

***Geology of the Other:
The Encounter as Vibration of the Flesh***
by Anaïs Nony with Images by Dani Robison

Prior to being a body present in time, the Other is a mountainous relief in the landscape of a common world, a perspective shape that the “I” chooses to welcome or not. This relief—if it has often been considered from the point of view of an authority deciding where It should stand—will become, we hope, the possible zone of an encounter. When this relief comes out of the ground and enters the world, when the Other becomes simultaneously something that feels and is felt, its expression opens up to become a zone of contact, a mobile and permeable layer of exchange.

In this surrounding zone, the Other strips and exposes itself as evanescence. It is this unattainable geometric point that inscribes an atmospheric change by its presence: tempest, thunder, earthquake, but also heat, humidity, and evaporation. The Other is an organic sounding board reflecting our modes of being together. It is this person—per-sonare—through which the world resonates, who transforms, in the same fashion, the thermal sensations into energizing transfers, into dynamic emotions. A sensorial choice is always inscribed at the threshold of an encounter. The Other is a sensation echoing my own becoming flesh. Its flesh is a premonition of my own flesh, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty would say.

For a long time, and often, the Other has been both the excuse and the scapegoat for an outpouring of hegemonic thoughts, which common ground was based on an other’s servitude: the foreigner, the barbarian, or the savage, but also the artist, the poor, the thinker, the child, the woman, or the elderly. The Other can be that which attempt to retrace history and write its own trajectory instead of the one imposed on it. If, out of clumsiness, foolishness, malice or for profit, I force the Other to be the guarantee for a difference imposed by my sight—namely my point of view—then, the Other is reduced to alienating contradictions. The Other is this different to whom the “I” offers, in turn, a weapon or a hand. To hurt and reduce the Other is forcing a ghostly stain onto our common landscape, a stain that no collective effort can really erase within myself or the Other. The experience of the Other is thus reduced to a cliché, a tag, a label, that leads to a consumption of haunted in-dividuals.



“...Tempest, thunder, earthquake, but also heat, humidity, and evaporation.”



“...Reduced to affects of sadness, fear, horror, panic, and terror, as well as effects of stagnation, fixation, and immobility.”

The “I” is haunted, tempted, by the wound of the Other. The alienation of the Other is the symptom of a process of individualization—such as love and knowledge—that is haunted, and therefore reduced to affects of sadness, fear, horror, panic, and terror, as well as effects of stagnation, fixation, and immobility. From then on, this reduction that subjugates not only erases the Other as relief of a common world, but also as path toward a possible world. The Other is only difference if admitted as an enigma that resonates and echoes my own reflexive existence, this never ending quest of the “who am I” that transforms into “how do we become.” If welcomed as a changing plurality, the Other guarantees a mobile trajectory, and develops a shared multiple in which the plural is not opposed to the singular, and in which diversity only contrasts with particular.



“..To assemble and not separate the exchange are not a given but an effort.”

The quality of the Other as both welcomed and welcoming, and the space necessarily maintained between I and the Other, in order to assemble and not separate the exchange, are not a given but an effort. Being welcoming relies on a blending and a spatio-temporal agreement with the Other so that for a moment of improvisation, the possible sensations of an encounter may resonate. Such encounter is vibration of the flesh, which skin becomes a vessel for reciprocating these sensations. Chills, redness, smiles: the body as a whole is a barometer of my relation to the Other. The space of the encounter becomes a mode of being whole, a full attitude which fluctuates according to feelings, withdrawing and expanding as the Other inscribes in this space a trace where the face of the Other and my own become the zone of our common reflections.

An ontological reciprocity unveils itself with the Other. Such reciprocity contains an enigma that remains to be interpreted constantly through a spontaneity demanded by an exchange, such as offering a hand or lending an ear, such as looking and discovering a relief.

The encounter is a global ascension, in zero gravity, in which the Other is the agent of its own discovery. The encounter wants itself sociality; a living together to finally write a common world. The encounter is an apprenticeship where the Other is no longer a tool for alienation, but rather a back and forth between knowledge and emancipation.



"...Depth, passage, and atmospheric change..."

Sociality, before being institutionalized, is a change of state, a rite of passage in which the Other becomes a manifestation of our potentials. This passage is located inside of us and evaporates through its presence any opposition between the inside and the outside, the finite and the infinite. The Other becomes a field of fascination, but only manifests itself when we maintain a contact with It, calling in turn for attention, care, or donation, because the diverse and multiple ways to figure out existence reside within It.

The becoming other than our ordinary self: here lies the repeated promise that the Other offers as depth, passage, and atmospheric change. A world without the Other would be a love declaration without exchange, namely, an emotional abyss from which no common horizon can be envisioned. The Other is a creative compass that allows for displacement, a power to act that resets the scale of inequalities.

It is no longer about thinking of verticality as a separation between the similar and the different, the I and the Other, the right and the left, but instead about considering it as an ascension, an imaginary hike in which the Other elevates itself to crush, through its plural singularity, any outdated modes of thinking.

To welcome the Other, one has to tackle the trends that we are used to establishing—such as our privileges—and to cultivate another language in which the Other is an integral part of this relational encounter of ‘acting out’. Acting out to become Other than what we are, to open up a zone of uncomforted ease where relations are created anew.

The Other is this being which calls me back to my own ignorance, to the limits of the knowledge I have of what I believe to be so close to me. The capital letter placed on this Other that rushes the most into the silent ignorance that I impose onto it, is a call for sound: one has to say “the other with a capital O.” The capital “O” of the Other is therefore not about being unique, indivisible, ONE, but about the multiple, the dynamic, the plural vibration of the unsayable that is shared. The Other is the guarantee for a genealogy of our human relations. It is the palimpsest that reveals the difference in time, this difference marking the quasi-feminized and majestically elaborated spelling by Jacques Derrida.

The one in the Other, the all in the One.



"...A zone of uncomforted ease where relations are created anew."



"It acts in a way that escapes me and dislodges my own intelligibility."

By its presence, the Other assembles space and time. It is no longer about reducing the Other to the measure of our fantasies for exoticism, the elsewhere, the far away, but to welcome the Other as potential and enigma. The Other is this unattainable spot, this being of dynamic and creative desires. The Other is a promise made to the future, not a causal equation that I can use to make sense of the Other every time It acts in a way that escapes me and dislodges my own intelligibility. One has to give some of its time to the Other, the time to flourish in order to invent together other common modes of existence. Nevertheless, we always impose space to the Other, pushing It into the margins, rather than at the edge, of our singularities.

Before being rejected into the margins, the Other stands on the banks of my singularity, in a liminal position as if it were breaking, through its presence, the pending silence between my lips. The “I”, as a sensible phenomenon, gives space to this other being, to this being other. In constant becoming, the Other is only a difference because It inscribes itself in an experience of its own, which escapes us and which renews itself indefinitely as our common world becomes tinted by our exchanges. The non-quantitative and non-qualitative difference, namely the ontological difference, is a dynamic one in which the other is thought of as a creative process. This changing process inscribes itself in opposition to the identical and to the identity promoted by the market economy. The latter necessitates mathematical conclusions and numeral equations to determine what can be created and exchanged, therefore defining what is important by excluding that which cannot be reduced to a numerical category. Identity is a social construct, and as such, it is based on a point of view, a positioning. It is an economic construct regulated by laws such as production, consumption, and speculation. Identity is a label, a brand, a slogan. In other words, it is both an image of thought and the vehicle for a market value. The capitalist hegemony replaced the forces of production by the forces of relations, preventing us from thinking about the Other, namely the one that escapes both a fixed identity and an economic reproducibility. What Derrida precisely denounces is the commodification of our ability to think, to confront the Other, and therefore to radically transform our modes of being together in the world. Difference does not think about the ONE, it thinks through us via the multiplicity of our potentials. It is not so much that the Other is within us, and that any other is an us, another us, an Other for us. Difference is taking risks, the event that always calls us back to a humanity, a non and radical in-humanity. This is why Derrida mentions art and its often-misunderstood extravagances. As soon as art is understood, it enters a market economy and earns a place in the art market. When Derrida affirms that the West has never been able to think about the Other, he is referring to this forced identity that prevents us from thinking. As soon as the Other is understood, it is reduced to a fixed identity and earns its place in the market of inalterable definitions. One should not read melancholia in Derrida’s affirmation that “the West has never been able to think...” but perhaps a sort of mourning for a mode of thinking that is no longer present in the West. Derrida is well aware that in Ancient Greece, the Other was already at the base of a form of thinking that allowed for the integration of entities such as the foreigner, the ghost, the animal, the mortal, and the spirit. However, this pre-Socratic Greece, as it has been called—although we should include Socrates in it, and not all of Plato’s Socrates—, was reclaimed when writing, politics, and history, became a tool of domination. The Other is our scrapbook, this repository of memories from the past, which guards an irreducible experience that I cannot grasp or truly think. Here, in the experience that the Other carries within It and brings to me, the thought and the healing are indiscernible: the Other moves back and forth between the fragility of the lived experiences and the strength of the future, encompassing both the visions of the future and the wounds of the past.

The Other is a space where reliefs that have been more or less flattened— like old mountains, so tall, and yet so flat—are inscribed. Therefore, it is about thinking of these spaces no longer as full of gaps, traps, dark corners where the I loses itself, but rather as multiple and dynamic zones of elevation with creative processes that are deeply anchored within our archetypes. Loving the Other means offering a space-time in which the encounter becomes vibration of our flesh. To love is to care and care is nothing but what makes future bearable in the present. To desire care, to develop a desirable care, and to care for our multiple, non-unilateral desires is a key. One that unlocks borders, zones of un-passage, spaces of violence where trajectories of beings are attacked, to welcome the vibrant presence of the Other in us, in every single becoming other. The moment of encounter, the gift of sharing with the other, is the duration of a world of relations where emotions and affects that are so particular to what makes life worth living, erupt.



"...The Other stands on the banks of my singularity, in a liminal position as if it were breaking, through its presence, the pending silence between my lips."



"...Encompassing both the visions of the future and the wounds of the past."

Geologies

*Series of eight 8" x 10" collagraph prints
2017*

"These prints play the role of Other, infiltrating the text and allowing an ontological reciprocity between myself and Anaïs. Collagraph as a medium is the result of a collision between a relief plate and the porous flesh of paper wherein the ink acts as the mobile zone of contact, the site of felt exchange. I constructed my plates from bits of refuse I found both mundane and personally significant: crushed aluminum cans, torn clothing, and circuit boards. My hope was to depict a dissolution of boundaries and discrete forms as well as to enact the style of encounter described by the text."

-Dani Robison

Original text in French, titled *Géologie de l'autre: La rencontre comme tremblement de la chair*, by Anaïs Nony.
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