

# Stenography of the Itinerary

*Field notes from the summer 2017 field work in Siberia*

## **Stenography of the itinerary. 1**

Suddenly (and I have to fly tomorrow) I am not excited to go to “the field,” which is also “home.” The distance is never a stable measure. The distance grows. With time, it deepens. I am clinging to things: a kerchief that I have not been wearing for months, I definitely need to take it with me. All the colorful pens. All these books I have not finished. The pages of handwriting I did not have time to type; I am spending the last day before the departure trying to determine what I might be missing the next day. A futile wonder. I will miss nothing in particular and everything at once, but I probably will also be too occupied with what immediately arises in my sight to ponder over anything that I have left.

My phone is suddenly broken, of all things—my phone, which prosthetic qualities are never as evident as they are now, when it is not “here,” out of order. I suspect that I inhabit the screen: *Evernote*, messengers, colorful icons of familiar apps—icons and anchors of familiarity itself. To go without the phone, a false body member, is to be derived of the instrument, of *techne*, of the possibility of art, which is only available through technology. To have a new phone on the eve of flying from one country to another is more like changing planets. Now I will have to spend at least two hours and likely more recalling all the passwords that open myself to myself.

Derrida doubtlessly did not anticipate the development of technology which by a peculiar twist favors writing—for the first time in human history writing seems ubiquitous, everyone is writing, it is not going to last long, I think, when the advance of video will take over. Derrida issues old-fashioned laments on the death of love letters (as a genre) that he predicts tirelessly in his own love letters—little did he know. He would have been thrilled by sexting.

Itineraries deprive one of that little sense of home which one might possibly have after having moved from one hemisphere to the other. Every travel is a little bit of death, death foreshadowed, half-disclosed, hinted, promised—a rehearsal of how you’ll leave everything at once on a certain day to come. The inevitability of it is monotonous: it is not the event itself but the inescapability of it which is gruesome. To think about all the orphaned objects you will leave, and of the facelessness, the indiscernibility of these objects.

I dislike the word “fieldnotes”: in my imagination, the field is a meadow, something open, wild, full of flowers or snow, and a lot of what I will encounter will be usual sanitized places familiar to everyone. Let it be a stenography of the itinerary, an [auto]ethnography on the go, a shortcut to that anonymous dictation which is writing, a collection of occasional remarks that I am agreeing to multiply because to record things is a requirement of my trade, and my trade consists of the double malediction: to be captured by and capture in one’s turn the incessant flickering of language (what else?).

## **Stenography of the itinerary. 2**

Hardly ever do I come so close to trying to solve in one effort the accursed question “Which book would you take with you to an uninhabited island?” in practice more hopelessly than having the only-20-kilogram-a-trunk limit looming above me, and every time I have to decide which exactly, out of my recently-acquired, precious books, I can leave behind without much of a heartache. But the most practical consideration is that I uncovered unwillingly, namely that on the Uninhabited Island not only does one not need books, but they must not be there. The more beautiful the book is, the more often it is possible to reread it endlessly, the less value it has on the Island. Think about *Ulysses* for example, and imagine that you would be forced to meander Dublin streets with a soap bar in your pocket or searching for a coin to pay for milk; it is impossible to imagine a self-inflicted mental torture more intricate than that. *In Search for Lost Time* is not any better, it will drive you mad with the unlikelihood of the possibility to ever imagine Albertine in a girl passing you in the street. Plato’s *The State*? A volume of Baudelaire? To have a book on the Uninhabited Island is like to have a book from the planet of your birth which were blasted in your sight while you were watching helplessly. There are plenty of books that might be considered a breathing, lively, vivid memorial to our dead civilization, but none of it should be taken to the Uninhabited Island lest you do not want to survive there either. (Which might be a good idea: not to try even.) But as I am heading to the Island densely populated, the island of my memory and my forgetting, I would rather take all my books. I had a moment of joy at the recollection that for my first travel the USA–Siberia in 2013, I took with me a copy of *Infinite Jest*, and for my second travel of the same trajectory, in 2016, a small and perfect library, one of the most splendid volumes in which was *The Arcades Project*, that I perused at my leisure and had a great many evening hours passing in a hypnosis of reading, yet for the this-year round... but let me first finish something.

## **Stenography of the itinerary. 3**

It has been a strange, strangely bright light outside of my window tonight. As if it was arranged by someone on purpose, to make things more dramatic, to add drama, to make me, specifically, feel like I am leaving. These moments of leaving when leaving has not yet taken place but is about to happen, are the ones when you have already departed and only have not fully certified it by the very fact of departure. You look at everything as it should be looked at every day, perhaps: as something transient, falling behind, and, simultaneously, new, very new, having barely emerged, as if for the first time, as if it has just come into existence, surprising itself.

#### **Stenography of the itinerary. 4**

And this light, this certainty of the uncertain, dying twilight, is something for me to remember, to recollect. Susan Sontag said it is not that we remember through photographs, but that photographs become the only things we remember. As for text, it is the only something which becomes known, an open enigma for everyone to contemplate, build hypotheses, come into a proximity of knowledge, and fail at the very point where the unknown is about to become known. Let them guess what I mean, what the author wished to say (but omitted). It is not that we know through text but that text is the only thing we know.

#### **Emails. 1. The Anthropologist of Heart**

It is a difficult question, who is the anthropologist of heart, or, yet more difficult, who are the anthropologists of heart, if they exist at all. I found that I am often not happy with anthropological writings. Apparently what I admire of anthropology is what is in it from philosophy or literature. Foucault? Derrida? (By no means an anthropologist, unless we are talking about anthropologists of heart. Cardioanthropologists?) Anna Tsing is a writer who makes one stop pondering at times with a lingering sentence. She was astonished once while inhaling the aroma of matsutake mushroom.

#### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 5**

This year there is no direct flight Houston—Moscow, or Anything-Else-Suitable—Moscow, the lovely Singaporean airlines that took me to Russia, disappeared, and everyone is obliged to invent doubling destinations. The straightest way to go is through London, but being born in Russia, unlike my American friends, I thought that I and my child, we will both need transit visas, and I was not sure if they are given automatically or it is some kind of procedure—in short, I bought tickets to the NYC and from there, after five hours of waiting in the airport, there are some ten hours to Moscow. It is a vigil, to fly from here to there, and has always been, now it has stretched on several more hours. I will spend hours waiting.

#### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 6**

Derrida, apart from many other things, was a joker, a figure of carnivalesque presence. There were multiple Derridas, numerous Derridian subjects, writers resembling one another to the point of conflation, but nonetheless entirely separate.

The whole writing for the day (at least in *The Post Card* (252), since he probably wrote many more paragraphs that day, in any of his innumerable writings, abound like sand grains, no, flows; plus letters probably, et cetera):

“24 August 1979.

you know the end of the detective story: Socrates knocks off all of them, or makes them kill themselves among themselves, he remains alone, the gangbusters take over the locale, he sprays gas everywhere, it’s all ablaze in a second, and behind the cops the crowd presses forward somewhat disappointed that they did not give him alive or that he didn’t get out of it, which amounts to the same.”

He is describing a computer game. I myself am caught in a pleasant play of anachronisms and cultural forms, reading it. There were perhaps first computer games at the time, but not close at all to what is painted here. The prophet who is Derrida foresaw the future where the body as you say is interlaced with technology and veins and wires are no longer separable. Socrates is the Terminator. He terminates the course of history before history even begins unfolding. He is a superhero, a Superman. She sprinkles everything with hemlock. Socrates is fighting not merely with gangbusters, or gangbusters are not mere gangbusters, but they are mutants and zombies and otherwise strange subjects—specters probably, ghosts, transformers, Pokemons, werewolves, volandemorts, and so on.

On the plane they now charge for every little trifle: \$5 for earbuds, something for blankets, food of course—and moreover there is no opportunity to pay cash, only a debit or credit card sliding in a slit of portable cashier automaton—speaking of the Derrida’s guess of the disappearance of money: it is now a symbolic capital, one might argue and doubtlessly some do, a charge of a character in a computer game or their “health” scale. (And needless to say the blocking of your cards is tantamount to your death in the contemporary world.)

During the Derridian time there was nothing of separate selling of trifles at airplanes, I believe, and also no meticulous regulation of which seats board the plane first, not to mention x-ray security checkpoints (chocking points). Derrida did not live in a world so thoroughly Foucauldian—only Socrates did.

It is the Eleusinian-eucharistian mysteries: the annual resurrection of Socrates. Here he is dying under bullets, but after a brief period of mourning that he himself performs over his dead body, he is back to life, more alive than ever.

I asked for tea with lemon, and they brought me a small package with inscription: “{TRUE lemon.} Crystallized lemon: real flavor from real fruit.” Such title begs a question “what I is true, particularly true lemon; since when did the powder extracted out of lemon has become a truer

lemon than the fruit itself?" I do not doubt that the irony is not lost on those who produced it, it was intentional. There is a self-arranged doom in it.

Android where I type, offers me to transform the word "lemon" into a visual form: 🍋. It seems to me that we long have been living in a dystopia, and the anthropologist Jason Cons is right: heterotopia should yield to heterodystopia. Only one step to connect the two: how about by typing "lemon" I infuse lemon juice running cheerfully down my veins? A dream of cosmonaut food, the one you do not spend any excessive effort on preparing or consuming, is about to take over the everydayness decisively.

Séva is asked on the plane by an attendant if he is excited to go to New York. Séva nonchalantly replies that he is going to Siberia, not the New York City where he has been already. He adds to me that he is so excited his head is about to burst, and adds: "Don't worry, mama, it's just a joke, I'm fine, my head is not going to explode." I am privileged to have him for a companion.

The lemon that they gave me tastes horrible. If I could ever imagine a chemical lemon, a true lemon, before, I could not have done it in such viscerality.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 7**

Another regret draining me is that the travel is so long and tiresome. It is several days cut out of the customary circle of things, of reading, writing, and editing.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 8**

I like the English expression "hometown": in the most literal of senses, it is a town where one's home is. It is a town where you grew up, dictionary offers, but never mentions if you were born there or not (why complicate matters?)

To the contrary, the Russian expression "rodnoi gorod" (native town) implies that you were born there and very possibly grew up, but says nothing about the whereabouts of your current home.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 9**

Every travel is a time travel because time (not space) is where travel unfolds.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 10**

The sad reality is, there is no place for one on the planet. I am looking at my father, who abandoned Moscow for the village of Anosovo, Siberia. He was born in the village of Yandi, that subsequently was included in Anosovo—absorbed, after the relocation: the Bratsk dam construction and flood. I think a Pinnacle of his career must have been a talk in Vienna at an international meeting where he represented Russia like an official. He said coffee in a place where he stayed was terrible. I remember his notes made in an accurate handwriting in a notebook, which he read at the meeting.

He always said that he will return to Anosovo eventually, but I do not think he himself believed it. It was merely a dream and a pose of sorts. And also turned out to be a self-interest prophecy of kinds. There, in Anosovo, which he left as a little boy, there was nothing that awaited him quite as it was or as he remembered. K.A. always repeats that this is his idea of the future as well: that he will return to P., the country of his birth, after a long, productive career in the American academia. Specifically he mentioned some village. But the sad reality of these claims, very few of them are fulfillable, and if they are, they do not bring a sense of return, a sense of completion. You cease to belong anywhere: here, there, everywhere. It becomes mercilessly clear in non-places, and the airport is such a non-places, along with: a popular chain of cafes, etc. Non-places where non-ferrous happens, where nothing is conducting itself, an always-empty space of transience.

I need to take a cold medicine. Two hours before boarding. Two? Let's not check right now, I checked but twenty minutes before. It is hard to notice a flow of time happening in a non-place. In a non-place non-time flows (or, rather, doesn't), despite everyone getting late or in a hurry.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 11**

I tried reading The Post Card but it is a reading which requires quietude. It is not easy (although fascinating) to keep up with Derrida's thought. His teacher, Foucault, is plain and accessible in comparison to Derrida. There should be a philosopher who surpasses Derrida in complexity (remaining legible: there is no sense in obscurity for the sake of obscurity). But if such a philosopher exists, I have a difficulty naming him.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 12**

That was what struck me about Derridian letters: he wrote her (and this is only the published, abridged version, it is unclear how severely but abridged, the original was evidently burnt, and what a gesture, unless this is merely a literary device, and maybe if it is merely a device, then it is even a more impressive gesture) 250 pages of the densest, petite font. All the while he was married and swearing all the time that he loves only her. I imagine she hated him when she finally broke such dubious an arrangement, but not sooner than spending something of a decade on these stolen dates and secret love letters. A clandestine society of transgressors! In all his brilliance, in his love letters, Derrida is lecturing a young academic, and he is fifteen years her senior.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 13**

How do I know that I am still I, if I have just been somewhere, and now I am not there?

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 14**

The flight was terrible and I am dying. In bed. So many hours. I am sick.

To do almost anything is harder than to write now. And to write only automatically, without a thought. On the plane I was trying to watch a movie but any additional tension was too much. I watched several minutes of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*; seems fun but that is what always made movies tiresome for me: I dislike being excessively captured. I want to keep my judgement, I do not want to be absorbed, frightened, excited, etc. I could not read either. I could only write and want to be in bed, and write about how I want to be in bed. I only survived on the thought that soon I will be in bed. (I have a comfortable bed in one of the rooms of my family's Moscow apartment.)

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 15**

Technology. Numbers. Failing memory. I found my SIM-card from the last year, forgot number. I found it but it turns out the number is discarded after almost a year of non-use. I had a new phone which of course did not pick up the set on my laptop (at least, thankfully) wi-fi, therefore I had to call and get a login and password. I could not remember the code from the metal door in the porch. All this distracts me from other things that I might have [not] remembered instead.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 16**

For a while, I will be jetlagging. Everyone will be sleeping and I will be wide awake; everyone will be awake, and I will be sleeping. And so it will continue until I learn how to be a local human being.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 17**

Our posterity would not believe that we had to change SIM cards in phones moving from one country to another. The encumbrance in technology feels like a bodily impairment. I am handicapped with my phone half-functioning.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 18**

My father is walking with a stick this summer. "Give me my horse; I'll ride." he quipped.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 19**

In the Moscow apartment of my family, the corridor is the longest and narrowest I saw in such apartments. It takes half of the apartment, or so it feels. It goes to the unimaginable depths and darkness, enclosing tiny rooms on both sides like a snake enclosed her eggs with her infinitely long tail. It is a corridor more fitting a medieval castle. It only lacks staircases springing from its stem here and there, otherwise it's just as you would imagine a corridor of a medieval castle to be. This building was constructed in 1985. It has 24 stories. Each level has five apartments.

On the ground floor the neighbor whom I have not seen several years, walking his small dog out of the door (I did not know he had a dog) casually greeted me by name without asking a single question. I was relieved he was not up for a conversation, however small.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 20**

The only thing that could make trans-Atlantic rites bearable is a book that continues to be read. There is a continuity to a book. It seems bordering with absurdity to read a book in English in Russia though.



### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 21**

I slept through the day and missed even the visit of my in-laws, although I heard them talking and laughing in the living room with my parents and Sévochka. So strange to hear long-unheard voices through sleep and be not able to wake up. Or maybe I merely dreamed it? (No, of course not.)

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 22**

There were two protest meetings against corruption in Moscow today, on the 12nd of June: one agreed upon by city administration, and one not sanctioned, the latter organized by Navalny.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 23**

I have long had this dream: you wake up in no country in particular.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 24**

Again it seems to me that traveling is a grand preparation to death. I had great mental travels conducted from here, from the place of my youth, from home. I walked from here to the churches nearby and stood long hours at the Orthodox sermons. I tried drugs. I delved into philosophy, I dreamed of becoming an enlightened being. And of course I wrote: wrote, wrote, and wrote. This house seems to me uncomfortable and awkward. As though I acquired more sharp angles and they do not fit the form that I once navigated perfectly well. It is a house of my worst horrors. I lived here through my most beautiful nightmares. I am constantly afraid that they still live here, ready to jump at me and continue any moment. My sweet delusions.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 25**

Russia could not collapse because it is continuously in the mode of collapsing. Collapse is its modus operandi. The whole world as an endless exploration of collapse. A grand collapse where there are smaller collapses. Collapses folding into one another, encompassed by the great collapse—so great there are no observable limits from any of its points. The only stability

recognized as stability will be thus a stability of perpetual collapsing. At the same time, every collapse is refreshingly new and lived for the first time by new actors. There is no “end of civilization,” there is only an endless promise and fantastic possibility of further collapse and a forever-growing eschatological excitement. Self-gratifying, orgasming mysteria of collapse.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 26**

Suddenly I have this amazing feeling that this very room, where I spent so many sleepless nights and talked to specters, is my place of power. A dot in space where I am most myself: most independent, most relaxed, and most powerful. A rare, precious feeling. Perhaps might be called a feeling of being home.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 27**

Don't you think that it is impossible how loneliness envelops a human being, how in the end of the travel there is not one to diminish your loneliness at least a tiny little bit, to make it slightly more bearable, to offer even a welcome divertissement of deception? Every human being seems to be completely enveloped in its supreme loneliness. Everyone seems to be speaking their own language, is busy with their own shifting contexts.

I am slightly better by the end of the second day after my flight, but this time around things do not look exciting for me at all. I found Moscow dim, smoky, unenlivened. My parents got older, my friend put on some weight, all the familiar things acquired as if an additional layer of dust.

I was told last year “don't worry, no one disposes of anything” when I expressed my concern about a bookshelf standing immediately outside the door of my apartment, stuffed with books—on its way to be given away or simply thrown away, it appeared to me, and those books, despite that I knew I would never reread them, not even open and close, were a pity to lose; this year there is no bookshelf on its place, and I did not even ask where did it go—what's the reason for me to disturb the normal course of events?

### **Emails. 2. The Weather**

It is devilishly cold in Moscow! This summer is like no other. No wonder global warming is not a scary prospect for Russians (I write it in jest of course. But. When I was in Finland in 2008 on some summit or other as a journalist, I could not believe my ears: people only talked about global warming. From a country where poverty and social discontent were (still are, more than ever) visible and, moreover, palpable, it looked, as though of course we could say it wasn't, as an

indulgence into the things of *not* primal importance.) It is a luxury to be worried about global warming, much as it is impossible to overstate its universal importance.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 28**

The flight was and the adjustments are so hard I at the moment wish to think about it as about the absolutely last flight of such duration.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 29**

The whole house is asleep. 11:04 PM. I alone am keeping vigil. There is not a room to read. Thank God for phones with glowing screens.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 30**

I temporarily abandoned *The Post Card* having finished the first part. I freely admit that I am less interested in Derridian reading of Freud or “pleasure” in theory than in his love letters. I wish Derrida would continue with his love letters indefinitely.

I started on *Specters of Marx* which is all the more interesting since I read the article of the same title. I was curious how similar or dissimilar the article and the subsequent book are. There are textual coincidences, as should be expected, but there are divergences too. I do not have the feeling that I am reading the same text. Derrida is a supreme writer. I wish I read him earlier but at the same time there were not a single opportunity to do so. I remember I bought *On Grammatology* in Russian translation in 2004. I opened it, shrugged my shoulders, and put it where it belonged—on a bookshelf with other unread philosophical volumes. The journey is too long, and the time to complete anything is too short (not to mention, accomplish). An intellectual life is a history of failures and defeats. Maybe this is its true content, its lesson, and its result: to scratch a surface and be horrified by unimaginable depths that do not even begin unfolding in front of your eyes. You only sense the bottomlessness and this is the end of it, or a (hopeless) beginning.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 31**

Looking at my window at the city, I saw not only how Moscow changed, how it grows—slowly (after Austin) but steadily, but I also saw that my vision has lost another degree of sharpness.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 32**

An unusual development: this is the first year I don't have to actually buy a phone SIM card, with calls to mobiles only 20 cents a minute and free internet on my T-MOBILE plan. Finally some progress has been made. Otherwise you had to change number in order to save some money.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 33**

From previous stenographies—this is also written in Moscow, four years ago:

“4 AM in Texas. Poor fishes. I doubt that Texas exists. Our scientists more or less agreed today on the well-thought-over hypothesis that it was just a complex tactile hallucination.”

[2013]

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 34**

There is not much to love about this apartment. Of course I love it because it's my home, but I am aware it is not particularly comfortable. All the more so since I am currently confined to it, thanks to the blow of this damned two-flight trajectory that my I'd say nearly-translucent body suffered. But, in the corridors there are bookshelves. And in the glass of the bookshelves the Moscow windows are reflected. Should you walk this corridor without being completely absorbed by your thoughts, you'll walk clouds: Moscow will be continuing—all her wide streets, all her noisy boulevards—in the glass of the bookshelf, and the glass of the bookshelf will freely flow into Moscow crowded streets and empty boulevards (or vice versa).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 35**

There is a park near my house where I liked walking. I liked, in the past sense, as one could say about a dead person—not because I stopped liking that park, but because I as I knew myself, ceased to exist, and there is no one, in place of that me, to walk there. It is as if there is no more park. It is the Botanical Garden. A maze of verdure. A tablet of floral elements. In the evening, I would go there with my darling, beloved friend. There remained a palace of some pre-Revolution nobility, of course appropriated and used for administrative purposes. The building was in a state of that pleasant decrepitude which covers old things like patina, and seems to only add value. In the semi-dark, in the twilight, nothing betrayed in this palace its present, it was reflected in the green, dim

mirror of the pond. There were old trees around, linden trees. Nonetheless, despite that this constitutes a cherished memory, despite that I walked there later pushing a baby carriage, hoping to have some time for myself before my baby wakes up, despite so many precious moments, I had a sense of “incomplete completion” of any of these moments (as it were), there was always something to remain, to dream about. What light days those were, how they shone gently, how beautiful they were! And only now do I get to realize that those days were complete, there will be no addition to them, nor subtraction. The sense of great expectations was but a part of their hermetics.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 36**

I turned into a crepuscule animal living in the sepulcher of the apartment where everyone is asleep. A day round, day in, day out, I will soon lose the count of time. The light everywhere is dim, and I try to read in the dim light. The internet beckons. There is no better place for me to browse Facebook than Moscow. Live is at once so eventful.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 37**

In Russia, a full-blown process of deprivatization picks up speed, and people are about to be left with very uncertain rights on their property, including real estate. My family’s assets are all in Moscow. Particularly my parents’ dacha happens to be constructed in a place which struck me as very unsafe even in calmer times, in the underbelly of the developing Moscow “sputnik” town, the town of Balashikha, developing quite rapidly. The dacha is now situated on a tiny stripe of land between the newly-built neighborhood and the forest which is a “protected nature zone” (pripodookhrannaya zona). When the house was being built, it was in a dacha settlement, now it has shrunk and surrounded with multi-story buildings. I have a storage of my (mostly handwritten) manuscripts in there (or typescripts with markings), although plenty of those are stuffed in our Moscow apartment as well. I am thinking every year about collecting all my archive together, as I might have been working through it, but where? It is not that in the US I have any place to live that would have been not temporary and uncertain. I do not care about material possessions but I’d like to preserve my manuscripts. (Of course to further endanger property is far more dramatic than that, for the question of right on one’s own house is a question of well-being, livelihood, health, life and death for many, many people, my parents and I included—but my manuscripts! My archive! I care about this, first and foremost.)

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 38**

Professor C. kindly writes me an email:

“I’m sorry you’ve fallen ill and hope for a speedy recovery. I know it is a weak truism but I still cling to it in times like these: time heals all wounds.

Seriously though, take your time, give yourself a break. (...) If you were locked in prison cell for a year I have no doubt you’d write a brilliant dissertation. I know you’ll make the best of this.”

Etc. Too precious to let it disappear. Prison cell... Too heavy a cultural metaphor.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 39**

It’s five in the morning. My life runs its course in looking how time flows. I switched from Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* to recreational reading, which turned to be Foucault’s *The Order of Things*.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 40**

In this very room where, contrary to the expectations, I get to celebrate my insomnia, among many other gifts of insomnia now gained, spent, and forgotten, my baby first held his head. I was the sole witness of this divine miracle, that sudden, awe-inspiring performance, when he, lying on his belly, held his head for the first time. Heavy, it swung back and forth, rocking his light body, and he resembled a snake, a cobra rising, a miraculous animal he was and is, a human being and the beginning of a human being. I took several photographs, and sat across him and watched him and continued guarding him. And now in the very same room, the child, the one who is not a bearer of this memory, of which he is a hero, is asleep and calmly breathing. Everything in the interim, on a great distance between these two moments, the moment of him lifting his head for the first time, and the moment of the present sleep, sweet dream, with me being an observer of both—everything in between seems to be as if of no significance at all, it rapidly fell, avalanched into the limbo of forgetting, nonexistence, and disremembering.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 41**

I watched the “direct line” with the president of Russia Vladimir Putin. He is a convincing speaker. His strong side is numbers. He has a great memory. The questions asked were loyal in form and content, and even then they presented a striking picture of destruction and devastation. I wrote on Putin’s quite elegant comment on the Lermontov’s poem that the president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko quoted recently. I could not help thinking what if Russia had public debates, free presidential and Parliamentary elections, free press expressing diverse views—how many more good speakers, and what kind of debates, we could hear. It’s a shame that there are these one-person four-hour-long carefully put together “direct lines” going on for fifteen years, instead of the full-scale debates of honest, competing, ready to tear one another apart, opponents.

I am still jetlagging. I am struggling with an urge to fall asleep right now. Wake me up when free election will be finally given by the almighty god to this unlucky country. Russia deserves it.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 42**

Dying light of the day across the multi-story buildings, a typical Moscow neighborhood. I am looking at this city all day today, without doing anything. I do not read, not do I indulge any memory. Goalless gazing. Although of course I remember, I remember too much, more than I wish. Every bit of the landscape is a recollection that I do not want to invoke. I do not summon the ghosts that are there. But they have a capacity to summon me: produce and define.

For many years I had been watching this landscape. It had been a part of my everydayness. The vastness of it, the realization that in every window there are people busy with their daily tasks, should be akin to the realizations that one is gaining looking at the stars. Too many universes to know, or indeed to even number.

But somehow it did not, it does not work this way. I always found an opportunity to not think about the vastness of the landscape too familiar. I was capable to concentrate on my tasks. One would think, at such a sight you could quit bothering to be doing anything at all. But somehow you don’t.

A place of seamlessness and similarity; how do you inhabit it? And it is so monstrous and monumental. What can one indeed know about the lives of people inhabiting such landscape? It is a mystery. Not only it is unknown but unknowable.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 43**

When I reread my own old journals and papers (I don't know if it has been your experience or not), I was always struck with impossibility of reconnecting through time and space to people and places I knew. I go through my archives, still unable to go out and happy I am unable, because (that's what I tell myself) I am not feeling very well (such a relief, I can simply dwell in my memoirs), and I came across a telephone number that I recorded, the number which belonged to my first husband. And for a second I thought about dealing this number, knowing perfectly well that after all these years (the journal was from 2004), no one possibly could answer me. (Under no circumstances could I wish to speak to him. If it were in my power, I'd tell then-me never deal that number too.)

There was a phrase in a still-earlier journal (2001; the time when the pale lilac color was in vogue) that looks to me now as a rather precise diagnosis of human condition: "Now I saturate the future with my dreams; later I will populate the past with memories." ("Сейчас я насыщаю мечтами будущее, потом прошлое стану населять воспоминаниями.") Sixteen years later, this is exactly what I am doing: I am populating my past with my memories. The work of memory is a creative work aware of the arbitrariness of its own process. There is never a given in what we lived through, but everything is transformed with recollection.

And while such transformation is a work that everyone is ceaselessly performing on one's own, its result, the result of combination, of joint effort, of contestation, is what makes "the past" into a shared history. Many actors summon, revoke and restructure the past, through actions: performance and language (there is no clear division between the two, as we know since Austin and Butler), endlessly reshaping what still appears to be a possible future.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 44**

Suddenly absorbed, swallowed by Moscow. What a delight to be here.


### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 45**

My sadness reached its limits on the VDNKh. There is no place sadder in the world.



### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 46**

An unusually beautiful playground in one of the Moscow backyards stopped my attention.

A wooden carving: a princess (well, I assume she is some sort of royalty) riding a wolf, fascinated me. 

Actually I am not sure what fairy tale this came from. I think one Ivan or other was riding a wolf at some point, but I am uncertain about the princess. Maybe I am forgetting things.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 47**

I have just learned that a friend of my childhood, my neighbor, a girl two years younger than me, died on the 26th of January, 2016. I know no detail, and there is no way to learn any—for her grief-stricken parents have an air of refusal to talk about it, and so, I did not even try.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 48**

I am an owl; as such, I one way or another overcome jetlag to find myself going to bed, again, later than I should.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 49**


It is ironic that the very writer who devoted her talent to showing that there is an innumerable array of human stories, that everyone has their own truth, is denied by some of her readers to be a bearer of such personal perspective, of an opinion. (Svetlana Alexievich is criticized in Russia for her anti-putinist stance).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 50**

Do I mark with a line at least that this summer I am spending days solving easy problems of addition and subtraction for the second grade, in a noble and unimportant effort to keep my child

remembering math? It takes so much of my time, and yet there is nothing to say about it. Everydayness that dissolves in the realm of the never-mentioned.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 51**

Returning from the store that I never liked—it seemed to me to be under pressure, or under hypnosis of some sort of scarcity, despite the familiar abundance that does not differ in any significant way from other supermarkets—I thought about the necessity of writing that I love Moscow, and I love it a lot, its air, its trees,  , its air full of the odor of trees, and I like people living there, especially my friends—but I forwent this idea, not because I do not love Moscow, or do not sympathize with its bright, struggling, stubborn, hilarious, generous, strange people—but because it appeared to me as a thought that might have appeased them, as a tribute of some sort, in my imagination, which was perfectly absurd, for they did not need any gesture of good will on my part, nor would they appreciate it, and they could even, perhaps, be briefly offended by what they would perceive (again in my imagination) as the sentimentality, insincerity, and blatancy of such my gesture, a gesture-to-be-made, an unmade gesture, a gesture-decided-against.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 52**

My book *London Diary* is out (in Russian).

I am, all unaware, named suddenly as one of the founders of the new realism in Russia (by the editor all too generous). An honor bestowed without merit, beyond that what I can bear. Mistakes of my youth! Sins of ambitions. Everyone can be enmeshed, in their early days, into one or another literary movement. I hope this is not the last movement which (re)birth I witnessed, nor is the last movement in the maletics of which I was involved. I did derive my share of amusement from proclaiming new realism a way to write and live.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 53**

Memory's clandestine work: I have whole buildings, neighborhoods, towns obliterated, as well as pencils in a cup, books, drawings piling on my table—forgotten without as much as the slightest recollection. However, whenever they come again, drift into the circle of my too-easily-distracted and too-rapidly-switching attention, they inhabit the world under my ceaseless scrutiny as though they never disappeared. The world is overabundant. It overflows itself. It could not contain itself; it has too many things. It drowns in its own tactility. Too many odors and textures.

Dacha. It is a sweet periphery of Moscow life. A realm of forgetting and recollecting, alternatively superceding one another. Here, I have books read and unread in 18, 19, 20, etc. etc., including those that I once brought here, in English: Coriolanus and so on—brought and forgot. Books that I was presented with by authors. Shelves and shelves of those. Light dead body of the fly, emerald-green, swiped from the table by the careless movement which had no intention to swipe the fly, no disturb the hyeroglyphics of dust, for that matter.

I have my first journals filled in with cursive school exercises. My numerous diaries. Photographs from nearly every epoch of observable history of photography, running a span from at least fifty years back. Sets of plastic transparent rulers which allow to draw circles and with which I have a flickering thought to amuse my child (the thought dwindling down and reappearing like the evening light). And, and... A lot of other things.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 54**

реконструкция,  
сестра деконструкции

реновация, сестра новации

а у нас реконструкция, а у вас?

“pardon us, we have reconstruction”

reconstruction and renovation, two words of the summer 2017 in Moscow

rapid development

burst of novelties of all kinds

previous byt (social practices / everydayness) is yet once again discarded, swept away, cleared the future, forever evading, is finally somewhere near (or something)

state-sponsored “gentrification” and ghettoisation of those who do not fit the new economic realities, drawing them to the “new Moscow” and alike territories, specifically created to “разгрузить город” (dis-load of the city) (The Village, 2014, <http://www.the-village.ru/village/city/moscow-in-figures/171391-что-такое-новая-москва-и-где-она>)

~

“миллиарды отбили” (показывая на новую плитку) “красиво теперь тут у нас”

в витрине магазине Сваровски, объявление: “цены пополам”.

я уточнила у подруги: “что это значит, скидка 50 процентов?”

есть в этом неточность какая-то

какая-то амбивалентность

русский язык трансформируется в трансформирующейся реальности

“а из этого дома выселили жильцов. не знаю, что там было, какие-то коммуналки”.

новая лепнина на (подновленном) старом доме (возле ст. м. “Проспект мира”)

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 55**

Smoking is the best activity, time best spent. People need more smoking in their lives.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 56**

Things will sift through recording, transcribing, translating, framing. What will remain of their “authenticity”? I am in a grip of anxiety: I am still in Moscow and cannot get to my field because of the necessity to prolong my visa and things. A time of in-betweenness of which Derrida wrote beatifically in “Specters of Marx,” analyzing time ‘out of joint.’ I suspect it is a gist of ethnographic work: a quest of waiting and biting nails.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 57**

During our Tsarbucks meeting with Darya G., we uncovered the secret of Russian nostalgia. It lays in the transience of life, in the speed of change. It is not possible to pass the same row of shops and cafes, for instance, going up or down a familiar street. Every two weeks things will be vastly

different. Small business and big dreams are routinely destroyed, with the new once, blissfully unaware of what has just happened, coming into existence to take on their place. For on the one hand, “the nature does not tolerate emptiness,” and on the other hand, forgetting is a form of memory.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 58**

The metro is a place of no time. Noplace. A place where noplacenness of the place is all too evident. There are always people of all ages in there. And only you slide along a timeline that makes people older and older your “peers,” or, to use Russian words, co-timers (sovremenniki), or even-timers (rovesniki).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 59**

Two things I hate the most: traveling and talking to people I do not know. How I wended up in anthropology, I doubt I would ever know.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 60**

My dear friend, a friend like no one, A.F., visited me today. The most missed in my oneiric travels. Now that he is gone, I think if it were not easier to not be seeing him at all. He is a spirit of Moscow, in a sense.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 61**

He walked away from her leaving her with two kids both of whom were on what is now called “autism spectrum.” On the day, two years ago, she finally kissed someone else, both her children, she told me, fell sick—provisionally. Very soon her absent husband returned to her.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 62**

In Moscow, you are a specter amongst specters, a ghost among ghosts. You are passing streets and squares without as much as leaving a trace. You never scratch a surface. You appear from nowhere in the eternal city, follow its rites and mystical ceremonies, and disappear wordlessly, leaving

everything just as before. Facades of the houses would not remember you, windows and mirrors would barely reflect you. There is glitter, yes; in its scintillating mass you dissipate completely, dissolving without leaving sediment.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 63**

“An Italian farmer transformed his cornfield into a giant portrait of Vladimir Putin using his tractor and impressive artistic skills. Dario Gambarin said the 135 meter portrait was created in the hope that the upcoming G20 summit will be successful.”

~

“Italian artist sheds 2 kg in one day producing Putin’s portrait

Society & Culture”

~

we’re blessed with a new diet.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 64**

I was invested in ruins and nostalgia and in all things past that are being re-lived in the present etc. but now I think: how much of it is a purportedly cultured “Western” view of the things that are in fact flourishing, developing, and were never in fact stuck in the past?

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 65**

She gave birth, with a distance of about a year, to two sons, Gerald Abraham and Nathan Aaron. She belonged to a rigorous church. Never did she call them Gerald or Nathan, nor Abraham or Aaron, nor by any form of any of these names. It was always “Gerald Abraham” and “Nathan Aaron” and never any other way, in daily interactions and also on Instagram. Gerald Abraham slept well and Nathan Aaron had a good appetite, and vice versa. She also had a girl, whom she gave a name, Julia, on her profile—the child was what others would consider to be a miscarried foetus.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 66**

Educated Russian sometimes have a sort of reversed ethnocentrism: everything Western seems to them to be better and more advanced than their own.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 67**

Deina Rabie has a work on taxi as a unit of mobility, each has its own microworld, its atmosphere, smell, spatial characteristics, sound. As a linguist, she looked at negotiations arising in Egypt taxis through the use of English. Every time I use the taxi services, I think how blessed I am with music I can only hear in taxis:

*Я сочиняю роман  
Рома-рома-роман  
Мужчина всей моей жизни  
(Чего-то там) по кругу  
Перепишу мои мысли  
И разошлю всем подругам*

Where else indeed would you catch a glimpse of the richness of the everydayness otherwise unknown if not in taxi?

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 68**

Could a person fly somewhere and not check in on Facebook? Scientists say, no.

~

Indeed it only makes sense to fly to announce the flight to everyone who ever cared and everyone who did not.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 69**

I think it will be correct to say that Siberians have a good image in Russia. Russian Siberians that is. It is not rare to encounter paternalism and known condescension towards “small peoples” (“malie narodi”), native peoples (“korennie narodi”) of Siberia in Siberia and beyond. But the Russian Siberians, especially men, enjoy a kind of recognition which includes stereotypical ascribing of strength, smartness, cunning rationality, resilience etc.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 70**

I was grumpy and unhappy in Moscow, because I could not wait to go to Siberia and was waiting for my TASK to be complete. Every day I hoped I will have a mail confirming my business and

every day passed without such confirmation. Finally I decided to fly without my task completed. And what a relief!

In Siberia, I am always happy. Things always work well in Siberia even if (or maybe especially since) they fall apart right in front of your eyes. Something in the air upholds the newness and clarity of the world. The unbeatable strength of living things.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 71**

Whenever you flight East: night is stolen.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 72**

Last time, a year ago, I was at Rock Garret (place in the town of Bratsk), I was an unwilling listener to a long phone conversation of a young man with first one his friend, and then another. He was trying to “razrilit” something, he dealt with some sort of betrayal or something, someone blurted out something to someone, and for a very long time he was convincing someone that they are like brothers to him, and that he would never, and that the rug was pulled out from under him by someone, etc., etc. He used the argumentation of an offended: “Don’t you believe me?” For a long time, something like half an hour. Some business was at stake. I wonder if it came to fruition, if it was satisfactorily resolved.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 73**

What is native—non-native anthropologist’s positionality? Already complex enough, these constructs only further complicate my idea of my own position as an anthropologist, since I am at once native and non-native in regard to the places I am studying. Not unoften the scientist is worked into the layered system of powers that place her at once as a subject taking on an unwillingly dominant position in the interactions dictated by the power imbalances of research (she is the one asking questions or writing, she is the one to be held accountable, as well as benefit from her writing), and as a “liminal subject” who is not an “anthropologist proper” precisely because she “belongs” to the community she is studying. But what does it mean, to belong to the community? Does it always mean, to speak the language of a community as a native speaker? Is this enough, and don’t we know the examples when the language stolen from people become a tool of denying them their authenticity: since you no longer speak it, you do not belong to your own folk? The colonial practices all too familiar and wide-spread. Does one have to live in a place for a long time to become a part of the community? How many years are enough? 5, 10, 50? 2? What about the cases of “inner emigration”? Is a mere feeling of belonging enough? What if one considers oneself to be a part of the community, but community disagrees or marks one as an outsider in numerous subtle ways? Finally, as an anthropologist trained elsewhere and arriving to



a place invested in theories that are written not in a language that the community is speaking, and linguistic ideologies full of tacit contracts and agreements that proliferate in your language of writing but are absent in the language of community, with many tropes sometimes directly reversed—could one be considered to be a native anthropologist then? Finally, how does one's national belonging to colonizers in this particular locus of the world, make one a native anthropologist—or how does it make you a non-native anthropologist, for that matter, considering that you have family ties with the region? Might it be that the framework “native—non-native anthropologist” is not adequate to describing the positionality of the researcher? In this case, which framework should or might we use, if any?

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 74**

For a second, seeing a post-Soviet interior, which remained perfectly Soviet at least in my mythologies, I thought that I discovered a time machine. Precisely discovered, for someone else has constructed it and likely abandoned, or something precluded her from taking full advantage of it—or maybe she did exactly that, she did take advantage, and transported herself into an epoch of her dreams, whatever it was.

сим объявляется, что гражданка Орлова открыла машину времени. не могу приписать себе честь изобретения - только открытия, и то частичного и неполного, но очень перспективного.

### **Emails. 3. Impossibility of Bratsk**

The town of Bratsk is fantastic and impossible to describe. I am certain that if, by a quirk of magic, you were transported here, a person from another world, you and Bratsk will simply annihilate one another. I could not imagine you here, nor could I imagine Bratsk having you somewhere in its street or in its buildings.

I was thinking about your observation that it works fine, for certain purposes, to have a "barbarian English," and I must say although by no means your English is barbarian; I understand the feeling very well. I sometimes say I use my Russian as a machete to make my way through the intricate verdure of English of which I know no history, not much of a sense of etymologies, and to which therefore I could have no particular reverence. To bend the language to our will is the only way to do for a non-native speaker. Paradoxically in this sense you have more control, as opposed to the degree that you could have speaking the native language which overwhelms the speaker and uses her as a mere mediator before there is any conscious consideration.

I now have a stadium on my right, right beyond the window, and for some reason it strikes me as a Siberian view, although it is hard to define what this Siberianness might be manifested in. In this landscape, there is something disturbing and pacifying at once. If I can, I'll attach you a photo.

I hope the peak of the summer is wonderful in your part of the world. In fact I am sure it is. Bright colors, pink stones, blue shadows, long evenings. Italy is a paradise in many imaginaries, and people there distinguish sorts of wine, cheeses, and things like that.

There was a tradition in the Soviet times to have pen pals, via Komsomol connections--I was told, it was a great luck to receive post cards for instance with images of artists, Western singers. One of my interlocutors told me he gradually convinced a girl who received particularly appealing post cards from somewhere with The Beatles, to give them away, every single one of them--one by one cards ended in his possession, and even today he says laughingly: "But she did not need them! She did not even know who they were!"



#### **Emails. 4. On Lucky Findings**

I've been so happy in my travel this time: so lucky, I am meeting about everyone I wanted, the doors of archives open for me miraculously etc. etc. I have not yet written S. as I am delving in archives, but I wrote another anthropologist, now based in Irkutsk, who was one of the founders of the Oral History Laboratory in Bratsk (I told you about)--the laboratory was deprived of funding, but they continue gathering data. I am placing much hope on my final Irkutsk week.

But the main luck, I came into possession of a grand selection of negatives of Bratskgesstroj archives, which were scanned by an enthusiast born in 1930s, and in the process of scanning the colors were ruined every now and then. And, it looks in fact as though it is made on purpose! They are so impressive! I posted a couple on facebook and maybe will post more. But it seems to me to have a potential of an art project or something. I long wanted to add surreal colors to such photographs, and here I have a bunch of them without intruding upon their gentle existence. I am so excited. When I am back, I'll show you and K. if she is willing to join, this amazing collection, and together we could think how to work through it. I want to produce a text around them... I don't know if handwritten or not. So many possibilities...

~

Imagine a *hollow man* walking like a zombie to scan those pictures to the archive every day from 11 till 3, with the sign "95 years to VLKSM" on his jacket. Snow or rain, he is there, but he is not even taught how to scan pictures, and so they have question marks of separate hair strings, strange, distorted colors, transforming ordinary scenes into surreal agglomerations which seem to be strangely revealing, suddenly affective.

That's a theme for a novel (and I deviate from "reality" of course in plotting such a novel).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 75**

I first saw the portrait of Andrey Andreyevich (name's changed) even and retook it on my camera in the hall of the museum, without knowing who that was. He was pictured in a company of laughing women, each as young as was he. Beyond them the painted slogan was visible: "Communism is the future of the humanity."

This group of happy faces somehow encapsulated the upbeat spirit of placard Communism so familiar by visual agitation of the time. Not for nothing was this picture adorning the hall.

It turned out Andrey Andreyevich, as well as those surrounding him, were those who are named with the neologism "hydrostroitel", "hydroconstructor," moreover, "pervohydrostroitel," "first (pioneer) hydroconstructor."

A constructor of a hydra, a monster of the construction.

And then I learned that Andrey Andreyevich, was alive and well, and he was coming to the archive every day from 11 AM to 3 PM, to work with the sludes. I visualized an old man walking with a stick to scan pictures, forever faithful to the project of his life. I had an opportunity to meet him in two days, and my idea was correct but inevitably lacked striking details which only the real connection could bring.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 76**

It is a known paradox of the propagandist photography: even if striving to depict the glorious present which is about to turn into the grandiose tomorrow, it every now and then allows for slippages of what one could only associate with the damned past: the past of hard work and wrecked “byt.”

But the “anti”-propagandist, “revelatory” photography, the photography of the exact opposite vector is liable to the same weakness: depicting hardships and terrors, it invariably flashes the viewer over with a sudden happy smile, an unwitting portrayal of youth, strength, bliss.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 77**

I am spending this week in Bratsk, in one of the buildings which were miracles to those who obtained apartments here, either after wooden barracks or after green tents with insulation (well, this particular building is rather old, no green tents by the time it was constructed, I trust).

It is not in any way unusual construction, thousands of thousands, billions buildings like that were erected all over Russia and former Soviet republics. It suffices to say that one of my first homes was of the exact same planning (in the Russian Far East), as well as the last summer I spent some time in an apartment like that in Irkutsk. One of the characteristics of these buildings known to all who have ever been their happy dwellers, is an extremely thin walls and acoustic qualities that amaze the meloman. A column of apartments is structured around a staircase, like a stem, on each level several doors like grapes on a branch. Each door leads a separate flat, be it one-room, two- or three- (never four-room); each apartment is almost as small as another; more rooms mean they are tinier, corridors are longer and darker, bathrooms are still wetter. I don't know if it's appropriate to call these buildings post-Soviet favellas (probably not, for a variety of cultural reasons).

The staircase, meanwhile, serves as a spine of this thinly tuned grand musical instrument, and on each level sounds of argument or a quarrel will penetrate walls, ceilings, and floors like purely nominal existences.

For two late evenings slipping long into the night I was obliged to hear the symphony of struggle between a man and a woman with pitches of her crying and his cursing, running up and down the stairs, enlivened conversations in the street right behind my windows, with the commotion invariably resulting in the rhythmic repetitive sounds above and her muffled cry of what must be a shattering orgasm.

I am waiting for this symphony renewed with a melancholy I have not known lately; what aggravates me most is that I was foolish enough to bring here my child. As children are nonchalant, however, I did explain him calmly that people thus hate and in turn love one another, and that neither of them were taught, in school or in family, to be the masters of their emotions, and finally that there is a heavy word describing it, and the word is, “abuse.”

My child astounded me with a reply which I have a trouble eliciting from adults whenever the conversation touches upon the matters of domestic violence, entangled so horribly with gratifying release of pleasure within the clandestine courses of deployment of sexuality.

He said: “The circle of abuse: the most difficult circle to break.”

I don’t know if kids are being taught in school with wisdoms these days, or he memorized the phrase from some of those rather horrid YouTube videos, which he watches without my supervision (for as much as I wish I could supervise them better, I could not—this is as much as I can); either way it did surprise me.

The scenes to which we are made sonic witnesses, did make me realize that pretty much they were a part of childhood of many, but above all I am thinking about that memoir of a young woman, Komsomol enthusiast, a high-schools graduate who traveled from Moscow to become a constructor of the Bratsk dam and was put in one tent with forty married couples. She describes her experience.

I read her memoir in the Memorial society’s archive in Moscow in 2016, but for some reason assumed that I, or much less my child, would be, to some extent, made privy to a similar (so greatly softened, of course) experience in Bratsk. I desperately want to conclude that it all has been some sort of hell ongoing here for the observable period of time, but as an anthropologist I should not be yielding even in my thinking to such indecency. Saint Ruth Benedict, моли бога о нас. АМИНЬ.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 78**

I felt as though stories overwhelm me, like they are splashing on the level of my teeth, like I am an empty, diaphanous skeleton being filled with others’ voices, the voices of those who would not otherwise speak through me, if I not let them or rather if they won’t overwhelm me and make me speak for them. Perhaps the existence of the anthropologist is the existence of the medium.

### **Emails. 5. An Email from the Inbox**

(Professor is writing in connection to the discolored slides that I am so thrilled with.)

“Here is what Sansi writes about Dada, found objects, and ready-mades...

“The surrealist “found object” is inspired by Duchamp’s ready-mades (Lütticken 2010). One of the central issues raised by the ready-made is the abolition of the distinction between production and appropriation. For Duchamp the word “art” meant to make, but then, “to make is to choose and always to choose.”<sup>3</sup> And yet, Duchamp’s ready-mades were not just an act of conscious appropriation, or an affirmation of the power of the artist to decide what is art and what is not. The

ready-made, in Duchamp's terms, was "a rendezvous" (Duchamp 1973: 32), an encounter between an object and an author (Duve 1994: 71). This encounter had two conditions: the first one is to choose the object. But this choosing, Duchamp said very explicitly, was not motivated, but based on indifference and total lack of responsibility (again to quote Duchamp: "I object to responsibility" 4). So that choice is actually chance: Duchamp's choice was totally unintentional. To the question "How do you choose the ready-made?" he responded: "he chooses you, so to speak" (Duve 1994: 72). The second condition of this encounter was that it has to be inscribed (Duve 1994: 73), registered, documented. Duchamp wrote down the place and time of encounter. This encounter then becomes an event, a memorable point in the past, and the object would be a document of this encounter. "Art" is to be found in the encounter rather than in the object, which is more a trace than a work of art itself.

One could read the work of the ready-made and the found object as taking commodity fetishism to its ultimate consequences, by explicitly unveiling the fetish character of the commodity in the found object (Hollier 1992). For they don't disavow the power that objects had over them, but they embraced this power. One could also say that by embracing fetishism, they were paradoxically subverting it; they recognized the power of commodities, but they turned it into a personal power—a use value, as it were; the value of the object was a radically personal value, not an exchange value. In other words, they turned commodities into gifts: they used them to build persons, instead of being objectified and alienated by commodity fetishism. The found object is not an art object per se, but an event with revelatory effects, which uncovers the "magic that surrounds us" in everyday life, under the "thin layer of civilization" (Leiris in Bataille 1995: 95)— even at the apparently rational modern city of Paris. Interestingly enough, it could be argued that surrealists and anthropologists developed similar theories of magic. In *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937), Evans-Pritchard described how the "magical thinking" of the zande, an African people, is not an "irrational" thinking, ignorant of the laws of nature. The zande does not question that tree branches do fall all the time. But if the tree branch falls on my head, the zande will ask, why now? Why on my head? It is precisely from the understanding that this is an exceptional fact that the zande starts to look for a social cause for a natural phenomenon: who caused the tree branch to fall on my head?

Sansi, Roger (2014-11-20). *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (p. 25). Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition."

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 79**

I was honored to be trusted with an almost full archive of writings of my FirstHydroConstructor, mainly poems, dated as far back as the 1950s. I am excited to read them all. Manuscripts were punctiliously typed out by the author, and they are in the Word format. He is not what we would call a "professional poet," but I do not recall when was the last time I was so interested in reading through a whole corpus of someone's texts. There is some memoiristic prose too, entitled "River of Memory"—a remarkably diverse oeuvre for someone who is not a "writer."

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 80**

I realized what's the deal with the titles of periodicals founded in the Soviet period: Ogni Angary (Lights of the Angara [River]) newspaper, and Siberskie Ogni (Siberian Lights) literary journal. "Lights" stood for a powerful and appealing vision of the future: in the hitherto dark massives of taiga (with exceptions, certainly), there were to be (and in fact came into existence) illuminated spaces, luminous cities, urban spaces brimming with energy and overflowing with light.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 81**

Today I depart for the village of Anosovo. It was raining during the night. The river tram from Bratsk to Anosovo goes five hours. It is a remote place.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 82**

7/19/2017. River tram travel. At 12:40 PM, unofficial brief stop near the village of Karda, which has officially ceased existing since 2008. An oar boat from there came, a quick exchange was made—fish sold. "Fresh, caught today," remarked the man in the boat, and the boat departed, and the river tram went along its way. Three people live in Karda, I am told every year. I had not have a chance to visit them and talk to them.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 83**

Connection between the mother and the daughter is a special connection, full of warmth, hope, and care. In the pink room that Catherina created for her daughter with a rare, melliferous name Evelina, all dreams should come true. Fairies, unicorns, barbies, princesses, and all the inhabitants of the world of wonder, world of fairytales, would witness the growth and development of the happy Evelina's life.

The girlhood. The desire that the happiness would come true, is so pronounced.

The soft light envelopes the tiny figure on a toy horse. And it seems like all the pink shine in the pink room emanates from this source of light.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 84**

We went to the Velentyevs (name changed).

Filth.

I nearly threw up entering their house, the air was miasmatic.

In a separate room, the poor invalid was dwelling, Marina. One of the children, now a teenager, who was born with a bunch of diagnoses and never attended school.

In an attempt to escape, I went away and explored briefly a ruin nearby. In the ruined house, rows of coats were on the nails, and all objects that had no value, agglomerated here and there: glass, brushes in traces of paint, broken tools, basket with something, a divan with springs sticking out.

Still it was all dry and “dead,” as opposed to “living” material of the house from which I just ran, where some sort of food was being prepared side by side with rotting remnants of things in the dish.

I will return from this travel yet a more convinced Russophobe than ever.

The owner of the house, already having six children, recently gave birth to the seventh. His fate was to grow up in the filth that his siblings knew too well.

At the moment, I had a feeling like I have enough of this village for the rest of my life. A damned place.

Then medical office was built. The new colorful fence surrounded the nursery. The school was being renovated. All these signs of the future did not look for me convincing at the moment. I was so depressed with what I saw and most of all by that it was perceived as something perfectly normal. It was the normality that nearly made me vomit.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 85**

07/20/2017 I have no Internet this time, because to pay for the Internet, one has to go to the town of Oust Ouda.

The village is also out of gasoline, and with the beginning of the rain my hopes to reach the village of Karda rapidly flunked. There is no passable road to them, and to use a boat is impossible for the aforementioned reason (the absence of gasoline).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 86**

I am working with the Russians in Siberia, of which there exist two (heavily interlinked) communities: “starozhili” (old-time Russian dwellers), descendants of those who moved to Siberia in 16-19th century; and a separate group at least in the region of Katalanga “often called”



“priezzhie (italic) ‘newcomers’,” who arrived in the 60-70s in the course of the Soviet industrialization (Davidson, preface to Anna Sirina’s book *Ordering the World*).

This division holds true to other parts of Eastern Siberia due to the Soviet industrialization efforts, although I never heard in the time of my sporadic and prolonged field work in Bratsk and in the zone of flooding (2006-2017) the term “priezzhie” applied for this generation of Russian ‘newcomers.’ But the wave of newcomers, markedly different from starozhili, did exist (and disceas). (Pereselentsi?)

There were several waves of coming of Russian and European-part-of-Russia and of European countries, mostly East European, into Siberia, with some of those grand relocation associated with Stalin’s rule and genocidal decisions.

(To show here a map, in Soviet anthropological historiography).

Every such wave deserves an independent study, and in the village of Anosovo, which was brought about by both the first wave of settlers and by the process of industrialization, each of these waves left their even if extinguishing traces in memory of people. (“Zhili u nas tut estontsi. Kogo tolko ni zhilo.”—“There lived Estonians here with us. Who did not live here? [Everyone did.]”)

Modern Siberia is comprised out of the infinitely rich number of different “ouklads” (ways of living), of innumerable variety of “ordering of world” (to use Anna Sirina’s phrase), and is in part befitting of the grounding American metaphor of the “melting pot,” which is partially famous precisely for its overly optimistic misattention to and omission of a too-well-known fact that the said crucible is not really transforming anyone into any kind of the all-encompassing unity.

With whoever I got to talk in some depth in Siberia, everyone had a complex trajectory of arriving here and being connected to the place by a variety of different ties.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 87**

At the moment of parting with my father I cursed anthropology which wrecked everything so, but before anthropology it was my voluntary exile and displacement that warped things to the degree they are now. The anthropologist loses every sense of home, as Levi-Strauss observed, but as an expat, I had no such clear sense to begin with.

The village of Anosovo unfolded for a moment as the river tram aligned itself with it’s course, and then folded, a small inhabited territory in the sea of the taiga, stretching up to the horizon, wherever the eye can see. Anosovo like a burst of people-populated territory, a strange notch on the face of the observable planet. One can easily imagine here that the whole world is thus inhabited. Cities of light are “zones of exception”—to use the Agamben’s phrase in a manifestly distorted manner—compared to the world as a whole.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 88**

Bratsk dam: sublime turned into the ordinary. For younger generations, the dam has always been there.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 89**

I broke in tears twice today, one time seeing my father departing with the moorage (although I can argue that it was I who was departing), and the second time recollecting avidly this picture in the evening.

The travel from Anosovo to Irkutsk is comprised of two distances: first, made by the river tram, it takes some four hours, then, a “marshrutka” (little bus) dragging the fragile bones of it’s passanges all across most picturesque landscapes, landscapes that in their beauty do not fail to convey the utmost severity. It is a Balagansk—Irkutsk travel; takes equally four hours, maybe more considering the stop amid the things surprising with their uninhabitedness. In 2006, I traveled Irkutsk—Anosovo straight via the river tram, but since then the level of the Bratsk reservoir (a more precise name for the Angara River) fell drastically—other dams in Cascade are to blame, a conventional wisdom suggests.

But the previous Angara River, fast, clear, narrow, still flows at the bottom of the Angara River of the present times, G.F. told me in Anosovo.

Drowned river.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 90**

It is impossible to appreciate Bratsk without appreciating Irkutsk. Irkutsk, in the richness and all the controversies of its history, has been built here for ages. Bratsk, the modern Bratsk, that is, emerged in some ten years, exploding at the place where previously several villages dwelt. Bratsk and Irkutsk represent two types of Siberian cities. The former, coming into existence abruptly, by decision, at a whim of the party, following vogue, and as a project, while the latter emerged slowly, and, perhaps we could say, more naturally. The difference is felt in every-thing, including the typical apartments to rent. My apartment in Irkutsk that I rented now, copies up, to the absurd, the one in which I spent several days in Bratsk. The very same planning: the window in the right wall is absent. There is no balcony. This is it. Well, it furnished differently. But the thing is, what is felt beyond the window. In Irkutsk, it is a city. In Bratsk, it is some sort of social experiment modelled to resemble city, to be like city, to be city, so that you could not in fact tell what’s the difference, only see unmistakably that it is too huge and itself is equal to a city, a city-in-between.

## **Stenography of the Itinerary. 91**

City denizens know how to read city, but village coalesces into a relative indiscernibility.

## **Stenography of the Itinerary. 92**

It suddenly occurred to me that it is not travel and otherness and exoticism and life in it's strange forms that interests us most, but the misleadingly-modest figure of the anthropologist.

Malinowski in the angle that his diaries cast on him. Boas not because of his poor Eskimo but because he proclaimed them equal to the "civilized men."

Levi-Strauss not because of his observations on customs but because he was searched on the border.

Renato Rosaldo not because he discovered the imperialist nostalgia but because his wife died in the field.

Geertz not because of the Balinese but because he ran after the illegal cockfight.

Kulick not because of travesties per se (wonderful persons they are though!) but because he is gay.

Susan Sontag not because of her observations on photography and pain, but because she wrote to charm her lover.

Donna Haraway because she has a dog.

Foucault, because he was a madman.

Derrida, because he had an affair.

And so on.

Sure, nothing of it would matter if there were no mazes of texts that they created, but not the maze is interesting, but its creator, her torment, and her plight. What made them build all those octagonal constructions? What secret wounds and tragic uncertainties? Curious.

Sure, they were making familiar unfamiliar, and unfamiliar, familiar. But what is made familiar if not they? What is made unfamiliar than whatever it was that they were trying to make familiar (suppose they were indeed)?

So much for the death of the author, and here is to autoethnography.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 93**

Marshrutka (Minibus) is a perfect place for observing Siberian soundscape; it belongs to the soundscapes of the ordinary.

Music in this particular marshrutka was an one-time popular song: “Ksousha, Ksousha, Ksousha, [your/her] skirt is [made] out of plush.” I thought it was a CD disk of the nostalgic musical hits of the past, but looks like it was a radio (there were ad announcements interrupting the flow of the (truly terrible and beautiful) pop music of the bygone).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 94**

What if affect is what is left after everything else was explained away?

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 95**

For young Anosovo-born people to participate in selfie-taking culture is to explore the modern media and the self simultaneously just like everyone else is doing it out there in all the different worlds. For those who remain in Anosovo it is a difficult practice because of the rarity of the Internet. For selfie, the Internet, ideally, should be “everywhere” (perhaps save some dark nooks).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 96**

The lake Baikal. A strange thing occurred: initially (I think) Buryat tradition to tie a ribbon to connect to a sacred / memorable / infused with significance place has spread in Siberia across ethnicities and nations, and now an iron rail at a panoramic view in Listvyanka is generously adorned with prom flowers and georgievskaya ribbons among other types of textile.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 97**

At the Baikal Museum a pusa was swimming on its back. I was surprised with proportions of their lithe bodies: how short and fat they are, and also nimble and graceful. (Probably better fed in captivity too, compared to their free kin).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 98**

At some moment, Irkutsk appeared to me unreal. All cities have these moments of absurdity ripping a visitor, as well as a denizen, apart. It is hard to pin down such a moment. Perhaps you just realize that each and every inhabitant of this place is here but temporarily, whereas the place has some resilience of existence. It will remain after everyone whom you saw throughout the day will turn into empty skeletons. And you who saw them, in their blood and bone, and foresaw in bone, stripped of blood, will, too, one day expire, but the city of Irkutsk will remain.

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 99**

At the Irkutsk Ethnography Museum. Fancy. I didn't know there were clips for pioneer ties one time (Irkutsk was at it on the brink of vogue as usual, no doubt).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 100**

I am no longer excited to travel. Perhaps too early in my (late) anthropological career. Flights and airports seem to me the boringest places in the world. Will I ever have this wanderlust that is on the profile of every life-loving person, returned? Is there any excitement ahead in measuring space of a terminal? A prospect to see someone? Or get someplace?

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 101**

Oh Siberian samotsveti! (*Self-colorings*, the Russian word for semi-precious stones). Jade, looking like a leaf of the waterweed, and the matchless charoite.

As a colonizer I am, I could not prevent myself from buying a gem whenever I saw it in Irkutsk. With the same greediness Europeans traded gold for glass: can't the silly natives see how unequal our exchange is?—In four centuries nonchalantly writing in museums (true story! still on display in Texas Museum): “These people loved glass beads...” (I am quoting from memory but, I assure you, quite close to the original).

### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 102**

O.B. invited me to attend the opera while we both will be at the AASEEES meeting in Chicago in November (having organized a number of panels together—yes, a number, it is all her energy).

She bought some crazily beautiful dress, all in golden flowers, the dress so grandiose, so gorgeous, that even the halls of Marriotte where the international conference is to be held, are not splendid enough places for such a dress, in her opinion. She only showed a part of the attire on instagram,

all gold, all flowers, and a satin-finish gauze covering the thicker layer of the chocolate-brown fabric; must be amazing on her with her dark hair and fair skin.

It took me about an hour to voluptuously entertain this thought, the thought of going to an opera with her so dressed, and I involuntarily looked at the mirror and twisted my mustache, and I also thought that I am ten years her senior and in every photo (and I will ensure there will be at least one snapshot) she will look so blinding in her brown-golden dress with golden flowers stinging like golden bees, that I will dissipate on the background. I have not a single dress worthy of a go to the opera, and at the time when I frequented opera (when I was married to an opera singer, obviously, when else; I preferred rock at the time, and silence today), my attire did not bother me that much. But in 37 a woman should not go to an opera unless she has a diamond brooch and an elbow-high velvet gloves and could be coiffured and manicured in a way she produces the impression of many-handed Kali, and all things like that.

Plenty of those whom I am privileged to know are people whose socio-economic status is way beyond mine; they are oftentimes either oblivious to it, or simply by virtue of their good upbringing never made me feel like I do not belong to their circle. (And ah, perhaps good upbringing and obliviousness are the same or inseparable parts of one another.) For me the conference itself however is a hard enough endeavor financially already, to add an opera visit to it, and yet of course I could not possibly decline, I agreed instantaneously, and only after that all other considerations entered my soul, which, I must admit, remained remarkably equanimous. I guess it still is in a childish habit of expecting some sudden sources of great enrichment every single day.

It also occurred to me, strangely, that, as I cleared my shoe from the clay against the emerald grass in Anosovo but several days ago, I might have had already known the future, already envisioned Olia in her overwhelming dress, Olia inviting me, in addition to all other many graces she kindly bestowed upon me.

And I might wear a costume, I thought, thus I would not have to be destined to compete with her impossible dress and her stature—however a good costume would cost more than a dress, a cheap dress can always pretend at least that it was expensive by the quirk of the market, and no such pretence is possible from the costume.

Never mind, some opportunity or other will surely present itself, perhaps a new credit card; but Chicago (where I have never been), opera (which I have not attended in years), Olia (with whom we never met, although, as she says, no one believes it—who even cares? I guess she is constantly in a center of great attention)—it all sounds like such a fairy tale, especially here in the fresh-after-Siberia-Moscow, at the time by which I have already abandoned reading every anthropological treatises and relapsed secretly first to reading Rabelais and then even deteriorated to de Sade (a fantastic writer, we all are not worthy of saying his name). And all of a sudden such a gift, amid all these depressing ruins. What a wonderful episode to be looking forward to!

How do you know if you are in your native city? You don't notice it.

#### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 104**

Séva played with two children: a little girl in the princess's crown and in purple mantle, blowing bubbles, and her older brother. Her brother and Séva popped the bubbles; her brother with a stick, and Séva with his plastic ninja dagger.

When the sun went down, and the fun was over, the boy attempted to shake Séva's hand, but only succeeded in shaking the left one, for Séva still held his weapon in the right.

"Will we blow bubbles next time?" Asked Séva, hopeful, in Russian.

"Of course," said the boy and smiled, and I, in my sentimentality, was almost reduced to tears at the certainty and futility of this casual and happy "of course," which is almost for sure never to be fulfilled, for the encounter had as its arena a small evening park in a grandiose city.

#### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 105**

Struggling "in the field" to obtain a book. I wonder how the life would have changed if the access to electronic libraries all over the world, archives of professional journals included, would be free for everyone? (This is my belief that it'll be so sooner or later; I want sooner, needless to say—it's only too fair). Perhaps notwithstanding economic difficulties (exaggerated, I'm sure), it will bring wider audiences to those very scientists who justly lament their limited readership.

#### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 106**

Dividing life between two countries is like having two eyes turned into different directions, each looking at an alien life, but differently alien. One of these lives (one eye is staring at) once belonged to you and you depart from it, imperceptibly but also undeniably. And another life was never yours and is never to be, yet you are adjoining it and have no distance between this life and you. This absence of distance does not mean unity, however. A viewer becomes something like a gecko, with eyes rotating in their sockets in asynchronicity.

#### **Stenography of the Itinerary. 107**

When you want to add back your friends on LinkedIn but oops, LinkedIn is banned in Russia. 2017... Pinch me someone, is this real? Besides, the heck? To ban LinkedIn and not to ban Facebook. Doesn't make much sense to me. My decree: ban electricity! Destroy them all.

(Anosovo will survive btw).