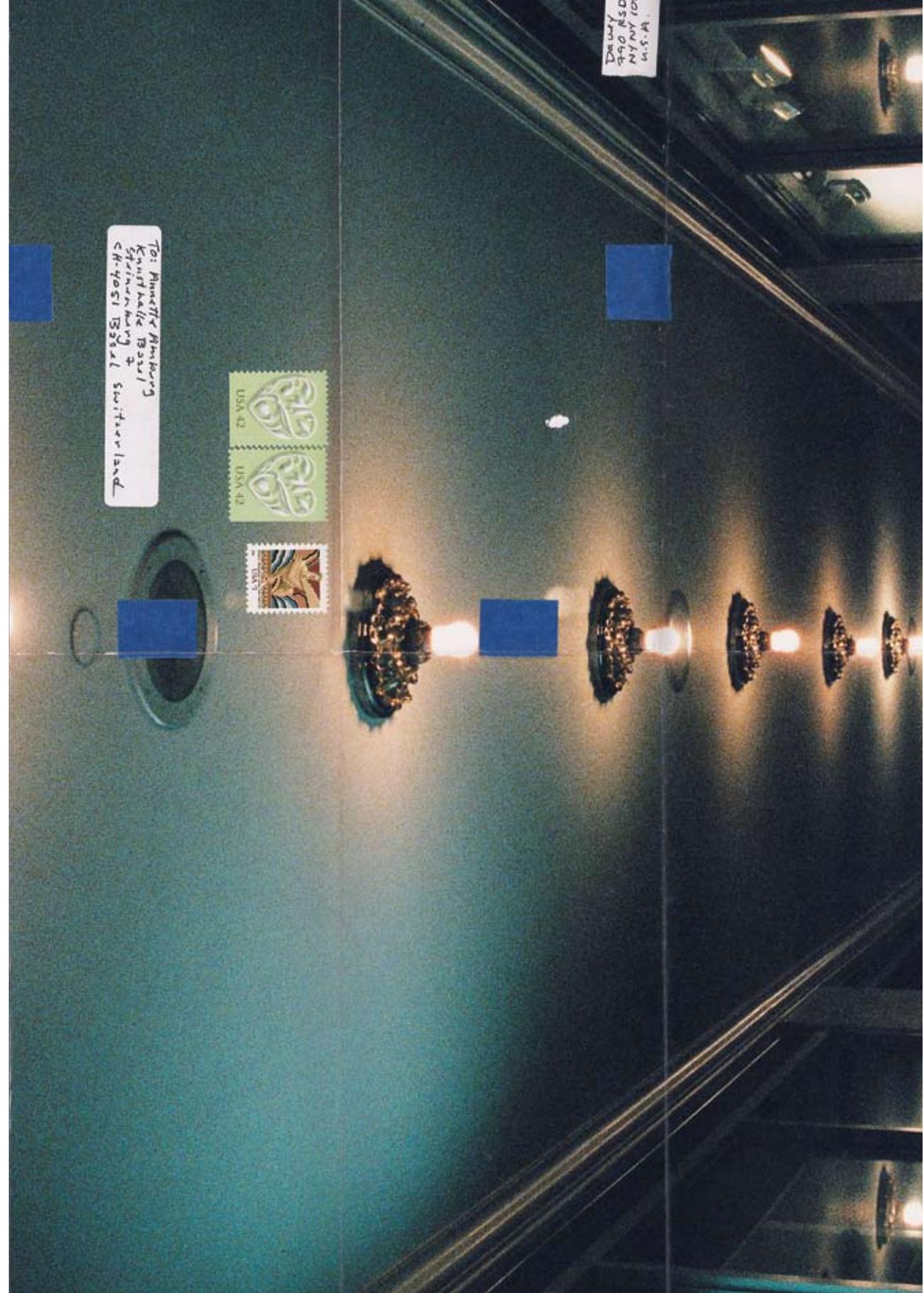
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To: Pinette Rimborg
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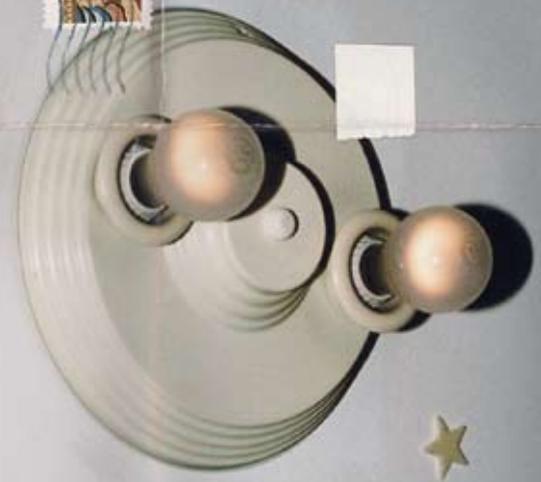
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INDEX CARDS
Moyra Davey

For Alison Strayer

To have been driven all one's life by some poorly understood mechanism in one's body and then be asked to cut the speed by a half or two thirds is asking a great deal. I am trying to find a new way to work.

20 December. WB writes a letter to his friend GS in which he says he now writes only while lying down, the desk having become freighted with associations to other writing. From his divan he has a view of the filled-in bog, the ice-skating rinks, and a clock about which he says: "More and more I feel this is a luxury I cannot do without."

5 January. New York City. Gaze down upon Audubon Terrace and Trinity Cemetery. At this time of year it's a vast, hoary mound of earth, rocks, and naked trees in shades of gray and brown: so much is visible, in fact, that parts of it, the eroded, outer edges, resemble an archeological dig. By summer the ground and stones will be obscured by giant puffs of green foliage, and not much will be distinguishable beyond the abundant flowering of huge old trees. In front of the cemetery is a building with this inscription:

WE ARE YOUNG
AND WE ARE
FRIENDS OF TIME

16 February. "Like a plant, in the mornings he wanted to live, by evening he wanted to die." (E. Leslie)

22 February. Think of three cemeteries: New Orleans (Paul Morphy); New York City (view from 790); Paris (Montparnasse, Père Lachaise, etc.). And Aldo Rossi's. This thought, of three cemeteries (plus Rossi's) in three cities in three moments in time gives a burst of optimism.

3 March. Andrea G. emails me Benjamin's "Surrealism" text with image of alarm clock at the end. I begin it but then read only the last sentence.

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12 March. Buy tickets to New Orleans. Begin MS recovery diet. Spitzer resigns.

13 March. Waste two hours reading about Eliot Spitzer in the *New York Times*. Read instead: Paul Morphy, E. Bowen, Natalia G. Or: read and write nothing. What would I do instead?

"In real life Sturgis was much more sanguine about giving up his writing career. His friend A.C. Benson said he thought Sturgis had all the makings of a great writer except the drive. Perhaps he was right. Though Sturgis ran through his fortune and fell on hard times toward the end of his life [...] he still seemed to be enjoying himself. He told Wharton after he underwent unsuccessful surgery for cancer, 'I'm enjoying dying very much.'" (Edmund White)

30 March. B. cannot say his own name without stuttering. Today he talked about the face and the vulnerability of the nose to being hit, and then more generally about the anatomy of the face. Amazed he knew this. And his own face is changing.

THE PROBLEM OF PAUL MORPHY

At the height of his career and prowess, chess prodigy Paul Morphy took himself to the Café de la Régence in Paris, where he'd arranged to play eight games simultaneously over ten hours, blindfolded. After defeating the last of his opponents he pushed his way out onto the streets through an ovation of cheering crowds; the next morning he dictated to his secretary every move of each

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of the eight matches, as well as multiple variations on those moves. Morphy was a consummate amateur so terrified of being thought otherwise he'd immediately give away any prize money won at chess. Triumphant in the chess world, there remained one Englishman named Staunton for Morphy to beat. An analyst of chess and the author of several authoritative books on the game, one of which Morphy had owned since adolescence, Staunton had long been construed an "arch-imaginal father figure" by the younger player. Strategically, Staunton dodged all invitations to play, insinuating that his challenger was motivated by monetary gain. This was mortification to Paul Morphy, who stopped playing chess, became more and more reclusive and paranoid, and died suddenly of congestion of the brain at age forty-seven. (Adapted from the case study by Ernest Jones)

CEMETERIES

Unable to make a decision about travel, about whether it would be good or bad for my health to travel, I woke one morning with the idea of a project rooted in travel, linked by three cemeteries in three cities in three moments in time. It made me happy to think I'd found a solution, and could accept the invitation to Mark and Dana's wedding in New Orleans, in a garden cemetery shaded by trees.

With me is a memory from the summer of 1988, of stumbling onto another of the city's little necropolises in blinding white

sunlight and intense, nearly unbearable heat. The site is completely exposed and the white of the tombs draws and refracts even more light and heat. We look for but don't find the grave of 19th-century chess master Paul Morphy, known to us by way of Ernest Jones's essay in *The Psychology of Gambling*, a book with a smiling, ash-white grim reaper on the dust jacket.

25 April. Back in New York, sunlight is pouring in and bird sounds fill the room. Why am I sitting here tearing my hair out? It's a warm spring day, the cemetery is now almost obscured by soft green, yellow, and red bursts of leaves. Remember the *New York Times* article on Rossi: birth and death in his conception of the cemetery in Modena. Wonder how easily I might locate and photograph all four cemeteries (New York City, New Orleans, Paris, and San Cataldo in Modena) on Google Earth. Pull *Times* article from files to read later.

29 April. Aura tells me about the essay "Hashish in Marseilles," that in it someone wakes up from a hashish trance and sees a clock. I read the version in *Reflections*. There is no clock, but there is this:

BALL OF THREAD

"What joy in the mere act of unrolling a ball of thread! And this joy is very deeply related to the joy of intoxication, just as it is to the joy of creation. We go forward; but in so doing, we not only discover the twists and turns of the cave, but also enjoy the pleasure of

discovery against the background of the other, rhythmic bliss of unwinding the thread. The certainty of unwinding an artfully wound skein— isn't that the joy of all productivity, at least in prose? And under the influence of hashish, we are enraptured prose beings raised to the highest power." (Walter Benjamin)

How much easier to read Benjamin on drugs. Resolve to read only this kind of thing, or the short pieces on food and cities.

The certainty of the skein reminds me of Virginia Woolf's "net of words": her sureness that when she is writing an essay (not fiction), a net of words will eventually drop down on her. Google various phrases that I remember from the passage, but, unlike most searches undertaken in this manner, nothing turns up. This is what I remember:

"When writing an essay I have the certainty that within an hour or so a net of words will drop down upon me and allow me to compose my essay, but with fiction there is a great despair and it is as though I must sit and gaze at the words from the other side of a blue abyss."

Resolve to refrain from including long quotes, though I can't resist "Ball of Thread" and read it over and over. Refrain from quoting authors I've only read secondhand.

{ "Myslovce-Braunschweig-Marseilles" is the story Aura meant, about a guy who takes hashish and misses his chance to become a millionaire: he keeps falling asleep and waking up to big clockfaces. }

STORY, STRUCTURE

What is the certainty Benjamin is talking about? Is it the assurance of having found a solution, the way out of an impasse? Ariadne's thread is literally a lifeline; for a writer, to hold the ball of string is to have the beginning and end of something, and all the twists and turns in between: to grasp the story, and know its unfolding.

Remember Jean-Pierre Gorin, who'd admit to a fundamental lack in his filmmaking: the subject of the film was the need of the maker to be making something, and the search for what that something could be. Disarming to have this lack so forthrightly acknowledged.

Malcolm: "The writer, like the murderer, needs a motive."

Genevieve: "[A]nd not just a story, but structure as well. Material is meaningless without: form, frame, container, thread."

But aren't confusion and drift truer to how lives get lived? Isn't structure a contrivance? Instead, why not just editing? As in Pasolini's "Observations on the Long Take," about how death imposes an immediate final edit, gives meaning to a life. Let story and structure unfold. But it takes so long. I sit and stare and I want to be an "enraptured prose being."

Aldo Rossi: "I felt that disorder, if limited and somehow honest, might best correspond to our state of mind."





NEWSPAPERS

In the middle of *The Heat of the Day* (E. Bowen, 1949), there is a long and tender ode to the newspaper. It is a passion shared by Connie, “a collector of newspapers of almost any age, either to look at again or wrap things up in,” and Louie, who, “once [she] had taken to newspapers [...] found peace.” The two women hoard the papers, savor their smells and textures, take pleasure in the brittle sounds of pages being turned and folded, empathize with their thinning bulk in war-rationed Britain and long to feed them, feel covetous at the sight of fried fish being wrapped in one of the precious broadsheets, and, having used a page to light a fire, “peer forward into the acrid smoke to read the last of the print till a flame [eats] it.”

Rainer Werner Fassbinder: “What’s needed is appetite. And if there is appetite, a story will unearth itself.” In a filmed interview RWF says he can make a movie from reading an article in the newspaper.

“[M]y impressions on certain mornings when I read the newspaper.” (Aldo Rossi)

“And I must read all the papers which I put into my closet week after week and never read.” (Jane Bowles)

8 May. The fundamental pleasure of making something (with our hands especially). Wrapping and unwrapping the ball of thread [...]

At night: inducing sleep with stories (but only the boring, predictable ones: Tony Judt).

J. & language: transmutation of experience, lessening of pain.
Joan Didion: “We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”
Quoted over and over in David Rieff’s memoir of Susan Sontag’s illness and death.

“Talking so as not to die.” (Jean Clair)

JANE BOWLES

The book falls open to a boarding pass for a flight to Puerto Vallarta dated December 1986. I begin to read Jane’s deliriously long and repetitive reflections on the minutiae of her life—money, ship schedules, the renting out of Paul’s apartment and her anger at having to clean it, Paul’s prolific writing, her own block-age. In one nine-page letter to him, she notes:

“I have waited to write because I have been in such a boiling rage with you having spent most of this week trying to make some order out of the havoc of your clothes and pure junk left around the apartment none of which I dare throw away [...] Unless I can get a friend to take [the apartment] everything in the closets will have to be packed away. I am willing to do this as best I can but I will take no responsibility about doing it wrong.”

I found, and still find the letters oddly comforting for the way they translate thorny life problems into Gertrude Stein–like, droning-on prose. I’ve often thought that diaries and letters are the real modernism: stream of consciousness without the contrivance. Unable to work on fiction most of her life, the letters are where Jane did her writing, and she wrote at great length about her inability to write. She called these dispatches “agonizers,” and was capable of cycling over the same nagging problem, in slightly modified form, a dozen times or more in a single letter. I have to admit to some *schadenfreude* in reading the letters, of finding consolation in someone else’s blockage.

I read from the beginning, but also flip forward to the page where I’d left the plane ticket, and where I’d possibly stopped reading in 1986. I’d forgotten that Bowles had had a stroke at age forty, and read some of the letters written shortly after in which she is struggling to spell common words and form sentences. Her vision is impaired and she cannot reread what she’s written, yet she is still attempting the same sweeping representations of her psychic and material state as before her illness.

But it’s quite a different thing to read Bowles at fifty than at twenty-eight, and this time, with less distance on her experience, both in terms of age and health, I am less seduced by her transformative prose powers, and much more confronted by the disabling neurosis that ended catastrophically.

In my notebook I have copied: “Inevitable that I would get this (stroke), no surprise (writer’s block),” but I cannot find the exact source for this quote in *The Letters*, and must consider the possibility that it is partially my own invention.

In her introduction to the letters, Millicent Dillon writes: “It was Jane Bowles’ custom never to date a letter.” I find this

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awesome and try to think of reasons why:

The letters sometimes took days or weeks to write, therefore the practical problem of choosing one date over another.

Superstition. She will be safer if she cannot be placed in time.

The letters were more than epistolary communication pinned down by the calendar: this was writing by the yard—which again makes me think of Stein’s extravagance.

Jane not wanting dates is the opposite of Benjamin needing the clock, of his finding stability and reassurance in its presence.

11 May. Patina of book covers: *The Psychology of Gambling, The Street of Crocodiles*.

ALDO ROSSI

20 May. Reading Rossi on Modena cemetery (bones) and thinking about my teeth. Reread *New York Times* article pulled from files:

“Rossi combined motifs of innocence and mortality in some projects [...] [made] efforts to reconcile the extremes of childhood and death [...] the womb and the grave [...] clocks appeared, totems of passing time.”

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Copy long quote from heavily marked-up library copy of Rossi’s *A Scientific Autobiography*:

“In April 1971, on the road to Istanbul between Belgrade and Zagreb, I was involved in a serious auto accident. Perhaps as a result of this incident, the project for the cemetery at Modena was born in the little hospital at Slawonski Brod, and simultaneously, my youth reached its end. I lay in a small, ground-floor [s/c] room near a window through which I looked at the sky and a little garden. Lying nearly immobile, I thought of the past, but sometimes I did not think: I merely gazed at the trees and the sky. This presence of things and of my separation from things—bound up also with the painful awareness of my own bones—brought me back to my childhood. During the following summer, in my study for the project, perhaps only this image and the pain in my bones remained with me: I saw the skeletal structure of the body as a series of fractures to be reassembled. At Slawonski Brod I had identified death with the morphology of the skeleton and the alterations it could undergo.”

Reread *The Painter of Modern Life* and “On Being Ill” in order to extract the following citations:

“In the window of a coffee house there sits a convalescent, pleasurablely absorbed in gazing at the crowd. But lately returned from the valley of the shadow of death, he is rapturously breathing in all the odours and essences of life.” (Charles Baudelaire)

“[P]erhaps for the first time for years, to look around, to look up—to look, for example, at the sky. [...] This then has been going on without our knowing it! [...] Ought not someone to write to *The Times*?” (Virginia Woolf)

SKY

“When you lay in the grass you were under the azure map of clouds and sailing continents. You inhaled the whole geography of the sky.” (Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*)

“I saw the sky, a few stars and a little greenery.” (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, cited in *The Neutral*)

“How was it I did not see that sky before?” (Leo Tolstoy, *Ibid.*)

23 May. *Silences*: small, yellowed paperback. Walk over bridge. Bittersweet aspect of B. on piano: loveliness of music but always his anger. Record his playing to have for Paris. Playing and crying. Buy him songs on iTunes.

Sunday. David Rieff at 6AM. Onionskin paper: when you turn a page, you turn two, and have to pick them apart.

Jane Bowles on the subway: Happiness of reading the early letters and trying to reconstruct my passion for them.

24 May. Begin Arsenicum Album. Rain this morning, now sun and heat. Reading Rieff on Sontag: her terror of death terrifying. But also her conviction that she could outsmart death, and her hubris about it. No, this is unfair. Sontag’s was the worst of situations. But Dennis Potter had the same fate and did not fear death.

Sontag in Italy, writing her second novel: "It was going well and she chose to ignore symptoms of second cancer." (David Rieff)

Thomas Mann quoted by David Rieff: "A writer is someone for whom writing is harder than it is for someone else."

27 May. Benjamin koan in *On Hashish*:
The little sheep reads.

Is the frame a writing song is it an image.

Sleep my little sheep sleep.

Write my little sheep write.

Sleep is the part I forgot and need to write about.

Put computer to sleep. Close eyes, rest. Open Benjamin's *On Hashish* at random and read: "[U]nder the influence of hashish, we are enraptured prose beings raised to the highest power." Begin to understand: He was stoned, he could write anything.

28 May. Strange sleep, no pill. Numbing sadness about Bella. Videotape B. on the Farfiza in the rain.

4 June.

Sleep (pills)

Shit (senna tea)

Clean desk

Weed shelves

Nadine Gordimer quoted by David Rieff: "You must write as if you're already dead."

? June.

Walter Benjamin writes to his friend Gershom Scholem that his 2,000 books have arrived, and that he now writes only while lying down. From his study he has a panoramic view of the ice-skating rinks, Schramm Lake, and a clock. He calls the scene "almost l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde." This

cryptic letter is the starting point for a work about writing, illness, sleep, and the view from the window: Baudelaire, Woolf, Rossi, Potter all have described supine or convalescent views of clouds, patches of blue sky, blossoms, or the crowd seen with the innocence of a child. The look of the world altered by illness. For Ray Navarro, in 1989, it was the little red blinking light on his stereo. He wanted to make an artwork about it but never got the chance.

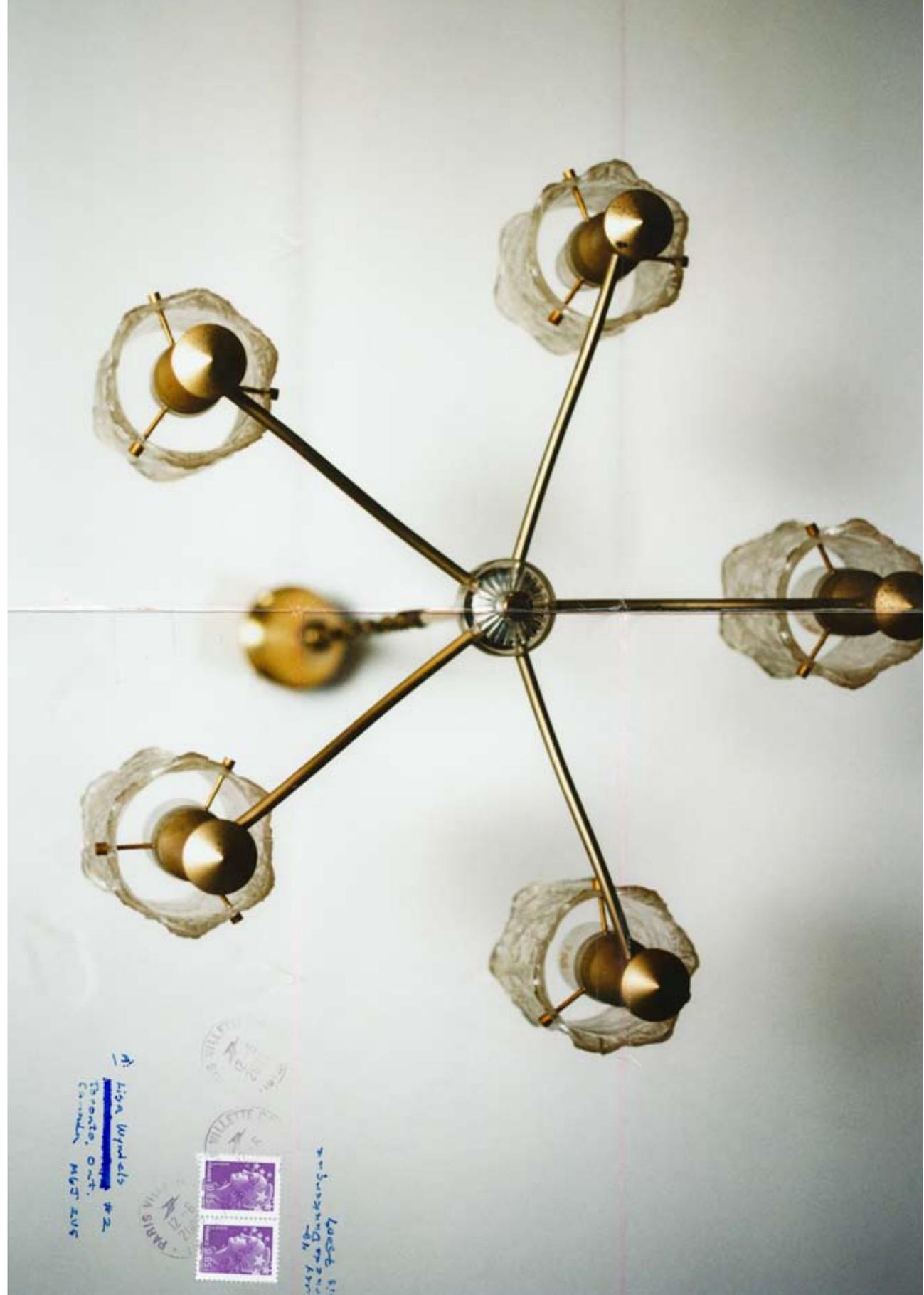
What do we do when the part of us that could go "all out" is no longer available? When brainpower is addled by drugs? My lifelong supposition has been that to remain healthy I must work. Now I must close my eyes, sleep, breathe.

11 June. "When I lost my sight I found I could think better. My head filled with ideas. Time passes differently. I let my memories flow. [...] Or I do nothing—I let myself live. I can remain sitting in an empty room, perfectly still, for three or four hours without discomfort." (David Hoon Kim)

BLINDNESS, ILLNESS, SLEEP DOC.

"I was getting used to this strange semi-darkness in which I lived and almost began to like it [...] I stood on the threshold of reality and imagination." (Oliver Sacks)

"The fleeting and poignant desire to no longer hear, to no longer see, to stay silent and immobile." (*Un homme qui dort*)





"I had an accident and had to stay in bed for a long time, on my back, laying down [...] I remembered a long time ago looking at the jaguar, the South American tiger, at the zoo, and noticing that the marks on its skin resembled writing. So, I united the two ideas, myself, immobile, sick, almost dying, and the idea of the jaguar and this mysterious form of writing." (Jorge Luis Borges on *le tigre*)

"I watched my blood flow as I would have watched a brook flow [...] I felt a rapturous calm in my whole being; and each time I remember it, I find nothing comparable to it in all the activity of known pleasures." (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, in RB, *The Neutral*)

"An illness without suffering is a great privilege." (Gilles Deleuze: "M pour Maladie," *L'Abécédaire*)

DREAMS

"Another system is to lie down and dream for one hour until one can go back to the writing table. This is about all I can take right now—Goodby [*sic*] I am going to dream." (Jane Bowles, July/August, 1966)

"Intense dreams of solitude." (GP)

"[C]rumbled and disordered from the weight of dreams." (*The Street of Crocodiles*)

"[S]ince failure follows me into my dreams." (Jane Bowles, facsimile letter)

12 June. Sleep and dream about desperately trying to find a pen that works in order to scribble a note on a tiny, crumpled pad of paper. Woke and shot trees in the cemetery. Too hot and light too hard.

{Montparnasse Cemetery, main gate on Boul. Edgar Quinet. Beauvoir on right, Beckett. Sontag 1933-2004. Cioran, Sartre, Raymond Aron, Baudelaire.}

25 June. But I have been sleeping, and putting the computer 'to sleep.' Thinking about doing nothing, about Sontag doing everything, "being driven all one's life." Sontag's chief regrets at the end: "not having done enough in the past, and not having been happier in the present."

"[T]he number of hours when I simply lie on the bed without reading or thinking would shock you." (JB, p. 34)

27 June. Wake this morning with the thought that the last thing we need is more product. This related to realization last night while looking at AF's new book, or at least the question it raises about: subsequent books motivated by need for advance income or the need to maintain identity; the writer's need to log the AM hours; the artist's need to be always thinking of or making things; the filmmaker's need to be already working on the next project. Stopping signals a breach of identity. Think of AR, who pointedly did not write second blockbuster novel but did activism instead. Think of JL, who gracefully dodged this pressure as well, though I'm sure it caused her pain.

In month of non-writing, and in growing anticipation of departure for Paris, I have been reading Gail Scott's *My Paris*. I made this list in her gerund-driven style:

I writing
I sleeping
I needing drugs
I having pain in hands
I having burning fingers
I feeling afraid
I missing B.
I feeling sadness for Bella
I shitting guts out all over floor
J. mopping up
I meeting Dr. Pain and getting new drugs
I writing in little notebook today on subway

1 July. Wake at 6AM. Beautiful light and air. Sit on bed with books and papers. Sleep again till 12 and dream. Attempt to pack, read instead old diaries. Day comes full circle. Cool breeze from window. 3AM *The Soccer War* in B.'s room, and continue reading: essays about war and liberation in Africa.

5 July. Two days of hell following Cymbalta, when I thought I was dying. Thoughts of all my dying friends and tell J.: I love you more than anything. I have arrived at the truth: only health is important.

15 July. Ulrike reads Benjamin letter in the barn and signals "l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde." It is from *Les Fleurs du mal*. B.'s interpretation of the clock: "Time is valuable. I like to know if I am on time, or have time to kill. It comes down to this: It's better to know something than not to know something."

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26 July. To Ben: "I am obsessed with the idea of artists and writers having a drive to produce, and the sometimes-conflict when the product may not deserve to exist."

Ben wrote back:
"Only connect [...]"

That's why I make stuff, the above, by way of trying to make sense of me and the world around me. That's why I'm not making stuff no more either. A performance is a bit of a gamble but easy enough to avoid."

Later LT says to me: you should examine those words: "deserve to exist." Evidence of how judgmental I can be.

26 July. Woke this morning thinking about photographing the weed and the trees in the cemetery, the necessity of getting out early for the light. Leave the house weighted down, shaky. Begin to see that many people are out at this hour: a man holds a small child by the hand. Realize that I can slow down and look and feel, and not always be driven by the urgency to capture, but also think: all photography is about discipline over constancy of light and sky. Light is everything. And: all photography is easel painting.

Climb ramp on West Side Highway to get the weed, but quickly realize how dangerous it is: drivers swerve at 50 mph, unnerved by the sight of a pedestrian on the ramp.

Finally, experience of being in the cemetery: Almost deafening chant of cicadas and crows; abundant tropical greenery, ivy, vines, and huge ancient trees. Heat and light, and the sound of cars whizzing by.

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of the night says: "Eros and death, anxiety and guilt."

Sontag: "To write is to spend oneself."

I am trying to find a new way to work.

6 August. Alone finally after week in P-Town, car breakdown, dog chaos. *Peace* and *Sun*. Yesterday, dreaming fitfully of "l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde."

9 August. Woken by crows. Think again of *l'atelier*. Beautiful light and sky. Deep sleep, no drugs. To see Louise Bourgeois yesterday at the Guggenheim: some works are autonomous, mute; others attached to language: these always shock, pierce. Then on a park bench with Julie: sun, wrinkles, fat.

12 August. 9:45 PM and I recall almost nothing of the day. Finish Elizabeth Bowen: woman with a baby and three swans.
16 August. Drive Bella to Montreal. Terrible depression absorbed in the night.

21 August. *The Soccer War*. Remember this model: journalism cut with "The Book that could have been" or "notes on [...]"

"Yet I have not written a dictionary or a book because whenever I start taking a deep breath and crossing myself as if getting ready to jump into deep water, a red light starts blinking on the map." (SW, p. 197)

23 August. Air India: swollen, whale of a plane. Pretty young women with babies. RER train to Gare du Nord with nine pieces of luggage.

28 July. Back to the cemetery for a third time: it is "l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde." I am working again. I am alive.

The act of going out. Of physical exertion, of climbing the mound, listening to those intense insect and bird sounds. And bringing something home. Except that in the cemetery it is also private, protected. There is no anxiety over the public encounter with strangers, as with street photography.

"All the crickets and bugs are singing outside."
(Jane Bowles, p. 49)

TO HAVE BEEN DRIVEN

"To have been driven all one's life by some poorly understood mechanism in one's body and then be asked to cut the speed by a half or two thirds is asking a great deal. Yet this adjustment is necessary for living an exacerbation-free life." (Swank)

How to reconcile this truth with the lifelong craving for the rise of spirits that comes with engagement? Addiction to fever, as in: The moment when you lock in and feel yourself drawn forward by something both certain and unknown? And what of the stamina needed to find out, eventually, perhaps, what that thing might be?

Then there is the part of the self that wants to be off the hook. To have once and for all made the thing that will end the need to make things (others have said this: Miranda July). How to make sense of these incongruent drives. A book grabbed in the middle

25 August. B.: "I heard you pee last night for the longest time." J.: "We both lay there and listened to you pee."

27 August. Arrive in Paris and begin to walk. Walk through the Passage Jouffroy with J. & B. Big, broken clocks, and a date: 1846. Jetlag adding to bell-jar effect in head and ears, this, in turn, doubled by muffled, muted sounds of glassed-in arcade. For Aragon it is like being underwater: arcade as "human aquarium." Also: *passage* as "coffin."

"[T]he same voice of the seashells, the whole ocean in the Passage de l'Opéra." (LA)

30 August. Johanna emails long, beautiful passage about cameras and clocks from *Camera Lucida*.

2 September. Dream about going to the Cité for first time and finding halls are smeared in dog shit. *Money + time*.

3 September. Inexorable tug of sleep on my body. Sleep as the weight of gravity pulling me down, and not able to resist until finally I hear myself say: "get up." And I do. And I wander out and buy the papers. I can't shake Gail Scott's book, or any of the other countless recitations of this place.

"A dead, a tranquil place." (GP, p. 165)

5 September. Angry at J. for throwing out papers, then find them in the trash on the sidewalk. Awesome beauty of park beside Notre Dame. Pleasure of maps, figuring out where I have been and where I will go.

8 September. Chiming bells every half hour. Powdery clouds and soft sun. In the middle of the night, waiting for sleep: recrimination; in the morning, in the metro: forgiveness. Feel the

tension of last months lift. And pain lifts.

Stock market crashing. Toss two Lyrica into my mouth. One falls on floor. Half out of my mind with drugs and frozen fingers. 5 PM: sleep, or rather observe myself sleeping and think about how I will extract myself from it. She is not dead but sleepeth.

17 September. Visit Sontag's grave, a black slab on which visitors have placed small stones and yellow Post-it notes. Someone has written a note on a metro ticket and weighted it with a chestnut. Shoot some mediocre video of the stone and surrounding trees, a fitting expression of my ambivalence about being here. I use the small map given to me by the custodian to locate Baudelaire's grave. It is covered with notes written on metro tickets; also flowers and a book wrapped in plastic.

19 September. Hungover. Sniffly. Sound of bells. Sound of singing. Crash of stocks. Reread Elizabeth Bowen chapter on Connie, Louie, and newspapers. Trying to read Baudelaire on beauty: beauty has an *eternal* and *circumstantial* element etc., but cannot get past two sentences without stopping to eat, drink, or note something. Sunlight and church bells. Trying to help B. with math in French, plunged back to my mother's situation forty-five years ago. *J'ai, tu as, il a, nous zavons, vous zavez, ils zont. Mon ton son, notre votre leur*. Returned to childhood.

22 September. J. loses wallet and we spend the rest of the day on the phone canceling cards. I am understanding because his disaster justifies my own excessive vigilance, paranoia.

26 September. The artist K recommends Regulin as a *laxative*, a powdered seaweed that swells up in the bowels, shakes them up, and is thus effective mechanically in contrast to the unhealthy chemical effect of other laxatives which just tear through





the excrement and leave it hanging on the walls of the bowels. OCD behavior over duplicate debit wire of \$16K from Walnut to Anita. Stupid to lose sleep over this, but I will never change unless I am forced to, i.e. by blindness. Finish *The Painter of Modern Life*. Read *Les Fleurs du mal*, "The Man of the Crowd," *La Horla*.

29 September. Goethe's diaries. A person who keeps none is in a false position in the face of a diary. When for example he reads in Goethe's diaries: '1/11/1797. All day at home busy with various affairs,' then it seems to him that he himself had never done so little in one day. Less pain in hands but now worried about thing on my nose. Serial anxiety. Sleep. Sleep of the dead. After years of wishing for sleep it is in fact frightening to sleep this much.

30 September. All evening he spoke often and—in my opinion—entirely seriously about my constipation and his. [...] When we had already said good-bye he called to me again from the distance: 'Regulin!' Anxiety about "thing" on nose replaced by anxiety over money and Walnut in the wake of stock market crash.

2 October. I fall asleep soundly but after an hour I wake up, as though I had laid my head in the wrong hole [...] I believe this sleeplessness comes only because I write. J. is reading *The Psychology of Gambling* and on my way out, grey skies, I think "Does my father love me?" (from the book), and wonder: will I be lucky again today?

4 October. After a week of staring at thing on my nose and growing anxiety verging on hysteria that it is 'something,' visit plastic surgeon and have it removed. In my notebook he writes "Basocellular carcinoma (benign)."

MAP OF PARIS

Brain, ball, spiral, maze, fractal, fist. What would it look like to pry open the fist of Paris? I will interrupt almost any activity with the excuse of consulting the blue book: finding my way in and around the labyrinth, retracing my steps. Study of the centrifugal Métro: calculating the shortest distance between points.

Aldo Rossi: "The emergence of relations among things, more that the things themselves, always gives rise to new meanings."

10 October. On the train, wedged between a woman doing a crossword puzzle and a stone-faced man staring unwaveringly ahead, a woman across the aisle weeps into her cell phone. With her free hand she staunches the flow from her nose with a big wad of tissues.

12 October. Yesterday at Max's wrote in the *Paris Diary*. Peel myself from bed at 8:30AM: Ambien on top of Laroxyl. Last Jane Bowles letters: she is losing her mind. After twenty years I have finally read them all. This produces a slightly shocking feeling: like, now her life is really ended, as is a chapter of mine. Today pianist is playing Schumann and other Romantics.

15 October. After nearly a fortnight of blockage I faint again in the WC. When I finally open my eyes I see curled up beside me the product of my unconscious labor, something so dense and compacted it leaves no trace on the tiles. I carefully wrap it in soft, white tissue, feel its weight and send it on its way into the twists

and turns of subterranean Paris. Later I recount this episode to K., who is appalled that "I did not have myself evaluated," and reprimands me for ignoring his advice on Regulin.

JANE BOWLES

Why Jane Bowles now? I'd kept the Black Sparrow Press spine in my peripheral vision for 20 years. I was getting ready to uproot (or so it felt to me), and this is what she did over and over. Wonder if I am beginning to overidentify with Jane. Instead copy passages where I've made a mark, often late at night:

"It was like going there after I died." (JB, p. 213)

"I was upset about the Leary scandal which Paul heard about from Susan Sontag, whom you've surely met or at least heard of." (JB, p. 282)

14 October. Burning fingers. *The Street of Crocodiles*: descriptions of sunlight and sun-soaked streets, memories of summer. I am like the father, stewing over bills and accounts. And I can't shit either. Neighbor pianist is playing Bach, now scales. My studio is also "l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde."

A.: Move towards images rather than words.

30

Ann C. reads three to four newspapers a day: "I read what interests me." I learned from her to read what interests me. Arrive: eat, read newspaper. Talk on the phone to A.: one hour. 1 PM: eat, read newspaper. Still have not finished paper from Thursday. Think of sleep. Ache in my teeth too real to be phantom.

21 October. Neighbor pianist practicing same trills of ten notes over and over, making the same mistakes. Ennui, lassitude. Benjamin and extreme aggravation of piano below his study. Index fingertips frozen.

22 October. Reading Alison on Jane Bowles: "[JB] is still looking to develop in her work her ideas on salvation, and increasingly to attain salvation *through* her work." Her descriptions of Bowles's "salvation through renunciation," self-abasement etc., remind me of Simone Weil, whom Bowles mentions reading toward the end of her life in a letter to Paul, along with "a little of S[usan] Sontag [...] and you."¹

23 October. Stagger out of bed alarmed because it is 10AM. See neon, glowing brain, Day-Glo colors and lights. Panic that now I've completely lost my sight. Fall over. Panic that now I've lost motor control. J. woken by noise: I am limp, but recover quickly.

24 October. Capture diary fragments like video captures, scenes recorded and forgotten. Because I want to include here words like: Arsenicum Album.

Yesterday, after the fall: Relief. And briefly: off the hook. Prolonged enjoyment in looking at books, looking at photographs, looking at anything. And 'taking the sun' in the gardens with G.

Today: Sense of doom. I want only to be with J. and B. I would run to them now. Walk at night to rue Réaumur for raucous dinner at L.'s. Evening is perfect antidote to day of gloom and stinging pain.

CUTS

In a document labeled "Cuts," I find: "Rossi quotes Benjamin: 'Therefore I am deformed by connections with everything that surrounds me here.'" (p. 19)

I realize that I write about being deformed and remade by the things I read. And I am trying to write in the form of the things that I want to read: diaries, fragments, lists.

"Pointless, and therefore true." (Gene Youngblood)

16 October. Watch David Bowie documentary from the '70s in which he demonstrates cutting up his lyrics into strips and reordering them randomly as a means of accessing unconscious thoughts. About his characters and personas he asks: "Am I writing them or are they writing me?" Seeing Bowie and hearing the songs: more burrowing. Wishing my fingers to fly across the keyboard like the pianist somewhere in this building.

20 October. On the train: reading New York edition of the *International Herald Tribune* from October 15. Story about conflict over non-extradition to Italy by France of Marina Petrella, 54, former Red Brigade. Carla Bruni visits her in the hospital and assures her she will be allowed to remain in France. Petrella is severely depressed and says she wants to die. Pianist is playing Bach.

31

25 October. Walk with B. in Tuileries gardens. Beautiful light and smell of dried leaves. Thousands of people stroll and sit in green metal chairs, 'taking the sun.' I sit with B. Finally I am 'with him,' but at this moment I am terribly hungry and that is all I can think about.

27 October. JM comes to studio and reminds me of the "book about the book that never was," and I remember why I copied down long passage from *The Soccer War*: to be reminded of the book you write along the way to writing the book that never gets written.

28 October. Dream about a woman: tall, red hair, stout body, guileless. She tells me she is a 52-cigarette-a-day smoker. Asks me if I think she'll be okay. I interpret the number "52" (as in weeks), to be a warning about the ill-advised nature of this diary.

"Perhaps the magnitude of the task is putting me off. To unravel the skein one more time, right to the end, to shut myself up for I don't know how many weeks, months or years [...] in the enclosed world of my memories, going over and over them until I'm both satiated and nauseated." (GP, p. 97)

4 November. Force myself vertical, pour coffee down my throat. Sleep is a succubus.

13 November. "J'ai horreur du passé. J'ai horreur du souvenir." Paul Claudel invoked by Pierre Boulez in *Télérama*. Read Baudelaire "Spleen" poems and think this is what I experienced at the flea markets on the weekend. Alison: CB pretty much said it all. You may as well get over it.

14 November. J.'s birthday. RIP dear little Bella.

25 November. *Little did I know I'd be the corpse that would arrest my own take, but I stop myself: out of superstition never write such things, or spell out medical anxieties. Sweep studio. Peel hair + dust from broom, let fly out window. Pianist rehearses same repertoire of fragments, segueing from one to the other, over and over, like a tic.*

24 November. Catacombs. New tooth: 3.5K.

20 December. "Dear Gerhard, The Christmas season is upon us once more [...] All of my books are here now and, even given these times, their number has increased over time from 1,200—although I certainly have not kept all of them by a long shot—to 2,000. The study does have some peculiarities: first, it has no desk; over the years, due to a series of circumstances—not only because I have become used to working in the café a lot, but also because of some notions related to the memory of what I wrote at my old desk—I now write only while lying down. I have a sofa inherited from my predecessor. It lends itself most wonderfully as a place to work because of its qualities—it is quite useless for sleeping. I once heard from her that it had been built for an old woman who was crippled. This, therefore, is the first peculiarity, and the second one is that it has a panoramic view of the old, filled-in bog, or, as it is also called, Schramm Lake—almost *l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde*—and now that it is cold, a view of the ice-skating rinks and a clock is in sight in all seasons; as time goes by, it is especially this clock that becomes a luxury it is difficult to do without. The rent for the apartment is unfortunately such that it seems as if all of these optical furnishings were included in the price.

"It is nothing short of an infernal irony that I had hardly written these lines when a piano, never heard before today [...] begins to make itself heard directly below my study. This is simply

horrible. But disconcerted as I am, I can do nothing but continue to write."

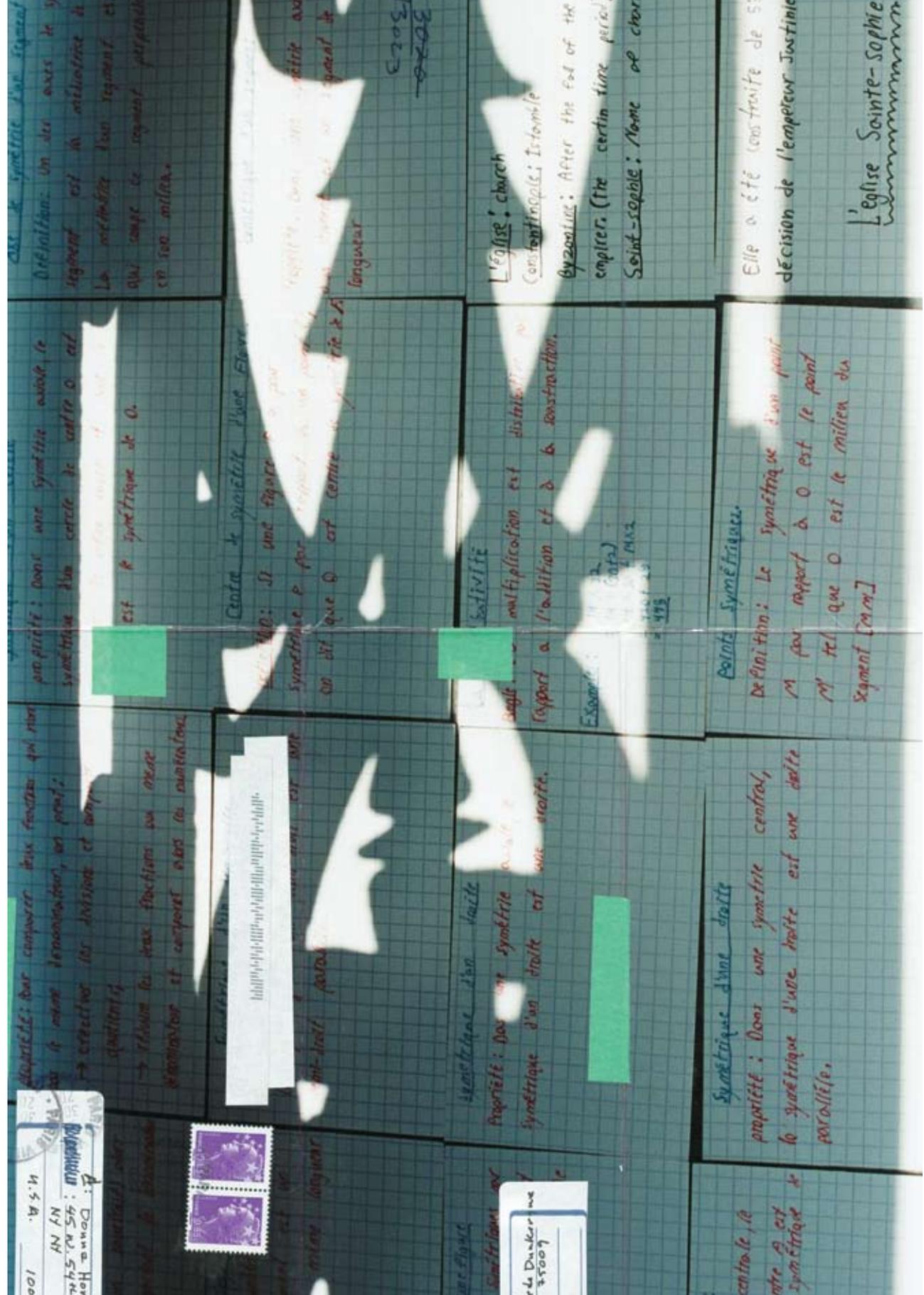
26 December. Finish *The Street of Crocodiles*. In the final story, "The Comet," the whole town is waiting for the end of the world. Father crawls into the flue of the chimney and, through his microscope and some trick of refraction, catches sight of the comet. At first it looks like "a brother of the moon [...] scrofulous and pock-marked." Then Father realizes it is in fact "a human brain, deeply asleep, and blissfully smiling in its sleep [...] in the light of waters of amnion."

31 December. Visit the caves of Nerja near Málaga on B.'s birthday. This vast, quieted underworld reminds J. of *Voyage to Italy*: Bergman dissolving into tears at the Pompeii ruins, and the religious procession in which she gets separated from her husband. Another tourist hole is redeemed: anger at B. fades, tension lifts. Long hike up through the hills. New Year's Eve on the Balcón de Europa.

Later, in "Cuts" I find: "JB died in a convent in Malaga." Search-engine this and immediately click on a detail of a map of that city with a blinking red dot on "Avenida Jane Bowles," and a photograph of her grave in San Miguel Cemetery, Málaga.

"I saw that the roses that had been next to the wall were a mass of dust and mildew." (*A Fairly Good Time*)

- 1 I'm grateful to Alison Strayer for her critical writing on Jane Bowles, and for her friendship and encouragement during my time in Paris. I'm indebted to Chris Kraus for her exemplary writing of self and other, in *Aliens & Anorexia*, in all her books.



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Jerry Ficowski is a poet, translator, and essayist.
 Born in 1924, he studied philosophy at the Univer-
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 prose, Ficowski was dedicated to finding Schulz's
 writers, which was a difficult task, since the majority
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