

MOSAIC



I wrote down what follows on or close to October 7, 2014. I wish I could be more precise about the date, but it isn't marked in my notebook. It is the transcript of the verbal portion of an encounter. It happened on a traffic island on Allen Street, facing Delancey, in New York City. The words aren't "mine."

I had just left rehearsal for MORTAL KOMBAT, a martial arts-inspired performance for the Whitney Museum that I created with the actor Jim Fletcher. Rehearsing this project was a physically exhausting and mentally fascinating adventure, involving punching and getting punched, slapping and getting slapped, dancing, tumbling, grappling, mirroring, and something we called "fake tai chi." The process opened strange and unusual currents in my body, and I often left rehearsal in a state of mildly euphoric mental numbness and physical elation.

Anyway, on this particular day, the sky was overcast and the weather mild as I made my way toward Delancey. I remember when the sun emerged from behind the clouds. It felt somehow warmer than usual. And something in me gave itself over to the pleasure of that warmth. I felt it entering me through the part of my head I sometimes call "my antenna," where my first white hairs grow, where my hair fell out while my mother was on Rikers Island, and where, when a truck drove into me near Léogâne, Haiti, in 2010, I developed a bump, though by all accounts I should have died.

The sun's warmth kept filling me, and what had begun as a slightly above-average warmth kept growing. It was starting to fill my body, and just before I totally surrendered to it, I had the inkling this might be something like the "bliss" I had heard about in old books. I had to sit down. There was even a bench to sit on right there, traffic streaming in both directions. I probably look like an idiot, I thought gently, if such a thought can be thought gently, and then I thought, I don't care.

Whatever bliss was, if this was it, it steadily gave way to rapture. I like the word rapture, but the truth is no word exists for what I felt. It was love, of such ravishing totality that I don't know what to compare it to, and of such magnitude I could scarcely speak of it for two and a half years. I have never felt anything like it. That's not true. I have felt love, and this was love, but of a magnitude so enormous there was no way to undermine or deny it. There was no way to see around it and no desire for anything but to be filled with it. It was a feeling I cannot compare to anything. It was like what some poets have written about. It was like nothing any poet has ever been able to put into words. I know I'm failing right now. But I'm a human being, and you are, too, and perhaps you have felt something like this.

I felt it filling me, and changing me, changing my cells, reorganizing me.

And then it began to speak. I was surprised and not surprised, and felt gently, lovingly taunted, mildly made fun of—the way I often do when something beyond me reminds me that I always knew it was there. This sensation of vague embarrassment—I'll come back to it—it's part of what made me trust the whole situation was “real,” and it's part of the psychological mechanism of surrender for me. I notice the weird artifice of my personality, how clumsy it is, how it gets in the way of things, right before I drop it.

The sun began speaking, but not strictly to speak. Thoughtforms were being communicated to me whole, in a didactic and commanding voice that was not literally a voice, insofar as it wasn't audible to my ear. The voice had no sound, but it communicated its totality into me in a masculine tone—my entire body, my every cell, and every particle of my experience was being reorganized in order to shape and receive each thoughtform, each one delivered into me whole instant by instant, second by second, minute by minute.

Yes, the speaker was somehow a maleness but not in the sense of a human maleness; it had a personality and character to which it was bending and shaping what existed in my own brain and psyche and body, using my substance to communicate with and to me. The words that I wrote down are like one edge, one bevel, a single facet of a multidimensional communiqué, around which all details and nuances, all consequent thoughts and realities, spread in every direction of space and time.

When I remembered that I had my notebook in my bag, I fished it out and began transcribing. After I had been at it for a while, I realized I had my notebook upside down, that I was effectively writing right-to-left, like some parody of a Hebrew prophet. And there was something else. As I was fumbling for my notebook and pencil, I realized with some hilarity and considerable embarrassment that I was meeting my maker while wearing a beard. To be precise, I was wearing a zit beard. A beard made of acne. I had not put it on by choice.

I had been going through a difficult time. Aside from the demanding rehearsals for MORTAL KOMBAT, I had a prestigious new job where my direct superior was a tenured creep who liked to taunt me and other female colleagues and students with banter of a sexual nature, testing how much he could get away with before we'd balk, as if daring us to out ourselves as scolds and prudes if we mentioned we didn't much like his style of repartee; who quizzed his female students on their sex lives and stalked them on Facebook, who held bizarre ideas about the origin of breasts. (“Women evolved breasts so that men would look them in the eye while fucking them,” he once declared to me, praising the research of his mentor...)

Although this creep was obviously a fool, and although I had withstood much worse than crass banter and “off-color” jokes at various jobs in my

youth, the whole situation had caused a strange reaction in my body: old experiences, ones I had thought myself long done with, were suddenly filling me. As though my body were nothing but a garbage bag. The time I was raped, the time a boyfriend choked me in the subway, the time another boyfriend knocked me to the ground in front of my brother, the time a boyfriend spat in my face, and all these were “sensitive” men, gifted men, “feminist” men. These things and things like them, which I had thought myself done with, had latterly come back to fill me.

During the course of the one semester I did this job, I developed stage fright, which I had never had before. I would quake and tremble before readings, and at one fund-raiser reading for Black Lives Matter, my voice shook so much I thought I would burst into tears right there onstage. I delivered my poem on my knees, in a posture I hoped could pass for reverential but that I knew was nothing but cowering. But it wasn't just performing I was having trouble with. I had begun to doubt my capacities in language in general, and because I no longer felt I had the right to language, I had begun to doubt my right to live. Had the “freedom” and the sexuality in my work made my boss feel he had the right to belittle me so casually, to bring sexual talk into spaces where it really did not need to be? I had begun to go silent. I could feel it happening to me, as though concrete were filling my cells. The more silent I grew, the more silence I wanted. Silence had become almost voluptuous—it was becoming my place of refuge. It became indistinguishable from rage. I tended this silence/rage in the darkness of my organs. I called it my privacy.

What I am trying to explain to you is how I grew my beard. My cheeks and chin had sprouted painful sores, like the sores King David or someone complains of in the Psalms. Of course, Job too, and other biblical figures, suffered boils. At the time, I referred to my beard only inwardly—I liked to mock myself about “the serrated gates of my face.”

Shame had made me grow a beard, the kind of beard that I was in a position to grow, and shame is what festering silence, what repressed rage

turns into. Of course my beard also caused me shame, in the recursive and exponential math of spiritual truths. I had Jew's horns. Witch tits. I was afflicted with the kind of blemishes that might have gotten me killed in medieval Europe or seventeenth-century Salem. I would occasionally try to remind myself that my inner torment had put me—facial hair-wise—in line with the rabbis and sages, the elders, Fathers Time, pharaohs, the bureaucrats disguised as holy men, and the real holy men of the ages, but the thought that the wages of my suffering might for ancient men have meant a badge of wisdom or authority only made it easier to deride my sorry lot in the now. And while being forced to live my life out in the open with a face so afflicted was obviously a torture (it also physically hurt), this particular colloquy—which I privately came to call MOSAIC—and this too was a joke, since like Moses I was afflicted with a [temporary] speech impediment—this event was probably the only encounter for which such a beard could be the ideal and really the only possible garment for my naked woman's face.

The first time I spoke publicly about MOSAIC was in a keynote lecture at OCCULT POETICS, a conference at Concordia University in Montreal, in February 2017.

REALITY IS PERCEPTIBLE

SITUATIONS ARE CELLS

PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW
TO USE THEIR TALENTS

ANALOGY IS THE STRUCTURING
PRINCIPLE OF THE UNIVERSE

THE SUFFERING OF WOMAN IS THE
TRUE STORY OF THE UNIVERSE

WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES AT ALL COSTS

NATURE EXTENDS FROM US

NATURE MIRRORS US

WATER → MIRROR

∖ /
WINDOW

EACH PEOPLE HAS THE GIFT OF ITS CATASTROPHE
LEARN HOW TO USE THIS GIFT OR MEET YOUR PERIL

EARTH IS SPECIAL
PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE UNIVERSE
WILL COME HERE
THERE IS NO "BACK" TO GET TO

"GOD" DIDN'T DIE
HE'S JUST NOT THE ONLY GOD IN THE UNIVERSE

THE MOON IS SUPERIOR TO THE SUN INsofar AS SHE
HAS HAD THE NIGHT TO KNOW HE IS NOT
THE ONLY GOD IN THE UNIVERSE

DIFFERENCE IS MEANT TO BE COMEDY

DIFFERENCE IS A TOY

NAZISM WAS AN INVITATION TO THE WORLD TO
RECKON WITH THE NATURE OF EVIL

EACH THING TEACHES

WHEN FACED WITH EVIL
LEARN ITS SECRET

WHAT URGENT DISEASE
DEFICIENCY WITHIN MY OWN SOUL
DOES THIS WRETCHED SYMPTOM SIGNIFY

WE DO NEED EVERY KIND OF STORY
BECAUSE THERE IS EVERY KIND OF PERSON
YET STILL, GREAT ART IS CRUCIAL
FOR THE WORLD TO WATCH, WHEN IT WATCHES,
DIVINITY IN SPLENDOR
RATHER THAN WHAT WE'RE WATCHING NOW,
WHILE LEARNING TO WATCH

THE WORLD ALWAYS SUSTAINS THE MAXIMUM
SUFFERING IT CAN BEAR, ACCORDING TO
THE NATURE OF ITS AGE

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THE MAXIMUM
POSSIBLE DESTRUCTION IN A GIVEN TIME

THIS IS WHY THE OTHER WORLD
HAS ALWAYS NEEDED TO BE CREATED

KNOWING THAT THE WORLD HAS ALWAYS SUSTAINED
AND WILL ALWAYS SUSTAIN THE MAXIMUM
OF DESTRUCTION POSSIBLE

IS WHY THE OTHER WORLD HAS ALWAYS
AND WILL ALWAYS NEED TO BE CREATED

EVERYONE HAS A STAR

THIS IS WHY WE
PRACTICE DIALOGUE

WE'RE LEARNING

OUR SOLAR SYSTEM IS ANALOGOUS TO THE UNIVERSE

THE DEEPER INTO THE CELL WE GET
THE MORE KINDS OF PEOPLE WE PRODUCE
THE MORE WE LEARN ABOUT THE CELL
THE MORE WE HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE

MERCURY ALSO TEACHES
"I WANT TO BE LIKE"
AND THE RISKS THAT GO WITH "I WANT TO BE LIKE"
TO TEACH US ABOUT THE PRINCIPLE OF
LIKENESS THAT GOVERNS THE UNIVERSE

IT'S TRUE THAT THE OLDER
A THING IS THE BETTER IT IS
EXCEPT WITH FOOD & FOODLIKE PRINCIPLES
NOT THE SOCK ON YOUR FOOT
BUT ANY SPECK OF MATTER IN RELATION
TO THE DIGNITY OF AGE THAT IS THE WINERY

MERCURY FAVORS WOMEN
AND CHILDREN
BECAUSE WE KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE
TO LONG TO BE EVERYTHING
TO LEARN BY IMITATION
TO LISTEN

I GAVE YOU NO MAN FOR A FATHER
NO MAN COULD STAND BETWEEN ME AND YOU

MEDICINE IS DIVINE
NOT AS IT IS SHOWN
BUT AS IT SHOULD BE

DIVINE SCIENCE

DIVINE SCIENTIST

MEDICINE WOULD BE DIVINE

THE REASON GREAT ART MATTERS IS

SEE AS I SEE

WHATEVER YOU HAVE BEEN WATCHING
SHOULD HAVE TAUGHT YOU BY NOW

THE TIME OF SPECTACLE WILL PASS

TECHNOLOGY IS FOR COMMUNICATION

TECHNOLOGY EVOLVED SOLELY FOR THE
PURPOSE OF DIVINE COMMUNICATION

ALL ITS OTHER FORMS ARE BYPRODUCTS

THERE IS NOTHING A PERSON CANNOT LOVE

EVERYTHING HAS A NATURE

FIND OUT YOURS