

Behind the eyes.

'But I suppose the main way I coped with it at the time was to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed.' (Deleuze, 1995: 6)

Now open.

The first one was called the Metropolitan. It was just a line connecting two points, and the year was 1863. Eight days earlier, further to the west, Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation; 13 days later, to the east, Poland, Lithuania and Belarus will rise against Russia. But on January 9, between Paddington and Farringdon Street, a stretch of an underground railway opened, the first cutting gesture in the construction of a world that would reconfigure London, gathering the forces of economy and politics, incorporating the flows of bodies and machinery, permanently altering the city to include this

other London, simultaneously part of it and infinitely removed from it. No one realised it at the time, and few are aware of it still, but this was when a new conception of architecture was ushered in by the back door. Its ramifications are only beginning to be felt now, today, as I write to you from The British Library.

There are two people sitting next to me, and three on the opposite side of this table. The room is silent, peculiarly so, considering it is filled with what seem to be hundreds. They come here to consult their sources, the authorities they've inherited. They venerate and defer. But they cast occasional glances at each other as well, they sigh and stretch their backs. They eat secretly under the tables. Then they train their eyes on paper again, pursue the signs that mark the page. And they write: they produce more words to add to the literary towers already erected, like the one at the centre of this building, a totemic presence with overtones of Babel. They knew their references when they designed this place. Who are they, you might wonder? But don't ask me, this is your city, and your father's. Ask him instead, unless it's too late and your betrayal is written all over your face.

As I write this, you are taking a journey on the Underground. You never leave it, not until I enter the

station, walk through the barriers, and take to the escalators. This is when you surface to roam the streets, content and free. It is part of our arrangement, the necessary precaution if we are to remain unseen until it's all over and done, whatever the outcome. I can feel your presence in the world below as I walk the streets of London, I feel it when I travel to other places, when I leave this island and cross the seas. You remain on the Underground, inside the tunnels, your journey over once I have returned and gone under.

I wake up every morning and wash my face. I eat a piece of fruit, on some days two. I take a shower, brush my teeth, dress and leave this room I temporarily inhabit. It takes me an exact number of minutes to reach the library, including the time it took to walk to and from the station. But I have entered an architectural edifice by then, however cavernous it may seem, I am no longer in the labyrinth your father constructed. And it is from this library, this self-proclaimed temple of knowledge, that I write my missives to you: one more body in a silent crowd, not unlike the multitudes you encounter on the Underground.

There is a book in front of me. I open it and lower my eyes. 'Many a time, Polia,' it reads, and I can't

help but smile at how closely, how deceptively, it resonates with my own voice, 'I have thought of how the ancient authors dedicated their works aptly to princes and magnanimous men, some for gain, some for favour, and others for praise.' I look at the faces across the table. 'But it is for none of these reasons, except perhaps the middle one, that I offer this *hypnerotomachia* of mine, for I can find no prince more worthy of its dedication than you, my mighty Empress. Your noble station, your incredible beauty,' the voice incants, 'your highly regarded virtue and your understanding behaviour, by which you hold first place above any nymph of our age, have inflamed me excessively with a noble love for you: I have burned and am consumed.' I snort. Then mask it with a cough.

'O splendor of radiant beauty,' the voice intones across centuries, as I sit in the silence of the library, 'ornament of all grace, famed by your glorious looks, receive this small gift, which you have industriously fashioned with golden arrows in this loving heart, and painted and signed with your own angelic image; it belongs to you as its only patron.' I sigh with impatience. 'I commit this gift to your wise and intelligent judgement, abandoning the original style and having translated it into the present one at your behest.' Ha! 'Thus if any fault appear therein,

and if you should find any part of it sterile and underserving of your discriminating approval, the blame is yours, as the best operator and only possessor of the key to my mind and heart.' I perk up at this. 'But I cannot think of, nor hope for, any reward of greater value and price than your gracious love, and your kindly favour for this. Farewell' (Colonna, 2005: 10).

What an apt starting point for us, Ari, and an immediate end. Mine will be no glorious outpouring of passion, no obvious *eros* to be found in this *machia*; just a series of illegitimate entries and exits, aimed at birthing a monster as much as killing one. As for dream, the *hypnos* I will invoke is one more recent in meaning: a few tricks only, cannily performed. So the blame is yours if you misinterpret the exchange initiated when you decided to veer from the official narrative. The nameless author of this text (a monk, they say, an architect perhaps, or someone else altogether, unknown to us and lost in time) is correct. The blame is yours.

I close the book. I contain the desire to disturb the silence of this room, to shout out your name and mark the beginning thus. Not a cry of love then, but a hypnotic cue: Wake up! And sink deeper into sleep.

You will dream of the Underground. Of buildings marking its entrances and exits, never complete, their interiors spilling over to seep under the city, no longer buildings but strange initiators of experience instead; you'll dream of spaces unlike any you've encountered before, spaces that unravel yet remain confined still; you will discover the interiority of architecture that matches that of the whole city, and you'll observe surfaces that reflect your hidden self, from which you peer at my words, frowning. You will encounter images, watch their boundless horizons fold and assume darkness as their only limit; and you'll recall movement, the ceaseless movement of your body, endlessly repetitive, ever stubbornly new, recognising it for the movement of machines as much as the ripples crossing the faces of those who try not to give themselves away. Wake up now, Ari. Slip under the surface.