

Still, here

The fugitive being of relation in S. Katugampala's film, *Still Here*

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Still

*Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the
dance.
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say
where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in
time.
(Eliot: 1943)*

“Still” is a necessary pause or a musical interval opening to “here” as a different posture towards time, life, becoming, trauma, displacement, shapeshifting, grief and resistance. Language itself is tricky, shifty, still and moving, always moving in minor keys, while its major conceptual framing tends to solidify: but its very still-ness is never still. An analogy in the realm of physics would be the voidless void of quantum fields. If the ancestors of language dwell in sound, consider the sound of this very word, *still*. A very slow, light-sounding drip-dropping, as when an icicle speaks in melting. It's the sound of the slow, continuous, aeon-dripping drop, shaping stalactites, sculpting persisting strength as it falls. Or as the Italian proverb says *la goccia scava la pietra*, “the drop hollows the stone.”

The Latin etymological root *still* as a fact does mean exactly that: a drop. Middle English *stillen* meant to *distill*, an alchemical procedure consisting in heating a liquid to turn it into gas, then cool it and let it drip back into liquid form either stronger (whisky) or purified (water).

Consistent, unceasing, slow dripping was also used to determine time. Stillness became a *measure* of impermanence's persisting flow. The first devices for measuring time in Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and Greece were water clocks, or clepsydras (the word means “water thieves,” and possibly stealers of time). Still measuring time as a slow-dripping flow.

Stillen has a common root with the Greek *στέλλειν* “to put in order, to make ready; to prepare (for a journey), to furl (sails)” (all conditions of movement); the Armenian *stelc-anem* “to prepare, create;” the Albanian *shtiell* “to wrap, to gather;” the Old Slavonic *po-steljo* “to spread along;” the Old Prussian *stallit* “to stand;” the Old English *steall* “to bring or be brought to a stop or standstill;” and the Old High German *stellen* “to set, to place.”

Stillen is also related to Old English *stillan* “to be still, to have rest” and to *stille* “to quiet, to calm, to appease; to stop, to restrain.” These shades of meaning – permanence and quietness – indicate the constant flow of dripping still (ac)countable time *and* the uncanny mysterious emergence of a wider reconciled time of suspended wonder. Apparently, they both derive from an Old Proto European root **stel* which means to stand, to put in place, to prepare. A posture allowing a “more than human” and also a “less than human” dance. The “Human” and “Time” as mere abstractions can finally get lost.

To say to children “stand still!” is tautological. An impossible injunction as stillness is the final lesson in movement. But watch a child falling asleep! Stillness is anything but dead: it announces a rhythm, a creation out of something minor, imperceptible, unseen. A carillon-like still-ing melody, but also a sort of annunciation in the dark of night. As the Austrian Christmas carol goes: “*Stille nacht, Heilige Nacht*,” Silent night, Holy Night. Therefore: birthing events, a “dialectics at a standstill,” [Walter Benjamin] or “action at rest.” A cosmic hide-and-seek. Indeed, God speaks in a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11-13 KJV).

Only through a cognitive mistranslation and misperception stillness is presented as a form of death. Giorgio Agamben has noted how the German *Gleichen* (in English the “likeness,” the imaged aspect of sameness, similarity) is related to *leiche*, the corpse (1986: 10). Corpses shapeshift very rapidly and the Romans’ *imago mortis* – the waxed cast of the dead’s face they hung in their homes – was a way to hold on to the image of the dead. Perhaps the translation of a “still life painting” into “soulless nature” (*nature inanimée*) in the Enlightenment (specifically in Diderot’s work) reflects a rather similar attitude. Since then, the term *nature morte* (“dead nature”) prevailed in French and Italian and took the place of the original expression calling for the attempted contemplation of the unknown life of things.

The direct translation of the word “still” in Italian would be *ancora*, a term that comes from the rigidly formalized Latin *hinc ad horam* “from here (or from a given time) to now.” It signals a space-time continuity, without however referring to the more nuanced idea of a “still point” that is the source of movement as silence is the womb of worlding. When the wording is too linear the soft dripping dries up.

In his reflections about the paradoxical nature of “stillness,” Báyò Akómoláfé argues:

Have you ever tried standing perfectly still? If you do, you might notice you are actually moving in barely perceptible ways, leaning back and forth, vibing in the minor key. Yes, it would seem “standing” is always troubled by the quantum inclinations that ripple through our claims to stable and resolute positionality. The rectilinearity assumed in the mathematical precision of a stand hides from us the ways we might be participating in and sustaining the very conditions we would like to rectify. The ways we are already *moved*. (2023c)

This contradiction is captured by the word *hâlâ* in Turkish: both “a’s” are long sounded: «haalaa»... feel how the double extended vowel opens to spaciousness. The root is the Arabic حَال (hāl) which means condition, state, situation, position, status, circumstance, matter, concern, *fugitive being*.

When I used to live in Turkey, I sang songs as a busker, and I roamed cafés and restaurants feeding on the generosity of customers. One of the favourite Turkish Sufi songs we sang was by Aşık Veysel:

“Bilmyorum ne haldeyim gidyorum gündüz gece, gündüz gece, Oy”

which translates as “I do not know *what state of being* I am in (what my current circumstances, what my posture, what my spiritual condition might be), *but I move forward* day and night – day and night, Oy.”

Hâl is one of the many spiritual posture in which the seeker gradually *lets go*. “I don’t know what my *hâl* might be” – a condition mirroring the mystery of getting finally lost. I am also struck by the fact that as a verb *hâla* also appears to mean: to intervene, to take a stand, even to interfere or to prevent. Since we are still here, we still can! As we also let go.

Here

What does a home mean in this world of shifting sands and eroding foundations?
(Akómoláfé 2017: n.p.)

“Minor sociality” (...) is an encounter with the more-than that populates us (...) Feeling overflows and runs through [the impersonal]. It rises from the understory and runs over into the overstory, connecting the infra-personal to the transpersonal. (Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, in Drigo Agostinho and Laberge 2019: 207)

In Suranga D. Katugampala’s film, *Still Here*, images are rafts over the water. Shipwrecked lives on the raft, each life a line of flight... the raft a temporary home, an attempt at fugitive belonging, moving with the minor gestures of song, play, failure, memory, repetition: getting lost, shouting grief, leaving, returning, being alive, still, here. The icicle slowly dripping, still. Yet this impermanence moves us beyond the binary way we consider place, grounding us in an essential contextual “here” within and beyond locality. Within and across time.

Taking a stand and being still might be less binary than it would appear. The agreed conventions of usage shapeshift, betraying the polysemic, still moving, ambivalent nature of language itself: the plurality of languages, of *ethos*, of sensoriums. We can take still take a stand, even in stillness. Wherever we stand, within a wider space and a wider time than modernity allows.

Katugampala does it by inventing a place called *Nouveau Port*, a wyrding sanctuary a “new harbour” for new departures: from the norm, from the past, from the future. An assemblage of bodies beyond inherited belongings with no common organs of memory. In the film, the *Nouveau Port* is the name of an underground café, a transrefuge in suburbia, where marginalized lives, fugitive lives gather: immigrants, neurodivergents, old folks. They gather in suspended time, in a nowhere land warmed by bodies, presence, tales of the day-by-day as well as the ordinary gift of bewilderment

Sometimes live music is played in the *Nouveau Port*.

“Wait a minute, is that Lou Reed?” I thought for a second, as a local performer – Roberto Dellera – sang cracks into the obvious, leading to even wyrd, wilder sides.

Suranga told me of how the invention of *Nouveau Port* came about. An old chicken butcher abandoned for 15 years in the outskirts of Milan, was turned into a temporary café nightclub for the shooting and other events, tuning into the *minor* visionary potential of the local community. And the camera with-nessing this commonality of *in-difference*, temporarily grounded in emerging relational “event-based” practices that create their own value. Thought in relation. Thought in the act. The soundscape of still. An effective example of how “in the ecology of practices where it is not the mind that speaks, what emerges is not a subject-centered narrative but an account of how thought moves, how it moves us, and how it moves the world.” (Manning 2015)

The *Nouveau Port* reminds me also of what Erin Manning writes in discussing forms of minor sociality: “nonconscious thought is everywhere active in experience. It moves at differential speeds. It cuts across. It opens up. It shifts. It is not *in* the body or *in* the mind, but *across* the bodying where world and body co-compose in a welling ecology.” (2016: 116)

Creolization. A worlding undercommons where many other things and actors are synchronistically at play, wittingly or unwittingly engaged in a processual, relational, plural agency, a “more than human,” “impersonal” dimension, transforming the rule of the “major” downbeat. Art in its daydreaming forms is part of this ecology. Art as awareness of something emerging in the cracks and in the ruins. The perception of how the extraordinary emerges in the unassuming apparent ordinariness of daily life. Language diffracted and recreated. Images recollect and connect, moving us towards creation, rather than the representation of the known.

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It's neither documentary, nor fiction; it's the customary, this customary being so real that it surprises. (Deligny 2022: 237)

The urgency of cinema is this: to revive that which (...) is numbed, dazed, squandered, overnourished. (Deligny 2022: 39)

The reference to Fernand Deligny's work was crucial in orienting my own attempt at commenting on *Still Here*. His attempts to create "rafts in the mountains," and his use of the camera in allowing the non-human to enter the picture, crack our addiction to linearity and to the legibility of the surface.

Deligny refused to be called an educator, a psychologist, or a philosopher. His perspective is a curious and hybrid attempt, closer to a poetic anthropology or perhaps a posthuman ethology. Filming was always an integral part of his work. According to Báyò Akómoláfé:

In 1967 Deligny made an "attempt." A dissident educator whose politics was a resolute refusal of fascism in its many forms, Deligny – among others – witnessed the many ways autistic children were incarcerated in asylums by the Vichy regime of France, forced to fit in, and violently suppressed. [...] Deligny led non-verbal autistic children away from their shackles – eventually creating an experimental network of renegade communes in the rocky range of Cevennes in Southern France. Those communities – or "attempts" – were tentative and humble gestures to get to the other side of language, to imagine disability as emancipation, to refuse rehabilitation, to listen to the cracks. In more ways than one, Deligny's dissidence addresses the impasses of social justice, the limitations of activism, and the inadequacy of a politics devoted to saving the marginalized subject. (2023b)

Deligny's "attempts" with autistic kids and with his use of images wandered far from linear, neurotypical, *ableist* schemes rooted in the individual need for clarity and the reassurance of patterned recognition.

When I watched *Ce gamin, là* (*That Kid, There*, 1975) directed by Renaud Victor, a visual gathering of Deligny's experience with the autistic boy Jean-Marie J. – or "Janmari," as Deligny called him, giving words to the kid's own unwording – in the Cevennes, I paused on the comma. The comma in the French title turned the sentence around from "(ah...I get it... you mean) *that* kid," into "(*Do see*) that kid, that situated kid in that very place." Both the kid and the place are *seen* within a processual assemblage: one can feel the woods, the streaming water, the simple homes, the goats, the pots, even the stones. At one point, Deligny notices how Janmarie lays by the torrent and contemplates the rhythm of the water flowing with the deepest intensity. And Deligny wonders: Is there a subject? Is there an object? Does it matter? He tells his coworkers: He does not see *us* but he sees the *water*, we must become like water.

Ce gamin, là shows the manner of presence of the adults looking after the kids:

[They are] giving the impression of being absent or inattentive; in fact, an entirely different sort of "attention" and listening is being developed – a type of attention akin to being "on standby," a presence without being excessively present. The aim was to build this fragile dialectics of distance-closeness capable of both respecting the incommensurable distance of alterity and pursuing the effort of forging bonds – of accepting the distance and at the same time being closely present, creating a zone of proximity where the autistic child felt safe and was encouraged to act. (Deligny 2022: 31)

Filming was a way to create this “zone of proximity,” not only with the subject represented but also with audiences. Deligny said that he wanted his works to be “full of holes” so that audiences might be *moved* from passive points of view (*point de vue*), to active “points of seeing” (*point de voir*).

I find these reflections so relevant to my comment on how *Still Here* also invites audiences to respond to the “incommensurable distance of alterity”. Katugampala’s film gathers a poetic and evocative *chronicle* of the ordinary as grief’s magic, as imperfect care, as a desire to listen to the cracks rather than presenting the Other through victimizing rethorics and the worn out tunes of identity politics. This is decolonial postactivism. As a fact there is a *diffraction* at work in Katugampala’s work that illustrates well Deligny’s idea that the contemporary dominant visual framing is not a *way of seeing* at all, but the narcissistic comfort of a *verbalized reproduction*.

The film expresses a sort of immune grace, an *in-difference* to what classifies lives as being more or less valuable. I think *Still Here* explores an emerging desire for post-apocalyptic narratives: not as the survival of the lone hero preserving humanism against all odds in a dystopic future, but the ongoing persistence of ordinary people’s lives under conditions that seem unpropitious.

I consider it a visionary attempt at postactivist filming, aligning closely with Deligny’s practice as presented by Akómoláfé. Postactivism is the opposite of a depressive resigned surrender to the norm, it does not avoid grief or ignore that we are living in “the ruins of capitalism.” Postactivism is post-apocalyptic in granting access to a different timeline where past present and future are entwined and entwining. Postactivism is ab-normative and ab-normal. It offers an ab-therapy as an underground carnival where “zombies” – “the forbidden child of the crossroads [who] lurk at the peripheries of the modern” (Akomolafe 2023) – are welcome. Postactivism engages with the world within a wilder emerging political relationality. It cultivates *in-difference* towards the permanent normo-pathic invitation to surrender to the colonial binary of “adaptation or exclusion.”

Unlike Deligny, Katugampala’s work does not focus on the nonverbal language of autistic children, but the way *Still Here* portrays the two “children” deserves noticing. They appear as lost creatures arriving into a lost world and contemplating its ruins, as children often do. The “mother” leaves them with their “father” and disappears into the “zone” bordering the swamps, or maybe she roams into her native Sri Lankan past or into its present ruins, she wanders and wanders and wanders, postponing and diffracting a possible return.

The kids express two possible polarities of childhood when facing the lost world of adults. The elder, who is probably 11 or 12, is a holder, a point of stability, taking upon herself the diasporic task of somehow turning exile into home. She is a witness and an observer, wading somehow through the waters of displacement and loss. The younger child – the son of a different father – is feral; he flees towards the swamp screaming like a wounded animal.

There are non-verbal, affective and sensory forces in all children’s play that are strictly *meaningless*, yet attempt to explore the real, its possible wonder as well as its dreads, even before wording. This non-verbal activity has a great equanimity towards the ray of light and the smell of shit. This is often a kinesthetic mode, the entanglement of movement and how it works in our perception. But I also like to think of it as *kin-est-ethical*, as an unfathomable, perceptive, relational moment “making *kin*” with the world, allowing us if we do, to reclaim a space for the ethical as well.

To approach these non-verbal forces – invisible, minor, not still and not only *here* – we need the comma, a musical pause, the *selah* in the Psalms, the negative capability, the *neti neti*, the neither nor, the *anatman*, the necessary crossroads of a host of traditions. The mark for the comma we use today has a story: in the 17th century it was morphed from a slash (/), a separation, a slight crack in the discourse. A slash still used sometimes to transcribe poetry when there is no space. Thinking poetically has its own rhythm. Think / these may/ or may not / be / mere words. And *Still Here* is poetry in motion both in its faithful and daring immersion in the swamp and in the attuned space Katugampala gave to all the voices within and without the *Nouveau Port*.

I felt such kinship between Deligny’s *Ce gamin, là* and Katugampala’s *Still Here* that I had to steal the comma for my article to highlight how much his film honoured something that is still, here, yet belonging to all. Something that is found in Deligny’s heritage of a whole life dedicated to building rafts in the mountains, in Katugampala’s faithful and daring poetic immersion in the Swamp, and in the attuned space he gave to all the voices within and without the *Nouveau Port*. Watching the film, we can still see what’s in that comma: a necessary decolonial slash in the way so many visions, politics, theories are formatted. Words in this case also/do not suffice.

“Caming”

Nonconscious thought is everywhere active in experience. It moves at differential speeds. It cuts across. It opens up. It shifts. It is not in the body or in the mind, but across the bodying where world and body co-compose in a welling ecology. (Erin Manning (2016: 116)

The ordinary, which the extraordinary is always trying to become. (Bayo Akómoláfé)

I also want to mention Fernand Deligny’s passion for ‘caming’ a term he preferred to filming. In a text called *Miscreating*, (Deligny 2022) he emphasised the term *caming* as an attempt ‘to avoid intention’ and added that this required ‘a strange rigour that can’t be intentional’. The camera was to be another eye allowing a lateral view – as if it were a spider’s web weaving itself beyond a single normative neurotypical agency.

The camera, just there, as another situational and situated material tool, allows the indirect “implicit” setting of “doing something together” and replaces the neuronormative setting of a worded script. Worded intentionality is only one – often limited – form of consciousness.

There is in Deligny and in Katugampala a constant questioning of what the ‘human’ might be. And the camera is also *there* in order to multiply perspectives, in order to further a *milieu* moving us towards “points of seeing”.

Decades before Viveiros de Castro and his ‘ontological turn’, in his work with autistic and other institutionalized kids Fernand Deligny, the educator turned critical anthropologist, caught the liberating whiff of *perspectivism* – the recognition of a shapeshifting fugitive commonality, a multispecies shimmering differentiation within the ‘human’ itself in its relationship with ‘things’ and indeed with other species beyond the Great Divide between ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’.

This insight included the radical idea that the image can “move us” from our anthropocentric stance, since the image is ‘part of the animal kingdom’. (Deligny 2022 p.235) The camera itself belongs to a commonality of things and relations. Deligny’s attempts in the Cevennes, exploring emerging practices, tracing wandering lines beyond representation, was also considering new ways to imagine a setting (or a set), both absolved from anticipation, expectations, and pre-formatted meanings.

In the unrecognized languages of childhood lives a different sensorium, not yet framed into usefulness. The need, that is, to become acquainted with the world beyond “meanings”, just “being with” things, is then so alive, before a certain way of “making sense” of things is imposed by overcognitive framing. Being alive is after all so deeply embedded in the possibility of rhythm. As a fact, movement is one of the child’s first languages and they learn *stillness* as the most advanced form of movement. Sometimes they seek movement at all costs, they can’t stay still, in compensation for a whole cultural dismissing of rhythm as their First Language. Neurotypical policing frowns on that.

Isn’t Deligny inviting us to see the spider’s web as an emerging bio-intelligent excess; something that that the excess of purpose and intentionality (our unsituated colonialist ”meanings”) disrupts? For him images needed to appear by accident, chance or synchronicity: as a Language both *within and without* language; as a gesture towards the fugitive, metabolic flow of reality, attempting a true image. Away from the incarcerating bonds of identity where neurotypicality would discipline monsters and “frame our idea of which lives are worth fighting for, which lives are worth educating, which lives are worth living and which lives are worth saving.” (Masnning 2006)

This desire for camering as *tracing* on a canvas rather than through a rigid worded script (bypassing the narcissistic need for clarity, recognition and reproduction) is also so alive in *Still Here* as to be hypnotic. A minor form of shamanism at play. A depth chronicle of the ordinary as magic.

+The Decolonizing Potential of the Minor Gesture

The neurotypical is the very backbone of a concept of individuality that is absolutely divorced from the idea that relation is actually what our worlds are made of. (Manning 2016: 6)

The individual, the traditionalist human subject is already a form of genocide(...) an ongoing reproduction of the 'world' as 'clearing' – a cutting off of the ways we are imbricated with ecological matterings that coincides with the killing fields of industrial gentrification and with the asylum captivity that is named, "the Human."
(Akómoláfé 2023a: n.p.)

Still Here offers a decentered idea of how things matter, of how experience moves us beyond any subject-centered narrative. Because of its hypnotic ability to open cracks in the ordinary, I think this film weaves a para-pedagogical tale. Para-pedagogical is a term I have often heard Akómoláfé and Manning toss at each other. The Greek preposition παρά has many meanings: near, alike, besides, beyond, even against. As a prefix para- is used as a sort of minor counterpoint to the established meaning of a word, a practice, a discipline. The resonance can include various shades of meaning as in paramedical (a capacity *supplementary* to medicine), paranormal (*beyond* the normal), paradoxical (*against* common opinion). When we talk of the para-pedagogical, we point to a “soundscape of learning full of inklings which reside below the threshold of actual perception” (Manning 2015: n.p.). The para-pedagogical moves with the minor and with the slightest gesture away from neurotypical linear verbal indexing of experience.

This sideways look at what moves “below the threshold” has helped me to approach Katupangala’s use of the image as an invitation to explore the fugitive consistent relationality of being in the ruins of modernity. Images are thus a portal into “the *minor* gesture” a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as the decolonial syncopation of normative dominant languages through what they called “*points of non culture*” or “Third World linguistic zones by which language can *escape*, an animal enters into things, a coming-into-agency can find an arrangement [*agencement*].” (1975: 49, my translation)

To acknowledge the relevance of these “points of non-culture,” among other things, entails reconsidering what it means to be human beyond the separation between “superior” human thought and “inanimate” matter, a split that served the extractive agenda of colonial modernity. In this context, neurotypicality as a normative and supposedly superior stance is a concept that is structurally connected with a persisting pattern of systemic violence. Settling for *inclusion* within that frame will not alter it much. In fact, such growing awareness opens to a deeper political insight on modernity and decolonization beyond what identity politics have offered.

To stress the decolonizing impact of Suranga Katugampala’s film I now bring in two of my favourite contemporary authors, Báyo Akómoláfé and Erin Manning. As a fact Suranga was instrumental in helping me find the funding and organize my dear friend Báyo’s journey to Italy for the presentations of his book *These Wilds Beyond our Fences* which I had the honour to translate into Italian.

Akómoláfé is a clinical psychologist turned philosopher, a transpublic (cosmic) intellectual and a posthumanist transdisciplinary and transcultural trickster weaving critical theories with Yoruba lines of flight and Delignian para-pedagogical “attempts” such as his on-line course *We Will Dance With Mountains*.

Erin Manning is just as amazing: shimmering on the threshold of disciplines as a political philosopher, cultural theorist, dancer, designer, activist, cloudgazer. She connects decolonial work to the liberation of those bodies who are learning in other ways, using other languages and engaging in other rhythms of sociality and thought.

They both have the uncanniest ability to evoke embodied possibilities of desire, and point to thresholds of awkward grace towards *The Widening*.

For Manning, neurotypicality is *foundational* for the *identity politics* whiteness keeps offering and policing. That is why it is rarely questioned.

Neurotypicality, as a central but generally unspoken identity politics, frames our idea of which lives are worth fighting for, which lives are worth educating, which lives are worth living, and which lives are worth saving(...) [O]ur lives are deemed less worthy, less worthy not just because of our visible difference, but because we have already been classed as less-than, as less educable, as less desirable, as less knowledgeable, as less valuable. We have already been situated, aligned in opposition to the dominant ideal of life, to the majoritarian discourse of neurotypicality, and we fall short. (2016: 3, 4)

Neurotypicality would also love to keep naturalizing its bias, to hide colonial violence under the mask of the supposed superiority of “Caucasian bodies”. Akómoláfé shifts this perspective:

By Whiteness(...) I mean to temporarily name the racializing assemblage of agencies, cartographies, archetypes, desires, stories, orientations, and gestures that have had the colonial effect of re/producing a hyper-rationalized, flattened world available for human mastery. (Akomolafe 2023a: n.p.)

As a counterpoint Erin Manning, in *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, calls for a “defiant and joyful” insurgent sociality of blackness, that drives towards a relational field *beyond the individual*, the kind of desire “that interrupts the narrow confines of category” and exceeds the universalized subject (2020: 55).

[blackness] is black in this refusal of the one, of the single, personal, already-recognized, bounded human. It is neurodiverse in this same refusal. To emphasize its blackness, its neurodiversity, is to articulate a commitment against whiteness’s limited-to-the-personal neurotypical commitment to property and propriety.

A neurodiverse idea of blackness emerges also in Akómoláfé’s writings as a trace towards wilder political stances:

We need a different *blackness* – a *non-identitarian one* that gestures towards larger fields of mattering, that notices the ecologically vibrant ways bodies are mediated and

modulated and oriented and activated beyond identity. (...) The only way for Blackness to spill beyond this hegemonic dance of form over matter, of subject over objectified bodies, of master over slave, of neurotypicality over neurodiversity – these relations of colonial superintendence – *is to collapse the binary through a different reading of their shared indebtedness to a larger stream of collective becoming.*

If Whiteness is the major, blackness is the minor; if Whiteness is the normotypical teacher, blackness is the unlearned grace of childhood; if Whiteness is the downbeat, blackness syncopates it; if Whiteness frames identity politics, blackness creates social relationality as a jam session; if Whiteness reproduces the *same*, blackness is the mother of invention; if Whiteness is proper, blackness is improper; if Whiteness is *normotypical*, well blackness is something *else*. It resists capture.

This resistance to capture is one of the reasons that touched me so when I watched the film. I felt that those who inhabit *Still Here* and its *Nouveau Port* were part of an *agencement* of experience, a relational articulation of other forms of learning and unlearning within the way *we are lived* by life.

Raimon Panikkar, one of my teachers and mentors, often spoke about this as a necessary posture. Talking about his book *L'esperienza della vita* (2005) he insisted: “it is not *your* experience of life, it is *life's* own experiencing through you.”

There is some deep-seated otherwise at the core of this posture, some unresolved stubborn persistence, some richer sensorium, unsundered to easy meanings and definitions.

In many ways *Still Here* invites us to attune to the way life is multiplying and diffracting experience through us:

Angela, the old lady (the “neighbour”), with her musical reminiscences and day-by-day random recollections manifests the resistance of memory-in-act and weaves in *Still Here* a thread of metabolic every-day awareness as an unlikely elder within the *Nouveau Port's* parliament of lives. There is also room for Janith, the “uncle,” and his disjointed shamanic aspirations and, for the “mother”’s restless wandering. The tune of her absence resonates throughout the film like an eerie flute playing an unending *raga*, asking us to take account of all that is out of joint, of all that is lost. And there is room for the “father”’s own shattered and astonished persisting, holding on while he still can. Whereas the “children” inhabit their new underprivileged suburban landscape as a jungle, while that very tune leads them to magical or pain-filled flights into the posthuman. And the camera with-nesses all of this and helps us understand the potential of “the minor gesture.”

The major is a structural tendency that organizes itself according to predetermined definitions of value. The minor is a force that courses through it, unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards. (2016:2)

People that are not inscribed in discourse sometimes surf and unmoor the major with passionate indifference, *acting and speaking otherwise*.

Whether we call this “something else” the minor gesture, blackness, or neurodiversity or a recovered animistic stance, something with many names is evolving. This idea suggests that the

exceptionalist position of humans towards other forms of life could transform into a more humble ability to grieve the damage caused within and beyond our species, as well as acknowledge our interconnectedness with what extends beyond the human.

The call of the wild, that both Manning and Akómoláfé – among others – recognize as crucial has many names and is captured in a sequence of *Still Here*, when the feral wild child flees towards the swamp screaming in a monstrous sensuous affirmation of life, an affirmation within and beyond loss. And the father – who is not his father – seeking the child near the swamp is forced to face the *otherwise*, and has to move past the resilience of his fixed posture.

Still Here is not a shallow subject-centered romanticized ode to marginality. Rather as an impersonal invitation to attune to the “more-than”, to the otherwise in life, it invites us to open to a bewildering apocalypse of the senses.

God-zilla in the Swamp

The monster is not the thing lurking in the distance; it is a pattern of relations that potentializes and actualizes errancy (...) from anthropocentric algorithms, from fascist continuity, from image copy, from justice as logistics. The monster is the glitch, a program without designer, an aesthetic of refusal.

(Akómoláfé 2023a: n.p.)

From this vantage point of an ecology of practices, it is urgent to turn away from the notion that it is the human agent, the intentional, volitional subject who determines what comes to be. (Manning 2016:2)

I like the way T.S. Eliot – certainly politically conservative in the heart of whiteness – found in his *Four Quartets* lines of flight and syncopation towards a different rhythm between the living and the dead, between humans and more-than-humans, between monstrosities.

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god – sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.
The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in cities – ever, however, implacable.
Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder
Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated
By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.

Some sort of **Leviathan resides in this poetic image: an untamed monster, unhonoured, unpropitiated but waiting, watching and waiting...** facing The Machine and the Waste Land.

In *Still Here*, rather than by Eliot's dark brown god, the wilds beyond our fences where monsters live are evoked by the a *swamp* bordering the abandoned promiscuous outskirts; in fact the Swamp is one of the most fascinating features of Katugampala's film.

Corvetto, the marginalized suburban area of Milan where the film was shot, and where many srilankese immigrants live, borders a dense little wood where drug addicts hide and huddle in all seasons and sometimes die. In the film, the Swamp is at the same time a posthuman no man's land, a place of uncertainty, silent wailing and unrest, *and, at the same time* an unsubmitted sanctuary of sorts. That's where "Mother" initially went. Her wandering absence is a haunting promise beyond intentionality and beyond loss, a refuge from any moralistic reduction of aspiration into pre-formatted discursive rethorics.

In one of the first scenes we see the mother, the fugitive woman, the wife, the daughter of Lilith, drifting away and crossing the threshold separating the suburbs from the wooded stretch bordering the Swamp.

The Swamp, a wyrder call of the Wild, evokes the monstrous as a promise, the promise of a flight into unknowing, where the rawness of mourning or the madness of laughter might sprout eyes on one's back or create underwater lungs. To escape like Water.

Although they have sometimes been given the same name, two very different Leviathans face each other. In Eliot's poem the first, the monstrous god, which is also the metabolic River Time, flows in immanence in its slow or raging inhuman stance, while the other Leviathan, the technocratic algorithmic attempt at terraforming, the neoliberal struggle for global governance, builds walls of isolation, apartheid and flattening denial. The final solution against all monsters. Like the War to end all wars. And, still, in the underground struggle between these dragons who can say what kind of "here" is being birthed?

As I am writing, a volcano just erupted in Iceland. The picture I was sent from Reykyavik is stunning. As I keep mentioning Leviathan I must say it is a classical Biblical reference in the Book of Job. God(s) describe it in great length in their answer to poor Job complaining about his

misfortunes. Leviathan is a most powerful dragon emerging from the deep, like a post-atomic Japanese God-zilla. “Come on Job,” says God, “Let there be monsters!”

What if “God” is saying to Job “Wake up! The whole of creation is wondrous and monstrous, cosmic and metabolically entangled in a process where the human is not the supreme blossoming of consciousness, awareness, morality, the *crown of creation*, so to speak, but part of the whole.” What if the whole creation is in some ways also a Monstrous glitch and might God(s) also be Glitchy? Some uncanny reality that can only be perceived through a glass “darkly”...

However, even this narrative is already tinged with an anthropocentric projection as words are forced in the usual binaries (abled/disabled, whole/broken, darkness/light etc.) we use to define a reality beyond description. What do we know of that Voidless Void from which everything is constantly re-birthed?

The re-semantization of Leviathan as a positive solution: as the State turning into Empire and acquiring the exceptional right to dominate and rule, to conquer and extract, to colonize or destroy the supposedly less-than, is a different kind of monstrosity, a global geopolitical madness.

Even in its fury I can relate to the volcano and prefer the dark brown river god to the nations’ bloody wars over a monstrous “final” governance of the world.

Time out of joint

There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism (...) The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of exception” in which we live is the rule. (Benjamin 1944)

[The minor gesture] is out of time, untimely, rhythmically inventing its own pulse. (Manning 2016)

The minor might evoke the idea of very *low*, minor *frequencies* unable to deal with the apocalyptic horsemen of destruction. As a fact, apocalyptic models are powerful attractors of narratives embedded in our frames of reference. We are yet to acknowledge that in the minor’s immanent life there may be a kind of intensity reaching further, possibly something that might diffract the linearity of the final disaster projected somewhere onto the “timeline.” Something moving us beyond that sort of death drive longing for Armageddon or some other kind of “final solution” to happen, the interesting longing to put a stop to it all.

The story of Jonah – in which the warning prophecy “*Ninivah* shall be destroyed!” failed to happen – should be a guide in composting narratives stating that only utter destruction *in linear time* might ‘in the end’ lead humankind to repentance. Oh, Apocalyptic destruction has been going on all along! The “end” is always with us. Yes, Armageddon but also Healing through The Leaves Of The Tree. These references are to the New Testament’s Book of Revelation, but we should really look into other indigenous narratives about metabolic endings and new beginnings.

Deligny was a friend of Chris Marker, who in his famous film “*La jetée*” tells of a time-traveling child who chose to forgo a future “salvation,” returning instead to the *moment* in time when he experienced an immanent gesture of love even if it meant his own passing.

I think of how Walter Benjamin in the darkest of times during WWII spoke wisely of “historical symptoms” as a sort of short-circuit, where the entanglement of past and present emerges in a flash of intuition – revealing in lightning mode another ruinous cycle of destruction – rather than history being served to us on a cold linear historical plate erasing a multitude of voices.

Benjamin’s answer to these historical symptoms was the vision of a very different *state of exception*, not the rule of oppression (i.e. the right to suspend rights by the powers that be), but another kind of exception: a meta-temporal one, beyond linear time, the intensifying drive to acknowledge the value of every single moment of every single life that has ever lived.

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation *à l'ordre du jour* – and that day is Judgment Day. (1944)

This very dense 3rd Thesis on History needs unpacking: chroniclers do not subscribe to the timeline framed on major triumphant steps in the march of history. On the contrary, the chronicler gathers day by day each minor event in the fugitive flow of life: for the chronicler *nothing that has ever happened in history should be regarded as lost*, each moment lived would deserve quoting, like a *citation, à l'ordre du jour*.

The reference here is to the official war bulletins the army released, highlighting the heroic act or death of a soldier or officer or division, that is the socially recognized value of one of his actions in times of war. (Yes, war is normotypical!) In the above quote, Benjamin reverses that, saying that each moment of the life of each person who has ever lived deserves recognition, deserves to be quoted, deserves equitable Judgment. This is of course impossible in any linear timeline. Time itself, in this respect, is multidimensional and cannot be stolen by mechanical clock time. Our own actions, our own attention, our posture, argues Benjamin, would connect us to the generations before and after, if only we were able not only to slow down but to *stop* in a truly post-apocalyptic stance.

The Widening

A pragmatics of the useless is value's way, its artful orientation to the anarchic share that moves through process to reveal what couldn't be contained. (Manning 2020)

Still Here belongs to an emerging opportunity and a need. We are invited to a wider bewildered sensorium. I use the term “sensorium” as tracing of the ways we *make sense* of the multidimensional “informations” we receive from the world. Including what we ourselves bring forth into the world beyond our wording.

A sensorium wide enough to include those who have crossed over but also the ancestors being birthed and those yet to come. This is what I have called a less anthropocentric Apocalypse, *an Apocalypse of the senses*. (Offering the word Apocalypse in its original meaning of “revelation.”)

This could be called The Widening, extending our capacities, allowing an entangling networking of processes where the emerging is still birthed beyond the personal, in communal mourning, in ecologies of care and relation, in spite and thanks to the failure of our attempts, in recollection of a wider kinship allowing us to also rejoice in “always coming home” – as we mourn our human and non human kin and this waste land.

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