Revolution goes through walls

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Preface by Jean-Luc Nancy

SplitLevel Texts
Beaded Water: Preface by Jean-Luc Nancy          8

I would like to say                12

Water drops on Tahrir           16
   A Gaze, It Is Blue
   Mina and Mohammad, Blood and Water
   This Is a Book and This Is a Notebook: Teaching
      Arabic for Beginners
   Ex Mohammad Mahmoud Street
   Deadline — To Mohammad Taimor El Malawany
   The Eye Sniper
   It
   Daily Phone Calls
   Martyr
   Hair
   Hang In There
   Dead Day
   The Day the Events of the Ministerial Council Revisited
      the Lake
   A Wednesday of the Month of April 2011 — It Was
      Another Wednesday after the Battle of the Camel
   “Joy Is Not My Mission” — To Mohamed Al Maghut
   A Year and a Half Ago / Half-Years like Half-Revolutions
   I Am Perplexed
   Gas
   A Cup of Coffee While Seeing Egypt on the Screen
   Permanent Session
   In Japan Where Fukushima Is

Snapshots       50

Acknowledgements     57
Beaded Water: Preface

— Jean-Luc Nancy
On 17 December 2010 a young Tunisian man set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid. That was the signal. A few months later in Cairo, *Tahrir Square* flares up and rediscovers its soul: liberation, independence.

Very quickly, the girl from Egypt crosses the sea, heading straight to *Tahrir*.

She photographs, cinematographs, polygraphs. She also has agraphia.

She writes and what she writes butts up against a glass wall — that is what she says, what she writes.

It is a story of walls. They bar the way, resist, block. But they have cracks too. And you can also stick photos posters graffiti poems screams on them.

Above all, in the end the walls they murmur. A fine, discrete murmur that crosses the walls like her brother crossed the wall between life and death.

What goes through this way is the revolution, she says: a lost word but a murmur of which crosses. Crosses the girl from Egypt, come home — *from where?* She comes — come back as before to see and nurse Mohammad, come back to see and take care of the visible as much as of the invisible.

A mother tells her daughter that the Square is a place for men but this girl, maybe all girls, knows it should make way for girls.* Make way for girls, little girls and women, the revolution is a girl.

* *Tahrir*, a name that will live — the name of a square in Cairo that will remain as the name of an opening, a breach, a gaping hole, from behind which there is no coming back.

Egypt will not come back nor any other country around the White Sea into which the Nile spreads.

*(la Place majuscule, celle qui dit « place, place ! ») Nancy plays on the word Place/Square and the imperative *place à* — “make way.”*
From a breach that is also a wound.

But from a spring nonetheless.

A spring: water beads on *Tahrir* — she says. That’s how things are set alight: as water distributed by a young girl to the fighters, as water that will refuse to wash off the blood on the general’s hands.

This is the spring and she who keeps it flowing. Drink, drink, the weather is still very hot.

— Jean-Luc Nancy
For my brother Mohammad
I would like to say
I would like to say, I don't know the road to paradise… that my tongue, the people, and that man sitting contemplating the railway lines in a deep meditation nobody will ever know, existed. My house existed — in a place I am still seeking. It wasn’t in this village where I witnessed other children being born on the same blood-stained mattress I was born on in the same room to which the midwife regularly came, when she went away with the bit and took away the tongue. I saw myself searching for that old mattress stained with the blood of all those who had already come into the world so there would be another child around here. I saw myself not looking for a house but making the search for a house my way. So much blood dried like rust as each cut of the scalpel breached my skin, each cut of the scalpel piercing me, as I lay deadened, anesthetized. I would have loved the time of the anesthesia to lead me to the day you are no more, a day you can calculate for 50 dollars on the net.

I would like to say
I write about what I lost, about my vanished blood, about my laughter frozen into a mask, about this young girl who was chased away because she sighed next to the wheat dunes, that stuffed the young girls’ mouths with secrets, about this girl who was and is no more, about another one I saw spinning under the ceiling of the empty living room, her dress on fire, she calls to her master to save her, and standing naked in front of all those men. I say: I want neither father nor mother, nor to have them put on my road, or slipped into my story. Without them, I remain, and in spite of them all, I am:

I don’t know the road to paradise
I didn’t save you from hell
Sharia, that void, didn’t strike me,
I will not go to the one who has gone and will inevitably return
I wrote lines, licked the drops from the face

I said: she is of those whose past bears the present
she dashed along the wide avenue trying to cross
like me, you also are a traveler
without coyness, you come bearing that light,
or is it this myth that kills us
Shoot!
Kill, ash-dark bird!
Fall to earth on your feathers
that a wind blowing from the Sahara scatters sand dunes, purple light
that you cross from where you are not,
this Sahara, our home.
There, two poles.
The coming will not come
visiting rather
he is your guest
suddenly shy when he sets foot,
vanishes enchanted
to where your awakening is
you, the sublime Magus
Amon
tell me, where you keep your remains
where can I find what leads me to them
You, the Thing, the Non-being
when they appeared, fire had covered the light

I write on your whereabouts
to meditate on you,
to envision
imagine
your shadow,
you, sublime creature
Be, a little, that I may see you

_Cairo_, imaginary date; written unthinkingly 31 November 2013
Water drops on Tahrir
A Gaze, It Is Blue

It was a grain of sand
opened time where the roads cross
I had no fear of myself but the mirrors terrified me when I looked at all
these stories
Salt was
a mountain appearing with each picture pulled from memory’s box
The years harbor ships I journeyed on and others I wished I had seen
even from afar

*Renal failure* carved on a coin
you toss
pictures you’ll forget are drawn in the air
When the other mountain rose
on its peak two boys grown from years of dialysis
I split from the one who was asleep
my shadow crossed walls
returning to a place, or a certain hour

Death was a promise of water that never left his insides

In the dusty place, I perceived a tent
transparent in the light
A revolution’s face lit up
it was a glowing ring whirling
a voice sprang from a red brick forest’s clamor
or from the asphalt’s rising columns of white gas
an instant has fallen from time
Where have you gone, writer of the letter?
Where are you now, who sleep in the blue gaze?
This mountain of faces throws eyes to the street
to my lens
spits the taste of salt
on the side of the path

I had a brother…and another brother
he flew away with the fugitives
soared from a bed under repair
there was basil at the Nasser Institute
I had two brothers; now only one with eagles
I had a vast heart my chest couldn't hold, the other elsewhere
She is the one who comes to go
the un-homeland became a place
there, a glass of tea and an icon in which I imprisoned my face
that loved weeping

The angel of history runs facing the past
they'll come to it carrying on their heads this map
with this slogan
that crossed the places of the valley without knife or blade
yet the grass was the people who want…*

Your voice disappeared
while you hit the wall next to the bed
screaming with your fists
I learnt that the disobedience of cities and streets slept in your heart
your body became a tree and your screams
strayed to the ground of the Square, one after the other
then dawn water drops on a stone plateau

There was a bag I would have carried, climbing over any barrier
I look at you, shrouded and resuscitated
from a stay of several years
“You, how are you doing, how are you?”

You were dying voiceless

*The main slogan in all the Arab revolutions was: The people want the regime to fall.
I whispered into his ears with all the others
after he died
“Raise your voice Mohammad, Mohammad: raise your voice.”

_Cairo, 6 October 2011 — Italy, 20 August 2012_
In the house I live in from time to time
I saw him on a screen talking to a lens: “I am sure this is my brother”
he held a handful of blood and a crushed body part
around him eyes hovered like a flock of flying grains
in the house of stupor
I said what would my body be like if crushed by the caterpillar treads of
a tank
driven by that man, does he have eyes?
The sign entered the frame
Horus’ eye pierced by a sword
the eye of the “military police”
from which pus pours still.

My brother’s kernel will take flight in a swarm of seeds and land in a
clay pot of Egypt

M, the letter meem, (Matrix)
a little circle and a stalk rise one day from the pot into flesh and body
your name appears
on a piece of your crushed flesh a small pool of your coagulated blood
decorates mud
absorbed by this earth
encircled by a fence of uncooked bricks
another name germinates

Living Martyr

The enemy is in front of you
the sea behind
Do as you please!
To drown in blood is still possible
I see the earth opening its mouth to slake its thirst
I saw him walking in the desert
wearing a suit
The lines of his body
shimmer out in the sun, he screams
“I am thirsty, I am thirsty”

Be another brother
you were other!
The blood brother was one, the water brother was one, the eye brother
was one, the brother of the brotherless was one
now trees walk to where you stand
Today a grove will reach us
borne by golden birds
Christ will rise again in *Tabrir*
in *Maspero*
in *Talaat Harb*
in the valley’s plateau
in the *Ezbah Al Nakhl*
in *Mancheia Nasser*
and in the *Pyramid Gardens*
from its secret another brother will rise for me, for you, for all
a unique brother from dusk to sundown the ants will never walk across

*Paris, 15 October 2011 — Italy, 1 August 2012*