

"We need to treat a photograph's own explanation of events with a certain skepticism. It is often the image taken with an eye to the future that is the most suspect," he concluded.

His voice keeps coming. The concentric circles in the lake keep expanding. The birds keep exchanging duty posts on the water, flying and returning, usually in pairs. On some mornings, there is a faint indication that the lake could freeze again before summer. I took a picture of the flowing water yesterday, a piece of evidence for me that I saw the water flowing. A piece of evidence against the voices in my head telling me my friend was never real.

Senses Lilac

Rainer Diana Hamilton

An index card among Robert Grenier's
Sentences (1978) reads

lilacs
against it
as if it were a protest
sign—"it" being, say, borders,

or dress codes—or lilacs,
some queers—or a sigh
from a lilacphobe, hatred
of the syringa family
gone so far
they lose their taste

for olives. I can't say how
the cardstock felt, since I read this
poem online, nor what lilacs
might stand for, though I know that
they have sensory experience,
themselves, and that, by some theories,

this could result in their
creation of nostalgic
art, which I, like lilacs,
am against. Watching
a video that says it's
Etel Adnan reading

Five Senses for One Death
—the name of her book
that, once I track it down, disappoints,
in that (among other mysteries) it does not include
this phrase, but instead

a ghost riding on a motorcycle

*carries Marilyn Monroe
to her horses —
there is an eye in your smile
inch by inch some pentotal
is moving through your
cells*

where the five senses are shut down
by general anesthesia—she says:

"They tell me there are four seasons, but I believe in a fifth one, which is your space and your time." The five seasons:

1. Your Space and Your Time
2. Summer
3. Fall
4. Winter
5. Lilacs

In Moscow, scientists put caterpillars

of the large fruit-tree tortrix (moths) on three fruit trees (they prefer their namesake)—plum, apple, and currant—and one lilac, to measure whether the tree on which the caterpillar grew would affect the number of "sensilla," their sensory organs, the little hairs they use to feel and smell and taste.

I thought, on first read, this meant they were hypothesizing that the young caterpillars would be motivated to grow more sense organs if they experienced challenging sensory information, —Mozart for babies, lilacs for tortrix larvae—

but no—the number of sensilla merely substituted for predicting the moth's ability to adapt to new environments.

When something is sensed, it repeats in the sensor's body, helping them remember it: the iconic (fleeting images), the echoic,

the haptic, the proprioceptive. Sometimes the repetition lingers longer than it ought—a sound keeps ringing—or before it should be sensible—anticipatory nipples—or as it shouldn't—a person sees a friend whom others insist is imaginary—but for the most part, sense memory is timely. In *Keats's Odes: A Lover's Discourse*, Anahid Nersessian introduces

the poet as sensitive, and this vulnerability to sensory experience as a source of suffering: his "senses always strain, are always under stress." Marx appears,

offering salvation, by sparing Keats's love of beauty the charge of being unengaged:

Early on Marx decided that "the forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present." Any attempt to understand the way things are had to be rigorously carnal: it could not operate "solely within the orbit of thought . . . devoid of eyes, of teeth, of ears, of everything." [. . .] To perceive is to hurt—sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. If the task of Marx's critique of political economy is to locate the cause of that pain, the task of Keats's poetry is to make it unforgettable.

Marx's grave is flanked by rows of blue lilacs.

The first ten years of Bryher's life (1894-1904) were marked by the constant sound of horses, I learn from *The Heart to Artemis*, which makes me want to know what sound marked mine.

An interrupted silence, maybe, as when a car, not obviously belonging to an immediate neighbor, pulls in front of a house, in a small town, so that the click of the locks, as it's driver's silhouette steps into the last light of the headlights, brings the block to its windows, frightened by the audacity that might permit someone to park in front of a house

that is not theirs, and at night. Bryher visits Paris, in those horse years, about which:

*I have recognized moments of my foreign childhood since in several books. There are exterior scenes from *Si le grain ne meurt* that are as evocative as old photographs although I was mercifully spared Gide's scruples. One Paris, however, would have seemed completely strange to me. The Champs Élysées of Marcel Proust was near in time but so remote from my experience that the place belonged (as it did) to a totally different city.*

Bryher, child heir, future lesbian boyfriend of H.D., can't put their family in relation to those that frequent the same salons as Marcel, with a shipowning father, John

Ellerman, who became the richest man in England, but lived as though he hadn't:

Our household was less extravagant than thrifty and the emphasis was on character rather than caste. I once saw a socialist report upon my father. It listed his business activities but then added, "There is no sign that he has ever tried to use wealth or power for his personal advantage."

In Adnan's Paris,

When It's Naked, which Ted Dodson told me to read because "there's a lot of writing about

death, which is lilac-adjacent,” she and a friend, Simone, admire a happiness’s silence. Ernaux, by the way, also measures France by its resemblance to Proust, but from another direction. Noting her father’s contemporaneity with the French novelist of sense memory, she also finds the overlap unlikely: “When I read Proust or Mauriac, I cannot believe they are writing about the time when my father was a child. In his case it was more like the Middle Ages.” And these positions matter, in Ernaux’s account, not from moral accountancy, but, in part because they affect our sensory pleasures:

Proust, for instance, took delight in pointing out the mistakes and the old-fashioned words used by Françoise. His concern, however, was purely aesthetic, because Françoise was not his mother but his maid, and because he knew these expressions were not natural to him. My father saw patois as something old and ugly, a sign of inferiority. He was proud to have stopped using certain idioms. Even if his French wasn’t perfect, at least it was French. During the fete in Y—, those who had the gift of the gab would dress up in traditional costume and perform sketches in Norman French while onlookers roared with laughter.

Bryher, meanwhile, regrets that their French schooling permitted a Churchillian accent.

I am not sensitive, and mostly glad,
to aesthetic data—I overlook plenty. This makes it
possible to wait for a red light near foul-smelling trash, to enjoy
spicy food, to be touched by others, to get some distance
from the internal sensation that the heart is racing
or the foot hurts again, to be able to leave

the body behind, to focus
instead on something outside of it, as in the kind
of guided meditation that asks you to notice
the sound of the air conditioner, or bees, or to pretend
that the earth, however many layers
of city sidewalk and about-to-open rat pits and underground

parking garages stand in its way, reaches up, comes
into contact with the soles of your feet, then promotes
growth, so that you briefly understand yourself
as an especially fast-moving tree. I’m currently passing,
for example, some bricks that are kind of surprising
orange, that’s nice. I am hearing a motorcycle



Daniela Grande