

IN MEMORY OF FEASIBLE GRACE

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“Looked at from the perspective of the everyday world of appearances, the everywhere of the thinking ego — summoning into its presence whatever it pleases from any distance in time or space, which thought traverses with a velocity greater than light’s — is a nowhere. And since this nowhere is by no means identical with the twofold nowhere from which we suddenly appear at birth and into which almost as suddenly we disappear in death, it might be conceived only as the Void. And the absolute void can be a limiting boundary concept; though not inconceivable, it is unthinkable. Obviously, if there is absolutely nothing, there can be nothing to think about. That we are in possession of these limiting boundary concepts enclosing our thought within (insurmountable) walls — and the notion of an absolute beginning or an absolute end is among them — does not tell us more than that we are indeed finite beings.

Man’s finitude, irrevocably given by virtue of his own short time span set in an infinity of time stretching into both past and future, constitutes the infrastructure, as it were, of all mental activities: it manifests itself as the only reality of which thinking qua thinking is aware, when the thinking ego has withdrawn from the world of appearances and lost the sense of realness inherent in the *sensus communis* by which we orient ourselves in this world... The everywhere of thought is indeed a region of nowhere.”

- Hannah Arendt

ESTHETOGENESIS

A process generating a reality in which all components, beside being the means to the self-revelation achievement, are also ends to themselves (the meaning of self-revelation). A final state of grace that only the mind can generate via evolution.

Paolo Soleri

*I am the Urban Mutant¹
inextricable from this place
four generations before me
straphanging when there were straps
piecework and factory wages
in this teeming, seething anthill
where bodies exposed to high temperatures
become diamonds if they survive
visible only if you get far enough away*

*we are knit of the same fabric
its materials my materials
its pressures my native tongue*

*but the city too is not itself
was never a thing
and so you cannot be the city
even though you are
since you cannot be the city
you cannot be*

1 SOLERI SAYS that the New Yorker is of a different breed from the Iowa farmer not only culturally but genetically, especially once the breeding has gotten its own momentum. He warns of grave danger, of offspring whose goal might be movement to higher social and cultural niches, unaware that they are in the throes of the pressure of slow or rapid mutation processes governed by the iron rule of “natural” selection” where the “twist” is in the transformation and transforms of the natural by the doings of man.

*just don't think too hard about it
and just keep moving*

*if you're lucky a trickster god
will get you a good deal on a place in Brooklyn
not far from train, bathroom in hall
cozy, good light
good credit only, no guarantors
nice girls only please ha ha just kidding
except not except we are serious except read between the lines
no one puts what's really happening on paper here*

I OFTEN WONDER why we speak about evolution as though it were something that is over, of which a generous 'we' are the end result to be studied, a phenomenon in past tense. We watch the fabric of the globe erode and shift in response to our behaviors and materials, our stories, and speak of ourselves as though fixed objects. I go to the doctor and think about this.

I walk down the street wherever I am and think about this. When I am abroad I wonder what feels so different in the energy of the streets of Berlin versus New York and it's only when I return home that I realize what the lack of active bioprecarity feels like if you're sensitive to it. What I mean is: in New York City nearly every body is actively aware of its mortality, actively aware of how close its cells are to destruction. Part of its charm.

*anyone with power learns that early
if your parents never had any
good luck with that, there's no distribution center
just figure out how you need to dress
what armor you need where
to pass unnoticed
taking furious notes*

*sometimes passing unnoticed
means your clothes will be loud;
these are not the same silences*

survival is the hottest game in town

THE UNITED States is unique in its energetic tenor of bioprecarity — systemically breeding into its populace a genetic disposition for fear of an ability to care for oneself or one's family that is pervasive through most of our population, given the vast disparity between most US residents and the 1%. These issues are particularly prominent in our most vulnerable populations, with statistically higher occurrence in persons of color, immigrant communities, those whose families have been persecuted for their religious beliefs, those on the LGBTQ spectrum, and for the disabled and chronically ill. The longer one's family has been in this position, the more notable the consequences of epigenetic trauma on and in the body and the body of our children and our children's children.

*every awning says original Ray's
yes the signs can just say "best pizza"
even though it isn't, you're catching on*

*surprisingly sometimes the best way
to camouflage oneself
is to stick with the herd*

*Uroplatus Gecko
Willow Ptarmigan
Toad
Common Baron Caterpillar
Tropidoderus Childrenii
Stone Flounder
Great Potoo
Katydid*

I WONDER what to walk in the air full of this heady fear feels like for someone from a country where their cells aren't primed for danger. The electricity of a city like New York, touted as the purview of flashing lights and fast moving money, may indeed be most felt from its bodies in constant motion.

In American cities, surrounded by similarly traumatized bodies, away from the bio-regulating processes and naturally occurring organic densities (i.e. forest, i.e. silences both visual and aural), competing for resources that are increasingly rare and out of reach, these stakes and their consequences are notably exacerbated.

*in the insect world things are often not what they seem
especially if you're a hungry predator
For 250 million years, insects have survived
because they often appear to be something
other than what they really are.
Is it a bug, a twig, or a leaf?
Is that butterfly the bitter-tasting one,
or the delicious one that resembles it?*

*here, we are the Thracian girl, laughing
when we thought we would be the philosopher
but fuck, who wants to be down a well*

*look at the stars alone in your room on your phone
so that no one sees you falter*

AND YET, these things both are and aren't a product of the physical environment, which at times even in seeming service of the systems that cause these ills manage to stay their effects. Meaning — the physical plant isn't always in service of the system that exists within and on top of it. Just as the bodies aren't always in service of the system within and on top of us. Sometimes, what we've made can help our bodies hack our epigenetics.

Look up, look around. I have come to accept that much of the time I look like a tourist in my "own" city (the city that, according to Soleri, has become inextricably linked to my genetic makeup) because I do not cease to look up and around, noticing.

Lucky for me, I know how to do this without stopping short on the sidewalk. I am nothing if not a knowing conduit.

*cry because they shine so brightly
whisper their names under your breath
or louder
if you can stand it*

*Eridani; Acamar; the ostrich, aulax, "the furrow," "End of River"
Cassiopeia; Achird
Taurus; Ain; "eye," oculus bores
Lyra; Alathfar; "the talons of the swooping eagle"
Albaldah; Lucida Oppidi, "brightest of the town"*

I WILL NEVER STOP being grateful for learning to draw early because it was here, in the city, pencil then pen then charcoal in hand I learned to see. I see the whole frame, its composition, major themes of light and dark at the same time that I see the cornice, its small architectures, that cat in the window, the refraction of the leaves on the sidewalk, the pattern on his socks, the way she cranes her neck to look behind her.

My students are in their first year of architecture school. I ask them how and if they think the physical environment of where they were raised influenced the characteristics they consider to be part of who they think they "are." We talk about whether we are from the city or the country and whether we were able to walk to get around, whether we could get to water or woods or town, whether we were isolated or amongst crowds, what colors and ages and religion and sexuality we saw and knew and became accustomed to not only with our minds and in story but in body.

They say they've never thought about this before and I say that's exactly why architects need to be reading and writing and listening and drawing and knowing the body and the world and the word, not just putting art as mausoleum for capital around equally blind citizens.

*sing a song to Ursa Major, Arundhati, Alcor, Suhā; the “neglected one”
the shards of Arabic on your tongue, mispronounced
as unfamiliar as these galaxies
and yet as comforting*

*the city sits on top of the city which sits on top of the city which sits on top of the city
and it cannot ever not be a collision,
a sordid density where dream calls itself a power bottom
and sometimes it is
sometimes it actually enjoys it
sometimes amongst the shut eyed abandon
sometimes it remembers it-self-dream
sometimes my fallible body believes in love*

SO YOU learn the body. And then you learn to look away from the body to know the body, back into the body, so that you look at the stars and down from the stars and still know your surroundings enough to not fall down the well.

And maybe you come to look at the city as natural, since the bodies in it are natural and our ability as humans to make and change and adapt and build is in those same genes as the end result of trauma. Maybe the same buildings and bodies that traumatize can become the site of discovery for their reconstruction. Maybe you can see Times Square again for the first time like the giant, flawed, canyon of yearning that it is and taste sweetness on every inch of concrete and steel, our infant species splaying its attempts at creation across our days in the most spectacular of failures.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

The title, “In memory of feasible grace,” was derived from visionary Italian architect and planner Paolo Soleri’s *Glossary of Terms*, though he never put them together. “Feasible” and “Grace” are two entries near each other, and on the Arcosanti website, one sits atop the other, an accidental compound which I loved, and which seemed to speak to Soleri’s particular brand of dream—one I share, in many ways. When I first saw the prompt for this project I immediately thought of Soleri’s writing on the Urban Mutant, in the back of his 1973 *The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit is Matter Becoming Spirit*. This text is not about him, or for him, and is not in response to his writings directly, but it became a foil against which to set my own meanderings and postulating on place, self, precarity, and after all, possibility. The dream of a better city feels like a memory, and it is this I memorialise here, even as I posit that it might, still, be within reach.

from the definitions:

Feasible Feasibility is utterly tangled in the spacetime web. What was unfeasible then is feasible now, what is unfeasible now will be feasible then (in this is the irrepressible optimism the desirable easily drifts in). This tie to the “present” (i.e. , recent past and anticipatable “future”) is both the yeast for feasibility and the seducer that can and does take feasibility into irrelevance and or into the fields of horror. The hyper-horror of the H-bomb, the irrelevance of 90% of our shopping centers merchandising utopias. Etc, etc...

Grace Since I term Esthe-quity (esthetic and equity) the ultimate achievement of mind and nature, I am at a discomfort of sorts to define grace as the all-inclusive terminal state of reality. They are interchangeable. Esthe-quity points at the “magical” convergence of the esthetic and equity. A convergence, so inevitable when the evolutionary sequence is positively guided , as to make the two agencies into one, the Omega Seed. Grace points at the transcendence of conflict not in a sort of despairing resignation, but in the luminosity of a prodigious and concluded reality.

—The frontisquote from Hannah Arendt comes from Arendt's lectures, in *The Life of the Mind*. Let you think I immediately had all of Arendt at my command, it is not so. I found it through Maria Popova's excellent brainpickings project. The link is here: <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/12/02/hannah-arendt-the-life-of-the-mind-time-thinking/>

—*Esthetogenesis* is another of Soleri's definitions.

—*The Urban Mutant*, as mentioned earlier, is a short text at the back of *The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit*...here the divide in the text is predicated on an offshoot of a traditional footnote of sorts, referring directly to and quoting the Soleri text, on the first page, then spinning off from it.

—The question of whether or not the city can be a "thing" is, sideways, a reference to / me thinking about thingness, through Heidegger's *What is a Thing* as well as Derrida's thinking on event and *Différance*.

—In the cutthroat world of apartment hunting in NYC, it is by no means uncommon to see listings on websites and craigslist in which a cheaper rent is offered in exchange for some subtle (or less subtle) fulfilment of fantasy of the owner or lease holder; it is often sexual or gendered in nature.

—We are only at the very beginning of a (western, medical/psychological) understanding of how epigenetics functions and its relationship to metaphysical mind-body links; as someone who suffers from C-PTSD but who also has long been obsessed with the study of contemporary human evolution and our lack of adequate systemic resources within which not only nature but nurture (both immediately and generationally) is considered, I often bring to my own healing journey questions that go unanswered in the hospital and doctor's office, instead filling in the blanks with my own scholarship, building a resource base from which I can begin to understand trauma. It is really through recognizing my body's own trauma that the traumatized condition of most people I know became clear. Much of my reading around the treatment and healing of PTSD and trauma is focused on trauma *in the past*—a situation quite different from structurally enforced insecurity with no immediate or even viable safe passage available. Samuel Hahnemann's concept of the **miasm**, from his book *The Chronic Diseases*, now central in homeopathic medicine, observing and considering physical, mental and emotional levels as well as contextual experience could be

enormously productive for further inquiry. Bessel Van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score* is also terrific. At the time of this project's completion, I'm about to read Somatic Experiencing founder Peter Levine's *Waking the Tiger : Healing Trauma : The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences*, which comes highly recommended.

—The phrase *surprisingly sometimes the best way / to camouflage oneself / is to stick with the herd* and the list of animals whose adaptations have evolved them with environmental camouflage is from that bastion of internet lore, Bored Panda.

<http://www.boredpanda.com/animal-camouflage-39/>

—The text beginning “in the insect world” is taken from a PBS library entry on the Evolution of Camouflage. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/01/1/1_011_03.html

—The reference to the Thracian girl laughing is from the story of the so-called first philosopher, Thales of Miletus. Originating in Plato's dialogue concerning the nature of knowledge, *Theaetetus* (c.369 BCE), this is a much repeated fable, related by Socrates, telling how Thales loses his footing and falls down a well, distracted as he is by the stars. It is often used as an example of how (or a question of whether) philosophical analysis, inquiry, and otherwise heady scholarship is in danger of being out of touch.

—I found the list of star names on Wikipedia. The lines work through constellation terms and modern proper names, as well as various historical names and etymological derivations. Most of those I found came were of Arabic origin.

—Lastly: I wasn't actually thinking about this while writing this particular piece, but Shusaku Arakawa and Madeline Gins work in and around *Architectural Body* is an interesting side-reference here, in thinking of how our physical environment might have the capacity to re-train us about our bodily and environmental intelligences. I do believe it is possible, in particular considering biomimicry-oriented building programs and systems.