

The Name of Shades of Paranoia, Called Different Forms of Silence

A Dreamatory Proposition by

The Name of shades of Paranoia,
Called Different Forms of Silence.

Heavy, Grey but Fragile Curtains Cover Layer by Layer,
Like Frightened, Liberated Springs.

Everything Insisting, Awakening,
While Watching the Sinking Glow in Our Eyes.

Viron Erol Vert, 2015

In his otherwise brilliant short essay »Istanbul was our past, Istanbul is our future«, published after the horrific and unbearable attacks in Istanbul on New Year's Eve, the ever thought provoking Hamid Dabashi poses a set of rather crucial questions, which are indeed questions gyrating in everyone's mind after such acts of proportionless savagery. He asked: »What is this inanity targeting? What is it, that it is opposing? What kind of sentiment, however crudely, does it want to provoke?« And according to Dabashi, the reason for the attack of a nightclub on that symbolic day is thus an attack »on the culture of tolerance, on the factual pluralism of Muslim countries now in many ways represented in Istanbul.«¹

¹ Hamid Dabashi, Istanbul was our past, Istanbul is our future, 2017, available via www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/01/istanbul-istanbul-future-170103074202409.html (retrieved 10.01.2017).

After every such act, be it by ISIL, Boko Haram, Al Shabab, Al Qaida, some lonesome lunatic or what-/ whoever might be the perpetrators, and be it in Kaduna, Baghdad, Jakarta, Paris, London or Berlin, the tendency is to look at them and treat them as acts against a culture of tolerance. While Dabashi later makes a strong point that »Muslims and non-Muslims, in and out of Islamic world, are facing a vicious battle, not of identity, but of alterity - not who they are, but who their nemesis is«, I think it worthwhile proposing an alternative reason, or at least speculating on a possible incentive behind such attacks. Fear.

Today, fear might have become the most puissant currency, and a thriving economy of fear might be the simple cause-effect of such acts. But surely this is in no way limited to such overt and loud acts of violence. Fear is a weapon used by sovereignties from Cameroon through China, USA, Turkey to Brazil, as a means to pluck the feathers of civilians, so that they fly below and ordinary pitch. It is fear that is the catalyst used to mobilize thousands of people to go on the streets like Pegida does, in order to protest against that fabrication of the foreigner who comes into Germany to take away German jobs and even German women. It is fear that is meant to be imposed on the community when such a mass presents itself in the public. It is fear that has birthed and breeds the AfD. It is fear too on which Trump built his campaign and fear too is the substrate on which his government will grow and thrive.

Fear is the currency with which hate is bought. Fear is the legal tender for the acquisition of paranoia – that mental state of mistrust, suspicion, delusions of persecution, unwarranted jealousy, or exaggerated self-importance, which is the blues and rhythm of our era. For fear is a two-headed snake. Once it has eliminated and silenced all others around it, it battles itself so as to be the lonesome spitter of venom. But as for now, in these times of dire existential and sociopolitical crisis, in these times when democracy seems to be in a cul-de-sac, and neoliberal capitalist economy is the order of the day, the ubiquitousness of fear paralyzes societies and its ferocious »Drang« for destruction and suppression can only be pacified when societies and individuals are lamed and silenced. To twist and twerk on Michel-Rolph Trouillot, fear breeds the silencing of the present². And it is the silencing of the majority that has led to even bigger atrocities in the world in the past.

² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston 1997.

The world we are building is a world of steel,
glass and wind swept mines.
Tomorrow's world is no longer virginal,
but ravaged and open to all
like some unrestrained slut.
The dreams we chase are are dreams of shining platinum.
The world we walk is a world of poverty.
The situation that imprisons us is the gaping jaw of a jackal.

Our fate flies like a cloud
opposing and mocking us,
becoming mist in the sleep of night
and sun in the work we do each day.
We will die in the riddle of our fate
with arrogant and clenched hands.
Hands that rebel and labor.
Hands that tear at the sacred envelope
and unfold the holy letter
written in difficult characters we cannot read.

Rendra (Willibrordus Surendra Broto Rendra), »Testimony«, 1967

But as James Baldwin wrote in his open letter to Angela Davis³ in 1970, we live in an age in which silence is not only criminal but suicidal, and that is why he took upon himself the right and duty to speak out and make noise about the deplorable conditions some have to face. Indeed, silence is not a position of neutrality, as it actually means taking the side of the oppressor and aggressor.

Paranoia as a state of lameness, of neutralization, of numbness. Which is a weapon of power too, to keep people silent. That is the case Baldwin was making. A case to wake up from that paranoia and numbness.

But what to do when the repercussions of utterance, of breaking the silence lead to what happened to Şansal in January 2017 or Dink in 2007? But what to do when life is at stake if the dictatorial reign of silence is fractured? What to do if one doesn't want to get into the economy and politics of risk-taking, playing the martyr, or the hero-complex? It is at this juncture that art, i.e.

³ James Baldwin, An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis, 1971, available via <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/01/07/an-open-letter-to-my-sister-miss-angela-davis/> (retrieved 10.01.2017).

poetry comes into play. Art and its poetic dispositions can be that space of reflection and of expression. This is one proposition that Viron Erol Vert is making.

Another proposition is sleeping and dreaming. While we can all restrain ourselves from utterances of political nature, while we can silence ourselves and be silenced, no one can silence our dreams while we sleep. Sleep is a natural process of resuscitation, during which active restoration, rejuvenation, regaining of strengths and reprocessing of the mind-body take place. It is also in sleep that our experiences are processed, and information taken on are processed and consolidated in short- to long-term memory. How can we consider sleep and dreaming as spaces and even as acts of/for unconscious political resistance? Here, one has to look beyond the bourgeoisie concept of resistance through sleep as abstinence, as this is only possible if one enjoys the privilege of possessing the resources for sustenance. Also, sleep within such a context is reminiscent to silencing or being silenced rather than a subversion.

It is more intriguing to consider how sleeping, or taking the time to sleep matters, especially within a neoliberal economic context of productivity and over-productivity, and within a social context wherein one finds drugs that allow one to go on and on for days without sleep. Within such frameworks, sleeping becomes an economic, social and political resistance, taking off time to sleep becomes an act of creating parenthesis within overloaded and over-regulated systems, and rest becomes an act of non-cooperation with those systems.

Also, sleeping is a collective act shared by millions around the world at any given time. A community of sleepers. It is a moment of sharing rejuvenation, but also a moment of sharing vulnerability and giving up one's self to the care of others, as Siobhan Phillips points out in »Sleep as Resistance- Hejinian, Whitman, and the politics of sleep«⁴. Phillips points out, amongst other very pertinent remarks, that sleep seems to remove us from the general tyranny of the advancing clock, sleep defines time, as it divides day and night, in sleep, our brains decide what to retain and dispose of. Then he comes to the sheer fact of sleep as a deliberate choice—a political choice, which could be a mode of resistance that resuscitates sociality.

⁴ Siobhan Phillips, Sleep as Resistance: Hejinian, Whitman, and the politics of sleep, 2014, available via <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/features/articles/detail/70108> (retrieved 10.01.2017).

(...)

The wretched features of ennuyees, the white features of corpses, the
livid faces of drunkards, the sick-gray faces of onanists,
The gash'd bodies on battle-fields, the insane in their
strong-door'd rooms, the sacred idiots, the new-born emerging
from gates, and the dying emerging from gates,
The night pervades them and enfolds them.

(...)

The blind sleep, and the deaf and dumb sleep,
The prisoner sleeps well in the prison, the runaway son sleeps,
The murderer that is to be hung next day, how does he sleep?
And the murder'd person, how does he sleep?

(...)

I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the other sleepers
each in turn,
I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
And I become the other dreamers.

(...)

I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician,
The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in the box,
He who has been famous and he who shall be famous after to-day,
The stammerer, the well-form'd person, the wasted or feeble person.

(...)

O love and summer, you are in the dreams and in me,
Autumn and winter are in the dreams, the farmer goes with his thrift,
The droves and crops increase, the barns are well-fill'd.

Elements merge in the night, ships make tacks in the dreams,
The sailor sails, the exile returns home,
The fugitive returns unharm'd, the immigrant is back beyond months
and years,
The poor Irishman lives in the simple house of his childhood with
the well known neighbors and faces,
They warmly welcome him, he is barefoot again, he forgets he is well off,
The Dutchman voyages home, and the Scotchman and Welshman voyage
home, and the native of the Mediterranean voyages home,
To every port of England, France, Spain, enter well-fill'd ships,
The Swiss foots it toward his hills, the Prussian goes his way, the

Hungarian his way, and the Pole his way,
The Swede returns, and the Dane and Norwegian return.

(...)

The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed,
They flow hand in hand over the whole earth from east to west as
they lie unclothed,
The Asiatic and African are hand in hand, the European and American
are hand in hand,
Learn'd and unlearn'd are hand in hand, and male and female are hand
in hand,
The bare arm of the girl crosses the bare breast of her lover, they
press close without lust, his lips press her neck,
The father holds his grown or ungrown son in his arms with
measureless love, and the son holds the father in his arms with
measureless love,

Walt Whitman, »The Sleepers«⁵ (Excerpts), 1855

Walt Whitman's very long and sophisticated poem »The Sleepers« grants us an entry into the universes of those rejuvenating communities. The piece in itself is an expression of democratic ideals, empathies and associations, and for an 1855 piece, a resistance in itself. But the crux is how Whitman conjures political utopias within dreams and succeeds in communicating with other humans by dreaming the same dreams. Sleep becomes that space of communion, an equality of consciousness even though not all are equal, as he juxtaposes race, age, class and other social hierarchies.

The exhibition **The Name of Shades of Paranoia, Called Different Forms of Silence** is a similar proposition by Viron Erol Vert. It is the transcription of poetry into space. A space which is meant to be a dormitory qua exhibition space – a dreamatory. It is a sleeping and dreaming laboratory, clinic and factory all in one. As fear has silenced and deprived people of spaces and the right words and voices to express themselves, Vert in this project proposes a space wherein people can come by to catch some sleep. The deliberateness in this is crucial. It is this taking time off the tyranny of the quotidian which is the resistance to the system.

Within this space furnished with beds, sound and a conducive sleeping outfit, Vert creates a democratic space wherein old and young, rich and poor, native and foreigner can come together

⁵ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition*, Blodgett, H.W., et.al (Eds), London 1965.

and share dreams. On the one hand, sharing dreams in a Whitmanian sense, i.e. dreaming other people's dreams, and on the other hand sharing dreams by narrating what they dreamt about.

Vert aims at transforming the space of Galerie Wedding into a cocoon or a womb that insinuates a safe haven. People can come in on a daily basis to narrate the dreams they had last night, or they might choose to have a siesta, and share their dreams if they remember. On an irregular basis, oneirocritics will be invited to the gallery space to interpret some dreams upon request by the dreamers. On a daily basis a dream of the day will be selected and published in some form.

The Name of Shades of Paranoia, Called Different Forms of Silence is an effort to convoke other spaces of sociopolitical reflections and resistances, in particular within the realm of the subconscious of sleeping and dreaming. A space where un-fearing and un-silencing are explored and practiced.

The project will also acknowledge the fact that although everyone dreams, metaphorical dreaming and the ability to remember one's dreams, are also privileges. In extreme dire straits dreams are luxuries, as they too are silenced by the sheer brutality of reality.

The exhibition project by Virol Erol Vert will be accompanied by lectures by scientists researching on dreams, as well as three performances by Driftmachine framed around three of the dream deities, Oneiroi, in Ovid's »Metamorphoses«, namely Morpheus (god of dreams), Phobetor (god of nightmares) and Phantasos (god of surreal dreams, of inanimate objects in prophetic dreams).

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, PhD