

Excerpt from *Agnomia*

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Translated from Slovak by David Short

Even errantry has paths to follow. One could speak of being freed of the compassion that necessarily follows from circumstances. In her case, this means that when they're dancing and she's twirling around them she's the only one who's not dancing. "But does someone have to go and jump off a bridge because of that?" the poet asks. "Yes," replies the dead girl's consciousness, which has been mysteriously silent in life. In her lifetime this consciousness had preferred hypotheses, which it immediately tested by destroying them. For example, it would always test the possibility of touching by touching, and so on. Even acts of coition seemed real, but how could they be real when they weren't? Liquid mercury introduced into a half-open mouth to compensate for bated breath is ill-advised. And yet, this was what she craved, after her consciousness had been chafed to possible nescience. For what other approach is there to a game in which what one's conscious of is attributed to the consciousness, to the latter's permanent disadvantage? Stories that begin at the end don't need beginnings that would convict them of making a point, that is, of committing a falsehood. A falsehood that loses its falsehood, being turned inside-out by the truth, as if that were possible at first sight. But in any subculture there are other rules and privileges accorded to others that permit them to fire off viruses at everyone else, as if all that was at issue were the odd truth. As indeed is the case. Such truths have been hiding beneath the surface of inebriation and have usually been silent, because nobody would let them get a word in. Actually, attendees at these parties would subconsciously exchange them for falsehoods, as if they, whether truths or falsehoods, were immaterial. The point is that the seesawing certainties of these people prevented them from letting truth get a foothold. As if a prerequisite for the stability of a certain order were the prerequisite for stability even in an element that isn't stable. Watching bodiless souls being joined in a bouncy rhythm by soulless bodies. Giving over one's breath as an event that needs to be retold. Inner silence cannot capture it. Being silent outwardly means participating in building the temple. The monomorphism of being at every instant, each instant advancing under the impulse of obligation. Being as an analogue of breathing means denouncing breathing as something unnatural. The identity of the optional. Yes being entitled to Yes; likewise No. A consciousness that outstrips its own progression. First, one might believe and ask questions only afterward, or one might ask first and believe afterward. Flypaper keeps flies alive. In loving, what matters is not *who with*, but *how*. And the unity of opposites of pain. The zenithal moments of life in their conjunction with tight-lipped gobs. When not killing oneself, one's killing others, but those around are immune to it. Divers pasts of a diverse past (cast back from each point in the shade into a landscape of Platonic ideals). The anachronism of a vision that climaxes beneath a cloak of respite. Movement always complying with one and the same motion from the point of view of the goal. But a goal cannot be the arbiter of any point of view. My sorrow is organized by a sorrow that is organized. Little beetles, it says, have carried off the path to my person. Ever straying to the exact goal, as if straying had goals encoded into it. Visions of the instantaneous, not to be supported, not to be undermined. One can get sentimental even over a hangman, if you think about it. The monotony of any settled notion that, in its turn, turns any settled notion inside out. Torment is unending, but the form of its expression expresses something else. Fanatality. Raising doubts about the given, which is dubious only if the given is indubitable. The hands on a clock point to eternity at every moment of intransigence. But what kind of eternity is it when it persists only in an intake of breath and breathing actually harms it? Pain depicted through the variability of the meanings that, ex post facto, consign it to the cage of understanding. Having an understanding of somebody else is possible through both detachment and introspection. Both methods produce secondary static from the primary absence of understanding. A Yes won by obduracy is the product of having

expected an unexpected No, which may spoil it. Containing oneself within a zone of inviolability, in order, if need be, to furtively pause and wonder. The furtive perception of a moment gulps in expectation of what it might perceive. So, its enjoyment is twofold, once in the anticipation and once in the inversion of it whereby any Yes of the present moment is but a vain rendering visible of something that effectively extends into the domain of what might be seen from the domain of what has been seen, which cannot be seen given that it is a direct component of our seeing. The bilateral uses blind alleys for the purpose of takeoff. We left the venue with a pleasant thrumming in our ears. "Your laughter is so infectious," says D., radiant as an aspen. We toast life with a draught of corrosive. On the way to the toilet, one after the other, we watch those present and their shadows. A group of guys, Sex Pistols cypcats, are just finishing their set. Encouraged, we've staggered off to another dive. Here we're watching a girl with huge breasts and an uproarious top that does almost nothing to clothe them. The girl's having a great time, downing one pint after another. D. says that there are no girls like that back home, alluding thereby to the invisible boundary between licentiousness born of a desire and licentiousness born of hysteria. Others would blame it on American girls' innate tendency toward excess: they need to be outrageous in all circumstances. In another bar, D. unexpectedly asks me whether I've ever raised a hand against L. I no longer remember what my exact reply was, but I do remember that I hesitated. She nestled down in the leather seat and then stretched out like a flower about to burst from its bud. After letting her attention roam briefly but intensely around the sleazy interior, which is filling up with dozens of successful young men in suits, carrying briefcases, she says with seeming apathy: "Let's go." We've ended up on a motorcycle, where I hold her tenderly in my arms as if she were not one for rough play. Somebody had parked the motorcycle at the edge of a small square, which looked empty, but then it turned out that uniformed eavesdroppers can pop up from around every corner, if it comes to that. "We're going now," I say. I might have helped her break free from certain stereotypes, but she didn't need my help. She might have helped me break free from certain stereotypes, but I didn't need her help. Repetition is reminiscing ahead. Ineffectual dreams don't exist, so the unconscious is more effectual than consciousness. And since my pain doesn't follow from the findings of philosophy, the question is: In what respect can clarification of the cause of my pain be aided by the findings of philosophy? In being accountable for anything's enduring, since for what else can one be held accountable? This raises more questions: To what extent can the consciousness's accountability for something enduring be its consistent monitoring of it, and to what extent is the monitoring of what endures even conceivable and admissible? Is every story a manipulation? And so forth. A story is the span of a horizontal network needed for any vertical event to have something to grab hold of and evolve. The sheer intensity of the need for anticipation, which gradually mutates into a prophetic aptitude for precisely foreseeing what's already been called the future.

