Loving Disappearing Traces

a psychogeographical travelogue

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L O V I N G
D I S A P P E A R I N G
T R A C E S

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by

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Wandered lonely in the voice of another who had no voice
This is what I remember
Two figures by the water's edge, stopped by such beauty, one numbers
The complaints travel the body stop nowhere never stop are always
Later by an open window notebook open "This is what I remember . . ."
– Laura Mullen, "No Voice"

For the most part, the sculptures
seem to be looking at nothing in particular;
they have a gaze,
but they don't have a need for it.
– Jena Osman, *Public Figures*

"I" was not there. Suppose the photograph is not still: minutes before the boats were docked on the shore, I was left to another woman on the other side of the lake, (I was barely a year old then and was left on the other side of the lake after catching a cold). Her mother, the one who took the photograph, boards down the boat and surveys the field alongside her husband, their adopted son, and other family relatives. The travel guide's voice blasts through the speaker, announcing the sightseers' arrival at the Volcano Island—

To bear witness to the mouth of the world's smallest volcano, the traveler must cross the Taal Lake to get to the Volcano Island. They may then board a horse to reach the other side of the island and cross the Crater Lake. In the middle of the lake lies the mouth of the volcano, agape.

*

Then minutes after they all landed, time was frozen in place—

*

The upward trek lives outside of the frame, becomes story, becomes frozen testament stored in a damp corner of a yellow house in Mindanao, waiting for visitors, until "I", in search of memory, happens upon the photograph 22 years after the fact. Some of the pages of the albums were yellowing at the edges, some were eaten by molds.

*

On the fringes of the photograph, "I" negotiates with the poet, and I obliged to her request.

A long time ago, there was no need for names. People made do with pointing. The earliest conception of the idea of a body may have begun when Adam and Eve fled from the Garden of Eden, when flesh became more than just flesh. There began a need to find the beginning and end of things—the body of a snake, the body of an apple, the body of a tree, the body of a bird, the body of a woman. But back then there were no words. They made do with pointing, drawings, grunts, and screams.

*

What there may have no body: the sea, the land, the sky.
How can you reduce mass to an utterance? There used to be no words.
There used to be no point with words.

*

Before "I" spoke the boats were already tethered to the shore.

*

The past is yet to happen. They took him outdoors, sat him at the back of the car. The ride lasted for hours. They carried him aboard a boat, crossed the lake, then carried him out.
On the shores of the lake, the horses were waiting.

*

Position-center. Maintain eye-contact.
The very instant they took the photograph, he turns around.

The force of the photograph is known to leave its victims
no body, nor apparition, only shards.

*

Can a photograph kill? If only you were not too enamored with memory,
I may have outlived that photograph in your hands.

*

A shard catches your attention. You have no flesh, no mouth.

*

Tell me how words are not clumsy fingers sifting through the grains in the shore.

*

Suppose that the sentence and the photograph
are pining for the affections of the same woman.

*

I wanted to see where my words can take me.
She wants to put herself into words.
She wanted to be words.

*

I borrow words from mouths "I" never kissed.

The world began with a series of divisions: the light from the dark, the sky from the sea, the sea from the land, the man from the woman, the signifier from the signified.

*

There can be no language without culture. There can be no culture without beings.
There can be no culture among beings who were newly conceived.
How did God warn off Adam and Eve from the apple tree?

I cannot speak but I do see.

Story: The photographer wanted to see what world an image may contain.

Image: No one is inside. No one is trying to get inside. No one can see you. No one passes by here anymore. No one glances at your direction anymore. No one goes here anymore. It is stark morning. Can't you see? The bicycle across the street is not here to visit you. What are you apologizing for?

Caption: I lend my body to the poetic line.

*

Story: Can a photograph replace the sky?

Image: There were two of her, and then there were none. The cover seats were left to the moths; the rattan furniture, long abandoned in a desolate house. The yellow flowers were of no consequence, you can find it anywhere.

Caption: In the page I stand with words emptied of selves.

*

Story: A sentence needs to be read. A photograph only begs to be seen.

Image:

Caption: A sentence may envy the photograph, for its unfailing power to disclose.

Story:

Image: Photographs are populated with ghosts. The photographs are populating the ghosts. The photographs populated the ghosts. The photographs are populated by ghosts.

Caption: You do not need me. I cannot do but echo.

*

Story: What begs to be alive?

Image: The fallen lamppost, the bottle hanging by a thread? The waiting figure, the illuminated shadow?

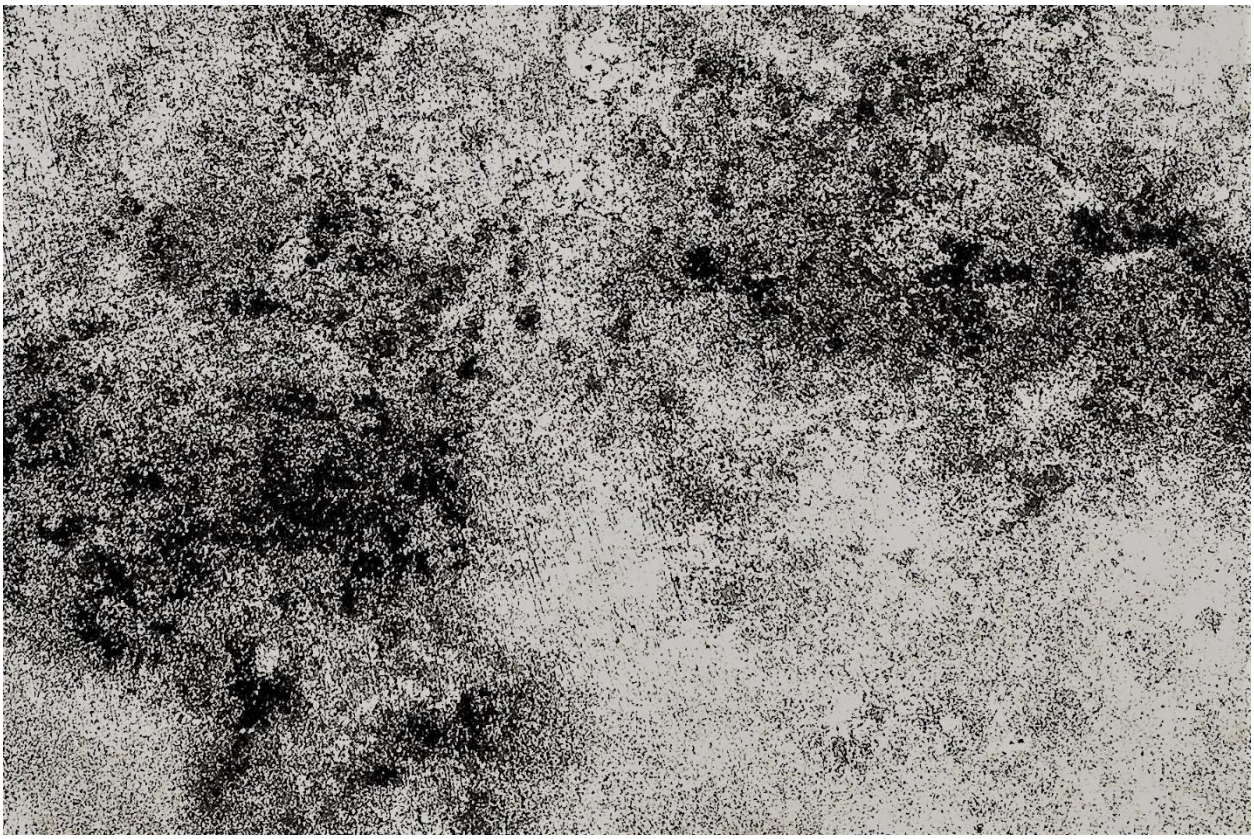
Caption:

*

Story: […]

Image: Headlines made flesh.

Caption: In my dreams, your faced is erased.



[A picture containing outdoor, grass, nature]

I breathe out of a water basin.

*

Story: If it weren't for the lampposts, the car lights, the silhouette of the trees, you're nothing.

Image: You were an accident.

Caption: The limits of words, of language, of tongues berated for not articulating what the eyes can see.

*

Story: This may mean refusal. This may mean that something is broken. This may mean silence.

Image: The sensors are defunct.

Caption: Do not cross the fence.

*

Story: I no longer want to write about analgesics.

Image: The flesh quivers; the body, aquiver.

Caption: There is no lack.

You think of hunger as something deserved.

I cannot catch you. My hands are not sleepy. My hands are not slippery. I envy the photograph. It catches you perfectly. My words end where my language ends. I do not understand your language. You resist to be understood. You refuse to speak.

*

I cannot pin you into place. I cannot pin us into place. I cannot pin me into place. I can only look at the birds outside my window, and when they linger, I should be grateful that they allowed me to inspect them.

If you tell me that you love me, then love accompanies me. What is written does not reveal love, it only reveals my loyalty.

Dis donc,

Du coup,

Bref,

Thus,

[Aller / Verse / Point / Virgule / Ouvre les guillemets / Point de / Lyric / Interrogative / Ferme / Guillemets / The Response / Il n'y a une point / Il y a quelqu'en ici / De loin]

Sans fin

_____

Archivist's Signature

Notes

1. This essay is a homage to Laura U. Marks's essay "Loving a Disappearing Image".
2. The form of this essay was loosely based on Theresa Hak Kyung-Cha's Dictee and Jena Osman's Public Figures.
3. The organizing subterranean metaphors of this essay are based from Laura Mullen's Dark Archive (2011) and Haryette Mullen's Sleeping with the Dictionary (2002).

Works Cited

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Jessa C. Suganob is a translingual practitioner working with diagrams, languages, and ephemera. She writes in English, French, Filipino, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Kinaray'a in her works. She attained her undergraduate degree from the University of the Philippines Los Baños. She has been a fellow in the 20th Ateneo National Writers Workshop. Her collaborative zine "So We Must Meet / Apart" was featured as one of the finalists for 2024's The Big Other Readers' Choice Award. Her works are accessible at *ANMLY*, *Kritika Kultura*, *Hulagway: Empire & Emporia*, *OF ZOOS*, *TLDTD*, *LUMIN Journal*, and elsewhere.

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1) Catherine Vidler – ***Chaingrass***
2) Abby Minor – ***Watershed***
3) in8 iÐ – ***U/X 010-101: doG-one***
4) Roberto Harrison – ***Tropical Lung: Mitologia Panameña***
5) Kenneth M Cale – ***Nostalghia***
6) Brenna Womer – ***Dear Mom***
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