

Notes on
Paris

The city is in flux, building and constructing, folding and reshaping. The past and present reverberate before my eyes, flickering in and out of focus, ignited and extinguished in a single moment—it lives in perception—the ability to be seen, to appear natural and seamless, traces of Creation lost in time, locked in the past. Able to reveal and conceal, playing on the anonymity of the city and the ingenuity of those inhabiting it. “Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.”¹

This is my city: in all its dreams and absurdities, and all the people who have spent their years shaping it. A single perspective, thoughts and moments, all trying desperately to stay. This is my account of space and time, of inspiration—A place, its people, and their portraits.

¹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 38.

—THE PLACE—

I sit here for the second hour now. Time passes differently here and I feel I am out of practice.

“That’s the way the cookie crumbles,”² I overhear and am reminded of childhood idioms. I think of synonyms apt for the café’s setting. This game starts and stops with “Take the cake.” I enjoy the visual as the server slices delicately into the cheesecake and serves it to the table next to him. This is not New York where everyone around us is in a rush. The shop lacks the conventional whirring and buzzing of people agitated by their usual caffeinated vigour. People here sit down and breathe, cast away the hours as if they were mere minutes. Conversations emerge where I have grown used to only charged cacophony. And yet coats still slice the air and swinging doors let in the cold. I shiver.

My mind goes blank from too much coffee, only vaguely aware of the wild gesticulations penetrating my periphery. It seems out of place amid the hushed conversation. They speak of exchange and dreams, apprehension and judgement. I welcome the idealism of it all. It is a discussion unrestrained—bound by neither time nor space, equal and invested, reciprocated and lengthy. This is not New York.

I turn my attention back to the couple. Now they speak of adrenaline—the thrill of performing. I imagine the two as concert pianists, or perhaps violinists. In either case, I want them to belong in a symphony, on the stage of the Opéra Garnier, melodies flowing under Chagall’s painted stars.

² Anonymous, overheard personal conversation at Caf  t  que, Paris, France, August 26, 2012.

Kristina Chan

22.09.2012 15h30 75015

Today I witnessed all of prehistory unfold. There were no words, only faceless mouths, and eyes, and jaws.

22.09.2012 15h31-16h31 75015

Perhaps it begins with the press of a button, an on and off, a steeping, a brewing, a percolation—of thought, of whimsy, of creative—nay, of caffeinated bliss. It is a process, a journey, a stimulant that transforms a rock into a shard, an arrowhead, a venus.

It begins with a movement, one of feet, back and forth, in and out—through fields, across plains, and into caves. Hollowed out and paused for breath, we take our hands, soiled by the trials of the day and rest them on cold stone. Welcome to Lascaux. Horses, hunts, and bisons follow suit.

Farms replace the cave, and pots their walls. The heavens give rise to ritual, whole pyramids and crypts, streets of gold, death masks, and lore. Mausoleums and cathedrals, crusades, and illuminated manuscripts.

Gods are reduced to One. Tableaus and icons inlaid in gold; their gleam shining bright in the midst of such Dark Ages.

Man becomes master of his fate, both in vivid detail and smoky *sfumato*—the world swells and grows plump and spherical, and the horizon is powerless to cast ships off its edge. Pick up an air of change as power shifts—from North to South and East to West. Churches split, replaced by Heads of State. Soon science reigns: Cadavers uprooted, organs painted, and anatomy becomes a derivative of Phi.

New worlds discovered and explored: Entomology illustrated in endless detail, books, , and tales of beasts. India is discovered twice over and “noble savages” carve totems, ceremonial masks, and canoes—warmed through drink and poisoned blankets.

Meanwhile across the seas revolutions rage and maps are redrawn: Imperialism and freedom walk hand and hand—a raft cursed with the name Medusa.

All this under the guise of “progress:” La Belle Epoque where Daguerre snaps a photo and the whole world followed suit. The world holds expositions as nature grows romantic and untamed. Art becomes disfigured and degenerate while perspectives skew and cubists play their games. Hans Bellmer cuts his dolls and Greenberg mocks totalitarians and their affinity for kitsch. Somewhere in between Poland becomes a country again. Sculptures fold and monuments are erected. The sublime followed by the commercial. And amid all this, mirrored cubes reflect whole histories back onto us.

Such is the history of art in one hour.

“And yet the nineteenth century is all the prehistory the twentieth thinks it needs.”³

10.10.2012 08h30 75015

He gestures wildly: “Be an artist, a poet—be crazy, unusual. Animate and jump. Embrace Bob Dylan, read Vogue, think outside the box.”⁴

His hands, not his arms, cross and uncross, roll and shift—changes caused by a near death accident and escaping space the only way such incidents allow. All ideas are imposed: “All artists lie in copy. As Picasso said, ‘If there’s anything to steal, I will steal it.’ Presence is what your pour into it. So don’t worry, be free.”⁵ All this before 8h55.

26.10.2012 11h15 75020

There is magic in this city today; a kind of magic only possible when carried on the backs of streaming rays. The sun in intermittent, each reappearance an unexpected surprise.

³ William Mackendree, personal conversation with author, October 10, 2012.

⁴ William Mackendree, personal conversation with author, October 10, 2012.

⁵ William Mackendree, class lecture at Paris College of Art, October 10, 2012.

It is fall. And Paris is grey.

Strange how we tend to fall back onto stereotypes.

And yet this fact descends into fiction as the October chill becomes irrelevant in such a sheen. I sit on the wicker seats, red and cream, like sweets littering the streets. I *take* a coffee, a café crème. I revel in the beauty of mistranslation—a smile crossing my lips, letting smooth salvation in.

Next to me sits an elderly man, white in both hair and coat. He hunches over at such an angle I can only assume has been practiced for years. Flakes of his croissant dance in his beard with every exhale. Larger flakes free themselves only to be imprisoned in the loose knit of his woven scarf. I crane my neck over his shoulder, deciphering the pages of his daily crossword.

Five across: c'est pas propre, c'est _ _ _ _ _

I mouth the word *b-o-r-d-e-r*, amused by such coincidence.

05.11.2012 14h25 75015

Paris is slow. It progresses at an amble, rarely rising above a casual saunter, and yet even without the crazed hustle of New York, I find myself equally as lost and disorientated. But perhaps it is more a physical loss, as the winding streets lead me this way and that. Turned and returned, abiding by no visible law, only vaguely aware of a final destination. I had the idea of finding a café—small, reclusive, and calm. But finding refuge from waves and decibels are a rare commodity, even in the fifteenth.

There are two types of cities: “Those that through the years and the changes continue to give their form to desires, and those in which desires either erase the city or are erased by it.”⁶ My

⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 30.

mind drifts and I find myself transported. I see the French Revolution, the July Ordinances: Two hundred years of revolution. A Paris plagued until the mid-nineteenth century.

Hausmannization still two decades away from being realized. The city itself was to become a tool for suppressing revolution. Ninety-five kilometres of wide, straight boulevards would carve apart the city. Cobblestone was to be replaced by concrete and the Boulevard Périphérique ensured multiple points of access while simultaneously diminishing an opponent's ability to lay siege to the city. On streets wider than twenty meters, building heights legally had to be equal to its width as square buildings were nearly impossible to pull down or demolish. To prevent rooftop vantage points, the pitch of buildings was limited to forty-five degree angles.⁷ Green space and public parks provided fresh air and prevented disease while concurrently restricting public assembly to easily monitored and patrolled crowds. After all, wasn't it Baudelaire who lamented how "the physical fabric of a city changes, alas, more rapidly than a man's heart?"⁸

And yet on October 29, 1667, Paris became the City of Lights, of romance, of poetry, and of art, "and from the minute those nearly three thousand lanterns were lit...the world never looked back."⁹ Urban and rural have become mutually exclusive and yet, on the surface, the arterial winding and romantic roads of this medieval city appear organic and timeless, as if casually, effortlessly added on as time progressed and population expanded. Indeed, a city is nothing if not psychological: in modern architecture's hurry to maintain the status quo, it instead created a social panopticon, responsible for such underlying anxiety, and phobias that are symptomatic of our less than settled lives.

And yet we take these politics as natural, seen everyday unquestioned and assuming. Heading west from rue de Severo in the fourteenth arrondissement towards Vaugirard, there is a building. It is not just any building. Concrete slabs and caged steel stalk up and tower high—their limbs stretched and elongated in an attempt to cut the sky, lacking all the romantic notions of meeting the horizon.

⁷ Howard Saalman, *Hausmann: Paris Transformed* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1971), 49-58.

⁸ *ibid*, 58.

⁹ Joan Dejean, *The Essence of Style* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 206.

Here it is cold. Industrial. It belongs to the abandoned, grasping hopelessly at the flushed color of the living. And yet it watches you. No so much the building, but the void created by its intersections—an air worn thin by then by breaths not taken.

Across from me, a slew of exasperated Russian distresses over terminal changes and metro transfers, cultural visits, and races through the Louvre.

The conversation peaks and breaks in tandem with the rhythmic electro-pop occupying the background. During moments of deep concentration, it quiets to a distant hum and I recall how white noise, incessant in its static, marks the beginnings of the universe—remnants of an explosion long since passed, but only now reaching our infantile ears.

15.11.2012 13h30 75011

Today we meet in République, although this is not our final destination. We twist and turn, cross the canal, remark on how the wall mural on Quai St. Martin has once again changed, and wonder if *Le Comptoir General* is still open during the fall. I walk straight past the wooden framed windows, with a purpose only acceptable in New York. Without turning, I step backwards to the front door, baristas grinning at my staggered moonwalk as I enter; their amusement directly reciprocal to the embarrassment threatening to creep across my slowly flushing cheeks.

Instead I smile. We order. And proceed to sit.

I only then become acutely aware no wicker chairs occupy my sight. No exterior seating. No ash-trays. The decor is basic—it does not belong to Paris. Its white walls are high and the primary coloured stools fold flat with an IKEA-esk degree of efficiency. English floats on the air. It twinges with accents of ex-patriots from across the globe. And yet, this is not a Starbucks.

18.11.2012 19h00 75009

Lights surround us, festive in their anticipation of the holidays. A carousel chimes in tune with overzealous children. We sit outside despite the time, our orders indicated by a number written hastily on an elevated wooden chip. Inside, the menu is written on sliding blackboards: Gluten-free is a pastry option, and latte art a prerequisite. In other words, Vancouver. I find myself transported, standing on the corner of 10th Avenue and Discovery, stepping into *Bean Around the World*, a daily addiction I have yet to successfully, or perhaps willingly, confront.

In the end, we always need direction: Somewhere to go, to let our minds drift upon or our feet to guide us to. We need a point of reference. A city centre. All cities are contingent upon one—streets that lead both to and from. They create a point of reference around which everything circulates. We, the city's inhabitants, can physically go from one point to another, our thoughts, routes, and destinations discerned by such paths. And yet despite our efforts, we can only go from point to point, from A to B; the destination remains unchanged despite the varying routes we take. The idea of a centre creates our social "Truth," the idea that while reality may have many paths, it arrives at a single destination, be it a specific crossroad or address. And if destination is singular, the question then, of intersection, becomes paramount. The ability to turn and cross and fold then serves not to divide, but rather to join, be it a soul to a mind, a time to a space, or any variation thereof.

I have been reading Certeau, enraptured by the whimsy of his words. He investigates the ability of a populace to transcend the confines of rational delineations by equating the logic of the grid to the New York City street plan. There is a manipulation in an intersection; they allow for aimless winding and ambling, but this briefest sense of autonomy exists only in the space between two points:

It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes...The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thick and thin of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body

is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author or spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces.¹⁰

¹⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, University of California Press), 158.

25.11.2012 10h25 75020

Came here once
while the sun shone bright
A sight so stern
fixed and tight
hands clasped
knuckles white
undisturbed, set to flight
—A true escape in its own right.

A jump in time
The curtain's pulled
How whimsical
—A pantomime.
Now twirl about, unconfined.

Here you're free, in your own mind¹¹

¹¹ Kristina Chan, *New York.*, (Paris, Self Published Artist Book), 12.

27.11.2012 14h30 75014

Breathe

Kristina Chan

05.12.2012 9h37 75015

“We are not charitable in our attention...and justifiably so.”¹²

“Art is immediate. It goes straight past the eye before rationality convenes.”¹³

07.12.2012 16h46 75015

“Throw your dreams into the wild.”¹⁴

Let them roam free, see the world, run, be chased. Taste the sky and kiss the rain. Let the winter in. Take in the cold to remember warmth. See your breath to know you’ve taken one.

Six words printed on a poster: Lyrics of a song now pasted on the wall in front of me. An apparent invitation to unleash my racing thoughts.

I feel hollow, emptied and carved thin, cracked and fractured.

Paris is lonely. Lonelier now.

But here tears fall from mournful skies,
Thunder gives voice to stifled cries.

From far away church bells ring
and choirs sing—a speech of hope in rhyme and hymn.

On my face I feel your grin
You mock your service—A deathly sin.
I know your fear, your tears and pain.

¹² William Mackendree, personal conversation with author, December 5, 2012.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Kim Lomba, I post(er) it, 2012, Poster illustration, artist collection.

Swallowed whole. No warmth
nor evening rain.

From up above, they're supposed to sing
But I see no angels,
nor loving King.¹⁵

Tears and laughter. And tears again.

There are two stages to grief. They repeat, sporadically and suddenly, its length and termination unclear.

We have all lost. And yet the absence does not make us lighter.

23.12.2012 23h32 75018, 75013

Is there magic in not knowing? Or is it simple ignorance that ignites the air with mystery?
The air is wet; mist shimmers in the lamplight and lyrics resonate in my head, in a space hollowed out and vacated by all productive thought. Slowly. Melodically. The lyrics to U2's *Where The Streets have no name* invade my reverie and match my stride.

“I want to run
I want to hide
I want to tear down the walls
That hold me inside
I want to reach out
And touch the flame
Where the streets have no name.”

¹⁵ Kristina Chan, *New York.*, (Paris, Self Published Artist Book), 3.

And I took a moment, and watched them turn to days: Months and centuries converge... “the city’s aflood.”¹⁶

Before me stands a door. Dark. High. Towering. Imposing. It serves to separate, admit or deny entry. Dictate. We like our privacy. Building walls and roads and barricades between us and what we deem as wild. These walls create enclosures, safe, controllable and rational delineations. We call them dwellings, apartments, homes, and beds: They are laced with meaning. Woven thick, knit and pearled by memories in time. They house, simultaneously alienating while providing refuge: “a product of rapid oscillation between two characteristic moods of urban life: the over-close identification with things and too great distance from them.”¹⁷ This is the urban. Here rationale and logic reign. Here we are free to distance and disorient. We fear what we know and so we attempt to alter fact and twist it to our fiction. Perhaps it is from this depth, this unspoken distance, where art is formed. It grows, like weeds through the pavement, budding from the “unconscious of the modern society, places we can go to keep our dreams undisturbed.”¹⁸

14.01.2013 23h18 75003

There are living ghosts within ourselves—fragments of selves assembling and disassembling at will—an oscillating staircase in an Escher sketch. Modern society has allowed us to separate, hide, or reinvent ourselves. Reality is merely consolation, “never more than the stating of an interpretation...a trace...a material vestige of its subject:”¹⁹ A fabricated world where direction holds no clout and orientation becomes meaningless. Society is living the dualism that Descartes so vehemently cautioned us against. Linear progression is nothing more than an oxymoron:

¹⁶ U2, “Where the Streets Have No Name from ‘The Best of 1980-1990.’”

¹⁷ Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁹ Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, *Visual Culture: the reader* (London: SAGE publications Ltd., 1999), 80-1.

“Thus the city repeats itself, identical, shifting up and down on its empty chessboard.”²⁰

I enjoy this idea of a cyclical history. It allows for the reassurance of something to fall back on: A plan B, or at the very least, another chance to learn from one’s mistakes. After all, it was Escher who made no differentiations between negative and positive space. They were interchangeable—image and impermanence went hand in hand. His tessellations, defined as regular divisions of the plane through the arrangements of non-overlapping closed shapes, led to a plethora of work culminating in over four hundred lithographs, woodcuts, and engravings.²¹

18.01.2013 10h45 75005

I wonder what constitutes a border, staring at the *Paris Plan* for the umpteenth time. Divisions decide your postal code; I ponder how 75000 delineates Paris from *La Banlieue*.

And yet the city is strange. Built up upon whole versions of itself, all resting precariously atop one another. In the streets across from *Le Bateaux d’Ivre*, there stands a wall—my fingers trail along its break, grabbing at its corners, tentatively testing its structural integrity with the fleeting fantasy of taking hold, hoisting myself up, scaling whole empires through the eras, their kings, and conquerors. The grand stones have long been torn apart, the mud and mortar that once served to reinforce now lies cracked and crumbling. Like all medieval villages, the wall served to encase and fortify. Built in 1127, it marked the limits of Lutèce—a Paris that dared not venture past Cardinal Lemoine on Line 10. This a trend throughout the city: Cobblestones reveal themselves under the hardened tar of pavement. Passageways that lead nowhere and doors you cannot enter. All ghosts of places once walked:

²⁰ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 56.

²¹ The Mathematical Art of MC Escher, “Tessellations”; available from <http://www.mathacademy.com/pr/minitext/escher>; Internet; accessed 20 October 2012.

It sort of suggests Piranesi...full of these floors that really go nowhere and stairways that just disappear into clouds, and this sort of breaks off... and you're just sort of left with this rather handsome wall structure...I can't figure out why they put that door there but it seems to belong, it seems to have some incredible...necessity.²²

I like the idea of necessity, or feigned necessity perhaps. It acts like a facade, or more appropriately, a puzzle; it offers a place for everything and yet offers no rationale behind such system. I suppose then, the importance lies in its assemblage: in 1767, John Spilsbury, an English engraver and cartographer, took a world map and pasted it to a block of wood, after which, he proceeded to cut out the shapes of each country, creating the first commercially sold jigsaw puzzle. A world dissected and fragmented.²³

21.01.2013 16h34 77140

Paris is not France. Today we visited Nemours.

The train raced past stop by stop, offering a blurred transition from city to rolling fields and industrial plants that lie just beyond its borders. The scene changes still; trees interrupt the horizon line, long and slender without their leaves, naked and ominous, holding all the eerie intrigue of a Casper David Friedrich landscape.

The sun streams down to spite the cold. Movement here is slower, as if through water: We are outsiders here—our presence questioned in each passing glance we share.

There are houses here. All individual in construction and yet identical in aesthetic. Gates separate each property and I realize this is the closest reference to a suburb I possess. We walk until we find the canal. Built by Napoleon, it supposedly intersects the country. We could follow it to Lille. A smile escapes along with the sudden urge to head South—fantasies to reach Toulouse, Marseilles, or Aix-en-Provence-and chase the sun until we reach its warmth.

²² Robert Smithson, "Hotel Palenque" (lecture, University of Utah, 1972).

²³ About.com Inventors, "The History of Jigsaw Puzzles"; available from <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/bljigsawpuzzles.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 October 2012.

03.02.2013 17h54 75016

“Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone.”²⁴

It is our invisibility that allows us time to reflect upon ourselves and our inspirations; it is the breeding ground for creativity, be it in calm contemplation or passionate action.

Revel in obsessive passions.

Be aware of passionate obsessions.²⁵

And it is in our invisibility that we are finally free. Geometry and logic served only as far as to stimulate intrigue: Haussmann’s newly widened boulevards and reconfigured city plan renewed Paris, allowed it to be rediscovered. Poets, artists, and inventors began to retrace the city, wandering with neither destination nor direction, but rather the pleasure of getting lost: The *Flâneur* was born. “How often I found where I should be going only by setting out for somewhere else.”²⁶

And it is a game; each taking their turn, each hand dealt a chance to start anew and embrace both chance and strategy. The game intrigues, brings us close. It is a space that holds its own reality, rules, and order, one we can choose to pick up the cards, roll the dice, and engage with, or not.

08.02.2013 20h38 75004

“I always imagine he’s on one of them,”²⁷ she confesses as we watch the boats pierce through the Seine. These boats, they hold tourists, all on the edge of their seats snapping photographs of the Notre Dame: businessmen in pressed suits conducting conferences; and swaying dancers, slaves to the distant drumming of a soundproofed rhythm.

²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 184.

²⁵ Kristina Chan, *New York.*, (Paris, Self Published Artist Book), 9.

²⁶ Brainyquote.com, “R.Buckminster Fuller Quotes,” available from http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/r/r_buckminster_fuller.html; Internet; accessed 22 April 2013.

²⁷ Antonia Speare-Cole, personal conversation with author, April 20, 2013.

We lay casually on the riverbank, letting our legs dangle down its cobbled edge. The sky is alive with whirring wisps of red and purple and I remember a time I held them in my hand, their rapture encapsulated on a roll of film as I claimed them as my own. And what a collection it was, bursting with blues, yellows, oranges, reds, and purples. These vibrant hues weave through the skies, past borders, oceans, and horizons. The wind shifts and so do these connections, like flight paths changing route. Leaning back, I place my hands down behind me on the cold stone and begin to hum:

“There are two lovers in the night,
waiting on the sun to rise.
Passing ships into the night,
under different skies.”²⁸

It’s a nice thought. To be longed for.

12.02.2013 14h15 68150

“The city is redundant: It repeats itself so that something will stick in the mind.”²⁹

Calvino’s words reverberate through my head as we drive through yet another country village and I cannot help but count the churches and notice the spires that reach up and invade the cloudless skies. “Every village will have two churches: One Catholic and one Protestant. That is how you know it’s Alsatian.”³⁰ Cédric’s endless local knowledge is as exhaustive as it is objective. We pass Strasbourg, where there is the largest expanse of red limestone in the region, lending to the overall pink hue of the city. Rounding Colmar, I am informed that a replica of the *Statue of Liberty* resides here in the sculptor Batholdi’s hometown. In Münster, I am made to smell the cheese. At Haut-Koenigsbourg, I learned of dragons and eagles and ancient myths of

²⁸ The Fray, “Be the One from self-titled album The Fray 2009.”

²⁹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 16.

³⁰ Cédric Elling, personal conversation with author, February 10, 2013.

lover's ghosts. Having wandered south from Switzerland, France's only two wolves have taken up residence in the woods just north of Ribeauville. Along Route D48, there are two currently frozen lakes, *Lac Noir* et *Lac Blanc*, which have been converted into hydroelectricity plants, disrupting the fresh water habitat and local ecosystems.

I smile as I have now taken to imagining him as a walking search engine: Askcedric.fr

23.02.2013 19h56 75001

You have to be always drunk. That's all there is to it—it's the only way. So as not to feel the horrible burden of time that breaks your back and bends you to the earth, you have to be continually drunk.

But on what? Wine, poetry or virtue, as you wish. But be drunk.

And if sometimes, on the steps of a palace or the green grass of a ditch, in the mournful solitude of your room, you wake again, drunkenness already diminishing or gone, ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, everything that is flying, everything that is groaning, everything that is rolling, everything that is singing, everything that is speaking...ask what time it is and wind, wave, star, bird, clock will answer you: "It is time to be drunk! So as not to be the martyred slaves of time, be drunk, be continually drunk! On wine, on poetry or on virtue as you wish."³¹

(Baudelaire, "Be Drunk")

Keli came into town today. Her eyes twinkled with the light of someone seeing the city for the first time. It filled with a wonder that has long been forgotten by its inhabitants. Photos must be

³¹ Poemhunter.com, "Charles Baudelaire: Be Drunk"; available from <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/be-drunk>; Internet; accessed 23 March 2013.

taken at every turn and pastries sampled throughout the day. She dances through the Tuileries, *chassées* under the arcades at rue de Rivoli, and insists on having the Eiffel Tower in view at all times.

On my left I spot Penone's bronze tree. At twelve meters long, the felled tree is less than conspicuous. And yet returning Keli's gaze I see this wonder, like its inexplicably detailed roots, have fallen on blank eyes, blinded by the sparkle of a distant tower. Alas, the traveler "must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one."³²

16.03.2013 13h57 75012

Gare du Lyon: The station's halls arrest stagnation. Nothing lingers. Dust takes sanctuary high in the rafters—its only refuge from the traffic below. The grand hall is just that: Its expanse only exasperated by the crowds swarming its every corner and alcove. The travelers' movements are not regal; they do not dance, nor hold whimsy. Instead sharp angles and long strides dictate their purpose—flashing glances towards the information signs the only clue as to their direction while their destination remains impossible to discern.

Train 6111 to Marseilles embodies with it a lulling sway bringing passengers to the edge of dream.

Nostalgia is melancholic. It is reflective, transportive. Seat 85 faces Paris and as the landscape, compartmentalized by the train's window frames, races past me in reverse, I see the Present be sentenced to the Past.

It is an anachronistic past: it holds no order. No sooner does the sun stream past Avignon does it hurtle me back to the grassy sidewalks of my youth. The sun is in my eyes and the wind pushes my hair into my face—my first double blind study. Before me, a silhouette of an adolescent Helen skips barefoot up the road. The grass is dry and itchy and she prefers the radiating heat of the pavement to its prickle. Her arms flail in attempted grace and verses from Weezer's *Island in*

³² Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 26.

the Sun are sung in all the wrong configuration. “We should have our own soundtrack to our lives,” she shouted over the roaring engines.

Looking around me at all the headphones encasing my fellow passengers I chuckle at the sad irony of such prophecy. It would seem, in Carriage 5, the French countryside and the iPad’s screen are equal opportunity attention seekers.

Perhaps it is not wisdom and youth that are mutually exclusive, but merely the recognition of such naïve genius.

17.03.2013 15h49 13001

There are two cities in Marseilles: The migrant port and the cultural capital. The two walk hand in hand, one constructed from the other’s fallen debris. New venues and contemporary art museums contrast the otherwise local open air markets and North African aesthetics: Imperialists and their colonists colliding in present-day political incorrectness. Old warehouses without windows take in the cold; Le Mistral swerves and twists to lick your face—a sour mistress not yet ready to be cast aside.

In a single street there is poverty and vast wealth, gentrification pushed passed the limits of any natural progression. There is a sadness here. One of a city “that can never be rebuilt or remembered.”³³ Yes, Marseilles is the new Cultural Capital of Europe. It is a title vied for by every country in the union. It is a great honor, opportunity, gift; indeed, “the city that they speak of has much of what is needed to exist, whereas the city that exists on its site, exists less.”³⁴

22.03.2013 23h17 75008

“De tous les elements du monde, seul le silence deborde le cosmos.”³⁵

“Of all the elements in the world, only silence can overflow the cosmos.”

³³ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 52.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 59.

³⁵ Abdelmajid Benjelloun, *Raccourcis*, 2013, Les Printemps des Poètes, les réseaux RATP.

Silence can be overwhelming. There is a great deal more than mere semantics behind the difference between the absence of presence and the presence of absence. Walking down the empty streets surrounding Solferino, I cannot help but think of Atget's Paris: The air so still I feel as though I could crop it from the world and hang it on my wall. But then I take a step and my stride invades the scene. There is an echo that reverberates off these stone walls; each step an incriminating, penetrating shutter.

clack.

Crash.

CRACK.

And I catch my breath, despite the unseasonably temperate night.

However, streets are just scenes without those who walk them. In 1978, Thomas Struth captured a New York City devoid of both people, movement, and motion.³⁶ Taken at dawn, these photographs document the brief half hour time-lapse when the "City that Never Sleeps" must reluctantly take a nap. The result is eerie, haunting, waiting.

28.03.2013 13h11 75008

"The relationship between art and life is undifferentiated and interwoven."³⁷

And I feel we will never be done.

Myth has given way to science, yet science has not quenched our thirst for knowledge. The "uncanny" exists because we exist to perceive it. Streets walked and cities travelled—whole areas

³⁶ Guggenheim Collection Online, "Thomas Struth"; available from <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artists/bios/1577>; Internet; accessed 23 April 2013.

³⁷ Jeu de Paume Online Press Release, "Muntadas. Entre/Between"; available from <http://www.jeudepaume.org/index.php?page=article&idArt=1507&lieu=1>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2013.

mapped and then forgotten, rooftop escapes and momentary breaks. We write and rewrite, unable to concede to a “useful ignorance.”³⁸

It is the flux, the mobility, that allows us to break from the grid. We, like the neighborhoods we inhabit, grow and shift, unrestrained by the streets we trudge. It is the inhabitants, those who populate a city that create the wonderfully irregular, unpredictability that provides the city with a heartbeat, a liveliness not possible in the cold shadow of logical delineation.

After all, didn't Darwin posit a species develops based on aesthetics?

The city is greater than the sum of its parts. It lends itself to those within it. Each neighborhood grows sporadically, adapting to its surroundings—encompassing city parks, rivers, and oceans. It grows to encompass a school district, a public library, a community center, a metro station. Boundaries shift and evolve when necessary, a species like every other. Its an evolution we can map, distort, and abstract. Anthony Vidler declares that “nostalgia is the haunting of tradition;”³⁹ the alluring linger of ephemerality—its legacy resonates, can be traced, read, rewritten.

We have created a world that, despite all efforts to the contrary, folds back upon itself—the curves of Time twisting and touching—its result seen in the ruins of a castle, blackened soot creeping up the wall of an abandoned factory, and dazed sight lines of a flashback. Indeed, we have created a “very particular kind of world, a very clean, clear, and orderly universe. But it was also a very paradoxical, inside-out world, a world where open [is] closed, simplicity [is] also complication, and clarity [is] also confusion.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (United States: Seven Treasures Publications, 2010), 20.

³⁹ Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 1.

⁴⁰ David Batchelor, “Whitescapes,” *Chromophobia* (London, UK: Reaktion Book Ltd., 2000), 10.

—THE PEOPLE—

The concert lights streamed down direct and bright. Their light as charged and tangible as the air they split—their fans highlighted and emphasized, jumping like words off the pages of a book.

It was a concert like so many others in Paris: A rebooked one. Delayed for twenty days and well worth the wait.

As the decibels climbed, so did the excitement. Agitation and elation rippled through the waving crowd, and I, standing on the mezzanine above, close my eyes and smile, gripping the grate of the amplifier, the vibrations tickling my fingertips.

And in this moment I am hopeful.

Graduation has come and past, lost to the blinding flash of overbearing cameras. There is gold and gowns and mirrors, crystal and champagne: A rehearsal procession where left is mistaken for right and tossed caps are held captive by overhanging chandeliers.

Then there is the stage. Each cross only once and I marvel at how four years has culminated in a mere six steps; for now we are alum and soon we will part, cast off to cities and countries and corners of the world I make no claim to be able to keep track of. But for now, for this instant, we are here. Together.

And this is our story. The briefest of moments that captured a lifetime.

The day is unseasonably warm and so we stroll. The Seine is high and the stone is wet. Her stride clicks delicately with the hollow ring of emaciated heels longing to be replaced. And I, having lost balance and fallen off the curb, meet the water's lapping edge, its tide kissing the outer edges of my boot.

29/05/2013 18h30 75004

Today the sky cracked open and the heavens descended in a storm that could only mark the beginning of summer. Even the Seine appeared flat, pounded even by vertical bombardment, and Pont Marie had never looked so beautiful.

"This is real rain!" she declared staring out the gaping window, arms outstretched as if in worship. The downpour hissed as it collided with the metal radiator and pooled beneath our toes. The moisture collected and soon our socks were saturated and cold, squished together like those damp dark days of autumn, wading through the school field, a lone red dot swallowed in a sea of mud.

I loved those days when the sky fell dark by three and black at four, where day and night held no meaning and you did not have to close your eyes to dream: Days where the stars shone as bright and close as any street lamp and Orion watched over you, belted in placed by the shift in season.

Those days, I could not breathe for fear of letting out the warmth: Each exhale a silver trace frozen on the air. Those days when you would draw each other close just to see the magic of them disappear, unmapped movements in the night.

06.06.2013 11h20 75011

"Sculpture in niche!" we would exclaim as we pranced across Pont des Arts, exhilarated by our very first lecture on Medieval architecture nearly four years ago. It would become one of many,

a ritual practiced every Thursday afternoon. And so would our game—searching high and low, peering over bridges, and under conclaves. Our discoveries amassed in decibels: Unruly yells over cracking pavement.

But alas, our yells have ebbed. Delighting instead in watchful reverie. These sculptures stand still, hold fast, endure. Refreshed, anew. My elbows rest against the painted moss green railing at the mouth of Canal Saint Martin, impressionably blushed and increasingly complementary in colour with each passing minute. And I watch the bursting gates of the damn push back the willing insistence of a rushing current. The water is soothing, its revolving echos coat my ears and I feel I understand the comfort of finding refuge in such shelter: refuge from home, overcrowding thoughts, missteps, and judgement. And the yelling; it is a cry to drown all others, to hush the world and find its peace. We listen to the river when we cannot bear to hear: A rush without adrenaline and a roar amid the silence.

And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so.⁴¹

I turn now, focusing now on the mosaic space invader across the way. They litter the city, resting high above the line of sight, urban icons in their own right. Craning my neck, I enjoy the contradiction, how we are taught to aim high, and yet, never to look down: A fear of heights crippled by the urge to climb.

07.06.2013 17h45 75015

⁴¹Gaston Bachelard, “The house, from cellar to garret, the significance of the hut,” *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, US: Beacon Press, 1994, 10.

Paris is a city for dreamers, ones that never wish to wake. Restored time and time again to exactly how it was, sacred in its masonry, quantified by intricacy: “Each one of its nooks and corners was a resting place for daydreaming.”⁴²

On Rue de Laos in the fifteenth arrondissement, I look out onto the apartment across from me. Haussmannian in design, the building holds five varieties of terrace railings, floors two and three the only duplicates.

Turning west, I cross the river and return home. My apartment holds no such captivation. No place to rest or daydream: A perfect square in white and ivory, reminders of the white omnipresent cube. Only in this gallery, I am to be hung and shown. But on what tier does the dreamer place? Alas, “we are never real historians, but always near poets.”⁴³

08.06.2013 12h32 75020

“You reach a moment in life when...the mind refuses to accept more faces, more expressions: on every new face you encounter, it prints the old forms, for each one it finds the most suitable mask.”⁴⁴

And I begin to think of all the faces I have met, all the ones I have dared to recycle. They are never quite the same, for in the end, they remain, immortals amid the moments they belong to.

A moment and its infinite description—how does one start, or restart for that matter? To discover, understand, and abandon: All for seconds soon to come.

Let us begin by laying to rest the dream, choosing instead the strength to rise.

⁴² Gaston Bachelard, “The house, from cellar to garret, the significance of the hut,” *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, US: Beacon Press, 1994), 15.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁴ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 84-5.

08.06.2013 17h35 75019

On Rue de Mouzaïa, there are many side streets, all self-declared villas—Victorian in style, rather than in values. Amid the wood and stone and shrubbery, there is a single complex with graffiti vandalizing the entrance to the car park. For as many times as I have walked passed it, I have tried to deduce its meaning. And yet, all I have concluded is that the teal of the spray paint is striking against the concrete, which is grey as the sky in early evening. It possessed a sheen that never seemed to fade and held a beauty that defied erosion. Like the stalled hand of a watch, it symbolized a moment never meant to last.

To my right there is a playground, gated, large, and vacant, themed after a construction site. Its giant toy trucks and tractors were painted yellow and black atop wheeled platforms. The ground is sand. There is no swing set. Yet if there was, I would imagine it as giant tires, swinging lightly with the breeze. Instead, a large foreboding gate claps against its lock: snapping with the wind.

And it was then that I remembered the ending to a movie barely watched, where two lovers, deep in the pit of the basement's foundation, hold each other tightly as the cement begins to pour. The only remnants of their story an everlasting dare sealed in a bright red tin, its sheen reflecting boldly against intermittent rays.⁴⁵

10.06.2013 13h45 75012

⁴⁵ movie jeux d'enfants

“The city does not know that its only moments of generous abandon are those when it becomes detached from itself, when it lets go, expands.”⁴⁶

11.06.2013 2h15 75020

Radiating outwards, the city is designed to leave itself. Run away from its core. Perhaps it speaks to the transient nature of the city. Perhaps it speaks merely of an architect’s desire. Simply of aesthetic. But then again, it is never simple. We are always guided. Aware of not. A path and a journey. A walk and a city.

Les Buttes Chaumont, a former rubbish dump, its many mounds have since been converted to rolling hills with suspension bridges, gazebos, ponds, streams, and a sightline that robs you of your breath. There are three hills in Paris, and I live on two of them. But I suppose it is all about recycling. Every morning and evening as I exit the metro at Gambetta on Line 3, I am greeted by a host of metro boutiques, selling everything from pots to pashminas: “Everything that ever fell off a Laurie landed here.”⁴⁷

But soon I will move to Crimée, steps away from the Galerie Cent Quatre. Rachel describes the area as up and coming. Not bothering to look up from her paperwork, Xavier retorts with laughter, “As in it hasn’t come up?”

How abundantly clear that Haussmannian Paris and the nineteenth arrondissement are mutually exclusive.

12.06.2013 14h03 75014

⁴⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 101.

⁴⁷ Eldon Chan, personal conversation with author, June 3, 2013.

Sitting on a park bench, I think of Montparnasse and my old apartment across from the Marie de XIX^{ème}. It had two orange walls and a panoramic blueprint that was shielded by a rounded roof, so as not to part the sky. But that is the thing about Paris, it only has “pieces of sky.”

These words came from a book I read, years ago back home: A single phrase in a essay in a collection that lay filed away in an unlit corner of a library at the west edge of the city. And as I absently flipped through its pages, my eye was caught and attention reinstated. And in my dark and unlit corner, I was bequeathed this smallest piece of truth: Paris has pieces of sky.

And it resonated.

For as a capital of history and culture, of vibrance and life, Paris is small. Hardly more than nine kilometres in diameter, and there is little room to breath. Haussmann built a city capable of oscillating infinitely, arrondissement by arrondissement, but never growing vertically—a skyline in six flights.

And yet it dwarfs you, encroaching from every angle, interrupting your periphery, letting you know you are not alone. And it is inescapable.

Two years ago, I was asked whether I would rather be deaf or blind. Without hesitation, I chose sight. Shortly after, I met a man who told me the most shameful thing a person can do was to be blinded, oblivious to the world around them—A world looked upon, yet left unseen. And in times of overwhelming gaze, he told me to look up, to find solace in an empty sky, for it was the only place no one else would find you.⁴⁸

Ever since, I have sought reprieve in open skies.

⁴⁸ Joe Neill, personal conversation with author, September 12, 2009.

But Paris only has pieces of sky.

13.06.2013 23h23 75001

I often wonder how it seems, all the times my words trail off into a smile as the world transforms before my eyes. In the midst of all this magic, what a shame it must be to see only someone lost in thought.

But peer closer still and the eyes, like rolls of film, expose the stars that coax the dreamer. How, in a second, the world reflected back onto us, skewed and distorted as if perspective held no clout, falls away and the pupil expands, blackened not from darkness but rather depth, and you are privy not to the other's soul but their capacity for life—a cavern carved out from all the walls and stones and attitudes we build to face the world.

It is a trust that envelops you, and you step off the edge of the world knowing you will meet the sky. In this stare and in this cavern, you discount gravity, and learn to fly. And understand finally how, in this incalculable expanse of darkness, you could fit the world ten times over, and it is hope that breaks away its edges, so it holds no bounds.

How could I ever hope to express this, to come back to the conversation, and explain I have been flying?

14.06.2013 13h15 75020

There is an angel on Rue Des Cascades, wheat-pasted on a slope as if falling from Grace.

For three years I have walked this city, navigated through the misty grey and cloud—footsteps repetitiously brushing the ground with monotony. I have come and left, and returned again.

Each time a different city greets me. Each time I realize I had never left:

You realize that the differences are lost: each city takes to resembling all cities, places exchange their

form, order, distances, a shapeless dust cloud invades the continents. Your atlas preserves the differences intact: the assortment of qualities which are like the letters in a name.⁴⁹

The city lives within my mind, nostalgic, longing, and insistent. I close my eyes and stroll its streets a hundred times over, digging each step into the ground as if to know my place. But the city is imaginative; each corner an opportunity to reinvent itself, and I fear my “footsteps follow not what is outside the eyes, but what is within, buried, erased.”⁵⁰

As I look down the roads that have made up this life,
that I travel to live and that lead me to die,
nothing is clear. There's no face, there's no voice,
just the flowers and weeds that grew out of each choice.⁵¹

15.06.2013 19h12 75010

We have a predilection with our past. How we pass through it, reinvent it and ourselves: “All these portals, apertures that could take us anywhere.”⁵²

But dreams are delicate and who knows why they turn.

⁴⁹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage, 1997), 125.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 81.

⁵¹ Miriam Waks, “There was Love” (original song, New York, 2013), 4-8.

⁵² Aislinn Hunter, “Attempts to Know the Past.” *The Possible Past* (Berkeley, USA: Publishers Group West, 1967), 11-12.

I remember when a knocking door
brought you to me on my garden floor
confessing pains and fears and malice
righting wrongs and screaming calice
crying hearts and grasping hands
summer tides and shifting sands.⁵³

⁵³ Kristina Chan, *Looking Back*, personal poetry, 2013, 1-6.

17.06.2013 22h34 75004

when Atlas shrugs
and fear treads
when figures found
you in their beds

when I will watch
while others weep
and let you slip
into your sleep

when ashes fall
from bitter skies
when love is lost
because its died

when I was sad
I would hope
that through all this
that I would cope

Such will is mine
but its not yours
I watch and touch
but can't support

your world is not
my weight to bear
but I will scream
because I cared

I scream when seeing
your back cave in
and watch you kneel
at your own ruin

to have your type
beside you fall
is to feel parts of
ones world appalled

It's so fucked up
It's lost to me
I cannot get
what I can't see

I cannot hold
I cannot lie
I've lost the will
to watch you die

(Untitled, Anonymous)

Her words rang with the echo of someone who had lost something greater than themselves, or perhaps the greatest part of themselves. Her eyes grew soft and her stanzas quickened, matching the elevating heart as it threatened to take away her words and arrest her chest. It was a catharsis. A confession. A secret and a storm. It was a rage and wrath, and a love rattling violently against its chains. Its every cry a threat to break.

18.06.2013 20h25 75020

“How do people have such dark layers?”

“Because we let them grow.”⁵⁴

18.06.2013 23h47 75010

The dark red spectacles framed Penny’s eyes. Dark and round, they grew wide with the wonder of a child. But in all the times I have seen them sparkle, her lips stay pursed with a wisdom born from lies.

20.06.2013 11h35 75011

On calm and quiet places

Herein lies the key.

On hushed silent displacement

for all who pay the fee.

Let me call you in

entice and draw you near,

with nare an uttered song to sing,

And only silence to soothe the ear.

A calm and quiet space

Left alone to misconstrue

A muffled yelling now displaced

Put on mute and left to stew.

⁵⁴ Antonia Speare-Cole, personal conversation with author, June 20, 2013.

It is a call unto its own
Let us laugh and shout and play
Relishing the chance to never speak again.

On calm and quiet places
Stand and be set free.
Fly away for you've become one of the faces
I do not care to see.⁵⁵

22.06.2013 05h07 75017

I used to say that New York held the capacity for the very best and worst of humanity. It was a city that teemed with life, each breath the expansion and contraction of a concrete jungle unprepared to compensate for such vivid elasticity. And as a result, it would seize and storm and crack, and let the nightmares in.

But even nightmares have their end. Now standing at the mouth of the circular courtyard, I feel as if I am in the eye of the storm. I have been told not to make a sound. Leaning gently against the cold stone wall, I watch an angel sing to birds. Back and forth. Responding and reacting. And it was to this harmony, that the night was whisked away. The light of early morning streaming in on the backs of beating wings.

23.06.2013 17h30 76790

The cliffs shot up into the air. Layers upon layers of strata marked centuries of tidal shifts. And while the sea was far from calm, the blowing wind drowned out its crashing waves. Laid out before us was a footpath. Pebble ridden rock guided us from hilltop to cliff edge and back again, weaving its way across the coast: Viewpoints that reveal an evermore expanse of sea and sky.

⁵⁵ Kristina Chan, *On Calm and Quiet Places*, personal poetry, 2013.

Arms outstretched in a feeble attempt to balance, we leave the comfort of the trail and descend towards the cliff face. There we perch, amid the sparse and spiky grass, resting against protruding stone to turn our backs towards the world.

Long since deafened by gale force winds, I look onward in revelled silence. My hair whips my face, and in this half knee crouch, understand at last the glory of Romantics—all their fears and pain and hesitation cast off the lonely precipice so as to stand again. Nature tamed by wild spirit. And I welcome this reenactment of a *Wanderer above Above a Sea of Fog*⁵⁶; this need to stand on the precipice, to look onto the edge of the world to see if there is place for you.

And it is in this solitude where Genius lays rest to Sanity and progress shows us the irony of “peace of mind:”

Man's unhappiness, as I construe, comes of his greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite.⁵⁷

27.06.2013 22h35 75001

Once again, we sit watching the lights flicker on, reflecting the brilliance of a city so often draped in overcast. I have never seen Paris dark, blacked out by night and left to wait for dawn; instead we watch the river shimmer and its current glow, radiating shades of halogen and tungsten flooding out from passing tour boats. The sky turns from blue to red, and on the hour begins to sparkle.

Moving west we make plans to see the carnival. But the Tuileries are dark and so we part; the weight of our heels drawing lines into the sand.

⁵⁶ Casper David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog* (Germany: Oil on Canvas), 1818.

⁵⁷ Thomas Carlyle, “Sartar Resartus,” *The North American Review* Vol. 41 (1835): 480.

Kristina Chan

31.06.2013 07h20 95700

The First Farewell.

In a letter. Over Paris.

“In Search of Lost Time.”⁵⁸

And I stop to think just how true these lyrics ring as I sit here; the words I am searching for long since lost to me.

They are words for time, for love, and for the soul. They hold a meaning too vast and large for the constraints of mere letters. How can I begin to tell you who I was before, how knowing you has made me better, how your compassion pieced me back together and taught me how to breathe again. And indeed, how, in every way, you saved me.

And I find these days pass faster than the storms and every minute a new sun rises; the moon swells to wash away the days. But despite their quickened pace, stay golden, with nothing lost and all to gain. With gardens walked and sunsets watched, with cliff faces scaled and guitars strummed. Here we stand, searching. Perhaps for the time, for its preservation, its arrest.

And yet how could such a time be lost, with every instant treasured.

With all my love, and so much more.

01.07.2013 15h13 75011

Today the city grows quiet, blanketed by the stillness of my stare. Nothing appears to have changed and yet somehow it is lacking. The city has lost something integral: an invisible underlying pulse, a beat I used to carry close as if to mimic mine.

28.07.2013 20h50 75003

And in the days gone past, I have been deafened by such silence. An incessant, unyielding drone. It is all I can do to push my hands to my head, and press upon my ears as if to keep them sealed.

⁵⁸Kim Lomba, Interconnection poster campaign, 2102, Poster illustration, artist collection.

14.07.2013 22h00 75011

self reflection in our tears

ad infinum; a hall of mirrors

estranged from all, Versailles

a gold prison, revolutionary tides

crown the sun, call it king

must be divine, kissing rings

fourteen days and seven months

the third lead with seven freed

they demanded his head

and the bloodbath was fed.⁵⁹

Fireworks shot through the sky at Place de la Bastille and I wondered as to the strength of selective memory.

24.11.2013 20h30 75019

“You spend all day smiling, with such incredible sadness.”⁶⁰

24.11.2013 16h27 75019

“such incredible sadness,”

⁵⁹ Kristina Chan, *Bastille Day*, personal poetry, 2013.

⁶⁰ Antonia Speare-Cole, personal conversation with author on November 25, 2013.

Kristina Chan

what a marvellous phrase
with none of the elegance of madness
only the mind an endless maze.

What an incredible sadness
turning round and round
like a spinning siren flashing
afraid to make a sound.

Stand up.
Be brave.
Don't cry.
Don't let it reach the eye.⁶¹

30.11.2013 17h39 75016

When you walk the halls of the Cité de l'Architecture & du Patrimoine, you come face to face with hundreds of statues, moulds and casts of facades and parapets of churches throughout France. Placed on the ground, the saints descend and the viewer is afforded the unsettling crumbling of limbs and eroded expressions: Centuries of weathering recast in plaster as if solidly complete.

Every step on the marble ground echoes outward from the soles of your feet, acting like sonars in an effort to reclaim the years.

But turn the corner and the scene changes, the years advance and spin as if to song, flapping to the Charleston. The year was 1925, *When Art Deco Seduced the World*.⁶² Geometric marble and

⁶¹ Kristina Chan, *All Day*, personal poetry, 2013.

⁶² Cité de l'Architecture & du Patrimoine Online Press Release, "1925, Quand L'art Déco Séduit le Monde": available from http://www.citechaillot.fr/fr/expositions/expositions_temporaires/25226-1925_quand_lart_deco_seduit_le_monde.html; Internet; accessed 30 November 2013.

wooden veneers shellacked lobbies and corridors of luxury hotels. Repeating triangles and connecting vertices joined together in chaotic matrimony with mirrored dance halls reflecting their glory back unto themselves. Indeed, it was seductive. Standing transfixed, I understood the allure offered by these patterns: Mathematical, logical, rational. They were immutable constants with solvable solutions. They ended where they began, recognizable and soothing.

27.11.2013 23h23 75019

and this is what hands learn to yearn
to touch upon its spine
the thing that drives the turbines
of the destroying force of time

to slow its steady tread
and soothe its angry roar
to calm its limbs
and gently ask for it to take no more⁶³

This is the silence hollowed out
by words impressed upon a page.
They are not mine
For these past months,
I struggle for both
sensibility and piece of mind.

And at the end
this is what's been discovered
A golden truth
partially uncovered.

A half written plea,
a hurried scrawl.

⁶³ Anonymous, found piece of poetry on November 29, 2013.

Kristina Chan

A summertime confession
filed away and left for Fall.

They were the words of someone better
who loved completely, thus beaten tender.
And to this day I cannot see
where on earth she's hidden: flee.

I find instead I'm standing here
impressing judgement on my peer
Best to let what lost be taken
I choose suspension over being forsaken.

After all, we will never leave,
Let the other fall completely to their knees.
I know now what you saw in me.
For looking back, I find reprieve.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Kristina Chan, *Since*, personal poetry, 2013.

02.04.2014 16h30 75020

It would seem only when we are able to suspend such evaluation, such ego and division, can we find solace in skepticism. It is only from incomprehensibility that wonder and awe can be reborn. And it is in this absence of presence that distance is bridged and whole worlds reformed.

So I'll lean back to give my thanks,
for all those times on the river's bank.
with setting suns and whiskey flasks
recounting memories of a Summer's past.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Kristina Chan, *Untitled*, personal poetry, 2013.

Kristina Chan

04.04.2014 20h35 75004

For with each new day, I fear, I pray,
that Paris takes your heart away.

AFTERWARD

—PORTRAITS—

It is in the nature of writing, especially that which is based on true account, to alter the names of all those mentioned—be it for protection, infringement, offence, or request. And so it shall remain. However, these are people who have had a great impact on my life, and I believe they require slightly more attention. I hesitate to say a character analysis, but perhaps posit instead, a sketch or brief contour. After all, it is in an artist's nature to outline and give form.

THE NEWCOMERS

They cross a bridge, simultaneously leaving and arriving. They possess the luxury of duplicity, privy to the enchantment of the traveller yet subject to the pragmatism of the since settled. They hold the freedom to redefine and rediscover home: Sights cast anew with comforting familiarity. With one eye still a visitor and the other its resident, they hold the capacity to transcend the city to make it what they will.

THE ANGEL

She has lost, for she speaks with both love and hesitation, immediacy and reserve, kindness and caution. Her smile is frequent and her laugh is short—amusement marked in pitch not length. She revels in chance meetings and dismisses all farewells. She leaves and returns and forgets where she has been, in search of time instead of place.

Such are the actions of someone who has been surrounded by love, and lost in spite of it.

But this is her beauty. Her wit and laugh and sight tread deep—never to rest on shallow waters. In early dawn, she greets the sun, its call and glow, and dreams of the world's edge: To stand victorious against its crashing seas.

But even angels face erosion, sadness that can darken the eyes and soften the stare. Yet, she protects the heart, as one must. For time is short and will not linger. So she takes all that is afforded, silently wishing it were longer, and dare not waste it on goodbyes. In this sense she is eternal, in suspension—Never Parting. Only waiting. Always searching.

THE SURVIVOR

She is stronger than anyone I have ever known. Her survival is unquestioned and her past protected. Her heart is locked and sealed—its key long since frozen under Tundra. Her past propels her and her drive keeps her from its repetition.

THE SONG

She knows both the sinking weight of misdirection and rushing air of rising purpose. A search for depth in balanced seas—mindful mediation amid lyrics of passionate decree.

THE SEARCH

He fills his days as best he can—an occupation with no hope of end.

THE CURIOSITY

With every day a multiplicity of inquiry, activities, and excitement, he travels in groups of constant reconfiguration, each new member sparking another round of “20 questions.” He insists and berates and frustrates—begrudgingly entertained by his incessant playfulness. And you are forced to smile, submit to the amusement, removed for days from responsibility and contained thought.

THE DREAM

Claiming to have a heart of ice, she welcomes in the cold, wishing for such frozen strength. But with desires unfulfilled, she is left vacant, with space instead to love wholly and without reserve. Clumsy and excitable, she runs from her intelligence—masking it in schoolgirl antics and choosing rather to exist somewhere between naivety and reality. She exhausts the Present with words and actions and dreams and crises that waste away the day.

Therein results a magnetism that draws and inspires and robs you of your hours. She is the endless distraction. Yet, through the haze, an underlying and determined gaze: Eyes that could arrest time but allow instead to let it pass without a care.

Kristina Chan

She delights in the concept and philosophy of a thing, preferring the question of a soul to the actions derived from it, the physics of existence to the forms it undertakes, and spirals for hours in the pursuit of shower curtains.

THE SHELL

She cannot see without her glasses, preferring it that way. Nocturnal, she keeps the light at bay, and in those nights, when not even warming company nor the numbing drink can lull her back to sleep, she will reflect. With this clarity, she reminisces and wants, and sees the world again. But soon the insecurity, self-reproach, and fear sets back in—leaving little more than pity in its wake. Seen through lightless eyes and raising anger, she compensates with hate, powerless to stop the world from moving and make it keep her company.

She is her regrets, and without the mercy to forget. I pray Audacity reciprocate her gaze, lest she be left alone in her blackened maze.

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