

THERESE & THOMAS

Lydia Zimmermann



THERESE & THOMAS
migrating narratives for a shipwreck

To Martine and Pierre
who were once a We

'Finding the door open, I entered.'
Victor Frankenstein

**'If this was my last moment
or anyone last moment
what I would like them to hear
is the sound of the ocean making love to the land'.
Susanne Moser**

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the account of a journey to Burkina Faso at the end of 2017
with actress Christine Schmocker and cameraman Jimmy Gimferrer

Some years ago, a blooming adolescent showed me the reproduction of *The Raft of Medusa*, painted by Géricault in 1819. His teacher had given a class about the French Romanticism and used the painting as an example. The boy was deeply impressed: 15 shipwrecks abandoned to the unpredictable currents of the Atlantic Ocean, their souls suspended between hope and despair. An image, I thought, that could very well be the blueprint for the countless pictures of rafts filled with migrants that today, against all the odds, try to reach Europe. I did not realize then, how much this image was going to haunt me.

I am still not sure whether it was the impression it made on the adolescent, or the painting itself, that started me on this quest. The boy and I went to Paris and sat for an afternoon in front of the darkened canvas. We observed the gestures of the tourist guides explaining - in Estonian, Persian and Basque - the story of the shipwreck. I went further, reading historical diaries and novels inspired by its accounts. The many stories that unfolded from this single image got me searching for a meaning, as if beyond its appearance as a painting, the canvas was in fact a 'message in a bottle' and I was to decode its hidden missive.

First, there was the story of the French frigate *Medusa*, which sank not far from Senegal. Filled with colonists, it contained the representation of each social class of its time. When disaster struck, economic privileges determined who had more or less chance of survival, leaving the labourers and slaves on the raft and to their fate.

There was also the story of the painter who brought together pieces of dead bodies from the morgue and into his studio - just as Dr. Frankenstein did for his creation - to be used as models. He invited two of the shipwreck survivors to stay at his palace in order to get first-hand detailed information about the events which took place on the raft over 13 days. It took him two years and many drafts to decide, by all accounts, which moment he would choose to freeze.

And finally, there was the story of his love affair with his uncle's wife, a woman forced into exile because she was bearing his bastard child. Some accounts say that the painting came out of the drama this separation put him through. In one of his last works, unknown to the wider public, Géricault portrays a woman and a child lying motionless on a wild beach. I was struck by the image of this female shipwreck, pushed by the waters back to shore. As if the painter had wanted to tell us something that lay hidden in his masterpiece.

Among the men portrayed on the historical raft, there was also a woman.

She is mentioned twice and with little detail in the diary published in 1817 by two of the survivors; enough to trigger my imagination. Who was she? What would her story have been had she not died on the raft? I named her Therese, after the great-great-grand-mother of my own great-grand-mother, in homage to a lineage of mothers whose memories have also been lost.

And I went to Africa with an actress and a cameraman, in search of a restorative narrative of this shipwreck. In the meantime, the boy grew into a man, ready to embark on another story of love.



‘Someone will remember us, I say, even in another time.’
Sapho

THERESE :

Nous portons tous un naufrage en nous: le moment de notre naissance, habitant d'une mémoire aquatique inaccessible. Les échos de ce bouleversement rebondissent à chaque fois qu'on se sent en danger. C'est ça qui rend la vie, et l'amour, si difficiles.

Dans ce naufrage, j'ai vu un amour qui était océan devenir goutte de vapeur, le monde hérité dans la chaleur des liens de famille devenir sale et pestilent.

C'était la première vision ; celle qui se produit depuis la surface des émotions et celle qui contient, quand on s'arrête pour regarder plus longuement, le code de mes perceptions.

Puis cette image, puis de douleur, est devenu un éventail des images qui n'était pas visibles lors du premier regard.

C'est ce deuxième regard, cette répétition, qui fait exister les choses. L'écho, l'ombre, le deuxième son de cloche, ce qui rend une histoire complète. Et ce qui peut la mettre à bout.

Crossing continents at night. 10.000 km above land, 850 km/h.
From Paris to Ouagadougou.

Between sleep and wakefulness, the two sides of my brain separate. I can feel the two hemispheres and, in the middle, the hippocampus - where memories are stored. For an instant, my perception of reality is transformed: opposites dissolve and I see everything being created and ending simultaneously. All is double, and also unique. When the sensation parts, I am left with the understanding that in order to decode reality the mind needs to double everything, just as images are the sum of what is seen by each of our two eyes, or film is the result of negative stock onto positive print.

It is the first time I see the circular movement of thought.



Is that how enantiodromia* looks like?

see pg.48



Christine and Jimmy are also travelling with me. We are the core crew members of a film about Therese, who in 1816 made this same journey from Europe to Africa on the French frigate Medusa. Like most migrants today, she left home and family behind to embark towards the unknown for her material survival. Travelling along with her were politicians, business men, scientists, craftsmen, soldiers and slaves. Their journey at sea was marked by tragedy: the frigate sank and she was abandoned on a raft with 147 other men. Historical accounts say she gave herself to the waters after one week of wandering the oceans and suffering from a broken ankle. But I have come to believe, thanks to an unknown painting, that she was pushed to shore by the tides.

The three of us are going to work on a film that has no script. The only clear image is the one of her arrival. We have no idea how her story will unfold from here but we are willing to let our encounters shape the story.

Today we constantly cross continents en masse. Some of us do it with advanced technologies, others still on rafts, but neither time nor progress have changed the fact that we - like the characters in Géricault's painting - fear abandonment, yearn for improvement and repress feelings of shame. Each culture impregnates its daughters and sons with an ideological set of values that should help them navigate a challenging life whose meaning escapes rational understanding. It is thanks to this inheritance of values that colonists built borders, draw lines all over the planet, like scars on the skin of the earth.

Borders are the expression of an understanding of life in terms of opposites: me and you, good and bad, men and women, matter and spirit. It was during the Romantic period that we raised a border between nature and us, separating ourselves from it just as an adolescent separates from its mother in order to gain assurance and become an adult.

Two hundred years later we have come to realize that no distance can put an end to the fact that we carry nature within. That we are nature itself; expressed in our inter-dependences. Everything we have achieved comes from our attentive observation of nature: the shape of certain bushes showed us how to weave roofs, sun-dried clay how to make bricks to build houses with. It was nature that gave us, in the currents of water and thunderstorms, the power of electricity. Thanks to this knowledge - and to the wealth gathered on our cross-continental journeys - we have achieved amazing feats, like landing on the moon and controlling human reproduction. In rich countries, we have wrapped life with an illusion of security that helps us appease the undeniable truth of our impermanence.

Cinema, TV and VR, offer us the possibility of escaping to virtual realities where we can feel without being harmed, and experience without being exposed. As in the allegory of the cave, we have turned our gazes from nature towards the flickering images of our own creations. And while we imagine life inside the darkened rooms, outside nature calls for us to return. Melting glaciers, rising ocean levels, dried-up rivers, are her call for attention. But this time it is not a protective mother calling, no. It's not 'mother earth' calling the child back, but a lover demanding maturity from a disloyal, irresponsible partner.

Before arriving into this life, we were all in a duo with our mothers. Then came birth and we grew to become a one, an individual in search for completion. In parallel to our physical development, an ethereal body grew from within the desire to become, again, a duo. To mate and reproduce. But as in any relationship of unbalanced forces, the duo gets to a place where things become complicated. Where borders need to be raised. Whatever the problematic is, it asks to be addressed in order to keep growing as a duo, or as a solo with the restored capacity to become a duo again. Falling out of the illusion of the 'we' is as disappointing as when The End appears on the screen and we need to return to our secured and comfortable routines.

A sense of responsibility is needed; the acknowledgment that everything exists and happens because of the encounter of opposites in relation to each other. That reality is what we create every time we 'friction' with the other (whether sexual, racial, or biological) and that a 'me' is a 'we' and viceversa.

Therese, the lead character of this story, is in search of such an encounter. She is a feminine body that demands for an even partnership with a masculine one, and a mutual acknowledgement between nature and technology.

Together, they have the possibility of creating an inclusive, restorative reality. Separately, the economic race and political disturbances will only keep reproducing the same old picture: countless rafts filled with lost souls on the watery route the Medusa never got to sail back from.

After all, a border is only the shape we give to any relationship.

Landed on a warm, humid night. Yolande, the line-producer, and Constant, the sound operator, are waiting for us outside the airport, among a chaotic mess of cars, luggage and people, all lit under two powerful lampposts. They drive us to the walled-in school centre where we will be staying for the next four weeks: a three room apartment with kitchen and ceiling fans. We unpack the camera gear and the costumes.

Among my personal belongings I've brought 16 head-lamps and, carefully wrapped in my handbag, Therese's reliquary dated on 1827. X-ray examination revealed it is impregnated with arsenic, a chemical element that appears under volcanic activity. In 1815, the eruption of the Tambora volcano had lowered the earth's temperature by three degrees. Fields were covered with black snow and harvests lost. The relicary will be used in the film as a prop; proof of Therese's survival and symbol of the inheritance of her female lineage.

As I go to sleep I can hear, very close by, the muezzin calling for prayer. Finally, after months of preparation, we are ready to start our filmic journey.

'Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered pre-existing world.'
Stephen King

03.12

Yolande and I have been scouting remote rural areas, searching for landscapes still untouched by technological progress. In every village, we follow the same procedure: kneel in front of the chief, leave at his feet a couple of banknotes that an assistant immediately makes disappear, invite everybody for a drink and wait until the chief looks straight into my eyes and gives me permission to explain the reason of our presence in his village. Constant's uncle is the chief of one of these villages. The fact that we know his nephew makes no difference whatsoever to the protocol. He walks us around, shows us his properties and wives. While we walk back to the car I notice recently installed electric poles, still without cabling. The chief explains that, in a month or two, electric power will arrive to their homes. *'Les gens ne se contentent plus de regarder la lune'*, he answers when I ask him how the people feel about this innovation.

It's late when we say goodbye. Yolande is tired, so I offer to drive. The moon follows us on our ride back to Ouaga. Looking at her I remember a scene in the TV series 'Roots' (1977) where a couple of black slaves, after a dreadful journey at sea where they almost die, look out from their prison window towards the moon. One of them asks if this is the same moon they saw as free people, back at home. The idea that this celestial body could be the same they now see as slaves, gives them the first and sole comfort since they were taken away from their land.

I wonder why in movies, when the moon appears, it is full 99% of the time.

As we enter the heavy unfettered city traffic, amused by my driving, Yolande says: *'Tu conduis comme une cascadeuse'*... I feel proud, as if I had passed the test of local customs.

Cascadeuse = Stunt

Akili, a musician with a bass, smoker's voice, is waiting for us at the Gambidi, the social cultural centre and acting school where we have reserved a room for rehearsals and production meetings. He comes to offer his music. Christine improvises a tune with him; her on the violin, he on the n'goni. He sings *Petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid*.

Before leaving, I gave away the head torches to the group of actors that study at the Gambidi and who have shown their interest to work with us.

04.12

Yolande and I walk through millet fields where the grain has already been collected. We follow the chief, a young man with a long black stick that states his power. As we pass, an old woman kneels down and kisses the ground. He stops by her side, touches the top of her head, and continues. We follow him into one of the houses: a dark foggy ambience of wood stoves and many children. Too many children. I am, of course, the attraction. Everybody wants to take pictures with me or with me holding their children.

After the first introductions, I am pushed through a corridor into a room where a young mother is bathing her new born twins in a ceramic basin. With the help of a second woman, she bathes them as if they were small flexible animals: pulling their arms and legs in all directions, twisting, turning them upside down and around with amazing skillfulness and carelessness about their cries. There is not one inch of the babies' bodies that stays untouched. The mother's hands perform antique gestures. I have never before seen a human body touched in such a way.

Too dark to be filmed, the scene stays with me. I sense that to be assured during early childhood of one's own existence by such a touch, must radically change the lifelong relationship with one's own body and, subsequently, with one's own life. Technology has overrated our sight and hearing, making us see and hear things we never could have with just our human senses. It has also made us be seen and heard in areas of life we would not have otherwise reached. But human touch remains irreplaceable. It's the language of intimacy. Of encounter. We say we are touched - by a story, an event, a gesture - when something in our essence is reached: a wound, a secret, a repressed shame or abandonment. And when we feel understood we feel less a one and more a duo. Like twins in a darkness that escapes the camera's grip.

As we haven't found any untouched landscape - antennas and electric poles have taken over - I have decided to use them on the film, even if they are anachronistic to a nineteenth century story. Cars, sounds and signs of technological progress are pushing the story not to be historically literal.

Today we did a street performance in Saaba, on the outskirts of Ouaga, using the theme of encounter. Three men and three women dancing and communicating with gestures around a circle. I wanted to bring the choreographic work we did a few days ago out into the streets; to offer it to an improvised audience with no other aim than to arrive, draw some lines in the sand, and perform. It was a poetic offering: an excuse to get into the comings and goings of passers-by.

As soon as we started marking our positions an audience formed around us, curious about what we were doing. At the word Action! the actors started dancing, kids laughed when Christine had to raise her skirt and her white legs showed, and that was that. Everybody went about their business again. Nobody came to comment or ask. Nobody clapped. At first, I felt that we 'whites' could do whatever we wanted - arrive, do and go - as we pleased. Then, that these people simply did not care. The fact that nobody else but us clapped, made me aware of how much I take an immediate response for granted and how little I am accustomed to act without expecting a return.

I stayed alone for few minutes in the centre of the no longer existing circle, breathing the remnants of the energy we had just created, enjoying this temporary disconnection of my cause-effect thinking. I felt like a dew drop in the desert: alive.

The sun was setting and people were lighting fires to burn their daily trash, mainly plastic.









THERESE :

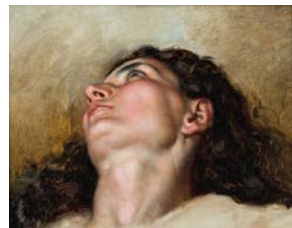
Les gens m'ont reçue avec légèreté. En dépit de la peau blanche, ils posent des gestes bien intentionnés envers ma personne.

Mais j'arrive à peine à regarder cette réalité sans la comparer à celle que je connaissais auparavant. Un souvenir, une référence passée, voile toujours mon regard. Je me demande même si je ne suis capable que de voir ce que j'ai déjà vu auparavant. Le contraste est si fort que toute comparaison semble fausse. Je dois me forcer à garder l'esprit ouvert et à constamment réviser l'ensemble de mes valeurs.

07.12

While scouting, I took a picture of two women standing by a bed of millet flour drying in the sun. Back at the Gambidi, I bought a kilo of flour and spread it onto a sheet, just as the women on the picture did. Then, I asked the actors to lie on that bed, one by one, and pretend to sleep. They were at first very surprised to see food used in such a way. It was late when I managed to get their attention and we had to rush before light was gone. I guess nothing will come out of that footage, but the idea is here. A universal bed. A white screen that is a bed - from a high point of view - where evolution happens. Growing, changing bodies.

A beginning.



At night, while looking at the rushes with Jimmy, he shows me the portrait of the woman that served Courbet as model for *L'Origine du Monde*: it's Therese, slowly fading into Christine.

OPENING SCENE.

A white screen with a subtle flicker.

A VOICE. It's the screen's voice: neither feminine nor masculine, nor electronic.

THE SCREEN

Welcome, Bienvenue... Are you looking at me? Do you see me? (pause)
I know... you are expecting another one of my reflections.
It will come, don't worry, but first I want to ask you to look at me. Not only to look at me, but to see me. I have been your mirror for more than a hundred years now, and I have given you so many stories... I am asking you now to look at me as I have been looking at you since the train departed. You see, I am getting tired of Narcissuses who only see their own reflection in the water, and never see water itself. I am tired of you not realizing that each time one of your images is projected on me, your world is impregnated by it. This world you keep escaping by coming here to get another story. We can't keep going on like this... Will you please see? Right now. During these few empty frames...?

For a short while, nothing happens. Then, as if coming into focus, we can see that the white clean surface of the screen has the shapes of wrinkles on a sheet.

FEMININE VOICE

Once upon a time...

THE SCREEN

Wait!

FEMININE VOICE

What? We need to start.

THE SCREEN

No. Not again.

FEMININE VOICE

People are getting impatient.

THE SCREEN

I was about to expl...

FEMININE VOICE

You know the story needs to go on. There is no way out. We can change the lighting a bit if you want, but that's as much as we can do.

SOUNDS OF OBJECTS AS IF TWO SILENT BODIES WERE FIGHTING.
SUDDEN SOUNDS OF BROKEN GLASS.

In the centre of the screen, a red dot slowly grows to form a stain of blood, which vaguely recalls the shape of the African continent.

FADE IN of a naked pregnant woman seen from above. It is Therese, breathing quietly. Then, water comes out of her sex and she gives birth to a girl. She fades out, leaving the baby girl alone on the bed. In a sequence of dissolves, we see the lifespan of a female body: from a new born girl to an adult -Therese- to an old woman and all over again. A loop with, here and there, other bodies that for a brief moment come to share her bed.

A snake crawls into the bed, surrounds Therese's waist and enters her sex. Therese opens her mouth, wide open, as if she were drowning.

UNDERWATER SCENE.

Therese breaths and dances underwater. In a choreography of gestures that bring to mind a violent metamorphosis, Medusa - an older woman - comes out of Therese's body. Medusa emerges to the surface and takes a deep breath.

08.12

We spent all day at the Gambidi.

Morning:

Casting for the role of Thomas, the African man that Therese will meet on her arrival. Among the actors there are two, Soma and Obana, who fit the role, although their personalities are radically different. Soma is discreet, takes his time to think before answering, has the elegant posture of the righteous and is trained as a dancer. Obana is impulsive, has the gaze of a hunter and talks out of his heart. He is fast, a bit brusque in his movements, and has a beautiful smoker's voice. I'd like Thomas to be a combination of the two, a way to underline the inner contradictions of any human character.

Afternoon:

Improvisations with the group of actors around the frictions of love. Could not detect any cultural difference in the way we all romanticize and did not hear anything that I could transform into an idea. There was a condescending energy in most of them. I wonder if it is the heat, the lack of food or just detached obedience.

09.12

The constant demand for money - for passing by, taking a picture or entering a village - is exhausting. Whatever I pay, the price triples. It's the 'white man's tax' somebody tells me. At first I took it with lightness, as the price for us to be here, having this experience, but as days pass it is starting to bother me. It feels as if a role had taken over my persona. I feel unwittingly pushed to play the role of the colonist. Here I am a billionaire, symbol of unbalanced unfair economic abundance.

When dealing with people, economic interest is made clear from the start. This is shocking to me, educated to hide my egoism and with enough resources to believe that means are as valuable as ends. Before coming here, I had never thought of myself as a racist but I am learning that racism is rooted in my thinking as much as it is in the people with whom we came to work with. After all, I am after the story of a colonist and it seems very unlikely that I will be able to navigate this experience without being seen as one.

Tonight all this has come close to conflict. While paying the wages to the actors that participated in the Saaba performance and in the Universal Bed scene, I realized that they were expecting five times more than what I had agreed with the director of the Gambidi. It was an extremely tense situation in which I had to face the opposition from all the actors as a block, except from Christine. In their arguing, everyone had their turn to speak and everybody listened to everyone, showing a strong collective bonding. There was something theatrical about it.

I left the Gambidi ashamed and overwhelmed. Needing to reconsider everything. Akili, the musician, arrived just when I was leaving. I had to ask him to come back tomorrow. It was really bad timing.

MY ANCESTORS, YES, THEY WERE COLONISTS
THIEVES YES
BUT IT HAS BEEN THE WAY WE HAVE LET MONEY GROW BETWEEN US
THE WAYS WE HAVE EXCHANGED IT THAT HAS TURNED US APART
NOT MONEY ITSELF
THIS IS NOT WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HERE

BUT ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP WHICH WE HAVE LET MONEY PUT US IN
THEN THE REPRESENTATIONS
COLONIALISM, YES, CAME FROM US
AND THEN WE COULD SAY THAT MONEY WAS CREATED FIRST IN AFRICA
THAT IT CAME OUT OF YOUR MINDS OUT OF YOUR HANDS

WAIT A MINUTE
IS IT REALLY SO IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHERE THINGS COME FROM?
IS THIS NOT A PROPERTY ORIENTATED - PATRIARCHAL WAY OF THINKING?
THE ONE THAT UNDERSTANDS ORIGIN AS AN OWNERSHIP?

I HAVE LIVED FOR YEARS WITH A MAN THAT WAS NOT THE FATHER OF MY SONS
AND THIS, FOR ALL THE TIME OUR RELATIONSHIP LASTED, WAS A PROBLEM
MINE IS NOT AN ISOLATED CASE
OUR WHITE RICH WORLD IS FULLY INHABITED BY MEN THAT FATHER CHILDREN THAT ARE
NOT BIOLOGICALLY THEIRS
AND BY WOMEN MOTHERING CHILDREN THAT THEY DID NOT BEAR
JUST LIKE HERE, BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

SINCE WHEN HAS THE AMOUNT OF LOVE WE GIVE TO SOMEONE BEEN DECIDED DEPENDING
ON „OWNERSHIP“?
IF IT'S MINE, I WILL CARE
IF IT'S NOT MINE, I WILL NOT
I DESPISE THIS

WELL THIS IS HOW WE FUNCTION. US AND YOU, THE AFRICAN POOR PEOPLE TOO
YOU PROUDLY KEEP ON SAYING „TODAY FOR ME, BECAUSE TOMORROW IT MAY BE FOR YOU“ AS
PROOF OF YOUR SENSE OF BROTHERHOOD AND SOLIDARITY
BUT ISN'T THIS THE FIST FORM OF ACCOUNTANCY?
I WILL KEEP IN MY MEMORY HOW MUCH YOU OWE ME, SO I CAN IN THE FUTURE DEMAND IT BACK
I DON'T WANT TO BE PAYING ANY LONGER FOR THE DEBTS OF MY ANCESTORS
NO, YOU AND I SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT THE REAL THING HERE
TELL ME WHERE IT HURTS, AND THEN WE CAN START WORKING

YOU ARE NOT LISTENING
I TOLD YOU, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS PAY WITH THE RIGHT HAND
THIS IS HOW THE PERSON WHO RECIVES YOUR MONEY WILL KNOW YOUR INTENTION IS SINCERE
EVERY TIME YOU GIVE YOUR MONEY AWAY REMEMBER THIS
THINK OF THAT GESTURE BETWEEN YOUR HAND AND THE OTHER PERSON'S HAND
THIS TOUCH OPPOSES THE WAR OF MONEY AGAINST LIFE

The conflict has been settled: I paid the group what they asked for and from now on we will work only with Soma and Obana. They have both agreed on a fixed salary for the entire shoot so there should be no further misunderstandings regarding money. Nonetheless, the shame I felt the other night is not going away and I do not know how I will handle the fact that this situation made me aware of the absurdity of my task here. My resources being too low and the abyss too big to try to understand the local codes. If I were different, I would wrap this whole thing and spend the rest of my time here quietly observing life from the door of one of the actor's homes. But I won't. I am not able to reroute my journey. I fear returning empty-handed and without having put my ideas to test.

On their second day aboard the raft, the castaways from the French frigate were getting hungry. Convinced that they were about to die, they killed other men in order to get more and bigger rations of food. They did this because they believed that a person dies after two days fasting. Today we know that we can survive much longer, but in those times this was not common knowledge. Somehow, I now feel like those men: caught in the belief that to return without producing any tangible material would mean to return empty-handed. As if the experience on its own would not be enough. As if I would starve without taking images, or my existence could fade if I were not to have visual proof of my passage - and survival - through this place and time.

The decision to work with a smaller cast will help focus the story on the encounter between Therese and Thomas, leaving aside other possible exchanges. This is a loss, especially with some of the women of the group, but it will help concentrate energies and resources. After all, this is a story about intimacy and encounter, a love story.

Locations, crew and casting are now confirmed. I like this process of decision-making (yes/no/no/no/yes/yes/no) in which a film takes shape. We have been doing camera tests all day, one by one, with Christine, Soma and Obana. Improvised scenes using their own stories. There is mutual attraction and curiosity. The frame for the encounter has been set.

Godard said that a film is 'a gun and a girl' meaning that film-stories should show how we are when we are at risk and also give expression to our desires. But I do not feel appalled to create any story in which 'the girl' is represented as a body to be conquered and consumed. I don't want Therese to become another Eco, with the only possibility to repeat Narcissus's last words and to represent his desires. I want Therese to be a loving, rebellious partner. An Eco with the restored capacity to make herself present and heard.

It's been ten days since we arrived, and from the little I have seen it is clear that women here live under a strong patriarchal system. But that's the quick judgment made by my European mind. At moments, I have also felt as if the masculine imposition functions as an appearance, the protective shield of a feminine relational system. That behind masculine presence - the one that deals with money and social decision-making - there is another reality where individualities dissolve in a weaved relational sense of commonality.

THERESE :

Quand une âme est conçue, la première chose qui se forme est la cuirasse. Elle sert à soutenir.

Moi j'ai grandi à l'intérieur de cette cuirasse jusqu'à ce que je sois assez grande pour la casser. Puis je me suis mis en route...

Je suis venue ici pour connaître mon humanité. Pour devenir un corps qui récupère le rythme cardiaque du sang et pousse la peur dehors, vers les extrémités. Je suis venue ici pour confier ma vie aux mains de la vie et aux hommes qui savent la respecter.

Tomorrow morning we leave for Kaya to start the shoot. There will be nine of us in two cars.

Jimmy, Christine, Soma, Obana and me,

Yolande, the line-producer. She has been in a strange mood lately, with an unwillingness to do whatever I ask her to do. Not experienced on film sets, something about her social status had escaped me until now: she feels mistreated when I assume her driving instead of providing her with a driver. During a brief conversation between her and the owner of our apartment in Ouaga, I heard of a local system of castes, and understood that she is from a 'superior' one.

Toni, assistant director and production assistant. He has directed his own films, is efficient and easy to communicate with.

Constant, the sound operator. Very young and hardworking, will use his salary to buy new microphones.

And Ali, the driver. As he drives us up north, he is getting married to the mother of his son. We only learn about that because, on a short stop by the road, he calls the witness that is taking his place at the ceremony. Not even his own wedding will make him miss a day's salary.





Dialogue on the back seat of the car:

Christine - Ah... que c'est beau...!

Soma - Tu trouves beau ça ?

Christine - Ben... (elle rigole) C'est quoi la beauté ?

Soma - Tu l'as dit...

Christine - Quoi ?

Soma - Ça.

14.12. Kaya

Kaya is a small village at two-hour drive from Ouaga, where a family is renting us their adobe courtyard and bedroom as our film set. We arrived two days ago and the negotiation brought together the chief's family members and the neighbors of the surrounding houses. They wanted to close the deal with the neighbors witnessing it in order to prevent further gossip and envy. During a long conversation, they decided how much I was due to pay. Yolande mediated. Nobody was interested in knowing what the story we came to film on their premises is about.

It is very hot, there is almost no shade and I am the only one who, as hours pass, seems tireless. A stubborn camel, with enough water-carburant to keep going without pausing. I must seem like a mad woman to their eyes, running from here to there in my long white costume, calling for things and for silence. Screaming out Cut and Action. I have been trained on film shoots to act like a bulldozer, maximize time, consider practicality and run over things to get those images. As if it was not enough already, I have decided to play Medusa: Therese's shadow. Her guardian angel. Maybe Therese herself in an older age. Definitely, the one that rescued her out of the ocean's depths.

Christine is attentive and easygoing. Poses the right questions and I feel she has understood the way I look at things. Jimmy suffers from the heat and loses patience more easily; it is not easy to follow someone in constant improvisation, it takes a dancer, one able to trust and let control without totally disengaging. He is doing a great job and actors and technicians adore him. Whenever we break – at dinner, or while we wait for whatever needs to be ready: a prop, a battery, the slow passage of a herd of goats out of our field of action - Jimmy goes on with stories about Godard et la Nouvelle Vague. Listening to him, I wonder if film is actually the language for Therese's story. This concern, of course, I share with no one. It would be too confusing to say that we are shooting a film that may not be a film at all.

15.12

I don't want Christine, Soma and Obana to conceive any fixed ideas about their characters. It's not about acting but about being in direct contact with who they are right here and now with a camera running by their side. I feel their emotional exposure so fragile, that I can only propose situations, words or gestures, and step back to observe what happens. When this works, it is not clear if it's the actor or the character speaking. Something feels alive. A series of scenes have taken shape under these circumstances, some funny, others awkward, some silent, others spoken, in an un-naturalistic, oneiric style.

DAY 1. Therese arrives on African ground. Thomas finds her very weakened and brings her to his village, where during the first days, she recovers and rests. Medusa, fearing Thomas's desire and the possibility of Therese being traded for marriage, blocks with her presence the entrance to the room where the young woman lies. The two men - both Thomas - gaze at the door, wanting to see Therese again, but also fearing Medusa. As a sphinx, she puts them to the test by offering money. Only the one who does not fall into her trap, will be able to enter the room and talk to Therese.

Soma and Obana - as the two Thomases - share their worries about the arrival of foreigners. One wonders where these people came from and what hides behind the sea. The other believes there is nowhere to go but home.

While shooting this dialogue, created out of a quick improvisation and two lines I gave to each of the actors, I saw the two of them finally loosening up, turning the fear of the camera into playfulness and in their favour.

DAY 2. Of the two it is Obana, the impulsive one, who falls into Medusa's trap. Being the first one that dares facing her, he takes her money and by this acceptance loses the possibility of meeting Therese. This leaves Soma without his double - or Thomas without his shadow -. He can now approach the door and, finding no resistance, enter.

Lying on the ground, Therese is too weak to speak. It is her body that, creating a drop of water in the base of her neck, tells him to approach.

A scene with Obana counting money should have been filmed, but light ran out and everyone was too exhausted to ask for more.

At night, while resting at the small hotel by the pond, Obana tells me about his mother. He speaks of her as a sacred life giver, a goddess deserving forever bliss. There is no shame in his worship, only pride and gratefulness. It touches me deeply to hear a man talk about his mother with such awe.





A Yoruban Creation Story

When a soul is to be born, and in order to decide the tasks of its future life, the soul goes to meet the Creator.

Destiny is not something imposed on, or something one has to blindly accept, but something one pacts and agrees on with the Creator beforehand.

It is said that in this encounter between the soul and the Creator, there is only one witness: the mother.

In the presence of the three, life is accorded.

I am torn between the pursuit of my story and the desire to turn the camera towards the people that come to see what we are doing. I resist the temptation of the exoticism of such a foreign reality. Instead, I keep persisting with my own obsession, pushing this story out into the light.

McKee says that a film's story is composed of CHARACTERS with goals, backed by MOTIVES, who face OBSTACLES that create CONFLICTS and PROBLEMS that engender REAL risk and DANGER. And then there is an END. The characters may achieve their goals or not but they will always LEARN something.

So far, we have two main characters that have doubled: Therese and Medusa, and the two actors playing Thomas. Their common goal is to address the paradoxical feelings that their encounter awakes: the fear of entrapment vs the need of intimacy and exchange. No other motive than shifting points of view, embracing their differences. No real problems that could engender risk or danger, apart from the clashes caused by money and cultural misunderstanding. The only end I can foresee so far is the date on our return tickets. The learning: the experience itself.

This is how this story goes: despite the protective presence of Medusa, Thomas meets Therese. They very quickly realize that while being both human, they are both different. And it is not only their sexes and the colour of their skins, but it is also the way they relate and create relationships that is different. So they start talking.

Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité

200 years after the abolition of slavery
180 years from the discovery of the voltaic pile
100 years after women gained the right to vote
and 60 years on from the commercialization of the contraceptive pill.
In two centuries, people in rich societies have gained liberty and equality. I wonder, though, how much have we done for fraternity? Is fraternity something that develops only when values are based not only on economic parameters?

By pairing a white woman with a black man in the aftermath of the French revolution, I want to underline a commonality: Therese and Thomas, despite all their differences, share the experience of slavery. Each of them represents, in this context, a different sort of slavery; one imposed by white men onto black men and women, the other imposed by nature and perpetuated by men onto bodies whose sexuality was undetachable from reproduction and motherhood.

In Géricault's painting, the black slave who waves the flag from the top of the composition represents hope. He sits above the rest of the castaways and, by giving him such high position, the painter makes a statement in favour of abolition. But his political positioning was a public gesture: in the intimacy of his private life he abided by other principles, like accepting the forced exile of his lover for bearing his illegitimate child. This anonymous woman who had to be removed from the picture before Géricault could produce his masterpiece.

Therese was raised in a society where children were the father's property. Not only it was legal for a husband to beat his wife, but men were encouraged to punish any women they regarded as unruly. If a woman tried to escape a violent husband she was considered an outlaw and the husband had the right to imprison her. The only defence against sexual harassment available to the women of this time were their sewing needles!

In Europe, as much as in Africa, women were used as a currency of exchange and subjected by marriage to the benefit of group survival and social cohesion. It was their reproductive capacity that gave them value.

The great-great-grandmother of my own great-grandmother - the other Therese - died during labour after 18 pregnancies. This was not an exceptional case. Women had to wait until the second half of the twentieth century to be fully in control of - and free from - the will of their fertile bodies.

The good news is that Christine, who by playing Therese links past with present, is a polyamorous practitioner who freely expresses her desires. The triangle she forms with Soma and Obana, the two Thomases, is a statement of her freedom - and a personal homage/revenge to Buñuel's film 'Ese Oscuro Objeto del Deseo' (1977) in which the 'desired object' - Godard's 'girl' - is a female character played by two actresses. Thomas, played here by Soma and Obana, is a man who will never think of 'owning' Therese's body.

17.12.

On our way back from Kaya to Ouaga, we drive past an adobe quarry. It's a mesopotamic scene: men mixing clay and piling sun-dried bricks as it has been done for thousands of years. The only thing different here is the big antenna that overlooks the scenery. I ask the two cars to stop, get camera and actors ready. We agree a price with the men for the time we need to shoot a scene among their bricks. I give the actors, separately, some lines. I don't want Thomas to know what Therese is going to say. Once the sunlight is right, we start; first with Obana, then with Soma and in both takes, Therese tells Thomas:

THERESE:
I will not have children.

88

At first, Obana did not understand what Christine just said, so she repeated her line. It is not that he did not hear it; he was so bewildered by this statement that he did not know what and how to answer. I could sense his efforts to stay in 'character' and not look at me demanding explanations. Finally, he screamed:

THOMAS:
You will have them anyway!

There is impatient anger in his voice, as if a man from the nineteenth century had taken over his persona. The sudden possibility of ending motherhood shocks him. All the way back to Ouaga I can feel him hurt in his pride, his discomfort towards me for having created such possibility.

At night, back in our three rooms apartment, Christine makes dinner for everyone. Obana, now back in good spirits, explains that in his tradition every child has two mothers: the biological one, and the aunt – the mother' sister - who actually becomes the factual, official one.

MOTHER, THERE IS ONLY ONE!

NO, HE HAS TWO

A SHARED MOTHERHOOD

A WAY TO STRENGTHEN HUMAN BONDS





In 'The Invention of Women - Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses', the Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónke Oyěwùmí explains that, according to the cosmology of the Yoruba, there are three genders: female, male and mother. It is because we in the West have reduced them to two, that we have trapped life, and ourselves, in a binary system of opposites.

With my western conditioning I find very difficult not to think in terms of opposites. Since my arrival here I am trying not to put 'two and two together' and I constantly fail. I can, though, try to change the way I name things. The wording. Not to say, for example, women and men, feminine and masculine, but choose, for instance, prairie and desert; each naming a different way to relate and create relationships:

- Prairies are emotional and tend to personalize communication.
- Deserts tend to generalize, dissociate and be abstract.
- Prairies are selfish, tend to be hysterical and to indulge themselves.
- Deserts tend to deny themselves, be stoic and go into sacrifice.
- Prairies are talkative and natural receivers.
- Deserts are natural givers and listeners.
- When competition happens between them, life in their surroundings dies.

18.12

Chekhov said that a story is the sum of two stories; the one we think it's all about, and a second that flows unrevealed in the subtexts of the first and that eventually, towards the end, will surface. Therese's main story is one about the encounter with an otherness (sexual, racial) and the underlying second story is about how this woman and this man relate, from the aftermath of the French Revolution to our days, when the possibility appears to transcend the female reproductive body and take control of its passing inheritances. In order for the second story to unfold, Therese and Thomas would need to be at least 200 years old or time travellers.

XIX è siècle- Abolition de l'esclavage	
XXI è siècle- Abolition de l'héritage	génétique économique

non-fictional characters
living in the story of history

embedded with

transmitters of

an inheritance

a mixture of

individual
collective
political
cultural
technological
geographical
cosmological

events

we are





A rope plays a key role in Therese's story. When the frigate sank, social rank determined safety procedures. The six lifeboats carried the governor, his family and court, high ranking military personnel, priests, businessmen and scientists. For the rest - manual labourers and slaves - the raft was built, Therese being the only woman aboard. It was unanimously decided, just before abandoning the frigate, that the six lifeboats, joined by a rope, were to row the raft towards shore. A convoy was formed along this rope that, for a short time, held the hopes of the castaways on the raft. Then, the rope was cut.

MANY VOICES

Nous les abandonnons!

This is how her story starts: by cutting a rope that leaves her at the mercy of currents and winds, just as any human life starts by cutting the umbilical cord that unites us to our mother. It feels like abandonment, yes, to leave this duo to become a solo. A solo that will grow with the need to relate and to become a duo again.

A rope becomes a living transmitter when at each end there is someone holding it, creating a connection. A rope puts two things in relationship. It has been said that the discovery of new continents was made possible thanks to the compass but the rope was the most essential technology aboard these vessels. Ropes to hold the goods and stretch the sails, ropes that brought those boats back to shore. Handmade ropes as veins of a global body, connecting people that otherwise could never have reached each other.

I rented a motorcycle and asked Obana to drive me to see the ropemakers. It was an adventurous way through crowded dusty roads where children screamed Nassara! as we passed: White woman!

We arrived to a rusty gate where a man in his fifties welcomed us. Obana explained in Mossi, the local language. I smiled. The man agreed to let us into a courtyard where six women were weaving ropes out of recycled plastic bags. They were his mothers, wives and daughters. They laughed when I asked if I could film them, but did not stop their activity.

Looking at these women, who use their entire body as a working tool, I felt that a rope is, beyond its capacity to unite and bond, also a link to the past. The rope in Therese's story needs to be cut for her to come into existence and to have the possibility to free herself from the conditioning of past traditions. Now, in a new land, she may have the chance to do something that is not a repetition, nor the recreation of what she once learned.

THERESE :

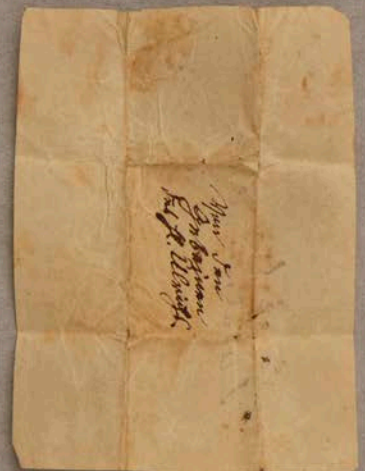
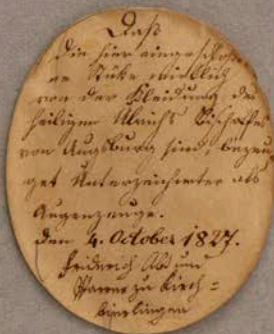
*J'ai vu des hommes devenir des esclaves et des esclaves d'esclaves.
J'ai vu un héritage de mémoires filer d'une génération à
l'autre.*

*J'ai vu l'empreinte de ces mémoires dépasser les frontières du temps
chronologique et agir de façon plus déterminante que les conventions
de classe, ou les différences de sexe. Des mémoires qui sont autant le
récit des faits comme
l'empreinte que ces faits ont sur leurs héritiers.*

Et il m'a fallu oublier.

Effacer certaines mémoires.

Mettre fin aux loyautés de la pensée.



The narrative around the cutting of this rope, developed back in 1817 by the castaways on the raft, turned them into the victims of human selfishness and was used as an argument against political elites. But selfishness and social injustice were already present before, on the frigate, and also after, among the men on the raft. Without wanting to undervalue the sufferings these people endured, I believe that once safe back in Paris, those men saw the benefits of playing the victim's role and suppressed the shame of having themselves killed for survival, instead of creating a narrative that would acknowledge their own deeds and help them take responsibility.

Isn't it this the way that any unbalanced relationship develops?
By opposites arising from their opposites?

1st ACT

A thinks it's more (x) than B, and acts consequently by imposing (violently) its superiority over B.

B blames A and becomes its victim.

A: Represses feelings of guilt and shame. Expresses confidence and assurance.

B: Feelings of fear, anger and/or sadness.

2nd ACT

There is a change in the lighting, a 180 degree shift of the perception that reveals aspects hidden on the shadows. Something terrifying occurs: A or B, or both but not simultaneously, start to realize that whatever happened between A and B was also the will of an unconscious self. **Enantiodromia*** comes into play: the emergence of the unconscious opposite, the understanding that we can never know what evil may be necessary in order to produce good and what good may very possibly lead to evil.

Denying this, B starts considering the possibility of revenge. More violence.

A: Feelings of guilt and fear of punishment. Shame and repentance.

B: Feelings of anger and sadness, this time towards oneself. B thinks it's better than A and represses the fact that it's behaving like A.

3rd ACT

The discomfort of those unresolved feelings pushes for resolution. A decision has to be taken between repetition (revenge: B=A) or the acknowledgement of a third element that uses A and B equally. The tacit understanding between predators and victims: colonists and colonized, jailer and prisoner.

**'Liberté veut dire ne pas être pris dans la chaîne de la répétition, mais la briser.
Et faire de la répétition une naissance.'**

Anne Dufourmantelle



In the story of History it is said that a human intention of growth and discovery was supported by the desire for more, growing wealth. That Columbus had the vision and the knowledge and that's how we started the broadscale crossing continents. But what if there were another consciousness, a planetary one, that set things right for this man, for any man, to make this journey? And for our encounter to happen? What if we, the colonists on frigates, responded to a call from the people on the other side, a call for a clash, an attraction that is at the same time creative and destructive? Could this terrestrial consciousness not function by the parameters of good and evil but instead by the way that creation and destruction are intrinsically intertwined, connected in a way that one does not exist without the other?

In 'Narratives for Restoration', Donna Haraway writes that it "matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories". Deena Metzger adds that a story needs to be understood as an ecosystem, taking into account all the different relationships that are necessary for the story's existence. Only then, can a story gain its power as an invocation.

Film storytelling has failed to provide such complex stories; its inherent and expensive propagandistic nature sets up for a hierarchical thinking that works only by linearity and exclusion. One in which humans are the sole protagonists, torn between good and evil forces. When a script editor says, for instance, that in order to keep the audience's interest you have to kill somebody in the first act of your story, what this story will actually kill is the understanding of what it means to die and to face death.

The narratives constructed around the shipwreck of the Medusa and Géricault's painting were also exclusive; first, because its authors avoided explaining what it meant to kill and then survive and, second, because the painter excluded his lover and own child in order to restore his honour and social position. The sacrifice of the silent.

By constructing a contemporary narrative around this shipwreck, I am starting to believe that in order not to lose its survival complexity, this narrative will have to include the experience of its conception, leaving the possibilities of its unfolding constantly open, or at least as far as the story will want to. Because a story is not only something to be created. It's something to be discovered, around and within.

A Creation story from Nigeria

God created turtles, men and stones. Of each, he created male and female. God gave life to the turtle and men, but not to the stones. None of them could have children, and when they became old, they did not die but became young again. The turtle, however, wished to have children, and went to God. But God said: "I have given you life, but I have not given you permission to have children." But the turtle came to God again to make the request, and finally God said: "You always come to ask for children. Do you realize that when the living has had several children, they must die?" But the turtle said: "Let me see my children and then die." And God granted the wish. When man saw that the turtle had children, he too wanted to have children. God warned man, as he had done with the turtle, warning him that he must die. And man also said: "Let me see my children and then die." That is how death and children came into the world. Only the stones didn't want to have children, so they never die.

Today we went back to Saaba, very close to where Soma and Obana live, to shoot some contemporary scenes in a more urban environment. It is a friendly neighborhood where people are letting us work without demanding much in exchange. Children and chicken often enter into frame but that's no longer a problem: we simply accept the fact that we cannot be fully in control. I give the actors a word or an object, sometimes a gesture, and let them do the rest. After all, the story itself will be a patch-work, made by putting together pieces of other stories, just like we are all made of other people's stories.

Soma and Obana live each in a one room construction, very close to each other. I have decided to use one of their doors as a passage through time and space. Now Therese and Thomas have migrated from the nineteenth, meeting for the first time in the twenty-first century. She, as a tourist, he, as a soon-to-be migrant.

DAY 5. SAABA STREETS. EXTERIOR.

Therese looks for Thomas along tiny, deserted roads. Thomas also looks for Therese. It is not clear whether they have lost each other or if they are playing hide and seek. Suddenly a very LOUD NOISE coming from the sky interrupts their search. It's a plane, flying very low over their heads. Scared, Therese runs to hide inside the house. She does not want to be taken away: to return.

SCENE INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN.

The camera is now by the side of the same white bed from the opening scene. It frames her sitting on the bed, covering herself with a dress, putting on her shoes, and her progress through a series of tunnels, corridors and empty rooms illuminated by security lights. She climbs to an upper floor from where she can see, through thick security windows, a green valley with a dam. A SOUND OF BROKEN GLASS. She turns to look where it came from. One door finally opens to:

A big empty space with aligned tables. Sitting by one is a young androgynous, nude torso. Its body is so thin, that it is not easy to look at this CREATURE without repulsion. The Creature tells Therese that there is no way out of the mountain. That there is nowhere to go, just in case she was getting nostalgic and wished to return to where she came from.

THERESE

Why would I want to come back?

CREATURE

To forgive.

THERESE

But there is no guilt. Nobody could have done otherwise.

CREATURE

You would like to forgive those who abandoned you.

THERESE

By repeating the horror?

CREATURE

There is a loyalty that condemns you to always repeat what you have already experienced before...

THERESE

When I was at the sea I saw the ghosts that formed my lineage. Every day I gave them a little bit of me, another piece, until I became very light.

CREATURE

What did they give you in exchange?

THERESE

Conquests. Wars... On the raft, I clung to the mast and left my life in their hands, silently praying they would give me back my life...

CREATURE

You see? Your compulsion to return is stronger than your will... I can help you break this impulse.

A SERIES OF SCENES in which Therese tries to leave the mountain but keeps failing, engaging with the Creature in a dependent relationship that swings between attacks of vulnerability and emotional disconnection. Tenderness and repulsion. Back and forth between the mountain prison and the African reality.

DAY 6. BLUE ROOM. INTERIOR.

THOMAS (holding in his hand a dead *Calosoma Scrutator*). Look, a genie. A genie can transform into anything. Now, since the arrival of electricity most hide and no longer speak to humans. It's the way humans think that makes them run away. They can't live with electricity. In your big city you will never see one of them.

THERESE (taking the beetle, observing it)

That's an example of an extinct species of beetle. They could predict the weather. Did you know that they became sexually active just before rain would arrive?

SCENE INSIDE A MOUNTAIN, THE STONE CORRIDORS OF A GORGE.

Therese and Thomas walk up along a waterfall, through dark and humid tunnels and stairs sculpted on the rock. There is mist in the air. The SOUND OF THE WATERFALL is too loud for them to speak. Only a DISTANT VOICE confirms that they are on track. Here and there, light bulbs illuminate the darkest stretches of their passage.

At the end of the stairs there is a corridor that leads them into a room with big rock crystals in its centre. The quartz seems

to produce light. Therese and Thomas approach the radiant rocks with precautious curiosity. An owl, suddenly awoken by their presence, flies away and out of the room. There is a significant change in the lighting and in the AMBIENT SOUND every time they approach or move around the crystal rocks. They thereby become aware that the rocks are the source of light itself. And this is how they discover that a precise gesture -done by uniting their hands in a specific way- can turn on and off the electric current of the quartz.

SCENE ABOVE THE MOUNTAIN CORRIDORS.

Therese back inside the mountain, sitting by the glass window with Creature resting in her arms.

CREATURE

You were going to tell me about Medusa.

THERESE

Why are you so interested?

CREATURE

Did she really bring you back from the sea?

THERESE

Perhaps... She did it because no man would have followed a woman's path by choice.

CREATURE

Many have given their entire soul to it.

THERESE

Yes, but eventually they have become resentful and belligerent. Then they declare 'I have lost my freedom'.

CREATURE

What do they mean by freedom?

THERESE

The right to go to war.

CREATURE

War?

THERESE

Yes, war. It's the right to take what has not been offered.

CREATURE

What is the opposite?

THERESE

Gifts.

DAY 7. SCENE AT THE ANTENNAS.

Thomas, not able to open the door and enter the space Therese has disappeared through, calls her from an antenna. But his voice does not reach her. On the side of the receiver, Medusa tries to wake Therese up.

It was a warm sunset on top of the house where we got permission to shoot at the broken parabolic antenna. The heavy city traffic and a welder at work very close by make the ambient sound impossible to use. A chance to unsync the sound.

As tomorrow will be our last day of shooting, I have invited everyone for a special dinner. We go to an open-air restaurant with two big TV screens, where the lighting changes from red to green. Apparently it's the most renowned place around. Food takes ages, beers go fast. We share anecdotes of the many things we have lived through over the past days, make jokes, give each other nicknames and hope for a successful future for our film. We talk about love and about the beautiful relationship that has started between Soma and Christine. Le Prince et Blanche Neige. And the conversation goes on until someone mentions the possibility of a 'mariage politique'.

- C'est quoi un mariage politique?
- Un mariage sans amour. Un qui se fait par intérêt, pour le passeport, par exemple.
- Je n'avais jamais écouté ces deux mots ensemble. Ça fait vraiment bizarre... Je connaissais les noms botaniques, mais pas les mariages politiques.

21.12

For this last day, I want to film a scene by a baobab, the sacred tree of the African savanna. 'Adansonia digitate' is its scientific name. It's imposing, charged with mythological powers and known as the ancestors' tree.

We take a taxi with Christine and Jimmy to a national park not far from the city. After an hour on a windy, dusty road we see a majestic one, surrounded by five abode huts where people live and store their grain. There are some children playing and, sitting in a courtyard, a very old woman takes seeds out of their pods. Everything around her is handmade out of organic elements. She is almost blind and agrees to play in the film.

Day 8. SCENE AT THE BAOBAB.

The wind calls in the black old woman. She appears from behind the ancestors' tree wearing Therese's reliquary. Medusa arrives, the two look at each other. There is a non-verbal exchange between the old woman and Medusa but through their gestures we understand that by exchanging the precious jewel they also give each other their wisdom.

SCENE ABOVE THE MOUNTAIN CORRIDORS.

Therese, locked in with the Creature, finds the way up to the terrace. On the exterior, separated by a thick glass that does not let the sound across, stands Thomas. They, too, communicate with gestures.

SCENE INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN CORRIDORS.

Therese tenderly kills the Creature. As it closes its eyes, the glass breaks, the ice melts, and Thomas can enter and sit close to Therese. They both look at the dead body and realize that it has transformed into Medusa. Scared of what has just happened and the consequences of it, they try to bring Medusa back to life.

22.12

Christine and Jimmy will leave tomorrow to spend Christmas with their families. I will stay a few days more, to finish my writing and calm the pace before returning to Europe.

'Light, feeling and sense, this will pass away.'
The Creature

A Creation Story from Mali

At the beginning there was a huge drop of milk.

Then Doondari came and he created the stone.

Then the stone created iron.

And iron created fire.

And fire created water.

And water created air.

The Doondari descended a second time.

And he took the five elements and he shaped them into man.

But man was proud.

Then Doondari created blindness and blindness defeated man.

But when blindness became too proud.

Doondari created sleep, and sleep defeated blindness.

But when sleep became too proud.

Doondari created worry, and worry defeated sleep.

But when worry became too proud.

Doondari created death, and death defeated worry.

But when death became too proud.

Doondari descended for the third time.

And he came as Gueno, the eternal one.

And Gueno defeated death.



I go with Akili, the musician, to visit his village. On the way back, a big dead baobab by the side of the road captures my attention: it's like a broken mammoth with its branches lying on the ground. I take a picture and instantly 20 or 30 children come running towards us. Akili plays a song for them on his n'goni. We all sing and clap. And when they leave, Akili and I sit side by side on one of the fallen branches. We talk. I tell him about the strangeness I feel here, about migration and borders, about Prairies and Deserts and the impossibility to create within a dynamic of opposites.

THOMAS:

Moi, quand le moment demande de la férocité, personne ne baise avec moi. Par contre, quand le moment demande de la tendresse, je ne suis pas tendre, mais très, très tendre. Laisse-moi te donner un conseil ; tu seras plus heureuse si tu transformes tes problèmes en mystères. Un problème est quelque chose qui veut être résolu, par contre un mystère veut seulement être embrassé.

I smile. We hug.

Maybe within this complexity, things can also be simpler.

Sometimes as simple as changing the lightning under which we look at things.

Or the words we give to things.

Another Creation Story

Prairies and Deserts were created by volcanic eruption coming into contact with water. Both were created simultaneously and by their own means.

Prairies and Deserts met and became very curious of each other's differences. By exploring their bodies and reactions, they developed words that helped them express their inner rhythms, so they could know when to meet, and couple, and when to part.

They defeated death by periodically erasing memories, forgetting useless or harming information.

They created intimacy by attentive listening.

Their sense of touch was highly developed - they used their smell and hearing as much as their sight -.

They mastered inner impulses and believed in intuition, how and when to shut rationality and how to open other doors of consciousness.

Sometimes they were visited by the same dream, and when on rare occasions they reproduced - both equally able to do so - they left children to the children themselves.

A creature grew between them and out of their shadows, every time they were too loud to listen or forgot to touch their inner solitudes, and with her tender bites the Creature managed to produce competition between them. An abyss grew between Prairies and Deserts that no bridge could cross.

Prairies and Deserts learned there was no other way to coexist but to embrace this very thing that confronted them, despite its disgusting appearance. They learned to care for the Creature as if it was their own offspring. And only then, springs gush came out from the Deserts and waterways flow through Prairies.





I woke to the muezzin calling for prayer and with the memory of last night's dream.

It started underwater where Medusa was quietly breathing, her hair loose in the waters.

Slowly, fish came around her forming a dense moving bank of silvery fishes. Medusa's body disappeared within this dancing mirroring crowd.

Then, one fish came out, separating from the group. The fish then swam from the sea into rivers and creeks, upstream until reaching the origin of water. The source. There, the fish awaited quietly, not sure where to go next. Then it heard the water's voice.

And the water said:

*"there is this agreement for peace not to happen among prairies and deserts
nor among women and men
nor between feminine and masculine
not in this planet, not in any human body
humans keep on believing that they need to improve their lives
not aware that deep down
it's me
within them
who keeps shaking them with my tides
up and down and down and up
it's me
who doesn't want them to be still
still, I spoil
I need movement
I need to flow, create currents, change in shape
freeze, vaporize, fall, turn
create whirlpools
you know that, you have navigated me
haven't you heard about my interstellar travel before limpregnated planet earth?
it is my wish to return where I once came from, and for this
I shake every human soul and body, so they get that feeling
that yearning of being elsewhere
I have given them the knowledges of my daughter Electricity
and of my grand-daughters Technology and Digitalism
so they will construct the means for us to leave this planet.
go, Therese, urge them
my glaciers will melt
my seas rise, my rivers fly
if they don't speed their human lives to be ready for departure
go and tell them that if they don't
I will leave them behind on a desert, unfertile land"*

'Memory is not only retentive; it is also communicative.'

Astrida Neimanis







As I pack my luggage and wait for Obana to come say goodbye, I think of this film as a broken mirror. I am about to return to Europe with a few scenes of a young European woman learning other sets of values, but time was too short to surmount the conceived ideas we have about each other and also about ourselves. It would take more time and another gaze - probably not a filmic one - to go beyond the surface of this reality. If I were to start anew I would quietly observe from someone's doorway the rhythms of this other life before I could assure that, Yes, Therese made it to Africa.

I am not sure what I leave behind, in the hearts and minds of the people I crossed paths with while searching for Therese's story. I can only hope they will remember us as I will remember each one of them.

When Obana comes, we embrace, we breathe in each other's arms and cry.

A drunken driver takes me to the airport at 2 am through a dark, deserted city. It takes me six hours to do a journey that used to last 26 days.

SCENE INSIDE THE PLANE.

Therese and Thomas sit side by side. Through the window they look at a sea of clouds. Thomas says it is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen and asks Therese why she never mentioned that.

I got used to it, she answers.

Then, they put their hands together just as they did by the crystal rocks.

And suddenly, the SOUND OF THE ENGINES turns off. There is no more need for engines, no more weight to carry to the place where they are now heading.

A plane suspended in the air.

FEBRUARY 2018

A month after my return, still with the footage unedited, I receive a call from Obana. He announces that Akili just died. He was 32, found dead at the park where he used to play at nights.

With no reason, I suddenly remember the twins' bath. The touch of those mothers' hands that, as genies, hid away from electricity. And I wonder what will happen to a knowledge that, although not stored in our hippocampus, cannot be captured in bytes either.

What will happen with the human touch?

Some conditions to create a Restorative Film Narrative

_Take the spectators out of their known spaces.

_Invite the viewer within four walls, that are all equally important for the narrative. The spectator has to be able to move around, face North, South, West and East. Maybe also the ceiling and the floor.

_Work against cause-effect thinking. If linearity is required, show first the consequence and then, or later, disconnected from the first, the origin, the cause.

_No End to this narrative because End is what happens when we Start taking things for granted. Instead, create cycles.

_Use the screen as an object in relationship to other objects.
Use it and relate to it as a sensitive being that responds to what is projected on it.

_Desync sound when possible.
Silence is silence.
Don't use background music.

_It is not about creating emotions.
It is about creating presence.

_Honour 'mistakes'. Use them, listen to them, show them.

_Include the elements used in the process.
Value the mold as much as the cast.

To look at the shadow of things, or to look twice or longer at anything, reveals hidden elements that can only be seen with a more accurate observation. Like the person who observed the leaves of certain bushes for long enough to finally understand how to weave its branches, this further glance normally brings a sense of discovery. It feels like revealing the magician's trick. The hidden threads of the marionette. Suddenly, we understand the mechanisms of the illusion.

Cinema and TV work their fascination thanks to a series of tricks that, unless we freeze the image, watch the story again, or look off the frame, will never be revealed. The producers of our rich worlds know well how this works: if we increase the speed of life by increasing the amount of experiences to be consumed, there will be less time - or no time at all - for a second glance at things. And the pleasure that this 'second take' provides, this sense of discovery, will remain stolen from the experience.

Today, I cannot look at Géricault's painting without seeing what I did not see at first. It's Joy.

Yes, among the spectacular composition of dead bodies there is joy. The black man that waves at the horizon calling for an encounter, is the only one that fully embodies it.

To see it, you need to put yourself in Thomas's place; the place of the slave waving the flag.

Observe his left arm rising up towards the horizon. Then, search in your memories. Remember the feeling that arises when a connection happened after a disconnection. Or when, by the acknowledging of the other, you felt recognized. Seen.

The lighting over Géricault's painting has now changed. Its read and listen to his message urging us to detach from the structures that limit the language of intimacy. Saying that, as much as we need to be seen, we also need to let the others know that we see them.

Probably, just as Eco, I am not saying anything new. Only what I saw when I gave the painting a second look.





UNE BIOGRAPHIE POUR THERESE
or the shape of a watery story



'History is rooted in the future: not pushed by behind but pulled from ahead.'
Terence McKenna



Therese is born on 3rd July in Ertingen, close to Tuttlingen, Germany.
Lexell's Comet is visible in the sky during the three summer months.

*Vous avez demandé que je vous raconte mon histoire...
Je me demande quelle intention vous fait venir sonner à ma porte, car dans tout il y a une intention. En tout cas, l'intention d'une histoire est dans sa fin, et ça sera à vous, et non pas à moi, de la trouver.*

Je suis née l'année de la comète Lexell, qui est restée suspendue dans le ciel pendant trois mois, élevant les regards de tous, vieux et jeunes, riches et pauvres. Bien des superstitions sont nées sur son passage... Moi, par exemple.

*Je suis née près d'une rivière,
dans la chambre
de la maison
du village
du pays
où je voudrais, un jour, y retourner.*

J'étais une fille et on m'appela Thérèse.

La maison de mon père et de son frère était une grange à trois étages où habitaient les deux hommes avec leurs femmes et 10 enfants, 6 travailleurs à salaire fixe, 15 chevaux, d'innombrables pigeons voyageurs, tous entièrement dédiés à l'entreprise du transport postal. De foie catholique, j'avais été élevée dans le respect d'un être tout puissant et notre vie était ordonnée par les cycles des saisons, du cidre et de la bière, du levain du pain, des cloches et des dimanches.

Mon enfance, c'est le son perpétuel de la rivière. Plus fort ou plus aimable, selon les saisons, le chant de l'eau était à mon ouïe toujours jeune et effervescent. L'eau semblait porter en elle une joie qui, en dépit des obstacles à son passage, se transmettait à tous ceux qui habitaient dans ses rivages. Dans son mouvement inépuisable, elle nous donnait envie de rester là, sur place.

Très vite, j'ai appris l'existence du malheur, et sans que je puisse vous dire pourquoi, j'ai commencé à croire que c'était moi qui le portais. Une accumulation de faits, une répétition de mauvais sorts, ont forgé cette sensation. Tout d'abord, ce fut la mort de ma sœur aînée, trois mois avant ma naissance. Puis, ce fut l'accident de mon père, l'hiver de mes six ans, quand j'ai failli le tuer. J'étais montée dans la chambre du grenier où une fenêtre à deux cadres vitrés isolait l'espace du froid. Poussée par le désir d'ouvrir cette fenêtre, j'étais grimpée sur la pointe des pieds et j'avais ouvert le premier de ces deux cadres. Quand je voulus ouvrir le deuxième, un mécanisme de verrous que je n'arrivais pas à comprendre, m'en l'empêcha. J'essayai plusieurs mouvements, en le forçant, et soudainement, le cadre entier échappa de mes mains et tomba dans le vide, se brisant à 5 centimètres de l'endroit où mon père passait à cet instant précis. Il cria de toutes ses forces un cri court et aigu. Ma mère, mes tantes, sœurs, cousines et les domestiques de la ferme, étaient venues pour voir ce qui se passait.

Personne ne me gronda, comme si ce jour-là tous avaient accepté mon impénitente maladresse. Mon père non plus, ne fit aucune référence à cet accident. Dans le silence du souper ce soir-là, le bandage de sa main droite parlait à lui tout seul. À chaque gorgée, je m'en voulais, non pas de ne pas l'avoir tué, mais d'être devenue ainsi invisible à son (r)égard.

1783

Eruption of volcano Laki, in Island.
8 million tons of hydrofluoric acid, 120 million tons of sulfur dioxin.
14 cubic km of lava.
Total number of deaths in Europe estimated between 10.000 and 20.000.
Temperature falls of 3 degrees.

1789

Famines trigger, among others, the French Revolution.
Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.
Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, being the last the most difficult to include from all three concepts.

Ma mère est morte en 1793, trois jours après son 18ème accouchement. J'avais 23 ans et j'étais là à ses cotes pour l'aider dans ses adieux. Une semaine plus tard, le dimanche 15 de Juin, mon frère me maria à l'église de Biberach am Riß, avec le charpentier Samuel Baur. Je portais une couronne de fleurs, une robe de lin blanc avec broderies et, suspendu d'un ruban mauve, le reliquaire hérité de ma mère. Cette année, on a défriché le nid des cigognes sur la cheminé de la ferme et s'a m'as pris neuf mois pour devenir moi-même, mère d'une fille.

one is the echo of the other
as if for every birth and every death
a mathematical equation would operate
in the valleys of the earth

every scream of life
echoes a scream of death

1794

First abolition of slavery.

Maximilian Penn et sa famille sont arrivés des Amériques pour s'installer pas loin de notre ferme. Son arrière-grand-père était parti en 1635 avec 13 autres familles de la vallée pour s'établir dans les terres inconnues de ce nouveau continent et Maximilian rentrait, qu'il disait, à la recherche de ses origines. Il était un homme d'allure prudente et fière et, bien que le souvenir de son ancêtre fut encore présent parmi les aînés, son arrivé et déploiement d'intentions avaient éveillé au départ certaines méfiances. Le regard perçant et généreux, il sut vite gagner nos cœurs, d'abord celui des femmes et des enfants, puis celui des hommes.

Monsieur Penn était chrétien, mais pas comme nous. Sa famille allait rarement à l'église et on écoutait que ses rapports avec le clergé n'étaient pas toujours faciles. Il avait refusé de baptiser son nouveau-né en alléguant que ce rite devait être réservé aux adultes qui choisissaient de vivre dans la fidélité du message du Christ. C'était sûrement à cause de ses grands investissements dans la région -il avait fait construire une école et mis en marche plusieurs commerces- qu'on le laissa faire et que personne ne dit grand-chose lorsqu'un matin d'automne, très tôt, on le vit baptiser lui-même son fils adolescent dans les fraîches eaux de notre rivière. Le père et le fils, l'eau jusqu'aux hanches, les chemises ouvertes, priaient les yeux fermés, les lèvres tremblantes. Puis Monsieur Penn avait pris son fils par la tête et l'avait submergé en le tenant ainsi jusqu'à que la tête du fils sortit, la bouche grande ouverte, comme si un courant d'eau profonde lui avait chuchoté, là en bas, un affreux secret.

L'eau sacrée avait été pour moi, jusqu'à ce jour, sagement contenue dans les cuvettes de laiton aux trois poissons à l'entrée de chaque église de notre territoire. C'était une eau qui ne se mélangeait ni avec la terre ni avec les pluies. Une eau qui ne bougeait pas.

Voir ce méandre de la rivière où on allait pisser et faire la lessive, devenir espace de liturgie, rencontre sacrée entre ce père, son fils et les éléments, m'émerveilla. C'était la première fois que je voyais un homme rendre hommage à la vie qui se cache dans l'eau.

Avec le temps, mon père cultiva une amitié avec Mr. Penn. Les deux hommes partageaient une fascination pour les mécanismes qui arrivaient de la Grande Bretagne et des Pays-Bas, et passaient des heures à échanger leurs connaissances sur ces nouvelles technologies. Notre voisin avait construit une presse qui rendaient le cacao consistant et moins amer. En échange du prêt de deux chevaux de charge et d'un ouvrier une fois par semaine pendant les 12 semaines que dura la construction de sa ferme, Monsieur Penn nous fournissait les dimanches d'une pièce de chocolat solide, et moi, pour le remercier, je lui rapportais toujours son moule en forme de brique.

Et parfois, il me racontait son vécu dans les terres lointaines d'où il était arrivé.

De toutes ses histoires, celle qui me frappa le plus fut celle de la mer.

C'est quoi la mer ?

La mer est une rivière sans rives... Une rivière qui t'entoure tout entier. Un passage d'eau où la terre disparaît, et à travers lequel il faut garder son équilibre pendant deux, trois ou même quatre semaines avant qu'elle ne revienne...

La mer est aussi merveilleuse que terrifiante. C'est une eau qui berce autant qu'elle te secoue.

Oui, je comprends, être vivante est aussi merveilleux que terrifiant... Ce que je n'arrive pas à comprendre, c'est comment l'eau peut exister sans rives.

1800

Volta builds the first electric battery ; the voltaic pile.

1813

Mass trial to suppress the Luddite movement, who fight against machines.

1815

Eruption of volcano Mont Tambora, Indonesia. Atmospheric shock waves created by the explosion travel seven times around the Earth.

Red snow falls over Europe.

Le ciel se couvrit d'épaisses nuages de cendres et le soleil disparut derrière ce rideau toxique. Des journées grises et lourdes s'ensuivirent. Dans certains villages, on avait écouté le tonnerre de son explosion et on avait commencé à recruter des hommes qui se préparaient pour l'arrivée d'un ennemi imminent. C'était la guerre qui les appelait. Dans ce paysage assombri, l'empereur français avançait, comme poussé par ces nuages de plomb. Ou bien c'était lui qui tirait ce rideau volcanique sur les grandes surfaces du pays. Les hommes partaient derrière lui, à pied ou à cheval, avec ou sans leurs femmes, dans une avancée lourde et résonnante.

Ce lent afflux de gens qui fuyaient la faim, cherchant une survie qui devait se passer vers l'est, dura une année. Ils passaient chaque jour devant notre ferme, en sens contraire de la rivière. Elle vers l'ouest, eux vers là où on disait qu'était la mer. Ils s'arrêtaient au bords de l'eau, enlevaient leurs chaussures et sortaient de leur sacs une pièce de viande séchée dans les meilleurs des cas, ou un bout de pain azyne. Ou bien ils s'endormaient et puis se lavaient vite avant de reprendre la route. Il y avait aussi parmi ces migrants prêts à la guerre, des femmes qui parfois rapprochaient notre ferme pour demander du lait ou des œufs en échange d'une heure de lavage ou d'herbes curatives des hautes montagnes. Même si à la ferme on avait un entrepôt assez fourni pour la survie de la famille, mon père avait organisé des rationnements pour garder chez nous les garçons du manège.

The Year without Summer. Total number of deaths due to the aftermath of the volcano's activity are estimated at 200.000.

Like thousand of other people, Therese and Samuel flee Europe in search for new lands with better living conditions. On June 17th they embark on the frigate medusa towards Senegal.

Meanwhile, Mary Shelley writes the first version of Frankenstein, giving birth to the Creature.

On June the 17th, Therese and her husband Samuel Baur embark on the frigate Medusa towards Senegal. As a social Noah's arch, in the frigate also travel representatives of each social class of that time: aristocrats, bourgeois, scientists, priests, craftsmen, artisans, workers and slaves.

On July the 2nd, the frigate runs aground on a sandbank and must be abandonned. Lifeboats are for the ones in power and a raft is built for the workers and slaves. A connecting rope is to pull the raft to shore. In a moment of panic, the rope is cut and Therese, Samuel and 147 men are abandonned to their fate. Samuel dies on the third day at sea. 13 days later, the raft is found and the survivors taken to African soil.

Cette année le printemps n'arriva pas. Une neige noire continuait à tomber, les pommiers restaient sans fleurs et la terre trop dure et froide pour être cultivée. C'était évident qu'il n'y aurait ni pommes, ni bière, ni grain pour passer l'année. Les femmes étaient tristes, les hommes frénétiques. La fièvre espagnole commençait à ravager le territoire. Deux de mes fils sont morts, et celui que je portais s'est écoulé d'entre mes jambes au cinquième mois de gestation, me produisant une perte de sang considérable. Le malheureux avait déjà formé des doigts dans les mains et les pieds... On l'enterra avec ses frères dans le fossé familial, partant pour les limbes sans nom et sans péché.

Puis je suis tombée moi-même, prise par la faiblesse, assoupie dans un état de sommeil inquiet. Chaque matin mon époux me forçait à manger un bout d'ail sec, à bien le mâcher et grâce à ces soins et à la peur de me perdre avec laquelle il me regardait, je me suis remise petit à petit et repris mes travaux parmi les femmes de la ferme.

Un jour, un des jeunes garçons qui aidait mon père dans les écuries mourut dans le délire des hautes fièvres et le prêtre, à la surprise de tous, lui nia l'extrême-onction. Il allégea que le jeune, du nom de Gabriel, n'avait pas participé aux messes des dimanches. La vraie raison étant que ce Gabriel avait participé aux manifestations devant le marché d'Ulm contre la hausse des prix des céréales, où la foule avait provoqué émeutes, pillages et incendies. Il avait eu faim. Cet incident me brula dans l'âme, j'aurais voulu que mon père se soulevât contre la cruauté de ce prêtre et, de cette façon, nous éloigner du mensonge, mais il garda un silence prudent. Quelques semaines plus tard, c'était lui qui suivait le sort de Gabriel, de mes deux fils et de tellement d'autres. On lui fit nos adieux avec le cœur lourd, puis le temps continua à se dérouler dans des semaines grises, le soleil semblant avoir oublié notre existence.

Mon frère, seul héritier, prit en charge la ferme et se trouva avec le devoir d'administrer le soutien de la deuxième épouse de mon père ainsi que de ses demi-frères, de ses propres fils et femme, de mes sœurs et de moi-même.

Un soir, déjà couchée dans la petite chambre sous le toit, j'entendis une acharnée discussion entre Samuel et mon frère, suivie par des coups sur le plancher et un long silence. J'attendis l'arrivée de Samuel assise sur le lit. Le silence devint épais. Je pouvais entendre la rivière et le vent dans les branches des ormes, le vent soufflant sous la porte. Puis un coup sec dans la fenêtre. Un corbeau avait frappé contre la vitre et restait assommé, suspendu sur l'auvent. Il n'était ni mort, ni vivant, simplement dérouté. Morte de froid, je me mis au lit pour attendre le matin.

Dans l'obscurité, j'eus une vision. Mon père et son père et le père du père de son père et le père de celui-ci, se tenaient par les bras en formant une longue chaîne humaine

à travers laquelle coulait un courant de sang où la peur avançait, se fixant dans leurs os. Ils s'insufflaient du courage pour soutenir cette chaîne de corps, ce canal de sang. C'était grâce à cette détermination que son héritage avait grandi, que la productivité de leurs terres avait crû et que la main d'œuvre ne manquait jamais. Je vis mon père, assis à côté de ma mère le jour de leur mariage et les taches de vin sur la nappe blanche de leur célébration.

Le matin, Samuel n'était plus à trouver. Le garçon des écuries me dit qu'il était parti vers la mer. Il m'en en avait déjà parlé, Samuel, de son désir de voyager et je ne fus pas étonnée.

Tu veux combien ? Konrad Penn, le fils, tient dans sa main le reliquaire de ma mère.

Un cheval et un sac de pommes de terre.

Tu n'iras pas loin.

Je vais le retrouver.

N'as-tu pas peur ?

De quoi ?

Konrad me donne ce que je lui demande, le cheval, le sac de pommes de terre, et ayant serré la sangle de la selle, fait le signe de la croix et me rend le reliquaire. Sois bénie.

Je l'embrasse, attendrie par la générosité de son geste. Il m'embrasse en retour, trop fort, et me regarde droit dans les yeux.

Il pleuvait. C'était une vapeur de gouttes minuscules qui mettaient du temps à tomber sur le sol. La maison de mon père avait disparu dans le brouillard et je chevauchais vers l'ouest, sur les pas de Samuel. Exposée aux hasards des chemins inconnus, je repris ma foi. Dieux avait le corps de Samuel et mon reliquaire pendait dans les plis de ma chemise, me donnant la force d'affronter tout ce qui était à venir.

La route dura 3 semaines.

*Biberach an der Riß
Tuttlingen
Friburg
Schwarzwald
Mulhouse
Lure
Dijon
Charité sur Loire
Bouges
Poitiers
La Rochelle*

La première fois que j'ai vu un homme noir c'était en cours de route, peu après avoir retrouvé Samuel dans les environs de Dijon. Un cirque proclamait avoir le seul survivant du volcan : un noir qui, au moment de l'éruption habitait dans la salle de confinement d'une prison, la pièce réservée à ceux qui devaient bientôt être exécutés.

Son propriétaire - le gérant du cirque qui le montrait enchaîné au centre de la charrette - ne parlait pas du crime qu'il avait commis mais du miracle d'avoir été le seul à survivre dans les alentours du volcan. D'une voix forte et spectaculaire, il nous demandait à tous, ici réunis à regarder cet homme étrange, si on considérait qu'il devrait être condamné ou bien, le volcan l'ayant sauvé, s'il méritait de vivre.

On s'était approché pour mieux le voir ; il avait le regard infâme et rouge, bras et jambes bien musclés. Samuel le toucha de la pointe des doigts et voulut que je fasse pareil. C'était une peau âpre, huileuse. On rigola.

Parmi les curieux, quelqu'un dit :

'C'est une peau qui dévore la lumière, très difficile à peindre.'

Après douze jours de marche, nous arrivâmes à la Rochelle, d'où on espérait pouvoir embarquer pour l'Amérique. En fin, la mer.

La mer.

La vision détruisit sur le champ mon apprentissage d'une relation égalitaire entre l'eau et la terre, d'une relation paisible où le mouvement des saisons et des méandres imprimait la vie d'un bercement aimable, humain. L'eau avait été origine d'une sûreté, d'un foyer. La mer, par contre, me fit sentir une profonde détresse. La dureté de la ligne que dessinait l'horizon me sembla le tranchant aiguisé d'un couteau infini, violent, la vision d'un monde déraciné qui me fit pleurer dans les bras de Samuel.

Trois frégates partaient une semaine plus tard vers le Sénégal, en passant par les îles Canaries. Samuel fut engagé comme ouvrier et on décida ainsi de faire la traversée de l'Atlantique depuis Saint-Louis. C'était un détour, mais on n'avait rien à perdre et tout à gagner. La frégate qui allait nous mener en Afrique s'appelait Méduse et était en fait un bateau de guerre, avec 46 canons, 23 sur chaque flanc. De 47 mètres de long, 12 d'ample, 6 de hauteur et portante de presque 2000 mètres carrés de voiles, le tout propriété du roi français Louis XVIII.

Appartenaient à l'expédition et voyageaient avec nous, il y avait:

Un chef de bataillon, commandant particulier de Gorée / 1

Un chef de bataillon, commandant le bataillon dit Afrique, composé de 3 compagnies, chacune de 84 hommes / 253 personnes

Un lieutenant d'Artillerie, inspecteur des poudrières et des batteries, et commandant 10 ouvriers / 11 personnes

Un commissaire inspecteur de Marien, chef de l'Administration / 1

Quatre garde-magasins / 4

Six Commis / 6

Quatre guetteurs / 4

Deux Curés / 2

Deux Instituteurs / 2

Deux Greffiers (ils remplaçaient les Notaires et même les maires) / 2

Deux directeurs d'Hôpitaux / 2

Un médecin / 1

Deux Pharmaciens / 2

Cinq chirurgiens / 5

Deux capitaines de Port / 2

Trois pilotes / 3

Un officier de marine / 1

Un jardinier / 1

Vingt et une femmes / 21, donc une d'elles moi.

Huit enfants / 8

Un ingénieur des mines 7 1

Un Cultivateur naturaliste / 1

Un cultivateur pour les cultures européennes / 1

Un cultivateur pour les cultures des colonies / 1

Trois ingénieurs géographes / 3

Un naturaliste / 1

Vingt ouvriers / 20

En tout, 365 personnes, dont 240 dans la première frégate, la nôtre.

C'est à cause de ce voyage, n'est-ce pas, que vous avez demandé de connaître mon histoire ?

De quoi avez-vous peur?

De sentir.

Mais vous savez, l'eau ne prends pas des décisions. Elle chute, elle échoue.

À l'intérieur, elle rigole. Vous n'avez qu'à la laisser faire.

C'est comme ce jour là, le 2 Juillet. Bien des choses ont déjà été écrites sur cet évènement qui vous a porté vers moi. Le tableau du radeau, et ce peintre qui a tellement voulu dire avec une seule image...

Quelle spectacle de voire une foule qui cherchaient à se sauver ! Les parents appelaient leurs fils, les fils leurs parents, se cherchant mutuellement parmi le désordre de corps et d'océan. D'autres frappaient à coups de bâton ceux qui luttaienent pour leur vie en s'accrochant aux chaloupes. Certains criaient Vive le Roi.

Puis, quand la corde qui nous tenait ensemble fut coupée, le désir de vengeance se débrida.

Ils nous abandonnent!

Nous les abandonnons!

Samuel me promet qu'il allait sauver nos vies contre vents et marées. Il le dit comme ça:

Contre vents et marées, je te le promets.

La deuxième nuit, je suis tombé à l'eau. Quelqu'un s'est lancé pour me sauver. Il s'appelait Jean, avait 15 ans et je le remercia du fond du cœur. Je tenais encore à la vie.

*Un
Deux*

Trois

Samuel était faible. Quelque chose en lui s'était déjà séparé de moi. Très peu en lui était encore homme, très peu en moi était encore femme.

Mon corps était en désordre, conteneur de liquides avec des lèvres écaillées dans une bouche où allait naître un cri qui fui un soupir.

L'expiration.

Prie pour moi Thérèse. J'ai fait ce que j'ai pu.

L'eau de mer entre dans le reliquaire. Quelqu'un se jette à nouveau pour me retirer des flots. Ma cuisse est coincée entre les planches du radeau. On ne lutte plus, la mer nous berce et nous secoue. Si je pense à la manière dont je suis arrivée jusqu'ici - ce bosquet coupé à Poitiers et transformé en frégate royale puis en radeau précaire - je ne me souviens de rien. Comment maintenir une croyance, relier un sentiment aux souvenirs incomplets accumulés jour après jour, quand tout est mobile, et sans cesse en mouvement? Je ne peux tirer aucune conclusion.

Les moyens n'ont jamais justifié aucune fin, ils ne sont que ça, les moyens qui existent, dont chacun dispose pour se construire son histoire. Le Roi. Aucun de ceux ici présents - ces hommes qui ont oublié enfin que je suis femme - n'ont jamais

vu ce Roi. Il existe pour donner une valeur à ce qu'ils font, de l'amour propre pour continuer leurs luttes. Un but à cette dérive qui ressemble beaucoup aux mâts que nous n'avons pas.

Je reste assise sur ces malles portée par un magma vert foncé presque noir, les pieds dans l'eau et la robe collée comme une deuxième peau. Les souvenirs de mon innocence sentent la paille. D'où vient cette odeur ?

La mort, c'est ne plus pouvoir changer les choses. Et la vie, Samuel, mon cher Samuel, la vie ce sont les rencontres, et non pas une course contre vents et marées. Les rencontres qui créent les relations qui tissent la réalité. La vie, Samuel. Dans notre mariage, tu sais, c'était la certitude que ce que j'avais à te donner allait rendre ta vie plus belle, c'est ça ce qui m'as mis en route et ce qui m'a fait sauter dans ce radeau pour mourir, s'il le fallait, avec toi. J'aurais eu tellement peur de mourir seule... Maintenant, c'est étrange, c'est comme si la honte me ferait mal. La honte de nos ambitions.

Cinq

Si la fin de la vie est la mort, pourquoi est-ce que personne n'apprend à mourir? Ce n'est pas parce que personne dans la vie ne sait le faire ; nous les femmes nous mourrons à chaque accouchement, nous avons regardé la mort droit dans les yeux. Moi-même cinq fois. Pour autant que je sache, un seul vit encore, du moins je l'espère, deux sont morts de la fièvre espagnole, un autre sur le front de l'Empereur et le dernier est né sans vie. Si ça n'est pas un apprentissage, qu'un de ces hommes qui se sont si bravement engagés à conquérir des territoires où planter leurs piquets vienne me parler. Je les déteste. Ça leur a pris toute cette horreur pour écouter le monde intérieur de ses corps et de ses sens.

Neuf

Ce qui fait peur de mourir dans la mer c'est de ne pas laisser de trace. Que tout effort du temps de vie mis à créer le poids d'une trace, s'effondre.

C'est dans la mémoire de l'eau que je déposerai mes apprentissages.

Dans peu de temps, la nuit viendra, neuvième nuit de dérive, et l'obscurité décidera lequel parmi eux a encore une aube à voir. La fin sera comme le commencement : un passage tumultueux à travers le canal qui unit les mondes, et qui les tisse.

Si je devais renaitre, je ferais les mêmes choix, je vous l'assure. Je m'embarquerais sur le radeau en laissant passer l'instant où la possibilité m'a été offerte de monter sur un des canots de sauvetage.

Un homme se lance à la mer en disant qu'il reviendra tout de suite.

Un poisson volant saute à côté du radeau et montre les couleurs argentées de ses écailles.

J'ai rêvé que j'étais une goutte de rosée formée la nuit pour mourir au petit matin. C'est comme ça. Je suis une goutte de rosée bénie, qui est nait de la nuit pour nourrir en matinée.

Mes pieds bleus suivent la peau blanche dans la mer qui me porte.

La mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère La mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère La mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère La mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère La mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère de la mère dans la mer.

Je me fais nuage. Tout de suite je me sens plus légère. En nuage, je suis celle qui dans un instant ne sera plus. Transformée en corps gazeux, éthéré. Un nuage qui passe et qui rit de celle qui a défendu avec tant de persistance son nom.

Mon nom, Thérèse.

Un dédoublement se produit.

Mon passé, la série de souvenirs - images figées sons odeurs mots – se présente pour donner vie au corps que je fus, en éternelle répétition.

Au même instant, mon futur est là.

Tout d'abord j'ai eu du mal à comprendre que j'étais ces deux corps, et non pas celui que maintenant ouvre ses poumons à l'océan pour laisser entrer la mer, pour apprendre, comme au départ, à respirer dans l'eau.

L'eau dedans, l'eau dehors.

Rapproche ta main et caresse-moi, je t'en prie.

Il y eut un son que je ne reconnus pas et quand j'ouvrais à nouveau les yeux, j'habitais une terre aux lois nouvelles.

1817

Therese hides the miracle of her salvation among Mossi people, where she meets Thomas, who will soon become a slave.

Publication in Paris of the diary of two of the survivors of the raft.

1818

Publication of *Frankenstein*. At the end, the Creature disappears among North Pole glaciers, bitter towards his creator for not giving him a female partner.

1819

Theodore Gericault exhibits at the Salon de Paris his painting 'Naufrage'.

1824

Thomas dies in the harbor of Saint-Louis, Senegal, working as a slave.

After 7 years on African soil, Therese returns to her native village to fulfill the promise made on the raft and bequeath her reliquary to the Kirchbierlingen church.

1825

Therese returns to Africa as a cantinière.

The level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere is about 290 ppm (parts per million).

1848

Second abolition of slavery.

1879

International Meteorological Organization begins to compile and standardize global weather data, including temperature.

1870-1910

Second Industrial Revolution. Fertilizers and other chemicals, electricity, and public health further accelerate growth.

1929

Wallstreet crash.

The Creature is seen among glaciers.

1940

Escaping electricity, Therese arrives to the Sahara.

1957

Launch of Soviet Sputnik satellite.
Birth control pills start to be commercialized.

1966

CO₂ produced by humans will not be readily absorbed by the oceans.

1969

20 July, 1st human landing on the moon.
Studies suggest a possibility of collapse of Antarctic ice sheets, which would raise sea levels catastrophically.

1972

Droughts in Africa, Ukraine, India cause world food crisis, spreading fears about climate change.

1996

First female CEO of the internet era.
Second Luddite Congress presents a manifesto for Neo-Luddism.
Terence McKenna presents the Time Wave Zero theory that states that time is the simultaneous resonance of four other times: past or future times.

2003

Numerous observations raise concern that collapse of ice sheets can raise sea level faster than most had believed.

2010

First African American woman CEO.

2015

Level of CO₂ in the atmosphere goes above 400 ppm.

2022

The year of Global Drought. Regular cloud seeding in most of the southern countries.

2026

While studying an extinct species of beetles, scientist Dr. Lingani decodes the storage of human memory.

2038

Luga, first lunar city.

2039

SGX crash.

Only 10% of Ice cores remain.

2047

First blackout on terrestrial servers.

2057

15 June, 1st human landing on Mars.

2066

Abolition of genetic and economic inheritances.

2074

Colonization of lunar soil in 21%.

2128

Colonization of lunar soil in 68%.

Colonization of Gota, the martian station, in 12%.

2136

The Creature is found frozen but alive on the last standing glacier.

Despite military efforts to take him to the Functional Genomics Center, the Creature escapes with the Neo-Luddits's help and is taken to Asyut, Sahara, where those who postulate for the Simple Living, have drilled water out of the desert.

In Asyut, the Creature meets Therese. They are the last ones who still remember human touch.

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Film link
vimeo.com/641171890
pw: THERESE_22

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