

## **Nightflight thoughts: Echoes, lights, darknesses.**

Maddie, I'm writing for you on a night flight out of a small cold city in the north heading south and then further south again. There were small lights everywhere around me when the flight began. But I am thinking of the lights that might come later when you and I are long gone. I am writing this as I think about these lights. Thinking about the differences in the ways lights pass in and out of being – the difference between lights going out and lights being extinguished; the difference between lights coming on and lights being lit. It feels clumsy to start by saying "I am writing..." and  
1 "I am thinking..." a conceit of self dramatisation made even clumsier by writing another sentence again about it "now."

There are more subtle ways for critical reflexivity to set itself in play. Your practice seems to me to be suffused with modes of critical subtlety as forms of aesthetic action, making me wish that I could partake in something of their nature. But I will settle for the hope that maybe the clumsy and the subtle can switch their different ways between light and dark and generate yet other ways of becoming for a moment in twilight.

### **It begins.**

In the north there was a city. North of the city there was an archipelago of small islands in the wide sea-like lake. There was this garden island. There was this community of people, now gone. They withdrew to the island and have withdrawn yet further now. I am remembering that you picked apples there. I am remembering how you spoke about the orchards and the islands. So many apples that for more than a century ripened, perhaps. Maybe even ripening and rotting over a time that would see three or four generations of people pass in and out of existence. It seems that the apples budded, blossomed, fruited and were fallen a hundred times with no Eve or Adam there to coax their secret knowledge or break teeth into their bitter pips. Then there was the dream of bringing the apples south over the water to the exiled city: All those contingencies of people and weather that constitute our days of work. I remember the sign that asked the apple-eaters to come to the quayside and receive some apples there. Then the pie maker in the market with all those sunny American apple-pies arranged unassumingly, laid out on a stall, with apple names echoed again that had not been spoken aloud there for some time.

These gentle gestures, so jealously guarded against the colonising tyrannies of "a project" or "a meaning", placed there, just on the edges of visibility and disappearance. These public moments on the verge of evaporation

into the big empty blue above them. Such lightness in the orchestration of new airs through the old orchards. The beautiful abruption of a micro-tear in the fabric of these island worlds. These tiny openings through which another kind of wonder chinks its way back into the world. Where eyes widen for a moment, not for the spectacle or for flashing magic, but for the delight in the world becoming wider, deeper, older: Just for a moment – a moment already released into the detours of time unnoticed.

### **Passing over water.**

2 I am remembering now the conversations about Cork and the placing of names in the funny folded fabric of the streets and bridges of that city. How they called it “Jewtown” for the love of the familiar hidden in it. How they called it “Passover Bridge” for the naming of their own strange humours. How they lately called it “Shalom Park” in anticipation of the gasworks being beautified through some grim technical specification – this park being a public remaindering of a little space and a little time, left over after business is all finished and done.

So many places emptied out across old *Mitteleuropa*. But how has it happened in this other place again, on the western edge of Europe, on these wistful north eastern Atlantic shores? How has it happened so late after history has broken in half? How has it happened again that a few remaining people are going or gone already? It’s like a lost tongue where a few words, maybe even a short phrase, persist in a trans-generational echo, but emptied of the world they need to speak, however fleetingly, a clear meaning.

A shadow has long ago congealed into a still thickening darkness that moves relentless through the world. Something has passed by us. But we still remember it moving, moving through and over the people. Moving at night, in the cold hard rage of destination and destruction. Too sacred to be named sacred; too ordinary to be named ordinary; too real to be really named and summoned into service for us. But, again, of course, this was already not a nameless one; not a holy-among-holies; not an unthinkable; but a terrible banal project to find a further exile within the fallen world. Abyssing in an abyss.

### **Lifting up yet higher.**

I heard in recent days, Jalal Toufic speak in Helsinki. He gave us this poem of a paper to listen to, about joy and *jouissance* and demons and angels. He spoke of a kind of refusal, a refusal to proceed with certain imaginaries of

sin and evil. I think I disagreed with him. Mostly I think this because of a kind of Manichean theme – of good and evil, where it is evil that has made the world and bound us here, while it is – in reversal – the angel who has been sent into exile. However, there was so much beauty in what he said. He rehearsed a wonderful trope that seemed to come from a prayer – the request to be made subtle. This image that he set in play created a longing, a deep longing in me to become quieter, to become slighter, to become subtle.

3 The sudden shudder of the aircraft in the turbulence of an Atlantic squall makes it seem that a prayer has passed through the bodies arrayed around me with: “Make brutal into subtle but not docile; make the *zoon* into the *zoon politikon* but not into that which makes itself go on and on and on; make of the animal more *anima* but not another thing among the thousand thousand things that clutter the world; make light of it all in these heavy hands of mine; make it immense as air in atonement for small broken things.” But who would dare make prayers these days? It seems distasteful to pray in this cemetery of worlds.

### **The flight is full.**

There are two voices behind me, two men, two philosopher-theologians, debating on the modalities of being and the lost *arcana* of the dissipating orders of matter that rise toward the register of spirit. One says with enthusiasm for pronouncement and position:

‘It is written in the later commentaries that “one who wishes to give names to the subtle beings of the world only opens holes in the ground near Gehenna.” You understand that in such holes, neither the living nor the dead will be found. The commentaries continue – “Digging in this manner is to turn air into gravel and to make water into rock.” It is clear from the text that this is caught in the same prohibition that forbids us to “tangle matter through the winged spine”. If you will allow me, I would like to say that this is akin to the folly of spinning golden thread to pass through needles and in such a manner to try stitch the torn curtain back into place.’

His partner in this dialogue draws breath heavily, and maybe even sighs a little, indicating a note of weariness and perhaps even a little despair. He speaks then; slowly, patiently and carefully: ‘But did not Celan, in the majesty of his remonstrance with the sullen rhetorician of being’s subtlety not also say – “I came, hoping for a word.”’

The other responds quickly, breathlessly, with urgency but still quietly: ‘Yes, yes, but a word does not come!’

The man who is breathing heavily seems to be struggling yet harder for the air. There is the familiar rustle of moisture gathering in his lungs, lungs working hard to make oxygen take traction with the blood. He gently chants his next phrases and sentences in the staccato of short breaths: 'All these ways of talking. The *via negativa*. The "absconded one." The one "who did not come." The one who is "unawaited"... It is exactly as Hamann...though not of our people... has explained it. You will find it... in his *Socratic Memorabilia*. He declares that he offers his writing: "To the boredom of the public from a lover of boredom, to nobody and to two." This is how it is...in the matter of subtle being...and the attenuated ontology

4 of things that are caught in contingency...caught in that modality of...as these other people around us here would say... "if it is a thing that..."

The response comes: "But, but this opacity, this belittling of things, this does not say enough...cannot possibly be enough. Can it?"

Again the heavy breathing man sighs a little, and says, clearly intending to bring the discussion to a close: "No. The fear is that it is already to say too much!"

### **Signalling at stars.**

Through the small ovoid window, I can see another twitching light – flickering its semaphore to whom? I wonder first if it is the wing tip light. But then it seems to move urgently in another register, wired to another frequency and destination. It is another thing moving in the outer darkness, passing over us that little bit higher and breathing in the yet thinner, yet higher air. We are flying, dense matter flung recklessly technically through the air, tearing great ocean holes in the high thin, now odourless air. Flying south, away from these strange new winters that we have made. Flying toward the hot damp – I wonder if the man with the heavy breath understands this. It feels careless crashing through the air like this – more clumsy hasty propulsions pronouncing an unthinking thought.

This other light that will appear – announced obliquely in an older calendar – recurring on a moveable feast of lights without bold declarations, flickering its semaphore to whom? Would it be wrong of me to imagine that this other light has already reached me for a shattered moment as I am hanging here in the high thin air from this weakening thread of vapour and vulgar machinery? I am sure I caught a glimpse of it in a temporary reflection, just the merest hint of the paradoxical photons shifting in and out of being, across the manifold, in that strange tempo of the future becoming present.

As always in the air, I'm on the edge of tears, muttering to myself internally: interrupted then by another rash and fevered noise-between-the-ears, speaking another internality with all these artifices and conceits assembled on the page. Yes, now I am properly agitated and twitching. The paper I am writing on creases and folds, and is worried over as I re-read and re-write. But then I startle myself with yet another short panic; start to rummage quickly among the pages. Have I got the other ticket for the next flight? Will there be enough time to make the connection? A change in Paris – just another relay: not a place, not a world, not an event – just conveyancing, transpositioning, zapping, alighting not on the ground but landing through liminal temporary architectures that reconstitute themselves as endless corridors of circulation and nowhere-being. I realise that I am distracting myself again from the task of thinking.

### **Where was I?**

I gather myself back into the thought of the light you are setting in play quietly somewhere. And yes, I remember again. I was trying to attend upon that light that I feel somehow we are not supposed to wait for. How to go on? Have I brought many other people with me on this flight tonight? I feel they are also here with you, and me, moving, swarming in anonymity and some new-found subtlety, defying the murkiness of this world, and thickening thin air into a small disappearance re-appeared. The festival of light comes in the darkest days of the year. This is so that we can go forward. The little oil, taken a long way from any temple, lights the long way to another morning. How to go on.

Mick Wilson

## What Comes Around

1989 saw the naming and establishment of a small park in Cork city. A podium and PA system were set up for the occasion. In the tradition of under-attended local civic events, the ceremony took place in the rain, on the greyest of days. A group of men in long coats held their umbrellas in the air in a way that could be called defiant but was probably closer to courtesy, sheltering the invited speaker whose task it was to open Shalom Park officially.

7 The speaker was Michael Smith, Minister of Energy, who was gifting the park to Cork City Council on behalf of the Cork Gas Company (now Bord Gais), whose headquarters stand close by on Gasworks Road. Smith made a few jokes about regional rivalries, being a Tipperary man himself, before going on to suggest how the park might alleviate the local realities of unemployment and continued emigration that were affecting many living in the area.

“When the husband comes home”, Smith said, “[don’t] needle him about some bill that hasn’t been paid... Just come out here and relax and leave him alone because he’s out there helping to build up Cork and make it a better place...”

Shalom Park, he seemed to suggest, could put the concerns of personal debt into a calming sense of perspective. It might not have been born to play a qualitatively productive role in the regeneration of the city, yet Shalom Park’s function as a breathing space for the accompanying pressures of a city-on-the-make were vested into it from the start.

Shalom Park is – in more ways than one – the most recessionary of places. It was established during a period of economic recession in Ireland, and we return to it now in 2011, in similarly dark days. It is recessionary in intent (precisely, as a place of non-production that is simultaneous with the patterns of labour) and it is recessionary also because it falls short of being truly withdrawn and leisurely in the way that the best parks aspire to be. Shalom Park is too small to feel any real effect of cultivated wilderness. There are few trees, the play area looks more brutal than liberating (it seems to expect vandals more than it does children), and the park is surrounded by dense residential housing on one side, a corporate and commercial centre on another, and six lanes of traffic that form the main arterial road south of the city. As a park, Shalom Park barely qualifies, definable as much through its absences and its absenting benefits, as through any specific positivity.

However, with many commentators on the Irish recession speaking of a lost generation, and making comparison to pre-boom austerity, to turn

our attention to Shalom Park today might be all the more appropriate.

In the last few years, Shalom Park has been granted another neighbour and another in a list of obtrusions: the Elysian apartment complex. The tallest residential complex in Ireland at the time of writing, the Elysian looms over Shalom Park, with all its glitz and facility. It even has its own 'Japanese Garden' for residents, complete with rare plants, water features, and sculptural works.

In 2009, the Irish Times described the Elysian as the 'Mary Celeste of the recession' on account of its emptiness. The advertising images that came before it presented the Elysian aglow at dusk, towering stoically above the light-streams of traffic headlights. Today, the majority of lights are off, with rumours that the Elysian's developers turn the lights on in some apartments in a rather desperate effort to sustain a sense of coming and going, and avert any sense of dormancy and abandonment. With many of the apartments left unsold, and the retail units on the ground floor unoccupied, each day the Elysian is a reminder of the over-optimism in the Irish property market, and the danger of too many promises awaiting too much return.

Back at the scene in 1989, after his brief speech, Michael Smith steps up a ladder in a final act of ceremony, and lights one of the gas lamps in Shalom Park.

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To give a name, is that still to give? [...]"

"— One can have doubts about it from the moment when the name is not only nothing, in any case is not the 'thing' that it names, not the 'nameable' or the renowned, but also risks to bind, to enslave or engage the other, to link the called, to call him/her to respond before any decision or deliberation, even before any freedom. An assigned position, a prescribed alliance as much as a promise."

— Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*

The naming of Shalom Park arrived with the gift from the Cork Gas Company. There was no Shalom Park there before it, and nothing exactly owing to that name. We might assume that the word 'Shalom' (Hebrew: peace) was chosen to invoke the kind of remedial, work-a-day peace that Michael Smith referred to in his speech.

The naming of the park in Hebrew not only avoided an obvious duplicity (Cork City has another so-titled 'Peace Park'), but also served to

recognise the Jewish community that once lived in the immediate area, a district known colloquially, *affectionately*, as 'Jew Town'. This was a community that emerged from the settlement of Russian and Lithuanian migrants in the 19th century; a community that peaked in the early years of the 20th century with a population of several hundred.

Today, the community barely registers. There is a small synagogue, already under speculation for future sale, and a Jewish cemetery soon to come under the custodial care of the City Council now that a cessation of the Hebrew congregation of Cork seems certain. The community lives on in the hands of a few committed individuals, who admit that their more  
9 active years are long behind them. Inside this community, they are making practical preparations. On the cusp of registration, they – the community – imagine their future *without future*; their only public testimony disappearance itself.

The peace of Cork's (other) Peace Park, with its commemoration of fallen soldiers in the World War I, is, by contrast to Shalom Park, a peace that is designated in the shadow of historical catastrophe. (Jewish history has had its fair share of catastrophe, even in Ireland, with pogroms in Limerick in the early 20th century. Yet this is not the dedication or the orientation of Shalom Park). In this sense, it carries a name that plays a different balance in history. It uses past horror both to remind us of loss and sacrifice, and to warn off any similar horror being repeated in the future, as is the function of all monuments. The peace of the Peace Park is a pause for past sorrow, and a brace for the future. In this sense, the promise of 'shalom' in Shalom Park is not the promise of 'peace' in the Peace Park, despite the translational equivalences; the promise implicit in the naming of Shalom Park is the promise of an identity, to be met and returned.

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In December 2011, three further lamps were added to those already existing in Shalom Park, making a total of nine. It is a change that will go unnoticed by many people, or else be mistaken for an act of civic regeneration of no particular concern or benefit to most. Those who are sensitive to change, and to the minor registers of urban life, might have noticed this, and perhaps also that one lamp stands slightly taller than the others and remains off throughout the day and night. Who (can we ever know?) will be there to track these changes in future, and to witness the lamp alight for half an hour every year, at a precise time on the last night of Hanukkah?

This is some of the fragility of *Evening Echo*, an artist's project concerned with Shalom Park and its relationship to the community that

is dedicated in its name. Its fragility is both in terms of its recognition as a work of public sculpture, but also in the speculation of how the work will play out in time. *Evening Echo*, after all, is a work that continues ad infinitum, as long as the City Council adheres to its custodial agreement. The lighting of the 'ninth lamp' is left entirely in their hands.

10 With nine in total, the lamps of Shalom Park correspond to the primary Jewish ritual of Hanukkah, and the Hanukkah lamp in particular. This eight-day holiday, known as the Festival of Lights, starts on the 25th day of Kislev in the Hebrew calendar (anytime between late November and late December in the Gregorian calendar), and is observed by a sequential kindling of lights in a nine-branched candelabrum. Eight candles are lit according to the progressive days of the Hanukkah, with the ninth candle (the shamash, usually central and raised in the candelabrum) alight throughout and used to light all other candles.

*Evening Echo* is an act of approximative commemoration. Though it corresponds in part to the exacting ritual of Hanukkah, it neither affirms nor celebrates that ritual. Its approximation of the Jewish custom is perhaps part of the work's conscience – the conscience of representing something of a community to which you don't belong, and the conscience of representing something as diminishing and fading as the Jewish congregation of Cork in particular. *Evening Echo* creates both a beacon of resistance to the obsolescence of this community, and a resistance to the general 'civil' calendar that goes further, to speak of resistance more broadly. In its adjustment of one calendar with another, we might even say that *Evening Echo* structures another time of its own accord.

The annual publication of an announcement in a local newspaper (also called *Evening Echo*) is another aspect of this project intersecting one space and time with another. Declaring the exact date and time of the 'ninth lamp' illumination, the advertisement is a public gesture that not only throws the weight of forecast on to the page of a daily newspaper, but also acts to identify the strains of cognition between the everyday narrative and the perennial ritual of the paper and Hanukkah respectively. *Evening Echo* extends the terms of a promise that began back in 1989, when the park was first named. Through fragility and approximation, it allows consideration of the future recognition of a community and its history, and lays bare the necessary contingencies of promising, full stop.

Matthew Packer