

GASPAR OROZCO

FROM AUTOCINEMA

TRANSLATED BY MARK WEISS

FILM SEEN ON A PIANO KEY

The glazed murmur of the archipelago. Remembering the names of lost cities. The red first letter of each name caught in the act of vanishing. Thus, the disappearance of bridge, column, cupola, almost transparent, like a snake's eyelid. The temple quivers beneath a yellow leaf. Music in the depths of a submerged pavilion. The tooth of the moon has sunk. The orchestra pauses: the singer intones a secret to the stone. A crack in the bone's splendor. The note will last forever if anyone dare awaken it.

FILM SEEN ON AN EARLOBE

A peninsula. Footprints will survive for a long time here. The sand is white. Fragments of pottery and glass on the beach. Bits of tiny machinery also. With the steel point of a broken compass I draw lines, paths. I stop in the midst of an unfinished sketch of a silent vowel. A mollusk hides in the gray grass. They say that this sand covers a vast landscape of bones, weapons and stones that sounds have protected for a long time. Further off, a hole marks a well. Blind. On the wall, the skeleton of a snail. I decide to go back. Empty wind. All of my footprints have been erased. I hear the irregular noise of a tugboat approaching the shore.

FILM SEEN IN A WUNDERKABINET MADE BY ULRICH BAUMGARTEN (1600-1652)

for Monika Zgustova

The collector's cabinet as nocturnal city. The traveler will always arrive with flood tide and the south wind. A bird is watching you from every parapet. Architecture as somber proportion. A bottle of February's rainwater rests in the hollow of the niche. A chunk of red coral glints on the temple staircase. Is it music that seeps from the edge of the obelisk? Is it time in another form? Beneath the reef's diaphanous vertebrae the sleeping hand traces a circle within a circle: no constellation breaks the ebony night. But the gold key burns in the final door. Through a crack you discover a sea-snail striped like an Amoy tiger. The soft roar of the sea.

FILM SEEN WITHIN A GULL'S CRY

Ash on the statue's fingertips. The hand points to the source of the sea's power, dark now, sleeping. The dreamer listens. Against the wind, the flight of the gull suspended between two islands. But the salt falls on uncertain ground. Where is he who receives this message within his forehead? Among those who sail in impenetrably silent ships and touch with their gaze the frozen water? Among those who have just abandoned ships that arrive from shores of rusted metal? A gull and a wall. Mist on the statue's fingertips.

FILM SEEN ON A WHITE SQUARE ON A CHESSBOARD

Once I heard a horse run off. Today the east wind carried some grains of red sand. From here I saw the tower fall. I saw the bishop bow his head. Others say that the sea can be seen through a crack. Others say that it's a still dream in the Queen's head. In a dream Our Lord discovered an unknown tree in whose fronds were hidden nameless birds. That day we were victorious. Our kingdom is a petal on the finger of God. Yesterday the Queen moved northward. Her step was a drop of metal. Black wheat fields spread out beyond the bridge. The snow begins to fall. Silence.

FILM SEEN WITHIN AN AMBER BEAD

Words from then that retain the clarity of silence. Which is why speech was unnecessary. The depths of night remembered the oldest gold: hours of the lightest secret, of when you begin to enclose yourself in the world that lives within closed eyes. A music that drifts from far away. A smell that travels from the deepest heart of the peach. *Is autumn not memory's most translucent fashion? Is autumn not the beginning of incurable forgetting?* One glance is poured into another and from that union comes forth a new water. A color visible to our eyes only. And there, suspended, a sliver of sun lives in the dark of night. From and by that light I write: *I held in my hand the fruit of the wind. And it was warm.*

FILM SEEN IN THE THREAD OF A SPIDER WEB

for Juan Luis Panero

If you breathe something will tremble on the far side of the city. If you remember a voice a motion will be lit, a sound. If you are quiet something elsewhere will become silence or ash. A city, a wind. For he who would have come to touch this city there will be no return. You know it, and in any case you will find yourself one day passing through these empty streets, searching for what can't be found, awaiting the arrival of the dirty colors of day.

FILM FORGOTTEN IN THE RAMPA THEATER IN HAVANA

for Mark Weiss

I was leaving a theater in Havana before the show was over when two old men in the lobby asked me the name of the film. I couldn't remember. Turning away, one said to the other: *so young and such a lousy memory!*

SOME FILMS SEEN ON A SPRAY OF WHEAT (A LITTLE BOOK OF RUTH)

From ironwood the softest fruit. An empty wave left it before me on the shore. Now by yourself in a room you memorize the stone's lines, the salt's murmurs. On this island the border between autumn and winter is lavish with apparitions. If you touch the water's skin the stars of all nights come together. All my memories disperse if you touch my brow. From you come words in the language of iron and snow: in the beginning, the tree beneath which I was born whose shadow is my blood, whose murmur my silence, whose leaves my memory, whose roots my forgetting.

*

In the scene in my head is a woman surrounded by broken sprays of wheat. She gathers those not harvested. There's no one in the theater. Gleaning done, her basket full, gratefully she gazes westward. The curtain falls. All the silences. At that moment, fragrant and violent, the fire begins. Calmly I leave the theater. The theater in flames is the only light on the island. Slowly the island is lost in the night. A smaller and smaller ever-sharper dot of flame pierces my head.

*

These images will come to you from across the ocean. There the wind will be cut with swords. Like the bread of war. I hear you rehearse your lines in an empty room. In the depth of a mirror, the island, rain; which is to say: memory. From whence will come the much-awaited Grace? I will look to the east and abide. I suppose you sleeping, hidden among waves of rye in an oddly gentle winter. The star extinguished above me at this hour in your heavens is lit by a different power. I know that now you are possessed of Grace.

*

From the empty adjoining room I hear the tidal surge of white wheat. The secret prayer
of winter on the desert island.

*

And paradise will be covered with sprays of wheat for as far as our dead eyes can see.

FILM SEEN THROUGH A KEYHOLE

For you the garden of moments is opened.

Earlier versions of some of the translations appeared in Jerome Rothenberg's blog "Poems and Poetics," at *Jacket2* (<http://jacket2.org/commentary/gaspar-oro-zco-ten-prose-poems-autocinema-part-one>). A bilingual edition of *Autocinema* is forthcoming from Chax Press.