

STRETCHES

A face looks out, beaming intention like sun rays. Still, the need to peel off the skin, check the rear, prod the inside. Is there someone, something, in there? What private goings on are the eyes hiding, those net-curtained windows? A question both philosophical and horrific: does something live beneath the surface? Or is the surface itself, life? Bots crawl our faces, reading from the skin the contents of the fleshy bags we call our bodies. The inside, they say, reveals itself on the façade: in the minute changes of pupils, the contractions of mimetic muscles, the colouring of lips. There is no inside anymore. But if the face looks out from nowhere, there would also be nothing to read.

I, do, feel, there's something going on behind the façade. Can't you hear it? Is it completely silent within you? (Trying to estimate the chances of a 'yes' here, and the amount of surprise my pupils would reveal.) In my left hamstring there's a sound that has been humming for some time now. Heartbeat is a word that suggests noise while it is quiet on that front, to be honest. The heart is a stranger in the corner of the room, taking sips from his drink. Sips like the systole and diastole, with tiny heart attacks to bridge them. It could be so easy: just rip it out, the heart. There you have it, the something beneath the surface, brought up from the deeps. But hell no, see, the heart is just another impenetrable façade, a stone. Its arterial patterns reveal nothing.

A mantra: 'There is no such thing as individualism.' 'I' is done for. What goes on inside is a symbiotic feast, a striving together. 'I' are many. Abolish the 'I' then, or redefine it, as the self has been. The self, they say, is a pattern; carved out on the inside as once a pattern was carved out on the inside of the earth's crust (once). A pattern carved out in time, like geological patterns are. A roadmap laid out within the body, which dissolves and forms again, as you shift between sleeping and waking. A cycle that beats just like the heart, but slower, and suffering its own series of tiny attacks. 'Why, when we begin thinking again, is it not another personality than the previous one that is incarnated in us?'

Wisława Szymborska writes: 'the onion, now that's something else / its innards don't exist / nothing but pure onionhood / fills this devout onionist / oniony on the inside / onionesque it appears'.* No-one'd dare ask about the inside of the onion. It is a multiplicity of insides (or outsides). Nonetheless, the onion is thick and round. So is there really a difference between an onion and a stone? The stone says: 'My whole surface is turned toward you, / all my insides turned away.' Go away, it urges, I don't have a door. And whatever you might want to read off of me, 'I don't have the muscles to laugh'.**

The octopus, thick and round, carries its thickness and roundness on the side. Its skin is a sentient skin, a façade that is not to be read but reads. It stretches out its tentacles, stretches out its being into its tentacles, like the self stretches out itself into legs, arms and heart, at the same time stretching in the beings that exist inside itself.

The octopus has been brought up from the deeps. So the deep exists after all.

* Translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh

Acknowledgments: Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, Jean-Luc Nancy, Marcel Proust, Marjan Slob, Wisława Szymborska