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Venetian Blind

Outside a cloud floats in front of the sun, it takes a moment for the eyes to adjust, then it is calm again and the room seems to take on a different focus, the objects emerge in the foreground and each and every tiny particle forces itself to the surface to become visible. The child is lying on the carpet, in front of them a landscape opens up: the prairie, the Wild West, a battlefield at the foot of the mountain. Indian tents, fences, Playmobil horses and guns. The edge of a wooden textured bed protrudes into the image from above. Everything is tinted green, as if seen through a glass bottle.

The blinds are lowered, for a short moment the wall is perforated by speckled strips of light, then it is dark.

„Jalousien aufgemacht, Jealousie zugemacht, jalouzien aufgerauft, zulozien raufgezut“, it slips out before I can think about it and I am immediately embarrassed. "Shhhh, Christine!" Darkness, silence. The light cone of the projector comes on, the spools turn. How loud the mechanism is when you stand right next to it.

The images cast onto the wall depict historical black-and-white sequences: a steam locomotive moving back and forth; a street with a double-decker bus and busy people moving in reverse; soldiers running backwards through a forest. A chimney raised from the ruins of war and the head of a newborn pushed back into the womb. "For me, the most fascinating thing about film has always been that you can stop the projector and run the scene backwards," says Nicolas Roeg. "Everything can be rewound to a state of what has not yet happened." He mumbles, jaw surgery. But he says he always speaks unintelligibly anyway. As do I. Then a scene from Roeg's Walkabout - the Australian steppe, a group of hunters appear. Animals are running, and a frightened flock of birds flies across the screen. Then the boy (played by Roeg's own son) watches a buffalo as it is shot and falls to the ground. In the boy's face I can see how the sequence of events plays backwards in his mind's eye and the buffalo rises again. "A nice, beautiful thought for a child," Roeg thinks aloud. As the light in the room comes on I see Tobias and Michel Majerus sitting on the floor behind me, their backs leaning against the wall. Michel Majerus has an open notebook resting on his legs. I can see that a lot has been crossed out and there is a small sketch in between. Directed at Tobias, he begins to read aloud, I listen too: "All paintings have to be painted anew. When I say all paintings, then I mean all those paintings we know and we no longer want to see because they've had their day. You can't drink milk all the time, it turns sour sometimes too, and because all painting is derived from influences of nature anyway, the natural process of renewal is inevitably at work here as well. It's all about inventing the invented." He reads as if he is seeing these notes for the first time, faltering and without any emphasis, it irritates me a little because I know they are his own notes. And then the words are so demanding. I liked the bit about the sour milk though. "It was obvious that you liked it," says Tobias. Michel Majerus ignores us and continues: "between the 2nd and 3rd World Wars." "That's now" I say, again without thinking. This time unusually loud and clear, and I feel uncomfortable again. Not really because of Tobias and Michel Majerus, not even because of Roeg. He disappeared. But Peter Handke and Cézanne over there can hear everything. Never mind, never mind, never mind. Cézanne is already dead anyway. Concentrate on something else. It occurs to me that both Michel Majerus and Tobias compose many of their pieces in extreme horizontal formats, forcefully drawing their motifs apart, in order to bring them in line with the horizon. And I imagine how there could be other images that have not yet been painted on the outer edges of these pictures that have been stretched to a timeline. I'm not sure if I'm thinking or talking. Nobody reacts. Thank God Handke brought his daughter with him. I can't judge how old she is and so I try to calculate it. I can't get a hold of one single year, it's all blurred. I like her

leopard-print shirt and the somehow poorly-fitting red trousers. Handke is wearing a T-shirt printed with Persian calligraphy under his jacket. I find it curious for a writer, to wear such an image of letters.

"And how did you come to be involved with Cézanne?" the daughter asks her father.

Tobias opens the book, *The Lesson of Mount Sainte-Victoire* and reads aloud in Handke's voice: "In a separate room, which seemed circular, one picture after another showed the top of Mont Sainte-Victoire, which the painter depicted from different angles, but always from below, from the plain and from a distance." And then, much too quickly and as if learned by heart, it erupts from Cézanne: "The same motif, seen from different angles, offers an object of study of such extreme interest and such diversity that I believe I could keep busy for several months in the same spot, just turning now a little more to the right, now a little more to the left." The way he talks doesn't match what he says at all. But it frees me from my inhibitions to speak. "I've always imagined how you would sit down there, applying layers of colour over months. And they would never clump together to form an object but remain thin layers," I get calmer and calmer and can even listen to my own voice: "as if they were illuminated by the same light that they try to reproduce. Do you know what I wrote down the other day? 'Cézanne painted down there in the plain as a beginner.' An eternal beginner, I got that from Handke." I glance over at Handke for a second, but he is looking right past me.

I carry on, the words just come to me, thinking and speaking become one. "I believe that this deep observation of nature is only possible if one thinks of oneself as an eternal beginner. And if I imagine that every picture is a new invention, then every picture would make you a beginner. Because one doesn't know everything! 'During the course of my life, I have never felt secure', says Philip Kobal in *Repetition*. Sometimes this sentence comes to mind. And I always shudder. Slowing down has nothing to do with security, becoming aware of all inconspicuous things goes hand in hand with continual shock. Is that too abstract? Last night I rode my bike home through the rain. Every second the drops on my face were hurting and I could hardly open my eyes. The entire journey had the same intensity, but I had to keep opening my eyes, because I had to see the street and the lights."

"Yes, eye-opening fear," for the first time Handke smiles.

"Beauty is a daughter of fear," says the daughter.

"Is that from you?" he asks, still smiling.

"Goethe."

"Remember, when you were little, we looked at a painting of the Massacre of the Innocents: an infant in the snow raises its arms to its mother in headscarf and apron; one of her legs is twisted back; the henchman, with crooked index finger -"

"Wait," says Tobias "I know the spot." He holds *Children's Story* open in his hand and begins to read: "...In headscarf and apron; the henchman, with crooked index finger, is reaching out for the child, and as though all this were happening now, the beholder thinks, literally: This must not be! And resolves for his part to embark on a different tradition."

Why does Tobias always sound like Handke when he reads one of his texts? And then, as if a switch had been flipped, Tobias' own voice: "But I don't understand. Why does he start now? The Massacre of the Innocents, apron, henchman."

"No?" For me it is all transparent, the images and stories overlap like translucent layers. "The other tradition - what the father and child see there, the father can't accept it as final for the child. Does Roeg not let the shot buffalo get up again for a similar reason?" How to put into words what I see? "Tobias, show us the slides, *Das Licht der Welt!*"

That is also another tradition. The beginning of your life as a beginner!"

Another one of those pauses. Nobody moves. As if we were playing musical chairs - the music is off, everyone is sitting, and I am the one left without a chair. I look at Handke and for the first time he returns my gaze.

"Another moment of the 'standing Now.'"

"What do you mean?"

He goes into it again: "...to perceive the unity between my earliest past and my present: in another moment of the 'standing Now', I see the people of those days -- parents, brothers and sisters, and even grandparents -- in the company of today's people, all laughing at my remarks about the colours of things around me. A kind of family game consisted of letting me guess at colours; the confusion, of course, rested not with the others but with me." The first slide lights up: it shows a corner of a room; the wall is clad with marbled tiles. And with each turn of the carousel the angle from which you look into the room changes, as if you were turning your head a little to the rhythm of the clicking projector. And with each image, the intensity and colour of the light that is falling into the room changes. It is the delivery room where Tobias was born at the precise time of his birth. But they're fabricated images. Digitally reconstructed, they only pretend to document this moment. The space is an immaterial model and seems to be merely a stage for the incoming light as it reflects on the surface. I discover enlarged scratches and dust and have to think of the days and months that I myself spent in the photo lab; the balancing and negotiating of the colour casts, filters that slide in front of the motif and determine the intensity of the sun after the fact. Walls are not white and the sky is not blue.

The carousel continues to turn and although the slides repeat, the light seems to change as if the clouds outside were moving.

"Are these perhaps some of the images from the edge of the timeline?"

Nobody's in the room, I'm alone.

"To stand in front of an illuminated wall and later recognise the weather as the secret protagonist in many paintings," Tobias writes in *Le monde pictorial*.

Cézanne and Handke were certainly here because of this secret protagonist. The pictures are inventions. The door is torn open, it's blinding. I want to jump up to close it but I can hardly move. The air is as resistant as water. Oskar Matzerath's penetrating, almost biting, film voice: "I saw the light of this world in the form of two 60-watt light bulbs". It flickers. Is the floor moving? A red spotlight circles. "The sun was in the sign of Virgo... a late-summer thunderstorm..." Then a woman's voice much louder, but softer than Oskar's. Polish, Latvian? I don't understand it. Meanwhile, Oskar:

"... Neptune... the tenth house..." I wobble, circling with the spotlight. My eyes are glued. All the weight accumulates in my head as if I were hanging from the ceiling. "... Mars... in the house of the Ascendant... Libra... and anchored me..."

Stop.

It's a cold day. The sky is not blue. You are the weather.