

What can these be but the playthings of a mad God who made us to build them for him?

Imagine Neanderthal man glimpsing with this vision in his head:
a flash of city at night, all motion and light.

He cannot tell what it means, he has had a poetic vision, all motion and light,

A sea of lights, he cannot unravel the images that land in his mind, like birds, swift, unreachable birds.

Thoughts, memories, visions are the same to him, a scary hallucination.

Such was William Gibson's vision when he wrote Neuromancer and invented Cyberspace:

He saw a Sargasso Sea, full of binary algae.
On that image we Neanderthals grafted our own visions, our thoughts and memories, our pitiful scraps of information.

But none of us knows what a city is.

This is the stuff you used to write.

You wrote at night, late, sitting at the computer, before you logged out.

I'd find it in the morning when I logged in.

You had been working at your game, and I was about to work on my book.

Computer at night, barnow's delight.

Computer in the morning, tomcat's warning.

You said we were two eights, eight hours for you, eight hours for me, eight hours for us both.

Okinawa was sacrificed!

Why do material objects display such endless, willful mockery?

If it could be turned to energy, the world could do without oil.

Why is it whenever I ask friends to taste my Tarte Tatin, my speciality, my triumph. all the teaspoons dematerialise?

And why at coffee time do we stir the sugar with forks?

So shaming.

And why does a monkey steal one of my socks every night, just one, to see me scabble in the morning and leave with odd socks?

Shame again.

Not to mention the computer.

Bombs everywhere,

Type would be prettier, but it's always type.

Is that what general Ushijima thought when he saw victory slip away?

When war displayed the stubborn willfulness of material objects?

All that strategy, all that loyalty to the Emperor, and the malignity of objects stole an army as neatly as monkeys steal socks.

I thought the Game would rectify this malignant fate.

The Division stuck in Formosa?

So I create a "Formosa" sub-program, I ask for the Division's intervention.

You're kidding! "Access denied".

If I insist, the sub-program vanishes.

If I insist again, the system crashes.

The beginning is strange.

Landing April 1st sounds foolish.

It's Sunday, like Pearl Harbour.

The Americans expect a bloodbath, like in the other islands.

They land on the beach.

No reaction.

No reception committee.

They reach the Japanese forts, find them abandoned, yet intact: the bombs didn't work.

So why did the Japanese leave?

Ushijima, watching from the Shuri heights, waits for planes to decimate those idiot Yanks trapped on the beaches.

No planes.

For both sides, nothing goes as planned.

I'll sort this mess out.

Put the Japanese back in their bunkers, bring in planes.

Sounds easier to move symbols than real planes...

But no. "Request denied".

And here I am with my codes that don't enter, my access denied,
my type errors...

And my calling on you.

One day I'll give Chris all this stuff for him to try to do something.

A game that won't work,
a woman going loony...

We'll see what he can do,
the editing wunderkind.

That's where I came in.

At that point in my life
I was readier for other people's images
than my own.

Laura's challenge fired me up.

I began with their trip to Tokyo.

Like them I loved the city.

And the Game offered me

a new way in WWII.

I'd become so Japanese I shared
their collective amnesia.

As if the War'd never happened.

I feel the Japanese
have changed a lot.

I feel they want to bury
their whole past,

World War II...

Japanese people

tend to avoid facing that issue.

It's a tragedy that's affected
my whole life.

Yet it contains a depth,

a kind of life
so strong and vivid

that today we cannot approach

that kind of intensity.

There's some kind of madness,
in fact,

about WWII.

It's not nostalgia,
I'm not nostalgic

about that era.

But those who lived through it

find something missing today.

Some of that was worthwhile.

Which is not to belittle
the atrocities

perpetrated by the Japanese military.

But having to define who one is,

having to fight to the very end,

means facing

something which alters
your whole perception of life

in the face of something crucial.

I want to tease the computer,

like we used to,
fool about with it,

turn its neurons inside out.

In Logo, for instance,
a noun for a verb.

"Dog" and the computer
is foxed,

It doesn't know what to answer and
confesses: "I don't know how to dog".

"Sardine":

It doesn't know how to sardine,

Or "Cauliflower":

"I don't know how to cauliflower".

So humiliating for a computer
not knowing how to cauliflower.

"Tortoise":
"I don't know how to tortoise".

"Rhododendron"...
"Cake-slice"...

"Eiffel Tower"...

"Shoe":

"I don't know how to shoe".

I remember an abandoned shoe,
one night.

It was in a crosswalk,
alone, derelict.

No one had picked it up.
No one had run over it.

Another night,

it was still there.

As if the citizens of Paris
had no interest or found superfluous

to deal with abandoned shoes.

Maybe an unknown woman
left her shoe every night

in the crosswalk.

Welcome to OWL.

Optional World Link.

This terminal will give you access
to all available networks:

Radio, television,
news networks,

whether they exist or not,
present or future.

Bits have replaced savings.

Gold and dollar belong
in the past.

Right here, feel the beating
of the heart of the future.

The Knowledge—standard!

Ah, the Network!

That was
Wladimir Zakrjevski's contribution,

the genius of the banks.

The Network's Network, that gave you
a free connection

to databanks worldwide.

In pre-historic times
people used pseudonyms.

Here they wore virtual masks.

Laura spent time cyberlooking

for Okinawa witnesses and informants,

but, like in any other network,
she found all sorts of things.

Rumour had it initiates could

plug into other people's
nervous system. So they said anyway.

Yesterday I had
a strange exchange on OWL.

A guy said:

"Good evening, Michel.

I just took something to sleep.

I won't wake up.

I feel so calm.

Before dying,
I want to make a gift

of the kind my contemporaries
can appreciate.

One last phone call
before I go.

I am well-known, you see,

very well-known.

Tomorrow my name
will be in all the papers.

And yours too, if you say
you're the last person

I spoke to before I left.

So I make this gift.

The last words of...

You'll see tomorrow in the papers,
I'm not fooling, you see?"

I answered:
"I think you're fooling,

because I know about death,

I know it well,

I know it by heart.

And we could still talk
even if you said

you were dead.

Because the man I loved is dead

and I talk to him every night.

Good night, Michel."

The next day there was
nothing in the papers.

At first, I thought

that he was fooling,
that he was a nobody.

But there's a dark space there.

thinking back on it.

Nothing in the press.

But what if the death part
wasn't fooling,
only the fame part?

What if he'd only lied
when he said

"I am well-known",
to make me believe before he died
he was someone else,
and I deprived him of that pleasure,
one last joy before dying?
And I thought I've never
mentioned you to a stranger before.

He died somewhat mysteriously
after the trip to Okinawa.

For those who love premonition signs,
his last images were shot
in the foreign graveyard of Naha.

He said it'd be good to lie
among the decaying tombs

of the combatants of all the useless wars,
including that of Commodore Perry's.

years before MacArthur,
Perry came unasked

to Shuri Castle,

that World War II
would turn to dust,

whilst modernising Japan.

As if this country needed a US soldier
each century to enter a new era.

Beside Perry's tomb he'd
explained Oshima's comment,

his: "Okinawa was sacrificed!".

Sute-Ishi,
a term from the game Go:

It means sacrificing a piece
to save a game.

If you cut... the root.

If you cut life at the root.

If you are cut from
the root of life,

you die. If...
In any strategic technique,

you need to consider
saving yourself

and sacrificing
a victory card.

If we speak of Okinawa
with respect to Japan's main island,
such was the sacrifice.

The battle was lost in advance,
a battle the Japanese army
had no chance of winning.

It was inscribed
in the context of defeat.

And because that was the context,
the purpose was to fix the aftermath,
and reinforce the "Tennosei",
the imperial system,

which had to survive
to the military defeat.

Another direct consequence
inscribed in this context of defeat,
was that no effort was made
to protect the civilian population,
so civilian casualties
far outnumbered
military casualties.

It's true that Okinawa
was a horrendous battle.

Nothing remains, no culture heritage,
no culture from the past.
Everything was destroyed,
utterly destroyed.

I who love so much the past,
in Okinawa I feel a deep despair.

In a way, the people of Okinawa
are resentful, even today.

There is a profound
feeling of injustice
on account of those events.

I think the war
isn't over yet.

In conversation, I still mention
the levels
we used to give to people
when we spoke.

When someone came and said:

"I am Catholic, or Communist,
or Anarchist",

or any other bigotry,
we would say:

"Level One!"
We'd laugh so much!

When they were funnier,
or wittier,

we'd say: "Level Two!"

But it never went higher.

The Game became
such a standard

that we could do nothing
unless we gave levels

to everything in life.

But nothing ever reached Level .

I remember one day I said to you:

"Must one die to get to Level Five?"

She had enjoyed Okinawa.

She had loved the ice in summer.

She had loved Naha, a spiritless
city, apparently,

yet full of ghosts,
and they loved ghosts.

She had loved the jungle figs indoors,
and birdsong at traffic lights
that got the blind across.

It was Japan, yet that Japan

that hadn't lost its memory.

There were cats too,
for they loved cats.

There were tags,
and owls and karate.

And their cult-film: a ghost story.

Seeing together there
was a sign to them,

and they loved signs.

That's when you started
calling me Laura.

We loved the film.

We didn't know about the song yet.

I was amazed you could fall
for an image,

then have a real lady
appear in its stead.

Can one be as lovely as an image?

Can one be as memorable
as a song?

I remember about David Raksin,

commissioned to write a song

over the weekend
for Mr Preminger.

You don't keep Mr Preminger waiting.

He'd got a letter from his wife
which he couldn't decipher.

He wasn't short-sighted,
but something odd inside him

prevented him from being able
to read it.

He used to compose by placing
a sheet of paper

on the piano to focus his attention,
so the music flowed from a void,
not from an idea.

And he took his wife's letter
that he couldn't decipher

and put it on the piano.

Then the notes started to flow.

And as they flowed,
as they fell,

he began to decipher the words.

They said his wife was leaving him.

And me too, when

I decipher your programme,
I don't understand it fully.

It seems complicated,
I'm afraid I'll mess it up,

I'm afraid I'll find
things hidden

that flow out without my noticing.

Like in a storm when there's a fog

and suddenly the sun pierces through
and truth appears.

I'm afraid...

I'll find something's
going to happen there

which I can't see yet,

something that suddenly

will seem as potent as a song
suddenly not ours anymore,
but everyone's to share,
just as Laura's song
has become ours... now.

Can you hear my footsteps?

That summer, a store
hired dancers from Kyoto,

there in the big island,
the true Japan.

Where, in ,
they'd sent

thousands of children for safety.

No one asked their parents,
for centuries no one
asked anything to the Okinawans.

The children were put on a ship
and the ship sank.

dead. Even before
the battle started,

Okinawa had its dead,
only they didn't know.

Survivors were told to send cards
saying everything was fine,
everyone had landed safely.

Ten years later, Oshima
filmed the parents

gathered where the ship sank,
to console the souls,

as the Japanese saying goes,
of their drowned children.

Seen from the sky, Okinawa's main island
looks like a beast.

Not a green crocodile
like Cuba,

rather a crouched beast,
ready to jump, to unfurl
into who knows what form:
a lizard, a dragon?

As if all History's fierceness,
was in that island,

where people are so peaceable
they infuriate History

for having something
to do with them.

It's like Julius Caesar
moving to Bora Bora.

Or Napoleon in the South Pole.

St Helena was no fun anyway.

Strange to think that
the first ever mention of Okinawa
was on account of him.

An English Captain came to him
after going around the Pacific,
and described a strange little island,
wherein "the natives had no weapons".

"No cannons?", says the Emperor,
somewhat disgusted.

"No cannons, no pistols,

no muskets,
no weapons at all."

"How do they wage war?"

"They don't.
They're not interested."

Napoleon, outraged,
concluded that people

who don't love war
are most "despicable".

So thought the island,
the big dragon
hidden in the island,
ready to pounce like a cat,
like a tiger
waiting for the proper time.

Travellers enraged him,
travellers of all times,
with tales of Okinawan's gentleness.

Gentleness! Is history written
with gentleness?

Do you honour gentleness
when you're a dragon?

So Okinawans hated violence?

They had it coming.

A peaceful isle
out of the world,
out of History, would become the stage
of the bloodiest battle of all time.
A happy, life-loving woman
was chosen to encounter death.

I recognise myself
in that little island,

because my suffering,

my most unique suffering,

my most intimate suffering
is also the most banal,

the easiest to name,

So...

It's irrelevant to give it a name
that sounds like a song,

like a movie,

"Okinawa mon amour..."

The Americans landed
in the Kerama islands.

They bombed Naha from there.

Look, we had a swim
over there yesterday.

I'm sure you've read
about it in the papers,

mass suicide in the Kerama islands...

I read page after page on Okinawa

and I feel like crying.

The only place in the world,
the Nazi camps aside, where people

continued to die after the battle.

The islanders weren't true Japanese,

but were Japanese enough to die.

"No one falls into enemy hands alive,
it is shameful".

We were imbued with army orders
stating that,

if necessary, meaning
when encountering the enemy,

the first grenade was for the enemy

and the second we had to use
for suicide.

Two months later, one of the most famous
images of that battle

showed a little girl
waving a white flag

at the head of a line
of civilians and soldiers.

Okinawa would remember that symbol:

A child survivor of forced suicide

put out to protect an Army in ruins.

See that?

You'll be on American TV.

And because we were convinced
this was what war was,

that everyone was
doing this to everyone,

because they must not shame,
a superior race,

a model for humanity,
and because they were nice,

and because they were helpful

and wanted to do what
was expected of them,

and wanted to prove
Napoleon wrong,

they killed themselves...
in their thousands, whole families.

With a grenade, if the Army
has supplied grenades,

with sticks if they had no grenades

or by jumping off cliffs,

like the women of Saipan
had done.

I'd seen these images before.

In slow-motion you can see
this woman turn back,

and spot the camera.

Do we know she would have jumped
if at the last minute

she hadn't known she was watched?

I remember the man in Paris,
in
attempting a mad leap
with a Batman-like parachute

from the Eiffel Tower.

It's so obvious,

at least it is to me,

that at the last minute,

he knows the contraption
won't work,

he knows he'll die,

but the camera is there.

He can't chicken out,

so he jumps and dies.

The woman in Saipan saw the lens
and knew

that foreign devils
would show the world

she hadn't had the guts to jump.

So she jumps. The cameraman
aimed at her

like a hunter
through his sights,

and he shot her like a hunter.

This is a little book entitled
"The tragedy of Okinawa".

The print is odd,
with characters spaced

like in a primer.

It's very thin,
the lines are doublespaced.

It's like it intends
to teach how to read,

and how not to read.

No book can explain

how a years old boy
kills his mother

because an invisible camera
spies on him,

and he cannot disobey.

The boy's name was Kinjo,

he lived in Tokashiki Island,

where you used to go whale-watching.

What could he tell us now, Kinjo?

What could we say to him?

Know what?

When I began to choke,
literally choke,

among this horror
where everyone is a persecutor,

I put a flag in the program

that'll prompt a quote.

Too bad for those who don't get it.

You know it.
It was in the Keepsake

where I saved sentences for tough times.

Thinking ahead...

It's Rabbi Huna's admonition.

Maybe most people won't understand.

It's the one that goes:

"God always sides with the persecuted.

If a just man persecutes a just man,

God sides with the persecuted;

if a bad man persecutes
a just man,

God sides with the persecuted;

if a bad man persecutes a bad man,

God sides with the persecuted;

and even if a just man persecutes a bad man,

God sides with the persecuted".

These bullfights, like in Mycenae...

In Spain when there's a bullfight
it's to challenge death,
you stare at the sun,
stare at death in the face, like
in the fascist anthem "Cara al sol".

In Okinawa, it's the opposite:

They say that before death
is a time for playing,
not a time for killing.

- It's a brave animal.
- But it's not in shape.

- Can it do better?
- It's really brave.

- It has no luck.
- It's a brave beast.

If some future ethnologist
gets to see these images,

he'll ponder the funeral rites
of the strange tribes
of the late 20th Century.

I'll be pleased to give details.

Yes, it was customary for such tribes
to address a familiar
and protective spirit
known as a computer
to some of them

and as an electronic calculator
to others.

They'd consult on everything,
it kept their memory.
In fact, they no longer had a memory,

it was their memory.

It was accompanied
by a whole ritual.

The ethnologist from the future
doesn't know what he's missing,

by not following me in the morning,
between switching the computer on

and coming later to work on it.

He could send a spy camera,

and see me having breakfast
with two cups,

hanging out two towels,

placing two toothbrushes
in a glass..

Pardon me, dear ethnologist,
this is not really for you.

It's for Gloria,
when she comes to clean for me,

and for passing friends.

It re-assures them.

They think "Laura has got someone
in her life. She plays the mystery girl,

but I know the tell-tale signs".

If they suspected my encounters with you,

they'd be aghast.

In The Girl with the Golden Eyes,
Marsay refers to screen-women,

women you display
to hide the one that matters.

I've got a screen-man,
with my cups

and my towels
and my toothbrushes.

Only he's the hidden one
and you're invisible.

You can't make a better
mÈnage à trois.

Well. Back to the grind.

The Knowledge-standard...

When you saw the knowledge
available on the net,

you could smile.

But that was exactly their game:

have information ever further
and faster.

In past times, to lend
weight to money,

they sought a dense, rare material

to act as a pledge
inside coffers.

They chose gold.

Money became
invisible and volatile,

so the new power needed a pledge

that was invisible and volatile too.

They found Knowledge.

Atoms of knowledge
came through our screen,

It was into Knowledge's black holes...

that fell this century's dreams
of power. This unending century.

The screen tore into black shapes
reminiscent of other forms,
wherein the century
had made the blueprints
for its own suicide,
engraving images in our minds.
Images of ruins:
The ruins of Coventry and
Berlin, of Dresden and Stalingrad.
The ruins of Okinawa.
Yesterday I set the puzzle
as a screensaver.
Very appropriate.
I have the impression that
you left me in a huge puzzle,
with the discouraging thought that,
in the end,
there'd be no image.
Pretty modern.
A puzzle about itself.
Our grandmothers' puzzles were
the Mona Lisa,
the Night Watch.
I imagine a perfect gift
for the century's end,
that might be
an Yves Klein puzzle.
Strategy games are made
to win back lost battles. No?
Did you really think a player would
just repeat history

the whole night long

and learn he could only play
his part one way?

I tried the Marienbad game.

After a few moves the computer said:

"I won already,

but we may go on if you like".

Death could say that.

The south of Okinawa
is an anthill

with thousand of caves and tunnels

fortified by High Command.

The frontline is at Shuri,

where Ushijima's headquarters were.

With him, General Cho,
a hardline nationalist,

involved in the coup d'etat
in Manchuria in ,

the Sino-Japanese prelude

to World War Two.

There is also Colonel Yahara,
a man as reflective

as Chao is loud.
He too plays by the book.

Reading the archives, you find proof
the three of them know:

their mission's suicidal.

The battle cannot be won.

Yet there were bombastic bulletins

and tracts proclaiming victory.

Doubters received drastic punishment.

In April and May,

Cho launched mad counter-attacks.

Since the battle is lost,

samurai spirit is what counts.

Japanese soldiers practising
bayonet drill

on live prisoners,

or choking babies in caves

so the enemy don't hear them,

doesn't sound so samurai-like.

But committing suicide with grenades

in the subterranean Navy HQ
is truly in the grand tradition.

But Maginot Lines never hold.

Outside, the US attack progresses.

Another famous photo shows
the Tomori lion

surrounded by infantry men.

I wonder what the first GI thought

when he saw that critter.

The lion still guards
its village,

since its mission was to protect it.

Visitors never fail

to leave coins in its mouth,

for good luck.

They chuck coins in the tunnels too.

In a bunker like this,
Yahara writes in his diary

that before the final rout,

he took the time
to destroy all his papers

and rearrange the furniture
"to leave a good impression".

I found one Kinjo
in one of your listings,

I was obsessed by that boy
who had killed his family
to obey a tacit order
engraved on his child's mind.

"No one falls into
enemy hands alive".

The syllables of his name sum it up.

I was disappointed.

That Kinjo is in Yahara's book,
one of the many boys of Okinawa

drafted under the engaging motto:
"By blood and by iron".

Not even soldiers,

they're just trying to help out,
obeying orders.

Yahara describes going by night

to get sugar-cane, underfire,
for survival.

Then he ran home and
hid under the bed, like a puppy.

Yahara thinks of his own son
and he starts to have doubts
about the War.

But the other Kinjo,
will I ever get to understand him?

I only know it happened
in the Kerama islands,

where we went on a day
so glorious.

A massacre seemed unimaginable.

The view over the archipelago.

"The fractal islands on Klein blue",
you said,

simple as ever.

Kannon,
Goddess of Mercy's temple,

her statue behind glass

that made her appear

in her place,
in the sky.

There was also
a magical Okinawa weaver.

Unavoidably, one calls
on all those myths

the knotted threads of man:

the Parcae, the Norns,

all the figures devised by men to say

life's thread unravels
and breaks.

Do they spin Kinjo's life still?

What would Kinjo think before
fractal islands and Klein blue?

Before the Goddess of Mercy?

A few visits to Heiwa Dori,
Naha's indoors market,

and you become aware:
it is run by women.

All are connected with the War.
They are widows and orphans.

Sometimes survivors.

Most little girls of that age
experienced mobilization, propaganda,
a feeling that they too must fight.

The nurses at Himeyuri-no-to
became a symbol.

An obligatory tourist pilgrimage
in Okinawa.

It starts with a cheerful song,
which was their favourite.

Then the photo sessions.

And faces peering into a hole
that looks like a simple hole
in the ground.

This is the entrance
to the Himeyuri cave,
site of the 1st surgical unit,
where girls died suffocated
during the final attack,

when the Army disbanded
the Nursing Corps

and left them to their fate,
with orders not to surrender.

In the local museum,

there's a diorama of the cave
with sound and light effects.

Next comes a "requiem" room

with portraits of the pupils
and teachers of the Himeyuri College,

and eye-witness accounts.

As could be expected,

the choice of site was controversial.

Was too much
made of girls

from the Okinawa elite

when others were forgotten?

As if there were privileged martyrs.

This adds more sadness, this competition
of memory.

My dead are deader than your dead.

We had seen that too.

The Game had kept only the faces.

That was enough.

But to understand what happened,

one must climb down into the caves
with rope and a torch,

then turn out the light

and try to imagine

a teenage girl in the dark,

with rotten corpses and
amputation without anaesthetic.

The sound of maggots in live flesh.

and other sounds,
the shrieks of dying men,

the hungry begging

for amputated limbs
to be cooked.

Try to imagine that.

And also the wait for a resolution.

Most likely, liquidation
with flame-throwers.

Soon, Heiwa Dori will get normal traders

like any other.

Until then, the market guards
Okinawa's memory.

Its ladies are grave-keepers.

I wish I could bring good news.

The Network is not
what it was.

You said there is something
irretrievably vulgar about success.

OWL must be a success.

You wonder how some people
plug in.

A few days ago a man
in an Oberon mask asked me

if I was his baby donkey.

I felt a whiff of nostalgia.

I remembered the time when

you were all just weirdos
in Washington DC,

and thought that secrecy

in this overbugged world meant
entering the most open network,

with passwords to discourage morons.

But there's no discouraging morons.

You were part Robin Hood,
part secret society,

You were on raids for information,

like leaving Sherwood for supplies.

Then you retreated back
to your impenetrable lair.

I have to go out too,

to gather knowledge
about Okinawa,

and I feel like a hunted spy,
I'm afraid they're after me.

And I wonder if it isn't true.

Under those pussy-hound masks,

I discern true enemies,

people who want to know too much
or who already know too much.

"Okinawa?

Rings a bell. Wasn't there
a strategy game about that?

Written by some peculiar guy?

Remind me his name..."

Sure I'll give your name!

Now, I don't mention Okinawa.

I sidestep: the end of
the Pacific campaign,

Ernie Pyle's death,

as if Okinawa was a lethal word,

an "open, Sesame". Only I don't know
waht it would open.

How come he knew about the Game?

To whom did you talk?

How stiffing suddenly

these unasked questions.

I get time-ache like headaches.

Here. It spins you inside.

You want to excise it, to get out,

and leave your head to its aches,

you want to go for a stroll.

Time should take care of itself,

leave me to here and now,
talking to cats,

feeling early spring sun
on my skin.

No way. Time drills into me.

I suffer electric shocks,

time neuralgia,

the image of a silent house,

a garden in snow,
a rainy day,

fondling a horse over a gate.

It is in me but not mine,
a migraine of time,

where time is just
pointless pain,

without sentiment or nostalgia,
the sting of time,

the sting of an invisible insect

you can do nothing about.

I was in Vézelay for two days.

I realised I'd forgotten the clue

which distinguishes genuine capitals
from restored ones.

Or vice-versa.

I had the question, but
the answer was a blank.

Could an angel scan my memory

and find the clue

which distinguishes
remembrance from oblivion?

An angel, like in the Jewish legend

you used to love so much:

One second before birth,

we know all about everything.
Plato used to say the same.

But, one second later,
an angel gives us a pat

and erases our memory, so man has

the honor of rediscovery,

if he's up to it.

Does another angel come later

when, willy-nilly, we've gathered
our scraps of memory,

like refugees, and erase
the lot pat by pat?

If I forgot the clue
to the capitals,

so vivid last time
I was there,

what clues to you will I lose,
one by one?

The Gershwin song
we loved,

sung by Sarah Vaughan...

No, no they can't take that away
from me...

The way you this,
the way you that...

They can't take that away.

But, yes, angels can.

They can take everything
one day.

Here's a piece Florence wrote.

it's in her book of short stories,

To Be Read in an Elevator...

Cocoloco.

It was on an endless tour
in South America

that she bought Cocoloco,
the prettiest of parrots.

Everyday, to exorcise
awful shows,

shabby theaters,
dangerous and dirty hotels,

she devised an act with Cocoloco,

which exhaustion and fever
helped her consider brilliant.

Perhaps it was, after all.

She gathered up scraps
of news from a Europe

she loathed

and now regarded as Paradise Lost.

She conceived comic, poetic scenes,
with political satire...

Cocoloco was very good as Yeltsin...

A zaniness reproduced before
startled Indians,

startled but friendly.

Each night took her closer to home.

Closer, in her delirium,

to a triumphal return, with her
and Cocoloco

as kings of TV.

Too exhausted to take notes,

she rehearsed sketches in her head,
with brilliant repartee...

Yes, that was a blank,

but it would come back,
she knew.

And Cocoloco on her hand
would look so funny in close-up.

Then Cocoloco died of parrott-disease,
and, back in France,
she realised she'd forgotten it all.

You see, Cocoloco?

We'd have been a great act.

You would have spoken
just after me.

You would have said things.

You would have said things.

Things as fun as now.

Things as fun as now.

– Pretty Cocoloco.
– Pretty Cocoloco.

We would have been a hit.

We would have been a hit....

You and me in America.

You and me in America.

– You're so sweet, Cocoloco.
– You're so sweet, Cocoloco.

Do you forget stuff too?

Do you ever forget things?

– Do you ever...
– Does the little angel come to you?

Does the little angel...?

- And, with a pat, erase...
- And, with a pat, erase...
- the memory of things?
- the memory of things?

Do you too hover...

between remembrance and oblivion?

Between remembrance and oblivion...
Cocoloco, say something!

Cocoloco.

Cocoloco.

Have you forgotten everything too?
Cocoloco!

You too refuse to speak,
Cocoloco?

The angel has erased the lot.

You too.

Cocoloco!

Cocoloco.

All you remember is your name.

This film hasn't been seen in years.

Demoralising, the army censors said.

More moralising was John Wayne

in The Sands of Iwo Jima,
that got shown in wartime

with unexpected results.

The Star turned up in cowboy garb
at a naval hospital,

and got booed!

An episode in a war of images
that soon coincided with real war.

It started here,
at Iwo Jima,

with that famous scene.

Or with another scene, in Borneo.

Each scene has its tale.

I know where Gustave is from.

You told me his name was Gustave.

I'd seen him a hundred times.

Nobody had ever filmed
a man burning alive so close,

a lulu for war documentaries.

The unknown soldier, in full kit,
holding his own flame.

He was carted around battlefields,

like a war-artist on tour
with a unique act.

Gustave in the Philippines,
Gustave in Okinawa.

I even saw him in a Vietnam movie,

still burning years later.

i viewed so much newsreel
I knew Gustave at birth.

Filmed in Borneo,
by Australians.

The interesting thing is that,
at the end of the original shot,

you can tell he doesn't die.

He gets up again.

You feel he'll get over it
like the napalm girl in Saigon.
That ending has always been cut
in all documentaries.

A born symbol doesn't get out
of it so easily!

He testifies against war,
you cannot weaken his testimony
for the sake of a few frames.
Truth? What is truth?

The truth is, most didn't get up.

So what's so special about this one?

The ethics of imagery?
Is napalm ethical?

Are you in favour of napalm?
Whose side are you on, comrade?

Private Ira Hayes knew his side.

He was a US Marine,
brave and disciplined.

He was told to pose, with five pals,
to re-stage the picture. He didn't waver.
It was for the cause.

Those who had put up the flag
in combat, were gone.
They took six others.

It wasn't much,
just a set-up,
there'd be more like it,

the original was uninspiring anyway.

Hayes never got over it.

He wasn't to blame,

he had fought with the best,

but he'd been asked to lie.

Simple soul,

he couldn't live with that lie.

He couldn't tell the truth,

the Corps honor was at stake,
so he took to drink,

and died in poverty.

The picture has become an icon.

It was used in Sarajevo
in ,

but not to hail the US Marines.

The Army would gladly have done
a replay in Okinawa,

but Marine Corps
Public Relations

was unbeatable.

and Okinawa wasn't that simple.

Mabuni Museum shows war as chaotic

and hard to represent,
and unrepresentable.

But – as in the books and films –

the smell of battle is missing.

Till we get smellies, like talkies,

war films don't exist. Just as well,

I swear there'd be no audience.

I remember the fear

and I have really experienced the feeling

of being a part of Japan at war.

That is why I particularly feel,

since my job is film-making,

that Japanese war films are rubbish.

They deal only with themselves,

how they suffered from the war,
how brave and painful it was,

They never show the other side.

Once again, Oshima
pointed the way.

Laura went on to study

how each side depicted the enemy.

It was none too pleasant.

We were taught that Westerners

were demons. We were told
if US troops captured us

they'd cut off our noses and ears,
cut off our fingers.

They would drive tanks over our bodies,

and rape our women.

We would suffer horribly, then die.

We were so imbued with all this

that it seemed better

to suppress our loved ones,

than leave them to the enemy,
For them, it would be a consolation
to die by the hand of a loved one.

Filled with this thought,
we lamented and, lamenting,
interrupted our mother's life.

That's where I recognised him: Kinjo.

The boy from the Keramas.

A village elder, a leader,
was snapping off a tree-branch.

I watched him,
intrigued.

Then, on his very hand,
the stick became a weapon.

As if having a seizure,

he began to beat the life out
of his wife and children,

whom he loved,
using just this piece of wood.

It was terribly shocking,

but telepathically
all of us thought

this was the thing to do

and others began to kill
the people they loved most.

They began with children,
with the weak and the old,

with those who lacked the strength
to take their own lives.

So husbands killed wives,
parents killed children,
brothers killed sisters.

They killed them because
they loved them.

Such was the tragedy
of those mass suicides.

It was a real butchery,
and the waters of the river

where they threw the bodies
indiscriminately

became rivers of blood.

As for my own family,

my brother, who was
two years my senior,

and I raised our hand
for the first time

against the mother who had borne us.

At my brother

could not help moaning.
He suffered so much.

My father went off to die.

We also killed our younger
brother and sister.

Afterwards, he sought
a glorious death in war

crossing enemy lines:

He was captured alongside soldiers
who had called capture dishonorable.

Mass suicides accompanied
the advance of US troops.
Together with Japanese executions
and casualties of war,
some . . . civilians died in Okinawa,
a third of the population.
No other group suffered so,
except in the Nazi camps.
Europeans, surviving this,
might have turned to Buddhism.
Kinjo found Christianity.
He became a minister.
He offers his memory
to help others decipher theirs.
He wants Japan to acknowledge
its war crimes,
and mass suicides taught
in school books,
not ignored, or called madness.
He wants what nations and men
are least capable of:
that memory be faced,
and forgiveness asked.
If you look in the Bible,
you'll see confessing your mistakes
and expressing repentance,
cleanses people of their past.

But Japanese mentality,
the way of thought,

considers that errors
committed in the past

remain errors forever.
They cannot be erased.

I decided that
my mission must be

to proclaim the value of human life

to counter the notion,

the ideology of the past,

that held life in such contempt,

for such was the lie they taught.

That was the motivation

for my becoming a missionary,
a Christian minister.

After the retreat from Shuri,
General Buckner

sent Ushijima,
in his Southern bastion,

an offer of honorable surrender.

The Japanese general reacted
with an outburst of laughter.

Was it laughter,
borne on the wind,

that prompted a frontline gunner?

Unknowningly, he aimed
at Buckner,

who was examining the ground,
and Simon Bolivar Buckner,

only US general

to die in combat,
failed to convince his enemies,
and died a few days before them.

It is said that Ushijima prayed
for Buchner when he died.

Then he and Cho
arranged the ending,
the only end they could conceive.

He doesn't know how to harakiri.
You don't say.

Seppuku is not,
in the European sense,
suicide, but the act
of giving oneself death.

The act of living through harshest pain
at the end.

That's what seppuku is.

So to perform seppuku,
you must be in good health,
very well-balanced,
with enough energy
to make a gift of death.

Pulling a trigger is not enough,
nor is swallowing pills,
nor stepping out into the void.

You must touch yourself
to the end,
with living energy.

What of the piety
that surrounds

the tombs at Mabuni Hill?

Hard to believe these quiet people,
these quiet girls
born thirty years later,
are nostalgic for imperial times.
Does sacrifice erase everything?
When you say "it happened here",
something deep inside us
resurfaces.

That is why many people come
spontaneously, join hands and pray.

Myself, knowing or learning
the nature of this place,

I'd offer incense and pray.

That's all I need to know.

One wonders what a Japanese general
has in mind when he offers
his life to the Emperor.

Thanks to Yahara,
we know.

The last thing Cho
tells him is:

"Remember the French film
we saw
in Saigon, in ' ?"

It was Waves of the Danube,
with extras posing as gypsies.

And the music Cho heard
while disembowelling himself,
watching the horizon for the last time,

was Black Eyes.

Am I going mad?

I used to see you
everywhere,

I recognised you from afar,

I went back to the places we loved,

the Jardin des Plantes,

the little farm
at the Bois de Boulogne,

the shore beneath the Golden Gate

where Kim Novak feigns suicide
in Vertigo...

I'd see a man from behind,
looking at parrots,

or sitting among goats,
or leaning against a rail,

and it would be you.

Then I'd come closer,
he'd turn round, be someone else.

I'd wonder how anyone

could replace you so fast.

In my moment of distraction,
not more than a split second...

Now it's the same in the Network.

Someone calls, it's you,

I know by tell-tale signs,

a special word only we would use.

Then I'd question him,
and he'd shy away,

not like you anymore.
Then another sign.

Is this a game?

Is it you teasing me?

One day, one woman
knows too much,

too much about you, about me,
about the Game, about everything.

We are plugged into the masks gallery.

I ask her to show me hers
and on the screen I see this.

The end of the battle is written
in the deep, by Okinawa,

where Oshima,
surveyor of memories,

filmed underwater graveyards.

Okinawa was
the Japs' sute-ishi,

their sacrificial pawn.

If the price was high enough,
the US

would shrink from invading

Japan's main island

and peace could be made.

The reality was,
it made the case

for the Atom Bomb.

Without Okinawa's resistance,
Hiroshima would not have been,

and the century would've been different.

Which means that in all respects,
our lives were fashioned by events
that took place in that little island,
between the moment
when Kinjo killed his family,
and general Ushijima's
self-death.

Now Laura saw
the Game couldn't change history.
It would repeat it, in a loop,
with respectably futile obstinacy.
Storing the past so as not to revive it
was sheer 19th Century.

She was detached now,
as if she'd come to a limit;

The Game was not hers anymore,
nor was History.

I knew she spoke
with Masks at night.

I asked what she wanted,
she responded:

Level Five, of course,
in a tone that made you think

she was cured, as if for her
the War was over.

Naturally, I was wrong.

Last night: fun dialog
with a mask.

A Harfang owl mask,
so I listened.

Having some knowledge about Harfang,
in our days,
shows some culture.

Disappointing, as usual.

When he went for a date

I really got him:

"Think of all the time we've saved
in just five minutes:

Six months of passion,
two years of jealousy,

four years' infidelity,
eight of misunderstandings,

reconciliation one spring,

one summer of fighting,
one autumn of breaking up,

one winter of despair,
just work it out.

Bye and thanks
for the time saved".

He found nothing to say.

And you?
Shall I thank you?

The list I gave him, so as to shine,
did time have it in store for us?

I see me, in ten years,
without you,

reading in the paper you've died,

a feeling of something already seen,
already lost,

the faraway echo of something
I don't know,

your absence now
which I wouldn't have known,

but would have felt within me,

as if my programmer foresaw it all,

what happened, what
might have happened.

Like when you search for a word

that escapes you.

"I had it on the tip of my tongue".

I'd have your death
on the tip of my memory,

I'd have thought:

"There was a time when..."

But then there was another time,
the time of my list,

from jealousy to deceit,

and that time would mute our time,

mute the echo of our life.

Everything would have been
as though through a wall,

barely audible...

Like when rescuers search
through a wall of rubble,

they always come too late.

And you?
What would you have kept?

One day my image would
begin to blur,

you'd realise the scraps
of words,

scraps of life
filling your memory,

were shifting out of focus.

Must I thank you too?

Thank you for this gift?

A life in which
there wasn't enough time

for something mediocre to slip in,
neither lies nor cruelty.

So swift that the ordinary gremlins,
that sneak into everyday life,
haven't had the chance to get to us.

They met a shut door:

"Closed for a death".

So annoying for them.

Nothing for them in the will.

A life, a body, untouched,
on which I never saw
the first signs

of lovelessness,

abandon

or relinquishment.

A real fairy-tale, one of them
falls asleep

and never changes.

There's no greater gift.

Shall I thank you?

I thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

I never saw Laura again.

The workshop seemed unchanged,
the machines were on,
as if she had just
stepped out.

Our loyal screensaver cat
kept watch.

and the OWL mail page
was open.

Without thinking, I typed in her name.

He didn't know that either.