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I receive an email. I am asked if I want to attend. They gauge my interest in participating in a meeting, overseas, with others. (It is the second invitation of this kind I get this year. I accepted the first. They called each other comrade. I liked it because they owned it, but they do not travel yet, or pay for tickets).

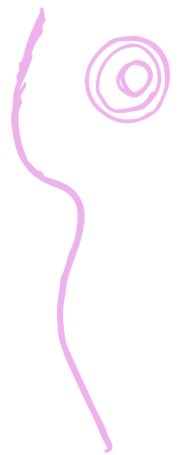
The second invitation is ambiguous. “What I am doing with my life?” they ask. “Would I be willing?” they ask. I am not sure who they are. I have heard their names. I have a sense. The sense is they are not harmful and I may get something out of it. This doesn’t sound like the usual criteria on which I base my decisions, or, for that matter, a good enough criteria. They call the meeting *informal*, just like the subject line of the email I receive: “Informal Meeting.” What kind of collaboration am I being recruited for? I reply politely with a subtle reluctance, doubting my own affirmation: “Sure.”

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I ask for details, for the names of the others solicited. I am curious. Who is being recruited? “Not now,” I am told. A long silence. I then receive another letter addressed to me and to others. I cannot see who they are. It is more formal in tone and written by one of the leaders. It is official although they insist on informal. They invite me to fly to a location renowned for its dark and poor neighborhoods, its political operatives, its pork, and its men with big gold rings on their pinkies. Handed down to me from mafia films. I will go—it would be great to see a new city, eat fatty pasta, and drink earthy wine. How selfish of me. I could even fly to the commune while there... But what kind of plan was this? Why was I being recruited and to what end? Why did I assume it would be safe to eat fatty pasta with these people in the first place? What kind of training can pork and pasta possibly prepare you for?

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Silence. I am contacted a third time. The meeting has been canceled until further notice. No explanation. I am not suspicious. Shouldn’t I be suspicious? Syria is on fire until Harvard urban planners alongside big private money put it back together again, while the others divide it up. Next door there is a malignant occupation, and below to the left, there is science fiction and every single person is in jail. Europe is a right-wing testosterone fest. And here, we are building eco-malls. Not to mention everything else on the level of your molecules. In any case, there was no point. Standing for something is called “clear-cut binaries.” A bad thing these days, I hear. Checkmate they call cynicism, armed militancy and talk of the future are replaced with perspective. Millennial humanitarianism is the new ideology.



I become alarmed by my own lack of suspicion as to why the meeting was canceled. Mostly irrelevant thoughts go through my head. Where would they go next? Would it be sunny? Did they change their mind about recruiting me? Were my friends and foes invited? It was international after all. Informal, International, without the I-S-T at the end. What happened to that? If you look you might find. Some vacuous, others dangerous. But some, solid gold. While all has melted into post-gold. Maybe “-ist,” like its opponent, is a multi-headed hydra. The future, although already here, can be forged.

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Some months later, a personal letter. The leaders want to meet me in the city where I live. A *totally* informal meeting this time, I am told. We meet, we chat over spicy food, we talk about the world. About people we have in common. They like me, I think. We sip coffee, the bill comes, I am invited.

Before that, there was another letter with a new location. Perhaps it was safer there. Or more remote. Again, no names, nothing expected of me. All taken care of. I think, what do they want from me? Do they like my style? Had they read something I had written? Did someone tell them that what I had not yet written was more important than anything I may have already written? Did someone tell them I would be great at smuggling—my assertive, baritone voice always a good cover? That I was an angry Marxist, and still talking to kids about ideology? But that cannot be of any fucking use to them.

OK. I will go to the new location. It will be in the depths of winter, freezing cold, and I could use a traditional scrubbing down by hefty, barely clad, indifferent women, and I know a nice, hyper-talkative artist there. How selfish of me.

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Months later, my ticket already booked, I find out that two other operatives are coming from my city, and others from other cities. We need to answer some questions. We are sent an airline ticket, an itinerary, and no names. We receive instructions the night before we travel. We board the plane. Despite paranoid airports and heightened inspections, I get searched casually. Why casually? Did I look innocent? What if I were carrying grams of opium or, better, a weapon in my boot? In fact, why had no one asked me to carry those grams, or anything else for that matter? When I found myself jokingly telling the male officer that the female officer’s was a weak search (alarmed by my own words as I uttered them), he retorted: “No. Now we know just by looking.”

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A dark-haired young man flashed our names and quickly put the paper in his pocket. Not a word. He walked us outside, a black car was awaiting, we got in. The driver spoke no English. He sat



in silence and looked Uzbek: his small head well nestled between wide shoulders, Turk and Kazak. We reached the port where a young woman—clearly an innocent working for the job, just a go-between—was waiting with the tickets. She hurriedly ran ahead with my suitcase and put it on the ferry, saying we had two minutes. We get on board. I gaze at one island after the next through the ferry window. Two hours later we are on the island. Trotsky. Mister Sedov. A young European man greets us at the port and walks us to our accommodation. We drag our small luggage uphill. We have not seen the leaders yet. Nor the other operatives. On a cold, half-abandoned island of stray dogs, horses, cats, and haunted Ottoman villas, we wait.

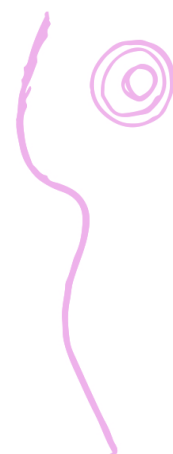
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I have a friend. An ex-love. Actually, two. Actually, more. One of them is of a generation that came of age in the 1960s. His hair is not yet gray, though the skin around his neck is starting to thin. He has the soft eyes of a horse and the will of a bull. He is old-school. He was on a mission as a youth. Actually, many. An operative. The ones I can only imagine, read about, would have been dead good at, without an ounce of a nostalgia, only something else, much stronger. Oh, the taboo of it. The Baaders, the Meinhofs, the Okamotos, the countless Abus, and the countless nameless others? Not the “informals” on Prince’s Island.

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For the Informal Meeting, we sit huddled in the front room of a two-story house, behind the main door. We form a large circle occupying sofas and chairs. We share three electric heaters. All the shutters, doors, and windows are closed. The rest of the house has thick teal carpeting, floral chandeliers, fake Roman sinks, and a black and gold, smoky dining table. Good for cutting. It is 1970s kitsch. It’s a biting cold January day on this southern island. All I can remember is the pregnant woman in the Japanese United Red Army who died on that pole in the snow in that sensationalist film, for being disobedient. I might be pregnant. But this sofa is actually pretty comfortable and my disobedience, insofar as words come out of my mouth, seems to be a source of giggles for the others. Why is that?

As we sat and spoke in turn obediently, taking small breaks, I kept wandering off in my head: Thankfully there are no name badges. Was it in fact that the H of history needed a bit of form injected into it? Or had the H of history been taken over by an h, or an N, or a T, and the fight was over. Someone once accused me not of disobedience, but of polemicism—not a word, OK—of didacticism. I thought, why? I knew why. She was YouTube culture, and everything is available. I was taught to see the heart of a humanitarian neoliberal project, where others saw what they called an “opening unto something else.” If someone could please tell me what that might be. I was also taught that for neoliberalism to take root, become



everyday-casual, everyday-proximitous, it needed to appeal to your values. You know, human dignity and freedom, so central to—well, everyone—so that it could be nurtured by talk of “peace-making,” “dialogue,” “transitional justice,” “the free market,” “globalization,” “freedom-spreading war,” and so much more, with your feet clicking right behind. I did not come up with that. I mean, it is 101.

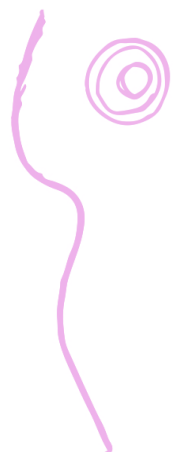
That same person indirectly accused me of using the term “art world,” insisting that there are “art *worlds*.” And that I was a part of it/them. (Accusations are handled very differently now. They are called conversations, questions we should raise but never answer.) The many is one. “Out of many, one.” I did not say that one either. It is a national motto. And worse. Its contemporary variants are many-toothed in a mouth: diversity, multiculturalism, free speech, alternative facts, etceteraetcetera you get my drift. I am sure you know their metallic underbelly.

That was the extent of my disobedience. I was so disobedient that no one cared. I was evidently not going to and did not want to be left on a pole to die in a bid at auto-critique like that pregnant Japanese revolutionary from the last century in that sensationalist film. For one, because the one is many and no one needs to threaten anyone for disobedience. But rather engage in the fantasy of hearing them out. In fact, wasn’t that what we were here on this island for?

Someone else in the extended art *worlds* said that the insurrection was not coming, it was outgoing. Something like that. She was only half right. Contemporary art and its apparatuses *are* corollaries of the dominant logic of late, late capital. I certainly did not think that one either. The institution is the bad boy, and saying “no” is cooler. But arithmetic never taught them that two negatives make a positive, and an impotent no is worse than a yes. Not to mention nostalgiamoderetromaniazombieformsuperficiality. The vocabulary seeps into language, so intimate. It has taken the word and emptied it. Word, location, form, battlefield. Read it all over. Transnationalism is a long word but it has replaced nothing. It has become a condition from which you cannot look away if you want to be looked at. The contemporary is a projected unity of times, of space through the translational. A fiction of collectivity through endless individualities. The transnational makes this illusion possible. I did not say that one either. We do not live in many times, mate. But history can return as farce. And the informal the seed of liberal elite venom. Look it up. Tactic? Tic toc tic toc.

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I go back to sipping my black watered-down coffee in that cold front room, feeling safe in the corner despite the gaining momentum of my thoughts. Eating these Belgian chocolates straight from Belgium helps. We proceed to listen to English speakers from Egypt, Lebanon, Ireland, Romania, Palestine, Turkey, France,



living or based in or between New York, London, Beirut, Cairo, Amsterdam, Brussels, talking in turn. We are all one. Flown in from the many. Ten to twenty minutes each. In turn, we have our say, we are “heard out.” Don’t get me wrong.

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“If you could collaborate with anyone who would it be? If you woke up one day and the art world didn’t exist what would you do? Are you an insider or an outsider? Choose three words that are important to you. Please choose one question.” Upon arrival to the hotel we notice that they have placed folders in our rooms. Folders with sheets. Sheets with names, dates, phone numbers, biographies, schedules, questions picked by operatives, maps. Büyükada, once fourth internationalism’s island, was small and steeply hilly and now prime jet-set location. Other transnationals had visited his old house just this summer. A green, stony path leads downhill from the partly burnt-down, partly ruined mansion to the Marmara seafront. Every single moment of the day, animals cohabit on the island alongside humans. Cats, pigeons, dogs, and horses graze together, and crows create much ruckus at the early hours of dawn, conferring over some issue or other, some body or other. They confer over corpses to find the cause of death. Allegedly they are prime forensic investigators and excellent at facial recognition. They had set intentions if someone harmed them. So I was told.

Our schedule was set. We moved in groups. We moved and went nowhere. We were obedient. We were safe in numbers. Anyway, this is what I told them. They published it. You know, we can do much more with all this.

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When I returned, I found myself talking with students about how the *Beirut* of Beirut—the one the company Solidere had italicized while keeping the name—was like the *street* of the street food they were eating at that place that sold them *street food*, informally, but for an entrance fee, in a private space, for fear of brushing against the street.

This text was written during the 6th Informal Meeting (since re-named Accomplices) which took place on Büyükada Island, Istanbul, January 29 to 31, 2016.

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