

Autopsy of a Spring

by Mathias Clivaz

AUTHOR'S NOTE

From September 2015 to January 2019, I was part of the Jean Dutoit Collective, a group formed by and around migrant people of African origin to provide them housing. The collective remains active to this day, in Lausanne, Switzerland. Its African members have always been its centre of gravity: between eighty and two hundred people depending on the period, all men, most of them of Gambian and Nigerian nationality. Alongside them, members of Swiss nationality – women and men, between three and ten depending on the period – use their citizens rights to support the 'people under the roof' (literal translation of the French “gens du toit”). It is in this capacity that I have taken part in the collective and that I invite you to situate the words that you will read in these pages: a Swiss national, white, cisgender man, I belong to one of the most privileged social categories in this country.

The formation of the collective in 2015, its history, organisation and struggles are recounted in a document published in November 2017¹. Its title – *Report for the rights and mobility of black African migrants in Switzerland and in Europe* – clearly expresses the need we found ourselves in to inscribe our action in the convergence of struggles, and in the transnational reality of migration and its "management" by European nation-states.

The following pages bring together the notes I took over the months following the death of Mike, a friend and member of the Jean Dutoit Collective, who died following his arrest by the Lausanne municipal police on the evening of 28th of February 2018.

March, April, May, June: four months of crisis for the collective, during which I tested my own limits more than ever. It was these two aspects that led me to revisit and rework these notes, with the need to give an account of what happened, and to express, in my own name, the events we experienced². Recollection, reflections, feelings: the proximity between these different types of writing allows new perspectives to unfold, while preventing the story from closing in on itself.

There are also several temporalities: the notes that I took sometimes on the spot, and those written afterwards, with the intention of keeping a trace, or already beginning to filter

¹ The report is available online, in French and in English: <https://collectifjeandutoit.wordpress.com/>, as well as in some bookshops and libraries, ISBN 978-2-8399-2503-7.

² So as not to expose anyone unnecessarily, the names of Mike's family members have been redacted, and false first names have been given to the members of the collective.

and metabolise this experience. I gave up trying to rearrange these pieces to give the reader an artificial chronological continuity. The writing winds and unwinds like a spiral, returning to events to retell them in a different way, in the wound, or in the memory of the wound.

The events described in these notes can be broken down into three main threads: the repatriation of Mike's body, the police operation on May 29, and the street-dealing polemic that took place at the same time. I'll summarize them here to give the reader an overview.

Shortly after Mike's death, the collective found a lawyer to defend his family and take the police to court. The autopsy on Mike's body took place in March. When the body was returned to us, we began the process of repatriating him to Nigeria, where his family wanted him. Yet it was above all with his close ones – his wife and children who live in Spain, and his brother, who lives in Italy – that we formed ties, particularly during the weeks leading up to their visit to Lausanne at the end of May, and the departure of Mike's body for Benin City.

During the same period, the Lausanne municipal police and the cantonal police were preparing an anti-drugs operation targeting certain members of the collective. They finally launched the operation on May 29 at the house occupied at the time on Chemin des Sauges: "four people were arrested", wrote the press, including "the main perpetrator of a major cocaine trafficking operation", but "the squat's inhabitants were not targeted". The collective, shaken by Mike's death and the ensuing legal proceedings, was reviled.

As by a twist of fate, the week before the police raid, Fernand Melgar – a film-maker known for his documentaries on the unfair treatment of migrant people in reception centres and their expulsion from Switzerland – got fed up with the drug dealing he was observing in the Maupas district where he lives, and published an article in *24 Heures* (a regional newspaper) that was to become the starting point of a heated controversy. On Monday, May 28, he persisted by posting photos on Facebook of six black men he had just bumped into in the street. Following the police raid the next day, the Jean Dutoit Collective became the catalyst and scapegoat for the hatred and frustration that had built up. During three weeks, the town was torn apart in a toxic debate, leading to a heightened police presence, an explosion of racism on social networks and, for the Jean Dutoit collective, an unprecedented sense of fear.

Between Mike's death on February 28 and the end of the controversy at the end of June, something happened. The much-needed debate on anti-black racism, on the dehumanisation of migrant people in Switzerland, on police violence, on drug use – this debate was blocked by shame and hatred. Yet over these few months, something got under the skin of the city, and I don't think it will ever come out again.

I have known a tall, gentle man. Mike liked to have a laugh, he had this mischievous, warm side, and was easy to talk to, perhaps because he didn't judge people. In any case, having been an anonymous migrant, the fact that his name is now known to the whole of Lausanne must probably make him laugh.

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March 25, 2018

I refused to start writing the day Mike died and the days that followed. What was happening then could only have been transcribed at the cost of risking publication one day, and I didn't want that. In a world where the dead carry so little weight, words must be silenced, especially written words. Let them circulate by word of mouth, yes. Between the living, with no reference to the future or the past. Where memories are made.

Soon, however, writing was a necessity: press releases, emails, leaflets. And gathering people's voices, transcribing, and speaking too, a lot. Words as tools of transmission, needed to ensure that Mike's death, this death that we now refer to, that "Mike's death" enters this public sphere that rejects and denies it.

The need for words to hit true.

A few days ago, the front page of the newspapers carried the following headline: "Police officers heard as defendants, investigation launched into negligent homicide".

I write from there, bringing back to the present what I want to keep a record of. Then comes fatigue, and I let it come because the situation seems to allow it, because there's a moment to breathe. If you don't let it come, it catches up with you, your nerves give out, you end up lacking breath, depth of momentum, empathy too.

This last week has been punctuated by meetings with the press and political appointments, but I've also spent it switching on subtitles for a play by Gremaud and Lenoble at the Arsenic, called *Partition(s)*. Sarah Jane did the translation, I did the subtitles and I play them manually during the performances, from Tuesday to Sunday. The play is one of those that can only be written in times of peace, a peace that has lasted for a long time (so people believe, in Switzerland) and smacks of boredom, petty bourgeoisie, bobo or hipster, call it what you will. It's a play that speaks about itself, self-referential, self-deprecating (it's the least one can do to maintain a shred of intellectual honesty) but without going as far as satire.

Today, Sunday, I'm writing after the last performance. François Gremaud told me about a play he saw last night by a man called Marthaler, apparently a very famous director from Basel, with lots of sets, technicians and actors on stage. The action takes place in a bunker 250 metres below Lake Constance. The audience is made up of bourgeois concerned with surviving in these dangerous times, survivalists in Louis Vuitton bathrobes who no doubt reinfuse their lines with the latest theories of collapsologists from here and abroad. Just writing it out makes me angry. Bourgeois logorrhea. Ivory tower posturing, inaction, worse, "I told you so". Nevertheless, I'm writing it because this way of seeing – and of representing in the theatre what we see, in all mimicry – I interpret it as symptomatic.

As Anna told me on Friday about the racist comments and insults directed at Mike on the internet: "It takes us out lives".

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April 1st, 2018

In whose name, for what reason are the lives of men and women given greater importance than others? It's a question of *giving*, not recognising, because the language of rights remains for human nature a garment of circumstance. Perhaps one day, as is the case today for some, it will become a second skin for the majority. But what about those who have something to lose at giving rights? They are many, those who believe they have something to lose. Whatever the depth of the violence of this fiction.

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April 29, 2018

If I had to say today what is the world, I would speak Warsan Shire's poem:

later that night
I held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere

Wherever you point your finger on the map, there is suffering. From moment to moment, pessimistic, heroic or tragic, and in what colours? Because colours matter a great deal: the shimmer over the abyss; lifted like a veil over the impermanence of all things, of all beings; thrown like a blanket over frozen limbs, over chapped skins that we warm if we can't heal them, over cracks that we hide when we can no longer cross them. I don't know exactly what I am any more. I don't know what there is to do, the goal eludes me – when living can no longer be by itself a goal, because living sums up, gathers and ignites its own will; when I know that in wanting to pursue a single goal my vision twists and cripples itself by no longer being able to see the colour that carries it; how to move from one colour to another, to capsize, to lose one's way, to lose one's mind and find it again. To have climbed all the way to the summit, to have touched it with my hand, kissed it with my lips at the risk of leaving them stuck to the ice, my mouth bleeding, from the top of the mountain onto the world of red words thickened by blood. In all the valleys of adventure to the daily chores to the address book to the things to be done to the laundry to the attention stolen from the normal course of things to the abnormality feared and at the same time invited, like a traveller to whom we slam the door in the face, so moved are we that they turn up, so aware are we that our whole life depends on letting them in, and that there is no hope for them, that they should sleep outside, ignored on the doorstep

that we forbid ourselves to cross. Why hasn't everything already been said? Why do we still have to speak?

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June 4, 2018, La Sage

I put down my bag and the groceries. In front of the chalet there's an old bench. I lie on it, soaking up the sun, getting ready to really see the place around me. I've looked at it so far without seeing it, I've realised: my senses were telling me that they didn't recognise anything, that they didn't yet understand the colours.

I drink a glass of water, put on my shoes, head off somewhere. I stop to look at pebbles, streams, dead branches on the ground, I examine the unfolding leaves on a shrub. I take off one sweater, then another. The warmth returns.

What am I thinking about? I let the tightly woven web of my thoughts unravel, helped by the motion of the walk, the sweat and the wind.

Some ants on the path call out to me, and I avoid them as best I can. Yes, every living being has the same value as a living... It doesn't matter that an ant has no nerves, and therefore doesn't suffer when it's crushed. The argument of animal suffering to justify vegetarianism is flawed. The only three solid arguments are 1) to put an end to the excesses of industrial production and the senseless waste of life, energy and intelligence that it engenders, 2) personal asceticism, 3) the shaping of a civilisation. The lives of these ants are as important as my own, as the lives of millions of people who have died in wars, in every era and in every region of the world. That there are predators, that there is suffering, that there is death: inevitable. We can protect ourselves from suffering, yes, but not any suffering, not in any way and not at any time. That cannot be a goal in itself. Whether we want to take care of human beings, animals or plants, from an ontological point of view the work is the same. From a political point of view, it's more complex, but no more complicated. From a personal point of view, the terrible thing is that we have to choose. Simply because you can't do everything.

Did I have to say this first, to let these thoughts unravel first, before approaching this vulnerability where, like a child asking: why? I let myself be the invader of my own life, mingling with this destiny which is also the life of others, the life of Mike, his children, his partner, his parents, his loved ones.

Alive, Mike was part of a collective of around a hundred men who had migrated from various West African countries to Europe (I'm all too familiar with this kind of phrasing as I've become accustomed to *telling* this story). What I have felt over the last three months is not just the loss of a friend, but also the loss and shock felt by the men who lived with him, who, unlike me, shared his condition and share it today. His death permeates our souls. Death, but not just any death. No. Brutal death, violent death.

I had bumped into him three days earlier, on Sunday evening outside the station. We shook hands and exchanged family news. I'm very reluctant to speak about it. I don't know how to do it, even less if I should, or if it would be better not to. I just don't know. I'm not writing here to do justice or to remember. I'm writing bits and pieces, or rather moments. I think it will be impossible for me to convey what I feel. But I want to try. Maybe only people who lived through those events will be able to understand what I'm trying to say. And those who remember Mike.

Now that I've come back to my senses, I feel a spark, a pulse. It pulses, like the line that separates death from life, that line alone that we learn to experience and against which everything conspires and moves. Now I can tell the sadness: if I no longer need to run away from it, if it is no longer quite the opposite of joy, but what allows us to measure its depth and feel it, once again, by bits.

I can still hear the stream in the mountain, in the high night.

What comes behind sadness is fear. I was afraid. I was afraid and that fear resonates within me. It's not just my fear, but the fear of others, the fear I've seen in people's faces, the fear that resonates in their tone of voice, in certain decisions. We all retreated at some point: sorry, I can't do it, it may be selfish, but I can't do it. We would have liked to be able to do something for the pain of others.

It's also the fear of the people who saw what happened, or who heard Mike being beaten up, fear because they felt his pain, his terror, and fear again of bearing witness, of making their fear public, of exposing themselves.

The fear of people with a C permit who won't lodge a complaint because they're afraid it will bar them from Swiss citizenship. Fear of black people who have to live with the suspicious gaze of white people, who know that they will always be a little more suspect than others. The fear of people without a valid residence permit who have nowhere to go, nowhere to exist, the fear of being discovered and arrested, put in prison for violating a territorial ban order, reduced to the status of a legal object, exchanged from hand to hand, from policeman to henchman, to a cell in this district or in another, then another cell in a removal centre, then a plane, ever further from Switzerland, ever closer to fear. The fear of refugee families in Switzerland, waiting for a police squad to break in at 4am to take them away and expel them from the country; or maybe just the father, or maybe just the mother. The fear of families where the father is in Switzerland to earn a living, and they, the wife and children, are in Italy, Spain, Greece, in a country on the African continent, afraid for their husbands and fathers, because they know that in Europe black African men lose their lives during police "controls".

There was a time in Switzerland when it was not good for you to be Italian, Spanish, Portuguese or from a country of the former Yugoslavia. Today it's not good to be Arab or black African. People don't know what country you come from, they don't know anything about Africa, they just see that you "look it". And maybe you've spent your whole life in Switzerland, but that's a secondary concern. The politics of stigma.

The fear of not being believed when you speak out, of not being recognised for who you are, a human being, of being underestimated, misjudged every day – the fear of losing the will to live, of losing the joy of living, and we prefer to spare ourselves this fear and what might cause it, because the very essence of our lives is at stake, our joy for life: what's more precious?

On the other hand, those who look the other way, those who accuse immigrants of all the evils, who make up stories about them or peddle them, who make a fuss about them at the slightest opportunity, who make generalizations at every turn to maintain their illusions of order and superiority, all those who feel satisfaction in doing so, who feel safer in being able to sideline, ostracize, invent culprits, protect their turf, their ideas, their ego, yes of course : they too are afraid. Such misery.

There's one word that keeps popping into my head: *ignominie*. I'm not even quite sure what that word means. Ignoble, the opposite of noble? Noble means generous, respectful, human. Another word: *immonde*³. The opposite of world, that which goes against the world, destroys it, annihilates the possibility of being in the world.

What's really disgusting is that it took Mike's death for the press to 'get hold of the problem' (and even then, because that's a long way off!), for people to pay attention to events that had been known and denounced for a long time. What happens next? Two months in the media, then nothing. Until the trial, no doubt.

I keep thinking: what if I'd shouted louder, what if I'd done more? What if I'd fought harder to ensure that these problems weren't ignored, to wake people up? (Are they asleep?) What if I'd done more to express, to reassure, to make people understand, to state the facts, to convince, to make the voices of those who aren't being listened to be heard? If I had been quicker to understand the gravity of the situation?

And then there's the indecency. It hurts, this feeling that people don't give a shit about the suffering of others. Wouldn't *cruelty* be a better word? Or stupidity? And the indecency of lying about a man after his death: cowardice.

I'm walking at an altitude of 2000 metres, surrounded by gentians, yellow-grey grass on which the snow has just melted and which once again smells of wind and sunlight, and I think of Mike's body in a cold room in Lausanne.

When R■■■■, Mike's brother, and A■■■■, his sister-in-law, accompanied by Rachel, went to visit his body in the chapel of St-Roch in Lausanne the other day, my thoughts were with them. I know that place well. Faces and names come back to me.

The first time I set foot in this mortuary chapel was for the cremation of Manu, a childhood friend. He had taken his own life, leaving a short note to his parents saying that he hadn't found his place in the world. I seem to remember that at the time of his death, about fifteen years ago, he was working as a landscape gardener near Geneva. I'd lost touch with him a long time before. I remember his mother, devastated. And something else struck me: his parents were

³ Literally "un-worldly".

Buddhists, believing in reincarnation, and suicide in this religion is a negative death: the soul lost forever in limbo. Which is like condemning people who have had difficulty finding their way to never find it, isn't it?

My second visit to the chapel of St-Roch was for Wolf, a man who touched me deeply in his way of being. I'd met him in the university library, where he came as a self-taught man to read, learn and chat. Ricardo told me that he was a sound engineer, and one of the very best. He died of cancer. I had gone to St-Roch with Ricardo, who had accompanied him during the last months of his life, and after a time of meditation I remember leaving the two of them alone. His body was like a lump of stone, a little grey, hieratic – and the make-up, the clothes, the way the undertakers made him look, accentuated this aspect, that of the image of a man – yet everything about his faded features, the features of his face, recalled the person he had been. His nose was that way because it was him, his jaws were that shape because it was him. It was him, because he had been.

It was 2015. In the spring.

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June 7, 2018, Lausanne

18h30

I have to retrace the events of the past few days. Everything is already whirling in my head. What I've done, the events that have followed, the decisions I've made.

I'm exhausted. I knew I was going to be. My measure wasn't in tune with the events, I got overwhelmed, even if by a little. The truth is, I'm still holding it all together. But at the same time, it's being in the thick of things that has allowed me to feel where life has gone beyond my strength. There's a phrase that's been running through my head a lot over the last few weeks, like a mantra: periods of very high intensity highlight who we are, our strengths and our vulnerabilities.

Reality is violence.

The banks along which I approach this furious river are cut into the rocks of intersubjectivity, all the different densities and tessituras of these lives, everything that consciousness encounters when we are with others, consciousness whose sack and surf we must know if we want to have any chance of lasting. In what sense does a knife cut depend on the skin it cuts? In what sense is being wounded also a matter of agency? The life that rises and the life that ebbs and flows, the absorptions and protrusions that are as many faces, all these shores by which reality comes to me, in this encounter, are violence. However diverse it may be, exhibited like a statue in a museum surrounded by tourists, or visible with half-closed eyes only between the dustbin and the sink, or centred in the body with a sensitive but unintelligible precision, or thought out in the brilliance of an emotion too strong to be metabolised and which is sublimated in the instant as if under the pressure of rocks: the diamond: violence. This is the meaning of meaning. Such is the feeling of life's power and of acting on it.

What I make sense of, the events the feelings the thoughts, that make sense, happen next to me and I am produced within this self produced there in the indefiniteness of the meaning to be given to what is. I cannot close my eyes, I cannot. There comes a moment when I fall asleep; the violence continues, however, only in muffled tones, on and under my eyelids, continues to lick them with such abrasion that during this sleep I can't break out of the habit of feeling the cliff in all its rage – as it emerges from the sea and salt, the earth and blood – in all its terrible clarity. One moment predestined, the next moment become, destroying predestination, plugging birth into death and revealing death.

My eyes are so heavy, so heavy.

19h10

There's no point in trying to mitigate the violence; consciousness is its passage and the ravaged, mad, senseless moment structures it until it recognises itself in it. In 1 minute, 1 year, 100 or 1000 years, it doesn't matter (because you can't control it).

I saw them, R■■■■, N■■■■ and D■■■■, walking on errors as one would walk on water – with very little margin as to whether to do it or not: it had to be done – with very little margin as to how to do it because we had to find out how and do it, inscribe the act in time, turn back the lips of chaos and on its teeth while they're crushing us carve into the bone the signs of our passage to death, the signs of death : how it pierces us, inscribing even incomprehensible signs, sufficiently comprehensible nonetheless for us there on the spot, interpretable like a riverbank that has come to life for the eyes of others to whom we will have to tell what we have said, what we have done, and how this doing must be valid, and sayable. How do words here become almost objects, (haunting) artefacts, words-as-gestures, concretions fighting against time to domesticate themselves, to make us habitable to ourselves at last, and how does this continuity hold together? How is it even possible?

I see it and I remain in it, sea eyes washed over cliffs of blindness. For vision is born in becoming, however contrary to becoming vision may be, which, in its suffering, freezes what it sees, takes up a position and thus does not see, not because it cannot but because its power to see is identically the power not to see. This is the only meaning of the word identity. And when the infinity of not-seeing is crossed and finds itself at its point of seeing, vision looks through itself as through a ghost.

22h36

Incandescence. This word came to me as I was kissing you, this word came to cover what it was saying, to encapsulate it, or rather to encapsulate me from the incandescence reigning all around, from the excess of meaning and violence (it's anchored in me, everywhere).

What I was telling you just now: that there's a place inside me that's gone mad. Or that is mad, I don't know, that has been reopened, discovered, laid bare, the incomprehension that explodes there in an in-between of vulnerability that totalises me: with no opposite but this infinity. I'm also talking to you and we're eating together, I'm joking and I'm playing with the gods and I'm making them tinkle in your ears, it makes you laugh, it makes me feel good.

Two. But not two, or two in the way that numbers were used before algebra, before the determination of the numbers' numberness, before they existed on their own ecliptic, before they occupied a throne in this sky so unfit for anyone's consumption but humans', and yet so hermetic to humans. Two, that is to say, something that is, that authentically exists, and that is also several, asymptotically existent.

Earlier I told you, earlier I heard – I was on the outskirts of Place St-François, I was about to cross the road to go down Rue du Petit-Chêne and I heard – a high-pitched creaking, a squeaking of metal against metal and I wondered what it was, yet without looking. It was as I started down the street that the noise also came closer, and I looked up: it was the sound of the blinds on the massive Société des Banques Suisses building (those letters carved into the stone 10 metres above the ground), with no entrance other than cascading windows of blinds all lowered at the same time by an invisible command. It's creaking and creaking and creaking, and why now, at this hour, when the day is ending, it's 8pm and nobody is probably occupying those offices up there any more, why are those blinds going down at this hour? I looked down at the street below, my feet treading lightly, and the first thing that struck me was: look, they're not here, where are they? I couldn't see any of the men who often walk up and down this street at night, selling cannabis or cocaine. And suddenly the thought struck me, the vision burst into my mind, I envisaged a possibility and the anguish came over me that it was precisely that, a possibility, something that could happen, the truth of it in this moment when worlds threatened never to cross or meet again, to the point of leading me to believe that they had never, ever crossed: the vision that everything I had experienced over the last few days, with R ■■■, with Mike's children, with all my friends in the Collective, the vision that these last few years had only ever existed in my imagination, in a reverie that could be wiped from the world's memory in one fell swoop like a rag on a dirty window, a disgusting comparison that captures the tenor of my anguish: that this world in which I live can be denied, the lived experience of these last three years completely and methodically denied, simply because this society would have managed to make these men disappear from this street, from all the streets, and to make them forget, to the point that I, I who am memory, would have been denied its own existence, would have seen it described as a 'story', a 'fantasy', a 'novel', that I would have been snatched from my daze in the face of this denial of what we had experienced, and experienced intensely, precisely because it had been intense and had therefore escaped the norms of the perceived, because the gutter, another disgusting word, had allowed the obscene [*l'immonde*] to cross, had opened the gates of the future to it, but had clenched its teeth on the world we wanted to bring to light and had swallowed it back. But from that moment on, and for ever, that creaking marks a fault line in my head, and in my head I can still hear it, the dimensions opening and closing like stars, their faces terrified in the evening light, straw butterflies with dead eyes, fragile sphinxes, enduring as pure signified.

I went down to Rue du Midi, walked thirty metres and rang at Cathy and Luis's doorbell. During the French lesson, I regained consistency through their contact, through their friendship, a consistency of a different kind, through the interplay of our words and our attention, because there was also in the action of talking and giving a class, a give-and-take that was given and taken, a gesture that was fulfilled, on that evening when so much was taken

from me, so much was taken away that I felt that words were going to fail me, but that I had to make the effort, to say, because otherwise something would die.

It's that word incandescence, that's what it means. That's also why it came to me at that moment, when I was kissing you. Because kissing you wasn't about holding back, it was about continuing. It wasn't about holding apart, it was about making contact; it was camping myself on the slope of time, determined to live somewhere. Am I not the fire burning up there in the mountain, am I not the hourglass overturned by the genie, am I not the loss of all soil, am I not the abyss and the mountain overturned on the abyss? And as the blue-winged beetles fly from my eyes, am I not here to give: shape to eternity?

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June, 11-18, 2018

A form of madness had taken hold of the town. Every day or so, in the newspapers, new notices were published, the opinions of public figures, respectable men, fathers or mothers, local residents, everyone had their say. Everyone had their say, their stone to add to the edifice, without realising that the edifice had no foundations and kept collapsing in on itself, so much so that the streets were soon crumbling under pieces of wall that made walking difficult. The eyes wandered, searching for their bearings. The world seemed empty without its dealers.

The victory that had consisted in making street dealing invisible had made something else visible: the void. This emptiness between people, between things, this excess of space of Swiss hygienism, not the cleanliness of the streets, but the cleanliness of meaning – this contradiction in terms: because meaning is dirty by definition, it is born of chaos.

It was only after Mike's body had been received by his family in Nigeria and buried, that I felt all the mire of this controversy. Everyone was right, as politicians are so good at conceding, and everyone was wrong.

The journalists had fired in all directions, it was now or never: they knew that every day people would be drawn to the newspapers, wanting to read about the latest shift in public opinion, the last voice to make itself be heard. They knew that everyone involved had their weaknesses, that no point of view could be perfect or the last to be heard. All they had to do was show this and play the forces off against each other in a skilful (but not too skilful) production, with the occasional didascaly, for example: such and such "had the courage to say out loud what everyone else was thinking in silence". As in all lynchings, all it takes is one stone, but then when everyone joins in, the responsibility disappears.

The *20 Minutes*, a free newspaper with a fickle pen, moved with the wind without any concern for consistency. The large-circulation newspapers, which were politically positioned, found it harder to manage the weather. *Le Matin Dimanche*, for example, took a turn to the right, supported conservative positions and then decided that the safest thing to do was to hide behind the protection of the youth. But for three weeks, not a single journalist addressed

the subject at the heart of the debate: drugs. All they wanted was for children not to use them. That it shouldn't be sold in the street in an overly ostentatious way. That's all. Drug use, why the Swiss, the people of Lausanne, were addicted to cocaine – those people whose cars were described as passing through the neighbourhood early in the morning, who parked in front of the offices of the former Missionary Department of the Vaud Protestant Church, in front of the former library at Les Cèdres, in front the school, who opened their windows and went shopping before going to work – nobody wrote about them in the newspapers.

Etc. I don't feel like recounting the story. If one wants to know what was said, they'd be better off reading the newspapers of that shameful summer. During the same period, local residents had circulated a leaflet saying "they're just a small workforce, easily exploited and easily replaced if arrested. As they are doubly exposed to violence – from their suppliers and from the police – they do not lead a quiet life, and therefore have a vested interest in maintaining calm in their neighbourhood" (May 30). Tags had appeared and posters stuck on the walls ("I'm more afraid of the police than of the drug dealers in my neighbourhood"). Some women said that drug dealers made them feel safer at night, while others said the opposite. Conferences were organised, and political figures such as Yvan Perrin of the UDC [anti-immigration right], Sandra Pernet of the PDC [center-christian-right], and Fernand Melgar of course, turned up at rallies. There's nothing interesting about the man himself: everyone knows how matches work. On Facebook, too, the hatred was in full swing. The use of the smiley 'burst of laughter' was used as a weapon to deny humanity, as a sign of exclusion, of contempt for the lives of the 'dealers' to whom all these assholes felt so superior. After trolling the Jean Dutoit's page, the Résistance Helvétique [nationalist far-right] page ended up being presented by Facebook as a "related page" of the Collective. Same thing for the "Stop Care-Bear Justice" page. It's all the rich white man's argument over and over again: hide the drug dealers to better profit from them, to better control them. Making mothers scared, relying on Swiss "common sense", encouraging denunciation like during the last war, instrumentalising children... Basically, all the contributors were drugged, on cocaine or testosterone, on indignation or nationalism, on the idea of justice or on the local white wine. It's a safe bet that everyone was quick to forget the hangover the next day.

During these weeks, the rain was torrential. And during these weeks, a boat in the Mediterranean Sea, the Aquarius, with 629 migrants on board rescued off the coast of Libya, was refused passage from port to port. Italy, Malta, France...

The meteorological phenomenon was not without resonance with the complaint that was rising from the city, the hot and cold fronts that were divided, opposed, freed from their ordinary consensus. Not since 2015 had the "migration crisis" been so obvious, the fronts so clear-cut; and yet, once again, nobody was talking about this migration, its causes, its actors. Above all, nobody was talking to "them".

What had it all been? A conflict between generations? An episode in the class struggle against the backdrop of globalised national liberalism? The crossing of a threshold in the demographic evolution of the region? The repercussions of a war that does not say its name

and whose hot front is to be found just about everywhere in Europe, moving with the makeshift camps destroyed by the authorities, Calais, Como, Ventimiglia, Paris, Lesbos?

Be that as it may, by dint of banging on left and right, trying everything, drawing guns at the slightest provocation, people learnt about the new shape of the society, to put it under the sonar, to know its edges, strengths and weaknesses. At first, the authorities and the police seemed to be swimming far behind. Then they came up with a 'tactical idea', planting cops in every street to calm everyone down, which was obviously only made necessary by the toxicity of the debate. The fight against drug trafficking was going to be hampered by this: instead of being easy to spot on the streets, the dealers would get lost in hidden corners and compounds, and all the shadowing work would have to start all over again.

On June 18, the Aquarius was authorised to dock in Valencia, Spain. The long days at sea had put the lives of many of the passengers at risk, and the Red Cross was waiting on the quayside. Valencia, home to B■■■■, N■■■■ and D■■■■, Mike's partner and their children.

B■■■■ who is pregnant with their last child.

*

June 18, 2018

I went to the Pompes Funèbres Générales [a local funeral home] to pick up the original death certificates that Mrs L■■■■ had obtained from the ad hoc department, in order to send them to B■■■■, as the Spanish authorities had refused the certified copies sent earlier.

Mrs L■■■■ tells me that we had been close to a hard time ten days ago, because the weight limit at Lufthansa is 200 kg... and the coffin weighed 198 kg. We came very close to having to start all over again, with a different airline, a different flight, and so on.

Earlier in the afternoon I met Shyaka Kagame, a film-maker who wants to make a documentary about Mike's death for the RTS programme *Temps Présents*. Talking to him about the last three months makes my stomach into a knot.

*

June 19, 2018

7h20. Last night we learned that security guards had been hired by the Lausanne merchants' association to keep drug dealers away from the vicinity of shops.

Let's bet they'll also keep out Roma people, whether they're begging or not, and drug addicts, and probably also black people who have never dealt drugs in their lives but who have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Like Claudio, who was violently arrested by the cops while jogging one evening. In short, they will 'remove' everything that bothers the white bourgeoisie but which they usually refrain from complaining about too much, because they don't want to appear racist either, it's not good for business. This street-dealing controversy is a real godsend...

June 21, 2018

Tonight in Lausanne, it's the *Fête de la musique*. Tonight in Russia, the football World Cup. Sarah Jane is in Berlin. I've just had a major anxiety attack, lying on the kitchen floor for 30 minutes after a phone call with A■■■■. She told me off for not being careful enough with my phone⁴. Caution is sometimes all that separates us from anxiety: whether it is actually useful in protecting us, or whether it serves, through its very gesture, to create a stable space in the chaos.

I called her to read her the email Jean Dutoit received this afternoon: a lawyer hired by the owner of the Sauges building where the Collective is currently housed is proposing a deal for us to leave the building by September 30, in exchange for the withdrawal of the criminal complaint. It smacks of of blackmail, and it's yet another layer on our heads when we're already crawling on the ground. I also called her because I needed to talk to someone who knew the situation and what I was going through, to avoid long explanations. I should have stuck to sharing my feelings, rather than letting myself be driven by a desire to sort everything out straight away, by talking about this email.

In this anguish, I am attacked by demons of flight. A violence to leave, to get away, to get it over with. It's hard to find the place where I can hold on, where something "holds on". That's where I'm trying to write from now. An empty stomach with no desire to eat. My chest crushed, my eyes open like those of a madman who sees through things, through trees, through light in fact. Strange how at a given moment I emerge precisely through my senses, how it's in my senses, in my way of being with the senses that I find something that holds. The body. Breathing. Concrete light.

I think back to the last days of Mike's body in Switzerland. Of Mike in Switzerland. Cursed country. R■■■■ cursed it. For days I've wanted to start writing about what happened, but I haven't been able to, or because there's so much to do and I'm escaping into the things-to-be-done rather than writing. Is it really an escape? At this point I can't even tell the difference between movement and perspective. Immersion through relentlessness. Through anger, through all these affects that I'm probably wrong to want to take on for myself.

Where do I start? Perhaps when I heard from Mrs L■■■■ that they (the Pompes Funèbres Générales) had found a flight? Or when R■■■■, Mike's brother, came to Switzerland the week before with the last of the needed papers from Nigeria?

On Monday, May 28, Ciara with her son Sol and I left Lausanne by car. We met R■■■■ at Geneva station; he had arrived the day before and the three of us had an appointment with his lawyer. R■■■■ wanted the lawyer to have more contacts among the Collective, people who would act as a relay between him and the family: Rachel alone had taken care of everything up to that point. Time would show that this was a prudent idea.

After dropping the car off at the Mont-Blanc car park, we made our way to Place de Longemalle, in the heart of the most ostensibly wealthy part of the city, with its banks,

⁴ The future will show me that she was right, because the police had bugged us for a few months at the beginning of 2018. We were no longer tapped at the time of this phone call (A/N).

insurance companies, jewellers and art dealers. We arrived at the law firm, were welcomed and shown into an office with a long rectangular table, comfortable chairs and glasses of water. The lawyer enters with his assistant. We had a cordial exchange. It's impossible for me to recount everything, and the aim here is not to report all my observations and everything that was said. I was committed to a high level of memory and impressions, and the key elements would enable me to bring the whole scene back to life later if need be.

The lawyer explains the situation. In English. Everything will depend on the final toxicology test. The cause of death is known: respiratory arrest. But what caused it? It may have been "positional asphyxia", caused by the position in which the police officers held Mike's body – on his stomach, hands behind his back, legs raised, knee pressure on his back – for 3 to 4 minutes. Or it could have been a cocaine overdose, as traces were found in Mike's mouth, requiring a thorough examination. The accused police officers, their lawyers, the police force, the authorities of the city of Lausanne and the canton of Vaud, not to mention right-wing and far-right political parties, would prefer cocaine to be the cause of death. That would clear the police officers' names, and add another layer to the onion of denial that envelops the problems of police violence and racism in Switzerland. On the other hand, Mike's family and friends, the members of the Collective, all the groups and associations fighting racism and defending migrants, the left-wing and far-left parties, all the critical voices, they would like to see these police officers condemned for an action which, in any case, whatever the cause of the respiratory arrest, was excessive and disproportionate use of force, in a context where, in 15 months, three black men have lost their lives in connection with the police: Lamin Fatty, who died in a cell at La Blécherette in 2017, and Hervé Mandundu, who was shot dead by a police officer at his home in Bex at the end of 2016.

If it is indeed positional asphyxia that is conclusive in the eyes of the forensics, then the lawyer will lodge the complaint for *homicide par dol éventuel*, which means that, no, these police officers did not get up that morning with the intention of killing Mike, but that, given their training and practice, they must be held responsible for using this immobilisation technique in conditions and in a manner that led to his death. They knew that their actions could kill him and they persevered. This is where culpability would lie in the eyes of the law. There would be a trial. And a chance of compensation for the family. Otherwise, if the forensic doctors conclude that it was an overdose, then the prosecutor – representing the Public Prosecutor's Office – will have no trouble keeping the case out of the court. Mike's family lawyer would then have to file another complaint and conduct the case in a different way. The public, political and media repercussions of such an outcome would be chilling: the far right and the right-wing would claim victory, the issues of racism and police violence would stagnate or even decline in importance in the public opinion, and any financial support B [REDACTED] and the children might receive would be no more than a vague possibility.

I'll go back over my notes, but here's what came out, what I also passed on to the people I met in the Collective. R [REDACTED]? Very calm, resilient, attentive. Ciara too. Sol in her arms. We got in the car and headed back to Lausanne.

That evening, Sarah Jane and I went with my mother to a friend's house to pick up a little cat. The village of Saint-Barthélemy, in the middle of the countryside. That's where we met Turbine, the little troublemaker cat, with her tortoiseshell coat and blue eyes.

R■■■■ was due to go to the Nigerian embassy in Berne the next day to have the papers he'd brought back from Nigeria validated. I don't remember who took him there by car, only to discover that it was a public holiday in the canton. So they went back the next day. R■■■■ was counting his days in Switzerland, days away from his job in Milan, and his employer was putting pressure on him. But he returned from Berne on Wednesday afternoon with all the necessary papers, the last to be added to all those he and Rachel had already put together. He met me at the Collective's house and I left the meeting to go with him to the Pompe Funèbres Générales. Mrs L■■■■ wasn't there, so we met one of her colleagues. After checking everything out, we left for the Collective's house, where R■■■■ wanted to talk to a few people. Then I accompanied him to Lausanne train station. Neither of us knew what to say, how to speak. On the platform. The train leaving.

The next day, Thursday, May 31, Mrs L■■■■ contacted me by phone: all the papers were there and she had put in a request for a flight with the company Anubis – the name of the Egyptian god of death... – which deals with this type of booking with airlines. There was a flight with Air Maroc the following week, leaving Lyon on Thursday, June 7, at around 6pm, with stopovers in Paris and Casablanca, and arriving in Lagos very early on Friday morning, at around 3am. We need to move fast, this situation has gone on far too long. I call R■■■■, I call B■■■■, they give the green light, I confirm with Mrs L■■■■. The sealing of the coffin – an essential step before transporting it – is scheduled for Wednesday morning, before the body would leave for Lyon by road.

It's time to take Mike's body out of the cold room where it has been for almost three months. All those days in the freezer haven't stopped time, either for us or for him. His condition deteriorated. The funeral home employees also fear that he may have put on weight when he was defrosted; in any case, he "swelled up".

For us, time remains suspended, and will remain so until his body has been buried according to the wishes of his family, in the country where he was born. Switzerland is a land of exile.

It's hard not to remember the funeral of Timba, who died last year following a brawl near Saint-François, and whose relatives in Nigeria were ultimately unwilling, or unable, to have his body repatriated. The funeral had been a bitter thing. At Montoie cemetery in Lausanne, the people working there had refused to open the coffin, making it impossible to perform the rites appropriate to Timba's culture and the people present. A man in exile, buried in this land of exile, we felt all the loneliness of this. And it was raining. There were perhaps a dozen of us in the middle of this immense cemetery, around the coffin. Lost somewhere in the universe.

Maybe... I'll stop here for tonight and pick up again tomorrow.

*

June 22, 2018

I'll take it from here. A lot of wind today, the leaves on the trees tinkling with flashes of sunshine. The station, the trains, the sounds, they rescue me. What do I have to do? Write.

Thursday, May 31. I called B [REDACTED] and we talked about the children's arrival, but everything remained in a bit of a limbo for several days. The following Monday things seemed to become clearer. B [REDACTED] couldn't come. Her papers would cause problems in Spain on her return and that was not an option. But there was family pressure for the children to come: Edo tradition dictates that children should salute the body of their deceased father, especially the boy. B [REDACTED] asked one of her friends, C [REDACTED] to accompany D [REDACTED] and N [REDACTED]. She had to go to a solicitor on the Monday and then return on the Tuesday to produce a certificate allowing C [REDACTED] to travel with the children. She then went to a travel agency and booked a flight for the same day. But when they arrived at the airport that Tuesday afternoon, they were told that the flight had been cancelled. They were due to arrive on Tuesday evening, and I was to pick them up at Geneva airport to take them to Lausanne, where they were expected at 9.30am on Wednesday morning at the chapel of Saint-Roch, to say farewell to their father. At Valencia airport, they were proposed a replacement flight, departing the next morning, which would be too late for seeing their father's face, before the PFG employees sealed the coffin.

When I told Mrs L [REDACTED], she made no secret of her relief. For several days, she had feared the confrontation of these two young children with their father's body, his swollen face deformed by the autopsy, the freezing and thawing.

It was a thought that preoccupied us all. I've come to think of it as *the affect of the integrity of the deceased body*. The expression brings together different aspects linked to the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. But there were really two issues here, which come together around the moment of burial, the moment when the body disappears from the eyes of the living. I'm well aware that in thinking about all this, at a time like this, I'm in the process of "repressing from above", as Derrida used to say...

Before, there are the funeral wakes, when, in the Nigerian tradition as in many others, the body is exposed to relatives, friends and acquaintances. Everyone comes to see the dead person, to greet him or her, and to acknowledge the death of the person they knew. This is an important moment in the grieving process, for children and adults alike. In today's hygienic Switzerland, children would not be allowed to see their dead father, and that's a mistake, unless we consider that in today's society there is nothing to frame this vision: the rites are poor, the void that surrounds the deceased and separates them from the living is too vast, and in such conditions, can the vision of the dead body contribute to a constructive elaboration on the part of the child? But there is the aftermath, and it is the aftermath that seems to be the focus of most attention in Christianity. Otherwise one would not understand the obsession with placing the bodies in solid, rot-proof wooden coffins, which are designed to preserve the body in the ground and not allow it to mix with the soil (in contradiction with the time-honoured expression: "Dust thou art born, dust thou shalt return"). Was this method adopted to protect the bodies from being eaten by worms? As if God was not trusted to resurrect the bodies in their physical integrity at the end of time, and that humans therefore had to take charge of that time, that time of waiting until the end of time? Perhaps so.

The most important thing, I believe, lies elsewhere: in our relationship to the physical integrity of the living body, and to the circumstances of its death. How we tell the story, how we make sense of what happened. The important thing is what the body says.

*

June 23, 2018

As soon as Mike's body was taken in by the funeral home, it became a source of concern. With a view to transporting him and staying in Switzerland for an undetermined length of time, depending on how quickly the authorities reacted, they were instructed to embalm him. The process – called thanatopraxy by the specialists – consists of washing and disinfecting the body, then sucking out the body fluids to replace them with a formalin-based product. The formalin helps to preserve the body, but must remain inside the body to do so. The funeral home employees therefore always close all orifices, cuts and incisions. However, in Mike's case, a thorough autopsy had been carried out: so thorough that when the undertakers wanted to embalm the body, they were unable to do so. The liquid was coming out of the body. So they decided to send it to the forensic laboratory, which took care of it. Once this operation was complete, the body was sent to Montoie cemetery to be kept in a cold room for as long as necessary (cost: CHF 550 per month).

When the body had to be prepared for the trip, two days before the scheduled departure on Thursday, June 7, thawing caused it to swell, and some of the distended sutures let liquid through again. The cause was the particularly deep incisions made by the forensic doctors, especially on the legs. The face had swollen too, but Mike was still recognisable. What had the undertakers done, in terms of thanatopraxy, to achieve this result? Silicone in the face? Make-up? Hairstyling? I don't know. But the effect was undoubtedly the best they could achieve. The colour, creamy white, like a death mask where the memory of the flesh barely outweighs the rigidity of stone. For R■■■■, who was the voice of the family, this process was essential because, as I said, the people of the Edo community hold funeral wakes, at which the coffin must be open and the face visible, the body of the deceased dressed for the occasion in a white suit.

Last night, June 22, R■■■■ sent me two short videos filmed during the vigil held between June 8 and 9, the night Mike's body finally arrived in Benin City. In the second one, you can see people walking around the coffin, then lifting the wooden lid: underneath, they discover the zinc plate that was sealed over the body for transport; you can see a man running his finger over the weld, trying to see if they can access the body, but there's nothing to suggest that they can; when I asked R■■■■ about this, he didn't reply. I hesitated for a long time before asking him, I didn't want to make things more difficult than they already were, but this impossibility of opening the coffin was making me sick. There is only one 'window' in this zinc plate, at head height, so that you can 'see' the dead man's face. Behind the glass, separated from the world of the living, it is a state of sensory deprivation that runs counter to the rites and gestures that accompany the dead person until his or her separation – consented, shared and experienced as such – from the world of the living.

I'll pick up where I left off. The children would arrive on Wednesday, June 6, in the afternoon. Before that, in the morning, the coffin would be sealed, and relatives and friends would be able to attend. R■■■■ arrived in Lausanne on Tuesday evening. On Wednesday, I was at the Collective's house, Chemin des Sauges, around 8am to gather people. We had to be at St-Roch's chapel, next to the PFG offices, by 9.30am. It's a chapel in name only: from the street, an electric door opens onto a staircase leading down to the basement, where a series of rooms have been set up to hold coffins. In the middle is a larger room with benches, laid out according to the Christian rite, a place for gathering, ceremony and prayer.

About twenty persons came, people from the Collective, Africans and Swiss, Mike's friends, members of the Edo community from Lausanne and other places. R■■■■ and I were the first to enter the chapel to speak with Mrs L■■■■ and see the body. R■■■■ had to decide whether it was suitable for viewing. I've already described Mike's face, but nothing of the rest of his body could be seen, everything had been placed under a thick white satin shroud, from the feet to the neck; and at the neck, a white bow tie dressed the dead man. R■■■■ had brought socks, a new shirt and a new pair of trousers to put on his brother: when we presented these items to her and asked if the employees could pass them on to Mike, Mrs L■■■■ was speechless and turned to one of her colleagues in a white coat. He explained to us, and I translated for R■■■■, that the swelling of the body during thawing did not allow this. R■■■■ asked if they could then do it in Nigeria and if the clothes could be sent with the coffin: there was nothing to prevent this, but the people at the PFG advised against changing the clothes. They were swimming in euphemisms, of course. We had to understand that the body was too far gone to be handled in any way. Would the sutures open? Would the liquid flow? Ellipsis and circumspection led us to imagine the worst; but the worst is not reality. The assessment of the actual state of the body was taken away from us, although with the best of intentions and, in such a situation, a certain pragmatism.

R■■■■ decided to leave things as the PFG employees had presented them to him. The other people then entered. R■■■■ asked them not to take any photos – only he could do that. He sang. Then we all went round the coffin, three times. The people then stayed around Mike.

At the back of the chapel, I saw Mrs L■■■■ talking to this tall, thin man in his fifties, dressed in very ordinary clothes, even for a Swiss: he was the State-sworn coffin sealer. I had overheard him earlier, when R■■■■ and I entered the room, telling Mrs L■■■■ that we shouldn't "overrun the schedule too much" because he had other commitments that day and people were expecting him. The ceremony lasted as long as it did, coming to an end so quickly because the children were not present. People had now moved away from the coffin and were looking at each other. I asked R■■■■ if it was time to seal the coffin. He replied in the affirmative. So we left the room where the ceremony had been held.

Three men in white coats came and took the coffin off the roll-top table and into another room nearby. After a few minutes, I asked Mrs L■■■■ if we could go in, and she went to see if everything was "in order"; shortly afterwards we joined Mike in the smaller room.

It was divided into two parts: near the door, the parents, relatives and friends who were standing in two or three rows, their backs to the wall; and two metres away in front of them, the coffin, and the three men in white coats, as well as the sealer. They began by fitting the zinc lid: Mike's body and face disappeared, but we also caught a glimpse of the small window.

One of the employees took the soldering iron and began to melt it all around the plate, making the inside hermetically sealed. The audience watched the welder's work. Once finished, the four men carried the wood lid and placed it on the box. Four screws were inserted into the four corners of the coffin. The attendant then took a stick of red wax and a small blowtorch: he filled a hole in the side of the coffin with wax, then used a metal seal to mark the it. He repeated the operation on the other side, with the confidence and dexterity of a man who has done it a hundred times. It was finished.

We were able to get closer. On the lid of the coffin, an inscription on a metal plate, the name of the deceased: Mike BEN PETER.

We left the room, then, in small groups, went up one floor to the street. R ■ left with some people towards the Collective's house. For my part, I had to go to Small World office on Avenue d'Echallens. I was going to send B ■ the amount she'd paid the previous evening when, because the children's flight had been cancelled, it had cost her extra to send them the next morning because of a different route.

Talking about money. In the end, the funeral expenses came to just over 10,000 Swiss francs. Last-minute plane tickets for the children and C ■ cost around 900 francs. A fund-raising campaign was organised via friends' networks and social networks, plus two support evenings, which raised a total of just over 12,000 Swiss francs. On Monday, we were able to pay the balance of the bill to the PFG (around 7,000, Jean Dutoit having already paid 3,000 as a deposit two months earlier). On Tuesday, we went to Small World to send B ■ the money for the plane tickets. She'd had to borrow the money, which means that if we hadn't been able to assure her that we'd cover the cost of transport, the children wouldn't have been able to come to Lausanne. We also sent money to K ■, R ■ and Mike's brother, who had to receive the body in Lagos, transport it to Benin City (300km from Lagos) and organise the wake and funeral.

I then went back up to Sauges, and R ■ and I set off for Geneva, heading for the airport. We waited for the children. They arrived.

I remember thinking to myself: how small they are. With a kindness and gentleness that contrasted with the context and events that brought them here, to a country called Switzerland, on Wednesday, June 6, 2018. When I think back to that moment, to their faces, their childhood, it all seems incomprehensible.

It was the first time that R ■ and they met each other face to face – they had often seen each other via Facetime, but never in the flesh – and they were meeting me for the first time. I don't know how they saw me, as a white man, as a Swiss, as a bit of all that and also as the face I showed them, the attention I manifested towards them, their uncle's attitude towards me. He asked me to take a photo of him and his niece and nephew in the car park. Then we got in the car and drove back to Lausanne.

The adults chatted in the car – I didn't mention C ■, who was accompanying N ■ and D ■ – and the children soon fell asleep. They'd been up since 4am, the first plane at 6am to

Frankfurt, then a four-hour wait, and a second plane, landing at 1.21pm in Geneva. When we arrived at Ciara's house, they were warmly welcomed and settled in, and then everyone had a little rest. I ate (Robin had prepared a good quantity of spaghetti bolognese in the outdoor kitchen, right next to the small swimming pool where two children were swimming). Then R■■■■, C■■■■, N■■■■, D■■■■ and I set off for the Collective's house.

Once there, we went down to the meeting room: I remember the movement of the people when the children came in, they made room for them quickly, there was a silence, attention, relief, also the joy to see them, to be with them, to think that they could do something for them because they were there; and at the same time so much sadness for these two children who had lost their father, sadness for all these fathers, all these men in this room, knowing that it could have been them, that it could have been their children here in this room, without them. R■■■■ introduced the children. There were several short speeches of welcome. A moment together. Then we left. We were all due to return for the wake in the house at around 5pm, but for now, we were expected back at the chapel around 3.30pm so that the children could say goodbye to their father.

As I write this, I think about what I said to myself that day: it is probably the longest day of my life. I was always in the background. I was translating, creating choice if it wasn't presented as such in this Swiss environment that I know well. I was trying to feel, to be adequate, prepared to get through the day whatever happened. I was making mental notes of everything, recording what was happening with precision, with the aim of serving the present moment. And all this contributed to this dilation of time.

We arrived at the chapel, R■■■■, N■■■■, D■■■■, C■■■■, and also Anna, Ciara and Rachel who had joined us at the Collective's house. At Ciara's house, I had passed on R■■■■'s request: if we could find some sand for the ceremony. Lucien had filled a bag with it. R■■■■ had also brought plastic flowers and the clothes that would go with the coffin. We went down to the basement. I looked on the notice board to see which room the coffin was in.

In front of the door. I looked at R■■■■ to see if it was time to come in, and to his silent assent I turned to the door and opened it. I immediately felt something and turned to R■■■■ who said: "You don't knock at the door?" I apologised and closed the door. I knocked, waited a while, then opened it and withdrew behind R■■■■ and the children, who entered the room, just the three of them.

I didn't knock on the door: I remember that gesture with shame. For R■■■■, Mike's soul was somewhere around his body. We had to respect the privacy of his room and announce our arrival. To ask, symbolically, through the gestures we make to the living, for the right to come in his presence. I resented it all the more because everything in that place, in that room, in those corridors, went against the rites that, for R■■■■ and his family, should have taken place to respect the dead and traditions. The chapel offered no rough edges, no footholds to hold on to as the final gestures were carried out.

From the threshold, I could hear the words spoken inside the room. "Do you want daddy to go to Heaven?", "Yes", "Say: Daddy, I want you to go to Heaven", "Daddy I want you to go to

Heaven". It seemed to me that R■■■■ was making the children understand that, if they didn't want their father to go to heaven, he wouldn't, not because he wasn't entitled to, but because the children's desire to hold on to their father, not to let him go, not to send him to heaven, had real strength, and that they now had to direct that strength at letting him go, to send him there with all their heart and hold nothing back. "May his gentle soul rest in perfect peace", as K■■■■ had written on the obituary notice.

R■■■■ asks me for the sand. I take the bag from my bag but I'd tied it too tightly and untying the knot seems to take forever. I finally give it to R■■■■ and leave the room. R■■■■ makes N■■■■ take a handful and D■■■■ a handful, then the three of them put their hands against the wood of the coffin and say a few words that I won't write down. R■■■■ then put the sand they had held in their hands into two small bags I had brought with me, which he closed and on which he wrote the name of each of the children. This sand would later be sent with the coffin and mixed with the earth from their father's grave. C■■■■ was crying beside me in the corridor outside the door.

Meanwhile, Rachel had gone to speak with Mrs L■■■■, who came over to us. We exchanged a few words and she gave us the death certificates that Bridget would need for the children. Then we left the chapel.

Rachel took R■■■■, D■■■■, N■■■■ and C■■■■ in the car, while I walked to the place where Mike was killed. I got there before them. It's a place that serves as a car park, below Rue du Midi, on Avenue Sainte Luce. Bad saint. Bad place.

On the evening of February 28, Mike was arrested there, knocked to the ground, beaten, immobilised on his stomach, legs in the air, one knee behind his back, against the concrete, for four long minutes, stressed, terrified, thinking about his wife, his children, his family, the whole situation, about what he had to do and what he might suddenly no longer be able to do, that feeling that is perhaps all the pain of losing one's life: no longer being able to be there for the people who count on us, who count for us, imagining how our death will hurt them.

R■■■■ takes the children near the little wall, towards the stairs that go down towards the Avenue de la gare. The last time he was here, he placed several candles on the low wall: they have been removed. "What kind of people would do this?"

Then, I tell them how, during the demonstration in March, there were at least two hundred of us here, around this little wall. You can still see the letters "R.I.P. Mike" spray-painted on a wall that evening. There were prayers, songs and speeches. Silence.

Now they're here, the three of them, we're here, the six of us. Or seven? R■■■■ takes two candles out of his bag, along with some tape, and attaches the candles securely to the railing of the fence. He gives the children a lighter to light the candles. He asks them to repeat his words after him. And I'm not going to write these words down, because they didn't say them for me to hear. They said them to the world, to God perhaps. But I will always remember those two little voices in that immense void.

*

June 24, 2018

I come back to writing, telling myself that I have to finish. A full stop, which will never be a full stop anyway. The body has been buried since a fortnight. What happens now?

Time has flown. Over the last two weeks I've been on the move in every corner of the country, trying to present a different image of the Collective than the one the media are playing out in yet another episode of the hit series they've invented.

So on June 6. I meet up with the people from the Collective and the Ben Peter family at the house on chemin des Sauges. It was the wake keeping. A public invitation had been issued but nobody from outside came. Only people close to the Collective.

In the meeting room, everyone was busy creating a welcoming space. I didn't take much part because Rachel told me to call Mrs L [REDACTED] back, and the news wasn't good: Air Maroc, which was to have taken charge of the trip, had just cancelled. The reason was that the coffin was too heavy – the maximum weight for this flight is 180 kg. Dazing news.

I said the news to R [REDACTED] who took it stoically. I could feel how down we both were, but neither of us was going to let anything distract us from our goal of getting Mike's body to Nigeria the next day. A possibility emerged: a Lufthansa flight due to leave at around the same time and which, with various stopovers, would arrive later in Lagos on Friday. Doing everything to make it work. Among other things, Mrs L [REDACTED] advised us to call a number in Nigeria and send an email to a certain address to prepare the ground, stressing the urgency of the situation, so that the next morning, as soon as the offices opened the booking could be finalised. The problem was that R [REDACTED]'s brother in Nigeria, K [REDACTED], didn't have an email account. As for the telephone number, it indicated that the office was already closed for the day. In the end, one of R [REDACTED]'s half-brothers was put in charge of sending the email, but when R [REDACTED] called him he was on the road, so we had to wait and R [REDACTED] grumbled at him; in the end the email was sent. With this eventuality assured, we went down to the meeting room and joined in the wake.

The members of the collective have collected money among themselves and are giving it to the children, talking to them, and surrounding them. There are dances, songs, prayers, speeches and lots of emotion. In the back of my mind, I'm still unsure about Mike's trip the next day. He will definitely be leaving from Lausanne, as he has to arrive in Lyon before 10am for check-in, in case the Lufthansa plane can actually take him.

I remember leaving the house at around 9.30pm. I said goodbye to R [REDACTED] and C [REDACTED], then to the children. N [REDACTED], Mike's daughter, looked at me with her big eyes, and I knew, I understood she didn't know what to say. D [REDACTED], her younger brother, when I spoke to him, when I told him that we would never forget them and that we would always be there with them, with him, for him, his eyes filled with tears, mine too. But most of it flowed inside, I could feel a boiling river flowing from my eyes down my cheeks and into my throat, burning my heart and my chest. It went all the way down to the bottom of my stomach and it's still there, and it won't leave me.

It is also an inextinguishable furnace of anger.

A place of radical vulnerability.

That evening, Sarah Jane returned from London. Her plane was late. At midnight I didn't have the strength to go and welcome her at the station. She walked home alone. It was raining. I had no strength left. I told her about the two mistakes I'd made during the day, then went to bed. Her presence helped me fall asleep.

The next day, Thursday, I received the good news at around 10am: the flight had been booked and Mike's body would be leaving Lyon in the evening for Frankfurt, then Lagos. All day Friday I waited for the news of his arrival. Late at night, around 2am, I received a message from R [REDACTED] apologising for the late hour and telling me that his brother had just arrived in Benin City. I later learned that the body had been buried that very night, after the wake had ended. The open wooden lid... and the zinc lid?

Immediately, I found myself once again caught up in the street-dealing controversy (which began on Thursday, May 24 with an article by F. Melgar) and the aftermath of the police intervention at the Collective's house at Chemin des Sauges on May 29. In a fortnight, at least 30 press articles, TV reports, ATS news, radio broadcasts and TV and radio debates have been published.

On Saturday, June 9 (it seems like an eternity ago, but it was a two weeks ago), I posted a message on Facebook announcing that Mike's funeral had just taken place, with the obituary notice issued by his brother K [REDACTED] in Benin City. The messages of insults and hatred were not long in coming ("salesman of death, well done for him", "one less", "out with all the migrants from Jean Dutoit", etc. etc.). I deleted them as they came in. Sarah Jane told me to be careful because it was eating up all my energy: I wanted to reply. The cowardice of these people. The insults towards Mike were the worst.

I'd been managing the Collective's Facebook account for several months, and on previous posts I hadn't filtered the comments, leaving everyone free to have a bad time reading these hateful, stupid and racist diatribes. Nor did I want to protect Swiss readers from what the people in the Collective were suffering: the hatred of individuals who had the opportunity to let off steam because 1) another man had cast the first stone, F. Melgar, a left-wing man, a defender of migrants, who had not hesitated to call drug dealers "bad migrants", in a super sour remake of the poisonous debate of 2015 when the press and politicians had opposed "economic migrants" and "political migrants", in a disgusting abstraction ; and because 2) the Lausanne authorities had, in an obviously opportunistic manner, taken a spectacular measure to "maintain public order" by announcing the deployment of police officers in the areas affected by drug dealing for a period of six months, a measure that came into force on Friday, June 15 (we could then see in each of these streets a policeman stationed, "scarecrows for drug dealers" as the press dubbed them). With the State behind them, these hateful and gratuitous Facebook posts had all the hallmarks of the worst forms of cowardice.

The following Wednesday, June 13, at the meeting, the Collective members were terrified. The psychosis had been ratcheted up several notches, and some believed that on Friday the police were going to shoot them on sight in the streets of Lausanne. Seeing newspaper

headlines about drug dealing for three consecutive weeks, and front-page photos of black people in darkened streets. Not understanding the articles in French, having them translated, then recounting them, and amplifying certain elements because of the fear they provoke. Being in the spotlight, being the centre of attention in a whole town, being singled out, hearing people talking behind your back. Saying goodbye to a friend who died at the hands of the police and welcoming his children. Seeing the house you live in surrounded by a hundred armed police, being searched, journalists on the lookout with their cameras. People didn't dare leave the house and waited anxiously and frantically for that fateful Friday when there would be cops *everywhere and justice nowhere*.

On Saturday 16, there was a national demonstration against racism in Bern. I went alone. Me, with my white face, didn't have to fear for my skin, so I went. I tried to 'reason' with people at the meeting, to say that they would be protected non-stop during the demonstration, but fear was the strongest, and fear had its reasons. Fear had its reasons... And I didn't want fear to win, I didn't want to let them be afraid: that was my mistake. I thought we should have gone ahead, because hiding was exactly what the other side wanted: for Jean Dutoit's Africans to disappear from the sight of 'honest citizens'. But sometimes hiding is the only thing to do. Accept your vulnerability. So that later you can gather your strength and get back on track.

On Tuesday evening, at the Zinéma, Anna and I attended a debate organised by the Ensemble à Gauche group [far-left party] about the street-dealing controversy. And on Wednesday evening, at the Datcha, I went to speak to the members of the POP [communist party] and their supporters, who had invited the Collective to talk about the report we published in the Spring, highlighting the testimonies of police violence we had gathered. I found myself in a position I didn't want to be in, but which I accepted because of the situation. The Swiss members have always made a point of being there to make the voices of the African members be heard, who are minoritised and stigmatised by Swiss society, to make them visible and heard, not speak on their behalf.

Wednesday 20, at the meeting, it was a little calmer for the first time. The following Saturday, another demonstration, this time in Lausanne. Sunday, that is today, there was a special meeting to discuss the future of the Collective... and the email we received two days ago in which the lawyer for the owner of the Sauges building announced that he was going to file a civil suit with a view to forced eviction. But he offered us a deal: if the Collective left the premises before September 30, the owner agreed to withdraw his criminal complaint.

We talked a bit about the future of the Collective. But I was frustrated by the situation of the last two weeks, by the people's withdrawal. It was not my place to make the others feel what I felt, but I couldn't do with it.

Friday, July 21, 2023

Dream. In the village where I grew up, a small village at the top of a hill, in this village: a house, the house where I grew up. I enter this house of origins, this translation of origins, this womb. It's dark.

On the ground floor, I notice that I'm not alone, but the people who are there I hesitate to call people, I hesitate to understand who or what they are, and I don't understand. They are men, black, standing, about twenty of them, motionless, or like plants, their mouths slightly open in the direction of the ceiling. Beings between life and death, zombified, who perhaps could have woken up at any moment but didn't, and who were waiting, but I didn't know what.

Change of scene, it's daylight and I find myself with one of them just outside the house. I'm in a wheelchair and he's pushing me. He pushes me through the village, we're going somewhere, and at that moment I realise that if we get there we'll get to the place where I'm going to die, the place where I know I'll meet my death. So I start arguing with him, negotiating, trying to convince him to take another route, another direction; and I succeed; he swivels the chair and starts pushing me towards another corner of the village.

I'm not going to die today. I've been given this extra time, this reprieve, to revisit the past, to return to this womb where bodies between life and death await me. Time to free these imprisoned half-lives, which may in turn imprison me. A time to look after them, to ask myself who they are and what they're doing here, a time to understand and bring this process to an end, if there is an end, however relative it may be. A time to go towards me, a time to go towards us.

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Wednesday, April 24, 2024

A dream. Under the city of Lausanne, dozens of metres below the Place de la Riponne, galleries run under the hill towards the cathedral. I'm one of a team of archaeologists and we're about to enter a hidden space that no one has entered for ages: behind this huge door, invisible to the naked eye but there it is in the stone wall, and only a certain combination can open it, a combination made up of gestures and blood.

Outside, on the surface, brawls are breaking out. It's night-time and first on the square, then all over the city, you can feel the atmosphere turning to civil war, the boiling is spreading, it's going to get nasty...

Back in the subterranean world, I walk through huge stone corridors and immense halls. Here I am again, near the door. I've found the combination and I activate the mechanism. Blood appears, seeming to condense from the stone. It begins to flow through the veins in the floor like a labyrinth. And the door opens.

Thursday, May 9, 2024

I've finished going through my notes from 2018, to which I've just added the dream I had nine months ago – it seems so obviously linked to these events, yet not only – and the dream from a fortnight ago, two days before I decided to open this file, retrieved from a USB stick I'd put in a safe place, and entitled 'Autopsy of a Spring'.

My notes end on June 24, 2018. Over the months that followed, I gradually withdrew from the Collective. I started in a new teaching position in September that allowed me to *do* something else; I immersed myself in it body and soul. I needed the feeling of moving on, seeing something else of life, finding another rhythm.

I wouldn't have been able to do it if others hadn't stepped in at the time. The sense of loyalty I felt towards the Collective as a whole, and towards so many people in particular, was difficult to manage during those months when I was trying to leave without really succeeding. Over the next few years, too. Every time I bumped into people from the Collective they'd ask me when I was coming back. I left with the impression that my absence could be seen as a disavowal, an abandonment. Now I understand that they were expressing their friendship. The risk we take in committing ourselves to others, which is also the risk of friendship and love, is never a risk taken once and for all, because it only really exists in this very action. Committing oneself means giving another the opportunity to commit themselves too, as a response to a response.

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