

HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

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I first came to France in 1999. I was in confident mood after the beginner's crash course in French I had just taken. But the true extent of my linguistic skills was revealed immediately.

I originally came to do a three-month artist's residency at the Musée Nicéphore Niépce in Chalon-sur-Saône, but I stayed on. Within a year, I had learned to understand enough to manage to sit through dinner parties right to the end. After two years, I was able to speak without being mortified by everything I said. After three years, I could read *Zazie dans le métro*. I still read Proust in Finnish. I will never get rid of my foreignness, even if some habits are contagious. I live in an in-between state: I am no longer able to be in Finland, but I have yet to learn to be in France. I am irritated by Finns' lack of politeness and their bad manners. I hate French people's duplicity and the way they do things via personal contacts. There again, in my good moments, I think I get the best aspects of both: I get a warm autumn and an early spring, while, on the other hand, I get to walk with the dog across the ice on the sea. I get good food. I get the Louvre. I get to go to sauna with my friends and to swim where I like. And I get light summer nights when the entire sky shimmers like a vast pearl light bulb.

I don't know any French artists. For some reason, we never seem to get invited to the same exhibitions. An invisible wall divides Europe into French speakers and 'the rest'. Finland clearly ranks among the latter, and it is amazing how little information or art crosses that wall in either direction. Perhaps I am still thought of as a Finnish artist here; I wonder whether they even know I live in their country?

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It is strange in how short a time you go through lots of different emotions here. Happiness about not feeling stifled or hot, but peaceful streets and my bicycle and the sea. I feel no need for sleep. In this city grief and satisfaction and solitude are a continuum, each morphing into the other.

I cycled from Kumpula, via Pasila and Töölönlahti Bay, to the city centre in limpid air. I was feeling almost overwhelmed, on the verge of panic. I am here now and I am seeing all of this, and again I have to leave. I am also anxious about how things change in Helsinki and I don't know anything about it: yesterday, I wanted to go and eat at the Carrols in the Citykäytävä shops, but there was a chemist's there.

I sit here in the same lecture theatre where I once listened to lectures in art history. I look at the people around me, they write down the cryptic phrases of the doctoral candidate and his opponent. "Absence is appearance" and so on. Now I notice how much the environment affects work with art. When I was an art student, I collected phrases, words, things in writing, which I attached to my pictures, to ones already made or to ones as yet unmade. In Finland

and at university I was much more inside the language than I am now. Now – five years later – I refer to other pictures in my work, not to words. I get my inspiration from pictures, not words. This is a big change and, now in this situation, it is revealed to me in all its clarity. I have slipped away from language towards pictures.

Why? I no longer need to legitimise my solutions with the authority of others: I have learned to trust the picture (and myself). When language ends, that's where the picture starts. I have also visited museums a lot in recent years, and I am enchanted by the pictures: they bypass language and go straight to the point.

It must also be significant that I am surrounded by a foreign language most of the time. This is exhausting. I think in French and that simplifies my thinking, I become less substantial, more pragmatic; terse, slightly autistic. I escape tiredness and frustration by abandoning language.

Rain runs in furrows down the window of the airport bus. Outside are beautiful autumn colours: the maples wine-red, otherwise there are various shades of yellow and dark green conifers. I feel a bit like I am in a dream, an unreal feeling. I am going again. There will be eight flights within three weeks.

I age in a different way from other people. This comes from my living in two different countries. Time is discontinuous for me.

When I return to Helsinki after an absence of a few months, my friends have carried on living their Helsinki lives. They are a couple of months older. My experience of time is different – I carry on from where I left off last time. And not all of it make sense: new words have entered everyday speech; now, you are supposed to go to this or that new bar; last time, I sat by the water, but now I awake to the clank of a snowplough... Because my life is divided into totally disparate parts, I actually have two different lives; I feel like I am ageing at half the speed that most people are.

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Yesterday, I took Saarikoski's Tiarnia trilogy off the bookshelf again. How well the man writes, about little things and with classical references. I am able to identify with his landscapes, I see what he sees, and my own disappointments match his disappointments. Perhaps this means that pictures can have the same effect on the public. And the themes: they come from what is in front of our eyes, from what we read or see; in other words, from what the poet reads and what the visual artist sees in a museum.

I do work that draws its energy from something centuries into the past. That is why it is good to be in a city with a long history and so much old art. I live a rather quiet everyday existence in Paris – my social life is in Helsinki. But Paris has museums and bookshops. It is here I collect material. You could call it studying. The more I see and learn, the more conscious the composition is and the more multi-faceted the iconography.

I get a happy feeling when my feet carry me along and know where they are going. I got off at Anvers and collected some developed films and contact prints from the lab. The air is just as I like it: you don't sweat with your jacket on, and you feel like lingering in the sun.

In Paris the air looks dusty, hazy. Helsinki autumn mornings are limpid and clear. Yesterday, I was still in Helsinki and cycling into the city centre. There's that fountain behind the National Theatre, with the red roses growing around it. Those roses always remind me of autumn. Again, I was almost in tears, since leaving seemed such a big thing to do. It's like this: when you don't live somewhere continually or keep up with the changes of the seasons and the slow metamorphosis of the landscape, the city turns into pictures. This comes from what I was talking about before – the discontinuity of my personal time. I see the city, but I look at it as though I were looking at pictures. There is an alienation, a strangeness, in my gaze. This is what prompts me to burst into tears as I am cycling through Helsinki on an autumn morning. I am no longer a part of the city. I have become a spectator.

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