

# NO GOAL BUT THE PATH – THINKING AT THE CROSSROAD BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE

(Bled Texts for the Writers for Peace Committee, by Teresa Salema Cadete)



## Introduction, May 2022: The Unthinkable War?

Who would think of invasion and destruction, bombing and refugees, war reporters and displaced citizens, old people but also soldiers and children carrying animals and objects while searching for more secure place, if possible not very far from their homes, hoping to be able to return soon, even to rooms with more lime and dust than furniture or even a roof? Who would think it would happen 2022 in – Europe? Yet it has happened in the nineties – and some Balkan countries still remember it painfully. And yet it kept happening again and again since then, in many countries of the so-called globalized world, maybe as one of the many reverses of the capitalist system of production and distribution – of commodities, of weapons, of news – in a clash of geopolitical interests.

The following texts have been written almost yearly since 2003 for the Bled meetings of the Writers for Peace Committee, in full consciousness about the persistence of

warfare in any part of the globe and, in the spirit of the Bled Manifesto (2013), also in full awareness of the imperative need to build bridges instead of raising walls, to talk with the devil in order to obtain an even so precarious cease-fire, as absolute priority, to negotiate even in unequal conditions in order to obtain release for suffering citizens. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sitting together in order to exchange ideas and accept the differences has got a more than symbolic meaning. It implies a close look at Gaia and its inhabitants, which we are too, sharing its gifts without hurting living beings – the sensibility patterns are changing, and they claim nowadays for a better, more cooperative managing of the precariousness of sheer life.

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The Torn Texture: Five Theses About Rescue In The Middle Of Danger (2003)

1. *The quest for chances always takes place between order and chaos.* Chaos and order always go together. Our age is said to be ontologically secure, this means, we no longer have to search for ultimate reasons to which modern science can provide explanations. Moreover, the sophistic rhetoric of contemporary thought is always ready to deconstruct everything that seems to be consistent. But that comfortable security may disclose itself as a fragile texture, and we do not need to recall the omnipresence of danger and death, the too recent memories of war and devastation in Iraq in order to realize all the menaces that come from our frail psychical constructions, from the destructing drive of instrumental technology, that culminates in military machineries. What is the role of art, of literature, among such turmoil? Should that fragile texture not become constantly torn?

All laws of reciprocity (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) are among the best examples for the close relationship between order and chaos. As a matter of fact, all laws may serve as examples, since we know that justice has always grown out of violence, out of the need to put an end to or to avoid violence, in the worst case by using higher forms of violence, which have the force to legitimate themselves by the power of persuasion or of weapons.

Nowadays we are said to live under the laws of the image. Images seem to hold an absolute sovereignty, and in this sense many of us are ready to sacrifice the kingdom of self-respect for a single minute in a trivial show-off situation. Surely we know that such extreme cases (to which reality shows and TV interviews fill our perceptive memory with plenty of exemplary situations) are but a consequence of the modern sequestration of our performative capacities and possibilities. In the intimate tyranny of the private realm, images may force people to a passivity that means the absence of engagement for interventions within the public realm, for arts, in other words for citizenship. Such passivity also means an invasion of chaos, of images and information and techniques of persuasion, into our personal systems of perception, discernment and feeling, and the subsequent inability to configure our ethical claims to a singular or collective, to a performed voice.

And yet we cannot turn our back to the world where we live and must therefore search for the first form of rescue in danger, in which our singular voices may grow stronger out of trivial violence without leaving the ground beneath our feet.

2. *We have not yet left modernity, we shall perhaps never leave it.* The unpredictability of human manifestations is involved in a web of ideas and emotions, ideologies and judgements, a web which carries acts and words in relationship with their intersubjective, interactive and material environment. We always live in *contingency*, and yes, we even contribute to increase contingency, since our subjectivity leads to problematical forms of world alienation. I do not only mean by

that fundamentalist forms of religion, in a sense which made Nietzsche write that religious people only think of themselves. We could take another example, the struggle for world hegemony, for energy sources, for geopolitical influence, a struggle which motivations always root in a dark chaos of intentions, desires, and legitimation, where order and reason have their source and find their legitimation as a form of *compensation* for the generated chaos. Such compensation means an attempt to reduce the moments of insecurity and anxiety by acting in the world and by interpreting the world often seen as a sheer jungle.

Today, the global reality enters our living room through screen images and shows us how the culture patterns are increasingly merging. The collective pride and traditionalism of the *shame-cultures*, such as the Islamic one, is being crossed over by the fascination of individual models, of the *guilt-culture* which relies upon western tradition of self-identity. No testimony is timeless, and I write these lines some days after the surrendering of Bagdad, after having read in the papers about the discussion in all the world (including the streets of Bagdad, where the people, although humiliated, feel now free to defend their own opinion) concerning the role of military and political agents, of international instances by remaking a new order out of the chaos. The psychical precariousness of the modern subject, so often mentioned in the literature of the three last centuries, finds here a tragic correspondence with the material precariousness of the living conditions caused by the subjective and objective arise of contingency.

3. *More than about a clash of civilizations or empire, would it not be appropriate to speak about a spiral of hypercontingency and overcompensation?* The drama of the world visions and of the subsequent individual performances is daily shown in images that makes us realize many modalities of merging between shame and guilt, between honour and responsibility, between material interest and ideals, between religion and western concepts of citizenship – here we are in the middle of the dilemma of freedom and responsibility. Nowadays we realize how reduced and simplified was the leitmotiv of the so-called isolated subject in the twentieth century, if we just fancy all the implications of the butterfly effect in the economic and communicative exchanges on global scale.

From the thesis about the clash of civilizations (Samuel Huntington) we may retain the feeling of the emulative inhibition from the *shame-cultures* facing the power of technique and military machineries which provide a monopoly of violence in the *guilt-cultures* and makes by that possible to develop in most European countries the politics of social state, the discourse of social and international solidarity which now seems to get spread across the globe. Neither we have reached the end of history nor the often quoted author of that thesis (Francis Fukuyama) believes in it, because at the end he keeps sustaining that human beings never will abdicate from a so-called thymic

impulse, which aims to reach beyond the own possibilities and skills. In a way, we find here the heritage of the *shame-culture* even in our world wide web, and this means an always renewed chance to act, to create and to perform both art and citizenship.

Yet the same thymic impulse may inspire extreme attitudes and originate forms of *hypercontingency*, which contributes to create permanent disorder and crisis. The bigger the chaos, the more powerful the order which intends to respond to it, and this is why we see and hear nowadays to forms of discursive legitimation of *overcompensation*, which becomes imperative, inquisitorial, intransigent, in the way it defends its supposed democratic values: By an impressing technological apparatus, which intends to confuse our perception of reality and fiction, of B-series pictures and science fiction.

4. *Between sublime and ridiculous, should we not try to rescue the tragic feeling, together with the possible lightness of being?* The codes of the heroes are codes of cruelty, of aggressiveness. They tend to rise themselves not only against sheer materiality of daily life, against consumerism and leisure society, but also out of a situation of simple needs, of economical despair, of political hopelessness. Between both extremes we always see expressions of religious unconditionality, of ideological conviction, of more or less explicit interests, which turn into violence when they take possession of some kind of object, of material reality. In both cases we feel the excesses of energetic fluxes, which are nevertheless requested by life and by art. "Meanwhile, until the philosophers try to explain the construction of the world, the same world keeps going through hunger and through love", wrote Friedrich Schiller more than two centuries ago (1795) in a satiric poem about "The wise men of the world".

Nowadays, the so-called old Europe (D. Rumsfeld) seems to represent the enlightened, cynical, tolerant part of the world. It also seems to be crammed between two fundamentalist domains, the self-cultivated American illusion of legitimacy for world hegemony and the Islamic conviction of spiritual integrity. But it might be that what in the last months rather looked as a frailty, the sense for the diversity of the other embedded in a social state, the conscientiousness of the weight of our cultural heritage, of the endless precariousness of human life and uniqueness of each individual biography, it might be that all this means a new chance for searching and finding other forms of engaged citizenship, closer to life, to art, to informality, to the rhythms of heart beating, tempered by a disciplined breath.

We have felt ourselves in the latest months impotent between two main streams, the discourses and the movements of the self-declared heroes on one hand and, on the other hand, the deconstructions of their images most of all through the internet cartoons over the first intended and then executed Iraq invasion. We could see Bush and Saddam as symmetrical figures, as a kind of unhappy comic and tragic blood

brothers, in several forms of ridicule through materialistic reduction of their poses. At this point we should be allowed to ask how can we rescue, out of both forms of noise and chaos, the hero discourses and the sarcasms that intend to tear them down, how can we rescue our differentiated, ambivalent, dialogical heritages, such as irony and dialectics, such as the tragic feeling and a bearable lightness of being? Are we really paralyzed through the overdoses of global information, so that we have stopped being able to translate our communicative impulses into new performative acts?

5. *There is no receipt for rescue in danger or "nobody can grasp God alone" (Hölderlin).* Today we may replace the word God in Hölderlin's poem "Patmos" by some kind of sacred values that not only mean the "real presences" (George Steiner) in art, but also claim for materialization in forms of justice, freedom, human rights. We should know by now that struggles supposed to be just are only those ones which are carried out for negative purposes, that means, against the lack of those values. It means therefore a struggle for a chance, for new gaps where we might inscribe not only fairer political systems but our works of art and, on an untouchable personal level, may be our nostalgia of the possible happiness. For such tasks we must trust the role of culture, for the sake of an open, discursive and acting rationality, which should be able to recognize the *place of contingency* and prevent it to become a factor of random, of anomy, of totalitarianism. In this point of view, war is not just a form of *hypercontingency*, but also an evident manifestation of a movement of flux and reflux, of identity contraction facing external threats, a merging between star treks and gulf struggles. It means not only a gap between the existential interests of the civil populations and the strategies of the big capital, which during the colonial period used to export social inner conflicts, and in the post-colonial ages needs the help of a mask under the form of a democratic discourse. Should our capacity to deconstruct the same discourse remain the testimony of our powerlessness?

Precisely in this situation, and before we come to face the threat of defeatism, we are invited to search new human dimensions over the useless weapons of the former heroes, that means: To mock about our frailties and faults, to explore our capacities, to reformulate the consciousness of the world virtualities into new forms of creation. We still admire American culture, literature, film, music, as well as the precious Islamic tradition and arts. And we know that the response to oil wars cannot be as simple as the polemic one which Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote 1947 in their "Dialectics of Enlightenment", under the trauma of the experience of the American culture industry. What I mean by this is that we can do more than (as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer polemically have put it) light candles, eat raw vegetables and ride by carriages or simply walk. Yet this may be a beginning too.

(For the Round Table *An Eye for an Eye and the Entire World will be Blind*, 36<sup>th</sup> International Writers' Meeting, Bled 21.05.-25.05.2003)

Two Or Three Things that Did Not Happen: Is There Any Possible Peace Without  
Somewhat Tragic Memories? (2004)

This question looks suspiciously rhetorical. Its implicit answer could make all the following considerations sound superfluous, even sophisticated. And yet we writers feel a kind of pressure to keep spinning a tiny thread of sense, raising a small voice, in a world that seems either too illegible, too illogical, too absurd, or too unpredictable. Since “faith has become portable” (Fouad Ajami), since ideologies have become changeable, the temptation to complain about these and many more items (the increasing replacement of the book by the screen, for instance) is no longer sustained by a system of traditional values, which most of us have drunk with mother milk, also in order to deny them during our own process of individuation.

Whoever thinks of reality as a heart beating, living system, with its systolic rhythms of distress and pain, but also with its diastolic moments of joy and anger, cannot help but also thinking historically (in time) and contextually (in space). For two or three moments of extreme violence, brought into our homes by the TV evening news, we can easily imagine a long, too long odyssey of accumulated daily sufferings, humiliations, oppressions, which fertilize the soil where violence grows, seasoned by any kind of religion or ideology. Even this is everything but new, we all remember the words of Friedrich Engels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about the theory becoming material *Gewalt* when it takes possession of the masses. *Gewalt*: This German word which means both violence and power, showing how the second grows out of the first, how the memories of the fire must be kept alive to help giving a modulate sense to light, where the shadows remain perceptible within the most intensive clarity. As we know, this was one of the most cherished metaphors during the Enlightenment, where thinking and debating were finally being seen as a progress in contrast to the devastating scenes of the Thirty Year War. But we know that the wars were being fought while thinkers and writers discussed in the salons or through publications about the most suitable means of implementing a government of justice and peace on earth. A peace which, if we do remember the irony of Immanuel Kant’s words, we may desire to be eternal, but only on the graveyard lasts forever.

So we must keep trying to formulate our concerns, our aims, our hopes, our fears, within a system of words and images which are increasingly worn out. It seems already that the not even so modern, the not even so post-modern fight between words and images is getting exchanged for a long succession of *déjà-vus*, a most used coin on which we are no longer able to read the inscriptions, also because we already know them by heart. But we just need to remember, for instance, that amazing scene of the film **American Beauty** (by Sam Mendes), where the boy describes to the girl the movements of a simple plastic bag in the wind. Suddenly, that prosaic object we use every day at the supermarket is animated by some forces of nature which seem to make it alive and a bearer of a will of its own: If not a free, at least an aesthetical will.

Suddenly, another reality emerges in the middle of a distressing, suffocating environment. Suddenly, the sight of an unexpected graceful form may contribute to neutralize family violence, generation conflicts. At the end, the world kaleidoscope has changed. It has become lighter, somehow bearable.

But we do not live in a movie, although the fictionalization of the world goes on, ceaselessly. Moreover, these fictionalization, which we experience daily in TV news, reality shows, etc., is strongly darkened with some tragic knots that are supposed to increase the appeal of the show. But instead of inoculating the germs of a strong character, as Friedrich Schiller defended in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, those home made tragedies do not prepare us to act properly in a real tragic situation. This does not happen because we are only such spectators who sit most of the times comfortably at the sea shore gazing at the ship while it is sinking. Then this was also the situation of the spectator at Schiller's time. (By the way, we can read how Schiller argued against the banality and futility of most spectators, thus anticipating the critical voices of the present against a demonized TV, as if we were not free not to turn it on, not to choose a book or a CD, instead of watching reality shows or, at least, zapping into a cultural channel.) We only feel disarmed when we cannot bear the silence which inevitably precedes the analysis of tragic situations, and therefore also such works that most of us aim to create, within a most large spectrum in time and space, from the stupidly killed and wounded people up to the dancing, flying plastic bag.

But are there words to say silence? Are there acts to answer tragedy? From this question on, from all the real memories that we have of the present, even if they merge with many journalistic banalities and TV news or shows, from the unsheltered human condition which makes us perhaps stick together, we may begin rethinking peace. The idea of peace may be therefore a collection of living images and forms, which contain at least two or three things that did not happen, but could tragically have happened in reality. In our unreligious world, this exercise may seem suspicious. But I really think that precisely such an exercise not only lies at the root of all art creation, but may also stimulate a new, at least a better attitude towards the environment, that means nature, that means constructed world, that means other people, even if we do not understand them. This is, at a time when everyone speaks and reads English, not a matter of language. It's a matter of finding where the roots of our system may be able to blend with History and fiction (but is the writing of History not already a kind of fiction?), of finding where the branches of our human condition are unprotected against the winds of violence, except when these branches get wings and start to fly after having stood still during a big storm.

(For the Round Table *Peace: A Lucky or Unlucky Compromise?*, 37<sup>th</sup> International Writers' Meeting, Bled 26.05.-30.05.2004)



## Terrorism Of Expression As A Means For The Sake Of Freedom (2006)

Some twenty years ago, when I was working on my doctoral thesis, a Sociology Professor told me that he had dreamed one day of becoming a writer. But, he told me further, I never knew what moves writers, that's why I quitted literary studies. I only knew one thing all my life: Such authors as Walter Benjamin or Theodor Adorno, whose paths to their own expression were not possible to be decoded, were far more interesting for me than such ones as Georg Lukács or Max Weber.

I would therefore place the first two authors, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, among the group which I call the *authors of silence*. That means for me, authors who shape the sentences out of silence, bringing the words into life as the result of a struggle against silence. But what does silence really mean? In the context that matters for the sake of art, of creation in freedom, for the sake of everything that prevents life from being an "eternal view of destruction", as Friedrich Schiller wrote more than two centuries ago, silence could also mean a sort of threat, a condemnation to oblivion, a negation of the right to live and let live, precisely *not* in the sense of a struggle for life.

Some further steps have been made since the debates about engaged art and ideology, since Sartre's *littérature engagée*, since Peter Weiss' *aesthetics of resistance*, since many others who have not quitted searching for the suitable measure, for the right weight, who have not given up trying to represent the unrepresentable. Between silence and triviality, we seem to have at our disposal a wide road, or at least an open field of aesthetical virtualities. But I don't think we do. The resistance of the text is proportional to the challenges of which we become aware, which touch us or even penetrate us deeply, but which we can't let turn into expression. I'm not speaking about the epidemic agitations following clear geopolitical interests under a cloak of religion. Neither am I speaking about the risks which freedom must take, otherwise it would not deserve to be called freedom.

Instead of that, I'm speaking about the obscure web of implications from which the human condition never can escape. We must not take the cloud for Juno. If we do so, if we remain by the letter forgetting the desire to search the ways which could bring us to an idea of spirit, we profess well-intended commonplaces such as "freedom of expression is a high good", "religious feelings deserve respect", "some regimes pour oil into fire", "violence is not always unjustified", etc. But we all know that the problem lies somewhere else. Perhaps we do not even know where the problem is, but we know almost always what it is *not*, I mean, we are able to differentiate instinctively the ways to explore a subject for a newspaper article, for a radio feature, or for a written text.

By this time I should have begun to explain the title of my paper. If I seem to be beating around the bush it is because I'm perhaps afraid to be misunderstood. Many of

us had the opportunity to live radical historical changes, from censorship to liberty of expression. For instance, living in Portugal during the dictatorship, going into exile and coming back after the Carnation Revolution of 1974. Those who have made such experiences had also to look for fractures within the system, into which is always possible to pour what we would like to say, or at least to suggest it.

We know the text tension, the challenge to improve. This might even produce a great thrust of adrenalin in censorship times, which might also later contribute to our own mistrust the freedom of expression, as the natural consequence of a democratic evolution. But here we also know the slings and arrows of the book market, the inner tension caused by our own aesthetic censorship, often against the mainstream taste. As a result, at the end there is no wide road, no open field for our creation, just a small gap between anger and longing, between engagement and reflection.

How can we therefore make a step beyond the discussion about engaged art? Here I would say that engaged art goes beyond the discussion itself. This is not merely a speech game. We all feel it each time that we experience the necessary, although not always urgent, dimension of a work of art, in such a way which is always more than words could say. But at the beginning and at the end we must work with words, which remind us that each tug of war between spirit and letter often leads to a clash of fundamentalisms, not of cultures. This because cultures are resistant because they are versatile; fundamentalisms are fragile in their apparent toughness, in their real fear to get fissures into their walls by opening themselves to new impulses.

Freedom is both, resistant and fragile. No power is able to defend it without making itself vulnerable. Therefore, the dilemma is that no power is able to defend itself without keeping liberty of expression. Neither is this a speech game. And I must stress that the title of my paper has no intention to play games with the theme of this round table, which I take most seriously because it concerns me since many years. Furthermore, I am convinced that freedom in its noblest sense, which goes together with human dignity, with human rights, always must be conquered against some kind of oppression, of prejudice, of self-complaisance, of security thinking, against all those attitudes which tend to take things too easily for granted. Each of us has surely a different definition of freedom, more or less driven either by the desire to decide about our own ways of acting, of writing under the given conditions, or by the caution not to hurt someone else by our own actions, by our own writing. In any case I just care about the following kind of alternatives, which may well be mixed in different proportions: Freedom in a positive sense of doing something, freedom in a negative sense of not having to do something, freedom to care about someone else's feelings, freedom to face contradictions, freedom to restrain the own freedom at last. In this last case freedom begins to take another shape, to become a sort of civil courage, to give the linguistic expression speech acts its full sense.

But even all these forms of freedom tend to become common places, especially nowadays. It's enough to wrap them in a journalistic jargon, which may flatten and dissolve each text by ignoring its context or, even worse, by creating a false context dictated by immediate interests. But here again I would not like to be misunderstood. To put it in a sentence, we should not forget our aims over useful purposes. I'm not establishing hierarchies, I'm just speaking of different things. In the same way I refuse any attempt to put limits into liberty of expression, I would like to stress that one literary aim may be a kind of terrorism of expression, as a consequence of freedom and for the sake of freedom. Here I am at last at the point where I have to explain what this means for me. But it is not an easy job. Otherwise it is too easy to imagine some kinds of shocking effects, of language attacks, of sadomasochistic descriptions. But this would perhaps never leave the significant level and remain as epidermic as an angry person burning a flag at a demonstration (and this is not only a scene we experience today; several decades ago we often saw the burning of American flags at demonstrations against the Vietnam War).

To leave the epidermic level will not lead us to any kind of "essentiality", which is a construction of the mind and simply does not exist. Instead of a nebulous "Empire" we live in a networked world. Yet every art producer has known and felt this for many centuries, in any case before he or she could dream about the existence of a world wide web. What we really know is the existence of the world as a battle field, a mine field with some beautiful places, some landscapes, some houses, some cafés, some works which cannot but bring us into a permanent astonishment. But the battle field, the mine field is everywhere, even if we feel secure. It is just the price of freedom, which many of us would like to push away. We notice it at the mere level of words when I try to legitimate my positions in order not to be misunderstood, precisely as if I walked over a mine field. And the occasional explosion would not come from some kind of anger which my words could provoke on you, but from inside, from my own conception of living within the reality of the texts, of their networked implications.

We could also see that metaphorical mine field as a severe warning about the need to differentiate. Each painful situation and memory on one side, but also each cliché, each commonplace on the other side, may be a mine. And how can we write about what is marked by mines by forgetting these mines precisely, by concentrating on what is between them? Mines are not only local metaphors, they have also a temporal life in our individual and collective memories. I use them here as metaphors for what would destroy perhaps not really our safety but most of all that tension, which is indispensable for a work of art to achieve its polysemic dimension, its resonance of former stories, of lives which remained perhaps without expression, but were nevertheless really lived. Perhaps you recognize here the old claim put forward by Walter Benjamin in his historical-philosophical theses, written down few months

before he committed suicide in a small hotel at the Spanish-French border, in order not to fall in the hands of the Nazis.

But rescuing the forgotten begins with our own History. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Karl Marx wrote, while reasoning about the Jewish Question, that the Christian State is the *Christian negation of the State* and not the political realization of Christianity. By replacing Christians by Moslems, by comparing History with present times, we are doing more than summing up History, we are mainly rescuing the European memories of all that long process of secularization during the Modern Age, which gave birth to many possibilities of tolerance and coexistence, by separating religion and politics. This was made possible – and the work of Thomas Hobbes is perhaps the best example of it – by putting pacifying people and their satisfaction of basic needs over the religious question as a public one, not as a private one. Therefore, we are more likely to defend our cultural and political heritage of freedom and human rights, of plurality of expression, if we remember how dramatically it has been conquered. The History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, that Age of Extremes according to E. Hobsbawm, reminds us too closely that this same heritage of freedom and tolerance has for a long time been everything but granted. Even the coexistence of cultures, of groups, is no guaranty for the dialogue between them, which should always start from the beginning like a morning exercise. Let us start, for instance, with Guantanamo.

Still we may gaze at the passion that moves masses in rage against freedom of expression when it is felt, as it was in the Danish cartoon affair, and secretly envy that emotion picture show because we would like to have our own citizens also passionately mobilized for causes that we take for nobler, for freedom, for the environment. But we also forget too easily the individualistic implications of a guilt-culture. We are, so to speak, sentenced to pluralism, therefore to challenges made to our capacity to tolerate, not only people with different habits, beliefs and sensitivities but most of all situations and conflicts caused by practices which are incompatible with the democratic order and its claim of dignity. This differentiation could be a criterion to help us breaking the chains of political correctness, which make people blind or fearful towards the necessary clarification of the contradictions. Perhaps we should take a little help from our Danish cartoonist friends. In any case I find political correctness a much more suitable stuff to be an object of satire than any kind of deity, who in our secularized society rather lacks of flesh and blood, and therefore of explosive potential.

It took Europe many centuries to learn how to between differentiate powers, religions, ideologies, perspectives. The analytical social sciences even intensify that tendency. But only art can retie the threads which had in the past to be cut in order to have democratic liberties, freedom of expression. If I say art, I mean literature within it, with open limits and glass doors between the codes of expression. Because if

literature does not produce a sort of butterfly effect, showing the implications of each simple story, of every apparently clear situation, if a text does not confront us with the unbearable dimensions of that life that must incessantly feed art, then you may look for a pocket book at an airport magazine store and have a pleasant flight.

Don't worry, you are not on the passenger list of a hijacked plane.

(For the Round Table *Freedom of Expression as a Means against Terrorism*, 38<sup>th</sup> International Writers' Meeting, Bled 29.03.- 02.04.2006)

### The Walls Inside Us Or: What Kind Of Resistance Is At Stake? (2007)

Which are the poles of resistance, active and passive, conscious or unconscious, that impeach us to do the right thing? In the prologue of her work *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt asks herself and the reader whether the emancipation and secularization of the Modern Age, "which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the father of men in heaven", should "end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky" (p. 2). Fifty years ago, there were already good reasons to worry about the Earth, regarding the agonistic escalation of nuclear weapons in the Cold War, the paranoia represented by the stubborn clashes of ideologies between the blocks of the so-called free world, against the so-called socialist world, or, in reversing terms, of the so-called imperialist world against the so-called totalitarian world.

Historians often speak about the century of ideologies, the Era of the Extremes, etc. Umberto Eco even said in an interview that he *believed* that the 20<sup>th</sup> century had turned to be "hyperreligious". The irony is not accidental, I just had to stress once more how the analyzing subject is himself/herself a constitutive part of the analyzed object, also incorporating the object in his/her mind. But what is the core of the problem, if there is ever one? In any case we should retain the accurate analysis by Hannah Arendt of what she called "world alienation", that means several forms of subjectivity, of withdrawal from the reality in the name of some paradise searching, of aggression of the objects in the name of some survival or welfare or even profit interests.

But we also know that this is a general problem of setting limits inside us, of judging what is right or wrong, not according to moral norms but in consequence of the judgment about a concrete situation; we must "play it again", and again, and again, repeating the question about the Here, about the Now and most of all about the Who – that means, about the place and the time, about who is really concerned in a crisis situation. But if we think simultaneously historically and globally, we correspondingly risk to generalize but also to particularize. Excuse me if I mention Hannah Arendt

several times, there are surely the usually expected reasons for doing so (her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and the conferences and meetings everywhere last year), but there is also a leading idea by her that I would like to stress, about the possibility of being symbolically born again and again by having the courage to act according to our judgement, made possible by reflection and completed by communication and interaction. This is by no means a system of rules drawn by the book and out of reality, but on the contrary a conscientious presentation of our whole philosophical tradition as a sort of treasure arch from which we are free to get inspired in our reflecting connections with the real world. If Hannah Arendt refused, in the famous TV-interview given to Günter Gaus, to be labeled as a political philosopher, and instead of that she claimed to be called a political theorist, this was because she knew too well that the treasure arch threatened to turn into a Pandora box with claims to make ideological readings of the world and subsequently to take possession of it, following an idea, or – even worse because higher placed – an ideal. Instead of that, theory should rather be a tool which anyone could use, even in precarious situations, even in dark times. She stressed, in the same interview, that there are always ways to act with dignity without risking one's life. We know the History, we know what she was talking about. We can spare ourselves the recalling of her analysis of totalitarian systems in the late forties, her report about Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in the early sixties. But we must remember that she refused to anthropologize the political contingency, to sustain that there is an Eichmann inside each of us, who could act in the same way as he did, under the same circumstances.

My own point by mentioning H. Arendt is above all to think reality, and correspondingly History, in a holistic, systemic way, that means by trying to observe the observer. As a matter of fact, this author offers a most interesting, I would even say, passionate example of the difficulties of getting along with the "hardships of the plains" after having experienced the "hardships of the mountains" – the words are from the poem "Wahrnehmung" ("Perception") written 1949 by an already disillusioned Bertolt Brecht, and chosen by H. Arendt's biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruhl as the epigraph for the chapter about the post-war period. In the so-called dark times men (a problematic designation, which includes Rosa Luxemburg and Isak Dinesen among Lessing, Jaspers, Heidegger, Brecht, H. Broch, W. Benjamin and Pope Johann XXIII; but I don't intend to follow the path of gender studies) could fight, had to fight against outside barriers; afterwards, in times which we don't really dare to call full of light, people who have gone through all forms of totalitarian darkness due to the suppression of the possibilities of living the differences in public spaces, such people have to face a sort of inside barriers, that means interiorized walls.

How come these walls remain – or even arise anew - in a democratic society? Here we must pay attention not to throw away the child with the bath, therefore not to anathematize economic progress as a factor that brings along short-sighted,

materialistic perspectives and behaviours: We know too well the cynical cartoons that pointed out (not only with the pencil, there are many words with cartoon effect, as we know) the rush of East Germans towards Coke and bananas after the Berlin Wall came down; it is then too logical to proceed with a really Wailing Wall litany against the loss of orientation and values, about the dissolution of violence monopolies, about the incapacity of common people to fight against more or less sophisticated forms of criminality in the era of globalization, as if there remained no alternative than to become “one of them” or to remain sitting on a cozy couch and read the last world best-seller about conspiracy theory.

But we don't live in a Brave New World, but just in a time where the information speed confronts us with the simultaneity of the unsimultaneous, we may call it the clash of civilizations and yet do not really understand what is going on. I must correct myself: We begin to understand even if cognition goes in slow motion, we always begin understanding when we feel how contradictions and paradoxes of our time go through our complex psychosomatic system and cannot but leave traces.

In this sense, post-totalitarianism might be a new illustration of the fable of the wizard apprentice: The big broom is not only been broken but also replaced by a lot of small brooms, which seem to work together to produce a similar paralyzing influence, however with a significant difference. Totalitarianism was a visible wall, which created within the tradition of human rights the wish to regain them again, the will to fight against injustice. The small brooms are the “hardships of the plains”, under the shape of the comfortable belief about already reached utopias. But is that really so? Can we afford to quit climbing mountains, and not only for fun or fitness? At the moment I write this, I see the TV news about the disclosure of a planned terrorist conspiracy in Great Britain to kidnap and execute a soldier – but I also hear after that the wonderful lyrics by David Gilmour, and I ask if we can hear them, again and again, without a chill, which is more than a mere goose skin reflex, but a sense of real freedom of choice, a real capacity of determination, that breaks the walls of indolence inside us: “On the day the Wall came down/They threw the locks onto the ground/And with glasses high we raised a cry for freedom had arrived” (Pink Floyd, *The Division Bell*). Can we still complain about becoming conformists, can we still – raising the cynical parade – be glad about the existence of reasons elsewhere to fight for freedom? Let me quote freely H. Arendt one last time, sustaining in a letter to Kurt Blumenfeld that wrath was a more positive feeling than hope...

(For the Round Table *Post-totalitarian Resistance, 39<sup>th</sup> International Writers' Meeting, Bled 28.03.- 01.04.2007*)

### Abolish Conflicts? Don't We Need Them For The Sake Of A Stable Peace? (2008)

About such issues as trying to develop an ethical attitude to history as a source of peace, as trying not to forget tragic events, as doing everything in order to prevent deformation or even repression of painful facts, we cannot prevent feeling a deep contradiction. For some of us, who did not live our whole life under the banner of freedom, it seems that our highest aim, now that we enjoy the freedom of expressing our thoughts, which is also warranted by law, should properly be never to rest before the “whole truth” is discovered – or may be better: Uncovered, or disclosed. This means here both, shown through images and written down. It could seem most probable that we feel a strong need to bring to the surface some hidden aspects of a past of dictatorship, censorship, war, and civil war. But why is it not always so? Putting it in other terms, why does for instance literature reach farther than history, sociology, statistics, psychology, and all these together? It seems to accomplish a broader understanding of complex situations, in spite of the fact that it cannot work without the support of all the forms of knowledge?

We know that literature universalizes insights without losing the appearance of tracing a direct line to our individual soul. However, this individual soul is also part of a system, this being a complex mixture of feeling and understanding, trying to reach a balance of emotion and critical reason. Here I hesitate about which term I should mention first, and decided to put on the first place what displays itself more immediately, that is, the emotion, which in a certain way also provides a considerable part of the energy that is necessary to move the mechanisms of judgment.

With the help of these precise mechanisms, we can disclose another ambiguity. We cannot but feel occasionally a kind of nostalgia for those times of dictatorship and raw violence. And why does this happen? Because those times also allowed developing radical qualities, which were themselves, most ambivalent. We could say that it was heroism mixed with criminal energy, courage mixed with ferocity, but also fear, hope and disappointment. Anyhow, it was the capacity to give both the best and the worst of oneself. Here we already begin to see how literature may work more effectively than social sciences. While sociologists like Karl Mannheim were able to *mention* complexity as the “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous”, writers like Malcolm Lowry *described and dissected* the reasons why modern individuals feel torn when facing past and present.

We realize that the present commitment of cultivating historical memories, which we notice for instance at the universities through the creation of such specialized branches as “Memory Studies” or “Memory research”, is not only proportional to civic conscience but it also appears as a political conquest against the tyranny of pragmatism and functionalism, against the primacy of strict economic criteria which are often imposed by global rules. For the twentieth century, “memory” leads often to



the problematic of the “Holocaust”, and I do not see any reason not to agree with that if we see it in a broad perspective, which grasps all the victims of the totalitarian Nazi hallucination about eliminating all the persons who did not fit into the fable of a 1000 Year Reich, supported by the idea of a pure Aryan people.

Let us say that we carry with us our phylogenetic memories, whether we like it or not: We carry with us the former hunter and collector, who have been a more considerable part of the humankind than the shepherd and the farmer or, closer to us, the courtesan and the citizen. Both our phylogenesis and our ontogenesis are crossed with memories of violence and the process of its taming. This process is everything but linear, but we generally may say that the biggest civilization conquest has been the evolution from direct physical violence to a performative and dialogic one, either under the form of satire, irony, drama, story-telling, debate, or any kind of discourse. Here we can clearly see two sorts of reasons: first, why literature plays a capital role in changing societies and interfacing times; secondly, why we can never take any peaceful situation for granted, either between two or just a few people or among a group or a nation. As Norbert Elias, the Jewish sociologist whose parents died at Auschwitz put it, as he had to answer to the accusations of seeing his civilization process – that is, the evolution from the warrior to the courtesan – in a linear way, which did not fit into reality: We can never say, “once civilized, forever civilized”. Even the philosopher may turn into a cannibal under particular circumstances, wrote the young Friedrich Schiller in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Our ethical commitment to History means, as I see it, a close relationship with our phylogenetic past as well with our ontogenetic biography, because we know, at latest since Freud, that we were born neither as wolves, nor as lambs, with a considerable part as a *tabula rasa*. In other words, we need a close experience of conflicts precisely in order to develop the capacity of conflict. The danger of ignoring the possibility of becoming aggressive, and this sooner than we might imagine, creates a problematic gap or a blind zone where fear, hope, love and hatred may establish the most fantastic projections which sudden appear as a “material idea” (Schiller) where ideology takes direct possession of any kind of object.

I do not want by any means to adopt Goethe’s words when he told Eckermann that he did not know any kind of crime, which he would not be able to carry out. Let us hope never to come into a situation when we are forced to kill in order to survive or to defend ourselves. Let us reject, with Hannah Arendt, the assertion that there is always an Eichmann inside us. H. Arendt did it vehemently during a debate in the sequence of the not very peaceful reception of her Eichmann report in the early sixties – we may do it more softly and skeptically on the present days. But we need an insight into History, and this implies reading it as Walter Benjamin did, as a History of injustice and repression, which claims to be rescued, as a text with images which we draw

retrospectively because the past put these images into the text, like negatives, which claim to be developed.

Since Aristophanes, we know that wars may break the stagnation and even decadence of long peace periods. Nevertheless, if we look closer at that kind of “peace”, we notice that it already contains the germs of violence in it, and this not just because violence is inherent to life as a sort of primary energy, which needs to be “processed”, sublimated, civilized, cultivated, canalized – that means, both modulated and moderated. Furthermore, if we look at the real life, which occurs in those times of “peace”, we probably notice that it may be a “hot peace” (in a way, a pendant to “cold war”, or the other side of the same coin). It is usually the time where material plenty is not favourable to the cultivation of citizenship virtues, of civil courage and discipline without giving up generosity and solidarity. Those qualities are generally supposed not to grow on that soil, on the contrary, we often see them be satirized, may be because they are felt as unbearable to the way of feeling and living of the mainstream. The step from that to the tyranny of the market rules, to conjuncture pressures by majorities, is a small one, as we know.

How can we draw our path lines in the most complex web of our globalized realities, among a plenty of sense offers, of historical narratives? Perhaps we should simply go back to our human condition, which we never really have abandoned, and remember the sentence that René Char wrote during his years of the Résistance: “Notre heritage n’est précédé d’aucun testament” (“Our inheritance was left to us with no testament along”) (*Feuillets d’Hypnos*, 1943-44). In the words of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: “Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar” (Wanderer, there is no way, the way is made by walking”). For that, we are not undefended, because we have our capacity of collecting information (including, or even first of all, our perceptions) and submit them to our faculty of judgment.

Hannah Arendt quoted that sentence by René Char (in her book *Between Past and Future*) in order to remind us how problematic it is to forget the link to the years of the Résistance or to idealize that period, which a whole generation of European intellectuals have experienced, having in this way contributed to the building of the European identity, as the inheritance of both critical and practical reason. We come back to the problem that I already have mentioned in my paper last year, namely the problem of the transition from a situation where everything is missing and danger lingers, to another one where we cease to measure each step, where every deed and word loses weight among the noise of the *doxa*. I therefore will not insist over this problem, but just remind how crucial it is to interpose our critical judgment between our heroic nostalgias and our living, daily praxis. This praxis should be precisely a constant research for peace. This reaches from a present, where we have at every moment to take options, which are often painful, to an active way of dealing with the

past. It is still Hannah Arendt who compares René Char's lack of testament with Tocqueville's assertion about the obscurity in which a man would wander when his past has ceased to throw its light upon the future.

How can we reach that peace with the world in which men seem to be engaged in many kinds of warfare? Here I do not agree with Hannah Arendt when she says that we seem to be determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet. The ethical claim of describing and narrating the past, of setting it as a problem by opposing true versus distorted facts, by comparing different historical perspectives and, at the same times, by trying to analyze the reasons of all kinds of censorship, should always be more than a simple rescue of stories, of names, of voices, of situations. It has to be a challenge for taking ethical attitudes at the very present. For this challenge, there is no rule, no book, just the faculty of judging within an unavoidable situation of contingency. But it was still René Char who wrote in those above-mentioned Résistance papers: "L' homme est capable de faire ce qu'il est incapable d'imaginer" (*Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris: Gallimard 1983, p. 230). Even if we know that History is not always suitable to be told, we may always try to tell a version, which we at the same breath admit that it is our version. It might also become our contribution and proposal to peace.

(For the Round Table *An Ethical Attitude to History as a Source of Peace*, 40<sup>th</sup> International Writers' Meeting, Bled 26.03.- 30.03.2008)

#### Understanding Versus Acting: A Silent Effect? (2009)

The well-known assertion by William Faulkner that the past is never dead, because it is not even past, has found, since its formulation in 1951, infinite possibilities of utilization, namely within the realm of memory studies, following the intention to precise and differentiate historical narratives. In our global time and space, the conscientiousness about the fact that such historical narratives come closer and closer to fictional writing, has come to the surface and has become a discursive evidence.

Historical memories may therefore be seen as one of many discursive strategies that we use by our task of understanding. I hereby recall Hannah Arendt's answer to Günter Gaus on a TV-Interview, after having been asked whether the job of thinking, of constructing political theories, would not be a specifically masculine task. We must remember, this happened in 1964! The answer of the non-feminist Arendt could lead us to the fringes of gender role clichés, when she told the interviewer – among thick smoke waves, by the way, since smoking was at the time not yet generally forbidden – that while men wanted so terribly to *act*, to produce effects, she would rather try to *understand*, as if this meant to make a step backwards from the action arena, towards a reflection platform, which might be a threshold to action, or not.

In our communicative world, we may no longer stay aside processes which lead to decisions that might be of some importance and contribute a little bit to make the world more human, or less inhuman. At least we must not remain any more mere individuals *de jure*, just enjoying the fact of having civil rights, since the new technologies are increasingly putting means at our disposal that allow us to exercise our faculties of understanding, judging, *and* acting, in order to feel as a part of a huge communicating world; therefore, we are inserted in a process which may make us to socially, but also environmentally stamped individuals *de facto*, that means, citizens who stand for their words and deeds, even under life risks, and can not always be aware of all the factors of influence.

We know that Hannah Arendt rather ranged herself to a shadowy private domain, in order to observe how the different realms of the world interacted. This was reaffirmed several times, including in her last speech, delivered upon receiving Denmark's Sonning Prize in 1975, several months before she died. Her position has in my opinion less to do with a possible self-judgement about a feminine incapacity to act or to carry the existence of a political person, than with her sense for the correlative proportion of understanding, which would also imply judging and acting. In some sense, we could say that understanding and acting, rather than excluding themselves mutually in the sense of situational option, are mutually related, similarly to the invisible and visible parts of an iceberg.

A most interesting, and perhaps less known, proof of an unusual sense for an urgency to act by Hannah Arendt has been a series of articles by her that were published during the forties in several American magazines, in English and in German, concerning the Palestine issue and the foundation of the Israel state. Here is no more the question about a reflexive interaction between understanding and acting. On the one hand, we feel the pressure of urgency through her pointing to the Palestine Jews the necessity of taking political measures and acting in a dialogical way towards Arab citizens, as well as the necessity of neither letting themselves become enraptured by Zionistic policies nor failing to criticize all situations of violence and injustice. On the other hand, Arendt's urgency, in this particular case, of judging by acting and acting by judging, could not be understood by us, as her readers, without knowledge about her philosophical and political working and living processes and experiences.

"There is still time": This is perhaps the most acute assertion that we might read or hear, when we know that it was formulated just a few days before the proclamation of the Israeli state. The article, published in May 1948 in the New York magazine *Commentary*, meant the "Jewish homeland", which in H. Arendt's opinion still could be saved, *both* as idea and as reality, not as a result of Zionist claims based upon a militarist and expansionist practice, but rather upon the neighbourly reality. It should be, at each moment, made possible by negotiations, most of the times on the edge of

incommunicability, between Jews and Arabs. This simultaneous reflection about the conditions of the possibility of acting politically, and the subsequent communication about it within an influent Jewish community, not only in the USA, turns around the polarity of what “should never have happened”, as she said, during that mentioned interview with Günter Gaus, concerning the Holocaust.

I cannot help asking myself, again and again, what that assertion (“there is still time”) could have really meant, since Hannah Arendt was too well aware of the irreversibility of the creation of the Israeli state, under the banner of the Zionists. She knew about the long history of the Zionist fiction of a so-called “land without people for people without land”. She knew about the total disrespect of Zionist groups and their armed troops, such as Irgun and Stern, towards their Palestine neighbours. She knew about the long coexistence practices between Jews and Arabs under the Ottoman Empire and afterwards the British protectorate. She knew about criminal military “operations” against the Palestine peoples, Arabs but also and British citizens, since April 1948, in order to protect settlements outside the territories included in the UNO decision of November 1947. She knew about the massacre at the Palestine village of Deir Yassin on 8.5.1948, where 254 people, mostly women and children, were brutally killed. She knew the complexity of the historical relationship between Jews and Arabs, which the Zionists were about to reduce to a *tabula rasa*. She knew what we also know today, since the reigniting of the Gaza war has lead to a wave of eagerness to be informed about a past, which is not even past.

And yet – would there be “still time”? We look at the waste land of Gaza nowadays, we have heard the permanent bombings and the intransigent statements by Arabs and Jews during the recent fights by watching to Al Jazeera, which seemed for a while to be the only bearable TV channel, because it was close to a reality which we knew that it was too real but yet unable to let us come out of our daily life, no more than the financial crisis 2008.

Yes, there still could “be time”. Time to reset the capacity of thinking back to the complexity of a situation which carries not only geopolitical but also ideological, religious and symbolic aspects. Understanding could mean, in the context of the Palestine issue, deliberately *not* to act in a first moment, in order to ask how to break the violence spiral to interrupt the cruelty chain, which is itself a twisted product of most diverse violence chains.

Is the Israeli-Palestine conflict really so original within the universal History? In his booklet against fanaticism, Amos Oz asserted that both peoples have to be ready, like two men who agree to be amputated of a limb to save their lives, to make most painful concessions, that in his opinion should lead to a peace, which Europeans had reached after an unequally longer time. Hannah Arendt stresses, in the forties, an immaturity of both sides, Jews and Arabs, reflected by emotional, nationalistic and illusionary

forms of behaviour, made possible by the sheltering umbrellas of the Ottoman empire and, afterwards, British protectorate. As a “late nation” like Italia and Germany, Israel has until today continuously reinforced its symbolic legitimacy with the help of the Holocaust tragedy, which lead an Irish journalist to ask for an end of the such argumentative legitimacy, in order to allow the world to judge, without such a burden, the Israeli war crimes and daily humiliations inflicted to the Palestine people.

Is there “still time” to re-act like a symbolic new birth, out of a mined political platform, out of a clash of intransigent interests? In any case, the analysis by Hannah Arendt about the violent clashes around the creation of the Israel state points us, *mutatis mutandis*, the necessity of deconstructing the Israeli colonization of Palestine, as a tragic case where dominators and dominated live at the next door and not in a distant continent. In spite of not being a feminist, and perhaps just because she was no one, Hannah Arendt allows us to understand better the reasons of long self-legitimizing, humiliation, aggression, that means, a long chain of irrational aspects not really beyond but rather in-between the daily life of Israelis and Palestinians. In this sense, the letter by a Jewish woman to Barack Obama, written to the new president of the USA on the day of his election and begging him to come to the disputed “homeland” and release her for the pain of carrying the guilt of a brutal colonization (“Obama, take away the pain in my stomach”, which everyone can google), shows us a similar preoccupation for caring for real people without having to support any more forms of daily military violence.

Next to, or beyond the analysis of materially detectable and describable aspects, perhaps the biggest part of the problem still remains, and perhaps it is as big and silent as the hidden part of an iceberg, or as sinuous as a labyrinth thread that leads to a perpetuation of violence chains, out of symbolic, ideological, religious, historical issues that keep clashing and building an endless spiral. The way that leads to negotiations seems to be blocked by a genuine dilemma, out of the necessity of a mutual recognition on the one side, which is on the other side blocked by the fear of getting into great dangers by recognizing the other, the first of them being losing the own face, the next being giving up own rights and forms of legitimacy. And we cannot forget that such moderate people, who agree to start a dialogue, are openly exposed to the fury of fanatics, which often means a death sentence. Men - Hannah Arendt would perhaps say again, if she would live in this precise moment – want so dreadfully to keep humiliating and shooting and bombing their neighbours, but women have enough trying to understand that and want once for all to sleep in peace, raise their children, cook a meal in order to invite all the neighbours, Arabs and Jews.

There is always time for a common, shared meal.

(For the Round Table *The Age of Liberation, 41st International Writers’ Meeting, Bled 25.03.- 29.03.2009*)

Rapid, The Shadow Of Peace, Between Hinge And Door (2010)

I'm borrowing the title for my paper at a beautiful novel by Vergílio Ferreira (1916-1996), a most distinguished novelist and essayist and also founding member of Portuguese PEN. He meant this shadow as a memory of luminous moments of happiness, such moments that we are, most of the times, only able to recognize when they are gone. We may also experience the memory of dark moments in order to stress the sunshine that we feel, after such moments, in our breathing chest, and that makes us sing a secret hymn to sheer life. So is also peace often felt, out of an oppressing, depressing realm, back to simple and clear lines of life which are so easy to recognize, but often so difficult to put into words.

Yet peace is more than mere no-violence, though absence of violence may be seen as a threshold of peace. But what does peace have to do with dreams?

If it is almost evident to me that daydreams are affected to what Ernst Bloch called *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, the principle of hope. But it is by no means clear to me that night dreams would be definitely bound to turn into nightmares. I think that most of us even love the night atmospheres, and find them suitable, not only for dysphoric sceneries, but also for open-eyed dreams of a better world, while we speculate between books and the computer screen, between cat purring under our working lamp and jazz music turned low because of the neighbours during the night work, a soft saxophone within imaginary smoking spirals. There we may also come into terrible arena fights between hope and anger. Then we may realize how paralyzing hope can be, how mobilizing anger can disclose itself.

Contradictions lurk and sit everywhere. We may have blissful and hopeful day visions, scenes of a possible better life, as well as we may experience not only nightmares but also stimulating night dreams, probably as projections of our daily wishful thinking. Dreams are no linear issue, but rather complex. That's why they are an inspiring source for literary images, both in poetry and fiction.

However, there is a perspective according to which light and darkness must be strictly differentiated: All forms of repression and tyranny need a conspiring dimension in the dark, which means in private secret domains, apart from the lights of the public realm. But soon we notice how these realms of light and darkness cannot really exist without each other. So we also know that they melt in a borderline that is similar to the sea level, where the smaller visible part of the iceberg emerges from its bigger invisible part. They stick intrinsically together, such as a totalitarian regime blends light and darkness, private conspiracy and public presentation.

But even in the middle of the political darkness, where the state of hope touches a threat of despair, there always may exist daydreams of a better world, based on experiences that have been made elsewhere, or in former times. Such experiences, or

the report of them, allow us to tell that some dreams could possibly come true someday, at the places where we happen to have been born, because they have become reality elsewhere. However, there are situations where we fancy to be dreaming the reality itself. Then we often exclaim that “we must be dreaming”, but it is also possible that we do it either in a positive or in a negative sense.

I can tell you my own experience. As a daydreaming, eighteen year old girl from the middle class, I fled the Portuguese dictatorial regime after the secondary school, in order to make my studies abroad. Though I had friends, in the Portugal of the sixties, who had troubles with the political police, I did not have the sensation to go into the exile. My grandfather, a freemason and humanist, showed me that there could always be a narrow path where one could pursue a civic life with dignity, also under a dictatorship.

It was therefore not directly any form of political persecution, but rather a suffocating atmosphere that pushed me out of the Lisbon village – it was almost a village or a small town in the sixties, where I left it, with old yellow tramways and double-decker buses. Girls had to wear skirts and uniforms at school. We all knew that in each corner, at each table of those beautiful cafés in the city, there could stand or sit an covert agent of the political police. Literature and cinema of the fifties and the sixties had shown me that a myriad of different worlds existed, worlds with more freedom of expression and more life choices, without having to wait for family favours or to carry the consequences of expressing my own opinion. Worlds with more glamour and mobility, cosmopolitan worlds.

I was a student in West Berlin, having been strongly engaged in anti-imperialist causes during the wild sixties, when I heard the news one morning, on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974, about the movement of the April captains in Portugal and the huge support of a population that was fed up with the rotten dictatorial regime. My first reaction was to say “It must be a dream”, and though I stuck to the radio and TV news during all that day, it happened that I only really believed what was happening on the next day, when a Brazilian friend congratulated me at the University, slapping on my back, so to say as a sign to come back to a reality that I never had dreamed before. Later on, having read a lot about the factors that have led to the Carnation Revolution, I understood again that the immaterial dimension of many of those factors was made of the same stuff dreams are made of – dreams of a better world. Just a small push was needed to bring an already frail building into fall.

Thirty-six years after this revolution, many of those beautiful cafés in the Lisbon city have been replaced by banks – one could cynically say, political freedom needs its economic support. In our days it would just bring a café to its ruin if there were still the old possibility of sitting a whole morning or afternoon at a table reading the paper or discussing the daily life and drinking just one espresso during all this time. But we



cannot forget the permanent paradox of life, of literature, of culture. The Portuguese poetry of the twentieth century has reached a high quality partly because there has been censure and many messages were obliged to circulate through the flower, *durch die Blume*, using the well-known German expression, through metaphors. But in this way they also reached the receivers often as an explosive “condensation”, *Dichtung*, therefore through a process which is similar to Freud’s *Traumarbeit*, dream work.

Dreams circulate in our communication, as well in our literary work. I would even say that in their volatility they may begin by fitting themselves to the empty spaces, between facts and objects. But, at the same time and by doing so, they contribute to reshape what seems to be so indefectibly factual and objective. We all incorporate our dreams, both daydreams and night dreams, in a dimension that is not always conscious to ourselves.

What has peace to do with all this? Well, we know since the Greeks that both war and peace are ambiguous. The most common aspects connoted with peace are positive, such as peace of mind, civilized urban communication, material development. On the opposite side, most live testimonies give us the image of war as sheer hell, but not only: We have even “war tourism”, and since the Gulf wars we know how the possibility of exercising an “embedded journalism” contributed to raise adrenalin levels not only among men. And we have experiences of what we call rotten peace, graveyard peace, most of all in corrupted or totalitarian regimes, but also in welfare nations.

Nowadays we live daily with real war images that haunt us constantly; we eat them during dinner, and they may even contribute to reach higher shares at prime time. The danger of this situation has not only been analyzed by media researchers: We feel it every day precisely by noticing that our capacity of empathy with sufferance may probably vanish with it. We cannot reach a hand to the children in Gaza or in Haiti, or in many African countries, and if we could do that we would perhaps get more troubles in our busy existence. City life is tending monochronic, that means, we have to do just one thing at a time, in order to accomplish what has been put into the agenda. Therefore we try to appease our troubled social and environmental conscientiousness by making donations, by signing petitions.

We mean therefore to live in peace, in the daily struggle of our urban life. But we know that this situation may change ever instant. Out of the apparently most peaceful situation, the most unexpected forms of violence may emerge, challenging our endurance, our capacity of conflict to deal with them. We can just fancy how many accumulated frustrations and nightmares have worked in the dark in order to build the support, during a long time, of many sudden attitudes of violence.

But we also know that the inverse situation is possible, that means, we have experienced, or read, or seen in pictures or on TV that in the middle of a brutal struggle there may be gestures of kindness, of mercy, of humanity. I remember that wonderful picture by B.Z. Goldberg, Judith Shapiro and Carlos Bolado called “Promises” (2001). There we see how seriously and concerned Israeli and Palestinian children are brought to talk with each another, to ask their parents inconvenient questions. Children, has Goethe once said to Eckermann, are the greatest realists. At the end of this independent documentary, the Israeli children bring their parents to a dinner invitation by the Palestinian family of their new friends at the West Bank.

There must be perhaps a childish impulse to produce conditions for peace, a naïve gesture made of a precise will, a will not to forget but rather to go beyond heavy memories. This is the sense of the words of Ernst Bloch in his *Prinzip Hoffnung* (Principle of Hope): *Denken heißt Überschreiten* – thinking means going beyond. And it was a Portuguese poet and scientist, António Gedeão (1906-1997), who wrote in the fifties a marvelous poem, “A pedra filosofal” (“Philosopher’s stone”). As soon as it has been put into music by the singer Manuel Freire in the sixties it rapidly became a resistance song against the oppressive atmosphere of the dictatorship: I quote the last lines:

“They neither know nor dream, / that dream leads life, /and always when a man dreams, / the world springs and goes forward,/as a colour ball / between the hands of a child”.

Or between hinge and door, perhaps as rapid as a shadow, but not less vivid, as a powerful source of hope and anger and impulse to act.

(For the Round Table *Peace between Diurnal and Nocturnal Dreams*, 42nd International Writers’ Meeting, Bled 24.03.- 28.03.2010)

On the Road Between Pages With A Multitude of Strangers, And Me Among Them  
(2011)

It seems to be nowadays a commonplace to say that we are our next strangers, this means strangers towards ourselves. As children, we discover parts of our body, we see for the first time our face in the mirror, we experience all that as something both familiar and strange, and only after that first experience as something of our own. The process of socialization – seen from a perspective of an average individual, living in a modern city – helps us to get acquainted with a large palette of Others, always plural. We get to know both figures of the *alter*, as the familiar Other, as our privileged dialogue partner, and figures of the *alius*, as the really strange stranger, as the uncanny Other. The process of individuation, which follows in the ontogenesis the process of

socialization, makes us acquainted with the abyss of our own self. And later, as adults, we feel able to turn such forms of fracture, experienced during childhood and adolescence, into masks that we are obliged to use in our daily practices. They can even be masks of creation, like the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa. (By the way: Fernando Pessoa himself, as a signature with his real name, might have been just one more mask, and not necessarily the most achieved one.)

We seem, as adults, to have interiorized former experiences, facing both the *alter* and the *alius*. We could say that they struggle now among each other inside us. Such situation is a common pattern of our experience of interior strangeness before we get acquainted with avatars of exterior strangeness. Sometimes, both forms of strangeness get intertwined. Along this processes, we build our images in endless configurations. They have to be problematic, critical, unusual, if they are supposed to supply us with stimulating material for our creative plans. In other words: Why should images of the stranger, as well as experiences with strangers, be felt as threatening ones from the beginning? It must not be so, at least in times and places of current city life in peaceful times and spaces, if we grow up within an open-minded human environment. City life is exciting, so are the strangers we meet there. Moreover, an image of a stranger can be a permanent reason for fascination, if the conditions of possibility are given to include it in an open horizon of understanding.

The image of the stranger may yet become threatening if coped with any sort of identity obsession, from the individual or collective sort. This happens because such identity obsessions provoke in most cases a closure of that horizon of understanding, letting it turn into an arena of misunderstanding. Reading the Other is, in such situations of closure, no more a sheer adventure on a wire, searching for balance between discovery and risk, but rather a dull, uniform, self-reproductive task. The horizon is also no more one of understanding, but of self-defense. From that reactive platform to aggression and violence there is no more than a small step.

If we look for a shelter (an in many occasions we simply need a shelter, or a friendly shoulder), we must provide that such shelter keeps a door, at least a window open, otherwise it rapidly turns into a prison. And if we keep being free, according to our eccentric human nature always looking for new information or impressions to be written on our reservoir of experience, we also keep being critical towards prejudices. We know too well that a prejudice is no more than the result of a blatant inability to set communicative bridges towards the Other, correspondingly to recognize his or her merits, his or her particularities. The problem of the stranger is therefore a matter of receptivity.

We read the Other, but we also read ourselves. And within each further reading, contradictions and paradoxes become more and more visible, yet disclosing connections with aspects that we can only suspect, these being therefore invisible – or

rather, as we could say, *protovisible*. As we know, visibility does not mean necessarily clearness. We always carry with ourselves a fullness of forms, of masks, of impressions and pictures, of experienced or imagined otherness. The wider and more diverse we keep the spectrum, the smaller is the danger that we build hostile images of the Other, most of all out of experiences with the *alius*. Diversity keeps us from one-sided clichés. The roots of any form of barbarism always lie in a dangerously narrow sense of the meaning that we produce, for ourselves and for the others.

And how do we learn to deal with diversity, if not through literature and art? Literature provides us with that wide spectrum of characters, many of them said to be bigger than life, in any case able to extend our organs of perception *ad infinitum*. I must say that I cannot speak for the generations that are born with e-books. My individual room, as an adolescent, was situated next to the home library. The limitations of the experience space, due to the Portuguese dictatorship in the fifties, always found a lot of compensation between book covers. We could read almost everything, because the regime trusted upon the gap between the small cultivated elite and the non alphabetized people. Reading had therefore to be, in the second decade of my life, for me experience enough.

Perhaps we should reformulate the sentence which says that an image is more worth than thousand words. As a matter of fact, does a single word not provoke thousand associations too, correspondingly images? Discussing this issue in my university courses, a student gave as an example the word LOVE and the myriads of images associated with it. All the academic audience understood her immediately. We understand this immediately. And yet there is also hardly a word that may lead to more frustrations and misunderstandings than the word LOVE. Literature nourishes itself in a considerable part out of this insight. But human sciences, for instance psychoanalysis, come to similar conclusions: If we listen to Freud in his "Civilization and its Discontents", we soon recall not only the deceiving and the deceptions connected with love in spite of its sublime moments, but also the *fata morgana* dwelling in the Christian dogma that tells the believers to love the Other, and further, to love the own enemies. To such assertion, Freud a strong skepticism.

We know that even if we succeed in doing so, we are lying to ourselves, or even worse, we may be violating our thoughts and feelings. And why is this so? Because in doing so, we are erasing, or trying to erase, the necessary distance, within the space of appearance, from which we become able to understand, to respect, and, if it is the case, to love the Other. (I would not like to be misunderstood: There always may be, of course, situations of *coup de foudre*; but if they are bound to become stable relationships, they must go through a process of mutual knowledge and understanding too.)

Our capacity of handling with insecurity, with difference, with contradiction, with ambiguity, with strangeness, can be intensively promoted through literature. But here we must care about the way we do it. If we functionalize what we read, for instance in order to quote it in academic papers or before an audience, we may be jeopardizing the chances of knowing the Other, because by doing so we shall be subjecting it under a dialectic on means and ends. (Again I ask not to be misunderstood: in our academic jobs such procedures are too often unavoidable, but this is not a reason why they should not be recognized as functionalistic.) In an interview about his researches on Hitler's private library, Timothy Ryback said that the German dictator only used the matters that he read in his books in order to legitimate his perverted deeds through quotations. This could be an extreme but significant example of the assertion above. Books do not make us better without a process of self-distance.

From literature we also experience processes of identification. Which characters are sympathetic to us, which roles we often play secretly, resembling to the figures under whose skin we feel easy to slipper? But precisely because this is a process, we soon realize how differences and discrepancies become clearer and clearer, and therefore we become strange to them, and also a stranger towards ourselves.

To promote that capacity of handling with strangeness means to approach literature with the open attitude of purposelessness. We do it for its own sake, incidentally in the same way as we should approach a strange face. We are aware of all the light-years of knowledge and experience, all the black holes that lie in the great history of mankind, but in spite of that we keep trying to build small narratives upon our experience of reading, of facing the Other. We are looking for meaning instead of (immediate) love, for deeper insights instead of deceiving images of happiness. We are cultivating a mental space that promotes the ability of living with ambivalence. All strangers have several *Doppelgänger*, doubles, such as we have them. Literature and art have shown this to us since the most primitive times. Freud has just asserted it. Some writers handled genially with this insight. Pessoa once wrote that he felt to be just one as a prison. As we know, he escaped from that prison by creating several heteronyms.

Walking with our own *Doppelgänger*, we keep struggling with him, or her, or even them. But we also escape from the prison of identity obsessions. And at the end of the road, we may feel happy because we breathe freely, without having been pursuing happiness, or any form of essentialism, as a primary purpose. And most important of all, we make peace with the strangers inside and outside us, because on our way we have learned how to measure and to handle with distance, with mediation, before we arrive at the threshold of our home.

(For the Round Table *The Image of the Stranger in Literature as a Route to Peace*, 43th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 04.05.- 08.05.2011)

### A Handful Of Sand: Looking For A Lost Paradigm? (2012)

Modernity has a large spectrum, in time and space. It persists in our days, and may include late modernity and post-modernity as variations, or reading protocols, of the same pattern. One of the main characteristics of such a pattern could consist in a sort of absence of previous determination, leaving free space for tracing individual paths. This would mean that we are able to see in many manifestations of modernity also the gaps left among the paths of greater mobility and dynamics. But is it really so? If we look back upon the long history of Modern Ages and the first manifestations of what Hannah Arendt called *pathos of novelty* (in the last chapter of **The Human Condition**), we may draw a line throughout five centuries, through the attempts to follow one's mind and faculty of judgment, sliding among obstacles or clashing against all kind of barriers of authority, hierarchy, traditions, prejudice. Therefore, we may also say that modernity is a permanent state of latent or outburst crisis.

As a matter of fact, we need to differentiate among a lot of aspects. In this second decade of the 21th century, in which we live, we might unfold, so to say, a fan of innumerable stories within History. They are both universal (since the anthropological structure of humankind has hardly changed) and local (with their visual outlines but also sounds, textures, flavours, tastes, culture patterns). This means, within our individual protocol of reading History, we are continuously drawing lines of short and long stories, and also discovering how they are interwoven among themselves. Looking into each one of such microcosms, we also might disclose expressions of free will against rules and conventions, giving us a possible plot out of such clash situations that help shaping successful narratives.

Let me put things clear: Whether such processes are carried out in full conscientiousness or not, we are always tracing our own story within History. If we write fiction, we slip under the skin of our characters by bringing them into life – otherwise, they will not be living characters but mere outlined shadows. If we write essays, we unfold our line of thought around concerns that we personally share upon any object of analysis. Thus we are always sharing the world with others, on a very basic level. We are permanently exfoliating ourselves within the world, as well as incorporating parts of it. But should we remain merely on this ground, which still has a huge degree of openness, and allows not only sustainable ways of reading and acting, but also considerable poetic chances?

Modernity means mobility too, as we know too well. In crisis scenarios, we are forced to remain mobile, even if we have a secure job. I mean hereby a flexible, protean kind of mobility, able to create forms of empathy and solidarity, beginning with the availability to listen to others. Moreover, in our age of communication, we have access to all kinds of scenarios without getting up from our working chair. But as well as for

creating our fictive characters, we need not only a full documentation and research about a topic, but also a full life inside these characters.

We have to experience the whole meaning of sharing, before choosing which step might be our next, both in literature and in real life.

In his reflections about the essence of beauty, Friedrich Schiller analyzed five situations of helping a man who had become a victim of robbery and lied, wounded, on the edge of a road. The first four situations showed people acting out of a genuine will to help, but still displaying different kinds of secondary motivation and interest. The only kind of beautiful act was therefore, according to Schiller, the last one, as the example of an action carried out of a spontaneity that meant not precisely a real absence of motivations, but most of all an impulse born within the situation. This leaves in a second plan the dialectics of means and ends, because the gesture of the helping hand takes over the whole picture. No matter how helping somebody else, in this case a stranger, would bring trouble into the daily life of the one whose hand was being reached to the wounded, such a gesture was simply drawn without asking further questions, and therefore providing the scene with an absolute character. Later, Schiller characterized such an attitude as graceful. Furthermore, in a letter written to a friend he wondered whether the Christian religion could be the only one which deserved to be called aesthetical. This means surely a form of idealization of the character of Jesus, after whom the Pietistic tradition created the conception of the "beautiful soul". We may even trace a biblical influence in Schiller's description of the five scenes of helping the wounded man, leading to find out which one could be considered as aesthetical. But we must also say that Schiller did not conceive an unhistorical theory of beauty, since such perfect and fulfilled situations never can be programmed and have to be considered but as ephemeral and absolute. The beautiful soul, he wrote in his essay about grace and dignity, has no other chance than becoming sublime in situations of affect, urgency, necessity, pain and death – in order to bear such adversities better.

"Does God judge us by appearances? I suspect that He does". By quoting W.H. Auden at the beginning of her volume about Thinking, so to say as the first degree of the life of the mind, Hannah Arendt did not want to hurt any religious feelings, but only to draw the reader's attention upon our worldly condition. Under this very condition we stand every minute before the decision of keeping or sharing material and immaterial things. This is not a matter of consuming in order to be happy – whatever each of us may understand under the volatile concept of happiness – but simply of understanding the difference between use values and exchange values.

By the same token, we have to go a step further. This means taking into account not only material, exchangeable goods or unique objects that may bring colour into our lives, but also the wholeness of materialized ideas. These ones can be perceived as a

link between the visible realm and the invisible domains that exist and take shape and existence when we communicate, act and create. Conceiving therefore the world as a huge mosaic, full of familiar as well as uncanny regions, of delight and dread, we cannot but begin realizing that openness towards such a mosaic could already be a first degree of sharing. But this is not enough.

If we try to shed a contextualizing light upon the examples mentioned above, we realize that the biblical influence in Schiller's aesthetic considerations not only integrates topics of Ancient and New Testament, but roots also mostly in the tradition of an ancient culture, according to patterns which prescribe the duty to share our possessions with relatives, friends and strangers, acknowledged as such. We still experience this in many countries, correspondingly in rural regions. The subjacent thought could be thus formulated: What Mother Nature has given to us, is always to be shared.

On the opposite side, modern urban culture has been built in the last three centuries upon a basis of individuals who earn their living and rely therefore primarily on the result of their work. This creates forms of ontological security yet existential anxiety, as Anthony Giddens has put it. The numerous glosses about individual spleen and solipsism in literature and art, in human and social sciences, can be read both as a brand, or even a stigma, of modernity itself. Moreover, since the modern human condition seems to have the face of a magazine cover, with fancy clothes but sad eyes foretelling a tragic "Dorian Grayish" aging, its representations seem to lie on the opposite side of the socializing life of traditional, tribal cultures.

Since Freud, however, we are also aware of the double bind of freedom and neurosis, the later seen as the incapacity of the ego to endure the free times and spaces of each individual path. This is also why many modern individuals try to compensate such moments of emptiness with full agendas and meticulous routines, as if they lived within a huge tribe of alter egos, somehow repressed, or at least troubled, by an unconscious or untold sense of guilt. The glass-bell motive has also been too often glossed in all sorts of works which deal with modernity. The way out of such modern dilemmas might seem to be sheer suicide or madness.

Many of us, modern citizens, live therefore in a culture that makes sharing simultaneously easier and more difficult. Easier on the one hand, because free individuals in democratic regimes enjoy freedom of expression and association, of making personal choices. More difficult on the other hand, because individual urgency of earning a living – a condition that we often paradoxically share without the sense of sharing - inhibits the socializing moments that belong to the communication texture that makes sharing consistent, as a praxis of joyful interchange.



If we assume the freedom of excavating the asphalt in order to find the beach which means utopia, according to the sixty-eighty slogan, we may even reach a handful of sand, which we are at the first moment unable to share. It is not only a matter of searching a kind of cultural second nature, in form of a lost tribal tradition. We have also seen the historical results of the obsession to find or build forms of group sheltering, out of modern loneliness. They may even lead to forms of totalitarianism, where the freedom of exchanging free opinions with the others on the public realm has been simply erased in the name of a so-called “community”.

Let us assume that Kant’s anthropological assertion of the “unsocial sociability” has a considerable amount of experienced historical reality. This would open the door to other anthropological interpretations of human beings as being born with an openness that is connected with an almost total lack of autonomy. Let us stick to this image, associated with Hannah Arendt’s assertion of acting among the others ( as a plurality, not towards a mystified abstraction of “the Other”) as a symbolic form of birth, of nativity. By communicating and sharing our knowledge (Dalai Lama said) we achieve the only possible form of reliable immortality. This kind of sharing means earth connection, not bank donation.

We need both tradition and modernity, also in order to deal with the so-called crisis. This word may also have been felt as a mere cliché of real ancient tragedies, when whole populations were massacred in wars or lost their entire living basis in nature catastrophes. Media discourses of (financial) crisis have a taste or ruminant arrogance towards the sufferance of contemporary whole populations in other continents. We still have a roof over our heads, flowing warm water in our homes, enough to eat and to wear. But do we have the courage to live with the essential goods, not sacrificing animals in order to get nourished, assuming the transitory aspects of creation and interaction as if they were moments of being – as Virginia Wolf has put it – and handling with the objects that we call ours and that will survive us as if they were ephemeral goods, that we can easily give away because the most important aspect of sharing comes of an immaterial impulse, of becoming part of the eyes and ears of the world?

Until this moment, the word peace has been avoided, perhaps because such a word easily becomes another cliché if it is merely proclaimed, not converted into a living praxis, out of a desire to end all superfluous forms of daily violence, to break the chains of repression and cruelty and looking into the eyes of another individual, even if we do not speak his or her language. May be then we have found a lost paradigm, which lies around the corner and can be reached by our stretched hand, without asking why.

(For the Round Table *Sharing with Others – a Path to Peace, 44th International Writers’ Meeting, Bled 16.05.- 20.05.2012*)

### Close To The Next Door (2013)

Travelling is becoming more and more difficult in our days, and this happens precisely the easier it is being made. This apparent paradox is rapidly solved, if we think of what travel as a learning process should *not* be – the purchase of a tourist package, the often blind and breathless running between airports and seashores, monuments and hotel rooms. All this will keep existing, as a continuous self-reproducing commodity, crossing our eyes and probably generating new forms of blindness. And such blindness is then supposed to be compensated by the frantic eye of the cameras, which completes the apartheid of the senses, of our complex psychosomatic system, from the respective environment. But let us be sure: It is not difficult to agree upon avoiding tourist packages if we want to become, and remain, a full system in permanent connection with the changing environment, nature and landscape, people and living beings, art and all-day objects, lights, odors, all this before the written feedback appears.

Some great writers never have travelled far from home, or never have travelled at all. Does this mean that they never get out of their bodies, that their bodies do not get transfigured? Reality changes every second, even if we do not leave our working chair. There are basic aspects about travelling that should be discussed before talking about the peaceful role of the writer abroad, or about the use of new media.

Peace means regaining self-balance, after letting contradictions and paradoxes speak up and display themselves. If what is at stake is a simple understanding of other cultures, we just need to cross the street and to meet the sheer difference in other individuals, with their own complex systems and subsystems, with their own biography, even if they speak the same language as we. Intercultural communication, as it is supposed to be the political correct way of approaching foreign people, begins therefore at a former, almost incipient level, which seems to be subconscious; in no case at all it may be taken for granted. The experience of the Others, of the Strangers, always begins close to the next door. And such an experience, even if it should be a radical one, is not always frightening or threatening: it may be felt not only as a fascination towards the Freudian Uncanny, but also as a genuine wish to read the great book of the world, with its light and shadow, its colours, its sounds and smells, its moments of silence and cacophony, of misunderstanding and *déjà-vus*. As for the people one meets, the great discover consists in changing the *alius*, the uncanny other, into an *alter*, a travel mate on the path of life, in a mood of intense present, as if there were no goal but the path.

The idea of the *Bildungsreise*, only approximately translatable as a travel for one's own formative enrichment, is at least as old as the educative ideals of the Enlightenment. Reading travel reports from the eighteenth century, such as Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, means travelling in time and space. This implies a patient work of

context interpretation and reconstruction, in which the incorporation of familiar, apparently familiar, not really familiar, and strange aspects, all this helps fulfill the formal figure of the *re-entry*, which enlarges our views, our mind, and our memory. We assimilate images, text passages, ideas, impressions, reflections, until they become a part of our living system. If we read about Goethe trying to understand whether the coach drivers in Naples are really lazy or just have to wait for hours for a customer on the streets, having occasionally the opportunity to make a siesta meanwhile, we also incorporate a new understanding for the differences of life conditions in various cultures. Goethe was, as we know, a practicing anthropologist *avant la lettre*, trying to seize structures in a participant observation, as Claude Lévy-Strauss later did.

All genuine literature could, in a certain sense, be read as travel literature, since it means endless longing for what is far and unreachable – and a spiritual trip to the places which are described in a book. It never ceases to produce the tune of such a longing (in German: *Sehnsucht*, the most perfect word for this feeling perhaps, and for this reason quite untranslatable) in our head, in our soul and between the lines. Even when the text describes places that may sound familiar, literature always configures various forms of distance and longing for it. Such a distance has also a time dimension, between temporary experience and writing about it. There is always a *before* and an *after* (the real or imagined journey). Travel literature is therefore an example, not only for what Michel Foucault called *heterotopie*, other spaces, but also for what I would call *heterochronie*, other times. When the traveller writes down his topics in notebooks, paper or digital ones, there is always a new version that differs from the concrete experience. If we are aware of this as readers, we may ask about the worlds that turned around between such moments.

Travel reports satisfy both aspects of our phylogenetic heritage: first the hunter's and collector's mobility, or hunger for getting new experiences, secondly the settler's text cultivation. As a traveller and note taker, the writer is a hunter and collector; as text worker, he or she is a farmer. The chronological sequence may synthesize the former big periods of our common history. Furthermore, within a developing media system, in which journalists and writers come closer to each other, the formers often compose novels out of their reports and the laterers give up some stylistic exigency in order to reach a wider public.

Travel literature may therefore become a part of mass tourism, since also many book guides mean to enrich themselves with literary quotations – both from specific literary reports and from literary works of the country to which they introduce the tourists. In this view, the experience of foreign countries and the strangers who live there may become an obligatory homeopathic exercise of the modern citizen, in order to rescue the educative dimension of the travel. This implies traveling as its own goal, in the

sense of Kavafis' "Ithaca" – "As you set out for Ithaca, hope that the voyage is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery".

But what has all this to do with peace? At the first moment, very little. In any case, not directly. But insofar every form of stable peace cannot but be born, in a negative sense, out of the experience, or memory, or knowledge of war, we should ask ourselves whether the war reporters could (not) be the best defenders of the idea of peace, whether they intend it or not. In this perspective, it is interesting to consider a work which could be characterized as the opposite of travel literature – Jean Genet's *Un captif amoureux*, published 1986, shortly after the author's death. Here we deal with a multiple terrain of writing – is this an essay, an autobiography, a travel report, a poem in prose, a novel?

Genet has, using Goethe's words, a feeling eye and a seeing hand, which allows him to change each *alius* into an *alter*. Genet follows, in the seventies, the romantic mythos of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, according to the model of the anti-colonial guerilla fight. His search is everything but touristic: the *feddayin* have not yet a real national conscience, which would later be expressed as a demand for a Palestinian state. Genet searches for the eternal mobile, under the form of that permanent *Sehnsucht* that aims no goal but the path. He does not care about a chronology while noting his Middle East experiences, being aware of its artificial character and the permanent perspective change on a ground that had been often retraced, reoccupied, redefined. For him, each attempt to settle down becomes a danger of getting corrupted. In this sense, we have a travelling author writing about a moving object. The self-critical dimension, as a second degree observation in time and space, is also a sign of the conscientiousness about his near death, recalling the several trips to the Middle East, in the early seventies and in the eighties. He also testified in Beirut the consequences of the departure of the multinational UN-forces and the massacre of the remaining Palestinian refugees in the Chatila camp, carried out by the soldiers of the Phalangist Party with the complicity of the Israeli troops. Two year later, Genet testifies a turbulent daily life at the same refugee camp which had been the arena of that massacre. This inspires the question about the ghost character of all memories, even the bloodiest ones, even those that seem to have been deeply engraved in the author's system with the help of all senses.

The quest for peace makes a tragedy into an epos: it has a narrative structure. We could also call it a *narrative spirit* that pulls forward the writing hand. Peace quest could also be read as a remake of the Odyssey. Genet's Penelope is a family fragment, a home that had given him shelter in the early seventies, the young Haza and his mother. He asks himself: "... mais pourquoi ce couple est-il tout ce qui me reste de *profond*, de la révolution palestinienne ? » (J. Genet, *Un captif amoureux*, Paris : Gallimard 1986, p. 611).

We could read in Genet's search for the reality of *that* house, of *that* family, which fulfill the dream of a precise sense of *home*, and this fourteen year later, as a search for peace. This means a search for a kind of settlement without corruption represented through the simplest family ties in their daily labour. In this sense, we find in Genet a defense of the practice of peace, of images and situations related to peace and coexistence, which leads the struggle for peace and should be also present in every conversation that politicians carry out on this issue. Only when the sound of guns is overlapped by the memory of devastation and by the desirable horizon of a reestablishment of the conditions for a normal life, only then we can begin talking about peace. The recall of what has been caused by a spirit of war can also be a safe midwife of a stable spirit of peace.

Like Goethe, Genet carried out a participating observation of the communities that shared with him their daily life. Is there any other way towards peace? Can we rely on writers who have not shared the same bread with the people of the regions where they travel, until they give us a sense of these places and people being close to the next door?

(For the Round Table *The Writer as a Traveller Creating Peace facing the Challenges of the New Media*, 45th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 08.05.- 12.05.2013)

#### A Hundred Years' War? Some Notes On A Lacking Culture Of Peace (2014)

"When I attempt to find a simple formula for the period in which I grew up, prior to the First World War, I hope that I convey its fullness by calling it the Golden Age of Security". We all know the Incipit words of the tragic autobiography by Stefan Zweig, **The World of Yesterday**. He posted the manuscript to the publisher in 1942, the day before he committed suicide, together with his wife, in his Brazilian refuge.

If we begin counting war losses, in time and space and in a broader sense, we may recall the successive ruptures of the European order since 1914. In his essay **In Bluebeard's Castle** (1971), George Steiner mentioned the global loss of cultural cohesion between 1914 and 1945. He therefore christened this period as a "Thirty Years' War", mainly because of the ominous consequences of the Versailles Treaty and the following political restlessness in the so-called "Golden Twenties", as well as the age of totalitarianisms that began in the Thirties.

Literature and art may be seen (and heard, and felt) as the pulse and the breathing, as the heart beating of epochal spirits. They often succeed not only to accomplish brilliant syntheses and codifications of unfulfilled affects like fear and hope, but they are also able to seize such affects from the rearguard. Since WW I, History has become increasingly accelerated, and the rhythms of the Twenties bring this aspect

immediately to our senses. The expansion of culture contents also began then to reach broader audiences. A side-effect of this phenomenon is that we may at the present regard many of those figurations, historically, as genuine culture products. For instance, an *agit-prop* song in ragtime rhythm, from the Berlin scene of the late twenties, tells us how the creation of the Society of Nations made people believe that an “eternal age of peace” had broken, and the production of war gas and battleships served peace goals. *Aus ist's mit den bösen Kriegen sprach der Völkerbund /Friedenstauben munter fliegen um das Erdenrund./ Es ertönt in jedem Land Friedensmusik /und geächtet und verbannt ist jetzt der Krieg. (Finished are the evil wars, said the Society of Nations/Peace doves fly animated around the globe./In each country sounds peace music/and despised and exiled is now the war.)*

We know how tragically such warnings must be read at the present, since History has also displayed before our eyes the results of the sectarianism of all the antifascist forces in Germany. Yet such a song, which was most popular at its time – although not fully politically effective – reminds us that any cultural paradigm must remain close, as a system, to its margins, correspondingly to its contrary. The issue is not to *prepare* the war in order to make peace (according to Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus’ *Igitur qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum.*”), but rather to *get acquainted* with war issues in order to acknowledge the conditions of possibility to build an effective peace culture.

This means a huge amount of work, for a lifetime. It begins with an active use of the memory, both our own one and historical memories. Only those who have experienced peace and war, according to the words of Stefan Zweig in his autobiographical testament, may say that they have really lived. This shows the path for those who have not experienced war, since we all have experienced, are experiencing peace.

The building of a peace culture must therefore correspond to the reconfiguration of a whole system, with a permanent living consciousness of the closeness between war and peace. This always implies sharing knowledge, sharing memories, exchanging points of view. There is no such thing like an individual peace culture, although individual contributions, due to a developed critical judgment, may become crucial to push forward an effective peace culture.

What has this to do with the so-called longest peace period since WW II in Europe? If we stick to the principle of paradigmatic connections, we soon realize that the period between 1945 and 2014 was anything but “peaceful”. Even if a kind of “brave new world of security” could be re-established after the effects of the Marshall Plan and the building process of such organizations as the United Nations, the NATO and the European Union, we know too well to which measure the “war export” has been crucial to maintain the standard Western life style: that means, the energy issue has

been since WW II a permanent concern and a factor of economic growth within the capitalist system, to which no one seems to be able to present a real alternative.

In the middle of the 1990 decade, the Vice-President of the German Parliament, Antje Vollmer, from the Green Party, has published an accurate reflection on the issue of violence, **Hot Peace. On Violence, Power and the Mystery of Civilization (Heisser Frieden. Über Gewalt, Macht und das Geheimnis der Zivilisation**. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1995). In this essay, she stresses what civilization theorists since Sigmund Freud never cease to remind us, that is - each still so considered “high civilization” may every moment become susceptible of falling back, at least partially, into barbarianism. She also recalls the mechanisms used by traditional societies in order to prevent conflicts or, at the least, their most grievous consequences. They all have to do with rituals that imply a high dosage of sacrifice, correspondingly self-sacrifice.

With such assertions, A. Vollmer touches the nerve of the problem. In our informal Western societies, we are surrounded by “exploding egos” that are “seldom social” (AV, p. 55 of the German edition). The isolation of the “lonely crowd” in the consumer’s world has partially found anthropological compensations, as a multiplicity of networks, real and virtual. Such a problem as the re-building of community figurations on the basis of a conscientious free will is correlated with the conditions of possibility to build free communities in modern societies: they risk turning into overcompensated forms of group cohesion, such as configurations of nationalism, tribalism (football hooliganism, for instance), religious fanaticism, etc. In such cases there are always risks to experience a loss of a clear faculty of judgment in order to decide, on a dialogical, interactive basis, about the most proper forms of acting in order to prevent real conflicts by exercising (harmless) conflict forms.

It has already happened that some columnists compare the present times with the eve of WWI, quoting Stefan Zweig’s assertions about “the world of security”. As a matter of fact, many of us may look back and recall his and her student years in the sixties and seventies, protesting against the established generation of one’s parents, as well as his or her working decades under the umbrella of a secure job, as a form of such a world. In the second half of the last century we experienced in democratic revolutions (Portugal, Greece) or transitions (Spain, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile), as well as the fall of the Berlin Wall. An alleged “end of History” seemed to introduce the beginning of a “era of hysteria”, of fragmentation into a myriad of individualistic representations, soon multiplied and reflected by the explosive development of the new technologies. Surely, the anthropological constitution of such a complex psychosomatic system as the human being allows the choice of a multiplicity of paths in our informal societies. Therefore, we experience an increasing amount of culture shocks, due to the information we get from those countries and cultures practicing tribal rituals that collide blatantly against the mentality that grew up under the sky of parliamentary

regimes and freedom of expression. According to the cooperative tendencies that keep balance – at least potentially or theoretically - with the selfish ones, the possibilities of intervention through multiple networks are numerous, although the real efficacy of such interventions is always contingent.

Two hundred and thirty years ago, Kant put a rhetoric question: Do we live in an enlightened time? – and gave the answer by the same token: No, in a time of enlightenment. We could rephrase the sentence and ask whether we live in a time of peace and answer: No, in a time of building a peace culture. What do we miss, what do we need? In the last two decades, we had the ill experience of a radical financial deregulation of the economic basis of our stability, as a condition of possibility for the exercise of our freedom of expression, of creation. The lack of a militant peace culture, which is necessarily dialogical and interactive, has been in that occasion brutally displayed in the Western world, although the challenges to grasp the urgency of the present and to switch into more cooperative moods could be openly perceived.

The building of a peace culture, in spite of its urgency, is an evolutionary issue. It requires a real pedagogical vocation – which also stresses the importance of school education – to embed all our gestures in the respective contexts. This task is does not always fit to sensible souls. Let me put it straight: by “peace” I mean the absence of all forms of aggression towards the other living beings and the environment. What does bring us together, especially as grown up individuals with ideas and tastes that cannot easily be given up for new prospects or common values? Recognizing this issue means also stressing the role and the importance of education, from the beginning of the verbal supported socialization process, but also with every attitude, every gesture. How can this be achieved? Let us think of some examples. As educators, we must be able and available to explain our children the damages of a *real* weapon or any object represented – and therefore made harmless - by a toy or by a war game. By the same token, it is not difficult to explain – or even to display - the pain of animals raised for mass meat production, both during their short lives and at the moment of being slaughtered. Is such a situation unpleasant to see, to hear, or even to imagine? Of course, but still much less unpleasant than the real situation we are talking about. We might therefore say that peace culture also begins by forms of consequent vegetarianism.

We do not live in a gated community. If, according to Antje Vollmer, the most secure warranty for a lasting peace is a long war experience, a certain mutual consented normativity and the effectiveness of the social organs, as well as of the justice system (AV, p. 86s), together with the development of cooperative faculties, all this may fulfill an important role. It is neither too soon or too late to begin with.



(For the Round Table *Do We Live in War or in Peace? Cultural and Political Consequences of the Great War, 46th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 07.05.-10.05.2014*)

Beyond Mainstream - Setting Marks In Time And Space (2015)

*A culture that is not liberating and does not lead to a broader and freer view of the world is no longer a living culture. If it limits and narrows down the human mind, it is trapped in a cul-de-sac of its own making.*

Karel Čapek (1890-1938)

History seems, at a first moment, to compact time and space. We are at the present almost being put into pressure between two commemorations – hundred years since the beginning of WW I and seventy years after the end of WW II. In this period, perhaps comparable to a “thirty year war” if we follow George Steiner’s analysis of the “hell on earth” represented by the arising of totalitarian systems, there has been a profusion of visible signs pointing to the probability of the outbursting of a new war. The most dramatic of such signs were perhaps the *real* war moments, such as the Spanish Civil War, happening side-by-side with the inebriation given by upcoming new opportunities, most of all in America, while the totalitarian regimes spread their ideologies and discourses without finding visible resistance, due to uncontrolled repression.

Perhaps we should pay more attention to the discourse level and to the forms which discourses took in European countries after the Versailles Treaty. I mean all sorts of discourses and registers, from the semantically poor journalistic and political ones up to literary and artistic ones. Many of them present valid examples of the process character of civilization patterns, which tend to evolve from open struggle up to ideological polemics, from the sheer use of physical force up to dialogue.

May be we should not forget such simple issues as not having to live daily under any kind of threat, not having to wear heavy clothes and not being prohibited to study as women – as not having to obey to more or less open forms of group pressure in societies where religious masks succeed to legitimate sheer repression. This basic liberty of expressing ourselves, of shaping and reshaping our sentences, of interacting with the environment as complex systems, such liberty soon displays its limits, making the role of one’s responsibility more visible. At this point I would not like to be misunderstood: here is by no means meant any kind of self-castration of expression due to fear of “fundamentalistic” consequences, of sheer violence. Responsibility should mean in this sense a mere knowledge of the time-space contexts, as such ones that give birth to intolerant, lethal ideologies and their narrow-minded supporters.

I must admit that the formulation of the round table proposal, by all means well-intentioned, could not prevent causing in my eyes a deep form of suspicion. The act of asking how to react, how to speak, how to write, seems to shelter some displayed or hidden forms of programmatic appeal. This may be okay for a statement that has to be rapidly written, corresponding to the urgency of a specific moment. But even in such occasions, if we really assume our permanent calling as writers, we produce different texts from the ones written by professional politicians or journalists. Moreover, I am convinced that this aspect belongs to the specific way of breathing as a writer, shaping and reshaping sentences as a writer, setting frames and composing landscapes as a writer. Schiller knew it already in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education* (1794): Only in the illusion is the truth able to survive, that means to keep on living, to become art.

Besides that, I remain suspicious about hearing or reading any kind of advices about the way how to write – poetry, essay, or novel, or an opinion article for the media. What I would name *writing drive* consists of a most complex mixture of emotional impulse and guideline out of a reflexive process. I mention the impulse first because it appears fast and spontaneously. In this context, the moment when the text finds its form can be intrinsically related to the surprise or shock character of the occasion. We cannot but think of the violent situations which are frequent or even daily in many countries but still seem a most unpleasant and undesirable exception in *our* Europe. Did therefore the *Charlie Hebdo* and the Jewish grocery brutal murders not push the most of us to write at least some lines for the media or for the social networks?

Pushed by my very own impulse, I had to run to the next street demonstration and, arriving back home, to sit at the computer and write an article on the discomfort of being. This discomfort may balance between feeling “to be Charlie”, speaking it out loud, and asking ourselves how far we can really “be Charlie”. I must confess to have felt a first impulse to cry out against a *state of war*, as well as against tribal ideologies and violence caused by primary prejudices, in the name of a critical tradition in which I have been raised, in despite of having been born within the longest dictatorship in Europe, thanks to a caring family and a beloved grandfather, who was also a freemason and always taught me to stand for my ideas, in words and acts.

Should we compare violence, in its blindest and most direct aspects, with a hard knot that can only be cut with the sword or melted with words? In fact, the *Charlie Hebdo* situation proved us that the corrosive function of satire was able to provoke a vicious circle, according to the intentions of some fanatic forces to raise a spiral of terror. Many of us who wrote about this issue know that any kind of concession or reduction of the liberty of expression “in order not to hurt religious feelings of other people” (as we are meanwhile used to hear exhaustively at each corner) meets the heart of liberty itself. In a balanced culture, with a high degree of critical thinking and individual autonomy, liberty excesses tend to be self-regulative. There is for instance no

politician in our countries that should not be aware of the immanent possibility to be satirized, caricaturized. The possibility of complaining remains, of course, in any rule of law, against excesses.

Does the Charlie Hebdo occurrence strike us for being terribly predictable, even suggesting conspiracy narratives of terror management by the French government, just letting things happen, just letting violence be employed by people who have already been under surveillance, in order to exercise repression afterwards? This line may be followed by thriller authors who would like to write best-sellers and cooperate at the production of the following film scripts. But this should not be our concern. Perhaps instead of suggesting of how we should write, we should be able to follow the thread of silence and cultural misunderstanding, of a stupid obsession of political correctness that turns out to be a real threat to an open and critical liberty of expression. This is in my opinion precisely the point where the sword of our writing pen should make the first and perhaps deepest cut. How it is made, which register is chosen to put it in words, is already a secondary aspect.

Critical thinking is highly alive; I have no doubt about it. Many voices point to the risks of starting a WW III out of futile reasons, thoughtless public statements, not to speak about the reshaping of the world economic and political relationships due to globalization. In other words: whoever wants to start a war, for instance out of the weapon industry or the finance lobby, also manages to promote conflicts and the corresponding ideologies of hate, identity discourses. Critical thinking should never forget, in this context, to ask the good old Roman question: *Cui bono*? But critical thinking is also an art of sailing, of rowing between Scylla and Caribides, between mainstream discourses and delirious conspiracy theories. What we really need is, in the words of Edgar Morin, an open rationality.

Only such an open rationality is able to see the voids in mainstream discourses and in the real world. Such voids are not deserts, but filled with singular people who just need an opportunity – not only in social networks – to tell their story, to share their points of view. We know that novelists do that, as well as good journalists. But the question remains how to fill the gap, how to overcome the abyss between those mainstream discourses that reduce complex reality to narrow perspectives, if not ideological clichés. I propose a kind of *crossroad writing*, which is in fact intrinsically interdisciplinary. Let us pick the example of a politician, in whose name or for whose sake we often do not know he is speaking – *cui bono*?

Setting marks in time and spaces corresponds therefore to fill voids, finding analogies in History without looking specifically for them, which is perhaps the safest way to avoid ideological short circuits and the self-castration of political correctness. Critical judgments are painful in most cases and formulating them for the public space will unavoidably hurt someone. Critical minds that are able to think historically will not

react squeamishly or angry, but will be able to deconstruct any discourse. Therefore, one main question that appears in this context is to find a way to break the blocks of tribal ideologies with their empty formulas, because they are in fact the sheer opposite of thinking.

When we attempt to do this, we may discover that there is no one but many ways to break the ice of prejudices that promote violence and wars. There is no road map for it, as well there can be no unique recipe for writing. Writing celebrates the plurality of the road that shapes itself while it is being experienced, step by step.

(For the Round Table *Visible and Invisible Wars, 47th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 06.05.- 09.05.2015*)

### Behind The Eyelids, Beyond The Ears – Seeking Refuge In Times Of Disquiet (2016)

A shock effect might replace the ancient role of astonishment as a matrix impulse to begin thinking and to think further, to enlarge the circles caused by a stone thrown into a lake. As a matter of fact, for someone who misses or has lost the faculty of getting astonished about the tiny miracle of every inch of communication, of each interaction – and, at last, of sheer everyday life, for such a person a shock coming from outside begins by shattering every ready-made certitude.

I cannot help writing these words a few days after the Brussels bombings. Beyond the fact that suicide bombers are mislead people and that “ceci n’est pas une religion” – as a cartoon showing a machine gun pointed out, evoking Magritte’s “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” – we just have to open our eyes and spread our sight over the world, then mainly focusing the cradle of our culture, the Middle East countries. Then we realize that bombings and other fights with weapons are happening THERE every day, every moment. That many people THERE have no place to hide, to run into, no medical assistance provided by the state, as we have in our countries and within our European welfare system.

As Hannah Arendt once said, “ich will verstehen”, I want to understand. More precisely, I keep trying to understand what can surely never be completely enlightened. Mission impossible? And yet, among the broken pieces of our reality perception, beyond the mainstream media discourses, in words and images, I never quit trying. Let us switch off the TV news and listen to the radio news; let us read the newspapers and finish any attempt to accelerate our perception by landing on a book by any author who has been through troubled times too. And then we may realize that all great literature goes pregnant with war and conflict experiences.

Let us therefore offer a thinking pause to ourselves – and by doing this we are already behaving as mental refugees, seeking a shelter for our anxieties and confusions, running from the temptation to adopt easy solutions and answers. Many

of us may also seek a shelter for the piercing question about what writers can do in such occasions, as if the answers were not clear enough: What we cannot carry out as human citizens, as thinking and acting people, we hardly would achieve as writers. And we also know, by the same token, that our huge task begins precisely at this point. The relationship between living and writing life cannot be but twisted yet intertwined, if we mean literature and not journalism. We collect an amount of facts and materials, but this rough stuff becomes glittery when we grasp for the subjects that are at stake. As a matter of fact, for those of us who have experienced both periods, namely the printed and digital ages, such tasks as collecting and selecting seem to have become extremely disquiet in our digital age.

And yet there are moments when it looks as if nobody but writers are entitled to remain the seismographs of what happens around them, since they have to seize and transfigure all facts and voices, images and sounds and pour them into the paper or screen through the flowing pen or the hammering keyboard. It seems to flow like blood or to beat like a heart. And such rhythms are troubling recurrent, it means that they do not quit so easily. Nor do the floods of migrants who what despairingly to come ashore at the arrogant European coasts.

We read the UNHCR statistics and can hardly realize that last year (2015) there were in the whole planet circa 60 million refugees forced to leave their homes due to conflicts, natural catastrophes or the simple lack of opportunities to make a dignified living according to the most basic human rights. One million, “just” one million, has looked for a chance in Europe. Regarding the circa 135 000 people who came to our continent (according to the UNHCR statistics) between January and March 2016, 46 % are men, 20 % are women and 34 % are children. And the UN children’s agency, UNICEF, says that some 87 million children under the age of seven are growing up in conflict zones across the world, in conditions that can adversely affect their brain development, essential for health, emotional well-being and ability to learn. That geopolitical wars are the best method to breed terrorists, everybody knows. This means that no security measures in the rich Western countries will be able in the future to prevent the long term results of the geostrategic wars carried out by the countries that profit from resource exploitation and weapon trade. We know which countries are meant, yet we suspect that a huge amount of agents all over the world are implied in opaque forms of business that have indirectly to do with the big interests of finance capital and energy or trade corporations.

Let us go back to the discussion of ideas, even if we know that the simple gesture of switching on a light in our home or the engine of our car makes us to become an indirect accomplice of those inextricable wars and interest webs. Such a knowledge should give us a healthy dosage of intellectual humility, which is also an inherent part of a conscious citizenship. This shows us the paradox and dilemma of our condition: “We are all refugees”, since we cannot take refuge, since we cannot find an excuse for

our common behavior, for the simple tasks of our daily life that allow us to earn a living. No one of us can afford a Robinson existence.

In the present days, the unhappy conscientiousness that for Hegel was the price of living in historical transition times, is a two-sided coin. It has often the tragic face of Syrian men, women and children that do not cease to come ashore at our coasts. On the other side, the helplessness of such people in our cities, who go on living as if nothing happened, or as if what happened did not matter, has got grotesque features. Some of us are already asking for, or even trying to adopt, a lifestyle that implies the most possible restrictions regarding resource exploitation. This also means getting back to use values instead of exchange values. This can take several forms, from old books, clothes or other objects up to growing one's food in the backyard or becoming vegetarian. We are also refugees in a planet that cannot afford an ecological footprint which is bigger than one's shoe size.

As so to say "mind refugees", expelled out of former certitudes and therefore bound to look for new literary themes and ways of saying the eternal human saga across times and spaces, we are concretely challenged by how to reach out for people who come every day across the fields with bags and rucksacks, small children and pets, family objects and wheelchairs – the victims of wars which we should be committed to contribute to a rapid cease. There are many ways of doing this, as well as several levels of action and creation. A cartoon published in the media or social networks has perhaps not the same effect as if it is carried on a poster at a demonstration and displayed again after that public proof. The same might happen with a slogan that could come out of a writer's pen. And yet – even if the time is out of joint, we are not born to "set it right". No salvation can come out of literature, no messianic task is expected from a writer. When we get aware of this insight and acquainted with it as a provider of guide lines for life and for creation, we may be able to start handling with the problem of the refugees, starting at our own corner without letting the global problematic out of sight.

Meanwhile, we are bound to look for refuge in the "shadowy wrinkles, gestures without grace and imperceptible scars" (W. Benjamin, *Einbahnstrasse*) not only of beloved people but also of well known places, of our daily tasks. The challenges of our literary works become rougher, wilder, sheer uncontrolled. That is also why we love our work like a beloved human being, knowing about our privilege that consists of keeping writing in a shelter of beloved books and familiar faces.

Behind our eyelids, beyond our ears, many unfamiliar faces appeal to us. Perhaps if we know about our own need to get a new refuge after being expelled out of former certitudes, we shall be able to reach out for those who need a hand, both as a reality and as a metaphor.

(For the Round Table *We are all Migrants – Terrorism Everywhere, 48th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 11.05.- 14.05.2016*)

## Squaring The Circle Or Circling The Square? Some Notes About War And Peace (2017)

*But how and wherefrom is the writer to attain the ability and the power to defy the apparent heroism of violence and substitute it for the empathy towards his fellow beings? How is one to stop war and build peace?*

The last question of the thematic realm that has been sent for the Peace Committee round table is not a mere challenge – it could be seen as an attempt to square the circle, to tear apart the close connections between war and piece. As we know, no intellectual, no artist has ever been able to stop a war, to prevent violence from expressing itself in its plural faces, either as a form of energy that allows the creation of art out of tragic memories, or in its most direct and crude manifestations. Pacifists like Gandhi, one could say, have surely provided a huge contribution to accelerate the tendency of the civilization process, therefore pushing a more rapid evolution from a direct use of violence towards forms of discussion, debate, and dialogue. As we know, Gandhi's tragic end taught us about the endlessness of the same civilization process, thus also reminding us about the closeness of war and peace.

If we take the example of Tolstoy's novel, which was supposed to give the motto for this round table, we can also go through a similar approach in order to ask about the closeness of war and peace. The omnipresence of war within the apparently peaceful environment – in the chapters concerning the family and social life of the main characters - makes its ravages, on one hand, as a violent spiral of fear and hope, experienced by all of them in different forms and situations; on the other hand, the vivid memory of peace in the middle of a battle opens breaches beneath the feet of each warrior, which are breaches of doubt, if not disbelief and mistrust about the purposes of the whole war business. At the end, the sheer experience of devastation, displacement and loss, all this sheds a particular light over the last pages of a novel, jeopardizing its supposed happy-end. May I suggest a re-reading of these pages, together with the author's own reflections about war and peace, as the representation - or even an indirect suggestion or proposal - of a new pattern of living, stressing each moment with a frugal and reflective joy, for the simple reason of having been kept alive, and after having mourned the loved ones.

Three questions may follow: 1. How is it possible to take the peace endeavour seriously without an insight into such ways of living that constantly promote forms of war? 2. Who among the individuals living in Western countries, enjoying all the comfort provided by modern technology, is aware of the suffering caused by the exploitation of the resources needed to build and feed the fundamentals of the same comfort? 3. Should such individuals, even knowing about the geopolitical and economical reasons for the promotion if conflicts and wars in so-called »third countries«, stop using their cars, computers or mobile phones, because of the suffering caused to the workers at such resources, often children in school age?

To questions like these, there should be neither an immediate nor a simple answer, neither a »yes« nor a »no«. Let us proceed a little further. Everybody knows that a stable peace can only be founded on a negative level, that means on experience or memories of war. If there is no experience that should be able to cause direct memories, here we may have a first insight into the role of the writers who have given us, since the oldest days, all kinds of war narratives.

A crucial question must be put about the factors that lead to war, not only out of geopolitical and economical interests but also as a cultural issue in its anthropological dimension. In a most interesting book about the »Handcrafts of war« (*Das Handwerk des Krieges*, Berlin, Rowohlt 1998), Cora Stephan stresses its ambiguity. The war awakes – in her words – both the »beast and the best« (p. 11) in a man, articulating »altruism and willingness to be sacrificed with utmost forms of aggression« (ib.). Therefore, there would be no reason to despise war, because this would lead to a broader absence of rules (p. 14). Here I would also see one main cause for the failure of blue-eyed pacifism., as well as abstract peace slogans, cherished by politicians, most of all when they are, at the same time, brooding war plans.

Here we have already an important insight: If we want to fight the war, or even contribute to stop it, there is no chance not to go through its horrors, at least by studying the plurality of factors that lead to it, and trying to understand the whole pattern of connections that articulate peace situations to war zones. None of us is a Robinson, living on an island, or fed from a biological garden and a well of one's own, with electric power generated by sun and wind sources, without a car of one's own, without consuming any kind of animal products. If someone says Yes to any of these items, he or she may immediately step out of this discussion. But I fear that most of us is obliged to stick to it, the discussion about the realistically possible measures that can be taken in order to prevent wars and promote peace, therefore being a constitutive part of a whole dissipative structure that integrates both war and peace. In other words, war narratives, served by the mainstream media, not only in the evening news at dinner, but nowadays the whole day through, try to blur our minds about the evidences of such wars, most of them being proxy wars. The narratives of »alternative facts«, or one-sided perspectives, or stories miserably told, are there to help the audiences to naturalize war facts and forget that they are the product of designed, formatted processes, not of »natural« evolution.

One's task as an intellectual could be, correspondingly, to shed a light on structures of meaning, not by sheer denying mainstream war narratives, but rather by filling the huge blanks and display the missing links of sense, giving them therefore new frames. One should never stop asking questions. For instance, is Cora Stephan's book outdated, since it was published before all the processes that were initialized by the globalized issue of »war on terror«? Instead of answering Yes or No, I prefer to stress the need to develop new framework questions for each process that constantly displays new aspects and involves new agents.



Perhaps it is needless, and even demagogic, to say that we are all refugees and that everyone who gets direct or indirect profit of exploitation businesses that lead to wars should open the door to the first refugee family who knocks at our doors, fleeing from sheer war devastation. If we recall the civilization process, we notice a lot of troubles and discontents in the Western countries, many of them reflected on election results, which really should surprise nobody. In our countries, we have learned to fight not with weapons but with ideas and words, to use, and even abuse liberty of expression. If we do not agree with the nationalist groups and parties, we should at least be able to question the reasons of their discontents, more than most parties and European instances seem to do. Intellectuals and writers are not able to stop wars, but at least they may use their tools to dive into the structures of discontent (which I would call civilized forms of fighting battles), emerging from them with their disquiet as a mighty link between the imaginary zones of war and peace. If war is the product of a designed squaring of the circle, we may show they we are able to create alternatives not only to, but also out of the chaos caused by war - and therefore to circle the square.

(For the Round Table *War and Peace*, 49th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 10.05.-13.05.2017)

From A Cul-de-sac Into An Open Field – Who Is Willing To Make The Step And To Pay The Price? (2018)

After telling a collective story, the thematic summary for the Peace Committee round table of this year confronts each one of us with a challenge – it sounds like an exhortation to demolish “evil” barriers and to build “positive” bridges. I am afraid not to be able to develop a proper answer, first of all because I remain stuck in a handful of questions before any kind of attempt to sketch any form of proposition.

As a declaration of intent, I deeply mistrust the use of the word “we”, especially when it is followed by any kind of assertion. Who does, or who does not fit under such a huge, collective, undifferentiated umbrella? How many of “us” did not hope anything particular but mainly enjoyed that “wonderful sunrise” (these were Hegel’s words about the French revolution, alias written some decades after) of “the day the Wall came down” (Pink Floyd)? How many of “us” have testified negative reactions to the consequences of the opening of that segregation symbol, from anecdotic up to more serious ones, from people who felt distressed in crowded West Berlin underground wagons or buses since November 9 1989 (full of people whom many West Berliners did not recognize as their neighbours, suddenly feeling closer to Turkish fellow citizens, suddenly felt as neighbours) up to women who in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), then unified Federal Republic of Germany, had a huge difficulty to find a job, to find a nursery or a whole day school for their children? The so-called

“Ostalgie” (which could be translated as “eastalgy”, yet losing the phonetic closeness to “nostalgia”) has had many faces and expressions, and what for many GDR citizens had been a suffocating, repressive society, soon began to take an idyllic aura. Hereby I cannot help recalling the powerful German TV series “Weissensee”, which brought the social atmosphere of the former GDR back to the TV spectator, confronting him or her with facts of breathtaking closeness to reality and displaying the hypocrisy and brutality of the GDR regime.

I am just bringing this as a mere example, but does not each example evoke an amount of contradictory images that keep unceasingly moving among the facts, correspondingly as a source of creation for a writer? Writers are by definition disquiet individuals, questioning rebels, therefore mistrusting walls, fences, barriers, unless they build them, yet under the condition of being able to put them down in order to be able to build new ones, either for aesthetic or political purposes, or both. Or may be it is better to build bridges, where there are gaps. As we notice, writers move themselves on open fields of creation, on which the aimed final work sets a number of guide lines and parameters for the sake of its own economy, which may (but must not) include a “message”. (Hereby I must admit that I prefer ambiguous works without explicit “messages”, yet willing to be read as a plurality of messages – the discussion must move on.)

Nowadays, less things are obvious. But to recognize this should not push individuals into the trap of political correctness. To be born in the European continent, where many people feel rewarded for the ability, and possibility, to think things over and under a plurality of aspects, this circumstance does not overshadow the fact that - for instance – my own first seventeen years of life were experienced under a - not always evident - dictatorship. An authoritarian education could also be a challenge, seasoned with moments of soul support but also of great doubt. This melting of horizons, of which Hans-Georg Gadamer spoke (*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960) is yet different of the sense given to this very expression by Zygmunt Bauman in *Trust and Fear in the Cities* (2005). No one will deny that cognitive horizons expand themselves while vital experience grows. What needs to be discussed is whether such procedures may occur between individuals who have been through radically distinct forms of socialization. Individuals are open systems, who have the ability to learn and to incorporate insights that may begin to seem strange – but only if the environmental conditions of possibility give them the chance to.

According to this – and always keeping in mind the need not to generalize, but just to point tendencies – someone who has grown up in a shame-culture and has therefore a tribal way of seeing things, making summary judgments and acting (hereby I resist the temptation to say: Behaving instead of acting), will at least take a long time before being able to let his or her horizon to melt with someone else who has been brought

up as a free thinker with the liberty to act and criticize, that means, who is born in a guilt-culture. Surely, the responsibility of understanding the mental walls of others is heavier when free expression allows a reflection process to become dialogical. Such responsibility could also be seen as an ironic compensation for his or her “lightness of being” (Milan Kundera). The other side of the coin of such an openness of horizons, which allows him or her to make further steps towards the others, towards individuals who pretend to keep a dialogue and instead repeat worn out formulations, got from an ideologically shaped socialization, that other side is the risk of being misunderstood and to remain lonely at the end.

Tribal mentality is unhappily not only a sign of a narrow-minded socialization, which prescribes and imposes formulas, therefore pushing individuals into a cul-de-sac with an inescapable wall at the end. The tragic aspect is that they often incorporate that wall in their minds and hereby ignore that all cul-de-sacs have an open end, so that many of them just have to turn their back to the wall and walk out of that street into the open fields of judgment, of dialogue, of creation. This is all but evident – and one just needs to think of the so-called “honour murders”, carried out by the guidelines of a patriarchal order. Women are the victims without exception, women of promising ages, who had the courage to turn the back to the cul-de-sacs of their families and to make the huge step out of the narrow street into the uncertainty of the open field, where doubt and loneliness are lurking. Pain and regret risk being so unbearable that the temptation of making a step back to the tribal security may be too real.

Questioning the aspects of the mentality which is inherent to the two main culture patterns – again I stress, trying to point tendencies without making absolute assertions, therefore always living in a space for difference and singularity – such questioning is useful to understand what is at stake. But a step further must be taken. At this point, the ways of dealing with the “wall problems” may converge or diverge. On one hand, it is always an act of courage to deconstruct obsessive ideologies that lead to hate discourses. It brings risks, for instance if Islamic fanaticism is at stake – one has in mind the fatwa declared upon Salman Rushdie almost 30 years ago, or the consequences of the cartoon satiric, up to the murders 2015 at Charlie Hebdo. On the other hand, if it is easy for a critical mind to detect tribal or religious patterns, yet it is more difficult to deconstruct forms of hate speech that do not come out of a recognizable pattern. Literature may provide pictures of fanatics, but I fear that such characters are not the most interesting, since they are one-sided. Real art, including literature, lives within an aura of ambivalence that produces and allows multiple reading protocols.

Once more *se hace el camino al andar* (the path is made by walking) and there is no recipe with warranty to neutralize hate speech. That does not mean to overthrow the walls inside hate speakers, to put aside fences between people, to make crossing

borders easier. In any case this must happen on the open field of freedom of expression and requires an amount of hermeneutic skill, in order 1. to signalize the others that one is also able to listen to each kind of argument and also may take it seriously, 2. to put the proper questions in order to lead the hate speaker back to his or her contradictions, so to say in a boomerang effect, and 3. (surely the most difficult part) to develop such kinds of discourses and proposals that may help building an alternative ground, where radically different positions may meet and look in each other's eyes, perhaps for the first time. Giving each other the hand may still remain a difficult step.

Then, horizons of both sides may enlarge, even if they do not melt. But would it not be enough if they respect each other and keep a proper communication distance, a willingness not to let the fragile thread of dialogue get broken by inopportune relapses into the enraged lust of being right at any price? According to this, the word "we" should be seen as a goal and not as a starting point – a goal that is not sure to be achieved. The ground remains fragile, but "when I am understood, I feel at home" (H. Arendt).

(For the Round Table *Wall, Fence, Border, 50th International Writers' Meeting, Bled 18.04.- 21.04.2018*)

#### A Walk Around The Lake. Praising Fragility (2018)

Are there are islands in time? This question occurred to me when walking around the Bled lake, which I use to do every time I come to Bled. Most of the times I do it with friends who have also taken part at the Bled meeting, the round table discussions, the literary sessions. Walking around the lake might mean, consciously or not, the closing of a circle that can never be fully closed, a circle which is always imperfect - the circle of peace. Talking with friends about the meeting moments, while walking, also means closing the discussion circle until the next year. Walking on the lanes near the lake, looking at the eccentric position of the island over the quiet waters, and the church on the top of the stairs at the island, all that might suddenly seem like the miracle of an impossible construction, made real by common efforts, by compromises after struggles between religious and secular powers along our European history.

When my steps are not accompanied by any conversation, I use to walk faster, so to say towards the closing of an imperfect circle, thinking of its symbolic meaning within the history of the Bled meetings. If such meetings are themselves full of historical memories, of a war which is anything but forgotten, the Balkan war in the nineties, a war which no European country seemed to wish but towards which most European countries also seemed to withdraw their eyes, it is always useful to remind that History is always displaying its challenges before our eyes.

The Bled meetings may be a kind of island in time, conceived to remind us of the fragility of the human affairs, and the Bled Manifesto of the Peace Committee, which must be seen as a result of many steps, of many hours of previous text work and discussions, should be read as a serious warning about the dangers of turning such fragility into meanness towards the world beyond and under us (Goethe). As a matter of fact, we experience an increasing gap between what is recognized as an urgency to be done and what is experienced as being beyond the reach of our possibilities.

Yet the Bled days bring us also a marvellous gift besides the joy of meeting our friends each year. While the other three PEN Committees follow more precise goals, standing for the rights of persecuted writers, women, or minority languages, the Bled meetings offer us the priceless chance to move upstream to the contexts and factors that make conflicts happen and wars explode, but that also make peace possible. Even if the conflict between Israel and Palestine seems to have become an endless labyrinth, even if the tensions between Turkish and Kurdish people seem to provide a hopeless amount of impasses, we have experienced in Bled the possibility of dialogue between colleagues of the opposite sides. It might have been a matter of a few moments, of singular situations that could neither last long nor be repeated. But precisely because of the fragility of their uniqueness, they remain as a “principle of hope” (Ernst Bloch), not as an illusion, but rather as a source of energy that helps a conscious mind to set premises in order to see things clearer, that is to say beyond the criteria of hope or hopelessness, and to become able to reach the backstage of what is able to move us, as much as the concern for peace: the shaping of our own texts, out of the gap between the limits of the creation and the extensions of reality.

Walking around the Bled lake may also display some surprising moments. We may meet street artists who are ready to draw our portrait, or cross some colleague who wants plainly to be alone in order to find some missing lines for a poem or a suitable end for a short story. There are parts of the way which follow closely the lake margins, and some parts that go closer to the road, motor noises, cries of group bicyclists. Yet the head of the walker always turns towards the island, again and again, and cannot help shooting one more picture, as if one could forget that every island in space is bound to survive beyond all the single instants that we might be tempted to stay at that place.

It might be too easy to make a kind of memory home out of a place that provides us such vivid, pictorial memories. But perhaps it could be enough to know that our home is there where our mind settles down in order to create text images. And also these ones are islands in time. Other kinds of home are threatened with the dangers of will and representation, of sheer belief, as the anthropologist Helmuth Plessner reminded us, following the path of the nineteenth century ideology critics. Therefore, what perhaps should be allowed any time without any danger of the kind is the warm

feeling of having been on unique time islands such as Bled, again and again, with the consciousness of one's fragility and the openness of the paths of thinking, creating, interacting.

This could also mean a small milestone in the world peace process and give us the energy for the last steps that are needed to close the imperfect circle around the lake. The last look does not reach the island anymore, but the castle sitting on the cliffs and the mountains around, reminding of the paths that remain to be explored, in time and space.

Written for the "50 Years International Writers' Meeting at Bled, 2018.

### When Paths Turn Into Crossroads, Crossroads Might Turn Into Labyrinths (2019)

It would be so simple if I had kept the belief pattern of my Catholic childhood and could therefore praise God for living in a safe country, without needing to feel threatened by any neighbour or remote power that settles missiles close to our border - or is simply transformed into a threatening entity by paranoia management through the government. But even lost simplicity can always be rethought and transformed into laic paradigms, into a kind of open-eyed confidence, which has to be continuously worked at. And this is all but simple.

I shall just try to contextualize some aspects of what I mean.

The media and the social networks surround us nowadays with myriads of threads, spinning delirious narratives, which threaten to turn into ropes that immobilize thinking brains and writing hands. But against that there is always the proven remedy: get off your nutshell and take some steps into nature, breathing deeply! Most of those threads easily fade away after the first steps outside.

What remains is the insight that peace (similar to environment protection) is a precious good that has to be constantly negotiated, like most material goods in the world. For that, you should be aware that you have to bring the devil to sit together personally with you at your side at the table, and then you have to start any kind of dialogue with him, as hard as it might be to find a first common platform. It's true: Even well-known belligerent rulers will not deny the necessity to keep peace. If there are open fights, to reach a cease-fire as soon as possible, in order to save lives. Yet the next move at the table will be no less difficult, as a choice made between two paths at a crossroad – in short, peace ok, but with or without weapons? The rude answer to that has become a viral slogan, brutal but somehow true: Bombing for peace is like fucking for virginity. The horrendous profits of the weapon industry in the countries that secure their budget partly through such kind of business are also well known.

At this point, the complexity of the issue turns to be endless, or to seem endless, like a crossroad that sees its paths twisted and tangled into a labyrinth. As one knows, labyrinths have been throughout the history of art and humankind a stylization of the perplexity of humans who see themselves before apparently unsolvable dilemmas. One can compare networks with virtual labyrinths that lead us often to unsuspected issues, or to a way out, maybe sooner than one had expected. In all cases, and before one might lose the game and never get able to find the way out, the dialectics of means and ends should always be kept in mind. Media are means to one's conceptual and creative aims, in order to understand and to create.

In a short conference text, Umberto Eco mentioned an anonymous paper called *Report from Iron Mountain: on the possibility and desirability of peace*, which appeared 1968 at the United States<sup>1</sup>. According to Eco, the author sustained that the reconversion of the American society into a peaceful situation would be disastrous, because only war would be able to build the ground of a harmonious development of human societies. Moreover, organized expenses for the sake of war would be a kind of safety valve ruling the balance of the society. War engagement would build and strengthen identity values, etc., etc. One can easily complete such sentences. Does that insane pseudo-argumentation need to be followed, knowing that such discourses were at the time intended to legitimize the American involvement at the Vietnam War? But should one care more about the persistence of belligerent identity obsessions than about the ways of building bridges towards the others?

To put it straight as a first main thesis of this paper: If one does not try to build bridges and bring efforts to find the missing links in order to fill the gaps between us and the others, one is unavoidably offering space to war lords, to identity trolls, to xenophobic, narrow-minded characters that are displayed almost every evening at the precise hour of TV news. This means also (and this could be a second thesis, as a question) that one should seriously ask about which is more important and has therefore more value: either deconstructing hate speeches or building constructive, alternative discourses?

Let me put things clear at this point: both tasks are honorable and valuable, both are surely needed. If I personally see them as alternatives, this should not mean that I intend to be right, but just mean to focus upon a task which has still many unfulfilled aspects and has until now, perhaps, drawn less attention than the deconstruction of hate speeches.

The above mentioned image of getting out into nature, in order to keep one's mind clear, is not a mere metaphor. Here I just have to think about the aims of what deserves to be called real art – singularity that turns to be universal, ambiguity as a guide throughout complexity in order to neutralize all aggressions and clichés. There is

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<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco, *Construire l'ennemi et autres écrits occasionnels*. Paris : Grasset 2011, p. 36s.

a difference between moral and ethics, somehow similar to the difference between the analyses made by social sciences and literary creations. At this point it also becomes understandable why I am here avoiding the simple word “we”. Speaking in my own name, critically and self-critically, I would like to stress the artificiality of all collective constructions, in their similitude to group identity patterns. In this sense, the difference between moral and ethics also become clearer: Moral is a set of rules meant to be applied aprioristically to a complex reality, therefore being doomed to fail. An ethical point of view demands a differentiated insight into the complexity of a single character, such as it is portrayed by literature. Moral is a collection of receipts – ethics is a path to be made by walking at the very moment the problem appears.

And here is a writer back again to the loneliness in front of a lot of decisions that he or she has to take while typing each single sentence – in front of new crossroads. Moral intentions, most of all the ones dictated by the so-called “political correctness”, become useless. Both in literature and in real life, it takes courage to hold firmly Ariadne’s thread in order to cross the labyrinth and get out of it, which means: When the final sentence of a narrative with interesting characters is written down.

But what does an interesting character mean? Someone who becomes familiar to the writer who loves him or her in spite of his or her bad temper, his or her excessive kindness that makes him or her, as a character, to be a hostage of pernicious guys, for instance. At this point, a writer may realize that the path is really narrow, that the choices about the narrative sequence may become dramatically restricted. And this happens simply because of the two cliffs that have strictly to be avoided: The inclusion of a plain moral message and the allowance of sheer violence. Scylla or Charybdis?

Here comes the third thesis of this presentation: real art (concerning literature or visual arts) suggests rather than displays, or still better: shows the whole dimension of the results of the use of violence, but not necessarily violence itself. This means walking on wire, suspended over or between two abysses, the sheer “good” and “bad”.

For the treatment of the figures of the “other”, this means making the stranger into a dialogue partner, the uncanny *alius* into a familiar *alter*. In doing so, one discovers the alterity inside oneself too, and this turns to be an exciting exercise of self-discovery *nolens volens*, without falling into the traps of psychologism. Then the tiny thread of Ariadne appears to be a powerful means of balancing irony with compassion, critic with self-critic, intimacy with distance, particularity with universality – but such a result can only be the reward of the hard task of singular differentiation, not of programmatic intention.

Let me finish with a personal testimony about my own writing experience. In my last published novel (*O Arco de Nemrod*, which has been translated into Croatian under the



title *Nimrodov Luk*), one of the main characters, Mirena, says “There are no happy ends. Neither unhappy ends. There are no ends”. In the novel that I am about to finish, one of the main characters discovers that she, an European, is carrying the child of a war refugee. She is aware of all gaps that separate them, from language to ways of thinking. Yet she does not hesitate a second in her intention of carrying out and raising that child, if possible together with the father, no matter of all differences between them, as the song says, no matter what the future brings. Honestly, I would not be able to see deeper into the future. But I keep thinking that such an adventure is worth being lived with a hopeful heart, no matter the skeptical mind this person keeps. May be this child could become a new Ariadne’s thread: One of many possible threads.

(For the Round Table *Representations of the Other: Path towards Peace or War*, 51st International Writers’ Meeting, Bled 03.04.- 06.04.2019)

#### Illusory Shelters, Real Paths. Reflection On The Migrant Topic (2020)

Let me say it ahead - such a sentence like “We are all migrants” always seemed incomplete to me, even a little bit suspect, or almost as suspect as its apparent opposite that is rather a complementary issue: the search for a shelter, which is of course completely legitimate for anyone who might feel unprotected.

In our days, we cannot but take a systemic point of view, which connects different aspects and moments of material life with the history of culture and therefore the shaping of culture patterns. This leads to the immediate question about the near and distant implications of the migrant issue that is present in all the media and keeps ringing a bell in our individual consciences.

And yet – saying that “we are all migrants” might not specially contribute to improve one’s capacity and availability for empathy. This happens because empathy grows within a deeper sense of difference, along with the desire to build bridges towards other people who are radically different. Such differences regard not only language and socialization contexts, as well as culture patterns, but also the present living conditions. And yet – who is not, at least theoretically, willing to help and give more visibility, more life to the inhumane situations that the TV news constantly drops into our home screens?

Some of such images may remain deep engraved in our short-term memory. As writers, it is always possible to portrait situations that give new lives to individual stories within the History. As critical, sympathetic citizens, we may always interact with groups and associations that promote support to the integration of migrant individuals and families in our near communities. But we are also aware that precisely migrant individuals and families who settle down in our near communities are the least

problematic cases. We all know successful situations of migrant integration, for instance with small restaurants of Arabic food, where many of us love to eat tasty small plates, or tailor workshops. Both examples are also meaningful situations that are inserted in a sustainable way of living, which should be anyhow widely adopted.

What are therefore the problematic cases? I would say that it is less a matter of single or group cases than a matter of the global problem itself. In such countries that have to deal with waves of immigration, the so-called “Boat people” to whom our dear Judith Rodriguez wrote such a beautiful poem, have also to face the pressure of the public opinion, the rising of right-wing movements or parties looking for the easiest and most fragile scapegoats.

Yet the core of the problem – or one of the problem cores, if we adopt a polylogical perspective, as Julia Kristeva defended more than forty years ago – is the implicit attempt, in the sentence “We are all...”, to create a fragile, instable, therefore probably unsustainable group identity within a multitude of differences. As it has already been said, it is precisely out of the difference principle that the migrant/refugee problematic needs to be approached. For which reason?

Along with the consciousness of the difference, not only a spontaneous yet mighty sense of empathy, but also a consequent curiosity do emerge, and even a willingness to research the spectrum of real and possible causes of massive migrations in the last years. And here we have a heavy list of well-known items, from resource exploitation by big corporations up to proxy warfare situations for the sake of geopolitical interests. Let me ask at this point: How could we ever imagine as children many years ago, while playing the family game Monopoly within a (for us) well-known city scale, that the international finance would be eager to purchase every inch of land in meanwhile not so distant continents, that the earth-sharing games would become a cruel reality, where forests are uprooted for cattle breeding, where nomad desert populations are chased from their habitats in order to win raw metals for sophisticated gadgets in rich countries.

Meanwhile many people are aware of such kinds of connections, and there is a positive aspect in this issue – it makes it more difficult for demagogic, xenophobe and right-wing groups in countries with a considerable percentage of migrants to keep on supporting simplistic hate discourses. Yet these are increasing, and we have to keep trying to understand the reasons why. For this sake, let us go back to the identity problematic and its relationship with my scepticism towards the slogan “We are all migrants”.

First, let me say ahead that there are moments when similar slogans are from the start absolutely justified. This is for instance the case of “Je suis Charlie” at the beginning of 2015, after the barbaric assassination of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists in Paris.

Immediately lots of people in whole Europe understood that it was a unique moment: What was at stake was an evidently focussed, high junction of understanding and feeling, which emerged spontaneously under the light of all media. While we mourned the courageous cartoonists whose work we admired, we also feared for the precious, fragile heritage of liberty of expression, which on those days of 2015 seemed to keep claiming for blood in order to be defended. In this sense we added one more page to the long history of struggle for democracy, against all forms of obscurantism, tyranny, totalitarianism, terror. I have always praised the amazing power of satirical synthesis displayed by some iconic cartoons. Such cartoons also provide expressive connections between stationary texts, printed on paper, which appeal to concentration, reflexion and exchange of ideas on one side, and the frantic, volatile digital images, which tend to be immediately consumed and lead to diversion on the other side. This is not a judgment for the ones against the others – as contemporary persons of a generation that has grown in a pre-digital world, we rather tend to enjoy such complementarity.

Thereby we are back to the identity problem. Identity – I mean collective identity - reveals to be an illusory shelter because of its transitory, contingent character. The huge sympathetic, energetic wave that has risen 2015 for the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists was not supposed to last long, and also for this reason we are able to understand and accept such contingency. Moreover, one becomes also able to enjoy the slowness of the reflexive differentiation, which is – let me stress this – never separated from emotions that go along in such a path that follows, in Freudian terms, both the *Realitätsprinzip* and the *Lustprinzip*, the principle of reality and the principle of pleasure – pleasure of thinking, imagining, but also correcting false perceptions. Walking consciously, slowly, along the real path of recognition makes us also to wanderers, therefore joining migrants in a sympathetic movement towards them, in a permanent endeavour to place ourselves in the shoes of the others (not of an abstract Other, but of the vivid plurality of the others).

Such an insight could reach farther than one might imagine. It shows us, for instance, that the best succeeded integration means the dissolution of larger migrant groups – not families – in order to avoid the building of ghettos and to provide a real cultural exchange of small groups with the communal environment.

Here is a huge task to fulfil, which permanently regards us all Europeans, in the places where we live.

(For the Round Table *We are all Migrants – Literature in Exile, 52nd International Writers' Meeting, Bled 23.09.- 26.09.2020*)

### The Neighbour's Cloud – Or Back To The Earth (2020)

During a writers' Congress in Lisbon, in the remote year of 1982, two of our most prestigious writers, Mário Dionísio and José Saramago, fought a friendly dispute on the floor at a session during the discussion period, and all attentions felt irresistibly driven towards the arguments that came from both sides, so that nobody dared to say anything further. The issue was about the ground existence of a writer, so to say his or her way of working daily and earning a living, since both aspects are like the two faces of the same coin. On one side, Mário Dionísio (1916-1993), who was not only a poet, novelist and essayist, but also a painter and a teacher, sustained the argument that a writer should better keep a profession which could provide his or her daily bread, in order to leave to the creating brain and the producing hand the whole freedom to write. On the other side, the novelist José Saramago (1922-2010), who would 1998 receive the Nobel Prize, claimed his highly strong wish to become a full-time writer, so that he would no more be obliged to make one translation after the other for a living.

By means of this recall, we are able to catch a glimpse of a writer's dilemma, which he or she shares perhaps with a translator – the so to say hyperbolic need to stay confined for longer periods in order to put thoughts, images, characters and whole worlds together and compose them into presentable texts. With or without a bread-providing profession or any other basic income, the writer needs a huge amount of time and space to provide the most various inputs, in order to be able to give shape to any literary output. The iceberg metaphor is in this context rapidly suggestive.

This has not changed in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this sense, it was just too probable that the conditions of confinement made a writer feel, at the first moment, no more like an exception among his or her fellow-citizens for not leaving home in the morning, for having to remain working between the own walls, together with millions of people who have begun to work at their home computers since the beginning of the confinement rules in many countries.

Moreover, that first time of obligatory confinement was felt by many people as a very mixed one. I cannot conceal the delight, in many moments, coming from being able, or allowed, or even obliged, to read whole books on bed or on the wing armchair without a single bit of regret, similar to former periods of childhood flu that used to open opportunities to recreate the atmosphere of a novel, which hardly happens if one reads (or writes) just some pages a day, most of all in the night before falling asleep. In this way, there was an amount of energy which has also been set free for the attention to what was going on, for a vivid sense of solidarity towards other people, most of all the unprotected ones. And who can say that there is no one in the next circle of family and friends without real need of material support, which at the first moment can only be provided by relatives or close friends, even if untouched by the disease?

Very soon the complexity of the connections came through and puzzled all the best intentions of simplifying life and relationships, therefore of restructuring forms of communication. And soon one had to realize, during the months of confinement, that if the permission of leaving home for a while – and for the officially allowed purposes, such as buying food, medicine, or walking the dog - did not interfere with the working rhythms, the understanding of what was going on exposed all contradictions of the predatory capitalist system and the aggressions towards the environment even more blatantly. Who – except probably the owners and workers living from the cruiser ship industry – did not rejoice upon the clear waters not only in the Venice channels, but also on sea shores, on rivers all over the world? Who could not bear the contradiction of being forced to wear a mask in closed spaces, if the price was the quality of the air that we breathe all over the world, after the drastic reduction of the air traffic? And yet one could not but feel sympathetic with the people who have lost their jobs, even if many of those jobs meant an aggression towards the environment. Who has not realized that most of the governments were simply too absorbed by the fight against the immediate and direct effects of the pandemic, trying to save lives even if sometimes there was a need to choose among the people who had to be connected to a ventilator, because in a lot of situations and countries there were occasionally more people in need than ventilators available?

Soon the reported daily numbers of new cases, new deaths, were already becoming abstractions, when no one within one's acquaintances was concerned. But it always remained possible to find a balance between caring for the own health and showing solidarity. It was possible to keep looking at a flying cloud and share it in thought with the neighbour, together with the grocery shopping if he or she could not leave home and wishes of getting better as soon as possible, just before the cloud melted into air again. The cloud could in this sense become a metaphor for instinctive engagement, for an impulse to help without waiting for any reward, just because in our times people were about to discover that the illusion of a lot of patterns concerning strength, quality of life, success, etc. had also melted into air. Individual and collective self-praises, all forms of narcissistic shortness of sight and self-praise have burst like a balloon in their ridiculous uselessness. Only the duty to stay alive, to help others, to smile gently, to give a sign of solidarity at the proper distance, seems to be the proper way of living with others among the pandemic storms.

Moreover, the fact that all clouds change rapidly is perhaps able to drive one's eyes towards the earth, the environment, the living beings, the nature, which should never have been neglected for the sake of keeping ways of living that are knowingly predatory for the only planet that is given to us to live in. But where is the courage of most governments to implement long term measures of sustainability, concerning transports of people and commodities, concerning putting an end to the insanity, for instance of providing tropic fruits in rich Northern countries the whole year, of

organizing animal transports to be slaughtered after a long agony on ships for the sake of being sacrificed for religious purposes or simply eaten by wealthy people (who do not want to know how they risk to become sick after incorporating the distress of beings that simply wanted to stay alive)?

Paradigms have to change, but who has the courage to set alternative tendencies on their way? Who dares to put an ear close to the earth and listen to rivers flowing while women are washing the clothes that are made for local needs and not for luxury stores, while the consciousness that each fallen tree is jeopardizing our living balance, that the long distance production and consumption chains have to be broken? And yet those tendencies must remain initiatives of individuals and small groups that keep growing, of movements by the civil society pushing governments to think over every single measure, every single decision.

All this said and written, I badly miss this year the live meetings of the Bled colleagues, even if those meetings contributed in the past to make our ecological footprint much longer because of the unavoidable flights – but who said that human life on earth is never free of contradictions?

(Text written in the pandemic situation, for the *52. International Writers' Meeting, Bled 23.09.- 26.09.2020*)

### Some Thoughts On Freedom And Its Double Faces (2021)

If asked about which story I would find the most fascinating, perhaps I would say: A story about a situation with just a starting, with no goal but the path. The story gets therefore developed by every step taken by the protagonist(s), and the narrative gets shaped mostly by the obstacles found along the journey, that means during the narrative. The end should remain open.

One could say, with the freedom problematic things behave similarly. We all know that contemporary Western democracies are the result of a long struggle for freedom by the people throughout centuries, against tyranny and censorship, against dictatorship and misinformation, against all forms of abuse, of repression, of pressure, of seduction, or even blackmail, by all entities that embody any degenerated form of power. Because real power does not need any form of violence, as Hannah Arendt has taught us.

The first cry for freedom is always, as we well know, the freedom to say NO. The energy of a strong desire for freedom, the absolute need of freedom, without which a person cannot live with dignity, helps shaping a struggle that always begins without knowing how it is going to end. Perhaps there will be no end at all. All we know is that

the struggle must go on and on. Under this perspective, path and goal may even occasionally go together.

But let us speak about the present situation in our European countries, in our parliamentary democracies with constitutionally guaranteed freedom. In times like ours, when the pandemic threat is by far not under control, the liberty of movements is still restricted. For some people, this means a sheer limitation of their *sense of freedom*, yet not of *their real freedom* – and this would be my first thesis for discussion. In other words, there is always a gap between inwardly felt, subjective freedom, or the lack of it, on one hand, and really displayed and achieved, objective freedom, which does never exist without a double of responsibility, on the other hand.

According to my second thesis towards a definition of freedom, we might find more gaps by approaching the concept of freedom. We also begin to suspect that there are as many definitions of freedom as thinking individuals in the world, according to each result of personal judgments, based on individual experience. The gap I meant above does express itself not only as a manifestation of sheer hedonism against sanitary measures. It may be felt and lived also in the opposite sense, as a form of self-restriction within permitted limits, a self-restriction out of reflection, of responsibility, of respect for other beings on earth. That means: no real freedom without using the capacity to judge, to get engaged, to dare the step into unknown regions, but also to restrain the own personal freedom for the sake of the very common sense.

Hannah Arendt has defined “the freedom to be free” precisely as the courage to start something new. In order to enjoy the freedom *towards* any initiative, one has to be free *from* any kind of constriction, for instance from sheer material necessity, from tyrannical rules. This was the theme of a lecture she gave in the sixties, and her conclusions seem to have become consensual at the present.

Much more problematic is to set limits on the freedom of expression, when it is abused and violated by hate speech. It has always to be analyzed and defined in each case and situation. In present democracies there is a kind of reticence to establish rules and simply to forbid, for instance, the activity of far-right groups or parties. According to the European historical experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Constitutions include clauses and articles explicitly forbidding fascist activity and propaganda. Yet in some countries (including Portugal), far-right parties are growing through populist propaganda, allegedly “against the system”, and hate speech against immigrants and minorities. It is possible, but not always easy, to deconstruct their discourses. It takes time, it takes patience, it takes responsibility, it takes - freedom.

My third thesis on freedom is simple: it remains an open concept, a blank page. At the corner of each definition, double faces are lurking.

(For the Round Table *The Future of Freedom. The Writer in Action: Protest or Dialogue*, 53rd International Writers' Meeting, Bled 09.06.- 11.06.2021)

Writing Among Roaring Boots. On The Persistent Fragility Of The Hand (2022)

The two main themes for two of the round tables are indissolubly intertwined, in my opinion. If the writing hand seeks a shelter in order to draw some consequent lines about what it is going on in the present troubled world, as required for one round table, it cannot ignore the hooves of the contemporary Apocalypse horses, as named by the proposal for another round table. The monstrous shadow of war has meanwhile overshadowed the five mentioned items. At the moment I write these lines, we can but hope that the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army stops as soon as possible and that a cease-fire makes place for negotiations. We know, alas, that every compromise will be linked to losses among ruins and deaths.

If four of the new horsemen seem to have conquered an undeniable place in the media (covid, hate speech, violent protests, global warming), yet I must question the idea of a "decline of democracy", since the core of democracy is conflict itself, including the struggle for freedom of expression in every place of the globe where it should be muzzled. And so we are approaching the conditions of possibility given to the writer, starting with the assertion that such thing as "global ethics" is probably impossible to be put in practice in every region on earth, precisely because democracy is a mosaic, better, a kaleidoscope full of contrasts, of points of view, of political positions, and I fear that the expression of ethics is only recognizable by most people where it coexists with a blatant lack of it.

Therefore, a narrow path is displayed in front of the writer, between silence on one hand and trivialization of all evils, as named above, on the other hand. Such evils are themselves, as we know, exploited to the marrow by the media that drop all day into our homes an indigestible cocktail, mostly with all these ingredients, heavily salted with ideologically formatted war games, as filtered messages of real tragedies. And these have to be understood and deconstructed, which is extremely difficult within a vertiginously changing reality.

Some years ago, a Portuguese politician admitted in an interview to be unable to understand what was going on during civil war in an African country. A scholar who wrote weekly for a newspaper commented: "Had he read Shakespeare, then perhaps he would have understood better what is at stake in this conflict". Actually, the writer has the responsibility to go beyond epidemic phenomena such as hate speech and look for their remote causes, even if the always provisory conclusions should remain as mere working hypotheses. He is entitled to pierce them, searching for their origins, roots, contexts.



We may also chose a point of view as a starting point – and here I chose Gaia. In this sense I pick “global warming” as a complain out of the depth of the voiceless nature. Out of such a platform I may become able to discern a whole palette of aspects, for instance the consequences of regarding the living earth as an object that can be appropriated in all possible senses of making profit: mining, drilling, deforesting, promoting mass agriculture, animal breeding, etc. If it can be so, the ideology of growth never quits persisting to help such possibilities become real. In this sense too, a non-anthropocentric perspective could see a mere gradation between the brutal appropriation of large polar regions for oil and mineral drilling, as it was being dealt by D. Trump and W. Putin before 2020, and the destruction of a sovereign foreign country like Ukraine, fighting for its national identity at the beginning of 2022. Both disrespect nature, cities and lives – of people, of animals. The first issue could be regarded as the beginning of a war, carefully planed and carried out by human beings against nature. The present war can be seen in the same perspective: Like nature beings, human and other living beings and cities are at the present treated as mere objects. In this sense, my understanding of global ethics could be described with the simple word RESPECT.

JUST STOP ALL FORMS OF AGGRESSION.