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ON A SEARCHER'S PATH

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Escape and return

When I was eighteen I made my first try to get in the Theatre Academy. It was not a serious effort; I was not sure about what I wanted or whether I was talented enough to become an actor. However, before the last part of the auditions the jury suggested that I would continue the audition with the group that was applying to the department of dramaturgy, since they had been fond of my autobiography and my analysis on *The Doll's House* by Ibsen. I was shocked. A dramaturge? How did they know I could become writer if I didn't know it myself?

Of course I followed their advice, but at the same time I was horrified about the possibility to start studying something I had not chosen myself. Luckily they didn't choose me, so I had one year to think it over before the next try. My decision was clear: I have no experience of life – I can't become a writer. And: I want to do something with my whole body and with other people – I want to be an actor. And so I did, the next year I started my acting studies.

After four years' studies I started work as actor. Acting meant a huge challenge to me and I took it seriously. I was passionate about theatre. Meanwhile, reading and writing became more and more difficult. I started to detest those lonely evenings in my former life that I had spent writing poems and stories and reading dusty novels and poetry. I secretly destroyed my childhood poems that had been read in the Children's Radio program when I was about ten, an orange covered notebook with a rabbit's face on it. My former, lonely me was a shame I tried to get rid of. It was like a bad smell or dirt that covered the real me. Even writing my name down became painful in my recreation process aiming at visibility on stage. Somehow getting lost in loneliness and writing started meaning the same thing to me. When acting I learned to use my body memory instead of notepads and to trust situational memory instead of notes I'd written down. Writing meant getting separated from real life and talking to ghosts. Visibility on stage meant contact, getting together and playfulness.

Now, after twenty years, I am seeing my way back to writing as an escape and a return, as a way of looking for the treasure, or as a spot on a searcher's path. My parents' home was filled with books. I grew up in a special atmosphere where language, both spoken and written, was held like a wild, flourishing garden that would be carefully raised and cultivated. I got linked to a tradition full of meanings, rules, aspects of admiration and pain that grew out from the use of words. After going out to the world I soon noticed that the special atmosphere was like a wall between me and others; it prevented understanding and made me feel different and far away. It is no wonder I wanted to lose it all, before finding back to the garden of words and the joy, the tickling and sparkling attraction of language, its possibilities of communication.

Desire

The desire to write reappeared little by little - a friend asked for texts that she could compose, a colleague asked for help in adapting a novel. Then there were times when I had that strange feeling that I was lacking something. I did a lot of acting with poetry; I made performances alone and with others, I was often chosen for my roles because I had "this talent to speak my words," I had lots of work and wonderful parts. Now and then during my first ten years in theatre I started some kind of

secret writing projects or tried to study more French – for what? If there was a purpose, I've forgotten it. But I still remember being ashamed, feeling different and lost. I remember the smell of paper and dust and the fear of getting separated again.

Little by little I realized that I wanted to do something other than acting. I translated a play, I adapted a children's story, and I decided to leave my permanent job at the theatre sooner or later. By then I already knew I was a searcher. Fear was beaten by desire. Head full of plans I started a new way of living - planning and producing, taking risks and hunting for new challenges. At that time I used to read aloud to my little son; he was eager to hear all the tales and rhymes in the world and I got a feeling of a new kind of connection between the text, the listener and me. I felt at home.

Quite soon I also started my studies again. It was there that colleagues and teachers put the mirror in front of my face. 'Why don't you write? I love to read your essays, you should write more.' Again I was surprised - I had told myself a long time ago that the jury didn't know what they were doing, I had told myself I was a childish young woman who couldn't be taken seriously, I had told myself it was an error. And now it felt good when these new people in my life recognized the writer in me! So I started to recognize it too, my secret, a piece of identity that I had carefully hidden deep inside.

Problems and accidents

But the problem was still there: the dilemma between the desire of writing and being alone - getting lost and separated. The escape was finished. I gave up (almost desperate). In the first stage I just dived into the writer's lonely world, where everybody else is asleep or out there somewhere while the poet sits in the cellar. I remember having long sleepless nights sitting in an armchair with a notebook and a pencil burning in my hand, not knowing what to write, to whom to write. Far from my husband and the warmth of our bed, far from the tranquillity of black, silent velvet nights. Accusing myself: Is this only another escape? Am I just diving into another fiction instead of living my life? Am I just incapable of solving the question of the reappearing crossroads in my life, am I heading to deserts instead of choosing one of the paths in front of me? Somehow, there were no choices. I spent many long, pale, winter days in my armchair, far from all reasonable people who had all gone to their reasonable work, a burning pencil between my fingers. If I was writing, it was more like applying for entrance to the world of papers and pencils. Like an alphabet asking for short-term-license for immigration after a cheating smuggler had left her in the harbour customs zone. Tired when facing my family in the mornings, impatient when waiting for a moment of lonely space and the writing time. I did some reasonable work, too, but somehow I can't remember what it was. The focus was on the moments of time I could steal for the alphabet writer.

Then, by accident, on a journey to the Lesbos Island, in Greece, (it was June, just before the high season) I started a new diary in an open-air café on a square, under a huge platan tree. Those sweaty afternoons left a trace on me. I have often longed for the easiness of writing I felt there. Was it the light coming through the dark green parasol of leaves? Was it the culture of temporality in the village – the way everybody spent their time in cafés looking for shadows, avoiding the brutal sunshine, after swimming, before dinner? After shopping, before returning home? Was it the way sounds (music, conversation, dogs) disappeared in leaves, in walls of the surrounding houses and in the wind? Was it the quietness in our travelling together, just me and my husband, long walks in the scenery, watching the sun set in the sea, late supper in the fish-restaurants in the port, the horizon appearing and disappearing along the changing of the day, the shared moments without words. However, it was impossible to me to find a similar situation at home.

A few years later, on another trip, I found it again. What was different was that I was travelling alone and I started to write in order not to feel lonely. My trip was a cultural one, I went to two or three theatre shows per day and to museums as well. Diary was my partner in dialogue on the pieces of art I had seen. She also became a co-traveller, company when having breakfast, coffee-break or dinner. Back home I realized the change, by accident as usual. It was some time after the journey, when a raindrop reminded me of a detail I had forgotten that once came back to me as a sensation, falling on my hand, warm although it was December. I immediately went to a bookstore, bought a notebook, went to a café and started to write down what had come into my mind instead of doing my Christmas-shopping. I was acting like a puppet manipulated by a puppeteer. That's how I suddenly noticed that I was writing in the middle of others, in a café, crowded with people, not somewhere else.

Presence

As a result, things turned upside down: Being alone started to mean not being able to write. Writing started to mean something like a natural way of being, an activity I could do almost anywhere, anytime, though my favourite places to write still are cafés or at home on silent late evening times. Long ago I had that feeling of anxiety when even thinking of writing. Writing had been an uncomfortable labyrinth, full of stillness, rules, values and traditions to be taken in condition, a space with no movement, a desert, a forgotten garden, where one could get lost for a hundred years. Now there is a strong, affirming bodily experience when I write. My senses are open to the world around me, I'm actively involved in my own action, I'm at a point of crossroads in the space, aware and connected. Even late evenings, alone, are full of respiration, sighing, humming, falling of dust, unending sound and movement that bind me in the middle of the environment, connect my sensations into the living world around me.

During last winter, as I studied on a course among the director and dramaturgy students at the Theatre Academy, more professional challenges on writing appeared. The issue was to recognize 'the writer's shadow'. During the workshops everybody shared what they had been working on. We had a lot of spontaneous talk and rapid tasks to do and show with no preparing time. It was impressive, hard and sometimes irritatingly uncomfortable to realize the necessity of sharing my work, even if it was still in process. The recognition of my shadow (family, teacher, self-control) watching behind my shoulder was an important discovery. The shadow challenges into conversation, it demands struggle. It opens new directions in thinking and writing. I'm learning to throw control away. I'm learning dialogue and playfulness, I'm getting more shameless and sharp in my sayings. These are the consequences guiding my writing conditions at present. I'm also heading toward this new challenge, learning how to write non-fiction, even getting ideas of what it takes to write a research text. Writing has become a way of thinking, a way out of anxiety, company on lazy days – a way of being that is much like an actor's way. The garden is presenting its diversity to me.

Spaces in places

I think I have an actor's manner of concentrating on writing. I work in time and place, under the circumstances, or it's more like acting with the circumstances. It is necessary to find the conditions on which the situation becomes possible. Once you knowing them it is possible to act, no matter what they are, to get impulses and react, to move toward visibility. The simple choice is to start by opening the PC and beginning to write. The opportunity to do so may be an early morning or a lunch-break. If I'm in my study at the Academy, I open the computer there, knowing well that the

phone will ring in five minutes, or someone will start a discussion right behind my door (the door can't be shut, there's not enough fresh air inside). The study is small and its window opens on the inner parts of the building, not outside. The concentration time can be short but then I start again after a break. It doesn't bother me, actually I often enjoy it. I enjoy concentrating hard, exerting myself, winning and losing the feeling of getting connected to the environment.

At home, the PC is in the middle of everything else. The most peaceful moments for writing are usually late evenings, sometimes weekends when the family gets out. At home the most irritating, teasing disturbance is one of our two cats, Dixie, who believes he is the centre of the universe. He makes a lot of noise; he wants to be noticed at once and he loves to walk on the keyboard as if he were the one with the inspiration. His singing sounds like that of a crow, and it's often heard when there is nobody around to play with him right away. He seems to be continuously asking: "Can there be anything more important than to throw and catch a little grey toy mice?" I can't imagine a more inspiring partner for a tough scene. My son and husband make a lot of noise, too, when they are around. Then I use my ability of seizing those short intervals to concentrate. Now and then, of course, I give up, when the scene doesn't fit my mood or I just get fed up and leave the stage. It's not always fun to act in challenging situations, and our home is not only my playground. Luckily also my son and husband read and write, so there are some quiet moments at home, and then the only sound is the turning of a page, and the napping on the keyboard, the words awakening, flying and shivering silently in the air and landing, marking the paper. Then the air thickens of traces being followed back and forth, new paths and forgotten lands getting formed, while imagination and my own existence make contact and the invisible can easily be seen.

Writing is a valuable space I don't want to spoil. I've been doing many things in my life under pressure. Writing is not one of them. When beginning the activity I let my mind work, I trust in my capacity to express myself and I let it come, let it happen. I am very conscious of the importance of being present, sitting on my bones on a chair, opening or closing the ears, breathing in and out, not asking too much of myself, letting flow and taking a break now and then. The more I write, the more eager I get to put my mind to it, although it's often a struggle. The fun is not what I am hunting, but rather the clearness of thoughts and their presentation. It is built through the uncomfortable but enjoyable process, guided by intuition, accompanied by pleasure and hints of deeper meaningfulness. To write is to live my life, and the difference between writing and playing at the theatre seems to disappear.

To achieve my goals on writing it is important to have persons near me that help me revise the text and gain some perspective on it. There are colleagues, some friends, and my husband, whom I often ask to read a bit of what I'm working on. Sometimes I only ask them to converse with me. And they are patient. I do my best to keep my work as my work, but often I notice it's a silly principle or at least just impossible. Their comments help me move forward: their presence, their eyes and ears. Getting disturbed, asking stupid questions, and getting interested and losing the point, give me inspiration to go further. As I have noticed how the childish, former me has grown older, the scale of the searching process has become clearer: It is all unfinished, like many of my writing projects. The work to be done is patiently there, waiting for action. And for acting I need playmates; my primary writing circumstances are my people.

In dialogue

One night I was lying in bed beside my husband. It was dark. The window was open and the cold autumn night air entered in. I said: "Today, on the philosophy lesson, I realized why I originally chose acting as my profession. There I sat listening to a professor who explained the principles of Kant's theory of philosophy. He went on repeating several times a sentence that was difficult to catch, as if we should have understood the meaning just by listening to the sentence, the same sentence over and over. It brought back the feeling I had during school years – that by sitting and thinking nothing happens, nothing becomes concrete, there's only emptiness behind thinking clearly or working with your head."

My husband answered: "That's funny."

I: "Why?"

He: "Because I chose sitting and thinking. Both of my parents were actors and I thought acting in theatre was empty."

I: "I see."

He: "Maybe it's an existential question for all of us. How to avoid emptiness, how to get the feeling of doing something real."

I: "Maybe... When I was young I had the feeling I should go somewhere, that there is a place for me somewhere – a place where I would do something real and that I just ought to go and find that. The real life was somewhere else."

He: "Until you met me?"

I: "Exactly!"

The next morning, I had a little meditation on the feeling of being here, being present, and the meaning of the experience of getting bored. Being present gives life meaning. It feels good, as if my whole experience of life were sitting beside me, all the years of my existence glimpsed, realizing that being together can also mean to be lonely, as well as being alone can mean being connected. And so I came to think of getting bored. I believe it is one of the main issues in living a human life. I mean that in the same way that we think about love and death. There is no solution, no way to get out, to get rid of it. We must live with it every day and every night, we can't leave it in the attic or behind the door when we go for a walk by the seashore or when we travel abroad; we have to sit against it at the table and to read the morning news with it. If we forget about it for a while, it does not mean it isn't still around. The solution is to learn to accept our existence. It is my shadow; it has my shape, a shadow that throws itself over my existence like love and death do. A shadow filling emptiness with life.

When I was eighteen I was terrified by the thought that I would write a play some day. It was the most difficult manner of writing I could imagine. Now I can see myself doing it and I find it natural. Not less frightening but still a matter I know I can achieve. I can handle it like I held the burning pencil between my fingers. I can see my search proceeding like an actor's process when working on a new role. It has a lot to do with rehearsing new manners, varying rhythm in movement, facing situations with different attitudes. It is about re-encountering my previous experience, letting my memory work, becoming mediator. Facing the others (things, people, atmospheres) in surprising actions, looking and wandering around with astonishment and curiosity and making lived fiction - characters, stories - out of it.

AT the Summer School in Jyväskylä last June (Personal writing II, organised by The Research Centre for Contemporary Culture in 2002) I was facing a big question: How to express the idea of my thesis – how to describe the idea of how the reality of making theatre consists of stories that the group shares with each other. My group was stunned as I tried to explain it with words. My idea

was in my head and it came out as a mess. As I walked up and down the hot summer city streets, questions and claims arguing with each other in my head, mocking my thoughts, laughing at my effort (“childish middle-aged woman, shame on you”), I came to think of the connections in communication, like the city streets, and I started to draw and write an example of it on transparent sheets of paper that I luckily found in a bookstore. Where would I be without bookstores? It was amazing that a part of my idea became visible to me in a new, clearer way, and also to the others in my group. The situation – time, place, bodily presence – and the stories of all the participants could be seen at a glance and in a new, accessible perspective. The network of stories became visible, sheet by sheet. It was my first conscious step towards describing human communication in theatre work as a space of encountering a dialogical and ethical moment of facing the other, a deeper recognition of the dialogical philosophies of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. That’s the way I see life, too - in scenes and characters acting as parts of a bigger entirety, a story to be told.

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