

Dear S

A week ago, my mother posted a video of one of the pet turtles trying to escape. She keeps them by the entrance to the restaurant ostensibly for the feng shui (though typically the turtle should be placed at the back but she has read much more Lillian Too than me). In the clip, the turtle is attempting to climb out of a white plastic baby bathtub; latching its two front legs onto a ledge at the top and lifting its body upwards. There is no lid, no other obstacle than this physical feat - one senses it will be only a matter of time before the turtle succeeds. Altogether, there are three turtles purchased back in 2016 for my nephew Ollie, whose enthusiasm for them has long since expired. Each year they grow too large for their shared habitat and are thus moved to a new larger plastic container lightweight enough to clean regularly, where they can alternate between a few things: they sit, they waddle, they wait. They fight too. It's true, my mother could just set the turtle free. Once upon a time, pet turtles who had outlived a certain period would be deposited into the lily pond at the local park. It happened with such frequency that there is now a large sign, in Malay and English, threatening large fines for those who leave their turtles at the pond.

It is perfectly conceivable the turtle manages to simply walk out of the restaurant without much fuss. Once on the road though, owing to its speed or rather lack thereof, the turtle is a very vulnerable creature. On land, by and far, "the greatest threat to these shelled creatures are automobiles," so says Dr. Ron Hines. He created a webpage called "How to Fix a Cracked Turtle" to provide detailed instructions on how to care for turtles with severe shell fractures, should you come across one. He advises on how to handle the turtle to avoid being bitten, proper hygiene requirements while treating it, whether it is kind to try to salvage its life at all. Many others have also documented their attempts to put a broken turtle back together again online. The procedure usually involves a very basic setup at home: picture a makeshift 'operating' table, ruffled blue towels; the proportions of a baby changing station. There are a wide range of methods: in some cases, the broken shell is secured with plastic cable ties or bra metal clasps, some adhered with dental casting agents or patched with epoxy resin, in Hines' case - a steel wire is threaded through tiny drilled holes in the shell holding it together in formation. The images of these fractures often reveal how fused the shell is to the turtle's body, exposing the soft pink bloody flesh along the crack. Hines explains:

'Most folks know that a turtle or tortoise's shell is made up of smaller organized bony sections covered with a thin fingernail-like keratin coating (the scutes). These bony sections are connected to each other through fine, saw-like lines borders called sutures. What many folks do not realize is that cracks generally follow the margins of these sutures - not the margins of the scutes.'

The fracture along the line of these sutures recall geographical fault lines, where stress and pressure can also cause a rupture between the plates. A wavelength at the precise moment of trauma. Do you remember at your screening, you were speaking of how the landscape was characterized by ruptures and dislocation? Like a language, like a consistency.

I undertook my first artist residency in a small town in Switzerland called Burgdorf six years ago. Among the local "sights" were the abandoned concrete prototypes of the Swiss engineer Heinz Isler - you could cycle to them, just slightly off a path. They resembled life-sized igloos in form, with circular window openings, made of gypsum and clay, they had begun to disintegrate when I had made my pilgrimage. Isler is most known for his thin concrete shell structures and his unconventional methods of architectural form-finding. He introduced a technique of hanging and inversion: in allowing a hanging membrane to 'become' form through its self-weight, tension, stretch and compression; it had the capacity to generate an infinite variation of shell forms. I like the way the limits of the material determines its own structural efficiency. (The shell is the supporting structure and the space enclosure at the same time.) Somehow I've cycled back there again, here at another residency, thinking about the composition of shell structures, the architecture of the turtle - the desire to play with forms I could not fully control nor anticipate.

Last night, the alarm at Rupert went off three times while we were asleep. As far as we could establish, no one or no thing was trying to break in. I wonder if the building, like a body, writes past encroachments into its system and now it screams emergency whenever a perceived threat arrives at its door. If it is a frightened building, it doesn't speak much of it other than these occasions of panic - there is a sense of rest with its surroundings, I feel safe within even with its large tree-height windows broadcasting work/life to falling leaves. They send me song and I dance along. The only source of dissonance is perhaps myself: the wildcard inadvertently stumbling into business meetings in my pyjamas, wine-drinking at 2:45pm - the madwoman escaping the attic yet again. Here in Vilnius, I had a studio visit with a former professor who asked me, what are you hiding? It was a word that I kept using or implying throughout our conversation. I didn't know how to answer him. Later I thought of something my friend Simona wrote recently, "if language needs to be used for pain, it needs to be correct, humour laden, discreet, or abstract. It needs to be hidden, written with constrain." Why does one need a covert form of speech? Perhaps that is obvious enough, but does it get tiresome? Is that what you mean? Just another ruse : this is a letter I promised to write to you in lieu of me "talking about my work." I guess I am the guy who says goodbye he's leaving the party and you see him three hours later right where you left him.

p.s. I am sorry if I drank anyone's wine without invitation.

I hope our paths will cross again,

xxKBC