

10:00 (IN THE CAFÉ QUERANDI)

I was drinking coffee, I was eating crescent rolls. And something else. When the waiter walked up to ask what I needed, his hand hung down, quiet, curled up, secret—and idle—until not knowing what to think, I thought about some sort of bush, which I had looked at once at a station, from the window of my train. The hand attacked me in the silence that fell between us. . . . Period. The end. Someone was already walking in and sitting down noisily at a neighboring table—two men—and they asked for dice.

I pulled letters out of my pocket.

"This is a strange example of great intelligence whose object of interest is a field from which he is intuitively cut off. . . ."

"Sandauer est arrivé ici il y a une dizaine de jours. . . ."

"Passing through Kielce, I found Rena. . . ."

"Richter sent me copies of his letters in which he explains all the oddities and problems of this prose. . . ."

10:45 (AT HOME)

The hand of the waiter had vanished and was no more. Until a certain thought from Nietzsche injected it with a dose of splendid existence.

Neske, the German publisher of Heidegger, sent me his *Essais et conférences*, published by Gallimard. The book lay next to the record with the quartet and caught my attention. Why, here in his lecture on Zarathustra, Heidegger discusses the thought that Nietzsche called his "most abysmal"—about the eternal return, "which liberates the spirit of vengeance," vanquishes time that escapes, time that approaches, and imparts to becoming the character of being. *Imprimer au devenir le caractère de l'être . . . telle est la plus haute volonté de puissance.*

I won't let them lead me around by the nose—I am familiar with this childhood, frolicking with Infinity, I know all too well how much frivolity and irresponsibility is needed to proudly enter the terraces of those thoughts-not-to-be-thought and severity-not-to-be-withstood, I know this brilliance! And this Heidegger, at his Nietzschean lecture, suspended over the precipices—clowns! To despise the abyss and not to digest unreasonable thoughts—I determined to do this long ago. I ridicule a metaphysics . . .

. . . which devours me (*nota bene?*).

It is interesting that at the same time and without the least embarrassment I can be a man and a Man. While wondering whether or not to send out the laundry, I am like an arc stretching from there, from the primal beginning, to its latest realizations in what is before me. Not losing a most everyday train of thought for even a second, I am the Mystery of being and its pride, its malady and torment. The bitterness of humanity. The fury of humanity. The unleashing of humanity. The quiet of humanity. The quiet hand of the waiter there in Querandi—quiet and curled up. What is it doing there—while I am here?

11:30

If I had not returned to the hand of the waiter, it would have easily disintegrated into nothingness. . . . And now it will keep returning to me because I have returned to it.

12:00 (AT THE AMBASSADOR'S)

One of those limpid days with a refreshing heat, deliciously mixing late spring with early summer. The park has become green from the palace to the river, which, as almost always, is immobile and blinding. Breakfast was served in the pavilion, outdoors. Sausage patties—then small and masterly beefsteaks on toast, probably à la Chateaubriand, with artichokes—and phenomenal desserts of cold fruit and cream—add to this a few wines, five butlers.

Adante scherzo quasi allegretto. Sun flashing on crowns of fern. Conversation ripples and gleams. And the minister plenipotentiary, an amphitryon, playfully wraps the serpent of conversation first around Spanish bulls, then around Aztec sculpture, Parisian theater, Argentine *asado*. The topiary swans glisten with pearls, while we—the guests, butlers—are like a concert hushed in flawless singing. The French ambassador finds a few kind words for the writer who has paid him a visit, and the flash of a restrained smile appears on the lips of both ambassadors (that is, his and mine). Liqueurs are served.

A diplomatic hand on the arm of the chair, with fingers slightly bent, but it is not this hand but that one, left there as a *point of reference*—a distant flash in the night, a beacon! Farewell, land! I am on the open sea, foam spurting, wind, storm, furrowed waters . . . and the open sea, open thunder and fury.

(Satisfaction that I had not donned my white but cream-colored shirt from Smart—because we ate in the garden—and that I did not have on too ornate a tie, brown, single-toned, rather unattractive.)

5:00 (IN THE CAR OF THE EMBASSY ATTACHÉ OFFICER)

She swallowed the hook. . . . What, Olivos already? . . . This old man, his coloring . . . Charlemagne has more in common with me than does Bolesław Chrobry. . . . They will have to grow accustomed little by little to revolutions vanishing into the past. . . . I have not seen . . . in a long time. . . . The dentist . . . Should we go to Tandil? . . . How easy it is to move the world from a standstill. . . . Make a telephone call . . .

6:00 (AT HOME)

I am on the open sea again!

She prattled and gabbed without mercy. Until her girlfriends cried: Cut your tongue off! Well, this offended her!

She grabbed the scissors, snip, snap, look, you bad girls: the tongue is on the ground, blood on the lips.

In a corner bar. A seventeen-year-old worker talks to his fiancée on the phone. . . .

. . . Hospital. The right leg shattered. The left cut up and threatened with gangrene . . . ??? What luck! What a coincidence . . . because exactly when he was calling, the Peronist Moya, a militant and a terrorist, was passing by the bar with a bomb under his arm. The bomb mechanism was put into motion unexpectedly. Horrified, Moya threw the bomb helter-skelter, into the bar, and . . .

Without legs. Without a tongue. I read this in the paper.

I was alone, I was sitting on the couch with the paper and before me in the middle of the room were two tables loaded with papers, the back of the chair, a typewriter cover, farther away a wardrobe. I was on the open, open, open sea. What can one do? Pity? I will have pity *here*—and they *there*. . . . Love? I will love *here*—and they *there*. . . . If only our positions didn't bypass each other. . . . A strong wind, dark masses of water that are thrown up and fall back in an uncontained boiling, drowning in one another, a furrowed expanse, an expanse of unappeased movement, no land, no lighthouse and only there, there, there, in Querandi, that one, that chosen hand . . . what is its purpose?

I am very afraid of the devil. A strange confession from the lips of an unbeliever. I am incapable of liberating myself from the idea of the devil. . . . This roaming of the dreadful in my immediate vicinity . . . What good are the police, rights, all guarantees and means of solicitude if a Monster strolls freely among us and nothing protects us from him, nothing, nothing, there is no barrier between him and us. His hand is free among us, the most free of the free! What separates the bliss of the casual stroller from the underground wailing of the voices of the tormented? Absolutely nothing, only empty space. . . . The earth upon which we walk is so covered with pain, we wade in it up to our knees—and this is today's, yesterday's, the day before yesterday's pain, the pain from a thousand years ago—for one should not be deluded, pain does not dissolve in time and the cry of a child from thirty centuries ago is no less of a cry than the one that resounded three days ago. This is the pain of all generations and all beings—not just of man. And finally . . . but who told you that death can bring some sort of peace by releasing you from this world? "And what if nothing but spiders are 'there'?" And what if there is pain there infinitely exceeding anything we can imagine? You don't tremble too much at the thought of that moment because you surrender to the illusive certainty that beyond that wall you will encounter nothing that will be completely ahuman—where does this certainty come from? What authorizes you to have it? Isn't there some diabolical principle contained even in the very womb of our world which is inaccessible to man, inconceivable to the human mind and emotion? Where is our guarantee that the other world is supposed to be more human? Perhaps it is antihumanity itself, the complete contradiction of our nature? But we cannot accept this, for man because of his nature—and this is certain—is incapable of comprehending evil.

Point. I want to believe that in Querandi there is nothing deviating from the most ordinary of the ordinary even though I lack all basis for such an assumption . . . but the presence of evil makes my existence something so risky . . . so disturbing . . . so inclined to the diabolical . . . that in truth it would be difficult for me to succumb to any certainty at all, especially since the lack of data in this case has exactly the same meaning as an abundance of data.

6:30

That ridiculous Leon Bloy! One day he writes in his journal that that morning a terrible cry awakened him, as if it were coming from

infinity. He did not doubt that this was the cry of a damned soul, so he fell to his knees and surrendered himself to ardent prayer.

The next day he writes: "Ah, now I know whose soul that was. The press announced that Alfred Jarry died yesterday, at exactly the same hour and minute at which I heard his cry. . . ."

And now for a contrast—the ridiculous Alfred Jarry! In order to avenge himself on God, he asked for a toothpick and picking his teeth, died.

I prefer him to Bloy, whom God supplied mainly with a splendid "absolute" superiority over other mortals. Bloy lived well off the Omnipotent One.

Medieval mind, medieval soul? During the time of Charlemagne the role of the intelligentsia was exactly the opposite of today. Then an intellectual was submitted to the collective thought (of the church) and it was the simple man who thought—empirically, dogmatically—for himself—in practical, daily matters. . . . Today it is just the opposite. . . . Nothing will stop the intelligentsia from running riot any longer . . . (the way communism would like). . . . I have to go see J.

If I could for one moment cope with the whole. To constantly live only with fragments—pieces? To always concentrate on one thing, in order to have all the rest escape? What do I need this Leon Bloy for? And then again . . .

8:00 (AT THE CORNER OF LAS HERAS)

I dropped by J.'s but he wasn't home.

I was standing on a stone island in the middle of the street. Evening and early nightfall, lights being born and flickering—and the growing hubbub, cars shoot out next to me, I barely have a chance to look around when two trolley buses turn with a screech, a column of ringing trams approaches, a truck tears out from behind me, I turn around pierced by the whistle of speeding taxis—what madness is this?—still more of this, faster, a high-pitched, earsplitting tone rises from the booming, grating, ringing din, swarming with prickly flashes.

Speed moving into the deep—moments of such velocity that everything wailed, and I lost my footing on the island as if swept up by an undertow. . . . I don't like and I like Bach. I am a "profound nonexpert" of painting. He said ridiculous things. . . . What time is it? It's unfortunate that I lost the letter in French about the translation, when I told M. to leave the table . . . it's good that it happened this way . . . but too bad that . . . What a crater! . . . I have no luck with . . . That bill

. . . Chlorine—God, save me from the river surrounding me from the outside and the even worse river that rushes in my center—from the inner whirlpool—from my dissipation into a thousand moments. From my own haze! My dust cloud! From the flurry that I am. But I do have a—calm—hand in my pocket.

But what about the hands of these people speeding by in vehicles! Calm. Resting . . . on knees. . . . And the hand in Querandi? What does it do? And what would happen if I knelt before it? If I fell to my knees before a hand? On this island . . . here . . . Well. Yes . . . But what for? No, I will not do this. Of course not, from the beginning I knew that I would not do it.

8:15 (IN THE TRAM)

I would call this groping along the peripheries in search of . . . A constant toiling on the borderline in order to . . . An attempt to build . . . An attempt (unsuccessful, as always, as all attempts) to raise there, farther away, some kind of altar, to whatever, in any old place . . . Ah, this kind of grabbing onto any old thing! The hand of the waiter from the Café Querandi!

8:30 (IN THE RESTAURANT SORRENTO)

The waiter comes to the table, I choose snails *à la marinera* and a carafe of white wine, but his left hand is at rest, just like the one in Querandi, although this hand of his doesn't concern me at all—it is important only insofar as it is not that hand. . . . I thought about this a little for my amusement . . . and it amused me that that hand had caught hold of me so easily . . . and also that it grips me harder than this amusement.

To the left and the right the bourgeoisie. The women are putting cadaver meat into the openings of their mouths and moving their mandibles—this goes to their gullet and alimentary canal—they make a face as if they were sacrificing themselves—and again open the opening to put in . . . The men operate knives and forks—among other things their calf muscles are nourishing themselves in their trouser legs, exploiting the workings of the alimentary organs . . . and it would really be strange to conceive of the work of the persons gathered here as the feeding of calves! . . . ? . . . But the apparatus of their movements is set down to the tiniest detail, these manipulations have been shaped by centuries—

reaching for a lemon, buttering pieces of bread, talking in between swallowing, pouring or serving with a conversation on the side, with a crooked smile—the uniformity of movement almost as if it were from the Brandenburg Concertos—and here one sees humanity repeating itself without respite. A room filled with grub, revealing itself in endless variations, like a waltz figure taken up by dancers—and the face of this room, focused on its eternal function, was the face of a thinker.

Yes, but—oh God—this is Sorrento!

This is not Querandi!

8:40 (IN THE RESTAURANT SORRENTO)

Why do I feign anger?

Why should it bother me that this is not Querandi?

And why am I clinging to his hand like a drowning man—I'm not drowning, am I? I admit that the hand means absolutely nothing to me. I do not know that waiter personally. A hand like so many other hands . . .

9:00 (ON CORRIENTES STREET)

I adore the thing that I myself have elevated. I kneel before the thing that has no right to demand of me that I kneel before it—consequently, my kneeling derives only from me.

My anger is the anger of that sea—an unending expanse, a movement unencompassed by anything—but my secret is the fact that I am located in reality twice. Because I walk along Corrientes Street in Buenos Aires having eaten my supper in the restaurant Sorrento. Yet at the same time, I am there, on the open, open, open, and roiling sea! Tossed by tossing spaces . . . I am on Corrientes and, at the same time, I am in the darkest, interstellar abysses—alone in space! I have just had a pretty good supper and I am cast into infinity, like a shout. . . .

Bah! I chose a hand in Querandi simply to grab hold of something, to feel in relation to something. . . . As a point of reference . . . I chose it precisely for the reason that it has no meaning . . . all directions, places, and things are equally good in my boundlessness, where there is nothing except motion that is becoming. I chose it from the billion things that surround me, but I could have chosen something else. . . . Only now I would not want it to do something to me! To do with me—

or to do to me. . . . Am I no longer alone? Am I already one-on-one with the waiter's hand, which I have chosen . . . are the two of us together?

9:10 (CORRIENTES STREET)

I do this only to show how rapacious this parenthetical hand can be in grasping (parenthetically). For my amusement.

9:15 (CORRIENTES)

Gombrowicz felt that he had the right to a metaphysical tempest, to a cosmic catastrophe and a transcendental spine tingle. On the condition, however, that he not betray the everyday.

He felt that he had the right to sail on the open sea on the condition that his foot did not leave solid ground, this ground here, in Buenos Aires.

9:20 (IN A BAR ON THE CORNER OF LAVALLE AND SAN MARTIN)

A discussion with Gomez on the subject of Raskolnikov (because one of them, Goma, or perhaps Asno, is reading *The Possessed*).

My view: that in *Crime and Punishment*, there is no drama of the conscience, in the classic, individualistic sense of the word. This is what I lectured to them about.

—At the beginning of the novel—says Gomez—Raskolnikov commits a crime. At the end of the novel he voluntarily turns himself in to the police and confesses the crime. What is this if not his conscience?

I: —Not so simple, *niños!* Look closer. . . .

Raskolnikov does not experience pangs of conscience. In the last chapter it is clearly stated that he regretted only that he “was unsuccessful”—this he considered his sole transgression and in the throes of this guilt, no other, he bowed his head before the “absurd” sentence that overtook him.

If he lacked conscience—what force possessed him therefore to give himself into the hands of the police? What sort of force? The system. The system of almost mirrored reflections.

Raskolnikov is not alone—he is situated in a certain group of persons, Sonia . . . the investigating magistrate . . . his sister and mother . . . his friend and others . . . that is what his little world is like. His

own conscience is silent—Raskolnikov, on the other hand, suspects that other consciences will not be silent and that if those people found out, they would condemn him as a criminal. He is hazy to himself, and haziness is allowed everything. But he knows that others see him distinctly, more sharply though superficially, and, for them, judgment of him would be possible. Well—for them—he would be something of a criminal? It is from this suspicion that a feeling of guilt begins to crystallize, he slowly sees himself with the eyes of others and he sees himself a little like a criminal—and this image of himself he communicates in thought to the others—and from there return the even more distinct face of a murderer and the damning verdict. But this conscience is not his and he senses this. This is a specific conscience, arising and growing between people, in a system of reflections—where one man sees himself in the other. Gradually, in proportion to the swelling of a bad self-image after committing the crime, Raskolnikov makes them his judges more and more—and his guilt outlines itself more and more boldly. But I repeat, this is not the verdict of his conscience—this is the verdict that has risen from a reflection, a mirrored verdict.

As for me, I would be inclined to think that Raskolnikov's conscience manifests itself in only one thing: when it surrenders to that artificial, interhuman, mirrored conscience as if it were his rightful conscience. Herein lies the moral: because he who killed another human being now fulfills the dictate born of human association. And he does not ask if it is just.

12:10 A.M. (ON THE WAY HOME)

I could have told them. About the hand. I didn't.

12:20 A.M.

Yes, yes . . .

My good God, the things one says!

One says whatever comes to mind. This mechanism of speaking . . . astounding! When and how do I plan the sentences I utter! How do I know what I want to say, if I do not consider it for a moment in the brisk course of my speech? When beginning a sentence, do I know how it will end? How the words choose and round themselves . . . the thoughts . . . ?

Yes . . .

But better yet, explain why, in saying so much, you told them nothing about the hand, about the hand from Querandi?

I could have said something. But I didn't.

Whereby it became more secret.

And in its own way that *reflex* . . . this *reflex* . . . is a mirrored conscience, created from reflections . . . but this is, after all, similar to creating for oneself the hand somewhere on the outside, beyond . . . as if on the strength of the reflex. . . .

12:30 A.M.

How his conscience built itself up (Raskolnikov). Just as this hand is building itself up.

It is like a parasite. Now it is feeding on what I said about Dostoyevski—it will not rest until it sucks from my words . . . everything that it needs. . . .

For what?

Polyp! It sucks, exploits, in order to construct, to construct there, beyond my limit. . . . It is indefatigable!

I have to finish these notes and send them off tomorrow so that they will make it to Paris by the sixth.

The sixth—the sixth—it is not yet here, it will be, but here it is . . . like the hand!

Again!

12:50 A.M. (AT HOME)

Where can it be right this minute? Still in Querandi? Perhaps it is already resting and sleeping in some apartment, on some pillow?

Futile hopes. There is no way to take advantage of its sleeping, to be rid of it. . . . The more it sleeps, the more alert it is. The less it is, the more it is.

Let us note: It seemed so calm when I saw it for the first time, in Querandi . . . but it is becoming more and more possessive . . . and I myself no longer know what could stop it there, on the periphery . . . where I end.