

Performing  
the self –  
the interview

Enrica Camporesi – Elena Mazzi

**THALiE**  
ART FOUNDATION

## FOREWORD

**Nathalie Guiot**

Founder of ThalieLab | Thalie Art Foundation

ThalieLab is dedicated to supporting socially engaged contemporary arts, encouraging trans-cultural exchange and promoting arts education programs. Our aim is to facilitate innovative artistic practices by serving as an incubator for art, ideas and actions as well as to forge links between the world of contemporary art and civil society.

The role of ThalieLab and of Thalie Art Foundation is to enlarge the audience beyond the art world, to move the lines, to create new collaborations and to support collective actions on the major challenges we collectively face, such as ecology and migration, because we truly believe that art is both an act of resistance and a fertile opportunity to grasp reality and create social ties.

It is in this spirit that we chose 'Identities and territories in the context of Brussels' as the first, inaugural theme of our program of residencies. In fact, in 2016/17 ThalieLab launched an open call for artistic proposals and selected three emerging international artists whose practices are dealing with and inspired by the thematic of territories and communities.

Visual artist Elena Mazzi (1984) has often turned her artistic practice into an anthropological tool to investigate the geographical, economical and socio-political contexts surrounding her.

Her analysis take different shapes such as videos and installations, prints and drawings.

In "Performing the self – the interview" she collaborates with researcher Enrica Camporesi on the realization of a multi-channel video installation based on a theatre performance premiered in Ghent in November 2017.

"Performing the self – the interview" explores the dialogical dimension of the asylum-granting procedure in today's Europe.

On one side sits an asylum seeker who has managed to escape from his troubled past in the hope of being reborn somewhere else, and who must now construct a new present,

starting from his papers. On the other sits a protection officer whose role is to establish the migrant's credibility throughout the procedure.

We experience the impossible but promising discussion between the two, mixing literary quotes, small talk, and traditional songs with philosophical reflection on their own roles and their biased frames of reference. The dialogue shifts constantly between compassion for each other and the inflexibility of the legal system, between the personal drama and the understanding of the rules of the law.

The pretext to start the conversation is the absence of the interpreter, i.e. an unexpected gap in the procedure, allowing a dialogue (both informal and unreliable) to arise. Each character deconstructs the prejudices of the other, while listening attentively to each other's mutual expectations. But the text and the performance also reflect on how words and gestures can betray one another, how communication can also be transformed into manipulation, revealing a tricky and fragile communicative ecosystem, yet not without notes of individuality and humour.

Artist Elena Mazzi and researcher Enrica Camporesi thus capture a real issue confronting society through a theatrical and performative perspective, outlining the contours of the challenges that this hot topic represents: our relationship to the other, the concept of responsibility and the role of politics are all exposed here in a subtle way, free of dogma.

*Writer, curator and art collector, Nathalie Guiot studied journalism and communication. She founded Anabet Editions in the 2000s and, in 2012, created Thalie Art Project which eventually evolved into the current Thalie Art Foundation. A founding member of the Tokyo Art Club (Palais de Tokyo), and committed to promoting education, she is also a co-founder of the Fonds des Amis de la Cambre pour l'International and of the Thalie fund (hosted by the King Baudoin Foundation) that supports a school for disadvantaged children in India. She also contributes to the educational activities of Wiels (Brussels). Nathalie Guiot is the author of 'Collectionneurs, les VIP de l'art contemporain' (Anabet Editions, 2008) and 'Conversations, l'artiste et le collectionneur', (BlackJack Editions, 2013).*

**"REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE – STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL"**

**Carlos Amoraes**  
Artist

The voice in the speakers announced that we would be landing in Brussels airport in twenty minutes, right at noon. After the airplane taxied for some extra minutes and we finally parked at the gate, the door was opened and as usual, there was a moment of impatient human traffic in the corridor. It's always like that, people take ages bringing down their hand luggage from the storage compartments, so clumsy. Once outside the airplane I connected to the signal of my mobile phone and checked my emails. Between a bunch of junk mail I received a message that apparently was sent from my own account. I wondered how this could have happened. Messaging oneself without knowing it? How could I have done it if I was inside the airplane for two hours with my phone in flying mode? I just had landed right in the center of the European Community. The message's title was "REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE – STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL". I checked around to make sure none of the other passengers flocking next to me were looking over my telephone's screen. All was clear, everyone was immersed in their own business, walking at a fast pace towards the luggage claim.

I began reading the email:

"I am Carlos Amoraes, the cousin of Mexican Astronaut, Air Force Major Francisco Amoraes. He was the first Mexican in space when he made a secret flight to the Salyut 6 space station in 1979. He was on a later Soviet spaceflight, Soyuz T-16Z to the secret Soviet military space station Salyut 8T in 1989. He was stranded there in 1990 when the Soviet Union was dissolved. His other Soviet crew members returned to Earth on the Soyuz T-16Z, but his place was taken up by return cargo. There have been occasional progress supply flights to keep him going since that time. He is in good humor, but wants to come home."

What? I am not the cousin of a stranded astronaut! I am an artist on my way to an important meeting in a new art

foundation in Belgium called ThalieLab, to visit the Italian artist Elena Mazzi and her collaborator Enrica Camporesi, who invited me to screen one of my films and discuss with them about the project that they are working on. Elena and Enrica told me that Europe's actual frontier takes place in the conversation between a border officer and an immigrant, where the officer's mission is to find out the credibility of the immigrant's story, to prove that his reasons for seeking asylum are politically urgent (that he or she is actually in danger) and not merely for banal economical reasons. Because of the enormous amount of people seeking refuge, there's a ranking of provenance in which the country of the immigrant's origin is ordered from stable to troubled. It is a common case that "incorrect" immigrants coming from stable countries invent dramatic stories to convince the border officers that they are fleeing from a dangerous political situation so they are accepted as "correct" immigrants. For their project Elena and Enrica question how the truthfulness of such stories is discerned, as both officer and immigrant speak different languages and the power of their narrative relies in the accountability of an unsympathetic translator. The border line in Europe is embodied in the translator.

I continued reading the email:

"In the 14-years since he has been on the station, he has accumulated flight pay and interest amounting to almost \$ 15,000,000 American Dollars. This is held in a trust at the Monterrey National Savings and Trust Association. If we can obtain access to this money, we can place a down payment with the Russian Space Authorities for a Soyuz return flight to bring him back to Earth. I am told this will cost \$ 3,000,000 American Dollars. In order to access his trust fund, we need your assistance. Consequently, my colleagues and I are willing to transfer the total amount to your account or subsequent disbursement, since we as civil servants are prohibited by the Code of Conduct Bureau (Civil Service Laws) from opening and/or operating foreign accounts in our names. Needless to say, the trust reposed on you at this juncture is enormous. In return, we have agreed to offer you 20 percent of the transferred sum, while 10 percent shall be set aside for incidental expenses (internal and external) between the parties in the course of the transaction. You will

be mandated to remit the balance 70 percent to other accounts in due course.

Kindly expedite action as we are behind schedule to enable us include down payment in this financial quarter. Please acknowledge the receipt of this message via my direct number +521 (55) 41-88-5088 only.

Yours Sincerely, Dr. Carlos Amoraes  
Astronautics Project Manager"

What a nonsense story... But wait a minute... What if, since I am called Carlos Amoraes, I just pretend all is correct and play along and call him? Call me? Would the anonymous sender of the email and its associates bite on my move? Having such a lot of money won't do any harm, so I guess that I could claim a larger percentage of the share from my "colleagues". Why not send the 3 million dollars, get the 15 million dollars in my account and then negotiate a larger percent after my cousin is brought back to Earth? I could easily make an extra 2 millions. Since 20 percent is only 3 million dollars, negotiating 30 percent for my help would be realistic because after all, it's me who is putting his name upfront in this business of helping my poor stranded cousin. I am actually the boss of this scam, so what could I do if I had such a big chunk of money?

Can you imagine someone living for 14 years outside in space? Once I was for a full month in an Art residency in Washington D.C. and I almost died, from boredom... But with 4.5 million dollars I could establish a super amazing Art residency in a great place. Not like your typical studios filled with lousy Marxist artists but something more like a lab, a lab for ideas to bring Art directly into Society and change it positively, something like ThalieLab. If I would make such residency I would use all the money I could get from email scams to invite top artists to make special projects with top immigrants and the top world leaders, to talk about the real shit and make real deals that would have a real effect in real global politics. Something like "USA for Africa" and "Live Aid" for today's contemporary world. Trump, Putin and Xi Jinping surrounded by a bunch of shinning stars singing a remake of "We Are the World" with hype musical arrangements by Daft Punk meets Manu Chao. Can you imagine it? I am already singing it...

But, going back to the email, I guess I should not be fantasizing on all this and instead be cautious, as perhaps these guys, my email "colleagues", are actual dangerous mobsters or even worse, as from what I had read, my "cousin" is associated with the former Soviets and who knows what these guys do for a living now that they have become Neo Liberals. Fuck man, how could they get my email address and phone number and send this message to me? How much inside this mess am I in right now? Have I been tracked to Brussels? Do they know I am at the airport?

Most likely if I ignore and delete the message and don't answer soon, they will figure out that I am suspecting something, so I should rather make my move by answering them but without letting them know that actually I am aware of their scam, then play along to buy some time, meet Elena and Enrica, do our thing in Belgium and get the hell out of Europe as fast as I can, hoping that in Mexico, where for sure there are more people named like me, they will lose track and catch a namesake not as smart as I am. But then what if the message actually is sincere and the money is there for real? Shall I tell Elena and Enrica what is going on? But then perhaps they would want to share the money and this whole thing won't become such a good business anymore. Or shall I tell the police? But since my name is in the message how could I prove that I am not the person plotting this scam and I am the big boss? Oh God, I never have felt so unsure about something!!!

Help! Money!

Sent from my iPhone

*Carlos Amoraes (1970, Mexico City) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work focuses on language and the impossibility or possibility of communicating through non-recognizable or un-codified forms: sounds, gestures, symbols. He experiments using different media such as video, film, drawing, installation, performance, and sound.*

# Candice Breitz Love Story



What kind of stories are we willing to tell? What kind of stories move us? Why do we watch the same audiences that are often torn by fictional blockbusters, main affectless in the face of actual man suffering? *Love Story* (2016), a ten-channel installation by Candice Breitz, interrogates the mechanics of identification and the conditions under which empathy is produced. The work is based on the personal narratives of six individuals who have fled their countries in response to a range of oppressive conditions: Sarah Ezzat Mardini, who fled war-torn Syria; José Maria Sábido, a former child soldier from Angola; Lany Maloba Langa, a survivor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Habeeba Francis Saveri, a transgender activist from India; Luis Ernesto Nava Tolero, a political dissident from Venezuela; and Farah Abdi Mohamed, an idealistic young atheist from Somalia. It evokes the global scale of the so-called 'refugee crisis,' evolving out of lengthy interviews conducted with the six participants in the countries where they are seeking or have been granted asylum (two interviews took place in Berlin, two in New York and two in Cape Town). The personal accounts shared by the interviewees are articulated twice by *Love Story*. In the first space of the installation, re-performed fragments from the six interviews are woven into a fast-paced montage featuring Hollywood actors Alec Baldwin and Julianne Moore who are cast in the work as themselves: 'an actor' and 'an actress'. Each was asked to channel excerpts from three of the first-person narratives on a green

screen set, without the support of fictional backdrops, costumes, props, accents or interlocutors. Breitz's edit intertwines the six renditions, plotting the diverse socio-political circumstances and personal experiences that prompted the interviewees to leave their countries. Her polished restaging of the six stories strips the source interviews of their depth and nuance, of their imperfect grammar and accented English, provocatively mimicking and exposing the logic by means of which 'true life stories' migrate into popular entertainment. In a second space that is accessible only via the original interviews unfold across six suspended screens in their full duration and complexity, now intimately voicing the individuals whose lived experiences they archive.

Suspending viewers between gritty firsthand accounts of life and would typically remain nameless in the media, *Love Story* features two a drama featuring two a the very embodiment of *Love Story* raises questions where our attention is deployed by the and Baldwin might other attention time, media ide

2015-2016  
handboek voor de advocaat-stagiair  
vrijemdelingen-  
recht

The South African Pavilion presents Candice Breitz + Mohav Modison's two-person exhibition that explores the disruptive power of storytelling in historical and contemporary waves of migration. The exhibition foregrounds the challenging narrative structures via which each artist addresses experiences of displacement, focusing on the conditions that pertain to subjectivity within contexts of exclusion and transience. What is it to be a migrant in everyday life. It seeks to ask, yet to be at the level of cultural, political or

# Voyeur



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Kluwer

VIII.2 Professional Experience and Environment  
Beyond numerous contextual circumstances, the decisions on the asylum framework also have crucial influence on the decision made.  
An asylum officer on the border is more likely to grant asylum to a person who has been persecuted in their home country than after 60 days.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION  
...considered a thing and frequently...  
...of proof for the...  
...art held that "10% of...  
...studies a well-founded...  
...your country?"

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50%

EXERCISE 1c  
...multiple means in practice? ...  
...reading, prepare a list of...  
...and application of a suitable...  
...in asylum cases.

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Raffaello Cortina Editore

PAUL  
RICOEUR

La memoria,  
la storia,  
l'oblio

L'installazione richiama le scavi giuridici della cosiddetta "crisi dei rifugiati", che emerge dai lunghi colloqui con i sei intervistati nei paesi in cui stanno cercando o hanno ottenuto asilo (due interviste sono state girate a Berlino, due a New York e due a Cape Town). Le storie personali condivise dagli intervistati sono raccontate due volte in Love Story. Nella prima parte...

rimaste senza p... nel media e un... con due attori... personalizza... Story solenn... attraverso i... concerta... della Moor... storie che... per suscitare... campagna. At...

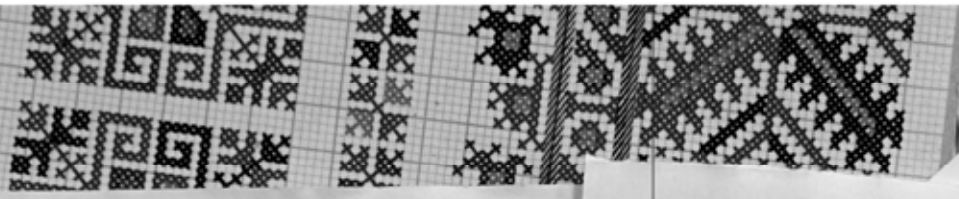
methodology?



façade à un commerce, juste devant le bureau du parti. Nous nous étions réparti entre nous les lieux d'affichage.

- Qui est le chef du gouvernement chinois ?
- Euh... Je ne sais pas.
- Quel type de papier et quelle encre ont été utilisés pour réaliser ces affiches ?
- On avait acheté le papier au commerçant et ...
- De quelle dimension était le papier ?
- Euh, comme ça (il montre avec les mains). Et l'encre, on l'avait volée à l'école.
- Le papier était de quelle couleur ?
- Blanc.
- Et la colle ?
- On n'avait pas de colle. On a utilisé de la tsampa [farine d'orge grillé, mets de base des Tibétains] mouillée.
- Est-ce qu'on vendait de la colle dans votre village ?
- Je ne sais pas. Je n'en ai jamais vu.
- Et ensuite, que s'est-il passé ?
- Ensuite, ça ne s'est pas passé comme on avait prévu. On a commencé à coller nos affiches très tôt, le soleil n'était pas encore levé, et ...
- Quelle heure était-il ?
- Oh, je ne sais pas, je ne sais pas lire l'heure. C'était encore la nuit.
- ... et alors, quelqu'un nous a vus. Je ne sais pas exactement qui nous a vus, peut-être le gardien du bureau du parti. C'est moi qui collais les affiches là. Tout à coup, on a entendu les sirènes de la police. J'ai crié à Tashi et à Samten de fuir parce qu'ils étaient





## What do we know so far about emotion and refugee law?

Refugee Convention, subsidiary protection and art 3 are considered concurrently. In the Republic of Ireland, protection rights under the Refugee Convention must be considered before subsidiary protection is considered.<sup>8</sup>

Refugee receiving states which are signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention to the status of refugees, whilst bound to offer protection to persons fitting the definition of a refugee, are free to assess claimants by their own procedures. The United Kingdom Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued a number of non-binding guidelines to guide the task. Thus, paragraph 195 of the UNHCR Handbook states:

The relevant facts of the individual case will have to be furnished in full and in place by the applicant himself. It will then be up to the person charged with the task of determining his status (the examiner) to assess the validity of any evidence and the credibility of the applicant's statements.<sup>9</sup>

Such statements usually involve a history of persecution, which goes to the heart of their 'well-founded fear' of return for one of the five Convention reasons.

Decision-making in most receiving countries has two or more stages, allowing for an initial decision and the possibility of an appeal process. In the UK, the initial decision is taken by a state-employed case-owner, who interviews the claimant, reviews any paperwork and either allows the claim or writes a 'reasons for refusal' letter, addressed to the claimant and signed 'on behalf of the Secretary of State'. The claimant may then appeal to an independent tribunal, consisting of a single judge, usually with an oral hearing. Both the state and the judicial decision maker have an unusually difficult task. Unlike other areas of law there is often little or no corroborating evidence to the history given in support of the claim. The decision maker may draw on country evidence, that is, reports gathered about current situations in the alleged country of origin. Other than this, the judgment typically relies on an assessment of the credibility of the claimant and his or her account. All of this has to be performed within a highly politicised and media-dominated context of discussions about immigration, human rights and – rightly or wrongly – terrorism and crime.

This reliance on credibility makes refugee status determinations a particularly interesting area of law for psychological study. A recent report on the asylum process in the UK quoted immigration judges as saying that their task was to rely on 'common sense and experience' to decide the credibility of the people before them, the plausibility of the histories they allege and the reliability of their testimony. However, many authors have highlighted the subjectivity of this approach.<sup>11</sup> A US-wide survey of refugee status determinations shows widespread inconsistencies of decision-making according to which court hears the claim, the gender of the claimant and the gender of the

UK

uniquely in the judgment  
politicised context



credibility

all \*

city

of violence has made them indifferent but because they are afraid. As everyone has observed, there is a mounting level of acceptable violence and sadism in mass culture: films, television, comics, computer games. Imagery that would have had an audience cringing and recoiling in disgust forty years ago is watched without so much as a blink by every teenager in the multiplex. Indeed, mayhem is entertaining rather than shocking to many people in most modern cultures. But not all violence is watched with equal detachment. Some disasters are more apt subjects of irony than others.\*

It is because, say, the war in Bosnia didn't stop, because leaders claimed it was an intractable situation, that people abroad may have switched off the terrible images. It is because a war, any war, doesn't seem as if it can be stopped that people become less responsive to the horrors. Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has

\*Tellingly, that connoisseur of death and high priest of the delights of apathy, Andy Warhol, was drawn to news reports of a variety of violent deaths (car and plane crashes, suicides, executions). But his silk-screened transcriptions excluded death in war. A news photo of an electric chair and a tabloid's screaming front page, '129 Die in Jet', yes. 'Hanoi Bombed', no. The only photograph Warhol silk-screened that refers to the violence of war is one that had become iconic; that is, a cliché: the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb, repeated as on a sheet of postage stamps (like the faces of Marilyn, Jackie, Mao) to illustrate its opaqueness, its fascination, its banality.

been communicated. If one feels that there is nothing 'we' can do – but who is that 'we'? – and nothing 'they' can do either – and who are 'they'? – then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic.

And it is not necessarily better to be moved. Sentimentality, notoriously, is entirely compatible with a taste for brutality and worse. (Recall the canonical example of the Auschwitz commandant returning home in the evening, embracing his wife and children, and sitting at the piano to play some Schubert before dinner.) People don't become inured to what they are shown – if that's the right way to describe what happens – because of the quantity of images dumped on them. It is passivity that dulls feeling. The states described as apathy, moral or emotional anesthesia, are full of feelings; the feelings are rage and frustration. But if we consider what emotions would be desirable, it seems too simple to elect sympathy. The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway sufferers – seen close-up on the television screen – and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an impertinent – if not an inappropriate – response. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and

SYMPATHY?

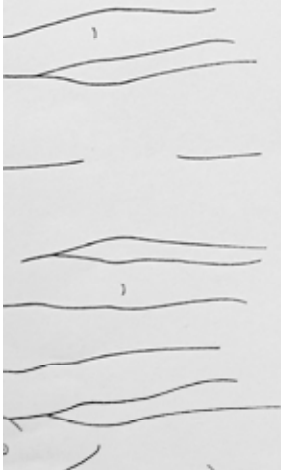


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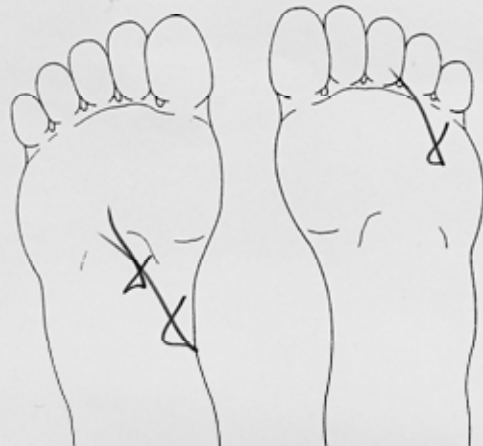
# Istanbul Protocol

Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

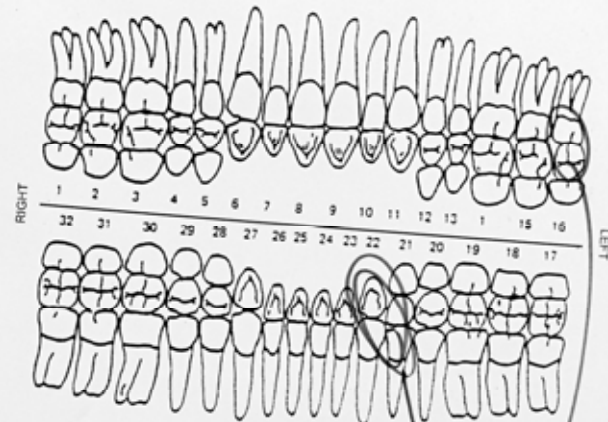
LE—ANTERIOR AND POSTERIOR VIEWS



FEET—LEFT AND RIGHT PLANTAR SURFACES



MARK ALL EXISTING RESTORATIONS AND MISSING TEETH ON THIS CHART



Estimated Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Sex \_\_\_\_\_  
Race \_\_\_\_\_

Circle descriptive term  
Prosthetic appliances present  
Maxilla  
Full denture  
Partial denture  
Fixed bridge

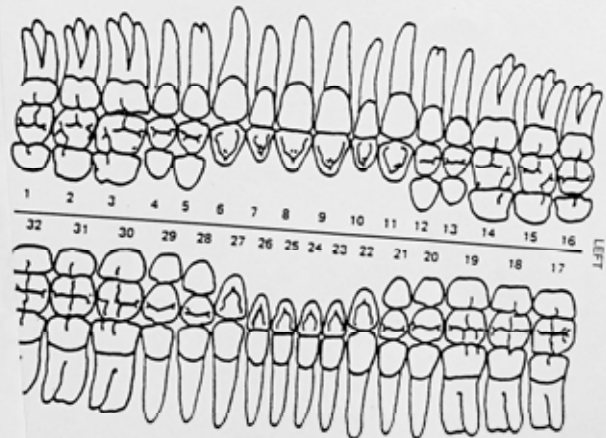
Mandible  
Full denture  
Partial denture  
Fixed bridge

Describe completely all prosthetic appliances or fixed bridges

*Missing*  
*damaged*

Stains on teeth  
Slight  
Moderate  
Severe

MARK ALL CARIES ON THIS CHART  
Outline all caries and "X" out all missing teeth



Circle descriptive term  
Relationship  
Normal  
Undershot  
Overbite

Periodontal Condition  
Excellent  
Average  
Poor

Calculus  
Slight  
Moderate  
Severe

and the noise of the pump puttering on the shore—these were the only noises. I continued swimming and swimming, resolved to make the northern shore. That was the goal. In front of me the shore rose and fell, the noises being totally cut off and then blaring forth. Little by little I came to hear nothing but the reverberation of the river. Then it was as if I were in a vast echoing hall. The shore rose and fell. The reverberation of the river faded and overflowed. In front of me I saw things in a semicircle. Then I veered between seeing and blindness. I was conscious and not conscious. Was I asleep or awake? Was I alive or dead? Even so, I was still holding a thin, frail thread: the feeling that the goal was in front of me, not below me, and that I must move forwards and not downwards. But the thread was so frail it almost snapped and I reached a point where I felt that the forces lying in the river-bed were pulling me down to them. A numbness ran through my legs and arms. The hall expanded and the answering echoes quickened. Now—and suddenly, with a force that came to me from I know not where—I raised my body in the water. I heard the reverberation of the river and the puttering of the water-pump. Turning to left and right, I found I was half-way between north and south. I was unable to continue, unable to return. I turned over on to my back and stayed there motionless, with difficulty moving my arms and legs as much as was needed to keep me afloat. I was conscious of the river's destructive forces pulling me downwards and of the current pushing me to the southern shore in a curving angle. I would not be able to keep thus poised for long; sooner or later the river's forces would pull me down into its depths. In a state between life and death I saw formations of sand grouse heading northwards. Were we in winter or summer? Was it a casual flight or a migration? I felt myself submitting to the destructive forces of the river, felt my legs dragging the rest of my body downwards. In an instant—I know not how long or short it was—the reverberation of the river turned into a piercingly

loud roar and at the very same instant there was a vivid brightness like a flash of lightning. Then, for an indeterminate period, quiet and darkness reigned, after which I became aware of the sky moving away and drawing close, the shore rising and falling. Suddenly I experienced a violent desire for a cigarette. It wasn't merely a desire; it was a hunger, a thirst. And this was the instant of waking from the nightmare. The sky settled into place, as did the bank, and I heard the puttering of the pump and was aware of the coldness of the water on my body. Then my mind cleared and my relationship to the river was determined. Though floating on the water, I was not part of it. I thought that if I died at that moment, I would have died as I was born—without any volition of mine. All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge. It is not my concern whether or not life has meaning. If I am unable to forgive, then I shall try to forget. I shall live by force and cunning. I moved my feet and arms, violently and with difficulty, until the upper part of my body was above water. Like a comic actor shouting on a stage, I screamed with all my remaining strength, "Help! Help!"



Note: The following text excludes the Dutch subtitles,  
which are always present during live performances.

Performing the self

-

the interview

FINAL SCRIPT

But the memory has two light hands  
That evoke the land with fever  
And the memory has  
The smell of a night rose  
That cries and awakens  
within the blood of the exiled the need of chanting  
"Lift up my grief, so I can retrieve my time."

SEE MAHMUD DARWISH  
"MURAL",  
2005 (ENG. VERS.)

-----  
SCENE 1  
-----

Audience enters, house lights off.  
On proscenium, three rear projection screens hide what will happen on stage. Subtitles always appear in the central one.  
On stage, A.S. (Asylum Seeker) repeats a few times the same poem in AR.  
If not diversely indicated, the whole conversation is subtitled in EN or NL, according to the language spoken on stage.

A.S.:

لكنّ للذكرى يدان خفيفتان  
تهيجان الأرض بالحمى  
و للذكرى  
روائح زهرة ليلى  
تبكي  
و توقف في دم المنفى حاجته إلى الإنشاد  
كوني مرتقى شجني أجد زمني

White subtitles in EN and NL appear on the top of the central screen on a black background.  
Rear projection on in the central screen.  
A yellow light frames a woman – the Protection Officer – sitting at a geometric table with a transparent (glass) tabletop. On the other side of the table, 2 empty chairs. On the table, her mini-laptop. The audience sees only very sharp shadows of the whole setting.  
From time to time, the P.O. takes notes which appears as a real-time projection in the central screen.  
She is clearly waiting for someone. She's not nervous.

She types:

29 November  
09:30  
Brussel

-----  
SCENE 2  
-----

*P.O. (Protection Officer) stands up, tone of voice is very formal, bureaucratic, straight and correct. P.O. doesn't understand Arabic, while A.S. doesn't understand Nederlands.*

P.O.: Goede morgen Meneer. Ga maar zitten.

*A.S. walks from the right screen - still in darkness - to the central one. His shadow appears on the yellow screen. He takes a seat.*

P.O.: Welkom bij CGVS. Spreekt U al Nederlands?

A.S.: Salam aleikum, bedankt. Nee Mevrouw, ik praat niet goed Nederlands. English?

P.O.: Welcome to the CGRS. Well... First of all, my apologies, we are waiting for the interpreter.

A.S.:...

P.O.: [*reassuring*] Don't worry. We will not begin without the interpreter. That's written in the law, it's one of your rights... Do you understand me?

A.S.: [*neutral*] Yes.

*P.O. types something on her laptop:*

*Tolk is te laat.*

*Onvoorziene omstandigheden.*

*De aanvrager antwoordt in het Engels.*

P.O.: [*gentle*] Is everything fine? Would you like a glass of water in the meantime? It's such a sunny day today!

A.S.: A lot of sun, a lot of cracks. Thank you, don't worry about me Madame. I am OK. And you, your family, your relatives?

P.O.: [*embarrassed but used to these sorts of comments*] Oh, well, yes, yes. I am very good and so are they. Thank you.

A.S.:... [*breathing loudly*]

P.O.: Apparently the interpreter is stuck in a traffic jam, because of the rain up in the North... [*softly, a bit upset, she types*]:

*De tolk zit vast in het verkeer.*

A.S.: [*in AR, quite evocative and romantic. No subtitles.*]

Interpreter is late.

Due to unforeseen circumstances.

The applicant answers in English.

The interpreter is stuck in a traffic jam.



SEE "THE MU'ALLAQA" OF PRE-ISLAMIC  
ARAB POET JAHRU 'L QAYS (7<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.),  
AMONG THE MILESTONES OF ARABIC LITERARY  
(AND, HERE IN THE ENG. TRANSLATION OF  
[ENYKV GHANI BIN ENYKV JSOth.

My friends stopped their riding-beasts beside me  
and they said to me "do not destroy yourself with sadness  
but persevere".

Not so long ago – when our intern psychologist got fired  
because of the rationalisation of HR –

I completed a training and received a strict protocol about  
– where is that? – in regards to how to deal with trauma-  
tised, antagonistic or non-cooperative subjects...

قفا نبك من ذكرى حبيب و منزل بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فحومل  
فتوضح قالمقراة لم يعف رسمها لما نسجتها من فيلفورد وبروكسل ...

P.O.: I beg your pardon?

A.S.: [repeats in EN] Stop! Let us cry in remembrance of a  
beloved and her lodgings at the extremity of winding sand  
between Vilvoorde and Brussels North.  
[pause, sarcastic] The interpreter will come, no worries,  
I can wait.  
[quite miserable] I have been waiting for so long for this  
interview –

P.O.: [interrupting him, calm but suspicious] Hold on,  
what was that about? Which beloved? Is she lost somewhere?  
[apologising] I will try not to interrupt you during the  
interview but [firmly] Before we'll proceed any further: do  
you have any sort of personal bond with the interpreter?  
How do you know she is stuck somewhere in Brussels North?  
[worried about A.S.] Which sand?

A.S.: [ironic] Relax, it's just a quote.

وقوفا بها صبحي علي مطيهم يقولون لا تهلك اسي وتجمل

A.S.: [He goes on with the AR quote.] My remedy for sadness  
and pain is an effusion of tears, but is there any place  
for crying near the disappeared traces?

P.O.: [inquiring, quite worried] Who disappeared and when?  
[more comprehensive] Are you upset or under the effect of drugs?  
Can you endure this interview? Hold on...  
[in NL] Wacht even... niet zo lang geleden werd de psycho-  
loog op onze dienst ontslagen door besparingen van HR –

A.S.: [interrupting, trying to guess] H.R. ... Humble Reports?

P.O.: [bossy] Human Resources [To herself, continuing her  
previous sentence in NL] Ik heb toen een vorming gevolgd  
en kreeg een strikt protocol mee over [impatient, looking  
for something in her laptop or papers] – waar is dat toch?  
– over hoe om te gaan met getraumatiseerde, antagonis-  
tische, niet-coöperatieve individuen...

P.O.: [correcting herself, back to EN.] With this I don't mean  
that you are hostile towards me... after all, we just started!

A.S.: [surprised] Hostile? On the contrary Madame, we  
haven't even started yet!

P.O.: [relieved] Right! [taking some time] Maybe is it too  
early to suggest a break?

The applicant writes mysterious

beautiful

exotic

Drawings on table.

Only God knows everything!

Cold silence of both. Waiting.

A.S.: [narrative, didactic, romantic, in a way]  
Dear Protection Officer, let me tell you a story.

A.S. grabs the pencil of the P.O. and draws things  
on the glass table. Live projection of the drawings  
starts on the right screen.

A.S.: There was a poet once, actually there were many at  
the time, well: a poet hanging around with camels and his  
tribe in the desert, eventually singing a love song to his  
absent and desired beloved beauty.

P.O. types on her laptop:  
De aanvrager schetst mysterieus  
P.O. deletes "mysterious" and writes  
mooi  
P.O. deletes "beautiful" and writes  
exotic  
P.O. deletes "exotic" and writes  
Tekeningen op tafel.

A.S.: [emphasising, not afraid of sounding epic] He knew  
that she was there, stuck somewhere in the [unsure]  
fluorescent desert of his memories –

P.O.: Maybe flourishing? Or floral?

A.S.: Flourishing! Flourishing desert of memories and maybe  
[in AR]

الله يعلم كل شيء

A.S.: [keeps on telling] And maybe she was also thinking of  
him, dying of impatience and curiosity to finally meet her  
saviour.

[relaxed] And so am I, a dozen centuries later...  
[pause – sarcastic] My absent interpreter brought this  
old poem to my mind.

P.O.: [curious, intrigued] Did you learn that at school?

A.S.: I don't remember exactly dear Protection Officer. But a lot  
of people know it, it's like Dante, Shakespeare or Gezelle here.

P.O.: [persisting – chasing him] No, I meant the calligraphy...

A.S.: Oh, no Madame! [surprised] I am not good at that. I  
am faking it. [laugh] I was just scribbling my name...

-----  
SCENE 3  
-----

A.S. keeps on drawing on a paper. The drawing is projected in real time on the right screen. In the beginning, clear words and geometric signs forming the façade of a house, the plan of a few streets, then little by little the table becomes full of signs, more and more curves.

A.S.: I love scribbling while chatting!  
[as if to himself] I start with my name or with the name of my street... with signs on paper, anyway, because writing, writing is traveling.  
[telling a story] It implies entering a new space, in a fresh, new zone maybe belonging to someone else, in a new territory where everything moves: words pass, thinking is a convoy, imagery flows, metaphors slip, the page drifts, eyes wander...

P.O.: [interested] So you don't write to better understand or note things down and remember. Writing for you is rather an attempt to enlarge reality, to mess it up and to reshape it.

A.S.: Voilà! These drawings tell me how to find a place that I've never seen before but that I've often imagined...

*He stops drawing and starts to drop alcohol on the paper. With the alcohol the ink of such a drawing changes and takes unpredictable shapes.*

A.S.: [disappointed] Now that I arrived here, this place is not any more the place of my imagination. I completely realise that what I am drawing is only where I have already been. As for where I am going, there is no map yet.

P.O.: But now, [encouraging] here, you got somewhere: accurately following this or another map, you got somewhere...

A.S.: But this place is not any more the place of my imagination!

P.O.: [consolatory, "the common sense"] Oh... don't take it personally, don't get mad at this Cartesian disappointment. [sighing] Maps... the more they become real, the less they are true.

A.S.: [doubting] Cartesian? No, that's not the point.

HERE IAIN CHAMBERS RE-READS AND REWRITES  
M. DE CERTSAU "THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY LIFE" (1988)  
→ "migrancy, culture, identity" (1994)

God damn the interpreter!

A.S. LOVES TO QUOTE  
TAYMIB SALIH'S "SEASON  
OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH", (1969)  
ENG. VERS.

Here, in this scorching office, I am only expected to sit and remember – [sarcastic] or pretend to. At will.  
[explaining] For sure you expect me to bear witness, to show you the [with an effort to invent his new words] "photothings", to loudly pronounce the "statuewords" and add some more details, just some more, more, and – please – the right ones, so we all save time before getting to the next candidate...  
[getting nervous] I was so ready to finally begin to move further but [in AR]

يا يخرب بيت المترجم!

– Now I am condemned to wait and wait and the starting blocks are getting red-hot...  
[confused] Turning left and right, I find I am also stuck half-way between North and South. I am unable to continue, unable to return.

P.O.: [with a distance] Wait, I lost you.



→ his calligraphy  
should overlap  
with the video  
of institutional  
buildings!

-----  
SCENE 4  
-----

Live camera projection of the drawings overlap on the right screen with pre-recorded videos of institutional but unrecognisable architectures and slowly the drawings disappear. Live camera off.

Video projections of architectural details appear clearly on both side screens. Central screen is always framed in yellow.

P.O. tries to get back to formalities. A few gestures to change the rhythm. P.O. pulls her jacket off, for instance.

P.O.: [almost supplicant] Do you realise where you are now?

A.S.: [crystal clear] I am at ease, sitting on a comfortable chair in a wide and quite neutral room. A sensitive woman in front of me – it has been a while since the last time. You are also looking more relaxed now, in your chaste tailleur. Heavy yellowish curtains frame the shiny windows and protect us from the indiscreet sun.

P.O.: [worried] Is that all?

A.S.: No strong lamp aimed at my eyes, but a shy light fills the empty spaces in between things with a soft glow. Everything is delicate and firm, here. Everything is just waiting for me, pushing me, begging me – me and everyone else sitting here before and after me – to begin, to say, to plead for change, for a new state of being.

P.O.: [looking almost exhausted] I can't really follow you. My apologies. You should avoid such complicated metaphors... [mild] are you like water? [humoristic] Are you going to rain? Or worse, evaporate? [laugh]

A.S.: [proudly imploring] Dear Protection Officer –

P.O.: [cutting him off] Just call me P.O.!

A.S.: Dear P.O., don't laugh at me, please.

P.O.: [merciful] But laughing together could bring us much closer! [kind of embarrassed but still trying to say something that makes the atmosphere lighter] Laughing is healthy and so... contagious!

[whispering] Please, don't play the victim, personally I cannot stand this with you, M.E. cases! [mortified]

As much as possible I should avoid confusing you, the One, with the miserable others in the crowd... which crowd? That's maybe something to discuss in the next training with my colleagues

Middle East

Middle East

Middle East

A.S.: [interrupting, as a footnote] I am not playing the victim. I don't want to exaggerate my plight, but [cautious] – currently – I guess it's my legitimate role, here. Don't you agree?

P.O.: Oh, I am sorry. Maybe that was a bit too harsh? [to herself, continuing her previous sentence in NL] Ik moet zo goed mogelijk jou, die Ene, proberen onderscheiden van de miserie van alle anderen... maar welke? Dat is misschien goede gesprekstof voor de volgende opleiding met de collega's –

A.S.: [interrupting, just curious] Anyway, what about M.E.?

P.O.: [enthusiastic] I love abbreviations.

A.S.: [friendly] I've noticed that.

P.O.: [straight] Time is money!

A.S.: [confirming] sure!

P.O.: [didactic] M.E. stands for Middle East [in slow and heavily articulated AR]

الشرق الأوسط

[self-pleased] If I am not wrong.

A.S.: [correcting her pronounce, in AR]

الشرق الأوسط

P.O.: [repeats in AR]

الشرق الأوسط

A.S.: [after a long pause, kind of resigned] Isn't it silly that the two of us cannot describe my region in any language without referring to such an anachronistic vision of the world?

P.O.: [genuinely surprised] You are right... Actually that's the first time that someone pointed this out to me.

A.S.: Far or middle, east or west, I still feel trapped and – at the same time – mislead.

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SCENE 5  
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*On the side screens, both videos continue with static details of institutional buildings.*

*Then, on the right screen, close-up on A.S.'s legs and feet. He walks outdoors on different grounds holding a blue folder in his hand. He is quite dressed up, with an elegant blue suit and black leather shoes. He walks very determined until he gets to a closed door. Meanwhile, on the left screen, indoor scenes of P.O. waiting: close-up on P.O.'s legs [walking in an office, sitting next to a window] or hands [drinking from a cup, grabbing a paper.]*

P.O.: *[consolatory, trying to get back to the point]* No need to panic. Since we are not experts we can't help but get lost in this labyrinth of limited viewpoints. Wherever we are, anyway, we establish the centre.

A.S.: *[sounding controversial]* That's so pretentious, exactly what "egocentric" stands for, don't you think?

P.O.: *[irritated]* But we can't help but be self-centered, dear guest. We are but ourselves.

*[more didactic]* As for "what's normal" and "your new centre", you are in a rush to understand everything and immediately in this new country. That is even more pretentious. *[as a gentle advice]* Try to be patient!

*[taking a pause, more comprehensive]* There is a reason why we are supposed to wait for the interpreter after all, because *[friendly]* – you'll see – now we get stuck again in geography.

*[inquiring and recalling something that he said before]* Anyway, that thing about north and south... Maybe if you would have said it in your mother tongue...

*[rational, trying to gather some practical details]* Is this functional for your story and for me to better understand how you got here?

*[encouraging]* Do you want to draw it, make another one of your nice sketches, for instance? Would you prefer to point it out on a map? Hell no, let's forget the maps! Was that really important for my notes?

A.S.:*[sigh. Disappointed.]* Mmm... not really.

P.O.: *[amicable]* Come on! We haven't even started yet and you are already so annoyed, suspicious, even disappointed by me.

SEE THE CRITICAL WORK  
OF CSEL.ORG.UK  
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY  
OF EMOTION AND LAW (LONDON)  
F.I. "JUST TELL ME WHAT  
HAPPENED TO YOU :  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY  
AND SEEKING ASYLUM"  
BY JANE HERLIHY  
(2012)

A.S.: It is not about becoming embittered, but I heard so much about this interview and I know I cannot fail it. [assertive] I want and deserve to move further, I need those papers, so badly.

P.O.: [honestly friendly] I perfectly understand.

A.S.: [kind of ashamed, excusing himself] But when I am under pressure, I don't always perform at my best.

P.O.: [whispering as "the best friend"] I know that feeling.

A.S.: [surprised] Really?

P.O.: Of course! I am also under pressure here. You have to deal with your story only, while I, I have hundreds in my head. And more will come. You are so many -

A.S.: [deadly serious, interrupting her] I am only one.

P.O.: [complaining] And I have to make quick decisions...

A.S.: [after a cold silence] Still, I don't feel we are really in the same boat.

P.O.: Just keep in mind you have to be yourself! Super natural!

A.S.: Supernatural?

P.O.: Super [exaggerated pause] natural. Nothing more, nothing less. [an advice, again. Smiling] You don't have to impress me, you know?

[pause] What you call pressure is in fact adrenaline, positive stress which will push the two of us to do our best! Isn't it?

[encouraging, informative] Just tell me what happened to you, without additions or gaps. Step by step, we'll go slowly back to where you belong and create a reasonable plot. This is such a good opportunity for you...

Video off.



PARAGRAPH 195, UNHCR "HANDBOOK ON PROCEDURES  
AND CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING REFUGEE STATUS  
UNDER THE 1951 ~~CONVENTION~~ CONVENTION AND THE  
1967 PROTOCOL..." → RE-EDITED IN 1992

Thanks P.O.  
for pointing this out to me!  
SEE ALSO GABOR GYULAY  
"CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT IN ASYLUM  
PROCEDURES" (2013)

-----  
SCENE 6  
-----

P.O.: [*highly formal register, as if she is embodying the law*] The relevant facts about individual cases will have to be furnished in the first place by the applicant himself [*pointing to him*] – you! –  
It will then be up to the examiner [*pointing to herself*] – me! – to assess the validity of any evidence and the credibility of those statements.

*On both side screens, details of a photocopy machine. In the right one, a scanner is framed, with scanner light on. On the left side, close-up on the mechanics of the photocopy machine while printed papers are ejected.*

A.S.: [*reflecting, worried*] I, and I alone, carry the burden of proof upon my tired shoulders. Who else will I blame in case of refusal?

P.O.: [*solemn moment resulting in P.O. being clumsy and awkward*] Don't feel lonely! We both share that heavy burden... I will follow clear and official protocols, acknowledged by the best international institutions. I am trained to examine your asylum application with a multidisciplinary approach.

A.S.: I really feel I am in good hands!

P.O.: Neutral, open, confidential, impartial, honest, effective, resolved, aware of our cultural differences and the framework for our values.

*Videos turn off.*

A.S.: [*doubtful*] Dear P.O., You don't have to impress me! [*impressed*] This sounds like quite a hard task for a whole team! How could you manage all of that alone?

P.O.: [*goes on with determination*] A hard task, indeed. Do you know that we and all the hulpverleners – I mean the caregivers – are the professionals most exposed to vicarious traumas and burn-outs?

A.S.: [*comprehensive*] I'll try to be gentle, to water down some details...

P.O.: [*further explaining*] I am supposed to reposition your selective, fragmented and contradictory memories in a coherent and objective context.

A.S.: [*admiring, yet sounding quite sarcastic*]  
Madame, I will try to be as coherent as possible,  
I promise, I will.

P.O.: Let me give you my very personal advice: please,  
speak clearly and loudly, and try as much as possible to  
avoid metaphors.

[*proudly*] Quite uniquely in the jurisprudence, my bosses  
and I, [*pointing up there, somewhere*] here, we decide  
about your future risk of persecution in case –

A.S.: [*interrupting*] You'll send me back home?

P.O.: In case your request is refused.

A.S.: [*with distant, detached consideration*] Protection  
Officer you'll be guessing my past and deciding my future  
according to my own words?

[*self-reflecting*] I have to be consistent, reliable and  
plausible. Every detail, every gesture, every silence  
weighs a ton...

P.O.: [*exclamatory, didactic, cutting him off.*] Oh no!  
Concerning the gestures, no worries. I know that I cannot  
rely purely on non-verbal communication because it is  
highly untrustworthy.

A.S.: [*astonished*] What do you mean with "untrustworthy"?  
But... It works perfectly every day?! [*as a remark*] Madame,  
you don't want to trust evidence!

P.O.: It's not that I don't want to, but rather that I cannot.  
"Every day" is not like "now".

A.S.: [*it sounds like a romantic note, like he's softly  
flirting*] Can't you just lose yourself in what you see and  
feel? [*seductive*] For instance the liquid and pleasant  
sensation of trust that you feel now in front of a culti-  
vated, sophisticated and [*choosing the word, very sure of  
himself*] lightly perfumed guest?

P.O.: [*embarrassed, as if she committed a mistake, as if  
she is kind of trapped, clearly out of her comfort zone.  
She tries to explain*] Well... I meant... The non-verbal is  
untrustworthy because it is [*looking for a better word*]  
highly culturally determined. Yes, that's it.  
And we – or I should rather say I – I have to watch out for  
your cross-cultural misunderstandings!

A.S.: [*complaining*] How could you say "my" misunderstandings.  
At least "ours" ... what do you mean?

ROLAND BARTHES  
"L'EMPIRE DES SIGNES"  
(THE EMPIRE OF SIGNS,  
1983 ENG. VERS.)

IT HAS TO BE SOMETHING LIKE "A MESSAGE FROM UNDERWATER", A VERY FAMOUS LOVE POEM BY ~~NIZAR~~ NIZAR QABBANI, PERFORMED BY THE EGYPTIAN MUSIC LEGEND ABDEL HALIM HAFEZ.

P.O.: [correcting herself] Ours, of course!

[getting poetic] When heading towards new shores, signs can leave the safe haven of a specific language, culture and system of thinking. And there they can acquire new meanings which may be unrecognisable, incomprehensible.

A.S.: It sounds like a trap... are we but a pile of unwritten codes? Can't we change anything on our own? What if me and you, we agree that when we say "blue" with a raised eyebrow we mean "walking in the sunset". We would have invented a new little thing that works perfectly for the two of us!

P.O.: [back to A.S., yet sounding sceptical] As for the silences you mentioned above, let me warn you... I wonder if it is always a conscious choice.

[giving an explanation] Do you realise that avoiding answering could have a negative impact on your application? [suspicious] Who are you protecting? Your family is far, the smugglers as well. You are here alone, think for yourself!

[firmly] In short, your silences, perfumes and elegant clothes could be misleading and even... counterproductive.

A.S.: [allusive, seductive in a way] Or maybe too convincing?

A.S. hums a love poem by Nizar Qabbani.

-----  
SCENE 7  
-----

On stage, A.S. keeps on humming the Arabic song of Nizar Qabbani, sometimes with higher pitches, sometimes interrupting the P.O.

On the right screen, a video.

It frames a wooden table, from above, with an old photo album.

A.S.'s hands open it, turn its pages and spread its contents [family photos, postcards, old banknotes, greeting cards] on the tabletop. After a while, P.O.'s hands also enter in the frame and choose few a pictures from the collection, while further spreading the rest. They both exchange and lift up some photo's before closing the album. P.O.'s hands remain in the frame, holding a postcard.

P.O.: [takes distance and gets back to a bureaucratic tone] Actually, I already have a sense about your intellectual level and I also agree with you that you are a quite interesting guest. So, to examine further your C.O.O. -

A.S.: [He stops humming, asks his question then sings again] C.O.O. ... Club Of Omissions?

P.O.: Country Of Origin - I could ask you about relevant cultural events or the name of the last mayor of your city.

A.S.: [detached] I was not really into politics, Madame.

P.O.: [as if she didn't hear him speaking] I would surely discard classic rural questions like "what is the name of a pregnant buffalo" or "the most typical irrigation system of your region".

A.S. keeps on humming, sometimes with higher pitches.

P.O.: So as not to trouble you, I would also avoid those inconvenient questions some colleagues of mine ask, like "what's depicted on the 50 dinar banknote"?

A.S.: [sincere, sounding ironic!] Oh, that's a pity, because actually I was prepared to answer that one...

P.O.: Let's be honest! I have no clue of what is depicted on the 2 euro coin! I can't blame you if you have no idea about that.

WHAT IS "CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY"?  
HOW TO EFFECTIVELY CHECK THE COUNTRY OF  
ORIGIN OF THE APPLICANTS AND PREVENT FRAUD?  
SEE F.I. "DE L'EXIL A L'ASILE : TEMOIGNAGES ET  
ADVENT AUTHENTICITE CULTURELLE DES CANDIDATS  
TIBETAINS AU STATUS DE REFUGIE POLITIQUE EN BELGIQUE"

1. MEMRIOW -  
DOUREY (2007)

ABOUT FUNCTIONAL AMNESIA AND MEMORY  
SEE PAUL RIGOUK "MEMORY, HISTORY, FORGETTING"  
(2005, ENG. VERS.)  
OR THE VERY SPECIFIC "DISCREPANCIES IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL  
MEMORIES. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS"  
BY HERLIHY - SCRAAG - TURNER (2002)

I have to be alert. Your reticence...

Your way of getting upset, almost stoned, when I mention anything about your country... Is it your reaction to the abuses you have been a victim to, or - something worse - that you might have caused?

[explaining] In fact, that has nothing to do with assessing your C.O.O., I mean: country... It sounds more like a tricky quiz about functional amnesia... But I don't have to fool you [declarative, important] and I do hold your testimony in much higher consideration!

A.S.: [stops humming] Canary Islands, Cyprus, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Madeira, Malta, Martinique, Réunion.

P.O.: [worried] Oh no... Are you still here with me?!

A.S.: Did you ever notice that all those islands are minutely but proudly featured on the bottom corner of all your euro banknotes?

P.O.: [surprised] Frankly, no. [quite annoyed by this discovery] I didn't even know that Guadeloupe was still a European colony, just like centuries ago. [honestly disappointed] Oh... it is so embarrassing...

A.S.: [consolatory, comforting] It's not your fault, lady. You were not even born back then [joking] I guess... [intriguing, playing] Maybe you would like to check it now, just for the sake of curiosity?

[rhythmic, charming, fascinating] Now that we have some time, some spare time, some silly time to pay attention to the functional side of things that we barely notice every day...

A.S. throws some coins on the table. Then, together, they sing something that sounds like a lullaby.

A.S.: A coin

P.O.: Is a coin

A.S.: Is a moon

P.O.: Is a coin

A.S.: Is an orange

P.O.: Is a coin

A.S.: Is a ring with two stars for three twins and four suns with five crowns on the head of a queen...

A.S. repeats this while P.O. speaks in NL to herself

P.O.: [to herself, in NL] Ik moet alert blijven. Jouw terughoudendheid...

De manier waarop je je opwindt, stoned bijna, als ik iets vraag over jouw land... Is het jouw reactie op de mishandelingen waar je slachtoffer van bent geweest?

Of - misschien erger - waar je aan hebt deelgenomen?

*I feel I am quite tired, it shouldn't change anything for me, I should stay the same, evaluating only your need for protection... but, I am scared in front of you.*

*Who are you?*

[pause]

Ik voel me moe worden. Het zou niets mogen uitmaken.

Ik moet mezelf blijven, enkel jouw nood aan bescherming evalueren. Maar ik ben bang, terwijl ik hier voor je zit.

[with a mix of curiosity, fear, care] Wie ben jij eigenlijk?

*P.O. straight to him, back to EN.*

P.O.: Who's there?

*Video of the album off.*

-----  
 SCENE 8  
 -----

Rear projection turns on only on the central screen  
 [yellow background with black subtitles].

P.O.: [to him, extremely friendly but suggestive, very delicate, confidential and comprehensive] I know that you could be hesitant to trust the police or authorities in general... In me, for instance, you could feel frightened by me and by all my questions.

A.S.: [reassuring] Oh no, dear Protection Officer! You deserve your name! I have full trust in you and in your [hesitating] protective function. Since the first moment I came in, I immediately felt understood and... [looking for - but not finding - a better word] protected here.

P.O.: [thankful] Oh, I am so relieved to hear that! You know - out there - a lot of people say very controversial and unfair things about us but we are reliable people!

A.S.: [seductive. He sings a love poem in AR:]

إن كنت قوياً أخرجني  
 من هذا اليمّ فأنا لا أعرفُ فنّ العوم

P.O.: For instance, I'm pretty sure that if you say "blue", I do understand "blue" and if I say "fear" or "lie" or "abyss", you do understand me.

A.S.: [in AR]

الموج الأزرقُ في عينيك  
 يُجرّجُرني نحو الأعمق

P.O.: Even if an anthropologist says that all those concepts like "darkness", "lie" or "blue" - but is blue a concept or rather a thing? - anyway, that everything changes, according to time, space, cultural codes...

A.S.: [in AR]

وأنا ما عندي تجربةٌ  
 في الحب ولا عندي زورق

P.O.: But that sounds exaggerated to me... What do you think about it?

A.S.: [in AR]

إن كنت أعز عليك فخذ بيدي

P.O.: [embarrassed] Not to mention that languages are not

A.S. REPEATS NIZAR ZABBANI'S  
 "A MESSAGE FROM UNDERWATER"

If you are strong...  
 Rescue me from this ocean  
 For I don't know how to swim

The blue waves in your eyes  
 Drag me to the depths

And I have no experience  
 In love... and no boat

If I am dear to you then take my hand

For I am filled with desire from my head to my feet.  
I am breathing under water

I am drowning...

I am drowning...

I am drowning...

I am drowning...

equally precise regarding the computation of time, orientation in space, description of feelings and attitudes...

A.S.: [goes on with poem in AR]

فأنا عاشقةٌ من رأسي حتى قدمي  
إني أتنفّسُ تحت الماء

P.O.: [almost panicking, seeking relief from the romantic situation] So, what do you stand for, for the anthropologists? [embarrassed] What about contextualising?

A.S.: [goes on with poem]

أغرق

P.O.: [getting closer on the table, almost whispering] I know perfectly well that you could have gone through traumatic or degrading experiences.

A.S.: [goes on with poem]

أغرق

P.O.: In fact, I am supposed to ascertain your real or apparent degree of physical fatigue, psychic disorder and anguish.

A.S.: [goes on with poem]

أغرق

P.O.: And if you want to show me your scars, I will stop you from stripping off and humiliating yourself.

A.S.: [goes on with poem]

أغرق

P.O.: [touched by the poem, almost slanting on the table] And if you would cry, I will offer you... a break!

A.S.: [stops humming the poem to make a clear point] Hey, hold on. It is not that I am always upset or shocked, Madame...

[conciliatory] I can still remember poems and anecdotes, I can brilliantly brainstorm, I hum love songs, I even recognise your cheap quotes...

[hallucinating, poetic and somehow cruel] And about the scars, I brought you the medical reports!



-----  
SCENE 9  
-----

Videos on both side screens turn on.

Sometimes the images alternate with black stills, as a wink, as a flashback. On the left screen: close-up on doctor's white coat sleeves and doctor's hands on a sterile worktable. He turns the pages of a forensic medical report which consists of outlines of the human body anatomy. From time to time, with a red pen, he takes notes and writes crosses on specific spots of those figures [forearm, molars]. On the right one, close-up on A.S.'s naked, hairy legs sitting and hanging off the edge of a grey medical bed. When the side videos start, the central frame turns from yellow into black, with white subtitles.

A.S. begins a sort of rap, or a lullaby. Atmosphere is suspended in time and space. From time to time, P.O. tries to intervene in this dramatic flow.

A.S.: The crosses you'll see  
spot my cemetery.  
For each one of them: a secret, a name,  
a minute of shame

P.O.: [formal] Unfortunately, I have to inform you that the  
medical reports are not sufficient proof to cast out any  
doubt on the causes of the harm undergone and -

A.S.: [interrupting] But ever since  
I am lost in time,  
so - please -  
don't expect me to be too precise.

P.O.: But I will conduct additional research...

A.S.: [sometimes repeating words, letters, sounds]  
The doctor  
The doctor's hands  
The doctor's hands wear  
ssss-urgical gloves  
on surgical d-rape  
spread out on my whole  
me-mory, ar-mour  
and more and more...

P.O.: [coughing, embarrassed] Am I wrong here or are we lost  
again in a melodramatic poem that won't help you by any means?

SEE "ISTANBUL PROTOCOL MANUAL ON THE  
EFFECTIVE INVESTIGATION AND DOCUMENTATION  
OF TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN  
OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT"  
U.N. (NY - GENEVA, 2004)

HOW TO "SAY" WHAT CANNOT BE SAID?

HOW TO ~~REMEMBER~~ REMEMBER WHAT HAS TO BE FORGOTTEN?  
ON THE HUGE TOPIC OF (SELF) VICTIMIZATION,  
SEE F.I. THE WORK OF LARVELLE, "THEORY OF VICTIMS" (2015)  
OR ALJEMEN - VLOEBERKES - SMITS "PSYCHOLOGICAL AND  
PSYCHIATRIC ASPECTS OF RECOUNTING TRAUMATIC  
EVENTS BY ASYLUM SEEKERS" (2006)  
AND THE PREPARATORY FIELD RESEARCH WITH ASYLUM  
SEEKERS, REFUGEES AND PSYCHOLOGISTS.

A.S.: [*hysterical, almost laughing*]  
Pointing at me with curiosity –  
paradoxical doctoral pleasure of him:  
"please let me be happy  
with my discoveries!"

P.O.:  
Let me be rude and cut all of this:  
your scars are but signs fluctuating in the sea  
that I can accept as long as I need  
some acts to report your misery.

A.S.: [*first angry, then slowly getting back to the more  
formal interview*] Nothing is sufficient in this sunny  
office because you focus only on the results, on the  
effects, on the ex-post.  
As for the causes: they remain for you as exotic as  
Guadeloupe, Martinique and the Canary Islands: as far as  
forgettable.

P.O.: [*imploring*] Oh no, not again...

A.S.: [*with sorrow*] You even prefer to read between my  
lines instead of listening to my real story.

P.O.: [*exhortative*] Let's be honest: [*sincerely worried for  
him*] can you follow me now? Are you back here in Brussels?

*Side videos off.*

*Central screen back to the yellow frame with black  
subtitles.*

P.O.: [*firmly repeating*] Are you back here in Brussels? You  
beg me to listen to the truth but please – and be honest! –  
now try to define what is such a thing.

A.S.: [*thinking a bit, taking his time*] It's more like a  
reminiscence, in fact.

P.O.: [*conciliatory*] You see?! We agree!

A.S.: In fact, I don't. [*confused*] I don't know any more  
what happened for real, what the facts are...

P.O.: And aren't you happy that I'm helping you with such a task?

A.S.: [*then smiling at her*] The fact is that my memories  
are the shotgun's holes, the rumbles of the storm, floating  
pictures on rafts...

P.O.: [*quiet, respectful, almost whispering*] And what if I  
ask you to tell me something less metaphorical?

A.S.: [*sigh*] I can't help but disappoint you: I am unable

SEE LISA MALKKI,  
"SPEECHLESS EMIGRANTS: REFUGEES,  
HUMANITARIAN AND DEHISTORICIZATION"  
(1996)

I admit that it's more and more difficult for me to approach each case afresh and to avoid creating hierarchies of suffering which demand ever higher levels of abuse to incite sympathy...

to produce another sort of narrative, I doubt that a complete verbal narrative of my experience exists at all.

P.O.: [*consolatory yet sounding quite cynical, not on purpose*] You all say the same... Do you know that you are not the only one feeling speechless and even pretending not to remember?

[*intimacy, a sort of revelation*] But... do you realise that your reticence is also a typical symptom of cases like yours [*adding a very important detail, almost happy*] making of you a more reliable candidate?

A.S.: [*feeling depressed*] Your sense of humanity is as desolate as a drying lake.

P.O.: [*in NL – self-analysis. Once again, a parallel discourse*] Ik geef toe dat het steeds moeilijker wordt voor mij elke zaak fris en helder te benaderen en te vermijden dat ik hiërarchieën binnen het lijden creëer die altijd maar meer misbruik vereisen om sympathie op te wekken.

*P.O. keeps on talking to herself, in NL, analysing the situation [without subtitles], while A.S. speaks [with subtitles]. Overlapping of the two voices.*

A.S.: Once more, I am unable to continue, unable to return. You are just out of reach for me at the moment!

P.O.: [*back to him*] On the contrary! I'm here with you! [*slightly enthusiastic*] And even more convinced that you are an original, plausible traumatised guest. A key factor which makes your story easier to believe for everybody here. And please forgive me if I do also rejoice like that doctor before, but in this non-process we all stand on the same side!

A.S.: [*surprised*] So, am I doing well? [*exhausted*] I'm getting thirstier.

-----  
SCENE 10  
-----

*Side videos on. On both screens, sunny light and static details of institutional buildings.*

P.O.: [*like she's talking with a kid, motivating*] We are both doing great! [*formal and extremely proud of herself*] I am here in the shining sun to serve the Human Rights Convention, the Nation is here at your service and finally [*with a certain satisfaction*] you have begun to cooperate.

A.S.: [*asking for a confirmation, double checking*] Remembering the truth?

P.O.: Why are you so focused on that? Are we in a police interrogation, in a tribunal?! [*as a confession, as a secret*] I'll tell you again for the very last time: of course I expect you to speak the truth but [*smiling*] I cannot really state it... I can only establish your credibility!

A.S.: [*takes a distance*] Dear Protection Officer, after all I feel that everything will just be easier for you if I start enumerating dates, bribe amounts, routes, smugglers' names, rails, miles and coherent anecdotes to fill your notes with countable entities.

P.O.: [*assertive*] My personal advice: through facts, figures, and action plans, you can accept your past, cope with it, and attempt to bring about changes in your current situation... within the limits of your potentialities.

A.S.: [*annoyed*] What are you saying?! Which limits? [*ironic. Sceptical*] Fantasies! Do you still believe in the superstition of numbers?!

P.O.: [*mild tone*] Dear friend – I admit we are much closer now, don't you agree? – everybody knows that human sciences cannot show "how things happened for real"... Anyway, that's the only way we have to move further.

A.S.: Now, I don't want to reduce myself to a mere number of official pages describing my own temporary misery. [*imploring*] What's wrong with my metaphors?

P.O.: They make my job impossible! And my job... my job is to protect you from your own dangerous future. [*as acknowledging something for the very first time, murmuring for herself*] After all, a good choice in my life.

ABOUT DETACHMENT, SYMPATHY AND COMPASSION  
(cf. SUSAN SONTAG "REGARDING THE PAIN OF OTHERS" (2003))  
AND THE FIELDWORK/INTERVIEWS.

A.S.: [mean, almost cruel] Honestly, it is not my concern whether your choices have meaning. And, about my own future, it's still to be decided! I believe I can –

P.O.: [cutting him off, as an exclamation, exhortation] Stop believing unrealistic things! Don't you see what is happening over there, and here too?!  
[apologising, mortified] Oh... I am sorry... I should avoid this tone of voice, so harsh and threatening. And even judgmental sentences have to really be avoided during my interview. [as excusing herself] I hate being cynical, I was not like that when I first started this job, but you are so... [looking for the right words] stubborn and idealistic!

A.S.: [surprised, wounded] What is wrong with that? Aren't these the same reasons why you started your career here?

P.O. and A.S. get little by little closer to each other on the table, building up a very intimate atmosphere. Meanwhile, videos fade slowly to black.

P.O.: [with self-pity] You are forgetting pacifism, third-worldism, the sense of guilt in our consumerist society... Oh, by the way, I feel so good, so comfortable now, chatting with you, as if we have met before... After all, you are quite unique and different from all the rest!  
[as a self correction] But don't worry: this will not make any difference to your procedure. [honestly proud of herself] I am training myself to empathise, not sympathise nor be antipathetic.

A.S.: Even if I tell you about –

P.O.: [cutting him off] Precisely.  
For a minute could you stop referring to your hopeless poems and acting so miserably? [imploring] Just let me work, with the right distance and detachment.  
Everything just gets more complicated for me and – as a consequence – for you as well when I have to avoid your tricky traps about humiliation, speechlessness, PTSD –

A.S.: [interrupting] Part Time Symptoms of Disappearance?

P.O.: [didactic] Post Traumatic Stress Disorders.  
Luckily, I don't have to establish any ultimate truth from your messy story made of dreams and aged literature. [almost whispering] Luckily, I am not a judge.

A.S.: But if I am expressing myself wrongly my future will be a prison.

P.O.: *[with emphasis]* I will protect you from your own mistakes as a guardian! *[pause]* But still you don't understand that your credibility within these four walls is something else than your honour, out there.

A.S.: *[with incredulity]* I could lie to my wife, my mum and friends and still, will you be willing to believe my statements?

P.O.: I only have to listen through your words, forget the superfluous, smell the danger...

A.S.: *[hopeful]* And I'll be safe?

*Blackout.*

*The end.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Enrica Camporesi

After an academic formation in Arabic language, history and literature at the University of Bologna, Venice and Aix-en-Provence, Enrica Camporesi (1985) studied Arabic in Tunis, Cairo and Beirut in order to write her thesis about political theatre in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War based on field research with anthropologists, historians and artists (2009).

In Cairo (2011-2013) she worked for *Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival*, *Falaky Theatre* and the *Italian Cultural Institute* in charge of PR and communication. Back to Italy, she took part in and organized theatre workshops with asylum seekers, refugees and citizens.

In Belgium since 2015, she combines her didactic practice as social integration teacher for Arabic speaking newcomers with her independent writing and research activity.

### Elena Mazzi

Elena Mazzi (1984) is a visual artist, working with specific geographical and socio-political contexts.

Her poetics deals with the relationship between man and the environment in which he lives and with which he must reckon on a daily basis. This analysis, which often follows an anthropological approach, investigates and documents an identity which is at the same time personal and collective, and gives rise to forms of exchange and transformation.

She studied History of Art (Siena), Visual Arts (IUAV, Venice) and Fine Arts (Mejan, Stockholm).

Her works have been displayed in many solo and collective exhibitions all over the world. She attended several residency programs, and she is the winner of various art prizes. In 2015 she started to lead workshops for young artists, teachers and general public in collaboration with Institutions, Schools, Academies.

## ABOUT THE WORK

This publication is part of the project "Performing the self – the interview", an ongoing artistic research by Enrica Camporesi and Elena Mazzi.

The première of the script published in this volume has been staged in Victoria Deluxe (Ghent) on 29 November 2017 as part of the Mestizo Arts Festival. "Performing the self – the interview" has been also screened as a 3-channel video installation (50min., NL/EN/AR spoken - EN, NL subtitles) for the first time in ThalieLab (Brussel) on 11/18 January 2018.

"Performing the self – the interview" stages the impossible conversation between a protection officer and an asylum seeker just before the interpreter arrives.

Drawing on interviews with protection officers, asylum seekers, recognized refugees, lawyers and social workers as well the academic literature, "Performing the self – the interview" zooms in on the protection officer and the asylum seeker as co-producers of a dialogical but reliable and consistent life story, a new and reasonable plot whose crucial goal is to be awarded with the asylum status.

The interview is a real "make or break moment" in the life of the asylum seeker. And it puts the protection officer under the immense pressure of judging someone else's future risk of persecution mainly based on his own oral testimony, while tolerating the intrinsic uncertainty of such a decision making process.

What might happen before such an overloaded conversation begins?

"Performing the self – the interview" builds up an imaginary space that redefines the existing protocol of questions and answers, mutual expectations and power relations.

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## CREDITS

### Images and postcards

Immagini storiche archivio Antonio Grandesso; Candice Breitz/Love story; Cleopatra/100 Egyptian Pounds banknote; Paestum/East slab with Ephebe as a cup-bearer; Peikwen Cheng; Il Cristo Velato/Giuseppe Sanmartino/Museo Cappella San Severo (Napoli); Carl Cappelle; Ohad Matalon - Inhalexhale; Rania Matar; Egyptian electoral campaign; Ghyath Al Jebawi; Hermann von Wissmann/Collection KIT-Museum; Essam Marouf/Mashrabia Gallery Editions; The Galata Bridge; the Swiss Red Cross SRC (Berne).

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