

I made a line in her direction but then a body slammed into me, pushing me obliquely away. I swam furiously, and saw that she was closer, but then a poorly designed streetlamp took her by surprise.

The air was filled with sprays of rust, liver, and tomato. I called, “O#%M#T!” and saw her head jerk around. Her face wrinkled...and then we were slammed again—she by a quadricycle, I by a bowling cube—in neatly opposite directions. She spun and spun and I swam and swam, and every time we came within earshot, we were pinballed away. I could not reach her.

A steady paw grabbed me from behind and stopped my motion. I looked around at the black-encased arm of an inertiate as another one nearby calmly and easily stilled O#%M#T’s flight. It held her grasped in its paw as the two experts considered. I shook myself free and walked towards her.

I was barely aware that the entire landscape was careening around us as I moved toward O#%M#T in the pinball’s eye. Clods of dirt exploded around her head like fireworks as the inertiate’s paw held her shoulder firmly. Her eyes spun at me. I reached one hand out and just touched her scales; with the other hand I reached out to brace myself against the nearest solid thing. It was the tower. I pressed into it.

“O#%M#T,” I said to her.

The tower moved. She wrinkled her face. The tower tipped. The inertiates jerked out of repose, signaled each other. One grabbed me again and held me against the ground. The one holding her seized her with all three arms. He threw her up at the sky in a slightly angled trajectory that missed every sailing sedan chair and clod of petals still in motion. Her limbs went out in a wheel. But she did not slow down; she flew up like a falling star resurrected. The world of objects slowed down below as she soared.

The tower swung harmlessly like a bat striking out, and then settled.

“O#%M#T!” I screamed.

“O#%Y#\$T,” the inertiate holding me said, his voice as dark as anything I’d ever seen.

I watched her body spinning away, moving more freely than she had ever moved before. She rose, growing smaller and ever more graceful as she left the shreds of friction behind and flew away unobstructed. It seemed in that moment that she was a being made not for the confines of a world mourning its loss of gravity, but for the void.

The black-suited paw held me down. Around me, bodies and benches were bumping into perfect balance, equaling each other, bringing each other back into inertia. All around me, the world was ceasing.

When all was again still, the inertiate carried me back to the ship, and made it clear that I was no longer welcome on the planet. I gazed out the window for weeks afterward, hoping that we would at least encounter her body floating through space, that I might at least hold her cold, dead scales one more time. Of course, I never saw her again. I also never saw the terrifying jewels and blackness of space again, never saw anything in space again but clarity and structures.

But for me the night sky has always held the possibility of frozen life, and eternally preserved beauty. Every gravitated world I’ve stood on has possessed the possibility of drawing to it O#%M#T’s remains, and someday I could be standing here, or somewhere, and her body could fall into my arms from the sky as if she were made for a world that holds its own. She would be dirty, lumpen, and magicless. And I’m sure I’d find that we weigh exactly the same.

CLAIRE LIGHT

SEE:
ENTROPY
FUTURE

GREEN SCARE

Pay strict attention to moments when you are moved to sentimental response by the mere appearance of emotional flux: your dog’s face, for example, the mesmeric flexibility of that face changing from anxiety to joy when you emerge from a doorway. Or, your mother’s body, its grace in movement, its manifest pain when she is arthritic, but the persistent lyric of her trunk revolving, her hand sweeping across to perform some task. Attend to these moments, these images, carefully and you will notice all the elaborate armature

that is needed for them to have their effect: the suture, the absorption, the strings of language we are force-fed from birth: words like *dog*, or even *doggy*, and *mother*, or *mama*, words that are turned on in us like faucets before we are psychically mature enough to decide for ourselves how they will signify, how resonate.

Let's say you are a surgeon who performs dissections of live, unanaesthetized baboons. You do this, let's say, with the institutional support of and between the walls of the Huntingdon Life Sciences laboratory in East Millstone, New Jersey.

Day after day, without end, you cut baboons with a heavy heart, able, of course, to construe their screams and cries as the cinematic hysteria of the living with its train of codes and conditionings trailing behind. Your heavy heart, your grieving silence, is for the resounding pathos of the scalpel between your fingers, with whose dense, feeling metal you move: almost not movement, your stilled concentration; tissue is quick to yield, when it understands, finally, that that is its function.

Three vivisections a day, taking notes and entering them into a database, a three dimensional grid to envelope every bodily zone, every possible disruption that could be caused by six months of inhaling the binding agent used in the Viagra pill; the baboons flow across your operation table like shades down the river Styx, immaterial to a far point, yet shrieking with all the force they were, as infants, trained to muster, attempting perhaps to drown out the more palpable agony of the clamps that hold open their cavities, to drown out the armored calm of the surgeon, who is you, standing above.

Let's say you go home that night to your house and your family. You turn the car into the cul-de-sac, and all of that hard, static, melancholy you have all your life cultivated is broken in an instant by the sight of a hundred agitated people outside your house, yelling, chanting, singing songs—jostling you with all the devious agility of the living-temporary as you make your way from car to house.

And what if a few weeks later you arrive at work in the morning, and though everything appears to be in exquisite order, the building secure, the floor cleaned and polished, the animals in their cages, the small cameras nestled in their ceiling corners; the fax machine urges out a document that

lets you know that the yacht club owned by your company's trading partner, Carr Securities, has been covered in red paint: The cars of major shareholders of Glaxo Smith-Kline and Phytopharma Inc. have been splashed with paint stripper. Windows broken, wall graffitied. You grieve, in your unspeaking, unmoving way, for those windows and walls. You fish around your desk for an inter-lab bulletin you have passed over for weeks without reading—you read about acts against cell phone towers, against laboratories engaged in the bioengineering of hybrid poplar trees, against mink farms where hundreds of minks have been released into the land. Hmm, minks, you think, and you have a moment of slippage, you are brought back to something: a river otter you watched on some indistinct adolescent day: the serpentine curl forward of it running through the kudzu, as if its spine were a roiling whip; and then in its warren, coiled, pressed into dirt, smelling fish scales, blinking, shifting, blinking, oiled in its own smell, haloed by hanging roots. Yes it is easy to think of the freed mink, your sentimental education encourages it, but when you lose yourself in such a fantasy you forget that the mink is just this side of fictional, to liberate it is to liberate a picture from the screen upon which it is projected. More difficult to think of the cages, the cages in their remembering metal, which constitutes them; mourning all of infinity at every moment with their whole mass like Trojan women; dear Lord, you there 4000 miles under the surface of the earth anguished and encrusted in your mass of nickel, I ask you: who ever thought of the cages? we must never forget *their* sorrow, *their* loss.

Now, imagine the exhilaration of having your picture taken next to Janet Scott, executive of legal and security issues at Wal-Mart and private sector coordinator of the American Legislative Exchange Council task force that wrote the model legislation for the Animal Rights and Ecological Terrorism Act. You stand with her against the stars and stripes backdrop the hotel workers set up in the entryway to the Tierra Madre pavilion, the largest banquet hall in the Desert Ridge Marriott, designed to look like a massive Hopi ceremonial Kiva. You smile as the flashes go off and then you say a few words to Janet about how much you admire her work to prevent the rising trend of Infant Formula Theft, particularly her work in setting up the Texas Task

Force on Infant Formula Theft, whose main target is the reselling of the contraband baby formula at neighborhood flea markets, you congratulate Janet on her clarity in understanding that alternate economies (flea market, internet selling, much of Central America) go hand in hand with eco-sabotage, and that both of these issues depend on border security both practically, and as a grand symbol of how people can see through their years of training to the fact that *there is no undeniable and fluid impulse of living systems* that urges us to flow over and around our obstructions. We can and must learn to recognize our own phantom logic, we must stop dead still in empathy for the obstructions set before us, grateful for the unyielding reminder of what's real, and what *really* suffers.

CHRISTIAN NAGLER

SEE:

BARI, JUDI
FACTORY FARMING
GENETICS

GRIEF

REFLECTIONS ON ETHNOGRAPHY

I.

In Ilongot¹ headhunting practice, a group of men lay in ambush for a random, unsuspecting victim and then attack, slicing off the man's head and tossing it away in a symbolic casting off of their own troubles. In "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," anthropologist Renato Rosaldo² describes his decade-long struggle to understand Ilongot tribesmen's motivations for headhunting. When Rosaldo asked Ilongot men to explain their behavior, they reported that life makes one feel impossibly heavy; the accumulation of life's losses leads one to accrue a storehouse of rage that can only be released through headhunting.

1. The Ilongot are a tribe in the northern Philippines.

2. Rosaldo, Renato. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage." In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

In traditional ethnography, the anthropologist searches for an explanatory framework above and beyond the native interpretation. When a headhunter tells you he kills because he's grieving, you look for the larger, systemic function of his behavior. Does it subvert the need for all-out tribal warfare? Does it keep the human population capped in an ecologically delicate area? Rosaldo tried out various such exegeses and found them lacking; this led him to propose a new explanatory principle: force.

Rosaldo's conception of "force" refers both to the emotional force of grief and the analytic force of the Ilongot explanation. It was not until the accidental death of Rosaldo's wife that he was able to recognize the saliency of Ilongot understandings of grief and rage. He writes simply, "During all those years I was not yet in a position to comprehend the force of anger possible in bereavement, and now I am."

When I first read Rosaldo's article, I was a junior in college; grief and headhunting were equally foreign to me. All the same, I was sure I got the gist of the argument.

When I was a kid I read a novel about a boy who got trapped in an avalanche. Tucked deep within the snow, he was immobile save for his left arm. The kid kept his sanity by watching the minutes click by on his digital watch. I think he even named it—Mr. Watch or something. The passing of time was reassuring; it allowed the boy to count down the minutes to his rescue. And because this was a children's book, he did get rescued.

After I read this story, I rolled myself up in my mom's white terry cloth robe. I pulled the cloth over my head and bound myself into a tight cocoon. Sweating and breathing my own recycled breath, all I could see was white. "Wow," I thought to myself, "this must be how it feels to be buried alive."

Rosaldo writes, "One should recognize that ethnographic knowledge tends to have the strengths and limitations given by the relative youth of field-workers who, for the most part, have not suffered serious losses." As a young ethnographer, I admit that when I first went to the field to complete my Master's research in a Ugandan village, nothing in my personal history prepared me for the hardship I found there. The villagers are poor and lack adequate access to clean wa-