

funghi_zine

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Arkadiusz Półtorak, Agata Ingarden

[the zine is to mushroom every autumn from now on; the artist and curator are committed to enter more fruitful conversations with each other as well as other people in order to keep the funghi growing]

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WAITING FOR ORDINARY RAIN

Arkadiusz Półtorak

It is raining—thoughts start to mushroom.

In the beginning of his essay *Politics of Encounter*, Louis Althusser distinguishes between two kinds of rain: the providential and anti-providential one. He borrows this taxonomy from Malebranche—but does it only to introduce yet another type of rainfall, one that eludes the forecasting based on providence-related criteria. He speaks, namely, of the ordinary rain.

One could easily object to this account of Althusser's writing and clarify that the philosopher does not speak of “real” rain at all; that rain appears in his text as a figure expressing the world's emergence—a poetic nod to the ancient philosophers of nature, who believed that atoms fall from the sky and engender reality through constant clashes. According to this account, Althusser quotes Malebranche's classification of rains jokingly, only in order to indicate that he himself does not aim to write about H₂O. Though let us assume for a while that the philosopher's game is more sophisticated than this—or, at least, that the joke is very elaborate. If it were otherwise, why would the opening sentence (“First of all, this is a book about an ordinary rain”) sound so emphatic? Why would it have to be the opening sentence at all?

So, let us posit that one can discern three kinds of rain (three distinct meanings that we can assign to a rainfall), and that the properties of the ontogenetic

“rain of atoms” match only one particular interpretation of moist weather. Like any good metaphor, Althusser's “rain of atoms” is more precise than a mere comparison. After all, it does hark back to the Roman poet Lucretius' serious hypothesis about composition of physical reality. It might also hint at the immediate context of Louis Althusser's late writings, to which I shall pay more attention in a short while.

Now, once again, let us assume that there is a distinction according to which only one sort of rainfall occurs beyond providence and god's vengeance. It is, indeed, a rain beyond good and bad. There is nothing extraordinary about this rain—just like there is nothing extraordinary about mere existence of real things. The rain falls or does not fall; events occur or they don't.

When an attentive interpreter of Malebranche mentions the Catholic philosopher's thoughts on providential and anti-providential outpours only to finish writing about the ordinary rain, what does it tell about this person (so, in our case, about Althusser)? Are they defying the providence in general, implying that no rain ever is sent by supernatural forces and hence “extraordinary” (for a rain is a rain is a rain, while the world is the world is the world), or maybe—having acknowledged the wisdom of Malebranche, Noah and Job—they insist that there is something quite peculiar about this phenomenon? Can it be that this “third”, ordinary rain is, by way of paradox, a rarity—something really “extra”? It seems worthwhile to look into sources. As concerned with the providential and anti-providential as he was,

Malebranche did, in fact, acknowledge the possibility of an ordinary rain. In *A Treatise on Nature and Grace*, he mentioned precisely that such rainfalls occur on an irregular basis.

Althusser's essay about ordinary rain—written in mid-1980s—is an exemplar of a philosophy of immanence and multiplicity. Akin to writings of Gilles Deleuze or Felix Guattari, it is a praise of imagination and humans' productive forces, whose traces are to be found not only in the so-called “sector of production” but also in arts or philosophy itself. Following a rather extravagant group of predecessors (Heidegger, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Marx), Althusser affirms the human capacity of “world-building” and coming at ease with radical contingency after god's death in modern philosophy. He takes the discussed lineage of European philosophy to be its “materialist undercurrent”—and although he is following an admittedly irregular trajectory, he remains convinced of its significance.

Louis Althusser wrote his text about the ordinary rain while hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic, “living through that nameless time that does not pass”. Reaching for his pen, he tried to connect to the world behind the clinic's closed doors. Although the time he spent in the asylum might have seemed uneventful, the political reality around the philosopher was replete with fruitful events. One could call these occurrences providential—in 1981 the Left won all possible elections in France, and the new government took legal measures to protect employees' rights. Perhaps it was one of these times when “ordinary people” (that is, people other than the ruling class)

expect the ordinary rain; one of the rare times when events “might or might not happen”—but one can count that they actually should. Suffice it to have patience. Althusser thought about it this way, referring to gradual advancement of social policies in France: “one has ‘to wait until sugar dissolves’: everything takes time to mature, and nothing is worse than premature development that opens door to all sorts of misadventures”. What has been planted, shall grow. A seed does not need much providence to crack open and free sprouts. Labor once done shall bring fruit—this is the most ordinary thought around 1985.

Althusser's late writings would not gain a high currency until mid-1990s; by the time the philosopher has already passed away and some have forgot how he made it to an asylum—or why his earlier thought had already met with harsh criticism. The thought of “ordinary rain” gained its prominence in the wake of “third way” practice—and, once a theory of doing, it was turned into “practical theory” by representatives of “alternative movements” such as alter-globalism. People relied on the comfort of planting seeds and calm waiting until the crops appear. Think of Bill Clinton's America. Or the France of Nicholas Bourriaud, the famous curator who wrote *Relational Aesthetics*—an essay filled with references to Althusser's latest writings—in the 1990s.

As said by another couple of prominent curators, Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajva, for many art people the nineties were a decade of “saying yes”. Together with alter-movements, the artists and curators of the 1989 generation took up the task of building their social realities “otherwise”—but not

necessarily in stark opposition to the political and economic hegemony. The idea that there is enough space and resources for everyone and that the strategy of small steps and patience pays off more than revolutionary thinking seemed to reign supreme for better and worse. We might deem Esche and Hlavajova's essay *The Making of ‘Once is Nothing’* yet another account of some “ordinary time” in history—although, contrary to Althusser's, it is one written *ex post* instead of within the discussed moment.

Just say yes ... Isn't this rubric, the motto of our post-1989 age? The 1990s generation grew up to say ‘yes’, or at least ‘yes, but ...’ because it seemed there was no alternative. [...] It just seemed easier to agree and try to make the system work in the best way for those with whom it engaged.

The essay by Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova was written on the brink of the economic crisis in 2008: one of dialectical moments that bring to mind the rarity of “ordinary times”. Calling the 1990s a decade of yea-saying, they performed a symptomatic historization of this decade. Dialectical moments are those that bring delayed recognition—but they do not always bring empowerment. Perhaps it is in such moments that one can appreciate the value of “ordinary rain” the most—and yet, understand how little it has to do with providence. Rain might or might not fall. Events might or might not happen. The fruit might or might not be born from the planted seed.

Some would have thought that a dry summer like this of 2018 would not bring forth any fruit or mushroom. Still, spending this time at Gastatelier Leo XIII in Tilburg, we decided to think together with Althusser and submerge ourselves in the nineties in order to understand something about the ordinary rain—and those who keep waiting for it. To understand ourselves better; to understand our *amor fati* as well as the subtle—perhaps too subtle—difference between Althusser's affirmative “there is no world other than this one” and the most nauseating of modernity's mantras, “this is the only possible world”. To understand the historicity of our own experience as we hail from a near-Eastern country—us people born A.D 199X.



SOME THOUGHTS AND IMAGES (NOT?) TO AFFIRM IN 2018

OLIVIER ZAHM: When we started out together, in the 1990s, we were curious about the world. We had a thirst to go abroad that was tied to a desire to follow the world in the flux of its modernity or progress. Today, the world is adrift and torn by regression, violence, and fear.

PHILIPPE PARRENO — One of the first things I did was a demonstration in a school courtyard with children crying, “No more reality!”

OLIVIER ZAHM — It was an emblematic work.

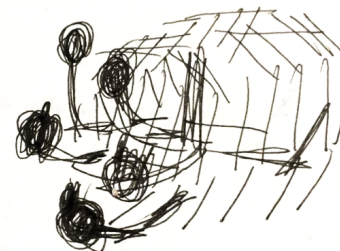
PHILIPPE PARRENO — Yes, and I come back to it all the time. Reality, as we all know, does not exist. There are multiple realities and universes. So, maybe that is the purpose of art: to populate the world with multiple realities through new forms or other kinds of exhibitions. Jean-Luc Vilmouth had a very romantic way of looking at the world, and the animal world. It was a very 19th-century way of looking at things. Today, we're watching the nonhuman world develop before us. The world isn't necessarily human anymore. We're living in a time when we're starting to take an interest in what is not on the order of the human.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Are you nostalgic at all?

PHILIPPE PARRENO — Not at all. Nor am I very optimistic. That's why I'm still attached to the “no

future” ideology of the punk movement, while remaining certain that the future will be interesting.

[from Purple Magazine F/W 2016, issue 26]



WE SAT AT THE DINNER TABLE on the terrace. As the dinner was coming towards its end, mom told us the story about the Snake.

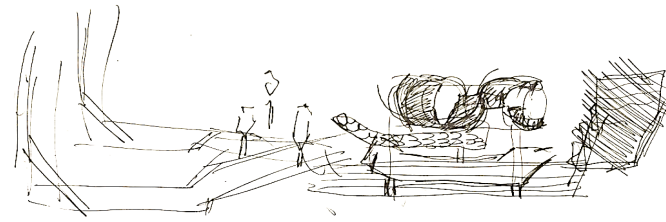
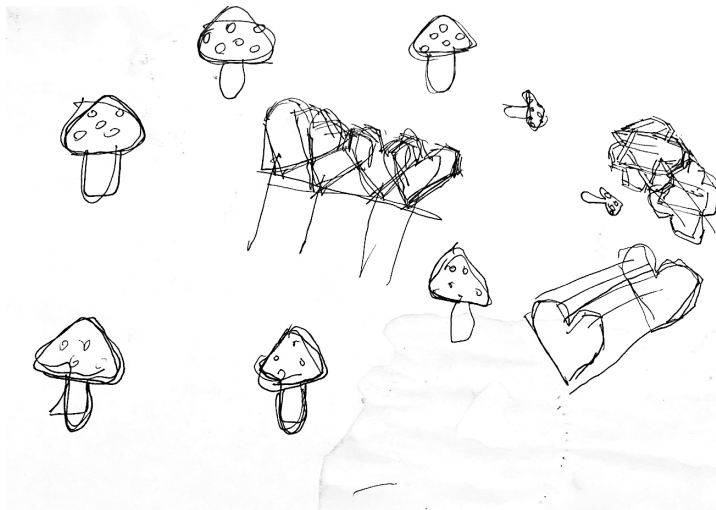
It was a year ago or two that I went out on the terrace in the full sun. And there it was a snake on the stones of the terrace and it came from the garden, that for sure or maybe the mountains. And I knew it was venomous because it had the black stripe on it so I took a broom, you know because the broom was lying there and I came out to clean the terrace. I tried to kill it with the end of the stick but the snake went through the hole, so I lifted it and threw it away in the distance. And there it was the snake you know, so I caught it, I tried to kill it. It was a venomous snake and there are some here, if the cats don't eat them, there are some, and they come out to the sun to rest. It would come to the house so I caught it, and threw it away. And the owners also say that there are venomous snakes here and we have to be careful, so I caught it. It was two years ago or maybe it was the last year but they say that if its venomous you have to kill it but I just threw it away. But the cats normally kill them you know, I feed the cats in the morning.

None of the present guests was a witness to the event. None of them had ever seen a venomous snake in the vicinity. The snake did not exist. Almost everyone knew the story, though, since it had been told multiple times before. Mom used to tell it over and over again, using the very same words and phrases every time. Still, on that day I wasn't sure if I had indeed heard it before or if mom was telling it for the first time. One's perception of time could easily get lost in the story, making the short while last forever. Words were disconnecting from their usual meanings and acquiring new ones.

Bored to death, we decided to go to the beach. On our way back, we stepped on a venomous snake. There it was—petrified and frozen in range of a flashlight.

The Snake came out of the Mother's mouth and installed itself in the House.

[Agata Ingarden, *The House*, excerpt]



One dark night,
my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
I watched for love-cars . Lights turned down,
they lay together, hull to hull,
where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .
My mind's not right.

A car radio bleats,
"Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear
my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
as if my hand were at its throat. . . .
I myself am hell;
nobody's here—

only skunks, that search
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.
They march on their soles up Main Street:
white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire
under the chalk-dry and spar spire
of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top
of our back steps and breathe the rich air—
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the
garbage pail
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
and will not scare.

[Robert Lowell, *Skunk Hour*, excerpt]

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a
peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon
the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

[T. S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, excerpt]