

Stavanger Beginnings (Script)

This house is white. This house is made of wood. This house is part of a large family of wooden houses, scattered around the Bay and far beyond. Since their facades are painted frequently, the city keeps looking fresh and clean, as if it has no past and is pleased to appear for you anew each day. It's rare to encounter paint peeling off, but on closer inspection, interruptions do exist. Rotting wood. An abandoned residence. The Acne store that has been permanently closed. And then there's a peculiar abundance of so-called street art. The colourful spray paint emphasizes the city's predominant whiteness - this graffiti isn't going all out, it is disciplined, domesticated somehow.

Street art always takes me back to a conversation of ten years ago, when a writer I was interviewing proposed that real graffiti and Japanese silkscreen from the 19th century have more in common than legal graffiti and illegal graffiti. 'There is no relation between those two', he said, 'It's a kind of blackface. Legal graffiti decorates the property of an owner, while real graffiti simply takes that property away'.

Over there are some houses. They are also made of wood. They are covered in spray paint. But the knots are more complicated to untie. This graffiti doesn't take the property away from the owner, it rather contaminates the white wood by commission, offering the municipality an excuse to demolish the monumental walls, and replace the house with, well with what really? A shopping mall? A five story condo with a view over... this house?

This house is white. This house is made of wood. This house is located in a small winding street paved with cobble stones, where the urge to take a picture is hard to resist. The street exposes itself in the right angle, no matter if you decide on landscape or portrait. Most of the houses, which have been built during the 18th and 19th century, are residential, but the owners are on holiday now. Only the neighbour with the ceramics workshop still opens her door these days. New batches of visitors walk by continuously, completing the image.

'It feels like being in the real world', I said when we arrived.

'It totally does', he confirmed.

We were both dressed in black Patagonia, prepared for unpredictable weather and ready to blend in with the locals.

'Does the real world still exist?'

'Wait, I have to write that down.'

Within a few days, you realise it's Groundhog Day. When you roll up the curtains, and watch outside the window over the rooftop of another white painted wooden house, the cruise ship has already arrived in the Bay. While you were sleeping, its foghorn must have been blowing during the early sunrise. But you didn't hear it.

Cruise ships have names such as Aida Bella, Allure of the Seas or Crystal Symphony.

Ok.

Cruise ships have names such as Aegean Paradise, Carnival Imagination or Enchanted Capri.

More.

Cruise ships have names such as Lord of the Glens, Norwegian Epic or Celebrity Silhouette.

Enough.

You wonder why Norwegian toilets have no sink inside.

You try to keep your ten minutes head-space meditation routine.

Three roommates, coming from three different cities abroad, have decided on mutual breakfast habits: French press coffee, appelsin juice, yoghurt with fancy mountain honey and some average muesli.

When you walk outside the house, tourists stare at you, expecting you to be a local. They don't know how to handle you. But you don't mind being a figuration within their holiday.

When you cross the square at the Bay, there is often a market going on with stalls selling woolen jumpers, warm slippers and local toys. Delete this market now. The only stall that is still there, and is an ab-

solute constant, is the man selling fidget spinners. He takes part in Groundhog Day. You don't need that much to sell fidget spinners. Just a cardboard neon sign. And a parasol, here rather used for shelter against the rain than the sun. There's never a customer. It's 2017. How many fidget spinners have been made? And when and where was it decided this would be the hype of the Summer?

Spidget finger.

Once you have determined it's Groundhog Day, although it is early July and not the second of February, a groundhog appears. That's how it works. This particular groundhog comes in the shape of a small wooden sculpture at the shopping street. He's standing up, holding his forelegs to his chest. Another groundhog is resting behind him on a plateau filled with chip-wood.

This Headspace routine is so not working. Or rather, not happening.

You thought keeping things Groundhog would keep things grounded.

Meanwhile you read Eileen Myles. That classic novel that they themselves define as 'the thing'. They don't seem to have a strict regime of swimming lanes daily, or doing a morning stretch.

15.162 people are meditating with Andy now.

I'm sorry Andy. It's just not happening today.

Even when I know you offer me guided and unguided solutions for rough days, focus and restlessness.

Thanks but no thanks.

What about Eileen? They just keep on drinking, riding along with the ups and downs. Empty days. Spending last dollars on cigarettes and beers. Surviving on the joy of a roll from the bakery with flecks of garlic on the top and a giant glass of ice water. But those were those days of course. In a city that is now a polished version of its mythicised self.

Here you keep on counting. A hot dog is about four euros. A can of beer from the grocery store about three. Supermarket visits take forever, you loiter around the same aisle wondering if the beer tastes

better if the can has a matte finish instead of a shiny one. On Fridays you need to check the clock, and buy your alcohol before eight.

Here, you have to plan to loose control.

This Summer, Eileen's days seem pretty groundhog.

Their instagram reveals a lot of dog walking. So you get this repetition. Of cracks in the pavement, of bushes to pee in, of a honey brown wagging tail, of on-going road works marked by orange pylons. And vertical and horizontal lines. The lines of electricity poles, a water hose poking through a wall reaching out for the tap, the railway track. 'Better WITH dogleg', they caption. And so it continues. More bushes. A brush of faded crimson paint along the pavement. More lines. Weird angles. Their images are never at spirit level. Sometimes a bright flower or the velvet skin of a cactus leaf. And when they're travelling, it's all about slippers left behind on the carpet in a hotel room. Tissues in the wall of the airplane toilet. A sentence written at the airplane toilet. 'Airplane graffiti yay', they caption.

I like following them.

There is a house. The house is for rent. It's probably one of those typical Amsterdam apartments in the centre with high ceilings and a tiny kitchen. It must be three stories high, and that's an estimated guess. All I recognise in the video of not even two minutes, are the familiar stairs: steep and narrow. There is a woman who stayed over with her friends as AirBnB guests. They are all part of the crew around South-African artist Zanele Muholi. It's the morning after her successful opening at the main museum for contemporary art in the city. They have celebrated, and now they are an hour too late for checkout. These things happen.

There is a house. There is an argument with the owner, escalating. We know this type of video filmed with a smart-phone too well nowadays. Panic pours from the trembling hand that holds the camera, the picture is stuttering, screaming occurs from multiple directions we can't decipher. It's always going too fast to get the full picture. At what second did the hand decide to press record and film? 'Why are you so emotional?', someone yells. 'Out, out now!' a man responds. There is luggage falling down. Bouncing off those stairs.

It just takes one push.

There is a woman. There is a body. She's falling down. Those stairs.

The last seconds of the video hint at the total frenzy afterwards. When everyone in the house, both the guests as well as the host, realise that that push could have killed her.

You can't unsee the image. You can't walk on the stairs in this house anymore without thinking of the stairs in that house.

Someone you don't know sends a message to a bunch of you, the ones that are all somewhere else this season, but share loose connections somehow.

'Could you please share the video, share the story', she asks, 'people must know'.

We bring the image in circulation again. But there are many other images to compete with, this is the Summer of 2017.

A friend bathing with her baby in a Bali river. A DJ capturing his crowd at the main stage of another festival. A dance performance in Kassel. A swimming pool here and a blue sky there.

I just want to walk along with Eileen and her dog. Where are we going today?

On a small island, not far from this house, you can hear a jingling sound. The island is reached by walking over a sturdy bridge. And when you stroll around, you soon recognise the tinkling noise is coming from goats who are hopping around the sloping hills, surrounded by stones covered with emerald moss. You leave the goats for what they are, walking further, but still hearing their bells jingling in the distance. You have gotten used to the colours here. The many shades of green grass and leaves, and how the horizon often seems to disappear in between the sky and the water, dissolving into a complementary grey.

You spot a flower. It belongs here, but is at the same time a complete outsider. Its long stem is carrying a cluster of vivid dark pink petals that are bell shaped. When you peek inside them, you notice a pattern of purple and white freckles, so extraordinary it is almost unreal. You take a picture of the flower and send it to your friend who is in a different place, another timezone.

I sent you this flower, you would some days later say out loud. Sharing the anecdote with the rest of the group as part of a writing exercise.

But I didn't share the full story.

I didn't mention that a flower can also be loaded, going beyond its initial beauty. Because well, my friend loves flowers. And she taught me about Saadi, a Persian poet who, during the 13th century wrote about a flower garden. 'As you know, flowers do not last and unfulfilled are the promises of the garden. Men of wisdom advise against attachment to that which is ephemeral.'

But she also once told me – almost casually, somewhere between the lines – how she got imprisoned, only because she dared to make a series of self portraits on the streets of Tehran. 'You are an artist right?', they said during the interrogations, 'Why do you need to take pictures of yourself? Why don't you take pictures of something beautiful, like a flower?'

So yes. I sent you this flower.

'OMG', you replied, 'all the colours you need'. And you responded with a screen-shot of that same image, where you zoomed in, diving right into that small universe of purple alien freckles.

—Radna Rumping, July 2017