

“Somebody else’s world”
a short story by Naoki Sutter-Shudo

All that can be seen are rugged bumps, small, and some cracks in the periphery, head turned toward wall and positioned too close to it, eyes go in and out of focus. Street noises are heard, rhythmized as waves, people walking and talking, mostly cars passing, sirens too. Perhaps there is a busy avenue nearby, behind the wall, or perhaps the sounds are prerecorded and pulsing out of speakers strategically arranged to emulate natural ambience, the engineers responsible for setting them up deserve all the applause. In contrast, whoever finished these walls should be spat on and ridiculed. They were obviously put up in a hurry, with no concern for durability. Just look at the texture, dust and dirt trapped under layers of paint, each layer amassing more grime, dirt accumulating, grime becoming bumps and causing cracks... Better not to fixate on the cracks: a sustained gaze could accelerate their furthering, and there might be something unsightly hidden inside them. Better close the eyes.

In the middle of all the street noises sits a small dog. It speaks. Static in the lukewarm atmosphere, it emits a prayer-like voice with no hesitation, no angst. Its words are hard to decipher. Or perhaps this is all a recording as well. A monotone continuous voice causes drowsiness. Better keep the eyes closed.

Two men in a brawl obstruct sleep. Garbled insults are thrown at each other in turmoil, until all goes silent: physical assault replaces the verbal ones, some punches can be heard, the heavy breathing, panting, moans. Sadly, both of these men lack moderate intelligence, let alone basic civil ethics, otherwise they would take their fight to a more secluded location. Here, all they do is disturb everybody. Only the dog sits, unbothered, perhaps a saint above ugly confrontations, or perhaps an idiotic animal untouched by stimuli. It keeps speaking.

The shorter man, now pushed against a wall, knows not how to defend himself under heavy punches. Self-defense lessons are regularly published in most newspapers: it’s a shame this man hasn’t ever picked one up. He has no curiosity or intellectual thirst beyond his own survival, yet he lacks the very knowledge of how not to die under attack, and in fact, his chest, struck by a hefty blow, caves in, like a moldy fruit pressed by a malicious finger: the attacker’s fist goes inside the flesh, through fat and muscles, past rib cage and lungs, and grabs the spine, pulling it out of the chest hole, in a swift motion. The attacker seems so natural in this last blow, like he knows exactly what he is doing, like he has studied it for years, when in fact his only motivation is pure instinctive hatred. Any martial arts professional would surely stand in bewilderment at how elegantly the attacker has executed his murder. He pulls out the spine while he pushes the head down into the torso: the spine comes out with the skull still attached, he spins it like a lasso and bangs it against an electric pole. The skull crushes on a ‘lost dog’ poster. Is it of the speaking dog? No one can tell now that the poster has been soiled. How men are brought to such savage killings must indicate the evilness of this world, there is no doubt about it.

The unfazed dog’s voice is heard, now that the killing commotion is over.

“Death is always behind your head,” it says, “behind your head and pressed firmly against it... it floats like a bubble, it pushes against your head and doesn’t pop until it’s time... sometimes it gets bigger, sometimes it gets smaller, but it stays

where it is... if you turn your head quickly enough you might catch a glimpse of it, although this isn't advised... remember to thank the bubble for not popping yet... it stays behind your head, but its aura engulfs you... sometimes it feels too prominent, like it's swallowing your whole body..."

Is this dog a stray? Or is it a discarded pet, thrown out because of its confused rambling?

Waste sorting has to be completed with the utmost care. It's only natural we, as a society, collectively tackle what is now becoming a pressing issue. Landfills are getting out of control. Radioactive waste is crudely cemented into cubes and illegally buried, mostly in cemeteries to avoid being uncovered. In the dead of the night, the occasional grave robber stumbles upon such a mysterious cube, and thinking it's treasure, brings it back home with great effort, the greatest effort of his life: the cube is extremely heavy and the exhausted robber, once home with the loot, falls asleep on top of it, a nap from which he won't wake. None of his neighbors will wake either, the whole apartment complex is now cursed by the cube. Without anyone caring for it, vines rapidly take over the building. Such condemned dwellings are not uncommon in this part of town, and make for visually pleasant oases among the drab streets. The grave robber should have robbed landfills instead, people throw away everything nowadays, no one knows the value of anything.

The inhabitants here are all cornered rats. No one has time or energy to think about sorting their trash. This results in rotting piles of mixed waste devoid of rationality: aluminum and meat, diapers covered in broken glass, old magazines soaked in leftover alcohol... Obviously a fight between upset neighbors is routine, occasionally culminating in murder on the spot. At least they die by the garbage, which facilitates the sorting afterward.

The dog's voice cannot be heard anymore. Good riddance! Instead, let's hope these passersby are able to provide some much needed entertainment. One is a housewife, the other a high school boy with acne all over his face. They are standing near the garbage area.

"As a young member of the community," the high school boy explains, "it's essential I question the accepted teachings and strive on my own to pursue truth. Only by doubting tradition and the status quo, we can make things move forward, liberated from myths that hold us back in a state of medieval fear."

The housewife is not convinced. She might not even be listening. Her hungry children await her return. The fresh produce in her bag will soon begin to spoil if she does not hurry home.

The boy continues, "There is no need to pester the vagrants to make them leave. It's only legitimate they would loiter near the trash. Instead, why don't we suggest our neighborhood council that vagrants could be employed to guard and sort the trash, killing two birds with one stone?"

An exemplary young man, surely... his face might be covered in volcanic pimples, but his voice is soothing and invites slumber. We can rest confidently in the knowledge that the young generation will provide solutions to society's problems, all the while we nap, we preserve our energy for when the time is right to wake up and help the youngsters.

Keying in on the bumpy disgusting wall, a nuanced palette makes itself apparent. What looks like a beige expanse from afar is in reality an impressionistic composition of years, maybe decades of piled up filth. Splattered muck of all shades attest to both the passing of time and the absence of upkeep, the disregard for total

hygiene. Black flies randomly land on parts of this landscape. How beautiful this must look like to their kaleidoscopic vision... That is, until they notice the crushed corpses of their relatives dotting the wall. Some of them are even under the paint. Hundreds of generations of flies have been frequenting this wall... killing one here and there makes no difference, this place is theirs. Other flies reside on piles of garbage. Lucky ones get to inhabit fresh cadavers. Different houses, different lives, all of them good, all the flies friendly. How nice...

Suddenly a loud scream is heard. It's the high school boy, covering his face with his hands, rocking back and forth. Is he applying ointment on his acne? Actually, the housewife had cut his face, sick of hearing his preaching, with new gardening shears that still retain their price tag. She was planning on returning them, after realizing most of the plants in her tiny garden were dead or soon to be. Her children loath the garden ever since one of them had seen something truly awful in it, and she knew it was a matter of time before it became another garbage zone. What good could new shears do, then? She stabs the poor boy in the back as he tries to walk away. He turns back, and she quickly cuts open his stomach. She whistles: the dog comes running, jumps on the boy, grabs a loosened gut in its mouth, and runs away, pulling intestines out, they unfold like a pimple being pressed hard. So the dog was not a stray after all! The housewife must hurry home now, the children get hungrier by the minute, and the blood and gore on the shears must be washed away if she wants to return them.

The dog, now crimson-faced, lets go of the intestine to speak again. But thankfully, before it can say anything, a deafening voice from above draws everyone's attention.

"This was fun," it says, "we should play more often!"

"Yes," another equally heavy voice responds politely, "thanks for having us!"

And with that, from above a lid comes down, the sky appears closer now; the lid is about to close, better close the eyes.