

for the birds

## O I 8 something queer

There were a few things about a column that interested me, or at the very least caught my attention, when I when I was invited to embark on this endeavour. Apart from my affiliation with, and affections for, the Editors, the magazine, and what they've been doing, one of them was its striking formal resonance with its architectural namesake. I don't write a blog but in some ways it's a similar thing to the trad column printed, albeit perhaps more democratised, prolific even. If I encounter a blog though, my scrolling imagines the architectural form differently. Rather than being able to capture it at a glance on a page, my reading eyes move down its length so to speak, as my fingers slide it past the window of the screen. It's how this text appears as I write it. Of course the invitation didn't necessarily preface me becoming a columnist, a regular contribution could be whatever it wanted to be, but that's what we've been calling it and I like the sound of it.

The thing I think that most enamoured me of the possibility of taking on a column (sitting on one) though, was its serial nature and its relation to accumulative time (over & over again). An extended yet broken trajectory might make it possible to explore an idea or thing or set of such things moving through a kind of linear time, allow a discrete thing to generate or insinuate movement or change or, by accumulation, develop a kind of body over that time, a body constructed of parts of course. Some literary works have been created under similar circumstances, in journals for instance.

Perhaps you might ask why I'm even going in to all this, but you see, another thing about a column is Opinion: the I that's dressed in an O-pinion piece. Martin and I talked about this journalistic tone one evening over a beer. Blogs have mostly gotten that pinned down, and although I think it's quite possibly—again—a good moment for me to start slinging mud about willy-nilly, and let's not discount the fact that I decided at the outset to name my column 'for the birds', I had thought this column might be able to approach opinion from a different angle. I drew upon a more literary approach in the hope some 'other way' might emerge, from where another form of speech, another

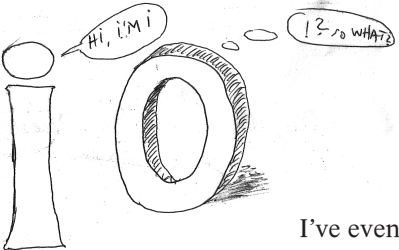
body of words might be constructed.

In the Summer issue I began with O as the character under question in Crumbs, with a fragment I'd found written a year earlier, and some writing about birds. I've often written with a bird, or birds, occupying a pivotal role. That might not be surprising as I often write outdoors. But you see, the thing is, O's been giving me the shits!

Perhaps I'm envious of O but I'm torn. He does take up more space than I.

There is a certainty to his form, like the column, the I—perhaps one of the most impervious of shapes anyone could isolate amongst the other shapes here. O looks so good from here!

Even when lips pronounce his name they mimic his form. Perhaps this was a way to introduce a different kind of O, one that didn't annoy me so much, to imagine his impervious line as lips, or an asshole for that matter, one more to my liking!

  
I've even  
imagined O as a  
hoola-hoop rotating around my waist,

the inside of his rim tracing lines around me.

If I imagine him like this though—he must be a he because I've written it so—I get stuck, I become so curious about his appearance that I almost forget what this particular O has been up to.

The story of O no doubt has precedents—notions from which I will acknowledge are part of his becoming—and begins with a breakfast he's decided to spend some saved up coins on. He then goes about recognising himself in all these things around him. This actually begins with the coins, but moves on to the table he sits at, and the saucer and lip of his coffee cup. It then happens that a pigeon whose legs have by some accident come to be tied together enters the scene; shackled as the story goes, but this is where O fails to intuit a resemblance. He instead scoffs at the bird's situation. Do you see my initial distaste with O? It's his relayed misanthropy: relayed because there are a few things about his situation that echo the bird's predicament, the most obvious being an awfully lot of attention paid to the consumption of food, Crumbs. Or is it the 'anthropy' bit in general? Must O project his likeness like that onto everything, 'mis' or not?

A year later Kafka comes along with a few lines of something about futility and control. K's few lines introduce an opportunity to imagine O empathising with the bird having difficulty walking about because of an encounter with a length of string; not the most perilous of obstacles in an urban landscape. This was an attempt to read the story of O in another way, to think about care as a possible motivation. But even an attempt at altering his mood, at introducing an imagined benevolence, reduced the pigeon to his own understanding of freedom, got all caught up in a master slave relationship. O did recognise his difference from the bird in question and that makes sense: different animal, different.

Returning to the screen, the white inside of O was simply a portion of what it was he was sitting on. He was

marked as different simply because of that unbroken circular line. I started to think if the piece of white that line captured was really at all different from the white it had been sitting on.

I began thinking of O as a geography, an Island instead of a character/person, no nagging letters left or right, just an ocean of white to consider.

Nikola meanwhile had introduced an idea about the plastic island, a great mass of discarded crap, plastic, petrochemical impunity in various states of becoming smaller and more dispersed, all collecting in the Oceans due to great currents and wind depositing the stuff there. Birds hang out there too and often at great risk. They, the two largest are in the northern parts of the Atlantic and Pacific, are not dense enough to walk on but maybe in the future we'll move there and find a way to grow some tomatoes/potatoes instead of moving to Mars or one of Pluto's moons or probably not. Crap is a great fertiliser but I think that excludes human waste in the form of distilled crude, silica, rubber, detergents and metal.

I was heading out of town again, this time to Nicosia, Cyprus, the largest of islands in the East Mediterranean. Perhaps six weeks on an island—a discrete form whose boundary is drawn by its dry-land limits meeting the sea—would provide O with an opportunity to be written differently. It could be a study for a New O, an I-land O. By supplanting his human form with another incarnation altogether, it might be possible to reconsider the foul mood, the misanthropy that had been permeating the column, this O—pinion piece thus far.

I did know some relatively unstudied details about the place—one being that it was very far East from here even though its immediate surrounds have often been called the Near East—but I'd not obsessively googled/gone down a scroll-and-click-hole before landing. I had recently been told by friends there was great cruising/public sex to be had, but also that the people who were to host me were very generous, so I was reassured.

We didn't get off to a good start though. Even my I's first contact with the island was rebuked, as if this possible New O refused to be penetrated. After 4 1/2 hours I was desperate for a cigarette so when the plane came in for landing, wheels making initial contact with tarmac, my muscles relaxed. Moments later no further thuds or rumble had followed first contact... landing had failed. The plane and all its contents were back in the air when an announcement reassuring all aboard a second attempt would bring us safely to ground at Larnaca Airport, in the south of the island, was sounded. Thankfully the Captain's assurances had not been falsely broadcast, and a lit cigarette was again within reach.

#### *Oct passing into Nov '15*

As the crow flies, about 22kms south of the cordoned off, ghosted beachside resort of Famagusta, which, before its fall to the occupying Turkish army in '74, was frequented by the likes of Dick Burton, Liz Taylor and Brigitte Bardot. By car? 73kms encountering various borders: checkpoints and fenced-off areas defining sovereignties, including a BOT (British Overseas Territory), and roadways punctuated by sentries patterned in different coloured camouflages.

#### *NMR 11.5*

I'll be glad when this moon turns new. It's been the 11th in A Year with 13 Moons.

I've been watching its fullness waning rise, night after night.

It's diminishing round rising... revealing itself sucked-on-lozenge-shaped from behind a line I cannot decipher when night turns both sea and sky black. That is, until the diminishing pizza-pie illuminates the separation of its sky by rippling the darkness of the sea with its diffused resemblance, adorning it with a widening triangular shape full with a glimmer I'd like to imagine as sequins becoming ever larger as they approach my eyes set into my face.

I'll be glad when that moon rises

without its being lit up by the sun... turns new. I've stopped watching the news for a few days. At least a dark moon will not allow that horizon line to make itself known at night, when the day's activities have slowed. Beyond that horizon, if my eyes were able to breach just 150 kms or so, their focal length being able to bend slightly with the curvature of the earth and naturally the surface of the sea, they would reach a Syrian shore.

I'm a foreigner to this particular shore and I'm a guest in an out-of-season beachside resort.

*Aug '82*

*Three o'clock. Daybreak riding on fire. A nightmare coming from the sea. Roosters made of metal. Smoke. Metal preparing a feast for metal the master, and a dawn that flares up in all the senses before it breaks. A roaring that chases me out of bed and throws me into this narrow hallway. I want nothing, and I hope for nothing. I can't direct my limbs in this pandemonium. No time for caution, and no time for time. If I only knew—if I knew how to organize the crush of this death that keeps pouring forth. If only I knew how to liberate the screams held back in a body that no longer feels like mine from the sheer effort spent to save itself in this uninterrupted chaos of shells. "Enough!" "Enough!" I whisper, to find out if I can still do anything that will guide me to myself and point to the abyss opening in six directions. I can't surrender to this fate, and I can't resist it. Steel that howls, only to have other steel bark back. The fever of metal is the song of this dawn.<sup>1</sup>*

How to possibly write in this I, this column, here & now? Especially after re-reading a portion of Mahoud Darwish's Memory for Forgetfulness over my morning coffee, he writing from a Lebanese shore, begging for a break in warfare, simply to prepare a coffee. I'd read it too over coffee in Protaras, that horizon line just beyond the page. Days before that now, standing on a beautiful sandy white beach also not far from

where Darwish had written, under sun amongst a handful of people enjoying the warm sea, just hundreds of inches from the pile of barbed wire and wood and whatever else that was the Unwelcome fence to the aforementioned Famagusta resort, I said, "I should've brought my swimmers!" Coming from land-locked Berlin via London where winter was encroaching with more force, I thought this wasn't an unreasonable desire. The Greek speaking Cypriot from south of the line we crossed to come here; passport check, said, "We don't swim here". The we she spoke of I knew nothing about really but I liked her and I could receive her sincerity. I found myself saying "but this sea is ambivalent, and it's the same one south of the fence".

It was the same sea.

It was the same ambivalence on which tens of thousands had decided to risk passage in the previous months alone...

I look at the almost bald back of my hands staring. I search out the few near to invisible blond hairs sprouting there, that I can only see in silhouette escaping from the obviously redundant follicles under the skin. The words they might transport to my fingers are/feel hopeless.

I want to reject keys, pens, pencils but my I persists.

A guy I once saw who came to clean the pool was one of the only people I talked with during those days. In a broken conversation I asked him if he worked there all year round, regardless of the ghosted houses. In an English he apologised for, he told me a story about being stuck for hours on top of one those houses out-of-season when the wind blew his ladder down.

I'd decided to spend the days remaining before leaving the place avoiding any ladders, swimming in that sea and walking. Walking along the cliffs on red mud and chalky dust, passing in and out of thorny shrubs and hundreds of Eucalyptus. Walking within reach of the attentive ears of kilometre tall radio towers needling the sky on a distant peninsula from inside the parameters

of one of two Sovereign Bases governed by the CBF (British Forces Cyprus). This one, those needles broadcasting, governed by the GCHQ, is called Ayios Nikolaos, or Santa Claus, and is mostly funded by the NSA under the UKUSA, or Five Eyes agreement. We know this thanks to Ed Snowden. Canada, New Zealand & Australia provide the extra three eyes to the beast.

I went looking for Cyclops' Cave, searching out a historical geography that might proffer an equivalent ambivalence with which I saw the sea for that split moment just days earlier, or better still, a landscape not littered with disregard or burdened by grief. The floor was spotted with beer cans and other trash. Emerging into sun from the cave my eye adjusting caught a bright plastic Orange attempting to escape a chalk-white ground by a grey-green bush to join the *hellblau-türkis* ocean background, to ride its waves, embark on a journey toward an island where others like it gathered. But would this Orange make it to the Pacific Plastic Island? The Suez Canal was close enough but from there the north Pacific was pretty far. Luckily, for the escaping Orange, there's a Trash Vortex in the southern Indian Ocean.

I'd decided to turn my attentions/intentions inward, away from the sea.

The same sea...

In... away from the rim.

Back to people and the split centre of the Island, to the city, to Nicosia and the unquestioning of immediate physical concerns and novelties.

In away from the rim of this possible New O. To ignore the coast, the cliffs and the beach and the apparently impervious line of the sea that drew this possible New O. To get to know this particular geography not merely by its shore and the coast that draws it's shape or from what lies beyond that line.

The city, the Old one, was built round with pointed elaborations tracing its outer rim. Its walls, still with remnants of the star-pointed, heart-shaped Bastions protruding at its edges, contain it inside the circle of a very

round O. Venetians drew the plans and built this variation of the city after they'd taken the place from Crusading French Lusignans, before ceding the Island to the Ottomans, who'd ceded it to the British, and whomever else had been there before them all, from Egypt to Assyria, Byzantium, not to forget the Ancient Greeks... It's said here that Aphrodite was born from the sea in the South East. I saw her all dressed up in a combination of Assyrian, Egyptian and Greek attire in the Archaeological museum just beyond the circular wall of the Old Town.

From the doors of this museum that post-modernism hasn't yet refurbished, along the streets to the west, strings of buildings trace a few roads. There are sandstone Colonial Administrative Victorian villas with bungalow—from Begali—prostheses that helped to regulate the flushes of heat a Victorian construction might encounter in warmer climes, and Military Barracks. These too have bungalow verandas, as do grand domestic villas. They're the same buildings I've encountered in Australia: another discrete shape drawn by the sea, that one the British saw fit to make their prison. An island, that island, the perfect prison. But it wasn't just the buildings! Driven by a perverse appropriation they'd exported/imported Eucalyptus from Australia, from where the tree originates, about 150 years ago. They'd planted them there to soak up the swampy wetness outside the city walls and they'd taken over! They were everywhere like a rash... the girth of some trunks competing with any I'd seen! The scene was enough to provoke in me a near psychic break, asphyxiated by the cooking of their discarded leaves by hot sun on dusty ground. Words like Gundawindi, Wyalong, Coonabarabran and Woolloomooloo, came to mind. They mingled with Greensborough, Queensland, Melbourne, and now with Eleftheris, Paralimni and Lefkosia.

O! It's getting awfully full inside of this island, this discrete shape.

I decided to swallow it all.

Masters this I will eat you too. I will



savour what I find at all desirable.... but I'll shit out whatever is indigestible, undesirable... from sphincter to sphincter.

May '28

*Against antagonistic sublimations brought over in sailing ships.<sup>2</sup>*

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Back to the split centre of the Island, to the Capital, to Nicosia, the centre split by a line named after a pen, a green one, in the hand of a British Soldier, a line drawing a demilitarised zone between antagonisms. Back to the south of that line, to immediate physical concerns and the search for a New O. It becomes increasingly apparent that an uncomplicated O is not within reach...

I ride the streets on a bicycle, there aren't many around. Those that are, are as-a-rule ridden by people who's skin is darker than most people's here, and Delivery boys. These two observations are often to be found in the same rider. Cars are a theme here, and they can be quite aggressive. I have to ride like I own the streets, speeding through the streets on two O's. The place fluctuates between strangeness and familiarity. Another thing the British brought to the island is English. This I've swallowed, as have many there, and our vomiting it up makes it easier for us to communicate.

Robust follicles were getting busy framing beautiful eyes, faces, with thick dark hair. I'd met a bunch of people who were generous enough to show me some ropes. They took me around the place. That is, we went drinking together, often. Getting drunk really seems to relax my borders, our borders. We drink Brandy Sours, first concocted at the Forest Park Hotel, 45 clicks south of Nicosia, for the young Egyptian King Farouk in the 1930's. Many of my new acquaintances were artists who'd studied in England. They were sharp and funny and keenly attuned to the politics of the situation they're in and their immediate physical concerns. This wave of young producers was getting busy doing things, and not being shy about

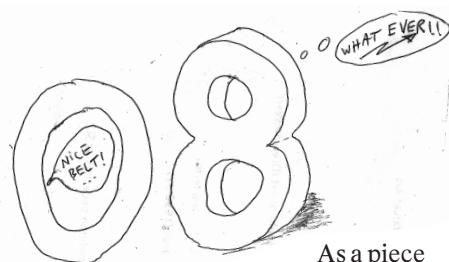
it, despite cash-flow problems—one possible consequence of the financial collapse that introduced EU austerity programs some years back.

In short, they're GR8! If I've managed to catch them in O's net, O's mouth, my I's mouth, and have swallowed them in the search for a New O that has also managed to ingest Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago* (*Cannibalist Manifesto*) (1928), I regurgitate them here, and in the process I hope they arrive back into the world on this page... in part if not in name.

Cyprus is one of the most militarised places on the planet. Six different armies crowd the interior of the Island's outer line, all crowding other lines drawn inside of the sea drawn line that marks this island. C once said... "*this Island is cut up like a pizza*". If we're to zoom out, its shape resembles less an O, or a pizza, and more a strangely shaped pot with a delicate handle, or the hand-bag/man-bag known as a wristlet. The strongest of interior lines draws its middle, the same one that splits the Old Town into north and south, splits the encircled O shape of its centuries old walls in two. The main street, whose name, Ledra, is a remnant of an ancient kingdom that once stood there, scores a line vaguely perpendicular to the Green one, north of that line its name is Lokmacı. If the checkpoints that bracket their intersection reductively read as border between Turkey and the EU, the distance between them there would be paved and only paces wide. When I first walked that in-between space, I found myself wishing the passage toward the EU those thousands had been traversing, instead of those miles on treacherous seas, would have been as simple as those few steps I was taking.

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There are streams of young Greek men, soldiers walking out of marching time, on breaks, on our side of the Green Line. An O-like form appeared around one boy's waist, not a hoola-hoop but a fanny-pack/bum-bag: it's a belt with a zippered integrated pouch, where essentials are kept.



As a piece of fashion, albeit functional, this possible O conspired with this soldier's casual, yet confidant stride to produce twin pleasures, mine and his. Bouncing around to the rhythm of his step, the fanny-pack would slip from its more practical altitude around his waist, inching lower under the weight of its booty, descending into his mobile lap to press more insistently against the package between his legs. As each leg left and right hinging at its hip socket swung back and forth, the pouch at front was hoisted upward, dropping weight into to his crotch on the off beat between each step. He would allow himself to gain enough pleasure from the bag's banging before intermittently taking fingers mid-conversation or cigarette to return the bag to his hip. The cycle occurred at a relatively slow pace, on about a 15-step rotation. My pleasure? From a near-enough distance behind, watching the belt squeeze his ass checks together as it slid slowly downward, puckering his outer cheeks under silky leisure pants while drawing his ass-crack with a stronger line. The squeeze I enjoyed, coupled with his—the rhythm banging at his cock and balls—was probably not the most consummated of sexual spectacles I enjoyed in public space... Robust follicles sprout lashes, from which beautiful genitals flower, one-eyed columns, and I ingest those too... but I'd relaxed no other border than my eyes to any soldier during that time.

Distances and differences and even lines drawn are inevitable, but these do not preface a lack of enjoyment... do not have to preface lack at all. de Andrade writes: "*Once carnal, it turns elective and creates friendship*".<sup>3</sup> I'd like to think that differences don't have to be carnal for them to be productive, but attraction is an engine getting busy,

and I was really beginning to like the place.

The same acquaintance from Berlin who'd sparkly-eye transmitted some details about good cruising had also said there was some nostalgia for the old West Berlin to be had. And although the land/climate/language combination didn't match up, or even the generational geopolitic, some of what he said did ring true. Most CBS's (Cypriot Brandy Sours) were drunk next to the border that spilt the Old town in two, next to the wall that wasn't Green at all, near a sentry painted in stripes blue and white. That line has paradoxically created some free zones; ones the locals were allowed access to. This bar was in a near-to-not-forgotten corner of the somehow still lit up red light district of the quickly 'gentrifying' south. One night a small parade of us sang Happy 60th Birthday to the Grand Madame of the area after drinking a little too many, plastic/paper whistles jammed in mouths, local clementines in soft fists.

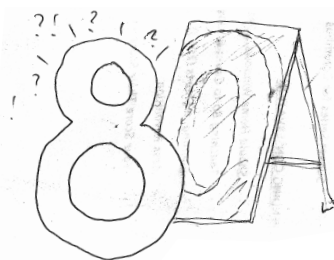
My revelling in that nostalgia was mixed with its neighbour state, melancholy. A pointy friend once said when I'd first arrived in Berlin that the city *was merely awaiting the clutches of the winners*. I was sceptical at the time, but 11 years later I have an idea of what he might have meant. The flash of the possible—shall we be as vain to call it transgression?—that I see now differently in Berlin; transformed and/or souterrain; or by now that awfully bloated word integrated, I saw as apparent on the landscape and in the lives of those people I talked with in Cyprus. Cyprus has been a place of both conquest and combination for millennia, a crossroads for forces east and west, north and south. While the Goddess of Love I'd seen in the Archaeological Museum was testament to combination's rewards, right now, back then, it felt like a place in a state of hiatus, where combination was being approached tentatively, and possibly for good measure, as more violent conflict rages all around.

Perhaps the caution or mistrust I think I sensed was also fuelled by spec-

ulation that has a fast-track solution to the 'Cyprus problem' projected for the near future, as talks have resumed in earnest. The engines that drive International Relations may win over there too, while; among other forces at play, the EU's border-lines buckle—some clapping shut—under the weight of the influx of people seeking refuge in the EU, and Turkey arrests the I's of journalistic freedoms whilst attempting to mask the killing of Kurds as co-operation with the West's insurgence into Syria.

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I made a show while there at the place that hosted me called Point. Sounds sharp but just as I'd been reassured back in London, they were very generous. The gallery was in a part of the city that used to be fancy not so long ago but whose streets now featured rows of empty glass facades after said financial collapse. The gallery's windows face a street whose dead end just 10's of meters away drops into the moat of the Old City, where a Zaha Hadid metal skeleton scandal was in the process of becoming a concrete ambassadorial public anomaly for a new city, a projection of a unified city?



Three sculptures in the show

Yes No Future, toyed with the letters O X & I... strung together in that line from left to right, they translate as NO in English. The word it spells has a longer history than the recent referendum in that other Greek speaking part of the world that voted for a rejection of Euro Zone fiscal imperatives: it turns out there is a 70 odd year-old commemoration day named after the word, also celebrated in Cyprus. Each letter is spelt out with those ribbed metal bars normally used as armature in concrete building construction. It's the same material Hadid's almost monument

was gobbling up. These bars appear bare all over the island in the guise of hair-like protrusions, sprouting from the tops of mostly domestic buildings. There they allow for further floors to be built, upwardly speculating familial expansion. In this form they're called in Greek, which translates as something like anticipations. The O of NO as sculpture is sub-titled (*Reclining (sleeping) Soldier*). A worn used plinth from the gallery lay prostrate on the floor, the bars drilling their way through the top; now one side, of the plinth to trace the line of O in pointed protrusions, it looks something like a round of bullets, sleeping.

When I read an unfinished version of this for Ariane and Nikola, Ariane mentioned Patrick Keiller. We ingested portions of his films and started spitting words about Sebald. Natasha Soobramanien, a writer who was the editor of my printed book—pages of which were also re-printed in this magazine—was one of the last students to study under Sebald in Norwich, England, before he died. Her biography also contains a colonial past, an island and a Nation State in the Indian Ocean. Her novel, *Genie & Paul*, cannibalised an 18th century French novel featuring its then colony Mauritius.

Two days before I left Cyprus regrettably, on a passenger craft toward cold and winter in the north, French warplanes were taking off from the same peninsula I've written in another altitude of this column. Or was it the other BOT further to the west?

There's one last writer from a former colony; of France, that I want to introduce, again he's male. His thoughts were reignited in me by a curator of an exhibition I'd taken part in in Berlin. Edouard Glissant, he died a few years ago. I come from a former colony, a very big Island Nation with a particularly tight asshole when it comes to refugees. I do not want to conflate the particularities of either Australia's or Martinique's (where Glissant was born) colonial iterations; posts included, they're very different, but my growing up there fuelled an interest in thinkers grappling with

master slave dilemmas others from other colonial and southern latitudes have attempted to unwrap, even flatly deny. *I demand for all the right to opacity. It is not necessary for to me to understand the other, that is to reduce the other to my own model of transparency, in order to live and build with that other.*<sup>4</sup>

There was a fourth sculpture at Point, J for *Ja*, and when I paste in Glissant here, I want to write one last shout-out to those people I met in Nicosia... I want to write *geniesst es*, but I'm back in the Germany re-united where a million migrants have been allowed right-of-stay. During late summer, Henrik and I, exasperated by disturbing reports at borders right across Europe, a suggestion arose... *Germany should just take a million*, after all the strong-arming

of its recent economic politics in Europe, not to mention concurrent events that reported echoes of its historical fascism... although no other country has allowed so many people entry after fleeing disaster, the sentiments these events projected have since mutated and spread, they became mass media sponsored racism, O-pinions attempting to smear all those recently arrived. I love Berlin, I love the many freedoms I would find mostly prohibited in other cities—on of these might be as simple as a nice gay bar where you can smoke, there are none in Nicosia for instance—but I'm a bad migrant, my German is terrible, and as a result I don't read so much German news. Right now though? I'd resist that entering any hole I got, my muscles retract... it's not to my taste.

I'd like to look at another menu please!...

Actually, this search for a New O is completely stuffed and I think I've lost my appetite.

- 1 <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpresse-books/view?docId=ft1z09n7g7&chunk.id=ch1&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ch1&brand=ucpress>
- 2 [https://events.ccc.de/congress/2009/Fahrplan/attachments/1386\\_cannibal-manifesto1928.pdf](https://events.ccc.de/congress/2009/Fahrplan/attachments/1386_cannibal-manifesto1928.pdf)
- 3 *ibid*
- 4 In the exhibition text for Re-Discovery 6 at Autocenter Berlin, curator Martin Germann paraphrases Glissant from *On Opacity*. [http://shifter-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Glissant\\_For\\_Opacity.pdf](http://shifter-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Glissant_For_Opacity.pdf)