

From Goddess to Grandfather

for Merel

The Goddess who Breathed Colour

*There was a goddess
who breathed blue*

*She breathed all day
and all night and
the sky became
bluer and bluer
and the sea -
bigger and bigger*

*She breathed to infinity
and there was no end
To her breathing*

*But one day
she stopped
and all
became
black.*



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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather. I feel like I did not know him much. Extracting information from him was one of the hardest things to do. I remember sometime in the early 2000s I tried to make a “documentary” of his life. The attempt was not very serious, it occurred one afternoon in a shopping mall restaurant in Moscow, I took out my camera and pointed at his face, “Tell me about your time in Cuba, Grandpa.” I guess I expected his story to romantically pour out, kind of like I expect this thesis to just roll out onto the page. I was dissatisfied with the information which followed. He surfaced the matter vaguely, here and there mentioning Fidel lightly. I felt like he was name dropping just for fun, “Me and Fidel would go catching lobsters”, or “Me and Fidel would go drinking cuba libres.” My insufficient video recording stopped there. At the hint of feeling that any sort of story extracting from him would be quite a task, feeling defeated, I dropped it there and then. I must have been around 20.

Ten years later and the urge has still not left my body but my grandfather is now dead. He died last Autumn, aged 89. And there we all were, preparing for his 90th birthday, imagining him in all his military badges of honor, left hanging. He was a veteran of war and got much ornamentation from the State. The same State that for a period of years considered him a traitor, following and surveillancing him, him living in constant fear that at any moment he could be exterminated.

Perhaps somewhere deep down I wish I spent more time with him, I wish I did not give up so feebly my attempts at documenting his life, telling his story. I guess I always romanticized about his life; the deep sea voyages, his youth spent with my gorgeous grandma in Mexico, the lavish banquets she would organize for all the officials, baking hundreds of her signature *pirojki* or cabbage pies to feed them all. Cuba would follow. That is where he must have worked with Fidel. He told me once, “I will take my story to the grave.” The feeling he evoked in me most was mystery.

If you resist your own nature, you will suffer. If you accept it and learn to understand and use it, you will be free.

-Tao

She dwells deep below the earth, in the underground. She has been buried by people time and time again but she is never quietened. Her presence grumbles when you have eaten something rotten. The sulphur stink erupts like bombs. Dissatisfied, the stomach gurgles. This is the goddess of the inner world, the ugly side of goddess, Mzrshz.

In her day there is no light. She lives in pitch black darkness. She only comes out at night, or in the days that feel like night. If your day feels like night you know that Mzrshz has come out to play. She lives inside each and everyone of us. There is a Mzrshz inside us all.

She is the one who stops you in your tracks, with sticks and stones in the way. She is the goddess of worry, anxiety and doubt. She wakes you up in the middle of the night with her head spins, taking your mind on a roller coaster ride, laughing, when all you want is peaceful sleep. She is against all kinds of inner meditations, flows. In fact flow kills her, she is the opposite of flow. She drowns in it. She is so constipated, so arid dry, like the driest desert, only allowing snakes and lizards to slither by. Her skin is like that of an armadillo, so thick and cactus like to not let any accidental light in heaven forbid, nor any water. She is the driest of dry. Her only excretions are long overdue stale gases, sulphur like and full off toxins. There is no water flow inside her body and that is why if you are, perish the thought, in flow she panics and lets herself be known. Her body is all mould. She grumbles and she roars, the source of all disquiet.

She loves the blue light, this is the only light she can withstand, not real sunlight but the blue light of your screen. She feeds off this light, LED light which messes up your day and night. She likes to confuse and play tricks and games on you. If you have been writing a book on your laptop and did not save it and then the laptop drops in the canal or someone steals it from your house while you are in it, that was Mzrshz. That is her idea of fun. The greater the despair, the greater the confusion the happier Mzrshz is. She is insatiable, constantly craving, there is never balance in her life, she thrives off the wildest of extremes and memes and force fed information stations, floods of fluid info springs, she sings amen!

“Down with your meditations! I am the princess of Disquiet and I will sing and shove and scream and shrill the most horrible scream like that of a petrified rat who thought she sensed a cat and screams for 24 hours, a wail so horrible, so horrendous, it almost kills and it goes on”- this incessant thought flow or rather flood of thoughts is the only flowing operation system she knows how to manage. A constant restless stream of fears, worries, doubts.

If you hesitate you know it's Mzrshz. But you do not need to tame her, you do not need to hide her, you just need to acknowledge her and treat her like another being and then she won't erupt so frequently with her vile gases. See the beauty in ugly Mzrshz. She is also allowed to live.

Valentin Sergeevich Loginov was born on December 23rd 1927 in Moscow. He was an only child. His father was never really there and his mother, who was supposedly a very tough woman, baboushka Lena, kicked his father out when little Valechka was still a young boy. Family legend goes that when he was going to the war, she told him, "I hope the first bullet gets you", so it was not the most loving of family homes. I actually think his father never returned, or never returned to their household. So my grandfather grew up without a father. My father thinks because of this, and because he had no 'proper guidance', he ended up in the navy; ("No one in their right mind with a decent father to show them the way would go there otherwise!") But my grandfather had no such guidance. So him and a friend signed up at the N.G. Kuznetsov Naval Academy in St.Petersburg, then Leningrad, the only Naval Academy of Russia, where he was to spend the next four years training to be a marine in the Submarine Department. It must have been 1946 – just a year after the war and he must have been around 19.

My grandfather spent a large part of his life in or under the sea, on board of ships or submarines. His submarine was called Malutka or 'the little one'. His role on board, he later confessed, was that of a bomb detonator. They were sent down in groups to detonate enemy bombs. And you know how they did this? Via sound. In this moment I remember trying to tell him about my studies in ArtScience, and how we also use sound, somehow the link was there. These bombs reacted on vibrations and it was his job to spot them and make them out of tune so they could not pick up vibrations any longer. He did this with the use of heavy magnets. All underwater. To think, this your job. Apparently submariners are trained listeners.

One time, he told me, the captain of Malutka announced that they would not reemerge. But they did in the end. Can you imagine, you are all in this thing underwater and they tell you, "Sorry, we won't come up"?

He used to tell me about men overboard. One day there was a huge storm at sea and his friend who was cleaning the deck was swept overboard. My grandfather went to help and was also swept over, thank god he had strong arms so he was able to grab onto something and hoist himself up. The other guys did not make it. Imagine what it must have felt like, to have seen your friends go overboard.

I remember when I visited my grandfather in the old people's home for special forces outside of Moscow. This place is not on Google maps, so it is quite hard to find. I went there a few times. Now I wish I went there more. Last time I was going to visit him there was a wild looking dog running around on the premises. I was afraid it will bite me, so I waited for the warden to escort me. The warden was a young military woman in her military gear. This place is run by the army. No wonder they have army dogs running around. She assured me that the dog was harmless but still, she was a police dog, you never know. I remember walking through this old people's nursery and nostalgia hung heavy in the air. It is as if time stood still there, preserved like sardines. I think it was on purpose they did not let progress through its doors. The 'art' which decorated the walls also - still from the times of the Stalinist regime, the whole place was decorated in the way as if Russia had won, as if we were still living in those times. But what struck me most was the art on the walls of my grandfather's little cabin, "*kayuta*" as he called it, or the cabin of a ship. There was a photo of a mermaid. I wish to this day I asked him about it. Did he believe in mermaids? She was there, next to his paintings of ships. I guess if you spend that much time underwater, you start to believe.

My mother always said my grandfather was a difficult man. But I somehow always found a way to relate to him. Everyone in the family says my 'artistic side' comes from him. He was the only other artist in the family, but not by profession. It was his escape. I always loved spending time with him because so much of it was always withdrawn, he always left me with a feeling of wanting to know more. He was very good at withholding information. It was his profession after all.

Towards the end of his life my father told me that he loved to hug trees. He must have felt some affinity to nature. Towards the end of his life he also started to get delusional at times, even though he had a sharpness of mind right to the last day. He was the sort of person who did not say much, always ate in silence and never asked questions. My brother spent some time with him in Moscow, through half of which my grandfather thought he was robbing him and kicked him out. With me he never lifted his voice, he was always soft and gentle, maybe because I was the only *vnuchka*, the only granddaughter, the others were all boys.

Apart from passing on his artistic abilities, my grandfather passed on some of his physical diseases namely the tendency for constipation and haemorrhoids. Constipation occurs when your digestive flow is blocked. It is actually a very uncomfortable state, a sort of stalemate. On a metaphysical level it can mean a blocked inner flow. Not letting yourself do or say what you want. It is a spiritual stopper, which can result in the physical body getting sick. It is actually a disease. If your spirit cannot do what it wants to do then your physical body suffers. In many Eastern medicinal traditions physical discomforts and illnesses are not only studied physically but related to the whole body psychologically and spiritually. There is a spiritual cause underlying most diseases which starts from an accumulation of negative emotions and thought patterns¹.

“Haemorrhoids consist in pain and bleeding of the anus when the person defecates. Defecating is painful. In fact the person is afraid to release. The person has difficulty in letting go.”²

“Haemorrhoids reveal a build-up of emotional pressure caused by stress and fear that you would rather not discuss and show. The result is burdensome. Haemorrhoids may occur if you pressure or force yourself to have more; perhaps you are enduring a job that you do not like.”³

¹ Anna Merkaba, <https://sacredascensionmerkaba.com/2013/11/13/emotional-component-of-your-hemorrhoid-issues/>

² Ibid, <https://sacredascensionmerkaba.com/2013/11/13/emotional-component-of-your-hemorrhoid-issues/>

³ <https://www.ecoutetoncorps.com/en/resources/metaphysical-definitions-20-illnessesdiseasesdisorders/hemorrhoids/>

Another physical discomfort my grandfather passed on was athlete's foot. He battled with it all his life. I think he even had a surgery where the nail of his big toe was removed. Thank god it was not his whole big toe, otherwise he would not be able to stand up straight. Here I cannot help but think back to my studies in Art History at UCL and the essay 'The Big Toe' by the subversive French Surrealist philosopher Georges Bataille⁴, who I remember greatly admiring during my studies for his splattering the cadaver like theories of the '*informe*' or without form, of base materialism, of everything we are ashamed of and hiding, like the big toe, when in fact "being begins with the big toe."⁵

Bataille would question notions of the grotesque and the '*informe*' in relation to the human body, arguing that formlessness brings about a feeling of anxiety and shame and that we are forever trying to hide everything 'formless' that we are ashamed of such as spit or faeces, and everything which happens to be closer to the ground (ie our big toes, especially when covered in disease, as opposed to the head - the pride and seat of enlightenment).⁶ But perhaps it is in these crevices that we must look and search for the answers.

My grandfather also had a surgery for hemorrhoids, but apart from these he was in good health. His mind stayed sharp until the last days. Well except from the bouts of paranoia. That time when my brother went to stay with him in Moscow and midway my grandfather kicked him out accusing him of being a thief.



Jacques-André Boiffard, photograph of a toe to illustrate Georges Bataille's article 'Le Gros Orteil' in Documents 6, 1929

⁴ Some scientists claim that if you cut off your big toe you will not be able to stand up straight. This was also something explored by Georges Bataille, who considered the big toe to be the most important part of human body, "in the sense that no other element of this body is as differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape (chimpanzee, gorilla, orangutan, or gibbon). Georges Bataille, 'The Big Toe', 1929

⁵ Matthew Beaumont, 'In the Beginning was the Big Toe: Bataille, Base Materialism, Bipedalism', 2015

⁶ "In addition, the function of the human foot consists in giving a firm foundation to the erection of which man is so proud ... But whatever the role played in the erection by his foot, man, who has a light head, in other words a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud." Georges Bataille, 'The Big Toe', 1929

As my grandfather greatly appreciated painting, we would always try to go and visit a museum when I was in Moscow. A painter we both loved was the Russian Symbolist painter Mikhail Vrubel, who we would go see at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. Whenever we would go to the Tretyakov we would marvel over Vrubel's *Swan Princess*. The dreamy, magical, fairytale composition of his work. We never discussed it by I think my grandfather was a romantic⁷. He loved fantasy. He also liked the *Daemon Seated*⁸.



Царевна-Лебедь (Swan Princess), Mikhail Vrubel, oil on canvas, 1900, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

⁷ To work in espionage you need one hell of an imagination.

⁸ Another famous painting by Vrubel in the Tretyakov Gallery which depicts a daemon seated resting amidst a bush of flowers.

The last painting show we took him to with my family was the retrospective of the Russian beginning of the century painter Zinaida Serebryakova at the Tretyakov in the Summer of 2017. Can you imagine, the last show you will see? This is hard to imagine. In this show he liked the portraits of the peasant farm girls the most, their soft juicy flesh, their big bodies, their warm smiles.

The thing that killed him, I believe was loneliness. The absence of a human body. Towards the end of his life he craved the human touch. He would try to touch me and while I felt horrible I also felt really sorry for him and felt his pain of being denied this basic human right. We should have hired him a prostitute as a nanny.

In hindsight, I think my biggest regret is not having talked to him more.



Zinaida Serebryakova, *The Peasant Woman Putting on her Shoes*, oil on canvas, 1915, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

The Backside of the Embroidery

But why Goddess might you wonder? Well actually this is how this thesis started out. The plan was to write about goddesses. But then through a somewhat painful process of stripping down - learning to let go and in this way creating space via meditation and self-reflection, I realized two things: namely that I burden myself with too many things - once you let go and are more wise about what you choose and stick to your choices and follow through you realize how much space you can have and what miracles space can do ! The relief this sensation provides is incredible, yet many of us are stuck in ongoing waves of clutter, unable to let go, fearing that if we let go of all the things we've managed to amass and claim for our own, then there is nothing left. Is this a fear of vulnerability? Of being yourself? Perhaps it has something to do with trusting ourselves and our choices, or overcompensating for the fact that we will one day also go. The second realization, which is perhaps more apt as clue for the missing Goddess, is that meditation has showed me that I am always trying to achieve great things, reaching for the skies so to say in grandeur. For what? To impress everybody around? But what about myself? As a result the self gets trampled on and forgotten under the weight of all that aspired to grandeur. One of the best advices I got when consulting one of my coaches was, "Don't talk to the Goddesses, talk to yourself." Slap in the face. Stop looking outwards and to some distant diety, why? In this process I feel like I have completely forgotten myself. And then it snowed.

As I am sitting writing this, outside my window the snow has started. It is a magical, mystical moment. In a moment I am filled with nostalgia, the flakes take me back to Moscow, to the Russian snow, to Winter. My grandfather's terrain. How he must have loved Winter. He was born right in the midst of it. In fact, I can safely say Winter was probably his favourite season. The coolness, the stillness of it all, the silence. Nothing beats a snow filled Winter in Moscow. Especially in the countryside. The snow envelops and wraps everything in its charms and you feel safe, and protected and muted. I remember when I played him that techno track and he was immediately transported to the *vyuga* - a blizzard deep in the forest. The magic of snow. It brings such childlike happiness in me, forgetting everything, I am transported. Amazing how just one element has the power to do that. I wonder if rain has the same effect on Dutch people?

In a recent conversation with a friend and BBC journalist, Natalie Ktena, Natalie shed light onto the nature of our generation, “We are the millennials. We have unbelievable burdens to achieve. Whatever we do, it has to be about changing the world. Anything short of that is failure.” I wonder if this is the voice of our generation? The generation who has everything, who has so much choice they themselves have to impose limitations as a coping mechanism. Vegans, pescatarians, fruitarians. It is different times and we adapt, as the adaptable organisms we are, to the situation at hand. But sometimes it helps to be aware of the bigger picture. Of our context. Painter, designer and professor of the Bauhaus school László Moholy-Nagy, writing in 1950s, summarized it well in his book *Vision in Motion*:

“The metamorphosis of the world through mass production, mass distribution, and mass communication forced man to think in economic terms and organize his business affairs on a global scale. But his life philosophy remained provincial. The new technological trends developed rapidly but their social effects soon got out of control.⁹ Contemporary man threw himself into the experience of these new relationships. But saturated with old ideologies, he approached the new dimension with obsolete practices and failed to translate his newly gained experience into emotional language and cultural reality.”¹⁰

⁹László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, Paul Theobald and Company, 1969, pg 13

¹⁰Ibid, pg 10

My grandfather did not have the choices we have today. I remember him telling me how he spent one year in hospital in Leningrad, now St.Petersburg, during the great blockage only surviving on fish oil.

He was an acetic man of few things. If he were Dutch he would have probably embraced the Calvinist tradition. He always spoke of Holland with such love and admiration. His eyes twinkling. It was on the Dutch navy that the Russian fleets were modelled so for him it was always a god like vision, a heavenly apparition, *Holland* and what this wonderful country must entail. Sadly he never came. If he would have, I imagine I would have taken him to all the museums and it would be like honey to his eyes. All the Dutch Masters. This would be his dream. How he would marvel at their precision, at their sharpness of eye and mind. He was a man of razor sharp mind, always alert. He would have appreciated the precision of the still lifes the most. The flowers. I guess in times of war when one is plunged into chaos, precision and clarity of thought is all you have.

So instead of looking to some far away trophy - Goddesses, I decided to stick to my grandfather. It was the choice our great thesis advisor Merel already foresaw like a trained psychic with an eye for good thesis material but back then I still fought it. Now finally I have come to my senses and back to myself. Thank you dear reader for listening.

'Grey, black, white and dull with fog and brown coal smoke'¹¹

The tea I am drinking as I write is *Haagsche Heeren*. It is a special smoky kind of blend with delicate blue flowers, the color I associate with my grandfather. This tea somehow makes me think of him. Evoke him. In ancient Egypt they used to evoke gods and goddesses through perfume. That's where the word 'perfume' comes from, from the Latin *pro fumum* meaning through smoke.¹² The hot taste and smell of this tea almost seems to evoke his spirit. I can imagine him living in The Hague, dressed very elegantly, always keeping a low profile, doing his work with due diligence, in silence, enjoying the crispness of the winter cold and sun, walking silently, thinking silently, devising, scheming. Or rather not scheming. He was not much of a schemer. In fact he seemed more of a romantic, a dreamer, a faithful servant to his cause. In silent contemplation, contemplating the sky, the waves, the ships. He loved painting. Someone who has so much patience for painting a ship must enjoy contemplation. I can imagine him getting his tea, he was definitely a tea drinker, not much of a coffee drinker, well actually in the Soviet Union coffee was really not a thing. We were always more associated with Asia so it was tea, tea and a slice of lemon. My grandfather definitely loved his tea. He was not a man of many words. He always seemed to be in his head. His energy was cool, silent, detached, contemplative. Not warm, not an entertainer. Trained to keep a low profile. A mystery really. Trained to remain a mystery, as if he was in some other dimension, but always observing or at least that's what he said he was doing when I used to ask him when I was small, "What are you doing, Grandpa?" and he would always reply boldly, "Always observing!"

Was he so silent by nature or did his life train him to be so? Surveillance was his profession after all. I wonder why I did not ask him more what he was actually observing. I wonder why any attempts at asking him about his time in Cuba with Fidel and Che, about actually being in the same room with these people, conversing with them, working, devising, planning, always seemed to deflate like loose balloons. It is as if he, the person, was not there, but his body was, serving a cause. Did he actually have any say in the operations he carried out? Did he have any personal involvement, could he voice any of the opinions which he actually thought? Did he think? Did his voice play a part in the outcome of the things he was tasked to operate or was he just a tool of the system?

¹¹ How the retired Stig Bergling describes the life of a secret agent in Ben Macintyre's, *The Spy and the Traitor*, Viking, 2018, pg 103

¹² The 'Other' Senses, Caro Verbeek, the ArtScience Interfaculty, B1, Semester 2, 2016, lecture notes

What was it that he told me once that he observed? Come on Subconscious, it must be in there somewhere, focus and think hard, peel off the layers of years of ambiguity, the veils of dry ice which seemed to have clouded and deposited sediments onto the clarity of your memory. He told you once, go back to that conversation, he told you once, "I observed how your mother was always all over you but not your brother." Something like this? How my mother was always all over me? I wonder what else he observed.

Looking back, my grandfather's life fills me with great awe. It seems so rich, so full of adventures and great challenges. He was not stuck with the idea of "what will I do with my life", for years, not knowing, getting weighed down by the overabundance of it all. It seems as if in a moment, in a flash he decided and his decision took him on a journey. He was not living for himself. Back then ideals were different. A fervent nationalist he lived to serve his country, a '*Homo Sovieticus*' one might say, as author Ben Macintyre describes, rather dismally the protagonist in his book *The Spy and the Traitor*, "an obedient state servant forged by communist repression."¹³ (Repression' is of course a matter of perspective. As I have known him, my grandfather was always humble but proud, the ideals of the Soviet Union filling his heart and soul. It made him feel good, it gave him meaning in his life, so why not?) This pretty much constituted his life. He was not a businessman nor a self-made man, he was a man who gave his life, heart and soul, to his nation. The only thing he might have given up was his creativity, only turning to his own inner universe of wonder when time permitted. On paper he served his nation. Perhaps this is why my family treat any form of artistic practice as leisurely activity only to be indulged in the spare time. Perspectives are changing but this belief is a heavy one to budge.

In his book *Understanding Russia*, which aims at understanding the characteristics of the 'Russian' mind (as opposed to the 'Western' mind) by studying Russian Literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, family friend and philologist Evgeniy Kostin writes that in the context of civilization today, the individualized '*homo*' is celebrated, however Russian culture, perhaps the only one or one of the few in the world, keeps persisting its position based on other values, preferring '*obshechelovecheskiye*' or universal values as opposed to individualist ones.¹⁴

¹³ Ben Macintyre, *The Spy and the Traitor*, Viking, 2018, pg 9

¹⁴ Evgeniy Kostin, *Understanding Russia*, Aletheia Press, 2016, pg 13

What I really admired about my grandfather is that he was not a showman. There was absolutely no artifice about this man, mystery in his aura yes, but absolutely no artifice. He was a purist, a puritan, if he was religious he probably would have been a Calvinist, but he was an atheist of course, only believing in the might of the Soviet Union. He was dedicated to his cause, he was loyal. He was not kniving, or deceiving, or had his own agenda. He was the truest form of slavic sincerity or soviet ideology one might say. Almost too simple compared to the more scheming neighbours Britain and France as my father would say. His cold blue eyes oozed this sincerity, this solemnity. This is perhaps why he was chosen to do what he did. So loyally and fiercely was he devoted to his cause. This devotion is something to be envious of. He was not calculating, not thinking about how to profit for himself at all, no he was wholeheartedly committed and given over to a cause outside himself and this guided his life. I wonder if it made him happy, but it definitely must have given him a great sense of purpose. A sense of direction. Out at sea man needs something to hold on to.

What is this?

With the research question - how can my grandfather relate to the Goddess, I set off on this strange path. It all started after Summer with the dilemma, how to combine the two? Before Summer I wanted to focus my thesis on goddesses. This seemed clear and simple enough. Then one day I woke up in the middle of the night and decided to dedicate the thesis to my grandfather. To make things more complicated, all along I wanted to explore non-rational ways of thinking. Secretly, I think I was setting up a silent protest to the 'rationality' of it all, to the linearity, to knowledge gaining via external means; having to read and extract data, having to choose a topic and explore it externally, having to make sense, to academia, to science. I wanted to explore knowledge, but not knowledge as we know it today, but the knowledge that already lies within us: memories, feelings, associations. For this I looked into Buddhism and went within. Deep in the silence within, we must already know everything. Deep down I also just wanted to tell a story. So for the sake of experiment, welcome to my story.

Method

This thesis was written using intuition as method. Most parts were written in the middle of the night or in the early hours of the morning immediately upon waking; the first thing to come out of the Subconscious so to say, then reworked and edited. It incorporates the following elements, listed in order of appearance, from which inspirations were drawn and which, in no particular order, contributed to its manifestation. Under each subheading one can find a description of each element or subject matter and how it relates to the overall composition. All definitions are taken from the online version of the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

The non-rational

Definition non-rational: not based on, guided by or employing reason. Writing like dreaming is a method to be irrational¹⁵. Escape rationality. Dreams - Carl Gustav Jung. Writing this thesis is an experiment in non-linearity, gothic novel. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Animate something, fill it with life, the electric fluid. The non-rational as method, not following logic but intuition. Intuition means going within, not listening or reading externally but primarily shutting out the external world, cultivating the space to hear the inner voice within, guided by the Subconscious.¹⁶

¹⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, Aldus Books Limited, London, 1964, reprinted in 1979

¹⁶ In his book *Man and His Symbols* Carl Gustav Jung writes that in order for man to live a healthy and wholesome life, he needs to start cultivating a relationship with his Subconscious (which he proposes is to be done through dreams.) Otherwise, we are left living only using 50% of our human capacities (using only the conscious part of our mind) leaving us handicapped, trapped by the intellect. Ironically my grandfather was always exalted for his exceptional logic.

Goddess

Definition goddess: a female deity, the supreme or ultimate reality. The thesis started with a longing for non-rationality. The original idea was to write about goddesses as a pledge for the return to 'a pre-rational time' with the pretext - the mystical is missing from today and needs to be brought back. A goddess is a mythical creature with divine powers, possessing the highest virtues used in mythology as an example to strive towards. As a metaphor, she embodied this longing for me; turning to a higher source from a higher self expressed in the form of stream of consciousness and automatic writing, which were all part of my research on ways to be non-rational. The idea was then to have two voices, and set up a juxtaposition whereby two tales would be interwoven, the grandfather and the goddess, a highly unlikely combination, which was supposed to yield interesting literary results, or that was the intention at least. But then the realisation or rather, the great burden of weight came, which combining these two subjects would entail.

Grandfather

Definition grandfather: the father of one's father or mother, an ancestor. My grandfather lived a rich and fascinating life which I know little about. Now that he is gone my deepest regret is not having talked to him more. But it was not by logical intention that the idea to write the thesis about him came about. The idea came *irrationally*. It was born one night at 4:00am - when you wake up feeling possessed and have to let it out. It dawned on me that the thesis has to be dedicated to him. Apparently that is how all great works of Literature come about, in a frenzy, or so claimed Mary Shelley when she described the conception of *Frankenstein*.¹⁷

Mzrshzr

Pronounce reading consonants only and 'sh' as "shhh ": [mmm-zzz-rrrr-shhhh-zzzz-rrrr].

Mzrshzr was also born one night from an obsessive urge to write. How exactly? Following a class on Redeconstruct Media. I lie. Actually the story is more complex than that. 'Redeconstruct Media' happened to take place at the same time as 'Inner World Out', an elusive new course offered on the ArtScience curriculum, lead by the mysterious Martijn Engelbregt. And there was another class on top of that - 'Invisibility, Invasiveness and the Uncontrolled' - Klara Ravat's course on smell. Finding myself in a heated three-way dilemma of which to pick, I spent the weekend before painstakingly googling the hell out of Martijn and all he did for any clues; it all

¹⁷"Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw - with shut eyes, but acute mental vision - I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion." Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1818, Penguin Classics, reprinted in 2013, Author's Introduction, pg 9

sounded legit on paper. The course sounded amusing, I was intrigued, it was something unknown. Besides, Kasper and 'Redeconstruct Media' have been around for ages, I knew that but never took it; the familiarity of it did not appeal much at the time. But then again, I was also interested in smell and cursing myself for not having taken more smell courses over the past years. The internal conflict was not leading to any concrete solutions; instead I abused by gut, forcing him to make an intuitive decision. I still remember the morning, we were driving from my boyfriend's place in Delft to first drop of his kid at the primary school. It was cold, but sunny and crisp. *Still* undecided, I desperately looked for any signs to point me in the right direction. Then, on the way passing 'Psy Q', I saw it - a sign; a red 'Kung Fu School' sign out of the window to my right. "That's it! There it is, the spark of divine intervention!" The decision was made. And so in I went to KABK, walking right past the stairs to go up to PB301 (where 'Redeconstruct Media' was) confidently towards the Masters Studio where Martijn's obscure class was to take place. But as I walked past the stairway up to PB301 I remember something inside of me lurch; ever so silently, a tiny movement, but something went off, a small whiff of impending decay. As soon as I entered Martijn's class, the decay feeling would not leave; it started to unravel, little by little, small puffs of invisible smoke pulling me soothingly, "What are you doing here? Go to PB301." It must have been around 10.15 am and we were still waiting for 'more people to turn up.' Then around 10:30 we did our usual ritual introductions and I announced that I am still undecided between some classes - better let the group know now about my hesitation. We then went into some sort of physical group exercises, but by then my mind was already out of the class; body tiredly grudging into improvised on the spot movements by this strange man who played soft reggae music and talked with a voice that seemed suspiciously too low, unnaturally *too* calm and contained. The alarms where going off louder and louder; I had to escape immediately and reroute to Redeconstruct Media ASAP. During lunch I found Kasper and Nenad, the course leaders of Redeconstruct and asked, in what seemed a desperate tone, if I could still join their class. They were chill but stern, "Yes you can, but then you have to stick to it." The ultimatum made me flinch, but I had no choice, it was their class after all. The rest is history, but what a detour, which leads me back to the main culprit - who is *Mzrshzr*?

Martijn's class, the elusive description of which on the Interfaculty course page did not make it any less cryptic - "The student develops an inner-world self-diagnosis instrument to manifest a bite-sized self-portrait of the outside world with the help of internal kung fu."¹⁸ was about **introspection**. The class since disintegrated and I secretly thanked my body at having made me jump ship before it was too late, but I am grateful for *that* morning. It was a guide towards introspection. The few hours spent with Martijn lead, in the early hours of the *next* morning, to the composition of *Mzrshzr* - a mythical creature who came directly out of my Subconscious. *Mzrshzr* is the ugly side of goddess. She stands for all the darkness that lurks inside each and every one of us which goes unacknowledged, repressed deep in the underground. I decided to keep the automatic, stream of consciousness writing which gave birth to *Mzrshzr*, which you can find on page 7 and page 29. She should also be allowed to live.

¹⁸ 'Inner World Out', course description by Martijn Engelbregt, <http://www.interfaculty.nl/programme/courses/#innerworldout>

It was the name, *Mzrshzr* which was developed in 'Redeconstruct Media'. In the first class we were given an assignment: to deconstruct something. My instinct was cipher. I was always fascinated by code. Instead of clarifying and simplifying, I wanted to complicate and hide. The coded name comes from the Caesar cipher which was apparently invented by Julius Caesar. An ancient, quite simple form of cipher in which you replace each word of the alphabet with its previous letter. In this case I took my Russian name "Nastia" and ciphered it to become *Mzrshzr*. *Mzrshzr* is my ugly alter ego.

Urge to Cipher

Definition cipher: a method of transforming text in order to conceal its meaning. The idea was to intricately compose the thesis in such a way that it would be a cipher within a cipher. Goddess as a metaphorical layer about non-rationality weaved in with memories of my grandfather's life, but all this a smoke screen. So while being suggestive of his life, not spelling it out, but mirroring it by going undercover and only addressing the surface of things. Not letting the real truth come out. Because that remains secret.

Mystery

Definition mystery: something not understood or beyond understanding, profound, inexplicable, of secretive quality or character. My grandfather was always a mystery to me. That is why I decided to write about him, but through this process I realized, I am a mystery to myself. Are most people a mystery to themselves? What most people don't realize is everything they think, see and perceive as truth is a construction of their own mind¹⁹. What I came to realize in this process is that the stories I tell of him are a projection of my own mind.

Meditation

Definition meditation: to engage in contemplation or reflection. What does it mean to meditate? To meditate means to stop, to take space, to silence the mind and go within. It is about going deep. Going deep into the self to explore the self. To meditate can also mean to think deeply about something. Meditation is also essentially about breathing. When you breathe you are alive; when you don't you are not anymore, just remember that.

¹⁹ Conversation with Merel Boers during thesis boost #2, 22 January 2019

What have I discovered?

Whenever I was with my grandfather I always had the feeling that he had his own secret agenda throwing smokescreens to keep us off-track. He had this air about him, aloof, that you never really knew what he was thinking. He might say something but you never knew if that was what he actually meant. One Summer in my mid-twenties he was there with us in Cyprus and I had a couple of friends over from Germany. We were all having dinner outside. The whole time he remained silent and everyone assumed he did not speak English. Us, 20 somethings chattering away, him 80 something struggling with his food, chewing slowly. I think in the beginning he threw some smokescreen at only being able to converse in Russian by greeting my friends mumbling something Russian indecipherably, so all attempts at interacting with him stopped there and then. But then someone asked him or me, I don't remember, something about him and he answered in perfect English, and then talked about his time in Japan and concluded with a few words in German about the topic we were discussing at hand and laughed. Everyone laughed with him, but then the table hushed in silence. It was one of those spine chilling moments when you realize that you are actually being watched. Shooting us a second of his razor sharp presence, he quickly disappeared back into his Russian oblivion, but now everyone knew that he knew, and maybe even knew more than we knew.

What started off as an attempt to tell my grandfather's story became a method of using him to uncover myself. His method was not to reveal any truth so I too will not reveal any.

Visit to Mauritshuis

One of the most valuable courses I had at ArtScience was Esther Polak's class 'Performance as Object in Public Space' where we had to embody a performance in order to learn about it. I have never heard about embodiment before and found this a hugely useful new method to work with. So, as an experiment and lament for my grandfather, I decided to 'embody' him and go to the Mauritshuis to look at some flower paintings. My meditation for the day was 'winter'.

In preparation I drank black tea with sugar and ate some herring with beetroot salad on rye bread. How many similarities we share. How he would have loved the juicy, oily, almost sweet taste of Dutch herring. What a good combination with beetroot salad; through the senses I was transported back in time, back into his body. How I imagined him to be, quietly observing it all. Then walking up the stairs of the Mauritshuis, how he would appreciate the utmost upkeepness. I remember on a visit to the German-Russian war Museum in Stieglitz just outside of Berlin I thought this is the perfect marriage of Russian nostalgia and German order, the place was filled with heart but was also very well maintained and looked after. The Mauritshuis is the next level of maintenance. A place like this would simply not exist in Russia. The almost clinical attention to detail, the maintenance, the care, the painful detail, all for a government funded building - unheard of! The interiors of museums he knew were always shabby. The shabby desolation of the Eastern bloc. Economising. The Dutch are great economists but they never economise to the detriment of them and their surroundings.²⁰ The remnants of the Golden Age are still there my father would say. How he would admire this *viliznost* or, as if licked by a tongue. The pristineness of it all and we haven't even looked at any paintings yet. This is Europe. And this is why Russia will never be so.²¹ This is a care and love and attention to detail which might have been foreign to him yet, which he admired from afar and would have been ready to travel for. The attention to detail is insane!!! I think he would have loved the flower paintings most. The painstaking, precarious detail. He would have absolutely loved the painting *Vaas met bloemen (Vase of Flowers)*, c.1670 by Jan Davidsz de Heem. The *krijovnik*, the bouquet of flowers, the raspberries, the twigs of wheat, the butterflies, the snail. The miniature reflection of sky. The rare blooming tulips. This painting is just divine! *Prekrasno!* He must have had a pull for the divine. For art, for perfection, for beauty. Lifts the soul.

²⁰ A personal observation made which could of course be inaccurate following "the grass always looks greener" logic.

²¹ Quote from back cover of the book by Evgeniy Kostin, *Understanding Russia*, Aletheia Press, 2016

How funny to meet a fellow ArtScientist, little Soerria here, who says she here to do undercover work with her new job. Undercover? My grandfather is definitely here with me. His energy vibrates. We are also undercover. What does an undercover agent do exactly?²² Am I going undercover to go into myself? Immaculate, exquisite detail of the glass. The rich lush interiors, how he would have lavished. And finally, he would get to see the *Girl with the Pearl Earring*. But we don't talk about it, his life story carved in his bones.



Vaas met bloemen (*Vase of Flowers*), c.1670 by Jan Davidsz de Heem, oil on canvas, Mauritshuis, The Hague

²² 'Gets inside the minds of others, into their logic, their rationality'. - MI6 Officer, Ben Macintyre, *The Spy and the Traitor*, pg 187

She used to crave facts. She used to only rely on the truth. She had a personal aversion to fiction. If it was not true, it was not real. A perfect example of our times, obsessed with the truth, she discarded any sort of myth or story as mere riffraff. 'That stuff'²³ seemed insignificant to her. If it did not exist and could not be proved then it was not true.

²³ "It's good I decided to cut my hair today. It's the second day of the new moon, that's when hair grows. If you want your hair to grow, you should cut it on the growing moon, not on the waning moon."
"Oh yeah?" replied my hairdresser; "I did not know that before. So are you into astrology and all that stuff?"

The end
7532 words.

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This thesis is dedicated in the loving memory of Valentin Sergeevich Loginov (1927 - 2017) war veteran, military officer, marine, diplomatic consul, special agent, party official, grandfather, father, son, husband, artist, adventurer, explorer, painter, dreamer, great, mysterious and precise soul.



My grandmother and grandfather on their wedding day, 4.11.1951

I would like to thank the following people for their guidance, supervision and input: my thesis advisor Merel Boers for her unyielding eye, mind and drive, my personal coach Eric Kluitenberg for believing and giving this cloud of what I thought was utter nonsense some sort of shape and definition, for first calling this 'Literature'. Felix Bodin for some design tips, which I did not follow. Lauren Jetty and Catherine Ostraya for their time and feedback. My aunt Irina Smirnova for some facts and images. My parents who are yet unaware that I have disclosed some family secrets. The ArtScience Interfaculty for giving the space and time over the last four years of floundering uncertainty to let such a piece of writing come to existence, to their initial call to curiosity which in turn sparked mine, and last but not least my grandfather for being an unlikely source of inspiration, curiosity and constant questioning. May his soul rest in peace and may mine continue to question.

APPENDIX

“The burden of too much “human knowledge” creates a dungeon for the soul.”

- The Oracle of Trimurti, the Triple Goddess

What is knowledge? According to the Oxford dictionary knowledge is “facts, information and skills acquired through experience or education.” When I was at a lecture of Rimpoche, a Tibetan monk passing by Holland in Leiden University the other week what struck me most was his view on our (the West) education system, when someone inquired what his views are about learning about Buddhism in a western university, through academia. Of course he did say that like we of them have a generalized stereotypical view of the East, so they too have a generalized view of the West. He said the plus side of the western approach is that we are incredibly organized. This is something to be envious of, he said he believed this is partly because of western languages, English, Dutch, they are very objective and so allow for an objective view, where standardization is key and so allows for swift organization. The Asian languages, on the other hand, he said were much more flexible, each person could appropriate how he understood something by changing the language, so in this way while it is much more poetic and personal, on a wide scale it is very chaotic since there is no standardization. But now we diverge. The remark which made me ponder was that he said – the ironic thing he finds about western education is that we are all educated to primarily be selfish since education focuses outwards, on gaining as much possible outer knowledge outside oneself, so one becomes proficient in a subject of his choice, this ultimately leads to alienation because it creates competition, you have to be better than the others to succeed, so instead of compassion and collaborative efforts people are trained to be individuals competing. But the irony is, there is no focus within. No education directs people within to get to know themselves.