

ACCIDENTAL PLEASURES

Yeb Wiersma, 2010

There's still time, for some exercise.

I am walking the streets of Warsaw [1] – pondering what I will be speaking about later that afternoon at the conference [2] – when loud and throaty calls are asking for my attention: *caw-aw-ah, caw-aw-ah*.

I look up.

Even though I am aware of this scruffy crow [3] being just another city dweller roaming for human leftovers, I decide it's not just some random hooded creature, but my personal VIB – Very Important Bird – escorting me towards my final destination: Ujazdowski Castle.

While I am checking on my aerial chaperon, my mind wanders.

- I have to think of Kaos [4]. The film. Pretending I am the dizzying bird's-eye-view flying over the archaic and unyielding chorography of Agrigento.
- I have to think of the fact that I hardly see any hooded crows in The Netherlands. I wonder why.
- I have to think of how there's always a Joni Mitchell [5] song to intensify my journeys: There's a crow flying, black and ragged, from tree to tree. He's black as the highway that's leading me, Now he's diving down. To pick up on something shiny, I feel like that black crow, flying in a blue, blue sky.
- I have to think of the emerging artists who signed up for my workshop. They are curious, to find out what it means and takes to become an artist-in-residence. They are ready, to leave their terra cognita behind. How can I show them which path to take to make this happen?

Some of them might be disappointed. Since I won't be handing out A to Z guides on 'How to become Artist-in-Residence'. Nor will I be selling 'all-inclusive-last-minute' package deals.

Dear artist, I would like to invite you to accompany me. On a trip.

What shall we bring;

- Neon Lights
- Laughter
- Party Supplies
- Emergency Blankets [6]
- Vertical Clouds
- Large Windows
- Pine Trees
- Brainstorms
- High-rises [7]
- Whirlwinds
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Let's surprise ourselves today and NOT take the highway, but follow the road less travelled by [8].

Recently I wrote down a passage written by the author Rebecca Solnit who stated in her book 'The Field Guide to Getting Lost' [9]:

to be lost is to be fully present, is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery
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 to be lost is to be fully present, is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery

Like a mantra, I am reading this line. Over and over. She's right, in order to find inspiration and materials to create intriguing and merciless art works, you have to allow yourself to travel within this field of uncertainty and mystery.

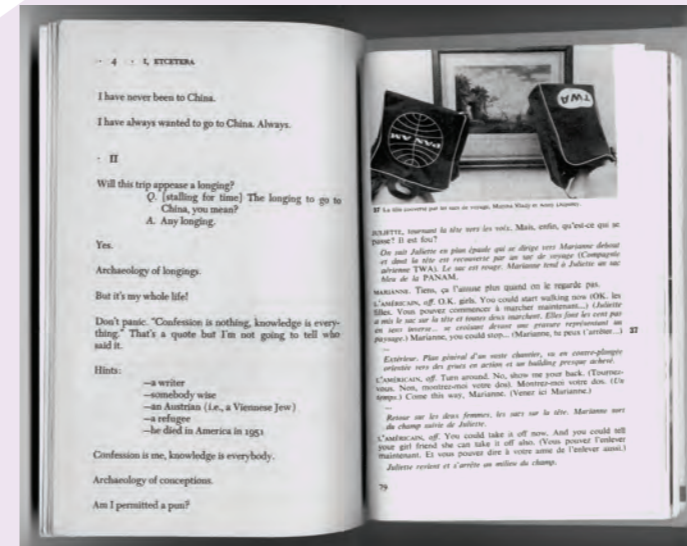
It's not always easy though to maintain a crisp state of mind in which there's plenty of room for serendipitous experiments. Daily occupations and worries lurk around the corner and can keep you from falling or roaming around. Losing yourself is serious business. It requires full dedication. And time, time to travel.

INWARDS AND OUTWARDS

Of course, there are many ways to undertake an illuminating journey. I am not suggesting you always need to bring your passport [10]. You do not necessarily need to go far to feel like playing [11] again; there are many ways to revitalize;

- Start Running
- Lye Down in the Grass
- Organize a Lecture Series
- Start a Fire
- Make Out [12]
- Get Bored
- Buy a Bottle of Something
- Collect Driftwood
- See the Library
- Learn Tap-Dancing

But, what if this doesn't do the trick, what if you keep longing?



Left page: *I, etcetera*, Susan Sontag. Right page: *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, J.L. Godard

When this is the case and even when this is not the case – you're doing great, but you have an adventurous mind –, this might be your boarding call.

Artists have always travelled to the far corners of the world, in search for isolation* and inspiration. [13]
 – nothing new about that–

*By the way, do not forget to pack loneliness.

Alienating yourself from time to time from your comfort zone, by going somewhere else, by changing your scenery and set of working and living conditions, often functions like an eye wash station; it triggers your imagination and lust for life. When you are able to deal with the uncertainties that come along with exploring new territories – like confusion and chaos – I am sure you will be back.

For more.

One way of travelling – inwards as well as outwards – is to sign up for an artist-in-residence programme.

SAFETY WARNING:

Working your way through the voluminous catalogue of artist-in-residence opportunities can be overwhelming and might lead to (temporary) indecision where to go.

And yes, they do come in all different colours and sizes. [14]

Upon arrival, you will land softly though; artist-in-residence organisations are the specialists when it comes to hosting travelling artists. They know what it takes to comfort strangers and what it means to embrace otherness. Not only will they share their hospitality and their expertise with you, they will also provide you with a set of professional working tools to facilitate your artistic needs.

Dear artist, you are well on your way, heading towards your residence of interest. Let's say goodbye. Here and now.

I do not see any barriers nor reasons NOT to continue. You are sufficiently equipped. To fall. Into mysterious fields.

Of uncertainty.

And that will make all the difference [8].

CAW-AW-AH!

CAW-AW-AH!

CAW-AW-AH!

CAW-AW-AH!

My accidental friend, my bird's-eye-view calls in again.

It is time, for some action.

I look up as far as I can, before the crow disappears in the sky. In the nearby distance I hear a small crowd of people laughing.

I smile, while I walk towards them.

ACCIDENTAL

1

'Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. To lose oneself in a city – as one loses itself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling' – Quote by Walter Benjamin – Benjamin was not only a professional strolling philosopher, he was also known for his miniature handwritings. His ambition was to squeeze hundred lines of crabbed, compressed thinking on to a single page of notepaper. He never managed to do so. (www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jan/27/society)



3

Romanian artist Anca Benera has been one of the artist-in-residents at Ujazdowski Castle in 2008. During her residency she observed and investigated the lives of Warsaw's wild animals – familiar from gossip, tales, legends and research reports. It turns out that crows like magpies and ravens often prey on other bird's nestlings. A magpie can even catch a baby sparrow on the fly. (http://csw.art.pl/a-i-r_en/index.php?/artist/anca-benera/)



5

At the age of nine, Joni Mitchell contracted polio during a Canadian epidemic, but she recovered after a stay in hospital. It was during this time that she first became interested in singing. She describes her first experience singing while in hospital during the winter in the following way: 'They said I might not walk again, and that I would not be able to go home for Christmas. I wouldn't go for it. So I started to sing Christmas carols and I used to sing them real loud. The boy in the bed next to me, you know, used to complain. And I discovered I was a ham'. She also started to smoke at the age of nine, a habit which is arguably one of the factors contributing to the change in her voice in recent years. Mitchell herself disputes this in several interviews. (www.wikipdia.org)



10

NOTES

2

RE-tooling Residencies was the title of the conference organized by Ujazdowski Castle and Res Artis, as part of the Eastern European Res Artis Meeting. The conference provided a platform for the critical reworking of both existing and emerging residency models in Central and Eastern European countries, Warsaw, November 2009.

4

The film *Kaos* -directed by the Taviani Brothers- is based on Luigi Pirandello's short stories. Pirandello was born in a village with the curious name of *Kaos*, a poor suburb of Agrigento, a town in southern Sicily. Typical for Pirandello writings is to show how art or illusion mixes with reality and how people see things in a very different way — words are unreliable and reality is at the same time true and false. (www.wikipedia.org)

6

The Emergency Blanket from Gelert is made from strong insulating material; aluminised both sides to reflect at least 90% of radiant body heat. Provides emergency protection in all weathers when camping and mountaineering. (www.cave-crag.co.uk/1689/Gelert-Emergency-Blanket.html)



ACCIDENTAL

7

On the second day of the conference I attended a resourceful talk by the visual artist Cyprien Gaillard who presented several of his iconoclastic works and films. In collaboration with musician Koudlam, who was responsible for the accompanying soundtracks. At the time of the conference, Gaillard and Koudlam were both artist-in-residence guests of the DAAD & Berliner Kunstprogramm and closely working together on a new series of works.



In 'Belief in the Age of Disbelief' from 2005, Gaillard has introduced high-rises into 17th Century Dutch landscape etchings. These post-war structures, once a symbol of utopian promise that have now come to represent racial conflict, urban decay, criminality and violence, have been seamlessly assimilated into a rural idyll. Like the paintings of Hubert Robert, admired by Diderot, who depicted ancient ruins and even the imaginary future ruins of the Louvre, Gaillard comments on the relationship between romanticism and decay, and architectures' inherent communicative power.

10

'Artist-in-residence isn't necessarily about international mobility anymore, it is about inhabiting a space, and that space might be around the corner. The concept of an artist' residency is no longer attached to geographical mobility. While formerly a residence was about going somewhere else in a geographical sense, and mainly outside one's own country, artists also want to experience difference in terms of a social, cultural or professional otherness. This doesn't have to be far, but can take place in your own city'. This challenging statement was made by Mrs. Odile Chenal, who is part of the Research and Development Team of the European Cultural Foundation. She was one of the guest speakers at the Ujazdowski conference, 2009 (reported by Erik Hagoort at www.transartists.org)

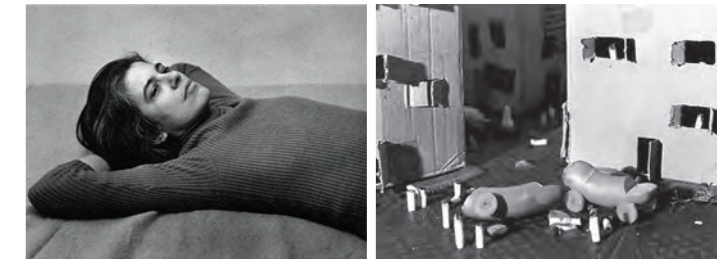
NOTES

8

This line was stolen from Robert Frost's poem: *The Road Not Taken* (1920)

9

Further Reading, books I consulted: *A field Guide to Getting Lost* by Rebecca Solnit – *Will happiness find me?* by the Swiss artists Fischli and Weiss – *A project for a trip to China* by Susan Sontag.



Left, Susan Sontag, right, Fischli & Weiss.

11

Jules et Jim, a playful film by Francois Truffaut, 1962.

11

12

Jack Nicholson and Maria Schneider are about to make out in Michelangelo Antonioni's movie *The Passenger*, 1975



14

The Trans Artists website hosts an online database, which contains more than 1.000 different artist-in-residence programs, world wide; start wandering at www.transartists.org.



13

Inspiration and isolation are just one of the numerous reasons why artists travel today and sign up for an artist-in-residence programme. The Trans Artists Foundation informs artists of all disciplines on artist-in-residence opportunities. On their website you will find an extensive and helpful checklist, which guide you through all the different criteria of why and how to join an artist-in-residence programme. (www.transartists.org)



Vatnasafn Iceland, Library of Water by the artist Roni Horn who has often travelled since 1975 to Iceland. The landscape and isolation of Iceland have strongly influenced her body of work. In 2010 CCA Ujazdowski Castle presented a large number of Roni Horn's photographs. It must have been 1996 when I first met the work of Roni Horn. Her works open me up, seduce me to wonder off. Again and again.